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I **Introduction:**

The Sons and Daughters of Los

In the initial stages of the project whose results are collected in the present volume, we approached popular culture in Los Angeles using as a heuristic the idea of “grassroots cultural organizations.” By this we had in mind the more or less ad hoc instances where people who were marginal to the city’s established cultural institutions came together to share their poetry, painting, dance, and other forms of art, and in so doing created communities that then developed lives and momentums of their own.¹ Conceived in dissatisfaction with both industrial and other publicly sanctioned forms of culture, they generally produced themselves as demotic alternatives to establishments that they perceived to be alienated and compromised. Within the frame of this guiding orientation, the associations we explored were diverse in respect to both their internal organization and their eventual relations with the dominant cultural institutions. Growing from the initial efforts of very small groups, in some cases only one or two people, they were originally independent and autonomous, at least to the degree to which these concepts can presently be meaningful. But as they developed wider constituencies, they inevitably became affiliated in various ways with the kind of organizations with which they had before been in conflict, both public—such as city, state, and federal agencies—and private—such as foundations and corporations. Despite these affiliations, their creativity remained to some degree refractory, still honed on a stone of critical alterity.²

With the exception of the Vedanta Center (an earlier and somewhat differently conceived initiative), the associations we examined were formed in the tide of populist social contestations mobilized in the 1960s and were mostly shaped by the ideas in which social and political identity were conceptualized and lived in this period, that is, through struggles for civil rights by ethnic and sexual minorities. The local emergence and self-assertion of these political identity groups were of course part of national movements; and indeed, the remarkable ethnic diversity and other demographic features of Los Angeles ensured that they were also often affected by global issues, especially by population shifts and changing patterns of migration. On the other hand, the

more immediate motive in their creation was usually an interest in a particular cultural form, often a medium with a distinctive and integral relationship to the development of the specific social group. For example, though African Americans in the city have made public art in the form of murals for many years, the combination of indigenous and European elements in the traditions of mural painting developed in post-revolutionary Mexico became a primary reference point in the assertion of a Mexican American identity in Los Angeles.

Even if they were locally forged and were not quite so thoroughly constitutive, similar relations have obtained between other groups and specific mediums. Performance art, for example, has proven particularly valuable for women and for gays and lesbians. So the current flier distributed by a performance collective that is the subject of the one of the essays below announces: "This workshop is for gay men to gather together and create community through performance."³ Sometimes a given medium and the institution that developed around it proved valuable for different groups at different times; thus, when the poetry center *Beyond Baroque* became a focus for minority poets, part of its constituency changed from what it had been in preceding periods when it revolved around beat and punk subcultures. And though most of the associations studied here based themselves on mediums with less rather than more concurrent commercial viability, sometimes these and parallel communities have flourished by employing the art forms of the culture industry itself—film, television, and recorded music. Visual Communications (VC), the Asian American community cinema considered in Chapter 12 is such an instance. Like all attempts to create popular practices of commercial cultural forms, VC and similar popular cinemas have to construct themselves both within and against the immense social authority and economic resources of the industrial usage of the mediums in question, so they have been especially precarious, though by the same token their achievements remain of special interest.

But whatever the relative importance of their immediate aesthetic or social motivations, the organizations examined in this volume all have in common a foundation in integral human usefulness, the noninstrumental exercise of the creative faculties. All were created by people, some of them oppressed or otherwise marginalized and disenfranchised, who found cultural activity to be a means of self-realization and communal discovery. All were sustained as popular activities in which people developed forms of symbolic self-expression and joined with others of similar interests. Within the communities they formed, art was not engaged primarily as the production of commodities, so its role in increasing the value of invested capital or in preserving the system of capitalism as such was negligible. Even though their existence has been besieged and importuned by a rampant market economy, they have known from the beginning what William Blake, as he lived through the emergence of the commodification and industrialization of culture in the late eighteenth century, came at last to understand: "Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only."⁴ Nor were their practices initially supported by the institutions of the established museum and conservatory cultures, for since their interests were no more purely aesthetic than they were purely social, they could not be coerced into the defensive, putatively extra-social reservations premised

on aesthetic autonomy. Initially, they were opposed to both the sublation of popular participatory culture into *haut bourgeois*, fetishized real estate and the entertainment industries' commercialization of it into standardized, marketable commodities. Their point of origin and their ongoing aspiration was thus popular activity prior to both poles of the contemporary "high/low" bifurcation of cultural possibilities and prior to both forms of reification by which social creativity is assimilated into complementary fractions of capital.

Sailing without regard to the Scylla and the Charybdis of the high/low binary, popular cultural activity finds itself and its constituencies outside both arms of corporate culture—the industry and the museum—and as a consequence, it has hardly developed a theoretical armature of any general social leverage or persuasiveness. A full theoretical elaboration of such a contrary model of contemporary popular culture cannot be attempted here, and any assessment of the implications of the communities (anti-capitalist? proto-socialist?) that such an elaboration might subtend must remain provisional. On the one hand, the complexities of both crucial terms—"culture" and "community"—bespeak the huge social transformations of the period of advanced capital.⁵ A comprehensive encounter between the two terms would have to include the way they have been constructed in the fields of sociology, social and cultural anthropology, urban geography, and the various minority studies areas as well as in the specific disciplines of poetry, art history, performance art, video, and other artistic mediums. On the other hand, the available data about actual community cultural projects is extremely limited; and indeed, the present project should be understood as a contribution to the collection of primary material upon which more generalized hypotheses about new forms of progressive popular culture could be elaborated.

Though specific theoretical presuppositions are implicit and sometimes explicit in each of the essays below, the alternative theories of popular cultural production they project are subordinate to the historical details, the aesthetic achievements, and the varying social possibilities of the individual case studies. Any attempt to deduce or synthesize a general theory of a genuinely popular culture from them would necessarily involve a critique of the institutions and the theoretical apparatus that presently legitimize and naturalize capitalist culture as a whole. In lieu of such a general theory and propaedeutic to it, here we will only sketch the environment in which the sodalities studied below came into being, the cultural conditions in the city in which they were created, and hence give some concrete grounding for their various innovations and interventions.

Such a geographical focus on Los Angeles may well initially appear to be Quixotic if not misguided, for the city is famous for being the center of industrial culture—the capital of the culture of capital—and, at least until recent developments in museums and art schools reversed this, hostile to autonomous art. But what has appeared to be the city's categorical anomalousness is in fact a compounded prototypicality that gives the present project a more-than-regional significance. For if the specific urban and spatial structures developed in Los Angeles are, as many claim, the model for future cities, and if the culture industries located in it have a global hegemony, then the conditions that variously shape, inhibit, but also nurture the emergence of truly popular cultural

communities in Los Angeles may reasonably be considered to exemplify a general situation, and the specific institutions and histories examined below have implications about alternatives to capitalist culture more generally. Here, then, we will be concerned with a pattern of homologies and other relations between social space and culture in a city whose drastic reconfiguration of both appears to be historically prototypical.

Whether despising Los Angeles or celebrating it, whether understanding it (as they used to) as an exception or (as they now do) as a paradigm for future conurbations all over the world, geographers have recognized it as a distinctly new kind of metropolis. The great nineteenth-century cities, they argue, were each composed of a vertically expanding core surrounded by dependent rings. But Los Angeles developed as an agglomeration of separate communities dispersed across the desert plains between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. There successive waves of immigration—Spanish invaders in the colonial period, then Anglos and other Europeans from the Midwest and the South, Blacks and Mexicans, and most recently, Asians—created distinct enclaves, many of them internally homogenous and largely segregated from each other. Together these formed, not the radial melting pot of the modern city, but a polynucleated postmodern megalopolis.

In the phrase of Robert M. Fogelson, one of its pioneering historians, the Los Angeles that became a great city did so as “a fragmented metropolis.”⁶ Its fragmentation only intensified over the last third of the twentieth century when it became ethnically and culturally one of the most diverse cities in the nation. Changes in U.S. immigration laws in the mid-1960s, combined with the city’s expanded role as a center for Pacific Rim capital and with the Reagan administration’s neo-imperialist ventures in Meso-America that made it the premier port of entry for immigrants, simultaneously transformed the city’s demographic structure. But fragmentation had characterized its development from the beginning; and awareness that phased immigration, voracious peripheral growth, and horizontal rather than vertical development was producing an unprecedented galaxy of unintegrated satellites is itself anything but new. Postmodern geography now proposes a “Sixty-Mile Circle” of “at least 132 incorporated cities” or “the most differentiated of all cities,” “a combination of enclaves with high identity, and multiclaves with mixed identity . . . perhaps the most heterogeneous city in the world.”⁷ But before World War II, well before Los Angeles became so conspicuously a microcosm of global diaspora, the 1939 WPA guide to California described it as “nineteen suburbs in search of a city”—already a tripling of the “six suburbs in search of a city” noted in 1920s witticisms.⁸ And, summarizing in the midst of the urban expansion, for the rubric to his 1946 chapter on the “Los Angeles Archipelago” of “social and ethnic islands, economically interrelated but culturally disparate”—still the best analysis of the historical evolution of the city—Carey McWilliams quoted one Charles A. Stoddard, who in 1894 had noticed that “Southern California is made up of groups who often live in isolated communities, continuing their own customs, language, and religious habits and associations.”⁹

Reinforced by the long history of anti-labor politics that hindered transethnic working-class consciousness and solidarity, the social dispersal that allowed immigrant groups

to settle in relatively homogeneous and autonomous clusters produced a distinctive segregation. Though historically these communities all too commonly become visible to the hegemony at moments of racial or cultural strife—the anti-Chinese riots of the 1870s, for example, or the military’s terrorization of zoot-suiters in the 1940s, and the uprisings of Blacks in the 1960s and Latinos in the 1990s—all the while, within themselves they have nurtured and sustained local traditions of enormous and distinctive vitality. The barrios of East Los Angeles and the neighborhoods of South Central L.A. (where African Americans have preserved the customs of the rural South and even echoes of Africa), and more recently the “little” Asian cities of Tokyo, Manila, Taipei, Saigon, and so on have all lived as vibrant and substantially self-sustained cultural milieus. Re-establishing some of the elements that formed the land- and city-scapes of other spatialities—the family structures, the customs, and the festivals, but also the creative rhythms of street behavior and social living—these communities have fashioned themselves between the cultural patterns of their originals and those of their new environment, forging a new local life for often globally distant identities.¹⁰

Spatiality in Los Angeles is thus structured between two primary vectors: a centripetal pull toward the Hollywood/downtown core, which has always been and remains the focus of the civic, economic, and transport networks of the basin; and the centrifugal pull generated by the semiautonomous industrial and residential enclaves. If the segregated peripherality of these enclaves precluded their full integration and representation in the city and full participation in its rewards, it also compensated by allowing a spontaneous culture to flourish and to mediate in some measure the social traumas that pervade the postmodern city—for which, again, Los Angeles is recognized as the prototype.

The global movement of capital that impelled many of the population flows that created the city also devastated its social fabric. In the past quarter-century, massive if selective deindustrialization and the growth of precarious low-income jobs, especially in the service and tourist industries, have been compounded by white-collar crime; virulent police corruption and brutality; and the exploitation and destruction of the land, water, and air. Trickling down to the lives of working-class people, these socioeconomic developments manifest themselves in unemployment and underemployment, poverty, homelessness, and alienation; in crises in public health, housing, and education; and in suspicion and conflict among sexualities and ethnicities. With the world-historical victory of neoliberalism, similar and in some cases much worse forms of intertwined social destabilization, atomization, and massification have become globally pandemic. But the paucity of attempts to address them in Los Angeles have been no less extreme than the economic developments that produced them. Paralyzed by what has been called “a collective or civic aversion to dealing with social, economic and political problems,” local governance has not begun to address the erosion of the older forms of urban community adequately. Instead, “governments and populace have colluded in a decline of the commonwealth . . . the collapse of community.”¹¹

In this, again, the city is a paradigm of the widespread lived experience of loneliness, alienation, and social impotence; of the cultural attenuation and anomie that are now more intense and inescapable than even during the upheavals and dislocations of high

modernity. Then, at least, however corrupted its actual instantiations may have been, socialism as a political philosophy sustained the ideal of a nonexploitative human commonality, whether projected as popular participatory control over local life or as a future classless society. But now it is the market, abetted wherever possible by military power, that administers the world; and free-market fundamentalism appears locally, not in communal social projects, but as *privatization*. In the telling image of one popular analyst, we now go “bowling alone”; for, as a more abstract one reminds us, the “gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer . . . is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community.”¹²

Though this crisis in community is a cultural crisis in all senses, it has been enacted especially dramatically in the industrialization of older forms of culture and in their transformation into the business of entertainment during their assimilation by, and integration into, first finance and then corporate capital. Summarily designated as “Hollywood,” the corporate entertainment industry now comprises virtually all forms of film, television, and recorded music and all their various satellites, spin-offs, franchises, and surrogates, their pimps and proxies. These industries have now extended to the spheres of politics, sport, religion, and other distinct areas of public life, reconstructing them within its own values and priorities, commodifying what once were popular activities and turning them, too, into entertainment. The traditions that inform the culture of popular participation may be implicitly or residually present in industrial culture, but only as they too are reduced to entertainment.

The resulting divided culture, the culture of separated, monopolized industrial production and of popular consumption, is the culture with which Los Angeles has become globally synonymous; and locally it is so overwhelmingly powerful that the forms of popular cultural practices in the city that are the present concern have become virtually invisible. For Hollywood’s ubiquitous and all-pervasive presence in Los Angeles makes its attractions and rewards the context for all popular cultural activity. So great is the gravitational pull of the industry’s stars and its star system that all other arts are forced to revolve around it. The structural core-periphery tensions that shape the city geographically and economically thus generate parallel determinations within its culture: the minority arts of the local communities in Los Angeles are created in the tension between the centrifugal pull of independent and indigenous aspirations and the centripetal pull of corporate capitalist culture. In Los Angeles, culture and geography are reciprocal: the social tensions of cultural marginality are isomorphic with the city’s spatiality.

Until the 1950s, “Hollywood” designated simply the companies that manufactured films and recouped their expenses and profit in theatrical ticket sales. But since then, their production has simultaneously diversified and consolidated what before were several separate industries, while, especially with television, distribution sites have metastasized throughout the range of once-public places running from homes and schools to prisons and hospitals. The limits of the film text itself have eroded and fused into all its marketing extensions—sequels, T-shirts, theme-parks, lunch boxes, toys, comic books,

video games—the miasma of hype that makes it hard to imagine, let alone glimpse, any space outside the business.

This apotheosized culture-as-capital is identified with Los Angeles more completely than an art form was ever before associated with a single place. Infants together in the first decade of the century when the movies were little more than a cottage industry, the city and the industry fostered each other's growth to maturity. Late in 1907, the Selig company built a stage on Olive Street for the shooting of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and two years later the company established a permanent base in the city. Other companies followed, including a troupe of Biograph players to shoot the local epic *Ramona* and the Keystone Comedy Company. By 1912, more than seventy production companies in Los Angeles employed three thousand people. During the teens of the twentieth century, the manifest advantages of the region's year-round sunshine and topographical variety persuaded even more companies to relocate to the region, and eventually some of them merged into larger combines that joined film production and distribution—the vertical integration of the industry. By mid-decade the industry's annual payroll had reached \$20 million, and the identification of Hollywood the medium and Hollywood the city was established, with 60 percent of U.S. films being produced there.¹³ In the post-World War I years, the studios surpassed the French, Italian, and British film industries to become the single most important source of production; and by the 1930s, the American film industry was dominant throughout the world. Even Carey McWilliams's unusual rhetorical excess does not seem an inappropriate summary of the city's debt to the medium: "If ever an industry played the Fairy Prince to an impoverished Cinderella, it has been the motion-picture industry in relation to Los Angeles"¹⁴

After World War II and Hollywood's second major global expansion, the other branches of the entertainment industries were assimilated to it. Though the rise of television coincided with a series of crises in the 1950s that forced the industry to restructure, in the early 1970s it again reinvented itself. Generating subsidiary industries as well as accelerating the development of other labor-intensive craft industries in the area, Hollywood attracted all the other components of the broadcasting industry. Since then, the television industry has itself expanded enormously, and the two industries are now completely integrated, not only with each other but also with the popular music industry, whose move west became conclusive in the 1980s. The strength of the industry's infrastructure and the abundance of creative and technical workers in the area supported the economic explosion of the 1990s, lifting Southern California out of the slump caused by cutbacks in the defense industries. With the expanded need for products to fill the new multichanneled global television systems of the decade, by the turn of the twenty-first century the annual business of the entertainment industries based in Los Angeles had grown to \$40 billion, with more people in Los Angeles working in Hollywood than in electronics and aerospace combined.

The concentration of control over these media industries by a small number of corporations increased rapidly during the 1990s, paralleling the longer-standing globalization of the market. Japanese corporations began to invest heavily in the industry in

the late 1980s, with Sony buying Columbia Pictures in 1989 for \$3.4 billion, and Matsushita buying MCA (Universal) in 1990 for nearly \$7 billion.¹⁵ Though film production had been controlled by a handful of major studios since the 1930s, by the late 1990s the six largest of them accounted for 90 percent of theatrical revenue, and all but 16 of the 148 features Hollywood released in 1997 were produced by only six firms. By that time, six firms also effectively monopolized more than 80 percent of the country's cable television, and only four companies controlled one-third of all radio station income.¹⁶

Especially after the deregulation of the communications industries in the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the elimination of restrictions on corporations moving across different branches of the communications industries led to enormous increases in conglomeratization. Just to take one locally important example, the Walt Disney Company, with annual revenues of only \$25.4 billion (by comparison, General Electric, owner of NBC grossed \$129.9 billion in 2001): among Disney's movie holdings are Walt Disney Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, Hollywood Pictures, and Miramax Film Corporation; it owns the ABC television network, together with the Disney Channel, Soap Net, all divisions of ESPN, and 80 percent of A & E and the History and Biography Channels. In addition to Disneyland itself, its theme park holdings include Disney World, Disney Cruise Line, and Disneylands in Paris, Tokyo, and one planned for Hong Kong. As well as extensive holdings in book publishing, it owns half of *U.S. Weekly*, *Discover*, and *ESPN* magazines; fifty radio stations; 741 Disney stores; and extensive theatrical interest.¹⁷ This list is just a selection, and diversification of an equivalent or greater extensiveness has been documented for AT&T, Sony, AOL/Time Warner, Vivendi Universal, Viacom, and one or two more of the integrated communications and entertainment cartels.

Some indication of the momentum of this consolidated corporate ownership of American culture is revealed in the periodic summaries by one of its most important analysts, Ben Bagdikian. When he published the first edition of his book *The Media Monopoly* in 1983, fifty corporations dominated mass media in the United States. By the second edition in 1987, the fifty companies had shrunk to twenty-nine; by 1997 that number had been further reduced to ten; and by 2000 he found that only six dominant firms controlled more of the industry than the combined fifty seventeen years earlier.¹⁸

Manufacturing the culture that is marketed and consumed all over the world, the Los Angeles entertainment industry has become the vehicle, not so much of an American imperialism as of the imperialism of capital itself, inflating into a global omnipotence the implications of the Supreme Court's 1915 diagnosis that "the exhibition of moving pictures is a business, pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit, like any other spectacles."¹⁹ Just one instance of this voraciousness may suffice: the case of *Jurassic Park*. The film was not only "accompanied by over 1,000 products identified as official Jurassic Park merchandise, distributed by 100 official Jurassic Park manufacturers around the world," but the Jurassic Park logo from the merchandising was displayed *in the film itself* in the park's gift shop; thus, the "film itself was a tie-in," intradiegetically displaying its combined merchandising, product placement, and other forms of economic proliferation.²⁰

Though cultural activity has always been subject to economic transactions, only in the recent past have the culture industries themselves become so thoroughly integrated with each other, with all other forms of material production, and with the state. Training the world in consumerism, entertainment becomes capital's mode of operation. As Theodor Adorno, writing half a century ago in Los Angeles, noted, culture has amalgamated with advertising.²¹ Or as a Coca-Cola marketing chief more recently remarked, it is the medium in which capital operates: "The culture that comes out of L.A.—films, television, recorded music, concerts—is the popular culture of the world and it is through that culture that we communicate with the consumers of Coke."²²

Guy Debord and others among the Situationists, the French philosophers who have provided the most profound analysis of the assimilation of human life into this cultural-economic system, designated it as the *Spectacle*. In the "Society of the Spectacle," the immediate relationships among people appear to have been replaced by relations between people and images, an imaginary relationship that also has the effect of concealing the actual social relations created by the capitalist system's production of material wealth. The symbol and fulcrum of this condition, Los Angeles is thus the Capital of the Spectacle, and the comprehensive form of the city's economic, spatial, social and cultural alienation is ontological: "The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere."²³ Though the ruin of community, the alienation of the imagination, and authentic social relations that constitute the Spectacle now affect almost everyone in the world, they affect people in Los Angeles especially powerfully and comprehensively. At once a cynosure and an *ignis fatuus*, and alternately enriching and depleting all other arts in the city, Hollywood attempts to frame all cultural practice in Los Angeles in its own economic imperatives and entrepreneurial ambitions; life there is enthralled by it.

To designate as "popular culture," not Hollywood itself, but practices outside and opposed to it, contravenes what has become the term's dominant usage, its reference to the consumer culture produced by capitalist industries. This recent transformation and narrowing of the concept of popular culture is not accidental, but rather it has accompanied parallel transformations and narrowings in the cultural field as a whole. Commodity culture's colonization of all areas of life—the individual psyche, the public realm, the political process, and indeed all forms of art—now appears to be so complete that, it is often argued, any popular practice outside it is impossible if not inconceivable. Responding to the preoccupation of the cultural field by capital, many journalists and academics have made corresponding investments. Whereas early attempts to legitimate the study of what was then called "mass culture" approached it as sociological or ethnographical data, more recent methodologies employ aesthetic criteria that allow for newly positive understandings of its social role. So though the fact of the structural integration of the dominant forms of contemporary culture in the general operations of capital is indisputable, its implications are widely disputed. More or less determinist positions like those of Adorno and the Situationists mentioned above, for example (that are rooted in Hegelian analyses of capitalism's intrinsic alienation and so propose that cultural domination and exploitation follow necessarily

from the economic structure of the entertainment industries) have become key points of reference, usually negative ones, in contemporary debates over the social implications of the mass consumption of culture produced by corporate interests.

On the one hand, it is argued that corporate culture, especially broadcast television, has been pivotal in the disintegration of the democratic process, the collapse of community, the rise of the New Right, and the emergence of a universal cynicism.²⁴ But as with all other forms of capitalist production, the culture industries' constant need to reconstruct themselves produces disjunctions and contradictions that render the overall system unstable and vulnerable to intervention by the people involved in its various stages. So on the other hand, other commentators emphasize the possibilities that the industrial production of entertainment does not preclude authorial self-expression during the process of its manufacture, nor does mass consumption of it preclude the audiences' parallel assertion of their own identity and creativity, specifically their ability to mobilize their own critical, against-the-grain reception of its intended messages. When such creative responses to entertainment become socially extensive, they produce fan cultures that may elaborate the imaginary identifications we all make with others who share our tastes into virtual or even real communities that become to various degrees independent of the original mass media sources. The Grateful Dead and Star Trek fan cultures are among those most often cited as sustaining such communities. Indeed, an entire academic discipline, Cultural Studies, now exists, premised on the moments of autonomy and alterity that the system as a whole allows and thus on the supposition that resistance to capitalist culture is marshaled within its own processes.

Though the Cultural Studies literature is now so immense that every position on the question of the relation between culture and political economy in these industries can somewhere be found in it, its main tradition derived from the work of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 80s. The Birmingham group initially formulated itself around the investigation of the more or less delinquent activity of specifically working-class subcultures: dress, hairstyles, dance movements, and so on—the traditional field of anthropology or sociology rather than of aesthetics *per se*. It proposed that these subcultures reflected the transformed class tensions of advanced capitalist society and were, at least partially, ritually symbolic continuations of earlier and more overtly political working-class social contestations. In this formulation, popular culture was understood to comprise “Resistance Through Rituals”;²⁵ that is, specifically working-class opposition to the dominant culture, which in Britain at that time was still the culture of the bourgeois and the aristocratic establishment, not yet melted into air by the entertainment industry.

The primacy of this working-class resistance to a dominant culture was largely lost in the Americanization and “postmodernization” of the Birmingham project that produced contemporary Cultural Studies. Occurring during the Reagan/Thatcher era's assaults on trade unions and all other forms of working-class self-organization, the transformation of the discipline entailed parallel offensives; the term “popular culture” was decisively relocated from the working-class oppositional subcultures to the entertainment industry, which in the United States (and increasingly so in Britain and the rest

of the world) had itself become the dominant culture. Its exclusive reference became the consumer culture manufactured by corporate industries rather than street-level attempts to resist or transform it, let alone to sustain alternatives to it. Popular culture was now produced by corporate capital, not by the people. As the term acquired the market definition of popular, its specific associations with the working class and hence the possibility that culture could focus structural social resistance were dumped. In a period where the significant crises in capitalism were explained as crises in over-production, to be assuaged by increasing the consumption of commodities of all and every kind, the academic study of culture followed suit by deploying itself primarily around the consumption of commodity culture.²⁶ The academy became yet another stage where capitalist culture as a whole was legitimated and naturalized; affirming, rather than interrogating the status quo, Cultural Studies amalgamated with advertising.

Though the present work does not assume that any autonomous sphere of popular culture, whether specified as the activity of an ethnic or sexual minority or as some fraction of the working class understood more generally, may now exist outside the gravitational field of the culture industries, it is oriented to those popular practices that attempt to produce themselves outside their priorities and processes and thus outside the field that Cultural Studies now demarks. Though they are surrounded by, and inevitably linked to, Hollywood, the initiatives considered in this book are displaced from it in multiple ways, but especially in being pursued as essentially amateur practices; and almost all are in mediums that the entertainment industry has not completely colonized.

Hollywood and Los Angeles, the industry and the city, culture and geography form the context, comprise the cloth on the edges of which participatory popular cultures weave new forms of community. In this they mark the continuation of the cultural resistance that began when the arts were first industrialized in the print business of eighteenth-century England. William Blake earned a meager living for himself and his wife on the edges of this industry, but he devoted himself to the composition of epic poems that he illustrated and engraved himself, the two of them coloring the printed sheets by hand. In these poems, Blake detailed a mythology describing the emergence of the modern world system—the specters of science, imperialism, the industrial revolution, and commodity culture—but also envisioning revolutionary republican attempts to humanize it. He coined the name *Los* for his central figure, an anagram for *Sol*, the sun, that also punned on the *loss* that surrounded him. Blake imagined *Los* as a blacksmith, hammering out a vision of a fully human, fully emancipated commonality. In the furnaces of his imagination, *Los* labored to build Jerusalem, or Liberty, by producing a genuinely popular culture, a Republican Art such as could be made at home like Blake's own, or one owned and exhibited by the general public, like early Renaissance frescoes—or modern murals.

Some two hundred years later, the word *Los* became current among working-class Latinos, many of them displaced from their homelands by the global forces of capital and empire, as the name for the city in which they made their homes, a city where they hoped to find liberty and fellowship and which they sometimes illuminated with exquisite, spontaneous frescoes.²⁷ From one of the first to the most recent scenes of crucial cultural resistance, the Sons and Daughters of *Los* continue to contend in their furnaces.

Notes

1. My own role and investment in this project followed from previous work in the study of popular culture, particularly independent cinema, and in the study of Los Angeles. This introduction draws on several of my previous publications, especially *Power Misses: Essays Across (Un)Popular Culture* (London: Verso Books, 1996), and on a history of non-studio filmmaking in Los Angeles currently in process, parts of the introduction to which I have adapted here. Agreement with the principles expressed in this introduction should not be ascribed to the other contributors.

2. Constrained by both space and hindered by the difficulties of finding scholars willing to commit their time to topics of this kind, our survey is by no means exhaustive in its account of cultural communities that have either existed in the recent past or are presently coming into being. Prominent among the omissions are the Social Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), the Wallenboyd and the Boyd Street Theaters, the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, various public television initiatives, and Pasadena NewTown. Of new organizations, the many forms of community that are growing around the Internet (the Los Angeles Alternative Media Network, for example) are beyond the scope of the present volume, as are organizations specifically responsive to very recent immigration, such as the Mayan organization, IXIM, and the Salvadoran American National Association. On these last, see Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 66–67. Our concerns here include attention only to those grassroots community movements that developed specifically around cultural activities; for the role of parks, neighborhood and homeowners associations, community newspapers, public libraries, and the like in creating communities in Los Angeles, see *Metamorphosis Project White Paper Number One, The Challenge of Belonging in the 21st Century: The Case of Los Angeles* (Annenberg School for Communication, 2001, <<http://www.metamorph.org/vault>>). Another major omission here is the many communities that have formed around music. These include classical music, ranging from the “Evenings on the Roof” of the 1940s and the “Monday Evening Concerts” (for which see Dorothy Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939–1971* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995]) to the music and sound events organized by Cindy Bernard, initially the late 1990s at the Sacred Grounds coffee house in San Pedro and then at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House in West Hollywood. And they include more popular practices of music, of which the Los Angeles Punk movement in the 1980s and South Central Hip-Hop in the 1990s are the most important recent examples. These latter were not examined here because mostly (though not entirely) they developed in nightclubs, record labels, or informal tape distribution mechanism that grew on the edges of, or within, the music industry itself.

3. “Highways Spring 2002 Schedule,” notice for “Gay Men’s Performance Workshop.”

4. “The Laocoön,” *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed., David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 272.

5. For user-friendly introductions to these concepts, see Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1989); and Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985).

6. Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

7. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 224; Charles Jenks, *Heteropolis* (London: Academy Editions, 1993), 17 and 32.

8. *WPA Guide to California* (New York: Pantheon Books, [1939]1984), 208; Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 84.

9. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, [1946] 1973), 314.

10. The notion of “cultural bifocality” or pluralism is now more germane than older assimilationist models of acculturation; see Hamilton and Chinchilla, *Seeking Community in a Global City*, 9.

11. Greg Hise, Michael J. Dear, and H. Eric Schockman, *Rethinking Los Angeles* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996), 11.

12. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1.

13. David Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 123. By 1922, 84 percent of U.S. films were made here.

14. McWilliams, *Southern California*, 341.

15. Five years later, Matsushita sold 80 percent of MCA to Seagrams for \$5.7 million. These figures are taken from Colin Hoskins, Stuart McFadyen, and Adam Finn, *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 23. For a complete analysis of the effect of the corporatization of the media system, see Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

16. Figures in this paragraph are from McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, 17–18.

17. Selected from listings in “The Big Ten,” *The Nation*, 274, 1 (7 January 2002), 27–32.

18. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 6th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), xxi.

19. *Mutual Film Corporation v Ohio Industrial Commission*. See Richard Koszarski, *An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928* (Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 1994), 199.

20. Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the Information Age* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 205.

21. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 161: “So completely is [culture] subject to the law of exchange that is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used. Therefore it amalgamates with advertising.”

22. Quoted in Andrew Jaffe, “The Hollywood Threat to Madison Avenue,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 September 1991, B7. The article reported that the Coca-Cola Company had retained Michael Ovitv and his Creative Artists Agency to “put it in touch with ‘global pop culture.’”

23. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 23.

24. Some recent examples of such wholesale critiques include Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, trans. Priscilla Ferguson (New York: New Press, 1998); and Jeffrey Scheuer, *The Sound Bite Society: Television and the American Mind* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1999). Robert D. Putnam has argued that television watching is negatively correlated with civic participation and social involvement: “Television . . . is bad for both individualized and collective civic engagement, but it is particularly toxic for activities that we do together. . . . Just as television privatizes our leisure time, it also privatizes our civic activity, dampening our interactions with one another

even more than it dampens individual political activities” (*Bowling Alone*, 229). On the other hand, some recent empirical evidence from Los Angeles is equivocal about the negative effects of television, finding that whereas it had a direct negative effect on the relatively privileged west side of the city, it had “indirect positive effects” among the largely immigrant populations of East Los Angeles; see *Metamorphosis Project White Paper Number One*, 34.

25. See Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (Birmingham, U.K.: Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1976).

26. As Nicholas Garnham has noted, the emphasis in affirmative Cultural Studies on cultural consumption rather than production “has played politically into the hands of a right whose ideological assault has been structured in large part around an effort to persuade people to construct themselves as consumers in opposition to producers”; see “Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or Divorce,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 1 (1995): 65.

27. On the urban writing of working-class Latinos in Los Angeles, see Susan A. Phillips, *Wall-bangin’: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). The city is designated as “Los” on a map on page 151. As part of his *California Trilogy*, James Benning made a wonderful film in 2001 about Los Angeles that prominently featured its Latino citizens; he titled it *Los*.