‘the metropolis and five stages of modernity’ is an explorative research on contemporary ecologies and the historic (re)-emergence of public domain, infrastructure and urban form in Los Angeles
Los Angeles

“The world of supermodernity does not exactly match the one in which we believe we live, for we live in
a world that we have not yet learned to look at. We have to relearn to think about space”.
Marc Augié (1995)
“Fascinating research has been done on the rich history of (popular) culture in the LA metropolis...”
Fig. 01. Four urban schemes for the LA region by the Department of City Planning - 1967

Fig. 02. Preliminary city-wide plan prepared for consideration - 1970
“...However, these manifestations can never exist independently from the materiality of the tangible city. This thesis is mostly about that Los Angeles”.
Prologue

“So, like earlier generations of English intellectuals who taught themselves Italian in order to read Dante in the original, I learned to drive to read Los Angeles in the original”. Reyner Banham (1970)

Unlike the planners utopias neither the ancient city nor the contemporary metropolis is the work of an individual genius. The city is rather a collective creation of ordinary people. An organism that works, grows, shrinks and evolves. Nowadays a lot of cities seem to suffer from sentimental considerations, denying the fact that they are part of a larger whole and as such completely ignoring dimensions of an entirely different order. More than cities we should talk about urbanisation. Transformational processes and frozen politics. Memories without time and clones without originals. Los Angeles is then a wonderful place to exploit.

I started looking at the city, and developed several hypotheses. I followed my curiosity and tried not be judgemental. My believe is that cities do not happen because of nothing, or because of a collection of happy accidents. My main hypothesis is that cities are simple, traceable and more about evolution then revolution. In retrospective this thesis juxtaposes urban materiality and theory, questioning the relation between concepts as ecology, urban form, infrastructures and public domain. This thesis is done in the Urbanism MSc programme within the Faculty of Architecture at Delft University of Technology. The projects was like a marathon where the finishline continously moved. I hope that - more than giving answers - this thesis outlines a framework for questions that keep on coming.

Jorick Beijer

Introduction

Los Angeles is ‘everywhere’, since everyone has seen it at least once on television (Saïa, 1989). That is how it too often has been analysed in a popular academic way (Davis, 1990). A city ‘Stranger than Fiction’ (Berlage, 2010). A ‘simulacrum’, presenting reality as a dream experience (Boonkens, 1989). Los Angeles ‘Plays itself’ (2003).

Not neglecting an utterly rich history of popular music. From the Beach Boys to NWA, the ‘X’ and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Fascinating research has been done on both of these cultural expressions. This thesis is studying the environment where these originate from. The not so fancy spatial diagrams of the late 60s and early 70s might just meant a lot to those pop-cultures. Hence, these manifestations are artefacts from a very tangible materiality, directly or as a residual. This thesis is mostly about that tangible Los Angeles.

Los Angeles as a city regions gives place to around 17 million people and features a vast, homogenous landscape of diffuse sprawl, radically reinforced by the freeways making more and more land available for settlement. The momentum of expansion sustained, sprawl, radically reinforced by the freeways implemented by the city government with extensive network of the car. The typical pattern of sprawl was thus already established before the arrival of the automobile. After having served their purpose, the train lines were rapidly replaced by the more flexible and extensive network of the car.

The momentum of expansion sustained, making more and more land available for sprawl, radically reinforced by the freeways implemented by the city government with the intention to move people in and out the congested city. It made Los Angeles city explode, in the number of inhabitants but also in size. It didn’t take long before those freeways were completely gridlocked. Resulting in a vast, homogenous landscape of diffuse sprawl, where clusters started congealing.

This postmetropolitan city-scape features a great set of layers, cultures and liberties. After the 20th century of enclosure, nowadays relations are based on the understanding that everything appears in plural and one understands that we can be multiple people at the same time without being schizophrenic. A person inhabiting a place in a city can be at the same time and without contradiction inhabiting a street, a neighbourhood, a city and a nation.

Each of these simultaneous ‘identities’ involves different relations to objects around one, in special to transportation technologies, to physical networks.

On the other hand there are different ecologies supporting each of these different identities and these ecologies or the persons relations to them are different for a person inhabiting the contemporary city to the way they were for someone inhabiting the same spot in 1980 or 1930. Nowadays people inhabiting a shopping street will relate to it through an ecology of the metropolis, formed by the freeway, whereas those in the 1930s and 1880s will have related to it by way of the streetcar, stagecoach or by walking.

This thesis aims to develop an understanding of how patterns of daily activity evolved over the years and where these patterns relate to. I am eager to understand how these patterns created a kind of centrality and clustering, and what this meant for the way public space in these phases has been (re)formed. This may not really be a problem, but I believe that this is not necessarily the starting point of a research.

My objectives are to investigate how different stages of modernity made different ecologies (re-)emerge in Los Angeles, how the public domain of emerging centralities is formed and how design interventions can contribute to their meaning for local life. Looking beyond the mirrored simulacrum and beyond the decorated skin. Bypassing Hollywood. Exploiting the armatures that really form.

Los Angeles is ‘Plays itself’ (2003). Not neglecting an utterly rich history of popular music. From the Beach Boys to NWA, the ‘X’ and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Fascinating research has been done on both of these cultural expressions. This thesis is studying the environment where these originate from. The not so fancy spatial diagrams of the late 60s and early 70s might just meant a lot to those pop-cultures. Hence, these manifestations are artefacts from a very tangible materiality, directly or as a residual. This thesis is mostly about that tangible Los Angeles.

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My fascination for Los Angeles has been catalysed by Reyner Banhams book ‘Los Angeles: the architecture of four ecologies’. His celebration of the four ecologies is an interesting starting point for the investigation on contemporary ecologies. In retrospective this thesis juxtaposes urban materiality and urban theory, questioning the relation between concepts as ecology, urban form, infrastructures and public domain.
fig 04. A nightview on the 101 highway.

fig 05. Sprawling suburbia and floating infrastructures.

fig 06. Downtown Los Angeles - the urban 'theme park'.

fig 07. Chinatown, Downtown Los Angeles.
# Prologue
- 8 Prologue
- 8 Introduction
- 11 Content
- 12 Research & methods
- 14 Talking about Los Angeles

# Project
- 20 Emerging regional form
- 28 Ecology
- 30 Centrality?
- 38 Ecology of joy
- 44 Foodurbia
- 46 Public domain
- 49 Evolving urban form
- 50 Santa Monica 1891
- 52 Santa Monica 1950
- 54 Santa Monica 1970
- 56 Santa Monica 2011
- 58 Downtown LA 1888
- 60 Downtown LA 1929
- 62 Downtown LA 1970
- 64 Downtown LA 2011
- 66 Place(-making)
- 70 Shopurbia
- 72 On shopping

# Thesis
- 76 Thesis overview
- 77 1888 the ecology of walking, tasting modernity
- 78 1929 collective modernity; the ecology of the street car
- 79 1970 autopia; persuasive modernity
- 80 2011 a supermodernity of residual ecologies
- 81 2028 linked by the sky; intopia
- 82 Design laboratory
- 84 skytrain
- 94 station
- 99 zones
- 100 lab: little tokyo
- 104 lab: 8th and Olive
- 108 lab: pershing central
- 112 casestudies

# Epilogue
- 116 Reflection
- 117 literature
- 117 images
- 118 Samenvatting
- 119 Acknowledgments

# Appendix
- 120 Interviews
- 120 Jeffrey Kipnis
- 122 Michael Rotondi
- 123 Peter Zellner
- 125 Hernan Diaz Alonso
- 126 David Rogers
- 128 Benjamin Bratton
- 129 Wes Jones
- 130 Margaret Crawford
- 132 Martin Wachs
- 133 David Bergman
- 135 Eric Owen Moss
- 136 Edward Soja
- 139 Rene Daalder
- 143 Sir Peter Cook
The content of this research on purpose has a fragmented character. Just as the city it exploits has. All sixteen chapters are readable independently and although they are analysed some sort of isolated — there is an coherent order. The research has two parts, the project and the thesis.

The project elaborates through the scales of metropolis (from the region to the street) and links every scale to a theoretical concept. The regional metropolis with that of urban ecology, the focus on downtowns with the concepts of public domain and the scale of the street/shopping mall to the questions of placemaking. Intertwoven are small side steps with an introductory interview and two essays based on my own experiences in Los Angeles.

The thesis starts with an integral overview. This sets out my arguments, built upon the research done in the project. Then it starts with a positioning of my thesis in the discourse of critical city making which forms the beginning of the design laboratory. That elaborates towards a design strategy in the realm of optimistic utopian and is finally critically reflected and positioned in relation to the findings of the research project.
1.1) Motivation

My motivation regarding urban planning and design is intrinsic. Not only because of the fun I experience envisioning the build environment, but more because I deeply believe in the big responsibility that we as academics and designers / planners share. A responsibility to put maximum effort in using our talent and to put this in favour of our main client: the society.

Los Angeles became the place that gave me the possibility to visit for multiple months and join a local design school. It offered me the chance to explore one of the most intriguing cityscapes in the Western World.

For my graduation project I chose the Complex Cities studio, within the chair of Spatial Planning & Strategy. The reason why I chose this studio lays in their approach on methodology in research. The idea that problems and solutions co-evolve fits very well in my explorative research approach.

1.2) Societal & academic relevance

The societal relevance of this research projects lays in the fact that we in a global context, see more and more people living in peripheral suburban areas of metropolitan city regions. Defining problems in this relation and developing intervention strategies that create more inclusive and diverse centrality is then a relevant task.

The aim of this project, exploring how the ecology post-suburbia emerged, how the public domain of emerging centralities is formed and how design interventions could contribute to their meaning for local life, is academic relevant because of this relation. There has been done a lot of impressive research on the post-modern metropolis and its society, but I want to bring this a small step further by more in depth explorations on public space and developing intervention strategies.

1.3) Glossary

Every research in a certain direction of (practical) science has its own definitions and jargon. For my graduation project I want to define my very personal interpretations of some of these words.

Clustering: The phenomena of demixing of some of these words.

Centrality: A concentration of functions and activities, directly related to local life.

(urban) Ecology: The territory of urban culture. The environment where urban form, landscape typology and people are related.

LA: Los Angeles, in this thesis constantly used interchangeably

Defining this, I’m very aware of the fact that there is a huge amount of definitions regarding for instance ‘centrality’. With regard to this I chose to define them in my own way, and by that narrow the scope of my research a bit.

1.4) Involved specializations

Finding the right mentors for a intensive year of thesis is quite a challenge. I am very happy with the combination of characters that I could trigger to help me along the way. The mix of backgrounds in my mentor team and their attitude towards doing research makes that I am very happy to work with the following mentors.

Stephen Read
Chair of Spatial Planning & Strategy, TU Delft.

With dr. Read as my first mentor I think that I can succeed in really doing a research project, and not just a design project. His experience in research combining theory and historical application is of great value and I appreciate his strictness on rational thinking in research.

Hengo Bekker
Chair of Urban Design, TU Delft.

The reason why I have asked prof. Bekker as my second mentor was the fact that I didn’t want to end my project only in a theoretical conclusion. Eventually developing good design interventions would for me a much more satisfying result since I still consider myself as an urban designer.

Wouter Vanstiphout
Chair of Design as Politics, TU Delft.

Prof. Vanstiphout has a great understanding of the context of Los Angeles, and already for only that reason his contributions are really valuable. But also his experience in field-research, socio-political relationships and contemporary criticism fits very well in the way I want to organise my research. Prof. Vanstiphout is involved as a supporting mentor, not as an official mentor.

1.5) Research questions and aims

My research will be focused on the role of the public domain in emerging centralities in Los Angeles and how design interventions could contribute to their meaning for daily local life. The thesis is built upon 4 main concepts: ecology, public domain, infrastructure and urban form. This could be interpreted as multiple projects, but that’s not what I want to do - although it would certainly be possible. I am very much interested in how these 4 concepts (have) relates to each other, both in theory as in ‘reality. The timeframes that come back in my whole research are first the situation of around 1890, the 1940 city with streetcar network, then the city with flowing freeways of 1970 and at last the city of 2010 with its gridlocked infrastructures. The main research question is:

How did the public domain of Los Angeles’ post-metropolis evolve over time in relation to centrality and clustering, and how can design interventions contribute to the meaning of these spaces on a local scale?

This question is in two ways twofold. First within the research part it distinct the development of city form on a regional scale from the understanding of public domain, on a very local scale. Secondly I hope that it clearly distinguishes the aim that I want to do an explorative research and use that for any kind of design interventions.

In order to elaborate further on the broad main research question I made the following 6 sub-questions. That seems to be a lot, and of course making combinations would be possible. I chose to not do this since I want to be as explicit as possible in underpinning which methods I aim to use and what kind of outcomes are expected.

1. How is ecology, and the specific ecology of Los Angeles, theoretically defined?

This question is most directly derived from my thesis title. First I will analyze the (American) origin of ecology, the definition by the Chicago school, and later by the way that the LA School gave it another meaning. I will elaborate further on how it was Reyner Banham being one of the first to define something as he called the ecology of the freeway, ‘autopia’, in his 1970’s ‘The architecture of four ecologies’. The work of Kazys Varnelis takes this definition a step further by proposing that the contemporary ecology is a kind of reappearance of earlier ones, as a kind of shadow of history.

2. How does modern and post-modern theory describe the over time changing meaning of ‘public domain’?

[theory frame] This is a rather broad question, but I’m very much interested in the changes that the public domain went through, from the time of the streetcar city to Autopia. This shadow of history might affected clustering and centrality in the public domain of the city.

3. How did patterns of daily activity in Los Angeles change, and where are these patterns linked to?

This question should form the bridge between theory and actual looking to the city. Within the here above mentioned four timeframes I want to understand how Los Angeles transformed from a historic core to a vast post-suburban regional city.

4. What did these changes mean in terms of centrality and clustering on the scale of the city?

Building further on question 3, this question should help me to understand the relation between the form of the city and the way how in it, centrality and clustering is shaped. Post-suburbia seems to be a synonym for homogenous sprawl and I want to find out if that is true, or if there might be a pattern or hierarchy of centrality. In this regard, and as shown in the glossary, with centrality I mean a kind of concentration of functions and activities, directly related to local life. With clustering I mean the phenomena of demising of social, ethnical and cultural groups.

5. How did this changing patterns affect public space in these centralities in each phase?

This question is intended to get an understanding of the presence and meaning of the public domain, in the centralities found (or not found) in question 4. Not only in the contemporary post-suburban moment, but in the same timeframes mentioned in question 3. The idea is that I will select three places in question 4, and use those from that moment on for analysis.

6. What in these centralities needs changes, adaptation or reinforcement?

After analyzing these centralities in a descriptive way, this question should help me with getting a more normative point of view. I aim to do this in order to bridge the research and the design, as a tool to give me guidelines for proposing any kind of intervention.

7. How can architecture and urban design contribute to more diverse and inclusive centralities?

This question should then explore possibilities to do ‘something’ with the outcomes of question 6. For me it’s not self-evident that all the three centralities need a design intervention to make it good. If the analysis shows that this is already the case, then my contribution could be to, as a kind of extreme laboratory, intensify or reduce this, or maybe re-create them somewhere else.

1.6) Methods

Methodology during the graduation project basically describes the different methods that are going to be used during the research and the expected outcomes. The different sub-research questions require different methods in order to answer them. In this sub-section I will shortly list the methods that I want to use for each sub-question and elaborate on how they work together.

1. How is ecology, and the specific ecology of Los Angeles, theoretically defined?


2. How does modern and post-modern theory describe the over time changing meaning of ‘public domain’?


3. How did patterns of daily activity in Los Angeles change, and where are these patterns linked to?

Mapping: With mapping I mean drawing a set of maps that represent the development of the city form of Los Angeles in four timeframes (1900, 1930, 1970 and 2010).

4. What did these changes mean in terms of centrality and clustering on the scale of the city?

Relating, layering, the found centralities to demographic clusters as racial background and income. This is done by mapping
functional indicators of centrality as: atm’s, churches, food chains, post offices etc. But I also want to map Census statistics to relate these maps to ethnicity.

5. How did this changing pattern affect public space in these centralities in each phase?

Mapping the historical development of the selected centres in relation to the public domain in the mentioned four timeframes.

6. What in these centralities needs changes, adaptation or reinforcement?

Own observations supported by means of writing, photography and maybe video. But also the observations of residents, by interviews & mental maps. This I will do during my exchange term at SCI-Arc (January – May 2012).

7. How can architecture and urban design contribute to more diverse and inclusive centralities?

Research by Design and case studies on comparable projects in Los Angeles. I see the research by design as the way how the design interventions are supported by the research done before, but in the same time also how the design can lead to new insights that could be analysed again.
Talking about Los Angeles

During my stay in Los Angeles I interviewed a rather diverse group of people about their Los Angeles. From personal reminiscences to professional observations and scientific research. Architects, professors, a Dutch screenwriter and a media theorist. In talks ranging from 20 minutes to over 2 hours, I got the chance to look through their glasses and reflect on some of my own notions. The dazzling amount of text would be way to extensive for this introduction. I have chosen to edit all the talks into one ongoing discussion about a place that never boring. None of the participants where interviewed together - without changing anything of their formulations - I have only selected certain phrases and put this in a coherent order. Subdivided in various themes this discussion will set a framework for this thesis. Twelve sections; nine times Los Angeles, architecture, urbanism and politics.

Longing for the city

Hernan Diaz Alonso: “I think we need to change the way that we think about things and understand them in order to develop another layer of depth that doesn’t establish from the notion of deep knowledge but by the accumulation of a lot of small parts of layered knowledge. This is how the things are right now, it just changed the social protocols. It changes protocols of interactions, of the city. The city got another dynamic, became bigger, but now they are so big and jammed that we come back to pre-19th century models where everybody develops micro-communities. Everything is cyclical right? technological apparatus expands the world and the city like trains did, cars did, planes did. At the same time things become so exaggerated and over-complicated that you now start to reverse that.”

JB: Verworden steden dan van een fysieke representatie van cultuur tot een steeds generiekere infrastructuur?

Rene Daalder: “Laat ik het anders stellen, ik weet niet zeker van dat waar is of niet. Maar opnieuw, als je onde steden ziet is dat anders. In New York doen ze nog steeds hetzelfde als wat ze vroeger deden, nog steeds. Het zijn nog steeds bankiers, het zijn publishers, TV-people: je ziet veel. But that doesn't say that that non-identity is not like an enormous pool of identities. The lifestyle is one of spreadoutness, non-identity and that's it. Precisely what you want. It is not anonymous, not of identities. The lifestyle is one of spreadoutness, non-identity and so on. Precisely what you want. It is not anonymous, not at all. Wat ik altijd interessant vind is om LA te vergelijken met Silicon Valley. That really makes a lot of sense, comparing them is really interesting because they are decisively different. But at the same time they have the same suburban nothingness as their main attractor.

Talking about California: first there was Hollywood. Hollywood changed the world fairly drastically for half a century. Now it is not that important anymore. Now, talking about the same California, the world – again – is completely changed, out of Silicon Valley. So if we talk about hundred years of world-transforming power in one state, in a perimeter of 200 miles. Dan gaan we even terug naar het Los Angeles van de 20ste eeuw: ‘Ok, dus in LA is het ene dat ze gedaan hebben die filmindustrie?’. Nu ook wel wat muziek, maar vooral de entertainment industrie ja. Zou je kunnen zeggen. Maar, er is ook Pasadena. Pasadena hebben ze rocket science, NASA komt daar vandaan! De hele space-age komt uit Pasadena. De eerste Freeway, waarschijnlijk ter wereld, komt uit Pasadena. So that is here right, that’s LA. Als je dus nog even terug gaat je voordeel je het west over 120/130 jaar world transformation, initiatied in this small region. That comes because of something! So then you asked yourself what these two parts of the world have in common? LA and Silicon Valley if you wish. They are completely suburban. Radically, aggressively so. Now you can talk about density as much as you want, but it gets to be ironic. What then exactly does density do? And everybody talks about it, or researches it, but very few people have given it a very simple consideration. How come that a whole century has been defined from out of suburbs? Why?!!

JB: Over welke tijd praten we dan?
Rene Daalder: ‘Pffl. 70’s anus. De Freeways waren toen maar halfweg de vertraging van het leven. Maar zo ontwikkelde zich een nieuwe wijze van werken. Het was een periode waarin praktische bezuinigingen van belang waren. Nu is het weer anders. Het is nu een kwestie van de efficiëntie van het storen zijn. Het is een kwestie van het effect van de storen zijn.’

Hernan Diaz Alonso: ‘Ik ken L.A. als mijn favoriete stad in de wereld. Ik wilde, ik wilde, ik wilde alles. Ik dacht erover en ik dacht erover.’

JB: Living Los Angeles

René Daalder: ‘Ik heb ook in New York gewoond, in London gewoond en op een boel andere plekken. Maar dit was het. En ik hou van die stad. Ik hou van die stad, en ik hou van haar. Ik hou van haar, en ik hou van haar. Ik hou van haar, en ik hou van haar. Ik hou van haar, en ik hou van haar.’

Living Los Angeles

JB: Later we bij het begin beginnen. Hoe was het toen u uit Nederland kwam en de stad voor het eerst zag?
Rene Daalder: ‘Voor mij was het heel sterk. Ik voelde me hier voor het eerst thuis in een stad. Niet meteen, ik begreep er niets van in eerste instantie. Ik weet nog dat ik in een groot huis geïntegreerd werd, in een van de buitenwijken van Los Angeles. Ik was educatief op de Italiaanse oude stad – en dat was de stad van de filmindustrie, maar ten tweede natuurlijk de filmindustrie, maar ten derde er waren nog een heleboel andere dingen hier. Ik weet nog wel dat ik bij een filmstudio werkte en dat ik er altijd veel werk had en dat ik daar altijd veel werk had en dat ik er altijd veel werk had.’

David Bergman: ‘Ik geloof dat het een specifieke periode was toen ik in Los Angeles kwam. Ik was er in 1980. En het was toen de stad nog helemaal anders was dan nu. Ik heb me herinnerd dat bijna alles veranderd was. Het was een stad die nog heel anders was dan nu.’

JB: What was so characteristic about growing up in the neighbourhoods of LA?
Michael Rotondi: ‘I am close to this city because I have been here all my life. I grew up in a neighbourhood where there were no other ethnic families alike, there was a mixture of everything. Most of the families were either first or second generation. My family was first generation Italian, across the street was first generation Japanese. A couple of houses away was first generation Russian, African American to Mexican, it was a great mix. Multicultural refers to LA as a main phenomena.’

JB: Did Los Angeles change you?
Hernan: ‘At the professional level it completely changed my view. This is the city that put together popular culture, superfluity and depth in a way that I can not think of in any other context. I am heavily influenced by the LA architecture scene and the entertainment industry, but also the product design and all the local manufacturing. It completely changed my way of thinking. There is a desire for the imperfect form of beauty, disorganization as a way to organize, almost everything works by opposition. I am Argentinian as an individual, as an architect I consider myself now as an Angeleno – an LA architect’.

LA in perspective

JB: How special is Los Angeles?
Edward Soja: ‘We know a lot about Los Angeles but the amazing thing isn’t the kind of economic or other qualities of the city, there’s nothing really special about Los Angeles’ architecture, built environment, geography or whatsoever. What’s been most remarkable is that it’s created some of the worst inequalities and it’s getting the strongest movements against inequality, including 1992’s rioting and burning of the city. The worst riots against globalization and against inequality. And now you see the strongest social movements, it’s really, if you want to listen to Los Angeles, this is what you need to listen to.’

David Bergman: ‘So I always tell people if they ask ‘what do you do?’ I’m a city planner in Los Angeles. And let me tell you that LA could be something else, and LA and I will say that LA for sure needs some city planning. I say no, everything here is planned. There is nothing here that follows some traditional pattern, its all here from the very beginning as a result of human agency and intentional human decisions. The problem is that those decisions are not coordinated, and that what is you see, a surface that is uncoordinated between historic time periods and political jurisdictions.’

In the 1920’s a decision was made, and that is all in the plans, that it is a regional metropolis. Looking at the concept of the Garden City and given the fact that it’s benign climate and the geography that is very flat, the cheapest and most progressive technology of that day was the automobile. So land use patterns appear to reflect that from the 1920’s on. And then you get in the 1950’s, post-war. Costs of an automobile are dramatically reduced. The war industries that did planes and tanks could do automobiles good and very cheap. So what they did was adopting this thing here, the Interstate Highway system. Besides that, don’t underestimate the importance of the second world war. Impacted in our post-war planning was the idea that you want to be decentralized so that you don’t get bombarded.’

JB: An early laboratory for other cities?
David Bergman: ‘Here the mode of accumulation is understood as one of the capitalist cities of the late 20th / early 21st century. It is a city, unlike the cities that you like look at in Europe that has no significant pre-capitalist history. It is an artifact. So the American capitalism of the second half of the 20th century is really the story and this city is the laboratory, in many ways, for 21st century capitalism. For example, you could say that LA was the first city to have a real identity crisis. As a result of the rise of the film and television industry, it has a cultural identity that is very different from the cultural identity of the rest of the country. And that is the case with Los Angeles, it is a city that has very strong cultural identity. And the cultural identity of Los Angeles is very different from the cultural identity of the rest of the country. And that is the case with Los Angeles, it is a city that has very strong cultural identity. And the cultural identity of Los Angeles is very different from the cultural identity of the rest of the country.’
This city repeatedly (re)oriented itself along infrastructures right?

Edward Soja: “Are we transforming into another species or city? I raised the question, I didn’t know how to answer it but now the answer is yes. There’s a new species of city emerging in Los Angeles and it is showing it but it’s going to take a while for us to know what really this new city is like but if we’re going to have clues it’s going to be from here better than anywhere else. Chicago is irrelevant [laughs].”

The Chicago school didn’t even invent the metropolitan model. Chicago school did the earlier centralized form of the industrialized capitalist city that Engels found in Manchester. There’s a concentricity, that’s what Burgess observed in a 19th century city and he pretended but that had nothing to do with Chicago! Well I mean they could map it onto Chicago. Chicago had already changed in the metropolitan model, it was polycentric and there was no neat single concentricity any more. What they did, the 19th century cities lingered on and they found behavioural patterns that fit the 20th century city, continuing in 20th century Chicago. Just as I think they’re going to find the metropolitan model in Los Angeles lingering into the 21st century. That is not going to be entirely erased.

[JB: And then, do you see LA transforming in another urban concept?]

Ed Soja: Orange County, I mean that’s the new city. That’s where I would take people now. Los Angeles is just getting to be old fashioned. Orange County is just very weird. It’s neither positive nor negative, it’s just the idea of having lost centrality entirely. So that there’s a, don’t know, 35 nodes, large nodes each seeking centrality but not able to find it. It’s more like a bunch of grapes kind, just silky. You know I say as I saw 35 little bubble cities, nodes, all bunched together. It’s just very weird and it’s got employment, culture, it’s got all of it. It’s got every urban characteristic you’d ever want. Except it doesn’t look like anything you’d ever seen that’s urban.

The categories are just gone. It’s really not urban in a traditional sense as I call that ‘suburbia’ and not suburban, certainly not any more. It’s just a new kind of city that has erased the old categories, it’s a new species of modern regional urbanization.”

The dispersed metropolis

Jeff Kipnis: “The true form of Los Angeles is one of great sprawl, which I like. I like the land at an airport, not being able to see the end of Los Angeles”.

Margaret Crawford: “There isn’t a core or a concentration, there are multiple things. The best thing about Los Angeles is that if you want to go out you have like 10 places that you could go to: Downtown, West Hollywood, Santa Monica, and in most cities there is just one center. So I think this is a much, much better way of having multiple centers that are different but equal. To me that model of multiple nodes and corridors is what is fundamental, unique and fantastic about LA.”

[JB: Will infrastructure be able to once again radically change the form of the city? For instance the to be developed light rail system; will there once be a sort of ‘transit ecology’?]

PETER COOK: “I lived in the same street as Banham and Eames. Every Friday afternoon we had this kind of lunch together, where also Peter and Allison Smithson joined. For me his book was not new because what Banham did after coming back from LA was just testing his book haha. Every week he discussed something, not saying that he was working on a book. And then all of the sudden we saw that book.”

JB: Can Los Angeles still surprise?

Michael Rotondi: “I saw the building of the first major free way, I think I was about eight. I didn’t know the word infrastructure. But I sensed that it was connecting the region, not just local stores, because I knew the city from how we moved around as children and from going places with my father. So when they said ‘this freeway is going to some place’. All the way down to Disneyland for instance, I knew that that was really quite a distance. So you get the sense that there were different scales in the city, thinking of the different scales in your body. I just didn’t know how conceptualize it, it was all imagination.”

Jeff Kipnis: “I think that idea of seamless mobility is still valid. The fact that the freeways are lifeline I think is very important. It gives us a feeling of the whole city and the sense of universality, cohesion, and I think that is a very important function. Did you see Banham movie? When he gives over the 855, that’s totally true. You see huge expands, it’s really exhilarating. There is no question about it.”
David Bergman: “Something to think about is, how does the city come to you? That the city does not only re-concentrating and re-densifying but dis-aggregates. I think one of the great responses of this is the food truck. There has been a huge explosion in the last two or three years of high quality cater restaurants and food services loading it into trucks. This is what Amazon.com is for the book store, the food truck is for the restaurants. It’s a better social experience because it comes to you, you get more diversity and it’s a better reflection of what’s really urban. There is a element of experimenting. All the qualities that make urban life urban are expressed in the food truck. But why stop there? All kinds of retail could be mobile.

### Public (Space)

**JB:** According to Banham the freeway was ‘a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life’. Is it that much of a public event?

Jeff Kipnis: “I don’t think that Los Angeles has a public. You know it has its publics and they don’t really want anything to do with each other. Disney Hall is a kind of fantasy of a new collectivity about Los Angeles”.

**JB:** So public space in Los Angeles is unnecessary?

Peter Zolnay: “I think we do have public spaces only they just happens to be natural. We have beaches, mountains and this is one of the great benefits of being in LA. Instead of going into a park you go for a hike in the mountains and you go down to the beach for a walk in the beach. So there are public spaces, very different in terms of their scale and mostly they are organic”.

Wes Jones: “In these European cities, the quality of the space is much higher. Because one they are not dominated by cars and second the materials are usually real. It is probably stone in the facade, tiles on the ground and real trees. It is real stuff. Not like the concrete stucco that we have here. It has been in the facade, tiles on the ground and real trees. It is real stuff. Not like the concrete stucco that we have here. It has been influenced by Mies, but he was influenced by the Mies that was practicing in America already. And so the openness of the houses is almost a vernacular expression of the local conditions. And it felt good.”

**Downtown LA**

**JB:** So far we have been talking about the characters of Los Angeles, its ecology, regional form, the meaning of infrastructures and the meaning of public spaces. To concretise, I want to scale down and try to get Los Angeles a bit shape. How about Downtown Los Angeles?

Eric Owen Moss: “There’s a big discussion the last few years about downtown. That seems to have dissipated a little bit but to try to think honestly what we need here. This is why the Case Study period is so interesting here. Because this was a period of architecture without looking across the Atlantic, although it all obviously was modernist. Greg Elwood was clearly influenced by Mies, but he was influenced by the Mies that was practicing in America already. And so the openness of the houses is almost a vernacular expression of the local conditions. And it felt good.”

**JB:** And that does interest me because a lot of those boulevards are not accidently on that places and in that dimensions right?

Martin Wachs: “Very good, that’s right. Olympic boulevard, Whittier boulevard, Pico, they all predates the freeway and really gave L.A. It’s form in the 1920s and 1930s. So you are absolutely right. Where I live right now, that was developed in 1936. And it was clearly along different streetcar lines.

Have you seen pictures of Venice boulevard with four or five rail tracks in the middle? That’s why it looks like that. It was that wide because it carried public transport and then gradually over time, when the public transport was removed it got pavement.”

**JB:** But that is hardly to call a qualitative public space right?

David Bergman: “Look around you. Where is the public space? Public realm is shit! When you look in Los Angeles never mistake on what is happening at the corridors and what is happening in the neighbourboodhs behind it. The corridors are just places of commerce, nothing particularly critical is happening there. This is the generic space, the real things happen in the blocks behind it. It’s just around the corner, but you have to know where you are looking for”.

Wes Jones: “From a practitioners standpoint it would be better not to be looking elsewhere and trying to pretend versions of that, but to try to think honestly what we need here. This is why the Case Study period is so interesting here. Because this was a period of architecture without looking across the Atlantic, although it all obviously was modernist. Greg Elwood was clearly influenced by Mies, but he was influenced by the Mies that was practicing in America already. And so the openness of the houses is almost a vernacular expression of the local conditions. And it felt good.”

**JB:** Is there a feature for it?

Eric Owen Moss: “I don’t understand, nobody knows how to answer that. I don’t know if there are any cities that are unresolved in perpetuity. And you can argue on the other hand that’s a good time to be in L.A. Because everything is not stratified, everything is not organized, everything is not set, so there are a lot of proposals floating around and that makes the discussion interesting. But the ability of the city to resolve those questions, to say this is where the train should go. They can’t do that. They don’t know how to do that.

Ed Soja: “I just was in New York again and I, my mouth just opened up. I want to be biased against New York because it’s an amazing place [laughs]. Just that kind of heavy density that smacks you in the teeth is just fascinating! We don’t have it in LA even though it’s got this overall density. In a sense it’s interesting, New York has this – maybe sometimes, oppressive density but you can escape it in total low density whereas you can’t escape any more from Los Angeles. You can’t, you just, you go out - and it’s built up.”

**JB:** How important is LA’s Downtown anyway?

Soja: “Thinking of the old metropolitan model, the idea is if the downtown dies, the whole region dies. But in the new model downtown isn’t dying. There’s some panic about planning in central cities because so many of them are losing population and so they think “oh my god, we have to do a ‘Boillou effect’ and get Gehry to do a Guggenheim and all of that city branding. I think that’s going to continue as long people still hang on to the old model, but we’re going to see less of if people begin to realize that the city region is something else and that we have to adapt the administrative system to these new regional structures”.

**Shopping**

**JB:** Santa Monica could be an example, although in a different scale. David - what’s the trick?

David Rogers: “what we [Jorda, Partnership, JB] have done is we reimaginating commercial space within the city in a multi-used way. The multi-used projects in Asia that we are building or even a 2 big project coming up in Moscow at the moment. It’s a living-work-play situation

It’s just the center of the city because the center of the city used to be all of those things, and in completely integrated, operating and healthy. They are not shopping, it wasn’t a shopping center. It’s just the core of the city, so the idea that its going back to the core of the city is simply reliving the history of urban development, isn’t it?

**JB:** But aren’t we just reviving the mall as public domain?

Wes Jones: “Obviously most of the malls in the country are design by a limited number of architects who have developed this expertise. I think that the most typical architects don’t even get a chance to think about it. The only situation where we could do that is here, in school, where we might run a studio on it. Operating in the critical realm, trying to understand this phenomena”.
JB: But do we still need to build new malls for instance? A certain self-criticism would be proper.

Rene Daalder: “To be honest the moment you said that I was thinking about twenty years ago. This is — and I now forget his name — did all the malls here.

JB: John Jerde?

Rene Daalder: “Presumably, Jerde. All these architects, including Rem, hated them, where at least at and checked all his stuff. He was building big malls after each other. And of course Rem did all these things about how many square footage mall builders build in comparison to architects. But that now seems to be such an old discussion. When Rem was doing his proposal for Universal City Walk — totally excited, because architects are always like ‘oh shopping, fashion, whatever’ — Go away! Please, shopping and fashion... Pop-culture, architects admire pop-culture. They have no fucking clue what it is! But again, they got to do something [laughs].

Architecture

JB: Architecture - anyone?

Edward Soja: “Architecture merges with a kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that really is the city building profession. The cities are made by architects. And that idea has been progressively destroyed and so a great proportion of people and students are just crushed in the aftermath. ‘we can’t do anything, who cares?’ “Let’s just do it because we like it, in fact good”. The others that take urban theory seriously are smart enough to realize that the things they were taught are no longer relevant. They don’t understand what alternative there is. And as it becomes chaos, it becomes incomprehensible, ‘post-urban’, you know all of that stuff. No others then architects do that! It is this deep ego-history of ‘we are the creators’. Herman: “The field is conceptual and intellectually more fragmented then ever, and I think that that is a good thing. There is a lot of research nowadays about what the reconfiguration of architecture will or could be and that is great. On a professional level an interesting thing is the strategic and economical side. All the new opportunities that places like China and India are creating in this time of realignment has come in a very bad architectural relations to it. The downside of this is that architecture as a profession has more then ever been reduced to a capitalist craft. Something that is responding to a problem and responding to somebody else. And I don’t think that that is the origin of architecture. The origin was much more that of a cultural agent, not so else. And I don’t think that that is the origin of architecture. That grows on just needs the agar for basic stuff”. John Jerde? Edward Soja: “Yeah, European maybe, Dutch. Italian maybe.

JB: Is there still an urbanist as a kind of societal conscience?

Peter Zellner: “We are largely working within limitations that are setup by zoning and planning restrictions, neighborhood organizations, design regulations and that sort of stuff. For me any changes that one makes basically produces a conflictual relationship as opposed to a propositional relationship. So I would say gaining a foothold in changing the shape of the building for young architects in Los Angeles is an urban design proposition to begin with.

David Rogers: “I mean look at the city, how it’s laid out, who is the first person on the scene? The planner, the traffic engineer and the sewage engineer. What did they know about developing a city? Get the architects and the designers, environmentalists, involved in this, before they start worrying about sewers and traffic!”

Urbanism

JB: What is the ‘urban architect’ doing in LA?

Eric Owen Moss: “Just a hypothesis to resolve that question whether a freeway is now buried under the mountain or climbing over the mountain or whatever the hell it is. The infrastructure needs to be looked at less as a civil engineering problem and more as a what kind of city are you making problem. That’s all”.

JB: Is there still an urbanism as a kind of societal conscience?

Edward Soja: “Yeah, European maybe, Dutch. Italian maybe. Not this country, and that goes back to our discussions on urbanism. If you’re an architect that has connections with strong urbanist traditions then yeah you can say that but so much of architecture has lost that connection. So and, you know urban geographers are just disclosed these days and say: ‘why architects?’ No, but I have to be careful because I do have this strange bias against architects”.

JB: What is an urbanist then, according to this ‘LA model’? What do they do, again? Do they even draw for instance?

Jeff Kipnis: “No. I think if you want to be a really good urbanist and you want to take it seriously: end up with policies, no drawings. Diagrams and policies, that is what the city is. Have some courage not to draw stuff and built models. So an urbanist is – do you know what an agitator is? These pots dishes in which the basic nutrients are supplied, they put the bacteria in there and then it grows. So urbanists actually make the agit. But don’t confuse the agit with the fact that the thing that grows on just needs the agar for basic stuff”.

JB: Okay, staying into that biology setting. How much is the urbanist still exploring a laboratory?

Peter Zellner: “I think all the great experiments that have been conducted through architecture, less through planning unfortunately. Planning has mostly been the realm of engineering projects and it’s only in this new century that architects are beginning to grasp the possibilities of dealing with the urban scale. Now you have somebody like Michael Maltzan designing a park in Playa Vista. This is what’s changing now, I think it’s the small pieces of urban infrastructure are becoming coming in the territory of artistic practice and that’s good”.

Jurick Bijker: “Is planning slowly being replaced by programming?”

Benjamin Bratton: “Look if one person is running one app on his phone, he is activating the space in one way. If someone else is using his phone, that activates the space in another way. This is found in the logic of determinist programming. Because instead of the partial logic of the space - or sectional logic - determining the conditions of programming, that conditions of programming are activated by the particular agents that you see to that space. Which could be overlapping in multiple ways. The ultimate cumulative effect of those things may have everything to do with tendencies towards massive centralization, or decentralization. Things that are permanent become temporary, things that are temporary become permanent. Things that were mobile are becoming immobile. But architects seem to be excused: Or find themselves excused, stuff will always be built”.

JB: Is there still an urbanism as a kind of societal conscience?
JB: How much does the spatial construction of the city influence the way its processes are structured - and vice versa?

Eric Owen Moss: “It’s hard to manage so many pieces with very different vantage points. That worked for architecture, because you can go and do odd things in odd places and nobody gives a damn. In most cases, it doesn’t work for big organizational strategic ideas because you bump into this supervisors, into this city council, you bump into several separate civic jurisdictions. So what you need is I think in a political sense a kind of supervisory authority that will allow you to make decisions.

So people have a sought this kind of piecemeal approach, stitching things together. Like you make trains that will go from nowhere to nowhere and stop in the middle. Whereas a city like New York or a city like Chicago and other cities in the world have a pretty focused single minded way of making. This doesn’t mean it’s so easy - in fact you could argue that by democratization of ‘blah blah blah’ that Los Angeles is a good city to talk about things forever and do nothing.

Eric Owen Moss: “I think there is really no consistent policy. So what you get is a kind of redefinition, periodic redefinition and periodic re-prioritization of what matters. What matters more, what matters less, where do you want to be, where do you want to go. Things will pop up and then everybody runs there”.

Jorick Beijer: So your projects in Culver are merely about creating the hype?

Eric Owen Moss: “The guy who did a lot of this stuff in Culver City, he figured out that he could pull people using architecture essentially to sell business. So he got AOL, he got NIKE and he got all these fancy companies which would have been very hard to do in New York and most cities. And they come running because of the images, and things like that.

I think LA is a city where the emphasis on what matters and why? What’s important? And where should I go, where should I not go - is continually changing.”
For many Los Angeles has become a synonym for the ultimate non-city. An endless landscape of sprawl, a generic-like environment regarded as anonymous - one without history and an own identity. When we could agree that everything that exists has directly a ‘history’; then this is also true for Los Angeles. Compared to other Northern-American metropolises maybe a rather short one, but just that very idea of hyper concentrated city emergence makes it an very interesting study case.

Los Angeles origins in a series of missions and presidios set up as outposts by the Spanish between 1769-1777. These outposts gradually grew into settlements mostly used for agricultural production. Well known is El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles, founded in 1781 (Varnelis, 2005). The temperate climate made this place evolve in an important agricultural settlement on the Pacific Coast.

As Banham described in his book this landscape was not only interesting for agriculture, when connected to a transcontinental railroad system it became a wonderful place to life. Along lines radiating from the city center people started to inhabited town like developments, driven by overactive land speculators:

“The result was the precondition for Southern California’s establishment as one continuous megalopolis” (Varnelis 2005: 177).

The well-known ‘typical’ pattern of sprawl was thus already established before the arrival of the automobile.

2.1] Shaping regional form
After having served their purpose, the train lines was rapidly replaced by the more flexible and extensive network of the car. This made more and more land available for sprawl, and that was reinforced by the freeways implemented by the city government with the intention to move people in and out the congested city. It made Los Angeles city explode, in the number of inhabitants but even more in the territories annexed by them.

This development is represented in the following maps, showing the timeframes 1890, 1930, 1970 and 2000. What we see in the first map (left) is the situation around 1890. Clearly noticeable settlements are Los Angeles downtown, Pasadena, Santa Monica and Long Beach. Connected by the earlier mentioned railways and with some roads for car traffics. In fact a lot of these small roads are the origin for nowadays very popular boulevards as Wilshire, Sunset and Washington.

The second map shows the situation around 1930. This step of 40 years shows an impressive expansion of the hearth of Los Angeles city, south from Downtown, but also in the direction of Pasadena. The streetcar was one of the main facilitators of this vital expansion.
Fig 13. Los Angeles region around 1890

Fig 14. Los Angeles region around 1940
From the 1920’s the fine network of the Pacific Electric Railway network catalysed an enormous growth potential which resulted in the so called ‘streetcar-suburbs’. It became clear that the commuting to downtown resulted in a completely congested core. The removal of the streetcar trolleys was seen as a step towards undoing congestion, even as it undid any future possibility for mass transport.

The result was however the gigantic increase in the sprawl of the city. This map show the situation around 1970, with a coherent system of freeways connecting exurban center to exurban center. The fact that these freeways all came together around downtown that it transformed from a destination (streetcar timeframe) towards a hub for the traffic that bypassed it. New postsuburban areas as Orange County grew massively, resulting a diffuse, horizontal sprawl throughout the majority of the Southern California territory.

The last map shows the state of 2010. It shows a further densification of the region, especially in these new postsuburban areas around Orange County, San Fernando and West Covina. These days the flowing freeways of the 1970’s are completely gridlocked on a daily basis. The whole infrastructural flow moved from the freeways to the secondary element, the extended boulevard network. Around downtown a metro network is being executed, following some of the old streetcar lines. This is of course a bit late, the liberty of the automotive realm already created a, in Varnelis words, ‘continuous megalopolis’.
Fig 17. Juxtaposing growth and former infrastructures; darker fabric is older.
2.2] A city of minorities

The diffuse and homogenous sociological texture of Los Angeles has over time transformed by a community of ethnical clustering. By many Los Angeles is described as a city of minorities, also in demographics understandable as a city of peripheries without a centre.

Figure 07 shows this transformation in the timeframes 1930, 1970 and 2000 and is based on Census 2000 GIS mapping by the University of Southern California (UCS). It shows ethnical and racial majorities, in yellow whites, in blue African Americans, in red Hispanics and in green Asians. While for instance 76 percent of the population in 1970 where non-Hispanic whites (middle), in 2000 this is only 30 percent. Where the African Americans where a majority in the city centre of the 1930’s, in the 1970’s they extended their territory incredibly, but also shifted south-west. Around 2000 their territory has shrunk, and in a lot of places they were in terms of majority replaced by Hispanics.

Los Angeles nowadays is one of the largest Asian settlements outside the Commonwealth, outnumbering the African Americans. Not only this powerful internal migration is different from other Northern-American metropolises, also the precise ethnical layout is. Where cities as Chicago, Detroit and Philadelphia remained to a great degree in black and white, Los Angeles in the 20th century became increasingly multi-coloured.
Ecology in itself is a vague, difficult and easily be misused word. It’s used by multiple directions of science, all with very different and specific articulations of the meaning. According to the Collins English Dictionary, ecology as a part of life sciences can be defined as ‘the study of the relationships between living organisms and their environment’. It defines the sociology variant as ‘the study of the relationships between human groups and their physical environment (also called bionomics)’. The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics has a definition for ecology in the field of economic science ‘ecological economics is a trans-disciplinary field of academic research that aims to address the interdependence and co-evolution of human economies and natural ecosystems over time and space’. These definitions touch close upon each other, and both share the idea that in ecology it’s about the relation between ‘something’ and the environment where that ‘something’ acts in. In this chapter I want to set to the four main theoretical concepts that are developed for ecology, roughly in the last 90 years.

This section will start with the Chicago school model, mainly based on the work of Burgess, then Reyner Banham’s ‘architecture of four ecologies’ followed by the work of the LA school of geographers and finishing with the more contemporary work on networked ecologies by Varnelis.

3.1] Chicago School

In the early 1920s the Chicago School published The City, a publication that was at the heart of their academic work and for decades a vital means of communication. Nowadays this book is more than only an historical document. It can be regarded as exemplary for the modernist analytical paradigm of the whole 20th century.

The Chicago School builds an argument for linking human behavior to an urban ecology that could be seen through processes of extension and succession, concentration and decentralization (Haar, 2007).

"[Th]ink of urban growth as a resultant of organization and disorganization analogous to the anabolic and catabolic processes of metabolism in the body" (Burgess 1967:53).

The actual internal processes of the city where thus distinct from its rational design, a split that in the modern city became even more visible as these metabolic functions were increasingly handled by technologically complex infrastructures (Haar, 2007).

The City included various assumptions, but three core beliefs are worthwhile remarking; A three core beliefs are worthwhile remarking; A

The Chicago School of sociologists would codify its urban ecology in the concentric ring theory, an account of the evolution of differentiated urban social areas by Ernst Burgess (Dear, 2000c). Burgess concluded that cities more and more would tend to form a series of concentric zones, bringing order to social classes and economic functions. This model would be radiating out from the central city, with pockets of ethnic and racial concentration in working class residential zones (fig 14). The model included a strong socio-evolutional component, by progressing status populations should gradually be filtered outwards from the centre. This model was therefore predicated on an increasing trend of immigration to the city.

At the core of the model was the CBD, the central business district, which was surrounded by a transitional zone where older private houses were being converted to offices and light industry. The transitional zone was succeed by a zone of houses for the workers and beyond that in a new ring were the middle class was housed in newer and larger dwellings. The commuters’ zone was physically disconnected from the city fabric (Dear, 2002). This scheme was the basic model of the archetypical American metropolises at the dawn of the 20th century, one could think to Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Boston. This theoretical model was however a strong generalization and shouldn’t therefore not be read to literally. Burgess for instance was aware that the model would only be applicable in an ideal context, one without opposing elements such as topography, and he anticipated considerable internal alteration within the different zones (Dear, 2002).

One of the prominent members of the lose group that formed the LA School, geographer Ed Soja, criticised the work of the Chicago first of all by questioning the originality. Soja traces the metropolitan city model back to Manchester, where an industrialized capital city indeed formed a scheme that they later mapped onto Chicago. According to Soja by that moment was already a metropolis with a polycentric structure and was the fact that they used 19th century central city, with pockets of ethnic and racial splendours and grotesqueries, appear in this chapter I want to set to the four main theoretical concepts that are developed for ecology, roughly in the last 90 years.

"Modern Los Angeles is still there while the city post-modernizes" (Beijer 2012:7).

3.2] The architecture of four ecologies

In one of his profound essays on the rise of the LA school, Michael Dear suggested that the work of Banham could be regarded as the canonical moment in the prehistory of the Los Angeles school (Dear, 2002). With his 1971 book Los Angeles: the architecture of four ecologies, Reyner Banham produced a pioneering architectural study on the ecologies that in his view shaped Los Angeles. More then his discoveries on themselves, his work became of clustering. Rather extensively Varnelis describes the history of Los Angeles and

3.3] LA School

"It was during the 1980’s that a group of loosely associated scholars, professionals and advocates based in Southern California became convinced that what was happening in the region was somehow symptomatic of broader socio-geographic transformation taking place within the United States as a whole. Their common, but then unarticulated, project was based on certain shared theoretical assumptions, as well as on the view that L.A. was emblematic of a more general urban dynamic" (Dear 2002:10).

To this LA School of sociologist and geographers as among others Allen Scott, Edward Soja, Mike Davis, Dana Cuff, Jennifer Wolch and Michael Dear belong and it should not be confused with the LA school of architects that emerged around the same time. It was UCLA professor Edward Soja that with his 1989 publication Postmodern Geographies was one of the first that effectively shifted the discourse on LA from exception to prototype:

"What better place can there be to illustrate and synthesise the dynamics of capitalist spatialization? In so many ways, Los Angeles is the place where ‘it all comes together’… one might call the sprawling urban region … a prototopos, a paradigmatic place, or … a mocosmos, an ordered world in which the micro and the macro, the idiographic and the nonnomothetic, the concrete and the abstract, can be seen simultaneously in an articulated and interactive combination” (Soja 1989: 191).

In an interview that I had with Ed Soja we did some back casting on the LA School, something that Soja is profoundly doing in his forthcoming book, preliminary titled ‘Ma Los Angeles’. Fashionably denying the academic meaning of the school and his own contribution, Soja emphasised on the way the school formed a vivid body of research, repetitively rediscovering Los Angeles:

"For me LA has evolved from urban restructuring to crisis generated revenue restructuring to a kind of post modern urbanization to post metropolitan transition and now to regional urbanization. Now I know that I didn’t know where the city was going…" (Beijer 2012:7)

The foundations of a acknowledged school were completed in Marco Cenzatti’s 1993 examination of the thing called an LA School of Urbanism. Emphasising on the role of the school as laboratory, Cenzatti underscored the idea of an seemingly never ending quest:

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

Los Angeles could be regarded as the leading and defining American type of urbanization at the end of the 20th century. Described by the Los Angeles school as one that is shaped by automobile instead of rail roads; sprawling multi-centric regional development instead of the old model of a single, dense centre of work and power surrounded by residential zones and served by its periphery or hinterland; an economy characterized to an extraordinary degree by post-fordist service industries and a heterogeneous population from around the world.

3.4] The networked ecology

Varnelis in his essay Los Angeles: the cluster city (Varnelis, 2005) draws a historical outline of the spatial development of Los Angeles as basis for an, in his eyes, contemporary state of clustering. Rather extensively Varnelis describes the history of Los Angeles and
it’s sprawled neighbourhoods in relation to evolving infrastructures:

“In postsuburbia, daily commutes would be from exurban center to exurban center. The resultant diffuse, horizontal sprawl reconfigured the existing traffic patterns, radically undoing the predictable flow of traffic into and out of the city, in favor of a homogeneous and eventually evenly gridlocked field” (Varnelis 2005: 181).

Varnelis argues that the rise of flexible consumption, the post-fordist market resulted into further fragmentation of ethnic minorities into smaller groups. This all replaced an common awareness of being the same with an individual search for identity. Varnelis analyses that in Los Angeles the condition of sprawl ended and that it slightly began to transform into a ‘cluster city’ (fig 19-20).

These clusters are then centres and nodes in the formerly diffuse field of urban sprawl. Varnelis points out an awareness of the continuous shaping of identity because of the ongoing diversification of the mass market and the traditional minorities. In the last part of his article Varnelis describes three case studies, showing realized projects that should support his statement. What Varnelis through his writing proposes is the idea that some earlier ecologies are starting to reappear as a kind of ‘shadows’.

One might say that this is a rather unlikely phenomenon for a city as Los Angeles, so young that contemporary centralities at first eye maybe seem hardly explainable historically. None of that is true, and the short period of existence is likely the reason that in Los Angeles different ecologies emerged so rapidly after each other that they remain rather meaningful, both tangible as intangible. Varnelis elaborates quite extensively on the electric railway, the former streetcars of Los Angeles. This mode of connectivity in the 1920’s created the so called streetcar suburbs. A hypothesis for my research could be that these lines and endpoints in retrospective are traceable as contemporary centralities. In his book ‘the infrastructural city’ Varnelis brings this point of view a step further.

“Los Angeles exists by grace of infrastructure, a life-support system that has transformed this wasteland into the second largest metropolis in the country” (Varnelis 2008: 9)

Varnelis opposes the idea that infrastructure is deeply embedded in the way Americans think, and how it has captured the popular imagination. Varnelis describes how over the years American so for instance accepted modern architecture only after the burst of infrastructure building under the New Deal that gave them the idea that structures based on functionalism and technology would lead the country to economic prosperity (Varnelis, 2008). The ‘networked ecologies’, where the book in fact is about is definitely not only that kind of civil infrastructure. Varnelis networked ecologies embody the dominant form of organization today, the network, but these networks can be telematic, physical or social. Here he steps away from the ecology of Banham, who did described it much more as a discrete phenomenon.
Los Angeles is by some seen as the end of the city, the region of peripheries without a centre as the ultimate non-city. Some call it even a centrality archipelago. I would like to research a different perspective, namely the idea that there is a grained network of mini-cores lurking under the vast, homogenous grid there. The hypothesis is that these sub-centralities are heavy related to infrastructure. Kazys Varnelis referred to this kind of place with the term ‘clusters’ (Varnelis, 2005). For me clustering is too much related with the demising of (social) groups, and since I see these place more as points where clusters cancel out each other, I chose to define them as centralities. Finding these lurking centralities isn’t necessary difficult. As a first research tool I chose to map indicators of human gathering. The selected 12 indicators form a rather broad range, including functions as e.g. atm’s, gas stations, churches and restaurants.
Fig 24. LA centrality indicators, all

Fig 25. Centrality indicators, clockwise: McDonalds, Starbucks, doctors, drug stores
Without any infrastructure added to the map it shows roughly three types of patterns. First the linear centralities, secondly some smaller centric centralities and at last a lot of sprawled indicators, not creating centrality. Regarding these indicators I defined a place a (centric or linear) centrality when it attracted more than 5 indicators, uninterrupted.

Relating this data to different means of infrastructure starts creating some more interesting insights. First we see that a lot of centrality patterns outside the ‘city’ are clearly visible along the stretched lines of the railway. This is in itself of course not really surprising since a lot of these post-suburban cores where as settlements developed along these lines, at the end of the 18th century.

The 1940s streetcar network shows an strong intensification of centrality in downtown, but more interesting also in the more outwards streetcar suburbs that it created. Single lines of the streetcar connected local streets to a bigger network and by this connection got enough critical mass to consolidate into an attraction point. The new metro development in a way seems to replace this refined connectivity, but I would say that this development should then be seen in a kind of retrospective as a shadow of the past.

Relating the centrality patterns to the extent freeway network provides us with another interesting insight. Where we see a kind of centric centrality of fast-food chains around freeway exits, no overall kind of centralities are visible along the freeways themselves. On itself this is not strange, the freeways as linear elements are mostly seen as the connectors of these kinds of centres. The strong kind of centralities because of late 18th / early 19th century settlement as we saw along the railways is not visible regarding freeways. I would explain this with arguing that these freeways are not made upon the early roads that connected settlements as Long Beach, Santa Monica and Pasadena.

Where we do see the strongest kind of relation between indicators of centrality and infrastructures is along the boulevards. Those where the early connectors in Los Angeles County, and are because of that deeply embedded in the territory. Here historic, and nowadays very popular boulevards as Wilshire blvd, Sunset blvd and Ventura blvd turn out to be strong attraction points. Although these boulevards seem to be endless, and the linear centrality extremely stretched, a closer looks shows that also here some of them are rather well defined. The maps show that crossings of boulevards are then more distinct places of centralities, but they might also be defined by the morphology and typology of the built environment.
Fig 27. Centrality indicators, clockwise: banks, ATM’s, car wash, gas stations

Fig 28. Centrality indicators, clockwise: post office, day care, churches, community centres
Fig. 29. LA centrality clusters related to rail.

Fig. 30. LA centrality clusters related to the former streetcar networks.
Fig. 31. LA centrality clusters related to contemporary freeways.

Fig. 32. LA centrality clusters related to boulevards and streets.
Fig. 33. The relations between older (darker) urban fabric and faceted contemporary clusters of centrality indicators.
The maps in section 7 show intriguing regional patterns of urban centrality and suggest interesting relationality towards both historic and contemporary infrastructures. After having lived in Los Angeles for almost half a year I realised that these maps don’t exactly show the phenomena that makes the city so interesting. The pattern in these maps show a ‘variation of the same’, for instance the distribution of McDonalds locations, that are everywhere more or less the same. The Los Angeles that I got to know was much more an archipelago of different urban environments. Thinking of a map that would show a ‘variation of diversity’ I asked my SCI-Arc fellow students to draw mental maps of their Los Angeles. The variation in their background and the time that they have lived in LA showed interesting perceptual differences.

Ecology of joy
fig 34. Name: Antonio Follo, Nationality: Venezuelan, in LA for 2 years

fig 35. Name: Michael Ho, Nationality: Chinese/Vietnamese, in LA for 7 years
40 LOS ANGELES: THE METROPOLIS AND FIVE STAGES OF MODERNITY

Fig. 36. Name: Jason Velazquez, Nationality: Puerto Rican, in LA for 1 year

Fig. 37. Name: Alan Sillay, Nationality: American, in LA for 10 years
Fig 38. Name: Chi Hang Lo, Nationality: Chinese, in LA since 2006

Fig 39. Name: David Hui, Nationality: Asian, in LA for 4 years
fig 40. Name: Daniela Arriagada, Nationality: Chilean, in LA for 3 years
Food forms our urban environment. Los Angeles is nothing more than a fine-grained network of great food, if you know where to look*. You have to be aware of the buzz. In the pockets of LA man can find the most intriguing fusion of subcultures. Being surprised today, disappointed tomorrow – good food in LA is volatile and mobile. 99% of the food in LA is just generic food, from very bad to nothing special to haute cuisine. But that 5 star French restaurant is not likely to be in the buzz. They might were once but stood still and fell into disgrace. They might still be well visited, but not by the 1% that looks for surprises.

Buzz
The buzz is everything and nothing, somewhere and nowhere. The good places are off the radar, so someone has to tell you. But they are not able to tell it to you at the tourists info points. The source of information is the blog, facebook, twitter. Or - very retro – face to face in that hip coffee place Intelligentsia. It are unconfirmed rumours that you have to investigate before they vanish. It is about sharing exciting discoveries and banal failures, reviewing beyond yelp, keeping the buzz alive. Noticing Son of a Gun in Beverly Hills as worthwhile trying. Reporting the stops that the Lobos Truck makes tomorrow.

Pop-Up 1
The good food pops up. Literally. Don’t look for the name on the façade, find the poster with a wolf dressed as a sheep and you are set. If you have the luck to find a place, no reservations are made. This is the ‘pop up’ restaurant. For an unknown time - 1 day or maybe 3 months – a regular nondescript restaurant is completely taken over. Capri on Abbot Kinney was a boring special Italian restaurant, until two new chefs took over and set a radical new menu. Fresh ingredients from the farmers market, Latino flavours with an Asian touch – LA fusion at its best. Packed from opening – without any advertisement. After 3 weeks a review in the LA Times – now its probably time to close and move along.

Pop-Up 2
In Los Angeles the good food comes to you. Drive-through is too static, too boring. The last years showed an staggering increase in the amounts of food trucks moving throughout the whole city. A liberation from the canteen. Pure gastronomic democracy. SCI-Arc doesn’t have a restaurant, it has two or three food trucks a day. More diversify for a better price. Unconstrained and flexible. Intelligent routes allow the merchants to be busy the entire day. A school during lunch, an metro station around dinner and a bar during the night. Where you see street vendors with small food stalls you will not find the trucks and vice versa. They serve different audiences in different places. But both activating space. In Los Angeles the distinction between public and private is a contradiction in terms. Food has the capacity to activate both public side walks as private parking lots. Just for a short moment of fraternization before the domain crystallises again in a banal passivity.

Pocket Geography
Food goes beyond topography. Ethnic minorities blending in communities that used to be different are layering excitement. Japanese boutiques on Abbot Kinney: mysterious discrete attraction. Sushi places in Little Tokyo with neon on the façade: recognise and avoid. A pocket is often a micro-aggregate of a couple of exciting places within walking distance. Chinatown is a pocket. Little Tokyo together with the Arts District is one. Abbot Kinney is one, Venice Ocean Walk is not. Valet parking is the alternative for that other isolated singularity - boring but efficient. The pockets are on train tracks, in alleys, on the third floor of a warehouse. But also in between Starbucks and Quiznos. The pockets can be more interesting because of the place, but are never depending on the place. The pockets don’t make the place, they are the place. If you see them, micro-cities, places where subcultures blend. Unforeseen, unpredictable, exciting.

* Antonis Ricos knows where to look. Working as an established photographer and living in Los Angeles for more than 40 years he took the chance to exploit his passion for food. I am very grateful for the snapshot that he showed me of his micro-city and for revealing its secrets. Secrets that he discovered walking in LA. Before and after the internet.
Kang Kang - Alhambra
Son of a Gun - Beverly Hills
Phoenix Inn - Chinatown
Fathers Office - Culver City
In n Out - Culver City
Far Bar - Downtown
Shin-Sen-Gumi - Downtown
Cole’s - Downtown
LA Cafe - Downtown
Pete's - Downtown
Wurstküche - Downtown-ArtsD
Novel - Downtown-ArtsD
Urth Caffe - Downtown-ArtsD
Handsome - Downtown-ArtsD
Porta’s - Glendale
Moodaejo II - Koreatown
Awash - Mid City
Half and Half teahouse - Monterey Park
Elite - Monterey Park
Bodega - Pasadena
Bhan Kanom Thai - Thaitown
Capri - Venice
Intelligentsia - Venice

LOBOS truck - SCI-Arc
Taco Truck - Downtown

The Abbey - West-Hollywood
WP24 @ JW Marriott - Downtown
Villains - Downtown-ArtsD
Library bar - Downtown
Congregation - Pasadena
The idea of non-place urban realms is not a gathering of activities, but then not in a very Angeles could be regarded as an even bigger collection of program in a confined space.

An intriguing hypothesis is then whether Los and Sennett, in which the city society is held by the evacuation of the public realm, as in an emergency fire drill. The urban plan now by the corporate culture of our space is gradually becomes more and more controlled by the corporate culture of our capitalist society. They not only do sponsor museum exhibitions, theatre shows, sports events, . media entertainment and the news, they also control many of architectural spaces of the city, theme parks and shopping malls, they have seemingly overtaken the very sites of cultural expression (Boyer, 1994).

“entail a continuous urban topography, a spatial structure that covers both rich and poor places, tonicific and humble monuments, permanent and ephemeral forms and should included places for public assemblage and public debate... ” (Boyer 1994:66).

4.1] The Generic City

Rem Koolhaas translated a lot of his ‘post- everything’ thinking in his concept of the Generic City (Koolhaas, 1995). Provocatively he challenges the meaning of the public domain:

“The serenity of the Generic City is achieved by the evacuation of the public realm, as in an emergency fire drill. The urban plan now only accommodates necessary movement, fundamentally the car; highways are a superior version of boulevards and plazas, taking more and more space” (Koolhaas 1995:125).

In Koolhaas’ eyes the generic city the average urbanist does not like: sprawl, sameness and repetition. Koolhaas argues that the phenomena of urban sprawl is a basic characteristic of the future city in which density is artificially created in the form of urban simulacra as shopping malls and theme parks.

“The generic cityscapes is usually an amalgam of orderly ordered sections [...] and increasingly free arrangements everywhere else. The generic city is the apotheosis of the multiple-choice concept: all boxes crossed; an anthology of all the options” (Koolhaas 1995:125).

Koolhaas criticizes the 19th century model of Sennett, in which the city society is held together by its public domain. The generic city thrives on the luminar zones in between cities. In this concern it’s interesting to refer to earlier writing of Koolhaas, Delicious New York. It was his book that made him in 1979 famous as a critic, and the book is by some now regarded to be a modern classic in architecture and urban theory.

In the book Koolhaas referred to Manhattan as a set of cities within cities, in what he called a ‘culture of congestion’ (Koolhaas, 1994). According to him that was made possible by the collection of program in a confined space.

An intriguing hypothesis is then whether Los Angeles could be regarded as an even bigger gathering of activities, but then not in a very confined space.

The idea of non-place urban realms is not new, it even dates back to the 1960’s. What the generic city points out is the overwhelming importance of infrastructure for urban life, where not proximity but connectivity, not history but adaptation are the key variables. The generic city should in a way be understood in relation to thinking on themes such as the reinvention of citizenship, the technological culture and the individualist suburbanism as a dominant lifestyle (Hajer, 1999).

4.2] Mental life in the Metropolis

The German philosopher Georg Simmel already in 1903 wrote on this relation in his article ‘the metropolis and mental life’. Simmel himself experienced the shift from living in the city of Berlin to the metropolis, Berlin, with around 2 million inhabitants in 1900. In the essay Simmel illustrates the basic aspects of modern urban culture.

Although the metropolises of the time that Simmel wrote about are certainly different then the metropolises of today, I believe that this essay is still very relevant. It describes the position of the individual in the big city urban way of living, and the physiological coping with this form of existence. As he describes:

“The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolis individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (Simmel 1999:11).

Simmel argues that the metropolis inhabitant, having to cope with a vast amount of impressions, creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption of the external milieu they fitted. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolis type reacts primarily in a rational manner. According to Simmel this over-simulation combined with an active intellect result in the blasé attitude (Simmel, 1999).

The great number of people in these metropolises and their anonymity make one, I would say of necessity, more reserved. Reserve is the outer aspect of one’s inner indifference and aversion to others. This results in a heightened sense of individuality and freedom from group demands. It is this condition of the metropolis which is as well cause as effect of this characteristic, argued by Simmel:

“the relationships and concerns of the typical metropolis resident are so manifold and complex that, especially as a result of the agglomeration of so many persons with such differentiated interests, their relationships and activities interlaced with one another into a many-membered organism” (Simmel 1999:13).

One of the most appealing conclusions regarding socio-space in my eyes is his statement that the city is not a spatial entity with sociological consequences, but rather a sociological entity that is formed spatially. The development of social boundaries and distances in the metropolis is of fundamental importance in understanding patterns of social interactions and networks in the city.

4.3] Towards a collective memory

Urban public spaces as plazas, streets, parks and public buildings have long been essential environments for activities of urban public life. This includes activities related to communication, identity framing, entertainment and political participation. Contemporary advance of communication technology is logically invading in that public realm, since a growing portion of our daily life migrated from the physical space to the realm of the virtual space (Boyer, 1994). When new kinds of public space as the Internet café where the first manifestations of this development, nowadays with the mobile advancement of communication it has been of tremendous impact on our virtual perception of physical space.

Building further on the work of Varnelis and in critique of Koolhaas’ manifest for genericness, I want to set out some of Boyers ideas on the collective memory, the shared memories of a particular person or group, framed in space and time. The fact that memory traces earlier architectural forms, monuments and collective spaces, shows that although cities evolve and cityscapes deforms, becomes forgotten and reappears – they (cities) always include a layering of history. Boyer in the City of Collective Memory sets out an critique of the visual perception of city space to both modern and post-modern urbanism. More then critiquing post-modern architects for the use of referential fragments, she critiques the way these these images subsequently get inserted into a contemporary context, that is formed and controlled by vastly changed traditions and desires. This eventually diminishes our past by minimising it to nostalgic sentiments.

Boyer sets out that this ‘treatment’ of history changed over time, and she identified three prototypes of city images.

The City as a Work of Art is more or less the prototype traditional city, where the cityscape was designed and viewed as a theatrical stage, displaying monuments that spoke of exemplary deeds and national unity (Boyer, 1994). The modern city of the early 20th century was on the contrary impacted by the development of infrastructures and transportation systems, by movement transforming the static city image into the City as Panorama:

“new experience of moving through the city tended to erase the traditional sense of pictorial enclosure as the cityscape was transformed into a series of fleeting impressions and momentary encounters” (Boyer 1994: 40).

Post-modern urbanism from the 1980’s made cityscapes emerge that assemble historic styles and scenographic allusions, interconnected by various kinds of visible and invisible infrastructures. In the City of Spectacle the collective memory is replaced by a false -or at least manipulated -historical image, mainly articulating the message of consumerism. Boyer wants the ‘City of Collective Memory’ to recall, re-examine and re-contextualize memory images from the past until they awaken with us a new path to the future (Boyer, 1994).

In the City of Spectacle the concept of ‘public’ is in crisis, Boyer sees an inversion of public and private space, although she on forehand states that ‘public’ in relation to ‘cities’ nowadays mainly gets misrepresented (Boyer 1994). In the contemporary metropolis city space is gradually becomes more and more controlled by the corporate culture of our capitalist society. They not only do sponsor museum exhibitions, theatre shows, sports events, . media entertainment and the news, they also control many of architectural spaces of the city, theme parks and shopping malls, they have seemingly overtaken the very sites of cultural expression (Boyer, 1994). Boyer argues that the City of Collective memory should:

‘entail a continuous urban topography, a spatial structure that covers both rich and poor places, tonicific and humble monuments, permanent and ephemeral forms and should included places for public assemblage and public debate... ’ (Boyer 1994:66).

Needless to say that this requires a new attitude of the architect, city planner and spectator. Wiling to start moving beyond the will to instrumentally formulate historical unities. But it is not even one step further backwards? Is it not – as Boyer imples herself – the corporate capitalism that drives this proliferation of consumerism expression? Can we blame the architect or even the planner? Boyer argues that the City of Collective Memory should have a play of oppositions, the existence of randomness, disturbances, dispensions & accidents” (Boyer, 1994). That the architect and planner could do their loopholes of their corporate assignments.

4.4] the eyes of the city

In ‘Les yeux des pauvres’ (the eyes of the poor) Baudelaire describes a romantic evening in 19th century Paris. A couple is in a new and beautiful dressed café, but the romance is shattered when the urban reality shows her face. In the window of the café suddenly appears a clearly starving family, lighted out in the cone of the new gaslight. The family stares admiringly in, but conversely the two lovers do not know where they should look.

“That evening, feeling a little tired, you wanted to sit down in front of a new café forming the corner of a new boulevard still littered with rubbish but that already displayed proudly its unfinished splendours. The café was dazzling. Even the gas burned with all the ardor of a debut, and lighted with all its might the blinding whiteness of the walls, the expanse of mirrors, the gold cornices and moldings... nymphs and goddesses bearing on their heads piles of fruits, pates and game... all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony. On the street directly in front of us, a worthy man of about forty, with bred face and grey beard, was standing holding a small boy by the hand and carrying on his arm another little thing, still too weak to walk. He was playing nurse-maid, taking the children for an evening stroll. They were in rags. The three faces were extraordinarily serious, and those six eyes stared fixedly at the new
Harvey argued that it was technology that produced the collapse of time and space (Harvey, 1989). It eroded the orientation of physical presence and proximity, which resulted in a scattered pattern of urbanization. Here the very idea of public domain is under heavy pressure. He argues that:

"The character of public space counts for little or nothing politically unless it connects symbolically with the organization of institutional and private spaces" (Harvey 2006:13).

The relational connectivity between public, semi-public and private space is what counts discussing the role of politics in the public sphere. The beautiful case-study of the Haussmannisation of Second Empire Paris that Harvey uses supports this statement. Haussmann succeeded to orchestrate this symbiosis on the ground while in the same time facilitating the stronger presence of the commodity as spectacle in the new Paris that his works helped create (Harvey, 2006).

According to Harvey it is rather difficult to sort out any kind of relationship between the physicality of urban public space and the politics of the public sphere. But since none of us does experience the city blankly and much of what we do absorb from that daily experiences presumably has some kind of influence upon how we are situated in the world and act politically. Harvey defines a mix of socio-geographical perceptions, expectations and material conditions which in his eyes forms the basis of every thinking about how urban design in general and the shaping of urban public space in particular influences politics in the public sphere.

Haussmann in Paris in fact reorganized public space for the mundane purpose of facility a more free circulation of money, commodities and people throughout the spaces of the city. Here already the basic principle of movement, in that time by carts and public conveyances, had a political representation. Harvey argues that this kind of movement put the city in another pace:

"Everything seemed to speed up, the stimuli of urban living became, according to many accounts, more and more overwhelming" (Harvey 2006:8).

Harvey touches here upon Simmels ‘blasé attitude’ but argues that it took an even deeper hold on urban life. The theatricality of the boulevards fused with the picturesque world inside the many theatres popping up along them (fig.49). These boulevards became public spaces where ‘the fetish of the commodity ruled in every sense’ (Harvey, 2006).

4.5] The public interior

"In this there is something characteristic of the sociology of the big city. Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads and trams in the nineteenth-century, people had never been in a position of having to look to one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one after" (Benjamin 1985:38).

Walter Benjamin in his work on Charles Baudelaire and his – unfinished - Arcade Project also works with the Paris of Haussmann. Benjamin develops a theory that starts from the anthropological assumption that people in all epochs dedicate themselves to creating interiors, and at the same time he seeks to emancipate this motif from its obvious timelessness (Sloterdijk 2009).

"The arcades were a cross between a street and an interior. The street becomes a dwelling for the flaneur; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls" (Benjamin 1985:37).

The leisurely quality of these descriptions fits the style of the flaneur who goes walking on the asphalt. But even in those days it was not possible to stroll about everywhere in the city. Before Haussmann wide pavements were rare, and the narrow streets afforded little protection from vehicles. Strolling could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades. The arcades, a...
rather recent invention of industrial luxury,” so says an illustrated guide to Paris of 1852. “are glass-covered, marble-panelled passageways through entire complexes of houses whose proprietors have combined for such speculations. Both sides of these passageways, which are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature.” It is in this world that the flaneur is at home; he provides the favourite sojourn of the strollers and the smokers, the stamping ground of all sorts of little metiers, with its chronicler and its philosopher (Benjamin 1985).

Universal expositions celebrate the city as a centre of commodity circulation, technological innovation and social progress. According to Sloterdijk the 9th century capitalist man expressed his need for an interior in these expositions:

“He uses the most cutting-edge technology in order to orchestrate the most archaic of all needs, the need to immunize existence by constructing protective islands. In the case of the arcade, modern man opts for glass, wrought iron, and assembly of prefabricated parts in order to build the largest possible interior. For this reason, Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace, erected in London in 1851, is the paradigmatic building. It forms the first hyper-interior that offers a perfect expression of the spatial idea of psychedelic capitalism. It is the prototype of all later theme-park interiors and event architectures” (Sloterdijk 2009:pp).

According to Sloterdijk the arcade heralds the abolition of the outside world. It abolishes outdoor markets and brings them indoors, into a closed sphere. Benjamin argued that the 19th-century citizen seeks to expand his living room into a cosmos and at the same time to impress the dogmatic form of a room on the universe. Sloterdijk sees this in line with a trend that is perfected in the 20th-century apartment design as well as in shopping-mall and sports-stadium design (Sloterdijk 2009). We could think if those developments really are ‘in line’ with the grandeur and scale of the Crystal Palace. Although contemporary skyscrapers stay impressive representations of our capitalist society, what does it in cultural sense mean that much of our organisational space nowadays facilitated in anonymous data centres is faded into the background?
Evolving urban form

The analysis done in section 7 gives a great starting point for further exploration. What I precisely would like to understand more precisely is how some of these centralities changed over time. The three elements that I have used, the streetcar, freeway and boulevard, are then helpful tools. For me they represent in a way the different time frames of 1940, 1970 and 2010. Of course they don’t exclusively belong to only one of these frames, so this exploration on a smaller scale will be as broad as possible. The three places that I chose for more in depth research are: LA downtown, downtown Glendale and downtown Santa Monica.

Mapping the historical development of the selected centralities should give more precise insight in how these places evolved. The scale of research will be focussed on the public domain, but of course this can’t only be done by analysing the smaller scales. By referring the results of this analysis simultaneously back to the bigger scales, I might discover new interpretations of these centrality networks and the ecology of Los Angeles.

For the morphology studies of Downtown Santa Monica I have used 1891 Sanborn maps, 1950 Sanborn maps and an aerial photograph from 1970. For the morphology studies of Downtown Los Angeles I have used 1888 Sanborn maps, 1930 Sanborn maps and a 1970 aerial photograph. Those I have been able to copy/photograph from the UCLA Research Library and the Los Angeles City Public Library.

For interpretation of the maps I used four indices, 3 spatial and 1 referring to diversity. Spacemate is an effective instrument for describing space usage in both quantitative and qualitative terms. It clearly sets out the linkage between densities on the one hand and land development, urbanization and non-built space on the other (Berghauser Pont, 2004). Simpson’s Diversity Index is a measure of diversity. In ecology, it is often used to quantify the biodiversity of a habitat (Colinvaux, 1973).

Simpson’s Diversity Index takes into account the number of species present, as well as the abundance of each species. As species richness and evenness increase, diversity increases (Colinvaux, 1973).

Floor Space Index (FSI): The FSI expresses the built intensity of an area. \( FSI = \frac{\text{gross floor area}}{\text{plan area}} \).

Ground Space Index (GSI): The GSI expresses the compactness of an area. \( GSI = \frac{\text{built area}}{\text{plan area}} \).

Open Space Ratio (OSR): The OSR expresses the openness of an area and the pressure on the non-built space. \( OSR = \frac{\text{plan area} - \text{built area}}{\text{gross floor area}} \).

\[
D = \sum_{i=1}^{s} \frac{n_i(n_i-1)}{N(N-1)}
\]

Fig 43. Spacemate schemes - FSI, GSI, OSR.

Fig 44. Simpson’s Diversity Index formula.

Fig 45. Los Angeles ‘metro’ with the two focus research territories.
Source of this historic mapping is Sanborn material, obtained from the online archive of the Los Angeles Public Library. As mentioned in the introduction, the Sanborn maps offer an absolutely stunning representation of the past. Regardless of its high level of detail, we have calculated a certain incorrectness. Since this is the only material available for this study, there is no possibility for cross-referencing.

The border around the maps on the right page may look a bit constraining, but are purely drawn as a defining border. For the sake of a comparative series of maps I chose to work with a defined area. In the case of Santa Monica I chose to work from the Ocean to 6th street, where in terms of commercial program the city stops. On the left I did the same thing, on Washington Av and towards the right I took a margin where now the civic center is. The 1891 map shows then for instance unfinished blocks in the top of the map, and that’s only because my source material didn’t contain that area.

When looking into the regional scale we see a region of long lines. Roads, likely to originate in horse tracks connecting cities and smaller settlements. We recon roads that are now called Pico blvd, Santa Monica blvd and even the current track of the Santa Monica Freeway. Santa Monica really is a small city. Very flat, only a couple of hotels have some height. We see the endpoint of a train track and a small station, close to the original pier. The city consists of a lot of individual buildings, mostly dwellings and just a tiny strip of restaurants at what then was called Utah Av, now Broadway.
The 1950 Santa Monica map is again based on Sanborn material, obtained from the Los Angeles Public Library. Looking into the regional scale, one can imagine that the city in these 60 years grew out of the drawn border. The regional scale shows the beginning of urban fusion, but clearly distinct along the Pacific Electric Railway that looped from Downtown LA to Santa Monica, Venice Beach and back. In Santa Monica the new build city hall has a prominent place, close to the end of an industrial rail track, close by one of America’s first department stores: Sears, which is still at that very location.

We encounter some linear densification on 3rd street, but not really a very concrete centrality of the functions that I mapped. Most of those functions, being banks, gas stations, drug stores, schools and restaurants are placed on the corners of the blocks. The overall densification from 1891 manifest, the FSI increases from 0.15 to 0.55 and the OSR decreases from 5.95 to 1.16. In the category ‘particularities’ one could mention the ‘veterans temporary housing project’, just beneath the City Hall. Another thing, clearly noticeable in the maps is the extended ocean shore and the new Pleasure Pier – build in 1916 as successor of the Municipal Pier which only was build to discharge sewage pipes in the ocean.
The 1970 map of Santa Monica is based on a high resolution aerial photograph that I copied from the UCLA Research Library. We see a freeway coming in Santa Monica, on the place — and later parallel to — Olympic blvd. In the bigger scale we now really see the ‘regional metropolis’, to speak with the concept of Ed Soja. The city of Santa Monica these days completely merges into the urban sprawl of Greater Los Angeles. The Santa Monica Freeway (The 10) coming into the city, looping around it and converting into the “1”, the Pacific Highway that continues along the Ocean.

Again we reckon an significant increase in density. The FSI triples again from 0,55 to 1,51 — the OSR decreases a bit less dramatic, from 1,16 to 0,32. Basically we start seeing more serious ‘high’-rise, one should think about 7 – 8 floors, with some exceptions towards 20 floors – mostly hotels on the ocean side. The grain of the urban fabric starts to become bigger, especially in the densest areas. Unfortunately the 70s maps don’t contain information about functions, source material for that was unfindable. With the super-positioning of the Freeway, the civic centre seems to be rather ex-centric. But it seems that consciously has been chosen to cluster the city hall, court and police department outside the commercial part of.
The 2011 map of Santa Monica is a reproduction of maps that I obtained via the City Planning department’s online OPIS system, based on rather precise GIS sources. On the scale of the region we see the final phase of infill, and having in mind the gridlocked status of the freeways also a revival of the boulevard’s importance. The densification in and around Santa Monica continues and through all kinds of material infrastructures it becomes an interconnected part of the regional metropolis. The FSI increases a bit (1.51 to 1.99) and the OSR decreases relatively much from 0.33 to 0.22. Again we see a bigger urban grain and less empty plots. Centrality became more linear, especially along streets as Santa Monica Blvd, Arizona Av and 3rd street.

That 3rd street is an interesting case. On Broadway Av it now ends in the Santa Monica Place shopping mall. Designed in the early 80s by Angeleno architect Frank Gehry this mall really forms the spatial termination of 3rd street. That street itself changed radically too, since it already in the early 60s was transformed into a pedestrian promenade. Santa Monica Place has since been renovated into a new open-air shopping and dining experience by the Jerde Partnership and re-opened in 2010. Interesting to see is that this big boom of ‘shopping-centrality’ didn’t work for the overall diversity in Downtown Santa Monica, that decreased since 1950 from 0.78 to 0.53. Noteworthy is furthermore that Santa Monica besides the buses these days is not connected to a public transit network. Plans are made to connect the light rail that now stops in Culver City to Santa Monica, but that development will take several years due to landownership issues and political complexity.
The 1888 map of Downtown Los Angeles is a reproduction of Sanborn maps that I obtained via the online archive of the Los Angeles Public Library. When we again start with orienting us at the regional map we immediately distinct a center city. Lines radiating in and out, adjacent to a north-south water flow. Roads to the west start to form a kind of rectangular super-grid, southwards we distinct long lines that go all the way down to the port of Long Beach and San Pedro. Alameda Street is one of them, and stands out in the fragment of Downtown. Its industrial rail track was on those key connections and for that reason its station is surrounded by a post-office, banks, commercial program and a square like space with a fountain.

It is in that area where we see the highest density of buildings, but for the programmatic centrality that is not the only thing. That centrality manifests itself clearly along the length of Main and Los Angeles Street, and that is something to keep in mind if while analyzing the next map of 1929. In these maps of 1888 we furthermore see a lot of individual buildings, mostly private dwellings. Noteworthy is the amount of Chinese laundries, the German schools and the orange orchards and vineyards that are just in the center of the city.
INFRA + FUNCTIONS

MORPHO + FUNCTIONS
The 1929 map of Downtown Los Angeles is based on Sanborn originals that I photographed in the special collection of the UCLA Research Library. There is no discussion that by this time Downtown Los Angeles transcends the size of the border that I drew. In the case of Downtown LA I defined that border by the situation as of the moment that I lived there. It stretches from Alameda Street in the North-West to the Freeway in the South, Chinatown in the West and LA Live in the East. The regional map shows a city heart that literally exploded. This immense expansion oriented itself twofold, mainly in the direction of the Hollywood Hills and to South. Both expansions guided and triggered by the fine local network of the Red Cars, resulting in the so-called ‘streetcar suburbs’.

Where we saw already in the 1888 maps the genesis of linear centrality in Downtown Los Angeles, these maps emphasis that even more powerful. Functions and density clutters together along the long lines of both the Pacific Electric as the Downtown Red Cars, and around both stations. The densest core stretches, although the new City Hall is being build close to the old centre. Downtown becomes more and more twofold, with a growing contrast between dense urban blocks and loose individual buildings.
The 1970 map of Downtown Los Angeles is based on a high resolution aerial photograph that I copied from the UCLA Research Library. What we see on the regional scale is this momentous impact of the freeway, radically interconnecting new territories for urban expansion, and looping narrowly around Downtown LA. That same freeway aggressively cut through the morphology of Downtown, splitting up complete blocks. The drastic reduction in the number of residents in the area from the 30s onwards further reduced the viability of street front businesses that would be able to attract pedestrians. For most Angelenos, downtown became a drive-in-drive-out destination. The city of Los Angeles undertook the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project in 1955, a massive clearance project that leveled homes and cleared land for future skyscraper renaissance. The city centre got an entirely different grain, serious urban voids and a flammable population.

Interesting is that the density stays comparable - the FSI maintains at 1.33 – but the OSR increases to 0.50. All these open spaces make a scattered city heart, a place without coherence and really no more public domain. Unfortunately again there is no source material to map functions, that would have given us even more insight in the momentum of rise or definitively fall.
INFRA+FUNCTIONS

MORPHO+FUNCTIONS
The 2011 situation of Downtown Los Angeles is reproduced from a 2011 Cartifact map, obtained at the UCLA Research Library. The regional scale is very much a continuation of what the development of the 1970s set in. More land infill, higher density and more pressure on infrastructures. For Downtown Los Angeles a lot changed in that time frame of 30 years. Serious skyscrapers has been built, the highest one reaching out 310 meters. Although there are still a lot of gaps visible in the maps – mostly operationalised as expensive parking lots – the Open Space Ratio diminished from 0.5 to 0.25. Also the density increased seriously, the FSI went up from 1.33 to 2.15.

A main piece of public transportation comes back in Downtown when in 1990 the Red Line opens. Now the correlation between the stations and – program wise – centrality seems not very strong. Only the station on 7th/Flower finds itself in a cluster of retail program. In general the centrality seems more scattered then ever. Downtown Los Angeles became a place of radical dispersedness. The diversity index that has been calculated is slightly higher then it was in 1970, but from 0.54 to 0.57 that differs only three hundredth of a point. Los Angeles remains a paradoxical place. A skyline that holds a strong identity but a public realm that doesn’t appeal too many people. A concatenation of attractive places but a lacking urban vitality.
Place(-making)

While now this research project did inquires on the form of the region, linked to theories on ecology. It showed studies on the emergent form of downtown areas, linked to theory on the public domain. The last step is to zoom in on the form of the shopping street. Before we make the step to the thesis, I would like to end the research project with a final reflection. In this chapter I want to outline some of the concepts on place and placemaking, rootedness, authenticity and the ordinary.

First I would like to position my own prepositions on space, in order for the reader to understand my reflection on conceptual and abstract phenomena as place and space. Space is a more abstract concept then place. When we speak of space we tend to think of outer-space or the spaces of pure geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes, places have space between them. The Chinese geographer Yi-Fu Tuan linked space to movement and place to pauses:

“What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endure it with value... The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.” (Tuan 1977:6)

Marin Heidegger argued that the construction of that place is one of the existential necessities for people to define themselves in relation to the material world. David Harvey criticizes Heidegger argument elaborates on this point, something that Doreen Massey brings further. She develops a extended critique on this reactionary sense of place. Michael Sorkin was one of the first to critique the heavily ‘disinchantment’ of the public realm of the city, describing another layer that is driven by endless consumerism. Finally Sharon Zukin brings the discussion of authenticity back on the argument of Jane Jacobs.

5.1 The human construction

Marin Heidegger can helps us to understand the importance of ordinary public spaces. Heidegger argues that a fundamental element in the construction of a place is the existential necessity for people to define themselves in relation to the material world. He contended that human beings originate in an alienated condition and define themselves, among other ways, spatially. The creation of ‘place’ roots them in the world, their homes and localities becoming biographies of this creation (Heidegger, 1971).

One of the difficulties in clarifying the relation between space and place is, not only that the two are necessarily connected, but that this concept for years tended to be understood only spatially. In such place is most often treated as either a certain position in space or else as a certain portion of space. This way of understanding place is itself led to a particular conception of space as identical with physical space, that is, with space as it is articulated within the system of the physical sciences, and so as essentially articulated in terms of the measurable and the quantifiable. Heidegger comments on the modern concept of space and the way it has come to dominate the idea of place, thus:

“For us today space is not determined by way of place; rather, all places, as constellations of points, are determined by infinite space that is everywhere homogenous and nowhere distinctive”.

The concepts of place, and of space, that are at issue for Heidegger cannot be assumed to be identical with any narrowly physical conception, nor can it be assumed that place can be taken as derivative of space, or as identical with spatial location, position, area, or volume. In this respect, place should not be assumed to be identical with the “where” of a thing. Although this is one sense of space, it is not the only or the primary sense - place also refers to that open, cleared, gathered “region” or “locale” in which we find ourselves along with other persons and things (Cresswell, 2004)

Central to Heidegger’s philosophy is the notion of ‘dwelling’, the basic capacity to achieve a form of spiritual unity between humans and the material world. Through repeated experiences and complex associations, our capacity for dwelling allows us to construct places; to give them meanings that are deepened and qualified over time with a continuous flow of nuances. For Heidegger, ‘dwelling’ was the very essence of existence, the things that made a place. Heidegger used the illustration of a farmhouse in the German Black Forest to make this point:

“Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, dominions and mortals enter in simple oneness into things, ordered the house. It places the farm on the wind sheltered slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deepening down, shields the cambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in this chamber for the hallowed places of childbirth and the ‘three of the dead’ – for that it was called a coffin there; the Toltenbaum – and in this way it designed for the different generations under on the character of their journey through time. A craft which itself is sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and frames as things, built the farmhouse”. (Heidegger 1971:160)

Place as dwelling then is a spiritual and philosophical endeavour that unites natural and human worlds. A properly authentic existence to Heidegger is one rooted in place.

5.2 Imagined rootedness

David Harvey in his work critiques Heidegger concept of seeing place-as-dwelling as the ‘locale of the truth of being’ – the thing that makes humans humans. Harvey points out that Heidegger thinking was heavily influenced by the time-space compression in the Germany that was becoming a war state. It was this terror that forced Heidegger to withdraw from the world into his Black Forest farmhouse, a situation that for Harvey is hard to relate to:

“For example, what might the conditions of ‘dwelling’ be in a highly industrialized, modernist and capitalist world? Cannot turn back to the Black Forest farmhouse, but what is it that we might turn to? The issue of authenticity (rootedness) of the experience of place [...] is a difficult one. To begin with... the problem of authenticity is itself peculiarly modern. Only as modern industrialization separates us from the production and we encounter the environment as a finitely commodities does it emerge” (Harvey 1996:302)

As Cresswell argues it is not possible any more for large numbers of modern dwellers to retreat to farmhouses in the Black Forest or anywhere else. He links the critique of Harvey on the work of Heidegger to the contemporary efforts to make places more distinctive and visible and to provide a sense of pride and belonging (Cresswell, 2004). As Harvey notes this takes often the form of ‘heritage’ where a sense of rootedness in the past and in place is provided for the consumption of locals and tourists. Something that we nowadays see – for instance the San Diego ‘Gas Lamp district’ of (fig.IS) - is urban areas being cleaned up and marketed as a form of heritage. Signposts appear with kibbsy ‘old’ maps and detailed histories. All of this we can relate to as a search for authenticity and rootedness. In his text Harvey refers to the work of Yi-Fu Tuan when he borrows the argument that being rooted in place is a different kind of experience from having and cultivating a sense of place:

“A truly rooted community may have shrines and monuments, but it is unlikely to have museums and societies for the preservation of the past. The effort to evoke a sense of place and of the past is now often deliberate and conscious”. (Harvey 1996:302)

Harvey continues by stating that place is often seen as the locus of collective memory, an argument that we earlier saw in the work of Christine Boyer (IP6). This locus being a site where Identity is created through the construction of memories linking a group of people into the past.

“The preservation or construction of a sense of place is then an active moment in the passage from memory to hope, from past to future. And the reconstruction of places can reveal hidden memories that hold out the prospect for different futures”

Harvey 1996:306)

This construction of imagined places is important to Harvey, he would later dedicate the book Spaces of Hope entirely to the theme (Harvey, 2000). Harvey portrays in both these works place as a deeply ambiguous facet of modern and postmodern life. On the one hand investments in place can play a role in resisting the global circulation of capital but on the other it is often quite and exclusionary force in the world where groups of people define themselves against threatening others who are not included in the particular local expression of place.

5.3 A global sense of place

Doreen Massey’s paper ‘a global sense of place’ is in many ways a response on Harveys way of thinking, a response that hinges on a redefinition of place as an inclusive and progressive site of social life (Cresswell, 2004). Her plea for a new conceptualization of place as open and hybrid – a product of interconnecting flows - of routes rather than roots. This extended notion of place calls into question the whole history of place as a centre of meaning connected to a ‘rooted’ and ‘authentic’ sense of identity; forever challenged by mobility.

Harvey’s critique on Heidegger was already echoed by Doreen Massey in her paper ‘power geometry’. Although her work has also been important in bringing ideas of space and place to greater prominence in contemporary theory, nevertheless, Massey explicitly criticizes what she takes to be the “Heidergerian view of Space/Place as Being” and raises a variety of objections to such an account (Matapas, 2007), claiming that:

“There are a number of distinct ways in which the notion of place which is derived from Heidegger is problematical. One is the idea that places have single essential identities. Another is the idea that the identity of place - the sense of place - is constructed out of an introverted, inward-looking history based on dwelling into the past for internalized origins... Another problem with the conception of place which derives from Heidegger is that it seems to require the drawing of boundaries... [Another aspect of] the Heidergerian approach, and one which from the point of view of the physical sciences now looks out of date, is the strict dichotomization of time and space...” (Massey, 1993:64)

Massey describes a twofold problem with the definition of place as a merely static and rooted reaction to a dynamic and mobile world. First she argues that I may be the case that people do need a sense of place to hold on to – to be ‘rooted’. Secondly Massey sees the flow and flows of global movement as processively as anxiety provoking. The reactionary sense of place that troubles Harvey is for Massey marked as problematic by at least three interconnected ways of thinking, being: the idea that places have single, essential identities, the idea that the sense of place is constructed out of an introverted, inward-looking history and the conception of place as something that requires the drawing of boundaries (Massey 1994).
In her paper Massey describes Kilburn, a neighbourhood of London where she lived for years. Her description is a celebration of diversity and hybridity, an evocative mix of people of multiple ethnicities living and working side by side:

“While Kilburn may have a character of its own, it is absolutely not a seamless, coherent identity, a single sense of place that everyone shares. It could hardly be less so. […] Moreover, not only does Kilburn have many different identities (or its full identity is a complex mix of all these) it is also, looked at in this way, absolutely not introverted. It is […] impossible even to begin thinking about Kilburn High Road without bringing into play half of the world as a considerable amount of British imperialist history […] Imagining in this way provokes in you (or at least in me) a really global sense of place” (Massey 1994:174-175).

Massey’s Kilburn is, in her words, a ‘meeting place’ where a particular ‘constellation of social relations’ comes together in place. Her observations of Kilburn draw towards a what she defines new extrovert, progressive and global sense of place. This definition of place is marked by:

1. Place as process
2. Place as defined by the outside
3. Place as site of multiple identities and histories
4. A uniqueness of place defined by its interactions

Reviewing the outlined perceptions of place by Heidegger, Harvey and Massey it seems important to notice the very local context in which they developed these concepts or to what context they refer. Heidegger uses the complete, romanticised and slightly naïve, isolation of the Black Forest farmhouse. David Harvey refers to Guildford, a places that seeks itself under threat from difference and seeks to create clear boundaries to distinguish itself from the threatening outside. Massey’s Kilburn on the other hand is a place or radical openness. In this perspective it is not surprising that her considerations are different. Where Harvey sees place as too reactionary, Kilburn on the other hand is a place or radical openness. Massey’s context allows her to suggest that it is okay to seek identity in place because that identity is never fixed and bounded.

5.4] See you in Disneyland

Sorkins book ‘Variations on a Theme Park’ (Sorkin, 1992) was a very critical contribution that had a big impact on the discussion on urban renewal at that moment. In the early 90s he was one of the first to draw a problematic conclusion: in a predominantly suburban America Disneyland is one of the few places where there a real urbanity can be experienced on a manner that is not threatening. It is a safe place where all the infrastructure is organised well, where everything works and where everything is neat, where reigns an utopian ethos of pleasant living. According to Sorkin it is no wonder that private developers have taken Disneyland as an example for their new projects. Around the world, Disney is the benchmark.

Sorkin abhors this Disneylandification. The illusion ofarchetypal and universal happiness for all, based on an almost completely passive way of leisure – a world without work – is his problem. For Sorkin even worse is the lack of freedom of choice, a result of cutting away everything that might disturb people - nonconformity, the aberrant. His most fundamental objection, however, focuses on the lack of democracy, of real citizenship. Sorkin uses television (another popular 90s phenomena in criticism) as a metaphor:

“[…] the structure of this city is a lot like television. TV’s main event is the cut, the elision between/broadcast bits, the seamless slide from soap opera to docudrama to a world from our sponsor. The ‘design’ of television is all about erasing differences among these bits, about asserting equal value for all the elements in the net, so that any of the infinite combinations that the broadcast day produces can make ‘sense’. The new city likewise eradicates genuine particularity in favour of a continuous urban field, a conceptual grid of boundless reach” (Sorkin, 1992:231).

Sorkin argues that what is missing in the city is not just a matter of any particular buildings or places, rather the spaces in between, the connections that make sense of forms. Liberated from its ‘centres’ and edges due to advanced infrastructures and by a new world order bent on a ‘single citizenship of consumption’ (Sorkin, 1992), the new city threatens an unimagined sameness even as it multiplies the ilusory choices of the TV system. Sorkin sets out three characteristics that mark this city, and outline his book. First is the scattering of stable relations to local physical and cultural geography, the loosening of ties to any specific space. Second is the obsession with ‘security’, both technological and physical. Third is the realm of the city turning into one of simulations, the city as theme park.

Comprehensively Sorkin elaborates on the notion that he sees between Disney Land and the garden city, both in organization as in scale. Their location on the urban perimeter, at the intersection of highways and internally strictly ordered. Radiating from a strong centre the parks are thematically zoned. Whereas the ground plane is dedicated to the pedestrian circulation, its perimeters and airspace are the terrain of extensive and expressive transport systems: trains, monorails and aerial gondolas. He sees it as a particular way of urbanism, one that accelerates trends that are everywhere noticeable. According to Sorkin the problems addressed by ‘Disneyzone’ are quintessentially modern: crime, transportation, waste, the relationship of work and leisure, the transience of populations and the growing hegemony of simulacrum (Sorkin 1992:231).
Sorkin argues in extent that like world fairs, theme parks offer "intensifications of the present, the transformation of the world by an exponential increase in its commodities. And for Sorkin the motion is essential in this experience, movement is ubiquitous and central:

"Getting there, then, is not half the fun: it’s all the fun. At Disneyland one is constantly poised in a condition of becoming, always someplace that is ‘like’ someplace else. The simulations referent is ever elsewhere, the ‘authenticity’ of the substitution always depends on the knowledge, however failed, of some absent genuine. Disneyland is in perpetual shadow, propelling its visitors to an unattainable past or future, or to some (inconvenient) geography” (Sorkin 1992:216)

In the end his contribution Sorkin links Disneyland to an existing city, Los Angeles. Where historic themes describe the city’s own self-description. The genius of the city resides according to Sorkin not simply in dispersal but in juxtaposition. The Disney visitor seeks and delights in the relationship between what he or she finds and its observes back home.

“In the Disney utopia, we all become involuntary flaneurs and flaneuses, global drifters, holding high our lamps as we look everywhere for an honest image […] Like television, it is a machine for the continuous transformation of what exists […] into what doesn’t […]. It’s a genetic utopia, where every product is some sort of mutant” (Sorkin 1992:232)

5.5 No more Wonderland. A Critique

Both in academia as in newspapers increasingly is being written about the neighbourhoods where rapidly settling wealthy residents catalyse what they call ‘gentrification’. What was considered a ‘typical’, ‘authentic’, ‘original’ district was taken over by representatives of the wealthy middle class and everything that initially was so appealing - particularly the mixing of the population and the creative atmosphere - has disappeared. In Amsterdam something occurred for instance in the Jordaan: for long being a typical Amsterdam neighbourhood, but whereas nowadays all real ‘Jordanezen’ moved to Purmerend or Almere. New York is the biggest offender of them all, the anonymous blogger behind Lost City viciously described Bloomberg’s city as:

"homogeneous, anodyne, whitewashed, suburbs, toothless, chain-store-ridden, ordinary, exclusive and terribly, terribly expensive. A town for tourists and the upper 2%. He took a world-class capital of culture, individually and independent endeavour and turned it into the smoothest, first-class, gated community Houston ever saw”. (Anonymous 2010)

Zukin focuses on urban change as manifest in specific neighbourhoods, building on the argument of Jane Jacobs but in the same time critiquing it. To this end she analyses accurately what has happened in a few famous New York neighbourhoods like Williamsburg, East Village and the area around Union Square, but also a former no-go area as Harlem. She finds a pattern: ramshackle neighbourhoods get discovered by squatters, artists, immigrants and undergo a metamorphosis. There are then attractive shops with local products, restaurants with exotic foods and there is a dynamic, cosmopolitan atmosphere. The ‘authentic neighbourhood’ is born (Jacobs, 1961).

Jacobs showed a world that was disappearing in the time she wrote about it. There are no housewives any more who spend all day monitoring the street and talking with the grocer on the corner. Existence is mobile and has become hectic, we have barely any opportunity to deeply root into our neighbourhoods. Zukin argues that authenticity refers to the ‘look’ and ‘feel’ of a place, as well as the social connectedness that place inspires:

“Yearning for authenticity reflects the separation between our experience and of space and our sense of self that is so much part of modern mentalities. Though we think authenticity refers to a neighbourhood’s innate qualities, it really expresses our own anxieties about how places changes. The idea of authenticity is important because it connects our individual yearning to root ourselves in a singular time and place to a cosmic grasp of larger social forces that remake our world from many small and often invisible actions”. (Zukin 2009:220)

Zukin shows that cities are subject to the market and therefore sensitive to changes in appearance, taste and fashion. Whether we like it or not, Zukin argues, our preference for lattes, designer clothing, healthy food and audiovisual toys dispels vulgar and cheap eats, trendy mass stores. Likewise, our desire to live in the water large former warehouses ensure that such buildings are restored and made suitable for habitation. But this applies to everything that formerly sat dispelled and disappears. ‘Authentic’ is a buzzword, obsolete before you know it.

Authenticity is often used as a lever of cultural power for a group to claim space and take it away from others without direct confrontation, with the help of the state and elected officials and the persuasion of the media and consumer culture. We can turn this lever in the direction of democracy, Zukin argues:

“By creating new forms of public-private ‘stewardship’ that gives residents, workers and small business owners, as well as buildings and districts, a right to put down roots and remain in place. This would strike a balance between a city’s origins and its new beginnings; this would restore a city’s soul”. (Zukin 2009: 246).
Shopping forms our urban environment. Los Angeles is a wild grown scattering of shopping centres, malls, department stores and even shopping streets. You can do whatever you want if you know where you are looking for. More then it is the replacement of a street life that once was there, it now starts to become the ultimate simulacrum of the good life. Miniature Europe on astroids. All made possible by billionaire developer Rick Caruso, who sees it as his supreme moral obligation to provide the future generation with a rich and steadfast foundation. A future where the security patrol wears cowboy hats, the grass is surveyed by CCTV and the street lighting produces the tones of Frank Sinatra. A future without homeless people. A future of iced coffee and pretzels. A future where a fake historic trolley brings consumerism to the next level. The diversity is dazzling and the matrix keeps on growing. For malls enclosure (A) nowadays seems to equal boringness, although the Beverly Center remains rather popular. Remodeled by the Jerde Partnership, Frank Gehry’s Santa Monica Place is again life and kicking. An open, multiple floor mall (B), where sun and shade are both attractive. Seemingly immortal are the one floor shopping centres, available in different flavours. Masquerade exterior – generic interior as in the Citadel, Generic exterior – masquerade interior as in the Little Tokyo Village, hardcore thematic as Universal City Walk or the European happiness of the Grove. Whatever you prefer. And while these are banal references to village (C) life, the Americana and Paseo flagrantly mimics city (D) life with their stacked mini-aggregation of apartments, shops, theatre, swimming pool and parks. If once the hotel was the city, now the shopping centre is the ultimate simulacrum. Real is rare. On Colorado blvd you might some exciting urban street life (E), liberated from car traffic (F) Santa Monica 3rd street boulevard has evolved by consumerism. As how we define shopping, the endless boulevards that contain strip shops don’t really count. The markets get close, whether they have the permanence (G) of the Grand Central Market (G) or the periodically appearance of the Hollywood Farmers Market (H). If these variety has an economic or cultural explanation then it would be that fashion appears recursive.

More then anything shopping is therapy. The setting liberates from daily boredomness, the credit card from loans and mortgages. At least for a while. Malls are neutralized zones where enclosure and rhythm enables you to focus on joy, being happily trapped. The urban streets seems to be more exciting, but the variety and discontinuity distracts. While you walk more they lack street furniture. Optimal comfort you will only find in the mall. Food always on the top floor, clean toilets, sofa’s to relax and a steady 70°F. Exciting? No. Efficient? Yes. If you don’t want to think, you really don’t have to. Just as Abercrombie and Hollister, H&M and Forever21 are always together, minimalising your effort to shop in the same style with the same budget. Basically every corner has a department store like Bloomingdale. The same variety of brands, condensed and in different price ranges. Or you leave the mall through Target where you find anything for almost nothing, being able to directly walk into the parking lot. For shopping less really is more. Distracted by Macy’s customer reward card you will every time end up buying those two cute skirts that seems to be really cheap, but you really don’t need.

For many shopurbia is the last remaining physical manifestation of the ‘public’. Everything happens there. Couples stroll around, have dinner and go to the movies. High school kids hang out, drink a smoothie and flirt with some eye contact. They take a bus from school and their parents pick them up after work. This controlled and regulated seems to be the only alternative for the streets that get increasingly unsafe. It is the place where you see and be seen. Referencing yourself constantly to others or to your appearance in the windows. Being able to set different personal standards, just by driving to that other mall in that other neighbourhood. Finding the class that you (want to) belong to in the Beverly Center, or not caring about your fellow shoppers at all when you attack the Citadel Outlets. Just as boulevards once had different audiences and atmospheres, the malls do to. Even the web does. You might shop for exclusive Japanese fashion or you go for quick and cheap – without leaving your house. There is a shopurbia for everyone.
Third Street Promenade has been a center of business in Santa Monica since the town’s inception in the late 19th century. The Promenade’s roots date back to the 1960s when three blocks of Third Street were converted into a pedestrian mall. Although successful, by the late 1970s, the Santa Monica Mall (as it was then called), was in need of modernization and a redesign. A new enclosed shopping center, Santa Monica Place (1980–2007), designed by Frank Gehry was added at the Promenade’s southern end. The renamed Third Street Promenade opened on September 16, 1989.

Although wildly successful, many long-time local residents of Santa Monica have mixed feelings about the Third Street Promenade, particularly about the homogenized stores and restaurants and the loss of the distinct personality and individuality provided by such independent stores. This simulation aspect makes Third Street Promenade almost indistinguishable from any other outdoor plaza (i.e. the Grove or Universal City Walk). Other points of contention for locals center on the increased traffic and over-crowded parking structures.

The Third Street Promenade has seen a drastic decrease in local businesses in favor of sanitized chains. Larger tenants include H&M, Barnes & Noble, Urban Outfitters, a three-story Gap, Forever 21, Abercrombie and Fitch. It boasts several theaters and also hosts the largest and oldest certified organic farmers’ market of California, each Wednesday and Saturday. Street performers and entertainers are a frequent sight on the street. On a typical Saturday night in the summer, singer-songwriters, classical guitar players, magicians, clowns, hip-hop dancers, lounge singers, session drummers are all lined up along Third Street.
Santa Monica Place is an upscale shopping mall in Santa Monica, California. The mall is located at the south end of the famous Third Street Promenade, and is also two blocks from the Santa Monica Pier and the beach. It underwent a massive, 3-year renovation process beginning in January, 2008, and was re-opened on August 6, 2010.

Santa Monica Place opened in 1980 adjacent to the old Third Street Mall and was renovated in 1991 and again in 1996. For the next ten years, the mall was three-story, 570,000-square-foot (53,000 m2) complex. It featured 120 shops, including upscale brands such as Kenneth Cole and Williams-Sonoma, along with its largest store, Macy’s. It is 152,000 sq ft (14,100 m2) on three levels. Santa Monica Place was designed by renowned architect Frank Gehry early in his professional career, constructed in 1980 and renovated in 1990. It has served as a backdrop for several films and television shows, most notably the exterior of the Ridgemont Mall in Fast Times at Ridgemont High; it has also been used in Pretty in Pink as well as Terminator 2: Judgment Day and Beverly Hills, 90210.

Developer, The Macerich Company, purchased the mall in 1999 and in 2004 proposed tearing down the mall and replacing it with a 10-acre (40,000 m2) complex of high-rise condos, shops and offices. The plan met with strong opposition from local residents who felt the project did not meet the low-rise character of the neighborhood and would worsen traffic. In a second 2007 proposal, Macerich significantly scaled back its plans, which was received as positive by the public, and was passed. For more information see the interview with Jerde Partnership design director David Rogers.
Americana at Brand is a large outdoor shopping community in Glendale, opened on May 2, 2008. The property is owned and operated by LA super-businessman Rick Caruso and his company Caruso Affiliated. Americana at Brand has 75 retail shops and a variety of dining options. The Americana includes 100 condominiums and 238 apartments. The Americana project stirred debate in Glendale for years; with some merchants fearing the Grove-style hurting businesses for stores along Brand Boulevard and in the Galleria.

The Americana is organized upon the idea of a city centre—with a mix of architectural styles, building heights and materials used, as well as vast open spaces at the projects’ centre. The architectural style of the Americana is meant to reflect the industrial era, including a massive elevator shaft with exposed steel beams. The Americana at Brand is designed to appear like a public space, but is private property, and is protected as such.

However, the 2-acre park in the centre of the complex is entirely public property, further blurring the line between public and private space. Even though the park is public, the policy is that personal photography, other than that of friends or family, is forbidden and these rules are enforced by private security. Security also restricts the size of dogs that one may bring into the mall and to the park.
Developed by Glendale Associates, the Glendale Galleria mall opened on October 14, 1976. The architect was Jon Jerde, the famous California mega-mall designer. By 1990, the mall was around 150,000 m² in size, and had annual revenues of $350 million. The Galleria included the first three-story Target department store in the United States. It was also selected by Apple Inc. as the location of one of the first two Apple Stores in the world; both officially opened on May 19, 2001.

The building of the Galleria was of a major momentum for the community of Glendale in the early 1970s. The Glendale Historical Society noted it as: “A two-decade teardown trend in the ’70s and ’80s marked the end of central Glendale’s historic residential neighborhoods” (Glendale Historical Society, 2000). Besides the development of the shopping mall, Brand Boulevard and adjacent streets were “redeveloped”, with large office buildings replacing many small shops. The construction of the 134 Freeway across the center of the city created a “Golden Triangle” of freeways that echoed the geographic triangle of Jose Maria Verdugo’s Rancho San Rafael. The Glendale Galleria mall nowadays does over $600 a square foot. It’s over 90% leased, but under huge pressure of the adjacent Americana at Brand.
This overview reconsiders the red line of this research project, forming the actual thesis. Whereas the research project that you have been reading here before was built upon the isolated scales of the region, the downtown and the shopping centre - supported by three theoretical frames [ecology, public domain, place making], this overview aims correlate through scales. The overview distinct four modernities, the thesis finally will deal with a fifth. Each modernity is represented by an urban ecology and vice versa, together they mark a certain moment in time. Each of these modernities is in this overview described and reconsidered in an isolated way. Not as an seemingly continuous story, but by setting them aside celebrating their uniqueness while being part of the same history. The written text is related to the seven concepts [connectivity, identity, intensity, expansion, speed, disclosure, identification] that I have used in the upcoming design laboratory for the fifth modernity, intopia.
The Angeleno, inhabiting Los Angeles just before the 20th century was interconnected by foot, bicycle and horse conveyance. Modernity was tasted little by little, whereas transnational trains for instance showed a first glimpse of a world that later would virtually become smaller and smaller. In Downtown LA this was anchored by the rail track on Alameda Street and the little cluster of a post-office, bank and some shops. Around that, life was organized and determined by distances one could walk. Intensity. The grain of Downtown LA is rather fine and low dense, we distinct a small centrality and around that basically a variety of houses on single plots. The grid is rigid but spacious and allows streets to have wide profiles. Downtown was loosened from its heavy urban ties by orange- and vineyards, spread out of the fabric. The population of Downtown was already of great mixture. The Sanborn maps show Chinese laundry's and German schools. Expansion. Downtown LA truly was LA. The regional maps shows very distinct cities and settlements, connected by long stretches. These roads, possibly even sandy paths, were to facilitate the horse conveyances trough what back then still was much of a desert. Speed. Needless to say is that the city back then was in a pace that we nowadays hardly would reckon. In fact, a pace other than the ones given by nature – a man walking, a horse trotting – came into play for the very first time. The space / time configuration of the public domain in Downtown LA truly formed a distinct urban ecology. The space / time configuration of the ecology of walking gave arguably rise to a certain kind of enclosed identity of the citizen. The people related to their urban environment by the way of walking or maybe a horse conveyance. Downtown Los Angeles those days was much a City as a Work of Art - more or less the prototype traditional city. Where the cityscape was designed and viewed as a theatrical stage, displaying monuments that spoke of exemplary deeds and national unity (Boyer, 1994). Clearly the United States lack a renaissance history of public art as statues and monumental squares. Los Angeles Plaza or singular buildings with institutional meaning as the County Courthouse (fig.104) might have been the rare exceptions.
1929 collective modernity; the ecology of the street car

Connectivity. Around 1929 the city was ‘fixed’ by two networks of public transit, the Pacific Electric Railway (the red cars) and the Downtown yellow cars. The long lines of the Pacific Electric were dialectic to the so called ‘streetcar-suburbs’ as Pasadena, Glendale, Burbank but also to adjacent cities as Santa Monica. The yellow cars were part of an impressive expansion of the heart of Los Angeles city mainly to the south of Downtown. The streetcar was one of the main facilitators of this vital expansion, but really was another chapter in the life of Downtowns inhabitants. The grain of Downtown LA was small, some boulevards densely built. Centrality was linear, it was a place of long lines (fig.108).

Intensity. One could imagine lively boulevards, full of activity and people walking. And masses of people moving together, on electricity. The modern city of the early 20th century was on the contrary impacted by the development of infrastructures and transportation systems, by movement transforming the static city image into a city of panorama where the new experience of moving through the city tended to erase the traditional sense of pictorial enclosure. The cityscape was transformed into a series of fleeting impressions and momentary encounters (Bayer, 1994). The German philosopher George Simmel writes about the psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, being the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli (Simmel, 1999). Simmel argues that the metropolitan inhabitant, having to cope with a vast amount of impressions, creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption of the external milieu threatening it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner. This rationality we find back in Haussmann’s work on Paris. He basically reorganized public space for the mundane purpose of facility a more free circulation of money, commodities and people throughout the spaces of the city. Here again the basic principle of movement had a political representation. Harvey argues that this kind of movement puts the city in another pace. Ordinary life speeding up, the stimuli of urbanity became more and more overwhelming (Harvey 2006). Walter Benjamin argues about this state of enclosure: “In this there is something characteristic of the sociology of the big city. Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads and trams in the nineteenth-century, people never had been in a position of having to look to one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one other” (Benjamin 1985:38).
79

Just before autopia would emerge, commuting to work was not very pleasant at all. The choice for the freeways was a deliberate choice for modernity. It let a completely new public domain emerge, a domain with the ENCLOSURE of the mall and parking garage. The freeway – a product of public capital – became the very last remaining public space. Reyner Banham labelled the extensive freeway landscape of Los Angeles, Autopia. Collectively the Angelenos in the fifties and sixties renounced the Pacific Electric railway system in favour of the car. SPEED. CONNECTIVITY. The automobile was comfortable and gave presence to the desire of being independent. But Banham’s Autopia was definitely not only the freeway as piece of infrastructure, it was “a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life” (Banham 1978:213). EXPANSION. The freeways catalysed a last leap of urban sprawl as we see in the regional map (fig.111). But it also did something to the form of the downtown. The 1970s centre of the city has got a bigger grain, became less INTENSE and got a noticeable different morphology (fig.112). It developed a radically different pattern of centrality. Freeways made it possible for department stores and shopping malls to pop up, the 1980 Frank Gehry design of Santa Monica place is just one example (fig.199). That ecology of automobiles didn’t just drop out the California sky. David Harvey (2001) understood this phenomena as an expression of the ‘spatial fix’. The spatial fix is literally a fix. I understand it as a geographical expansion to resolve problems of overaccumulation. It is partly achieved through fixing investments spatially, embedding them in the land and by that creating an entirely new landscape for capital accumulation (Harvey, 2001). A spatial fix does not necessarily has to be a geographical expansion, but in the case of California it repetitively was. The infrastructures of urbanization are crucial to absorb surpluses of capital and labour. The spatial fix every time solves a crisis. Infrastructures as MONUMENTS of modernity. Burning city as a monument for social unrest and riots. A downtown that got stripped to rebuild something that never was. A Central Business District called Bunker Hill, cold rationality without IDENTIFY. Postmodern urbanism from the 1980’s made cityscapes emerge that assemble historic styles and scenographic allusions, interconnected by various kinds of visible and invisible infrastructures. In the City of Spectacle the collective memory is replaced by a false or at least manipulated historical image, mainly articulating the message of consumerism (Boyer, 1994). Michael Sorkin abhors this what he declared ‘disneyfication’. He sees problematic consequences in the illusion of parochialism and universal happiness for all, based on an almost completely passive way of leisure and the lack of freedom of choice, a result of cutting away everything that might disturb people - nonconformity, the aberrant. His most fundamental objection focuses on the lack of democracy, of real citizenship. Sorkin uses television as a metaphor: “In the Disney utopia, we all become involuntary flaneurs and flaneuses, global drifters, holding high our lamps as we look everywhere for an honest image […] Like television, it is a machine for the continuous transformation of what exists […] into what doesn’t[…] It’s a genetic utopia, where every product is some sort of mutant” (Sorkin 1992:232).
2011 a supermodernity of residual ecologies

Postmodernism is dead and we might never have been modern at all (Brown 1990; Latour 1993). Marc Auge argues a ‘supermodernity’: something that does not communicate the negotiation of narrative and identity, but more their theatrical multiplication in an avalanche of space, time and event. So not so much the ‘post-’ as an condemnation of the previous, but the multiplication of newer modernities. “We could say of supermodernity that it is the face of a coin whose obverse represents postmodernity: the positive of a negative” (Auge 1995:30).

**INTENSITY . CONNECTIVITY .** Kazys Varnelis draws the historic outline of the spatial development of Los Angeles as a basis for a contemporary state of clustering through evolving infrastructures: “In postsuburbia, daily commutes would be from exurban center to exurban center. The resultant diffuse, horizontal sprawl reconfigured the existing traffic patterns, radically undoing the predictable flow of traffic into and out of the city, in favor of a homogeneous and eventually evenly gridlocked field” (Varnelis 2005: 181).

**EXPANSION.** Varnelis analyses that in Los Angeles the condition of sprawl ended and that it slightly began to transform into a ‘cluster city’ (fig 114). These clusters are centres and nodes in a formerly diffuse field of urban sprawl. Varnelis points out an awareness of the continuous shaping of **IDENTITY** because of the ongoing diversification of the mass market and the traditional minorities. What Varnelis through his writing proposes is the idea that some earlier ecologies are starting to reappear as a kind of ‘shadows’. The places that matter in 2011 then can be understood in a multiplicative perspective of history (fig. 115). Nowadays relations are based on the understanding that everything appears in plural and one understands that we can be multiple people at the same time without being schizophrenic. **DISCLOSURE.** A person inhabiting a place in a city can be at the same time and without contradiction inhabiting a street, a neighbourhood, a city and a nation. Each of these simultaneous ‘identities’ involves different relations to objects around one, in special to transportation technologies, to physical networks. In 2011 we see a stack of infrastructural components in the city that have been of key influence on the perception of the public domain.

**SPEED.** The pace of the city changed by the mode of transport, from the stagecoach to the car to the airplane. It resulted in a domain of motion, one of intense stimuli, extreme spectacle and blinding genericness. Rem Koolhaas argues that the phenomena of urban sprawl is a basic characteristic of the future city in which density is artificially created in the form of urban simulacra as shopping malls and theme parks. “The serenity of the Generic City is achieved by the evacuation of the public realm, as in an emergency fire drill. The urban plan now only accommodates necessary movement, fundamentally the car; highways are a superior version of boulevards and piazzas, taking more and more space” (Koolhaas 1995:1251).

**MONUMENT.** The 1940 concept of Arcade is still in play. According to Peter Sloterdijk it heralds the abolition of the outside world. It abolishes outdoor markets and brings them indoors, into a closed sphere. A sphere that literally was closed in the 70s, but now formally mimics the false illusion of openness (fig.113). Benjamin (1985) argued that the 19th-century citizen seeks to expand his living room into a cosmos and at the same time to impress the dogmatic form of a room on the universe. Sloterdijk sees this in line with a trend that was perfected in the 20th-century: “[…] Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace, erected in London in 1851, is the paradigmatic building. It forms the first hyper-interior that offers a perfect expression of the spatial idea of psychedelic capitalism. It is the prototype of all later theme-park interiors and event architectures" (Sloterdijk 2009:128).
“Los Angeles seems to be the city of endless possible selves, the place where frictionless personal transformation can occur, the arena of ultimate do-it-yourself construction”
(Jencks, 1993)

In the time since the development’s completion, globalization has produced a plethora of urban centres which are as uniform and sterile as the worst examples of orthodox Modernism – minus the social idealism. What once was called the public realm has become a place of frenzied consumerism monitored by the watchful eyes of thousands of surveillance cameras, often closed off to those who cannot afford the price of membership. In this new world, architecture looks more and more like a form of corporate branding. We forgot how to design ordinary places in the city.

We as urbanists are all part of a group of people, a pact. Ones work and ones existence are potential agents of historical transformations. This thesis mixes Jencks and Superstudio, combines Rossi with Friedmann and adds a bit of Debdor on Koolhaas. Coming up with a critical design concept for Downtown Los Angeles, the envisioning of a superstructure. It are these large scale things that make the whole community structure comprehensible and assure the identity of the parts within the whole (Smithson, 1967).

In the urban region where the ‘armature’ for decades has been the celebration of expansion, this is the momentum where we should invert the way we treat infrastructure. Proposing a concentrated, inwards oriented armature. Revealing an ecology of various ecologies. An ecology were - to use the words of the Prussian explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1835) – Alles ist Wechselwirkung, all is interaction (Kwinter, 2011). Form and nature are expressions of this interactions, more or less incorporating and synthesizing the environment. A project that operates in the realm of optimistic utopia’s. Forecasting a different future, radically provoking reality. Intopia: intense, interpersonal, interconnected.
The design laboratory distincts in its exploratory design 7 themes and 3 scales. The scales are system - object - territory, being: the skytrain, the station, the transformation. The aim of the lab is not to develop some kind of answer to an urgent need. Positioned in the domain of ‘optimistic utopia’ the design project deals with the concept of ‘spatial fix’, anticipating new times of overaccumulation.

More than a solution the project is a statement, radicalising a different future modernity.
Circular Bridge, Mt. Lowe, Cal.
Los Angeles downtown’s rich diversity of ‘themes’ suffers from fragmented continuity in the experience of the public realm. Great micro-environments are of a distance from each other that is too far to walk, while downtown at the same time is utterly inconvenient to drive.

Empty plots and big parking lots are opportunities for further intensification and when located around interesting zones, public parks and other means of public transport they can serve as location for the connecting monorail stations.

Instead of homogenising the urban landscape and turning the diversity into a nondescript themepark, the monorail helps to manifest the various identities and characters. Just by being a nondescript generic element itself that only connects great micro spheres. The map in the right bottom shows an overlaid history (1888-2011) of historic ‘hotspots’, and repeatedly show one of the arguments of this thesis. Attractive and meaningful spaces don’t just suddenly appear, most of them are parts or residuals from earlier ecologies. The four time frames are mapped on the next phase, showing the relation between morphology, function centrality and infrastructures.

1. Interconnect
Los Angeles downtown’s rich diversity of ‘themes’ lacks continuity in the experience of the public realm. Great micro-environments are of a distance from each other that is too far to walk, while downtown at the same time is utterly inconvenient to drive.

2. Intensify
The superstructure adds another grid to Los Angeles. It introduces zones with a radius of 150m where the land market opens up, and zoning comes in a new perspective. This new layer will catalyze new intensities, density and excitement.

3. Manifests identity
Instead of homogenising the urban landscape and turning the diversity into a nondescript themepark, the monorail helps to manifest the various identities and characters. Just by being a nondescript generic element itself that only connects great micro spheres.

4. Appropriate
By connecting to existing and new build fabric, the skywalk appropriates valuable unused space. This appropriation makes it possible to program another Los Angeles by superimposing another urban landscape.

5. Temporise
The monorail combines a new culture of congestion with one of high-speed movement. By this contradictory motion it provides different readings of a continuously different city.

6. Reveal
Riding the monorail reveals unexpected panoramas on Downtown Los Angeles. Passengers encounter the city as how it is, not only as how the city is branded.

7. Iconize
Infrastructures are the cathedral of the city. The refined stations will form an unified landmark for downtown Los Angeles. Expressive and generic, subtle and banal, the monorail itself forms and exciting space.
VACANT SPACES

GREEN SPACES
EXISTING PUBLIC NETWORKS

ATTRACTION ZONES
HISTORIC LAYERING

COMPLEX POTENTIALITY
ROUTE + EMPTYNESS

ROUTE + EXISTING
REACTIVATING DOWNTOWN
LA SKYWALK
Before designing the Skytrain station, I made a conceptual scheme for the column supporting the Skywalk. The final concept is based on Gothic cathedrals and the idea of man stretching in a forward direction, not keeping his legs aside but stepping forwards. Columns that mash up Gaudi and postmodernity. The column is with its straight side oriented to the facade of buildings, with its opening figuratively stepping over the sidewalk.

1. **Interconnect**
The station connects the reactivated street to the high speed network of the Skytrain and the low speed network of the Skywalk.

2. **Intensity**
Within a radius of 150m the land market is opened up and the zoning regulations for new and existing buildings becomes more flexible. More than a strict border, that line of 150m is the core of a sphere of transformation.

3. **Identity**

4. **Appropriate**
By connecting to existing and new build fabric, the skywalk appropriates valuable unused space. This appropriation makes it possible to program another Los Angeles by superimposing another urban landscape.

5. **Temporise**
Different modes of motion are expressed in different ways. The escalator and elevator relate to high speed, a grand stair to low speed.

6. **Reveal**
The pavilions rooftop terrace provides magnificent views on the Skywalk, the station area and the never ending City of Angeles. The windows of the train are in particular orientated beneath the horizon. Not orientated at the far sprawl, but focused on a Downtown in motion.

7. **Iconize**
Infrastructures are the cathedral of the city. The robust red towers will form an unified landmark for downtown Los Angeles. Expressive and generic, subtle and banal, the monorail itself forms and exciting space.
fig 129. Some study schemes for the supports column.

fig 130. The human body, distributing forces by making a step.

fig 131. The gothic cathedral scheme; dividing forces through arches.
Columns, inspired by a Gothic cathedral force distribution scheme, support the LA Walkway - elevated 16 metres above the street.

The Skytrain station is basically not much more then platforms on both sides of the train.

A braking Skytrain gives besides gravitation a complex play of diagonal oriented forces.

A 50cm thick perforated body of concrete distributes those forces and supports both the Skywalk as the two Skytrain platforms. See the appendix for calculations.

Making the transformation between the column and the station, a hybrid element is introduced that supports the platforms.
Transformed into a set of stairs, this element links the platforms to the Skywalk.

Linking fast to fast. Escalator and elevator to the Skytrain platforms.

And slow to slow - the activated street to the LA Skywalk.

A second concrete slab finishes the body of force and movement.

A 40m² pavilion on the Skywalk works as attraction point with functions as a coffeebar, lounge, gallery or minimarket.

The pavilions rooftop terrace provides magnificent views on the Skywalk, the station area and the never ending City of Angeles.
Chosen is for a hanging monorail system, automatically operated. Three cabins each host 24 seats, making a total of 72 sitting places. The images on the right show two concepts, significantly different in the floor of the cabin.
1. Interconnect
The four or six blocks that are involved in the area transformation are connected to a bigger network of mobility through the Skytrain, but in their own scale are connected with each other through a lively pedestrian area on the street.

2. Intensify
The developed scenarios are visualisations of a possible future. Flexible grids allow developers to densify and re-develop. Preferable development is facilitated by the LA City Transit Company. Pioneering the development and operating the zone, highest quality is possible.

3. Manifests identity
A lively street level with shops, bars, restaurants, dwelling and offices. Living diversity, in the intimate sphere of the inner block. A radically new typology for LA, creating customized zones where specific urban qualities are expressed to the fullest.

4. Appropriate
By rule, always at least three quarter of the pedestrian zone is connected on the street and one quarter through the air. Appropriating a rooftop landscape on the 4th floor, connecting even to buildings with 2,3,5 and 6 floors.

5. Temporise
A high density of people is needed to maintain two lively networks, on the ground and in the air. Elevation points are mostly in programma, that in general orients shopping to the ground and leisure to the Skywalk. Assuring maximal vertical motion and dynamics.

6. Reveal
Streets in Downtown LA are barely streets. The sidewalk is domain of the bus stop, parked cars and beggars. Inverting the public domain makes the experience more intense, more exciting. Smaller alleys seduce anyone to discover intensive urbanity.
The selected intervention area near Downtown LA's Little Tokyo is now an enormous parking lot, on the east bordered by three gated condo's. The parking lot now functions mostly as division between the oldest core of Downtown and Little Tokyo and has because of that great potential to redevelop.

The zone that has been envisioned builds upon that. On one hand it stretches the great environment that the open air Little Tokyo plaza has, while on the other hand informally tying it to Downtown LA on Grand Blvd. Because of the gathering of older grids, the morphological genesis is rather diagonal and the development on top of that becomes naturally dynamic.
PEDESTRIAN ZONE

SKYWALK
Skywalk Detail

1:100

Hardened glass balustrade
Concrete column
Grass and moss planting
Belgian stone
Peel-up bench hard wood
Stainless steel railing
Belgian grass turfs
Peel-up bench
Concrete slabs
Grass and moss planting
Belgian stone

Fig. 136. Skywalk detail 1:100
IMPRESSION

FUNCTION MAP
The zone around 8th Street and Olive Street is chosen as example of a low dense, not so active area in Downtown L.A. With some dwelling, not too expansive, and mostly office buildings and parking lots. The area becomes interesting by its proximity to the booming LA Live, a big concentration of entertainment and joy with hotels, restaurants, clubs and the Staples Centre.

The zone designed is not too extreme. Development limits itself to around 6/7 floors and their has mainly been focussed on creating a green urban environment.
PEDESTRIAN ZONE

SKYWALK
FUNCTION MAP

SKYWALK DETAIL
IMPRESSION

IMPRESSION
One might think that the analysis on empty spaces with development potential completely misses out on this project. The historic meaning of Pershing Square - the oldest and biggest public park in Downtown LA, the proximity to the ancient Angels Flight, the contemporary density and the great connection by Metro makes this place a meaningful hotspot and extremely interesting for further evolution.

Different from the previous two projects this one doesn't have space to develop a pedestrian route through multiple blocks. As a sort of experiment in an experiment here has been chosen to stack everything in one superblock. A 5600m² footprint of a 36m high glass cubical encloses a vibrant interior, while the three mixed function towers peak through the roof and form a expressive addition to the LA Skyline.
PEDESTRIAN ZONE

SKYWALK
Here is the future. Just as you remember it.

In 1961 Disney nearly tripled the length of its 1959 Tomorrowland monorail, to two and a half miles, and made it as much a form of transportation as an amusement ride. From early on in the planning of Disneyland, Walt Disney envisioned a monorail in Tomorrowland. At the time it was the park’s most popular and talked about attraction. Millions of TV viewers saw the monorail on Walt’s Sunday show and became convinced of its future in transit. In 1961 an extension was added to connect to the nearby Disneyland Hotel. While Disney installed the monorail to promote it as a train of the future, the effect it had was just the opposite. Monorails for many years would be type-cast as amusement park rides.

But not only that. A year later Seattle opened its mile-long monorail linking downtown to the World’s Fair grounds and the Space Needle. A 1964 Saturday Evening Post article painted a glorious picture of tomorrow: “After reaching their train via escalator, the passengers recline in molded fiber-glass seats and gaze out large picture windows as electric power shoots them from station to station at 90 miles per hour.” But especially in the United States the monorail suffers from persistent disgrace. Some bring this back into conspiracy theories involving the oil and automotive industry in the early 70s. Others argue that they just haven’t been looked at seriously just because of the fact that they were theme parks and world’s fairs (Curtis 2005).

In this case study I briefly reviewed multiple concepts of mass transportation that relates to the monorail principle. First we will look into successful monorails supported by a ‘normal’ elevated track, then will review hanging monorails, cable cars and (moving) walkways. Besides that I review three contemporary ways of enclosing the track in stations or complex urban situations where very few support structure is allowed.
The loop that runs through downtown Sydney to Darling Harbour has become a must-see, must-ride for visitors to the city. Stations are located inside buildings, over freeways, at hotels and near several tourist destinations. It is privately owned and operated by the Metro Transport Sydney by Veolia.

| Build  | 1988 | Length (km) | 3.6 | stations | 8 | Hours | 7 am – 10 pm | Frequency (min) | 3-5 min | trains/cabins | 4 | ppl/train | 170 | adult fare one way | $5 | passengers/day | 11,000 | speed at track km/h | 36 |

This privately built and operated monorail has been lengthened along the famous Las Vegas Strip. The line runs from the Sahara Resort to the MGM Resort and further extensions are under study. For tax purposes, the Monorail is registered as a not-for-profit corporation, which is allowed under Nevada law since the Monorail provides a public service.

| Build  | 2004 | Length (km) | 6.3 | stations | 7 | Hours | 7 am - 3 am | Frequency (min) | 4-6 | trains/cabins | 9 | ppl/train | 360 | adult fare one way | $5 | passengers/day | 12,075 | speed at track km/h | 80 |

The Chiba Urban Monorail holds the world record for the longest suspended monorail system with a length of 15.5 km.

| Build  | 1988 | Length (km) | 15.5 | stations | 18 | hours | 5 am - 10 pm | frequency (min) | 4 - 5 | trains/cabins | 79 | adult fare one way | ¥200 (2.52 usd) | passengers/day | 45,430 | speed at track km/h | 35 |

The SkyTrain operates between a new Düsseldorf Airport Rail Station, a parking structure and the latest airport terminal. The Siemens H-Bahn is a variant of SAFEGE monorail technology.

| Build  | 2002 | Length (km) | 2.5 | stations | 2 | hours | 3.45 am - 12.45 am | frequency (min) | 3.5 - 7 | trains/cabins | 5 | ppl/train | 160 | adult fare one way | free | passengers/day | 17,512 | speed at track km/h | 40 |
1970 ROTTERDAM

After Ahoy (1950), E55 (1955) and Floriade (1960), and twenty-five years after the liberation, C70 is another national event. In the light of changing social relations and a clear reconstruction ‘tiredness’ men opts for something completely different. Instead of ports and industry, the emphasis now is on fun and entertainment in the innercity of Rotterdam. The cable car was a main asset, looping from the Weena to the Coolingtje, the Binnenwegplein and via the Karel Doormanstraat back to the Weena.

1893 CHICAGO

The first moving walkway debuted at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, in Chicago, Illinois. The Great Wharf, Moving Sidewalk had two different divisions: one where passengers were seated, and one where riders could stand or walk. It ran in a loop down the length of a lakefront pier to a casino.

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<tr>
<th>Build</th>
<th>1893</th>
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<td>Length (km)</td>
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Whereas some of Sydney’s monorail stations are located inside buildings, others are partly enclosed near stations or in some complex urban situations. The design of these tubes differs, but generally the structure is round and very transparent.
Metrocable (Caracas) is a gondola lift system integrated with the city’s public transport network, which provides quick and safe transportation for those who live in the neighbourhoods situated on Caracas’ mountainous regions. The system was built as a tool for social reform with stations set up to accommodate a variety of services such as daycares, libraries, police stations, markets and theatres.

- **Build**: 2010
- **Length (km)**: 2.1
- **Stations**: 5
- **Hours**: 6 am – 10 pm
- **Adult fare one way**: 0.5 bolivares (0.09 EUR)

The Emirates Air Line (also known as the Thames cable car) is a cable car link across the River Thames in London built for the 2012 Olympic Games. The service opened on 28 June 2012 and is operated by Transport for London. As with the marketing of the London Eye, the transit of the cable car is referred to as a “flight” and marketing literature borrows language from the airline industry, such as referring to tickets as “boarding passes”.

- **Build**: 2012
- **Length (km)**: 1.1
- **Stations**: 2
- **Hours**: 7 am – 9 pm
- **Adult fare one way**: £4.30 (5.36 EUR)

Calgary’s +15 Skywalk is a public pedestrian walkway system that links buildings throughout the Downtown and provides alternative routes for pedestrians to numerous and varied destinations. The public access through private buildings enables pedestrians to travel in weather-protected walkways, approximately 15 feet above the street level.

- **Build**: 1970
- **Length (km)**: 16
- **Hours**: 7 am - 9 pm

The Central–Mid-levels escalators in Hong Kong is the longest outdoor covered escalator system in the world. The entire system covers over 800 metres in distance and elevates over 135 metres from bottom to top. Apart from serving as a method of transporting, it is also a tourist attraction and has restaurants, bars, and shops lining its route.

- **Build**: 1993
- **Length (km)**: 0.8
- **Hours**: 6 am - 10 am downhill, 10.30 am - midnight uphill

The McCormick Tribune Campus Center is located at the historic 120-acre (50-hectare) campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. The campus, designed by Mies van der Rohe who became the head of IIT’s architecture program in 1938, after the closure of the Bauhaus, is bordered by an expressway and divided in half by the elevated trains. Rather than disguising the elevated railway Koolhaas encircles it as it crosses the top of the building.

> “The railway has a huge impact on IIT’s character: to proclaim a new beginning we enclosed the section above the campus centre in an acoustically isolating stainless steel tube, releasing the potential of the land surrounding it and creating a crucial part of IIT’s image”.
> Rem Koolhaas

For a length of 400 metres the viaduct is constructed from a skeleton structure of rings of mild-steel strips with a diameter of about 10 metres, interconnected by diagonally set tubes to form an open tube structure. The relatively great structural height of the tube makes it easy to cover the large spans. The construction will be supported by V-shaped columns and provides room for two tracks for passing trains. Thanks to the big spans of 40 and 50 metres there are relatively few columns at street level. There is also hardly any visual obstruction at eye level, so that social safety and traffic safety are not compromised.
Perspective 1 – Studying a Laboratory Nowadays a lot of cities seem to suffer from sentimental considerations, denying the fact that they are part of a larger whole and as such completely ignoring dimensions of an entirely different order (Soja 1999, Koohas 1995). More then cities we should talk about urbanisation (Lefebvre 1970). Transformational processes and frozen politics. Memories without time and clones without origins. Los Angeles is then a wonderful place to exploit. Right? In retrospective this thesis juxtaposes urban materiality and theory questioning matters as ecology, urban form, infrastructures and public domain. But how relevant is Los Angeles to the discourse of modern city planning? How relevant is it again exploit a city that has basically was a laboratory itself?

The matter of relevance – socially and academically spoken, locally and globally – is something that I have discussed repeatedly in this essay. I tried to stay in Los Angeles. Why it unceasingly will remain relevant to exploit and discuss Los Angeles because of its amazingly apparent indifference. Los Angeles laces laissez-faire with super-power, omnipotence with cold rationality. A city unbelievable ordinary.

“Los Angeles is so ordinary. Its got this fabric of absolute ordinaries, that goes on forever, and so fantasy just never got on to tell the truth. Actually I feel what’s great about Los Angeles is the genericness. Endless amounts of the same stuff, going on forever, which makes the city not precious. Now San Francisco is a precious city, everyone loves the old buildings and they don’t want to ever change anything. But in Los Angeles you could do anything, you could do whatever, because it just goes on forever and is not considered to be precious. And it functions. I think that is a very democratic city”. (Crawford, 2012)

But there is something beyond that. Los Angeles emerged into another self, just around the corner:

“Orange County, I mean that’s the new city. That’s is where I would take people to. Los Angeles is just getting to be old city. That’s is where I would take people to. Orange County is just very weird. ‘Orange County, I mean that’s the new city.” (Soja, 1999).

Los Angeles might then been exceeded, it will discourse of criticality in its forms exploit. Because of its condensed history Los Angeles shows a marvellous dense package of layers of modernity. Being developed radically and at the centre of the globalized capitalist world, in LA everything happened intense and at high pace. The ageing of this young whatever-pots will finally thickens its fabric with more density, more democracy, more exclusion, more genericness, more technology and more modernity.

Perspective 2 – Project and Thesis I started looking at the city, and developed several hypotheses. I followed my curiosity and tried not be judgemental. The content of this research on purpose has a fragmented character. Just as the city exploits has. At sixteen chapters are readable independently and although they are analysed some sort of isolated – there is an coherent order. The research has two parts, the project and the theoretical part that forms exploit. Because of its condensed history Los Angeles shows a marvellous dense package of layers of modernity. Being developed radically and at the centre of the globalized capitalist world, in LA everything happened intense and at high pace. The ageing of this young whatever-pots will finally thickens its fabric with more density, more democracy, more exclusion, more genericness, more technology and more modernity.

Project and Thesis. The relationship between research and design. My first and only challenge was to set up an intriguing exploration, the research project became a marathon from which the finish line continuously moved. And a personal educational challenge and also as a statement towards the typical problem solving attitude in the Department of Urbanism, the goal originally was only to do empirical research, find a subject of discussion and take a position. The research project as a dry set of smaller researches. Fragmented, but more or less consistent through the scales. The thesis as an theoretical constructed position in the discourse of modern city making. Over time that changed and my st ay at SCI-Arc has been of great influence on that. Visiting lectures of Peter Eisenman, Thom Mayne, Hernan Diaz Alonso and Jeff Kipnis changed my view on the design project. While my architectural bachelor education was own of sober functionalism, SCI-Arc introduced me to the discourse of architecture. The meaning of the building, the meaning of the materiality, the meaning of the drawing. Architecture as art. Provocative, explorative, tettering the unlettered. I decided to come up with a strong design project, aiming to go even beyond the typical TU Delft Urbanism level of architectural refinement. The research project as a research project, the design project as a thesis. “There is no hierarchy, what you do is reinventing yourself”. 

Perspective 3 – Method and Product The mainstream education I have followed during the years has always focused on problem finding and solution generating. Whereas I found the Masters curriculum Urbanism too much of the last – nearly naive, the first is especially apparent in the Complex Cities studio which seems to predominantly focus on problem finding. Yet also in the lecture series Complex Cities has been set up as studio trying to understand complex cities and not necessarily making design interventions. Driven by a desire to finally do ‘research’, I at first constructed a framework for strong research. 

Interested how patterns of daily activity evolved across modernitides, and where these patterns related to. Eager to understand how those patterns created a kind of centrality and clustering, and what this meant for the way we live in these phases has been formed. This may not really be a problem, but I believe that this isn’t necessarily the starting point of a research. With not so much a problem statement, but mainly vague hypotheses. Although my research on front might have seen methodically weak, I think that Complex Cities and Explore Lab could have been the only studio facilitating it. Because where it might took a paradox to its profound focus on methodology, it is the only studio that approaches the urban with the same curiosity. To my believe, most graduation studios render a project where a problem is stated and subsequently an intervention is envisioned (8) – and the explanatory process is worked through (B). The methodical line that I could pursue was one where A was not a problem but a fascination, B and C completely blank. It allowed me continuously shift and shift direction, adding up small insights and big questions. This comes back in the structure of my research project that doesn’t start with an inclusive theoretical ‘body of knowledge’, a framework so to speak. The research project as presented, presents literally the project. Empirical research (centrality/ecology) – theory – empirical research (public domain) – theory – empirical research (urban form) – theory.

My thesis as an overview on 4 stages of modernity in Los Angeles isn’t in any way a found problem. And I think that the constant lack of balance between problem finding and solution generation makes the design project strong. Whereas the project never was about finding a problem, the design project also doesn’t focus on fixing something. It is much more meant as discussion between a strong statement and designing a preferred reality. The power of this project is I think the narrative match has been developed from the interrelation of these two counterparts. The product is an envisioned fifth modernity. With concepts that are of course distanced from the previous four, in a certain way fulfilling a possible need – but mostly rendering an image of a better future. In the end the design project became way more intensive then expected on beforehand. Again, my time at SCI-Arc undoubtedly played a big role in this. Surrounded by great architectural projects and visualisations, I found it important that research and design can be both done in a great way. Not as a simple from A to C via B. But as a combination of research, a discussion through provocative beauty.

Another perspective

Basicly the design project is a reflection on the research project. That makes it highly personal on subjective, in different ways.

The design project reflects upon the four stages of modernity, by taking mostly note from the last one and transforming that into a future perspective. By that it unexoniously gives value to certain notions, even if those are not explicitly mentioned in the written thesis. It adds up history and renders an image of a future that is realistically better. After four stages of spatial-temporalich expansion, I chose to invert this project – developing an towards spatial fix. Easily I could have made a radically different argument, adding another expansion – something very much with the development of Orange County. For instance I chose to reintroduce the micro-ecology of the pedestrian, after three stages of metropolitan individualisation. Easily I could have made the argument for advancing technology and virtual spheres.

I challenge anyone to come up with that kind of different perspectives. From the research project I distilled the concepts of connectivity, identity, identity, expansion, speed, disclosure and association. Which would you find? I gave value to them in a design project, based on a certain body of literature. Which values would you choose? The design of Orange County at its core an open paradigm? Would you even distilate the same conceptual parameters? The data is all open and accessible for anyone to take either the notion of this project to a next step or develop a radically different interpretation.

The figural split of doing research and design is deeply anchored in the paradigmatic vulnerability of the Faculty of Architecture. Architecture as art, Urbanism as science? Practical design education or academic skills? I remain doubtful whether the middle actually represents something. Not the architectural refinement, not the pragmatic planning skills, the theoretical sophistication, the feeling for policy, the understanding of geography. Often brought as an asset, being the ‘spider in the web’. Hopeful impotence? Maybe as an discipline eventually yes. As a graduation project certainly not. The graduation project as an pleasant avalanche. Unsure where to crystalize again.

I hope that this project can add something to the debate of modernity and the understanding of urban form, that it can generate new insights on how to deal with the rapid acceleration of daily life in the city and new perspectives on the vitality of the diverse and inclusive global metropoi. I want to encourage everyone to take initiative, look at the city. Don’t fix stories, play with hypotheses, answer questions with questions and be curious. According to Augé our world of supermodernity does not exactly match the one in which we believe we live, for we live in a world that we have not yet learned to look at (Augé, 1995). I returned to think about space and hopefully will keep on doing that everyday.
Los Angeles - de metropool en vijf stadia van de moderniteit is een exploratief onderzoek naar Los Angeles dat zich richt op stadsecologie en de herverschijning van moderniteit in het publieke domein, infrastructuur en stedelijke vorm.


Na de 20e eeuw van de omsluiting zijn relaties tegenwoordig gebaseerd op het besef dat alles gebeurt in meervoud en begrijpt men dat we in dezelfde tijd vele personen kunnen zijn, zonder last te hebben van schizofrenie. Een persoon op een bepaalde plek in de stad kan op dat zelfde moment en zonder tegenstelling zich in een straat, een buurt en een natiestaat bevinden. Elke van deze gelijktijdige identiteiten kent verschillende relaties tot objecten en fenomenen, in het bijzonder met de relaties met fysische netwerken en transport technologieën. Er zijn verschillende ecologieën die deze verschillende identiteiten ondersteunen en die zijn ontstaan en veranderd door de tijd. De hedendaagse gebruiker van een winkelstraat zal hier toe relateren door een ecologie gevormd rond de snelweg terwijl een persoon omstreeks 1930 dit gedaan zal hebben door middel van de tram en een persoon in 1890 door middel van de paardenkets.


Het thesis duidt omstreeks 1890 een ecologie van het lopen, een die proeft aan vroeg stedelijke moderniteit. Een ecologie die zich bevond binnen enkele blokken en met een intensiteit die wij nu nauwelijks nog zouden herkennen. De moderniteit van het begin van de 20e eeuw, en vooral van het Los Angeles in de jaren 1930, is paradoxaal genoeg juist die snelweg het ruimte was dat het publieke domein bevond in de omsluiting van winkelcentra. De Yellow Cars waren onderdeel van de traditionele wijk als Santa Monica en Burbank. De Yellow Cars waren onderdeel van de vitale uitbreiding van Downtown en waren het raamwerk voor de zuinige ‘streetcar suburbs’. De lijnen van de streetcar netwerk zorgde voor een intensivering van de boulevards in Downtown LA en veranderden daarmee niet alleen de stedelijke vorm maar vooral de belevenis van het publieke domein. Het tempo in de stad verhoogde zich en mensen bevonden zich massaal voor het eerst gezamenlijk in openbare transportmiddelen. De metropolaanse individu ontwikkelde zich, een rationele die zich in toenemende mate wapende tegen alle stimuli van het stadse leven (Simmel ,1959).

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To my family & Marije;

I am because we are.

Jorick Beijer
May 6, Los Angeles / December 31, Nieuwerkerk
Jeffrey Kipnis

Jeffrey Kipnis (born 1951, Georgia, USA) is an architectural critic, theorist, designer, filmmaker, curator and educator. Not a registered architect, Kipnis first came to prominence through his association with avant-garde architect Peter Eisenman and their joint collaboration with French philosopher Jacques Derrida. From seminal studies of the work of such key practitioners as Philip Johnson, Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas, to theoretical reflections on the intellectual, cultural and political role of contemporary architecture in his essays as Toward a New Architecture, Twisting the Separatrix and Political Space I, to his award-winning film on the work of Frank Gehry.

Kipnis holds a Masters degree in physics from Georgia State University, USA (1971), and in 2006, he was awarded an honorary diploma by the Architectural Association School of Architecture London, in recognition of his contributions to the discipline of architecture as a teacher, critic, and theorist. Other honors include the AIA (Georgia Chapter) Bronze Medal for Service to Architecture (1995), a Professional Development Award from the Architectural Society of Ohio Foundation (1992), and an Ohio State University Distinguished Research Award (2005).

Jeff Kipnis is professor and overlord of architecture at the Ohio State University, Columbus. He has been a visiting professor at Princeton University, Columbia University, the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Kipnis taught at the Architectural Association from 1992–1995, where he was the founding director of the Graduate Design Program. He is currently a Distinguished Visiting Professor of the University of Applied Arts Vienna (Arхитектурный Кук), and is Distinguished Visiting Professor and Special Thesis Author at the Southern California Institute of Architecture.

Jeff Kipnis: "I think that, even if it is correct, ecology and in particular Reyner Banham's Four Ecologies is a complete misunderstanding of the city. Because there is no such thing as urban ecology here, it's all artificially constructed. It is not that there was this city ecology and then the city grew around it. It was like: water was stolen, plans were brought in and then their became four ecologies. So I think that the essence of architecture, a little bit like Holland, is entirely artificial. And for me that is the heart of the city. Any argument that there is some natural condition or typology - or anything that would belong to an intimate longer and merging relationship between the city and the environment and the people - is wrong. So I find now interest in whatsoever. What was the other form?"

Jorick Beijer: Urban form.

Jeff Kipnis: "Well urban form is a kind of interesting. There used to be no downtown here, and certainly no high-rise downtown. The Union Bank Building, which I think is a fantastic building - even though its not Frank Gehry - I mean it's a very traditional style. The work it does downtown it is exceptional. Its not just that it is the tallest building, it is round, it has this crown on top of it, it is shouldered; it has a way of gathering all other buildings around it into kind of dialogue. You will never see a movie anymore of Los Angeles that doesn't start with that or end it, it is the first building that got destroyed in Independence Day. So generally the idea of a downtown was not something I was enthusiastic about. But there is a real downtown now and it's a great one, its important. You would never have gotten an urban form of downtown in Los Angeles if somebody decided not to produce one. In another sense it belongs completely to an artificial idea."

Jorick Beijer: Is it because of that that its spatial and social diversity nowadays is so explicit?

Jeff Kipnis: "It's almost like a theme park that became self sustaining. The true form of Los Angeles is one of great sprawl, which I like. I like the land at an airport, not being able to see the end of Los Angeles."

Jorick Beijer: How do you look at the desire of people to develop more and more of these central nodes?

Jeff Kipnis: "That's true, sometimes you can get fooled by them actually. The sense of wanting to articulate the sky line of a center is starting with that. It turned out to be very profitable for real estate developers. The other thing about Los Angeles in terms of urban form, and this is not an argument I make, this is an argument that Eric Moss makes, is that like in New York or in most of European cities all of the bankers will be in one area etc, so there is a kind of sectioning by program. And in Asia it's completely radical: all the bicycle shop are in one area, all the restaurants in one area etcetera.

So it's very hard to use architecture to attract anybody from one area to another in other cities. You can build the best advertising building in the world, here in downtown and I doubt seriously that any company will move there. Bankers will go down there. Whereas here, in Culver City it's proven that there has been really a mobility. It is so generic, its such a good mentality. You live mobile, you don't think that that adjacents relationships are crucial. The neighborhood system has dissolved, though not completely. It's still completely intact to New York for example, because of the car. You walk in New York and that
keeps the neighborhood system intact, you drove here and eventually you don't even notice the difference between one mile or two miles. You know the difference between no traffic and a lot of traffic. So I think it's a really unusual city in that way, it is much more like Bangkok I think. You have been to Bangkok?

Jorick Beijer: Not yet.

Jeff Kipnis: "Bangkok is just another giant sprawl that suffered 30 years of western urban redesign. Cover the canals and that kind of stuff. Their entire urban planning department – which is 400 people. The only problem that they have - they don't have the time or the money to do anything else – is just figuring out how to get the trash out of Bangkok everyday. I do think that Los Angeles is special, but I think that every city is special which is why I don't believe in such things as urbanism".

Jorick Beijer: That was precisely my next question.

Jeff Kipnis: "Haha. Look, you got to have to build new towns. We are building new towns everywhere. There is China, Milton Keynes, there is Brasilia, there is the French new town movement. It takes about 50 years for a city to be born. Meaning for the first 50 years particularity for a city in Europe and America - I'm not sure about Asia because of Asia's capacity to colonize form and organization. There is so much social form and social organization that they are very different from the material form of organization. They don't exist the way we know. So family structure, jobs, familiar relationships are much more organizing forces in Asian cities than they are in Western cities.

I don't know any bad cities. But for example the regeneration of Brasilia everywhere was attacking it, you got paid extra to go there etc. Guaranteed trips out. There is now a whole new generation, a fourth generation, 50 years old – who love it, understand it. And it's not some kind of historical artifact that they want to protect it's not a preservation idea. It took that long to learn how it has a personality, what the shortcuts are. What's important is that what the people who live there know what the tourists don't know. In that sense it's almost like a game, a combat game. You can only become an expert by playing it a long time. If you go to Atlanta, I grew up in Atlanta, when I grew up in Atlanta it had over 400 thousand people, it's little over 5 million now. We had five country seats and I grew up new it has 30 counties. What used to be considered as the far sunsets of the city are now considered as almost mid town. It has some of the worst traffic in the world. But I can get from the airport to Lanox Square which is on the exact opposite side of town - in the middle of the worst traffic - in one tenth of the time that everybody else takes. Just because I know shortcuts which are still intact.

This includes stuff like unpaved dry-roads in the middle of the town, you just have to live there forever, drive around, hang around there, get drunk as a high school kid. I mean there is no way you will ever learn any of that unless you spent a lot of time there and with other people that know it. So I don't know how anyone turns that into a theory or practice. I do know that most new towns are either political driven like China, actually I did a city in the south of China.

I was at the Architectural Association where I started a program together with Bahram Shafiedi that eventually became the DRL. We did a project on new town development in China. Went to the Urban Institute in Beijing where they showed us 30 cities they had under design everywhere from 1 million to 15 million inhabitants, all with exactly the same pattern. Just traced out and up. We did a lot of work on it and thought we had a good solution and they adopted it and they used it to extract variance from developers. Either do what the plan says or pay a fine. Virtually they all pay the fine. The idea was to shift the costs of urban amenities from the city to developers. They would rather pay a little bit less than not do it".

Jorick Beijer: But coming back on this aging of the city, which often is recreated nowadays, how do you see that precisely?

Jeff Kipnis: "People who complain about Milton Keynes and anything, all you hear are complaints, until enough time and I have decided that it is about 50 years. By that point of time enough personality, specialty for the city has taken place. So they get to know and like it independent of the design. Not despite the design. Because they like the personality parts and the idiosyncratic parts that no designer can ever put in. We spent some time working on a theory of development - how do you design a city that can be built in 3 years that behaves like a city that is 400 years old. So we used complexity theory and all kinds of diagrams and I think still that it is an interesting idea. But it's incredibly expensive, for example the sing most important thing to know when you are building a new town is the layout of the power grid and water system. And if you don't lay it down rationally you are going to spend a fortune. I always call for too many people that want to put up in weird places on the hope that things will go all around them. So infrastructure of the city is not roads, its water, power, sewer, and access to services like food. I suppose that the Dutch know a lot about this in a certain sense, although I am not very impressed with their spatiality is that the people who live there know and the tourists don't know. In that sense it's almost like a game, a combat game. You can only become an expert by playing it a long time. If you go to Atlanta, I grew up in Atlanta, when I grew up in Atlanta it had over 400 thousand people, it's little over 5 million now. We had five country seats and I grew up new it has 30 counties. What used to be considered as the far sunsets of the city are now considered as almost mid town. It has some of the worst traffic in the world. But I can get from the airport to Lanox Square which is on the exact opposite side of town - in the middle of the worst traffic - in one tenth of the time that everybody else takes. Just because I know shortcuts which are still intact.

It's very hard in Europe and American cities that are already operating - as they get new development, it's almost entirely developer driven. So developers are going to make more money on short term pleasures, they don't make any money on short terms. They are going to do something like Amsterdam is doing and going immediately to visit Disney hall. If you live there you end up never going there because it's so boring. The phenomenon is that you get there once - if you go there all - there is no value to its previous experience. And so you don't do it. I think it's a good idea but if you are a developer you are working for tourists. So you are not actually working for the city.

Jorick Beijer: Relating to the discussions that we had on Monday and Wednesday on the SCI-Arc thesis projects, How is an urbanism thesis different from an architecture one?

Jeff Kipnis: "It is a different. Let me give you an answer that you might not like very much. I think there is a fundamental way urbanism has to be a science. And I think architecture is an art. Architects talk about experiments all the time, experimental architecture, but I don't know anyone that goes back and checks the results. Like Rem Koolhaas, he went back to a library to see if all of his ideas work. Nobody goes back, there is no one expecting these people to go back. There is no experiment to be run, so there are no results to be determined. The building is like a work of art, it takes a lot and sometimes people like it, sometimes people don't like it. Some work, some don't work.

If you are going to be an urbanist you are not going to be worried about these qualities of life after 2000 years of evolution. You have to be worried about these basic amenities and structures and functions that are going to make life possible. So an urbanist – is do you know what an agar is? These pets dices in which the basic nutrients are supplied, they put the bacteria in there and then it grows. So urbanists actually make the agur. But don't really care the fact that the thing that grows on just needs the agar for basic stuff. So you think will be a fool not to approach that problem from a science point of view. People have been trying to figure out sciences of social space and social interactions or social analysis, I think there is something in that. There was this experiment with the rise of states in public space. You know if it's too high people won't sit on it. There is a whole book on how you do state design stairs so that people will use them as public spaces. Or how to design a waterfiall that will make different sounds and figure out which sounds attract the most people. So there is a little bit of actual anthropological science that goes in it. But what you are looking for is something that is verifiable results that you can repeat. And one no wants that in architecture. So I'm not saying that architecture is an art, like painting, but it belongs to the arts. Its psychological and political effects are far more important than its instrumental effects, and so the basic amenities are easy to produce. I don't know a library in the world you can't go check a book out. I walk in a door, the book is drawn, I check it out, I walk out. That's it for the function. So I don't know, it's pretty hard to make a bad library (laughs). It's pretty hard to make a bad thing, nothing one uses a house like I do. I read in the bathrooms. I eat everywhere. But that who cares?

Jorick Beijer: My research is all about observation and exploration – in your view still on the science side. How does an urbanism thesis crystalize?

Jeff Kipnis: "First of all, accumulating data is an important part of doing research. So you don't have to have a position. But, everyone who has accumulated data also stated a position. Sometimes they are right, sometimes they are wrong. The position is about actually stimulating the next body of research. I won't do all that work without saying what I thought about it. But also I wouldn't expect what I thought about it to have anything to do with it".

Jorick Beijer: So I can state everything?

Jeff Kipnis: "Laugh" So you say: build more malls.

Jorick Beijer: But I try to figure out this problem of representation. Does it crystalize in words or in lines?

Jeff Kipnis: "No. I think if you want to be a really good urbanist and you want to see it, you need to end up with policies, no drawings. Diagrams and policies, that is what the city is. Have some courage not to draw stuff and build models".
Michael Rotondi: “I saw the building of the first major freeway. I think I was about eight. I didn’t know the word infrastructure. But I sensed that it was connecting the region, not just local stores, because I knew the city from how we moved around as children and from going places with my father. So when they said ‘this freeway is going to some place’. All the way down to Disneyland for instance, I knew that that was really quite a distance. So you got the sense that there were different scales in the city, thinking of the different scales in your body. I just didn’t know how conceptualize it, it was all imagination.”

Jorick Beijer: Did this sense changed when you got older and got more and more mobile?

Michael Rotondi: “What changed was being able to pick up direct experiences and come up with concepts based on that experience. At first it was having a concept and then wondering what it’s like. So what changed was understanding it in a more complex way. And then also being able to take that, that I knew, and then I put it into a broader context. I begin to travel in my early 20’s - everywhere from Japan, Europe to New York. Then I started to understand how Los Angeles was not monolithic in any way; it was not monolithic culturally, ethnically, architecturally. So I could adjust how I knew Los Angeles and use it as a way to look at other cities. If I wanted to look at it socially, I could say ‘how much alike does everybody look?’ I could think about it physically, did it look this way or did it look that way? How easy is it to get around? LA became a lens for understanding other cities. It wasn’t to look at them as if you were Los Angeles; it was to look at them with Los Angeles giving me some insight on how to assess it.”

Jorick Beijer: How did you move through Downtown Los Angeles become the let’s say antitheses of a typical Downtown?

Michael Rotondi: “The density of Downtown hasn’t changed that much. I mean there is more stuff build, there is more high-rise. But the areas that people are now moving back into, those were always like that. There were always five, six, seven or eight, nine, ten storey buildings. And what is downtown now - but where still not that many people live - are the bridges between those areas. Those always were dark streets, except the ones that had movie theatres. Any world city has been changed by the amount of people coming in. My father answered this question: ‘why did you move to Los Angeles and not say in New York with the rest of the family?’ His answer was: ‘because I wanted to live in America’. And I said ‘New York is America’, and he said ‘no, it’s like the old country. The people there live very tight in their own ethnic groups’. But he also said that people came to America with the expectation to be able to invent a whole new life. In New York it couldn’t have been a whole new life because the family patterns are determined from the old country. And then he said that the way he knew that things hadn’t changed was to walk that the seat that he had at the dinner table was the same in America as it was in the old country. And he said that was the whole hierarchy right there.”

Jorick Beijer: So how much are these let’s say perceptions geographically anchored?

Michael Rotondi: “So if I would ask you to draw your family tree, you know how to draw that tree. You know what your role is, you position etc. If I’d ask you to draw your SCI-Arc tree, then it depends on who you are hanging out with and then it depends on what we are doing. So it’s all contextual. Los Angeles in my mind is that. You can change the way you think, the way you see things, the way you behave as you want different places to see. Not just as variations, really as difference. The city is so diverse in density, characters...”

Jorick Beijer: But is it also not a lot of the same?

Michael Rotondi: “You could probably find a simple epicentre of every different community, whatever that might be. It could be in density, in social distribution, the way those people move. Where those communities overlap, new life emerges. I think that that is really what happens in the city.

If I drove 5 miles from my neighbourhood, you will find places that are completely mixed. You find Indian, Eastern European, West European; they are all living next door to each other. And that’s where on the longer term new ideas come from. I mean the children that are born in this neighbourhood, some of them are here [SCI-Arc] for instance. You are heavily entangled by the environment that you come from. Like the students that I know in my studio here, coming from really dense parts of the world, are all interested in density. How do you manage that? Not how do you eliminate it. How do you get it to work better?

Jorick Beijer: So what then occurs in Los Angeles is this hybridization, were densities emerge – but never come into extremes.

Michael Rotondi: “The question is if we are willing to accept the different states. Right now this is a period in education generally where they want to know the outcomes before you start doing anything. And then when you have to match those outcomes there is no creativity. We are to good with words. We are the best, we are the brightest, we are the tallest, and we are the fastest. Never has been a period in any time like that. I think we are actually in a stateless state. I think we might even be devolving.”

Jorick Beijer: Where does this formalisation originates from?

Michael Rotondi: “I don’t know, in the beginning when you trying survive it is a fairly inert process. In anatomy, I have been working on a hospital for big birds that were very ill or injured. They put them in a closure that is a little beyond the stils. And those are big birds like fox and eagles and then they will be forced to be as small as possible. All their energy is going inside, but I was wondering if that just wasn’t cruel. But it is just the way to focus their recovery internal and when they get better, their enclosure gets bigger bigger and bigger until they finally fly back in the world.

As an institution my experience from the very beginning was that nobody wanted to help, and we didn’t ask for help. We just did what we wanted to do. And because we were not connected to the university, nobody could tell us what to do. That’s the good news and the bad news. The bad news is that there is no safety net. As an institution gets older, just like any of us, becomes more bureaucratic. The question is, is it possible to accumulate experience in knowledge and memory without becoming bureaucratic? Sometimes you just have to forget, but you don’t necessarily forget to get in a world that wants people to become experts. When you want to become an expert, you have to keep all that memory in forward position. So if somebody says ‘I want something new’, you say ‘I will give you something new’, but its looks like something that you did before. Or you get hired because people say ‘I want something new, show me 10 things like this that have been done before’. SCI-Arc is what it is right now. It does many things very well. It’s still an experiment, not a big experiment as it was in the beginning, but it is still an experiment.”
Peter Zellner
Director at Zellnerplus, Future Initiatives coordinator at SCI-Arc

Jorick Beijer: How would you link the concept of ‘ecology’ to Los Angeles?
Peter Zellner: ‘Banham used the notion of ecology to decouple his reading of LA from the ways one traditionally would read a city. In terms of structure, as an assembly of buildings and roads. Banham used ecology as a term to describe an urban condition that exceeded capacity then in the 1960s. Urban planners to let’s say analyze its composition; in what seems a hollow complex. And I think that in the early 21st century we certainly have the tools to look at an urban system, a higher order of complexity and therefore I think what could maybe appear, you know historically as disorganized will just be a high order of complexity. And you just order a high order that is harder for us to pick out. So I would be really careful with using the word ecology in these days.

Banham used it because he wanted to talk about urban systems that were different in terms of their orientation, geography, street, block organization, topography etc. Do you know the saying, ‘a forest, is a city made up of trees?’ I think the analogy is so equally needless today and I think that when we use the term ecology, it embeds within our understanding of the city that’s somehow it is not man made and I think that that’s not the case in Los Angeles. I think Los Angeles is ultimately the byproduct of numerous urban planning systems, street systems and infrastructure systems, freeways, housing plans. I would really warn you to use ecology so easily today because certainly it was appropriate in 1960 when Banham was looking at the city. I think today, I would suggest that Los Angeles is matured, has stabilized and has recognizable urban characters that are comparable with most other cities. And another thing the rest of the world has begun to look a lot more like LA. And in comparison to certain places, perhaps in the developing world, Los Angeles is very taint and civilized. If you were to look at favelas and you were to look at LA, you could clearly understand that a favela has a high order of complexity than Los Angeles does in its urban organization. And in LA is actually a relatively ordered environment in fact. So that’s urban ecology.’

Jorick Beijer: But was Banham’s work not particularly a celebration of diversity?
Peter Zellner: ‘Well, I would just suggest that in the European eyes in 1968 Los Angeles seemed very noble. But I think that from the 21st century perspective the city already seems like a historical artifact to 20th century development. And I would describe Los Angeles as frankly an urban environment in which density has begun to push through its suburban qualities towards city form. I think it’s just a city that’s organized along different axes, it doesn’t have a center point, it is multi nodal and the nodes themselves, generally accumulates mountainous population, you know based on a proximal relationships.

But my point would be that again if you were to look at any number of western cities or cities that are emerging and developing who do you need to be more than a college, you’re still there I don’t know. But I think that one has to be careful picking up a project of the 60s, in which there was an attempt for academic purposes. Just to sort of loose the language of analysis into others models and that’s what Banham was doing. He just borrowed the concept from the science. I would suspect that how one would understand ecology would be different because the science itself has changed’.

Jorick Beijer: For me it seems to stay a question of networks, networks that change over time and structure different city forms.
Peter Zellner: ‘I would look at networks basically as a contemporary model that could have a sort of analogue in infrastructure. Because it seems to me that one of the things that you would like to take up in LA would be the role of geometry in the kind of fabrication of its urban networks. Which is to say that for me LA is nothing if not man made, it’s nothing if not mathematical. It’s just that the map doesn’t always align because the grids essentially are not organized. And it’s the overlap of overlap that obviously we find sort of areas of interest. And remember that Banham understood that Los Angeles was fundamentally the super-positioning of grid forms onto a landscape. So you get the foot hills, you get autopia which is the infrastructures that cuts it up, you get surburbs which is the edge of the grid when hits the ocean etc. So when you really get into the book, you know it never really says LA is like a forest or LA is like a desert or LA is like an ocean. I mean it really is just that the term ecology is used to describe the transitions of flat land, you know into topography or less.

Jorick Beijer: How do you see the impact of infrastructure on urban form in LA?
Peter Zellner: ‘I think you need to look at the morphology of the building and the block, and less at the topic of programming. Because it’s pretty clear to me that in Los Angeles certain building types have remained morphologically fixed while others have evolved. So the shopping mall maybe has evolved a little bit, but you could argue the corner store which still functions in some ways is morphologically indifferent to any changes like consumer habits. I would look at morphologically and I would look for clues in the fabric that are not so embedded in the space between things because I think that’s sort of the European bias towards space, as opposed to looking actually at the shape of the objects themselves which I think is probably the thing that you can track in LA much more coherently. Much more then space, it’s questionable that we even have public space.

Banham wanted to look a sort of in the larger field, but ultimately his most incisive point for me is when he starts looking at the components of the field. And he looks at the building type and says, ‘Well okay, what is it that is actually is operationally different in the architecture of the city?’ Because at the end of the day, streets are streets. What may have been fascinating to Banham in the 1960s was the super presence of the automobile in Los Angeles. I don’t think that’s something that has occurred in almost every other city in the world, maybe there are some exceptions in Europe. But it could assure you that any present 70s development, in Germany or France, looks a lot like LA. So these conditions have been exported. In LA I think that the topic is not so much roads and infrastructure, but whether or not density is reinvestigated at the level of block, the building, the unit’.

Jorick Beijer: In this ‘re-investigation’, how do you see the role of the urban designer / architect in Los Angeles?
Peter Zellner: ‘Well, I don’t think Los Angeles has a great urban design culture that’s available to young architects to be frank with you. I could be wrong but the majority of architectural decisions generally consume with or agree to zoning and planning regulations.

And I would say most architects of my generation are doing work on a house or on a building with supporting within limitations that are set by zoning and planning restrictions, neighborhood organizations, design regulations and that sort of stuff. For me any changes that one makes basically produces a confrontational relationship as opposed to a propositional relationship. So I would say gaining a foothold in changing the shape of the building for young architects in Los Angeles is an urban design proposition to begin with.

Los Angeles is a city that has become increasingly impossible to experiment without having a real grasp of code. So my answer to your question would be that the venue for experimentation in Los Angeles is challenging the political limitations of its regulations and it used to be something different which was formal. Architects in this town used to experiment through quite radical formal maneuvers, but I think that the arena has been reduced. And to break out of it and to propose things that are unique or in some way more adaptable to actual life in the city requires a kind of very careful reading of regulatorion environment that we operate
in. For me urban design for the architects in Los Angeles becomes a much more tactical engagement”.

Jorick Beijer: I seem to suffer from a west-European bias in this discussion. Are you saying that urban design in Los Angeles is much more a thing on the scale of the envelope, the code, and then the building itself?

Peter Zellner: “The subject of freedom is an interesting one because I think the traditional popular conception of the early LA architects is a kind of revolutionary, now there’s another flavor added to it, which is if you look at the interesting young architects in this town they’re really smart in reading code and pushing the envelope of their buildings right up against the limitations or regulations and quite often I think we define code by looking for loopholes in it. So, this is a kind of very interesting to me as it produces a much more intelligent architecture because it is a sort of ‘free for all’. And this is crucial in understanding how LA has transformed; it’s not a kind of free open plain where everybody just has room to experiment without any connection to a kind of social order. The city has compressed physically, sociologically, politically and producing in much more difficult and also interesting in some ways”.

Jorick Beijer: Is there an interest among LA architects to introduce some sort of publicness in these private developments?

Peter Zellner: “The tendency for most developers in LA is to try to max out their investment, so they are trying to get into box as much as possible and this basically reduces the architectural game in to kind of decorating of that box. This is in a way the Venturi problem. The subject of spatial design, let’s say the thing that’s between the buildings or inside the building, becomes a very thin, like literary thin problem. It’s a very interesting game, but I think very few architects in LA who play it. If you look for instance at something like the West Hollywood Library, the diagram of the building is pretty interesting in terms of where public goes because the ground play in this project has been largely voided by the parking structure to the rear and access to that parking structure in the front. So on one side of the access point they have put a coffee shop, there’s a stair wall that goes into the library entry point. And then there’s a very large glazed ribbon that runs on the top. It’s a kind of displaced ground, in a way. It’s a very interesting sort of visual clue; you can sort of see people inside of the building but they are not on the side walk, they are two stories up. So the urban void is moved into the building and under the facade”.

Jorick Beijer: And do you see this discourse and practice of urban design become more globally equalized or increasingly location specific?

Peter Zellner: “My practice is fundamentally about this city and from this city and I grasp you know, in a very local way with its problems. That said I am not abdicating the opposition at least it’s interest, you know. Even if that interest is in the form of opposition at least it’s interest, you know. My own work as a designer I’m very invested in it and thinking about its history in terms of long legacy of experimentation and to do with sort of again the subject for me in urbanism in Los Angeles is architecture first, I think that the big movies are finished in LA. The new ones are mostly surgical work that gets done at the scale of a train line, a bus or a light rail line. These things are going to take a lot of time to implement and I don’t know yet what the shape of the city will be when they’re finished. Because as you have noticed Angelenos a very resistant in the use of public infrastructure in a public way. They just don’t know how. I would say that these are behaviors that have to be re-learned. It’s not the first thing that occurs to somebody, catching a bus when they have to go shopping. You know even if we are talking about three four blocks, these are behaviors that we don’t know anymore and I think it will take a generation to re-learn. But it’s going to happen, inevitably. The resources are there and the commitment is there on the part of governance and cities and planners”.

Jorick Beijer: Great. As a final question, how did LA influence your own practice?

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Peter Zellner: “No, I think that it’s changing more specifically in this context. I would say urbanism in New York, like the High Line, for instance is very different from urbanism in Los Angeles. We’re just getting to the topic of trying to put public parks back into our city, just introducing more green space for now in a traditional way. The High Line is a kind of a retrofit of an infrastructure.
Hernan Diaz Alonso is principal and founder of the Los Angeles-based design practice Xefiotorch. Diaz Alonso has served for the past several years as Distinguished Professor of Architecture and the Graduate Times Coordinator at SCI-Arc. Previously, he was a design studio professor at Columbia University GSAPP, and head studio professor in the “Excursías” post-graduate program at the University für Angewandte Kunst in Wien, Austria. He was recently honored by Yale University with the Louis I. Kahn Visiting Assistant Professorship of Architectural Design for fall 2010.

He received his architecture degrees from the National University of Rosario, Argentina, and from Columbia University’s AAD Program, from which he graduated with with honors. In 1996, he worked as a research professor of Enric Miralles in Barcelona and in 2010-2011 he was senior lecturer at Etschmann Architects in New York.

Diaz Alonso has lectured extensively at major institutions around the world. His architectural designs have received numerous awards and have been displayed in both architecture and art museums exhibitions. His work has been widely published in magazines and periodicals worldwide and multiple books, including the “Excursías” monograph.

His work has since been the subject of solo shows at the San Francisco MOMA in 2006, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

In relation to architecture itself I think that there are times that are incredibly interesting, more than ever. The field is conceptual and intellectually more fragmented then ever, and I think that that is a good thing. It means a lot of possibilities to discover new ideas and solutions to problems. It is clearly that there will be a struggle on how things will go into practice. I think historically it was much easier, maybe not, but it felt easier to intervene with the discipline and the profession. Now this will be more difficult, but that means it will be a fantastic time for the discipline. There is a lot of research nowadays about what the reconfiguration of architecture will or could be and that is great. On a professional level an interesting thing is that the discipline and the profession are in a very interesting moment of reflection. In one level you can see intelligence as objectification raising to new levels, but in the same time also stupidity and ignorance raise to new levels. There is a lot of stupidity and ignorance in the structure of the city these days and that is incredibly dangerous. Now this was probably always like that, the only difference is that now we are much more exposed and we are more aware of everything. This over awareness is a cliche, but generates interesting problems.

But that fact that information is so easy accessible creates also a kind of superficial knowledge. Basically you have some bites of everything but in the end you might not see the whole. It is impossible to know everything and it is impossible to understand anything. Before this explosion of technology it was impossible to know everything, but at least you knew where you know to understand something. Nowadays you don’t even have to do that, we just get away by know a little bit of everything. This is a kind of simplicity that for me is a down side. I think we need to change the way that we think about things and understand them in order to develop another layer of depth that doesn’t establish from the notion of deep knowledge but by the accumulation of a lot of small parts of layered knowledge. This is for me an interesting thing to work with, because the natural tendency is to complain. This is how the things are right now, it just changed the social protocols. It changes protocols of interactions, of the city. The city get another dynamic, became bigger, but now they are so reduced and jammed that we come back to pre-19th century models where everybody develops micro-communities. Everything is cyclical right? technological apparatus expands the world and the city like trains did, cars did, planes did. At the same time things became so exaggerated and over-complicated that you now start to reverse that. For example I flew the last 10 years a lot around the world, for whatever reason. Now I get a bit older I fly less and less. I want my life simpler, more reduced. I want my house, my office and SCI-Arc in a five minute radius. So in a way I live a very dull life even though I live in a fucking big city, I believe in a global economy and a global culture; my desire is to simplify my life.

But I try not to think to much about ‘what if’. In that sense I am very pragmatic, I live life as it is.

Jorick Beijer: You already touched upon the implication of this all for urban life. How do you see yourself as an part of the agglomerate Los Angeles?

Hernan Diaz Alonso: “I consider L.A. as my favorite city in the world, to live, to work, to do anything. I love it and I think it is a very exiting city because it is a city that doesn’t have any reference. In a city that doesn’t look like any other city, it doesn’t have any commitment to a historical understanding of what a city was. If you look to the East Coast, New York – which I love – is like London on asteroids. LA is not like that, it is a bunch of small cities that grew in to one, as you say an aggregate. They collapsed into each other, crashed in to each other. There was no planning. The only planning on city level is the Highway, which have nothing to do with improving the quality of the city, only with improving the efficiency of moving stuff. There were no strategies and to make that the city is. It is fascinating how this produces pretty amazing relations of social structures, economic forces and everything. But without hierarchy. There are layers, but there is no order. And I would say that there is this ecology of human interaction that makes this very interesting.

I lived in New York for four years and we had a lot of friends, but when you get together with them over there you go to a bar; and you go to their homes for dinner, a barbeque etc. They have a normal house and a yard, but the fact that you are there makes the relation different. I think that the horizontality of LA produces a completely different protocol then in a vertical city. Most of the dwelling is simply horizontal, and that gives peculiar architectural problems. And I think that this is a city or a metropolitan area, or an urban whatever you want to call it, that can not be fixed. It is in what it is and that makes it so interesting. The idea that in a 30 blocks radius you can go to three different social structures is fascinating. It is a perfect blend of first and third world, more them than anything. And I like that in LA and I think that it has to do with the extension, the time that you need to go from one place to another. But there is nothing natural about this city, everything is completely artificial and man-made. Even the nature is completely fake. And I am fascinated by this artificiality, also the specific plague: artificiality of humans in certain parts of the city people walk that are more then people other then human. I like that.”

Jorick Beijer: How do you see the future of Los Angeles when there is now a development of densification in the nodes?

Hernan Diaz Alonso: “I think that this development is not a strategy, but purely about necessity. The nodes are becoming interconnected. Don’t get me wrong, on an economical level there was always this kind of connectivity, but these days everything is on astrobis. The communication between the things are very fast, for good and for bad, and I think that has a lot of influence on the societal structure. Now when times are hard or good, it seems always worse or better. This is produced by a kind of resonance. At the same time the most interesting transformations come always out of deep and profound crisis. What now is diferent is that we are really going towards a reconfiguration that is much more economical then it is political. In the past these times would always give a lot of political noise, at least at the Western side of the hemisphere. Of course there is a lot of political revolution now going on in the Middle East, but I think that is that another game.

I had the the chance to talk with Hernan in his office, not far from SCI-Arc. An empty office, not far from SCI-Arc. An empty office, with a moment of change. There is a clip that I watched last night. The paperless office, with a moment of change. There is a young guy that wants to be a rock journalist and he talks to an older journalist, played by Seymour Hoffman. By then Rock and Roll is still young, it exists maybe 15 or 20 years, but he tells the young kid: “hey you come to a very dangerous time for Rock and Roll. Rock and Roll is dead”. Always is interesting, always is dangerous. For me the most exciting thing is this fragmentation. You have now all these great aspects of technology and innovation and that levels the field. But at the same time it also levels the quality. Anybody who has more or less some skills with the toys can produce work that looks more or less interesting. In consequence you have the capacity to move faster and come with new ideas but at the same time you have the capacity to produce incredibly shallow and superficial work. But again I think that like everything else in life this develops just a new kind of sensibility and a new intelligence to distinguish the good and the bad. Some times when the professional work is not so good, that is not a bad thing for the discipline. We are in a very interesting moment of reflection. In one level you can see intelligence as objectification raising to new levels, but in the same time also stupidity and ignorance rise to new levels. There is a lot of stupidity and ignorance in the structure of the city for these days and that is incredibly dangerous. Now this was probably always like that, the only difference is that now we are much more exposed and we are more aware of everything. This over awareness is a cliche, but generates interesting problems.

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Hernan Diaz Alonso

Founder of Xefiotorch, faculty and graduate program chair at SCI-Arc
more drastic because there are more and more people that want to simplify their lives, live close, and aggregate. Nobody wants to spend two hours in a car while traffic jams and I think in a sense the failures of the city produces its new success. These nodes as Santa Monica come out of pragmatism, people want to have a simpler life and for that they try to consolidate activities. Also I think that there is a rebirth of social interaction, despite all new kinds of technology. People more and more desire to live an urban life and that's why density is great. Dense and complex cities produce more compassionate people, more tolerance as it stimulates diversity. All these racist and homophbic things come from neighborhoods and little towns because people tend to fear what they don't know, and in cities you just learn a lot. I am completely in favor of bigger cities, mega cities, not only it creates better people it creates better relationships. I really believe in that. This is something that my wife and I often discuss now having our daughter. We could move to a more quiet neighborhood area but we decided to stay in Downtown because we want here to grow up in the complexity of the city. Experiencing different cultures, social layers, poverty and money. We want her to understand that the world is a complex place, not an isolated fake narrative".

Jorick Beijer: You came here in Los Angeles from Argentina, did this city change your view on architecture, did it provoke?

Hernan Diaz Alonso: "Absolutely! I came from Argentina first to New York and in between I lived for a year in Barcelona. I always wanted to live in New York, already from being a kid I thought that it was the coolest city on earth, and when I visited it for the first time I fell completely in love with it. I went to Columbia because I thought that it was at that time the most interesting school, but also because it was in New York. I lived there for some years but when I got the possibility to teach at SCI-Arc I came to LA and I remember the first time I was driving around with my wife I was completely depressed because I hated it. The city was awful, ugly, I completely hated it and couldn't see myself living here after having lived in New York. But at the same time I loved SCI-Arc and so we moved. In less than a year I totally fell in love with the city and I can not imagine myself living anywhere else. But that is on the personal level. At the professional level it also completely changed my view. This is the city that put together popular culture, superficiality and depth in a way that I can not think of in any other context. I am heavily influenced by the LA architecture scene and the entertainment industry, but also the product design and all the local manufacturing. It completely changed my way of thinking. There is an immediacy of the way that LA thinks about things and there is a kind of corrupt logic - not corrupt in the sense of Latin-American money corruption – I am talking about the ethics of the process. There is a kind of non-commitment to the process and the people here are highly intellectual, but they are not highly academic which is something that I really like.

LA has been of fascinating influence on my work and I could not imagine my work being the same if I was not based here. There is a desire for the imperfect form of beauty, disorganization as a way to organize, almost everywhere works by opposition. I am Argentinian as an individual, as an architect I consider myself now as an Angeleno – an LA architect. I don't see myself as an Argentinian architect, I belong to a particular way of thinking, a particular way of producing and operating. And in that sense SCI-Arc is as Los Angeles as it can. I cannot think of any other institution in Los Angeles that is more Los Angeles then SCI-Arc. SCI-Arc represents perfectly that spirit and notion, a deep commitment to what you are doing and being at one point respectful and knowledgeable about the history the discipline but in the same time be able to abandon all of that, forget about that and don't care about that. Being able to reinvent yourself pretty much every day, every month or every year".

Westwood which was really - first of all- 3rd Street was semi-active. It was coming back, and it had been dealt the way you see it now, it was coming back, but it was still a long way to very successful. And Westwood was hugely successful, and they had some gang trouble over there, and a couple of shootings, and virtually one week later, Santa Monica was absolutely packed. Just like that. So the social aspect of how urban centers and components of cities are so driven by what people want to do, when they want to do it and safety within the city. When they felt safe Westwood was great, who wants to go to Santa Monica? The minute it was smarter, they came into the safety of Santa Monica, so that was a very interesting evolution and it virtually was may be two weeks, but not more than that. Now after let's say 25 years its beginning to get a little clearer. Now with the re-building of Santa Monica Place, I think they probably will see a what we call a realm of influence. It's like chopping a pebble in still water. So, that will now begin to influence the new upgrade of that whole area. You will see quite a jump in the development of things around, right two weeks after we worked on Santa Monica place, we were asked to look at the Holiday Inn because they wanted to do some remodeling, and then there is another developmental project very close to it, so its already starting. People are starting to see the potential of development, and financial development within the city, and that's true for all of our project especially every project we have done in this category. It's a real catalyst for urban development. We needed to say that if it wasn't a bit rundown – well, I can't say, what I was going to say. If it wasn't a bit rundown, you know may be its not ready for development".

Jorick Beijer: But this is all before Jerde comes in. What really made Santa Monica place characteristic for the Jerde Partnership? Is there a method?

David Rogers: "When we did Santa Monica place we did a lot of research on scale, how the original blocks were set up and then how they morphed overtime. We took that morphing into that entry on Broadway, we wanted that to be a seamless as possible using the same materials, planting, modules and proportions as to be as being just a continuation of the street into the project. Although it just a big, just a great shopping center. The reason 3rd street was such an enormous success had to do with urban design then with sociology. We had – and when I showed up in Los Angeles was in '80, '85, I had my own office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for seven years before I came in – and it was in the late 80's when we had riots here in LA, and a lot of gang activities in urban areas.

Many of our projects are 7 to 10 years, long projects. The first thing we wanted to do was tear the roof of, but the client wasn't at all interested in that, so it took us a couple of years to convince them to tear the roof of the project and open it up. Because after all its Santa Monica! We spent the next six months interviewing the political components of the project, the city council. And they just turned it down. So then we went into nearly a year of Sunday afternoon meetings with the community, it was an interesting approach in which we've tried sens and it worked really successfully. We covered entire wall with paper and then we bring in cartoons to draw, and we asked the audience: what would be the perfect development of your city in that area?

And so out of that they put together a whole cartoon, literally a cartoon book, of how to go through the urban design of their city. I think we did that five times, and then we went from there into meetings with groups that had models of the area with the program that we needed to build the project. We had to have a certain amount of program on the site in order to make it financially feasible, right? And so then we had those blocks, and we had to put different groups to put together the project. Based on the cartoon book which was really fascinating, and through that process we got a lot of recommendations from the city with what the project should be. From there we started to redraw the project".

Jorick Beijer: That is a very dynamic process of actor participation, but demanding a lot of time. Is this always necessary?

David Rogers: "It is indeed a very, very extensive process, a lot of people. What we find in the development of urban design projects, is that it is not just the citizens, because its theirs! And we had to be very, very careful that they get what they wanted out of it. The developer got what he wanted, and the citizens got what they wanted".

Jorick Beijer: Are these processes designed in the same way for projects that Jerde does in for instance China and Taiwan?"
Jorick Beijer: Do you have a preference for one of these variations?

David Rogers: “Well, I think the Santa Monica model is certainly the way to do it because then everybody wins. We have an opinion as architects and urban designers. The Jerde Partnership essentially builds components to cities or cities themselves. That’s our expertise, and if we are not a part of that planning process then there is that whole black box that nobody ever sees which is a disaster of course, that’s why so many real bad projects are built in cities when the architecture is not involved. I mean look at the city, how it’s laid out, who is the first person on the scene? The planner, the traffic engineer and the sewage engineer. What did they know about developing a city? So, this is a really big problem, we need to be in that urban design process that says look this is how big the box is, and this is what it is, and this is the zoning of it. Get the architects and the designers, environmentalists involved in this, before they start worrying about sewers and traffic!

Jorick Beijer: What is there then to design for these architects? Is the public domain of city centers from let’s say 30 years ago now not only the shopping center?

David Rogers: “It always was, always. You know when we started the firm we simply took all the components that were in the city that were dying because of transportation: distributed into the suburbs, learned about how they worked and put them back and into the city, integrate them into the city. What happened in the 70s for example to the Santa Monica place, they built this big dumb shopping center right in the middle of Santa Monica. Well that was terrible! Now what we have done is we reintegrating commercial space within the city in a multi-used way. The multi-used projects in Asia that we are building or even a big project coming up in Moscow at the moment. Its a living-work-play situation.

What we haven’t quite accomplished is reintegrating all of that into the fabric itself, so it’s not a shopping center. It’s just the center of the city because the center of the city used to be all of those things, and in completely integrated, operating and healthy. They are not shopping, it wasn’t a shopping center. It’s just the core of the city, so the idea that its going back to the core of the city is simply relating the history of urban development, isn’t it?

Jorick Beijer: So you are saying that these places that once were a center got dispersed when the car came in, and finally there this desire to bring this micro places back.

David Rogers: “That’s exactly right. But it’s not only because of the car. In America for instance, it was because the central city became dangerous. The schools began to deteriorate terribly. The flight to the suburbs was generated financially yes, but basically because of the schools. I think the families couldn’t develop in the center of the city because it wasn’t safe and the educational process weren’t there. So again you are back on the sustainability, those five sustainability components absolutely have to be in vibe in any urban development from their operating, and live, and be healthy.”

Jorick Beijer: And what does Jerde do to give these micro places their attractiveness?

David Rogers: “Well, I think if you just give people a safe place to come with decent transportation and parking, just a place to be together, with food and drink and commercial activities, they will like it, doesn’t take much. But you absolutely need enough critical mass to really generate a place that people want to come. They have to be entertained. They have to feel fit. They have to feel safe for their families. And you could see this in cites. People come into cities, and they come into downtown Los Angles now because there is a lot of people, and they are safe. Some years ago nobody wanted to go to LA an 8 o’clock at night, it was just dangerous”.

Jorick Beijer: From where then comes this desire from for people to go to places as Citywalk for instance, places that are highly themed?

David Rogers: “Well you give them a specialty. This is an interesting question. It is there was the theme park in Citywalk and the parking garage was right here [sketches on paper]. Where did we build Citywalk? People here, parking right there, and here that Citywalk. It was just a very simple diagram. You have a destination and you have the arrival of people, and you connect these two. And shopping centers are all about a destination, another destination and a series of shops in between. So you go here, you go there and you come back. In the meantime you pass all the shops, and that’s basically the way cities work. If you look at the way cities work in urban areas, you have a destination and a connection between the two, and if these [the destinations, JB] are healthy, this connection is healthy. And then there is the triangulation of that, and another one down here and now you are beginning to build an urban court.

And those destinations can be a -- may be like in Paris, it’s a square in the city center, there are the famous cafes and a few restaurants. And then there is another one over here, and may be there is one of the big shopping centers over here, and the streets that connects those two are very successful streets. Look at Bond Street in London, it’s a lot the same way.

Jorick Beijer: In what scope of scale should I think for these dual or triangulated connections?

David Rogers: “Length wise, that’s an interesting question. If you look at renaissance cities between 1200 and 1500 feet something needs to happen. In most of the projects we work on when we come into the city, we begin to analyze how it works and where the things should be located, and we begin to say there is something -- there is a weak component to this somewhere. We find out that there may be the distance from destination to destination is too far. The square needs to happen on that scale for instance. That’s just kind of a rule of thumb we start looking at when it happens”.

Jorick Beijer: But there is a motion inside this circuits and towards this circuits. How do you see the role of public transport in that? And isn’t the parking garage not a big barrier in these relations?

David Rogers: “Got to have it. And especially in Los Angles because this is a really a car place. They made a failed attempt for a real subway system and they ran out of money. One day they will finish that subway system. As a matter of fact Santa Monica place will then be one of the destinations. Right across the Santa Monica Place you know, the Bloomingdeales, there is an empty site now that used to be the automotive barrier for Sears. That would be the place for a mass transit station coming in from Downtown LA. Everybody is working on it, its going to happen. Now the light rails stops in Culver, it’s there, it’s in operation right now. They just stopped it because now they are going to have to buy some more land”.

Jorick Beijer: That will certainly generate -- again a new kind of dynamics for Santa Monica.

David Rogers: “Can you imagine? I mean somebody Central Los Angeles without an automobile, you can get on a train and end up at Santa Monica. At the beach”.

Jorick Beijer: So utopia becomes metropia?

David Rogers: “Yeah that’s unbeatable. You can imagine how that train is going to be on Saturday morning. You will never get on it!”

Fig. 116. Santa Monica Place shopping mall by Jerde Partnership.
Benjamin Bratton: “Well you could research that in two ways. One being analytical and one being projective. The first is looking into ways how a particular kind of information by infrastructure transforms in space. Like how did putting the television in the middle of a living room in the United States of the fifties change the domestic space? To something more projective. If you could put the agents in ink that could track the CO2 emission of every building in the world, how could you develop climate systems from that point on? Both are very interesting. I’m interested in how specific you mean public. Because taking the Netherlands and the United States this is already something very different. As opposed to personal, as opposed to domestic, as opposed to privatized – like the private mall, so public is like what that domain left over. That’s where the politics happen, the public space. Easily you could mean something completely different with it.”

Jorick Beijer: “In my perspective public spaces as squares or boulevards are interesting but especially how they in the context of Los Angeles shift towards the semi-public place of the mall...”

Benjamin Bratton: “Or Dodgers Stadium, the department of motor vehicles or the buses...”

Jorick Beijer: But as you are saying, those places are only ‘public’ to a certain extend.

Benjamin Bratton: “Legally they are almost all private spaces, indeed. Looking at the urban scale, my juxtaposition would be not to just take one city as the core element of analysis, but rather looking at the urban as a part of the global city. That has nodal connections in it, megacities. You can’t talk about Los Angeles without talking about all the thing that come in and out Los Angeles right? So raising research to a higher level that examines how energy networks, water networks, information networks that constitute the material structure of the city. And are mass distributors of urban form. And the question of publicity, or the body of politics that might arise from this could be interesting on that level. My argument is that infrastructures in the city determines who is a citizen. But that has not so much to do with the idea of the public, rather with the idea of the sovereign. What is represented politically?”

Jorick Beijer: “How do you see this issue of political representation in relation to the users?”

Benjamin Bratton: “The infrastructure is as public space something that is modeled over and over again, and where everybody is a user. But users don’t have political citizenship. That is not a qualification of their status as a user. So I am interested in the ways that systems interpolates the person as a user, giving them sovereignties over their territory. Maybe there is a rotation of such, where the sovereignty of the user in relationship to these forms of infrastructure, cloud systems, mobile telephone systems which seems to be above or below traditional Westphalia sovereignties. A rotation where new discussions about public realm might are coming from, and the way these become more formalized. I don’t know what the implications of these things are for designing cities, but that is your problem.”

Jorick Beijer: But that question is particularly a question of scale...

Benjamin Bratton: “Of course! If you think of networks of cities, that is a different question than for instance redesigning geographies. We have a research program that focuses on Westphalia 2, where we questions what the modes are for alternative geography. Whether it be bio-regional systems, or think of the AMO project where they re-mapped Europe according to energy sources, stuff like that. How can we redraw the space with natural systemic logic according to some other kind of form, and second, what are the other possibilities by which we could redraw the lines in a different kind of way. Not only in a two dimensional way, maybe it has three dimensions, four. Maybe that will eventually work itself out on the level of an individual city. Take for instance something as Jerusalem where you got this seventeen dimensional sovereignties, where every cubs is discussed for already four thousand years. Where I’m particularly interested in, in that bigger question, is what I call the ‘cloud polis’. If you think for instance of the Google vs china conflict, where you have one logic that is a bounded plane – inside this line, which is the firewall, is the sovereignty of China. And then you have a certain ubiquity sphere, a layer of cloud computing that sits on top of it, beneath it or whatever, and these layers don’t blend. It is no Photoshop, there is no merge. They are just stacked. So it is the geopolitics of a stack that I’m interested in. A book that I am writing now is dealing with this idea of the stack, the way of having vertical geographies. You basically take a few different cities, a few different networks, different territories, make sense of the kinds of envelopes and infrastructures that are segmenting them and try to make clear what the agencies of the various zones are. Then you can maybe think of other forms of this organization as well. But this done in different ways. Toolkits for instance is looking at the different spaces on the both sides of the Berlin wall, the kind of no-man zone. But you can also look to Palestinian stuff, special economic zones. But most of them are looking at specific temporal autonomous zones. And I think that we can also look at this one step higher up, and thinking about geography as megastructure. The delineation of geography as a new kind of megastructure”.

Jorick Beijer: Will this eventually change the city of less say “every day life”, as in the form of our urban environment?

Benjamin Bratton: “Yes it will, but probably not in the way you would think it does. The strongest impact that software had on our visible culture is in logistics, in supply chains. The ability to move molecules from one place to another, easily. If you then really want to see the impact of software on the city you better go to WalMart. Or a warehouse district, or the port of Longbeach. There you don’t see interactive walls or any kind of media-architecture, what you are going to see is discrete packages in the shape of commodities or shipping containers. Which are essentially just analogies of instances in multiple databases, tied together across time. That has moved the oil out of Venezuela, the Carl file from London, manual labour across the Pacific Ocean near Riverside. The coordination of that movement is the logistical modernity, and I think that this had key impact on the city. Or on the objects, which move much faster then cities. [pointing at a girl that passes by us, walking but in the same time staring to here phone] Look that is the key thing, the navigation device. The phone as a remote control to the city.”

Jorick Beijer: So can we replace planning then by programming?

Benjamin Bratton: “Look: if one person is running one app on his phone, he is activating the space in one way. If someone else is using his phone, that activates the space in another way. This is found in the logic of deterministic programming. Because instead of the partial logic of the space – or sectional logic – determining the conditions of programming, that conditions of programming are activated by the particular agents that you use to that space. Which could be overlapping in multiple kind of ways. So the implication of urbanism to segment, if you think of zoning, planimetric programming in a larger scale to determined different kinds of activities according to the way you portion them, there is now a new layer. It gets complicated by the fact that there now is this layer existing on top of it, which allows all the agents within that space – human, non-human, cars, machines – to activate that space in ways that are very different from each other. So that’s another way of doing things. The question is not about moving blocks around the ultimate cumulative effect of those things may have everything to do with trends towards massвес centralization, or decentralized. Things that are permanent become temporary, things that are temporary become permanent. Things that were mobile are becoming immobile. That is how I try to look at the issue.”
Wes Jones
Principal of Jones, Partners: Architecture, design faculty at SCI-Arc

Wes Jones is a partner in Jones, Partners Architecture (J,P:A), a California-based, international architectural practice founded in 1991. Wes Jones transferred in 1998 from the United States Military Academy at West Point to the University of California at Berkeley, from where he graduated in architecture in 1980 with Highest Honors. Jones next attended the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. After producing a thesis that offered a critical homage to Louis Kahn and his use of geometry and structure, Jones received a Master of Architecture with Distinction in 1984. In his final seminar at the HGD Jones served as TA for Peter Eisenman, and he joined Eisenman’s office, EDA Wearne/Robertson after graduating.

During his tenure as Design Partner at Holst, Hounslow, Peck, Jones, the firm rose to national prominence for its technologically inspired work. His short Progressive Architecture Design Awards include two for the Alexandria Memorial at Kennedy Space Center and the 15th Southern California Chiller Plant for UCLA. After six years as Design Partner at Holst, Hounslow, Peck, Jones was elected to form his own practice, Jones, Partners Architecture. Current projects include offices in Venice CA, a coffee shop in Pittsburgh, and residences in Tamar, FL, Hollywood, Silverlake and Redondo Beach.

A recipient of the Rome Prize in Architecture, Wes Jones has lectured widely, and has served as Visiting Professor in the schools of Architecture at Harvard, Princeton, ICT, Columbia, UCLA and the Ohio State University, and presently teaches at the Southern California Institute of Architecture.

The talk with Wes Jones was one that I could describe the best as a very personal remembrance of his life in Los Angeles. Reflecting on suburbia, the perception of public realm and the materiality of the city Wes provided me with an interesting view on both practice and philosophy.

Wes Jones: ‘I grew up in Los Angeles, so in a way I have very little perspective on it. It is natural to me. Through my education in architecture, and traveling in Europe, I became the familiarized. I was educated in the Italian old town – urban coherence – coming back to LA and the suburb I was able to understand how strange they are within the history of urbanism. Or let’s say the history of human congregation. Unprecedented, only 150 years old in terms of their development, and basically the only development in the city. As soon as the city started to grow it grew in the suburban model. And this model has grown through different ages. LA had
rays at one time, then they get displaced by buses and the cars. And we have what we have now. But suburbia has always been interesting to me, and especially the way the lot-structure and the grid has created a sort of a self-sustaining logic. A logic that seldom is examined but is understood as being inadequate in a lot of ways and has been pushed, pulled and twisted in various ways. But rarely does it get even pre-examined from scratch. So I think that particularly architects are aware of the fact that the rules related to that, when they are not natural, are not easy to work with’.

Jorick Jeber: But scholars still try to work on it. Immediately I think of the work of Dana Calvi in the UCLA CityLab, where they did studies on backyard homes. Where do you think that this desire of densification comes from, and how will it influence the as you said logic of the blocks?

Wes Jones: ‘Given that we now have discovered this equation between volume and value, I think everybody now understands that real estate now is an investment and not longer just the place where you live and where your kids might eventually live. Now you feel almost morally wrong if you don’t use the space, which means max out the volume. Which is a little odd, because when you think of the fact that the value in LA is in the land, not in the structures, so the equation is not exactly right. I don’t understand how more structure on land doesn’t decrease the value of the land. I would say that if we really want to maximize the value of the land, we would preserve that. That is in a way the origin of the city. The fact that we have weather that allows you to spend a lot of time outside was the reason to make blocks of this size and create a pattern like we have’.

Jorick Jeber: But in addition to that, it is also not the case that the density of suburbia is low. In contrary, suburbia gave Los Angeles as metropolitan region now the highest density in the United States.

Wes Jones: ‘Now you’re absolutely right. And where you mention Dana Calvi, the idea of a second volume on the plot is interesting but creates new problems. I am not sure if you have seen the work that we [Jones/Partners] have done on the car and suburbia, but we did some speculative studies on the size of the car in relation to smaller roads, less parking caretakers. I think that the grid doesn’t care about more or less houses. This problem ultimately always comes down on parking, where do you put all those cars? Especially all those full-size monster cars that we are still driving. But this is what drives most of the urban rules in Southern California, the first thing that you do when a developer approaches you is you calculate how much parking space is available because that tells you how many units you can put on the site. It’s not the other way around. And that is different from for instance San Francisco where you are not allowed to have parking in Downtown because they try to force you to use public transport. But in LA you have to have two cars per dwelling and basically all the effort of architects is to figure out ways to work with these rules. Bring housing every household here at least has two cars nowadays, so if you start adding households in the backyard you better wonder two people put those two extra cars’.

Jorick Jeber: The car not only seems to be a determining element for suburbia, but in general for the perception of public realm in the city. How do you read this relationship?

Wes Jones: ‘Well of course the cliché is that public domain is suburbia, in the United States but in particular in Southern-California, now is the mall. It is not strictly public, it is actually private. The public spaces that are assigned by the government as being public to be boring spaces where nobody ever goes to Civic plazas, parks, you might have some activity but not to the extent of public love that you could consider as being a city at all. It seems to happen in these commercial, privatized spaces, where frankly the money is available to make a nice environment and invest in all the typical sources of urban life. But then we are back again at the problem of parking, because that is the thing that isolates it even further from the city. Whether the parking is around the mall, or the mall is on top of the parking, there is always a problem of continuity of the public realm’.

Jorick Jeber: Could we see Universal City Walk as one of the most characteristic examples of this kind?

Wes Jones: ‘Yes sure, and also one of the most extreme examples’.

Jorick Jeber: In these places the power of consumerism seems to bring all the visitors on the same level. All of the sudden the ground floors doesn’t matter anymore. Everybody gets the chance to relax and stop worrying for a while. But the examples that we mentioned all have aggressive types of architecture. To what extent you think that is really necessary?

Wes Jones: ‘I think that this question is still open. In the past there has been a sense that a set of skills or a expertise associated with it was required. Obviously most of the malls in the country are design by a limited number of architects who have developed this expertise. The most famous of course Jon Jerde, the one Ren is now so full of. He has exported his model all over the world. So I think that the most typical architects don’t even get a chance to think about it. The only situation where we could do that is here, in school, where we might run a studio on it. Operating in the critical realm, trying to understand this phenomena. But I don’t think that typical architects even get the chance to design a single shop in these environments. Most of the stores in the places are chains and they have architects that are, again, specialized in a particular style. The focus is in the end only on how to create a fantastic environment that makes people interested in spending money. All of the traditional values of the public realm disappear, it is all about the theater that you create. These people are not shopping for the necessities of live, they are shopping for luxurious and so they want to be in the mindset of vacation. Without worries, delighted, they want to be entertained’.

Jorick Jeber: Looking to the other end of the architects spectrum. What does this new realm of concentrated happiness mean for designing buildings and public space in the other parts of the city?

Wes Jones: ‘I think that this depends on the generations that house architects. For architects in my generation, growing up in the really pomo [postmodernism, JB] and deco [deconstructivism, JB] era, the debate about the importance of the street was alive. And so we all understood that our first duty, as architects, was to the street and so we were conscious of all the tricks and rules we could use in order to make sure that you not turn your back to the street. On the other hand both the city and the developers are often less interested in it, usually because parking goes on the ground-level and nobody wants to see cars. Recently there have been municipal bodies that required to develop retail around parking lots to do something about that. But then you face the problem of the scale of this retail whether it can contribute or not. This model of urban street life is based on cities like Paris, Rome, cities that have a density and enough things going on. So then if you walk from a place to another there is a continuity of this experience. But here the scale basically makes this continuity impossible. Even if you are for instance dining with a view on the street, then you are always looking on parked cars’.

Jorick Jeber: In this continuous experience that you describe, what kind of role does the materiality of the street play in that?

Wes Jones: ‘In these European cities, the quality of the space is much higher. Because one they are not dominated by cars and second the materials are usually real. It is probably stone in the facade, tiles on the ground and real shoes. It is much more like the concrete status that we have here. It has been there for a while, and I think that we appreciate that. So when you walk down a street, even those who are careful designed to evoke that feeling, people still can recognize that this is just crappy ass stucco, the paving stone pattern there stamped into the ground that is it fake. I think that sublimatory they notice the difference, and that it’s why we still continue to go to Europe. Anecdotally I can say that people go there, see the reality of the stuff that has been fakerd here and does just makes it feel even worse. From a practitioners standpoint it would be better not to be looking elsewhere and to pretend versions of that, but to try to thinking honestly what we need here. This is why the Case Study period is so interesting here. Because this was a period of architecture without looking across the Atlantic, although it all obviously was modernism. Greg Elwood was clearly influenced by Mies, but he was influenced by the Mies that was practicing in America already. And so the openness of the houses is almost a vernacular expression of the local conditions. And felt good. Imagine Mesian courtyard houses. But the realm of the street is about the street and we make no apologizes for that. It gets even worse if you see infrastructures as the streets or map/boundaries that are designed completely for the car and then you have a few gestures as if to say for the pedestrian. A tree, a little 5
Margaret Crawford teaches courses in the history and theory of architecture, urbanism, and urban history as well as urban design and planning theories focusing on small-scale urbanity and postmodern planning. Her research focuses on the evolution, use, and meanings of urban space. Her book, Building the Workman’s Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns, examines the role and fall of professionally designed industrial environments. Crawford is also known for her work on Everyday Urbanism, a concept that encourages the close investigation and sympathetic understanding of the specifics of daily life as the basis for urban theory and design.

Another interest is Los Angeles urbanism, which led to The Car and the City: The Automobile, the Built Environment and Daily Urban Life, edited with transportation planner Martin Wach. She has also published numerous articles on immigrant spatial practices, shopfronts, malls, public space, and other issues in the American built environment.

Prior to coming to Berkeley, Crawford was Professor of Urban Design and Planning Theory at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and before that, Chair of the History, Theory and Humanities program at the Southern California Institute for Architecture. She has also taught at the University of Southern California, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, and the University of Florida. Italy Crawford has been the recipient of numerous fellowships, including the Gehry, Driehaus, Quadrant, James Madison, Turner Foundation, and Graham Foundation.

While visiting UCLA for a lunch lecture on Garage Sales I had the chance to meet with Margaret Crawford at the beautiful campus of Westwood. On a sunny terrace we spoke about everyday urbanism, the car and her Los Angeles.

Margaret Crawford: You should know that I completely rejected that, I don’t believe it anymore.

Jorick Beijer: That’s what I wanted to ask in the end forthcoming. Could you tell me why?

Margaret Crawford: “Those fantasy places appeared as a thread in the 90's, but actually it's not so. Los Angeles is so ordinary. Its got this fabric of absolute ordinariness, that goes on forever, and so fantasy just never got on to tell the truth”.

Jorick Beijer: Are there then places as City Walk or the Santa Monica Pier, that appeared to me as concentrations of instant joy and fantasy, necessary for the people here to escape the ordinary of the city?

Margaret Crawford: “Yes in a certain way I think I don’t have anything against them. For instance Universal City is actually one of the most diverse places that you could ever see, because of its excessive security. Everybody is there, families and gang members, at the same time and they feel save because of its so heavenly surveilled. So I think surveillance engulfs diversity. But I don’t think that this fantasy environment actually prevails, and if it does it’s harmless. One of the most interesting things that I heard in all my years as a teacher is that students from Orange County buy a season ticket for Disneyland for 75 dollar, so that you can go whenever you want. And every Friday and Saturday night they went to Mainstreet at Disneyland, and all the other kids from their high school went there, so it was their main street. Even that it’s in Disneyland doesn’t matter, it just functions as a normal place. So I see that as everyday into the fantasy world, the opposite”.

Jorick Beijer: Do the people then miss a kind of public domain in their living environment? The boulevards as corridor seem lack any quality as public space.
things. The best thing about Los Angeles is that if you want to go out you have like 10 places that you could go to: Downtown, West-Hollywood, Santa Monica, and in most cities there is just one center. So I think this is a much, much better way of having multiple centers that are different but equal. To me that model of multiple nodes and corridors is what is fundamental, unique and fantastic about L.A. [after a short silence] Cause it offers the most freedom”.

Jorick Beijer: But then the car is the determining element?

Margaret Crawford: “Yes you have to have a car. Even though you could take the bus now, the rapid bus”.

Jorick Beijer: Still not very rapid...

Margaret Crawford: “[laughs] Oke. Well at least better then it’s used to be”.

Jorick Beijer: To what extent did the implementation of the Freeways in the 50’s enhanced this creation of a vast, homogenous landscape and the meaning of the nodes?

Margaret Crawford: “It made it stronger, but I think it originated in the 1920’s and there is a really great book called Inventing Autopia, a urban history book that’s fantastic. In the final chapter which is a defense of Los Angeles it describes the 1920’s where the dominant images where the skyscrapers of New York, that’s the vertical sublime. Los Angeles is then the horizontal sublime, one that’s going forward. He [Jeremiah Axelrod] claims that that was a deliberate choice in the 1920’s. But there is still a minority that wants to make Downtown the center of the city and densify it”.

Jorick Beijer: Downtown has a fascinating history in that sense. For long time it was a center of infrastructures, but when the Freeway was looped around its meaning completely changed.

Margaret Crawford: “Yes sure. There is another important article called The Perils of a Parkless Town by Richard Longstreth who talks about how you in the 1920’s get these multiple centers and Downtown, nobody went there if they could go to other places like Hollywood to shop. So actually I think that the 1920’s is the moment where that happened and Downtown started to decline”.

Jorick Beijer: To come back at the whole urbanization of the city. If you reject now your Ecology of Fantasy article, then you also – maybe partly – reject the critique on Koolhaas and his argumentation about genericness and junkspace

Margaret Crawford: “Actually I feel what’s great about Los Angeles is the genericness. Endless amounts of the same stuff, going on forever, which makes the city not precious. Now San Francisco is a precious city, everyone loves the old buildings and they don’t want to ever change anything. But in Los Angeles you could do anything, you could do whatever, because it just goes on forever and is not considered to be precious. And it functions. People find what they need in all those places, and it’s all the same. For example there is an area near West-Hollywood, West 3rd street, that has very high-end and expensive stores. But it’s pretty much the same as Pico blvd, just the stuff inside is different. The buildings are exactly the same, the same-old stuff. And I think that is a very democratic city”.

Jorick Beijer: Do you mean all these buildings with the Hispanic kind of look? All a little bit different, but very much the same because of this little difference?

Margaret Crawford: “Yes they are all the same. There are like five different styles, it’s all stucco, two storeys in pretty much the same shape. And then there are little differences, but these differences are not significant. But what I mean is that the experience is pretty much the same everywhere. Anywhere literally, even in the valley”.

Jorick Beijer: But that has probably also something to do with the fact that these places where developed in a short amount of time during the various booms of urbanization.

Margaret Crawford: “Whenever there is a time of real estate expansion, it is all the same stuff just reproduced over the city, there is nothing distinctive. We [the Getty] did an architecture and urbanism show and there was a conference on what we should do, and precisely this is what turned out to be the thing that people actually liked about Los Angeles. And what they found as really important where these acres of the same stuff, the horizontal sublime. Which is at night the most striking, especially when you arrive at LAX. It’s totally amazing. It looks really beautiful at night and very ordinary at day time”.

Jorick Beijer: Talking about the various models of ecology that I defined in my research we ended up discussing the contemporary meaning of Reyner Banham’s work.

Margaret Crawford: “His book is really great. The Burgess model [the Chicago School] where you start with never really worked like that. Even in Chicago it didn’t, because it is an ideal model. The ecological model is a little bit troubling because it is a biological analogy, which when you talk about human beings is troubling. Banham uses the ecological term very loosely, I think in a reasonable way. The areas that he defined are quite true, these areas are now just a lot bigger”.

Jorick Beijer: But then Kayros Varvelas argues that because of the gridlocked freeways the city starts to re-orientate at clusters. A lot of them with traceable paths.

Margaret Crawford: “When I did another kind of update of Banham’s work I think I called it hetero-autopia. Because the freeways still flow, I was just on the 405 coming here and it was amazing. I think that is where L.A is all about. They still flow, except for certain hours and certain freeways. But I think that idea of seamless mobility is still valid. The fact that the freeways are lifted up I think is very important. It gives you a feeling of the whole city and the sense of urbanness, cohesion, and I think that is a very important function. Did you see Banham’s movie? When he goes over the 405, that’s totally true. You see huge expanses, it’s really exhilarating. There is no question about it.

I do think that Banham was the first person to say good things about Los Angeles. Everything he said was good, was what others said was bad. Of course there where other people that understood and appreciated it, and you mentioned the LA School of geographers, but he really turned the corner because he was the first person to say that this is a great kind of urbanism. But what’s your answer? Is this a good kind of urbanism?”

Jorick Beijer: Most of my presumptions turn out to be not entirely true, I think the city isn’t understandable only by maps and books, because there hardly is any reference. But it works, so in that sense it is a good kind of urbanism. But it works for this particular society, this shapping happens of course in two directions. But what I don’t like, or maybe just don’t get yet, is that the amount of social interaction on the street latches or is of an almost bizarre kind.

Margaret Crawford: “I actually don’t think that. The public realm is different but people still live in their neighborhood. And in the neighborhood people live very close together. Most are like that, there is an incredible neighborhood feeling and that’s what people not always know. They think that people don’t interact with each other, but they do. They talk with each other in weird places like garage sales. You always see people in a way that is very surprising. I used to see Michael Rotondi [SCI-Arc Director from 1987 to 1997; [B!] every morning on the freeway. Actually to me it is one of the nicest, most accepting, most tolerant social atmosphere in any place that I’ve ever been. People are very accepting for everything, because people here come from everywhere. And you have to remember that this is one of the most diverse city. Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador. They don’t even know each other. People from Honduras and from Guatemala, do you think they have something in common? They hate each other because they had some war. So everybody is really different. Given the diversity this is an extraordinary achievement. Everybody is pretty much living together since ’92, in peace. I think that is what the spreadoutness allows to happen”.
Martin Wachs
Em. Professor of Urban Planning & Transportation at UC Berkeley and UCLA
Senior principal researcher at RAND.

My main objective for right now is, and that is very basal, to get to understand the city and the specific historical development of the correlation between infrastructures and urban form. I might, since I have to conclude my thesis with a design, use my current SCI-Arc project on aggregated relations between all those things in my research project. But I know that those two things might appear still a bit loose from each other.

Martin Wachs: “Go one”.

JB: Unconsciously there might come a second objective. Being here and getting to understand my own presumptions, I know also would like to show others that Los Angeles is not only what it looks like. There is a vast amount of clichés, the strongest ones that it's a historical and that it is a city of congestion and smog. But this is also something that I couldn't find in literature. There has been written extensively about sprawl, infrastructure, demographics etc. But until now I didn’t find a scholar who related those things to basic urban form.

Martin Wachs: “You mean recent literature?"

JB: Any kind of literature, but really simple maps that show how the city was formed and reformed over time. Because there are a lot of words, but...

Martin Wachs: “Let me see what I have here [walks to his book stacks] you must know that this is not my main office, I have office at the RAND where my library is. But there is a book, a tiny report, that deals with the stuff you talk about. I can sent that to you electronically, it is a RAND publication, so I have the PDF".

Martin Wachs: “Why is Los Angeles as it became what it is right now, interesting for Europeans?”

JB: I think that Los Angeles in terms of its contemporary form, whether you might call that a postmetropolis as Ed Soja did - but that’s only one name, and the organization of the city is one of the very first models of its kind. A kind that we are now seeing in Asia, cities that are not anymore the concentric Burgess model but are becoming polycentric. A kind that we are now seeing in Asia, Europe do have about L.A. Are not true and also much more complex. There is not as much smog as most think, it's urban cores are not extremely violent but most that the freeways are not always gridlocked. The city has a flair that is distinctly flowing – of course congested as certain hours just as any metropolis. But I would argue that, just as I did earlier, that it is a city beyond a single core or multiple cores. I think Los Angeles is an unique example of a city that is composed by its inhabitants, who are liberated by the car. The availability of such an amount different kind of urban environments is makes the fabric very exciting. But this liberty comes with the car, because the public transport is certainly not very efficient. But this is more than two minutes. It's a hard question.

Martin Wachs: “Thank you, that is very interesting and informative for me. If I would respond and tell you what more I think is interesting, it would be in a different direction. Because of your intellectual background, interest and understanding you are really focused on the physical form of the city. And that you have these different communities – affects human satisfaction, behaviour, you are here you should spent more of your time out there. Looking, sensing, going with the public transport and talking with people”.

Let me ask a hard question, I understand that is a difficult one. Suppose that today you would go back to Delft. Then, let's say, the dean of your school would ask you what you learned about Los Angeles, that you didn't know before and the most people don't know. If you have two minutes to tell that person what you discovered, what would you say?”

JB: [after a long silence] Well I would probably start with telling her that most of the prejudices that most of the people in Europe do have about L.A. Are not true and also much more complex. There is not as much smog as most think, it's urban cores are not extremely violent but most that the freeways are not always gridlocked. The city has a flair that is distinctly flowing – of course congested as certain hours just as any metropolis. But I would argue that, just as I did earlier, that it is a city beyond a single core or multiple cores. I think Los Angeles is an unique example of a city that is composed by its inhabitants, who are liberated by the car. The availability of such an amount different kind of urban environments is makes the fabric very exciting. But this liberty comes with the car, because the public transport is certainly not very efficient. But this is more than two minutes. It's a hard question.

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JB: That's where my mapping is lacking, but also where the US Census data is not really sufficient. Because it shows always majorities and that doesn't do good to the actual diversity.

Martin Wachs “Sure, but besides that there now is a change in the definition of race that changes the whole thing. A very large proportion of the people can now be classified with multiple races.

I noticed and I'm planning to work on.

Martin Wachs: “In Los Angeles urban form indeed developed around rail, streets and the highway. But water was very important, and in particular in the San Fernando Valley. That was a very dry area, desert like, and the importation of water by building aqueducts really facilitated the growth and development. Electricity probably less so, it followed, but the availability of water was just as important as the rail and the roads, well maybe not just as important but certainly significant for the development of the city”.

JB: Interesting. But given the fact that Los Angeles is built in a desert, we then don’t talk about natural water flows right?

Martin Wachs: “What happens is that rivers are empty most of the year and when it rains heavenly the flood. So what is done in the 1920's and 30's was that they've put them in concrete, intended to prevent the flooding of residential and commercial areas. Now there is a movement, and people are really concerned about this, to restore the river in it's original state. Make it more beautiful, more natural and ecologically more genuine. But most of the water where I'm talking about is stolen, brought in by very large aqueducts. Most of it comes from Northern California. So in 1890 they build a huge dam Yosemite national park, called the Hetch Hetchy dam. And they pumped the water through huge pipes over the hills, all the way South. William Muthomthon, the chief engineer who designed the water system, he in 1911 opened the Los Angeles aqueduct that came from the North and made it possible to develop land in the San Fernando Valley".

JB: That is a great new layers, thanks for pointing that out.

Martin Wachs: “Well that's one suggestion. Which books have you read about Los Angeles, besides Banham?”

JB: Let's see: Everyday Urbanism by Margaret Crawford, The provisional City by Eina Cuff, The Resistible Rise of the L.A. School by Michael Dear, The Ecology of Fear by Mike Davis, Bourgeois Utopias by Robert Fushman, Heteropolis by Charles Jencks, Postmetropolis and The City by Ed Soja. An article and The interviewal City by Kariann Varnelis, The Car and the City by you and Margaret Crawford. But there are others to...

Martin Wachs: “Did you read anything by Kevin Starr?”

JB: No, Should I?

Martin Wachs: “Well the list that you present has a kind of ideological flair to it. These are all people that are left, progressive oriented. Kevin Starr is not like that, he is more the kind of typical mainstream historian and maybe even a bit to the right. He has written 19 or 20 volumes about the history of California, but several of his books are in particular on Los Angeles. It's a different kind of work, not as ideological though people like Ed would describe his work as too conservative. I think you should take a look at that. And you might even talk with him, he is available at USC”.

Martin Wachs: “You mean recent literature?”

JB: That's a good but also a difficult question. My main interest is in doing research that is about solving a problem – that exists or you create – but I'm not fascinated by the work, what happens it with when you finish. What is the intent of the project, the purpose? I think is interesting, it would be in a different direction. Because of your intellectual background, interest and understanding you are really focused on the physical form of the city. And that you have these different communities which affects human satisfaction, behaviour, movement. I think another dimension of Los Angeles that is really important is ethnic communities and the fact that is like a Latin-American city, like an Asian city, that you have these different communities and different places. In the end I don’t think that that is independent from the form, I think it's much more inter-reaction. They are connected in a way that is hard to figure out, but if you make some progress in figuring out that I think that you would have an even deeper understanding of Los Angeles”.

Martin Wachs: “You mean recent literature?”

JB: That's right. In fact that is something that...
We had so much intermarriage and so much intermingling, geographically, that a substantial portion of the society has parents with different backgrounds, so they check more then one box. And this is happening very rapidly. So that is also Los Angeles. First the ethnic enclaves and now the intermingling, that all is related to space. But in subtle ways that are hard to figure out. I mean there are a lot of scholars trying to figure it out, but it’s not that easy."

"So I have time for some more questions before my next appointment. What do you want to know especially from me?"

"Ok let’s see. Maybe then the future of Los Angeles. At this very moment we see a slow but apparently firm movement of re-adapting public transport and especially by rail. This will again mean a lot for the form of the city and things as density patterns. Could you elaborate a little bit on that?"

"Right now the single biggest issue is the control of land use and transport together at a regional level, for greenhouse gas reduction. They are really trying to concentrate new growth at transit stops. And that’s a hard job given the fact the local municipalities here emphasize on their power on land use and this is trying to do it together as a region. And there is of course tension."

"You wrote extensively about the transformation from the streetcars to the automobile. How difficult will it be to get the Angelenos out of the car again?"

"The change that we are facing now is separate from the 1920/1930 year history. I think it is fair to say that the last 20, 30 maybe years, almost all the growth has been concentrated in the center where we got a higher density, and the edges of the city didn’t spread further out. So while the city is still sprawling, as a region the overall density is higher then New York, and what is happening now is that most of the new housing is in multiple level buildings. Buildings of 8, 6, 8 until 100 and 150 units. And the majority of those are oriented at transit locations. If transport trips are region wide 1 or 4 percent of all trips, and it doubles, it is still a small percentage: but doubling is quite something”.

"Very good, that’s right. Olympic boulevard, Wilshire boulevard, Pico, they all predate the freeway and really gave L.A. It’s form in the 1920’s and 1930’s. So you are absolutely right. Where I live right now, that was developed in 1936. And it was clearly along different streetcar lines."

"Now it is rather strange places. Full of program, but without any quality in terms of public space. Already the profile makes it hard to perceive as an entity."

"Well have you seen pictures of Venice boulevard with four or five rail tracks in the middle? That’s why it looks like that. It was that wide because it carried public transport and then gradually over time, when the public transport was removed it got its pavement. There is a book about the redesign, the Pacific Electric Railway, that is really good. A bit old, but it is called: ‘Ride the big Red Cars’, by Spencer Crump. That you should see”.

"Let me know if you have any difficulties entering a library, here at UCLA or somewhere else. And let us stay in touch. Your doing fascinating work and I’m really interested in the progress”.

David Bergman: “That’s ambitious”.

"I see it as an inspiration. He developed an understanding of LA that although it is nearly 40 years old still is valid, or at least traceable in the city."

"So I always tell people if they ask ‘what do you do’? I’m a city planner in Los Angeles. And they laugh and will say that LA for sure needs city planning. I say no, everything here is planned. There is nothing here that follows some traditional pattern, its all here from the very beginning as a result of human agency and historical human decisions. The problem is that those decisions are not coordinated, and that is what you see, a surface that is uncoordinated between historic time periods and political jurisdictions.”

Even from the earliest settlements everything is planned here. Even downtown, look at Alameda Street here. It’s still grid, it doesn’t follow the Cartesian directions. This street, all over to Hoover, why is that? Well its because it follows the law of the Indies, promulgated by King Philip the 2nd of Spain. Giving instructions to conquerors how to lay out a city. This is exactly what you will find in Santa Fe, Peru, Santiago, everywhere. So that one grid at the origin of the city. And then you have overlying it where it doesn’t connect, the Ord survey of 1856 which is the first American survey that is a complete back of beyond and yet it gets surveyed, along the Cartesian directions of the Jeffersonian grid system. Already right there, at the inception you have conflicting histories, conflicting ideologies, conflicting priorities. Even in the basic layout of where the streets and blocks are going to be. And nothing is accidental, they are all intentional. So you get these layers.

So again a misunderstanding about Los Angeles is that it’s not planned. Everything is planned, but the plans are not coordinated. The other myth on Los Angeles is that it’s a-historical. That’s bullshit! No place in the world is a-historical. Even Dubai has a history.”

"I see it as an inspiration. He developed an understanding of LA that although it is nearly 40 years old still is valid, or at least traceable in the city.”

David Bergman: “All cities are path dependent. So these initial conditions form different patterns for development. There are two things that can dilute, Ur, London and Los Angeles. And that is first the mode of accumulation. So what is the economic structure of society, how are surpluses managed and distributed in the society. In Ur you have labor to support the hydraulic work, you have priest to look at the stars and you have administrators to tell you where to dig the canals and when to open the sluice gates etcetera. So that’s one mode of accumulation and it produces a particular urban pattern. And then you have different patterns in pre-capitalist cities. So now you come here to look at Los Angeles. Here the mode of accumulation is understood as one of the capitalist cities of the late 20th / early 21th century. It is a city, unlike as the cities that you look like in Europe that has no significant pre-capitalist history. It is an artifict. So the American capitalism of the second half of the 20th century is really the story and this city is the laboratory, in many ways, for 21st century capitalism. How it expresses itself as a global city with all the cultural and ethnic global connections, the types of industries that are highly mobile as information industries and cultural industries which are happening here and they leave a pattern in the landscape.

The second is the mode of regulation, the legal system. Given a city like London, just as example. Everything in London is on a 99 year ground lease, and the Duke of
We nominally own the land. He can't sell it, so it's good to be the Duke, but it creates a different kind of urbanization under the circumstances. The rules of the game here are determined by land use controls at a municipal level and what underlies that are the fiscal impacts that allow the municipality to provide services. Here nothing is national, everything is provided by the locality. And that reinforces the unevenness and the fragmentation that you see in the landscape. So mode of accumulation and mode of regulation.

Jorick Beijer: This is of course also spatial. How did it form the city?

David Bergman: “What is the city? The city is a technology, it's a human artifact. There is nothing natural, biological or pre-undertaken about it. This is human agency, so it's a technology. And its a technology designed for the social reproduction of capitalism. The city becomes a vessel for the economic regime to be expressed. Well there are other things to, but you get that from architects. I'm interested in how the social division of labor expresses itself spatially. You see that in the whole structure of the city and the functions that happen.

And then technological change comes and you have the automobile. Los Angeles begins to urbanize in the second half of the 20th century. 1917 is the year that more than a million of the Ford Model T are produced. 1920, the city is growing incredibly rapid and the population of LA County breaks the barrier of a million people for the first time in history. In the 1930's a decision is made to adopt the most progressive technology that is available for mobility, and its clearly that the advantage goes to the rubber tired vehicle with the internal combustion engine. Its the progressive choice of that time. You looked at the inner city streetcar line, but if you read the contemporary counts you would see that they are miserable! People don't like them, they cause congestion, they all come together in Downtown and because they are controlled by the public utilities commission there is a limit of what they can charge an individual and so they fall into disrepair. In the postwar Europe and the rest of the United States those private train lines get consolidated and get turned into municipal authorities. In Los Angeles the system is so debased that people don't want it. It's over romanticized how great these streetcar lines were.

Jorick Beijer: We are now looking at it's predecessor then, one with an unforeseen impact?

David Bergman: “In the 1920's a decision is made, and that is in all the plans, that it is a regional metropolis. Looking at the concept of the Garden City and given the fact it's benign climate and the geography that is very flat, the cheapest and most progressive technology of that day was the automobile. So land use patterns appear to reflect that from the 1920's on. And then you get in the 1950's, post-war.

Costs of an automobile are dramatically reduced. The war indutries that did planes and tanks could do automobiles good and very cheap. So what they did was adopting this thing here, the Interstate Highway System. Besides that, don't underestimate the importance of the second world war. Implicit in our post-war planning was the idea that you want to be decentralized so that you don't get bombed.

(pointsing to the horizon) By the way: that's Century City. In Century City there is more employment then there is in Cincinnati, a midsize American city and it is here just one note in the consolidation, or the network, of interconnected centers.

So if you read the County Highway Commission that made the plan to build this highway system that is again another infrastructural grid that is being placed over. And the idea for it is to be a grid, so that you never supposed to be more than four miles away from an entrance to a highway. But hey, this is working! Everybody talks about how freeway the freeway system is, it can be. But look at this mobility, how are we running - very quickly across this region. In 1954 when the County is writing their highway plan, they write in their preface that this system here is based on what we know about expected urbanization, population growth it should work until about 1984. By that time there will be a completely new technology that makes this obsolete. A reasonable decision to make in 1954, looking back to 1914 they are living in a completely different world. So path dependency matters in a city that forceloss certain kinds of choices. Which is partly the reason why the LA rail system is so misogynizing, because its trying to reinforce a 19th century solution on a 21st century city.

But to think about is how does the city comes to you? That the city does not only is a manufacturing and re-distributing but disaggregates. I think one of the great responses of this is the food truck. There has been a huge explosion in the last two or three years of high quality cater restaurants and food services loading it into trucks. This is what Amazon is for the book store, the food truck is for the restaurants. It's a better social experience because it comes to you, you get more diversity and it's a better reflection of what's really urban. There is a element of experimenting. All the qualities that make urban life urban are expressed in the food truck. But why stop there? All kinds of retail could be mobile.

(pointing to the cars around us at the 10) Who are all these people and where are they going at the middle of the day? This guy in the Porsche is going to a meeting in Santa Monica having to do with the financing of a film. This is a studio truck from CBS transporting materials for a set, and that guy is a carpenter. We go from gig to gig to gig, these are all offices. Or maybe households. But this is a different urbanism happening here. The city is happening in a different and mobile way and that's why these kinds of infrastructures are critical.

Jorick Beijer: Do you think that the city again could make such a progressive choice in terms of technology?

David Bergman: “The adoption of the car was the commitment to technological progress. There is no reason why Los Angeles can't continue to be a field adopting technological progress at the cost of its urbanism. The mobility enables us to participate in the economic production. I can pretty cast, within a day, to 18 million people. All by the means of this infrastructure. And of course there are negative artifacts, but that are technological problems. And I think that architecture and urbanism has something to say about that. But its very important not to look at this and see it just as a crapsoul of unsustainable development. Because it works. And how do I know it works? Because the gross regional product of this area is a bigger economy then Switzerland. It is just incredibly productive”.

Jorick Beijer: Is that misunderstood?

David Bergman: “That's what bothers me sometimes. We get Europeans in, and I'm not saying that its you, who say that Rome is better urbanism. Rome is the solution for a problem that goes from 15th to t be 17th century. As a 21st century city there is nothing informatively better about it.

But here we are (while driving into Santa Monica). We have been in a car for half an hour and we are in a completely different city. In Europe we would just moved from Flanders to Wallonia to give you some context. It's a poly-nuclear city, a thorough regional metropolis”.

Jorick Beijer: Is Los Angeles, in terms of its urbanization concept and lay-out, an early example for regional metropolises as we see them nowadays in Asia? And what is then the future of LA itself?

David Bergman: “Yes it's one of the first and continuous, hopefully, to be innovating in that regard. So that it's constantly reinventing itself and that nothing is static. We are now at a moment in where we are getting static for a variety of reasons, and there seems to be a crisis in confidence. This all has to do with economy, the fact that we can't build infrastructure that allows us to continue in spreading out. Some for good and some for bad reasons.

But look around you. Where is the public space? Public realm is shit! When you look in Los Angeles never mistake on what is happening at the corridors and what is happening in the neighborhoods behind it. The corridors are just places of commerce, nothing particularly critical is happening there. This is the generic space, the real things happens in the blocks behind it. It's just around the corner, but you have to know where you are looking for"
Eric Owen Moss: The idea of going to buy things you need, whether in person or online, I think came to be a form of entertainment. Which says something very fundamental about the culture. I mean if you say, ‘okay I need paint, I need shoes, I need a watch’ but it’s not like that. It’s something else. And as opposed to looking past to what you need, you know I have shoes so I can walk somewhere. That doesn’t appeal very much to me. I mean I wouldn’t deny that it exists, but whether we should compliment it or not is another question. I mean I get it, I think it has something to do with the commercialization of almost everything.

We were having a discussion the other day about SCI-Arc having to replace the infrastructure like the trunk lines, getting computers and things like that. One of the things that people were complaining about, people meaning faculty, is that people are streaming Netflix, Pandora, Facebook while the studio is running. And some people have tried to cut that down – and we will cut it down – and some people are complaining that it was censorship, you know. It wouldn’t be my definition of censorship.

This is another example I think of confusion. Between I guess, means and ends. And the technical tools are just like shopping. They have taken on a new interest or values in themselves, you know. So it’s not so much I have these tools – I have these hammer so I can pound his nail in this wall. There’s an interest in the hammer itself and it’s not that I can’t see that or it seems to me, it has to be some other human purpose. It is missing some goal, some aspiration; the world should be different. We should make it different. As opposed to just going along with whatever, the demographic democratic interests that appeal. Which I think we tend to do a lot.

So when you are trying to do something like a major train. You immediately have arguments with every district on top of the one you have with the cities this city has like Santa Monica, Culver city, Bushwick, West Hollywood, Beverly Hills. For years they tried to build a train down Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly Hills always said ‘No we don’t want a train’. Now very recently they said it’s okay to make a train.

So you have supervisory districts, council managed districts and then you have those independent civic jurisdictions. So you can say this is LA but wait a minute we are in Culver City or in West Hollywood or in Santa Monica, those are all cities. For somebody who comes to Los Angeles there is one big chunk of whatever. It’s an old joke that you take off from JFK and you immediately fly over LA. I mean it’s not as had as Mexico city but it’s huge. It just keeps going, going, going. It goes all the way down to the port of San Pedro, way out to the valley, way out the beach, way out.

There have been arguments in the past that it would rather be broken into pieces because: it’s hard to manage so many pieces with very different vantage points. That worked

Eric Moss was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. He received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1965. Moss continued his education, earning his Masters of Architecture from the University of California at Berkeley, College of Environmental Design in 1968 and a second Masters of Architecture from Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 1972.

Moss has held teaching positions at major universities around the world including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, University of Applied Arts in Vienna, and the Royal Academy in Copenhagen. Moss has also been a long-term professor at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), and has served as its director since 2003. He was honoured as the 2006 AIALA Educator of the Year.

Moss was awarded the Academy Award in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1999. He received the AIALA Gold Medal in 2003. He is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architecture and was a recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award for the University of California, Berkeley in 2003. In 2007 he received the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize, recognizing a distinguished history of architectural design. In 2011, he was awarded the Jencks Award, given each year to an architect who has made a major contribution to theory and practice of architecture by the Royal Institute of British Architects. There are ten published monographs on the work of Moss’ office.

Talking about my thesis and coming along one of my sub themes, shopping, Eric started to think out loud in his very own way.

Eric Moss: ‘That raises a completely different discussions. First of all the political structures in LA make absolutely no sense. There’s something called supervisory districts. You know about that? There are five supervisors, each have huge areas. Overlapping that to some extent are what they call council managed districts. There is a city council of LA, I think there are fifteen districts plus the mayor. The mayor has almost no power. The districts belong to the council people. So there’s a governmental overlap of council managed districts, supervisory districts. No overall governing authority really.

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Jorick Beijer: So your projects in Culver are merely about creating the hype?

Eric Owen Moss: “The guy who did a lot of this stuff in Culver City, he figured out that he could pull people using architecture essentially to sell business. So he got AOL, he got NIKE and he got all these fancy companies which would have been very hard to do in New York and most cities. And they come running because of the images, and things like that. I think LA is a city where the emphasis on what matters and why? What’s important? And where should I go, where should I not go – is continually changing.

You can argue that this makes the city livable in a kind of variable way. Meaning, its priority’s aren’t clear, and not established so they keep moving around. They keep changing and so it is a sort of adolescent city. It’s a big important world city but it hasn’t decided what goes where and how important it is.

There’s a big discussion the last few years about downtown. That seems to have disrupted a little bit during the slowdown of the economy, but may come back again. I think one of the reasons SCI-Arc actually went downtown was because it is one of the more complicated areas sociologically. Because if you go to Pacific Palisades you have all this kind of white upper class, Santa Monica very much the same thing... Downtown is a mix, it is more complicated sociologically. How long it will be that way, I don’t know.”

Jorick Beijer: What future do you see for Downtown LA?

Eric Owen Moss: “I don’t know, nobody knows how to answer that. I don’t know if there are any cities that are unresolved in perpetuity. And you could argue on the other hand that that’s a good time to be in LA. Because everything is not stratified, everything is not organized, everything is not set, so there are a lot of proposals floating around and that makes the discussion interesting. But the ability of the city to resolve those questions, to say: this is where the train should go. They can’t do that. They don’t know how to do that. Or this is a river, this is what we should do with the river, this is what we should do with a power grid. This is how we should diminish the decisive qualities of freeways. Again, drop it below, lift it up above, let the neighbourhood go under, let the neighbourhood go over, whatever it is.

So, I don’t know, I mean probably the next step is the density. We’ll have to do with increasing density of probably bigger movements and what we [Moss’ office, JB] proposed is that we use a bigger building with the infrastructure, so that the buildings and the infrastructure end up being bridges between the areas they are divided. I got to go. Hope this helps. If you do something interesting, sent it to me.”

Edward W. Soja (born 1946, New York City) is a postmodern geographer and urban planner. Ed Soja is a distinguished professor of Urban Planning at the University of California - Los Angeles (UCLA) and Visiting Contenual Professor in the Department of Sociology at The London School of Economics. He has a Ph.D. From Syracuse University. After starting his academic career as a specialist on Aftrica, Dr. Soja has focused his research and writing on urban restructuring in Los Angeles and more broadly on the critical theory of cities and regions. His wide-ranging studies of Los Angeles bring together traditional political economy approaches and recent trends in critical cultural studies. Of particular interest to him is the way issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality intersect with what he calls the spatiality of social life, and with the new cultural politics of difference and identity that this generates.

In addition to his work on urban restructuring in Los Angeles, Ed Soja continues to write on how social scientists and philosophers think about space and geography, especially in relation to how they think about time and history. His policy interests are primarily involved with questions of regional development, planning and governance, and with the local effects of ethnic and cultural diversity in Los Angeles. His publications include: Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory (1989), The City (1998), Thirdspace (1996), Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions (2000) and Seeking Spatial Justice (2010).

This interview is a loose collection of excerpts out of an two hour talk that I had with Ed about Los Angeles and its regional urbanisation, evolving demographics, new urban species and the mystery of Downtown.

Jorick Beijer: The subtitle of my research mentions the ‘postmetropolis’. In fact it deals with the causes and consequences of regional urbanisation. What is regionalisn for you?

Edward Soja: I don’t know if you do have that mobility. That was the old. Remember I was talking about Webber? That was true for LA in the post – and may be true continuing from for Yuppies and Wealthy – but in the post people lived in networks and they were sometimes quite distant. But not on a regional scale: I don’t see them as, well maybe they could be seen as regions. But I don’t see that mobility. I see my family and so on, they’re so focused on Santa Monica. They’ll go down the coast and they’ll go occasionally to La Brea but getting East of La Brea is...

Jorick Beijer: When I look at the people that I have around me right now, it is stunning to see how shopping and especially food organises the city. In very loose, flexible and temporary ways.

Edward Soja: ‘Amsterdam has such a powerful downtown, that it organizes your life. Whereas it doesn’t in LA. Like a fly in a web or something, you can fly around more easily in L.A. It’s not sticky as the web in Amsterdam is. But you are making an interesting call whether there’s a kind of more flexible an open kind of networking going on. It’s really hard to tell, I mean the substance students, architecture students, may not be a great one to generalize from: We don’t know if you are able to get some statistics on flows or anything? I used to do work on telephone books and I don’t know
of those kinds of statistics are still available”.

Jorick Beijer: There are fascinating maps of Erick Fisher whose doing geogaphy by pictures. If you make a photo with your camera or phone it has a GPS position and this Erick Fisher has made maps about the geographical position of these pictures. What you then see is a fascinating geography of place awareness.

Edward Soja: “Now that’s an interesting issue when you say place awareness. When Webber was writing, he was writing about the almost complete absence of place awareness. Today the place awareness is extremely intense, but I don’t know how much has changed depending on ones income and so one. I don’t know if I can go back, but it would be great to find out whether things have changed because of this place awareness. I mean that’s vital for my story, that they’ll become more aware of place and location and you see it more politically and you. But shopping is weird because the famous places that became success stories where old-town Pasadena and the Promenade in Santa Monica. Then you have the absence of Downtown. And I don’t know if it’s West Hollywood because the Grove [popular open air shopping mall, JB] is that West Hollywood? Yeah I think so. But that’s what you end up doing perhaps and that’s the place awareness. And that’s not at all what you want – is looking at malls”.

Jorick Beijer: Ed you mentioned your new book, that’s coming up. Could you reveal something?

Edward Soja: “The first basis of it is that I have been changing my view of Los Angeles, as I see Los Angeles change. What I started with is very different from what I’m talking about now. So the first chapter is ‘It all comes together in LA’. Political economy - very confident in all, ‘this has all the answers’. Then I did the ‘taking LA apart’ towards a post-modern idea and I stepped back to find out what we can find out. Then I stay with that playful postmodernism and go into Orange County, ‘inside exurbs’ - that’s chapter three - and that’s my most sort of wildly post-modern thinking. Chapter four is about what happened in 1990 and really starts with the development of the so-called ‘edge city’ US, that I didn’t know anything about. I stepped on top of new empirical work, which Orange County in the sense was, but started looking at comparisons. So I extract some from the Amsterdam article and other discussions, and then follow it up with my contribution to the dual city, that are new. I wrote a piece on Los Angeles for the New York book and that chapter ends with a little essay I did on sprawl where I compared American cities and this remarkable movement away from - when I started there was sprawling low density and then suddenly this is the densest urban area in the united states. Chapter five are the six discourses. So I go through each of the six discourses and update them.

I did a fascinating thing on gated communities, and in especially Palo Vides. They set aside a lot of land for ecological purposes and by that resist the urbanization of suburbia. A very powerful assertive maintenance of low density, wealthy elite of suburbia. A very powerful assertive purposes and by that resist the urbanization of communities, and in especially Palos Verdes.

Chapter six is regional urbanization. I mentioned it all the way along but chapter six I’m going to do it as an interview with myself, just to stop saying what this is and that. It’s going to be repetitive of what I’ve said before so I want to find a way of making it a little livelier. The last one, chapter seven, are writings on the bus riders union, spatial justice and the right to the city alliance: A lot of my latest interests and a little sort of LA coalition building history. Then maybe a little tiny final chapter on the occupancy movement. I feel I go to do something with that. I didn’t realize there was a very strong thing in LA and in Orange County. There is a very strong Orange County movement in Irvine, very supportive, and it’s fastest, it’s still going as I understand, so I thought I’d do a final myth on all of that”.

Jorick Beijer: Fascinating. Is there a kind of overall provisional conclusion?

Edward Soja: “Well as I said – LA is shaped by this transformation of suburbia. You use a lot the word post-suburbia, post-suburbia is fine, I see this outer city is forming may be four and a half other cities. It’s very odd – it’s very similar to the map I had in ‘taking the city apart’ - that is a kind of pentagon as the inner city and then these other cities. Orange County as may be the biggest and the eldest of the outer cities in an empire that’s not quite there in the city. There are real regional sections of Los Angeles that are part of this regional city and the interior. I have to think about it, but the interior is ill. I mean we’ve got East LA, in East LA the body is dead, the city is dying because they are about as 500,000 people and it would be the second largest city. Then there I guessed the valley, west LA, and then South East LA - which is sort of getting into outer city - but that’s this remarkable 97% Latino from 80% white. Extraordinary, so much die. There’s some panic about planning in central cities because so many of them are losing population and so they think “oh my god, we have to do a ‘Bluff effect’ and get Gehry to do a Guggenheim and all of that city branding. I think that’s going to continue as long people still hang on to the old model, but we’re going to see less of that. I begin to realize that the city region is something else and that we have to adapt the administrative system to these new regional structures”.

Jorick Beijer: Was that not one of the common grounds of the LA School?

Edward Soja: “Well, I have a whole section on looking at the whole debate about the LA school and I back away from strong school elections. But this is a remarkable research cluster that’s produced more vivid research on recent history and restructuring in Los Angeles than in any other city in the world. Basically what I’m saying is that LA has evolved from urban restructuring to crisis generated revenue restructuring to a kind of post modern urbanization to post metropolitan transition and now to regional urbanization. Now I think that I didn’t know where the city was going until the last few months and now I think it’s a big step for me. That chapter 6, is that still not written - is a major chapter because it’s saying ‘oh my God, now I know what’s happening’. What was I witnessing - which is what I intuitively was feeling - is it a fourth revolution, an urban evolution? Are we transforming into another species or city? In the New York book I didn’t know how to answer it but now the answer is yes! There’s a new species of city emerging and Los Angeles is showing it but it’s going to take a while for us to know what really this new city is like but we’re going to have clues it’s going to be from here better than anywhere else. Chicago is irrelevant [jatl].”

Jorick Beijer: That Burgess model was rejected right away?

Edward Soja: “That was just as much rejected in LA as the post-industrial model was and the density curve was and so on. You could find some stagnation, some neck, concentricity in Los Angeles but this was part of not even the metropolitan model. The Chicago school didn’t even invent the metropolitan model, Chicago school did the earlier centralised form of the industrialized capitalist city that Engels found in Manchester. There’s concentricity, that’s what Burgess discovered in a 19th century city and he pretended but that had nothing to do with Chicago! We I mean they could map it onto Chicago. Chicago had already changed in the metropolitan model, it was polycentric and there was not that single concentricity anymore. What they did, the 19th century cities lingered on and they found behavioural patterns that fit the 19th century city, continuing in 20th century Chicago. Just as I think they’re going to find the metropolitan model in Los Angeles longer than we thought it going to be entirely erased. So there’s going to be big argument because people are going to say ‘oh, this is not what happens and this is LA’. But I’m going to be saying that that’s the metro model and it still exists it’s not erased. Modern Los Angeles is still there as it postmodernizes. That was like what I said before but now it’s a little different. I don’t want to get into that modernity debate again. The book is an explanation about how I changed and why I changed”.

Jorick Beijer: In your piece on Amsterdam you quote Rem Koolhaas, who criticizes the paradoxical suffering for the old city. Will the old city just evolve instead of disappearing?

Edward Soja: “You know that’s one reflection and an architect thing, so I’m probably not going to use it [jatl], but that’s what’s happening. A lot of people have been longing for this kind of new city light that’s discussing the contemporary city. I think that’s a kind of vector, I mean it’s a part of the literature that people particularly outside Los Angeles use. They look at Los Angeles and say well you know ‘this is destroying the essence of a really truly historic city’, now that’s what I want to counter.

It’s hard to say surprised. I mean it’s been fascinating going over my work to try to sort of explain its evolving character you know and to try to say that this is part of the essence of Los Angeles. And the fascination comes from the fact that it is changing so much and that you have to change with it in understanding it. That kind of argument I really only make when I talk to sort of somebody like you. I can’t write it out but I try”.

Jorick Beijer: How special is Los Angeles?

Edward Soja: “We know a lot about Los Angeles because it is not very different from any kind of economic or other qualities of the city, there’s nothing really special about Los Angeles’ architecture, built environment, geography or whatsoever. What’s been most remarkable is that it’s created some of the worst inequalities and its getting the strongest movements against inequality, including 1980’s recession and changing of the city. The worst sorts against globalization and against inequality. And now you see the strongest social movements, it’s really, if you want to listen to Los Angeles, this is what you need to listen to”.

Jorick Beijer: So in LA more than anywhere else we encounter this social special dialetic?
Edward Soja: “I don’t see it” happening more, I see a greater awareness of the significance of the spatial side than normal. You know, the east to the Susan Fainstein and Peter Marcuse talking about the ‘just city’ with no space in it. They are talking about social justice and they are saying you know, the spatial is just something else, an aspect. And that’s not what I’m talking about, that’s just the opposite. By the way my book was just put up against the others for this planning award – the Davidoff Award – and I came in second to Susan Fainstein. The profession is not ready for a social special diabetic.

Where the special is just as important as the social and that they interact and form each other. That’s vital to everything I do, but that’s not what the establishment does in planning. Interesting, I did get a honourable mention in the C.Wright Mills Award which is for the best social science book [laughs]. Actually I was up for the geography award which I didn’t get! So the social science recognizes me and they seem to be almost ready for the spatial stuff and they got it. Ironically C. Wright Mills is the person who I used in Postmodern Geographies to epitomize the historic, the sociological imagination. He epitomized what I was writing against with the spatial stuff and then he becomes, the awards that I get for the best social science book [laughs]. Then the planners are recognizing this in terms of its activism and contribution to planning but not quite against the kind of Susan Fainstein stuff which talks about the just city and you know, walls and traditional justice theory”.

Edward Soja: “Yeah, European maybe, Dutch. Italian maybe. Not this country, and that goes back to our discussions on urbanism. If you’re an architect that has connections with strong urbanist traditions then yeah you can say that but so much of architecture has lost that connection. So and, you know urban geographers are just discounted these days and say: ‘why architects?’. No, I have to be careful because I do have this strange bias against architects”.

Jorick Beijer: Why do designers often don’t get those things at all? I mean they are close to the street.

Edward Soja: “Yeah, a Hot Topic! Just that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinary elitist arrogance that kind of extraordinar

Jorick Beijer: What is Downtown LA for you?

Edward Soja: “Downtown LA will never ever ever be like Downtown Amsterdam, Rotterdam or New York. Anything that looks like a downtown, Los Angeles will never be. There will be constant efforts to make it that way, and there might be little increments towards it, but as they all are going to fail. Centrality here is just too much dispersed. See Amsterdam and that massive centrality already from the 16th century, globally! And then a kind of sense of preservation, that kept it going. So you have this unbelievable, remarkable, thing happening. It is safe to say that Downtown LA is not going to be like Amsterdam because nothing will be like Amsterdam. It is really one of the most amazing places in the world. Venice is another of this spectacular places but that shows signs of disintegration whereas Amsterdam burnt of liveliness. LA is quite symbolically proud of its downtown, already. And as you are saying there is something absolutely fascinating about Downtown LA, but that is more because it feels like a weird themepark with a diversity that is just extreme. Radically different then any tradition”.

Jorick Beijer: Can you spend a day in Downtown?

Edward Soja: “I haven’t really done it recently but I’ve done it with lots of visitors; taking them downtown to spend the entire day, exploring the diversity. I always started – before Disney hall was there - on grand avenue, to little Tokyo and toy town, skid-row, the furniture area and so on. Did you ever see Angelenos Heights? I love that area with the small scale petrol pumps in people’s backyards that are fenced sill. They wanted to expand in western direction of Downtown and they expected this to be a booming area. But they couldn’t bring together large blocks of property because there where powerful regulations on land sale around working petroleum pumps. You should see that movie with Michael Douglas. It has this fascinating Victorian housing. Yeah this would be another part of the tour. But you probably need a car, but I always felt that in two days you can really such a diversity. SCI-Arc in the arts district, the funny east area, the flower district. It is just very rare to see all these districts still alive in a big city like LA. Jewelry district, grand central market and Broadway and then on Broadway going on to the Bradbury building. Is that it, you don’t need other densities”.

Jorick Beijer: How do you think about projects like Gehry’s Grand Avenue project. Is the social and economical geography of Downtown LA not just fundamentally wrong?

Edward Soja: “No indeed. It is like Gehry and others have said maybe the last public space in Los Angeles of that size. And they will be trying to make it look as a public space. But it will just more and more look like a theme park. Funny little ethnic clusters and it wont be with anything one is familiar with. But maybe it a new kind of meeting place, who knows? But it is certainly not going to be part of a 24 hour Downtown LA”.

Jorick Beijer: But there is this absurd populosity of these simulacrum places like the Grove and City Walk.

Edward Soja: “I’m just wildly thinking, maybe they should build canals and row houses in Downtown [laughs].”

Jorick Beijer: As my thesis should be a kind of critical semiotic proposal. A roller-coaster would make your two day trip one of 4 hours and ofcorse way more fun!

Edward Soja: “I see, great! Make it a sky coaster would make your two day trip one of 4 hours and ofcourse way more fun!”

Jorick Beijer: But density nowadays is really a hot topic, especially in the Downtown areas and around public transport.

Edward Soja: “I was just in New York again and I, my mouth just opened up. I want to be biased against New York because it’s an amazing place [laughs]. Just that kind of heavy density that smacks you in the teeth is just fascinating! We don’t have it in LA, even though it’s got this overall density. In a sense it’s interesting, New York has this – maybe sometimes, oppressive density but you can escape it in total low density whereas you can’t escape any more from Los Angeles. You can’t, you just, you go out and it’s built up. That picture, that aerial view of the bay, well it’s in your maps once you get into the 1980s. Where is it, yeah I mean this kind of stuff. That’s just stunning. I mean there are these sorts of halls here but they don’t sort of make it. But look at these and what is this? 10 million, 15 million people!”

Then there’s this world of the valley which is a separate place, should be a separate place. Then and then this [pointing at the maps]. Orange County again, I mean that’s the new city. That’s where I would take people now. Los Angeles is just getting to be old fashioned”.

Jorick Beijer: Is Orange County that new species? 

Edward Soja: “Yes, yeah. Orange County is just very weird. It’s neither positive nor negative, it’s just the idea of having lost centrality entirely. So that there’s. I don’t know, 35 nodes, large nodes each seeking centrality but not able to find it. It’s more like a bunch of grapes kind, just silly. You know as I say 35 little bubble cities, nodes, all bunched together. It’s just very weird and it’s employment, culture, it’s got all of it. It’s got every urban characteristic you’d ever want. Except it doesn’t look like anything you’d ever seen that urban.

The categories are just gone. It’s really not urban in a traditional sense as I call that ‘cosmopolis’ and not suburban, certainly not any more. It’s just a new kind of city that has erased the old categories, it’s a new species of modern regional urbanization. It’s as if a new species is emerging and Los Angeles has 100 hundred years of metropolitan urbanization – none of the earlier one – but 100 hundred years of not so centralized metropolitan one. LA was emerging around an old skeleton whereas Orange County I just completely new. Just like Chicago and Manchester exemplify the earlier industrialist capitalist city and then maybe New York, Los Angeles and maybe Chicago exemplify metropolitan urbanization. Well not New York, because
New York was not a blank slate, Chicago was a blank slate, Los Angeles was a blank slate and now Orange County’s the blank slate. So we are seeing, like Engels saw in Manchester for the early industrial capitalist city and the Chicago School saw in Chicago for the early metropolitan city, we are seeing this as the advanced laboratory of the new kind of city. And the Chinese know it too. The Chinese are building their urban/suburban whatever from Orange County. Orange County builders are going and building Irvine around Beijing.

Jorick Beijer: So LA is again the city that explores a quite radical new momentum in city form?

Edward Soja: “Yeah absolutely. It is being used by the Chinese because they have their take on the inner city. What they want in the inner city, they want to preserve that inner city but they know Beijing is just going to grow like crazy and so what do you do because for this growth outside the core of Beijing, You make it Orange County [laughs]. It looks like Los Angeles too but it is the Orange County version of Los Angeles”.

Jorick Beijer: So a kind of poly-nuclear city without nodes?

Edward Soja: “Indeed. Or the nodes are shopping center and malls or five malls together. Maybe even new industrial suburbs. Which maybe could even have a more nodal structure but just scattered around. The majority of the population will be living in this post-post-suburban, I don’t know post-urban whatever, Irvine”.

Jorick Beijer: That sounds to me like a great new research project.

Edward Soja: “I discovered this laboratory of regional urbanization happening now in the Antelope Valley where Lancaster and Palmdale are located. It’s got 500,000 people now and they’re expecting to be a million very soon. When I first came here it was just this brown dusty landscape, nothing there and then I watched all this housing going and now there’s new towns being planned. There’s this new place called San Antonio or something, they expect to have 80,000 in a couple of years and they said: ‘this is the future, here’s where the new future is’. I never wrote those words until very recently, the ‘Chinese urbanisation of suburbia’. Making a connection between the regional urbanization arguments and just observing this growth of China-Town. Fascinating!

Mainly with sort of Google and Wikipedia type of diggings - which I don’t force reference of course [laughs] - but I discovered how this occurred. Monterey Park was kind of advertised for a while as the Chinese Beverly Hills in Taiwan, those real estate agents selling a lot of property. So you had Taiwanese capital and some Chinese American capital coming in to Monterey park and making it the first Asian majority city in the United States and then the Anglo and Latino population joined up together - which is absurd - and fight the Chinese to make English the official language so that they wouldn’t have Chinese signs all over the place. And other kind of things that are making the Chinese comfortable would be discerned against by these angry Anglo’s and Latinos and so they start moving out. Colonizing other areas, going across the whole San Gabriel Valley and create their own whole worlds of up to ten municipalities. In such a short time, that’s another fascination about Los Angeles. So the future of Downtown is almost irrelevant and it’s a European kind of idea - still very prominent by American civil leaders and so on - but I’ve always been very sceptical about any kind of major development in Downtown”.

Jorick Beijer: Wrapping things up. How did philosophers like Foucault, Lefebvre and Heidegger influenced your thinking?

Edward Soja: “Heidegger certainly not, Foucault and Lefebvre very much. To me they are the originators of the spatial turn. That was misunderstood and forgotten for 25 years and now is being revived. Lefebvre personally a little bit more but this is the leading spatial urban philosopher in the world, ever.

Jorick Beijer: Did you dealt with more contemporary philosophers like Deluzet, DeLanda, Latour?

Edward Soja: “Yeah. I started with Habermas, Derrida, Deleuze, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, De Certeau and so on. But by that time I had become so spatialized that my reading revolved around whether they were going to add any new insights to my spatial thinking, and they haven’t. Maybe Bourdieu and his work on Africa, or maybe Baudrillard because he is a student of Lefebvre. But I can’t get interested into this matter. Maybe Derrida because I see him as the master of deconstruction and I think deconstruction is a powerful method as long as it has reconstitution added to it.

That’s how I was talking today in the lecture about deconstructing geographical and social sciences, but you can’t leave it alone. So we talk about doing something far away from bloody architects and deconstructivists, just tearing everything apart and let it all fall to ruins. That was how I saw architects attracted to Derrida. I was once in an elevator with him and he just kept shaking his head saying ’these architects never ever will understand anything I say’. I try to impossible, completely different worlds. The most influential person nowadays is probably David Harvey. You see I don’t do a lot of reading because I just feel like I’m bursting with stuff that I don’t need to reinforce any more. My problem is expressing anything I get to time to get it all out. Getting it all out in a way that captures what can do in verbal situation. To do onto paper is just not so easy”.

Rene Daalder: Dutch screenwriter and virtual reality filmmaker, based in Hollywood

This two hour long talk was partly in Dutch and partly by two Dutch guys talking English. In order to maintain as much of original quality, I decided to edit it in the same way.

JB: Een belangrijk onderdeel van mijn onderzoek is de percepie van het publieke domein. Nu weent u hier al tientallen jaren, hoe evert u LA?

Rene Daalder: “Ik ben heel erg internet georiënteerd, dus wanneer jij zegt publiek domein dan ik zeekafhelezende. Films, media, etc. Wat bedoel je?”

JB: In dit onderzoek beschouw ik het vooral als de tautestre plek waar mensen elkaar ontmoeten, de straat, het plein, de snelweg. Maar in brede zin het internet daar ook bij natuurlijk.

Rene Daalder: “Haha! Misschien, volgens mij is dat vooral een architected wisselijkm aschaling.”

JB: Recent is mijn aandacht verschoven naar de schaal van het wisselgelekte, en dan in een historisch perspectief. Bovenaanbrand Brand Boulevard in Glendale, waar eerst een waarschijnlijk paarden liepen, er toen een straatcar stopte, de snelweg kwam en het winkelhuis verdween er nu een enorme open lucht mall is gebouwd.

Rene Daalder: “Wél het interessante van Americana, die mall, is dat het een schakeling is. Er zit ook een jaren ‘60 mall aan vast. Dat was een enorme mall en daar in Amerikaans letterlijk ingevolgd. Het is gelijktaak ook niet zo’n echte als The Grove [Verbeterbare mall ook van ontwikkelaar Caruso, JB].

JB: Het grootste deel van mijn onderzoek richt zich vooral op Downtown, waar ze’n wisselgelekte dus compleet ontweekt. Ik woon in Little Tokyo, misschien is dat nog de reage…”

Rene Daalder: “Little Tokyo vind ik echt fantastisch. En ik begrijp niet zo goed waarom – ik kan net zo goed naar Silver Lake gaan, zelfs abstand – maar ik gevoelig aldaar bij Little Tokyo. Vraag me niet waarom, maar ik vind dat kleine plaats echt smacks hebben. Het is een idee dat ik niks is, en toch duldelijk Japan in L.A.

JB: Het voelt voor mij nog steeds wat kitsch, nep.

Rene Daalder: “Maar het is niet nep, 80% van de inwoners in Japan dus hoe kan het nep zijn? En ook al is het een rommelige, I don’t mind. I love it.”

JB: Het is zeer interessant wat ze’n gebied betekende voor Downtown als geheel. Ik ben nu gefascineerd door Grand Avenue, de straat van ontzettelijk programma waaruit echt een elastisiteit bestaat maar dat toch niet tot een verbonden domein behoort. Misschien ga ik daar aan werken, die oude straat car daar weer terug
Rene Daalder: “Ik ben niet zo heel erg geïnteresseerd in de buitenvoortuin. Ik kom met uit New York en iedere keer dat ik daar ben keek ik dat ontluikte na voor mij is een situatie dat ik de 19e eeuw daar vanaf trekken, os. Je bent in de 21ste eeuw daar. Noot. Met wat? Is er één gebouw of initiatief waarvan je denkt je 'heh, we zijn in de 21ste eeuw?' Ne. Je bent overal overweldigd door de 19e eeuw. En bijvoorbeeld hier in deze straat met al die Victoriannaanse huizen, het enige dat je goed aan is wat mij betreft is. Ik begrijp niets van die Victoriannaanse mensen en en wens akkoord te niet begrijpen. Het staat zo ver van me af dat het een soort science fiction is. Zo extra-creatief, echt iets. Dit zijn films van, er zijn hier 60/70 jaar per keur films actueel.

Maar ik vind veel van wat je verteld interessant en ik heb er wel een mening over. Maar hoe kan ik je precies helpen?

JB: Laten we bij het begin beginnen. Hoe was het toen iemand uit Nederland kwam en deze straat voor het eerst zag?

Rene Daalder: “Voor mij is dat heel simpel. Ik voelde me hier voor het eerst in een stad. Niet meteen, ik begreep er niks van in eerste instantie. Ik weet nog dat ik er binnen kwam, op Santa Monica Highway basically – en my feeling was almost determined right there. Ik verduurde dit plaats.

En later heb je de gedachte ‘hoe komt dat’ en toen realiseerde ik me dat er toch deels diep ligt. Ik ben geboren op Texel – kan ik het in het Engels doen? op Texel there was this enormous agricultural revolution going on. So we had tractors, combines all those of things. Alleen in Amerika – laten we het gewoon in het Nederlands doen. Die boeren waren dus allemaal enorm in Amerika. En ik heb daar maar vier jaar gewoond, maar ik kwam er vaak terug en dan op de boot van Den Helder daar werd altijd gezegd dat de mensen op het vasteland niet drukten. Dat gevoel zat er al heel vroeg in. Toen ik 8 was was ik al niet dat ik daar niet zou blijven wonen, wie de boeren in Nederland ben ik eigenlijk opgegroeid in Bloemendaal-Ameidehout en dat was helemaal Los Angeles in die regio. Nouveau Riche villa’s met zwembaden, GPS maar die stad was altijd al zo, je was de straat gezien te hebben rijdt je de driveway en op boom's that's it. Nu is dat overal zo met GPS maar die stad was altijd al zo, je was helemaal geen deel van de stad. Je zat op de Free ways van de ene geïsoleerde plek naar de andere, twintig minuten verder. En je komt nooit openen over een brug waarbij je denkt: ‘Oh, nu zijn we weer in Utrech’. Maar ook zo'n idee van Little Tokyo bijvoorbeeld. Dat weert je gewoon toevallig, dat wordt nergens aangegeven. Alles wat er in de ogen van de mensen altijd zou zijn zou aan deze stad was en voor zo wat prestaties waar de enorme kracht van deze stad is.

JB: Nu is er er hier in de laatste jaren een behoorlijke revolue geweest in de Downtown gebieden, verdirching die zich ook steeds meer richt op het metro netwerk. Is dat een trend die je herkent?

Rene Daalder: “Nou dat leek even zo te zijn toen Downtown voor het eerst werd ontwikkeld, tensel leek ook een poos minder zo te zijn en nu lijkt het weer weer beter zo zo te zijn. Dat fluctueert echt. Laten we kijken naar Williamsburg [New York] en Echo Park [Los Angeles]. Dat is bijvoorbeeld een gigantisch verschil in de populatie. Ze hebben de zelfde ambities, lijken eigenlijk heel erg op elkaar maar tegelijkertijd is het hele gebied van LA gewoon onkwam wereldwijd. En toen de Olympische Spelen hier voor het eerst waren, toen voor het eerst hadden die mensen het gevoel van ‘Oh, LA is een grote stad’. Maar iedereen houd zich bezig met die stad. Het zijn altijd mensen van buiten die eigenlijk een zestigste van Los Angeles.' Wat is dat? Wat moeten erover zeggen? Downtown is Downtown, dat's all it is. Je kunt er lang over praten maar het is gewoon in dergige jaren of whatever, en het is wel leuk want het is weer anders dan Beverly Hills en weer anders dan Little Tokyo, een nieuwe.

Rene Daalder: “En er is ook natuurlijk heerschijnsel van de plekken, ze zijn allemaal interessant of allemaal niet interessant.

JB: Over welke tijd praten we dan?

Rene Daalder: “Phil. 70's, en. De Free ways waren toen maar half de traffic van nu, dus dat werkten echt op een ongehele mooie. Je zou doen de Free ways, just like that. Compleet dream like, amzing. Datzé en Pasoucalo, heb je daar gereden? Amazing, dat was de allerzorgst in Amerika. Dat is één ding, on twee van die weido de industrie maar ten derde waren er nog een heleboel andere dingen hier. Iedereen roop tijd maar de film industri, maar allemaal heel erg multimediaal geweest en hier zat ook altijd een geweldige muziek industri. Ik ben altijd erg toegankelijk geweest en daar is natuurlijk in Europa geen voedselbodem voor. En Nederland, er was gewoon een beertje een mismatch tussen wat mij interesseerde en die voedselbodem industrie, maar ook een beertje een gewoon een onderweerder emigrant die het hier niet meer zag zitten en dat benauwende Europa gewoon moserloos van zich af schuilde.

Ik ben ook in New York geworden, in Lodewijk gewoond en op een boel andere plekken. Maar was dit was. En ik kocht nog steeds zielveel van deze stad, het is een fantasie. Tijdgevolution realiseer ik me meer en meer en meer dat hoe grooter een stad is hoe beter ik me er voel. Ik ben nu bijvoorbeeld van Mexico City enorm geamuseerd. Zei ik van die fantasie. En de plekken, ze zijn allemaal interessant of allemaal niet interessant.

JB: Wat je interessant vind is wat er nu gebeurde - in de tijd dat jij er was - is dat die Pacific Standard Time situatie [kunstmanifestatie LA 1995-1998, http://www.pacificstandardtime.org/]. De hele cultuur, de hele kunstwereld van LA was gewoon onkwam wereldwijd. En toen de Olympische Spelen hier voor het eerst waren, toen voor het eerst hadden die mensen het gevoel van ‘Oh, LA is a kind of a great city’. Maar iedereen houd zich bezig met die stad. Het zijn altijd mensen van buiten die eigenlijk een zestigste van Los Angeles.' Wat is dat? Wat moeten erover zeggen? Downtown is Downtown, dat's all it is. Je kunt er lang over praten maar het is gewoon in dergige jaren of whatever, en het is wel leuk want het is weer anders dan Beverly Hills en weer anders dan Little Tokyo, een nieuwe.

JB: Ik vind Los Angeles juist zo interessant omdat het een discussie is tussen homogeniteit en een constellatie van verschillende karakters. Zijn steden soort complex gemeente?

Rene Daalder: “Zeker waar. Maar alles wat mensen er op tegen hebben gehad door de jaren heen is allemaal interessant. Iedereen is heel geïsoleerd in zijn eigen bestaan. In deze tijd is dat echter in alle opzichten een voordeel aan het worden. En dan kan je je gewoon open baren. De film industri werkt ook niet vanzelfsprekend. En dat doen ze niet van een studio, vroeger wel. Nu doen ze het van huis, of ze nemen een huis elders. Iedereen is eigenlijk hier, dit [wijst naar de 5 mensen die de verderop in huis zitten te animeren]. Elk film is een soort industrie op zich zelf en als die film is afgelegd dan is de company folded en ga je weer werken aan de volgende company.

Rene Daalder: “Ja, ik Klopt, het is maar net wat je te doen hebt en waar je bent. Het meest interessante daar is dat ik het pretenderen kan om ook een soort te doen. Maar dat maakt Los Angeles zo interessant. En dat heeft grote sociale consequenties. Isomiet bijvoorbeeld, het is mogelijk om hier vrienden te maken. Ik zie een hoop emigranten die daar mee streuggen. En dat vind ik interessant, ik is ook wel veranderd nu in this online age. Op ziek hoogte ander, want iedere dag is een nieuw dag en je moet jezelf wel opnieuw vinden. En weer opnieuw jezelf motiveren om wat nou precies eraan te gaan doen? Dan is genial, dat je daar mee moet leven. Het is mogelijk, maar het is ook fantastisch. Bijvoorbeeld hier [wijst naar zijn medewerkers, JB], niemand weet wat we morgen gaan doen. Niemand. Maar houden we ons niet meer bezig. Nee. Misschien is het maar een durfmen bedrijf. En dat is het hele Silicon Valley model. Iedereen wil al zijn moment waar innovatie vandaan komt. Dat heeft allemaal met dit soort dingen te maken, innovatie geboren gewoon niet in oude omgevingen – daar is iets heel speciaal voor nodig. Onder andere het verandert, al dan niet eigenlijk bijna niks is. Maar dit is altijd heel virtueel geweest. Juist het idee dat je in deze auto zit en God wet wat waar je vandaan komt of waar je naartoe gaat, je zit een off ramp. All of a sudden are you on the street grazen te hebben rijdt je de driveway en op boom's that's it. Nu is dat overal zo met GPS maar die stad was altijd al zo, je was helemaal geen deel van de stad. Je zat op de Freeway van de ene geïsoleerde plek naar de andere, twintig minuten verder. En je komt nooit openen over een brug waarbij je denkt: ‘Oh, nu zijn we weer in Utrech’. Maar ook zo'n idee van Little Tokyo bijvoorbeeld. Dat weert je gewoon toevallig, dat wordt nergens aangegeven. Alles wat er in de ogen van de mensen altijd zou zijn zou aan deze stad was en voor zo wat prestaties waar de enorme kracht van deze stad is.

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Rene Daalder: "Laat ik het anders stellen, ik weet niet zeker of dat waar is of niet. Maar opnieuw, als je ouch zetten ziet dat is anders. In New York zijn ze nog steeds hetzelfde als wat ze veertig denden, nog steeds. Het zijn nog steeds bankiers, het zijn publiekers, TV: mensen die een soort van informatie zien en daarna naar algemene statistieken als inkomen, belastingdruk, etc. En die realiseerden dat in de San Fernando Valley waar all die kinderlijke rookjes zaten. And there was absolutely no office space, no business of any kind – there were just suburban residences. So where is then all that money coming from? And they realized that 80 percent came from the porn- industry. That was incredibly important. Because what is interesting to imagine the future of that suburb. How will it evolve, what will it become? That are indeed fascinating things to think about.

JB: Is it interesting though to imagine the future of that suburb. How will it evolve, what will it become? That are indeed fascinating things to think about.

Rene Daalder: "Well you find it interesting because you are an architect. The good things about architects is that they not think about buildings. If you leave the buildings out of there, that's the things. The problem for me is that no-one ever looked very deep into why things truly happen. Take innovation, huge topic! Entire parts of the world are in dying need of innovation. Why does innovation seems to come out of nowhere? That's really fascinating, isn't that incredibly important. Because what does density mean? That means commerce. People going to their office. Again here, there are four people working here and four remotely in San Francisco. And that makes no difference, we are all working on a computer animated film. And the studio will need to be here, in Tokyo, perhaps a bit in Singapore, perhaps something will be done in France. We are already way there. Going to an office is becoming luxury, you might stimulate each other a bit more by-fiscally being in the same space – but it is stupid to do that everyday from nine to five! When you don’t feel like seeing people, you shouldn’t be there. People have to do it, no matter what. No need.

And there are so many office spaces, and you know why they exist? Because once upon a time – and that’s how Downtown exists – the boss had the fire cabinets, the phone, the fax machine, the IIM Seflecite. The boss had all the stuff you had to go there to.

Now, non of that is sifi any consequence or whatsoever! So why do they go to there office? Just because they from a historic perspective kept building these fucking offices! And that's why you are going to an office. That's the only reason. Seventy percent of the white collar jobs, they don't need to go there. And beheads that it is unbelievably unproductive because they are in traffic all the time. You can solve that problem too, and Google driver-less car is just an instant solution. You can develop freeways that do work, even with more vehicles if you want.

But again. These are all very interesting things that architects don't talk about. I love architects, but sometimes they are just backsward. They refuse – for good reasons maybe – to move into our moment of time. It is just way more interesting and way more clear then the way actually have to make it. What else are they going to do then only engaging in their own discourse?

JB: Bestaat dat discussie überhaupt nog wel? Als je het zeel bekijkt, beweegt Los Angeles net het failliet van de architect als stadsmaker?

Rene Daalder: "Zeker en laten we bovendien even eerlijk zijn – een aspect dat veel langer terug gaat in tijd. Architecten hebben nooit een rol gehad in urbanism, sowieso. Dit is helemaal hun bedrijf dus.

JB: Maar als we dat allemaal hardop zeggen bestaat het vak niet meer...

Rene Daalder: "Haha. Ik ben een film aan het afronden over – onder andere – Rem, Le Corbusier en city building. And they probably are not going to what I say there. Well, I don't know. But these people know that cities are an impossible mission. It just doesn't work like that.

JB: Interessant, kan je wat meer vertellen over die film?

And I really think that that shouldn’t be a worry, because they don’t build. Build is another thing. Why is that? A lot of very fascinating things they do there. And even Herman [Diaz Alonso – SCI-Arc Grad Director] [JB] doesn’t know anymore how important he is in that movement. He didn’t want to be an architect, he wanted to become a filmmaker right? And when you see now the work that his students do, they are phenomenal production designers – everyone in Hollywood should be really jealous. Anyway. That multidisciplinary thing is the thing of our time.

But here is the dilemma. Architects have to be part of a top-down reality because it is all old money. Museum showing their own relevance; they need architects to design great buildings for them. So they are basically always hired by the establishment to do their building. Like the CCTV; the way they make television is no longer the way television will be made at all. CCTV is in essence the headquarters of the new internet in China. Which they didn’t come to terms for at all, and for which you certainly don’t need a building? But nevertheless, those are the opportunities that architects have. The film industry, again, is completely different. We have to respond, have to deliver to an audience. And the audience is not about top-down stuff, an author telling them what to do. So both have to learn how to cope with these new rules, new rules – which everyone already has been talking about for ten years!

At least filmmakers already went on their knees. Architects don’t function in the world in that way. In that you could be right, they might as well just create artistic statements and stop thinking about their function in society. Or, do think about society and then understand – again! - that to think and to write is equally important as building. That’s why they always will be my friends. They already learned that they don’t build before they are 50, so what are you going to do more? How many kind of people, figure out its own, freshwheel and come up with whatever. Even the educational system I appreciate – and I hardly say that about any other school – it is a very organized way of keeping these people somewhat of the street and going. The fact that they all think that they have to build is another thing. Why is that? A lot of my friends suffer, because they don’t build. And I really think that that shouldn’t be a problem or whatsoever.

[JB]: Isn’t that the architecture not the one that hasn’t been braid?
Rene Dalscher: “Yeah, always!”

[JB]: The scenario envisioning through images, working together with communities, crowd funding – very much the work of the Dutch urbanists, isn’t that completely antithetical to the Angeleno Architect?
Rene Dalscher: “Well indeed, that is the other problem in architecture. If you are going to work more with the bottom-up way of thinking – you will hate yourself as an architect. Certainly in the eyes of your colleagues [laughs]. There is this deep misunderstanding; nobody asks for architects. Other then some establishment exceptions. Nobody needs them. And by the way, another thing – who is really asking for movies? That’s an interesting question. You have to realize that you make a movie for hundred million dollars right. Now in order to get that movie to be seen, you have to spent fifty million dollars on advertising. And literally you have one, maybe two, weekends to create an entire worldwide brand recognition. From scratch! So who really wants to see those things?

But architects seem to be excused. Or find themselves excused, stuff will always be build.

[JB]: Yeah but do we need to build new malls for instance? A certain self-criticism would be proper.
Rene Dalscher: “To be honest the moment you said that I was thinking about twenty years ago. When this – and I now forget his name – did all the malls here...

[JB]: John Jerde?
Rene Dalscher: “Precisely, Jerde. All these architects, including Rem, hated them, where jealously at him and checked all his stuff. He was building big malls after each other. And of course Rem did all these things about how many square footage mall builders build in comparison to architects. But that now seems to be such an old discussion. When Rem was doing his proposal for Universal City Walk – totally excited, because architects are always like ‘oh shopping, fashion, whatever’ – Go away! Please, shopping and fashion... Pop-culture, architects admire pop-culture. They have no fucking clue what it is! But again, they got to do something [laughs].

I understand that. That whole discourse is saying ‘I want to build, I want to build, I want to build’. I never saw Eisenman before, but in his self-deprecating way I think he was just funny. But also ridiculous, I mean, what was he really saying? Was he trying to say ‘maybe with my architecture I have given you a slight insight in the new meta-project‘? Well I don’t think so, thought you didn’t [laughs]. The fast already that you assume that every hundred years there is a new meta-project, that doesn’t automatically make you a contributor to it’.

[JB]: In a way you could say that Eisenman and Koolhaas are at this very moment the only Pritzker price architects that really have a personal thesis, besides their projects.
Rene Dalscher: “I do feel but Rem was never mentioned that night, and that is very interesting. Later on people asked me what I thought Rem would think about this. And then I could only say that I don’t know. And I really don’t know. He is now so occupied with the Metabolists, maybe that was a meta-project? I don’t know. Then Eisenmann time span was not right and was there a project 50 years ago, I mean, what do I care about Vitrum and so on?

[JB]: To me it was just a very sad attempt to talk yourself into the meta-architect status. Why would we care?
Rene Dalscher: “I take my chances a little bit in that film on Le Corbusier. I don’t talk about Mies, or even about Le Corbusier as an architect, much more about him as a phenomena – a thinker. And his crazy endurance towards doing something impossible. And how in Rem you can see the equivalent, to some extent. Actually there is more, well you will see it. But what I found very interesting was that Eisenman picked Le Corbusier and his Domino building as the last conceiver of a meta-project. Very fascinating, Le Corbusier making his way back into the architecture discourse.

[JB]: What I found interesting was that a week a later, Thom Mayne used the fact that Eisenman picked Le Corbusier as the last meta-architect to make the argument that architecture is always sonically deeply interwoven. An argument to said Eisenman himself completely aside.
Rene Dalscher: “It is funny, we use Cargo – the creative publishing platform and we are now working on networking for example all architecture schools to students. Screw the faculty. A worldwide network, very successfully so. Now we are doing a sort of pilot project with Thom Mayne who really is very much the guy behind this, but also with Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Yale – 10 architecture schools. And the whole perception was that we would would great this fantastic collaborative space for them and then Thom would be the one to talk this into the Obama administration. Again! It is always so transparent what they want. He just wants to build something, that’s all it is. Of course none of them is very much interested in working together, but whatever.

But this is what Thom Mayne’s thing is. Eisenman says we need a new meta-architect, then Thom says that we need a popular-architect. Whatever comes in handy in their ridiculous appetite to built, that’s all there is to it. And of course none of them is very much interested in working together, whatever.

The best films – in the most broad populist way – are the Pixar films right? Okay! Just as you would love Brad Bird for the Incredibles and Andrew Stanton for these other movies – this two guys, and that’s just like architects. These two guys think ‘I have to make a live action movie!‘. And now you get Mission Impossible made by Brad Bird – who was my hero – and oh my God you get this fucking miserable movie. What do you need to do that? And Andrew Stanton makes the biggest flop in the last 50 years with John Carter. Why did they have to do that?! They were in the perfect medium, they had a fantastic job. No, live action pays more. Live action gives you more power in the system. Live action makes you like a kind of general in the army. That’s why’.

[JB]: That funny over amount of steroids, wanting to be more important, more influential, more pioneering...
Rene Dalscher: “Architects have that totally! It is all about power. Because only power is going to help them build – those in power. So they emulate power, they want to be close to power. It is the only thing that counts for them. Only power is going to get done what they want. And that is not a very good place to be.

[JB]: I suddenly have to think of this funny dance that Winny Mazz is doing around president Sarkozy...
Rene Dalscher [laughs]

[JB]: But OMA is doing the same. Now with this business director Victor van der Chijs, but also Rems close ties to the EU. In the end it is just all to create work.
Rene Dalscher: “Right. That’s it. And it creating work in a society that doesn’t need them to work. At all. Unless they have a meta-project [laughs], and they have the intelligences to... Well Rem is in this really interesting balance. He always positions himself just right, tries to make it happen – but it is almost an impossibility thing. I don’t know, I love it. They just built stuff that is totally their passion, nothing wrong with that.

[JB]: But that is a bit easy. Do we then even need architecture? For instance, if we would take Thom Mayne’s new building [California Transport Authority] out of LA, would that even a single bit change the character of the city?
Rene Dalscher: “No, not at all. And that again is maybe the interesting thing about LA. I don’t know why, but you are right. We all know that this is unstable ground. People that just visit here: often don’t know, but we have huge earthquakes and a lot people have lived through some of that. We have lived through riots, the whole bloody city burning. Amazing! Super exciting on some strange level – incredible. And undetermined, Are you in the desert? The mountains? Where are you even here?

[JB]: But not only its natural setting makes this region so distinct, lets not forget the intriguing demographics. 52% of the population now Hispanic, and that keeps on changing.

Rene Dalscher: “Yeah and if you would hop on a plane, lets say for a casual four hours – its like flying to Hawaii or whatever that is local almost. You land in Mexico City and then all of the sudden you think: ‘Wow! I should live here too, this is like the sister-city of LA’. Those to belong together, totally. It is beautiful, and what great is about this city is also great about that one. I feel totally at home.

I go to Europe... [emphatic sigh]. I just don’t know, I just don’t know. Already New York is a shocking old kind of thing. But Europe... Coming from a strong technology kind of thing. I have no idea how they are going to make that happen there – I just don’t get it.

And I’m not saying that this country is in great shape and by the way, there are many times that I am pretty fed up with this country. Politically I think this is... [sighs]... yeah, there will always remain this strange feeling here – it is an illusion or not – that you are free. The state doesn’t take care of you and that is maybe a good thing, in some ways, because we don’t like the government. And that is a very bad thing because you need
the government for many many reasons, that's true - but it's also a very good thing. There is a certain Wild West anarchoism that will not go away.

**Jh:** Isn't it just a dangerous thing, locals that don't give anything about politics - and for instance the upcoming elections?

Rene Dudler: "Yeah, a lot of people will tell you that. Maybe, I can't judge Mitt Romney – neither way. I have no clue. He could be better than Obama, I have no idea. These are again the things for architects, they have to deal with the powers that be. But I don't deal with those realities. Ultimately that is not what is going to change the world in a society like this. What is going to change the world is - ironically - to some extent, the people! Maybe strange, but we feel at some level that we are empowered. And in the internet age we feel that to a larger extent then ever before. So again you are talking about something that is technically irrelevant. And of course you can talk about the internet, politically. Make decisions on a grassroots level – vote on one issue at a time. Those things are not far either. The whole leadership thing – the author, the filmmaker, the architect - same thing. These people have been demoted to a lower level, as we speak. And not only in this country, in many many other countries.

I don't know about Europe where they are strange – just like China – when it comes to the internet, copyright issues, whatever. Don't know. They want to hang on to her old. The government runs the people in Europe, they really do. They can vote and they feel a kind of participatory government – but it's not. Here we don't feel that. We know fully well that it isn't like that - so we don't waste time on that.

**Jh:** But that participatory thing can be inverted to. The pressure that a medium as Facebook can exert is just overwhelming.

Rene Dudler: "Are you into Zizek? [Slavoj Zizek - a Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic, Jh.] Hardly ever I am into him, but there is something I saw where he talks about 'authoritarian democracy'. That the only thing that has a future is an authoritarian democracy – meaning the Chinese model. Democracy is the strangest topic. It is a word that is so hollow, anyway. You start from scratch and figure it out. Unless you want to say that the internet stands for democracy. You could make that argument – certainly you could say that it is at least a democratic aspect of society in it. Another very interesting subject where in my eyes hardly anyone thinks about in the right way – and Europe again takes a very negative position in this - is this whole user data issue. How much do you share? Well that is the artificial intelligence of the future. That is so important and that is where the internet is precisely about. Okay if there are problems with that, deal with those problems. But don't stand up against that, because then you are standing in the way that things are going anyway! It will evolve and that's where it is about – that's the essence of it. You can always look to it in that way. And then those big corporations, all very dangerous. Whatever it is, it is going to happen. And you should never stop what is going to happen, because then you will be the victim.

LA at that time was just fabulous. It really was a great place and we were all there, I was at UCLA and Banham was at the other school, USC. I remember for instance Ron Herron doing a big lecture at the County Museum.

I remember a city of gasoline and palm trees. And the Sunset Strip. I was here in early '69 and then I didn't come back for years. I came back in '80. And it was a completely different city, a city eleven years older. It was better! There was still a lot of the old mes but all of the sudden it get good bookshops and good restaurants. It really mattered a lot. It was better and that was scary.

The other thing was, I didn't know the guys like Mayne and Moss. I read about them, but we never met. And then I visited a very early house of Eric Moss, in Playa del Rey. And that was fascinating. Then I got invited back to SCI-Arc shorter, I think around every two years. But I managed be here at least once a year for quite a long time. I was just thinking on the toilet: "how many time did I clocked up in LA?", I come here for 43 years, so it easily could be a full year.

What is interesting is if you take the period from '80 lets say. One has seen small revisions in the city. Not too much new, some things a bit remodeled. I think you need about three years to see something changing. When I got back to Tokyo last Christmas, there was I think a five year gap. And then you really notice things. My specialization is tracking micro changes haha. "When did that bookshop open? When did that bakery turn into a furniture store? When did that could got build?".

I mean it happens in London. They released to really strong personalities. What's his name. The guy with the gold hair. Boris Johnson. And the other guy is Red Ken [Ken Livingstone]. Both personalities. Ken was saying that London is definitely moved to the East. The East is the new West. And in a way it's true. A sort of movement of the arts. But the West still smells better and is nectar. The East is grumpy but edgy as well. But you got to be young for that.

It is a lot like LA. This movement of places where stuff happens, expensive restaurants are. And you have to catch it because it can be away in two years. What you see in both cities is that it is not so much about local economies. In London it is all about American money, Chinese money.

Hey!"
‘the metropolis and five stages of modernity’ is an explorative research on contemporary ecologies and the historic (re)-emergence of public domain, infrastructure and urban form in Los Angeles.