

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

The Abstraction of Bunker Hill: Landscape and Architecture, 1930-2023

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4gw5323h>

Author

Martinez Hernandez, Italia

Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

The Abstraction of Bunker Hill: Landscape and Architecture, 1930-2023

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Art History

by

Italia Martinez Hernandez

Thesis Committee:
Associate Professor James Nisbet, Chair
Associate Professor Roberta Wue
Professor Roland Betancourt

2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: Role of Landscape	2
Determination of Redevelopment	4
CHAPTER 2: Life Cycles	5
Annihilation of Space	6
CHAPTER 3: Modernism	7
CHAPTER 4: Corporate architecture	8
Form	9
Landscape	10
CHAPTER 5: Postmodernism	11
RSVP Cycles	12
CHAPTER 6: Bunker Hill Steps	14
CHAPTER 7: Concrete	17
Water	19
CHAPTER 8: The Cycle Continues	20
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Financial support was provided by the Steckler Family Initiative in Art History Fellowship and the Virginia H. Laddey Endowed Fellowship in Art History.

ABSTRACT

The Abstraction of Bunker Hill: Landscape and Architecture, 1930-2023

by

Italia Martinez Hernandez

Master in Arts in Art History

University of California, Irvine, 2023

Associate Professor James Nisbet, Chair

The "forgotten" Bunker Hill neighborhood is an example of an upheaval community that has transformed the city of Los Angeles, California. The "lost" community represents the urban growth and urban blight in Los Angeles post-1940s. An example of city-wide redevelopment, Bunker Hill entered a new phase of land use, no longer a residential space but instead designed as a booming commercial center. The redevelopment of open space in this site is examined through two sites: a modern landscape plaza by Garret Eckbo and postmodern steps by Lawrence Halprin. These projects are examples of the city's attempts at revitalizing the western end of Downtown Los Angeles. The development program reflects the interworking of concrete, water, and movement; these elements display the ties a city creates to maintain connectivity and community. The visualization of changes in community and space works to address the elemental architectural units of the spatial space at a larger scale; the life cycle of the space demonstrates the significant shift in Los Angeles's identity. The city's focus is on public design structures that link human togetherness. The formation of the city lies in its foundation, reconstruction, and decay. The locations address public connection for continued development and growth as key factors can affect personhood and landscape.

Bunker Hill is a 130-acre area, of which 73.1 acres is blighted. Bounded by First Street on the north, Hill Street on the east, Fifth Street on the south, and the Harbor Freeway on the west, the neighborhood design consists of a gridiron street pattern.¹ The space extends south of First Street to the Civic Center and Central Business District, and its southern boundary is the Richard J. Riordan Central Library.² Located in the city of Los Angeles, the neighborhood of Bunker Hill historically was separated from the western end of the city. Due to its location on top of a hill, it became a staple of the given name and, for the residents, a distinctive landmark that became the dividing factor between wealthy downtown residents and the crowded renters. The shift came as a result of urban renewal, the process of demolishing large private and public property for the cause of modernizing the beginning shift occurring between 1949 and 1974.³ The U.S. Government initially provided federal funding for the renewal plans for improved housing opportunities. Over time, on the local level, the funds were used for industrial and commercial redevelopment. The consequences of urban renewal led to the destruction of historic structures and the displacement of low-income families.⁴ Governmental usage of eminent domain and the political shift of trickle-down theories of economics question the behavior of space and "public space" as an increasingly regulated target of corporate wealth. Bunker Hill is an example of the balance shift from community building to simple destruction lost to the balance of private-public order that forms the current public space. This paper aims to understand the spaces built around people and their impact on the environment and Bunker Hill, even as they transform across time and space. The landscape architects Garrett Eckbo and

¹ Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, "The Bunker Hill area, Los Angeles, California: Determination of Blight" (cooperative survey, Community Redevelopment Agency, the City Planning Dept., the Health Dept. of the City of Los Angeles, 1951), 1-2.

² Ibid, 9.

³ James W. Follin, *Slums and Blight ... a disease of urban life* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1955), 7, eBook Collection (HathiTrust).

⁴ Ibid, 9.

Lawrence Halprin played a significant role in shaping the public's experience of the present sites and their history of gentrification and displacement. The practice of landscape design evolves, and the idea of what is modern continues to change. Nevertheless, three factors remain consistent: forms of movement, the materials of concrete, and water. The concept of movement includes bodily, spatial, and relationship awareness as landscapes mature, and design can add to the stress of displacement. The focus on Halprin's network of space reflects his grander idea of community involvement and Eckbo's free-form design and grander connection to Bunker Hill's westward movement in Downtown Los Angeles. Shifting from a modernist landscape to a postmodernist design embraces the site's social and ecological histories. These two sites explain the aftermath phase of the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project, reshaping previous and new space to create binding structures adapted by the city. The space, once rundown, has emerged as a positive and negative conformity sense of place where the public conforms to a new commitment and betterment of Downtown Los Angeles. Concrete has made the sites noticeable, the shift from the wildness of nature to a homogenized force of security and constraint from the development of spaces. The element of water shifts the single narrative to expressive forms of the importance of water delivery in Bunker Hill and the water features as protagonists of the sites. The transformation of Bunker Hill becomes a ripple of open space with a focus on reuse and change. The concept of movement, the engineering material concrete, and the substance water existing as a liquid state foster the connection of renewal within the neighborhood as a living organism.

Role of Landscape

Land is a material quality, meaning open space could change a city. Open space, as established by the Los Angeles Department of City Planning, is defined as land free of structures

and functions in various ways; for this context, it provides opportunities for recreation, creates community scale and identity, and enhances the city's economic base.⁵ California's population doubled in millions, 3.4 to 6.9 million, in growth in the 1930s; this quickly led to rapid urbanization. Following the Great Depression (1929-1939), under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the New Deal created the Home Owners Loan Corporation determined to evaluate and organize residential neighborhoods.⁶ Launched as an economic savior, the agency helped distressed mortgages of more than one million homeowners during the Great Depression.⁷ The federal agency categorized the neighborhoods in U.S. cities and assigned grades to residential neighborhoods from a scale of A to D visualized through color-coded maps. The high grade is colored green, while the lowest grade, colored red, was considered hazardous. The Mapping Inequality draws connections between past and current housing American issues, as homeownership (now renting) was most responsible for the intergenerational wealth built in the United States during the twentieth century. The redlining of these maps only added to the issues of racial discrimination and poverty in the poor districts/ neighborhoods in Los Angeles. The spaces with the lowest grade colored red were considered hazardous and deemed spaces of blight.

The conceptualization of urban blight designates a critical stage in the functional or social depreciation of tangible property beyond which its existing condition or use is unacceptable to

⁵ Department of City Planning Los Angeles, California, *Open Space Plan*, June 1973, 1, www.planning.lacity.org/odocument/01ea5f66-3281-488a-930b-f523712fef07/Open_Space_Element.pdf.

⁶ "Poor Housing Conditions in Los Angeles, 1938-1949." CSU Northridge University Library. July 16, 2019. <https://digital-library.csun.edu/poor-housing-conditions-los-angeles-1938-1949>.

⁷ "Introduction," Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America, University of Richmond, Creative Commons Attribution, www.dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=1/41.245/-105.469&text=intro.

the community.⁸ The cause of blight is functional; changing land use, technological change, and social property depreciation of rising standards are commonly related to economic progress and urban growth. Land disruption and the economic progress of a city are common elements unifying the concept of urban blight. The city's once single-family home paradise changed towards overpopulation, and the government intervened with programs for public housing and slum clearance.⁹ A "slum" describes housing conditions considered unsafe. For example, Bunker Hill was viewed by officials from the city as a slum due to the high number of residents living in one room, typically five to six people. Therefore, the property's growing congestion led to it being deemed at the critical last stage of unsatisfactory structural conditions and overcapacity. Development occurred through land use projects focusing on expanding neighborhoods that would bring economic growth. The once blighted land has become a critical focus for big capital for the closure and structure of a city's downtown area.

Determination of Redevelopment

In April 1951, the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles created a cooperative survey that included city planning and health departments in determining blight. The outcome of the survey concluded by the Los Angeles Fire Department reports that building overcrowding created a framework for life hazards; the lack of access and escape within the facilities could lead to profound loss, injuries, death, and a significant loss of property.¹⁰ The area was deemed feasible for development and divided into twenty-five larger development sites.

⁸ G. E. Lewis, "The Concept and Causes of Urban Blight," *Land Economics* 43, no. 4 (1967): 369–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3145542>.

⁹ Lewis, "Urban Blight," 375.

¹⁰ The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, California, *Amended Redevelopment Plan Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project*, October 30, 1967, www.crala.org/internet-site/Projects/Bunker_Hill/upload/bhredevelopmentplan.pdf.

The sole purpose of the urban renewal project was to eliminate blighted conditions, create a modern neighborhood in the form of functional high-rise apartments, and ample space for the fostering growth and development of Los Angeles as a new growing city. In place of the historical space of the hill is the central place that connects to the modern planned cities of squares and plazas. This new space aims towards functional movement between city blocks and corporations. Because the city and landscape, more broadly, space embrace the nature of power and the complexities of control. Landscape and open space work alongside modernization and redevelopment to provide the city with community centers, the bank plaza, and the Bunker Hill steps, serving as new positive and negative centers.

Life Cycles

It is clear to see the transformation of Bunker Hill from what used to be an upper-class Gilded Age neighborhood in Downtown Los Angeles to a residential area filled with Victorian homes.¹¹ What is no longer seen or felt is the old charm of the buildings, the structure of turrets, domes, light, and shadows of these mansions with names such as, the Melrose, the Salt Box, and the Castle. To address its problems with transportation, one of the first changes to the neighborhood began when the city drilled through one of the hills in 1924 for tunnel access to facilitate easier commutes in and out of downtown.¹² The first transitional phase of the hill occurred after the 1930s when wealthy industrialist residents left their mansions for new suburban enclaves; Bunker Hill during the 1940s then became a working-class neighborhood. Reformers for modernization proposed downtown redevelopment for economic benefits and

¹¹ Adrienne D. Jaime, "The Lost Neighborhood of Bunker Hill, Los Angeles: Decline During the Inter-War Period (1918-1941)," (PowerPoint presentation California Polytechnic Pomona).

¹² Stephen Jones, "The Bunker Hill Story: Welfare, Redevelopment, and Housing Crisis in Postwar Los Angeles," CUNY Academic Works, 2017, www.academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/2344.

commercial consumption; pro-redevelopment was associated with modern capitalist Los Angeles. The lack of compassion in ousting working-class residents from the redevelopment elites and advocates of high-rise apartments demonstrated a significant shift in Los Angeles's housing identity and cycle.

Annihilation of Space

A city needs urban renewal; the blank and open space at the bottom of modern Los Angeles represents the gradual extent of development, expansion, and transition. Various urban developers and architects have long interpreted Los Angeles as an unplanned metropolis.¹³ The urban boom after World War II encouraged new construction, and the city underwent a new life cycle; beginning in the late 1950s, extensive studies conducted by the city determined the demolition of neighborhoods allowing for the creation of new space networks. The replacement of housing communities with developers' space for real estate and business interests highlights the racial and ethnic disparities of homeownership and who inhabits these spaces. By replacing local residents with offices and commuters, the redevelopment of space generated a signature skeletal structure of Los Angeles. The historical space of the hill becomes the central place of growth for the city by connecting modern planned squares and plazas aimed at urban circulation. The new spatial organization allowed for an inflow of people daily as a focal point and activity center. The goal of redevelopment is to provide transportation and public space.

¹³ Michael Dear and Steven Flusty, "Postmodern Urbanism," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88, no. 1 (1998): 54, www.jstor.org/stable/2563976.

Modernism

Garret Eckbo defines modernism in environmental design as a holistic approach to shaping spaces in which people live. Modernism, in practice, includes a contemporary idea of shaping the land for human beings and social groups. Landscape architects beginning in the 1930s, focused on public spaces such as parks, gardens, and backyards to shape individual and community needs. Through a variety of forms, materials, and functions, including exposed steel, rich ornamentation, and further exposure to past styles, modernism turns the commercial city into a suburban metropolis. The idea of modernistic American 'California style' calls for open-minded, simple solutions to new types of landscape dynamics to create a feeling of excitement and quality calmness.¹⁴ The focus is on the basic materials of landscape' design: trees, shapes, and the embracement of quantity and quality of nature. An example of a modernist landscape design is the first major commercial development, the Union Bank Square, the plaza designed by Eckbo aimed at geometric lines and forms to create a constant sense of motion. Eckbo's designs experiment with forms, spaces, and textures by creating spaces with freedom and dynamism in movement from intimate to open spaces. Through the conscious modern design process, the five senses can understand and feel the constant changes in the landscape and produce a reaction. The developing sensibilities of the environment within a three-dimensional space can be naturalistic and formal, treating a social pattern that creates and coincides with the physical landscape.

¹⁴ Melanie Simo, "The Education of a Modern Landscape Designer," Pacific Horticulture, March 17, 2023, <https://pacifichorticulture.org/articles/the-education-of-a-modern-landscape-designer/>.

Corporate Architecture

The City of Angels continues to develop its personality and identity through its people, culture, and architecture. The built environment changes and influences the atmosphere; walking down any city can be a replicated experience of being in a living museum. A part of the Bunker Hill redevelopment included new forms of architecture; a prime example of this new stage included the first building construction to pass the citywide thirteen-story height limit. Los Angeles architecture from 1940-1990 reflected the modern changes and new state of the twentieth century, including the assortment of buildings and city planning brought by the influence of technology.¹⁵ A marker on dynamic structures began an era of high-rise buildings, part of the wave that settled the new financial district into Bunker Hill. The Connecticut General Life Insurance Company funded the commercial building, developed by the 445 Property Corporation and owned by Walton Street Capital Partners until 2003; the Union Bank Square stands 512 feet tall, claiming the title of the fifth tallest skyscraper on the Los Angeles skyline.¹⁶ The Bank finished construction in 1966, recognizable as an iconic Class A tower located at 445 South Figueroa Street, the center of the Central Business District on the edge of Bunker Hill overlapping the Harbor Freeway to the west. The non-official grading system classifies properties and office assets in commercial real estate; the three classes: A, B, and C, act like a framework open to interpretation. Classifying buildings include the age of the building, infrastructure, and HVAC system quality; the property's amenities are essential to determining

¹⁵ Alan Hess, "Everyday Modernism: Diversity, Creativity and Ideas in L.A. Architecture, 1940-1990," *Los Angeles Conservancy*, May 23, 2013, <https://www.laconservancy.org/sites/default/files/files/documents/Modernism-Alan-Hess-Full.pdf>.

¹⁶ "Union Bank Square, Downtown, Los Angeles, CA," PCAD, <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/building/181/>.

the property rate.¹⁷ Class A properties are prestigious buildings in prime locations usually built to impress and express modernization. Most new high-rises built in a city's financial district are considered Class A properties. Differentiated by the different design phases, the emphasis focused on developing essential centers. Bunker Hill became an area of commercial and entertainment spaces. The rise of such iconic architecture parallels the rise of major cities in the Western U.S., progressed by the socially corporate function of capitalist society and class in architecture.

Form

The square tower contains two renovated retail centers and an outdoor plaza; open space during this time of redevelopment for Bunker Hill became an identifying factor that later remobilization focused on community development and concept. Union Bank Plaza became the first Bunker Hill Redevelopment project area building, later evolving as a staple in the financial building scene as it inspired and is credited for bringing fellow banks to the mid-Wilshire area.¹⁸ It features a modernist tower and the first high-rise to span the era of skyscrapers in Bunker Hill and the business district. The building was initially painted with white and gray metal piers, highly contrasted with the dark windows. It is the first high-rise building within Los Angeles to use interior stairways, which are efficiently useful for a net usable area.¹⁹ The exterior facade blends architectural unity through bronze and glass windows, allowing for flow with the framing system and utilization of the horizontal louvers. The Los Angeles City Council voted to make Union Bank Square the first Los Angeles Downtown skyscraper designated a Historic-Cultural

¹⁷ Jorge Fontan, Fontan Architecture, last modified June 4, 2020, www.fontanarchitecture.com/commercial-building-classifications.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Union Bank Plaza," Portfolio. View by Studio (AC Martin)

Monument.²⁰ The building is historic for its three-acre plaza built in 1967 and roof garden by renowned landscape architect Eckbo.

Landscape

Site selection, design, and construction are part of the complex planning process. The Union Bank aesthetic in Downtown Los Angeles's architectural shift reflects the era's culture and the landscape architecture displaying the American Modernist movement within the urban context. The paved plaza is on the third floor above the street level, on top of a parking garage. The nature of the site sitting on top of a parking lot reflects the 1950s focus on commercial real estate development and the need for park spaces due to the thematic development of car-concentrated Los Angeles. Eckbo focused on site planning by fusing a plaza, a garden, and a parking structure. The evolution of the multi-story glass-walled building influenced Eckbo's design as it allowed for control between interior and exterior climate yet was still visual through complete transparency.²¹ In the case of a high-rise building, the air space is most important, as the space combines with the view of the design from above.²² The new space works in conjunction with the existing facilities maximizing the recreational use of forms and shapes and setting the site's tone for balance and contrast. The use of a rectangle and circle on either side emphasizes the use of an active space. The ground plan is a grid meant for organization, yet it creates an oppositional site form, the tall building in contrast to a flat plaza. Eckbo argues for juxtaposing straight lines and free curves to create a dynamic visual experience. The grid lines further accentuate the east-west space aligning with the building columns. The interplay of

²⁰ "Union Bank Square," Los Angeles Conservancy, 2020, www.laconservancy.org/issues/union-bank-square.

²¹ Garrett Eckbo, *Landscape for Living* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950), 237.

²² Eckbo, 48.

contrast emphasizes the leveled base plaza's overarching high-rise structure: uneven versus even, firm versus light, and luminosity versus gloom. Straight lines versus free curves juxtapose to create an organizing system for the interplay of circular and orthogonal forms.

The plaza reflects the advocacy of recovering landscape, the recasting of its role of being a product of culture to being an active agent of culture by creating a new spatial, visual, and vital organization of exterior space—the expansion of tradition within its development and accessible pleasure for the people. The design is the central subject for the development of this site as the emphasis on placement for pedestrian movement and viewpoints by the bank employees fits the modernist style. Multiple entry points create an open access space for neighboring sites, stairs, elevators, and other surroundings. The plaza positively impacted those from above, within, and around the space. The movement in place connects to modernization and community. The open space concept focuses on a clear site for public use benches, and the now-remodeled southeast corner includes a mezzanine level and restaurants. The prominent location provides a valuable view of the landscaped plaza, Bunker Hill, and the grander city of Los Angeles. The site illustrates an example of an American Modernist landscape in an urban setting, a prime celebration of contrasting elements. Similar to the development of Bunker Hill, focused on city planning, architecture, and landscape, these were the new three space planning professions that Eckbo embraced.²³

Postmodernism

Halprin is an important figure in the later twentieth century, advocating bringing nature into urban spaces. Beginning his firm, Lawrence Halprin and Associates, in the 1950s, he worked on a small scale of typical post-war projects, including residential gardens and small

²³ Ibid, 242.

housing projects. The transitional phase of Halprin's first began in 1962 by focusing on large-scale urban space design, working on campus master plans and suburban shopping centers. The landscape designs by Halprin were inspired and created alongside his wife, dancer, and choreographer Anna Halprin; the designs sought positive social impact, movement of natural elements, and the balance of humans and nature. The shift from modernist ideals of shaping a site through a fixed program counters the postmodern embracement of the diverse needs of humans. Landscape projects were created from the outcome of workshops that encouraged community involvement. The last connective project part of the redevelopment included the Bunker Hill steps designed by Halprin, working with a postmodernism design that reflects choreographed movement through space. He tells and creates a story through design and form, specifically working to contribute to connecting people and cities. Halprin's steps breathe life into the streets by creating a space for activity and city creativity. While simultaneously being a space that provides a quiet and reflective place that brings a quality of life to the city.

RSVP Cycles

In response to the effects of urban renewal and public demand, Lawrence and Anna Halprin formulated the RSVP Cycles or scoring, the initial idea of the interrelationship of a process-oriented helpful framework to develop a collective creative endeavor. The source of inspiration came from theater-dance and the environment by using both fields to nature humanistic needs and desires. It is a means of viewing and communicating the processes of the arts. Influenced by the changes occurring in the 1960s of social protest and riots, Halprin's cycle

stems from the ethics of inclusion and the implementation of his designs for the public to connect collectivity.²⁴

The cycle has four components:

Resources the materials, knowledge, and motivations for said score brought by participants and the designer.

Scores are the process or plan for action.

Valuation examines the results; it is a reflective process that facilitates the ongoing evolution of the action-oriented and decision-oriented aspects.

Performance is the result, the action itself.

Lawrence Halprin used landscape architecture to apply this theory by designing open spaces as scores to create an open-ended kinesthetic response and structure performance events of public participation. Key factors to the scores are reshaping economic forces and community interests. The use of scoring in urban design involves the community in the development or redevelopment process. By creating community-based workshops, landscape architects and urban planners can work alongside community members to be involved in the act of creation. Together they are in a cycle of participation, feedback, and communication.²⁵ Therefore, these workshops aim at creating an open space that embraces changes in the community. Scores are built differently from systems. Halprin defines systems as being close; this refers to the idea that a system has a linear mindset and a pre-established specific technique, following a logical and

²⁴ Alison B. Hirsch, "Scoring the Participatory City: Lawrence (& Anna) Halprin's Take Part Process," *Journal of Architectural Education 1984-* 64, no. 2 (2011): 130, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41318788>.

²⁵ Lawrence Halprin, *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* (George Braziller, Inc., 1969), 10.

sequential formation. Scores are the process, the ingredient of the creative process. Simply put, scores build on the results of systems by providing and inviting a creative process as a guide.²⁶ In short, the score allows the creative process to be a natural urban and human organization scale. Halprin uses the scoring to study movement and the human body's interaction with the environment and space. How does the energy of people interact with space? The answers are found in his drawings, where his ideas about designs and the relationship between the natural world and humans focus on creating purposeful landscapes for people. Halprin's drawings capture what he calls "the ecology of form" images with a language of water, a transformation to his approach to nature and design.²⁷ He is interested in designing spaces that embrace natural environments; he fits nature into everyday life. The Bunker Hill steps are filled with abstractions of the process of nature's shapes and materials that capture the movement of human life.

Bunker Hill Steps

Lawrence Halprin completed the Bunker Hill steps in 1990, with a total of 103 steps to scale the once-nicknamed "Cardiac Hill," which made it nearly impossible for residents to access the crest of Bunker Hill.²⁸ The steps tie Downtown Los Angeles with the original Bunker Hill both literally as a site and metaphorically as a space for connection and community; they reflect Halprin's ideals that the greatest cities are not made by automobiles or skyscrapers but by the "open spaces and the people who use those open spaces."²⁹ Halprin's postmodern style came from the inspiration of the Spanish Steps in Rome with a more asymmetrical experience; his

²⁶ Hirsch, 70.

²⁷ Kenneth I. Helphand, "Larry Halprin: Drawing to Think." *View*, no. 19 (2019): 75, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26906661>.

²⁸ "Bunker Hill Steps," TCLF (American Society of Landscape Architects, n.d.), <https://www.tclf.org/landscapes/bunker-hill-steps>.

²⁹ "Bunker Hill Steps," Los Angeles Conservancy, n.d., <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/bunker-hill-steps>.

steps completed the redesign of an urban experience of a city street; pausing between each layer admits a new perspective. Beginning from the farthest left corner is the museum wall that includes small sculptured grottoes and a row of escalators that lead to terraced landings. An irregular polygon separates the metal stairs from the concrete steps; the different line lengths play well with the single straightness of the escalator, and the use of irregular angles expresses the feeling of movement. The long path of the staircase is broad, gradual rather than narrow and harsh, and takes gentle wind and turns, with various levels in between; each story climb allows further access to terraces and vistas crowded by the high-rise buildings. The long stairway includes one long artificial mountain stream rock-like formation that begins at Fourth Street and ends at Fifth Street. The narrow but unbreakable space flows within a corporate surrounding; the flowering trees and other vegetation alongside the stairway's edges invite visitors and embrace nature within the city limits. The curvature of the rails is parallel to the graded change of curved to straight steps. The landscape linking multiple spheres and circular paths creates harmony and movement. The continuous breaks between platforms make the space feel bigger than it physically is; the flow of water follows some of these breaks. The open form allows for incoming and going movement around without unnecessary interaction. Two big breaks trail toward the square plaza that connects to the Equinox building on the south; this contains seating and a circular balcony overlooking the steps and the lower levels. Each new level adds a new perspective of the city's sightline, looking up and out. Lighting is on the side platforms by the steps; it lights a path; the dim lighting reflects well with the concrete and structure of the tiled floor. The arcs and tangents of the levels resemble the edges of stairs blended within the composition. The lower platform palm trees are uplit from the stem, which gives them texture and creates a sense of drama and stature. Despite the intended movement of up and down stairs,

a circular path at the top platform shifts visually as the space breaks into circular patterns. The center concept works as the design lines move across the field of vision, creating a relationship between human beings and their environment. The steps act as the missing link between development and urban design meant to foster social spaces and community.

How are cities alive, and how do elements play a role in creating activity? The role of re-imagining a public realm for American cities is vital by emphasizing pedestrian spaces of striking forms and sequences. A city's complexities are manageable through movement; design threads the qualities of nature and growth to provide for people in their public and private life. Design choices affect how individual and communal movement occurs within a public space. The steps have replaced a retaining wall made from concrete; the route connects Bunker Hill to the Los Angeles Central Library, allowing for easier access between districts. The steps are an example of the final phase in the redevelopment of Bunker Hill, a reminder of connectivity between the past and the future. Movement is one design principle that keeps the eye and body in motion throughout a landscape. The steps at their core have the building's principles of design balance and rhythm. The movement here is the aim and, therefore, not part of the principles. The steps engage harmony between the placement of buildings, trees, and stones, and the layout creates a collaboration that redefines the understanding of spaces within cities. The placement and ecological design stressed the regular flow of rhythm. Halprin's identifying elements included water features, concrete, and native stones, which he used to redefine urban spaces for human engagement. Halprin interpreted the past landscape architecture as being syncopation in space.³⁰ Moholy-Nagy's term, *visions of motion*, helps characterize Halprin's idea on the missing

³⁰ Zaš Brezar, "The Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin." *Landezine*, December 6, 2016, <https://landezine.com/the-landscape-architecture-of-lawrence-halprin/>.

link between science and design.³¹ Halprin reconstructed the design process by translating the relationship of dance and musical scores into drawing and thinking of the dynamism of ideas of space and time. His movement studies included drawings and other works from his workshop series, which he termed motation, the process of documenting imagined movement through the landscape.³² The cross-artistic practices of dance and design have fueled Halprin's exploration into understanding the interaction of energy within an environment. The landscape design creates a happening that resembles a performance for actions or public involvement aimed at stimulating the open-ended kinesthetic response visualized in performances. Movement fits within the grander idea for the redevelopment of Bunker Hill aimed at greater public access and communal space. The Bunker Hill steps address the urban condition, the aesthetic of the urban landscape, and the organization of unity and visibility.

Concrete

Make no mistake, Los Angeles is filled with open space. After the demolition of homes, Bunker Hill consisted of empty land used for parking lots. Although that open land only lasted a short period, the rising land values pushed open parking underground and paved the way for designed open space. The new face of downtown became the open space initiatives, and Eckbo and Halprin became the forces of restoration, improvements, and collaboration. Focusing on the Bunker Hill Steps on the western side of Downtown Los Angeles contributed to the urban design of park imagery. Landscapes are grounded in their materiality and the elements they include in the design. Halprin's landscapes suggested the rugged wilderness of nature, a breath of life into

³¹ "Lawrence Halprin," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2003, www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/lawrence-halprin.html.

³² Ibid.

cities. Eckbo illustrates his call for an organized landscape by highlighting the relations between humans and land.

The foundation of these landscapes is concrete, the most widely used construction material. Louis Vicat invented artificial cement in 1817, and it became the most common type of cement during the 19th century and was used for building almost all industrial buildings.³³ Concrete is a mixture of aggregates and pastes in its most basic form. Concrete's durability, endurance, and aesthetics make it the backbone of infrastructure. It serves as the foundation of modern life and protects and contains nature and the elements.³⁴ The Bunker Hill Steps are made from concrete, and the strong material allows for a noticeable bold structural form. This site is used architecturally and decorative by providing a structural firmness and aesthetic finish. Almost all concrete is noticeable, and recognized material is visualized through the color gray. Time is a friend to no one, especially to naturalist settings, and concrete as a material can produce a feeling of the past. Landscape design relies on concrete to form and build these spaces; as seen in the Bunker Hill steps, the material can be brutalist and plain. A further example of the Halprin use of concrete seen in the Los Angeles Open Space Network, a linear spine proposal by The Maguire Partners in 1980, imagined a range of parks and civic spaces meant for activity and human interaction.³⁵ Halprin tackles the project with a postmodern design inspired by the Southern California landscape. For Halprin, open space is a celebration of the city's vitality.

³³ "Louis Vicat, inventing cement (1786-1861, Year of Entry: 1804)," Institut Polytechnique De Paris, 2019, www.225.polytechnique.fr/en/225-stories/louis-vicat.html.

³⁴ Jonathan Watts, "Concrete: the most destructive material on Earth", *Guardian News & Media Limited*, last modified February 25, 2019, www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth?CMP=share_btn_tw.

³⁵ "Los Angeles Open Space Network," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2003, www.tclf.org/landscapes/los-angeles-open-space-network.

Eckbo's plaza is a majority of open space, walkable surface made with concrete and exposed aggregate. The grid lines are the defining factor of the landscape as they provide a powerful organizing device and a recognizable grid cell. The two colors, gray and white, become a rhythm between the vertical building columns and the horizontal ground plane. The white material adds flare to the plain ground and an appearance of a stronger, taller building. A strong foundation leads landscape design creating and shaping space to prove a visual path for human flow between the old and new Los Angeles. A functional material and a picturesque element abstract and embrace nature to guide the planning and design process.

Water

People are like water, flowing up and down steps. Halprin's designs pull nature into cities by creating positive human movement through the mimic of a flowing stream. A long stream at the center of the steps provides a continuous visual of reflective tricking water. The ravine, which once included rustic protruding rocks, has been replaced by a scored stone resembling bricks that create a ripple through the water.³⁶ The anchor of this stream began at the top of the stairs on Fifth Street via a round fountain and small lower basin. At the center of the circular pool is Robert Graham, Source Figure, a 3.3-foot high cast bronze sculpture on top of an 8.8-foot granite pedestal.³⁷ Due to its location within California, a state with a dry climate and known for its water conservation, the fountain's water is often turned off during the week. Water is an often playable interactive feature in Halprin's 1970s works, most notably Ira's Fountain in Portland, Oregon. Visually the water features are blocky and static in contrast to the gentle flow of water

³⁶ "Bunker Hill Steps," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2003, www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/bunker-hill-steps.html

³⁷ "Source Figure," Google Arts and Culture, www.artsandculture.google.com/asset/source-figure-robert-graham/wAEL59F0RPCZ3w?hl=en.

running down the stream in constant motion. The focus of the Bunker Hill Steps is the material use of concrete, while the water feature slightly contrasts the fixed landscape.

Union Bank Square plaza and the water feature are the protagonists of the site. The layout of the space intertwines with a water feature and the lawn. Eckbo's inclusion of water reflects basic principles of landscape design, specifically advocating water as powerful. The modernist pool design elevates the nature of the plaza, especially the northern section, an isolated open space that provides a feeling of a private garden.³⁸ Eckbo began his career by designing swimming pools for residential homes. Inspiration from his past comes forth in the plaza with an oriented focus on the water feature accented by grass areas. The crossover of a grassy landscape and a water feature creates biomorphic forms. The opposing categories within the landscape demonstrate Eckbo's interest in keeping a positive human movement through the environment.

The Cycle Continues

A modern Bunker Hill emphasizes community space and environmentalism; the lack of housing and the disappearance of one community for a grander space is present in the open spaces. The landscape exists and is not becoming by the impact of human imagination and innovation. Once public spaces become reconstituted as private spaces, communities, and neighborhoods mourn the loss of local space. Residents of Bunker Hill during the 1950s walked among Victorian-style buildings, picturesque mansions, iconic residences known as "the Castle" and the "Sand Box," which vandals, unfortunately, burned down. The exchange from public housing to the private sector welcomed public open spaces. The examination of the current site in correlation with the past physical, social, and cultural attributes of the public spaces developed

³⁸ U.S. Department of the Interior, Union Bank of California Plaza (Union Bank Square), 2019, 7, www.memory.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/ca/ca4100/ca4198/data/ca4198data.pdf.

a broad historical context helpful in determining an example of other "lost" communities. The *core* of Bunker Hill for its use of open space allows people through the physical sites visualization of community, allowing members of communities to build social networks. A look at the high-rise buildings serves to recognize some of the elements and connections of urban structures as an individual becomes aware of their small stature within an overpowering architectural atmosphere: the city layout and metropolitan planning remaining within the street space and the effects on personhood and community visually seen in the structure and form of the facility. The contemporary shift from discarded land to urban corporations and large-scale economic projects, including megaplexes, shift the power from minor to global interests controlling urban spaces. The Bunker Hill story tells a lot about the city of Los Angeles as a microcosm of national development and identity. Architectural technology, environment, and style development created large-scale suburban developments. Bunker Hill redevelopment expanded the commodification of housing, and the shift towards private entities allowed them to profit from acquired and redeveloped land. A space is unrecognizable and no longer represents the history it once held; the reshaping and growth of a city occur; the only remaining thought is whom the community and the city are serving now. It has shed its working-class layer and strives to fit into the upper class to serve the newly prosperous in a future that is already present in some regions of Downtown Los Angeles, a future of high rent, inflation, and lack of accessibility to basic needs, which is to say a perplexing paradox.

Historically, the objectiveness of appearance and surroundings has been based on principles of comfort and convenience, the more conscious display of power and abundance of value. Industrial development has grown by the scale of programming, determining and dominating people's lives and landscapes. Size and conditions determine sites, managed by their

land values, becoming a by-product of urbanization and community development. Landscape spaces continued to be maintained and redeveloped, enhancing the quality of life for public usage; the Bunker Steps, for example, despite their contrast to contemporary urban design, bring a fresh, brutalist form and an added element of diversity among the similar facing urban landscapes. Cities are living organisms expanding and decaying; through economic, social, and ecological factors, Los Angeles' increasing population worsens its housing and public space crisis, the social unrest that follows with the growing current environmental destruction of this era. The destruction of places, land, and the community, continues throughout the development of spaces; people and structures continue to grow and change, yet there is a solid tie to memory and emotion, the absence that makes a presence. The layers of the past and the presents define a city; they bring life to the evolving values of space.

Bibliography

- Aushenker, Michael. "L.A. Rising: Bunker Hill." *Los Angeles Business Journal*, August 29, 2022. www.labusinessjournal.com/special-reports/l-a-rising-bunker-hill/.
- Breger, G. E. "The Concept and Causes of Urban Blight." *Land Economics* 43, no. 4 (1967): 369–76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3145542>.
- Brezar, Zaš. "The Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin." *Landezine*. December 6, 2016. www.landezine.com/the-landscape-architecture-of-lawrence-halprin/.
- "Bunker Hill Steps." Los Angeles Conservancy, n.d. www.laconservancy.org/locations/bunker-hill-steps.
- "Bunker Hill Steps." TCLF. American Society of Landscape Architects, n.d. www.tclf.org/landscapes/bunker-hill-steps.
- Dear Michael and Steven Flusty. "Postmodern Urbanism." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88, no. 1 (1998): 50–72. www.jstor.org/stable/2563976.
- "1 Cal Plaza." DCBID: Downtown Center BID. Downtown Center Business Improvement District. www.downtownla.com/building/1-cal-plaza.
- Cecilie Sachs Olsen British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow. 2022. "Urban Planning Can Be Elitist, but Art Empowers People to Reimagine Their City's Future – Artist's View." *The Conversation*. September 13, 2022. www.theconversation.com/urban-planning-can-be-elitist-but-art-empowers-people-to-reimagine-their-citys-future-artists-view-111893.
- "City National 2 Cal." Two California Plaza. CIM Group. <https://2cal.la/>.
- Chen, Dung-Sheng, Lu-Lin Cheng, Caroline Hummels, and Iipo Koskinen. "Social Design: An Introduction." *International Journal of Design* (2015): 1-5. www.ijdesign.org/index.php/IJDesign/article/viewFile/2622/719.
- Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles. *Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project: Rebuttal Statement*. 1958. www.hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.c043383255.
- Department of City Planning Los Angeles, California. *Open Space Plan*, June 1973. www.planning.lacity.org/odocument/01ea5f66-3281-488a-930b-f523712fef07/Open_Space_Element.pdf.
- Eckbo, Garrett. *Landscape for Living*. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950.

- Fontan, Jorge. Fontan Architecture. Last modified June 4, 2020.
www.fontanarchitecture.com/commercial-building-classifications.
- Follin, James W. *Slums and Blight ... a disease of urban life*. Michigan: University of Michigan, 1955. eBook Collection (HathiTrust).
- Google Arts and Culture. "Source Figure."
www.artsandculture.google.com/asset/source-figure-robert-graham/wAEL59F0RPCZ3w?hl=en.
- Halprin, Lawrence. *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment*. George Braziller, Inc., 1969.
- Helphand, Kenneth I. "Larry Halprin: Drawing to Think." *View*, no 19 (2019): 10–18.
www.jstor.org/stable/26906661.
- Hess, Alan. "Everyday Modernism: Diversity, Creativity and Ideas in L.A. Architecture, 1940-1990 ." Los Angeles Conservancy, May 23, 2013.
www.laconservancy.org/sites/default/files/files/documents/Modernism-Alan-Hess-Full.pdf.
- Hirsch, Alison B. "Scoring the Participatory City: Lawrence (& Anna) Halprin's Take Part Process." *Journal of Architectural Education (1984-)* 64, no 2 (2011): 127–40.
www.jstor.org/stable/41318788.
- Institut Polytechnique De Paris. "Louis Vicat, inventing cement (1786-1861, Year of Entry: 1804)." 2019. www.225.polytechnique.fr/en/225-stories/louis-vicat.html.
- Jones, Stephen. 2017. "The Bunker Hill Story: Welfare, Redevelopment, and Housing Crisis in Postwar Los Angeles." Dissertation, New York City, New York : *CUNY Academic Works*. The Graduate Center, City University of New York.
- "Kelo v. New London." Oyez. Accessed January 17, 2023. www.oyez.org/cases/2004/04-108.
- LaCroix, Catherine J. "Urban Agriculture and Other Green Uses: Remaking the Shrinking City." *The Urban Lawyer* 42, no. 2 (2010): 225–85. www.jstor.org/stable/27895787.
- Lin, Jan. "Boulevards, Gentrification, and Urban Culture." *In Taking Back the Boulevard: Art, Activism, and Gentrification in Los Angeles*, 17–55. NYU Press, 2019.
www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvwr42r.5.
- Lin, Jan. "The Stages of Neighborhood Transition." *In Taking Back the Boulevard: Art, Activism, and Gentrification in Los Angeles*, 56–91. NYU Press, 2019.
www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvwr42r.6.

- Los Angeles Conservancy. "Union Bank Square." 2020.
www.laconservancy.org/issues/union-bank-square.
- "Poor Housing Conditions in Los Angeles, 1938-1949." 2019. Digital Collections. CSU Northridge University Library. July 16, 2019.
www.digital-library.csun.edu/poor-housing-conditions-los-angeles-1938-1949.
- Rojas, James. 2021. "Why Urban Planners Should Work with Artists." KCET. July 9, 2021.
www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/why-urban-planners-should-work-with-artists.
- Simo, Melanie. "The Education of a Modern Landscape Designer." Pacific Horticulture. Last modified March 17, 2023.
www.pacifichorticulture.org/articles/the-education-of-a-modern-landscape-designer/.
- Department of Health, Department of City Planning Los Angeles, California. *The Bunker Hill Area, Los Angeles, California: Determination of Blight : A Cooperative Survey*. Los Angeles 1951. www.hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.c033956688
- The Cultural Landscape Foundation. "Bunker Hill Steps." 2003.
www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/bunker-hill-steps.html
- The Cultural Landscape Foundation. "Lawrence Halprin." 2003.
www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/lawrence-halprin.html.
- The Cultural Landscape Foundation. "Los Angeles Open Space Network." 2003.
www.tclf.org/landscapes/los-angeles-open-space-network.
- The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, California. *Amended Redevelopment Plan Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project*. October 30, 1967.
www.crala.org/internet-site/Projects/Bunker_Hill/upload/bhredevelopmentplan.pdf.
- "Union Bank Square, Downtown, Los Angeles, CA." PCAD.
www.pcad.lib.washington.edu/building/181/.
- "Union Bank Plaza." Portfolio. View by Studio. AC Martin.
www.acmartin.com/portfolio/union-bank-plaza#:~:text=Union%20Bank%20Plaza%20was%20the,adjacent%20to%20the%20Harbor%20Freeway.
- "Union Bank Building." USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.
www.dornsife.usc.edu/la-walking-tour/union-bank-building/.
- University of Richmond. "Introduction." Creative Commons Attribution.
www.dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=1/41.245/-105.469&text=intro.
- U.S. Department of the Interior. Union Bank of California Plaza (Union Bank Square). 2019.
www.memory.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/ca/ca4100/ca4198/data/ca4198data.pdf.

Watts, Jonathan. Concrete: the most destructive material on Earth. *Guardian News & Media Limited*. Last modified February 25, 2019.
www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth?CMP=share_btn_tw.