



Pages from Alexander von Humboldt's *American Travel Diaries 1799-1804*: showing post-travel reflections pasted directly on top of on-site travel notations. Source: Berlin State Library/Prussian Cultural Heritage

Criticality in Research/Criticality as Praxis: Knowledge tools for designing urban futures

Course Leaders:

Lisa Diedrich, Prof. of Landscape Architecture/Director of SLU Urban Futures
Andrea Kahn, Prof. of Site Thinking in Research and Design, SLU Landscape

Criticality in Research/Criticality as Praxis: Knowledge tools for designing urban futures

Course responsibles

Lisa Diedrich, Prof. of Landscape Architecture/Director, SLU Urban Futures
Andrea Kahn, Prof. of Site Thinking in Research and Design, SLU Landscape

Guest lecturer

Thaïsa Way, Director of Studies, Garden & Landscape Studies, Dumbarton Oaks / Prof. University of Washington

Course assistant

Sonia Curnier, MSc Arch. PhD EPFL, Post-doc SLU Landscape

Examiner

Lisa Diedrich, SLU

Higher education credits

7.5 ECTS

Subject area

Landscape Architecture

Language

English

Prerequisites

PhD students (registered or applicants) in fields concerned with urban landscape futures (design, planning, environmental science, landscape architecture, architecture, urban history, ecology, sustainability studies etc.)

COURSE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

To apply, candidates should submit the following materials in a single PDF with their full name in the document header. Email to SLU Profs. Lisa Diedrich & Andrea Kahn (lisa.diedrich@slu.se; andrea.kahn@slu.se) by **2 JULY 2021**:

- a 1-page abstract of their PhD research project, including title
- a 1-paragraph statement with their motivation for participating in this course
- PhD start date, name of supervisor(s) and home institution

Note: A nominal 1000 SEK (ca 100 EUR) fee will be required from non-SLU students. Accepted students will be asked to provide their invoicing information for processing.

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"Thinking is an action. For all aspiring intellectuals, thoughts are the laboratory where one goes to pose questions and find answers, and the place where visions of theory and praxis come together". bell hooks

"Broadly speaking, criticality comprises - and is a composite of - three things: thinking, reflecting and acting. In emphasizing "action" in addition to thinking (in the form of argumentation and reflective judgment), "criticality" might thus be seen and conceived of in relation to established definitions of critical thinking as trait." Martin Davies

"Critical urban theory involves the critique of ideology (including social-scientific ideologies) and the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities." Neil Brenner

"Knowledge is always knowledge for what. It must be interpreted to suit the practices, and practices must be ready to integrate knowledge" Helga Nowotny

INTRODUCTION

A critical approach

Critical thinking is an interactive process. It puts theory and practice into productive contact. As American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey noted early in the 20th century, critical thinking deploys the active power of thinking to destabilize apparently stable worlds.

Criticality, a socially situated practice, goes further still. Comprising three operations - thinking, reflecting *and* acting – criticality exposes a disposition to position oneself outside received frameworks of understanding. Criticality is motivated by an aspiration to engage other-wise, and other ways, with the world.

Critical theory, like criticality, attends to the circumstances conditioning its production. It is at once reflective and situated. As such, *doing* critical theory means engaging with practice as always and already informing the theoretical work.

Critical thinking, criticality and critical theory transcend any single disciplinary domain or practice-based arena. All three proffer tools for observing and gleaning understandings from the various forums and formats through which useful knowledge gets generated and applied. This “Criticality in Research/Criticality as Praxis” course aims to mobilize the insightful force of these critical tools to enrich and help evolve epistemological norms and received practices towards new forms of knowledge production.

A landscape perspective

Thanks to its simultaneous engagement with academic research and professional practice, landscape architecture harbors profound transdisciplinary and critical potential. Embracing

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distinct work modes, and operational methods affords those working in, or on, the landscape field opportunities to productively synthesize diverse forms of knowledge in the service of addressing wicked problems associated urban transformation. The process of designing urban landscapes involves weaving together insights and know-how gleaned from many research areas (natural and social sciences, technology, humanities, etc.) and practice arenas (industry, politics, education, culture, and more). Thinking critically – in the sense of reflectively and seriously – about how such interactive interweaving happens can yield valuable insights for creatively grappling with real-world challenges as well as for defining theoretical research questions that arise from, and associate to, uncertainties surrounding urban futures.

This third course in the Criticality course series offers participants a chance to engage with texts on critical theory, critical thinking, criticality and reflexivity; analyze publications written from a critical perspective on urban landscape futures; and undertake an exercise in critical writing. Adopting a landscape architectural perspective, it welcomes researchers from multiple disciplines, in order to rehearse interactive and synthetic critical thinking processes. It is open to participants who wish to sharpen understanding of their own research aims within broader disciplinary contexts, and to strengthen their capacity, as researchers, to contribute to the evolution of landscape knowledge for sustainable urban futures.

Course structure

The course consists of two (2) group meetings, preparatory and follow-up reading and writing work. The first meeting, an intensive start seminar (24h), is preceded by a preparation phase (ca 40h) with reading and short writing assignments. After the start seminar, a writing-up phase (ca 50h, at distance) precedes the second group meeting. This 1-day pre-final paper-presentation session (6-8h), is followed by an additional, short final writing period (ca 10h) when students integrate peer and instructor critical feedback (provided during that 2nd group seminar) into their final paper submission.

The core of the course is an intensive seminar with four ½ day-sessions scheduled over 4 days (4-7 October 2021). The paper presentation session takes place 6 weeks later, on 16 November 2021. Organized by SLU Landscape, the course is designed to be attended virtually due to ongoing unpredictability associated with Covid, and its associated international related travel restrictions.

Coursework

Preparatory coursework (independent)

Prior to participating in the first core seminar, students undertake four types of preparatory work. This allows everyone to familiarize themselves with a shared body of literature, and each other's PhD research topics. Prior to meeting during the core-seminar, each participant will:

- closely read 4 chapter-length required critical writing texts
- closely read 4 chapter-length required theory literature texts
- prepare four 4-sentence *rhetorical précis* paragraphs (guidelines provided), one per theory text, and circulate via mail to all participants by 1 October, 2021
- prepare a 4-sentence *critical précis* (guidelines provided) of the critical position they wish to develop in their paper
- draft a 1-paragraph synopsis of that final paper topic, to be circulated via email to all participants, by 1 October, 2021

estimated time: 30h

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Core Seminar coursework (group online)

The core seminar includes four half-day long work-sessions. The first two focus on assigned literature, including examples of critical writing on landscape topics and theoretical texts from various fields. Presentations and student discussions of sample critical publications will emphasize how (and why) such critical texts are produced. Discussions of theoretical literature, guided by the reading of participants' rhetorical précis, will address key framing concepts. The final two work sessions focus on developing participants' critical research praxis, using the critical précis as a tool to sharpen positions, nuance vocabularies, and strengthen writing skills. Constructive inputs on student written assignments will be driven by fellow PhD students, Lisa Diedrich and Andrea Kahn. The core seminar includes lectures on critical design practice by Lisa Diedrich (Director SLU Urban Futures platform, and chief editor of Landscape Architecture Europe/LAE); on critical research praxis, by Andrea Kahn (design theorist, SLU professor and founder of designCONTENT, a strategic consultancy for designers); and on critical writing practice by Thaïsa Way, Director of Studies, Garden & Landscape Studies, Dumbarton Oaks/ Professor, University of Washington
estimated time: 24h

Post-core seminar writing period (individual)

5 weeks devoted to final critical paper. *estimated time: 50h*

Paper presentation session (group online)

A one-day session devoted to pre-final paper presentations and pre-designated constructive critical peer-respondent and professor feedback. *estimated time: 8h*

Final writing period (individual)

1 week devoted to integrating presentation session inputs into final critical paper. *estimated time: 10h*

Final Papers will be evaluated by Lisa Diedrich and Andrea Kahn.

COURSE TIMELINE

21 May 2021

Preliminary course information available, circulated through networks

2 JULY 2021

Application deadline (*see p.2 for requirements*)

16 JULY 2021

Close of application review period

15 AUGUST 2021

Distribute updated course information, schedule, literature packages and précis guidelines/assignments and course participant list to successful applicants.

until 1 OCTOBER 2021 (hours allocated at participant discretion)

Preparatory work period for course reading and preparatory course assignments.

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1 OCTOBER, 2021

Four (4) rhetorical précis, 1 critical précis, and 1-paragraph final paper synopsis due (circulated by mail to all participants).

4-7 OCTOBER 2021

Core PhD seminar, four (4) ½-day work sessions (conducted virtually)

9 NOVEMBER 2021

Pre-final paper drafts due (exchange between respondent pairs).

Student course evaluations due

16 NOVEMBER 2021

. Pre-final paper presentation session. Respondent critical comments due – (group meeting/online)

1 DECEMBER 2021

Final paper submittal

CORE-SEMINAR: OVERVIEW OF 4 WORK-SESSIONS (preliminary hourly schedule, TBC)

<u>4 OCTOBER, Monday</u>		<u>COURSE INTRODUCTION & SESSION 1</u>
11:30h-13h		Introductory Meeting: Sonia Curnier/Personal introductions and course practicalities
13h-13.45		<i>Course Introduction</i> WHY/WHAT/HOW/WHO/WHEN
<i>Session 1: Critical FRAMES/Critical RESEARCH</i>		
14.00		Talk, Lisa Diedrich – “Critical WRITING Praxis”
14.30		<i>Break</i>
14.40		Guest presentation on critical writing practice – <i>How's It done? Why is it done?</i> Thaisa Way, Professor, University of Washington/Dumbarton Oaks (See Literature list, below, p. 11)
15.30		<i>Break</i>
15.45		Group Discussion – How is a critical position articulated? Group discussion on assigned critical literature
16:45		Summary of day/overview of session 2
17.00		<i>End of session</i>

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5 OCTOBER, Tuesday

Session 2

Session 2: Theoretical FRAMES/ Critical RESEARCH PRAXIS

Advance Preparation: Participants draft 4 rhetorical précis (1 per assigned text) adhering exactly to guidelines provided, and circulate in a single PDF document to all participants by 1 October

14:00	Introduction to Session 2
14:10	Talk, Andrea Kahn: "Criticality as Praxis/Criticality in Research"
14.30	Discussion of required theory articles (see Literature list, p. 12 below) initiated by reading aloud of participants' rhetorical précis
15.30	<i>Break</i>
15.45	Discussion, Part 2
16.45	Summary of session & overview of Sessions ¾
17.00	<i>End of Day 1</i>

6 OCTOBER, Wednesday

SESSION 3

Session 3 WORKING knowledge: Formulating critical positions [TAKE 1]

Advance Preparation: Participants draft a critical précis and read their peers' 1-paragraph final paper synopses (proposed topic, and relevance to PhD work)

11.30-13.00	Open ZOOM classroom: (Q & A on individual research focus/topics/questions to set preliminary pairings for final paper peer review).
	Lunch Break
14.00-18.00	Critical research practices and knowledge production. <i>Seminar work session:</i> Participants verbally present a brief (4 minute) pre-prepared critical position statement (the critical précis) of their proposed paper, for constructive critical inputs and discussion from peers and course professors. Focus on position and argument development - <i>Why</i> choose to write on that subject? <i>What</i> do you want your reader to 'take-away'? <i>How</i> are you contributing to current discourse in your field? Discussion will focus on strengths and weaknesses of outlines, conceptual clarity of critical précis and direction/suggestions for iterative rewriting of the critical précis (for follow up discussion during Session 4)
18.10	Summary of Sessions 3 findings/overview of Session 4
18.30	<i>Close of day</i>

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7 OCTOBER, Thursday

SESSION 4

Session 4 WORKING knowledge/Refining critical positions [TAKE 2]

11.30-13.00	Open ZOOM classroom: <i>Finalize 2nd iteration of critical précis</i>
14:00- 17.15	PhDs present revised critical précis for second round of peer driven constructive critical inputs. How did your position statement and/or argument evolve in response to preliminary critical inputs? Further discussion of evolving critical positions, directions/suggestions for writing of Final Paper
17:15	Wrap up/Core Seminar
18:00	Wrap-up/Practicalities: final paper pairings, debrief, course evaluations, etc.
18:30	<i>Close of day</i>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Criticality in Research/Criticality as Praxis” aims to strengthen awareness of the variety of critical theory and practice models available to academic and professional actors in the landscape field. Setting a landscape focus guarantees a shared arena for the coursework, making it easier to recognize how diverse knowledge-creation practices (including but not limited to design) generate understanding and contribute to the evolution of landscape-relevant discourse and action. The course is suitable for researchers from all disciplines concerned with the constructed urban landscape (design, planning, environmental science, sustainability studies, landscape architecture, urban history, heritage, ecology, architecture, etc.).

Why take a landscape perspective?

The landscape field, intermixing concerns of interest to the humanities, the creative arts, the natural and the social sciences, offers a model for synthetically and critically thinking and working across disciplinary domains. As a composite knowledge area, landscape cross-fertilizes spatial, scientific, cultural, historical and regulatory perspectives. People who work in the field recognize that landscapes never exist in isolation, and are therefore best considered as dynamic constructs, complex systems and networks of simultaneous, multidirectional environmental, ecological and social exchanges. As such, neither landscape as an area of study, nor landscapes as empirical realities, lend themselves to narrowly siloed research or sectoralized action.

Why criticality?

According to the 1990 Delphi Report by the American Philosophical Society, critical thinking is an essential tool of inquiry, making it indispensable for the individual researcher interested in ideas and concerned with the pursuit of knowledge. Criticality, extending beyond a tool to a trait or disposition, involves the ability to think outside a framework of conventional understandings; to think anew, to think differently. In this sense, criticality can best be viewed as a practice that concerns not just the individual active thinker, but how active thinkers participate in the world.

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For this reason, as Julia Czerniak noted in a 2018 JoLA editorial, criticism as a mode of *enacted criticality* has the ability to influence “not just how we see and understand the world, but how we act in, and in some instances, change it.”.

Why research and praxis?

Within the academy, engaging in a practice of socially situated thinking, reflection and action (criticality) allows researchers and educators to distinguish and discern how academic disciplines “work”. By identifying preferred and established disciplinary methods, in turn, makes it possible to recognize how such work methods inform pedagogical practices and epistemological outcomes. It reveals research (often associated with theoretical endeavors) as a practice, or praxis, in its own right. Encouraging reflection on how thinking, learning and creative knowledge production happen, this course invites the meta-cognitive and a meta-disciplinary stance associated with synthetic, integrative research. Inviting participants from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, the core seminar provides a space to rehearse how knowledge gets actively constructed when individuals with differing views and backgrounds work together.

Why include participants from many disciplines?

Every discipline operates within, and associates with, its own normative set of practices, beliefs, and values; what matters to one discipline (what it deems worth examining, ‘critical’ – in the sense of crucial - to address) does not necessarily hold the same importance to another. In multi-disciplinary work situations, the distinct value-sets that associate with separate disciplines come into contact, but with little substantive impact; individuals (be they academic or professional) continue to work from their own discipline-specific position even as they share expertise. Interdisciplinary collaboration occurs when researchers from diverse disciplines jointly focus on a common problem; layering a variety of working knowledges increases the likelihood of integrating perspectives. Transdisciplinarity has at its core the creative and synthetic integration of multiple perspectives, knowledge production practices and disciplinary expertise (Sill). Transdisciplinary practices prioritize mixed methodologies to establish new practice domains, dissolve boundaries and found new social and cognitive spaces. Critical thinking and criticality play key roles in opening up such new territories, encouraging active reflection upon how ‘other’ ways and worlds of work productively destabilize one’s own.

Course content

The course has 3 aims: provide participants a framework for understanding criticality in design research and practice; expose them to various models of critical research writing; and offer tools to enrich the constructive criticism toolbox and sharpen critical thinking, reading and writing skills.

The core seminar includes close reading and in-depth discussion of sample critical publications in Landscape architecture, to increase familiarity with critical writing formats; close reading and in-depth discussion of 3-4 relevant theory literature texts, using the rhetorical précis tool to improve critical reading skills; and presentation, discussion and iteration of each participant’s critical précis and final paper synopsis.

Critical reading/critical writing - why use rhetorical précis and critical précis tools?

Disciplinary training predispositions us to interpret, and formulate, critical positions as researchers in particular ways. Every research fields prioritizes its own set of issues and frames research questions differently; therefore, what ‘catches our eye’, sparks our interest, motivates us to

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engage in developing counter arguments and responses depends on our learned frames of reference. To bring forward the formative relation of disciplinarity to working knowledge, the course adopts two “shared tools” to structure the critical reading process and in-seminar group discussions: the rhetorical précis and the critical précis. These tools help highlight the impact of disciplinarity on research and working knowledge and how that relation shapes understanding. Adopting these shared tools sets up the precondition for rich group discussion; adhering to a common writing format immediately and vividly renders the range of interpretative, disciplinary and critical positions apparent. All students are expected to strictly observe the given formats for each tool. [Instructions on how to write a “rhetorical précis” and a critical précis will be provided as appendices to the course literature package].

Participants will utilize the rhetorical précis method to critically synopsize required theoretical reading. This tool for recording and understanding the essential elements of a text follows a tightly structured 4-sentence format (see rhetorical précis guidelines). It focuses reader attention on the relation between *what* a piece of writing says (its content), and *how* that message gets conveyed (its form). In a concise paragraph, précis-writers present the author and genre of a text, explain its discursive context, recap the major assertion or thesis, mode of argumentation, stated and/or apparent purpose, and define the relationship between author and audience. Less neutral than a simple summary, *rhetorical précis*-writing builds analytic and critical reading skills by exposing value frameworks at work in the development of arguments by paper authors and their readers/interpreters.

The critical précis tool provides a similarly strict writing format for participants to articulate their own critical positions, in the form of a brief statement synopsizing the arguments they wish to develop in their final paper. The 3-sentence critical précis (see critical précis guidelines) is adapted from a model for articulating research questions and goals developed by, and borrowed from, Booth, Colomb and Williams (*The Craft of Research*: University of Chicago).

Final paper writing (two phases)

During the core seminar, participants will present a 1-paragraph synopsis of their proposed final paper topic and its relevance to their PhD work, and two (2) iterations of a critical précis, for discussion and inputs. Following the seminar, participants develop a paper, not to exceed 6000 words. A week prior to the pre-final paper presentation session (16 November 2021), participants will exchange pre-final drafts of their papers. They will then develop written comments on the paper draft by one (1) of their peers, to share at the group session. Pairings for this constructive critical input exchange will be set during the core seminar.

The pre-final paper presentation session involves close reading, and in-depth discussion, of peer critical commentary. During the session, each participant will deliver a pre-written summary of their own final paper, and one pre-written constructive critical response for their ‘partner’ reader. Following the pre-final presentation session, participants will engage in final revisions of their paper, to incorporate inputs.

Final paper requirements

Each participant will submit a word.doc text file, following submission guidelines provided during the core seminar. (1 December 2021)

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Learning outcomes

The course offers students these learning outcomes: how to develop an understanding of the concept of “criticality” through reading and group discussion of theoretical literature; how to critically reflect on their own working research praxis and assess how it shapes their capacity to forward critical positions in their work; how to engage in guided peer feedback to constructively comment upon and refine research aims; how to articulate, elaborate and integrate critical thinking in their PhD related research practice; how to use rhetorical and critical précis tools to support quality research.

Participation requirements

To successfully complete this course, participants are expected to:

- read all compulsory course literature (literature packages will be provided)
- write *rhetorical précis* (follow instructions provided and circulate prior to core seminar) and rehearse use as a critical reading tool
- develop *critical précis* (follow instructions provided) and rehearse use as a critical writing tool
- prepare a 1-paragraph synopsis explaining relevance of proposed paper topic to PhD work
- attend the 4 half-day sessions of the core seminar and actively contribute to discussions of readings and peers work
- attend the pre-final paper presentation session, to present their work, and to act as constructive critical respondent, providing feedback on a pre-final draft of one (1) participant’s final paper
- hand in an elaborated paper at the end of the course

(Complete details on seminar assignments & précis guidelines will be provided)

Course evaluations

At the end of the intensive core seminar, participants must complete a SLU course evaluation form and a brief questionnaire as a prerequisite to receiving a final grade/course certificate.

PRELIMINARY LITERATURE LIST (all required literature will be provided in PDF format)

Required Critical Publications

Diedrich, Lisa and Cervera, Marina (2020) “Under the Sky: Barcelona’s Tres Turons: Three hills and three cruelties, *JoLA: journal of landscape architecture* 15:2, 68-85

Way, Thaisa (2016) “Urban Ecological Design as Feminist Practice” invited chapter for Kate Orff, *Toward an Urban Ecology: SCAPE / Landscape Architecture* (New York: Monacelli Press) 132-138

Way, Thaisa (2013) “Under the Sky: Landscapes of industrial excess: A thick sections approach to Gas Works Park” *JoLA: journal of landscape architecture* 11:1, 28-39.

Kahn, Andrea (2017) “Connect to history and do good, but to what end?” *‘scape the international magazine for landscape architecture and urbanism/ Ezine* 1-2017

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Required Theory Literature

Brenner, Neil (2009) "What is critical urban theory?" *City*, 13:2, 198-207

Brenner, Neil (2017) "The Agency of Design in an Age of Urbanism", A dialogue with Daniel Ibañez, *Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays* (Basel: Birkhauser) 224-237

hooks, bell (2010) "Teaching 1, Critical Thinking", *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York, Routledge)

+ TBD

Related Literature (recommended for participants wishing more background)

Akkerman, S.F. and Bakker, A. (2011) "Boundary Crossing and Boundary Objects", *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (June), 132-169

-discusses reflection as a mechanism for recognizing and explicating different practices.

Boix Mansilla, V. (2010). Learning to synthesize: The development of interdisciplinary understanding. In Edited by: R. Frodeman, J. T. Klein, & C. Mitcham (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook on interdisciplinarity* (pp. 288–306). New York: Oxford University Press.

Burbules, N. C. and Berk, R. (1999) "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits" in *Critical Theories in Education*, Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler, eds. (NY: Routledge)

- posits an alternate criticality *as practice*, a way of being as well as thinking

Czerniak, J. (2018) Thinking it, doing it: Landscape criticism's range and agency, *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 13:3, 5-7)

-editorial overview of JOLA issue devoted to the culture of critique in Landscape architecture

De Block, G., Vicenzotti, V., Diedrich, L. Notteboom, B. (2019), "For whom? Exploring landscape design as a political project" *JoLA: journal of landscape architecture* 14:3, 4-8

Diedrich, L., de Wit, S., Avermaete, T. (2018), "The Vicissitudes of criticism in the landscape metropolis". *SPOOL open access journal for design in architecture and the built environment*, V5/#1

- editorial overview of a SPOOL issue devoted to the culture of critique in urban design, landscape, and architecture

Davies M., (2015) A model of critical thinking in higher education in M.B. Paulsen (ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 30

-clear overview distinguishing between critical thinking, criticality, and critical pedagogy

Facer, K. (2019) *Learning to live with a lively planet: Renewing the mission of the European University*. Inaugural Lecture for the Zennström Professorship in Climate Change Leadership Uppsala University, 1st October 2019

- reimagining the university

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hooks, bell (2010) *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York, Routledge)

Nowotny, H., Scott, P and Gibbons, M, (2003), 'Mode 2' Revisited: The New Production of Knowledge, *Minerva*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Special Issue: Reflections on the New Production of Knowledge 179-194

- discussion of Mode 2 knowledge, providing a summary of arguments presented in the authors two earlier books, *The New Production of Knowledge* (1994) and *Re-thinking Science!* (2001)

Sill D. J. (1996) Integrative thinking, synthesis, and creativity in interdisciplinary studies. *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. 50, No. 4, Best of JGE: Featuring Articles from 1984–2000 (2001)

Tietjen, A, Riesto S. and Haddad, R. (2017), Doing critique of what design does at Superkilen. CRIOS - Critica degli ordinamenti spaziali, Vol. 4, No. 13, 2017, p. 45-60

Way, Thaisa (2006), "Social Agendas of Early Women Landscape Architects" *Landscape Journal*, 25/2 (Fall): 187-204.