

# THE ETHICS OF FORM: DESIGNING NEW LANDSCAPE HISTORIES THROUGH AN ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGY

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## 1 ABSTRACT

*This paper presents the work of an advanced graduate level studio from the University of British Columbia that engaged disciplinary history as a site of research through speculative design. Fourteen students working in teams of two explored the relationships between physical form and social function in canonical works of building and landscape architecture completed in the eighteenth century at Stowe house, grounds, and park in Buckinghamshire, England. They used design as a tool to envision alternative proposals which give form to a set of contemporary ethics.*

*Stowe was critical in the development of the discipline of landscape architecture, as it provided the location, labor, and funds for William Kent and Capability Brown to formalize a new aesthetic, later called the “English landscape garden.” This design direction moved away from an ordered geometric design and toward a less formal, more picturesque approach. This landscape tradition also anticipated the rise of ecological design and an ethic of environmental responsibility.*

*Beginning with this historical narrative, this design studio asked, “what are the physical forms that other ethical commitments would have taken?” This question is particularly important in academia today, where social justice and activism are attracting increasing attention. This paper discusses how design was used as the method to research these historically celebrated works at Stowe, and critically engage with history through the proposal of alternative designs.*

### 1.1 Keywords

design studio, research by design, history and theory, ethics, Stowe.