

Los Angeles and the Problem of Urban Historical Knowledge
A Multimedia Essay to Accompany the December Issue of The American Historical Review,
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Philip J. Ethington
University of Southern California, Department of History

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Study/segment of "Along Central," Robbert Flick (c) 2000.

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This is a compilation of the principal essay texts situated in the electronic publication called “Los Angeles and the Problem of Urban Historical Knowledge” (e-AHR, historycooperative.org December 2000). As such, readers are advised that the contextual relationships between the essay texts, and within a multimedia web site, have been lost. The following is a list of these “stand-alone” textual essays (called “elements” here for lack of a better term), in the order presented in this distribution file:

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Preface (Element 1)

This web site--composed of images (still, panoramic, moving, and sequential), maps, short essays (epistemological, bibliographic, methodological, and conceptual)--is written as a totality; the verbal text and other media are meant to be encountered as a whole. It is "panoramic" in both a figurative and literal sense.¹ It attempts a broad "survey" of a vast metropolis, attempts also to provide deep knowledge about particular places, but frankly confronts all such attempts as exemplary of the intractable epistemological problems urban historians must encounter.²

The "Essay" explores the hypothesis that the key concept in the search for historical certainty should be "mapping" in a literal, not a metaphoric, sense. Readers can follow this essay as they would a traditional printed article, using menu bars and annotation to jump into the other media of the site. Readers can also encounter the concepts in that essay piecemeal, through links to its subsections in the "Concepts" page. But readers can also disregard the Essay altogether, because it is not essential to the site--only one of its elements.

The best analogy to "reading" this site is that of a newspaper: the reader's eye wanders between articles and images, relatively free from linear narrative. Readers should feel free to skip around from any starting-point, using the omnipresent menu buttons on the top and left-hand side of each page. The most basic purpose of the site is to give readers an opportunity to explore Los Angeles in both overview and richness of detail, within the theme of the ultimate unknowability of any metropolis. How do we make sense of something so vast and historically mutable as a metropolis? Given the frequent claims that Rome, or Los Angeles, or São Paulo, or Paris, or New York, or Hong Kong represent(ed) important global trends, or that they stand/stood out as unique, how can we begin to sort-out the certain and comparable knowledge assumed by these claims?

This web site is also an experiment in pursuing some empirical and interpretive strategies, in the hopes that we will soon move to a more productive stage of comparative urban historical scholarship. The unifying goal of this site is to exemplify the profound difficulties of performing urban history, given the daunting obstacles of scale, complexity, historical erasure,

¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn, 1989) documents a rich figurative usage of this term almost immediately after the visual spectacle called a "panorama" was first introduced in London in the 1780s: "b. fig. A complete and comprehensive survey or presentation of a subject. 1801 (title) *The Political Panorama*. 1806 MRS. STERNDALE (title) *The Panorama of Youth*. 1812 J. SMITH (title) *The Panorama of Science and Art*. 1813 M. EDGEWORTH Patron. (1833) II. xxvii. 137 In his rapid panorama of foreign countries, he showed variety of knowledge. 1860 PUSEY Min. Proph. 425 Habakkuk, in one vast panorama,...exhibits the future in pictures of the past."

² The "survey" tradition in urban scholarship began with Charles Booth, et al. *Life and Labour of the People in London* (London, 1902) and Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, et al. *Hull-House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing out of the Social Conditions*. (New York, 1895). These texts clearly mark the origins of social-scientific urban scholarship. For the intellectual history of social surveys and their long-term impact, see, Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds., *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1990).

and postmodern skepticism--much of which has taken the urban condition as its touchstone. Without reading anything but this preface, readers should understand the following theme in all of the "locations" throughout the site: *historical evidence in and about cities is inherently unstable, oscillating between the certainty that inheres in its mappability--its location--and the way specific evidence always raises consciousness of alternatives that were not identified or mapped.*

The author believes that historians have a major responsibility in the contemporary crisis of knowledge, to probe the claims made not only about specific cities, but also about the possibility of certain knowledge. "It is scarcely possible to give a coherent historical account of an incoherent presence," E.P. Thompson wrote in another context, "but some attempt must be made."³

ESSAY (Element 2)

“Los Angeles and the Problem of Urban Historical Knowledge”

"The enigma of history lies in what it means to be historical."
Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* (1924).

"If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty."
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (1949-1951).

This essay invites readers to explore "Los Angeles" and the knowledge claims made by historians of the urban condition. Recent claims that Los Angeles is a quintessential site of postmodernity raise fundamental epistemological questions--many of which rapidly turn into ontological ones. How can entities so vast as great metropolises be grasped, let alone compared, when it is not even clear what empirical elements (architecture, class, crime, culture, demography, economics, gender, political institutions, sexuality, street life) are preeminent? What exactly is and/or was Los Angeles? How can we know, and what might constitute certainty or at least usable knowledge? How do photography, cartography, textual documents, and quantitative data ("statistics") give us access to historical urban space and time? Influential writers on postmodernity such as Fredric Jameson have named specific sites within Los Angeles as evidence of a new condition, in which history itself is effaced by the "depthlessness" that characterizes a core condition of the "world space of multinational capital"--the ultimate source of ongoing exploitation and alienation. Recent scholarship has singled out Los Angeles as either

³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966), 452. Thompson is referring to the "presence" of English working class.

unique among cities or especially representative of new conditions of urban life and globalism.⁴ But the concerns engaged by this essay go far beyond the relevance of Los Angeles. From Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin and since, cities have been posed as the signature locations of modern indeterminacy. As Marshall Berman writes about New York City, "The city has become not merely a theatre but itself a production, a multimedia presentation whose audience is the whole world." The stakes of these claims are extremely high, because they are used by many to deny the very possibility of historical knowledge in general. Los Angeles has become metonymic for the entire course of human history.⁵ How do we assess these claims?

I am motivated simultaneously by two ongoing debates: one among historians about "objective knowledge" and another among urbanists about the depthless postmodern condition. The first was sparked largely by the publication of Peter Novick's 1988 *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, which portrayed historians as fated to epistemological impotence, caught between an untenable goal of "objectivity" and an inescapable "relativism." The second debate, that among urbanists, portrays the late twentieth (and twenty-first) century urban condition as a simulacrum, within which scholars and all subjects are trapped in a global hyperspace, far beyond the crisis of representation. I attempt here to use an archetype of "hyperspace"--a web site--to link the discourse on Los Angeles with that on historical certainty.⁶

⁴ The seed of this discourse was Fredric Jameson's essay "Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 59-92. His essay provoked Mike Davis's reply, "Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism," *New Left Review* 151 (May-June 1985): 106-13, and then a nearly simultaneous batch of major books, all following Jameson's hypothesis that Los Angeles is to be treated as the exemplar of late capitalism: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1989); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London, 1990). Jameson refined and expanded his argument in *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C., 1991). It is very important, however, to note that Jameson, Davis, and Harvey all worked out their accounts as frank variations on Karl Marx. These are materialist works in significant ways (even if "culture" is the material), and all presuppose the possibility of certain knowledge about the postmodern condition, and about Los Angeles, even though Jameson and Harvey are very concerned about our slipping grasp on that knowledge. The more thoroughgoing postmodern concern with Los Angeles rejects any "metanarrative" (e.g. Marxism) and seeks to achieve a total skepticism. For this view, see Michael Dear, "The Premature Demise of Postmodern Urbanism," *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (November 1991): 538-52.

⁵ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1988), 288. The strongest recent claims against the possibility of certain knowledge have not come from those directly concerned with Los Angeles, although Jacques Derrida is quoted by Michael Dear as a sort of endorsement: "The state of theory, now and from now on, isn't it California? And even Southern California?" The signal work is Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis, 1984). Those who are enthusiastic about making Los Angeles the exemplar of postmodern skepticism have primarily come from the field of geography. Edward W. Soja's most recent work (despite his attempt to rely on Henri Lefebvre) and that of Michael Dear (despite his attempt to rely on Fredric Jameson) are good examples. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford, 1996); Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford, 2000), Derrida quotation, p. 10.

⁶ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York, 1988); James T. Kloppenberg, "Objectivity and Historicism: A Century of American Historical Writing," *American Historical Review* 94 (October 1989): 1011-30.

This multimedia hyper-essay is an experiment, then, created to challenge historians' and other writers' use of "Los Angeles" as an exemplar of any condition, and specifically to probe Jameson's call for an "as yet unimaginable new mode of representing [the world space of multinational capital], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain the capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion."⁷ I, the author, serve as your *valet de place*, a specially commissioned guide through an infinite tangle of urban space and time. What becomes immediately apparent is the extreme selectivity imposed by such an exercise. I present artifacts from "locations," which include "empirical paths" through the metropolis and many street corner sites. These locations are vast in their own right, and yet remain only tiny fragments of the metropolis. Alternatively, I offer synoptic views of the entire metropolis or large regions of it. These, while seemingly comprehensive, are extremely limited in other ways: shallow might be the best adjective. In this essay, I explore basic issues involved in assembling knowledge about cities, and put at your disposal a large collection of representations, which you are free to either explore or not in connection with this essay about the epistemology and ontology of the historical metropolis.

I shall argue in this essay that "mapping" is indeed the key to "certain" knowledge (in a space-time phenomenological sense, to be explained further). Mapping is not only a powerful metaphor for the historical knowledge project but a concrete tool for affirming the presence of the historical in the condition of the present, for mediating between the infinitely local and the infinitely global, and for building knowledge communities. It should be possible, in short, to meet Jameson's demand for a new form of representation, if beforehand we interrogate and elucidate the fundamental issues at stake.

Mapping the Certainty of Historical Artifacts

All history is the study of artifacts that exist only in the present. We historians claim for them a status as genuine "sources" of historical knowledge. Consider the detailed scale model called *Model of the City of Los Angeles* that was created by the Works Progress Administration and the Los Angeles City Planning Department in 1939-1940. Only one portion of this once very large model survives, that portraying the central portion of downtown, including the old Bunker Hill. It is held behind glass in the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum (sharing space with 300 million-year-old fossilized life and 3 million desiccated insects). This model was meticulously constructed at a 1:120 scale to facilitate "urban renewal," and was instrumental, ironically enough, in planning the massive destruction of the historic Bunker Hill neighborhood in the 1960s. It is invaluable today for reconstructing the history of that and other neighborhoods, a relatively comprehensive representation of a built Los Angeles world "that is no longer." Artifacts, be they manuscripts or models or photographs or newspapers, give us access to history, but how? There is a spatiality to historical research itself that seems to go unnoticed. The

⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 54.

historian goes to the archive to observe, or read, or copy the artifacts, and comes away with notes and copies and claims as to the being of the historical city.

The "scale" (i.e., 1:120) is an algorithm for converting the representation, or model, back into an imagined reality. It could stand for the entire enterprise of interpreting or inferring from historical sources. We create narratives, and these are suspended in language, but this fundamental insight of the linguistic turn does not in itself preclude certainty. It does make obsolete the "Cartesian anxiety" that has put Western philosophy on such a bad track, as Richard J. Bernstein and Richard Rorty have made so plain. The account of photographic urban knowledge given here is meant to stand for other modes of inquiry as well. While there certainly are genre distinctions between oral histories, written documents, quantitative data, maps, and photographs, each is subject to the same "Cartesian anxiety" that the knowing subject may not be adequately representing the reality of the urban condition, or that (as in Kant), the knowing subject is simply debarred from knowing the *thing-in-itself* of that reality.⁸

Los Angeles is fatefully divided along the boundary of the Los Angeles River: to the east is the great Latino metropolis, historically anterior to the great Anglo metropolis to the west or the vast and varied Asian metropolis dispersed throughout both sides of this divide. Situational or perspectival explanations of knowledge would have it that these multiple, overlaid metropolises have their own, community-specific notions of certainty. In the heart of East Los Angeles, in a *colonia* or neighborhood called "Maravilla," stands a tiny tavern now called "The New Silver Dollar." In that place on August 29, 1970, a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy *assassinated* (allegedly, according to common sense) or *accidentally killed* (formally, according to the trials that ensued) the Mexican-American journalist and leading voice of Chicano L.A. by firing a tear-gas canister through his head. Certainty about Ruben Salazar's death during a mass demonstration (the Chicano Anti-War Moratorium) holds great importance for a divided metropolis that has never come to terms with its ghastly history of collective and repressive racial violence. It is rare to encounter a Spanish-speaking Angeleno who does not know about the killing of Salazar; it is equally rare to meet a non-Spanish-speaking Angeleno who has ever heard of Salazar (even though the Spanish-language television station he founded, KMEX, has the largest viewership in the metropolis). Is it conceivable that some form of knowledge can bridge this public, social, cultural, and political chasm?⁹

It is one thing to suggest that a faithful recognition of the linguistic turn does not preclude certainty, but quite another to show how certainty could be obtained. I will now attempt to do so

⁸ I am following the work of the neo-pragmatists here, ably defended in the context of the debate about historical knowledge by James Kloppenberg in several essays, but see especially his "Objectivity and Historicism," and "Deconstruction and Hermeneutics as Strategies for Intellectual History: The Recent Work of Dominick LaCapra and David Hollinger," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 9 (1987): 3-22; Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, 1983); Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J., 1979).

⁹ Edward J. Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971," *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993); Mario T. Garcia, ed., *Ruben Salazar: Border Correspondent; Selected Writings 1955-1970* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995).

through a kind of historical materialism--really a phenomenology of artifacts. Of course, there is insufficient space to make a full case, so I shall explore one particularly important kind of artifact for historical knowledge: the photograph.

Photography as Time Machine

"The true method of making things present," writes Walter Benjamin, "is to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space). We don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life."¹⁰ We would do well to follow Benjamin's reflections on photography and history when pursuing the certainty possible in either, because he developed a compelling case, as Eduardo Cadava has shown, that history is essentially photographic, in the sense that our historical knowledge is a series of fleeting snapshots. In a much-quoted passage from his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin writes: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."¹¹ Crucial also to Benjamin is the necessary disjuncture between the photograph and its referent. By supporting a myth of realism, photography began modernity's erasure of a critical, reflective attitude. Benjamin, one of the first in a long line of twentieth-century critics who saw in aesthetic realism a dangerous prop for fascist domination via the image, proposed an epistemology of the "true," which was, nevertheless, not a "correspondence" theory of the image with reality. It was, in Cadava's summary, a "politics whose infinitely mediated relations prevent it from organizing itself around a particular form of instrumentality."¹²

Benjamin may be said to have opened the debate about the position of the photograph in history and as history. I wish now to contrast two distinctive positions within this long discourse. The prevailing view normalizes the photograph by contextualizing it as a mere species of text within a wide network of power and institutions that make each photograph perform specific functions. Photographs in this view have no special access to reality in general, let alone the past. John Tagg is the most forceful exponent of this view, formed in part in a critique of Roland Barthes's remarkable argument in *Camera Lucida*. There, Barthes seems to have committed a heresy within the radical skepticism of postmodern discourse, by asserting, "From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation." Photography, he claims, gives unmediated access to reality. Barthes recalls a photograph he had clipped as a child, of a slave market: "for my horror and my fascination as a child came from this: that there was a certainty that such a thing had existed: not a question of exactitude, but of reality. The historian was no longer the mediator, slavery was given without mediation, the fact was established *without method*." To this apparent naiveté Tagg responds first

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eliand and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 206.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Harry Zohn, trans., Hannah Arendt, ed. (New York, 1968), 255.

¹² Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, N.J., 1997), 47.

with an *ad hominem* dismissal--that Barthes's position was motivated by his grief and longing for his departed mother (much of the essay is devoted to what Barthes calls the "Winter Garden Photograph," of his mother at age five, in 1898)--and then by his characteristic Marxian institutionalism. Always in Tagg's work, the photograph is suspended in institutions of power. Photographs are "evidence" only because the police in the bourgeois regimes of France and the United States forced it to perform this social task.¹³

Tagg's critique is remarkably unpoetic. While Tagg the skeptic is clearly the more objective and even scientific analyst of the photograph, Barthes and Benjamin seize instead upon the mystery of the photograph's relation to death as the enduring element that gives it such power of *truth*:

In 1865, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *this will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."¹⁴

Let us compare the images of Broadway and Seventh Street, Los Angeles, 1905-2000, with a different pair of images, at Broadway and Temple, 1868-2000. Using Barthes's terminology, the *studium* of both the 1868 and the 1905 images resides in the recognizable traces of a world that is no more. But the traces are far more faint in the 1868 image, because fewer indexical features remain in the depicted landscape. It is possible that not a single building visible in the 1868 image remains standing. But landforms may be used to establish referents (how verifiable these are is the important question). Bunker Hill is quite visible in the south-by-southwest extreme (right-hand edge) of the 1868 panorama. The old Anglo courthouse is easy enough to verify through cross-referencing with official plans and other photographs. Indeed, although the 1905 image is far more easily verified as the same location than its 2000 analogue, even that shows few traces of the life world apprehended in 1905. All this destroyed? Not a soul left living? And yet there it is. Two truths stare us in the face: the *studium* of the indexical traces and the *punctum* of a living world, those *moving* (blurred) figures who shriek at us from the grave: "We are alive!" (and we are going to die).

¹³ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, Mass., 1988), the critique of Barthes is on 1-2; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York, 1981), 89, 80.

¹⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

Now let us consider these archival photographs as truthful in a different manner. Kendall Walton makes a compelling and surprisingly blunt case about the "transparency" of photographs: "Mirrors enable us to see around corners. Telescopes and microscopes make distant and small objects visible. With the help of photography we can see into the past as well."¹⁵

Can we really "see" into the past in this way, as though peering into a telescope? H. G. Wells imagined such a space-time instrument in his 1897 short story "The Crystal Egg." A crystal egg is discovered in a London second-hand store, through which a viewer may observe a living but fantastic Martian landscape. As the story unfolds, we become aware that the crystal ball was planted on Earth by the Martians as a portal through which to observe us. Their corresponding two-way communication unit is held high upon poles in an urban Martian public plaza: the flying Martians periodically approach these spheres, peering, as it were, into our world. Walton's argument holds that photographs are portals allowing at least one-way vision to the historical world. "We must resist the tendency to water down this claim, to take it as a colorful or exaggerated way of saying that in viewing a photograph one has the impression of seeing the thing photographed, or that the photograph one sees is some sort of substitute or surrogate for the object. Watering it down in either of these ways endangers both its interest and its truth. We really do, literally, see our deceased ancestors when we see photographs of them."¹⁶ In our current discourse, so saturated by the concept of "social construction," it is remarkable to read such an outlandish claim, but it is important to take it seriously at least as a hypothesis, so that we can begin to develop criteria for distinguishing between the genres of "fact" (the term I prefer is certain knowledge) and "fiction." No doubt photographs can be manipulated to represent history that did not occur, fabricated from whole cloth to represent sheer fantasy, or produced for abstract aesthetic purposes, like the photograms of László Moholy-Nagy.

Accordingly, any account that takes seriously Walton's or Barthes's claim that photographs give us direct access to "the past" must also explain how to sort the spurious and the mendacious from the certain.

Uncertainty and Certainty as Urban Conditions

Jeannene M. Przyblyski offers a remarkable reconsideration of Eugène Appert's notorious staged and superimposed photographic documents of the 1871 Paris Commune. She admits their fictive and reactionary political origin but nevertheless locates them in a structure of modern practice of consumerist pastiche: the circulation of images for the urban spectacle of "*acutalité*" that might be said to inhabit the same discursive framework as such urban consumerist mechanisms as the *grands boulevards*, the new department stores, and the wealth of novelty attractions mapped

¹⁵ Kendall L. Walton, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism," *Nous* 18 (1984): 66. Walton's work is part of a larger philosophical debate about form and experience of pictorial representation. See also Robert Hopkins, "Explaining Depiction," *The Philosophical Review* 104 (July 1995): 425-55; Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 2d edn. (London, 1976); Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2d edn. (London, 1980).

¹⁶ H. G. Wells, "The Crystal Egg" [1897], rpt. in H. G. Wells, *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories*, Michael Sherborne, ed. (New York, 1996); Walton, "Transparent Pictures," 67.

across modern Paris, a framework within which distinctions between the real and the commodified were blurred according to the logic of commercial enticement." Przyblyski meticulously deconstructs Appert's constructions, by a contextual mapping of their elements within a dense network of documentary evidence of and about the Paris Commune. Her performance demonstrates that every photograph, and by extension every other species of artifact, can in principle be verified, not by the Cartesian method of correspondence between "representation" and "reality" but by the new historicist method of mapping its relations to the network of texts of which it forms a part.¹⁷

This is why my blatant manipulation of single still frames, both from the historical archive and from my own camera, to create that quintessential nineteenth-century spectacle, the "panorama," is not at all fictive. Ironically, I have used 1990s manipulative technology to achieve what the photographer was unable to do: render through stretching, skewing, and blending images that he or she could only stand edge-to-edge for the 1868 or 1905 spectators to observe. The result is a form of "virtual reality," enticing the viewer to experience the sense of place one might have had at the corner of Broadway and Temple atop the roof of the Lankershim Hotel on that day in December 1905. Taking further steps to "animate" the image, through a viewer, we imagine ourselves peering through Walton's timescope into the past. Indeed, the very mimetic essence of this kind of fiction is what gives us the ability to map its reality.

We historians must always ask, "How would we know?" How could it be imagined that photographs provide knowledge of the past? How can they become part of our world of knowledge? Los Angeles, as global capital of the "culture industry," must provide the acid test for any phenomenology of certain knowledge. Director Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* has become emblematic of the depthless condition of postmodernity, set of course in a future Los Angeles, in which the "age of mechanical reproduction" has reached an extreme stage. Human beings themselves can be robotic "replicants" or natural bodies, and no one can really tell the difference.¹⁸ The replicants themselves verify their own "real" status via photographs of their childhood, and memories of this childhood have been programmed into the replicants' minds. Are we in such a condition? Do we fetishize the photograph because so much else--especially verbal text--has become so dubious? Is it impossible, in principle, to distinguish the truthful history from the fictive in the photographs? Certainly, Hollywood's location in Los Angeles raises the stakes in answering this riddle of reality's merger with the fantasy world of "consuming images" (to borrow Stuart Ewen's phrase). Critical scenes in *Blade Runner* take place in the Bradbury Building (304 S. Broadway: George H. Wyman, 1893), a recurrent site of futuricity and pastness. Wyman was inspired by Edward Bellamy's 1888 book *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, to achieve a futuristic, utopian space, and yet the sense of this place was reconstituted by *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941 as a dystopian setting of the 1930s film noir

¹⁷ Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "Moving Pictures: Photography, Narrative, and the Paris Commune of 1871," in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), 269. For obvious reasons, practitioners of the "new historicism" have been notoriously reluctant to set out an explicit program, but see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago, 2000).

¹⁸ This interpretation is vividly proposed by David Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 308-23.

aesthetic. That aesthetic contributed to the underworld representation of Bunker Hill that was essential to the ideology of the 1950s planners who destroyed it. *Blade Runner* is an homage to film noir, and yet the edifice has been lovingly restored by a 1990s real estate magnate, Ira Yellin, in a supremely naive preservationist manner. The work of these preservationists (such as the Los Angeles Conservancy) to save from erasure the eroding fabric of the old downtown of Los Angeles, once centered at Broadway and Seventh, is powerfully supported by the Hollywood movie industry, which thrives on the "period" settings of this region to produce fictitious New York Cities, Chicago, and Los Angeles itself in many eras.

"Hollywood" (another metonymic "Los Angeles") has manufactured for the human race a massive collection of what Vanessa Schwartz calls "spectacular realities." Schwartz and her colleagues have traced the genealogy of cinema as clearly descended from dioramas and wax museums--genres that re-anchored sensations of "reality" for urbanites increasingly unmoored from networks of certainty.¹⁹ It is not difficult to read further back, relying on histories of popular visual culture to show that photography descended from centuries of urban depictions created with the intent of transmitting certainty. The Italian painter Canaletto's (1697-1768) well-known use of the *camera ottica* to produce his precise views of Venice exemplify only the high end of a market that also drew millions into crowded tents to view dioramas of infamous battles, fires, and other spectacles.

But the photograph, while clearly a direct descendant of the *camera obscura* and the diorama and panorama, is also unlike those media in a very specific sense. The difference does not lie, as many have thought, in the photographic instrument's independence from human intervention (each photograph is always intended, and the camera is only human equipment). Rather, it lies in this instrument's capabilities to see around the corner of time, and to explode space into infinitely new dimensions.

Benjamin memorably unpacked the power of photography to achieve new feats of "seeing," in a manner perfectly consistent with Walton's claim about photography's transparency:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye--if

¹⁹ Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998); Charney and Schwartz, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*.

only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."²⁰

Consider now the photography of Robbert Flick, with whom I have collaborated in a documentation of South Central Los Angeles. Flick's finished multi-frame artworks are poised between the unique vision of a vehicular *flâneur* and an accessible, cognitive map of the long streets of Los Angeles. His method is to use a Hi-8 video camera, mounted at a fixed 90-degree angle to the direction of travel and shooting to the left (driver's side) at the eye-level of the driver. He then captures still frames from the immense number generated by the 30-frames-per-second speed of the videotape, and selects from these a limited number he wishes to use in composing a very large rectangle. The method is structuralist in the manner of twelve-tone modernism. His rule is to assemble the images in a linear succession from the upper left to the lower right, overlapping each frame with its adjacent frames, in order to give the viewer a verifiable reference. The result allows a guided tour of the *studium* of a recognizable grid, or alternatively, a free exploration of the *punctums* to be experienced across vast trajectories across the metropolis. "Along Central," the artwork produced from our collaboration, makes it possible to "see," in simultaneity, 20 kilometers of Los Angeles, through neighborhoods that are recognizable, if only by name and association with negative news, around the world. Just as Benjamin predicted, Flick explodes the reality of these supposed totalities of "South Central," or "Watts," allowing us to explore occupied space in its quotidian details. By "reading" the work out of order, the possibility of cognitive mapping becomes apparent. The fragmented life worlds of the metropolis are "seen" together, as social relations within the visual fabric.

The artistic practice of Robbert Flick may at first seem "depthless" in the sense that a) it is shot from a moving vehicle and does not attempt to gain intersubjective knowledge from the residents or various neighborhoods; and b) it is just a series of pictures, lacking contextual data (texts, quantitative, testimonies). But such is the division of labor in society that no one artist or investigator can supply the whole we seek. The critical point is that Flick's sequential frames are a kind of map that can be indexed with any manner of other empirical data. As we travel along the empirical path we have provided here, from the northern terminus of Central Ave at 1st Street to our stopping point at El Segundo, we travel through an immense variety of lived "places," spaces invested with place-ness by a myriad of "communities" (in the sense of communicating social networks).

Many urban scholars have been influenced by Kevin Lynch's method of cognitive mapping. In his landmark *Image of the City*, Lynch asked urbanites to self-represent their surroundings, to describe their own sense of place.²¹ Fetishizing this method, however, leads to another form of the "Cartesian anxiety." If we accept that only such forms of knowledge are authentic, then a generalized urban historical knowledge becomes impossible. The sense of place experienced by the blurred pedestrians in the 1905 Broadway and Seventh panorama is utterly

²⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 236-37.

²¹ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); for an excellent overview and sampling of Lynch's work, see Tridib Banerjee and Michael Southworth, eds., *City Sense and City Design: The Writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

inaccessible to us. But so too is the existential perspective of every living contemporary. The Spanish proverb has it that "Cada cabeza es un mundo" (loosely: Everyone's head makes a different world).

To establish that in principle we can "see" the circa 1940 Harlem of the West Coast along Central Ave. between 21st Street and Vernon, I have superimposed the display ads from a 1940 Central Avenue Business Directory onto the building, circa 1999, in which those addresses corresponded, in "2150 South Central Avenue, 1940 and 1999." These "catastrophic spectacles," in Barthes's terms, establish a map to the historical formation of a neighborhood, even though most of the physical traces of the remarkable cultural production by African-American artists, intellectuals, and professionals along Central have been destroyed (massively in the two riots of 1965 and 1992) or renamed by the current Latino occupants. Nevertheless, these historic neighborhoods can be attached to Flick's (or others') maps. Indexed together, the result is depth. I call this method "reflexive indexing," because each image may index, or map, another, by reflecting space-time coordinates identifiable in the other. The method is also "reflexive" in the cognitive sense of self-consciousness. Certain knowledge cannot arise from artifacts without the self-aware hermeneutics pioneered by historicist Willhem Dilthey (see below).

History as a Landscape of Presence

Few historians reflect on the nature of time itself.²² Rather, they emphasize the craft of writing about history, as though the existence of "the past" can be assumed as a given. Still fewer urban historians have written on this subject. In what manner the past as such exists is a matter of paramount importance if one seeks to illuminate the conditions for urban historical knowledge. I take as my guides the hermeneutics and historicism of Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger. Dilthey's critique of knowledge in the human sciences grew from a theorizing of time as an eternal present: The present is the filling of a moment of time with reality; it is experience, in contrast to memory or ideas of the future occurring in wishes, expectations, hopes, fears and strivings. The present is always there and nothing exists except what emerges in it. The ship of our life is, as it were, carried forward on a constantly moving stream, and the present is always wherever we are on these waves--suffering, remembering or hoping, in short, living in the fullness of our reality.²³ The critical phrase is Dilthey's claim that "nothing exists except what emerges" in the present. Inquiry about the temporality of a city is distinguished from most other historiographic inquiry by a heightened importance of spatiality. We are necessarily answering spatial questions when we form historical urban knowledge--even though the weight of *modern* discourse works to obfuscate space through an obsessive temporalizing of experience.²⁴ This

²² A very important exception is J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago, 1971). Also instructive is David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, rev. and enl. edn. (Cambridge, Mass., 2000).

²³ Quoted in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York, 1988), 149-50.

²⁴ Tracing and interrogating the erasure of space from the discourse of the Western human sciences is the enduring achievement of Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*.

insight leads us to recognize the need to develop clear (transparent) linkages between space and time. It must be clear that I am *not* writing metaphorically, then, when I say that the "terrain" on which the history of a city can be apprehended is a vast *landscape of the present*, strewn with artifacts accumulated from countless "past" moments of human labor.

Heidegger's explication of the empirical status of these artifacts is highly useful, but it only makes sense within his account of being itself, which places the "past" in the "future" in the sense that the present is not simply filled with *experience*, as in Dilthey, but *intended* as in Edmund Husserl. "The possibility of access to history is grounded in the possibility according to which any specific present understands how to be futural. This is the first principle of all hermeneutics." When interpreting what we understand as the past, we are "running ahead," as Heidegger puts it, or being futural. Being for Heidegger is always *located*, a condition he calls *Dasein* ("being-there"). "Dasein as human life is primarily being possible, the Being of the possibility of its certain yet indeterminate past."²⁵ With this intentional phenomenology in mind, let us follow Heidegger's interpretation of historical artifacts at some length:

The "antiquities" preserved in museums (household gear, for example) belong to a "time which is past"; yet they are still present-at-hand in the "Present." How far is such equipment historical, and when it is not yet past? Is it historical, let us say, only because it has become an object of historiographical interest, of antiquarian study or national lore? But such equipment can be a historiographical object only because it is in itself somehow historical. We repeat the question: by what right do we call this entity "historical," when it is not yet past? Or do these "Things" have "in themselves" "something past," even though they are still present at hand today? Then are these, which are present-at-hand, still what they were? Manifestly these "Things" have altered. The gear has become fragile or worm-eaten "in the course of time."

Heidegger turns here to focus on the *use* of the artifacts, or household "equipment" in his example and distinguishes between two conditions. The "present-at-hand" is merely present, but not an object of familiarity, and not an expected element of the world we inhabit. The "ready-to-hand" is a part of our everydayness, the pen or automobile that we use and expect unself-consciously to be part of our world:

What, then, is past in this equipment? What were these "Things" which today they are no longer? They are still definite items of equipment for use; but they are out of use. Suppose, however, that they were still in use today, like many a household heirloom; would they then be not yet historical? All the same, whether they are in use or out of use, they are no longer what they were. What is "past"? Nothing else than that world within which they belonged to a context of equipment and were

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, William McNeill, trans. (Oxford, 1992), 20, 12. This was a lecture delivered to the Marburg Theological Seminary in 1924. Also of great usefulness in following the development of Heidegger's ideas toward his 1927 masterwork, *Being and Time*, is a longer collection of lectures, published as *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992).

encountered as ready-to-hand and used by a concerned Dasein who was-in-the-world. That world is no longer. But what was formerly within-the-world with respect to what world is still present-at-hand. As equipment belonging to a world, that which is now still present-at-hand can belong nevertheless to the "past." But what do we signify by saying of a world that it is no longer: A world is only in the manner of existing Dasein, which factually is as Being-in-the-world.²⁶

Mapping Knowledge of Institutions and Institutions of Knowledge

Knowledge claims about the significance, or interpretation, of particular artifacts locate an intersection in space-time between the institutions we seek to represent and institutions of representation. The discourse of representation may be postmodern, rational-choice, Popperian social science, deconstructivist, narratological, queer, postcolonial, and so on. But each of these discourses is, as Benjamin asserted, essentially and practically photographic. "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. 'The truth will not run away from us': in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."²⁷ Benjamin in this passage performs a cognitive mapping. To recognize (artifacts from) the past as part of our world (in the sense outlined by Heidegger, as being ready-to-hand even if mainly only present-at-hand) is to draw a set of index lines from the institutions of representation to the institutions we seek to represent. What confronts us most challengingly is not the barrier to reality imposed by Cartesian anxiety or Derrida's "il n'y a pas d'hors texte" but the sheer complexity of the mapping problem.

The historical knowledge project is neither more nor less than a large set of institutions. Institutions range in degree of formality from uncodified social practices such as handshakes to highly formalized phenomena such as the U.S. Constitution, with all of its supporting statute law, Supreme Court rulings, and so on. Urban historical knowledge is suspended in concrete institutions of "higher education," such as the American Historical Association and the Urban Historical Association, but also in extra-professional historical societies, the site-specific work of journalists, and the folk knowledge of neighborhood residents. Conceived in this way, knowledge producers (historians, writers) can be located vis-à-vis the knowledge they produce. The "city" is neither more nor less than a very large set of institutions as well: religious, state, kin, economic, and creative institutions, to name just a few large families of institutions.²⁸

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York, 1962), 432-33.

²⁷ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

²⁸ "Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution." Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y., 1966), 51. For a spirited rejoinder (which inexplicably never mentions Berger and Luckmann), see John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York, 1995). Searle attempts, unsuccessfully it seems to me, to rescue the Cartesian dualism between e-AHR (electronic American Historical Review)

Cities are present to us as institutions. Cognitive maps and familiar pathways retraced by urbanites in their everyday practice are institutions, by the definitions given above. The infinite variety of these individual maps is formalized in historical knowledge. To gain concrete purchase on "Los Angeles" is to crystallize such institutions into maps. To illustrate both the immense complexity of this enterprise but also its possibility, we can attempt to portray the institutional totality we call "Los Angeles." As Mike Davis sarcastically remarked contra postmodern skeptics, "Los Angeles can be presumed to exist." Yes, but beyond that easy nod to common sense, we are left attempting to answer the acid-test question: What are its boundaries? When we study "Los Angeles," do we study the "Consolidated Metropolitan Area" of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, or do we restrict ourselves to the chartered City of Los Angeles? We could take the County of Los Angeles, or we could just ignore these official boundaries and use a wide variety of popular, vernacular definitions. The most-viewed TV series worldwide is "Baywatch," in which viewers in Southeast Asia see Los Angeles portrayed as a strip of Pacific Ocean beach in Malibu, Pacific Palisades, and Santa Monica.

One of the ways to sort out this boundary problem is to map the actual descriptive and jurisdictional boundaries of the various definitions of Los Angeles. In my own research on Los Angeles, I have chosen the boundaries of the county by that name, because it is coherent and consistently encompasses the vast majority of the larger "metropolitan area." This remains a relatively arbitrary choice, but it is at least publicly visible and subject to critique. The county boundaries have remained stable since the late nineteenth century, but almost all political jurisdictions within that space have changed massively since the turn of the century. There were only eleven incorporated cities in 1900, and by 1994 there were eighty-eight. The incorporated City of Los Angeles itself has grown and sometimes shrunk by more than 300 annexations and detachments since it was created by the United States government in 1850. The bewildering overlays of state institutions as shapes on the ground are also, of course, shapes in time, as the single map of metropolitan spaces (giving dates of incorporation) illustrates.

Concluding Remarks

This essay is undoubtedly too short to convincingly establish the case for a mappable historical certainty, but I hope to have suggested at least its possibility in principle. Orientation to history is an institutionalized practice. Narratives order the past. They do so about spaces, were written in spaces and for spaces. Narratives are subject to narratology and, with myth, ideology, and fashion thrown in, are all--in principle--mappable practices in space-time. Maps, when they become reflexive with other maps, fix each other and create what Paul Ricoeur calls the "trace,"

"institutional facts" and "external reality." I am writing here within a discourse of the "new institutionalism" in the social sciences. For representative examples, see James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York, 1989); Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, "Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a 'New Institutionalism,'" in Lawrence Dodd and Calvin Jillson, eds., *The Dynamics of American Politics* (Boulder, Colo., 1988), For an overview, see Philip J. Ethington and Eileen McDonagh, "The Eclectic Center of the New Institutionalism: Axes of Analysis in Comparative Perspective," *Social Science History* 19 (Winter 1995): 467-77.

the enduring artifacts (texts or photographs or models of the city circa 1940). The trace, Prasenjit Duara succinctly observes: "is a sign of the past whose materiality is revealed in that it is not exhausted by successive interpretations." Recall Barthes's similar tribute to the Photograph (*his* capital P): "From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation."²⁹

The key element in my case is a space-time phenomenology, wherein we take historical evidence in its material presence as an artifact and map that presence through indices of correlation within the dense network of institutions, which themselves are mappable. This method depends heavily on a "theory of practice" that has been developed by such figures as Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, but it will require a great deal of work to adapt that theory to a phenomenology of space-time mapping.³⁰

I have not attempted to achieve anything so scientific as a critical map of "Los Angeles" but, rather, to raise the epistemological question: "How would we know?" by creating a "spectacular reality." That "postmodern hyper-space" of which Jameson complained turns out to be a very familiar urban condition. I want to suggest that the cognitive mapping necessary to regain agency within this global disorientation is nothing less than the cognitive mapping necessary to reestablish urban historical studies in a comparative and constructive manner. The central claim, in fact, is that the institutions of knowledge are themselves urban, in the sense that a complete map is impossible, and in the sense that the discourses that make it up are neighborhoods as well: communities with mappable locations.

"That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it," the early Wittgenstein wrote. Urban historical knowledge is the map of institutions and the institution of mapping itself. This web site is such a map, "laid out against reality like a measure."³¹

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1984-88); Philip Rosen, "Traces of the Past: From Historicity to Film," in David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, eds., *Meanings in Texts and Action: Questioning Paul Ricoeur* (Charlottesville, Va., 1993), 67-89; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, 1995), 72; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 89.

³⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall, trans. (Berkeley, Calif., 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Richard Nice (Stanford, Calif., 1990). These works are typically devoid of spatial methods, so we will need to build from the groundwork laid by such pioneers as the geographer Torsten Hagerstrand. See the discussion of daily path mapping in David Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, chap. 13.

³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, trans. (1921; London, 1974), 2.151-2.1512, p. 9. See also "Theory and Method of this Web Site" below

Panoramas (Element 3)

"Panorama" is Greek for "all-view" or "all-spectacle." The term is credited to Robert Barker, in his Royal British patent of 1787, and an 1866 source has it that "the first panorama exhibited in London was painted by Robert Barker in 1789; it represented a view of Edinburgh." The 1801 *Encyclopedia Britannica* offers "Panorama, a word ... employed of late to denote a painting ... which represents an entire view of any country, city, or other natural [*sic*] objects, as they appear to a person standing in any situation, and turning quite round." The "Cyclorama" had these paintings mounted on the inside of a large cylinder, while the panorama was often rolled, scroll-like, and unfurled across a stage while a narrator explicated its contents. The "Diorama" essentially an elaborate scene in a room-sized lighted box, is credited, significantly, to Louis Daguerre himself, first exhibited in London in 1823 (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d edn., 1989).

The term and the concept of panorama, then, as it has grown in usage since the late eighteenth century, is essentially urban and also proto-photographic. Louis Daguerre, co-inventor of photography, first trained under the celebrated panorama painter Pierre Prévost. Very often, the scenes were of rural or wild settings, but the point of them was exhibition, and the exhibitors, beginning with Mr. Barker, were dependent on large urban audiences. Vanessa Schwartz writes of the "O-rama craze" in late nineteenth-century Paris.³² The tradition continues with the 3-D "IMAX" theaters, which exhibit spectacular scenes on gigantic screens. Browser technology permitting, readers can also view the panoramas on this web site as "virtual reality," which means that they have been converted into a "Quicktime" movie format that allows you to "pan" around as though you were turning your head.

I have created many panoramas for this web site, all direct descendants of Barker's invention. The methods of panoramic photography have evolved steadily since the first attempt by Talbot in 1843 to align two separate images to form a single, wider view. Eadweard Muybridge, credited also with creating early cinematic techniques, created huge segmented panoramas of San Francisco in the 1870s (one copy is owned by the New York Historical Society). Each segment was shot with an 18 by 12 inch field camera, and the total assemblage of one edition reaches 14 feet in length. This method, called "segmented panoramas," is the one used throughout this web site.³³

Evidently, the 1868 (Broadway and Temple) and 1905 (Broadway and Seventh) panoramas displayed in this web site were intended for such display. The photographer is unknown in both cases. The 1868 images were traded and re-photographed several times, and information about the original photographer has been lost. The California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California contains a richly annotated (and erroneously dated) version. The separate frames of the 1905 panorama, held by the Getty Research Institute, are quite crisp and possibly are first-generation prints from the negatives.

³² Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities* chap. 4, pp. 149-76.

³³ See Joseph Meehan, *Panoramic Photography*, rev. edn. (New York, 1996).

Into the Labyrinth of Los Angeles Historiography: From Global Comparisons to Local Knowledge (Element 4)

There are many ways to structure a historiographic essay on a given city, each driven by some stated or unstated goal. Why would we seek knowledge of Los Angeles? Each answer to this question indicates a different path through the city: through its ethnic communities, its religious institutions, its architecture, its politics, its economy. As a byway of the larger "Essay" I have composed here ("Los Angeles and the Problem of Urban Historical Knowledge"), this bibliographic essay is written in the spirit of introduction for the neophytes, and in the spirit of reflection on the problem of ascertaining the significance of Los Angeles in a world-historic context.

Major scholarly and critical discourse on Los Angeles has been concerned with its significance in a family of U.S. and world cities. This perspective is rather new in the scholarship of U.S. cities, in which the relative importance of cities is usually not at issue. The vast literature on Chicago and New York City does not typically take as a primary theme the way those cities represent forces or trends that serve as a window on the condition of world history; nor do these works seem compelled to assert the historical presence of their cities--such is usually taken for granted. This distinctive theme is ironic because, in comparison to other world cities, the historical literature on Los Angeles is very thin and very young. Claims about the great importance of Los Angeles have been vastly out of proportion to the knowledge base.

Landmarks of serious scholarship on Los Angeles have always raised it out of the local, insisting that this city needs to be recognized on the global stage. This tradition begins perhaps with Anton Wagner's *Los Angeles: Werden, Leben and Gestalt der Zweimillionenstadt in Sudenkalifornien* (1935), translated as *Los Angeles: The Development, Life, and Form of the Southern California Metropolis*.³⁴ Wagner, who studied with the cultural geographer Oscar Schmieder (1891-1980), is recognizably in the German landscape-and-society tradition of Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904). Fascinated by this apparently new breed of city, Wagner engaged in constant comparisons with European cities. It would be welcome now that environmental history has finally returned to vogue, but it had simply no impact on English-language scholarship.

In 1946, Carey McWilliams published what remains the deepest and also widest-ranging inquiry into distinctive features of Los Angeles, *Southern California Country, an Island on the Land* (later retitled *Southern California: An Island on the Land*). Another attempt to take stock of the city's development did not appear until Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (1967). But alas, decades after Fogelson's study, few thinkers recognized

³⁴ This little-known classic is still not published in English, but it has been translated by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld for the Getty Research Institute and is available there as a bound typescript (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1997).

Los Angeles as a major world city, and the weight of the scholarship itself seemed to support the idea that it was exceptional in many ways: it was Western, built rapidly, with little foresight, at the far edge of the United States, by different rules. It is the enduring achievement of Mike Davis, in his profound but idiosyncratic *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1989), to have established beyond cavil that the history of Los Angeles articulates in highly revealing ways the major forces transforming global society in the late twentieth century. Davis broke what Roger Kiel calls the "exceptionalist narrative" of Los Angeles. His writings, along with the ghastly spectacle of the 1992 "uprising"/"riot"/"civil unrest," served to fix the gaze of many scholars on Los Angeles.³⁵ The result has been several collections of great value, especially Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, *Ethnic Los Angeles* (1996), and Allen J. Scott and Edward J. Soja, *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (1996). Dolores Hayden's nuanced and place-specific *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes and Public History* (1997) is the product of years of community advocacy/research by a feminist architectural historian, and in many ways it outclasses all the synoptic histories that have come before it. Although largely a reflection on the wider issues of the politics of public history, Hayden's graphic-rich book is a genuine innovation and model for future work.

The works mentioned so far are all "synoptic" because they purport to encompass the entire city in their gaze. But these synoptic histories have only been implicitly comparative in their effort to establish the special significance of Los Angeles. Once the significance issue is raised, even if only implicitly, the imperative of comparison is immediately imposed. This imperative demands: How would we know if Los Angeles is so significant? Only by attempting to raise similar claims about other cities. It is surprising that only two major studies have attempted to place the metropolis into explicit comparison with other great cities: Janet Abu-Lughod's *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities* (1999), and (to a lesser extent) Peter Hall's *Cities in Civilization* (1998). Abu-Lughod's study is a welcome and instructive departure. She carefully delineates the terms of comparison and then (typical of her historical sociology) sets about to assemble comparable knowledge on these lines. Abu-Lughod's method is to construct a narrative of U.S. history within global history and then to place New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles within this context in order "to differentiate between global and local causes" (p. 4). Her concern is from the start to make visible the work of history. In order to isolate distinctive features of each city, she first sets them into spatio-temporal motion, so that we might see the commonalities first. Her effort is intended to illuminate both the ontology of the "global city" phenomenon and the unique qualities of separate cities. After long and remarkably detailed local histories, she attempts to "sum up the cities' comparative histories to explore the question of how much of the variance is due to globalism, how much to context, and how much to the unique qualities of the three" (p. 398). Abu-Lughod's thesis and conclusions raise considerably the stakes of the problem of urban historical knowledge: "My argument throughout has been that common forces originating at the level of the global economy operate

³⁵ Roger Kiel, *Los Angeles: Globalization, Urbanization and Social Struggles* (Chichester, U.K., and New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), is a very useful overview from a decidedly Davisian perspective; In addition to a continuous outpouring of essays and journalistic columns, Mike Davis published a much-anticipated monograph, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998). See also his short *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US Big City* (New York: Verso, 2000).

always through local political structures and inherited spatial forms. They are therefore always manifested in particular ways that differentiate cities from one another and that militate against the facile generalizations that have hitherto been made about a class of cities called global" (p. 417). Abu-Lughod's New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles should shape our next phase of Los Angeles scholarship. It is a challenge to begin documenting the proliferated claims about the significance of the city. But a fascinating thing happens when we attempt to follow her example. Her detailed account of Los Angeles is fully dependent on a huge labyrinth of local knowledge, but those sources actually cited amount to few more than a hundred titles.

Composing a comparative narrative of Los Angeles requires familiarity with the vast terrain of topical studies of the metropolis. These are far more difficult to summarize, but several major categories have accumulated over the decades. One of the earliest topical fields to develop was ethnic history, and it is now perhaps the most developed. The city's Spanish-Mexican origin strongly suggested this approach, and the rise of the "new urban history" in the 1960s laid emphasis on the ethnic-group experience. Richard Griswold del Castillo's study *The Los Angeles Barrio: 1850-1890: A Social History* (1979) and Ricardo Romo's *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (1983) laid the groundwork as social history. These were followed by even more nuanced explorations of the multi-racial conflicts and exchanges, in Douglas Monroy's *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (1990) and Lisbeth Haas's *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (1996). George Sanchez's *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (1995) and Douglas Monroy's *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (1999) set this field on a new plane altogether, with a mixture of the new cultural history and older urban sociology of immigration. George Lipsitz has led the development of a topical field that might be characterized as urban "borderlands" or "hybridity" studies, beginning with his influential "Cruising around the Historic Bloc" essay in his *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (1990). Raul Homero Villa's *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (2000) pushes Chicano Studies beyond its Sixties roots toward postmodern methods. A steady stream of more traditional scholarship on Latino (especially Mexican-American) history continues to increase. Rodolfo Acuña's *Anything But Mexican* continues a nationalist Chicano narrative he has pursued since the 1970s, and adds to his remarkable output of very useful topical knowledge. Edward Escobar's recent study *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (1999) and Mary Pardo's *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Neighborhoods* (1998) show how this literature has deepened to the point where facets of the topic receive close analysis.

Compared with the great riches of Latino Los Angeles history, the literature on African-American Los Angeles is almost nonexistent. Lynell George's *No Crystal Stair: African Americans in the City of Angels* (1992) is the closest thing to a serious scholarly book on the African-American experience in Los Angeles, but although helpful it is not a major monograph. The best studies at our disposal are still dissertations and journal articles. J. Max Bond's "The Negro in Los Angeles" (PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 1936) and Lawrence de Graaf's "The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 39 (1970), are still the most important starting points for

historical knowledge of this topical field. Fragmentary works of great value do appear, however, and these are symptomatic of the birth period of a field. Clora Bryant, *et al.*'s *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (1998) is a rich compilation of memoirs by participants in the jazz scene that thrived along Central Avenue from the 1930s to the 1950s. Serious work in oral history and archive development has been under way for some years, but it is still in a formative stage.

Asian-American history of Los Angeles is about as developed as that of African-American history. Considering the impossible burden of the label "Asian" to cover everyone from the Philippines to Korea, Japan, China, and Vietnam, it must be said that the history is far less developed than African-American history. History of Japanese-American internment has received the most attention, due primarily to the notorious "internment" of Issei and Nisei during the Second World War--the majority of whom lived in Los Angeles before the round-ups. This history was pioneered (primarily from the perspective of the anti-Japanese movement) by Roger Daniels, but it has now taken the Japanese-American community's perspective as the point of departure. Brian Masaru Hayashi, *"For the Sake of Our Japanese Brethren": Assimilation, Nationalism, and Protestantism among the Japanese of Los Angeles, 1895-1942* (1995), and Lon Kurashige, "The Problem of Biculturalism: Japanese American Identity and Festival before World War II," *Journal of American History* 86 (March 2000), are both excellent introductions to this newer wave. One of the great strengths of emergent Japanese-American Los Angeles historiography is the prominent, well-funded, and highly organized Japanese American National Museum.

An obvious but also very difficult category to outline is "Hollywood," meaning the motion-picture industry and only sometimes its location in Los Angeles. Most works are not faithfully about Los Angeles the place, but rather, about a far-flung industry. They all are, nevertheless, about "Los Angeles" in some respect. Readers might start with two works that detail the historical process in which "Hollywood" came into being: Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (1997); Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: the Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (1983). Writing a history of "movies" within a social-historical context was pioneered by Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies* (1975). More specific to the location of Los Angeles are Neal Gabler, *An Empire of their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (1988) (only lightly footnoted), and Otto Friedrich, *City of Nets: A Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s* (1986). There is, to date, no history of the motion-picture industry that is also an urban history of Los Angeles. A stunning tour-de-force of antiquarian research, however, is John Bengston, *Silent Echoes: Discovering Early Hollywood through the Films of Buster Keaton* (2000). Bengston painstakingly identified Keaton's actual locations within Los Angeles and organizes a filmography around these locations, using archival photography and other records. He has thus transformed Keaton's opus into a historical document. On a loftier note, film scholar Robert Carringer is at work on a major study of representations of Los Angeles in American cinema, a portion of which is forthcoming in Michael S. Roth and Charles Salas, eds, *Los Angeles and the Language of Images* (2001).

Considering its notoriety as a city of suburbs and as a pioneer of the freeway, it is not surprising that another highly developed topical field is the study of transportation and the built environment. The work of Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (1987), and of Martin Wachs, "The Evolution of Transportation Policy in Los Angeles: Images of Past Policies and Future Prospects," have set standards and posed the most important questions in this field. A more recent wave of research by Edward Dimendberg and Matthew Roth integrates the history of technology with cultural and political formations of modernity, and ties these formations to local facts on the ground.³⁶ Historians of architecture and development have long cultivated Los Angeles. Greg Hise, with *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (1997), broke the myth of the unplanned sprawl of Los Angeles by showing how the polycentric structure of the metropolis had originally been planned in the 1920s around industrial clusters. Greg Hise and William F. Deverell have edited and republished a landmark in the planning history of Los Angeles: *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Regional Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (2000). Richard Longstreth's *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (1998) and *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (1999) have now set the history of built form on the highest level of scholarship.

As a final example, the political history of Los Angeles is in need of much development, despite a few important studies. The urban politics of the Spanish, Mexican, and nineteenth-century Anglo periods is virtually *terra incognita*, except for antiquarian publications in the early numbers of the *Southern California Historical Quarterly* and what can be gleaned from synoptic books written for other purposes, such as Fogelson's *Fragmented Metropolis*. The so-called Progressive Era (1890s-1920s) has attracted the most attention, in wide-ranging scholarship collected by William Deverell and Tom Sitton in two edited volumes, *California Progressivism Revisited* (1994), and *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (2001). Practically the only major work on the period since then is Raphael Sonenshein's *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (1994), covering the electoral coalition-building that led to the long mayoralty of Tom Bradley.

The seeker of historical knowledge about Los Angeles has at his or her disposal vastly more titles than the few mentioned above, and fortunately, about 15,000 of these have been collected into three major bibliographies: *Los Angeles and Its Environs in the Twentieth Century: A Bibliography of a Metropolis*, edited with an introduction by Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. (1973), approximately 9,000 entries, and *Los Angeles and Its Environs in the Twentieth Century: A Bibliography of a Metropolis: 1970-1990*, compiled and edited by Hynda L. Rudd (1996), approximately 5,700 entries. The third is the forthcoming digital merger of these two bibliographies, with updates and a widening of scope: Philip J. Ethington, Hynda L. Rudd, and Lynn Sipe, general editors, *Los Angeles: A Comprehensive Bibliographic Database* (2001;

³⁶ Wachs in Scott and Soja, *The City*, 106-59. Matthew W. Roth, "Mullholland Highway and the Engineering Culture of Los Angeles in the 1920s," *Technology and Culture* 40 (July 1999): 545-75; Edward Dimendberg, "The Will to Motorization: Cinema, Highways, and Modernity," *October* 73 (Summer 1995): 91-137.

www.usc.edu). The principal limitation of these bibliographies is that they are at present confined to the twentieth century.

Of course, all that has been discussed so far is what we call "secondary literature," which calls to mind Herman Melville's "pasteboard mask." If we seek what lies beyond this mask, we enter the true labyrinth of Los Angeles historical knowledge, the primary documents, photographic images, motion pictures, audio and video tapes, and three-dimensional objects that repose in the vast archives of the metropolis. The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities recently completed a multi-year collective project by the L.A. as Subject Advisory Committee, to create a guide to these local archives, especially those that are "lesser known": *Cultural Inheritance/L.A.: A Directory of Less-Visible Archives and Collections in the Los Angeles Region* (1999). This directory is also available online at the Getty Research Institute and will soon migrate to a new host at the University of Southern California.³⁷ It is apparent from someone who participated in this directory project that the amount of untapped original documentary material available for researchers of Los Angeles is truly staggering--especially for a city that is so young. Community-based cultural institutions concerned with archival development have been hard at work for longer than most scholars can imagine.

One could say that the pursuit of historical knowledge about Los Angeles must begin simultaneously in the synoptic works with global perspective and in local archives, such as the independent labor-oriented Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research on Vermont Avenue and Slauson, or the Western States Black Research and Educational Center, the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Regional Archives Center of the University of Southern California, the Oral History Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles, the Social and Public Art Resource Center, the Jewish Home for the Aging, the Los Angeles City Archives, and so on.

Knowledge of any city is necessarily radically fragmented. Apart from the personal experience and knowledge of a city that arise from long residence, we have at our disposal constructed sources that range from the most synoptic to the most specific, with hundreds of general histories strewn about the middle of this range. For Los Angeles, we can visit an encyclopedia such as *Los Angeles A to Z* by Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, read classics like Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis* or Mike Davis's *City of Quartz*, or some of the 15,000 compiled titles, such as Harvey Werner, "Folklore in the Los Angeles Garment Industry," *Western Folklore* 23 (1964). There exists no body of "survey" literature about most great cities, comparable to the "Western Civilization" or "American History" surveys written for classroom instruction. The closest thing to a single "comprehensive" treatment of a great city is the 1,350-page *Encyclopedia of New York City* (1995) edited by Kenneth T. Jackson, which required the labor of more than a thousand people over a ten-year period. Even this, as Jackson would be the first to admit, is far from comprehensive. But the capacity of the scholars of New York to have constructed such a resource is indicative of the great depth of knowledge about that global city, against which Los Angeles compares very poorly indeed. It can safely be said that,

³⁷ As of November 2000, the URL for this resource at the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities (www.getty.edu) is <http://www.getty.edu/gri/public/lasubject.htm>.

compared with the depth of published research on Chicago, Paris, and New York City, the construction of historical knowledge about Los Angeles has not passed from infancy.

On the Method, Structure, and Theory of This Web Site (Element 5)

Writing before anyone could have guessed the tremendous diffusion and saturation of the Internet and the actual growth of "hyperspace," Fredric Jameson laid out a strong program for developing tools of "cognitive mapping" (before Kevin Lynch's famous method), in order to visualize a particular intersection: "the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with un-lived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality."³⁸

This web site is an attempt to create such an instrument of critical and empirical vision. It is a space-time panopticon, much in the Foucauldian sense, but also a counter-representation, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin. It departs from the disciplinary function of panopticons that Michel Foucault criticized, by generating what Prasenjit Duara calls "dispersion" of narratives. In this sense, it is like an insect eye (or the eyes of many persons), with thousands of independent points of view. It is a labyrinth, just as the city is. It is an institutional form (historical scholarship) and it tries to carry out a proposition of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*:

2.151 Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.

2.1511 That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it.

2.1512 It is laid against reality like a measure.³⁹

There are many such pictures in this site, and all are laid out against the place called Los Angeles, like a measure. If I can be permitted to coin one term, this is a "placetry," as much as a "history." Over and above my words, I write without words through narratives that are spatial pathways. All along those paths, I indicate spaces that are both sites of global relations ("un-lived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality") and irreducibly unique ("the empirical position of the subject"), each a specific instantiation of humanity's infinite crossroads. The site required thousands of hours of detailed labor, and yet it only succeeds in opening more questions about the sites, and about experiences and voices not investigated, as it does about those revealed.

You reach the sites in this site by various means: locations, names, maps, and concepts. Always mediated, the sites themselves are deeply cross-referenced. This site is composed of more than 1,200 independent "pages" of HTML text, .jpg, .gif, and .mov files, as well as at least

³⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C., 1991), 52. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

³⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, 1995). Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, trans. (1921; London, 1974), 9.

7,000 separate links, each of which was set deliberately by my own hand. No multimedia production team helped me produce this, nary even a student assistant. I made this experiment to see if it could be done from start to finish, from design concept to cartography, photography, to web-authoring. It is an e-book, in Robert Darnton's sense: a historically situated mass-disseminated text.⁴⁰ It is of a distinct genre that became very common in the late twentieth century but that emerged abruptly from about 1992 to 1998 (much like cinema exploded within about five years, from about 1898 to 1903). More technically, it should be a matter of record that I created all of the maps using ESRI's ArcView 3.0 (R), image manipulation with Adobe PhotoShop 4.0 (R) and MGI PhotoVista 2.0 (R), and the web site itself with Adobe GoLive 4.0 (R). Except for the Central Avenue segment, all of the street photography with a date more recent than 1996 is also my own work. As a historian, I of course did all of the archival work as well, in research that began about 1995.

A major limitation was imposed on me by the editors of the *American Historical Review* for historycooperative.org: I could not use "frames," a common way of organizing web sites. I am glad that this stricture was imposed, because it makes the site more simple and elegant. But it also cost many hundreds of hours of labor, because I had to manually set links that would have been easy to globalize with a hierarchical structure. One result may be a certain error rate among the thousands of links within the site. The site consists of more than 1,200 separate files in about 140 directories. These directories are a hierarchical tree organized by the major categories in the menu bar.

In the end, this web site is a city of its own. I argue in the "Essay," in fact, that cities converge with their representations through a phenomenology of indexical linkages. This thesis should explain why I do not believe that the web site is "virtual" reality, nor does it exist in some unreal "hyperspace." It occupies very real geometric space on your computer screen, and the files displayed are real electromagnetic entities. They have addresses--just like your home or office, which are expressed as "URLs," for Universal Resource Locator. Every time you click on a mapped portion of your screen, a file is fetched from the server on which this site was published, and transported to your computer. In other words, the action performed is identical to the model of indexical knowledge I outline in the "Essay."

⁴⁰ Robert Darnton, "The New Age of the Book," *New York Review of Books*, March 18, 1999.
e-AHR (electronic American Historical Review)

Acknowledgements (Element 6)

This web site is dedicated to Carol and Lena, who loaned me to it.

My thanks for the opportunity and enthusiasm for, as well as patience with, this web site go first to Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Acting Editor of the *American Historical Review*. Allyn Roberts, Assistant Editor for Articles, showed that adapting to the electronic world can be a highly rational process. One major portion of this site is the result of my collaboration with Central Avenue path--a collaboration with Robbert Flick, who shared with me some years ago his conceptual strategy of adjacent framing and "trajectories" (what I call "paths" in this web site). Robbert also provided invaluable advice and conceptual feedback throughout the long authoring process. He produced his major work, "Along Central," at a sped-up pace to match the deadlines of this project, and provided me with detailed intersection metadata for each of the segments of his work-in-progress. Only someone who has tried to photo-document the streets of a vast metropolis can appreciate the endless hours of procedural labor involved, and Robbert endured this for the sake of this site.

Special thanks to Vanessa Schwartz for a very careful reading of the essays and valuable advice on revising the site qua urban representation.

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Note to Acknowledgements:

* "Segregated Diversity: Race-Ethnicity, Space, and Political Fragmentation in Los Angeles County, 1940-1994," Final Report submitted to the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation (July 20, 2000).

