

# Course Syllabus

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1. T. Cole, *View of the Catskills*, 1828



2. A. Feininger, *NY Harbor, 42<sup>nd</sup> St*, 1942



3. O. Eliasson, *The NY Waterfalls*, 2008

## Course Description

What if the Hudson River were conceived as a metropolitan spectacle, and Manhattan a natural phenomenon? By reversing how we conceptualize these two spaces, this seminar invites us to think of them as inseparable but no longer as a core and a periphery, a City and its "domesticated" surrounding territories. Instead, they form a continuous territory understood by means of the concept of the *sublime*. In these terms, both spaces overwhelm our sensory and rational capacities, and enable a new way of thinking about the formation of modernist myths, namely the myth of the modern metropolis and its relation to both nature and culture.

How can the sublime recast a notion of the urban subject and the technologies of experience in relation with the environment?

The seminar is divided into three interdependent threads which we posit as central to the metropolitan sublime.

1) Questioning *naturalism* and the formation of modern dichotomies (subject/object, nature/culture, etc.) that constitute the framework for the sublime.

2) Reinterpreting the pictorial traditions set by the *Hudson River School* of painting, as they expanded to include the representation of landscapes, buildings, and engineered artifacts, through the notion of the infrastructural sublime.

3) Exploring *alternative* paradigms of art practices – assemblages, sculpture, landscape – that weave together heterogeneous elements in time and space, to re-position architecture. These practices include: Surrealism, Environmental Art, Conceptual Art, Installations.

Rather than conceiving of architecture as an object cast on a site or placed in a landscape, this seminar explores the idea of architecture as an “environmental apparatus,” a constellation of systems operating on multiple scales. And to challenge our understanding of concepts such as art, environment or collective social life, the seminar will incorporate ethnographic research that offers different modes of relating subjective experience and nature.

*Consider (see images above):*

*Three images introduce key seminar references about art, nature, and technology:*

- 1. Thomas Cole, one of the founders of the Hudson River School of painting, transferred to the Catskills and the Hudson River Valley the sublime of the American West.*
- 2. Andreas Feininger created images of New York City and its harbor that have come to embody the modernist myth of the metropolis.*
- 3. Art installations since the 1960s – such as the NY Waterfalls by Olafur Eliason – engaged extreme landscapes and urban infrastructures, reframing them in environmental terms to define a new notion of “Metropolitan Sublime.”*

## **Objectives**

- Promote fluid discussions on art work and art practices – including painting, sculpture, installations, and video.
- Enable students to understand the varied frameworks that affect the relations between bodies, things, actors and contexts.
- Become familiar with the modernist rhetoric about representations of the metropolis and/or nature.

## **Assignments**

There are two “Hinge” assignments that break up the regular discussion sessions, enabling the formulation of a Final Project, consisting of a thesis about the relationship between subject, art, and nature.

Hinge 1: analysis of one artwork and one tribal artifact  
(translation/transformation)

Hinge 2: one-page draft thesis (500 words) and animated storyboard (animatics)

Final Project: illustrated 1,500-word paper and 1-minute animation with voiceover (soundscape).

The two “Hinge” sessions are moments in which the class collaborates to review the conceptual and visual components which have emerged through the previous sessions, including analyses of artworks chosen by each students.

Each of the "Hinge" sessions will include guests who are familiar with the readings, as well as with the artworks analyzed in previous sessions.

### **Coursework**

The class will consist of short weekly lectures by the professor, student led discussions of readings and student led analytical presentations of artworks, to advance her/his thesis in visual and written form.

Analysis of artworks selected by presenters in relation with each session’s three readings will lead to the development and exploration of individual formats for her/his Final Project, which will be agreed upon with the instructor at the end of the second “Hinge” session.

### **Grading**

Class participation is mandatory. Expected absences must be announced to instructor.

Class participation	20%
Individual Presentation	20%
Contribution to “Hinge” Sessions	25%
Final Project	35%

### **Schedule and Readings**

A dialogue between text and image is the seminar’s main means of engaging questions, articulated below, which will inform class discussions. Required readings are **highlighted in bold**. Investigation of artistic works is open to individual selection by each student and will be enriched by specific bibliographical references provided by the instructor. The list of artworks listed below for each session includes suggested references **in bold**.

## 1. The Sublime - September 10

How do aesthetic notions such that of the Sublime, a keystone of western Enlightenment, impact a subject's perceptions of natural phenomena?

**J.F. Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde;" "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics," in: *The Inhuman*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. 89-107; 135-143.**

Jonathan Crary, "Modernity, and the Problem of the Observer;" "Visionary Abstractions," in: *Techniques of the Observer; On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, The MIT Press: 1990. 1-24; 137-150.

Marco de Michelis, *The Sublime is Now*, Milano, Skira, 2008. 29-39.

ART: Philip James de Loutherbourg, *An Avalanche in the Alps* (1803) - **Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818); *The Sea of Ice* (1823-24); *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1825-30)** - William Turner, *Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps* (1812); *Snow Storm, Steamboat off a Harbor Mouth* (1842); *Rain, Steam, and Speed* (1842).

## 2. Nature/Culture - September 17

Can anthropology's discourse contribute in opening up the western paradigm of "naturalism" and how it has informed the relationship of subject and object in modernity?

**Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 232-44.**

Giorgio Agamben. "In Playland; Reflections on History and Play," in: *Infancy & History. The Destruction of Experience*, New York: Verso, 1993. 67-87.

James Clifford. "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in: *The Predicament of Culture; Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. 117-151.

ART: Hannah Hoch, *The Sweet One* (1926) - **Barnett Newman, *The Sublime is Now* (1950-51)**- Tacita Dean, *JG* (film, 2005) - Hans Haacke, *Rhine Water Purification Plant* (1972) - Marina Abramovic, *Cleaning the Mirror* (1995) - Ed Rucha, *Course of Empire* (2005) - Bill Viola, *Ocean Without a Shore* (1977).

### 3. HINGE #1 – MASKS - September 24

Is it possible to interpret the ritualistic significance of masks in terms of their figural components as mediators between interiority (self) and physicality (world)?

**Evan Maurer, “Dada and Surrealism,” in: *Primitivism in 20-Century Art, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984. Volume 2, 534-593.***

Masks from the American Northwest, from a set distributed by the instructor, to visualize two key paradigms of nature/culture relationships: the "Animism" of Eskimo People, and the "Totemism" Kwakiutl People.

### 4. Hudson River Valley - October 1

How did the Hudson River School of painting set-up a trajectory of landscape's perception that contributed to the process of the Valley's urbanization?

**Leo Marx, “The American Ideology of Space,” in: *Denatured Visions, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, . 62-78.***

Raymond O'Brien, “Steam and Iron versus the Romantic and the Pastoral,” in: *American Sublime: Landscape and Scenery of the Lower Hudson Valley, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981. 164-190.*

Bryan Jay Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision; Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. 177-236.

**ART: Thomas Cole, *Sunny Morning on the Hudson River (1827)*; *The Oxbow (1836)*; *View of the Catskill, Early Autumn (1837)*; *River in the Catskills (1843)*; *Arcadian Pastoral State (1858)* - Asher Durand, *Kindred Spirits (1848)* - Frederick Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi in Eruption (1862)*; *Niagara Falls, from the American Side (1867)* - Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak (1863)*.**

### 5. Technological Sublime - October 8

Did the technological engagement of the environment in utilitarian terms fulfill America's “manifest destiny” of exploiting it as an infinite resource?

**David Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994. 17-43; 173-198.**

Hadas Steiner, "Silo Dreams," in: *Reconsidering Concrete Atlantis*, Buffalo: The Univ. of Buffalo, 2006. 103-113.

Kenneth W. Maddox, "Asher Durand's *Progress*, The Advance of Civilization and the Vanishing American," in: Susan Danly and Leo Marx, *The Railroad in American Art; Representation in Technological Change*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988. 51-69.

ART: Edward Hicks, *Peaceable Kingdom* (1834) - Winslow Homer, *The Veteran in a New Field* (1865) - John Gast, *American Progress* (1872) - George Bellows, *Rain on the River* (1908) - John Fulton Follinsbee, *Canal and River* (1922) - Rawlston Crawford, *Buffalo Grain Elevators* (1937) - **Charles Sheeler, *My Egypt* (1927); *Classic Landscape* (1931); *American Landscape* (1930); *Suspended Power* (1939).**

## 6. Metropolis - October 15

How did New York's infrastructural context inform the development of its modernist myths as a metropolis of super-objects, as variously referred to by 20-Century Avant-guard?

**Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay; Reworking Nature in New York*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002. 19-51.**

Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. 68-109.

Manfredo Tafuri, "The Disenchanted Mountain," in: *The American City*: Cambridge, MIT Press, 1983. 442-503.

ART: George Lurks, *Roundhouses at Highbridge* (1908) - Joseph Stella, *Brooklyn Bridge* (1917-18) - Paul Strand and Charles Scheeler, *Manhatta* (film, 1921) - Edward Hopper, *Automat* (1927); *New York Movie* (1939); *Nighthawks* (1942) - Lionel Feininger, *Church of the Minorities II* (1926) - **Thomas Hart Benton, *America Today* (mural, 1931)** - Arthur Dove, *Fields of Grain Seen from Train* (1931) - Andreas Feininger, *New York, Midtown at 42nd Street* (1942).

## 7. HINGE #2 – CINEMATICS - October 22

How does the perception of the environment through new time-based techniques of representation effect a linguistic transformation in reading urban dynamics?

**Sergiej Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" [1930], in: *Film Form; Essays in Film Theory*, Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1949. 28-44.**

## 8. Thresholds - October 29

Does the Surrealist breakup with the agenda of modernization point towards an alternative notion of visuality, establishing different modes of relationship between subjective experience and nature?

**Rosalind Krauss, *Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993. 32-76.**

Roger Shattuck, William Seitz, "Transcript – Extract," in: *The Art of Assemblage: A Symposium (1961)*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992. 124-140.

Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'," [1925], in: *Collected Papers, Volume 5*, New York: Basic Books, 1959. 175-80.

ART: **Max Ernst, *One Hundred Headless Woman (1929)***; *The Master's Bedroom (1920)* - Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4AM (1932)*; *No More Play (1933)* - Paul Klee, *Exotic River Landscape (1923)*; *Static Dynamic Gradation (1923)*; *Monument in Fertile Land (1929-41)* - Adolph Gottlieb, *Pictograph (1946)*; *Vigil (1948)* - David Smith, *Hudson River Landscape (1951)*; *Wagon II (1963-64)*.

## No Class - November 5

## 9. Expanded Field - November 12

How did the environmental sculpture of 1960s recast the perception of extreme (and less extreme) landscapes, challenging both monumentality and self-referential abstraction?



**Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in: *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986. 276-290.**

John Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1989. 13-40.

Gary Shapiro, " Rifts: Beyond the Garden to the Sites of Time," in *Earthwards*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 113-152.

ART: Richard Long, *A line Made by Walking* (1967) - Michael Heizer, *Double Negative* (1969-70) - Mary Miss, *Perimeters, Pavilions, Decoys* (1977-78); *South Cove* (1984-87) - Walter de Maria, *Lightning Field* (1977) - **Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty* (1970), *Floating Island* (2015)** - Robert Irwin, *Black Line, Room Division* (1977).

#### 10 Operations - November 19

Is it possible to shift aestheticized readings of industrialization towards its inscription in social processes of formation and transformation of the built environment?

**Gilles Deleuze, "What is a Dispositif?" in: *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, New York, Routledge. 159-168.**

James Corner, "Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes," in: *The Landscape Imagination*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014. 240-255.

Francois Lyotard, "Duchamp as a Transformer," in: *Duchamp TRANS/formers*, Venice (CA): The Lapis Press, 1990. 70-75.

ART: Francis Picabia, *Daughter Born Without Mother* (1916-17) - Paul Klee, *Exotic River Landscape* (1922); *Static-Dynamic Gradation* (1923) - **Marcel Duchamp, *The Large Glass* (1915-23)** - Three Standard Stoppages (1913); *Rotative Demi-Sphere* (1925); Given: 1. The Waterfall / The Illuminating Gas (1946-66) - Salvador Dali, *Apparatus and Hand* (1927) - Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Portrait of Henrietta Morales* (1963); *Three Figures in a Room* (1964) - Robert Rauschenberg, *Oracle* (1962-65).

#### 11. Apparatuses - November 26



Can architecture productively interrogate its relationship with multi-scale fields of environmental forces through its inevitable condition as constructed object?

**Sandro Marpillero, "Rosalind Krauss Diagrams," in: Spyros Papapetros Ed. *Retracing the Expanded Field; Encounters between Art and Architecture*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014. 222-226.**

Mieke Bal, "Light Politics," in: *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, London: Thames & Hudson (SF-MOMA), 2007. 153-181.

Giuliana Bruno, "Interiors: Anatomies of the Bride Machine," in: *Rebecca Horn*, New York: The Guggenheim Foundation, 1993. 78-95.

ART: Jean Tinguely, *Hommage to New York* (1960) - Rebecca Horn, *Overflow Blood Machine* (1970); *The Yellow-Black Race of Pigments* (1986) - **Olafur Eliasson, *The New York City Waterfalls* (2008); *1m3 Light* (1999); *The Weather Project* (2003)** - Sarah Sze, *Triple Point* (2013).