

ON BROADWAY: DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

ROBERT ADAMS
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ARCHITECTURE AND NEWSLETTER May 1994 IN THIS ISSUE: **URBAN DESIGN**

LOS ANGELES URBANISM

THE AIA CONVENTION COMES TO TOWN: David Jensen and Joe Day take issue with the state of the profession. Robert Adams presents our own Broadway District with new eyes. Fred Dewey describes the consequences of 'Cyburbia.'

ARCHITECTS, ARCHITECTURE, AND ACTIVISM?

DAVID JENSEN

"Architecture has sacrificed the street party for the private club."

Splinter 1994

In a recent New York Times article, "Architecture as Social Action, and Vice Versa," Herbert Muschamp interviewed Frank Gehry and discussed with him recent concerns that architects should be socially responsible in addition to discussing Gehry's own socially conscious designs and particular brand of activism. In the article Gehry states, "Just

being an architect is an act of social responsibility. Even the strangest concoctions of our imaginations have to do with humanist values—with people, society and context. We're all part of the human fabric. And to have this backlash now is strange. I suppose it's human. But I wish people would stop it." It is clear from these comments that Gehry views himself as socially and politically responsible through his work, as should all architects as a result of their selected vocation. Muschamp questions Gehry's ability to create socially relevant buildings when he quotes from Mike

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jensen *continued from page 1*

Davis' book, *City of Quartz*, where Davis assails Gehry's, "Hip Portfolio [of buildings] as a nostalgic evocation of revolutionary constructivism and a mercenary celebration of bourgeois-decadent minimalism." At the same time Davis suggests that Gehry's buildings do embrace a loose social agenda, because Gehry "clarifies the underlying relations of repression, surveillance and exclusion that characterize the fragmented, paranoid spatiality toward which Los Angeles seems to aspire."

As Muschamp continues, his discussion turns to the recent division of labor within the profession of architecture between designers and technicians, which leads him to conclude, "...that formal innovation has lost a good deal of the luster it acquired in the 1970s and '80s, when architects were busting loose from the restriction of the modern canon....Diversity of practices, not diversity of forms: that is the news from the edge of architecture today."

It is disconcerting that popular critics of architecture, when considering the topic of architecture and social activism, can only conclude that architecture and social responsibility in the '90s leads to a division of labor in the execution of professional design services. There are many architects, designers, and artists whose work is engaged in the production of buildings that address the problems confronting society. The following is an attempt to outline some of the current work being produced by architects and activists who are responding to concrete social, political, and economic changes. I present here only the ground-work for a larger and more comprehensive discussion of the topic at a later time and offer some findings from preliminary research on some architects who are concerned socially and doing something about it.

DMV/AIA

JOE DAY

The American Institute of Architects has a window of opportunity in Los Angeles that it has not enjoyed in the last twenty years. For a variety of reasons, few having much to do with the AIA, young designers in California are fighting tooth and nail to qualify for and pass their licensing exams as quickly as possible.

While in most parts of the country this is the uninterrupted norm, California had been different. Through the late eighties, a quarter-century-long building boom sustained an unprecedented number of architectural practices, licensed and unlicensed. A generation of designers educated and trained in California remain convinced that licensing is an anachronism, one suffered only by less talented, (and/or) more corporate practitioners.

Without naming names, many of the most published boutique designers in LA practice without, and completely within the law. As long as drawings are "signed off" by an engineer, the architectural designer is (generally) liable only for design and code violations, not structural flaws. As long as one is careful not to call oneself an architect, one can build a lot of fine buildings without NCARB's imprimatur.

For many smaller offices threatened by spiraling insurance costs, liability for structural failure is too expensive, whether or not such coverage is available to a licensed practitioner within the firm. In such cases, having a license without full coverage may add to one's exposure in a lawsuit.

It would appear strange then that students fresh out of architecture school in California are racing to take their licensing exams, but the era of "Deprofessionalization" is over.

The obvious and over-arching cause is the economy. In a recession, many turn conservative, running under the institutional umbrella of the licensing board and, by extension, professional organizations such as the AIA. The logic is as age-old and as corporatist as children of the sixties would condemn it for being: the more qualified, the more likely employed, and the more paid. Though one hears over and over from principals

THE SPLINTER IN YOUR EYE IS THE BEST MAGNIFYING-GLASS.

Antic architecture *goes against the grain*, only that which embodies power, whether that of the Medicis or of MacDonalds. Architecture has served power and in return has been *head-locked* by it. Similarly, the institutions that define and support architecture; the media, the schools, and the profession, *have been duped* into accepting this predetermination and then treated it as an exclusive preserve and privilege. *Architecture has sacrificed the street party for the private club.*

What this power play excludes may in fact be altogether removed from it: not unprofessional, but non-professional, not unacademic, but non-academic, *simply not playing by the same rules.* The antic *goes it on its own*, undisturbed by ordinariness and unafraid of the excessive, the undignified, or the grotesque, conditions shunned by taste. Instead of enforcing distinctions, it accepts and promotes slippage between roles and states and occupies the territory where *the repulsive and the compulsive overlap.* Where values conflict we see *patterns of interference* develop. The antic resists the tyranny of the *big corporate take over* of all aspects of life and its re-modelling of all social relations. Antic architecture is a contradiction that makes you *bite-the-hand-that-feeds-you.*

Whether architecture can become *like a tag team match* remains uncertain. The institutions that monopolize architecture have their own means of communication, recognition and evaluation. The antic, not being based in power, is *inimical to being institutionalized.* The Splinter will act as an *agent of the antic*, not determine it.



Editorial Excerpt Splinter #1, Antic Architecture.

that skills, not qualifications count, the fact remains that skilled, under-documented designers receive less pay than skilled, licensed associates.

But work may be even more scarce for the over-schooled and over-qualified. When work was plentiful, a few years in other disciplines look like painless digression. When design work is scarce, passing up qualifying hours seems far more irresponsible.

Two revolutions in architectural education—the ascendency of computer-based design and the incursion of critical theory into architectural instruction—were each heralded as the final liberation of the architect from the shackles of apprenticeship. Neither has set us free.

The first promise is often summed up in a platitude: with a powerful computer one can rival the output of an office at a fraction of the time and cost. But firms bought the technology as quickly as private consumers did, and in general made better, longer-term investments. To get near the best design systems today, one must don a suit and go knocking at Gensler Associates or Anshen + Allen. Don't arrive without CAD experience and a license, and don't expect entry-level CAD positions at any of the larger offices. Almost all architects at larger firms are designing on CAD, with little help from interns.

The second case is more complex. Practitioners often lament the turn that architectural education has taken in this country toward interdisciplinary "discourse," but most students embrace the broader discussion of their work. A recent SCI-Arc graduate, Ariel Asken speculates that as schooling and practice are no longer parallel enterprises, some may feel obliged to establish institutional credibility in the workplace as a corollary to their theoretical training, rather than an extension of their studies in the "building arts."

Whether practitioners choose to humor its dictates or not, critical theory had at least one major impact on the workplace. Many of the most talented

people entering architecture school in the late eighties did so not to practice and build, but to write, teach, and fill slots at the myriad of new architecture schools that have opened in the last twenty years across the country. Many of these schools and others, more established, survived the recession in tatters, certainly in no shape to support the academic careers of would-be architectural theorists with professional degrees other than PhDs.

Both revolutions in technology and theory promised radically open-ended design environments, architectures without Architecture, to paraphrase Rudofsky. Neither has come to pass, and both failures have left a current crop of graduates with more peers and fewer options than perhaps any generation of designers in the post-WWII period.

With prospects so grim, what could the AIA do to capitalize on this renewed interest in the mainstream institutions of the profession?

Shy of direct subsidies, not much, said most.

With prospects so grim, is there something the AIA could do to make getting licensed to practice architecture in California more attractive?

Kevin McMahon, Head Librarian, SCI-Arc: "Create the illusion that there is work here."

Elizabeth Lemell, student: "Promote the weather. The sun is the only reason people stay."

Michaele Sae offered this suggestion: foster competition. Throughout continental Europe, small firms compete for work through mandated competitions for commissions of any size. Larger firms are encouraged to hire young talent through national agencies that place students with firms in their second and third years. Perhaps Theory isn't the only export we should purchase wholesale from the French.

Joe Day is a recent graduate of SCI-Arc.

The notion of social responsibility and architecture has been present throughout twentieth-century architectural practice and discourse—from Bruno Taut in the first twenty years of this century, to modernist European architecture that reflected the social changes occurring between the wars, to 1960s radicalism embodied in Robert Venturi's reading of Las Vegas, to the celebration of formalist architectural solutions through contemporary postmodernism, and of course recent guerrilla art and architecture activities. In this context, does so-called architectural activism stand the test when compared to other direct forms of political, social, or economic activism either expressed artistically or radically? Do architects and the buildings they create even fit this mold? Does architecture have a relationship to direct action activism as expressed in the struggle for women's, civil, human, or queer rights, environmental activism, homeless advocacy, etc.? Are architects in a position of professional and class conflict vis-a-vis social activism?

In a recent computer on-line article, book, and dissertation search of the topic "Architecture and political/social activism," the results were interesting. Out of 11 databases searched, more than 1136 entries were found, of which 35 were dissertations, 200 historical entries, 300 directly architectural related, and the rest resided in arts and humanities databases making more than half of the entries found in sources other than specifically architectural. Where are the architects writing about the social responsibility of their buildings? If all architects, to a greater or lesser extent, are socially responsive, where is the dialogue?

There are many individuals, collectives, and groups working internationally who are concerned with making socially responsive architecture. The following gives a some highlights locally, nationally, and internationally.

ARCHITECTURE AND DIRECT ACTION ACTIVISM

The Mad Housers, originally formed in Atlanta, reappropriate unused, abandoned land and erect small houses, called huts. All a prospective hut owner must do to obtain a hut is request one, then help build it. *The Mad Housers* don't ask for permission from the system, they don't get permits, and they have no legal right to land. Like *the Mad Housers*, a group in New York called *Casitas*, are taking urban "dead space" and reinventing programs and projects for numerous abandoned sites.

Casitas is a group of guerrilla house builders in New York who work with community residents, housing activists, and city and county governments to provide solutions that are generated by the residents themselves. Community members build *casitas* (houses) on city-owned land as part of gardens leased to community groups by the city or as pioneers appropriating neglected lots. When official approval cannot be given by the state, *Casitas* continue to occupy these discarded spaces, miraculously transforming sites overnight. Both *Casitas* and *The Mad Housers* are reimagining the streets and abandoned spaces of Atlanta, Chicago,

New York, and other cities across the U.S. reusing discarded materials to assist in immediate housing solutions.

ARCHITECTURE AND INFORMATION ACTIVISM

"Zine culture" has now invaded the world of architecture publishing and not too soon. Zine's, the independent magazine revolution, is being championed on the architecture front by a group in Toronto who call themselves "Splinter." The zine founded in 1988 also called *Splinter* has provided a forum for architects, urban theorists, artists, and students who do not see architecture and urban planning interventions living up to the political and social standards they feel are necessary to confront the issues challenging society and the architect's role in providing built solutions. *Splinter* has been effective in Canada and parts of the United States, to change local and regional planning decisions along the lines of housing, public art, public buildings, and planning policy. They have effectively helped sympathetic governmental officials and community groups to engage in dialogue around specific projects, while at the same time lobbying for their own brand of urban solutions and architectural expressions.

The alternative architectural publishing world does not stop with the printed page. The information revolution has found two computer on-line organizations providing information for urban social-scientists, architects, and activists on a host of social, political, and related architectural topics. The two not-

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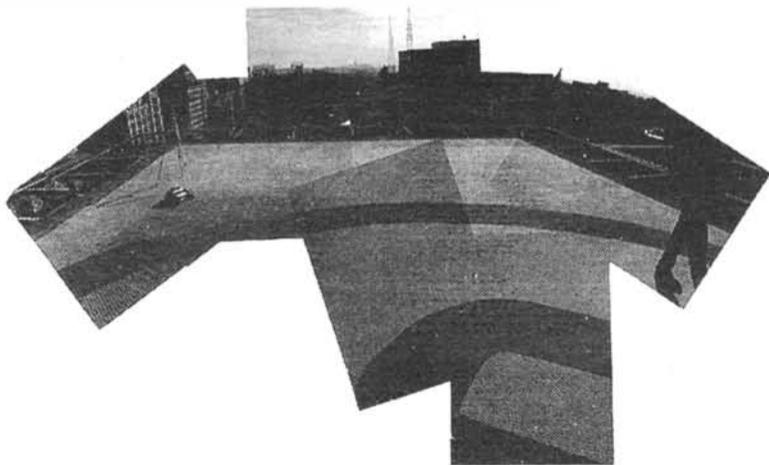
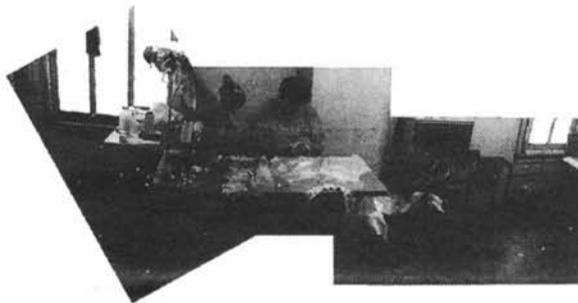
ON BROADWAY: DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

ROBERT ADAMS



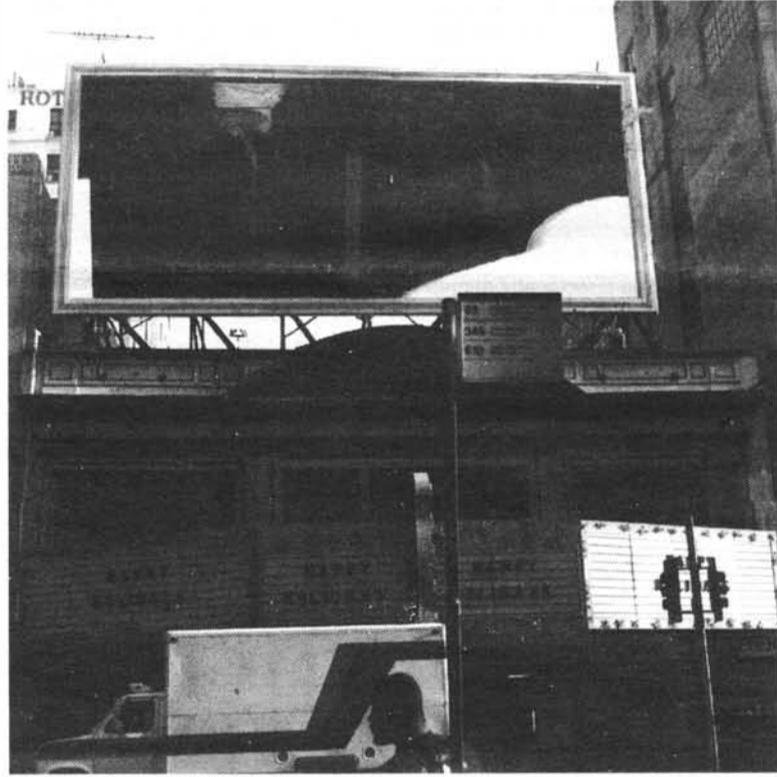
North, past the Arcade Building by several blocks, is the Victor Clothing Store owned by Ramiro Salcedo. Aside from selling clothes and appliances, Victor Clothing, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Salcedo, is full of artifacts that reveal important qualities of **BROADWAY'S** history not found in the files of the CRA or Building Department, or the archives at the Grand Central Library. Referring to the photographs under the plate glass of his desktop, Mr. Salcedo traced the rich history of then unpaved *Forte Calle* before it was named **BROADWAY**, the social and shopping center of Los Angeles thirty years ago where the street cars would pass by old City Hall. Fifty autographed portraits of movie stars, many of them Hispanic, hang along the south wall above the changing rooms, now used for storage. The large room is surrounded by a series of painted murals. Commissioned by Mr. Salcedo, the fourteen year old artist represented daily life on **BROADWAY** and in LA, including himself kneeling, just above Mr. Salcedo's shoulder in the photo above. Ramiro Salcedo tells the story of the restaurant down the block where he would eat lunch when he used to go out on the street. Beyond providing good food the restaurant owner would twice a day sweep the sidewalk the length of one block as a service to the other shop owners, and due to his success certain 'others' looted and burned his restaurant, driving him off **BROADWAY**. It was then that things were not quite as they appeared, that there among the action of **BROADWAY** was a hidden and compelling array of people working, peculiar spaces, austere large walls, signs leaking into the city, and other associations specific to **BROADWAY**.

Above Victor Clothing is another Salcedo business called Top Hat Bridal run by Ramiro Salcedo's sister and mother. A pale green garment production studio in the back is operated by Carolina Lugunas, sister-in-law of the Salcedo family. Unlike the mass production garment industry managed by ANJAC, Carolina Lugunas measures each client, marks and cuts every piece of textile and assembles exquisitely detailed wedding gowns.



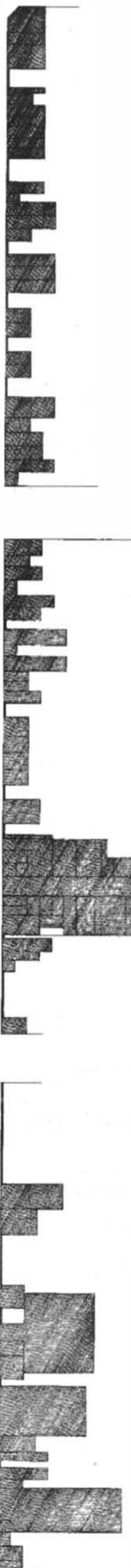
Off **BROADWAY** from the Biltmore Hotel heliport overlooking Pershing Square, one can see the two KRKD Radio towers atop the Arcade building. A building in the foreground has been removed creating a gap, framing a small portion of **BROADWAY**. From Bunker Hill **BROADWAY** leaks through several of these openings, and specifically from the heliport, one can see the Cameo Theater with rooftop billboard displaying an outdated Cherry 7-UP advertisement.

The Cameo, formerly Clune's Broadway, was the first theater on **BROADWAY** made specifically for the new technology of cinema. Designed by Alfred Rosenheim in 1913, this long narrow theater had a sky window above the audience and an electronic billboard at the entrance composed of hundreds of light bulbs and a digital clock. Later a billboard proportioned for twenty-four, 30 x 40" poster boards advertising the feature film replaced this sign. From the street this billboard was repetitive advertising, much like the posters that advertise Snoop Doggy Dogg, Industria del Amor and others wrapping the scaffolding arcade surrounding the vacant Broadway Department Store. As seen from the Biltmore heliport and other Bunker Hill buildings, this sign appeared as a quilted pattern of blurry image/text. The Cameo closed a couple years ago and was converted into retail shops occupying the lobby and light storage in the auditorium. The photo above—at the right—below replaces the outdated Cherry 7-UP, and from the heliport one looks over the shoulder of the film projectionist into the projection port, towards the screen.

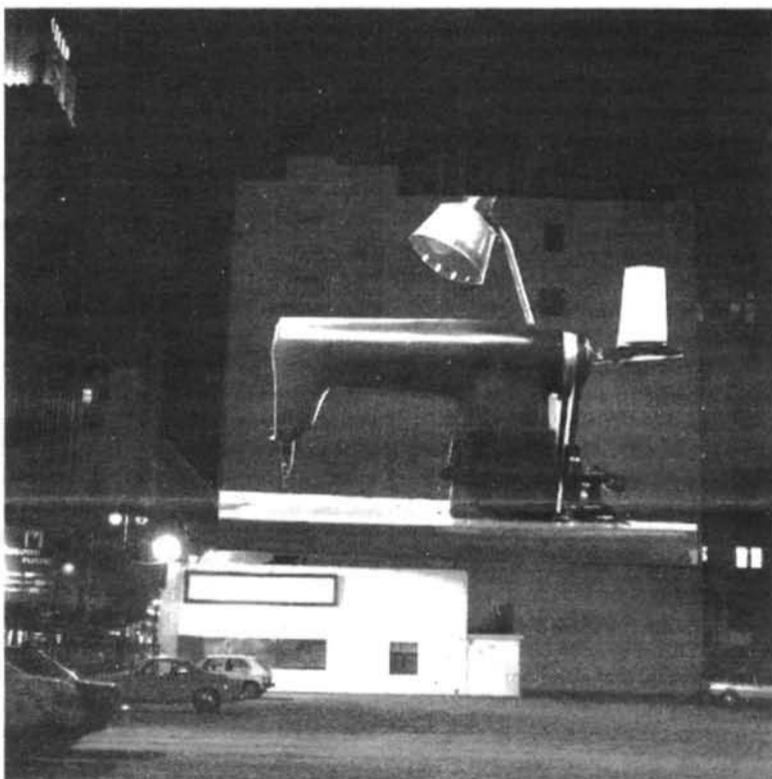


Other building cuts along **BROADWAY** produce large exterior rooms that are surfaced for parking. Each lot has a small food shack that is out scaled against an eight-story blank wall. The demolished building exposes a new wall, leaving behind an outline of its section. These large austere walls are windowless. Some have painted signs that hint at the interior, telling what is being produced or who controls the building. One is painted a rich, deep red. Most, like the metal industrial shed, indicate nothing of their contents. The *Sun Drug Co. Bldg.* is surfaced with a lace-like pattern of ceramic tiles much like the lace on a dress in the display case of Sussy's Brides. This particular building is occupied and active with garment production. Instead of a Miller Beer advertisement, such as the one on the Hotel Figueroa, a six-story sewing machine is painted on the south facade of this garment building, telling of the work going on inside and identifying the location of the garment district.





A survey was made of **BROADWAY** between Fourth and Seventh Streets, to determine building use, occupancy, and square footage utilized. The long plan represents not the familiar building footprint, but rather the compression of **BROADWAY** buildings against the street. The solid black line indicates a vacant building. The most obvious example of this is between Fourth and Fifth Street on the west side of **BROADWAY** where a few buildings in the center of the block are bracketed by the empty Broadway Department Store and the recently closed Newberry's. A perpetual clearance sale forced all products down to the ground level, escalators were boarded up sealing off the upper floors, and finally the metal gate closed, leaving only the inlaid terrazzo sign "Newberry's". in the sidewalk floor. Instantly these buildings become voids in the city, the modern ruins of **BROADWAY**. A long narrow shop 30 x 120 feet uses only the first 20 feet of available space to sell clothes; the long back room remains empty. Another flat shop selling an eclectic variety of goods is less than six feet in depth, while Babak Saghian's clothing store finds itself in the five foot gap between the Cameo Theater and the Pantages Theater.



On Sunday driving east on Sixth Street. Bunker Hill is quiet with few people on the street. Past Grand Central Library, past Pershing Square approaching the intersection at **BROADWAY**—then slowing for the hundreds of people packed onto the sidewalks. On Sunday, **BROADWAY** triples its daily population of security guards acting as jewelry store bouncers, street vendors selling mangos, cucumbers, and ice cream, leaflet distributors handing out coupons for haircuts or religious propaganda, street people collecting cans from restaurants, street preachers raising books and voices to the passersby, shop owners yelling "three for one" for socks and earrings, an accordion player in front of Clifton's Cafeteria, a man selling chewing gum, an El Salvadorian woman selling pornographic magazines from one of the many green news-booths, LAPD passing out parking tickets as fast as they can, layers of signage on the walls and strewn across the sidewalk. Focused on the street, one seldom looks up into the buildings or to the sky.



Driving east on the 10 towards downtown, beyond the aqua-green artificial horizon of the Convention Center, the two KRKD radio transmission towers on top of the Arcade building again are visible in the city. The Arcade Building had a complex program that included a post office, pharmacy, offices, restaurants, a basement assembly hall and KRKD Radio. The Arcade is one of the few **BROADWAY** buildings to accept the daily activity of the street within its long blackened glass covered arcade connecting to Spring Street. As a short cut to the bus stops on Spring Street, this heavily traveled corridor contains electronic stores, swap meets selling many types of gadgets, a botica, restaurant, and hair salon; the former basement assembly hall is now a parking garage.

At night the vacancy along **BROADWAY** is more apparent as security lights come on only in the active buildings. The street activity of the day, is reduced to a few waiting buses below the windows of the Yorkshire Apartments, a group of street cleaners in orange suits working at 4:00 am, and the occasional lone person walking down the street. The dormant Arcade building, closed to the street, projects nothing but an ominous facade of dark windows.

BROADWAY is a place that is constantly under speculation by investors, business people, developers and architects. **BROADWAY** is a social center for two and one half million Hispanic Angelenos. **BROADWAY** is supported by the garment and jewelry trades industries. **BROADWAY**, like other major retail/production streets in America, is a familiar street typology in downtown landscapes. **BROADWAY** is open for, and deserves, further consideration as a place to learn from and act upon.



Work cited: photo processing: Christian Bandi, photography: Robert Adams, survey and drawing: Kyle Scotland, editing: Vic Liptak, Deborah Mackler, advisors: Chava Danielson, Mary-Ann Ray, Robert Mangurian.

for-profit networks, *Hands Net* and *Community Link*, provide networking information and communication services for community organizations related to housing advocacy, urban planning policy issues, housing and legal rights issues, in addition to providing access to congressional forums and educational databases. Housing advocacy information and direct action housing activism have been facilitated by *Community Link* for the past twenty-five years.

LOCAL EFFORTS

A number of socially responsive urban planning and architectural collaborative projects have recently emerged in Southern California. Michael Dear, social scientist and Professor at the University of Southern California, has developed a working-homeless encampment just west of downtown. Collaborating with city officials, the group of professors, students, and community residents has been effective in providing temporary housing for the homeless while assisting in building an interdependent community.

"Adobe LA", a collective of four architects and two artists, are working on a series of interventions at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) as part of "Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public Realm" examining the Latino community's relationship to "negative spaces" in the city. In addition, Adobe LA is producing a video of the

social mapping of cities. The group is also working in a collaborative installation with Mike Davis at the Wexner Center in Ohio that explores the point where cultures collide in the urban landscape.

The Design Professionals' Coalition (DPC), formed after the civil unrest in April 1992, has dedicated itself to providing volunteer design assistance to neglected communities in Los Angeles. The DPC assists community groups and neighborhoods in land use planning, conducting design and planning charrettes, advising community organizers on planning and policy issues and is a conduit of information exchange with other community groups on architectural and design issues. Outreach programs include working with local residents and high school students to understand more about their built environment while encouraging design solutions that are community inspired. The DPC has quickly come to fill a void in Los Angeles with the interface between governmental, commercial, and community interests.

Muschamp concludes his article pitting practice (in a professional sense) against the generation of architectural forms. I believe that a diversity of practice (in every sense) will produce new types of architectural forms while reinventing architectural process. The aforementioned groups reflect a shift from this perspective in the conceptualization, construction, and production of architecture and urban interventions. *Splinter* editors Ken Hayes and Barry Isenor have called

on architects to be socially responsive through the works they make while at the same time pushing the limits of design, theory, and social consciousness. *Splinter* believes architecture must act like a rupture to be effective, or in the words of *Splinter's* manifesto, "The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass." More splinters, please.

Notes

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David Jensen is an architect/media maker and currently works for the Getty Center for History of the Arts and the Humanities.

CYBURBIA: L.A. AS THE NEW FRONTIER, OR GRAVE?

FRED DEWEY

L.A. has long been boosterized as a kind of paradise for commerce and fantasy. It has also been lamented for its lack of a sense of community, for cars out of control, people's retreat into isolation, and the privatization of public space. What if these latter dilemmas are not absences, but effects of a new, emerging type of city?

Scholars have been struggling to find terms for this new landscape and its rumbling conflicts. I would argue L.A. has long been struggling not with suburbia, but with suburbia's transitional nature, gestating a new form which is only now materializing with the development of information and image transmission technologies. Its primary trait is the merger of what we still, in perhaps outmoded fashion, think of as material versus immaterial that is, the real and unreal. It is a built environment that produces and is made of images, information, and formidable strategies of mobilization and security. It is an imaginary city only in the sense of 'setting the stage,' to borrow a brilliant distinction made at a recent Getty symposium on the city and cinema. What is set up is all too real.

L.A. may be the first city truly created by the information revolution, albeit in its early stages. From its takeoff at the turn of the century, the L.A. Times and the Chandler-Otis dynasty and its close friends used real estate holdings and hype to steer the city's development, layout, water supply, political direction, and in turn, the nation. Hollywood and defense/aerospace joined suit, with suburban tracts financed and filled by, and in turn fueling, war production, altogether creating 'environments' with global impact. This resulted in a city produced by and producing a truly unique confluence of forces, what one could call the defense-entertainment-information complex.

The commonality of electronics to the defense industry, the entertainment industry and news production unveils an entirely new paradigm of armed, and somewhat ruthless, semiotic expansionism. Far from a city without a center, a city of multiple identities, whatever heterogeneity or independent public politics arises here is subsumed in L.A.'s design and production of the fantasy-security dome protecting,

imagining, and globalizing the United States. This may be why, as Ed Soja has noted sardonically, the city is ringed by the most formidable array of military bases in the history of the planet.

L.A. has evolved into an anti-polis, a city of pure privacy. Its cybernetic, spatial, political, and economic tendencies sustain a highly productive and diverse world of industry and labor yet, perhaps for the first time in urban history, thwart development of a free, public realm as reward and dutiful repository for this endless labor. In an increasingly electronified loop, those excluded and crushed play their critical role. Social breakdown and neglect are not merely 'entrenched.' They are becoming part of the nest of forces driving the development of an electronically saturated and secure world. Fear has always been a part of the city of nets. But far from a failure, it may turn out to have been all along one of the critical forces propelling the push inward, ever more into not the self, but the private, producing a technologized, secured, fantasy realm to blanket the world.

The built environment has always been about the geography of power. This is no less true when the netting and electronicization of our environment, through modems, cable, mobile technologies and the 'air touch' of cellular and microwave, make the goal of absolute, narcissistic control of 'reality' materially attainable. The lure of cyburbia is precisely to live in a technologically protected, secure, safe, dreamlike and monitored world. When truly personalized, cyburbia may offer as its portal to community an interactive screen of electronic selves and agents that arise and vaporize week by week. Yet as the net overlays and weaves holes in material boundaries, human metaphysical encapsulation, on the one hand, and total vulnerability and degradation on the other, grow. The privileged over-class retreat behind their enveloping electro-mechanical buffer, while, those without, a large and growing group, experience the brutish facticity and chaos, not of fantasy, but of its abdication and effect, the real.

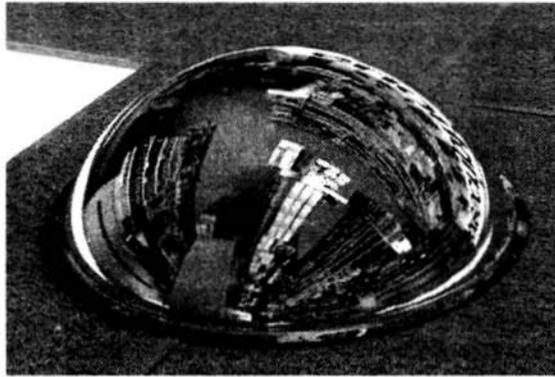
L.A. is approaching its cyburban anti-polis status by a radical advance in spatial containment and elimination. For even as it refines its thematization and control of reality, bringing the privileged together electronically inside secured, gated enclaves, problems

on the 'outside' deepen. It is not by chance the two most resonant riots of the late 20th century occurred here, in Watts and South Central. A cybernetic loop has been established, whereby the perception of increase in crime and chaos, i.e., their threat, whether true or not, propels desire for ever more exclusive control, security, and monitoring to protect what is 'inside,' the fantasy of immaculate, non-human existence.

The breakdown of the real into toxicity, crime, traffic jams, poverty, and community disintegration become caught in what cyberneticists call a feedback loop, but what I would prefer to call the material, built environment. They provide the necessary, and dependant, impetus for industrial development of an immaculate world where none truly come face to face. In L.A., first there was the closeup, then the media event, and now the virtual event. It is, in some profound ways, a neo-medieval paradigm. The real world is a lost cause, and so we retreat. As more and more real communities fail, the push is on for ever more refined and secure castle-enclaves, points of entry into, and exclusion from, the magic kingdom of infinite desire.

These pathologies driving the expansion of cyburbia find their origins in suburbia, where flight meant leaving unfortunates behind and turning one's back on real problems. This has profoundly restructured the process of cultural division and segregation. Suburbia's safe, secure, clean and orderly private space meant one could indulge every primal fantasy in a technological, built way, disappearing into communities where everyone was apparently just like you. This was the first nail driven into the coffin of the polis. In time, as we now see, suburbia reveals the ravages of its inhumanity, both internally and externally.

Cyburbia's hubris, which is L.A.'s hubris, first and foremost, is to provide the door to never having to face the errors of our suburban and inner city past. In cyburbia, the desperation of the excluded becomes electronically bonded to the retreat of the elite. Far from representing the problems produced by exclusion, fantasy, and security obsessions, in the new virtual realm, the real becomes the ghetto, a place losers end up. It is the thing to be technologically avoided. As net surfers and cybernauts put it rather graphically, everything human outside the cyber-realm becomes 'meat.'



GLARE

There was an arresting moment in a film we saw recently. Beyond swirling blue and black images of desolate industrial housing appeared a hesitant shimmer that quickly developed into the fierce glare of a sunset reflected by a tall mirrored glass building. It took over the screen and left an indelible image.

Glare is the image's power to compel you to look into it's brightest spot.

We realized that *glare*, not "filmic space" or "montage" might be where we could begin to talk about cinematic architecture in our everyday world. What glare does is upset the balance between a specific point and it's background. It's an effect, an irritant that creates the commodity's edge, determines it's ability to stand-out. If we've made objects into rivaling images our reward is that they *glare* back at us, solicit our attention by affronting us. The screen is the locus of glare.

The glare of cinema has fixated architecture, which always used to make spaces dark. Film has been latched onto by architectural theory as a metaphor for the narrative complexity and spatial qualities that architecture has always already had. What has become compelling is the absolute control of the image, the capacity to fix your view on a single edited experience. Disregard claims of intrinsic similarities; this is architecture threatened and envious of the new techniques of projecting images of desirability and power.

Surveillance and the Spectacle are not antagonists: they collaborate to keep the whole world in thrall. In Cinecitta, you **SQUINT OR GO BLIND**.

Glare & the Antic Architecture Cinema, Splinter #4.

Dialogue in cyberspace is, contrary to hype, ill-equipped to affect or reign in powerful interests moving ever further ahead of the citizen. Information quantity is multiplying, but control of distribution, affecting what gets through, is concentrating in ever fewer hands. Open 'meeting places' in cyberspace may never make the leap to dealing with problems in the real world, and therein lies their tragic lure. People meet to share common interests in private, hardly to work out and face intractable differences between real, sweaty, and flawed human beings. Those assemblies which can occur, do so almost entirely now in cyberspace, where anything can be monitored, infiltrated, recorded, or steered off course by hard-to-identify agents. The most obvious and important trait is never discussed: electronic, or virtual, communities have a very hard time enduring, in a meaningful, built, face to face sense. When real people do meet, they may be driven further apart, to the edge of violence.

The reduction of community to a symbolic and semiotic technology leaves the real as the target of cleansing, a world of privatization with no privacy, existence with no substance, immaculate life on one side and violence on the other. The long-trumpeted suburban silent majority, with all its apathy, is not about withdrawing from and refusing power, as Jean Baudrillard has argued, but about people being withdrawn from, and beginning to hate, each other: it is atomization without open domination. As Tony Vidler noted in the same recent Getty colloquia, the panopticon of surveillance has been superseded, and we need new models.

Suburbia first developed the deadly triad of separation, virtual sensations, and total mobilization. Positioned in production lines, people were then placed happily in pleasure domes. The car got you from one to the other. Inside controlled enclosed spaces, we gained the 'sense' of the uniqueness of the non-unique, through the 'presence' of glamorous events and personalities on TV or goods in the mall, more 'real' than screaming kids and arguing parents across the lawn. As Anne Friedberg has argued in *Window Shopping*, the automobile may itself be a training for virtual space, where one is cut off, enclosed, moving through a world one did not create by virtual window.

In advancing all this, cyberspace is the very definition of ideology, as Scott Bukatman noted in the Getty symposium. No longer does ideology need to be reduced to statements, beliefs, or political platforms. Now it can exist as interactive worlds, entire labyrinthine plateaus of virtuality. What is left out of the

discussion is that, however much Internet romantics see the data ocean as our salvation, they have de facto given up on face-to-face accountability and accessibility. This is not just an abstract problem. It is a problem of the built environment. Where do people go and exist while net-life unfolds?

L.A. promotes a strange and dangerous notion, that the face-to-face realm is avoidable, that privacy is better. Its entire technological and conceptual base pushes us to believe imagination, fantasy, and thinking come from retreat into privacy, rather than from being in the public space. But the face to face realm is messy, like the real world. And just as we failed to take charge of the development of suburbia, with its proliferation of Levittowns and freeways, we are now once again turning from the messy real into a technological fantasy of order that may well be catastrophic.

Interests driving the new frontier are hardly going to discuss its effect on civic life and interaction. But how do we deal with a world where ever larger regions of life are severed from public visibility and accountability? The L.A.-cyburban paradigm suggests the single perspective is impossible. Unfortunately, it is being replaced with a realm of endless perspectives folding inward, and likely, with cyburbia in full flower, no stable position whatsoever.

The model, I would argue, for this new cyburban regime of no viewpoint, is hardly the agora, with its open discussion and debate between real citizens, but the over-worked model of Disneyland. Here a totally privatized fantasy disguises control of the constitution, control, and expansion of the world by a corporatized few. It is a world we must enter and agree to before we can experience something, and still we must pay. It is a place where point of view does not matter. We 'buy in.' If we do not, we're 'out.'

Disneyland has become the folkloric trope of our era, like Coney Island was in its day. Yet to see this as theme park is radically insufficient. It is here we find the link not just between space and theme, but between the cybernetic world of feedback, control, monitoring and the built environment. The control and rigidity of experience which Disneyland symbolizes is based on constant, unblockable control and monitoring: it is a force which lets go only when you're out of money. Mechanized, automatic, navigable, and claustrophobically banal, Disneyland is a transitional technology, where people do not create or revise the reality they traverse, but decide how to traverse a reality created by others, all inside a secure perimeter. One learns to forget the desire to create reality oneself, and instead to experience the pleasure of a machine the mass is said to desire.

In cyburbia, our reduction to laboring animals in pure society becomes invisible. People will be able to work at home, conversing with people continents away, never having to meet the stranger across the street or next door, or, for that matter, the boss. Not to mention someone of a different group, race or class. When plugged into the screen, confronting a real person becomes a threat, a danger to immersion. Yes, one can leave a hundred messages on the boss' E-mail, but what then? Will five hundred employees each get to talk one-on-one with the boss, or will it be Perot's town hall, where the boss speaks to five hundred, personally, at five hundred locations?

Just as suburbia and its partner the decaying inner city have thwarted and undermined material possibilities for public space, cyburbia represents the end of public interaction and movement across, and overcoming, differences of hierarchy, race, class, and gender. It has replaced this real movement with a pseudo-movement of signs. The technicalized, professionalized bureaucratic buffer of the 20th century is expanded and transformed into a post-modern electronic curtain, enveloping everyone in their own private, segregated world of consumption, labor, speculative existence and total penetration. Far from pulling back the electronic curtain to reveal the men behind the levers, cyburbia suggests the feudalistic politics of caste and invisible power, lurking under industrialism and bureaucracy, are now rationalizing themselves into the only remaining domains of existence.

This is why place, location and physical space, far from being antiquated by cyberspace, become the key issue again. Bringing people together face-to-face, and making this a constructive, ongoing and secure activity for self-government is a task professionals can ill afford to ignore if our freedom is to survive. In the face of cyburbia, we must devise ways to encourage different people to come together as equals, face to face, to govern and create their own worlds, not to navigate worlds handed to them. This is the abyss facing architecture, design, and community - what William Gibson, describing Singapore, calls 'Disneyland with the death penalty.' Resistance is springing up, but architecture and the human must first become better friends, or they may well become enemies.

Fred Dewey resides in Los Angeles and has written for London's New Statesman, LACPS' Framework and the L.A. Weekly.

LOS ANGELES FORUM FOR ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN

The Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design provides a framework for design professionals and members of the general public to explore, evaluate, and impact the development of architecture in Los Angeles. Throughout its seven years of operation, the Forum has brought together young designers, seasoned professionals, critics, urban theorists, artists, students, and people interested in their physical environment in a diverse series of activities. The Forum seeks to reach out beyond the confines of professional organizations, schools and established groups and does not limit itself to one approach to design or theory. It provokes discussion, seeks out places and designs unseen or unnoticed by the general public, publicizes architectural investigation and commentary, and promotes the serious exploration of strategies to influence the development of our urban environment.

Founded in January of 1987, the Forum has organized lecture series, a number of special events, a theory reading group, produced a quarterly newsletter, has published nine national-distributed pamphlet-sized books, authored a Rizzoli International book *Experimental Architecture in Los Angeles*, and since April 1992 has worked with other groups, architects and institutions to understand its community and participate in activities to rebuild it. Financial support for Forum projects has been received from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, and from many members over the years. The Forum is widely recognized as one of the most active architecture and urban design groups in Southern California.

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