

The Narrative Environments of Los Angeles: A Research Forum

Date: Friday, April 19

Time: TBD

Location: Ide Room, USC Taper Hall (THH)

Los Angeles was once the poster city for postmodernism, from Reyner Banham's "ecologies" of dingbat housing, fast-food signage, and freeways to the "peculiar and placeless dissociation" that Fredric Jameson saw in the Bonaventure Hotel. The city's centrifugal sprawl inspired noir narratives, and it has served as a stand-in for both capitalist excess and structural dispossession, seen in social satires of whiteness (*Play It As It Lays* [1970], *Less Than Zero* [1985], *L.A. Story* [1991]) and accounts of racial and ethnic struggle that range from the realist (*Killer of Sheep* [1978], *Always Running* [1993], *Boyz in the Hood* [1992]) to the allegorical (*Deep Cover* [1992], *The Tattooed Soldier* [1998]). And one need look no further than Damien Chazelle's curdled love letter *La La Land* (2017) to know that the mystique of Hollywood and sunshine, already skewered by the *Day of the Locust* (1939), still casts a spell.

Amid this complexity—the cultural and social layers that comprise Los Angeles—the city has also emerged as an ecocritical hotspot, a place where the convergences of postmodernism, racial capitalism, and nature become clear. Mike Davis kick-started this approach in his exhaustive account of apocalyptic L.A. narratives that concludes *Ecology of Fear* (1998). More recently, nonfiction writers have moved beyond the "sunshine or noir" dialectic to explore everyday encounters with L.A. nature: from Jenny Price's "13 Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A." (2006) to D.J. Waldie's meditations on our "compromised nature" in *Becoming Los Angeles* (2020). Answering this call for new nature stories, novels such as Héctor Tobar's *The Barbarian Nurseries* (2011) and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) crack open the presumed whiteness of environmental literature to reveal a radically entangled social-ecological terrain. Figures of smog and concrete rivers have inspired critical and poetic works across genres, while present and future crises of water, land, and air urgently demand new social narratives. At the same time, contemporary artists Mercedes Dorame, Cindi Alvitre, and others remind us that we reside on Indigenous land, creating works that use their ancestral knowledge to imagine a more breathable future in the Tongva Basin.

For this research forum, we invite anyone working at the intersection of Los Angeles studies and ecocriticism to join for an afternoon of scholarly conversation. Participants will offer **short (5-7 minute) presentations** on their work and small groups will facilitate more intensive dialogue. The event will conclude with a keynote address from a guest speaker.

To be part of our conversation, please send a **short abstract (~300 words)** to Nick Earhart (nearhart@usc.edu) or Meagan Meylor (meylor@usc.edu) by **March 10**. We enthusiastically encourage submissions from across disciplines at USC and schools around the Los Angeles region. This is an opportunity to experiment with presentation strategies and connect with others in this vital subfield.