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Hidden Power and Built Form: The Politics Behind the Architecture

Noam Chomsky¹

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Abstract:

Emeritus Professor in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy at MIT, Avram Noam Chomsky is amongst the world's most cited living scholars. Lauded as the 'father' of modern linguistics and instigator of the 'cognitive revolution' he was voted the "world's top public intellectual" in 2005. He is, however, best known, and at his most controversial, in the fields of political criticism and activism. Perhaps the most prolific author alive today he has engaged with issues ranging from the Vietnam War, US policy in South and Central America, what he calls the 'US-Palestinian-Israeli problem', the Spanish Civil War and the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, to name but a few. The scope of his thinking is nothing short of immense.

Despite this range of subjects, however, one area that Chomsky has not discussed is the built environment. Here, for the first time he is asked to consider the contemporary infrastructure of the United States in the context of his writings, criticism, and thought. In doing so, he discusses the military infrastructure crossing large swathes of the southern United States in the form of the US-Mexican border. He also discusses urban sprawl as a product of what he calls "social engineering"—a project conceived and orchestrated by a sophisticated web of affiliations across the government and the private sector. Caught up in this, he also pinpoints the subprime crisis and the current economic recession as the result of a matrix of forces within which architecture inevitably played a role. In short, he offers his particular perspective on what lies behind some of America's most conspicuous architectural and infrastructural projects.

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Interview article with/by Noam Chomsky and Graham Cairns
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U.S.–Mexico Pacific Ocean border. Tijuana, Mexico. Photo by Scott Shelter

‘The US–Mexican border, like most borders, was established by violence—and its architecture is the architecture of violence.’ – Noam Chomsky

The fourth in the *Architecture_MPS* ‘interview-article’ series is a piece by/with Emeritus Professor in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy at MIT, Avram Noam Chomsky. Amongst the world’s most cited living scholars, Chomsky is lauded as the ‘father’ of modern linguistics and the instigator of the

‘cognitive revolution’.¹ In 2005, he was voted the “world’s top public intellectual”.² He is, however, best known, and at his most controversial, in the fields of political criticism and activism. Perhaps the most prolific author alive today he has engaged with issues ranging from the Vietnam War, US policy in South and Central America, what he calls the ‘US–Palestinian-Israeli problem’, the Spanish Civil War and the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, to name but a few.³ The scope of his thinking is nothing short of immense.

Despite this range of subjects, however, one area that Chomsky has not discussed is the built environment. In this piece with author and *Architecture_MPS* Editor, Graham Cairns, he considers the contemporary infrastructure of the United States in the context of his writings, criticism, and thought for the first time. In doing so, he discusses the military infrastructure crossing large swathes of the southern United States in the form of the US–Mexican border. He also discusses urban sprawl as a product of what he calls “social engineering”—a project conceived and orchestrated by a sophisticated web of affiliations across the government and the private sector. Caught up in this, he also pinpoints the subprime crisis and the current economic recession as the result of a matrix of forces within which architecture inevitably played a role. In short, he offers his particular perspective on what lies behind some of America’s most conspicuous architectural and infrastructural projects.

The first of these projects to be discussed is one that has been largely overlooked—the ‘fortification’ of the US–Mexican border. For some, it is an example of what could be described as “America’s architecture of oppression”; for Chomsky, it represents a form of internal militarization.⁴ Along with the various immigration bills that have been proposed, and passed, as corollaries to it, this physical division of the two countries has been controversial. *The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act* was passed in Congress in December 2005. The bill, and its later accompanying legislation, included a plan to blockade 860 miles of the border with vehicle barriers and triple-layer fencing.

The proposals gave rise to demonstrations in Mexico and inside the United States that were quickly defined as the *U.S. Immigration Reform Protests*. They started with a demonstration of 100,000 people in Chicago on March 10, 2006, and culminated in a 500,000 strong demonstration in Los Angeles on March 25.⁵ Although both bills died in the committee stages of the legislative process, *The Secure Fence Act* of 2006 was eventually passed and permitted the construction of 700 miles of high-security fencing aimed at stopping both vehicular and pedestrian crossings.⁶

The entire border cannot be protected of course, and is consequently patrolled by over twenty thousand border patrol agents on both the US and Mexican sides of the frontier.⁷ What has been built passes through urban and

uninhabited areas alike. It is concentrated in New Mexico, Arizona, California, and now Texas.⁸ Faced with explaining an infrastructure project that echoes, albeit in milder form, some of the darker examples of recent political architecture—from the Berlin Wall to the separation wall between Israel and the Occupied Territories—Chomsky begins with a historical perspective.

NC. In order to understand the rationale behind the fortification of the border and the physical form it has taken in recent years, it is necessary to go back a little first. The US–Mexican border, like most borders, was established by violence—and its architecture is the architecture of violence. The US basically invaded Mexico in a pretty brutal war back in the 1840s. The war was described by President-General Ulysses S. Grant as “the most wicked war in history”.⁹ That may be an exaggeration, but it was a pretty wicked war. It was based on deeply racist ideas. First of all, it started with the annexation of Texas, which was called the re-annexation of Texas on the grounds that it was “really ours all along [...], that they stole it from us, and now we have to re-annex it”. That took Texas away from Mexico. The rest of the war, and the later historical period, basically involved additional land grabs.

In order to understand it, you should read the progressive writers like Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. The position was, as Whitman put it eloquently, that “backward Mexico had to be annexed as part of bringing civilization to the world”—which the US was seen as leading.¹⁰ Emerson said it in more flowery language along the lines of: “it really doesn’t matter by what means Mexico is taken, as it contributes to the mission of ‘civilizing the world’ and, in the long run, it will be forgotten”.¹¹ Of course, that’s why we have names like San Francisco, San Diego, and Santa Fe all over the southwest and the west of the United States. We should really call it Occupied Mexico.

Like many borders around the world, it is artificially imposed and, like those many other borders imposed by external powers, it bears no relationship to the interests or the concerns of the people of the country—and it has a history of horrible conflict and strife. Take the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, for example. The British imposed the borderline. They partitioned the overall area nearly in half and arbitrarily divided the land. No Afghan government has ever accepted it, and nor should they. This has happened all across Africa as well, of course, and so the Mexican border is no exception.

After the war of the 1840s the US–Mexican border remained fairly open. Basically the same people lived on the same sides of it, so people would cross to visit relatives or to engage in commerce, or something else.¹² It was pretty much an open border until the early 1990s. In 1994, the Clinton administration initiated the program of militarizing the border, and that was extended greatly under George W. Bush in the 2000s—largely under the guise of safety and defence from terrorism.¹³ The two key pieces of legislation were called “The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of

2005” and the “Secure Fence Act of 2006”.¹⁴ That was interesting, and revealing, because the warnings from the security services were that the dangerous border, with regard the possible incursion of terrorists into the US, was the Canadian border. If you take a look, you can see why. The Canadian border is so porous that you and I can cross it in some forested areas. If you were worried about terrorism, you would fortify the Canadian border. Instead, they fortified the Mexican border where there is no threat of terrorism; it was, clearly, for other reasons.¹⁵

The Clinton militarization of the border in 1994, that you mentioned, coincided with the passing—I should say the “imposition”—of the executive version of NAFTA, since it was not supported by the public.¹⁶ In fact, the details of NAFTA weren’t even known by the public.¹⁷ The labor movement, which is by law supposed to be consulted on trade-related issues, was barely notified until the last minute; and their recommendations were disregarded along with the recommendations of Congress’ own research bureau. The Office of Technology Assessment called for some form of free trade agreement, but one that was quite differently constructed to the final version of NAFTA.

It was clear that the final version of NAFTA, which is not a free trade agreement at all, would lead to the substantial destruction of small- and medium-scale American-Mexican agriculture.¹⁸ Mexican *campesinos* can be efficient, but they can’t possibly compete with highly subsidized US agricultural business. Mexican businesses were forced to compete on level terms with the US multinationals, which, in addition, had to be given what’s called *National Treatment* in Mexico.¹⁹ The investment conditions were set up so that US firms would be able to invest in Mexico, exploit cheap labor and the weak labor and environmental constraints there. It was also inevitably and deliberately meant to undermine smaller scale American agricultural businesses and workers, which is exactly what happened.

In general, it was assumed that there would be a flow of people fleeing from Mexico across the border as either a direct, or indirect, result. It had to be militarized and protected. The defense infrastructure that crosses swathes of US land now was not coincidental. It was tied up with all these issues. We don’t have internal documents from that period, so we can’t know for sure whether the militarization of the border was directly based on the expectation of an increase in economic refugees, but it seems a pretty plausible surmise.²⁰

Incidentally, it’s not just to prevent Mexicans fleeing the ravages of US economic policy, but also refugees from other parts of south and Central America forced out of their countries by other policies. In early May this year, one of the dictators of Guatemala, Rios Montt, was given a heavy sentence for his role in the virtual genocide of indigenous Guatemalans living in the highlands—actions that were strongly supported by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Across the United States, generally, there are many people who fled the Guatemalan highlands as a result of the atrocities carried out in the early 1980s.²¹ In fact, many live right where I do, near Boston.

Border crossings themselves are the acts of desperate people. You have to go miles through the desert with no water. It's long treks in the heat during the day and freezing cold at night—and there are armed militias roaming around trying to hunt people down. I know personally a Guatemalan-Mayan woman who crossed the border half a dozen times while pregnant. Finally, she made it on the seventh try. I think she was seven or eight months pregnant and was rescued by solidarity workers who brought her to Boston. There are plenty of other cases like that—terrible cases. Families that are torn apart. Basically, these people don't want to be here. They want to be back home, but conditions there have been made so awful that they can't survive. They are torn from their families, they can't see their children; they can't see their grandparents. They live and die apart. It's a terrible situation.²²

It's interesting, however, that to some extent recently, there has been a slight opening of the border in the San Diego-Tijuana area to allow for commercial and cultural contact. It does not break the border, but it does bend it a little. My own feeling is that what ought to happen, over most of the world—since these borders are in large measure unofficial and imposed by force—is that a process of the border erosion should be begun; attempts to allow for everyday cultural contact that could, in the longer term, lead to some form of integration. However, at the moment, the built forms you see in the US border states, that militarized architecture developed over years, seems likely to stay for a while. Certainly our understanding of it cannot be divorced from the social and political context surrounding it. It is clearly political architecture—maybe even a symbol²³—built to send a message to both the Mexican and, importantly, the American public.²⁴

GC. In drawing out this background to the physical infrastructure across the US–Mexican border, Chomsky expands on ideas hinted at in some of his most recent works—principally references found in *Making the Future—Occupations, Interventions, Empire and Resistance*, 2012 and *Occupy*, also from 2012. In responses to questions on US suburbanization in the second half of the Twentieth Century, he does something similar—develops isolated thoughts found elsewhere in his writings into more fully fleshed out arguments here. In *Powers and Prospects* for example, one finds the reference he develops in this interview to suburbia as a “social engineering project”. Similarly, his comments here on the ‘interventionist’ underbelly of successive, supposedly free-market, US governments, echo ideas explained in *Understanding Power, Occupy*, and a number of other texts.

However, in shifting attention from the clearly ‘oppressive’ architecture of a ‘separation barrier’, to the ‘desirable’ and much sought after ‘suburban dream house’, his thought shifts significantly in register. The politics and issues that underlie this civil, and apparently market led, architecture reveal, for Chomsky, a contradiction at the heart of US rhetoric on free trade. According to Chomsky, US governments have always wanted a very powerful state that intervenes

massively in the economy. The key difference to the standard reading of the interventionist state, however, is that in the case of the US, it was intervention for the benefit of the wealthy.²⁵

He argues that this interventionist model was, in fact, the one upon which the country was founded. He also suggests that “the US pioneered that model of development” and furthermore, that Alexander Hamilton invented the concept of “infant industry protection and modern protectionism”.²⁶ Not only is that why, he argues, the US is a rich and powerful country today, it is the reason why the country’s residential infrastructure has developed in the way it has. It is what lies behind the suburban dream.

NC. As you indicate, the social and physical construction of suburban America really was quite complex. It was a very elaborate system, and clearly a massive social engineering project that has changed US society enormously.²⁷ Incidentally, I don’t have a personal objection to suburbs, in fact I live in one, but suburbanization is a different question.²⁸ It starts back in the 1940s with a literal conspiracy. I mean a conspiracy that went to court. The conspirators got a minor pat on the wrist, however.

They were General Motors, Standard Oil of California and, I think, Firestone Rubber. The origins of suburbia reveal an attempt to take over a fairly efficient mass-transportation system in parts of California—the electric railways in Los Angeles and the like—and destroy them so as to shift energy use to fossil fuels and increase consumer demand for rubber, automobiles and trucks and so on.²⁹ It was a literal conspiracy. It went to court. The courts fined the corporations \$5,000, or something like that, probably equivalent to the cost of their victory dinner.³⁰

But what happened in California started a process that then expanded—and in many ways. You know the story. It included the interstate highway system. That was presented as part of the defense against the Russians. It was launched under the Interstate Defense Highway Act of 1956, and was intended to facilitate the movement of people and goods, troops and arms, and, allegedly, to prevent overpopulation in specific areas that could become the focus of nuclear attack.³¹ The slogan of defense is the standard way of inducing the taxpayer to pay the cost of the next stage of the hi-tech economy of course.³² That’s true whether it be computers, the Internet or, as in this case, a car-based transportation system.³³

From the late 1940s, into and through the 50s, there developed a complex interaction between federal government, state and local government, real-estate interests, commercial interests and court decisions, which had the effect of undermining the mass transit system across the country. It was pretty efficient in certain areas. If you go back a century ago for example, it was possible to travel all around New England on electric railways. The first chapter of E. L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* documents it.³⁴ Subsequently, we saw the elimination

of the mass transport system in favor of fossil fuel use, automobiles, roads and airplanes, which are also an offshoot of federal government.

Today, we have private airline companies, but if you take a look at a Boeing plane next time you travel, you'll see that you are basically taking a ride on a modified bomber. A lot of the technology, and the research that goes into the development of apparently independently funded and non-government projects in our economy, comes directly from, or has its origins in, federal government. The Reagan Administration, for example, was committed to an enormous increase in state investment through the "Pentagon system"—diverting public finance into hi-tech industries and a state-guaranteed market—largely through arms production. It is essentially public subsidy for private profit—and they call it "free enterprise". That can only be done by inciting fear in the minds of the public.³⁵

The military has, to a large extent, always fulfilled this role of course. It has been used repeatedly as a site for technological innovation. The US is a perfect example.³⁶ If you revisit the roots of the aviation industry, it's a clear case. You can read it in *Fortune Magazine* and other business journals of the time. It was understood in the 1940s that the airline industry—the private airline industry—could not have developed, and today cannot survive, without extensive federal government subsidy. It was stated perfectly openly, and was well understood. It's the same today. The airports are government built—and so on and so on.

The whole infrastructure of air travel was, and is, part of government policy. It is not a natural development of a free economic system—at least not in the way that is claimed. The same is true of the roads of course. It is simply not true that suburbia is a product of the market, or market forces, or people's "uninfluenced" desires. It is the result of a deliberate social engineering program—led from the center. It is totally political in that sense. It's often presented as a product of the market—and in that regard, it's a standard argument that tries to draw upon the writings of Adam Smith to give it some sort of justification.

But this use of Smith to justify free market economics is just another distortion. Adam Smith would have hated the capitalism we see today. Smith is explicit about it. He was not in favor of free, unbridled, markets. Today he would be called a libertarian socialist.³⁷ He understood, and stated it clearly in *The Wealth of Nations*. He argues that England could be "saved" from a form of neoliberal globalization by an "invisible hand".³⁸ There needs to be control—or intervention. Daniel Defoe, argued something pretty similar in the eighteenth century.

Defoe identified that British industry wouldn't be able to survive in the face of "genuine" productive competition from China, India, and other Eastern countries. Britain had the highest real wages in the world and, at the time, the best organized working class—at least that's what much recent research suggests. As Defoe argued, in that context, Britain would have been deindustrialized by the cheap costs of Indian production if protectionist policies hadn't been employed.³⁹ From that, you can see how this use of Smith to "justify"

the market religion is actually false; and there are numerous other, more recent examples, to underline that.⁴⁰

Thomas Jefferson picked up many of the same themes.⁴¹ Like Smith, he saw the potential destruction the free market could bring. It was foreseeable. In the case we're talking about here, the same is true. The devastating effects of exclusively profit focused thinking that the development of suburbia represents were foreseeable—and foreseen. Obviously, the interstate highway program and the destruction of public transport were prerequisites for it, but they served more than just limited interests of oil producers and car manufacturers, although they were central to it. It contributed, and was intended to contribute, to the artificial manufacture of other markets. These attempts to scatter the population into suburban areas across the country led to the emergence of shopping malls, for example. It also led to the breaking down of inner cities and so on. It was also accompanied by “white flight” of course.⁴² Additionally, racial segregation was one of the other consequences, at least at first.⁴³

That was all part of what we can quite literally call, a massive social engineering project—of a very complex sort.⁴⁴ While there are some attractive elements to suburban living, as I said I live in a suburb myself by choice, it has left us with a society, and a physical infrastructure, that is unviable. Just take the Boston area where I live. It takes me forty-five minutes to one hour to drive to work because of traffic jams and detours and so forth. If there was a subway, it would take me ten minutes. But our system is designed so that you don't have the choice of efficient, humanly beneficial transportation—and Boston is only one example. None of this is “natural” in any way. It didn't emerge spontaneously—a magical product of the market. It was engineered for a specific range of interests.

GC. In contrast to the construction boom that pushed suburban sprawl to even greater extremes in the past two decades, the most recent ‘development’ to really mark the suburban landscape has been quite different—the subprime crisis. Leading to foreclosures on thousands of mortgages, and consequent repossessions and empty properties across the country, it represented the conversion of ‘the dream’ into a nightmare for many. In responding to questions on this subject—specifically the context in which suburbia was once more promoted, and has momentarily declined—Chomsky identifies the culpability of a ‘corrupted’ and ‘blinded’ banking system. However, picking up on the concerns of previous *Architecture_MPS* authors, he is also asked to consider the interconnection of interests that link the Clinton and Bush administrations to the construction sector, and which facilitated the ‘turning of a blind eye’ to the artificial manufacture of demand in the years prior to 2008.

With particular regard the fomenting of demand for houses at an artificially inflated price⁴⁵—through unrealistically accessible mortgages—he is scathing of the banking and economic industries. However, his perspective goes deeper than the immediate actions of recent economists and financial executives. He

argues that the logic and principles used to justify the liberalized operations of the market are, in themselves, myths. In returning to his interpretation of Adam Smith, he again suggests that they are principles based on a misunderstanding, or deliberate misinterpretation, of this historical doyen of the ‘free-marketeers’.

NC. The subprime fraud can be seen as the latest stage of the processes we were discussing earlier. I can see that. It also involved an ever more complex and intricate set of interests—the banks, government, the building industry, and real-estate interests once again. Those interests have been at play since the mid-twentieth century with regard the development and exploitation of the land, and the need to house people in the United States. It is true that it wasn’t solely the banking sector—but they are the prime criminals.⁴⁶ What they were doing verges, and maybe crosses over, into literal criminal activity.⁴⁷

The chicanery of mortgage selling should be seen as a crime I think. Tricking people into taking mortgages they can’t afford and so on, driving the prices very high—artificially high—why isn’t that considered a crime? Although the banks were the leaders in this, I suppose the economics profession in general deserves a good part of the blame here too. They simply refused to see the huge bubble that was developing. For about a hundred years house prices had pretty much tracked GDP—they sort of reflected the growth of the economy. Then, all of a sudden, they started shooting up. There was no economic basis for it.⁴⁸

It should have been obvious. It was obvious. But the economics profession is caught up in a religion of market efficiency—ideas of rational expectation and so on. That “religion” dictated that what was happening had to be right because the market was doing it. That pseudo-religious belief in the market meant that they simply didn’t see it. Here again, we come back to that distorted reading of Adam Smith. There were a few people who did see it all developing of course—Dean Baker, and a couple of others.⁴⁹ However, the profession predominantly, didn’t see it—or refused to see it, maybe. It seemed that they were enraptured by their form of religious fanaticism—but perhaps that is too sympathetic a reading of their motives.

The Federal Reserve Bank releases its transcripts after a five-year period, and the most recent ones released were those of 2007. They’re worth reading. Here are some of the most prestigious economists in the world, bankers and so on, discussing the economy. The economy was about to collapse around them. It was just at the point when the housing bubble was about to burst—when trillions of dollars of fake money was about to be lost with devastating effects for thousands of working families across the country. You read the transcripts, and they didn’t even see it. The grip of the religion was so strong that they couldn’t see what was in front of their eyes. They were programmed to see something else—the effectiveness of the market.

Primarily the responsibility is with the banks but there was federal government support, there was state government support, and a whole range of other interests were in play as well. You’re right in pointing out Clinton, and then again Bush.⁵⁰ Both administrations pushed the housing market and, inevitably,

contributed to the explosion of urban sprawl that continued to spread across the country. But, if you look at the detail, it was principally a banking crisis. The banks were responsible for the most obvious and literal “criminal” activity, as they were in Ireland and Spain and a number of other places. It verged on criminal behavior, undoubtedly. Incidentally, those responsible are bigger, richer, stronger than before—thanks to government bailouts—which was another scandal.⁵¹

As you mention, the effects on the ground were clearly visible throughout that period—growing suburbs, growing sprawl etc. From the 90s and later on, it was perfectly visible in terms of urban, suburban, and rural land developments, but it was also seen in prices. House prices were going through the roof—far higher than anything based on economic essentials would dictate—but there was that blindness, a kind of euphoria. It was evident in the economics profession, the media, politicians, and others, etc. They were all hailing this as an enormous achievement. It was called “the great moderation” and Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve Chair, who was manipulating it all from the top, was hailed as one of the greatest economists of all time.⁵² St. Alan he was called. For sure it was visible—but praised.⁵³

You can see it on the ground where I live. My wife and I bought our house for \$40,000 many years ago. Maybe today that would be \$100,000, which is not exorbitant by US standards. It’s the only house on the street that has not either been torn down and replaced by a new, bigger building, or substantially expanded. When they were torn down during that recent period, what went up in their place was a mansion—a building that would that sell for millions of dollars. There was rampant speculation. Homes became an investment, very obviously.

It all added more energy to segregation on the grounds of wealth. The poor are driven out of whole areas when this takes place. All that was just as visible as new suburbs, towns, sprawl etc. Again, of course, as you indicated earlier, it’s an example of your field, architecture, operating as something integrated into a bigger complex of forces. In this case it’s property speculation and an economic system exploiting laws and people’s aspirations.

All of this was happening when this country faced a tremendous infrastructure collapse, which is still very serious. US infrastructure is in a terrible condition. It’s not just evident on our inner cities, where housing for the poor is still often in bad condition, but on our roads, bridges and so on. Driving to work this morning I got caught up in detours of rebuilding that is, in some ways, essential. At least it is essential to the continuation of the current inefficient and failing transport model. It is necessary to reconsider the infrastructure of this country—the way it is set up and financed. It’s not really a question of your profession, architecture, in the first instance—although they are involved. It is a question of politics and economics of course.

Architecture_MPS has developed a new genre of academic writing: the ‘interview-article’. It is a variation on the interview format that deepens the scholarly potential of

that particular genre. Extensive notation and footnotes are interwoven within the text to offer supplemental information and alternative argumentation.

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¹ Margaret Fox, “A Changed Noam Chomsky Simplifies,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/05/arts/a-changed-noam-chomsky-simplifies.html>.

² Duncan Campbell, “Chomsky is voted world’s top public intellectual,” *The Guardian*, October 17, 2005. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/oct/18/books.highereducation>.

³ Of his innumerable texts, the most cited and probably the most influential was his 1988 book with Edward Herman: Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

⁴ Noam Chomsky, *Occupy. Occupied Media Pamphlet Series* (New York: Zuccotti Park Press, 2012), 42.

⁵ The story of this is covered in Story 11, *The Senate Speaks*, of the documentary film, *How Democracy Works Now: Twelve Stories*. The series was directed and produced by the filmmakers Shari Robertson and Michael Camerini. The Epidavros Project Inc. 2010, DVD.

⁶ The White House, “Fact Sheet: The Secure Fence Act of 2006,” Accessed May 17, 2013. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061026-1.html>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Fact Sheet: Southwest Border Next Steps,” June 23, 2010. Accessed May 17, 2013. <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2010/06/23/fact-sheet-southwest-border-next-steps>.

⁸ Randal C. Archibold, “U.S. Plans Border ‘Surge’ Against Any Drug Wars,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2009. Accessed May 17, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/08/us/08cher-toff.html?_r=0.

⁹ The Mexican–American War is given very different historical interpretations by both sides. Active between 1846 and 1848 it followed the US annexation of Texas in 1845 US which itself followed a “revolution” in its borders by US settlers. The revolution gave rise to the establishment of the Texas republic. Mexico defined both the revolution and the subsequent war as an illegal land-grab and an invasion respectively—a position shared by Chomsky. Amongst the most cited material on the subject are: Alwyn Barr, *Texans in Revolt: The Battle for San Antonio, 1835* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990). The most recent addition to the material on this is: Amy Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 2012). A post-colonial interpretation is found in: Martha Manchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans (The Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture)* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Writing in the Brooklyn Eagle on 11th May 1846 Whitman begins thus: “Yes: Mexico must be thoroughly chastised! We have reached a point in our intercourse with that country, when prompt and effectual demonstrations of force are enjoined upon us by every dictate of right and policy.” See: National Humanities Center Archive. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminarsflvs/Whitman.pdf>. Accessed May 18, 2012.

¹¹ While Emerson is generally known for opposing the war with Mexico—describing it as “arsenic that would kill the person taking it”, and despite being a member of the Whig party that also opposed it, both the party and Emerson somewhat altered their arguments in subsequent years. Zachary Taylor was made the Whig Party candidate for the Presidential election of 1848 and praised the military’s performance on the campaign trail; and Emerson would famously be

remembered for accepting that “most of the great results of history are brought about by discreditable means”. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* (1860), 110.

¹² For a brief introduction to the history of the border issue, see: Oscar J. Martínez, *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (Jaguar Books on Latin America)* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996).

¹³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Fact Sheet”.

¹⁴ See” The White House, “Fact Sheet: The Secure Fence Act of 2006”. See also: CNN Report, “Bush OKs 700-mile border fence”. Accessed May 17, 2013. http://web.archive.org/web/20061027071514/http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/10/26/border.fence/index.html?ref=rss_politics. See also: U.S. Customs and Border Protection Act, September 28, 2005. Accessed March 27, 2010. <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/>.

¹⁵ For a discussion on this see: Karina J. Ordóñez. “An On-Going Dilemma”, *Homeland security Affairs Supplement* No. 2 (2008). Accessed May 15, 2013. <http://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=485696>.

¹⁶ Chomsky, *Occupy*, 42.

¹⁷ For an overview of NAFTA, the drafting of the legislation and the negotiations that produced it, see: Frederick, W. Mayer, *Interpreting NAFTA*, (Columbia University Press, 1998). For a more openly critical perspective, see: William A. Orme Jr., *Understanding NAFTA: Mexico, Free Trade, and the New North America*, (University of Texas Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Noam Chomsky, *Making the Future—Occupations, Interventions, Empire and Resistance* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012), 23.

¹⁹ For a range of materials on this subject in the George W. Bush administration refer to The Mexico Portal of the Mexico Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. <http://mexicoinstitute.wordpress.com>.

²⁰ The events and initiatives of the Clinton period included operations with the following revealing names: Operation Hold-the-Line in El Paso, Texas, 1993; Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, 1994; Operation Rio Grande for South Texas, 1997; Operation Safeguard in central Arizona, 1995. For details, see: Karina J. Ordóñez, “An On-Going Dilemma”, 2008.

²¹ Here Chomsky picks up on ideas he has dealt with in much more length elsewhere. See, for example: Jennifer Harbury and Noam Chomsky, *Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Companeros and Companeras* (New York: AK Press, 1994).

²² For more information on the personal stories of immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere attempting to enter the US see the website set up specifically to recount these stories and offer advice to illegal and legal immigrants in the US: My Immigration Story.com. This activist led website can be found at: <http://www.myimmigrationstory.com/>.

²³ In his 2007 book, *Inside Lebanon*, Chomsky does not deal with architectural symbolism in his passing and tangential comments on the built environment but Assaf Kfoury does discuss visits and comments made by Chomsky on the “symbolism” of specific sites and buildings in that context. In particular he discusses the conversion of the site of Lebanese Christian Phalange massacre of Palestinian refugees into an official graveyard in the Sabra-Shatila Refugee Camp. He also discusses Chomsky’s visit and comments on The Khiam Detention Centre. Formerly a French military base subsequently used by the Lebanese Phalange as a prison and torture chamber during the Lebanese Civil War, it was later liberated by Hezbollah in 2000 and converted into a museum—a purely symbolic structure that was finally bombed because of its symbolic value by Israeli forces in the 2006 war. See: Assaf Kfoury, ed., *Inside Lebanon—Journey to a Shattered Land* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007), 14, 86–89.

²⁴ In the context of United States in the post 9/11 period, Michael Sorkin has described a whole range of construction projects and minimal security devices around buildings and infrastructure projects that were designed to function primarily as symbols—rather than genuine security measures. He refers to them as “mnemonics”. The “security fence” between the US and Mexico serves a similar, if not identical purpose in these regards. See: Michael Sorkin, *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Insecurity State* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 216.

²⁵ Noam Chomsky, *Class Warfare—Noam Chomsky Interviews with David Barsamian* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 30–31.

²⁶ Hamilton's role in the establishment of the financial requisites of the industrial based US economy is well documented. He was Secretary of the Treasury under George Washington, was responsible for economic policy in the early years of the new government and entered into a bitter feud with Thomas Jefferson on the nature of and model of US economics—an issue that revolved around contrasting positions on the funding of the state debts by the Federal government. Key to his arguments was the establishment of a national bank and a system of trade tariffs. For details on this see: Ryan, P Randolph, *Alexander Hamilton's Economic Plan: Solving Problems in America's New Economy* (New York: Rosen Pub Group, 2003). David Reynolds, *America—Empire of Liberty* (London: Penguin, 2010), a book from the BBC Radio 4 documentary series of the same name, 2009.

²⁷ Chomsky uses this term in *Powers and Prospects*. See: Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* (London: South End Press, 1999), 153–154.

²⁸ Paul S. Grogan and Tony Proscio have questioned the “naturalness” of suburbanization in the US in the way Chomsky outlines here. Specifically they state: “Perhaps suburbanization was a ‘natural’ phenomenon—rising incomes allowing formerly huddled masses in city neighborhoods to breathe free on green lawn and leafy culs-de-sac. But, we will never know how natural it was, because of the massive federal subsidy that eased and accelerated it, in the form of tax, transportation and housing policies.” See: Paul S. Grogan and Tony Proscio, *Comeback Cities: A Blueprint for Urban Neighborhood Revival* (London: Basic Books, 2002), 142.

²⁹ This story of the move from rail to the use of the automobile in the case of Los Angeles was examined from a much more positive perspective with more emphasis on purely architectural and urban design questions by Reyner Banham. See: Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 2nd edition (University of California Press, 2009). A parallel argument to that of Chomsky here is offered by Kenneth Frampton in an earlier interview for *Architecture_MPS*. See: Kenneth Frampton, “A Critical Architecture—comments on politics and society,” *Architecture_MPS* 1:4, December 2012. <http://architecturemps.com/backissues>.

³⁰ This point is dealt with in passing in *Powers and Prospects*. See: Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects*, 153–154.

³¹ Michael Sorkin, amongst others, has also dealt with this question. Particularly, the idea that the construction of the interstate highway system can be seen as, in part, a product of ‘fear’ and military necessity. See: *Some Assembly Required* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 221.

³² In *Powers and Prospects*, Chomsky suggests that, “in the 1950s, virtually all funds for research and development of computers came from the taxpayer, along with 85 per cent of R&D for electronics generally. Ignoring this fact means we can understand little about the contemporary economy or ‘really existing free markets’”. See: Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects*, 153-154.

³³ In *Pirates and Emperors* he discusses the same issue in the context of the Ronald Reagan administration of the 1980s and attempts to increase ‘public fear’ so as to facilitate state subsidies to the hi-tech industry of military production. See: Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors—Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World* (New York: South End Press, 2003), xi. Also see: *Class Warfare*, 30–31; and *Understanding Power—the Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 256.

³⁴ *Ragtime* is a novel set in the New York City area in the first two decades of the Twentieth Century. E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Random House, 1975).

³⁵ In *Pirates and Emperors* he defines it as a policy that “can only be implemented if the general population is properly frightened by monsters against whom we must defend ourselves”. Namely the Russians in the case of Reagan’s administration. Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, xi.

³⁶ This is an argument dealt with by numerous other thinkers and commentators. See by way of example: Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (New York: Verso, 1997); *A Landscape of Events* (Cambridge:

MIT Press, 2000); *Polar Inertia* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000); *The Vision Machine* (Indiana University Press, 1994). For a general outline of this phenomenon, see also: Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008). For specific comments on this in the context of architecture, see: Robert Kronenburg, *Houses in Motion: The Genesis, History and Development of the Portable Building* (London: Academy Press, 2002); Rheinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

³⁷ Here Chomsky develops ideas found in other works. See: Chomsky, *Class Warfare*, 34.

³⁸ Chomsky, *Occupy*, 31.

³⁹ Chomsky also suggests that: “Contemporaries saw matters much in that light”. A century after Defoe, liberal historian Horace Wilson observed ruefully that, without protection, “the mills of Paisley and Manchester would have been stopped in their outset, and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the power of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of Indian manufacturers”. Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects*, 149.

⁴⁰ In *Powers and Prospects* he puts this particular point as follows: “The Reaganites followed much the same course in the face of Japanese competition half a century later. Had they permitted the market forces they worshipped in public to function, there would be no steel or automobile manufacturing in the United States today; nor semiconductors, massively parallel computing, and much else. The Reagan Administration simply closed the market to Japanese competition while pouring in public funds, measures expanded under Clinton”. *Powers and Prospects*, 150.

⁴¹ Chomsky, *Class Warfare*, 34.

⁴² Kevin Kruse has examined white flight in terms that go beyond a mere geographical movement of the white middle classes to suburbia. In outline, he identifies and explores how this was integrated into the support of a new set of political views and policies and thus how it effected US politics on more fundamental levels. See: Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁴³ The case of Levittown homes would become the epitome of enforced segregation in the US suburbs of the post war period. However, it was not only private industry that fomented this segregation in the early suburbs. The Federal Housing Association implicitly supported segregation in the public housing sector by only offering mortgages for non-mixed developments. Purchase agreements stated that properties could not be rented to non-whites. For more information on the racial policies in Levittown, see: David Kushner, *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb* (New York: Walker & Company, 2009). Julia C. Mead, “Memories of Segregation in Levittown,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2003. Accessed May 18, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/11/nyregion/memories-of-segregation-in-levittown.html>. Bruce Lambert, “At 50, Levittown Contends With Its Legacy of Bias,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 1997. Accessed May 18, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/28/nyregion/at-50-levittown-contends-with-its-legacy-of-bias.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

⁴⁴ It should also be noted that other social and political issues played a role in this. Amongst them we can count: The Housing Act 1949, Mortgage Finance programs, Redlining and the use of housing vouchers to replace the construction of social housing. An interesting argument against public housing that refers, indirectly, to such issues is found in the work of Howard Husock. See: Howard Husock, *America's Trillion-Dollar Housing Mistake: The Failure of American Housing Policy* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2003). An alternative view is offered by Nicholas Dagen Bloom. His positive view on public housing references alternative readings of these same issues. See: Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked—New York in the Twentieth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁴⁵ He mentions this point in a little more detail in *Occupy*. See: Chomsky, *Occupy*, 87.

⁴⁶ In these arguments one finds echoes of comments made in *Powers and Prospects*. In this book he dwells on the historical background and states that these are the: “banking institutions and moneyed incorporations of which Thomas Jefferson warned in his later years—predicting that, if

not curbed, they would become a form of absolutism that would destroy the promise of the democratic revolution". He also states that they have: "more than fulfilled his most dire expectations". See: Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects*, 109.

⁴⁷ A wealth of material is now available on the background and consequences of the sub-prime crisis. Two basic examples that offer overall introductions include: Robert J. Hiller, *The Subprime Solution: How Today's Global Financial Crisis Happened, and What to Do about It* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008). Michael Lewis, *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

⁴⁸ Again we find ideas insinuated in previous texts: Chomsky, *Occupy*, 87.

⁴⁹ Dean Baker is a left leaning American economist known for his outspoken criticism of US economic policy. *The Conservative Nanny State: How the Wealthy Use the Government to Stay Rich and Get Richer* (New York: Lulu, 2006); *The United States Since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); *Plunder and Blunder: The Rise and Fall of the Bubble Economy* (San Francisco: PoliPoint Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Another brief and accessible examination of the political role in the sub-prime crisis is offered in: Thomas Sowell, *The Housing Boom and Bust* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

⁵¹ This argument is dealt with by Michael Moore, see: Michael Moore, dir., *Capitalism—A Love Story* (Production Co.: Overture Film, Paramount Vantage, Weinstein Company, 2009).

⁵² In *Occupy*, Chomsky is critical of Greenspan for other reasons as well. He states that, for Greenspan, "the success of the economy is based on worker insecurity". Chomsky, *Occupy*, 33.

⁵³ In 2007, Alan Greenspan wrote what was essentially his memoir, but which also functioned as an analysis of free market economics in the United States of the twentieth century. On the eve of the financial meltdown there are few indicators that the events of 2008 were foreseen. He also uses the Adam Smith term, "the invisible hand" in a way directly contradicted by Chomsky. For Greenspan, it refers to "people's motivational self-interest". See Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).