

Others studying the changing city, however, began to focus their attention on making practical and theoretical sense of the new urbanization processes that have been reshaping the modern metropolis. This has generated a rich and increasingly insightful literature concentrating specifically on what is significantly new and different in cities today. In *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, I attempted to summarize and synthesize these writings on what I call the postmetropolitan transition, the still-ongoing reconfiguration of the modern metropolis into a new form and functioning. From this perspective, a very different view of the actual new urbanism (without its capital letters) emerges.

As mentioned earlier, three interrelated processes have been the primary forces driving the transformation of the modern metropolis: the intensified globalization of capital, labor, and culture; the formation of a “new economy,” described by such terms as flexible, postfordist, information-intensive, and global; and, reinforcing and facilitating both, the spread of new information and communications technologies. Each of the three has developed distinctive discourses aimed at explaining the causes of urban transformation and what is new and different about contemporary urbanism. Moreover, none of these powerful forces of urban change was easily identifiable fifty years ago.

The transformation of the modern metropolis and the emergence of a new urbanism are nowhere more effectively demonstrated or more comprehensively studied than in the urbanized region of Los Angeles. In 1956, Los Angeles was the least dense and probably the most sprawling major American metropolis. Its media-enhanced suburbia, with its auto-driven and excentric lifestyles, stoked such descriptions as “sixty suburbs in search of a city” and the “non-place urban realm.” For many, L.A. was then, and continues to be today, a provocative and often fearsome model of what the suburbanized city of the future would most likely be. Very few participants in the Harvard conference spoke specifically about Los Angeles, but ominous images of the future, especially from the East Coast and Frostbelt perspectives dominating the conference, were almost surely attached to Los Angeles’s sprawling, centerless, smog-filled autotopia.

Over the following fifty years, however, one of the greatest, least anticipated, and still poorly understood urban transformations experienced anywhere took place. Against all its images and suburban stereotypes, the urbanized area of Los Angeles, spread over five coun-