Abstract

Gated communities are not self-sufficient; they do not exist by themselves. The vast majority of them are only residential and depend on a city (in the broad sense of the word) to provide them with the urban functions they lack : food, work, leisure etc. They are just one part in an urban system, and cannot be understood without taking in consideration the environment in which they appear.

This paper aims to show why gated communities fit with the American (read: Californian or Sunbelt) idea of the city. The urban system of Los Angeles, and the way of life it promotes, is very similar to the logic of gated communities. Most of them were advertised as the achievement of the American Dream.

Another aspect of Los Angeles' urban structure that points to the development of gated communities is the lack of public space relative to a traditional city. The social life is not created by the whole population, but organized through communities of choice or interest. The city is a series of enclaves that do not melt into a single shape, an archipelago of private microcosms interconnected by various networks.

Most gated communities around the world appear in this sort of urban area. They rely on the same logic as theme parks, shopping centres, university campuses, office parks, airports, museums… all are privately built, access-controlled, physically detached from the outside world. They create their own public space out of nothing.

Gated communities are only the most visible part of a very general phenomenon: the social and ethnical segmentation of the city into a network of distinct pieces.

LOS ANGELES AND THE LOGIC OF THE PRIVATE URBAN SYSTEM

« L'on entendra parler d'une capitale d'un grand royaume, où il n'y avait ni places publiques, ni bains, ni fontaines, ni amphithéâtres, ni galeries, ni portiques, ni promenades, qui était pourtant une ville merveilleuse. »

(« One will hear about a capital city in a great kingdom, where there were no public squares, nor baths, nor fountains, nor theatres, nor galleries, nor porticos, nor promenades, which was however, a wonderful town. »)

La Bruyère (1645-1696)

1   From enclosed city to open city, and back again

According to the modern occidental (read: European and American) ideal, the city is open and democratic; its territory has no physical limits and its access is free to all. The city is connected not only to its surroundings, but also to all the other cities in the world.

This ideal of the "open city" is in opposition with the general evolution of human settlements. The occidental cities of the nineteenth and twentieth century are almost the only ones in history not to be surrounded by walls. The last two centuries of open cities follow six thousand years of enclosed cities. It is worth nothing that neither London nor the American cities have ever been surrounded by walls. They have always been open and their expansion was free. The American cities could develop without impediment; on a potentially infinite territory.

Walls of traditional cities did not provide only protection. By enclosing and isolating a part of the territory, walls create a cultural and economic unit, they bring together a whole society, define a specific world. They induce a compact city, and frame the urban culture, specific to the dense city. The walled city has its own sovereignty, its own rules, its own culture and traditions. Physically isolated, its territory is marked and defended against wild animals, nomadic hords, rival cities. Its doors are closed at night. It is "a big collective house", as historian Michel Ragon puts it (Ragon, 1975).

Since the European Renaissance, though, the increase of cannons' shooting power and changes in the nature of conflicts gradually make city walls inefficient. Walls are being dismantled around most European cities. Without walls, European cities could welcome an ever-increasing and diverse population, ever more connected to the rest of the world, with a growing freedom of movement. The modern city brings together people, information and goods from all over the world. Huge and varied, with no physical limits, it does not form a coherent unit any more: it becomes a territory, containing a series of cities: a megalopolis. But the megalopolis itself is part of a bigger scheme, the urban networked society, whose limits go beyond the frontiers of the country it belongs to. Its territory is virtually infinite. Just as the globalisation of the economy has linked economically the different countries of the world, the territories of the Occidentalised cities tend to link themselves together, and form a unique international network, a world-

city made out of all the megalopolises, that geographer Olivier Dollfus calls the "archipelago of the megalopolises of the world" (Dollfus, 1996).

In this ever more connected world-city, recently developed areas are increasingly remote from the former public space. A growing number of enclosures are created to define specific areas within the overall networks: building-contained shopping centers, office campuses malls, leisure parks... Access control is becoming ubiquitous. The more huge and open the urban territories become, the more self centered and closed their districts.

Gated communities are the most obvious self-contained areas, using the oldest architectural device – walls – to limit their territory. Yet, their specificity is not the gate or the wall that surrounds them: it's the confrontation between the open megalopolis and the closed districts that appear inside of it.

A wall around a district doesn't automatically create a city, and gated communities differ from traditional cities. The vast majority of them are only residential. They are not autonomous; they do not exist by themselves. Even the gated communities that became incorporated municipalities are not self-sufficient societies. With a very few exceptions, gated communities do not contain offices, shops, factories, farms, hospitals or jails. They depend on a city (in the broad sense of the word) to provide them with the urban functions they lack: food, work, leisure, networks etc. They are not "worlds" in themselves, as traditional cities were. They are just one part in an urban system, and cannot be understood without taking in consideration the environment (the urban system, the social context) in which they appear.

Gated communities are definitely part of the occidental city, even if they are completely opposed to its logic. Deliberately separated from the open territory of the megalopolis, they depend on it. There is no gated community out of the urban civilization. Even those located in the middle of the desert, tens of miles from any other built area, are still extensions of the megalopolis. They still depend on the urban networks and facilities, yet refuse to melt in the city completely.

2   Gated communities: the essence of suburbia

The first gated communities appeared simultaneously in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, on the edge of towns. They follow the invention of the modern housing estates by the London bourgeoisie who, at the end of the eighteenth century tried to imitate the houses built in the countryside (Fishman, 1987).

Yet, gated communities were a marginal phenomenon at the time. They did not match the ideal of the European city, and were reserved for an elite, because only the elite could afford to disconnect themselves from the dominant logic of the open city, and live remote from the society.

Llewellyn Park (Orange, New Jersey), is the American ancestor of the gated commuter suburb. It has already all the characteristics of the modern gated communities, and is the prototype of the American suburb. Located relatively far from Manhattan, it was created in the 1850s for the first (rich) commuters, who could afford to live and work in two different worlds (Reps, 1965). In the nineteenth century, this was reserved for an elite, but during the twentieth century, it became possible for the middle-class to work in the

open city, and live in the "countryside", in a purely residential, isolated community. This way of life became the dream of every American family, and this dream became a reality in California.

The sprawl of the gated communities occurred in the United States, about one century after the early elitist ones were created. The configuration was broadly the same. The elitist model of the gated communities revealed itself adapted to the American way of life of the Middle-class, fitting naturally into the American suburban environment, as if they had always been designed for it.

Most of the gated communities were created for the same reasons as any other suburban community. Their characteristics are very similar. Gated communities are, just like suburbs, conceived for people who want to use the city, without actually living in it. It's a one way relationship: people who live in the suburbs can still go to the city, while the people who live in the city won't go to the suburbs. Gated communities represent the essence of this idea, marking the separation with the outside world with a wall. Gated communities are the essence of suburbia.

3   Los Angeles and the American Dream

According to the American cosmogony, both paradise and hell are located on Earth. The city, created by mankind, embodies hell, while paradise can only be found in the virgin nature, created by God. A considerable amount of literature describes the metropolises of the industrial age, like New York or Chicago, as rude, anonymous, dense, overpopulated, dirty, dangerous, inhuman, and subject to workers riots and all kinds of disasters (White Morton and White, 1962). As for the contemporary city, it is considered as "an alien place where by definition middle-class Americans refuse to live" (Adler, 1995). The city is not only considered as the opposite of nature, it is also the contrary of the community: an archaic form of social organization, inapt to welcome the American Dream.

To build paradise on earth, Americans have to fly away from the city and create a new environment: "Suburbia, I came to believe, must be understood as a utopia in its own right. Its power derived ultimately from the capacity of suburban design to express a complex and compelling vision of the modern family freed from the corruption of the city, restored to harmony with nature, endowed with wealth and independence yet protected by a close-knit, stable community." (Fishman, 1987).

Southern California is a perfect place to understand how this new model has emerged.
It is "an anti-world, an imaginary alternative not only to New York, but to Europe" (Rieff, 1991), the place where the new suburban city model was invented. This kind of environment is not specific to Southern California any more, it has sprawled all over the world. Yet, it is interesting to study the history of Los Angeles, as it is the place where it was created.

Los Angeles is the model of a free market city, the first example of a city entirely created by private companies. Even before the sprawl of gated communities, all the functions of the city had been transformed and adapted to a private logic. Real estate developers were responsible for the vast majority of its growth. Private companies supplied all its "public services". Private companies built its churches, train stations, beaches, museums

(MacWilliams, 1946; Fogelson, 1967)… Surprisingly, the only elements that were financed by the city, the state or the federal government are the freeways and roads – individual transportation.

The city attracted its population by advertising its perfect climate and ideal way of life, as being "the edge of the American Dream". Tourists and retired farmers were the principal settlers, and the actual builders of the city. They had no urban tradition and no will to create a city as a whole, as a place where different communities can melt together. They created an urban system based on cars, tourist houses ("bungalows"), small communities, gated resorts (MacWilliams, 1946; Fogelson, 1967). This way of life is very similar to the logic of gated communities, and many of them were, originally, resorts. Most of them were advertised as the achievement of the American Dream.

To build a non anonymous, residential environment instead of the chaos and density of the metropolis, Southern Californians created a city – Los Angeles – organized as an infinite series of homogeneous and segregated communities. The suburban environment is not, as the city was, the amalgamation, in one place, of different communities. The social life is not created by the whole population, but is divided into communities of choice or interest. Each community has its own district, enclave or ghetto. That is why historian Robert Fogelson names Los Angeles the "fragmented metropolis" (Fogelson, 1967).

He explained how the Angelinos, who desired a small-scaled environment, close to the nature created, by mistake, Los Angeles. Each new community is supposed to give its inhabitants the serenity and quietness of rural life, the sociability and good neighborliness, deeply rooted in American tradition, while remaining close to the city. But, as more and more people are pursuing this ideal, the city can only get more bigger, working in opposition with the ideal of the small community.

Developers tend to overuse the word "community", a selling point in itself, which costs nothing. Any development can be called a "community". The efficiency of this marketing slogan comes from the fact that the quest of the ideal community is present at every step of the American history, in every group of the population, from Native Americans to the most recent immigrants, including the members of the gangs or the gated communities inhabitants. Even if this ideal is different for every American, it shared by them all, contrary to other sociological characteristics, considered as "typically American" (pioneer spirit, free enterprise etc.), which are shared only by those who believe in the WASP version of the American Dream.

4   Los Angeles, scale model of the world

The map of Los Angeles shows a patchwork of enclaves, whether ethnic (Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Saigon, Little Tokyo, Little Addis, Little India…), economic (CBS Television City, Universal City, City of Commerce, City of Industry, Fashion Island, Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, UCLA, Bel Air, Culver City, Century City…) or otherwise (gay, old hippies, artists).

The social specialization, which exists at the scale of the streets in a city, is at the scale of the districts in the metropolis, and at the scale of whole cities in the megalopolis. As Mike Davis notes, Los Angeles contains an equivalent of the Silicon Valley, and of

Detroit, Cleveland, Boston, South Bronx, São Paulo or Singapore (Davis, 1990). Los Angeles describes itself as a "world-city", and contains more Iranian people than any city except Teheran, more Mexican people than any city except Mexico, more Salvadorian people than any city except San Salvador, more Lebanese people than any city except Beirut… and one might say: more American people than any city except New York.

Yet, the city doesn't look socially mixed. Each economic or ethnic group lives in a different area, occupying its own territory, and has few contacts with the other groups. When moving around the city, one goes from one country to another. These countries are separated by borders, hierarchical relationships and territorial conflicts: gang wars, gentrification, ethnic riots. Los Angeles is a scale model of the world, with as many borders as the world itself. In this context, the construction of walls and gates is simple redundancy.

Gated communities are only the most visible expression of a much more general phenomenon: the social and ethnical split of the city into a network of fragments dispersed on the territory. The territories of a same kind (for instance: gated communities and malls for the upper classes) do not need to be physically contiguous, as one goes around in the closed box of his car. Connected by roads and information networks, they have to be seen as cities of millions of people, in separate parts. They constitute an urban system made out of distinct networked environments, a discontinuous and international archipelago, with no definitive borders, location or unity.

The gated community is the model unit of this network, simultaneously closed to its immediate surroundings and open to the larger networks, filtering exterior inputs. This is a logical response to the megalopolis, a way to manage the inconvenience of its infinite expansion and openness. On could say the more open the urban networks, the more closed the units they contain. Yet, even if they are closed, the networked enclaves still have the world at their disposal. The slogan of the gated community of Serrano Eldorado expresses it clearly: "Close to so much, yet above it all".

5   Southern Californian public space

Los Angeles is not structured by public spaces, as a traditional city. The social life is not created by the whole population, but organized through communities of choice or interest. The traditional "European" public spaces, inherited from the past, integrated to the social structure and frequented by a local population, have lost their raison d'être in a megalopolis where one doesn't go out by necessity anymore, but only by choice.

European public spaces are the result of a very long process. The history of Southern California is too short to generate this kind of public space. It isn't old enough to contain public spaces which would have « naturally » appeared with time. The open space of the city is only used for leisure, or by the very poor. Tourists and homeless people are the last two categories of people who use them, because they use the city in a traditional way – walking around on foot. Public space has thus become "a place that's been abandoned to the poor and the bandits and deserted by the rich and (the) middle-class", as a journalist of the Los Angeles Times put it (*Los Angeles Times*, 2001). The public spaces do not constitute a unified and consistent system; they do not structure the city.

The only way to create public space there is to build places conceived for a specific use: amusement parks, office campuses, universities, malls, golf courses or gated communities. These public spaces are never exterior, open to all, but interior and private. They are not linked by public streets, but separated units accessible by car. Yet, they are a new kind of public spaces.

Many traditional public spaces have been replaced by private equivalents. The streets are dimly lit, because cars use their own headlights. There are few squares and public gardens because every house has its own garden, every building its own park or patio. There are few public benches, because Angelinos prefer to sit quietly in their own cars if they have to wait in the street. And every single citizen participates to "the replacement of city streets and squares as social centres by suburban living rooms" (Sennett, 1977). The megapolis's agora is not a single collective place, but a network of private places.

In 1964, after a journey through the area, the architect Charles Moore found out that the only place which had the characteristics of a public space was Disneyland. Only Disneyland succeeds in creating a pedestrian promenade, and the urban qualities one can usually find in a traditional city. In Los Angeles, the artificial city is more humane than the real one. But Disneyland is the opposite of a European public space: it is built in the fields, out of the city; surrounded by a wall; its access is restricted; it is private and frequented only by the people willing to pay. Moore's paradoxical conclusion was that, now "You have to pay for the public life" (Moore, 1964).

Theme parks have been compared to islands, because they are autonomous enclaves, creating their own world, isolated from their urban context (Eyssartel & Rochette, 1992). When you enter the gate to Disneyland, you leave the city to get into another world. This world is organized like a traditional city, around a centre (the castle), which leads to the different themes. The strong centre reminds the visitor that he is not at the periphery of the real world, but at the centre of an "invented world" (Eyssartel & Rochette, 1992). Rather than islands, theme parks are peninsulas or cul-de-sacs, as they are always connected to the road networks, the same way as the Mont Saint-Michel or Venice are connected to the land; or that gated communities are connected to the city.

The architecture critic Paul Golberger described Disneyland as "the town square of Los Angeles". Indeed, in a huge megapolis organized around its road networks, the town square can only be a theme park connected to the freeway. Disneyland is full of open public spaces – squares, market places, promenades, and so on – which provide Los Angeles with what it lacks.

Since it is a closed and autonomous world that needs no contact with the outside world, the theme park cannot depend on the equipments and public services of the real world. In Disneyland, every element of the real world – transportation networks, shops, accommodation, restaurants, administration, police, fire station, etc. – is reinvented, "Disneyfied": one hangs around in monorail, shops in a cartoon-like city and lives in themed hotels.

Walt Disney hated Los Angeles and the urban sprawl, and he created Disneyland as the contrary of Los Angeles; its insularity being "the symbol of an anti-world contained in ours" (Eyssartel & Rochette, 1992). While Los Angeles is infinite, isotropic and open, Disneyland is finite, anisotropic and closed. Los Angeles's architecture is vernacular and local; Disneyland's architecture is full of historical stylistic referents. The urban variety of

Los Angeles is very low; the urban variety of Disneyland is as high as can be. One can only move around by car in Los Angeles; one can move in Disneyland by any conceivable means of transportation, except cars. Los Angeles is made out of indifferent places; Disneyland is made out only of specific places. Los Angeles contains no public space; Disneyland contains only public space. Los Angeles is anarchic; Disneyland is completely controlled. Los Angeles is open to all; one has to pay to gain access to Disneyland. Los Angeles's population is multi-cultural, Disneyland erases all the cultural or ethnical differences of its visitors.

6   A new urban model

Inverting systematically all the characteristics of Los Angeles, Disneyland created a consistent environment, perfectly integrated in the context of Los Angeles, and that will rapidly become an urban model, admired by millions of tourists and studied by architects and urban designers.

Disneyland is, at the same time, the opposite of Los Angeles and its essence, as the city is "a collection of theme parks" (Moore, 1984). All the so-called public places of Southern California rely on the same principle. Shopping centres, university campuses, office parks, airports, museums, gated communities are all access-controlled, privately built, and physically detached from the outside world. They create their own public space, inside themselves, out of nothing, the way theme parks do. The network constituted by all these environments creates a consistent urban system: an archipelago of private microcosms. Public spaces, streets, cafes etc. have not disappeared from the city: they are now built indoors.

All the components of the city evolve in this direction: swimming pools are transformed into "Wet'n'Wild" or "SplashLand", giving the possibility not only to swim, but to access a complete universe, with attractions and sophisticated sceneries. Malls are much more than just stores grouped in a building, they develop around indoor streets and places, or even attractions or themes, as City Walk in Hollywood (designed by architect John Jerde). Offices are designed as campuses, with leisure areas, parks… (the Microsoft campus, in Redmond, is a famous example). Even museums (as the Getty Center, on his private hill) are organized as theme parks.

Residential areas are following the same trend:

LOS ANGELES	DISNEYLAND and GATED COMMUNITIES
Infinite	Finite
Centerless	Centered
Isotropic	Anisotropic
Open	Closed
Systematic	Labyrinthic
Multicultural « World-City »	Monocultural « American City »
Unremarkable, ordinary urban space and architecture	Strongly characterized urban space and architecture
Repetition of sameness	Diversity of places
Adapted to cars	Designed for pedestrians
No public space	Only public space
Open to all	Access-controlled
Unplanned	Planned to the last detail

Table 1: Urban characteristics of Los Angeles, Disneyland, and gated communities.

As a real estate marketing product, gated communities can go out of fashion. But the trend that is at the origin of their sprawl corresponds to a fundamental shift in the use of cities. They are part of a new urban system that challenges the European ideal of the city based on public space.

If the idealized public spaces (based on the Greek agora) have disappeared, new forms of public spaces have been created in response to the huge scale of the megalopolis and to the small scale of the local communities. Disneyland was the first environment to combine efficiently these two logics. Compared to a traditional district, its context is at the same time more limited and much larger. Inside, it is a small scaled, closed and pedestrian environment, a traditional public space, human scaled and carefully designed, which boundaries are clear. Outside, it is open on all international networks, world famous and accessible to all the inhabitants of the world: its context is international.

All components of the contemporary city rely on the same logic. Public space is not in the street any more, it is created out of nothing in places intended for that use. It is therefore logical that districts are more and more disconnected from their immediate surroundings, and more connected to the global context. The more huge and open the city is, the more its components are looking for physical limits and social homogeneity. Open urban networks generate private closed enclaves.

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