2. Montage and Superposition: The Poetics and Politics of Urban Memory in *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920–1986*

Jens Martin Gurr

How does one represent, synchronically as well as diachronically, the complexity of Los Angeles, city of Hollywood myths and inner-city decay, of ceaseless self-invention and bulldozed urban renewal, of multiethnic pluralism and ethnic ghettos, a city where both the promises and problems of 'America' have crystallised to the present day? For, while the discourses of urban utopia and urban crisis with all their contradictory ideological implications, of course, are as old as the concept of the 'city' itself (cf. Mumford; Gassenmeier; Teske), Los Angeles has always been imagined in particularly polarised ways:

> According to your point of view, Los Angeles is either exhilarating or nihilistic, sun-drenched or smog-enshrouded, a multicultural haven or a segregated ethnic concentration camp – Atlantis or high capitalism – and orchestrating these polarized alternatives is an urban identity thriving precisely on their interchangeability. (Murphet 8)[1]

Los Angeles, of course, has long been a centre of attention for urbanists as well as for scholars of urban planning and of cultural representations of the city. It has been the subject of innumerable studies, the locale for countless novels, documentary films and particularly of count-

1 This passage is also cited in Bénézet 56.

less feature films.[2] However, one of the most impressive renderings of the complexities of 20th-century Los Angeles, and surely one of the most ambitious attempts to do justice to these complexities by presenting a wealth of material in a highly self-conscious form of hypertext, is Norman M. Klein's multimedia docu-fiction *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986*.[3]

Bleeding Through, which combines a 37-page novella with a multimedia documentary DVD[4] on 20th-century Los Angeles, is based on the fictitious story of Molly, who moved to L.A. in 1920 when she was 22 and whose life and times the narrator of the novella attempts to chronicle.[5] The question whether or not she killed her second husband Walt (or had him killed) at some point in 1959 serves as a narrative hook to launch the reader and user of the DVD on a quest through layers of 20th-century Los Angeles. Thus, as the cover blurb of the 2003 edition appropriately notes, *Bleeding Through* is "a loosely constructed documentary underlying a flexible literary journey, it is an urban bricolage held together by the outline of a novel spanning sixty-six years."[6]

I will here argue that *Bleeding Through* makes full use of the opportunities afforded by the digital medium to represent the complexity,

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2 From among the innumerable studies, cf. for instance Davis; Fulton; Klein 2008; Murphet; Scott/Soja; Soja 1996b, 2000, and 1996a; Ofner/Siefen.

3 With a novella written by Klein and an interactive interface programmed by Rosemary Comella and Andreas Kratky, it was co-produced by The Labyrinth Project at the Annenberg Center for Communication at the University of Southern California and the ZKM – Zentrum für Kunst und Medien – Karlsruhe.

4 References to the novella, where this source is not clear, will be abbreviated BT, references to the DVD will be given by tier and chapter. For a 44-minute film sampling material from the DVD, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMX5xuuyIDQ.

5 For the connections between Molly's story and the material on the cultural history of L.A., cf. also the additional texts in the original *Bleeding Through* booklet by Klein's collaborators on the project, Shaw 52; Kinder 54f.; Comella 59; and Kratky 60.

6 Klein's collaborator Rosemary Comella calls it "a sort of stream-of-consciousness interactive bricolage-documentary overlaying a fictionalized story based on a real person" (59).

multiplicity and dynamics of the city in a way no other medium could.[7] I will first establish the contexts for an analysis of Klein's multimedia documentary by outlining the key findings of his 1997 monograph *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*, on which *Bleeding Through* is based to a considerable extent. *The History of Forgetting*, however, also provides the context for *Bleeding Through* in another sense: The flaunted self-reflexivity of Klein's distinctly non-academic and often highly literary work and its attempts at creating a non-linear textuality also highlight the problems of representing the complexity of the city in any 'traditional' linear form, whether in print or in a documentary film. These problems of representation demonstrably lead to the non-linear format of multimedia hypertext in *Bleeding Through*. By outlining the relationship between the novella and the documentary and by highlighting some of the features and design principles of the interactive DVD, I will then show how *Bleeding Through* re-presents the complexity of 20th-century Los Angeles by taking us on a revisionist tour of its history since the 1920s and by pointing out the extent to which fictitious urban imaginaries – the innumerable *films noirs*, detective films and thrillers set in L.A. – have shaped perceptions of the city and even the city itself. I will then more explicitly point out the aesthetic and political implications of the multimedia format, of what one might call 'interactive multimedial docu-fiction in hypertext'. Featuring the narrative and aesthetic strategies of hypertext documentaries, *Bleeding Through* can be shown to deploy rhizomatic structures to do justice both to urban structures and to provide a radically subversive, anti-hegemonic view of 20th-century Los Angeles. More generally, it also critically engages with decades of US politics into the the 21st century and thus points forward to Klein's later work.

7 Though a digital database narrative like *Bleeding Through* would now, in the year 2022, almost certainly be set up as a website, the fact that it was placed on a DVD in 2003 only matters to my argument insofar as a DVD is essentially 'complete' and cannot be added to, whereas a web-based presentation could potentially be enlarged and built upon, possibly even in a curated form with further materials being supplied by users.

In particular, I propose to read *Bleeding Through* side by side with Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which has received an astonishing amount of critical attention in urban studies (and elsewhere) in the last 20 years as arguably *the* paradigmatic text on urban modernity. I want to focus on the urban texture of both texts, particularly with regard to how they represent layers of urban memory.

My particular focus in reading *Bleeding Through* and Benjamin side by side will be on Benjamin's notion of "superposition". The underlying view of the city as a palimpsest and the notion of layered spatialized memory this entails, I believe, accord well with the poetics of Modernist urban poetry (I here discuss "superposition" and "palimpsest" together; for a differentiation, cf. Gurr 2021, 84–109).

Finally, I will argue that the emphasis on urban layers and the frequent overlay montage of older and more recent photographs that is one of the most characteristic features of *Bleeding Through* literalises Benjamin's notion of the "interpenetration and superposed transparency" of different temporal layers referred to as "superposition" (546).

Establishing Contexts: The Problems of Representing Urban Complexity in Klein's *History of Forgetting*

Klein's 1997 monograph *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* is itself highly unusual in its mix of genres: Parts I and IV are scholarly studies of 20th-century urban planning in L.A. and of the impact of filmic representations on the urban imaginary of the city; Part II is the imaginative recreation of the perspective on the city of a Vietnamese immigrant in a novella of some 65 pages (2008, 151–215), while Part III is a collection of creatively essayistic "docufables" (217–243).[8]

8 In his "Outline" in the "Introduction", Klein sets out his plan for the book as follows: "In the chapters that follow (Part I), I will examine the map of what is left out in downtown Los Angeles, how urban myths (social imaginaries) have been used as public policy. In the second part, I present a docu-novel, (or novella) based on Vietnamese immigrants who live in areas affected by these policies. In the third part, I present docufables from other residents in these commu-

Klein names as one of his key themes "the uneven decay of an Anglo identity in Los Angeles, how the instability of white hegemonic culture leads to bizarre over-reactions in urban planning, in policing, and how these are mystified in mass culture" (2008, 17).

Referring to what is surely the most drastic urban redevelopment project in 20th-century Los Angeles, Klein states that "Bunker Hill [became] the emblem of urban blight in Los Angeles, the primary target for redevelopment downtown from the late twenties on" (2008, 52). The Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project, begun in the 1950s and extending into the 21st century, brought the virtually total razing of a neighbourhood, the flattening of the hill and the building of the high-rise buildings now popularly regarded as constituting "Downtown L.A.". Similarly, Klein comments on the razing of the "old Chinatown, old Mexican Sonora […] the old Victorian slum district, and other *barrios* west of downtown, [which] were leveled, virtually without a trace" (2008, 97). Commenting on an eerie commonality of all these 20th-century urban renewal projects in L.A., Klein writes:

> [E]xcept for Chinatown, every neighborhood erased by urban planning in and around downtown was Mexican, or was perceived that way (generally, they were mixed, often no more than 30% Mexican). […] While East L.A. may *today* seem the singular capital of Mexican-American life in the city, the mental map was different in the forties. The heartland of Mexican-American Los Angeles was identified as sprawling west, directly past downtown, from north to south. Bunker Hill was identified as "Mexican" by 1940, like Sonoratown just north of it […] and particularly Chavez Ravine. (2008, 132f.)[9]

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nities, particularly about how their memories are affected by public traumas: drive-by shootings, racist neglect, policies toward immigrants, the Uprising of 1992, and so on. And in the final parts, I examine how literature and other media use techniques of the 'unreliable narrator,' and how the corporate uses of 'unreliable' memory are transforming the cultures of Los Angeles" (2008, 17).

9 Klein also refers to the "policy of shutting out downtown to non-whites […] since the 1920s" (2008, 132).

In *The History of Forgetting* as well as in a number of essays, Klein further shows how the urban imaginary of Los Angeles has been shaped by images of the city in film, from *noir* to *Blade Runner* and beyond, creating "places that never existed but are remembered anyway" (2002, 452), even arguing that the ideology of *noir* and neo-*noir* films, these "delusional journeys into panic and conservative white flight" also help "sell gated communities and 'friendly' surveillance systems" (1998, 89).

More immediately, *Bleeding Through* – though the details do not all fit – is clearly based on one of the short docufables in part III of *The History of Forgetting*: In a mere three pages, "The Unreliable Narrator"[10] (see ch. 5 of the present volume) tells the story of 93-year-old Molly Frankel, who moved to the city in or around 1920, ran a shop for decades and rented out most of her spacious Victorian house in Angelino Heights to a large Mexican family. Towards the end of the text, the experimental and tentative nature of these musings is pointed out by self-reflexively sketching a genealogy in a number of references both to the tradition of the unreliable narrator and to accounts of the constructedness of historiography and memory since the 18th century: "the Münchhausens and Uncle Tobys […] German and Central European fiction after 1880 […] the absent presence that in Michelet's words are 'obscure and dubious witnesses' (1847) […] the broad crisis of representation in cinema" (Klein 2008, 233).

A similar concern with forms of representation is apparent in the chapter entitled "The Most Photographed and Least Remembered City in the World" (247–262) in *The History of Forgetting*. Klein here comments on previous fictional films and documentaries seeking to record the history of ethnic Los Angeles, such as Kent MacKenzie's *The Exiles* (1961) or Duane Kubo's *Raise the Banner* (1980) and the way in which even these well-intentioned films evade the issue of the razing of ethnic neighbourhoods (cf. 2008, 248f.): "The twin beasts that erased much of downtown – racist neglect and ruthless planning – leave only a faint echo in cinema, because generally one will distract the other, or because cinema, by its very apparatus, resembles the tourist imaginary" (2008, 249). Klein here speaks of the "utter instability of cinema as a formal record, and the fact that

10 "Unreliable Narrators" is also the title of a chapter in the novella (BT 26–34).

audiences enjoy this paramnesiac sensation, as memory dissolves. […] The layering of erasures is essential to moving the narrative along, to its simultaneity, its unreal solidity, its anarchic orderliness" (2008, 253).

Anticipating the self-conscious concern with narrative form in *Bleeding Through*, Klein notes in *The History of Forgetting* that when he began to write about the 20th-century transformations of Los Angeles, he "noticed that [his] scholarship was beginning to resemble fiction" and speaks of the "crossed identity" fostered by this type of writing, "[making] the scholar both reader and character within the same text" (2008, 6f.). Even more directly linking the arrangement of a wealth of materials to the writing of fiction, he comments: "In many ways the materials I have assembled look like research gathered by a novelist before the novel is written, before the writer turns the contradictions into a character-driven story" (Klein 2008, 7). In a highly revealing footnote, he further comments on his concern with form:

> I am trying, with as much modesty as possible, to identify a form of literature that is not simply 'hybridized', or 'de-narratized', and certainly not deconstructed – not a blend of others but a structure in itself, a structure that is evolving […]. By structure, I mean *how to generate alternatives within the text itself, within the style itself.* (Klein 2008, 20, note 10; italics original)[11]

In *The History of Forgetting*, Klein even points forward to *Bleeding Through* by employing – if only half-seriously – the techniques of hypertext. In a short section entitled "Brief Interruption" in the "Introduction", in a reference to theories of memory and forgetting, he states: "The only solu-

11 Cf. also Klein 2008, 7: "There are clear signs that both critical theory and cultural studies have generated what amounts to a new category of literature (as yet unnamed). What names there are sound a bit early in the cycle right now, clearly not what this (genre?) might be called ten years from now: docu-novels, "mockumentaries", false autobiographies, public autobiography; "faction"; phonebooks or chatlines as variations of personal essay; public autobiography; "witnessing" […]; historiographic metafiction. I would rather not add more labels. Instead, I'll stick to the term "history". That is problematic and fictive enough already".

tion for this introduction is a kind of hypertext (click to page 301). For the reader also interested in memory theory […] I have included an Appendix […]. Read it now or read it later, whenever is suits you" (Klein 2008, 14).[12] *The History of Forgetting* in its frequently scrupulous and highly self-conscious concern with narrative form thus clearly points forward to *Bleeding Through*.[13]

Bleeding Through: Multimedia Docu-Fiction on the Erasure of Multi-Ethnic Los Angeles

While *The History of Forgetting* addresses more directly the perversions of city planning driven by greed and racism, *Bleeding Through* tackles them more obliquely if more experientially. It does so by juxtaposing two formats: the 'traditional' narrative of Klein's novella on the one hand and a multimedia DVD on the other hand. The documentary is thus held together by the underlying story of Molly and her life in L.A. between 1920 and 1986.

Klein's constantly self-reflexive 37-page novella *Bleeding Through* has a highly self-conscious first-person narrator who tells the story of Molly and – just as centrally – his attempts to reconstruct it:

> I couldn't trust any of her stories. Not that her facts were wrong. Or that she didn't make an effort. [But] she'd fog out dozens of key facts. Whenever I noticed, she would blow me off, smiling, and say, "So I lose

12 Elsewhere in the "Introduction", he refers to the effect of his strategies of representation in the book as those of "digital simulations", "special effects, a morphing programme in slo-mo, when the simulation is naked, when the tiger is obviously three frames away from turning human" (16). This morphing of one image into the other by means of match dissolves is precisely one of the most impressive features of *Bleeding Through*.

13 On the other hand, establishing a connection between the contextual material on Molly's story on the DVD and *The History of Forgetting*, the narrator of the novella comments on "numerous characters in the background [of Molly's story] who may show up, but certainly will appear in future volumes of *The History of Forgetting*" (BT 29; cf. also 32).

> a few years." […] But there were seven memories in the years from 1920 to 1986 that were luminously detailed. (10)[14]

It is these seven memories of key stages of Molly's life around which the novella and the DVD are structured, and which serve to explore 66 years of developments in the city. Set largely within the three-mile radius near downtown L.A. in which Molly spent most of her life, the documentary deals with neighbourhoods such as Boyle Heights, Bunker Hill, Chavez Ravine, Chinatown and Echo Park, the disappearance of which was chronicled in *The History of Forgetting*. As the narrator explains here, this area was the site of the most drastic urban renewal projects in the country continuing over decades: "Hundreds of buildings gone: that could just as easily have been caused by carpet bombing, or a volcano erupting in the central business district" (BT 12). The same area around downtown, however, is also the centre of a filmic universe: "Inside those three miles, under the skyline dropped by mistake into downtown ten years ago [in the 1980s], more people have been murdered in classic Hollywood crime films than anywhere else on earth" (BT 12).[15]

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14 The "preface" on the DVD, readable above a vintage photograph of downtown L.A. with City Hall still by far the tallest building, similarly makes clear the central principle of this "cinematic novel archive" (Klein 2002, 453) and already highlights its major concerns: "An elderly woman living near downtown has lost the ability to distinguish day from night. Rumors suggest that decades ago, she had her second husband murdered. When asked, she indicates, quite cheerfully, that she has decided to forget all that: 'I lose a few years.' Three miles around where she is standing, more people have been 'murdered' in famous crime films than anywhere else in the world. Imaginary murders clog the roof gutters. They hide beneath coats of paint. But in fact, the neighborhoods have seen something quite different than movie murders; a constant adjustment to Latinos, Japanese, Filipinos, Jews, Evangelicals, Chinese. What's more, in the sixties, hundreds of buildings were bulldozed. And yet, pockets remain almost unchanged since 1940".

15 The novella refers to "290 murder films […] shot no more than five minutes from Molly's house" (BT 31). The narrator later states that "[s]ince the Seventies, murders have been relocated a few blocks west, because gunfire looks more ironic underneath the L.A. skyline at night, seen best from the hills in Temple-Beaudry" (BT 37).

The documentary database includes hundreds of images, maps, newspaper clippings, drawings and sketches, historical film clips and (for copyright reasons[16]) film snippets recognisably re-enacting key scenes of famous L.A. films merely by repeating the camera movements in basically empty streets in the original locations, but without actors.[17] Furthermore, there are numerous interviews with long-term residents, sometimes elaborate captions, as well as narrative commentary by Norman Klein.[18] Klein's video commentary frequently gives clues as to the story behind the disappearance of Molly's husband Walt, which adds a playful dimension of detective game to the navigation experience, because, such is the underlying fiction, the point of navigating *Bleeding Through* in the first place is to act as a detective on the hunt for such clues. However, as the narrator of the novella comments, "[t]he journey through the evidence is more exciting than the crime itself. We want to see everything that is erased to make the story legible" (BT 37). In the novella, the narrator outlines the structure and function of the DVD as follows:

16 For this cf. Comella's short essay on the "making of" *Bleeding Through*; cf. especially 58.

17 The re-shot sequences of films such as *Falling Down, Heat, Training Day, Chinatown, The Last Boy Scout, T-Men, Omega Man, DOA, To Live and Die in L.A.* are frequently iconic scenes with the downtown towers looming in the background. In addition, this section also features maps of L.A. pointing out key locations used in these films.

18 The narrator of the novella (whom one is likely to have identified as "Norman Klein") refers to his materials as follows: "I have about a thousand photographs and newspaper articles, over two hundred relevant movies on file, and over twenty interviews, along with hours of interviews with Norman Klein; and hundreds of pages of text" (BT 27; cf. also 33, 38, 42, 43). The narrator comments on the way the documentary is to be perceived: "I turned toward my research on Molly's life, as if I could edit her sensations into a story that was symphonic in some way, or contrapuntal. […] I could gather data for Molly's story, and embed it like bots under the skin: newspaper clippings, historical photographs, and patches of interviews. Then I could assemble my assets into a vast database, for a search engine that could be selected according to the senses." (BT 11).

> The structure works like this: […] Each tier [of the DVD] comments on a specific medium that tries to make the city intelligible as it erases, collectively forgets, survives from day to day. The history of forgetting is a distraction from the basic reality of urban life in Los Angeles, its quotidian power of survival. (BT 42)

The first "tier" of the documentary DVD, "The Phantom of a Novel: Seven Moments", structured around the seven key moments of Molly's life in L.A. between 1920 and 1986, is dominated by historical photographs of people and places in the neighbourhoods surrounding Bunker Hill. Thumb-nails of these photographs are arranged in random sequence and can be selected by the user; alternatively, the user can go through the photo archive by enlarging each photo to almost the size of the screen and then continuing either with the photograph on the left or on the right. Making full use of the technical possibilities, the sequence of photographs is not fixed but rather randomly brought up from the archive. Additionally, with each phase of Molly's life, there is a short narrative comment by Norman Klein in a window in the corner – a commentary that can be opened and closed by the user. The narrator of the novella describes this first tier as "a visual, interactive radio program […] a kind of modern novel on a screen with hundreds of photos and Norman as narrator. You might say they are also a docu-fictional movie" (BT 43).

Tier 2, "The Writer's Back Story", which the narrator of the novella describes as "more like a contextualization" (43), is largely made up of newspaper clippings and establishes the context of other people and places more loosely connected to Molly's story. It collects newspaper clippings covering events and developments occurring during Molly's life, with references to the prohibition and illegal distilleries, the ban on interracial marriages in the state of California in a 1932 newspaper clipping, the controversial reception of a 1941 anti-semitic speech by Charles Lindbergh, the deportation of Japanese Americans during World War II, illicit gambling, the McCarthy era with its Red Scare and the building of air-raid shelters – frequently interspersed with innumerable sensationalist clippings reporting murders in Los Angeles. Additionally, explanatory captions beneath newspaper clippings and

photographs contextualise developments, with comments, for instance, on the ambivalent views of Chinatown in the 1920s as both "an exotic place in the popular imagination" and a place "considered as an eyesore, as more brown and black races converged at the Plaza" (DVD 2:1).

Tier 3, "Excavation: Digging Behind the Story and its Locale", is described in the novella as "the aporia of media itself" (BT 43). In five sections, it offers a wealth of further material, here arranged thematically rather than chronologically. There is a section entitled "People Molly Never Met But Would Make Good Characters in Her Story", featuring randomly arranged interviews with twelve residents (including Norman Klein) of these neighbourhoods who comment on their experiences within the social and ethnic developments in 20th-century L.A., the 'Zoot Suit Riots', fear of violent police officers, ethnic festivities, Anti-Communist witch-hunts during the McCarthy era, the 1947 murders of Elizabeth Short – the "Black Dahlia" – and of Bugsy Siegel, or the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Largely consisting of film and video sequences, it is a "vast 'ironic index' of what Molly left out, forgot, couldn't see. It samples from the back-story that gets lost when the movie or novel is made legible" (BT 43). It is also described as

> a meta-text (not a deconstruction). It is the structure of what cannot be found, what Molly decided to forget, what Molly never noticed, what passed before her but was lost to us. It is proof that no novel or film (documentary or fiction) can capture the fullness of how a city forgets, except by its erasures. (BT 38f.)

Thus, neither the novella nor the DVD are to be regarded as a higher-level commentary one on the other; they are mutually complementary: Just as the DVD can be seen as a vast exploration of the themes outlined in the novella, the narrative frequently comments on the contents of the DVD: "Next day, I went into a newspaper morgue, looking for articles on Walt's disappearance. Instead, I found fifty ways to kill a man between 1959 and 1961 (along with five suicides). I've scanned all the articles into a database for you" (BT 24).[19] In the novella, the fictional story of Walt's dis-

19 A selection is to be found in ch. 7 of the present volume.

appearance is constantly related to current developments chronicled on the DVD, tying the wealth of documentary material back to the underlying quest narrative: "Among police photos, I find what should be Walt's body. […] Then I discover that on the same day, the downtown editor cancelled photos about racist crimes, particularly the railroading of blacks and Latinos" (BT 25).

With Molly as its protagonist, *Bleeding Through* shifts attention from hegemonic white males and draws attention to the role of minorities in L.A.'s complex history: Molly, "a twenty-something girl from a Jewish home in the Midwest" (DVD 1:1; cf. also BT 13), is herself a new-comer and an outsider when she arrives in the city in 1920. As Bénézet points out, "[t]hrough Molly, Klein articulates a gendered and minority-oriented revision of the city's history" (69).

From the very beginning, both the novella and the DVD characterise Molly's neighbourhood as a multi-ethnic one.[20] Much of the material centres on transformations in 20th-century multi-ethnic L.A., whether in references to "Brooklyn Avenue with its famous mix of Jews and Mexicans, Japanese and other 'swart' young men" (BT 15; cf. also 40) to "restrictions against the black community on Central Avenue, especially when by 1924 membership of the Klan reached its highest number ever" (BT 30), to the tearing down of Chinatown for Union Station (built in 1939), to the history of mixed Japanese and Mexican neighbourhoods, with a Japanese American family man running a Mexican grocery store (cf. DVD 3:1), the 1943 'Zoot Suit Riots', the Watts rebellion, or the turning of Little Tokyo into "Bronzeville" during World War II, when African Americans and Mexicans moved into the area while the Japanese Americans were held in deportation camps away from the West Coast (cf. BT 22).

The drastic changes imposed by radical urban development projects in areas such as Bunker Hill may well be seen as the central theme of the documentary DVD. The section "Collective Dissolve: Bunker Hill", in film sequences from Kent McKenzie's 1956 documentary *Bunker Hill* and *The Exiles* (1961), maps as well as photographs from the 1890s to the

20 In his insert narrative accompanying the DVD preface, Klein refers to a family of "Latino's renting downstairs" in Molly's house.

1960s attempts to recreate Bunker Hill before the massive demolition programme that cleared the area for what is now regarded as 'downtown' L.A. A long sequence from McKenzie's *Bunker Hill* refers to the Community Redevelopment Agency's major plan to relocate 8000 residents of the neighbourhood, to demolish all buildings and to sell the land and have modern office and apartment complexes built (cf. DVD 1:6). This chapter of the DVD also displays images from 1959 and 1960 showing the large-scale demolition of Bunker Hill. A sequence from Gene Petersen's 1949 film "… And Ten Thousand More [housing units]" also refers to the problem of 'slums' in L.A. and the need for urban development. This sequence is captioned "The myths of urban blight".[21] Similarly, the photograph of a model "Redevelopment Study for Bunker Hill, March 22, 1960" is captioned "Cooking statistics to justify tearing down Bunker Hill" (DVD 1:6). Indeed, statistics on the housing situation and living conditions in Bunker Hill appear systematically to have been distorted in order to win public support for the demolition of this predominantly Mexican neighbourhood. In the caption underneath a sequence from McKenzie's *The Exiles*, the fact that "this was a brown and black identified downtown center" is explicitly identified as "one of the reasons it was torn down" (DVD 3:3).

In the interview section, residents comment on racial segregation in L.A. Japanese American Bill Shishima recounts his experience of having to leave Los Angeles in May 1942 as an 11-year-old to be interned away from the coast with his family; retired African American fireman Arnett Hartsfield reports coming to Los Angeles in 1929, "when we couldn't even cross Washington Boulevard on Central Avenue [because of segregation]" (DVD 3:1). Finally, Esther Raucher recalls her experience of first coming to downtown as a white child and of staring at African Americans: "As a child […] I don't think I'd seen a black person […]. That's how segregated the city was that you would never see a black person" (DVD 3:1). Tying such developments to the underlying story of Molly, a clip from Jeremy Lezin's 1975 documentary *A Sense of Community* with

21 On the discourse of crisis and the frequently disastrous consequences of large-scale restructuring plans in L.A., cf. also Soja 1996a.

references to undocumented immigrants working in L.A. is captioned "With each year, Molly felt the massive immigration from Latin America change the rules in her world." (DVD 1:7).

All in all, in keeping with *The History of Forgetting*, *Bleeding Through* thus shows how 20th-century Los Angeles, in the process of becoming increasingly multi-ethnic demographically, continued to erase the visible traces of this diversity in favour of a de-ethnicised 'all-American' look and feel modelled on the needs of a largely white elite and enforced by representing ethnic L.A. along the lines of the paranoid and implicitly racist aesthetic of innumerable *noir* murder films. It remains to be shown that the attempt at an open, non-hierarchical and anti-hegemonic representation of these complexities is closely tied to the non-linear and decentred form of the multimedia hypertext documentary.

Archival Database Fiction and Questions of Form: Nodes, Rhizomes and the Media-Historical Moment of 2003

The experience of navigating *Bleeding Through* is a fundamentally contradictory one: On the one hand, by making sophisticated use of the technological possibilities of the multimedia database, the fast-paced, multi-dimensional, overpowering, non-hierarchical, multi-faceted documentary recreates the urban experience of 20th- or even 21st-century L.A. On the other hand, there is a nostalgic quality to the experience, which partly arises from the use of vintage photographs, film clips and newspaper clippings which appear to work against the grain of the high-tech mode of presentation – in keeping with Klein's views expressed in *The History of Forgetting* on the constant self-reinvention of the city and the concomitant memoricide of previous layers of its history. However, while these aesthetic and experiential implications of the form are worth noting, the more momentous implications of the form are its implicit politics, which elegantly complement the more explicit political commentary also packaged into *Bleeding Through*.

Repeated references to the editorial decisions that went into the compilation of the material, the frequently self-reflexive narrator of

the novella as well as the meta-narrative[22] titles of the DVD's three "tiers" – 1: "The Phantom of a Novel: Seven Moments", 2: "The Writer's Back Story", 3: "Excavation: Digging Behind the Story and its Locale" – already point to the fact that this documentary database fiction self-reflexively foregrounds its own narrative constructedness. This is continued throughout the DVD. In between the interviews with eleven other residents of the central L.A. neighbourhoods, Klein in interview clips comments on his thoughts on Molly, on the writing of the novella, as well as on his own first coming to Los Angeles:

> When we began these interviews […] we were continually locating details that were half remembered, badly remembered or often forgotten and lost and couldn't possibly be known to her. […] And it seems that we became almost more interested in locating what she couldn't find, what she had to forget, what she couldn't locate. […] It's such a great pleasure to not be constrained simply by the legibility of the story. […] The complexity becomes such a great pleasure. It's such a pleasure noticing what she wouldn't have noticed. […] So in a way the absences become much more present in these interviews than anything else. (DVD 3:1)

Postmodern literary and filmic explorations of the city, it is true, have already dissolved distinctions between genres, between fiction and discursive exploration; they have self-reflexively highlighted the ambiguous role of the writer or film-maker as both observer and participant in urban interactions; they have highlighted the dissolution of traditional views of the city and have frequently attempted to make the city itself legible as a text; they have set out formally to represent the multiplicity, polyphony and fragmentation of the city through multiple, polyphonic and fragmented textuality (for some of these tendencies, cf. Teske). Similarly, in keeping with the views on the narrativity and constructedness of historiography in the work of Hayden White, Michel de Certeau and

22 For the concept of metanarrative as distinct from metafiction, cf. Fludernik; Nünning.

others, many documentaries constantly foreground artifice, subjectivity, etc.[23] Furthermore, precisely the fact that the documentary needs to be manipulated by the individual viewer for anything to be visible at all further reminds us of the mediality and the constructedness of what we are witnessing. The medium thus constantly draws attention to itself – in contrast to much traditional documentary film-making which relies on the reality effect of suggesting that what we see is somehow 'evident' and can hardly be questioned. Hence the paradox inherent in much documentary film-making that is meant to be anti-hegemonic, subversive, etc. but through its very narrative form frequently cannot help being suggestive and (since the viewer is essentially passive[24]), imposes a view of the world. *Bleeding Through*, however, in contrast to even the most advanced filmic documentaries, which still inescapably rely on the linearity of film, makes full use of the digital medium to break linearity. Thus, while documentaries, which are originally meant for collective viewing, induce forms of collective medial experience, the effect of *Bleeding Through* specifically relies on a highly individual experience. The constant need to 'do' something in the process of navigating *Bleeding Through* – all clips are very short, hardly anything happens without being triggered by the user, who is essentially assigned the role of a detective in search of the truth – then, not only foregrounds the mediality, narrativity and construction of the material, it also activates the viewer.

23 For a discussion of these tendencies in urban documentaries, cf. for instance Aitken; Hohenberger; Nichols.

24 I am aware, of course, that the tradition especially of British cultural studies has long pointed out the viewer's active role in the constitution of meaning of TV, film and other forms of popular culture; for a discussion of the productive role of the viewer, cf. for instance Winter. Nonetheless, the constant need for active manipulation and the flaunted non-linear and hypertextual nature of the programme in contrast to the reception of even the most experimental, fragmentary, 'postmodern' – but ultimately still 'fixed and invariable' documentary film is bound to have consequences for the constitution of meaning.

In keeping with the promise of the medium[25], the non-linear presentation of the material thus precludes closure, stimulates the discovery of knowledge rather than imposing it and thereby fosters learning without being explicitly didactic.

The non-linear structure of *Bleeding Through* and its dual function of both simulating urban textures *and* of empowering viewers, might be characterised in terms of what Christoph Bode has called "future narratives". Bode designates as a "future narrative"[26] any narrative that describes more than one potential continuation in a given situation and thus does not – as most narratives do – present a development as having already happened in the past and as no longer allowing for different outcomes. Rather, "future narratives" in Bode's sense portray the future as being open and subject to intervention. The decision points at which different future developments are possible are referred to as "nodes". In *Bleeding Through*, the numerous points at which users of the DVD have to make decisions about how and where to continue appear to simulate the nodes and decision points in the city. However, while in most of the cases Bode refers to, the future is at least potentially open for the protagonist of a "future narrative", there is no such openness for Molly as the protagonist – her story is clearly represented as having happened in the past. For the user, however, who becomes the protagonist of the quest through the material, the choices that need to be made do suggest an open future.

Moreover, the aesthetic and political implications of the form can fruitfully be accounted for with reference to the concept of rhizomatic structures. As proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (7–13), rhizomes are characterised by the principles of "connectivity", "heterogeneity", "multiplicity", "asignifying rupture", "cartography" and "decalcomania".[27] If,

25 Cf. my discussion of the media-historical moment of 2003 and the optimism about the potentials of digital formats in this chapter as well as the discussion in the interview in ch. 9.

26 "Future narrative" is a term coined by literary scholar Christoph Bode (Bode/Dietrich). The present outline is strongly indebted to the introduction to Bode/Dietrich.

27 For a discussion of the rhizomatic nature of hypertext along the lines of these characteristics, cf. Burnett.

as Burnett has argued, "[h]ypertext is rhizomorphic in all its characteristics" (28) – and the ingenious digital interface makes full use of the medium – *Bleeding Through* may be characterised as fully rhizomatic, with all the non-totalising and anti-hegemonic implications Deleuze and Guattari famously ascribe to rhizomatic discourses. Thus, the multimedial, multivocal, multi-perspectival, interactive, non-sequential and highly self-reflexive experience of navigating *Bleeding Through* brings out "traits that are usually obscured by the enforced linearity of paper printing" (Burnett 3) and, like hypertext generally, serves to undercut, liquefy and question established and hegemonic representations with their frequently unquestioned dichotomies and "*hierarchies violentes*" (Derrida 56).

As Marsha Kinder argues in her short essay in the original booklet of *Bleeding Through*, "database narratives [are] interactive structures that resist narrative closure and expose the dual processes of selection and combination lying at the root of all stories" (54).[28] *Bleeding Through* is narrative 'enough' so as to create interest and curiosity, but it flaunts its constructedness and constantly requires its users to select from a wealth of narrative items and, by means of a succession of such choices, consciously to perform themselves the acts of selection and combination usually hidden behind the surface of conventional narrative. Database fictions, in flaunting the arbitrariness of such choices and enabling users to choose differently next time (but never exactly to retrace their steps),

28 Bénézet's allegedly original coinage of the term "database narrative" and her claim to harmonise what were previously regarded as the incompatible formats of narrative and of database (cf. 56f.) are hardly as original as she claims – she here merely follows Marsha Kinder's essay "*Bleeding Through* Database Fiction" which already attempts a synthesis based on her reading of *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986* (cf. especially 54). Curiously, much of what Bénézet somewhat pretentiously presents as the results of "[her] analysis" (63) is explicitly stated in Klein's text or the accompanying essays or is blatantly obvious anyway: "There are many reasons that may have led Klein and his team to privilege a recombinant poetics. My analysis suggests that the presentation of an openly multifaceted, critical, and self-reflexive creation was one important motivation" (63).

are potentially subversive purely in their form in that they expose as a construction and fabulation what narrative traditionally represents as a given. By making each journey through the material necessarily a different one – and by thus presenting what is merely material for a story as subject to change and human intervention – these narratives also contribute to the activation and mobilisation of the user in ways that even the most advanced self-reflexive fiction – which, apart from some few formal experiments with non-linearity[29], is still subject to the linearity of print – cannot achieve (cf. also Kinder 54).

True to the frequently enthusiastic conceptions of hypertext digital media as an inherently democratic and potentially liberating form current in the early 2000s[30], *Bleeding Through* already by means of its very form serves to deconstruct hegemonic constructions of history by constantly drawing attention to the medial, discursive, constructed nature of such conceptions. As a user, one is never allowed to forget this is a revisionist, anti-hegemonic, at times polemical re-construction of a repressed, alternative Los Angeles.

What makes *Bleeding Through* even more directly political is that it self-reflexively draws attention to the political implications of its narrative procedures and even explicitly links its own constructedness to a history of political fabrications from the Cold War to the Bush administration. In this vein, the narrator of the novella self-consciously comments on his narrative procedures:

> I need a different model for the unreliable narrator as well as for the fragrant noir world, vital though these have been for modern literature, detective stories, cinema suspense; and for lies the State Department delivered on broadcast news during the Cold War. (This is 1986,

29 One might here think, for instance, of B.S. Johnson's 1969 *The Unfortunates*; for a discussion cf. Gurr 2017.

30 I am aware that my interpretation of the centrality of the random or stochastic presentation of the material to the overall 'point' of *Bleeding Through* does not accord with Norman Klein's own rather more sceptical views as expressed in parts of ch. 3 of the present volume as well as in the interview (see ch. 9).

> remember. You the reader may have more grisly forms of unreliable news to deal with.) (BT 28).

This passage strikes one as curiously multi-layered and proleptic – one is tempted to say prophetic – political commentary: While *explicitly* referring to 1986 and "the Cold War", it clearly seems to suggest the "lies" of another "State Department", namely Secretary of State Colin Powell's infamous UN Security Council speech on February 5, 2003, which occurred during the very final stages of work on *Bleeding Through*. Reread during of after the Trump presidency, however, it appears to suggest the way in which Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo infamously lied in the Trump-Ukraine affair or abused the office to support Trump's lies about the 2020 election.

A similarly self-reflexive passage on the DVD draws attention to the fact that part of the material originally collected for the documentary was destroyed in a computer crash; however, more than merely suggesting the haphazard, selective and necessarily incomplete nature of even the most scrupulously undertaken reconstruction project, this passage again closely associates the contingencies influencing the production of *Bleeding Through* with contemporary political events:

> On November 1 [2002], an electric surge boiled two hard drives for *Bleeding Through*. Perhaps the Day of the Dead came by phone, reminding us that all media looks better as a sketch. We lost four programs. […]
>
> November 9: The drives still smell like burnt upholstery. […] On TV, we watch George W. Bush take charge of our future. The Pentagon was working on a Stinkpot called Stench Soup, so foul smelling that it could stop a crowd. […] They are trying to decide if it would make a good "non-lethal" weapon.
>
> The last paragraph [on Bush and the Pentagon's stink bomb] is completely accurate. The rest is what works for you.
>
> March 23, 2003: A last gasp for the project. The troops are less than 100 miles from Bagdad. (Tier 3, "The Lost Section")[31]

31 The text is here presented in written form reminiscent of a typed diary entry.

The novella, too, ties events in L.A. back to the grand national questions, turning what seems a novella and documentary on L.A. only into a *pars pro toto* representation of 20th-century America (and by implication even of 21st-century America). For instance, the problems of violence and murder in L.A. are tied to the "longstanding American distrust of urban democracy" (BT 25):

> Many Americans believe, as they did in Jefferson's day, that equality can survive only in a small town. By contrast, fascism flourishes in crowds. […] I prefer to make Walt's murder a critique of urban capitalism; but then crime becomes a defense of the suburbs. (BT 25)

In his essay "Absences, Scripted Spaces and the Urban Imaginary: Unlikely Models for the City in the Twenty-First Century" (rpt. as ch. 8 of the present volume), written while he was also working on *Bleeding Through*, Klein describes the results of drastic urban renewal projects. After a long section on some of L.A.'s contemporary problems, he explicitly relates contemporary L.A. to the problems of the US and the world at large:

> In short, the global civilisation has begun to settle in. We see its monuments more clearly, its glitter, its brutality. […] This is a world that has more than lost its way. It is the best and the worst of all possible worlds, dominated by scripted spaces and social imaginaries inside a level of surveillance, top-heavy economic fragility and media feudalism […]. And yet its possibilities are extraordinary. (451)

Even more explicitly, this 2002 essay links genre-specific urban imaginaries of Los Angeles, ruthless urban planning and reactionary and paranoid US politics in general (especially of the Bush era). Interestingly, it then comments on this conjunction of urban imaginaries of L.A. and grand national themes as being central to *Bleeding Through*, thus suggesting that it should be seen as far more than a multi-media documentary on the changing face of Los Angeles. This passage needs to be quoted at some length:

> During the noir film era, from about 1944 to 1958, the horizontal imaginary city [of Los Angeles] evolves into a complex grammar. […] This

> noir grammar has become the standard way for broadcast media to dis-report the news, to generate a highly conservative, fundamentally reactionary vision of the world that finally covered up key information about the presidential election of 2000, the Enron scandal, the War on Terrorism, the anthrax attacks, Homeland Rule. […] Of course, noir reportage has always been a mode of distraction. [But now], that distraction has become national presidential policy, and CNN, Fox, CNBC policy as well […] So 2002 shows us a noir scenography as our national vision. We have extended this noir staging into national obsession with surveillance as well. […] I am currently trying to engage these issues inside a cinematic novel/archive entitled *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles, 1920–1986*. (2002, 452f.)

However, while *Bleeding Through* thus both seeks to counter the memoricide induced by urban planning in L.A. *and*, also critically comments on U.S. politics more generally, the question remains to what extent a cultural product which so centrally relies on the individual, the solitary user for its experiential form of negotiating central urban issues and which thus inherently forgoes any chance of fostering a sense of community can ever be truly subversive. Although extremely advanced at the time conceptually and in the programming of the interface, in its implied optimism about the liberating potentials of hypertext, the work in retrospect seems characteristic of the media-historical moment of its origin in 2002/2003. Klein himself in an essay written in 2007 (rpt. as ch. 3 of the present volume), states that "[f]or media narratives, I have lost my faith in chance techniques, in hypertext, in neo-minimalism, in clicking and clacking to your own adventure …" (2019, 260f.; open-ended sentence in original).[32] What the digital format allows for in unique ways, however,

32 In a laudatory 2003 review of *Bleeding Through*, Helfand (n.p.) insightfully commented on the "digital revolution's promise of new literary forms" and the "brief blossom and fade [of the "experiments in online interactive fiction"]" and – speaking of the "many unfulfilled dreams" of the genre, regards *Bleeding Though* as living up to the promises of the form's technological possibilities. For analyses of the technological and literary implications of the digital form and their repercussions in literary studies, cf. especially the classic studies by Aarseth;

is the suggestive visualisation of urban layers as implied in the title of *Bleeding Through: Layers of Los Angeles 1920–1986*.

Urban Layers: Memory, Superposition, Archive

These can be conceptualized in the terms familiar from Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, *Das Passagen-Werk*, which Benjamin worked on between 1927 and his death in 1940, though the first notes and suggestions go back to the early 1920s. This is a vast collection of about 1000 pages of some 3500 quotations and thoughts on the 19th-century arcades in Paris, organised into 36 folders or sections ["Konvolute"] and a number of essays and outlines. The text is quintessentially a work of *fragmentary historiography* (rather than a *fragmentary work of historiography*), proceeding as it does, not discursively, but by means of the suggestive juxtaposition and montage of quotations from over 800 different sources, ranging from police reports to Baudelaire and from snippets of observation to more or less aphoristic remarks on methodology. Perloff appropriately describes Benjamin's technique as an "astonishing piling up of quoted passages" (25) and suggestively states that "the repeated juxtapositions, cuts, links, shifts in register […] conspire to produce a poetic text. […] The most sober documentation [of] police edicts regulating prostitution in 1830 […] is placed side by side with an extract from Baudelaire or Rimbaud." (43). As Benjamin noted himself, "[t]his work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage" (458; all references are to the 1999 English edition).

In a way remarkably similar to this type of montage, the urban montage in *Bleeding Through* also makes use of various types of distinctly 'urban' text – pub conversations, street scenes, domestic conversations in various social classes, snippets from popular songs, the language of business transaction, etc. This type of urban montage allows both texts to do

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Burnett; Ensslin; Gaggi; Hayles; Landow; McGann; or Sloane. Most of these studies date from the early 1990s to the years shortly after 2003. For Norman Klein's rather more skeptical view, see chapters 3 and 9 of this book.

justice to what urban sociologist Gerald D. Suttles has called "the cumulative texture of local urban culture" (283), defining "local urban culture" as "a vast, heritable genome of physical artifacts, slogans, typifications, and catch phrases" (284). He speaks of some cities – and Rome, Paris or London would, of course, be among the 'classic' examples – as places that "have a lot of such culture" (Suttles 284). Suttles further mentions

> songs that memorialize […] great streets or side streets, homes once occupied by the famous or infamous, a distinctive dialect or vocabulary, routine festivals or parades […] dirty lyrics, pejorative nicknames, […] celebrated wastrels, and so on. (284)

In addition to the built environment, then, the layering of *immaterial* urban memory can also be conceptualised as a palimpsest: Thus, particular neighbourhoods may be characterised by a dense layering of memories, anecdote, urban legends triggered by established festivities, parades or specific buildings such as long-existing pubs or restaurants, which may be associated with legendary local figures formally or informally memorialised in street names, memorial plaques or drinking songs, poems, or nicknames.

This sequence of examples appears striking in the context of both *Bleeding Through* and the *Arcades Project*, which both also use such trivia to suggest local texture. Interestingly, Suttles argues that these items of local culture are richly interconnected in the minds of community residents in that they mutually evoke each other. The "mnemonic relatedness" (Suttles 294) of such items seems strikingly familiar to readers accustomed to the textures of both Benjamin's and Klein's urban evocations.

In his discussion of the *Arcades Project*, Irving Wohlfahrt links Benjamin's practice to contemporary developments in the arts and speaks of "Benjamin's […] hypothesis that the montage technique of the avant-garde points towards the form of presentation necessary today for a material philosophy of history" (266; my translation). In a related vein, Bolle comments on the "constellation of thousands of building blocks of text which are used in an attempt to translate the order of the city into the syntax of a historiographic text" (Bolle 2010, 19; my translation). In our

context of textualising the city, it should be noted that the German title *Passagen-Werk* – in contrast to the English *Arcades Project*, where this connection is lost – by virtue of the ambiguity of '*Passagen*' as both 'arcades' and 'passages (of text)' suggests a convergence of urban and textual structures that is profoundly resonant in Benjamin's *opus magnum* (cf. also Bolle 2010, 19).

In the *Arcades Project*, the complex structure of the urban fabric with its multiple interconnections is represented in a strongly non-linear form, a hypertext *avant la lettre* (cf. Perloff 31–38; Bolle 2010, 22). There are, for instance, multiple cross-references and some 30 different symbols marking thematic clusters *across* the different folders. This system of internal cross-references instead of a linear presentation strongly invites a kind of hypertextual reading following certain threads or thematic strands; Bolle here speaks of a "network-like reading" (Bolle 2010, 25; my translation; cf. also Bolle 2005).

How, in addition to suggesting "the cumulative texture of local urban culture" (Suttles 283) and its memorialisation, do these observations relate to the poetics of urban memory? In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin develops a notion of the interpenetration of different layers of time and of their simultaneous co-presence in urban space, a phenomenon he refers to as "superposition" (172, 418, 854 *et passim*). This concept is never set out discursively in any coherent way by Benjamin; thus, what Bolle (2000, 413) states about Benjamin's notion of historical cognition, namely that is has to be re-constructed from a large number of fragments scattered throughout the *Arcades* book, is also true of his notion of "superposition" and the reading of the layers of meaning in urban history. Isabel Kranz has here spoken of "Parallelstellenexegese", the need for a synoptic reading of numerous parallel passages (115). My reading of Benjamin's notion of "superposition" is indebted to Dieter Hassenpflug, who has explored its implications for urban semiotics. Hassenpflug summarises the idea as follows:

> [Superposition is] the ability to remember the new – for instance by regarding present urban elements as elements of a spatialised memory and, in so doing, as anticipations of prospective urban realities. […]

> The technique of superposition points to history which is preserved in the elements of cities. (2011, 54)

Given a certain frame of mind – and Benjamin clearly characterises this frame of mind as that of the *flâneur* – this simultaneous co-presence can be perceived and understood by an urban observer. He even speaks of this "interpenetration and superposed transparency" of different times in a given space as the "perception of space [unique to] the flâneur" (Benjamin, 546): "Thanks to this phenomenon, anything that ever potentially happened in a space is perceived simultaneously. Space winks at the flâneur: 'Well, whatever may have happened here?'" (Benjamin, 418; translation modified; cf. also 4, 390, 392, 418, 462, 841, 854, 879f.). Thus, "superposition" refers to both the temporal layering and to the ability to perceive it; Hassenpflug even refers to it as a "technique" (2011, 54).

It is important to note that this type of perception is possible even if the space no longer offers any points, traces or clues to which these layerings can be anchored. Thus, the notion of superposition allows for a *remembered* presence: what matters is what an observer knows, remembers or associates with a site. The following passage from *The Arcades Project* in another characteristically Benjaminian formulation makes clear the role of this knowledge to the perception of urban space:

> That anamnestic intoxication [anamnesis in the medical sense of knowing about a pre-history, the pleasure, the intoxication of having these levels simultaneously present] in which the flâneur goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge – indeed, of dead facts – as something experienced and lived through. This felt knowledge travels from one person to another, especially by word of mouth. But in the course of the nineteenth century [this refers to the literature on Paris, of course], it was also deposited in an immense literature […] Wouldn't he, then, have necessarily felt the steep slope behind the church of Notre Dame de Lorette rise all the more insistently under his soles if he realized: here, at one time, after Paris had gotten its first omnibuses, the *cheval de renfort* was harnessed to the coach to reinforce the other two horses. (417)

The past of a site, then, does not necessarily have to be physically seen to be remembered and to inform an observer's perception.[33]

In an excellent discussion of Benjamin's view of modernity in the *Arcades Project*, Brüggemann speaks of two types of modernity, represented by Breton and Le Corbusier, of which the latter conceives of the metropolis as a space of "geometrical order and functional separations […] absolutistically related to the present", while the former regards it as "a memory and image space of mutually overlaying and interpenetrating periods" (595; my translation).[34] Though he does not comment on Benjamin's concept of "superposition" here, it lies close at hand in the notion of the city as a time-spanning space of layered memory, an understanding which clearly anticipates all the still current notions of the 'city as palimpsest'.[35]

In *Bleeding Through*, the changes in 20th-century Los Angeles are rendered in a fascinating if oblique way in the frequent pairings of an old photograph and a recent one taken from exactly the same angle; some of these are made to blend into one another in fascinating match dissolves or 'bleeds'.[36] Thus, there is a pair of photos taken on the corner of Spring and Main Street in the 1920s and today, in which a shop sign "D.W. Wong Co. Chinese Herbs" disappears and a billboard advertising "Green

33 The discussion of the *Arcades Project* and of superposition as allowing for a "remembered presence" in these paragraphs follows my discussion in Gurr 2021 and 2022.

34 The German original reads: "absolutistisch auf die Gegenwart bezogen […], ein Wahrnehmungsraum geometrischer Ordnung und funktionaler Trennungen" [Corbusier] vs. "[ein] Gedächtnis- und Bild-Raum einander überlagernder und durchdringender Zeiten und Zeit-Räume" [Breton] (Brüggemann 595).

35 For an excellent recent discussion of the urban palimpsest, cf. Mattheis 49–82; for various aspects of the 'city as palimpsest' notion, cf. Assmann; Butor; Freud 16–18; Gurr 2021, 52–109; Gurr 2022; Harvey 66; Hassenpflug 2006, 2011; Huyssen; Martindale; Mattheis/Gurr; Sharpe/Wallock 9; Suttles. For a theoretical exploration of the palimpsest, cf. Dillon.

36 For the use of such techniques in city films, particularly in Pat O'Neill's L.A. film *Water and Power* (1989), cf. MacDonald 232–234.

River Bourbon" dissolves into a billboard advertising a $ 7,000,000 lottery draw in Spanish (cf. DVD 1:2). In another of these dissolves, juxtaposing 1941 Main Street with a contemporary image, "Fond's Pants Shop" on 655 Main Street (with "Ben's Barber Shop" and "Adams Radios & Appliances" next to it) turns into "Dongyang Machine Co." (cf. DVD 1:3).

Another pair of photographs morphs the area around the South Hill Street funicular "Angels Flight", with buildings around six floors in height, into the present-day high-rise towers of downtown. A further iconic match dissolve overlays a 1943 image of South Main Street with City Hall in the background as clearly the tallest building among a few modest shops in small two-story buildings (cf. fig. 1) with a modern image of City Hall and with the small shops replaced by the glass-and-steel block of the old Caltrans [California Department of Transportation] Annex building (cf. fig. 2).

This is a highly interesting site: Less than three years after the 'new' photo was taken in 2002, the old Caltrans Annex building was torn down to make room for the new HQ of the Los Angeles Police Department completed in 2009 (cf. fig. 4). This, in turn, is directly opposite another landmark building, the spectacular *new* Caltrans District 7 building on 100 South Main Street, completed in 2004, designed by Thom Mayne's Morphosis Architects (cf. fig. 5).

The resulting overlay (cf. fig. 3) was also used as the cover illustration of the 2003 box set.[37]

37 For these match dissolves or 'bleeds', cf. also the interview in ch. 9.

Figs. 1 and 2: Juxtaposition of two images of South Main Street with City Hall in the background, one from 1943, one from 2002. Source: 2003 ed. of 'Bleeding Through', booklet, p. 48. The images are also used in a match dissolve on the DVD.

Fig. 3: The resulting montage, presented as a match dissolve on the DVD and used as a cover illustration for the 2003 edition of 'Bleeding Through'.

Fig. 4: LAPD HQ, completed in 2009, now occupying the site of figs. 1–3. https://www.tutorperini.com/projects/justice/lapd-administration-building. Reproduced by permission of Tutor Perini Corp.
Fig. 5: Thom Mayne/Morphosis Architects' celebrated 2004 Caltrans District 7 building directly opposite LAPD HQ. Its building site would have been directly behind the photographer when the photograph in fig. 2 was taken in 2002. Photograph by Patrick Vogel for this book. Used by permission

Given the radical changes in 20th-century Los Angeles, in which older layers of the city where thus frequently "leveled, virtually without a trace" (Klein 2008, 97), this representation of urban layers and their superimposition and interpenetration strongly suggests Benjamin's notion of "superposition", and although he is not explicitly mentioned in *Bleeding Through*, Benjamin is a strong presence in the text (cf. the interview in ch. 9 below).[38]

Thus, if *The History of Forgetting* provided an archaeology of 20th-century L.A. as the *Arcades Project* did for 19th-century Paris, then *Bleeding Through* in its non-linear presentation of a broad range of materials even in terms of form approximates Benjamin's representational strategies in the *Arcades Project*, if in an early 21st-century format. In this vein, the overlay montages or match dissolves as arguably one of the most suggestive features of *Bleeding Through* simulate the "interpenetration and superposed transparency" of different temporal layers that Benjamin refers to as "superposition" (546). The argument both *The History of Forgetting* – explicitly – and *Bleeding Through* – implicitly – make is that even layers that are gone "without a trace" (Klein 2008, 97) matter to the city because they matter to the people who continue to live there and who *do* remember.

This memorial potential of Klein's medial configuration of the city is particularly due to its hypertextual structure. In order to conceptualise

38 In its major source, *The History of Forgetting*, however, Benjamin is explicitly referred to several times. The book even includes a six-page speculative piece, "Noir as the Ruins of the Left" (233–240; rpt. as chapter 6 of the present volume), in which "Benjamin does not commit suicide; instead, he takes a boat to New York and winds up among the German emigrés. Being too much of a scholar of the city streets, he elects not to live in the Pacific Palisades, not to bow at the feet of Thomas Mann. […] Benjamin moves instead to Boyle Heights. […] [He writes] fifty pages of notes for a Los Angeles *Passagenwerk*, nothing as elaborate as what Benjamin planned to write on the Parisian arcades. (Klein 2008, 233–235 as well as ch. 6 of this volume). Moreover, Benjamin is mentioned in Klein's 2002 essay "Absences, Scripted Spaces and the Urban Imaginary: Unlikely Models for the City in the 21st Century" (rpt. as ch. 8 of the present volume) written during work on *Bleeding Through*.

this archival and memorial function of literary and cultural production, one might draw on a conception that shares the media-historical moment of *Bleeding Through*, namely Moritz Baßler's notion of the archive (2003/2005).[39] Baßler defines the archive as follows:

> We will use the term archive to designate […] the sum of all texts of a culture available for an analysis. In the archive, these texts are accessible without being hierarchized. The archive is a corpus of texts. Within this corpus, passages equivalent to each other can be marked with a search request, as it were. These passages form an intertextual *structure of equivalence.* (196; my translation)

Following George P. Landow's notion of a "convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology" (subtitle), Baßler then suggests that this theory of textuality, of intertextuality and of text-context relations might quite literally be translated into a methodology of contextualising cultural analysis based on data-processing technology (cf. 294). Thus, he refers to the cultural archive in the sense of such a totality of available texts as a "full-text database" (Baßler 293; my translation) accessible by means of search requests and organised in the manner of a hypertext. Indeed, Baßler's entire terminology and methodology suggest a view of the cultural archive as the collection of heterogeneous and not necessarily contemporary texts in a synchronic, non-hierarchically ordered hypertextual database. This 'archive', it is easy to see, will fulfil an important function in maintaining and shaping cultural memory. This notion, tied as it seems to a specific media-historical and technological moment, appears to be literalised in *Bleeding Through*.

All in all, *Bleeding Through* thus functions as a structural and functional model of urban complexity, flaunting the spatial and temporal structures associated with the city in order to represent the non-linearity of urban environments, not least by means of fully hypertextual structures. Most characteristically, *Bleeding Through* uses the digital medium to *literalise* Benjamin's notion of "superposition" in a form of

39 This was developed in a postdoctoral project ('*Habilitation*') completed in 2003 and published as a monograph in 2005.

overlay montage or match dissolve to represent the interpenetration of these layers.

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