

USC School of Architecture

University of Southern California School of Architecture

Introduction to Landscape Architecture Design: Translations & Dialectics

Landscape Architecture 541A, 6 units // Fall 2017 Semester

Location	Watt Hall (WAH), 3rd Floor, Landscape Studios University of Southern California
Time	Monday / Wednesday / Friday 2-5:50PM
Coordinator, Instructor	Alexander Robinson, Assistant Professor email: alexander.robinson@usc.edu
Instructor	Joe Sturges, Lecturer, GSLA email: sturges@usc.edu

Course Introduction

dialectic (from OED):

- a. *Logic, reasoning; critical investigation of truth through reasoned argument, often spec. by means of dialogue or discussion.*
- b. *In Idealist philosophy: the philosophical analysis of metaphysical contradictions and their resolution; spec. (in Hegelian thought) the repeated process by which internal contradictions within both concepts and the external world (i.e. the natural world and the world of human history and society) give rise to the dissolution of those concepts, forms of life, etc., and their transition into new ones, resulting in continued progress in both thought and the world; (also) the second of the three stages in this process, in which the original concept, etc., is negated.*
- c. *The existence or operation of opposing (abstract) forces, tendencies, etc.; the tension produced by these.*

"Dialectic [...] are a way of seeing things in a manifold of relations, not as isolated objects."

– Robert Smithson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape

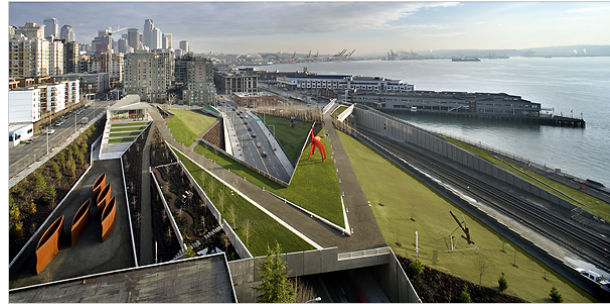
Landscape architecture is in large measures a practice of manipulating the exterior ground plane for the purposes of society. To do this well, the practice of landscape architecture must operate on the existing conditions to transform it into one that better delivers value to society. In topographic design, for instance, we must make find a way to mediate between nearly insensible (sublime) geologic process (or by the logic of some past use) and whatever future purposes we might have for the landscape. We adapt a system whose conditions and framework currently has no inherent interest or predilection for our intentions, into one that does. To form landscape designs, two different forms of logic have relations – the impenetrable geo-logical condition and the logic of human intervention / need. The translation from one condition to the other can be considered what



Teresa Moller, Punta Pite

landscape architects do and design. The character of this translation and how we treat the various entities involved defines the landscapes we make.

Both the projects *Punta Pite* and *Olympic Sculpture Park* as places are defined by multiple relations, but it is this relation between movement and topographic condition that define their design. The logic of movement, of human program, engages with given form. A project defined by relationship, this careful dialogue, is what we will call a dialectic. The design of these landscapes can be understood by neither the previous site nor the intervention alone. Its definition lies within the resolution between the two. Dialogue that occurs between two different “logics”; a dialogue that is not predetermined by either logic, but is informed by both. Landscape architecture design traditionally thrives on this dialectic – driven by a relation of site.



Weiss Manfredi, Olympic Sculpture Park

Once it is built it also operates and continues within such a condition, as the land artist Robert Smithson writes about Central Park in New York City:

“In another sense Olmsted’s parks exist before they are finished, which means in fact that they are never finished; they remain carriers of the unexpected and of contradiction on all levels of human activity, be it social, political, or natural.”
– R. Smithson, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape*

But let's look closer at these two logics. Closer examination reveals a couple important conditions for design.

One is that the logic of the existing condition ground condition; the geo-logic is variably compatible with our needs. The geological terrain is made by complex and accumulated processes that have no design or specific sensibility that relates to human need – any overlap is either our own adaptive evolution or coincidence (we do happen to settle in places where this overlap is common or not far off!). They relate to geological forces and are ordered, but their logic is fractured by time and space in a way that become effectively insensible. They often seem sublime (or picturesque) to our sensibilities. Punta Pite’s site is a beautifully ordered ruin. As Smithson writes, *“The picturesque, far from being an inner movement of the mind, is based on real land; it precedes the mind in material existence.”*

However, as source material for enriching our interventions, they are limited. Most interesting site logics are constructed by forces that we cannot reproduce except by superficial copying or extravagant investment. Furthermore, most sites geo-logics have been wiped or dulled, leaving insufficient material by which to define a formal design. Even natural ones can provide limited interest to design. However, conceptually, as landscapes generated by forceful, insensible, “geologic” violence, they are models for a process of generating interesting form through conflict and tension. This conflict is often effectively echoed in design: what would Punta Pite or the Olympic Sculpture Park be without their challenging site conditions? The generative logic and power of these projects is rooted in the space in between – the design fixes this tension into something useful, yet one that still vibrates and creates resonances.

The second is that the logic of program alone is insufficient as a design device and mode of intervention. Landscape design, while it has a powerful set of form-dictating logics, it relies on its relationship with the existing condition. If such a dialectic does not exist, its own logic is insufficient for making an interesting condition. Design relies on the strange dependencies of dealing with a challenging and insensible ill-logic. It needs the strange so-called incompatibility of “natural conditions” to produce an interesting condition. Landscape architecture thrives on operating on these mis-alignments; its effect is proportional to its incompatibility with

site conditions. Yet, many urban sites lack a rich site logic, urban or natural, and contain rarely enough formal remainder site conditions to inform a dialectical design. Instead we often arbitrarily import other conditions to the site to make interest and tension. Within these conditions we must learn how to develop our own dialectic – create a system of tension and resonance to satisfy the needs of design.

In this studio, we're going practice a dialectic design process in two ways:

First, we're going to formulate our own dialectical process of design using the basic tools of a landscape architecture design studio. Landscape architects do not build the things that they design. Instead we draw/build/construct a series of representations. These representations are the instruments by which we explore the dialectics with which we create landscape compositions. The different means of representation, both of site and our own intervention logic, also have interesting and productive relationships with each other. It is within the space between reality and our representations (and different kinds of representations) that we will first practice design. As a means to generate form and content we'll practice translation between the mediums and content of landscape architecture practice. We'll generate dialectics of our own between the different kind of representations and site engagements. The process will resemble a kind of dialectic design; relating illogic and logic to eventually create, a functional, intentional, dialectical design.

For the second part of the studio we will work within an existing site, with challenging topographic conditions and clear programmatic goal to produce a public landscape, that adapts the work and approach of the first half. Integrated with this part we also practice topographic design skills learned in your topographic design class.

Exercises and Deliverables

Part 1: Translations & Dialectics

Practice translations and adaptations 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.

Translation Exercises (Drawing – 2 weeks)

Site Analysis (Model & Drawing – 2 weeks)

Dialectics (Model & Drawing – 3 weeks)

Part 2: Urban Dialectics

Adapt part one content and logic to site conditions and then condition a formal intervention to this hybrid of existing site logic and introduced logic.

Case Study Drawing and Model (~2.5 weeks)

Urban Design Project (5 weeks)

Pin ups are the week of the assignment unless otherwise noted.

Other Class Methodology

In Class Pin-Ups

The class will predominantly consist of group pin-up reviews, split between the two sections or as one large group. After the second meeting, 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 up) by then will not be discussed and considered late.

Carefully pin up your drawings using good pins and pinning and careful trimming (with a straight edge) when necessary. They should be straight (using a level) and evenly spaces (1" apart in general with 2" apart between students – measure!). The presentation of your drawings will be affect your grade! Poorly pinned up drawings / poor quality pin-ups may not be assessed.

You are generally encouraged to participate in the in-class pin-up reviews. Eventually, student input will become mandatory. This is ~6% of your grade!

Lectures & Workshops

There will be semi-regular lectures / workshops to introduce topics and demo assignments. These will generally be conducted after the pin-up.

Site Visits

There will be regular site visits. In general, no transportation will be provided. You will be required to take a Taxi or public transportation. Please bring suitable shoes (covered), water, and visit a bathroom prior!

Limited Software Instruction

Professor Robinson will provide limited Rhino / Illustrator / Photoshop demos for assignments that use new or unusual commands. Please direct additional technical inquiries about 3D software to him. The class and instructor only provides instruction as related to the assignments. For basics and additional software instruction beyond what is provided in media courses, see the resources listed below (Lynda in particular is a great resource!).

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. Professor Robinson and/or Sturges will be available for specific questions and consultations at a nearby desk. Please consider whether the question can easily be answered by your peers prior to consulting a professor.

Final and Mid Reviews

Outside reviewers will come to discuss and evaluate your work at mid and final reviews. Presentation orders will be posted. 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 (and awake!) during the course of the review. Do not take your own notes – ask another student to make notes for you. Presentation durations will be specified.

Readings

There will be semi-regular readings. Look at class assignment schedules to see the date that the readings must be read by.

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 – white background or not!

Schedule

Week	Dates	Content
1	8/21-23	<i>Introduction & Discussions & Workshops</i> Translation Exercises A: Translation Translation Exercises B: Construct
2	8/28-9/1	Translation Exercises C: Compose & Analyze Translation Exercises D: Form
3	9/4-9/8	9/4 Labor Day Holiday – No Studio Monday Site Exercise A: Section Site Exercise B: Montage <u>Site Visit</u>
4	9/11-9/15	Site Exercise C: Topographic Translations
5	9/18-9/22	Dialectics Exercises (1)
6	9/25-9/29	Dialectics Exercises (2)
7	10/2-10/5	Dialectics Exercises (3)
8	10/9-10/13	10/9 Combined Mid Review for first 7 weeks Case Study Project (1)
9	10/16-10/20	Case Study Project (2)
10	10/23-10/27	Case Study Project (3)
11	10/30-11/3	Urban Design Project (1)
12	11/6-11/10	Urban Design Project (2)
13	11/13-17	Urban Design Project (3)
14	11/20-24	Urban Design Project (4)
15	11/27-12/1	Urban Design Project (5) 12/1 Last day of classes
	12/11-13	Landscape Architecture Department Final Reviews

Grading

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

Midterm projects (42%)

Post Midterm Projects (52%)

Participation throughout (6%)

Equipment and Resources

Students will be required to use the Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign) and Rhino V5 (Windows or Mac, OK).

Lynda Software Tutorial (USC provided)

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

You should also be sure to purchase the following analog equipment:

- Imperial architectural and engineering scales!
- Tombow Pencil (2) each: B, 2B, 4B, 6B (or equivalent)
- 18" wide white trace-paper
- small blank sketchbook (8.5x11) or smaller
- vellum sheets as needed
- X-ACTO (or equivalent) #1 or #2 Knife with extra blades (for cutting models)
- small snap-off blade and cutting ruler (with protected ridge / edge for safely trimming drawings – 36" min)

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" <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>.

Support Systems:

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

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

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

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.
<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.
<https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and micro-aggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations.
<http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>