

## **Environmental Design, Sustainability, and Artistic Intervention**

Socio-economic collapse, increased localization of resources, and the prospect of a post-carbon apocalypse or utopia are common tropes in contemporary American life. A pervasive sense that we now live in a riskier world, dominated by technologies beyond our control, is characteristic of our times, in which ecological anxiety defines daily lives. The fraying of relationships between humans and non-human worlds has become a persistent concern over the last two hundred years, and while grassroots attempts to revive these relationships are easily dismissed, we are left with an uneasy sense that as we slide ungovernably towards climate disaster, there is some elusive merit to these efforts. In the midst of our anxiety over the future of human civilization, emerging eco-artistic/social movements are reimagining and enacting ways of living that serve to oppose narratives of inevitable eco-apocalypse. From the “Nowtopia” articulated in Carlsson’s work, to the pursuit of nation-wide urban farming and gardening as a form of politics, we see intersecting discourses and practices emerging like broadleaf plantain from concrete cracks.

While critical figures like artists Robert Smithson and Joseph Beuys laid the groundwork for interventionist environmental arts practices, the current generation of artists, activists, and designers is directly engaging extinction, environmental destruction and the possible end of human life on earth. Bringing together critical theory, ecological thought, restoration ecology and activism, a wide range of theoretically driven artistic environmental practices draw attention to how we eat, the landscapes we inhabit, and how our daily choices reproduce the contradictions we are trying to escape from.

In this seminar we will map emerging intersections of poetics, intervention arts, ecological restoration, localization movements, environmental design, and initiatives in permaculture and sustainability. Relationships between theory and practice will be explored through a series of projects to be defined by the participants. As Joseph Beuys wrote in 1973,

I wished to go completely outside and to make a symbolic start for my enterprise of regenerating the life of humankind within the body of society and to prepare a positive future in this context.

In this vision, then, the practice that is needed is no less than the re-imagining of how humans can flourish into the future, and responds to a call that is currently resonating with intervention artists and environmentalists. How might we explore such a practice in this seminar, taking seriously Beuys' radical vision? How might we enact such a practice? We will, as James Corner writes, attempt to “weave the diagram and the strategy in relationship to the tactile and poetic,” tacking back and forth between the material world, the theoretical and the practical.

Seminar participants will develop hands-on collaborative art/environmental design projects. These may include building dwellings on campus that create new relationship to the environment, working with the “Haverfarm,” or expanding our explorations into Philadelphia, where we will engage with flourishing scenes in urban environmental arts, agriculture and activism. Projects will resist conventional building methods and reinvestigate design and site through practicing art intervention.

Furthermore, seminar projects will be site specific and will examine the role of the public space and public participation. Using the campus as a living laboratory, we will examine diverse ways to foster transformative experiences in our relationship to the environment

and the material world, to deepen our understanding of design principles and to incorporate emerging practices of making. We will (for example) make use of recycled materials in design, we will explore the intersection of ecological restoration and the arts, and we will consider visions of Ecotopia.

We will also examine the relationship between making and pedagogy in the context of liberal arts education, particularly in regards to relationships among environmental studies, arts, and activism. Building on the “Critical Making Faculty Seminar” (Spring 2015), and in anticipation of Haverford’s Visual Arts and Media Program (VCAM) and sustainability plan, we will imagine and create possible futures. Fieldtrips may include Recycled Artist in Residency Philadelphia, Mildred’s Lane and the Schuykill Center.

Artists and writers include: Joseph Beuys, Billy Dufala, Jonie Turback, J .Morgan Puett,, Scott Kellogg, Chris Carlsson, Rebecca Solnit, Keith Basso, Mark Shepard, Masanobu Fukuoka, Wendell Berry, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Gary Snyder, Nancy Jack Todd, Kate Stohr, Peter Berg, Cameron Sinclair, Natasha Bowens, Charles Waldheim, Karin Bradley, Pablo Helguera, Nato Thompson, Linda Weintraub.

**Note:** This seminar will require a budget for field trips and materials to be determined by the nature of the project that participants design.

## **Online Resources**

<http://landarts.org>

<http://www.mildredslane.com>

<http://proteusgowanus.org>

<http://rairphilly.org/how-to-apply>

<http://www.schuylkillcenter.org/>

<http://www.thefreeseas.org/>

<http://www.recologysf.com/index.php/about-air>

<http://www.dreamtimevillage.org/>

<http://www.planetdrum.org/>

<http://conservationmagazine.org/2013/03/restorative-art/>