

University of Waterloo School of Architecture

**ARCH 520** — Spring 2020. Special Topics in Urbanism and Landscape

ONLINE COURSE: site hosted on Learn

Instructor: **Dr. Tracey Eve Winton**

email: [traceywinton@yahoo.ca](mailto:traceywinton@yahoo.ca) (see guidelines below)

Office hours: TBA



## LANDSCAPE AND REPRESENTATIONS

“Before an unbounded nature, before the images of its countless particulars represented in our mind (from trees and torrents to fields of sunflowers and rolling hills), before nature’s “spiritual physiognomy” that corresponds to the full spectrum of our most intimate feelings, then, we are convinced that something exists that transcends this vast, extremely rich panorama of disparate elements. To our conscious minds, that something takes the form of all-enveloping, diffused totality, like an uninterrupted flow of emotions and perceptual data, an affective irradiation. That something is the landscape. It is more than the sum of the parts, of the individual fragments of our perception scattered along the temporal continuum of our sensibility. It is more than the attraction of psychic processes. It is the spirit of an infinite and magical connectedness of forms. The idea of the landscape develops in history, but also in the individual, through the effects of time and space joined together in the rhythm of lines and surfaces that human beings know how to compose almost instinctively.” — *Raffaele Milani*

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## INTRODUCTION

Although this course is about landscape, we are focusing on its aspect within cultural discourse, how landscape is presented and represented within a heterogeneous system of meanings that have social and ethical and historical implications beyond the natural environment and its workings. Taking artworks, films by artists, documentary and feature films from popular culture as source material to analyze thematically, including many from the era of environmental activism, we will use clues from selected short readings to discuss the landscape as a cultural artifact with embedded human values and ideas, and navigating the complex relationships between nature and culture, including people's relationship to place, and sense of place. We will look for the presence of art and cultural forms as a way of reading complex and multilayered landscapes, and practice to decode as a way to find relevant questions and more nuanced vocabulary to gain insight from them. Ability to grasp cultural history, to engage in theory in connection with the environment, goes beyond research and is crucial for the critical engagement of ethical contemporary design practice.

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND TOPICS OVERVIEW

Geographer Donald Meinig (1976) described landscape as the union of the physical and the psychological: "composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads." Thus the landscape is an entity that is defined by our senses and interpreted by our intellect. It reflects prior experience as well as prevailing cultural, social, and economic values. Landscapes express, in addition to their own biophysical makeup, the character of a society as it has evolved over an extended period of time. When fully understood, the landscape may be comprehended as more than just a physical condition and more than just an emotional response to perception, but also as one of the most accurate reflections of a society, its values, its technology, and its aspirations.

— Michael Murphy, *Landscape Architecture Theory: An Ecological Approach*, p.10-11

Our experience of the world is mediated and shaped by positions and constructs, within us and external to us. In this course we use photography as an exploratory artistic medium of research to examine material and ephemeral cultural factors involved in our understanding of landscape. We take an interdisciplinary approach, mixing readings, presentations, discussions, and field exercises. The emphasis is not technological, so you do not require a DSLR. A phone camera is fine. If you have one, or can make one, a tripod of some kind may come in useful.

On the surface, this course's interest in representation is concerned with landscape via *photography*, including film and video photography, which have frequently been used to disseminate to audiences works or places too large to be traditional artifacts. Yet the deeper aims are to attune us to taking a critical view on representation, and how we fathom our places and inhabit our environment with meaning. We aim to sensitize ourselves, to deeply perceive underlying conditions and communicate what we find by poetic means. Through this approach, we speculate on how the arts create knowledge, and relationships to natural or urban environments, of action, stewardship, plunder, or abandonment. In our time, as in the 1970s, awareness is rising of ways in which our environment is at risk. We live in a world dominated by visual media, and thoughtful explorations can help us understand how and what productive knowledge about the environment can be created and communicated via photographic techniques. We start with the notion that every site is full, rather than empty.

In the course materials, I include references to earth art and land art from the 1970s era, which followed closely on the rise of ecological consciousness in society. I encourage everyone to keep in mind various ideas including time, history and movement (human and natural) as well as the concept of ecology. Ecology involves the situatedness and complexity of natural systems processes, and the understanding of landscape, as well as grasping a whole sensory configuration (not just visual) that is dynamically, responsively interconnected, greater than its component elements and details, in an artistic sense of looking.

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## COURSE WORK

Your work in the course will be organized around weekly thematic modules of readings and viewings, and will include your analytical responses to the course materials and to your classmates photos. The movies are considered artworks for analysis and discussion alongside other materials. We will start a running discussion on Learn in which you are expected to participate regularly for credit, as it is the main forum in which we can form a community of minds and share work and ideas. Following the prompts posted weekly on Learn, you should choose a convenient site, and produce photographs or photo-collages of it as a sustained study over the course of the term. Your goal will be to use visible, visual media to reveal aspects of the site that are invisible, to enhance your own visual literacy, and inspire each other's ways of seeing and looking.

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## PROCESS

Your photography will document and recreate a site as a landscape. You will be looking for and working with two main ideas: **dynamic processes** and **indexical representation**. An *index* is a trace left by the presence of something else, through a physical relationship. A footprint, a fingerprint, a shadow, a symptom, an element cast like boardform concrete, rock worn away by water, leaves turned green by the Sun, 'paths of desire' in a park, efflorescence on a wall, marks in dust, birdshit, a signature or clue.... The index also registers the passage of time.

Beginning right away, identify and choose a landscape site in walking or cycling distance, to serve as the focus of your own project. It can be natural, rural, urban, industrial.... Get or make a dedicated journal or sketchbook or numbered loose leaf folio, that you will use to make notes on your observations, sketch, collage in photographs, and keep a running record of your work. Time for working is dedicated to get everyone to their landscape for intensive photographic study. Following weekly prompts, and working in response to specific artists, take (and later edit and upload) a connected series / sequence of landscape photos. Online the following week, your peers will comment, analyze and "critique" work that is posted, not from a technical viewpoint, but looking analytically at what ideas and information are embedded in each image, individually and in your narrative or field of images.

Your goal: sustained research by photography, while introducing a dimension of fiction. At end of term, you submit it as a portfolio including a short essay on a selected topic which I have approved. In your portfolio notes, you reference concepts and ideas from readings and lectures that were pertinent to your exploration, analyzing in what ways you most successfully honed your ability to perceive or create meaning in the landscape. You will additionally be commenting at the end of June, separately, on what and how you learned through this new mode of working.

NOTE: if you edit or filter your photos on a phone, watch out for apps that reduce file size and thus the resolution and clarity for when you print as well as on the larger screen.

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## ORGANIZATION

Each week we have a module made up of different media arranged around a particular theme. Every Monday, I will post to Learn the materials for that week's module, and the tasks you are required to do (for example, readings, viewings, discussion online with your classmates, or uploading photos, questions and notes). The one constant is that you will create and upload new photos, due every week, responding to each new prompt.

Instead of a fixed deadline you'll have a block of participation time, to give those of you in other timezones greater flexibility. Therefore, in this course, most material will be delivered "asynchronously," which means that I will record and upload videos / slides or post written notes and introductions for you, rather than relying on live Zoom meetings with the whole group, especially since recording group meetings is complicated by participant consent. **The nominal slot for our class is three hours every Wednesday**, but your participation time is flexible to accommodate other courses and your own schedule.

It's our first experience with online courses, it's a new platform for all of us, so things can shift unexpectedly. To help us adapt to our new digital environment we will need to update and change elements. For this reason the course outline has its date in the footer.

**Online learning** is simply a different thing from in-class learning. Each form has a different culture of engagement, and there are pros and cons to both.

You may be accustomed to learning mainly through lectures, which puts the student in a more passive position as a recipient of information, but this course is based on Web 2.0 and interactive, peer-learning, and your participation makes it a more active and engaged learning experience, vital to build a sense of a learning community with the presence of others online. *Please reach out to me if you have requests, suggestions or ideas.*

This course is concerned with skill development. In the structure of the modules, I am leveraging the idea of collective intelligence - the concept that our natural diversity in strengths and interests means that in collaborative settings we are able to refine ideas in a more nuanced way, become more critically aware, solve more problems by working together and thus to create better quality knowledge by creating as you learn.

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## CALENDAR, CONTENT, SCHEDULE

The course schedule *is not yet finalized and is subject to change*. Please regularly check Learn for updates.

Weekly Assignments: You'll get new materials and prompts on Monday. You will upload 5 photos and relevant notes by Saturday (8am-8pm), and comment on others' work by Sunday (8am-8pm). During exam period you will review and resubmit them as a photo-essay along with a short critical essay that weaves together ideas from the course, your photo research, and more.



Week	Date	Topic	Readings/Viewings	Activities / Assignments
1	May 11–17	Introduction	Readings posted on LEARN	TASKS posted on LEARN
2	May 18–24		1937, <i>Lost Horizon</i> , Capra, OR 2000, <i>The Beach</i> , Boyle	1970, <i>Spiral Jetty</i> , Smithsonian
3	May 25–31		1979, <i>Stalker</i> , Tarkovsky	1986, <i>Pearblossom Highway</i> , Hockney
4	June 1–7		1972, <i>Deliverance</i> , Boorman	Josef Albers, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy
5	June 8–14		1973, <i>Apocalypse Now</i> , Coppola	
6	June 15–21		1975, <i>Picnic at Hanging Rock</i> , Weir	Montaigne
7	June 22–28		2002 <i>Rabbit Proof Fence</i> , Noyce	Assessment due
8	June 29–July 5		1964, <i>Woman in the Dunes</i> , Hiroshi	
9	July 6–12		1964, <i>Red Desert</i> , Antonioni OR 1974, <i>Chinatown</i> , Polanski	
10	July 13–19		1948, <i>The Bicycle Thieves</i> , De Sica	
11	July 20–26		1956, <i>The Searchers</i> , Ford	
12	July 27– Aug 5		<i>Wavelength</i> , Snow	<i>Empire</i> , Warhol
	Aug 7–15	Final Assessment Period (no Exam) <u>Submissions due August 8, 2020</u>		

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Research and interpretation skills will be attuned to noticing and observing landscape and its complex characteristics overall, and in detail, the relations between culture and nature, and thinking about representations and visual communications.

Acquiring awareness of different ways of looking and seeing and the implications for our practices, critical thinking, building up a nuanced conceptual vocabulary, practice of constructive critique, refinement of visual literacy, enhancing visual communication, practice of narrative storytelling, framing and editing, translation of ideas, environmental awareness and stewardship, appreciation of the character of landscape, research methodology, personal growth, local culture, professional competency, attunement.

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## COMMUNICATION

If you have a question which may apply to another student please ask it on Learn “Questions” on our class page, and check first to see if it has already been answered. Communication emails directly to me must use the following format in the SUBJECT line:

**Arch 520 LastNameFirstName\_nature of inquiry.** This is so that I can quickly sort my emails to find and read class messages.

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## GRADE BREAKDOWN

<i><b>Activities and Assignments</b></i>	<i><b>Weight (%)</b></i>
<i><b>Introduce Yourself</b></i>	<i><b>Ungraded</b></i>
<i><b>Reflections</b></i>	<i><b>25%</b></i>
<i><b>Discussions</b></i>	<i><b>15%</b></i>
<i><b>Photography project &amp; notes</b></i>	<i><b>50%</b></i>
<i><b>Assessment</b></i>	<i><b>10%</b></i>

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## EVALUATION AND GRADING CRITERIA

General: Evidence of critical thinking and creative enterprise, grasping complex ideas, thoughtful questions and comments, intellectual curiosity, skill in interpretation, ability to take complexity from analysis to synthesis. Photography assignments: Clarity and legibility of idea, coherence in visual communications, evidence of lateral thinking, evidence of inspiration from films and course materials in your photography, citation and re-use of cultural materials like paintings, techniques, scenography, scenery, literary descriptions, videos, etc. Handling of colour hues or black and white tonality, composition, framing, visual horizons, relationship built up between photographs in a set, reflection of ideas deriving from a site and brought to a site, temporality, light and luminosity, relation between communicative or interpretable and uninterpretable elements. Continuously building up and deepening a broad spectrum of cultural references and ideas, assessing evidence, communicating effectively with other people through a variety of media.

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## LATE WORK

Assignments that are handed in late will receive an initial penalty of 20% on the first calendar day late and a 5% penalty per calendar day thereafter. After 5 calendar days, the assignment will receive a 0%. Only in the case of a justified medical or personal reason will these penalties be waived, and only if these have been officially submitted to the Undergraduate Student Services Coordinator and accepted by the Undergraduate Office. Students seeking accommodations due to COVID-19, are to follow Covid-19-related accommodations as outlined by the university here: (<https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/academic-information#accommodations>).

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## COURSE TIME ZONE

All dates and times communicated for this course are Eastern Daylight Time (EDT, GMT-4).

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## MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Texts - posted on Learn

Journal articles - through the library / OMNI, the internet, and Google Scholar

Visual Images: **Artstor** (through the library website), Google Images

Movies: **archive.org**, Netflix, Primevideo, Youtube, etc.

Websites: **Ubuweb**, **MoMA**, **monoskop.org**, **metmuseum.org**, <http://socks-studio.com/>





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## YOUR PROF — ABOUT ME

Hello - most of you already know me in person. This photo was taken a couple of years ago in the jungle in Cambodia, near the great temple of Angkor Wat. I appreciate you signing up for this course, and I look forward to working with you.

I'm trained as a professional architect, worked in offices, plus my own studio, then decided to focus on architecture and cultural history. I got my M.Arch. degree from McGill University in the History and Theory of Architecture, working with Alberto Pérez-Gómez, then took a gap year of travel through Jordan, India and Pakistan visiting sacred and holy sites of numerous different religions. Later, I received my Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge in England, in the History and Philosophy of Architecture, working with Dalibor Vesely. My dissertation title was *A Skeleton Key to Poliphilo's Dream: The Architecture of the Imagination in the Hypnerotomachia*. The *Hypnerotomachia* is a dream book published in 1499, narrating a journey through fantastical gardens and buildings in the ancient world, in extraordinary detail. In 2002 I moved to Rome, and started teaching Studio and Urban History in the Waterloo Rome program. Recently, my sabbatical research took me to Bali and Mexico to study ceremonial and traditional architecture and theatre, as well as self-built housing. I agree with my friend the architectural philosopher Juhani Pallasmaa that we often learn more about architecture from our non-architecture books. My teaching is oriented towards critical thinking, the importance of diversity for collective intelligence, the richness of history for the imagination, strategic research, techno-poiesis, and thinking outside of the box. My current research project is a book on the modern language of architecture and Carlo Scarpa's Castelvechio Museum, a famous adaptive-reuse project. I love hiking, travel, dogs, and dim sum. You can find many of my publications, conference papers and lectures as well as student theses [here](#). It is worth signing up to get free access to many research papers.

Instagram: [@Space Odyssey](#) Facebook: my [Architectural Group](#) - feel free to join

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## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

**Academic integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check the [Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.]

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. [Check the [Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties, check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

**Note for students with disabilities:** [AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require



academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Turnitin.com: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit alternate assignment.

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## CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION

### [Coronavirus Information for Students](#)

This resource provides updated information on COVID-19 and guidance for accommodations due to COVID-19. Given the continuously evolving situation around COVID-19, students are to refer to the University of Waterloo's developing information resource page (<https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/>) for up-to-date information on academic updates, health services, important dates, co-op, accommodation rules and other university level responses to COVID-19.

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## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

All of us need a support system. We encourage you to seek out mental health supports when they are needed. Please reach out to [Campus Wellness and Counselling Services](#).

We understand that these circumstances can be troubling, and you may need to speak with someone for emotional support. [Good2Talk](#) is a post-secondary student helpline based in Ontario, Canada that is available to all students.

