# TECHNOLOGY AND THE LANDSCAPE

## DETAILS

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| Instructor | Prof. Jeff Thompson |
| Email | jeff.thompson@stevens.edu |
| Office/hours | Morton 208, Thurs 10am–12pm |
| Meeting times | Thursdays, 1.00–4.50pm |
| Location | Visual Arts & Technology Lab<br>40.743658º N, 74.026892º W |
| Course materials | www.github.com/jeffThompson/TechnologyAndTheLandscape |

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Fences, grafting, E-ZPass, flint knapping, fake tree cellphone towers, geophones, weather sensor networks, bonsai, train tunnels, electronic billboards, aerial kite photography.

This hybrid studio/seminar course examines how technology has impacted our experience of the landscape, from stone tools to the invention of perspective to algorithmic and virtual worlds. Through creative projects, readings, writing, and field visits, we will explore how technology has shaped the landscape, ways of recording it, and our cultural relationship with the natural and built world.

## ATTENDANCE

Due to the condensed, technical, and collaborative nature of this class, attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two absences per semester to use at your discretion – each additional absence will result in your final grade being lowered by ½-letter. Late arrivals will be marked tardy, with 3 tardies equaling one absence. The only exception is severe illness – if this is the case, please let me know as soon as possible and provide a doctor's note documenting your illness.

## HOMEWORK

Homework in this class is meant to be exploratory, a way to expand on the experiences and ideas in class. I encourage wide-ranging interpretation of assignments: consider ways that you

can fulfill the requirements in a way that is creatively and intellectually exciting for you, not just the obvious requirements. Of course, this is much harder than just reading a chapter or studying for a quiz! I expect considerable engagement from you this semester, and you should expect the material to be rigorous and thorough.

All assignments are due by the start of class – details of projects will be available on the class GitHub page (see link on the first page) including how to turn your work in.

You will have 24/7 access to the Lab and Studio, and use of the Fab Lab during open hours for printing and equipment checkout.

## GRADING

The goal of all assignments is for you to think and make. Everyone comes from a different background and experience, so the goal is improvement – I want to see curiosity, engagement, and willingness to experiment.

To get a C (an average grade) you should:

+ Put time into your projects each week
+ Complete everything on time
+ Participating in critiques and discussions

For a B or an A, you should:

+ Take risks and try things enthusiastically
+ Be an active and unsolicited participant in critiques and discussions
+ Take assignments beyond their minimum requirements

A grading rubric will be provided with each assignment to help you understand what is expected and how you did.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

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| Homework | 50% |
| Essay project | 10% |
| Class participation | 25% |
| Final project | 15% |

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

Required and suggested readings will be provided as PDFs on Canvas – there is no required textbook.

+ Drawing materials of your choice – *bring every week!*
+ Comfortable shoes, sunscreen, and bug spray
+ Metro Card for NYC trips (we will be taking two trips to NYC, requiring a ride on the PATH and the subway)
+ Travel for other field visits (will be a reasonable cost, under $30 total for the semester)
+ Art supplies (paper, etc) and printing as needed

## COURSE CALENDAR

Please note this is subject to change – be sure to check Canvas and your email regularly. Readings are listed for the days they are due.

**WEEK 1**

Introductions and syllabus

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| In class: | Make sketchbooks, observational drawing and writing exercises |
| Homework: | Gather supplies |

**WEEK 2**

Observation, pre-historical New Jersey, timescale

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| In class: | Field visit to Liberty State Park |
| Readings: | Selections from *Grapefruit* (Ono), *The Goose Lake Trail* (Eliasson/Obrist), *An Attempt to Exhaust A Place in Paris* (Perec), and Lenape folklore |
| Homework: | Record three square feet |

**WEEK 3**

Walking as a way of knowing, acoustic ecology

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| In class: | GPS drawings, field recordings |
| Readings: | Selections from *Walking and Mapping* (O'Rourke), *NSA Nature Walks* (Guardian) |
| Homework: | Document a walk |

**WEEK 4**

Mapping and the technological perspective

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| In class: | Exploring mapping techniques |
| Readings: | Selections from *Gustav Klimt Landscapes* and *Experimental Geography* (Paglen) |
| Homework: | Create a map of your surroundings |

**WEEK 5**

The Grand Tour, the domesticated and reflective landscape

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| In class: | Nature walk in Minecraft |
| Readings: | Selections from *Birth of the Modern* (Johnson); Frost, Thoreau, and Collins |
| Homework: | Finish Minecraft sketches and poems, begin research paper bibliography and gather visual material |

**WEEK *6***

Exploration and visiting places we've never been

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| In class: | Print/bind Minecraft chapbooks, walking tour in Google Maps |
| Readings: | Selections from *Endurance* |
| Homework: | Document walk in Google maps in a place you've never been; continue research paper |

**WEEK 7**
Artificial landscapes, Frederick Law Olmsted

In class: Field visit to Central Park
Readings: Selections on Central Park/Olmsted
Homework: Draft research papers due

**WEEK 8**
Suburban and industrial landscapes

In class: Field visit to Meadowlands
Readings: Selections from Robert Smithson
Homework: Research papers due

**WEEK 9**
Exploring the urban landscape, cameras, and technology of capture

In class: Dérive in NYC, 3D scanning/photogrammetry demo
Readings: Selections from *Situationist International Anthology* (Knabb), *Drone Shadow Handbook* (Bridle)
Homework: Recording spaces and objects

**WEEK 10**
Technological infrastructure

In class: Visit sites of internet infrastructure in NYC
Readings: Selections from *Tubes* (Blum), *Networks of New York* (Burrington)
Homework: Write final project proposal

**WEEK 11**
Future landscapes

In class: Selections from *Blade Runner*
Readings: Selections from *Vermillion Sands* (Ballard)
Homework: Work on final project

**WEEK 12**
Virtual and algorithmic landscapes

In class: Videogame play-throughs, make something from the perspective of a data buoy
Readings: Selections from *Ready Player One*, articles on Dwarf Fortress and No Man's Sky
Homework: Work on final project

**NOVEMBER 24**
Thanksgiving break, no class!

**WEEK 13 and 14**
Work weeks

In class: In-progress critique and work day
Homework: Work on final project and documentation

**FINAL EXAM PERIOD**
(Date TBA, please save in your calendar)

Final critique