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The "Postmodern Geographies" of Frank Gehry's Los Angeles

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THE “POSTMODERN GEOGRAPHIES” OF FRANK GEHRY’S LOS ANGELES

BY

KATHERINE H. SHEARER

SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

PROFESSOR GEORGE GORSE
PROFESSOR BRUCE COATS

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INTRODUCTION

“Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness.”

— Frank Gehry

What makes a city unique? Is it the people? The buildings? The history? Is it D) All of the above? Every city—no matter how big, small, old, or young—is defined by its own intricate and interweaving characteristics. However, these attributes are ever changing, evolving, and redefining a city’s uniqueness. While our 20th and 21st century perceptions of New York City might include Broadway and the Empire State Building, and of Los Angeles, the freeways, Hollywood studios, and the Disney Concert Hall, these traits, as well as the communities that live there, have not and will not always define these metropolises. Perhaps the only trait of a city that remains constant is that it is alive. A city is a conglomeration of the cultures and the individuals who work and reside in it. Moreover, a city is the body in which its population circulates, it metabolizes its society and grows accordingly. This growth can be seen and experienced most prominently in a city’s architecture. To this end, this thesis will examine three buildings designed by influential postmodernist architect Frank Gehry using urban theorist Edward Soja’s concept of “postmodern geographies” as a tool to decipher how and why Gehry’s structures reflect, interact with, and progress the architectural and societal growth of the Greater Los Angeles Area throughout the latter half of the 20th and into the 21st century.

Before diving into an analysis of Gehry’s work or Soja’s notion of “postmodern geographies”—both of which will be discussed later in this section—it is important to examine the artistic and socio-spatial effects of architecture. As opposed to other forms of
three-dimensional art and “functional art,” architecture interacts with society in ways inherent and exclusive to the discipline. Whereas conventional sculpture can offer its viewers an artistic, intellectual, experiential interaction in the round, architecture provides the actual physical framework for human operations and societal functioning. Human bodies move through architecture and experience life both within and around it. Not only does architecture dictate human movement through space and manipulate visual perspectives in a built environment, it also provides the physical structures within which innumerable acts of human life are performed: we live, sleep, eat, work, learn, and socialize within architecture. These facts of life give meaning to the autopoiesis of architecture.\(^1\) According to architectural theorist Patrik Schumacher, “The theory of architectural autopoiesis identifies architecture’s societal function as the innovative framing of social interaction.”\(^2\) In other words, a significant amount of social interactions take place in designed spaces, making architecture a main participant in the framing and reproduction of social systems of communication. Therefore, it becomes the task of the architect to appropriately address the social function—the social interactions that constitute society’s social systems—through the form of architecture. For many postmodern architects, such as Frank Gehry, this relationship between form and function is interpreted in a multitude of ways.

In keeping with its societal role, responsibility, and overall raison d’être, architecture continually evolves for and with an ever-changing society both physically, through use and adaptive reuse, and conceptually, through style and social functions. Therefore, just as the built environment acts as a framing device within which society is

\(^{1}\) Autopoiesis derives from Greek and means self-production. It has been used in biology to describe the
reproduced, the advancement of architecture itself is reciprocally dependent on the social conditions and institutions of its societal surrounding. This symbiotic relationship between architecture and society will ultimately inform my examination of the Greater Los Angeles Area’s “postmodern geography” and the ways in which its built environment and social landscape have coevolved over the second half of the 20th century.

In the years following the end of World War II, the United States, along with the rest of the world, was experiencing both the detrimental and beneficial effects of the war’s aftermath. Although the war took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans, it also revitalized the American economy and pulled the country out of the Great Depression through the expansion of the industrial sector and increase of employment opportunities. This boost to the American economy launched the country into its so-called “golden age of capitalism,” a period of sustained economic growth and prosperity that lasted until the early 1970s.

The social, political, and economic effects of this “golden age” certainly made their mark on Los Angeles and its surrounding cities. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the emerging political and economic forces in Los Angeles were setting the stage for the major societal and architectural transformations of the urban environment that were to

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3 The modern image of the middle class comes from the post-WWII era, during which time the 1944 GI Bill provided returning veterans with funds for college, businesses, and home mortgages. Additionally, the expansion of industrialization and suburbanization provided prosperous opportunities to this emerging middle class. However, members of the white middle class were the primary beneficiaries of these changes, while other non-white Americans were excluded and segregated to slums. For more information on post-WWII America see Mark C. Carnes, *The Columbia History of Post-World War II America* (New York: Columbia UP, 2015).


5 Ibid, 3.
come. In 1955, Los Angeles’ city planners commenced a massive slum clearance project in the then-residential Bunker Hill neighborhood in an effort to establish the area as a sophisticated financial, commercial, and cultural hub in the Downtown, replete with modern corporate towers and plazas. The first stage of this project included clearing out the Victorian homes and diverse community that once populated Bunker Hill and leveling the terrain. Continuing throughout the rest of the 20th and well into the 21st century, the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project would become the longest urban renewal project in Los Angeles’ history. Over time, a L.A.’s new cultural and commercial center was forged from the early 20th century reviverist style buildings along Broadway to the mid-century modernist glass skyscrapers in the Financial District, and, in recent decades, the postmodern structures lining Grand Avenue. Today’s Bunker Hill is home to numerous cultural landmarks, including the Museum of Contemporary Art (“MOCA”), the Colburn School, the Disney Concert Hall, and the Broad Museum of Art (“The Broad”), just to name a few. Despite their varied dates of construction and distinct appearances, many of these buildings, along with numerous others in the L.A. area, embody the style that developed throughout the mid to late-20th century and constituted a new ideological and artistic movement: postmodernism.

In general, postmodernist theory is defined by its skepticism toward the grand narratives, ideologies, and credos of Enlightenment rationality that have dictated and

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6 The Bunker Hill area had been home to the city’s wealthy elites in the late 19th through early 20th century. The affluent residents began moving west and the area became a slum of tenement buildings, home to the city’s poor and working class, by mid-century. For more on Downtown redevelopment, see Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space,” in City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles, 223-263 (London: Verso, 1990), 229-230.

bolstered Western schools of thought and value systems since the 18th century. Within the realm of architecture, postmodern theory emphasizes the semiotics of architecture, that is to say, a system of architectural visual signs. Postmodern architectural design is typically characterized by its eclecticism, or its historical references in decorative forms, its use of surface ornament and non-orthogonal angles, and by its reference to surrounding buildings within urban spaces. Throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, Los Angeles has become a prototype of the “postmodern city” in its incredibly eclectic character. The region’s tumultuous history and richly built and social environments are reflected in its considerable growth—geographically, demographically, and architecturally. Although postmodern architecture only makes up a mere fraction of this cityscape, the ideologies of postmodernism remain ingrained in the cultural fabric of the 20th- and 21st-century L.A. area.

As implied by its name, postmodernism emerged as a decisive response to and departure from its predecessor, modernism. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modernism emerged as a philosophical, social, and artistic response to the transformation of modern society following the Industrial Revolution. In this way, modernism embodied the Zeitgeist or the spirit of the age. Modernist sentiment ripened along with the feeling

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8 This is not to say that postmodernism, as explained by philosophers Jurgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard, rejected Enlightenment objectives regarding the social emancipation of humanity, that is, of increasing freedom and universal rights. Rather, it rejects the totalizing arguments with which the elite imposed said rights on subservient minorities. Postmodern liberalism argues the agenda of multiculturalism and rights of minorities should be asserted without diminishing the rights of other minorities. See Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* 4th ed. (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 15.

9 This postmodern ‘linguistic’ approach to the design and function of architecture—in which the signifier indicates the signified—departs from older Vitruvian notions of *Firmitas, Utilitas, Venustas* (firmness, utility, beauty).


that traditional concepts and practices—of philosophy, social organization, science, and the arts—were becoming unsuitable for and outmoded in the new economic, social, and political environment of the industrializing world. Seen as a socially progressive trend of thought in the West, this modernist outlook insisted on the human ability to reshape and reform the environment by way of practical experimentation, scientific knowledge, and technology.

In architectural terms, this modernist spirit of renunciation of the old world—fueled by technological advancement and intergenerational rivalry—manifested itself during the decades between the World Wars. Additionally, modernism’s rejection of old historical styles in favor of a new futurist vision forged a new architectural vocabulary. This new vocabulary was informed by modern, Cubist notions of space and was demonstrated in the minimalist planar box structures of European architects Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius. Modernism’s emphasis on reason and efficiency in the machine age was embodied in its architectural design, which followed the simple steps of functionalism: “form follows function.”12 The principle of “functionalism” states that buildings should be designed based on their intended purpose.

To this point, Le Corbusier famously stated in his 1923 book *Vers une architecture* that “Une maison est une machine à habiter” (“A house is a machine for living in”).13 This design approach saw ornamentation as entirely superfluous, an excessive addition that

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Modernism’s abstract style focusing on the functional qualities of materials and the spatial environment forged what became known as the “International Style.” This name was first used in a 1932 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, curated by Americans Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, and titled *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*. The MOMA show coined this term for its international influence and the “International Style” soon came to define modernist architecture of the early 20th century.

The general characteristics of the International Style (also referred to as High Modern) include the use of radically simplified rectilinear forms, open interior spaces, a visually weightless quality of construction, and the total exclusion of any and all forms of ornamentation. Many of these ideal attributes were achieved through the use of modern materials and techniques, such as reinforced concrete, steel structural frames, and glass curtain walls, all of which contributed to the style’s “machine aesthetic” and overall acceptance of industrialized mass-production techniques. During the first half of the 20th century, cities were undergoing massive growth which only quickened in pace after World War II. The International Style’s use of mass-produced material and its universal aesthetic—due to the expulsion of any associative ornamentation—made it an easily achievable style option for sizable urban development projects. Throughout the aforementioned “golden age” of post-World War II capitalism, the International Style matured and came to define the “corporate architecture” that dominated in the United States for decades. Prime examples of the International Style include Ludwig Mies van

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14 In his famous 1910 lecture and essay, “Ornament and Crime,” modernist architect Adolf Loos claims, “The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects.”
der Rohe’s design for the Seagram Building (1958) and Walter Gropius’ for the Pan Am Building (1963) in New York City, the new corporate capital of the world, as well as Welton Becket’s Chandler Pavilion (1964) and Arthur Erickson’s California Plaza project (1985-1992) in Los Angeles.

In addition to its implementation in the corporate sphere, modernist architecture’s sleek machined surfaces, structural rationalism and functionalism, and commitment to the notion that “Less is More” found use in addressing certain social issues, particularly those regarding mass housing needs. Modernist architects believed that these broader goals of social reform could be achieved by way of the style’s speedy construction and relatively low-cost materials. Thus, in addition to stylish institutional or private-use structures—such as Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion (1929), Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye (1928-1931), and Walter Gropius’ Haus am Horn (1923)—modernist architectural design was used in social housing projects. Among these projects were the Wiessenhof housing exhibition in Stuttgart and Ernst May’s design for the New Frankfurt affordable public housing program in Germany.17

Inspired by this socially beneficial implementation of modernist design, architects conceived of similar urban housing projects in the United States under the new urban redevelopment provisions listed in the Housing Act of 1949. However, some attempts were more successful than others.18 Perhaps the most infamous of all these modernist

16 “ Wenig ist Mehr” (“Less is More”) was a statement made by modernist architect Mies van der Rohe, which became the mantra of modernist design.
18 In Los Angeles, modernist design was employed in the Estrada Courts low-income housing project in Boyle Heights. Added decades later, the murals painted on Estrada Courts, which reflect the Chicano barrio culture and traditions of the area, have become a landmark to the Chicano Mural Art Movement that began in the 1970s. See Holly Barnet-Sanchez and Tim Drescher, Give Me Life: Iconography and Identity in East L.A. Murals (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico, 2016).
housing projects was that of Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, designed by modernist architect Minoru Yamasaki, who would later design the World Trade Center towers in the early 1970s. Although constructed to alleviate some of the need for affordable housing in St. Louis during the mid-1950s and initially celebrated as a breakthrough in urban renewal, Pruitt-Igoe’s thirty-three, eleven-story apartment buildings quickly deteriorated within a decade after their construction.\(^\text{19}\) Despite the major social, political, and economic factors that contributed to the site’s demise, there exists a popular misconception that Pruitt-Igoe’s failure was the direct result of its design flaws and architectural shortcomings. Although some of Yamasaki’s design choices did prove problematic over time, the site’s deterioration was primarily the result of institutional and environmental racism. St. Louis’ white-controlled city government was unwilling to provide an adequate budget to maintain the buildings and grounds or to allow its increasingly impoverished residents the ability to earn enough to afford rent or maintain their own units.\(^\text{20}\) Thus, the persistence of segregationist policies in St. Louis played a major role in inevitable downfall of Pruitt-Igoe.

Regardless of where blame was being placed, vandalism, violence, and near total abandonment plagued Pruitt-Igoe at the expense of its primarily black residents and the already financially constrained city government. By the late 1960s, the St. Louis Housing Authority was encouraging the remaining residents to leave. With budgets already far exceeded and hopes for rehabilitation becoming ever slimmer and unrealistic, local and state authorizes agreed to demolish the site over a three-year period beginning in 1972.\(^\text{21}\) Postmodern architectural historian Charles Jencks theatrically recounts the aftermath of


\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
the first tower’s demolition stating, “Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3:32pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite.”  

Following this symbolic end of modernist architecture—and to an extent, urban renewal and public policy planning—postmodernism as an architectural movement fully emerged in the 1970s and continued to make its mark on the built environment throughout the remainder of the 20th century.

Although postmodernism is seen as a dissatisfaction with and push away from modernism, its theoretical intentions and aesthetic tendencies remain rooted in the foundation of modernist conventions towards which it directs its response and overall critique. As clearly stated by Charles Jencks, “Postmodern architecture was a hybrid movement that never rejected the suffix of its mixed definition. Rather it was a loyal opposition, […] one that accepted the reality of the modern world.” In other words, although postmodernism opposed the universal, minimalist, machine aesthetic of modernism, it did not oppose technological innovations or the pursuit of progress and modernity. The particular counterculture attitude of postmodernism can be succinctly surmised in postmodernist architect Robert Venturi’s response to modernist architect Mies van der Rohe’s statement “Less is More” with “Less is Bore.” Thus, postmodernist architects rejected the monolithic, narrow, linear homogeneity and claims of universality and rational functionality of modernist architecture. Instead, they tended

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23 Ibid., 46.
toward the irrational, radical, vernacular, and metaphoric treatment of both space and materials.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite its emergence in response to and rejection of modernism, postmodernism remains a notoriously elusive concept, encompassing a broad range of influences, ideas, and applications. While primarily heralded for its return to architectural wit and ornament, inspiration from popular culture, and historical reference in response to the formalism of modernism, postmodern architecture was also heavily informed by the social, economic, and political circumstances of the time. It also maintained clear linkages with certain 20\textsuperscript{th} century philosophies, primarily deconstruction and post-structuralism, and their associated philosophers Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault.\textsuperscript{26}

Jacques Derrida developed deconstruction as a form of semiotic analysis that questions the understanding of a text in terms of its presuppositions and hierarchical and ideological substructure. Although originally conceived as a theory for philosophy and literary criticism, the “deconstructive” approach has also been adapted in postmodernist thought and design.\textsuperscript{27} A new branch of postmodern architecture called “deconstructivism” emerged, characterized by its deliberate fragmentation, distortion, dispersion, and discontinuity of architectural elements.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] Robert Venturi’s co-authored 1972 text, \textit{Learning from Las Vegas}, is a pivotal text in the emergence of postmodernism. In it, Venturi argues that architects should be more receptive to the tastes and values of popular culture and less inclined to erect heroic, self-aggrandizing monuments. Additionally, he argues for a return to symbolism in architecture and claims that Las Vegas is, in fact, the victory of symbols-in-space over forms-in-space.
\item[26] Key texts from these philosophers include Jacques Derrida’s \textit{Of Grammatology} (1967), Jean Baudrillard’s \textit{The System of Objects} (1968), and Michel Foucault’s \textit{Discipline and Punish} (1975).
\end{footnotes}
The other influential school of thought, post-structuralism, shared a similar interest in semiotics.\textsuperscript{29} Post-structuralist thinkers, such as Baudrillard and Foucault, believed that meaning is brought about through systems of interrelated signs working together. Although post-structuralism, like deconstruction and postmodernism, is not easily defined by a set of shared axioms or methodologies, it emphasizes how various aspects of a culture—ranging from the most mundane details to its most abstract beliefs—determine one another. Thus, stemming from this deconstructionist and post-structuralist search for and understanding of the construction of meaning, postmodernists rejected modernism’s aversion to recognizable or historical content, preferring instead to maintain a material or object’s recognizable aspects while exploring how its constructed meaning could be deconstructed and reconfigured.

Just like the construction of a successful building, this analysis of postmodernist architecture in the Greater Los Angeles Area progresses through a number of necessary systematic steps. With this general overview of postmodernism and postmodernist architecture, the metaphoric footing of this analysis has been dug, so we can now lay the foundation. Given my concern with the relationship and interaction between postmodernist architecture and Los Angeles society over time, an examination of the existing scholarship on postmodern urbanism will provide the foundational material in this next step of the construction process.

Within the large body of literature on postmodernism, there is a general consensus concerning the characteristics typical of postmodernist architecture, but far less agreement regarding the exact catalysts of this ideological paradigm shift. In 1985, Mike

\textsuperscript{29} Madan Sarup, \textit{An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism} (Athens: University of Georgia, 1993), 34.
Davis contributed his essay “Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism” to *New Left Review*, in which he presents his leftist arguments on the topic of postmodernism and the “urban renaissance.”

Davis—a self-defined international socialist and “Marxist-Environmentalist”—is an American writer, political activist, urban theorist, and historian, known for his Foucauldian investigations of power and social class in Southern California. In this essay, Davis lays the foundation for his arguments by introducing and then quickly debunking the claims made by the American literary critic and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson in his 1991 work *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Davis also uses the ideas presented in Marxist economist Ernest Mandel’s 1975 book, *Late Capitalism*, in both his attack on Jameson and the development of his own opinions concerning postmodernism’s effects on the city, specifically Los Angeles.

The first of Jameson’s claims that Davis takes issue with is his assertion that the late capitalist period—defined by the proliferation of multinational corporations, globalized markets, mass production and consumption, and the overall expansion of the global economy—began in the Sixties. Davis supports Mandel’s original claims that late capitalism was born, instead, circa 1945 as a direct outcome of World War II and was used to understand the “long postwar wave of rapid growth.” Davis’ emphasis on this distinction derives from his frustration with Jameson’s account of the conception of postmodernism.

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32 Preceding the other two texts, Mandel’s book establishes the three periods in the development of the capitalist modes of production on which Jameson and Davis’ works are founded. Mandel begins his three-part periodization of capitalism as moving from the “freely competitive capitalism” of the 18th and 19th centuries, to the phase of “monopoly capitalism” that lasted until World War II, and finally a into the postwar period of “late capitalism.” See Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975).

postmodernism, in which he aligns the 1960s emergence of the postmodernist sensibility and cultural attitude with the transition to late capitalism. Davis argues that—given late capitalism’s rise in 1945 and the dominance of the High Modern or International Style throughout the 1960s—modernism, at least in architecture, remained the functional aesthetic of late capitalism. With this distinction made, Davis argues that the Sixties must be predominantly seen as a “fin-de-siècle decade, more a culmination than a beginning.”

The second aspect of Jameson’s approach that Davis disagrees with is his apparent oversimplification and homogenization of different aspects of postmodernism and the effects of late capitalism. According to Davis, Jameson sees the United States’ integration into the multinational capitalist system and the many changes that ensued as signs of triumphant capitalist expansion for the country. In contrast, Davis sees the effects of this phase of late capitalism as “symptoms of a global crisis.” Overall, Davis reveals the ideological inconsistencies in these foundational texts in order to raise questions about and provide original answers to the timing and effects of late capitalism, the significance of the Sixties as a potential epochal turning point, and the role of postmodernism in “the American Downtown Renaissance.”

Davis ultimately calls for a modified interpretation of postmodernism. He believes that this new reading of the concept must link postmodernism’s emerging impact on the built environment to the increase in international investors during the late-20th century’s “crisis phase of capitalism” and to the abandonment of idealized urban reform.

34 Davis notes the construction of iconic Modernist skyscrapers such as the World Trade Center, the John Hancock Center, and Sears Tower. Ibid., 108.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 109.
37 Ibid., 108.
resulting from the new class polarizations taking place in the United States. Throughout his interpretation, Davis stresses the “coercive intent” of postmodernist architecture, which he claims polarizes the city into “radically antagonistic spaces.” Davis uses the transformation of Downtown Los Angeles as an example of the effects of the postmodernist “urban renaissance,” calling it, along with Haussmann’s renovation of Paris, a counter-revolutionary restructuring.

Other scholars also grapple with the complexities surrounding postmodernism’s emergence, its relation to late capitalism, and its significance to the social and built environment. In his 1989 essay, “Postmodernism: Roots and Politics,” published in Cultural Politics in Contemporary America, American sociologist, political writer, and cultural commentator, Todd Gitlin discusses the multiple converging forces that have engendered the postmodernist sensibility. Gitlin boils down the many influences and instigators of postmodernism into a clear four-pronged approach: the effects of late capitalism (the economic approach), the social aftermath of the Vietnam War (the political approach), the experience of Yuppies born during the baby boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s (the generational approach), and the Cold War’s provocation of the American cultural tendency to revolt against current conventions (the American approach), which in this case was the enshrined modernism of the postwar period. With regard to postmodernism’s visual and ideological impact, Gitlin argues that postmodernism should be understood as both a style and a general orientation, which he

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 113.
calls a “structure of feeling.” This “structure of feeling” functions as a framework within which humans can understand and experience the world and their place, or rather “placelessness,” in it.

In her 1999 book, *Postmodern Urbanism*, author Nan Ellin also examines postmodernism’s relation to space and place. In the chapter, “Reconceiving the City and Culture,” Ellin examines the paradigm shift and “legitimacy crisis” in Western conceptions of the city and culture that began in the 1960s. Ellin states that similar shifts have occurred at other pivotal moments in history, specifically during the 1890s and the period between the two World Wars. During the first American Industrial Revolution in the 1890s, the city and culture were conceived in terms of Nature, as entities that functioned as organic organisms. Then, during the second Industrial Revolution—occurring from the late 19th century through the interwar period—the organic metaphor was joined by the machine metaphor. Whereas the former introduced the notion of “human ecology” and the city as an organism, the latter saw the city and culture as functionalist entities that could be designed through engineering.

By the 1960s, the machine metaphor had come to entirely eclipse the organic metaphor. As Ellin explains, it was during this post-World War II period of corporate capitalism that notions of the city and culture shifted again. The concept of a “city collage” or a “city-montage” emerged, replacing that of the modernist functional city. The “city-montage” approach to urban planning does not model the city after nature or the machine, but rather on cities of the past. In this way, a more heterotopic urban fabric is created as “mono-zoning gives way to undirected hetero-zoning” that promotes the

41 Ibid., 348.
mixing of social functions across the environment.\textsuperscript{43} Postmodern urbanism also promotes the concept of “pluricentrality,” or having multiple centers to a city, an idea Ellin notes as having influenced the growth plans for cities like Paris and Los Angeles. Overall, Ellin’s account of the shifting notions of city and culture away from modernist functionalism and towards a postmodern pastiche, or hybridity, offers useful theoretical background for my examination of Los Angeles as a postmodern city.

However, when it comes to literature on Los Angeles’ form and culture, influential English architecture critic Reyner Banham’s 1971 \textit{Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies} remains a foundational text. In this book, Banham offers an optimistic vision, or even a celebration, of Los Angeles, in which he praises the modernist designs of its émigré architect pioneers, such as Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra, as well as the region’s vernacular forms: gas stations, surfboards, cars, and freeways. Furthermore, Banham categorizes the Los Angeles experience into four “ecologies”—Surfurbia (the beach-cities), Foothills (the affluent communities), The Plains of Id (the L.A. Basin), and Autopia (the freeways)\textsuperscript{44}—and explores the distinct architectural cultures of each. For Banham, cities were about movement, whether by foot, as in London, or in the car, as in L.A. Thus, for his 1972 BBC documentary \textit{Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles}, Banham learned to drive in order to “read Los Angeles in the original,”\textsuperscript{45} that is, to experience L.A. the way it was made to be experienced. Among the many things that caught Banham’s eye during his tour of L.A. was the 1964 Danziger

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 285.
Studio on Melrose, designed by the then-little-known Frank Gehry, who Banham was already comparing to the great Schindler.

While many of Banham’s judgments, such as recognizing Gehry’s young talent, proved highly perceptive, his optimistic celebration of L.A. in the 1970s largely ignored many of the area’s broader societal issues. With his 1990 publication, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, the aforementioned scholar Mike Davis presents a dystopic, Foucauldian, myth-busting response to Banham’s Los Angeles. Davis offers a new historical framework that addresses L.A.’s class and racial tensions and highlights the degree to which boosterism and civic corruption dictated the city’s growth. According to Davis, the city’s architecture and urbanism reflect these tensions and have evolved into both commercial commodity and defensive fortress. Thus, between Banham’s exciting “Surfurbia” and Davis’s carceral “junkyard of dreams,” Los Angeles has been painted as both a bright urban prototype and a depraved model in 20th-century scholarship.

These many conflicting and overlapping perceptions of Los Angeles’ urbanism, architecture, society, and postmodernism are synthesized in postmodern political geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja’s concept of “postmodern geographies.” In *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Soja offers a succinct, yet extremely complex, definition of postmodernism and discusses its ideological ability to reassert space, or “geography,” in contemporary critical social theory. Soja aligns the emergence of postmodernism—a concept that he claims attempts to make “theoretical and practical sense of [the] contemporary restructuring of capitalist

spatiality”—with the epochal transition in both critical thought and material life. By emphasizing the role of physical space in cultural history and social theory, these reconstituted “postmodern geographies” offer more critically revealing ways of looking at the combination of time and space, history and geography, period and region, and the sequence and simultaneity inherent in all landscapes. Furthermore, in his effort to deconstruct and recompose the rigidly historical narrative, Soja gives an explanation of contemporary urban and regional restructuring based on a tripartite periodization of posthistoricism, postfordism, and postmodernism. Soja’s analysis of the emerging postfordist urban landscape of Los Angeles, the archetypal “postmodern city,” offers a unique perspective on the city’s politicized spatiality of social life, as systems of production, consumption, exploitation, spatialization, and social control continue to adapt to the changing landscape and vice versa. Throughout this thesis, Soja’s notion of “postmodern geographies” will serve as the theoretical lens for my examination of Frank Gehry’s architectural contributions to L.A.’s postmodern cultural fabric and landscape.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th and into the 21st century, postmodernist architect Frank Gehry has contributed many renowned, but also highly controversial, structures to Los Angeles’ built environment, which have made him not merely a participant, but an authority, in the region’s spatial development and vernacular style. Although the Canadian-born architect has risen to international fame, earning some of the most prestigious accolades—including the Pritzker Architecture Prize (1989) and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2016)—Gehry’s roots remain embedded in Los Angeles, the city where he began his architectural education and professional career. Given the

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48 Ibid., 2.
significant influence and reciprocal impact that Gehry and Los Angeles have had on one another, an exploration of this architect’s evolving contributions to Los Angeles’ urban form will provide a more focused framework for the exploration of the city’s “postmodern geographies.”

Our discussion Gehry’s role in the architectural postmodernization of the L.A. area will be framed around three of his contributions to the region’s built environment. These three postmodernist buildings—Gehry Residence in Santa Monica (1977-78), the Frances Howard Goldwyn Library in Hollywood (1983-86), and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Downtown L.A. (1999-2003)—offer a diverse range of construction dates, materials, and geographic locations, in addition to their wholly dissimilar functions. In addition to demonstrating Gehry’s design techniques from the ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s respectively, each these three structures interacts with and stands as a testament to its individual social, material, and environmental surroundings. Therefore, through an analysis of Gehry’s postmodern structures, this thesis will ultimately investigate how Los Angeles evolved into what Edward Soja and other urban theorists have deemed the archetypal “postmodern city” and how this transformation has impacted and continues to affect the social functionality of this city of four million people.
CHAPTER 1: “Wood, Metal, and Chain Link”

Gehry Residence, Santa Monica
(1977-1978)

The first structure in this tripartite examination of Frank Gehry’s architectural contribution to the “postmodern geographies” of Greater Los Angeles is located in Santa Monica, on the corner of Washington Avenue and 22nd Street. Here simultaneously stands what was once Gehry’s primary residence and what is still one of his most iconic structures. Despite the change in occupant, this house forever retains the name that has come to define it: Gehry Residence.

Unlike the other two structures in this analysis, Gehry Residence represents Gehry’s early residential work, although it was not completely designed by him. In 1976, Frank and Berta Gehry purchased a quaint, pink Dutch Colonial house located on a corner lot in the Wilshire-Montana neighborhood of Santa Monica. Gehry spent the next two years deconstructing and reconstructing this house, transforming the existing structure with his unique postmodern flare. Among the most notable aspects of Gehry’s renovation is his addition of a metallic exterior that “wraps” around the original building in a manner that simultaneously visually conceals and reveals many of the house’s original details (Figure 1.1). Although Gehry was little-known at the time, his design for Gehry Residence illustrates his already revolutionary architectural vision during these formative years and has since become a defining hallmark of his early career and aesthetic.

In addition to its bold assertion of Gehry’s own architectural style, the house’s postmodernist remodel also makes a bold statement about the conflicting perceptions of the region’s cultural landscape. In stark contrast to the modesty and bourgeois conformity
of the original house, Gehry’s radical transformation of the structure is anything but “domestic” in the conventional sense. Through his unique and unprecedented choice and treatment of materials—exposed and untreated plywood, corrugated metal sheets, and chain-link fencing—Gehry boldly breaks the rules of suburbia and creates a postmodern masterpiece on an otherwise ordinary Santa Monica street corner. However intentionally or inadvertently achieved, Gehry Residence embodies and immediately communicates a sense of profound rupture and fragmentation. These qualities largely inform the radical statement Gehry’s home makes on formal composition and unorthodox use of materials. While Gehry Residence partakes in the tradition of architect houses—key examples include Philip Johnson’s Miesian-style house in New Canaan, Connecticut and Robert Venturi’s postmodern residence outside of Philadelphia—Gehry’s radical deconstructivist design strongly impacts and disrupts the predominant social and spatial context of Greater Los Angeles in the late 1970s.

An analysis of the Gehry Residence—particularly how it functions within the intersecting discourses of art, society, and spatial geography—opens the door to a multitude of questions: What does Gehry aim to achieve with this design? Was his message received as hoped? If not, how have others interpreted the house? What statement, whether intended or not, does the structure make at the local level? At the regional level? What does this structure reveal about how Canadian-born Frank Gehry perceives his surroundings? How does Gehry participate in Greater Los Angeles culture through this and others of his lasting contributions to the built environment? In order to properly approach and investigate these questions, we must first establish Gehry within the context of Los Angeles.
By the time he purchased this home in the late 1970s, forty-something-year-old Gehry was no stranger to Southern California. Nearly thirty years prior, Gehry, born Frank Owen Goldberg, had emigrated from Toronto, Canada with his family in 1947 at the age of eighteen. Due to his father’s failing health and inability to withstand another frigid Canadian winter, the Goldberg family settled in sunny Los Angeles. In this way, Gehry’s experience contributes to the region’s long history of émigré artists and architects—such as Austrian-born modernist architects Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler—who came to Los Angeles for a better life and became major influences in the area. However, prior to pursuing a future in architecture, Frank attended Los Angeles City College, during which time he worked as a truck driver. Feeling unsatisfied and uninspired, Gehry resorted back to his childhood passion for art and began taking architecture classes. In 1954, Gehry graduated from the University of Southern California’s School of Architecture. While at USC, Gehry and other liberal-minded students formed the Architecture Panel, an informal club that focused on enhancing the connection between architecture and social responsibility. During a time of heightened McCarthyism and anti-communist sentiment in L.A., Gehry, one of the group’s most active members, organized a series of evening talks to encourage group participation in public issues.

Gehry’s leftist political leanings did not find a welcome home when, two years later, he moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to study urban planning at the prestigious Harvard Graduate School of Design. It soon became apparent that Gehry’s personal values and interests did not align with those of the rigidly structured program. After

50 Ibid., 69.
failing to properly address the professor’s prompt for a final project, Gehry was dismissed from the program, much to his initial chagrin. However, his dismissal was eventually seen as a blessing in disguise. Gehry was able to remain at Harvard with special student status, allowing him to audit any classes of his choosing and further cultivate his knowledge in his specific areas of interest. Gehry left Harvard and returned to L.A. to resume work with Victor Gruen Associates, a commercial architecture firm with whom he had apprenticed during his time at USC. While working under Austrian-born Victor Gruen, a prime proponent of the International Style, Gehry undoubtedly gained influential exposure to modernist architectural and urban design techniques. Finally, after a year working in Paris, Gehry moved back to Los Angeles in 1962 to establish his own practice, which became known as Frank Gehry and Associates by 1967, and as Gehry Partners by 2001.  

Despite having spent a great deal of his life in Los Angeles, a city and environment with which his name and architecture would soon become synonymous, Frank Gehry still remained, in some regards, an ‘outsider.’ According to architectural critic Paul Goldberger, this outsider status arose from two central aspects of Gehry’s Southern California career. First, being based in Los Angeles, Gehry was working as an artist outside the epicenter of the art world, New York. Second, he was an architect who chose to align himself with the city’s artist community. During this time, architects did not frequently mix with artists, making Gehry’s circumstances unusual, but unique. Regardless, Gehry found that the L.A. modernist artist circles provided an environment

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52 Goldberger, Building Art, 10.
far more conducive to support, collaboration, and inspiration. Gehry explains his choice to socialize with the artist community:

My colleagues who were doing architecture that were my age were making fun of what I was doing, so I didn’t have much of a support system from them—I had a kind of blank stare. And here were these funny artists, that I just loved their work, who were treating me like I was part of the team.\(^5^4\)

Among the artists that Gehry befriended were members of the L.A. Light and Space and L.A. Pop Art movements, such as Robert Irwin, Chuck Arnoldi, Ron Davis, Ed Ruscha, Larry Bell, John Altoon, and Ed Moses, just to name a few.\(^5^5\) Gehry admired the artists’ risk-taking, experimental energy and engagement with popular culture, which allowed and encouraged him to explore new concepts and find inspiration through exposure to their artistic endeavors.

In addition to his local artist friends, Gehry’s artistic appetite was fed by his encounter with the Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art of New York artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Rauschenberg’s *combines* and Johns’ collages utilized non-traditional materials and objects in innovative combinations. These works, along with others of the emerging Pop Art, Minimal art, and assemblage movements that distinguished American and Southern Californian art beginning in the 1960s, paved the way for the total reconfiguration of Gehry’s architectural practice. Gehry grew inspired to return to basic materials and to develop a design aesthetic organized around the immediate apprehension of form and space.\(^5^6\) Regarding his design approach, Gehry states:

\(^{5^4}\) Ibid.
\(^{5^6}\) During this time, a new generation of Californian artists had crystallized around the Ferus Gallery (Jasper Johns, Roy Lichenstein, Ed Ruscha, Robert Irwin, etc.), as well as the Gemini G.E.L. print studio. See
My approach to architecture is different. I search out the work of artists, and
use art as a means of inspiration. I try to rid myself, and the other members of
the firm, of the burden of culture and look for new ways to approach the
work. I want to be open-ended. There are no rules, no right or wrong. I’m
confused as to what’s ugly and what’s pretty.\textsuperscript{57}

In this way, Gehry saw and approached architecture as art, interested not in current
cultural trends, but rather in the search for new frontiers. To Gehry, architecture \textit{is} the art.

While his approach to architecture certainly emphasized \textit{art} in many respects, Gehry
drew consideration inspiration from local \textit{architecture}, as well. The Arts & Crafts
tradition and Modernist aesthetic in Los Angeles, both of which had distinct roots in the
Southern California, informed many of Gehry’s design decisions and anchored his
structures in a recognizable regional past through his inclusion of reimagined aspects of
each style.

Beyond the region’s rich artistic culture and history, the atmosphere and
innovative spirit unique to Los Angeles gave particular meaning to Gehry starting his
career in Southern California.\textsuperscript{58} Throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century—particularly after WWII,
when the L.A. area was developed as a major industrial center for the war effort—the
region’s population, industrialization, urban development, and cultural reputation had
increased exponentially and greatly expanded in reach. Rapid transformation and
renewal, extraordinary heterogeneity, and a continual search for the “new” defined the
city’s fulsome landscape and energetic atmosphere. Los Angeles’ general vitality, artistic
and intellectual freedom, and overall pulse of insatiable, uninhibited, open-minded

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\textsuperscript{57} Gehry quoted in Rosemarie Haag Bletter, “Frank Gehry’s Spatial Reconstructions” in \textit{The Architecture
of Frank Gehry}, ed. Rosemarie Hagg Bletter et al. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.,
1986), 25.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Frank Gehry}, eds. Lemonier and Migayrou, 12.
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exploration proliferated its reputation as a land of opportunity. Gehry, who was among many artists influenced by the city’s visionary spirit, was inspired to approach his artistic endeavors, as he says, with “no rules, no right or wrong.” In this stimulating geographic context, Gehry’s avant-garde designs soon caught the eye of the architectural world and ultimately launched his career to new heights. Among the early designs that introduced the world to Gehry’s originality and ingenuity was his iconic transformation of Gehry Residence, which stood as a kind of ‘portrait’ or statement of the architect’s revolutionary vision and marked a turning point in his professional career.

By the time Gehry had begun his transformation of his Santa Monica home in 1977, he had experience working on both commercial and private residence commissions. Among these were the Ron Davis Residence and Studio (1968-72), the Gemini G.E.L artist studio (1976-79)—both works reflecting his involvement with local artists—and the Santa Monica Place shopping center (1973-80), an early commercial commission in his resident Santa Monica. However, Gehry Residence would be the first project in which he was not beholden to any client vision, timetable, or demands. This allowed Gehry to freely experiment with the design, inhibited mostly by his own small budget.

In their search for a place to call home, both Frank and Berta had felt that the financial and emotional expense of building a home from scratch would be too great, so it made sense to buy an existing house to remodel. Berta, who discovered the house on the corner, said, “The first moment I went through it I thought, ‘Frank can do things to this

59 Author Kevin Starr has written a series of books on the idea of the “California Dream,” such as *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963.*
Located in a pleasant, quiet, residential Santa Monica neighborhood, this Dutch Colonial home, typical of those built in the 1920s and ‘30s, had no strong architectural presence to speak of, which Gehry saw as a plus. Although it was an ordinary Dutch Colonial, houses in this style were unusual enough in Los Angeles, where Spanish-style homes were ubiquitous. Thus, the house was ordinary enough that Gehry could manipulate it, but not so ordinary to the area that Gehry would feel he was living in a “cliché.”

There were many attributes of the house that Gehry liked and wanted to keep or highlight. These included various aspects of the landscaping, certain elements of the existing house—such as the pink asbestos shingles, the original windows, and the two-story design—and its street corner location, where he could develop his architectural vision in three dimensions to better showcase his style. Nevertheless, Gehry wanted to engage this old house in a new architectural discourse, to weave his own wholly dissimilar kind of architecture in and around it in conversation with the Dutch Colonial. The resulting design demonstrated this newly-constructed discourse through Gehry’s experimental play with shapes, solids and voids, transparency and opacity, and ultimately through his forging of a dialogue between old and new, between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

This untraditional renovation and expansion of the house involved three layered sections: the interior, the original exterior, and the newly constructed trapezoidal shell that encompassed the entire existing structure. From the outside, the old two-story house was surrounded by a new one-story high structure of corrugated metal, but remained

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60 Goldberger, *Building Art*, 194.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 195.
visible from all sides, poking up through the midst of the new (Figure 1.2). This sharply angled corrugated metal façade was broken at the corner and partway down the side by large sections of exposed wood framing covered in glass. In the front of the house, the roof of the new extension became a deck, enclosed by large nets of chain-link fencing. The white front door, which divides the metal façade, was surrounded by untreated, unpainted plywood boards and beams. The front steps were composed of large plywood platforms that were stacked askew atop other concrete slabs on the right, and which met a more conventional cement staircase on the left. As evidenced by this description, Gehry wanted to emphasize the everyday, utilitarian materials in their unpretentious, unfinished state. All together, this improvisational collage appeared to be ‘in progress,’ resembling a construction site on this suburban street corner.

On the northern side of the house, between this protective metal layer and the house’s original exterior, Gehry had created a new kitchen and dining area (Figure 1.3). The pink exterior wall of the old house divided the kitchen from the living room, ambiguously poising the kitchen, with its poured concrete floors, between feeling like an indoor or outdoor room.⁶³ Thus, in postmodernist fashion, Gehry’s abrupt and disjointed definition and separation of inside and outside reject the seamless transitions of indoor-outdoor spaces of modernist architects, such as Mies van der Rohe and Neutra.⁶⁴ A large cubic skylight, rotated at a 45-degree angle, connects the new exterior to the original above the kitchen, further enhancing this blurring of indoor-outdoor space (Figure 1.4). These glass-covered, exposed wood-frame sections intervened between inside and outside by bringing in natural light that cast playful shapes and shadows from the trees

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⁶³ Ibid., 200.
into the newly internalized space. Moreover, with many of Gehry’s unorthodox design elements visible from its street corner location, Gehry Residence overtly calls into question traditional notions of residential ‘curb appeal’ and home improvement or ‘renovation.’

In contrast to the major additions made to the outside, Gehry’s renovation to the inside was predominantly subtractive. Within the original interior, many of the walls and ceilings were removed or stripped back to their framework. Gehry also opened up some of the smaller rooms to make a larger, flowing living space on the ground floor. This living area was enclosed by one solid white wall, one wall of unpainted plywood, and another of exposed studs (Figure 1.5). Wooden joists were left exposed in the ceiling, sections of which were removed to create open lofts in what had been the attic (Figure 1.6). Gehry took the home’s finished interior and undid it, opening it up and reverting it back to a stage of apparent incompletion.

Observed in its entirety, the house exists in a permanent state of tension. Gehry established this tension by eclectically juxtaposing opposing concepts throughout the house: old and new, inside and outside, finished and unfinished, visible and hidden, and so forth. This apparent unruly randomness of Gehry’s design emerges from his immediate responses to textures, materials, and setting. Gehry was interested in using materials that were associative, contextually relevant, and artistically intriguing as a means of architectural decoration and humanization. Gehry explains this fascination with materials, saying, “I grew up a modernist. Decoration is a sin, that’s the mantra of modernism. So if you can’t use decoration, how do you humanize a building, how do you

65 Goldberger, Building Art, 200.
humanize a thing? Materials could be expressive." This statement on the expressive power of materials is prominently demonstrated in Gehry’s enigmatic design in which he features materials that are staunchly untraditional to a residential setting, such as unpainted plywood, corrugated metal, and chain-link fencing. By creating these unnatural unions between his materials, Gehry encourages the rethinking of materials and their socially accepted and associative uses. These materials, which are generally associated with industrial and construction sites, confront and disrupt the suburban homogeneity and speak to a broader local context that extends beyond the pleasant tree-lined neighborhood streets of Santa Monica. Additionally, Gehry’s collaged, pastiche composition achieves both a visual and conceptual conflation of these familiar materials being used in unfamiliar ways with the surrounding suburban context. Therefore, Gehry’s original and experimental use of common, utilitarian, vernacular materials is indeed a specific response to the local artistic and architectural traditions, the urbanization and industrialization of the area, and the societal conditions of the time.

It is important to note that, in the context of his career, Gehry’s redesign of the Santa Monica residence both summarized his work up to that point and propelled it forward in new directions. Thus, elements of his home redesign—certain materials, forms, and ideas—can be found in his prior and simultaneously occurring architectural commissions. For example, the concept of contrasting a harsh and angular corrugated metal exterior with the warmer and rougher tonalities of an exposed wood interior has precedent in Gehry’s design for the Malibu studio and residence of the artist Ron Davis.

67 Gehry quoted in Sketches of Frank Gehry.
68 Through his unique application of concrete, Le Corbusier had also encouraged the rethinking of material uses and associations. The amalgamation of different materials had also been seen in the Cubist collages of Picasso and Braque, as well as in the works of Rauschenberg and Johns. For more information on influential artistic techniques see Bletter, “Spatial Reconstructions,” 31.
In both cases, Gehry creates an unnatural union between the industrial, high-tech associations of corrugated metal and the low-tech nature of plywood. This pairing of materials forges a concurrent sense of tension and collaboration, as the high-tech metal contrasts with, yet works alongside the relatively low-tech plywood. However, both the high- and low-tech qualities are expressions of a certain Californian mentality, wherein pride in advanced technology coexists and comingles, however uneasily, with the willful reliance on a do-it-yourself approach.69

Furthermore, in the context of Southern California specifically, Gehry seems to reference the Arts & Crafts and Modernist traditions by abstractly combining the handmade uniqueness of Charles and Henry Greenes’ Gamble House (1908-09) in Pasadena with the machine-like appearance of Richard Neutra’s Von Sternberg House (1935) in Northridge, as he both strips the interior down to its core wooden framework and installs industrial metal around the exterior.

In addition to its continuation of the dialog between the region’s industrial and suburban architectural practices through certain materials, the design for Gehry Residence also builds on the optical manipulations of space that were introduced at the Davis Studio. In his design for the Davis Studio, Gehry initiated his own commentary on the intricate relationship between art and architecture. He responds to the art and sculpture of his time in his transfer of illusionistic geometries into a fully three-

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69 Bleter also suggests that Gehry’s design was influenced by other art and architecture of the 20th century, such as the cubist-inspired architecture of Le Corbusier, the simultaneous nonobjective composition, yet assertion of materials of Abstract Expressionists, and the contradictory formal abstraction of workday materials of the Russian Constructivists. This latter influence appears to have been strongly incorporated in Gehry’s choice and treatment of materials. See Ibid.
Through his use of complex planar interactions and expressive angles, Gehry refers to and exaggerates our normal perspectival perception of orthogonal architecture by gradually deforming the modernist cube into an asymmetrical structure, replete with a trapezoidal floor plan and a dynamic slanted roof.

The Davis Studio’s already high degree of visual complexity is carried a step further in Gehry’s design for the sharply angled corrugated metal shell that enveloped his Santa Monica home. In the early planning stages of Gehry Residence, Frank brought on a young architect named Paul Lubowicki as his design assistant. Lubowicki made the model from Gehry’s early sketches for the house that the two of them then worked on. In this original design, the façade incorporated an unbroken wall of corrugated metal (Figure 1.9). However, in his determination to push the house beyond the design of the Davis Studio, Gehry said, “Let’s cut away at it,” and picked up a knife. Although the dramatically pointed corner, similar to that of the Davis Studio, remained, Gehry and Lubowicki cut the front section apart in the center, breaking the façade into two parts, creating an opening in the middle to serve as the entryway (Figure 1.10). The house’s white front door, set within its unpainted plywood framework and surrounded by corrugated metal on either side, creates an austere and somewhat hostile entrance. Unlike the presumably more inviting original entry to the Dutch Colonial, this new entrance stands closer to the street, confronting passers-by, and guarding the private home space with its protective barriers and stark, unadorned front door.

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70 Ron Davis’ work dealt with two-dimensional optical illusions, which Gehry takes a step further by bringing the artists ideas into the third dimension. See Ibid., 26.
71 Gehry had met Lubowicki at Cooper Union in New York only a few months earlier, when Lubowicki was a student there. Intrigued by Lubowicki’s eager, young, and still undefined approach to architecture, Gehry asked him to assist in his renovation of the Santa Monica house. Goldberger, Building Art, 197.
72 Ibid.
There are other design techniques used in the Santa Monica house that have precedent in Gehry’s prior works, such as his use of cubic skylights with exposed wood framing. When discussing his design for the windows, Gehry said, “We were told there were ghosts in the house. I decided the ghosts were ghosts of cubism. The windows, I wanted to make them look like they were crawling out of this thing.” These “ghosts of cubism” appear on the sharply angled northeast corner of the house where a large, three-sided window juts out (Figure 1.11), and again further down the northern side of the house where the skylight shaped like a rotated cube emerges above the kitchen. Similarly styled windows and skylights appear in Gehry’s earlier renovation and expansion of Gemini G.E.L. (1976-1979), a fine art lithography studio located on Melrose Avenue (Figure 1.12). Among the numerous alterations Gehry made to the studio was his addition of a large window and angled skylight by the entrance. The structure’s balloon-frame is left exposed behind the window glazing and skylight, retaining the feeling of a building still under construction. A similar effect is achieved to a higher degree at Gehry Residence, where the unpainted wooden window frames, in conjunction with the almost scaffolding-like shell composed of traditionally industrial materials, make the entire house look like a construction zone.

In addition to the formal significance these cubist-inspired windows offer, the window elements also provide glimpses into the living quarters through the otherwise visually and physically impenetrable metal shell that surrounds it. Herein lays the ingenuity of Gehry’s play on the visible and the hidden, open and closed, public and private. While, in reality, the windows are set high up or far back enough to preclude

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73 Gehry quoted in *Sketches of Frank Gehry.*
ample sight into the house from a street or sidewalk point of view, their mere incorporation into the design partially contradicts the popular claim that Gehry’s house represents a withdrawal from the public realm.

Gehry employs another transparent element in his transformation of the house, one that has garnered controversial feedback, but that has nevertheless become one the architect’s trademark materials: chain-link fencing. Throughout the 1970s, Gehry incorporated chain-link fencing into numerous projects, both residential and commercial (Figures 1.13, 1.14). Although chain link was invented and primarily used as a fencing material, Gehry recognized its potential for things other than keeping people out of certain places. Enthralled by the material’s perceived ordinariness, ugliness, and overall lack of pretention, Gehry felt he could exploit the design possibilities of chain link and, in so doing, separate it from the negative connotations it traditionally held. Gehry admits, “I loved the way it looked,” adding, “It had a humanity to it, and it had an accessibility to it. It wasn’t precious,” all the while knowing that “everybody hates it.” His aim was not to provoke irritation, but rather recognition that chain link is a ubiquitous material, yet most people don’t think about or even notice it until the context in which they see it has changed. Instead of denying its ubiquity, Gehry sought to use it more creatively. To Gehry, chain-link fencing could be pure, geometric form, a sort of metal mesh or scrim that could be put together in almost any shape, yielding a kind of “instantaneous architecture.”

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74 During his redesign of Gehry Residence, Gehry was also working on three other residential projects: Gunther House, Familian House, and Wagner House. Although they were ultimately never built, Gehry’s designs for these homes allowed him to experiment with certain ideas that were then realized at Gehry Residence, such as the use of chain link, which appeared in his designs for all three homes.
75 Gehry quoted in Goldberger, Building Art, 191.
76 Ibid.
surround the second story in the front of the house fulfill no structural purpose or provide any visual obstruction, they do add to the literal and metaphorical transparency and overall spatial and conceptual ambiguity of the design.

With its unusual combination of forms, abrupt transitions between conventionally unrelated materials, and constant plays on opposing concepts, Gehry Residence sticks out like a sore thumb on the otherwise ordinary Wilshire-Montana neighborhood block. When it was unveiled in 1978, the house was greeted by, as one *L.A. Times* reporter puts it, “a mixed cocktail of cheers and jeers.” While some neighbors complained, calling it an “eyesore” and a “monstrosity,” others—including the mayor of Santa Monica, who was asked to inspect the house by a distressed resident—dubbed it a “masterpiece.” On one occasion, Gehry Residence was even shot at. However, after hearing from a local police officer that other houses in the neighborhood have been hit as well, Gehry claimed that this shot in the dark could not be interpreted as architectural criticism. Given the controversial reception of this house by the public and in academic circles, Gehry Residence has been interpreted in many different ways. Thus, while it is crucial to understand what the architect intended with his design, it is also necessary to recognize how others read the architecture, for it has become part of their shared built environment, as well.

A popular approach to comprehending this house is to read Gehry’s design statements as a conscious expression of his personal views on Los Angeles’ chaotic culture. Gehry Residence embodies a sense of chaos, as its design concurrently

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possesses a seemingly improvisational fragmentation and amalgamation of form, space, and materials. Gehry explains his tendency toward fragmented composition, referring to his Santa Monica home as a “testing ground for this breaking down of the parts into separate objects, having separate identities…almost a separate aesthetic. And using the richness of the parts to make a whole, which is like how our cities are built.”

This claim that cities are created through the consolidation of heterogeneous parts accurately describes the Greater Los Angeles Area, where continual refashioning of diverse and ever-evolving components and identities has forever driven urbanization.

In this vein, Gehry believed the combination of the old and new structures would enhance each individually, as they work to define, or redefine one another. Gehry creates a new dialogue between the old and new structures, as the latter envelops the former without stripping it of its character. Therefore, the aggregate composition imbues the entire structure with newfound identity and meaning. However, what statement is Gehry either intentionally or incidentally making with this old-new structure?

Throughout the 20th century in Southern California, a new “spatial” culture was taking shape through the accelerated suburbanization and redevelopment programs. The constant construction of identical tract housing developments had come to dictate the region’s built environment and vernacular style. Thus, Gehry creatively—and somewhat ironically—alludes to this vernacular style throughout his unique deconstructivist design to ultimately critique the generic development architecture that had become increasingly ubiquitous in the region.

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Furthermore, many have interpreted Gehry’s fractured, assemblage design as a visual articulation of the fragmentation of the family, community, and urban environment. This fragmentation was in large part due to the invasive urban renewal of this new “spatial” culture that was further dividing, excluding, and alienating people from one another.\(^{81}\) Whether by socio-economic status, ethnicity, or the massive freeways and outward sprawl, the distance between the people of Greater Los Angeles was only increasing over time. The increasing absence of social consensus, exacerbated by the devastation of the public environment by the automobile, caused a widespread introversion of built form throughout the sprawling Los Angeles area. Thus, Gehry’s use of non-traditional materials and fractured design disrupts the ease of the gentrification of this once middleclass residential neighborhood, and mirrors instead the disjointed contemporary environs of the broader urban context.\(^{82}\) Gehry establishes the house as a place of withdrawal, interiority, safety, and separation, offering a modern commentary on the “American Dream” notion of the house and home as a sacred sanctuary. Through this increased internalization of the already private home space, Gehry seems to give in to the urge to create a sense of place in the face of urban and suburban sprawl.

While the societal consequences of 20\(^{\text{th}}\)-century urbanization of L.A. can be deciphered in the defensive turn inward of Gehry’s design, so too can the industrialization of the environment be detected in his choice of materials. In his exploration of L.A.’s “postmodern geographies,” Edward Soja comments on the


“apparent invisibility of industrial production in Los Angeles.” As the region continued to urbanize, it also continued to industrialize to meet the demands of its expanding consumer population. However, industrial growth was never part of the general public’s perception of Los Angeles’ expansion, and thus has remained an unseen or simply unacknowledged reality. By incorporating these industrially associated materials—corrugated metal, chain-link fencing, and untreated plywood—into a quaint residential neighborhood, Gehry’s house reveals a deeper historical interplay between industrialization and urbanization that has defined the development of the capitalist city. Therefore, while Gehry’s exterior additions to the house are seen as a disruption in the neighborhood context, they stand as silent response to the generally unseen, but very real presence of industry that defines the broader regional context and “postmodern geography.”

As will become evident throughout our exploration of his later postmodernist structures, Frank Gehry critically and creatively engages with the “postmodern geographies” of his cultural and geographic surroundings in different ways and to varying degrees. The unique forms and functions of his postmodernist constructions not only serve as individual “masterpieces” of architecture, but also offer critical commentaries on the spatiality of our cities. With Gehry Residence, Frank challenges us to see past his seemingly absurd design and perhaps rethink our notions of “home” and L.A. domestic architecture. His composition also implores us to reconsider our traditional associations of materials, to acknowledge the dependence that L.A.’s urbanization and subsequent gentrification continue to have on industrialization, and to see how this ceaseless

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84 Ibid., 233.
transformation of the landscape have fragmented society and internalized space. Moreover, the juxtapositions, contradictions, and realities that define Greater L.A.’s “postmodern geographies” in turn define Gehry’s contributions to it.

In the following chapter, we transition from the and Gehry’s 1970s deconstructivist style into his 1980s quest for the monumental and separation of cubist elements. As we travel from suburban Santa Monica to commercialized Hollywood, we will trace how, over the course of a decade and in a distinctly different neighborhood context, Gehry’s motives and techniques for reimagining and redefining space have evolved as he takes on the challenges of civic architectural design.
Figure 1.1 — Gehry Residence (1977-78). Located on the corner of Washington Avenue and 22nd Street in the Wilshire-Montana neighborhood of Santa Monica. (Image courtesy of Tim Street-Porter, The American Institute of Architects)

Figure 1.2 — North side of Gehry Residence (Image courtesy of IK’s World Trip/Creative Commons)
Figure 1.3 — Large skylight rotated at a 45-degree angle about kitchen. The wall on the right is the exterior wall of the original Dutch Colonial. (Image courtesy of Gehry Partners, LLP / Rizzoli)

Figure 1.4 — Rotated skylight above kitchen. (Image courtesy of Alex Fradkin, Architect Magazine)
Figure 1.5 — Gehry Residence stripped-down living room. (Image courtesy of The American Institute of Architects)

Figure 1.6 — Master bedroom in Gehry Residence. Stairs connect the newly opened up loft areas. (Image courtesy of Gehry Partners, LLP / Rizzoli)
Figure 1.7 — Ron Davis Residence and Studio (1970-72). Malibu, CA. (Image courtesy of T. Kitajima, ofHouses.com)

Figure 1.8 — Untreated plywood used throughout the interior of the Ron Davis estate. (Image courtesy of T. Kitajima, ofHouses.com)
**Figure 1.9** — Early sketches for Gehry Residence, featuring an unpointed metal exterior. (Image courtesy of arcspace.com)

**Figure 1.10** — Frank Gehry’s model for Gehry Residence. (Image courtesy of Gerald Zubmann/MAK; Gehry Partners)
Figure 1.11 — Northeast corner of Gehry Residence, featuring large convex window. (Image courtesy of Tristan Bravinder)

Figure 1.12 — Gemini G.E.L. Studio (1976-79). Located at 8365 Melrose Ave, Los Angeles. (Image courtesy of Architectural Resources Group)
**Figure 1.13** — Cabrillo Marine Aquarium (1979-81), San Pedro, CA. Gehry created a chain-link cage-like structure above the building. (Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

**Figure 1.14** — Santa Monica Place (1973-80), Santa Monica, CA. Gehry featured a four-story high chain-link sign on the side of the parking garage that boldly reads, “SANTA MONICA PLACE.” (Image courtesy of the Santa Monica Historical Society Museum)
CHAPTER 2: “Walls, Gates, and Cubes”

Within a decade of completing his renovation of the Santa Monica house, Gehry’s career, reputation, and style had progressed substantially. As Gehry entered this new phase of his career, he began receiving more significant commissions and his design aesthetic started to evolve into a more monumental Cubist style. Among his many new endeavors, Gehry was given the opportunity to design his first ever library from scratch. He had designed plans for shopping centers, academic buildings, and museums, each of which were public, but only to an extent. Designing the Hollywood Regional Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library would be, in theory, the most democratically public institutional commission to date in Gehry’s career, a space open to everyone and free of exclusive membership or ticket requirements. However, how does one create a space that caters to a diverse public during a time of increased violence, poverty, homelessness, and heightened paranoia? These are some of the dilemmas Frank Gehry had to grapple with in his design for the Frances Howard Goldwyn Library in Hollywood (Figure 2.1).

While Hollywood’s legacy will be forever tied to the glitz and glam of its renowned film industry of the early 20th century, certain contributions to the city’s built environment reveal the bleaker reality experienced by the majority of its inhabitants during the latter half of the century. According to Edward Soja, “The new topography of race, class, gender, age, income and ethnicity has produced an incendiary urban geography in Los Angeles, a landscape filled with violent edges, colliding turfs, unstable boundaries, peculiarly juxtaposed lifespaces, and enclaves of outrageous wealth and
The weaving of postmodernism into the fabric of Los Angeles’ built environment was occurring alongside the programmed hardening of the urban surface in the wake of the social polarizations of the Reagan era. In his famous 1990 publication, *City of Quartz*, notable Southern California urban theorist Mike Davis explains that the race and class struggles of the “Second Civil War” that began in the 1960s had been institutionalized into Los Angeles’s built environment and were dictating the urban reform that was underway.

For Los Angeles’ black and white populations alike, the 1965 Watts Riots signified a landmark event in the region’s racial history. For six consecutive days in August of 1965, rioters—mostly young African American men—rampaged through the streets of Watts, a deeply impoverished black neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. Days of looting and burning stores, overturning automobiles, beating passing motorists, and fighting with the police, firefighters, and thousands of California National Guard troopers, who had been sent in to quell the unrest, resulted in the death of 34 people, with over a thousand reported injured, and almost four thousand arrests. By the time order was restored on August 17th, the surrounding environs were left in near total

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87 The riots were triggered by an incident on August 11, 1965 when Marquette Frye, a young African American motorist, was pulled over and arrested by Lee W. Minikus, a white California Highway Patrolman, for suspicion of driving while intoxicated. A crowd of onlookers gathered at the scene of Frye's arrest and tense exchanges between police officers and the crowd erupted in violence. The violent outbreak that followed Frye's arrest immediately ignited a large-scale riot centered in the commercial section of Watts. See Sorin Adam Matei and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, “Watts, the 1965 Los Angeles riots, and the communicative construction of the fear epicenter of Los Angeles,” *Communication Monographs* 72, no. 3 (2005): 302.
ruin. With more than forty million dollars’ worth of property damage, the Watts Riots were both the largest and costliest urban rebellion of the Civil Rights era. However, this was just the beginning of a period of unrest and urban riots across the United States, with Martin Luther King’s assassination in April of 1968 through the Rodney King trial of the early 1990s.

Only a year earlier, in 1964, an Urban League survey ranked Los Angeles as the most desirable city for African Americans to live in.\(^{89}\) This myth was quickly debunked by the events at Watts. Although the riots had been initially triggered by acts of police brutality that engendered larger conflict, they were nevertheless a reaction to longer histories of systematic discrimination and unrest. Additionally, the Watts Rebellion represented a shift in the form of non-violent protest that had characterized the Civil Rights generation. They were the first in a series of violent acts of protest by the black community that would become commonplace during the 1960s and later become part of the Black Power Movement.

Given the unprecedented scale of these race riots in Los Angeles—a city that then-mayor Sam Yorty proclaimed had “the best race relations…. of any large city in the United States”\(^ {90}\)—California Governor Edmund G. “Pat” Brown ordered an investigation of the riot’s root causes. This investigation, known as the McCona Commission, released a report in December of 1965, entitled, *Violence in the City—An End or a Beginning?: A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965*, which identified the high unemployment, poor schools, and inferior living conditions for African Americans...

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\(^{90}\) Ibid., 169.
Americans in Watts as key contributing factors behind the unrest. The report also offered recommendations for addressing these problems, such as "emergency" literacy and preschool programs, improved police-community ties, increased low-income housing, more job-training projects, upgraded health-care services, and more efficient public transportation." Despite the findings of the commission, city and state government officials ultimately failed to implement measures to improve the social and economic conditions of African Americans living in Watts.

While the Watts Riots garnered little movement in terms of new or improved government programs, it had immediate and significant effects on the psyche and geographic movement of Los Angeles’ black and white populations. The events at Watts prompted the remaining white residents of South Central to abort any neighborhood perseverance or investment efforts and ‘get out of Dodge.’ This immense “white flight” occurred throughout the area, as paranoid white residents flocked to the safety of surrounding suburbs, far removed from the violence of the non-white, impoverished, crime-ridden “epicenters of fear” in Los Angeles’ inner city. Throughout the postwar period, the white populations of the San Fernando Valley and Orange County continued to grow exponentially, and cities like Lakewood seemed to spring up overnight. This was in large part due to the creation of new homes that were—through both overt and covert means—reserved for incoming white residents. In this way, the region’s sprawl forged a

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91 John A. McCone, Violence in the City—An End or a Beginning?: A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965 (Los Angeles: Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965).


cultural discourse in which this postwar suburbanization was linked to a white renewal, as pristine subdivisions of white homogeneity could again be naturalized and the suburban ideal reclaimed. However, this outward movement of whites propagated large-scale segregation as the “white suburbs” and the “chocolate city” emerged as separate entities.  

Along with the white exodus, many of South Central’s manufacturing firms had begun relocating to outlying suburban areas. By the end of the 1970s, the period of post-war economic prosperity was coming to a rapid close, and many of these companies disappeared altogether as a result of both the national economic shift from manufacturing to service industries and the increase of international economic competition. In Los Angeles County alone, 75,000 manufacturing jobs—which had been the foundation of black prosperity since the 1950s—were lost between 1978 and 1982. On top of this hit to personal income, Los Angeles’ low-income population suffered from a loss of affordable public housing, deep cuts to welfare, and the consequences of increased drug availability, abuse, and addiction. Consequently, the social, political, and economic gap between races and classes only continued to widen. Such was the case in Hollywood, where the glamour years of the 1920s and Sid Grauman’s Chinese Theatre had faded and given way to serious social issues that have increasingly plagued the area since the 1960s.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, these new and extreme social polarizations were becoming evermore internalized by and integrated into Los Angeles’ built environment. While certain groups were drawing up plans to redevelop areas into beautified, luxurious spaces for the city’s elite, others were merely trying to survive in

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95 For additional information on the de facto segregation of in cities and suburbs see Davis’ *City of Quartz.*

and hold on to the ever deteriorating minority communities and neighborhoods that were being threatened by discrimination and rapid gentrification. The paranoia that pervaded Los Angeles—in particular, the population of upper-class whites in power—determined the redesign of the city, as decision makers attempted to seal off poor neighborhoods as part of the war on drugs. The comingling of government and corporate matters controlled Los Angeles’s urban reform, as these realms cooperated in the massive privatization of public space and the subsidization of new racist and classist enclaves.

During this time, constant demolition and rebuilding marked the city, as entire communities and neighborhoods were displaced and erased from the landscape. Throughout the Greater Los Angeles region, areas once populated with a racially and socio-economically diverse community—such as the Downtown district and Bunker Hill neighborhood discussed in fuller detail in the following chapter—were bulldozed and the poor ‘undesirables’ were pushed outside the boundaries of the newly claimed, protected areas of the incoming white upper classes. While other areas of L.A. were undergoing this kind of urban renewal, Hollywood was slowly deteriorating from a center of urban culture to a poor, run-down district with seedy side streets and an ever-growing homeless population.

Throughout the region, city officials and influential stakeholders were intent on deterring certain groups from the newly redeveloped areas. The city soon became heavily militarized, and new spaces and structures were replete with various mechanisms of exclusion and security reinforcements: surveillance cameras, LAPD substations, gated entrances, privatized public parks, bum-free benches, and panopticon-style malls.97 Davis

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97 See more in Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles,” 233.
states that Los Angeles was on “the bad edge of postmodernity,”98 where there was a “tendency to merge urban design, architecture, and police apparatus into a single, comprehensive security effort.”99 This obsession with security systems and its manifestation in the architectural policing of social boundaries defined this age of urban restructuring and redevelopment of the built environment.

This shift toward paranoid, defensive urban design in L.A. was part of a larger urban trend of the late-20th century that was appearing across the nation’s major metropolises: the emergence of the postmodern “fortress city.”100 This notion of the “fortress city” was predicted in the 1969 National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence report’s description of “the city of the future.” The report described a city in which the affluent would escape to gated communities and distant suburbs that are connected by “sanitized corridors,” allowing computers to bypass “ghetto slum” neighborhoods on their way to work in high-rise office buildings protected by high technology in central business districts.101 Thus, as can be observed in the spatial transformation of Los Angeles, this “fortress effect” emerges, not as an inadvertent failure of design, but as deliberate socio-spatial strategy.102

A combination of cultural and economic forces drove the progressive fortressification of American cities and suburbs, as the widening economic divide spawned a culture of privatization and civic secession. As was seen in Los Angeles, a pliant city government collaborated with the middle and upper classes’ demands for

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98 Ibid., 224.
99 Ibid.
100 Michel Foucault discusses the idea of a postmodern “Panopticon” environment of heightened surveillance in Discipline and Punish.
increased spatial and social insulation. Thus, these common interests of the upper echelon gained regulatory powers—particularly zoning control—that enabled the implementation of institutional and physical features that would attract desired entrants and wall out the undesirable. 103 Furthermore, disinvestment in traditional “public” space and services assisted the shift of fiscal resources to these corporate-defined redevelopment priorities. Overall, the ultimate consequence of this effort to secure the city was the complete destruction of accessible public space and the creation of new repressive conceptions of space and movement. These privatizing measures exaggerated the stratification of race and class and paradoxically further degraded the very conditions they were supposed to remedy: the amenity, safety, and environmental conditions of the public realm. 104

Both the motives behind and unique architectural design for the new Hollywood branch of the Los Angeles Public Library offer an instructive example of the way in which the region’s defensive turn inward manifested itself in traditionally “public” institutions. After the original Hollywood Public Library was mysteriously destroyed in an unsolved arson fire on April 13, 1982, prominent film producer Samuel Goldwyn Jr., along with the other five board members of his philanthropic foundation, decided to take on building a new library as a special project. 105 Samuel Goldwyn Jr. was the son of legendary Hollywood film industry mogul and philanthropist Samuel Goldwyn, after whom he and his motion picture production and distribution company were named. In 1986, it was reported that the Samuel Goldwyn Foundation, which was founded in 1945 by Goldwyn Sr. to fund community service projects in Southern California, had given

$3.24 million to cover the entire cost of the new library. 106 At this time, this was the largest cash contribution ever donated to a public library in California.

Following the 1978 passage of California Proposition 13—officially named the People's Initiative to Limit Property Taxation—Los Angeles’ capital spending program had been severely reduced. This left little hopes of finding public money for the project, making Goldwyn’s timely and generous contribution all the more crucial. In numerous newspapers articles covering the library’s rebuilding, Goldwyn was portrayed as highly sympathetic to the library’s misfortune. In one *L.A. Times* piece, Goldwyn was quoted: “It is enormously important to make everyone aware of the importance of books in our lives,” adding, “There are a great many hidden emotions that come out with libraries,” and, “Libraries have come to us at critical times of our lives.” 107 Therefore, he was determined to take the opportunity to give the Hollywood community “a state-of-the-art library” and simultaneously memorialize his late mother, Frances Howard Goldwyn, an avid reader and frequent visitor to the old Hollywood Library. 108 Furthermore, Goldwyn hoped that this endeavor would offer a shining example of the possibilities of public and private-sector cooperation. 109

In the case of the Hollywood Public Library, Los Angeles, represented by City Librarian Wyman Jones, would be the client, and the Goldwyn Foundation the patron. In this deal, the patron, not the client, would select the architect, oversee the design and construction process, and deliver a completed building to the city. Determined to give Hollywood an architecturally distinguished building, Goldwyn commissioned the

107 Ibid.
108 Viladas, “Illuminated Manuscripts,” 76.
109 Ibid.
reputable Venice-based firm Frank Gehry & Associates, with whom he had previously worked on designing the Goldwyn Company offices. Nevertheless, City Librarian Wyman Jones was able to weigh in with his expertise, having acted as a consultant on thirty-five library building projects. According to Jones, “most public libraries are failures, because they aren’t interesting enough, or because they don’t function well—or a combination of the two.” Jones noted that the new library should be inviting, adding, “You should want to go there and stay there.” However, these criteria—interesting design, functionality, and drawing power—would come into conflict in Gehry’s plans for the new library.

With regard to the library’s architectural design, Goldwyn was intent on avoiding the dark, dreary, and musty look and feel traditionally associated with libraries. Goldwyn stated, “As a kid, my impression of libraries was that they were so dark you couldn't see. The design you look for is one that will stimulate people to go read a book. The building has to make that sort of a statement.” Goldwyn and Gehry believed they solved his issue by creating a structure that would maximize natural light while minimizing glare for the library visitors. After studying the light on-site and with models, Gehry designed a two-story cubic structure with a five-story windowed tower, glazed almost entirely on the north and east-facing sides (Figure 2.2). The second floor of this central structure housed the children’s reading room, where the soaring forty-foot ceiling was made possible by sinking the first-floor lobby entrance four feet below grade. In an effort to bring natural light into this partially sunken entry level, Gehry added a light well above the lobby that

110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
opens to the main-floor children’s reading room and card catalog (Figure 2.3).\textsuperscript{112} Fortunately, the well’s thick glass walls deaden noise floating up from the floor below. At the back of the lobby, a sweeping, curved stair lobby leads directly to the main floor, where it, too, is topped by a skylight (Figure 2.4).

The main tower is flanked by two nearly identical structures composed of boxlike elements. Both of these side sections house adult reading areas and sit in shallow outdoor reflecting pools. After the city vetoed his idea for a palm garden, which would be too costly to maintain, Gehry designed these “water gardens” to make up for the lack of landscaping. Additionally, Gehry continued the expansive window motif to provide ample daylight to readers in the side sections, as well. However, in his effort to avoid glare, Gehry installed metal canopies above the windows to shade the outer corners of the two side reading rooms. Although he initially planned on placing canopies atop these pavilions as well, he felt they would look too thin, and decided to turn them into more substantial light-monitor boxes (Figure 2.5).\textsuperscript{113} These large, soaring boxes offered additional open space above the reading rooms, creating a perplexing contrast between the almost claustrophobic lowness of the entry below and the expansive openness of the second floor area. Nevertheless, through the combined effects of the design’s window placement, solid south-facing walls, and outdoor reflective pools, Gehry managed to create a series of varied views from each reading room. Overall, Gehry’s design for the library was predominantly defined by his tripartite arrangement of upright,

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 78.
unembellished, peach-colored, open cubic forms and expansive rectangular windows that collectively adhered to an overarching bilateral symmetry.\footnote{There exist many similarities between Gehry’s design for the Goldwyn Library and Bertram Goodhue’s 1926 design for the Los Angeles Public Library, such as the sunken lobby, open upper levels, central pavilion with wings, and overarching bilateral symmetry. However, Gehry’s unadorned boxes and postmodern transparency sharply contrast with Goodhue’s Egyptian and Mediterranean Revival style design.}

To many, the library’s formal composition appeared to be a departure from the Frank Gehry of decades prior. As one \textit{TIME} writer put it:

\begin{quote}
With his work of the 1980s, as complicated as ever but no longer perverse, Gehry has accomplished an extraordinary synthesis of the common and the profound. Now that he allows a measure of classicist calm to seep into his work, he may no longer be written off as an idiosyncratic California bad boy.\footnote{Kurt Andersen, “Building Beauty the Hard Way.” \textit{TIME}, October 13, 1986.}
\end{quote}

While Gehry’s newfound incorporation of symmetry and “classicist calm” can be attributed to the inspiration he drew from the “simple, unadorned American Classicism” of American Beaux-Art architect Paul Cret, when designing the library,\footnote{Viladas, “Illuminated Manuscripts,” 84.} the use of more monumental Cubist building blocks did have precedent in Gehry’s oeuvre.

In his iconic design for the Danziger Studio, completed in 1965, Gehry placed a stripped down pair of separated, solid, stucco boxes, with generous clerestory glazing, behind a high wall (\textit{Figures 2.6, 2.7}). By 1983, Gehry had evolved these ideas in his designs for both the Hollywood Public Library and the contemporary Sirmai-Peterson Residence in Thousand Oaks. At the Sirmai-Peterson Residence (1983-88), Gehry retained the concept of separate elemental units, but here creates three individual structures, each composed of numerous stacked and adjoining cubic forms (\textit{Figure 2.8, 2.9}). Furthermore, Gehry incorporated a significant amount of glazing on multiple sides of the structure, as he had done at the library on a larger scale. Whereas Gehry’s 1960s
design for Danziger was about solid forms in abstract construction turning inward toward a light-filled space from above, his 1980s designs for the Goldwyn Library and Sirmai-Peterson house turn outward and invite people into the open interior spaced filled with light and lofty spaces overhead. Thus, in his 1980s signature style, Gehry takes his once minimalist use of simple box forms to the next level, where his increasingly postmodernist treatment of cubic volumes creates more monumental, spatially rhythmic, and visually complex compositions that address their surroundings with their augmented transparency.

Although the Goldwyn Library does offer an architecturally interesting and engaging design, to many it falls short in a one major category: curb appeal. In their popular guidebook, *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, leading Southern California modern architectural historian David Gebhard and Robert Winter review the library’s design and state: “What is really disturbing is the exterior, which has no presence at all.”117 Mike Davis even refers to it as “undoubtedly the most menacing library ever built.”118 While those already inside the building or viewing it from a high and distant vantage point can appreciate Gehry’s impressive glass-covered towers, these awe-inspiring architectural features remain visually inaccessible to any street-level passersby due to the vehemently high walls that encircle the library compound. Given the fate of the previous library—which had been destroyed by arson—and the neighborhood’s questionable reputation—located on Ivar Avenue, just off of the increasingly ‘gritty’ Hollywood Boulevard—security concerns had always been a priority. Gehry elaborates on how these issues of security impacted his design:

118 Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles,” 239.
I think the level of paranoia from the library people was high, and that’s understandable because of the arsonist. They asked me to put 20-foot walls around the building and moats with piranha. They were joking, but they did insist on the high walls. And we agonized about those walls.¹¹⁹

The librarians and Goldwyn alike wanted this new building to be vandal-proof. Whereas most architects would try to subtly integrate security features into their designs, Gehry foregrounds these elements as motifs of the design. In the spirit of postmodernist aesthetic theory, there was no dissimilation of function by form, as Gehry used recognizable aspects in undisguised ways. The building was decked out with fifteen-foot security walls of stucco-covered concrete block, anti-graffiti barricades covered in blue ceramic tile, a recessed entrance blocked by white wrought-iron gate, numerous surveillance cameras, and sophisticated burglar and fire alarm systems, all of which were overtly incorporated as essential functional and aesthetic elements to the library’s overall postmodern design (Figure 2.10).

The staunch juxtaposition Gehry creates between the soaring and inviting light-filled interiors of the soaring block towers and the fiercely barricaded exterior entrance demonstrates the manner in which the social and political hostility and tension that marked Los Angeles were manifesting themselves through the fortification and privatization of public spaces (Figure 2.11). In this way, Gehry’s concurrently inviting and foreboding postmodern design puts an asterisk at the end of Goldwyn’s claim that “this is a library for everybody,”¹²⁰ as it projects two very different messages to two very different societal groups. The library’s design simultaneously assures the desirable middle-class library-goers that they will be safe in this heavily protected environment,

¹¹⁹ Simross. “Frances Goldwyn Library to Premiere in Hollywood.”
¹²⁰ Ibid.
while tauntingly daring the poor, homeless, and criminal undesirables to ‘hit it with their best shot.’

However, to what extent does security become a real or imagined issue? In some cases of such enforced protection, it seems that security has less to do with personal physical safety than with the degree of personal insulation from unsavory groups.\footnote{Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles,” 224.} However, at the Goldwyn Library, there are very real and apparent reasons for such protective measures. While there were certainly many middle-class citizens and families that visited the library after its completion in the 1980s, today’s visitors are not coming for its literary resources, but rather for the shelter, electrical outlets, and bathroom facilities. Hollywood’s burgeoning homeless population has remained a chronic social calamity in the area for decades and the rapid diminishment of truly public spaces has left these disadvantaged people with no other option but to congregate in spaces such as the Goldwyn Library. These circumstances are unfavorable for everyone—the homeless, the patrons, and the librarians—as spaces like the Frances Howard Goldwyn Library become depositories of social problems, instead of places for public education and learning.

Although the Goldwyn Library did not ultimately achieve what its design intended it to do, Gehry’s design for this public institution nevertheless embodies aspects of and contributes to Hollywood’s evolving “postmodern geographies.” His architecture reflected the social conditions of the time and, today, suffers from them. Thus, while such spatial forms and elements reflect the economic and social divisions in the polity, they also help perpetuate and exaggerate them.\footnote{Geyh, \textit{Cities, Citizens, and Technologies}, 97.} At this rate, the level of residential and commercial security will soon supplant any residual hopes for urban reform and social
integration, if it has not done so already. All things considered, Gehry’s forbidding enclosure of this purported “public” library reveals his own architectural reference to the climate of social and political paranoia and participation in the broader militarization of the socio-spatial environment that was rapidly redefining Los Angeles’ “postmodern geography” throughout the latter half of the 20th century.

Issues surrounding the role of government and corporate agendas in the creation—or rather, destruction—of “public” spaces and will carry over into the following chapter. In this third and final example of Gehry’s postmodernist contribution to the built environment, we witness another major stylistic transition. From Gehry’s 1970s collage, to his 1980s monumental blocks, we now move into his curvilinear style of the 1990s and early 2000s. In this final section, we will explore one of Gehry’s most career-defining structures, located in the Bunker Hill district of Downtown L.A.
APPENDIX II

Figure 2.1 — Frances Howard Goldwyn Public Library in Hollywood shortly after its completion. Located at 1623 Ivar Avenue, Hollywood. (Image courtesy of Mary Ann Sullivan)

Figure 2.2 — Ariel view of Goldwyn Hollywood Public Library. (Image courtesy of Pinterest)
Figure 2.3 — Light well between the lobby and the main floor. (Image courtesy of Katie Shearer)

Figure 2.4 — Spiral stairwell leading from the sunken lobby to the elevated main floor. Photograph taken in 1986, just after the library’s completion. (Image courtesy of The Ned Paynter Collection)
Figure 2.5 — Gehry installed a thin canopy shades in the windows by the adult reading area, as well as a light-monitor box atop each side structure. Light well between the lobby and the main floor. (Image courtesy of Katie Shearer)

Figure 2.6 — The Danziger Studio, completed in 1965, is located at 7001 Melrose Avenue in West Hollywood. Gehry’s treatment of Cubist planes in space is representative of early Modernism. (Image courtesy of ncmodernist.org)
Figure 2.7 — Back side of the Danziger Studio. (Image courtesy of *Metropolis Magazine*)

Figure 2.8 — Gehry’s model of Sirmai-Peterson Residence features a rather ‘picturesque’ treatment of Cubist elements. (Image courtesy of archINFORM)
Figure 2.9 — Sirmai-Peterson Residence (1983-88). Located at 970 Calle Arroyo, Thousand Oaks, CA. (Image courtesy of Gehry Partners, LLP / Rizzoli)

Figure 2.10 — Street view of Hollywood Public Library. Steel gates, high walls, and a sunken entrance ‘guard’ the library at the street level. (Image courtesy of Mark Preston)
Figure 2.11 — The cubic towers of the Goldwyn Library glow night, even behind the closed iron gates. (Image courtesy of Tristan Bravinder)
By the end of the 1980s, Gehry’s style, commissions, and personal reputation were taking on astonishing new shape and scale. During this time, Gehry’s architectural inclination toward monumental cubes and the separation of elements was beginning to give way to a newfound affinity for the drama and beauty offered by the arabesque line. Thus, throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, Los Angeles, along with the rest of the world, was introduced to Gehry’s deconstructivist curvilinear style, which has since become a hallmark of the architect’s later works.

The iconic status of Gehry and his signature curves continued to gain international notoriety with his acclaimed designs of cultural monuments such as the Vitra Design Museum in Germany (1989), the Frederick Weisman Museum of Art at the University of Minnesota (1993), the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1997), and, the focus of this chapter, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Downtown Los Angeles (2003) (Figure 3.1). Although this latter monument now stands as a landmark in Los Angeles’ built environment and within contemporary architecture, the history behind and significance of how this metallic monument came to be extends far beyond the fifteen-year saga of its completion. While primarily heralded for his famous design of the Disney Concert Hall, Gehry’s role in the hall’s creation contributed to the larger issues of redevelopment, gentrification, and the social and spatial segregation that had increasingly come to define Los Angeles’ urbanization throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Furthermore, just as Gehry Residence and the Goldwyn Library embody aspects of Gehry’s evolving style and of their respective societal contexts, this third and final example of Gehry’s contribution
to Los Angeles’ built environment stands as a testament to a period of his career and offers a reflection of and addition to Los Angeles’ transforming “postmodern geographies” nearing the turn of the century.

With its street entrance at the corner of Grand Avenue and 1st Street, the glistening Walt Disney Concert Hall encompasses an entire city block in the Bunker Hill district of Downtown Los Angeles. By the time of its completion in 2003, Disney Hall was by no means the first major cultural monument built on Grand Avenue. In fact, Disney Hall served as an extension of the Los Angeles Music Center campus that was already comprised of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (1964), the Mark Taper Forum (1967), and the Ahmanson Theatre (1967). On the opposite side of Grand Avenue, the Museum of Contemporary Art (1986) and the Colburn School (1998) further enhance the street’s emphasis on art and culture. It was by no mere coincidence that this section of Bunker Hill has developed, or rather, has been redeveloped, into a major cultural hub of Downtown Los Angeles.

Prior to the multi-million dollar modernist megastructures and superblocks, the Bunker Hill landscape had been defined by the residential neighborhood and large Victorian homes that had been established in the 19th century. Although the neighborhood had initially been populated by wealthy white elites, the significant “white flight” of the early 20th century caused the area to deteriorate over time, as the working-class and poor moved in to the abandoned homes. Thus, by the 1950s, this run-down,

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seedy area, which sat adjacent to the central business district, appeared to be a prime location for urban development.  

A few years prior, President Harry Truman had presented the Fair Deal to Congress in his State of the Union Address in January of 1949. Among the many initiatives presented in this program of domestic legislation, Truman proposed the expansion of the federal role in mortgage insurance and issuance and the construction of public housing. In July of that year, the Housing Act of 1949 was signed. In a statement, Truman celebrated the law’s passage, saying, “This far-reaching measure is of great significance to the welfare of the American people. [...] It opens up the prospect of decent homes in wholesome surroundings for low-income families now living in the squalor of the slums.” Despite its noble intentions to provide adequate and affordable housing to American families, in reality, this law paved the way for city planning commissions, aided and persuaded by other non-governmental stakeholders, to remove minority communities and gentrify neighborhoods in the name of the public good. This was absolutely the case at Bunker Hill.

In 1955, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), under Mayor Fletcher Bowron’s administration, conducted a massive slum clearance as the first step to the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project. Along with the removal of the old, dilapidated buildings from the hill was the wholesale eviction of poor working-class neighborhoods and leveling of Bunker Hill’s terrain. In this way, Los Angeles’ city planners erased the

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124 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
hill’s entire historical landscape in their attempt to raze all association with the
downtown’s past to prevent any articulation with the non-Anglo urbanity of its future.\textsuperscript{127}

The Bunker Hill redevelopment was originally planned to be a mixed-use area of
both commercial and residential buildings, which would include a commercial apartment
development. Deriving from Le Corbusier’s Radiant City concept of the 1930s, these
limit-height, thirteen-story apartment high-rises were designed in the International Style
and intended to serve as affordable housing for downtown workers. However, the
downtown social elite soon swiftly sabotaged these plans for public housing. Through the
wheeling and dealing of Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Co. president and \textit{Los Angeles}
\textit{Times}’ chief political operator Asa Call, the land’s development plans for public use were
extinguished in pursuit of other downtown business interests.\textsuperscript{128} Call, along with a
number of other major corporation heads that he and his ‘Committee of Twenty-Five’
had persuaded to construct new headquarters in downtown, envisioned a terrain dedicated
to financial district expansion, luxury housing, and elitist cultural monuments. Thus,
plans for affordable housing soon gave way to visions of a sophisticated cultural and
business acropolis, replete with modern buildings, plazas, and parks.

Throughout the 1960s, this influx of corporate presence, along with the repeal of
earthquake height-limitations, which had previously set a 150-foot maximum, made the
political and economic benefactors’ vision for a cutting-edge commercial hub a truer
reality. Given the area's existing dense zoning and the overarching desire for modernism,
developers built some of the tallest skyscrapers in the region between the 1960s-90s, such
as the stainless steel Wells Fargo Building (1983) and the twin black monoliths of the

\textsuperscript{127} Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles,” 229.
\textsuperscript{128} Davis, “Urban Renaissance,” 109.
ARCO Towers (1989). Beginning in the 1970s, however, Bunker Hill’s built landscape began reflecting international financial speculation on an unprecedented scale, as individual buildings soon gave way to multi-block developments. Within a few years, offshore investors dominated Downtown construction, funding massive modernist structures, such as the Japanese-financed Westin Bonaventure and the largely Canadian-financed California Plaza project.\textsuperscript{129} Construction of these privately financed commercial, financial, and cultural institutions in the Bunker Hill district persisted, resulting in an epochal geopolitical shift that made the Downtown of the 1990s second only to Tokyo as a financial pole of the Pacific Rim.\textsuperscript{130} Moreover, while the initial push for Downtown’s “urban renaissance” began in 1955, the mission of the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project continued throughout the rest of the 20\textsuperscript{th} and well into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, making it one of the largest postwar urban designs in North America and the longest redevelopment project in Los Angeles’ history.\textsuperscript{131}

Through the combined efforts of planners, developers, and business leaders, this ‘new urban archetype’ of privately financed monumental structures came to emblematize the city’s future. Large developers, such as Thomas Maguire III, Eli Broad, and the Shuwa Investments Corporation, dominated every level of this new cultural superstructure, aided by their personal or business connections in city government. The political clout of Maguire, Broad, and Shuwa—all major campaign donors to the mayor and city council—ensured that municipal cultural policy favored Downtown or Westside development projects by enabling the presence of on-site public art or museums to inflate

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\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Davis, \textit{City of Quartz}, 74.
\end{flushleft}
property values.  

While it claimed to promote “the integration of the arts into all aspects of the built environment,” the Community Development Agency’s ‘culture tax’ of one percent of new development of public art largely functioned as a subsidy to Downtown developers, whose expenses were partially recompensed by reduced land leases or advantageous density transfers. These types of policies facilitated the systematic segregation and gentrification of Downtown L.A. as bigwig benefactors commissioned world-renowned architects to design corporate megastructures and cultural monuments in the name of urban renewal.

Among these local boosters was Lillian Disney, widow of Walt Disney, the famous pioneer of the American animation industry, and who still remains a major name in film production and entertainment around the world. Given the substantial role Walt played in establishing Los Angeles as a major center of the arts, Mrs. Disney felt that a state-of-the-art concert hall would be a proper way to memorialize her late husband and a beneficial contribution to the county-owned Music Center. In 1987, Mrs. Disney made a $50 million contribution and held a design competition, in which she asked candidates for a design that embodied innovation, elegance, and permanence. She wanted these traits to be reflected through the use of permanent materials, such as stone, and through refined interior details, such as the handrails and seats. Among the four finalists was L.A. legend Frank Gehry. Determined to prove his artistic range, Gehry stated, “In the competition, I demonstrated my ability to deal with those issues by making models to show them that I wasn’t just the corrugated–chain link guy they thought I was, that I could deal with

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132 Davis, City of Quartz, 76.
133 Ibid., 78.
decent uptown ideas.”134 Sure enough, Gehry—the only local architect among the four finalists—won the competition with his majestic designs.135

Over the course of Disney Hall’s fifteen-year completion process, Gehry executed some 30,000 drawings.136 Thus, the initial design for the concert hall was quite different from what was eventually built. Nevertheless, Gehry’s work remained characterized by his uncompromising dedication to architecture as art, combined with his response to the simultaneously laid-back and fast-paced Californian lifestyle.137 In his original design, Gehry had imagined a small village for classical music at the top of Bunker Hill (Figure 3.2). At the center was a conservatory containing a lobby and topped with a sloping roof. The main auditorium was set back toward 2nd and Hope streets, diagonally oriented, and clad in limestone. Gehry had also included a pedestrian bridge that reached over 1st Street to Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, a glass-domed restaurant along Grand Avenue, and a hotel, all three of which would later be eliminated from the design.138 Although the plan changed dramatically over time, Gehry’s retained his goal of creating a concert hall that expressed “the joy and the sensation of music,”139 while embodying the essential informality of Los Angeles. He wanted to demystify and democratize classical music through the hall’s architecture.

Even in the years before construction began, Gehry’s models for Disney Hall evolved substantially. Over time, the many separate smaller buildings of the initial 1988

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135 The other finalists were: Gottfried Bohm of Cologne, West Germany; Hans Hollein of Vienna; and James Stirling of London.
136 Mathewson, Frank O. Gehry, 40.
137 Ibid., 41.
139 Frank Gehry, eds. Lemonier and Migayrou, 148.
proposal were eventually gathered into a single mountainous limestone structure and shifted closer to Grand Avenue. In addition, Gehry’s approach to the exterior’s curvature had been drastically reimagined in his 1991 sketches and study model (Figure 3.3, 3.4). While the initial design was composed of convexly curved forms stacked atop one another, his later plans demonstrate the development of his iconic curvilinear style in which a mixture of concave and convex forms intersect and overlap in a seemingly organic manner. Furthermore, Gehry’s innovative sculptural forms were intended to distinguish the structure from its 1960s era neighbors—the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Water and Power— and provide a striking contrast to the skyscraper boxes of Downtown’s financial district. Moreover, Gehry’s sculpted masses of sensuously curved limestone would add a newfound richness to the otherwise desolate site in a homogenous sea of concrete, asphalt, and modernist buildings.

In typical Gehry fashion, his seemingly chaotic building masses were anything but coincidental. Whereas his design for Gehry Residence was perceived as haphazard and random, despite his deliberate placement of forms, Gehry’s apparently spontaneous composition of curves in the Disney Hall exterior was even more consciously and meticulously calculated. In fact, Disney Hall was one of the first major structures to incorporate the calculating precision of the CATIA (Computer Aided Three-dimensional Interactive Application) software program into the architect’s design approach. Although originally developed for the automobile and aerospace industries, CATIA software has revolutionized architecture since the 1990s by enabling complex

\[141\] *Frank Gehry*, eds. Lemonier and Migayrou, 148.
architectural models to be translated into digital forms that can then be further manipulated on computers. Therefore, only through the ability of CATIA software to transcribe complex forms from models into prefabricated building elements was Gehry able to design a limestone structure with such extreme and intricate curves. However, while Gehry’s designs were technologically conceivable, they were not necessary financially feasible.

The financial debacle that would plague Disney Hall for the better part of a decade commenced shortly after construction began on the site’s underground parking garage in 1992. Los Angeles County had donated the land and floated a $116 million bond to finance this six-story underground garage with the expectation that parking revenue earned both during and after the hall’s construction would cover the debt. While the garage was completed in 1996 at the hefty cost of $110 million, the construction of Disney Hall became tied up in delays and would not be completed until late 2003. As it turns out, few people park in an underground structure if there is nothing above it. Therefore, during the seven years before the hall opened, parking revenue fell far short of debt payments, leaving the nearly bankrupt County to subsidize the garage even as it laid off employees.

Although primary causes of this financial turmoil were Lillian Disney’s desire to fast-track construction to meet her December 1992 groundbreaking deadline, despite the lack of finalized design and finance plans, and the unforeseen costs of Gehry’s

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142 Mathewson, *Frank O. Gehry*, 51.
144 Manville and Shoup, 6.
145 Ibid.
incredibly complex design, Los Angeles’ requirements for off-street parking also contributed to the problem. Unlike New York and San Francisco, which have strict limits on how much parking they allow in their Central Business District, Los Angeles requirements set a minimum. For a downtown concert hall, Los Angeles requires, as a minimum, fifty times more parking than San Francisco allows as its maximum. Thus, these L.A.-specific planning requirements dug the city into a financial hole as deep as its cavernous six-story garage.

In 1994, work on Disney Hall ground to a halt due to skyrocketing costs. According to David D’Arcy’s 1996 *Los Angeles Magazine* article, “Why L.A. Hates Frank Gehry,” the total price of the hall’s construction, including the garage, rose from $210 million in 1992, to $260 million in 1994, to an estimated $340 million in 1996. The soaring costs were immediately attributed to Gehry’s “complicated” design and “extortionate” fees. Shortly thereafter, real estate development and property management firm, Hines Interests was brought in to survey the damage. A Hines consultant stated, “There is still a lot of fat that can be taken out.” The new project managers, who were hired after the original engineering firm and project manager were dismissed, quickly identified $27 million of potential cuts. It soon became clear that a key variable was whether the building’s curvaceous “winged” exterior sections would be made of limestone, as originally planned, or of titanium, which would be as much as $5 million cheaper and much easier to work with.

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147 Manville and Shoup, 5.
148 Manville and Shoup compare the amount of parking at San Francisco’s Louise Davies Symphony Hall with that at Los Angeles’ Disney Concert Hall. See Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
While everyone was quick to point fingers at the architect and his lavish design, Gehry remained confident in his ability to work on time and on budget, and claimed that mismanagement, not the limestone, was to blame. According to Gehry, Disney Hall was “not a runaway train” and was, in fact, cheaper and more efficient per square foot than either the Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas or the Sydney Opera House, two notorious projects that went colossally over budget.152 Desperate for a solution, some officials thought it would be easiest to throw out Gehry’s designs and start over from scratch. For Gehry, this was not an option:

You could start over again and build a cheaper hall with less fancy materials and more industrialized techniques, but that would have been like the building I would have done twenty years ago—which they hated and don’t want.153

Gehry had come a long way from the early renegade works using chain link and corrugated steel and considered the hall’s magnificent design to be his crowning achievement. In fact, before construction began, his drawings and models for the hall had been exhibited as works of art in their own right at the Venice Biennale.154 He had designed Disney Hall to be a grand gateway to the 21st century, only to have his vision, and that of the Lillian Disney, cut short. Distressed and disappointed, Gehry removed all traces of Disney Hall from his office during this indefinite period of ceased construction. Gehry also regretted the way the hall’s incompleteness had affected the Disney family. Diane Disney Miller, the only surviving child of Walt and Lillian, was understandably displeased at what had become the minimal buying power of her mother’s $50 million

152 Ibid.
153 Gehry quoted in Ibid.
154 Ibid., 69.
What was supposed to have been a fitting memorial to Walt Disney, an architectural triumph for Gehry, and an effort to jump-start downtown redevelopment, became a symbol of mismanagement and incompetence.

Throughout Los Angeles, members of the wealthy elite, especially those known for funding cultural institutions, vowed that they still believed in the project, yet very few were willing to contribute their millions to the cause. Still deeply in debt for the $116 million bond, L.A. County was unlikely to contribute any more to the hall. Furthermore, the County demanded that 95 percent of the funding be in place before construction could resume, and every year’s delay added about $10 million to the total cost, so at least $142 million had to be raised by December 1998. Given the increasing severity of the issue, Harry Hufford, a former chief administrative officer of L.A. County, was hired to lead new fundraising efforts and get the hall back on track. However, Hufford’s efforts proved futile, as many remained uninterested in funding an addition to the Music Center, particularly one associated with Disney. In his Los Angeles Magazine article, D’Arcy stated, “The Music Center has long been seen as a downtown WASP domain and something of a Chandler family fiefdom at that.” Furthermore, grim memories of Walt Disney’s anti-communism, McCarthyism, and anti-unionism may have also factored into the reluctance of Westside donors to give money for anything “Disney.” However, with the help of Eli Broad, then-mayor Richard Riordan, and their beneficial connections, the needed fundraising restarted in earnest in 1996.

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155 Ibid.
156 Ibid., 70.
157 Ibid., 71.
158 Ibid., 172.
159 Ibid.
Throughout this lapse in construction, Gehry’s flamboyant design drew most of the blame, and his local reputation took a nosedive. Gehry remarked on the public’s hostility, stating: “When I go out in L.A., people sort of look at me like I’ve got the cross on my chest.”¹⁶⁰ The alienation Gehry faced in the public sphere also carried over into his professional career, as many potential clients believed the Disney Hall fiasco was caused by his “extravagance,” and turned their needs to other architects. Fully aware of the effects of his bad press, Gehry said, “I’ve heard two or three times now, on projects I’m not going to name, that my name was taken off the list because of Disney Hall. I’m being damaged by this, and it’s pissing me off.”¹⁶¹ One such project was the rebuilding of St. Vibiana Cathedral in L.A. Although Gehry was in the final three, he was ultimately not selected for the project, in favor of Spanish Catholic architect Rafael Moneo, then-Dean of Harvard Design Center. Gehry was not chosen because, according to him, “They’re afraid that if I do a building it will be a ‘Frank Gehry building,’ and they really wanted to do a ‘Los Angeles’ cathedral.”¹⁶² However, others close to the project said it was the unsuccessful Disney Hall that affected the outcome.

Apart from a Disney office building and hockey practice rink and a renovation of the Norton Simon Museum, Gehry did not receive any commissions anywhere in Los Angeles, or even in California, for years.¹⁶³ Frustrated by the constant comments about Disney Hall, and with other projects already underway in Spain, Germany, the Czech Republic, Korea, and Seattle, Gehry entertained the idea of leaving Los Angeles.¹⁶⁴ Although he ultimately never relocated, the time Gehry spent working on projects outside

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 68.
¹⁶¹ Ibid.
¹⁶² Ibid.
¹⁶³ Ibid.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 172.
of L.A. provided him with much needed space from the Disney Hall disaster and the chance to strengthen his reputation and refine his ideas from afar.

Among his international projects, Gehry’s awe-inspiring design for and the widely publicized success of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (1992-97) proved critically influential to the future of Disney Hall. Located in the Basque city of Bilbao in northern Spain, on a formerly industrial downtown site crisscrossed by freeways on the banks of the Nervión River, sits Gehry’s titanium-sheathed Guggenheim Museum (Figure 3.5). This museum was the first project in Bilbao’s downtown revitalization plan, which also included a new rail system, airport terminal, city council hall, and cultural center, all of which were to be designed by prominent architects.\(^\text{165}\) Gehry had taken into careful consideration the site’s context—at the juncture of bridges, the river, rail lines, and high-speed traffic—and mimics the surrounding movements in the upturned streamlines and momentous curves of the building’s glistening titanium exterior. The emphasized horizontality and harmonious collision of silver forms capture the look and energy of the nearby metal trains and the shining river.\(^\text{166}\) Moreover, Gehry’s design mirrors the moving city in static form (Figure 3.6).

Following its opening in 1997, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao proved an instantaneous success in every way. Regarding its architecture, Philip Johnson compared the museum’s structure and architectural presence to that of a cathedral and remarked, “This may be the finest building of our time,” adding, “There’s a clarity and a solemnity

\(^{165}\) The decision to hire world-renowned architects undoubtedly came at a hefty price. For example, Gehry was paid $12.1 million for designing the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. See more in Beatriz Plaza, “The Bilbao effect (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao),” Museum News, Sept. 2007, 3.

\(^{166}\) Jencks claims that in this building’s iconic nature resides its relevance to postmodernism in the way it “underscores the primary role of communication;” it attracts people and allows them to freely interpret the forms they see. See more in Charles Jencks, The Story of Post-Modernism, 206.
to it.” Indeed, the museum in Bilbao remains a pinnacle in Gehry’s impressive architectural career, as well as in the field of museum design. The metal surface’s smooth continuity and the structure’s overall programmatic unity was a clear departure from Gehry’s previous design techniques, such as the Cubist collage of vernacular materials at Gehry Residence or the separation of monumental masses at the Goldwyn Library.

Financially, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was also met with unprecedented success. With its distinctive titanium curves, soaring glass atrium, and massive limestone components, the museum at Bilbao posed an equally complicated a construction job to Disney Hall. However, with just over $100 million spent on construction, the new Guggenheim cost about the same as the Disney Hall parking facility. Furthermore, the design’s inventive and captivating integration of art and architecture drew visitors from around the world by the millions. Over the span of a decade, the museum had an average of a million tourists per year, generating a tourist income of $1.6 billion. With this steady monetary influx, the museum’s return on investment—not including the value of the permanent art collection—was complete in early as seven years after opening. Moreover, the impact that the Guggenheim Museum had on Bilbao’s economy gave rise to the concept colloquially termed the “Bilbao effect.” This term is used to describe the effect that installing a world-class institution—in this case, a branch of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain—will have on attracting considerable tourism and investments and increasing cultural energy, effectively transforming the cultural and economic

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potential of a city.\textsuperscript{171} Sure enough, Gehry’s Guggenheim in Bilbao started the most recent flowering of iconic structures, following the smaller growths led by buildings such as Le Corbusier’s chapel in Ronchamp (1955), Frank Lloyd Wright’s New York Guggenheim (1959), and Jørn Utzon’s Sydney Opera House (1973).

Among those inspired by the “Bilbao effect” were the officials presiding over the stalled Disney Concert Hall project back in Los Angeles. The beneficial monetary outcome of Gehry’s building in Bilbao motivated the L.A. team to resume work on Disney Hall in the hopes of reaping similar economic and cultural rewards from their version of Gehry’s monumental, billowing design. This newfound motivation also catalyzed the contribution of additional funds for the project, the majority of which came from final gifts made by Diane Disney Miller and The Walt Disney Company.

Although the Disney Concert Hall technically predates the Guggenheim project, the long delays on the former and knowledge gained while constructing the latter wound up sharpening Disney Hall’s design by the time construction recommenced in 1997. The most critical change was the decision to move from a curved limestone skin to a titanium skin, as was used at the Bilbao museum. Nevertheless, while he had created an altogether new architectural language in his design for the museum, Gehry did not want to repeat himself in with the concert hall.\textsuperscript{172} Therefore, although a curving metal exterior is used in both the Guggenheim and Disney Hall designs, Gehry manages to employ the architectural language introduced at the museum in a way that says something different in the concert hall (Figure 3.7).

\textsuperscript{171} The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao earns around $39.9 million annually for the Basque treasury. See more in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Gehry was frustrated when observers would look at buildings he had done after Bilbao that also used lyrically curving forms of metal, glass, or stone and think that these structures, regardless of how striking their appearance was, were just copies of his previous work. See more in Goldberger, \textit{Building Art}, 11.
After fifteen long and grueling years, the Walt Disney Concert Hall opened on October 23rd, 2003. As the fourth addition to the Music Center, Disney Hall expanded the Center’s campus to eleven acres. To this day, the 2,265-seat concert hall is home to the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Master Chorale. In addition to the central auditorium, Walt Disney Concert Hall includes the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT) and outdoor program areas, including the W. M. Keck Foundation Children’s Amphitheatre and the Nadine and Ed Carson Amphitheater. These spaces seat 266, 250 to 300, and 120 audience members respectively. The two outdoor amphitheaters, along with an office wing, clad in white limestone, and a shady public garden, are found on the above grade portion of Gehry’s design. The gardens were included at the request of Lillian Disney, who had asked for them when she made her initial gift for the hall back in 1987. In the middle of the roof garden is a rose-shaped fountain made of broken blue and white Delft china. The fountain, entitled “A Rose for Lilly,” honors Lillian Disney, who had passed away in 1997, and was designed by Frank Gehry in recognition of her incredible support for the creation of the Walt Disney Concert Hall (Figure 3.8).

Walt Disney Concert Hall’s composite structure is part building, part concert hall, and part freeform sculpture. This state-of-the-art facility pushes the envelope of both modern architecture and concert hall design. The curved stainless steel skin that envelops the entire structure is composed of convex and concave undulating surfaces that often create a freestanding curtain (Figure 3.9). These billowing curtain forms create an architectural spectacle on Grand Avenue and are reminiscent of the region’s entertainment industry and culture. Although Gehry is known for creating new
architecture far removed from historical allusions, his billowing metal forms achieve a
sense of frozen motion similar to that of Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni’s famous 1913
sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. In the context of Downtown L.A., the
perceived motion of Gehry’s iconic titanium waves seems to mimic the hectic, yet
dynamic movement of speeding automobiles that came to define Los Angeles’
transportation in the 20th century. The graceful and animated beauty of Gehry’s metallic
arabesque forms appears to not only reflect, but celebrate the region’s car culture.  

The glistening, energetic forms of the exterior stand in marked contrast to
reverence of the interior. In the foyer, large amounts of Douglas fir paneling offer a
natural and warm contrast to the cool metal surfaces outside (*Figure 3.10*). This theme of
a metallic shell with a natural wood inside reminds us of Gehry’s beginnings, having
employed the same technique with exposed plywood and frame studs at his Santa
Monica home in the 1970s. Furthermore, angled skylights fill the space with natural light,
giving visitors the impression of meandering through a calm forest grove as they walk
past the many Douglas fir pillars that fill the lobby’s serpentine layout. Compared to
other traditional concert halls like Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, or the L.A. Music
Center, the lobby of Disney Hall is rather small. Gehry, who always had a flare for
drama, wanted to keep the entrance relatively narrow and calm so that greater
astonishment could be reserved for the auditorium.

As one enters the auditorium, the serenity of the foyer quickly gives way to shear
amazement. Wood paneling covers every major surface in the concert space, making

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173 Reyner Banham discusses unique the car culture that made L.A. a kinetic city. See Banham’s *Los
Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies.*
some feel as if they are “inside a violin.” Mezzanines and tiers wrap around the concert hall space, situating the orchestra in the center of the grand theater in the round (Figure 3.11). With seats on all sides of the stage, this deeply populist hall, without suites or private boxes, gives audience members a chance to look out at the architecture, the musicians, and at one another. In the front of the hall, massive lead and wooden pipes, organized in a deceptively random arrangement, energetically burst forth from the organ, resembling a tubular take on Marcel Duchamp’s 1912 *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Figure 3.12). Finally, after years of research and productive collaboration with acousticians Minoru Nagata and Yasuhisa Toyota, Gehry did not fail to provide concertgoers with state-of-the-art acoustics. In its entirety, Gehry’s design for Disney Hall offers an incredibly sensational experience, one of music visualized.

Since Disney Hall’s opening in 2003, Gehry’s design for the hall has provoked a mixture of praise, criticism, and bewilderment. While some compared Gehry’s accelerating curves to “a galleon in full sail” and “a pocket handkerchief,” others thought the design indicated that the “whole world had gone mad,” calling it “space trash” or “L.A. after the big one.” In addition to its aesthetic effect, Disney Hall’s controversial exterior also had a significant effect on the surrounding environment. While most of the building’s exterior was designed with stainless steel given a matte finish, the Founders Room and Children’s Amphitheater were designed with highly-polished panels. Furthermore, the concave bend of the Founders Room exterior walls reflected sunlight in a concentrated manner similar to a parabolic mirror. The resulting heat made certain

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rooms of nearby condominiums unbearably warm, created hot spots on adjacent sidewalks that reached temperatures as high as 140°F, and increased the risk of traffic accidents due to the blinding sunlight. After complaints from owners and residents of neighboring buildings, Gehry Partners came up with a solution. Through computer analysis of the building’s surfaces, Gehry’s team was able to identify the problematic panels, all of which were dulled by 2005 through a process of light sanding.

Apart from inspiring the witty one-liners of Los Angeles Times’ critics and heating up nearby apartments, Gehry’s architectural concept for Disney Hall engaged with the broader environs of both the Bunker Hill district and Los Angeles at large (Figure 3.13). In an article written for the hall’s 10-year anniversary, Los Angeles Times architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne claims that Disney Hall “understands and adapts to its peculiar context” far better than the Grand Avenue buildings by other esteemed architects that preceded and followed it, such as Arata Isozaki’s Museum of Contemporary Art, Rafael Moneo's Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, and Coop Himmelblau's high school for the visual and performing arts.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Disney Hall is how from the start it sensed the extent to which the literal and symbolic holes in the Bunker Hill urban fabric needed filling. The exuberance of the design, the way it seems eager to expand outward like a bunch of balloons in a child’s fist, is in direct contrast to Moneo’s cathedral and Isozaki’s museum, both of which turn inward.

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179 There were also stories of trash bins catching fire and traffic cones being melted. Apparently, the EIR (environmental impact report) was written for white limestone and had not been properly updated after the decision to switch to a stainless steel exterior. See more in Marc Schiler, “Examples of Glare Remediation Techniques,” (paper presented at the Passive and Low Energy Architecture Conference, Quebec City, Canada, June 22-24, 2009).


181 Hawthorne, “Disney Concert Hall is inextricably of L.A.”
While Disney Hall’s animated design does visually engage with its surroundings differently from the rigid stone facades of MOCA and the cathedral, it does not necessarily do so to a different audience. In fact, with regards to Soja’s concept of “postmodern geographies,” Disney Hall’s contribution to the built and social environment follows and widens the path already carved by Bunker Hill’s existing cultural institutions, such as the Music Center and MOCA. Therefore, although Disney Hall adds a certain flamboyance amongst the more conservative modernist neighbors, it nevertheless joins the other cultural megastructures as monumental evidence of the corporate-controlled redevelopment projects that were continuing to consume Downtown Los Angeles.

The societal effects of Disney Hall range from the denigration of street landscape to the ousting of minority artists from the L.A. art scene. To this first point, the functionality of Disney Hall seemed an extension of the already present anti-pedestrian bias of the new Downtown corporate citadel. Given the region’s strong car culture, Downtown had, by the turn of the century, already become the increasingly dense and self-contained circulation system it is today. The moat of the Harbor Freeway and the regarded palisades of Bunker Hill cut off the new financial core from the poor immigrant neighborhoods that surround it on every side. Furthermore, the city’s parking requirements take additional steps toward making Downtown little more than a group of buildings, each a destination in its own right, to be parked at and departed from, and not part of some larger whole. Disney Hall’s six-story subterranean garage is thus a perpetuation of the resulting spatial apartheid, as most concert patrons arrive from

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182 Davis, *City of Quartz*, 230.
183 Manville and Shoup, “People, Parking, and Cities,” 8.
underneath, rather than outside, the hall. Gehry’s design also caters toward drivers and away from pedestrians. While the hall has an impressive, albeit underutilized, street entrance, its more magisterial gateway is the “escalator cascade” that flows up from the parking structure and ends in the foyer. This has profound implications for street life as concertgoers can get their entertainment without ever setting foot on a sidewalk in Downtown L.A.

The missing sense of urbanity that plagues Downtown is also the consequence of the new geography of power that concentrated cultural affluence along the Grand Avenue axis. The Bunker Hill redevelopment, with its boom in public art and cultural monumentality, has gone hand-in-hand with a culture depression in most of the inner city. Not only are Downtown’s formerly mixed crowds of Anglo, Black, and Latino pedestrians of different ages and classes no more, but the constructed illusion of a contemporary “Downtown renaissance” has been designed to make such heterogeneity virtually impossible. Bunker Hill has essentially been recolonized and intensely gentrified by affluent corporate boosters who have cemented over the district’s former culture with monumental “entertainment architecture.” These new cultural institutions for the elite spatially and financially displace those of smaller, non-white, lower-income artistic communities that are struggling to stay afloat. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the 21st century, drastic cutbacks have been made to school art programs, affordable community workshops, foundational support of Black and Chicano artists, and to vital generators of community self-definition, such as the Watts Towers Arts Center,

184 Davis, City of Quartz, 232.
the Inner City Cultural Center, and the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts. While the Disney Concert Hall did not initiate this ousting of the local arts community, it undoubtedly participates in this “age of arts affluence” and perpetuates the annihilation of former inner city culture.

Frank Gehry’s design for the Walt Disney Concert Hall provides another telling example of the architect’s search for the essence of architecture as an expression of the paradoxes of our time and its impact on Los Angeles’ “postmodern geography.” While Gehry’s billowing metallic forms add a distinctly postmodernist flare to the Miesian skyscape of the nearby financial district, Disney Hall nevertheless embodies ‘Los Angelesness’ in its participation in the long redevelopment of and constructed illusion of the “Downtown renaissance.” In this way, Frank Gehry, his design for, and the mere existence of the Walt Disney Concert Hall are all inextricably of Los Angeles.

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Davis, City of Quartz, 78.
APPENDIX III

Figure 3.1 — Walt Disney Concert Hall (1988-2003), seen from across Grand Avenue. (Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 3.2 — Frank Gehry, Diane Disney Miller, Frederick Nicholas, and Ernest Fleischmann with the first model of Walt Disney Concert Hall, 1988. (Image courtesy of John T. Barr, L.A. Weekly)
Figure 3.3 — Sketches of Disney Hall from May, 1991. (Image courtesy of Gehry Partners)

Figure 3.4. Frank Gehry looks over a model of Walt Disney Concert Hall during groundbreaking ceremonies in Los Angeles. (Image courtesy of Michael Tweed, Associated Press)
Figure 3.5 — Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain. Constructed between 1992-1997. (Image courtesy of Guggenheim.org)

Figure 3.6 — Frank Gehry’s 1991 sketch of the riverfront elevation of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Bilbao, Spain. (Image courtesy of Gehry Partners)
Figure 3.7 — A detail of the main entry of the most recent design for the Walt Disney Concert Hall. (Image courtesy of Rick Meyer, *Los Angeles Times*)

Figure 3.8 — Frank Gehry designed “A Rose for Lilly” specifically as a tribute to the hall’s initial donor Lillian Disney (1899-1997) who loved Royal Deft porcelain. The fountain resides in the Blue Ribbon Garden that surrounds Disney Hall’s upper level. (Image courtesy of L.A. Phil)
Figure 3.9 — Disney Hall at night. (Courtesy of Kirk McKoy, *Los Angeles Times*)

Figure 3.10 — Disney Concert Hall lobby, featuring Douglas fir paneling. Lobby bar designed by Belzberg Architects. (Image courtesy of Belzberg Architects)
Figure 3.11 — Disney Hall auditorium. (Image courtesy of L.A. Phil)

Figure 3.12 — The pipe organ at Walt Disney Concert Hall, in Los Angeles, has a range of ten octaves. It is known as Hurricane Mama. (Image courtesy of Dan Winters, *The New Yorker*)
Figure 3.13 — View from Los Angeles City Hall of Walt Disney Concert Hall and surrounding area. (Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)
CONCLUSION

During the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, Frank Gehry’s innovative and unexpected designs have garnered a great deal of attention in both public and academic spheres. While there exists a plethora of scholarship on the architecture and life of Frank Gehry, new insights can still be gained from an examination of his works through the lens of “postmodern geographies.” In explaining the significance of this approach, Edward Soja states, “Today, it is space more than time that hides consequences from us, the ‘making of geography’ more than the ‘making of history’ that provides the most revealing tactical and theoretical world. This is the insistent premise and promise of postmodern geographies.”186 Indeed, the “decidedly postmodern landscape”187 of Los Angeles, in both public and private realms, reveals a mosaic of uneven regional development within an increasingly capitalist city. Through his many renowned, yet highly controversial, architectural contributions to the Greater Los Angeles Area, Frank Gehry has become not simply a participant, but an authority, in the region’s spatial development and vernacular style. To many, Frank Gehry has become identified with Los Angeles in terms of its “free form” culture and urban society that are characteristic to the Southern Californian way of life. Thus, this exploration of Frank Gehry’s evolving contributions to urban form, across both public and private space, has provided a more focused framing of Los Angeles’ historical and human geography.

As demonstrated throughout his career, and by the three exemplary structures examined in this thesis, Gehry is engaged in an ongoing search for a “new” architecture, one far removed from historical allusions or precedent. This search for “the new” resulted

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186 Soja, Postmodern Geographies, 1.
187 Ibid., 2.
in the creation of many unique, strategically designed buildings that respond to their surroundings in an ironic, critical, or celebratory manner. Regardless of differences in perceived tone, each of Gehry’s structures engages with the idea of conflict as a central theme to “postmodern geographies.” This sense of tension functions through his combination of opposing forces or concepts: public and private space, traditional and reimagined associations, opposing forms and functions, just to name a few. While the three buildings examined are each characteristic of Gehry’s changing style and architectural approach during their respective decade, they also address different and many conflicting ideas that make a statement about Los Angeles.

In the first chapter, we looked at Gehry Residence, a previously modest and mundane house in residential Santa Monica that Gehry transformed in the 1970s. It being his private residence, Gehry was able to experiment with this remodel and make his own statement in and about the Greater Los Angeles Area. Located in an area where bourgeois performance and self-image have remained dominant aspects of regional culture, Gehry Residence demonstrates the architect’s uncanny ability to translate and transcend the superficiality and conformity of Los Angeles into a “new” architecture. Gehry’s design makes radical statements about deconstructing and remaking the idea of a suburban home, about the vernacular value of certain non-traditional materials, and about the potential of architecture as an art form.188 Thus, in this suburban example of Gehry’s early assemblage work, Gehry Residence stands as a physical and symbolic contribution to the “postmodern geography” of the L.A. area, as it conflicts with and ultimately breaks the rules of traditional suburban revival development design by ironically exposing and

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188 Mathewson, Frank O. Gehry. 19.
debunking the region’s superficial image. Through his Cubist collaging of unconventional materials, Gehry sends a bold artistic message to his Southern California surroundings, telling a city obsessed with image to just be itself, even if that meant chain link and plywood.\textsuperscript{189}

In the second chapter, we transition into the context of 1980s Hollywood, where Gehry’s design for the Frances Howard Goldwyn Library relates and contributes to the “postmodern geography” in a very distinct, if rather unsettling, way. Completed in 1986, the Goldwyn Public Library offers rich insights into Gehry’s 1980s architectural style and treatment of public institutional space. In this structure, Gehry’s design generates conflict in its concurrent and contradictory use of open and closed forms. While the multi-story windows open the library’s interior to the surrounding environment, the seemingly excessive incorporation of overt security measures on the exterior produces an oppositional sense of public and private space. Thus, the separation of the building’s modular elements—an emerging technique in Gehry’s work during this time—alludes to broader issues of spatial and societal fragmentation. Despite Gehry’s intent to create a library that engages the public, his design seemingly ‘buys into’ the paranoia and subsequent destruction of public space that was plaguing—or rather, endemic to—Los Angeles’ socio-spatial environment. Moreover, as Gehry’s career progressed and his collaboration with municipal government and corporate sponsors increased throughout the 1980s, his architectural additions to the built environment began reflecting and perpetuating the climate of what Mike Davis called “Fortress L.A.”

In the third and final chapter, we investigated the long and tumultuous creation of Walt Disney Concert Hall in Downtown Los Angeles, which was an attempt to create a signature cultural institution for “postmodern” L.A. and the world. Among the numerous monumental cultural institutions that Gehry has designed in the U.S. and abroad, his design for Disney Hall retains special significance, having been designed in and for Los Angeles, the city where Gehry’s personal life and professional career had taken root decades prior. While this iconic structure, enveloped by Gehry’s quintessential titanium curves, serves as a monument to Walt Disney and to the later work of Frank Gehry, its existence is inherently and inextricably rooted in the region’s conflicted past. The monumental cityscape of Downtown Los Angeles is the direct result of the urban renewal, late capitalism, and multinational corporate investment that transformed the region throughout the second half of the 20th century. Thus, the addition of Disney Hall to Grand Avenue’s existing Music Center, and numerous other cultural monuments to the arts, participates in the long history of uprooting neighborhoods, privatizing public spaces, and homogenizing a once socially diverse landscape. Therefore, while his shimmering, curvaceous forms aesthetically conflict with the nearby monolithic skyscrapers, both Gehry and his design add luster to, but nevertheless perpetuate the takeover of corporate architecture that continues to transform and define Downtown Los Angeles’ “postmodern geography.” Gehry’s famously influential curves have even created an international phenomenon called the “Bilbao effect” in which iconic architecture like Gehry’s has the power to convert an industrial town into a postmodern entertainment city.
Over the course of his career, Canadian-born Frank Gehry has become the ‘human face’ of corporate architecture and interests, and has acquired a popular authority over Southern California’s regional taste. Sometimes this authority even resembles the historic influence that Disney had on regional culture in creating an entertainment city, a spectacle, for the middle class\textsuperscript{190}—an influence that was homegrown in Los Angeles, but then proceeded to spread worldwide. Although his architecture has been met with a considerable amount of applause and boos, Gehry’s fate is, for better or for worse, tied to Los Angeles, and vice versa.

However, with great power comes great responsibility. While Gehry began his career by creating extraordinary designs using ordinary materials, his architecture has greatly evolved from his early revolutionary residential—made of plywood, chain link, and corrugated steel—to his more recent monuments in titanium, glass, and stone. Throughout this stylistic evolution, Gehry’s commissions have also become more prestigious and increasingly impactful within their social landscape. Gehry’s architecture—intentionally or inadvertently and for better or worse—addresses central issues of our society and contributes to the public discourse. As Gehry explains, the societal importance and potential of architecture are paramount:

I am obsessed with architecture. It is true. I am restless, trying to find myself as an architect, and how best to contribute in this world filled with contradiction, disparity, and inequality, even passion and opportunity. It is a world in which our values and priorities are constantly being challenged. It is simplistic to expect a single right answer. Architecture is a small piece of this human equation, but for those of us who practice it, we believe in its potential to make a difference, to enlighten and to enrich the human experience, to penetrate the barriers of misunderstanding and provide a beautiful context for life’s drama.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{190} Davis, City of Quartz, 81.
\textsuperscript{191} Gehry quoted in Mathewson, Frank O. Gehry, 41.
There is no doubt that Gehry’s innovative structures and iconoclastic designs add artistic and aesthetic value—or at the very least, variety—to the Los Angeles landscape. Despite his apparent morality and social concern, the mere existence of many of Gehry’s architectural contributions is nevertheless attributed to Southern California’s new spatial culture that took shape under the aegis of accelerated suburbanization and invasive urban renewal programs. Such developments wielded a new urban configuration that ultimately sanctioned the formation of a socio-spatial order in which the regional population was virtually ‘sorted out’ by class, race, and industry.

The consequences of redevelopment and modernization have caused many scholars, activists, and lawmakers to speak out against this mid-20th-century approach to urban renewal. Along with many other academics, USC art historian Diane Ghirardo argues, “contemporary cities should not undergo further devastating urban renewal according to the misguided principles of the Modern Movement, but rather should be nourished as the vital and engaging places they were in reality.”

Despite this growing sentiment, Los Angeles—which is currently in the midst of another substantial building boom, whose rapid pace and scale of construction is predicted to surpass that of the 1980s—charges forward with new plans for modernized development. One of the plans involves the redevelopment of an 11-mile long section of the Los Angeles River that runs through the heart of the city. The city’s decision to bring in Frank Gehry to assist with project was seen as controversial, as many fear that the architect’s celebrity-status and prior corporate involvement will steer the project in the same socially and environmentally destructive direction that numerous other ‘renewal’

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projects have gone before. Therefore, during these times of severe regional, national, and
global social disunity and spatial fragmentation, it becomes increasingly important for
influential contributors, such as Frank Gehry, to critically consider short and long-term
effects on the social and built environments and the lasting impact these changes will
make on the “postmodern geographies” of Los Angeles, now and in the future.
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*Frank Gehry.* Edited by Aurélien Lemonier and Frédéric Migayrou. London: Prestel, 2015. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at LACMA and the Centre Pompidou. Exhibition catalog.


