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Taking Los Angeles apart: some fragments of a critical human geography

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Abstract. This essay is a presentation of a succession of brief, tentative, and often incongruous readings of the human geography of contemporary Los Angeles, an urban region of both telling uniqueness and compelling generalizability. Viewed as a comprehensive whole, Los Angeles brings to mind Jorge Luis Borges's perplexing encounter with *The Aleph*, "the only place on earth where all places are", a limitless space of simultaneity and contradiction, impossible to describe in ordinary language. Extraordinary language is accordingly experimented with in describing Los Angeles as a place where everything seems to 'come together' in evocative fragments. Abstractions and concreteness are combined in verbal tours of the peripheral and central landscapes of Los Angeles, critical travelogs aimed at restructuring how we look at, interpret, and theorize the spatiality and historicity of contemporary urban society, how we read the urban con-text.

> "'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'" (pages 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?" (pages 12-13).
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph*

Los Angeles, like Borges's Aleph, is 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 extend laterally instead of sequentially. At the same time, its spatiality challenges orthodox analysis and interpretation, for it too seems limitless and constantly in motion, never still enough to encompass. Looking at Los Angeles from the inside, one tends to see only fragments and immediacies, fixed islands of myopic understanding generalized to represent the whole. To the more far-sighted outsider, the visible aggregate, the whole of Los Angeles, churns so confusingly that it induces little more than stereotype and illusion, if it is 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 senses of the word. Nowhere is this more evident than in its cultural projection and ideological reach, its almost ubiquitous screening of itself as Dream Machine to the world. Los Angeles broadcasts its 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 of America, a cargo which currently surpasses that of the smaller ocean to the east. Global currents of people, information, and ideas accompany the trade. Once dubbed Iowa's seaport, today Los Angeles has become an entrepôt to the world, a true pivot of the four quarters, a congeries of East and West, North and South. And from the teeming shores of every quarter has poured a pool of cultures so diverse that contemporary Los Angeles re-presents the world in urban microcosms, reproducing in situ the customs and ceremonies, the conflicts and confrontations, of a hundred homelands. The extraordinary can be exemplified endlessly in this fulsome urban landscape, but 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" (page 13).

I too will try to recollect what I can, adding to and drawing from what I have already written elsewhere[1]. The following is a succession of fragmentary glimpses, a freed association of reflective and interpretive field notes which aim toward constructing a critical human geography of the Los Angeles urban region. My observations are necessarily and contingently incomplete, but the target I hope will remain clear: to appreciate the specificity and uniqueness of a particular empirical landscape while simultaneously seeking to extract insight 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, and what the old debates called the idiographic and the nomothetic.

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 ..." (page 13).

We must have a place to start, to begin the reading. However much the formative space of Los Angeles may be global (or perhaps Mandelbrotian, constructed in zigzagging 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 kilometers) 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 1950s the only structure in the entire region allowed to surpass the allegedly earthquake-proofing 150-foot height limitation. It is an impressive punctuation point, capped by a 1920s interpretation of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, enclosing a Byzantine rotunda, and etched with this infatuating inscription: "THE CITY CAME INTO BEING TO PRESERVE LIFE, IT EXISTS FOR THE GOOD LIFE". Significantly, it sits at the corner of Temple and Spring.

[1] In previous papers (Soja et al, 1983; Soja et al, 1985; Soja, 1986) I have repeatedly presented analytical descriptions of the urban restructuring of Los Angeles. The present essay is both a continuity and a break with these works, a somewhat experimental rereading of the contemporary urban landscape.

The Sixty-Mile Circle so inscribed covers the thinly sprawling 'built-up' area of five counties, a population of more than twelve million individuals, at least 132 incorporated cities, and, it is claimed, the greatest concentration of mathematicians, scientists, engineers, skilled technicians, and high-technology industry in the USA. Its workers produce, when last estimated, a gross annual output worth nearly $170 billion, more than the gross national product of all but a dozen countries and almost as much as the 800 million people of India. 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'[2]. 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 technicians and scientists of the Sixty-Mile Circle, surely today the most powerful assemblage of weapon-making expertise ever grounded into one place. In contrast, the second signals peacefulness, tranquility, moderation, amity, concord. Holocaust attached to halcyon, one of the many simultaneous contraries, interposed opposites, which characterize Los Angeles and help to explain why conventional categorical description 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 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 marked the past forty-five years. It is not always easy to see the imprint of this imperial history on the empirical landscape, but a cruise directly above the contemporary circumference of the Sixty-Mile Circle can be unusually revealing.

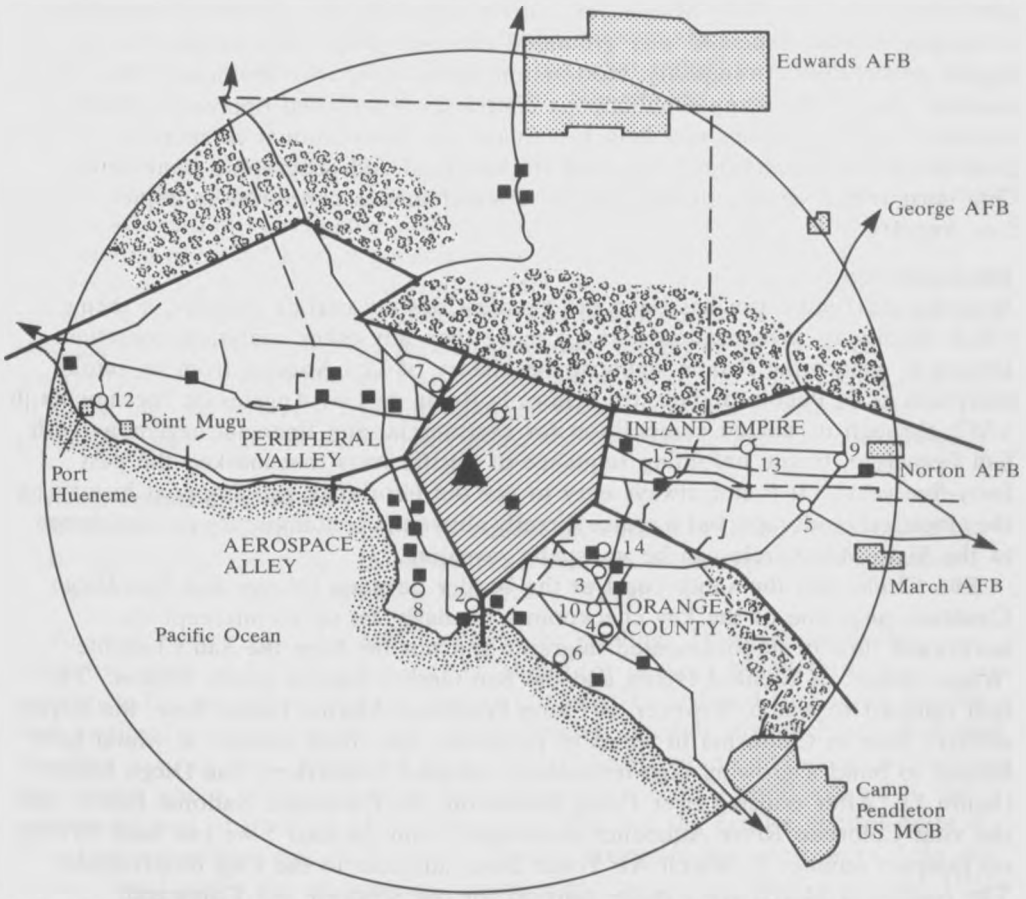
The Circle cuts the south coast at the border between Orange and San Diego Counties, near one of the key checkpoints regularly set up to intercept the northward flow of undocumented migrants and not far from the San Clemente 'White House' of Richard Nixon and the San Onofre nuclear power station. The 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 (figure 1). After cruising over Camp Pendleton, the Cleveland National Forest, and the vital Colorado River Aqueduct draining in from the east[3] we can land directly on rampart number 2, March Air Force Base, adjacent to the City of Riverside. The insides of March are a major outpost for the Strategic Air Command.

Another quick hop over Sunnymead, the Box Spring Mountains, and Redlands takes us to rampart number 3, Norton Air Force Base, next to the city of San Bernardino and just south of the San Manuel Indian Reservation. The guide

[2] At least eight editions of "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.

[3] 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.

books tell us that the primary mission of Norton is military airlifts. To move on we must rise higher to pass over the ski-sloped peaks of the San Bernardino Mountains and National Forest, through Cajon Pass, and past the old Santa Fe Trail, into the Mojave Desert. Near Victorville is rampart number 4, George Air Force Base, specializing in air defense and interception. Almost the same distance away—our stops seem remarkably evenly spaced thus far—takes us by dry Mirage Lake to sprawling Edwards Air Force Base, rampart number 5, site of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and USAF (US Air Force) research and development activities and a landing field for the Space Shuttle. Stretching to the south is an important aerospace corridor through Lancaster, to Palmdale Airport and Air Force Plant 42, which serves the key historical function of Edwards as testing ground for advanced fighters and bombers.



1	Los Angeles	3 144 800	6	Huntington Beach	179 900	11	Pasadena	126 600
2	Long Beach	381 800	7	Glendale	148 800	12	Oxnard	121 300
3	Anaheim	234 706	8	Torrance	135 100	13	Ontario	108 100
4	Santa Ana	221 600	9	San Bernardino	134 700	14	Fullerton	107 700
5	Riverside	183 400	10	Garden Grove	130 300	15	Pomona	106 300

Figure 1. 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 defense 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).

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 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[4], to the idyll-ized town of Ojai, 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 number 6, a complex consisting of a now inactive Air Force Base at Oxnard, the Naval Construction Battalion Center of Port Hueneme, and, above all, the longsighted 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.

It is startling how much of the circumference is owned by the Federal Government in one way or another. Premeditation may be impossible to ascribe, but postmeditation 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, the 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.

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 cognition of Los Angeles that its explorers are often compelled to exaggerate to keep their lines of vision open and clear. Yet it is no exaggeration to claim that the Sixty-Mile Circle contains the premier industrial growth pole of the 20th century, at least within the advanced capitalist countries. Oil, agriculture, 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. Around 250 000 manufacturing jobs were added in the 1940s, nearly 400 000 in the 1950s, another 200 000 in the 1960s and, during a decade when the net increase for the entire country was not more than a million, an estimated 225 000 in the 1970s. There has been somewhat of a slowdown in the 1980s, but not enough to prevent the Sixty-Mile Circle from finally surpassing the twenty-six-county Greater New York Area in total 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 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. Further evidence of the apparent invisibility of industrial production in Los Angeles came at about the same time from *Forbes* magazine, that self-proclaimed source book for knowing capitalists (who should know better). In 1984, *Forbes*

[4] The last few remaining condors were recently removed to zoos after lead poisoning threatened their extinction in the 'wild'.

published a map identifying the major centers of high-technology development in the USA. 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.

Even excluding aerospace, the generative core of the region's high-technology sector, Los Angeles County alone today employs over 250 000 people in the Bureau of Labor Statistics 'Group 3' category, a widely used definition of 'high tech', versus about 160 000 in Santa Clara County, heart of the image-fixing Silicon Valley. With aerospace included, the Sixty-Mile Circle had *added* during the 1970s an employment pool in high-technology industries almost equivalent to that of the entire Silicon Valley at the end of the decade.

Still partially hidden behind these statistics are the primary generative agencies, the intricate processes producing this preeminent production complex. One key link, however, is abundantly clear. Over 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 programs subsidizing suburban consumption (suburbsidizing?) 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 sun, demonstrating decade by decade its redoubtable ability to go first and multiply the public seed money invested in its promising economic landscape[5]. 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 today, under the aegis of the military Keynesianism of the Reagan Administration and the permanent arms economy. At Hughes Aircraft Company in El Segundo, engineers have already used some of the $60 million in prime Star Wars contracts to mock up a giant infrared 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 Miracl, 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 (Sanger, 1985). Today, not only the Pacific 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 Davis (1984) has called the 'Californianization' of Late-Imperial America.

[5] 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 USA, Sunbelt and Frostbelt included.

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 after war. Spinning off in its tracks has been an intricate tracery of links, from defense and space-related expenditures on research and development, and the associated formation of the aerospace industry in the wake of civilian aircraft manufacturing; to the instigation of computerized electronics and modern information-processing technology, building upon an ancillary network of suppliers and demanders of goods and services which stretches out to virtually every sector of the contemporary economy and society[6]. 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 preeminence. Many millions more lie within its 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 ghettoes which provide dependable flows of the cheapest labor power to the bottom bulge of the bimodal local labor market (specialized scientists and engineers filling the smaller bulge at the top). 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, and intended life-styles.

This extraordinary differentiation, fragmentation, and social control over specialized pools of labor 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. 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 what Banham (1971) once called 'Surfurbia', there has developed the largest and most homogenous residential enclave of scientists and engineers in the world. Coincidentally, this beachhead of the high technocracy is also the most formidable racial redoubt 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% white[7].

[6] In 1965, it was estimated in a Bank of America study that nearly 43% of total manufacturing employment in Los Angeles and Orange Counties was linked to defense and space expenditures. Some percentages by sector included paperboard containers and boxes (12%), fabricated rubber (36%), computing machines (54%), photographic equipment (69%), screw-machines (70%), and machine-shop jobbing and repairs (78%). 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).

[7] For more details, see "For whites only: the South Bay perfects racism for the '80s" (Mate, 1982).

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, meshing together into the largest and probably fastest growing Outer City compage in the country. 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 master-planned New Towns which paradigmatically evince the global cultural inspirations 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 blocked out to recreate the places and peoples 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 elite of sports-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 delivers enticing portions of the American Dream. 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 compage has also been the focus for detailed research into the high-technology industrial complexes which have been recentralizing the urban fabric of the Los Angeles region and inducing the florescence of master-planned New Towns. The pioneering work of Scott, for example, has helped us see more clearly the transactional web of industrial linkages which draw out and geographically cluster specialized networks of firms, feed off the flow of federal contracts, and spill 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 urbanized core. 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)[8]. Another is being promoted (although not yet achieved) 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 (see figure 1).

As Scott's work in particular has helped us see, these new compages 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

[8] Gallium arsenide chips operate at higher frequencies and allegedly compute faster than silicon chips. Developed primarily for military uses, 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).

become sufficiently dense to challenge the older urban cores as centers 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.

Back to the center

> "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 splintered labyrinth .... I saw, close up, unending eyes watching themselves in me as in a mirror" (page 13).

To see more of Los Angeles, it is necessary to move in from the periphery and return, literally and figuratively, to the center of things, to the still adhesive core of the urbanized landscape. In Los Angeles, as in every city, the nodality of the center defines and gives substance to the *specificity* of the urban, its distinctive social and spatial meaning. Urbanization and the spatial divisions of labor associated with it revolve around a socially constructed pattern of nodality and the power of the occupied centers to both 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[9].

It is easy to overlook the tendential processes of urban structuration that emanate from the center, especially in the late-modern capitalist city. Indeed, in contemporary societies the authoritative and allocative power of the center is purposefully obscured or, alternatively, detached from place, ripped out of context, and given the appearance of democratic ubiquity. In addition, as we have seen, the historical development of urbanization of the past century has been marked by a selective dispersal and decentralization, emptying the center of many of the activities and populations which once aggregated densely around it. For some, this has signalled a negation of nodality, an age of peripheral urbanization, the submergence of the power of place.

Yet the centers *hold*. Even as some things fall apart, dissipate, new nodalities form and old ones are reinforced. The centrifuge is always spinning, but centripetal nodality never disappears. And it is the persistent residual of political power which continues to precipitate, specify, and contextualize the urban. Cities originated with the simultaneous concentration of commanding symbolic forms, *civic* centers designed to ceremonialize, administer, acculturate, and control. In and around the institutionalized locale of the *citadel* adhered people and their 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 the center. To be urbanized still means to adhere, to be made an adherent, a believer in a specified ideology rooted in extensions of *polis* (politics, policy, polity, police) and *civitas* (civil, civic, citizen, civilian, civilization)[10]. To maintain adhesiveness, the

[9] Debate on the specificity of the urban—essentially whether the urban is a significant object of study in its own right and, if so, what it is that defines this significance—runs through the history of social theory. The debate will not end with the arguments presented here.

[10] In contrast, the population beyond the reach of the urban is comprised of *idiotes*, 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 is primarily a statement of relative political socialization, of the degree of adherence or separation in the collective social order.

civic center 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. It is not production or consumption or exchange in themselves that specify the urban, but rather their collective surveillance, supervision, and anticipated control within the powerful context of nodality.

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 awarely expressed in practical consciousness. Surveillance too is problematic, for it can exist without being embracingly effective. There is always room for resistance, rejection, and redirection in the nonetheless structured arena of the urban, creating an active politics of nodal spatiality, struggles for place, space, and position within the regionalized urban landscape. Adherence and surveillance are thus unevenly developed in their geographical manifestations, their regionalization. Simultaneously, this patterned differentiation, this immediate superstructure of the urban spatial division of labor, becomes a critical arena in which the human geography of the city is shaped.

Recentralization

The Downtown core of the City of Los Angeles—signs call it Central City—is the agglomerative and symbolic nucleus of the Sixty-Mile Circle, certainly the oldest but in other ways 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 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 militarized 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 center, however, can the surveillant 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 from City Hall, the site is especially impressive to the overviewing 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 sixty-foot fountain of water, light, and music. 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% of the Californian prison population, 11 000 inmates held in four jails. Included are the largest women's prison in the country (Sybil Brand) and the seventh largest men's prison (Men's Central), with more being insistently planned by the state.

On the south along First Street are the State Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) with its electronic wall maps monitoring the 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. Near the 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 4 million strong) and another estate of significant proportions.

Looking westward now, toward the Pacific and the smog-hued sunsets which regularly 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 the largest county in total population in the country. Standing across Grand Avenue is the most prominent cultural center 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 civic cultural life since it was inaugurated in 1964"[11]. Just beyond this cultural crown is the Department of Water and Power (surrounded by usually waterless fountains) and a multilevel extravaganza of freeway interchanges connecting with every corner of the Sixty-Mile Circle, a peak point of accessibility within the regional transporation network.

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 Civic Center. Sitting more tranquilly just beyond, cut off by a swathe of freeway, is the preserved remains of the old civic center, 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 suburbs. This skylined sight contains the bunched castles and cathedrals of corporate power, the gleaming new central business district (CBD) of the Central City, pinned next to its aging predecessor just to the east. Here, too, unending eyes are kept open and reflective, but they reach and mirror much wider spheres of influence.

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. Perhaps as many as half the major properties are in part or wholly foreign-owned, for example, 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 (coowner of the sleak-black Arco Towers), Crocker and Union (both owned by British firms), 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

[11] Colorful 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.

giant Coldwell Banker, the new offices of the Pacific Stock Exchange, all serving as attachment points for silvery webs of financial and commerical transactions extending practically everywhere on earth.

The two poles of the citadel, political and economic, connect physically through the condominium towers of 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 labor necessary to sustain its preeminent industrialization and consumerism. Planning choreographs Los Angeles through the standardized movements of the zoning game and the staging of supportive community participation, a dance filled with honorable intent, dedicated expertise, and selective beneficence. It has excelled, however, as an ambivalent but enriching pipeline and place-maker to the 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[12].

Although conspiracy and corruption can be found, the planned and packaged selling of Los Angeles usually follows a more acceptable rhythm played to the legitimizing beat of market forces. In the created spaces which surround the twin citadels of Los Angeles, the beat has been particularly insistent and mesmerizing. Through an historic act of preservation and renewal, there now exists around Downtown a forcefully 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. Direction is handled primarily by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), probably the leading public entrepreneur of the Sixty-Mile Circle[13].

There is too little time now to tour the sites contained in this compartmentalized corona of the Inner City: the Vietnamese shops and Hong Kong housing of an expanding Chinatown, the Big Tokyo financed modernization of old Little Tokyo's still resisting remains, the induced pseudo-SoHo of artists' lofts and galleries, the protected remains of El Pueblo, the anachronistic wholesaling markets for produce and flowers growing while other downtowns displace their equivalents, the booming sweatshops and merchandise marts of the Garment District, the Latino bustle of the Broadway shopping street (another preserved zone), the national capital of urban homelessness in the CRA-gilded Skid Row, the enormous muralled barrio stretching eastward, the deindustrializing and virtually resident-less wholesaling City of Vernon, the Central American and Mexican communities of Pico-Union, the obtrusive oil wells in the backyards of predominantly immigrant Temple-Beaudry, the intentionally yuppifying South Park, the revenue-milked towers of Bunker Hill, the resplendently gentrified pocket of 'Victorian' homes in old Angelino Heights, the massive new Koreatown pushing westward against the edge of Black Los Angeles, the Pilipino pockets to the northwest still uncoalesced into a 'town' of their own, and so much more.

[12] Investigative reports of the political corruptability 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: Castro, "LA Inc.," a three-part series in the *Los Angeles 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 powerless", 12 March); and Curran and MacAdams, "The selling of LA County", *LA Weekly*, 22-28 November. Nothing comparable appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.

[13] The CRA is a California state-legislated agency. It functions publicly in Downtown Los Angeles in ways which resemble the master-planning operations of the Irvine Company in its private domains of Orange County.

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 compage of dilapidated and overcrowded housing, low-technology workshops, relicts and residuals of an older urbanization, a sprinkling of niches for recentered professionals and supervisors, and above all the largest concentration of cheap, culturally splintered, occupationally manipulable Third World immigrant labor to be found so tangibly available in any First World urban region. Here then is another of the manufactured crown jewels of Los Angeles, carefully watched over, maintained, and reproduced to service the continued development of the region.

The degree and persistence of simultaneous concentration here in Downtown Los Angeles cannot be ignored either by participants or by observers. The industrialization of the periphery may be turning the production space of the region inside out, but the old center is more than holding its own as the preeminent political and economic citadel. To jog some further nomothetic connections, consider the following extract from the work of Giddens (1984, pages 183–184):

> "This 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'."

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. The deeper sources of this structuring process are usually glossed over and its problematic history is almost universally simplified, but the resultant surfaces of social geometry remain visible as geographical expressions of the crude orderliness induced by the effects of nodality.

The most primitive urban form is the radial attenuation of land-use 'intensity' around the center to an outer edge, a reflection of the Thunian landscape which has become codified most figuratively in the irrepressible two-parameter negative exponential population density gradient. The TPNEPDG, in part because of its nearly universal exemplification, has obsessed urban theorists with its 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 TPNEPDG has been the lodestar for the monocentric understanding of urbanism. And, within its own bands of confidence, it works.

Population densities do mound up around the centers 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 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 outward from the center, reminiscent of 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 theoreticians have accordingly refused to follow this path. But direction does induce another fit, by pointing out the emanation of fortuitous wedges or sectors out from the center. The sectoral wedges of Los Angeles are especially pronounced once you leave the inner circle around Downtown.

The Wilshire Corridor 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 which 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". As if in counterbalance, on the other side of the tracks east of Downtown is the salient of the largest Latino *barrio* in Anglo-America, where many of those who might be shot are carefully imprisoned. And there is at least one more prominent wedge, stretching southward from Downtown to the twin ports of Los Angeles–Long Beach and reputed to be one of the largest consistently industrial urban sectors in the world. This is the primary axis of Ruhral Los Angeles.

A third ecological order perturbs the geometrical neatness still further, punching wholes into the monocentric gradients and wedges based on the 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' 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.

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. They mislead not because there is disagreement over their degree of fit—such arguments merely induce a temporary insensibility by forcing debate onto the usually sterile grounds of technical discourse. Instead, they deceive by involuting explanation, by the legerdemain of making the nodality of the urban explain itself. Geographical covariance is elevated to causality and frequently frozen in place without a history—and without a human geography which recognizes that spatiality 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. Different routes and different roots must be explored to achieve a practical understanding and theorization of urban landscapes.

Deconstruction

Back in the center, 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[14]. 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. 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 pastiche of superficial reflections bewilder coordination and encourage submission instead. Entry by land is forbidding to those who walk but do not drive, but entrance is nevertheless encouraged at many different levels, from the truly pedestrian skyways above to the bunker-like inlets below. Once in, however, it becomes daunting to get out again without assistance. In so many ways, architecture recapitulates and reflects the sprawling manufactured environments 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. Thus the Bonaventure both simulates the restructured landscape of Los Angeles and is simulated by it. From this interpretive interplay emerges an alternative way of looking at the human geography of contemporary Los Angeles.

From the center 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 labor. As is true for so much of the patterning of 20th century urbanization, Los Angeles both sets the historical pace and most vividly epitomizes the extremes of contemporary expression. Municipal boundary-making and territorial incorporation, for example, have 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, and Santa Monica pockmark the 'Westside' bulk of the incorporated City of Los Angeles, and thin slivers of City land reach out like tentacles to grab onto the key seaside outlets of the port at San Pedro and Los Angeles International Airport[15]. 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 part of the Central City of the Los Angeles–Long Beach SMSA (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area). Few other places make such a mockery of the standard classifications of urban, suburban, and exurban.

[14] The Westin Bonaventure, financed by the Japanese, features prominently (if not with the correct spelling) in Jameson's perceptive analysis of "The cultural logic of Late Capital" (1984). See also the excellent rejoinder by Davis (1985) and an essay on postmodern planning by Dear (1986), all parts of a continuing debate on postmodernism in Los Angeles.

[15] Another outlet reached near LAX is the Hyperion Sewage Treatment Plant, expectorating 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. 1985 brought 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 now aptly named croaker); and doctors warned many of their patients not to swim off certain beaches.

Over 130 other municipalities and scores of county-administered areas adhere loosely around the irregular City of Los Angeles in a dazzling 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 bluntly 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 other contemporary urban processes, time and space are reduced and packaged to serve the needs of here and now, making the lived experience of the urban increasingly vicarious.

A recent clipping from the *Los Angeles Times* (Hebert, 1985) tells of the 433 signs which give identity within 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 harbor, the old Shoestring Strip where many of the 32 000 residents often forgot their ties to the City. One of the founders of the program pondered its development:

> "At first, in the early 1960's, 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" (page 3).

Ultimately, the city signs are described as "A Reflection of Pride in the Suburbs".

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 copresence means in the urban context. It has in effect deconstructed the urban into a confusing collage of signs which advertise what are often little more than nominal communities and outlandish representations of urban location[16]. There remain an economic order, a nodal structure, an essentially exploitative spatial division of labor, and this spatially organized urban system has for the past half century been more continuosly productive than almost any other. But it is increasingly obscured from view, imaginatively mystified in an environment more specialized in the production of encompassing mystifications than practically any other. And as so often has been the case in the USA, deconstruction is accompanied by a numbing depoliticization of fundamental class relations and conflicts when all that is seen is so fragmented and filled with whimsy.

With exquisite irony, contemporary Los Angeles has come to resemble more than ever before a gigantic agglomeration of theme parks, a region comprised of Disneyworlds divided into showcases of global cultures and mimetic American landscapes, all-embracing shopping malls and main streets, corporation-sponsored magic kingdoms, high-technology-based experimental prototype communities of

[16] There are many genuine neighbourhoods to be found in Los Angeles and finding them has become a popular local pastime, especially for those who have become isolated from propinquitous community in the repetitive sprawl of truly ordinary landscapes which make up most of the region. Here again the urban experience becomes increasingly vicarious, adding to the confusion.

tomorrow, attractively packaged places for rest and recreation, all cleverly hiding the buzzing workstations and labor processes which help to keep it together. Like the original 'Happiest Place on Earth', the enclosed spaces are subtly but tightly controlled by 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 for a sufficient length of time. 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 labor, is filled with the most modern technological gadgetry, enjoys extraordinary levels of 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.

Synthesis?

> "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*) (page 3)

I have looked at Los Angeles from many different points of view and each in part 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 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 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.

There is hope nonetheless. The critical and theoretical reading of geographical landscapes has recently expanded into realms that functionally had been spatially illiterate for most of the 20th century. New 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 practiced 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 (Soja, 1985). Here too Los Angeles has attracted observant readers after a history of neglect and misapprehension, for it insistently presents itself as palimpsest and paradigm of 20th 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 LAleph. Its representations of spatiality and historicity

are archetypes of vividness and simultaneity. They beckon inquiry at once into their telling uniqueness and, at the same time, into their assertive generalizability. Not all can be understood, appearances as well as essences persistently deceive, and what is real cannot always be captured in ordinary language. But this makes the reading even more challenging and compelling, especially if once in a while one has the opportunity to take it all apart and reconstruct.

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