THE CULTURE OF NATURE

LACH4410 Landscape: Culture of Nature
COURSE GUIDE

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University Of Western Australia

Semester One, 2007
INTRODUCTION – GENERAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This course is constructed upon the belief that contemporary cultural conditions of ecological crisis necessitate broad knowledge of the conceptual and material relations which have shaped our history and which in turn determine our present and its prospects. The course offers a series of lectures regarding 'nature' as it has been understood mythically, theologically, ideologically, philosophically, scientifically, and artistically.

Landscape architecture, architecture and visual art are all primarily mediations between nature and culture and the philosophy of this course is that we cannot fully appreciate this position without broad historical and theoretical knowledge. For students from the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts, the course intends to create an enriched framework for creative work.

By reviewing a broad history of ideas, this course relates to all fields of academic and professional endeavour, enabling and encouraging students to develop their own ethical and philosophical perspective regarding their chosen profession, if not life itself.
COURSE DETAILS IN SUMMARY

Wednesdays – 10-1pm. Hew Roberts Seminar Room (adjacent to main lecture theatre)

Credit: 6 points  Availability: Semester 1

Outcomes: Students gain a basic understanding of the historical pattern of Western culture from the agricultural revolution to the twenty-first century; a basic knowledge of the intersection between the arts and sciences across the course of Western history; and an enriched conceptual framework within which to understand landscape architecture as the embodiment of a set of philosophical values. From this breadth of material students are enabled and encouraged to develop ethical and philosophical perspectives. Students also develop skills in researching and producing images and academic text.

Content: Drawing on aspects of science, philosophy and the arts, this unit surveys the historical relationship between culture and nature. It presents an overview of the ways in which 'nature' has been understood mythically, theologically, ideologically, philosophically, scientifically, artistically, ecologically and politically. The unit connects this broad history of ideas to contemporary conditions of ecological crisis and in turn folds this into the history of landscape architecture.

Unit Co-ordinator(s): Professor Richard Weller

Prerequisites: BSc (LMgt) students require approval to enrol
Contact hours - 35 (lectures + Tutorials combined 35.)

Unit Structure
Lectures and tutorial formats are interwoven over a three (3) hour session with a break.

Unit Requirements
Students will be expected to be able to produce a graphic montage using either manual skills or basic computer programs such as photoshop and have a strong command of English in regard to academic essay writing.


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Faculty Policy and Procedures
Policy and Procedural information for the Faculty is available on the web at www.alva.uwa.edu.au/current_students/forms_and_policies

Communication
(a) all students must activate their Pheme account and student email account
(b) all students should check their account regularly (at least weekly)
(c) all students must communicate with University staff ONLY through their student email account. (Staff have been advised not to respond by email to any other addresses.)

The lecturer is available on level 4 in room 4.19 of the ALVA building. Please be advised that UWA staff will not respond to emails issued from accounts other than Tartarus. Please ensure that you check your Tartarus email account weekly for updates from the lecturer during the semester.
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<th>Week/ date.</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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| 1) 28/2/2007 | **THE NATURE OF NATURE?**  
Course introduction and overview of key themes and historical frames. |
| 2) 7/3/2007 | **URBAN NATURE**  
Nomadism, cities, geometry.  
The origins of architecture and landscape architecture. The agricultural revolution. |
| 3) Friday 16th /3/2007 | **KNOWING NATURE**  
| 4) 21/3/2007 | **FALLEN NATURE**  
Christianity, Islam. Paradise. |
| 5) 28/3/2007 | **MECHANISED NATURE**  
The Scientific revolution. |
| 6) 18/4/2007 | **MODERN NATURE 1**  
Modernity: Enlightenment, Romanticism.  
Submit essay draft |
| 7) Tuesday 24/4/2007 | **MODERN NATURE 2**  
Industrial revolution: Evolution. |
| 8) 2/5/2007 | **POST MODERN NATURE(S)**  
Modern to postmodern representations of space & time.  
| 9)9/5/2007 | **CHAOTIC NATURE**  
Chaos and complexity theory. Fractals.  
Artwork review session. |
| 10) Friday 11/5/2006 | **DE-NATURE**  
Cyborgs, genetics, landscape architecture, ethics.  
Where to from here? |
| 16/ 5/ 2006 | **SUBMIT ESSAY – Resource Room** |
ARTWORK

The artwork involves computer-generated imagery. Individual creations will be combined to form one complete image. The image will have a standard landscape structure (horizon line and set field conditions taken from the moon or elsewhere) but within each individual frame you can create a micro-landscape of your own. Somewhat unusually, I will ask everyone to assess everyone else’s individual contributions and I will then draw down an average mark from these assessments. A discretionary mark will be awarded to the student that works as the project manager for this exercise.

The inspiration for your artwork is to be derived form the following key statements.

1. Could it happen that the next generation will be our last generation of real humans? The temptation to use the rapid advances in biotechnology to use the rapid advances in biotechnology to genetically “improve” our offspring could prove to be irresistible.

2. We could find the world divided into two classes of people: “new improved” humans in the wealthier countries, living in a seamless, artificially enhanced environment, and old humans still struggling with the vicissitudes of “natural” nature.

3. Nature is less and less the mysterious nourishing force that emerged with the birth of the universe and more and more something that we are re-creating ourselves.

4. From the greenhouse effect to the green revolution that has spawned supercharged strains of grains and vegetables, nature is being reconstituted.

5. Nature is more often than not something to be experienced on television or on a club med vacation. Nature is increasingly an artificial experience.

6. Nature has traditionally been the ultimate inspiration and challenge for the artist who, depending on his or her orientation sought to imitate it improve upon it or interpret it.

7. Not only have artists studied nature for centuries they have also looked to it for the revelation of basic truths. An immersion in nature gave artists, scientists, and philosophers a deeper picture of reality.

8. A truly contemporary artist might be better advised to seek truth in nature in a strip mine of in the visitor’s centre of a game preserve. To immerse oneself in nature today is to immerse oneself in layers of chaotic exploitation.

9. Man-made improvements!

10. Genuine nature may now be more artificial than natural. The jungle ride at Disney may in fact be more real to most people than the real jungle in the Amazon.

11. Plastic surgeons, farm managers and real estate developers and all kinds of ordinary people are now making aesthetic decisions that only artists and architects once made.
12. More and more people are becoming more comfortable in the simulated world than in
the real one.

13. Renderings of nature tended to spiritualise it, romanticise it or intellectualise it.

14. The natural world has never before been overrun with the kind of artificiality that now
permeates it but one’s conception of it has always been a man-made construct.

15. The development of Cubism and geometric abstraction coincided with the opening of
a whole new universe of knowledge through the field of theoretical physics an d its
applications

16. On the one side there is the pessimistic view that we have nearly depleted our natural
resources and are on the verge of destroying what’s left of our forests and our
atmosphere. Then there is the optimistic argument that our advancing technology will
allow us to construct a complex life support system.

17. An ever-increasing percentage of our world is covered by the same depleted almost
characterless landscape that is neither rural nor urban.

18. The environment has become so artificial that he traditional aspiration of the artist to
reveal the truth in what he or she sees may have become impossible.

19. A portrait of the new consciousness of self, demonstrating how one can reshape
one’s body through exercise and plastic surgery.

20. The exploding technology of computer science and artificial intelligence along with
the advances in biological science may bring as strong a degree of change in the way
we live as did the aeroplane and the automobile.

21. As modern art paralleled the direction of science and industry in its explorations of
the basic structures of natural materials and systems, the advanced art of the next
decade will most likely reflect the new world created by the synthesis of new life
forms.

22. With the emphasis on image rather than substance in communications and in the
marketing of everything from automobiles to politicians the traditional search for truth
has perhaps become obsolete.

23. There is no longer one absolute reality but the possibility of multiple realities each one
as real or as artificial as the others.
ESSAY QUESTION
(3,000 words)

A: Humans have succeeded in almost completely remaking their environment according to their culture - so much so that some now refer to “the end of nature”. Some see our current condition as one of ecological terminus and others as the natural evolution of the species. Discuss the historical progression of this development and the ideas that underpin it so as to arrive at considered speculations on the future.

Or

B: Culture is broadly shaped by the way in which a group of people perceive themselves in the greater context of nature (both earthly and cosmological). In our time two of the most important landscape architects that have provided the discipline with a philosophical and creative grounding are Ian McHarg and James Corner, both as it happened, Chairs of landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.

In this essay you are asked to engage critically with both Ian McHarg and James Corner’s idea of nature. Compare and contrast the world views that underpin McHarg’s philosophy and Corner’s philosophy. Describe their ideas then draw out their differences and similarities. Having done this, work through their ideas to arrive at your own assessment of what would constitute a valid contemporary philosophy and ethic of Landscape architecture.

WEEKLY READINGS

A copy of the reader is available from the Resource Room and on reserve in the EDFA library. Students are encouraged to purchase the reader for a nominal fee.

1-2  
THE NATURE OF NATURE + URBAN NATURE


3  
KNOWING NATURE


4  
FALLEN NATURE


5  
MECHANISED NATURE


6 & 7  
MODERN NATURE 1 AND 2


8  
QUANTUM NATURE


9  
POSTMODERN NATURE(S)


10
CHAOTIC NATURE


11
DE-NATURE


BIBLIOGRAPHY.

THE HISTORY OF IDEAS (GENERAL OVERVIEWS)


GARDENS AND LANDSCAPE


SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION


ROMANTICISM


HISTORY OF TECHNOLOGY

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<th>THE NEW COSMOLOGY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hawking, S., <strong>A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes</strong>, Bantam, 1990.</td>
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<td>Gribben, J., <strong>In Search of Schrodinger's Cat</strong>, Corgi Books, 1984.</td>
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<td>Berry, T., in <strong>Encounters</strong>, Thomans Berry with Paul Collins, ABC Tapes.</td>
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<th>ART AND SCIENCE – NEW ORDERS AND DISORDERS</th>
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**Future -Natural- (ref forthcoming)**

### POSTMODERNISM


### CYBORGS AND INFORMATION SOCIETY


**Future-Natural. (ref forthcoming. (EDFA)**


### ECOFEMINISM


SUSTAINABILITY AND UTOPIAN THOUGHT


ECOLOGICAL METAPHYSICS


Dubos, R., A God Within, Angus and Robertson, 1972.


Berry, T., in Encounters, Thomans Berry with Paul Collins, ABC Tapes.

Collins, P.,

