

Beyond Blade Runner: Urban Control The Ecology of Fear

Every American city has its official insignia and slogan, some have municipal mascots, colors, songs, birds, trees, even rocks. But Los Angeles alone has adopted an official Nightmare.

Mike Davis, author of *Prisoners of the American Dream* en *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in LA* (1990) shows how this nightmare is slowly becoming real.

In 1988, after three years of debate, a galaxy of corporate and civic leaders submitted to Mayor Bradley a detailed strategic plan for Southern California's future. Although most of *LA 2000: A City for the Future* is devoted to hyperbolic rhetoric about Los Angeles' irresistible rise as a 'world crossroads', a section in the epilogue (written by historian Kevin Starr) considers what might happen if the city fails to create a new 'dominant establishment' to manage its extraordinary ethnic diversity. *There is, of course, the Blade Runner scenario: the fusion of individual cultures into a demotic poly-glotism ominous with unresolved hostilities.*

Blade Runner - LA's own dystopic alter ego. Take the Grayline tour in 2019: The mile-high neo-Mayan pyramid of the Tyrell Corp. drips acid-rain on the mongrel masses in the teeming Ginza far below. Enormous neon images float like clouds above fetid, hyper-violent streets, while a voice intones advertisements for extra-terrestrial suburban living in 'Off World.' Deckard, post-apocalypse Philip Marlowe, struggles to save his conscience, and his woman, in an urban labyrinth ruled by evil bio-tech corporations...

With Warner Bros.' release of the original (more hardboiled) director's cut a few months after the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, Ridley Scott's 1982 film version of the Philip K. Dick story (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) reasserts its sovereignty over our increasingly troubled sleep. Virtually all ruminations about the future of Los Angeles now take for granted the dark imagery of *Blade Runner* as a possible, if not inevitable, terminal point of the land of sunshine.

Yet for all of *Blade Runner's* glamor as the star of sci-fi dystopias, I find it strangely anachronistic and surprisingly unprescient. Scott, in collaboration with his 'visual futurist' Syd Mead, production designer Lawrence Paul, and art director David Synder, really offers us an incoherent pastiche of imaginary landscapes. Peeling away the overlays of 'Yellow Peril' (Scott is notoriously addicted, c.f. *Black Rain*, to urban Japan as the image of Hell) and 'Noir' (all the polished black marble Deco interiors), as well as a lot of high-tech plumbing retrofitted to street-level urban decay, what remains is recognizably the same vista of urban gigantism that Fritz Lang celebrated in *Metropolis* (1931).

The sinister, man-made Everest of the Tyrell Corporation, as well as all the souped-up rocket-squad-cars darting around the air space, are obvious progenies - albeit now swaddled in darkness - of the famous skyscraper city of the bourgeoisie in *Metropolis*. But Lang himself only plagiarized contemporary American futurists; above all, architectural delineator Hugh Ferriss, who together with skyscraper designer Raymond Hood and Mexican architect-archeologist Francisco Mujica (visionary of urban pyramids like the Tyrell tower), popularized the coming 'Titan City' of hundred-story skyscrapers with suspended bridge highways and rooftop airports. Ferriss and company, in their turn, reworked already existing fantasies - common in Sunday supplements since 1900 - of what Manhattan might look like at the end of the century.

Blade Runner, in other words, remains yet another edition of this core modernist vision - alternately utopia or dystopia, *ville radieuse* or Gotham City - of the future metropolis as Monster Manhattan. It is a fantasy that might best be called 'Wellsian' since as early as 1906, in his *The Future in America*, H.G. Wells was already trying to envision the late twentieth century by *enlarging the present* (represented by New York) to create *a sort of gigantesque caricature of the existing world, everything swollen up to vast proportions and massive beyond measure*.

Ridley Scott's particular 'gigantesque caricature' may capture ethno-centric anxieties about poly-glottism run amok but it fails to imaginatively engage the real Los Angeles landscape - especially the great unbroken plains of aging bungalows, dingbats and ranch-style homes - as it socially and physically erodes into the 21st century.

In my book on Los Angeles (*City of Quartz*, 1990) I enumerate various tendencies toward the militarization of this landscape. Events since the uprising of Spring 1992 - including a deepening recession, corporate flight, savage budget cuts, a soaring homicide rate (despite the black gang truce), and a huge spree of gun-buying in the suburbs - only confirm that social polarization and spatial apartheid are accelerating. As the Endless Summer comes to an end, it seems quite possible that Los Angeles 2019 could well stand in a dystopian relationship to any ideal of the democratic city.

But what kind of cityscape, if not *Blade Runner*, would this malign evolution of inequality produce? Instead of seeing the future merely as a grotesque, Wellsian magnification of technology and architecture, I have tried to carefully extrapolate existing spatial tendencies in order to glimpse their emergent pattern. William Gibson, in *Neuromancer* and other novels, has provided stunning examples of how realist, 'extrapolative' science fiction can operate as prefigurative social theory, as well as an anticipatory opposition politics to the cyber-fascism lurking over the next horizon.

In what follows, I offer a 'Gibsonian' map to a future Los Angeles that is already half-born. Paradoxically, the literal map itself, although inspired by a vision of Marxism-for-cyberpunks, looks like nothing so much as that venerable *combination of half-moon and*

dart board that Ernest W. Burgess of the University of Chicago long ago made *the most famous diagram in social science*.

For those unfamiliar with the legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology and their canonical study of the *North American city*, let me just say that Burgess' dart board represents the five concentric zones into which the struggle for the survival of the fittest (as imagined by Social Darwinists) supposedly sorts urban social classes and housing types. It portrays a 'human ecology' organized by biological forces of invasion, competition, succession and symbiosis. My remapping of the urban structure takes Burgess back to the future. It preserves such 'ecological' determinants as income, land value, class and race, but adds a decisive new factor: fear.

Scanscape

The current obsession with personal safety and social insulation is only exceeded by the middle-class dread of progressive taxation. In the face of unemployment and homelessness on scales not seen since 1938, a bipartisan consensus insists that the budget must be balanced and entitlements reduced. Refusing to make any further public investment in the remediation of underlying social conditions, we are forced instead to make increasing private investments in physical security. The rhetoric of urban reform persists, but the substance is extinct. *Rebuilding LA* simply means padding the bunker.

As city life, in consequence, grows more feral, the different social milieux adopt security strategies and technologies according to their means. Like Burgess' original dart board, the resulting pattern condenses into concentric zones. The bull's eye is Downtown.

In another essay I have recounted in detail how a secretive, emergency committee of Downtown's leading corporate landowners (the so-called Committee of 25) responded to the perceived threat of the 1965 Watts Rebellion. Warned by law-enforcement authorities that a black *inundation* of the central city was imminent, the Committee of 25 abandoned redevelopment efforts in the old office and retail core. They then used the city's power of eminent domain to raze neighborhoods and create a new financial core a few blocks further west. The city's redevelopment agency, acting virtually as their private planner, bailed out the Committee of 25's sunk investments in the old business district by offering huge discounts, far below market value, on parcels in the new core.

Key to the success of the entire strategy (celebrated as Downtown LA's 'renaissance') was the physical segregation of the new core and its land values behind a rampart of regraded palisades, concrete pillars and freeway walls. Traditional pedestrian connections between Bunker Hill and the old core were removed, and foot traffic in the new financial district was elevated above the street on pedways whose access was controlled by the security systems of individual skyscrapers. This radical privatization of Downtown public space - with its ominous racial undertones - occurred without significant public debate or protest.

Last year's riots, moreover, have only seemed to vindicate the foresight of Fortress Downtown's designers. While windows were being smashed throughout the old business district along Broadway and Spring streets, Bunker Hill lived up to its name. By flicking a few switches on their command consoles, the security staffs of the great bank towers were able to cut off all access to their expensive real estate. Bullet-proof steel doors rolled down over street-level entrances, escalators instantly stopped and electronic locks sealed off pedestrian passageways. As the *Los Angeles Business Journal* pointed out in a special report, the riot-tested success of corporate Downtown's defenses has only stimulated demand for new and higher levels of physical security.

In the first place, the boundary between architecture and law enforcement is further eroded. The LAPD have become central players in the Downtown design process. No major project now breaks ground without their participation, and in some cases, like a debate over the provision of public toilets in parks and subway stations (which they opposed), they openly exercise veto power.

Secondly, video monitoring of Downtown's redeveloped zones has been extended to parking structures, private sidewalks, plazas, and so on. This comprehensive surveillance constitutes a virtual *scanscape* - a space of protective visibility that increasingly defines where white-collar office workers and middle-class tourists feel safe Downtown. Inevitably the workplace or shopping mall video camera will become linked with home security systems, personal 'panic buttons', car alarms, cellular phones, and the like, in a seamless continuity of surveillance over daily routine. Indeed, yuppies' lifestyles soon may be defined by the ability to afford *electronic guardian angels* to watch over them.

Thirdly, tall buildings are becoming increasingly sentient and packed with deadly firepower. The skyscraper with a computer brain in *Die Hard I* (actually F. Scott Johnson's Fox-Pereira Tower) anticipates a possible genre of architectural anti-heroes as *intelligent buildings* alternately battle evil or become its pawns. The sensory system of the average office tower already includes panoptic vision, smell, sensitivity to temperature and humidity, motion detection, and, in some cases, hearing. Some architects now predict the day when the building's own AI security computer will be able to automatically screen and identify its human population, and, even perhaps, respond to their emotional states (fear, panic, etc.). Without dispatching security personnel, the building itself will manage crises both minor (like ordering street people out of the building or preventing them from using toilets) and major (like trapping burglars in an elevator).

When all else fails, the smart building will become a combination of bunker and fire-base. When the federal Resolution Trust Corporation seized the assets of Columbia Savings and Loan Association they discovered that the CEO, Thomas Spiegel, had converted its Beverly Hills headquarters into a secret, 'terrorist-proof' fortress. In addition to elaborate electronic security sensors, a sophisticated computer system that tracked terrorist incidents over the globe, and an arms cache in its parking structure, the 8900 Wilshire building also has Los Angeles' most unusual executive washroom: Tom Spiegel's office, in addition to the bullet-proof glass, was designed to have an adjoining

bathroom with a bullet-proof shower. In the event an alarm was sounded, secret panels in the shower walls would open, behind which high-powered assault rifles would be stored.

Free Fire Zone

Beyond the scanscape of the fortified core is the halo of barrios and ghettos that surround Downtown Los Angeles. In Burgess' original Chicago-inspired schema this was the 'zone in transition': the boarding house and tenement streets, intermixed with old industry and transportation infrastructure, that sheltered new immigrant families and single male laborers. Los Angeles' inner ring of freeway-sliced Latino neighborhoods still recapitulate these classical functions. Here in Boyle and Lincoln Heights, Central-Vernon and MacArthur Park are the ports of entry for the region's poorest immigrants, as well as the low-wage labor reservoir for Downtown's hotels and garment sweatshops. Residential densities, just as in the Burgess diagram, are the highest in the city. (According to the 1990 Census, one district of MacArthur Park is nearly 30% denser than Midtown Manhattan!)

Finally, just as in Chicago in 1927, this tenement zone (*where an inordinately large number of children are crowded into a small area*) remains the classic breeding ground of teenage street gangs (over one-hundred according to LA school district intelligence). But while 'Gangland' in 1920s Chicago was theorized as essentially *interstitial* to the social organization of the city - *as better residential districts recede before the encroachments of business and industry, the gang develops as one manifestation of the economic, moral, and cultural frontier which marks the interstice* - a gang map of Los Angeles today is coextensive with the geography of social class. Tribalized teenage violence now spills out of the inner ring into the older suburban zones; the Boyz are now in the 'Hood' where Ozzie and Harriet used to live.

For all that, however, the inner ring remains the most dangerous sector of the city. Ramparts Division of the LAPD, which patrols the salient just west of Downtown, regularly investigates more homicides than any other neighborhood police jurisdiction in the nation. Nearby MacArthur Park, once the jewel in the crown of LA's park system, is now a free-fire zone where crack dealers and street gangs settle their scores with shotguns and Uzis. Thirty people were murdered there in 1990.

By their own admission the overwhelmed inner-city detachments of the LAPD are unable to keep track of all the bodies on the street, much less deal with common burglaries, car thefts or gang-organized protection rackets. Lacking the resources or political clout of more affluent neighborhoods, the desperate population of the inner ring is left to its own devices. As a last resort they have turned to Messieurs Smith and Wesson, whose name follows *protected by...* on many a porch

Slumlords, meanwhile, are mounting their own private reign of terror against drug-dealers and petty criminals. Faced with new laws authorizing the seizure of drug-infested properties, they are hiring goon squads and armed mercenaries to 'exterminate' crime in

their tenements. The *LA Times* recently described the swashbuckling adventures of one such crew in the Pico-Union, Venice and Panorama City (San Fernando Valley) areas.

Led by a six-foot-three 280-pound 'soldier of fortune' named David Roybal, this security squad is renown amongst landlords for its efficient brutality. Suspected drug-dealers and their customers, as well as mere deadbeats and other landlord irritants, are physically driven from buildings at gunpoint. Those who resist or even complain are beaten without mercy. In a Panorama City raid a few years ago, the *Times* notes, *Roybal and his crew collared so many residents and squatters for drugs that they converted a recreation room into a holding tank and handcuffed arrestees to a blood-spattered wall.* The LAPD knew about this *private jail* but dismissed residents' complaints *because it serves the greater good.*

Roybal and his gang closely resemble the so-called *matadors*, or hired gunslingers, who patrol Brazilian urban neighborhoods and frequently, while the police deliberately turn their backs, execute persistent criminals, even street urchins. Their common coda is that *they get the job done all else has failed.* As one of Roybal's most aggressive competitors explains: *Somebody's got to rule and when we're there, we rule. When somebody says something smart, we body slam him, right on the floor with all of his friends looking. We handcuff them and kick them and when the paramedics come and they're on the stretcher, we say: Hey, sue me.*

Apart from these rent-a-thugs, the Inner City also spawns a vast cottage industry that manufactures bars and grates for home protection. Indeed most of the bungalows in the inner ring now tend to resemble cages in a zoo. As in a George Romero movie, working-class families must now lock themselves in every night from the zombified city outside. One inadvertent consequence has been the terrifying frequency with which fires immolate entire families trapped helpless in their barred homes. The *prison cell house* has many resonances in the landscape of the inner city. Before the Spring uprising most liquor stores, borrowing from the precedent of pawnshops, had completely caged in the area behind the counter, with firearms discretely hidden at strategic locations. Even local greasy spoons were beginning to exchange hamburgers for money through bullet-proof acrylic turnstiles. Windowless concrete-block buildings, with rough surfaces exposed to deter graffiti, have spread across the streetscape like acne during the last decade. Now insurance companies may make such *riot-proof bunkers* virtually obligatory in the rebuilding of many districts. Local intermediate and secondary schools, meanwhile, have become even more indistinguishable from jails. As per capita education spending has plummeted in Los Angeles, scarce resources have been absorbed in fortifying school grounds and hiring armed security police. Teenagers complain bitterly about overcrowded classrooms and demoralized teachers on decaying campuses that have become little more than daytime detention centers for an abandoned generation. The schoolyard, meanwhile, has become a killing field. Just as their parents once learned to cower under desks in the case of an atomic bomb attack, so students today are *taught to drop at a teacher's signal in case of ... a driveby shooting - and stay there until they receive an all-clear signal.*

Federally subsidized and public housing projects, for their part, are coming to resemble the infamous 'strategic hamlets' that were used to incarcerate the rural population of Vietnam. Although no LA housing project is yet as technologically sophisticated as Chicago's Cabrini-Green, where retinal scans (c.f., the opening sequence of *Blade Runner*) are used to check i.d.s, police exercise increasing control over freedom of movement. Like peasants in a rebel countryside, public housing residents of every age are stopped and searched at will, and their homes broken into without court warrants. In one particularly galling incident, just a few weeks before the Spring 1992 riots, the LAPD arrested more than fifty people in the course of a surprise raid upon Watts' Imperial Courts project.

In a city with the nation's worst housing shortage, project residents, fearful of eviction, are increasingly reluctant to claim any of their constitutional protections against unlawful search or seizure. Meanwhile national guidelines allow housing authorities to evict *families* of alleged drug-dealers or felons. This opens the door to a policy of *collective punishment* as practiced, for example, by the Israelis against Palestinian communities on the West Bank.

The Half-Moons of Repression

In the original Burgess diagram, the 'half-moons' of ethnic enclaves (*Deutschland, Little Sicily, the Black Belt, etc.*) and specialized architectural ecologies ('residential hotels', 'the two flat area', etc.) cut across the 'dart board' of the city's fundamental socio-economic patterning. In contemporary metropolitan Los Angeles, a new species of special enclave is emerging in sympathetic synchronization to the militarization of the landscape. For want of a better generic appellation, we might call them 'social control districts' (SCDs). They merge the sanctions of the criminal or civil code with land-use planning to create what Michel Foucault would undoubtedly have recognized as further instances of the evolution of the 'disciplinary order' of the twentieth-century city.

As Christian Boyer paraphrases Foucault: *Disciplinary control proceed[s] by distributing bodies in space, allocating each individual to a cellular partition, creating a functional space out of this analytic spatial arrangement. In the end this spatial matrix became both real and ideal: a hierarchical organization of cellular space and a purely ideal order that was imposed upon its forms.*

Currently existing SCDs (simultaneously 'real and ideal') can be distinguished according to their juridical mode of spatial 'discipline'. *Abatement* districts, currently enforced against graffiti and prostitution in sign-posted areas of Los Angeles and West Hollywood, extend the traditional police power over nuisance (the legal fount of all zoning) from noxious industry to noxious behavior. Because they are self-financed by the fines collected or special sales taxes levied (on spray paints, for example), abatement districts allow homeowner or merchant groups to target intensified law enforcement against specific local social problems.

Enhancement districts, represented all over Southern California by the 'drug-free zones' surrounding public schools, add extra federal/state penalties or 'enhancements' to crimes committed within a specified radius of public institutions. *Containment* districts are designed to quarantine potentially epidemic social problems, ranging from that insect illegal immigrant, the Mediterranean fruit fly, to the ever increasing masses of homeless Angelenos. Although Downtown LA's 'homeless containment zone' lacks the precise, if surreal, sign-posting of the state Department of Agriculture's 'Medfly Quarantine Zone', it is nonetheless one of the most dramatic examples of a SCD. By city policy, the spillover of homeless encampments into surrounding council districts, or into the tonier precincts of the Downtown scanscape, is prevented by their 'containment' (official term) within the over-crowded Skid row area known as Central City East (or the 'Nickle' to its inhabitants). Although the recession-driven explosion in the homeless population has inexorably leaked street people into the alleys and vacant lots of nearby inner-ring neighborhoods, the LAPD maintains its pitiless policy of driving them back into the squalor of the Nickle.

The obverse strategy, of course, is the formal *exclusion* of the homeless and other pariah groups from public spaces. A spate of Southland cities, from Orange County to Santa Barbara, and even including the 'Peoples' Republic of Santa Monica', recently have passed 'anti-camping' ordinances to banish the homeless from their sight. Meanwhile Los Angeles and Pomona are emulating the small city of San Fernando (Richie Valens' hometown) in banning gang members from parks. These 'Gang Free Parks' reinforce non-spatialized sanctions against gang membership (especially the recent Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act or STEP) as examples of 'status criminalization' where group membership, even in the absence of a specific criminal act, has been outlawed.

Status crime, by its very nature, involves projections of middle-class or conservative fantasies about the nature of the 'dangerous classes'. Thus in the 19th century the bourgeoisie crusaded against a largely phantasmagorical 'tramp menace', and, in the 20th century, against a hallucinatory domestic 'red menace'. In the middle 1980s, however, the ghost of Cotton Mather suddenly reappeared in suburban Southern California. Allegations that local daycare centers were actually covens of satanic perversion wrenched us back to the seventeenth century and the Salem witch trials. In the course of the McMartin Preschool molestation case - ultimately the longest and most expensive such ordeal in American history - children testified about molester-teachers who flew around on broomsticks and other manifestations of the Evil One.

One legacy of the accompanying collective hysteria, which undoubtedly mined huge veins of displaced parental guilt, was the little city of San Dimas' creation of the nation's first 'child molestation exclusion zone'. This Twin-Peaks-like suburb in the eastern San Gabriel Valley was sign-posted from stem to stern with the warning: *Hands Off! Our children are photographed and fingerprinted for their own protection*. I don't know if the armies of lurking pedophiles in the mountains above San Dimas were actually deterred by these warnings, but any mapping of contemporary urban space must acknowledge the

existence of such dark, Lynchian zones where the *social imaginary* discharges its fantasies.

Meanwhile, post-riot Southern California seems on the verge of creating yet more SCDs. On the one hand, the arrival of the federal 'Weed and Seed' program, linking community development funds to anti-gang repression, provides a new set of incentives for neighborhoods to adopt exclusion and/or enhancement strategies. As many activists have warned, 'Weed and Seed' is like a police-state caricature of the 1960s War on Poverty, with the Justice Dept. transformed into the manager of urban redevelopment. The poor will be forced to cooperate with their own criminalization as a precondition for urban aid.

On the other hand, emerging technologies may give conservatives, and probably neo-liberals as well, a real opportunity to test cost-saving proposals for *community imprisonment* as an alternative to expensive programs of prison construction. Led by Heritage Institute ideologue Charles Murray - whose polemic against social spending for the poor, *Losing Ground* (1984), was the most potent manifesto of the Reagan era - conservative theorists are exploring the practicalities of the *carceral city* depicted in sci-fi fantasies like *Escape from New York* (which, however, got the relationship of landvalues all wrong).

Murray's concept, as first adumbrated in the *New Republic* in 1990, is that *drug-free zones for the majority* may require social-refugee camps for the criminalized minority. *If the result of implementing these policies (landlords' and employers' unrestricted right to discriminate in the selection of tenants and workers) is to concentrate the bad apples into a few hyper-violent, antisocial neighborhoods, so be it.* But how will the underclass be effectively confined to its own 'hyper-violent' super-SCDs and kept out of the drug-free shangri-las of the overclass?

One possibility is the systematic establishment of discrete *security gateways* that will use some bio-metric criterion, universally registered, to screen crowds and bypassers. The *most elegant solution*, according to a recent article in the *Economist*, *is a bio-metric that can be measured without the subject having to do anything at all.* The individually unique cart-wheel pattern of the iris, for example, can be scanned by hidden cameras *without the subject being any the wiser. That could be useful in places like airports - to check for the eye of a Tamil Tiger, or anybody else whose presence might make security guards' pupils dilate.*

Another emerging technology is the police utilization of LANDSAT satellites linked to Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Almost certainly by the end of the decade the largest US metropolitan areas, including Los Angeles, will be using geosynchronous LANDSAT systems to manage traffic congestion and oversee physical planning. The same LANDSAT-GIS capability can be cost-shared and time-shared with police departments to surveil the movements of tens of thousands of electronically tagged individuals and their automobiles.

Although such monitoring is immediately intended to safeguard expensive sports cars and other toys of the rich, it will be entirely possible to use the same technology to put the equivalent of an electronic handcuff on the activities of entire urban social strata. Drug offenders and gang members can be 'bar-coded' and paroled to the omniscient scrutiny of a satellite that will track their 24-hour itineraries and automatically sound an alarm if they stray outside the borders of their *surveillance district*. With such powerful Orwellian technologies for social control, community confinement and the confinement of communities may ultimately mean the same thing.

The Neighbors are Watching

An anxious delegation of police officials from the ex-DDR recently contacted the LA Police Department. The former East Germans, faced with a massive upsurge in crime and ethnic violence following Westernization, desperately wanted to find out more about Los Angeles' most celebrated law enforcement personality. But they were not enquiring about Chief Willie Williams or his predecessor Daryl Gates. Rather they wanted to know more about 'Bruno the Burglar', the felonious cartoon in a mask, who appears on countless signs that proclaim the borders of a 'Neighborhood Watch' area.

The Neighborhood Watch program, comprising more than 5,500 crime-surveillance block clubs from San Pedro to Sylmar, is the LAPD's most important innovation in urban policing. Throughout what Burgess called the 'Zone of Workingmen's Homes', which in Los Angeles comprises the owner-occupied neighborhoods of the central city as well as older blue-collar suburbs in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, a huge network of watchful neighbors provides a security system that is midway between the besieged, gun-toting anomie of the inner ring and the private police forces of more affluent, gated suburbs.

Neighborhood Watch, now emulated by hundreds of North American and even European cities, from Rosemead to London, was the brainchild of former police chief Ed Davis. In the aftermath of the 1965-71 cycle of unrest in Southcentral and East LA, Davis envisioned the program as the anchor of a larger 'Basic Car' strategy designed to rebuild community support for the LAPD by establishing a territorial identity between patrol units and neighborhoods. Although Daryl Gates preferred SWAT teams (his invention) to Basic Cars, Neighborhood Watch continued to grow throughout the 1980s.

According to LAPD spokesperson Sgt. Christopher West, *Neighborhood Watch block clubs are intended to increase local solidarity and self-confidence in the face of crime. Spurred by their block captains, neighbors become more vigilant in the protection of each other's property and well-being. Suspicious behavior is immediately reported and home-owners meet regularly with patrol officers to plan crime prevention tactics.*

An off-duty officer in a Winchell's Donut Shop was more picturesque. *Neighborhood Watch is supposed to work like a wagon train in an old-fashioned cowboy movie. The neighbors are the settlers, and the goal is to get them to circle their wagons and fight off the Indians until the cavalry - that is to say, the LAPD - can ride to their rescue.*

Needless to say, this Wild West analogy has its dark sides. Who, for example, gets to decide what behavior is 'suspicious' or who looks like an 'Indian'? The obvious danger in any program that conscripts thousands of citizens to become police informers under the official slogan *Be on the Look Out for Strangers* is that it inevitably stigmatizes innocent groups. Inner-city teenagers are especially vulnerable to this flagrant stereotyping and harassment.

As an illustration, let me relate what happened at a meeting of my local Neighborhood Watch group (in the Echo Park area near Downtown). An elderly white woman asked a young policeman how to identify hardcore gang youth. His answer was stupefyingly succinct: *Gangbangers wear expensive athletic shoes and clean, starched tee-shirts*. The old woman nodded her appreciation of this 'expert' advice, while others in the audience squirmed in their seats at the thought of the well-groomed youth in the neighborhood who would eventually be stopped and searched because of this idiot stereotype.

Critics also worry that Neighborhood Watch does double-duty as a captive constituency for partisan politics. As Sergeant West acknowledged, *block captains are appointed by patrol officers and the program does obviously tend to attract the most pro-police elements of the population*. These pro-police activists, moreover, tend to be demographically or culturally unrepresentative of their neighborhoods. In poor, young Latino areas, Watch captains are frequently elderly, residual Anglos. In areas where renters are a majority, the pro-police activists are typically homeowners or landlords. Although official regulations supposedly keep the Neighborhood Watch apolitical, block captains are generally regarded as Parker Center's *de facto* precinct workers. In 1986, for instance, the police union routinely campaigned in Neighborhood Watch meetings for the recall of the liberal majority on the state Supreme Court.

The new 'community policing advisory boards' established in the wake of the Rodney King beating are hardly more independent. Although the reform commission headed by Warren Christopher criticized the LAPD's failure to respond to citizen complaints, it failed to provide for elected advisory boards. As with Neighborhood Watch groups, the board members serve strictly at the pleasure of local police commanders. When the Venice advisory board, for example, dared to endorse a Spring 1992 ballot proposal (Proposition F) crafted by the police commission, but opposed by the police union, they were simply fired by the captain in charge of the Pacific Division. The timorous police commissioners then refused to intervene on behalf of their own supporters.

Although the rhetoric resounds with pioneer values lifted out of a John Ford Western, the actual practices of the Neighborhood Watch and Community Policing programs more often evoke the models of (ex) East Germany or South Korea, where police informers on every block scrutinize their neighbors and watch for suspicious strangers.

Mini-Citadels and Gerocrats

When I first began to study gated communities in Southern California in the mid-1980s, it was a trend largely confined to very wealthy neighborhoods or new developments on the distant metropolitan frontier (e.g., the areas Burgess described as the 'restricted residential district' or the 'commuter zone'). Since the Spring 1992 rebellion, however, dozens of ordinary residential neighborhoods in Los Angeles have demanded the right to gate themselves off from the rest of the city. As one newspaper put it, *The 1980s had their boom in mini-malls; the 1990s may bring a bull market in mini-citadels.*

Although crime and safety are the ostensible issues, increased equity may be the deeper motive. Some realtors have estimated that 'gatedness' can raise home values by as much as 40 percent over ten years. As communities - including black middle-class areas like Windsor Village and Baldwin Hills Estates - race to reap this windfall, Burgess' 'Residential Zone IV' begins to look like a fortified honeycomb, with each residential neighborhood now encased in its own walled cell. In most cases, the local homeowners' associations also contract 'armed response' private policing from one of the several multi-national security firms that specialize in residential security. Obviously this only further widens the 'security differential' between the inner city and the suburbs.

'Empty-nest' households are especially passionate advocates of restricted-access neighborhoods, and there is an important sense in which Los Angeles is not merely being polarized between rich and poor, but more specifically between the young poor and the old rich. Furthermore, the 1990 Census showed that metropolitan Los Angeles has the greatest discrepancy in the nation between household size and home size. On the Westside and Hollywood Hills, where 'mansionization' has been in vogue, older, smaller Anglo households occupy ever bigger homes, while in the rest of the city large Latino families are being crammed into diminishing floor-space.

California as a whole is an incipient gerontocracy, and any post-*Blade-Runner* dystopia must take account of the explosive fusion of class, ethnic and generational contradictions. Three of the state's leading demographers have recently given us a preview of what the near-future may hold. In their 'worst-case scenario', civil war breaks out in the year 2030 after the ruling class of aged, Anglo Baby-boomers, living in 'security-patrolled villages' and confiscating the majority of tax revenues to support their geriatric services, imposes an Iron Heel on a huge underclass of young Latinos who live in *unlit, unpaved barrios*.

Strikes broke out in assembly plants, security walls were set afire and toppled, the sale of guns, and their price, soared in the elderly areas. The younger Latinos painted the elderly as parasites, who had enjoyed all the benefits of society when those benefits were free and now blithely continued to tax the workers to maintain their style of living. The elderly painted the younger Latinos as foreigners who were soaking up benefits that should go to the elderly, as non-Americans who were threatening to dilute American culture, as crime-ridden, disease-ridden, and lawless. Each side prepared for a last assault on the other.

At the end of summer 1992, the California legislature took a giant step toward the realization of this scenario when it savagely cut the budget for schools and social

services. The Democrats capitulated to the intransigence of Republican Governor Pete Wilson, who repeatedly emphasized that the underlying issue *is not the current recession, it is demographics*. Wilson, of course, was calculating that aging Anglo voters (still an electoral majority) were not willing to support the traditional high standards of California public education now that the schools were full of Latino and Asian children. The budget vote, thus, effectively ratified two, unequal tiers of citizenship and entitlement.

Parallel Universes

Burgess and his students, who took 1920s Chicago as a vast research laboratory, never had any doubts about the 'raw reality' of the phenomena that they were systematically studying. Empirical method was matched to empirical reality. The image or mythography of the city did not intervene as a significant stratum in its own right. Nor did the Chicago School pay any attention to the critical role of the Columbian Exposition as an ideal-type for the city's planned development. Although the 1892 and 1933 Chicago World's Fairs were theme parks *avant la lettre*, urban sociology could not yet make conceptual space for the city as *simulation*.

Today there is no way around the problem. The contemporary city simulates or hallucinates itself in at least two decisive senses. First, in the age of electronic culture and economy, the city redoubles itself through the complex architecture of its information and media networks. Perhaps, as William Gibson suggests, 3-dimensional computer interfaces will soon allow post-modern *flaneurs* (or 'console cowboys') to stroll through the luminous geometry of this mnemonic city where data-bases have become 'blue pyramids' and 'cold spiral arms'.

If so, *urban cyberspace* - as the simulation of the city's information order - will be experienced as even more segregated, and devoid of true public space, than the traditional built city. Southcentral LA, for instance, is a data and media black hole, without local cable programming or links to major data systems. Just as it became a housing/jobs ghetto in the early twentieth century industrial city, it is now evolving into an *electronic ghetto* within the emerging *information city*.

Secondly, social fantasy is increasingly embodied in simulacral landscapes - theme parks, 'historic' districts and malls - that are partitioned off from the rest of the metropolis. All the post-modern philosopher kings (Baudrillard, Eco, etc), of course, agree that Los Angeles is the world capital of 'hyper-reality'. Traditionally its major theme parks have been primarily architectural simulations of the movies or television. At the old Selig Zoo, for instance, you could enter the jungle set for *Tarzan*. while at Knotts Berry Farm or its Calico ghost town you could participate in a typical Western. Disneyland, of course, opened the gates to the 'Magic Kingdom' of cartoon creatures and caricatured historical biographies.

Today, however, the city itself - or rather its idealization - has become the subject of simulation. With the recent decline of the military aerospace industry in Southern

California, the tourism/hotel/entertainment sector has become the single largest regional employer. But tourists are increasingly reluctant to venture into the perceived dangers of Los Angeles' 'urban jungle'. As one MCA official recently complained: *There's somebody on every street corner with a Work for Food' sign, (and the city) is not fun anymore.*

MCA and Disney believe the solution is to recreate vital bits of the city within the secure confines of fortress hotels and walled theme parks. As a result, *artificial Los Angeles* is gradually coming into being. In essence, it is an archipelago of well-guarded corporate cashpoints where affluent tourists can relax, spend lots of money, and have 'fun' again. A largely invisible army of low-wage service workers, who themselves live in virtual bantustans like the Santa Ana barrio (Disneyland) or Lennox (LAX) *barrios*, keep the machinery of simulation running smoothly.

Because these simulated landscapes compete with one another over 'authenticity', some strange dialectics ensue. Simulations tend to copy not their 'original' (where that even exists), but one another. Consider, for example, the multiple or exponentialized hyper-realities involved in the corporate battles to monopolize 'Hollywood'.

Hollywood(s): Powers of Simulation

For the last seventy-five years there has been an uneasy fit between movie-made Hollywood glamour and the dowdy Hollywood district. Movie stars, of course, have never lived in the tenement flatlands, and most of the big studios moved long ago to the suburbs. The actual Hollywood of the 1930s was best described by Nathaniel West: home of the 'flea people' the extras, laborers, grips and failed starlets.

The Hollywood in the imagination of the world's movie public, therefore, was kept tenuously anchored to its namesake location by regular rituals (premieres, the Academy Awards, etc.) and the magical investment of a dozen or so places (the Bowl, Graumann's, etc.) as tourist shrines. But over the last generation, as the real Hollywood has become a hyper-violent slum, the rituals have ceased and the magic has waned. As the linkages between historic signifier and its signified decayed, the opportunity arose to resurrect Hollywood in a safer neighborhood. Thus in Orlando, Disney created a stunning Art Deco mirage of MGM's golden age, while arch-competitor MCA countered with its own idealized versions of Hollywood Boulevard and Rodeo Drive at Universal Studios Florida.

Meanwhile, the elopement of Disney and Hollywood to Florida further depressed real-estate back in real-time Hollywood. After bitter battles with local homeowners, the major landowners were able to win city authorization for a \$1 billion facelift of Hollywood Boulevard. In their scheme, the Boulevard would be transformed into a gated, linear theme park, anchored by mega-entertainment complexes at each end. But while the redevelopers were still negotiating with potential investors, MCA pulled the rug out from under Hollywood Redux with the announcement that its nearby tax-dodge enclave, Universal City, would construct a parallel urban reality called 'CityWalk'.

Designed by master illusionist Jon Jerde, CityWalk is an 'idealized reality', the best features of Olvera Street, Hollywood and the West Side synthesized in *easy, bite-sized pieces* for consumption by tourists and residents who *don't need the excitement of dodging bullets ... in the Third World country* that Los Angeles has become. CityWalk incorporates examples of Mission Revival, Deco, streamlined Moderne, and 'LA Vernacular' (the Brown Derby), as well as 3-D billboards, *a huge blue King Kong hanging from a 70-foot neon totem pole*, and a sheriff's substation for security. To alleviate the sense of artificiality in this melange, a 'patina of age' and a 'dash of grit' have been added:

Using decorative sleight of hand, the designers plan to wrap the brand new street in a cloak of instant history - on opening day, some buildings will be painted to suggest that they have been occupied before. Candy wrappers will be embedded in the terrazzo flooring, as if discarded by previous visitors.

Hollywood redevelopers immediately responded to construction of CityWalk with a \$4.3 million beautification plan that includes paving Hollywood Blvd. with 'glitz' made from recycled glass. But even spruced up and glitified there is almost no way that the old Boulevard can compete with the hyper-real perfection on Universal's hill. As its MCA proprietors have taken pains to emphasize, CityWalk is *not a mall* but a *revolution in urban design ... a new kind of neighborhood* - an urban simulator. Indeed, some critics wonder if it isn't the moral equivalent of the neutron bomb: the city emptied of all lived human experience. With its fake fossil candy wrappers and other deceits, CityWalk sneeringly mocks us as it erases any trace of our real joy, pain or labor.

The Toxic Rim

Where does the nightmare end? Burgess was not greatly interested in urban boundaries. His Chicago dart board simply fades into the 'commuter zone' and, beyond, into the Corn Belt. The city limits of Dystopia, however, are an intrinsically fascinating problem. In *Blade Runner*, it will be recalled, the dark megalopolis improbably yielded, at its outer edge, to Ecotopia - evergreen forests and boundless wilderness.

No such happy ending will be possible in the coming Los Angeles of 2019. Post-modern geographer Edward Soja has observed that Southern California is already bounded, along an almost unbroken desert perimeter, by huge military air bases, bombing ranges and desert warfare reservations. Now a second, equally ominous circumference clearly is being drawn around this Pentagon desert. Choking on its own wastes, with its landfills overflowing and its coastal waters polluted, Los Angeles is preparing to export its garbage and hazardous land-uses to the Eastern Mojave and Baja California. Instead of reducing its production of dangerous waste, the city is simply planning to 'regionalize' their disposal.

This emergent *Toxic Rim* includes giant landfills at Eagle Mountain (the former Kaiser open-pit iron mine) and possibly near Adelanto (defunct Air Force base), the controversial radioactive waste dump in Ward Valley near Needles, and the relocation of

such polluting industries as furniture manufacture and metal-plating to Tijuana's *maquiladora* belt. The environmental consequences may be almost catastrophic.

>The proposed 300,000 barrels of nuclear waste, for example, in the unlined trenches of the Ward Valley nuclear dump will remain lethal for 10,000 years. They will pose the perennial risk of leaking radioactive tritium into the nearby Colorado River, thereby poisoning the irreplaceable water source for much of Southern California. For its part, the immense landfill at Eagle Mountain - 2.5 miles long, 1 mile wide, and 2,000 feet deep - will not only contaminate the water table but also create a toxic shroud of air pollution over much of eastern Riverside County. Meanwhile, the flight of hazardous industries across the Border, eventually including a large segment of Los Angeles' petrochemical production, will increase the possibility of Bhopal-like catastrophes.

In sum, the formation of this waste-belt will accelerate the environmental degradation of the entire American West (and part of Mexico). Today a third of the trees in Southern California's mountains already have been suffocated by smog, and animal species are rapidly dying off throughout the polluted Mojave Desert. Tomorrow, Los Angeles' radioactive and carcinogenic wastes may be killing life as far away as Utah or Sonora. The Toxic Rim will be a zone of extinction.

Before we Wake...

Finally, leaving behind all the Burgessian diagrams and analogies, what will be the real fate of Los Angeles? Can emergent technologies of surveillance and repression stabilize class and racial relations across the chasm of the new inequality? Will the ecology of fear become the natural order of the 21st-century American city? Will razor-wire and security cameras someday be as sentimentally redolent of suburban life as white-picket fences and dogs named Spot?

A global perspective may be useful. Los Angeles in 2019 will be the core of a metro-galaxy of 22-24 million people in Southern and Baja Californias. Together with Tokyo, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Shanghai, it will comprise a new evolutionary form: megacities of 20-30 million inhabitants. It is important to emphasize that we are not merely talking about larger specimens of an old, familiar type, but an absolutely original, and unexpected, phyla of social life.

No one knows, in fact, whether physical and biological systems of this magnitude and complexity are actually sustainable. Many experts believe that the Third World megacities, at least, will eventually precipitate environmental holocausts and/or implode in urban civil wars. Indeed, the contemporary 'New World Order' certainly offers enough grim examples of total societal disintegration - from Bosnia to Somalia - to underscore realistic fears of a mega-city apocalypse.

If Tokyo proves an exception, despite inevitable natural disasters, it will only be by dint of extraordinary levels of public investment, private affluence and social discipline (and because Japan is culturally a highly urban rather than suburban society). In the recent past, however, Los Angeles has begun to resemble Sao Paulo and Mexico City more than post-modern Tokyo-Yokohama.

It may be theoretically possible, of course, for a Democratic administration in Washington over the next decade to begin to reverse American urban decay with massive new public works. But it will remain extraordinarily difficult to secure Congressional support for reinvestment in the Bos-Wash and Southern California urban cores as long as the Reagan-era deficit remains the dominant issue in domestic politics. Indeed the principal legacy of the Perot movement - the most successful electoral insurgency in 75 years - may be precisely the fiscal Gordian knot it has managed to tie around any resolution of the urban crisis.

If hopes of urban reform, now guardedly raised by the Clinton landslide, are once again dashed, it will only accelerate the dystopic tendencies described in this pamphlet. For in the specific case of Los Angeles, where recession has already wiped out a fifth of the region's manufacturing jobs, there is little private-sector help in sight. Even the most traditionally optimistic business-school econometric models now predict a 'Texas-style' regional slump lasting until 1997, while forecasters at the Southern California Association of Governments talk about steady-state unemployment rates of 10-12 percent for the next *twenty years*.

As the golden dream withers, so also may faith in non-violent social reform. If last year's riots set a precedent, anomic neighborhood violence may begin to be transmuted into more organized political violence. Both cops and gangmembers already talk with chilling matter-of-factness about the inevitability of some manner of urban guerrilla warfare. And in spite of all the new residential walls and scapes - even the future police eye in the sky - sprawling Los Angeles is a metropolis uniquely vulnerable to strategic sabotage.

As the examples of Belfast, Beirut and, more recently, Palermo and Lima have demonstrated, the car bomb is the weapon of anonymous urban terror *par excellence* (or, as one counter-insurgency expert once put it, *the poor man's substitute for an airforce*). Car bombs have reduced half of Beirut to debris, wiped out a neighborhood known as 'Lima's Beverly Hills', and massacred Italy's most heavily guarded public officials.

If the British Army, uniquely, was finally able to prevent car bombers from entering Belfast, it was only after years of effort and the construction of an immense security cage around the entire city center. A comparable preventative effort in Los Angeles - e.g. closing the freeways and heavily fortifying all the public utilities, oil refineries and pipelines, and commercial centers - would not only cost tens of billions but also dissolve the city as a functioning entity.

The Los Angeles freeway system, in effect, guarantees to the future urban terrorist what the tropical rainforest or Andean peak offers to the rural *guerrillero*: ideal terrain.

If we continue to allow our central cities to degenerate into criminalized Third Worlds, all the ingenious security technology, present and future, will not safeguard the anxious middle class. The sound of that first car bomb on Rodeo Drive or in front of City Hall will wake us from our mere bad dream and confront us with our real nightmare.

This pamphlet was first printed in *Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, Pamphlet #23*, Open Media, New Jersey, USA, december 1992. Last Modified by PH on 7-july-1995