

# Postmodern Urbanism

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Theories of urban structure are a scarce commodity. Most twentieth-century analyses have been predicated on the Chicago School model of concentric zones, despite the obvious claims of competing models. This paper examines the contemporary forms of Southern California urbanism as an initial step toward deriving a concept of “postmodern urbanism.” The Los Angeles model consists of several fundamental characteristics, including a global-local connection, a ubiquitous social polarization, and a reterritorialization of the urban process in which hinterland organizes the center (in direct contradiction to the Chicago model). The resultant urbanism is distinguished by a centerless urban form termed “keno capitalism,” which we advance as the basis for a research agenda in comparative urban analysis. *Key Words:* postmodern, urbanism, urban structure, Chicago, Los Angeles.

Sometimes, falling asleep in Santa Monica, he wondered vaguely if there might have been a larger system, a field of greater perspective. Perhaps the whole of DatAmerica possessed its own nodal points, infofaults that might be followed down to some other kind of truth, another mode of knowing, deep within the gray shoals of information. But only if there were someone there to pose the right question (William Gibson, 1996:39).

One of the most enervating aspects of recent debates on the postmodern condition is the notion that there has been a radical break from past trends in political, economic, and sociocultural life. There is no clear consensus about the nature of this ostensible break. Some analysts have declared the current condition to be nothing more than business as usual, only faster—a “hypermodern” or “supermodern” phase of advanced capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Others have noted that the pace of change in all aspects of our global society is sufficient for us to begin to speak of “revolution.” In this essay, we are cognizant of an invocation of Jacques Derrida, who invited those interested in assessing the extent and volume of contemporary change to “rehearse the break,” intimating that only by assuming a radical break had occurred would our capacity to recognize it be released. Similar advice was offered by C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959):

We are at the ending of what is called The Modern Age. Just as Antiquity was followed by several centuries of Oriental ascendancy, which Westerners provincially called The Dark Ages, so now The

Modern Age is being succeeded by a post-modern period (1959:165–66).

Mills believed that it was vital to conceptualize the categories of change in order to “grasp the outline of the new epoch we suppose ourselves to be entering” (1959:166).

Have we arrived at a radical break in the way cities are developing? Is there something called a *postmodern urbanism*, which presumes that we can identify some form of template that defines its critical dimensions?<sup>2</sup> This inquiry is based on a simple premise: that just as the central tenets of modernist thought have been undermined, its core evacuated and replaced by a rush of competing epistemologies, so too have the traditional logics of earlier urbanisms evaporated, and in the absence of a single new imperative, multiple urban (ir)rationalities are competing to fill the void. It is the concretization and localization of these effects, global in scope but generated and manifested locally, that are creating the geographies of postmodern society—a new time-space fabric.<sup>3</sup> We begin this search by outlining the fundamental precepts of the Chicago School, a classical modernist vision of the industrial metropolis, and contrasting these with evidence of a nascent postmodern Los Angeles School.<sup>4</sup> Next we examine a broad range of contemporary Southern California urbanisms, before going on to suggest a critical reinterpretation of this evidence that encompasses and defines the problematic of a post-modern urbanism. In conclusion, we offer comments intended to assist in formulating an agenda for comparative urban research.

## From Chicago to Los Angeles

It has been a traditional axiom of classical writing about the city that urban structures are the domain of reason (Jonathan Raban 1974:157).

### The Chicago School

General theories of urban structure are a scarce commodity. One of the most persistent models of urban structure is associated with a group of sociologists who flourished in Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Morris Janowitz, the “Chicago School” was motivated to regard the city “as an object of detached sociological analysis,” worthy of distinctive scientific attention:

The city is not an artifact or a residual arrangement. On the contrary, the city embodies the real nature of human nature. It is an expression of mankind in general and specifically of the social relations generated by territoriality (Janowitz 1967:viii–ix).

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. (These are the same assumptions that were later to form the basis of the land-rent models of Alonso, Muth, et al.) 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 succeeded by a zone of working-men’s homes, which included some of the oldest residential

buildings in the city and stable social groups. Beyond this, newer and larger dwellings were to be found, occupied by the middle classes. Finally, the commuters’ zone extended beyond the continuous built-up area of the city where a considerable portion of the zone’s population was employed. Burgess’s model was a broad generalization, not intended to be taken too literally. He expected, for instance, that his schema would apply only in the absence of complicating factors such as local topography. He also anticipated considerable variation within the different zones.

Other urbanists 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, 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 grew. Distinctive sectors thus expanded out from the CBD, often organized along major highways. Hoyt emphasized that nonrational factors could alter urban form, as when skillful promotion influenced the direction of speculative development. He also understood that the age of buildings could still reflect a concentric ring structure, and that sectors may not be internally homogeneous at one specific 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)economies. Harris and Ullman (1945) also allow that real-world urban 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 preexisting patterns.

Much of the urban research agenda of the twentieth century has been predicated 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 intraurban 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 are probably related to a beguiling simplicity and the enormous volume of publications produced by adherents of the Chicago School. Even as late as 1992, Mike Davis's vision of an ecology of fear in Los Angeles managed to produce a sketch based on the now-familiar concentric rings (Davis 1992c).

### A "Los Angeles School"?

During the 1980s, a group of loosely-associated scholars, professionals, and advocates based in Southern California began to examine the notion that what was happening in the Los Angeles region was somehow symptomatic of a broader socio-geographic transformation taking place within the U.S. as a whole. Their common but then unarticulated project was based on certain shared theoretical assumptions, and on the view that L.A. was emblematic of some more general urban dynamic. One of the earliest expressions of an emergent "L.A. School" was the appearance in 1986 of a special issue of the journal *Society and Space*, which was entirely devoted to understanding Los Angeles.<sup>5</sup> In their prefatory remarks to that issue, Allen Scott and Edward Soja referred to Los Angeles as the "capital of the twentieth century," deliberately invoking Walter Benjamin's reference to Paris as the capital of the nineteenth. They predicted that the volume of scholarly work on Los Angeles would quickly overtake that on Chicago.

The burgeoning outlines of an L.A. School were given crude form by a series of meetings and publications that occurred during the late 1980s, and by 1990, in his penetrating critique of Southern California urbanism (*City of Quartz*), Mike Davis was able to make specific reference to the School's expanding consciousness. He commented that its practitioners were undecided whether to model themselves after the Chicago School (named principally for the city that was its object of inquiry), or the Frankfurt School (a philosophical alliance named only coincidentally after its place of operations). Then, in 1993, Marco Cenzatti published a short pamphlet that was the first publication to explicitly examine the focus and potential of an L.A. School. Responding to Davis, he underscored that the School's practitioners *combine* precepts of both the Chicago and Frankfurt Schools. Just as the Chicago School emerged at a time when that city

was reaching new national prominence, Los Angeles has begun to make its impression on the minds of urbanists. Their theoretical inquiries focus not only on the specific city, but also on more general questions concerning urban processes. Cenzatti claims that one concern common to all adherents of the L.A. School is a focus on *restructuring*, which includes deindustrialization and reindustrialization, the birth of the information economy, the decline of nation-states, the emergence of new nationalisms, and the rise of the Pacific Rim. Such proliferating logics often involve multiple theoretical frameworks that overlap and coexist in their explanations of the burgeoning global/local order—a heterodoxy consistent with the project of postmodernism.

Los Angeles is undoubtedly a special *place*.<sup>6</sup> But adherents of the Los Angeles School rarely assert that the city is unique, nor necessarily a harbinger of the future, even though both viewpoints are at some level demonstrably true.<sup>7</sup> Instead, at a minimum they assert that Southern California is a suggestive prototype—a polyglot, polycentric, polycultural pastiche that is somehow engaged in the rewriting of the American social contract (Dear et al. 1996; Scott and Soja 1996; Steinberg et al. 1992). The peculiar conditions that have led now to the emergence of a network of Los Angeles-based scholars may be coincidental: (a) that an especially powerful intersection of empirical and theoretical research projects have come together in this particular place at this particular time; (b) that these trends are occurring in what has historically been the most understudied major city in the U.S.; (c) that these projects have attracted the attention of an assemblage of increasingly self-conscious scholars and practitioners; and (d) that the world is facing the prospect of a Pacific century, in which Southern California is likely to become a global capital. The vitality of the Los Angeles School derives principally from the intersection of these events, and the promise they hold for a re-creation of urban theory. The validity and potential of the school will only be decided after extensive comparative analysis based in other metropolitan areas of the world.

### Ways of Seeing: Southern Californian Urbanisms

This latest mutation in space—postmodern hyper-space—has finally succeeded in transcending the

capacities of the human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world (Fredric Jameson 1991:44).

### Taking Los Angeles Seriously

Most world cities have an instantly identifiable signature: think of the boulevards of Paris, the skyscrapers of New York, or the churches of Rome. But Los Angeles appears to be a city without a common narrative, except perhaps the freeways or a more generic iconography of the bizarre. Twenty-five years ago, Rayner Banham (1973) provided an enduring map of the Los Angeles landscape. To this day, it remains powerful, evocative, and instantly recognizable. He identified four basic ecologies: *surfurbia* (the beach cities: “The beaches are what other metropolises should envy in Los Angeles. . . . Los Angeles is the greatest City-on-the-shore in the world,” p. 37); *the foothills* (the privileged enclaves of Beverly Hills, Bel Air, etc., where the financial and topographical contours correspond almost exactly); *the plains of Id* (the central flatlands: “An endless plain endlessly gridded with endless streets, peppered endlessly with ticky-tacky houses clustered in indistinguishable neighborhoods, slashed across by endless freeways that have destroyed any community spirit that may have once existed, and so on . . . endlessly,” p. 161); and *autopia* (“[The] freeway system in its totality is now a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life,” p. 213).

For Douglas Suisman (1989), it is not the freeways but the boulevards that determine the city’s overall physical structure. A boulevard is a surface street that: “(1) makes arterial connections on a metropolitan scale; (2) provides a framework for civic and commercial destination; and (3) acts as a filter to adjacent residential neighborhoods.” Suisman argues that boulevards do more than establish an organizational pattern; they constitute “the irreducible armature of the city’s *public space*,” and are charged with social and political significance that cannot be ignored. Usually sited along the edges of former *ranchos*, these vertebral connectors today form an integral link among the region’s municipalities (Suisman 1989:6–7).

For Ed Soja (1989), Los Angeles is a decentered, decentralized metropolis powered by the insistent fragmentation of post-Fordism, that is, an increasingly flexible, disorganized regime of

capitalist accumulation. Accompanying this shift is a postmodern consciousness, a cultural and ideological reconfiguration altering how we experience social being. The center holds, however, because it functions as the urban panopticon, the strategic surveillance point for the state’s exercise of social control. Out from the center extends a melange of “wedges” and “citadels,” interspersed between corridors formed by the boulevards. The consequent urban structure is a complicated quilt, fragmented, yet bound to an underlying economic rationality: “With exquisite irony, contemporary Los Angeles has come to resemble more than ever before a gigantic agglomeration of theme parks, a lifespace composed of Disneyworlds” (Soja 1989:246).

These three sketches provide differing insights into L.A.’s landscapes. Banham considers the city’s overall torso and identifies three basic components (*surfurbia*, plains, and foothills), as well as connecting arteries (freeways). Suisman shifts our gaze away from principal arteries to the veins that channel everyday life (the boulevards). Soja considers the body-in-context, articulating the links between political economy and postmodern culture to explain fragmentation and social differentiation in Los Angeles. All three writers maintain a studied detachment from the city, as though a voyeuristic, top-down perspective is needed to discover the rationality inherent in the cityscape. Yet a postmodern sensibility would relinquish the modernism inherent in such detached representations of the urban text. What would a postmodernism from below reveal?

One of the most prescient visions anticipating a postmodern cognitive mapping of the urban is Jonathan Raban’s *Soft City* (1974), a reading of London’s cityscapes. Raban divides the city into *hard* and *soft* elements. The former refers to the material fabric of the built environment—the streets and buildings that frame the lives of city dwellers. The latter, by contrast, is an individualized interpretation of the city, a perceptual orientation created in the mind of every urbanite.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between the two is complex and even indeterminate. The newcomer to a city first confronts the hard city, but soon:

the city goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity. For better or worse, it invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed (p. 11).

Raban makes no claims to a postmodern consciousness, yet his invocation of the relationship between the cognitive and the real leads to insights that are unmistakably postmodern in their sensitivities.

Ted Relph (1987) was one of the first geographers to catalogue the built forms that comprise the places of postmodernity. He describes postmodern urbanism as a self-conscious and selective revival of elements of older styles, though he cautions that postmodernism is not simply a style but also a frame of mind (p. 213). He observes how the confluence of many trends—gentrification, heritage conservation, architectural fashion, urban design, and participatory planning—caused the collapse of the modernist vision of a future city filled with skyscrapers and other austere icons of scientific rationalism. The new urbanism is principally distinguishable from the old by its *eclecticism*. Relph's periodization of twentieth-century urbanism involves a premodern transitional period (up to 1940); an era of modernist cityscapes (after 1945); and a period of postmodern townscapes (since 1970). The distinction between *cityscape* and *townscape* is crucial to his diagnosis. Modernist cityscapes, he claims, are characterized by five elements (Relph 1987:242–50):

- (1) megastructural bigness (few street entrances to buildings, little architectural detailing, etc.),
- (2) straight-space / prairie space (city-center canyons, endless suburban vistas),
- (3) rational order and flexibility (the landscapes of total order, verging on boredom),
- (4) hardness and opacity (including freeways and the displacement of nature),
- (5) discontinuous serial vision (deriving from the dominance of the automobile).

Conversely, postmodern townscapes are more detailed, handcrafted, and intricate. They celebrate difference, polyculturalism, variety, and stylishness (pp. 252–58). Their elements are:

- (6) quaintspace (a deliberate cuteness),
- (7) textured facades (for pedestrians, rich in detail, often with an “aged” appearance),

- (8) stylishness (appealing to the fashionable, chic, and affluent),
- (9) reconnection with the local (involving deliberate historical/geographical reconstruction), and
- (10) pedestrian-automobile split (to redress the modernist bias toward the car).

Raban's emphasis on the cognitive and Relph's on the concrete underscore the importance of both dimensions in understanding sociospatial urban process. The palette of urbanisms that arises from merging the two is thick and multidimensional. We turn now to the task of constructing that palette (what we earlier described as a template) by examining empirical evidence of recent urban developments in Southern California (Table 1). In this review, we take our lead from what exists, rather than what we consider to be a comprehensive urban research agenda.<sup>9</sup> From this, we move quickly to a synthesis that is prefigurative of a protopostmodern urbanism, which we hope will serve as an invitation to a more broadly based comparative analysis.

### Edge Cities

Joel Garreau noted the central significance of Los Angeles in understanding contemporary metropolitan growth in the U.S. He asserts (1991:3) that: “Every single American city that is growing, is growing in the fashion of Los Angeles,” and refers to L.A. as the “great-granddaddy” of edge cities (he claims there are twenty-six of them within a five-county area in Southern California). 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. Although Garreau agrees with Robert Fishman that “[a]ll new city forms appear in their early

**Table 1.** A Taxonomy of Southern California Urbanisms

Edge Cities	Interdictory Space
Privatopia	Historical Geographies of Restructuring
Cultures of Heteropolis	Fordist/PostFordist Regimes of Accumulation/Regulation
City as Theme Park	Globalization
Fortified City	Politics of Nature

stages to be chaotic" (1991:9), he is able to identify three basic types of edge city. These are: *uptowns* (peripheral pre-automobile settlements that have subsequently been absorbed by urban sprawl); *boomers* (the classic edge cities, located at freeway intersections); and *greenfields* (the current state-of-the-art, "occurring at the intersection of several thousand acres of farmland and one developer's monumental ego" [p. 116]).

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 1991:187). Jennifer Wolch (1990) has described the rise of the shadow state as part of a society-wide trend toward privatization. In edge cities, "community" is scarce, occurring not through propinquity but via telephone, fax, and private mail service. The walls that typically surround such neighborhoods are social boundaries, but they act as community "recognizers," not community "organizers" (pp. 275–81). In the edge-city era, Garreau notes, the term "master-planned" community is little more than a marketing device (p. 301). Other studies of suburbanization in L.A., most notably by Hise (1997) and Waldie (1996), provide a basis for comparing past practices of planned community marketing 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 homeowners' 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 more than 11 percent of the nation's housing stock (McKenzie 1994:11). Sustained by an expanding catalogue of covenants, conditions, and restrictions (or CC&Rs, the proscriptive constitutions formalizing CID behavioral and aesthetic norms), privatopia has been fueled by a large dose of privatization, and promoted by an ideology of "hostile privatism"

(McKenzie 1994:19). It has provoked a culture of nonparticipation.

McKenzie warns that far from being a benign or inconsequential trend, CIDs already define a new norm for the mass production of housing in the U.S. Equally important, their organizations are now allied through something called the Community Associations Institute, "whose purposes include the standardizing and professionalizing of CID governance" (1994:184). McKenzie notes how this "secession of the successful" (the phrase is Robert Reich's) has altered concepts of citizenship, in which "one's duties consist of satisfying one's obligations to private property" (1994:196). In her futuristic novel of L.A. wars between walled-community dwellers and those beyond the walls (*Parable of the Sower*, 1993), Octavia Butler has 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 hyperdefended enclaves of the very rich.

### Cultures of Heteropolis

One of the most prominent sociocultural tendencies in contemporary Southern California is the rise of minority populations (Ong et al. 1994; Roseman et al. 1996; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). Provoked to comprehend the causes and implications of the 1992 civil disturbances in Los Angeles, Charles Jencks (1993:32) 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 heterogeneous city in the world." Such ethnic pluralism has given rise to what Jencks calls a *hetero-architecture*, which has demonstrated that: "there is a great virtue, and pleasure, to be had in mixing categories, transgressing boundaries, inverting customs and adopting the marginal usage" (1993:123). The vigor and imagination underlying these intense 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 com-

plexities 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 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" (1993:75). 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 1993:84). Despite Jencks's optimism, other analysts have observed that the same Southern California heteropolis has to contend with more than its share of socioeconomic polarization, racism, inequality, homelessness, and social unrest (Anderson 1996; Baldassare 1994; Bullard et al. 1994; Gooding-Williams 1993; Rocco 1996; Wolch and Dear 1993). Yet these characteristics are part of a sociocultural dynamic that is also provoking the search for innovative solutions in labor and community organizing (e.g., Pulido 1996), as well as in interethnic relations (e.g., Abelmann and Lie 1995; Martinez 1992; Yoon 1997).

### 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. Architectural dreamscapes are readily convertible into marketable commodities, i.e., saleable prepackaged landscapes engineered to satisfy fantasies of suburban living.<sup>10</sup> Many writers have used the "theme park" metaphor to describe the emergence of such variegated cityscapes. For instance, Michael Sorkin, in a collection of essays appropriately entitled *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992), describes theme parks as places of simulation without end, characterized by aspatiality plus technological and physical surveillance and control. The precedents for this model can be traced back to the World's Fairs, but Sorkin insists that something "wholly new" is now emerging.

This is because "the 800 telephone number and the piece of plastic have made time and space obsolete," and these instruments of "artificial adjacency" have eviscerated the traditional politics of propinquity (Sorkin 1992:xi). Sorkin observes that the social order has always been legible in urban form; for example, traditional cities have adjudicated conflicts via the relations of public places such as the agora or piazza. In today's "recombinant city," however, he contends that conventional legibilities have been obscured and/or deliberately mutilated. 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 as a place of "Taylorized fun," the "Holy See of Creative Geography" (1992:227). What is missing in this new cybernetic suburbia is not a particular building or place, but the spaces between, that is, the connections that make sense of forms (xii). What is missing, then, is connectivity and community.

*In extremis*, California dreamscapes become simulacra. Ed Soja (1992:111), in a catalogue of Southern California's urban eccentricities, identified Orange County as a massive simulation of what a city should be. He describes Orange County as: "a structural fake, an enormous advertisement, yet functionally the finest multipurpose facility of its kind in the country." Calling this assemblage "exopolis," or the city without, Soja asserts that "something new is being born here" based on the hyperrealities of more conventional theme parks such as Disneyland (1992:101). The exopolis is a simulacrum, an exact copy of an original that never existed, within which image and reality are spectacularly confused. 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 (1992:120).

### Fortified City

The downside of the Southern Californian dream has, of course, been the subject of countless dystopian visions in histories, movies, and novels.<sup>11</sup> In one powerful account, Mike Davis

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, have placed Los Angeles "on the hard edge of postmodernity" (Davis 1992a:155). The dynamics of fortification involve the omnipresent application of high-tech policing methods to the "high-rent 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 Space

Elaborating upon Davis's fortress urbanism, Steven Flusty observed how various types of fortification have extended a canopy of suppression and surveillance across the entire city. His taxonomy of interdictory spaces (1994:16–17) identifies how spaces are designed to exclude by a combination of their function and cognitive sensibilities. Some spaces are passively aggressive: space concealed by intervening objects or grade changes is "stealthy"; space that may be reached only by means of interrupted or obfuscated approaches is "slippery." Other spatial configurations are more assertively confrontational: deliberately 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 notes how combinations of interdictory spaces are being introduced "into every facet of the urban environment, generating distinctly unfriendly mutant typologies" (1994:21–33). Some are indicative of the pervasive infiltration of fear into the home, including the bunker-style "block-home," affluent palisaded "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 sociospatial 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, of course, 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 our judgment, the least studied major city in the U.S. 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 (1973) seminal general history and Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis* (1967), an urban history of L.A. up to 1930. Other 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 (Erie forthcoming; Hise 1997; Weiss 1987), and oil (Tygiel 1994). The political geography of the region is only now being written (Fulton 1997; 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 (1996a) 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 above), 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 post-modern 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 and Michael Storper have portrayed the burgeoning urbanism of Southern California as a consequence of this deep-seated structural change in the capitalist political economy (Scott 1988a, 1988b, 1993; Storper and Walker 1989). For instance, Scott’s basic argument is that there have been two major phases of urbanization in the U.S. 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 upon 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.” This is a form of industrial activity based on small-size, small-batch units of (typically subcontracted) 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 (a development refigured in Fishman’s description of the “technoburb”; see Fishman 1987; Castells and Hall 1994).

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. The rise of neoconservatism and the privatization ethos have coincided with a period of economic recession and retrenchment which 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 socioeconomic polarization has resulted. In 1984, the city was dubbed the “homeless capital” of the U.S. because of the concentration of homeless people there (see Wolch 1990; Wolch and Dear 1993; Wolch and Sommer 1997).

### Globalization

Needless to say, any consideration of the changing nature of industrial production sooner or later must encompass the globalization question (cf. Knox and Taylor 1995). 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 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, and the reflux of low-wage manufacturing and labor-intensive service industries, following upon immigration from Mexico and Central America. For instance, Davis notes 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” (1992b:26). 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.

### 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 (M. L. Davis 1993; Gottlieb and FitzSimmons 1991; and Reisner 1993). On 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 (see, for instance, McPhee 1989; Darlington 1996). On the other hand, its inhabitants have been energetically, ceaselessly, and sometimes 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 it also brings forth habitat loss and dangerous 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. The politics of environmental regulation have long been studied in many places, including Los Angeles (e.g., FitzSimmons and Gottlieb 1996). The particular combination of circumstances in Southern California has stimulated an especially political view of nature, however, focusing both

on its emasculation through human intervention (Davis 1996) and on its potential for political mobilization by grass-roots movements (Pulido 1996). In addition, Wolch's Southern California-based research has led her to outline an alternative vision of biogeography's problematic (Wolch 1996).

**Synthesis: Protopostmodern Urbanism**

If these observers of the Southern California scene could talk with each other to resolve their differences and reconcile their terminologies, how might they synthesize their visions? At the risk of misrepresenting their work, we suggest a schematic that is powerful, yet inevitably incomplete (Figure 1). It suggests a "protopostmodern" urban process, driven by a global restructuring that is permeated and balkanized by a series of interdictory 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 en-

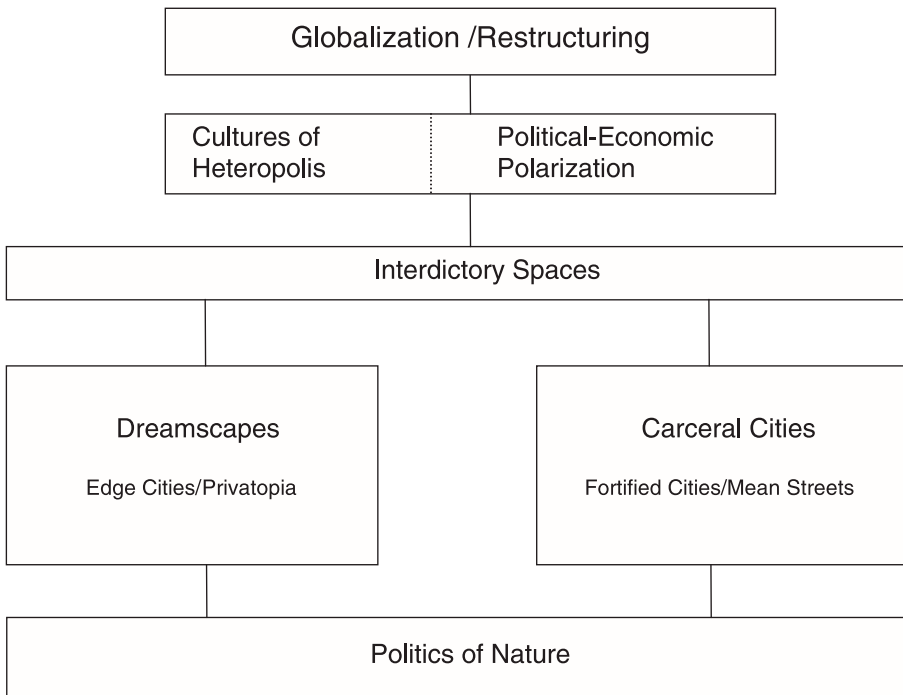


Figure 1. A concept of protopostmodern urbanism.

vironment, also reflective of these processes, is being erased to the point of unlivability while, at the same time, providing a focus for political action.

## Postmodern Urbanism

The only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency (Stuart Hall 1992:280).

Recognizing that we may have caused some offense by characterizing others' work in this way, let us move swiftly to reconstruct their evidence into a postmodern urban problematic (Table 2). We anchor this problematic in the straightforward need to account for the evolution of society over time and space. Such evolution occurs as a combination of deep-time (long-term) and present-time (short-term) processes, and it develops over several different scales of human activity (which we may represent summarily as micro-, meso-, and macroscales) (Dear 1988). The structuring of the time-space fabric is the result of the interaction among ecologically situated human agents in relations of production, consumption, and coercion. We do not intend any primacy in this ordering of categories, but instead emphasize their *interdependencies*—all are essential in explaining postmodern human geographies.

Our promiscuous use of neologisms in what follows is quite deliberate.<sup>12</sup> This technique has been used historically to good effect in many

instances and disciplines (e.g., Knox and Taylor 1995). Neologisms have been used here in circumstances when there were no existing terms to describe adequately the conditions we sought to identify, when neologisms served as metaphors to suggest new insights, when a single term more conveniently substituted for a complex phrase or string of ideas, and when neologistic novelty aided our avowed efforts to rehearse the break. The juxtaposing of postmodern and more traditional categories of modernist urbanism is also an essential piece of our analytical strategy. That there is an overlap between modernist and postmodern categories should surprise no one; we are, inevitably, building on existing urbanisms and epistemologies. The consequent neologistic pastiche may be properly regarded as a tactic of postmodern analysis; others could regard this strategy as analogous to hypothesis-generation, or as the practice of dialectics.

## Urban Pattern and Process

We begin with the assumption that urbanism is made possible by the exercise of instrumental control over both human and nonhuman ecologies (Figure 2). The very occupation and utilization of space, as well as the production and distribution of commodities, depends upon an anthropocentric reconfiguration of natural processes and their products. As the scope and scale of, and dependency upon, globally integrated

Table 2. Elements of a Postmodern Urbanism

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GLOBAL LATIFUNDIA
HOLSTEINIZATION
PRAEDATORIANISM
FLEXISM
NEW WORLD BIPOLAR DISORDER
Cybergeoisie
Protosurps
MEMETIC CONTAGION
KENO CAPITALISM
CITISTÄT
Commudities
Cyburbia
Citidel
In-Beyond
Cyberia
POLLYANNARCHY
DISINFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

---

consumption increases, institutional action converts complex ecologies into monocultured factors of production by simplifying nature into a *global latifundia*. This process includes both homogenizing interventions, as in California agriculture's reliance upon vast expanses of single crops, and forceful interdiction to sustain that intervention against natural feedbacks, as in the aerial spraying of pesticides to eradicate fruit flies attracted to these vast expanses of single crops. Being part of nature, humanity is subjected to analogous dynamics. *Holsteinization* is the process of monoculturing people as consumers so as to facilitate the harvesting of desires, including the decomposition of communities into isolated family units and individuals in order to supplant social networks of mutual support with consumersheds of dependent customers. Resistance is discouraged by means of *praedatorianism*, i.e., the forceful interdiction by a praedatorian guard with varying degrees of legitimacy.

The global latifundia, holsteinization, and praedatorianism are, in one form or another, as old as the global political economy, but the overarching dynamic signaling a break with previous

manifestations is *flexism*, a pattern of economic-cultural production and consumption characterized by near-instantaneous delivery and rapid redirectability of resource flows. Flexism's fluidity results from cheaper and faster systems of transportation and telecommunications, globalization of capital markets, and concomitant flexibly specialized, just-in-time production processes enabling short product- and production-cycles. These result in highly mobile capital and commodity flows, able to outmaneuver geographically fixed labor markets, communities, and bounded nation states. Globalization and rapidity permit capital to evade long-term commitment to place-based socioeconomies, thus enabling a crucial social dynamic of flexism: whereas, under Fordism, exploitation is exercised through the alienation of labor in the place of production, flexism may require little or no labor at all from a given locale. Simultaneously, local down-waging and capital concentration operate synergistically to supplant locally owned enterprises with national and supranational chains, thereby transferring consumer capital and inventory selection ever farther away from direct local control.

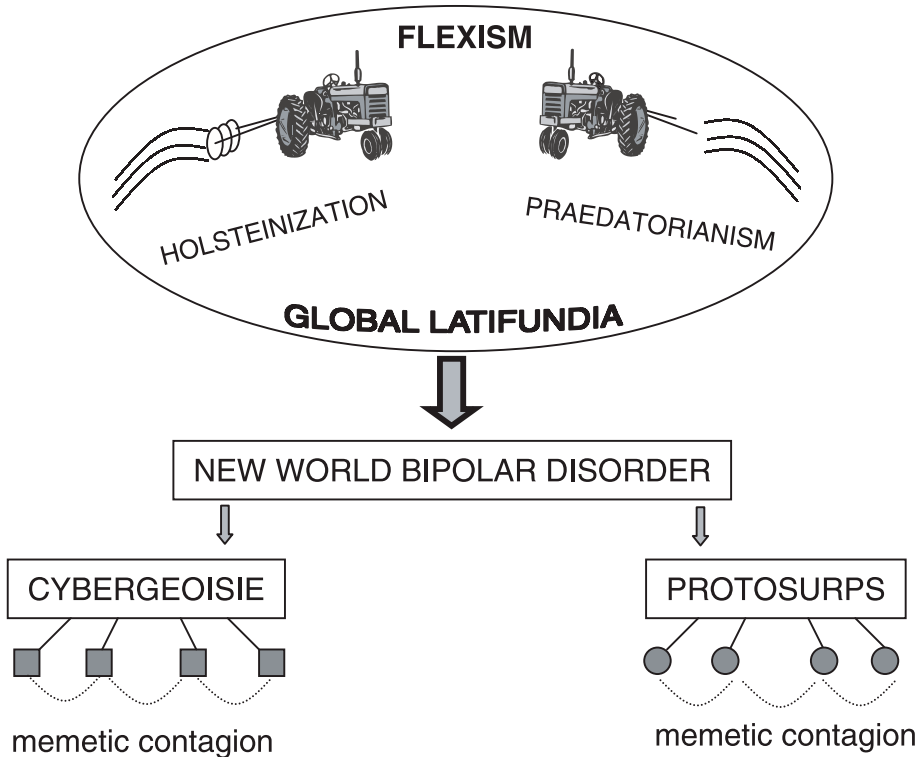


Figure 2. Elements of a postmodern urbanism - 1.

From these exchange asymmetries emerges a new world *bi-polar disorder*. This is a globally bifurcated social order, many times more complicated than conventional class structures, in which those overseeing the global latifundia enjoy concentrated power. Those who are dependent upon their command-and-control decisions find themselves in progressively weaker positions, pitted against each other globally, and forced to accept shrinking compensation for their efforts (assuming that compensation is offered in the first place). Of the two groups, the *cybergeoisie* reside in the “big house” of the global latifundia, providing indispensable, presently unautomatable command-and-control functions. They are predominantly stockholders, the core employees of thinned-down corporations, and write-your-own-ticket freelancers (e.g., CEOs, subcontract entrepreneurs, and celebrities). They may also shelter members of marginal creative professions, who comprise a kind of *paracybergeoisie*. The *cybergeoisie* enjoy perceived socioeconomic security and comparatively long-term horizons in decision making; consequently their anxieties tend toward unforeseen social disruptions such as market fluctuations and crime. Commanding, controlling, and prodigiously enjoying the fruits of a shared global exchange of goods and information, the *cybergeoisie* exercise global coordination functions that predispose them to a similar ideology and, thus, they are relatively heavily holsteinized.

*Protosurps*, on the other hand, are the sharecroppers of the global latifundia. They are increasingly marginalized “surplus” labor providing just-in-time services when called upon by flexist production processes, but otherwise alienated from global systems of production (though not of consumption). Protosurps include temporary or day laborers, fire-at-will service workers, a burgeoning class of intra- and international itinerant laborers specializing in pursuing the migrations of fluid investment. True surpdom is a state of superfluity beyond peonage—a vagrancy that is increasingly criminalized through antihomeless ordinances, welfare-state erosion, and widespread community intolerance (of, for instance, all forms of panhandling). Protosurps are called upon to provide as yet unautomated service functions designed to be performed by anyone. Subjected to high degrees of uncertainty by the omnipresent threat of instant unemployment, protosurps are prone to clustering into affinity groups for support in the face of adversity. These affinity groups, however, are not exclusive, over-

lapping in both membership and space, resulting in a class of marginalized indigenous populations and peripheral immigrants who are relatively less holsteinized.

The sociocultural collisions and intermeshings of protosurp affinity groups, generated by flexist-induced immigration and severe social differentiation, serves to produce wild *memetic contagion*.<sup>13</sup> This is a process by which cultural elements of one individual or group exert cross-over influences upon the culture of another, previously unexposed individual/group. Memetic contagion is evidenced in Los Angeles by such hybridized agents and intercultural conflicts as Mexican and Central American practitioners of Afro-Caribbean religion (McGuire and Scrymgeour forthcoming), blue-bandanna'd Thai Crips, or the adjustments prompted by poor African-Americans' offense at Korean merchants' disinclination to smile casually. Memetic contagion should not be taken for a mere epiphenomenon of an underlying political economic order, generating colorfully chaotic ornamentations for a flexist regime. Rather, it entails the assemblage of novel ways of seeing and being, from whence new identities, cultures, and political alignments emerge. These new social configurations, in turn, may act to force change in existing institutions and structures, and to spawn cognitive conceptions that are incommensurable with, though not necessarily any less valid than, existing models. The inevitable tensions between the anarchic diversification born of memetic contagion and the manipulations of the holsteinization process may yet prove to be the central cultural contradiction of flexism.

With the flexist imposition of global imperatives on local economies and cultures, the spatial logic of Fordism has given way to a new, more dissonant international geographical order. In the absence of conventional communication and transportation imperatives mandating propinquity, the once-standard Chicago School logic has given way to a seemingly haphazard juxtaposition of land uses scattered over the landscape. Worldwide, agricultural lands sprout monocultures of exportable strawberry or broccoli in lieu of diverse staple crops grown for local consumption. Sitting amid these fields, identical assembly lines produce the same brand of automobile, supplied with parts and managed from distant continents. Expensive condominiums appear among squatter slums, indistinguishable in form and occupancy from (and often in direct communica-

tion with) luxury housing built atop homeless encampments elsewhere in the world. Yet what in close-up appears to be a fragmentary, collaged polyculture is, from a longer perspective, a geographically disjointed but hyperspatially integrated monoculture, that is, shuffled same set amid adaptive and persistent local variations. The result is a landscape not unlike that formed by a keno gamecard. The card itself appears as a numbered grid, with some squares being marked during the course of the game and others not, according to some random draw. The process governing this marking ultimately determines which player will achieve a jackpot-winning pattern; it is, however, determined by a rationalized set of procedures beyond the territory of the card itself. Similarly, the apparently random development and redevelopment of urban land may be regarded as the outcome of exogenous investment processes inherent to flexism, thus creating the landscapes of *keno capitalism*.

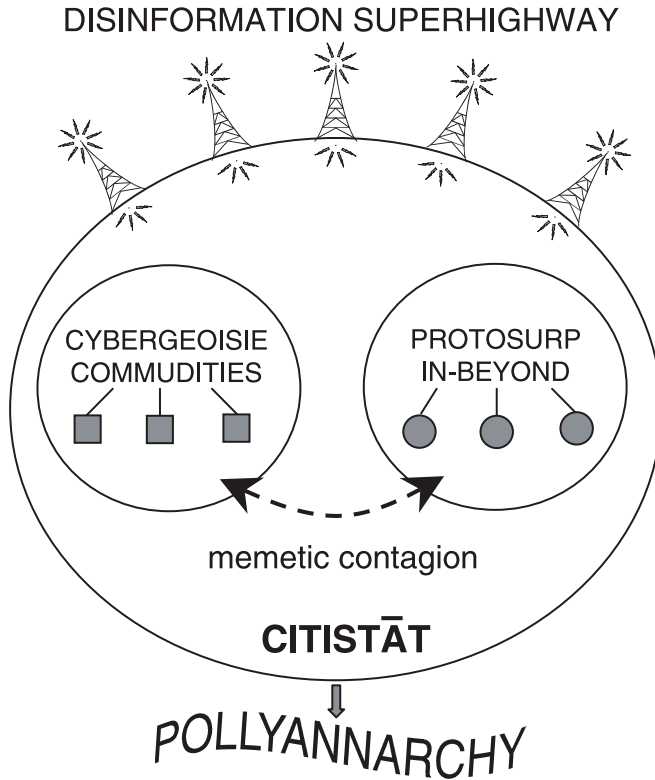
Keno capitalism's contingent mosaic of variegated monocultures renders discussion of "the city" increasingly reductionist. More holistically, the dispersed net of megalopoles may be viewed as a single integrated urban system, or *Citistāt* (Figure 3). *Citistāt*, the collective world city, has emerged from competing urban webs of colonial and postcolonial eras to become a geographically diffuse hub of an omnipresent periphery, drawing labor and materials from readily substitutable locations throughout that periphery. *Citistāt* is both geographically corporeal, in the sense that urban places exist, and yet ageographically ethereal in the sense that communication systems create a virtual space, permitting coordination across physical space. Both realms reinforce each another while (re)producing the new world bipolar disorder.

Materially, *Citistāt* consists of *communities* (centers of command and control), and the *in-beyond* (internal peripheries simultaneously undergoing but resisting instrumentalization in myriad ways). Virtually, *Citistāt* consists of *cyberbia*, the collection of state-of-the-art data-transmission, premium pay-per-use, and interactive services generally reliant upon costly and technologically complex interfaces; and *cyberia*, an electronic outland of rudimentary communications including basic phone service and telegraphy, interwoven with and preceptorally conditioned by the disinformation superhighway (DSH).

*Communities* are commodified communities created expressly to satisfy (and profit from) the

habitat preferences of the well-recompensed cybergeoisie. They commonly consist of carefully manicured residential and commercial ecologies managed through privatopian self-administration, and maintained against internal and external outlaws by a repertoire of interdictory prohibitions. Increasingly, these prepackaged environments jockey with one another for clientele on the basis of recreational, cultural, security, and educational amenities. Commonly located on difficult-to-access sites like hilltops or urban edges, far from restless populations undergoing conversion to protosurpdom, individual communities are increasingly teleintegrated to form *cyberbia* (Dewey 1994), the interactive tollways comprising the high-rent district of *Citistāt*'s hyperspatial electronic shadow. (This process may soon find a geographical analog in the conversion of automotive freeways linking communities via exclusive tollways.) Teleintegration is already complete (and *de rigeur*) for the *citidels*, which are commercial communities consisting of highrise corporate towers from which the control and coordination of production and distribution in the global *latifundia* is exercised.

*Citistāt*'s internal periphery and repository of cheap on-call labor lies at the *in-beyond*, comprised of a shifting matrix of protosurp affinity clusters. The *in-beyond* may be envisioned as a patchwork quilt of variously defined interest groups (with differing levels of economic, cultural, and street influence), none of which possesses the wherewithal to achieve hegemonic status or to secede. Secession may occur locally to some degree, as in the cases of the publicly subsidized reconfiguration of L.A.'s Little Tokyo, and the consolidation of Koreatown through the import, adjacent extraction, and community recirculation of capital. The piecemeal diversity of the *in-beyond* makes it a hotbed of wild memetic contagion. The global connectivity of the *in-beyond* is considerably less glamorous than that of the cybergeoisie's communities, but it is no less extensive. Intermittent phone contact and wire-service remittances occur throughout *cyberia* (Rushkoff 1995; also see Knox and Taylor 1995). The pot-holed public streets of *Citistāt*'s virtual twin are augmented by extensive networks of snail mail, personal migration, and the hand-to-hand passage of mediated communications (e.g., cassette tapes). Such contacts occasionally diffuse into communities, as with the conversion of cybergeoisie youth to wannabe gangstas.



**Figure 3.** Elements of a postmodern urbanism - 2.

Political relations in Citistāt tend toward polyanarchy, a politics of grudging tolerance of *difference* that emerges from interactions and accommodations within the in-beyond and between commudities, and less frequently, between in-beyond and commudity. Its more pervasive form is *pollyannarchy*, an exaggerated, manufactured optimism that promotes a self-congratulatory awareness and respect for difference and the asymmetries of power. Pollyannarchy is thus a pathological form of polyanarchy, disempowering those who would challenge the controlling beneficiaries of the new world bipolar disorder. Pollyannarchy is evident in the continuing spectacle of electoral politics, or in the citywide unity campaign run by corporate sponsors following the 1992 uprising in Los Angeles.

Wired throughout the body of the Citistāt is the *disinformation superhighway* (or DSH), a mass info-tain-mercial media owned by roughly two dozen cybergeoisie institutions. The DSH disseminates holsteinizing ideologies and incentives, creates wants and dreams, and inflates the sym-

bolic value of commodities. At the same time, it serves as the highly filtered sensory organ through which commudities and the in-beyond perceive the world outside their unmediated daily experiences. The DSH is Citistāt's "consent factory" (Chomsky and Herman 1988), engineering memetic contagion to encourage participation in a global latifundia that is represented as both inevitable and desirable. But since the DSH is a broadband distributor of information designed primarily to attract and deliver consumers to advertisers, the ultimate reception of messages carried by the DSH is difficult to target and predetermine. Thus the DSH also serves inadvertently as a vector for memetic contagion, e.g., the conversion of cybergeoisie youth to wannabe gangstas via the dissemination of hip-hop culture over commudity boundaries. The DSH serves as a network of preceptorial control, and is thus distinct from the coercive mechanisms of the praedatorian guard. Overlap between the two is increasingly common, however, as in the case of televised disinfotainment programs like Amer-

ica's Most Wanted, in which crimes are dramatically reenacted and viewers invited to call in and betray alleged perpetrators.

As the cybergeoisie increasingly withdraw from the Fordist redistributive triad of big government, big business, and big labor to establish their own micronations, the social support functions of the state disintegrate, along with the survivability of less affluent citizens. The global migrations of work to the lowest-wage locations of the in-beyond, and of consumer capital to the citidels, result in power asymmetries that become so pronounced that even the DSH is at times incapable of obscuring them, leaving protosurps increasingly disinclined to adhere to the remnants of a tattered social contract. This instability in turn creates the potential for violence, pitting Citistāt and cybergeoisie against the protosurp in-beyond, and leading inevitably to a demand for the suppression of protosurp intractibility. The praedatorian guard thus emerges as the principal remaining vestige of the police powers of the state. This increasingly privatized public/private partnership of mercenary sentries, police expeditionary forces, and their technological extensions (e.g., video cameras, helicopters, criminological data uplinks, etc.) watches over the commudities and minimizes disruptiveness by acting as a force of occupation within the in-beyond. The praedatorian guard achieves control through coercion, even at the international level where asymmetrical trade relations are reinforced by the military and its clientele. It may only be a matter of time before the local and national praedatorians are administratively and functionally merged, as exemplified by proposals to deploy military units for policing inner-city streets or the U.S.-Mexico border.

### An Alternative Model of Urban Structure

We have begun the process of interrogating prior models of urban structure with an alternative model based upon the recent experiences of Los Angeles. We do not pretend to have completed this project, nor claim that the Southern Californian experience is necessarily typical of other metropolitan regions in the U.S. or the world. Still less would we advocate replacing the old models with a new hegemony. But discourse has to start somewhere, and by now it is clear that the most influential of existing urban models is no longer tenable as a

guide to contemporary urbanism. In this first sense, our investigation has uncovered an *epistemological radical break* with past practices, which in itself is sufficient justification for something called a Los Angeles School. The concentric ring structure of the Chicago School was essentially a concept of the city as an organic accretion around a central, organizing core. Instead, we have identified a postmodern urban process in which the urban periphery organizes the center within the context of a globalizing capitalism.

The postmodern urban process remains resolutely capitalist, but the nature of that enterprise is changing in very significant ways, especially through (for instance) the telecommunications revolution, the changing nature of work, and globalization. Thus, in this second sense also, we understand that a *radical break* is occurring, this time in the conditions of our *material world*. Contemporary urbanism is a consequence of how local and interlocal flows of material and information (including symbols) intersect in a rapidly converging globally integrated economy driven by the imperatives of flexism. Landscapes and peoples are homogenized to facilitate large-scale production and consumption. Highly mobile capital and commodity flows outmaneuver geographically fixed labor markets, communities, and nation-states, and cause a globally bifurcated polarization. The beneficiaries of this system are the cybergeoisie, even as the numbers of permanently marginalized protosurps grow. In the new global order, socioeconomic polarization and massive, sudden population migrations spawn cultural hybrids through the process of memetic contagion. Cities no longer develop as concentrated loci of population and economic activity, but as fragmented parcels within Citistāt, the collective world city. Materially, the Citistāt consists of commudities (commodified communities) and the in-beyond (the permanently marginalized). Virtually, the Citistāt is composed of cyburbia (those hooked into the electronic world) and cyberbia (those who are not). Social order is maintained by the ideological apparatus of the DSH, the Citistāt's consent factory, and by the praedatorian guard, the privatized vestiges of the nation-state's police powers.

Keno capitalism is the synoptic term that we have adopted to describe the spatial manifestations of the postmodern urban condition (Figure



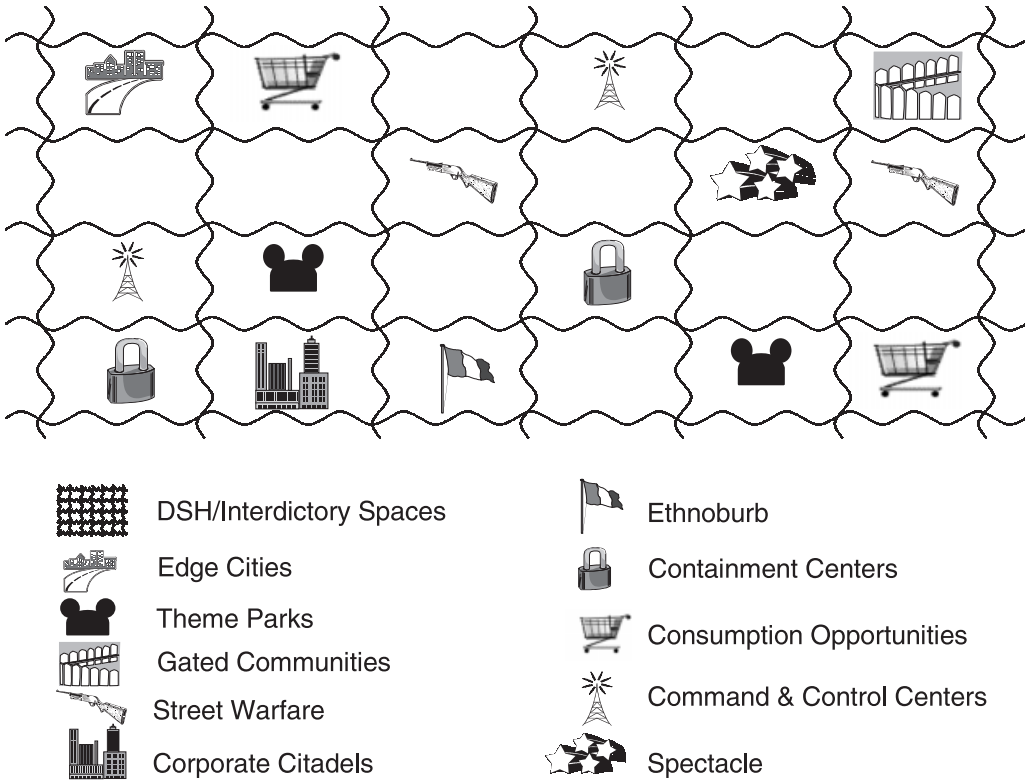


Figure 4. Keno Capitalism: a model of postmodern urban structure.

4). Urbanization is occurring on a quasi-random field of opportunities. 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 nondevelopment 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 apply. Conventional city form, Chicago-style, is sacrificed in favor of a noncontiguous collage of parcelized, consumption-oriented landscapes devoid of conventional centers yet wired into electronic proximity and nominally unified by the mythologies of the disinformation superhighway. Los Angeles may be a mature form of this postmodern metropolis; Las Vegas comes to mind as a youthful example. 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 mafias), the city as gaming board seems an especially appropriate twenty-first century successor to the concentrically ringed city of the early twentieth.

## Conclusion: Invitation to a Postmodern Urbanism

Tell me, they'll say to me. So we will understand and be able to resolve things. They'll be mistaken. It's only things you don't understand that you can resolve. There will be no resolution. (Peter Hoeg, 1993:453).

Our notion of keno capitalism is necessarily partial and positional, not a metanarrative but more a micronarrative awaiting dialogical engagement with alternative conceptions of the urban, both from within Los Angeles and elsewhere. Although it is impossible for us to begin an exercise in comparative urban analysis at this point, we conclude with some general observa-

tions about a research agenda. Our knowledge of the literature suggests at least four broad themes that overlap with the substance of this essay.

(1) *World City*: In its contemporary manifestation, the emphasis on a system of world cities can be traced back to Peter Hall's *The World Cities* (1966). The concept was updated by Friedmann and Wolff (1982) to emphasize the emergence of a relatively few centers of command and control in a globalizing economy. Extensions and appraisals of the concept have been offered in, for example, Knox and Taylor (1995) and special issues of *Urban Geography* (1996) and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* ("Globalization and the Changing U.S. City" 1997). A significant emphasis in the more recent work has been on the global-local connection, and on the implications of the sheer size of the emergent megacities (Dogan and Kasarda 1988; Sudjic 1992).

(2) *Dual City*: One of the most persistent themes in contemporary urban analysis is social polarization, i.e., the increasing gap between rich and poor; between the powerful and powerless; between different ethnic, racial, and religious groupings; and between genders (O'Loughlin and Friedrichs 1996; Mollenkopf and Castells 1991). Too few analyses have traced how this broad class of polarizations is translated into the spatial structure of cities (e.g., Ley 1996; Sassen 1991, 1994).

(3) *Altered spaces*: Another prevalent condition of contemporary urban existence is fragmentation, both in material and cognitive life. It has been noted by observers who place themselves both within and beyond the postmodern ethos (see, for instance, Watson and Gibson 1995, and the essays in the *City* journal ["It All Comes Together in Los Angeles" 1996]). Their concerns often focus on the collapse of conventional communities and the rise of new cultural categories and spaces, including especially cultural hybrids (Canclini 1996; Olalquiaga 1992; Morley and Robins 1995; Zukin 1994).

(4) *Cybercity*: No one can ignore the challenges of the information age, which promises to unseat many of our cherished notions about sociospatial structuring. Castells (1996, 1997) has undertaken an ambitious three-volume account of this social revolution, but as yet relatively few people (beyond science-fiction authors such as William Gibson and Neal Stephenson) have explored what this revolution portends for cities. One pioneering exception is William J. Mitchell's *City of Bits* (1995).

Each of these themes (globalization, polarization, fragmentation and cultural hybrids, and cybercities) holds a place in our postmodern urbanism. But (as we hope is by now clear) none of them individually provide a sufficient explanation for the urban outcomes we are currently observing. A proper accounting of contemporary pattern and process will require a much more strenuous effort directed toward comparative urban analysis. Unfortunately, the empirical, methodological, and theoretical bases for such analysis are weak. We lack, for instance, adequate information on a full sample of national and international cities, although valuable current syntheses are available in *Urban Geography* (1996) and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* ("Globalization and the U.S. City" 1997). There are a number of explicit comparative studies, but these tend to focus on already well-documented centers such as London, Tokyo, and New York City (e.g., Fainstein 1994; Sassen 1991). In contrast, the vibrancy and potential of important centers such as Miami still remain closeted (Nijman 1996, 1997; Portes and Stepick 1993). Our methodological and theoretical apparatuses for cross-cultural urban analyses are also underdeveloped. Castells (1996, 1997) offers an insightful engagement with global urban conditions, and the theoretical insights of Ellin (1996), King (1996), and Soja (1996b) on a putative postmodern urbanism are much needed excursions into a neglected field.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Chauncy Harris's (1997) recent reworking of his multiple nuclei model into what he terms a *peripheral model of urban areas* reveals an acute sensitivity to the contemporary urban condition, but engages theoretical precepts quite different from ours. Finally, work on cities of the developing, postcolonial, and non-Western worlds remains sparse and unsustainable, as well as being stubbornly immune from the broader lessons of Western-based theory—even though the empirical parallels between, for example, Seabrook's (1996) subtitle, "Scenes from a Developing World" and our construction of postmodern urbanism are striking.

We intend this essay as an invitation to examine the concept of a postmodern urbanism. We recognize that we have only begun to sketch its potential, that its validity will only be properly assessed if researchers elsewhere in the world are willing to examine its precepts. We urge others to share in this enterprise because, even though our

vision is tentative, we are convinced that we have glimpsed a new way of understanding cities.<sup>15</sup>

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## Notes

1. See, for example, Pred (1995) and Augé (1995).
2. Some elements of this discussion may be found in Watson and Gibson (1995), Ellin (1996), and Knox and Taylor (1995).
3. The theoretical bases for this argument are examined more fully in Dear (1988, 1991). For specific considerations of the rhetoric of city planning in the new urbanism, see Dear (1989).
4. This should not be confused with the L.A. School of *architecture*, discussed by Charles Jencks (1993).
5. The term “school” is problematic, but we here follow Jennifer Pratt and use the term to refer to “a collection of individuals working in the same environment who at the time and through their own retrospective constructions of their identity and the impartations of intellectual historians are defined as representing a distinct approach to a scholarly endeavor” (1995:2).
6. For example, Longstreth (1997) examines the role of Los Angeles in the invention of the regional shopping mall. See also Hayden (1994).
7. The claims of a “Los Angeles School” may have already been overtaken by a burgeoning “Orange County School.” According to Mark Gottdiener and George Kephart in *Postsuburban California*, it is Orange County that is the paradigmatic window on late-twentieth-century urbanism:
 

We have focussed on what we consider to be a new form of settlement space—the fully urbanized, multinucleated, and independent county . . . formally separated from but adjacent to large well-known metropolitan regions. . . . As a new form of settlement space, they are the first such occurrence in five thousand years of urban history (1991:51).
8. Postsuburban districts, they further state, “possess relatively large populations; they are polynucleated, with no single center that dominates development as it does in the traditional urban model; and they possess relatively robust employment bases and also serve as residential areas, especially for the white middle class” (p. 51). Such districts appear to be identifiable by four characteristics: “postsuburban spatial organization, information capitalism, consumerism, and cosmopolitanism” (1991:4).
9. Raban’s view finds echoes in the seminal work of de Certeau (1984).
10. It is worth emphasizing that in the overview, we focus solely on the concatenation of urban events that are occurring in contemporary Southern California. This is not to suggest that such trends are absent in other cities, nor that a larger literature on these topics and cities is missing. A complete review of these other places and literatures is simply beyond the scope of this paper.
11. Such sentiments find echoes in Neil Smith’s assessment of the new urban frontier, where expansion is powered by two industries: real-estate developers (who package and define value), and the manufacturers of culture (who define taste and consumption preferences) (Smith 1992:75).
12. The list of L.A. novels and movies is endless. Typical of the dystopian cinematic vision are “Blade Runner” (Ridley Scott 1986) and “Chinatown” (Roman Polanski 1974); and of silly optimism, “L.A. Story” (Mick Jackson 1991).
13. One critic accused us (quite cleverly) of “neologorrhea.”
14. This term is a combination of Rene Girard’s “mimetic contagion” and animal ethologist Richard Dawkin’s hypothesis that cultural informations are gene-type units, or “memes,” transmitted virus-like from head to head. We here employ the term “hybridized” in recognition of the recency and novelty of the combination, not to assert

some prior purity to the component elements forming the hybrid.

14. The collection of essays assembled in Benko and Strohmayer (1997) is an excellent overview of the relationship between space and postmodernism, including the urban question. Kevin Robins's valuable work on media, visual cultures, and representational issues also deserves a wide audience (e.g., Robins 1996; Morley and Robins 1995).
15. A much fuller treatment of this assertion is to be found in Dear (forthcoming).

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