

UEP 308

Architecture and the Built Environment/Third Los Angeles Project

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Office hours by appointment

The **Third Los Angeles Project** is a course at Occidental College woven together with a series of public conversations, some held on campus and others elsewhere in the city. Directed by Christopher Hawthorne, architecture critic for the Los Angeles Times, the Third L.A. Project will hold up for scrutiny a city that is moving into a dramatically new if uncertain phase in its civic development.

As it finally builds a comprehensive public transit system and returns its attention to a long-neglected civic realm, Los Angeles in the midst of profound reinvention. Or perhaps it's better to call it a profound identity crisis. Either way, the old clichés about the city clearly no longer apply. This is not the deeply private city it was for much of the postwar period, expanding rapidly and organized around the car, the freeway and the single-family house. It is turning into a markedly different kind of place: more (if tentatively) public, more willing to test out various kinds of shared or collective urban space, from pocket parks and bike lanes to light-rail cars and vertical living.

At the same time, it's important to remember that many of the things L.A. is struggling to add and *in fact grew infamous around the world for lacking in the post-war period* -- mass transit, places to walk, civic architecture, attractive and innovative multifamily housing -- it produced in enviable quantities in the early decades of the 20th century. In the most basic sense, that's why I am calling this initiative the Third Los Angeles. We are not just entering a new phase. We are also rediscovering the virtues and challenges of an earlier one -- and acknowledging the full sweep of L.A.'s modern history.

In the First Los Angeles, stretching roughly from the city's first population boom in the 1880s, the decade modern L.A. was born, through World War II, a city growing at an exponential pace worked to establish a coherent civic identity. The city built a dense, compact and walkable downtown and a comprehensive

streetcar system along with a string of great public buildings (the central Library, City Hall and Griffith Observatory along with movie palaces and the campuses of USC, UCLA, Caltech, Occidental College and others) and inventive multifamily residential architecture by Irving Gill, Richard Neutra and R.M. Schindler.

In the Second Los Angeles, covering the period from 1945 to the turn of the millennium, we pursued a hugely ambitious experiment in building suburbia -- a privatized, car-dominated landscape -- at a vast metropolitan scale. Our most important and innovative architecture, to a dramatic and new degree, was the detached single-family house with private garden, our most impressive infrastructure the freeway and the channelized Los Angeles River. We used architecture, in efforts like the Case Study program, and promoted by deeply charismatic photographs by Julius Shulman and Maynard Parker, to market a vision of postwar affluence not just to Southern California homebuyers but around the world.

Now we are entering a new phase: the Third Los Angeles. Having run out of room to sprawl, virgin land to conquer, the city is doubling back on itself, constructing more infill development and experimenting with denser housing and vertical architecture. We are finally building a comprehensive and public mass-transit system to match the privately run one of the First L.A.

In its simplest terms the challenge of the Third L.A. is to retrofit the Second L.A. to make it more public, more human-scaled, more open and more easily navigable. That effort has some key lessons to learn from the architecture and urbanism of the First L.A.

But there are also fresh challenges that mark the Third L.A. as surely as those new opportunities do. They include the specter of climate change, the decline of manufacturing and industry across Southern California and a political system marked by weak leadership, overlapping constituencies and feeble levels of civic engagement. (And we might add, as this course begins in January 2018, the prospect of intensifying political conflict between L.A. and the Trump administration in Washington.) Many residents, particularly the beneficiaries of Second L.A. policies favoring home and car ownership, see the evolution toward the Third L.A. not as something to encourage but as something to be anxious about or to fight.

During in-class discussions and public conversations during the spring of 2018, the Third Los Angeles Project will explore and explain this new city. It will help Occidental students (many of them new to Los Angeles) and citizens understand and navigate it. And it will play a key role in setting the agenda for new policies and initiatives in Los Angeles, both political and cultural, that might give it a more intelligent and equitable shape.

This course will offer students a range of ways to analyze Los Angeles, a notoriously slippery city to get a handle on. It will more broadly teach them how

to approach the task of analyzing and writing about cities, architecture and the built environment. It will teach them further to think about the connection between Occidental and official city policy in the realms of urban planning, transportation and land use. It will expose them to the work and approach of an architecture critic at a major daily newspaper.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND PUBLIC EVENTS

Week 1: January 24.

Introductory meeting.

Overview of the three L.A.s. and the conceptual framework of the Third Los Angeles. Review of syllabus, schedule of public events and assignments.

Week 2: January 31.

The First Los Angeles. Plus: How to read a building.

Reading: Mayo, McWilliams.

Week 3: Feb 7.

The Second Los Angeles, Part 1.

Reading: Banham, Brodsky, Foster, McCoy, Waldie.

Week 4: Feb. 14.

The Second Los Angeles, Part 2.

Reading: Davis, McPhee, Plagens, Smith.

Week 5: Feb. 21.

The Third Los Angeles.

Reading:

<https://boomcalifornia.com/2016/05/10/christopher-hawthorne-third-los-angeles-interview/>

<https://boomcalifornia.com/2016/12/29/a-boom-interview-in-conversation-with-jennifer-wolch-and-dana-cuff/>

<http://www.latimes.com/la-ca-harbor-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmlstory.html>; <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/boulevards/la-ca-atlantic-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmlstory.html>;

<http://www.latimes.com/la-ca-lankershim-boulevard-los-angeles-index-dto-htmistory.html>; <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/boulevards/la-ca-sunset-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmistory.html>

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-immigration-architecture-full-coverage-htmistory.html>

Watch: <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/episodes/third-la-with-architecture-critic-christopher-hawthorne>

Week 6: Feb. 28.

CASE STUDY: BUNKER HILL.

Reading: Anderton et al.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-broad-review-20150830-column.html>

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-womens-march-los-angeles-pershing-square-20170121-story.html>

First short paper due.

Week 7: March 7.

CASE STUDY: THE LOS ANGELES RIVER.

Reading: Orsi; Gandy.

Price:

Part One: http://www.believermag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price;

Part Two: http://www.believermag.com/issues/200605/?read=article_price

BBC Radio: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p056hnb2>

[[March 14: No Class: Spring Break]]

Week 8: March 21.

CASE STUDY: THE HOLLYWOOD SIGN.

Reading: Braudy, plus assorted excerpts.

Week 9: March 28.

PUBLIC EVENT #1. Does Los Angeles need a downtown the way other cities do? DTLA.

Second short paper due.

Week 10: April 4.
CASE STUDY: THE OLYMPICS.

Week 11: April 11.
PUBLIC EVENT #2: Is Los Angeles exceptional?

Week 12: April 18.
Designing the Third Los Angeles. Final in-class meeting. Guests will include architects and others. Recap of public events, readings and class themes.

Week 13: April 25.
PUBLIC EVENT TBA -- to be developed by the class as a whole.

Wed., May 9: Final paper due.

Assignments/expectations. Two short papers on themes related to the course, its readings and the public events: one of 3-4pp due Feb. 28 and a second of 4-5pp due March 28. **One final paper** of 6-8pp due May 9. The class will collectively be responsible for planning the April 25 public event. Each student will be expected to keep up with the reading and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. Each student will also be asked to contribute to all of the public events in at least one significant way: examples include helping run a social-media feed, introducing a speaker, reading a passage onstage or helping promote each of the events or with community outreach.

Grading. Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:

- Short paper #1: 15%
- Short paper #2: 15%
- Final paper: 40%
- Attendance/contributions in class and to panels: 30%

PLEASE NOTE: Though three of the class sessions will be taken up with public events, this will be very much be an academic course, with a good deal of reading required and careful attention paid to the quality of students' research and writing. Your attendance at each class meeting and public event is expected.

READING: Along with links above, selections (posted to Moodle) from some or all of the following:

Anderton, Frances, ed. *Grand Illusion: A Story of Ambition, and Its Limits, on L.A.'s Bunker Hill*.

Avila, Eric. *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*.

Banham, Reyner. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*.

Braudy, Leo. *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon*.

Brodsky, David. *L.A Freeway: An Appreciative Essay*.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*.

Davis. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*.

Foster, Sesshu. *City Terrace Field Manual: Poems*.

Gandy, Matthew. *Riparian Anomie: Reflections on the Los Angeles River*.

Mayo, Morrow. *Los Angeles*.

McWilliams, Carey. *Southern California: An Island on the Land*.

McCoy, Esther. *Piecing Together Los Angeles: An Esther McCoy Reader*.

McPhee, John. *The Control of Nature*.

Orsi, Jared. *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles*.

Smith, Anna Deavere. *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*.

Waldie, D.J. *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*.