Fortress Los Angeles: 
The Militarization of Urban Space

The city bristles with malice. The carefully manicured lawns of the Westside sprout ominous little signs threatening “ARMED RESPONSE!” Wealthier neighborhoods in the canyons and hillsides cower behind walls guarded by gun-toting private police and state-of-the-art electronic surveillance systems. Downtown, a publicly subsidized “urban renaissance” has raised a forbidding corporate citadel, separated from the surrounding poor neighborhoods by battlements and moats. Some of these neighborhoods—predominantly black or Latino—have in turn been sealed off by the police with barricades and checkpoints. In Hollywood, architect Frank Gehry has ensnared the siege look in a library that looks like a Foreign Legion fort. In Watts, developer Alexander Haagen has pioneered the totally secure shopping mall, a latter-day Panopticon, a prison of consumerism surrounded by iron-stake fences and motion detectors, overseen by a police substation in a central tower. Meanwhile in Downtown, a spectacular structure that tourists regularly mistake for a hotel is actually a new federal prison.

Welcome to post-liberal Los Angeles, where the defense of luxury has given birth to an arsenal of security systems and an obsession with the policing of social boundaries through architecture. This militarization of city life is increasingly visible everywhere in the built environment of the 1990s. Yet contemporary urban theory has remained oddly silent about its implications. Indeed, the apocalypticism of Hollywood movies and pulp science fiction has been more realistic—and politically perceptive—in representing the hardening of the urban landscape. Images of prisonlike inner cities (Escape from New York, Running Man), high-tech police death squads (Bladerunner), sentient skyscrapers (Die Hard), and guerrilla warfare in the streets (Colors) are not fantasies, but merely extrapolations from the present.

Such stark dystopian visions show how much the obsession with security has supplanted hopes for urban reform and social integration. The dire predictions of Richard Nixon’s 1969 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence have been tragically fulfilled in the social polarizations of the Reagan era.¹ We do indeed now live in “fortress cities” brutally divided into “fortified cells” of affluence and “places of terror” where police battle the criminalized poor. The “Second Civil War” that began during the long hot summers of the late 1960s has been institutionalized in the very structure of urban space. The old liberal attempts at social control, which at least tried to balance repression with reform, have been superseded by open social warfare that pits the interests of the middle class against the welfare of the urban poor. In cities like Los Angeles, on the hard edge of postmodernity, architecture and the police apparatus are being merged to an unprecedented degree.

The Destruction of Public Space

The universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space. The American city is being systematically turned inward. The “public” spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity. Inside malls, office centers, and cultural complexes, public activities are sorted into strictly functional compartments under the gaze of private police forces. This architectural privatization of the physical public sphere, moreover, is complemented by a parallel restructuring of electronic space, as heavily guarded, pay-access databases and subscription cable services expropriate the invisible agora. In Los Angeles, for example, the ghetto is defined not only by its paucity of parks and public amenities, but also by the fact that it is not wired into any of the key information circuits. In contrast, the affluent Westside is plugged—often at public expense—into dense networks of educational and cultural media.
In either guise, architectural or electronic, this polarization marks the decline of urban liberalism, and with it the end of what might be called the Olmstedian vision of public space in America. Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of Central Park, conceived public landscapes and parks as social safety-valves, mixing classes and ethnicities in common (bourgeois) recreations and pleasures: "No one who has closely observed the conduct of the people who visit [Central Park]," he wrote, "can doubt that it exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and most lawless classes of the city—an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance."

This reformist ideal of public space as the mollificant of class struggle is now as obsolete as Rooseveltian nostrums of full employment and an Economic Bill of Rights. As for the mixing of classes, contemporary urban America is more like Victorian England than the New York of Walt Whitman or Fiorello La Guardia. In Los Angeles—once a paradise of free beaches, luxurious parks, and "cruising strips"—genuinely democratic space is virtually extinct. The pleasure domes of the elite Westside rely upon the social imprisonment of a third-world service proletariat in increasingly repressive ghettos (where Spanish-surname children are now almost two-thirds of the school-age population); public amenities are shriveling radically, libraries and playgrounds are closing, parks are falling derelict, and streets are growing ever more desolate and dangerous.

Here, as in other American cities, municipal policy has taken its lead from the security offensive and the middle-class demand for increased spatial and social insulation. Taxes previously targeted for traditional public spaces and recreational facilities have been redirected to support corporate redevelopment projects. Apliant city government—in the case of Los Angeles, one ironically professing to represent a liberal bicultural coalition—has collaborated in privatizing public space and subsidizing new exclusive enclaves (heingly called "urban villages"). The celebratory language used to describe contemporary Los Angeles—"urban renaissance," "city of the future," and so on—is only a triumphal gloss laid over the brutalization of its inner-city neighborhoods and the stark divisions of class and race represented in its built environment. Urban form obediently follows repressive function. Los Angeles, as always in

the vanguard, offers an especially disturbing guide to the emerging liaisons between urban architecture and the police state.

Forbidden City

Los Angeles's first spatial militarist was the legendary General Harrison Gray Otis, proprietor of the Times and implacable foe of organized labor. In the 1890s, after locking out his union printers and announcing a crusade for "industrial freedom," Otis retreated into a new Times building designed as a fortress with grim turrets and battlements crowned by a bellcose bronze eagle. To emphasize his truculence, he later had a small, functional cannon installed on the hood of his Packard touring car. Not surprisingly, this display of aggression produced a response in kind. On October 1, 1910, the heavily fortified Times headquarters—the command-post of the open shop on the West Coast—was destroyed in a catastrophic explosion, blamed on union saboteurs.

Eighty years later, the martial spirit of General Otis pervades the design of Los Angeles's new Downtown, whose skyscrapers march from Bunker Hill down the Figueroa corridor. Two billion dollars of public tax subsidies have enticed big banks and corporate headquarters back to a central city they almost abandoned in the 1960s. Into a waiting grid, cleared of tenement housing by the city's powerful and largely unaccountable redevelopment agency, local developers and offshore investors (increasingly Japanese) have planted a series of block-square complexes: Crocker Center, the Bonaventure Hotel and Shopping Mall, the World Trade Center, California Plaza, Arco Center, and so on. With an increasingly dense and self-contained circulation system linking these superblocks, the new financial district is best conceived as a single, self-referential hyperstructure, a Messian skyline of fantastic proportions.

Like similar megalomaniacal complexes tethered to fragmented and desolate downtowns—such as the Renaissance Center in Detroit and the Peachtree and Omni centers in Atlanta—Bunker Hill and the Figueroa corridor have provoked a storm of objections to their abuse of scale and composition, their denigration of street life, and their confiscation of the vital energy of the center, now sequestered within their subterranean concourses or privatized plazas. Sam Hall Kaplan, the former design critic of the Times, has
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angered the antistrreet bias of redevelopment; in his view, the superimposition of “hermetically sealed fortresses” and random “pieces of suburbia” onto Downtown has “killed the street” and “dammed the river of life.”

Yet Kaplan’s vigorous defense of pedestrian democracy remains grounded in liberal complaints about “bland design” and “elitist planning practices.” Like most architectural critics, he rails against the oversights of urban design without conceding a dimension of foresight, and even of deliberate repressive intent. For when Downtown’s new “Gold Coast” is seen in relation to other social landscapes in the central city, the “fortress effect” emerges, not as an inadvertent failure of design, but as an explicit—and, in its own terms, successful—socio-spatial strategy.

The goals of this strategy may be summarized as a double repression: to obliterate all connection with Downtown’s past and to prevent any dynamic association with the non-Anglo urbanism of its future. Los Angeles is unusual among major urban centers in having preserved, however negligently, most of its Beaux Arts commercial core. Yet the city chose to transplant—at immense public cost—the entire corporate and financial district from around Broadway and Spring Street to Bunker Hill, a half-dozen blocks further west.

The underlying logic of this operation is revealing. In other cities, developers have tried to harmonize the new cityscape and the old, exploiting the latter’s historic buildings to create gentrified zones (Faneuil Market, Ghirardelli Square, and so on) as supports to middle-class residential colonization. But Downtown Los Angeles’s developers considered property values in the old Broadway core as irreversibly eroded by the area’s status as the hub of public transportation primarily used by black and Mexican poor. In the wake of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, whose fires burned to within a few blocks of the old Downtown, reaggregated spatial security became the paramount concern. The 1960–64 “Centropolis” masterplan, which had envisioned the renewal of the old core, was unceremoniously scrapped. Meanwhile the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) abetted the flight of business from the Broadway–Spring Street area to the fortified redoubts of Bunker Hill by spreading scare literature about the “imminent gang invasion” by black teenagers.

To emphasize the “security” of the new Downtown, virtually all the traditional pedestrian links to the old center, including the famous Angels’ Flight funicular railroad, were removed. The Harbor Freeway and the regraded palisades of Bunker Hill further cut off the new financial core from the poor immigrant neighborhoods that surround it on every side. Along the base of California Plaza (home of the Museum of Contemporary Art), Hill Street functions as the stark boundary separating the luxury of Bunker Hill from the chaotic life of Broadway, now the primary shopping and entertainment street for Latino immigrants. Because gentrifiers now have their eye on the northern end of the Broadway corridor (re-dubbed Bunker Hill East), the redevelopment agency promises to restore pedestrian access to the Hill in the 1990s. This, of course, only dramatizes the current bias against any spatial interaction between old and new, poor and rich—except in the framework of gentrification. Although a few white-collar types sometimes venture into the Grand Central Market—a popular emporium of tropical produce and fresh foods—Latino shoppers or Saturday flaneurs never ascend to the upscale precincts above Hill Street. The occasional appearance of a destitute street nomad in Broadway Plaza or in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art sets off a quiet panic, as video cameras turn on their mounts and security guards adjust their belts.

Photographs of the old Downtown in its 1940s prime show crowds of Anglo, black, and Mexican shoppers of all ages and classes. The contemporary Downtown “renaissance” renders such heterogeneity virtually impossible. It is intended not just to “kill the street” as Kaplan feared, but to “kill the crowd,” to eliminate that democratic mixture that Olmsted believed was America’s antidote to European class polarization. The new Downtown is designed to ensure a seamless continuum of middle-class work, consumption, and recreation, insulated from the city’s “unsavory” streets. Ramparts and battlements, reflective glass and elevated pedways, are tropes in an architectural language warning off the underclass Other. Although architectural critics are usually blind to this militarized syntax, urban pariah groups—whether young black men, poor Latino immigrants, or elderly homeless white females—read the signs immediately.

Extreme though it may seem, Bunker Hill is only one local expression of the national movement toward “defensible” urban centers. Cities of all sizes are rushing to apply and profit from a
formula that links together clustered development, social homogeneity, and a perception of security. As an article in Urban Land magazine on "how to overcome fear of crime in downtowns" advised:

A downtown can be designed and developed to make visitors feel that it—or a significant portion of it—is attractive and the type of place that "respectable people" like themselves tend to frequent... A core downtown area that is compact, densely developed and multifunctional, with offices and housing for middle- and upper-income residents... can assure a high percentage of "respectable," law-abiding pedestrians. Such an attractive redeveloped core area would also be large enough to affect the downtown's overall image.5

Mean Streets

This strategic armor of the city against the poor is especially obvious at street level. In his famous study of the "social life of small urban spaces," William Whyte points out that the quality of any urban environment can be measured, first of all, by whether there are convenient, comfortable places for pedestrians to sit. This maxim has been warmly taken to heart by designers of the high corporate precincts of Bunker Hill and its adjacent "urban villages." As part of the city's policy of subsidizing the white-collar residential colonization of Downtown, tens of millions of dollars of tax revenue have been invested in the creation of attractive, "soft" environments in favored areas. Planners envision a succession of opulent piazzas, fountains, public art, exotic shrubbery, and comfortable street furniture along a ten-block pedestrian corridor from Bunker Hill to South Park. Brochures sell Downtown's "livability" with idyllic representations of office workers and affluent tourists sipping cappuccino and listening to free jazz concerts in the terraced gardens of California Plaza and Grand Hope Park.

In stark contrast, a few blocks away, the city is engaged in a relentless struggle to make the streets as unlivable as possible for the homeless and the poor. The persistence of thousands of street people on the fringes of Bunker Hill and the Civic Center tarnishes the image of designer living Downtown and betrays the laboriously

constructed illusion of an urban "renaissance." City Hall has retaliated with its own version of low-intensity warfare.

Although city leaders periodically propose schemes for removing indigents en masse—deporting them to a poor farm on the edge of the desert, confining them in camps in the mountains, or interning them on derelict ferries in the harbor—such "final solutions" have been blocked by council members' fears of the displacement of the homeless into their districts. Instead the city, self-consciously adopting the idiom of cold war, has promoted the "containment" (the official term) of the homeless in Skid Row, along Fifth Street, systematically transforming the neighborhood into an outdoor poorhouse. But this containment strategy breeds its own vicious cycle of contradiction. By condensing the mass of the desperate and helpless together in such a small space, and denying adequate housing, official policy has transformed Skid Row into probably the most dangerous ten square blocks in the world. Every night on Skid Row is Friday the 13th, and, unsurprisingly, many of the homeless seek to escape the area during the night at all costs, searching safer niches in other parts of Downtown. The city in turn tightens the noose with increased police harassment and ingenious design deterrents.

One of the simplest but most mean-spirited of these deterrents is the Rapid Transit District's new barrel-shaped bus bench, which offers a minimal surface for uncomfortable sitting while making sleeping impossible. Such "bump-proof" benches are being widely introduced on the periphery of Skid Row. Another invention is the aggressive deployment of outdoor sprinklers. Several years ago the city opened a Skid Row Park; to ensure that the park could not be used for overnight camping, overhead sprinklers were programmed to drench unsuspecting sleepers at random times during the night. The system was immediately copied by local merchants to drive the homeless away from (public) storefront sidewalks. Meanwhile Downtown restaurants and markets have built baroque enclosures to protect their refuse from the homeless. Although no one in Los Angeles has yet proposed adding cyanide to the garbage, as was suggested in Phoenix a few years back, one popular seafood restaurant has spent $12,000 to build the ultimate bag-lady-proof trash cage: three-quarter-inch steel rod with alloy locks and vicious out-turned spikes to safeguard moldering fishheads and stale french fries.
Public toilets, however, have become the real frontline of the city’s war on the homeless. Los Angeles, as a matter of deliberate policy, has fewer public lavatories than any other major North American city. On the advice of the Los Angeles police, who now sit on the “design board” of at least one major Downtown project, the redevelopment agency bulldozed the few remaining public toilets on Skid Row. Agency planners then considered whether to include a “free-standing public toilet” in their design for the upscale South Park residential development; agency chairman Jim Wood later admitted that the decision not to build the toilet was a “policy decision and not a design decision.” The agency preferred the alternative of “quasi-public restrooms”—toilets in restaurants, art galleries, and office buildings—which can be made available selectively to tourists and white-collar workers while being denied to vagrants and other unsuitables. The same logic has inspired the city’s transportation planners to exclude toilets from their designs for Los Angeles’s new subway system.

Bereft of toilets, the Downtown badlands east of Hill Street also lack outside water sources for drinking or washing. A common and troubling sight these days is the homeless men—many of them young refugees from El Salvador—washing, swimming, even drinking from the sewer effluent that flows down the concrete channel of the Los Angeles River on the eastern edge of Downtown. The city’s public health department has made no effort to post warning signs in Spanish or to mobilize alternative clean-water sources.

In those areas where Downtown professionals must cross paths with the homeless or the working poor—such as the zone of gentrification along Broadway just south of the Civic Center—extraordinary precautions have been taken to ensure the physical separation of the different classes. The redevelopment agency, for example, again brought in the police to help design “twenty-four-hour, state-of-the-art security” for the two new parking structures that serve the Los Angeles Times headquarters and the Ronald Reagan State Office Building. In contrast to the mean streets outside, both parking structures incorporate beautifully landscaped microparks, and one even boasts a food court, picnic area, and historical exhibit. Both structures are intended to function as “confidence-building” circulation systems that allow white-collar workers to walk from car to office, or from car to boutique, with minimum exposure to the public street. The Broadway-Spring Cen
ter, in particular, which links the two local hubs of gentrification (the Reagan Building and the proposed Grand Central Square) has been warmly praised by architectural critics for adding greenery and art to parking. It also adds a considerable dose of menace—armed guards, locked gates, and ubiquitous security cameras—to scare away the homeless and the poor.

The cold war on the streets of Downtown is ever escalating. The police, lobbied by Downtown merchants and developers, have broken up every attempt by the homeless and their allies to create safe havens or self-governed encampments. "Justiceville," founded by homeless activist Ted Hayes, was roughly dispersed; when its inhabitants attempted to find refuge at Venice Beach, they were arrested at the behest of the local council member (a renowned environmentalist) and sent back to Skid Row. The city's own brief experiment with legalized camping—a grudging response to a series of deaths from exposure during the cold winter of 1987—was abruptly terminated after only four months to make way for the construction of a transit maintenance yard. Current policy seems to involve perverse play upon the famous irony about the equal rights of the rich and poor to sleep in the rough. As the former head of the city planning commission explained, in the City of the Angels it is not against the law to sleep on the street per se—"only to erect any sort of protective shelter." To enforce this proscription against "cardboard condos," the police periodically sweep the Nickel, tearing down shelters, confiscating possessions, and arresting resisters. Such cynical repression has turned the majority of the homeless into urban bedouins. They are visible all over Downtown, pushing their few pathetic possessions in stolen shopping carts, always fugitive, always in motion, pressed between the official policy of containment and the inhumanity of Downtown streets.

Sequestering the Poor

An insidious spatial logic also regulates the lives of Los Angeles's working poor. Just across the moat of the Harbor Freeway, west of Bunker Hill, lies the MacArthur Park district—once upon a time the city's wealthiest neighborhood. Although frequently characterized as a no-man's-land awaiting resurrection by developers, the district is, in fact, home to the largest Central American community in the United States. In the congested streets bordering the park, a hundred thousand Salvadorens and Guatemalans, including a large community of Mayan-speakers, crowd into tenements and boarding houses barely adequate for a fourth as many people. Every morning at 6 a.m. this Latino-Bantuistan dispatches armies of sewing operadoras, dishwashers, and janitors to turn the wheels of the Downtown economy. But because MacArthur Park is midway between Downtown and the famous Miracle Mile, it too will soon fall to redevelopment's bulldozers.

Hungry to exploit the lower land prices in the district, a powerful coterie of developers, represented by a famous ex-councilman and the former president of the planning commission, has won official approval for their vision of "Central City West"; literally, a second Downtown comprising 25 million square feet of new office and retail space. Although local politicians have insisted upon a significant quota of low-income replacement housing, such a palliative will hardly compensate for the large-scale population displacement sure to follow the construction of the new skyscrapers and upfitted "urban villages." In the meantime, Korean capital, seeking lebensraum for Los Angeles's burgeoning Koreatown, is also pushing into the MacArthur Park area, uprooting tenements to construct heavily fortified condominiums and office complexes. Other Asian and European speculators are counting on the new Metrorail station, across from the park, to become a magnet for new investment in the district.

The recent intrusion of so many powerful interests into the area has put increasing pressure upon the police to "take back the streets" from what is usually represented as an occupying army of drug-dealers, illegal immigrants, and homicidal homeboys. Thus in the summer of 1990 the LAPD announced a massive operation to "retake crime-plagued MacArthur Park" and surrounding neighborhoods "street by street, alley by alley." While the area is undoubtedly a major drug market, principally for drive-in Anglo commuters, the police have focused not only on addict-dealers and gang members, but also on the industrious sidewalk vendors who have made the circumference of the park an exuberant swap meet. Thus Mayan women selling such local staples as tropical fruit, baby clothes, androach spray have been rounded up in the same sweeps
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as alleged "narcoterrorists." (Similar dragnets in other Southern California communities have focused on Latino day-laborers congregated at streetcorners "slave markets.") By criminalizing every attempt by the poor—whether the Skid Row homeless or MacArthur Park vendors—to use public space for survival purposes, law-enforcement agencies have abolished the last informal safety-net separating misery from catastrophe. (Few third-world cities are so pitiless.) At the same time, the police, encouraged by local businessmen and property owners, are taking the first, tentative steps toward criminalizing entire inner-city communities. The "war" on drugs and gangs again has been the pretext for the LAPD’s novel, and disturbing, experiments with community blockades. A large section of the Pico-Union neighborhood, just south of MacArthur Park, has been quarantined since the summer of 1989; “Narcotics Enforcement Area” barriers restrict entry to residents “on legitimate business only.” Inspired by the positive response of older residents and local politicians, the police have subsequently franchised “Operation Cul-de-Sac” to other low-income Latino and black neighborhoods. Thus in November 1989 (as the Berlin Wall was being demolished), the Devonshire Division of the LAPD closed off a “drug-ridden” twelve-block section of the northern San Fernando Valley. To control circulation within this largely Latino neighborhood, the police convinced apartment owners to finance the construction of a permanent guard station. Twenty miles to the south, a square mile of the mixed black and Latino Central-Avalon community has also been converted into Narcotic Enforcement turf with concrete roadblocks. Given the popularity of these quarantines—save amongst the ghetto youth against whom they are directed—it is possible that a majority of the inner city may eventually be partitioned into police-regulated “no-go” areas.

The official rhetoric of the contemporary war against the urban underclasses resounds with comparisons to the War in Vietnam a generation ago. The LAPD’s community blockades evoke the infamous policy of quarantining suspect populations in “strategic hamlets.” But an even more ominous emulation is the reconstruction of Los Angeles’s public housing projects as “defensible spaces.” Deep in the Mekong Delta of the Watts-Willowbrook ghetto, for example, the Imperial Courts Housing Project has been fortified with chain-link fencing, restricted entry signs, obligatory identity passes—and a substation of the LAPD. Visitors are stopped and frisked, the police routinely order residents back into their apartments at night, and domestic life is subjected to constant police scrutiny. For public-housing tenants and inhabitants of narcotics-enforcement zones, the loss of freedom is the price of “security.”

Security by Design

If the contemporary search for bourgeois security can be read in the design of bus benches, megarestructures, and housing projects, it is also visible at the level of auteur. No recent architect has so ingeniously elaborated or so brazenly embraced the urban-security function as Los Angeles’s Pritzker Prize laureate Frank Gehry. His strongest suit is his straightforward exploitation of rough urban environments, and the explicit incorporation of their harshest edges and detritus as powerful representational elements. Affectionately described by colleagues as an “old socialist” or “street-fighter with a heart,” Gehry makes little pretense at architectural reformism or “design for democracy.” He boasts instead of trying “to make the best with the reality of things.” With sometimes chilling effect, his work clarifies the underlying relations of repression, surveillance, and exclusion that characterize the fragmented landscape of Los Angeles.

An early example of Gehry’s new urban realism was his 1964 solution of the problem of how to insert luxurious spaces—and high property values—into decaying neighborhoods. His Danziger Studio in Hollywood is the pioneer instance of what has become an entire species of Los Angeles “stealth houses,” which dissipate their opulence behind proletarian or gaugster facades. The street frontage of the Danziger is simply a massive gray wall, treated with a rough finish to ensure that it would collect dust from the passing traffic and weather into a simulacrum of the nearby porn studios and garages. Gehry was explicit in his search for a design that was “intervened and fortresslike,” with the silent aura of a “dumb box.” Indeed, “dumb boxes” and screen walls form an entire cycle of his work, ranging from the American School of Dance (1968) to his Gemini GEL (1979)—both in Hollywood. His most seminal design, however, was his walled town center for Cochiti Lake, New Mexico (1973); here ice-blue ramps of awesome severity enclose
an entire community, a plan replicated on a smaller scale in his 1976 Jung Institute in Los Angeles. In both of these cases architectural drama is generated by the contrast between the fortified exteriors, set against "unappealing neighborhoods" (Gehry) or deserts, and the opulent interiors, opened to the sky by clerestories and lightwells. Gehry’s walled-in compounds and cities, in other words, offer powerful metaphors for the retreat from the street and the introversion of space that has characterized the design backlash to the urban insurrections of the 1960s.

Gehry took up the same problem in 1984 in his design for the Loyola Law School in the MacArthur Park district. The inner-city location of the campus confronted Gehry with an explicit choice: to create a genuine public space, extending into the community, or to choose the security of a defensible enclave, as in his previous work. Gehry’s choice, as one critic explained, was a neoconservative design that was “open, but not too open. The South Instructional Hall and the chapel show solid backs to Olympic Boulevard, and with the anonymous street sides of the Burns Building, form a gateway that is neither forbidding nor overly welcoming. It is simply there, like everything else in the neighborhood.” This description considerably understates the forbidding qualities of the campus’s formidable steel-stake fencing, concrete-block zigzag, and stark frontage walls.

But if the Danziger Studio camouflages itself, and the Cochiti Lake and Loyola designs are dumb boxes with an attitude, Gehry’s baroque fortified Goldwyn Branch Library in Hollywood (1984) positively taunts potential trespassers “to make my day.” This is probably the most menacing library ever built, a bizarre hybrid of a dry-docked dreadnought and a cavalry fort. With its fifteen-foot-high security walls of stuccoed concrete block, its anti-graffiti barricades covered in ceramic tile, its sunken entrance protected by ten-foot-high steel stakes, and its stylized sentry boxes perched precariously on either side, the Goldwyn Library (influenced by Gehry’s 1980 high-security design for the U.S. Chancellery in Damascus) projects nothing less than sheer aggression.

Some of Gehry’s admirers have praised the Library as “generous and inviting.” “the old-fashioned kind of library,” and so on. But they miss the point. The previous Hollywood library had been destroyed by arson, and the Samuel Goldwyn Foundation, which endows this collection of filmland memorabilia, was understandably preoccupied by physical security. Gehry’s commission was to design a structure that was inherently vandalproof. His innovation, of course, was to reject the low-profile, high-tech security systems that most architects subtly integrate into their blueprints, and to choose instead a high-profile, low-tech approach that foregrounds the security function as the central motif of the design. There is no dissimulation of function by form here—quite the opposite. How playful or witty you find the resulting effect depends on your existential position. The Goldwyn Library by its very structure conjoins the demonic Other—arsonist, graffitist, invader—and casts the shadow of its own arrogant paranoia onto the surrounding seedly, though not particularly hostile, streets.

These streets are a battleground, but not of the expected kind. Several years ago the Los Angeles Times broke the sordid story of how the entertainment conglomerates and a few large landowners had managed to capture control of the local redevelopment process. Their plan, still the focus of controversy, is to use eminent domain and higher taxes to clear the poor (increasingly refugees from Central America) from the streets of Hollywood and reap the huge windfalls from “upgrading” the area into a glitzy theme-park for international tourism. In the context of this strategy, the Goldwyn Library—like Gehry’s earlier walled compounds—is a kind of architectural fire-base, a beachhead for gentrification. Its soaring, light-filled interiors surrounded by barricades speak volumes about how public architecture in America is literally turning its back on the city for security and profit.

The Panopticon Mall

In other parts of the inner city, however, similar “fortress” designs are being used to recapture the poor as consumers. If the Goldwyn Library is a “shining example of the possibilities of public- and private-sector cooperation,” then developer Alexander Haagen’s ghetto malls are truly stellar instances. Haagen, who began his career distributing jukeboxes to the honkytonks of Wilmington, made his first fortune selling corner lots to oil companies for gas stations—sites since recycled as minimalls. He now controls the
largest retail-development empire in Southern California, comprising more than forty shopping centers, and has become nationally acclaimed as the impresario of South-Central Los Angeles’s "retail revival."

Haagen was perhaps the first major developer in the nation to grasp the latent profit potential of abandoned inner-city retail markets. After the Watts Rebellion in 1965, the handful of large discount stores in the South-Central region took flight, and small businesses were closed down by banks' discriminatory redlining practices. As a result, 750,000 black and Latino shoppers were forced to commute to distant regional malls or adjacent white neighborhoods even for their everyday groceries. Haagen reasoned that a retail developer prepared to return to the inner city could monopolize very high sales volumes. He also was well aware of the accumulating anger of the black community against decades of benign neglect by City Hall and the redevelopment agency; while the agency had moved swiftly to assemble land for billionaire developers Downtown, it floundered in Watts for years, unable to attract a single supermarket to anchor a proposed neighborhood shopping center. Haagen knew that the Bradley regime, in hot water with its South-Central constituents, would handsomely reward any private-sector initiative that could solve the anchor-tenant problem. His ingenious solution was a comprehensive "security-oriented design and management strategy."4

Haagen made his first move in 1979, taking title to an old Sears site in the heart of the ghetto. Impressed by his success there, the redevelopment agency transferred to him the completion of its long-delayed Martin Luther King, Jr., Center in Watts. A year later Haagen Development won the bid for the $120 million renovation of Crenshaw Plaza (a pioneer 1940s mall on the western fringe of the ghetto), as well as a contract from Los Angeles County to build another shopping complex in the Willowbrook area south of Watts. In each case Haagen's guarantee of total physical security was the key to persuading retailers and their insurers to take up leases. The essence of security, in turn, was a site plan clearly derived from Jeremy Bentham's proposed Panopticon—the eighteenth-century model prison to be constructed radially so that a single guard in a central tower could observe every prisoner at all times.

The King Shopping Center in Watts provides the best prototype of this commercial Brave New World for the inner city:

The King Center site is surrounded by an eight-foot-high, wrought-iron fence comparable to security fences found at the perimeters of private estates and exclusive residential communities. Video cameras equipped with motion detectors are positioned near entrances and throughout the shopping center. The center, including parking lots, can be bathed in bright [lights] at the flip of the switch. There are six entrances to the center; three entry points for autos, two service gates, and one pedestrian walkway. . . . The service area . . . is enclosed with a six-foot-high concrete-block wall; both service gates remain closed and area under closed-circuit video surveillance, equipped for two-way voice communications, and operated by remote control from a security "observatory." Infrared beams at the bases of light fixtures detect intruders who might circumvent video cameras by climbing over the wall.

The observatory functions as both eye and brain of this complex security system. It contains the headquarters of the shopping-center manager, a substation of the LAPD, and a dispatch operator, who both monitors the video and audio systems and maintains communication "with other secure shopping centers tied into the system, and with the police and fire departments." At any time of day or night, there are at least four security guards on duty—one at the observatory, and three on patrol. They are trained and backed up by the regular LAPD officers operating from the observatory substation.

The King Center and its three siblings (all variations on the Panopticon theme), as expected, have been bonanzas, averaging annual sales of more than $350 per leasable square foot, as compared to about $200 for their suburban equivalents. Moreover, Haagen has reaped the multiple windfalls of tax breaks, federal and city grants, massive free publicity, subsidized tenants, and sixty- to ninety-year ground leases. No wonder he has been able to boast, "We've proved that the only color that counts in business is green. There are huge opportunities and huge profits to be made in these depressed inner-city areas of America that have been abandoned."
Fortress Los Angeles

High-Rent Security

The security-driven logic of contemporary urban design finds its major “grassroots” expression in the frenetic efforts of Los Angeles’s affluent neighborhoods to physically insulate their real-estate values and life-styles. Luxury developments outside the city limits have often been able to incorporate as “fortress cities,” complete with security walls, guarded entries, private police, and even private roadways. It is simply impossible for ordinary citizens to enter the “cities” of Hidden Hills (western San Fernando Valley), Bradbury (San Gabriel Valley), Rancho Mirage (low desert), or Palos Verdes Estates (Palos Verdes Peninsula) without an invitation from a resident. Indeed Bradbury, with nine hundred inhabitants and ten miles of gated private roads, is so obsessed with security that its three city officials will not return phone calls from the press, since “each time an article appears, . . . it draws attention to the city, and the number of burglaries increases.”

Recently, Hidden Hills, a Norman Rockwell painting behind walls, has been bitterly divided over a Superior Court order to build forty-eight units of seniors’ housing on vacant land outside the city gates. At meetings of the city’s powerful homeowners’ association (whose members include Frankie Avalon, Neil Diamond, and Bob Eubanks) opponents of compliance have argued vehemently that the old folks “will attract gang and dope.”

Meanwhile, older high-income cities like Beverly Hills and San Marino have restricted access to their public facilities, using byzantine layers of regulations to build invisible walls. San Marino, which may be the richest and most Republican city in the country (85 percent), now closes its parks on weekends to exclude Latino and Asian families from adjacent communities. An alternative plan, now under discussion, would reopen the parks on Saturdays, but only to those with proof of residence or the means to pay daunting use fees. Other upscale areas (including thirty-seven Los Angeles neighborhoods) have minted similar residential privileges by restricting parking to local homeowners. Predictably such preferential parking ordinances proliferate mainly in neighborhoods with three-car garages.

Affluent areas of the City of Los Angeles have long envied the autonomy of fortress enclaves like Hidden Hills and Palos Verdes. Now, with the cooperation of apliant city council, they are winning permission to literally wall themselves off from the rest of the city. Since its construction in the late 1940s, Park La Brea has been Los Angeles’s most successful experiment in mixed-income, high-rise living. Its urban population of singles, young families, and retirees has always given a touch of Manhattan to the La Brea Tar Pits area of Wilshire Boulevard. But its new owners, Forest City Enterprises, hope to “upgrade” the project image by sealing it off from the surrounding neighborhoods with security fencing and no trespassing signs. As a spokesperson for the owners blandly observed, “It’s a trend in general to have enclosed communities.”

A few miles north of Park La Brea, above the Hollywood Bowl, the wealthy residents of Whitley Heights have won the unprecedented privilege of withdrawing their streets from public use. Eight high-tech gates will restrict access to residents and approved visitors using special electronic codes. An immediate byproduct of “gated-hood” has been a dramatic 20 percent rise in local property values—a windfall that other residential districts are eager to emulate. Thus in the once wide-open tractlands of the San Fernando Valley—where a decade ago there were virtually no walled-off communities—homeowners are rushing to fortify their equity with walls and gates. Brian Weinstock, a leading local contractor, proudly boasts of the Valley’s more than one hundred newly gated neighborhoods, and reports an insatiable demand for additional security. “The first question out of [every buyer’s] mouth is whether there is a gated community. The demand is there on a three-to-one basis.”

Meanwhile the very rich are yearning for unassailable high-tech castles. Where gates and walls will not suffice, the house itself is redesigned to incorporate state-of-the-art security. An important if unacknowledged motive for the current “mansionizing” mania on the city’s Westside—the tearing down of $3 million houses to build $30 million supermansions—is the search for “absolute security.” To achieve it, residential architects are borrowing design secrets from overseas embassies and military command posts. For example, one of the features currently in high demand is the “terrorist-proof security room” concealed in the house plan and reached by hidden sliding panels or secret doors. Merv Griffin and his fellow mansionizers are hardening their palaces like banks or missile silos.

But technology is not enough. Contemporary residential security in Los Angeles—whether in the fortified mansion or the average
suburban bunker—depends upon the extensive deployment of private security services. Through their local homeowners’ associations, virtually every affluent neighborhood from the Palisades to Silver Lake contracts its own private policing; hence the thousands of lawns displaying the little armed response warnings. A recent Times want-ads section contained over a hundred ads for guards and patrolmen, mostly from firms specializing in residential protection. Within greater Los Angeles, the security-services industry is a Cinderella sector that has tripled its sales and workforce—from 24,000 to 75,000 guards—over the last decade. “It is easier to become an armed guard than it is to become a barber, hairdresser, orjourneyman carpenter,” reports Linda Williams in the Times. Although the patrolmen are mostly minority males earning close to minimum wage, their employers are often multinational conglomerates offering a dazzling range of security products and services. As Michael Kaye, president of burgeoning Westec, a subsidiary of Japan’s Secom, Ltd., explains: “We’re not a security-guard company. We sell a concept of security.”

What homeowners’ associations contract from Westec—or its principal rival, Bel-Air Patrol (part of Borg-Warner’s family of security companies, which include Burns and Pinkerton)—is a complete “systems package”: alarm hardware, monitoring, watch patrols, personal escorts, and, of course, “armed response” as necessary. Although law-enforcement experts debate the efficiency of such systems in foiling professional criminals, there is no doubt that they are brilliantly successful in deterring unintentional trespassers and innocent pedestrians. Anyone who has tried to take a stroll at dusk through a neighborhood patrolled by armed security guards and signposted with death threats quickly realizes how merely notional, if not utterly obsolete, is the old idea of “freedom of the city.”

The LAPD as Space Police

This comprehensive urban security mobilization depends not only on the incorporation of the police function into the built environment, but also on the growing technopower of the police themselves. Undoubtedly the LAPD’s pioneering substitution of technology for manpower was in part a necessary adaptation to the city’s dispersed form; but it also expresses the department’s particular relationship to the community. Especially in its self-representation, the LAPD appears as the progressive antithesis to the traditional big city police department with its patronage armies of patrolmen grafting off their beats. The LAPD, as reformed in the early 1950s by the legendary Chief Parker (who admired, above all, the gung-ho elitism of the Marines), would be incorruptible because unapproachable, a “few good men” doing battle with a fundamentally evil city. Dragnet’s Sergeant Friday precisely captured the Parkerized LAPD’s prudish alienation from a citizenry composed of fools, degenerates, and psychopaths.

Technology helped foster this paranoid esprit de corps, and virtually established a new definition of policing, where technological surveillance and response supplanted the traditional patrolman’s intimate folk knowledge of a specific community. Thus back in the 1920s the LAPD had pioneered the replacement of the flatfoot or mounted officer with the radio patrol car—the beginning of dispersed, mechanized policing. Under Parker, ever alert to spin-offs from military technology, the LAPD introduced the first police helicopters for systematic aerial surveillance. After the Watts Rebellion of 1965, this airborne effort became the cornerstone of a policing strategy for the entire inner city. As part of its Astro program, LAPD helicopters maintain an average nineteen-hour-per-day vigil over “high-crime areas.” To facilitate ground-air coordination, thousands of residential rooftops have been painted with large, identifying street numbers, transforming the aerial view of the city into a huge police grid.

The fifty-pilot LAPD airforce was recently updated with French Aerospatiale helicopters equipped with futuristic surveillance technology. Their forward-looking infrared cameras are extraordinary night eyes that can easily form heat images from a single burning cigarette a mile away, while their 30-million-candlepower spotlights, appropriately called “Night Suns,” can turn night into day. Meanwhile the LAPD retains another fleet of Bell Jet Rangers capable of delivering complete SWAT units anywhere in the region. Their training, which sometimes includes practice assaults on Downtown high-rises, anticipates some of the spookier Hollywood images—as in Blue Thunder or Running Man—of airborne police terror.

But the decisive element in the LAPD’s metamorphosis into a technopolice has been its long and successful liaison with the mil-
itary aerospace industry. Just in time for the opening of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the department acquired ECCCS (Emergency Command Control Communications Systems), the most powerful police communications system in the world. First conceptualized by Hughes Aerospace between 1969 and 1971, ECCCS’s design was refined and updated by NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory, incorporating elements of space technology and mission-control communications.

Bunkered in the earthquake-proof security-hardened fourth and fifth sublevels of City Hall East (and interconnecting with the police pentagon in Parker Center), the Central Dispatch Center coordinates all the complex itineraries and responses of the LAPD using digitalized communication to eliminate voice congestion and guarantee the secrecy of transmission. ECCCS, together with the LAPD’s prodigious information-processing assets, including ever-growing databases on suspect citizens, have become the central nervous system for the vast and disparate security operations, both public and private, taking place in Los Angeles.

The Carceral City

All these technologically advanced policing strategies have led to an invisible Haussmannization of Los Angeles. No need to clear fields of fire when you control the sky; no need to hire informers when surveillance cameras ornament every building. But the police have also reorganized space in far more straightforward ways. We have already seen their growing role as Downtown urban designers, indispensable for their expertise in “security.” In addition they lobby incessantly for the allocation of more land for such law-and-order needs as jail space for a burgeoning inmate population and expanded administrative and training facilities for themselves. In Los Angeles this has taken the form of a de facto urban-renewal program, operated by the police agencies, that threatens to convert an entire section of Downtown and East LA into a vast penal colony.

Nearly 25,000 prisoners are presently held in six severely overcrowded county and federal facilities within a three-mile radius of City Hall—the largest single incarcerated population in the country. Racing to meet the challenge of the “war on drugs”—which will double detained populations within a decade—authorities are forging ahead with the construction of a controversial state prison in East Los Angeles as well as a giant expansion of County Jail near Chinatown. The Immigration and Naturalization Service, meanwhile, has been trying to shoehorn privatized “microprisons” into unsuspecting inner-city neighborhoods. Confronting record overcrowding in its regular detention centers, the INS has commandeered motels and apartments for operation by private contractors as auxiliary jails for detained aliens—many of them Chinese and Central American political refugees.

The demand for more law-enforcement space in the central city, however, will inevitably bring the police into conflict with developers. The plan to add two high-rise towers with 2,400 new beds to County Jail on Bauchet Street, Downtown, has already raised the ire of developers hoping to make nearby Union Station the hub of a vast complex of skyscraper hotels and offices. One solution to the increasing conflict between carceral and commercial redevelopment is to use architectural camouflage to insert jail space into the skyline. Ironically, even as buildings and homes become more like prisons or fortresses, prisons are becoming aesthetic objects. Indeed, carceral structures are the new frontier of public architecture. As an office glut in most parts of the country reduces commissions for corporate high-rises, celebrity architects are designing jails, prisons, and police stations.

An extraordinary example, the flagship of the emergent genre, is Welton Becket Associates’ new Metropolitan Detention Center in Downtown Los Angeles. Although this ten-story Federal Bureau of Prisons facility is one of the most visible new structures in the city, few of the hundreds of thousands of commuters who pass by every day have even an inkling of its function as a holding center for what has been officially described as the “managerial elite of narcoterrorism.” This postmodern Bastille—the largest prison built in a major U.S. urban center in decades—looks instead like a futuristic hotel or office block, with artistic flourishes (for example, the high-tech trellises on its bridge-balconies) that are comparable to Downtown’s best-designed recent architecture. In contrast to the human inferno of desperately overcrowded County Jail a few blocks away, the Becket structure appears less a detention center than a convention center for federal felons—a “distinguished” addition to Downtown’s continuum of security and design.
The Fear of Crowds

In actual practice, the militarization of urban space tends to race far ahead of its theoretical representations. This is not to say, however, that the fortress city lacks apologists. Charles Murray, ideologue \textit{par excellence} of 1980s antiewelfarism, has recently outlined ambitious justifications for renewed urban segregation in the 1990s. Writing in the \textit{New Republic} (increasingly, the theoretical journal \textit{of} the backlash against the urban poor), Murray argues that landlords—“one of the greatly maligned forces for social good in this country”—\textit{not cops} are the best bet for winning the war on drugs.\textsuperscript{20} Given the prohibitive cost of building sufficient prison space to warehouse the country’s burgeoning population of inner-city drug-users, Murray proposes instead to isolate them socially and spatially. In his three-prong strategy, employers would urinetest and fire drug-tainted workers at will; parents would use vouchers to remove their children from drug-ridden public schools; and, most importantly, landlords would maintain drug-free neighborhoods by excluding the “wrong kind of person.”

Murray advocates, in other words, the resuscitation of the right of employers and landlords to discriminate—“without having to justify their arbitrariness.” Only by letting “like-minded people ... control and shape their small worlds,” and letting landlords pursue their natural instinct “to let good tenants be and to evict bad ones,” can the larger part of urban America find its way back to a golden age of harmonious, self-regulating communities. Murray is undoubtedly proud of all the Los Angeles suburbanites rushing to wall off their tract-home \textit{gemeinschafts}.

At the same time, he unflinchingly accepts that the underclass—typhied, in his words, by the “pregnant teenager smoking crack” and the “Uzi-toting young male”—will become even more outcast: “If the result of implementing these policies is to concentrate the bad apples into a few hyperviolent, antisocial neighborhoods, so be it.” Presumably it will be cheaper to police these parish communities—where everyone, by definition, is a member of the dangerous class—than to apprehend and incarcerate hundreds of thousands of individuals. “Drug-free zones” for the majority, as a logical corollary, demand social-refuse dumps for the criminalized minority. Resurrected Jim Crow legislation, euphemistically advertised as “local self-determination,” will insulate the urban middle classes (now including the Cosby family as well) from the New Jack City at their doorstep.

In this quest for spatial discrimination, the aims of contemporary architecture and the police converge most strikingly around the problem of crowd control. Cothinkers of Murray doubtless find the heterogeneous crowd a subversive anathema to their idyll of “like-mindedness.” As we have seen, the designers of malls and pseudolocal space attack the crowd by homogenizing it. They set up architectural and semiotic barriers that filter out the “undesirables.” They enclose the mass that remains, directing its circulation with behaviorist ferocity. The crowd is hived by visual stimuli of all kinds, dulled by Muzak, sometimes even scented by invisible aromatizers. This Skinnerian orchestration, if well conducted, produces a veritable commercial symphony of swarming, consuming monads moving from one cash-point to another.

Outside in the streets, the task is more difficult. The LAPD continues to restrict the rights of public assembly and freedom of movement, especially of the young, through its mass sweeps and “Operation Hammer,” selective juvenile curfews, and regular blockades of popular “cruising” boulevards. Even gilded white youth suffer from the strict police regulation of personal mobility. In the former world capital of adolescence, where millions overseas still imagine Gidget at a late-night beach party, the beaches are now closed at dusk, patrolled by helicopter gunships and police dune buggies.

A watershed in the local assault on the crowd was the rise and fall of the “Los Angeles Street Scene.” Launched in 1978, the two-day annual festival at the Civic Center was intended to publicize Downtown’s revitalization as well as to provide Mayor Bradley’s version of the traditional Democratic barbecue. The LAPD remained skeptical. Finally in 1986, after the failure of the Ramones to appear as promised, a youthful audience began to tear up one of the stages. They were immediately charged by a phalanx of 150 police, including mounted units. In the two-hour melee that followed, angry punks bombarded the police cavalry with rocks and bottles; fifteen officers and horses were injured. The producer of the Street Scene, a Bradley official, suggested that “more middle-of-the-road entertainment” might attract less “boisterous crowds.” The prestigious \textit{Downtown News} counterattacked: “The Street Scene gives Downtown a bad name. It flies in the face of all that
has been done here in the last thirty years." The paper demanded "reparations for the wounded 'reputation of Downtown.'" The Mayor canceled the Scene. 26

The demise of the Scene suggested the consolidation of an official consensus about crowds and the use of space in Los Angeles. The restructuring of Downtown eliminated the social mixing of groups in normal pedestrian circulation, the Street Scene (ironically named) remained one of the few occasions or places (along with redevelopment-threatened Hollywood Boulevard and the Venice boardwalk) where Chinatown punks, Glendale skinheads, Boyle Heights lowriders, Valley Girls, Marina designer couples, Slauson rappers, Skid Row homeless, and gawkers from Des Moines could still mingle together in relative amity. Moreover, in the years since the Battle of the Ramones, relentless police intimidation has ignited one youthful crowd after another into pandemonium, producing major riots in Hollywood on Halloween night 1988, and in Westwood Village in March 1991 (during the premiere of New Jack City). Each incident, in turn, furnishes new pretexts for regulating crowds and "preventing the invasion of outsiders" (as one Westwood merchant explained in a TV interview). Inexorably, Los Angeles moves to extinguish its last real public spaces, with all of their democratic intoxications, risks, and undeodorized odors.