

## The Architecture of Seven Ecologies II: Engaged Urban Theory and Praxis in Los Angeles



I. The Beaches



II. The Hills



III. The Flatlands/ South  
Central



IV. The Downtowns



V. El Este de Los Angeles



VI. L.A. River



VII. The Macro-Frontier

## COURSE OVERVIEW

The weekly seminar and two research methods workshops will open our field of scholarly inquiry to explore broad topics of urban theory and praxis in the context of Los Angeles, a city that is paradigmatic as a site of social upheaval, political resistance and progressivism, demographic change, and cultural experimentation and expression. In dialogue with the city's storied past is its ever-changing present; it is in our moment of social, political, and environmental crisis when we must turn to the challenges Los Angeles faces and propose new possibilities for our collective future.

Such a task calls for an urban humanist approach that brings multiple perspectives, disciplines, and positions together through a collaborative, scholarly project. An urban humanist approach also explicitly invokes praxis, that is, the deployment of theory through action intended to make the world a better place in some small way. When we talk about urban praxis, its meaning is broad enough to encompass architecture and planning but also arts interventions, exhibitions, journalism, narratives, poetry, and activism. Praxis emphasizes that urban humanists are university scholars who engage their real-world agency.

To frame our analysis in Los Angeles, we will employ the theoretical lens of ***borders and commons*** within seven speculative “ecologies” of the city. Public discourse about border walls and about sanctuary cities points to the deep interrelationship between borders and commons. A threshold, for example, can be a barrier, a point of welcome, or both. Beyond the threshold is a shared space where many potentials exist simultaneously, including sanctuary, friction, violence, community, and anonymity.

Like borders, the commons can be interpreted in multiple ways; our interest lies in the dynamic construction of space. To situate the commons is a humanist practice that builds a public, identifies a public sphere, creates collectivity, or sets the terms of shared space. Borders and sanctuaries are fundamentally cultural and socio-political constructs, by which inside and out, safe and perilous, ours and not-yours, welcome and hostile, are defined not only by policy and behavior but by physical means. Borders and commons exist at different scales and intensities, from the macro-scale of international border walls and sanctuary cities to the micro-scale of the sidewalk and the park.

For our purposes, we will translate the macro-concepts of Borders and Commons to the micro-scale of “invisible walls” and “small pockets of resistance” that exist in each neighborhood. An invisible wall is a space that works at the physical, psychological, and symbolic levels simultaneously, they are social constructs that exist in different forms and affect people in different ways depending on race, socioeconomic class, and gender. Small pockets of resistance are small spaces formed when two or more people come together in agreement to create a collective. The resistance is against the inhumanity of the current economic order and the pervasive systemic forms of exploitation and discrimination that results from such order. These tactical spaces, pockets are temporal and change and mutate depending on the circumstances and needs.

For our purposes, we will focus our research on the invisible walls and pockets of resistances in seven particular locales, or “ecologies,” of Los Angeles. Throughout our research, we must ask: *How are these invisible walls and pockets of resistance produced and reproduced within these ecologies? How are the pockets of resistance or commons experienced and interpreted? Who controls these spaces, and in what way? Who is granted access, who is denied access, and why?*

**Course Themes: Borders and Commons, Invisible Walls and Pocket of Resistance, Urban Ecologies, Public Art and Visual Narrative, Spatial Justice, Subversive Spaces and Sounds, Engaged Scholarship**

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

**Accommodations:** If you are already registered with the Center for Accessible Education (CAE), please request your Letter of Accommodation on the Student Portal. If you are seeking registration with CAE, please submit your request for accommodations via the CAE website. Please note that the CAE does not send accommodation letters to instructors—you must request that Gustavo view the letter in the online Faculty Portal. Once you have requested your accommodations via the Student Portal, please notify Gustavo immediately so he can view your letter. Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations should submit their request for accommodations as soon as possible, as it may take up to two weeks to review the request. For more information, please visit the CAE website [www.cae.ucla.edu](http://www.cae.ucla.edu) or contact them by phone at (310) 825-1501.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. Introduce students to engaged urban theory and spatial justice in the context of Los Angeles through the theoretical lens of borders/invisible walls and commons/pockets of resistance.
2. Introduce students to the transformative potential and politics of visual and public art as employed by different communities in Los Angeles.
3. Expand students’ methodological toolkit to include Podcast/Sonic Narrative as a method of spatial inquiry and critique of socially constructed borders and commons.
4. Maintain and refine space for ongoing discussion on engaged scholarship.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Attendance to all the Class meetings is required, except in special cases.
- Active participation during class.
- Attendance at the two Research Methods Workshops is required, except in special cases.
- Completion of all assignments on time.

## **COURSE STRUCTURE: THE SEVEN ECOLOGIES**

*As a reminder, the Fall course is structured around a weekly seminar (4 credits) and two Research Methods Workshops (2 credits).*

All students are expected to attend all scheduled seminar times and complete all readings. Seminar meetings will be structured with the following components: a short overview of the ecology and associated topics by the instructor and group discussion about the readings, and on some occasions concluding with either a film screening, a recorded talk, or a guest presentation.

Since you will complete the 4-unit seminar and the 2-unit workshops concurrently, the assignments for both courses will interrelate. For the seminar, you will complete a final experimental podcast/sonic narrative project and written report. All the workshop components help build your final podcast and thick maps.

We will begin the seminar (Weeks 1-2) by reading key theoretical and scholarly approaches to understanding various notions of borders and commons. Then, as praxis-oriented scholars, we will locate and interrogate the borders and commons across the city. As the city is vast and diverse, we will shape our approach to Los Angeles through **seven ecologies**, playing off the notion of the 'four ecologies' described by British architectural historian Reyner Banham in his book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, published in 1971.

Since Banham's ecologies, Los Angeles has been theorized as a type of decentered urbanism, a fragmented metropolis, or networked city; while these macro-theories have contributed significantly to a better understanding of Los Angeles urbanism, they have overlooked the particular dynamics of space/place production in a particular neighborhood or area of the city. Part of the argument here is that such urban dynamics occur at different scales and intensities depending on the particular geographic area (ecology) and have different effects on people's lives. For instance, socio-spatial dynamics of borders and commons are different in wealthy neighborhoods (The Hills and The Beaches) than in the Flatlands (South LA and north San Fernando Valley). This spatial complexity requires a more nuanced kaleidoscopic theoretical approach.

In this course, we will expand and “thicken” Banham’s ecologies, and for our purposes, we will define the notion of ecology to encompass three juxtaposed conditions:

- a) **Physical and Environmental**, involving the particular topography and climate of the area.
- b) **Social and Cultural**, relating social dynamics and cultural forms distinctive in a neighborhood.
- c) **Representational and Imaginary**, exploring how representations and images of a particular neighborhood can have a profound effect in the perception of its people and their everyday lives.

Together, these seven ecologies can be understood as a speculative conceptual framework for theorizing the rapidly changing urban conditions of contemporary Los Angeles. The seven ecologies are:

- I. The Beaches: Malibu, Santa Monica, Venice, Marina del Rey
- II. The Hills: Hollywood Hills, Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood
- III. The Flatlands / South Los Angeles, North San Fernando Valley
- IV. Downtowns: Skid Row, financial center, Bunker Hill, the arts district, garment district, Little Tokyo, and Chinatown
- V. El Este de Los Angeles: Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights, City Terrace
- VI. The L.A. River
- VII. The Macro-Frontier: Los Angeles/San Diego/Tijuana corridor

*The task is not only to update Banham's original four ecologies to respond to today's cultural, social, and spatial complexities but also problematize the notion of 'ecology' through the lens of borders and commons.*

Each of the subsequent weeks (Weeks 3-9) will be devoted to investigating one of each of the seven ecologies. Class time will comprise a short lecture, review of the weekly readings, discussion, and either a film screening, guest presentations, or time to work on team projects.

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

As groups, students will complete three primary assignments over the course of the Fall quarter:

- 1) A digital **thick map** that analyzes one or more invisible walls (border) and pockets of resistance (commons) in your assigned ecology

- 2) A **5-10-minute experimental podcast** based on a real/fictional story created by your group about your ecology's significant, eccentric, or hidden aspect and speculates about its possible evolution.

### **Assignments and Grading for 4-Unit Fall Seminar (AUD 289-9)**

In interdisciplinary groups of 3-4, you will construct a thick map of the borders and commons you discovered in your assigned ecology. Also, you will research, develop, record, edit, and present an experimental podcast of approximately 5-10 minutes. Your same team will co-author ~3,000-word report related to your podcast.

- 15% - Attendance and Participation, including reading preparation for discussion
- 5% - Proposal for Final Podcast project
- 30% - Final Podcast project - [Link to Brief](#)
- 25% - Thick Map - [Link to Brief](#)
- 25% - Podcast Report ~3,000 words - [Link to Report Brief](#)

We invite the class to use the website platforms of **StoryMaps** and/or **Cargo Collective** during the year to archive relevant material gathered and produced during the UH academic year. This archive will serve as a repository for the work you will create during the year.

The link below shows some examples of last Spring' UH students' final projects using these platforms:

<https://www.urbanhumanities.ucla.edu/ecodex>

### **FORMING THE SEVEN ECOLOGY TEAMS**

By the end of Week 1, you will be assigned to an interdisciplinary team of 3-4 persons. Each team will be assigned to an ecology of your choosing. To do this, your team will meet during Week 1 and rank your top three choices for an ecology. Each team will be notified of their assigned ecology prior to meeting Week 2.

your thick map and podcast report will have a social-spatial frame that operates as a focal point, locating the ecology in a specific setting, situation, example, etc. It must have a point of view or an argument that is developed through the seminar. A part of the podcast report will be to build a glossary of 4-6 key terms (keywords) related to your ecology. Many of these will originate from your assigned readings, and teams may bring in other materials from further research. Remember that the way we are thinking through borders and commons is through the lenses of the environmental/physical, social and cultural, and representational or imaginary.



# FALL COURSE SCHEDULE

*Please note that the readings and overall structure of each class are subject to change. Unless another form of convening is noted, all classes will be held in person. Please read all required readings prior to class. Links to the readings can be found on CCLE, and many are also linked in this schedule.*

## **Week 1—September 29. Introduction to Engaged Urban Theory, Borders & Commons, and the “Seven Ecologies of LA”**

- *Introduction: Gustavo Leclerc; Long Term Assignment - Watch and study Reyner Banham’s Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles (1972).*
- *Introduction to Thick Mapping as a socially engaged research method by Todd Presner.*
- *Introduce the theme for the Fall seminar and walk through the syllabus and assignments*
- *Group work: Form students’ teams and assign ecologies*
- *If time permits, we will watch Reyner Banham’s Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles (1972). <https://vimeo.com/22488225>*

## **Week 2—October 6. Theories of the Commons; Podcast as a Research Method**

- *Introduce podcast-as-method/tool for investigation and thinking about cities; introduce the first podcast assignment by [Jacqueline Jean Barrios](#) and Gus Wendell.*
- *Lecture and Discussion: **The Commons: The Commons and the Public Sphere**; definitions of public and community; historical perspectives on the public sphere*
- *Discussion of readings*
- *Group work: Review assigned ecology; determine roles and responsibilities for each team member and deliverables (i.e., Thick Map, Podcast, Final Report)*

### **Required Readings on Theories of the Commons**

- Harney, Stefano and F. Moten. [The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study](#). Wivenhoe/New York: Minor Compositions, 2013. (Open Access). Ch 0: The Wild Beyond (by Jack Halberstam), pp 5-12; Ch 1: Politics Surrounded, pp 17-20



- Harvey, David. "[The Creation of the Urban Commons.](#)" In *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London and New York: Verso, 2012. 67-88
- Mouffe, Chantal. "[Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces.](#)" *Art + Research*, v 1, n 2, Summer 2007. (5 pp)
- Arendt, Hannah. "[The Public Realm: The Common.](#)" In *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. 50-58.

### Additional Readings

- Fraser, Nancy. "[Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,](#)" in *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990), pp. 56-80
- Meskimmon, Marsha. 2013. "[The Precarious Ecologies of Cosmopolitanism.](#)" *Open Arts Journal*, 1 (1), pp.15-25.
- Kruse, Kevin M. "What does a traffic jam in Atlanta have to do with segregation? Quite a lot." [New York Times, 1619 Project](#), Aug 14, 2019. (3 pp)
- Soja, Edward W. "Ch. 4: Seeking Spatial Justice in Los Angeles." In *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 111-155.

## Week 3—October 13. Theories of the Border - Ecology I: The Beaches

- *Lecture and Discussion: **The Border:** Locating different theories of the border; bordering; the relationship between commons and borders*
- *Discussion of readings*

### Required Readings on Theories of the Border

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. "[The Homeland, Aztlan / El Otro Mexico.](#)" In *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987. 1-13.
- Nail, Thomas. "[Chapter 14 Moving Borders.](#)" In Anthony Cooper and Soren Timming, *Debating and Defining Borders: Philosophical and Theoretical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2019. 195-205.
- Leclerc, Gustavo. "[Tiempo de Híbridos: Migration, Hybridity, and Cosmopolitics at the U.S.-Mexico Border.](#)" In *The US-Mexico Border: Place, Imagination, and Possibility*. 2017. 48-54.
- Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. "The Proliferation of Borders." In *Border as Method: or, The Multiplication of Labor*, Durham, Duke University Press. 2013. 1-25. **pdf**

### Additional Readings on the Border

- Cruz, Teddy. "Border wallsBradford's [as Public Space?](#)" In Rael, Ron. *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the US-Mexico Boundary.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017. Viii-xiv.
- Fox, Claire F. "[Chapter 2. Establishing Shots of the Border: The Fence and the River.](#)" In *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S. - Mexico Border.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 41-68.

#### Required Readings on Ecology I: The Beaches

- Banham, Reyner. "[Chapter 2. Ecology I: Surfurbia.](#)" In *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 19-37.
- Davis, Mike. "Chapter 3. "[The Case for Letting Malibu Burn.](#)" In *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster.* New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998. "12 pp."
- LeMenager, Stephanie. "[The Los Angeles Urban Rangers, Trailblazing the Commons.](#)" In Adamson, Joni and K.N. Ruffin (eds) *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship.* New York: Routledge, 2013. Pp 220-235.
- Devienne, Elsa. "[The Right to the Beach? Urban Renewal, Public Space Policing and the Definition of a Beach Public in Postwar Los Angeles, 1940s-1960s.](#)" *Revue Francaise d'Etudes Americaines* 2016, 3, n 148. Pp 31-51.

#### Additional Readings

- Morton, Patricia. "[A Tale of Two Venices.](#)" In *A Confederacy of Heretics: The Architecture Gallery, Venice 1979.* Los Angeles: Southern California Institute of Architecture, 2013.

#### Recommended Film:

Dogtown and Z Boys (2001) - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogtown\\_and\\_Z-Boys](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogtown_and_Z-Boys)

## **Week 4—October 20. Ecology II: The Hills**

**Guest Speaker TBD**

#### Required Readings on Ecology II: The Hills

- [Banham, Reyner. "Chapter 5. Ecology II: The Foothills." In \*Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies.\* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 77-91.](#)
- Davis, Mike. "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn." In *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster.* **pdf**
- Yoder, Jon. "Vision and Crime: The Cinematic Architecture of John Lautner." In *Archi.Pop: Mediating Architecture in Popular Culture,* ed. D. Medina Lasansky. New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2014.  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1CMkO4YFMYdxgSCi6kXPFFYZSrPU5I7tG>

- Clare, Nancie. “How the World’s First Movie Stars Made Sure Beverly Hills Didn’t Become Part of L.A.: The Birth of Beverly Hills was also the Birth of Celebrity Politics.” *Los Angeles Magazine* February 20, 2018).  
<https://www.lamag.com/mag-features/birth-of-beverly-hills/>

#### Art References: The Hills

- David Hockney’s *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, 1980
- Ramiro Gomez, Happy Hills -  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/aug/22/ramiro-gomez-latin-american-art-los-angeles-david-hockney>

### **Week 5—October 27. Ecology III: The Flatlands / South Central**

#### ***Guest Speaker TBD***

- *Lecture and Discussion: The Politics of Space in the Generic City; The LA Riots; Popular Culture; African American Visual Artists*
- *Watch Mark Bradford interview at the Tate Museum and discuss his work*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4isoSmHKiU> (1 hr-18 min.)  
Its or a shorter interview. - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5mhdCvhDtQ> (24 minutes)

#### **Required Readings on The Flatlands / South Central**

- [Reyner Banham's \*Ecology III: The Plains of Id\*](#)
- Davis, Mike. “[Chapter Three: Homegrown Revolution and Chapter Five: The Hammer and the Rock.](#)” In *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*. New York: Verso (1990). 152-218; 267-322.
- Sides, Josh. “Straight into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb.” In *American Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 3, Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures (Sep. 2004). 583-605 -  
[https://drive.google.com/open?id=1qJg8z9IMzVU4yloD\\_P76HkoCuWdgN\\_Og](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1qJg8z9IMzVU4yloD_P76HkoCuWdgN_Og)
- Jones, Kelly. “Introduction. South of Pico: Migration, Art, and Black Los Angeles.” In *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*. Durham: Duke University Press (2017). 1-22. **pdf**
- Brown, Kathryn. *The Artists as an Urban Geographer: Mark Bradford and Julie Mehretu*. **pdf**

#### **Additional Readings**

- Jones, Kelly. “Emerge: Putting Southern California on the Art World Map.” In *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*. Durham: Duke University Press (2017). 23-65. **pdf**
- Candida-Smith, Richard. “Learning from the Watts Towers: Assemblage and Community-Based Art in California.” In *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and the Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (2009).  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=16A1RBntfYOWN-i6dFanO5I6Ae66cBePI>

### Film References

- Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep* (1997) -  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/30/movies/30kill.html>
- John Singleton’s *LA Burning: The Riots 25 Years Later* (2017)

### Art References

- Mark Bradford, *Rebuild South Central* (2015) –  
<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/mark-bradford-rebuild-south-centra>
- Lauren Halsey, The Crenshaw District Hieroglyph Project (Prototype Architecture) -  
<https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2018/made-in-la-2018/lauren-halsey>

## **Week 6—November 3. Ecology IV: The Downtowns**

### Required Readings on The Downtowns

- Anthony Vidler’s Introduction “[Los Angeles: City of the Immediate Future](#),” in Banham’s *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*
- Reyner Banham’s “[Chapter 10: A Note on Downtown...](#)” in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*.
- Mike Davis’s “[Chapter Four: Fortress L.A.](#)” in *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*. New York: Verso (1990). 152-218; 221-263.
- William Estrada’s “Chapter Four. Homelands Remembered” and “Chapter Five. Revolution and Public Space,” in *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press (2008). 109-132; 133-167.

### Additional Readings

- Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

### Public Art References

- David Alfaro Siqueiros's *America Tropical Mural* on Olvera Street (1932) - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Am%C3%A9rica\\_Tropical:\\_Oprimida\\_y\\_Destrozada\\_por\\_los\\_Imperialismos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Am%C3%A9rica_Tropical:_Oprimida_y_Destrozada_por_los_Imperialismos)
- Los Angeles Poverty Department - <https://www.lapovertydept.org>

## **Saturday, November 6. PODCAST WORKSHOP**

The Podcast workshop will be on Saturday, November 6 from 10 am to 4 pm.

## **Week 7—November 10. Ecology V: East Los Angeles**

*Guest Speaker TBD*

- *Discussion of readings*

### **Required Readings on Republics of East LA**

- Leclerc, Villa and Dear's *Introduction to Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina en LA*
- William Deverell's "Introduction: City of the Future" and "Chapter One: The Unending Mexican War" in *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*.
- Raul Villa's Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture
- James Rojas's *The Latino Use of Space in East Los Angeles*
- Margaret Crawford's *Mi Casa es su Casa*
- Tomas Ybarra-Frausto's *Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility*
- Avila, Eric. *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*

### **Art References**

- Patsy Valdes; John Valadez; Diane Gamboa; East Los Streetscapers; Shisu Saldamando, Gajin Fugita

## **Week 8—November 17: Ecology VI: LA River**

*Guest Speaker TBD*

### **Required Readings on LA River**

- Gumprecht, Blake. *The Los Angeles River*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1999. Ch 5: Exhuming the River. 235-301.
- Cuff, Dana, and J. Wolch. "[Urban Humanities and the Creative Practitioner.](#)" *BOOM: The Journal of California*. V 6, n 3, pp 12-18.

- Khafagy, Amir. "[Gentrifying the L.A. River](#)." *Jacobin Magazine*. 05.16.18.
- Orsi, Jared. *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles*. Epilogue: "The Historical Structure of Disorder: Urban Ecology in Los Angeles and Beyond." pp. 165-184.

### **Additional Reading**

- Mike Davis's *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*

### **Art References**

- *Bending the River into The City* by Lauren Bon & Metabolic Studio
- Graffiti

## **Week 9—November 24: Ecology VII: The Macrofrontier**

*Guest Speaker TBD*

### **Required Readings on Macro-Frontier**

- Lawrence Herzog's *From Aztec to High-tech*
- Dear & Leclerc's *Postborder City*
- Josh Kun's *Tijuana Dreaming*
- Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

### **Art References**

- Marcos Ramirez ERRE; Jamex and Einar de la Torre;

## **Week 10—December 1. Presentations Thick Maps and Podcast Projects**

*During the final class meeting, each team will present their final presentations and share their podcast contributions with the group.*