

ARTH 5770 / ARCH 7130 ECOLOGICAL THINKING IN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Fall 2024, Thursday 10:15 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.

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Course Description

In the past three decades, discussions about ecological impact and sustainability have come to prominence in the Arts and Sciences as well as in Architecture and Urban Planning. On the one hand, the growing priority of ecocriticism across the humanities (e.g., the recently developed *Undergraduate Minor in Environmental Humanities* at Penn) and the enlarged agenda of Ecological Art to engage with environmental, aesthetic, social, and political relations have led Art Historians to strive at a probing and pointedly ethical integration of visual analysis, cultural interpretation, and environmental history—for an “Ecocritical Art History.” Architecture schools, on the other hand, have created MA programs, such as “Landscape Urbanism” and “Environmental Building Design” and architectural theorists and ecological thinkers coin new terms – “resilience,” “adaptation,” and “mitigation”—in efforts to reframe and more effectively tackle the urgent environmental and demographic pressures of global urban developments. Many of these developments aim to articulate a more earth-conscious mode of analysis for art and architecture alike. Such concerns have been intensified recently by initiatives to designate the current era of geological time as the “Anthropocene”—the epoch that began when ‘the human enterprise’ started to have a noticeable influence on earth systems.

These anxieties are not new. Concerns around climate and environmental conditions has been an essential aspect in architecture for centuries, and even more so in the early years of the architectural modernism. From well-known architects such as Le Corbusier, to lesser known figures such as the Olgyay brothers and Constantinos Doxiadis, ecological thinking has played a substantive role in the development of design strategies. In the current critical analysis of the idea of “nature,” art has been conceptualized as a means to articulate concerns about humans’ environmental impact. From Roman garden and landscape paintings to Georgia O’Keeffe’s flower paintings and Thomas Cole’s landscape paintings, artists have long both responded to and actively instigated changes in ecological understanding.

This course will address diverse narratives of ecological thinking in the history of art, architecture, and urban planning during the 20th century, so as to highlight how discussions about the idea of a “post-carbon world” has taken place across time and in numerous disciplines. The course intends to engage students in the School of Arts and Sciences and the Weitzman School of Design in a discussion on the interconnected histories of environmental thinking in art and architecture during the 20th century.

Learning Objectives

On successful completion of this course students are expected to be able to:

- understand the diverse narratives of ecological thinking in the history of art, architecture, and urban planning during the 20th century;
- map received trajectories of Eco Art, Ecocritical Art History, and Ecological Histories of Architecture and Urban Planning
- contextualize and interrogate contemporary disciplinary discourses as well as historical assumptions related to ecological thinking in art and architectural history and environmentally-conscious practices

Method of Assessment

Participation

20%

Active class participation in Zoom meetings and on Canvas

Keyword Submission and Presentation in Week 8

20%

At mid-term, each student will submit three to five keywords, with a robust re-definition and images or projects to help explain the utility of this keyword to reimagining ecological histories of art and architecture.

Presentations in Weeks 13-14

20%

Students will be responsible for a presentation of 20 min, drawing out aspects of the readings and projects under discussion that may relate to their research for the course.

Final project / Papers

40%

For the final, students will be expected to produce a project – for some, this might be a graphic or illustrative project clarifying the newly framed ecological aspects of familiar projects; for others, a text-based exploration of an episode in eco-art or -architectural history (paper of 4,000 words). Collaborative projects will be encouraged. All student projects will be presented in an online exhibition co-curated by the professors, presenting the historical narratives and theoretical underpinnings of ecological thinking in the history of art, architecture, and urban planning during the 20th century.

Synchronous participation: Zoom Meetings

Synchronous Zoom sessions during rostered time blocks, which will be recorded for those who cannot attend. The presentation of the course's material will be interwoven with interactive discussion and exercises in breakout groups. **Note that a few seminars (on February 18 and February 25 we will meet later, between 4-6 p.m.).**

Asynchronous Participation: Disseminated instructional materials through Canvas

Brief Canvas quiz or survey or board post in which students respond to each other about recordings or readings.

Readings

Required and recommended readings for each class will be available on Canvas.

Schematic seminar meeting schedule (subject to change)

ECOLOGY, NATURE / CULTURE, AND DESIGN

Week 1

Nature, Ecology and Ecocriticism

Angela L. Miller, "The fate of wilderness in American landscape art," in Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmsher, eds., *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in Art History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 85-109.

Alan C. Braddock and Karl Kusserow, "Introduction," in Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, eds., *Nature's Nation: American Art and Environment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 12-39.

Moore, Kathleen Dean, ed., *How it is: The Native American philosophy of V.F. Cordova* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 186-200.

Recommended:

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1: 1 (1996), 7-28.

Week 2

Ecology, colonization and empire

Alan C. Braddock, "The order of Things," in Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, eds., *Nature's Nation: American Art and Environment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 43-69.

Karl Kusserow, "Ordering the land," in Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, eds., *Nature's Nation: American Art and Environment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 71-101.

Alan C. Braddock, "Bodies of water: Thomas Eakins, racial ecology, and the limits of civic realism," in Alan C. Braddock and Laura Turner Tilgoe, eds., *A Greene Country Towne: Philadelphia's Ecology in the Cultural Imagination* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2016), 129-150.

Week 3

Design with Nature and Ekistics

C. A. Doxiadis, *Ecology and ekistics*, edited by Gerald Dix (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977): Part 2, Ekistics seen as a science related to ecology, 49-70.

J. Tyrwhitt, "Background to C.A. Doxiadis' «Ecology and Ekistics», " *Ekistics* 45: 266 (1978): 12-19.

Ian L. McHarg, *Design with Nature* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Natural History Press, 1969), 1-18, 55-66, 187-197.

Week 4

Tropical Climates

- Chang, Jiat-Hwee, "Building a Colonial Techno-scientific Network: Tropical Architecture, Building Science and the Power-Knowledge of Decolonization," in Lu, ed., *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2010): 211-35.
- Le Roux, Hannah. "The Networks of Tropical Architecture" in *The Journal of Architecture* 8:3 (2003): 337-354.
- Mindlin, Henrique. *Modern Architecture in Brazil*. (New York: Reinhold, 1956). 2-12. [note: the entire book is in the readings folder, should you want to browse...]
- Sandler, Daniela. "The Other Way Around: The Modernist Movement in Brazil" in Duanfang Lu, ed., *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 31-56.

Week 5

Solar Imaginary

Film screening and discussion with Cristina Hemauer and Roman Keller

<https://ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/events/solar-imaginaries-road-not-taken-christina-hemauer-and-roman-keller>

Week 6

The Solar Panel

Discussion with artists and policy makers on community solar energy and its cultural effects.

<https://ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/events/solar-imaginaries-solar-panel-community-fantasy-and-technology-energy-futures>

Week 7

Air Conditioning Takes Command

- Banham, Reyner. "The Well-Tempered Home" in *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969): 93-121.
- Böer, Wulf. "Synthetic Air" in *Future Anterior* 13:2 (Winter 2016): 77-101.
- Horn, Eva. "Air Conditioning: Taming the Climate as a Dream of Civilization" in *Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary*. New York/Zurich: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City and Lars Müller Publications, 2016: 233-241.
- Olgyay, Aladar and Victor Olgyay. *Design with Climate: A Bioclimatic Approach to Architectural Regionalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). [note: the entire book is in the readings folder, browse...]
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *Terror from the Air* (Cambridge, MA: Semiotexte, 2009). "Gas Warfare – or: the Atmoterrorist Model" 9-46.

Week 8

Fall Break

Week 9

Presentation and discussion of key-words

Week 10

Guest Lecture

ECOCRITICAL ART HISTORY AND ECO ART

Week 11

Planetary Ecology and Environmentalism

Alan C. Braddock, "From nature to ecology: The emergence of ecocritical art history," in John Davis et al., *A companion to American art* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2015) 1165-1215.

Scott Hicks, " 'A thorough study of causes': W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, and *Progressive Era Materiality*," in Alan C. Braddock and Laura Turner Tilgoe, eds., *A Greene Country Towne: Philadelphia's Ecology in the Cultural Imagination* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2016), 141-152.

Alan C. Braddock and Karl Kusserow, "The big picture: American art and planetary ecology," in Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, eds., *Nature's Nation: American Art and Environment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 357-393.

Week 12

Ecology, Materiality and Agency

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), ch. 7, "Political Ecologies," 94-109.

Hartmut Böhme, *Fetishism and culture: A different theory of modernity* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014), ch. 1, "Now that's some thing – an introduction to the world of things: 7 -9; 68-120.

Rebecca Zorah, "Welcome to my Volcano": New materialism, art history, and their others," in Christopher P. Heuer and Rebecca Zorach, eds, *Ecologies, Agents, Terrains* (Yale: YUP, 2018), 147-166.

Robert Felfe, "Premodern geosphere: Nature's workshop, treasure house, and deep time," in Christopher P. Heuer and Rebecca Zorach, eds, *Ecologies, Agents, Terrains* (Yale: YUP, 2018), 113-134.

Week 13 (April 15)

Guest Lecture

Weeks 14-15

Student Presentations