

Arch 608

Special Topics in Urban Theory: Los Angeles

Fall 2012

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2 Units

This course meets once a week for 3 hours during weeks 9-16

This course is an advanced seminar in urban theory with an emphasis on contemporary architecture theory and writing on cities. Of key interest is the city of Los Angeles; through reading and intensive seminar discussion, students will deepen their understanding of this extraordinary city's historical transformations and recent development. The seminar examines the city's complex relationship with its environment as well as power and resource distribution in the city. Always keeping the primary example of Los Angeles in mind, seminar discussions will focus on discrete weekly topics and investigate the urban information they expose.

How, for example, does architecture imagine the city, its management, appearance, its cleanliness and contaminations? More broadly, this course aims to give the student new tools to analyze the contemporary material conditions of cities; it is curious about the history and theory of ecology, atmosphere and environment. Through lectures and reading, students will first become familiar with the genealogy of these and associated terms in architecture. In subsequent research assignments, field trips, and seminar discussions, they will extend these concepts into analytical positions for examining the architecture and urbanism of contemporary Los Angeles.

Week 1 **Introductory Lecture: The Material History of the Contemporary City**

The introductory session discusses Los Angeles during three historical episodes: its turn of the century development, its rapid expansion after the Second World War, and its contemporary manifestation.

Week 2 **Weather and Promoting Southern California**

Sloterdijk, Peter. Interview. *Architecture of Change 2: Sustainability and Humanity in the Built Environment*. Ed. Kristin Feireiss and Lukas Feireiss. (Die Gestalten Verlag, 2009), 18-23, 80-85.

Starr, Kevin. "Materializing History" in *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), 181-201.

Cain, James M. "Paradise" in *the American Mercury* [March 1933]. Reprinted in David L. Ulin, ed. *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology* (New York: Library of America, 2002), 108-116.

Week 3 **Typology and "Good City Form"**

Lynch, Kevin. "The Image of the Environment" and "Los Angeles" in *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1960) 1-13, 32-42.

Blake, Peter. Preface and "Skyscape" in *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape*. (New York: Henry Holt, 1979) 7-10, 127-139.

Rowe, Colin and Fred Koetter. Selections from *Collage City*. (Cambridge: MIT P, 1984).

Week 4 **Asphalt: Transportation and Network Infrastructure**

Banham, Reyner. "Autopia." *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. (Berkeley: UCP, 2009)

---. "Roadscape With Rusting Rails" in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham* (Berkeley: UCP, 1996), 124-128.

Galison, Peter. "War Against the Center," *Grey Room* 04 (Summer 2001): 6-32.
Nye, David. "The High Energy Economy" in *Consuming Power: A Social History of American Energies* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1999), 187-216.

Week 5 **Inversion Layer: Southern California Air**

Carle, David. Introduction, "The Thin Blanket: The Atmosphere," "Air Apparent: A Field Guide to the Sky," "California Air Basins" and "Footprints in the Air" in *Introduction to Air in California* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2006), 1-157.
Martin, Reinhold. "Environment, c. 1971," in *Grey Room* 14 (Winter 2004).
Sánchez, Marcos. "Environment," in Sylvia Lavin (ed.), *Crib Sheets: Notes on the Contemporary Architectural Conversation* (2005).

Week 6 **Water and Power**

Starr, Kevin. "Foundations in Water" in *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s*. (Oxford UP, 1991), 3-64.
Polanski, Roman. *Chinatown*. Paramount, 1999. Film.

Week 7 **Economics and Ethnicity**

Harvey, David. "What's Green and Makes the World Go Round." *The Cultures of Globalization*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), 327-355.
Saskia Sassen, "A New Geography of Centers and Margins: Summary and Implications," in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout (eds.), *The City Reader* (Routledge, 2011), 208-214.
Soja, Edward W. "It All Comes Together in Los Angeles" and "Taking Los Angeles Apart" in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Second Edition. (Verso, 2011), 190-248.

Week 8 **The Culture of the Contemporary City and Image of Los Angeles**

Castells, Manuel. "The Space of Flows, Space of Places: Materials for a Theory of Urbanism" in Graham, *Cybercities Reader* (Routledge, 2003), 82-93.
Koolhaas, Rem. "'Life in the Metropolis' or 'The Culture of Congestion,'" [1977] in K. Michael Hays (ed.) *Architecture Theory Since 1968* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1998), 320-331.
---. "Junkspace" in *October* v.100, Obsolescence. (Spring 2002) 175-190.
Martin, Reinhold and Kadambari Baxi. Selections from *Multi-National City: Architectural Itineraries*. (Actar, 2007).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to complete all the weekly assigned course readings before the week's class. Assignments will be available on Blackboard or distributed by the instructor.

Active participation is essential to this class. The student is expected to:

- (1) Attend class meetings attentively
- (2) Come prepared to participate fully in class discussions
- (3) Complete assignments on time

Each student will be required to submit a preliminary research report (which describes an increasingly refined topic and bibliography) and to complete a 20-page research paper. Both will encourage the ability to actively engage architecture within broader culture.

Grading will be determined from the following distribution:

- 15% Class Participation
- 25% Preliminary Research Report (describing topic and bibliography)
- 60% Final 20-page research paper

The course grading is cumulative. There will be no curve or assessment based on average class level – students will compete for their grade against the point system alone. Due to the nature of the course requirements, there will be no opportunity for make-up assignments or extra credit.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this classroom or at this school. Any instance of plagiarism will be dealt with severely and immediately, according to University procedures.

ATTENDANCE

Attending classes is a basic responsibility of every USC student who is enrolled in courses at the School of Architecture. **The School of Architecture's general absence policy is to allow a student to miss the equivalent of one week of class sessions**, without directly affecting the student's grade and ability to complete the course (this is for excused absences for any confirmed personal illness/family emergency/religious observance or for any unexcused absences). For each absence over that allowed number, the student's letter grade can be lowered up to one full letter grade.

If additional absences are required for a personal illness/family emergency/religious observance, the situation should be discussed and evaluated with the faculty member and appropriate Chair on a case-by-case basis.

All students should understand that any false representation of their attendance is grounds to be considered for a violation of ethics before the University.

Any student not in class within the first 10 minutes is considered tardy, and any student absent (in any form including sleep, technological distraction, or by leaving mid class for a long bathroom/water break) for more than 1/3 of the class time can be considered fully absent. Each tardy class counts as half an absence. If arriving late, a student must be respectful of a class in session and do everything possible to minimize the disruption caused by a late arrival. It is always the student's responsibility to seek means (if possible) to make up work missed due to absences, not the instructor's, although such recourse is not always an option due to the nature of the material covered.

Being absent on the day a project presentation, exercise or other study is due can lead to an "F" for that project presentation, exercise, or study (unless the faculty concedes the reason is due to an excusable absence for personal illness/family emergency/ or previously approved absence for religious observance).

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at:

<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

ACCREDITATION STATEMENT

The USC School of Architecture's Master of Architecture degree is an accredited professional architectural degree program. All students can access and review the NAAB Conditions of Accreditation (including the Student Performance Criteria) on the NAAB Website:

http://www.naab.org/accreditation/2009_Conditions.aspx