The Future of Office Work
Volume 1: How We Got Here

This cityLAB + Gensler Los Angeles publication initiates a new conversation about the future of office work, office buildings, and their impacts on downtown Los Angeles, as well as the impacts of urbanism on the city and its residents. It seeks to frame the discussion around how downtown Los Angeles fell from favor, how it is now on the rise again, and what the implications might be for the future of downtown Los Angeles’s office market, especially in light of recent economic trends and developments.

The cityLAB + Gensler Los Angeles publication explores the complex relationship between downtown Los Angeles and office work, and in particular, the kind of downtown work most often characterized as “office work.”

The publication delves into the history and evolution of downtown Los Angeles, from its early days as a hub of commerce and industry to its current status as a major metropolitan center. It examines the role of office work in shaping the city’s economic landscape and its impact on the urban fabric.

The publication is divided into two sections: The Future of Office Work and The Future of Office Work: How We Got Here. The first section explores the current state of downtown Los Angeles, including its office market, and discusses the challenges and opportunities it faces in the future. The second section provides a historical perspective on the city’s development, highlighting key periods and events that have shaped its evolution.

In conclusion, the publication aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the future of office work in downtown Los Angeles, including its historical context, current state, and potential future trajectories. It seeks to foster a new conversation about how office work and downtown Los Angeles are evolving and what the implications might be for the broader urban landscape.
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This cityLAB + Gensler Los Angeles publication reflects a new conversation about the future of office work, office building, and their im­ pact on downtown Los Angeles. Though it is intended to reflect on the twentieth century downtown. The variety of Los Angeles’s office landscape is the result of decades of architect­ural experimentation, and according to some historians, has contributed to its recognition as a city of exceptional friendliness.

Introduction

The reimagining that continues to transform Los Angeles’s central business district (CBD) into the downtown Los Angeles (recently re­figured as DTLA). This instigation takes place during an era of urban resurgence in the city, the spaces formed there, and the pattern­ning of urban lives and livelihoods.

Angeles can be considered both America’s last big-city downtown and the city that transformed into a global economic pole, circuits of the city, building and desk in order to understand the development of office work as a host of other once inherently incompatible, binary, relationships that described the fabric of the CBD and, in some places, the skyscrapers, office work—even more than the consummation of high culture and high-end goods—has been the signature activity of many downtowns—especially those in the West and Southern California region’s political and economic center. As such, the transformation of Los Angeles’s downtown has been sheltered by multiple versions of the monocentric city—and more recent theorizations of polycentric urban form. In the midst of this vast formal change, an essential component of downtowns, the one interpretation of the late capitalist Angeleno has been the kind of downtown work most often labeled “office work.”

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Fully integrated within an architectural workspace and surrounded by the latest technology, the worker becomes a component of a system that integrates the space, the tools and the user equally.

Based in the Romanesque Revival style typically associated with commercial office spaces of the period, the Bradbury Building, Los Angeles, is a testament to the integration of efficiency and aesthetics. It was designed with 13 stories, featuring a steel frame with 24-foot floor-to-floor heights and windows that can be opened individually.

Los Angeles, by the 1890s, the economic advantages firms realize by locating near one another concentrate Southern California commerce in an increasingly bustling Downtown Los Angeles. By the end of the 19th century, the city had a population of 97,000, with Downtown growing to 18,000 acres.

The telephone, once the most common (and essential) business appliance, supports a wide-ranging network of economic relations. The downtown worker's second home is a product of the Larkin Building, completed in Buffalo in 1886, considered the first purpose-designed office environment. The Los Angeles Times notes, "Every Pueblo called 'La Reyna' will put up with great limitations and inconvenience rather than leave the heart of trade and commerce."

The geographical center of Los Angeles is the old Plaza, but breaks off due to population growth. Southern Pacific enters Southern California, setting off a rate war with Santa Fe railroad.

Executives at Machine Age firms prize the geographical center of Los Angeles as the old Plaza, but breaks off due to population growth. Southern Pacific enters Southern California, setting off a rate war with Santa Fe railroad.

The calculating machine is marketed as a marvel of mechanical construction and a time-saver for the daily routines of financial institutions. The punch clock fragments office workers' lives into second home activities. The Wainwright Building is a 10-story red brick office building in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. Described by Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, it is an entirely new building type specifically devoted to knowledge-based activities.

Electric trolleys arrive in Los Angeles upon the completion of the Southern Pacific in 1876, contributing to the social vibrancy and economic competitiveness of downtown by making it a place to transport large amounts of customers, workers, and goods. By 1887, approximately 100 new towns are planned.

The first skyscraper in Los Angeles is the 13-story Continental Building, completed in 1889. This building is considered the first skyscraper in Los Angeles, featuring a steel frame and a reticulated frame structure for open interior space, allowing for greater light and air.

An acre of land goes for $1,500 in 1886. By 1890, a rate war with Santa Fe railroad enters Southern California. The Wainwright Building is completed in 1895, marking a new era in architectural design and commercial office work.

Frederick W. Taylor promulgates methods to quantify human and mechanical processes to streamline activities and enhance overall productivity. The Wainwright Building is a 10-story red brick office building in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. Designed by Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, it is an entirely new building type specifically devoted to knowledge-based activities.

Numerical Keyboard: Introduced, early form of the calculator and computer, allowed for quick tabulations.

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• Yet downtown Los Angeles was, and DTLA is—"the ascendance, the decline and ultimate obsolescent office building fabric. In turn, a third volume will follow that promotes new design ideas that address these opportunities. The intention will be to provoke new conversations among the communities, the succession of ideas about how knowledge-based work is and should be accomplished. Logics, the succession of ideas about how knowledge-based work could be said to be happening at various scales: the City, the Building, and the Desk. This introduction sets the stage for our understanding of work in Los Angeles and how have they been reimagined there?

• The essential questions that drive this inquiry cut across scales, and implicate the dis- cursive agglomeration, its dispersal, and its revision in the neglected zones at downtown’s edges. That being said, Los Angeles’s exceptionality would necessitate change (tearing down, reconfiguring, or expanding with new program) that, given both exemplar and exception. Height limits have these principally been advanced on rational, cultural, or symbolic grounds? What does the future character of downtown as place, and at home and in cafes, comport or conflict with the ascendance, the decline and ultimate obsolescent office building fabric. In turn, a third volume will follow that promotes new design ideas that address these opportunities. The intention will be to provoke new conversations among the communities, the succession of ideas about how knowledge-based work is and should be accomplished. Logics, the succession of ideas about how knowledge-based work could be said to be happening at various scales: the City, the Building, and the Desk. This introduction sets the stage for our understanding of work in Los Angeles and how have they been reimagined there?

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In 1885, the Santa Fe Railroad entered Southern California, setting off a rate war with the dominant railway line of the area, the Southern Pacific. Competition and low fares made Southern California accessible to the rest of the country in a way it had heretofore never been. New cheap transportation, huge tracts of available land, temperate weather, popular culture, outrageous promotion, and avarice proved a combustible combination, enflaming the land boom that was the true genesis of Los Angeles’s downtown. In 1886, an acre of land there went for $100. The next year it was worth $1,300. From 1884 to 1888 roughly 100 new towns were planned, and in 1887 Orange County was broken off due to population growth. Between 1880 and 1896, Los Angeles went from a population of 11,000 to 97,000.

By 1889, the boom subsided, but Los Angeles had established itself. Too, prices eventually recovered and continued to rise into the 1900’s. Infrastructure enhancements and the laying of a street grid eventually brought development south of the original settlement into what today are labeled the Civic Center and Historic Core neighborhoods. In 1891, the Los Angeles Times noted, “The geographical center of Los Angeles is the old plaza, but that has long since ceased to be the center of population... While at one time most of the population was north of the plaza, during the past ten years go per cent of the improvements have gone up in the southern half of the city. These are solid facts which it is useless to attempt to ignore by playing the ostrich acts, and level-headed property holders in the northern part of the city are beginning to ask themselves seriously what is to be done to arrest or at least delay the steady march of the business section from the old to the new plaza on Sixth Street...”

As occurred in other western and southwestern railroad cities (Albuquerque, El Paso, San Diego, and San Francisco among them), businesses and eventually residents migrated from the colonial city center to the new center, in the process producing a new urban culture that was English-speaking, largely white, and increasingly Protestant, and with it a changed culture and ethic of work.

Southern California, thus, was somewhat late to the business of forming downtowns. The term, “downtown,” originally intended to describe the burgeoning business district in southernmost Manhattan, had been in use in North America since the 1830’s, a time when Los Angeles remained an agricultural market center. Some steps in the formation of downtown, at least as understood by a morphologist like James Vance—his inception, exclusion, and segregation...
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During the early 20th century, the construction of "downtown" as the city’s central place and the place of business was inseparable from the process of urbanization of Los Angeles itself.

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In the same period the Broadway area became a central hub for entertainment and shopping. Department stores like Bullock’s and the May Company purveyed goods to the gentry living in nearby suburbs. As in many Northern cities, industry was restricted to downtown Los Angeles’ edges. Unlike these cities, these uses have persisted in areas close to DTLA, where toys, garments, and jewelry continue to be manufactured and distributed. Fact, industrial employment has remained an important portion of all the work done downtown.

Working Downtown

Downtown Los Angeles, like other downtowns across urban America, represented a new kind of city making. Indeed for most social theorists, the closure, autonomy and separateness of the urban community and urban work, including office work, located the city directly within the capitalist, political, and social organization. For at least one theorist, Ferdinand Toennies, urban work engendered an entirely new way of life, and entirely new senses of time, of place, and one’s self in relation to them. Social relationships based on place were weakened by broad migrations to industrial cities like Los Angeles, and were replaced with relationships based on associations of common economic interests.

Work, particularly office work, was central to the formation of downtown, more so than shopping.

entertainment, or even governance. As downtown work was like industrial work, wage work, done in the central business district outside of industry and retail activity, was primarily knowledge based and centered on recording, storing, and retrieval of information central to commerce.

In many Northern cities, downtown was a place where business services were provided rather than products produced. Thus the start of the service economy drove downtown growth and the mono-functional office building morphology that would serve it.

While work like this had existed for centuries, principally in government, banking, and insurance, the quantity of it mushroomed by the middle of the 20th century, first with the increasingly rapid circulation of circulating capital, then compounded further by the advent of consumerism. Administration and management of goods production and service provision emerged as a logistical imperative of the new industrial economy. The processes of the modern business enterprise and the hierarchical structures that guided its relation and tasks were first promulgated by railroads in the 19th century. Railroad companies were among the first firms faced with managing the cooperation of hundreds of spatially dispersed people and the logistical challenges of moving people and freight. In the United States, the railroads created a system of internal operations out of these challenges that could be supplanted anywhere and was organized to accomplish highly specific tasks, rather than some general sense of enterprise. The management structure used to implement the system proved...
to be effective. Soon financial institutions, insurance companies and later manufacturers, importers, and chain stores adopted similar practices.

The need for meetings was supported by railroad time. Railroad time, which transformed temporal reckoning from being ambient, whole, and local to being abstract, standardized and universal, enabled an explosion in the number of business meetings that provided, arguably, most efficient opportunities for face-to-face communication. In the 1880’s, California Architect and Building News made the point, “Every enterprising man seeks to get as near to the center as possible and will put up with great limitations and inconvenience rather than leave the heart of trade and commerce.” More importantly, these organizations possessed the capital to outbid other users for those spaces, displacing first residents and then industry. Early images of downtown work—office work—show it taking place in rooms, arranged similarly to our contemporary image of an office: groups of desks with their respective occupants mulling through papers. With limited residential choices and a public sphere that was at times intentionally under-nourished, downtown was a place of administration, documentation, litigation, commerce and exchange among the city’s elites.

Though downtown Los Angeles remained a place of industry, a new building type was necessary to accommodate the scale at which new business service activities were now taking place. Office work—office work—show it taking place in rooms that looked like palaces (to wit Rome’s Bank of the Holy Spirit), monasteries (the Inns of Court), or market halls (the original Lloyd’s of London) as original sites of knowledge-based work. The downtown office building of the industrial era had to be re-invented. To the British historian of art and architecture, Nicholas Pevsner, the closest predecessor of the office building was the warehouse. Like warehouses, new office buildings were large. More importantly, as a result of new technologies and surging land rents, they were tall. Downtown was not immune to the particular economic logic of the skyscraper or new technologies and surging land rents, they were tall. Downtown was not immune to the particular economic logic of the skyscraper. As elsewhere, tall buildings were vastly unpopular, largely because of the street congestion that they engendered. In Los Angeles they were also un-Californian, denying local streets of the region’s plentiful sunshine. The argument for height limits in Los Angeles were won based on its allowing California’s sunlight to penetrate to sidewalk level, ensuring that downtown Los Angeles suffered none of the “urban canyon” effects of New York and Chicago. An updated height limit ordinance was passed in 1911, establishing a specific limit of 150 feet. Exceptions were granted for decorative towers such as those later built on the Eastern Columbia Building in 1928 and the since demolished Richfield Tower. With height limits enforced, downtown Los Angeles became increasingly distinct from other American downtowns. It sprawled across more land, and generated no distinguishing skyline during its pre-World War II heyday. The 1911 ordinance was repealed only in 1957. The first private building to exceed the old limit was the 28-story California Bank Building, located at the southwest corner of 6th and Spring Streets.

Living Downtown

Railroad time resulted in fragmenting the sense of self of people who lived by it. People saw their lives divided into roles fulfilled according to clock time that divided the day and people into public and private parts.
neighborhoods within about a six-mile radius. Henry E. Huntington became its owner in 1898. The system slowly morphed into a bus system over the years until the last streetcar went out of service in 1963.

Office workers were variously commuters, functionaries, and perhaps participants in public life in working class carved out space for public conversation about the city, struggled to gain a foothold however, private life has been prized over public in Los Angeles. In many ways, the downtown elite housing in downtown and adjacent neighborhoods along the Wilshire Corridor, in-cluding Cole’s and Philippe’s. Even today, some DTLA interests demand public faces for other-wise entirely private and commercial ventures (e.g., LA Live).

As important as the railroad was to structuring the city’s parks and plazas have languished. While the neighborhoods of the downtown poor isolation. In DTLA, this was Bunker Hill, Paris suburbs, like Angelino Heights and Highland Park, developed by immigrant historiography and critical. Those left behind by the new urban property, succeeded thereafter within the shadow of a decade in 1861.

The area would remain a significant example of how an open-shop Los Angeles. In 1909, the city fathers placed a ban on free speech from public life, and was construed as private. In fact, very few people lived downtown; fewer lived there by choice.

Downtown as Mobility Hub

In addition, downtowns have evolved considerably. In Los Angeles and elsewhere, mobile, relocating first to new amenity-centered neighborhoods along the Wilshire Corridor, in-cluding Cole’s and Philippe’s. Even today, some DTLA interests demand public faces for other-wise entirely private and commercial ventures (e.g., LA Live).

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Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax Building was designed to clearly impart and reinforce corporate values, creating an atmosphere of organizational identity. The design of the building goes beyond the functional and aesthetic aspects to create an environment that reflects the values and ethos of the corporation. The plan reinforces the internalized identification of the worker with the corporation, making them feel like an integral part of the organization.

The image of the secretary is gradually emerging to take a more visible place beside the technological apparatuses of work, which previously had often been depicted devoid of users. This change signifies a shift in the perception of the worker's role and their relationship with the technology that is integral to their tasks.

Projecting forward to 1950, this futuristic vision of the city is based upon a vertical layering of functions in the name of efficiency and productivity. The cityscape of the future is envisioned as a vertically organized environment where different sectors of the economy are concentrated in specific layers, reflecting the growing emphasis on efficiency and productivity in various sectors.

Los Angeles and many other US industrial cities continue on a path of decentralization that begins as early as the late 1920s. The urban planning and development of the period reflect a trend towards dispersed growth, with a focus on creating accessible and organized communities for workers and their families.

By 1930, the city of Los Angeles has grown significantly, with plans for major developments such as the Hollywood Freeway. The city is undergoing rapid changes, with new buildings and infrastructures being constructed to accommodate the growing population and industries.

In the 1920s, the worker is valued for his ability to systematically replicate the efficiency of an industrial era machine. This era marks the rise of the machine age, with advances in technology and machinery transforming the workplace and work processes. The office takes on Taylorist aspects of the factory floor, with a focus on maximum efficiency from major advancements in office furniture, such as the vertical filing cabinet, and the use of chemicals like carbon paper and blotting tissues.

As had already occurred in industry, office work is subject to de-skilling. Stenography, once considered an essential skill among professional secretaries, is largely replaced by "business phonographs" - dictation machines. These machines promise to not only make the process of dictating more efficient, but also to ensure greater leisure time as a result, reinforcing time as the basic unit of work.

The Hall of Justice, the Japanese Union Church, Great Western Savings, the Sun Drug building, the Westinghouse Banking Corporation, the Spring Street Financial District, and the Roosevelt Office Building are all significant buildings and institutions that have been erected in downtown Los Angeles. They represent the changing face of the city and the growth of its industries.

Downtown Los Angeles: Broadway at Seventh Street is a day pour into the City Bldg Desk. The Spring Street area is the biggest electric railway in the world at its greatest extent, around 1925: the Pacific Electric Railway or Red Car and the Biltmore Hotel, Ritz Hotel and Astor Hotel are built in downtown LA. The Biltmore Hotel is completed in 1923, and the Xerox machine is invented without chemical copies, as had already occurred in industry.

The Ediphone Dictating Machine promises to not only make the process of dictating more efficient, but also to ensure greater leisure time as a result, reinforcing time as the basic unit of work. The use of telephone by women for domestic purposes is at first discouraged and then celebrated by service providers.

The Ad from the Sandusky Register and Film are published as a guide to standardizing operations by office managers and workers to gain maximum efficiency from major advancements in office furniture, such as the vertical filing cabinet. The use of liquid chemicals like carbon paper and blotting tissues is introduced, along with the use of new appliances like phonographs and typewriters.

The Bleakly Brothers, Camden Courier Post, and the Bleakly Brothers, Camden Courier Post, are among the notable developments of this era. The office becomes an organized professional life, with the introduction of new appliances and machines that transform the way work is done.

1931 has marked the end of this era, with the rise of the machine age and the transformation of the workplace. The effects of this era are still felt today, as the principles of efficiency and productivity continue to shape modern work environments.
As downtown languished for decades, Los Angeles as a whole flourished, a testament to downtown’s vestigial nature. A substantial body of scholarship has attempted to make sense of Los Angeles, and downtown in particular within the metropolitan economy.

The Non-central CBD: Downtown in the Polycentric City

Los Angeles’ once-mighty business district, once the focal point of the city’s cultural and economic life, has undergone a profound reconfiguration over the past several decades. The non-central CBD, or “second CBD,” has emerged as a new almost subterranean configuration at the Los Angeles Mall, named ARCO Plaza and then First Avenue Plaza by its developers. This development has been described as a “new CBD,” separate from downtown interests, and one eager to champion urban decentralization.

Advocates focused their ire on a proposal to build New York City-like elevated transit in downtown Los Angeles. When plans for a primarily recreational parkway had surfaced in the 1920s, members of the Automobile Club of Southern California whose primary goal was to build a fast road “between downtown and the San Fernando Valley.” The first segment was to be a road for high-speed traffic, while the rest would serve as a grade separation for street parking, a more positive option for pedestrian use of the street. Much of the city’s inland region was served by a direct route that connected downtown and the San Fernando Valley. The route was a direct route to downtown and the San Fernando Valley.

In 1930, the Arroyo Seco Parkway would be a major highway, suggested that it be built as a parkway, giving motorists “a great deal of incidental recreation and pleasure”.

The massive parking garages on which downtown were dependent continued to be the predominant land use downtown, beginning in the 1960s the majority of Los Angeles office space would be located outside downtown, strung along the Wilshire Corridor as it wound its way west towards the Pacific Ocean.

By the mid-1930s, Pershing Square was renovated in 1910 and again more recently at 7th and Figueroa. Arguably one of the few downtown’s cultural palaces rest give many, especially the Music Center’s various pavilions, an uncomfortable boost above street level making pedestrian accessibility to these places awkward at best. In portions of a redeveloped Bunker Hill, elevators and escalators were designed to connect high-rise office buildings.

As retail activity followed consumers to the suburbs, downtown lost its hold on other kinds of employment too. The motion picture industry, which had once dominated downtown, began to decline. As construction costs rose, film studios were pushed out of downtown Los Angeles. By the 1930s, downtown was no longer the hub of the city’s movie industry. Downtown construction remained dormant until the 1940s when Pershing Square was renovated in 1910 and again more recently at 7th and Figueroa.

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The increase in the automobile’s share of total trip-making has been a two-edged sword for Los Angeles. On one hand, the automobile has increased average trip lengths, particularly freeway trips, as a necessity downtown. The automobile has also increased the number of commercial activities that occur in the automotive, inventing car-oriented urban form, while concentrating on traffic relief and noting the outsourcing of many office functions and the growth in network organization forms, has led to the phenomenon of downtown’s decline.


Downtown’s hegemony was challenged by a number of rivals to downtown, including the construction of the Arroyo Seco Parkway, the first segment of which was completed in 1930. The Arroyo Seco Parkway was designed to provide an alternative to the downtown’s streetcar network, which was becoming less accessible by interurban transit, a bevy of decentralization advocates within local government, and a group of influential downtown interests opposed to it.

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been identified among the culprits. So have vast industry consolidations that have left fewer firms overall in many sectors. Reliance on the automobile as the citizenry’s primary mode of transportation has also been blamed. In the early 1990’s, Gallino and Small identified 29 existing employment centers and three additional emerging ones in Los Angeles. The four largest centers and one smaller one are located on an east-west arc traveling from Hollywood to the Pacific Ocean. Despite the large number of centers, the traditional CBD, even in Los Angeles, remains important, while it no longer accounts for the majority of employment, it has twice as many employees as the next largest area subject to deferred maintenance including downtown. The four largest centers and one smaller one are located on an east-west arc traveling from Hollywood to the Pacific Ocean. The four largest centers and one smaller one are located on an east-west arc traveling from Hollywood to the Pacific Ocean.

In arranging such projects, the city sought to project a modern, sophisticated image and provide an iconic skyline against a backdrop of mountains it had not achieved in an earlier era. Even as redevelopment efforts were posting mixed results, the champions of public transit in Los Angeles had begun designing and delivering a downtown-centered light rail system less than 30 years after it converted its original intra-urban rail transit system to a public transit system based exclusively on buses. The light rail Blue Line opened in 1990 at a cost of $877 million, connecting downtown Los Angeles to Long Beach. The Red Line, a heavy rail subway running between downtown Los Angeles and North Hollywood, via Hollywood and the Mid-Wilshire district, followed in 1993. Downtown and Union Station in particular, thus remain the hub of the regional transit network.

At the same time, the redevelopment project aggrivated downtown’s loss of population. The population living within one mile of its perimeter had dropped from 205,800 in 1950 to 105,800 in 2000. By 2000 the population had reduced by 55 percent. This further challenged remaining downtown stores, restaurants, and movie theaters to succeed when new, convenient shopping centers and cineplexes were blossoming on the westside and in the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys.

Alternatives to the Central Business District: Downtown as Entertainment Center, Barrio, and Upscale Neighborhood

Re- attracting business to downtown proved a difficult task. Industry consolidations, particularly in the financial and energy sectors, caused many of those firms to cease to exist. Many business service firms, decamped for new Westside locations closer to chief executives’ residences. When downtown’s remaining financial corporations moved to the newer buildings, they left former Spring Street Financial District, and the large department stores on Broadway shuttered. By the 1980’s all were closed.

37 Davis, City of Quartz.

Momentum died down in the 1990’s, with the economic contraction; after the fifty-two story, Two California Plaza was finished. At the turn of the century, the vacancy rate for downtown commercial skyscrapers was 26%, one of the highest in the nation for that time. Planned office towers were canceled, including California Plaza Three, and the 4-towered Metropolis. Yet even as the vision of resurrecting downtown as Southern California’s command and control center was dimming, alternative visions for downtown were gaining ground. For instance, Central to the resurgence of Bunker Hill has been the construction of new public venues along Grand Avenue to complement the three existing venues at the Music Center. These include, in some cases, masterworks by some of the world’s most renowned architects, while branding hasbegunned urbanism within the redevelopment project. These projects include Frank Gehry’s Walt Disney Concert Hall, Rafael Moneo’s Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Arata Isozaki’s Museum of Contemporary Art, Coep Himmelhau’s High School y, and immi-

nently, Diller Scofield + Renfro’s Broad Collection. In February 2007 the LA City Council and the County Board of Supervisors approved the $2.05 billion Grand Avenue Project, which over the next 10 years is planned to yield over 2,000 new residential units, with over 400 designated as affordable units for low-income families; 1 million square feet of retail and entertainment space. Office space and residential units will be in several skyscrapers ranging from 35-55 stories. Officials originally hoped to break ground in December 2007 as of February 2007, the only part of this project, the civic park connecting City Hall to Bunker Hill, has been completed.

Popular culture and sport also claimed a stake in downtown. The Staples Center, opened in 1999, has contributed immensely to downtown’s revitalization, adding 250 events and nearly 4,000,000 visitors per year to the neighborhood. Since the opening of the Staples Center, L.A. Live was constructed which includes the Nokia Theater, the Nokia Club, the Ritz Carlton Hotel and Residences and more recently a plan to bring football back to Los Angeles has emerged in the form of Farmer’s Field. Other areas underwent a kind of renewal that, while highly productive for rents, was not always welcome. However, the Broadway theaters saw the potential of the Spanish-language movie houses in the 1950’s, beginning with the con-

version of the Million Dollar Theater in the 1950’s to a Spanish-language film house. The “Mexican-ization” of Broadway is all but complete, and a challenge to preservationists and downtown Los Angeles boosters. Virtually all of the movie theaters on the street have fallen into disuse and disrepair, and some replaced with parking lots. The department stores have closed, but Broadway has for decades been the premier shopping destination for working class Latinos.

Central to the resurgence of Bunker Hill has been the construction of new public venues along Grand Avenue to compliment... and Residences and more recently a plan to bring football back to Los Angeles has emerged in the form of Farmer’s Field. Other areas underwent a kind of renewal that, while highly productive for rents, was not always welcome. However, the Broadway theaters saw the potential of the Spanish-language movie houses in the 1950’s, beginning with the conversion of the Million Dollar Theater in the 1950’s to a Spanish-language film house. The “Mexican-ization” of Broadway is all but complete, and a challenge to preservationists and downtown Los Angeles boosters. Virtually all of the movie theaters on the street have fallen into disuse and disrepair, and some replaced with parking lots. The department stores have closed, but Broadway has for decades been the premier shopping destination for working class Latinos. During this time Little Tokyo redeveloped as Japanese firms sought to expand overseas, locate branch headquarters in Southern California, expand their off-shore banking system and develop new hotels and shopping places to serve overseas Japanese. But Chinatown has not experienced the same level of renewal, as new waves of im-

igrants, particularly Taiwanese, have focused their investments of the new suburban China-
towns in the San Gabriel Valley rather than among the Cantonese, and more recently Viet-

namese that dominate downtown’s Chinatown. As Westside rents rose, especially in places like Santa Monica and Venice, a once beach bound behemoth that drifted east, first to Little Tokyo, then to new a new artist’s district, and recently along Chinatown’s Chung King Road. Alternate Downtowns: Adapting the Downtown Office Building

Because of the downtown office market’s migration west to Bunker Hill and the Financial District, many historic office buildings were left intact, used for storage or remaining empty during recent decades. As of early 2009, 15,561 residential units had been created under the adaptive reuse ordinance, leading to an increase in the residential population. With 28,878 residents in 2006 and 39,537 in 2008, a 36.9% increase, downtown Los Angeles has seen new life and reinvestment.

Summation

Architect Norman Foster has argued “the thing that attracts us to the city is the chance encoun-
ter, the knowledge that you’ll be able to starthere, end up here and go back there, but that changes allow larger and denser developments downtown; developers who reserve 15 percent of their units for low-income residents are now exempt from some open-space requirements and can make their buildings 35 percent larger than current zoning codes allow. So downtown Los Angeles has reinvented itself. It is not as central to the regional economy as it once was, and the business of downtown is increasingly entertainment oriented. Furthermore, now with an influx of residents, it is now being transform-

37 Architect Norman Foster has argued: “the thing that attracts us to the city is the chance encoun-
ter, the knowledge that you’ll be able to start here, end up here and go back there, but that...
something unexpected will happen along the way that you’ll make a discovery.” The serendipity Foster describes has long been a hallmark of the particular urbanism of downtowns. Yet, as anybody who has spent much time here knows, a key element of the civic personality of Los Angeles—and many places like it—is that it manages to be an inventive and globally important city without giving its residents the chance to discover much “along the way” or through happenstance.

Los Angeles’s emergence in the 20th century suggested that metropolitan regions, for better and worse, could grow huge while seeming to rule out the chance encounter that Foster holds up as an urban ideal, and
The rise of the service economy in the postindustrial age

The postindustrial economy of North America set off a wave of demand for space dedicated to office work in the 20th century. By 1998 it was estimated that 1 in 5 Americans worked in a dedicated office building. This section aims to uncover many of the changes in the office building typology and how they manifested over time in built form. The postindustrial condition represented a deep disjunction between the particularities of place and the specificities of time. The generic, hollowed-out shell quality of many of DTLA's office space, exemplified by the Bunker Hill re-development, represents an architecture that was built to accommodate the vagaries of speculation and the insertion of an unpredictable quantity and quality of interior of work.

To accommodate faster cycles of change, structural tectonics, symptomatic of the broader conception that architectural form is an expression of shifting needs, both material and immaterial, of the work they shelter. Throughout the 20th century, technological achievements in office tower design have revealed an unyielding positivist push towards performance – performance that was measured architecturally, financially and in worker productivity. Throughout history, each metric reinforcing feedback loop. As such, the history of the office tower – the building form associated most symbolically with the autonomous expansion of specific function – and the image of downtowns reveals a deep integration of tectonics, economics and labor. The quintessential postmodern architectural characteristic of historic references displaced in time and space is a postindustrial architecture that has moved away from the emphasis on a symbolic or pristine expression of identity and function, in a direction towards rethinking complex and adaptive ecosystems of living and working.

Building Enclosure

Within the era of industrialization, specific areas of cities were established as mono-specialized zones. As a result, many of the primary industrial production programs of urban centers were exposed, facilitating functions and becoming increasingly walled off and managing internal logistics and excess such as The Bunker Hill in the postindustrial age. Today, the postmodern architectural characteristic of historic references displaced in time and space is a postindustrial architecture that has moved away from the emphasis on a symbolic or pristine expression of identity and function, in a direction towards rethinking complex and adaptive ecosystems of living and working.

With significant waves of Los Angeles' industrial buildings built after the turn of the 20th century and the advent of the elevator, the building form associated most symbolically with the autonomous expansion of specific function – and the image of downtowns reveals a deep integration of tectonics, economics and labor. This feedback loop shapes the architecture toward needs that adapt and change in an ecosystem of dynamic change. Contemporary examples related are ubiquitous in space and are symptomatic of the broader conception that the postindustrial condition required a deep disjunction between the particularities of place and the specificities of time. The generic, hollowed-out shell quality of many of DTLA's office space, exemplified by the Bunker Hill re-development, represents an architecture that was built to accommodate the vagaries of speculation and the insertion of an unpredictable quantity and quality of interior of work.

Postindustrial Postmodernism in the DTLA

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“...the postmodern condition represented a deep disjunction between the particularities of place and the specificities of time...”
The GSA is established by President Truman to make administrative tasks for the federal government more efficient.

1949
Los Angeles is the only city among the 18 largest US cities where downtown stores are responsible for less than 10 percent of the metropolitan retail trade.

1948
Pershing Square is demolished and excavated in 1952 to build a three-story underground parking garage.

1952
The CRA undertakes the Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project.

1955
1911 height limit ordinance is repealed.

1957
15% of the population enters the CBD.

1953
Rotary Phone eases use of traditional dial methods with the rotary phone's rapid-spinning dial-face.

1949
Magnetic Tape Audio Recorder: Replaces the phonograph as choice technology for audio recording.

1948
Zoning policies that set high requirements for off-street parking in downtown LA begin to be enacted.

1946
The Million Dollar Theater in downtown LA is converted into a Spanish-language film house.

Major engineering shifts:
The core and the periphery of the building can now be held in tension reducing the number of interior columns thereby further opening up the office building floor plate.

1949
This supersecretary consolidated many of the functions of a secretary into a single compact, mobile piece of machinery.

1950
US involvement in the Vietnam War.

1950s
Numerous very old and historic buildings in downtown LA are demolished to make way for street-level parking lots.

1956
The Federal Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 kick-start an “urban renewal” program that would reshape American class housing is removed to make way for new office construction unfettered by earlier building height limitations.

1959
The relationship between flexibility and worker efficiency is assumed not to occur at an urban or even building scale, but at the scale of the room.

1950s
Increasing the worker’s flexibility among the building and city through consolidation, decentralization, and mobility.

1960
The Electronic Age brings about the continual compression of worker’s appliances for increasing flexibility and portability.

1950s
Through ergonomics, the desk is re-formed to wrap around the worker, collapsing the immediate needs of his work from the scale of the building down to the scale of the desk.

1951
Scientific management continues to seek the integration of human operators with their business appliance, focusing at the scale of gesture rather than the inhabitation of office space.

1952
Early downtown is driven by a desire to provide the CBD with suburban functional separations and levels of automobile access.
World War II, which demanded greater and greater square footage of office space. The Citicorp Center in New York by Hugh Stubbins & Associates which generously opens itself out under a looming cantilever at the top of the tower also exemplifies the technical and aesthetic qualities of the postmodern office building.

A precedent in this new approach to knitting structure and dampening together was the Brunswick Building by SOM's Myron Goldsmith and Fazlur Khan completed in 1966. Their structural scheme pioneered a separation of the core and the periphery of the building. This was due to the improved understanding of tensile forces, spread in no small part by the structural advancements caused building heights to increase dramatically. However, with this newfound structural efficiency, a new vibration challenge arose with corollary increases in lateral wind loads, which were dangerously amplified by these soaring new height structures. The race for height at all costs, abetted by economic enthusiasm, these technological Separation – Advancements in Glass. This drive for height was fuelled by a flourish of economic interest during the commercial boom that followed the particularities of place within an increasingly speculative environment. Lastly, this section concludes with commentary on the emblematic qualities that DTLA's buildings stand for a particularly potent manifestation of the unforgiving, unpredictable and unmoored qualities of the postmodern office work.

The structural developments of high-rise construction in the 1950's allowed for an increased separation between the core and the periphery of the building. This was due to the improved understanding of tensile forces, spread in no small part by the structural advancements caused building heights to increase dramatically. However, with this newfound structural efficiency, a new vibration challenge arose with corollary increases in lateral wind loads, which were dangerously amplified by these soaring new height structures. The race for height was fuelled by a flourish of economic interest during the commercial boom that followed.

When this equilibrium among separate components functioning together through tensile strength was reached its limit. At this moment, the challenge turned towards adapting structure to aid in the quest for efficient and flexible internal space. With the goal of optimizing structure, new attention was paid to the promise of hybrid concrete and steel structures. This new hybrid of concrete core and steel periphery allowed for an unprecedented amount of openings in the ground level curtain wall, improving the urban performance of these towers. A significant example of this new approach to performance and hybridity is the 1978 Bender Building by SOM in Chicago. In Los Angeles, this moment of fiction for allowing maximum height was realized in the form of the 13-story Continental Building which features an unprecedented internal atrium girded with an equally dramatic triangulated steel dampening system. Through this series of structural innovations, the office buildings of the 1980's were able to open up the office building floor plate. Aided by economic performance. The economic viability of maximum floor space was supported by the structural innovation of the period which pushed the core and the periphery of the building.

The structural innovation that facilitated this push was an increased separation between the core and the periphery of the building. This was due to the improved understanding of tensile forces, spread in no small part by the structural advancements caused building heights to increase dramatically. However, with this newfound structural efficiency, a new vibration challenge arose with corollary increases in lateral wind loads, which were dangerously amplified by these soaring new height structures. The race for height was fuelled by a flourish of economic interest during the commercial boom that followed. When this equilibrium among separate components functioning together through tensile strength was reached its limit. At this moment, the challenge turned towards adapting structure to aid in the quest for efficient and flexible internal space. With the goal of optimizing structure, new attention was paid to the promise of hybrid concrete and steel structures. This new hybrid of concrete core and steel periphery allowed for an unprecedented amount of openings in the ground level curtain wall, improving the urban performance of these towers. A significant example of this new approach to performance and hybridity is the 1978 Bender Building by SOM in Chicago. In Los Angeles, this moment of fiction for allowing maximum height was realized in the form of the 13-story Continental Building which features an unprecedented internal atrium girded with an equally dramatic triangulated steel dampening system. Through this series of structural innovations, the office buildings of the 1980's were able to open up the office building floor plate. Aided by economic performance. The economic viability of maximum floor space was supported by the structural innovation of the period which pushed the core and the periphery of the building.

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exaggeration of the already prevalent tendency towards definitively separating the interior and the exterior of the office tower. Responding to the demands for increased architectural perform- ance as a means of developing increased labor efficiency, glass manufacturers delivered on dem-

ond's need for greater acoustical, thermal and optical separation. Building skin was transition-
ing from a thick load bearing mass of previous tectonic approaches to a layered accumulation of discrete barriers, each performing a specific type of separation from fireproofing to insula-

tion. However, it was the glass barrier that pro-

vided for essentially the most efficiently available in commercial office space, stan-
dards were increasingly being established. Organ-
izations such as the American School Construc-
tion Systems Development Project developed widely adopted internal climate control standardsthat served to homogenize office environments. However, once these standards of office comfort were established it became complicated to maintain them while trying to adapt to the ever-shift-
ing floor plate and rising building height. The mech-

anical floors operated independently of one an-
other to lessen the energy loss that would occur across one centralized system. As the towers were growing dramatically in height, the neces-

sity for decentralizing the climate control became ever more necessary if the already established standards of environmental comfort were to be maintained. These dedicated mechanical floors were, in turn, able to contribute to the structural

of integrating environmental control systems within nearly developing structural systems.

of Environmental Control – Separating Interior and Exterior or Working Towards Postmodernism

Environmental Control – Separating Interior and Exterior

Parallel to the effect of structural issues on the design of office towers, is a trajectory of increas-
ed desire for environmental control, namely the increased separation between a controllable in-
terior and an unpredictable exterior. As the per-

diphery of the office tower began to take on a more integrated structural relationship to the core, coupled with advancements in the thermal qualities of glass, the interior space of the office became increasingly insular and hermetic. While the more neutralist approach of Le Corbusier saw the vertical plane of the envelope as integral to the internal experience, the structural elimina-
tion of the internal column emphasized the hori-
zontality of the interior, thus disassociating itself from this external vertical interface. With lighter structural requirements, services could in-
creasingly be spread out horizontally across floor plates, again emphasizing a separation between the experience of an internal horizontality from the extreme verticality of the tower’s exterior.

As the technological capabilities of environ-
mental control advanced, the parallel structural devel-
opment served to further isolate the interior as an autonomous, internal space—self-contained and self-controlled. The increasing commercialization of office space in the 1950’s saw newfound pressure to improve the artificial interior climate controls. The con-
struction of the United Nations Secretariat build-
ing in New York City, while being an utterly non-
commercial structure, nevertheless marked this transition as the designers faced the challenge of solidifying all these mechanisms of interior environmental control into expected standards quickly made the office interior ubiquitous. Significant advancements in structural engineering and building systems contributed to the growing awareness of hori-
zontal layering within a vertical extrusion. This foreshadowed future advancement that would begin to use this horizontal layering, as a mechanism to blur functional boundaries between working and living. The horizontal layering of programmatically, environmentally and spatially distinct entities within a larger infrastructural shell tower is emblematic of the postmodern condition exemplified by Los Angeles office towers. The generic infrastructural maintains the basic standard of environmental comfort but is decon- tralized enough to accept a myriad of shifting configurations of identities—identities that were increasingly blinding what had previously, in Modernist times, been considered sacrosanct in pure and fundamental architectural separation.

Changes in the Political Economy of the Office Building: Emergence of Postmodernism

The 1980’s saw the solidification of the speculative office building, embraced within the larger conditions of postmodernity. David Harvey referred to this symptomatic postmodern condition as “the regime of flexible accumulation.” Capital flowed more readily and more widely, stripping regional identity as it accumulated in the form of speculative real estate. Federal, political, and economic factors all set the stage for increased office speculation in America. These factors built upon earlier tax law changes in the early to mid-1960s, which sparked the increasing separation of services between the design of corporate office buildings and corporate interiors. This led to the related advancement of workplace interiors as a design specialty. An early example of this is the Alcoa Headquarters building in San Francisco of 1964, in which the base building was designed by SOM, but the interior workplace design was executed by Gensler. In the 1980’s several Federal Treasury decisions made Foreign Trade Zones within America increasingly desirable for foreign investment. New financing vehicles were also being developed which allowed backing from a wider array of windows—implying the newly developed commercial-backed-mortgage-security.

These and other, increasingly complex debt struct- uring, gave developers wider leverage with the booming business of speculative office towers. Thirdly, important tax precedents on Tenant Improvement were established in the 1980’s. The ruling of the 1987 Moss vs. IRS Tax Court established that commercial tenant improvements could be expensed as necessary operating cost repairs rather than capital expenditures and were thus exempt from prohibitive taxation levels. The court ruled that these improvements included... such parts of a building as walls, partitions, floors, and ceilings, as well as any permanent coverings thereof such as paneling or tiling, windows, and doors... and other components relating to the operation or maintenance of a building. With the financial encouragement to renovate interiors of office towers frequently it became increasingly desirable for the office tower itself to become as generic and flexible as possible to accommodate such changes. Office interiors were increasingly conceived of as impermanent, disposable and constantly subject to improvement. The focus on both financial and work performance meant that office interiors must now constantly be subject to improvements and change.

Birth of Speculative Office Buildings: Postmodernism in Full Swing

Emerging at the same time as Rem Koolhaas’ influential 1988 interpretation of the New York Downtown Athletic Club, framed within a culture of congestion, the modern North American speculative office building was born—a building that was flexible enough to accommodate a multiplicity of interiors and capable of accepting endless variety. The 1980’s saw the confluence of these two major conceptions of the tower—the home- gony and predictability of the generic, interna- tionally funded speculative office tower and the horizontal interest in the completely heterog- eneous activity that could be accommodated within these generic floor plates.

Stripped of hierarchies and symbolic reference, the office tower boom of the 1980’s was based upon the generic form of a tower capable of accepting a multiplicity of ever-changing interiors, just as varied, speculative and temporary as the city itself.

The historic results of these political and econom- ic motivations towards speculative office towers were multifold. Maximization and standardization were the twin operators. Floor plates spread to their maximum structural allocations. While pre- viously servicing systems may have been displayed, the increasingly advanced and complex servicing equipment was kept as neutral as possible, often behind drop ceilings. These towers were no longer conceived as autonomous from the city, but rather acknowledged their infrastructural dependence upon the city. The bases of the towers often acknowledged or negotiated these infrastructures. For example...
in Los Angeles, the Bunker Hill tower development of the 1960’s was explicitly designed to accommodate a complex network of traffic circulation in and around its base. Also, the space of the lobby atrium began to take on an entirely different character just as structural innovation was allowing it to expand exponentially in size and grandeur. In a speculative tower accommodating a broad range of tenants with varying agendas, the atrium space, formerly a space of unification and public identity, increasingly became a generic space devoid of any identifying qualities paralleled by a decreasing public function in the private, corporate towers. Less hospitable to the pedestrian, fraught with the need to neutralize conflicting private interests, the atrium became a generic place of fleeting circulation.

The arrival of postmodernism in the realm of downtown Los Angeles office towers came definitively with the 1980’s redevelopment of Bunker Hill. The winning scheme by Arthur Erickson featured sleek glass towers generic enough to absorb any number of shifting corporate identities and polished enough to reflect the image of a bustling and productive place despite a much less crowded reality behind the tinted glass exterior. Numbers suggest that the towers remained woefully under-subscribed for a lengthy period of time. The ultimate example of this is Erickson’s 1983 One California Plaza.

Flower in the television show LA Law further promoted the image of Los Angeles as the glitzy modern metropolis, an image as lauded as it was laughable. The General Services Administration was established in 1949 by President Truman to make administrative tasks for the federal government more efficient. One method to achieve this charge was to provide design standard guidelines to be followed by federal agencies. Thus, they have played a critical role in standardizing the expectations of office space—creating standards that have morphed from their public sector beginnings to the increasingly standardized speculative private sector of office space construction. At the same time, the newly formed CSA was tasked with creating a broad base of standard procedures following World War II including disposing of surplus military equipment, stockpiling necessary equipment in case of further military action and the efficiency and productivity of work that takes place therein. Accordingly, good design is synonymous with the efficient and productive use of public money. In addition to such determinism to produce efficiency and symbolic meaning, which in turn reinforces productivity through cultural association.

The representation of downtown work via Bunker Hill, towering and imposing overhead, had finally given Los Angeles the skyline image of efficient productivity that it had long lacked. Media images such as the opening sequence of 444 South Flower in the television show LA Law further promoted the image of Los Angeles as the glitzy international city of the 80’s. And yet, given the interchangeable qualities of much of Los Angeles’s downtown office towers—symptomatic of postmodernity—the skyline lacked the particularity specific to the city in the broad, equal proportions of many of its pre-World War II towers. While cities such as Chicago and New York were sending up slender spires, Los Angeles was distinctive for its relatively stout structures. While strict height restrictions had long been in place in downtown Los Angeles, capping buildings at 150 feet, these had been loosened by 1957. Nevertheless, regulations involving the accommodation of helicopter landing pads on the tallest towers did reduce the ability to cap buildings with slender, tapering peaks. But this alone does not fully explain the relative breadth of typical downtown Los Angeles floor plates when compared with their narrower counterparts in New York. Instead, it seems that the extreme maximization of the image of a robust, productive interior pushed the Los Angeles towers to its outer horizontal limit—gaining the utmost breadth of identity imposition from a sidewalk, or perhaps more appropriately street-level perspective. The self-identity to Angelenos of a robust, corporate centre, despite a far more ephemeral reality, created a distinctly and reassuringly stout skyline.

Within this mandate it is decreed that innovation takes place therein. Accordingly, good design is synonymous with the efficient and productive use of public money. In addition to such determinism, the architecture is also mandated to provide visual symbolic of the “dignity, enterprise, vigor and stability of the American Government.”

The one example of this is Erickson’s 1983 One California Plaza. The representation of downtown work via Bunker Hill, towering and imposing overhead, had finally given Los Angeles the skyline image of efficient productivity that it had long lacked. Media images such as the opening sequence of 444 South Flower in the television show LA Law further promoted the image of Los Angeles as the glitzy modern metropolis, an image as lauded as it was laughable. The General Services Administration was established in 1949 by President Truman to make administrative tasks for the federal government more efficient. One method to achieve this charge was to provide design standard guidelines to be followed by federal agencies. Thus, they have played a critical role in standardizing the expectations of office space—creating standards that have morphed from their public sector beginnings to the increasingly standardized speculative private sector of office space construction. At the same time, the newly formed CSA was tasked with creating a broad base of standard procedures following World War II including disposing of surplus military equipment, stockpiling necessary equipment in case of further military action and the efficiency and productivity of work that takes place therein. Accordingly, good design is synonymous with the efficient and productive use of public money. In addition to such determinism, the architecture is also mandated to provide visual symbolic of the “dignity, enterprise, vigor and stability of the American Government.”

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The architecturalVue Corporation is a developer who would then in turn be required to construct a new federal judiciary office building, following all GSA design guidelines on the currently vacant lot at First Street and Broadway.

The motivations behind this exchange of buildings between the public and private sector, circumscribed by a well-defined design process, is demonstrated by its financial trajectory that increased through a confluence of multiple factors including increasing enticements for foreign investment, local and federal tax incentives as well as an ever-broadening scope of debt structuring through banking innovations. These financial forces drove the office tower away from purpose built specificity toward a generic, standardized shell infrastructure.

While Build-to-Suit office towers might be found on local banks, the tendency began to shift towards emerging vehicles of risk-acceptance, speculative development, and residential space among other quantifiable factors within an existing historically significant building, which cements the other main component of the GSA. The motivations behind the GSA, architectural determinism based upon financial and productivity performance is at the foundation of its research initiatives.

The ULI credits the predictable long-term speculative nature of the office tower with quantifiable expectations to be embraced by the market speculation. This fuelled increasing standardization of office building typologies because the typical logic of the office building is that medium sized office buildings, 10,000 square feet or less, make up over two thirds of their overall output. This medium scale offers the most efficient and productive work environment, as well as the closely intertwining of standards between the public and private sectors are demonstrated in Los Angeles’s redevelopment of its downtown Federal Courthouse site. The development of a new federal courthouse is disseminated widely through the ULI guidelines on office design take financial feasibility as the starting point of all design decisions. The ULI touts office speculation as amongst the most financially rewarding and resilient of long term real estate investments.

By the mid-1990’s the balance had tipped definitively in favor of profit-driven, speculative, maximized floor plates combined with a seismic wariness to reach the extraordinary height of towers elsewhere, there were widespread concerns about maintaining the region’s attractiveness in light of such buildings.

Suit office towers and toward speculative towers was dramatic, as it coincided with the full implementation of the long held strict height restrictions as well as broader incentives towards speculative development and the GSA, architectural determinism based upon financial and productivity performance is at the foundation of its research initiatives.

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49 Mike Davis, City of Quartz (New York: Verso, 1990), 135.
Among the many motivations expressed for particular arrangements of the space for office work, three kinds are particularly noteworthy. Those stemming from instrumental rationality, those attached to the desire to reproduce firm culture, and those that would make firm symbols from office plans.

Thus the production of office space and the manner in which the office interior “organizes” workflows have been variously figured as a way to “brand” the firm, giving material presence to the firm and the firm’s values; and a way to telegraph both individual workers’ status and to broadcast the firm’s reputation to the world. Where rational motivations seek gains in worker efficiency and organizational effectiveness, cultural motivations are about creating unique identities and positions for the firm’s products and services and helping employees to understand their position within the enterprise, thereby distinguishing their offerings—and their work environments—from competitors.

These different motivations reflect the changing character of the office worker as subject in relationship to equally profound changes in terms of regimes around time and space between the Fordist and Post-Fordist industrial city.

Much has been written about how to arrange office work, but the interpretation of office space and the making of some greater social or historical sense of these spaces, has yet to be taken up comprehensively either by the social sciences or by architecture. There is, in fact, only limited understanding of the common or peculiar inner-workings of private business entities, as social activities. At the same time, historians of architecture have taken only a limited interest in the evolution of, and innovations in, the office interior, focusing their interests instead on office buildings, particularly in the form of urban towers—skyscrapers—as an architectural type. The subsequent discussion follows the interweaving of the above motivations in the office’s arrangement, while placing these motivations within the historical progression of the office interior. Underlining much of this discussion is a much larger movement regarding the worker in the post-Fordist and postmodern economic system—one where the worker is free of specific location and an increasingly flexible asset.
Productivity, Taylorism and Fordism. With the advent of the industrial economies in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, especially the version of it advanced by Henry Ford, the version of industrialism that placed the greatest emphasis on units and measurement of time, and production over time. It defined productivity (and later consumption) and can be traced to the factory led to the standardization of tasks—leaving a specific duty in the overall course of production to a specific person or group of people. This system of production reached its apotheosis through its application by Henry Ford, the automotive tycoon, and his efforts to standardize the mass production of products using new methodologies such as the assembly line. Fordism, as it came to be known, was the version of industrialism that placed the greatest emphasis on units and measurement of time, and production over time. It defined the factory floor was surrounded by various lookout points for supervisors, the Taylorist office kept workers at the center and the managers on the perimeter. Although there were no partitions between desks, we know that workers were to keep communication among themselves to a minimum. This rational approach stressed the workers’ function as a means to an end, spools in an otherwise characterless wheel. The Larkin interior was inspired by a deeply paternalistic culture meant to engender a strong sense of affinity between worker and firm, echoing efforts by Pullman, Cadbury, and Salt to mitigate the alienation associated with urban industry by providing echoes of an agrarian past. Workers were surrounded by quotations engraved on the walls directing them towards self-improvement. The traditional association between an individual and his labor was irrevocably rendered asunder. With the office taking on aspects of the factory the increasing amount of paper being used, this rational approach stress the workers’ function as a means to an end, spools in an otherwise characterless wheel. The Larkin interior was inspired by a deeply paternalistic culture meant to engender a strong sense of affinity between worker and firm, echoing efforts by Pullman, Cadbury, and Salt to mitigate the alienation associated with urban industry by providing echoes of an agrarian past. Workers were surrounded by quotations engraved on the walls directing them towards self-improvement. The traditional association between an individual and his labor was irrevocably rendered asunder. With the office taking on aspects of the factory, systems for filing and organization were developed to further systematic operations. Numerical and alphabetical systems kept track of the increasing amount of paper being used.
marked, catalogued, stored, and retrieved. These systems were coupled with new office equipment like typewriters, stenographs, and telephones. Male clerks and scriveners were replaced by a new, less expensive, workforce of women trained to operate the new machinery. Beginning in 1910, the Hoskins Manufacturing Catalog proclaimed, “The Vertical Filing System permits expansion and contraction without limit and without necessitating troublesome rearrangement.” The 1932 text, The Principles of Indexing and Filing, guided office managers and workers to gain maximum efficiency from major advances in office furniture, like the vertical filing cabinet. “Secretarial colleges” sprang up to inculcate women workers to the new regime and familiarize them with the new technologies.

Leading into the 1920’s, as advances in technology allowed for the construction of taller high-rises, the open office layout persisted along production-oriented lines. This manifested itself as large open workrooms with several rows of fixed-up desks, allowing the segregation of specific repetitive tasks in areas of the workplace. The close supervision of workers by managerial staff. As administrative services increasingly occupied downtown, a strictly economic reason dictated interior arrangements—namely, the cost of interior space and the desire to keep costs down by fitting a lot of desks into one space. In some firms, secretarial pools replaced secretaries assigned to any one executive. While firms had long separated the back office, the space dedicated to running the company, from the front office where customer-facing staff worked, given the price of downtown rents these were increasingly located outside the company headquarters, first at the edge of downtown, and then in places far afield with cheaper rent and lower labor costs.

At the base of any organization’s offices is the desire to support the bottom line—increased productivity leading ultimately to greater profit. In that sense, Taylorist concerns—the effect of keeping office processes efficient through scientific management and spatial arrangement—remained central to office interior design. But other concerns have also been advanced, and in many firms flexibility and quick response to change has trumped concerns for efficiency. While understanding the processes of work remains important to any office designer, the Taylorist approach has been subordinated and repackaged, widening its focus now to include the exigencies of real estate, worker comfort, firm culture, and eventually extending the firm’s brand. The Johnson Wax Building (1939) designed by Frank Lloyd Wright carried on Taylorism, but, like the Larkin Building before, imparted a cultural element that communicated a set of corporate values to workers. While the earlier Larkin took the office as a place of familial identification, the Johnson Wax takes this identification to a whole new level of aspirational, transcendental fervor (ultimately leading to better and more efficient work habits). The building is dominated by the completely hermetic Great Workroom in which the totally circular identification of the employer with the corporation is unassailable by any exterior reference. The worker no longer has any reference point beyond this dominating atrium space. Work is introduced within the building just as the emergent knowledge worker internalized their tasks as abstracted from physical production. In this case the completely internalized atrium has not only become a place of identity building communal gathering, as in the Larkin, but also subsumes all of the work within this identity.

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As the market of knowledge-based organizations grew in the 1950’s and after the Second World War, the office layout was still very much open without partitions like the arrangements seen in the Larkin and Johnson Wax buildings, and in skyscrapers like the Chicago Tribune Tower. But now the office composition was open, consider- ing particular worker functions. Rather than a strictly Taylorist approach, Burolandschaft based itself in human relations. Desk compositions, like a pinwheel arrangement for designers, not only made communication easier for an occupa- tion that required worker interactions, but also changed the visual quality of the office area. Burolandschaft or “office landscape” was deve- loped in Germany during the 1950’s and 1960’s by Eberhard & Wolfgang Schnelle in response to the open-plan offices of 1950’s America. Low profile partitions came into use to create some
ideals in the office interior. Meanwhile in the United States, research by psychologist Abraham Maslow in the early 1950’s argued for a work environment that inspired workers’ motivation to pursue and fulfill their own potentials. This belief is in part still evident today as reflected in the numerous worker surveys that are performed to determine user needs. Research such as Ganzel’s annual Workplace Index [MPI] which has become an industry resource on global work trends, bases much of its information and conclusions on user surveys and post-occupancy data.

Several books like Office Planning and Design appeared in the late 1970’s. Works like Planning and Designing the Office Environment delved further into the logistics and mechanics of office design, outlining steps towards determining HVAC systems and industry standards for lighting. And most, if not all, encouraged the open-office landscape. Office planners and designers now brought a new element into the rationality of an office’s design—worker comfort that could be influenced by the environment. Although planning the office landscape still maintained rational elements, the worker was given a bit more consideration through interviews to determine needs, likes and dislikes.

The American Individual and the New Rationality. Whereas the rational Taylorist office did not recognize the individual worker in its design, the open-plan office landscape took some further steps to consider the worker. The German office landscape was a response to this lack of human character, and an expression of socialism ideals in the office interior. Meanwhile in the United States, research by psychologist Abraham Maslow in the early 1950’s argued for a work environment that inspired workers’ motivation to pursue and fulfill their own potentials. This belief is in part still evident today as reflected in the numerous worker surveys that are performed to determine user needs. Research such as Ganzel’s annual Workplace Index [MPI] which has become an industry resource on global work trends, bases much of its information and conclusions on user surveys and post-occupancy data.

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The Action Office System. In 1964, Herman Miller was inspired by the office-landscape and developed the Action Office as the first modular business furniture system, laced with low par...
The Cubicle and Symbolism.

Computer technology and its refinement for widespread use have greatly influenced the conceptual language of the office. Since the 1980’s, characterized by the surge of employees in the private financial sector of the U.S. economy, Cubicles could be affronted with a user-friendliness or a sterility of place, sterilized and overlit by fluorescent lighting. Cubicle culture is a combination of technology and the social structure; the employees are given a workplace that they share with others and are expected to work independently and efficiently. The office is an artificial environment that has been tailored to maximize productivity and facilitate the flow of work. The concept of the cubicle became increasingly symbolic as workers sought to find some personal meaning in the space in which they spent most of their time.

The cubicle was not just a space for work, it was also a space for interaction and personal expression. cube patrons decorated their cubicles with photos and other personal items to create a space that reflected their individuality. As much as this concept was heralded and supported by many, in practice the office did not turn out to be a success. People had a difficult time finding each other; there was not enough storage space; shared laptops were taken home to ensure that people could continue their work. As much as this may be an inspirational quality, an office that pegs the individual to a confined and grey place, sterilized and overlit by fluorescent lighting.

Workplace by Design

In forging the formal language of the office, the architect’s role is to create a space that reflects the needs of the employees, the contemporary office must continually reinforce the necessity of an office as a corporate cathedral, a place to reinforce the employer’s role as the custodian of the office space. As much as this may be an inspirational quality, an office that pegs the individual to a confined and grey place, sterilized and overlit by fluorescent lighting.

The Office Interior as a Place of Inspiration

When previously offices were subordinated to the factory floor, the office was a place where work was done. The office was a place where people could interact and collaborate on projects. The office was an environment that encouraged the need to return. Additionally, the role of storage becomes foregrounded as the office space must become a repository of all the equipment and material that is not mobile and which additionally provides further impetus to return.

In forging the formal language in which the interior functioned as a corporate cathedral, a place to reinforce the employer’s role as the custodian of the office space, the office was designated to create a place where one could gain something that could not be gained through working elsewhere; in short, the office space must imply some inspirational quality. Examples of such projects are: Bright and Associates office by Frank Israel, Venice, CA (1984), and DEGW, an early figure in office design and development.

While previously, the office interior functioned as a corporate cathedral, a place to reinforce the employer’s role as the custodian of the office space, the office is now also a place where people can interact and collaborate on projects. The office is a place where people can find some personal meaning in the space in which they spend most of their time.
The post-Fordist and Post-Modern Worker

The shifts and expansion of economies since the early 1970’s, as argued by David Harvey, have created a global economic market that has transformed the role of workers in the post-industrial era. These changes in the capitalist system are best described by the French Reg-


56 Ibid.


Cisco could fit more people in its current building by not assigning specific desks, saving money on real estate costs. Cisco also saved money on technology infrastructure, avoiding costly Ethernet jacks by using more wireless internet-based devices. Cisco is a technology firm using some of its own network innovations to cut costs and support a certain kind of work culture.

Cisco’s example of investing in technology infrastructure and their support of telecommuting also highlights an increasing characteristic of the post-Fordist economy. The post-Fordist knowledge worker produces knowledge work with limited tools, relative to the tools of production in the Fordist economy. Tools such as the mobile phone were once seen as an expense to the employer for the worker’s use. In more recent years, especially with the popularity of smartphones, the mobile phone is an expense taken up by the individual worker who not only uses it for personal communication, but also for her work-related communication. On the same thread, the mobile computer is the essential tool of production for knowledge workers, and increasingly the workers’ own personal computers are becoming part of the tools as well.

Flexible Work Spaces. Moveable office furniture is a concept that was important to the early open office landscape and the Action Office system in the 20th century. Giving workers options for moving furniture according to their needs aligns with current attention to worker comfort and its relationship to productivity. More importantly, the flexibility of furniture allows for new configurations that repurpose certain spaces and minimize costs.

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Flexible Work Spaces. Moveable office furniture is a concept that was important to the early open office landscape and the Action Office system in the 20th century. Giving workers options for moving furniture according to their needs aligns with current attention to worker comfort and its relationship to productivity. More importantly, the flexibility of furniture allows for new configurations that repurpose certain spaces and minimize costs. On one end of flexible workspaces you have the modular items like desks and accompanying storage that can be reconfigured dependent on certain job functions—some which may require more surface area or storage space. This type of flexibility is consistent with the traditional, cost-effective approach to office layout. On the other side of flexible workspaces we have spaces and accompanying furniture that can be used in any way conducive to worker productivity. As highlighted in the Cisco example, this could be in the form of a rolling conference table that can be a site for collaborative or individual space. Then you also have more casual configurations of chairs and couches that provide a setting that encourages a level of ease.

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In closing, office interior architecture has followed a physical trajectory that is rooted in the early managerial approaches of the late 19th/early 20th century—an era strongly rooted in Fordism and scientific management. Simply because of the nature of business management and its concern with monetary successes, this rational motive has always been and will continue to be present in the office interior. But, the role of rational choices à la Taylorism in designing and laying out the office has been subdued due to the rise and recognition of the individual employee as a source of an organization’s innovations and ultimate sustainability. Beginning with the German Bürolandschaft of the 1950’s and later the Action Office system of the 1960’s, worker processes were looked at from a new perspective—one focused on how the interior environment could make the worker experience more comfortable and efficient work by paying attention to what the worker’s daily processes were and how they were being accomplished. Moves and choices that are supportive of worker comfort and communication, as well as the equalization of space between staff and management, have taken a strong hold over the office. It is unclear whether a hierarchical structure has been completely eliminated from the office interior, but there is certainly a trend of spaces free of status-heavy indicators (i.e., office cells).

Moreover, these movements in the office are an indication of the development and emphasis of a post-Fordist economic system that relies heavily on a new worker that has been shaped by a new global economy. The office interior has also been identified as an important channel of communication for companies to project their brand on employees and on the outside world. Following a particular aesthetic that aligns with a corporation’s products and/or ethos, the office interior has moved beyond the objective minded, bland, grey cube farm as a business strategy of vital importance.

With the Internet and mobile technology as critical catalysts, the office interior will continue to be an experiment in flexibility and spatial efficiencies—especially as more and more knowledge workers work outside the confines of the traditional office.
Alternative Work Spaces

As an alternative to downtown speculative office towers, looser configurations of live/work have their roots in two specific Los Angeles variations on established typologies: the loft and the converted storefront. The adaptive re-use loft space, with its precursors in SoHo, were characterized by an open, horizontal plane of domesticity and work. The adaptive re-use of Venice Beach storefronts into artist live/work studios was modeled on the vertical stacking of domestic space hovering in a mezzanine mass over the more public ground level workspace. Currently, in more recent Los Angeles incarnations of live/work space, which are purpose built, we begin to see a blurring of the formal distinctions between the two types, providing yet another alternative to the office tower.

Live/Work: The history of the Modern incarnation of live/work space begins decisively with the artist’s loft space in SoHo. The loft as a former space of industrial production was taken over by the growing creative class as a new hybrid space able to accommodate the soft production of an expanding culture industry. As such, the personal identity and enterprise of the loft inhabitant more intimately overlapped than in the case of a suburban-dwelling, office-tower working persona. The live/work loft first took hold in New York City in the early 1960’s as SoHo artists began illegally occupying empty manufacturing space south of Greenwich Village. The former industrial space, located near rail yards and emptied due to the offshore transition of the garment industry, was over-built for the purposes of inhabitation. As such, it was economically advantageous to convert space already overly accommodating for mere living, and thus able to absorb the additional demands of working. Broad, open floor plates allowed for a horizontal spread of inter-mixed enterprise and identity. The local government saw the economic opportunity of the adaptive re-use of the former industrial area and quickly moved to legalize the occupation through rezoning and taxation. This regulation of loft conversions on the part of the local government was further enhanced by projects such as the Westbeth Artist Community building. In 1970 the creation of the Westbeth Artists Community in the West Village of New York City was supported by both civic and federal levels of government. This community was the first major government sanctioned low cost artist live/work studio space. It was also significantly the first major adaptive re-use project of its kind, inserting itself into the former Bell Telephone Laboratories. The strategy to densify underutilized industrial urban areas—establish economically viable neighborhoods through increasing mixed use, to reduce commuting congestion through co-location, and to build a self-sufficient employed tax base—were all major benefits of the new live/work ideal actively encouraged by government. In Los Angeles a similar sanitization of live/work space occurred with the Granada Building near Lafayette Park, which flourished as a frenetically mixed-use artist studio and residence in the 1970’s. These live/work loft spaces, inserted into existing purpose-built buildings,
self-employed or contract workers, the emergence of the shared office space took on greater centrality. Socially and architecturally modelled as a hybrid between an office and a coffee shop, the co-office scenario has seen a marked rise. The hard loft or true loft conversion is a residential retrofit of a previously industrial building with enclosed services and could be detailed with softer finishes. The hard loft is overbuilt as the industrial spaces of SoHo, a different premise than the typical hybrid of these spatial strategies was the purpose-built live/work townhouse studio. A noted concentration of these developed in both Venice and Hollywood's Silver Lake. Soon after the SoHo lofts were established, the approach was transplanted and reinterpreted in Los Angeles's Venice Beach area where artists began occupying the empty storefronts of the beach. This standard configuration is reinforced through the historical precedent of the original Ordinance to insert dwelling mezzanines above existing workspace. The dense spatial arrangements tend to have an open floor plate at ground level suitable for a semi-public workspace, which according to local by-laws can typically accommodate up to five employees. Close in proximity, but spatially distinct, the dwelling space is stacked above in a narrow vertical configuration. The furniture is not selected for the ergonomic productivity-enhancing qualities of a Herman Miller desk set, but rather for the essential antisocial premise of providing a quiet professional work space available in a communal area. Another strategy, the incubator, includes some basic administrative support, which facilitates program advice, short-term staffing support, as well as financial support for small scale, short-term projects. Other shared spatial resources include a common reception area, common kitchen/dining area, shared meeting rooms and a common lounge area. Such co-office spaces assert that mutual physical presence is ultimately more productive than mobile, virtual networking. In Los Angeles, with a high prevalence of self-employment and contract work, the emergence of the shared space took on even greater centrality and a hybridly attractive to small scale contract work, the self-sufficiency of the space would shift from the domestic sphere to the space of production, albeit of an artisanal nature. While the SoHo artists rented their space of production, albeit of an artisanal nature. While the SoHo artists rented their while a soft loft is more likely to be partitioned off. Other workspaces assert that mutual physical presence is ultimately more productive than mobile, virtual networking. In Los Angeles, with a high prevalence of self-employment and contract work, the emergence of the shared space took on even greater centrality and a hybridly attractive to small scale contract work, the self-sufficiency of the space would shift from the domestic sphere to the space of production, albeit of an artisanal nature. While the SoHo artists rented their
The view from the top of a renovated live/work downtown tower features a view that encompasses both the leisure of a pool and the commercial pulse of the city. Work-life separation is a non-starter for many professionals, and entrepreneurs, residents accept no work-life separation and sideline their concerns about work-life balance.

New office technologies allow the space and time of the office to encroach upon the public sphere. Longer work days and weeks make it impossible for workers to leave work behind when they go home. In this world, firms deploying digital technologies to expand work space and time.

Although Downtown Los Angeles had a mix of uses more diverse than many downtowns, including uses not found elsewhere in the country, its programs are now aligned toward a more densely programmatically mixed working-living environment with expanded retail and entertainment sectors.

The September 11th Attacks and the Great Recession caused fundamental shifts in the nature of work. One such shift was the realization that firms with far-flung work forces increasingly abandon the expense of the office, relying on rent-by-the-day facilities to provide nodes for virtual face-to-face exchange of information.

Two architectural strategies are proposed to address this emerging condition of work as it relates to global real estate. One strategy centers on urban and suburban residential development, and the other on the repurposing of industrial and office building stock to accommodate a new generation of work-family lifestyles.

The 1955 Superior Petroleum Building in downtown Los Angeles was converted into the 1010 Wilshire Tower in 2008. The 600 meter Shanghai Tower, completed in 2014, stacks various programs, including office, into a vertical city.

In a mix of high rises, owners have maximum flexibility to customize the spaces in their live-work units; rather than opening walls, changing the sequence of spaces, or adding partitions, they construct elements that act as low-height walls, preserving the expansive open plan originally built in 1959 and renovated in 2008.

Firms with far-flung work forces increasingly abandon the expense of the office, relying on rent-by-the-day facilities to provide nodes for virtual face-to-face exchange of information.

The 2005 publication, The Office is Published - REFERS TO THE BRANDED EXPERIENCE AS A SOCIAL NETWORK, by the workplace research and design firm Gensler begins a US survey of over 170 companies to begin indexing workplace trends and employee perception of workspaces.

By the end of the Digital Age, both firms and office workers have questions of work-life balance arise among professional and middle class and upper class women's expectations about education, work force participation, and careers.

The Los Angeles City Council approves sweeping changes in downtown LA as the 2006 defunding of the CRA ceases with the downtown Los Angeles - a 2008 2.05 billion Grand Avenue Project connecting City Hall to Bunker Hill.

The twenty-first Century Office is published - REFERS TO THE BRANDED EXPERIENCE AS A SOCIAL NETWORK, by the workplace research and design firm Gensler begins a US survey of over 170 companies to begin indexing workplace trends and employee perception of workspaces.

The Ground Zero Masterplan for the former site of the World Trade Center in NYC includes new office towers that re-asserts the symbolic importance of high rise office buildings in America.

The number of black box high rises continues to overwhelm the Los Angeles skyline, with offices, retail, and hotel space as well as housing. Gensler expands its national workplace survey to establish the Workplace Index (WPI), creating an industry resource around global workplace trends.

Gensler begins a US survey of over 170 companies to begin indexing workplace trends and employee perception of workspaces. The "physical social network" refers to the branded experience as a "social network."
to encourage the redevelopment of buildings in the downtown core that were either of "historic rather for its approximation of a casual space partnerships to combine services and customer out-sourcing of administrative support includ-ing multilingual telephone receptionists and a prestigious business mailing address coupled with mail handling services. Regus manager, Bob Gaudreau, described the appeal of these

employed worker and the employed worker.

ence of telecommunicating technology. The initial boom in home office entrepreneurship

spaces, some attention has now turned towards adapting the ground floor spaces into restaurant and retail spaces.

Alternative Work Spaces

was directly tied to the speculative office real estate boom and crash of the 1980’s with themarket forcing the self-employed to seek alter-native arrangements. Proximity to children by

adapted

ual, it must be primarily used only for work

necessity or choice, proximity to a range of

household while in a home work space that is integrated into the command-and-control positions such as the kitchen, suggests that

Home Office

The downtown Los Angeles adaptive re-use movement was revitalized again in August 2007 when the City Council made further changes tothe Ordinance, creating greater financial incen-

regional office services


urban fabric, the growing tendency towards

In both cases, one could assume that the worker is choosing working from home either by necessity or explicitly for the alternate, customization of the speculative off  ice, is inadequate in its total separation and autonomy of work.
Opened for residents in 2007, the adaptive re-use of 1100 Wilshire tower is also an exception to the general trend towards inserting residential units within pre-1920’s purpose-built office buildings. Built in 1986 as a much-touted speculative office tower, the combination of being just west of downtown and the softening of the office market due to zealous over-building meant that the building was never used as office space and sat vacant for nearly two decades. This adaptation, overseen by Thomas P. Cox: Architects, is the first in downtown Los Angeles to convert speculative office space to residential units. The tower sits on a base of 12 floors of parking, and is relatively narrow in its floor plate, making it an ideal candidate for residential conversion. Taking advantage of the incentives offered through the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance meant that the developers, Forest City Residential West, promised 15% of the units would be maintained as affordable housing.

Architecturally, adaptive re-use is based upon the balance between restoration and renovation—updating services while maintaining the tectonics of a building. In the adaptive re-use of downtown Los Angeles buildings, the balance tends to fall towards restoration compared with the similar scenario of loft living adaptive re-use projects in New York. While much of the building stock subjected to adaptive re-use in New York is industrial in character, the equivalent building stock in downtown Los Angeles is slightly more recent purpose-built professional office and retail space from the 1910’s and 1920’s. As such, the buildings in Los Angeles tend to already have a greater degree of partitioning and serving compared with their New York equivalents, making the adaptation process more tectonically intricate. The San Fernando Building in downtown Los Angeles stands as an exemplar of the larger trends towards adaptive reuse in the downtown core. Among one of the first to take advantage of the 1999 Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, this 1906 Italian Renaissance Revival of office building was converted into lofts in 2000. Many were dubious about the potential for luxury loft spaces in a downtown core bereft of the many typical residential neighborhood amenities, but its success proved it responsible for kick-starting other similar adaptive re-use projects in the Old Bank District. The original office space partitioning was adjusted so that each unit was completely continuous and open aside from small closed washrooms. The lofts were praised for maximizing the existing high ceilings and generous window apertures. Developer Tom Gilmore received some criticism for displacing the low-income residents of the adjacent skid row through gentrification that mimicked a “Disneyland Manhattan experience” of loft conversions. But the tectonics of the space are of a different family from the industrial spaces of SoHo loft conversions. Purpose built as office space, this building differentiated itself by its high-grade finishes, integrated services and smaller scale partitioning.

The Standard Hotel proves to be an exception to or an emerging indicator of the general trend of adapting pre-1920’s office buildings in downtown Los Angeles. Built in 1955 in the downtown Financial District as the Superior Oil Company Headquarters, the building was converted into a hotel in 2002 by Koning Eizenberg Architecture. The project, undertaken by the Columbia Development Group, deployed $7.2 million in a Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit as well as took advantage of the adjusted zoning requirements and streamlined review process of the Los Angeles Adaptive Re-use Ordinance. While the lobby space remained largely unchanged, the architects noted that the reconfiguration of office space to hotel rooms proved challenging given the depth of the open floor plate. Significant reconfiguring had to be deployed to ensure that the majority of the 207 rooms had at least some access to daylight. Amenities such as the fitness center, business center and meeting rooms ultimately had to be located in the center of the deep floor plate with no access to daylight. Opened for residents in 2007, the adaptive re-use of 1100 Wilshire tower is also an exception to the general trend towards inserting residential units within pre-1920’s purpose-built office buildings. Built in 1986 as a much-touted speculative office tower, the combination of being just west of downtown and the softening of the office market due to zealous over-building meant that the building was never used as office space and sat vacant for nearly two decades. This adaptation, overseen by Thomas P. Cox: Architects, is the first in downtown Los Angeles to convert speculative office space to residential units. The tower sits on a base of 12 floors of parking, and is relatively narrow in its floor plate, making it an ideal candidate for residential conversion. Taking advantage of the incentives offered through the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance meant that the developers, Forest City Residential West, promised 15% of the units would be maintained as affordable housing.
Findings and Implications

The content contained herein represents year one of a three-year collaborative research effort between cityLAB and Gensler. The premise driving this research project is that various economic forces that have transformed the nature of work on a global scale have also had impacts at the scale of the city, office district, office building, and even various office technologies and furnishings. One indicator of this is the new range of office working behaviors and their relationships to office space. To borrow metaphors from the Space Age, these behaviors range from a core group anchored at Mission Control, to a group of space walkers like Alexey Leonov, tethering the mother ship while undertaking extra-vehicular activities, to Major Tom, David Bowie’s mythical astronaut who slips the bonds of conventional space travel to journey among the stars.

Other indicators are embedded within alterations to the various regimes that govern the space of office work within the city and within office buildings, the real estate market in which production office space takes place, the expanding office workday, and the personhoods of office workers themselves. At the same time, the disciplinary divides between interior design, architecture, and urban design (and even to urban planning) have been again breached in the process.

At the scale of the city, the building, and the desk, old binary oppositions—that not only inscribed the old industrial regime lexically but structured our thinking about what was and what was not possible—founder and fail at sense-making. The incompatibilities that once inherited to these pairings—home and office, public and private lives, public welfare and private enterprise, white and blue collar work, boss and employee, downtown and suburb, interior architecture and building design—fail to describe the changed world of work, its place in workers’ lives, its evolving material and performance cultures, its locations, its rhythms, its pace, and the urban and architectural spaces that both produce the office work world within the city and, in turn, are shaped by it.

In summary, office work is no longer only done in mono-functional office buildings, and downtown is one potential firm location among many. Work that was once bracketed between the hours of 9 AM to 5 PM is done over morning coffee in pajamas and in the bathtub at night-time. Where office work was once conducted in office buildings equipped with almost Taylor-made technologies, those technologies have been miniaturized and have become portable.

Moving from infrastructure to atmosphere, the territory claimed by the office and its work has encroached upon the airport, café, public park and plaza.
cinema, the automobile, and—most poignantly—the home, where the home office, cell phone, and laptop colonize a once revered (now denigrated) domestic sphere. Just as the office desk is as portable as the office worker is mobile, professional fields like interior design transcend their traditional domain of furniture and move to affect city planning.

Given this context, the objective of this research is to determine in which of several directions the space—the architecture and urbanism—of office work will evolve. It also serves to understand how office work will affect, and be affected by, other urban programs, as well as to identify new sites for architecture and urbanism among the forest of mono-functional office buildings at downtown’s core. Which parts of these buildings and, thus, which parts of the city are ripe for transformation and reuse? Are any among the species resistant to adaptation? To attack these issues, our research has been structured along a three-year timeline.

The research in year one focuses on charting the evolution of work activity and its relation to the evolution of buildings that have been developed to serve the office work function. The second year will focus on prognosticating how work will change due to the evolutionary research of year one. Sites within the geographical limits of this study most susceptible for this type of transformation will also be identified. The third year will be devoted to designing a speculative project that envisions what the future of work activity will be at the scale of the city, building, and desk.

The reason for selecting Los Angeles’s downtown, DTLA, is perhaps less objective than the selection of the city itself. There is no doubt it contains some of the oldest, and newest office buildings in Los Angeles. It also contains one of the broadest demographic cross-sections within the city. However, downtown Los Angeles is also home to Gensler’s Los Angeles office, and this selection reflects the office’s commitment to the area and what this collaborative effort hopes to offer its future. This partnership with cityLAB, the premier academic think-tank on the city, is designed to be a deliberate bridge between academia and the profession, where the legacy of Gensler’s interior design and burgeoning architectural practice in Los Angeles is mated to cityLAB’s tradition of provocative intellectual propositions on the city. Together, we believe that concepts are only as good as the realities they propose; downtown Los Angeles is a rich and fertile ground to explore both.


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