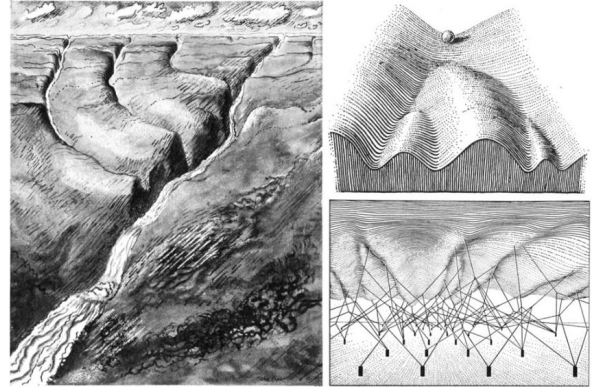


VPAS 6377-001 (88548)
Organic Modernism: from the Bauhaus to Cybernetics
Dr. Charissa N. Terranova
Fall 2023
We 4-6:45 pm ATC 2.705

Contact: terranova@utdallas.edu
Office Hours: By appointment
Office Location: ATC 2.704

Course Description:

This class focuses on “organic modernism,” 1930-75. Distinct from other forms of modernism in the fine arts and architecture, organic modernism was rooted in nature and the sciences, in particular biology and geology. This manifested literally as biomorphic shapes in surrealist paintings and deep geological time in neo-romantic renderings of the landscape. It also took shape in art-science-design collaborations, as with the friendship of painter John Piper and geneticist Conrad Waddington that bodied forth the “epigenetic landscape” as image and scientific fact. Modern architecture is both backdrop and catalyst in, for example, the ISOKON, a pristine pale-pink apartment building in London where teachers from the Bauhaus, the epic modern design school, found refuge from the Third Reich.



Left: John Piper, *The Epigenetic Landscape*, 1939
Right: Conrad Waddington, *The Epigenetic Landscape*, 1957



Wells Coates, ISOKON Building or Lawn Road Flats, London, 1934

What held organic modernists together was “organicism,” the idea that the

whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Philosophical organicism made for a capacious and inclusive modernism that brought together artists, architects, designers, and scientists. Molded by Depression-era destitution, interwar extremism, and WW II atrocities, organic modernists were problem-solving collaborators who sought urban reconstruction and economic justice for all. After the war, experimental art-science-design exhibitions and newfound systems aesthetics manifested the optimism of the welfare state and scientific futures of cybernetic communication.

Topics include: modern light art; modern architecture; the diasporic Bauhaus; organicism in the writings of László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Read, and Christopher Caudwell; art and the Spanish Civil War; British Surrealism; British popular science; Penguin Pelican book series; Theoretical Biology Club; Isokon Design Company; London Bauhaus; British neo-romanticism; British War Artists Advisory Committee; Conrad Waddington’s epigenetics; Institute for Contemporary Arts in London; Festival of Britain in London; György Kepes’s *Vision and Values Series*; the creation of the art-science-design journal *Leonardo*; systems and cybernetics in art exhibitions 1968-70; eco-art, eco-feminism, and land art, 1970s-present; contemporary bio-art and interspecies art.

Requirements:

Students are required to attend all classes, complete readings, participate in class, make one in-class presentation based on the reading assignments while also leading class in discussion, submit one short essay in conjunction with this presentation, and make a final presentation based on a final research paper.

Readings:

The majority of readings are online in the ereserves provided by the library at elearning. Students should purchase only one book: László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Bauhaus Design, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*. New York: Dover, 1975 [1929].

Assignments:

- 1.) Leading In-Class Discussion: One Short Paper and One In-Class Presentation

Students will write and present one 1000-word paper based on the week’s reading assignments. Essays should summarize the reading, relating it to relevant art, architecture, or design. Your presentations should be made using powerpoint, catalyze discussion about the reading, provide biographical information about the figures where possible, and explain salient ideas of the reading to the class.

Formatting, etc.:

- 1000 words in length
- double spaced
- titled; title in italics centered at top of page one
- heading with course name and number, professor’s name, and student’s name left-hand justified
- paginated
- 12-pt font
- include footnotes and a bibliography
- The presentation should include a powerpoint with related works of art and/or architecture.
- Students are responsible for presentations in accordance with sign-up sheet.
- Papers are due one week after in-class presentation. Students should upload essays to a file at elearning. File titles should be “Lastname_InitialofFirstName,” as in “Terranova_C”.

2.) Long Research Paper and Final Presentation

Students will write a 17- to 20-page research paper on a topic discussed with and approved by the professor. The topic should both come from the material in class and, if possible, relate to the student’s overarching research goals as a graduate student at the university.

Formatting, etc.:

- 17- to 20-pages in length
- double spaced
- include a title page and a title
- paginated
- 12-pt font
- include footnotes and a bibliography with at least five sources
- 30-minute presentation: PowerPoint and Discussion
- Final Paper Due on December 15

Grades:

Leading In-Class Discussion: Presentation + Paper:	40%
Final Paper: Presentation + Paper:	40%
General Class Participation:	<u>20%</u>
	100%

Schedule:

August 23	Introduction
August 30	László Moholy-Nagy, the New Bauhaus, and Art as Organism
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • László Moholy-Nagy, <i>The New Vision: Fundamentals of Bauhaus Design, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture</i>. New York: Dover, 1975 [1929]. • Charissa N. Terranova, <i>Art as Organism: Biology and the Evolution of the Digital Image</i>. London: Bloomsbury, 2022 [2016]. 1-66.
September 6	Organicism and Late Modernism, An Introduction

- Charissa N. Terranova. Introduction. *Organic Modernism: from the British Bauhaus to Cybernetics* (provided by the professor).
- CP Snow. "The Two Cultures." Rede Lecture, Cambridge University. 1959.
- Lionel Trilling. "Science, Literature & Culture: A Comment on the Leavis-Snow Controversy." *Commentary Magazine* (June 1962) 461-77.

September 13 No Class

Dr. Terranova gives keynote lecture, "A Biological Bill of Rights: Organicism as Justice-Seeking," at the 30th Annual Light Art Symposium hosted by the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest, Hungary

September 20 **Organic Modernism in London and British Elsewheres, 1930s**

- Charissa N. Terranova. Ch. 1. *Organic Modernism: from the British Bauhaus to Cybernetics* (provided by the professor).
- Paul Nash. "Swanage or Seaside Surrealism." *Architectural Review* (April 1936).
- Ben Highmore. "Itinerant Surrealism: British Surrealism either side of the Second World War." In *A Companion to British Art: 1600 to the Present*, eds. Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett (London: Blackwell, 2013) 241-64.
- Boris Jardine. "Mass-Observation, Surrealist Sociology, and the Bathos of Paperwork." *History of the Human Sciences*. Vol. 31, No. 5 (2018).
- James Clifford. "On Ethnographic Surrealism." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct. 1981).

September 27 **Biology and the British Bauhaus**

- Charissa N. Terranova. Chapter 2. *Organic Modernism: from the British Bauhaus to Cybernetics* (provided by the professor).
- Erik L. Peterson. *The Life Organic: The Theoretical Biology Club and the Roots of Epigenetics*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. 3-12, 93-116.
- Elizabeth Darling. "Institutionalizing English Modernism 1924-33: From the Vers Group to MARS." *Architectural History*. Vol. 55 (2012) 299-320.
- Yasuko Suga. "Modernism, Commercialism and Display Design in Britain: The Reimann School and Studios of Industrial Art." *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer, 2006) 137-154.

October 4 **Romantic Genetics: Landscape Lived, Rendered, and Epigenetic**

- Charissa N. Terranova. Chapter 3. *Organic Modernism: from the British Bauhaus to Cybernetics* (provided by the professor).
- Caroline Humphrey. "A Nomadic Diagram: Waddington's Epigenetic Landscape and Anthropology." *Social Analysis*. Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter 2019).
- Susan Squier. "The World Egg and the Ouroboros: Two Models for Theoretical Biology." In *Earth, Life, and System: Evolution and Ecology on a Gaian Planet* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015) 127-150.
- Anna Reid. "Paul Nash's Geological Enigma." *British Art Studies*. No. 10 (2018).

October 11 **Exhibition as Extended Organism: Three Shows in 1951**

- Charissa N. Terranova. Chapter 4. *Organic Modernism: from the British Bauhaus to Cybernetics* (provided by the professor).
- Julian Huxley. "New Bottles for New Wine: Ideology and Scientific Knowledge." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol. 80, No. 1/2 (1950).

- Oliver AI Botar. "György Kepes' 'New Landscape' and the Aestheticization of Scientific Photography." In Nina Czeglédy and Róna Kopeczky, Eds. *The Pleasures of Light: György Kepes and Frank Malina* (Budapest: The Ludwig Museum, 2010).
- Ben Highmore. "Richard Hamilton at the *Ideal Home Exhibition* of 1958: Gallery for a Collector of Brutalist and Tachiste Art." *Art History*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (November 2007) 712-37.

October 18 The Eccentric Cybernetics of György Kepes and Organic Modernism

- Charissa N. Terranova. Chapter 5. *Organic Modernism: from the British Bauhaus to Cybernetics* (provided by the professor).
- Jack Burnham. "Systems Esthetics." *ArtForum*. Vol. 7, No.1 (September 1968) 30-35.
- Charissa N. Terranova, "Nonstop Modernism: Continuity in Jack Burnham's Systems, Structures, and Occultism," in *Perception and Agency in the Shared Spaces of Contemporary Art*, Christina Albu and Dawna Schuld, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2017) 199-210.
- Ed Shanken. "In Forming *Software*: Software, Structuralism, Dematerialization." In *Mainframe Experimentalism*. Eds. Hannah Higgins and Douglas Kahn (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 2012) 51-65.

October 25 Meetings with Dr. Terranova to Discuss Final Essays

November 1 Eco-Feminism, Eco-Art, and Land Art, 1970s-present

- Eleanor Heartney. "How the Ecological Art Practices of Today Were Born in 1970s Feminism." *Art in America* (May 22, 2020).
- Gloria Feman Orenstein. "The Greening of Gaia: Ecofeminist Artists Revisit the Garden." *Ethics and the Environment*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Special Issue on Art (Spring, 2003) 102-111.
- Eva Diaz. "Ecofeminist World Building." *Aperture*, No. 234, Earth (Spring 2019) 36-43.
- Bruce Clarke. *Gaian Systems: Lynn Margulis, Neocybernetics, and the End of the Anthropocene*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2020) 1-46.

November 8 Contemporary Bio-Art and Interspecies Art

- Charissa N. Terranova. "'Bioart and Bildung Wetware: Art, Agency, Animation, an Exhibition as Case Study.'" *Journal of Microbiology and Biology Education*, 2016 Dec; 17(3): 409-416.
- Meredith Tromble. "Interspecies Communication: An Introduction and a Provocation." In *Public*. Vol. 30 No. 59. (2019).
- Charissa N. Terranova, "Hannah and Joe: Interspecies Art between Bird and Man," a review essay about the exhibition "Parrot Architecture" at the Dallas Contemporary (16 April-21 August, 2022) and "Joseph Havel: Flight Paths and Floor Plans" at Talley Dunn Gallery (14 May-25 June, 2022) Dallas, Texas. Published at *Interalia.org* (Nov. 2022).
- Dorothee Fischer. "Art between Species: Two Case Studies of Animals' Agency in Interspecies Art." *Journal of the Lucas Graduate Conference*, Special Issue on "Animals (Un)tamed: Human-Animal Encounters in Science, Art, and Literature," No. 8 (2020).

November 15 Final Presentations

November 22 No Class Fall Break

November 29 Final Presentations

December 6 Final Presentations

