

1st Response: Introducing Landscape

Aside from the general information regarding the grade composition and specific requirements for the assignment, the first lecture also touches on the contested notion of landscape. More specifically, the definition of landscape is discipline-shaped, in which, while it is an essential concept of geography, it is also regarded as a genre of painting and photography. Interestingly, some of the definitions of landscape adopt an anthropocentric perspective, defining landscape as “the unique psycho-sociological perception of a place defined in a spatial-cultural space” (Penko Seidl et al. 2021: 3), which is in accordance with the ELC’s definition in 2000.

For me personally, it was kind of surprising to get to know that the definition of landscape is closely intertwined with human beings and culture because all throughout my life, I have thought that landscape is just a natural entity that functions independently, just like the sun and moon. It was through the first lecture that I renewed my understanding, viewing the relationship between humans and landscape as inseparable. On one hand, humans are constantly doing things that either directly or indirectly cause changes to the landscape, including excavation and urbanisation. On the other hand, we, as humans, see landscape as an integral part of our existence and certainly have gone great lengths incorporating landscape into our artistic creations.

The first lecture was very eye-opening. It revamped my run-of-the mill definition of landscape and endowed me with a sociocultural, anthropological, artistic, political, and scientific lens to view landscape. Additionally, in essence, landscape can be

construed of and perceived materially and abstractly, but it is the temporal nature, variety, and diversity of it that underlie much of how it functions as an object and a sociocultural construct.

Reference list

Penko Seidl, N., Šmid Hribar, M., Hudoklin, J., Pipan, T. and Golobič, M. (2021).

Defining Landscapes, and Their Importance for National Identity—A Case Study from Slovenia. *Sustainability*, 13(11), p.6475.

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2nd Response: Landscape, Art and The Sculpture Park

The theme that stood out the most to me in this week's lecture is how humans not only utilise various means to portray landscapes (e.g., painting) but also proactively modify the existing conditions of landscape to create arts.

Broadly speaking, this form of art is termed environmental art, which can be categorised into earthworks, ephemeral art, ecological art, and so on. Amongst various forms of environmental art also exists a series of changing dynamics and relationships between human artists, artworks, and the site artworks are displayed in. The concept of site-specificity accounts for the intricate dynamics between artworks and the landscape/site on/in which they are displayed. Interestingly, even the concept itself bears competing definitions, the most notable of which include three different paradigms dealing with the literal, grounded interpretation of the term as well as the more discursive, ideological, virtual construction of the term (Morris & Cant, 2006).

Regardless of how one may define site-specificity, I personally think it comes down to what impact the artist aims to exert on the viewers, if there is any, and whether the artwork itself strikes a chord at that specific site. More specifically, a painting of mass murder hung on the wall of a run-down building in gang territory may come across as a way of cherishing violence, whereas the same painting displayed in a museum alongside other counter-war materials may achieve educational purposes. In this case, site-specificity dictates the impact that the painting potentially has.

Notably, the lecture touched on the artist who creates geometric shapes on the beach using simple tools such as a brush and sweep, captures the transient artwork using a camera, and makes them into postcards. The fact that this artist does so in a non-invasive way epitomises the essence of harmony, which in this case, manifests as simply drawing on the fluid, easily moldable surface that then gets restored to its original outlook after the ebbs and flows take their course. The mother earth is forgiving enough to allow such a transient artwork being scrawled on its body, certainly more so than it is towards acts such as urbanisation at the cost of forestation, which poses existential threats to certain species.

What's more, the level of artistry and dedication of beach drawing are no less than what we see in many other landscapes or different forms of artwork. But it is the respect towards nature and the absence of obsession with preserving legacy and the materialisation of artwork that also make this artist and his work stand out. Maybe, one can argue that he is just being smart, utilising whatever means at hand to create things without costs, one in a million forms artist-businessman acumen out there, but to me, the willingness to let go of one's possession and let nature handle things is something we need to value in a society wherein people tend to cling onto material possessions, the sole matter that keeps them grounded, so to speak.

Reference list

Morris, N.J. and Cant, S.G. (2006). Engaging with place: artists, site-specificity and the Hebden Bridge Sculpture Trail. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(6), pp.863–888. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360601055805>.

3rd Response: Landscape, Phenomenology and Performance

Our perceptions, the lens through which we view the world and objects, are all tainted by experiences, thinking patterns, cognitive processes, and biopsychosocial makeups sui generis to ourselves. This is my initial thought after immersing myself in this week's lecture and readings. Nonetheless, after some outside researching, I discovered that such a phenomenological way of construing the world is carried over to the scientific realm.

During my searching of scholarly articles related to phenomenology and landscape, I came across Ohta's (2001) study that utilises a phenomenological methodology to study how people interpret and assess the aesthetics of landscape. Ohta (2001) sets forth that the then research studies focusing on the assessment of landscape aesthetics and art aesthetics in general tend to over-emphasise positivism and rationalism, often relying solely on quantitative methods in an attempt to yield objective results regarding the aesthetics of a certain artwork or landscape. For example, many studies drawing on artistic theories, quantify the aesthetics based on whether an artwork possesses the golden ratio, symmetry, and so on. However, such methods ultimately

overlook the qualitative aspect of art research, which can be more important in certain cases and produce more intricate results.

Recruiting 16 participants, Ohta's (2001) study used several pictures of different landscapes and asked each participant how they think about the landscapes in semi-structured interviews. As a result, the study uncovered a range of themes extracted from the interview transcripts, ranging from participants' childhood memories and impressions to their aesthetic judgement and meaning of nature. Ohta (2001) then sub-categorised each theme into a series of sub-themes, including feelings, individual characteristics, sensory modalities, loneliness in nature, benefits of nature, and so on, just to name a few.

Although the study is limited in its sample size and perhaps the scope in terms of the objects used (i.e., photos of landscape), the extent to which it was able to uncover the intricacies of the participants' own interpretation and the association of it to their personal characteristics is simply astounding and fascinating as well. It symbolises a move away from the quintessential positivist method of research and a leaning towards a panoptic view of landscape.

This week's lecture is extremely enjoyable, as it touches on the philosophical aspect of not only landscape but art and human life and perception more broadly.

Reference list

OHTA, H. (2001). A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO NATURAL LANDSCAPE COGNITION. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21(4), pp.387–403. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.2001.0233>.

4th Response: Landscape and Justice

While environmental justice may come across as something that only tackles environmental concerns, landscape injustice, pollution, and more broadly, the natural environment in general, it is quite obvious that the movement itself has evolved to address the interplay between social and natural problems embedded in the environment of human communities.

There are various forms of environmental injustice. For instance, higher-than-usual levels of air pollution and other man-made pollutants found among minority communities in the United States constitute a major issue that the environmental justice movement concerns (Alvarez, 2023; Montague, 2022), demonstrating how

environmental injustice is not only the issue of human activities exerting deleterious effects on the environment but also an intentionally carried out injustice targeting certain populations. As I delved deeper into the issue, I discovered that there is much more behind it.

There is a common phenomenon in the United States referred to as 'food desert', essentially an area that lacks access to fresh and healthy food. In these food deserts, fast food chains, such as McDonald's, and the lack of supermarkets and farmer's markets abound, leaving the residents in the vicinity with no options of healthy and fresh food, which directly produces negative health outcomes (Hilmers, Hilmers and Dave, 2012). It is also worth a moment's attention that people residing in these food deserts are often the disadvantaged and marginalised populations, composed of largely minority families and low-income individuals. Interestingly, food deserts sometimes can even be caused by over-pollution, which is yet another form of environmental injustice. The correlation and even causation in some cases just show how one form of environmental injustice can lead to various detriments.

Reference list

Alvarez, C.H. (2022). Structural Racism as an Environmental Justice Issue: A Multilevel Analysis of the State Racism Index and Environmental Health Risk from Air Toxics. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 10.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01215-0>.

Hilmers, A., Hilmers, D.C. and Dave, J. (2012). Neighborhood Disparities in Access to Healthy Foods and Their Effects on Environmental Justice. *American Journal of Public Health*, [online] 102(9), pp.1644–1654.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2012.300865>.

Montague, D. (2022). Systemic environmental racism exposed. *Nature Sustainability*.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00875-y>.

5th response: Migratory Landscapes

Through this week's lecture, I got to know that landscape and the geographical or architectural features of one place is not only shaped by the local residents but also constantly renewed and modified by human migrations. The 'aboriginality' of a place mingles with migratory influences, the two producing an amalgamation that is fascinating and reflective of the sociocultural, political, and historical context that a place situates in.

In the lecture, we discussed the landscape ethnicity and symbolic landscape. There was one statement that really struck me as meaningful, which is "if public spaces are

produced and managed by narrow interests, they are bound to become exclusive places.” (Agyeman, 2012). Right off the bat, a series of words and themes came to me. I thought of how landscape can reflect pluralism, democracy, colonialism, and so on. Then, the lectures touched on Chinatown. As a result of my heritage and the interest in the whole “Chinatown” phenomenon, I did more research on the topic.

As Chinese immigrants moved around the globe, they also established their own neighbourhoods in different countries, commonly known as Chinatown. To outsiders, for example, in the case of the United States, where Chinatown bore distinctive stigmas and criticisms because of its otherness, Chinatown seemed like a place that rejects pluralism, is enclosed, and Sino-centric (Wong, 1995). However, due to the discrimination that Chinese diaspora experienced in the early days, close-knitted family values, and perhaps pride, Chinatown did not form without a reason, and the reason can be thought of as neither ethnocentric nor prideful.

In terms of the landscape and architectural features of Chinatown, Chinese people brought traditions with them, building architectures with roof corners, extended eaves, sloping tiled roofs, and so on (Yang, 2024). On the streets of Chinatown, people can even see those makeshift displays of commodities and food on the ground where the merchants, also known as illegal, unlicensed vendors, would be hollering (Jacobs, 1996). Therefore, Chinatown is the nexus of the community, which reminds me of the last lecture.

Overall, it is fascinating to delve into the interplay of migration and landscape. What is a better representation of cultural mix and melting pot than, say, a place like Chinatown?

Reference list

Agyeman, J. (2012). *Just Sustainabilities*. [online] Julian Agyeman. Available at: <https://julianagyeman.com/2012/09/21/just-sustainabilities/>.

Jacobs, A. (1996) 'NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT:

CHINATOWN/DOWNTOWN; Experiment Fails As Peddlers Vote With Their Feet', *New York Times*, 28 Jan,

available: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A150549322/AONE?u=anon~3e656653&sid=googleScholar&xid=4bf95d80>

Wong, K.S. (1995). Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain. *MELUS*, 20(1), p.3. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/467850>.

Yang, Z. (2024). Dual Cultural Influence on the Architectural Style Evolution of San Francisco Chinatown: A Comprehensive Examination. *Civil and environmental engineering*, 20(1), pp.274–282. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2478/cee-2024-0021>.

6th response: Borderscapes

To me personally, I have never dabbled in any of the materials of this week's lecture. I have heard about border issues here and there, especially regarding the US-Mexico border wall in the past several years, but to construe the border and landscape through a perspective detailed in this lecture was definitely something novel to me.

Near the end of the lecture, it talked about Berlin's Green Belt, which is basically an urban planning project that incorporates ecological means to replace the fallen Berlin Wall. Now, buildings, monuments, and architecture that signify or carry certain political connotations and historical significance are certainly nothing new and have existed since the dawn of human history, but the extent to which this project combines and successfully executes a variety of elements and fulfils several purposes is just, for a lack of better term, amazing.

As Kowarik's study (2019) points out, the Berlin Wall is a quintessential example of "uncomfortable" war remnants, the things of a similar category of which either ought to be demolished right away after the war or will induce much controversy. Doing

neither, if we set aside the small parts of the Berlin Wall that were destroyed, the German government initiated a challenging project, converting the wall into an environment-friendly urban greenway that connects central Berlin to the surrounding rural areas. Not only was the project successful, achieving the conservation of the old remnant and making it into a greenspace successfully, it also benefits the residents of occupying the disadvantaged status by providing them with access to urban greenspace (Kowarik, 2019).

In my opinion, such a practice is something that needs to be learned by countries around the world. We are often too caught up in the idea of industrialization and technological advancement and urbanisation that they are done at the cost of our environment, which means we are ultimately digging graves for ourselves by injuring the very soil we feed off of. By developing greenscape in urban areas, we achieve sustainability.

Reference list

Kowarik, I. (2019). The 'Green Belt Berlin': Establishing a greenway where the Berlin Wall once stood by integrating ecological, social and cultural approaches.

Landscape and Urban Planning, 184, pp.12–22.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2018.12.008>.

7th week : Wilding

I think rewilding unavoidably collapses nature and society into binaries, just like the lecture discussed. I cannot help but ask myself and people around me: is not human society part of nature, or rather, part of the environment? It seems like such a question is automatically invalidated by the tendency to categorise human-made buildings and a wild forest into two separate entities. However, it is mother earth and nature that produced homo sapiens; it is homo sapiens who built clans and families; It is during this process that buildings and urban areas sprout to life. Therefore, is it not that we, including society, are all part of nature? Rewilding is the finest socially constructed term, in my humble opinion.

What's more, rewilding is also an anthropocentric term that stems from self-preservation. The earth certainly does not care about the extinction of humans, just like it did not care about the extinction of dinosaurs. Supposedly, humans vanish from the earth, and what ensues is just another cycle of life in which new species emerge, or perhaps the earth turns to a massive deserted planet. It sounds a bit nihilistic, but rewilding is essentially an anthropocentric practice that serves to preserve our development or an organism-centric practice that serves to preserve as many species as we can.

However, it is not that the concept of nature and conservation has not been challenged before. We have also dealt with to what extent and how humans should conserve and intervene in nature where Lorimer (2015) untangled the anthropocene era in which we

now have a whole new set of interconnections with everything that is labelled as nature. It becomes obvious that humans can perhaps never refrain from adopting an anthropocentric tone to discuss nature. It is we vs. nature at the end of the day.

Reference list

Lorimer, J. (2015). *Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation after Nature*.

Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.

8th response: Landscape and Heritage and Archaeological Landscapes

This week's lecture looks into the heritage landscape, constructing historical landscapes and sites, as well as intangible cultural remains as a sense of belonging shared by the same groups. I want to incorporate the Great Wall of China and the Great Firewall to illustrate how heritage sites can serve to facilitate the sense of belonging, act as a testament to controversial Chinese history, and evolve into phenomena that share semantic similarities.

The Great Wall of China was built in 220 BC. It is known that the establishment was ordered by the emperor who basically enslaved and forced numerous Chinese citizens to build the wall in an effort to defend the invaders from the north. Fast forward to the 20th and 21st centuries, the Great Wall is lauded as a testament to the hard-working quality and value that the workers possessed. Moreover, the Great Wall made it to the World Heritage List in 1987 as a prominent architectural work, “whose outstanding universal value is that it is an example of the integration of architecture and landscape” (He, Chen and Zhang, 2024:2). Attracting numerous tourists and gaining tremendous exposure continuously, the Great Wall is a national treasure, something that mainland Chinese take pride in having (Zhao, 2000).

However, the site itself is not without controversy. For example, some have pointed out its dark history and its signifying the totalitarianism and confinement that the Chinese government imposes on the whole nation (Zhao, 2000). To date, the word has been borrowed to create a new term: the Great Firewall of China, which refers to the internet censorship system created by the Chinese Communist Party that prohibits Chinese netizens from accessing foreign websites and search engines (Roberts, 2018). It is ironic how the national treasure-the Great Wall-was borrowed to create yet another pairing term, a similar fortified structure but in a virtual form.

Reference list

He, D., Chen, W. and Zhang, J. (2024). Integrating Heritage and Environment: Characterization of Cultural Landscape in Beijing Great Wall Heritage Area. *Land*, 13(4), pp.536–536. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/land13040536>.

Roberts, M.E. (2018). *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. [online] JSTOR. Princeton University Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77b21> [Accessed 30 Mar. 2022].

ZHAO, S. (2000). Chinese Nationalism and Its International Orientations. *Political Science Quarterly*, 115(1), pp.1–33. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/2658031>.

9th response: Haunted Landscape of the Anthropocene

The lecture on seascape directly deals with the relationship between seascape and the broader ecological system in which various types of seascape exist. Additionally, it covers the interaction between humans and coastal areas where strategic planning aiming to fulfill tourism needs and environmental concerns is carried out.

To me, this lecture has an intimate touch because I have witnessed first-hand how a beach near my hometown in China undergoes rapid changes and developments in less than a decade. It is a beach located in Hainan, the southernmost point of China. Since my childhood, my family would go there and spend the winter because of its mild weather during the most cruel periods of winter. Consequently, we came across many beaches in Hainan, one of which is the one located outside our hotel. In the early to

mid 2000s, the beach was really no more than a bare piece of land with sand and near the ocean, but ever since the number of tourists increased, the beach has turned into a tourist hot spot and has been decorated and renovated again and again.

It was not always a good thing at first because many people would litter on the beach, and the pollution level also increased with human activities. At that point, I personally thought this sacred land was going to disappear. Thankfully, the government did everything they could to preserve the ecosystem while promoting economic gains through tourism.

Such a conflict is especially pronounced in marine protected areas (Casimiro et al. 2023). It resembles a tug-of-war between two extreme ends of a spectrum. On one hand, it is our responsibility to protect the seascape and its surrounding areas; on the other, we are constantly driven by financial gains to promote activities such as tourism, which at the same time does harm to the environment. This ultimately leads us to carry out practices that minimize man-made natural hazards, such as littering. Given that the community member is often the party who is at the most stake in this matter, community-led locally owned initiatives can come in handy in many cases (Murphy et al. 2021). Combined with government-initiated regulations, we may find a middle ground on the spectrum.

Reference list

Casimiro, D., Ventura, M.A., Botelho, A.Z. and Guerreiro, J. (2023). Ecotourism in Marine Protected Areas as a tool to value natural capital and enhance good marine governance: A review. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 9.

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Murphy, S.M., Farmer, G., Katz, L., Troëng, S., Henderson, S.C., Erdmann, M.V., Corrigan, C., Gold, B., Lavoie, C., Quesada, M.L., Díazgranados, C., Mora, A.M., Nunez, E., Montebon, R.F., Meo, S., Waqainabete-Tuisese, S., Guilherme Fraga

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3(6). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.423>.