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SATURDAY REVIEW

The Spanish Conquistadors called it City of Angels but few angels live there now. We think of a mess of sex-mad dirty dealers, timsel shows, freeways, flashy wealth and urban sprawl. A place to make an urban planner shudder. LEONIE SANDERCOCK, Professor of Urban Studies at Macquarie University, went to live and teach there for six months. She expected the worst but she fell in love with the place and its people, its surging energy and manic variety. Here she tells of her affair with Los Angeles:

WHY I LOVE L.A.

sweatshops, rotten rebels, riches and all

LOS ANGELES is an instant city. Barely a century old, its population has trebled and retrebled in living memory. Its monuments are the artefacts of civil engineering: off-ramps and interchanges that sweep into concrete parabolas. It is immediately apparent that no other city has ever been produced by such an extraordinary mixture of geography, climate, economics, demography, mechanics and culture.

Seen from the air, Los Angeles is the least attractive of cities: an unrelieved flat grid swathed through by concrete pathways and enveloped in brown haze. If this is the prototype of future cities, is it the harbinger of universal urban doom?

LA has always had its critics. It is the easiest of cities to dismiss or disparage. In the 1920s newcomers flocking to it described it as "six suburbs in search of a city". In later versions the original six grew to a hundred. What visitors experience of LA is where the tourist buses go: Disneyland, Universal Studios, Sunset Strip and Beverly Hills. You either love it, entranced by the glamour of the entertainment industry and the fabulous wealth of finance capital in this newest of World Cities: or you loathe it because it is not Siena, or Venice or Paris or Florence, not one of the heavenly cities. But if you live and work there, as I just did for six months, it is a city that both repels and compels, in strange and entirely unexpected ways.

MUDSLIDES: On any hillside in the rainy season you can have all the excitement of surfing in the comfort of your own living room.

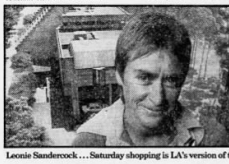
The unrelieved monotony of grid suburbs that you see as you descend on LA from the Pacific is not all there is to it. In fact I am hard-pressed to think of many other cities that contain within them so many different residential ecologies. For surfies or ocean lovers of all ages there is a long stretch of beachside suburbs. From Malibu at the northern extreme, where TV and movie stars compete to pay the highest prices for the smallest houses, built right on the sand (and thereby denying public access) and inviting disaster from Pacific storms: to Palos Verdes on the southern tip of Santa Monica Bay, where merchant bankers and venture capitalists outbid each other for the largest houses and gardens on these rolling hills overlooking the ocean and looking down on the entire bay; and many shades in between.

● Santa Monica itself, now totally gentrified and condominium-ed, yet in the early 1980s famous as Red Santa Monica, for its 'socialist' city council which introduced (gasp) rent control and tried to exercise some control over the pace and nature of market-led redevelopment.

● Venice Beach (celebrated in Ray Bradbury's latest novel, *Death Is a Lonely Business*) originally conceived in the early 1900s as a residential subdivision around a series of canals (replete with gondolas) that would be totally cleansed, and attract a good class of citizen. Venice lapsed into stagnation and raffishness and its boardwalk became a mecca for the most outlandish and inventive exhibitionists LA has to offer: bodybuilders, gymnasts, trick roller skaters, clowns, jugglers, magicians, artists, surfies, religious freaks, soapbox politicians. A human circus, 365 days a year.

● Manhattan Beach, where narrow streets and narrow two-storey houses built between the 1920s and 1950s step down a hill to beach and boardwalk, where ordinary folks get on with quiet lives, strolling, jogging, cycling: and where the graffiti on the boardwalk says "if you don't live here, don't surf here".

From beachside communities to hillsides, the ring of hills dividing LA from the San Fernando Valley and desert beyond contains within it some of the most beautiful canyons, with the feel of the Blue Mountains or of Eltham. Some are the preserve of aging hippies and maturing yuppies and the emphasis is on home made (bread, sandals, furniture, etc). Others are extensions of Beverly Hills-type bland luxury: and in others you'll find elderly European women violinists or two-income academic households huddled in tiny cottages that are now worth small fortunes. Some canyon residents have chosen to defy nature and sound physical hazard analysis by building on the sides of hills that were never meant to be built on. It is they who experience the above mentioned mudslides. All canyon residents in their preference for exuberant and leafy gardens, are at constant risk from bushfires.



Leonie Sandercock ... Saturday shopping is LA's version of the Sabbath.

LA is commonly thought of as the archetypal low-density city, but that is not true either. For mile after mile along the western end of Wilshire Boulevard stretch luxury high-rise condominiums built by Arab and other foreign capital. And in West Hollywood, where I lived, modern 12-storey towers rub shoulders with older three storey walk-ups and detached single-storey houses on quarter-acre lots. West Hollywood is one of LA's strangest neighbourhoods. Only 5 per cent of its households have children. Its city council is run by an unusual coalition of gays and 'grys' (elderly citizens). Its three main axes, Sunset Boulevard, La Cienega Boulevard, and Melrose Avenue, encapsulate LA's culture: Sunset, with its billboards, neons, strip clubs, discos and car rental outlets; La Cienega with its galleries, antique shops, expensive delis and other restaurants, and interior decorating salons; and Melrose with its post modern and chi-chi boutiques, coffee shops, toy shops and Olivia Newton-John's Koala Blue.

And then there is the other LA: East LA, where the poor and the huge illegal immigrant population lives in overcrowded tenements; and mobile homes-ville stretching down freeway arms through the old industrial district towards Anaheim. And, right on the edge of Downtown (what we would call the Central Business District), the homeless (some 30,000 in this city) 'live' on the sidewalks in large cardboard cartons in which they huddle on winter nights, tolerated by police and local authorities because there's nowhere for them to go. A soup kitchen attracts long queues around five in the evening.

And then the ethnic communities: the black district of Watts, Hispanic areas close to Downtown, Korea-Town, now some 500,000 strong, Chinatown, Little Tokyo.

To get from any one of these locations to another, according to a native of LA, takes you 10-30 minutes by freeway – which of course assumes that you have a car and can afford to drive it. Downtown is surrounded, moat or noose-like, by a maze of freeways that are utterly intimidating to a stranger, second nature to a native. These 10-lane concrete conduits do get congested at peak hour, and do contribute to the deadly smog problem, but they also function smoothly and people clearly enjoy them. Mastery of the freeway system is an essential survival skill, absorbed by osmosis by natives, but unconquerable by New Yorkers – those intense people who don't obey traffic lights in a car or on foot. (Most of them can't even drive.)

As for public transportation. It is a term always used in connection with the words "impossible in LA". *I should be very much pleased if you could find me something good (meaty) on economic conditions in California ... California is very important for me because nowhere else has the upheaval most shamelessly caused by capitalist centralisation taken place with such speed* (Letter from Karl Marx to F. Sorge, 1880).

The area circumscribed by a 60-mile radius from downtown LA and encompassing the built-up area of five counties is one of the largest industrial metropolises in the world. Since the late 1960s it has experienced a concentration of industrial production, employment growth and international corporate finance that may be unparalleled in any advanced industrial country. Between 1970 and 1980, when the entire United States had a net addition of less than a million manufacturing jobs, the LA region added a quarter of a million. Over the same time, the population grew by 1.3 million and an extraordinary office-building boom marked the emergence of LA as a global city of corporate headquarters, financial management and international trade.

Sustaining this rapid centralisation of industrial activity, financial controls and corporate wealth has been a series of structural changes which have changed the social and economic geography. These structural changes have affected the organisation of the labour process and the composition of the workforce, the location of industry and the sectoral distribution of employment, the organisation of the working class and the patterns of class conflict. Substantial overall economic growth has been juxtaposed with extensive job lay-offs and plant closures, deepening poverty and unemployment, and the re-emergence of industrial sweatshops reminiscent of the 19th century, the intensification of ethnic and racial segregation, and increasing rates of urban violence and homelessness.

In many ways the LA region combines the contrasting dynamics of both 'sunbelt' and 'frostbelt' cities, adding to this mix some features of intensified industrialisation characteristic of Third World export-processing zones. The result is a peculiar composite metropolis reflecting all of the different patterns of change affecting major US and other cities: a Houston, a Detroit, a lower Manhattan and a Singapore fused into this 60-mile radius on the Pacific Rim, containing aerospace and entertainment industries, high-tech firms and labour-intensive sweatshops, and corporate headquarters and finance capital celebrated in the post-modern skyscrapers of the past decade's development downtown.

SO HOW do people live in LA? My first impression was that people spend their lives shopping. Shopping is a form of recreation to which all of Saturday may be devoted: LA's version of the Sabbath. Shopping centres are ways of life. Their internal architecture offers pools and ponds, trees and terraces, a kind of oasis or shelter from the urban desert or jungle outside.

The shopping centre is LA's answer to the street life of New York or of European cities. No street life in LA. People are frightened of being on the streets, except in their automobiles. So the shopping centre is a huge womb offering protection and every kind of physical and 'spiritual' nourishment, a world turned in on itself, often without windows onto the adjacent neighbourhood.

One ugly eight-storey structure near us, occupying several entire blocks, presents a blank wall (no windows) to the outside world, but inside: four floors of car parking, then three storeys of shops, then the top level of 11 cinemas and about 30 different food outlets (every cuisine under the sun, including Ethiopian). The first time I was driven into the bowels of this structure I felt I was betraying my principles – you know, small is beautiful, long live the corner shop, shopping means walking along a street and experiencing climate and movement, and so on. But one trip through the fruit and vegetable department and I was hooked for the duration. There were, quite simply, the best quality and greatest choice of fruit and vegetables I have seen anywhere in the world.

There are only two places in LA where you shop by walking along a street, like the High Streets of old, or like Lygon Street in Carlton, Oxford Street in Paddington, Darling Street in Balmain ... One is Melrose Avenue, which tourist buses will, I am sure, soon discover, if only to stare at the shoppers – young, affluent, mostly under 35, mostly post-modern punks with outrageous hairstyles full of streaks and spikes and jagged edges. These are the affluent rebels without a cause. Their shops are works of interior decorating art – the most inventive windows and displays imaginable. One shop sells quaint old-fashioned toys (for kids of all ages) alongside space-age robots and monsters. Another, War Babies, sells militaristic clothing. Another – Industrial Revolution – has a range of kitchen ware and office furniture, all in black, red or white. And of course Koala Blue, Olivia's success story, selling Ken Done everythings and Jenny Kee sweaters, and jars of Vegemite and packets of Iced Vovos. A bar serves Australian wines by the glass, cappuccinos, meat pies, lamingtons and pavlovas, and on the back wall a large video screen replays old Aussie Rules matches (I caught a glimpse of a former lover) and old Bert Newton Tonight shows. To my amazement, on the two occasions when I went in, it was packed with excited Americans clamouring to buy sweaters with kookaburras and cockatoos on them. This can only be explained in terms of fashion fads, of which more later.

The other shopping street is the famous Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, which makes Toorak or Double Bay look like Cheap Street. For here in Rodeo Drive is extreme wealth, extreme chi-chi, the most exotic foreign cars parked at the meters, the most exotic shoppers, sporting thousands of dollars' worth of clothing on their backs and carrying more in their shopping bags. What can I say? It makes the Paris and Rome rivals pale into insignificance. Here is the ultimate in Conspicuous Consumption. If you want to be convinced that this is a society rotten at the core, this is where to go.

> "Easterners prefer to see LA as a frivolous aberration from the true America, but in order not to be banished from this paradise its denizens work harder than we know how to."

Apart from shopping, there are two other conspicuous LA activities. One is keeping the body beautiful. So there are fitness centres for all faiths (aerobics, yoga, karate, jazz movement, etc etc) on every second corner (just as once there were churches) and tanning studios open 24 hours a day (in this city where the sun almost always shines). The other is eating.

Food fashions come and go with astonishing rapidity: from sprout salads to sushi bars to pasta places, in quick succession. Just when you thought it was chi-chi to order sushi, along comes the meat loaf special. In a sudden sway away from the natural foods and lighter fare that have characterised the trend-setting Californian restaurant market, the dining pendulum appears to be swinging towards the meat and potatoes of "diners" with a nostalgia theme, recreating the atmosphere of by-gone days – the thirties, forties, fifties.

Restaurants, shopping centres, clothes, sporting activities – Nothing Lasts. The overwhelming feeling is of evanescence. Shops and restaurants disappear before you've had a chance to revisit them. In the large and successful Esprit fashion store in West Hollywood the entire stock changes every fortnight. This is a city of instant access and instant gratification, the Credit Society writ large. Yet nothing comes to mind more than that marvellous phrase of Marx: "All that is solid melts into air". Hence the importance of that crucial preposition in LA language – INTO. You get in a car, but into just about everything else. For example: Lawyer – "For a while I was into corporate law, but now ...."; Intellectual – "Lately I've been getting into Proust"; Real Estate Broker – "I have a nice property if you're into tax shelters". But next week they'll all be into something else.

But there is a serious side to LA. Rumour has it that UCLA (where I was working) is the only Californian university that has an admission policy requiring that undergraduates look good in running shorts. And indeed most of the undergraduates, with their pearly white teeth and perfect tans and blondness, looked as though they were straight out of the Big M ads, and as though they should be carrying surfboards under their arms rather than brief cases.

The campus also has a good number of black and Hispanic students, and the joy for me in being there was partly to do with the extraordinary ethnic diversity of both staff and students, and the higher levels of political activity and organisation.

There is a serious cultural side to the city: it embraces jazz and classical music, new theatres, museums and so on, though most of the best art is in private museums (the Norton Simon, the Getty, the Institute of Contemporary Art) rather than public, and there is, literally, no cultural centre to the town, neither in the form of buildings, a district, or a movement. I confess to finding more conventional cultural excitement (that is, theatre and galleries) and choice in ten days in New York than in six months in LA, to which Sydney and Melbourne compare more than favourably, particularly in theatre and painting. But still and all, while LA is not NY, nor means to be, it has something special to offer, this city of choice, instant access, and evanescence.

I expected (I confess) to hate the place, to find it alienating, scary, crass, superficial. And to some extent it is those things. But also more. It's got something to do with energy and argumentative spirit and seriousness, particularly on campus, but in the wider society too. Amidst all the apparent easy-going hedonism there is a determination to make things happen, higher expectations, a competitive edge – all of which probably have something to do with the volatility and frontier nature of the place – and without which life is reduced to comfort and stagnation. Easterners (ie, those north the East Coast of USA) on the whole fail to perceive this about LA, preferring to see it as a frivolous aberration from the true America, on their side of the country, of winters and work. LA may not have any winter, but in order not to be banished from this paradise its denizens work harder than we know how to in this nation that prides itself on sickies and she'll be right, mate.

I happen to think that Sydney is just about the most physically exhilarating and sensual city in the world, with its own brash cultural vibrance. Like many a wandering Australian, I have been captivated by the hazy Tuscan light on cypress hills, the colours of the buildings along Venetian canals, the angles of terracotta roofs in Florence, and the breathtaking crispness of Swiss mountains and valleys, and the sheer sense of history embedded in those ruins in Sparta, Sofiounty and Agrigento. What I never expected was to be drawn, physically, to LA.

Yet, to my astonishment, I became attached to the view from the freeway of the palm trees floating and receding in the smog-haze; attached to the deceptive perspectives of the pale subtropical light, to the backdrop of the Hollywood Hills, so much like a movie set; to the scurrying sandpipers and salsating seagulls on Santa Monica Beach at sunrise; to the view of the Milky Way and its shooting stars that you get at 3 am after a two-hour drive to the Mojave Desert; to nights in the hot summer evenings in the Hollywood Hills overlooking the city as it turns on its fairy lights, and down to Sunset Strip itself, that raucous celebration of popular culture.

I have to go back.

The Duncan case: three men charged after nearly 14 years

MACABRE ADELAIDE

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three years when a company of which he was a director failed to pay value-added tax. In 1976 O'Hanlon was sentenced to seven years' jail for his part in a pornography protection racket. He and four other detectives were convicted of taking bribes to protect porn merchants from prosecution.

In 1978 Harold Salisbury was sensationally sacked as Police Commissioner by the then Premier, Mr Dunstan. One of the grounds for his dismissal was that he had misled the Government. He had not disclosed that the police Special Branch kept secret files, including the so-called pink files, on the State's homosexuals and others.

The Vice Squad officer Michael O'Shea was cleared of suspicion in the Duncan case. But after the inquest he and his partner in the Vice Squad were put back into uniform.

After that things did not go well for him in the police force. His marriage was shaky, he hit the bottle and had psychological problems. In 1976 he went to a group therapy session recommended by his psychologist. It was conducted by the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the Rt Rev J. B. Edwards, at his home.

A young nurse in the group was an introvert who did not mix well. "She was very fearful of dying so the doctors decided they would put her through a series of exercises that would give her rebirth," O'Shea said last year.

She huddled on the floor in the foetal position and the group lay around her with cushions to try to contain her. O'Shea lay on top. "She was struggling and I was containing her, and after a while she went quiet and one of the doctors told us to get up quietly and leave the room because she was asleep. Well, of course, she wasn't asleep, she was dead."

Once again, the web of misfortune enmeshing many connected with the Duncan case was evident. The death, officially put down to misadventure, haunted O'Shea.

O'Shea left the police force in 1981 and, last year, told what he knew of the Duncan case to *Advertiser* journalist Mike McEwen. The story won McEwen the coveted Walkley Award, and led to the reopening of the police investigation into Duncan's death.

Shortly after McEwen's story *The Advertiser* printed another story which alleged political interference in the case. It reported that detectives working with the Scotland Yard pair in 1972 were prevented from interviewing a man prominent in the legal affairs of South Australia, on the instructions of someone at a top level of the State Government.

The Adaptiser's Editor, Ian Meikle, said this week that he was disappointed that the story "didn't stand up to the scrutiny of the [police] task force. We had believed it had some substance."

He said the story had come from someone who "should have known" but who was a "reliable" rather than "impeccable" source.

But *The Advertiser* also reported in the story that detectives working with the Scotland Yard pair had been obstructed when they tried to get a full interview with an eminent Adelaide professor, a world authority in his field, who was allegedly seen walking in the city with Dr Duncan on the night of his death. The professor is still alive.

On February 5 this year, six months after the police reopened the Duncan case, three men were charged with Dr Duncan's manslaughter. The names of two who appeared in court in South Australia were suppressed. A third man, Brian Edwin Hudson, was arrested and charged in Western Australia, where he runs a panel-beating shop in the Perth suburb of Cannington.

The death of Dr George Duncan has had a lasting effect on South Australia. Peter Duncan (no relation), now a Federal MP, and who as State Attorney-General introduced the homosexual reform legislation in South Australia, said this week that it was "the reason as much as anything that the homosexual reform bill got through".

Dr Duncan's death has also popularised the image of Adelaide as a city of effeminate homosexuals. "It probably gave birth to the Max Gillies satirisation of Peter sipping wine in Adelaide," said Ian Meikle. The city is now lumbered with the image of being a community of quiche eaters, he said.

"It has also had an effect on the police force. Police in 1986 are vastly different in their attitudes and social awareness from the days when they used to go down and flick a few poofs."

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