

Los Angeles Studies: the emergence of a specialty field

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Introduction

Writings on Los Angeles highlight the city as a flash-point for theoretical and empirical research on post-modernism, post-Fordism, globalization, urban spatial development, cultural heterogeneity, and symbolic mediation. This essay reviews a selection of books and articles that take Los Angeles as their topic of study and argues that these writings signal the emergence of a specialty field that I label “Los Angeles studies.” The term “L.A. School” has been used to describe “an emerging current of neo-Marxist researchers (mostly planners and geographers) sharing a common interest in the contradictory ramifications of urban ‘restructuring’ and the possible emergence of a new ‘regime of flexible accumulation’” (Davis 1990: 84); “L.A. School” also designates a group of urban postmodern architects with a penchant for combining heterogeneous stylistic elements with an aesthetic of realism (Jencks 1996: 52). Because neither of these uses adequately captures the diverse range of writings on L.A., I employ the term “Los Angeles studies” as an umbrella category for all writings specifically about this city.

This essay is a selective literature review and is not intended to provide comprehensive coverage or precise narrative continuity. My intent, instead, is to offer an overview of recent notable works in the field, with a specific focus on authors who reference each other and create a specialty dialogue across disciplinary lines. As scholars in the field of science and technology studies (STS) have observed, when specialty fields arise, they demonstrate particular patterns of development: “role-hybridization”—where the

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methods of established fields are applied to the materials of a new one (Ben-David & Collins 1991); collaborative authorship and co-citation practices—where certain works are often cited together and reference one another (Price 1986; Hess 1997); and intellectual and social activities—where collaborations, social functions, centralized theories, and academic programs are instituted around a problem area (Mullins 1972). As the reviews that follow shall illustrate, investigations into Los Angeles increasingly match the criteria for a specialty field, including collaboration and co-citation practices across varied disciplines: anthropology, architecture, cultural studies, geography, political science, Latin American studies, sociology, social history, urban studies, and more.¹

I will state my general evaluation of Los Angeles studies up front so that readers can observe the trends of the literature throughout this review. L.A. studies is superb at revealing how the political processes that dictate urban development are socially constructed and how the built forms resulting from those decisions are politically valenced. With some exceptions, however, L.A. studies tends to perpetuate a type of spatial determinism that does not allow for much cultural interpretation, material appropriation, or tactical action *after* decisions are made and built forms are erected. Thus, translation of policies and navigation through spaces are seen as apolitical, closed, or unimportant. One of the only forms of co-construction permitted within these deterministic confines is that of direct opposition—either social (e.g. urban uprisings) or political (e.g. rent-control movements). It is not surprising, given this tendency towards spatial determinism, that there are very few ethnographies within this literature.²

I group this essay loosely into the following sections: Social History and Urban Development, Culture and Inequality, and Postmodernism and Spatial Theory. Since significant topical overlap occurs and no work neatly falls into any one section, I have organized the works according to the thematic elements that I wish to accentuate so that a general overview of the field is achieved.

Social History and Urban Development

Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja's *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1996) is a collection of important essays on Los Angeles both as a city and as a locus for critical urban theory. As is often the case with

collections, the fourteen essays in this volume do not adopt uniform approaches to the place of study, but instead pursue diverse lines of inquiry into the multiplicity of built environments and lived experiences in Los Angeles. For instance, Richard S. Weinstein reads the politics of L.A. and its frontier mythology through the historical lenses of literary works (Henry James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau) and political writings (Karl Marx, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexis de Tocqueville). Using images and text, Charles Jencks gracefully outlines the contours of Los Angeles architecture and convincingly argues for its uniqueness in achieving spaces of heterogeneous expression through building conversion and urban adaptation. Jennifer Wolch mobilizes statistical data to explain the combination of structural conditions that established a post-Fordist economy and precipitated a crisis of homelessness starting in the 1980s: deindustrialization of manufacturing, reindustrialization of high- and low-tech production, public sector contraction of social services, and service sector expansion.

Several key themes emerge out of the mist of these varied investigations. The most overtly articulated theme is that of L.A. as a post-Fordist and postmodern global city. Soja asserts: "Fordist mass production was rooted in dedicated assembly lines and vertically integrated production systems feeding off increasing internal economies of scale . . ." (1996a:438). In contrast, the new post-Fordist regime found in L.A. and elsewhere

is characterized by more flexible (vs. hierarchical) production systems located in transactions-intensive clusterings of predominately small and middle-sized firms intertwined to achieve increasing "external" economies of scope through complex subcontracting arrangements, improved inventory control, the use of numerically controlled (i.e., computerized) machinery, and other techniques that allow for easier responses to market signals. [1996a:439].

The embodiment of post-Fordist rationalities in urban spaces, business practices, and everyday experiences is what sets Los Angeles apart from other industrial metropolises in America (Soja 1996a:vii). Moreover, L.A.'s internationalization in terms of foreign capital investments, diverse migratory inflows (over 5 million since 1965), cheap labor for industry and service work, and dominance in cultural exports make L.A. a truly global city (Soja 1996a:442-3). Yet this particular configuration cuts in several

directions. It can allow for a truly heterogeneous, postmodern space of urban possibility that thrives on difference, hybridity, and confrontation—what Jencks calls a “heteropolis” (1996:47). On the flip-side, it can spawn conditions of income and racial inequality, social and geographical fragmentation, outright exclusion, and violent resistance movements. The book’s contributors present the ongoing challenge of harnessing the healthy possibilities of this new flexible ideology while eschewing its destructive tendencies in the future growth of this world city.

A less obvious theme that binds these essays together is that of L.A.’s exceptionalism. The editors initiate this trend by calling L.A. “the largest industrial metropolis in America” (Scott and Soja 1996:vii). Jencks posits that L.A. is “perhaps the most heterogeneous city in the world” (1996:51). Scott claims that it is “indisputably the largest high-technology industrial region in the world” (1996:276). Wolch adds that the city is “the homeless capital of the United States” (1996:390). Several important rhetorical moves are occurring in these articulations. The first is a carving out of specialized territory in the field of urban studies: a field that has traditionally perceived L.A. as a site of curiosity and vague interest but not of any significant importance. The second move is to position L.A. at the forefront of all inquiry into the future of metropolises throughout the world, because L.A. is a precursor to the globalization of all cities and a harbinger of the complexities that many metropolises will have to contend with in the future. Regardless of how this implied message oversimplifies the extreme variation and situatedness of cultural adaptation in other places and times, this book establishes a good case for why “Los Angeles, as always, is worth watching” (Scott and Soja 1996:460).

Roger Keil, in *Los Angeles: Globalization, Urbanization and Social Struggles* (1998), takes on the question of how research on world city formation can adequately account for and encourage local intervention. For Keil, this problem requires attention to the diverse social and political struggles over city development policies—these conflicts mediate global forces, translate them into built form within local milieux, and dialectically reconstruct globalization discourse. Using Los Angeles to expose this process, this book provides an impressive review of current writing on the region and a selective overview of the region’s political history over the past thirty years. The book also communicates a sense of place through sixty photographic plates scattered throughout the text, depicting everything from downtown architecture and traffic to street vendors and organized labor protests.

Keil's focus on political agency serves as an important counter to deterministic interpretations and justifications of global restructuring in large metropolises. For instance, throughout the 1970s and 80s, Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley chose to postpone confronting the Fordist growth-induced crises of economic recessions and urban uprisings through an overt internationalization of the city; this included the creation of foreign investment incentives, an accommodating transportation infrastructure for imports, and a world-city image that culminated in the successful hosting of the 1984 Olympic games. Los Angeles became a "testing ground for post-Fordist innovation" (Keil 1998:99) in this climate of internationalization, as it mutated through a process of deindustrialization of industry, a reindustrialization of craft production, and the emergence of a vast yet polarized service-sector.

The internationalization of Los Angeles has not simply established a hegemony of global capital and anti-urban economic development, Keil argues. The process of internationalization has simultaneously catalyzed *insurgent civil societies* that have successfully agitated for social, environmental, and political change across disparate communities and interests:

The hundreds of thousands of working-class Angelenos, most of them people of color (who are a majority in the city), have begun to claim spaces of alternate civility that represent a major challenge to the anglo, middle-class society Los Angeles was believed to be. Excluded from the benefits of world city formation, these communities have started to build a civil society from below: in churches, labor unions, political organizations, environmental groups, neighborhood associations and other forms, the poor and disenfranchised of Los Angeles have created a network of democratic self-organization. [Keil 1996:35]

This concept of alternate, tactical networks operating within the cracks of world city restructuring is a salient and optimistic contribution to globalization and urban theory.

One expects Keil to connect detailed examples of these insurgent civil societies to his larger claims about the mediating functions of political struggles upon global forces, but instead readers are led through several cursory summaries of grassroots political action and told that important links do exist. For example, in the brief chapter entitled "Redevelopment," Keil narrates a history of partial successes in opposing the destructive plans of Los Angeles' Community Redevelopment Agency in Little Tokyo, Chinatown,

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and Hollywood, and then concludes: “The resistance of community activists and labor organizers to the dictates of the internationalized restructuring proved partly successful and stood as testimony that the internationalization of space in Los Angeles occurred in a context of struggle” (1998:170). Unfortunately this is the closest Keil comes to achieving the book’s promise of articulating how local political struggles mediate larger processes of globalization—the thesis is compelling but not substantiated in this text.

There is a tense theoretical undercurrent felt throughout *Los Angeles* that may explain, in part, the elusiveness of the book’s promise. Keil clearly positions himself in the neo-Marxist camp of Mike Davis (1990), David Harvey (1990), and Henri Lefebvre (1991), which ideally suits his macro-spatial and -economic critique, but he problematically dismisses everyday practices, cultural experiences, and postmodern sensibilities in the process. Keil writes: “Everyday Los Angeles, first and foremost, is a result, terrain and origin of political and social struggles . . . While the street serves as the classical stage for the everyday, there is more to this dimension than the occupation with sidewalks, asphalt and chance encounters” (1998:xxiv-xxv). This formulation intimates that the everyday is always only political, and that meaning-making practices are secondary to and separate from social struggles.

Keil then takes this position one step further to suggest that researchers who pursue the theoretical complexity of cultural experiences and everyday life in world cities are unwittingly serving the interests of global capital: “Authors like Michael Dear and Edward Soja have deconstructed Los Angeles into a fragmented pattern of places and temporalities in a way that suggests the existence of a total(itarian) synchronicity” (1998:6-7), and “the neoconservative celebration of pluralism and fragmentation . . . is a thin veil in front of deregulation and privatization . . .” (1998:232). In this case, it seems that Keil has extended his interest in political opposition to the theoretical realm and has constructed artificial oppositions, rather than mediations, between different approaches to scholarship. As a consequence of Keil’s aversion to theories of the everyday, the rich ethnographic detail present in this book’s photographs never finds any voice in textual description, and readers are left with summaries of interesting events but not the palpable flavor of political action in Los Angeles.

William Fulton’s journalistic tone serves his project well in *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (1997). Each chapter of this book begins with a mystery of how current conditions in the greater Los Angeles region came to be

and then invites readers to participate in the detective work of unearthing the myriad political negotiations that underlie city development: the establishment of rent control in Santa Monica; the building of water, rail, and freeway infrastructures; the construction of the San Joaquin Hills toll road; the bankruptcy and bailout of Orange County; and the design of the Disney Music Center on Bunker Hill in downtown Los Angeles.

Dispelling the myth of Los Angeles as a spontaneously developed decentralized city, Fulton draws attention to the planned decentralization of Los Angeles and the constant consumption of land for (sub)urban and industrial use. Fulton writes: “From the 1880s onward, real estate speculators created highly sophisticated techniques for marketing outlying land. The rail lines were usually paid for by the landowners, and wiggled oddly on the landscape in order to reach the property of everyone who paid” (1997:28). Landowners and rail investors, such as Henry E. Huntington, soon sold their property for a profit and left infrastructure upkeep to others. This “growth machine” paradigm of development, Fulton argues, maintains hegemony to this day across all arenas of city and regional planning and has engendered a uniquely “anti-urban” (read “anti-human”) environment.

One can easily detect the anti-urban character of Los Angeles in its freeway traffic, homelessness, and absence of public places. Perhaps the most enduring problems, however, are the extreme class divisions and ethnic segregations that fuel periodic social conflagrations such as the Watts rebellion in 1965 or the citywide uprising in 1992. Fulton observes that these releases of tension do not catalyze problem resolutions in urban areas but instead push the wealthy and middle classes farther away—both physically and psychologically—into suburbs and gated communities, and the effect is a kind of *cocoon citizenship* that precludes diverse communities and democratic ways of life:

once inside their cocoon, the suburbanites see no butterfly-like value in emerging. They only seek to stay inside forever, petrified in their tracts, like ancient fossils. So removed are cocoon citizens from the totality of metropolitan life that they can no longer see the full range of activities a metropolis encompasses, or that they are part of it no matter what they do. All they can do is try to define the breadth of metropolitan life by what they’ve observed inside their cocoon. (1997:341)

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and citizens remain unwilling to assume responsibility for creating sustainable urban places; social instabilities are reacted to but their root causes, whether material or symbolic, are never seriously questioned.

By writing significantly about development issues around yet outside of Los Angeles city proper (in Orange County, Riverside County, Ventura County, Santa Monica), Fulton succeeds in demonstrating the profound interconnectedness of Southern California as a region. This focus also affords an important criticism of positions that justify neglect of urban areas because most people don't happen to live there. That said, by concentrating on outlying regions and on political negotiations, Fulton's analysis runs the risk of emptying out the rich cultural history of community life in urban Los Angeles and reifying the void of urban areas in the public imaginary. (Authors Klein (1997), and Valle and Torres (2000), covered later in this essay, struggle against just such an effacement of cultural history.) This risk is most apparent in the structure of Fulton's narrative, which prioritizes places outside of L.A.: the introduction relates the author's reflections on a journey, by car, from his home in Ventura County to Moreno Valley in Riverside, and the first chapter is devoted to the negotiation of Santa Monica's rent control ordinance as a model for Los Angeles to follow. An alternate approach would have been to focus both the content and the structure of this text upon L.A.'s rich urban landscape and then illustrate how necessary external connections dialectically define the city's identity and its problems.

Myths about Los Angeles depict the city as a forbidden territory, a violent land, an entertainment mecca—anything but a real place with historical roots where people live and are in constant need of better living conditions.³ Norman Klein's provocative book *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (1997) illustrates how such sensationalist constructions of Los Angeles gain dominance and displace memories of lived experiences. Throughout the history of Los Angeles, Klein argues, instability in white hegemony has led to overreactions in public policy, urban planning, and police practices, and these overreactions find expression in the built world (as freeways, demolished communities, and decimated public transportation systems). Once the material landscape is altered, memories lose their symbolic cues and history itself adapts to the dominant stories of urban growth. Building explicitly upon Mike Davis' scholarly excavations of unequal development in L.A., Klein concentrates on individual responses to demolished communities and how memories of these places

become contaminated by media images or political declarations.

Klein develops a few versatile concepts to assist the reader through interpretations of myth and memory. *Imagos* are idealized representations that stand in for actual experiences (Klein 1997:4). The *social imaginary* is a built environment that also contains an evacuation of meaning; the emphasis here is on the intersections of power, culture, and materiality—“A collective memory of an event or place that never occurred, but is built anyway” (Klein 1997:10). *Distraction* indicates selective forgetting in a social imaginary, an instant when one imago covers another, or a manipulated erasure that occurs without notice. By way of these concepts, Klein reads personal interviews against archival materials (pictures, ads, editorials, policies, novels, and films) to demonstrate patterns of memory erasure in Los Angeles.

The first dominant myth of Los Angeles, from the 1880s to 1930s, was that of the *climate*: an untouched garden of sunshine ripe for development yet wonderfully devoid of the evils of other major U.S. cities—pollution, overpopulation, and slums. The *freeway metropolis* myth came next, from 1936 to 1949, stressing the need to control an unruly nature that had led to uneven development and urban decay. L.A.’s impressive 1,200 miles of trolley lines were “erased” during this development phase (although some of the original tunnels still stand today as memory signifiers for those who know how to decipher them). Overlapping this freeway mythology was one of *downtown renewal*, justifying the elimination of ethnic (non-white) enclaves that had “nothing worth saving” anyway. According to Klein variations of these and other myths persist to this day and obscure the unwritten histories of communities while constraining the kinds of policies and practices that people consider reasonable. To challenge such formal constraints on memory, Klein interpolates some alternate parallel mythologies into his text, including several experimental “docufables” (brief fictive accounts of symbolic distractions) and a novella based on experiences of Vietnamese immigrants in Los Angeles. Klein’s book is ultimately a gracefully normative, historical and ethnographic exploration of myth-making and memory in L.A.

Janet L. Abu-Lughod’s monumental *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America’s Global Cities* (1999) seeks to redress studies of global or world cities that too often neglect history in their synchronic emphasis on current trends (e.g. Sassen 1991). Abu-Lughod challenges the premise that global cities are entirely recent phenomena by taking a long, diachronic and comparative look at the political, economic, and geographical changes that

have differentially shaped these urban centers—from their colonial inceptions to the present day. The characteristics attributed to global cities,⁴ she argues, can be found at least in embryonic form in the past of these cities, if one takes the time to look for them. While she seldom explicitly flags such incipient global factors, Abu-Lughod does succeed in communicating an appreciation for the manifold differences that American cities demonstrate as local mediators of national and international forces.

Executing such a vast comparative study of the development of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles requires both a sensitivity to place and an anti-deterministic disposition toward spatial development:

The built environment is *not* organic, although it may appear chaotically unplanned. It has been created and is continually re-created, albeit by collectives and social actors engaged in complex dances of successive and symbiotic interactions. These interactions continually weave together nature, materials techniques, socioeconomic processes, and cultural forms to generate the urban fabric—a transitory expression of space that, like any work of art, derives its meanings more from observers' responses than from creators' intentions. [J. Abu-Lughod 1999:4-5]

So while cities in general and global cities in particular do not arise organically, the durable embodiments of their political and spatial histories do constrain and inflect future development patterns as cities translate external forces in locally specific ways. For example, New York's current grid structure is a result of wealthy land owners subdividing the island by leasing module "lots" of land to poorer immigrants in the early 19th century; Chicago's fewer number of tall skyscrapers can be attributed to earlier sub-divisions of bigger lots of land and strict height restrictions in the early 20th century that encouraged box-shaped buildings which maximized light through atriums rather than through vertical growth; and the extreme geographical displacement of minorities in Los Angeles can be traced to freeway construction in the mid-20th century, which physically enforced social divisions in ways that were mostly symbolic before.

In part four of the book, "Restructuring the Global Economy," Abu-Lughod dispels the myth that new global regimes of flexible production and automation exist somehow transcendently outside of human agency, or that they are autonomous pressures impinging upon urban policies and structures. Such "technodeter-

minism,” as she calls it, detracts attention away from national tax and labor laws that have discouraged unions, increased financial speculation, and more than doubled income inequality in the U.S. since 1973. In the case of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, for example, global financial integration was a choice actively sought after by the likes of Milton Friedman in the 1960s and 70s, not the natural result of intangible, external forces. Now that the U.S. has successfully exported much of its industrial production, many skilled jobs in the service sector are following suit; this is a harsh realization for those who believe that more education and training will help empower poor urban populations by affording them greater job opportunities.

Culture and Inequality

“The road toward social justice,” as the editors of the collected volume *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* describe it (Bobo et al 2000: 33), is especially difficult to survey when cultural colors are as complex and distracting as they are in this city. The first step that this book takes is to scout out existing data that synthesizes the conditions of inequality as experienced by local inhabitants—the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality (LASUI) serves this purpose. The data for this vast study were collected from 1993 to 1994 through 4,025 survey interviews with whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos living in Los Angeles. *Prismatic Metropolis*’ objective mirrors that of LASUI: “to broaden our knowledge and understanding of how three sets of forces—changing labor market dynamics, racial attitudes and relations, and residential segregation—interact to foster modern urban inequality” (Bobo et al 2000:6). Where much recent research on Los Angeles concentrates on the historical, geographical, and political developments that have led to conditions of inequity, such as work by Davis (1990), Soja (1996b), and Abu-Lughod (1999), all the essays in this book build upon LASUI to explain current disparities through statistics.

On first pass, the findings in this collection are mostly intuitive: (1) poverty persists in spite of social programs, (2) economic hardships fall disproportionately on black and Latino communities, (3) women continue to have fewer opportunities than men do, and especially black women who are not employed as frequently as Latino or Asian women in service jobs (such as nannies,

day-care providers, house cleaners, manicurists, etc.), (4) employment trajectories demonstrate that black, Asian, and Latino workers tend to be relegated to low-skill positions while other ethnic groups, such as Indians and Iranians, acquire high-skill IT jobs (Bobo et al 2000:30-32). These findings may be expected, but they are valuable in their confirmation of extreme conditions that require immediate and sustained attention.

A closer reading of these essays reveals several more surprising results. For instance, social networks are crucial for immigrant Latinos to secure employment, but statistically insignificant in facilitating employment for native Latinos; this latter group depends much more upon English language proficiency as a passport for job opportunities (Bobo et al 2000:269-73). Excepting Koreans, “ethnic economies” (such as food service and retail trade) are not linked to upward social mobility and do not offer protected economic niches; these economies insulate workers from discrimination, but they also relegate individuals to menial jobs and enforce a linguistic isolation that hinders advancement (Bobo et al 2000:304-6). Finally, for marginalized and low-skill workers, especially women of color, longer commute times correlate with lower wages (even when one controls for bus usage); possible reasons for this phenomenon include racial residential segregation and gender and racial preferences (or discrimination) at places of employment (Bobo et al 2000:480-83).

The book’s title, *Prismatic Metropolis*, serves as a metaphor for the many refractions of cultural diversity occurring throughout the United States.⁵ According to the 1990 census, thirty-seven “multiethnic metros” exist, and since the national trend toward urban diversity is expected to increase, this book argues that Los Angeles should be understood as a mirror to modern America (Bobo et al 2000:11). Los Angeles, then, is simultaneously constructed as an exceptional case and a predictive model, and the city seemingly holds these extremes in a tension that is compelling for urban research but perhaps obfuscating for social advocacy.

On a critical note, the editors boast that they “aim to go further than most social science analysis, which is often constrained by reliance on the U.S. census and other highly standardized data sources” (Bobo et al 2000:4), but they neglect to probe the methodological shortcomings of their research which depends almost exclusively upon quantitative representations of individual experiences. The demographic findings of LASUI may serve to create a more complex map of inequality than the U.S. census, but these findings neither convey the actual lived experiences of indi-

viduals in Los Angeles, nor do they initiate investigation into policy changes that would address the disparities they document.

The absence of strong normative positions or recommendations for change prevents this book from fulfilling its underlying goal of moving us down the road toward social justice. Readers are left wondering what personal practices or public policies are needed to dismantle structural and cultural barriers to a more just society? If Los Angeles serves as a model for emerging multi-ethnic metros, how can its problems of poverty, discrimination, and exploitation be avoided in other cities? As a guide, this book describes the landscape of inequality exceedingly well but stops short of providing any coherent directions.

If global cities are culturally rich localities, replete with contradictions and ambiguities, and shaped by political, symbolic, and material forms, what research methods and textual conventions can aspire to interpret these worlds? In *Latino Metropolis* (2000) Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres succeed admirably in this interpretive task by adopting a scholarly position that mirrors the radical hybridity of their area of study. The book combines chapters on the creation of “single-use industrial cities” within L.A., media (mis)representations of the 1992 “race riots,” the historical appropriation and sanitization of Mexican cuisine, and the political maneuvering behind the building of the “Staples Center” sports arena in downtown. The narrative flows smoothly through

these case studies because the authors shift their methods flexibly with the terrain, sometimes culling archival materials and biographies, other times juxtaposing discourse analysis and critical media studies with statistical data, and in other chapters combining ethnography with what I can only call postmodern political science.



Staples Center, Los Angeles, August 2002 [Photo by Joshua Hayes-High]

In spite of the diversity of topics and methods, continuity is established across the chapters of *Latino Metropolis* through the development of a politically oriented conceptual framework. The

authors employ the organizing concept of *mestizaje* as an emerging semantic category that stresses the significance of cultural ambiguity as a force for mobilizing political action (Valle and Torres 2000:56, 191). They assert that a new type of *mestizaje* politics (and research) is needed in the post-Fordist landscape of global cities, one that connects geographically dispersed groups, exploits the symbolic production capabilities of new technologies, and reinvents “class” as an identifying and unifying category in the face of global capital. Valle and Torres demonstrate the potential of this concept through their case studies (which I will turn to in a moment), but also through their theoretical sensibilities. Marxist and critical postmodern theory, they assert, must be used in tandem to address the convolutions of racialization in global political economies (Valle and Torres 2000:10).

An analysis of media representations of the 1992 social uprising affords insight into the need for fluid cultural categories. By characterizing this event as a crisis in “race relations,” the mainstream media avoided inquiry into the multiple underlying causes and conditions and instead reified simple (and simplistic) race oppositions in the public imaginary. The media framed the uprising as black vs. white, and in some cases black vs. Korean, even when the neighborhoods were predominately Latino. This egregious reporting was aggravated by frequent television interviews of black individuals as experts and “event insiders” in Latino communities. The message communicated by this reporting was one of Latino silence, under the assumption that Latinos must be illegal aliens if they are silent about such events. In response to these representations, Valle and Torres observe: “the arrest records indicated that the rioters were united more by lives of joblessness, homelessness, and educational failure than by race” (2000:47). In situations like this, the concept of *mestizaje* would productively blur racial categories to allow for cross-ethnic connections through class and thereby more accurately reveal root causes of strife.

In another chapter, Valle and Torres describe the post-Fordist and postmodern political tactics employed by Latinos in response to the city’s subsidizing of the Staples Center (where the Lakers and Kings now play). Instead of affecting an overtly oppositional stance to the sports arena and its negotiations, Latino union members, working mostly in hotels, used stealth maneuvers of media manipulation and coalition building. A strike in this circumstance would only have encouraged the hiring of illegal immigrants to take the place of union workers, so members created a special spin-off organization (Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy) that

produced and distributed a video documenting unfair labor practices and advocating a living wage. The outcome of this approach was one of mixed success: the arena was built and subsidized by the city, after all; however, “The arena development agreement guaranteed union access to the job site and a living wage for the arena’s permanent jobs, a stipulation that could benefit as many as twelve hundred full-time arena service jobs” (Valle and Torres 2000:126). Valle and Torres flag the successful stealth tactics of Latino union members as an indication of the networking potential of *mestizaje* politics in the communities of global cities.⁶

There are few shortcomings in this concise yet generative book, and they are minor considering the agenda of the authors. First, the global connections among cultural politics and places are not clearly articulated, but they are convincingly performed. Second, the authors construct technology as a deterministic mode of empowerment, whether through Latino access to media production equipment or to computers. Since giving “gifts” of technological access can be a political technique for ignoring deeper issues of inequity (Monahan 2001), *Latino Metropolis* could have elaborated upon the specific conditions under which technology access does and does not catalyze empowerment. Overall, however, this book is an exemplar of what research on culture, place, and globalization should be.

On the topic of technology and media politics, Joost van Loon (1997) develops Bakhtin’s term *chronotope* to read what he calls the “televisualization” of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. In its literary sense, *chronotope* (literally “space-time”) accounts for the ways that time acquires flesh or presence through the narrative structure of novels, and by extension how the presence of narrative events folds into intertextual temporal relations—space becomes temporalized. Loon illustrates how this dialectic is manifested in the construction of *place-myths* about Los Angeles: first, L.A. as a dream city replete with glamour and possibility; second, L.A. as a nightmare city of civil disorder with enclaves of poverty. Both of these *chronotopes* map race onto representations of space, so that Hollywood, for example, is constructed as white and South Central as black.

Rather than problematizing these two *place-myths*, post-riot discourse establishes a logic of normalcy that operates within a mediating system of semantic domination: “what constitutes the event is not the singularity of the truth in its full *presence*; but its dissemination in traces which permeate both local and private ‘memories’ and ‘experiences’ and global and public ‘official

accounts” (Loon 1997:93). Mediating technologies act to diminish modernist-realist notions of presence, but also hide the construction of the conditions of possibility in discourse, or the choices selected and dismissed, allowing for “selective memorization and forgetting” (Loon 1997:96). The presentation of serious disturbances as “news” implies orderliness as the normal and desirable state of affairs, yet in the Rodney King beating and the subsequent acquittal of the police officers, the only unusual event was the capturing of the activity on videotape.

In another critique of media coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles uprising,⁷ John Fiske (1994) targets places of consumption as sites of protest where “looting” or what he prefers to call “radical shopping” takes place. Because of dissonances with the dominant “free market” ideology in the U.S., discrimination at sites of consumption resonates sorely with minorities who have long been marginalized in areas of employment and production: “For the Black and Latino communities, the store is an active agent in the colonizing of the place where they live: it works to prevent economic as well as territorial self-determination. The absence of territorial and economic control disempowers the dispossessed in the broadest social arena” (Fiske 1994:479). Radical shopping, without the negative overtones associated with “looting,” was a tactical practice that allowed minority groups to assert their presence; their actions, Fiske avers, were not “senseless,” but public speech acts that created space within mainstream media for addressing larger issues of systematic inequity.

While not explicitly about Los Angeles, Sharon Zukin’s *The Cultures of Cities* (1995) has significantly influenced L.A. studies by addressing a facet of urban theory that is often elided—the role of cultural production in city development. Zukin’s main thesis is that postindustrial cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles utilize artists, museums, and symbols as forms of economic stimuli with material effects:

culture is neither an unimportant adjunct of the material transformation of cities nor a purely symbolic realm for differentiating social roles. Instead, cultural symbols have material consequences—and more important material consequences as cities become less dependent on traditional resources and technologies of material production. [1995:268]

The presence of artists in communities, Zukin claims, can be linked to the opening of specialty restaurants, coffee shops, shop-

ping centers, galleries and the overall gentrification of those places. This trend is different from past uses of art as a representation of existing wealth, for this new symbolic economy inverts Marx's base/superstructure social model by letting culture determine, in large part, the material conditions of urban spaces (Zukin 1995:23-4).

As urban policies are shifting to this focus on cultural production, they are also increasingly privatizing public spaces and resources. In New York and other cities, *business improvement districts* (BIDs) have been set up to allow "business and property owners in commercial districts to tax themselves voluntarily for maintenance and improvement of public areas and take these areas under their control" (Zukin 1995:33). When public institutions abdicate control of space through such transfers, public rights and goods are also at risk: Bryant Park is policed by private security guards that displace undesirables, the Metropolitan Museum of Art periodically expands into the public space of Central Park, shopping centers

and restaurants are proposed for these park spaces with little public scrutiny, and homeless and non-unionized workers are hired at less than minimum wage to clean up 34th and other New York streets. The privatization of public space may alleviate some of the short-term financial concerns of cities, but it threatens the



Disney Center under construction, Los Angeles. March 2002 [Photo by Torin Monahan]

principles of public stewardship and open access as it converts these public goods into places of consumption and exploitation.

Zukin's examples include Disney theme parks and planned communities, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), and New York art galleries, parks, restaurants, and markets. Each of these cases demonstrates a shift toward privatized development through the symbolic economy, but Zukin also alludes to the democratic and populist potential of this emerg-

ing economy. As art galleries feel the pressure to appeal to mass publics, for instance, their practices—from expansion plans to exhibit choices to employment policies—become scrutinized and open to debate. Similarly, the practice of shopping performs more than a reification of commodity fetishism; it catalyzes negotiations of public culture and group identities (Zukin 1995:253-4). Despite this hopeful undercurrent about the politicization of culture, Zukin's book better serves as a study of disquieting trends than as a harbinger of democratic possibilities.

Postmodernism and Spatial Theory

In his brief introduction to a special journal issue on space and narrative, Dick Hebdige (1990) eloquently articulates the shift in critical theory (social and literary) toward investigations of spatial relations in the 1980s. Citing uneasiness with the teleological bent of explanatory and predictive models of history, and a perceived need to explain emerging social configurations in globally networked space, Hebdige gives a favorable reading of this particular postmodern turn. He then proceeds to argue for the rehistoricization of such inquiry, but on locally situated grounds:

Renouncing generalities means concentrating on the material effects of specific organisations of space, on the *contradictory* dynamics of globalisation and on local negotiations of and resistance to globalising pressures. It means concentrating on what is at stake in representations of particular places. [Hebdige 1990:vii]

The method advocated by Hebdige is to pursue hybrid combinations of literary, theoretical, geographical, and technological approaches to spatial change. This sidestepping of restrictive boundaries typically erected through disciplinary orientation makes profound sense given the complexity, diversity, and promise of the terrain.

Fredric Jameson's essays, such as "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984), have been especially popular among researchers of cities and spaces, not only because he writes scathingly about postmodern architecture in Los Angeles, but because he reads such emergent aesthetical forms as intricately tied to the operations of multinational capitalism: postmodernism privileges space over time, effaces historical perspective,

and facilitates the commodification of everyday life. My review of Los Angeles studies so far has demonstrated that urban theorists are committed to answering Jameson's call and re-inserting history back into investigations of urban spaces. However, some urban theorists (e.g. David Harvey 1990) pick up Jameson's anti-postmodern, neo-Marxist herald and charge without seriously interrogating his deterministic claims about the relationships among postmodern art, postmodern theory, commodification, and the internationalization of capitalism.⁸

According to Jameson, commodity production has reached a stage where it now totally absorbs aesthetic production, so that material culture functions as an expression of U.S. domination: "this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror" (1984:57). This imbrication of cultural production and capitalist domination compels Jameson to posit postmodernism as the new "cultural dominant" of our historical period, and as such, we can recognize the framing effect it enforces upon us and position ourselves for political action within and against it.

Jameson asserts that the primary feature of this new cultural dominant (postmodernism) is the repudiation of oppositional models that have historically allowed for political action and philosophical normativity. The destabilized or deconstructed models include hermeneutic, dialectical, Freudian, existential, and semiotic, and their ungrounding causes all depth in theory and experience to be replaced by flat surfaces of empty signification: practices, discourses, and texts (Jameson 1984:61-2). Subjects are deprived even of alienation, which previously motivated some reaction, and are instead fragmented and depoliticized. Further, this fragmentation culminates in a loss of self and feeling, in a play of "free floating" intensities, and in the waning of temporality as a pedagogical referent (Jameson 1984:63-4). Alongside these theoretical and psychological ruptures, and not coincidentally, Jameson observes the breeding of a pure form of capital that is wrongly called "postindustrial," but is better described as insidiously and pervasively "multinational"—in short, it is "the apotheosis of capitalism" (1984:77).

The "Bonaventura Hotel"⁹ in Los Angeles functions as a link for Jameson between postmodern aesthetics and multinational capital. He reads this hotel as a built form that purposefully dis-

tances itself from the urban city, perplexes contemplation, and confuses orientation. Instead of being a populist space that corrects



Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, August 2002. [Photo by Joshua Hayes-High]

the sterilizing and sanitizing tendencies of Modernist architecture, this hotel aspires toward a type of totalization (shopping, food service, rooms, atrium and lake) that makes the surrounding city an unnecessary and unwanted appendage. A reflective glass skin repels the city and creates placelessness: “[the glass] is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel’s outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself, but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it” (Jameson 1984:82). Once inside, pedestrian explorations are discouraged by means of spatially dominating escalators and elevators, and the symmetrical four-tower design make it impossible for individuals to get their bearings in the lobby. The Bonaventure serves as a synecdoche for the constraints on collective action within global networks and late capitalism: only through a new type of meta-level cognitive mapping can one secure a place for mobilization and critique. Jameson concludes that only by seeing cultural productions as necessarily political and non-autonomous and diagnosing their current form as disempowering,

can we hope to regalvanize the capacity of culture (meaning art, architecture, and literature) for world change:

the new political art—if it is indeed possible at all—will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to say, to its fundamental object—the world space of multinational capital—at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confu-

sion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale. [1984:92]

Of all postmodern theorists, Jean Baudrillard has been singled out in L.A. studies as an anathema—as someone who celebrates the very processes of de-historization and de-politicization that have made Los Angeles a site of urban inequity and injustice. On first blush this appears true. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard (1994) gazes from above on the workings of Los Angeles and surgically traces hyperreal phenomena as indicators of the displacement (or the “rotting”) of the real more generally:

Los Angeles is surrounded by these imaginary stations [such as Disneyland] that feed reality, the energy of the real to a city whose mystery is precisely that of no longer being anything but a network of incessant, unreal circulation—a city of incredible proportions but without space, without dimensions. [1994:13]

From Baudrillard’s perspective, that of a tourist-theorist, Los Angeles demonstrates perfectly Borges’ fictive creation of maps that precede territories and then become territories. This, in fact, adequately describes L.A.’s early history of development as well as its export of cultural images (from Hollywood symbols to “street riots”) that then become the dominant identities of this (place-less) place.¹⁰

Baudrillard, however, is clearly not apolitical, despite his detached musings on shopping malls, amusement parks, and movies. He chooses also as subjects for analysis labor strikes, nuclear deterrence, animal research, and mutations in capitalism. What Baudrillard seeks to combat in each of these cases is modernist thought that justifies alienation and destruction (and the destruction of alienation as a political force) through the mystification of narratives of linear history and progress—this is the “real” to be exorcized. He asserts:

But we also have to fight against the profound fascination exerted on us by the death throes of capital, against the staging by capital of its own death, when we are really the ones in our final hours. To leave it the initiative of its own death, is to leave it all the privileges of revolution. [Baudrillard 1994:153]

It is in passages like this one that it becomes difficult to dismiss Baudrillard as someone who simply revels in simulations as empty significations. It is more complicated. As the chapter titled “The Remainder” explains, it is not the case that nothing is left after the erasure of binaries, but that all reality becomes residual (Baudrillard 1994:146), and this condition where the real is sup-
planted yet still *remains* is the dire problematic of our time.

From a cultural studies perspective, Celeste Olalquiaga (1992) offers a counter-approach to Jameson and Baudrillard’s theories on the postmodern condition. In *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities*, Olalquiaga argues for cultural consumption as a (some-
times) redeeming meaning-making practice within voids of lost signification. She writes in response to Baudrillard:

as opposed to a mute or passive resistance, the ability of collectives to flex cultural material can be quite eloquent, as long as one is willing to pay attention to these articulations instead of lamenting the waning of conventional discursive arrangements and the loss of a stable referent. [Olalquiaga 1992:xvi]

Simulation may be essential to understanding postmodernism, but referents need not disappear entirely—one should instead look at cultural appropriations of images that productively perform outside of language (or *avant la lettre*). She next takes on Jameson, saying that he allots capitalism too much agency and autonomy, such that culture is over-subordinated in his analysis; it is more accurate to say that “postmodernism is capitalism’s currency, more than its cultural logic” (Olalquiaga 1992:xvii).

For Olalquiaga, postmodernism introduces destabilizing perceptual shifts that jointly challenge identity-making and research inquiry: from organic to cyborg, symbols to images, verbal to visual, and indexicality to intertextuality. The register that emerges encourages the utilization of technology and media as consumable sources of identity, and as the increasing efficiency of high technology obscures heterogeneity, individuals seek out cyborg realities to preserve degrees of difference (Olalquiaga 1992:4-12). Meanwhile, the loss of a stable referent—or an index of truth—produces anxiety within individuals who respond by oversaturating their lives with vast quantities of cultural images; ironically, instead of alleviating the condition, oversaturation engenders what Jameson calls “a waning of affect” or an emotional numbing (Olalquiaga 1992:20-34). It is on this terrain that Olalquiaga surveys creative and heterogeneous uses of consumption, effectively

sidestepping the hegemonic, indeterminate, and apolitical (post-modern) interpretive traps that caught Jameson and Baudrillard.

Megalopolis' chapter on kitsch most convincingly demonstrates consumption's potential. Taking the religious iconography and home altars of Latinos in New York and beyond as a cultural referent that is constituted by image pastiche, Olalquiaga guides readers through three degrees of kitsch and meaning. The first degree is that of an indexical referent: the mostly older and personalized icons signify authentic meaning to their creators. The second degree is the self-referential one of souvenirs: here value is emptied from the objects and they operate only as exchange value. The third degree synthesizes the previous two to reevaluate the icons as "art works": this re-appropriation achieves questionable empowerment by simulating the authenticity of the creations (because the artists are Latino) while capturing the exchange value popularity of souvenirs and displacing it through use. In this example, popular imagery is employed and products consumed, yet global capital homogenization and individual disempowerment does not occur. Local cultural undercurrents shift with technological and epistemological tides of postmodernism, but one must dive beneath symbolic surfaces to detect them.

Mike Davis' *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990) interprets most of the L.A. studies research as following in the Jameson (and Frankfurt School) tradition of accepting the city as a paradigmatic case study of post-Fordism, and then positing the importance of geographical constellations in the shaping of post-modern cultural logics (1990:84).¹¹ Davis critiques (and distances himself from) these and other predilections in L.A. studies that he sees as occluding the history of political agency in the shaping of the city:

by hyping Los Angeles as the paradigm of the future (even in a dystopian vein), they tend to collapse history into teleology and glamorize the very reality they would deconstruct. Soja and Jameson, particularly, in the very eloquence of their different "postmodern mappings" of Los Angeles, become celebrants of the myth. The city is a place where everything is possible, nothing is safe and durable enough to believe in, where constant synchronicity prevails, and automatic ingenuity of capital ceaselessly throws up new forms and spectacles . . . (1990:86)

Davis' answer to this perceived celebration of spectacle is a literary, political, and spatial inspection of the mechanisms by which

human agency achieves material form. While I concur with his reading that Jameson ascribes too much agency to capital, Davis' dismissal of Soja appears to be more of a disciplinary aversion to theory-based (versus empirical-based) analyses.

Edward W. Soja (1996b), in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, answers this critique by noting the deterministic "historization of geography" (as opposed to the "spatialization of history") that Davis' work unwittingly falls into. In Davis' analyses, Soja asserts,

no lateral or synchronic connections are allowed except for the insidious impact of global capitalism . . . With the present so unproblematically a product of the past, the possibility that postmodernity poses new challenges to radical discourse and politics, that it marks in some way a break, or at least a significant deflection, of that "menacing glaciation" of the past, virtually disappears. [1996b:201]

In Soja's quest to disrupt dualisms and to search optimistically for places of political action and creative expression within postmodern geographies, he develops a tripartite theoretical framework to facilitate inquiry into cities like Los Angeles.¹² The usual binaries for such analysis are those of spatiality and historicity (or the material and the symbolic). The problem with these topical areas, Soja continues, is that they artificially bound research and establish boundaries among researchers. By adding a third category of "sociality," one can account for the open exchange between the domains of space and time and one can track how these domains co-construct human experiences of being-in-the-world.

Conclusion

This essay has provided an introduction to the emerging specialty field of Los Angeles studies. The section labeled "Social History and Urban Development" surveyed the political and economic history of city growth; "Culture and Inequity" mapped racial tension, class polarization, and gender discrimination onto the developed and developing urban landscape; and "Postmodernism and Spatial Theory" presented competing interpretive lenses for making sense of existing forms-of-life and opportunities for change within global cities like Los Angeles. Most of

the works in these sections reference and complement each other, even when they instigate controversies over the state or direction of the field. The greatest tension articulated within the literature is between “political” (neo-Marxist) and “theoretical” (postmodernist) orientations to urban scholarship, represented by Davis and Soja, respectively, but this tension is generative for the field as a whole because it catalyzes intertextual conversations, collaborations (in the form of edited volumes), and co-citation practices across disciplinary lines.

L.A. studies’ strength lies in its multi-disciplinary consensus that urban policies and spaces are socially constructed and that they establish politically charged contexts for city inhabitants, often leading to social polarization and conflict. That said, a general critique can be leveled against the L.A. studies literature for its adoption of a type of spatial determinism that unproblematically perceives social relations as products of urban environments. This critique does not hold true for all the authors covered in this essay, but the trend is unmistakable when the field is taken as a whole. I assert that spaces do govern social practices but always in dialogical relationship with individual autonomous actions and cultural appropriations. Urban space, in other words, is always underdetermined and co-constructed. With L.A. studies, the politics of space are relatively easy to spot, and the contingent political processes that give rise to spatial forms can be historically deconstructed, but the translation of policies into spatial forms and the cultural negotiation of those forms are harder to document or theorize. Nonetheless, it is in this area of cultural appropriation, translation, and meaning-making that L.A. studies is currently deficient, and this deficiency can most easily be corrected through critical ethnographies of spatial practices in Los Angeles.¹³

Notes

Acknowledgements: Several sections of this essay have appeared as book reviews in other journals: *Journal of Historical Geography*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Social Forces*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, and *Urban Affairs Review*.

¹³Since the acceptance of this essay for publication, it has come to my attention that Dear (2002) recently engaged in a similar endeavor of demarcating an “LA School.” I read this occurrence as further validation of the argument advanced here. However, I would like to suggest that the

criteria that Dear proposes for determining a “school”—such as members being “geographically proximate” or “self-identifying” with the school (2002:8)—are unnecessarily restrictive and that the concept of “specialty field” more accurately and flexibly describes this group of scholars.

²In her review article on the anthropology of cities, Low (1996) offers an alternate, supplementary explanation for the relative absence of anthropology in urban studies discourses: by adopting an everyday focus and by attending to migration and identity construction, ethnographies don’t often articulate macro-theoretical connections or explicitly contribute to public policy debates. This standpoint places responsibility on anthropologists, and with some justification, but I think that other scholars of cities should also move toward recognizing the importance of ethnographic research for achieving a full understanding of city life.

³See Banham (1971), Davis (1998), and McPhee (1989) for in-depth explications of L.A.’s ecological disasters and the myths and politics surrounding them.

⁴“Among the hallmarks of this new global city are presumed to be an expansion of the market via the internationalization of commerce, a revolution in the technologies of transport and communications, the extensive transnational movement of capital and labor, a paradoxical decentralization of production accompanied by a centralization of control over economic activities, and the increased importance of the so-called FIRE economic sector—finance, insurance, and real estate. Accompanying these changes, and often thought to result from them, is a presumed new bifurcation of the class structure within the global city and increased segregation of the poor from the rich” (J. Abu-Lughod 1999: 2).

⁵The book’s title is also an obvious allusion to what is considered to be one of the first investigations of L.A.’s urban history: Robert M. Fogelson’s *The Fragmented Metropolis* (1967).

⁶Mike Davis’ *Magical Urbanism* (2000) complements this approach by expanding the focus to a national level and analyzing the sea changes in urban politics brought about by demographic growth of Latino populations in U.S. cities.

⁷While “riot” was the term most frequently (and still) employed to describe the events following the verdict in the case against the police who beat Rodney King, many living in Los Angeles, including my students at city community colleges, took offense to this term’s negative connotations, preferring “uprising” instead. Fiske comments on the politics of such linguistic choices: “Very few African Americans, however, used the word ‘riot’; for them the words of choice were ‘insurgency’ or ‘rebellion’, while left leaning Whites preferred ‘uprising’. . . A change of word is always significant, for it indicates a change of discourse, and by discourse I refer to a socially located and politically interested way of making and circulating a particular sense of social experience” (1994:471).

⁸While this literature review is not the place for a detailed critique of Jameson’s (or Harvey’s) version of postmodernism, allow me a few words of general response. Given the year of publication (1984) and the decline

of Marxist theory (and rise of cultural theory) at that time, some of Jameson's interpretations and projections now sound extreme but certainly not without merit. I read Jameson as asserting a worst-case scenario for the postmodern condition—that art would obscure the conditions of global capital dominance and distract us from imperative social struggle and conflict. Fortunately, this account is flawed in several key ways. First, art performs multiply as an agent of protest, expression, documentation, propaganda, etc. and therefore can never be simply “political” in the sense that Jameson intends. His concern is more salient perhaps for the realms of popular culture, advertisement, and branding. Second, I think Jameson underestimates the ability of cultures (in the more anthropological sense) to appropriate and co-construct cultural dominants such as postmodernism or globalization. The work of Olalquiago (1992), covered later in this essay, Fusco (1995), and L. Abu-Lughod (1989) captures some of these postmodern appropriations.

⁹Called “Bonaventure Hotel” by Angelenos.

¹⁰On this front, *Simulacra and Simulation* is itself a simulation; it is a book has little empirical relation to the real or the lived, but it does generate truths that substitute for experience. Baudrillard may critique science and its methods for killing its subjects (1994:7), but his theoretical dissections-at-a-distance and fiats about the patterns of our historical period perform a similar violence.

¹¹I am emphasizing the dialogue between Davis and Soja in this section, but *City of Quartz* is probably best known for its portrayal of Los Angeles as a fortress city that separates the rich from the poor to the detriment of public spaces and democratic ways of life. Teresa P. R. Caldeira (2000) expands upon this theme in her stunning comparison of São Paulo and Los Angeles: *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Caldeira interprets “fortified enclaves,” such as gated communities and shopping malls, as reactions against the unsettling of social boundaries—whether through the development of political democracy in Brazil or through demographic shifts in California. In both cases, the privatization of public space allows “new urban morphologies of fear” to acquire durable, material forms that threaten to perpetuate inequity, attenuate democracy, and delegitimize public institutions well into the future (Caldeira 2000:334-5).

¹²Soja's newest book, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (2000), expands this agenda to situate the development of current city forms historically and posit the democratic potential of new spatialized politics.

¹³The following ethnographies can serve as models of such supplementary work: Caldeira 2000, Cintron 1997, Duneier 1999, Bourgois 1995, and a forthcoming collected volume on ethnographies of Los Angeles edited by Scott Frank and Pensri Ho.

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