URBAN ANALYSIS as MERCHANDISING: The 'LA School' and the Understanding of Metropolitan Development

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If the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ran a story regarding a group of academics who claimed the moon was made of green cheese, no doubt there would be some responses that it could print from other academics both *pro* and *con*. It might even get a letter or two stating that someone was helped by the article because they hadn't really thought about that issue before. The *Chronicle* could then pat itself on the back and believe that it had done a genuine service in the interests of science. When it, in fact, printed the article by D. W. Miller on the so-called LA School (Miller 2000: A15), it actually acted as if it had raised the issue of the moon and green cheese. The premise of the LA School, that somehow Los Angeles is uniquely positioned as the exemplar of contemporary urban studies, is as ridiculously false as anything Dr. Seuss may have said about the lunar landscape.

In Peter Wollen's (1993) analysis of consumer society he notes how commodity-oriented capitalism thrives by raiding the past and converting other people's ideas and culture into products that are then marketed as 'new'. The LA School has adopted this strategy for what seems like shameless self-promotion at the expense of scholarship. Perhaps this phenomenon is now part of the more general effect of social positioning for spectacular rewards and notoriety brought on by globalization. Surely, academics permit almost any kind of behavior, short of plagiarism, by their colleagues. But we can rightly wonder why the LA School seems so desperate for media hype while sacrificing the cumulative project of urban science in its transparent attempt at intellectual elitism.

There are many things wrong with the assertion by Michael Dear that there is an 'LA School', including the systematic way urbanists elsewhere are excluded by their media-oriented hype, but the worst is his consistent refusal to cite previous work that would clearly challenge the very premise of his argument. In brief,

what is disturbing about the 'intellectual amnesia' on the part of the new crop of geographers in Los Angeles is their limited contribution to the understanding of contemporary development patterns and processes. Before discussing the latter, which is my interest, it is necessary to briefly address the former because of its potentially negative effects on urban studies.

The LA School as a form of logocentric ideology

The geographers living in Los Angeles who hype the LA School have fashioned an exclusionary ideology that pyramids work on metropolitan regionalism into a hierarchy, placing themselves at the top. This discourse, which hides a rampant elitism, logocentrically valorizes a select group at the expense of others through exclusionary techniques that are then promoted in popular venues, like the press, which cannot be easily challenged by fellow academics. The discursive hierarchy is created by valorizing a particular place rather than specific ideas critical to an understanding of contemporary urban patterns. The fact that the true intellectual pursuit of the latter proves false the claim of the former is completely obscured. The LA School ideology has the following components. It excludes other well-respected, practicing urbanists within the same geographical area; it objectifies physical location at the expense of social processes and forces; it treats history as simply descriptive; it excludes pertinent and important approaches in other disciplines.

The exclusion of other urbanists

The notorious 'New Urban Studies' article (Miller 2000) begins with a description of Michael J. Dear as he rides a helicopter '2,000 feet up' in order to map the 'ever-changing topography' of the Los Angeles region. Apparently, Dear prefers to make this graphic and spectacular claim to the media rather than calling the Department of Geography at the University of California, Riverside. The latter is a campus lying below the flight path of Dear's helicopter about 50 miles east of LA. There are first-rate geographers on that campus who, no doubt, have acquired some appreciation for the spatial or 'topographic' arrangements in their own backyard and who can report on them with ease. In fact, not too far from the Riverside campus is the location of the firm that developed the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software which is used by every serious urbanist,

apparently except Dear, interested in tracking the 'ever-changing topography' of developing areas around the globe. They also have both a phone number and useful software.

Second, LA School hypsters exclude from their group well-respected urbanists, such as Eric Monkkonen and Ivan Light, who are both professors at UCLA. Small wonder, then, if they can ignore people just down the hall from where they work, that they have also excluded, in their media drive to promote themselves, serious urban scholars working on other campuses in the area. I was a professor, for example, from 1977 to 1994 at UC Riverside. Spencer Olin, a distinguished professor of urban history, works at UC Irvine and co-edited the important book, *Postsuburban California* (Kling *et al.* 1991), a book, by the way, that does significantly more to explain contemporary regional patterns of growth than anything ever written by the LA Schoolers. It is also worth pointing out that, not that far from Los Angeles, the campus of UC at Santa Barbara has several well-known urbanists, and that Harvey Molotch, the co-originator of the influential Growth Machine perspective, for example, worked there for decades. All of these 'other' urbanists, and many more, are simply excluded from the self-promoting group of which Michael Dear is the most vocal media representative.

The ideological objectification and valorization of physical location

Essential to LA Schoolers like Dear and Soja is the claim that the vast developing area east of Los Angeles city limits be included conceptually in their discursive referent – the 'Los Angeles area'. However, this is simply an ideological construction. In truth, the Southern California region around Los Angeles comprises three metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) – LA/Long Beach, Riverside/San Bernardino, and Orange County. The area to the east, the one which Michael Dear is fond of flying over in his 'rented helicopter' (Miller 2000), is designated by the United States Census as the Riverside/San Bernardino MSA. Recently the census has consolidated these into one massive superurban category, called a consolidated metropolitan statistical area (CMSA). In 1995 there were thirteen of these regions identified in the United States, with the New York area the most populous. It is precisely the emergence of these sprawling, developing, urbanizing regions outside the more commonly recognized and historical central cities, like Los Angeles, that contributes to the need for new concepts and theories of

urban growth. In the United States, very few cities have been able, like Houston, Texas, to annex their hinterland, making regional development for most places a highly fragmented affair with contending political jurisdictions and spatial competition increasingly characteristic of this arrangement.

What makes the new spatial patterns compelling to understand and analyze scientifically is precisely the regional, multi-centered character of development that overshadows in importance the influence of any particular city. By conflating the three different MSAs comprising the region in and around Los Angeles/San Pedro/Hollywood/Beverly Hills/Compton/Burbank/Pasadena/Glendale/Anaheim/Irvine/San Bernardino/Fontana/Riverside/Marino Valley/Palm Springs/Banning, etc., into their discursive construction called 'Los Angeles', the LA Schoolers obscure in the worst possible way the very phenomenon they seek to study.

Clearly, the LA Schoolers, by attempting to valorize Los Angeles as the exemplar of contemporary growth, simply pyramid themselves into position at the top of the academic hierarchy by justification of location alone. Their 'LA area' is a convenient fiction and the prime quality of their importance is not their individual work on the matter of sprawling development, but simply the address of their campus office.

Can it even be claimed that Los Angeles is illustrative *par excellence* of contemporary urbanism? In reality, has urban studies up until the present been anchored by the objectification of 1930s Chicago as the exemplar, and has the field now, thanks to Michael Dear and Edward Soja, been superseded by the example of 1990s Los Angeles? Is urban studies today bed rocked on a foundation that uses a single city as its exemplary model for its concepts? These are precisely the core assertions, the essential claims, of the LA School. Serious scholars view their field in precisely the opposite way. It is not the objectification of a city as an ideal case but the painstaking study of societal processes and their sociospatial effects on settlement space everywhere that defines the field.

Contemporary urbanism seeks to study the forces and agents that produce new spatial forms (Harvey 1973; Castells 1977; Lefebvre 1991; Gottdiener 1994). No single city can possibly encapsulate all the complex nuances of present-day metropolitan growth. The LA School seeks to make its location the primary referent for this study, but understanding contemporary urbanism requires a referent of an entirely different kind. What unifies the quest of urban

scholars is not our commonality with any particular city, but our common interest in understanding the powerful social forces arising from the economic, cultural, spatial, and political dimensions of social behavior that shape and reshape local areas around the world.

Downplaying history

Scholars ignore history at their peril. Los Angeles is touted as the exemplary suburban, auto-era city. The automobile, in particular, is viewed as the generator of current spatial patterns, especially the sprawl of regional growth. The history of Los Angeles is not only quite different but is instrumental to an understanding of contemporary spatial processes in the CMSA. One hundred years ago, prior to the mass production of cars, the area in and around Los Angeles already had an extensive regional public transportation infrastructure based on rail and electrified trolleys (see Crump 1962; Gottdiener 1994). Most significantly, it was the network of trolleys, which in the early 1900s extended from San Pedro harbor, the westernmost part of Los Angeles, to Lake Arrowhead in the San Bernardino mountains, high above the expanding region, that provided the infrastructure for real estate development. Much later, many of the automobile routes simply paved over these tracks and followed them to create the present-day system of freeways (Gottdiener 1994: 69). Evidence from other metropolitan areas also supports the view that suburbanization is a phenomenon characteristic of every city and that the highly centralized, bounded city that was the model for the Chicago School and is the convenient strawman for the LA School simply never existed (see, for example, Warner 1962; Walker 1981; Jackson 1985). Processes of real estate development, capital flows, factions of capital, returns to capital, local politics, decentralization, recentralization, agglomeration, and dispersal are the key topics requiring study by the new urban approach (see Castells 1977; Kling *et al.* 1991; Lefebvre 1991; Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999).

The LA School claims to be replacing the Chicago School as an influential brain's trust. It forgets history; this time, the history of its own field. The Chicago School paradigm has been dead and buried for decades. Any serious urban scholar can tell you that it even took fatally ill shortly after Ernest Burgess published his famous 'concentric zone' model of city growth. In this light, the claim by Michael Dear and his significant others to be replacing the Chicago

School seems more like a call to recast *Night of the Living Dead*. Consider the following observation:

> The urbanization theory of the early Chicago School began to receive a critical response in the 1930s (Davie 1937; Hoyt 1933; Alihan 1938; Gettys 1940; Harris and Ullman 1945; Firey 1947; Form 1954). Contentiousness over theoretical assertions surfaced during this time, especially over the Chicago School's reluctance to recognize the important role which cultural values played in the determination of locational decisions and its reliance on economic competition as paramount in social interaction. In addition, however, Alihan raised another issue, namely, that taken as a whole, ecologists used the term 'community' to specify both an empirical reality and an abstract unit of ecological organization (1938). In this way, the Chicago School confused the 'real' with its 'theoretical' object of analysis and which, as its critics maintained, was misguided even as an ideal type (Hoyt 1933; Harris and Ullman 1945). (Gottdiener 1994: 34.)

If Milla Alihan were alive today, she would make the very same criticism of the LA School. No 'real' city can also serve as an 'ideal' type that totally exemplifies core social processes. Those that claim otherwise confuse theory with analysis, a fallacy that nineteenth-century social scholars, such as Max Weber, already conditioned academics to avoid.

Is geography, and the LA School geography in particular, the only insightful discipline studying contemporary urbanism?

Michael Dear and his friends work hard to exclude mention of the work of urbanists in other disciplines and obscure the importance of their contributions, which, in many cases, were made significantly before the LA School hyped the value of its own importance. Miller titles his *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece 'The New Urban Studies'. More than twenty years ago, sociologists were articulating the conceptual framework for the 'New Urban Sociology'. There has even been a multi-edition urban textbook in print for almost a decade on this subject which specifically advances ideas about new urban forms (Gottdiener 1994; Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999). Sociologists spoke a decade ago of a paradigm shift in urbanism away from the ideas of the early Chicago School, the later Chicago School, and the human ecologists toward an approach centered on analyzing and understanding the new social forces and processes structuring metropolitan regions (Gottdiener, Feagin 1988). One of the true founders of

the new approach, Manuel Castells, is a sociologist, as was the seminal thinker Henri Lefebvre, whose ideas have inspired an entire generation to consider urbanism in precisely this new light (Lefebvre 1991). Political science also has many practitioners who subscribe to the new ideas and have done so for decades. Finally, there are even some new urban geographers who do not live in Los Angeles. Surprisingly, a few of them have also managed to publish important work with insights from their experience with other cities that are helpful to the new urban approach (see, for example, the work of David Harvey).

What can be learned from the critique of 'LA School' hype?

Academics would prefer not to be harsh with their colleagues. After all, the key activity characterizing our profession is the serious advancement of knowledge. However, in the wake of the *Chronicle*'s article and the obvious arrogant hype that it seeks to pass off in place of respectable scholarship, it was necessary to dissect the phenomenon more systematically. But what can be learned from this critique?

There is, in fact, a strong need to get away from the old vocabularies describing forms of urbanization. There is also a need to outline the factors that are critical to an understanding of the new sociospatial forms. Finally, there are important theoretical issues for urban analysis that are raised once we acknowledge the current limitations of thinking about sociospatial forms and processes. Curiously, the economic, political, cultural, and spatial aspects of contemporary growth processes have already been studied with considerable effect and insight by academics that do not live in Los Angeles.

Understanding the new spatial form

Writings about contemporary urban processes remain city-based. The use of the city focus for urbanization is a fallacy. Yet, almost without pause, publishers persist in producing book after book using the 'city' as the referent for organized and constructed settlement space. We hear about the 'postmodern city', the 'culture of cities', 'edge cities', 'global cities', and the like. For some time now, I have argued against this discourse and its referent. The bounded, centralized city that organizes its hinterland, as the Chicago School sociologists, geographers, urban economists, and so-called postmodern interpreters all believe to be the

correct model of space, simply no longer exists (Gottdiener 1994). Contemporary urbanization is characterized by the general process of deconcentration – a ubiquitous leveling of both population and societal activities across space that has produced intranational and intraregional fragmentation. Reformation of the new spatial form, the multi-centered metropolitan region, is characterized by the operation of two distinct sociospatial forces: decentralization and recentralization. Before the latter two can be understood within the context of contemporary urbanization, it is necessary to describe the massive scale of deconcentration and its effects, because the processes are all interrelated – each one has both developed and, in turn, contributed to the conditions of development of the others.

Deconcentration

After World War II America's population was concentrated in the Northeast and the Midwest. After the 1980 census, just thirty years later, the population had deconcentrated in a massive shift to the south and west, a region known as the 'Sunbelt'. Growth in the Sunbelt was both substantial and rapid. Entire industries relocated there, not just people. And this trend continues. New York dropped from the number one slot as the country's most populous state in 1980, to be replaced by California. Now Texas has a larger population and New York is ranked third. Of the ten most populous cities in 1994, three – Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio – were in Texas, two – Los Angeles and San Diego – were in California, and one – Phoenix – was in Arizona (Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999: 4). In short, it is the Sunbelt that dominates urban life today, despite the persisting health of places like New York City and Chicago.

Now trends show that deconcentration continues even within the Sunbelt. Between 1990 and 1994, Los Angeles lost over one percent of its population and Dallas was growing slowly. Places like El Paso, Texas, and Las Vegas, Nevada, became boom towns, the latter largely because of flight from LA. Manufacturing and office work also dispersed (Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999, Ch. 5; Gottdiener *et al.* 1999).

Deconcentration has a second component; the shift to the suburbs. Not confined to any particular part of the nation, this post-1950s phenomenon took place within every metropolitan area. By the 1970 census more people in the United States were living outside the major central cities than within them.

In 1994–95 New York City had a population of slightly over 7 million but its metropolitan region contained over 18 million people, that is to say, more than a multiple of two. The region of Los Angeles was larger in population by almost a multiple of five than the city itself. Chicago's central city population declined slightly between 1990 and 1994 but its metropolitan area population increased by over 4 percent. The metro areas with the most rapid growth during that same period were Dallas-Fort Worth (10.2 percent), Atlanta (16 percent), and Phoenix (14.5 percent). But even classic 'Rustbelt' cities like Detroit, which lost over 15 percent of its central city population between 1980 and 1994, possessed metro areas that gained population, rising 1.8 percent between 1990 and 1994 (Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999, Ch. 1).

With suburbanization dominating growth patterns so completely it seems odd that urbanists persist in focusing their thoughts on the city. More significantly, suburban areas have themselves changed and matured so that the simplistic city/suburb dichotomy no longer has relevance today (Kling *et al*. 1991). As in the case of the Sunbelt shift, movement outside the central city involves economic as well as demographic components. Factories, banking, retailing, and other consumer services dispersed throughout metropolitan regions after the 1950s (Gottdiener 1994). Nor can it be said that these dramatic shifts were the consequence of globalization alone, as some currently contend. More complex, more domestically sourced, and more structural or institutional in form, the forces that brought about the deconcentration of both the economy and the population to the Sunbelt and the suburbs have their basis in fundamental processes of our society (Gottdiener 1994), which I shall discuss in more detail subsequently. These include the features of analysis emphasized by what has come to be called the 'new urban sociology', namely, the central role of institutional factors, such as the actions of the federal government in channeling resources and transferring value across space, structural changes that provided new incentives such as depreciation laws for factory buildings, real estate development and speculation, wage differentials and the varying institutional impact of unions across space, the powerful role of sign value and symbolic factors in affecting growth, deindustrialization and the dominance of the global economic level, and the rising affluence of the general population (see Gottdiener 1994; Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999).

Taken together these new forces and factors have produced a pattern of growth that supersedes the central city and its organizing powers. There is a new

form of settlement space. I call it the multi-centered region and it has replaced the central city as the referent for growth.

Characteristics of the multi-centered metropolitan region

The new form of settlement space has not eliminated the classic central city but has only absorbed it in a matrix of increasingly personal, political, and business decisions that has assumed a regional shape. At the same time, every part of this deconcentrated mix has become more functionally specialized since the 1970s, so that, in particular, the historical central city has itself undergone profound change. Furthermore, it is precisely because of the action in space of population and business dispersal, that is, the process of deconcentration, that the new functional specialization of spatial nodes and areas became necessary within expanding metropolitan regions. Consequently the decentralization of both population and societal activities – economic, political, and cultural – and their recentralization in new centers within expanding regions are both functionally related to the more global pattern of deconcentration. Much of the power of the central city prior to the 1960s was its role as the location for manufacturing, office services, finance, retailing, and residential living. Now these same activities are dispersed in a massive regional array. Central cities have become, in turn, more specialized, especially with the loss of their manufacturing base. Now they focus on tourism, finance, business services, information, and the provision of housing for the more affluent segments of the population, most of which do not have children. In some cases, however, types of manufacturing, such as textile and clothing production, which involve low-wage immigrant labor, persist in the central areas of cities despite these counter-trends.

The key characteristic of the new spatial form is that the historical central city no longer organizes growth in the hinterland. In fact, as an extreme example, there are a number of multi-centered metropolitan regions across the country that have no single, large central city at all. These areas are neither suburbs nor cities, yet they are fully urbanized in the developmental sense. Perhaps the best example is Orange County, California (Kling *et al.* 1991). It had a population of close to 2 million in 1980 but the largest city it contained, Anaheim – the home of Disneyland – had only 219,311 residents in that same year, i.e., about one tenth of the county population. This county, which became an MSA in its own right, is a net employer with an economic base that imported workers from outside the

area and which had an employment to residence ratio in 1980 of 0.84, a figure that is larger than many central cities. The county comprises several functionally specialized nodes, like Irvine, which are connected by highways and which provide services and retailing through strip-zoned streets and agglomerations like malls and shopping centers. Although this pattern of development seems to some observers as quite suburban in form, Orange County is not a suburb of Los Angeles. It is an entirely separate area that is culturally, economically, socially, and, of course, politically independent. In sum, Orange County, more so than Los Angeles, exemplifies the new form of settlement space that is, in fact, also characteristic of expanding, massive areas like those containing our older, central cities – the multi-centered metropolitan region.

In 1980 there were at least twenty other areas like Orange County in the United States which were fully urbanized and yet contained no large, central city (Gottdiener, Kephart 1991: *passim*). Eight of these places were in the Sunbelt, but the others, like Fairfield County, Connecticut, were in the region known as the 'Rustbelt'. Despite having populations that varied from a low of 503,173 (Monmouth County, New Jersey) to a high of 1,932,709 for Orange County in 1980, only one of these areas (Hillsborough County, Florida – the region of Tampa/St. Petersberg) contained a city with more than 20 percent of the total county population. A classic suburb in the outmoded central city model of urbanism would have a very low employment to residence ratio because most of the people living there would be working outside the area. Its 'bedroom community' status would be indicated by an employment to residence ratio of well under 50 percent. In our 1980 sample, this ratio varied from a low of 0.54 (Fairfax County, Virginia) to a high of 0.99 (Montgomery County, Pennsylvania), a very impressive range that indicates the urbanized and independent quality of these sprawling regions which has undoubtedly been fortified over the last two decades.

Multi-centered regional growth is the spatial pattern characterizing all development in the United States, even those areas that include our largest cities, as indicated above. People no longer need the benefit of living near highly centralized places of employment, retailing, social or business services. Due to the reliance on automobile transportation, people today routinely drive to work, to shop, to obtain needed services, to visit institutions of education or medicine, and to participate in recreational activities. Owing to the functional specialization of multi-centered areas, they visit nodes spread out across an expanding spa-

tial array. Yet, because of the reliance on the car and the expansive nature of the new spatial form, developers have taken advantage of the need for agglomeration and created new centers that offer a variety of economic, social, or cultural opportunities. Perhaps shopping malls are the best example. They draw customers mainly because of the presence of large, so-called anchor department stores, but they contain scores, if not hundreds, of smaller shops that also hope to attract consumer dollars. These shops pay rent to the owners of malls and support their concentrated way of doing business. In other cases, counties themselves may provide businesses with special zones that offer reduced taxes, proper transportation infrastructure, and restricted land uses, such as office or industrial parks. These highly specialized nodes are also spread out within the regional mix of the multi-centered region.

Clearly, the dominance of this sprawling growth pattern also results in many problems that can be directly attributed to the use of space. Traffic congestion, such as the serious gridlock conditions in and around Atlanta, Georgia, is just one example. I shall address these matters below, but it is also important to note that none of these emergent concerns that also make up the new urban research agenda is particularly unique in any sense to Los Angeles.

A typical multi-centered region

The LA Schoolers, in their effort to validate their own address, have things backwards. Understanding contemporary urbanism requires us to distance ourselves from any one place and, instead, to appreciate the abstract settlement patterns of the new spatial form. We do need an ideal type, but, as the simplest understanding of that theoretical concept dictates, there is no actually existing place that can be tendered as the model. Instead, all areas should be compared with the tendencies and patterns abstracted as the ideal.
A typical multi-centered region has the following features:

(1) There is one (or more) historical central city that once dominated the region but does so no longer.
(2) There is a massive, sprawling array of residential developments that mix high- and low-density dwellings and separate centers for retailing, manufacturing, office work, wholesaling, shipping, leisure and cultural activities located throughout the region.

(3) These multi-centers vary in scale of development from, for example, immense regional shopping malls, sometimes called 'Gallerias', to strip development along shopping streets. Historical centers retain daytime density but have become functionally specialized according to differentiation within the regional array. Cultural and leisure activities have their own centers, such as sports stadiums, concert venues, golf courses, and recreational areas, each varying in their capacity to draw customers.

(4) Political jurisdictions produce their own mini-centers of government within the region. Governance itself is fragmented. While in the past local politicians were once capable of commanding prestige and national attention, now even 'big city' mayors have lost their national clout. Current political jurisdictions compete with each other for regional resources, while no single elected official commands a hierarchy of influence powerful enough to command national attention in the delivery of votes. Local politics in the multi-centered region is trivialized and petty, with the county, state, and federal levels acquiring increasingly more power at the expense of the city and other incorporated areas.

(5) The aggregated regional array of cities, suburbs, strip-zoned vectors, specialized centers, leisure areas, and dispersed institutional buildings is connected everywhere by expanding networks of automobile-oriented modes of transportation. The multi-centered region is a place of highways, gas stations, feeder roads, connector roads, expressways, service roads, and strip-zoned streets. Access in and out of this baffling, networked array is provided by regional airports that increasingly have taken over the economic functions and the importance of the large, central city (Gottdiener 2001).

Understanding the sociospatial forces of multi-centered development

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of the LA Schoolers' discourse is its failure to supply analytical depth. They describe but do not go beyond extolling the virtues of their own location as a place that exemplifies the new urban trends. Their superficiality is a direct consequence of their intentions. By purposely ignoring other urbanists they also ignore what other urbanists do and what they have been doing during the same period in our recent past, namely, studying and researching the forces that are molding and changing our metro regions. Their writings cannot help us understand multi-centered regional life because they do not analyze its underlying dynamics.

The sociospatial forces producing and reproducing the new form of settlement space are well understood (see the summary in Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999: 18) and have been researched by writers from Europe and Latin America as well as the United States. An excellent source of information about these contributors is the membership and activities of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee 21. The factors studied are not simply static categories but frame active research agendas as scholars relate spatial patterns, on the one hand, to the logic of capital, on the other, while also paying attention to empirical facts on the ground in different but related ways. Among the most important forces associated with the understanding of new sociospatial patterns and processes are the following:

(1) The role of the interventionist state in the transfer of value and the subsidization of growth – the institutional component of development.
(2) The role of capital logic, especially with regard to the development of real estate as a second circuit of capital.
(3) The role of location and space as a part of socioeconomic relations.
(4) The role of culture and symbols in the development process.
(5) The structuration and effects of uneven development, especially as it relates to persisting inequalities in class, race, ethnicity, age, and gender.

It is essential to ignore this formidable research agenda and the incredibly diverse set of writers working in the 'new urban' tradition in order for the LA School hypsters to succeed in valorizing their work. However, among urbanists, the above approach is so well known, having been actively refined for several decades, that it is not even necessary to discuss these aspects, but refer to the literature (for a good review, see Harvey 1990; Feagin 1988; Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999; Gottdiener *et al.* 1999). Instead of reviewing these factors, I shall isolate a few aspects in order to demonstrate the logocentric bias of the LA School discourse and the fallacy of using Los Angeles as an exemplar of twenty-first-century urbanism.

The multi-centered form and the interventionist state

It is often argued that metropolitan regions are a product of capital. Some writers, such as Harvey (1981, 1985a, 1985b, 1996) or Smith (1996) consider this factor exclusively as the determining force. Most of the LA School geographers

follow suit (see the work of Scott, Storper 1992, for example). Such economism is wrong. For this reason I like to begin discussions about the causes of contemporary urban development by focusing on the actions of the state, which are not always taken in the service of capital and which are too often overlooked by writers who proclaim 'new' modes of production and 'new' economic structures as explaining contemporary patterns.

Los Angeles would be only one of several heavily populated southwest areas if it were not for World War II. Because of our fight against Japan, immense resources were committed to the West Coast and the Los Angeles area was a main beneficiary in California because of its excellent rail connections and harbor. Precisely because of the war effort, Los Angeles became a key manufacturing city in the United States. Aerospace, shipbuilding, military hardware manufacturing, and transportation industries grew up there. The government transferred billions of dollars in value to underpin this infrastructure. The scale of this spending activity was unprecedented. An entire steel industry was built from scratch in Fontana, California, outside of San Bernardino, for example, because of this effort. Yet, World War II military spending was just the beginning of government largess. Dollar amounts during the 1940s were dwarfed by spending because of the 'Asian' wars that followed – Korea and Vietnam. By the 1970s Los Angeles, in particular, was the direct beneficiary of thirty years of colossal military spending that created a high-technology infrastructure of industries employing highly trained professionals who lived affluent lifestyles. During the period of rapid expansion following the Vietnam War buildup in the 1960s, it seemed like Los Angeles and Orange County military contractors hired entire graduating classes of engineering schools, fueling not only the general trend of deconcentration but also a specific brain drain from the East Coast.

Often overlooked, the transfer of value by the federal government during the successive wars against Asian countries – Japan, Korea [China], Vietnam – is the key factor in Sunbelt growth, because it helped grease the wheels of population and economic deconcentration for decades. State spending aided the economies of Houston, Texas (shipbuilding and shipping), Tampa/St. Petersberg and Pensacola in Florida (defense spending, military bases, and training facilities), Las Vegas, Nevada (military bases, manufacturing), Los Alamos, New Mexico (atomic energy), and along the entire coast of California. Just as significantly, the federal government continues to provide these areas with large sums of money,

which represents a transfer of value from other regions of the country because it continues to support active bases for all military branches. If the successful development of the Los Angeles/Riverside/San Diego region, that is, Southern California, seems like a miracle to some, let me remind readers that this place is the location of major military bases with multi-billion dollar annual spending like Camp Pendleton (Marine Corps), Miramar Naval Air Station, the US Naval Air Station on Coronado, March Air Force Base, Norton Air Force Base, Twenty Nine Palms Marine Corps Base, the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, El Toro Marine Air Corps Base, along with many other smaller facilities and other federally supported agencies such as the Jet Propulsion Laboratory near Pasadena.

More familiar ways that the federal government has helped subsidize multi-centered regional growth as the new form of settlement space include the highly critical homeowner tax subsidy, which single-handedly created a mass market for family homes in suburbia, and the national system of defense highways, the Interstate Highway System, which opened up the hinterland of the United States to construction and development of all kinds. These and other spending programs and the transfer of value they represent helped provide the foundation for the settlement patterns we see today in the United States through the spending of billions of dollars. Although private sector business was certainly the means through which much of this spending translated into goods for society, even today we know that military spending is not capitalism but a particular form of state-supported development. The immense outlays of military spending are the means by which geopolitical and regional governmental influence meshes with the perceived needs of a world power guided by elected officials who are tied to special interests working for personal gain. Government spending is not just a branch of capital, as writers like Harvey persist in implying. It is a separate means by which both individuals and companies can become wealthy.

The role of real estate in the production of the multi-centered metropolitan region

Driving from Santa Monica pier on the westernmost boundary of the Southern California region directly east on Interstate 10, housing developments begin to peter out after Redlands because of the sudden rise in elevation as the crumpled land zone of the San Andreas and its lesser faults tilts the earth, making it dif-

ficult to build. That drive is a distance of over 70 miles. But it is absurd to imply, as does the LA School, that this sprawling region of an automobile-oriented settlement space is prototypical as Los Angeles. East Coast regions were there first. How convenient it is for LA hypsters to ignore reference to Jean Gottmann. He wrote his classic, *Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States*, back in 1961 when Los Angeles was mired in Oakie corruption and Zoot Suit riots. All the important ideas, lessons, and implications for future research were already evident in Gottmann's work when he looked at the East Coast from Philadelphia to Boston, a distance of hundreds of miles.

The LA School prefers to take the west-to-east gaze when it valorizes its work. Following the forgotten Gottmann, however, it is equally illuminating to view urbanization from Tijuana, Mexico, in the south all the up through San Diego and its military/education/tourism-based economy, continuing north across the Los Angeles/San Bernardino/Riverside region to the complex of oil/military/education/tourism/agriculture-based economic activities represented by Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. As mentioned above, that south-to-north vector is also Southern California. It is even a more illustrative model of multi-centered space than the west-to-east axis emanating out of Los Angeles.

Multi-centered growth depends on the continual creation of real estate deals, investment in land, political maneuverings to create or change zoning, the selling of single-family housing that eschews larger conceptions of community, bribes, graft, and greed, all of which were discussed in Mike Davis's important book on Los Angeles, *City of Quartz* (1990). But Davis was neither the first person to call this pattern of settlement space production to our attention, nor is the LA case particularly exemplary of this process. The issue raised by the discovery of the second circuit of capital as a central research concern is not which city or area is more illustrative of these shenanigans, but how this process works itself out in place after developing place across the country and from the earliest suburban developments (Gottdiener 1977; Jackson 1985) to the present (Fishman 1987). By attempting to validate the opposite emphasis, in order to valorize the work of a select group located in a particular place, the LA Schoolers miss the most significant research implication of contemporary real estate development patterns. Quite literally, the important theory of Henri Lefebvre and its refinement by subsequent writers on the ubiquitous use of real estate as a means to acquire profits, which is studied seriously by scholars from Singapore to Seattle,

from Hollywood to Helsinki, from New York to São Paulo, and from London to Moscow, seems to pass over the heads of these LA School avatars.

The role of space in the production of the multi-centered region

A decentered space, which is no longer structured by forces dominating from the center, is a region that is subjected to locational competition in all its aspects. Within the multi-centered region space is important because there is locational competition and no single place is inherently valorized. In the past people would automatically travel 'downtown' to the department stores of the central city in order to pursue retail shopping. Now people no longer view downtown as a magnet. They have their choice of immense retail shopping malls that are scattered around the expanding region and each of these constitutes a separate center, a destination that needs to attract people in order for it to remain economically viable. Competition across space, the dilemma of spatial distance between customer and retailer, is the very essence of profit-making within the multi-centered region. Even as malls have worked hard to succeed by becoming destinations, they now face the added competition from Internet sellers who have annihilated space completely. Shopping in the multi-centered region is about space – its transcendence, its valorization as a unique location, and, today, its eradication through electronic means.

Is LA the exemplar of this process? What could have possessed the LA Schoolers to make this claim? To be sure, Fredric Jameson (1984) encountered the 'hyperspace' of postmodernism at the Bonaventure Hotel in 'downtown' Los Angeles, and this inspired his classic article. But this visit was the result of meetings held by the Modern Language Association in that particular place. He could have encountered the same kind of experience had he checked into Portman's San Francisco Hyatt, which, in its own way, is even more illustrative of the hyperspatial sublime that turned Jameson on.

In Chicago, Montreal, Toronto, São Paulo, Minneapolis, and Kuala Lumpur, for example, a visitor can find the same kind of disorienting postmodernism produced by the built environment. The issue, again, is not what is so prototypical of Los Angeles in this regard, but what is so essential to contemporary economies that they have redefined space – the space of shopping, tourism, leisure, banking, and entertainment – so that the classic elements of modernism simply no longer exist or are even viewed as necessary by capital as a means of organizing and signifying social activities?

Multi-centeredness and multiculturalism

Both Dear and Soja emphasize the point that Los Angeles represents a new spatial and institutional array produced by immigrant groups who are different than those who have shaped other, especially older, cities. They ignore work elsewhere that demonstrates the same pattern existing in places like New York City and Chicago. Korean grocers, East Indian newspaper shops, and Arab-run convenience stores are increasingly the markers of inner-city business throughout the United States. Nomadology practice provides the empirical evidence to question the LA School premise through examples from abroad as well. I have been driven by Iraqi cab drivers in both Stockholm and Manhattan, served by Italian waiters in both London and São Paulo, and bought convenience store goods or pizza from businesses owned by East Indians, Jamaicans, Iranians, Koreans, Nigerians, and Russians in *entrepot* cities from Toronto to Helsinki.

Soja (2000) reaches to say something profound by selectively focusing on Los Angeles-based research regarding the political and cultural implications of the new immigration. His points are lost on readers who know about literature reporting research in other places. The issue of governance and multiculturalism has been treated by Green and Wilson (1992), Kasinitz (1992), and Sleeper (1990), among many others, for the case of New York. Miami is covered by Portes and Stepick (1993) and Abrahamson (1996); San Francisco by Loo (1991).

A number of studies have also highlighted the settlement of suburbia by new immigrants as a means of countering the conception that all new arrivals settle first in the inner city (Horton 1992; Fong 1994; Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999). Finally, the claim that inequality is no longer correlated to ethnicity by Soja (2000: 289) as being something new and exemplified by the Los Angeles case seems odd when other literature on the new immigration is examined and placed in a global context (see Appadurai 1996; Gottdiener, Hutchison 1999).

In short, as with other aspects of the claim to exemplariness and distinction made by the LA School hypsters, an informed reading of recent research highlights new processes relating multiculturalism to sociospatial effects within metropolitan areas, rather than the putative uniqueness of the Los Angeles experience alone.

The role of culture/symbols in the production of the built environment

Quite obviously, as an urban scholar I have taken the claims of the LA School personally. But I have many reasons for doing so. Perhaps the one most current is the way LA Schoolers write about a new, 'postmodern' city as exemplified by Los Angeles. Their city-centric discourse aside, can there be anything more exemplary of postmodernism in this regard than Las Vegas (Gottdiener *et al.* 1999)? Based as it is on the casino-gambling economy, Las Vegas is nothing if not the true exemplar of the particular cultural forces that LA Schoolers have in mind. As Venturi, Brown, and Izenour (1977) taught us many years ago, we learn from Las Vegas, not LA. Significantly, however, Las Vegas is a multi-centered region, not a city. Most of the people live and most of the action takes place outside the downtown city boundaries. The famous Las Vegas Strip, overwhelmingly the most popular destination for tourists, is not located within the city limits. It is in the multi-centered region known as Clark County. The Las Vegas lived space of housing development, encompassing almost 2 million permanent residents, spreads west to the mountains (Summerhill), south (Spring Valley), north (North Las Vegas), and east (Green Valley and Henderson). It is the fastest-growing area in the United States. The region is beset by multicultural waves of new immigrants. It receives from five to six thousand new residents a month, although a thousand or more also leave. It gets over 35 million tourists a year. And almost every job, every dollar earned, is based on casino gambling – an economic activity that produces no product and no value.

Is the attempt to valorize Los Angeles by the very 'postmodern' LA Schoolers just a desperate act in the face of new landscapes like Las Vegas, Nevada, and Orlando, Florida? Maybe not. But ignoring first-rate and finely grained case studies of these 'other' areas (Zukin 1991; Gottdiener *et al.* 1999) is no way to advance their argument.

Cultural signs are important to an understanding of multi-centered regions because the spatial competition, which is at its core, is dependent on symbols. This is especially true for retailing and consumerism. Consumption today is fueled by media images and effected by themed environments, which are the new consumer spaces of our society (Zukin 1995; Gottdiener 1997; Gottdiener 2000). Franchising structures the delivery of services (Ritzer 2000). Our environment is increasingly themed and McDonaldized. This fact is as evident anywhere in the United States as it is in Los Angeles. Is LA particularly exemplary

of this trend? Hardly. By focusing instead on the process, as I have repeatedly suggested, we discover that it is theming and franchising which provide a crucial dimension to the organization of the new form of settlement space. Ironically, it is this same theming and franchising that also annihilates the uniqueness of place. The same firms – selling hamburgers, ethnic foods, clothing, furniture, jewelry, loans, cars, and cold cream – can be found in large malls or along commercially zoned strips everywhere in the country. One place, any place, has begun to look just like any other place in the nation. As Ritzer (2000) points out, this process of McDonaldization has recently been extended to the delivery of social services like healthcare and education. Presciently observed by Edward Relph almost thirty years ago (1976), we struggle in the new multi-centered environment to orient ourselves between Place and Placelessness, among the built structures that are the same everywhere, like McDonald's fast-food outlets or the scary familiarity of mall shops, and those elements within our daily purview that are not only signifiers of locality and uniqueness but to which we have grown attached as a marker of our own existence in space. Los Angeles is neither the earliest version of this existential struggle – 'there is no there, there' was how Gertrude Stein described Oakland – nor particularly exemplary of its many dimensions.

Beyond LA hype

The Chicago School's urban theory has been dead since the 1930s. An 'LA School' exists in the mind of only a few geographers. But the 'new urban' approach has been around for over two decades and counts political scientists, sociologists, geographers, and others among its adherents. Despite the ongoing research, the urban field remains weak and the LA School approach is a strong indicator, because it is so confused about its real object of analysis. Some of these problems about identifying empirical and theoretical objects of analysis for a uniquely 'urban' science were already discussed in a penetrating and insightful way in the early work of Manuel Castells (1977; see also Pickvance 1976). Yet we still lack a consensually understood real object of analysis that can ground contemporary work. Much research by urbanists today persists in being bound up by the 'city' as the object of analysis. While 'region' is a useful counter-term, broadening the city-based approach in the right conceptual direction, it is much too amorphous. I believe my term, the multi-centered metropolitan region, is

both specific enough and conceptually accurate enough to qualify as the new object of analysis that urban science now needs.

Of course, it is always possible to continue to talk about 'the city', and, indeed, with its new, more specialized functional array, bounded areas like the City of London, Manhattan, The Loop of Chicago, the Market Street section of San Francisco, downtown Minneapolis, and Burbank, Hollywood, West Los Angeles, and the 'downtown' section of Los Angeles within the LA region, are all important in their own right as places to observe urban processes. However, the argument above pleads for a view that places structurational processes first. No actually existing city is the exemplar of the new social forces remaking settlement space because, as the most basic understanding of such theoretical arguments claims, an object cannot be both actually existing and an ideal type. Even to pose this question, as the LA School has done, reveals a basic, fundamental ignorance of the real issues facing urban analysis today. Significantly more critical is the advancement by urbanists everywhere of our understanding of the processes that have worked and reworked settlement space by increasing its scale, fragmenting its communities and nodal points of interaction; by decentralizing its businesses and then recentralizing them in new, functionally specialized nodes; by perfecting a cultural array of themes that organizes business through franchising, centralized malls and decentralized strip zones; by fragmenting populations according to class, race, ethnicity, and even age; by producing uneven development and reproducing social inequalities across the generations; and, finally, by making it increasingly difficult for society to deal adequately with problems related to environmental quality, equality, governance, the quality of community life, the issue of social mobility, public transportation, and civic culture. In the forthcoming productions of urbanists everywhere, I look forward to substantial contributions to this research agenda.

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Linna-analüüs kui kaubastamine: "LA koolkond" ja suurlinnade arengu mõistmine

Kokkuvõte

Artikkel keskendub linnauurimise põhimõtete eritlemisele ning nendega polemiseerimisele. Los Angelese koolkonna näitel seatakse kahtluse alla meetodid, mis ühe linna analüüsi põhjal tuletavad üldisi seaduspärasid. Linnauurimisel ei saa kõrvale jätta uuritava regiooni ajaloolist tausta, samuti tuleb peale geograafiliste faktorite arvesse võtta ka sotsiaalseid ja majandusprotsesse ning linnade arengu suunamist poliitiliste otsuste kaudu, nagu ka kohtade vahelise ruumilise ja sümboolse konkurentsi olemasolu.

Teise maailmasõja järgsetest aastatest alates võib Ameerikas täheldada rahvastiku dekontsentreerumist. Tänapäeval ei saa enam rääkida teravast vastandusest kesk- ja äärelinnade vahel. Tööstusühiskonna arenemisel postindustriaalseks ühiskonnaks kaotab ajalooline kesklinn paljud oma rollid; metropolide ahelas kerkivad esile uued erifunktsioonilised minikeskused. Kõigi keskuste funktsionaalne eraldumine ning kasvav spetsialiseerumine loovad erilist tüüpi multitsentraalsuse. Seda uut ruumivormi nimetab autor "mitmekeskmeliseks metropolialaks" (*multi-centered metropolitan region*). Paljude iseloomulike joonte hulgast on oluline, et seal on palju pisikeskusi, mis toimivad ühiskondliku läbikäimise areenidena; linnal puudub üks selge tsentrum, mis ajalooliselt toetas "linlikku elustiili".

Mitmekeskmelisus toob kaasa multikultuursuse kasvu, mis on ülemaailmse levikuga fenomen. Üleilmastumise kaasnähtusena toimub linnakeskkonna "McDonaldiseerumine", mis annihileerib kohtade ainulaadsuse. Muutuvate omadustega linnakeskkonna mõtestamiseks ei piisa enam kesk- ja äärelinna mõistetest; kaasaegset linna tuleks vaadelda kui killustunud kogukondade võrgustikku.