RICE UNIVERSITY

Krumped Control: Constructing the L.A.P.D. Interface

by

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What is at stake in this thesis are the ways in which we approach policing and controlling the cityscape, and, more importantly, architecture's role in this authoritative and institutional apparatuses. Looking at the Watts neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles as both example and test site, this project analyzes how and why the policing apparatus of a city fails to operate effectively, especially in contested urban environments. Existing architectural precedents here, and in other dense cities, have been reduced to emblematic fortresses, where the station and the police are rendered inactive and inaccessible. Responding to this crisis, this thesis re-imagines the police station as a piece of city infrastructure that situates itself as an interface between police and populus. Borrowing from vernacular models of spatial organization and local public phenomenon, the traditionally invisible policing processes get invaded by the surrounding neighborhood, rendering those processes visible and accessible.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis project has been preoccupied with understanding how and why the policing apparatus of the American city breaks down in contested urban environments, primarily looking at the Watts neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles as both example and test site.
WHAT IS AT STAKE IN THIS PROJECT ARE THE WAYS IN WHICH WE APPROACH POLICING AND CONTROLLING THE CITY SCAPE, AND ARCHITECTURE'S ROLE IN THESE AUTHORITATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL APPARATUSES.
2. BACKGROUND

Historically, architectural studies of L.A. have dealt with characterizing large-scale urban differences to the detriment of understanding localized cultural phenomenon. For instance, both Reyner Banham and Edward Soja, and to a lesser extent Mike Davis, in chronicling Los Angeles in terms of “ecologies,” make little or no mention of the area of the city known as South Central. South Central is problematic to investigation of the city because it epitomizes the conflict between large-scale generalizations of space and local differences that exist within. In fact, “there is no clear agreement on what exactly constitutes South Central Los Angeles.” South Central exists within the greater Los Angeles metropolis as a mythical place without fixed boundaries. The popular view of South Central as a dangerous and strife-ridden section of the city is reinforced by the fear and negativity generated in the wake of Watts riots in 1965 and 1992. These so-called mythical boundaries are defined and redefined depending on the current urban mythology of place. Most recently, in 2003 the City Council of Los Angeles voted to rename the community ‘South Los Angeles’, a move widely regarded as an attempt to erase the image of South Central promoted by the riots and films featuring gang violence and drug culture.

Los Angeles first took form as a pueblo, which rapidly grew to a large city with the first railways southbound toward Wilmington. Six years later another railway was finished, which ran north to connect to the Transcontinental Railroad.

South Central and specifically the Watts neighborhood have historically been almost exclusively African-American communities in a predominantly Anglo metropolis. This was for two reasons: proximity to industrial jobs at the port of Los Angeles and easy public transit access to downtown.
Initial railroad creation
Black mobility outside this industrial area was undermined by Watt’s incorporation into the City of Los Angeles in 1926. The incorporation of Watts into the City of Los Angeles nullified any autonomous political will the African American community may have held in the face of segregation policy advocated by the city’s government. Even with an ever-expanding population, this dynamic stifled the development of any substantial political force. The most prominent example of the city’s refusal to honor their minority citizens is the longstanding resistance to develop public housing for low-income workers and African Americans. Two housing projects were eventually built during the end of World War II, Jordan Downs and Imperial Courts, the latter initially been considered temporary.
Nonetheless, Watts became the hub of black settlement, the streetcar and bus being the primary means of transportation. The most traveled lines were the local Los Angeles Railway U car on Central Avenue and the Big Red Car interurban, or ‘express’ from Watts to Long Beach. The latter traveled to the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, which was one of the largest employers of African Americans during the war era.
It also became the unofficial cultural main street of LA, with clubs and bars sprawling down Central Avenue. Musicians such as Ornette Coleman, Johnny Hodges, Duke Ellington, Billy Holiday, and Dinah Washington could be seen regularly, and W.E.B. DuBois would proclaim it as one of the most vibrant and promising African American communities in the 1930s.
By 1950s, Los Angeles is devoting 40% of land to storage of cars.

But as Los Angeles moved into the freeway and automobile era, inadequate public transportation created a huge disparity between those who had access to transportation and those who didn’t. Watts, in the span of two decades, radically shifted from an active, culturally rich community to an economically depleted wasteland.
The geographical advantages held by Watts in the through the World War II were rapidly devalued. It was no longer in close proximity to industrial jobs (many of the plants closed and moved farther out into the suburbs, reachable only by car and not mass transit) and the interurban railway was fully dismantled in 1961, making downtown and the rest of the city extremely inaccessible to residents. With the construction of the Harbor Freeway (I 110), the street level rail lines that made the rest of the city accessible were killed off. The result is Watts is now shut off from the city, circled by four highways cut off from the rest of South Central proper. The highways, for the most part, are of limited access and bypass Watts and most of South Central.

From 1940-1965 the African American population in Los Angeles increased from 75,000 to 650,000. Because the city was extremely segregated, the population was concentrated in two areas: an already deteriorating Watts and the Central Avenue District. African Americans comprised 87% of the community. As the white population moved further out of the city that the postwar suburban construction allowed for them to do, the three largest African American neighborhoods, Central Avenue, Watts and West Jefferson, became one, creating what has been referred to as a “black belt” of more than forty square miles of segregated cityscape.
The 1965 riot broke out after an incident incited police violence on the corner of Avalon and Imperial, and raged unchecked, due primarily to inadequate action taken by the city, for five days.
The 1992 riot occurred a year after the initial event of police brutality, the beating of Rodney King by four LAPD officers. The announcement of a not guilty verdict in all four cases instigated and escalated violence in the protests that began around the city. Although popular culture stigmatizes the riots as part of the black/white rioting paradigm of the 1960s, some scholars consider the 1992 Los Angeles riots as America’s first multicultural riots. An analysis of the 7,056 arrests records from April 30 to May 9 show that 51% of those arrested were Latinos.

“The nature of rioting in the United States, particularly in Los Angeles, is growing out of the black/white paradigm and developing into something new and diverse,” where feelings of anger or resentment are not exclusive to one ethnic group but rather are identifiable by numerous groups. This theory is supported by the relatively recent in-migration of Latinos into South Central.
Since the 1992 riots, the Los Angeles Police Department has been under oversight by the FBI. The Christopher Commission, organized by the city to report on the status of the LAPD in 1993, recommended the hiring of, at minimum, 5,000 new officers. They attempted to address the following questions:

1. The "apparent failure to control or discipline officers with repeated complaints of excessive force"
2. "Concerns about the LAPD's 'culture and officer's attitudes toward racial and other minorities"
3. "Difficulties the public encounters in attempting to make complaints against the LAPD"
4. "The role of the LAPD leadership and civilian oversight authorities in addressing or contributing to these problems."

Calculations found that the LAPD has the fewest officers per resident, and the fewest officers per square mile. This results in more arrests per officer (a statistic the LAPD is extremely fond of). In 1991, the LAPD had approximately 8,450 sworn officers and 2,000 civilian employees. As of August 2008, the LAPD has 9,733 sworn officers and 3,303 civilian officers. They have the budget (ending in January 2008) to have 10,310 sworn officers.
3. ARGUMENT

In Los Angeles, I would argue that the Los Angeles Police Department has not utilized architecture as one kind of interfacing mechanism between its system and the cityscape it patrols. Existing architectural precedents here, and in other densely urban environments, have been reduced to emblematic signage, with stations becoming more and more fortress-like, rendering police space as both inactive and inaccessible.
Existing interfaces between the police and the communities further enforce this inaccessibility. Interface is defined here as a mechanism that enables separate and sometimes incompatible elements to coordinate effectively. These existing interfaces are manifested in fancy technological gadgets, the black (not blue) uniforms, SWAT and the general corruptive history of the department. This is significant because both architecture and the city are inherently spatial manifestations, and the policing institution does not have enough bodies to populate the city.
The result is that the existing system doesn't work. The panoptic disciplinary relationship breaks down when bodies are not actively deployed and engaged in space – whether that is a socio/political decision or a fact of life. This has become most apparent during both the 1965 riots and the 1992 Rodney King riots. What is fascinating and horrific at once is that the so-called "flash points" of these events are within 10 minutes of each other, and spread through the exact same areas. The effects of these events are still tangible today, which is partly why this site was chosen.
Because the system fails, other societal infrastructures create subversions of this power and control. In LA, the city's authority over its space is subsumed by street gangs, precisely because they operate as spatial territorializing entities. It is the de-facto social authority in most neighborhoods in south and east LA and deny the basic ability to move freely through the urban environment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Gang</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles city</td>
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<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
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<td>Central City</td>
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<td>East LA</td>
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<td>Southeast Los Angeles</td>
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**Note**: Currently there are 400 gangs within Los Angeles city limits, totaling an estimated 41,000 gang members.
The City's policy for financing street lighting requires adjoining property owners to bear the annual cost of operation and maintenance through a special assessment levied against each property which benefits from the Street Lighting System.

Street gangs have maintained that authority because of two factors. First, the city's policy for financing street lighting requires adjoining property owners to bear the annual cost of operation and maintenance through a special assessment levied against each property which benefits from the Street Lighting System. This creates a huge disadvantage for neighborhoods such as Watts, where the majority of residents live close or below the poverty line and many houses are not owner occupied. Second, there is a significant lack of traditional public space - parks, plazas, etc. Most of the existing public spaces are unsafe and territorized by street gangs.
So the question becomes how does the police station respond?
4. PROPOSAL

This thesis proposes that the answer lies in appropriating models of publicness that already exist and even thrive in gang infested neighborhoods as the way to re-conceptualize how the police operate. Responses to the oppressive nature of this environment are significant forms of, what I'm calling, identity assertions through spatial activity. These are essentially expressions of self like music, fashion, graffiti or dance. They create their own models of publicness that are defined both by the activity itself and their ability to temporarily invade spaces that already have an assignation.
One such model and the focus here is the phenomenon of clown or krump dancing. Clown and krump are similar urban African-American freestyle dance that arose spontaneously in the late 1990s in neighborhoods across South Central Los Angeles and Long Beach. Both exist in opposition to street violence and commonly referred to as growing out of the catastrophic violence inflicted on the same neighborhoods by the 1965 and 1992 riots. It is characterized by extremely fast and jarring body movements. It is significant because it essentially acts as a non-violent gang, with individuals forming families or groups, and congregating in already assigned space. Clown and Krump identities get played out spatially as groups appropriate various types of urban space for their use. A courtyard becomes a stage, a playground a battle zone, etc. Space becomes, at least temporarily, territorized as communal.
This lends us the ability to move away from thinking of the police station as an isolated structure to something that coexists with other programs, like a non-violent invasive species. The main formal strategy is to conceptualize the police program an armature or physical infrastructure that generates a ‘reciprocal infiltration’ – with the police infiltrating the surrounding neighborhood and the in turn the neighborhood starts to seep into the building. The hope is that through the development of these ideas in a design proposal a new typology of police station emerges that situates itself as an interface between police and populus.
THIS THESIS PROPOSES THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE IDEAS IN A DESIGN PROPOSAL FOR A NEW LAPD FACILITY IN SOUTH LOS ANGELES, A NEW TYPE OF POLICE STATION EMERGES THAT SITUATES ITSELF AS AN INTERFACE BETWEEN POLICE AND COMMUNITY.
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BOOKS


Race, Space, and Riots documents major racial riots in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. The riots are described according to exact chronology including buildup and aftermaths of the events. It also provides primary sources for information.


Reyner Banham analyzes the built environment of Los Angeles in terms of ecologies of architectures, which he terms Surfurbia, Plains of Id, Foothills, and Autopia. Banham's book was one of the first urban or architectural investigations of the city that looked at it in a positive light. It also provided a backbone for further discussions of the city, and almost all texts written after this (first published in 1971) refer to it in some context.


Crump documents the 1965 Watts riots in this book, which contains reproductions of primary texts and images, as well as a printing of the McCone report, the official document from the city government assessing the failures that contributed to the eruption of violence.


Spencer Crump documents the history of the Pacific Electric Railway and its relationship to the city of Los Angeles. The book includes reproductions of contemporary advertisements, system maps from different points of development and routes. It also includes a chapter discussing the dismantling of the urban rail system to make way for the automobile.


This book is a collection of photographs of the city of Los Angeles and reproductions of original art created by the author, an artist in residence for one year in Los Angeles.

*Mass Violence* graphically documents the events and histories of the 1965 Watts rights. The book is supplemented by first hand accounts, reproductions of original photographs and newspaper articles, as well as maps detailing the damage and violence.

This book discussed the relationship between territoriality and the construction of identity as a Los Angeles Police Officer. Each chapter focuses on separate factors contributing to the association of identity and territoriality, including bureaucratic orders, morality and issues of masculinity/conquest of space.

Hutchinson examines the historical relationship and structures between race and gender and transportation in Los Angeles. The book has an overarching focus particularly on African American women and public transportation, but also discusses issues such as bus transportation, issues of driving as an African American and whiteness and the city. Hutchinson draws from fiction and nonfiction sources on Los Angeles to construct and illustrate her argument.


Kay examines how the automobile has infiltrated all aspects of American life over the course of the last one hundred years. The book documents the history of the automobile in relationship to the detriment of public transportation systems that are, predominantly, no longer efficient. Kay also offers strategies for overcoming our automobile-dependency, suggesting that making a radical change in the way we move is possible, but requires the political will to do so.


This book is a collection of essays dealing with the implications of science on architecture and the relationship between them. This article, in particular, discusses the development of 'the virtual realm', what that is, and what implications it has for thinking about architectural space.


“Testimonies” is a series of articles discussing the city, identity and public space in major cities around the world.


Rose documents the history and evolution of hip-hop and rap music in major American cities. She draws from popular music to pull out arguments about racial stereotypes, gender, social and political implications, and hip-hop/raps position in the greater trajectory and history of African American music.


This article pulls out a wide range of architectural and vernacular buildings as a way to document the ranging possibilities of defining and architectural identity for the city. It supplements the whole collection of articles by systematically listing and analyzing the different areas of town and their buildings.


Edward Soja, as a way to further his definition of a Postmodern metropolis, expands upon Reyner Banham's classification of the city into four ecologies. Here, twenty years later, Soja argues that within Los Angeles there exists more types of ecologies of cities than just these four classifications, due to numerous factors. The six new ecologies he defines include the fortress city, the globalized city, the depleted fordist city, edge city and a social polarizing city.


*Thirdspace* attempts to expand the scope and practical relevance of how we think about space and how it relates to things such as location, landscape, architecture, environment, city and geography. Spatiality is either seen as concrete material forms to be mapped, analyzed, and explained; or as mental constructs, ideas about and representations of space and its social significance. Soja critically re-evaluates this dualism to create an alternative approach, one that comprehends both the material and mental dimensions of spatiality but also extends beyond them to new and different modes of spatial thinking.


This article is the first in the collection of essays and offers a brief historical analysis of the history of Los Angeles and it's architecture. It covers political urban development decisions as well as touching on canonical architects and their important works in the Los Angeles area.


Tafuri discusses the relationship between architecture and society and the position of the architect in the capitalist workforce. He also discusses the place of the avant-garde in the arts and prospects of alternatives.


Delivered primarily from first hand accounts from living in the inner city, Vargas discusses various constructions of what it means to be black living in South Central Los Angeles.


Source for:

This thesis examines the geographical nature of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Watts proposes that the nature of the riots has a geographic logic that corresponds to cultural and ethnic tensions in the area.

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