

# Tale of Two Cities

by  
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# AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.  
This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required  
final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically  
available to the public.

# ABSTRACT

It was the best of cities, it was the worst of cities, it was a place of giddy boom, it was a place of economic despair, it was a utopia, it was a dystopic no-topia, it was the world centre of fantasies, and the world centre of nightmares, a town where some struck it rich while others lost themselves in their desires for wealth, in short, the place was so far unlike the present place, that some of the noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. This thesis is constructed of fragmented stories but not in the classic sense as there is no over-arching narrative, no beginning, middle and end, no synthetic conclusion. Rather this thesis is similar to Los Angeles itself; it is a multi-faceted exploration of competing themes that have birthed a city of fictions, a centre of fantasy, a place that shapes our collective memories, even for those of us who grew up in far-off places.

Los Angeles has searched for a down-town core, a collective identity, a dominant narrative and these attempts are explored through different themes – the story of film noir, the development of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, the redevelopment of Bunker Hill, the violence and upheavals of the riots. I have explored how the city has tried to re-brand itself, Through these prisms, and how these attempts have shaped its development and history. It is said that Los Angeles has an architecture of absence, with its superficiality and lack of depth, and as a visual metaphor, this can represent the giddy changes happening in the field of architecture, where hyper-realism trumps facts. This idea of Los Angeles as a mirror should not surprise: it has long been a world centre for myth-making, an epicenter of fiction, cinema, architecture, et cetera, spewing out seductive, grotesquely exaggerated reflections of North America itself.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There were no research grants, scholarships, teaching assistance or other fancy strategies in this victory, just the love, patience and support of my family, which I hope to someday return in Kind.

Dr. Robert Jan van Pelt was the first to encourage me to try an L.A. strategy when I was still a fugitive nomad in the program. His invaluable guidance, endless patience and tenacity toward the end of this journey was a great source of motivation. Dereck Revington kept me in the workshop toiling at my craft and sharpening my tools, Donald McKay supplied an endless supply of reference and munitions to the front lines, as did David Leiberman. Panzer and I cruised the front lines together and its support is evident in the works success.

A primitive version of the book was read by Alexandra Shimo and Sean Irwin, I want to thank them for their invaluable advice and incisive criticism. I am deeply grateful for their patience in translation.

Farid Noufaily played an important role in shaping this thesis. His support and strategy was invaluable as we fought through battle after battle.

I have joined a greater band of brothers in my time here. Greg Perkins, Rufina Wu, Alexander Josephson, Taymoore Balba, Aaron Nelson, Chris Black and Golzar Taravati, I am grateful to have you all as my comrades.

In the course of writing this book I have felt the loss of Panzer. It is its rebel spirit that moves my cursor and renders the pages.

# DEDICATION

To my mother



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# PREFACE

Growing up far from Los Angeles, I liked to watch movies. Many of my favorites were filmed in or were about Los Angeles. In my mind I built up a portrait of the city that was the apotheosis of the American dream. Los Angeles, or at least the movie version, was a different ball game. There, people would say whatever they liked. For example, the romantic comedy *L.A. Story* poked fun at the city's gun problem and endless traffic. In its wit and playfulness, the city came across as a place that did not take itself too seriously and could satirize the stereotypes about itself.

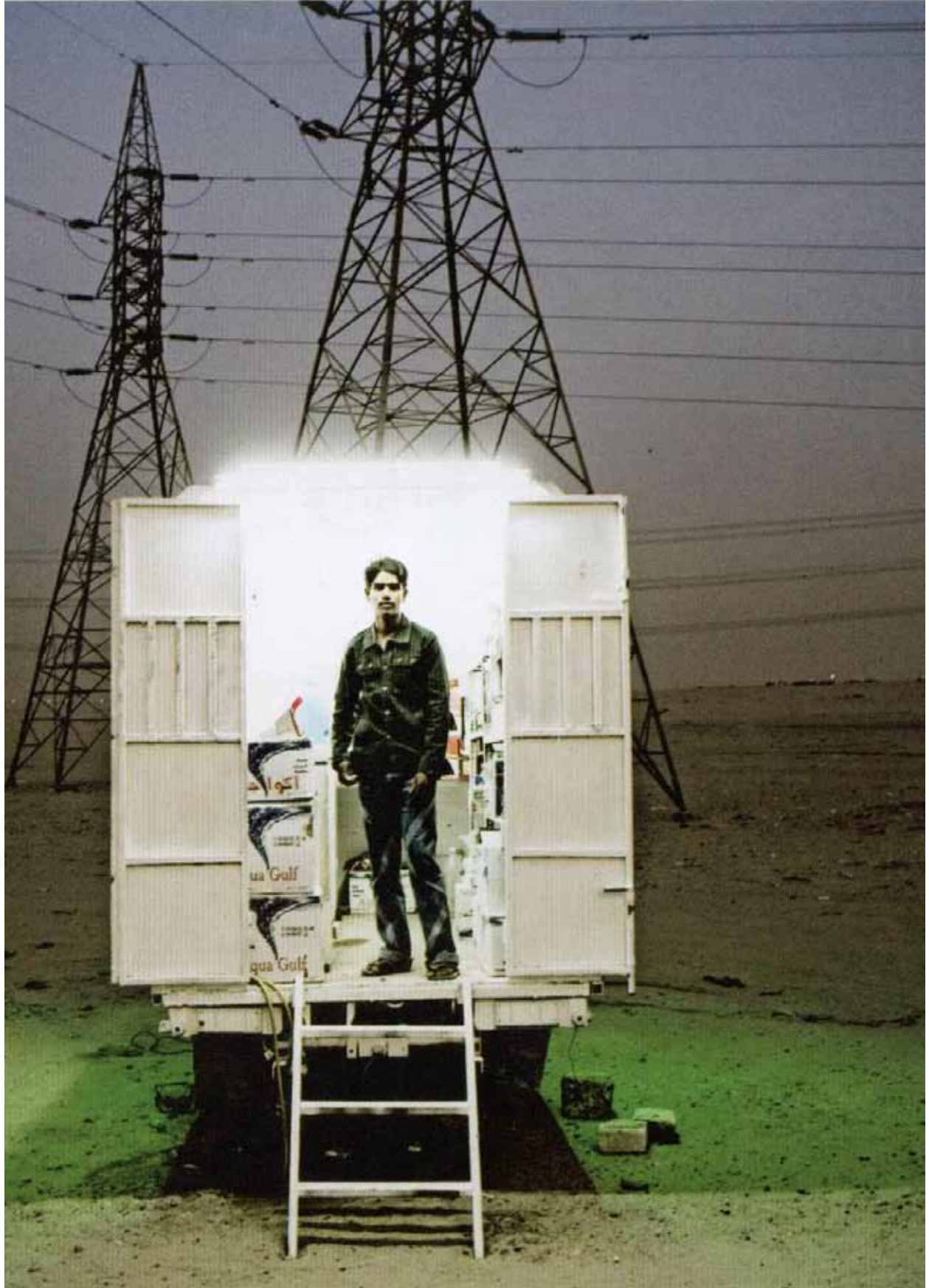
As about a year ago, I came across the book *City of Quartz*. The image of Los Angeles presented by the book was completely different to anything I had discovered in the media or my years of movie watching. Here was a description of Los Angeles as a divided city, where power brokers determined the fate of the less fortunate. Instead of a city of dreams, it was a gang-ridden city of haves and have-nots. *City of Quartz* affected me deeply. It suggested that my perceptions of Los Angeles had been so one-sided; it forced me to confront the underbelly of the city, and reassess how my perceptions had been formed.

*Figure 1. (Last page) USS  
Los Angeles flying over  
southern Manhattan Island,  
New York City, 1930.*



Like every city, Los Angeles is multi-faceted. But as a city that likes to tell and export stories about itself, its film fantasies seemed to have more weight. I grew up watching films shot in Los Angeles and thinking about the fantasies that were presented to me. As I probed deeper, this symbolic city became more nuanced and complex. I found myself torn between despair and uncertainty, mocking the origin of this dreamed city: a city where fiction is sold as truth and truth as fiction. I tried to excavate truth from fiction, but each time I reached a dead end. Exhausted and confused, I found myself questioning the whole foundations upon which my image of an architecture was once formed.

In short, Los Angeles resembles a dream. This book is a series of fragmented stories and imaginary illustrations which, together, depict a fictional city.



# INTRODUCTION

Once, I received a complaint call from a client, concerned that our team's building project did not look glamorous enough for marketing. After hours of discussion by phone, we agreed the best solution was to represent the same design in a different setting. The problem, explained my boss, was that the sky was not blue enough. I reluctantly went back to the office and re-rendered the project with a different background and lighting settings. We regained our client's satisfaction and the project was published several times. However, the project remained on paper and never proceeded to construction.

I left that firm after that project. I didn't think any more about the issue until I received an e-mail from the firm requesting I redo the background of the drawings. This time, the problem was lack of tropical greenery. "This is a joke", I responded and hung up. That was end of it.

The importance of perception, of constructing fantasy, whether through tropical trees or more blue sky seems to be increasingly important to our profession. In Dubai, a total of a hundred and twelve projects have been marketed

*Figure 2. Winner of the 2007 World Photography Press, Image of an immigrant worker in Dubai living in shipping container*

in under two years before the designs have been fully developed. Projects like Palm Islands were rendered as lush tropical gardens and sold to residents. Since the land and its houses never had any palm trees, but were built on a desert, the owners then came to wonder where the promised greenery was. Chess City is another example. The buildings were rendered as outlandish chess pieces, although the physical improbability of creating such structures is hard to imagine.

Computer visualization has transformed architecture dramatically. Fast and accurate computer modeling combined with the compelling visual effects has blended the design process with marketing and enabled the instant promulgation of design ideas to the market. Ultimately, under pressure from the global market and digitalization, simulation has become a main objective in practice.<sup>1</sup>

Firms are spending an increasing amount of time and effort on perfecting the visual aspect of the design. This trend has resulted in emergence of new genre which creates a series of visually life-like but artificial

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to *virtual reality*. Regarding the extensive and complex subject of virtual-reality, I deliberately hesitated to enter the subject. But instead I hinted at its primary character: the optical sense, which is directly associated with the current *perception* of architectural proposals (imaged-based architecture), not particularly the virtual architecture. As Paul Virilio noted virtual reality has more to do with optical perception than the nature of the subject matter itself.

*“The much-vaunted ‘virtual-reality’ is not so much a navigation through the cyberspace of the network. It is the amplification of the optical density of the appearances of the real world.”*

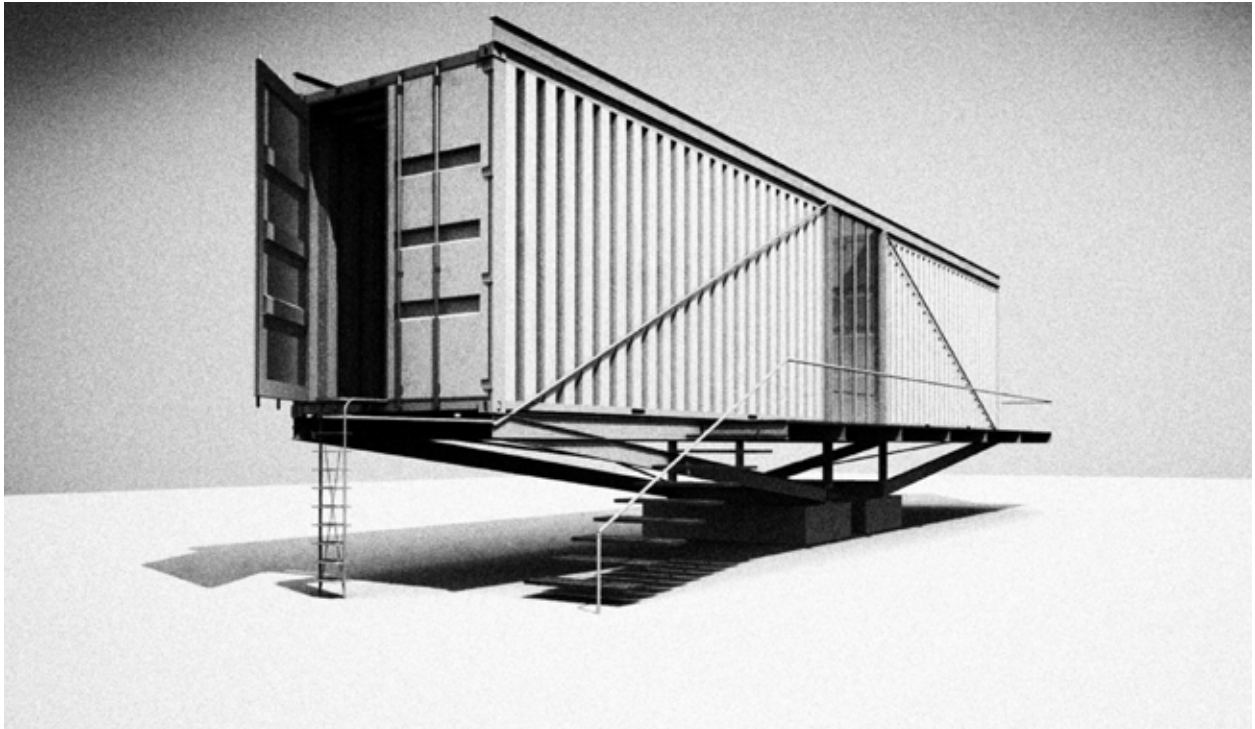
Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (Verso, New York, 2000), 14

projects around the world. In this genre (cases like Dubai or East Asia) the entire city is fictionalized instantaneously, then marketed and later sold as a package. What is bizarre about these projects is the public's acceptance of the process despite their awareness of their fakeness.

As I find myself drawn into practicing this form of architecture, adding tropical trees or blue skies to sell a project, I became intrigued by a city whose history has been defined by the myths that it created and exported. Los Angeles growth and its image has been shaped by the stories that it sells around the world. When I started this thesis, I understood Los Angeles through Hollywood fantasies. I soon found that its history is full of fictions marketed as truth. The early booster advertisements promised an agricultural paradise when the region was then a barren desert and encouraged immigration to the fledgling town. Myth creation would continue to influence its growth as fabricated newspaper stories about a coming drought ensured expansion northwards to the San Fernando Valley. Noir literature and cinema would come to influence how the city understood itself and shape other film fictions for generations to come. Architecture may be having a Koolhaas like moment, as it merges fantasy and reality.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Los Angeles has long

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<sup>2</sup> From the essay by Rem koolhaas 'Last Chance?' published on May 27-29, 2007 by AMO/OMA under the license of Volume Magazine. Al Manakh (name of the book) is a project review of recent OMA developments in Dubai, along side with fragmented researches ( what most of critics called a celebratory journal to



*Figure 3. from the project  
'Container City'*

intertwined the two, forcing us to question to what extent the simulacrum is real.

One may mistake the reality with truth and righteousness and immediately demonize Los Angeles as a dysfunctional dystopia. Noir was a dystopian aesthetic but, as I will explain later through four stories, I hesitated to cut to the heart of the problems for the sake of preserving the continuity of stories. After the *City of Quartz*, it is hard to see any alternative criticism. Although almost two decades have passed, the book still provides comprehensive analysis of today's problems.

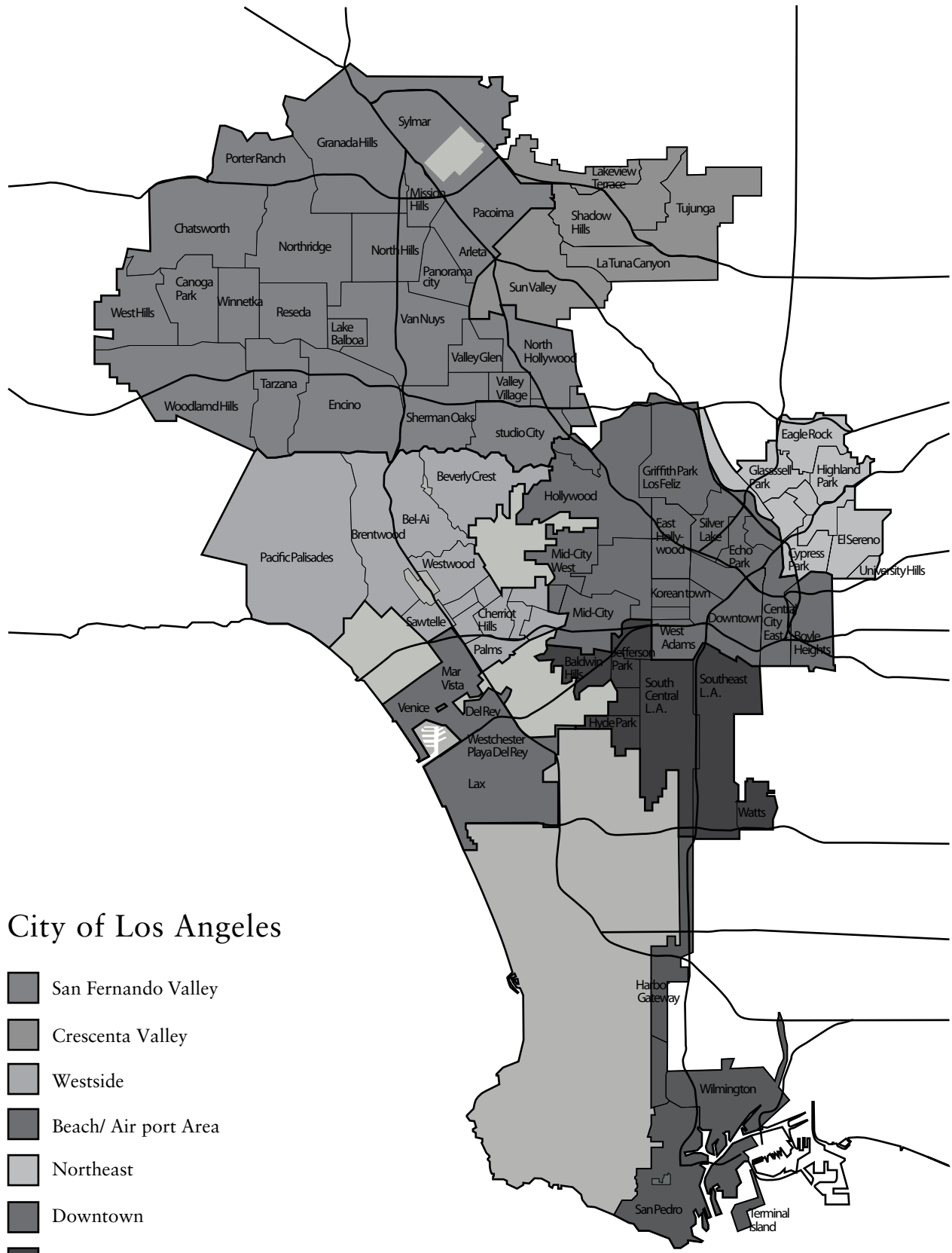
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justify massive developments in Dubai and particularly the OMA's role in them.) In an opening essay Koolhaas boldly attacks the critics by praising massive developments in Dubai. He regards Dubai as the 'last chance' and 'final destination' for architects and urban planners. The interesting point in the essay is the tone of argument; He confessed at the beginning to the arbitrary nature of the developments toward the end, portrayed them as more an opportunity rather than a fraud.

The essay finishes with this paragraph:

*This burgeoning campaign to export a new kind of urbanism- to places immune to or ignored by previous missions of modernism-may be the final opportunity to formulate a new blueprint for urbanism.*

Rem Koolhaas, "Last Chance?," *Volume (Al Mannakh)* (Stichting Archis), 2007, 7-12.



## City of Los Angeles

- San Fernando Valley
- Crescenta Valley
- Westside
- Beach/ Airport Area
- Northeast
- Downtown
- South
- Harbor Area



# TAKE ONE

**In movies about Los Angeles,** from *L.A. Story* or *Reyner Banham's Loves Los Angeles*, the city often seems to be both spacious and packed full of people, cars, billboards, roads, parking lots, drive-through restaurants and gas stations all competing for attention. The busy, crowded imagery is of a destination point for immigrant dreams, writers trying to strike rich, actors hoping for their lucky break, and the like, all portrayed against superficial beauty. It would seem that the one constant of Los Angeles is it is full of life.

The many authors who have written about Los Angeles often discuss this frenetic energy (Louis Adamic's *Laughing in the Jungle*), but there is another recurring theme in many discussions of the city, which is an underlying emptiness, or better, a lack of depth.

This emptiness crops up in writers as diverse as journalist, author James M. Cain notes Los Angeles as “dreadful vacuity”<sup>3</sup>, and Bliven portrays the city as:

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<sup>3</sup> -James M. Cain, *Paradise*, published in 1933 in *The American Mercury*. Republished in ; David L.Ulin, *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology* (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 117

*Figure 4. Map of Los Angeles  
Los Angeles is all about perfection:  
an exaggeration model of pleasure.  
Los Angeles is all about perfection:  
an exaggeration of brawl.*

*The world's prize collection of cranks, semi-cranks, placid creatures whose bovine expression shows that each of them is studying, without much of hope of success, to be a high-grade moron, angry or ecstatic exponents of food fads, sun-bathing, ancient Greek costumes, diaphragm breathing and the imminent second coming of Christ.<sup>4</sup>*

This humorous indictment suggests that vacuity is not merely confined to the superficiality of Hollywood but also pervades everyday social interactions. The entire mindset of the town is directed towards the vacuous; even the non-cranks do not have regular, meaningful lives, as Kevin Starr suggests, but focus their energies on banal, lifestyle choices, as Kevin Starr suggests<sup>5</sup>.

The vacuity seeped from the people into their surroundings, from residents into the very landscape

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Bliven in the *New Republic* in 1927, David L.Ulin, *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology* (New York: Library of Congress, 2002).15

<sup>5</sup> The term Luxury and good living manifested within the city and becomes the inextricable part of the Southern Californian Dream. Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream 1850-1915* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1973). 413-414

itself, suggests Cain. “Palm trees are here, but they are all phonies, planted by people bemused with the notion of a sub-tropical climate, and they are so out of harmony with their surroundings that they hardly arrest your notice.”<sup>6</sup> Even the flowers have lost their smell in Los Angeles, he continues, they may look good, but because of the dry air, the sweet fragrance is missing.

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<sup>6</sup> James M. Cain, *Paradise*, published in 1933 in *The American Mercury*.  
Republished in New York; David L.Ulin, *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology* (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 117  
Bruce Bliven in the *New Republic* in 1927.

**The result of this bizarre superficiality is or was the creation of a parallel city:** an alternate Los Angeles that remains in the background to accommodate its imaginary protagonist—The multiple myths about the city that in turn shape its growth and identity. Palm trees, for example, are not native to the area but were introduced to Los Angeles prior to the 1932 Olympics in order to suggest a Mediterranean climate. These are now a visual metaphor for the city. Myth has distorted the image of Los Angeles since its beginnings, making it an appealing subject for interpretation. Many of L.A.’s writers and urban critics took this tendency to the extreme: while emphasizing on the city’s superficiality, they downplayed fact, intent on carving out their own version of reality, no matter how fragmentary. Some like Reyner Banham and David Hockney celebrated the city without apology. Others, like Mike Davis, portrayed Los Angeles as a completely hopeless dystopia. As a city of scenarios rather than sceneries, both sides fuel the debate for, as Bertolt Brecht suggested, Los Angeles symbolizes both heaven and hell.<sup>7</sup> The city’s

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<sup>7</sup> - Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990). 25

vacuity character allows any powerful imagination to cast its own interpretation of the place and the emptiness allows multiple narratives to ring true.

Los Angeles is a city where the individual reigns supreme, characterized by its lack of public spaces and monuments. These tendencies fuel each other, for as Rem Koolhaas suggests, freedom is an absence of architecture: a city without a prominent landmark creates a space for freedom of form and function.<sup>8</sup> The city, therefore, is an empty form—ready to be shaped and played by any individual imagination. If London has Dickens and Paris, Hugo, Los Angeles has been depicted by dozens of writers and playwrights. They may have come to strike it rich, or find fame, but each tried to fill the vacuum with their narratives and fictions. At the end, vacuity still exists in the city. That is why no one can conquer the city entirely.

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<sup>8</sup> Reser+Umemoto, *Atlas of Novel Tectonics* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006). 23



## Finding a visual metaphor for this emptiness,

a building – an enclosed space creating a shelter or a home – was too solid. The airship, long considered a symbol of emptiness and surveillance, appealed because of its history and associations. Technically, airships are not empty at all – they are filled with gases lighter than air and carry people and propellers. But whether stuffed full of passengers or an inert gas, the airship remains a symbol for emptiness. Even the origins of the word “blimp” remind us of this void. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word likely came from the sounds made by striking the gas bag with the thumb. It’s an onomatopoeic word derived from the vibrations of empty air, one made from hitting at emptiness. Unlike other aircraft, airships float because of the void at the centre. And the word parallels this structure, “blimp” doesn’t have a standard etymological root.

*Figure 5. (opposite page) Return of the Zeppelin: From the height of luxury to war machine the Hindenburg airship bursts into flames as it tries to land New Jersey in 1937. Hindenburg incident was the end to decades of Zeppelin culture. As Guillaume de Syon points out in his book *Zeppelin, Germany and the Airship*, Zeppelin became an important icon (what he called the “Zeppelin spirit”) of the early twentieth century and meant different things to different people. Pacifists believed the airship would produce a new sense of independence and world unity. Militarists hoped the airship would become Germany’s ultimate weapon. Shrewd businessmen saw it as a flying piggy-bank.*

Historically, airships were symbols of progress and technological prowess. A fascination with the conquest of the air, which had started as a ballooning craze in the late Enlightenment, took off in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century with the arrival of the world's first aircraft. The euphoria surrounding this new technology reached a fevered pitch in Germany where Count Zeppelin would pioneer and name the world's first rigid air ships. Germany was so enthralled with their eccentric count and his flying machines that they would devise songs and poetry immortalizing Zeppelin, both its creator and aircraft.<sup>9</sup>

The unbridled optimism, the unbending trust in progress, and the gaiety in the triumph over nature's physical laws are part of the history of the airship. As a visual metaphor, the airship goes beyond the emptiness, as these same sentiments (optimism, trust in progress, etc.) dominate the early history of Los Angeles. The Los Angeles boosters, with their hyperbolic claims about a utopian climate spurred immigration from the late nineteenth century onwards. Southern California was not only an agricultural paradise; it was a climate of "perpetual spring"<sup>10</sup> according to advertisements at the time. The hyperbole reached the extreme: "the difference between this many parts of our land

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<sup>9</sup> De Syon, Guillaume, *Zeppelin, Germany and the Airship, 1900-1939*. (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. 2002). 27

<sup>10</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 1898



[Southern California]” and everywhere else, wrote the popular magazine *Out West* (Land of Sunshine) “is that [here] nature seems to work with a man not against him.”

The unbridled optimism of Los Angeles has given away to dark moments, from the Watts Riots of 1965, the razing of Bunker Hill in 1959, to the South Central riots of 1992. Similarly, the airship took on a more sinister edge as its function evolved. Once used to carry passengers across oceans, airships were increasingly used to gather military reconnaissance by the Axis and the Allies in the years leading up to the First World War. Military reconnaissance is still one of the airship’s top functions.<sup>11</sup>

Dread Airship is word-play on multiple levels, it is not clear whether the dread comes from those poor Afghans who are worried about how the spying airship will be used or from its historical associations as a bomber during the First World War. The Airship might have ushered in an era of optimism and enthusiasm about air travel in the early twentieth century, but forty years later, it was abandoned as a passenger carrier as too dangerous, with the 1937 Hindenburg disaster as the final straw.

Filmmakers have played with this duality, shifting

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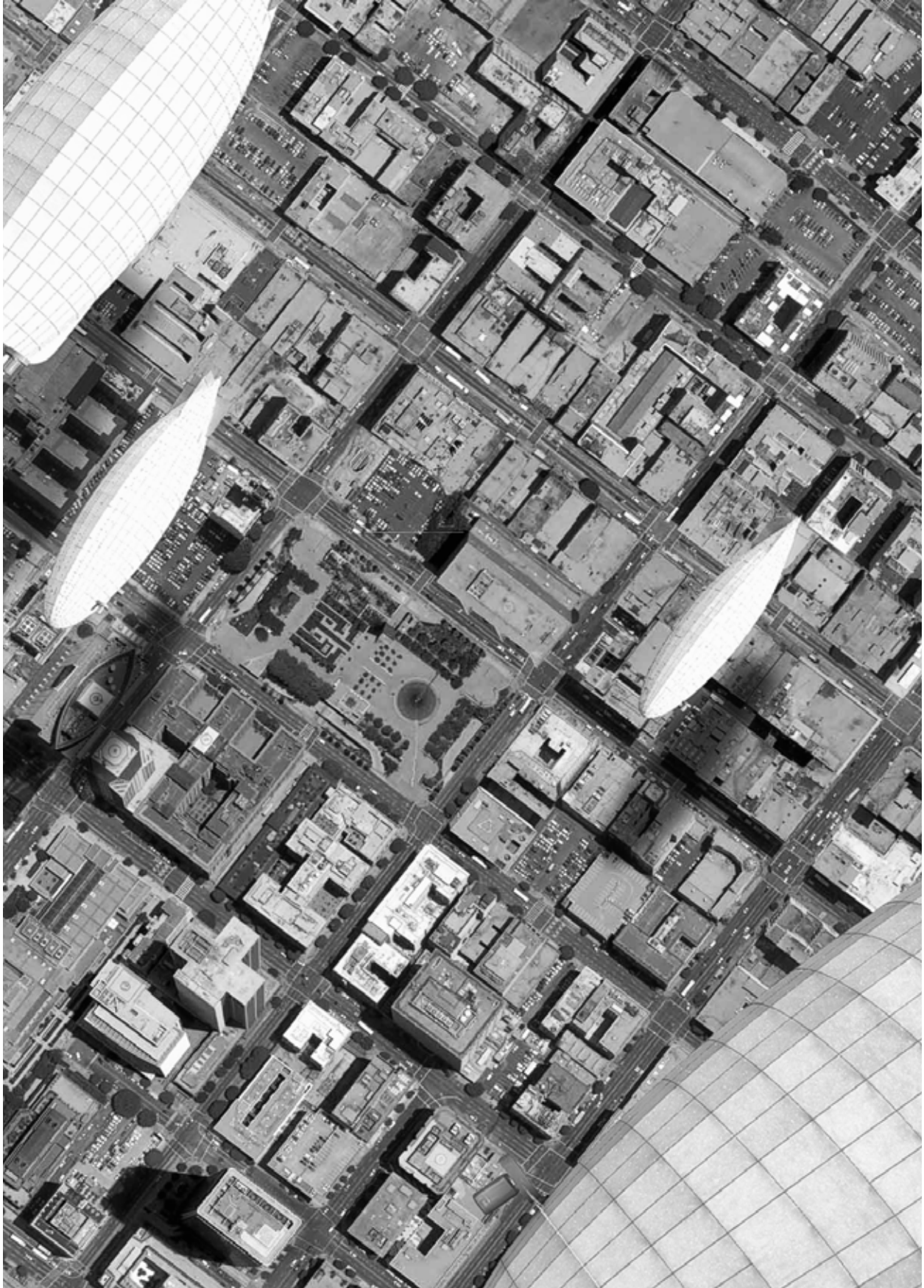
<sup>11</sup> The US army is currently testing the Long Endurance Multi-INT Vehicle ((LEMV) for surveillance in Afghanistan. LEMV is a state-of-the-art hybrid airship, which looks like a futuristic bug and has been coined “Dread Airship” on science blog.

between contrasting perceptions of the airship's many different functions. It is used as a harmless advertising balloon and military scout; it has been seen a symbol of progress or an instrument of war. the airship is much more than empty vessel, it is a bundle of contradictory associations, a complex visual metaphor that fundamentally changes the landscape where it is situated. Movie-makers have used this duality to tease the audience; for example in the 1986 movie *Flight of the Navigator*, a large ominous shadow passes over a crowd of people suggesting death from above but as the camera pans out, this penumbra is revealed as nothing more than a Goodyear Airship passing at low level.

Today, the airship tends to be seen as a tool to disseminate messages rather than a symbol of technology and progress. The Goodyear airships have become so synonymous with advertising that they crop up in movies, songs and books. The airship as an advertising vessel is common enough to make it into a Tragically Hip song (*Titanic Terrarium*) and a number of films, including the 1974 H.B. Halicki film, *Gone in 60 Seconds*, where an airship displays the amusing message "Lock Your Car or It May Be Gone in 60 Seconds." In the Brian de Palma gangster film '*Scarface*', Tony Montana sees the airship with the words "The World is Yours..." written in the lights. Finally, in the movie '*Blade Runner*', giant blimps were floating above the dark ghettos while advertising a escapism.

Advertising and propaganda is key to both the history

of the airship and of Los Angeles, as discussed in the chapters on water, noir and the downtown. Los Angeles is a city whose history is chockablock full of stories about hyperbole triumphing over truth. Some of them, such as fabricated newspaper warnings of imminent droughts, which were used to encourage the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, are so outrageous as to lend an air of unreality to the city's history. As discussed in the chapter on water, the city's main newspaper – the Los Angeles Times - often departed radically from the standards of objective truth telling, instead using its own power of persuasion and biased reportage to influence the growth and development of the city. Alluding to the city with a airship with a symbol of freedom and emptiness is as telling as it is tongue-in-cheek. The airship has a long history, and it has been used to record images, propagate messages, influence perceptions, to bolster fear or a sense of patriotism. These are some of the themes that play out time and again in the following chapters, as I explore the many myths and stories, advertising and propaganda, that have influenced the development of the city.



## The blimp determines our interpretation of the city.

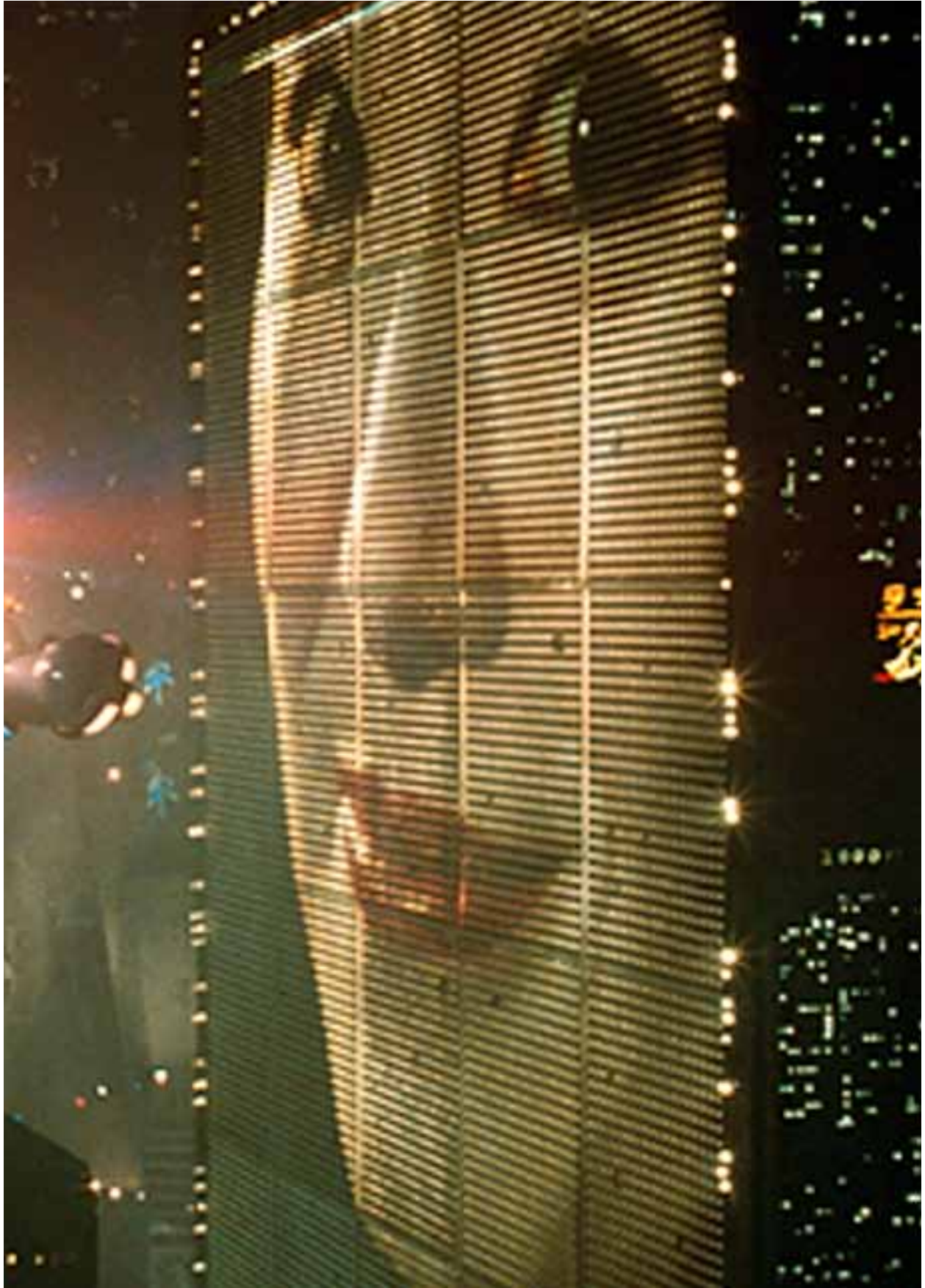
Each vignette is spare and uncluttered and yet they suggest very different narratives. Are we seeing a Big Brother society, where a worker is trapped under spotlights, even when seeking shelter under a bridge? Is this a scene from Blade Runner? Or is it an economic warning for those who fly too close to the sun? The blimp isn't just the focal point of these images of Los Angeles; it determines the perspective of the viewer. The blimp symbolizes emptiness, a void, and yet it dominates the vignettes. Like the number zero, it is a starting point, which determines the relationship of all other things. Zero is "not an integer, but a meta-integer, a rule about integers and their relationships,"<sup>12</sup> and similarly the blimp is not part of the landscape but a key that provides the viewer with visual clues about how we are to read the city.

In the perspective drawings that emerged from the Renaissance onwards, the vanishing point was the point at which parallel lines converged. This point, which is infinitely far in the distance, has been considered a virtual equivalent

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12 Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987).188

*Figure 6. (Opposite Page)  
Downtown Los Angeles ,  
Zeppelin patrolling the area*



of zero by philosophers. The vanishing point would give viewers a defined perspective. Like the number zero, this point would shape the perspective of all other objects in the picture. “One can observe how the vanishing point function as a visual zero facilitating the generation of an infinity of perspective images as zero generations an infinity of Hindu numerals.”<sup>13</sup>

In the vignettes, the blimp acts as a vanishing point determining the relationship between the objects in the design. Both are visual representations of zero, which in turn is a visual metaphor for a city characterized by absence, superficiality and emptiness. The blimp and the vanishing point have a profound effect on their surrounds. Similarly, Los Angeles, which can be visually represented by a void, profoundly effects the narratives and myths of other cities, shaping them in its own intangible image.

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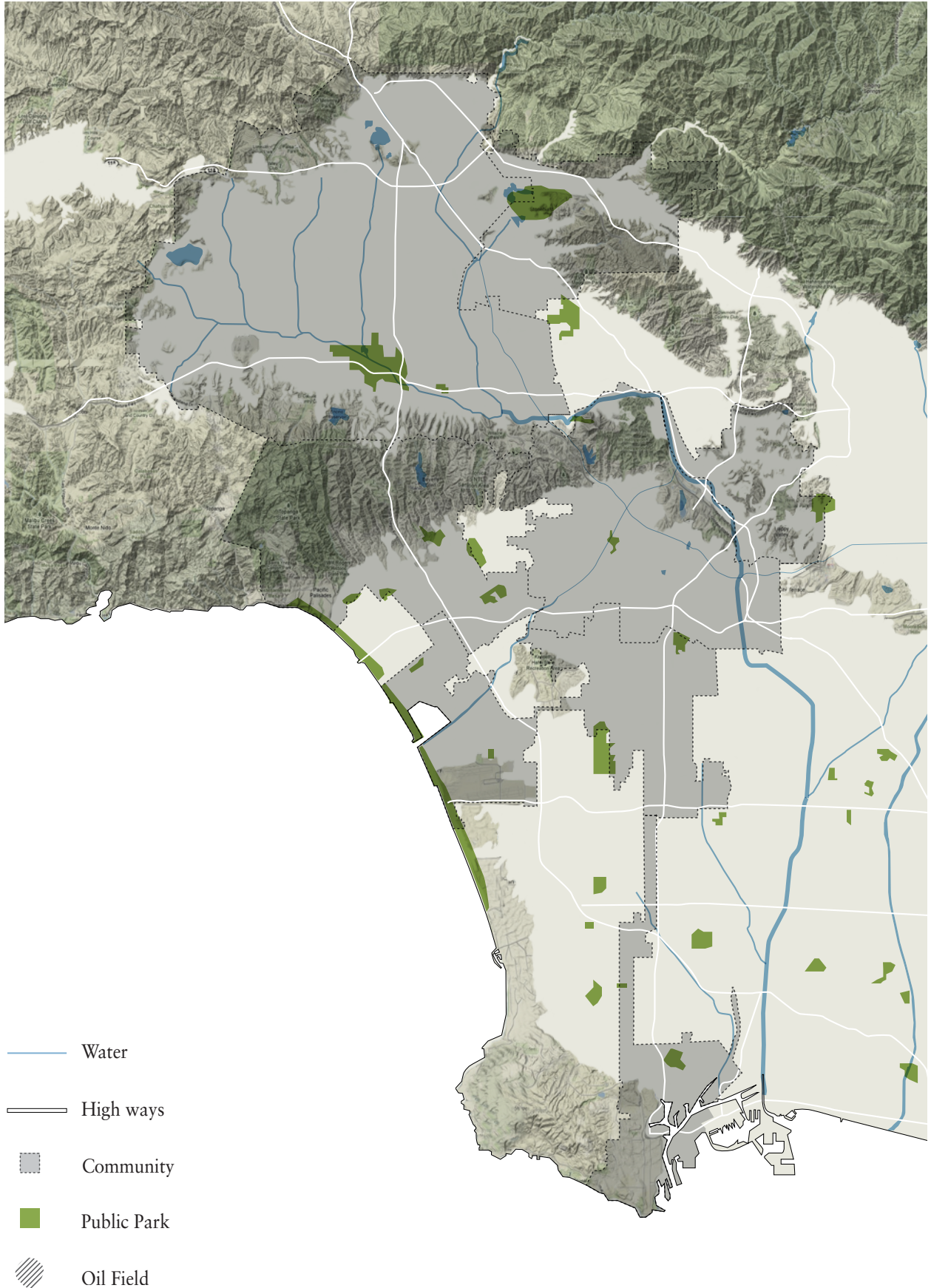
13 Ibid. 19

*Figure 7. (Opposite Page)  
Advertising on the blimp's body ,  
from the movie .Blade Runner.*









-  Water
-  High ways
-  Community
-  Public Park
-  Oil Field

# TAKE TWO

**The story of Los Angeles** has always been, on the most basic level, the story of the interaction between civilization and nature.<sup>14</sup>

Los Angeles is blessed with a temperate, warm and gentle climate. From its beginnings as a town to serve the cattle ranchers, its closeness and proximity to nature has been part of its myth. Unlike many industrial American cities, where development was based around a historic core giving clearer divisions between the urban and nature, Los Angeles was always diffuse and unplanned, mixing urban development and nature, man and landscape.

We largely tend to see the suburbs as an antithesis of nature, thanks largely to Jane Jacobs, Peter Blake and other urbanists. However, the dispersed development that characterizes Los Angeles was once thought of as a green alternative to congested city cores. In its early development Westlake, a district of Los Angeles, promised homes that would be situated on

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<sup>14</sup> Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology, Edited by L.Ulin, David (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 5

*Figure 8. (Last spread)  
'Welcome to L.A.'*

*Figure 9. Map of Los Angeles  
natural resources*

SECOND EDITION.

THE LAND OF



SUNSHINE

NEW YEAR'S

1895.

LOS ANGELES.



“curving cul-de-sac streets clustered along broad greenbelts and natural open areas,”<sup>15</sup> with the main goal of not despoiling the land. The open space, fresh air, and proximity to nature became integral to the manufactured images of Los Angeles, a city that would promise a “land of sunshine, fruit and flowers,”<sup>16</sup> and an escape from the dirty industrial cities of the east.

But beyond this catchy advertising and in reality, Los Angeles is the product’ of a speculation. The pattern of urbanization here, what design critic Peter Plegens once accurately called the ecology of evil’, “[where] developers don’t grow homes in the desert but they just clear and pave, hook up some pipes to the artificial river, build a security wall and plug in product’.<sup>17</sup>

It is hard to separate the true character of Los Angeles from its fictional persona, as the Los Angeles- for both intellectuals and ordinary folks, has always been about the construction/interpretation of the city myth. Thus, the majority of writings and research are concentrated on this mythical aspect of the city rather than its built environment.

Novels such as *Ramona*<sup>18</sup>, which sentimentalized the

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15 Ibid. 30


16 Ibid. 30

Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology, Edited by L.Ulin, David (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 108

17 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990). 4

18 *Ramona*, a novel written by Helen Hunt Jackson (1884)

*Figure 10. (Opposite Page)  
Out West (Land of Sunshine),  
edited by Charles Lummis*



**W**ARMED BY THE DESERT

3

**T**HE desert, lying beyond the mountains, Southern California sees the beneficial quality of her sunshine, for there always, with clear heat, disperse the ocean clouds that might otherwise cover the whole wider view from the sun. With a record of only 43.7 no cloudy days in the year, this region enjoys more of the "golden" rays that science has found to be so beneficial to the...

[x]

Figure 11. Advertising Los Angeles Nature from Out West (Land of Sunshine),

Mexican colonial life of aristocrats in Southern California, popularized a laconic way of life where agricultural largess was produced from a balmy climate and surprisingly fertile soil. The novel helped export the myth to the rest of the United States and tourists would come from across the land for Ramona tours. As Carey McWilliams described in his book *Southern California Country*, picture postcards were published showing “the schools attended by Ramona,” “the place where Ramona was married,” and various shots of “Ramona Country.”<sup>19</sup> As often with Los Angeles’ history, fact and fiction became intertwined: many who visited “Ramona’s birthplace” in San Diego or the annual “Ramona Pageant” at Hemet were surprised and disappointed if they chanced to learn that Ramona was a fictional novel rather than a biography.<sup>20</sup>

The romanticization of Southern California’s landscape continued with Charles Fletcher Lummis, a journalist from Chillicothe, Ohio. In 1884, Lummis heard about California’s ideal climatic conditions and decided to change his fortunes by heading to the west coast. Rather than travel by train, Charles Fletcher Lummis decided to walk 143 days across the American continent to Los Angeles. During the journey, he developed an appreciation for the

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19 McWilliams, Carey, *Southern California Country. An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1973).73

20 From “Helen Hunt Jackson” by Walton Bean in *Women’s History: Biographies*. Thomson Gale. 1997. Retrieved 2007-05-19.



*Figure 12. (Top) 'Romanticizing the Landscape' Pasadena Out West Magazine 1898*

*Figure 13. (Bottom) Palm Trees, Through more than a century palm trees have become a symbol of Los Angeles and have been depicted in literature, cinema and popular media. Of all of these clichés, the palm tree has been deployed to reference Mediterranean scenery. The palm trees have managed to stand against all the skyscrapers as the cities most recognizable icon.*



countryside's raw physical beauty, and the cultures of both new immigrants and Native Americans. As he traveled, he wrote about his experiences and sent these journalistic impressions to army general Harrison Gray Otis, owner of the Los Angeles Times. Otis was so impressed with his journalistic impressions that on arrival in L.A. He hired him as the newspaper's first City Editor. At that time Los Angeles was a just small town under the shadow of the biggest city of the west, San Francisco. By 1872, the Los Angeles Times reported that Southern California was so sparsely settled that the region would remain depopulated unless drastic steps were taken. Immigration, it reasoned, was "the great desideratum" and that "every practicable means should be used to secure it as rapidly as possible." A number of power brokers used their influence for this end. Lummis and Otis started the influential magazine *Out West (Land of Sunshine)*, publishing stories that glamorized the state's rugged landscape and Spanish culture, calling it "America's Mediterranean." Sold across the United States, much of it was hyperbole. For example the magazine wrote in 1883, "The difference between this many parts of our land [Southern California] is that [here] nature seems to work with a man not against him."<sup>21</sup> The Southern California Immigration Association, founded by Los Angeles Board of Trade, also put out advertisements

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<sup>21</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1967). 7

to encourage immigration, “a land of perpetual spring,” and “a veritable sanitarium,” and “no happier paradise for the farmer can be found than Los Angeles County.” This concerted effort resulted in a real estate boom from 1898 onwards.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the city’s history, nature has been packaged and marketed, whether to attract immigrants or sell real estate. Boosters emphasized a pastoral ideal, the luxurious arcadia of the Californian lifestyle. “America’s Mediterranean” was sometimes advertised as “The New Rome” and this metaphor took off, becoming a guiding principle of design. From the private canals of Venice Beach (on the west) to the luxury bungalows of the Arroyo Set’ in Pasadena (on the east), the architecture of Los Angeles was often modeled on Mediterranean cities.

As Kevin Starr suggests: “[the landscape] challenged Californians to achieve something better in the manner of American living: to design their cities and homes with reference to the poetry of the past and in harmony with the land and the sun. It asked them to bring their gardens to ordered luxuriance. Above all, it encouraged new attitudes toward work and leisure and what was important to live for, it stood for a culture anxious to foster an alternative to the industrial ethics.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.70

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream (1850-1915)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). 413-414

Paradoxically, the romanticization of nature could have perverse effects. The desire for the individual to each have their own green space would lead to a lack of communal space—only 10 percent Los Angeles is devoted to public parks,<sup>24</sup> one of the lowest figures in the United States. The desire for a “city in the countryside,”<sup>25</sup> a promise made by developers to sell suburbs, would lead to a “staggering” loss of green space and farmland.<sup>26</sup> And while some of the claims about Southern California natural abundance were—hyperbolic a mixture of fact and fiction—these statements ended up producing very real effects. The myth of Los Angeles’ natural beauty would affect not just its rapid growth but even the shape of its architecture.

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24 Base on the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and parks report on 2009

25 Robert Gottlieb, *Reinventing Los Angeles* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007). 29

26 *Ibid.* 33



**Seeking a cure** for his health problems, Chandler came to Los Angeles in 1883. While working in the fruit fields, he started a small delivery company that soon became responsible for delivering many of the city's morning newspapers, putting him in contact with Otis. He started work as a clerk in the Times delivery room. His rise was dramatic, and in less than two years, at age of twenty-nine, he took over as the paper's publisher. Newspapers weren't the only way he gained power and influence, with investments in publishing (including printing and building), ranching, timber paper and woolen mills, water development, steamship lines, air express, his personal fortune was said to be between \$200 million and \$1 billion in today's currency. He was a real estate tycoon and political kingmaker but he was also an outstanding entrepreneur, who started from nothing and rose quickly to become the richest man of Southern California.

For Chandler, his paper was more a tool to promote his political agenda than a conduit to objectively report the news. He used his paper to rally the public behind

*Figure 14. (Opposite) Aquaduct at Owen Valley .The Los Angeles Aqueduct system comprising the Los Angeles Aqueduct (Owens Valley aqueduct) and the Second Los Angeles Aqueduct, is a water conveyance operated by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Designed by engineer, William Mulholland, the system delivers water from the Owens River in the Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains into the city of Los Angeles, California.*

certain causes for a shipping port in San Pedro, (In 1909, he was victorious, and San Pedro was chosen over Santa Monica). His influence was particularly apparent in the development of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Water became crucial for sustaining the Los Angeles extreme growth. In 1903 the U.S. federal government drafted a plan to capture water from Northern Mountain of Los Angeles use for agricultural use of central California's dry Owen Valley.

However, the Los Angeles Water Commission (LAWC) wanted to use it for the city. To thwart the federal government's plans, they bought up the land that was being used for agriculture north of the city.

On August 14 1905, barely two weeks after the citizens of Los Angeles had learned for the first time of the planned aqueduct, the city council called for a \$1.5 million bond election to pay the costs of preliminary surveys and acquisition. The election was to be held three weeks later on September 7.

The Los Angeles Times, which already had a long-standing campaign warning the city that water shortages were imminent, stepped up their efforts. One of the most effective stories fabricated as part of this scare campaign involved a drought which descended on Southern California in 1895 and which reportedly persisted until 1904. Modern histories still refer to this drought, although there are no records of it before 1905.

In any event, the public took heed. The referendum went through, with 90 per cent of Los Angeles voting to pay the complete costs of the aqueduct project.

The public had paid for an aqueduct that would reach its terminus in Los Angeles. When it was built, there was another layer of deception. The aqueduct stopped before the city in the dry lands of San Fernando Valley, north of Los Angeles. For all the daily warnings from the Times, for all the paid advertisements, the power brokers (the newspaper and the Los Angeles Water Commission) had never intended the aqueduct to reach the city's core.

Instead, the price of land on the San Fernando Valley skyrocketed, and the area became the prime destination for vast housing projects. L.A.'s original residents those who had paid for the aqueduct were no better off. Those who owned San Fernando Valley saw their wealth boom. The man who had done more than anyone to engineer the boom, Harry Chandler, was also the biggest land owner in San Fernando Valley.

Exactly how could they fulfill their promise to the people of Los Angeles; Noah Cross, the character in the film Chinatown, would best put it:

*“Either you bring the water to L.A. or you bring L.A. to the water.”*

San Fernando Valley became part of L.A. city, causing the city to double in size. By manipulating the public,





the Los Angeles Times had forever shaped the city's size. Chandler would solidify the "anything goes" mythology of the city, which would be exported around the world through noir cinema. Indeed, the incident was popularized by Roman Polanski's award-winning film *Chinatown*. Through an atmosphere of suspense, the film presents a seedy, glamorous city where corruption reigns supreme, and those with money write the laws. As we shall see, L.A.'s history is one where art would mimic life.

*Figure 15. (Opposite Page)  
Los Angeles Times Building  
Advertising for the Los Angeles  
Aqueduct Bonds. Thanks to  
the 'Times' fear mongering the  
commission won the majority of  
public by 98 percent . The true  
winners from this deal were the  
owners of Los Angeles Times.*



# TAKE THREE

**“...[That] is all downtown Los Angeles deserves,”**<sup>27</sup> wrote Reyner Banham in his book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, cheekily mocking the on-going attempts at reconstruction of the historic downtown. Published in 1971 during a time of heated discussion about the need for civic core, the book provided a new way to understand the city, and urban planning itself.

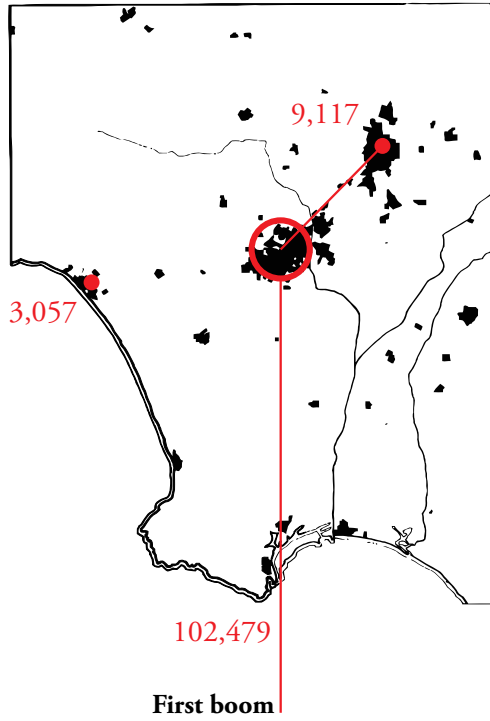
Reyner Banham was one of the most influential writers on architecture, design, popular culture from the mid-1950s onwards. Trained in mechanical engineering and art history, he was convinced that technology was making society not only more exciting but more democratic. As a member of the Independent Group (IG), he shared a passion for studying the role of pop culture in everyday life. He became fascinated with Los Angeles from a young age through its movies, which he would watch from a penny town hall cinema in his home town of Norwich.

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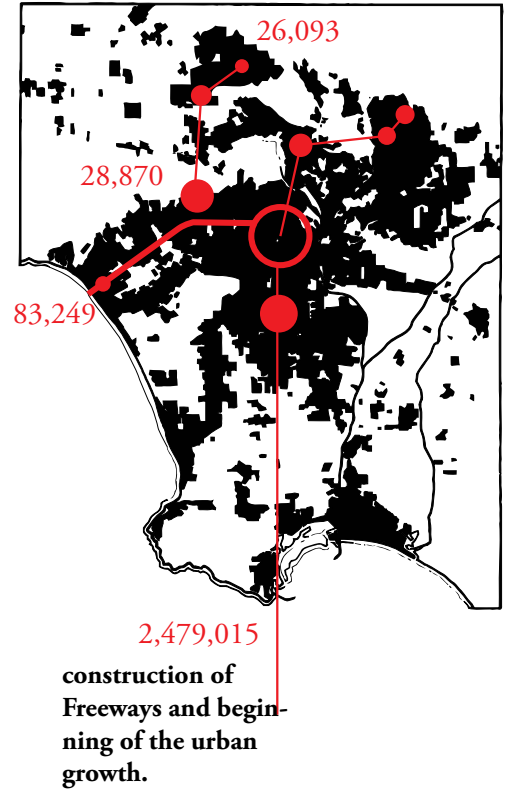
<sup>27</sup> Banham, Reyner. *Los Angeles The Architecture of Four Ecologies*,( London: The Penguin Press, 1971). 50

*Figure 16. 1906, San Fernando Valley; paved building lots were ready to transformed into one of the biggest suburbs in America.*

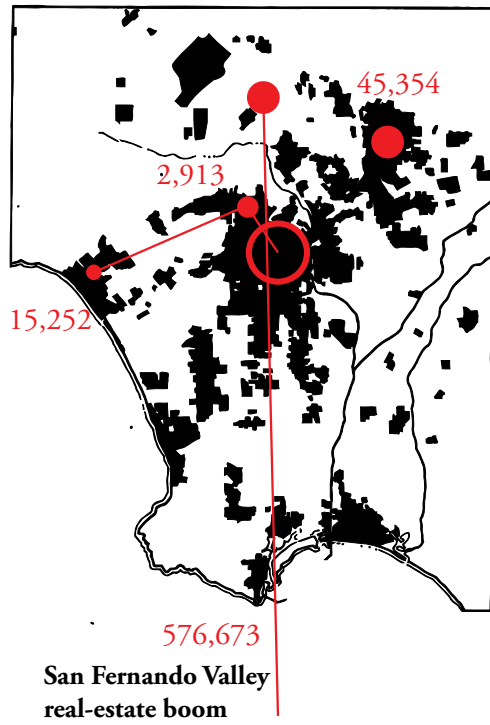
**1900, Population**



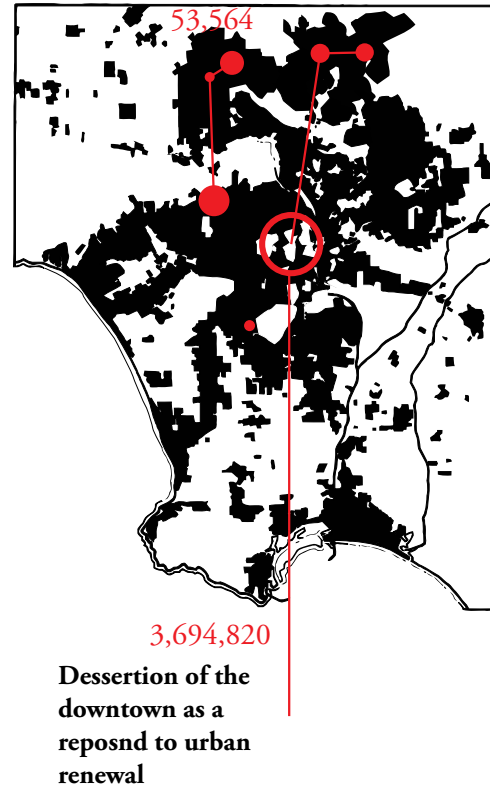
**1960, Population**



**1920, Population**



**2000, Population**



Banham would help shape perceptions of Los Angeles, by finding beauty in those aspects that other urban critics, such as Jane Jacobs and Peter Blake, had come to despise. Sprawl wasn't an urban blight but a dynamic extension of the city's individualist character. The beauty and complexity of the city was in the flow of people, goods, and ideas through its diffuse urban texture. "Mobility outweighs monumentality": it wasn't just about transport, it was a language of design, architecture and urbanism. Movement created vitality and an interchange, the city's freeways were a symbol of democracy and personal choice.

Banham changed the methodology of studying cities, describing the urban experience of being in a city, rather than analyzing it according to various urban theories. (Robert Venturi would use the same approach in his seminal book *Learning From Las Vegas*). By celebrating Los Angeles sprawling structure, he would help shape a movement that would replicate this ideology. Non-Plan urbanism wasn't Banham's baby alone, but he would help popularize it. It would go on to influence the development of other cities, such as Toronto. What's unique about Banham is that he helped sell the rest of the world on characteristics classically seen as blights, thus ensuring that other cities would be partially shaped in the image of Los Angeles.

*Figure 17. Patterns of the sprawl in Los Angeles 1900-2000.*



*“As I wandered about Los Angeles, looking for the basic meaning of the place, the fundamental source of its wealth and its economic identity, I found myself quite at sea. The Chamber of Commerce people told me about the concentration of fruit, the shipping, the Western branch factories put up by concerns in the East. But none of these things seemed the cause of a city. They seemed rather the effect, rising from an inexplicable accumulation of people - just as the immense dealings in second-hand automobiles and the great turnover of real estate were an effect. It struck me as an odd thing that here, alone of all the cities in America, there was no plausible answer to the question, “why did a town spring up here and why has it grown so big?”<sup>28</sup>*

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28 Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1967).<sup>87</sup>

*Figure 18. (Opposite Page)  
Los Angeles Downtown  
1943 Arrival of Automobile  
in Los Angeles and  
beginning of the sprawl.*

That quote by journalist Morris Markey (1899 ñ 1950) was written in 1932, and its sentiment is echoed in many of the criticisms about Los Angeles today. The city is often described as a “72 suburbs in search of a city”<sup>29</sup> or a sprawling fragmented metropolis, in search of an identity.

This absence at the heart of the city ñ a “no-topia”<sup>30</sup> has sparked decades of rejuvenation attempts. In this chapter, I shall explore the failures and successes of two such attempts, the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project of the late ‘50s onwards, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall rejuvenation today. Each scheme had some successes, but was also derailed because of historical events, and competing business interests and political groups.

However, there is a competing vision of the city, one where this absence is actually a positive attribute. This view, espoused in Reyner Banham in his book, *Los Angeles: the Architecture of Four Ecologies*, celebrates the chaotic mess of the city, where its dispersed centers are part of an ever-sprawling metropolis, an exciting city that “works.”<sup>31</sup>

*Figure 18. Los Angeles Freeways system or as Banham’s argued the city’s most fascinating monument.*

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29 *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology*, L. Ulin, David (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 112

30 A term by Reyner Banham referring to Los Angeles sprawl “As British Historian Reyner Banham suggested that the Los Angeles (supposedly) anti-aesthetic landscape was something that should replaced the established style of urbanism” Kazys Vranelis, *The Infrastructural City (Networked Ecologies in Los Angeles)* (New York: Actar, 2009). 12

31 Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London: The Penguin Press, 1971). 205

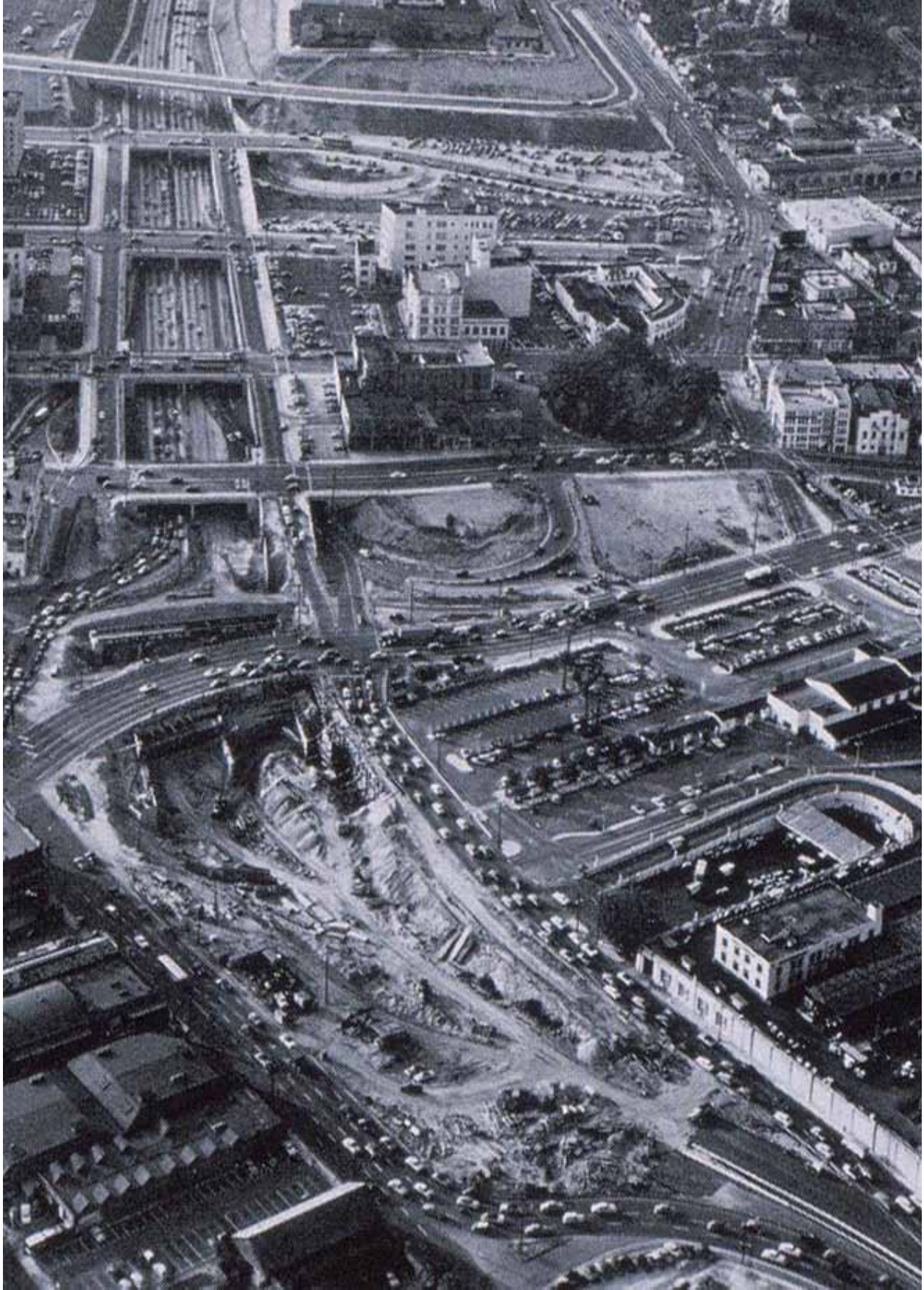


The fate of the downtown core has been highly contested over the years, and the critics and the media have branded the downtown core alternately as a slum and crime haunt, a soulless fortress, and a World City. Each of these labels have been used to sell a different version of the downtown core. With each attempt, the role of the historical downtown is questioned and contested. Ultimately, this jostling for identity fosters some of the energy and vitality of the city, providing an invigorating constant in a fragmented metropolis that constantly evolves.



**In the early years** of the city in the 1840s, Los Angeles had only one downtown, a Spanish Pueblo that grew up around a town providing goods and services to the ranching communities nearby. But with the rise of Hollywood, rival cores began to draw commerce and industry to the San Fernando Valley. The advent of the Pacific Electric Railway encouraged the development of the suburbs as did the automobile, as families moved to the city outskirts to live in detached single-family homes. Wilshire Boulevard, which runs from the downtown to Ocean Avenue in the City of Santa Monica, became a competing linear downtown core area as businesses sprung up the busy boulevard. By the 1940s, Wilshire Boulevard, one of the principal east-west arterial roads in the city, had become as significant as the historic downtown. Century City would also take prominence, rivaling the historic core for shops, industry, and business. In 1961, Century City was merely a backyard lot for Fox Studios, sold to developer William Zeckendorf and [Aluminum Co. of America]; The new owners decided to build a ‘city

*Figure 19. (Opposite) Los Angeles Civic Centre, early 1930's. Los Angeles Times brand new headquarter is standing strong as the new icon for the Downtown, reminding the absolute power of the newspaper over the city*



within a city<sup>32</sup>that would house leading hotels and entertainment centers. This would give Los Angeles had a topography we would probably recognize today: several cores, including Wilshire Boulevard, Century City, Bunker Hill, San Fernando Valley, and a sprawling metropolis, fragmented by parking lots and interconnected freeways.<sup>33</sup>

In 1949, President Harry Truman delivered his State of the Union Address promising “every segment of our population, and every individual, has a right to expect from his government a fair deal.”<sup>34</sup> Inspired by this historic legislation, L.A.’s mayor, Fletcher Bowron, supported by civil rights organizations, signed a contract with the federal government, promising to make “Los Angeles the first slum-free city in the nation,” by building 10,000 public housing units in areas like Chavez Ravine and Bunker Hill.

Social housing might have turned out a public good, but the proposal never got off the ground. The media, especially the Los Angeles Times, presented Bunker Hill as a “crime haunt,” and a “slum area.” In Bunker Hill, wrote the Los Angeles Times, “many families [are] composed of five or six persons crowded into one room. There is very little opportunity for young people to

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32 Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1967). 195

33 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990). 223 (Fortress L.A.)

34 Mike Davis, *Dead Cities* (New York: The New Press, 2002). 147

*Figure 20. (Opposite)  
Los Angeles, 1950, construction  
of the Hollywood Boulevard  
and Century City as the West  
L. A.’s new Downtown*



improve their standard of living under these conditions. Juvenile, as well as adult, crime flourishes in the transient, unsavory atmosphere of Bunker Hill.”<sup>35</sup>

While the newspaper had identified the neighborhood’s underlying social problems, it also had its own interests at stake. The Los Angeles Times was not only located nearby, it was on the board of the Central Business District Association, which was responsible for Bunker Hill’s economic growth.

Fearing an influx of low-income housing would exacerbate Bunker Hill’s social problems and bring about a decline in real-estate value, most of those with any power or wealth invested in the downtown were vehemently opposed. The Los Angeles Times and the Central Business District Association instead advocated slum-clearance of Bunker Hill’s tenement housing. In spring 1959, the city council approved the demolition of the neighborhood and within 18 months, its houses and streetcar tunnels were bulldozed as part of the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project. Its 12,000 residents were almost an after-thought; 2,000 were dumped to other parts of downtown -Skid Row- and the rest were displaced to the west bank of the Harbor Freeway.

Initially, there was no definitive development plan for the land after its clearance. After a series of studies, a downtown rejuvenation plan emerged called

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35 Los Angeles Times, July 5 1956.

*Figure 21. (Opposite) Los Angeles, 1955, Hollywood Boulevard. Freeways were simply superimposed on the city.*

Centropolis. Its primary vision was the linkage of new development on Bunker Hill with the revitalization of the fading financial district along Spring Street and the retail core along Broadway and Seventh Street. This plan might have been implemented had it not been for the Watts Riots of 1965. By the time the riots had ended on Sunday, 15 August, 34 people had died, more than 1,000 were injured and more than 600 buildings were damaged or destroyed by fire and looting. The flames of August 1965 had crept to within a few blocks of the downtown's southern perimeter, and the threat of future violence sparked fear in the early investors and caused many to invest in Century City instead.

We cannot know whether this Centropolis would have been a success had not intervened. However, it was not the last attempt the rejuvenation of the downtown was taken up again in 1972 by the Silver Book Plan<sup>36</sup>. This design improved transportation and pedestrian links between mixed-income downtown neighborhoods and expanded open space and parks. Ultimately, it was scrapped because competing business interests did not support it<sup>37</sup>, and the downtown core lay empty for more than twenty years after the initial demolition.

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<sup>36</sup> After the failure of the first plan, *Central City* L.A. became universally known as “the Silver Book” because of its striking metallic cover.

<sup>37</sup> Downtown simply became too big for local interests to dominate. Thus in 1979 the Times reported that a quarter of Downtown's major properties were foreign owners; six years later the figure was revised to 75 percent (one authority has even claimed 90 percent).

Mike Davis, *Dead Cities* (New York: The New Press, 2002). 155



In the 1950s, Mayor Fletcher Brown had proposed rejuvenation via social housing<sup>38</sup>, and the Los Angeles Times had opposed. The next proposed revitalization, Centropolis, had been scrapped because of the Watts Riots. The Silver Book Plan was castrated by competing business interests. Was it fate?

One theory, proposed by Reyner Banham, was that the absence of a downtown core was a manifestation of the character of the city.

In a city where private property can be more important than a public civic core, this absence was to be expected.

The city lacks a downtown core because “that is all the downtown that Los Angeles deserves.” Rather than worry, citizens should embrace this idiosyncrasy. A downtown core is important for cities geared around the pedestrian, but Los Angeles would never be such a city. It was dispersed, fragmented, vibrant and alive, and core or no core, he said, it will “work”.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Mayer Fletcher Bowron, supported by the CIO and civil-rights organizations, signed a contract with the federal government under the Housing Act of 1949 to make Los Angeles the first slum-free city in the nation by building ten thousand public housing unit in areas like Chavez Ravine (which later became the site of Dodger Stadium) and Bunker Hill (current financial district).

Mike Davis, *Dead Cities* (New York: The New Press, 2002). 147

39 From the 1972 documentary Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles.



## It must be this sense of irrelevance

that undermines any feeling of conviction in the architecture of the new buildings that have been put up (in Downtown) for commercial or civic purposes. They are a gutless-looking collection, neither tough-minded nor sensitive, neither architectural monuments nor Pop extravaganzas. Above all, they do not belong to Los Angeles, “but memorials to a certain insecurity of spirit among timid souls who cannot bear to go with the flow of Angelenos life.”<sup>40</sup>

Critics of globalization often discuss the transfer of power from elected government to unaccountable multi-national corporations (MNCs). Cities and their local governments compete for the businesses of these MNCs to create jobs for their residents; eager to offer a lean, mean business environment, they sell some of the municipal public institutions to private industry to reduce operating costs. In this transformation, the city loses some of its local character, becoming instead an empty shell filled with soulless executives.

While this is a broad generalization, several critics have

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<sup>40</sup> Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London: The Penguin Press, 1971). 210

*Figure 22. Downtown Los Angeles, 1971. Finally After two decades , the new Financial District was built over the historic site of Bunker Hill*

used this story to explain the landscape and economic story of the city. Some have compared Los Angeles with a financial fortress dominated by the headquarters of multinational corporations<sup>41</sup>, the statistics suggest they aren't totally off the mark; by 1985, 75 per cent of properties had foreign owners. The bleak mass of towering buildings have lead cultural critics, such as Peter Wollen<sup>42</sup>, to compare it to the set of Blade Runner- a soulless fragmented city where business interests dominate individuals.

Aware of its negative image, the city tried again (In 1986) to resuscitate its dismal downtown core. anxious to bolster his image for the coming gubernatorial race, Los Angeles' mayor Tom Bradley put together a committee with representatives from the private and public sectors to "prepare a strategic plan for future of downtown Los Angeles".<sup>43</sup>

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41 Mike Davis, *Dead Cities*(New York: The New Press, 2002). 70

42 "To see Blade Runner as simply exchanging New York for Los Angeles, but simply in reality, it provides an generalized image of a generic world city, rather than any particular conurbation."Blade Runner's Los Angeles is a conceptual montage of many different urban phenomena, drawn from a variety of sources. Theoretically this mishmash of deconstructed images sits perfectly with the true image of Los Angeles the home of the world's entrainment industry, dominating world imaginary, its spectacle is not original but stolen or borrowed from somewhere else. Peter Wollen, "Addressing the Post-urban," in *Blade Runner, Riddleyville and LA* (London: Routledge, 2002). 239

43 Tom Bradley, Los Angeles Mayor from 1973 to 1993, was the first African-American Mayor of the city. Bradley was supported by the coalition of Westside liberals, Southside blacks; labor unions , the downtown business establishment. As a response to his backers, he promised a mega-project downtown rejuvenation, with a slogan: Los Angeles a "world-class city", envisioning a thriving downtown boasting luxurious hotels towering office buildings. Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, *Los Angeles A-Z* (Los Angeles,

The committee was able to attract an unusual degree of attention from Los Angeles usually divided elites. The resulting report, *L.A. 2000: A City for the Future*<sup>44</sup> echoed earlier attempts to create a cultural hub at the centre of the city.

In 1988 the city council, along with The Walt Disney Company, launched an international competition for a concert hall at Bunker Hill. Together with the existing cultural venues, the Central Library (Bertram Goodhue, 1926), the Music Center (Welton Beckett and Associates, 1964), and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA, Arata Isosaki, 1987) the site was chosen to generate a continuous cultural belt emphasizing the powerful urban core.

The competition committee insisted in their brief introduction that competing architects should demonstrate an “understanding of the Walt Disney Concert Hall as a building block” of the city.”<sup>45</sup> From

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1997). 57-58

However Mike Davis painted Bradley’s plan as more a backroom deal with private investors: “Mayer Bradley established a corporate-dominated blue-ribbon committee to prepare a ‘strategic plan for Los Angeles’.

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990). 82

44 The catchy term *L.A. 2000: A city for Future* as Kevin Starr (in the epilogue of the report) put it was that the last coherent Los Angeles, that of the 1920s, found ‘community on civic level’ because it ‘had a dominant establishment and dominate population’ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990). 82

...Echoing the Allied Architects’ plan “civic acropolis” of parks and public building. The Allied Architects’ special cause was that of a landscaped “heart of the city,” through which key institutions, monuments, and destinations were to be linked by pedestrian-friendly greenways. Vinayak Bharne, “a note on downtown,” *LA forum*, no. 06 (2002). 80

45 Carol McMichael Reese and Thomas Ford Reese, “Gehry,

the outset, a genetic code for urban revitalization was part of the conception of the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Raising the bar, the competition gained huge publicity for downtown developers and the city council.

Rendered in Stainless steel, the concert hall was celebrated as “silver bullet” mega project, a \$240 million structure endowed with so much optimism and capital it promised to regenerate downtown single-handedly. To achieve this goal. The downtown would need not just a building, but a monument or “dramatic podium” that could energize the entire core.

This combination of star architect and spectacle was intended to recreate “Bilbao effect”. As Carol McMichael writes in the Walt Disney Concert Hall’s official monograph, it “was a symbol of the power of architecture to incite and nurture urbanism.” But beyond that, the concert hall was a product of longstanding dreams to make the downtown a symbol of the city’s collective enterprise, locating flagship buildings for government, commerce, and culture there. And, in the face of the downtown’s decentralization and disintegration, it was hoped that the building could bring investors back to the core.

In October 2003, after 16 years of building and planning, the Walt Disney Concert Hall opened to the public. Initially,

it seemed like the city had done the impossible providing a core for a “no-topia,” and created a second, if muted, Bilbao effect. A mini economic boom led to lucrative developments such as 3000 luxury-housing units and the Grand Avenue Project, a high-profile cultural district.<sup>46</sup>

While the initial reports seemed to silence critics, the market crash called into question the revitalization’s success. Having spent \$240 million on a single building, the downtown core did not flourish as promised and is still having economic troubles. The market crash of 2009 curtailed the downtown’s revitalization plans and many projects have been either cancelled or put on hold. [At the LA-based Caruso Affiliated real estate company, 100 condominiums sat empty in 2009, all of their downtown stock. To paraphrase Banham, Los Angeles spent millions, but it got all the downtown that it deserves.

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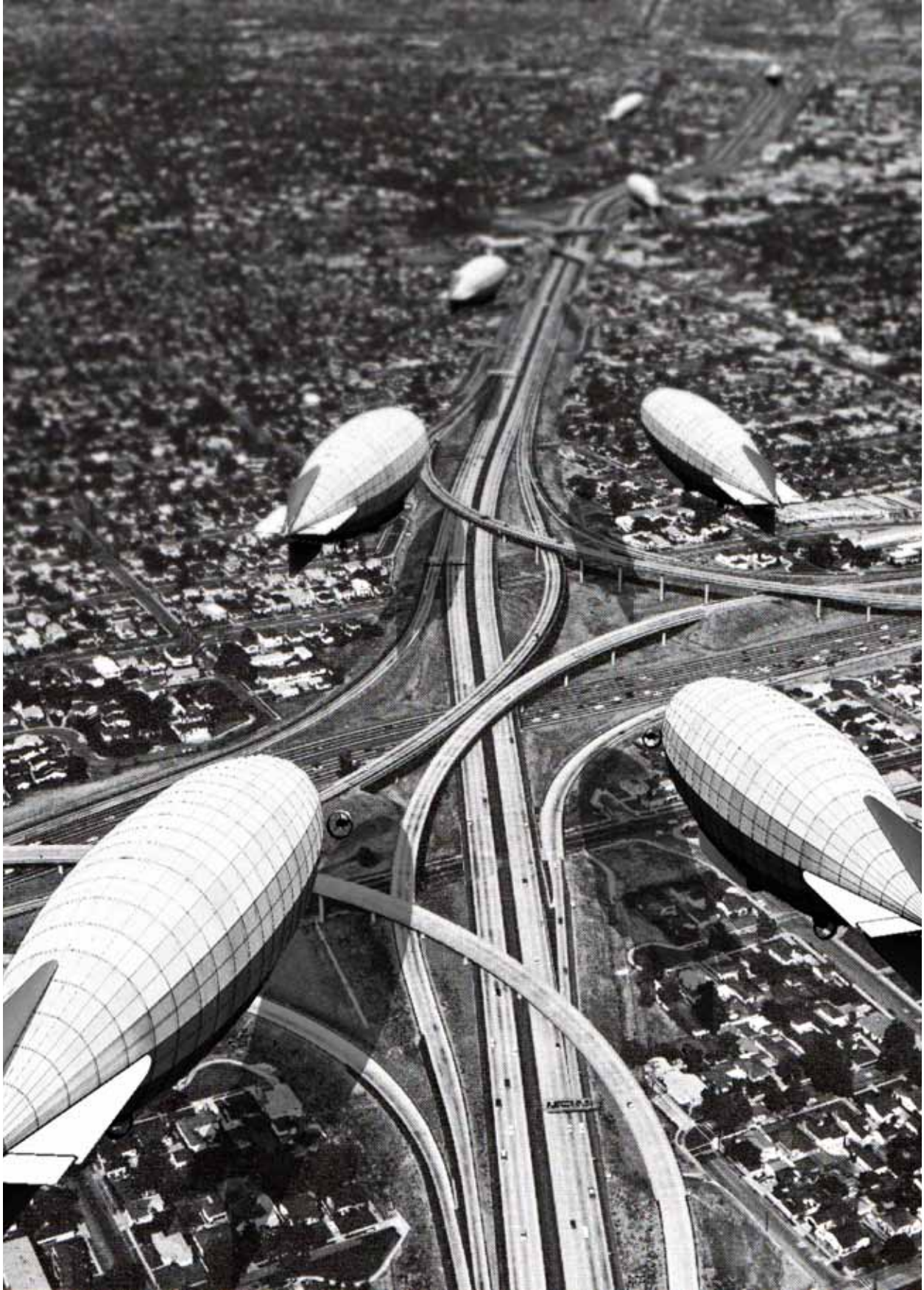
<sup>46</sup> In the early twenty-first century, downtown is a microcosm of the “prismatic metropolis” that Los Angeles has become. In the city of Los Angeles, the US Census 2000 reported a population of approximately 3.5 million, of which 40.9 percent are foreign-born and 57.8 percent speak a language other than English at home. Developing a unitary “civic center” with buildings of symbolic shared civic values is more challenging today in increasingly heterogeneous Los Angeles, or, for that matter, in any other globalizing city. Competing, or at least multi-present, centers represent a number of ethnicities downtown. Vinayak Bharne, “a note on downtown,” *LA forum*, no. 06 (2002). 4



*Figure 23. Empty Los Angeles  
by Matt Logue, 2010*



“Empty L.A.” by Matt Logue shows a number of recognizable intersections and stretches of freeway in and around the city where people, cars and other signs of life have been scrubbed away through digital manipulation. The end result looks eerily realistic, forcing us to question where fact ends and fiction begins. The photos may fetishize emptiness, but it justly does tell the story of the downtown. What is left to discuss at the end this game? Would the recent reassertion eventually kill Los Angeles? Would anyone notice? These questions can generate the plot for a movie of possible scenarios for the immediate future.



## TAKE FOUR

**“Los Angeles seems endlessly held between these extremes: of light and dark of surface and depth. Of the promise, in brief, of a meaning always hovering on the edge of significance.”**

Graham Clarke from the American City <sup>47</sup>

By the 1920s, Southern California had one of the largest concentrations of European intellectual émigrés in the United States. As a result of the Great Depression and the growing censorship of the Nazi party, waves of German directors like Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Robert Siodmak and Edward G. Ulmer immigrated to Hollywood. Many were Marxist students who had been educated at the Frankfurt school and were familiar with German expressionist cinema. With their socialist bent, they would write stories and criticism that would fundamentally change how Los Angeles marketed itself, and how it was perceived by the rest of the world.

*Figure 24. (Opposite)*

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<sup>47</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, (New York: Verso, 1990), 50

**Bunker Hill Pictured as Crime Hau**  
*Los Angeles Times Jul 5, 1956; pg. A1*

# Bunker Hill Pictured as Crime Haunt

**Report Stressing  
Need for Rebuilding  
Readied for Council**

Redevelopment of Bunker Hill will make a bright spot out of an area which the police now list as a haunt of major crimes and a breeding place for juvenile delinquency, William T. Sesnon Jr., chairman of the Community Redevelopment Agency, said yesterday.

Next Tuesday he is to present the City Council with tentative plans for an urban renewal project designed to transform the Bunker Hill district into a model business and apartment area.

"Los Angeles will find itself at a major crossroads of civic decision in the matter to be laid before the Council for approval," declared Sesnon, as he disclosed the contents of a report filed with him by the police on crime conditions in the Bunker Hill area.

“Louis Adamic, a Slovenian American author, was one of the most important writers from this group of immigrants. In his autobiography *Laughing in the Jungle* (1932), he explored Los Angeles’ chaotic strata and its fluky construction, creating a dynamic image of a city that would realize dreams, or crush an immigrant’s soul.

Los Angeles is America. A jungle. Los Angeles grew up suddenly, planlessly, under the stimuli of the adventurous spirit of millions of people and the profit motive. It is still growing. Here everything has a chance to thrive -for a while - as a rule only brief while ... this is freedom [here] under democracy. “Jungle democracy!”<sup>48</sup>

The jungle democracy metaphor was exciting it alluded to a city that provided immense opportunity, but also a survival of the fittest mindset that preyed on the weak. But that morality could be destructive too; excess materialism brought a lack of spiritual wealth and a preoccupation with appearances. The obsession with “making it” affected the soul, shaping the individual, and clouding spiritual growth. The intense focus on the individual affected personal relationships social interactions tended to stay on the surface, unable to penetrate the soul beneath, and some would say that this superficiality still dogs Los Angeles today. A sense

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<sup>48</sup> *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology*, L.Ulin, David (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 51

*Figure 25. (Opposite) Los Angeles Times Propagation; By 1950’s Los Angeles Times along with downtown business owners set out a campaign to portray Bunker Hill as a crime centre which eventually led to the demolition of the entire neighborhood*

of entitlement is common to its residents, and a lack of depth of character, he complained. Yet, despite his criticisms, a dynamism and sense of fascination runs through his text.

[Los Angelenos] “are possessed with a made drive which is not deeply rooted in their own personalities, but is rather a part of the place, this great region of eternal spring which stretches between Sierras and the sea, and which, of late years, has begun to capture the imagination of millions of people”<sup>49</sup>

Like Marx, Adamic grounded his writings in social criticism, espousing a political shift leftwards to answer these societal ills. But as his popularity grew, the social problems that he identified became part of the myth of Los Angeles.

Many of the city’s unsavory elements became ripe material for the influx of writers seeking out the easy climate and the quick money that came with working for a Hollywood studio. For these newcomers, L.A. was exotic territory, full of outlandish egos and macabre fantasies, “a funhouse mirror offering grotesquely exaggerated reflections of America itself.”<sup>50</sup>

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49 *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology*, L.Ulin, David (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 53

50 David L.Ulin, *Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology* (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 15

In any event, the seedier elements of Los Angeles would provide a counter-point to the American dream fantasy spouted by Hollywood's studio system. Beginning in 1934, with James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a succession of through-the-glass-darkly novels all produced by writers under contract to the studio system repainted the image of Los Angeles as an urban hell. These movies were made cheaply, and were the first movies to be made on the streets of Los Angeles rather than in studios.

It's hard to know whether these dark visions were a direct response to the Tungsten bright, Polyannaish fictions mass-produced by Hollywood. According to this theory, noir literature and films arose to counter-balance the sickening sweet, sentimental version of the city that had been sold to the rest of America. The glamorization of the city's seedier side was the flip side to relentless optimism produced by Hollywood. These films were championed by a number of French intellectuals, such as Nino Frank, who delighted in the debauched and depraved vision of Los Angeles, and the implied failure of the American dream. As James Naremore explains, "French admiration for common American movies [film noir] was often condescending, as if Hollywood were filled with charming primitive."<sup>51</sup> The cruel and dark atmosphere of film noir was a in

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<sup>51</sup> James Naremore, *Film Noir : The History of an Idea*, film Quarterly, Vol. 49. No. 2 (Winter, 1995-1996).12

favor of their view point toward the Hollywood and America. They immediately abducted these types of movie, which were often ignored by Hollywood studios and developed them in a frame of a genre.<sup>52</sup>

Another theory is that noir literature and film arose out of the personal frustrations of screenwriters like Faulkner and Brecht who were forced to sideline their creative works to make quick money writing scripts. This would be particularly true for Brecht, who failed to establish himself as a screenwriter, and whose only credit was on Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die*.

Brecht arrived in San Pedro harbor in July 1941, escaping political backlash Nazi Germany towards the radical politics espoused in plays like *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930). In the poems he wrote during this era, he lamented the shallowness of Hollywood and the small-minded rootlessness of its citizens. In his poem *Landscape of Exile*, he writes that Los Angelenos don't believe in hell but they don't need to, because while L.A. may be a heaven for the rich and successful for failed screenwriters, it "serves the unprosperous, unsuccessful as hell."

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<sup>52</sup> *Noir* (black) it is a French name for the specific style ,tone and visual effects of movies. Although film noir was originally from America, it was never considered as a genre in America until 1970 . Post-WWII French movie critics first used the term *noir*.



On thinking about Hell, I gather  
My brother Shelley found it was a place  
Much like the city of London. I  
Who live in Los Angeles and not in London  
Find, on thinking about Hell, that it must be  
Still more like Los Angeles<sup>53</sup>

This wasn't the first time that Brecht would refer to L.A. as a form of hell, swallowing everything in its path. But like many writers who immigrated to Los Angeles, Brecht's relationship with the city wasn't as black and white as this quote would suggest. Like Adamic, Brecht would usually bemoan the city, but sometimes he would also rejoice in its energy and seething variety of life, his poems on Los Angeles shift from hopeful images to those of despair. Consensus in Los Angeles, even for the individual, can be elusive.

Los Angeles would draw those with outsized ambitions, eccentrics who embraced its raw individualism. It is difficult to know whether its darker seedier side was actually worse than other cities, or its writers were simply better at creating and exporting these myths. Often the events in the media were so outrageous and scandalous that they would seem like fiction before they were fictionalized. The murder of 22-year old Elizabeth Short was so bizarre and macabre that it would fascinate movie makers, novelists and song

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<sup>53</sup> See Brecht, 'On Thinking About Hell', *Poems: 1913 – 1956. Writing Los Angeles: a Literary Anthology*, L.Ulin, David (New York: Library of Congress, 2002). 290

writers for decades after the 1947 murder. She was a young woman from a middle class family who ended up a call girl, according to true crime books published at the time<sup>54</sup>. A stunning beauty, with jet-black hair, known to wear sexy black dresses, she was given the nick-name the Black Dahlia, after the exotic flower used by the Aztecs in their religious ceremonies. An exotic beauty with a striking bone structure, was horrifically mutilated, her mouth slashed from ear to ear. The police investigation mounted by the LAPD was one of the largest ever, and would involve hundreds of officers borrowed from other law enforcement agencies. Thousands of people were interviewed by the police. Hundreds of people were considered suspect. The media hype had an effect on the psychology of the city, about sixty people confessed to her murder, mostly men, but also some women. It's no wonder that the murder would inspire a Nat King Cole song, and multiple movies and books, including one by Brian de Palma and the 1953 Fritz Lang film *The Blue Gardener*.

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54 Many elements of the murder are highly disputed. According to John Gilmore, whose father was an LAPD cop at the time of the murder, Elizabeth Short was not a prostitute, since her sexual organs were abnormal, and not fully developed. In his book, *Severed: The True Story of the Black Dahlia Murder*, Gilmore alleges that one of the suspects, Jack Wilson, a reclusive, alcoholic burglar, confessed to the murder, and admitted details that would have only been known to the murderer themselves. Unfortunately, Wilson died in a hotel fire days before his arrest. But the plot thickens, as according to Gilmore, before his death he also admitted to the murder of the promiscuous Hollywood socialite Georgette Bauerdorf. That case was covered up by the LAPD under pressure by William Randolph Hearst, who was a friend of Bauerdorf's father. Police corruption, murder, mutilation and a media tycoon: it's no wonder that Gilmore's book has been optioned by David Lynch.

Police corruption would crop up in many noir films and novels and its easy to see why. The story of the Clint Eastwood film, *Changeling*, was based on real story of Christine Collins, who was unjustly deceived and then committed to a mental institution. Collin's son went missing in 1928. The story would have ended there had not a child imposter come forward claiming to be her missing son. Anxious for a quick fix, the LAPD first urged her to accept the young boy as her own. When she spoke up, they worked with city authorities to brand her as delusional and commit her to a mental asylum.

Mark Twain was not speaking directly of Los Angeles when he said that "truth is stranger than fiction", but it is a city where the two often feed each other. The LAPD has long been associated with questionable tactics and policies, from its corrupt handling of Ms. Collins to the Red Squads and their attacks on Communists. Events like the Watts Riots of 1965 and the Rodney-King beating in 1991 would traumatize the United States, leaving an indelible scar on the nation's psyche. But in the chaotic interchange between art and life that is Los Angeles, these tragic events would not only dominate the news, they would come to seep into America's fictional fabric. The novel *The New Centurions*, by Joseph Wambaugh, not only culminates in the Watts Riot but examines how the racism of the police affected the black community in the years preceding it. Frank Zappa wrote a song inspired by the Watts Riots, entitled *Trouble Every Day*, with the



lines like “Wednesday I watched the riot / Seen the cops out on the street / Watched ‘em throwin’ rocks and stuff /And chokin’ in the heat”.

Was police corruption and brutality that much worse than in other cities? Or were those ambitious writers manufacturing a dark mirage, carving out a noir literature that would come to define a whole genre of hard-boiled fiction? Having never been to Los Angeles, but only experienced it through its fictions and media, I cannot know, but this myth continues to exert a hold on my own and many other imaginations. Noir cinema has influenced a multitude of hard-boiled, expressionist and dystopic cinema, including films like *Blade Runner*, *True Confessions* and *L.A. Confidential*. It became a necessary part of the language used to describe the city. As Norman Klein said in the documentary *Inventing LA: The Chandlers And Their Times*:

“the dark side of Los Angeles became part of the fantasy, people like the anti-booster affair even more than the booster affair, they like the dark and sinister and ironic Los Angeles.”



*Figure 27 / 28. 'Off world'  
Screen capture from the Blade  
Runner. The blimp floats above  
the city promising everyone a  
fresh new start off world*

**Blade Runner** is perhaps one of the most influential movies of all time. It revolutionized the science fiction genre. Adapted from the Philip K. Dick novel “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?” *Blade Runner* sits within a postmodern science fiction genre: dialectic and apocalyptic. The story begins after a disaster and without further introduction; survivors are condemned to live in a derelict city. Throughout the movie, we see advertisements promising a better life in the “Off-world colonies,” a cryptic message that combines the optimism of starting afresh in suburbia, with dystopian insinuations about what happens in a “colony”. The ads float on airships or are projected onto skyscrapers. In contrast to the gloomy, gritty streets, they are dazzling and alienating. They flash escapism. The leftover city is a juxtaposition of promising ads (foreground/surface) over the image of a skirmish city (background/ depth).



*Figure 29. 'Neon'  
Screen Capture from  
the Blade Runner*



**The gloomy atmosphere** and neon lights hark back to earlier incarnations of L.A.'s film noir genre, movies such as *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957) the overcrowded streets. *Blade Runner's* first task is to depict two cities: the derelict slums where heterogeneous crowds of common people live and the isolated skyscrapers of power. This dichotomy is a visual exaggeration of the real-life divisions of Los Angeles, often called an enclave city. Yet although the movie is clearly set in L.A, we see that this could be any world city; we never see anything other than a man-made built environment with a mass of crowded skyscrapers, airships, and billboards. Even the weather has been manufactured; the buildings are so tall that they cause convection rainfall, so it is always raining. Ironically, the label world-city, with its associations of generic homogeneity, was used to advertise LA's downtown development project in 1986. As Mike Davis suggests, "the city of *Blade Runner* presents a conceptual future of Los Angeles. It is both the city which Los Angeles wishes to be, perceived in boosterish, optimistic terms from the vantage point of an elite, and that which it fears it will become."<sup>55</sup>

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55 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York: Verso, 1990). 83



*Figure 30 / 31. 'Los Angeles 2019'  
Screen capture from the Blade Runner.*

## **Blade Runner's city is a montage**

of many different urban phenomena; an eclectic mixture of western and eastern urbanism, suggesting a world-city of multiple competing influences. Theoretically, this mishmash montage of images sits perfectly with the true image of Los Angeles, which (as Banham proposes) resists a coherent identity and easy categorization and instead embraces conglomeration of different styles. The urban design of the city stands against a defined style, thus becomes more an act of montage.

Blade Runner might be seen an ordinary sci-fi movie but it is more than that, it correctly predicted the future of urbanism: the way cities are designed and the way they are (supposed) to be seen.

Noir movies may be a direct product of (or reaction to) Los Angeles, but, gradually they turned into the medium, through which the city is presented and perceived.



*Figure 32. Vermont Street  
day after the riots*

## TAKE FIVE

**“Sometimes, we have to be a little loud to make certain that we are heard.”**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, called riots ‘the voice of unheard’.<sup>56</sup>

One popular view of Los Angeles is of an enlightened city where everyone is equal and enjoying life in the sun with few worries. The fact that the 1992 fire triggered from video footage and followed by TV footages, makes the riot especial, definitely city entered new level, defines differently almost remote and boarder less. Mass media was the only valid representation of the city. As one of South Central resident, recalled:

“They (the government) knew there would be riots because they called and told us, they called at the first night April 29, while we were at the meeting, they blocked off the freeways and cut off the lights on the streets. We were trapped. On Saturday evening, the

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<sup>56</sup> James, Darryl, ed. *The Los Angeles Riots*. (Los Angeles: Tenacious Entertainment, 2002). 4



*Figure 33. Watts Los Angeles  
1965 National Guards patrolling  
the streets after a week riot.*

National Guard came in, marching and leaving nobody behind them. You came out either of the stores, or you got shot. The next morning, when allowed to come out, we walked down to 103rd and blood was running down the curbs like water, from where they had shot up people all night.”<sup>57</sup>

On Wednesday, April 29, 1992, at about 6 pm, the major networks stopped their daily schedules to report a shocking turn of events. Watching with my family in Tehran, I could not believe my eyes. More than 300 angry protesters were gathered at the intersection of Florence and Normandie in South Central Los Angeles. A new group of protesters appeared at Parker Center, the LAPD’s headquarters. The protesters were stopping and pulling people out of their cars to beat and rob those inside, mainly targeting whites.

The riots had several underlying causes unemployment, racial tensions, and poverty. However, they were mainly

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57 Ibid. 32

*Figure 29. Los Angeles 2003,  
City Council decided to change  
the name of South Central*

sparked by the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department officers, who had beaten an African-American motorist Rodney King following a high-speed pursuit. The footage of that beating, captured by on a camcorder by a local resident shooting from his apartment, was broadcast all over the media.

After six days of rioting, that captured media interest worldwide, at least 53 died and thousands were injured. Widespread looting, assault, arson and murder occurred—property damages topped roughly \$1 billion (US).

The riots created a psychotic scar on the nation. The land of the free had fallen into chaos, people were murdered in broad day light, and all the while the cameras rolled. Many went through a period of soul searching the L.A. police, who already had the reputation of being brutal and corrupt, tried to diversify their forces, adding more minorities. In response to the high unemployment rates, financial assistance was provided to the area to draw new retail stores and create new jobs. The media, which was highly criticized for sensationalized reporting, also attempted to change. When the four officers were retried (two were found guilty and two were acquitted), it toned down its coverage of the verdict, although many would argue that this was a short-lived change.

Ten years later, South Central has changed it is more racially mixed, whites and Asians had moved into the area.



There had been some gentrification, although problems of poverty and gang violence persist. To counter-act its recurring image problem South Central, which had become synonymous with poverty and crime voted to change its name to South Los Angeles. “South Central Los Angeles has been removed from the map of LA, in an effort to rid the area of its international image of gang violence and poverty, reported the BBC on 23 April 2003. Once again, Los Angeles was trying craft an alternative, better image of itself. Would it work this time? Would a re-branding shift people’s perceptions, removing the negative associations of that neighborhood? It is still too early to tell.

# FICTIONAL CONCLUSION

*There is a city, which constantly trumps paradise; it is a dream-factory pumping out glossy lavish lifestyles. Here prosperity has taken root and branches in almost every imaginable shape. It is cosmopolitan (m dash) immense and expanding because of the mental slavery of those that are explicitly hired to make its images better.*

*Los Angeles is all about perfection: an exaggeration model of pleasure.*

*There is another city, dark and polluted. Gang members open fire in the streets, burning everything in their way. Poverty is booming; crime is a growth industry. If there once was a dream, here you will find yourself trapped in the morning by an army of homeless roam furious and in the nights you will hear the bullet sound bites.*

*Los Angeles is all about perfection: an exaggeration of brawl.*

The immediate question that emerges at the end of this book is how to define a city from many fragments. In a society, which everything has been reduced to media driven representation, it is hard to excavate facts from fictions. Stories from Los Angeles were proof of this matter, as myths often overshadowed the truth and became factual statements. Thus, in this unclear climate, any possible conclusion is weak, since known facts are dubious. There are subjective to their sources and readers.

‘Good or Bad’, it is upon the reader to define the final image and to conclude the most appropriate version of the ‘truth’. That is how I entered Los Angeles, somewhere between the story of the Los Angeles aqueduct (the emergence of the myth) and the riot’s aftermath (the collapse of the myth). I tried to define an identity for the city, by pulling out what has been told and what has been shown. I have experienced it more through its myths than I could ever have in person.

Los Angeles knows best - how to get back to what really is, like movies. It consists only of perfected (enhanced) shots. Ten years after the ‘riots’, ten years of ideas, plans

and debates, the only verdict was to ignore them all and blindly change the name. And then, there is no longer South Central on the Los Angeles map.

### **‘Problem solved’!**

The entire intellectual analyzes of the L.A riot did not solve anything. Instead, think of a ‘blockbuster movie’ with exciting colors, sound, and edge-of-your-seat action. It is designed to precisely contradict the reality. It offers a simple trip from A to B, an escape from every day

Los Angeles is an endless thriller, the gun fights and car chases brought to you by news crews with helicopters. It is on you, the non-citizens, to decide which version sticks. You may be far from the action, but you cannot easily disregard its effect. Los Angeles (myth) constantly shapes our lives. You are enslaved by the city’s myth.

Those of you, who are enslaved by the city, are probably too busy trying to figure out your own lives, or too busy becoming ignorant of reality.

It was never the question of what the city is exactly but, rather, what it wants to be.

So, as in theater, you can select ‘your desired script’, ‘your reality of choice’. With Los Angeles, you just have to choose your favorite version of the city. It is, after all, a

movie with no particular ending. All you have to do is to sit back and try to enjoy the popcorn.

There is no need for dense theoretical justification for pop-culture. It is there, somewhere. The situation only becomes critical when pop-culture is turned into a lifestyle. It is obvious that television and the Internet- what I called the 'image-fiction entertainment'- has changed our perspective of the world. We are becoming one nation of viewers. Media has become our window to the world as well as diversion from it. Our addiction to image-fiction has altered our perceptions. We have a new "family", one we watch passively on TV or communicate with via Internet. We cannot escape media's invasion into our 'lives' nor do we want to. We literally cannot imagine life without the media. We have no memory of a world without a digital definition. So what is happening to the rest of 'daily' life? We are neglecting it, simply escaping to the imaginary world of media. We are staying perpetually on vacation.

This thesis started with constant reference to a famous phrase belongs to Walter Benjamin in early 20th century and in the midst capitalism: 'cities to be looked at rather than lived in' constantly in mind. Los Angeles is the paradigm of such cities - a city in which spectacle is privileged over substance and constructed 'temporality' becomes 'permanence'.

The superimposition of 'image-fiction' over the real world was my method for excavating Los Angeles. The final conclusion, per se, it is a fictional proposition. Driven from a popular icon, a pop object, blimp is simply a superimposition. The blimp determines an interpretation of the city. Each vignette is spare and uncluttered, and yet they suggest very different narratives. In the vignettes, the blimp acts as a vanishing point – determining the relationship between the objects in the design. Both are visual representations of zero, which in turn is a visual metaphor for a city characterized by absence, superficiality and emptiness.

There are no simple conclusions, rather than an act of watching.

**The intermission is over. We can go back to the theater now.**























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# THE TYPEFACE

This document is set in Sabon, designed by Jan Tschichold. The Roman is based on a specimen of Garamond by the Frankfurt printer Konrad Berner; the independent Italic is based on faces by Robert Grandjon.