

Cinematic visions of Los Angeles: representations of identity and mobility in the cinematic city

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**Cinematic visions of Los Angeles: representations of identity and mobility in
the cinematic city**

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the cinematic city**

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Kenneth James Fox

Cinematic visions of Los Angeles: representations of identity and mobility in the cinematic city.

Accounts of 'filmic' Los Angeles are often pessimistic, focusing upon the geographies of segregation and exclusion evident in both the 'material' and 'cinematic' Los Angeles. In contrast to these more familiar readings, I propose a less pessimistic and more nuanced picture of Los Angeles as cinematic city. I offer an analysis of the cinematic city that, on the whole, shows a greater willingness to deal with 'differences' and to examine the city's multiple geographies and identities. I examine these multiple geographies with particular attention to themes of mobility and identity which, I argue, are a central preoccupation of many Los Angeles films. Moving beyond previous work on the 'geographies of film', however, I contend that in order to address such themes in film analysis we need a fuller engagement with film theory. Hence, in analyzing these themes I pay particular attention to two issues. First, I give careful consideration to particular *film techniques*, specifically, *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and editing, to enable a more detailed analysis of the relationship between urban and cinematic space. Second, I turn to the function of genre, not as system of classification, but as a mode of "cultural instrumentality", to examine what films do culturally.

Through the evidence of the film analysis I propose the potential of cinematic city narratives to represent more fully the identities and mobilities of material Los Angeles providing a revision, and in some cases, a re-imagining, of its over-determined image of social chaos and ethnic conflict.

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I dedicate this thesis to my wife Antonia and my two daughters Niamh and Orla. Their love and support has got me this far.

Cinematic visions of Los Angeles: representations of identity and mobility in the cinematic city

Foreword

Situating this research within subjective memory is a way of explaining the genesis of the work and my commitment to it. My fascination with the study of the representations of identity and mobility arises out of where I come from, and that interest continues to be sustained by my passion for popular culture, in particular, cinema. As Stuart Hall (1990: 222) states: "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific."

I was born in Ballyshannon, county Donegal, a small town on the estuary of the River Erne feeding the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean in the north-west corner of Ireland. The town is bisected by the river and joined by a bridge that is the only road link you can take into or out of Donegal without crossing the border into Northern Ireland. The border lies five miles directly east along the course of the river. From a very early age I was aware of the importance of lines on maps and the territorialized *spaces* and *identities* they helped to create, the *mobilities* they restricted and facilitated.

When I was nine years old the Troubles in Northern Ireland were beginning to get increased coverage on television. Although I lived across the border in the Republic of Ireland, these representations of the island where I had my home filled me with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Excited by the notion that places like Derry, only sixty miles away, were being seen all around the world, and anxious because I thought the Troubles might move from being on our television to outside our door.

While the Troubles across the border and the Vietnam War dominated the news narrative on television, in the local cinema, westerns, war films and Elvis musicals were the regular fare. So when *The Fighting Prince of Donegal* (O'Herlihy, 1966) was advertised, I quickly forsook the Wild West for this representation of my own place. The story of Red Hugh O'Donnell, a sixteenth century Donegal chieftain who fought against the English colonisers, starring the British actor Peter McEnery and produced by Disney, showed me castles and countryside I didn't recognise as being part of the landscape of Donegal (Figure 1). I was however very willing to suspend disbelief as these representations of my place flickered across the big screen and seared into my memory. I continue to wonder why this cinematic geography of my own place had such an impact on me years after I knew the film had not been shot in Donegal but still retained for me an element of essential Donegal-ness. Perhaps it had something to do with the mention of the place I was from in a big screen story that would travel all around the world. This memory is one of the first instances where, for me, *film, geography and identity* coalesce.

In the light of the research I am now engaged in on Los Angeles it is probably easy for me to misremember or reconstruct ideally the impact of another film viewed at the local cinema about eight years after *The Fighting Prince of Donegal*. *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974), starring Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, also found an important place in my memory (Figure 2). Thinking back I realise that one of the many features of *Chinatown* that stayed with me was the focus on the developing urban landscape of Los Angeles, a place I had never visited, but one that somehow seemed more familiar to me than the cityscapes of Derry and Belfast. The Troubles, my own cultural identity, and my age, restricted my ability to visit these cities across the border but the cinema, apart from the price of admission, placed no

such restrictions allowing me to travel to the imagined spaces of America's cinematic cities, an often twice-weekly occurrence for almost ten years. What made *Chinatown* (1974) stand out was the lush use of colour together with the downbeat ending, suggesting there was something out of kilter in this film. I was left with a strange sense of unease, not just about the film's content but also by the film's form. The place, Los Angeles, seemed to declare itself in the brightness of the colour to be the film's main story and the identity of the central detective figure seemed to be tied to his navigation of the spaces of the city. I had been gripped by what Cawelti (1992) describes as the 'generic transformation' of a 1930s private eye film from recognizable black and white to the vivid brightness of a 1970s reconstruction of a 1930s location. What the colour, together with Jerry Goldsmith's edgy music, made me aware of was the importance of the locations, not just as a backdrop to the action, but also how they served the functions of character and metaphor.

As I have reviewed the film regularly in the intervening years it became more apparent to me that the growing awareness of my own sense of place was inextricably bound up with the images I had seen of far away places, in the local cinema and on television, in magazines and newspapers, and in the 'official knowledge' of the geography textbooks in school. I seemed to recognise these places as well as, if not better than, aspects of my home landscape. I moved to London in 1986, settling in Canterbury the following year where I had an economic mobility not afforded my father and his nine siblings who became part of the Irish diaspora in England and America. However, since the death of my parents, and the sale of the house where I was born, I am conscious now of my reluctance to name Ballyshannon as home. My emotional geography has changed. I now have two

children of my own and a partner who has ties with Cyprus, England and Ireland. While I don't long to return to the country of my birth I am fascinated by the shifting versions of mobility and identity that impact on my own life. These personal contexts have contributed to my questioning of what continues to shape my images and memories of the material and the cinematic geographies of the place where I was born and compelled me to investigate, triggered in the first instance by *Chinatown*, how the cinema creates its own geography of the near and far away.

Ballyshannon and Los Angeles may seem a long way apart geographically but in the theatres of my memory, to borrow Raphael Samuel's (1996) evocative phrase, I felt I knew the city through its representations. This ersatz knowledge has inspired me to investigate how Los Angeles is constructed in film as a cinematic city, and to explore why the cinematic Los Angeles appears preoccupied with questions of identity and mobility.

Chapter One

The Cinematic City

Over the past eighty years, films have been one of the most important sources for images of the city and urban life. It is important, even imperative, that we geographers begin to examine the roles that films have played in shaping our understanding and attitudes toward the city. ... We will never really understand the ways in which Americans perceive cities unless we pay attention to the roles that cities have played in films (Ford, 1994: 133).

Introduction

This thesis examines representations of Los Angeles in popular cinema since the 1970s and through the concept of the cinematic city explores how the relationship between urban and cinematic space is developed. As Ford (1994: 133) asserts, the relationship between the material and the imagined city is complex but irrefutable. Clarke (1997:2) argues that "... the city has undeniably been shaped by the cinematic form, just as cinema owes much of its nature to the historical development of the city." The concept of the cinematic city is a way of describing the symbiotic relationship that has been established between cinematic and urban space. My research develops our understanding of Los Angeles as a cinematic city by highlighting its preoccupation with themes of identity and mobility.

Mike Davis's (1990) *City of Quartz* is, rightly, one of the most celebrated accounts of how the material and the cinematic geographies of Los Angeles interconnect. Inspiring and insightful though his account is of the *film noir* influence on Los Angeles in particular, it tends to be restricted by the tragic mode of its own rhetoric. Like most researchers and writers about Los Angeles it is impossible not to be affected by the muscularity of Davis's prose and the enormous detail on popular culture forms he uses to support his analysis. Davis demonstrates that to write

about Los Angeles demands the inclusion of its cinematic as well as its material presence. However, like Duncan (1996: 259/60), I find some of Davis's work too pessimistic. According to Duncan:

The story that he tells of Los Angeles is an unrelenting tale of oppression, injustice and mean-spiritedness. ... The city that Davis describes is a place devoid of pleasure, for even the wealthy cannot enjoy their ill-gotten gains. They 'cower behind walls with their gun-toting private police', and shop in malls which are 'prisons of consumerism'.

A passage from Davis's (1990: 227) *City of Quartz* illustrates this pessimism.

In Los Angeles, once-upon-a-time a demi-paradise of free beaches, luxurious parks, and 'cruising strips', genuinely democratic space is all but extinct. The Oz-like archipelago of Westside pleasure domes ... is reciprocally dependent upon the social imprisonment of the third-world service proletariat who live in increasingly repressive ghettos and barrios. In a city of several million yearning immigrants, public amenities are radically shrinking, parks are closing, youth congregations of ordinary kinds are banned, and the streets are becoming more desolate and dangerous.

As Duncan (1996: 260) suggests: "...an unintended consequence of too strict an adherence to the tragic mode of description is that it undermines the credibility of the account. This devaluation of the very real problems faced by the poor in Los Angeles is one of the tragic side effects of Davis's troping."

It could be argued that *City of Quartz*, together with *The Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1998) illustrates Davis's tragic mode that Duncan finds so troubling. My analysis of how themes of mobility and identity are figured in past, future and contemporary cinematic visions of Los Angeles reflects some of the generally negative and stereotyped view from Hollywood of how the city functions. Hollywood representations can be seen as a major contributor to the dystopian model Davis produces. But I have identified a range of film examples

that suggest even within Hollywood there is a growing tendency to represent Los Angeles in its multiple identities and geographies. Although inspired by Davis's work I propose a less pessimistic and more nuanced picture of Los Angeles as cinematic city. I offer a picture of the cinematic city that, on the whole, shows a greater willingness to deal with 'differences' and examine Los Angeles as a city of multiple geographies and identities. I examine these multiple geographies with particular attention to themes of mobility and identity, which, I argue, are a central preoccupation of many Los Angeles films. To explore these however I turn to a close analysis of the films in terms of their use of film techniques and their cultural instrumentality.

I argue that to advance our understanding of the interconnections between urban space and cinematic space we need a fuller engagement with film theory. First, I give careful consideration to certain *film techniques*, specifically, *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and editing, particularly cross-cutting; to enable a more sophisticated reading of cinematic Los Angeles and its pre-occupation with themes of identity and mobility. Second, I argue we need to reconsider the function of genre, not as system of classification, but as a mode of *cultural instrumentality*, to investigate what films *do* culturally and to recognise how genre influences audience expectations. These aspects of methodology are set within the overall context of analysing how themes of identity and mobility are represented in cinematic city visions of Los Angeles.

Methodological Approach

With the greatly increased interest in visual representations as part of research in cultural geography a growing number of texts, for example, Aitken (1997), and

Aitken and Craine (2005), Crang (1998), Cloke et al., (2004), Rose (2001) and Shurmer-Smith (2002b) have outlined a range of methodological approaches for dealing with all aspects of visual representation. Grouped together these cover methodological approaches as varied as semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism, discourse analysis, content analysis, textual analysis and audience studies. My own methodological approach focuses specifically on the aesthetics and, to a lesser extent, production of "Los Angeles City Films", the whole being set within a broader concern to connect material and imaginary versions of Los Angeles that are both steeped in issues of representation. I argue that this method enables close attention to be paid to the texts and their means of production but also that it is linked in to questions of how cinematic city films reflect, refract and contribute to the ways in which we think and respond to the urban, and in particular, Los Angeles.

The close textual analysis that I use is of two kinds: first, a close reading of the film techniques, such as *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and editing that help to turn urban space into cinematic space, and second, an analysis of how cinematic city narratives of Los Angeles are developed around key substantive themes. The preoccupation I have identified is with themes of identity and mobility. These themes form part of broader issues to do with the interconnections between urban space and cinematic space. Films are representations of a particular kind that have their own semiotic processes and their own ways of making meaning so it is imperative that close textual analysis of film texts should be a major part of the thesis. One of the absences I have identified, (see also Kneale, 2003), in the growing range of publications that connect cultural geography with film is the paucity of close analysis of the actual texts as if there is a reluctance to engage

with the specificity of film language or genre (see Benton, 1995, Gold and Ward, 1994 and 1997). What is important in my analysis is the ways in which the choices made by filmmakers to use particular film techniques signify the world outside of film.

Choice of films: gathering and selecting the data

I viewed 150 films or more listed in the filmography that are set in and around Los Angeles. Underlying all the choices I have made is a key concern that in every film the city of Los Angeles should be central to the development of the characters and the narrative. In all the films I use for close textual analysis the city functions as much more than backdrop. Equally important is that the films should come out of a *popular* Hollywood tradition; that is, in nearly all cases the films were made to reach the widest possible audience, or targeted directly at the very large African-American or Latina/o cinema audience with the potential for cross-over success. Thus, I wanted both to look beyond the Anglo dominated vision of Los Angeles that is often expressed by Hollywood and, where examining that vision, to interpret it in new ways. As I viewed and reviewed these films I narrowed the field of potential texts by examining the degree to which the films used the city as central to the narrative. Through these indices of cinematic-city-ness and broad popular appeal covering a range of audiences, genres and time settings I selected the texts for close analysis. Viewing such a large number of films about one specific place enabled me to identify what I regarded as a key narrative preoccupation: the recurrence of representations of identity and mobility in the ways the urban space of Los Angeles is re-constructed as cinematic space.

A further element in my choice of film texts is to draw from a range of film *genres*

as a way of thinking through how urban space is represented in cinematic space. The concern is to use genre as a mode of *cultural instrumentality* to pose questions about what the variety of films *do* culturally. The films chosen for analysis both fit within, and fight against, the constraints of particular genres. In Chapter Three, for example, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995) deals with *film noir*, critiquing and remodelling the genre from an African-American perspective. A number of detailed studies have covered the *film noir* era from the 1940s to the 1960s, for example, Davis (1990), Christopher (1997), Hirsch (2001) and Dimendberg (2004). Given its importance to the construction of the Los Angeles imaginary, I knew I could not ignore the noir tradition. But I also wanted to extend this work, considering the ways in which films from the recent past self-consciously address the limitations of classic film noir discourse. Therefore, I decided to concentrate on films made since 1974 when *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974) was released.

The films I have chosen are connected with the ongoing history of my own cinema going experiences but much more than that they have been chosen because they explicitly deal with the spatiality of the urban. Because film is a mobile medium it is highly suited to the discussion and elaboration of how cities and other spaces are represented. As Shurmer-Smith (2002b: 90) points out: "Film is perhaps the most spatially aware of all forms of representation. Not only does everything have to be set, located, but space and scale are integral to the mode of communication". She points to the lead given by David B. Clarke's edited collection *The Cinematic City* (1997) in forging the relationship between film studies and cultural geography but she keeps hoping for "... a geographical study which prioritizes film's own internal spaces of closeness and distance of shot." To a degree that is what my focus on film techniques develops. The focus on *mise-en-scène* highlights the geography of

film and through close readings of that internal geography questions are raised about the filmic representations of the identities and mobilities within the cinematic geography of Los Angeles.

These readings of the films are supported by analysis of what the directors, producers, and marketing departments claimed was the intention or preferred meaning of their work. By examining interviews in newspapers, journals, on-line and in the DVD extras that now proliferate, *alongside* the viewing and reviewing of the films I was able to glean something of what the creators thought they were creating for the audience. I quote in the following chapters the views of directors such as Kathryn Bigelow (*Strange Days*), Gurinder Chadha (*What's Cooking*), John Stockwell (*Crazy/Beautiful*), Cheech Marin (*Born in East L.A.*) and Allison Anders (*Mi Vida Loca*), productions designers, Gary Frutkoff (*Devil in a Blue Dress*), Syd Mead (*Blade Runner*) screenwriters, Robert Towne (*Chinatown*), Carl Franklin (*Devil in a Blue Dress*) in order to get a sense of how they think they are representing Los Angeles. However, I was not interested in discovering how close or far away from the creator's intention my or other audience readings are or indeed how the production processes of the Hollywood industry shaped or changed the intended message. These elements are engaged with as part of the contextual work alongside the close analysis of the visual language of the films. The role of the viewer is given pre-eminence as I wanted to concentrate on the texts themselves rather than delve into the debate about film production and auteurship. I am interested in identifying those points in the films where representations of mobility and identity are made explicit through the use of film techniques examining the ways in which these representations complicate and challenge the histories of representation of Los Angeles in Hollywood films.

The stills in Volume 2 of the thesis illustrate the operation of the techniques in relation to the representations of mobility and identity. Although I employ textual analysis throughout the main chapters to provide evidence for what I see as the preoccupation of films set in Los Angeles with issues of mobility and identity I am aware that this method is inadequately equipped to cope with extra-textual questions. I am therefore interested in developing a layered approach that incorporates film texts and genres but also moves as Kuhn (1990: 9) states: "... into the sphere of discourses and practices at work beyond cinema itself, but in which films and genres participate." Therefore, a key element of methodology is the use of *cultural instrumentality* (Kuhn, 1990) to enable a focus on the question of what these films are doing culturally and connect the analysis of the films to the broader social, cultural, economic and political discourses outside the films.

The chapter pattern also has a methodological function as I argue that representations of Los Angeles past and future as they are analysed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four prefigure the preoccupations with identity and mobility in the films set in contemporary Los Angeles analysed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Strengths, weaknesses and other approaches

Morley (1997: 123) signals his concern about a methodological approach that is largely text based in relation to cultural studies which he argues "... often allows the cultural phenomena under analysis to drift entirely free from their social and material foundations". In order to safeguard against the tendency that Morley identifies I establish clearly in Chapter Two the interwoven nature of the cinematic and the material Los Angeles. Chapter Two highlights the demographic changes

that have taken place and continue to happen in Los Angeles, particularly in relation to the growth of the Latina/o population, the kinetic movement of the African-American population and the slow-down in growth but continued dispersal of the Anglo population, often referred to as 'white flight', to the suburban hinterland. I focus on the material surroundings of Los Angeles with reference to the architecture of the freeways that act, in a range of visual representations, as a metonym for the city as whole. The focus on the history of freeway construction also draws upon the centrality of the car in the performance of identity and mobility in cinematic Los Angeles. The closely intertwined nature of the economic geographies of Hollywood and Los Angeles is also considered as the site of production for cinematic representations that not only incorporate images of the city but also distils the image of the *urban* as Los Angeles. This analysis of the material geography helps to ground the textual analysis of the films in their social and material foundations.

Much like the warning offered by Morley (1997: 123) above about the textualizing of cultural studies, in most cultural geography accounts of using text based methods within a research project there is willingness to engage but unease about the problematics of interpretation. Are these readings of the range of films I offer as examples of cinematic Los Angeles limited because they are "my" interpretations? It is a question I have struggled with but hope I have put in place a robust structure that demands the use of the elements of methodology I have outlined above. By placing my own position at the beginning of this research journey it is hoped I have remained reflexive throughout, constantly demonstrating my awareness of other possible interpretations, for example using the readings of reviewers and critics and the readings of the films by writers across a range of

academic disciplines including, Kennedy (2000), Donald (1999), Hopkins (1994) and Davies (2003).

The methodological approach I have taken concentrates on the aesthetic and the cultural contexts in which films are produced. I am concerned to examine not just the ways in which themes of mobility and identity are represented in these cinematic city films but also the spaces of the films themselves. In that respect I have given more limited attention to some aspects of what du Gay (1997: vi) has identified as the "circuit of culture". Drawing on Raymond Williams's (1981) writings on the production of culture that comes to be known as "cultural materialism" du Gay identifies the following elements: Production; Consumption; Regulation; Representation; Identity as constituent parts of the "circuit of culture". My work in this thesis engages with the meta-structures of representation and identity and while I reflect on the production context for the films I do not go into detail on the workings of the Hollywood film industry apart from the close connections I make in Chapter Two between the growth of the industry and the evolution of representations of Los Angeles as the site and sometimes the source of those production processes. Although I do not focus in much detail on how these films have been consumed and responded to by audience(s) I do identify mainstream Hollywood films as a key element in my choice of texts and therefore offer implicit analysis of how, why and where audiences engage with these texts. A more detailed analysis of audience responses would have entailed, for example, the use of focus groups, in-depth interviews and questionnaires involving participating audiences similar to the work of Burgess et al., (1991) and Gabriel (1996) who both provide an interesting model for exploration of audience engagement, the former from a geographical background and the latter from a film and cultural studies

background. However, work on audiences tends to give little attention to the power of the texts themselves.

Aitken's (2005: 249) cautionary but positive note about the use of textual methods marks the approach I have taken in the following chapters.

Textual methods, like texts themselves, are social constructions and, as such, they take on the characteristics of their users. It may seem that there are almost as many ways to analyse texts as there are texts and students analysing them. There is some truth to this, but there is always a need to develop sensitive generalisations (but not overgeneralisations or essentialisms), either from a specific text and/or from critical reflection about the world we experience through that text.

Through the use of close textual analysis of specific film techniques, framing this within the concept of the cinematic city and questioning what the films do culturally I argue the analysis is sufficiently rigorous to maintain the balance that Aitken (2005: 249) identifies, avoiding overgeneralisations and essentialisms but offering detailed critical reflection about the issues of mobility and identity represented in the films. I argue my approach is sufficiently reflexive and linked with the world outside of the texts. The range of films and genres explored and the original list of films viewed and reviewed from which the key texts were chosen convinces me that the analysis is methodologically sound and effective.

The Cinematic City

One thing cinema - or at least film - has continued to do since the nineteen twenties has been to teach its audiences across the globe ways of seeing and so imagining the modern city, whether or not they live in one. The imagined landscape of the city has become, inescapably, a cinematic landscape (Donald, 1999: 68).

A central idea around which research has grouped for geographers and film scholars is the relationship between the overlapping discourses of the material city and what has now become an accepted term of discourse, the *cinematic city*. The edited collections by Aitken and Zonn (1994), Clarke (1997), Cresswell and Dixon (2002), and Shiel and Fitzmaurice (2001, 2003) focus on the role of the cinematic city in the construction of our understanding of the modern and post-modern city. As Ford (1994: 143) suggests at the head of the chapter and Donald (1999) above, the American city has become enmeshed with its representation in cinema to the extent that the material city and the cinematic city are inseparable.

In its broadest terms any city represented through the cinematic apparatus might be defined as a cinematic city. For the purposes of this research the notion of the cinematic city is used to refer to the interpenetration of urban space and cinematic space. However, I would concur with McArthur (1997:20) who proposes the contingent or fluid nature of the discourse contained within the notion of the city. Cities are constantly changing, and the cinematic apparatus, together with other methods for representing the urban in popular entertainment, television, video, computer games, and webcams, are also in the process of development. So cities within the discourse of the cinematic city "... do not have fixed meanings, only temporary, positional ones" (McArthur, 1997: 20).

With McArthur's note about the contingent and fluid nature of cinematic city discourse in mind I investigate the construction of urban space as cinematic space. In particular I examine the ways in which the city functions in the narratives of Los Angeles's films. I use this as a justification for my choice of films depicting Los Angeles, arguing that all the films chosen for analysis use the city to such an extent

that it becomes a key narrative element. Following the work of filmmaker Mark Rappaport (cited in Wollen, 1980: 26) who identified a number of ways in which place might function within film narratives, I have developed four functions of the city in film. My development of this work can be summarised as follows: *city as backdrop*; *city as character*; *city as metaphor* and *city as metonymy*. Identifying the different functions the city serves in cinematic city films provides a more multi-layered view of how urban space and cinematic space are intertwined.

Muzzio (1996: 212), for example, makes a distinction between 'true city movies' and 'urban local color movies', as she elaborates:

In the true city movie, the city actively participates in shaping character and plot. In an urban local color movie, substitution of another background might affect the detail within the movie but not the essential patterns of plot, characterization and theme.

Following the spirit of Muzzio's assertion I propose a more layered structure to the notion of the cinematic city. I return to the breadth of the original definition above that any city represented through the cinematic apparatus might be defined as cinematic, but suggest different functions, some, or all, of which might occur in representations of the city in cinema. Recognition of these different functions provides a more complex picture of how the city functions within the narrative of films set in cities.

Despite Muzzio's assertion, even when apparently offering only 'urban local colour' or what I would term backdrop, the city is far more active than this term implies. *City as backdrop* may be the least sophisticated function of the city within the narrative, but it can serve to invest a scene or an action with aesthetic or emotional

significance. For example, the city setting might draw attention to the long history of that place as a site of mythical imaginings, where countless other screen stories have been played out. The city, as well as a backdrop for the action, can have a certain elemental quality. I would argue this to be the case with Los Angeles, and New York, or any other world city that has had a strong relationship to cinematic production, including London, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Hong Kong, Bombay, Rio de Janeiro (Da Costa, 2001). As well as Los Angeles's ability to become any-city, every-city, because it is the location for the Hollywood film industry, even when being used as backdrop the iconic features of the city (the Hollywood sign, City Hall, the Planetarium, the sprawl, the juxtaposition of oil wells and orange groves, desert and ocean) can all trigger a range of associations in the spectator.

The city can be read as more strongly cinematic when it plays a significant enough role in the narrative to function as another character. This coincides with Muzzio's notion of "true city films" but without the normative properties that her terminology suggests. To interpret the city as *character* and therefore strongly cinematic requires the following conditions. First, the city should be crucial in defining the actions and attitudes of the human protagonists for example, *Falling Down* (Schumacher, 1993), *Born in East L.A.* (Marin, 1989), or *Crazy/Beautiful* (Stockwell, 2001). Second, the interaction of the central characters with the urban environment should help to construct the tempo of the narrative, for example, *Fast and the Furious* (Cohen, 2000); *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995); *Alien Nation* (Baker, 1989). Third, the film's narrative should arise out of the particular history and geography of the city, for example, *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995), *Mi Vida Loca* (Anders, 1993). The combination of these three

elements suggests that the city's representation is strong enough within the narrative to consider the city as character.

The *city as metaphor* is another key function of the city in film. Here the city has often been cast in terms of the binary opposition of a utopian or dystopian space. In their edited collections LeGates and Stout (1996) and Bridge & Watson (2002) provide an almost equal number of chapters from analysts of the urban experience who on the one hand see the city as representing the highest achievement of the human race and yet on the other hand, as representing the worst excesses of humanity where corruption, overcrowding, crime, poverty, injustice and social disintegration prevail. Hollywood film representations of the city have used a similar formula in their depiction of the urban and in this sense the city is often used as a metaphor for our dystopian excesses; corruption, sin, betrayal, segregation, alienation and entropy. Metaphors of decline tend to be most associated with cinematic Los Angeles but the analysis of the following chapters suggests more positive metaphors of the city are also in evidence in such films as Gurinder Chadha's *What's Cooking?* (2001).

Another layer can be added to how the city functions within specific films where an element of the place stands in for a broader sphere. This *metonymic* function can be seen specifically in those Los Angeles films where Hollywood stands in for L.A., for example, *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950); *The Day of the Locust* (Schlesinger, 1974); *The Last Tycoon*, (Kazan, 1976); *The Player* (Altman, 1990); *Swimming with Sharks*, (Huang, 1994); *Get Shorty* (Sonnefield, 1995), and *Ivansxtc* (Rose, 2000), or where Los Angeles stands in for the United States, for example, *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974), *Devil in A Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995), *Falling Down* (Schumacher,

1993) and *Born in East L.A.* (Marin, 1988). All of these functions are used in the analysis of the films considered here in order to provide a more complex picture of how the cinematic city represents Los Angeles.

I argue that the construction of urban space as cinematic space has long been a focus of discussion for film scholars as the city and cinema have grown in tandem. The “structural homology between the cinema and the city” identified by Strathausen (2003:25) has been evident since the 1930s in the writings of Walter Benjamin, whose seminal article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” drew attention to the close relationship between motion pictures and the especially mobile nature of city life in particular. A group of films that include *Manhatta* (Strand and Sheeler, 1921), *Paris qui dort* (Clair, 1923), *Metropolis* (Lang, 1926), *Rien que les heures* (Cavalcanti, 1926), Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin, The Symphony of a Great City* (1927), *Sunrise* (Murnau, 1927), *The Crowd* (Vidor, 1928), Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Jean Vigo’s *A Propos de Nice* (1930), signalled the pre-World War Two period as a paradigmatic moment in the cinema-city relationship and produced a range of theoretical discourses and cultural analyses that continues to be drawn upon.

Benjamin (1936) and Kracauer (1947), through to Davis (1990), Friedberg (1993), Donald (1999), Bruno (2001) and Dimendberg (2004) highlight the cinema’s relationship to the modern city to the extent that it can be argued that the “film-screen becomes the mirror of modern life” (Strathausen, 2003:25). This position needs to be problematised as it suggests a rather simplistic reflection of the city in cinema. I argue that using *cultural instrumentality* as a mode of interpretation the film-screen does much more than simply mirror city life. Rather, it draws attention

to the ways in which the material and the cinematic city are interwoven, representing fears and anxieties, critiquing the stereotyped visions of the city produced by Hollywood, and offering a method of analysis that recognises those cinematic visions that are remapping the multiple geographies and identities of Los Angeles.

The variety of approaches taken to construct the links between the material city and the cinematic city in recent writings range from the recurring use of the binary opposition of utopian and dystopian, the country and the city opposition, the urban and suburban relationship, the working through of the modern and postmodern trajectory of connections, the post-colonial perspective, to feminist perspectives on urban representation. But, only recently have scholars begun to pay close attention to how these themes are played out through the specific language of film. Clarke (1997: 1) notes:

... despite the immediately perceptible cinematic qualities that cities frequently seem to possess, and despite the uncredited role played by the city in so many films, relatively little theoretical attention has been directed towards understanding the relationship between urban and cinematic space.

It is precisely this relationship that my research develops in the analysis of themes of identity and mobility in cinematic Los Angeles. Davis's version of Los Angeles as a place always on the edge of conflagration, fuelled by his insightful interpretation of Hollywood representations of the city, has tended to dominate the discourse on the cinematic and the material city. I challenge that dominant discourse in a number of ways. First, I foreground the importance of *film techniques*, such as *mise-en-scène*, editing and camera movement, and I elaborate the role they play in constructing urban space as cinematic space, highlighting the pre-occupation with

themes of identity and mobility. Second, though others (for example Benton, 1995) use Los Angeles as a key site for the consideration of how the cinematic and material city overlaps, they underplay the role of film techniques and the centrality of *genre* in the construction of urban space as cinematic space. I take this work further by focusing on *genre* as a mode of *cultural instrumentality* enabling the investigation of questions of identity and mobility as part of the broader social, cultural and political domains of which film is a part.

Cultural Instrumentality

Highlighting the importance of genre through the use of Kuhn's (1990) notion of cultural instrumentality I pose questions about *what*, in broader terms, these cinematic city films *do* culturally. Examining science fiction films Kuhn proposes five terms of cultural instrumentality that I have modified to encompass cinematic city narratives more generally.

First of all, there is a notion that the overt contents of science fiction films are *reflections* of social trends and attitudes of the time, mirroring the preoccupations of the historical moment in which the films were made. In this reflectionist model, films are treated as, in a sense, sociological evidence. Secondly, there is the idea that science fiction films relate to the social order through the mediation of *ideologies*, society's representation of itself in and for itself – that films speak, enact, even produce certain ideologies, which cannot be read directly off films' surface contents. Third is the view that films voice cultural *repressions* in 'unconscious' textual processes, which like the dream associations and bodily symptoms of psychoanalytic patients, require interpretation in order to reveal the meaning hidden in them. A fourth cultural instrumentality concerns what science fiction films do to and for their *spectators*, the sorts of pleasures they evoke and the fantasies they activate. Finally, there is the view that science fiction films are actively involved in a whole network of *intertexts*, of cultural meanings and social discourses.

I have adapted these five cultural instrumentalities, giving prominence to some and grouping others together, in order to explore in detail cultural instrumentality in

cinematic city narratives more generally. For example, I merge *reflections* and *ideologies* to produce a more focused method of analysis, since the reflectionist approach appears too accepting of the notion that the cinematic city too simply reflects unproblematically the material city. Therefore, I use a concept of the cinematic city that can at once reflect and critique the current social order, suggesting an inherent dialectic in the process of interpretation. My argument is that the hegemonic operation of the Hollywood system controls but also creates spaces for contradictions and counter-hegemonic practices. According to Kuhn (1990:10) what emerges from such a combination is the implication that cinematic city representations can be reactionary and/or progressive and, as she states, “ ... this is culturally important because films shape, as well as reflect the ways we think about the world” (Kuhn, 1990:10). But it is also more complex than Kuhn suggests. Within individual film representations of the cinematic city can shift between the reactionary and progressive.

I engage less prominently with the cultural instrumentalities categorised as *repressions* and *spectators*, but they are evident in the analysis of the fears and anxieties about identity and mobility in representations of Los Angeles. These fears and anxieties deal with immigration as invasion, the white male in crisis, racial identity and spatial mobility, the disappearance of public spaces and the erosion of the borders between the self and the city and the public and the private. What the films do for and to spectators focuses on how the use of film techniques such as mobile framing, *mise-en-scène* and editing address spectators, offering pleasures in, but also cautionary and more hopeful visions of, the spectacle of the cinematic city.

The final element of cultural instrumentality is *intertexts* and this is important to the ways in which I want to relate the world of the film to the world outside the film, highlighting the relationship between urban space and cinematic space. The films I have chosen for analysis, like other cinematic representations, “are caught up in discourses which operate beyond the boundaries of text and genre” (Kuhn, 1990: 178). In attempting to develop a more protean and dynamic use of genre theory it can be argued that as an element of cultural instrumentality *intertexts* link the world outside the film text to the film itself, by framing that world as an amalgam of representational practices and discourses. To examine the ways in which film texts make links with and incorporate the representational practices and discourses outside the film, in particular themes of identity and mobility, it is important to focus on how aspects of film language help to construct urban space as cinematic space.

Urban space as cinematic space: the role of film techniques

Notions of the cinematic city are developed in this section by close attention to *how* film techniques operate to represent urban space as cinematic space. The analysis of cinematic city films focuses on a number of *film techniques*, including *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and editing. These elements work in combination and, as Gibbs (2002: 26) observes, it is most productive to think of them in terms of their interaction. In the analysis they may be referred to individually but it is the interplay of elements that is significant in representing urban space as cinematic space. The work of Natter (1994) and Davies (2002) points to the importance of understanding how cinematic city space is created as a prerequisite for a better understanding of how urban space is represented. This concentration on the creation of screen space has often been overlooked or given

insufficient attention in a range of cultural geography writing that invokes the cinematic city, for example, Benton (1995), Chambers (1997) and Dear (2000).

The analysis of the films highlights the use of the following film techniques as a way of emphasising the particular spatial elements of the medium. *Mise-en-scène* is the most visible element in any film and I focus on setting and lighting as key elements in the construction of cinematic city space. *Camera movement* is another crucial element because of its long association with the recording of the mobile city. *Editing* is analysed because it is the filmmaker's chief tool for creating screen space-time. I focus specifically on an aspect of editing known as *cross-cutting* which enables cutting back and forth between two or more lines of action, indicating they are happening simultaneously. A more detailed description of each of these techniques highlights their impact on the creation of screen space and the effects they produce within a given set of generic conventions.

Setting is a key element in the *mise-en-scène* of cinematic city films. As Bordwell and Thompson (2001: 159) suggest, since the earliest days of cinema critics and audiences have understood that *setting* plays a more active role in cinema than in most theatrical styles. *Setting* need not only be a container of events but can also dynamically enter the narrative action. As I have outlined already the city can function in a variety of ways as a setting for cinematic representations. Using the city as a setting for film has had a particular history in the ways in which cinema technology has developed to capture the mobile nature of city life but also in relation to how settings have been constructed and continue to be constructed to simulate city locations, whether in computer generated images like the *Matrix Trilogy* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999, 2001, 2003), in miniature models such as *Dick*

Tracy (Beatty, 1990), or through animation in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Zemeckis, 1988). The urban mise-en-scène provides some of the earliest cinematic images, for example, in the static camera of Lumière's *La Sortie des Usines Lumiere* and *L'Arrive d'un Train en Gare* (1895), to the beginning of the dominance of narrative storytelling in film, for example, Edwin S. Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* (1903).

Lighting, as part of the mise-en-scène, is a key element in articulating a film's dramatic impulse. I want to use the analysis of lighting as part of the mise-en-scène in a focused way to identify how films that have been loosely categorised as being part of the *film noir* cycle had a tendency to light for "whiteness". Dyer (1997) points out how from early cinema the lighting has always privileged the white face. He also argues that "... movie lighting discriminates on the basis of race" and confines a black person to the shadows (Dyer, 1997: 102). Here, the ideological effect of the aesthetics of lighting, that contributes so much to the look of the film, the overall mise-en-scène, and the identification with individual characters, is examined in relation to both race and gender identities.

Another technique used to focus the attention of the audience on specific aspects of the mise-en-scène is *mobile framing*, also known as *camera movement*. The centrality of camera movement to the depiction of the modern city marks it off as supremely important within the range of cinematographic techniques that have developed as a result of the development of cinema technology. The ability of the mobile camera to represent the movement of the city was established as early as 1896 when Eugene Promio, an operator for the Lumière Brothers, placed a camera on a gondola introducing movement into a view of Venice. By 1899 cameras were

placed on moving vehicles, in trains, subway cars, or trams, in order to provide in a literal sense a mobile view of the city. In Edison's *Panoramic View of the Brooklyn Bridge* (1899) and *Panorama of 4th St., St Joseph* (Weed, American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1902), the spectator became mobile. The city symphonies of Dziga Vertov (1929), Walter Ruttmann (1927) and Jean Vigo (1930) placed cameras on a moving automobile, tram, bus, train, or motorcycle, catching the speed and the movement of the modern city through montage, and helped to produce for the film spectator a mobile gaze. The movement of the camera demands a certain kind of mobility in the spectator across space and time.

As Bruno (2001: 17) has pointed out: "film came to place itself within the perceptual field that has been described by art historian Jonathan Crary as the 'techniques of the observer'". The preparedness of the audience for this spectatorial mobility, it has been suggested, came from the panoramic vision supplied in the railway journeys of the nineteenth century examined perceptively by Schivelbusch (1986). As cameras have become lighter, more mobile, more versatile, so the images they capture of the city have developed to frame the emergence of the modern city. A central feature of Los Angeles, as the city of the car, is this sense of mobility, and the film industry has done its utmost to get behind the wheel with a camera in order to depict and perpetuate that perception of mobility.

As well as placing the camera on a moving vehicle the camera itself can move. Bordwell and Thompson (2001: 224/6) outline several types of camera movement, each one of which creates a specific effect onscreen. The *pan* (short for "panorama") movement rotates the camera on a horizontal axis. It is as if the camera turns its head left or right. The *tilt* movement rotates the camera on a

vertical axis. It is as if the camera's "head" were swiveling up or down. The *tracking shot* involves the camera as a whole changing position, travelling in any direction along the ground – forward, backward, circularly, diagonally, or from side to side. In the *crane shot* the camera moves above ground level. Typically, it rises or descends, often thanks to a mechanical arm that lifts and lowers it. *Steadicam*, a gimbal-balanced camera mount attached to the operator's body by means of a brace, developed in the late 1970s, allows the capture of mobile shots of great smoothness.

The decision to move the camera, to make the frame mobile has particular consequences for the representation of the *mise-en-scène*. Camera movements can increase the information about the setting of the story, the space surrounding characters or objects. New objects or figures can appear providing a sharper, more vivid appearance than allowed by stationary framing. Tracking shots and crane shots supply continually changing perspectives on passing objects as the frame constantly shifts its orientation. Pan and tilt shots present the space of the city as continuous both horizontally and vertically. The mobility of the city and the mobility of the characters can be captured by the moving camera making it possible, as Bordwell and Thompson (2001: 226) suggest, "to see camera movement as a substitute for *our* movement ... camera movement provides several convincing cues for movement through space". Indeed, so powerful are these cues that filmmakers often make camera movements *subjective* – motivated narratively to represent the view through the eye of a moving character. Camera movement can be a powerful cue that we are watching a point-of-view shot. The *shot-reverse-shot* is a convention of cinematic storytelling that cuts from the point-of-view shot of one person to the person or object s/he is addressing or observing and then cuts

back to the first figure. This establishes a connection between the person or object being observed and the observer. The audience is encouraged to identify with particular characters through camera movement and in the editing process *their* movement can be interpreted as *our* movement.

The third element of film technique that the analysis draws upon is editing. I want to focus on *cross-cutting* as a particular aspect of editing, the first use of which is often attributed to D.W. Griffith's last-minute rescue scenes in, for example, *The Drive for Life* (1909). Griffith's development of cross-cutting in an urban *mise-en-scène* would be used to great effect by Fritz Lang in *M* (1931), a German film telling the story of the hunt for a child murderer in Berlin. While the police seek the child murderer, gangsters also prowl the streets looking for him, and we also occasionally see the murderer himself. Cross-cutting ties together these lines of action, it also helps to build suspense and create the terrifying atmosphere of a city besieged by fear and torn between the forces of order and mob violence (Katz, 1994). *M* (1951) was remade by Joseph Losey and set in Los Angeles where Dimendberg (2004: 218) points out the significant difference between the two versions, apart from the location, is the prominent role played by television in circulating information about the child murderer, a harbinger of the increasing role the visual media would play in the reporting of the city's dangers. Lang had already produced one of the seminal cinematic city films, *Metropolis*, in 1926 and when he moved to Hollywood in 1934 he went on to direct a range of films, including *The Woman in the Window* (1944), *Scarlet Street* (1945), *The Big Heat* (1953) and *While the City Sleeps* (1957), that were often fascinated by the impact of city life on the central characters.

I focus on cross-cutting as a key aspect of editing particularly in relation to the cinematic city because it is centrally concerned with representing two or more spaces in dynamic simultaneity, reflecting the multiple settings of the material city. As well as having a key role in the construction of the narrative, cross-cutting draws attention to the distinctive spatiality of film. In cinematic Los Angeles cross-cutting often works to produce a sense of the sprawl, the verticality or horizontality, where the spatial incongruities of the city can be highlighted. The opening sequences of Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (2002) offer examples of cross-cutting that elaborates the built environment of Los Angeles, suggesting heterogeneity in space and simultaneity in time. Editing in all its forms is a key indicator of the constructed nature of film. The finished film product is an assemblage of shots, even so, cross-cutting in Hollywood films happens so seamlessly that spectators have developed the perceptual skills of seeing several spaces at once. This method of editing captures particularly well the layout of Los Angeles. Films such as *Short Cuts* (1993), *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1995), *2 Days in the Valley* (Herzfield, 1999), *Magnolia* (P.T. Anderson, 2000) and most recently *Crash* (Haggis, 2004) tell the stories of separate characters through cross-cutting, a group of people in Los Angeles who never thought they would meet, but are brought together by the film's narrative. La Salle (1996: 25) suggests:

Perhaps it's that city's sprawling disconnectedness, its smiley-faced cruelty, its obsession with surface and status that makes filmmakers want to impose connections, to bring together people from different worlds and make that contact meaningful.

Representing the meaningful contact between people from different worlds in cinematic Los Angeles is a useful way to describe the trajectory of the thesis. The analysis of film techniques opens up for question the ways in which the technical

choices made by filmmakers are used to signify the broader histories and geographies of Los Angeles, how screen space is used to represent the urban space of Los Angeles and how questions of mobility and identity are figured in these representations.

Representations of Identity

Identity – broadly, a sense of self that encompasses who people think they are, and how other people regard them – is a complex and contested term (Blunt et al., 2003: 72).

The recognition that identity is a “complex and contested term” sets the parameters for its use as a central platform in the analysis of cinematic city films. In this thesis I argue cinematic representations of Los Angeles are a key site where issues of identity can be both temporarily fixed *and* visibly challenged. As Cresswell and Dixon (2002: 67) suggest, identity is always “unavoidably spatial” and film as an inherently spatial medium offers a potentially rich medium for the exploration of the interrelationship of the cinematic city and issues of identity. As the centre of the Hollywood film industry, with a quite particular demographic structure, Los Angeles offers a powerful site in which to situate an examination of the ways in which identity is constructed, and open up those constructions to question.

Building on the insights of feminism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism and post-modernism, recent research has challenged previously held fixed or essentialist notions of identity. Within an essentialist approach, identity is understood as providing a core and fixed essence. Essentialist notions of identity suggest a core and common identity shared by different groups of people. Essentialist notions of identity are now seen in a negative light as they have come to be understood as reducing a person or place to their supposed essences or essential qualities. During

the 1970s the impact of feminism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism moved the vocabulary on identity away from a neo-Marxist engagement with class relations and class struggle to a stronger focus on what began to emerge as the politics of difference fuelled by the writings of Foucault (1976, 1985), Said (1978), Butler (1990), Hall (1988) and hooks (1991, 1992). A move away from class relations was signalled as questions of race, sexuality, difference and otherness was taking shape. This approach focused on the social construction of identity moving it away from an essentializing process that over-simplifies the complexity of people and places.

This leads to the second way of examining identity which is to do so in terms of difference, drawing attention to the multiple axes of identity and their interplay at different times and different places. This non-essentialist notion sees identity as unfixed and open to change and as Blunt (2003: 70) argues this approach “views identity as socially and discursively constructed”. According to May (2003: 24):

Social constructionism is most easily defined as the recognition that understandings of the world are determined by the social context within which those understandings are constructed, rather than through any pre-given or innate quality of the object of inquiry itself. For example, once it is recognised that ideas of masculinity and femininity vary over time and space it becomes clear that gender is constructed rather than a pre-given.

Similar arguments can be made about race, sexuality, and the other multiple axes of identity. The ways in which identity is “discursively constructed” acknowledges the relationship between power, knowledge and language and discourse as a way of thinking about the interplay of these elements. Discourse is a concept most associated with the French philosopher and cultural theorist Michel Foucault (1980). As Ogborn (2003: 11) suggests Foucault understood discourses as the

frameworks that define the possibilities of knowledge. Therefore, "a discourse exists as a set of 'rules' (formal or informal, acknowledged or unacknowledged) which determine the sorts of statements that can be made. These 'rules' determine what criteria for truth are, what sort of things can be talked about, and what kind of things can be said about them." Ogborn (2003: 11) offers Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) as one of the most clearly worked through analysis that is explicitly geographical and deals with how the discourse of 'the West' has constructed versions of 'the East' that has shaped how the 'the West' defines itself in opposition to the 'other'. As well as opening up debates on aspects of identity *Orientalism* (1978) is regarded as an important reference point for the development of postcolonialist theory. So the confluence of Foucault and Said's writing has an enormous influence on how conceptualisations of identity shift to a non-essentialist mode where the emphasis is placed on how the multiple axes of identity are socially and discursively constructed. Interpreting identity as a politics of difference, in relation to diaspora, and as a process of hybridity reveals some of the changes in the conceptualisations of identity that have happened with the impact of post-colonialism, feminism, post-structuralism and post-modernism.

Following Said (1978), Stuart Hall's (1990, 1996) work on the development of identity and the Black diaspora, in particular where he articulates the connection between cinematic representation and identity formation, has been central to the way in which I have sought to examine identity in my analysis of cinematic city representations. As Mitchell (2004, 160-166) suggests: Hall (1996) has used diaspora to articulate the position of the subject in postcolonial and post-modern global circumstances. Hall's (1996: 447) focus on the politics of representation is argued through "an awareness of the black experience as a diasporic experience"

and an understanding of “the consequences this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization”. In the Foreword I set up this analysis as having a link with my own sense of identity and I referenced the work of Hall (1990: 222) who suggests:

Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think.

In my own experience as a part of the Irish diaspora I can feel the resonance of Hall’s (1990: 222) insights.

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.

The process of hybridization that comes with the diasporic experience that Hall identifies is taken on another spatial turn when worked through the arguments of Homi Bhabha (1994) whose elaboration of “hybridity” and “Third Space” has provided a very suggestive metaphor for geographers (see Mitchell, 1997, Rose, 1995 and 1997, Routledge, 1997 and Soja, 1996). Bhabha’s elaboration of these terms and their use within discussions of identity has not been without criticism (see Rose 1995, Kraniauskas, 2000) but given their inherently spatial connotations it is evident why they prove attractive in the analysis of how identity is represented in cinematic city versions of Los Angeles, that real-imagined place.

Bhabha's notion of hybridity discussed in an interview with Rutherford (1990: 211) suggests the allusive and metaphorical power of the term.

... for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather to me hybridity is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge.

This focus on the emergence of new positions in the term hybridity provides a useful frame for examining in later chapters the extent to which Hollywood films are beginning to consider a vision of Los Angeles that not only goes beyond the Anglo vision that has dominated cinematic representations of the city for so long, but engages in a re-imagining of the city. Rieff (1991) refers to Los Angeles as the capital of the Third World and Kennedy (2000: 32) has identified Los Angeles as "... an imperial city, economically and culturally formed by the dynamics of American empire building." Certainly, as I elaborate in the next chapter, Los Angeles has become a nodal point for migrants and immigrants. Hence, I argue it is becoming increasingly difficult to represent Los Angeles through film without, as Bhabha (1990: 16) has suggested:

... the marginal, oblique gaze of its postcolonial migrant populations cutting across the imaginative metropolitan geography of territory and community, tradition and culture.

Both Hall (noted above) and Bhabha have developed aspects of their work on identity through engagement with filmic representations. Bhabha's discussion of "Third Space" is considered to have been inspired out of his involvement with "Third Cinema". According to Hayward (2000: 389):

"Third Cinema" was a term coined in 1969 by the Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanos and Octavio Getino. The concept Third Cinema was used

to distinguish it from First cinema (Hollywood) and Second (European art cinema, and the cinema of auteurs).

The films of Third Cinema were seen as having a direct political message and to be in conflict with the colonial film practices of the Western world. It is unsurprising that Bhabha's development of his postcolonial critique would grow alongside his engagement with Third Cinema. Third cinema sought to "... articulate a different set of aspirations out of the raw materials provided by the culture, its traditions, art forms etc., the complex interactions and condensations of which shape the 'national' cultural space inhabited by the filmmakers as well as their audiences" (Pines, J. and Willemen, P. 1990: 10). The co-incidence of developments in post-colonial analysis working through aspects of cinema is clear to be seen and both of these cultural theorists engagement with cinematic representations highlights the potential of film to provide opportunities to explore the hybrid nature of identity.

Blunt and Willis (2000: 188) suggest that "... hybridity becomes an empowering way to envisage cultural difference that contrasts with representations of an exotic and usually inferior 'other' to a western 'self'". In Chapter Seven I argue this notion of hybridity has much to offer, though it is not without its tensions, as a way of framing what appears to be a tendency in recent mainstream Hollywood to represent Los Angeles as a cinematic city of hybridity. The work of bell hooks (1991, 1992) has been equally influential in the development of thinking on identity and the black sense of self. hooks argues that identity is formed according to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As McKittrick (2004: 190) notes:

What hooks gives a sense of is the doubleness of black identities – identities that are produced according to crude forms of race/racism *and* identities that are diversely challenging the meanings of these forms of race/racism.

hook's reconceptualization of home as a space of resistance, her politics of location drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, have become very influential in the development of identity in social theory. What makes hooks a doubly fascinating writer for someone engaged in cross-disciplinary work involving cultural geography and film studies is that she has written extensively in her books and journalism on how her multiple, shifting, intersecting and provisional contributions to the notion of identity bring together texts and spaces to such positive cross-disciplinary effect.

The work of feminist scholars across the disciplines has contributed greatly to the shift away from notions of essentialist identity and has coincided with the development of post-colonialism as another method of critical thinking about identity. McDowell (1996: 36) makes explicit the "thought-provoking coincidence" between the postcolonialist critique of cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994), Stuart Hall (1990, 1995, 1996) and Paul Gilroy (1993) and "feminists' arguments about gendered identities and ideas of the subject as multiple and fragmented".

Some of the work of feminist cultural geographers such as Rose (1993), Valentine (1995, 1996), McDowell (1997) have attempted to understand the social construction and the shifting and performative nature of identity. As Hall (2003: 232) notes, theories of performance provide a framework through which to try and make sense of those various bodily actions that constitute identity and characterise our social interactions. Hall (2003: 232) goes on to identify three main approaches to performance each of which relies upon a rather different understanding of identity. Those who have developed the work of Erving Goffman (1967) (see Crang, 1994 and Valentine, 1993) see social interactions and the roles we play as a form

of theatre, where we are following a script of what is socially accepted for the role we are playing, in a sense we put on a mask. This approach suggests that there is a pre-existing identity behind the mask and the scripts that we perform. The work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) offers a contrast to this approach in that she suggests it is the doing of the script that that gives rise to identity in the first place and that there is not a pre-given or pre-existing identity behind or underneath the mask/roles we play. As Sharp (2004: 70) asserts:

Butler ... has been key in understanding gender identities from a more fluid perspective. She considers the ways in which gendered identities are reproduced through the repetition of mundane activities rather than there being any essentialist biological definitions of gender, or any stable identity established through social construction. It is the deed and not the doer that is of significance.

Some of the work of feminist cultural geographers such as Rose (1993), Valentine (1995, 1996), McDowell (1997) has drawn upon but also critiqued Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) notion of performativity. What has emerged from these engagements is a more complex view of gender relations where gender cannot be understood in isolation of other elements of identity such as race, class, age and sexuality. This in turn has fed a more fluid and dynamic conception of the subject and how the subject experiences and is shaped by, for example, urban spatiality. The third approach to performance/performativity has raised questions about the ways in which some aspects of how we relate to and act in the environment is pre-cognitive, it may be a bodily action/reaction or a sensual experience and we may have to go beyond representation in order to interpret these actions. This approach is known as non-representational theory (see Thrift, 2000; Nash, 2000), because of the importance I place on filmic representation it has no impact on the interpretations of identity in the cinematic city narratives used in this thesis.

David Morley (2000: 250) offers a very useful guide to the ways in which the politics of identity has been re-shaped by various forms of post-modern and post-structuralist theory and offers a corrective to the possibility that in articulating the complexity of this politics of difference that one could end up celebrating incoherence. Morley (2000: 252) argues that if through these approaches identity is constructed as temporary, negotiated, contingent it is also important to have "... a formulation which both guards against the dangers of reification and yet recognises the necessity of strategic essentialism." Some feminist scholars, for example Spivak (1990), have suggested "strategic essentialism" offers the possibility of retaining the ideas of feminist politics and the desire to make things better without the necessity of a belief in biological essentialism or universalism (Sharp, 2004: 71).

I argue that the cinematic city films I analyse, in the main, although products of Hollywood, go against the Hollywood grain because they are beginning to show identity "not as that which fixed the play of difference in a point of origin and stability" but as that "which is constructed in or through difference and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out" (Hall, 1996: 5).

Cloke et al., (2004: 243/244) offers four key points of guidance when dealing with identity.

First of all, it is crucial to be self-critical about the identities that you identify. ... The secret is to be self-critical about our identified entities and categories and always regard them as 'open questions', as things that might need to be revisited, renamed and reclassified, even abandoned as the project progresses. We should endeavour never to let them achieve the solidity, the frozen quality, which is all too typical of much social-scientific

research. Secondly, it is crucial to be alert to the messiness of identity. Thirdly, it is crucial to be alert to the contexts of identity. Fourthly, it is crucial on occasions to consider scrambling binaries and hierarchies.

In the chapters that follow I use these as a guide in developing the analysis of the representations of identity in cinematic city narratives of Los Angeles.

Representations of Mobility

In this section I want to highlight some of the key developments in thinking about mobility as it has influenced cultural geography and explore how it became a key conceptual element in the analysis of Los Angeles as cinematic city in this thesis. In the previous section on identity it was noticeable just how much new material had been generated in cultural geography by the impact of post-structuralism, feminism, post-modernism and post-colonialism. Said's (1978, 1994) work is identified in the earlier section on identity as crucial to the development of post-colonialist theory and once again his ideas are of central importance in the development of thinking on mobility. Said's (1994) *Culture and Imperialism* develops Virilio's (1976) idea of counter-habitation, Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) treatise on the nomadic war-machine, and Foucault's discourse theory to identify mobility and migration as the key markers of our time, and links the characteristics of the exile with the mobile thoughts of postmodern thinking and theory. Thus, consistent with the developments in thinking about identity traced in the previous section, Cresswell and Dixon (2002: 4) note:

The epistemological shift from an essentialist stance to an antiessentialist one has had a major impact on how mobility is conceptualized and investigated. Mobility, like space and like identity, has no essential meaning or essence outside of the discursive fields into which it is inserted. Mobility can therefore be thought of as produced in a social and cultural context: produced mobilities are then articulated in particular ways to reproduce and/or challenge social relations. Far from being considered a fact of real life, in film or anywhere else, mobility can be thought of as an element in

the play of power and meaning within social and cultural networks of signification.

In the discursive field of cinematic Los Angeles the recurrence of themes of mobility and identity highlight the play of power and meaning in the interconnection between the material city and the cinematic city. As Cresswell and Dixon (2002: 3) suggest "... mobility is one aspect of filmic representation that lies at the heart of geography/filmic engagement ... and it is this very characteristic that invites scrutiny and provokes thought." Indeed it could be argued that what defines film is that "... it is a visual representation of a mobile world ... film viewing involves the observer taking a mobile view on a mobile world". In fact what makes film such an important medium in the representation of cities is, as Clarke (1997: 3) has noted, that "... film has a *diversity* of mobilities." Film techniques such as mise-en-scène, the moving camera and editing are central in capturing and dramatising the mobile nature of the city. And, central to this are questions about the ways in which identity and mobility are constructed and opened up to question through filmic representation.

The work of Tim Cresswell (1996, 1997, 2001b, 2003) and John Urry (1990, 1999, 2004) has been central in the development of the notion of mobility within geography. In particular, Cresswell and Dixon's (2002) recognition of mobility as a key concept in the relationship between film studies and geography has provided a series of useful signposts for the further development of that relationship in this thesis. In an issue of *New Formations* (2001b) Cresswell edited three papers on the contemporary fascination with all things mobile. In his leading article "The Production of Mobilities" he maps the development of the concept of mobility and highlights the uses and abuses of the term. Urry's interest in mobility arises out of

his background in Sociology and the development of his writing on tourism and the tourist gaze. Cresswell and Urry offer complementary versions of mobility which cover much of the same theoretical ground but apply to their different specialisms within the field.

Cresswell (2001b: 13) sets out to “explore the possibilities for an account of the production of mobilities ... an interpretative framework for thinking about human movement ... a way of thinking about mobilities that allows for the specificity of particular types of movement – a framework that has built into it but can account for that difference.” He sketches the history of the term and its emergence from the tradition of spatial science, and the geography of movement that tended to dominate geography text books of the 1970s. According to Cresswell (2001b: 15), “... the aim of these ‘scientific’ considerations of movement was to exclude those very factors which differentiated mobilities and thus provide a general model of movement.” As a move away from this ‘scientific’ consideration of *movement* the writings of de Certeau (1984), Bakhtin (1984), Deleuze and Guattari (1986) and Virilio (1989) argue that *mobility* has a transgressive quality that enables a close relationship to notions of resistance. Within such a reading the ability to move, to wander, to transgress boundaries is seen as an antidote to the ordered and the fixed. A consequence of this writing on mobility as resistance leads to what Cresswell (2001b) sees as a celebration of mobility for its own sake without a careful consideration of the power relations always inherent in questions of mobility and identity: relations hinging upon issues of who is moving, and why they are on the road. As Cresswell (2001b: 21) notes, and building on the insights of Harvey (1989), and Massey’s (1993) critique of Harvey’s analysis of “time-space compression”, the mobility of some immobilises others. Rather than an easy

celebration of mobility because of what it appears to offer in terms of resisting the ordered or subverting the wishes of producers, Cresswell (2001b) is therefore more concerned to express "... the differentiation and interrelation of mobilities." This "differentiation and interrelation of mobilities" acts as a useful marker in my analysis of the representation of mobilities in the cinematic city narratives of the following chapters.

The concept of mobility is clearly attractive to many who work from feminist, post-structuralist or postmodernist perspectives both because the world in which we live seems indeed to be increasingly characterised by movements and flows of all kinds, and because of the more fluid ways of thinking about the impact of such movements and flows it enables. The concept is however, not without its critics. For feminist scholars such as Rosalyn Deutsche (1991) and Janet Woolf (1994) mobility is a powerfully gendered concept. As Kaplan (1996) argues, socio-spatial mobility is too often only available to privileged white males. In a similar vein, Braidotti (1994) and Massey (1993) contend certain minorities and women do not have access to the technologies of mobility. For Massey (1993) global space is therefore subject to a set of laws she calls "power geometries" which are based on patriarchy, wealth and Western-centrism. As Sharp (2004: 71) notes, as a result of these "power geometries":

Global space is ... constructed to ensure that mobility is not available to all, that certain groups are still subject to the constraint of place, to be exploited by the power of capital that is mobile across the globe.

The mobility that is associated with notions of tourism has a strong suggestion of privilege and yet a number of feminist writers, most notably, Guiliana Bruno (1997) and Anne Friedberg (1993) have made links between the gaze of the tourist and

the film spectator's gaze. As Bruno (1997: 47) asserts when discussing the cities of New York and Naples and I would argue her analysis could equally be applied to Los Angeles:

Their very history is intertwined with tourism, colonization and voyage, and their relative apparatuses of representation. In many ways, their filmic image partakes in a form of tourism: ... both tourist attraction and tourist's nightmare ... cinema's depiction of is both an extension and effect of the tourist's gaze.

While Urry's (1990) work does not deal in detail with filmic depictions of the mobilities associated with tourism he argues for the fundamentally visual nature of the tourism experience. Urry focuses on how changing tourism practices relate to a transformation in how people gaze and what people expect to gaze upon. He argues that the compulsion to mobility relates to the widespread importance of various tourist gazes highlighting the dominance of the visual, in particular, the importance of visual images in disseminating the spectacle of mobilities and objects. The focus in Urry's work appears to be on voluntary forms of mobility that tourism and travel suggest which critics argue is a highly privileged form of mobility (see Tomlinson, 1999). However, in more recent work Urry (1999) has sought to broaden his discussions of movement as he focuses on the mobile practices of diasporic cultures, referencing Gilroy's (1993: 16/17) suggestive metaphor of the ship as a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion. Cresswell (2001b: 19), on the other hand, chooses mobility over travel or nomadism because he argues, referencing Clifford (1992), the former is a term thoroughly infused with connotations of privilege and the latter is marked by a romantic primitivism. What Cresswell and Urry both make clear is that mobility must be discussed in relation to how power enables and restricts and helps to produce mobilities that need to be seen as differentiated and interlinked.

In terms of the pragmatics of how I use mobility in the following chapters it is useful to identify, following Bowlby (1999: 168), three different types of mobility that are helpful in providing the range and the connections that are evident in cinematic city visions of Los Angeles. The first – what we might refer to as *movement* relates to everyday practices of travelling to and from work, shopping, visiting friends, etc.. In cinematic Los Angeles, these movements are intimately linked with the automobile. On a broader level the long-term movements of peoples (both voluntary and forced) between countries, cities, the rural and the urban, the centre and the suburbs is encompassed in the notion of *mobility* and is another key element in the portrayal of cinematic Los Angeles. The interconnections between mobility and identity are also figured in the notion of *social mobility*, where people move through space to achieve (or lose) social status. The possibility or impossibility of this type of mobility figures heavily in the films I have chosen for analysis.

All three types of mobility are set within the framework of recent developments in thinking about mobility elaborated above with the clear guidance that mobility as a concept is not reified as an unproblematically good thing but is set within the context of Cresswell's (2001b) discussion on the production of mobilities. In the following chapters all three types of *mobility*, and the connections between mobility and identity invoked by each, are examined as I argue that the destabilization that comes with representations of mobility, transgression, and displacement produces anxieties around formerly fixed notions of identity.

Hollywood representations are not often noted for their anti-essentialist stance where identity and mobility is concerned but I assess the potential of some contemporary films to represent more fully the multiple geographies, identities and mobilities of Los Angeles and complicate the over-determined image of the city as one of chaos and conflict. Yet, as noted above, this is not to suggest that mobility in itself is an unproblematically positive force. As Cresswell (2001) and Morley (2000) have cautioned, it is crucial to examine who gets to move, from what position of power this movement occurs, and whose interest this movement serves. In the following chapters I am concerned to use these questions as a guide in my analysis of the ways in which representations of mobility figure in cinematic city narrative of Los Angeles.

The interdependence of identity and mobility

As outlined above it is evident that mobility and identity are complex concepts. I want to highlight the interrelationship of mobility and identity in cinematic Los Angeles, and argue that even in Hollywood representations notions of fixed or essentialist identity and mobility are being problematised. Issues of mobility and identity often arise in cinematic city in the ways characters move through/across the city in the private and public spaces they occupy and in the in-between or liminal spaces where private and public overlap, for example, the office and the car. Thus I pay particular attention to the connections the films analysed make between representations of identity in the world of the home, or the micro, and representations of identity in the community/nation/homeland, or the macro. I also argue that some cinematic city films show an increasing awareness of the liminal or *inbetween* spaces that may be the equivalent of the hybrid identities that have formed in Los Angeles as a post-colonial city. Not only do the local and global co-

exist in the film geography and the material geography of Los Angeles, it is the purpose of the film industry to make the local connect with the global in the industrial process of film production and distribution.

In the chapters that follow the analysis charts the complex interplay between representations that sometimes offer a fixed notion of identity and mobility and often within the same film suggest a hybrid or more mobile sense of identity in cinematic Los Angeles. It is this co-existence of the fixed and the dynamic in the imaginary geographies of cinematic Los Angeles that makes it such a fascinating site for analysis and, as I set out in the next chapter, a key site for “thinking the city critically” (Donald: 2002:52).

The function of the stills and chapter layout

In the Foreword and Chapter One I set out the rationale, aims and methodologies of the thesis. Throughout the thesis stills are used to illustrate how the film techniques of mise-en-scène, camera movement and cross-cutting help to construct urban space as cinematic space and to provide visual evidence to support my interpretation of how the films represent issues of identity and mobility. But another reason for their use is to register the impact of specific shots from films such as *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) in my memory and my emotional response when recalling those images. I knew I wanted to write about *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) because of a single image of a group of young women walking in slow motion along the path in Echo Park. This image, where young women are celebrating their ability to promenade without an overwhelming sense of fear and oppression struck me as a powerful and positive representation of Los Angeles as cinematic city. To what extent, I asked myself, might a closer examination of Los Angeles films uncover other such, or similar moments?

Likewise, one of the key considerations in my choice of film for analysis in this thesis is that they should parallel my own history as an avid cinema-goer. This paralleling of my history as a viewer and the films I have chosen for analysis is important because as I set out in the Foreword my sense of identity and mobility is strongly linked with cinematic images of where I grew up, where I live now and how that relates to an ersatz knowledge of Los Angeles as a cinematic city.

Underlying all the choices I have made, however, is a key concern that in every film the city of Los Angeles should be central to the development of the characters and the narrative. In short all the films use the city as much more than backdrop. Equally important was that the films should come out of a *popular* Hollywood tradition; that is, in nearly all cases the films were made to reach the widest possible audience, or targeted directly at the very large African-American or Latina/o cinema audience with the potential for cross-over success. Thus, I wanted both to look beyond the Anglo dominated vision of Los Angeles that is often expressed by Hollywood and, where examining that vision, to interpret it in new ways.

A further methodological issue concerns the focus on a range of film *genres* as a way of thinking through how urban space is represented in cinematic space. The concern is to use genre as a mode of *cultural instrumentality* to pose questions about what the variety of films *do* culturally. The films chosen for analysis both fit within, and fight against, the constraints of particular genres. In Chapter Three, for example, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995), deals with *film noir*, critiquing and remodelling the genre from an African-American perspective. *Chinatown* (1974)

does similar work in terms of how it reconfigures *film noir* but also in the way it takes the story of the growth of the city as central to the narrative. A number of detailed studies have covered the *film noir* era from the 1940s to the 1960s, for example, Davis (1990), Christopher (1997), Hirsch (2001) and Dimendberg (2004). Given its importance to the construction of the Los Angeles imaginary, I knew I could not ignore the noir tradition. But I also wanted to extend this work, considering the ways in which films from the recent past self-consciously address the limitations of classic film noir discourse.

Chapter Two opens with an examination of questions of identity and mobility and the material geographies of Los Angeles, and an account of the ways in which the Hollywood film industry has become central to the marketing and the economic geography of the city. I then analyse the opening sequences of two Hollywood representations of Los Angeles from the late 1980s, *Colors* (Hopper, 1989) and *Stand and Deliver* (Mendenez, 1988) to make explicit the connections between the material geographies of identity and mobility and their cinematic counterpart. I argue that although negative stereotypes of inner-city chaos are fostered within these mainstream representations there are also complex questions about mobility and identity being addressed that contrast the white male vision of the city with the non-Anglo vision of the city.

The order of Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six and Seven follow a pattern where representations of Los Angeles past (Chapter Three) are succeeded by an analysis of future visions of Los Angeles (Chapter Four), both of these leading to an investigation of how the imagined past and future help to shape the contemporary cinematic Los Angeles (Chapter Five, Six and Seven). This movement from past

visions to future visions ties in with the ability of period films and science fiction films to allegorise the present. It is no coincidence that two of the films most associated with Los Angeles since the 1970s are *Chinatown* (1974) and *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982). As Kuhn (1991: 15) notes: "... films which appeal to our imaginings of future or alternative worlds will, intentionally or otherwise, also address contemporary concerns."

Chapter Three highlights the potential of a critical revisionist *noir* such as *Devil in a Blue Dress* to engage in a "cultural archaeology" (Voss, 1998: 168) that helps in the re-imagining of identities and communities. The discourse of *film noir* continues to be a strong identifier of cinematic Los Angeles, but is revealed for the most part as being, rather ironically given its title, blind to issues of racial and spatial difference. The relationship between mobility and identity in the central character of Easy Rawlins (Denzel Washington) in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) helps to supply a map of the racial and spatial apartheid of late 1940s Los Angeles.

In Chapter Four the power of the *noir* discourse is revisited in the emergence of representations of the future Los Angeles as a mix of stylistic nods and winks to the 1940s and 1950s. The focus on mixed race identity analysed through the character of the mulatto, Daphne Monet (Jennifer Beals), in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) in Chapter Three arises in a different form in the relationship between Mace (Angela Bassett) and Lenny (Ralph Fiennes) in *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995) and the accommodation of Sykes (James Caan), the bigoted white male detective and Sam Francisco (Mandy Patinkin) the newcomer in *Alien Nation* (Baker, 1989) examined in Chapter Four. Despite the apocalyptic visions that tend to dominate the representation of Los Angeles as a future metropolis the evidence in Chapter Four

suggests that embracing 'difference' is one way a more hopeful future might be secured in the science fiction cinematic city. Much as *Chinatown* (1974) provides a 'surrogate history' of the city, *Blade Runner* (1982) is a key text in any discussion of Los Angeles's imaginary future. *Blade Runner* (1982) has accumulated a wealth of academic analyses but as with *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) I take a less well trodden path in my investigation of what the film does culturally by allying it to a detailed study of two other science fiction city films: *Strange Days* (1995) and *Alien Nation* (1989). I argue that both of these past and future visions of the city are pre-occupied with themes of mobility and identity, and that they pre-figure the concerns and pre-occupations of the contemporary audience leading up to the Rodney King Riots/Uprising in 1992 and around the time of the O.J.Simpson trial in 1995.

The whole of Chapter Five is devoted to an analysis of *Falling Down* (Schumacher, 1993), a film which exemplifies a vision of the contemporary white male identity, and metonymically both Los Angeles and the wider nation, as in crisis. The ways in which the two white male central characters deal with 'difference', and the fear that the city is being taken over by the 'brown-skinned Other' is played out as they move, not by car but on foot, across the city of the car. *Falling Down* (1993) was marketed as a "state of the nation" film and what attracted me to it, despite its reactionary politics, is the ambiguous nature of its narrative and the fact that the central character leaves his car; offering a highly mediated, but nonetheless unusual, journey for a mainstream Hollywood film.

Falling Down (1993) deals exclusively with the white male perspective. It also offers a powerfully negative vision of Los Angeles's multiple geographies and identities,

particularly Latina/os. I therefore wanted to counterpoint this vision of the city with a number of films that attempt to re-make the city of Los Angeles through Latina/o stories. *Mi Vida Loca* (Anders, 1993), *American Me* (Olmos, 1992), *Stand and Deliver* (Mendenez, 1988), *My Family* (Nava, 1995) and *Born in East L.A.* (Marin, 1989) are the key texts analysed in Chapter Six. The contrapuntal nature of their vision of Los Angeles as opposed to that represented in *Falling Down* (1993) details the desire of these filmmakers to rework the stereotypes of some mainstream Hollywood representations of the Los Angeles Latina/o population and offer a different way of imagining the city that incorporates Latina/os in the city's histories and geographies. This space for re-imagining the city through Latina/o stories suggests a tendency in more recent films where Hollywood is beginning to take account of the huge demographic shifts in a city where Latina/os now make up the majority of the population.

Mi Vida Loca (1993) supplies one of the very few examples of a cinematic city representation where the female is not displayed as powerless or a victim. Three key areas of Latina/o spatiality in cinematic Los Angeles are highlighted as a way of showing how a more complicated vision of Latina/os can emerge from Hollywood representations. The interconnection of the barrio and the city, the barrio and the prison and the barrio and the homeland provide a more complex approach to Latina/o spatiality highlighting the interrelationship of mobility and identity. Each of these films chart a move away from the metaphors of decline evident in Davis's *City of Quartz* (1990) and the development of a more positive message, as begins to appear in his more recent *Magical Urbanism* (2000), for example.

In Chapter Seven I consider Hall's (1993) notion of identity as a process rather than a fixed entity. I argue that some contemporary films may be representing more thoroughly the range of mixed identities now evident in Los Angeles, using Bhabha's (1993) notion of hybridity to assess the potential for co-operation rather than conflict within the spaces of cinematic Los Angeles. In a number of films made around the turn of this millennium, including *What's Cooking?* (2001), *The Fast and the Furious* (Cohen, 2001) and *Crazy/Beautiful* (Stockwell, 2000) cinematic Los Angeles is represented as a city where there is potential for co-operation and co-mingling between identities, suggesting some recognition of the city's multiple geographies and hybrid identities.

In Chapter Eight I engage with the broader questions that relate to the development of the notion of Los Angeles as cinematic city and the identification of identity and mobility as key themes in these representations. I reflect on the use of cultural instrumentality and film techniques as a way of detailing how urban space becomes cinematic space and argue that the turn to these methodologies enables a more complex picture of the multiple geographies and identities of Los Angeles to be revealed. Undoubtedly this does not take into account the whole range of ethnic identities represented in Los Angeles but my argument is that cinema is a powerful tool for the re-imagining of identities and mobilities, and in time can be put to the service of these other groups. The construction of the urban space of Los Angeles in film leaves open, as much as it shuts down, in its more stereotyped form, the possibility to encounter difference through cinematic city representations and this encounter can prove fruitful rather than anxiety-ridden.

Just as the films chosen for analysis represent the city, so too, the city has a key function in the narrative of the films. In her doctoral thesis *Cities in Motion: Towards the understanding of the Cinematic City*, Maria da Costa (2001: 25) describes her work as being part of the “conversation between film studies and the new cultural geography”. My work is concerned with identifying how that conversation has grown into a much deeper dialogue. The following chapters present the evidence of that enhanced dialogue where the topography of Los Angeles is expressed not only by its material structures but also by the film texts that have helped to create it as a cinematic city.

Chapter Two

Los Angeles: interweaving the material and the cinematic city

But the city in its corruption refused to submit to the domination of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning (Rushdie, 1989: 329).

So, more than Venturi's Las Vegas, it is Hollywood that merits urbanist scholarship, for, after the theatre-cities of Antiquity and of the Italian Renaissance, it was Hollywood that was the first Cinecittà, the city of living cinema where stage-sets and reality, tax-plans and scripts, the living and the living dead, mix and merge deliriously. Here more than anywhere else advanced technologies combined to form a synthetic space-time (Virilio, 2002: 448).

The visible aggregate of the whole of Los Angeles churns so confusingly that it induces little more than illusionary stereotypes or self-serving caricatures – if in reality it is ever seen at all. What is this place? Even knowing where to focus, to find a starting point, is not easy, for, perhaps more than any other place, Los Angeles is everywhere. It is global in the fullest sense of the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in its cultural projection and ideological reach, its almost ubiquitous screening of itself as a rectangular dream machine for the world, Los Angeles broadcasts its self-imagery so widely that probably more people have seen this place than any other on the planet (Soja, E.W., 1989: 222/3).

Introduction

Salman Rushdie (1989: 329) might well have had Los Angeles in mind when he described the city in *Satanic Verses*. And as Virilio (2002: 248) and Soja (1989: 222/3) assert it is in part the symbiotic relationship of the material and the cinematic Los Angeles that contributes to the difficulty of mapping the city, or perhaps calls for a different kind of cartography, one that incorporates the imaginary map-making of cinematic representations.

In this chapter I set out the material geography(ies) of Los Angeles in terms of how it takes the shape it does as an urban metropolis and how this astonishing development has produced a distinctive politics of mobility and identity. The

purpose of this overview is to emphasise the significant interplay between the material and the imaginary Los Angeles in helping to construct the identity of the region for inhabitants, tourists, migrants, immigrants and viewers, who get a sense of the place through cinema, television and the other media industries. Throughout the thesis I focus on three ethnic groups using the ethnic identity labels employed by the U.S. Census Bureau 2000: Latina/o, White, and African-American. The first two make up the dominant population sectors in Los Angeles County according to the Census 2000. However, I am also aware of the myriad of other ethnic groups that Los Angeles contains, Asians, for example, including Pacific Islanders, who have overtaken African-Americans as the third largest grouping in Los Angeles County (Census 2000 Bureau).

The focus on these three groups is also determined by the number of Hollywood films produced since the 1970s and how they have represented in ascending order, Latina/os, African-Americans and, overwhelmingly, a White version of Los Angeles. Through the concept of the cinematic city I argue that the material geographies of Los Angeles are reflected and critiqued in the movies. Demographic changes such as the dramatic rise of the Latina/o population, the flight of the White population to "edge cities" (Garreau, 1991) of the Los Angeles conurbation, together with the decline of the African-American population in its traditional heartland of south-central Los Angeles figure prominently in cinematic city narratives. Cinematic city films provide representations of these demographic changes and construct a valuable frame for "thinking the city critically" (Donald, 2002: 52).

Documenting the ethnic geographies of Los Angeles into readily definable areas and corresponding blocks on a map gives a very limited picture of the complex co-

existence of both rigid and fluid population dispersals across the city's ethnic spaces. To look for any complexity of representation in the mainstream entertainment industry may likewise seem an exercise in futility. However, once one begins to consider the mediating force of the film, television, computer games and the music industries, the ways in which they have already contributed to how city imagines itself, and the distinctive interpenetration of the material and the cinematic that is part of Los Angeles's construction, a powerful argument emerges. This is illustrated through a brief analysis of the opening sequences of *Colors* (1989) and *Stand and Deliver* (1988) later in this chapter where I identify some of the key aspects of identity and mobility that arise in the chapters to follow. The argument is that film, in particular, can provide a more complex and contradictory representation of the city that begins to recognise Los Angeles's multiple geographies.

The interpenetration of the material and the cinematic city emerges because of the ways in which cinema and cities have developed in parallel, but Los Angeles becomes the ultimate cinematic city because it contains Hollywood. This intermingling of the material and the cinematic Los Angeles is well captured in Ramirez's (1992:12) question: "Has cinema been the logical producer of Los Angeles, or is the city a mere projection in physical space of this singular industry?"

I suggest a more complicated and contradictory picture that emerges in examining the Hollywood mapping of Los Angeles through the cinematic city. A Hollywood mapping of the politics of identity and mobility of Los Angeles gives recognition to the force and the limitations of popular culture representations, particularly in cinematic form, to enable communities to re-imagine themselves. Drawing on

Anderson's (1981) notion of "imagined communities" Fregoso (1993:2) suggests that film, which she describes as "the social/cultural technology of the imagination", can be a potent force in helping communities to re-imagine themselves. This re-imagining through film, as Fregoso's (1993) adoption of Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" suggests, can enable filmmakers and spectators to re-imagine themselves as part of the city, even within the commercially-driven businesses that make up Hollywood entertainment industries. A detailed account of how the material city has excluded and erased aspects of its non-Anglo history follows in the elaboration of how the politics of identity and mobility have changed so dramatically in the growth and development of Los Angeles.

Shifts in the politics of mobility and identity

A rough map of Los Angeles can be assembled that highlights its main ethnic divisions and boundaries: East Los Angeles as the location for the Latina/o community, South Central Los Angeles as the hub of the African-American community, the East Asian communities concentrating around the Monterey Park, Alhambra, San Marino and the eastern San Gabriel Valley, and the white population fortified within West L.A. and the suburban cities. But this oversimplification that some filmic representations perpetuate does not reflect the complexity of ethnic dispersion and development over the past thirty years. The focus in the chapters to follow is on how that demographic pattern is made more complicated within a range of films that are beginning to reflect the multiple geographies of the city.

As a guide to this mapping of the geohistory of Los Angeles, Soja (2000) provides a succinct account of the growth of the city since 1870, a date he suggests as being the start of the city's continuous expansion. Drawing from the seminal work of Carey McWilliams (1979) and Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* (1990) Soja provides a series of snapshots of the remarkable pattern of expansion. He identifies five waves of urban growth that provide a useful summary of the "continuous boom" that even softened the impact of the Great Depression relative to the rest of the country. Roger Kiel (1998), William Fulton (2001) and, in their interpretation of the 1990 and the 2000 census figures, Allen and Turner (1997, 2000) offer a complementary, and on-going picture, of Los Angeles as a metropolis that continues to grow, but where the gap between the poorest and the wealthiest also continues to increase. Los Angeles is a metropolis where constantly expanding suburbanization has been matched by a tremendous shift in the politics of identity and mobility, and yet where ethnically defined geographical spaces or enclaves are still very pronounced. All of these accounts point to the existence of multiple geographies within the metropolis that provide a complex pattern of settlement and dispersal. I want to focus on the shifts in mobility and identity in the Latina/o and African-American communities of Los Angeles setting the groundwork for the film analysis in the following chapters.

Latina/o Los Angeles

The principal demographic change in Los Angeles over the past thirty years has been the enormous growth in the numbers of the Latina/o population. In California as a whole the Latina/o population between 1990 and the 2000 census grew from 25% to 32% of the total population.

... California celebrated the millennium as the second mainland state (after New Mexico) to become a "majority-minority" society. Dramatically ahead of earlier projections, white non-Hispanics (nearly 80 percent of the population in 1970) became a minority for the first time since the Gold Rush.

This is Davis's (2000: 1-2) gleeful analysis of the major demographic shifts occurring in California. Davis (2000: 12) suggests neither Latina/o nor Hispanic as ideal meta-categories, as both "...were originally nineteenth-century ideological impositions from Europe" (2000:12). While recognising the imperialist provenance of these terms I have chosen to use Latina/o because I think it reflects more fully the array of actors, producers and directors, both within and outside Hollywood, who strive to make films representing the Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Central American experience in the United States. The majority of films that make some attempt to represent the Latina/o experience in Los Angeles and Southern California tend to focus on Chicanas/os, people of Mexican backgrounds. In fact 80 percent (Allen & Turner, 2002: 24) of the Latino/a population of Los Angeles are Chicana/os and this background is reflected in the films I have chosen to examine. So Latina/o becomes the compromise meta-category. But as with other Hollywood categories of broad audience types, I am aware that the term Latina/o hides the many national, sub-national, regional, local, linguistic, religious and cultural differences that exist.

In a report on the findings of the U.S. census 2000, the growth of Latina/os nationwide is expressed in the following *Guardian* headline, "2000 US census shows Hispanics are about to take their place as the biggest ethnic minority: Latinos outgrowing Black Americans" (Kettle, 2001: 11). The article goes on to suggest that:

The new figures underscore one of the most profound social and cultural changes ever to affect the United States. The effect is particularly powerful in states such as California, Arizona and Texas, where bilingualism is increasingly part of everyday life.

The Census Brief 2000: The Hispanic Population (2001: 2) shows a dramatic increase in the Hispanic population of the United States. "The Hispanic population increased by 57.9 percent, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000, compared with an increase of 13.2 percent for the total U.S. population."

In Los Angeles County persons of Latina/o or Hispanic origin currently make up 44.6% of the total population. Black or African-American persons make up 9.8%, Asian persons make up 11.9%, and white persons, not of Hispanic or Latino origin, make up 31.1 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, State and County Quickfacts website). If you match these figures with projected population growth based on birth rate then it is inevitable that the Latina/o population will be the majority group in California at the next census. Population growth is not in itself enough to shift the massive inequalities that exist but it is a significant factor in future development of Los Angeles and California. The census also reveals, " ... more than 4 million Hispanics live in Los Angeles County, and that Hispanics in East Los Angeles were 96.8 of the population, the highest of any place outside the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" (U.S. Census Bureau 2000 website, State and County Quickfacts).

The population data for Latina/os demonstrates the statistical facts of Latina/o growth in Los Angeles. These figures are supported by the ethnographic studies of Los Angeles Latino/as carried out by Rocco (1996). Rocco's study draws attention to the level of difference according to class, gender, country of origin, length of

residence, and generation within the Latina/o community. He notes the “extraordinarily heterogeneous nature of these Latino communities” suggesting that:

...the dispersion and residential mobility of Latinos throughout Los Angeles is so great that many of their social networks overlap in spatial terms. Thus, for example, while there are distinct Latino areas in Southeast Los Angeles, the social networks of many of the residents that constitute the basis of community linkages overlap and crisscross spatial boundaries, extending to sections of the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, Orange County and the San Gabriel Valley. Thus it is clear that the tendency to identify communities primarily or only in terms of physical spatial boundaries is of limited value. Rather, it is cultural space that seems to form the basis of community networks (Rocco, 1996: 369).

The enormous growth and heterogeneity of the Los Angeles’s Latina/o population is described by Davis (2000: 43) as a “... complex fractal geometry ... with its hundred Spanish-speaking neighbourhoods and sub-divisions radiating from the old Eastside core”. Roger Keil (1998: xxix) reinforces this picture of dispersion from the old East side core for Latina/os when he identifies their movement “... increasingly in old black neighborhoods of Watts, Compton and along Central Avenue”. Many Hollywood films are content to reinforce these ethnic boundaries, or like the Westsiders described by Rieff (1992: 87), pretend that non-white groups are there to provide a service and then quickly fade into the *mise-en-scène*.

The kitchens and the parking lots were the only parts of West Los Angeles that these maids and car parkers could lay claim to. Anglo-L.A. is comfortable enjoying meals *a la Mexicana*, and its kitchens, at mealtimes, are redolent of the spices of Veracruz or of the isthmus of Panama. ... Inside the restaurant or across the hall in the dining room, what was playing out was not simply the Californian dream but exercises in oblivion. The two worlds coexisted – indeed, in reality, they had become interdependent – but the Anglos barely took any notice of the people from the South who had come to live in their midst.

Significantly, as identified in Allen and Turner’s *The Ethnic Quilt* (1997: 211-212) the Latina/o labour pool is structured not only by race but gender. In what the

book refers to as “occupational specialization”, the data interpretation suggests Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Mexican women make up the main work force of all household servants in Southern California. What helps to maintain this “occupational specialization” is, among other things, the proximity of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan communities to the well-to-do white families on the Westside of Los Angeles. While the perpetuation of the perception of this ethnic/gender niche, Latinas as domestic servants, is re-enforced in many Hollywood films, exceptions detailed in the following chapters also complicate these ethnic and gender stereotypes.

Yet the experience of Los Angeles’s Latina/o communities cannot hope to be fully captured with reference only to their role as (invisible) workers. In his critique of the Los Angeles School of urban theorists, Smith (2001: 74) develops the concept of “transnational urbanism” to frame a more complex account of the diverse racial and ethnic landscape of Los Angeles. For Smith (2001: 74) Los Angeles’s complex geographies have emerged as the result of:

... the spatial relocalization and temporal convergence of historically particular social networks of transnational migrants and refugees drawn to Los Angeles by contextual factors other than a simple logic of capital accumulation or a “global control capacity” implemented by its financial and business service sectors.

Dealing specifically with Mexican transmigration to Los Angeles he asserts that it does not fit neatly into the economic globalization motif. One of the elements Smith (2001: 78) highlights in making the argument against the Los Angeles as global city discourse is to identify that:

... in the case of LA, despite the flow of remittances, Mexican transnational migration is not the one-way “cash-drain” constructed by anti-immigrant

groups in the racial discourse surrounding the passage of Proposition 187. Rather, the goods and services consumed by this and other segments of the Mexican-origin population in Los Angeles clearly contribute to demand-driven employment in the city and the region. Yet this grassroots dimension of the Los Angeles political economy, its "demand side," is given scant attention in either the popular media or the "LA as global city" literature.

Smith's argument is helpful in regard to the trajectory of this thesis. Part of what I am arguing, particularly in relation to Latina/o Los Angeles, is the possibility for more complex, confused, ambiguous, even progressive representations in popular cinema that go beyond the grand narratives of Los Angeles as a place of chaos, or Los Angeles as a place where the lumpen proletariat are always at the mercy of global economic forces which robs them of their sense of agency. Even within Hollywood the grand narratives of Latina/o and African-American Los Angeles are being revised, as I argue later in the thesis.

Some of the implications of the huge Latina/o population increase can be seen in political and spatial terms. One consequence was the introduction of Proposition 187, passed in November 1994, it removed all public funding for the healthcare of all undocumented persons. These anti-immigrant measures are the visible signs of anxiety about demographic change. A further indicator is the continued separation of communities into ethnic enclaves, the retreat of white Los Angelenos into gated communities and the suburban hinterland. As Allen and Turner (2002: 12) note:

Whites have been leaving the older and more central parts of Los Angeles County for several decades. L.A. County's White population dropped by a quarter between 1960 and 1990 ... in Los Angeles County 570,000 fewer Whites were counted in 2000 than in 1990.

As a consequence of this suburban movement the home and the car have become the two private spaces of white existence and as Rieff (1992) suggests, this has

worked to insulate the white population, and isolate them from the changing nature of the city. Apart from the huge increase in the Latina/o population the other major change not always reflected in Hollywood representations of the city is the dispersion of the African-American population from the South-Central core.

African-American Los Angeles

An examination of the changes within the African-American population of Los Angeles also illustrates the complex nature of settlement and dispersal. Although the African-American population is largely associated with the South-central area of the city it is really since the 1930s that this concentration occurred. Spurred by the promise of jobs in the defense industry after President Roosevelt desegregated the defence plants, the African-American population of Los Angeles grew from 70,000 to 200,000 through the 1940s (Anderson, 1996:342/3). According to Voss (1998:170) "...the housing shortages caused by the rise in population of African-Americans were exacerbated by racist restrictive housing covenants banning African-Americans from purchasing homes on the West Side, among other areas. The result was densely populated concentrations of African-American communities boxed in by specific spatial coordinates." What followed are the beginnings of the pattern that would help to shape the demographic map of Los Angeles for generations and build in restrictions on mobility of the non-Anglo population. Anderson (1996: 342) also notes the formation of the African-American ghetto as the result of the restrictive housing covenants and the concentration of new African-American migrants in one main area.

By 1950, the black population was nearly 200,000, and it continued to increase through the 1960s. With the start of increased migration, the boundaries were set for black residency; by the early 1930s, 70 percent of all black Angelinos resided in one assembly district. That pattern continued

until the Watts riots, which sparked the initial out-migration from the crowded black neighborhoods described by L.A. Times literary editor, Robert Kirsch, in 1965 as “a kind of forgotten archipelago in the garish basin of the region”.

A key element that contributed to the crisis in housing for African-Americans and other non-Anglo groups was the curtailment of the Public Housing Act in Los Angeles. Even though the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed restrictive housing covenants, declaring them unconstitutional in 1948, by the late 1940s, crowded, inadequately maintained housing was a citywide problem and public housing was seen as a response to this situation. Funds were available from the federal government to build affordable public housing. According to Anderson (1996: 344-5):

The real estate lobby, an intricate network of banks, property owners, and the L.A. Times, was able, however, through its considerable clout, to redbait and agitate the city into refusing to build the number of units it needed. As a consequence, Los Angeles led the country in the loss of federal funds for public housing.

This was the time of the McCarthy witch-hunts and tainting public officials with a socialist or communist smear was easily achieved especially with the collusion of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) under the control of William Parker. A number of city officials in favour of a more extensive public housing building policy were undermined and had to resign their positions. The housing shortage, among a range of associated economic deprivations led to the Watts Riots in 1965 and it was after this outpouring of frustration and anger that African-Americans began to move out of the South-central core. As Soja (2000: 293) notes:

The core black ghetto of Los Angeles has experienced a significant contraction and a definite push westward. The number of African American communities with more than 60 percent African Americans has shrunk to five: the large (169,000) West Adams-Baldwin Hills-Leimert district within the City of Los Angeles and four small pockets of unincorporated county

land (Westmont, West Compton, West Athens, and View Park-Windsor Hills). The very names of these areas signal the pronounced westward shift, as well as the overall shrinkage, of the core black Los Angeles to the area in and around the Crenshaw District. With the growth of Koreatown, and Anglo gentrification pushing from the north and the Latino wave spilling in from the east, black Los Angeles has become increasingly compacted as well as more internally polarized by income and lifestyle differences. And still further west, across the San Diego freeway, a new racial barrier looms in the great Anglo redoubt that runs along the Pacific shores south of Los Angeles International Airport.

A period of change that occurred for the African-American population post Watts was inaugurated with the appointment in 1967 of Tom Bradley as the first African-American mayor of the city. In the period of Bradley's ascendancy between 1967 and 1987, according to Anderson (1996: 349):

The ranks of the middle class swelled as a result of an expanding economy and the successes in the civil rights movement, which opened up jobs and education. Black households with incomes of more than \$50,000 grew by 350 percent. In California alone, the number of blacks in elected office went from one in 1960 to 300 in 1989. These gains contained the seeds of later disunity based on an unprecedented economic differentiation between blacks and growing class distinctions.

The picture that emerges through recent census figures is therefore of certain sectors of the African-American population that are highly kinetic – with considerable social and (to a more limited extent) spatial mobility. In (mainstream) film, television and music/rap culture, however, the picture all too often remains of an African-American community restricted to the 'badlands' of South Central Los Angeles. Davis (1991: 224) identifies the role that the media plays in magnifying the perceived threat to the white middle-classes of the Latina/o and African-American inner-city population, ensuring that private security firms, gated communities, social control districts and the Los Angeles police department patrol and maintain this spatial apartheid. McCarthy et al.,(1997) also identify the similarities in representations of the Los Angeles African-American community in

Hollywood and in the mainstream news media's gaze upon black and brown America, arguing that an "... overwhelming metaphor of crime and violence saturate[s] the dominant gaze of the inner city". The "demonological lens" to which Davis refers and McCarthy et al., allude has also been supplied by young Black filmmakers. For McCarthy et al.,(1997: 228) films such *Boyz N The Hood* (Singleton, 1991) and *Menace II Society* (Hughes Brothers, 1993) corroborate rather than critique the dominant vision of African-American Los Angeles supplied by the mainstream media.

By contrast, I suggest that the films analysed in the chapters to follow work to critique rather than support the mainstream media's demonization of Los Angeles's inner city African-American and Latina/o groups. In this sense the films offer a less pessimistic discourse about Los Angeles and provide a more positive *cultural imaginary* in the cinematic city.

Freeway geography and its impact on mobility and identity

In the range of films examined, the car or its absence as a means of transport helps to define the identity and the mobility of the characters. This aspect of mobility is often constructed in terms of gender stereotypes, with access to the car, if one exists, being restricted to the male. *Strange Days* (1995) and *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) are exceptions to this trend and offer what might be regarded as a more progressive representation of the female in the cinematic city. This is investigated further in the chapters to follow where patterns of mobility are so evidently intertwined with gender and class identity.

As David Rieff (1992) suggests, and, before him, Reyner Banham (1971) and Joan Didion (1970), mobility by car is integral to the make-up of all but the poorest Angelenos. According to Rieff (1991: 45):

If Southern California contains a world of dream houses, none are quite so dreamy in the end as the ultimate residence, the automobile. ... Certainly, the promise of the automobile was not transportation so much as solitude and independence, two ideas that dance in lockstep across the stage of the American imagination.

The prevalence of a certain type of mobility, linked to the automobile, is a recurring theme within the cinematic city narratives of Los Angeles. Los Angeles is a city laid out for the car and inevitably there is an almost total dependence on the car as a means of transport. The “structural homology” Strathausen (2003: 25) suggests between the growth of the city and the growth of cinema might be applied to the relationship between the car and the screen. Dimendberg (2004) offers a fascinating account of how automobile-framed views of the city are given prominence in the novels of Raymond Chandler and the *film noir* adaptations of his work. Dimendberg (2004: 173) suggests a new spatial perception is encouraged by this view from the car window at the city, one that “valorizes speed” and “... proposes automotive travel as the fundamental experience of passage through the city”. In a similar vein, in his discussion of the impact of the construction of the bridges and expressways in New York of the 1930s Berman (1983: 302) cites Giedion’s eulogy of Robert Moses, the driving force behind these projects. Giedion suggests that the experience of driving on these roads is akin to the movies. “The meaning and beauty cannot be grasped from a single point of observation ... it can be revealed only by movement” (Giedion, cited in Berman 1983: 302), in this case the movement of the car. The opening sequences of *Colors* (Hopper, 1988) and *Stand and Deliver* (Mendenez, 1987) begin with a car journey and, in the over-

determined image of Los Angeles as the city of the car, perpetuated by the Hollywood film industry, becomes symbolic of mobility and identity. As Orr (1993:127) notes the automobile has become a sign:

... defining the priorities of their owners and to a certain extent their owners' identities. Through the car they drive, people to some extent express who they are. Cars are forms of self-expression. They connote as well as denote.

The view from the car of the passing urban space provides a mobile gaze for the viewer. The car also supplies another window/screen the filmmaker can use to construct the narrative. As Davies (2003: 199-216) has argued, the presence or absence of mobility, often designated in terms of car ownership, matches with the character's ability to move through and in the space and place of the cinematic city. It may be that the cinematic representations of Los Angeles reveal anxieties and concerns about identity through this complex relation with mobility.

A brief history of the development of the freeway system associated with Los Angeles reveals its importance in structuring the city's politics of mobility and identity. This history suggests a series of missed opportunities to construct an integrated transport system that would have done less damage to local communities. Wachs (1996: 106-159) identifies the difficulty of funding the 1939 Aldrich Plan for the building of expressways, named after Lloyd Aldrich, the chief engineer for the city of Los Angeles. According to Wachs (1996: 127):

It was a remarkable plan in many respects. It provided for high-capacity channels of movement, yet it was rather sensitive to the integration of land use with both highways and public transit, treating transportation facilities consciously as elements of urban design.

Despite its widespread popularity, the implementation of the plan proved impossible and it was not until after World War II when the Interregional Highway Construction was heavily funded by the Federal Government, through the State, that the building of the Los Angeles freeway system began in earnest. Yet the freeway system that emerged in Los Angeles ended up having a character very different from the system advocated by Aldrich, and predictably, this occurred because of the need to compromise in order to obtain funding needed to undertake construction (Wachs, 1996: 129). The freeways became the domain of the state engineers and planners and the resultant system, the building of which moved into high gear in the late 1950s, sacrificed the Aldrich Plan which had been more sensitive to local conditions and urban design principles. The focus of the freeway system became a speeding through rather than a means of connecting local communities. As noted by Wachs (1996: 131), many observers have decried the freeway system that was built as:

... terribly destructive of a sense of community, that they cut swatches out of the urban fabric and provide barriers to community cohesion by creating enormous discontinuities throughout the city, especially in inner-city minority communities.

Social disruption and alienation appear to be some of the side effects of this freeway building policy. With car ownership essential to mobility around the metropolis it is hardly surprising that the car, as the symbol of individual freedom, identity and mobility, should figure so prominently in the narratives of cinematic Los Angeles. The representation of the freeways as routes of escape in *Speed* (de Bont, 1995), *L.A. Story* (1992) and *Poetic Justice* (Singleton, 1993), entrapment in *To Live and Die in L.A.* (Friedkin, 1986), *Falling Down* (1993), and division in *Mi Familia* (Nava, 1996), figures in a range of Hollywood visions of Los Angeles. The

relationship between the elevated freeways and the surface streets, going off-ramp by accident or design, provides the narrative catalyst for a number of contemporary cinematic city narratives including: *Assault on Precinct 13*, (Carpenter, 1976) and *Grand Canyon* (Kasdan, 1991).

According to Fotsch (1999: 119) the passing of the 1956 Interstate Highway Act "... benefited suburban residents by contributing 90 per cent of the costs of these suburban freeways." For those African-American, Latina/o and other immigrant/migrant communities remaining within the East side, South-central core of the city the freeways became, ironically, a barrier rather than a facilitator to movement. The building of the freeways also contributed to an enormous growth in car ownership and the negative side to all this finds its way in to visions of cinematic Los Angeles. The establishing shot of the smog-infested, gridlocked freeways of Greater Los Angeles has become visual shorthand for city dystopia in films such as *Soylent Green* (Fleischer, 1971), and *Falling Down* (1993).

The fascination of American cinema with the car often sees films set in cities attempting to reconcile the car's promise of freedom and the open road with the car as a form of imprisonment within the limited space of the city. Since the building of the freeways in the 1950s the city of Los Angeles has depended more and more on the private transport of the automobile. By the late 1960s this city and the car had become so indivisible that in his architectural and cultural history of the city Reyner Banham (1971) celebrated the often reviled freeway system and designated it as Autopia, one the four ecologies of the Los Angeles area. Banham (1971: 23) suggests that to read Los Angeles:

One can most properly begin by learning the local language; and the language design, architecture, and urbanism on Los Angeles is the language of movement. Mobility outweighs monumentality there to a unique degree. ... 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 be able to read Los Angeles in the original.

Baudrillard (1986) also highlights the importance of the car in understanding/reading America and particularly southern California. The idea that the city of Los Angeles is inherently cinematic is evident when Baudrillard (1986: 56) describes the "Los Angeles freeways".

Where is the cinema? Is it all around you outside, all over the city, that marvellous, continuous performance of films and scenarios ... It is not the least of America's charms that even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic.

Yet, according to Davies (2003: 218), while Baudrillard uses the car as a "seemingly neutral or universalist discourse throughout the book" he fails to "engage with the ways in which Hollywood depictions of the automobile as a symbolic object emerge ... as a significant focus of racialised meaning and contestation over the erasures and exaggerations of the cinematic LA." The automobile as a metaphoric and literal method of mobility figures in all of the films chosen for close analysis in the following chapters. While acknowledging the power of Davies' argument in relation to the use of the car as symbolic of racialised meaning I argue that, particularly in relation to some of the key film examples, it is possible for the mobility afforded by the car to shift the "association of the car with the gaze of power and white racial identity" (Davies, 2003: 227) to a more functional and subversive role. In all of these films the mobility afforded by the automobile does not necessarily erase the gaze of power and white racial identity but appropriates it as a way of constructing a space-time and place in the cinematic city for Latina/os and other non-Anglo identities.

Selling Los Angeles through the power of the image

If the freeways as a material presence have had a significant impact on how people move around but feel dislocated within the metropolis, then the imaginary Los Angeles mediated through Hollywood has had an equally powerful influence on how people sense and see the city. In the nineteenth century, before Hollywood came to dominate the image production of the city, the selling and settling of Los Angeles and Southern California was already being marketed through the hype of boosterism. Los Angeles was represented in government pamphlets, railroad and landsellers' advertising, as the land of opportunity, the promise of your heart's desire (Davis, 1990, Starr, 1988 & 2004). The allure of Hollywood has added to this hype, as the manufacturer of dreams, and the epi-centre of the illusion industry. Hollywood has contributed to making the city the turbulent mix of identities, nationalities, architecture, and landscape that people still want to buy into. The selling of the image of Los Angeles has become a global business but the creation of the myth of sunshine and palm trees, the beach and the mountains, has been counterbalanced over the years by writers, artists and filmmakers, particularly the makers of *films noir*, who have generated an anti-myth. Writers such as Nathaniel West, Scott Fitzgerald, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh (both British exiles), James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald's hard-boiled tradition superimposed on the land-of-plenty myth an anti-myth of lost opportunity and displacement and was translated into *film noir* equivalents. As David Fine (1984:7) suggests:

The tension between myth and anti-myth, between Southern California as the place of the fresh start and scene of the disastrous finish, recurs in almost all fiction.

The anti-myth literature of Los Angeles finds its pictorial equivalent in the photographs and pictorial essays of newspapers and magazines identified by Krim (1992:121) who suggests that "... no other American city has received such anti-urban response from professional observers," and attempts to explain this anti-urban image as "... an invention of tradition (or anti-tradition) distinct from that of the 'normal' city."

For outside observers Los Angeles did not look like a traditional city. The horizontality of Los Angeles can be explained partly in the planning regulations for earthquake areas that limited buildings to thirteen stories. So in the early 1930s an observer searching for the traditional urban skyline of a New York, Chicago, London or Paris would have been aware of its absence. As Krim (1992:126) notes:

The contrast between the suburban scale of metropolitan population and the absence of a traditional urban skyline confused observers about the internal structure of Los Angeles. ... It was not until the lifting of height restrictions in 1956 that verticality became a realized feature of central Los Angeles.

Despite its spatial anomalies, its pictorial representation as a non-traditional city, and the anti-myth produced in literature and *films noir*, Los Angeles still attracted a huge influx of migrants and immigrants who came with the desire for a better life. Klein (1997:55) has argued the dark side became an attraction.

The "noir image" has glamorized ... the ironic genius of social imaginaries as cities, either of the sunshine variety or the shady: they always wind up selling products, in a culture well adapted to promotion.

Hollywood-land and Los Angeles

What helps to make Los Angeles such a fascinating cinematic city is not just that it has been the backdrop for innumerable film and television representations but that the city itself, its politics, tales of corruption, fantasy possibilities and nightmare dead-ends, have become the key narrative material for these representations. Part of my fascination with representations of Los Angeles in cinema is the ways in which specific anxieties and dreams about urban living are explored in these cinematic city narratives. According to Patterson (2002: 5)

Everyone, especially people who have never been here, is convinced that they know Los Angeles, mainly because they have seen it in the movies. The city is, after all, the biggest movie set in the world. There are actually a million LAs in the City of Angels.

The cultural creation of Hollywood in Los Angeles develops further the interpenetration of the material and the cinematic city making the case for Los Angeles as an exemplary model of cinematic city-ness. The growth of Hollywood in the city has been crucial to the selling of the city. Not only does it mean that the city and Hollywood have material geographies in common, inextricably linked through politics and economics, it has led to the city being the most filmed urban space, and as Patterson (2000) suggests the most recognised urban space.

It was during the 1910 – 1917 period that Los Angeles emerged as the major film production centre in the United States. As Rebecca Solnit (2004: 32) notes:

One of the reasons often given to explain why the American film industry settled in Hollywood is southern California's ability to simulate almost any part of the world: it has lush agricultural areas, deserts, mountains, forests, oceans and open space in which to build Babylon or Atlanta, all drenched in

ceaseless light. That is to say to be in California is to be everywhere and nowhere and usually somewhere else.

Economic imperatives were also a deciding factor. It was cheaper to hire labour, actors, and build sets in Los Angeles, than on the East Coast. Hollywood was one small suburb where a studio had been set up. However, increased demand for production coinciding with the lack of production in Europe due to World War One meant the number of studios expanded rapidly until its name would stand for the entire American Film industry. So the material geography of Los Angeles and the surrounding Southern California landscape helped to ensure the city would become the centre of the film and television industries and eventually the city and Hollywood would become synonymous as the centre of the global entertainment industries.

The strength of these links between the city and the film industry continue. Indeed, the film industry is one of the region's biggest employers. In 1995 the Entertainment Industry Development Corporation (EIDC) was created to coordinate filming in the City and County of Los Angeles, and promote the region to the entertainment industry. The corporation grants permits for filming and takes payment of fees for all ancillary activities associated with location filming. As the corporation's publicity announces:

Los Angeles is home to roughly 400 sound stages with 4.4 million square feet of space. Why would you film anywhere else? (EIDC, 2002)

In 2002 the EIDC estimated that in the Los Angeles area alone, filming provides jobs for more than 220,000 people, and generated \$31.8 billion in local business and generating tax revenue for the city, county and state (Hernandez, 2003).

Through such processes Hollywood, and in its turn Los Angeles, has become, as much a state of mind as a physical place, as much a material city as an immaterial city, a dream shared by millions rather than simply a place where movies are made. Los Angeles has become the exemplary cinematic city. Rebecca Solnit (2004: 32) captures this interpenetration when she notes that:

... as the Los Angeles writer Jenny Price recently remarked, to say 'I ate a doughnut in Los Angeles' is a different thing altogether from saying 'I ate a doughnut.' The invocation of L.A. throws that doughnut on a stage where it casts a long shadow of depravity or opportunity (which, here, might be the same thing) ... Los Angeles and by extension California, are also how we think – about society, about urbanism, about the future, about morality and its opposite. It's as though, in the golden light, everything is thrown into dramatic relief, everything is on stage acting out some drama or other.

Also examining the relationship between Hollywood and the development of the city, Rieff (1992: 102) extends Solnit's arguments to also consider Hollywood's myopia with regards to the *multiple* geographies of the city. As he argues: "A city this long in the business of manufacturing illusions can hardly be expected to encourage its residents to look behind the stage set." Yet, my argument is that in some films produced by Hollywood, looking behind the stage set is indeed taking place, and that the multiple geographies of the city are beginning to be explored. In thinking about the future too one example of the interpenetration of the material and the cinematic Los Angeles can be seen in the adoption by urban planners of what is known as the *Blade Runner scenario*. Kevin Starr, writing in the epilogue of the report, *L.A. 2000: A City for the Future*, suggests what might happen in Los Angeles if its multi-ethnic diversity is not properly channelled. He identifies the *Blade Runner scenario* as: "... the fusion of individual cultures into a demotic polyglotism ominous with unrepentant hostilities" (Starr, 1988: 65).

Another measure of this interpenetration between the cinematic and the material can be seen in the choice Californians made during their recent fiscal and political crises, they turned to a movie star, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to be their governor.

Selective visions of mobility and identity

Two films made at the end of the 1980s in the pre-Rodney King Los Angeles illustrate the complex interplay of mobility and identity that Hollywood film can reveal. The two brief analyses below merge the material and the cinematic Los Angeles establishing how themes of mobility and identity figure as a signpost to the more detailed analysis of the cinematic city films in the chapters to follow.

Colors (Hopper, 1988) begins with written information about Los Angeles gang culture; the numbers of gangs, the number of gang-related deaths. After a brief pre-credit sequence to establish the two central characters, Hodges (Robert Duvall) and McGavin (Sean Penn) as Los Angeles police officers, the opening credits roll and we follow them on their tour of duty as they drive along litter strewn streets, marked with Spanish shop signs. Moving from an establishing shot of City Hall (Figure 3), the audience is only offered the cops' point of view as the patrol car proclaims their mobility (Figures 4 and 5). The shots from the patrol car construct their journey as a surveillance exercise. The absence of point of view shots from the passers-by makes them seem remote, an indication that their stories will not be enunciated. The pedestrians, mainly Latina/os and African-Americans are literally the *mise-en-scène* (Figures 6 - 10). The sequence of shots constructed through the various film techniques of *mise-en-scène*, editing, and the moving camera constructs an urban landscape that is blighted with poor housing, empty lots, liquor stores and low cost shopping centres. This view from the car makes the city

seem alien, and the people who inhabit these places are marked as "other" in their gang colours, special handshakes and gestures, their music and their low-rider cars.

The two white policemen, despite a later attempt by the filmmakers to pose questions about the underlying causes of gang related activity, represent "normality", and all other colours are "otherised". McGavin's subsequent relationship with a Latina woman allows him to see momentarily beyond his ideological position as a fence guard, but this association ends in rancour. *Colors* is a pre-Rodney King film about two white LAPD officers, which the story suggests, do their best to maintain their dignity in this urban jungle. The spaces of representation within the film highlight the absence of positive social relations between those in authority and those on the street. Against the background music of *Los Lobos*, the popular Latino band playing, rather incongruously, a country and western flavoured song "Born in America"; the LAPD cruiser is shown to patrol and attempt to control the spaces of the city. The representations of Latina/o and African-Americans or other non-white identities are viewed as being on the other side of the fence, to be surveilled and contained.

Stand and Deliver (Mendenez, 1987) offers another version of mobility and identity in the way it depicts the relationship between the driver and Los Angeles. The opening credit sequence follows the main character, Jamie Escalante (Edward James Olmos), as he drives his Volkswagen Beetle from the city into the barrio (Figures 11 and 12). Once again in this tour of the barrio by car many of the same images as those used in the opening scenes of *Colors* are repeated. However, on this occasion the array of images and their editing together with Latina/o music and sounds produce a "normalising" rather than an "otherising" sense of the city.

The upbeat music complements the view of the driver as we see what he sees from behind the wheel of his car. His sequence of point of view shots indicates recognition rather than surveillance. His journey is not represented as a rushing through, more of a meander, and this is emphasised by the shape and sound of his vehicle. Made for workaday life rather than speed, the VW trundles along as the audience is immersed in the sights and sounds of the barrio through the shot-reverse-shot establishing Escalante's point of view as the audience point-of-view (Figure 13).

Crucially, whether the roadside fruit and candy-sellers (Figure 14); a group of Latino men chatting together in the back of a pick-up (Figure 15); the mix of English and Spanish on shop signs is celebrated (Figure 16), shops selling Mexican piñatas, dolls stuffed with candy that are burst open on children's birthdays (Figure 17); or murals depicting Latino characters and saints (Figure 18) the succession of images (Figures 19 and 20) seen through his eyes are "normalised" rather than "otherised". As Escalante continues, another mural depicting a Che Guevara image asserts boldly in English: We are NOT a Minority (Figure 20). The next shot moves closer to the mural so it fills the whole screen. Seen from the driver's point of view, this associational edit places the driver firmly among the collective of Latina/os (Figure 21).

The editing in *Stand and Deliver* therefore contains a range of shots from the driver's point of view. Unlike the white cops in *Colors*, however, in the tempo of these shots, as well as in the use of both *diegetic* sounds, that is, sounds that come from within the world of the film, for example, car horns, people's voices, the car radio, and *non-diegetic* sounds and music, the space of the barrio is "normalised".

In *Stand and Deliver* the driver's point of view signals his ability to be part of the mise-en-scène. In *Colors* the cops' point of view signals their separation from the material geography.

In the close analysis of these two opening scenes four interrelated issues regarding identity and mobility are signalled and these are re-visited in the chapters to follow. First, the focus on whiteness as an identity under threat is evident in the representation of Hodges and McGavin in *Colors* (hooks; 1991, Dyer; 1995). It could be argued that the stereotype of Latina/o and African-American identity represented in *Colors* works on the construction of the two white cops as the norm. *Colors* is very concerned to address the notion that this combination of whiteness and masculinity represented by the cops, is in crisis, is in fact fast becoming the minority. The film reflects on a situation in Los Angeles where it is not just law and order that is under threat from the gangs but whiteness itself as the cradle of power and authority.

A second identity issue related to gender is evident in both films, the absence of a central female character. While these two selective visions of late 1980s Los Angeles represent almost the same material geography in very different ways, what they have in common with countless other filmic versions of life in Los Angeles is that stories about the male, whether white, Latino or Black, dominate the cinematic urban landscape. In the chapters that follow I highlight the ways in which cinematic techniques can be used in the service of groups, such as Latina/os, who are too often marginalized and constructed as victims.

A third identity issue that emerges from a closer analysis of the central character in

Stand and Deliver is the recognition of differences within the Latina/o community in terms of class, and an awareness of an upward or downward mobility. Jamie Escalante is a computer scientist who has given up a well-paid white-collar job to teach mathematics at a difficult High School. His early morning journey complicates the image of the material geographies of Latina/o existence by showing him drive from the city in to the barrio. He lives outside the barrio in a mixed suburb where, as we see later in the film, he has a good relationship with his white neighbour. The story of Jamie Escalante may be an exceptional case but it is part of a conscious effort by the filmmaker, Mendenez, to present a more complex and more progressive version of Latina/o identity and mobility.

A fourth identity issue that arises in *Colors* as the film develops is the difficulty of forming relationships between different ethnic groups. McGavin and Louisa's (Maria Conchita Alonso) relationship founders in *Colors* but the focus on miscegenation is a recurring feature in many of the films for analysis.

In *Colors* and *Stand and Deliver* the geographies of mobility and identity are refracted through race, gender and class. Even as products of mainstream Hollywood these films complicate in interesting ways the picture of the material geographies of Los Angeles. On the surface it would appear that both films, set in Los Angeles at the end of the 1980s, take a different approach to the representation of the same urban environment. A closer scrutiny of their use of urban space and place reveals certain consistencies about the ways in which the material geography of the city is interwoven with the cinematic geography.

Colors is a contemporary police drama featuring gang culture, *Stand and Deliver* a

biographical film (bio-pic.), that purports to tell the “true story” of the real-life central character Jamie Escalante. The codes and conventions of both these film types have been well established within the Hollywood film industry and in many ways the similarities and differences of their representation of the material geography of Los Angeles is structured, but not controlled exclusively, by their generic predisposition. In order to question what these films *do* culturally I turn to the concept of genre as a mode of cultural instrumentality. This enables a bridging of the gap between the textual representations of the urban space of Los Angeles and the extra-textual contexts that surrounded the production and release of the films. For example, in the range of films analysed within the thesis the significance of the Rodney King Riots/Uprising in 1992 can be acknowledged textually but also as background information on the condition of the city post-1992. It is evident from the broadly positive way the Los Angeles Police Department is represented in *Colors* with the focus on two white male officers that the film is a pre-Rodney King text. The construction of the city as over-run by gangs and gang culture with the LAPD standing in the way of total anarchy provides a measure of re-assurance but also creates unease through the death of the senior white officer Hodges. The film’s anglo-centric vision does not allow an engagement with non-anglo points of view. In contrast, *Stand and Deliver* seems to offer recognition of the aspirational nature of the Latina/o community and the possibility of social and geographical mobility for Latina/os.

The brief analysis of *Colors* and *Stand and Deliver* offered here focused on particular film techniques such as, *mise-en-scène*, the moving camera and the use of editing. This provides a model for analysis in the chapters to follow. In this analysis I highlight the pre-occupation with themes of identity and mobility in

cinematic city Los Angeles. While being aware that representations of the city in film are ideologically charged 'selective visions' I argue they are powerful tools in analysing the city in its real, symbolic and imaginary interconnections. Hopkins (1994: 50) draws attention to the potency of cinematic geography but adds a necessary reminder of the power and ideology of representations and the politics and problems of interpretation.

The pleasure of film lies partially in its ability to create its own cinematic geography, but so too does its power. The cinematic landscape is not, consequently, a neutral place of entertainment or an objective documentation or mirror of the 'real', but an ideologically charged cultural creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimised, contested and obscured.

The centre for that "...ideologically charged cultural creation" is Hollywood where the material and the cinematic city have become synonymous. In the next chapter the powerful influence of the *film noir* paradigm on Los Angeles as a material and cinematic city is set out and contested.

Chapter Three

Reconstructing Past Visions of Los Angeles: mobility and identity in the *noir* cinematic city.

For most people, the term *film noir* conjures up a series of generic, stylistic, or fashionable traits from certain Hollywood pictures of the 1940s and 1950s (Naremore, 1997:1).

Noir was like a transformational grammar turning each charming ingredient of the booster's arcadia into a slightly sinister equivalent (Davis, 1990: 38).

As much as I love *noir*, and find it exotically compelling, it is nevertheless utterly false in its visions of the poor, of the non-white in particular. It is essentially a mythos about white male panic (Klein, 1997:79).

Introduction

The legacy of *noir* casts a long shadow across past, future and contemporary discourses on Los Angeles. In Davis's (1990:38) examination of the role of *noir* as a "transformational grammar", he argues persuasively that the complex interchange of *noir* novels, films, and television shows, has helped to shape the "populist anti-myth" of Los Angeles. While recognising the scope of *noir's* paradigmatic power, particularly in the work of Davis, I would concur with Klein's analysis that there is a great deal that *noir* cultural products have difficulty dealing with directly. For the purposes of this chapter I identify *film noir* as the main mechanism for the dissemination of *noir* images of the cinematic city. I focus on the representation of identity, with a strong emphasis on racial and gender identity, but also an incorporation of how class figures, and its interweaving with mobility, in what is often regarded as the most powerful discourse for projecting the cinematic Los Angeles.

This chapter aims to move beyond the well-documented spaces of *film noir* Los Angeles detailed in Davis (1990), Krutnik (1997), Klein (1997), and da Costa (2001), and deal with the representation of mobility and identity in the *noir* cinematic city of the 1940s and 1950s as reconstructed by what I have termed critical revisionist *films noir*. The analysis focuses particularly on *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) as an exemplar of the critical revisionist *noir* category in order to reveal how public and private space constructed through the film's mise-en-scène becomes the map for the central character's mobility and identity. The narrative of the film arises directly out of the history and the geography of the city, highlighting the degree to which the film can be regarded as a cinematic city narrative. The inbetweenness or liminality of the space occupied by the central detective figure is also highlighted, and the Hollywood representation of characters of mixed race identity is examined as an indicator of how filmic space-time reconstructs the racialised space of 1948 Los Angeles. In terms of its cultural instrumentality it is argued that the film critiques the classical *noir* tradition and brings to the surface the racialised spaces of *film noir* Los Angeles. I demonstrate through a close analysis of the use of mise-en-scène, with a particular emphasis on lighting, editing and camera movement how this critical revisionist *noir* re-imagines the *noir* cinematic city.

Naremore (1997:15) identifies Nino Frank's *Un nouveau genre 'policier: L'aventure criminelle*, published in August 1946, as one of the earliest uses of the term *film noir* in relation to Hollywood output. Raymonde Bourde and Etienne Chaumeton's *Panorama du film noir américain* (1955) is later seen as the benchmark text on the subject. The origins of this term in post-war French artistic, literary, and film circles is important in relation to the analysis of *noir* and the ways in which it has become so strongly associated with Los Angeles as cinematic city. As Naremore (1997:13)

suggests: "In one sense the French invented the American *film noir*, and they did so because local conditions predisposed them to view Hollywood in certain ways."

The four categories of *film noir*

I use four categories to refer to the development of *film noir* since the 1940s as a way of charting the geography of L.A. noir. The first, classic *film noir*, refers to those films made in the 1940s and 1950s. The second, revisionist *noir*, describes those films made in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and current productions that recreate the mise-en-scène of the classic era such as, *Mulholland Falls* (Tamahori, 1995), and *L.A. Confidential* (Hanson, 1997). I argue that while these films may recreate successfully the "feel" of the time they are depicting, their revisionism is much more in terms of technical innovation than in a self-conscious examination of the social, cultural, political and economic values of the time being depicted.

The third category, *neo-noir*, as identified in Hirsch (1999), Naremore (1997), Rich, and Christopher (1997) among others has, in the main, been used to apply to films of the 1980s, 1990s and current productions that take on *noir* stylistics but set them in the contemporary period, for example, *Body Heat* (Kasdan, 1981), *The Last Seduction* (Dahl, 1994), *The Usual Suspects* (Singer, 1995), *Lost Highway* (Lynch, 1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2002). This category of *noir* has more to say about other films than it does about the shaping of the image of the city. As James Naremore (1997:275) suggests in his analysis of Lynch's *Lost Highway*:

Both the filmmaker and the characters keep circling around the same familiar bank of images, drawn like moths to a flame. Thus, for all its horror, sexiness, and formal brilliance, *Lost Highway* ultimately resembles all the other retro noirs and nostalgia films of the late twentieth century: it remains frozen in a kind of cinematheque and is just another movie about movies.

The fourth category of critical revisionist *noir* is applied to those films that move beyond a nostalgia for the past and tackle issues of race, class, and identity much more explicitly and with a self-reflexiveness that highlights their critical stance to the use of *noir* as a discursive force, for example, *Chinatown*, its sequel *The Two Jakes* (Nicholson, 1990), *True Confessions* (Grossbard, 1981) and, in particular, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995).

What classic *film noir* had difficulty dealing with, apart from a few notable exceptions, for example, *Crossfire* (Dmytryk, 1947), *Bad Day at Black Rock* (Sturges, 1954), *Odds Against Tomorrow*, (Wise 1959), *Touch of Evil*, (Welles, 1958), *The Crimson Kimono* (Fuller, 1959) are questions of race and class identity. Classic film *noir's* inability to represent the ethnic mix of Los Angeles does not negate its importance as part of what Davis (1990) calls the master dialectic of "sunshine and *noir*". But it does demonstrate the limitations of the "grand narrative" that L.A. *noir* has become, and the absences *noir* imagery has perpetuated. In her elaboration of the links between classic *film noir* and the urban setting, Thomas (1992: 60) has argued:

Strangeness and familiarity are, of course, relative concepts, but the anti-urbanism which *film noir* takes on is generally one from whose vantage point blacks, women and immigrants, among others – and not white male Americans – are strange.

Naremore (1997:240) also asserts:

... the ordinary run of *films noir* in the 1940s made black people almost invisible, like the briefly glimpsed figures who carry Walter Neff's bag or wash his car in *Double Indemnity*. Close-ups of these characters or figures are extremely rare, except in brief scenes involving jazz in such pictures as *Out of the Past*, *D.O.A.*, and *In A Lonely Place*.

The point here is that Blacks, Latina/os, Asians or other racial identities are not completely absent from classic *film noir* but are used mainly as part of the mise-en-scène of the urban milieu, without any sense of personal agency. Another way in which blackness, in particular, is used in classic *film noir* is to appropriate it for the white detective as a way of conveying his aura of 'cool'. Naremore (1997:241) suggests this might be part of what Norman Mailer has described as the "White Negro" syndrome, and is evident in the Mike Hammer character in *Kiss Me Deadly* (Aldrich, 1955), whose friendship with a black bar hostess and bar tender has no real narrative function but is used to characterise the white male detective's hipness. As Naremore (1997: 240) suggests, appropriating blackness is seen as a tradition of representation since Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Naremore cites Thomas Bogle (1990) who asserts the continuation of this tradition in the biracial buddy movies of, for example, the *Lethal Weapon* (1987) series. Bogle (1990:140) observes that, "darkness and mystery have been attached to the American Negro, and it appears that the white grows in stature from his association with the dusky black." And as Kennedy (1997: 44) comments:

It is less often noted that the moral space in hard-boiled fiction privileges a white subject as autonomous agent while devaluing black subjectivity as extrinsic to rights-assertion and agency.

Classic *film noir*, as the cinematic equivalent of the hard-boiled genre, could be said to work with the same colour blindness. Kennedy's analysis offers a more complex picture of the portrayal of ethnic subjects in classic *film noir*. As well as not being afforded any depth of character, crucially, their representations also lack any sense of autonomous control over their environment, their mobility is restricted by the limited nature of the identity afforded them in the mise-en-scène. Classic *films noir's* preoccupation with the dark side of life, with darkness as a metaphor for

corruption, carnality, vengeance, rarely dealt with the representation of African-American life, unless it was being appropriated by white detectives to signify their ability to move between spaces, as in the opening of Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940). Davis (1990:44) suggests that these representations of the shady dealings of businessmen, politicians, city officials, the judicial process, property and land developers have provided a "noir history of Los Angeles's past and future" and have come "to function as a surrogate public history" of the city.

The prologue to *L.A. Confidential* (1997) makes this point very forcibly in its use of picture postcards of Los Angeles that highlight the stereotypical booster images of the city: palm trees, beach parties, movie stars, and beautiful girls. But this is undercut by the narration of Sid Hudgens (Danny DeVito), whose change of tone reveals the 'reality' behind the illusion. The images that follow focus on organised crime, prostitution, gambling and violent death, finishing with a barbed message about the Los Angeles police force. In this revisionist *noir*, developed from James Ellroy's much darker novel, the director, Curtis Hanson, signals his determination to recreate the 1950s feel of the novel without producing a copy of a classic *film noir*. The film is certainly revisionist in terms of its use of *mise-en-scène*, particularly lighting, and settings, but it has little to say about the demonising of the Latina/o and Black communities by the Los Angeles police. I would agree with Naremore's (1997:275) observation that:

L.A. Confidential uses the past superficially and hypocritically. On the one hand, it attacks Hollywood of the 1950s, making easy jokes about the "reality" behind old-style show business; on the other hand it exploits every convention of the dream factory, turning history into a fashion show and allowing good to triumph over evil.

Naremore (1997:276) goes on to say that the film “is merely nostalgia, lacking the complex historical relevance that Roman Polanski and Robert Towne were able to achieve in the pre-blockbuster days at the end of the Vietnam War.” The film by Polanski and Towne referred to in the quote is *Chinatown* (1974), which, it could be argued, is a cinematic model for *L.A. Confidential* and another revisionist noir, *Mulholland Falls* (1996). Richard Sylbert, the production designer for *Mulholland Falls*, also designed *Chinatown* and the film is, according to Naremore (1997: 212), “visually indistinguishable from the world imagined by Towne and Polanski.” *Mulholland Falls* like *Chinatown* deals with official corruption and police violence but it adds little to the *noir* history of Los Angeles identified by Davis. Although I would categorise *Mulholland Falls* as revisionist *noir* it resembles many *neo-noir* films in that it has more of a relationship to the history depicted in other movies than it does to the “reality” of the time or place it is representing.

Surpassing the ‘fashion show’ history of *L.A. Confidential* is a critical revisionist *film noir*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Zemeckis, 1988). This highly stylized, anarchic mixture of cartoon and live action adventure, it could be argued, has more direct commentary on the material geographies of Los Angeles, in particular, the scandals surrounding the demise of the Transit system and the building of the freeways, than many of its so-called serious film counterparts. I would argue that the film fulfils the function of a critical revisionist *noir* by providing a “surrogate public history” of civic corruption.

Film mystery as urban history in the cinematic city

I want to examine in more detail *Chinatown* as it self-consciously takes the conventions of classic *film noir* and reworks them to capture something of the

racial geography of Los Angeles that classic *film noir* had difficulty dealing with explicitly. *Chinatown* is interpreted by Cawelti (1992), and Eaton (1998) as reviving, updating, and challenging the conventions of classic *film noir*. Indeed, Mike Davis (1990: 44) identifies Robert Towne, the screenwriter for *Chinatown* and its sequel *The Two Jakes* (1990), as “brilliantly synthesising the big land grabs and speculations of the first half of the twentieth century”, and therefore a key figure in revitalizing the “anti-myth” and elaborating it into a “fictional counter-history.” In terms of the film’s cultural instrumentality it taps into and generates a “fictional counter-history” that means *Chinatown*, the film, has taken on a discursive force well beyond the realms of film study.

Mike Davis (1990), Derek Gregory (1994), and Rosalyn Deutsche (1996) have all used *Chinatown*, rather like *Blade Runner*, to establish the discourse of the film as part of the vocabulary of urban geography. John Walton (2001:46) in a chapter entitled, “Film Mystery as Urban History: the Case of Chinatown”, outlines the influence of the film “... on the subsequent and ongoing controversy over water rights and land development in the region since the mid-1970s” (2001:46). According to Walton, the “significance of *Chinatown*, despite factual inconsistencies, captured the deeper truth ... of the story: Metropolitan interests appropriated the Owens Valley for their own expansionist purposes through the use of blunt political power.” *Chinatown* has become surrogate public history, but has also impacted upon contemporary urban renewal and development.

The film follows the story of J.J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson) a successful private investigator in late 1930s Los Angeles whose main area of work is marital infidelity. He takes on a job to follow the chief of Water and Power, Hollis Mulwray (Darrell

Zwerling), supposedly at the behest of Mrs. Mulwray (Diane Ladd), who suspects her husband is having an affair. When Mulwray is found dead in a reservoir Gittes realises there is much more going on than a case of marital infidelity, especially when he discovers he has been duped by an impostor claiming to be Mrs. Mulwray. The film takes on a double narrative as Gittes sets out to discover how Mulwray was murdered and why water is being dumped at a time when Los Angeles is in a drought situation. Gittes, a former police officer in Chinatown, brings the main characters together at an address in Chinatown for the film's dark finale. It is the only time Chinatown is actually seen in the film although there are numerous references to Gittes's past life there. Chinatown the place acts as a metaphor in the film for intrigue, betrayal, corruption and ultimate defeat.

This representation of Chinatown appears to be a reversion to the stereotype of the Oriental that had figured in many classic *films noir*, albeit in Far East locations, or simulated on the studio set, for example, *The Lady from Shanghai* (Welles, 1946), *Macao* (von Sternberg, 1952), *The House of Bamboo* (Fuller, 1955). However, I would concur with Naremore (1997:227) that: "one of *Chinatown's* distinctions lay in the fact that it treated the old-fashioned motifs ironically, as a kind of white projection."

Although *Chinatown* is told almost exclusively from the white male detective's point of view it locates the evil in the story in the metaphoric state of mind that is Chinatown, but also with the white ruling class, in particular, with the biblically named Noah Cross (John Huston) who has raped his daughter Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway), and the land. As Thom Anderson (2004) has argued convincingly in his documentary *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, *Chinatown* could be read as a displaced

vision of Watts, which after the 1965 riots was seen as that part of the city where municipal neglect, racist housing policy, and high unemployment had helped to produce the riots that shook the foundation of white authority in the city.

What this near-history, or surrogate history offers is a different cartography of the city where geographies of exclusion are represented and, I would suggest, the *noir* influenced contribution to the imaginary map of the city is broadened and deepened. And as Naremore (1997:227) suggests: "... if *Chinatown* treats the old-fashioned motifs ironically, as a kind of white projection", offering a degree of critical revisionism, it is necessary to examine in detail how black filmmakers have appropriated the white male geography of *film noir* and turned it into what Manthia Diawara (1992) has termed *Noir by Noirs*.

Reframing the blackness of *films noir*

Set in Los Angeles of 1948 *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) is based on the novel by Walter Mosley. It is a critical revisionist *film noir* by an African-American filmmaker, specifically depicting the post-war Los Angeles cityscape from a black point of view. As Liam Kennedy (1994: 67) asserts, in relation to Walter Mosley's writing, on which the film is based.

To understand the significance of the relationship between race and urban space in Mosley's fiction we need to consider the geographical and historical settings of his texts. ... Mosley has very self-consciously appropriated hard-boiled conventions in order to write a *noir* history of black life in the city.

Naremore (1997: 13) also asserts:

The discourse on *noir* grew out of a European male fascination with the instinctive, and many of the films admired by the French involve white characters who cross borders to visit Latin America, Chinatown, or the wrong parts of the city. When the idea of *noir* was imported to America,

this implication was somewhat obscured; the term sounded more artistic in French, so it is seldom translated as "black cinema".

Manthia Diawara's (1992) seminal article on "Noir by Noirs: Towards a New Realism in Black Cinema" is one of the first to take account of the racial metaphor of darkness incorporated in the French term film *noir*, and questions why so many studies of *noir* have overlooked its construction of the racialised other in relation to the norm of the white detective. Diawara argues persuasively that the reworking of *noir's* codes and conventions by African-American filmmakers goes beyond pastiche. She also cites the influence of Chester Himes's fiction on the revisionist *noir* of films such as *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (Davis, 1970), *A Rage in Harlem* (Duke, 1990), both based on Himes's novels, and on the *neo-noirs* *Deep Cover* (Duke, 1992), *One False Move* (Franklin, 1992), and *Juice* (Dickerson, 1991). Further connections between Himes's L.A.-based novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1947) and the Easy Rawlins series by Walter Mosley has been illuminated by Davis (1990), Kennedy (1997), Diawara (1992) and Neiland (1998). As Diawara (1992: 263) argues:

In a paradoxical sense, the redeployment of *noir* style by black film-makers redeems blackness from its genre definition by recasting the relation between light and dark on the screen as a metaphor for making black people and their culture visible. In a broader sense, black *film noir* is a light (as in daylight) cast on black people.

Devil in a Blue Dress's appropriation of *film noir's* conventions and their re-situation as part of black subjectivity illuminates the spatial apartheid of Los Angeles and draws attention to the race and class boundaries of the late 1940s that help to construct the segregated map of the contemporary city later represented in, for example, *Falling Down* (1993).

The film introduces the character of Ezekiel (Easy) Rawlins, a black World War II veteran who has moved to Los Angeles from Houston with his GI Bill money and the promise of a good job in the aircraft manufacturing industry. Recently fired from his job as a machinist he desperately needs funds to cover the mortgage on his house. Easy is hired by a white man Dewitt Albright (Tom Sizemore), who is made aware of Easy's vulnerable financial state by Joppy (Mel Winkler), in whose bar Easy first encounters Albright. With some reluctance Easy takes the job 'to get a location' on Daphne Monet (Jennifer Beals) the fiancée of the L.A. mayoral candidate Todd Carter (Terry Kinney). Albright needs Easy because of Daphne Monet's "predilection for Negroes, Jazz, and dark meat." Easy's search for Daphne leads him through a maze of bewildering murders, cover-ups, blackmails, and counter-blackmails surrounding the two mayoral candidates, Carter and Matthew Tyrell (Maury Chaykin). It also takes him on a journey across the boundaries of L.A.'s spatial apartheid.

Enlisting the help of his psychotic friend Mouse (Don Cheadle), Easy discovers the secrets that both candidates have tried to conceal: Daphne has photographic proof that Tyrell is a paedophile, and Tyrell has discovered that Daphne is a *mulatto*, even though she has been passing as white. Tyrell's paedophilia is revealed to Carter, who re-enters the mayoral race but he has to sacrifice his relationship with Daphne, as Easy witnesses when he brings her to a final meeting with Carter. In a voice-over, Easy sets out the power of racist boundaries: "The color line in America worked both ways and even a rich man like Todd Carter was afraid to cross it." Daphne returns to Louisiana with her black half-brother Frank Green (Joseph Latimore). Mouse returns to Houston, and Easy returns to his home. Cleared of his implication in the murders, Easy decides to use the money accrued from the case to

invest in more property and go into the private investigating business. The film closes on an optimistic, but unsentimental note, with Easy sitting on the porch of his home in a sun-lit neighbourhood, surrounded by black families enjoying their own space, with his friend Odell, who is seen reading a newspaper that declares "Negroes angered by new property restrictions."

The mise-en-scène of private and public space

As Kennedy's (1997: 46) analysis of Walter Mosley's fiction suggests, the focus on the representation of urban space is fundamental:

... for space is a modality through which relations of racial domination and subordination are naturalised. In racialised urban spaces we find metaphorical and material manifestations of the power structures which regulate and constrain the formations of racial identity and knowledge.

The focus on the interplay of public and private spaces is a useful device for foregrounding the central relationship between identity and mobility that the film explores. The analysis of the representation of urban space in the film, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, reveals the racist geography of Los Angeles in 1948, but this is embellished further by elements outside the world created by the film. For example, the film was released just at the moment of the O.J. Simpson verdict in 1995, when racial tension was at its highest since the Rodney King riots/uprising in 1992. The film is the creation of a black filmmaker, Carl Franklin, based on Walter Mosley's novel which sets out to re-imagine the history of Los Angeles from the point of view of a black subject. Mosley is himself of mixed race parents, African-American and white Jewish. The film also works with an awareness of the pattern of representation of black neighbourhoods, in Hollywood 'hood films. The sprawling South-central area, in particular, has become geographical shorthand in

the media for urban chaos. So the final scenes of the film re-imagine the Watts community as a late 1940s idyll where African-American families share a sense of mobility and identity far removed from the stereotypical ghetto image that Watts later becomes. A fleeting explanation for this future ghettoization is offered in the final scenes of the film when the director draws the audience's attention to the headline in the newspaper Odell is reading that identifies the restrictions on African-American homeownership. Re-imagining Watts in this way is not just an exercise in nostalgia. Much like the recreation of the vibrancy of Central Avenue in the opening scenes, these filmic recreations are a way of countering the stereotyped images of the 'hood that Hollywood perpetuates. As Manthia Diawara (1993: 13) contends:

Black films use spatial narration as a way of revealing and linking Black spaces that have been separated and suppressed by white times, and as a means of validating Black culture. In other words, spatial narration is a filmmaking of cultural restoration, a way for Black filmmakers to reconstruct Black history, and to posit specific ways of being Black Americans in the United States.

Devil in a Blue Dress, in its representation of the public and private space of black subjectivity, appears to be engaged in this spatial re-imagining. The film's opening credits set the tone for what is to follow. Over a background of painted street scenes (*Bronzeville at Night*, Archibald Motley Jnr.) the Blues number "West Side Baby" sets the spatial limitations of the colour line. The music plays on as we see the first street scene (Figures 23 and 24), a recreation of a bustling Central Avenue which provides the opening mise-en-scène as the camera on a crane sweeps effortlessly, without any cuts, from street level into the first floor window of Joppy's bar where our central character is waiting with the trademark *noir* voice-over (Figure 25). If we rewind those opening moments the importance of Central Avenue as more than decorative mise-en-scène can be explored.

In the film's re-imagining of Central Avenue as a black public space I develop Voss's (1998:168) suggestion that the film engages in a type of "cultural archaeology." The mise-en-scène, editing and camera movement in these opening scenes are used to re-construct a version of 1948 Los Angeles where the "cultural archaeology" helps to place the central character within the white power structures of the city but also identifies a sense of the vibrancy of the economic, social, and cultural life of the Central Avenue area for the Black population. The recreation of this Black public space, the thriving business district and jazz culture along Central Avenue was in a sense reconstituting lost space. Voss (1998) elaborates on how this "cultural archaeology" took place as she describes the film's production designer Gary Frutkoff's great difficulty putting together pictorial information on the district as many family photo collections had been lost in the Watts 1965 and 1992 riots/uprising. To supplement archive material the director organised a lunch with a group of older jazz musicians whose memories of the space and its cultural dynamic provided much help in the recreation of the district's vibrancy. This idea of "cultural archaeology" might also be extended to the ways in which the history of particular ethnic enclaves, such as South-central or East L.A., can be re-told in film to reflect a version that is not dominated by Anglo constructions. The importance of Central Avenue as the centre of black life in Los Angeles continued until the end of the 1940s, when, according to Fulton (2000: 288/89), the outward expansion of blacks, to the west and the south had two effects:

First, it segregated L.A.'s black residents by economic class. More affluent residents moved westward, towards the ocean and the hills, while poor blacks remained in the eastern sectors along Central Avenue and in Watts. This movement was not uniformly true, of course, as many working- and middle-class blacks remained in eastern neighborhoods, providing stability that continues to this day. But it had the effect of dispersing the common

energy of the black community that had been focused along Central Avenue. Second, as it decentralized the black population, this shift effectively segregated the city with greater severity. Most new areas that opened up to blacks after the war became virtually all black within a few years as a result of white flight, and new suburbs such as the San Fernando Valley remained completely off limits.

The decline of Central Avenue was also hastened by what Anderson (1996: 242/3) describes as the "...L.A. Police Department chief William H. Parker's obsessive sweeps of the jazz clubs and bars to prevent race mixing." From the bustling public space of the street the camera moves inside to Joppy's bar, a safe space for the central character, Easy Rawlins (Figure 25). Into this space comes DeWitt Albright (Figure 26), a white man who is a friend of Joppy's. This key scene, unchanged from Mosley's novel, not only offers a "... daring reinvention of the opening of Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* in which the white detective Marlowe enters a black bar, but also its lighting and mise-en-scène rescripts "whiteness" à la Himes, as symbolic of evil, and also constitutes the first in a series of Black spaces (public and private) occupied by Easy that must resist invasion" (Neiland, 1999:72). The film also plays with the convention of lighting for "whiteness" identified by Dyer (1997) that had a particular impact in the low-key lighting style employed in classic *films noir*. After establishing the mise-en-scène as Central Avenue in 1948 the fluid camera movement takes us into the first floor window of Joppy's Bar where we encounter our central character, Easy Rawlins, played by African-American actor, Denzel Washington. He is wearing a white t-shirt that emphasises his physique and his skin colour. Our attention is drawn, through the use of Easy's voice-over and his point-of-view shot in the next scene, to a white man who enters the bar. The natural lighting that comes in from the window and illuminates Easy is made less distinct for Albright letting the audience know that the aura which surrounds him is one of danger, and much like the projection of whiteness as evil,

in the form of Noah Cross in *Chinatown*, Albright is lit for a similar projection of evil.

Private space: the importance of place based identity

The function and significance of home clearly varies with its context and, in a hostile social environment the importance of "homeplace", as bell hooks phrases it, is all the more important. She argues that for black people in America, living in a racist society, the construction of some kind of autonomous domestic "homeplace" has been crucial to the development of any wider "community of resistance" (Morley, 2000:29).

The importance that is placed on home ownership in the narrative makes it a driving force in Easy's willingness to take Albright's job offer. In the second voice over of the film while Easy is driving back to his home in Watts along sunlit streets and neatly tended houses and lawns, an affirmation of what the district used to look like (Figure 27), Easy restates his love for his house (Figure 28), "I guess I just loved owning something." The tenuous hold that he has in the property market is threatened by his job loss but more explicitly his private space is invaded four times in the course of the film. The first occasion sees two white policemen arrest Easy at his house (Figure 34). Although the policemen don't enter Easy's house there is the strong sense that they can control Easy's movements even in his own front yard. The theme of surveillance is also introduced in this encounter, for although Easy is released from custody having been roughed up by the detectives, they accost him again later in the film, threatening him with incarceration. Even when he has been cleared of all wrong-doing at the end of the film, the idyll of his private space is invaded by the two white detectives prowling by in their car. This policing of Easy's movements is a reminder of how white authority controls the space and place of Los Angeles, and continues to set limits to the mobility of non-Anglos.

The second invasion of Easy's home reveals Albright's true nature. Easy arrives to find Albright and two of his goons making themselves at home in his house (Figure 31). Albright is in the kitchen making a sandwich and with the assistance of the two goons threatens Easy with his own kitchen knife. The slave/master scenario is played out as Albright demands that Easy serve him a drink. Easy refuses to serve and is admired rather mockingly for his bravery. Once again Albright is lit to reveal his evil nature and his racist attitudes, sitting at the table in the half-light of the kitchen. When the invaders leave the house having issued further threats, Easy's frustration is evident in his actions and his voice-over. "Albright liked surprise parties. I had someone I'd like him to meet." Easy's decision to call on his psychotic friend Mouse precipitates much of the violence that follows.

The third invasion of his home happens in the shape of Frank Green, the half-brother of Daphne Monet, who tries to discourage Easy from locating her (Figure 33). Easy is saved from injury by the arrival of Mouse who immediately shows his readiness for violence by shooting Frank Green in the shoulder as Easy tries to persuade him to talk. The last invasion occurs when Easy returns to his house to find Daphne Monet waiting for him. This is followed very closely by the return of Albright and his two goons who take the girl and leave Easy unconscious in his own front room. What this series of invasions might be seen to represent in the broader sense is that although Easy owns his own property, he can never be sure of his own private space. Power, usually in the form of white authority, can still exercise control over his sense of space. The film also identifies the ways in which black public space can also be controlled and invaded. Albright enters and taints the space of Joppy's bar. The secretive jazz club where Easy meets up with Coretta (Lisa Nicole Carson), is closed to white folks, we see an interesting reversal of the

colour code being observed when Easy enters the illicit space and the white man Richard McGee (Scott Lincoln) is refused entry. This colour coded spatial joke is undercut by the exercise of real power when we see two white policemen, who the owner claims she has just paid off, hassling customers just outside her store-front. As Muller (1995:289) argues:

Los Angeles serves as the psychological base for Mosley's investigation of entire American social order. The 'sense of place' in his fiction is not simply an attempt at local color but rather an effort to both objectify and mythologise the contours of national life. The imagined community of Watts that he depicts in his detective cycle serves as a 'placeable' form of human bonding, but this social community reflects the larger community of Los Angeles and ultimately the nation.

Neiland (1999:64) also asserts the centrality of "place-bound identity" when he identifies the ways in which the film "... interrogate(s) both the racialized subject's 'space' within society and history and his or her relationship to specific physical spaces." As argued by Muller (1995) and Neiland (1999), the reconstructions of Central Avenue and Watts have a greater importance in this film than simply the creation of a credible *mise-en-scène*. They see it as being part of the reconstruction of a historical continuity wherein the importance of local place based identity provides grounding for African-Americans.

Easy's home ownership, difficult though it is to maintain, and his decision to go into the real estate business at the end of the film, signifies the centrality of place-based identity to his existence. In historical terms it provides a reminder of the ghettoised nature of the Los Angeles African-American communities, as a result of racist housing practices of the past, and the perpetuation of the image of South-Central as a war zone. The film attempts the restoration of the imagery of this lost

space as a crucial way of helping the audience to re-imagine the past, present and the future.

Neiland (1999:74) goes on to emphasise the importance of the film's "restorative historical discourse ... insofar as it demonstrates an awareness of the debilities of place-identity disconnected from history." Easy's growing connection with the Watts community evident by the conclusion of *Devil in a Blue Dress* is played out more directly in Mosley's subsequent Easy Rawlins novels, for example, *A Red Death* (1991) *White Butterfly* (1992) through to *Bad Boy, Brawly Boy* (2003) which take Easy's vision of Los Angeles up to the Watts Riots. In *Devil in a Blue Dress* the film's mise-en-scène of the surrounding neighbourhood is bathed in natural light, there is no sense of threat or danger. The camera moves with Easy as we see children play along the sidewalk, families gathering in conversation outside their houses. Through the film techniques of mise-en-scène, editing and camera movement the re-construction of Watts as a living community is made possible.

Another aspect to the significance of being grounded in one place for Easy in *Devil in a Blue Dress* is how this trope of belonging is such a powerful re-scripting of the traditional *noir* detective's disavowal of home, permanence, or anything that would tie him down. As Krutnik (1997: 89) notes: "The most iconic male inhabitant of the *noir* city is the private detective, who shares with the *femme fatale* a willful rejection of domestication."

However, Easy Rawlins' blackness is of equal iconic importance to his role as a private investigator and, as bell hooks suggests (cited in Morley, 2000: 29), this sense of belonging to a home and a community of black homes "has always had a

political dimension, in so far as these were the places where black people could affirm and support one another, thus restoring to themselves the dignity denied them in the outside (white) world". The number of invasions, of Easy's private space, draws attention to the history of repression for African-Americans and signifies how far Easy is willing to go to maintain his "homeplace" and his identity.

As Doreen Massey (cited in Morley, 2000: 29) notes, the writing of bell hooks and Toni Morrison (especially in her novel *Beloved*) "undermines ... any notion that everyone once had a place called home which they could look back on, a place not only where they belonged but which belonged to them and where they could locate their identities" as the "very meaning of the term 'home' has been very different for those who have been colonised". Karen Voss (1998: 171) adds to this argument when she asserts:

While much important feminist work has pointed to the suburban and domestic spheres as feminized spaces of confinement reinforced by media representations, what is particularly riveting about *Devil* is how the suburban house becomes recoded as a space crucial to masculinity, specifically in terms of access for African Americans to the American Dream cast as property ownership.

So Easy's pride in his home and his determination to keep it could be read as a mark of his masculinity. The ordered neatness of the interiors, and the well-tended garden suggest an almost bucolic setting that "...complicates typical American ideological bifurcations of space – that is, typical binaries such as urban (masculine) space vs. suburban (feminine) space – in terms of the African American experience" (Voss, 1998: 172). The broader significance of the historical reconstruction of home and place through Easy's black subjectivity is neatly summarised by Voss (1998: 172):

This domestic, well-kept spatial milieu is clearly meant to be read against contemporary cinema's insistence on the place of African American masculinity as the criminalized terrain of the 'hood, actively working to displace the space of criminality to white Los Angeles.

Although it could be argued, as Berrettini (1999: 83) contends, that:

Withdrawing to his home again and again, Easy brings with him the psychic and literal baggage of his investigation and thereby transforms that private space into a different kind of private space, an office.

What is clear from the construction of the Easy Rawlins character as outlined above is that there is no distance between his sense of identity and his sense of home space. Although his home does become like an office space I would argue its main function is to remind the viewer that Easy's home ownership is set within a racist economy. Far from being at a distance to it, Easy's identity is clearly marked by it.

Mobility and the black detective in the cinematic city

The importance of auto-mobility as an essential part of the private investigator's journey in classic *films noir* married effectively the idea of Los Angeles as a city of motion, and the narrative and visual possibilities offered by scenes of travelling through the cityscape. In classic *films noir* the images of the city, even before the building of the freeway system in the 1950s, are mediated through the white male detective's gaze, but also through the window of his car. The sense of space-time that is delivered from these images is one that further fragments the idea of the city. If mobility is a key factor in assessing the ways in which the diverse elements of the city's population experience the city, the car is a fundamental part of that experience. Like most *film noir* detectives, Easy uses his car to move between locations, but also within the interior space of the car to conduct meetings, supply

voice-overs, and literally move the plot towards the final shootout, a cabin near Malibu on Route 9. What is significantly different in this critical revisionist *noir* is that the limits of Easy's mobility are clearly marked by the colour line.

The sense of satisfaction, security and familiarity that is evident in our first car journey with Easy, sees him return from Joppy's bar on Central Avenue after the first meeting with Albright, to the little house that he cherishes in the Watts neighbourhood. His voice-over tells the audience of his arrival from Texas after the War "like many other coloured folk", as he drives through sun drenched streets of a well-tended suburban neighbourhood where he is acknowledged with a wave and a greeting from his black neighbours. As he parks his car and walks to his front door a group of black children pass by on a home-made go-cart.

We see him enter a well-ordered interior where the *mise-en-scène* displays a photograph of him in uniform with two black Army buddies, confirming the voice over information about his time in Europe during the war. His voice over continues to tell us of his desperation for money, "in a week he would be two months behind on his mortgage, and he sure wasn't going to lose his house." This narration happens over a scene where Easy is planting trees in his garden. He expresses his nervousness about Albright as the scene moves to a brief night-time flashback of his friend Mouse, whose propensity for violence reminds him of Albright. This flashback acts as a transition from Easy's day time labours in the garden to his arrival by car later that night to the next meeting with Albright.

In the meeting with Albright lighting and editing are used to project the sense of evil surrounding him and this is enhanced by the use of a tight close up to the

interior of the building we see Easy approach after parking his car. The editing follows the shot reverse shot pattern of a conversation between Easy and Albright. However, the first interior shot begins with a close up on whiskey being poured into two glasses. As the conversation begins the camera withdraws to reveal Easy and Albright in a mid-shot at the opposite ends of a small table. As Albright tells Easy the nature of the job, to get a location on Daphne Monet, he shows a picture on the front of the *Los Angeles Times* of Daphne hand in hand with the mayoral candidate Todd Carter. The next series of shots in close up focus on Albright's removal of the money from his wallet to place it just within reach of Easy on the table. Easy is seduced by Albright's offer of \$100 in advance (Figure 29). The claustrophobic tightness of this scene gives way in the next shot to the music, sounds and rhythms of Easy's walk across Central Avenue, reiterating the vibrancy of this area, to the illicit jazz club where, according to Albright, Daphne has been spotted recently (Figure 30). The camera follows Easy who, after the encounter with Albright, is once again at home within black space. The creation of screen space through the *mise-en-scène*, the camera work, the editing, the lighting and the music, all confirm the restricted and controlled nature of the black character in the white world. By contrast the camera moves fluidly through the busy Central Avenue following Easy's graceful movements to the illicit jazz club, which according to white authority, should not exist.

Thus far Easy's movements have largely been unhindered but we get the first clear indication of the segregated spaces of the city when Albright, in a telephone conversation with Easy, suggests they meet at Malibu Pier. Easy's reluctance to travel to this location is cut short by Albright hanging up. We see Easy's arrival and walk to the end of the pier. It is night, the pier is almost empty of people, but

Easy's uneasiness is evident in the way he glances around, the camera cuts from Easy's point-of-view in a long shot of the pier to a close up of him when approached by a white girl, who joins him momentarily at the end of the pier. The editing then cuts more rapidly to bring a group of white youths over to accuse Easy of misconduct. Just when it appears that Easy is in danger, Albright enters the scene, and with gun in hand makes the most forceful white youth apologize to Easy by pistol-whipping him. Albright then shows his disgust for the white kid's readiness to do this. Far from saving Easy from a beating for being in a white space, Albright gives an indication of his sadistic character, and through his use of the gun signals firmly the power he can wield over Easy. The scene depicting the white youth being humiliated by Albright is filmed as a series of reaction shots of Easy, showing his discomfort at Albright's sadism, but also a growing awareness of Albright's power over him. Directing Easy to come to Malibu ensures Albright can control Easy's movements, something he cannot do in the safe black space of the jazz clubs on Central Avenue. Voss (1998: 173) notes how: "Easy's movement through the terrain of L.A., tracing a cartography of impediments in the places he cannot inhabit without incident, emphatically names the streets, the hotels, and the exact coordinates of segregation."

One of those named spaces is the Ambassador Hotel where Easy is asked to meet Daphne Monet who is in hiding. She is staying in the white only section, and so he has to be sneaked up the side entrance by the bell-hop. According to Anderson (1996:340), there was fierce racial discrimination in the Los Angeles hotel industry and one of the buildings that marked the importance of Central Avenue as a mecca for African-American people was the Dunbar Hotel on the bustling corner of 41st and Central, a place where the NACCP held its first western convention in 1928.

From her hotel room, at four in the morning, Easy agrees reluctantly to drive Daphne to Todd Carter's estate but she persuades him to make a detour to the Laurel Canyon Road to Richard McGee's house. Shot, like most of the film from Easy's point of view we hear Daphne ask as they pass a police car (Figure 32), "Are you nervous?". He doesn't reply but his voice-over reveals the true extent of his spatial anxiety. "Nervous? There I was in the middle of the night in a white neighbourhood, with a white woman in my car. No, I wasn't nervous. I was stupid." They find McGee dead and Daphne runs out of the house and drives off leaving Easy in inhospitable territory. On returning to his house the next morning he is confronted by Albright and his two goons and is humiliated in his own house.

Easy takes action by phoning Houston for the assistance of Mouse but he also decides to drive to the Carter Foundation to confront Todd Carter directly, as Albright has said he is working for Carter. In the novel Easy confronts Carter in an office building fronted by his fixer Mr. Baxter, while in the film, Easy is given more spatial mobility by driving directly to the Carter estate and talking face to face with Carter. Although, as Easy says in a voice-over, he has decided to fight back, the relative ease with which he gets through the portals of white power, and the confidence of his walk to the front entrance of the Carter mansion, dressed in a suit with a regulation fedora, sees him undercut the power of white authority, by revealing his access to information about Daphne.

Galvanised by the injustice of having his home repeatedly invaded and the intimidation from Albright, the sense of agency exercised by Easy puts him back in charge of his own destiny. This is a powerful image of a Black male identity

particularly within the context of the tradition of classic *film noir*, but also in the context of the shifting power relations based on identity, that the film plays out. Rather than the tentative movements the character displays in the other places of white power that he encounters, specifically Malibu Pier, the Hollywood Hills, and the police station, Easy's determination to assert his agency in the oak-panelled mise-en-scène of the Carter mansion is signalled by the camera angle which places Easy in the superior position, and the lighting which emphasises in the aura that surrounds him the power of his information about Daphne. Carter, as one of the richest men in Los Angeles, is not the fearsome figure of the novel, the worst kind of racist who "was so rich he didn't even consider me in human terms" (Mosley, 199:126). In the film Carter is much more amenable to Easy's presence and potential help in contacting Daphne. The racist nature of Carter in the novel is also dissipated in the film as the script changes the details of who is actually employing Albright. In the novel he is in the employ of Carter but in the film Carter hasn't heard of him and Easy finds out Albright is working for Carter's rival Eldon Tyrrell. The Carter of the film is therefore not implicated in the humiliation of Easy carried out by Albright, making him a more sympathetic character. The changed nature of the relationship between Carter and Easy from novel to film imbues Easy with a stronger sense of agency.

The control that the police exercise over Easy's movements is evident in his arrest and maltreatment in the interrogation room. The ability of the police to bring Easy in for questioning at any time hangs over him and is a constant reminder of the power of white authority. Easy's release from the police station in the middle of the night has him placed on the steps outside the police station where he is spotlighted by a parked patrol car with two white policemen who jeer him by

suggesting they play "chase the nigger". Easy is forced to walk home where he is stopped by a car containing Matthew Terrell, the rival mayoral candidate to Carter. Easy is requested by the chauffeur to enter the car and is interviewed by Tyrrell about the search for Daphne Monet. The interior *mise-en-scène* of this car feels more threatening to Easy than the dark streets he has been walking along. Tyrrell is another figure of white authority who can limit Easy's movements, but the scene also reiterates the notion of whiteness as evil, in the shape of the paedophile Tyrrell, who has a young boy with him in the back of the car, and Easy's voice-over signals the depraved atmosphere that he must escape. The lighting once again positions the white man as the source of evil. Neiland (1999: 72) suggests Easy's mobility allows him "... to move inside the Black world unreachable by Albright, may be a 'trope of freedom'." However, I would argue that Easy's ability to move between worlds is not so much a trope of freedom, as Neiland suggests, although he does acknowledge its problematic nature, but a way of sketching out a map of the racialised geography of Los Angeles in 1948. What the film's representation helps to construct is the co-ordinates of what Doreen Massey calls the "power geometry" of location and mobility (1994:149). The idea of power geometry recognises that not everyone experiences the flows and interconnections of capital in the same way. Race and gender plays an equally important part in charting the mobility of people and their position within this power geometry. The representation of Easy as an African-American male living in Los Angeles at the end of the 1940s but reconstructed through the concerns and values of the 1990s, when the film was made and the book written, describes precisely the limitation on mobility that becomes a central feature of most filmic representations of the city.

Easy's determination to buy some real estate and get involved in the private investigating business is explained to his friend Odell at the end of the film by echoing the words of Albright when he first meets Easy. Easy shows his reluctance to take the job of searching for Daphne by asking the question: "How do I know what I'm getting mixed up in?" to which Albright replies, "Easy, walk out your door in the morning and you're mixed up in something. The only thing you can really worry about is if you get mixed up to the top or not". Easy's readiness to get mixed up at the top of the trouble marks his developing sense of agency but there is also his recognition of his lowly place within the power geometry of Los Angeles.

The importance of place-bound identity for Easy, representing black subjectivity, suggests the importance of belonging to a place that African-Americans could call their own for many African-Americans of that era. The subsequent ghettoization of African-Americans in Los Angeles, and the dispersal of their political clout, would seem to be making an argument for the boundaries of a recognised ethnic/safe/black space. Easy's awareness of his powerlessness in the face of white authority is somewhat soothed by the location of his house within the safety of the all-black neighbourhood. African-Americans' history of disenfranchisement in the labour, housing, civil and political arenas makes place-bound identity in the historical reconstruction of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, a safety net, but as the decades pass, we see it represented in films such as *Boyz N The Hood* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (Hughes Brothers, 1992) as more a place of imprisonment for working class blacks.

Occupying liminal spaces

The private detective in *noir fiction* and film is usually characterised by his ability to move between the spaces of the crime underworld and the police. In Easy's case he is employed specifically because of his ability to enter the black world of Central Avenue, closed to Albright. Easy is able to occupy the space between the black world and white world of corruption and power, represented by Albright, Tyrell and Carter. His role as private investigator forces Easy to traverse the racial borders of Los Angeles but he must always return to that space of familiarity and security, threatened and invaded as it is, of his home in Watts. Easy's blackness is what makes him useful to white power but it also ensures his mobility will always be restricted. Kennedy (1997: 50) argues:

Easy's manipulation of his identity affords him (and ironically parodies) the autonomy and freedom of movement associated with the white detective. Yet Easy's movements through Los Angeles are also constrained by white powers. While his role as a detective broadens possibilities for transgressing established racialised and spatial limits, race nonetheless moulds the boundaries of social identity and mobility.

While I agree with Kennedy's analysis I would add that it is this mapping of the segregated spaces of Los Angeles that makes the novel and the film such a powerful re-scripting of *films noir's* usual colour blindness. Easy's occupation of the liminal space between white and black worlds is set in motion by his need for cash. However reluctant he is to take Albright's money he puts himself in the marketplace where his key asset is his ability to move between the space of the street and the spaces of white power. But Easy is not the only character in the film to occupy an in-between place. Daphne Monet, who is represented as the *femme fatale*, is central to the narrative. Daphne's disappearance, re-appearance, her role as the object of desire, and her ultimate rejection are well-established features of the *femme fatale's* lot in the classic *film noir* tradition. What makes *Devil in a Blue*

Dress markedly different as a critical revisionist *noir* is that it focuses precisely on the in-between racial status of Daphne as a mulatto. Her mixed racial status is not revealed until the final third of the film when Daphne is compelled to explain her actions to Easy. Neiland (1998:68) suggests: "... the bodily presence of the mulatto figure in fiction or film is itself always, already a form of resistance to a hegemonic modern logic intent upon maintaining the border fictions of race."

The mulatto figure is used by Mosley in the novel, and Franklin in the film, to highlight the racial and gender discourses surrounding mixed race relationships and reveal the fault lines in the racist landscape. Neiland (1999: 68) goes on to argue the historical significance of the mulatto figure and how its recuperation in the film situates the story within a historical continuity.

The mulatta can be read as the embodiment of miscegenation. ... the mulatta has been generally represented as the site of racial indeterminacy that effectively provokes an epistemological crisis in the visual logic of modernity. Since her skin may or may not bear the 'proof' of her race, the mulatta challenges the primacy of the visible as the means of securing identity and 'making race real in the United States.'" Or, to use Homi K Bhabha's terms, the mulatta's racial indeterminacy challenges the efficacy of skin color as the 'key signifier of cultural and racial difference' upon which contemporary colonial discourse depends.

Daphne's ability to occupy the spaces of whiteness as long as she keeps hidden her mixed race parentage is exposed by Terrell and her promised wedding to Carter is revoked. Daphne buys a set of photographs showing evidence of Terrell's paedophilia as a means of keeping her former lover in the mayoral race, however, she is given a pay-off by the Carter family to ensure she will renounce her engagement and leave Los Angeles. Easy and Daphne both find themselves, reluctantly, in the marketplace for information, and desirous of a sense of belonging. Their ability to occupy liminal space is revealed as a curse as well as a

problematic freedom. While Daphne survives the film, unlike many of her *femme fatale* predecessors, she is forced to leave Los Angeles with her belief in love shattered, a heartbroken woman, whose social, emotional and physical movements have been re-mapped by the colour line (Figures 35 and 36).

Conclusion

The specific mapping of the African-American subject's mobility and identity in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, reconfiguring the codes and conventions of classic *film noir* suggests the desire on the part of the filmmaker to address directly the absence at the heart of most *noir* cinematic city narratives. Through the representation of black male domestic space and black post-war public space, it could be argued, the film is engaged in what Voss (1998) has termed a "cultural archaeology." Beyond this, the reconfiguration of the codes and conventions of *film noir* around black subjectivity highlights the mobility and immobility of the central characters. The restrictions on Easy's mobility are the clear markers of the colour line and this is only partly circumnavigated by Easy's private detective status. The liminal space he occupies between the white world and the black world of the street makes him even more aware of the power geometry of the city. Daphne's occupation of the liminal space between white and black worlds is interrogated more sharply in her unmasking as a mulatto and therefore her banishment from the white kingdom.

Where *Chinatown*, in its critical revisionist critique, highlighted the white projection of the "other", it was still centred on the white male geography of the city. While clearly recognising the fact that *Devil in a Blue Dress* is a product of Hollywood and its chief aim is to make money, and it could be argued this reduces the power of its cultural critique, the film does appear to participate in a reframing of place based

identity, and black private and public space. As Neiland (1999:75) argues, films such as *Devil in a Blue Dress* and others that I have termed critical revisionist *noir*

Evince a faith in the cinematic medium to establish a *sense* of historical continuity through which place-identity accrues social meaning and force. History, these films suggest, does not need to be simply retrieved but meaningfully *reconstructed*.

In meaningfully reconstructing history, the film must also reconstruct the geography of the characters and their interaction with the cinematic city. And if *noir* provides a “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1974) for how Los Angeles has treated its inhabitants in cinematic terms, *noir’s* adherence to the white male subject’s point of view has been shown to limit its paradigmatic power, unless this is undercut by a critical revisionism of the type evident in *Chinatown* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*. The tradition of classic *film noir* will remain as a powerful discourse for describing the development of the cinematic Los Angeles, but the purpose of the chapter has been to demonstrate that the critical revisionism of films like *Devil in a Blue Dress* and *Chinatown* can demonstrate the power of the cinematic city to reflect and critique past visions of the real Los Angeles.

In the following chapter, I examine future visions of the cinematic Los Angeles and the recurring themes of mobility and identity resurface in these representations of Los Angeles’s future. I highlight the racial and gendered nature of identity as Los Angeles is turned into a retro-fitted future.

Chapter Four

Cinematic visions of future Los Angeles

In cinema, and in science-fiction cinema especially, place carries an additional expressive burden: in its function for the setting of a story, a place becomes visible as *mise-en-scène*. At the same time, place frequently functions as pure spectacle, a site for the display of *tours de force* of art direction and special effects (Kuhn, 1999: 75).

Introduction

In this chapter I examine how questions of mobility and identity are represented in future visions of Los Angeles in science fiction cinema. Part of my purpose is to explore how far these future visions re-iterate the concerns and tensions about identity and mobility explored in Chapter Three. The analysis of *Devil in a Blue Dress* offered a black perspective on the myth of *noir* that surrounds the cinematic city but as well as revealing fears and anxieties about these issues I highlighted the ways in which the film provides an opportunity for reclaiming and re-imagining the visual history of African-American Los Angeles. I investigate the ways in which science fiction's future visions pre-figure similar concerns about mobility and identity in the representations of the cinematic space and place of contemporary Los Angeles, but I also identify the potential for engaging with and responding positively to difference. I examine a number of science fiction films to develop the argument that future visions reflect but also challenge ideas about mobility and identity in the cinematic city.

These selected texts have been chosen because they contain explicit and implicit questions about mobility, and racial, gender and place identity, in their representation of the experience of future urban living in Los Angeles. In each film the city of Los Angeles is central to the progress of the narrative with the future

urban mise-en-scène of the city acting as much more than backdrop. The city functions as character, metaphor and it has a metonymic function in the way it stands in for urban and suburban growth in the United States. Added to this is the allegorical power of much science fiction cinema to depict in its fantastic mise-en-scène an image of the preoccupations and concerns of our contemporary world. As Kuhn (1990: 15/16) suggests in her lucid and provocative introduction to *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and the Contemporary Science Fiction Film*, "... most science fiction films tend to disguise, and thereby reveal more schematically, the social or psychological preoccupations of the moment". Kuhn (1990: 16) comments that the "disguise referred to here is the genre itself, the very codes and conventions which assert that science fiction film is nothing more than fantasy. But under the cloak of fantasy, issues of actuality may be addressed all the more directly". What the science fiction genre, and, in particular, the selected texts offered for analysis namely *Blade Runner* (1982), *Strange Days* (1995), and *Alien Nation* (1989) seem to be doing is reflecting on and questioning the dangers and the possibilities of living in the urban future of Los Angeles.

In Chapter Three I chose to avoid the debate about the definition of *film noir* as an identifiable genre, as the circularity of that argument is not very helpful in dealing with the notion of *noir* as a discursive force within the representations of Los Angeles in film. Instead, I offered four different categories of *film noir* as a way of arguing how progressive representations of identity, detailed in the critical revisionist noir, *Devil In A Blue Dress*, can be possible within what is normally a white, male dominated narrative form.

Like *film noir*, science fiction film is also a male dominated genre that resists easy definition. Most attempts to define science fiction have been drawn from the corpus of science fiction literature, which, as Sobchack (1993: 63) points out in her seminal study, *Screening Space* " ... don't go far enough". Sobchack (1993: 63) provides the following definition:

The SF film is a film genre which emphasizes actual, extrapolative, or speculative science and the empirical method, interacting in a social context with the lesser emphasized, but still present, transcendentalism of magic and religion, in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown.

Science fiction cinema attempts to transform the unknowable (future) into a visual and aural spectacle. In science fiction cinema, as Kuhn (1999: 75) suggests, place becomes visible as *mise-en-scène* and spectacle. Where most Hollywood productions seek to efface the story setting and focus on the narrative drive, the science fiction film has to provide an audience with a credible depiction of another world or another time. This direct relationship between the sense of place and the filmic representation make this genre a valuable site for investigating the interconnections of place, identity and mobility. Representations of the future, particularly centred on the urban sprawl of cinematic Los Angeles, provide a model for thinking critically about the recurring themes of identity and mobility.

In Chapter Three I outlined how the recreations of Los Angeles of the 1940s and 1950s demand an attention to detail in *mise-en-scène*, and production design. Future visions require a similar degree of verisimilitude, as the details of the future world created must inform the attitudes and actions of the characters, and convince the genre-aware spectator of the spectacle of the future city.

I argue that through an examination of the space and place of Los Angeles' cinematic future the thematics of identity and mobility figure heavily, and that this genre makes a significant contribution to the overall image of Los Angeles as the post-apocalyptic city of the future, but one where survival is still possible by embracing, or coming to terms with difference. Examining what these science fictions films do culturally I suggest that they reflect concerns and pre-occupations about identity and mobility but that they can also be read as having a more positive vision of accommodating difference.

One of the main descriptors of these science fiction representations of the urban is the utopian/dystopian binary (Kuhn, 1999:75). As Sobchack (1999: 129) asserts: "Traditionally, America's spatial mythology has privileged the non-urban and has been, indeed, anti-urban." It is therefore unsurprising that the science fiction cinematic city tends towards the dystopian in its portrayal of urban life. This is particularly true of future visions of Los Angeles, where a raft of science fiction films from the 1950s, for example *Them!* (Douglas, 1955), to the 1980s and 1990s, for example *Blade Runner* (1982), *Repo Man* (Cox, 1983), *Escape from L.A.* (Carpenter, 1996), have used the city as a metaphor for urban decay and social disorder. The city has also been the site for extraterrestrial invasion and colonisation in *They Live!* (Carpenter, 1985), *The Hidden* (Sholder, 1988), and *Alien Nation* (Baker, 1989). So what is it that makes Los Angeles the site par excellence for re-presenting, creating, or imagineering a post-apocalyptic nightmare urban setting?

As part of the explanation for the recurrent representation of Los Angeles as a future nightmare urban scenario I would suggest bringing together those elements

that focus on the interwoven nature of the material and imaginary city. These might include: the myth of *noir* developed by Hollywood in past visions; the uncertain geological and ecological future of the area, worked on in the science fiction and disaster movies of the 1970s, for example, *The Omega Man* (Sagal, 1971), *Earthquake* (Robson, 1974) and *The Towering Inferno* (Guillermin, 1974), and revisited, in the wake of pre-millennial tension, in films such as *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1995), *Dante's Peak* (Donaldson, 1997) and *Volcano* (Jackson, 1997). While the ways in which science fiction cinema can imagine the future Los Angeles may be confined in a utopian/dystopian binary continuing the tradition of what Sobchack (1999: 129) describes as America's anti-urban spatial mythology, the key function being served by the genre, its cultural instrumentality, is to provide cautionary, but sometimes hopeful tales about living in the city of the future, and allegorically, the contemporary city. In the films I have chosen for analysis, amidst the chaos of a dystopian cityscape, there is also the promise of some form of collaborative engagement between previously polarised identities and new ways of engaging with the mobile nature of the city are presented.

The *Blade Runner* Effect

The film most associated with a future vision of Los Angeles is *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982). A decade after it was first released the film was re-released as *Blade Runner: The Director's Cut* (1992). The Director's Cut eliminates Deckard's (Harrison Ford) voice-over but his possible identity as a replicant is suggested more directly. The analysis that follows refers to the 1982 film unless I designate it otherwise as *Blade Runner: Director's Cut (BRDC)*. The screenplay for the film is loosely based on Philip K. Dick's (1968) science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Much like *Chinatown*, described in the previous chapter as a film text that has become

symbolic of the civic and moral corruption upon which the city is built, *Blade Runner* takes that vision into the twenty-first century.

Using *Blade Runner* as a model, many urban, cultural and film theorists such as Bruno (1987), Harvey (1989), Denzin (1991), and Bukatman (1996) have designated it *the* postmodern film about *the* postmodern city. Other urban and film theorists have questioned the orthodoxy of reading that has developed around the film, for example Doel & Clarke (1997) and Davis (1999), suggesting that the film might be more useful as a site for the examination of how modernity and postmodernity are interwoven. Although Davis (1999:361) has argued that *Blade Runner* only alludes to "... ethnocentric anxieties about multiculturalism run amok", a closer analysis of the film suggests a much more explicit framing of issues to do with race and class.

Within the large body of literature that has accumulated around *Blade Runner* a small but significant number of writers, including Baringer (1997), Bukatman (1997), Desser (1999), Ross (1991), and Silverman (1991) have drawn attention to the ways in which issues of identity and class are raised in the film. A focus on aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and editing illuminates these issues and points to the ambiguities and uncertainties that have ensured the film's place as key text in film theory.

The film tells the story of a Blade Runner, Deckard, a detective specially trained to recognise and retire (kill) replicants, in this case, Pris (Darryl Hannah), Leon (Brion James), Zhora (Joanna Cassidy) and their leader Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer). Replicants are android constructions that have all the outward physical characteristics of humans, who have escaped from the 'off-world' colony and

arrived in Los Angeles where they attempt to make contact with their creator Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel). In effect, the Blade Runner is a bounty hunter. The prologue to the film provides a summary of the origin of the replicants and the formation of the Blade Runner squads.

Early in the 21st Century the Tyrell Corporation advanced Robot evolution into the Nexus phase – a being virtually identical to a human – known as a Replicant. The Nexus replicants were superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers that created them. Replicants were used off-world as slave labor, in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets. After a bloody mutiny by a Nexus 6 combat team in an off-world colony, Replicants were declared illegal on earth – under penalty of death. Special police-squads Blade runner units – had orders to shoot, upon detection, any trespassing replicant. This was not called execution. It was called retirement. (Prologue, *Blade Runner*, 1982)

As Silverman (1991: 110) notes: “Through this prologue, *Blade Runner* indicates that to be a replicant is to occupy the servile position within the master/slave dialectic.” However, the film also complicates the relationship between the master and the slave by making the replicants “virtually identical” to humans, “superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence”.

In its use of the *film noir* cinematic city, the film draws upon the cinematic past, comic book illustrations, and ancient and contemporary architecture to create a dystopic version of Los Angeles in 2019. The city contains a polyglot mix of “non-white immigrant groups who are left to scavenge over the scraps of a deindustrialised landscape” (Avila, 2004: 96). The language of the streets in Deckard’s voice-over description is ‘cityspeak’, “a hybrid mix of Spanish, Japanese, and German, what have you...” (Deckard, *BR* dialogue). Despite this polyglot mix, both Dempsey (1983) and Baringer (1997) note an almost total absence of black people in Ridley Scott’s Los Angeles. Silverman (1991) makes a convincing case for

seeing the replicants, who are bred to be slaves and have no rights on Earth, as symbolically representing African-Americans. In the voice-over of the 1982 film Deckard describes his superior, Captain Bryant (M. Emmet Walsh), as the kind of man who in history books would have used the term 'nigger' to refer to blacks. Bryant refers to the replicants as "skin jobs", making the issue of racial prejudice central to the film. The link between replicants and slaves is also suggested in Dick's original novel where an advertisement for androids promises to 'duplicate the halcyon days of pre-Civil War Southern states!' these 'custom-tailored humanoid robots' could serve as 'tireless field hands', the ad suggests.

The construction of the master/slave dialectic becomes even more complicated as Silverman (1991: 115) observes that Roy Batty, as the leader of the slave rebellion, "is the figure who most fully represents blackness" and yet he is "... a figure who is physically the very embodiment of the Aryan ideal." Silverman (1991: 151) suggests that this very visible contradiction between "slave", associated in a historical sense with "blackness" and Batty's appearance as the Aryan ideal encourages the white spectator to confront the relation between the position of slave and "... those who are slotted into it as absolutely arbitrary, and absolutely brutal." In the film it is as if replicants have become the primary racialised "other" and have subsumed blackness. With this reading in mind it could be suggested that Batty's rescue of Deckard from certain death in the climactic scene of the film, moments before his own demise, places the racialised "other" in the position of greater humanity and empathy. Deckard's saviour is a replicant and in the final scene Deckard returns to his apartment to make good his escape with Rachael (Sean Young), his replicant lover. The possibility of miscegenation between a Blade Runner and a replicant ends the film on a hopeful note but the mise-en-scène of

the final shots shows escape from the city as the only option for Deckard and Rachael.

Another aspect of the symbolic depiction of replicants as African-Americans can be seen in the passing for human trope much like the experience of the mulatto, Daphne Monet (Jennifer Beals) who passes for white in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) discussed in Chapter Three. The Voigt-Kampff test administered by the Blade Runner on suspected replicants is supposed to reveal their lack of empathy, and therefore their inhumanity. However, it is one of the many ambiguities of the film that two replicants, Rachael and Roy, help Deckard restore or, if he is a replicant, make him aware of his sense of humanity.

The film's mise-en-scène plays out a version of urban development that constructs the city as part of an ecological disaster area where the "little people" breathe the foul air of the streets and the forces of corporate power can still see the sun shine from their lofty towers. All those who can afford it have taken the path of 'white flight', literally and metaphorically, to the 'off-world colony', presumably, a kind of suburban California in space. Eldon Tyrell, living at the top of his Mayan pyramid style Tyrell Corporation Building, eight hundred stories tall, provides symbolic but also spectacular embodiment of how class and power is figured in terms of verticality and scale (Figures 37 and 38). The replicants hide themselves among the mass of "little people" on the streets, adopting what Baringer (1997: 14) has termed "working-class lifestyles". Leon works for the Tyrell Corporation as a nuclear fission loader, a blue-collar job, and lives in a run-down hotel. Zhora works in a strip-joint in Chinatown and Pris becomes a street person in order to make contact with J.F. Sebastian (William Sanderson).

And yet despite the dystopic nature of the crowded city streets in their rain-soaked neon, once the camera and the gaze become mobile, a panorama of vastness, scale, and movement through the air in the police spinners provides visual pleasure for the spectator. While the 'little people' remain on the streets the spectator is granted a gaze of 'upward mobility'. As Bukatman (1997: 56) suggests:

Blade Runner offers an urban experience of inexhaustible fluidity, endless passage and infinite perceptibility – a *utopian vision*, so to speak, as distinct from a *vision of utopia*.

This utopian vision achieved through the ingenuity of special effects, camera movement, mise-en-scène, editing, music and sound effects and provides one of the many scopic pleasures of *Blade Runner*. Bukatman (1997: 56) identifies the ways in which the camera's incessant movement through urban space in *Blade Runner* produces for the spectator a 'panoramic perception'. This term is drawn from the work of historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1986) whose study of railway travel in the nineteenth century suggested that travellers were turned into spectators by the closed compartment, the screen of glass and the speeding past of landscapes and cityscapes. This shifted the attention from objects and people that were near to distant panoramas. This regime of vision is exploited in *Blade Runner's* scenes of urban flight. In a series of shots that detail Deckard's pick-up by Gaff (Edward James Olmos) and his arrival at police headquarters we see the police spinner arise and from Deckard's point-of-view we share his 'panoramic perception' of the city's architecture (Figures 39 - 48). The film plays very successfully on this tension between the visual beauty of the scenes and the overall depiction of the city as a dystopian nightmare. It is one of the many of a series of uncertainties, contradictions and ambiguities that work through the film.

Another contradiction exists as Los Angeles itself never really served as architectural inspiration for the film, apart from the use of specific buildings such as the Bradbury for J.F. Sebastian's home and the climactic fight scene between Batty and Deckard. Union Station is used as police headquarters and the entrance to Deckard's apartment building is modelled on Frank Lloyd Wright's "The Ennis-Brown House". Deckard drives to his apartment building through the 2nd Street Tunnel with its glowing, glazed ceramic tiles. But otherwise the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* bears little resemblance to the sprawl most associated with the Los Angeles cityscape. The retro-fitted nature of the street scenes arise because the production team, due to financial considerations, had to build on top of an already existing old style set. So the film most associated with a vision of Los Angeles's future borrows as much from Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York and London as it does from the existing city. But this is what Hollywood cinema has been doing in Los Angeles for generations, constructing visions of other cities in its dream factory. It seems highly appropriate that Los Angeles 2019 of *Blade Runner* should be an amalgam of other urban and cinematic spaces mixing the past and the future.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the *noir* influence on Los Angeles's image of itself is particularly strong, and in *Blade Runner* it is transferred into a retro-fitted future. The hybrid nature of the film, with its mix of what Crunbow, (cited in Sobchack, 1999) calls 'junkyard futurism', and film *noir* conventions, enables the film to join the lineage of *noir* representations, a kind of future-past, variously described as "future noir" – a high-tech blend of forties film noir and twenty-first century science fiction" (Sammon, 1996: 2), or, "tech noir", - where "... machines provide the texture and substance of the film" (Penley, 1991: 64). The same interface

between human and machine provides the narrative drive for *Strange Days* (1995) in its depiction of Los Angeles at the brink of the twenty-first century. The dystopian vision of the city once again predominates but closer analysis of the issues of identity and mobility reveals a message of hope for the new millennium as the city swings between conflagration and celebration.

Pre-Millennium Tension

Like its future noir predecessors, *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), in *Strange Days* (1995), Los Angeles functions as the mise-en-scène, and the spectacle of the future city. *Strange Days* also shares with these other films the appropriation of *noir* stylistics in the portrayal of the central characters. The crime, the detective, the femme fatale, the corrupt system, the supportive woman, all figure prominently in *Strange Days* but are given their own particular spin by the director Kathryn Bigelow.

Questions of spatial and racial identity are to the fore in *Strange Days*, and in a way that may be directly related to the post Rodney King Los Angeles in which the film was made. The film also plays directly with the ability of the camera to recreate the mobility of the city, encouraging the audience to become immersed in the sights and sounds of urban living.

Set in Los Angeles, 1999, on the eve of the millennium celebrations, the narrative follows the underworld activities of Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), an ex-LAPD vice detective, who now peddles 'playback'. 'Playback' consists of illegal digital recordings taken directly from the cerebral cortex, using the optical nerve as the viewpoint through a device known as SQUID (Superconducting Quantum

Interference Device). Originally devised for the CIA, but now available on the black market, it enables the subjective recording of events as they are happening by a participant and their replay for another person who can take on the subject position of the person recording.

Virtual cinema more than virtual reality, the 'playback' clips usually involve highly kinetic acts of violence, sex, or crime and allow the viewer to feel as if they are partaking in those events. Lenny is himself hooked on 'playback' as his collection replays his relationship with Faith (Juliette Lewis), who has left him for Philo Gant (Michael Wincott), a record producer who holds more promise for Faith's singing career. Lenny's friend Max Peltier (Tom Sizemore), also an ex-cop, runs security for Gant's operation, and because of his friendship with Lenny, keeps a close eye on Faith. Lenny's other close friend is Mace (Angela Bassett), a black woman who Lenny helped in his previous life as a cop, and who now acts almost like his bodyguard, highly capable as she is of unarmed or armed combat. Her job as a limousine driver ensures a steady income for the maintenance of her home and her son, but her affection for Lenny often sees her rescue him from dangerous situations.

Mace is full of contempt for Lenny's obsession with Faith and 'playback'. Lenny is warned by Iris (Brigitte Bako) that Faith is in danger. Lenny's attempts to rescue Faith from Gant, even though she is unwilling to leave, puts him in the way of an unknown killer who sends him 'playback' tapes of horrific murders where the victim has been placed in the subject position of the killer, seeing their own death as it happens through the killer's eyes. Following Iris's warning Lenny believes Faith will be the killer's next victim. Iris also gives him access to a 'playback' clip of

the murder of Jeriko One (Glenn Plummer), a black rap artist and community leader, who is the major star of Philo's record label, by two white police officers (Vincent D'Onofrio and William Fichtner). Jeriko's music and political rallying cries having made him a target for the racist establishment.

Mace and Lenny set out to find the purveyor of the snuff 'playback' clips and to unmask the cops for the brutal murder of Jeriko One. In the closing scenes at the millennium street party, with the Bonaventure Hotel forming the backdrop to events, Mace hands over the incriminating clip of Jeriko One's death to the Assistant Police Commissioner Strickland (Josef Sommer), but is pursued by the two rogue cops. Having overpowered them she is subjected to a beating by the forces of law and order in a scene choreographed to replicate the Rodney King incident. The arrival of the assistant police commissioner, who has been convinced of the cop's guilt by the evidence on 'playback', has Mace released and the cops arrested. Lenny confronts the snuff killer, who turns out to be his friend, Max, and it transpires Max is also having an affair with Faith. Max dies in the ensuing fight, and Lenny, bloodied but vindicated, arrives at the scene just as Mace is being led away for treatment to her injuries. Against the backdrop of the millennium celebrations erupting on giant video screens, Lenny realises his feelings for Mace and the two embrace and kiss in an act of union that offers new hope for the new century.

White male identity in crisis equals the city in crisis

A major thematic in the narrative of *Strange Days* is the preoccupation with racial and spatial identity. The space of the city reworked by the conventions of the science fiction film has tended towards a dystopian vision of urbanity. This

dystopian view is one that dominates the mise-en-scène of *Strange Days*. But amidst this vision of controlled and controlling space is the inter-racial relationship between Mace and Lenny, a relationship that develops in the course of the film from one of friendship to one of love.

Lenny, the white male anti-hero, is in emotional crisis. Pining for his lost love, Faith, he has been forced out of the LAPD, and early in the film his car, the office on wheels, is repossessed. Lenny's emotional crisis is visualized through the collapse of the space between his past and present self. Lenny keeps replaying his life with Faith in 'playback' clips. Through the technology of SQUID Lenny is literally stuck in rewind mode. Lenny's obsession with Faith, re-lived through 'playback', restricts his emotional range, fractures his identity, and undermines his masculinity, but also clouds his perception of Mace's love for him, and his love for her. It is Mace who helps to supply a grounded identity for Lenny as a rejection of the blurring of the identity produced by 'playback'. The electronically generated way of being is shown to be corrosive of Lenny's sense of identity, his sense of responsibility, and his masculinity.

Lenny is the supplier of 'playback', this visual narcotic, and like most dealers, he is hooked on his own merchandise. He uses 'playback' of his relationship with Faith to re-live the past and in consequence he fails to live and act in the present. The film might have been subtitled: reclaiming the real; as much of the warning about the use of SQUID, highlights the dependence of those who are hooked, and their inability to 'live in the real world'. Lenny's friend Mace provides the grounded centre of the film and is one of the few characters who refuses to use 'playback'. She is more concerned with recognizing what is necessary to live in the present and

on several occasions exhorts Lenny to 'get real'. Using 'playback' people can step outside their own personality and become immersed in another's feelings, sensations, sounds, and most importantly, vision. This collapse of the boundaries between the self and others, the space of the subject and the space of the object/person being viewed is a stark warning of the power of the simulated.

Although there is the suggestion in the film that 'playback' is widely used, we only see it being the preserve of the white male, with the women who are involved playing the part of the object of desire or exploitation. Apart from the Assistant Police Commissioner Palmer Strickland, and the two white male rogue cops, all the other white males we encounter are immersed in 'playback'. Max, the voyeur-killer, uses 'playback' to revisit his crimes, Philo Gant, Faith's new lover, has his brains fried by an overdose of 'playback', as does Lenny's main supplier, Tick (Richard Edson). Concerns about identity are to the fore in the film, particularly as they focus on Lenny's growing sense of uncertainty about his emotional world. The merging of identities between 'playback' users and their surrogates signals a collapse of self-identity and this is played out against a backdrop of social chaos and civil disorder. This immersion in the sights and sounds of the city through the subjective point of view offered by SQUID produces frenetic images of ersatz emotions but fails to provide human connection.

SQUID's subjective point of view was made possible by a camera that had to be made especially for the film. Taking over a year to research and develop (DVD, *Director's Commentary, Strange Days*, 2001) this lightweight camera provided the point of view of the eye of the subject involved in using 'playback'. This close attention to subjective point of view gives the film its visual and aural language, a

kind of shorthand to enable the spectator to know that they are in 'playback' mode. The rest of the film adheres to an objective camera point of view, where the director's telling of the story represents other points of view to the audience. As Shaviro (2003: 162/3) argues in relation to the film's opening sequence:

... like all of the SQUID sequences, it is also a first-person point-of-view shot. This leads to a strange paradox. On the one hand, the first-person perspective of the POV shot evidently binds us tightly to the action. But at the same time, this perspective is oddly impersonal. For as we watch the sequence at the start of the film, we do not know who the protagonist is; we have no idea whose point of view it is that we are sharing. The action is so immediate and so visceral, that it abolishes the distance that traditionally separates the film spectator from the scene that is being displayed in front of him/her. But this lack of distance is also a lack of knowledge and of identity. It thrusts us into the action so viscerally, that it affords us no security whatsoever.

Thus the film certainly plays on the instability of identity; and creates instability in the audience's identification with the screen and the screen characters, in particular Lenny. For example, the subjective camera positions the viewer, as part of the action in the SQUID sequences but until we have someone to identify with our spectatorial identification is problematic and unsettling. It is only when the first SQUID sequence finishes that we realise we have been watching the action through Lenny's eyes. This is re-enforced in the next SQUID sequence when we see Lenny jack-in to the 'playback' device reflected by the mirror in his bedroom. In a way the mirror acts as a reverse shot, as Shaviro (2003; 166) notes: "It seems – for whatever psychological reasons – that a reverse shot, a view of the person with whom we are looking, is necessary if any identification with the character that does the looking is to take hold."

While the SQUID sequences provide one regime of vision in the film it could be argued that Bigelow complicates the conventional shot-reverse-shot of Hollywood

filmmaking to cast further doubt upon Lenny's point-of-view and problematise the audience's readiness to identify with him. When Lenny takes the audience on a car ride through night-time Los Angeles the riots/uprising of 1992 could still be going on. Burned out cars litter the road, militarised police use road checks, Korean shopkeepers stand guard on their shops with machine guns, a figure in a Santa costume is chased and assaulted by two women, and all this goes by the window of Lenny's car as he conducts conversations on his mobile, eats pizza and listens to the radio chat show predicting the apocalypse at midnight on New Year's Eve.

A closer examination of the *mise-en-scène*, the camera movement and the editing reveal this sequence to be more complex than the conventional shot-reverse-shot of Hollywood storytelling where we, as the spectators, are inside the car with Lenny looking out. Shaviro (2003: 171) suggests a more distinctive regime of vision, unlike the subjective point-of-view of the SQUID sequences, but not in tune with the objective identification with Lenny that the shot-reverse-shot sequence normally entails. The opening shot of this sequence does not begin inside the car with Lenny but on the street as it follows a group of people who appear to chase a victim across the street (Figure 49) as Lenny's car emerges from the smoke of a burned out vehicle, a shot that pays homage to the emergence of Travis Bickle's (Robert de Niro) yellow cab in *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976) (Figure 50). The next shot (Figure 51) shows the rear of Lenny's car as it passes. The camera provides the first interior shot (Figure 52) when we see fingers move to the car radio with the Mercedes Benz logo visible to connect it with Lenny's car. The radio provides aural and spatial continuity throughout this sequence as the soundtrack keeps the audience connected to the car and Lenny's point of view but the director moves

freely between a number of spaces. The exterior point of view is maintained (Figures 53-56) as the gliding camera movements take the spectator away from Lenny's car to follow the action. The camera seems to take on a life of its own where the mise-en-scène and the editing exceed their function of simply supplying Lenny's point-of-view. This regime of vision makes it more difficult for the audience to identify with Lenny while placing the urban landscape at the centre of the narrative. The first eye-line match the audience get to suggest we are seeing from Lenny's point of view has him look out the window and see two women chase and attack a Santa on the sidewalk (Figures 57 & 58). Again the camera takes up an exterior point of view (Figure 59) to show an iconic riot image (Figure 60).

All of these visual and aural details are supplied through fluid camera movement, slow motion, rapid editing, producing an aesthetic of urban disorder that has become a cliché of Los Angeles representations. Bigelow plays with audience identification but she also highlights the ways in which versions of the real and the mediated Los Angeles become intertwined in cinematic city representations. The mediated images of Los Angeles from the news have been turned into another version of themselves to supply the mise-en-scène for a cautionary tale about living in the future, and by implication, in the contemporary city. The beginning of *Demolition Man* (1994), *Predator 2* (Hopkins, 1998) and *Virtuosity* (Leonard, 1995) use the city in flames as a starting point for the unfolding of their narratives. And in the manner of the Hollywood myth making, in all three films the city is saved, the urban chaos and disorder of the opening scenes appear reconciled in the bright dawn of narrative resolution. *Strange Days* offers a similar hopeful resolution, and even the party atmosphere that almost turns into a riot returns to a party scene on the stroke of midnight.

As well as visualizing a white male in crisis, as a corollary to the city in crisis, the film confronts the audience with our complicity in the viewing experience. We are forced to watch the murders through the victim's gaze, but we are also rewarded as the film fulfils the generic expectations of a militarised, frenzied, chaotic, night-time, future-noir aesthetic, where our central characters confront the bad guys amidst the spectacle of the city in crisis. Bigelow's directorial style is noted by Murphy (1995), Powell (1994) and Rascaroli (1996) for its kinetic camera movements, rapid editing, and her determination to revise, critique or modify generic conventions. *Strange Days* is no exception, the spectator being constantly on the move through the aural and visual fields assembled by the filmmaker. The camera technology in *Strange Days* attempts a subjective point of view to replicate, and therefore involve the spectator more directly, in the experience of the cityspace and the collapse of boundaries between the self and others. This is achieved by the apparently seamless flow of action that is assembled with a minimum of cuts so that the narrative space appears to be inhabited by the spectator.

While the increased surveillance of public spaces is one of the recognizable features of a postmodern city, it is the surveillance of the private spaces of the home and the head that is warned about in the portrayal of 'playback' in *Strange Days*. What the film suggests is that the direct consequence of the dabbling with 'playback' is the creation of a de-centred self, a symptom of mental ill-health often associated with urban living. SQUID had been devised for the security services to replace the body wire but its illegal application on the streets produces first person perspectives on the thrill and danger of sexual, criminal and surveillance material. 'Playback' is used against Lenny when the unknown killer sends him a tape

showing the room where Lenny is sleeping. The killer records himself entering the room and walking up to Lenny's prostrate body on the couch and gently drawing a blade along his neck, nicking the skin and producing a low moan from Lenny, who does not wake up. The intruder departs but the message of the tape he has sent to Lenny is clear. Lenny has been watching his own potential death, and from the viewpoint of the potential killer, a stark message that Lenny is in fact murdering his spirit and his future with his continued use of 'playback'. The shock of watching his vulnerability revealed is like a recorded nightmare. The possibility of such personal invasion is one of the further warnings offered in the film of the dangers of technology trapping rather than freeing humankind, a cautionary note that is often a key feature of the science fiction film. The exterior world of the city is now covered by the panopticon of surveillance devices and the film parallels this in suggesting the same can happen with the interior spaces of the head.

The invasion of the private space of the subject through surveillance produces what Kennedy (2000: 45), borrowing from Davis's work (1990), has termed a 'paranoid spatiality'. In equating the use of 'playback' with the growth in popularity of 'reality television', Kennedy contends:

... reality television offers a fitting analogue for the paranoid spatiality that attends contemporary American urbanism. It is a television that projects onto the city the fears and anxieties of its populace, and then plays these back to them as externalized threat. Such television completes the circuit of paranoia as a virtual experience of the urban real. *Strange Days* and reality television propose that a significant transformation is taking place in our relation and connection to the urban world, one that projects feelings of dislocation in space as a collective urban experience, not as an individual psychosis (as *Falling Down* would suggest). Paranoid spatiality has become a prominent condition of visibility, not just in Hollywood cinema representations of the city but also in those of the newer technologies of representation that promise a more satisfying connection of postmodern optics and the urban scene.

I would argue that 'paranoid spatiality' has always been 'a prominent condition of visibility' in Hollywood representations of the city, and Los Angeles, in particular. *Film noir* visions and future *noir* visions encompass an array of city in decay and disorder images that have become part of the conventions of the spectacle of those genres. It appears that the generic conventions of science fiction are as important in creating the paranoid spatiality as the growth in methods of visual and aural surveillance. What these films offering future vision of Los Angeles have incorporated since the riots/uprising of 1992 is a host of riot and looting imagery as recorded by the news services from helicopters and on the ground. While Lenny has great trouble negotiating the paranoid spatiality of the city, which his use of 'playback' is a contributory factor it is Mace who is positioned in relation to spectator identification as the moral and ethical centre of the film.

Paranoid spatiality might describe the dystopian mise-en-scène of a city in crisis but the promise of a more benign spatiality, conditional on the reassertion of white male authority, is represented in the final scene. However, I would argue it is the coming together of Mace and Lenny where the film places its best hope for the white male and the city rather than in the reassertion of Lenny's male identity. The film's warning about electronically expanded identity is highlighted in Lenny's final kiss with Mace.

Black female mobility and identity

Science fiction cinema is a male dominated genre but true to Bigelow's track record as a director with her revisionary take on stereotypically masculine action movies the spectator is introduced to Mace as a strong, black, female character. The creation of Mace's character is consistent with a number of Bigelow's other films,

particularly *Near Dark* (1987) and *Blue Steel* (1990), where genre expectations are overturned and the female refuses to be confined within the genre's expected role for her. This is partly what has made Bigelow such a written about director, particularly for feminist film analysis, where her appropriation of the male action movie has received positive responses, in Tasker (1993), Powell (1997), and Murphy (1995), as well as more sceptical discussion from female critics such as Rascaroli (1997) and Springer (1999).

Mace is emotional but decisive, her sense of self and her sense of agency seem stronger than all the other characters. She has a confidence in her movements around the city through her job as an executive limousine driver and bodyguard. Her physical appearance, a finely tuned body shape, connoting physical prowess, is matched with her maternal and more glamorous persona, as represented in her attire for the millennium party. San Juan and Pratt (2002: 267) argue that in its representation of Mace the film upholds racial stereotypes when they assert that: "as chauffeur and security guard, Mace merges two clichés: Mammie and phallic black Amazon." In narrative terms I would argue that this claim is not sustainable as Mace displays a complexity to her persona not afforded any other character apart from Lenny. The representation of Mace as the black, female heroine struggles against countless negative images of Hollywood stereotyping, and while it perpetuates some of them to service the demands of the science fiction/action genre, Mace's grasp of the political implications of the Jeriko One tape puts the rescue of Faith by Lenny in the shade. Mace displays a sense of agency that cannot be confined within the clichés identified by San Juan and Pratt (2002).

Mace's sense of belonging to her location is suggested in her familial and maternal attachments. She is able to raise a young son on her own but has the support of an extended family with whom she leaves the boy on New Year's Eve while she and Lenny go off to confront the killers of Jeriko One. In contrast to the down-at-heel nature of Lenny's apartment and the absence of any family surroundings for the other characters this visit to Mace's extended family sets the African-American community apart. According to San Juan and Pratt (2002: 267), the representation of this New Year's Eve party is a striking contrast to the Millennium Party being held Downtown. This sets the African-American community "... apart from, and in opposition to, the cultural exhaustion, pleasures and impotence of white LA."

Mace's recognition of the civil unrest among the African-American community that would follow if the 'playback' clip of Jeriko's killing by two white cops is released to the media illustrates her grasp of the volatile nature of the city's racial politics. It is Mace who takes responsibility for what should be done with the tape, and, it is she, having subdued the two racist cops, who is set upon by the militarised police force in a scene choreographed to look like the Rodney King beating. It shows white uniformed men raining blows upon the black body. Kennedy (2000: 44) echoes Springer (1999) when he argues that this re-enactment of the Rodney King beating is "... a vulgar effort to focus the visual carnival of millennial unrest on the violent disciplining of a black body." Springer (1999: 217) asserts that the choreographing of Mace's beating to look like Rodney King's assault is "... a grotesque revision of the events ... the police chief proves ethical and benevolent, and the police force benign except for the two bad racist cops. ... Black rage has been erased, or, rather, redirected to support confused white people, at the film's dawn of the twenty-first century."

A closer analysis of the *mise-en-scène*, the use of editing and the camera movement in that final sequence suggests that the film is more ambiguous than Springer and Kennedy contend about the erasure of Black rage. The camera shifts ceaselessly between the crowd, the military police, Mace, and the two white cops who Mace has overpowered. Mace's beating begins as an almost ritualistic copy of the Rodney King video. The camera cuts between the crowd and Mace until there is an explosion of reaction as the crowd attacks the police in order to rescue Mace. Black rage is evident in the response of the crowd, and although, as Springer (1999: 217) suggests, Assistant Commissioner Strickland arrives from a helicopter, literally *deus ex machina*, the scene is finely balanced on the edge of civil unrest with people of Los Angeles rising up against police brutality.

Mace is saved by the intervention of the crowd, whose collective memory of the Rodney King beating seems to be invoked in the rapid editing between Mace's cries of agony, the baton-wielding police and the crowd (Figures 61-64). The camera focuses on the reactions of individual black faces in the crowd (Figures 65-67). In fact, the first person to come to her rescue, by jumping on a policeman's back, is a young black male (Figure 67). The camera cuts back to Mace in agony on the ground where the camera places the audience at ground level (Figure 68) and then draws back and rises on a crane to show the crowd overwhelming the police who are beating Mace (Figures 69-73). However, the crucial calming intervention is by the Assistant Police Commissioner, a white male authority figure who is shown to be on the side of the people (Figure 74). The film plays cleverly, if not altogether convincingly, with the responsibility of the police for inciting disorder but suggests

there is no wholesale conspiracy as the blame for Jeriko One's murder is seen as being the sole responsibility of the two rogue white officers.

Mace's occupation of a more mobile, confident, and pro-active narrative spatiality suggests that the film is offering a radical departure to the conventional Hollywood representation of the woman within the science fiction genre. Mace and Lenny's inter-racial love could also be seen as a refusal to endorse the standard Hollywood approach to inter-racial relationships, as outlined in the previous chapter. The focus on the kiss in the final scene (Figure 76), with the camera on a crane rising up to wrap the lovers in the excitement of the sights and sounds of the new millennium celebration could be seen as representing a positive change in the world of film, where inter-racial love is often a taboo subject, but also as a bridging of the spaces between the deeply segregated world of Los Angeles (Figures 75, 77 & 78). The resolution of the narrative seems to provide a degree of optimism that is certainly absent from much of the film's imagery.

Some have argued that the film's ending erodes some of the positive representation of black female spatiality, as it restores the centrality of white authority and redeems the white male. Rather than overturning the status quo the film actually subsumes blackness, and the female, in the recovery of power by the dominant forces of white order and stability. As Springer (1999: 215) argues in relation to *Strange Days*, *Virtuosity* and *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995) the "closure is consistent with the film's overall essentialism, which emerges most obviously in their racial politics." In all three films she argues:

... race is a central presence and African-Americans are consistently associated with the 'real'. There is an implicit message that African-Americans have a fundamentally 'grounded' essence that resists

electronically induced instability and can 'heal' white people who are careening out of control.

I recognise the force of Springer's argument but in relation to *Strange Days* I think she plays down the pro-active nature of Mace in the narrative. Mace may appear grounded in her determination not to use "playback" for recreational purposes but she is pragmatic and successful in her attempts to avoid the possibility of city-wide racial conflict. Mace's battle with the two white racist cops has a great deal more cinematic potency than Lenny's fight with Max over Faith. After all, it is Lenny who faints near the end when one of the white cops, who have been handcuffed by Mace, shoots a pistol at them. As Guerrero (1998: 333) has suggested, Mace's friendship and potential relationship with Lenny "is by far the most interesting buddy variation of the 1990s (and is) thematically radical and creative in terms of race, gender and romance". Overall the film probably promises more than it can deliver in terms of a new departure for inter-racial relationships but the recognition that embracing rather than rejecting difference is the only way to survive, is the potent final image of the film.

Immigration as Invasion

Even though *Strange Days*, *Virtuosity* (1995), *Johnny Mnemonic* (1996) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers, 1999) foreground the role of African-Americans in reclaiming the 'real' and helping to restore equilibrium, albeit in the service of white authority or the white male, there seems little or no role for the most visible portion of the Los Angeles population, Latina/os. This reluctance cuts across all genres and is evident in the representations of contemporary Los Angeles. Although ostensibly in *Alien Nation* Latina/os do not figure directly in the narrative, the story of the Newcomers and their treatment by white society has interesting

parallels with the institutionalized racism faced by immigrant groups such as Latina/os in Los Angeles.

Science fiction cinema has long been fascinated with aliens, extra-terrestrials, and their contact with humans. For example, the science fiction cinema of the 1950s can be interpreted as reflecting a sense of paranoia about invasion that mirrored the fears and anxieties promoted in the general populace about the threat of communist infiltration (Biskind, 1985; Jancovich, 1996; Sobchack, 1989). What the genre seemed to be doing was offering an outlet for the public's fears and anxieties about the atomic age, and the Cold War. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956), re-made in the 1970s and the 1990s, is a useful template for invasion anxiety.

Davis (1999) and Avila (2004) offer a well focused argument that makes the direct link between the rise of the urban science fiction film in the 1950s and their revival post *Blade Runner* (1982) with the increasing preoccupation of whites with the visibility of the alien Other. Avila (2004: 87) suggests:

Within the changing racial geography of the postwar, post-industrial metropolis, the urban science fiction film provided a cultural arena where suburban America could measure its whiteness against the image of the alien Other.

Davis (1999: 339-340) suggests that during the 1980s Hollywood seemed preoccupied by the arrival of extraterrestrials, more often than not signalling the end of civilization, or at least, white civilization.

Hollywood likewise was experimenting with the concept of shipwrecked aliens as Los Angeles's next ethnic minority. In the shadowlands of white

anxiety, the distinctions between the images of space aliens and illegal aliens was subjected to repeated elision. Immigration and invasion, in a paranoid register, became synonyms.

Avila (2004: 96) develops this argument and charts a longer history of connection between white flight and the urban science fiction film.

As white flight and suburbanization promoted the racial polarization of postwar America between 'chocolate cities' and 'vanilla suburbs', cultural productions such as the urban science fiction film represented that polarization in graphic images of alien invaders and the spectacular disintegration of American cities.

The elision of the distinction between space aliens and illegal aliens is made very explicit in the film *Alien Nation* (1988) and in the short-lived television series, *Alien Nation*, (1989-90) which followed it, although the franchise was kept going for a further five television films through the 1990s. According to Davis (1999: 241):

... the post 1980 boom in imagined aliens coincided with the increasing visibility of immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and East Asia in the daily life of the Los Angeles region. Like the Aryan survivalist novel, the fantasy of alien impregnation played off white fear and disorientation in the face of irreversible demographic change.

That irreversible demographic change, and the fears of the white community about losing control of the spaces of the city, and particularly the threat of racial mixing, in the face of a perceived invasion of immigrants, are themes that link past and future visions and, as will be demonstrated in the following two chapters, it is a recurring concern in contemporary Hollywood representations of Los Angeles. Yet, as convincing as I find the arguments of Davis (1999) and Avila (2004) with regard to the projection of white fear about the increasing visibility from the 1950s of African-American, Latina/os and Asians as a key concern in the urban science fiction

film, I would suggest that a closer analysis of issues to do with identity and mobility points to a more hopeful vision of urban living in the cinematic Los Angeles.

Alien Nation (1988), although it may lack the stylised glamour of *Strange Day's* future noir, is interesting in a number of respects, particularly as it moves the discussion of identity beyond the black/white dichotomy. Released in 1988 but set in the near future 1991, the science fiction premise on which the film is built involves the arrival of a six-mile long space ship in the Mojave Desert with 260,000 humanoid aliens. The space ship crash-lands on earth when the Newcomers rebel against their slave masters. These Newcomers are quarantined and then slowly assimilated into Los Angeles society. Genetically engineered by an extra-terrestrial intelligence as slave labour, the Newcomers are highly adaptable for work in heavy industry, chemical processing and other hazardous occupations. The film begins with a news review of the space ship landing, and clips of the then president Ronald Reagan appearing to welcome the Newcomers. This is followed by a cruise through the Los Angeles neighbourhood where they have settled showing their assimilation into American capitalism by being targeted as an audience for advertising and consumption with images of Newcomers on billboards for Pepsi and McDonalds.

The Tenctonese, Newcomers, or in racist parlance of the film, *slags*, have gathered in a neighbourhood not unlike the MacArthur Park district of contemporary Los Angeles, referred to in the film's racist vernacular as Slagtown. The Newcomers seem to be constructed as a composite of racial stereotypes of Latinos/as, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, eastern Europeans and Pacific Islanders.

Reminiscent of the *mise-en-scène*, editing and camera movement used in *Colors* (1989) to represent contemporary Los Angeles, the policing of Slagtown is seen from the point of view of two L.A. cops, Matt Sykes (James Caan) and his long time partner, black detective Bill Tuggle (Roger Aaron Brown). When Tuggle is killed in a shootout with a number of Newcomers involved in the armed robbery of a store, Sykes vows vengeance on the *slags* that gunned down his partner. The only way he sees of making progress in the case is to team up with the first Newcomer detective on the force, Sam "George" Francisco (Mandy Patinkin). The film follows the conventional pattern of a buddy-buddy police thriller as the reluctant partners begin slowly to respect one another. More interestingly they unravel the conspiracy set up by Newcomer entrepreneur William Harcourt (Terence Stamp), to sell a highly addictive narcotic to the Newcomers. In the final scenes our good-hearted bigot, Sykes, is saved by Francisco and forms a bond of friendship with him that sees Francisco attend Sykes's daughter's wedding. Much like the closure of *Strange Days*, the narrative suggests a reconciling of opposites and an accommodation of difference as the way forward.

One of the key features associated with the genre of science fiction film, its cultural instrumentality, is to allegorise the contemporary by dressing it up in the costume and *mise-en-scène* of another time or another world. The return from the peripheries to the metropolis of a genetically engineered slave group is the basis of the story of *Blade Runner*, and *Alien Nation* takes on that story for a whole population, without the condition of the short life span that afflicts the *Blade Runner* replicants. While the narrative of *Blade Runner* centred on the replicants' quest for human status, the kernel of *Alien Nation's* narrative is the assimilation of

the Newcomers into Los Angeles. In *Alien Nation* the scale of the Newcomers population metaphorises the difficulties faced by all immigrant groups, but also highlights the sense of foreboding evident in the white population about the influx of this other group.

The opening scene involves Sykes and his partner Tuggle as they patrol Slagtown with Sykes looking out the window making a series of racist remarks that might have been lifted from a similar patrol of African-African neighbourhoods, or Latino/a barrios. Tuggle is a black officer and he deals with Sykes's bigotry by deflecting attention on to Sykes's personal life (Figure 83). The bond of friendship between them is strong. The purpose of the black partner may be to leaven Sykes's apparent bigotry towards the Newcomers. By implication, Sykes can't be that bad if his best friend is an African-American. Much like the use of black characters in some examples of classic *film noir* cited in the last chapter, Tuggle is there to provide a counterpoint but also a degree of reinforcement for the racist views of the white character. After Tuggle has been murdered Sykes's teaming with Francisco places him in another inter-racial, more correctly, inter-species partnership.

A close analysis of this journey identifies how the *mise-en-scène*, the editing and the camera movement provide clear parallels between the Newcomers and other immigrant groups. Davis (1999: 341) suggests this representation of the Newcomers "... immediately socialized to poverty, alienation and addiction of the urban underclass." I find this analysis accurate but perhaps too culturally pessimistic as it fails to recognise the ability of Newcomers such as Francisco and Harcourt to embrace in their different ways the American Dream. The camera flicks

between Sykes's point of view and a more omniscient point of view recycling images of the cinematic city's dangerous zones, but these are interspersed with further clear examples of the Newcomers' desire to assimilate (Figures 79-82). On seeing a group of Newcomer streetwalkers in Slagtown (Figure 86), Sykes enquires of his partner whether they have the same "equipment down there" as humans, to which Tuggle immediately replies in the affirmative, a joking response, but one that plays on the stereotype of the African-American male as sexual athlete (Figure 85). As seen through the bigoted white male view of Sykes, sexual congress between Newcomers and inter-species sex has a strong sense of repulsion and attraction. This ambiguity about inter-species sexual contact is further evident in the scene where Francisco and Sykes visit a Newcomer bar in Slagtown where Sykes tries to use his police power to extract information from the clientele who are unimpressed by his orders and his physical presence. Newcomer men have much more physical strength and are seen as a threat to white male dominance, hence the show of machismo by Sykes and his rescue by Francisco. The camera cuts to a shot of a human female customer at the bar, and then a close-up of the hand of her Newcomer male companion proprietarily on her (Figures 87 & 88). Seen from Sykes's point of view the close-up is used to signal his sense of unease.

The third scene where the attraction and repulsion of Sykes, as the normative white male, to a female Newcomer is shown when he and Francisco interview an exotic dancer Cassandra (Leslie Bevis) at the nightclub Encounters, which as its name suggests, offers a place for illicit sexual contact between the species. After watching Cassandra do her exotic dance routine (Figure 89) Sykes and Francisco follow her back stage where she changes under Sykes' voyeuristic gaze. When Francisco exits Cassandra takes pleasure in making Sykes feel uncomfortable by

explicit flirting and bodily contact (Figure 90). Through Sykes the film reveals the degree of anxiety and attraction among the white male population about the immigrant group.

Anxiety about the Newcomers' intellectual ability is also made apparent in the opening news review scene when two white males are interviewed about the arrival of the Newcomers. "Why don't they go and live in Russia", the older white male suggests, and the younger white male complains about the intellectual ability of Newcomer ten year olds and their eagerness to work. He fears for his future job prospects.

One of the film's many contradictions is that while the opening scenes involving the television reports on the landing of the Newcomers and Sykes's and Tuggle's drive through Slagtown suggest widespread discrimination against the Newcomers this is only seen explicitly through one racist cop and a couple of television interviewees. Institutional discrimination against the Newcomers is somewhat displaced by the focus on Fedorchuk (Peter Jason), who we see watching the television reports on the third anniversary of the landing of the space ship carrying the Newcomers in the Mojave desert. The audience are not made aware he is a cop but his racism is clear in the remark, "I'll drink to that", when a white male interviewee on the television proclaims "why don't they go to Russia". We meet Fedorchuk again with his partner Altez (Tony Perez) when Tuggle has been killed and realise they are LAPD detectives assigned to cover the case. Sykes's disdain for them is evident as he sees them as lazy and incompetent, to Sykes's mind much worse than being a racist cop. In a later scene when the body of Joshua Strader

(Jeff Kober), owner of Encounters nightclub, is found at the beach side Fedorchuk scrawls graffiti on Sykes's car (Figures 91 & 92).

The desire of the Newcomers to assimilate and their aspirational nature is represented by Francisco's promotion to detective and in the portrayal of his home life. Francisco lives in a neat bungalow away from the urban decay of Slagtown. He has a wife and child who kiss and wave goodbye to him eliciting a mocking response from Sykes who is waiting in the car to pick him up (Figures 93-96). Francisco, the newcomer has the happy family life that has become impossible for Sykes, and this makes him aware of his estrangement from his daughter. She has invited him to her wedding. As his ex-wife and her new partner are paying for the wedding his pride makes him reluctant to attend. In one of the final scenes after Francisco has rescued him from the harbour we see them both together preparing to attend the wedding with Francisco helping to fix Sykes's bow tie (Figure 101).

The entrepreneurial ability of the Newcomers and their readiness to accumulate capital is evident in the character of William Harcourt (Terence Stamp). At a formal dinner in his honour hosted by the Mayor, who is of Latino origin, Harcourt's financial acumen and apparent philanthropy is applauded by a cross-section of wealthy Los Angeles (Figures 97-100). Upward mobility has happened with great speed for Harcourt although we do not learn the origin of his wealth. It later emerges that Harcourt is the power behind the manufacture and distribution of Jabroka, a potent narcotic used by their former slave masters to keep the Tectonese compliant. This narcotic is only addictive for Newcomers but Harcourt is ready to go into partnership with human criminal elements to distribute the drug. The capitalist as the main source of evil is not a new message but one that gives a

certain edge to the representation of Harcourt, a Newcomer who has embraced the American Dream so readily.

Reviews by Ebert (1988), Kampsley (1988), and Maslin (1988) at the time of the film's release highlight the potentially powerful allegorical nature of the central premise, *Newcomers* read as an amalgam of immigrant groups. However, they considered the film to revert too readily to the buddy-buddy formula evident in a range of 1980s and 1990 films such as the *Lethal Weapon* series (Donner, 1987, 1989, 1992 and 1998). This teaming of mis-matched pairs usually involving white and black cops or investigators has been termed by Guerrero (1993) as: "The Black Image in Protective Custody." Guerrero (1993: 244) focuses on those examples of the biracial buddy formula that work as an instrument of domination and keep the Other in protective custody. He also points to the potential of other biracial buddy movies including *Strange Days*, in the partnership of Lenny and Mace, and I would argue for Sykes and Francisco in *Alien Nation*, to open up new possibilities and combinations.

What drives Sykes as the normative white male in *Alien Nation* is revenge for the death of his partner. As the case develops Sykes's bonding with Francisco enables greater co-operation between the two. Sykes's revenge narrative is displaced by Francisco's determination to destroy the drug Jabroka, what Sykes sees as being crucial evidence in the case against Harcourt. In a reversal of roles that lifts *Alien Nation* out of the biracial buddy formula criticised by Guerrero (1993), Francisco's narrative of preserving the reputation of his people and their potential for further assimilation by destroying the drug, is an act with broader social, political and racial implications than Sykes's revenge narrative. Francisco's job develops into

saving his race and foregrounds the importance of the message of assimilation that the film seems to offer.

The reactionary nature of the Sykes's character in the film is lessened somewhat by his contact with a "good" Newcomer. He learns to trust Francisco, which was one of his main complaints about the Newcomers in his tirade against them while driving through Slagtown in the opening scene of the narrative. The relatively optimistic ending appears to reflect a message of assimilation as the necessary path to follow for immigrant groups, for the white male who can come to terms with difference the film suggests a better future as seen in the final shot of Francisco attending the wedding of Sykes's daughter as his new police partner.

I would argue that the central idea of *Alien Nation*, the extra-terrestrial alien read as the illegal alien, is a viable interpretation. Even though the potential for a critique of racial politics is somewhat lost in the formulaic narrative pattern of a buddy-buddy relationship, where the ill matched male pair become life long friends, *Alien Nation* still raises a range of confused and challenging questions about inter-racial friendship, minority space and place, and the white male fear of being overrun and emasculated.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Blade Runner*, *Strange Days*, and *Alien Nation* reveals a genre whose cultural instrumentality is to reflect and question anxieties about change in the urban landscape of future, and allegorically, of contemporary Los Angeles. These reflections might be summarized as follows: First, there is the crisis of identity, particularly white male identity, in the postmodern city, in the face of new

technologies and new ethnic and spatial configurations. Second, there is the breakdown of boundaries between the self and others, between private and public space, as evidenced in the surveillance technology of SQUID in *Strange Days*, creating a city where a “paranoid spatiality has become the prominent condition of visibility” (Kennedy, 2000:45). Third, the white male fear of being overrun by the immigrant hordes strongly stated in *Alien Nation*, and played out in other future visions, such as *Virtuosity* (1996), *Escape from LA* (1996), and *Blade Runner* (1982), as a warning about the contemporary city.

But, at the same time as the films reflect a series of warnings about the future, in *Strange Days* and *Alien Nation* in particular, there is also a sense of qualified optimism. This is evident in the representation of Mace as a mobile, confident, and proactive black female, who preserves and protects her own identity. Her relationship with Lenny, despite the reservations about the subsuming of blackness in the reassertion of white, male police authority at the end of the film, suggests a possibility of bridging the segregated spaces and identities of the city. Similarly, in *Alien Nation* the growing relationship between Sam Francisco, the Newcomer, and Sykes, the bigoted white male, suggests the possibility of difference being accepted rather than denied. If, as has been argued, the conclusion of *Strange Days* offers hope for a new millennium, in the form of Lenny’s and Maces’ inter-racial romance, then the power of that representation, together with the embrace by the crowd, seems to send a positive message about the future of the city. All of this optimism is qualified by the readiness of the crowd to change from supportive to threatening. In so far as racial mixing is revealed as the most heinous sin in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, the potential development of a replicant/human/replicant hybridity in *Blade Runner*, an inter-racial relationship in *Strange Days* and a newcomer/human

friendship in *Alien Nation* points to a more optimistic outcome for the future. The conclusion of all three films might also be read in a less optimistic light as subsuming the Other, as represented by Rachael/Deckard in *Blade Runner*, Mace in *Strange Days* and Francisco in *Alien Nation* into the mainstream of white society and authority. What this analysis of the cinematic city of science fiction points towards is a strange mix of optimism and pessimism, even as the dystopian nightmare of the future cinematic city seduces the viewer with its aesthetics of disaster, the possibility of emerging identities and mobilities are explored.

Strange Days, despite its return to essentialism about race, noted by Springer, offers a degree of progressive representation in relation to the female in the city. The limited scope the science fiction genre allows for female characters, with the qualified exception of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in the *Alien* quartet (1979, Scott; *Aliens*, Cameron, 1986; *Alien 3*, Fincher, 1992; *Alien Resurrection*, Jeunet, 1997) would suggest that it has similar problems of female representation as *film noir*. Neither *Strange Days*, nor *Alien Nation*, offer the same degree of revisionism of genre that *Devil in a Blue Dress* appears to offer. *Strange Days* does deal explicitly with new ways of seeing the city, but discredits the idea of the electronic expanded identity that the internet, virtual reality, and other forms of simulation seem to offer. The "space of flows" elaborated by Castells (1989) can be taken as a useful metaphor for visualizing the postmodern city, where space and time can be merged by the use of satellite, digital and computer technology. The process of globalization is represented through the mise-en-scène and spectacle of the science fiction Los Angeles, but they are held up for examination and criticism. This appears to be the cultural instrumentality of the genre, to reflect fears and anxieties about future /contemporary urban living, raising questions about space,

place and identity that are foreshadowed in past visions and played on systematically in contemporary representations.

The concerns and warnings evident in past and future visions, it is argued, are carried over to varying degrees in the analysis of contemporary representations of the cinematic city. What appears to be a recurring trope in past, future and contemporary visions of Los Angeles is to portray the city as a “frontier space in which ethno-racial difference is played out in symbolic conflicts centred on the insecurities of a white male subject” (Kennedy, 2000: 46). The cultural instrumentality of the genre is not only important in terms of reflecting the anxieties suggested above but also in the connections between these texts as films and the broader social, cultural and spatial discourses to which the films refer. For example, the replication of the Rodney King beating in *Strange Days* and *Virtuosity*, two films made in 1995, frames the concerns about spatial and identity politics within the broader context of the ‘real’ world. The ways in which cinematic representations of future Los Angeles work on the insecurities of the white subject in relation to mobility and identity is also central to the analysis in the next chapter, where the past and future cinematic city becomes the contemporary cinematic Los Angeles in *Falling Down* (Schumacher, 1993).

Chapter Five

Cinematic visions of contemporary Los Angeles

What is clear, even to the casual observer, is that there is more than one Los Angeles, that these 'multiple Los Angeleses' are a defining characteristic of the region (Rocco, 1996:366).

Whites in Los Angeles County have been declining in numbers each decade since 1960, when many began to move to Orange County and other outlying areas. In the 1990s Whites decreased in numbers for the first time in Orange, San Bernadino, and Ventura Counties. If that trend and the rapid growth of the Latino populations continue, Latinos will soon outnumber Whites in the outlying counties as they do now in Los Angeles County (Allen, J.P. & Turner, E. 2002: 10/11).

Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to focus on the ways in which contemporary film addresses the fears and anxieties of the white population about the demographic changes happening in Los Angeles. One of the arguments arising out of the analysis of the representation of mobility and identity in *Falling Down* (1993) is that it addresses directly the Anglo-American fears of being over-run, of becoming the minority, of being 'unable to move through and occupy city space, as prophesied in *Blade Runner* (1982), and implied in Allen & Turner's analysis of the 2000 Census quoted above. Part of my decision to focus on *Falling Down* in detail is its emergence as a key text about the issues of identity and mobility in the cinematic Los Angeles. Since its release *Falling Down* has been the subject of much critical attention from film academics such as Clover (1993); Davies (1995, 2002) and Gabriel (1996), in cultural studies by Kennedy (1996), Mahoney (1998) and Zilberg (1998), in cultural geography by Cresswell (1999) and Dunn & Winchester (1999).

Apart from the critical and academic analysis the film has accumulated it was also a box-office success and its central character D-FENS (Michael Douglas) was on the cover of *Newsweek* (1993) for a lead story entitled "White male paranoia." The white male identity under threat has been the clear focus for most of these accounts but I want to broaden this discussion about identity by examining in particular the mobilities of the central white male characters, D-FENS and Prendergast (Robert Duvall), and highlight the ways in which race and class are represented in the film. The (in)ability of the central male characters to move through the spaces and places of the cinematic city reveals, but also attempts to heal, the crisis of identity for whites that incorporates issues of gender and ethnicity, but also class. Indeed, in its confused way, *Falling Down* is one of the few mainstream Hollywood films to focus on the economic order as a determinant of identity. Representations of class position figure strongly in the film and this is detailed through the journey that D-FENS takes and the range of people he encounters.

With regards to its budget, leading male star, Michael Douglas, production values, marketing and distribution, and the dominance of narrative *Falling Down* has all the characteristics of a mainstream Hollywood product. As Dunn & Winchester (1999:182) note: ... "many mainstream films are positioned within the structures of capitalism, patriarchy and ethnocentrism." Hollywood film, for example, *Falling Down*, needs to be seen as "...essentially controlled by the dominant capitalist culture, and therefore reproducing its conservative ideology ... of the family, community and nation as natural and normal."

But though I have set *Falling Down* clearly within the dominant structure described above it is a much more ambiguous text than many other mainstream representations of Los Angeles that provide a white point-of-view; for example *Anywhere but Here* (Thomas, 1999), *City Of Angels* (Siberling, 1998), and *Hanging Up* (Keaton, 1998). Certainly, the film addresses directly the fears and anxieties of white male America, and it sets up preferred readings in its outcome. The narrative closure restores order and places another white male in a dominant position ensuring that women, ethnic groups, and the poor are kept, both literally and metaphorically in their place. However, a close textual analysis of the film enables us to step back and recognise the more confusing messages about the city, the family, capitalism, multi-culturalism, and identity, that the film's narrative system is unable to contain.

Part of my argument about the analysis of the representation of mobility and identity in the cinematic city is to highlight their relationship to the material spaces and places of urban living, but also to emphasise the ways in which mise-en-scène, camera movement and positioning, and cross-cutting, can be seen to operate as much more than functions of the narrative. These elements of on-screen and off-screen space operate within the narrative but they can, as I will argue is the case in *Falling Down*, help to reveal the tensions and contradictions that the film's narrative cannot suppress even when it seems to restore order in the final scene.

While in the previous chapter I suggested that in cinematic representation of Los Angeles's future the dystopian tends to dominate, it is perhaps more useful to plot a continuum along which films can be placed in their mix of utopian and dystopian references. Certainly it is this continuum, which is more useful when considering

the range of contemporary visions of Los Angeles. While the dystopian vision of Los Angeles tends to prevail in most filmic representations, there are a number of films that continue to construct Los Angeles as a utopic site; where dreams can come true, even if this is undercut by a mocking tone about the Edenic nature of the setting and some anxiety about the ethnic make-up of the majority of the inhabitants, for example, *L.A. Story* (Jackson, 1991), *Clueless* (Heckerling, 1997), *Get Shorty* (Sonnefeld, 1997) and *The Big Lebowski* (Coen Brothers, 1998). In all four films the comedy/fantasy genre is used to seal off the perceived common problems of Los Angeles and avoid or contain the multiple geographies of the city. This sealing off is most clearly seen in Diane Keaton's *Hanging Up* (1998) where the story is set in Los Angeles but nobody seems to exist apart from the three white female characters who engage in a three way telephone conversation that does not recognise the space outside their characters.

Placing *Falling Down* within a designated genre is more problematic. The film can be approached most productively by considering it as an intertextual dialogue between what Zilberg (1998: 192) has identified as "*film noir* and futuristic desolation epics, on the one hand, and a western epic adventure and cops-and-robbers on the other hand." The director Joel Schumacher, the star, Michael Douglas and the production company Warner Brothers sought to publicise the film as belonging to a "state of the nation", or "social problem" genre. Schumacher in an interview with the *New York Daily News* (1993) after the film's release emphasised the power of the screenplay when he first read it.

There was an everyday insanity about it. Darkly funny, but containing a monstrous anger that actually reflected the views of a wide cross-section of American Society. It was a script that dealt with racist, bigoted people who were angry that all they had worked for was disappearing.

The tag line on posters, advertisements and trailers identified the film as: "The adventures of an ordinary man at war with the everyday world." This attempt to situate the film as "speaking for a wide cross-section of American society", with the "cross-section" and the "ordinary man" figured as white of course, establishes the filmmaker's intentions to address the audience about contemporary urban living. *Falling Down* sets itself up to be viewed in terms of broader systems of cultural meaning. As Zilberg (1998: 195) comments:

Falling Down is filmed in the shadow of history – rumours of immigration and inner city crises and the urgent need to contain and police those crises – (and) the radical displacement of cultures brought on by global movements of labour, commodities and technologies.

Released three months after the Rodney King riots/uprising the mixed reception the film received provided further controversy and publicity. Klein (1997: 107) details the reaction of some audiences in Los Angeles cheering as D-FENS makes his violent way across the city. However, others including the *L.A. Times* film critic Kenneth Turan claimed the film was racist and anti-immigrant. Radio talk shows, magazines and as mentioned above Michael Douglas as D-FENS made the cover of *Newsweek* for a story titled "white male paranoia". In terms of its cultural instrumentality the film demands to be investigated in a way that connects the city depicted in the film to the city that had just gone through an enormous civil disruption.

In many ways, the crudeness of the stereotypes of Latina/os in *Falling Down* marks it as just one of many such representations of Latina/os in Los Angeles to emerge from contemporary Hollywood. In contrast to these other films, though, in *Falling Down* what the film does culturally is to place the concept of the Latinization of L.A. at centre stage. Building on films such as *Colors* (1988) as Norman Klein

(1997:107) suggests, *Falling Down* was the first full “remapping of the new Los Angeles myth - the city as Hispanic hell.”

Walking through the text

Falling Down begins with one of its central characters, D-FENS (Michael Douglas), caught in a traffic jam on the Los Angeles road system, where (as we learn later) he is on his way from his mother’s house in Pasadena. D-FENS abandons his car and walks away responding to the question of the driver behind with, “I’m going home”. So begins his journey on foot across the multiple geographies of the city. In the same traffic jam the film’s other central character, Detective Prendergast (Robert Duvall), working his last day as an L.A.P.D. detective, helps to move the abandoned car out of the way and notices the car registration, D-FENS.

D-FENS walks into a grocery store run by a Korean, Mr. Lee (Michael Paul Chan), to ask for change for the phone. This encounter precipitates an aggressive response from D-FENS as he trashes the shop with a baseball bat retrieved from Mr. Lee, because of what he sees as the high prices being charged.

As Prendergast clears his desk his ex-partner, Sandra Torres (Rachel Ticotin), is the only one of his colleagues who treats him with respect and they agree to have lunch together. The scene changes to a Venice Beach bungalow where D-FENS’ ex-wife, Beth (Barbara Hershey), is preparing a birthday party for her daughter Adele (Joey Hope Singer). D-FENS is trying to reach her by phone but keeps getting an engaged tone. D-FENS is threatened by two Latino youths who demand his briefcase as a toll for passing through their neighbourhood. D-FENS fights back

with the baseball bat he has taken from Mr. Lee's store and confiscates a flick knife.

Back in his office Prendergast takes a call from his highly-strung wife (Tuesday Weld) and placates her with entreaties and promises. Mr. Lee arrives at his desk to report the destruction caused by D-FENS in his store, describing the perpetrator as 'a white man with a white shirt and tie'. Looking for revenge the heavily armed Latino youths cruise in their car finding D-FENS on a pay-phone to his ex-wife. They shoot indiscriminately at the sidewalk in a drive-by that misses D-FENS and they end up crashing around the corner. D-FENS walks over to the car and relieves them of their cache of weapons. As reports of this incident come into the detective squad room Prendergast has to sit through a last-day speech from his bullying Captain Yardley (Raymond J. Barry). D-FENS' ex-wife Beth scared by the tone of D-FENS' call asks for police protection as she has a barring order against her ex-husband.

D-FENS walks through a public park and is confronted by a beggar (John Fleck) to whom he gives his empty briefcase. He makes his way to a Whammyburger restaurant where he is informed, to his great agitation, that he is minutes too late to order the breakfast menu. He takes out a sub-machine gun and terrorises the staff and customers. He buys a present for his daughter from a street vendor and has an encounter with an African-American male with a sign saying "not economically viable" protesting outside a Savings and Loan Bank. The protestor is arrested but not before he makes eye contact with D-FENS with the remark, "Don't forget me".

Back in the station Prendergast is watching his colleagues interview a young Latina woman, Angelina (Karina Arroyave), the girlfriend of one of the Latino youths, who denies that the drive-by and subsequent crash was a gangland feud. She describes D-FENS, a guy with a white shirt and tie, as the intended target of the drive-by. D-FENS enters a surplus store where the owner conceals him when Sandra makes her rounds of the neighbourhood after the Whammyburger incident. The owner (Frederic Forrest) is revealed as a neo-Nazi homophobe who changes his attitude to D-FENS and tries to assault him. D-FENS uses the flick knife to injure the owner and then shoots him. He leaves the surplus store dressed in combat fatigues carrying his bag of weapons and a bazooka.

Convinced that the white man in the white shirt and tie is responsible for all the incidents, Prendergast teams up with Sandra and returns to Mr. Lee's store where the first incident took place. He recognises the freeway above as the site of his early morning traffic jam and rushes up the embankment to the spot where he sees the abandoned car with the personalised number plate, D-FENS. Sandra tracks down the real name of the car owner, William Foster, and they visit his mother's house where he has been residing. They discover that he has been fired from his job and that he has an ex-wife and child in Venice Beach.

D-FENS crosses a Beverly Hills golf course and is provoked by two elderly golfers, Frank (Jack Betts) and Jim (Al Mancini) and responds by shooting at their golf cart causing one of the men to have a heart attack. He then climbs over the fence and enters the grounds of a Beverly Hills mansion owned by a plastic surgeon where he initially terrorises the caretaker (John Diehl) and his family. Another phone call to Beth signals his arrival in Venice Beach. Unable to get further police protection Beth

escapes from the house with Adele. D-FENS's entry into his former home is followed by the arrival of Prendergast and Sandra. She is wounded by D-FENS who makes his escape towards Venice Pier where he realises his ex-wife and child have gone. When Prendergast and D-FENS meet, D-FENS finally decides that his daughter will in fact be better off financially if he dies and so he tricks Prendergast into a gunfight and is shot. He falls off the end of the pier into the Pacific Ocean. Prendergast takes the family back to their house where he makes up his mind not to leave the police force having had the satisfaction of proving his captain wrong about his abilities.

Los Angeles without car

Despite the claims made by the film's tag line, 'an adventure of an ordinary man at war with the everyday world', *Falling Down* is actually about two men, two white men, D-FENS and Prendergast. The audience is asked to assume D-FENS' point of view in the opening shots of the film and we stay firmly with him until Prendergast is introduced. The point of view then cross-cuts between these two characters for the rest of the film, indeed there are only three scenes where neither of them appears.

A crucial aspect of the film in terms of how it moves away from the traditional car-dominated mise-en-scène of cinematic Los Angeles is the focus on walking. D-FENS' walking propels him into a series of geographic encounters that would otherwise be overlooked or unseen from the car. The walking perspective ensures the audience encounters rather than avoids some of the city's multiple geographies. That act of walking sees the central character D-FENS engage in a flânerie of sorts. A film about walking in Los Angeles interpellates the viewer to walk the walk with

D-FENS as he encounters the semiotic minefield of city life. As Cresswell (1997: 227) suggests:

The act of walking across Los Angeles can easily be romanticized as the act of a postmodern flâneur disrupting the functional structures of life in the city.

This connection between flânerie and D-FENS is useful, not, as Cresswell cautions, as a way of romanticizing D-FENS' resistance but in the reading of the term offered by Shields (1994). Shields, (1994: 72) draws out ways in which the practice of flânerie is anything but the smug gawping at the panorama of city life that is often suggested (Donald, 1999: 44). In contrast, Shields (1994: 66) suggests a sense of uncertainty about the flâneur, whose previous ownership and unfettered geographical mobility, is called into question.

One might venture, then, that while the flâneur is presented as a native of his locality, he is actually an individual caught in the act of attempting to regain and keep his native's mastery of his environment.

Discussing the use of the flâneur in Benjamin, Shields (1994: 77) provides a description that could equally be applied to D-FENS' alienation.

As Benjamin does not fail to notice, the flâneur is the embodiment of alienation. Triply so: within himself, between himself and his world, and between himself and other people.

According to Frisby (1995: 85) Walter Benjamin "... was the first to recognise the flâneur as a significant cultural figure of modernity," using the flâneur as a methodology in his own analysis of the city, its spatial relations and the growth of consumerism, in his unfinished *Arcades Project*. As Donald (1999: 44) notes: "In part, the flâneur represents one of Benjamin's defining topics; or rather, the figure

condenses a number of themes." Donald (1999: 44) is himself sometimes sceptical about the use of the flâneur as a methodological tool claiming that the "... figure risks becoming a cliché – sometimes, it seems little more than a way of claiming a frisson of outlaw glamour for the pedestrian tasks of the sociologist of urban culture." And yet Donald also concedes that "... the flâneur remains a pivotal term in Benjamin's unfolding project and in his emerging perspective".

So, with the cautionary notes of Cresswell (1999) and Donald (1999) in mind the connections between the film's use of the journey on foot and flânerie is confined to two specific areas. The first, following Shields' (1994) reading of the figure, sees D-FENS in a similar position; no longer master of the city's spaces and, because of joblessness, a consumer of limited power. Second, the film spectator who follows D-FENS' and Prendergast's walking has the privileged and mobile gaze associated with the classic accounts of nineteenth century flânerie (Benjamin, 1973; Buck-Morss, 1989). This emphasis on the similarity between spectatorship and flânerie as a practice is compelling and elaborated more directly in relation to film spectatorship by Bruno (1993: 48) when she states:

As perceptual modes, flânerie and cinema share the montage of images, the spatio-temporal juxtaposition, the obscuring of the mode of production, and the 'physiognomic' impact - the spectatorial reading of bodily signs. The dream web of film perception, with its geographical implantation, embodies flânerie's mode of watching and its public dimension.

She goes on to make these connections more explicit when she asserts:

The perfect flâneur is the passionate spectator, Baudelaire states. The wandering urban spectator, historically eclipsed by the life of the big modern city, is transformed, reinvented, and re-inscribed in the figure of the film spectator. The perfect flâneur is the passionate film spectator ... Founded on the physical/emotional experience of both intimacy and collectivity, and the dialectics of imaginary absorption, film spectatorship dwells on the borders between interior and exterior.

While the film's story may not be complex, the ways in which mobility and identity are represented is complex, confused and revealing. The analysis of film techniques such as mise-en-scène, editing and camera movement helps to identify how spectators are given access to the interior and exterior worlds of D-FENS and Prendergast. For both characters the film offers an analysis of why their sense of identity is in crisis. More than this though, it is the way in which the film plays out their crisis of identity, their curtailed mobility, and constructs the "other", whether in terms of racial, gender or class difference, as a contributory factor to their crises that makes it so important in the current thesis. For both D-FENS and Prendergast, issues of identity are worked through (if not worked out) as they in turn move through a number of different spaces; that include the domestic, work and public spaces of Los Angeles. Differences in their spatial practices help to outline key differences between D-FENS and Prendergast (Figures 102 – 107). They also help to keep the spectator in a shifting identification between the two central male characters and their sense of place (-lessness) in the city (Figures 108 – 111).

Recovering control of domestic space

If, as David Reiff (1992: 45) has suggested, the home has become a key site of identity for many white Angelenos then this space figures prominently in the crises of identity played out by the two main white male characters of *Falling Down*. D-FENS is barred from returning to the home he once shared with his ex-wife and daughter. He is living with his mother in what looks like his childhood home but his bedroom is devoid of all homeliness, it looks like an anonymous hotel bedroom. Prendergast's anxiety about domestic space is represented through his phone contact with his neurotic wife. Prendergast and his wife have suffered the loss of

their child through Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and his wife's neurosis is explained through both that loss and the potentially dangerous nature of his job as a policeman. He and his wife are about to move to a retirement community in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, taking them out of the urban space of her fear. The mise-en-scène frames her as appearing to be trapped within the home, afraid to venture outside to do the shopping. This sense of fear of the outside world is also mirrored in the scene at D-FENS' mother's house, where the mother is reluctant to let Prendergast and Sandra across the threshold. By the end of his journey D-FENS has scared his own family out of their home, but in death has perhaps secured his child's welfare through his insurance policy. Prendergast has asserted himself in a telephone conversation with his wife and decided not to retire from the police force.

The use of the telephone as a narrative and spatial device to enable cross-cutting between two locations is a long established filmic convention, and is to a certain extent taken for granted by spectators, even though it allows us the spectators to be in at least two different spaces at the same time. In *Falling Down* telephone conversations act as a space of (dis-)connection between the domestic and work spaces of the character's lives. Frequently the director cuts to the different locations on or before telephone calls. We see the location of the first telephone call when D-FENS' ex-wife and child, with their dog, are rushing back to the house as they hear the phone ringing (Figures 112 and 113). When she picks up the phone we then cut back to D-FENS standing at the phone near where he has abandoned his car, but unable to speak, and then his money runs out (Figures 114 and 115). Before Beth answers the phone, the ringing in the empty house expresses the absence D-FENS feels but also makes the audience aware that he feels

dislocated from the space where the phone call is being made. His inability to communicate when the phone is answered suggests an enigma that the film plays out for the spectator. D-FENS' next attempt to ring the same location is signalled by a cut from Prendergast's office where he is looking at the picture of his dead child to a kitchen scene involving the woman who answered D-FENS' first phone call and her daughter, for whom she is filling a water pistol at the tap while speaking on the phone to a friend. The cut to D-FENS at the same phone box as previously identified, having secured some change from his encounter in the Korean's shop, brings the two locations together through the sound of the engaged tone, but fails to connect the two spaces and the two people. It also sets up a contrast between the space now inhabited by D-FENS while making the call and the domestic space of that place he once called home.

When the film cuts to Prendergast's home when his wife rings him at his desk we see that both men share a similar form of anxiety about domestic space (Figures 116 and 117). Prendergast's conciliatory and therapeutic tone and dialogue provides a stark contrast to D-FENS next phone call when the enigma of the location and his connection with the people is made clear. He is told by his ex-wife that "this is not your home anymore" (Figure 119), and when he asks about his daughter, Adele, he is told that "she is doing fine without you." While he is listening to these words the spectator is also seeing him from another point-of-view, that of the gang of Latino youths with whom he tangled on the wasteland, getting ready to gun him down in a drive-by from their car. D-FENS stands out from the crowd in the street because of his white shirt and tie, and his ethnic identity, most of the people on the street being Latina/os (Figure 118). The audience see that he is in imminent danger, but it is the reaction to the repeated

rejection by his ex-wife that the director focuses on suggesting this estrangement from domestic space as being one of the causes for D-FENS' disintegration and growing anger. The drive-by shooting injures innocent pedestrians but the bullets miss D-Fens. His response to this near miss is to take his anger out on the Latino youths who have crashed their car and lie injured on the street. D-FENS takes their bag of guns but stops to inflict another wound on the gang-leader. As Mahoney (1997: 175/6) suggests humour is used in this scene and in a number of other encounters to distract from the violence and to help to maintain the audience's empathy with D-FENS, although as his level of violence grows the distracting humour becomes less potent.

The *mise-en-scène* of D-FENS' former domestic space provides further evidence of his sense of exclusion. The spectator can engage in what Bachelard (1957: 8) has termed, *topoanalysis*, "... the systematic study of the localities of our intimate lives". The *mise-en-scène* of D-FENS' mother's house, the absence of natural light, the emptiness of his room all symbolise the lack at the heart of D-FENS' identity. As D-FENS' sense of identity erodes, his failure to survive within the domestic space he now longs for is reiterated. Once he dons the uniform of the vigilante having killed the neo-Nazi store owner he phones Beth and his threatening tone moves him further away from a point where the audience can easily identify with him (Figures 136 and 137). The only way his former self can be revisited is through videos of the past signalling D-FENS has lost his contact with the present. When he returns to the house of his ex-wife in Venice Beach, he watches a video of an earlier birthday party for his daughter Adele, when he realises that they have escaped to the pier as it is mentioned on the video as her favourite place. The intimacy of those moments captured on video have a resonance beyond the domestic sphere

because once again they spotlight the sense of absence within D-FENS' existence. Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1957) offers some useful insights on the essential nature of home-space and its crucial part in grounding the identity through recognition of the small details of domestic life. Although Bachelard's analysis has been criticised by Harr and Reed (1996) for "its unreflexively masculine premises" it seems nonetheless valuable for the way it focuses on the house as "a metaphorical embodiment of memory and thus identity" (Morley, 2000: 19). According to Casey (1998: 290-1) in Bachelard's writing on the house, which takes up the first two chapters of *The Poetics of Space*:

What matters is the degree of intimacy and intensity of our experiences there; ... Thus rather than claim that the world is a house – a cosmological claim - topoanalysis tries to convince us that the house is a world. It is a place-world, a world of places.

This intimacy is part of what turns a house into a home and it is D-FENS' repetition of the phrases, "I'm going home" addressed to strangers, or "I'm coming home", addressed to his ex-wife emphasising that "world of places" as such an important part of his identity. D-FENS' exclusion from that "place-world" is one of the key elements that help to construct a picture of his psycho-geography as one where his external world view, in this case his vision of Los Angeles, mirrors his deteriorating internal, mental and emotional landscape.

As Morley (2000: 59) notes: "the domestic remains a site of specifically gendered anxieties" and in *Falling Down* it is very much the site of male anxieties. This is represented in part by the film's reactionary politics that blames the women in their lives for D-FENS' and Prendergast's dis-location from their domestic spaces. There are a number of clear examples of the film's negative representation of

women mainly in relation to domestic space. The film portrays D-FENS' ex-wife and Prendergast's wife as unreliable, and in the case of the latter, neurotic. Neither character is shown as having an existence outside of the domestic space they inhabit. As Cresswell (1999: 265) suggests:

The ability of D-FENS to walk and shoot his way through public space can be read as indicative of a particularly threatening form of masculine power in contrast to the private claustrophobia of his ex-wife's home.

The film does contain a third female character, Sandra, Prendergast's ex-partner, who appears to offer a representation of a woman, with a Latina background, who can control and move with confidence around her work space, the office, and the streets. However, Sandra's active femininity is used to degrade further the personality of Prendergast's neurotic wife. His final telephone conversation with his wife is not carried out in private but within the hearing of Sandra. She actually answers the phone on Prendergast's desk, and she remains in the scene for a number of reaction shots as she hears Prendergast take control of his wife's ravings and reverse the balance of power by telling his wife to shut up and ordering her to have the dinner ready when he arrives home. The reaction shots to Sandra reinforce Prendergast's sense of mastery and his recuperation of the domestic space.

A second example where Beth is constructed as contributing to D-FENS' crisis of identity in relation to domestic space occurs when she requests police assistance following his intimidating phone calls. Two policemen arrive and one white male officer questions her about the potential threat from her ex-husband. The reaction shots of the police officer suggest, and his dialogue and facial gestures imply, she has treated D-FENS harshly in getting a barring order against him. The film

appears to have little sympathy for Beth, and the lack of screen time afforded to her character suggests her story as a single parent whose ex-husband has stopped paying child support is not worthy of our attention. Ultimately Beth, like Prendergast's wife, is constructed as a hysterical female.

A third example where the film suggests female culpability in the sense of displacement Prendergast feels from his domestic space is inferred in his dialogue on the pier when he is trying to help Beth and Adele escape from D-FENS. According to Prendergast it was he rather than his wife who wanted to have a baby and his wife's reluctance, it is suggested, may have contributed to the baby being taken away from them inexplicably through SIDS. The film's underlying message appears to be raising the question whether a woman who is more concerned with her figure than childbirth really deserves to have a child.

So the film seems to be representing a crisis of identity for the two white males around their domestic space and placing the blame firmly on the women in their lives for creating this sense of unease. D-FENS does not succeed in re-establishing his place in the home but Prendergast regains control of his domestic space from his wife, even giving her a culinary command to "keep the skin on the chicken", to further assert his ownership of that space. The *mise-en-scène* of the domestic space sees the women either trapped or intimidated in their homes and the cross-cutting between the spaces occupied by the males and the females highlights their power relations.

Not economically viable

If D-FENS and Prendergast face a crisis of masculinity in terms of control of their domestic space, a similar crisis is played out in relation to their work space. D-FENS' dress code and briefcase connotes a white-collar worker, however, we soon become aware that he is job-less and 'not economically viable'. The close sense of identity with his former workplace is evident in the customised registration of his car, D-FENS, signalling his former place in the region's huge defence industry.

In D-FENS' case, then, the film suggests that it is the *combination* of his estrangement from his domestic space and his job loss that has created the conditions for his actions. But, one of the ways in which D-FENS' sense of identity is further eroded is in relation to his power as a *consumer*. D-FENS' journey brings him directly into contact with a number of instances of consumption, but his whole story is set within the framework of someone who has lost his job and whose purchasing power and therefore his sense of identity as a consumer is undermined. The first instance is in the Korean grocery store where his populist rhetoric about returning prices to 1965 is undermined by his xenophobic attitude to the shopkeeper.

Mr. Lee's presence in Los Angeles and the frequent placement as part of the *mise-en-scène* of Latina/o and Middle Eastern vendors locate the multi-cultural, commercial nature of the global city. D-FENS himself is an obsolete part in the reconfiguration ('downsizing') of the defence industry, a global industry that has long been part of the economic geography of Los Angeles. D-FENS' uncertainty about his identity is highlighted further in relation to consumption when one considers Shield's (1994: 74) analysis of the nineteenth century Parisian *flâneur*.

One imagines that the native-born flâneur could scarcely recognise his own hometown. Ties based on long-established, people-centred social relationships were displaced by brief interactions based on commodity-based consumption.

The concern for Shields' (1994: 66) more ambiguous analysis of the reduced power of the flâneur in nineteenth century Paris – a city where the global economy is beginning to rewrite the geography of the city – is expressed as follows:

While in Baudelaire, Dumas, Balzac, the flâneur is seen as a native of the crowded streets ... However, he is not 'at home', for these spaces (the arcades) are filled with foreigners and goods from distant lands. Paris is no longer the flâneur's homeland even if it is the city of his birth. In a surreal city 'made strange', the flâneur is a displaced native – an inversion of Simmel's *The Stranger*.

Such tendencies – the arrival of goods and people from other lands – is as a foretaste of the globalized landscape of Los Angeles through which D-FENS moves and in which he is himself no longer "economically viable". On a macro-level the impact of the global economy, where components can be made more cheaply in other countries, has led to the loss of his job, at least in D-FENS' reading of the situation.

The film's attempt to say a number of things about class is quite rare in a mainstream Hollywood entertainment as is evident from the writings of hooks (1996, 2000), Maltby (1995) and Neve (1992). That we should read D-FENS as a classed figure is evident from a number of scenes. Despite the loss of his job he still proclaims the necessity to be a useful member of the workforce when he encounters the beggar in the public park. Having been refused in his request for money the panhandler demands a toll for D-FENS passing through his park, much as the Latino youths do with their territory. This time D-FENS does give up his

briefcase to the astonishment of the beggar but when he opens this symbol of white-collar identification it is revealed to be empty apart from an apple and a sandwich, another indication of D-FENS' disappearing identity. This happens just after D-FENS has rebuked the beggar by telling him to get a job. D-FENS may be a victim of the downturn in the defence industry but he is not about to become a supporter of alternative lifestyles.

A further example that constructs D-FENS as a classed figure is when he escapes from the private property of the golf course where his victims at first think he is a groundsman, to the fortress-like mansion of the absent plastic surgeon (Figure 139). After a moment of misrecognition D-FENS' hostility to the family having a barbecue around the pool is assuaged when the man explains that he is the caretaker, not the owner. D-FENS rails against the fortress-like nature of the perimeter wall and the wealth necessary to purchase such luxury. The idea that Beverly Hills is like another country, populated by the very wealthy is one of the ways the film seeks to intensify the audience's relationship with D-FENS as a spokesperson for the ordinary white guy, against the rich folk. The fact that the owner is a plastic surgeon, the occupation of second choice in Hollywood, after all if you are not a movie star you can make people look like movie stars, adds to D-FENS' disgust and sense of disenfranchisement. However, D-FENS' jeremiad is somewhat undercut by the audience's extra-textual knowledge that these words are being spoken by a rich white movie star, Michael Douglas, playing D-FENS as an "everyman", who has his own Beverly Hills mansion with gated perimeters, adding further confusion to D-FENS's critique of late capitalist accumulation.

The final discussion about class happens between D-FENS and Prendergast, the two representatives of white-collar workers. D-FENS questions the whole basis upon which the economic order stands.

I did everything they told me to. But they lied. Did you know that I build missiles? I help to protect America. You should be rewarded for that. Instead they give it to the plastic surgeon. They lied to me. (D-FENS, *Falling Down*)

The anonymous 'they' has little focus and could be seen as representing government, capitalism, or the ruling elite. Prendergast is able to dismiss this critique as the ravings of a not very well clued up socio-path. Everyone knows the system is corrupt is Prendergast's cynical, but at the same time, reassuring message. You don't fight against 'they' with vigilante behaviour. Davies (1995:224) suggests an even stronger reading of the classed nature of D-FENS' self-sacrifice.

The difference between rich man and poor man is figured most effectively in D-FENS' death. Unable to sell his labour, which is no longer required, it is only by dying that D-FENS can provide for his daughter. In the last scene of *Falling Down*, economics is more of a determinant than race or gender.

Davies overstates the case here but does draw attention to the significant interplay of the categories of race, class and gender that makes D-FENS' representation quite unusual for a mainstream film. Also, the showdown scene is not the last of the film, and, as I argue later, D-FENS' final appearance on the VCR playing in an empty room provides a much more ambiguous ending.

The filmmakers are attempting to balance identification with, and a distancing from, D-FENS and they negotiate this through a shift in identification to the other white male, Prendergast. The contradictions and confusions of D-FENS' normality

are highlighted in the contrast between how D-FENS and Prendergast deal with difference in their movement through the spaces of the city.

Prendergast still has a work space but we learn on our first introduction to him that it is his last day. He is about to take early retirement. His desk has become the boundary of his work space and he is ridiculed by some of his colleagues and his captain for his perceived status as a desk-jockey. In their eyes his identity as a cop and a team player, but also his masculinity, are questioned. It is not until he abandons the desk and goes walking, becoming a true detective, that his own sense of self and how others perceive him begins to change. He demonstrates his ability as a detective by mapping out the route D-FENS is taking by plotting the incidents where a man with a white shirt and tie has been involved. By the end of the film Prendergast seems to have overcome his desk-jockey/inactive cop identity crisis through violence. He decides he will continue as a cop. We are not privileged to his wife's reaction to this decision.

White projection of racialised spaces

D-FENS is a white male, white-collar worker, who seeks identification with the audience by virtue of his normality; that is, his whiteness, masculinity and white-collar credentials. But while making D-FENS the normal guy who now feels himself in the minority the film is drawing attention, albeit unintentionally, to the character's 'whiteness'. Positioning D-FENS as a minority figure sets up a series of questions about the commonsense association of normality with 'whiteness'. As Dyer (1988: 44) has observed in a seminal article on the subject of 'whiteness',

Trying to think about the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category in mainstream film is difficult, partly because white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular.

The film draws attention to D-FENS' 'whiteness' but interestingly, the film's ambiguous range of meanings casts this normalcy into crisis, requiring the intervention of a more normal (less paranoid) white male in Prendergast. Both men are portrayed as having their masculinity threatened by the context of their home life. In both cases this is also linked directly to their positions in and out of the work place. D-FENS can no longer provide child maintenance for his daughter as he has lost his job. His role as the breadwinner has been twice removed, first by the divorce and now by his job loss. Both losses figure prominently in the reassertion of his masculinity as he engages in his increasingly violent journey on foot across the city. Prendergast has been forced by the concern for his neurotic wife to take a desk job and his masculinity, and ability to be a team player is questioned by his captain and his colleagues. Prendergast reasserts his masculinity by resorting to violence, action, swearing and imposing his authority on the domestic space by silencing his wife with a verbal assault on the telephone.

D-FENS' difficulty in negotiating the public spaces of the streets and parks highlights the ways in which, through the use of film techniques, his unhinged private world is being projected onto the view of the city being offered. Camera movement is used to establish D-FENS' increasingly deranged perspective. When he enters the public park where he encounters the beggar we are shown a series of images in slow motion, a convention of film that can often be used to represent disorientation. The adoption of Davis's (1990: 238) term "paranoid spatiality" by Kennedy (2000) in his analysis of *Strange Days* revisits his use of the term in an earlier discussion of D-FENS' movements in *Falling Down* (Kennedy, 1996). The use

of the term has a deeper significance in relation to D-FENS as it highlights how his disordered interior world acts as a filter through which he sees the exterior world of Los Angeles.

While the background images of the public park do not reveal it as a particularly threatening place for a white male, the camera lingers on poverty and illness, and suggests a decaying mental and civic life for this metropolis and its largely non-Anglo inhabitants. Kennedy (1996: 95) makes this point strongly when he refers to the montage of shots depicting a “public park populated by poor and homeless people.” Kennedy (1996: 95) goes on to observe that:

The camera surveys these people and foregrounds excessive images of poverty ... and the background is filled with predominantly African-American and Latino people. Whatever the filmmakers’ intentions in presenting us with these images their crude stereotypes compose an obscene depiction of a collective “underclass” existence, with people represented as degenerative signifiers of social immiseration and victimisation. This is poverty as spectacle, an aesthetic transfiguration of lived experiences into reified images which detach the viewer from the subjects viewed. As D-FENS moves through the park we share his position of imperial tourism.

The force and eloquence of Kennedy’s observation is powerful but a close analysis of this scene reveals a less fixed point of view than Kennedy suggests.

The point of view that introduces the scene is a bird’s eye view of the park from the director’s and therefore the spectator’s omniscient view. As the camera zooms slowly in on the children’s playground it cuts for the first time to a point of view shot from ground level behind a fence looking at the children as they play (Figure 124). Then the camera moves to its montage of images of poverty as Kennedy suggests but importantly, it keeps cutting back to the children playing. This oscillation between the children’s innocent playing and the images of societal

breakdown going on around them is re-enforced by the use of music which invades the point of view with exaggerated sounds of swings, children's voices, and the non-diegetic music which revisits the cacophony of interior and exterior sounds heard in the opening scene when D-FENS is forced to leave his car to escape the noises in his head. The movement of the camera and D-FENS' placement within the mise-en-scène suggest that the vision of the park is a projection of his sense of being lost in his city, much like the flâneur's fate as detailed by Shields. Far from engaging in imperial tourism with D-FENS the spectator observes D-FENS' growing sense of paranoid spatiality. Once again the film's narrative cannot contain the contradictions and confusions set up by the use of film techniques to construct D-FENS' warped vision of a public park where Latina/os and African-Americans dominate (Figures 125 – 131).

As with several other instances in the film, for example, while waiting at a bus stop before D-FENS abandons his efforts to take a bus we see further images of how race is identified with poverty through his gaze (Figures 120 – 123). How the film swings between reactionary visions of multiculturalism run amok and an attempt at a critique of the conditions of urban living in contemporary Los Angeles is evident in the way in which images of public spaces offered in the film reflect some of the claims made by Davis in *City of Quartz* (1990: 226) in relation to the destruction of public space and the segregation of the city.

To reduce contact with the untouchables, urban redevelopment has converted once vital pedestrian streets into traffic sewers and transformed public parks into temporary receptacles for the homeless and the wretched.

And this concern about the disappearance of public spaces is given voice by D-FENS in his journey through the Beverly Hills golf course. D-FENS reacts to the protests of one of the golfers, 'what's he doing walking through my golf course?' (Figure 138). D-FENS subsequent polemic about the disappearance of public spaces and the annexation by the golf course as an area where children and their families should be playing is undercut by his treatment of the golfer and the seeming pleasure he takes in watching his suffering. D-FENS' critique of urban restructuring echoes that of Davis (1990) above but its power is lost as D-FENS descends into more psychotic behaviour making audience identification with him more uncomfortable. Within sight of the Venice Beach bungalow he has been walking towards he phones his ex-wife, inflicting further mental cruelty, by signalling his presence in the neighbourhood. There may be a restraining order against him from entering his former home but this is one spatial barrier he easily ignores.

The audience is being asked to identify with a white middle-class male, a member of the majority community, who has lost his control over domestic space and work place, and now sees himself as a minority figure within the city of his birth. The film proposes this idea by the appropriation of minority status for D-FENS by linking him with the protest of an African-American male, similarly dressed in white shirt and tie, who is picketing the Savings and Loan Bank having been refused a loan on the basis that he is "not economically viable". The camera works in these scenes, through shot-reverse-shot, eye-line matching, and point-of-view, to suggest that D-FENS and the protestor, who is arrested by the police, have a shared experience of the city. This is made explicit in the final interaction between them which sees the police car pull up at the lights where D-FENS is about to cross and

the African-American catches D-FENS' eye and says, "Don't forget me", to which D-FENS gives a nod of assent (Figures 132 – 135). As Kennedy (1996: 96) suggests:

This is a startling scene of misrecognition which has the white man appropriate the space of the black protestor. ... The crude liberalism motivating this scene at once idealises and negates the alterity of the black subject. More than this, it induces historical amnesia. "Don't forget me," the black man says, but this is precisely what viewers are asked to do, to forget the historical content of his experience. Such amnesia allows the film to have its race and class conflicts and to forget the histories of these conflicts.

The film attempts to conflate class and race as a way of broadening audience appeal. The spectator is asked to adopt a white male vision of the troubled spaces of Los Angeles, but also to identify D-FENS as a minority figure in terms of class and ethnic identity. The film also reiterates the idea of multiculturalism as a problem for the white gaze of D-FENS, therefore as a problem for the audience. The spaces that non-white characters occupy in the film are, on the whole, marginal or threatening. The space of the city is continuously racialised through the identification of D-FENS as the 'normal guy who has had enough', the view offered to the spectator by the director's all-seeing eye which turns the streets into a spectacle of a threatening and mainly non-Anglo crowd.

Prendergast appears to be able to handle the multi-cultural make-up of the city quite successfully. His friendship with Sandra, his Latina work colleague, and his readiness to accept the evidence of the young Latina girl about D-FENS' identity, all suggest a white liberal reading of the city. The white male gaze through Prendergast might still be said to dominate at the end of the film.

The final scenes on Venice Pier draw the attention of the spectator to the final shift in point of view that has occurred. The two white males are finally brought together. By the time we get to the showdown it is Prendergast's point of view we are being offered. The camera circles around D-FENS and his family in tandem with the careful but relaxed movement of Prendergast. As usual the spectator has been given the best view of this showdown and its location. The end of the pier at Venice Beach becomes D-FENS' final destination. Spatially there is no where else to go. D-FENS is like countless travellers who come to Los Angeles in search of the Promised Land, but realise it is the city at the edge of the Western world. They cannot move further West, they must remain or go back to their point of origin. Los Angeles as a geographical terminus becomes the landscape of shattered dreams and broken hearts feeding the dystopian visions of the city (Figures 140 - 142). It is mainly Prendergast's perspective we see in the remaining shots. The final scene between the two men is constructed as shoot out (Figure 143). His death removes D-FENS from the screen but it is not his last appearance, and significantly, the film does not end with his falling down into the sea.

We return with Prendergast to see him rebuke his patronising captain and act as a surrogate father to D-FENS' little girl on the porch of her house (Figure 144). The camera then moves past Prendergast and the little girl and takes us to the living room where the VCR is playing and has an image of D-FENS with his wife and child in happier times. But as we saw when D-FENS first puts on the VCR those happy images soon gave way to intolerant behaviour from D-FENS as he demanded that the little girl should sit on the rocking horse despite her tearful protests and the reluctance of his wife to force her. We, the spectators, are allowed access to these final images, no one else apart from the dog on the sofa is observed in shot. Here

the spectators are being addressed directly so our viewing can continue until the screen fades to black (Figures 145 and 146). Being reiterated is what Kennedy (1996: 87) has suggested is a feature of public paranoia that the film tries to tap: "The growing recognition of whiteness as a social category and more particularly of white male selfhood as a fragile and besieged identity."

Conclusion

An analysis of the characters' mobility around the city focuses the attention on how they interact, providing a more detailed understanding of how a white-anglo character, D-FENS, in a mainstream Hollywood film, *Falling Down*, seeks to represent the ordinary (white) guy in the street, who fears the city is being re-colonised by non-Anglo settlers. The spatial juxtapositions through which the narrative is played is highlighted in the analysis of D-FENS' and Prendergast's ability to move through the city. The loss of identity suffered by D-FENS is linked closely, albeit problematically, with his exclusion from the family home; a failure to control domestic space, and the loss of his job; the failure to control work space. His inability to cope with the multiple geographies of the city he encounters signals the separation of his identity as a white male from the city. And the spectacle of the city laid out for us through his eyes constructs it as a place of crowds and chaos where territoriality and spatial apartheid operate, in this instance against the normal white male. In the analysis of D-FENS' mobility and identity we are offered the spectacle of the cinematic Los Angeles as multicultural hell. However, the gendered, classed and white identity of D-FENS raises a series of questions about the limited vision of the city on show.

D-FENS appears unable to invest the city with meaning and so it becomes a space of his dislocation. His loss of identity arises, partly at least, because the space of the city no longer operates as a “product of social relations for him” (Massey, 2000:159). His connections with family, other citizens, agencies and institutions have become disconnected because he is, in the reactionary rhetoric of the film, “not economically viable”. If, as Donald argues (1993: xxii): “It is not space that grounds identification, but place. ... Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed” (1993: xxii), then D-FENS’ determination to ‘go home’, which is now a non-place for him, suggests that his “paranoid spatiality” relates directly to his not being grounded by place.

In many ways the film rehearses and to a degree challenges the dominant ideology which also finds its voice in what McDowell (1997:6) calls “... the current political rhetoric, from both left and right, of belonging to a family, community and nation”... and this she sees as “... profoundly conservative”. This conservatism in film is often realised through a nostalgia for an imagined past of clearer identities, a more fixed sense of place, where spatial boundaries were perceived to constitute identity.

But, the conservatism of Hollywood stories, and of *Falling Down*, wants to work towards a reassurance for the viewing audience, particularly the white audience, about identity. In the end, the film seems to suggest, as long as there is one white man of integrity, who loves his wife, and sorts out his role in the workforce, then the fears about place-lessness and place-identity can be contained.

And yet the film ends not with Prendergast's triumph but with the video images of D-FENS and his ex-wife and child playing in an empty room with only the spectator for company. The filmmaker makes a clear attempt to re-focus identification between D-FENS as the "ordinary white guy" and the audience. As Kennedy (2000: 12) suggests:

Falling Down is a smart film, but it struggles to delimit interpretations of D-FENS' excessively overdetermined paranoia and to convince viewers that he represents an ultimately (mythologically) redundant model of white masculinity.

The dialectic of *Falling Down* as read through the filters of identity and mobility acknowledges the anxieties of place-lessness even as it attempts to reassure with the conservative message of a continuing white male 'regeneration through violence' (Slotkin, 1973), so important a feature of the mythology of the frontier and directly referenced in the final gunfight between the two white males. And yet it can't let go of the D-FENS character. It yearns for a measure of the audience's sympathy and identification. Ambiguous to the end, the film is on the one hand celebrating the triumph of white male masculinity in Prendergast yet afraid to declare D-FENS as a 'redundant model of white masculinity'.

As outlined in Chapter One, particularly in the work of Stuart Hall (1993), notions of identity can be seen as always in the process of being made and set within, not outside representation. While I argue that *Falling Down* is not a typical example of Hollywood representation of Los Angeles because of its attempt, in whatever kind of confused manner, to confront questions of identity and mobility, I cannot claim it has the self-reflexiveness necessary to see identity as a 'production that is never complete.' *Falling Down* perpetuates the normality of whiteness, the difficulty with

difference. The film has much to say about the apparent identity crisis of the white male but is unable to confront the possibility of the other identities that make up the multiple geographies of the city. The city itself functions as a character in the film, helping to define the central characters' attitudes and actions. The narrative arises out of the urban spaces of the city, and the interaction of D-FENS and Prendergast with the cityscape, mostly on foot, helps to construct the tempo of the narrative. Los Angeles also functions metonymically, as the city D-Fens inhabits becomes in a broader sense all U.S. urban space constructed as multi-cultural hell.

In a film like *Falling Down* then, the cinematic Los Angeles highlights the absence of certainties about urban space, place and identity. In other films not so pre-occupied with the white male's anxiety over loss of power, however, we can find a much more dynamic conceptualisation of mobility and identity. It is the aim of the next chapter to demonstrate the ways in which cinematic city films may also incorporate rather than denounce, or render invisible, the city's multiple geographies in ways that produce a more complex and perhaps progressive vision of identity and mobility.

Chapter Six

Cinematic visions of contemporary Latina/o Los Angeles

The schizophrenia of the city is rooted in its rejection of its very soul. Indeed, Hollywood's endless inventions and modifications of the city's image and identity are at least partly attributable to the vacuum caused by the obliteration of the Mexican past. Los Angeles is a "nowhere city" largely because its Anglo residents have traditionally refused to recognize its inescapable self. Not until Los Angeles confronts its Mexican-ness and begins to meet its obligations to its Mexican-American residents ... can it be at peace with itself (Paredes, R. A., 1995:251).

I think that probably the biggest change is that now we are everywhere. When I was growing up in East L.A. in the fifties, you knew where the Mexican areas were, and when you wandered out of those, you saw very few of us in places like Santa Monica and the west side. But now, it doesn't matter where I go in L.A., there we are. It feels so different now. When I was a kid sometimes my dad would take me with him on his deliveries over in Culver City, West L.A., Santa Monica, even Beverly Hills, and I would feel kind of funny, you know what I mean? I felt out of place; I wouldn't see any other Mexicans at all. But now, hell, I feel at home almost everywhere because I know there is going to be someone who looks like me, that talks like me, no matter where I am (Gonzalez, R., cited in Rocco, 1996: 365).

Introduction

These two quotations help to describe the paradox of Latina/o existence in the material and the cinematic Los Angeles, as one of ubiquity but also invisibility. In the previous chapter I explored how the representation of Latina/o Los Angeles in *Falling Down* (1993) constructs Latino/as as part of the dangerous mise-en-scène rather than active agents in their own right. In this chapter I investigate the possibility for re-imagining those representations in a number of Hollywood films that address directly the experience of Latina/os living in contemporary Los Angeles.

How race, class, and gender intersect in the formation of identity will be addressed in relation to the representation of the spaces and mobility of Latina/os. I argue that in terms of their cultural instrumentality these films offer a reflection, but also

a critique, of the pervasive stereotypes of Latina/o existence promulgated by Hollywood, and in their versions of cinematic Los Angeles the identity and mobility of Latina/os is represented as complex and multi-layered. In particular, what emerges from these films is a more complex relationship between characters and their location that sees Hollywood's traditional spatial co-ordinates of Latina/o life, the barrio and the prison, broadened to include: the relationship between the barrio and the city; the connection between the barrio and a homeland/place of origin, that is often constructed as off-screen space. There is also the awareness of a 'cultural space', as suggested by Rocco (1996: 369), that signals cross-barrio and trans-national social networks that provide a much more dynamic conceptualisation of mobility and identity for Latina/os in the cinematic Los Angeles. Added to this, are the variations in terms of gender, class, and age which are incorporated in this more complex web of character representation, ensuring that these films about the Latina/o experience go beyond the usual Hollywood focus on ethnic identity as threat. I argue that in their faltering way these films produce some of the conditions whereby the process of re-imagining the Latina/o identity can be sustained.

The conventional Hollywood representations of the Latina/o experience tends in such films as *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *Colors* (1989), *Falling Down* (1993) to offer one-dimensional characters who are either gang members, prison inmates, or service workers; maids, gardeners, busboys, car parkers, or drug barons and tyrannical despots in *Predator 2* (1998) and *Escape from L.A.* (1995).

The sense of threat from south of the border is evident in *Falling Down* (1993) where the city D-FENS walks through seems to be populated mainly by Latina/os.

Apart from the one-dimensional character portrayal, the space that is given over to Latina/os in such films sees them constructed as victims or aggressors. When Latina/os are allowed to move beyond the boundaries of East L.A. and into the anglo-Hollywood world they are used as part of the *mise-en-scène*, offering either a service, or, if the narrative demands, a threat. The places they originate from - in the movies it is always East L.A. - are otherised as not being part of the material, 'white' Los Angeles, as if Hollywood is in denial about the Spanish name of the city, the Mission style architecture that abounds, and the sounds of Spanish which fills the air.

The films chosen for analysis address explicitly the politics of identity and mobility, but also reflect the struggle to reconstruct a historical memory of Los Angeles for Latina/os. I focus on *Mi Vida Loca* (Anders, 1993) and *Born in East L.A.* (Marin, 1987) in detail while drawing supporting examples from *Stand and Deliver* (1989), *American Me* (Olmos, 1993) and *Mi Familia* (Nava, 1994). In all five films the city functions not just as backdrop but as fundamental to narrative and character development. Los Angeles becomes a cinematic city in all of these films to the extent that it functions as a character in itself. The city also functions metonymically in that it stands in for the rest of the United States in the reconstruction of history and the affirmation of identity of Latina/os.

There have been a small number of films, including *Zoot Suit* (Valdez, 1981), *The Ballad of Gergorio Cortez* (Young, 1982), *El Norte* (Nava, 1983), *La Bamba*, (Valdez, 1986), and *Selena* (Nava, 1997) that have addressed directly the Latina/o audience but also managed to be crossover hits with the general public. In most cases these films have been a pragmatic mix of independent production and Hollywood, or

other financial, backing. The term 'independent' does not necessarily mean that these productions are completely outside the Hollywood industry machine. Independent is a flexible term, and has become as much a marketing tool as a signal of a different aesthetic from the mainstream (Hillier, 2002). *Mi Vida Loca* (1993), for example, had funding from four separate production companies; Film Four International, HBO, Showcase Entertainment, and Cineville Inc., none of whom are major Hollywood studios. However, the distribution for the film was through Sony Picture Classics. At the time of release Sony were owners of Columbia, a major Hollywood studio, and the Classics division being used to distribute smaller budget films that were regarded as independent or (tellingly perhaps) 'foreign'.

As was shown in the last chapter, in most Hollywood representations of the Latina/o experience only the dominant white male point of view is on offer; for example, two white cops in *Colors*, or two white anglo-males in *Falling Down*. Wim Wenders's *The End of Violence* (1997) provides a notable exception as it plays on the invisibility of Latina/os on screen and within movie-produced Los Angeles. Mike Max (Bill Pulman), the central white male character, a wealthy movie producer, is kidnapped. Eventually he escapes, and under the protection of a Latina/o family of gardeners, he lets his beard grow, puts on gardener's clothes and avoids a citywide manhunt because by becoming Latino, he has made himself invisible. For the Latina/o characters the power to move through the space of the city is limited but this depends on what service uniform is being worn.

More generally though, in Hollywood representations of Latina/o identity, the prevailing stereotype of gang violence and social chaos mean that if you come

from the barrio you are inevitably guilty by geographical association. *Blood In, Blood Out* (Hackford, 1993), a mainstream Hollywood production, tells the story of a group of four Latino friends, one of mixed race parents. The repetition of spatial limitations is evident in what they grow up to be: gang members, a drug addict/artist and, to offer the source of internal conflict, a policeman. Throughout the film the experience of these youths is otherised in the choice of colour, lighting, the mise-en-scène of their locations, and in the myth affirming, rite-of-passage representation of prison life. These characters are literally and metaphorically trapped in place by prison and the barrio.

Even those films directed by Latina/o filmmakers, for example, *American Me* (1993) and *Mi Familia* (1994) struggle with the co-ordinates for Latina/os set down by Hollywood: the prison and the barrio. But I suggest that, though part of the Hollywood production and/or distribution system, both *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) and *Born in East L.A.* (1987) together with *American Me* (1993) *Mi Familia* (1994) and *Stand and Deliver* (1989), offer an uneven but nonetheless potent challenge/alternative to these spatial co-ordinates; presenting an alternative spatial grid with more complex characters that are more than fixed in space and trapped in place.

Here, the mapping of these co-ordinates within the cinematic city is elaborated upon through an analysis of the mise-en-scène of three categories: barrio/city, barrio/prison, barrio/homeland. These three categories extend Voss's (1998) analysis of the use of prison space and barrio space as spatial tropes in *Mi Familia* (1994). The tripartite analysis also draws upon the three 'presences' identified in Hall's (1993: 230) rethinking of the positions and repositionings of Caribbean

cultural identities. Like the three presences elaborated by Hall, the use of barrio/city, barrio/prison and barrio/homeland all have the presence of the other within them. I elaborate the complex relationship between Latina/o mobility and identity in cinematic Los Angeles by focusing on how film techniques develop this tripartite spatiality. I suggest that in *Mi Vida Loca* (1993), *Born in East L.A.* (1989) *American Me* (1992), *Stand and Deliver* (1989) and *Mi Familia* (1994) there is an attempt to engage with the history of images of the barrio disseminated by Hollywood and in some cases to re-make or re-imagine them.

Barrio/City spatiality: Homegirls promenading in *Mi Vida Loca* (1993)

Barrio is the Spanish word used to describe the poorer districts of South American and Central American cities, and those North American cities that have a high concentration of Latino/a population, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Miami. The word barrio has taken on a metonymic power in the representations of Latina/os, much as the word 'hood' has in African-American representations (Massood, 2003). The barrio is that place where Latina/os live; their territory, their neighbourhood, where networks of family relations exist and where street gangs define their territory through symbols, rituals, and territorial marking. Unfortunately this rather rigid view of the barrio as container of the 'other' is the one that tends to predominate in Hollywood representations of the Latina/o experience as exemplified in *Colors* (1989) and *Falling Down* (1993).

The multiple geographies of Los Angeles examined in Chapter Two highlighted the dispersion of Latina/os from the old East Side core. So while the barrio's metonymic function in films is still powerful, it fails to describe the complexity of the development of the Latina/o population in Los Angeles. Davis (2000:40) offers an

analysis of the exceptionalism of Los Angeles in relation to Latino/a growth when he compares it with New York and Chicago. Using a typology of Latina/o urban areas he suggests that the Latina/o population in Los Angeles in 1960 could be described as being located in a primate barrio with small satellites. By 1990, the picture had changed to one of city-within-a-city. Though the barrio is still the primary location for films about the Latina/o experience, in the five films analysed below it emerges as a more complex space where the relationship between the barrio and the city of Los Angeles is explored. The films highlight the importance of the barrio as a place of identity, a trans-national site for family and social networks, and a place of intersections as well as boundaries.

With the exception of Mace in *Strange Days*, previous chapters have highlighted the absence of female leading roles in the representation of Los Angeles as a cinematic city. Another exception to this Hollywood neglect is *Mi Vida Loca* (1993), a film that tells the story of girl gang members from Echo Park, Los Angeles. Focusing on ordinary Latina homegirls the film features three interlocking stories orchestrated around the characters, Sad Girl (Angela Aviles) and Mousie (Seidy Lopez). The girls are lifelong friends whose friendship is tested when they both end up mothering babies by the same homeboy drug dealer, Ernesto (Jacob Vargas). Without telling them Ernesto buys a custom-built mini-truck called Sauvecito, which El Duran (Jesse Borrego), a rival gang member from River Valley, feels is rightfully his. Sad Girl and Mousie meet to fight their duel of honour over Ernesto at exactly the same moment Ernesto is killed by a customer, and his assistant Whisper (Nélida López), is wounded in the leg. The boy's gang blames El Duran and vow revenge.

The girls go to collect a former gang member, Giggles (Marlo Marron) from prison. To their horror, she talks about going straight and getting a job in computers. Giggles rekindles her relationship with Big Sleepy (Julian Reyes), the custom car artist responsible for Sauvecito's design, but she is determined to be independent. Mousie and Sad Girl find out where Ernesto kept Sauvecito and at a gang meeting they decide to sell it to raise money for their children and Whisper's hospital bills. Meanwhile, the boy's gang, who planned to enter the truck in a custom car rally, discover it is missing and assume El Duran has stolen it.

Sad Girl's sister Alicia (Magali Alvarado) (nicknamed 'La Blue Eyes') is heartbroken when her prison pen-pal Juan Temido – recently released from prison – stops writing to her. Knowing him to be a notorious philanderer the girls take Alicia to a dance where she will meet him and discover what a deceiver he really is. But Juan Temido is a pen-name used by El Duran, and just as Alicia discovers his true identity, Sleepy (Gabriel González), a close friend of Ernesto, shoots him dead. Later, the gang learns that Sauvecito was borrowed by a boy from their own neighbourhood who wrecked it in an accident. In a drive-by shooting intended for Sleepy, Big Sleepy's young daughter is killed by El Duran's girlfriend. All the remaining central characters assemble at the churchyard for the funeral. The characters walk past the camera as they leave the graveyard but the camera remains fixed on the graveyard scene until the music of the closing credits begins to play.

As the opening credit music fades out at the beginning of the film the establishing mise-en-scène locates the downtown skyscrapers of Los Angeles in the distance. The voice-over of a young Latina is heard on the soundtrack and the scene cuts

directly to Echo Park, drawing attention to the relationship between the barrio and the city and the determination of the young woman whose voice we hear to tell the story of her people (Figures 147 – 150).

This is the L.A. neighbourhood where I grew up, Echo Park. We're East of Hollywood and then you're downtown. ... Our homeboys take pride in telling the history of our barrio cos white people leave out a lot of stuff when they tell it. On Saturdays and Sundays everybody shops on Sunset and Echo Park Avenue. There's no reason to leave. You can get anything you need in my neighbourhood. When I first moved here from Mexico all the signs in the stores were in English and I couldn't read them. Now there's as much Spanish as there is English. (Sad Girl, *MVL*, prologue)

One of the ways *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) sets out to disturb the fixed-by-genre images of the cinematic Latina/o Los Angeles is through the mix of filmic techniques it employs. The focus of this analysis is on how mise-en-scène, camera movement and cross-cutting help to represent the possibility of greater agency and more mobility for the young women of the cinematic Echo Park.

The spatial tropes and place images in *Mi Vida Loca* emphasize the connections between film techniques and the re-imagining of the Latina/o community where the barrio is clearly part of the city. The 'texture of sounds and images' that make up the style of *Mi Vida Loca* arise out of a contradictory mix of documentary and melodrama. Allison Anders, the film's director and writer, in an interview with B. Ruby Rich (1994: 15) has identified this mix as "romantic realism", what she termed an uneasy but productive clash of documentary and melodrama where camera movement follows character emotions. Documentary involves a high degree of verisimilitude, while melodrama demands an excess of emotion and mise-en-scène helping to produce a problematic backdrop and draw the audience's attention to the ways in which the central characters occupy screen space. The film's use of

cross-cutting and the tracking of character's emotions with the camera draw attention to the artifice of the film while helping to maintain its semi-documentary feel. Despite this being a gang film, violence, in the main, is portrayed off-screen and shown to have consequences. The voice-overs from most of the main characters provide a space for the articulation of voices rarely heard in mainstream cinema. The episodic narrative structure, the use of framing cards to introduce each storyline produces a non-linear narrative with multiple points-of-view. This is more in line with the fractured nature of conversation and gossip as the film resists the temporal determinants of most Hollywood stories. Music and sound is used to situate the characters within a Latino/a cultural space but with a crossover into soul, rock and rap.

These elements work together in the film to enable the young female characters to occupy the screen space with confidence, and yet the film does not provide a happy Hollywood ending. Instead there is a suggestion that through sisterhood and enduring the life of their place, *la vida* will go on. This gendering of space is achieved in the working through of some of the film techniques discussed above. However, this does not mean that the discourses of masculinism that normally dominate the screen space of this genre simply disappear. Anders acknowledges the masculine stereotypes but undercuts the stereotypical machismo by having one of her male characters, Sleepy, shed tears at the death of his friend, Ernesto, and seek advice from an older ex-gang member, Big Sleepy, on how to deal with the loss. Anders' focus on style allows the central female characters to occupy screen space in a manner that is suggestive of Rose's (1993: 159) description of "paradoxical space" as they "articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism."

The “simultaneous occupation” of these mutually exclusive spaces of “centre and margin, inside and outside” that are “multi-dimensional, shifting and contingent” (Rose: 1993; 140) is made possible by the style of the film, with its mix of documentary and melodrama, through the use of cross-cutting, and the camera movement which follows the emotions of the characters. A characteristic of Anders’ visual style is to have the camera follow the character’s emotions, using low-angle close-ups. The multiple voice-overs and fractured narrative leaves space and time for the young women characters to exist in a story where they are not over-determined by their gender, by the genre of the film, or by the stereotypical representation of cultural identity. The use of film techniques relate directly to the imagining of a more complicated version of existence for these young female characters, and, a more flexible representation of their location in the barrio and the city. In particular, I want to suggest that through cross-cutting, camera movement and mise-en-scène the film creates a “paradoxical space” where women are more visible. This greater visibility is complemented by what I have come to think of as the distinctive mobility and identity of these young women characters.

The film contains several scenes showing members of the girl gang promenading around their territory. These scenes emphasize, through slow motion camera movement and voice-over, the sense of confidence and ownership of their screen space the young women seem to possess. In the lead up to the duel involving Sad Girl and Mousie, for example, the mise-en-scène focuses on their responsibilities as mothers. The camera cross-cuts between their separate locations as they say goodbye to their babies highlighting what might be lost if either of them did not return (Figures 151 and 152). As Sad Girl and Mousie make their way to the

duelling ground in their fight over the feckless Ernesto, the cross-cutting also shows us Ernesto and Whisper dealing drugs in the alley and discussing the likely outcome of the duel. Ernesto becomes aware that both women have guns and that a gunfight rather than a fist fight will ensue (Figures 153 and 154).

The gunfight, the most masculinist of actions, doesn't happen between the two young women. We hear gunshots but the action takes place in off-screen space (Figures 155 and 156). Sad Girl and Mousie's apparent adoption of masculine codes of behaviour is overturned by the bonds of sisterhood and the space of conflict between them becomes a space of reconciliation. Ernesto and Whisper, it turns out, have been the victims of a drug related shooting that has left Ernesto dead and Whisper with a leg injury. Ernesto's funeral is followed by a scene in the park where the space of conflict between the two friends is closed as they agree to have lunch together in *MacDonalds*, leaving the park with their children fathered by Ernesto, to the strains of hopeful non-diegetic music.

At the beginning of the next section a storytelling device that draws attention to the film's artifice is used, as a new, but inter-related story is introduced by a frame card with Latina/o decorations and the message in English: *Don't Let No One Put You Down*. This transition to a new story strand is also identified by the change in tempo of the music and the use of slow-motion, which shows the homegirls walking around Echo Park. Whisper is in the centre, smoking a cigarette, and the girls in a line offer a powerful image of young women confident in their urban setting and unafraid in an environment that cinematically has often represented them as invisible or powerless (Figures 157 and 158). This is not just an easy celebration of the ability of young women to walk the streets of their

neighbourhood, although that in itself within the context of Hollywood representations is worth celebrating. Their mobility is of course circumscribed by the limits of Echo Park, their gender, their ethnic identity, their class and their allegiance to the gang. The young women may be able to engage in promenading within their barrio but it is clear from later scenes this does not imply freedom to wander more widely in the city. For the young women in *Mi Vida Loca*, as Brigham and Marston (2002: 236) suggest "... the street certainly appears as a place of potential danger ... But the street also emerges as a place of connectivity".

This example of female promenading in the cinematic city is significant not only because Hollywood seldom produces images of this sort, unless the women are portraying prostitutes, but it is also linked with the broader question of female representation in the city. Following Gleber's (1999: 172) argument in relation to women spectators and early cinema:

The question of the presence and representation of women in the streets, however, is neither an academic nor an accidental and marginal one. On the contrary, it suggests a pivotal constellation that may help articulate questions concerning prevailing structures of power and domination in Western society as a direct function of the – gendered – distribution of leisure, time, and status, that is to say, of the economic, psychological, and physical autonomy and self-assurance of that society's subjects.

Mi Vida Loca, as well as feminising the traditional gang-related genre, also feminises urban space, providing the possibility for the emergence of young women with a more mobile gaze. There is fluidity to their movement between interior and exterior spaces, the home and the street. Rosa Linda Fregoso (1995: 317-27) argues that *Mi Vida Loca* focuses on Chicana homegirls whose bodies mark the limit of the patriarchal project of *la familia*, namely, the confinement of Chicanas to the sphere of the home. As Fregoso suggests, their fluidity between

public and private spheres articulates the homegirls' rejection of such containment. The homegirls move freely between interior and exterior spaces, belonging in both, this is a way that multiplies the functions of home, for example, using it as a meeting place to debate and vote on what to do with Suavecito.

The young women do walk around their neighbourhood with a confidence that, at times, might be said to reverse the male dominated gaze of conventional Hollywood storytelling as elaborated by Mulvey (1976). Shaviro (2002: 168/9) summarises Mulvey's argument in the following way:

Mulvey powerfully presented classical Hollywood film as being predicated upon identification with the fantasy position of a male subject, and a corresponding objectification of the body of the woman. The fetishised female body appeared a fantasy object, but also a threat of castration, for the male protagonist and viewer. The woman, therefore was stripped of agency, to become either a spectacle for the male gaze, or else an object to be tracked through narrative, and sadistically mastered by the male protagonist with whom that gaze was identified.

It could be argued that the young women in *Mi Vida Loca* who are able to use their 'mobilised gaze' to re-imagine the city from its former position as an exclusively male domain, establish their own agency, and problematise Mulvey's account of the woman as spectacle for the male gaze. Rose's elaboration of 'paradoxical space' is a useful way to describe the attempt at reconfiguring the city and the gaze in *Mi Vida Loca*. As Mahoney (1997: 183) comments in relation to *Just Another Girl On The IRT* (Harris, 1992) films which: "... set out to inscribe experiences of the city previously marginalized or marked as 'other', do implicitly or explicitly challenge traditional discourses on urban space." I suggest this is equally true of *Mi Vida Loca*.

Considered through the mode of cultural instrumentality, in re-configuring the street gang genre the film therefore opens up the space of the cinematic city for the young women, and in its representation of their confident movement around Echo Park, proclaims a different spatiality and a more sophisticated sense of identity and mobility. If there is a cautious nod towards the movement of the young women around their barrio, these limitations are explained in relations to their inability to access a car. Thus, the homegirls' place in the class system is signified by the fact that none of them own a car. A key scene that highlights the importance of the car and its ability to transcend the boundaries of gang rivalry occurs when a group of homegirls, including Sad Girl and Mousie, drive to pick up Giggles on her release from prison. They use a car borrowed by one of the homegirls from her River Valley boyfriend, and as the driver rationalises this supposed transgression of gang loyalties to the rest of her homegirls they all nod in agreement to her conclusion that no Echo Park homeboy could offer a similar solution to the problem of picking up Giggles.

The *mise-en-scène* for this trip sees the young women driving along with the windows down, their hair blowing in the wind as music plays on the car radio. On the move they seem far from the constraints of Echo Park life. They are involved in a group activity, picking up their homegirl Giggles, who they hope will offer leadership to the gang. The camera moves from the conversations within the car to outside the car and again for that brief interlude the joy of being on the move is represented (Figures 159 – 162). However, as Brigham and Marston (2002: 239) note, "... in their world of Echo Park the image of the car as symbol of liberation cannot hold." The automobile is the vehicle for fantasized freedom but also the harbinger of death.

While the voice-over by Sad Girl at the beginning of the film announces that the intertwined stories all involve the low-rider truck *Sauvecito*, it is partly left behind by the plot. Its supposed theft by the rival gang in River Valley precipitates the murder of El Duran, and the revenge shooting from a car of Big Sleepy's daughter. *Sauvecito* represents possible prestige and prize money for the homeboys of Echo Park by entering it in the Pomona Car Show. Sad Girl and Mousie, whose deceased partner Ernesto was its owner, see the truck as a way of easing their existence with greater mobility to go to the supermarket, do the laundry and bring the children to the beach. Brigham and Marston (2002: 296) suggest it represents a way of "stabilising domestic life". But importantly, in a statement of intent that comes from Mousie speaking with her homegirls about what they could do if they had *Sauvecito*, she intones: "... go cruising, pick up some vatos (homeboys), show them a good time", the mobilized gaze of the young women places the homeboys as the object of their gaze.

Mi Vida Loca works well in highlighting the gendered nature of barrio space and reconfiguring or re-imagining it. In most representations of the barrio oversimplified polarities of utopian/dystopian images still dominate, and the representations are overwhelmingly male. In many non-Latino Los Angeles films, for example, *Falling Down*, *Colors*, or *Assault on Precinct 13*, a multi-cultural or strongly ethnic mise-en-scène of streets, signs, and people, is linked with a dystopian world-view. One of the ways in which the space of the barrio, and the people who occupy it, are represented as signifiers of a dystopian world is by making the environment threatening, unfriendly and alien.

In *Mi Vida Loca* the use of mise-en-scène, voice-overs, emphasize the importance of the link between the barrio and the city for the residents of Echo Park. Their sense of identity through location goes against the general trend noted above of cinematic city films where the barrio is constructed as a separate entity, where the boundaries of class, ethnicity and gender restrict mobility between the city and the barrio. Sad Girl's introductory voice-over states the strong link between the barrio and the city and sets up the project of the film to tell the history of the barrio from within.

This is the L.A. neighbourhood where I grew up, Echo Park. We're East of Hollywood and then you're downtown. ... Our homeboys take pride in telling the history of our barrio cos white people leave out a lot of stuff when they tell it (Sad Girl, *Mi Vida Loca* prologue).

As Rudolfo Acuna (1997: x-xi) asserts:

Key to that Chicano/Mexican struggle is reconstructing a historical memory of Los Angeles that has been diluted or denied by Eurocentric forces. This requires retelling what happened and redefining the causes of what happened. In these ways the reconstruction of history and affirmation of identity go hand in hand.

This sense of situating the experiences of the young women within the barrio but making clear the connections they feel between the barrio and the city is echoed in pillow talk between Mousie and Ernesto before his shooting. She is reminiscing about the time they went to the Planetarium together, an iconic site of the material and cinematic Los Angeles, figuring in *Rebel without a Cause* (Ray, 1954), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) and many other filmic depictions of the city. Mousie declares: "We looked at all the stars in the sky and the lights in *our* city." The sense of

belonging to *both* the barrio *and* the city is fundamental to the young women characters in *Mi Vida Loca*. As Brigham and Marston (2002: 237) suggest:

The built landscape of Echo Park is an intimate, unmistakably unique place suffused with place-bound meaning that is both produced by and shapes the actions of the protagonists.

Making the barrio of the city

In many ways *Mi Familia* (1994) provides a more conventional view of the barrio as a space of confinement and limitation. Yet it too attempts to critique the notion that the barrio is located *in* Los Angeles but not *of* Los Angeles. As Voss (1998: 164) argues *Mi Familia's* spatial and narrative goal is to place the appropriateness of Mexicanness with the history of Los Angeles, to make the barrio *of* the city (Figures 163 – 166). I would argue this is the spatial and narrative goal of all five films but substitute the broader demographic of Latina/os.

Mi Familia is an ambitious family saga charting the sixty years and three generations of the Sanchez family, where the mise-en-scène is adapted to the decades of the story, the arrival in Los Angeles from Mexico City in the 1920s, the death of the Chuco (Esai Morales) in the 1950s and the struggle to stay out of prison by Jimmy (Jimmy Smits) in the 1980s (Figures 167 – 170). Pacos (Edward James Olmos) plays the narrator and his voice-over, as Voss (1998: 161) suggests "... smooths the narrative's large temporal leaps and provides a point of familiarity for an American mainstream audience, just as Olmos' performances have articulated the Los Angeles Latino persona across films such as *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *American Me* (1992), and *Blade Runner* (1982)." Pacos tells how his father, José (Eduardo Lopez Rojas), has to join the workforce crossing the Los Angeles Bridge from the barrio to do the city's work. His narration also emphasises their

movement is only ever one-way, with none of the city's elite crossing the bridge into the barrio. Voss (1998: 163) notes in her analysis of the film:

As other family members cross the bridge in subsequent decades, the film makes it clear that they are accepting the racial and economic divides that structure Los Angeles. Significantly, the oldest son, Chucho, who opts for gang culture over assimilation, is shot by the police under the bridge ... Access to the city for Latinos is defined as a sort of plantation arrangement, as a spatial montage elaborates the gardening and domestic positions that define access to the city.

While *Mi Familia* draws attention to limitations of mobility enforced on its inhabitants, as noted in Chapter Two, *Stand and Deliver's* central character, Jamie Escalante (Edward James Olmos) is given more room to move. The significance of the early morning drive by Escalante crossing the L.A. Bridge in the other direction is the awareness that, though a Latino, Escalante lives outside the barrio. His spatiality is less confined and his relationship to the barrio and the city suggest a strong sense of identity with Los Angeles as a place. In a later scene the audience is shown his home, but importantly, not the inside, but the liminal space of his front garden as he puts some garbage in the bin and chats with his Anglo neighbour.

The ease of their interaction in the shared garden space is suggestive of the sense of ownership Escalante has over his immediate surroundings. As a former computer scientist who has given up his well paid job to teach computers in barrio schools, to his already complex spatial identity that encompasses the city, his home, and the barrio the film therefore adds a picture of Jamie's (new, middle) class identity.

Stand and Deliver displays another complex version of Latino identity. The central character, perhaps because he is male and middle-class, seems to have a greater

ability to move through the city, and this mobility suggests a broader spatiality to be considered in relation to the Latino experience, while also highlighting the developing importance of class as a key element of identity. As Acuna (1996: 6) asserts:

... the location of Latino peoples in Los Angeles is closely linked to economic status. They are hardly uniform in class background; in fact, class differences among Latinos are becoming increasingly important. For example, there is a growing gap between Latino homeowners and renters; increasingly homeowners come from the older and more affluent sectors of the Latino community, although this includes working-class people in older barrios such as Boyle Heights, unincorporated East Los Angeles, the San Gabriel Valley and other sections of the county. While working class Latinos are spread throughout the city, middle-class Chicanos are concentrated (but not exclusively) in the San Gabriel Valley.

In these examples of Latina/o cinematic Los Angeles the barrio/city relationship is a key concern. In *Mi Vida Loca* the connections between the barrio and the city are expressed explicitly through the voice-over and dialogue but also in the ways in which the mise-en-scène of Echo Park is established as being part of the wider city. The film makes more complex the representations of Latina/o identity and mobility with its focus on the visibility and developing sense of agency of the young women. *Mi Vida Loca* sets out to tell stories of the barrio through the homegirls just as *Mi Familia* sets out to represent the history of the Sanchez family as an integral part of the development of the city. *Stand and Deliver* takes this geography and history of the barrio and locates it in a more dynamic relationship to the city by having the central character commute from the city into the barrio, symbolically reversing the flow of Latina/o workers who service the city from the barrio. The barrio/city relationship forms the first part of the spatial grid that the Latino/a cinematic city represents but this is developed by the addition of the second coordinate of Latina/o identity, the relationship between the barrio and the prison.

Barrio/Prison

The prison film is a well-established Hollywood sub-genre, for example, *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (LeRoy, 1932), *Riot in Cell Block 11* (Siegel, 1954), *The Birdman of Alcatraz* (Frankenheimer, 1962), *Cool Hand Luke* (Rosenberg, 1967), *Escape from Alcatraz* (Siegel, 1979), and *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994). The claustrophobic environment responds well to the powers of Hollywood storytelling. The controllable mise-en-scène, the low key lighting, the sites for conflict - prison yard, showers, and prison cells - have produced a prison aesthetic that is far removed from, yet spatially close, to life in real prisons. The connections between the cinematic representations of cities and prisons is also well established particularly in the science fiction genre, for example, John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* (1981) and *Escape from L.A.* (1997), the city as imagined in *The Matrix Trilogy* (Wachowski Brothers, 1998-2002) is a prison of the mind as is the city constructed in *Dark City* (Proyas, 1997). Davis (1990) evokes the images from future city films as prisons in his dissection of contemporary Los Angeles as "Fortress L.A.". If prisons are about the control of mobility of the inmates by bars and walls, these physical barriers have been re-enforced by surveillance and the development of the all-seeing camera-eye. The proliferation of closed-circuit cameras in urban areas has increased the surveillance of the city and its citizens, once again chillingly evoked by Davis (1990: 243) when he describes the prototype plan for four Los Angeles shopping malls.

... all four shopping centers plagiarizes brazenly from Jeremy Bentham's renowned nineteenth-century design for the 'panopticon prison' with its economical central surveillance.

What films about the Los Angeles Latina/o experience have appeared to focus on is the use of the prison as both a reflection and a critique of the East Side barrios. The

huge increase in the Californian Latina/o population has also been matched by an increase in the Latino prison population. According to Davis (1999:414):

In 1988, new prison admissions were 35 percent black and 30 percent Latino; by 1993, however, the proportions were 41 percent Latino and 25 percent black.

Films such as *American Me* (1992), *Blood In Blood Out* (1994), *Mi Familia* (1994), and *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) use prison as an essential element in the history and identity of their Latina/o characters. While confinement and surveillance have been identified as the means of control in the barrio, there is also a way in which prison represents the place where identities are sharpened by the oppressive nature of the space, and the restricted nature of mobility.

As Fregoso (1993) explains in her analysis of *American Me* the narrative style is strongly influenced by Chicano *pinto* (inmate) poets. The letters written by Santana (Edward James Olmos), the central character in *American Me*, frames the action of the film. Their tone, suggests Fregoso (1993: 130) is:

... open-ended, elliptical – which made me wonder if this style does in fact reflect the sense of loss of time, or of loss while doing time. Santana's prose may very well capture the interminable agony of what it must feel like, on a daily, hourly basis, to be locked up for years.

But the letter writing as a narrative device also allows for voice-over reconstruction of a previous life outside prison and enables the mirroring of prison life and barrio life to be developed. The connections between the mise-en-scène of prison architecture and use of space is matched in the cinematic Los Angeles by an outside world where recurring images of protective bars – on homes, shop windows, houses, banks, pharmacies, schools, hospitals and the wealthy gated

communities - signifies a 'carceral city' (Figures 171 – 172). It also reinforces the 'paranoid spatiality' (Davis, 1990) referred to earlier in the analysis of *Strange Days* and *Falling Down*. In *Blood In Blood Out*, *American Me* and *Mi Familia*, one gets the sense of the mise-en-scène inhabited outside of prison being equally restrictive and controlling for the ex-convict and their loved ones. The paranoid sense of being under surveillance is effectively achieved through cinematic storytelling. As audiences engaging in the drive of the narrative we are also made aware that we are the watchers, who also feel a sense of identification with those in the film who are being watched. The audience's ability to have a split subjectivity is one of the effects of cinema spectatorship and this is heightened in representations of cities by the ever increasing use of closed circuit cameras, the portability and easily concealed nature of video cameras, and the ever-present eye in the sky of the TV news or police helicopter. The fractured subjectivity of inside and outside for the ex-convict is portrayed by revisiting the mise-en-scène, shooting style, and colour scheme of the prison experience.

Jimmy, one of the siblings in the Sanchez family whose history is told in *Mi Familia* returns from the harsh blue light of prison to the soft tones of his parent's house where his young son is being looked after. He also re-offends and the coldness of the blue light that permeates Jimmy's return to prison registers it as a place of penance. In a voice-over, delivered by Pacos, he describes the return of Jimmy to prison as if he was a martyr, the mise-en-scène, particularly the lighting, portrays Jimmy's self-sacrifice. He is the one who takes all the sins of the family on his back and pays their collective dues in prison (Figures 173 and 174). His sacrifice provides his siblings with the chance to be productive. These words are echoed in several other barrio/prison films, for example, *Blood In Blood Out*, and *American Me*,

where prison is seen as a rite of passage for young Latinos. However, unlike Jimmy in *Mi Familia*, they are not all penitents in the penitentiary. Jimmy knows he must move away to start a new life, to get out of the carceral city and leave the prison way of living behind.

A key element in the mirroring of prison life and barrio life is the inability of central characters such as Santana in *American Me*, to leave the prison behind in his barrio life. After his long-term prison sentence he replays the sexual violence of the prison in his efforts to form a relationship with Julie (Evelina Fernández). On their first date attempting to make love, he can only express his feeling violently and tries to sodomize her. Through cross-cutting the viewer is drawn back to prison where Santana has arranged the rape and murder of the son of a rival gang leader. It is clear Santana cannot escape the prison in his head, and as he is the voice-over narrator, neither can the audience.

Another key element in the mirroring of prison life and barrio life is the construction of the gang or *clica* as a social unit. In *Mi Vida Loca*, *American Me* and *Blood In Blood Out*, the gang is seen as being essential to the formation of individual identity, community/barrio identity and mobility, and in prison, the gang becomes the organising unit of ethnic identity. In *American Me* discussions about identity are raised explicitly through Santana who is the product of the rape of his mother by an American sailor during the Zoot Suit riots of 1943. Santana has to come to terms with his fractured identity that corresponds to the mixed identity of many Latina/o Los Angelenos.

There is a suggestion by Canfield (1994:5) that the gang may have displaced the traditional family unit in Latino/a culture. Perhaps it is more likely that in the burgeoning barrios of Los Angeles the gang and the family units become, in tandem, a way of dealing with this fractured subjectivity. The longing for belonging is always stronger in a place where one's ethnic identity can be used as a badge of exclusion from full participation in society. Canfield cites the sociologist Joan Moore on the ways in which gang identity is solidified.

Stories about the gang in jail become part of the gang's general mythic heritage ... Thus the clique structure of the gang means that in addition to each clique's own mini-culture, the clique has the general culture of the gang – both in the streets and in the prisons – to draw upon for myths and legends of prowess (Moore, cited in Canfield, 1994:5).

The links between barrio space and prison space identify this co-ordinate as another important factor in the formation of cinematic Latina/o identity. In the main, the mirroring of these spaces is used to reiterate the sense of confinement and limited mobility of the barrio, but in *Mi Vida Loca*, there is an attempt to undercut the rite-of-passage mythology of prison. Although Giggles's time in prison is seen as adding to the prowess of the gang, she wants to move away from the barrio/prison connection as she attempts to democratise the gang and share the powers of leadership. In the same film the story of El Duran and La Blue Eyes situates the importance of prison as a surrogate place of identity formation for those on the outside and those on the inside. When La Blue Eyes becomes aware of the duplicity of Juan Temido/El Duran it is as if the mythical/poetic nature of prison life is held up for examination and seen as a wasted site for the investment of time and space by the individual, the gang, and the community. The portrayal of prison as a surrogate homeland in *American Me*, and *Blood In Blood Out*, signals

the presence of each co-ordinate in the other establishing the complexity of Latina/o identity formation.

Barrio/Homeland

In a foreword to Davis's *Magical Urbanism*, Roman del la Campa (2000: xiii-xiv) suggests the complex nature of Latina/o identity.

Each Latino group may be unique, but even those who are newly arrived come to share a call for a different, if unstable, sense of ontological space characterized by doubleness – too American to seriously undertake a return to the motherland, but able to nurture a different cultural and linguistic heritage in the United States, with which it maintains contact in multiple and contradictory ways.

This “doubleness” is a feature of the identities of most of the central characters in *American Me*, *Mi Familia* and *Born in East L.A.* For many Latina/o immigrants, Mexico and Central America are the geographical locations of their homeland, although this oversimplifies the strong regional differences that exist. The relationship between Latina/os and their homeland is dependant on their length of residence, gender, class, and age. The imagined homeland is often the site for cross-generational conflict in Latina/o families, seen by the younger generation as an adherence to a nostalgic past that inhibits their chances of assimilation into the dominant white culture. These differences are evident in the relationship between the father of the Sanchez family in *Mi Familia* and his children. They strive to achieve a different sense of identity that marries, sometimes uncomfortably, their Mexican-ness and their American-ness, representing the doubleness that de la Campa (2000) above has observed.

Morley and Robins (1995: 103) establish the sense of illusion that is necessary in those peoples who retain a nostalgic longing for the place from which they travelled, or a place they imagined as their home:

There can be no recovery of an authentic cultural homeland. In a world that is increasingly characterised by exile, migration and diaspora, with all the consequences of unsettling and hybridisation, there can be no place for such absolutism of the pure and authentic. In this world, there is no longer any place like Heimat.

The problematic notion of homeland is the third part of the spatial co-ordinates that encompass the relationship of the barrio to the city and the prison. In each of the films considered here the representation of a place from which some of the main characters emerge, or are grounded by, becomes known as the homeland. Often there is an attempt to recreate the homeland in a version of identity and place politics. In *Mi Familia*, for example, the barrio in the city is lit with a richness of light that bathes the place in a soft glow recalling an ideal past time, but also a remembrance of an idealised homeland. The father of the Sanchez family grows corn in a small field near their home and the front garden is rich in flowering plants and garden produce. A little bit of Mexico idealised and transplanted in the barrio that is their American home. This sense of nostalgia for a homeland where prosperity was not possible is one of the many spatial contradictions that surface on close examination of barrio space.

In *Mi Familia*, the struggle of the Sanchez family to ground themselves in the new earth of East Los Angeles is centred round the family home, which becomes an oasis of settled identity, a mythic Mexico, amidst the troubles of forming a Mexican-Americaness. The mise-en-scène, the colour filters, the serenity of the

matriarch and patriarch, the interactions in Spanish, all help to produce an idealised space where Mexico has been re-made.

The interconnection between prison space and barrio space established in the last section is complicated by the representation of the prison as a surrogate homeland, a place of exile, where local or national geography is subsumed by the colour of your skin. In *Blood In Blood Out* attempts by the mixed race character Miklo to join the Latino gang, *La eme*, are severely tested by the gang leader, Montana (Enrique Castillo), who questions his loyalty because of his skin colour. Montana elaborates on how the Latino gangs within the prison system can take overall control and turn prisons into Latino states in exile. The nationalist rhetoric and post-colonial discourse provide a veneer of politicisation on what is essentially the desire to control the drug, gambling and prostitution trade within and outside the prison. This politics of identity are taken up with more vigour and narrative presence in *American Me*. Using flashback and flash forward Santana's history is represented as a model for identity formation forged in the conflict between oppressor (United States) and oppressed (Latina/os). Santana is the product of a rape by an American sailor in a tattoo parlour during the Los Angeles Zoot Suit riots of 1943.

A film that addresses directly the politics of identity, posing questions about assimilation and integration, Chicana/o nationalism and homeland nostalgia is Cheech Marin's comedy *Born in East L.A.* (1987). The genre and the director are important elements in the construction of this vision of Latino existence in contemporary Los Angeles. Best known for his comedy collaborations with Tommy Chong, in the 1970s the duo released a range of popular comedy albums of their stage routines that formed the basis for films such as *Up In Smoke* (Adler, 1978),

Cheech and Chong's Next Movie (1980), *Cheech and Chong's Nice Dreams* (1981), and *Cheech and Chong's The Corsican Brothers* (1984). Celebrations of the excesses of pot-smoking, music and sex, the films proved huge box-office hits for the Hollywood studios, making over \$300 million dollars. The comedy duo split in the mid-1980s when Nancy Reagan's "Just say no" ethos made their work less acceptable in Hollywood. On the strength of his success in the Cheech and Chong franchise Marin got the opportunity to write and direct a film for Universal Studios.

Born in East L.A. tells the story of Rudy Robles (Cheech Marin), a third-generation Chicano living in East L.A. who doesn't speak Spanish, who while picking up his undocumented Mexican cousin from the toy factory in downtown L.A. is himself considered an illegal by the immigration authorities (*la migra*) and deported to Mexico. In a series of comic episodes the film tells the story of Rudy's efforts to return to his home in East L.A. In an interview with Chon Noriega (2001: 190) Marin declared the idea for the film came to him when he read a similar story in the *Los Angeles Times* while listening to Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.* on the radio. Noriega (2001: 190) suggests that the film's narrative "... is first and foremost about the ephemeral status of Chicano citizenship ... it conflates Chicano nationalism with the national ideology of America as a land of immigrants." A close analysis of the opening scene reveals the ways in which the mise-en-scène with its carefully placed iconography sets up the paradoxes and contradictions of Rudy's Chicano birthright and the notion of homeland as Mexico/U.S.A.

Like *Mi Vida Loca*, *Born in East L.A.* begins with an establishing shot of the downtown skyline, the camera pans left to East L.A. and then tilts down and – through a series of dissolves – comes to rest on a house beside a church, with a

fence, well-kept yard and a tree, a location that becomes "... the defining unit of the barrio" (Noriega, 2001: 192). This shot overturns the usual Hollywood stereotype seen in *Colors* and *Falling Down* of the barrio as a place of chaos and danger (Figures 175 – 179).

The next shot moves to the interior of the home and here the mise-en-scène displays a household that offers a mix in terms of language usage, generation, popular culture and cultural identity of Mexico and the United States. These dualities are represented in a minor disagreement between Rudy and his mother, initially over her choice of a kitsch print of Jesus with a crown of thorns, then over his duties to extended family members. Throughout the scene, the full shots of Rudy and his mother register details of the interior décor: devotional items, family photographs, kitsch lamps, other objects and a home altar (Figures 180 – 182). Noriega (2001: 193) suggests this scene pinpoints one concise image that expresses and in some ways resolves their argument within the mise-en-scène, it also represents the doubleness referred to by de la Campa (2000):

... a home-altar atop a bookcase filled with an encyclopaedia set ... the encyclopaedias represent the immigrant's rite of passage into the objective knowledge of American society; while above, the altar with lit *velas* (candles) is an active and personal engagement of spiritual belief ... the mise-en-scène establishes a hierarchical conflict between mother and son that works on a number of levels: gender, generation, class, and culture of origin.

Through the vehicle of comedy Marin, as director and star, poses much more than the initial question set up by the film's plot, instead notions of home and homeland are questioned and complicated. In Mexico, the homeland of his forebears, Rudy has to make money in order to return home to East Los Angeles. A white bar-owner/entrepreneur Jimmy (Daniel Stern) hires Rudy to "Americanize" a

group of Asians. Rudy teaches them the style, mannerism, talk and dress of a Chicano homeboy from East Los Angeles (Figure 183). When they do emerge in the midst of a Cinco de Mayo parade in the barrio, passing as Chicanos, they approach a white LAPD officer who accepts their homeboy credentials of language and gesture (Figures 184 and 185). In comedic terms at least they are assimilated into the framework of institutionalized racism. As Fregoso (1993: 60) suggests:

If the figurative marker of the dominant culture is the color of one's skin, then Cheech Marin pushes this hegemonic distinction to its ultimate consequences. Because all people of color "look alike," then Asians can be taught to act like Chicanos and vice versa. Ultimately the filmmaker's critique of dominant culture illustrates the opacity of racism.

The comedy genre of the film is important as it enables Marin to deal with serious political issues in a way that suggests to the audience that scenes and images should not be taken at face value. Fregoso (1993: 62) suggests the film made a significant intervention in Chicano politics of identity as a Cheech Marin comedy produced by mainstream Hollywood.

He re-inscribes a Chicano political space that ruptures both the notion of Hollywood hegemony and borders of political correctness in Chicano cinema. At the very least, Marin gives us an alternative form for a Chicano/a activist aesthetics, one that draws from a vernacular tradition and re-constitutes, albeit in the ideal, a new social world through collective strength.

While in Mexico Rudy becomes involved with a Salvadorean girlfriend, Dolores (Kamala Lopez Dawson). On his return to the family home that he had taken for granted in the opening scene he appears to have embraced a pan-ethnic Latino identity characterized by Dolores's insistence that he learn Spanish (Noriega, 2002: 199). However, as Noriega (2002: 200) argues:

In *Born in East L.A.*, there is not a call for a nationalist “homeland” that exists within and against the United States itself as an ideological overlay, but rather an attempt to make “East LA” synonymous with “U.S.” and, hence, with citizenship. This is achieved through a rhyme that establishes metonymy between barrio and nation, “I was born in East LA,” and thereby signifies two seemingly opposite birthrights: Mexican descent and US citizenship.

The end title sequence has a parodied version of Springsteen’s *Born in the U.S.A* with Cheech Marin singing *Born in East L.A.*, happy to declare his U.S. citizenship and his Mexican ancestry not as an either/or but as a both/and. The cultural space created by this parody recognises the hybridity of the diasporic experience (Hall, 1991: 235) represented by Rudy’s enforced journey from home to homeland and back to a place, East L.A., that has become both home and homeland.

Conclusion

What emerges from the interconnection of the three spatialities identified in the range of films analysed here is the sense that a more complex version of the Latina/o character can be produced through Hollywood. In nearly all cases the films endeavour to make explicit the links between their location, whether barrio, prison or imaginary homeland and the city of Los Angeles. In these cinematic city narratives the barrio may still be represented as the container of drug, gang and criminal culture but there is also a re-appraisal of how the power of the gang or *clica* needs to be considered. As McCarthy et al., suggest (1997: 284) in relation to *American Me* (1992):

The drug-infested inner city is a sign of something gone wrong and in need of repair. What must be done ... is to leave the family of the gang and return to the family of the home and ethnic community where love and affirmation abound. The aspiration then is not to flee to the border suburbs, but, rather, to evaluate the new traditions – gangbanging, drugs, violence and the like – that have lead their inner-city world on a non-stop roller coaster ride to nowhere.

I argue this can be extended to *Stand and Deliver* (1989), *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) and *Mi Familia* (1994). *Mi Vida Loca* takes this mission further by focusing on the representation of Los Angeles Latinas, the female experience, and the construction of a community that recognises the powerful link between identity and mobility. For the characters in *Mi Vida Loca*, their barrio, Echo Park, is their home, and it is settled somewhere near the centre of the utopian/dystopian continuum. Appropriating Rose's term 'paradoxical space' it might be argued that these films work to provide a space for dialogue about the very nature of Latino/a representation, with *Mi Vida Loca* being the most ambitious in terms of re-imagining a gendering of space and place. The notion of identity is recognized as being problematic, and the contribution of class, and particularly gender, to the politics of Latina/o identity marks off *Mi Vida Loca* as a key text. In examining the film's spatial co-ordinates it emerges how this 'paradoxical space' might be mobilised as a way of challenging the stereotypical representations of Hollywood, producing the possibility of a re-imagining of the spaces of Latina/o life.

The chapter highlights the importance placed on the idea of the 'imagined community' as identified by Anderson (1991), and the role cinema can play in re-imagining a sense of Latina/o identity. What emerges in films such as *Mi Vida Loca*, *Mi Familia*, *Stand and Deliver*, *American Me* and *Born in East L.A.* is this ongoing battle to re-articulate the stereotyped Hollywood representations of *latinidad* that constructs ethnicity as a threat, and the female subject as invisible unless as an object of the male gaze. These films give voice to the diaspora experience of Latina/os in a way that reflects the definition suggested by Stuart Hall (1993:235).

The diaspora experience as I intend is defined, not by the essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing themselves and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

To follow Hall's argument further it might be suggested that those films that address directly the Latina/o population tend to represent a close link between identity and place.

In the films analysed the city, symbolic, imagined and literal, has a fundamental role in the formation of identity. Perhaps this is what provides the strongest contrast with the "paranoid spatiality" of *Falling Down* (1993) and other products of mainstream Hollywood cinema that make explicit the fear of being over-run by the Other. The lack of belonging manifested by D-FENS may be a symptom of the post-modern world where place seems to have collapsed as a signifier of identity, but it might also be read as an inability on the part of the white male to adapt to the hybridised culture that continues to develop in Los Angeles. In contrast *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) revels in the ties with locality, Echo Park, the city, and the transnational connections of commerce, music and links with the homeland, even the prison, and a sense of belonging to the gang. The characters in *Mi Vida Loca* (1993), *Born in East L.A.* (1988), *American Me* (1992), *Mi Familia* (1995) and *Stand and Deliver* (1989) recognise the bounded nature of their place but also the need to see it as a place of intersections, perhaps recognising it as a 'cultural space'.

If, as Rocco (1996: 369) has suggested "... it is 'cultural space' that seems to form the basis of community networks", it may be that films such as *Mi Vida Loca*, *Stand and Deliver*, and *Born in East L.A.* through their use of Latino/a music, graphics,

storytelling style, and performance, produces just such a 'cultural space' that helps to incorporate, but also move beyond, place-based identity. Representing the complexity of the relationship between the barrio and the city, the barrio and the prison, and the barrio and the homeland begins to define a Latina/o 'cultural space' that moves well beyond the stereotypical Hollywood representation of Latinos/as as an ethnic threat. The duality of images that construct the barrio as utopian or dystopian are often developed by the otherising of space, or by normalising the space we encounter. The liminal spaces where Latina/o characters encounter other worlds are often represented as troubled, but as was observed from the work on *Stand and Deliver* (1989) these spaces can also represent a sense of promise where social relations can occur, but this is often dependant on class and gender. As Rodolfo Acuna (1997: 2) contends "Mexican acceptability in Los Angeles varies according to the Mexican's appearance and socio-economic status" (1997:2).

A key element that emerges from this analysis is the self-awareness by filmmakers of how they are re-articulating the conventionalised spaces of Hollywood cinema. This helps to produce a self-reflexivity in the filmmakers that may engender in the targeted audience a more problematic, and dynamic, encounter with Latina/o mobility and identity. This suggests the possibility that in some instances, including *Mi Vida Loca* (1993), *Stand and Deliver* (1989), *Mi Familia* (1995), and *Born in East L.A.* (1989), filmmakers are consciously producing representations of Latina/o life that question the Hollywood stereotype of barrio life and assist with the re-imagining of communities. Making the complex geography of Latina/o Los Angeles visible in the cinematic city produces the geography of possibility, the possibility of re-mapping, and re-imagining. The exercise of that re-mapping is seen in the spatial and stylistic ambition of *Mi Vida Loca*, where cinematic city space is

feminized; in the comedic subversion of notions of identity and belonging in *Born in East L.A.*, and in the representation of the middle-class Latino teacher in *Stand and Deliver*.

From a Hollywood perspective the broad and ever-increasing constituency of Latina/o population in the United States is the more likely market-reach to encourage investment in Latina/o films. I am not suggesting that more Latina/o Hollywood films will necessarily mean more three-dimensional depictions of Latina/o life and experience. However, further production and increasing crossover success does offer greater opportunity for filmmakers to subvert, challenge, and modify the stereotypes that exist and may help to imagine anew the Latina/o community. Given time, Hollywood will be forced to recognise the demographic trend outlined in the Census 2000 and this may result in an increase of production of films aimed at the Latina/o market. As Macaulay (2003: 16) has asserted:

There are now 37 million Hispanics in the US, compared with 36.2 million African-Americans. The former constitute 13 per cent of the population and, like blacks, they spend more per capita on movies than the general public. The average age of Hispanics is 10 years lower than the general population. This means a huge audience, aged 18 to 34, of prime movie-goers just waiting to be bombarded with product.

In the next chapter I argue that Hollywood is beginning to identify this market potential by addressing specific audience groups, especially as the demographic information shows that non-Anglo ethnic groups, particularly in the metropolitan areas, will soon become Hollywood's majority audience. If the cinematic city of Latina/o Los Angeles is beginning to represent the multiple geographies and hybrid identities of the material city the next chapter explores how far Hollywood might

go to secure the niche markets by making hybridity a key selling point in the representations of cinematic Los Angeles.

Chapter Seven

Los Angeles: a cinematic city of hybridity?

People who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically) inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate *between* cultures and who, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed speak from *difference*. They speak from the “inbetween” of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being the same as and at the same time *different from*, the others amongst whom they live (Rushdie, 1991: 17).

Just as we might distinguish between forms of mobility and their significance depending on the context of power and choice within which they occur, so we must distinguish between different forms and modalities of hybridity in different contexts, most especially in relation to the degree of choice or control that people have over their living circumstances (Morley, 2000: 237).

Introduction

In this chapter I aim to interrogate the proposition that a number of contemporary Los Angeles films have begun to represent identity more as a process than a fixed entity. Despite the general narrowness of Hollywood’s view of the multi-ethnic make-up of Los Angeles, in my previous chapters I have elaborated a number of exceptions. I now want to focus on a number of contemporary films, released within a year, including *What’s Cooking?* (Chadha, 2000), *The Fast and the Furious* (Cohen, 2001), and *Crazy/Beautiful* (Stockwell, 2001) that still appear to be concerned with fears and anxieties about mobility and identity but also signal an attempt to move into another cultural space where the intersections of cultures and identities suggest a tentative embrace of hybridity in the cinematic Los Angeles. I argue that these films can be seen to engage in a reassessment of the nature of identity in the cinematic Los Angeles, providing a more complicated

picture of an ethnic, class and gender mix that represents the multiple, separated and intertwined geographies of the city.

However, whilst these films suggest the possibility for co-operation rather than conflict within communities and across the ethnic, economic and gender divides, they do not overlook the problems and accommodations that inevitably arise. As Amit-Talai (1998: 42) has noted in relation to theorists who interpret creolisation, hybridity, and crossing borders as wholly progressive.

In celebrating ... interstitiality, they can end up being quite cavalier about the necessary and ... difficult ... work ... required to construct ... new forms of identity and naïve about the political or personal costs of failed or stillborn efforts at creating new boundaries.

Hence, I am not suggesting that recognition or promotion of the notion of hybridity is in itself a symbol of a more progressive ideology. Rather, the cautionary note sounded by Morley (2000: 237) in the quotation above is a useful guide for the analysis of this so-called tendency of hybridity in the cinematic Los Angeles. It may well be that hybridity because of its frequency of use has "... acquired the status of a common-sense term, not only in academia but also in the culture more generally "(Brah & Coombes, 2000: 1). I still find the term valuable in helping to describe the mix of subjects, genres, and audiences that these films address, and the more complicated representation they offer of the multiple geographies of Los Angeles. Nonetheless in the context of Hollywood productions I would suggest that in these films there appears to be a less fixed notion of identity that is intimately connected to themes of mobility.

"Generation M" as a visible sign of hybridity

The growing awareness through census figures of the rise of what is being termed "Generation M" is part of the overall context for my argument that these films are beginning to encompass the process of hybridity and offering a foretaste of "Generation M". Harlow (2003: 23) describes this development in the following terms: "Generation M kicks off an American racial revolution."

One in five children born in San Jose is of mixed race, according to a new report. By 2030 up to 10% of Americans are expected to describe themselves on census forms as multiracial. "Generation M." The old ghettos and enclaves will still exist in the big cities such as Los Angeles, but the study – entitled *Does Anybody Else Look Like Me?* – predicts that young Gen M-ers will be concentrated in trendsetting communities such as San Jose, neighbouring Sacramento and San Antonio in Texas, from where their influence will spread across the country. Donna Jackson Nakazawa, the author of the study, argues that Gen M was inevitable after segregation was swept away in the 1960s. "People of different races worked together for the first time, where proximity breeds desire," she said. "We marry who we know, and as a result we are now seeing the first overtly multiracial generation in American history. Instead of hiding it away, they want to have the right not to have to choose a race. It will become a non-issue." ... Many celebrities such as Vin Diesel, the action film star, and Tiger Woods, the golfer, refuse to call themselves anything but multi-racial.

This report may be seen as overly optimistic in its declaration of the possible impact of "Generation M" but it does point to a demographic trend that the Hollywood film industry takes seriously. It must be remembered that intermarriage between whites and other racial groups was against California state law from 1901-1948. So officially the children of mixed race families involving whites have only been deemed lawful since the late 1940s and almost sixty years later it can still be a taboo subject for Hollywood representations, as Evans (2002) has argued. Yet, as Allen and Turner (2002: 51) note in their analysis of the 2000 Census, because of increasing intermarriage between members of different ethnic groups and the growing number of mixed-race children, a new mixed-race census category will

become even more important in the future, particularly in California. In the United States 2.4 percent of the population identified themselves in terms of more than one race; in California that figure was 4.7% (Allen and Turner, 2002).

The links between notions of hybridity and people of mixed parentage, or to use Nakazawa's term "Generation M", have been identified by Phoenix and Owen (2000). In their discussion hybridity is "... theorized as processes resulting from the combination of peoples and cultures ", so even though the term was not designed to refer particularly to people of mixed parentage, it "... offers ways of thinking about ethnicity which include those of mixed parenting without pathologising them" (Phoenix and Owen, 2000: 75). In their work, Phoenix and Owen draw upon an earlier study by Tizard and Phoenix (1993) that showed how amongst young people of mixed race in South London, rather than mixed race heritage being understood as pathological, working through the binaries of 'neither one nor the other', there was emerging the beginnings of constructions of 'hybridity'" (cited in Phoenix and Owen, 2000: 76). In the USA, a collection of articles edited by Root (1996) signalled the developing interest in the assertion of mixed-parentage identities in academic work. Root's collection focuses on the ways it is possible to negotiate and remodel the 'borders' between 'races'. While in the main Hollywood representations of mixed-identity have nearly always been pathologised as a dilemma for the mixed-identity character as 'either/or' I argue the three films of the cinematic Los Angeles under investigation here are beginning to conceptualise identities as 'both/and'.

The popularity of a film such as *The Fast and the Furious* (Cohen, 2001) may signal a greater acceptance by a broader audience of a "Generation M" character. This is

evident in the use of Vin Diesel, who is half African-American half Italian-American, as the star. Before the success of *The Fast and The Furious* Diesel came to the attention of Steven Spielberg who cast him as Private Carpazo in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Spielberg had been impressed with Diesel's directorial debut *Strays* (1997) billed as a multi-cultural *Saturday Night Fever*. Diesel's next film as a director *Multi-facial* (1999) told the story of an aspiring actor and the problems he encounters in auditions because of his mixed-race appearance. Diesel's marketing of his own mixed-identity background is seen as being an important part of his working philosophy and his audience appeal.

The other teen movie I examine is *Crazy/Beautiful*, which tells the story of an affluent, white, teenager and her relationship with an aspiring Latino youth. The cultural instrumentality of these films in the teen movie genre is to depict a Los Angeles that reflects the ethnic make-up of the city. *Crazy/Beautiful*, *The Fast and the Furious*, and *What's Cooking?* are analysed in terms of how cultural difference is represented through the cinematic techniques of mise-en-scène, the moving camera and cross-cutting. So the focus will be on those scenes where the difficulties and the potential of cultural mixing are represented through the film techniques and how this is related to what the films do culturally in terms of their representations of mobility and identity.

Culinary Mixing

Los Angeles is such an exciting city and what I was seeing wasn't really reflected in the scripts I was reading or in the films I'd seen about America. I was intrigued by this picture of a living, breathing city that is culturally shifting to accommodate new influences all the time. Thanksgiving is perfect for exploring the ways people of different cultures experience the most American of holidays (Chadha, in Falk, 2001:15).

The words of director Gurinder Chadha describing her excitement about the production of her film *What's Cooking?* (2001). Chadha, born in Kenya of Indian parentage, raised in London, might be seen as a female representative of the "in-between" culture suggested by Rushdie (1991:17) above. She is properly celebrated for her first film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), a refreshing comedy of subcontinental Indians from Birmingham on a day trip to Blackpool. Her follow-up film *What's Cooking?* took six years to go into production. Co-scripted with her American husband Paul Mayeda Berges, it tells the story of four families, African-American, White (Jewish), Vietnamese and Latina/o, strangers to each other but living close-by in a middle-class Los Angeles neighbourhood, who gather to celebrate Thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving meal is a ritual of great significance in American culture and, as Janet Siskind (1992: 167-191) has noted in her analysis of the day, it plays a prominent part in the affirmation of an American identity. Siskind (1992: 167/8) elaborates in the following way:

It is impossible to be an American and be unaware of Thanksgiving. ... Thanksgiving ... subtly expresses and reaffirms values and assumptions about cultural and social unity, about identity and history, about inclusion and exclusion. Thanksgiving is highly structured and emotion laden, with its celebration of family, home and nation. In every household that considers itself American or desires to be considered American, Thanksgiving brings family members back home, physically and emotionally, ritually transforming attenuated ties of kinship into a stronger bond. The Thanksgiving feast charges the set of meanings incorporated in being or becoming an American with the emotional intensity and significance of family. ... Participation in the ritual transforms a collection of immigrants into Americans by connecting them to a cultural history stretching back to the founding of the country. At the same time, Thanksgiving invests the value of family ties with an aura of religion and patriotism.

What's Cooking? examines closely the invented tradition of the Thanksgiving feast as a process of identity formation, raising a series of questions about race, class and gender. The organisation and consumption of the Thanksgiving feast provides

the narrative structure for the film as the director cross-cuts between each family in their simultaneous preparation and eating of the meals. This editing enables the audience to occupy the *mise-en-scène* of four different families of different ethnic origins. These differences are obvious in the approach they take to preparing the turkey but they are also united in the ritual of the day. I focus on those scenes where new identity formation is being negotiated. Jimmy (Will Yun Lee) the eldest son of the Vietnamese family is at University and has become the boyfriend of Gina (Isidra Vega), the eldest daughter of the Latina/o family. Rather than returning for Thanksgiving to his family home he invents a very busy study schedule so he can go to his girlfriend's home. Jimmy's sister Jenny (Kirsty Wu) also has a boyfriend outside of her ethnic group highlighting the greater readiness of second generation Vietnamese-Americans in forming relationships with partners outside their ethnic group. Such co-operation between Asian-Americans and Latina/os has been highlighted by Davis (2000: 46/47) who suggests: "Los Angeles is distinguished from other metropolitan areas by the extraordinary scale and economic importance of the daily interactions between its Asian and Latino immigrants."

In the preparation for the feast, the son of the Latina/o family has met his estranged father in the supermarket while buying the turkey. The father has moved out after having an affair with the cousin of his wife. In a moment of sympathy and in a futile attempt to re-make the family the son asks the father to visit for the Thanksgiving meal. The son hopes the gathering around the table for the Thanksgiving feast will enable some form of reconciliation between his mother and her unfaithful husband. Elizabeth Avila (Mercedes Ruehl), the mother of the family is a primary school teacher and we see her in one of the opening scenes conducting the children in their Thanksgiving assembly attended by the Vietnamese

mother, Trinh Nguyen (Joan Chen) and the African-American mother, Audrey Williams (Alfre Woodard), both of whom have young children attending the school. Elizabeth Avila is a middle-aged woman who has blossomed since the departure of her unfaithful husband and she is now having a relationship with one of her male colleagues who she plans to invite to the Thanksgiving meal, unaware that her son Anthony (Douglas Spain) has asked her estranged husband Javier (Victor Rivers). As well as being the matriarch of the Latina/o family she has her own strong work identity. One of the most powerful aspects of her depiction is her ability to reshape her identity after the betrayal by her husband. She is strong, confident, proud of her children, and unwilling to take her husband back; she has moved on.

Other identity formation issues are evident in the White/Jewish family. The Seeligs, Ruth (Lainie Kazan) and Herb (Maury Chaykin) appear to have lived in the once all-white neighbourhood the longest, and this is suggested through the mise-en-scène, the formal, slightly old-fashioned decor; with the lace cloth covering the dining room table and, with a touch of incongruity, the jacuzzi in the back garden. The Seeligs await anxiously the arrival of their daughter Rachel (Kyra Sedgewick) and her lesbian girlfriend Carla (Julia Margulies). The presence of the two women sets in motion a series of mostly comedic meeting and avoidance points as the mother and father try to come to terms with their daughter's sexual identity.

The African-American family has their own issues to deal with. Ronald (Dennis Haysbert) the father in this family has also had an affair but he and his wife have agreed an uneasy truce. They have a primary aged daughter Kristin (Bettany Jean Henry) and an older son Michael (Eric K. George) who is estranged from his father because of political/identity/class disagreements. The father works as a top aide for

the conservative, white governor, while Michael is an activist in a group that denounces the housing policy and other aspects of the governor's agenda, particularly his opposition to affirmative action. The clash between father and son is also fuelled by the past infidelity of the father. So although the father's mother Grace (Ann Weldon) is visiting from Chicago for Thanksgiving and is expecting to see her eldest grandchild, he is banished from the house. When he does arrive unexpectedly the disagreements flare up and the internal family scandal is revealed to the grandmother. Also at the table are their white friends, Paula (Shareen Mitchell) and James Moore (Gregory Itzin) a couple who have been through previous marriages and who have brought James's disgruntled teenage daughter Monica (Mariam Parris). Monica is also very resistant to the togetherness culture that the meal around the table demands.

The use of *mise-en-scène*, the moving camera and cross-cutting between the families enables an almost simultaneous presentation of the events in four different households. This occupation of the spaces of the home by the audience is given greater prominence by the construction of the *mise-en-scène*. By cutting back and forth between the four families Chadha establishes a buoyant, lively, rhythmic pacing while constantly furthering the plot. The preparation of the Thanksgiving meal is given four distinct approaches. The home becomes the focus for most of the action as the meal is prepared and consumed. Each home reflects the personality and ethnicity of the families but there are as many similarities identified as there are differences. With her moving camera Chadha tends to emphasize the rituals that unify. Jimmy gets involved in the football game on television with his girlfriend's brother and his friends. The football game is also being watched in the

Vietnamese household. Mothers and daughters or daughters-in-law prepare the stuffing and argue over the best way to cook the turkey.

Choosing to focus the narrative on the preparation, cooking and eating of a meal the film raises a series of questions about the ways in which difference has been made accessible to a broad range of ethnic groups through culinary mixing (Figures 190 – 193). The acceptance of Asian, Mexican, African-American ways of cooking and the use of a vast range of ingredients from other countries is, it could be argued, one of the most visible signs of multiculturalism, but also the triumph of consumer culture. The film appears to suggest that hybridity, at least on the level of culinary mixing, seems to work. What holds these elements together is the ritual of the turkey, flavoured by whatever tradition, but still regarded as being quintessentially American. As Siskind (1992: 169) points out the turkey "... is a model of and a model for the 'other'", and she also argues that the "stuffed turkey represents the Native Americans, sacrificed and consumed in order to bring civilization to the New World". So all ethnic identities, including Native Americans, and here I borrow hooks' (1992) term, have been "eaten/consumed", or subsumed in an American identity through the ritual of the Thanksgiving meal. However, the film raises interesting questions about the struggle between integration and assimilation with the complexities and the difficulties of those processes highlighted in the focus on the meal and the four different families. May (1996) and Cook, Crang and Thorpe (2000) draw attention to the dangers of seeing 'ethnic' cuisine as a visible product of multiculturalism and therefore somehow a 'good thing'. hooks (1992) in her seminal essay on "Eating the Other" provides a template for thinking through the ways in which "... cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to

enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed and forgotten” (hooks, 1992: 39). In the analysis of *What’s Cooking?* I argue what sets it apart from those cultural products that attempt to “eat the Other”, is that alongside the ritual of Thanksgiving the film provides representations of four families with fully rounded individuals, with vibrant cultures and identities that are part of, not separate from, their American-ness. *What’s Cooking?* could be added to list of films hooks (1992: 39) offers in her article, for example *Hairspray* (Waters, 1988), *Mystery Train* (Jarmusch, 1989), “... where desire for contact with those who are different or deemed Other is not considered bad, politically incorrect or wrong-minded”. The film also goes beyond exchanging one stereotype of the “other” as threat for another that casts the “other” as a pleasurable commodity for white consumption. The film does this by focusing on relationships between individuals and cleverly playing with the segregated geography for which Los Angeles is infamous by identifying the close proximity of the four homes encompassed by a crane shot (Figure 203).

As the four family groupings sit down to eat, the director focuses on the serving of food and in a series of dissolves between one table and the next, the differences become lessened as the common act of sharing food is highlighted (Figures 197 – 200). The director cuts between each house highlighting the emotional dynamics of each household by focusing on individuals or pairs of characters (Figures 194 – 196). As Thomas (2000:16) suggests “... the film seesaws between tradition and change with its people learning as they go what's important to hold onto and let go of. As a result, *What's Cooking?* captures the spirit of family life in contemporary Los Angeles to a degree unexpected in a mainstream movie. ”

Mobility across boundaries

Social, spatial and racial mobility figures within the film in a number of ways. The image of a white family of three generations celebrating Thanksgiving is the opening shot of the film. As the camera draws back the image is revealed as an advertisement on the side of a Los Angeles bus. The camera enters the bus to scan the multi-cultural identities of the passengers. The camera then foregrounds two young people, a white teenager and an Asian girl kissing, as the bus makes its journey across Los Angeles highlighting specific locations. The camera observes from the bus window various landmarks and street signs that fix the location of the film as Los Angeles. City Hall, Fairfax, Central Avenue, Little Tokyo are all referenced as the bus continues its journey and the film cross-cuts to another space to introduce some of the other leading characters.

We see the Thanksgiving theme re-established at a primary school play where once again the multi-cultural mix of the children on stage and the audience is the focus of attention (Figures 186 – 189). The director then cuts to another scene where a politician and his entourage are dedicating a space for housing development. The arrival of a car carrying a group of young protesters who throw eggs and flour at the politician is marked by the recognition between one of the protesters, a young African-American male, and one of the aides to the politician, an African-American man. The shot reverse shot convention makes the audience aware of their connection even if this has not been explained yet in the story. The camera's mobile gaze is then returned to the bus where as evening falls the passengers who queue to get on are standing alongside another advertising hoarding on the side of a bench this time depicting a Latina/o family celebrating Thanksgiving.

The journey the audience is taken on by the director in these early scenes as the opening titles roll, encapsulate beautifully the power of the moving image to transcend time and space and yet have the ability to be edited in a continuous fashion that suggests a causal link between all the images and characters on show. The decision to begin the film on a bus deliberately invokes other well-known Los Angeles bus journeys, particularly the one depicted in *Speed* (de Bont, 1995). But in this film there is no atmosphere of danger or menace on the bus. Despite the links between bus journeys and lower economic status normally associated with Hollywood representations of public transport, Chadha wants to represent the space of the bus as a place of multi-racial mixing rather than a space of the segregated poor. The film also draws attention to the fact that buses in Los Angeles are among the most used in the world (Anderson, 2004), despite the fact that the decentralized suburbanization of the city demands car ownership and freeway travel.

Inevitably the film also links the ability to move with the automobile and although Jimmy and Gina travel from their University campus, movements around the city are kept reasonably local, the supermarket, the video store owned by the Ngyuen family, are the limits of the journeys depicted. This is one L.A. story where residence rather than movement drives the narrative. Because of the nature of the story this does not feel like stasis but more of an attempt to reflect a sense of locality in the suburban sprawl of Los Angeles. So if mobility in terms of how and why people physically move is not so crucial in this story, other forms of mobility figure more directly. In terms of social/ethnic/class mobility a number of the second-generation characters show their determination to move across the boundaries that fix the world of their parents and grandparents. The university education of Jimmy and

Gina is evidence of this social mobility. The relationship between Rachel and Carla and the fact that they are going to have a baby reshapes the notion of family. The clashes that occur are often as a result of the dynamic of the generation gap, where second generation children are seen to embrace a mixed-identity, such as Mexican-American, Vietnamese-American, African-American and lesbian American. The children's greater social and ethnic mobility is celebrated by Chadha as many of the scenes involving these identity shifters are represented as loving and affectionate. The shots of Jimmy and Gina show them openly display their affection while in the Seelig household Carla and Rachel are more covert but their togetherness is ultimately celebrated through the acceptance of Rachel's parents (Figures 194, 201 and 202).

The film's comedy-drama genre hybrid ensures that while some moments of crisis arise they are overcome, or at least successfully side-stepped, by the demands of the comedy-drama marriage. But as with the difficulties that arise when hybrid identities are formed so the film faced some concern about its own hybrid nature.

As the director observed:

Editorially, people seemed to love the characters and the story. But then they'd pass it on the marketing department and word would come back, "How do we sell it? Is it a Black film? Is it a Latino film?" And I'd say, innocently, "It's an American film" (Falk, 2001: 17).

The nature of the genre ensures that the big issues raised by the formation of new identities by Jimmy and Gina, Carla and Rachel are not explored in great depth but in some cases fresh understandings are reached. Jimmy is asked whether he likes Jackie Chan movies as an attempt to keep small talk going with Gina's brother. He deals with this stereotype through humour and acceptance rather than

disapproval. In a scene where Jimmy offers to help in the kitchen he is spoken about in Spanish by the matriarchal group and to the surprise and delight of the women he answers in Spanish. Jimmy's teenage sister Jenny sees her white boyfriend against the wishes of her family but they are as concerned about finding an unused condom in her bag as the racial identity of her boyfriend. The Nguyens are so busy trying to hold on to their traditions that they seem unable to communicate with their children. Part of the reason Jimmy gives to Gina for going to her house instead of his own for the holiday is that he can't be himself in his parents' house.

And yet they are all brought back together by the crisis in the Nguyen family when the youngest child Joey, get his hands on a gun his older brother Gary has been hiding for some friends and accidentally fires a shot through the window. The reaction of the neighbours who hear the shot is to go towards the house in order to help, suggesting that gunfire is not a common experience in this neighbourhood. It is at this point that the proximity of the four houses is revealed. The camera moves on a crane to an overhead shot of the crossroads and the location of the houses where the audience have been spending their time is revealed not as the ethnic enclaves of Little Saigon, South Central, or East Los Angeles barrio but in a mixed community of many races. Representatives of the three families, the Seeligs, the Avilas, and the Williams's come together momentarily in the centre of the road as Jimmy rushes across to see what has happened in his family's house (Figure 203).

The moving camera through a mixture of crane shots and dissolves brings the audience back into the gardens or the kitchens of the four families. We see acts of

reconciliation and accommodation happening. Gina joins Jimmy at the Nguyens and as they sit around the table Jimmy's grandmother speaks in Vietnamese to say how adorable Gina is and that she looks Vietnamese (Figures 201 and 202). This final montage of scenes between the families is accompanied by the soundtrack of the Beach Boy's *Wouldn't It Be Nice* offered in celebration of the aspirational ideal that fits well with the generic make-up of the family saga/soap opera that this film undercuts and reinforces.

The final two shots of the film have the camera on a crane rise up from the street level to locate the four houses within the evening light of the neighbourhood and then the film concludes with a dissolve to a shot of night-time Los Angeles (Figures 204 and 205). Culturally what the film is doing through the use of mise-en-scène and camera movement is signalling metonymically through the shot of night-time Los Angeles the awareness that as a product of Hollywood these shots will represent the city to the world.

What's Cooking? is one of those rare films that offers a broadly optimistic view of life in the cinematic city of the Angels. And yet it should not be condemned as naïve because below the surface in all these families are issues of identity that question what it is to be an American. The film uses the ritual of American identification that is Thanksgiving to ask what is it to be an American living in Los Angeles at the start of a new millennium.

Racial mixing

Crazy/Beautiful (2001) is a film that falls within the teen movie genre and has at its centre a story about the formation of a cross-ethnic relationship and the problems

that this process creates. *Crazy/Beautiful* tells the story of two high school students from very different backgrounds embarking on a relationship despite their ethnic and class divisions. Carlos (Jay Hernandez) is a Latino who must travel for two hours on the early morning bus to get from his home in Boyle Heights to Pacific Palisades High School. Nicole (Kirsten Dunst) is an affluent white girl living in Malibu who slaloms down the road to the same High School in a jeep within minutes. The film opens with a voice-over from Nicole about her first meeting with Carlos and is framed by the use of Polaroid snaps in a photograph album (Figures 206 and 207). The images of Malibu pier morph from a still to the moving image of the story being told. Nicole's love of photography will again frame the final images of the film and accompanied by the voice-over offer a memory album structure that suggests the protagonists have lived successfully through the drama to come. Once the characters have met briefly on the beach where Carlos, with his homeboys, encounters Nicole doing community service by picking up the litter for what she claims was the robbery of a Seven-Eleven. Carlos and Nicole recognise each other from High School and as they say goodbye the opening credits roll (Figure 208).

The opening scenes portray the differences in their journeys to school and pinpoint the geographical co-ordinates of their separate worlds. His mother in the half-light of dawn wakes Carlos, she serves him breakfast and he heads out to catch a bus. In the morning light downtown L.A. occupies the backdrop as he makes his way to the bus stop and starts the two hour journey to Pacific Palisades High School. Unlike the upbeat representation of the bus journey represented at the beginning of *What's Cooking?* Carlos's bus is depicted as an old-style, pollution-emitting vehicle. The passage of time is shown as the scene cuts from one part of the

journey to another, showing the sunrise and the movement of the bus on to the freeway. Carlos yawns, rests his head and takes out a document that shows Annapolis Navy School, his ambition is figured by one piece of mise-en-scène. The use of ellipsis to construct Carlos's journey as a long one is reinforced when the camera cuts to Nicole still in bed but having been wakened for school by the calls of the Latina maid Rosa (Ana Argueta). Nicole is picked up by her friend Maddy (Taryn Manning) in her jeep, the audience learn she was arrested for a DUI (driving under the influence), rather than a robbery, and they slalom down the hill from their Topanga Canyon homes where they join the road to school just as the bus carrying Carlos makes the final stretch of the journey (Figures 213 – 216). He alights with a weary step but then moves purposefully towards class. Nicole and Maddy arrive with a screech of tyres and a bump on the kerb. Their lack of enthusiasm for school is evident in their dialogue and their reluctance to participate in classroom life.

Generically this is a teen movie made with a specific audience in mind with the star power of Kirsten Dunst, and the perceived on-screen chemistry between Dunst and her male co-star Jay Hernandez as an important element of the marketing strategy. Importantly the director, John Stockwell, who comes out of a documentary tradition, was very keen to reach the widest possible teen audience so certain Love-making scenes were trimmed for censorship classification purposes. Stockwell's intentions are made evident in the director's commentary included on the DVD (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2002). He remarks on his hopes for what the film might do culturally as part of the job of the teen movie summer release. Developed pragmatically as an entertainment vehicle for the star power of Kirsten Dunst, both director and star make clear their desire to push an agenda of

tolerance and understanding across the ethnic divide. I argue that this film's specific purpose, apart from drawing an audience, is to focus on the potential of a relationship across ethnic and class divisions.

Carlos is not portrayed as a stereotypical homeboy but an aspiring student with excellent grades whose ambition is to gain entry to navy flying school. Dunst plays the rich, white girl Nicole with family and identity problems. In the opening scene the use of *mise-en-scène*, moving camera and editing draws attention to the differences in their worlds. Carlos's lack of mobility in terms of the absence of a car is placed against his upward mobility in terms of his education and aspirations. His relationship with Nicole leads to some identity problems with his family and friends who see his relationship with this unruly, white girl as a betrayal of his ethnic origins. Both characters struggle to accommodate their differences and this is highlighted in a scene where Nicole visits Carlos's house during a birthday party. The camera moves with her through the throng of people dressed nicely for the occasion while she is in cut-offs and t-shirt. There is no outward hostility towards her but through clever use of the *mise-en-scène*, the tiny interiors of Carlos's home, claustrophobic yet filled with good cheer, contrast sharply with the *mise-en-scène* of her Topanga Canyon home which is all open space, big windows and sleek lines but lacking in homeliness and belonging. As Carlos goes to change the camera follows Nicole to the bathroom and stays with her as the party continues. We see evidence of her fractured identity as she stares into the folding shape of the mirror and three images are returned (Figures 217 – 219). When she emerges Carlos is dressed in smart shirt and trousers and is being spoken to by a Latina friend. As Carlos is brought to dance by the girl, Nicole leaves the party confirmed in her sense of being an outsider, linked with Carlos but not yet part of his world, linked

with her father but excluded from his world, and ill at ease with her own persona of the rebellious, affluent teenager. Nicole feels like a stranger in her own home as she is the child of her father's first marriage. Her mother committed suicide and she now lives with her father, his new wife and new child. Her father, Tom Oakley (Bruce Davison), is a liberal congressman bound up in his new family and unable to communicate with his daughter.

The director complicates the essentialism of the poor but happy, extended Latina/o family by developing a scene where Carlos's brother takes him to task for abusing the privilege of education he has been afforded by the hard work of his mother. Carlos has his family's blessing in his role as a Grade A student and a potential College applicant, but he also bears the burden of their expectation. The cost of crossing over from one ethnic group to another to form a relationship is again evident in a scene where Carlos and his homeboys meet some of Carlos's white, high school football team along the sidewalk cafés of Pacific Palisades. Racial tension leads to violence though the film doesn't go down the formulaic path of many high school movies set in Los Angeles, (where the spectacle of violent action becomes the centrepiece of the narrative). The lovers are reminded by their respective ethnic groups that crossing over comes at a price.

Yet in its representation of identities, the film is marked by its ability to avoid the difficulty noted by Dwyer (2002: 186) when she writes: "By theorizing identity through languages of 'cultural clash', ethnicity and identity are understood in terms that remain essentialist and static". Here, the 'cultural clash' between the two central characters does not dominate the narrative. Both Nicole and Carlos are attempting to forge their own identities. This is represented very effectively when

Nicole's relationship with her re-constructed family is the focus of the narrative. This is in stark contrast to the representation of the relationship between McGavin (Sean Penn) and Louisa (Maria Conchita Alonso) in *Colors* (1989) mentioned in Chapter Two where the language of 'cultural clash' leads to the break-up of their relationship.

In *Colors* (1989) when McGavin invites Louisa to a barbecue at his partner Hodges's house we see Louisa constructed as a demurely dressed young woman who is fond of babies. In a number of shots we see her holding the young baby who is the latest addition to Hodges's family. After McGavin and Louisa separate we meet her next as she emerges from the bedroom of a house he has raided and she is constructed as the stereotypical whore figure. Moving from Madonna to Jezebel the film reverts to negative stereotypes of the Latina character in order to justify McGavin's intolerance and inability to deal with difference (Figures 209 – 212).

By contrast, *Crazy/Beautiful* offers a more positive model of miscegenation. Gregory Stephens (1999: 272) notes the tendency among scholars, critics and reviewers to pathologize inter-raciality where every relationship that crosses racial lines is seen as inevitably exploitative or oppressive. Stephens (1999: 273) calls for the production of scripts, in the broader sense of that term, that provide a more affirmative position on inter-raciality. *Crazy/Beautiful* provides this more affirmative model but it does not try to hide the difficulties the young lovers face nor is it able to provide answers to all the questions it raises, particularly about Nicole's identity problems. It could be argued that Nicole becomes the victim of what Massey (1994: 11) has termed "flexible sexism". The mobility of Nicole as a young white, affluent woman carries with it an implicit threat to the patriarchal order. Nicole's

more mobile identity has to contend with society's masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilizing identity. Nicole's father, despite his apparent liberal and multi-cultural credentials, thinks that Nicole is unstable. When Carlos visits him in order to secure a potential sponsorship for the navy training school, his office walls are dotted with photographs of the congressman pictured with an array of different ethnic group leaders (Figures 220 and 221). In what might appear as a reversal of the traditional father's role to warn off the young man because of his unsuitability for his daughter, the father warns off Carlos from contact with Nicole because of her instability and the possibility that association with her will bring down his grade-point average and lose him the chance of admittance to Annapolis.

Having been warned off by Nicole's father, in the next scene the director highlights the forced separation of the lovers by placing them in the same space but separated by the long table in the school's eating area. Even as they move away from the male friends Carlos is sitting with, the lovers have a physical barrier between them. Film techniques used to associate the couple in the early stages of their relationship displaying their mutual attraction are now cleverly reversed to show that their separate worlds impose too many barriers (Figure 222). During this period of the film where the process of separation takes place the camera movement; mise-en-scène and editing all contribute to both characters' internal turmoil. The director cross-cuts between Carlos and Nicole in their different spaces, Carlos engrossed in his work at the table in the kitchen while Nicole seeks comfort with her friend Maddy. Carlos sits on the porch of his home with a book in his hand while Nicole gets drunk at a party.

The film ends with Carlos and Nicole staying together so it could be argued that the happy ending is simply and sentimentally Hollywood's easy answer to the problems of crossover relationships. And yet it could also be argued that too often in those rare films where a mixed race relationship is portrayed, for example, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), *Colors* (1989), *Far From Heaven* (Haynes, 2002), *Jungle Fever* (Lee, 1992), the relationship is inevitably doomed. The final image of *Crazy/Beautiful* accompanied by Nicole's voice-over shows Carlos in his flight uniform asking her to join him. This image is framed as a Polaroid snap of Carlos that Nicole states she always carries with her (Figure 223). As the credits roll other Polaroid snaps follow showing Carlos in his flight gear with his mother and his brother, an image that is loaded with the symbolism of the American Dream. The film seems to proclaim that in the United States meritocracy your ethnic identity need not be a barrier to success. The film declares that this union might represent what it is to be an American (Figure 224). Perhaps the director feels that wrapping the film's message of integration in the "stars and stripes" is the price he has to pay for the acceptance of the union between the races. In some ways this message of integration is similar to the one represented in *What's Cooking* where the ritual of Thanksgiving is closely linked, through Siskind's (1992) analysis, with notions of patriotism, and a sense of belonging to a family as a metonym for belonging to the national family. But as in *What's Cooking* the message of integration is represented not as unproblematic but part of a greater debate about what it is to be an American entering a new millennium.

Crazy/Beautiful works to promote the process of integration but it leaves many questions unanswered about Nicole's aspirations. Does her crossover romance help to heal the psychological wounds of her mother's death, her father's apparent

transference of love to his new family and her poor school performance? Is it enough for her to reach a state of contentment and therefore have herself fixed in place by love? Does she simply move from one form of patriarchal order to another? Does the film eventually curb her mobility even as it proclaims her fresh hybrid identity? These unanswered questions highlight the problematic nature of the process of new identity formation. The film provides an excellent model of this young couple being shown not in terms of a new hybrid identity but as represented in the *process of identity formation*, with all its associated accommodations, problems and possible rewards. This represents a move forward for mainstream Hollywood particularly within the teen movie genre and a more complex picture of identity relations in the multiple geographies of cinematic Los Angeles.

Taking it to the streets

A final film taking up this mixed identity process is *The Fast and the Furious* (2001). A film aimed mainly at the teenage market it became a huge hit in the United States and around the world and propelled the male star Vin Diesel to a place of some prominence as an action hero. The film might be more correctly classified in generic terms as a mix of the teen movie with the racing-in-the-street movie. Examples of this formula mix is evident in *Rebel Without A Cause* (Ray, 1955), *American Graffiti* (Lucas, 1972) through the whole range of hot-rod racing movies produced for the drive-in audiences of the 1960s and early 1970s, to the more recent car theft movies *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (Sena, 1999). The film was developed from a series of articles by Ken Li in *Vibe* magazine covering the LA subculture of young men who spend every penny of their own, and sometimes other people's money modifying \$10,000 Honda, Subaru, and other Japanese and

Korean models for illegal racing. Impromptu races take place in disused industrial areas with bigger meetings in the desert beyond the city (Hodgkinson, 2001:44).

This representation of the sub-cultural world of the street racers is allied to a plot involving freeway hijackings of trucks carrying luxury goods. An undercover police officer Brian O'Conner (Paul Walker) tries to infiltrate the world of the street racers as they are suspected of being responsible for the thefts, with Vin Diesel playing Dominic, the leader of the gang/family. The ethnic make up of the rival gangs maintains the racial divide of Asian-American, African-American, and Latina/o, but what makes Diesel's gang less fixed is Dominic's mixed race identity and the ease with which the gangs interact in preparation for the street race (Figure 225). The power of the sub-cultural group suppresses the ethnic differences and although there is clear rivalry between the African-American, Asian-American, Latino and Dominic's team the street racing sequences construct these disparate gangs in harmony against the power of the LAPD to disrupt their carefully planned street races.

Another strong aspect of identity explored in the film is the position of the undercover cop and his whiteness (Figure 227). As well as being the outsider, he is the white outsider, who in his longing to become part of the racing sub-culture group becomes involved with Dominic's sister Mia (Jordana Brewster) and eventually allows Dominic to escape when the final race/showdown happens. When Brian first enters what might be called "the contact zone" to race his car against the other street racers his whiteness is clearly referenced through the dialogue, the lighting and the iconography, but this is subordinated to what he has under the bonnet of his car. The engine of his vehicle with its racing modifications

provides what Sarah Thornton (1995: 11), in her groundbreaking research on the ethnography of clubbing, has termed "subcultural capital". Brian is able to gain limited acceptance by the other street racers because of the 'hip' or 'cool' status of his car. Thornton coined her term with obvious reference to what Bourdieu (1984) calls "cultural capital" but her analysis recognises the centrality of the media in governing the circulation of "subcultural capital". "The "subcultural capital" of what you have under the bonnet of your car is already part of the niche market of the car parts supply industry. Brian's undercover identity has him working as a salesman at a car parts outlet where his knowledge of the commodities provides him with an inside track to the sub-cultural world of the street racer. Brian's ultimate uncertainty about his own identity as an officer of the law is highlighted in the pleasure/abandonment he finds in the street racing and his recognition that Dominic represents the outlaw that he can never become.

The Fast and the Furious was the sleeper hit of the summer of 2001, in the sense that it had not been heavily marketed but achieved high box-office grosses through word of mouth enthusiasm from audiences, making over \$150 million dollars at the U.S. box office. Like *Crazy/Beautiful* this film has a PG-13 rating which makes it accessible to a young teen market. The reviews for the film are almost universally negative, (Bradshaw, 2001, Anthony, 2001) with the critical focus on the testosterone fuelled antics of the car drivers, the inadequacy of the plot and the stereotypical representations of the women and the Asian-American gang. Undoubtedly these representations are stereotyped and the macho posturing suggests a popular hit that sinks to the lowest common denominator. However, Diesel's mixed race character, Dominic, is part of what distinguishes the film. The space-time and place of his "activity path" in the narrative highlights issues of

identity and mobility in a very explicit and cinematic way. The identity of Diesel's character is tied as much to his racial origins as they are to his expertise with that other important facet of identity, the automobile (Figure 226). Patterson (2001:5) has suggested that the success of *The Fast and the Furious* can be explained in part by the boredom of the teenage market in the conventional all-white teen movie. The cast of characters in *The Fast and the Furious* Patterson (2001: 5) suggests "...move in packs largely defined by ethnicity but who intermingle freely with other groups". Rather than being racially motivated the enmity that exists between Dom's gang and the Tran gang arises out of a bad business deal and the fact that Dom slept with Johnny Tran's sister. The community of street racers has one common enemy, the LAPD, and when the warning of police arrival is given at the end of the first race where Brian tries to prove himself; the community scatters in a co-ordinated fashion.

The representation of Los Angeles that the film offers focuses not on particular enclaves but on a view of the city as a race-track. With each establishing shot using a crane to provide the scale of the street racing sequence, the audience sees cars emerge from the background like miniatures on a model race-track (Figure 228). It is not surprising that the film because of its success became a computer game in the tradition of *Grand Theft Auto* and that it also spawned a film sequel *2 Fast 2 Furious* (2003), set in Miami and directed by John Singleton, but without the star attraction of Vin Diesel as Dominic. The city is constructed as a mainly night-time location where wide boulevards enable four cars abreast racing. The association between Los Angeles and the car is long established but in the fantasy world of *The Fast and the Furious*, the streets are always empty and the freeways ready to

speed you along. This fantasy of perpetual movement is sustained by the coming together of mise-en-scène, camera movement and editing.

The construction of Los Angeles as a utopian cityscape for street racers provides an example of film where the car and its speed become Los Angeles. The mise-en-scène of the cars themselves highlights this metonymic function. Although we get the usual geography of car chases involving red lights, intersections, road bumps, hapless pedestrians and incompetent police drivers, the emphasis is placed much more on the internal workings of the machine. The racers must travel in a straight line to see who can reach the end point in the quickest time. Dexterity at the wheel is not the issue. So as the first race is due to commence the audience is taken within the cars of the four racers using a moving camera. Each has their own routine of preparation but rather than focusing on the car's exterior at the moment of take-off the camera brings us, through the use of special optical effects, within the "belly" of the machine to show the launch of the engine. This inward journey neatly encapsulates, not just the view of the city streets from the car, a pervasive trope of Los Angeles films, but also recognition of the power of the car as part of a super-intensified mobile identity (Figures 229 and 230).

Conclusion

The films I have analysed in this chapter provide clear examples of how Hollywood has begun to recognise the multiple geographies and ethnicities of Los Angeles. This is not to suggest that Hollywood cinema has embraced the notion of hybridity, which as Amit-Talia (1998) has suggested is not in itself an unproblematic progressive step. Rather, following Hall (1993: 222) I argue these films may more accurately represent identity as in the *process of being made*.

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.

Each of the films self-consciously deals with the cinematic city image of Los Angeles created by Hollywood and makes some attempt to re-assess or modify it. The films can be identified as cinematic city films as the city itself plays a significant part in the narrative. In all three films the narrative arises out of the specific city locations. *What's Cooking?* is about the multi-racial character of the city, the attitudes and actions of the characters are defined by the city. The characters come together for Thanksgiving as a process of identity building that subsumes their ethnic backgrounds with the superstructure of American identity. The tempo of the narrative is also developed in relation to the car-oriented culture of Los Angeles. In *What's Cooking?*, the sedentary nature of the Thanksgiving holiday means the focus on family life and the centrality of the home is portrayed as a very positive force. The positive nature of this stasis is heightened by the very fact of being in Los Angeles. The city works like another character making *What's Cooking?* a cinematic city film that celebrates the potential of Los Angeles's multi-cultural mix and multiple geographies.

Crazy/Beautiful fulfils all of the conditions set above but it is also concerned with establishing that even in the segregated geographies of the city set out so clearly in the contrasting journeys to school of Carlos and Nicole, the *process of identity formation* can be developed. Both these films can be seen to arise from different genres and yet their cultural instrumentality appears to be one of portraying a more tolerant, more inclusive, representation of a city that still has the most

segregated ethnic geographies of any American city. These films might be seen as a product of Hollywood wish fulfillment that allows an easy celebration of multiculturalism, or love conquering all as another product of “false consciousness”. However, I argue that through their explicit engagement with issues to do with identity and mobility they offer a re-assessment of the stereotyped representation of the cinematic Los Angeles as a place of chaos and collapse.

In the case of *The Fast and the Furious* I have examined through analysis of the film techniques of mise-en-scène, camera movement and editing style that a central theme of the film is the possibility that a sub-cultural movement could be powerful enough to smooth over the racial tensions that divide the segregated Los Angeles. If *What’s Cooking* deals with notions of mobility by staying still then *The Fast and the Furious* re-makes Los Angeles as a race-track. The city becomes a utopian landscape for night-time racers where the geography of the city streets is given over to the celebration of speed. The fantasy nature of this portrayal is heightened when one considers the contrast with the repeated image of the city as a grid locked freeway, producing a faint picture of the downtown skyscrapers partially obscured by the smog-fouled air.

The centrality of the automobile as a symbol of identity and mobility is re-iterated but it is given an unusual spin in this film by the way in which the central character Dominic Toretto, as played by Vin Diesel, proclaims his mixed-race identity. He provides the model as the anti-hero for the audience but also the admiration of the white, undercover cop Brian, who in the climatic scene of the film lets him go free. So whiteness is re-framed as a minority desperate to be part of the sub-cultural, ethnically diverse world of the street racers. The box-office success of the film

signalled to Hollywood that there is a broad audience for films that represent the fantasy world of Los Angeles but foreground the potential of its multi-ethnic make-up. The film's stereotyping of the Asian gang as the main villains suggests it cannot be proclaimed as a champion of multi-cultural progress but like most Hollywood films it can be interpreted as having a mixed ideological message. Progressive in its apparent embrace of mixed-identity characters but regressive in its depiction of Asian-Americans.

These contemporary filmmakers demonstrate that even within the commercial vortex of Hollywood representations it is possible to offer a more confused, unstable, mixed together map of a city where ethnic, class and gender identity can be seen as in the process of being made and unmade. My argument is that these films are part of a pattern to which could be added other films such as, *Set It Off* (F. Gary Gray, 1996), *American History X* (Kaye, 1998), *White Men Can't Jump* (Shelton, 1997), *Training Day* (Fuqua, 2002) and *Dark Blue* (Shelton, 2003) that reflect upon the multiple geographies and identities of Los Angeles and offer a degree of re-assessment of the city's image of racial segregation and disharmony. Undoubtedly the films play on the segregated geography for dramatic purposes but they also self-consciously explore other possible geographies and identities of Los Angeles. Their exploration of issues of mobility and identity signal a greater readiness to question as well as perpetuate cinematic versions of the city.

Hollywood's conservative ideology ensures that the mainstream movies analysed in this chapter will never go so far as to proclaim loudly the benefits of ethnic and cultural mixing, but in their desire to reach the broadest demographic the film industry will have to be ready to take into consideration the changing nature of

their audience. The impetus for change in representations may arise from a combination of filmmaker's intentions, audience demand and the profit motive of the Hollywood industry. The tendency I have identified in these cinematic city films needs to be seen within the broader picture of social, economic and gender inequalities that Hollywood perpetuates. And yet, even as Hollywood asserts its conservative ideology filmmakers find room to construct representations of the cinematic city of Los Angeles that provides their "imagined communities" with the raw material for re-imagining themselves.

Chapter Eight

Cinematic Los Angeles: a new imaginary?

The very heart of geography – the search for our sense of place in the world is constituted by the practice of looking and is, in effect, a study of images (Aitken & Zonn, 1994: 17).

... how we now figure ourselves in this city of images – through, for instance, directors, genres, and narratives – may be more central today than any attempt to make an accurate map of it --- let alone feel at home there (Corrigan, 1991: 98).

Introduction

As I stated in the Foreword, this research has its genesis in the links I made as a child between the geography of where I am from - with its restricted mobilities and hyper-sensitivity to issues of identity - and the faraway (Los Angeles) brought close (to Ballyshannon) by the machinery of cinema. But as the quotes above suggest the connections between cinema and the city offer a continuing fascination for the student of geography and film. In this concluding chapter I consider the routes of my research journey and discuss how my reading, viewing and reviewing, drafting and re-drafting of this thesis has developed my thinking on issues of identity, mobility and the cinematic city of Los Angeles. I reflect on the methodological approach I have used, bringing the critical insights of cultural geography to bear on my choice of a (predominantly) textual approach – an approach brought with me to the thesis from my background in film studies. I identify other areas of research that might develop from the marriage of film study and cultural geography worked through in this thesis. Finally I bring temporary closure to the narrative of this research in an Afterword that returns to the place where I began in a revisiting that encompasses the past thirty years of my engagement with cinematic representations.

Representations of Identity and Mobility

To begin, I would like to suggest some ways in which the confluence of the cross-disciplinary work on cultural geography and film that this thesis illustrates offers some new ways of approaching contemporary Hollywood cinema and its concerns with issues of identity and mobility. My claim to a new imaginary around such themes is however posed as a question, because what I suggest is that to take the geography of film and film geography of Los Angeles seriously means dealing with the complexities, inconsistencies and contradictions of how Hollywood has represented and continues to represent the city.

The analysis of the past and future representations of Los Angeles provides what Kennedy (2000: 13) calls "provisional frames of legibility" for the exploration of representations of mobility and identity in the contemporary cinematic city. The aim of this work has been to detail the mediated construction of urban space, identity and mobility in the cinematic space of contemporary Los Angeles's films. The theoretical approach I have taken is to focus on a range of contemporary film texts and examine how they represent through particular film techniques and generic conventions issues of identity and mobility in cinematic Los Angeles. I have also considered the production contexts of the films and the intentions of the directors and other key members of the production team as they have been revealed in journals, newspapers, books, on-line and from DVD extras. However, the focus is not on the texts/films alone but on the ways in which the films are part of an intertextual and extra-textual process that informs the relationship between the cinematic city and the material city. I use the notion cultural instrumentality (Kuhn, 1990) to frame questions about what the films/texts do culturally which

takes them outside the world of film and relates them to the broader discourses and cultural processes of society, urbanity, identity and mobility in which they play a key role.

As Kuhn (1990: 178) observes: "... films do not exist in isolation but in an active network of relations and practices". In the exploration of what films do culturally the emphasis is placed on how these texts feed off and dissolve into each other in the process of intertextuality. I have also focused on the extra-textual dimensions of these films through an examination of what they do culturally in order to demonstrate that films are bound up with the discourses that operate beyond the boundaries of text and genre. As Kuhn (1990: 178) argues: "... film texts and genre are part of the whole array of technologies, practices and pleasures that comprise the 'machine of cinema'". This focus on identity and mobility draws together a key element associated with cities and cinema, that is, the ability of cinema to depict the motion of the city through the moving camera and other filmic techniques. This elaboration of particular film techniques including, *mise-en-scène*, editing and mobile framing is used throughout the thesis to highlight the relationship between screen space and urban space. The crucial dimension that film offers is its very mobility, it is not fixed, so what I have been working towards is constructing an understanding of the relations between identity, mobility and the cinematic city that is not tied to essential notions of what constitutes these paradigms. How these elements figure in Hollywood representations complicates this mission. Hollywood is not an industry noted for its anti-essentialist stance, in fact it could be argued that Hollywood promotes the very kinds of essentialism that fixes people in place and traps them in a certain vision of urban space. However, what my analysis points to is the potential power of cinematic representations of Los Angeles to be

read as offering a different imaginary, one where the multiple identities and mobilities are made visible, illuminating the generic, ideological, inter-textual and extra-textual dimensions of this cinematic city.

In the main, cinematic Los Angeles, as represented by Hollywood, reveals a pre-occupation with denying, eliding and at times repressing the idea of the city as a place of multiple identities and mobilities. Nevertheless alongside this more reactionary message I identify a space for more progressive representations that focus on identity as a process rather than a fixed entity and an engagement by some filmmakers in re-imagining specific ethnic and cultural identities. These self-reflexive strategies are often figured in the use of particular film techniques but also in the portrayal of the relationship between the characters and their sense of belonging to or ownership of their place in the city.

Kennedy (2000: 3) has identified how the urban transformation of many American cities, particularly Los Angeles, has led to a compressed set of meanings and stock representations, what he has termed “narratives, images and metaphors of decline.” I agree that these stock representations of decline still exist, particularly in some Hollywood representations of the urban life of Los Angeles, but I argue they are being complicated by the co-existence of more complex spatial engagements in films that are beginning to recognise the necessity to represent the multiple identities and mobilities of the city. For example, the analysis of Latina/o identity and mobility in Chapter Six proposes a tripartite spatial relationship between barrio/city, barrio/prison and barrio/homeland as one way of identifying a more complicated version of Latina/o existence than is often portrayed in mainstream Hollywood. What emerges is a more complex representation of the

multiple geographies and identities of Los Angeles. Although this does not take into account the whole range of ethnic identities represented in Los Angeles, my argument is that cinema is a powerful tool for re-imagining identities and mobilities, and in time might be put to the service of these other groups. The representation of urban space as cinematic space in cinematic Los Angeles leaves open, as much as it closes down, the possibility of encountering difference through cinematic city representations. These encounters can prove fruitful rather than anxiety-ridden. As Kennedy (2000: 9/10) has argued:

Representation does powerful cultural work to produce and maintain, but also to challenge and question, common notions of urban existence; in doing so it shapes the metaphors, narratives and syntax which are widely used to describe the experience of urban living.

I have challenged and questioned common notions about cinematic Los Angeles and suggested other more positive metaphors, narratives and syntax for thinking about the ways in which identities and mobilities are represented. Donald suggests (1999: 68) "... film presents urban space itself as representational, as simultaneously sensory and symbolic". While being aware that representations of the city in film are 'selective visions' which are ideologically charged I would argue that as a way of thinking the cinematic city critically in its real, symbolic and imaginary interconnections, the force of representation as an ideational tool is crucial.

I identify identity and mobility as recurring key substantive themes in the range of films I have viewed, reviewed and analysed but I have also highlighted how mobility in particular is fast becoming a more widely used meta-concept that has its proponents (Bruno, 1997, 2001 and Cresswell, 2001b and 2002) and its critics

(Deutsche 1991, Massey, 1993). Feminists' critiques of mobility can be taken in other directions too. Los Angeles is a city with a quite particular, ongoing demographic development where ideas of fixity, permanence or centering continue to be disrupted by increased transnational and translocal mobilities. As Sharp (2004: 73) argues:

While the city does represent a space of masculinist order and control, it also encapsulates movement, disruption and decentering – traditionally feminine characteristics – certainly offering all sorts of challenges and opportunities to women, rather than rendering them little more than disempowered objects of the male gaze.

In my analysis of the representations of the young Latina women in Chapter Six in *Mi Vida Loca* (Anders, 1993) and Mace (Angela Bassett) a mobile, black female subject in *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995), I focus on the everyday practices of these women in the city and identify the methods through which they occupy the city's screen-space with greater confidence and power than is often associated with representations of women in the city, reversing the male gaze and challenging the scripts laid down for them. What makes mobility such an exciting trope for cross-disciplinary work is that it travels between cultural geography and film study very successfully in that it brings together aspects of spatiality and temporality without the unnecessary distinctions that often obscure space-time/time-space paradigms. Mobility is therefore a very useful way of understanding how film representations of cinematic Los Angeles reveal, contest and re-construct socially constructed factors such as race, class, gender, and other elements in the axes of identity.

Massey's (1999: 231) formulation that "... space is precisely the sphere of the possibility of coming across difference", might be appropriated for the screen spaces of cinematic city narratives as it also provides such opportunities to

experience difference vicariously. As bell hooks (1996: 2) suggests this vicarious experience may have a very positive impact where movies/popular culture can offer not just a simple reflection, but a way of re-imagining the world.

In this age of mixing and hybridity, popular culture, particularly the world of the movies, constitute a new frontier providing a sense of movement, of pulling away from the familiar and journeying beyond the world of the other. This is especially true for those folks who really do not have much money or a lot of time as well as for the rest of us. Movies remain the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing for everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage "the other."

I argue, borrowing from Jones and Moss (1995) quoted in Cloke et al., (1999b: 43), what the close analysis of the film representations of identity and mobility uncovers is the relationship between the "same", Hollywood's traditional construction of its audiences, and the "other", Hollywood's traditional construction of those regarded as a threat, danger or different to the mainstream "same", has begun to shift where cinematic city representations of Los Angeles are concerned. I argue that the films analysed in Chapter Three, Four, Six and Seven show some recognition that "same" and "other" identities are:

Contingent – in that differences which define them are part of an open and ongoing series of social processes.

Differentiated – in that individuals and groups of people will occupy positions along many separate lines of difference at the same time; and

Relational – in that the social construction of difference is always in terms of the presence of some opposing movement.

The Anglo-dominated vision of Los Angeles in Chapter Five's *Falling Down* (1993) acts as a counterpoint to the analysis of the other films. However, in its reluctant recognition of D-Fens (Michael Douglas) as a white male who cannot deal with

“difference” it acknowledges, even as it tries to warn against, the changing demographic nature of the city.

Alongside Hollywood’s economic imperative to make product for the broadest possible audience while recognising constant demographic change, is the awareness that filmmakers and writers will always be able to smuggle in their accounts of urban life that match more directly with the experiences of the urban dweller. It may be that dystopian visions of Los Angeles will remain the dominant representation of the future city, but that may be partly explained through the ability of films to express in cinematic form the anxieties of Los Angelenos about the troubled and unpredictable geology and geography of their location. The dystopian Los Angeles cityscapes of *Demolition Man*, *Escape from L.A.*, *They Live*, and *Predator 2* will continue to represent the city as a place on the edge of destruction, but a range of contemporary films are beginning to engage with a more positive representation of the city that encompasses more of the city’s multiple identities. This optimism draws in some ways from the long-standing ability of cinema to represent cities and their motion. The cinematic city as constructed in this thesis takes its place within the critical and conceptual tool-kit in enabling students of cities and cinema “to think the city critically” (1999: 52), to return to James Donald’s felicitous phrase. The close analysis of the film texts in terms of film techniques for example make evident the ways in which issues of identity and mobility arise as key substantive themes, how they are differentiated and interlinked. However, the incorporation of further work on the production contexts of these films might also make more visible the power relations always inherent in questions of mobility and identity.

All of the films chosen for analysis reflect what Pratt (1992: 6) has described as "... the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect." These intersections are still highly regulated by the sense of racial, gender and class difference that has developed in Los Angeles and is often perpetuated in Hollywood representations. However, the ways in which characters deal with 'differences', in racial, gender, or class terms, highlights the divisions not just between, but also within, different groups. And though these differences are sometimes reconciled, this reconciliation often poses equally complex questions around social mobility and the politics of miscegenation. Alongside the more complex representations and discussion that these reconciliations enable I also argue that some representations of cinematic Los Angeles are beginning to incorporate the hybrid identities and multiple mobilities of a city region where, for example, Latina/os are now the majority population. However, as Valdivida (2003: 151) argues:

Deciding who is a Latina/o and what counts as 'Latinidad', the culture produced by Latina/os and the practices of being Latina/o, has proven to be a nearly impossible task. The fact is that it is untenable to classify Latina/os by race, ethnicity, class, religion, language, food, dance and musical proclivities – to name but a few of the vectors of difference that often delineate the margins between one cultural group and another. Latina/os come from a variety of territorial origins. Many come from Latin American but many others predate the arrival of Anglo populations to the North American continent. Many speak Spanish, but many have adopted a hybrid language ... a turn to Latina/o studies forces us to explore the radical hybridity that composes every population, especially in the US.

As the quote above suggests the concept of identity as set out in Chapter One is a complex and contested term. I have drawn on the insights of feminism, post-colonialism and post-modernism to highlight how film can visibly challenge essentialist notions of identity and mobility. The work of Stuart Hall (1990) and

Homi Bhabha (1990) provides the basis for thinking about the ways in which filmic versions of identity and mobility might be used in a broader based analysis of how the demographic pattern of Los Angeles is developing. As a counterpoint to the more positive way in which I am presenting the film analysis of identity and mobility it needs to be stated, as argued by Dunn and Winchester (1999: 179), for example, that Hollywood cinema in its ideological adherence to the arc of storytelling and character development deemed acceptable for mainstream audience(s) oversimplifies and naturalises constructions of identity, mobility and place. However, I would argue that a close textual analysis of the films set alongside the theoretical work on identity and mobility reveals the ways in which cinematic narratives of Los Angeles represent the continual reconfiguring of the city by the “hybrids of the newly arrived and the previously there” (Short, et al., 2000: 317) and this posits a more complicated representation of the city.

I have employed Bhabha’s (1990) post-structuralist/post colonialist notion of hybridity as one way of identifying the shift in representations of identity and mobility that I argue is occurring in some Hollywood films to produce what might be tentatively called a new imaginary. Perhaps like many others who have been drawn to this term I find its appeal resides in its allusive and metaphorically suggestive nature. Although the term has its critics, for example, Ahmad (1996: 287), who argues that Bhabha’s post-structuralist intoned hybridity takes “an ahistorical stance ... neglecting any material co-ordinates ...and is remarkably free of gender, class (and) identifiable political location”. However, I see it, following Blunt and Willis (2000: 188), as: “an empowering way to envisage cultural difference”. The inherently spatial nature of mobility and how it is linked to identity in cinematic representations of Los Angeles provides a framework for helping to

think through how people negotiate versions of their own identity or indeed broader notions of community or national identities. In Chapter Two I identified the theoretical insights of Benedict Anderson (1991) with regard to the notion of “imagined communities”. One of the major themes to arise out the film analysis and its engagement with issues of identity and mobility is the use of film in the process of re-imagining identities and mobilities. Easy Rawlins (Denzel Washington) the black private detective in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995) given detailed consideration in Chapter Three, the range of characters from the films in Chapter Six which provides a Latina/o perspective on Los Angeles, and the representations of hybridity in Chapter Seven all have in common the desire of the characters to tell their own stories. In most cases this means a non-Anglo account of how they negotiate their sense of identity in Los Angeles and this is done by the ways in which their stories are structured and shot. The decisions to use certain film techniques or genres or narrative structures can be seen in terms of the production processes of the Hollywood machine but what I hope I have suggested in this thesis is that these elements can also be used to challenge, question and re-imagine issues of identity and mobility and representations of place.

The coincidence noted in Chapter One between the development of post-colonialist theory in relation to identity and feminist’s ideas about gendered identity as fragmented and multiple masks somewhat the absences there has been with regard to gender in the post-colonial theory of Bhabha. However, the work of bell hooks (1991, 1992) on black identity has been influential in shifting the focus away from patriarchal contexts and has been important in my analysis of *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995) in Chapter Three and the character of Mace (Angela Bassett) in *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995) in Chapter Four.

Although I might need to make more explicit the links between notions of performativity where issues of identity and filmic representation are concerned, particularly Judith Butler's (1990) elaboration of the term, it does present rich potential for further analysis. Films are social constructions and are made up of scripted roles that characters perform. It could be argued that in a sense film representations are closer to the analysis offered by Erving Goffman's (1967) view of social interactions as the putting on of a mask. However, I consider Butler's version of performance as related to identity offers more scope in connecting to the discourses beyond film. Some of the key examples I have offered as representing hybrid identities, the young Latina women in *Mi Vida Loca* (Anders, 1993) analysed in Chapter Six, the Cheech Marin character from *Born in East L.A.* (Marin, 1989), illustrate how masks or pre-ordained identity can be modified and a new one created out a sense of *both* Mexican-ness *and* American-ness. The mask of *either/or* has been reconfigured as *both/and*. Old-style assimilation has given way to the active maintenance of multiple loyalties, identities, and affiliations. This is a reconceptualisation of identity and mobility that is made visible through film analysis.

Is there a future for the Cinematic City?

I have developed the notions of the cinematic city by elaborating the functions of city cinema making the following distinction. In differentiating films *about* the city and films *of* the city, it is clear that in the former the city informs the thematics, the enounced of the text; while in the latter it structures its very enunciation and relations of reading. This offers effective guidance for the student of film or cultural geography when deciding what films to use or indeed how to use them in their

research. Films of the city, that is, cinematic city films, have their narratives and the audiences' relationship to the narratives structured through the mise-en-scène of the city. The more developed vocabulary of the cinematic city that I construct provides in its elaboration of the functions of the city in cinematic narratives as *backdrop, character, metaphor* and *metonymy*, a model that might be applied and modified when dealing with the representations of cities beyond Hollywood cinema. As Clarke (1997: 330) has pointed out:

Hollywood cinema takes 'real' American cities – 'real' being in inverted commas as they are already functioning discursively and re-inscribes them into discourse once more.

This cycle of intermingling that Clarke identifies is most potently defined in the concept of the cinematic city, with Los Angeles as its exemplary model.

Although I was able to see all the films analysed in this thesis in a cinema, I have viewed and reviewed them on video and DVD. Our means of engaging with films is rapidly changing. From video to DVD to online circulation how films can be used in the teaching experience has been made simpler. I am not concerned about comparisons between the cinema going experience and the home watching DVD experience, they both offer different forms of pleasure for audiences. It is not either that I fear for the death of cinema. The spectacle of the big screen will continue in some form and the ways we continue to represent the city making of it a digital, media or specifically cinematic city will have a currency for audience, researchers and scholars of the urban.

Yet, we must ask - is there a place for "cinematic" city representations in this age where the power of television, the internet, DVD, and mobile phone technology

means that audiences have many new and developing ways to engage with film stories? The technology for shooting film is itself changing with directors making much more use of High Definition Video, an example of this seen to excellent effect in Michael Mann's evocation of night-time Los Angeles in his most recent film *Collateral* (2003). Do these developments negate the power of cinematic representation to envision the city? Not at all, but they do make us aware that the cinema going experience and the engagement with film as a big screen spectacle is only one part of the matrix of distribution and viewing experiences in which audiences can now participate. Donald (1999: 186) quotes Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1965: x) recalling the way that cinema "... satisfied a need for disorientation, for the projection of my attention into a difference space, a need which I believe corresponds to a primary function of our assuming our place in the world". Donald acknowledges that this is how he experiences cinema and asserts for him: "Imaginatively, the different space, the space of difference, is still cinema" (Donald, 1999: 186/187).

I argue for the long-term relevance of the cinematic city paradigm as it seems to supply the template for the ways in which other media and digital forms represent the city. I am thinking in particular of virtual representations of cities in computer games, virtual planning and architecture models, and in the hybrid mix of comic book computer generated images and live action footage that provides a nightmare vision of the urban in *Sin City* (Miller/Rodriguez, 2005). I agree with Hay's (1994: 607) assertion that cinematic representations of cities still provide the "... lexicon, symbolic order, and narrative logic ... even though this symbolic order may be reorganized (the traffic of symbols redirected) as a result of these new media practices."

Further Research

One of the ways in which the research might be developed further is to focus in greater detail on the production aspects of the Hollywood machine so as to produce a cultural geography of production/consumption. As Shiel (2001: 9) observes:

...cinema has been imagined primarily as a collection of filmic texts rather than a spatially-configured industry comprising banks, multinational corporations, distributors, producers, exhibitors and exhibition spaces, various technology manufacturers, worker, consumers, and so on.

While my analysis did not give detailed attention to the range of industrial contexts that Shiel outlines above I would consider further work in this area might incorporate some of these elements alongside textual analysis and discourse analysis of the texts. As Bruno (1997: 54) argues in relation to the way cinema impacted upon newly arrived Italian immigrants to New York in the 1910s:

The imagery functioned as a shared collective memory while they were in the process of acquiring a new projected identity.

For the newly arrived and the previously there of Los Angeles it could be argued cinema can work in similar way. The collective experience of being in a movie theatre is a public event that brings one outside the private spaces of the home. In this sense the act of going to the cinema still has a potentially powerful role in linking public and private spatialities. The location of cinemas and how they are often set within mall complexes is another potential area for geographic investigation. How does the location of the cinema inhibit or enable the kind of private/public spatialities that I have suggested? The economic geography of cinema location is another element in the planning of communities and localities that have

been tried in places like Los Angeles. Having retired from basketball, Magic Johnson, (the former L.A. Lakers basketball star who in the late 1980s and early 1990s had as high a public profile as any Hollywood screen star), set up his Educational Foundation and Johnson Development Corporation with the intention of reinvigorating areas of South-Central Los Angeles. The Magic Johnson Theatres as well as providing entertainment services also act as a business stimulus, fostering local economic growth, job development and financial empowerment in the communities they serve. The first of these cinema complexes is located at Crenshaw Mall, South-Central Los Angeles in what historically have been underserved urban communities. The recognition of the central importance of not just film, but the cinematic experience in audiences' lives provides a potentially valuable area for further research to see if this initiative is having the economic, cultural and geographic benefits that the Johnson Development Corporation suggest.

Hay (1997: 216) has argued for a way of discussing "... film as a social practice that begins by considering how social relations are spatially organized. – through sites of production and consumption – and how film is practiced from and across particular sites and always in relation to other sites". The Magic Johnson theatres might represent an exemplar of the ways in which Hay would like to see notions of the cinematic city broadened. As Hay (1997: 216) argues:

The cinema is a place distinct from other sites but, in its relation to other sites, part of the formation of a territory which it worked to map ... emphasis shifts from the formation of consciousness, and ideology to how individual or social groups have access to and move to and from the place(s) where they engage films in their everyday lives. Film's role in maintaining and modifying social relations has to do both with how it becomes part of an environment and how it enables or constrains navigation of that landscape.

Another theoretical approach would involve the incorporation of work on audiences. For example, Macaulay (2003: 15) highlights the growth of the Latina/o cinematic audiences that raises questions about how the Hollywood machine will respond.

There are now 37 million Hispanics in the US, compared with 36.2 million African-Americans. The former constitute 13 per cent of the population and, like blacks, they spend more per capita on movies than the general public. The average age of Hispanics is 10 years lower than the general population. This means a huge audience, aged 18 to 34, of prime movie-goers just waiting to be bombarded with product.

As well as the growth in Latina/o cinema audiences, Patterson (2003: 10) notes how the growth of the Asian-American population in the greater Los Angeles area has begun to produce a subterranean wave of films and documentary makers. The absence of mainstream Hollywood productions dealing with the Asian-American experience mirrors in some ways similar absences in Latina/o and African-American stories.

Out here on the Pacific Rim ... the Asian-American experience is all around us. Los Angeles has its own Chinatown, Koreatown, Japantown, Thai Town and Little Tokyo, not to mention many thriving, predominantly Asian enclaves in the San Gabriel Valley 20 miles inland. Orange County has Westchester, or "Little Saigon", and San Francisco has the most famous Chinatown of all.

So a film such as *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Lin, 2003) although independently produced has created enough box-office interest to ensure Hollywood will come calling. After all the Asian-American demographic is another valuable constituency for the Hollywood machine, and the general market has shown that they have a taste for movies that show strong Asian influences or are Hollywood re-makes of Japanese, Korean and Indian movies. Future scholars of cinematic Los Angeles may

well be focusing on Asian-American representations as the number of Hollywood films directed at this internal market and the huge external market of what is currently the world's fastest growing economy, China, increase.

I have concentrated on Hollywood cinematic representations of Los Angeles as I was interested in those films that, in the main, attempt to reach the broadest possible audience. However, avant-garde cinema, documentary cinema, television, together with films aimed at niche markets such as Asian-Americans would all provide another approach to understanding the interwoven nature of the discourses of the material and cinematic Los Angeles.

Dealing with cinematic city narratives of Los Angeles poses another question about where and when to stop in relation to the numbers of films that continually use the city as a key site. The most recent films analysed in Chapter Seven were released before the events of 9/11. The events of 9/11 were of such magnitude that it impacted on the lives of every U.S. citizen and it usually takes Hollywood at least four or five years to deal with directly or obliquely. *Crash* (Haggis, 2005) has recently dealt very explicitly with issues of identity and mobility in Los Angeles in a post 9/11 world. Christopher (2005) suggests it addresses the unspoken racial nausea that lingers after 9/11 in a way that no other film has dared. Amidst its apparent bleakness there is a message of survival and tolerance. The film exhibits a tendency away from cultural pessimism rather than necessarily towards optimism. As more films emerge that deal with the post-9/11 experience of living in cities this will open up an area for further scholarship on the role of cinematic city representations. In his review of *Crash* (2004) David Thomson (2005) groups it with a number of other films to have dealt with the sprawling nature of Los Angeles, for

example *Short Cuts* (1993) and *Magnolia* (1999), and which, he argues, highlights the potential of cinematic city representations to transcend the pessimism that currently surrounds U.S. polity

... these pictures are the best evidence we have from cinema that America might be capable still of humane politics. And, the concentration on Los Angeles is fascinating, for a future is being made there. And it's ready for serving now.

Representations of Los Angeles can still surprise with their ability to offer a more complicated vision of the identities and mobilities of Los Angelenos. Two other recent texts, a book and a compact disc, to arise out of Los Angeles give some indication of the less pessimistic approach that this thesis has proposed. Reviewing Starr's (2005) *Coast of Dreams: California on the Edge 1990-2003*, Silvester (2005) argues that:

All in all, these "notes from the field" amount to a monument of informed rumination, which concludes on an optimistic note about a state that continues to be "dynamically expressive", and where newcomers are "raising American culture to new levels of effective ecumenism".

Although Starr's book might be read as continuing the booster's vision of California I am taken with his notion of "effective ecumenism" which might be another way of describing the hybridity I have argued is evident in the analysis of cinematic city narratives in Chapter Seven. Ry Cooder, a Californian singer-songwriter, musicologist, and film composer has produced a compact disc entitled *Chavez Ravine* (2005) which is a musical re-telling of the story of destruction of the predominantly Los Angeles Latina/o community of Chavez Ravine in the 1950s in order to build the L.A. Dodgers baseball stadium. Sung in English and Spanish and containing a number of the original artists of the period the cd has been described

as part memory-box, part psycho-geographical treatise (Empire, 2005). What makes it valuable and interesting from the perspective of this thesis is that it provides another example of a cultural product that can be used in the way I am suggesting film can be used to engage in a re-imagining of Los Angeles's past, in effect, a musical version of *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974) or *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Franklin, 1995).

Afterword

In the Foreword I began with memories of the town where I grew up so it is appropriate that I should bring this work to a close with another more recent memory of being transported to cinematic Los Angeles from Donegal. In August 2005 on holiday in Donegal I visited the local cinema to see *Crash* (Haggis, 2004). As the novelist Jonathan Coe (2005: 7) has observed: "A film is a mercurial thing; its very nature changes, depending on where we see it, when we see it, and who we see it with". Bruno (1997: 53) also notes the powerful influence image making and image consumption has had on the memory.

In an age of mechanical reproduction, the status of memory changes and assumes a spatial texture. Both personal and collective memories lose the taste of the Proustian *madeleine*, and acquire the sight/site of photographs and films.

Chinatown (1974) was one of my first experiences of Los Angeles coming to Donegal. It appears that what I have been engaged in since then is developing an understanding of how Los Angeles as the home of Hollywood has been like a surrogate home for my imagination. My mobility and identity framed in two cinema visits over thirty years apart. By way of cinema, the research journey is completed. The discourses of the material and the cinematic Los Angeles, and the

material but highly mediated, environment of my home town remain intimately connected in the theatres of my memory though cinematic representations.

Following Mahoney (1997: 171), the claim I would make for those films I have analysed in relation to the interplay of representations of identity and mobility is that they manage to “inscribe experiences of the city previously marginalized or marked as ‘other’” ... and “... implicitly or explicitly challenge traditional discourses on urban space”. I have endeavoured to move away from the somewhat pessimistic strain in Davis’s writings where Los Angeles is concerned and the model I have adopted is closer to Donald’s version of the continuing potential for urban living and the essential understanding of its representation through cinema as elaborated in *Imagining the Modern City* (1999). The cinematic city narratives of Los Angeles I have examined in their preoccupation with mobility and identity acknowledge “... indeterminacy and the inevitability of desire and violence without renouncing hope in the negotiability of our living together” (Donald, 1999: 187).

I contend there is the potential for cinematic Los Angeles to represent in a more complicated fashion the identities and mobilities of Los Angelenos, providing a revision, and in some cases a re-imagining, of its over-determined image of social chaos and ethnic conflict.

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American History X (1998) Directed by Tony Kaye [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

American Me (1992) Directed by Edward James Olmos [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Picture.

Annie Hall (1977) Directed by Woody Allen [Film]. New York: Rollins-Joffe Production Company.

Anywhere But Here (1999) Directed by Wayne Wang [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Assault on Precinct 13 (1976) Directed by John Carpenter [Film]. Los Angeles: CKK.

Baby Boy (2001) Directed by John Singleton [Film]. Los Angeles: New Deal Productions.

Bad Day at Black Rock (1956) Directed by John Sturges. Los Angeles: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez (1982) Directed by Robert Young [Film]. Los Angeles: Embassy Pictures Corporation.

Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City (1927) Directed by Walter Ruthman [Film Documentary].

The Beverly Hillbillies (1993) Directed by Penelope Spheeris [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Better Luck Tomorrow (2003) Directed by Justin Lin [Film]. Los Angeles: Cherry Sky Films.

The Big Heat (1953) Directed by Fritz Lang [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

The Big Lebowski (1998) Directed by Joel Coen [Film]. Los Angeles: Polygram Filmed Entertainment.

Blade Runner (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Los Angeles: The Ladd Company.

Blade Runner: The Director's Cut (1990) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Los Angeles: The Ladd Company.

Blood in Blood Out (1993) Directed by Taylor Hackford [Film]. Los Angeles: Hollywood Pictures.

Blue Steel (1990) Directed by Kathryn Bigelow [Film]. Los Angeles: Lightning Pictures.

Body Heat (1981) Directed by Lawrence Kasdan [Film]. Los Angeles: The Ladd Company.

Boogie Nights (1997) Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

Born in East L.A. (1987) Directed by Cheech Marin [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

Bowfinger (1999) Directed by Frank Oz [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

Boyz N The Hood (1991) Directed by John Singleton [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Bread and Roses (2000) Directed by Ken Loach [Film]. London: Filmfour Productions.

Cheech and Chong's Up in Smoke (1978) Directed by Lou Adler [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Cheech and Chong's Next Movie (1980) Directed by Tommy Chong [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

Cheech and Chong's Nice Dreams (1981) Directed by Tommy Chong [film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Cheech and Chong's The Corsican Brothers (1984) Directed by Tommy Chong [Film]. Los Angeles: Orion Pictures Corporation.

Chinatown (1974) Directed by Roman Polanski [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Choose Me (1984) Directed by Alan Rudolph [Film]. Los Angeles: Tartan Productions.

City of Angels (1997) Directed by Brad Silberling [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Bros.

City of Industry (1997) Directed by John Irvin [Film]. Los Angeles: Largo Entertainment.

Clueless (1995) Directed by Amy Heckerling [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Collateral (2004) Directed by Michael Mann [Film]. Los Angeles: DreamWorks SKG.

Colors (1988) Directed by Dennis Hopper [Film]. Los Angeles: Orion Pictures Corporation.

Cool Hand Luke (1967) Directed by Stuart Rosenberg [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Cotton Comes To Harlem (1970) Directed by Ossie Davis [Film]. Los Angeles: Formosa Pictures Inc.

Crash (2004) Directed by Paul Haggis [Film]. Los Angeles: Bull's Eye Entertainment.

Crazy/Beautiful (2001) Directed by John Stockwell [Film]. Los Angeles: Touchstone Pictures.

The Crimson Kimono (1959) Directed by Samuel Fuller [Film]. Los Angeles: Globe Enterprises.

Crossfire (1947) Directed by Edward Dymtryk [Film]. Los Angeles: R.K.O. Radio Pictures Incorporated.

The Crowd (1928) Directed by King Vidor [Film]. Los Angeles: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Cutter's Way (1981) Directed by Ivan Passer [Film]. Los Angeles: United Artists Classics.

Dangerous Minds (1995) Directed by John N. Smith [Film]. Los Angeles: Bruckheimer/Simpson Productions.

Dante's Peak (1997) Directed by Roger Donaldson [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

Dark Blue (2003) Directed by Ron Shelton [Film]. Los Angeles: Alphaville Films.

Dark City (Directed by Alex Proyas [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

The Day of the Locust (1975) Directed by John Schlesinger [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Deep Cover (1992) Directed by Bill Duke [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

Demolition Man (1993) Directed by Marco Brambilla [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Devil in a Blue Dress (1995) Directed by Carl Franklin [Film]. Los Angeles: Tri-Star Pictures.

Dick Tracy (1990) Directed by Warren Beatty [Film]. Los Angeles: Touchstone Pictures.

Die Hard (1988) Directed by John McTiernan [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

D.O.A. (1950) Directed by Rudolph Maté [Film]. Los Angeles: Cardinal Pictures.

Down and Out in Beverly Hills (1986) Directed by Paul Mazursky [Film]. Los Angeles: Touchstone Pictures.

Double Indemnity (1944) Directed by Billy Wilder [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

The Drive for Life (1909) Directed by D.W. Griffith [Film]. American Mutoscope and Biograph.

Earthquake (1974) Directed by Mark Robson [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

El Norte (1983) Directed by Gregory Nava [Film]. Los Angeles: American Playhouse.

The End of Violence (1997) Directed by Wim Wenders [Film]. Berlin: Road Movies Produktion.

Escape from Alcatraz (1979) Don Siegel [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures and the Malpas Company.

Escape from L.A. (1996) Directed by John Carpenter [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Escape from New York (1981) Directed by John Carpenter [Film]. Los Angeles: AVCO Embassy Pictures.

Falling Down (1993) Directed by Joel Schumacher [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Fast Times at Ridgemount High (1982) Directed by Amy Heckerling [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

The Fast and the Furious (2001) Directed by Rob Cohen [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

The Fighting Prince of Donegal (1966) Directed by Michael O'Herlihy [Film]. Los Angeles: Walt Disney Company.

Get Shorty (1995) Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld [Film]. Los Angeles: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Ghost World (2000) Directed by Terry Zwigoff [Film]. Los Angeles: United Artists.

Gleaming the Cube (1989) Directed by Graeme Clifford [Film]. Los Angeles: Gladden Entertainment.

Grand Canyon (1991) Directed by Lawrence Kasdan [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Gone in 60 Seconds (1974) Directed by H.B. Halicki [Film]. Los Angeles: H.B. Halicki Mercantile Co.

Gone in Sixty Seconds (2000) Directed by Dominic Sena [Film]. Los Angeles: Bruckheimer Films.

Hairspray (1988) Directed by John Waters [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

Hanging Up (2000) Directed by Diane Keaton. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Heat (1995) Directed by Michael Mann [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

The Hidden (1988) Directed by Jack Sholder [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

House of Bamboo (1955) Directed by Samuel Fuller [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932) Directed by Mervyn Le Roy [Film]. Los Angeles

Independence Day (1997) Directed by Roland Emmerich [Film]. Los Angeles: Radical Entertainment.

In a Lonely Place (1950) Directed by Nicholas Ray [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

In the Line of Fire (1993) Directed by Wolfgang Petersen [Film]. Los Angeles: Castle Rock Entertainment.

Internal Affairs (1990) Directed by Mike Figgis [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Into the Night (1985) Directed by John Landis [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.

Ivansxtc. (2000) Directed by Bernard Rose [Film]. London: Enos/Rose Productions.

Jackie Brown (1997) Directed by Quentin Tarantino [Film]. New York: Miramax Films.

Johnny Mnemonic (1995) Directed by Robert Longo [Film]. Los Angeles: Tri-Star Pictures.

Juice (1991) Directed by Ernest R. Dickerson [Film]. Los Angeles: Island World.

Jungle Fever (1992) Directed by Spike Lee [film]

Just Another Girl On the IRT (1992) Directed by Leslie Harris [Film]. New York: Miramax Films.

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (1976) Directed by John Cassavetes [Film]. Los Angeles: Faces Distribution Company.

Kiss Me Deadly (1955) Directed by Robert Aldrich [Film]. Los Angeles: Parklane Pictures Inc.

La Bamba (1986) Directed by Luis Valdez [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

L.A. Confidential (1997) Directed by Curtis Hanson [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

L.A. Story (1991) Directed by Mick Jackson [Film]. Los Angeles: Carolco Pictures Inc.

L.A. Takedown (1989) Directed by Michael Mann [Video]. Los Angeles: Ajar Inc.

The Lady from Shanghai (1946) Directed by Orson Welles [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Incorporated.

The Last Seduction (1994) Directed by John Dahl [Film]. Los Angeles: Incorporated Television Company.

The Last Tycoon (1976) Directed by Elia Kazan [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Laurel Canyon (2002) Directed by Lisa Cholodenko [Film]. Los Angeles: Antidote Films.

Less Than Zero (1987) Directed by Marek Kaniweska [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Lethal Weapon (1987) Directed by Richard Donner [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Lethal Weapon 2 (1989) Directed by Richard Donner [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Lethal Weapon 3 (1992) Directed by Richard Donner [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Lethal Weapon 4 (1998) Directed by Richard Donner [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Life of an American Fireman (1903) Directed by Edwin S. Porter [Short Film]. New York: Edison Manufacturing Company.

The Limey (1999) Directed by Steven Soderbergh [Film]. Los Angeles: Artisan Entertainment

The Long Goodbye (1973) Directed by Robert Altman [Film]. London: Lions Gate Films Inc.

Los Angeles Plays Itself (2003) Directed by Thom Anderson [Film]. Los Angeles: Thom Andersen Productions.

Los Angeles Without a Map (1998) Directed by Mika Kaurismäki [Film]. Los Angeles: Dan Films.

Lost Highway (1997) Directed by David Lynch [Film]. Los Angeles: Asymmetrical Productions.

M (1931) Directed by Fritz Lang [Film]. Berlin: Nero-Film AG.

M (1951) Directed by Joseph Losey [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Macao (1952) Directed by Josef von Sternberg [Film]. Los Angeles: R.K.O. Radio Pictures Incorporated.

Magnolia (1999) Directed by Paul Thomas Anderson [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

The Matrix (1999) Directed by Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski [Film]. Los Angeles: Village Roadshow Pictures.

The Matrix Reloaded (2003) Directed by Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers and Village Roadshow Productions.

The Matrix Revolutions (2003) Directed by Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers and Village Roadshow Pictures.

The Man With A Movie Camera (1929) Directed by Dziga Vertov [Film Documentary]. Moscow: VUFKU.

Manhatta (1921) Directed by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand [Short Film]. New York.

Menace II Society (1993) Directed by Albert Hughes and Allen Hughes [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

Metropolis (1926) Directed by Fritz Lang [Film]. Berlin: Universum Films UGA.

Mi Vida Loca (1993) Directed by Allison Anders [Film]. London: Channel Four Films.

Mulholland Dr. (2001) Directed by David Lynch [Film]. Paris: Les Films Alain Sadre.

Mulholland Falls (1996) Directed by Lee Tamahori [Film]. Los Angeles: Largo Entertainment.

Multifacial (1999) Directed by Vin Diesel [Short Film on DVD]. Los Angeles: Warner Home Video.

Mystery Train (1989) Directed by Jim Jarmusch [Film]. Tokyo: JVC Entertainment.

Near Dark (1987) Directed by Kathryn Bigelow [Film]. Los Angeles: F/M.

Odds Against Tomorrow (1959) Directed by Robert Wise [Film]. New York: HarBell Productions.

The Omega Man (1972) Directed by Boris Sagal [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

One False Move (1992) Directed by Carl Franklin [Film]. Los Angeles: IRS Media.

Out of the Past (1947) Directed by Jacques Tourneur [Film]. Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures Incorporated.

Panorama of 4th St., St. Joseph (1902) Directed by Joseph Weed [Short Film Documentary]. New York: American Mutoscope and Biograph.

Panoramic View of Brooklyn Bridge (1899) Director uncredited [Short Film Documentary]. New York: Edison Manufacturing Company.

Paris, Texas (1984) Directed by Wim Wenders [Film]. Berlin: Road Movies Film Produktion.

Paris Qui Dort (1923) Directed by René Clair [Short Film]. Paris: Films Diamant.

The Player (1992) Directed by Robert Altman [Film]. Los Angeles: Avenue Pictures Productions.

Poetic Justice (1993) Directed by John Singelton [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Predator 2 (1990) Directed by Stephen Hopkins [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Pulp Fiction (1994) Directed by Quentin Tarantino [Film]. New York: Miramax Films.

Rebel Without A Cause (1954) Directed by Nicholas Ray [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Repo Man (1984) Directed by Alex Cox [Film]. Los Angeles: Edge City.

Reservoir Dogs (1992) Directed by Quentin Tarantino [Film]. Los Angeles: Dog Eat Dog Productions.

Rien que les heures (1926) Directed by Alberto Cavalcanti [Film Documentary]. Paris.

Riot in Cell Block 11 (1954) Directed by Don Siegel [Film]. Los Angeles: Allied Artists Pictures Corporation.

The Running Man (1985) Directed by Paul Michael Glaser [Film]. Los Angeles: Braveworld Productions.

Safe (1995) Directed by Todd Haynes [Film]. Los Angeles: American Playhouse.

Saving Private Ryan (1998) Directed by Steven Spielberg [Film]. Los Angeles: DreamWorks SKG.

Scarlet Street (1945) Directed by Fritz Lang [Film]. Los Angeles: Fritz Lang Productions.

Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills (1989) Directed by Paul Bartel [Film]. Los Angeles: North Street Films.

Selena (1997) Directed by Gregory Nava [Film]. Los Angeles: Esparza/Katz Productions.

Set It Off (1996) Directed by F. Gary Gray [Film]. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema.

The Shawshank Redemption (1994) Directed by Frank Darabont [Film]. Los Angeles: Castle Rock Entertainment.

Short Cuts (1994) Directed by Robert Altman [Film]. Los Angeles: Avenue Pictures Productions.

Sin City (2005) Directed by Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller [Film]. Austin, Texas: Troublemaker Films.

Soylent Green (1973) Directed by Richard Fleischer [Film]. Los Angeles: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

The Slums of Beverly Hills (1998) Directed by Tamara Jenkins [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

South Central (1993) Directed by Steve Anderson [Film]. Los Angeles: Enchantment Films Inc.

Speed (1994) Directed by Jan de Bont [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Spanglish (2004) Directed by James L. Brooks [Film]. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures Corporation.

Stand and Deliver (1988) Directed by Ramón Mendénez [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Strange Days (1995) Directed by Kathryn Bigelow [Film]. Los Angeles: Lightstorm Entertainment.

Strays (1997) Directed by Vin Diesel [Film]. New York: One Race Productions.

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (1927) Directed by F.W. Murnau [Film]. Los Angeles: Fox Film Corporation.

Sunset Boulevard (1950) Directed by Billy Wilder [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Swimming with Sharks (1994) Directed by George Huang [Film]. Los Angeles: Cineville Inc.

The Terminator (1984) Directed by James Cameron [Film]. London: Hemdale Film Corporation.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991) Directed by James Cameron [Film]. Los Angeles: Carolco Films Inc.

Terminator 3: The Rise of the Machines (2003) Directed by Jonathan Mostow [Film]. Los Angeles: Intermedia films.

Them (1954) Directed by Gordon Douglas [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

Tortilla Soup (2001) Directed by María Ripoll [Film]. Los Angeles: Samuel Goldwyn Films LLC.

To Sleep With Anger (1990) Directed by Charles Burnett [Film]. Los Angeles: SVS Productions.

To Live and Die in L.A. (1985) Directed by William Friedkin [Film]. Los Angeles: New Century Productions.

Total Recall (1990) Directed by Paul Verhoeven [Film]. Los Angeles: Carolco Picture Inc.

Touch of Evil (1958) Directed by Orson Welles [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal International Pictures.

The Towering Inferno (1974) Directed by John Guillermin [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox and Irwin Allen Productions.

Training Day (2001) Directed by Antoine Fuqua [Film]. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.

True Confessions (1981) Directed by Ulu Grosbard [Film]. Los Angeles: Chartoff-Winkler Productions.

Two Days in the Valley (1996) Directed by John Herzfield [Film]. Los Angeles: Rhysher Entertainment.

The Two Jakes (1990) Directed by Jack Nicholson [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

The Usual Suspects (1995) Directed by Bryan Singer [Film]. Los Angeles: Polygram Filmed entertainment.

Valley Girl (1983) Directed by Martha Coolidge [Film]. Los Angeles: Valley 9000.

Virtuosity (1995) Directed by Brett Leonard [Film]. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures.

Volcano (1997) Directed by Mick Jackson [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Water and Power (1991) Directed by Pat O'Neill [Documentary Film]. Los Angeles: Stutz Inc.

Welcome to L.A. (1976) Directed by Alan Rudolph [Film]. London: Lions Gate Film Inc.

What's Cooking? (2000) Directed by Gurinder Chada [Film]. Los Angeles: BeCause Entertainment.

While the City Sleeps (1956) Directed by Fritz Lang [Film]. Los Angeles: Thor Productions Inc.

White Men Can't Jump (1992) Directed by Ron Shelton [Film]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox.

Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988) Directed by Robert Zemeckis [Film]. Los Angeles: Amblin Entertainment.

The Woman at the Window (1944) Directed by Fritz Lang [Film]. Los Angeles: International Pictures Incorporated.

Zoot Suit (1981) Directed by Luis Valdez [Film]. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures.