ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT:
Singular Ecologies: Design Intervention as an Experiential Interface in Wild Sites

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Wilderness is an immensely complex concept: difficult to define, and consequently difficult for conservationists to defend. Wilderness captivates artists, historians, writers, recreationalists, and environmentalists, but the human : nature dichotomy represented in part by wilderness produces social and environmental injustice. To Cronon, Olwig, Berry, and Howett, among others, wilderness is problematic: if humans are antonymous to wildness, and human presence invariably degrades wildness, how is it possible for humans to have a positive role in earth's ecology? For environmental designers, wildness appears to be a valuable landscape quality, offering resilience, diversity, functionality, and beauty. Experiential aesthetics, as it is introduced by Howett, offers a useful way to study wildness as a site character with broader implications. Wildness is better understood as an experiential aesthetic than an objectifiable landscape condition: it is not definable, it is felt. When humans feel they are immersed in wild places, they reach transcendental, restorative states. Design intervention in and through wild contexts can challenge the human-nature dichotomy and facilitate greater understanding of our perceptions, impacts, and potential. Wildness, the defining character of wilderness, is useful for designers-- by immersing people in wildness and making them participants in the ecology of the earth, designers might shift the prevailing land ethic from one of misuse to one which honors resources, wilderness, and culture. This project endeavors to better understand wildness and wilderness as cultural constructions, to address environmental design's ability to challenge the problems associated with wilderness, and to propose experiential approaches for designers practicing in wild places.