

Fortress City: Los Angeles and the Citadel of High Culture

In his path-breaking *City of Quartz*, political economist Mike Davis paints a chilling portrait of Los Angeles: a city marked by racial tensions from its very inception, its topography mapped by a repressive economy of spatial access. In Davis's words, L.A. is a "carceral city," an urban landscape whose wealthy suburbs are patrolled by fleets of private police, while its inner cities are sealed off and barricaded by a racist and lawless police force. The militarization of the City is evident not only in the policing of social boundaries, but in its architecture: fenced, panopticon-like inner city shopping centres host surveilling police stations, while the City's most celebrated architect, Pritzker Prize laureate Frank Gehry, apotheosizes a "siege-look."

Included in the scope of Davis's address is the aptly named Bunker Hill — a fortified entrepreneurial zone for international finance in Downtown Los Angeles. Situated at the very pinnacle of this redoubt are two cultural institutions: the Music Centre and the Museum of Contemporary Art. Davis, whose ambitious purview spans both the City and its surroundings, deals only cursorily with this fortress-scape and the cultural institutions that lend it cachet. My purpose in this article is to examine this zone more closely — to focus on a history of fortress-thinking that has characterized it for almost a century and to examine, with particular attention, the establishment there of a Museum of Contemporary Art.

Bunker Hill, the site of MOCA, rises from Broadway on the east, Pershing Square and the Library on the south, and is bounded by the Harbor Freeway on the west. In a non-nuclear age it might be an ideal site for a citadel. Of course, the idea of a military fortress at the heart of a twentieth century urban metropolis seems ludicrous; but as this article demonstrates, the idea of a "cultural" stronghold fired the imagination of L.A.'s power brokers as early as the first decade of this century. A recurrent theme in subsequent decades, it has now, in MOCA, attained its *denouement*. This article traces the permutations of its fortunes. In short, it tells a narrative of settlement, redevelopment, and cultural apotheosis on Bunker Hill. It is a story extending back into the 19th century; its conclusion still lies in the future.

Over the past fifty years Bunker Hill has undergone enormous changes, some of which can be apprehended by contrasting two texts which describe the area. The first is from a 1942 Raymond Chandler novel, *The High Window*. Chandler writes:

Bunker Hill is old town, lost town, crook town. Once, very long ago, it was the choice residential district of the city, and there are still standing a few of the jigsaw Gothic mansions with wide porches and walls covered with round-end shingles and full corner bay windows with spindle turrets. They are all rooming houses now, their parquet floors are scratched and worn through the once glossy finish and the wide sweeping staircases are dark with time and with cheap varnish laid on over generations of dirt. In the tall rooms haggard landladies bicker with shifty tenants. On the wide cool front porches, reaching their cracked shoes into the sun, and staring at nothing, sit the old men with faces like lost battles. In and around the old houses there are flyblown restaurants and Italian fruitstands and cheap apartment houses and little candy stores where you can buy even nastier things than their candy. And there are ratty hotels where nobody except people named Smith and Jones sign the register and where the night clerk is half watchdog and half pander. Out of the apartment houses come women who should be young but have faces like stale beer; men with pulled-down hats and quick eyes that look the street over behind the cupped hand that shields the match flame; with granite faces and wavering eyes; cokies and coke peddlers; people who look like nothing in particular and know it, and once in a while even men that actually go to work. But they come out early, when the wide cracked sidewalks are empty and still have dew on them. (53-54)

The second text is much more recent, for it was written some time in the 1970s. It is from a brochure produced by the Community Redevelopment Agency or CRA, as it is more generally known. Established in 1945, the CRA is a public agency, empowered with the right of eminent domain, formed with a mandate to implement urban renewal in Los Angeles. Unlike Chandler's description of an actual, existing topography, the CRA's text presents a projection, a vision of the future for Bunker Hill. The brochure reads as follows:

Bunker Hill is the West's prestige address. The development of a Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art as a central focus will enhance that prestige. The revitalization of the CBD [Central Business District] will be further accelerated as additional employment and housing are provided. The additional revenue produced (i.e., payrolls, sales, public revenue) will have a positive multiplier effect throughout the region. Further incentive for continued private and public reinvestment and a diversification of the economic base will be provided. As a result of proposed People Mover construction, dependency upon the automobile will be greatly reduced, thus reducing future parking requirements in downtown Los Angeles. This will provide an economic benefit to future owners and tenants and will maximize the use of current parking facilities. (*Development Offering: Remaining 8.75 Acres of Bunker Hill: Downtown Los Angeles*, unpaginated)

Between Raymond Chandler's evocation of a once-elegant-now-decayed Bunker Hill and the CRA's projections for the same area, there lies a significant chapter of Los Angeles history. On one level the story has a simple linear movement: a provincial bastion of Victorian grandeur is gradually encroached upon by an expanding urban economy and population. It succumbs to urban decay; is viewed as a "blight" to be eradicated; on the desert of its ruins city planners fantasize — and construct — a utopian city whose architectonics is designed as an effective instrument in the service of capital productivity. But of course the story is more complex than this simple narrative suggests. Behind it lies the enlightenment dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in all its parts, without dark zones of disorder (Foucault 1972, 152ff.). The picture drawn by Chandler is the anachronistic dark side of this dream — a nightmare of shabby shadowy spaces, "dark with time," presided over by a "night clerk," punctuated by characters who hide their faces under "pulled down hats" and who engage in illicit activities. The CRA report is the fantasy of the dream's fulfillment: its emphasis is on light, visibility, and public spaces; its key words are "central focus," "enhance," "revitalize," "positive," and the "People Mover" — a public transportation system designed to distribute individuals in space in a coordinated and orderly fashion.¹ This compulsion to eradicate the dark interstices conducive to crime and to establish instead legible, planned, monitored urban spaces calls to mind the panopticon designed by Jeremy Bentham as a workhouse (later modified into a prison) and used by Michel Foucault as a metaphor for a disciplinary technology of power (see Foucault 1977, 195-228). The work of Foucault offers one approach to understanding the socio-spatial production of Bunker Hill. But other issues must also be investigated: first, the agonistic relation between community benefits and private real estate interests that has characterized Los Angeles's development history; secondly, an urban planning discourse that, from the beginning of the century, has sought to turn Bunker Hill into an "acropolis" of Los Angeles's civic and cultural life; and thirdly, the ambitions of Los Angeles's power structure to transfigure the city from a "fragmented metropolis"² into one with a determinate core — a "centre." Although these issues are presented here as distinct, they are intertwined. As will become evident, these issues constitute the history not only of Bunker Hill, but of MOCA — and, not coincidentally, of the growing power of the CRA.

The inclusion of the word "Community" in the name "Community Redevelopment Agency" is misleading, for this organization has identified ever-more closely with corporate leaders and capitalist interests and not with any broad-based "community." Indeed, the CRA's nomination is sadly ironic, for its

1 See *Moving People in Los Angeles* 1977, 1980.

2 The phrase, "fragmented metropolis" is from the title of Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*.

involvement in Bunker Hill has consistently been about the overriding of community concerns in favor of entrepreneurial real estate interests.

Conflict between community and real estate interests in Los Angeles has mapped the City's topography from its earliest days, for L.A.'s development into a dispersed, fragmented metropolis has been the result of a "denial" of community³ — the proclivity of its residents to establish their individual privacy and security in the anti-urban pseudo-pastoralism of suburbia. However, the anti-urban predilection of the affluent white population has not been without tension or conflict, for City leaders recognized that local growth is dependent on the City's ability to establish the concentration of capital and cultural amenities typical of traditional, centralized, East coast-type or European-type cities. The City's growth machine forces viewed the "recentralization" of the City as a crucial component of growth, and in the late 60s they targeted Bunker Hill in Downtown L.A. as the focal point of their growth strategy. In order to legitimize these growth goals and present them as a social benefit, a socially-acceptable institution was planned as the redevelopment centerpiece. In the initial redevelopment blueprint⁴ this institution was identified on an area map as a large box labelled "Culture." Later, it was decided to fill the box with a museum of contemporary art.⁵ Indeed, the Museum became the redevelopment project's primary public-relations focus. Thus MOCA, located on the apex of Bunker Hill, was widely promoted as the "jewel" in the crown of Bunker Hill's "mixed-use"⁶ development.

In order to understand the process that led to this redevelopment, it is necessary to trace briefly the history of urban settlement in Los Angeles. It is a history that differs from that of other major metropolitan areas in that L.A.'s suburbanization occurred at a relatively early stage. Where most other American cities saw this move begin in the late 1930s, in Los Angeles suburban expansion was already an established feature by this date. This early suburbanization is at least partly attributable to the distinctive nature of the immigrants who settled the area between 1880-1930; for whereas immigrants to most of America's East coast cities came from impoverished conditions in over-crowded European or Eastern European communities, immigrants to Los Angeles came from small towns in the

mid-West. Compared to immigrants in East coast cities, Los Angeles's immigrants possessed skills and funds; they preferred trade and the professions to industry and, because of their native facility with English, choices were open to them. Already affluent, their expectations included single-family houses on large lots, surrounded by landscaped lawns, isolated from business activities. It was these immigrants who transformed the vast veld around Los Angeles into a concatenation of sprawling suburbs. Already by 1930 Los Angeles had more single family dwellings than any other comparably large or larger American city.⁷ A dispersal of residential areas soon led to a dispersal of commercial areas. Until 1920 economic and industrial enterprises had been concentrated Downtown, but these conditions changed after 1920 as a result of the failure of the electric railways and the increasing use of private automobiles. Parking Downtown became almost impossible and congestion unbearable. In response to this, merchants opened stores along Wilshire, Hollywood, and other major arteries connecting to the suburbs. By 1930 Downtown Los Angeles held only about half of the City's commercial and professional enterprises and was only one of its several business districts. Already by this date Los Angeles had become a "fragmented metropolis."

Although popular sentiment seemed to militate against the idea of a coordinated metropolis and in favor of decentralized individual entrepreneurship, Los Angeles did develop a centralized municipal government. And here we see a conjunction of community and real estate interests: private entrepreneurs had proved unsuccessful in providing utilities to the expanding suburban areas, and real estate interests needed and lobbied for a reliable, accountable, centralized, governmental source for utilities. Also, suburban homeowners feared that uncontrolled expansion in the suburbs could ruin neighbourhoods as easily as it had once established them, and they pressed for more careful planning of the City's growth. Conservatives argued that city-planning, far from being a radical undertaking, actually made for greater efficiency, and was "a sound self-sustaining business proposition" (Fogelson 249). It seemed clear that Los Angeles's prosperity depended on a viable and efficient centralization of city administration. Planning experts were called in to make this awareness a reality.

An early endeavor in this regard is a 1907 *Report of the Municipal Art Commission for the City of Los Angeles, California* by Charles Mulford Robinson.⁸ What is extraordinary about this report is that its recommendations

3 This is precisely Fogelson's argument in *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*.

4 I refer now to an undated CRA report titled: *Development Offering: Remaining 8.75 Acres of Bunker Hill*. Although it bears no date, this stage of CRA redevelopment belongs to the late 1970s.

5 The confluence of events leading to this decision are addressed in Berelowitz 1990.

6 The term "mixed-use" refers to a mix of functional facilities, e.g., corporate offices, a hotel, shopping center, and cultural institution as part of one development project. For further discussion of this concept, see Snedcof.

7 Fogelson gives a table, showing "Families and Dwellings in Selected Cities, 1930" (146) from the *U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*.

8 Robinson submitted similar reports to the cities of Honolulu, San Jose, Binghamton, Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Ridgewood, New Jersey, Oakland, Denver, Dubuque, Iowa, Ogdenburg, New York, Santa Barbara, etc.

for a civic and cultural centre on Bunker Hill are almost exactly in accordance with the actual project performed three quarters of a century later by the CRA.

Like the CRA publications, Robinson's provisions for Los Angeles embrace both economic boosterism and the dream of centralization. He viewed the creation of an attractive Downtown as a growth factor in Los Angeles's (already in 1909) flourishing tourist trade,⁹ and wrote that "no city in the United States ... has so much to gain by making itself civically attractive" (3). Robinson, like subsequent generations of developers, focused his energies on Bunker Hill. Of primary interest for the theme of this paper are the historical associations he mobilized for its redevelopment.

Robinson's report included a map: it shows an area bordered by Sixth Street on the south, Fifth Street on the north, Flower Street on the west, and Hill Street on the east. He called it "Proposed Site for a Public Library and Art Gallery and its Approaches. Los Angeles, Calif." It reveals that the 1907 plan included an art gallery in almost the exact site now occupied by MOCA. Like the Gallery in Robinson's plan, MOCA is bounded by Hope and Grand Streets; but where Robinson's Gallery is to the south of Bunker Hill between Sixth and Fifth Streets, MOCA is on a higher elevation between Second and First Streets. A little further on in the report Robinson puts forward his reasons for this grouping of buildings.

On this site I would place the Art Gallery and Public Library.... The details of the structures can be left to the architects. Perhaps it will be possible to combine them in one splendid building, or it may be better to construct separate pavilions, connected by open colonnades, the white columns showing from below against the blue Californian sky, for I should hope that the effect would be Grecian.... [The architect's] task would be [that] of designing the *acropolis of a great city*.... With [these projects] there is created here a *cultural centre* of which any city might well be proud ... scenically, and from the standpoint of civic development, it would be little short of a crime for rich Los Angeles to let slip ... the chance to create the "centre" here described. (19; emphases here and in succeeding quotations are mine)

Clearly, Robinson's model was the Athenian Acropolis. With political acumen, he viewed the Athenian project as a machine for creating and sustaining power relations, and was eager to establish such a machine for Los Angeles. More than half a century later Bunker Hill has become an "acropolis" in more ways than Robinson ever imagined. Not only the locus of civic and cultural activities (the Law Courts, Music Centre, and MOCA), Bunker Hill functions also as the citadel of Los Angeles's hegemonic power structure — an alliance of city government and multi-national corporate capitalism ensconced in a phalanx of megalithic high rises that loom over the flatlands of Downtown (see Davis 1985, 1987). But

9 He refers to L.A. as "The tourist metropolis of the country" (3).

as with the Athenians and their arch-enemies, the Persians, this citadel of power is besieged by foreign invaders — only in this case, the invaders are from South and Central America — a point I shall return to later.

The idea of establishing an acropolis for Los Angeles appears like a leitmotiv in the discursive history of Los Angeles urban planning. The next reference after Robinson's occurs in a 1912 article in *The California Outlook*, entitled "The Significance of the Civic Centre," by John Galen Howard, who is described as a "Noted Architect, [who] Reviews Ancient and Modern City Building ... a subject of immediate and intense interest to California's two leading cities — Los Angeles and San Francisco" (*The California Outlook* 12). Like Robinson, Galen evokes the model of Pericles's fifth century Athenian Acropolis. Additionally, he cites Rome's Capitoline Hill. His article is clearly intended as more than a mere lesson in ancient urban planning, for its thrust is directive: Los Angeles and San Francisco can become great cities by following the examples of Athens and Rome. The language in which Galen presents these cities and the ideas of centralization contained therein are worth quoting for they are part of a dominant thematic in planning for the downtown area. The excerpt given below is particularly relevant to this paper's topic, for its rhetoric echoes uncannily once again in CRA and real estate development publications about Bunker Hill. In describing the Capitoline Hill, Galen acknowledges it as:

a centre ... the heart of a series of communities that had gradually grown together and coalesced into one great whole, the heart and head of which was in the midst, around which the cities on the hills, ever, ever more populated were gathered and circled until in the end practically the entire world revolved around that centre of civilization ... given the name, by the ancient Romans, of the Umbilicus of the Empire. The stone which was considered to be the centre, the umbilicus, of the Empire, is still to be seen there, tells its story, and brings home to every visitor a sense of the unity of ancient Rome. (17)

Clearly, the value of ancient civic centres for twentieth century urban planners is that they provide a humanistic / cultural sanction for establishing a machine that creates and sustains a power relation. The technologies of power inscribed in the Acropolis and Capitoline Hill are glossed over in the ideological patter of establishing modern equivalents, thereby maintaining a historical / cultural continuum. As will be seen shortly, the mythology of a sacred city centre continued to exert a fascination — and it found its apotheosis in MOCA. However, before dealing with the specifics of MOCA, it is necessary to deal with the establishment of a civic centre in Downtown Los Angeles and then to present a chronology of development on Bunker Hill.

In 1918 a special mayoral committee was appointed to investigate possible sites for an administrative and cultural centre,¹⁰ and architectural firms were invited to submit plans and preliminary drawings. In the end the Regional Planning Commission drew up its own plan — a plan in every way inferior to those submitted by the architectural firms. However, theirs was the plan most acceptable to the Chamber of Commerce and other entrepreneurs because it allowed for the maximum circulation of automobile traffic and requisitioned a minimum amount of land for non-commercial, administrative purposes. Thus it was that even in the establishment of a civic centre, private interests overrode and superseded community interests, for city planning was acceptable only to the extent that it was in conformity with the goals of private enterprise.

The history of Bunker Hill reveals a similar conflict between community benefits and the will of private developers. The Hill developed in the 1850s as a residential area rather than as an extension of the central business district because its high elevation and steep grades made it unsuitable for commercial development. Around the turn of the century it was a fashionable neighbourhood characterized by large Victorian mansions serviced by the Angel's Flight cablecar railway which carried passengers up the steep incline from Third and Hill Streets. It remained prosperous during the 1920s, but during the Depression the area deteriorated. No longer desired by the wealthy, the large single family mansions were converted into multiple low cost rental units whose principal tenants were transient workers and the marginally employed. Already in the 1920s the area was recognized as "blighted."

It continued to decline. By the 1950s the overwhelming conclusion of public officials was that Bunker Hill contained an excessive amount of urban blight. By this time a set of procedures designed to deal with situations of this type had been introduced. The California Community Redevelopment Act of 1945 and the Housing Act of 1949 permitted the creation of public agencies empowered with the right of eminent domain. In 1945 the Community Redevelopment Agency was formed with a mandate to implement urban renewal in Los Angeles and in 1951 the Agency designated Bunker Hill an official urban renewal area. Initial plans were to develop it for residential purposes, for in 1950 the City was faced with a serious post-war housing shortage, and the L.A. Housing Authority drew up a plan to develop 10,000 low rent units on Bunker Hill. Had these plans been carried out, Bunker Hill would probably have been the most ambitious slum clearance and public housing project in the U.S. However, powerful real estate and business interests succeeded in destroying these plans, for low-cost housing hardly constituted the intensification of land use they so dearly sought. In order to abort the public housing project, they embarked on a campaign, distributing

leaflets throughout the City under such names as the "Committee Against Socialist Housing," arguing that the Housing Authority's project paved the way for Communist infiltration into the very heart of the City. Their efforts were eminently successful, for in 1959 the CRA's plans changed to reflect a strong bias in favor of commercial development.

But redevelopment was fraught with difficulties, not least of which was the real estate lobby's firmly established preference for decentralization. Beverly Hills and the Westside had by now undergone massive development and it was difficult to attract investment capital back into the central city. However, as Davis points out:

Ironically, the CRA's Downtown plan was saved by the explosion of the local Black working class.... The crisis of 1965, which continued to resonate through waves of inner-city unrest and white backlash for almost a decade, was instrumentalized by redevelopment interests in two decisive ways. First and immediately, by releasing the spectre of Downtown and USC engulfed by a militant Black population, the traditional corporate patrons of the CRA were able to galvanize broader ruling-class support for the renovation of Downtown, through the emergency Committee of 25 (later, the "Community Committee") and an expanded Central City Association.... The second aftermath of the Watts uprising was the consolidation of a multiracial coalition, based on Jewish (10 per cent of the electorate) and Black votes under the dispensation of Downtown boosters led by Otis Chandler's "liberalized" *Los Angeles Times*. After six years of blistering warfare against Mayor Yorty's white backlash the new coalition installed Thomas Bradley, a Black ex-cop and city councilman, as mayor in 1973. Bradley's regime, which over the years has drawn support from such landed powers as BankAmerica, the Irvine Ranch, and ARCO, enlarged the CRA mandate to encompass all of Downtown, opening a real-estate bonanza to commercial developers. (1987, 70-74)

Bradley's agenda, supported by substantial contributions from pro-growth advocates, has been to turn Los Angeles into a "world city." His success in that undertaking can be seen in a map reproduced from an undated CRA publication, *Development Offering: Remaining 8.75 Acres of Bunker Hill* — a publication designed to elicit proposals for the remaining uncommitted land on Bunker Hill, an area intended, in the words of the publication, as "the focal point of the Central Business District and metropolitan Los Angeles" (I). The map shows a concentration of corporate capital on Bunker Hill: Security Pacific National Bank's world headquarters, the World Trade Centre, the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building, Union Bank Square, Bunker Hill Towers, (a 725-unit residential complex) and the 1500 room Bonaventure Hotel. The publication further points out that

the accomplishments of Bunker Hill do not end at its boundaries. The whole development of the western CBD as a financial and corporate centre has been positively influenced by Bunker Hill's growth. Several examples should suffice. The Atlantic Richfield office

10 The mayor was Frederick T. Woodman. I am indebted for this information to Fogelson's chapter on "City and Regional Planning."

towers (twin towers of 52 stories) and subterranean retail shopping complex, the 42-story Crocker Citizens Building (recently sold for \$80 million, and accompanied by the bank's Los Angeles headquarters relocation to Bunker Hill), and the 62-story United California Bank Building attest to the extent of private sector commitment to downtown Los Angeles. (6)

Subsequent to publication of the report there has been extensive additional construction: the Wells Fargo Bank headquarters office building, the \$200-million Maguire Partners-Crocker Centre, the Library Tower (the tallest building on the West Coast), two of California Plaza's four office towers and its enormous performance plaza, and two up-scale apartment buildings. Building is proceeding apace for the 440-room Inter-Continental Hotel. Additionally, it should be noted that there has been a massive inflow of international capital into the area (most conspicuously by Shuwa Investment Corporation which owns more than \$1 billion of prime Downtown real estate and which, not coincidentally, has been a significant donor to the Museum of Contemporary Art).

The CRA publication is of particular interest to the theme of this paper for its pages are filled with the rhetoric of the ideology of growth — cloaking economic boosterism in a utopian projection for an ideal rational urban space which features a harmonious and mutually beneficial juxtaposition of business, civic, community, recreational, and cultural interests. Their prospectus is an ideological narrative which attempts to reframe the Bunker Hill redevelopment project as the locus for an ideal resolution of the contradictions and inequities of Los Angeles's social and political life. It is a programme for the manufacture of a city's self image — as Pericles's Acropolis was for fifth century Athens.¹¹ However, the fragility of the narrative's imagined homogeneity becomes apparent at the periphery of the gleaming corporate high-rises — for these are besieged by a dense circle of a million Latino immigrants in slum housing, of whom at least 200,000 live in illegal garage conversions without plumbing or heat (Davis 1987, 80). Small wonder the CRA report stresses that Bunker Hill's "most prestigious" land will be a "controlled, secure environment" (*Development Offering* 20). Clearly, the dominant sentiment is that this acropolis of Late Capitalism needs protection from the inroads of the poverty-stricken invaders.

A dominant feature of the CRA report is its resuscitation of the rhetoric of centralization: we are told that Bunker Hill "will become the focal point of the Central Business District and metropolitan Los Angeles," that it is fed by an "interregional network of freeways and major transportation systems" (1), that it "has become the hub of Southern California's commercial, cultural and civic

activities" (5) because it has a "preeminent, strategic location" (18). Los Angeles's emergence as a centre for world trade is indisputable. What is significant about these comments is that a "theory" of the city is now being constructed on its ever-expanding dominance as a corporate headquarters of the Pacific Trade. The myth of centralization sounds with the regularity of a heartbeat not only in the publications of the CRA, but also in the pronouncements of developers and of corporate leaders involved with the project. Thus Arthur Erikson, the (Canadian) architect of California Plaza, writes in his proposal: *Exhibit #2, California Centre*, that Bunker Hill will become "the centre for all these other [i.e., government, cultural, popular, ethnic, business] centres." Through this project "Los Angeles [can] express what is unique about itself and at the same time begin to fulfill its future role as a centre of centres of the western world."¹² If this is now Los Angeles's destiny, then it must steal the mantle from New York. And indeed, since L.A.'s eclipse of San Francisco, New York remains Los Angeles's only rival for preeminence among American cities. The keen spirit of entrepreneurial civic competition is apparent in statements such as the following by Eli Broad, founding Chairman of MOCA, donor of the fledgling institution's first million dollars and, not incidentally, an international property developer: "I think it's ... really good for the city to develop a real downtown, a real centre core that is akin to midtown Manhattan that we haven't seen" (Berelowitz 1987a). The contemporary rhetoric of civic redevelopment no longer draws on ancient paradigms, but on New York — home of Rockefeller Centre, prototype for multi-block, multi-purpose redevelopments. Indeed, urban theorists have coined the phrase "social Manhattanization" (Williams and Smith 212) to describe the agglomeration of corporate activities and of lavish recreation and entertainment facilities at the urban centre. The establishment of cultural complexes in downtown areas is a component of the lifestyle trappings of an economy based on international administration. To quote Eli Broad once again: "MOCA and other art institutions serve a city by creating a climate in which people from the financial and other professional worlds are very comfortable, as they are in Manhattan or London or Paris" (Berelowitz 1987a). It is important to note that MOCA constitutes only one component of a much larger cultural complex that will include the Dance Gallery on Fourth Street, and Disney Hall (a second music centre designed by Frank Gehry) on First and Grand Avenues. In the words of Fred Nicholas — lawyer, property developer, art collector, founding MOCA trustee, coordinator of its building campaign, director of the building campaigns for both the Dance Gallery and Disney Hall, and current Chairman of the MOCA's Board of Trustees:

¹² The photocopy I have is unpaginated.

¹¹ My argument for Los Angeles is based on and indebted to Preziosi's analysis of Pericles's program for the Acropolis (156-80).

As far as I'm concerned, Grand Avenue is going to be the Avenue of the Stars for downtown Los Angeles, and is going to be a cultural centre ... in the next decade that area is going to be jumping. Its going to have music, art, theatre, dance, and almost every aspect of the cultural life of Los Angeles will be centred there. (Berelowitz 1987b)

All of these projects effect a radical transformation of an urban landscape that was once described as "one hundred suburbs in search of a city." L.A.'s morphology is being rewritten by the machinery of Downtown restructuring. The CRA's project thus becomes much more than the physical redevelopment of a once blighted area: it becomes a focus from which to construct a new meaning for the city.¹³

Significantly, as noted earlier, the CRA made provision for a cultural institution at the very heart of this project. As their publication states:

A major highlight of ... development is expected to be the establishment of the Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art [subsequently renamed Museum of Contemporary Art]. The locational advantage of the property at the centre of Bunker Hill, and thus at the centre of the Southern California region, is further enhanced by the immediate proximity of local, state and federal government services located in the adjacent Civic Centre. (*Moving People* 1980, 1)

L.A., notorious for palm trees and beach culture, now has Culture enshrined at its very centre. In the rhetoric of redevelopment, MOCA becomes the very Omphalos of Southern California. Presumably, given its strategic location, once L.A. "begins to fulfill its future role as a centre of centres of the western world" (Erikson's report, unpaginated) MOCA may become the Omphalos of Civilization itself.

The rhetoric provokes questions: why is centralism so heavily emphasized and why is MOCA its focus? My answers are conjectural, but I offer them nonetheless. The idea / belief of a centred structure beyond play is deeply embedded in the episteme of Western discourse, lodged in systems of representations of whose historical dimensions we are often unaware. Inscribed in the

13 The narrative currently being constructed by the CRA is the second deliberate attempt, in Los Angeles's history, to write a narrative for the city. The first narrative was the creation of Charles Fletcher Lummis, who came out west in 1885 and, among other things, worked for the *L.A. Times*, as well as serving as editor and frequent contributor of *Land of Sunshine / Out West*. Lummis predicted a shift of social, cultural, and economic vigour away from the Atlantic East to the Southwest or Sunbelt empire. He had two key symbols for identifying this emerging region — the sun and the Spanish past. L.A.'s old mythology was predicated on historical nostalgia and on nature — on its being a heliopolis. The new myth currently being created by the CRA has some very different characteristics. For one thing, it has a focus on Bunker Hill.

notion of the centred circle is the onto-theological tradition of humanism. As Derrida has noted:

The concept of a centred structure is ... the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered... (279)

If we apply these concepts to the discourses surrounding MOCA, then several issues emerge: the Museum of Contemporary Art is both representation and symbol of Western Culture; its embodiment of this value-system is all the more significant because of its situation atop the acropolis of L.A.'s (internationally-oriented) financial district; the Museum stands for Humanism, Culture against Anarchy; it is an attempt to establish Western values at the heart of L.A.'s polyglot urban fabric, an attempt to reclaim downtown, a shoring up against the intercultural scenario of a "Bladerunneresque" future in which the inner city becomes crowded, overpopulated with immigrants whose threatening presence causes affluent white Angelenos to flee to the "off world" of the suburbs. It stands as symbol and metaphor for the "renaissance" of Downtown.

In addition to the myth of centralization, official writings on Bunker Hill abound with allusions to historic civic grandeur. Recall, for instance, John Galen Howard's exhortation to L.A.'s city planners to model their city centre on the Athenian Acropolis, or on Rome's Capitoline Hill where there "was a civic centre ... which was given the name, by the ancient Romans, of the *Umbilicus of the Empire*" (Howard 8). In 1986, Arthur Erikson dreams of Grand Avenue being "bordered with double rows of royal palms, a regal *umbilical cord* from the Music Centre to the business core" (unpaginated).

The official language describing the Museum is equally rich in associations. The most dominant metaphors are of spirituality, rarity and extraordinary value. Thus Erikson describes the Museum as "the jewel of the crown that is California Centre," and Arata Isozaki, who designed the building, describes it as a "jewel surrounded by a forest of highrises" (Traeger 57). We are told in the Museum's inaugural catalogue that Isozaki "believes that in today's society only the art museum approaches the sacred stature realized in the past by religious architecture" (Geldin 10). Sherry Geldin, MOCA's Associate Director, describes the museum as:

a temple ... in which the gods cavort, amuse, and delight, even as they inspire... [MOCA's] ambience invokes the power and wonder of the Roman Pantheon, though Isozaki has replaced cylinder and dome with cube and pyramid. The result is an equally uplifting space whose awesome splendor invites contemplation and joy. (10)

effectively neutralizes opposition to urban redevelopment. As Michael Pittas, director of the National Endowment for the Arts' Design Programme puts it:

Urban redevelopment projects are so complex that, inevitably it seems, constituencies organize against them for various reasons. The arts, however, are Mom and apple pie; they're consensus-makers, common ground. People can easily focus on the arts activities in a new project, instead of dwelling on the complicated costs and benefits public support for private development usually entails. (qtd. in Clack 13)

Precisely. The funding of a museum by a private corporation deflects public attention away from the "complicated" extraordinary tax breaks and benefits that accrue to that corporation — tax revenues that would otherwise be channelled into schools and social services.

For most of the art world, art's relationship to the urban growth machine is of minimal interest.¹⁶ Minimal, I suspect, because this relationship raises crucial — and difficult — questions about the oppressive connections of cultural institutions to hegemonic culture and to the material conditions of contemporary life. It is therefore important to foreground MOCA's relationship to the operations of the social system, rather than to read it — as the popular and coffee-table press does — as an unqualified social benefit, or as a timeless object of enduring value.

One of the devices that isolates the Museum and earns for it the epithet "jewel" is the obvious contrast between its diminutive scale and the megalithic highrises which now partially surround it and will eventually circumscribe it when the project is completed. It is precisely on account of its pygmaean stature that MOCA is so conspicuous. It appears to be predicated on a structural opposition to the highrises: where their movement is vertical, MOCA's largest spaces are subterranean horizontal halls, a succession of postmodern Lascaux caverns gouged out of mother earth. Where the highrises can be read as symbols of aspirant masculine endeavour, MOCA can be read as supine female body. This anthropomorphizing, far-fetched though it may seem, is attributable to MOCA's architect, Arata Isozaki, who designed a pattern template after the rear curve of Marilyn Monroe's naked body as it appeared in a 1949 photograph; Isozaki incorporated the curve into salient features of the building, thereafter likening the structure to the body of the movie star.¹⁷ Whether he intended to suggest a relationship between High Culture and the unattainability of a Hollywood sex goddess, is a matter for conjecture.

It is not only MOCA's diminutive size but also its architectonic formations that distinguish it as a special edifice. Its most characteristic architectural forms

¹⁶ Notable exceptions are Deutsche and Gendel Ryan, and Owens.
¹⁷ For a more extensive discussion of this, see Berelowitz 1993.

She adds that the Museum is "a symbolic half-buried treasure" (10). It has been called, with partisan pride, "a gem" (Berelowitz 1987a) and with strongly-felt criticism "that developer-subsidized little postmodernist jewelbox" (Sekula 6).

Clearly one of the building's meanings is that it is simultaneously treasure house and treasure, a place sacred in and of itself and because it houses that which must be revered. But there is another crucial dimension to the "value" issue which has appeared nowhere in the art press, and to which only Sekula's comment, given above, makes any reference: MOCA was subsidized by developers because the presence of an art institution greatly enhances the value of surrounding real estate.¹⁴ That the CRA was aware of this consideration is born out by a letter which Donald Cosgrove, Acting Administrator of the CRA, wrote in 1979 to William Norris, Chairman of the Mayoral *ad hoc* Committee to explore museum possibilities Downtown. Cosgrove states: "In addition to physical redevelopment we are also acutely aware of the demonstrated ability of the arts to enrich the local tax base as well as the human spirit, and therefore of their significance in the revitalization process" (Cosgrove).¹⁵ In prioritizing enrichment of the "local tax base" before that of "the human spirit" Cosgrove, a City employee, was thinking like any private real estate developer. This attitude is even more fully conveyed by Fred Nicholas, the afore-mentioned property developer responsible for overseeing MOCA's building campaign, now overseeing the building campaign of the soon-to-be-built Disney Pavilion, and current Chairman of MOCA's Board of Trustees:

every commercial developer feels that a cultural institution in its back yard or its front yard is a big advantage. It attracts people. It's a natural gathering place. It becomes a place by itself in the city. California Plaza is greatly benefitted by MOCA.... Business people like to be next to a cultural institution. It's good for their image.... A lot of developers feel it's to their great advantage to be on top of a cultural site where people will be attracted to come, and it makes it a much more interesting package for them. (Berelowitz 1987b)

More "interesting," more "valuable" because it aestheticizes the financial forces that determine the shape of the built environment. Such "aestheticizing"

¹⁴ The use of the arts as a component of an urban growth strategy dates to at least the era of President Kennedy. For example, a report compiled for Kennedy in 1963 advocated the inclusion of arts facilities in urban renewal projects (cf. Netzer).

¹⁵ Figures on the economic impact of the arts are not yet available for Los Angeles. However, in February 1983 New York City's Cultural Assistance Center surveyed the economic impact of the arts, finding that the arts in and around New York generate \$150 million in tax revenues, entertain 64 million people, create more than 117,000 jobs, and pump \$5.6 billion into the metropolitan economy each year (cf. Pittas).

are the pyramidal skylights of the galleries and the barrel vault of the library. Both forms resonate with historical signification: the former denotes the burial site of Old Kingdom pharaohs; the latter was used to span large, unobstructed internal spaces in imperial Roman structures and in medieval churches. In other words, these forms carry strong associations to hierarchically structured institutions. Critics may — and do — go into raptures of adulation, as architectural historian and critic Alan Temko did in an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, about Isozaki's "ideal proportions" (1) and "pure geometric forms — cubes, pyramids, the perfect half-circle of a vault — combined in different configurations" (3). His remarks position him within a formalist academy that refuses to acknowledge that forms can never be abstract pure essences, but are part of a semiotic system in which meaning is always contingent, existing always in a structure of difference. Undoubtedly, Isozaki's pyramids and vault do iconically refer to abstract geometry, but they also connote systems of social stratification.

However jewel-like, contained, and discreet Isozaki intended MOCA to be, the Museum constitutes a salient feature of Bunker Hill's redevelopment, which in turn exists in the wider context of the redevelopment of the Central Business District. If we accept that visual environments communicate particular meanings, deploy and stage particular relations of power, and construct and embody particular ideologies (cf. Preziosi) then we must look beyond the confines of the Museum to its "context" in order to tease out its meaning.

The topological economy of the Central Business District is that the flatlands below Bunker Hill are dominated by small retail operations and community markets patronized by L.A.'s enormous Latino community; the lower contours of Bunker Hill are characterized by new high rise office complexes which service L.A.'s international trade; the highest topographic node, the apex of Bunker Hill, is the site of Culture — MOCA and the Music Centre. If we view the Central Business District as a unit, it becomes apparent that the entire environment is "zoned" into distinct territories which stage or perform certain behavioural routines and establish particular class divisions. The lowest and largest territory accommodates the poorest, most numerous, least represented population in the city. Towering above this vast urban mass in the new megalithic corporate towers patrolled by security officers, bureaucrats engage in legal and financial machinations. At the very apex in the jewel-like / jewel-box rare air of MOCA the hurly burly dies down. The traveller leaves behind the dross of economic travail and ascends the steps to the ticket office — a rite of passage to the gateway of (the high security environment of) High Culture. The journey, which began in an urban space accessible to all and devoid of obvious security, proceeds through a buffer zone of relative security and terminates in a zone of maximum security, surveillance, and deterrence. The panopticon has now become "introverted" (Virilio 15). MOCA has become the heart of a carceral city.

Clearly this arrangement constitutes a narrative. Whether we choose to consume or deconstruct the narrative depends on personal orientations and affiliations. But first we must read it. Its predication is hierarchical for it fabricates a regime of power which operates via an economy of exclusion and desire. It inscribes class polarization, separating the noise and vitality of the Latino-dominated Broadway from the vivarium-like¹⁸ insulation of California Plaza's underground shopping mall — of which MOCA is but an extension. If we view the route from the flatland of Broadway up the hill to MOCA as a journey whose comfort in progression is guaranteed only to holders of the appropriate class affiliation, it becomes obvious that the route orchestrates an exuviation of classes, a cultural fission.

MOCA, L.A.'s protected jewel of High Culture, symbolizes a City whose growth has been written by a repressive economy of spatial policing, a City aptly characterized by Mike Davis as "Fortress L.A." Turning again to Davis's *City of Quartz*, I read that L.A.'s promotion of High Culture "has gone hand-in-hand with a culture depression in most of the inner city ... [which] has been culturally hollowed out in lockstep with the pyramiding of ... arts capital in ... Bunker Hill" (78). Across the City cultural institutions are positioned within situations of besiegement: MOCA against imagined dangers from the culturally disenfranchised while, at the other extreme, inner city cultural centres are threatened by poverty, community demoralization, and civic neglect. I write these words in the days following the worst urban racial violence that this country has known. On my desk is the May 1992 newsletter from the Inner City Cultural Centre. It states:

Inner City Cultural Centre, a multi-cultural theatre arts institution, was founded in 1965 out of the ashes of the Watts Rebellion. It was the intent of the city fathers to use the arts in an attempt to bridge the gap between the diversified multi-ethnic communities of Los Angeles. (2)

Ironically, as Davis pointed out in the passage cited earlier, the renaissance and cultural acropolis of Bunker Hill also grew out of the ashes of Watts. But Watts was left to smolder while the City's power elite turned away and erected a bastion of high culture on Bunker Hill. Now, in this period of post-riot shock, one wonders what cultural interventions will arise from Watts's new layer of ashes and what communities such interventions will serve.

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¹⁸ Davis describes John Portman's buildings as "large vivariums for the upper middle classes" (1985, 112).

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