Los Angeles and the Chicago School: Invitation to a Debate

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INTRODUCTION

> The state of theory, now and from now on, isn't it California? And
> even Southern California?
> — Jacques Derrida (quoted in Carrol, 1990, p. 63)

More than 75 years ago, the University of Chicago Press published a book
of essays entitled *The City: Suggestions for Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment*. The book is still in print. Six of its 10 essays
are by Robert E. Park, then Chair of the University's Sociology Department. There are also two essays by Ernest W. Burgess, and one each from
Roderick D. McKenzie and Louis Wirth. In essence, the book announced
the arrival of the "Chicago School" of urban sociology, defining an agenda
for urban studies that persists to this day. Shrugging off challenges from
competing visions, the School has maintained a remarkable longevity that
is a tribute to its model's beguiling simplicity, to the tenacity of its adherents who subsequently constructed a formidable literature, and to the
fact that the model "worked" in its application to so many different cities
over such a long period of time.

The present essay begins the task of defining an alternative agenda for
urban studies, based on the precepts of what I shall refer to as the "Los
Angeles School." Quite evidently, adherents of the Los Angeles School
take many cues from the Los Angeles metropolitan region, or (more generally) from Southern California—a five-county region encompassing Los
Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties. This
exceptionally complex, fast-growing megalopolis is already home to more
than 16 million people. It is likely soon to overtake New York as the
nation's premier urban region. Yet, for most of its history, it has been
regarded as an exception to the rules governing American urban development, an aberrant outlier on the continent's western edge.

All this is changing. During the past two decades, Southern California
has attracted increasing attention from scholars, the media, and other
social commentators. The region has become not the exception to but
rather a prototype of our urban future. For many current observers, L.A.
is simply confirming what contemporaries knew throughout its history:
that the city posited a set of different rules for understanding urban

growth. An alternative urban metric is now overdue, since as Joel Garreau (1991, p. 3) observed in his study of edge cities: "Every American city that is growing, is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles."

Just as the Chicago School emerged at a time when that city was reaching new national prominence, Los Angeles is now making its impression on the minds of urbanists across the world. Few argue that the city is unique, or necessarily a harbinger of the future, even though both viewpoints are at some level demonstrably true. However, at a very minimum, they all assert that Southern California is an unusual amalgam—a polycentric, polyglot, polycultural pastiche that is deeply involved in rewriting American urbanism. Moreover, their theoretical inquiries do not end with Southern California, but are also focused on more general questions concerning broader urban socio-spatial processes. The variety, volume, and pace of contemporary urban change almost *requires* the development of alternative analytical frameworks; one can no longer make an unchallenged appeal to a single model for the myriad global and local trends that surround us. These proliferating social logics insist upon multiple theoretical frameworks that overlap and coexist in their explanations of the burgeoning world order. The consequent epistemological difficulties are manifest in the problem of naming the present condition, witness the use of such terms as *post-modernity, hyper-modernity,* and *super-modernity*.

The particular conditions that have led now to the emergence of a Los Angeles School may be almost coincidental: (1) that an especially powerful intersection of empirical and theoretical research projects have come together in this particular place at this particular time; (2) that these trends are occurring in what has historically been the most understudied major city in the United States; (3) that these projects have attracted the attention of an assemblage of increasingly self-conscious scholars and practitioners; and (4) that the world is facing the prospect of a Pacific century, in which Southern California is likely to become a global capital. The vitality and potential of the Los Angeles School derive from the intersection of these events, and the promise they hold for a renaissance of urban theory. In this essay, I shall examine this potential, first through a history of the emergence of a "Los Angeles School," and a brief contrast with the precepts of the Chicago School. I turn next to empirical evidence of contemporary urban process in Southern California, using this evidence to sketch an orientation toward L.A. urbanism. Finally, I assess the promise of the putative Los Angeles School, inviting others to join the debate toward a revised urban theory. Before beginning these tasks, I emphasize that in what follows, I shall focus primarily on the Los Angeles School and its burgeoning traditions, and spend little time on an exegesis of the Chicago School, which is by now relatively familiar to most urbanists. I also want to stress that the arguments in this article are little more than a beginning, but they will (I hope) point toward a profound realignment in the way we understand cities.

THE LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS

It may come as a surprise that a region notorious for a certain neglect (even contempt) for its own history should, in fact, possess a rich intellectual, cultural and artistic heritage. Mike Davis's history of Los Angeles encapsulates some of these traditions in a series of wicked metaphors referring, as he does, to booster, debunker, noir, exile, sorcerer, communard, and mercenary traditions embedded in the city's past (Davis, 1990). Indeed, there seems to be a proliferation of various "schools of thought" across the L.A. spectrum. For instance, Todd Boyd (1997) has identified a distinctive L.A. cultural studies, Richard Cándida Smith a (Southern) Californian artistic canon (1995), and David Fine an L.A. literature (1995). Victor Burgin, Robbert Flick, Catherine Opie, Allan Sekula, and Camilo José Vergara are in the midst of creating a photographic record of L.A. landscapes, and there are also important public art and muralist traditions including Judy Baca and the ADOBE LA group. Finally, of course, I cannot fail to mention the Hollywood "school" of film-making.

Closest to my concern is the contemporary "L.A. school of architecture," which has enjoyed a rigorous documentation due to the efforts of that most intrepid chronicler, Charles Jencks (1993). I hasten to add that there are many L.A. schools of architecture, both past and present, including Richard Neutra, Rudolph Schindler, Gregory Ain et al. in the 1930s (Gebhard and von Breton, 1989), as well as members of the current LA Forum on Architecture and Urban Design. According to Jencks (1993, p. 34), the current L.A. school of architecture includes such luminaries as Frank Gehry and Charles Moore, and was founded amid acrimony in 1981:

> The L.A. School was, and remains, a group of individualized mavericks, more at home together in an exhibition than in each other's homes. There is also a particular self-image involved with this Non-School which exacerbates the situation. All of its members see themselves as outsiders, on the margins challenging the establishment with an informal and demanding architecture; one that must be carefully read.

Jencks (1993, p. 34) concurs with architectural critic Leon Whiteson that L.A.'s cultural environment is one that places the margin at its core: "The ultimate irony is that in the L.A. architectural culture, where heterogeneity is valued over conformity, and creativity over propriety, the periphery is often the center." Jencks's interpretation is of particular interest here because of its implicit characterization of a "school" as a group of marginalized individuals incapable of surrendering to a broader collective agenda. This is hardly the distinguishing feature I had in mind for this inquiry into an L.A. school of urbanism. My search was for some notion of an identifiable cohort knowingly engaged in a collaborative enterprise. Jencks's vision radically undermines this expectation as, in retrospect, have my personal experiences of the Los Angeles School.

A large part of the difficulty involved in identifying a "school" is etymological. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1999, p. 2714) provides 14 principal categories, including a "group of gamblers or of people drinking together," and a "gang of thieves or beggars working together" (both 19th-century usages). Yet also from the mid-19th century is something closer to the spirit of our discussion: "a group of people who share some principle, method, style, etc. Also, a particular doctrine or practice as followed by such a body of people." The dictionary goes on to give as an example, the "Marxist school of political thought."

In a broad examination of a "second" Chicago School, Jennifer Pratt uses the term "school" in reference to:

> . . . a collection of individuals working in the same environment who at the time and through their own retrospective construction of their identity and the impartations of intellectual historians are defined as representing a distinct approach to a scholarly endeavor. (quoted in Fine, 1995, p. 2)

Such a description suggests four elements of a working definition of the term "school." The adherents of a school should be:

1. engaged on a common project (however defined);
2. geographically proximate (however delimited);
3. self-consciously collaborative (to whatever extent); and
4. externally recognized (at whatever threshold).

The parentheses associated with each of the four characteristics underscore the contingent nature of each trait. Conditions 1-3 may be regarded as the minimum, or least restrictive, components of this definition. Second-order criteria for defining a school could include the following:

5. that there exists broad agreement on the program of research;
6. that adherents voluntarily self-identify with the school and/or its research program; and
7. that there exist organizational foci for the school's endeavors (such as a learned journal, meetings, or book series).

Most of these traits should be relatively easy to recognize, even though few candidates for the "school" appellation might simultaneously satisfy all of the criteria.

Verifying the existence of a school must always remain unfinished business, not least because we, who would identify such a phenomenon, are ourselves stuck in those particular circumstances of history and place to which our bodies have been consigned. But of greater practical concern is the fourth identifying characteristic, i.e., the external recognition needed to warrant the title of School. Outside recognition traditionally arrives only after most (if not all) of its participants are dead, simply because there are so many incentives to deny the existence of a school. Accolades from outsiders are routinely withheld because of professional rivalries, or (when granted) just as routinely rejected as crass careerism. Outsiders also appeal

to alternative standards of evidence in rejecting a challenge, most commonly seen in appeals to the "hardness" of my paradigm versus the "softness" of yours. Yet another variant in denying school status is the perverse pleasure taken by those who puncture a novice's enthusiasm with claims like: "There's nothing new in that. It's all been said and done before." With such curt put-downs, existing orders and authority remain undisturbed, and old hegemonies once again settle about us like an iron cage.

The refusal to even contemplate the existence of a distinctive (intellectually focused, place-based) school of thought is both intellectually and politically inept. It stifles the development of a critical gaze, both in epistemological and material terms; and it inhibits the growth of intellectual and political alliances. In short, the unexamined dismissal of a school's claims is a denial of new ways of seeing and acting. It is the least attractive personality trait of *homo academicus*. Therefore, I do not intend to wait for outsiders' recognition or permission; it is a far, far better thing to declare a school's existence, raise the flag, and let the battle commence on one's own terms.

THE LOS ANGELES SCHOOL EMERGES

Most births are inherently messy and the arrival of a Los Angeles School of urbanism is no exception. The genetic imprint of the school lies in some unrecoverable past, though we can identify the traces of inveterate city-improver Charles Mulford Robinson somewhere in the process. In his 1907 plan to render L.A. as City Beautiful, Robinson (1907, p. 4) conceded that: "The problem offered by Los Angeles is a little out of the ordinary." A peculiarly Angeleno urban vision was more convincingly established in 1946, with the publication of Carey McWilliams's *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (McWilliams, 1973). This work remains the premier codification of the narratives of Angeleno (sur)reality. It served to establish L.A.'s status as "the great exception," and has since colored both popular and scholarly perceptions of the city. McWilliams emphasized L.A.'s uniqueness with the assertion that the area reverses almost any proposition about the settlement of western America. He describes Southern California as an engineered utopia attracting pioneers from far away places like Mexico, China, Germany, Poland, France, and Great Britain. Among the most exotic immigrants were families from the American mid-western states. In McWilliams's account, local communities were rife with bizarre philosophies, carnivalesque politics, and a cultural melange of immigrant influences imperfectly adapted to local conditions. The whole enterprise was pervaded by apocalyptic undercurrents well-suited to a notional paradise situated within a hostile yet fragile desert environment.

McWilliams's exceptionalism was confirmed and consolidated by Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis*, which in 1967 (Fogelson, 1993), the year of its publication, was the only sustained account of the

region's urban history between 1850 and 1930. Fogelson (1993, p. 134) summarized the exceptionalist credo in this way:

> the essence of Los Angeles was revealed more clearly in its deviations from [rather] than its similarities to the great American metropolis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But perhaps the canonical moment in the prehistory of the Los Angeles School came with the publication of Reyner Banham's *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971). Responding to the notion that Southern California was devoid of cultural or artistic merit, Banham (1971, p. 23) was the first to assert that Los Angeles should not be "rejected as inscrutable and hurled as unknown into the ocean." Rather, he argued, the city should be taken seriously, to be read and understood on its own terms instead of those used to make sense of other American cities. But while L.A. was indeed an object worthy of serious study, according to Banham (1971, p. 24) its structure remained exceptional:

> Full command of Angeleno dynamics qualifies one only to read Los Angeles . . . [T]he splendors and miseries of Los Angeles, the graces and grotesqueries, appear to me as unrepeatable as they are unprecedented.

More than any other single volume to that date, Banham's celebration of L.A. landscapes served to legitimize the study of Los Angeles, and to temporarily neutralize the propensity of East Coast media and scholars to chart the eccentricities of their West Coast counterparts with mock amazement.

It was during the 1980s that a group of loosely associated scholars, professionals, and advocates based in Southern California became convinced that what was happening in the region was somehow symptomatic of a broader socio-geographic transformation taking place within the United States as a whole. Their common, but then unarticulated, project was based on certain shared theoretical assumptions, as well as on the view that L.A. was emblematic of a more general urban dynamic. One of the earliest expressions of an emergent 'Los Angeles School' came with the appearance in 1986 of a special issue of the journal *Society and Space*, devoted entirely to understanding Los Angeles. In their prefatory remarks to that issue, Allen Scott and Edward Soja (1986, p. 249) referred to L.A. as the "capital of the twentieth century," deliberately invoking Walter Benjamin's designation of Paris as capital of the 19th. They predicted that the volume of scholarly work on Los Angeles would quickly overtake that on Chicago, the dominant model of the American industrial metropolis.

Ed Soja's celebrated tour of Los Angeles (which first appeared in the 1986 *Society and Space* issue, and was later incorporated into his 1989 *Postmodern Geographies*) most effectively achieved the conversion of L.A. from the exception to the rule—the prototype of late 20th-century postmodern geographies:

> What better place can there be to illustrate and synthesize the dy-
> namics of capitalist spatialization? In so many ways, Los Angeles
> is the place where "it all comes together" . . . one might call the
> sprawling urban region . . . a prototopos, a paradigmatic place; or
> . . . a mesocosm, an ordered world in which the micro and the macro,
> the idiographic and the nomothetic, the concrete and the abstract,
> can be seen simultaneously in an articulated and interactive combi-
> nation. (Soja, 1989, p. 191)

Soja went on to assert that L.A. "insistently presents itself as one of
the most informative palimpsests and paradigms of twentieth-century
urban development and popular consciousness," comparable to Borges's
Aleph: "the only place on earth where all places are seen from every
angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending" (Soja, 1989,
p. 248).

As ever, Charles Jencks (1993, p. 132) quickly picked up on the trend to-
ward an L.A.-based urbanism, taking care to distinguish its practitioners
from the L.A. school of architecture:

> The L.A. School of geographers and planners had quite a sepa-
> rate and independent formulation in the 1980s, which stemmed
> from the analysis of the city as a new post-modern urban type.
> Its themes vary from L.A. as the post-Fordist, post-modern city of
> many fragments in search of a unity, to the nightmare city of social
> inequities.

This same group of geographers and planners (accompanied by a few dis-
sidents from other disciplines) gathered at Lake Arrowhead in the San
Bernardino Mountains on October 11–12, 1987, to discuss the wisdom
of engaging in a Los Angeles School. The participants included, if mem-
ory serves, Dana Cuff, Mike Davis, Michael Dear, Margaret FitzSimmons,
Rebecca Morales, Allen Scott, Ed Soja, Michael Storper, and Jennifer
Wolch. Mike Davis (1989, p. 9) later provided the first description of
the putative school:

> I am incautious enough to describe the "Los Angeles School." In
> a categorical sense, the twenty or so researchers I include within
> this signatory are a new wave of Marxist geographers—or, as one of
> my friends put it, "political economists with their space suits on"—
> although a few of us are also errant urban sociologists, or, in my
> case, a fallen labor historian. The "School," of course, is based in Los
> Angeles, at UCLA and USC, but it includes members in Riverside,
> San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, and even Frankfurt, West Germany.

The meeting was, I can attest, as insightful as it was inconclusive, as ex-
hilarating as it was hilarious. Davis (1989, pp. 9–10) described one evening
as a:

> somewhat dispiriting retreat . . . spent wrestling with ambiguity:
> "Are we the LA School as the Chicago School was the Chicago School,

or as the Frankfurt School was the Frankfurt School?" Will the reconstruction of urban political economy allow us to better understand the concrete reality of LA, or is it the other way around? Fortunately, after a night of heavy drinking, we agreed to postpone a decision on this question ... So in our own way we are as "laid back" and decentralized as the city we are trying to explain.

Yet, despite these ambiguities and tensions (with their curious echoes in the L.A. school of architecture recorded by Jencks), Davis (1989, p. 10) is clear about the school's common theme:

One of the nebulous unities in our different research—indeed the very ether that the LA School mistakes for oxygen—is the idea of "restructuring." We all agree that we are studying "restructuring" and that it occurs at all kinds of discrete levels, from the restructuring of residential neighborhoods to the restructuring of global markets or whole regimes of accumulation.

Davis (1989, p. 10) also recorded some substantive contributions made by the school's early perpetrators:

To date [1989], the LA School has contributed original results in four areas. First, particularly in the work of Edward Soja and Harvey Molotch, it has given "placeness," as a social construction, a new salience in explaining the political economy of cities. Secondly, via the case studies by Michael Storper, Suzanne Christopherson, and Allen Scott, it has deepened our understanding of the economies of high-tech agglomeration, producing some provocative recent theses about the rise of a new regime of "flexible accumulation." Thirdly, through both the writing and activism of Margaret FitzSimmons and Robert Gottlieb, it has contributed a new vision of the environmental movement, with emphasis on the urban quality of life. And, fourthly, through the collaboration of Michael Dear and Jennifer Wolch, it is giving us a more realistic understanding of the homeless and indigent, and their connection to the decline of unskilled inner city labor markets.

Davis was, to the best of my knowledge, the first to mention a specific L.A. school of urbanism, and he repeated the claim in his popular contemporary history of Los Angeles, *City of Quartz* (1990). But truth be told, following those fateful, strange days of quasi-unity at Lake Arrowhead, the Los Angeles School had already begun to atomize, even as the floodgates opened and tentative claims for a prototypical L.A. tumbled out.

By 1993, the trickle of Southern California studies had grown to a continuous flow. In his careful, path-breaking study of high technology in Southern California, Allen Scott (1993, p. 33) noted:

Throughout the era of Fordist mass production, [L.A.] was seen as an exception, as an anomalous complex of regional and urban activity

in comparison with what were then considered to be the paradig-
matic cases of successful industrial development ... [Yet] with the
steady ascent of flexible production organization, Southern Cali-
fornia is often taken to be something like a new paradigm of local
economic development, and its institutional bases, its evolutionary
trajectory, and its internal locational dynamics ... as providing im-
portant general insights and clues.

Charles Jencks (1993, p. 7) added his own spin on the social forces under-
lying L.A.'s architecture when he argued that:

Los Angeles, like all cities, is unique, but in one way it may typify the
world city of the future: there are only minorities. No single ethnic
group, nor way of life, nor industrial sector dominates the scene.
Pluralism has gone further here than in any other city in the world
and for this reason it may well characterize the global megalopolis
of the future.

The foundations of a putative school were completed in 1993 with
Marco Cenzatti's first explicit examination of the thing called an L.A.
school of urbanism. Responding to Davis, he underscored the fact that
the school's practitioners combined precepts of both the Chicago and
Frankfurt Schools:

Thus Los Angeles comes ... into the picture not just as a blueprint or
a finished paradigm of the new dynamics, but as a laboratory which
is itself an integral component of the production of new modes of
analysis of the urban. (Cenzatti, 1993, p. 8)

Since then, the rate of scholarly investigations into L.A. has acceler-
ated, just as Scott and Soja predicted it would. For instance, in their
study of homelessness in Los Angeles, Wolch and Dear (1993) situated
their analysis within the broader matrix of L.A.'s global urbanism. But
the pivotal year in the maturation of the Los Angeles School may yet
prove to be 1996, which saw the publication of three edited volumes on
the region: *Rethinking Los Angeles* (Dear et al.); *The City: Los Angeles
and Urban Theory at the end of the Twentieth Century* (Scott and Soja);
and *Ethnic Los Angeles* (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr). The 40 or more
essays in these volumes represented a quantum leap in the collective
understanding of the region and its implications for national and inter-
national trends. By 1996 there was also a growing number of predom-
inantly university-based centers that legitimized scholarly and public-
policy analyses of the region, among them USC's Southern California
Studies Center, UCLA's Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, and
Loyola Marymount University's Center for the Study of Los Angeles.
Other regional institutions evinced parallel interests in governmental
and nongovernmental agencies, such as the Getty Research Institute and
RAND.

FROM CHICAGO TO L.A.

The basic primer of the Chicago School was *The City*. Originally published in 1925, the book retains a tremendous vitality far beyond its interest as a historical document. I regard the book as emblematic of a modernist analytical paradigm that remained popular for most of the 20th century. Its assumptions included:

- a "modernist" view of the city as a unified whole, i.e., a coherent regional system in which the center organizes its hinterland;
- an individual-centered understanding of the urban condition; urban process in *The City* is typically grounded in the individual subjectivities of urbanites, their personal choices ultimately explaining the overall urban condition, including spatial structure, crime, poverty, and racism; and
- a linear evolutionist paradigm, in which processes lead from tradition to modernity, from primitive to advanced, from community to society, and so on.

There may be other important assumptions of the Chicago School, as represented in *The City*, that are not listed here. Finding them and identifying what is right or wrong about them is one of the tasks at hand, rather than excoriating the book's contributors for not accurately foreseeing some distant future.

The most enduring of the Chicago School models was the zonal or *concentric ring theory*, an account of the evolution of differentiated urban social areas by E. W. Burgess (1925). Based on assumptions that included a uniform land surface, universal access to a single-centered city, free competition for space, and the notion that development would take place outward from a central core, Burgess concluded that the city would tend to form a series of concentric zones (Figure 1). The main ecological metaphors invoked to describe this dynamic were invasion, succession, and segregation, by which populations gradually filtered outwards from the center as their status and level of assimilation progressed. The model was predicated on continuing high levels of immigration to the city.

At the core of Burgess's schema was the central business district (CBD), which was surrounded by a transitional zone, where older private houses were being converted to offices and light industry, or subdivided to form smaller dwelling units. This was the principal area to which new immigrants were attracted; and it included areas of "vice" and generally unstable or mobile social groups. The transitional zone was succeed by a zone of working-men's homes, which included some of the city's oldest residential buildings inhabited by stable social groups. Beyond this, newer and larger dwellings were to be found, occupied by the middle classes. Finally, the commuters' zone was separate from the continuous built-up area of the city, where much of the zone's population was employed. Burgess's model was a broad generalization, and not intended to be taken too literally. He anticipated, for instance, that his schema would apply only in
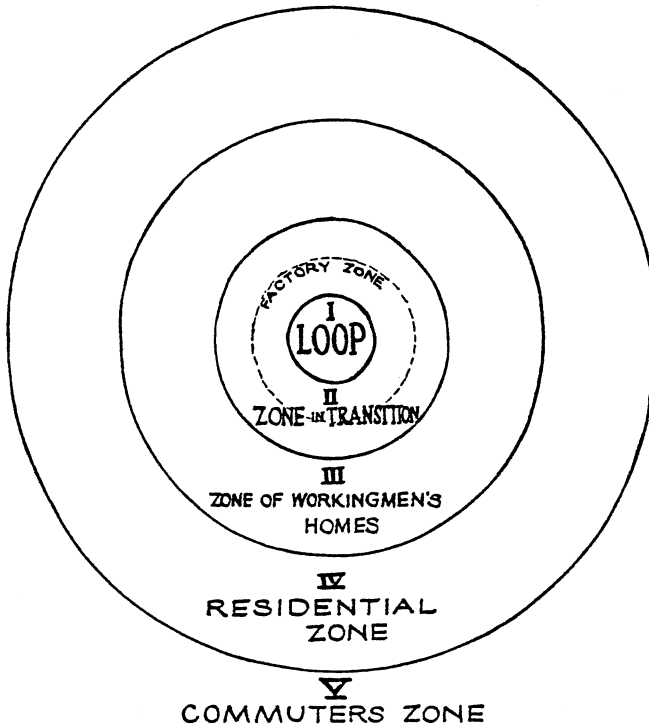
FIG. 1. The Growth of the city.

the absence of "opposing factors" such as local topography (in the case of Chicago, Lake Michigan). He also anticipated considerable internal variation within the different zones.

Other urbanists subsequently noted the tendency for cities to grow in star-shaped rather than concentric form, along highways that radiate from a center with contrasting land uses in the interstices. This observation gave rise to a *sector theory* of urban structure, an idea advanced in the late 1930s by Homer Hoyt (1933, 1939),who observed that once variations arose in land uses near the city center, they tended to persist as the city expanded. Distinctive sectors thus grew out from the CBD, often organized along major highways. Hoyt emphasized that "non-rational" factors could alter urban form, as when skillful promotion influenced the direction of speculative development. He also understood that the age of the buildings could still reflect a concentric ring structure, and that sectors may not be internally homogeneous at one point in time.

The complexities of real-world urbanism were further taken up in the *multiple nuclei theory* of C. D. Harris and E. Ullman (1945). They proposed that cities have a cellular structure in which land-uses develop around multiple growth-nuclei within the metropolis—a consequence of accessibility-induced variations in the land-rent surface and agglomeration (dis)economics. Harris and Ullman also allow that real-world urban

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structure is determined by broader social and economic forces, the influence of history, and international influences. But whatever the precise reasons for their origin, once nuclei have been established, general growth forces reinforce their pre-existing patterns.

Much of the urban research agenda of the 20th century has been predicted on the precepts of the concentric zone, sector, and multiple-nuclei theories of urban structure. Their influences can be seen directly in factorial ecologies of intra-urban structure, land-rent models, studies of urban economies and diseconomies of scale, and designs for ideal cities and neighborhoods. The specific and persistent popularity of the Chicago concentric ring model is harder to explain, however, given the proliferation of evidence in support of alternative theories. The most likely reasons for its endurance (as I have mentioned) are related to its beguiling simplicity and the enormous volume of publications produced by adherents of the Chicago School (e.g., Abbott, 1999; and Fine, 1995). However, there was also an enormous, persuasive substance in the burgeoning school, summarized by Louis Wirth in his well-known article on "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (Wirth, 1938). In this, he argued for a sociology that emphasized the city as a distinctive mode of human life based in core questions of population size, density, and heterogeneity, and focused not only on the physical spaces of the city but also on the constellation of personalities that collectively amounted to social organization and control.

In the final chapter of *The City*, the same Louis Wirth (1925) had already provided a magisterial review of the field of urban sociology, entitled (with deceptive simplicity and astonishing self-effacement) "A Bibliography of the Urban Community." But what Wirth does in this chapter, in a remarkably prescient way, is to summarize the fundamental premises of the Chicago School and to isolate two fundamental features of the urban condition that was to rise to prominence at the beginning of the 21st century. Specifically, Wirth establishes that the city lies at the center of, and provides the organizational logic for, a complex regional hinterland based on trade. But he also notes that the development of "satellite cities" is characteristic of the "latest phases" of city growth and that the location of such satellites can exert a "determining influence" on the direction of growth (Wirth, 1925, p. 185). He further observes that modern communications have transformed the world into a "single mechanism," where the global and the local intersect decisively and continuously (Wirth, 1925, p. 186).

And there, in a sense, you have it. In a few short paragraphs, Wirth anticipates the pivotal moments that characterize Chicago-style urbanism, those primitives that eventually will separate it from an L.A.-style urbanism. He effectively foreshadowed *avant la lettre* the shift from what I term a "modernist" to a "postmodern" city, and, in so doing, the necessity of the transition from the Chicago to the Los Angeles School. *For it is no longer the center that organizes the urban hinterlands, but the hinterlands that determine what remains of the center.* The imperatives toward decentralization (including suburbanization) have become the principal dynamic in contemporary cities; and the 21st century's emerging world

cities (including L.A.) are ground-zero loci in a communications-driven globalizing political economy. From a few, relatively humble first steps, we gaze out over the abyss—the yawning gap of an intellectual fault line separating Chicago from Los Angeles.

CONTEMPORARY URBANISMS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

I turn now to review the empirical evidence of recent urban developments in Southern California. In this task, I take my lead from what exists rather than what may be considered as a normative taxonomy of urban research. From this, I move quickly to a synthesis that is prefigurative of a proto-postmodern urbanism that serves as a basis for a distinctive L.A. school of urbanism.

Edge Cities   Joel Garreau noted the central significance of Los Angeles in understanding contemporary metropolitan growth in the United States. He refers to L.A. as the "great-granddaddy" of edge cities, claiming there are 26 of them within a five-county area in Southern California (Garreau, 1991, p. 9). For Garreau, edge cities represent the crucible of America's urban future. The classic location for contemporary edge cities is at the intersection of an urban beltway and a hub-and-spoke lateral road. The central conditions that have propelled such development are the dominance of the automobile and the associated need for parking; the communications revolution; and the entry of women in large numbers into the labor market. One essential feature of the edge city is that politics is not yet established there. Into the political vacuum moves a "shadow government"—a privatized protogovernment that is essentially a plutocratic alternative to normal politics. Shadow governments can tax, legislate for, and police their communities, but they are rarely accountable, are responsive primarily to wealth (as opposed to numbers of voters), and subject to few constitutional constraints (Garreau, 1991, p. 187; Wolch, 1990). Other studies of suburbanization in L.A., most notably by Hise (1997) and Waldie (1996), provide a basis for comparing past practices of community planning in Southern California.

Privatopia   Privatopia, perhaps the quintessential edge city residential form, is a private housing development based in common-interest developments (CIDs) and administered by homeowner associations. There were fewer than 500 such associations in 1964; by 1992, there were 150,000 associations privately governing approximately 32 million Americans. In 1990, the 11.6 million CID units constituted over 11 percent of the nation's housing stock (McKenzie, 1994, p. 11). McKenzie (1994, p. 184) warns that far from being a benign or inconsequential trend, CIDs already define a new norm for the mass production of housing in the United States. Equally importantly, their organizations are now allied through something called the Community Associations Institute, "whose purposes include the standardizing and professionalizing of CID governance."

He notes how this "secession of the successful" has altered concepts of citizenship, in which "one's duties consist of satisfying one's obligations to private property" (McKenzie, 1994, p. 196). In her futuristic novel of L.A. wars between walled-community dwellers and those beyond the walls, Octavia Butler (1993) envisioned a dystopian privatopian future. It includes a balkanized nation of defended neighborhoods at odds with one another, where entire communities are wiped out for a handful of fresh lemons or a few cups of potable water; where torture and murder of one's enemies is common; and where company-town slavery is attractive to those who are fortunate enough to sell their services to the hyper-defended enclaves of the very rich. (See also Blakely and Snyder, 1997.)

Cultures of Heteropolis   One of the most prominent sociocultural tendencies in contemporary Southern California is the rise of minority populations (e.g., Ong et al., 1994; Myers, 2001; Roseman et al., 1996; Waldinger and Bozogmehr, 1996). Provoked to comprehend the causes and implications of the 1992 civil disturbances in Los Angeles, Charles Jencks zeroes in on the city's diversity as the key to L.A.'s emergent urbanism: "Los Angeles is a combination of enclaves with high identity, and multienclaves with mixed identity, and, taken as a whole, it is perhaps the most heterogenenous city in the world" (Jencks, 1993, p. 32). The vigor and imagination underlying the consequent cultural dynamics is everywhere evident in the region, from the diversity of ethnic adaptations (Park, 1996), through the concentration of cultural producers in the region (Molotch, 1996), to the hybrid complexities of emerging cultural forms (Boyd, 1996, 1997). The consequent built environment is characterized by transience, energy, and unplanned vulgarity, in which Hollywood is never far away. Jencks (1993, p. 75) views this improvisational quality as a hopeful sign: "The main point of hetero-architecture is to accept the different voices that create a city, suppress none of them, and make from their interaction some kind of greater dialogue." This is especially important in a city where *minoritization*, "the typical postmodern phenomenon where most of the population forms the 'other'," is the order of the day, and where most city dwellers feel distanced from the power structure (Jencks, 1993, p. 84). Despite Jencks's optimism, other analysts have observed that the same Southern California heteropolis has to contend with more than its share of socio-economic polarization, racism, inequality, homelessness, and social unrest (Anderson, 1996; Baldassare, 1994; Bobo et al., 2000; Bullard et al., 1994; Gooding-Williams, 1993; Rocco, 1996). Yet these characteristics are part of a sociocultural dynamic that is also provoking the search for innovative solutions in labor and community organizing (Keil, 1998; Kenny, 2001; Pulido, 1996), as well as in inter-ethnic relations (Abelmann and Lie, 1995; Martínez, 1992), and spiritual life (Miller, 2001).

City as Theme Park   California in general, and Los Angeles in particular, have often been promoted as places where the American (suburban) Dream is most easily realized. Its oft-noted qualities of optimism and tolerance coupled with a balmy climate have given rise to an architecture and society fostered by a spirit of experimentation, risk-taking, and hope.

Many writers have used the "theme park" metaphor to describe the emergence of such variegated cityscapes. For instance, Michael Sorkin (1992), described theme parks as places of simulation without end, characterized by aspatiality plus technological and physical surveillance and control. The phone and modem have rendered the street irrelevant, and the new city threatens an "unimagined sameness" characterized by the loosening of ties to any specific space, rising levels of surveillance, manipulation, and segregation, and the city as a theme park. Of this last, Disneyland is the archetype, described by Sorkin (1992, p. 227) as a place of "Taylorized fun," the "Holy See of Creative Geography." What is missing in this new cybernetic suburbia is not a particular building or place, but the spaces between, i.e., the connections that make sense of forms. What is missing, then, is connectivity and community. *In extremis*, California dreamscapes become simulacra. Ed Soja (1992) identified Orange County as a massive simulation of what a city should be. He describes Orange County as: "a structural fake, and enormous advertisement, yet functionally the finest multipurpose facility of its kind in the country." Calling this assemblage "exopolis," or the city without, Soja (1992, p. 120) asserts that in this "politically-numbed" society, conventional politics is dysfunctional. Orange County has become a "scamscape," notable principally as home of massive mail fraud operations, savings and loan failures, and county government bankruptcy.

Fortified City   The downside of the Southern Californian dream has, of course, been the subject of countless dystopian visions in histories, movies, and novels. In one powerful account, Mike Davis (1992a) noted how Southern Californians' obsession with security has transformed the region into a fortress. This shift is accurately manifested in the physical form of the city, which is divided into fortified cells of affluence and places of terror where police battle the criminalized poor. These urban phenomena, according to Davis (1992a, p. 155), have placed Los Angeles "on the hard edge of postmodernity." The dynamics of fortification involve the omnipresent application of high-tech policing methods to protect the security of gated residential developments and panopticon malls. It extends to space policing, including a proposed satellite observation capacity that would create an invisible Haussmannization of Los Angeles. In the consequent carceral city, the working poor and destitute are spatially sequestered on the mean streets, and excluded from the affluent forbidden cities through security by design.

Interdictory Spaces   Elaborating upon Davis' fortress urbanism, Steven Flusty (1994) observed how various types of fortification have extended a canopy of suppression and surveillance across the *entire* city. His taxonomy identifies how spaces are designed to exclude by a combination of their function and cognitive sensibilities (Flusty, 1994, pp. 16–17). Some spaces are passively aggressive: space concealed by intervening objects or grade changes is "stealthy;" and spaces that may be reached only by means of interrupted or obfuscated approaches are "slippery." Other spatial configurations are more assertively confrontational: deliberately

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obstructed "crusty" space surrounded by walls and checkpoints; inhospitable "prickly" spaces featuring unsittable benches in areas devoid of shade; or "jittery" space ostentatiously saturated with surveillance devices. Flusty (1994, pp. 21–33) notes how combinations of interdictory spaces are being introduced "into every facet of the urban environment, generating distinctly unfriendly mutant typologies." Some are indicative of the pervasive infiltration of fear into the home, including the bunker-style "blockhome," affluent "luxury laager" communities, or low-income residential areas converted into "pocket ghettos" by military-style occupation. Other typological forms betray a fear of the public realm, as with the fortification of commercial facilities into "strongpoints of sale," or the self-contained "world citadel" clusters of defensible office towers. One consequence of the socio-spatial differentiation described by Davis and Flusty is an acute fragmentation of the urban landscape. Commentators who remark upon the strict division of residential neighborhoods along race and class lines miss the fact that L.A.'s microgeography is incredibly volatile and varied. In many neighborhoods, simply turning a street corner will lead the pedestrian/driver into totally different social and physical configurations. One very important feature of local neighborhood dynamics in the fortified culture of Southern Californian cities is the presence of street gangs (Klein, 1995; Vigil, 1988).

Historical Geographies of Restructuring Historical geographies of Southern California are relatively rare, especially when compared with the number of published accounts of Chicago and New York. For reasons that are unclear, Los Angeles remains, in my judgement, the least studied major city in the United States. Until Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* (1990) brought the urban record up to the present, students of Southern California tended to rely principally on Carey McWilliams's (1946) seminal general history and Fogelson's (1967) history of L.A. up to 1930. More recent chronicles of the urban evolution of Southern California have focused on transportation (Bottles, 1987; Wachs, 1996), the Mexican/Chicano experience (Del Castillo, 1979), real estate development and planning (Hise, 1997), and oil (Tygiel, 1994). The political geography of the region is only now being written (Fulton, 1997; Pincetl, 1999; Sonenshein, 1993), but several more broadly-based treatments of Californian politics exist, including excellent studies on art, poetry, and politics (Cándida Smith, 1995), railways (Deverell, 1994), and the rise of suburbia (Fishman, 1987). In his history of Los Angeles between 1965 and 1992, Soja (1996) attempts to link the emergent patterns of urban form with underlying social processes. He identified six kinds of restructuring, which together define the region's contemporary urban process. In addition to *Exopolis* (noted earlier), Soja lists: *Flexcities*, associated with the transition to post-Fordism, especially deindustrialization and the rise of the information economy; and *Cosmopolis*, referring to the globalization of Los Angeles both in terms of its emergent world city status and its internal multicultural diversification. According to Soja, peripheralization, post-Fordism, and globalization together define the experience of urban restructuring in Los

Angeles. Three specific geographies are consequent upon these dynamics: *Splintered Labyrinth*, which describes the extreme forms of social, economic, and political polarization characteristic of the postmodern city; *Carceral City*, referring to the new "incendiary urban geography" brought about by the amalgam of violence and police surveillance; and *Simcities*, the term Soja uses to describe the new ways of seeing the city that are emerging from the study of Los Angeles—a kind of epistemological restructuring that foregrounds a postmodern perspective.

Fordist versus Post-Fordist Regimes of Accumulation and Regulation Many observers agree that one of the most important underlying shifts in the contemporary political economy is from a Fordist to a post-Fordist industrial organization. In a series of important books, Allen Scott (1988a, 1988b, 1993, 2000) has portrayed the burgeoning urbanism of Southern California as a consequence of this deep-seated structural change in the capitalist political economy. Scott's basic argument is that there have been two major phases of urbanization in the United States. The first related to an era of Fordist mass production, during which the paradigmatic cities of industrial capitalism (Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburgh, etc.) coalesced around industries that were themselves based on ideas of mass production. The second phase is associated with the decline of the Fordist era and the rise of a post-Fordist "flexible production" (what some refer to as "flexible accumulation"). This is a form of industrial activity based on small-size, small-batch units of (typically sub-contracted) production that are nevertheless integrated into clusters of economic activity. Such clusters have been observed in two manifestations: labor-intensive craft forms (in Los Angeles, typically garments and jewelry); and high technology (especially the defense and aerospace industries). According to Scott, these so-called "technopoles" until recently constituted the principal geographical loci of contemporary (sub)urbanization in Southern California. An equally important facet of post-Fordism is the significant informal sector that mirrors the gloss of the high-tech sectors (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Post-Fordist regimes of accumulation are associated with analogous regimes of regulation, or social control. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of changes in the regime of regulation has been the retreat from the welfare state (Wolch, 1990). The rise of neoconservatism and the privatization ethos have coincided with a period of economic recession and retrenchment that has led many to the brink of poverty just at the time when the social welfare "safety net" is being withdrawn. In Los Angeles, as in many other cities, an acute socio-economic polarization has resulted. In 1984, the city was dubbed the "homeless capital" of the United States because of its concentration of homeless people (Wolch and Dear, 1993).

Globalization Needless to say, any consideration of the changing nature of industrial production sooner or later must encompass the globalization question. In his reference to the global context of L.A.'s localisms, Mike Davis (1992b) claims that if L.A. is in any sense paradigmatic, it is because the city condenses the intended and unintended spatial consequences of a global post-Fordism. He insists that there is no simple

master-logic of restructuring, focusing instead on two key localized macro-processes: the overaccumulation in Southern California of bank and real-estate capital principally from the East Asian trade surplus of the 1980s; and the reflux of low-wage manufacturing and labor-intensive service industries following upon immigration from Mexico and Central America. For instance, Davis (1992b, p. 26) noted how the City of Los Angeles used tax dollars gleaned from international capital investments to subsidize its downtown (Bunker Hill) urban renewal, a process he refers to as "municipalized land speculation." Through such connections, what happens today in Asia and Central America will tomorrow have an effect in Los Angeles. This global/local dialectic has already become an important (if somewhat imprecise) leitmotif of contemporary urban theory, most especially via notions of "world cities" and global "city-regions" (Scott, 1998, 2001).

Politics of Nature   The natural environment of Southern California has been under constant assault since the first colonial settlements. Human habitation on a metropolitan scale has only been possible through a widespread manipulation of nature, especially the control of water resources in the American West (e.g., deBuys and Myers, 1999; Gottlieb and FitzSimmons, 1991; Reisner, 1993). On the one hand, Southern Californians tend to hold a grudging respect for nature, living as they do adjacent to one of the earth's major geological hazards, and in a desert environment that is prone to flood, landslide, and fire (Darlington, 1996; McPhee, 1989). On the other hand, its inhabitants have been energetically, ceaselessly, and often carelessly unrolling the carpet of urbanization over the natural landscape for more than a century. This uninhibited occupation has engendered its own range of environmental problems, most notoriously air pollution, but also issues related to habitat loss and encounters between humans and other animals. The force of nature in Southern California has spawned a literature that attempts to incorporate environmental issues into the urban problematic (Pincetl, 1999). The politics of environmental regulation have long been studied in many places. However, the particular combination of circumstances in Southern California has stimulated an especially political view of nature, focusing both on its emasculation through human intervention (Davis, 1996), and on its potential for political mobilization by grass-roots movements (Keil, 1998; Pulido, 1996). It was also a foundation for Jennifer Wolch's alternative vision of the relationship between humans and non-humans (Wolch and Emel, 1998).

LOS ANGELES AS POSTMODERN URBANISM

If all these observers of the Southern California scene could talk with each other, how might they synthesize their visions? At the risk of misrepresenting their work, I can suggest a synthesis that outlines a "proto-postmodern" urban process (Figure 2). It is driven by a global restructuring that is permeated and balkanized by a series of interdictory

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Globalization/Restructuring      │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────┬──────────────┐
        │  Culture of  │ Political-Economic │
        │  Heteropolis │   Polarization     │
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   │         Interdictory Spaces          │
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   ┌──────────────────┐     ┌──────────────────┐
   │   Dreamscapes    │     │  Carceral Cities │
   │                  │     │                  │
   │ Edge Cities/Privatopia │ │ Fortified Cities/Mean │
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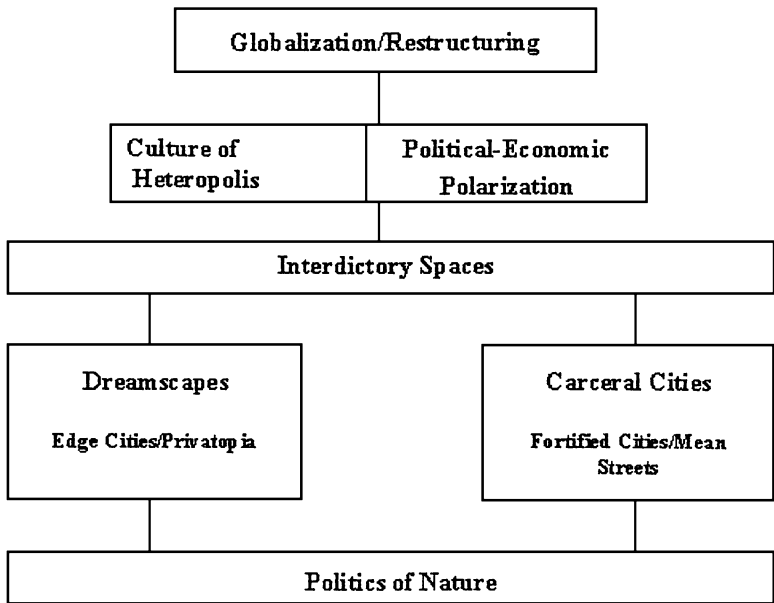
FIGURE 2

networks; whose populations are socially and culturally heterogeneous, but politically and economically polarized; whose residents are educated and persuaded to the consumption of dreamscapes even as the poorest are consigned to carceral cities; whose built environment, reflective of these processes, consists of edge cities, privatopias, and the like; and whose natural environment is being erased to the point of unlivability while at the same time providing a focus for political action.

While there could be widespread agreement about the terms of this diagnostic (Figure 2), based on these "texts" of contemporary urban landscapes, I want to go further toward a revised theory of urbanism. In what follows, I am not summarizing any kind of consensus about what the Los Angeles School suggests; instead, I will present my own construction of what such a theory might look like. In the space available, only a sketch of this alternative will be provided. Interested readers can turn for fuller presentations to Dear (2000, 2001) and Dear and Flusty (1998). I also want to emphasize that one does not have to agree with everything in the following formulation to be persuaded of the challenge it presents to prevailing wisdom.

Let me begin by noting some of the principal assumptions that distinguish a distinctive L.A.-based urban theory. As I will show, the shift toward a Los Angeles School may be regarded as a move away from modernist perspectives on the city (à la Chicago School) to a postmodern view of urban process. We are all by now aware that the tenets of modernist thought have been undermined and discredited; in their place, a multiplicity of new ways of knowing has been substituted. Analogously, in

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postmodern cities, the logics of previous urbanisms have evaporated; and, in the absence a single new imperative, multiple (ir)rationalities clamor to fill the vacuum. The Los Angeles School is distinguishable from the Chicago precepts (as noted above) by the following counter-propositions:

- Traditional concepts of urban form imagine the city organized around a central core; in a revised theory, the urban peripheries are organizing what remains of the center.
- A global, corporate-dominated connectivity is balancing, even offsetting, individual-centered agency in urban processes.
- A linear evolutionist urban paradigm has been usurped by a nonlinear, chaotic process that includes pathological forms such as transnational criminal organizations, common-interest developments (CIDs), and life-threatening environmental degradation (e.g., global warming).

In empirical terms, these assumptions find expression in the following urban dynamics:

1. *World City:* The emergence of a relatively few centers of command and control in a globalizing economy;
2. *Dual City:* An increasing social polarization, i.e., the increasing gap between rich and poor; between nations; between the powerful and the powerless; between different ethnic, racial, and religious groupings; and between genders;
3. *Hybrid City:* The ubiquity of fragmentation both in material and cognitive life, including the collapse of conventional communities, and the rise of new cultural categories and spaces, including, especially, cultural hybrids; and
4. *Cybercity:* The challenges of the information age, especially the seemingly ubiquitous capacity for connectivity to supplant the constraints of place.

"Keno capitalism" is the synoptic term that Steven Flusty and I have adopted to describe the spatial manifestations that are consequent upon the (postmodern) urban condition implied by these assumptions (Figure 3). Urbanization is occurring on a quasi-random field of opportunities, in which each space is (in principle) equally available through its connection with the information superhighway (Dear and Flusty, 1998). Capital touches down as if by chance on a parcel of land, ignoring the opportunities on intervening lots, thus sparking the development process. The relationship between development of one parcel and non-development of another is a disjointed, seemingly unrelated affair. While not truly a random process, it is evident that the traditional, center-driven agglomeration economies that have guided urban development in the past no longer generally apply. Conventional city form, Chicago-style, is sacrificed in favor of a non-contiguous collage of parcelized, consumption-oriented landscapes devoid of conventional centers yet wired into electronic propinquity and nominally unified by the
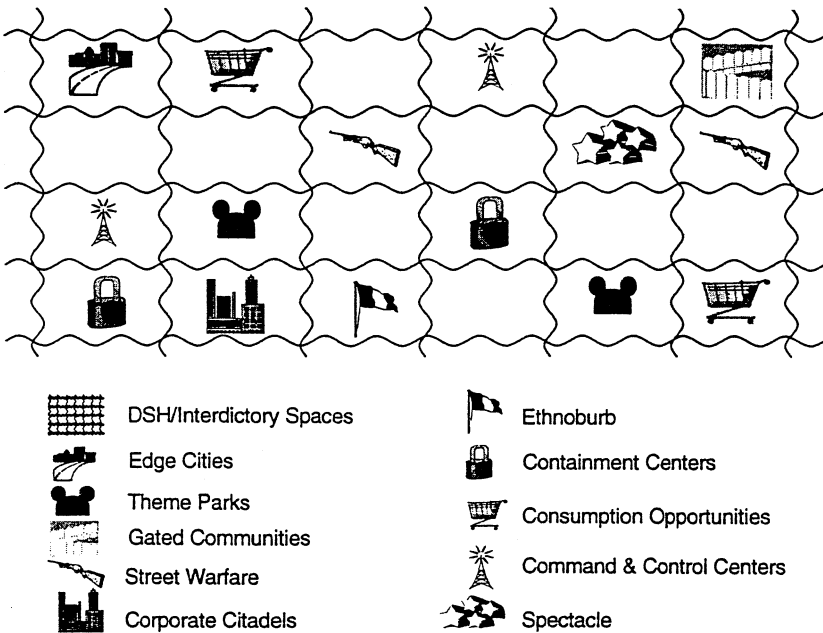
Symbol	Label	Symbol	Label
	DSH/Interdictory Spaces		Ethnoburb
	Edge Cities		Containment Centers
	Theme Parks		Consumption Opportunities
	Gated Communities		Command & Control Centers
	Street Warfare		Spectacle
	Corporate Citadels		

FIGURE 3

mythologies of the (dis)information superhighway. Los Angeles may be a mature form of this postmodern metropolis; Las Vegas comes to mind as a youthful example (cf. Dear, 2000, ch. 10). The consequent urban aggregate is characterized by acute fragmentation and specialization—a partitioned gaming board subject to perverse laws and peculiarly discrete, disjointed urban outcomes. Given the pervasive presence of crime, corruption, and violence in the global city (not to mention geopolitical transitions, as nation-states give way to micro-nationalisms and transnational criminal organizations), the city as gaming board seems an especially appropriate 21st-century successor to the concentrically ringed city of the early 20th.

I am insisting on the "postmodern" as a vehicle for examining L.A. urbanism for a number of reasons, most especially to encourage different ways of seeing the urban process. I have long understood postmodernism as a concept that embraces three principal referents:

- A series of *distinctive cultural and stylistic practices* that are in and of themselves intrinsically interesting;
- The totality of such practices, viewed as a *cultural ensemble characteristic of the contemporary epoch of capitalism* (often referred to as postmodernity); and
- *A set of philosophical and methodological discourses antagonistic to the precepts of Enlightenment thought,* most particularly the hegemony of any single intellectual persuasion.

Implicit in each of these approaches is the notion of a "radical break," that is, a discontinuity between past and present political, socio-cultural, and economic trends. My working hypothesis is that there is sufficient evidence to support the notion that we are witnessing a radical break in each of these three categories. The localization (sometimes literally the concretization) of these multiple effects is creating the emerging time-space fabric of a postmodern society. This is not to suggest that existing (modernist) rationalities have been obliterated from the urban landscape or from our mind-sets; on the contrary, they persist as palimpsests of earlier logics and continue to influence the emerging spaces of postmodernity. For instance, they are presently serving to consolidate the power of existing place-based centers of communication technologies, even as such technologies are supposed to free development from the constraints of place. However, newer urban places, such as L.A., are being created by different intentionalities, just as older places such as Chicago are being overlain by the altered intentionalities of postmodernity. Neither am I suggesting that earlier theoretical logics have been (or should be) entirely usurped. For instance, in his revision of the Chicago School, Abbott (1999, p. 204) claims that the "variables paradigm" of quantitative sociology has been exhausted, and that the "cornerstone of the Chicago vision was location"—points of departure that I regard as totally consistent with the time-space obsessions of the L.A. school of postmodern urbanism. Another example of overlap between modern and postmodern in current urban sociology is Smith's evocation of a transnational urbanism (Smith, 2001).

INVITATION TO A DEBATE

In these postmodern times, the gesture to a Los Angeles School might appear to be a deeply contradictory intellectual strategy. A "school" has semantic overtones of codification and hegemony; it has structure and authority. Modernists and postmodernists alike might shudder at the irony implied by these associations. And yet, ultimately, I am comfortable in proclaiming the existence of an L.A. school of urbanism for two reasons. First, the Los Angeles School exists as a body of literature, as this essay attests. It exhibits an evolution through history, beginning with analysis of Los Angeles as an aberrant curiosity distinct from other forms of urbanism. The tone of that history has shifted gradually to the point that the city is now commonly represented as indicative of a new form of urbanism supplanting the older forms against which Los Angeles was once judged deviant. Second, the Los Angeles School exists as a discursive strategy demarcating a space both for the exploration of new realities and for resistance to old hegemonies. It is proving to be far more successful than its detractors at explaining the form and function of the urban.

Still, I acknowledge the danger that a Los Angeles School could become another panoptic fortress whence a new totalizing urban model is manufactured and marketed, running roughshod over divergent ways of

seeing like the hegemonies it supplanted. The danger of creating a new "master" narrative stands at every step of this project: in defining the very boundaries of a Los Angeles School; in establishing a unitary model of Los Angeles; and in imposing a template of Los Angeles upon the rest of the world. Let me consider these threats in turn.

The fragmented and globally oriented nature of the Los Angeles School counters any potential for a new hegemony. The avowal of a Los Angeles School can become a decolonizing, postcolonial impulse, even as it alerts us to new colonialisms lurking along the historical path. Those who worry about the hegemonic intent of a Los Angeles School may rest assured that its adherents are in fact pathologically anti-leadership. Nor will everyone who writes on L.A. readily identify as a member of the Los Angeles School; some adamantly reject such a notion (e.g., Ethington and Meeker, 2001). The programmatic intent of the Los Angeles School remains fractured, incoherent, and idiosyncratic even to its constituent scholars, who most often perceive themselves as occupying a place on the periphery rather than at the center. The Los Angeles School promotes inclusiveness by inviting as members all those who take Los Angeles as a worthy object of study and a source of insight into the nature of contemporary urbanism. Such a school evades dogma by including divergent empirical and theoretical approaches rooted in philosophies both modern and postmodern, ranging from Marxist to Libertarian. Admittedly, such a school will be a fragmentary and loosely connected entity, always on the verge of disintegration—but, then again, so is Los Angeles itself.

A unified, consensual description of Los Angeles is equally unlikely, since it would necessitate excluding a plethora of valuable readings on the region. For instance, numerous discursive battles have been fought in L.A. since the events of April 1992 to decide what term best describes them or, more cynically, which term most effectively recasts them as a weapon adaptable to a particular rhetorical arsenal. Those who read the events as a spontaneous, visceral, opportunistic reaction to the acquittal of Rodney King employ the term *riot*. For those who read the events within the context of economic evisceration and social polarization, the term *uprising* is preferred. And those who see in them a more conscious political intentionality apply the term *rebellion*. For its part, civic authority skirts these issues by relying on the supposedly depoliticized term, *civil unrest*. But those concerned with the perspective of Korean participants, literally caught in the middle of the turmoil itself as well as the subsequent rhetoric wars, deploy the Korean tradition of naming an occurrence by its principal date and so make use of the term, *Sa-I-Gu*. Which name is definitive? The polyvocality of the Los Angeles School permits us to replace the question, "Which is it?" with, "Which is it, at which stage of events, at which location in the region, and from whose perspective?" Such an approach may well entail a loss of clarity and certitude, but in exchange it offers a richness of description and interpretation that would otherwise be forfeited in the name of achieving an "official" narrative (cf. Hunt, 1996).

Finally, the temptation to adopt L.A. as a world city template is avoidable because the urban landscapes of Los Angeles are not necessarily original to L.A. The luxury compound atop a matrix of impoverished misery, and self-contained communities of fortified homes can also be found in places like Manila and São Paulo. Indeed, Anthony King has suggested that all things ascribed to postmodern urbanism can be seen decades earlier in the principal cities of the colonial world. The Los Angeles School justifies a presentation of L.A. not as *the* model of contemporary urbanism, nor as the privileged locale whence a cabal of regal theoreticians issue proclamations about the way things really are, but as one of a number space-time geographical prisms through which current processes of urban (re)formation may be advantageously viewed. Hence, the literature of the Los Angeles School largely (although not exclusively) shows itself to be less concerned with looking to L.A. for models of the urban, and more about looking for contemporary expressions of the urban in L.A. Thus, the school and its concepts of contemporary Angeleno urbanism do not represent an emerging vision of contemporary urbanism in total; instead they are but one component in a new comparative urban studies working out of Los Angeles but inviting the participation of (and placing equal importance upon) the on-going experiences and voices of Tijuana, São Paulo, Hong Kong, and the like (cf. Sassen, 1991).

Even as I write, the claims of a Los Angeles School are being challenged by a nascent "Miami School" (Nijman, 1996, 1997; see also Portes and Stepick, 1993), a "Las Vegas School" (Gottdeiner et al., 1999), and even an "Orange County School." For instance, Gottdeiner and Kephart (1991, p. 51) claimed that in Orange County:

> We have focused on what we consider to be a new form of settlement space—the fully urbanized, multinucleated, and independent county . . . As a new form of settlement space, they are the first such occurrence in five thousand years of urban history.

While those who are familiar with Orange County might regard this assertion as a somewhat exaggerated if not entirely melodramatic gesture, such counter-claims are in fact an important piece of the comparative urban discourse that I hope this essay will help generate. To repeat, I am not advocating a Los Angeles School in the counterproductive sense of an exclusionary, hegemonic, institutionalized mode of thought. Instead, in this essay, I have simply begun to map the intellectual terrain surrounding a long-overdue revision of our perspective on 21st-century cities.

thanks also to Tony Orum, who invited and arranged for this engagement, and who provided valuable comments on an earlier draft.

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