an entire community, a plan replicated on a smaller scale in his 1976 Jung Institute in Los Angeles. In both of these cases architectural drama is generated by the contrast between the fortified exteriors, set against “unappealing neighborhoods” (Gehry) or deserts, and the opulent interiors, opened to the sky by clerestories and lightwells. Gehry’s walled-in compounds and cities, in other words, offer powerful metaphors for the retreat from the street and the introversion of space that has characterized the design backlash to the urban insurrections of the 1960s.

Gehry took up the same problem in 1984 in his design for the Loyola Law School in the MacArthur Park district. The inner-city location of the campus confronted Gehry with an explicit choice: to create a genuine public space, extending into the community, or to choose the security of a defensible enclave, as in his previous work. Gehry’s choice, as one critic explained, was a neocorporate design that was “open, but not too open. The South Instructional Hall and the chapel show solid backs to Olympic Boulevard, and with the anonymous street sides of the Burns Building, form a gateway that is neither forbidding nor overly welcoming. It is simply there, like everything else in the neighborhood.” This description considerably understates the forbidding qualities of the campus’s formidable steel-stake fencing, concrete-block ziggurat, and stark frontage walls.

But if the Danziger Studio camouflages itself, and the Cochiti Lake and Loyola designs are dumb boxes with an attitude, Gehry’s baroquely fortified Goldwyn Branch Library in Hollywood (1984) positively taunts potential trespassers “to make my day.” This is probably the most menacing library ever built, a bizarre hybrid of a dry docksed dreadnought and a cavalry fort. With its fifteen-foot-high security walls of stuccoed concrete block, its anti-graffiti barricades covered in ceramic tile, its sunken entrance protected by ten-foot-high steel stakes, and its stylized sentry boxes perched precariously on each side, the Goldwyn Library (influenced by Gehry’s 1980 high-security design for the U.S. Chancellery in Damascus) projects nothing less than sheer aggression.

Some of Gehry’s admirers have praised the Library as “generous and inviting,” “the old-fashioned kind of library,” and so on. But they miss the point. The previous Hollywood library had been destroyed by arson, and the Samuel Goldwyn Foundation, which endows this collection of filmland memorabilia, was understandably preoccupied by physical security. Gehry’s commission was to design a structure that was inherently vandalproof. His innovation, of course, was to reject the low-profile, high-tech security systems that most architects subtly integrate into their blueprints, and to choose instead a high-profile, low-tech approach that foregrounds the security function as the central motif of the design. There is no dissuasion of function by form here—quite the opposite. How playful or witty you find the resulting effect depends on your existential position. The Goldwyn Library by its very structure conjures up the demonic Other—arsonist, graffitist, invader—and casts the shadow of its own arrogant paranoia onto the surrounding seedy, though not particularly hostile, streets.

These streets are a battleground, but not of the expected kind. Several years ago the Los Angeles Times broke the sordid story of how the entertainment conglomerates and a few large landowners had managed to capture control of the local redevelopment process. Their plan, still the focus of controversy, is to use eminent domain and higher taxes to clear the poor (increasingly refugees from Central America) from the streets of Hollywood and reap the huge windfalls from “upgrading” the area into a glitzy theme-park for international tourism. In the context of this strategy, the Goldwyn Library—like Gehry’s earlier walled compounds—is a kind of architectural fire-base, a beachhead for gentrification. Its soaring, lightfilled interiors surrounded by barricades speak volumes about how public architecture in America is literally turning its back on the city for security and profit.

The Panopticon Mall

In other parts of the inner city, however, similar “fortress” designs are being used to recapture the poor as consumers. If the Goldwyn Library is a “shining example of the possibilities of public- and private-sector cooperation,” then developer Alexander Haagen’s ghetto malls are truly stellar instances. Haagen, who began his career distributing jukeboxes to the honkytonks of Wilmington, made his first fortune selling corner lots to oil companies for gas stations—sites since recycled as minimalls. He now controls the
The King Center site is surrounded by an eight-foot-high, wrought-iron fence comparable to security fences found at the perimeters of private estates and exclusive residential communities. Video cameras equipped with motion detectors are positioned near entrances and throughout the shopping center. The center, including parking lots, can be bathed in bright [lights] at the flip of the switch.

There are six entrances to the center: three at the center, two at service gates, and one pedestrian walkway. The service area is enclosed with a six-foot-high concrete-block wall; both service gates remain closed and are under closed-circuit video surveillance, equipped for two-way voice communications, and operated by remote control from a security “observatory.” Infrared beams at the bases of light fixtures detect intruders who might circumvent video cameras by climbing over the wall.15

The observatory functions as both eye and brain of this complex security system. It contains the headquarters of the shopping-center manager, a substation of the LAPD, and a dispatch operator who both monitors the video and audio systems and maintains communication “with other secure shopping centers tied into the system, and with the police and fire departments.” At any time of day or night, there are at least four security guards on duty—one at the observatory, and three on patrol. They are trained and backed up by the regular LAPD officers operating from the observatory substation.16

The King Center and its three siblings (all variations on the Panopticon theme), as expected, have been bonanzas, averaging annual sales of more than $350 per leasable square foot, as compared to about $200 for their suburban equivalents.17 Moreover, Haagen has reaped the multiple windfalls of tax breaks, federal and city grants, massive free publicity, subsidized tenants, and sixty- to ninety-year ground leases. No wonder he has been able to boast, “We’ve proved that the only color that counts in business is green. There are huge opportunities and huge profits to be made in these depressed inner-city areas of America that have been abandoned.”18