

## COMM 360: The Rhetoric of Los Angeles

Fall 2013: Monday/Wednesday, 10 - 11:50 am, ASC 228

Professor Vincent Brook

Office Hours: M/W 9 – 9:50 am (or after class by appointment), ASC 333

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

*Yaanga, Yang-na, Yabit, El Pueblo Nuestra Senora de la Reina de Los Angeles del Rio Porciuncula, City of Angels, City of Chaos, Sunshine City, Sin City, City of Desire, City of Dreams, City of Quartz, City of Blight, Bright and Guilty Place, The White Spot, La La Land, City of the Future, City of Forgetting, City of Lies, Equivocal City, Enormous Village, Chamelion Metropolis, Postmodern Megalopolis Par Excellence . . .* Los Angeles has been called all these things and more—out of pride, envy, hype, hubris, fear, denial, love, disgust, mis- and in-comprehension.

Following the trajectory my book, Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles, the course will exhume the many faces, facets, and feces of Los Angeles by looking at the Indian-village-turned-multicultural-megalopolis through the prism of a palimpsest—that is, the geographical and historical layers of Los Angeles will be explored in relation to their vast, complex and often contradictory discursive constructions (in literature, film, television, architecture, music, politics, etc.).

The course is divided into four main parts. Part 1 examines the early written histories of Los Angeles, from the imagined community's origins as a Tongva Indian settlement to its emergence as a major American metropolis in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Part 2 intersects LA's history with that of Hollywood, which as geographical site and generic term for the culture industry is itself an uncanny combination of reality and myth. Part 3 deals with film noir, the darkly seductive movie genre, many of whose canonical texts are set in LA and/or feature the City of Heaven/Hell as a main character. Part 4 explores the demographic diversity of Los Angeles—specifically, the histories and media representations of the Latina/o, African American, Asian American, and Anglo/White communities—thereby re-visioning LA's history from an ethno-racial perspective and bringing us into the multicultural present.

### REQUIRED TEXT:

Vincent Brook, Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles (2013)

### SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:

*American Quarterly* (Fall 2004): Special Issue on Los Angeles

Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*

Jeremiah Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles*

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

Howard Blum, *American Lightning: Terror, Mystery, the Birth of Hollywood, and the Crime of the Century*

John Buntin, *LA Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City*

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*

Michael J. Dear, H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, eds., *Rethinking Los Angeles*

Dydia DeLyser, *Ramona Memories*

William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*

William Deverell and Greg Hise, ed., *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*

Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*

Joe Domanick, *To Protect and to Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams*

William Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*

Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*

- David Fine, *Imagining Los Angeles*
- David Fine, ed., *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Essays*
- Douglas Flammig, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*
- Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*
- William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles*
- Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles*
- Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramon, *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*
- Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: And the Making of Modern Politics*
- Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*
- Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds., *20<sup>th</sup> Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict*
- “L.A. Palimpsest: Recovering Los Angeles’ Hidden Stories and Forgotten Communities”  
([www.scrippscollege.edu/.../la-palimpsest-recovering-los-angeles-hidden-stories-and-forgotten-communities](http://www.scrippscollege.edu/.../la-palimpsest-recovering-los-angeles-hidden-stories-and-forgotten-communities))
- Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place*
- William McCawley, *The First Angelenos: The Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles*
- William Alexander McClung, *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles*
- Kevin R. McNamara, *The Literature of Los Angeles*
- Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island in the Land*
- Enrique and Gilda Ochoa, eds., *Latino LA: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*
- Johnny Otis, *Upside Your Head: Rhythm and Blues on Central Ave.*
- Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios, A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890*
- Louise Pubols, *The Father of All: The de la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California*
- Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*
- Richard Rayner, *A Bright and Guilty Place: Murder, Corruption, and Los Angeles’s Scandalous Coming of Age*
- David Reid, ed., *Sex, Death, and God in L.A.*
- David Rieff, *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World*
- Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*
- George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity and Culture in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*
- Deepak Narang Sawhney, ed., *Unmasking L.A.: Third Worlds and the City*
- Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*
- Alain Silver and James Ursini, *L.A. Noir: The City as Character*
- Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-Imagined Places*
- Kevin Starr, Multi-volume series on California
- Bruce Torrance, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*
- Jules Tygiel, *Oil, Stocks, Scandal During the Roaring Twenties*
- David L. Ulin, ed., *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*
- Victor M. Valle and Rudolfo Torres, *Latino Metropolis*
- Max Vorspan and Lloyd Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*
- D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*
- Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgheimer, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles*
- John D. Weaver, *Los Angeles: The Enormous Village*

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- All assignments must be completed to receive a grade in the class.
- Late papers or assignments will be graded down 1/3 grade for the first late day, and an additional 1/3 grade for every subsequent two late days.
- Good attendance and punctuality are expected. Absences not only affect your class participation grade but can affect your overall grade as well. 10 or more unexcused absences results in an automatic Fail. Leaving the class early also factors into attendance.

- Class participation is encouraged, and can affect your grade positively (see Evaluation).
- Cheating on exams or plagiarism in writing assignments are grounds for failing the class.

**EVALUATION:**

Term Paper: 25%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam (non-cumulative): 25%

Group Site Visit Project: 15% (written and oral presentation; guidelines below)

**[Or Alternative—JEP Project: 15% plus Extra Credit; guidelines below]**

Class Participation: 10%

**GRADING:**

97-100% = A+, 93-96% = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, etc.

**SCHEDULE AND AGENDA**

(Readings/screenings subject to change)

**WEEK 1**

Mon., Aug. 26

Introduction, The Origins of Los Angeles

Reading: None

Screening: *LA Story* (Part 1)

Wed., Aug. 28

Origins (continued)

Reading: Brook, Prologue and Introduction

Screening: *LA Story* (Part 2)

**WEEK 2**

Mon., Sept. 2

**LABOR DAY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

Wed., Sept. 4

Hollywood

Reading: Brook, Ch. 1

Screening: *Ramona* (1936, Part 1)

**WEEK 3**

Mon., Sept. 9

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 2

Screening: *Ramona* (1936, Part 2)

Wed., Sept. 11

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 3

Screening: Documentary on Hollywood

**WEEK 4**

Mon., Sept. 16

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 3 (continued)

Screening: *What Price Hollywood?* (Part 1)

Wed., Sept. 18

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 3 (continued)

Screening: *What Price Hollywood?* (Part 2)

### **WEEK 5**

Mon., Sept. 23

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 4

Screening: *The Player* (or) *The Truman Show* (Part 1)

Wed., Sept. 25

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Ch. 4 (continued)

Screening: *The Player* (or) *The Truman Show* (Part 2)

### **WEEK 6**

Mon., Sept. 30

LA noir

Reading: Ch. 5; [http://dornsife.usc.edu/la\\_school/in\\_the\\_news/reynier\\_banham.html](http://dornsife.usc.edu/la_school/in_the_news/reynier_banham.html)

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Part 1)

Wed., Oct. 2

LA noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 5

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Part 2)

### **WEEK 7**

Mon., Oct. 7

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 6

Screening: *Chinatown* (Part 1)

Wed., Oct. 9

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 6 (continued)

Screening: *Chinatown* (Part 2)

### **WEEK 8**

Mon., Oct. 14

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 6 (continued)

Screening: *Blade Runner* (Part 1)

Wed., Oct. 16

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 6 (continued)

Screening: *Blade Runner* (Part 2)

### **WEEK 9**

Mon., Oct. 21

**WRITTEN PROJECTS DUE!**

**PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (Part 1)**

Wed., Oct. 23

**GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (Part 2)**

Handout: Study Guide for Midterm

**WEEK 10**

Mon., Oct. 28

Review for Midterm

Reading: None

Screening: Rehner Banham documentary

Wed., Oct. 30

**MIDTERM EXAM**

**WEEK 11**

Mon., Nov. 4

LAtinas/os

Reading: Brook, Ch. 7

Screening: *Mi Familia* (Part 1)

Wed., Nov. 6

LAtinas/os (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 7 (continued)

Screening: *Mi Familia* (Part 2)

**WEEK 12**

Mon., Nov. 11

bLAcks

Reading: Brook, Ch. 8

Screening: *Boyz N the Hood* (Part 1)

Wed., Nov. 13

bLAcks (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 8 (continued)

Screening: *Boyz N the Hood* (Part 2)

**WEEK 13**

Mon., Nov. 18

LA and Asians

Reading: Brook, Ch. 9

Screening: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Part 1)

Wed., Nov. 20

LAsians (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 9 (continued)

Screening: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Part 2)

**WEEK 14**

Mon., Nov. 25

LA and Whites

Reading: Brook, Ch. 10

Screening: *Falling Down* (Part 1)

Wed., Nov. 27

**THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**

**WEEK 15**Mon., Dec. 2

LA and Whites (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 10 (continued)

Screening: *Falling Down* (Part 2)Wed., Dec. 4

Review

Reading: None

*Inventing Los Angeles* documentary**TERM PAPERS DUE!****Handout: Final Exam Study Guide****WEEK 16**Mon., Dec. 9**STUDY DAYS – NO CLASS**Wed., Dec. 11**STUDY DAYS – NO CLASS****WEEK 17**Mon., Dec. 16**FINAL EXAM: 8-10 AM!**

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**Group Project: Guidelines**

- I. Written project due: Monday of the 9<sup>th</sup> week. If we have a TA, submit two hard copies: one for the TA and one for the professor.
- II. Length: 5-7 pages typed (double-spaced, default margins, 12-point/Times New Roman font), plus photo(s) verifying you were at the site.
- III. Topic: Research and scope your assigned Los Angeles site.
- A. Pre-writing:
- 1) Research the site, so that you know what to look for when you get there.
  - 2) Meet with the TA and/or instructor, to get research and other tips.
  - 3) Visit the site.
- B. Writing:
- 1) Describe the site's location, physical characteristics, historical background, rhetorical reputation.
  - 2) If the site is an individual building, group of buildings, or comparatively small space, place it in the context of its larger immediate surroundings (i.e., Griffith Observatory re Griffith Park, Disney Hall re the Music Center and Bunker Hill). If it is a larger space (Boyle Heights, Venice Beach), focus on key locations within the larger one (as pointed out by the instructor).
  - 3) Describe your experiential engagement with the site: what is it like to be there, and MOST IMPORTANTLY, how does it mesh with your expectations based on its rhetorical reputation and historical significance? (If individual responses vary, describe them separately.)

- 4) Conclude with an assessment of the site's socio-cultural significance—i.e., What is its relevance to the rhetoric of Los Angeles, historically and contemporarily.
- 5) Group members can write sections individually or together, but all are equally responsible for the finished product.
- 6) Include footnotes/bibliography, using accepted academic methods.

IV. Oral Presentation: Each group makes a brief (10 min.) in-class oral presentation on your site, Mon. or Wed. of the 9<sup>th</sup> week. Powerpoint or other creative tools are encouraged.

V. Cooperation and the equitable distribution of responsibilities with your partner are essential; failure to “get along” potentially hurts both parties.

### **JEP (Joint Educational Project)—Guidelines**

JEP is a Student Service Learning program sponsored by USC's Dornsife School ([www.dornsife.usc.edu/jep](http://www.dornsife.usc.edu/jep)). JEP provides an opportunity to go into a local public school and work as a mentor or teaching assistant and learn about the neighborhood around USC as well as the city in which you live while earning class credit. Students may work individually or in small teams.

You will receive training sessions and engage in weekly “reflective assignments.” JEP will supervise your participation and provide assessment to your professor. Besides the invaluable experience you will gain and community service you will perform, your grade on the project is equivalent to the On-Site Visit Project assignment, also counts for extra credit, and adds an impressive item to your overall resume.

Further guidelines, including written material, will be provided in class by a JEP representative. For further questions about JEP, contact Jake Peters, JEP's Assistant Director of Academic Affairs at [jjpeters@usc.edu](mailto:jjpeters@usc.edu) (213-740-1831) or MacKensie Gansert, [gansert@usc.edu](mailto:gansert@usc.edu).

### **Term Paper Guidelines**

I. Due: Wed. of the 16<sup>th</sup> week. (last regular day of class).

II. If we have a TA, submit two hard copies: one for the TA and one for the professor. Also submit an on-line copy to [turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com). Details TBA.

III. Length: 7-10 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, default margins)

IV. Topic:

A. Choose one of the four sections of the course (or more than one, if they overlap): Early L.A. History; Hollywood; L.A. Noir; Multicultural L.A.

B. Choose a film, TV show, webcast, book, piece of music, advertisement, location, etc.) that relates to your aspect(s). You may NOT choose any of the films screened in class as your PRIME focus, though you may DISCUSS one or more of them for purposes of comparison. Inform the professor ASAP of your choice of film, etc., as no two students can the same film, etc.—it's first come, first served.

C. Choose one or more of the theoretical frames from the class—e.g., smoke and mirrors, palimpsest, whitewashed adobe, booster, debunker, Banham’s four ecologies, etc. (and/or others of your choosing)—to analyze your aspect and film, etc.

D. As part of your analysis, also compare the historical backdrop or context of the period in which the film, etc., was made and/or set with your knowledge of the historical record for this/these period(s).

E. Develop a thesis (angle, take, argument) on the material.

#### V. Method:

##### A. Title Page:

1. Title of essay, with main title and subtitle. The title of the film, etc., should appear somewhere in the main or sub-title. Puns are encouraged, e.g.:

**“Having Your Movie and Eating It Too:  
Debunking the New Hollywood in *The Player***

2. Name; Course Number; Term

##### B. Introduction:

1. State your topic: What aspect of the course and what film, etc., will you be focusing on, and what theoretical frame(s) will you be applying?
2. For any film you mention, give (ideally in parentheses) the director and release date; for a TV show, the years of the original run; for a book, the author and date of publication: e.g., *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992); *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000 – 2012).
3. State your thesis: What is your angle, take, argument, etc., on the material.

##### C. Body:

1. Analyze your film, etc., using your thesis, theoretical frame, and historical comparison.
2. Support your points by referencing research material, which may include the book but must also bring in AT LEAST two outside sources.
3. Support/illustrate your points with passages, images, scenes, from the film, etc.
4. Always bear in mind how your material and analysis relates to the rhetoric of L.A.
5. Cite sources using one of the approved citation methods: MLA, CMS, APA.

##### D. Conclusion:

1. Briefly summarize your findings without being redundant.
2. End with a strong statement giving a clear sense of what you have tried to show.

##### E. Notes or Works Cited section.

#### VI. Additional Pointers:

A. Number your pages.

B. Underline or put in italics all titles (films, TV shows, books, etc.).

C. When referring to creators or authors, give the full name the first time they are mentioned, thereafter only the second name: e.g. “**Robert Altman** did thus-and-so. In addition, **Altman** did thus-and-so.”

D. When describing film or TV **content**, use the present tense: e.g., “In *The Player*, Griffin Mill **represents** a postmodern variant of the venal and corrupt studio executive”; “In this scene, Mill **displays** his moral depravity by **failing** to disclose his involvement in



the crime”; “*The Player* **satirizes** the film industry’s continuing sacrifice of art to the bottom line.”

E. To indicate a film’s **historical relations**, use the past tense: e.g., “*The Player* **was** the first mainstream U.S. film in decades to critique the Hollywood system”; “*The Player* **launched** a new trend in anti-Hollywood films.”

F. Avoid overlong plot **summaries!** Plot **information** must be included, of course, but only as much as is necessary to support or illustrate your points.

G. No plagiarism! Turnitin.com will monitor much of this, as will my comparison of the term paper with your other written work in class.

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### Some (Not Necessarily All) LA Films/TV Shows

#### Hollywood (some may overlap w/Film Noir):

*The Bad and the Beautiful, Barton Fink, Be Cool, The Big Knife, The Big Picture, Boogie Nights, Bowfinger, The Day of the Locust, Ed Wood, Get Shorty, Hollywoodland, The Last Tycoon, Mulholland Drive, SImOne, Singin’ in the Rain, A Star is Born (1937, 1954, 1976), SOB, Swingers, The Truman Show, What Just Happened*

#### Film Noir/Neo-Noir (some may overlap w/Multicultural LA):

*Ask the Dust, Bad Influence, The Big Sleep, The Big Lebowski, The Black Dahlia, Blood In Blood Out (Latino), Boulevard Nights (Latino), Brick, Changeling, Collateral, Colors, Crash, Criss Cross (1949), Dead Again, Devil in a Blue Dress (Black), Die Hard, Down in the Valley, Drive, Farewell My Lovely, Friday (Black), The Grifters, Heat, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Kiss Me a Killer (Latino), Kiss Me Deadly, Jackie Brown (Black), Juice (Black), LA Confidential, Lady in the Lake, Less Than Zero, The Limey, Magnolia, Memento, Mildred Pierce, Mulholland Drive, Mulholland Falls, Murder My Sweet, Play It As It Lays, Point Blank, The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946, 1981), South Central (Black), Strange Days, To Live and Die in LA, Training Day, True Confessions, The Two Jakes, Union Station*

#### Miscellaneous Films:

*American Me (Latino), Annie Hall (NY/LA), A Better Life (Latino), Beverly Hills Cop (Black/White), Big Wednesday (Surfurbia), Bling Ring (Hollywood), Born in East LA (Latino), Bread and Roses (Latino), Celeste and Jesse Forever, Charlotte Sometimes (Asian), Clueless, A Day Without a Mexican (Latino), The Debut (Filipino), Don’t Be a Menace While Drinking Juice in the Hood (Black), Down and Out in Beverly Hills, Dragnet, Earth Girls Are Easy, Echo Park, The End (Hollywood), End of Watch (Latino), Escape from LA, Exiles (American Indian), Fast and Furious (Mixed Race), Fast Times at Ridemont High, (500) Days of Summer, Down and Out in Beverly Hills, Fletch, Friday, From Prada to Nada (Latino), Gang Tapes (Black), Grease, Havoc (White/Latino), The Kids Are All Right (lesbian), Killer of Sheep (Black), I Love You, Man (White), La Bamba (Latino), Less Than Zero (White), Los Angeles Plays Itself (documentary), The Loved One, Mad Money (Black), Menace to Society (Black), Mi Vida Loca (Latino), Punch Drunk Love, Quinceanera (Latino, gay), Real Women Have Curves (Latino), Rebel Without a Cause, Repo Man, Ruby Sparks, Set It Off (Black), Short Cuts, Slums of Beverly Hills (Jewish), Soul Food (Black), Speed, Stand and Deliver (Latino), They Live!, Tortilla Soup (Latino), To Sleep with Anger (Black), Valentines Day, Valley Girl, Volcano, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Zoot Suit (Latino)*

TV Shows:

*American Family* (Latino), *Arrested Development*, *The Bernie Mac Show* (Black), *Beverly Hills 90210* (either or both versions), *Brothers and Sisters*, *Californication*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Devious Maids*, *Dragnet*, *Entourage* (Hollywood), *Episodes* (Hollywood), *Flashforward*, *The Game*, *The George Lopez Show* (Latino), *The Larry Sanders Show* (Hollywood), *L.A. Complex* (Hollywood), *Melrose Place* (either or both versions), *Mildred Pierce*, *Modern Family* (Multicultural), *Moesha* (Black), *NCIS Los Angeles*, *Numb3rs*, *The Parkers* (Black), *The O.C.*, *Resurrection Blvd.* (Latino), *Ray Donovan* (Neo-noir); *77 Sunset Strip*, *Southland*, *The Shield*, *Weeds*, various *Reality shows*