

**Spatial Injustice in Los Angeles: An Evaluation of Downtown L.A.'s Privately Owned
Public Open Space**

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Chapter 1: Why Public Space?

Introduction

This study is about space, how it affects people, and how people affect it. In particular this study is interested in public space – how it is created, used and altered to suit the needs of some or all. The need for quality public space today is perhaps more urgent than ever, as privatization increasingly threatens the public sphere. Public participation in urban space creates relationships and builds communities but there has no doubt been a decline in people's lives in public – a result perhaps of technological advances and increasing privatization of traditionally publicly provided services. With municipal governments facing constant budget deficits, it is no wonder cities are increasingly turning to the private sector to provide public goods and services.

We turn then to public space as a primary forum for establishing one's relationship with their community. What truly makes space public is the people who use it and the ways in which they are used. This study, in addition to being a valuable guide for planners and designers, is meant to provoke, inspire and facilitate community reclamation of downtown L.A.'s public spaces. Public spaces are valuable inasmuch as they give us a place to relax, to people watch, to experience people and space spontaneously, and to serve as community meeting places. This study recognizes the tropes of idealizing and trying to recreate the European piazza. Rather, this study suggests the modern role of public space is not as a central bazaar of goods, services and social interactions that it once was but as a place for people to express themselves spontaneously in an increasingly predictable (and privatized) urban culture.

The focus of this study is on the interaction between the private and public, with particular interest in the actors that influence the creation of space, the users of the space (and just as important, the non-users) and how we might be able to positively change public space

and the dynamics that create it. I am interested in the actors involved in the design, construction, and regulation of spaces, as well as the people who actually use them.

In the first chapter I review the literature on privately-owned public space, using theoretical work from Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco to inform my later discussions. The literature necessarily covers the fields of sociology, geography, city planning and urban design, and architecture and landscape architecture. The literature considers the reciprocal relationship between space and social relations and covers minute details in design such as the use of benches to broad political-economic trends that shape how and why people use space.

Chapter 2 considers the history of privately-owned public spaces, using New York and San Francisco to set the stage for a detailed history of development and space in downtown Los Angeles. The history is provided to give a social and political context to the development of downtown and the spaces produced through the development process. The chapter focuses on the actors that influenced the creation of privately-owned public spaces downtown.

Chapter 3 provides evaluations of all 27 sites considered in this study. This chapter is the first to study so many spaces in downtown L.A. Along with each site is provided a short description of the development process, the type of space and how the space fits into the theoretical criticisms of privately-owned public space in the city. Also important from this chapter is the identification of the different types of spaces produced.

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the Downtown Design Guidelines and rates the spaces according to two criteria – one set produced by the city of Los Angeles, the other an adaptation of categorizations by a critical urban design theorist. These evaluations give an indication of the discrepancies between how space is viewed within city government and the

critical literature on Los Angeles's urban form. Also revealing from these evaluations are the prevalence of exclusionary technologies in all 27 sites. This is no surprise, but a reaffirmation of the bulk of critical theory about the privatization of space. Chapter 3 also introduces these sites into the larger context of downtown Los Angeles by evaluating the sites spatially against demographic data for downtown.

Finally, Chapter 4 looks at changing practices around public space provision in Los Angeles and considers ways in which these spaces may be improved and reclaimed by providing recommendations for planners, architects and community members.

Literature

In this section I discuss the literature that guides and influences this study and on which this study also builds. There is extensive literature on privately-owned public spaces from the fields of city planning, urban design, sociology and geography, and this study draws on all backgrounds to analyze privately owned public open space in Downtown Los Angeles. There is a rift however, in the literature on the privatization of space, between the theory that considers space and social relations and the study of the practice of open space provision, design and maintenance. Because city planners, architects, developers and policy-makers are often faced with economic, political and organizational barriers of trying to function within a diverse and complex city structure, much of the important social critiques of cities from Marxist geographers and postmodern urbanists are lost in the daily practice of shaping a city. The literature is mostly reflective of this divide, as few studies of downtown privatization in Los Angeles or elsewhere connect space concretely with the way they affect people, and people with the way they affect space. In my review of the literature on privatization, I must therefore make a distinction between work that makes theoretical contributions to the discussion of space in the

city and social relations, and that which analyzes the on-the ground forces that produce, maintain, design and legislate space in the city. I also highlight and commend more recent literature that has begun to integrate discussion of postmodern urban theory on space with discussions of city policy, planning and politics.

This study contributes to the already robust literature on privately-owned public space in cities by building on the conclusions of previous authors who found that privately produced public spaces are intentionally designed to be exclusive and serve only the needs of the corporate worker. My study finds that downtown Los Angeles, despite having no official incentive zoning policy, has and is still creating privately owned public spaces that are intentionally exclusive. Through my evaluation of a comprehensive list of downtown spaces, I argue as others do, that the exclusionary technologies of privately owned public open space are still evolving, and consider ways to change the dominant modes of public space production in downtown L.A. This discussion will contribute to the theoretical understanding of privately owned public space through its synthesis of a diverse sampling of source material and a practical discussion of possible solutions to this socio-spatial dilemma.

William Whyte (1980) provided the first study of New York's plazas and recorded the ways in which people interacted with the spaces. Whyte found that many of the plazas he studied were barren of features and as a result, of people. Whyte concluded that diminutive improvements such as seating, flower beds and water made downtown plazas much more attractive to downtown pedestrians. Whyte suggested that these plazas were designed incidentally, by architects and developers who were trying to meet the newly implemented downtown zoning ordinance in an economical manner. Whyte recognizes most plazas as being exclusionary, but suggests it is incidental. Whyte's observation that the plazas exclude a broad

range of “undesirables”, including “bag women, people who act strangely in public, “hippies,” teenagers, older people, street musicians, vendors of all kinds,”¹ and other harmless urban characters introduces the discussion of social exclusion through space and design. Whyte’s work is also important in that his use of time-lapse video and detailed observations provide a methodology for recording behavior in public spaces and in his attention to minute design changes that have profound effects on the use and attractiveness of urban plazas to pedestrians.

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tridib Banerjee have written extensively on the private production of public space in Los Angeles, and this study is in many ways inspired by their work. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, in their 1998 book *Urban Design Downtown*, give a thorough overview of the production of privately-owned public space in downtown Los Angeles and San Francisco. In line with the arguments of Marxist geographers and the sociological perspective of Smithson, Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee argue that America’s post-WWII capitalist consumer culture shaped urban policies that sought to bring corporate entities downtown through economic incentives. The result of these urban renewal policies was an abundant creation of privately-owned public space in downtown L.A.

Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee’s text is perhaps most valuable for its historical account of American downtown transformation and its in-depth look at public space privatization as a result of urban renewal policies. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee suggest downtown acts as industry, managing the economy of cities by managing capital, marketing ideas, by acting as power brokers and making decisions that affect the wealth and wellbeing of the city’s residents. Through the lens of this political economy, Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee trace the development of privately owned public open space to the concentration of corporate influence and the information sector to downtown. With a focus on the production of the downtown built

environment, Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee give a political-economic analysis of downtown development that for the first time links behind-the-scenes development negotiations with the larger political-economic influences and transformations of the American city. The study's focus on downtown Los Angeles in particular, provides much information and analysis referenced in this study.

Ed Soja's postmodern urban theory from the Los Angeles school provides a theoretical basis for understanding the interaction between space and social relations. Soja argues for "the reassertion of a critical spatial perspective in contemporary social theory and analysis,"² one that understands space, time, history and geography simultaneously. Los Angeles is *the* global city epitomized by its downtown whose skyscrapers serve "as attachment points for silvery webs of financial and commercial transactions extending practically everywhere on earth."³ Through this discussion of Los Angeles Soja exposes the dialectical interaction of space and social relation – "space in itself may be primordially given, but the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience."⁴ Here Soja introduces the reciprocal relationship between space and social relations. Specifically Soja writes about notions of the urban center, and develops the idea that spatial organization and social conditions are inextricably linked and must be studied systemically and locally. In the city "the nodality of the center defines and gives substance to the specificity of the urban, its distinctive social and spatial meaning. Urbanization and the spatial divisions of labour associated with it revolve around a socially constructed pattern of nodality and the power of the occupied centers both to cluster and disperse, to centralize and decentralize, to structure spatially all that is social and socially produced."⁵

Smithsimon uses the example of New York's Battery Park City to make significant contributions to the literature about post modern analyses of urban public space, its production, and effects on neighborhoods and communities. Of particular value from Smithsimon's dissertation is his analysis of New York's bonus plazas (plazas created through New York's 1961 Zoning Ordinance – 503 spaces identified and analyzed by Jerrold S. Kayden) arguing that previous studies of public space, whether publicly or privately owned, fail to identify and understand the role of the primary actors and decision makers active in the production of the space. Smithsimon finds that in almost all cases New York's bonus plazas are designed to be intentionally exclusive, that developers drive the development of the spaces attached to their buildings and that architects design in compliance with the vision of developers. Intrinsic to this argument is that developers and architects know how design can attract and exclude some types of users over others, yet choose to design the spaces the way they have for reasons outlined by Loukaitou-Sideris, Banerjee and others.

In addition to looking at the actors involved in producing the space, Smithsimon suggests a historical and contextual analysis of the space production in order to better understand the reciprocal relationship between space and social relations. In particular Smithsimon draws on Marxist geographers David Harvey and Janet Abu-Lughod to place the observations of Jacobs and Whyte into a broader global cities context that includes the economic and social factors that influenced the development of public space. Smithsimon synthesizes the micro-level observation with the systemic analyses of Marxist geographers to further make the point that space and social relation have a reciprocal relationship. That is, space is created out of social relations (in our case out of Western urban capitalism that promotes downtown corporate development and public/private partnerships), has effects on

users (how people use/don't use and perceive the space,) and in response to these effects, users continue the feedback cycle by again changing the space to better suit their needs.

Smithsimon also highlights the importance of programming, which he argues is more significant in a space's exclusionary qualities than is the actual design of the space. The building of downtown luxury apartments, high-rise corporate office towers and the amenities that support and sustain these developments play a larger role in keeping people out than the physical design of the spaces. This paper is similarly concerned with programmatic planning as a tool of exclusion, and uses design as a starting point for looking at intentional exclusion and methods of creating inclusionary public open space.

With Smithsimon's notion of space and social relations maintaining a reciprocal relationship, it follows that study of space should consider the people affected by the space and who in turn affect the space – the users. Where much urban research about urban plazas focuses on their exclusionary properties and the social effects they have on those who are left out of these spaces, Smithsimon posits that these spaces are in fact more valuable as an indication of self-replicating and reinforced social hierarchies, arguing “that the significance of these spaces is not their effect on the poor but on the rich; that they are most important to understand not as sites of oppression but of elite reproduction.”⁶ Space acts not as an active agent of oppression, but is “most often a tool or a weapon to maintain or establish privilege.”⁷

Kayden et al. provide a valuable evaluation of New York's privately-owned public spaces that inspired a similar study in San Francisco, and from which this study also finds much inspiration. Kayden et al.'s study is notable for its thoroughness in identifying and compiling observational and archival data from all of Manhattan's 503 privately owned open spaces, and creating a database of the spaces for the city planning department. Additionally, Kayden et al.

introduce policy into the discussion of privately owned public space. Kayden et al. look closely at New York's 1961 Zoning Ordinance, which codified incentive zoning into city planning code and formally encouraged the provision of privately owned public open space.

Kayden's evaluation finds that New York City's 39 year old zoning resolution has produced a staggering number of privately owned public spaces but that the number has not been matched by a similar number of *quality* public spaces. Kayden does suggest that tighter regulations on the production of privately owned public spaces did produce higher quality and more publicly used spaces, but that in the end, most privately owned public spaces created as a result of the 1961 Zoning Ordinance are in fact more private than they are public. Often, Kayden found, property owners deny public access, annex the spaces for private use, and the removal of vital amenities, making the spaces essentially private.⁸

Kayden et al. provide a legalistic definition of privately-owned public open space that informs further discussion of public spaces. Kayden et al. define privately-owned public space as "a physical place located on private property to which the owner has granted legally binding rights of access and use to members of the public, most often in return for something of value from the City to the owner."⁹

Although Kayden et al. touch on the reasons developers liked the ordinance and the rationale behind the ordinance, Kayden et al. fall, like Jacobs and Whyte, into the trap of viewing the exclusionary design of the spaces as incidental, and despite their mild critique of the spaces created under the ordinance, focus on city policy over the goals of the architects and developers who produced and designed the space. Kayden et al. acknowledge that designers and developers did design their spaces to further their own agendas, taking advantage of the zoning ordinance to reap financial rewards, but fail to recognize these actors as primary forces in the

exclusionary process. Nonetheless, Kayden et al.'s analysis provides a systematic model for analyzing privately owned public open space and was the first in a long series of critiques of incentive zoning policies and the spaces they produced.

The 2008 report conducted by the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) indexes and rates privately owned public open spaces differently than Kayden et al.'s work in that its basis for analyzing spaces relies exclusively on the requirements of San Francisco's 1985 downtown plan, which like New York, formalized an incentive zoning program. Although this analysis is valuable for San Francisco in identifying and doing a simple evaluation of pre and post downtown plan is privately owned public open spaces, the SPUR policy paper is most important for its suggestions of ways in which to improve existing spaces and ensure the success of future privately owned public spaces. Again, however the SPUR report fails to include a discussion of primary actors outside of city planner and architects removed from the direction of the space. The SPUR report also contains little discussion of the implications of these spaces on the broader social context of downtown but instead focuses on how the 1985 downtown plan shaped development and the creation of public space.

Of note from this report is the distinction between the ways in which spaces were created, which for Los Angeles, as we find later in the study, is much more complex than in cities with overarching downtown incentive zoning ordinances. The SPUR report and Kayden et al. show that zoning ordinances and design guidelines have a demonstrable effect on improving the quality of public space produced by the private sector, but that even with marked improvements in the design of the spaces, design guidelines and principles only go so far in mitigating the exclusionist agendas of downtown developers.

SPUR and Kayden et al.'s studies provide histories of the first two cities to implement incentive zoning ordinances, and demonstrate some of the successes and tensions between city design policies, architects and developers

Davis through his historical critique of dystopian Los Angeles, in *City of Quartz*, demonstrates the importance of studying the local history of social, class, and racial exclusion in addition to the global forces transforming cities, and ties this discussion directly into architectural design. Davis similarly makes similar connections as Smithsimon in contending that the exclusionary designs of downtown public spaces are the product of an active and intentional private agenda. Davis, like Flusty, also contends that forces and technologies of exclusion are becoming more and more subtle to those intended to use the space, but ever more apparent to those who are excluded by it. For our purposes, Davis provides a critical history of downtown development and modernist visions of downtown Los Angeles under Mayor Tom Bradley in addition to his social critique of the present day spatial apartheid of downtown Los Angeles.

There is similarly much literature on the "citadel" design of downtown plazas which this study uses to critique spaces in Los Angeles. Whyte, without making the jump from design to exclusionary intentionality, was the first to document the ways in which urban plazas attract and repel different types of users, noting that specific design elements such as seating, sunlight and location of the plaza influence a space's popularity. Loukaitou-Sideris' *Designing the Inaccessible Plaza* (1990) provides an outline of some common design features found in bonus plazas that are intended to exclude. Loukaitou-Sideris finds that plazas built during the 1960s and 70s downtown redevelopment share common characteristics, such as rectangular, concrete form, fixed benches, modern sculpture, water elements, limited color palette and other design

conventions that are intended to keep unwanted guests out. Loukaitou-Sideris' analysis builds on Whyte's by making the connection between design and the developer's exclusionary agenda. Davis (1991) also ties his critique of spatial injustice in Los Angeles directly to specific design elements in what he describes as the militarization of Los Angeles through architecture. Flusty elaborates further on design and exclusion in *Building Paranoia* (1994) and categorizes different types of space based on distinctive exclusionary technologies. F

Francis and Marcus (1998), through the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) provide design guidelines for public open space, and guidelines specific to plazas and improving their use. Their suggestions provide an updated version of his suggestions for improving the urban plaza that Whyte studied for so many hours that include discussions of programming and retail vendors.

Steven Flusty's *Buidling Paranoia* provides a detailed analysis of the types of technologies used to filter out undesirables in what he terms "interdictory space." Flusty identifies five types of space that are useful for our analysis of downtown Los Angeles' exclusionary spaces, and a few of which Flusty engages with directly.

Slippery space "cannot be reached, due to contorted, protracted or missing paths of approach."¹⁰ *Crusty* space defends against undesirables by blocking out most of the public with walls and gates. *Prickly* space is uncomfortable to occupy through the use of spikes on sitting ledges or rounded benches to prevent loiterers from staying long, or the homeless from napping on benches. Unlike *crusty* and *slippery* space, prickly space can maintain a high number of users while still repelling undesirables. *Stealthy* space is hard to find, often hidden or obscured from view. *Stealthy* space's existence is often only known by those who use and are intended to use it most. Finally, *jittery* space is heavily surveilled, often by mounted cameras, and gives the

feeling that one's movement is constantly being monitored. Together these refined interdictory technologies effectively filter undesirables while having little effect on the intended users of space.

The critical literature of privately-owned public space gives this study a framework for looking at similar spaces in Los Angeles and other cities in the U.S. and internationally. It is through this critical and multidisciplinary framework that we look at privately-owned public open space in the context of a growing Los Angeles.

Chapter 2: Histories of Privately-Owned Public Open Spaces

The New York and San Francisco Experience

The history of privately-owned public space is closely linked with urban renewal policies of the 1950s and 1960s that tried to stem the flow of people and capital from city centers out to the suburbs. New York in 1961 adopted a zoning ordinance that institutionalized incentive zoning and the creation of bonus plazas. San Francisco followed suit in 1985 with its downtown plan. In New York, the zoning ordinance came as a reaction to the effect of modern skyscrapers and their effect on the streetscape. The 1916 Zoning Resolution was found to produce “wedding cake” buildings that, in an effort to maximize rentable floor space, covered almost all of the lot on the ground floor and as they rose vertically covered less and less of the lot area, creating a tiered building ending in a top-floor vertex, much like a wedding cake.¹¹ The zoning resolution was introduced to combat these wedding cake building and provide ground floor open space by encouraging, rather than requiring, the provision of public amenities.

This was the first codification of incentive zoning policy. In exchange for extra floor area for their buildings (in the form of more stories, and higher buildings) the building owner would be required to provide a publicly accessible plaza. In New York developers jumped at the

opportunity to increase the amount of leasable space in their buildings, as 70 percent of commercial office buildings constructed from 1966 to 1975 that qualified for the zoning variance took advantage of the program.¹² In total, 503 privately-owned public open spaces have been built in 320 office, residential and community buildings under New York's zoning resolution and is "one of the most effective demonstrations of law's power to promote specific design outcomes."¹³ Of the 503 spaces built plazas are the most abundant (167), followed by arcades (88), residential plazas (57) and a handful of other types of spaces, for a total of over 3.5 million square feet of privately-owned public space.¹⁴

The zoning ordinance originally only covered plazas and arcades, but over the years was expanded to include elevated plazas, covered pedestrian space, sunken plazas and open air concourses. In 1975 the ordinance integrated Whyte's observations about what makes successful public space by introducing seating, retail, trees, and other small design requirements into the resolution.¹⁵ In 1982 the resolution was again amended to include more pedestrian-friendly design elements including a varied color palette. The 1961 resolution also established an administrative process through which designs are to pass in order to gain city approval.

In San Francisco the zoning laws were similarly adapted to produce more ground level air and light in the central business district. Like New York, the 1985 San Francisco Downtown Plan combated the trend for downtown office building to occupy the entire footprint of a building site and provide no open space accessible from the street.¹⁶ San Francisco and New York, in an effort create more open space downtown, used open space as a justification to keep buildings away from the street line.

New York and San Francisco's privately-owned public space histories are well documented and their results analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. In both cases the central

business district was already constructed, and the changes in zoning code were merely a way to codify and mandate design into new downtown developments while having the added benefit of providing “public” amenities.

Urban Renewal and the Creation of Privately-Owned Public Spaces in Downtown Los Angeles

Los Angeles, in contrast to San Francisco and New York, was not concerned with issues of light and air in its downtown. In fact, Los Angeles in the mid 20th century was simply concerned about having a downtown at all. It is as a result of downtown redevelopment strategies that today’s downtown was created, with privately-owned public spaces intimately tied into the policies that helped lure business into the L.A. core.

Key to the urban renewal process in downtown was the razing of the Bunker Hill district. “Redevelopment in the Los Angeles CBD started with the drafting by the CRA of the *Proposed Urban Renewal Plan* which was adopted by the Los Angeles City Council in March 1959. The adoption of *The Redevelopment Plan* established the Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project.”¹⁷ Bunker Hill was first designated for redevelopment in 1951 by the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA), but it wasn’t until “1960 [that] the CRA began acquisition of Bunker Hill properties, relocation of residents and business, demolition of buildings, and site-improvement work.”¹⁸ The CRA was established in 1948 with the goal of “revitalizing, refurbishing, and renewing economically underserved areas of Los Angeles.”¹⁹ Bunker Hill, before designation as a blighted area, had a population of almost ten thousand that had been hit especially hard by Los Angeles’ fervent suburbanization of middle-class residents and business to more fashionable neighborhoods. After years of serving the downtown aristocracy, Bunker Hill had become home to overcrowded, dilapidated tenements, transients and other undesirables.²⁰ But much of the literature promoting this image of Bunker Hill was

produced and distributed by the CRA and others interested in the rejuvenation of downtown. Others argue Bunker Hill, prior to its razing beginning in 1951, was “still a good residential environment, but for a different segment of the population” - mostly low income males living in tenement housing.²¹ Accounts of mid 20th century Bunker Hill are indeed mixed – “some tell of a tightly-knit and multi-ethnic community, of mom-and-pop dry goods stores and corner bars where afternoons were spent listening to ballgames on the radio. The CRA/LA’s archival photographs of the area, on the other hand, show disintegrating clapboard tenements, hole-ridden interiors with rudimentary sanitary fixtures, and raggedly dressed children walking along the dangerously steep hillside.”²² Starting in the early 1960s, the CRA “utilized the power of eminent domain and tax increment financing to take possession of the twenty-plus blocks atop Bunker Hill, evict the entire remaining population, and raze all existing structures flat.”²³

The CRA’s Downtown plan originally faced fierce competition from the developing Westside, including the skyscrapers of what is now Century City and the increasing influence of the entertainment industry.²⁴ Davis argues that the Watts Rebellion of 1965 helped save the CRA’s downtown plan by galvanizing, as a response to fears of a nearby black militant population, support by the ruling class of downtown revitalization.²⁵ But “in 1971, the so-called Silver Book plan for downtown Los Angeles was published, ushering in two decades during which the city’s Community Redevelopment Agency became the dominant force in urban redevelopment schemes throughout the city, especially in the downtown and most spectacularly in Bunker Hill.”²⁶ Five-term mayor Tom Bradley was also an influential figure in the redevelopment of downtown. Bradley was first elected mayor of Los Angeles in 1973 and was initially opposed by downtown business and the Central City Association, but Bradley soon gained powerful downtown business support for the passing of the 1974 downtown

redevelopment plan. Bradley, after his election, was successful in winning over the “committee of 25”, a coalition of downtown corporate leaders with his pro-development policies.²⁷

The redevelopment plan indeed was the first work of exclusion in Downtown’s modern era; “The redevelopment plan followed all the doctrines of modernist city planning: it segregated pedestrian auto traffic, created superblock and megastructures, and differentiated each zone of activity from others, and in so doing, it stripped from these Bunker Hill streets the vibrancy and overlay of functions that had characterized them for almost a century.”²⁸ The results of Bradley’s policies and the successes of the CRA implementation of his agenda are evidenced in the construction of over 40 buildings above the old height limit of thirteen stories for buildings (there were five before 1975, and nearly fifty by 1991).²⁹ It wasn’t until the 1980s that much of modern Bunker Hill was constructed. Most downtown high-rise office towers were built “during the booming 1980s, when foreign investors from Tokyo to Toronto poured billions of dollars into Los Angeles real estate”³⁰

Davis is highly critical of the CRA’s methods. Davis criticizes the use of tax increments, and accuses the CRA of municipalizing land speculation by borrowing against future tax increases to subsidize future tax-generating projects.³¹ In this scheme the city subsidized large commercial real estate developments with money from the taxes those developments had yet to create. For the developer this reduced the cost of developing in redevelopment zones and increased the profit of owning property land whose value was ever-rising. The result of tax increments was the inflow of major foreign capital, primarily Canadian and Japanese, into downtown and the erection of many of the buildings that today shape Los Angeles’ downtown skyline.³²

After acquiring and razing much of the land on Bunker Hill, the CRA was able to lure development in ways otherwise impossible. Since the CRA owned the land “the voided parcels of hilltop real estate were all sold or leased out by the city’s redevelopment agency at “incentive” rates below projected market value. These leases were sweetened by a variety of customized subsidies to further increase the attractiveness of projects already deemed profitable.”³³ The CRA “initially pursued an incentive zoning programme,” which “allowed the Agency [CRA] to encourage private developers to provide various public amenities within the project site in exchange for enhanced development rights beyond the constraints of zoning ordinances.”³⁴ Loukaitou-Sideris identifies three factors that led to the development of the city’s incentive zoning policies³⁵:

1) The need of the public sector to relieve its financial burden and increasing reliance on the private sector to provide public services.

2) Developers willingness to accept development incentives and participate in public/private partnerships that incorporated public spaces into private development projects. Key is the recognition by developers that on-site public space could actually enhance the value of their property if tied into commercial facilities in the project.

3) A market amongst downtown office workers for privately produced, maintained, and controlled space that insulates from Whyte’s “undesirables.”

The city has spent vigorously to encourage downtown development. In the last twenty years alone, the city and state government have spent \$2 billion on downtown, and the CRA by itself has accounted for \$1 billion of that spending. And developers were more than happy to take the zoning incentives offered by the CRA, as between 1979 and 1992 20 million square feet of office space went up downtown.³⁶

As it concerns the provision of public open space, the city, through development agreements, essentially contracted out public space production to these new private entities downtown. Downtown L.A. as a result is replete with top level office high-rises, luxury hotels and world-class condominiums featuring “publicly-assisted plazas private plazas that are intended more as rent-leveraging tenant amenities than as remedies to the area’s open space deficit.”³⁷ Through redevelopment policy, developer incentives and the willingness of developers and architects to take advantage of such incentives, we get today’s downtown where

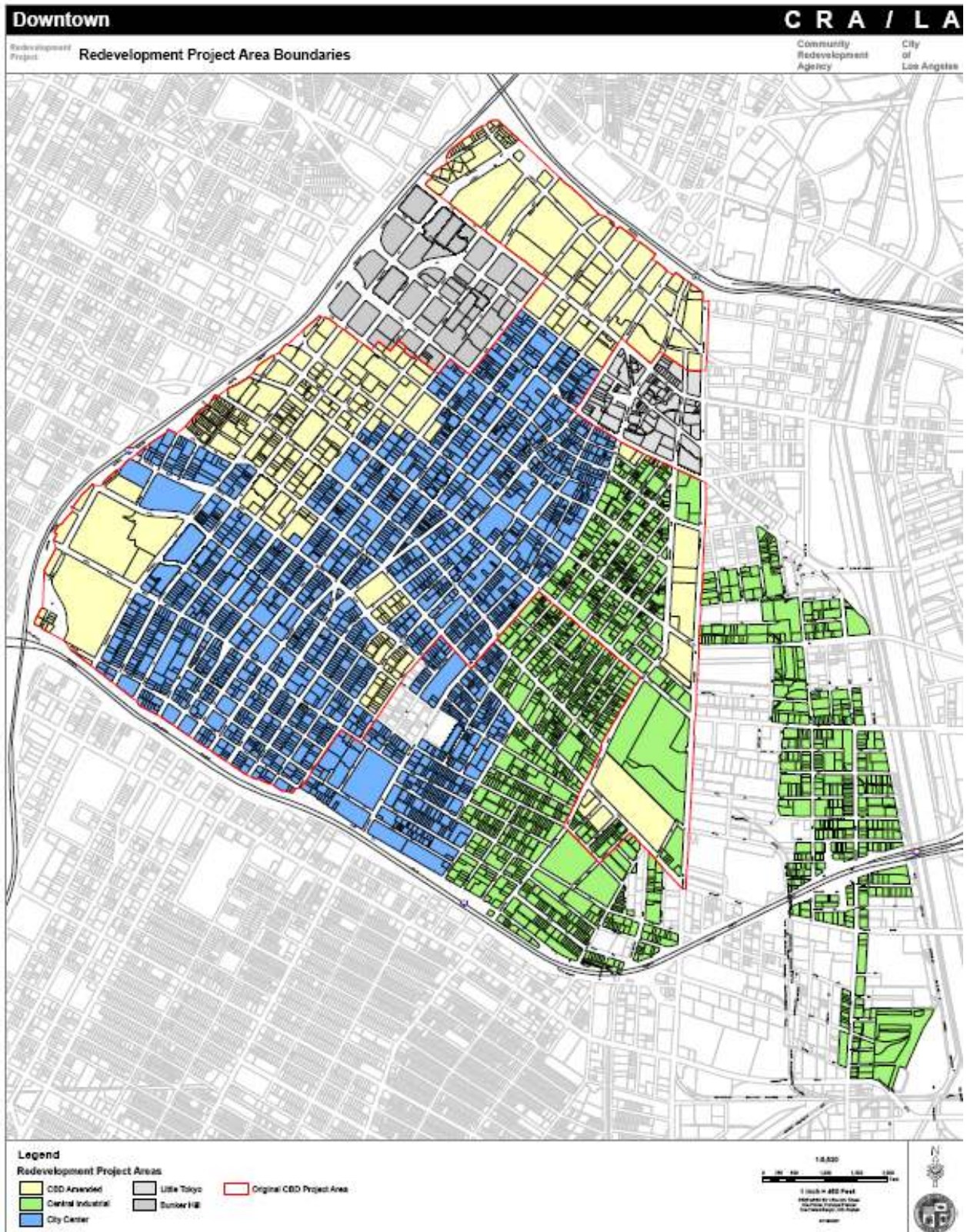
“urban design, municipal law and private policy conjoin to preclude the potential for unpredictable or “abnormal” behavior in every street and plaza. As a result, Downtown L.A. has become an agglomeration of pretty, homogenized spaces. It is a rarefied monolith of space, where the individual, who appears unable to afford the escalating price of prefabricated recreation has no option other than to be at home, at work, or in transit between the two.”³⁸

Edward Helfeld, an ex-CRA administrator calls the Bunker Hill redevelopment “a total clearance project, begun in an era when total clearance was considered primary and the best way to bring about revitalization.” As the oldest urban renewal project in California, “it promises to be the nerve center of Los Angeles in terms of economy, life style, imposing buildings, and unusual urban planning.”³⁹ The Bunker Hill redevelopment plan expires in January 2012.

Today, the city’s redevelopment efforts are focused on the city center around the Civic Center and in the Central City redevelopment area. Long the home of auto dealers, residential hotels and industrial uses, the South Park sub-neighborhood (subsumed in the Central City Redevelopment Plan) is quickly undergoing renewal. The 30-year redevelopment plan was initiated in 2002. The CRA has identified “numerous old and obsolete structures, a lack of sites for business expansion and major new development, substandard and overcrowded housing, a

shortage of affordable housing, small and oddly shaped parcels, complex and sometimes absent ownership entities that complicate or stifle revitalization and redevelopment of the area, and other conditions of blight.”⁴⁰ The Central City redevelopment area is the sight of four studied sites (Gilbert Lindsay Plaza, Nokia Plaza, Grand Central Market, Bidly Mason Park).

Figure 1: CRA Downtown Redevelopment Areas



The Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles

The CRA was established in 1948 by the Los Angeles City Council. Its primary functions are “to attract private investment into economically depressed communities, eliminate slums, abandoned or unsafe properties, and blight throughout Los Angeles.”⁴¹ CRA is the city’s public partner in economic, commercial, neighborhood development and housing. Much of the CRA’s revenue goes towards subsidizing affordable housing, and its other activities include revitalizing older neighborhoods, encouraging economic development, job production, supporting urban design and fostering citizen participation in redevelopment projects. The seven-member board is appointed by the mayor and subject to City Council approval. As of 1991 every CRA action is also subject to City Council approval. The CRA oversees 32 project areas, including seven in the Downtown area.

The CRA gets most of its funding from tax-increments, which are increases in tax revenue generated from the redevelopment efforts of the CRA.

Chapter 3: The Sites

The Research

Part of the intent of this study is to help city planners, policy makers, and community members interested in reclaiming these (quasi) public spaces. As such, a valuable contribution of this study is simply the identification of a vast number of privately owned public open spaces in downtown. This study is the first to identify such a vast number of sites in downtown, and while not a comprehensive database of spaces, the number of spaces studied is an indication of how rampant and how large an effect these spaces have on life downtown. With inspiration from Kayden, this study tries to be as exhaustive as possible in its collection of records and understanding of the forces that produced downtown L.A.’s privately-owned public open spaces. Revealing in the research process was the diffusion of data throughout Los Angeles city

and county agencies and lack of a consolidated database of downtown public space data. This study begins to build a database of spaces and actors involved in the transformation of downtown public space. This study also provides quantitative analysis of data from downtown plazas, and places them in a broad downtown context, looking at spatial relationships between the plazas and community demographics.

This study focuses on interaction between the CRA and private developers and the spaces they created. As a result, much of the data compiled in this study comes from inspecting CRA records and contracts for the construction of downtown buildings and plazas. Information was found in Disposition and Development Agreements (DDA) which are contracts between a developer and the CRA for the sale of CRA owned land. Many DDAs for downtown high-rise office buildings contain whatever zoning variations may have been granted for that particular development, and were particularly useful in this study's interest in how downtown privately-owned public spaces are produced. DDAs also contain valuable information on design and open space requirements of individual contracts and overall goals of the CRA for particular developments. Owner Participation Agreements (OPA), which are contracts between a developer and the CRA for the development of land not owned by the CRA, were similarly fruitful sources of data. Other data on city policy and procedure was taken from publicly available sources, general plan, CRA policies etc., much of it online and digitized.

For the study I also conducted interviews with planners and architects involved with downtown development. All interviews conducted were with planners within the CRA or L.A. City Planning Department. In all cases interview requests with planners at the CRA or City Planning Department were met with interest and enthusiasm, indicating a growing interest on the part of planners to engage with issues surrounding privately-owned public space. I

interviewed two planners at the CRA, Susan Grey and David Neubecker. Grey serves as Art and Cultural Programs Director and Neubecker is the Assistant Planner for the Downtown Region. I interviewed three architects: Simon Pastucha a planner/architect at the Urban Design Studio in the Department of City Planning, Patricia L. Smith, a landscape architect who has written CRA design guidelines and authored the Downtown Urban Design Guidelines which are now undergoing citywide approval process, and architect and Los Angeles Planning Commissioner Bill Roschen. Attempts to interview specific project architects and project developers were unsuccessful.

This study also relies on previous quantitative analyses of specific sites in downtown Los Angeles by Banerjee, Loukaitou-Sideris, Flusty, and Davis. All authors provide case studies of individual sites that are also identified in this study, and are cited where overlap occurs.

I also visited all 29 sites during peak (lunchtime) and off-peak hours documenting usage, behavior and looking for filtering or exclusionary designs, taking photos of each site and making comparisons and assessments after every visit.

CRA Art Policy

The CRA's art policy started in the 1960s and requires developers to incorporate art into their development projects. The Art Policy is important because many of the downtown plazas and spaces feature art pieces purchased through this policy, and in many cases the plazas themselves were built in order to accommodate the art pieces (Ketchum YMCA, for example) and 21 of the 27 sites studied were required to participate in the Art program. Until 1985 the CRA promoted public art through negotiations with developers on a case-by-case basis.⁴²

In 1985 the CRA formalized the program in the "Downtown Art in Public Places Policy" which applied to three downtown redevelopment areas – Bunker Hill, Central Business

District and Little Tokyo.⁴³ Most of the sites this study considers are within those three redevelopment areas and were subject to the city's art policy. In 1993 the CRA adopted the "Public Art Policy", which expanded the previous art requirement to all of the CRA's redevelopment areas. Finally, in 2005 the policy was revised again to make the policy conform with the Arts Development Fee. The development fee was established in 1991 and requires developers to pay up to one percent of the project cost of the building into the Arts Development Fee Trust Fund. Developers have three options to fulfill the city's art obligation. They may:

1) Provide on-site art that is incorporated into the development (most choose this option.) Up to 60% of the 1% art budget may go to on-site artwork. The remaining portion of the 1% (up to 40%) must go to a Cultural Trust Fund.

2) Include a cultural facility in the development project. The cultural facility must be on-site and be made available for public or non-profit use on a permanent or long-term basis. There must also be a demonstrated need for the facility in the area. The entire 1% may be used towards the construction of the facility.

3) The developer may contribute the full 1% art obligation to a Cultural Trust Fund.

The goal of the Art Policy is "to make artists and the art primary resources in the revitalization of the City and to provide physical, social, cultural, and economic benefits that will strengthen and sustain communities over time."⁴⁴

All projects with CRA financial participation are required to fulfill the art obligation. Any cultural facilities (like Disney Hall) and projects with development costs below \$500,000 are exempt from fulfilling the arts requirement.

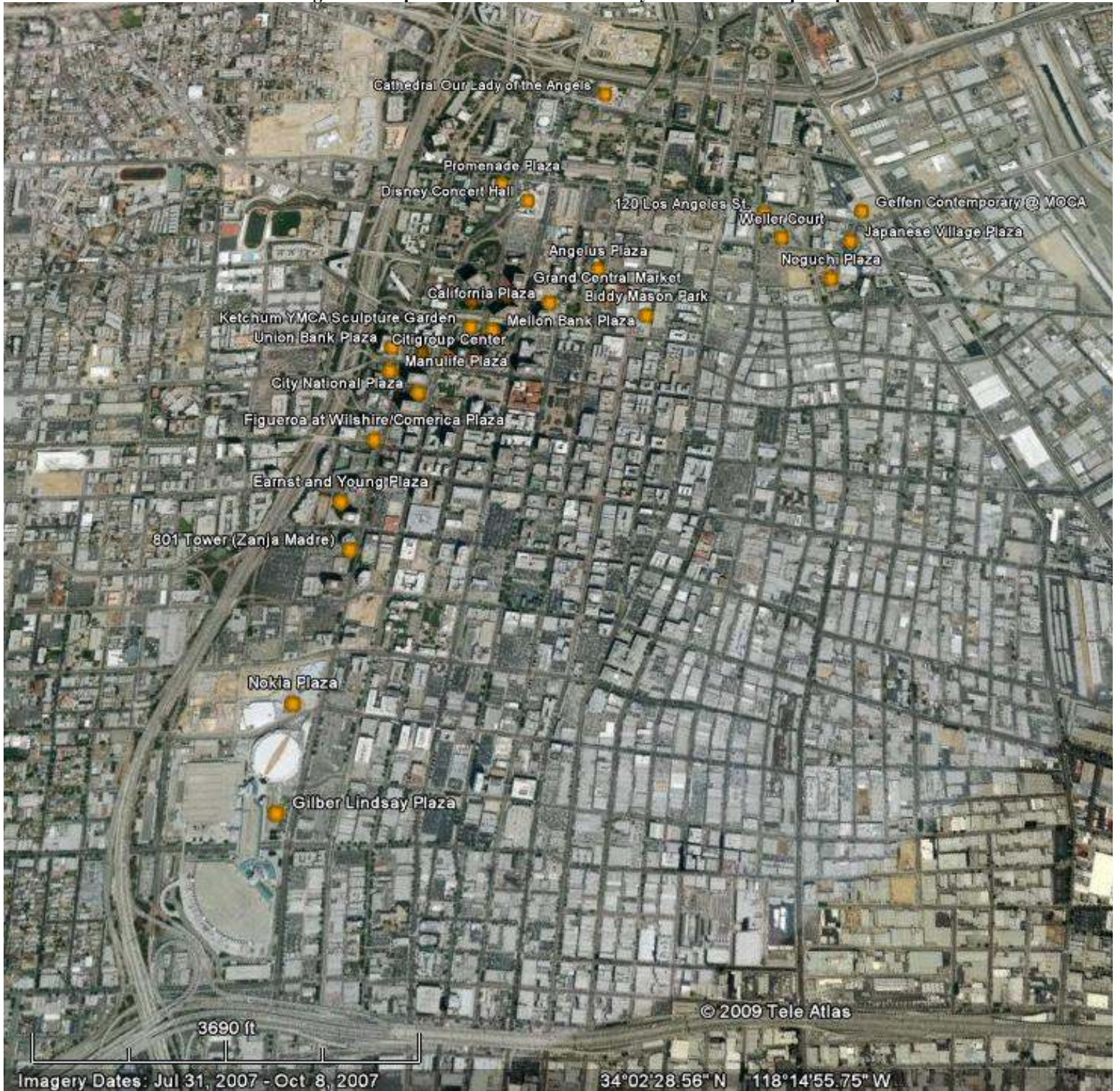
The Sites

The sites evaluated in this project all lay within three downtown redevelopment areas: Bunker Hill, Little Tokyo, and the Central Business District. They are grouped according to their redevelopment area and listed in chronological order, starting with earliest date of completion. The sites studied were chosen because of the ways in which they were produced. That is, this study is most interested in spaces created through incentive zoning policy – public space provided in a private development in exchange for additional density in the building. Not all spaces meet this criteria, but in all cases the spaces feature design elements and technologies that are meant to control who uses them, thus making them only quasi-public, if public at all. Although this is not a comprehensive list of privately-owned public open spaces, it does include all the major spaces in downtown. There are certainly more spaces in than this study identifies and new spaces are being developed rapidly in the South Park neighborhood of downtown, but this study provides the foundation for creating a comprehensive database of downtown's privately-owned public spaces.

Of the sites identified in this project, spaces can be characterized in three ways:

- 1) Spaces on private property, designed, developed and maintained by a private owner but open to the public at a minimum during business hours. Most Bunker Hill plazas fit this description.
- 2) Spaces on private property that are maintained with public funds. Bidy Mason Park is an example of this type of space.
- 3) Spaces on publicly owned land that were designed and developed by private actors with private money. Although not studied, the redesigned Pershing Square redevelopment exemplifies this type of space.

Figure 2: Map of Downtown L.A. Privately Owned Public Open Spaces



Bunker Hill Redevelopment Area



7 + Fig at Ernst & Young Plaza 725 S. Figueroa St.

The 7 + Fig at Ernst & Young Plaza development first opened in 1986 as Citicorp Plaza. The plaza and retail complex were developed in conjunction with two high rise office buildings and parking structure that covers two consolidated city blocks and provides 1.9 million square feet of office and retail space.⁴⁵ The retail space includes a 390,000 square foot open-air shopping center, while the plaza provides 2.5 acres of park-like setting.⁴⁶ The plaza and retail space were designed by architect Jon Jerde, of which the former serves as an enclosed park space for the corporate employees to lounge and eat lunch and the latter a retail grotto that “swirls’ people away from the activity of the street.”⁴⁷ The plaza, which sits above the retail space, has scattered art pieces provided by the developer through the CRA’s Percent for Art Program but has no public easements.

The retail space and plaza were developed through negotiations between the developer – Oxford Properties, Inc. and later Prudential Property Company – and the CRA. Out of these negotiations the developer agreed to pay \$5 million for a density variation of 1.2 million square feet (for a FAR of 9.5:1) in addition to providing 350,000 square feet of retail space. The CRA also contributed \$11.5 million for a parking garage and vacated the adjoining sidewalk to accommodate two planned department stores for the center.⁴⁸

The space exerts control over its users by offering little indication of its existence and is heavily patrolled by building and mall security.



**California Plaza/Watercourt
300 South Grand Ave.**

California Plaza is a superblock mega-development covering 5 city blocks that includes three high-rise office towers, a luxury hotel, the Museum of Contemporary art (MOCA) and parking. All of the buildings are linked through open spaces, courts, and plazas, and the entire development covers 11.2 acres of land, including 5.5 acres of open space.⁴⁹ The site also includes the Watercourt Plaza – a heavily landscaped fountain plaza that has retail space, ample seating, and in the summer hosts a lunchtime concert series.

California Plaza was developed as a single entity by Bunker Hill Associates, a group led by Canadian development firm Cadillac Fairview, but in 1983 the plan was altered by managing partner Metropolitan Structures.⁵⁰ The site was one of the last undeveloped sites on Bunker Hill, and the CRA decided to offer development rights for the entire site, with the idea that this Bunker Hill mega-development could serve as a major attraction in Downtown. Bunker Hill Associates was given a FAR variation (10:1) for the public benefits included in the project – MOCA, the Watercourt, and the restoration of Angel’s Flight.⁵¹ Architect Arthur Erickson

designed the modernist buildings and plazas as “a place efficient for business and attractive to tourists and middle-and upper class residents.”⁵²

California Plaza, when approaching from Broadway has little signage, limited access points, and is heavily patrolled.



**Bank Of America Plaza (formerly Pacific Securities Plaza)
333 South Hope St.**

The plaza adjoining the Bank of America building has a formal garden with fountains and a steel arched sculpture by Alexander Calder and provided through the CRA’s Percent-for-Art program. The Bank of America building was completed in 1974 and designed by Albert C. Martin & Associates. The plaza and garden cover 4.21 acres and according to the property website, boasts “200 trees and three 24-foot waterfalls” in addition to “the 42 foot-high “Four Arches” sculpture.”⁵³ The plaza has a weekly Friday farmers market that attracts a large lunch crowd and lunchtime performances.

Bank of America Plaza “seeks isolation from its surroundings” as the “the careful arrangement of plant materials, the uniformity of trees and planters, and the axial organization of the water channels seek to signify orderliness and harmony, attributes in sharp contrast with the disordered and chaotic environment of the surrounding city.”⁵⁴

Bank of America Plaza is patrolled heavily by building security and seating along the planters is rigid and uncomfortable.



CitiGroup Center Plaza
444 S. Flower St.

CitiGroup Center Plaza was completed in 1979 and was designed by A.C. Martin Partners. The building provides “a popular retail plaza with three open-terrace levels”⁵⁵ and four art pieces provided through the percent for art program. The main plaza sits on the corner of S. Flower and W. 5th and is dotted with tall palms spaced out evenly on the grid of the plaza. Past the greenish rectangular columns lay the retail and food court filled with chain retailers and restaurants and escalators that connect to the upper terraces to the north and west and connect to the Bunker Hill Steps. The upper terraces contain much of the public art in the space but their entrances are hidden away from the primary circulation paths through the building. The northern terrace also connects to a pedestrian skyway that links the terrace to the Westin Bonaventure and City National Plaza.

Citygroup Center Plaza is heavily patrolled and offers little comfortable seating for those not eating at one of the plazas restaurants.



ManuLife Plaza
515 S. Figueroa St.

Manulife Plaza lies at the entrance to the Manulife building, built in 1982 by A.C. Martin and Associates. The newly re-landscaped plaza contains Christopher Keene’s sculpture “Salmon Run,” which depicts bears fishing at a river for salmon and was included in the original plaza. Improvements to the plaza include “the installation of new palm trees, flagstone planters, fresh pavement and a contemporary art sculpture — all part of sidewalk enhancement plan aimed at making the property more attractive to the pedestrian.”⁵⁶ There are few seating options in the plaza, only a few patio tables have been installed and during the mid-day visit there were no movable seats set out with the tables and no retail space in the plaza. There an unused part of the plaza south of the sign that hugs the sidewalk and the plaza suffers from a lack of sunlight as the tall office building quickly blocks the sun from the small plaza in the afternoon. The plaza is also accessible from a pedestrian skybridge that crosses over W 5th St and connects to Union Bank Plaza.

Manulife Plaza offers no seating (despite having tables) and is under constant surveillance through the lobby window.



Union Bank Plaza
445 S. Figueroa St.

Union Bank Plaza was developed in 1968 by developer Connecticut General Life Insurance Company and designed by A.C. Martin and was the first building constructed in the Bunker Hill Redevelopment project. The site was purchased for just over \$3 million by the developer. The height limitations for the building were waived due to considerations by the CRA from a “planning and architectural standpoint... as well as functional.”⁵⁷ In exchange for the waiving of the height limitations for the building, the developer was required to include a plaza on top of the garage north. According to the DDA, the site was also to be linked to neighboring project by above ground pedestrian bridges provide and maintained by the CRA. The three-acre park on top of the garage was designed by Garret Eckbo and features Jerome Kirk’s “Aquarius,” which was the first piece installed under the CRA’s percent for art program.⁵⁸

Facing Figueroa is a newly constructed two-level retail complex with restaurants that serve the downtown lunch crowd and stairs up to the plaza, which sits on top of the parking lot to the north of the building. The retail space has upscale restaurants, plenty of outdoor seating and its own landscaping. Developer Connecticut General Insurance originally wanted the garage-top plaza by itself to fulfill the site’s percent for art requirement but the CRA insisted they include the art piece.⁵⁹ The plaza also features a fountain surrounded by coral, rubber and

jacaranda trees. The plaza unfortunately is in the shade much of the day, and *“its location on the roof of the garage isolates it from the surrounding city and it remains largely undiscovered and underused.”*⁶⁰ *The plaza is also heavily patrolled by security.*



Mellon Bank Center
400 S. Hope St.

The Mellon Bank Center was developed in 1982 by Olympic & York and the law firm of O'Melveny & Myers and designed by Welton Becket. The building sits on approximately 1.86 acres of land that in 1959 Olympic & York bought from Pacific Mutual Life Insurance. The stipulations of the OPA for the construction of the Mellon Bank Center include a height limit of 40 stories, 625,000 sq. ft. of floor area, an atrium with commercial space, pedestrian access between Grand Ave. and Hope St., no less than 50% lot coverage and an outdoor plaza at street level on Grand Ave.

The plaza on Grand features Alexander Liberman's controversial sculpture "Ulysses". The sculpture was produced through the CRA's percent for art program and has been criticized by art critics and city planners for its scale and design that appears incongruous with the site.⁶¹ The space wraps around the building to the north with a long pool with a marble ledge for

sitting and connects to the rear courtyard which is landscaped with trees, bushes and flowers. The rear space is also interspersed with tables and chairs, manicured shrubbery, and gets good noontime sun.

Mellon Bank Center is heavily patrolled, both in the outdoor seating area and inside the atrium.



**Teresa W. Lindsay Courtyard at Ketchum YMCA
401 S. Hope St.**

The Stuart M. Ketchum YMCA was developed in 1986 by the YMCA of Los Angeles. The plaza sits on top of the Arco Plaza garage and cost \$1.3 million to build. The YMCA of L.A. received a \$1.5 million Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG - The UDAG program established by Congress in 1977 to help with economic development in distressed communities.) The building was designed by Albert C. Martin and Associates, and “the grounds of the YMCA were designed to be both a setting for sculpture and a pedestrian passageway linking the gym with downtown.”⁶² The six sculptures in the garden, totaling \$130,000, are provided through the CRA’s percent for art program.

The space opens onto the street as a driveway, although the traffic is limited, and is inviting to the pedestrian. The south has an elevated terrace with a café and seating for patrons. The art garden flanks both sides of the drive and features lush landscaping in terraced planters.

The YMCA sculpture garden, although one of the least patrolled spaces on Bunker Hill, is still patrolled frequently.



**Wells Fargo Center (KPMG Tower + Wells Fargo Tower)
330 S. Grand St.**

The KPMG Tower and the Wells Fargo Tower make up the Wells Fargo Center, “an elegant, three-story, glass-enclosed atrium. The atrium links the two towers and showcases one of the most significant sculpture collections in Southern California amidst lush landscaping, fountains, retail shops and restaurants.”⁶³ The only two outdoor sculptures were procured through the CRA’s percent for art program, while the remaining three sculptures are located inside the atrium. The site is flanked by California Plaza and Bank of America Plaza. The atrium space sits between the two towers, cutting the superblock into thirds, and landscaped plazas and walkways serve as outdoor hallways between the tall office towers. There are two main entrances to the atrium - one on South Grand and one on South Hope – that serve as focal points for pedestrians walking along the sidewalk. The plaza on South Grand features the property’s only two outdoor sculptures, has trees in planter boxes and is raised a couple feet above street level. Temporary seating is provided during business hours. Both entrances are announced with four long vertical flag poles that advertise the center.

Inside the atrium are more sculptures and retail and food facilities. Dining establishments are predominantly upscale and include an upscale steakhouse. The atrium has

plenty of seating, two fountains and is heavily vegetated giving the atrium a rainforest feel. The atrium is heavily guarded by security, and in twenty minutes on the property I was twice asked by security to put my camera away.

Two paseos connect South Grand to South Hope and 3rd St. Both paseos feature planted trees and temporary seating for office tower workers and restaurant patrons. The paseos are wide and

Wells Fargo Center is one of the most heavily patrolled space on Bunker Hill, with countless security guards and security cameras inside the atrium.



Disney Concert Hall Public Garden
135 N. Grand Ave.

The Disney Concert Hall and public garden were developed by Walt Disney Concert Hall Inc. after a \$50 million dollar gift from Walt Disney's widow Lillian Disney. The concert hall was constructed through a public/private partnership between Los Angeles County, the Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles, and private donors. The County of Los Angeles donated the land for the project and provided the bond for the construction of the garage, under the condition that construction begin within five years of the donation. Frank Gehry designed the building, which took over 15 years to finally complete (1987-2003). The total cost of construction was \$274 million.⁶⁴

The 3.6 acre site is heavily landscaped and has a variety of different species of plants, all labeled and planted neatly in the space. There is outdoor movable seating, however access to the garden is restricted at night. The space is most used during intermission and directly after performances when crowds flood into the space.

The Disney Concert Hall garden has three to four security guards in the small space at all times.

Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
555 W. Temple St.

The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels was built in 2002 by the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles and designed by Spanish architect Rafael Moneo. The 2.5 acre plaza is accessed through a gate on the street. The plaza includes three fountains, a café and grill with outdoor seating, a gift shop, restrooms and administrative offices and several gardens. The plaza was mandated in the Owner Participation Agreement with the CRA and was required to be 60% paved and 40% landscaped. The fountains and sculptures in the gardens are provided through the city's art program.

The Cathedral Plaza is hidden from the street through a gate and features little signage.

Westin Bonaventure
404 S. Figueroa St.

The Westin Bonaventure was constructed in 1976 by John Portman. The space on the south end of the building connects with Union Bank Plaza, Citigroup Center and City National Plaza via elevated pedestrian sky-bridges. The plaza itself sits several stories above street level. The intent of the plaza and its easements echo those of LeCorbusier and have the effect of “welding the three blocks into a unified urban composition.”⁶⁵ The CRA required the building be no less than 750,000 sq. ft. and at least 28 stories. The CRA provided for the constructions

and maintenance of the pedestrian bridges. There is a small seating area on the elevated plaza for patrons of the hotel restaurant to sit outside.

The plaza itself is poorly maintained, above street level, has little planted area and is by all accounts unusable.



**City National Plaza
515 S. Flower St.**

City National Plaza (developed as ARCO Plaza) contains Herber Bayer’s “Double Ascension” fountain sculpture. The plaza is framed to the north and south by large office towers, and there is a restaurant on the eastern edge of the plaza. The plaza is accessible from street level on Flower St., but has no access points from Grand Ave. Underneath the plaza is a retail and food court. The plaza and towers sit on a 4.2-acre superblock and provide over 2.6 million sq. ft. of office, retail and open space.

City National Plaza is constantly under heavy surveillance and security patrol.



Promenade Towers Apartment Plaza
123 S. Figueroa St.

The Promenade Towers Apartment Plaza was built in 1978 and designed by Kamnitzer Cotton and Vreeland. 20,000 sq. feet of commercial space were required in the development of the site. The plaza is sunken about 5 feet below the street level at the corner of 1st St. and Hope St. where the main entrance to the plaza is located. There is a walkway that rings the West and South sides of the plaza to provide access to the store fronts. Most of the shops put chairs and tables out for patrons during business hours, and the plaza also has planter benches for sitting. The plaza has a fountain provided through the city's art program, however the plaza itself was not a requirement of the development agreement.

Promenade plaza offers little comfortable seating for those not patronizing one of the plaza's restaurants.



Figueroa at Wilshire – Comerica Plaza

601 S. Figueroa

Figueroa at Wilshire was built in 1990 by developer Mitsui Fudosan and designed by architect Albert C. Martin. The building was subject to the city's TFAR ordinance. In exchange for a transfer of floor area from four other downtown sites, the developer was required to provide at least 15% of the lot area "open to the sky" amenable to "park-like services" and 8,500 sq. ft. for retail.⁶⁶ The building had a FAR maximum of 13:1 built up from 6:1 with FAR donations from other sites. The building was also required to provide public art through the city's art program, which specifically required a water feature.

Figueroa at Wilshire has a security officer patrolling the premises at all times.

Central City Redevelopment Area



801 Tower/Zanja Madre Art Garden

801 S. Figueroa

Andrew Leicester's \$2 million Zanja Madre Art Garden sits on the South end of the 801 Tower and is accessible through the back of the lobby and an ornamental gate on Figueroa.⁶⁷

The art garden combines “modern sculptures and water features as a tribute to Los Angeles and Southern California.”⁶⁸ The garden was created through the CRA’s Percent-for-Art program and is tucked away behind large gates fronting 8th street.

From the street the space appears guarded and private, with the large columns establishing the space’s foreboding entrance. The seating spaces are too short to lie down.



**Nokia Plaza at L.A. Live
1111 S. Figueroa St.**

Nokia Plaza was developed by owner Anschutz Entertainment Group (the same developer as the Staples Center and other L.A. Live projects) as the open space requirement of the Nokia Theatre. The 40,000 sq. ft. plaza was designed by Rios Clemente Hale Studio and is “capable of hosting special events, community gatherings, cultural festivals and live performances.”⁶⁹ Unique to the plaza are 20,000 sq. ft. of LED signs, including six 75 ft. towers and a 22’ by 40’ electronic display. Nokia Plaza is designed to be able to host everything from “a daytime farmer’s market to a locale for promotional activities tied to an evening concert.”⁷⁰

Nokia Plaza is heavily patrolled and has little comfortable seating other than for patrons of the plaza's restaurants.

Little Tokyo Redevelopment Area



Geffen Contemporary @ MOCA 152 N. Central Ave.

The Geffen Contemporary @ Moca was established in 1983 after serving as a temporary exhibition space while the Grand Ave. site was being developed. The Geffen now occupies what used to be the Union Hardware building built by Albert C. Martin and was renovated by Frank O Gehry for MOCA.⁷¹ The renovations were completed with a \$120,666 loan from the CRA MOCA leases the space from the city for \$1 a year and in return Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Councilmember Eric Garcetti get to sit on the MOCA board.⁷²

The Geffen Contemporary plaza has no comfortable seating and little shade, making it a very uncomfortable place to sit. Surprisingly, during my visit there were many people sitting eating lunch on the steps.

Japanese Village Plaza 350 E. 1st St.

The Japanese Village Plaza was developed in 1984 by architect David Hyun and is a commercial through-block paseo with retailers and food service lining the mall. The buildings are designed with Japanese-style architecture. The pedestrian mall is maintained with funds from the CRA. The property was bought for \$200,000.

Japanese Village Plaza offers little seating in its public paseo.



**Noguchi Plaza
230 San Pedro St.**

The land for Noguchi Plaza was purchased for \$116,000 by developer Japanese American Cultural and Community Center. Noguchi Plaza serves the Japanese Cultural and Community Center. *The space is walled in, creating “a semi-private court, turning away from the world to reveal its contents only to the ‘initiated’ visitors.”⁷³ Based on the design “the space is not designed for human activity.”⁷⁴*



**Weller Court
123 Astronaut E. S Onizuka St.**

Weller Court was built in 1978 by developer East West Development Corporation and was designed by Kajima Associates. The court is a pedestrian promenade with retail shops and restaurants. The entrance to the court is hidden within the pedestrian street Astronaut E. Onizuka St. and is focused around a central court, with two terraced levels rimming the inner courtyard. The space provides public restrooms, has a fountain, and pumps music into the court during business hours.

Weller Court is difficult to find and is heavily patrolled by mall security.

Spaces in Other Areas



Grand Central Market **317 S. Broadway**

Grand Central Market is a food mall and open-air market open to the public located in the Homer Laughlin building, which was built in 1897. Building has 121 residential units above the market and currently has 43 vendors leasing space in the market.⁷⁵ The vendors sell mostly ethnic food in addition to the many produce stands. Grand Central Market is generally very full during the lunch hour and provides indoor and outdoor seating on the Broadway side of the market.

Despite being one of downtown's most used spaces, Grand Central Market is heavily surveilled by a several security guards.

Chapter 4: Evaluating the Spaces

The Urban Design Studio and the Downtown Design Guidelines

The Urban Design Studio was established in 2006 “to provide urban design, landscape and architectural expertise to the Los Angeles Department of City Planning and more importantly to integrate the work of other City Agencies.”⁷⁶ The studio consists of two landscape architects with the mission of further integrating design into city policy and planning. The Urban Design Studio is the primary force behind the Downtown Design Guide, which is an interdepartmental project between the City Planning Department, the CRA and the Department of Transportation and Public Works. The Downtown design guide’s goal is to create a citywide downtown design guide that puts in “new context-sensitive street standards which emphasize walkability, sustainability and transit options; and simple but critical urban design standards to reinforce the community character of Downtown Los Angeles’ many neighborhoods and Districts.”⁷⁷ The guide, which is still undergoing approval, would amend the Urban Design Chapter of the Central City Community Plan as well as the Los Angeles City Street Standards requirements for downtown. If adopted, the CRA would use the “Design for Development” guidelines which they currently use.

The open space chapter of the Downtown Design Guide regulates the design of on-site open spaces as follows:

Requirements:

- open space must sited in relation to street (2-3ft deviation allowed – rooftop gardens accepted)
- have a minimum planted area
- contain minimum seating
- containment – how many
- mature canopy trees within open spaces, especially along streets

Suggested design features:

- temporary seating
- landscaping and trees that provides mix of sun and shade
- provide transitions through steps, shading devices, or planters that mark building entrances

- establish scale, texture and color with landscaping
- screen or break up mass blank walls

Based on the guide above, and through my participant observations of the spaces, downtown

Los Angeles' privately owned-public spaces are rated as follows:

Table 1: Downtown Design Guide Evaluation

Rating	Number of Spaces	Description	Percent
Excellent	7	Design fulfills Downtown Design Guide requirements and suggestions	26%
Good	9	Fulfill Downtown Design Guide requirements but need improvement	33%
Fair	5	One or more elements that make the space unusable for the public	19%
Poor	6	Are unsuitable for public use because of poor design, amenities etc.	22%
Total	27		

In our analysis of downtown privately-owned public open space according to the Downtown Design Guidelines, over one quarter of spaces rate as excellent and a third good. Overall, results according to the guide are spread fairly evenly, indicating a range in the quality of privately-owned public spaces downtown. However, as we discuss in the next section, every one of the spaces identified in this study exhibits some design element that is intended to exclude. While the guidelines are indeed a first step towards bringing comprehensive design standards to downtown L.A., this evaluation shows that unsuccessful public spaces can still be produced even if the guide considers their design excellent. Even with the guidelines in place, it is likely we will see the development of public spaces that remain public in name only, and exclude through technologies not identified in the Downtown Design Guidelines. That said, the guidelines are valuable in their effort to consolidate a citywide approach to urban design and public open space.

A few amendments to the open space chapter of the guidelines, gleaned from interviews with planners and architects:

- 1) Include discussion of scale and relationship to pedestrian
- 2) Make distinction between open space for residential versus commercial
- 3) Make distinction between open space and public open space

The Flusty Guide

Since this study is more concerned with the social, rather than the architectural relationship with privately owned public space, we offer an alternative way of evaluating spaces – in accordance with Flusty’s identification of technologies for social interdiction through design. Whereas Flusty used examples in Los Angeles to illustrate different technologies used to keep unwanted visitors out of public space, we analyze the rampant use of these technologies in downtown L.A. and suggest some evolutions in interdictory technology that have been used in more recently developed sites in Los Angeles.

Table 2: Flusty Definitions for Exclusionary Space

Name	Description
Slippery Space	“Cannot be reached, due to contorted, protracted or missing paths of approach.”
Crusty	Defends against undesirables by blocking out most of the public with walls and gates
Prickly	Uncomfortable to occupy through the use of spikes on sitting ledges or rounded benches to prevent loiterers from staying long, or the homeless from napping on benches.
Jittery	Heavily surveilled, often by mounted cameras, and gives the feeling that one’s movement is constantly being monitored.
Stealthy	Hard to find, often hidden or obscured from view. <i>Stealthy</i> space’s existence is often only known by those who use and are intended to use it most.

Table 3: How the Sites Exclude

Site	Ways They Exclude
City Group Center (formerly 444 Flower Building)	Prickly, Jittery
Manulife Plaza	Prickly, Jittery
Union Bank Plaza	Stealthy, Jittery
Mellon Bank Center	Prickly, Jittery
Ketchum YMCA – Garden	Jittery
Bank of America Plaza	Prickly, Jittery
Wells Fargo Center/KPMG Tower	Jittery
California Plaza	Stealthy (from Broadway), Slippery, Jittery
Disney Concert Hall – Garden	Stealthy, Jittery
Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels	Stealthy, Jittery
Promenade Plaza	Prickly
Geffen Contemporary @ MOCA	Prickly
Japanese Village Plaza	Prickly
Noguchi Plaza	Stealthy, Crusty, Prickly
Weller Court	Stealthy, Jittery
801 Tower (pocket park)	Stealthy, Prickly
Earnst and Young Plaza (formerly Citicorp Plaza)	Stealthy, Jittery
Figueroa at Wilshire/Comerica Plaza	Jittery
Grand Central Market	Jittery
Westin Bonaventure	Stealthy, Slippery
City National Plaza	Jittery
Bunker Hill Steps	Prickly, Jittery
Nokia Plaza/LA Live	Prickly, Jittery
Gilbert Lindsay Plaza	Prickly
Biddy Mason Park	Jittery
120 Los Angeles St.	Prickly

Although not every downtown space exhibits every characteristic of Flusty’s categorizations, every space does employ one or more exclusionary technologies. Most prevalent among the downtown space studied is the use of *jittery* technologies. Every site visited, with the exception of the Little Tokyo sites and a few of the smaller sites in the Central Business District had security cameras pointed on the open space or security guards actively patrolling the space. Flusty highlights Biddy Mason Park as one downtown L.A.’s most *jittery*

spaces as it has security cameras and a patrolling private security guard. My observations found the Wells Fargo Center to have similarly overwhelming surveillance (3 security guards during my visit). In fact every downtown plaza I visited had at least one walking security guard present at all times.

Stealthy space was particularly apparent in the two blocks encompassing Union Bank Plaza and the Westin Bonaventure Hotel. The LeCorbusian qualities of these two superblock developments, which elevate their plazas several stories above the sidewalk, made the spaces difficult to find and access.

Nine square blocks of Bunker Hill offer perhaps the most exclusionary downtown area on the West Coast. Within these nine blocks lie California plaza, Wells Fargo Center, Mellon Bank Center, the Ketchum YMCA, Bunker Hill Steps, Citigroup Plaza, Westin Bonaventure Plaza, Manulife Plaza, and City National Plaza.

To Flusty's categorizations we also add *Disney space*. *Disney space* is a new type of design for urban centers emerging out of new Urban Entertainment Districts (UEDs).⁷⁸ These urban entertainment districts are not new to Los Angeles (Hollywood and Highland, 3rd Street Promenade in Santa Monica), but are new to downtown L.A. and reflect one vision of downtown that seeks to re-create the atmosphere of Times Square in South Park. Inspired by the thematic architecture of Disneyland, *Disney space*, described similarly as brandscape by Anna Klingman, "caters to a large, mostly middle-class consumer market and seeks to resolve both people's desire for excitement and their reluctance to take risks... 'which involve contact with the 'lower orders' in cities.'" ⁷⁹ *Disney space* is categorized by the use of a scripted theme, prevalent branding, isolation from surrounding neighborhoods and postmodern design "insomuch as it is constructed around technologies of simulation, virtual reality and the thrill of

the spectacle.”⁸⁰ Also integral to *Disney* space is thematic programming that appeals to its middle-class target by reinforcing the theme of the space.

Nokia Plaza, and the L.A. Live development is downtown L.A.’s first *Disney* space – the plaza, as *LA Times* architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne describes it:

“sits entirely on property owned by the developer, creates an impressive stage-set version of a public square. The problem is not just that the space is primarily aimed at visitors to L.A. Live’s concerts and restaurants rather than local apartment- and condo-dwellers; it is that it actively discourages any of the activities we traditionally associate with the use of collective space in a city: talking, reading, sitting under a tree, even pausing with a friend for a cup of coffee. Anybody who tried to do any of those things in the L.A. Live plaza, which is filled with both yelping video displays and security guards, would look not just out of place but foolish.”⁸¹

The experience of Nokia Plaza is unlike that of any of the other space considered in this study. Instead of trying to provide an urban oasis for white-collar downtown workers, Nokia Plaza instead tries actively to lure its clientele with postmodern technologies – megascreens, virtual reality and L.E.D.-inspired fantasies. These new technologies enhance the spaces feeling of place, but only inasmuch as a Hummer enhances the feeling of being in a car. The feeling of place derived from Nokia Plaza only emanates from the plaza’s ostentatious use of light and electricity to build a fantasy space for only a select few to use.

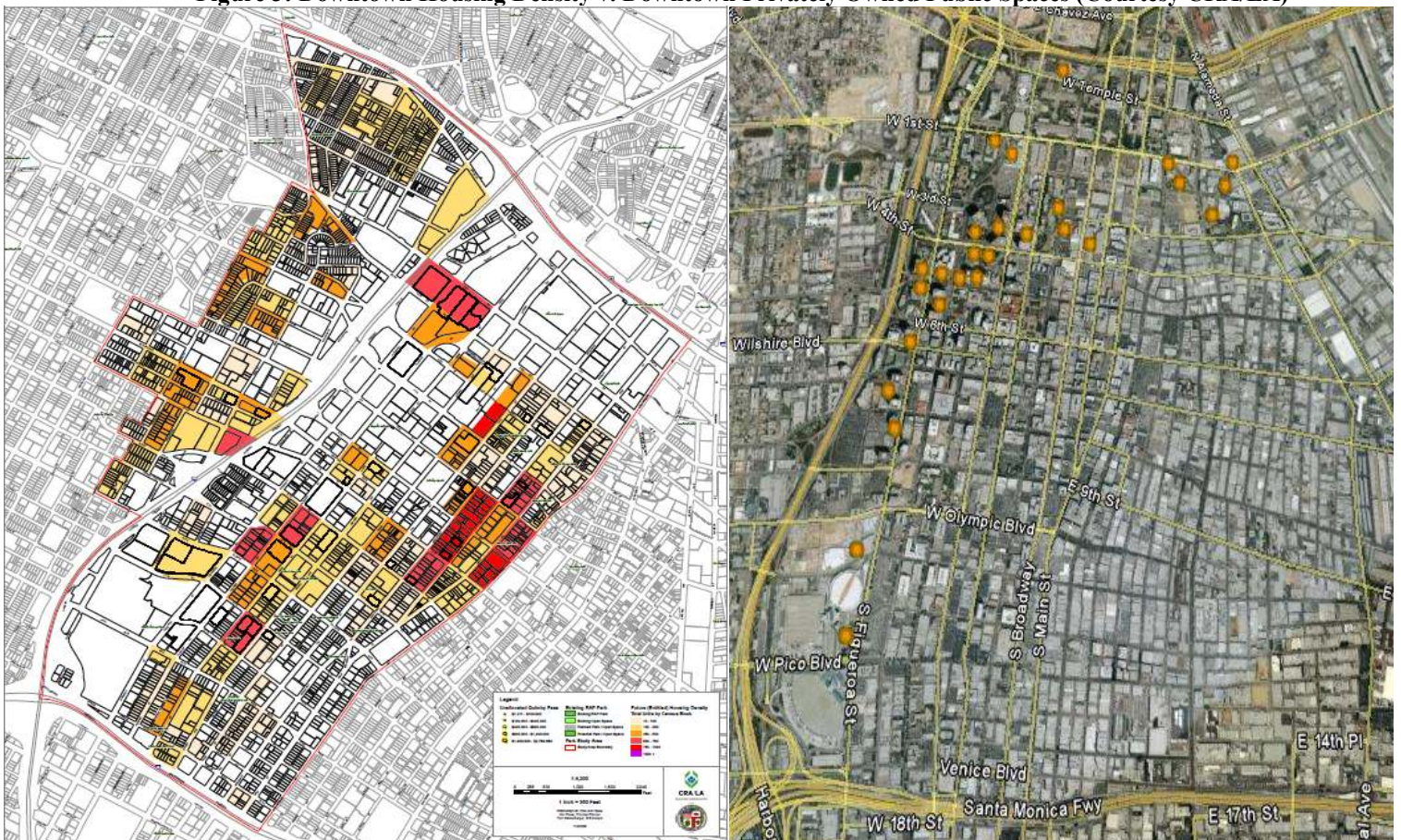
Nokia Plaza, although not as apparently exclusive perhaps as some of the other spaces studied, signifies an evolution of exclusionary technologies that Flusty and Smithsimon indicate. Nokia Plaza still exhibits some of the old design and programmatic features of exclusionary space - it is laboriously patrolled by security guards on the lookout for “undesirables” and has little comfortable seating – but is more important for the new technologies it introduces. The overwhelming use of sound and light, as

Hawthorne argues, makes social interaction difficult and uncomfortable. Certainly anyone who didn't have the money to spend on a concert at Nokia Plaza, a game at Staples, or who couldn't afford the plaza's expensive (chain) restaurants, would have no reason, or desire to spend anything more than cursory time in the space.

POPOS and Spatial Mismatch

Downtown Los Angeles's privately-owned public spaces also reveal some conflicts in land use and planning. Analysis of downtown privately-owned public spaces in relation to public space and demographic data shows discrepancies between the location of privately-owned public open spaces, public open space, and income and residential distribution within downtown.

Figure 3: Downtown Housing Density v. Downtown Privately Owned Public Spaces (Courtesy CRA/LA)



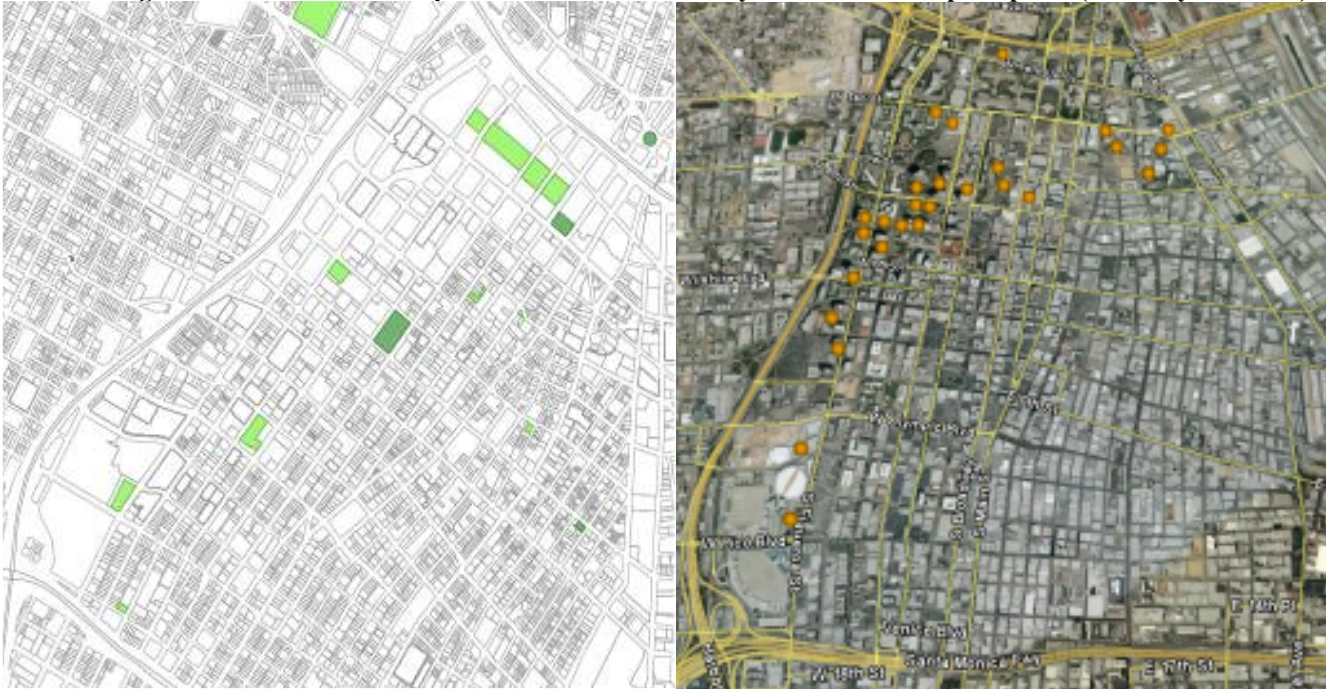
By comparing population density with the location of downtown's privately-owned public open spaces, we start to see the spatial mismatch that makes these spaces inaccessible, and creates a city with multiple downtowns. Bunker Hill and the Central Business District clearly is the center of the city's financial institutions, a growing condo market, but as of now, home to few residents. Rather most of the housing density in downtown is clustered on the eastern side of Broadway, in essence making Broadway the dividing line between the corporate downtown and the downtown that serves people who actually live there, mostly non-whites and many of low-income. (Figure 5)

Of a residential population of just over 25,000 (with estimates of about 30,000 for 2007) 88% are non-white. The median household income for downtown is under \$17,500. Downtown is also one of the densest areas of Los Angeles (over 8,000 people per square mile), another indication of the need for public space in the area.⁸² According to the Los Angeles Department downtown plan "residentially zoned land accounts for less than 5% of the total land area. According to the 2000 census, there are 11,713 households in the area (dwelling units only). The majority live in the periphery in mostly low income, over crowded neighborhoods."⁸³

Yet most public space in downtown, most of it privately-owned, is perched atop the slopes of Bunker Hill, inward oriented as if to give anyone walking up the hill from Broadway the impression there is nothing there to see. The corporate plazas are so well connected with paseos, escalators and elevated walkways, that one floats easily between Citigroup Plaza, Bunker Hill Steps and California Plaza. What few public spaces exist in downtown do in fact serve a wider range of Angelenos than do those of Bunker Hill, Little Tokyo and the CBD, but these spaces too are problematic (the Pershing Square renovation, Bidy Mason park) for their

own reasons. Los Angeles spends \$48 per person on park space, or a total of \$183,653,826 in 2006.⁸⁴ (Figure 6)

Figure 4: Downtown Park Space v. Downtown Privately Owned Public Open Spaces (Courtesy CRA/LA)

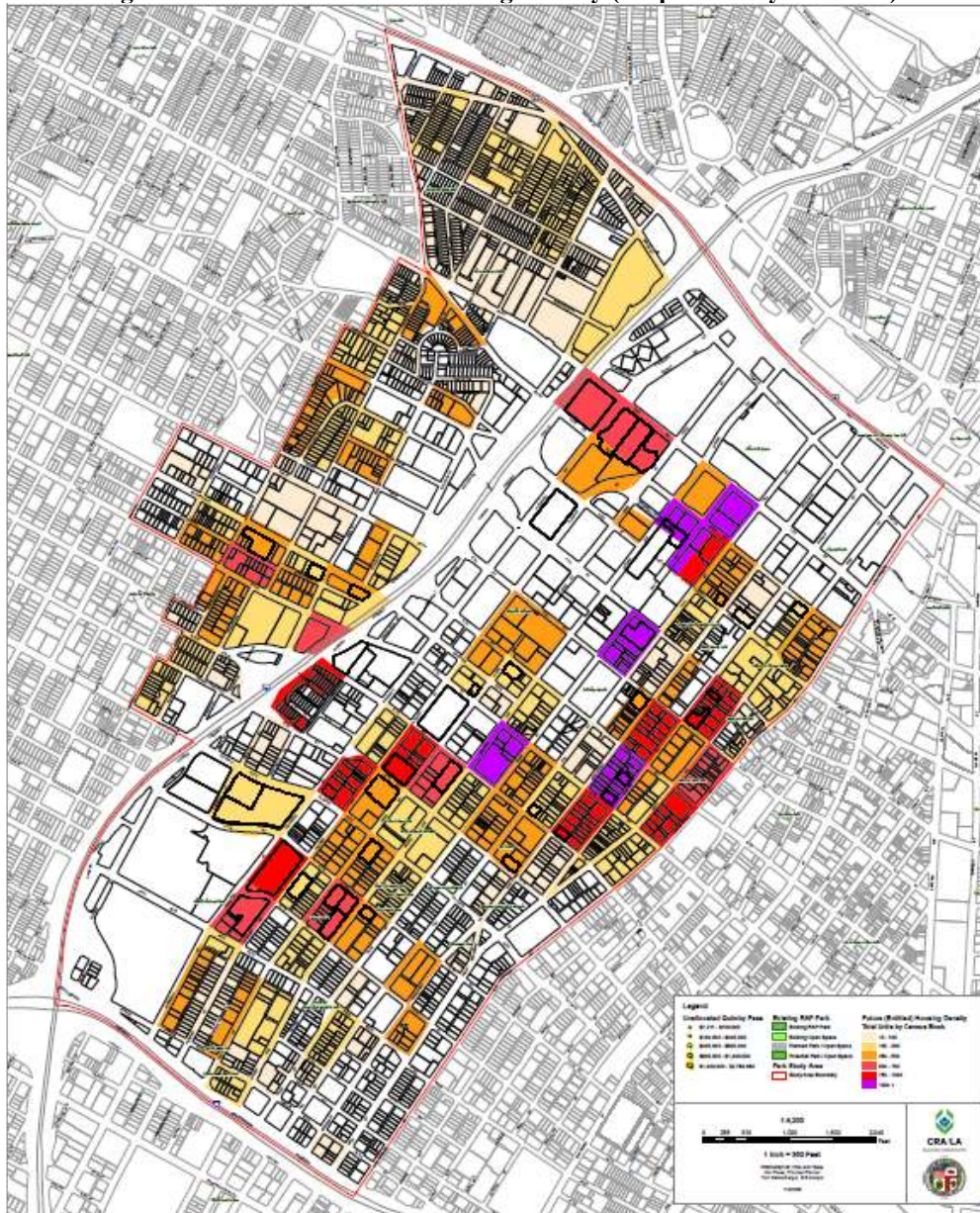


Privately-owned public space in downtown L.A., when viewed through this context, once again demonstrates it is public in name only.

A Changing Downtown

Where much of our study thus far has focused on how specific designs and macro-level planning and development strategies are intended to keep people out of downtown L.A.'s privately-owned public open spaces, we now turn to the role of these spaces on a changing downtown culture. As Smithsimon notes, “the significance of these spaces is not their effect on the poor but on the rich; that they are most important to understand not as sites of oppression but of elite reproduction.”⁸⁵

Figure 5: Future Downtown Housing Density (Map Courtesy CRA/LA)



The entertainment district is a clear indication of the changing downtown – one in which the poor downtown Angeleno’s future is unclear. Much of South Park’s infill developments are converting old warehouses and factories into posh lofts, that while attracting new residents to downtown, actively exclude many who already live there. Nokia Plaza and the Staples Center, along with other new developments along the Figueroa corridor threaten to dramatically change the nature of the community. Figure 7 shows how the CRA is invested in increasing housing

density in South Park along Figueroa. The question left unanswered is ‘who will this new downtown serve?’

Chapter 5: The Future of Downtown Public Space : Alternatives for Development and Reclamation Strategies

Reclaiming Public Space in Downtown Los Angeles

The ways in which public space is produced in downtown Los Angeles is changing, but the scope and breadth of this change depends on the successful work of planners, designers and community members dedicated to making public space just that, public. In this section we look at new city policies and programs that offer potential for major change in public space production and regulation, and suggest ways that community members can reclaim public spaces that are designed to keep them out.

Changing City Policy

The City of Los Angeles, despite encouraging and incentivizing much of the privately-owned public open space downtown, is taking steps, albeit minor, to address the lack of public space downtown.

The TFAR Ordinance, passed in early 2007, allows the sale of unused FAR (floor to area ratio) to developments that want to exceed existing FAR limits. The unused FAR comes from underdeveloped sites (sites that do not fulfill their FAR limit, such as the L.A. Convention center) and for a fee, can be transferred to essentially build up the density limit for a new development. The fees, which are calculated according to a formula built into the ordinance, are to be paid into the “Public Payment Benefit Trust Fund,” which is established to fund “amenities provided to the public including, but not limited to, providing for affordable housing, public open space, historic preservation, recreational, cultural, community and public facilities,

job training and outreach programs, affordable child care, streetscape improvements, public arts programs, homeless services programs, or public transportation improvements.”⁸⁶ The TFAR ordinance applies to commercial, industrial and residential developments that exceed 50,000 square feet.

The goal of the TFAR ordinance is to simultaneously increase density in downtown L.A. and funding for public amenities and services like low-income housing and public space. The newly amended TFAR ordinance is new, and its results have yet to be seen, but it is an indication on the part of the city that they are not willing to be as flexible with development incentives as they have in the past.

Los Angeles and the Project for Public Places

CRA/LA is also introducing new ways of thinking about public space in downtown. The CRA has contracted the Project for Public Spaces, a New-York based non-profit that works to turn public spaces into community places and has a long history of working with communities to reclaim space, to lead a series of workshops for CRA planners and other city planners involved public space. The workshops are “designed to introduce new ways of thinking about cities and towns and their public spaces.”⁸⁷

Reclaiming Downtown L.A.’s Privately-Owned Public Open Space

What truly makes space public is the people who use them and the ways in which they are used. This study, in addition to being a valuable guide for planners and designers, is meant to provoke, inspire and facilitate community reclamation of downtown L.A.’s public spaces. Public spaces are valuable inasmuch as they give us a place to relax, to people watch, to experience people and space spontaneously, and to serve as community meeting places.

Residents who want to reclaim their space can learn from current downtown expressionists. Flusty follows four downtown Los Angeles characters who find the blind spots and push the limits of downtown's privately-owned public spaces – a plaza bubble-blower, a young Latino skateboarder, an urban poet, and a freeway saxophonist.⁸⁸ Through these activities, the characters “are engaged in play. Seen in relation to a downtown comprised increasingly of tightly restricted quasi-public spaces, however, this persistent and highly visible play becomes stark refusal to disappear beneath the imperatives of spatial regulation that favors select target markets. In this refusal to disappear is an insistence on a right to claim, and to remake, portions of the city.”⁸⁹ Through self-expression one can reject the built-in hierarchy of these downtown spaces and make them their own such that downtown plazas no longer remain sanctuaries for corporate elite, but become venues of urban spontaneity - a backdrop for bubble blowing, a stage for a poet, a skate park, and a concert hall for a saxophonist.

Similarly important are planned and targeted demonstrations that change the way downtown's privately-owned public open spaces are publicly perceived. The REBAR art collective of San Francisco Rebar also partnered with performance group Snap Out Of It (SOOI) to “activate” fourteen of San Francisco's privately-owned public spaces with a series of “paraformances,” or public art/demonstration/occupation designed to “probe the spaces’ implicit social codes.” An example:

“One such event, called the Napping, invited the public to take a nap in a POPOS [privately-owned public open space] that resembled a dance studio with its shining wood floors and tall windows. Why do such a thing? “Our goal is to draw public awareness to these spaces and to give people the experience of existing in a city environment that is radically different from what you would normally do on your daily business,” says Oberthaler. “It’s creating a new realm of possibilities. Napping is something everyone does normally. But doing it in a public space that was a beautiful indoor environment was the radical thing about that.”⁹⁰

The combination of unplanned spontaneous use of otherwise controlled and scripted urban spaces with planned demonstrations and performances are vital to change public and political perceptions of how and by whom space is used downtown. Although the spaces do their best to keep people out, it is performances and demonstrations by people like Flusty follows and the demonstrations REBAR organizes that bring real change to the way people use and perceive *their* public spaces.

Conclusions

This study is the first to analyze such a variety and scope of Los Angeles privately-owned public open spaces and is a valuable resource for planners, designers, and community activists interested in reclaiming public space downtown. While the argument that privately-owned public space is exclusionary by design is not a new one (Loukaitou-Sideris, Banerjee, Flusty, Smithsimon and others,) this study reaffirms and builds upon criticisms of these quasi-public space and puts them in a downtown Los Angeles context. This study contributes to the work of the L.A. school of critics of privately-owned public space Loukaitou-Sideris, Flusty and Davis by providing a comprehensive look at the design and spatial layout of the spaces analyzed against community profile data for downtown. This study also provides an updated version of Flusty's somewhat tongue-in-cheek categorization of space in downtown, and adds a new technology of control to Flusty's categorizations. This study's identification and analysis of so many sites gives scope and immediacy to an issue that until now has existed only in segments.

There are some lessons to be learned from this study, for planners and for members of the downtown, and greater Los Angeles community. For planners, this study reveals the dynamics that created downtown L.A.'s privately-owned public spaces, and provokes planners to rethink the way public space is created downtown. Second, this study challenges planners to

look at public space privatization's effect on downtown as a whole and to think about new public space downtown not solely based on their economic impact on the city (attracting elite Angelenos), but on their impact on the neighborhoods and residents already there. This study also challenges downtown residents (and non-residents for that matter) to rethink and reclaim public space downtown. With a better understanding of where these spaces are, how they were created, designed and used, residents are now armed with the tools to begin the process of reclamation. With participation from both planners and community members we can make downtown L.A. a livable place that balances the public with the private and embraces the spontaneity of truly public space.

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