

## MIKE DAVIS - CITY OF QUARTZ (1990)

### Extract - Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space

The city bristles with malice. The carefully manicured lawns of the Westside sprout ominous little sights threatening "ARMED RESPONSE!" Wealthier neighborhoods in the canyons and hillsides cover behind walls guarded by gun-toting private police and state-of-the-art electronic surveillance systems. Downtown, a publicly subsidized "urban renaissance" has raised a forbidding corporate citadel, separated from the surrounding of poor neighborhoods by battlements and moats. (Mauer und Graben) Some of the neighborhoods - predominantly black or Latino- have in turn been sealed off by police with barricades and checkpoints. (...)

Welcome to post-liberal Los Angeles, where the defense of luxury has given birth to an arsenal of security systems and an obsession with the policing of social boundaries through architecture.

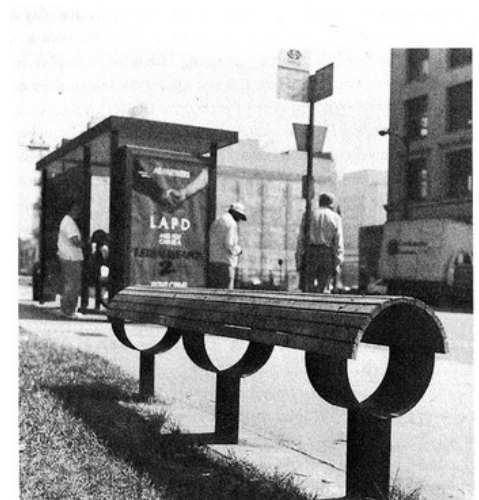
#### *The Destruction of Public Space*

The universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space. (...) Inside malls, office centers, and cultural complexes, public activities are sorted into strictly functional compartments under the gaze of private police forces.

#### *Mean Streets*

(...) In stark contrast, a few blocks away, the city is engaged in a relentless struggle to make streets as unlivable as possible for the homeless and the poor. (...)

One of the simplest but most mean-spirited of these deterrents is the Rapid Transit District's new barrel-shaped bus bench, which offers a minimal surface for uncomfortable sitting while making sleeping impossible. Such "bumproof" benches are being widely introduced on the periphery of Skid Row. Another invention is the aggressive deployment of outdoor sprinklers. Several years ago the city opened a Skid Row Park; to ensure that the park could not be used for overnight camping, overhead sprinklers were programmed to drench unsuspecting sleepers at random times during the night. The system was immediately copied by local merchants to drive the homeless away from (public) storefront sidewalks. (...)



Public toilets, however, have become the real frontline of the city's war on the homeless. Los Angeles, as a matter of deliberate policy, has fewer lavatories than any other major North American city. On the advice of the Los Angeles police, who now sit on the "design board" of at least one major Downtown project, the redevelopment agency bulldozed the remaining public toilets on Skid Row.

## ***High-Rent Security***

(...) A few miles north of Park La Brea, above the Hollywood Bowl, the wealthy residents of Whitley Heights have won the unprecedented privilege of withdrawing their streets from public use. Eight high-tech gates will restrict access to residents and approved visitors using special electronic codes. An immediate byproduct of "gatehood" has been a dramatic 20 percent rise in local property values. (...) Brian Weinstock, a leading local contractor, proudly boasts of the Valley's more than one hundred newly gated neighborhoods, and reports an insatiable demand for additional security. (...)



Meanwhile the very rich are yearning for unassailable high-tech castles. Where gates and walls will not suffice, the house itself is redesigned to incorporate state-of-the-art security. (...) For example, one of the features currently in high demand is the "terrorist-proof security room" concealed in the houseplan and reached by hidden sliding panels and secret doors. (...)

But technology is not enough. Contemporary residential security in Los Angeles- whether in the fortified mansion or the average suburban bunker-depends upon the extensive deployment of private security services.

## ***The Fear Of Crowds***

(...) In this quest for spatial discrimination, the aims of contemporary architecture and the police converge most strikingly around the problem of crowd control. Inexorably, Los Angeles moves to extinguish its last real public spaces, with all of their democratic intoxications, risks and undeodorized odors.

