

9

Taking Los Angeles Apart: Towards a Postmodern Geography

'The Aleph?' I repeated.

'Yes, the only place on earth where all places are – seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending' (10–11)

.... Then I saw the Aleph.... And here begins my despair as a writer. All language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past. How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass? (12–13)

(Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Aleph')

Los Angeles, like Borges's Aleph, is exceedingly tough-to-track, peculiarly resistant to conventional description. It is difficult to grasp persuasively in a temporal narrative for it generates too many conflicting images, confounding historicization, always seeming to stretch laterally instead of unfolding sequentially. At the same time, its spatially challenges orthodox analysis and interpretation, for it too seems limitless and constantly in motion, never still enough to encompass, too filled with 'other spaces' to be informatively described. Looking at Los Angeles from the inside, introspectively, one tends to see only fragments and immediacies, fixed sites of myopic understanding impulsively generalized to represent the whole. To the more far-sighted outsider, the visible aggregate of the whole of Los Angeles churns so confusingly that it induces little more than illusionary stereotypes or self-serving caricatures – if its reality is ever seen at all.

What is this place? Even knowing where to focus, to find a starting point, is not easy, for, perhaps more than any other place, Los Angeles is everywhere. It is global in the fullest sense of the word. Nowhere is this more evident than in its cultural projection and ideological reach, its

almost ubiquitous screening of itself as a rectangular dream machine for the world. Los Angeles broadcasts its self-imagery so widely that probably more people have seen this place – or at least fragments of it – than any other on the planet. As a result, the seers of Los Angeles have become countless, even more so as the progressive globalization of its urban political economy flows along similar channels, making Los Angeles perhaps the epitomizing world-city, *une ville devenue monde*.

Everywhere seems also to be in Los Angeles. To it flows the bulk of the transpacific trade of the United States, a cargo which currently surpasses that of the smaller ocean to the east. Global currents of people, information and ideas accompany the trade. It was once dubbed Iowa's seaport, but today Los Angeles has become an entrepot to the world, a true pivot of the four quarters, a congeries of east and west, north and south. And from every quarter's teeming shores have poured a pool of cultures so diverse that contemporary Los Angeles represents the world in connected urban microcosms, reproducing *in situ* the customary colours and confrontations of a hundred different homelands. Extraordinary heterogeneity can be exemplified endlessly in this fulsome urban landscape. The only place on earth where all places are? Again I appeal to Borges and the Aleph for appropriate insight:

Really, what I want to do is impossible, for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them amazed me more than the fact that all of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I will try to recollect what I can. (Ibid., 13)

I too will try to recollect what I can, knowing well that any totalizing description of the LA-leph is impossible. What follows then is a succession of fragmentary glimpses, a freed association of reflective and interpretive field notes which aim to construct a critical human geography of the Los Angeles urban region. My observations are necessarily and contingently incomplete and ambiguous, but the target I hope will remain clear: to appreciate the specificity and uniqueness of a particularly restless geographical landscape while simultaneously seeking to extract insights at higher levels of abstraction, to explore through Los Angeles glimmers of the fundamental spatiality of social life, the adhesive relations between society and space, history and geography, the splendidly idiographic and the enticingly generalizable features of a postmodern urban geography.

A Round Around Los Angeles

I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance. At first I thought it was revolving; then I realized that this movement was an illusion created by the dizzying world it bounded ... ('The Aleph', 13)

We must have a place to start, to begin reading the context. However much the formative space of Los Angeles may be global (or perhaps Mandelbrotian, constructed in zig-zagging nests of fractals), it must be reduced to a more familiar and localized geometry to be seen. Appropriately enough, just such a reductionist mapping has popularly presented itself. It is defined by an embracing circle drawn sixty miles (about a hundred kilometres) out from a central point located in the downtown core of the City of Los Angeles. Whether the precise central point is City Hall or perhaps one of the more recently erected corporate towers, I do not know. But I prefer the monumental twenty-eight storey City Hall, up to the 1920s the only erection in the entire region allowed to surpass the allegedly earthquake-proofing 150-foot height limitation. It is an impressive punctuation point, capped by an interpretation of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, wrapped around a Byzantine rotunda, and etched with this infatigating inscription: 'THE CITY CAME INTO BEING TO PRESERVE LIFE, IT EXISTS FOR THE GOOD LIFE'. Significantly, City Hall sits at the corner of Temple and Spring Streets.

The Sixty-Mile Circle, so inscribed, covers the thinly sprawling 'built-up' area of five counties, a population of more than 12 million individuals, at least 132 incorporated cities and, it is claimed, the greatest concentration of technocratic expertise and militaristic imagination in the USA. Its workers produce, when last estimated, a gross annual output worth nearly \$250 billion, more than the 800 million people of India produce each year. This is certainly Greater Los Angeles, a dizzying world.

The determination of the Sixty-Mile Circle is the product of the largest bank headquartered within its bounds, a bank potently named by connecting together two definitive pillars of the circumscribed economy: 'security' and 'pacific'.¹ How ironic, indeed oxymoronic, is the combination of these two words, security and pacific. The first is redolent of the lethal arsenal emanating from the Sixty-Mile Circle's technicians and scientists, surely today the most powerful assemblage of weapon-making

1. At least eight editions of a pamphlet on 'The Sixty-Mile Circle' have been published by the Economics Department of the Security Pacific National Bank, the first broadsheet version appearing nearly twenty years ago. The 1981 edition aimed to celebrate the Los Angeles Bicentennial. The edition I refer to, for 1984, advertises Security Pacific's support of the Olympic Games.

expertise ever grounded into one place. In contrast, the second signals peacefulness, tranquillity, moderation, amity, concord. Holocaust attached to halcyon, another of the many simultaneous contraries, interposed opposites, which epitomize Los Angeles and help to explain why conventional categorical logic can never hope to capture its historical and geographic signification. One must return again and again to these simultaneous contraries to depict Los Angeles.

Circumspection

Securing the Pacific rim has been the manifest destiny of Los Angeles, a theme which defines its sprawling urbanization perhaps more than any other analytical construct. Efforts to secure the Pacific signpost the history of Los Angeles from its smoky inception as El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciuncula in 1781, through its heated competition for commercial and financial hegemony with San Francisco, to the unfolding sequence of Pacific wars that has marked the past forty-five years of the American century. It is not always easy to see the imprint of this imperial history on the material landscape, but an imaginative cruise directly above the contemporary circumference of the Sixty-Mile Circle can be unusually revealing. Figure 11 will help to find the way.

The Circle cuts the south coast at the border between Orange and San Diego Counties, near one of the key checkpoints regularly set up to intercept the northward flow of undocumented migrants, and not far from the San Clemente 'White House' of Richard Nixon and the fitful SONGS of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. The first rampart to watch, however, is Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, the largest military base in California in terms of personnel, the freed spouses of whom have helped to build a growing high-technology complex in northern San Diego County. After cruising over the moors of Camp Pendleton, the Cleveland National Forest, and the vital Colorado River Aqueduct draining in from the east² we can land directly in Rampart #2, March Air Force Base, adjacent to the city of Riverside. The insides of March are a ready outpost for the roaming Strategic Air Command.

Another quick hop over Sunnymead, the Box Spring Mountains, and Redlands takes us to Rampart #3, Norton Air Force Base, next to the city of San Bernardino and just south of the almost empty San Manuel Indian Reservation. The guide books tell us that the primary

2. The imperial history of the watering of Los Angeles is a key part of the growth of Southern California, but it cannot be treated here.

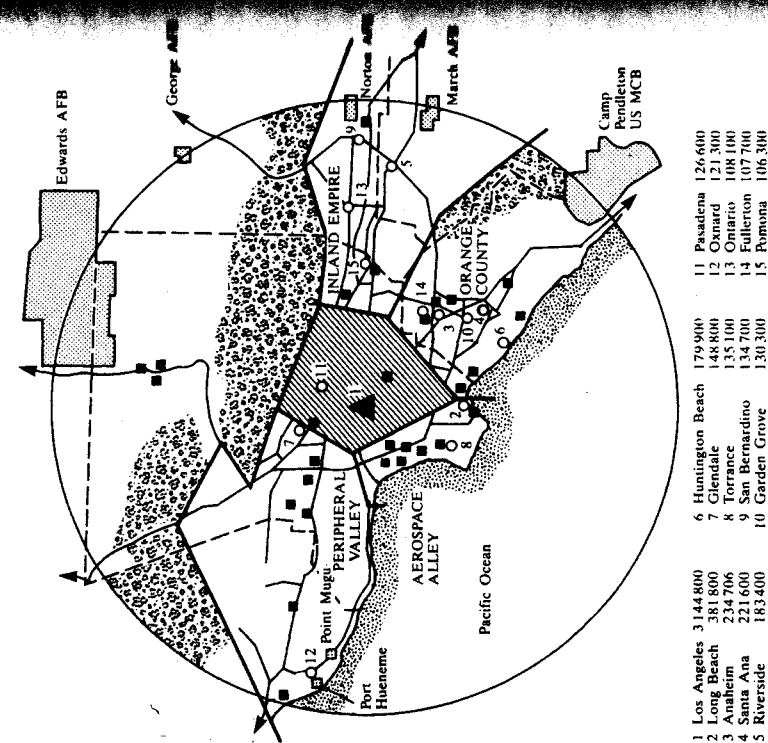


Figure 11 A view of the outer spaces of Los Angeles. The urban core is outlined in the shape of a pentagon, with the Central City denoted by the black triangle. The major military bases on the perimeter of the Sixty-Mile Circle are identified and the black squares are the sites of the largest defence contractors in the region. Also shown are county boundaries, the freeway system outside the central pentagon, and the location of all cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (small open circles)

mission of Norton is military airlifts, just in case. To move on we must rise still higher to pass over the ski-sloped peaks of the San Bernardino Mountains and National Forest, through Cajon Pass and passing the old Santa Fe Trail, into the picturesque Mojave Desert. Near Victorville is Rampart #4, George Air Force Base, specializing in air defence and interception. Almost the same distance away – our stops seem remarkably evenly spaced thus far – takes us by dry Mirage Lake to the giant

Edwards Air Force Base, Rampart #5, site of NASA and USAF research and development activities and a primary landing field for unexploded Space Shuttles. Stretching off to the south is an important aerospace corridor through Lancaster, to Palmdale Airport and Air Force Plant 42, which serves Edwards's key historical function as testing ground for advanced fighters and bombers. People who live around here call it Canyon Country and many want it broken off from the County of Los Angeles down below.

The next leg is longer and more serene: over the Antelope Valley and the Los Angeles Aqueduct (tapping the Los Angeles-owned segments of the life-giving but rapidly dying Owens River Valley two hundred miles further away); across Interstate 5 (the main freeway corridor to the north), a long stretch of Los Padres National Forest and the Wild Condor Refuge,³ to the idyllic town of Ojai (site for the filming of 'Lost Horizon'), and then to the Pacific again at the Mission of San Buenaventura, in Ventura County. A few miles away (the Sixty-Mile Circle actually cut right through the others) is Rampart #6, a complex consisting of a now inactive Air Force Base at Oxnard, the Naval Construction Battalion Center of Port Hueneme, and, far above all, the long-sighted Naval Air Missile Center at Point Mugu. If we wished, we could complete the full circle of coincidence over the Pacific, picking up almost directly below us the US Naval Facilities on San Nicolas and San Clemente Islands. These islands rarely appear on maps of Los Angeles and they remain invisible on ours.

It is startling how much of the circumference is owned and preserved by the Federal Government in one way or another. Premeditation may be impossible to ascribe, but post-meditation on the circumscriptive federal presence is certainly in order.

Enclosures

What in the world lies behind this Herculean wall? What appears to need such formidable protection? In essence, we return to the same question with which we began: What is this place? There is, of course, that far-reaching Dream Machine and its launching pads, transmitting visual images and evocative sounds of that 'good life' announced on the facade of City Hall. But the 'entertainment' industry is itself a facade and, significant though it may be, there is much more being screened behind it, much more that has developed within the Sixty-Mile Circle that demands to be protected and preserved.

3. The last remaining condors were recently removed to zoos after lead-poisoning threatened their extinction in the 'wild'.

If there has emerged a compelling focus to the recent academic literature on Los Angeles, it is the discovery of extraordinary industrial production, a eureka so contrary to popular perceptions of Los Angeles that its explorers are often compelled to exaggerate to keep their lines of vision sufficiently open and clear against external obfuscations. Yet it is no exaggeration to claim that the Sixty-Mile Circle contains the premier industrial growth pole of the twentieth century, at least within the advanced capitalist countries. Oil, orange groves, films and flying set the scene at the beginning of the century and tend to remain fixed in many contemporary images of industrious, but not industrial, Los Angeles. Since 1930, however, Los Angeles has probably led all other major metropolitan areas in the USA, decade by decade, in the accumulation of new manufacturing employment.

For many, industrial Los Angeles nevertheless remains a contradiction in terms. When a colleague at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) began his explorations of the industrial geography of Los Angeles, his appeal to a prominent national scientific funding agency brought back a confidential referee's report (an economist, it appeared) proclaiming the absurdity of studying such a fanciful subject, something akin to examining wheat farming in Long Island. Fortunately sounder minds prevailed and the research progressed in exemplary fashion. Further evidence of the apparent invisibility of industrial production in Los Angeles came at about the same time from *Forbes* magazine, that self-proclaimed sourcebook for knowing capitalists (who should know better). In 1984, *Forbes* published a map identifying the major centres of high technology development in the USA. Cartographic attention was properly drawn to the Silicon Valley and the Route 128 axis around Boston, but all of Southern California was left conspicuously blank! Apparently invisible, hidden from view, was not only one of the historical source-regions for advanced technology in aerospace and electronics, but also what may well be the largest concentration of high technology industry and employment in the country (if not the world), the foremost silicon landscape, a region that has added over the past fifteen years a high-technology employment pool roughly equivalent to that of the whole image-fixing Silicon Valley of Santa Clara County to the north.

Still partially hidden behind this revelation are the primary generative agencies and the intricate processes producing this pre-eminent production complex. One key link, however, is abundantly clear. In the past half century, no other area has been so pumped with federal money as Los Angeles, via the Department of Defense to be sure, but also through numerous federal programmes subsidizing suburban consumption (subsidizing?) and the development of housing, transportation and

water delivery systems. From the last Great Depression to the present, Los Angeles has been the prototypical Keynesian state-city, a federalized metro-sea of state-rescued capitalism enjoying its place in the sunbelt, demonstrating decade by decade its redoubtable ability to go first and multiply the public seed money invested in its promising economic landscape.⁴ No wonder it remains so protected. In it are embedded many of the crown jewels of advanced industrial capitalism.

If anything, the federal flow is accelerating under the aegis of the military Keynesianism of the Reagan administration and the permanent arms economy of the Warfare State. At Hughes Aircraft Company in El Segundo, engineers have already used some of its \$60 million in prime 'Star Wars' contracts to mock up a giant infra-red sensor so acute that it can pick up the warmth of a human body at a distance of a thousand miles in space, part of their experimentation with 'kinetic' weapons systems. Nearby, TRW Inc. (\$84 million) and Rockwell International's Rocketdyne division (\$32 million) competitively search for more powerful space lasers, capable, it seems, of incinerating whole cities if necessary, under such project code-names as Miracel, Alpha and Rachel. Research houses such as the Rand Corporation, just to the north in Santa Monica, jockey for more strategic positions, eager to claim part of what could potentially reach a total of \$1.5 trillion if not stopped in time (Sanger, 1985). Today, it is not only the space of the Pacific that is being secured and watched over from inside the Sixty-Mile Circle.

Outer spaces

The effulgent Star Wars colony currently blooming around Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) is part of a much larger outer city which has taken shape along the Pacific slope of Los Angeles County. In the context of this landscape, through the story-line of the aerospace industry, can be read the explosive history and geography of the National Security State and what Mike Davis (1984) has called the 'Californianization of Late-Imperial America'.

If there is a single birthplace for this Californianization, it can be found at old Douglas Field in Santa Monica, today close by an important transit-point for President Reagan's frequent West Coast trips. From this spot fifty years ago the first DC-3 took off to begin a career of military accomplishment in war after war. Spinning off in its tracks has been an intricate tracery of links, from defence- and space-

4. The federalization of the Sixty-Mile Circle still remains poorly studied, but in this process are the forceful clues necessary for understanding the uneven regional development of the entire United States, Sunbelt and Frostbelt included.

related expenditures on research and development and the associated formation of the aerospace industry upon the base of civilian aircraft manufacturing; to the piggy-backed instigation of computerized electronics and modern information-processing technology, meshing with an ancillary network of suppliers and demanders of goods and services that stretches out to virtually every sector of the contemporary economy and society.⁵ Over half a million people now live in this 'Aerospace Alley', as it has come to be called. During working hours, perhaps 800,000 are present to sustain its global pre-eminence. Untold millions more lie within its extended orbit.

Attached around the axes of production are the representative locales of the industrialized outer city: the busy international airport; corridors filled with new office buildings, hotels, and global shopping malls; neatly packaged playgrounds and leisure villages; specialized and master-planned residential communities for the high technocracy; armed and guarded housing estates for top professionals and executives; residual communities of low-pay service workers living in overpriced homes; and the accessible enclaves and ghettos which provide dependable flows of the cheapest labour power to the bottom bulge of the bimodal local labour market. The LAX - City compage reproduces the segmentation and segregation of the inner city based on race, class, and ethnicity, but manages to break it down still further to fragment residential communities according to specific occupational categories, household composition, and a broad range of individual attributes, affinities, desired lifestyles and moods.

This extraordinary differentiation, fragmentation, and social control over specialized pools of labour is expensive. Housing prices and rental costs in the outer city are easily among the highest in the country and the provision of appropriate housing increasingly absorbs the energy not only of the army of real estate agents but of local corporate and community planners as well, often at the expense of long-time residents fighting to maintain their foothold in 'preferred' locations. From the give and take of this competition have emerged peculiarly intensified urban landscapes. Along the shores of the South Bay, for example, part of

5. In 1965, it was estimated in a Bank of America study that nearly 43 per cent of total manufacturing employment in Los Angeles and Orange counties was linked to defence and space expenditures. Some percentages by sector included paperboard containers and boxes (12 per cent), fabricated rubber (36 per cent), computing machines (54 per cent), photographic equipment (69 per cent), screw-machines (70 per cent) and machine shop jobbing and repairs (78 per cent). By 1983, almost half the manufacturing jobs in Los Angeles County were related directly or indirectly to the aerospace industry and nearly half of these aerospace workers were employed on military projects (Scheer, 1983). There is no reason to believe these figures have changed significantly since 1983.

what Rayner Banham (1971) once called 'Surfurbia', there has developed the largest and most homogenous residential enclave of scientists and engineers in the world (see Figure 8). Coincidentally, this beach-head of the high technocracy is also one of the most formidable racial redoubts in the region. Although just a few miles away, across the fortifying boundary of the San Diego freeway, is the edge of the largest and most tightly segregated concentration of Blacks west of Chicago, the sun-belted beach communities stretching south from the airport have remained almost 100 per cent white (Mate, 1982). The worldview from this highly engineered environment is stereotypically caricatured in Figure 12.

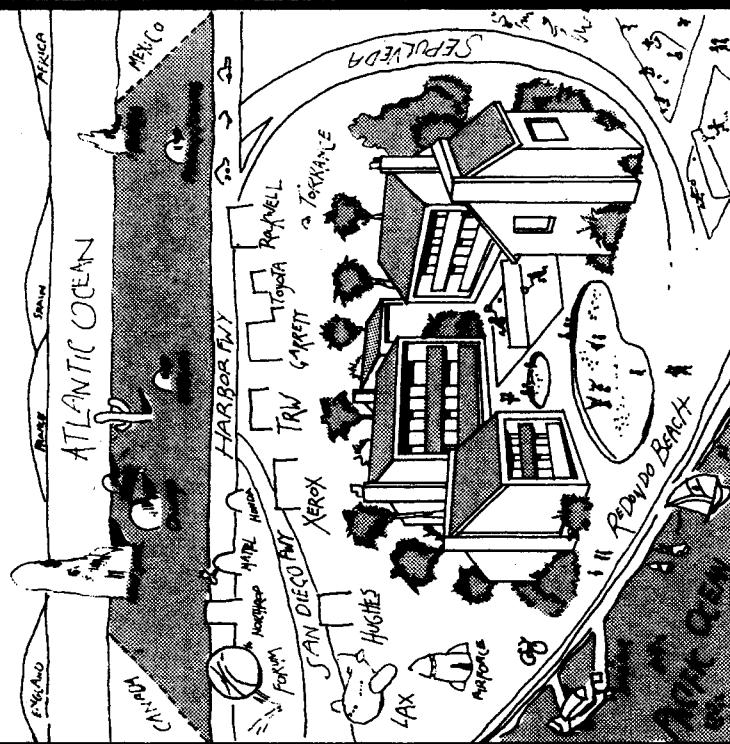
The Sixty-Mile Circle is ringed with a series of these outer cities at varying stages of development, each a laboratory for exploring the contemporaneity of capitalist urbanization. At least two are combined in Orange County, seamlessly webbed together into the largest and probably fastest growing outer city complex in the country (world?). The key nucleus here is the industrial complex embedded in the land empire of the Irvine Company, which owns one sixth of the entire county. Arrayed around it is a remarkable accretion of masterplanned new towns which paradigmatically evince the global cultural aspirations of the outer city imposed atop local visions of the experimental community of tomorrow.

Illustratively, the new town of Mission Viejo (never mind the bilingual pun) is partially blocked out to recreate the places and people of Cervantes's Spain and other quixotic intimations of the Mediterranean. Simultaneously, its ordered environment specifically appeals to Olympian dreams. Stacked with the most modern facilities and trainers, Mission Viejo has attracted an élite of sport-minded parents and accommodating children. The prowess of determined local athletes was sufficient for Mission Viejo to have finished ahead of 133 of the 140 countries competing in the 1984 Olympic Games in the number of medals received. Advertised as 'The California Promise' by its developer, currently the Philip Morris Company, Mission Viejo coughs up enticing portions of the American Dream to the chosen few. As one compromising resident described it, 'You must be happy, you must be well rounded and you must have children who do a lot of things. If you don't jog or walk or bike, people wonder if you have diabetes or some other disabling disease' (Landsbaum and Evans, 1984).

The Orange County complex has also been the focus for detailed research into the high technology industrial agglomerations that have been recentralizing the urban fabric of the Los Angeles region and inducing the fluorescence of masterplanned new towns. This pioneering work has helped us see more clearly the transactional web of indus-

AT REDONDO BEACH

BROOKSIDE VILLAGE



Open 10-5 daily or by appt. Luxurious condominiums from \$94,900.

Figure 12 Worldview from Redondo Beach

trial linkages that draws out and geographically clusters specialized networks of firms, feeds off the flow of federal contracts, and spills over to precipitate a supportive local space economy (Scott, 1986). What has been provided is a revealing glimpse into the generative processes behind the urbanization of Orange County and, through this window, into the deeper historical interplay between industrialization and urbanization that has defined the development of the capitalist city wherever it is found.

There are other outer cities fringing the older pentagonal urban core outlined in Figure 11. One has taken shape in the Ventura Corridor through the west San Fernando Valley into Ventura County (now being called the 'Peripheral Valley', with its primary cores in 'Gallium Gulch' and the Chatsworth area).⁶ Another is being promoted (although not yet in place) in the 'Inland Empire' stretching eastward from Pomona (General Dynamics is there) through Ontario (with Lockheed and a growing International Airport and Free Trade Zone) to the county seats of San Bernardino and Riverside, hard by their military ramparts. The inland empire, however, is still more of an anticipatory outer city, cruelly packed with new housing estates that automaniacally lure families ever further away from their places of work in Los Angeles and Orange counties, a truly transitory landscape.

Inland empires aside, these new territorial complexes seem to be turning the industrial city inside-out, recentering the urban to transform the metropolitan periphery into the core region of advanced industrial production. Decentralization from the inner city has been taking place selectively for at least a century all over the world, but only recently has the peripheral condensation become sufficiently dense to challenge the older urban cores as centres of industrial production, employment nodality, and urbanism. This restructuring process is far from being completed but it is beginning to have some profound repercussions on the way we think about the city, on the words we use to describe urban forms and functions, and on the language of urban theory and analysis.

Back to the Centre

I saw the teeming sea; I saw daybreak and nightfall; I saw the multitudes of America; I saw a silvery cobweb in the center of a black pyramid; I saw a

6. Gallium arsenide chips operate at higher frequencies and allegedly compute faster than silicon chips. Developed primarily for military use, they are expected by some to take an increasing share of the world semiconductor market in the future. 'Gallium Gulch' contains a cluster of recently formed companies experimenting with the new technology, all of which are headed by alumni of Rockwell International. (Goldstein, 1985)

splintered labyrinth ... I saw, close up, unending eyes watching themselves in me as in a mirror. ('The Aleph', 13)

To see more of Los Angeles, it is necessary to move away from the riveting periphery and return, literally and figuratively, to the centre of things to the still adhesive core of the urbanized landscape. In Los Angeles as in every city, the nodality of the centre defines and gives substance to the specificity of the urban, its distinctive social and spatial meaning. Urbanization and the spatial divisions of labour associated with it revolve around a socially constructed pattern of nodality and the power of the occupied centres both to cluster and disperse, to centralize and decentralize, to structure spatially all that is social and socially produced. Nodality situates and contextualizes urban society by giving material form to essential social relations. Only with a persistent centrality can there be outer cities and peripheral urbanization. Otherwise, there is no urban at all.

It is easy to overlook the tendential processes of urban structuration that emanate from the centre, especially in the postmodern capitalist landscape. Indeed, in contemporary societies the authoritative and allocative power of the urban centre is purposefully obscured or, alternatively, detached from place, ripped out of context, and given the stretched-out appearance of democratic ubiquity. In addition, as we have seen, the historical development of urbanization over the past century has been marked by a selective dispersal and decentralization, emptying the centre of many of the activities and populations which once aggregated densely around it. For some, this has signalled a negation of nodality, a submergence of the power of central places, perhaps even a Derridean deconstruction of all differences between the 'central' and the 'marginal'.

Yet the centres hold. Even as some things fall apart, dissipate, new nodalities form and old ones are reinforced. The specifying centrifuge is always spinning but the centripetal force of nodality never disappears. And it is the persistent residual of political power which continues to precipitate, specify, and contextualize the urban, making it all stick together. The first cities appeared with the simultaneous concentration of commanding symbolic forms, civic centres designed to announce, ceremonialize, administer, acculturate, discipline, and control. In and around the institutionalized locale of the citadel adhered people and their node-ordered social relations, creating a civil society and an accordingly built environment which were urbanized and regionalized through the interplay between two interactive processes, surveillance and adherence, looking out from and in towards a centre through the panoptic eye of power. To be urbanized still means to adhere, to be

made an adherent, a believer in a specified collective ideology rooted in extensions of *polis* (politics, policy, polity, police) and *civitas* (civil, civic, citizen, civilian, civilization). In contrast, the population beyond the reach of the urban is comprised of *idioties*, from the Greek root *idios*, meaning 'one's own, a private person', unlearned in the ways of the *polis* (a root akin to the Latin *sui*, 'of its own kind', with *generis*, 'constituting a class alone'). Thus to speak of the 'idiocy' of rural life or the urbanity of its opposition is primarily a statement of relative political socialization and spatialization, of the degree of adherence/separation in the collective social order, a social order hinging on urban nodality.

To maintain adhesiveness, the civic centre has always served as a key surveillant node of the state, supervising locales of production, consumption and exchange. It still continues to do so, even after centuries of urban recomposition and restructuring, after waves of reagglomerative industrialization. It is not production or consumption or exchange in themselves that specifies the urban, but rather their collective surveillance, supervision and anticipated control within the power-filled context of nodality. In Foucauldian terms, cities are the convergent sites of (social) space, knowledge, and power, the headquarters of societal modes of regulation (from *regula* and *regere*, to rule; the root of our keyword: region).

This does not mean that a mechanical determinism is assigned to nodality in the specification of the urban. Adherence is a sticky notion and is not automatically enacted by location in an urbanized landscape; nor is it always awarably expressed in practical consciousness. Surveillance too is problematic, for it can exist without being embracingly effective – and can be embracingly effective without appearing to exist! There is thus always room for resistance, rejection, and redirection in the nonetheless structured field of urban locales, creating an active politics of spatiality, struggles for place, space, and position within the regionalized and nodal urban landscape. As a result, adherence and surveillance are unevenly developed in their geographical manifestation, their regionalization, their reactive regionalisms. Simultaneously, this patterned differentiation, this immediate superstructure of the urban spatial division of labour, becomes a critical arena in which the human geography of the city is shaped, in which spatialization takes place. It maps out an urban cartography of power and political praxis that is often hidden in idiographic (from *idios* again) histories and geographies.

Signifying downtown

The downtown core of the City of Los Angeles, which the signs call 'Central City' is the agglomerative and symbolic nucleus of the Sixty-

Mile Circle, certainly the oldest but also the newest major node in the region. Given what is contained within the Circle, the physical size and appearance of downtown Los Angeles seem almost modest, even today after a period of enormous expansion. As usual, however, appearances can be deceptive.

Perhaps more than ever before, downtown serves in ways no other place can as a strategic vantage point, an urban panopticon counterposed to the encirclement of watchful military ramparts and defensive outer cities. Like the central well in Bentham's eminently utilitarian design for a circular prison, the original panopticon, downtown can be seen (when visibility permits) by each separate individual, from each territorial cell, within its orbit. Only from the advantageous outlook of the centre, however, can the surveillant eye see everyone collectively, disembedded but interconnected. Not surprisingly, from its origin, the central city has been an aggregation of overseers, a primary locale for social control, political administration, cultural codification, ideological surveillance, and the incumbent regionalization of its adherent hinterland.

Looking down and out from City Hall, the site is especially impressive to the observer. Immediately below and around is the largest concentration of government offices and bureaucracy in the country outside the federal capital district. To the east, over a pedestrian skyway, are City Hall East and City Hall South, relatively new civic additions enclosing a shopping mall, some murals, a children's museum, and the Triforium, a splashy sixty-foot fountain of water, light, and music entertaining the lunchtime masses. Just beyond is the imposing police administration building, Parker Center, hallowing the name of a former police chief of note. Looking further, outside the central well of downtown but within its eastern salient, one can see an area which houses 25 per cent of California's prison population, at least 12,000 inmates held in four jails designed to hold half that number. Included within this carceral wedge are the largest women's prison in the country (Sybil Brand) and the seventh largest men's prison (Men's Central). More enclosures are being insistently planned by the state to meet the rising demand.

On the south, along First Street, are the State Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) with its electronic wall maps monitoring the arterial freeways of the region, the California State Office Building, and the headquarters of the fourth estate, the monumental Times-Mirror building complex, which many have claimed houses the unofficial governing power of Los Angeles, the source of many stories that mirror the times and spaces of the city. Near the spatial sanctum of the *Los Angeles Times* is also St Vibiana's Cathedral, mother church to one of the largest Catholic archdioceses in the world (nearly four million

strong) and controller of another estate of significant proportions. The Pope slept here, across the street from Skid Row missions temporarily closed so that he could not see all his adherents.

Looking westward now, toward the Pacific and the smog-hued sunsets which brilliantly paint the nightfalls of Los Angeles, is first the Criminal Courts Building, then the Hall of Records and Law Library, and next the huge Los Angeles County Courthouse and Hall of Administration, major seats of power for what is by far the country's largest county in total population (now over eight million). Standing across Grand Avenue is the most prominent cultural centre of Los Angeles, described by Unique Media Incorporated in their pictorial booster maps of downtown as 'the cultural crown of Southern California, reigning over orchestral music, vocal performance, opera, theatre and dance'. They add that the Music Center 'tops Bunker Hill like a contemporary Acropolis, one which has dominated civil cultural life since it was inaugurated in 1964'. Just beyond this cultural crown is the Department of Water and Power (surrounded by usually waterless fountains) and a multi-level extravaganza of freeway interchanges connecting with every corner of the Sixty-Mile Circle, a peak point of accessibility within the regional transportation network. On its edge, one of Japan's greatest architects has designed a Gateway Building to punctuate the teeming sea.

Along the northern flank is the Hall of Justice, the US Federal Courthouse, and the Federal Building, completing the ring of local, city, state and federal government authority which comprises the potent civic centre. Sitting more tranquilly just beyond, cut off by a swathe of freeway, is the preserved remains of the old civic centre, now part of El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historical Park, additional testimony to the lasting power of the central place. Since the origins of Los Angeles the sites described have served as the political citadel, designed with other citadels to command, protect, socialize and dominate the surrounding urban population.

There is still another segment of the citadel – panopticon which cannot be overlooked. Its form and function may be more specific to the contemporary capitalist city but its mercantile roots entwine historically with the citadels of all urbanized societies. Today, it has become the acknowledged symbol of the urbanity of Los Angeles, the visual evidence of the successful 'search for a city' by the surrounding sea of

7. Colourful pictorial maps, so convenient for the exaggerated representation of presences and absences, seem to be multiplying at an unusually rapid pace all over Los Angeles, quietly erasing the unsightly, distorting spatial relations for effect and calling attention to the fantastic and the most merchandisable.

suburbs. This skylined sight contains the bunched castles and cathedrals of corporate power, the gleaming new 'central business district' of the 'central city', pinned next to its ageing predecessor just to the east. Here too the LA-leph's unending eyes are kept open and reflective, reaching out to and mirroring global spheres of influence, localizing the world that is within its reach.

Nearly all the landmarks of the new LA CBD have been built over the past fifteen years and flashily signify the consolidation of Los Angeles as a world city. Now more than half the major properties are in part or wholly foreign owned, although much of this landed presence is shielded from view. The most visible wardens are the banks which light up their logos atop the highest towers: Security Pacific (there again), First Interstate, Bank of America (co-owner of the sleek-black Arco Towers before their recent purchase by the Japanese), Crocker, Union, Wells Fargo, Citicorp (billing itself as 'the newest city in town'). Reading the skyline one sees the usual corporate panorama: large insurance companies (Manulife, Transamerica, Prudential), IBM and major oil companies, the real estate giant Coldwell Banker, the new offices of the Pacific Stock Exchange, all serving as attachment points for silvery webs of financial and commercial transactions extending practically everywhere on earth.

The two poles of the citadel, political and economic, connect physically through the condominium towers of renewed Bunker Hill but 'interface' less overtly in the planning apparatus of the local state. Contrary to popular opinion, Los Angeles is a tightly planned and plotted urban environment, especially with regard to the social and spatial divisions of labour necessary to sustain its pre-eminent industrialization and consumerism. Planning choreographs Los Angeles through the fungible movements of the zoning game and the flexible staging of supportive community participation (when there are communities to be found), a dance filled with honourable intent, dedicated expertise, and selective beneficence. It has excelled, however, as an ambivalent but nonetheless enriching pipeline and place-maker to the domestic and foreign developers of Los Angeles, using its influential reach to prepare the groundwork and facilitate the selling of specialized locations and populations to suit the needs of the most powerful organizers of the urban space-economy.⁸

8. Investigative reports of the political corruptibility of the planning process surface repeatedly in Los Angeles, with relatively little effect, for what is exposed is characteristically accepted as normal (if not normative) by the prominent practitioners. Two particularly thorough analyses appeared in 1985: Tony Castro, 'L.A. Inc', a three-part series in the *Herald Examiner* ('How politics built downtown', 10 March; 'Exercising political clout atop Bunker Hill', 11 March; and 'Critics claim CRA bulldozes over wishes of poor and

Although conspiracy and corruption can be easily found, the planned and packaged selling of Los Angeles usually follows a more mundane rhythm played to the legitimizing beat of dull and thumping market forces. In the created spaces which surround the twin citadels of Los Angeles, the beat has drummed with a particularly insistent and mesmerizing effect. Through a historic act of preservation and renewal, there now exists around downtown a deceptively harmonized showcase of ethni-cities and specialized economic enclaves which play key roles, albeit somewhat noisily at times, in the contemporary redevelopment and internationalization of Los Angeles. Primarily responsible for this packaged and planned production of the inner city is the Community Redevelopment Agency, probably the leading public entrepreneur of the Sixty-Mile Circle.⁹

There is a dazzling array of sites in this compartmentalized corona of the inner city: the Vietnamese shops and Hong Kong housing of a redeveloping Chinatown; the Big Tokyo financed modernization of old Little Tokyo's still resisting remains; the induced pseudo-SoHo of artists' lofts and galleries hovering near the exhibitions of the 'Temporary Contemporary' art warehouse; the protected remains of El Pueblo along Calmexified Olvera Street and in the renewed Old Plaza; the straggly anachronistic wholesale markets for produce and flowers and jewellery growing bigger while other downtowns displace their equivalents; the foetid sweatshops and bustling merchandise marts of the booming garment district; the Latino retail festival along pedestrian-packed Broadway (another preserved zone and inch-for-inch probably the most profitable shopping street in the region); the capital site of urban homelessness in the CRA-gilded skid row district; the enormous muralled *barrio* stretching eastward to the still unincorporated East Los Angeles; the de-industrializing and virtually resident-less wholesaling City of Vernon to the south filled with chickens and pigs awaiting their slaughter; the Central American and Mexican communities of Pico - Union and Alvarado abutting the high-rises on the west; the obtrusive oil wells and aggressive graffiti in the backyards of predominantly immigrant Temple-Beaudry progressively being eaten away by the spread of Central City West (now being called 'The Left Bank' of downtown); the

powerless', 12 March); and Ron Curran and Lewis MacAdams, 'The selling of L.A. County', *L.A. Weekly*, 22-28 November. Nothing comparable appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.

9. The CRA is a California state-legislated agency directly responsible to the Los Angeles City Council. It functions publicly in downtown Los Angeles in facilitative ways which resemble the masterplanning operations of the Irvine Company in its private domains of Orange County.

intentionally yuppiefying South Park redevelopment zone hard by the slightly seedy Convention Center; the revenue-milked towers and fortresses of Bunker Hill; the resplendently gentrified pocket of 'Victorian' homes in old Angelino Heights overlooking the citadel; the massive new Koreatown pushing out west and south against the edge of Black Los Angeles; the Filipino pockets to the north-west still uncoalesced into a 'town' of their own; and so much more: a constellation of Foucauldian heterotopias 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' but 'function in relation to all the space that remains'.

What stands out from a hard look at the inner city seems almost like an obverse (and perverse) reflection of the outer city, an agglomerative complex of dilapidated and overcrowded housing, low technology workshops, relics and residuals of an older urbanization, a sprinkling of niches for recentred professionals and supervisors, and, above all, the largest concentration of cheap, culturally-splintered/occupationally-manipulable Third World immigrant labour to be found so tangibly available in any First World urban region. Here in this colonial corona is another of the crown jewels of Los Angeles, carefully watched over, artfully maintained and reproduced to service the continued development of the manufactured region.

The extent and persistence of agglomerated power and ever-watchful eyes in downtown Los Angeles cannot be ignored by either captive participants or outside observers. The industrialization of the urban periphery may be turning the space economy of the region inside-out, but the old centre is more than holding its own as the pre-eminent political and economic citadel. Peripheral visions are thus not enough when looking at Los Angeles. To conclude this spiralling tour around the power-filled central city, it may be useful to turn back to Giddens's observations on the structured and structuring landscapes of modern capitalism.

The distinctive structural principle of the class societies of modern capitalism is to be found in the disembedding, yet interconnecting, of state and economic institutions. The tremendous economic power generated by the harnessing of allocative resources to a generic tendency towards technical improvement is matched by an enormous expansion in the administrative 'reach' of the state. Surveillance – the coding of information relevant to the administration of subject populations, plus the direct supervision by officials and administrators of all sorts – becomes a key mechanism furthering a breaking away of system from social integration. Traditional practices are dispersed (without, of course, disappearing altogether) under the impact of the penetration of day-to-day life by codified administrative procedures. The locales which provide the settings for interaction in situations of co-presence [the basis for social integration] undergo a major set of transmutations. The old city-countryside

relation is replaced by a sprawling expansion of a manufactured or 'created environment'. (1984, 183–84)

Here we have another definition of spatial planning, another indication of the instrumentality of space and power, another example of spatialization.

Lateral extensions

Radiating from the specifying nodality of the central city are the hypothesized pathways of traditional urban theory, the transects of eagerly anticipated symmetries and salience which have absorbed so much of the attention of older generations of urban theoreticians and empiricists. Formal models of urban morphology have conventionally begun with the assumption of a structuring central place organizing an adherent landscape into discoverable patterns of hinterland development and regionalization. The deeper sources of this structuring process are usually glossed over and its problematic historical geography is almost universally simplified, but the resultant surfaces of social geometry continue to be visible as geographical expressions of the crude orderliness induced by the effects of nodality. They too are part of the spatialization of social life, the extended specificity of the urban.

The most primitive urban geometry arises from the radial attenuation of land use 'intensity' around the centre to an outer edge, a reflection of the Thunian landscape that has become codified most figuratively in the irrepressible Two-Parameter Negative Exponential Population Density Gradient. The TPNEPDG, in part because of its nearly universal and monotonous exemplification, has obsessed urban theorists with its projectable objectivity and apparent explanatory powers. From the Urban Ecologists of the old Chicago School to the New Urban Economists, and including all those who are convinced that geographical analysis naturally begins with the primal explanation of variegated population densities (the most bourgeois of analytical assumptions Marx claimed), the TPNEPDG has been the lodestar for a monocentric understanding of urbanism. And within its own limited bands of confidence, it works efficiently.

Population densities do mound up around the centres of cities, even in the polycentric archipelago of Los Angeles (where there may be several dozen such mounds, although the most pronounced still falls off from the central city). There is also an accompanying concentric residential rhythm associated with the family life cycle and the relative premiums placed on access to the dense peaks versus the availability of living space in the sparseness of the valleys (at least for those who can afford such freedoms of choice). Land values (when they can be

accurately calculated) and some job densities also tend to follow in diminishing peaks outwards from the centre, bringing back to mind those tented webs of the urban geography textbooks.

Adding direction to the decadence of distance reduces the Euclidian elegance of concentric gradations, and many of the most mathematical of urban geometers have accordingly refused to follow this slightly unsettling path. But direction does indeed induce another fit by pointing out the emanation of fortuitous wedges or sectors starting from the centre. The sectoral wedges of Los Angeles are especially pronounced once you leave the inner circle around downtown.

The Wilshire Corridor, for example, extends the citadels of the central city almost twenty miles westwards to the Pacific, picking up several other prominent but smaller downtowns en route (the Miracle Mile that initiated this extension, Beverly Hills, Century City, Westwood, Brentwood, Santa Monica). Watching above it is an even lengthier wedge of the wealthiest residences, running with almost staggering homogeneities to the Pacific Palisades and the privatized beaches of Malibu, sprinkled with announcements of armed responsiveness and signs which say that 'trespassers will be shot'. Here are the hearths of the most vocal homeowners movements, arms raised to slow growth and preserve their putative neighbourhoods in the face of the encroaching, view-blocking, street-clogging, and *declassé* downtowns.

As if in counterbalance, on the other side of the tracks east of downtown is the salient containing the largest Latino *barrio* in Anglo-America, where many of those who might be shot are carefully barricaded in poverty. And there is at least one more prominent wedge, stretching southward from downtown to the twin ports of Los Angeles-Long Beach, still reputed to be one of the largest consistently industrial urban sectors in the world. This is the primary axis of *Ruhr* Los Angeles.

A third ecological order perturbs the geometrical neatness still further, punching holes into the monocentric gradients and wedges as a result of the territorial segregation of races and ethnicities. Segregation is so noisy that it overloads the conventional statistical methods of urban factorial ecology with scores of tiny but 'significant' eco-components. In Los Angeles, arguably the most segregated city in the country, these components are so numerous that they operate statistically to obscure the spatiality of social class relations deeply embedded in the zones and wedges of the urban landscape, as if they needed to be obscured any further.¹⁰

10. Compacted Black Los Angeles has been particularly perplexing. For many statistical years, it contained both some of the lowest and the highest median family income

These broad social geometries provide an attractive model of the urban geography of Los Angeles, but like most of the inherited overviews of formal urban theory they are seriously diverting and illusory. They mislead not because there is disagreement over their degree of fit – such regular empiricist arguments merely induce a temporary insensibility by forcing debate on to the usually sterile grounds of technical discourse. Instead, they deceive by involving explanation, by the legerdemain of making the nodality of the urban explain itself through its mere existence, one outcome explaining another. Geographical covariance in the form of empirico-statistical regularity is elevated to causation and frozen into place without a history – and without a human geography which recognizes that the organization of space is a social product filled with politics and ideology, contradiction and struggle, comparable to the making of history. Empirical regularities are there to be found in the surface geometry of any city, including Los Angeles, but they are not explained in the discovery, as is so often assumed. Different routes and different roots must be explored to achieve a practical understanding and critical reading of urban landscapes. The illusions of empirical opaqueness must be shattered, along with the other disciplining effects of Modern Geography.

Deconstruction

Back in the centre, shining from its circular turrets of bronzed glass, stands the Bonaventure Hotel, an amazingly storeyed architectural symbol of the splintered labyrinth that stretches sixty miles around it.¹¹ Like many other Portman-teaus which dot the eyes of urban citadels in New York and San Francisco, Atlanta and Detroit, the Bonaventure has become a concentrated representation of the restructured spatiality of the late capitalist city: fragmented and fragmenting, homogeneous and homogenizing, divertingly packaged yet curiously incomprehensible, seemingly open in presenting itself to view but constantly pressing to enclose, to compartmentalize, to circumscribe, to incarcerate. Everything imaginable appears to be available in this micro-urb but real places are difficult to find, its spaces confuse an effective cognitive mapping, its

census tracts in the county. And before 1970, the highest density of Black residents in any census tract was found not in the demarcable ghetto but in south Santa Monica. Blacks were among the original founders of Los Angeles in 1781, but there are virtually no major studies of the historical geography of Black Los Angeles currently available.

11. The Westin Bonaventure, financed and owned by the Japanese, figures prominently (if not with the correct spelling) in Jameson's perceptive analysis of postmodernism (1985). See also the rejoinder by Davis (1985) and an essay on postmodern planning by Michael Dear (1986). These writings form part of the first round of a continuing debate on postmodernism in Los Angeles.

pastiche of superficial reflections bewilder co-ordination and encourage submission instead. Entry by land is forbidding to those who carelessly walk but entrance is nevertheless encouraged at many different levels, from the truly pedestrian skyways above to the bunkered inlets below. Once inside, however, it becomes daunting to get out again without bureaucratic assistance. In so many ways, its architecture recapitulates and reflects the sprawling manufactured spaces of Los Angeles.

There has been no conspiracy of design behind the building of the Bonaventure or the socially constructed spatiality of the New World Cities. Both designs have been conjunctural, reflecting the specifications and exigencies of time and place, of period and region. The Bonaventure both simulates the restructured landscape of Los Angeles and is simultaneously simulated by it. From this interpretive interplay of micro- and macro-simulations there emerges an alternative way of looking critically at the human geography of contemporary Los Angeles, of seeing it as a mesocosm of postmodernity.

From the centre to the periphery, in both inner and outer cities, the Sixty-Mile Circle today encloses a shattered metro-sea of fragmented yet homogenized communities, cultures, and economies confusingly arranged into a contingently ordered spatial division of labour and power. As is true for so much of the patterning of twentieth-century urbanization, Los Angeles both sets the historical pace and most vividly epitomizes the extremes of contemporary expression. Municipal boundary making and territorial incorporation, to take one illustrative example, has produced the most extraordinary crazy quilt of opportunism to be found in any metropolitan area. Tiny enclaves of county land and whole cities such as Beverly Hills, West Hollywood, Culver City, and Santa Monica pock-mark the 'Westside' bulk of the incorporated City of Los Angeles, while thin slivers of city land reach out like tentacles to grab on to the key seaside outlets of the port at San Pedro and Los Angeles International Airport.¹² Nearly half the population of the city, however, lives in the quintessentially suburban San Fernando Valley, one and a half million people who statistically are counted as a part of the central city of the Los Angeles-Long Beach Standard Metropolitan

Statistical Area. Few other places make such a definitive mockery of the standard classifications of urban, suburban, and exurban.

Over 130 other municipalities and scores of county-administered areas adhere loosely around the irregular City of Los Angeles in a dazzling, sprawling patchwork mosaic. Some have names which are startlingly self-explanatory. Where else can there be a City of Industry and a City of Commerce, so flagrantly commemorating the fractions of capital which guaranteed their incorporation. In other places, names casually try to recapture a romanticized history (as in the many new communities called Rancho something-or-other) or to ensconce the memory of alternative geographies (as in Venice, Naples, Hawaiian Gardens, Ontario, Manhattan Beach, Westminster). In naming, as in so many other contemporary urban processes, time and space, the 'once' and the 'there', are being increasingly played with and packaged to serve the needs of the here and the now, making the lived experience of the urban increasingly vicarious, screened through *simulacra*, those exact copies for which the real originals have been lost.

A recent clipping from the *Los Angeles Times* (Herbert, 1985) tells of the 433 signs which bestow identity within the hyperspace of the City of Los Angeles, described as 'A City Divided and Proud of It'. Hollywood, Wilshire Boulevard's Miracle Mile, and the Central City were among the first to get these community signs as part of a 'city identification program' organized by the Transportation Department. One of the newest signs, for what was proclaimed 'the city's newest community', recognizes the formation of 'Harbor Gateway' in the thin eight-mile long blue-collar area threading south to the harbour, the old Shoestring Strip where many of the 32,000 residents often forgot their ties to the city. One of the founders of the programme pondered its development: 'At first, in the early 1960s, the Traffic Department took the position that all the communities were part of Los Angeles and we didn't want cities within cities ... but we finally gave in. Philosophically it made sense. Los Angeles is huge. The city had to recognize that there were communities that needed identification.... What we tried to avoid was putting up signs at every intersection that had stores.' Ultimately, the city signs are described as 'A Reflection of Pride in the Suburbs'. Where are we then in this nominal and nomenclature fantasyland?

For at least fifty years, Los Angeles has been defying conventional categorical description of the urban, of what is city and what is suburb, of what can be identified as community or neighbourhood, of what co-presence means in the elastic urban context. It has in effect been deconstructing the urban into a confusing collage of signs which advertise what are often little more than imaginary communities and outlandish representations of urban locality. I do not mean to say that there are no

12. Another outlet reached near LAX is the Hyperion Sewage Treatment Plant, exporting from the City of Los Angeles a volume of waste equivalent to the fifth or sixth largest river to reach the ocean in California; and creating an increasingly poisoned food-chain reaching back into the population of its drainage basin. Over the past several years, there have been claims that Santa Monica Bay may have the highest levels of toxic chemicals along the West coast. Signs were posted to warn of the hazards of locally caught fish (especially the so aptly named croaker) and doctors warned many of their patients not to swim off certain beaches. The fault-lines in the garbage-chains of the region may ultimately prove more threatening than those more well-known cracks in the earth's surface.

genuine neighbourhoods to be found in Los Angeles. Indeed, finding them through car-voyages of exploration has become a popular local pastime, especially for those who have become so isolated from propinquitous community in the repetitive sprawl of truly ordinary-looking landscapes that make up most of the region. But again the urban experience becomes increasingly vicarious, adding more layers of opaqueness to *l'espace vécu*.

Underneath this semiotic blanket¹³ there remains an economic order, an instrumental nodal structure, an essentially exploitative spatial division of labour, and this spatially organized urban system has for the past half century been more continuously productive than almost any other in the world. But it has also been increasingly obscured from view, imaginatively mystified in an environment more specialized in the production of encompassing mystifications than practically any other you can name. As has so often been the case in the United States, this conservative deconstruction is accompanied by a numbing depoliticization of fundamental class and gender relations and conflicts. When all that is seen is so fragmented and filled with whimsy and pastiche, the hard edges of the capitalist, racist and patriarchal landscape seem to disappear, melt into air.

With exquisite irony, contemporary Los Angeles has come to resemble more than ever before a gigantic agglomeration of theme parks, a lifespaces comprised of Disneyworlds. It is a realm divided into show-cases of global village cultures and mimetic American landscapes, all-embracing shopping malls and crafty Main Streets, corporation-sponsored magic kingdoms, high-technology-based experimental prototype communities of tomorrow, attractively packaged places for rest and recreation all cleverly hiding the buzzing workstations and labour processes which help to keep it together. Like the original 'Happiest Place on Earth', the enclosed spaces are subtly but tightly controlled by invisible overseers despite the open appearance of fantastic freedoms of choice. The experience of living here can be extremely diverting and exceptionally enjoyable, especially for those who can afford to remain inside long enough to establish their own modes of transit and places to rest. And, of course, the enterprise has been enormously profitable over the years. After all, it was built on what began as relatively cheap land, has been sustained by a constantly replenishing army of even cheaper imported labour, is filled with the most modern technological gadgetry, enjoys extraordinary levels of

13. The root of semiotic and semiology is the Greek *semeion*, which means sign, mark, spot or *point in space*. You arrange to meet someone at a *semeion*, a particular place. The significance of this connection between semiotics and spatiality is too often forgotten.

protection and surveillance, and runs under the smooth aggression of the most efficient management systems, almost always capable of delivering what is promised just in time to be useful.

Afterwords

O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a King of infinite space ...

(*Hamlet*, II, 2; first prescript to *The Aleph*)

But they will teach us that Eternity is the Standing still of the Present Time, a *Nunc-stans* (as the Schools call it); which neither they, nor any else understand, no more than they would a *Hic-stans* for an infinite greatness of Place.

(*Leviathan*, IV, 46; second prescript to *The Aleph*)

I have been looking at Los Angeles from many different points of view and each way of seeing assists in sorting out the interjacent medley of the subject landscape. The perspectives explored are purposeful, eclectic, fragmentary, incomplete, and frequently contradictory, but so too is Los Angeles and, indeed, the experienced historical geography of every urban landscape. Totalizing visions, attractive though they may be, can never capture all the meanings and significations of the urban when the landscape is critically read and envisioned as a fulsome geographical text. There are too many *auteurs* to identify, the *literalité* (materiality?) of the manufactured environment is too multilayered to be allowed to speak for itself, and the countervailing metaphors and metonyms frequently clash, like discordant symbols drowning out the underlying themes. More seriously, we still know too little about the descriptive grammar and syntax of human geographies, the phonemes and epistemes of spatial interpretation. We are constrained by language much more than we know, as Borges so knowingly admits: what we can see in Los Angeles and in the spatiality of social life is stubbornly simultaneous, but what we write down is successive, because language is successive. The task of comprehensive, holistic regional description may therefore be impossible, as may be the construction of a complete historical-geographical materialism.

There is hope nonetheless. The critical and theoretical interpretation of geographical landscapes has recently expanded into realms that functionally had been spatially illiterate for most of the twentieth century. New and avid readers abound as never before, many are directly attuned to the specificity of the urban, and several have significantly turned their

eyes to Los Angeles. Moreover, many practised readers of surface geographies have begun to see through the alternatively myopic and hypermetropic distortions of past perspectives to bring new insight to spatial analysis and social theory. Here too Los Angeles has attracted observant readers after a history of neglect and misapprehension, for it insistently presents itself as one of the most informative palimpsests and paradigms of twentieth-century urban-industrial development and popular consciousness.

As I have seen and said in various ways, everything seems to come together in Los Angeles, the totalizing Aleph. Its representations of spatiality and historicity are archetypes of vividness, simultaneity, and interconnection. They beckon inquiry at once into their telling uniqueness and, at the same time, into their assertive but cautionary generalizability. Not all can be understood, appearances as well as essences persistently deceive, and what is real cannot always be captured even in extraordinary language. But this makes the challenge more compelling, especially if once in a while one has the opportunity to take it all apart and reconstruct the context. The reassertion of space in critical social theory – and in critical political praxis – will depend upon a continued deconstruction of a still occlusive historicism and many additional voyages of exploration into the heterotopias of contemporary postmodern geographies.

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