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The kinetic icon: Reyner Banham on Los Angeles as mobile metropolis

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ABSTRACT: Architectural historian P. Reyner Banham (1922–88) is widely known for his numerous writings on the modern built environment, including the book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971). In the BBC television film *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles* (Julian Cooper, 1972), he concretized his earlier insights about the importance of mobility in the Southern California metropolis by employing the proclivity of the cinematic medium to represent movement. While traditional notions of the urban icon commonly understand it as a static monument or landmark, in these two works Banham challenges the suitability of this view to a city as inflected by automobility as Los Angeles and proposes the motorway and the experience of driving as its most characteristic iconic forms.

From the distinctive significance of its transportation networks, to the extraordinary rapidity with which its population and physical boundaries grew, to the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of its inhabitants and to its alleged lack of a single concentrated centre, Los Angeles, many have suggested, is a city unlike any other.[1] Whether or not one accepts this claim, scholarship devoted to Los Angeles consistently oscillates between demonstrations of its alleged singularity and attempts to relate its evolution to urban forms and processes observable elsewhere.[2] Founded in 1781, a fact that makes it older than more ostensibly 'historical' American cities actually incorporated later (Buffalo in 1803, Chicago in 1830, Atlanta in 1837), its geographic distance from these settlements in the East, the Midwest and the South has long rendered Los Angeles the permanent

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[1] For different assessments of this singularity see Robert Fogelson, *Los Angeles: The Fragmented Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), and Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London, 1990). Two earlier statements of the uniqueness of California which also consider Los Angeles are Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (New York, 1949), and Remi Nadeau, *California: The New Society* (New York, 1963).

[2] This tension permeates the essays collected in Allen J. Scott and Edward Soja (eds.), *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1996).

newcomer in American urban history, the exception always cited to prove the rules of traditional cities.

In their search for a distinctive urban icon that can readily identify Los Angeles in the public mind, cultural historians confront a similar exceptionalism. To be sure, landmarks do exist in the city and regularly appear emblazoned on the postcards that fill the racks in souvenir shops. Since August 1962 the Cultural Heritage Commission of the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department began cataloguing these sites in the interest of their historic preservation. To date, it has designated 700 Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCM), including the Bradbury Building (HCM #6), Graumann's Chinese Theater (HCM #55) and City Hall (HCM #150).[3] Yet just as the actual age of Los Angeles often recedes in public awareness, so does the visibility of many of these landmarks, especially the farther one travels away from the city. Lacking more instantly recognizable monuments such as the Eiffel Tower, the Tower of London, the Brandenburg Gate or the Statue of Liberty, Los Angeles might well appear to initiate a new urban iconoclasm as the first modern metropolis where the lack of a single urban centre is paralleled by the absence of a single paradigmatic monument.

Few large metropoles before or since have relied less upon the visual shorthand provided by conspicuous urban icons and forsaken the 'legibility' that urban geographer Kevin Lynch understands as a hallmark of effective urban design.[4] Indeed, many residents and visitors would be unable to locate the above monuments on a city map, thus rendering them useless as practical guides for spatial orientation and navigation. The problem may be not that Los Angeles lacks potentially 'imageable' urban landmarks but rather that it has too many of them. Visiting the city in 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote

> Los Angeles, in particular, is rather like a big earthworm that might be chopped into twenty pieces without being killed. If you go through this enormous urban cluster, probably the largest in the world, you come upon twenty juxtaposed cities, strictly identical, each with its poor section, its business streets, night-clubs and smart suburb, and you get the impression that a medium-sized urban center has schizogenetically reproduced itself twenty times . . . In America . . . cities . . . that move at a rapid rate are not constructed in order to grow old, but move forward like modern armies, encircling the islands of resistance they are unable to destroy; the past does not manifest itself in them as it does in Europe, through public monuments, but through survivals. The wooden bridge in Chicago . . . The elevated railways, rolling noisily through the central streets of New York . . . They are there

[3] For the listing of these landmarks and an explanation of the basis for their selection see Jeffrey Herr (ed.), *Landmark L.A. Historic-Cultural Monuments of Los Angeles* (Santa Monica, 2002). See also Gloria Koenig, *Iconic L.A.* (Glendale, 2000), who also deems the Watts Towers, the Hollywood Bowl and Griffith Observatory as icons.

[4] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA, 1960).

simply because no one has taken the time to tear them down, and as a kind of indication of work to be done.[5]

Possessing few public monuments of the type common in European metropoles, the American city must make do with what Sartre calls survivals, but the omission of any relics from Los Angeles' past on his list confirms that here the time *has* been taken to tear them down, leaving, as he notes, numerous empty lots – and monotonously identical buildings – in their wake. Sartre may well be among the first to claim that Los Angeles lacks urban icons, and that the city's history, if not its very public image, resists association with a single easily recognizable place or landmark. Opposing this idea are the myriad attempts to identify urban icons of Los Angeles. Disneyland, a perennial candidate, is actually located in Anaheim, and seems more associated with Southern California, if not Orange County, and thus lays better claim to representing the region rather than a single city.[6] And through the globalizing exportation of Disney theme parks to Florida, France and Japan, the linkage of Disney to California appears ever more tenuous.

The Hollywood sign, constructed atop Mt Lee in 1923, is a stronger candidate for selection as urban icon.[7] Yet its intended purpose as an advertisement for the Hollywoodland real estate development lacks a direct connection to the entertainment industry, and the neighbourhood of Hollywood is only one of many in the city. Pundits may well argue that this absence of a referent, a sign that is just a sign, perfectly captures the notion that Hollywood is less a physical place than a state of mind, if not a veil of deception. The entertainment industry with which Hollywood has become synonymous is itself widely dispersed throughout the region, and representative of only one strand, albeit a vital one, of Los Angeles' identity. Whether measured in relation to its economic significance to the region, or considered with respect to the foreign ownership of studios such as Sony, the movie business is not Los Angeles, and Los Angeles is more than the movie business. Despite the enduring appeal of the sign that renders it the key urban icon in Los Angeles, few people ever visit it, and even fewer would be able to explain its relation to the city's history and geography.

More recently, the Disney Concert Hall designed by Frank Gehry has become the newest candidate for urban icon. Yet it is hard to imagine that its impact upon the city will ever rival that of Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. And as more cities acquire buildings by Gehry, whose work seems tailor made for providing indistinct urban centres with

[5] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'American cities' (1945), in *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (New York, 1962), 121.

[6] For a discussion of the region see Rob Kling, Spencer Olin and Mark Poster (eds.), *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County since World War II* (Berkeley, 1991).

[7] For more on the history of the sign see George Williams, *The Story of Hollywoodland* (Los Angeles, 1992).

distinctive architecture, the connection of the Disney Hall to its urban matrix is also likely to weaken. Unlike the Sydney Opera House designed by Jørn Utzon from 1956 to 1958 and completed in 1973, an indisputable architectural icon of the Australian metropole, the Disney Concert Hall is one of many highly visible cultural buildings designed by Gehry, a single location in what increasingly appears to be a global franchise operation intended less to anchor the image of cities than to raise their cultural capital by associating them with the architect.

Los Angeles may well possess no shortage of urban icons, yet it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it seems more resistant to iconic symbolism than other cities. A promising avenue of approach that may well escape this cul-de-sac is suggested by British–American architectural historian P. Reyner Banham (1922–88) in his now classic book, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971).[8] One of the most influential arguments for the apprehension of Los Angeles urbanism as unique rather than deficient with respect to other cities, Banham's study is equally notable, if less recognized, for its radical reformulation of the notion of the urban icon. A student at London's Courtauld Institute of Art, Banham wrote his dissertation there with Nikolaus Pevsner, one of the twentieth century's major architectural historians best known for his typological analyses of buildings.[9] Banham's thesis was later published as a book and became a classic study of modernism, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960).[10] Banham wrote over a dozen books on modern architecture and authored more than 700 essays and reviews on trends in architectural, industrial and automotive design. He taught at the State University of New York in Buffalo and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Shortly before his death, he had accepted an endowed chair at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University.

Although Banham admits that Los Angeles does contain historic markers, in his judgement no single place, landmark, building or architectural style can effectively encapsulate the city. His is an architectural and urban history that privileges mobility over stasis and innovation over tradition, despite its debt to David Gebhard and Robert Winter, authors of the standard guide to Southern California architecture.[11] Banham writes:

The language of design, architecture, and urbanism in Los Angeles is the language of movement. Mobility outweighs monumentality there to a unique degree . . . And

[8] P. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London and Harmondsworth, 1971; reprint, Berkeley, 2001), xxxiv. All quotations are from this edition. Where no page citation is provided the quotation is from Banham's spoken narration in the film *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles* (Julian Cooper, 1972).

[9] See Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton, 1976).

[10] P. Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London, 1960). The most comprehensive bibliography of Banham's books and articles is found in Mary Banham, Paul Barker, Sutherland Lyall and Cedric Price (eds.), *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham* (Berkeley, 1996).

[11] David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles* (rev. edn, Salt Lake City, 2003).

the city will never be understood by those who cannot move fluently through its diffuse urban texture, cannot go with the flow of its unprecedented life. So, like earlier generations of English intellectuals who taught themselves Italian in order to read Dante in the original, I learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original.[12]

Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies is organized into thirteen chapters, four of which are devoted to architecture, and another four of which consider the ecologies in its subtitle. Banham's use of this latter term bears little resemblance to its conventional meaning in the natural sciences as the study of the interaction and habitats of living organisms. Rather, he endows it with new meaning and locates four distinctive ecologies in the city (Surfurbia, Foothills, the Plains of Id and Autopia). His book investigates the distinctive interplays between landscape, geography and the routines of daily life, and situates buildings by accomplished architects such as Craig Ellwood and John Lautner in the local topography.

Each ecology has its history, geology, material culture, lifestyles and characteristic state of mind. Surfurbia fosters a hedonistic antimaterialism, while the flat central basin that Banham dubs 'the Plains of Id' embodies the relentless land subdivision and avarice that he perceives as key to the city's urban psychology. Non-architectural objects such as freeways and surfboards receive detailed scrutiny, with the former occupying special significance in the book. In its emphasis upon the behaviour and emotions provoked by the experience of the city Banham's text appropriates understandings of 'psychogeography' and urban 'drift' advanced by Guy Debord and the situationists, applying them in an American urban context, arguably for the first time.[13] For the distinctive quality of Los Angeles, according to Banham, resides not merely in its architecture but in the range of feelings, emotions and kinetic sensations that the city encourages and elicits.[14]

By the conclusion of his book Banham has considered buildings by many of the distinguished modernist architects who worked in the city, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Lloyd Wright, Irving Gill and R.M. Schindler. Yet the Watts Towers, the Farmers' Market, public housing projects, shopping centres, department stores, office buildings, pedestrian plazas and fast food restaurants designed by less renowned or anonymous figures enter into his discussion as well. Illustrated with photographs by Julius Shulman, the most important photographer of Los Angeles modernism, and launched in its first Penguin edition with a David Hockney illustration on its cover, the book attained its own iconic status and became regarded as an essential contribution to the literature on Los

[12] Banham, *Los Angeles*, 5.

[13] The situationists were an influential group of European avant-garde cultural activists whose work of the 1950s and 1960s was informed by the ideas of surrealism and Marxism. For an introduction to their thinking on the city see Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (eds.), *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City* (Barcelona, 1996), and Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

[14] See Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London, 2002).

Angeles. Alternately praised and excoriated by reviewers, few denied that *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* expanded the notion of what counted as architecture, and in one fell swoop transformed the rather staid book series in which it was published, 'The Architect and Society', edited by John Fleming and Hugh Honour, into a venue for innovative scholarship.

By also making a film about Los Angeles, the little-known *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles* (Julian Cooper, 1972), Banham employed the cinematic medium, uniquely suited for the study of movement, to represent the city he understood to be uniquely marked by the language of movement. Even before he commenced his film project Banham's perception of Los Angeles was already mass mediated, so to speak, deeply marked by a sense of the flow of images and language. He arrived in the city in 1968 to produce four radio broadcasts for the British Broadcasting Company, later published in the BBC magazine, *The Listener*.[15] The utility of cinema for understanding the built environment had not escaped the awareness of earlier scholars. Already in 1928, architectural historian Sigfried Giedion described the impossibility of apprehending the buildings of Le Corbusier from a fixed single position. 'Still photography does not capture them clearly. One would have to accompany the eye as it moves: only film can make the new architecture intelligible.'[16] Giedion's observation, one that Banham knew, held out the tantalizing prospect of introducing viewers to a city whose history, while inextricably related to the development of the film industry and frequently visually arresting, was often murky and poorly understood by inhabitants and outside observers alike.[17]

Banham's film, part of a BBC series devoted to contrarian ideas, effectively makes the case for apprehending Los Angeles in and as movement, as contrarian a thesis about the normally static forms of the built environment as one might imagine. Composed of long passages of freeway and surface street driving intercut with explorations of famous architecture, such as the Gamble House, the Eames House and the Watts Tower, it premiered on BBC2 in March 1972, slightly more than a year after his book was published by Penguin, and was produced and broadcast in the context of a programme entitled *One Pair of Eyes*. In the words of its producer Malcolm Brown, the programme 'invited the eccentric, unusual opinionated, intelligent, and uninhibited to say whatever they bloody well wanted'. Each one-hour segment presented the ideas of a famous individual, figures such as playwright Tom Stoppard, composer Sir Michael Tippett, scientist Sir Bernard Lovell or actress Mai Zetterling. It was, in the words of Brown, 'an ego trip program' 'a one-man show on

[15] *The Listener*, 80: 'Encounter with Sunset Boulevard' (22 Aug. 1968), 35–236; 'Roadscape with rusting rails' (29 Aug. 1968), 267–8; 'Beverly Hills, too, is a ghetto' (5 Sep. 1968), 296–8; 'The art of doing your thing' (12 Sep. 1968), 330–1.

[16] Sigfried Giedion, *Building in France/Building in Iron/Building in Ferro-Concrete*, trans. J. Duncan Berry (Los Angeles, 1995), 176.

[17] In his essay 'The glass paradise' (1959), Banham mentions Giedion's *Bauen in Frankreich*. See 'The glass paradise', in Banham *et al.* (eds.), *A Critic Writes*, 32–8.

the air' that paired these public personae with a 'director who would add wit, wisdom, and skill to produce a program of quality'.[18]

BBC2 began broadcasting on 20 April 1964. Brown had taken over the *One Pair of Eyes* series in 1970, not long after the reorganization of the channel by its Comptroller Sir David Attenborough. Best known for airing highbrow fare such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilization* series, BBC2 consciously sought to countervail the objective news reporting associated with BBC1. Under the leadership of Attenborough, it became, in the words of Brown, a channel where 'people were allowed to air their obsessions'. If BBC1 sought to deny subjectivity in its programming and convey an impression of dispassionate factual journalism, BBC2 by contrast, invited it. Viewpoints, opinions and worldviews were allowed to proliferate, and by narrowcasting programmes on folk music, archaeology, sociology, golf, foreign films and the Rugby League, it could scarcely be confused with competing channels. In arguably the most famous contribution to *One Pair of Eyes*, a programme entitled *Tom Stoppard Doesn't Know*, the playwright sought to demonstrate he lacked certainty of anything. It is in this context that one must approach Banham's film, produced as Brown suggests with the contrarian aim of introducing a place widely thought to be the 'ultimate hell on earth city and to show its opposite'.

This contrarianism promoted by the BBC in the interest of expanding its journalistic palette dovetailed nicely with the aim of Banham's book to expand the definition of architecture and enable readers to appreciate a city where for a long while none was thought to exist. Had Banham simply echoed the then-prevailing negative opinions of Los Angeles as a culturally barren suburban wasteland, what one British journalist in 1968 called 'the nosiest, smelliest, the most uncomfortable, and most uncivilized city in the United States, in short, a stinking sewer', there would have been no controversy, and hence no basis for a film.[19] Hardwired into both his book and film is the goal of disrupting liberal bourgeois prejudices about the nature of the city, urbanism more generally and Los Angeles in particular.

One obtains a sense of this from a review of Banham's film published in *The Times of London* shortly after its first broadcast.

> But I was not persuaded by his argument that if the mark of a great city is that it imposes its style on other cities, Los Angeles, having done this largely by means of Hollywood films, is therefore both great and significant. What, after all, is the style of Los Angeles? Apart from being one of the few cities where people can live almost next door to their work, it seems to exemplify America's particular contribution to twentieth-century barbarism, namely the near-worship of everything that looks expensive and new. Mr. Banham, however, is a natural communicator and, happily, to enjoy him it is not necessary to agree with him.[20]

[18] Telephone interview with Malcolm Brown, Aug. 2003.
[19] Adam Raphael, *Guardian*, 22 Jul. 1968, quoted in Banham, *Los Angeles*, xxiv.
[20] Barry Norman, 'One pair of eyes: BBC2', *The Times of London*, 13 Mar. 1972.

Today, more than 30 years later, such stereotypes of Los Angeles, while not entirely vanquished, no longer dominate public perceptions of the city. Banham's account has become the lynchpin of a now familiar narrative of the emergence of the city as a centre of postwar modernism and postmodernism. Yet it is easy to lose sight of the radical character of his argument, especially the assertion that

> Los Angeles emphatically suggests that there is no simple correlation between urban form and social form. Where it threatens the 'human values'-oriented tradition of town planning inherited from Renaissance humanism it is revealing how simple-mindedly mechanistic that supposedly humane tradition can be, how deeply attached to the mechanical fallacy that there is a necessary causal connexion between built form and human life, between the mechanisms of the city and the styles of architecture practised there.[21]

He notes at the beginning of the film, 'You might wonder what I'm doing in Los Angeles, which makes nonsense of history and breaks all the rules.' In contrast to other commentators who perceive it as 'an unspeakable sprawling mess', Banham sees 'a city that is nothing like any other'. The roots of this alleged uniqueness derive from the patterns of settlement and what Banham calls the region's 'transportation palimpsest'. By this he means the overlayering of routes and roads, commencing with the Spanish and Mexican trails, such as the famed El Camino Real, that later become the basis for railroads, electric streetcars and freeways. Through a series of maps and detailed analyses, Banham convincingly demonstrates how each transportation technology builds upon earlier ones by continuing and completing older paths, some already in use for several centuries.

True to the form of his thesis about the significance of transportation routes in the city's evolution, Banham commences his film at LAX Airport, a fulcrum of mobility, where he picks up a rental car equipped with a 'Baede-Kar' recorded guide system, a clever invention and homage to German printer Karl Baedeker's classic city guides. For what most distinguishes this city from others is the extent to which mobility and collective fantasy permeate all facets of life, frequently blurring into each other. Mobility, be it swift spatial passage across the freeway network, or upward social mobility, is the great collective fantasy that Banham discerns in Los Angeles. It promises a world in which geographical or social distance can be obliterated and unfettered access to different social classes and milieux becomes possible.

If mobility holds out the tantalizing prospect of personal travel through space, collective fantasy introduces the possibility of access to different historical periods, be it the Spanish Revival architectural style, the faux small town urbanism of Disneyland, the postwar modernism of the Ships drive-in restaurant, the ornament laden historically styled apartment

[21] Banham, *Los Angeles*, 219.

buildings strewn throughout the city or the California bungalow.[22] Banham presents Los Angeles as a temporal palimpsest, a layering of distinct historical inscriptions simultaneously accessible in the present, as well as a series of spatial juxtapositions. This follows as a consequence of the city's relative architectural youth – he notes that most buildings in Los Angeles are the first structures built upon their spaces, 'instant architecture in an instant townscape', as he writes with a clear nod toward the 1964–66 'Plug-in City' of the British avant-garde architectural group Archigram. Yet it also comes from the 'mass produced fantasy' that allows escape from the here and now, the invitation to swap identities that emerges as a key virtue for Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour in their contemporaneous *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).[23]

Banham cleverly introduces the idea of cinema facilitating mobility into his own film. He does this by showing his boyhood home in Norwich, England, and noting that his first visits to Los Angeles were mediated by the representations of Los Angeles he initially encountered in films by Buster Keaton. This notion that film became a primary vehicle for knowing cities is repeated often in *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles*: in the hilarious bungalow parody of *Vertigo*; in a visit to the Griffith Park Observeratory whose teenager with his hot rod recalls *Rebel Without a Cause*; in the appearance of Graumann's Chinese Theater and in the tour of movie star homes accompanied by a singing bus driver.

Lacking any 'public monuments worth visiting', in Banham's phrase and dismissing the 'ancient monuments' of downtown at the film's beginning, he claims Los Angeles compensates for this absence by turning to film. Hollywood cinema supplies an instantly recognizable familiarity that substitutes for the recognition produced by the traditional urban icon. Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, we might say that for Banham this permeation of the city by the collective fantasies of Hollywood allows everyone to become an author, a producer of meaning within the city, rather than merely its passive recipient.[24] Just as Benjamin praised the plays of Bertolt Brecht for their anti-illusionism, exemplified by their montage structures that interrupt conventional dramatic plots, Los Angeles, too, frequently switches narrative registers and introduces quotation into the fabric of everyday life.

'Epic theater, therefore does not reproduce situations; rather, it discovers them. This discovery is accomplished by means of the interruption of sequences', Benjamin writes.[25] To an extent greater than other cities, Los

[22] See also Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*.
[23] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA, 1972); Banham, *Los Angeles*, 3. On the 'Plug-in City' and other projects see Peter Cook (ed.), *Archigram* (New York, 1973).
[24] Walter Benjamin, 'The author as producer' (1934), in Peter Demetz (ed.), *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978), 220–38.
[25] *Ibid*., 235.

Angeles disrupts the continuities of ordinary experience, the agendas, itineraries and projects through which one encounters any city, by encouraging reflection upon its role as the backdrop of Hollywood cinema, both onscreen and offscreen. Filmic references and citations (driving past a frequently filmed building or encountering a landmark that one previously knew only cinematically) unsettle the experiential sequence of life in Los Angeles, just as the theatrical experimentation of Erwin Piscator introduced film clips on to the stage and so produced a similar discontinuity.[26] Any city, of course, permits the informed observer to oscillate between present urban realities and his or her knowledge of its past. Yet no other metropolis has had its past as thoroughly documented by the motion picture industry and later destroyed by urban development, thus granting cinema a dual role as the interstitial historical memory of Los Angeles as well as a significant force in its development.[27]

Much of *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles* is shot from a moving automobile (frequently augmented by aerial cinematography) and exemplifies his thesis of the importance of mobility in the city. While lacking any mention of the four ecologies which structure the exposition of his book, Banham's film is implicitly organized by the notion of autopia. As a key source of this idea in his book he credits a 1965 *Fortune* magazine article by Richard Austin Smith, written shortly before the Watts Riots would puncture its sunny account of the city:

> Whatever glass and steel monuments may be built downtown, the essence of Los Angeles, its true identifying characteristic is mobility. Freedom of movement has long given life a special flavour there, liberated the individual to enjoy the sun and space that his environment so abundantly offered, put the manifold advantages of a great metropolitan area within his grasp.[28]

One might also note its confluence with a broader spectrum of modernist thinking in geography, architecture and the arts. Already in 1935, Austrian geographer Anton Wagner, in his book, *Los Angeles: The Development, Life, and Form of the Southern California Metropolis*, observed that 'American cities have been depicted as lacking tradition. This is true insofar as one defines tradition as the firm adherence to an inherited condition or firmly ingrained order. For Los Angeles, however, tradition means movement.'[29] One of the earliest studies of transportation networks in the region, Wagner's emphasis upon the significance of the railroad lines as a

[26] See Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theater*, trans. Hugh Rorrison (New York, 1978), and C.D. Innes, *Erwin Piscator's Political Theatre: The Development of Modern German Drama* (Cambridge, 1972).

[27] On this history see Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

[28] Richard Austin Smith, 'Los Angeles: prototype of supercity', *Fortune* (Mar. 1965), 97–108, quoted in Banham, *Los Angeles*, xxxv.

[29] Anton Wagner, *Los Angeles: The Development, Life, and Form of the Southern California Metropolis*, trans. Gavriel Rosenfeld (Los Angeles, 1997), 207.

precursor to suburbanization, automobility and highway construction provides a key armature for Banham's book, a crucial genealogy for mobility in the region well in advance of the automobility boom following World War II.

Modernist tropes of the highway and mobility had been in circulation for some time already, initially explored in 1920s and 1930s architectural schemes by Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, and soon rendered concrete, so to speak, through the construction of the *autostrade*, *Autobahn* and parkway in Italy, Germany and the United States.[30] The earliest parkways and arterial routes in Los Angeles date from the period around 1912.[31] Highways later were popularized by Norman Bel Geddes in his 'Futurama' exhibition for the General Motors pavilion at the 1939 New York Worlds Fair.[32] While architects and urbanists initially understood the highway as a built form that would facilitate exodus from overcrowded urban conditions, it was not long before commentators began to note its impact upon spatial and temporal perception, a new sense of speed and movement as paradigmatic of twentieth-century perception as the railroad was of the nineteenth. Like the experience of train travel analysed by Wolfgang Schivelbusch, the motorist 'sees the objects, landscapes, etc. through the apparatus which moves him through the world. That machine and the motion it creates become integrated into his visual perception: thus he can only see things in motion.'[33]

In 1941 architectural historian Sigfried Giedion wrote enthusiastically in *Space, Time and Architecture* about the perceptual experiences elicited by the modern parkway as paradigmatic of the modern age. Praising both the highway and the landscaped parkway, Giedion devoted three illustrations in his book to the Randalls Island Cloverleaf, the so-called 'Pretzel' intersection of the Grand Central parkway, Union Turnpike, Interboro parkway, and Queens Boulevard and the Henry Hudson parkway running along the Westside of Manhattan. Applauding the

[30] For a general history of highways see M.G. Lay, *Ways of the World: A History of the World's Roads and the Vehicles that Used Them* (New Brunswick, 1992). Although they seldom (if ever) actually built highways, the principal modernist architects of the early twentieth century frequently wrote about them. Examples of these analyses include Mies van der Rohe, 'Expressways as an artistic problem' (1932), in Fritz Neumeyer (ed.), *The Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, trans. Mark Jarzombek (Cambridge, MA, 1991); Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City* (1933), trans. Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux and Derek Coltman (London, 1967), 196–7; and Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Living City* (New York, 1958), 116.

[31] On this history see Matthew Roth, 'Mulholland highway and the engineering culture of Los Angeles in the 1920s', in Tom Sitton and William Deverell (eds.), *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley, 2001), 45–76.

[32] See Norman Bel Geddes, *Magic Motorways* (New York, 1940); Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley, 1998); and Edward Dimendberg, 'The will to motorization: cinema, highways, and modernity', *October*, 73 (Summer 1995), 90–137.

[33] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, trans. Anselm Hollo (New York, 1979), 66.

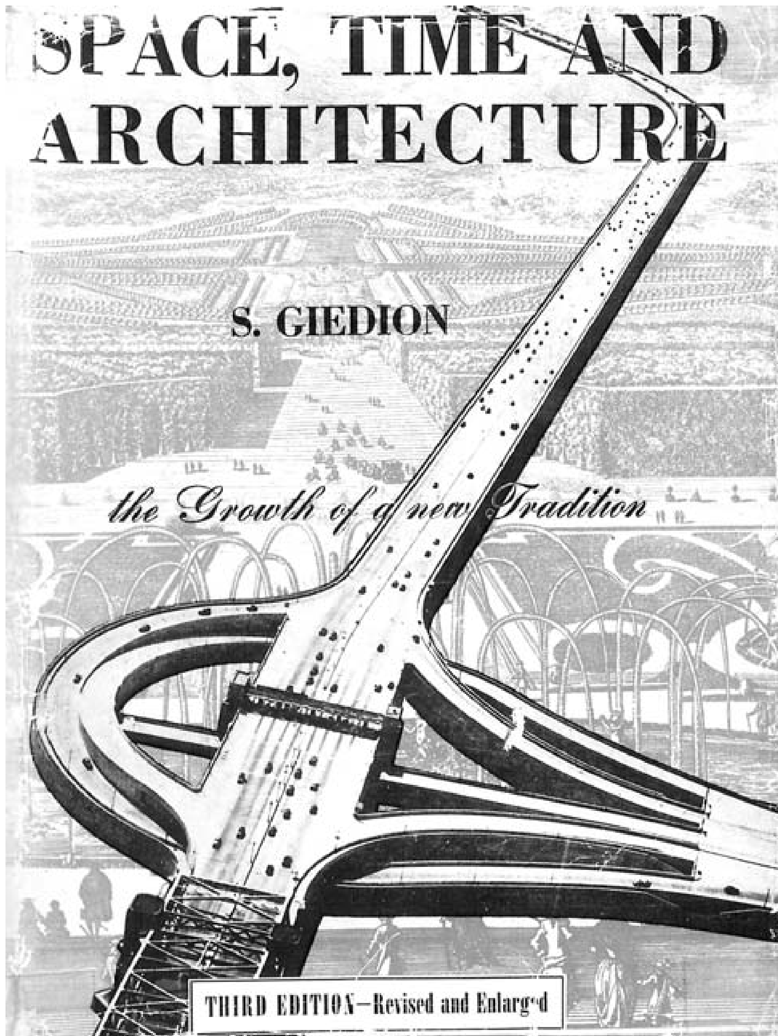

Figure 1: Cover illustration for S. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, MA, 1956).

Randalls Island Cloverleaf as 'expressive of the space-time conception both in structure and handling of movement', Giedion's interest in the structure was echoed by the former Bauhaus artist, Herbert Bayer, who selected it as a key motif for his design of the book jacket of the third edition (Figure 1).[34]

[34] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1941), 732.

Giedion shared his friend Le Corbusier's advocacy of the separation of different forms of circulation and equally admired the Pretzel as 'one of the most elaborate and highly organized of all recent solutions to the problem of division and crossing of arterial traffic'.[35] In writing of the parkway, the predecessor of the larger and less manicured highway, Giedion understood it as a quintessential manifestation of the space-time conception of the modern age:

> The meaning and beauty of the parkway cannot be embraced in one view. It can be revealed only by movement, by going along in a steady flow as the rules of traffic prescribe. The space-time feeling of our period can seldom be felt so keenly as when driving the wheel under one's hands, up and down hills, beneath overpasses, up ramps and over giant bridges.[36]

Space, Time and Architecture explicates what Giedion called the 'space-time' of the contemporary age, a post-renaissance worldview that he identifies with the early modernist historical avant-gardes including cubism, purism, futurism, De Stijl and constructivism, all of which prefigure the spatiality of modern architecture. Writing about cubism, Giedion describes it in terms which echo his account of the multi-perspectival character of the parkway:

> The essence of space as it is conceived today is its many-sidedness, the infinite potentiality for relations within it. Exhaustive description of an area from one point of reference is, accordingly, impossible; its character changes with the point of view from which it is viewed. In order to grasp the true nature of space, the observer must project himself through it.[37]

Six years later, László Moholy-Nagy writes in his book *Vision in Motion* (1947) about the experience of driving as paradigmatic of the new vision.

> The renaissance painter constructed the scene to be painted from an unchangeable, fixed point following the rules of the vanishing point perspective. But speeding on the roads and circling in the skies has given the modern man the opportunity to see more than his renaissance predecessor. The man at the wheel sees persons and objects in quick succession, in permanent motion.[38]

Urban planner Kevin Lynch, who systematized the notion of urban cognitive mapping in his 1960 book *The Image of the City*, reported that automobile traffic and the highway system emerged as dominant themes in the interviews he conducted with residents of Los Angeles. 'There were frequent references to over-passes, the fun of the big interchanges, the kinesthetic sensations of dropping, turning, climbing. For some persons, driving was a challenging, high-speed game.'[39] One might think here as

[35] *Ibid.*, 733.
[36] *Ibid.*, 729–30.
[37] *Ibid.*, 431–2.
[38] László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago, 1947).
[39] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 42.

well of Joan Didion's depiction of the freeway system in her novel *Play It As It Lays* (1970), whose female protagonist narrates the triumph of diagonally moving across four lanes of traffic while switching from the Hollywood on to the Harbor freeway.[40]

Rarely though, with the significant exception of Remi Nadeau, had the highway been deemed central by historians writing on Los Angeles.[41] Coinciding with the high tide of 'environmental design', in the 1960s and early 1970s, a holistically spirited admission of advertising, signage, everyday life and perceptual experience into the design of the built environment that departed from the work of Bauhaus figures Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer and Gyorgy Kepes, the publication of Banham's book spoke to and through this shift from monumentality toward kineticism and became a rallying point for those seeking to apprehend Los Angeles not simply as a place but as a template for modern life and its new modes of spatial and temporal experience.[42] Associated with the pop artists and architects of the British Independent Group, whose landmark 1955 exhibition 'Man, Machine and Motion' anticipated this fascination with kineticism, Banham also wrote extensively on Italian futurism.[43] The leap from F.T. Marinetti's (1876–1944) valorization of speed to the praise of the Los Angeles freeway system is not as far as one might imagine, and like the futurists Banham championed the intoxicating sensations of the machine age, finding in Marinetti's prosthetic ideal of 'the man multiplied by the motor' 'a fair identification of the characteristic type of inhabitant of contemporary culture'.[44]

Writing of the intersection of the San Diego and Santa Monica freeways, he claimed it 'is a work of art, both as a pattern on the map, as a monument against the sky, and as a kinetic experience as one sweeps through it'. It was this cloverleaf that convinced him 'the Los Angeles freeway system is

[40] Joan Didion, *Play It As It Lays* (New York, 1970), 14.

[41] See Remi Nadeau, *Los Angeles: From Mission to Modern City* (New York, 1960). Although he devotes several pages to the city's freeways, it is striking that unlike Banham Nadeau criticizes their failure to resolve the plight of the commuter as well as their traffic jams and congestion.

[42] Paradigmatic here is the Vision + Value book series edited by Kepes that published work by architects, urbanists, artists and social and cultural critics. The 1965 volume *The Nature and Art of Motion* that included an essay by George Rickey on kinetic sculpture and Donald Appleyard on movement in the city is especially suggestive as an example of the fascination with motion that would later appear in Banham's work on Los Angeles. For a more recent treatment of these ideas see Anne Friedberg, 'Urban mobility and cinematic visuality: the screens of Los Angeles – endless cinema or private telematics?', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1, 2 (2002), 183–2004.

[43] For a representative example of Banham's writing on futurism see Reyner Banham, 'Primitives of a mechanized art' (1959), reprinted in Banham *et al.* (eds.), *A Critic Writes*, 39–45. On the 'Man, Machine and Motion' exhibition see David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 130–3.

[44] For Marinetti's futurist writings see R.W. Flint (ed.), *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (New York, 1971); Banham, 'Primitives of a mechanized art', 44. On the role of sensation in Banham see Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 234.

one of the greater works of man'.[45] Visible from nearly everywhere in the city because of its immensity and indispensable for travel throughout the region, the freeway system becomes for him the city's principal urban icon. 'Paris is not famous as the home of the Metro in the way Los Angeles is famous as the home of the freeway.' 'For the Freeway, quite as much as the Beach, is where the Angeleno is most himself, most integrally identified with his great city', he writes.[46] Although the earliest freeway in the region, the Arroyo Seco parkway (today the Pasadena freeway), was completed in 1939, most of the major freeways in the city were not built before the 1950s and 1960s. Praising the San Diego freeway (constructed from 1957 to 1969) and the Santa Monica freeway (constructed from 1961 to 1966), Banham thus selects features of the urban landscape whose modernity would have been conspicuous when he first arrived in Los Angeles in 1968.[47]

Yet Banham is equally adept in his film at showing the limits of the mobility that automobile and driving can yield. One thinks here of the scene (an instance of Michael Moore style documentary *avant la lettre*) when a guard denies him access to a road that crosses the Rolling Hills gated community, certainly among the earliest representations in a film of such privatization of public space. Similarly, Banham's caustic characterization of Marina Del Rey as 'an executive ghetto, full of plastic boats and plastic people' speaks volumes about his reservations about a city in which 'nearly all the good architecture is private'. If the freeways attain such prominence in both book and film, this may be because they count among the few high-quality works of Los Angeles architecture not hidden behind fences and inaccessible to public view. Frequently interpreted as a naive booster of Los Angeles, Banham was a critic and defender of the ideal of public space in the city, perhaps one reason that Mike Davis treats him with uncharacteristic deference in *City of Quartz*.[48]

Ultimately, however, Banham's interest in the freeway is as much epistemological as it is kinetic, and he approaches it as a road to knowledge no less than as an urban icon. Anthony Vidler writes of the book's 'freeway model of history, one that saw the city through movement and as itself in movement' and notes the non-hierarchical structure of its organization, a methodological challenge to traditional architectural

[45] Banham, *Los Angeles*, 71–2.

[46] *Ibid.*, 196, 203.

[47] On the history of the Los Angeles freeway system see Martin Wachs, 'The evolution of transportation in Los Angeles: images of past policies and future prospects', in Scott and Soja (eds.), *The City*, 106–59.

[48] Davis calls Banham's book '*the* textbook on Los Angeles' and also refers to it as framing 'art-world views' of the city and primarily influencing 'the international intelligentsia', *City of Quartz*, 74. Still, the anti-elitism of Banham's association with British pop art seems to have earned the approval of Davis, and it is striking in a book that is hardly bashful about delivering criticism how little Banham receives. Apart from a quotation from the negative review of Peter Plagens and a critique of Banham's underestimation of the city's downtown, Davis is remarkably mute.

and urban histories.[49] Rejecting chronological narrative and the unities of style, architect and period, Banham introduces a new mode of writing on the built environment, paratactic rather than syntactic, organized around juxtaposition rather than exposition, in which 'all its parts are equal and equally accessible from all other parts at once'.[50] No less than its subject matter, the organization of Banham's book is a product of its age, an implicit challenge to the pretence of writing a total history of architecture. Save for his modification of Pevsner's typological mode of analysis to local conditions (the beach house, the fast food restaurant) and his appropriation of Giedion's Hegelianism (the freeway as culmination of the space-time of modernity), Banham borrowed little from then prevailing modes for writing on buildings or cities.

At once recalling the 'modern arrangements of knowledge in non-hieratic forms' championed by Independent Group member, Lawrence Alloway, Banham's equation of history writing with driving (signalled by his titling the book's introduction 'In the rear-view mirror') is unabashedly modernist in its valorization of simultaneity over succession.[51] It implies the notion of the cityscape as collage, in which, in the words of Kepes, 'the contrast and variety of the elements produces a vitality through tension and the potential of structure'.[52] One might also note how his film is equally disrespectful of the rules of documentary cinema, flaunting its artifice through the introduction of highly constructed situations and subjective judgements that undercut any pretence toward objectivity. In all of these instances, the freeway can be discerned as an organizing trope whose multiple points of entry and exit facilitate multiple historical itineraries.

In many ways Banham's film is mired in the time and place of its origin and fails to resonate with our current understandings of Los Angeles. This is perhaps most notably the case in his treatment of Watts and presentation of the neighbourhood's high rate of private home ownership as a sufficient demonstration of the racial and social equality of its inhabitants. Similarly, the sexual politics of both the film and book seem remarkably retrograde and untouched by the nascent women's liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. This is epitomized in the film in a gratuitous topless dancing sequence accompanied by The Doors 'LA Woman', with scarcely a nod to the imbrication of gender and space in a neighbourhood such as the Sunset Strip. 'Give me a beach, something to eat, and a couple of broads, and I can get along without material things', a Santa Monica bus driver

[49] Anthony Vidler, 'Introduction', in Banham, *Los Angeles*, xxv.

[50] Banham, *Los Angeles*, 18. See also Whiteley, *Reyner Banham*, 237. For a discussion of the rhetorical form of parataxis see entry on it in Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (eds.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, 1993), 879–80.

[51] Lawrence Alloway, 'The long front of culture', *Cambridge Opinion*, 17 (1959), 25, quoted in Whiteley, *Reyner Banham*, 448.

[52] Gyorgy Kepes, 'Notes on expression and communication in the cityscape', in Lloyd Rodwin (ed.), *The Future Metropolis* (New York, 1961), 196.

confides to Banham in his book, which apart from a single mention of homosexual couples walking on the beach at Venice, assumes the male heterosexual position as normative.[53] Together with Banham's notoriously cavalier dismissal of the city's downtown, these moments underscore the dated quality of his vision of Los Angeles, its presentation of what urban historian Robert Fishman has called 'a celebration of a vanished era'.[54]

In a University of Southern California lecture depicted in the film, Banham compares London and Los Angeles, finding them both cities that have imposed a unique style upon the rest of the world. He discerns this in local products of the entertainment industry, high-finish automobiles and surfboards, modernist architecture and leisure activities such as surfing. Contradictions in this argument become readily evident, however, as in the scene in which Banham interviews art writer Mike Salisbury and artist Ed Ruscha in the parking lot of Tiny Naylors drive-in restaurant. Like Venturi and Scott Brown, Banham praised the artist's work for its evocation of the everyday urban environment in his books of photographs such as *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1962) and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966).

In the film, Ruscha laments the replacement of the indigenous modernism evident in the drive-in by growing standardization. Here it becomes possible to discern the redemptive dimension of Banham's interest in Los Angeles. Mourning the eradication of the local tradition of fantastic architecture for which 'absolutely everything is possible, even a restaurant in the shape of a bowler hat', he admits such examples of popular culture into a counter canon of architectural history. Banham's valorization of the city's everyday environment is deeply tinged by nostalgia for past styles and buildings on the verge of disappearing. Although known for his appreciation of new trends, Banham's appreciation of Los Angeles also seeks to foster preservation and wonder, as if the very activities of writing and filmmaking might arrest the passage of time and reverse the destruction of so much that once was remarkable in its urban fabric and was vanishing before his eyes.

Yet the aspirations to celebrate trends and to venerate history ultimately prove incompatible and leave Banham vulnerable to the charge of wanting it both ways. He desires a world in which the latest automobiles, shiniest surfboards and most stylish products of consumer culture co-exist with an aging modernism but fails to grasp how the desire for history is itself a product of global capitalism and its replacement of older cultural forms and regionalisms in obedience to the imperatives of fashion and merchandising. Banham's hostility to postmodernism is well known, encapsulated in his famous remark that it occupied 'the same relation

[53] Banham, *Los Angeles*, 20, 14.
[54] Robert Fishman, review of Banham, *Los Angeles*, in *Harvard Design Magazine*, 16 (Winter/Spring 2002), 62–3.

to architecture as female impersonation to femininity'.[55] Yet he remains silent as to how the modern might resist incorporation, recuperation and commercialization by the postmodern, poised as the latter always remains to devour the very older styles and vernaculars he praises.

Determining the optimal relation between fashion and history, innovation and tradition, and how they might productively coexist, are issues that Banham never adequately addresses or resolves, despite their centrality to any reckoning with the cultural achievements of Los Angeles. If his high estimation of the disposable and transient products of consumer culture that he shared with other members of the Independent Group fails to defend the examples of architectural history that Banham clearly valued in Los Angeles, such as the Bradbury Building, it also raises the more troubling question of the wisdom of transferring and translating this cult of the new from the 1950s England to 1970s America. For in postwar Great Britain reviving futurist polemics about the destruction of history by mechanical civilization and praising the latest products of American popular culture doubtless served a tonic function and contained a strong element of class-based political critique. Cultural forms such as rock music and jazz were viewed by some as forms of cultural imperialism, while others appropriated them as a mode of resistance.[56]

Polemical extremism, after all, occupies a venerable place in the history of modernism, and it can be argued that British architecture and culture benefited from the attempts of the Independent Group and other avant-gardes to expunge the stuffiness of the official culture of the 1950s. By the time Banham arrived in Los Angeles in 1968, a time and a setting already predisposed continually to innovate, if not altogether discard its history, it is doubtful whether these ideas played a similar role. Read charitably, Banham's praise of 'instant architecture in an instant townscape' might be construed simply as an irrelevant invitation to Angelenos to continue their love affair with disposable buildings, fast cars and mass consumption they already had commenced without the imprimatur of Marinetti or the European avant-garde. A more critical reading of Banham's engagement with Los Angeles might find him an apologist for consumer society, fully capable of recognizing its crassness and vulgarity but unable to articulate a cogent critique of it or to develop a defence of modernity grounded in a deeper vision of culture and society than that provided by modernist notions of stylistic succession or kinetic experience.

[55] Quoted in Thomas Hines, 'Knock down, throw away: Reyner Banham and the expendable building' (review of Whiteley, *Reyner Banham*), *Times Literary Supplement*, 5166 (5 Apr. 2002), 4. Hines correctly underscores the tension in Banham's work between celebrating the new and often failing to appreciate the past. Yet I find his assertion that Banham 'seems to have had few "essentialist" commitments beyond his ardour for the New, the Now, the Trendy, and the Future' overstated and neglectful of the aesthetic allegiances which permeate Banham's writings.

[56] See Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Berkeley, 1989).

By identifying Los Angeles with the freeway and automobility, Banham may well have posed a problem for one function associated with the traditional urban icon: memory. With the possible exception of its most famous cloverleafs, the freeway system is difficult to remember. Its sheer size, the constantly altering cityscapes visible from its driving surfaces and the proclivity of many drivers to listen to the radio, speak on their mobile telephones or ponder their daily schedules suggest it is a less than ideal means of generating a memorable image of the city. Cityscapes perceived in movement appear at a distinct advantage over those perceived at rest, and the kinetic icon may well suffer with respect to its traditional stationary brethren. If urban icons thwart forgetting and guarantee a common urban lexicon in visual form, the Los Angeles freeway comes up short as a means of representing the city surrounding it.

Although Banham's strategy of appropriating cinema as a means of depicting the kineticism of the highway is a brilliant solution, no doubt the best option short of driving on it, the freeway system ultimately fails as a means of promoting and remembering the city, two vital tasks accomplished by every urban icon. For memorable images of a metropolis cannot develop from sensations alone, even if the sensations are as heady as those of driving the great freeway cloverleafs, and some element of intellection seems required as well if an urban icon is to be recalled. Though describing Los Angeles in his book as an amalgam of 'geography, climate, economics, demography, mechanics, and culture', one is struck by how the valorization of the freeway as its chief urban icon values the mechanical above these other factors.[57] The very real limitations of the futurist 'multiplication of man by motor', its sexism, romanticization of technology and environmental shortsightedness apply equally to Banham's book and film on Los Angeles.

Like all cults of the machine and technology, this one is also liable to omit histories and subjectivities which challenge modernist narratives of speed, efficiency and movement.[58] Not everyone, after all, drives in Los Angeles, and in the end Banham succumbs to the same 'mechanical fallacy' of equating built form with social life for which he chides urbanists imbued with the '"human values" oriented tradition of town planning inherited from Renaissance humanism'. Although Banham does note that some people in Los Angeles can walk to work, his interest in the lives of pedestrians is minimal. It is doubtless correct that the everyday environment of Los Angeles hinges upon automobility, yet studying the social experience of young people, the aged and the many residents who rely upon the city's system of public transportation would certainly yield a very different understanding of mobility from Banham's enshrinement of the (most likely

57 Banham, *Los Angeles*, 6.
58 Here a comparison to the contemporaneous work of another technological determinist, Marshall McLuhan, might prove instructive.

male) solitary motorist as its experiential foundation. Spatially and kinetically compelling as it may be, the freeway is not a royal road to the *Zeitgeist*.

And yet, if one desires a credible urban icon for Los Angeles, is there a more plausible choice than the freeway system? Given the sheer size and heterogeneity of the metropolis, is there another more compelling candidate? Like it or not, one cannot really dispute Banham's claims that 'the freeway is where the Angelenos live a large part of their lives' and act out 'one of the most spectacular paradoxes in the great debate between private freedom and public discipline that pervades every affluent, mechanized urban society'.[59] To castigate Banham, as have many critics, for reminding us of these uncomfortable truths is to kill the messenger who dares to admit that driving can be both a freedom and a necessity, a pleasure and a burden.[60] One can acknowledge the ubiquity of the freeway in Los Angeles, without valorizing it, as did Banham. Today it is no doubt possible, if not necessary, to part ways from the increasingly high environmental price of automobility and his sometimes comically naive endorsement of its real ecological consequences.

Or does the difficulty identifying an urban icon for Los Angeles not signal the end of the viability of the very concept, the sense in which the contemporary metropolis may no longer be representable in the manner of its precursors? Yet the modernist lineage of Banham's project gives one reason to suspect this may not matter, for as the contemporary veneration of 1950s California modernism has demonstrated, old modernist icons do not fade away. They return as classics. As automobility and the freeway spread across the globe, it is not unlikely that highways in other cities will one day eclipse the size and prominence of those in Los Angeles. Indeed, the growing shortage of habitable land in Southern California combined with the absence of the political consensus that once allowed freeways to eradicate residential neighbourhoods suggests that the construction of new ones is less likely in the future.

It may well be the highway systems of Shanghai, Lagos or Mexico City that elicit the most awe 50 or 100 years from now. Should this occur, and if the pace of traffic on the Los Angeles freeway slows down as population increases in the region fill it with ever more automobiles, then the Los Angeles highway network may well become an urban icon of the city in its classic modern phase, as timeless as the Eiffel Tower and as perennially stylish as an Eames chair. For if many urban icons such as the Eiffel Tower exude a whiff of the once modern and functional – the most advanced technology – turned archaic, even more glorious days of the freeway as the principal urban icon of Los Angeles may lie before us, through the front windshield of the future, rather than in the rear view mirror of the past.

[59] Banham, *Los Angeles*, 196, 198.

[60] For the most strident criticism of Banham's book see Peter Plagens, 'The ecology of evil', *Artforum*, 115 (Dec. 1972), 67–76. A less severe but still critical judgement can be found in the retrospective review by Robert Fishman.