Testing the Establishment: Authorial Signature and Professional Method in the Architecture of Gunnar Birkerts, 1958-81

by

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ABSTRACT

Though he was once among the most recognizable names in American architecture, Gunnar Birkerts has largely been overlooked in the historiography of late modernism. Birkerts was an unusually introspective and self-reflective architect and his collections therefore offer a view into the complex intertwining of the personal and the professional for entrepreneurial architects with eponymous firms. Through analyses of Birkerts's projects, practice, and pedagogy, the dissertation narrates the confluence of two realities: the persistence of a belief in the artistry of architects and the emergence of conditions that stretched their model of production to its breaking point. Consisting of intensive analyses of four key projects across the US by the firm Gunnar Birkerts and Associates (GBA), the chapters outline the ideas about artistry that continued to shape this firm's working methods even as large projects prompted Birkerts and his employees to take on new management protocols. Archival records of these projects illustrate the ways Birkerts assured that his authorial signature matched the output of GBA, and vice versa. The dissertation shows how architecture's turn toward Postmodernism directed architects to fashion themselves as distinctive personalities with signature approaches to design, and that for Birkerts, this self-fashioning was accompanied by a rejection of more bureaucratic working methods and by increased focus on, and specialization within, the more obviously artistic domains of architectural practice.

INTRODUCTION

Reckoning with Authorship

One might envision the architect Gunnar Birkerts (1925-2017) as a lonely figure at work in a studio, deep in contemplation of a design problem, surrounded by the products of his labor. In an early portrait of Birkerts from the mid-1950s, we are presented with precisely this kind of image (Figure 0.01). It shows a young man at work on the furniture designs that occupied many moonlight hours outside his day job with the office of Eero Saarinen in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Birkerts is depicted here as an inward-looking and devoted designer, monk-like in his commitment to architecture. Pencil in hand, he gazes at a drawing in progress, contemplating his next line. This image aligns with a recurrent and then-predominant conception of the architect: an independent, introspective individual. Of several props included in this portrait, however, perhaps none is more important than the magazine open on the drafting table, a symbol of his awareness and appreciation for the work of his contemporaries.

Contrast this with a later portrait, taken in 1983 at the height of his career. Instead of looking inward, Birkerts seems instead to invite the viewer into the creative process (Figure 0.02). He holds not a pencil but an architect's scale, as if he were in the midst of checking subordinates' work rather than producing drawings himself. Remnants of the design process are staged around him to illustrate the various phases of an architect's

work—a large scale model and construction documents for the Boyd Law Building at the University of Iowa (1979-86), then under development; isometric sketches of a house in Kalamazoo, Michigan he called "Villa Ginny" (1980-83); and, in place of the magazine, a lavish monograph of his firm's buildings and projects released that year by the Japanese publisher Global Architecture.[1] Strangely, except for Birkerts, the large office seems abandoned. Though the work of his firm's employees is all around him, he still appears as the sole author.

Portraits of architects can reveal much about the self-image of those they depict. They fall into a few distinct genres. Some, like these, show the architect at work, usually at the drafting table. There are also those that capture the architect in the midst of a presentation to a client or the public, hunched over a model or gesturing toward a drawing. Finally, there are those that depict the architect on the construction site overseeing the realization of their design, or at a completed building exuding pride, satisfaction, and confidence at a job well done. Of these genres, portraits of Birkerts fall overwhelmingly into the first. As his architectural career unfolded, it was to this image of the architect as an individual creative author that Birkerts maintained his highest allegiance. He was not alone.

In the mid-twentieth century U.S., the architect was widely understood as a hybrid artist-businessperson responsible for shepherding building designs from conception to execution by following protocols established by professional organizations.[2] Their

[1] William Marlin and Yukio Futagawa, eds., *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates* (Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. Edita, 1982).
[2] As others have concluded, the postwar decades (Birkerts's formative years, professionally speaking) were defined by "unprecedented professional consensus about what it meant to be an architect: its ethos, its protocols, its training." Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman, *Neo-Avant-Garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond*, Studies in British Art 21 (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2010), 12.

education came in two parts: first in the universities and then through apprenticeship in the field; in both, the drafting room was the predominant setting. This consensus frayed between the late 1960s and early 1980s, as demand for architectural services failed to match the supply of new professionally-trained graduates from the "baby boom" generation, and as control over the building process was wrested from architects by specialist disciplines that emerged in response to the increasing complexity of construction projects. In response to this identity crisis, architects like Birkerts actively re-centered their practices on design beginning in the mid-1970s, elevating aspects of the process over which they retained control.

The dissertation inhabits the temporal interval between these two Birkerts portraits, between youth and maturity. Simultaneously, it explores the gap between two archival collections: the Gunnar Birkerts Papers—a personal collection comprised of biographical information, photographs, sketches, and correspondence—and the Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records—a professional collection containing the output of the many assistants, associates, managers, and partners employed by Birkerts over the course of his lengthy career. Set up by Birkerts in collaboration with Bentley Historical Library archivist Sally Bund and others, these archival collections set out two distinct subjects, outlined in the dissertation's subtitle: authorial signature and professional method. Material included in the Papers, and particularly the schematic sketches preserved therein, is intended to illustrate the singular creative contribution Birkerts personally made to the building designs completed by his firm—or, as Bund puts it in her finding aid, "a rich perspective on the architect himself, illuminating his views on the creative process and the resulting conceptual designs which have defined his expressive

architecture."[3] The voluminous professional collection, on the other hand, fleshes out the stories of these buildings and the people who managed and administered their design and construction, as Bund summarizes, "a broad, visual representation of the evolution of each building through the 'Schematic Design,' 'Design Development' and 'Construction Document' sequences."[4]

This dissertation is the first rigorous critical analysis of an important architect, and it traces the persistence of the atelier model of architectural practice in a period increasingly dominated by corporate organization. Contextualizing modernist and postmodernist architectural aesthetics within the political frameworks that bounded them, it locates Birkerts's career within the professional and academic landscapes that surrounded him. Examining archival materials related to four key projects spanning two decades, it traces shifts in Birkerts's working methods resulting from the management expectations imposed by bureaucratic clients and new business demands brought about by the profession's reorganization. As his firm found its way within an increasingly corporatized architecture culture, Birkerts struggled to maintain the creative autonomy he enjoyed early in his career. While others changed paths, he redoubled his commitment to "testing" the professional establishment and questioning the hegemony of large, bureaucratic firms.

The phrase adopted as this dissertation's title, "testing the establishment," has its origin in Birkerts's lecture notes from a symposium at the University of Michigan in 1970, during which he advised the young architects in attendance against "turning anti,"

[3] Sally Linvill Bund, "Scope and Content Note," in *Finding Aid to the Gunnar Birkerts Papers: 1930–2017* (Ann Arbor: Bentley Historical Library, 2002, 2017, 2018).
[4] Sally Linvill Bund, "Scope and Content Note," in *Finding Aid to the Gunnar Birkerts and Associates records: 1960–2014* (Ann Arbor: Bentley Historical Library, 1999, 2008, 2015).

and to instead seek to surpass or supersede figures that he perceived as members of an architectural establishment, among whom he named Minoru Yamasaki, Paul Rudolph, Louis Kahn, and Philip Johnson (Figure 0.03). By "turning anti," Birkerts meant something akin to "dropping out" in the sense of contemporaneous countercultures—to turn one's back on the practice of architecture as conventionally understood. The "establishment," as Birkerts understood it, seems to have been comprised of widely published, well-known, respected professional architects. Instead of hewing too close to the example of these figures, Birkerts believed that architects must "reexamine" their work and "formulate new principles" in order to reach maturity as an independent voice. "Testing the establishment," for Birkerts, meant formulating one's own principles based on a careful examination of the work of respected contemporaries. In doing so, one faced up to a common problem of young architects: how to differentiate oneself in ways subtle enough to gain respect and status among fellow professionals.

Such moderate "testing" set the tone for Birkerts's relationship to establishment figures throughout his career, even those with whom he had an alliance or felt an affinity. In an autobiographical sketch for the 1982 *GA Architect* volume dedicated to his work, for example, Birkerts described his antipathy to the conformism that he felt pervaded the Saarinen office in the early 1950s:

> The designer group at the time had a fairly uniform standard of dress. It was "in" to wear a grey flannel suit, white button-down oxford shirt and black knit tie. Hair was worn short. This was, I think, the Eastern school influence and smacked of exclusiveness. My response was to buy a dark blue flannel suit, a light blue oxford button-down shirt, and a dark blue knit tie. I wanted to keep the textural quality but to distinguish myself from the prevailing color scheme. Unlike Eliel [Saarinen], who had been a dapper dresser, Eero [Saarinen] did not pay much attention to these matters. He was often seen in his dungarees, particularly after business hours.[5]

[5] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates*, 216.

While he was never one to be "seen in his dungarees," Birkerts didn't toss out conventions so much as subtly overturn them in ways that called attention and revealed what he saw as their pernicious influence. He did this while retaining the aristocratic bearing and authorial claims he admired in Eliel Saarinen and other European architects.

Birkerts never openly attacked the conventions of architectural practice or pedagogy in the ways that his one-time coworker and later intellectual nemesis Robert Venturi did. The conventions Birkerts chose to overturn were design conventions. Whereas Venturi attacked the Romantic conventions of architectural authorship with its values of originality, elitism, and heroism, Birkerts pushed against what he saw as the dogmatic formal and aesthetic constraints of Late Modernism.[6] Birkerts, one might say, retained a conventional bourgeois image of the architect while pushing to overcome the monotonous functionalism of American postwar architecture. Preoccupation with the traditional privileges of creative authorship was not unusual among postmodernists. As Craig Owens observed of contemporaneous tendencies in art practice,

> If as [Roland] Barthes argued, the author could not—or could no longer—claim to be the unique source of the meaning and/or value of the work of art, then who—or what—could make such a claim? It is my contention that, despite its diversity … the art frequently referred to as 'postmodernist,' can perhaps best be understood as a response or a series of responses to this question—even when artists simply attempt to reclaim the privileges that have traditionally accrued to the author in our society.[7]

[6] Effacing biography and the authorial intent were integral to the literary formalism of the New Critics, of whom Venturi was an admirer. Venturi continued on this track even as his fame increased, insisting that his wife and collaborator Denise Scott Brown receive appropriate credit for her involvement in the work despite the rampant sexism that often put her on the outside looking in. See Denise Scott Brown, "Room At The Top? Sexism and the Star System in Architecture," in *Architecture: A Place for Women*, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 237–46.
[7] Craig Owens, "From Work to Frame, or is There Life After 'The Death of the Author,'" in Lars Nittve, ed., *Implosion: A Postmodern Perspective* (Stockholm: Moderna museet, 1987), 207.

This last statement applies to architects like Birkerts—even as they worked to reclaim their traditional authorial privileges from bureaucratic practice and functionalist dogma, they were responding to the uncertain status of the author.

This reclaiming of privilege was not confined to creative practices. Business historian Peter F. Drucker concluded that between 1965 and 1985 the US transitioned from a "managerial economy" to an entrepreneurial one as the figure of the flexible, pragmatic business leader came to be seen as the source of economic progress and the way out of the stagnation that pervaded the economy of the 1970s.[8] A renewed faith in the individual figurehead therefore pervaded both the economic and the artistic realms by the 1980s, and because of architecture's intermediary position between art and business, architects accrued prestige from both realms.[9] While retrenching their status, they also sought to carve out viable market niches to capture commissions that would match their artistic ambitions.

Gunnar Birkerts is at the center of this dissertation, but its purpose is not to focus solely on the formation of one individual. He provides an exemplary case study of individualist practice within a bureaucratized and commoditized culture, yielding a better understanding of the form and function of architecture and architects within late capitalism. To accomplish this, each of the chapters centers on a single project that, in turn, illuminates a phase of Birkerts's career and particular aspects of his architectural practice. These thematic chapters render his building designs in a sharp contextual relief

[8] Peter F. Drucker, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 254–66. Drucker provides a concise description, we might say, of the turn toward Neoliberalism.
[9] Kazys Varnelis has similarly argued that the 1970s were a time of retrenchment in the culture of architecture: after briefly opening itself to influence from modernist functionalism and social science, a countermovement solidified the position of the artist-architect by 1980. Kazys Varnelis, "The Spectacle of the Innocent Eye: Vision, Cynical Reason, and The Discipline of Architecture in Postwar America" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1994), 72–79.

that enables us to see Birkerts not only as a staunch individualist, but also as a typical postwar architect whose path traverses the uncertain terrain of a profession in transition.

The goal is to map the complex of forces that shaped the image of American architects—both their own self-images and the public images they cultivated. Their individualism countered the implacable force of faceless architectural and engineering corporations, even as professional practice required an adoption of certain corporate protocols. The entrepreneurial ideal these architects embodied became increasingly important after the industry's forced deregulation in 1972, when business acumen became an even stronger criterion of success. In July of that year, the Department of Justice barred the American Institute of Architects from distributing fee schedules to its members or requiring compliance with "no bid" clauses, which Justice saw as restraints of trade prohibited by the Sherman Antitrust Act. As architectural historian Cecil D. Elliott summarized the importance of this consent decree, "The message was unmistakable: the 'learned professions' were now considered businesses, and providing 'professional services' was trade."[10] This deregulation split Birkerts's career roughly in two, and, paradoxically, resulted in a double move—toward better business practices on the one hand, and a retreat into artistic signature on the other.

This dissertation broadens the context within which Gunnar Birkerts's architecture has been situated, while opening up and examining the contents of his authorial signature and professional method—the aspects of architecture that Reyner Banham once resignedly called the discipline's "black box."[11] Birkerts is an ideal case for

[10] Cecil D. Elliott, *The American Architect from the Colonial Era to the Present* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003), 166.
[11] Reyner Banham, "A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture," [1990] in *A Critic Writes*, ed. Mary Banham (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 292–99.

a study of architectural authorship because of the introspective nature of his writings and the thorough documentation of his firm's major projects at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library. Through these writings and the assembly of his collections, Birkerts was, in effect, his own first monographer.[12] A prolific writer of autobiographical statements, Birkerts recomposed and reiterated the pieces of his identity at every opportunity. He endeavored, one might say, to close what Gabriele Guercio has called the "open finitude" of the architect's oeuvre by self-reflexively solidifying the uncertain relation between his life and his work.[13] The typical monographic equation of "the artist both as an individual empirically linked to a body of work through historical facts and as a personality created solely by that body of work," is complicated by Birkerts's self-awareness and reflexivity.[14]

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Birkerts never developed the skillful draftsmanship associated with fine art drawings. Drawings, for Birkerts, were done in the service of visionary concepts or metaphors, and to communicate those concepts to clients or subordinates. His sketches may have been the "embryos" from which designs materialized, but they could never take the place of the buildings that emerged organically from them.[15] Above all, his sketches reinforce his status as originator—they matter only insofar as they capture a concept with fidelity. They were, in his view, a form of architectural "handwriting." Existing literature about individual architects tends to foreground preliminary work like sketches while neglecting the influence of employees,

[12] See Gabriele Guercio, *Art as Existence: The Artist's Monograph and Its Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 267–77. Guercio similarly argues that Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, and Joseph Beuys produced statements and works that adopted the ambitions of artist's monographs and prefigured their reception by historians.
[13] Guercio, 5.
[14] Guercio, 6.
[15] Sven Birkerts and Martin Schwartz, *Gunnar Birkerts: Metaphoric Modernist* (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2009), 21.

consultants, or clients in complex building projects. This is a frequent pitfall in architectural biographies especially, which are always negotiations at the border between a subject's personal and creative lives. The pivotal third chapter of this dissertation shows that a close reading of everyday working methods can reveal the conventions of validation, legitimation, and subordination that guide firms like Gunnar Birkerts and Associates.[16]

Most explorations of architectural practice tend toward ethnographic or sociological methods and have shown little interest in material artifacts or completed buildings. A wealth of such literature addressed the profession during the 1980s and 1990s. Judith Blau's *Architects and Firms* and Robert Gutman's *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* were typical of this approach. Both books provide broad pictures of the profession's guiding value systems and its responses to economic uncertainty.[17] A more aesthetically attentive perspective is found in Magali Sarfatti Larson's *Behind the Postmodern Façade*, in which Larson chronicled the ways architectural practices are beholden to the political and economic realities that surround them, and openly critiqued postmodernist architects for their willingness to surrender social agency.[18] Dana Cuff's *Architecture: The Story of Practice* put forward an ethnographic analysis of everyday work in design firms, and critiqued the profession's unrealistic self-image and its lack of

[16] Perhaps the best monographic example of this approach is Thomas Leslie's book *Louis I. Kahn: Building Art and Building Science*, in which Leslie subtly deconstructs the architect's heroic myth by casting light on collaborations with subordinates and consultants that underpinned Kahn's groundbreaking buildings. Thomas Leslie, *Louis I. Kahn: Building Art, Building Science* (New York, NY: George Braziller, 2005).
[17] Judith R. Blau, *Architects and Firms: A Sociological Perspective on Architectural Practice* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984); Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).
[18] Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Facade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

diversity.[19] All of these analyses found that architecture's ideals and its reality were at odds as architects continued to assert their singular creative individualism while in practice habitually delegating tasks to subordinates and sharing responsibility with clients. This dissertation redeploys aspects of this sociological literature to provide a backdrop to its reading of Birkerts's practice and more rigorous support for its primary argument: that the deregulatory pressures and entrepreneurial emphasis characteristic of late capitalism pushed architects into the paradoxical position of retrenching their traditional identity at the same time that that identity was being undermined by unprecedented challenges to their professional authority.

The extensive historiography of the architecture profession has also shaped this dissertation. Andrew Saint's book *The Image of the Architect* shows the diverse ways that the architect's role has been conceived over several centuries, concluding that to overemphasize the creative component of architecture gives license to egoism while leaving the field of "everyday architectural design" open to appropriation by crass commercialism.[20] Mary N. Woods's exemplary book *From Craft To Profession* uncovers the origins of American architectural practice in the 19th century and shows that the now ubiquitous ideal of architects as artist-entrepreneurs was far from an inevitable conclusion.[21] Magali Sarfatti Larson's essential essay "Emblem and Exception: The Historical Definition of the Architect's Professional Role," frames the subject differently but no less authoritatively, pessimistically concluding that because of architecture's status within a market economy, the pursuit of efficiencies in building production will always

[19] Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).
[20] Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 164.
[21] Mary N. Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

outweigh architecture's *telos*, or symbolic intention.[22] This dissertation examines similar material but draws a different, less pessimistic conclusion: that late capitalism pushed architects to reprise the historic image of their profession despite the increasingly outmoded and contradictory claims to individual authorship that came with it.

Over the past several years, scholarship on architectural practice has been reinvigorated by debates around labor practices in architecture as groups like The Architecture Lobby have raised concerns about the hierarchies of credit, the workload, and the economic inequalities of practice. The recent collections *The Architect as Worker* and *Architecture and Capitalism*, both edited by Peggy Deamer, serve as useful methodological guides to these issues.[23] Equally important have been recent recontextualizations of postmodern architecture that place politics and economics on equal footing with aesthetics. Critical in this genre is Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman's edited collection *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern*, which offers a panorama of global attitudes toward the remains of the modernist project in the late twentieth century.[24] Likewise, Reinhold Martin's book *Utopia's Ghost* depicts postmodern architecture as interlaced with the forces of global capitalism despite its foolhardy claims to aesthetic autonomy.[25] Extending that argument, this dissertation

[22] Magali Sarfatti Larson, "Emblem and Exception: The Historical Definition of the Architect's Professional Role," Judith R. Blau, Mark La Gory, and John Pipkin, eds., *Professionals and Urban Form* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 49–86.
[23] Peggy Deamer, ed., *The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class, and the Politics of Design* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). Peggy Deamer, ed., *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2014). Meanwhile, the Lobby's pamphlet *Asymmetric Labors* has spurred reflection on my own status and labor within academia. Aaron Cayer et al., eds., *Asymmetric Labors: The Economy of Architecture in Theory and Practice* (Brooklyn: The Architecture Lobby, 2016).
[24] Crinson and Zimmerman, *Neo-Avant-Garde and Postmodern*.
[25] Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

suggests that some architects viewed aesthetic autonomy as an effective way to contend with, if not quite resist, their interpellation into American corporate capitalism.[26]

Analyzing Birkerts's architectural practice under the interlocking rubrics of authorial signature and professional method, the dissertation both supplements and interrogates these bodies of literature. The dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, "The Hardness of the Material," addresses how Birkerts's education and apprenticeship—which would later form the linchpin of his firm's marketing appeal—informed the design of the University Reformed Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan (1962-64). A deceptively simple concrete basilica with clever natural lighting, this early design was said to be an assertion of Birkerts's emergence from the shadows of Saarinen and Yamasaki—under whom he was apprenticed during the 1950s. Chapter 1 uses this design to reveal his beliefs about what constituted an architect's work and uncovers the biographical privileges and opportunities that enabled an immigrant with an accent to feel "destined" for success as an architect in the postwar US. David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* provides a useful counterpoint, showing how Birkerts's "inner-directed" nature may have led him to seek respite from interpersonal complexities in "hard" material matters of process and design technique, over which he retained unquestioned authority.

The second chapter, "Freedom and Flexibility," focuses on Birkerts's campus plan for Tougaloo College (1965-66)—a Historically Black College (HBCU) in Jackson, Mississippi. Despite his assertion of originality and independence, Birkerts's design for Tougaloo was molded by the images and ideas available to him through publications and personal relationships. Numerous stated and unstated sources for the Tougaloo design

[26] I am using 'interpellation' in Louis Althusser's sense, that ideology "hails" subjects, at once constituting their identities and making clear their lack of autonomy. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014).

help map the diverse networks into which Birkerts was linked at this time. Chapter 2 also shows how architecture, for a brief time in the 1960s, was pressed into service to help overcome the systematic oppression of minority subjects. Flexibility was a key concept in both the pedagogical and architectural attempts to transform Tougaloo into "the Harvard of the South." Ultimately, these architectural forms of flexibility were not as conducive to other kinds of freedom as they were intended to be. The Tougaloo episode contextualizes the self-fashioning recounted in Chapter 1, showing how the mythology of creative autonomy provides an inadequate account of architecture's inputs and outcomes, particularly during a period dominated by post-WWII, late modern protocols.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Minnesota (1967-73) is the focus of the third chapter, "Protocols of Process and Expression." A close reading of the design and construction process reveals the impact that the bank's management structures had on Birkerts's relatively small architectural firm and its working methods. Declining to subcontract (and thereby delegate some control to) another, more experienced firm, Birkerts instead brought on new staff and increased his firm's capacity while fighting to maintain the strict oversight of design decisions to which he was accustomed. Chapter 3 reveals the hierarchies and subordinations that underwrote Birkerts's self-fashioning and casts light on the history of overlooked but impactful project delivery protocols including the Critical Path Method and Construction Management. Chapter 3 traces the entanglements that accompanied institutional commissions in this period, providing a graphic demonstration of the degree to which Birkert's notion of the solo practitioner was at odds with the realities of an architect's complex tasks, most of them away from the drawing board. This chapter builds on Chapters 1 and 2 by revealing the complexities of

large building production, complexities that distracted from the architect's mythology about his own work.

The fourth and final chapter, "The Introspective Professional," uses Birkerts's addition to the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York (1972-81) as an entry point to his self-conscious writings on the architectural design process, which were published at the same time that his professional reputation had reached its apex. The Corning addition's expressive form is typical of his later projects, in which lyrical sketches came to be seen as the foremost reference point for all design decisions. This was the working method espoused in Birkerts's writings of the 1970s, which codified his years of professional experience as well as the pedagogy he had developed as a professor at the University of Michigan. The self-fashioning evident in these texts was critical in the market for professional services, enabling him to challenge powerful East Coast firms for commissions from influential, discerning clients. Chapter 4 closes by considering the unexpected validation of Birkerts's seemingly obsolete beliefs about architecture as the disciplinary landscape shifted around him. This chapter critically reveals the reasoning behind Birkerts's later emphasis on methodology and sketching, a conscious repositioning that responded simultaneously to a cultural turn toward myths of heroic artistry and to the increasing pressure he faced within a competitive market. The correspondence of deregulation within the architectural profession and a general economic downturn had immediate and transformative effects on the philosophy and practice of architectural offices like GBA—in effect, they took refuge in their entrepreneurial naïveté and steep professional hierarchy.

A brief conclusion discusses the installation of GBA plaques as literal signatures on some later buildings, an unusual and highly suggestive practice that made permanent the place of the architect in a time of rapid change.

In sum, this dissertation argues that the increasing importance of business practices including marketing drove Birkerts and other individualist architects to adopt managerial protocols that distanced them from the aspects of practice they saw as their unique purview, namely schematic design, while also requiring them to build refined identities for marketing purposes, which they often did through aesthetic novelty or signature style, publications in architectural media, and academic platforms. Their retreat from social engagement into a rediscovered disciplinary autonomy can't be understood without considering the deregulation of the professional structures on which American architecture had come to depend. Adopting the stance of the artist was, in the end, a way to market the architect's worth and keep the profession from succumbing to redundancy.

Birkerts resisted Postmodernism's commercial appeal while reveling in the recovery of authorial privilege that came with it. Stubbornly maintaining an outsider status while striving for insider success, Birkerts took a staunchly individualist—and therefore stereotypically American—path through the late twentieth century. His example shows how the artist-architect ideal was enlisted in a transformation of the profession that at once rejected the bureaucratic model pioneered by Late Modernist architects and allowed for the delamination of once-unified realms of practice into nearly autonomous domains.

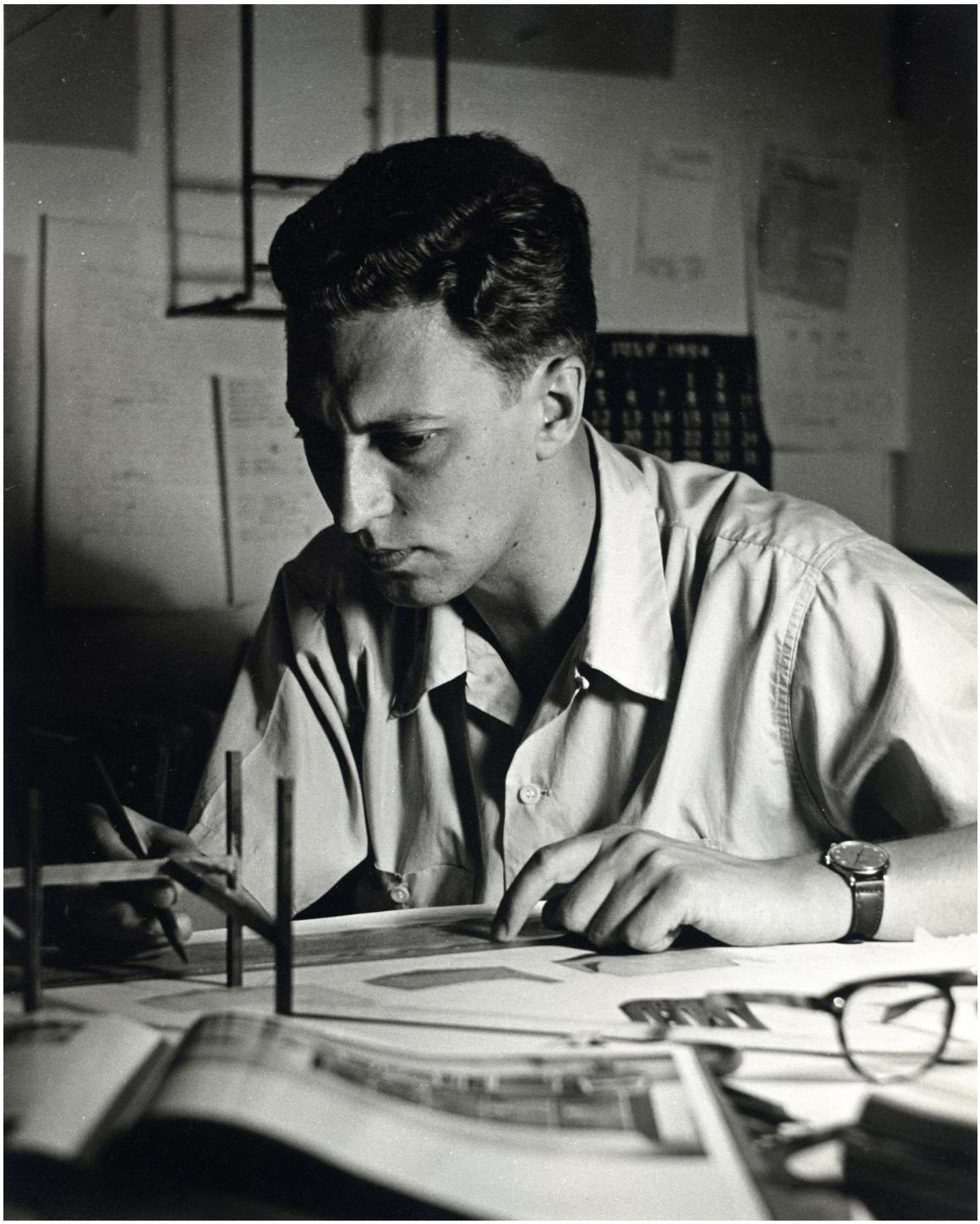

Figure 0.01 Gunnar Birkerts at work on furniture designs, 1955. Black and white photographic print, 8 x 10 inches. Box 1, Gunnar Birkerts Papers (GBP), Bentley Historical Library (BHL), University of Michigan.

Figure 0.02 Gunnar Birkerts in his studio at 288 Haynes Street, Birmingham, Michigan, October 1983. Black and white photographic print, 8 x 10 inches. Collection of the author. Photograph by Richard Lee, *Detroit Free Press*.

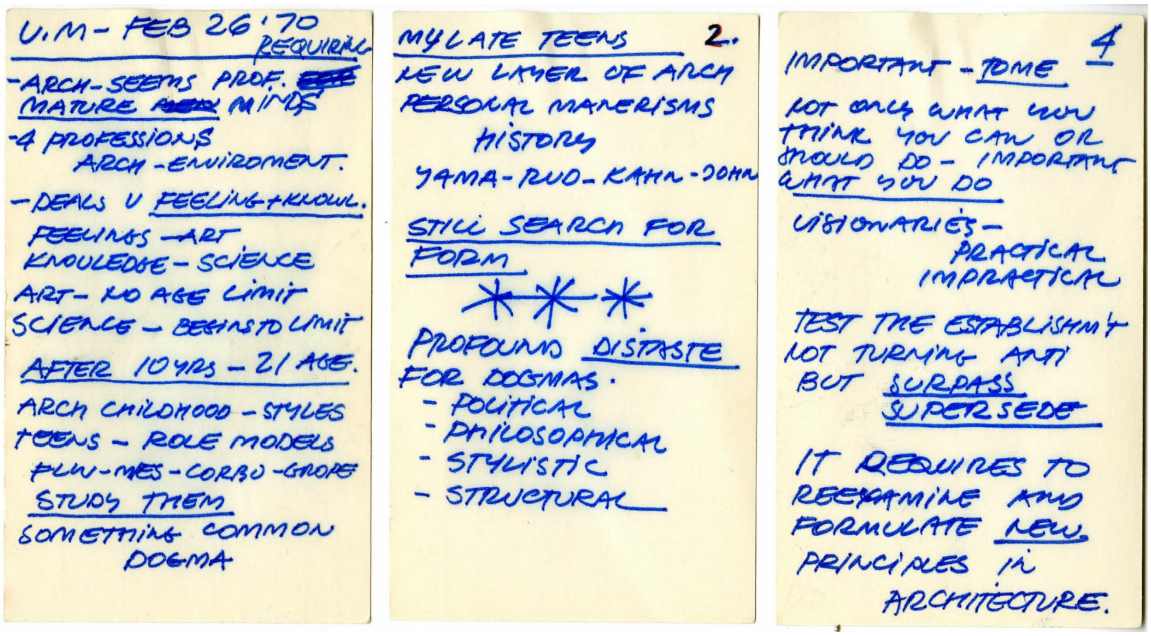

Figure 0.03 Lecture notes for remarks at Raoul Wallenburg Symposium, University of Michigan College of Architecture, February 26, 1970. Box 1, GBP, BHL, University of Michigan.

CHAPTER 1 (BEGINNINGS)

'The Hardness of the Material': University Reformed Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1962-64

> *[An] interest in beginnings is often the corollary result of not believing that any beginning can be located.*
>
> – Edward Said[1]

> *[Don't] we act as if merely coming after what was, we are somehow superior? It is the job of education eventually to convince us otherwise, to make us understand … we are so much smarter than our forebears because they are what we know.*
>
> – Sven Birkerts[2]

When asked to reflect on the course of his career as an architect, Birkerts has attributed great importance to his design for the University Reformed Church (URC) in Ann Arbor, Michigan (1962-64, Figure 1.01). In his view, this project "came at a very important time", when he was beginning to muster the confidence to step out from the shadows of his former employers Eero Saarinen and Minoru Yamasaki in search of his own "signature."[3] This simple statement reveals some of the preconceptions Birkerts held about modern architecture and his place within it. Whereas many of his American contemporaries were willing to efface their identities through collaborative, corporate practice or by hewing close to the example set by modernist masters, Birkerts had instead inculcated a firm commitment to the architect's individual authorship. The URC was an

[1] Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 5.
[2] Sven Birkerts, *My Sky Blue Trades: Growing up Counter in a Contrary Time* (New York: Viking, 2002), 13.
[3] William Marlin and Yukio Futagawa, eds., *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates* (Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. Edita, 1982), 52.

early example of that individuality's emergence and articulation. For its designer, the URC was a demonstration of independence and authorial autonomy. These qualities were manifest in both its materials and its form. Because of its symbolically rich and historically determined building type, the search for originality in this church design tested Birkerts's expressive abilities—as well as his professionalism and capacity for collaboration.

A compact concrete basilica, the building is sited where Fletcher Street terminates into Huron Avenue on the north end of the University of Michigan's central campus. On axis with Fletcher, the building's cast-in-place concrete south wall looms over the intersection. This monolithic wall is framed by concrete slabs that appear to telescope upward as they transition from aisle to nave, and it is capped by an exaggerated pair of cantilevered blocks at its top. All sides of the church are made entirely of exposed concrete.[4] Formwork was carefully aligned with crenellated stiffeners along the upper edge of the telescoping slabs to subtly reduce the monolithic character of the east and west walls (Figure 1.02).

The site is slender at only fifty feet wide, stretching from Huron on the south to East Ann Street on the north. Entry to the building is via a square narthex midway between these streets intended as a transition from the worship space on the south and a planned education wing to the north, which was never completed. The narthex is dominated by an assertive, cruciform structure made of paired concrete columns and beams, and is lit by a square skylight where the beams meet (Figure 1.03). From the

[4] One might take this as evidence of a Brutalist strain within Birkerts's early work, but in his case, concrete was used to achieve a kind of immaterial abstraction rather than an "as found" or honest use of material. Evidence of this is Birkerts's dissatisfaction with the quality of concrete surface achieved by the contractor on the south-facing exterior wall. He wanted a consistent coloration and texture, but got variation and irregularity instead.

narthex, congregants access the main level of the worship space either directly through double doors in the center or indirectly through slender passageways along its east and west walls. A small choir-and-organ loft is accessed by symmetrical stair flights on either side of the double entry door.

Within the worship space, the concrete slabs visible on the exterior are revealed as unusually thin beams and columns spanning a unified space comprising nave and aisles (Figure 1.04).[5] Light enters in the gaps between these slabs, through skylights placed within the crenellations above and through slender, translucent openings facing south. This strategy alleviates the need to puncture the east and west walls to create a conventional clerestory, allowing the walls to remain monolithic. The crenellations also align with a series of roof beams proportioned as if the structure were heavy timber as in traditional basilicas. Reiterating this effect, the ceiling between these beams is clad in wood. The crenellations and beams limit glare by shading the skylights, and the lighting is thereby diffuse and ethereal.

The raised chancel area, also built of wood, is asymmetrically outfitted with built-in seating for the clergy and lay speakers alongside a large cross, all in light-stained oak. Seating surfaces on the chancel were covered with a burgundy fabric—by far the most saturated color in the entire worship space—evoking the Communion wine that was shared there. The pews, pulpit, altar, and kneelers were custom-designed. The pulpit and altar were originally located atop the chancel but were later reinstalled longitudinally in front of it, possibly to disrupt the formality of an otherwise severe sanctuary and perhaps

[5] Birkerts worked with Ann Arbor-based structural engineer Robert Darvas, his colleague at the University of Michigan's College of Architecture and an expert in reinforced concrete construction, to design these deep-but-thin beams. Darvas was Birkerts's preferred structural consultant and collaborator until he was supplanted by the revered Leslie Robertson of Skilling, Helle, Christiansen, Robertson for work on the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis building discussed in Chapter 3.

also to alleviate the need for elderly congregants to climb steps to receive Communion (Figure 1.05). In this revised arrangement, the altar served as the focal point for strangely arranged pews. In the front area, pews were oriented perpendicular to the chancel to face toward the altar. The rest of the pews were left in two rows facing toward the chancel.

The telescoping motif he used in the URC design seems to have been initially developed it for Grace Lutheran in Albion, Michigan (1960, Figure 1.06), an unbuilt project, where it was a great deal more exaggerated. There, in ten steps, planes transitioned between a relatively low-lying atrium and a vertical element behind the altar to give the building more presence on its suburban site. The motif was also used in a design for a grocery store dating from 1962 (Figure 1.07).[6] For the URC, which is located in a more urban setting, the stepping motif enabled a gradual transition between a central, nave-like space and the lower, aisle-like areas on either side. It also permitted natural light to enter indirectly through skylights placed between each stepped wall.

Grace Lutheran and the grocery store were designed while Birkerts was in a professional partnership with Frank Straub as Birkerts & Straub. It was during the course of the URC project and perhaps because of disagreements about it that this partnership was dissolved, raising the stakes for Birkerts as this was therefore the first building completed independently under his own firm, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates (GBA).

It is in the URC's detailing that Birkerts most clearly asserted his individuality. Unlike in previous buildings or in his work at Minoru Yamasaki and Associates (MYA), he deliberately avoided elaborating the joints between forms, materials, or systems, attempting to hide these from sight as much as possible. These qualities align with a

[6] Consciously or unconsciously, Birkerts may have appropriated this telescoping motif from Eliel Saarinen, who had used it at various scales and in various materials throughout his work on the Cranbrook campus, which, by his own admission, was Birkerts's favorite weekend respite.

muscular, overtly masculine strain of modernism and contrasts with the weightless, seemingly effete work of MYA—characteristics that led Reyner Banham to count Yamasaki as a member of an imagined "Ballet School."[7]

While this reductive attitude toward details may have been liberating after a half-decade spent developing ornate material systems on behalf of the man Birkerts called "Yama," it made the building's skylights problematic. Situated in the hollows between the URC's concrete crenellations, these skylights were imagined simply as double-glazed units fixed in place by gravity and polyurethane sealant. No allowance was made in the detail for freeze-thaw cycles or for the expansion and contraction of the concrete as it cured. The detail was designed so improperly that the glass manufacturer refused to provide a warranty longer than twelve months.[8] Specifically, the manufacturer pointed out that it depended too much on the impermeability of two synthetic sealants, which would fail even with perfect installation. As the contractor Henry de Koning put it in a letter outlining the process of reinstallation in 1965, "The glass is going to leak in time, we all know, as there is too much expansion and contraction in the concrete which will pull the thiokol [a trademarked sealant] and open the joints and may not shrink back."[9] Nevertheless, the skylights were installed. As the manufacturer anticipated, they leaked almost immediately after the building's completion, damaging the church's furniture and

[7] On Banham's gendered and homophobic "Ballet School" critique, see Dale Allen Gyure, *Minoru Yamasaki: Humanist Architecture for a Modernist World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 155–57. Gyure characterizes this critique as typical of many who saw Yamasaki's work as primarily decorative and therefore an emasculated version of modernism.
[8] Henry de Koning to Lawrence Ulrich Tripp & Barense [legal council for University Reformed Church], April 19, 1965, "University Reformed Church Correspondence In, 1964-1967," Box 1, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[9] Henry de Koning to Gunnar Birkerts & Associates, April 7, 1965, "University Reformed Church Correspondence In, 1964-1967," Box 1, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

carpeting. Ultimately, the skylights were reinstalled twice in the first two years of the building's life, and continue to be a chronic issue.[10]

Birkerts encountered further problems with URC's exposed concrete. The construction schedule required that casting of the building's signature south-facing wall occur during the winter months. The architects instructed the contractor on how to maintain a consistent coloration by heating the materials prior to mixing and providing a protective covering during curing, but the contractors evidently failed to do so.[11] This resulted in uneven curing time and irregular striping on the key south-facing elevation. Unsurprisingly, the architect sued, claiming that contractors were liable for both the improper concrete casting and for installing the skylights incorrectly, despite the warning signs offered by glass manufacturers.

Despite these shortcomings in its detailing, the URC was recognized as a unique statement that announced its architect's emergence on the national scene. Its beguiling south wall appeared on the cover of the September 1964 issue of *Progressive Architecture* (Figure 1.08), in which it and other Birkerts buildings were included in an article inside titled "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts" (Figure 1.09).[12] Strikingly, given this title, discussion of Birkerts's "thoughts and works" was preceded by eleven paragraphs of biographical contextualization. We learn that "political turmoil" led him on a Westward trajectory from his birthplace in Riga, Latvia, "borne westward with the sweep of the Soviet armies

[10] The church building's current occupants, the Harvest Mission Community Church, have completely covered over the skylights to overcome this problem. The space is lit entirely artificially.
[11] Sections 4-6 and 4-7, "University Reformed Church Specifications, 9/18/62," Box 1, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[12] Jan C. Rowan, ed., "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts," *Progressive Architecture* 45, no. 9 (September 1964): 172–91.

to Stuttgart." He therefore numbered among the millions of Displaced Persons (DPs) who were forced from their homes by WWII. After an architectural education at Stuttgart, Birkerts's decision to immigrate to the United States was influenced by his outsize respect for the work of Eliel Saarinen and his son Eero, who he was said to have visited immediately after arriving. His having "arrived at Eero's house unannounced only to find that there was no opening for him in the Saarinen office" reveals youthful naïveté and overconfidence. A brief interregnum in Chicago ended with his being called back to Bloomfield Hills and the Saarinen firm. After several years under Eero, another brief, downplayed period spent in Milwaukee ended with a return to the Detroit area to work in firm of Minoru Yamasaki. Rising to chief designer and eventually promoted to principal there, he headed several well-known building projects while moonlighting on competitions. Eventually his extracurricular successes led to a departure from Yamasaki & Associates to establish a partnership with Frank Straub—who had also been a principal with Yamasaki—a classic managing partner who balanced Birkerts's design ambitions with practical expertise. The partnership was dissolved after four years in 1963, when both went into independent practice. Humanized by relatively personal touches, this "origin story" includes all the basic elements that have made up Birkerts's subsequent biographical statements.

Following this biography, *P/A*'s article describes Birkerts's persistent search for sources of inspiration, including a recent pilgrimage to Finland to see the work of Alvar Aalto and weekly walks with his family on the Cranbrook Academy of Art campus near his home in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. These personal details read as sincere if somewhat contrived. Embracing such eminent influences from the recent past or foreign

present suggested a disinterest in or dismissal of trends popular among his American peers, further underlining Birkerts's independence and perhaps even iconoclasm.[13]

P/A situated Birkerts among a group of immigrants they believed would shape the future course of architecture, like an earlier generation of "men of strong convictions who fled from hostile governments—men such as Gropius, Breuer, Mies, Mendelsohn, and Sert."[14] Foreign origin and relative assimilation were likewise central to the position of these elder modernists. *P/A* contended that the URC and other projects symbolized Birkerts's emergence as one of a group of singular immigrant voices in American architecture "whose capabilities are only now coming to light."[15] He and his supporters felt that the personal story of desperation and displacement that had brought him to suburban Detroit justified his place in this esteemed company and might help to explain his designs to *P/A*'s readers.

This early article illustrates how important Birkerts's biography was to his positioning within architecture culture, and its unusually personal emphasis makes this biography worth investigating in detail. Two key questions arise: first, why was Birkerts's biography made so prominent? Second, how exactly were readers expected to perceive a connection between biography and building designs? To help answer these questions, I will provide a firm, fact-based biographical chronology based on archival documents and secondary scholarship, while situating Birkert's biography in its architectural, intellectual, and historical contexts more firmly than existing treatments. This contextualization will reveal the advantages and privileges—the conditions of his

[13] He nevertheless did look closely at the work of his contemporaries and stayed abreast of contemporary architectural discourse, as is demonstrated in Chapter II.
[14] Rowan, "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts," 172.
[15] The rest of this group remained nameless, but was perhaps thought to include the journal's own editor, Jan C. Rowan. Rowan, 172.

entrance, to use a term from George Kubler's lexicon—that enabled Birkerts to find the success for which he felt he was fated.

The Latvian WWII Experience

Central to Birkerts's biography is the moment of his displacement by advancing Soviet forces near the end of WWII. Understanding this aspect of the story requires background on the status of Latvia and Latvians during the war years, and the fate of Latvian Displaced Persons (DPs) afterward. Birkerts was among hundreds of thousands of Latvians who fled to Germany in 1944. With hindsight, their fear of the Soviets may seem irrational when compared to the violent, racist authoritarianism practiced by their Nazi occupiers, but Latvia has for centuries been subject to imperialist conquests—a land traded back and forth between their more powerful Russian and German neighbors. Latvians were and still are perpetually conscious of living on the frontier between empires.

The nation had a brief period of self-determination between the world wars, when, following the Treaty of Versailles, Latvia and a number of other small European nations established independent democratic governments. Birkerts was born during this moment of national independence to parents who were active in the consolidation and documentation of Latvian cultural patrimony. His father Peteris Birkerts—who left his mother shortly before Gunnar's birth—was a prolific author of books on law, psychology, art, and folklore, "ambitious syntheses of important trends in European and American intellectual life," in the words of his grandson.[16] The father had spent several

[16] Sven Birkerts and Martin Schwartz, *Gunnar Birkerts: Metaphoric Modernist* (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2009), 9.

years in the US early in the century, studying at Valparaiso and Columbia then practicing as a lawyer in Chicago before returning to Riga. It's said that although Peteris resided in nearby Jūrmala with his brother after leaving his young family, the father and son never met.[17] Still, the parents' strong interest in indigenous and national traditions was important to Birkerts and made its way into his work.

Latvia's fragile independence ended on June 17, 1940, when, after the collapse of a Mutual Assistance Pact with the USSR, Soviet forces entered Latvia as occupiers. A "year of terror" followed, during which nearly 35,000 Latvians were murdered, disappeared, or were deported to Stalin's Gulag. Germany invaded in June 1941 as part of Operation Barbarossa, and the Nazis were seen by many as liberators after twelve brutal months under the Soviets. As in other regions of Europe, the Nazi rule that followed left Latvia's Jewish population decimated. Some anti-Semitic Latvians participated in the detention and murder of Latvian Jews, but resistance to Nazi directives was frequent, particularly in the country's cosmopolitan capital, Riga.

This was a complex and fraught period for ethnic Latvians. Many experienced more freedom under the Nazis than they had under Soviet rule because among the German-occupied peoples, ethnic Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians comprised a relatively privileged group. This relative privilege exempted them from the unfortunate fates of those considered either lower or higher in the Nazi racial hierarchy. They were spared military conscription because of their subordinate place compared to ethnic Germans, (though many Latvians did voluntarily fight on behalf of the Wehrmacht), but were higher in that same hierarchy than Eastern European Slavs, leaving them exempt

[17] Birkerts and Schwartz, 9.

from kidnapping into forced labor in Germany.[18] Moreover, they were excepted from the suppression of national culture and education that faced Slavs under Nazi rule, and were permitted relative autonomy and self-determination in those realms.

This enabled Latvians of Birkerts's generation to maintain a semblance of normalcy despite the war raging elsewhere. Still, the experience of the war was, as Tony Judt wrote, "a daily degradation, in the course of which men and women were betrayed and humiliated, forced into daily acts of petty crime and self-abasement, in which everyone lost something and many lost everything."[19] Sven Birkerts found his father reticent to talk about the war experience, but from his meager reflections concluded that "a numbed sort of survival mentality took over. He and his friend August [Grasis] scrapped ingeniously for food and necessary goods. But underneath the chaos and the numbness of loss the idea of architecture survived."[20] Despite the war's privations, Latvian youth were allowed to continue their education under Nazi rule, which Birkerts did, passing his final examinations to complete his diploma at an English-language *gymnasium* in April 1944.

Birkerts's commencement occurred just as the Soviets launched an offensive to retake the Baltic region. Battles raged in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania through the summer of 1944. Meanwhile chaos reigned in Riga, to which hundred of thousands of refugees had fled from the east. The situation became even more desperate when the Soviet bombing of Riga began on September 17 and continued until the Red Army

[18] Estimates of the number of Latvians who fought for the Germans run between 110,000 and 150,000. See: Valdis O. Lumans, *Latvia in World War II* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 296.
[19] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 41.
[20] Birkerts and Schwartz, *Metaphoric Modernist*, 11. August Grasis also emigrated to the US, and was twice a Birkerts client—first for a house near Chicago in the early 1950s that is usually excluded from Birkerts's oeuvre, and later for a vacation house in Vail, Colorado in the 1990s.

entered the city on October 12.[21] By then, the Wehrmacht, Latvian refugees, and many Riga residents had fled. Departing Riga, what remained of Germany's Army Group North resisted the Soviet advance in Western Latvia until the close of the war in May 1945 in what became known as "Fortress Kurland." While they held out, 250,000 Latvian refugees took shelter there.[22]

It was during the trying summer of 1944 that Birkerts fled Riga. Documents suggest that he left his home city as early as July 1944, but information is scant.[23] The mass evacuation of civilians from Latvia began in August, but the rate of departure increased dramatically in late September, when Nazi authorities announced that *all* Latvians were to be evacuated to the Reich. Able-bodied men and women were prioritized because of their ability to fight or work in munitions factories (desperation had by then undone the fragile racial hierarchy), leading to a situation in which the unwilling young were effectively kidnapped and placed directly on ships, while desperate and willing refugees—including families with children, or the elderly—languished. Nevertheless, in the closing months of 1944 and early 1945, hundreds of thousands of Latvians boarded ships bound for Germany.[24]

They feared not only the war's violence but also an expected political and cultural purge by the Soviets. Whether because of national pride or to avoid subjection to a Stalinist regime, very few of these refugees wanted to return home to Latvia after the

[21] The Russians' unexpectedly rapid advance had spared the city from sabotage at the hands of the retreating Germans, though Riga's two main bridges crossing the Daugava River were dynamited to slow their enemies.
[22] Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, 333–40.
[23] A Military Government questionnaire submitted as part of Birkerts's application to TH Stuttgart indicated that he was employed as a building manager or handyman from April to July 1944, and that his employment was terminated because of the approach of combat. "Military Government of Germany—Fragebogen (Undated)," Gunārs Birkerts Student Dossier, University of Stuttgart Archives.
[24] Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, 346–49. Though the exact number is unknown, estimates for the number of Latvian refugees reaching Germany run from 120,000 to 300,000.

German defeat. These Latvians were assigned the then-current bureaucratic label Displaced Persons (DPs) by the United Nations, making up a significant component of the many millions in Germany. Historian Ben Shephard has written that once the guns went silent, "the war's most important legacy was a refugee crisis."[25] This crisis lasted roughly five years, from 1945 to 1950, during which more than a million DPs like Birkerts were resettled in non-Axis nations across the world.

Each ethnic group recorded their own version of the war and its aftermath. These stories were marked by a kind of "competitive victimhood" that emphasized certain traumatic events while deemphasizing collaboration.[26] The Latvians' story played up the bravery of the "Latvian Legion" while downplaying the fact that these legionnaires fought on behalf of the Nazis. It furthermore emphasized the cultural flowering during Latvia's brief period of independence and stressed the Soviet "year of terror" while setting aside the condescension and oppression they faced during German rule. On the whole, Latvians' selective cultural memory meant postwar Soviet occupiers were demonized to a greater degree than the defeated Germans. It should come as no surprise, then, that anti-communism was a defining mindset among Latvian DPs and later among the Latvian cultural diaspora.

In a strange echo of their treatment by the Germans, Latvians' compatibility with Western anti-communist political ideology meant they had certain advantages among DPs. Shephard has written that they "from the start enjoyed a privileged status [and] soon showed themselves adept at exploiting the system and taking advantage of the occupiers' ignorance of what had gone on in Eastern Europe." Added to this, occupying soldiers

[25] Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 4.
[26] Shephard, 6.

from Western countries "felt a strong—almost racial—affinity with the 'Balts'—They were educated, well-dressed people, often middle class, many speaking perfect English, with their families intact."[27] This gave them a higher standing than groups who had been demoralized by their experiences as prisoners and forced laborers, or as inmates of concentration camps. Baltic DPs like Birkerts were also perceived to have "made the best of DP life" at least partly because of their aforementioned advantages.[28] Unlike other ethnic groups, Baltic "national pride" had been unbroken by the war, and they worked tirelessly to maintain cultural traditions during their time in DP camps.[29] This was especially true for Latvians because of the cosmopolitan makeup of their DP population—it has been estimated that close to 70 percent of the country's writers, artists, musicians and actors fled the anticipated Soviet cultural purge, making up a much larger share among Latvian DPs than they had in their home country's population.[30]

Unlike Yugoslavians and Ukranians (to cite only two contrary national examples) Baltic DPs were also protected from forced repatriation to their homelands—even though their nations were similarly occupied by the Soviet Union and subsequently formalized as socialist republics. While the Yalta Agreement of February 1945 declared that Soviet citizens should be returned to their homelands, it did not strictly define what it meant to be a Soviet citizen. Latvians avoided this fate because the Allies decided to limit such citizenship to those living within the USSR's borders as of the outbreak of war, or September 1, 1939. This bureaucratic declaration excluded Poles and Baltic nationals

[27] Shephard, 160. Birkerts spoke English and attended an English *gymnasium* in Riga.
[28] Shephard, 288.
[29] Shephard, 288–90.
[30] This estimate cited in: Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 160.

from repatriation. More than 5 million Soviet DPs from other nations were eventually sent back, often by force, only to be greeted by highly skeptical interrogators.[31]

These and other factors contributed to Latvian DPs like Birkerts being seen as desirable immigrants. Cynically seeking "good breeding stock," countries like the US sought to fulfill their baseline obligations to the international community while taking in as many of these most desirable DPs as possible. The legislation governing this process was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, a law compromised by nativist impulses that expanded the pool of potential immigrants to include "German expellees" from countries including Latvia. Restrictions also dictated that sponsors of immigrants provide guarantees of housing and employment to prevent them from becoming "public charges." In the end, more than 70 percent of DPs admitted to the US had been displaced from the territories of the USSR and Eastern Europe, and more than half were, like Birkerts, under thirty years of age. Birkerts was a rarity among immigrants admitted under the DP program in that he attended college. Only one in fourteen had received such advanced schooling.[32]

Riga, Nördlingen, Stuttgart

While histories of the DP experience largely focus on those who occupied camps, as many as 40% lived outside them in German cities and towns. Birkerts counted among this latter group. In 1945 (and perhaps well into 1946), he resided in the Bavarian town Nördlingen with the family of August Grasis. Subsequently, he relocated to Stuttgart to

[31] Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, 84.
[32] Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 98–112, Statistics on 110.

enroll at the Technische Hochschule. These two German cities joined Riga as the European locales to leave deep imprints on the young Birkerts.

Because of its importance as a Balkan trading center, Riga was a cosmopolitan locale during the decades leading up to WWII, both culturally and architecturally. Centuries of trade had brought a diverse array of nationalities and professions to the city, and this diversity made it more dynamic than other Baltic cities. A visit to the city in 1922, for example, exposed Finnish architect Alvar Aalto to the kind of internationalism he hoped would emerge in twentieth-century Europe. Aalto believed Riga's seemingly organic urban form worked in tandem with its cultural internationalism. Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen has written that for Aalto, Riga "could not be reduced to a single symbolic center or building to be contemplated, but had to be understood as a complex, intoxicating matrix that overwhelmed the visitor … a kind of sublime monster that could be experienced only in its overwhelming totality."[33] The organic, cosmopolitan wholeness of Riga both physically and culturally inspired Aalto to commit to the project of European integration.

Riga's central core is a 14th century Hanseatic city with a disorienting irregular plan, but successive waves of development brought order to its outer edges. In the first decade of the 20th century, for example, cultural institutions and parks were built on the eastern and northern edges of the old city, forming a band of wide boulevards, monumental architecture, and green space akin to Vienna's Ringstrasse. As one of the key port cities of the Russian Empire in the years prior to WWI, Riga expanded rapidly in the 1900s and 1910s. The Centrs district immediately outside the cultural ring was a

[33] Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, *Alvar Aalto: Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 83–84.

hotbed of experimental architecture during these decades. Architects like Mikhail Eisenstein (father of the film director Sergei), for example, developed a regional take on Jugendstil that drew in equal parts from industry and nature for its decorative elements (Figure 1.10). Birkerts lived with his mother in the Centrs district until he fled to Germany. Surrounded as he was by the kind of decorative encrustation typical of Art Nouveau and National Romaticist architecture, stripped-down modernist surfaces would have carried a novelty for him that they may not have for residents of other locales.

The Centrs district also had its share of more traditional architecture. The URC design has certain similarities to Old St. Gertrude, a mid-19th century Lutheran church located just two blocks from Birkerts's boyhood home (Figure 1.11). Like the URC, its east facade serves as the visual terminus of a street, telescoping forward and upward to meet it. Recollections of this distinctive formal solution may have informed Birkerts's design.

The engrossing organic wholeness Aalto experienced in Riga was similar to Birkerts's own experience of Nördlingen. While this rural Bavarian town was far from cosmopolitan, its peculiar origins made it formally suggestive. Nördlingen's heart is nestled in an ancient crater, and in a plan view its arrangement of streets, monuments, and city walls appear like a single-cell organism (Figure 1.12). For those attuned to this kind of experience, the sense of organic totality was confirmed by on-the-ground experience. Danish architecture theorist Steen Eiler Rasmussen, for example, described his experience of Nördlingen thusly:

> Your first glimpse of it, after having passed through the town gate, gives you the conception of a town consisting of identical houses with pointed gables facing the street and dominated by a huge church. And as you penetrate further into the town

> your first impression is confirmed. Nowhere do you stop and say: 'It should be seen from here.'[34]

Nördlingen was largely unaffected by Allied bombing or ground battles during the war, but Stuttgart had been heavily bombed on multiple occasions. While destruction there was not as widespread as it was in major Ruhr Valley cities like Cologne or Frankfurt, Stuttgart was still inundated with rubble and was, according to one estimate, about 33% destroyed.[35] Each of these German cities was presented with a choice to either remove or salvage the remains of their destroyed buildings. Stuttgart was unusually committed to and successful at reclaiming rubble. Nearly one quarter of the dwelling units constructed there by 1953 had been built using bricks, stone, and gravel salvaged or reprocessed from rubble.[36] Stuttgart also cleared its rubble comparatively quickly—88% had been removed by 1952.[37]

To enroll at the Technische Hochschule, Birkerts relocated to an address on the southern end of Stuttgart (6 Zimmermanstrasse) in 1946. From there, his commute to the TH would have brought him through the center of the city, where salvage, reconstruction, and redevelopment efforts were underway. The widespread damage prevented Birkerts from experiencing Stuttgart's urban form in the way that he had in Nördlingen, but some of its buildings nevertheless proved to be influential. The Technische Hochschule had been relocated from its heavily damaged building near the center of Stuttgart to space in art school buildings adjacent to the famous Weissenhof-Siedlung (Figure 1.13).

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[34] Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1959), 40. Birkerts owned this book and underlined Rasmussen's discussion of Nördlingen, yet it was most likely Rasmussen's illustration of the town that interested him most. For Birkerts, the town's organic quality perhaps resonated with Eliel Saarinen's use of biological metaphors as illustrations in Saarinen, *The City, Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future* (New York: Reinhold, 1943).
[35] Jeffry M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.
[36] Diefendorf, 28.
[37] Diefendorf, 29. Cologne, by comparison, had only removed 33% of its rubble by 1952.

A key landmark of interwar European modernism, the Weissenhof hosts residential buildings by many of the most revered architects of the period on a site planned by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Even among avowed modernists, the Weissenhof was not without controversy. Particularly tepid was its reception among Stuttgart's architects, most of whom were excluded from participation. The Weissenhof, then, was a site where fissures within the interwar Modern Movement originated and grew. The Stuttgart School split along these fault lines, with Weissenhof participants Richard Döcker (who served as site manager for the project) and Adolf Schneck on the one side and the more traditionalist architects including Paul Bonatz and Paul Schmitthenner on the other.

The Weissenhof survived the war without substantial damage, but did lose its innovative steel-framed house by Walter Gropius, which was destroyed by fire. This made it an invaluable teaching tool after the war, when Döcker ascended to head the Stuttgart architecture department ahead of the exiled Bonatz and the discredited Schmitthenner. Students like Birkerts were sent to the Weissenhof to measure, draw, and analyze extant buildings by, among others, Le Corbusier, Mies, J.J.P. Oud, and Döcker himself, who designed two of its single-family houses.

Postwar Pedagogy at the Technische Hochschule Stuttgart

Touring West Germany in the late 1950s to research his book *The Voice of the Phoenix*, American academic John Burchard found that "the most striking thing" about German architectural education was "the relation of the leading architects to the schools: Most of them are genuine working professors while carrying on practices which are rewarding

enough, too."[38] This balanced model was unfamiliar to him because successful American architects typically visited schools only sparingly, leaving the everyday instruction to assistants when they taught at all. Burchard singled out Stuttgart's Rolf Gutbrod as an exemplary figure who he believed struck an enviable balance between teaching and practice. Burchard admired Gutbrod not only because his architecture was highly original, but also because his teaching was nondogmatic. This meant he avoided forming a reverent band of imitators and sycophants—Gutbrod's students tended to be assertive individualists.

Gutbrod had only just begun his teaching career during Birkerts's time at TH Stuttgart, but his influence, at least on Birkerts, was nevertheless significant. As Birkerts's informal mentor and thesis supervisor, he encouraged Birkerts to prioritize design over more technical concerns in his final project, a museum of art in Stuttgart. In the end, however, the example Gutbrod provided was personal more than aesthetic. Birkerts was put off by the eclectic materials and organic forms of his mentor's competition-winning design for Stuttgart's Liederhalle (Figure 1.14), but nonetheless saw him as a role model because of his spirited entrepreneurialism and sophisticated personal lifestyle. For Birkerts, it seemed that Gutbrod "had everything … a successful practice, with important commissions—he had already built office buildings—and a strong personal style. He wore tailored tweeds and he drove a Lancia."[39] Moreover, Gutbrod's individualism allowed him to stay above the fray in the battle between ideological extremes that pervaded the Stuttgart faculty at that time. By adopting an individualist

[38] John Burchard, *The Voice of the Phoenix: Postwar Architecture in Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966), 5. Burchard found that some German architects spent 3/5 of their time teaching. Later in his career, Birkerts tried to strike a similar balance between practice and pedagogy, but found himself averse to the politics of academic life. He was never more than a part-time professor in the American mold.
[39] Gunnar Birkerts, quoted in Birkerts and Schwartz, *Metaphoric Modernist*, 12.

posture, he followed the path set out by his education: Gutbrod attended Rudolf Steiner's first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, which emphasized unstructured play, artistic expression, and empathy. He was later a protégé of the eminent Paul Bonatz at the TH.

Outside Gutbrod's studio, the architectural pedagogy at TH Stuttgart in Birkerts's time emphasized the pragmatic aspects of building. Despite disagreements about the proper character for German postwar building—namely whether it should be stylistically modern or traditional—both factions of the faculty had a commitment to this pragmatic form of pedagogy. An influential group known informally as the "Stuttgart School" had reformed the school during the prewar and interwar periods, refocusing the curriculum not on a particular style of design (or style in general) but instead on technical knowledge about construction practices. The key figures of this first Stuttgart School were Bonatz and Paul Schmitthenner. Both eventually became professors at the Technische Hochschule, and both were highly influenced by the most important Stuttgart figure of the previous generation, Theodor Fischer. Bonatz assumed Fischer's professorship at TH Stuttgart in 1908 after Fischer departed for Munich.

Over the next three and a half decades, even as he was essentially exiled to Turkey, Bonatz remained a mediating influence between the stylistic extremes of traditionalism and progressivism.[40] This is perhaps most clearly visible in his Main Train Station at Stuttgart (won through a competition in 1911 but not completed until 1927 after substantial redesign). Following Fischer, Bonatz's design rejected the monumentalism of imported styles and looked to vernacular traditions for design inspiration. The result was an asymmetrical grouping of straightforward, practical,

[40] Roland May, "Remigration: Postponed. The Architect Paul Bonatz between Turkey and Germany," *New German Critique*, no. 108 (2009): 7–8. May characterizes Bonatz's approach as an "antimodern modernity" or "moderate modern."

oversized spaces clad in rusticated stone (Figure 1.15). For Barbara Miller Lane, the Stuttgart station is illustrative of a larger tendency in German interwar architecture characterized by the "reduction of buildings into cubic masses and historicist ornament into stylized orderly pattern."[41] In line with his design practice's emphasis on reductive form and spare, matter-of-fact uses of material, Bonatz directed the rethinking of the TH Stuttgart curriculum so that it was no longer a "school of style" but instead a "school of construction."[42]

It was among Bonatz and Schmitthenner's students that disagreements about aesthetics and politics emerged. The two factions they formed—sometimes referred to as the Second Stuttgart School—kept alive a stylistic debate between traditionalism and modernism at TH Stuttgart through the 1950s. Both sides agreed, however, that the school's emphasis on technical proficiency over stylistic doctrine should be maintained. The leading Stuttgart modernist was Richard Döcker, who had been the only local architect asked to design for the Weissenhof. Döcker had subsequently turned against Bonatz in the early 1930s, after Bonatz declined to defend Döcker from denunciation to the Nazis. Discredited and marginalized, Döcker spent a decade largely out of architectural practice and academia. Appointed just after the war to a newly created professorship in town planning, Döcker shifted the curriculum to focus even more stringently on technical aspects of building, while also teaching courses in the planning of residential districts.

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[41] Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 16.

[42] Roland May, "Teaching and Building: Bonatz and the 'Stuttgart School,'" in Wolfgang Voigt and Roland May, eds., *Paul Bonatz 1877-1956* (Tübingen: Wasmuth Verlag, 2010), 69. Bonatz had decamped to Turkey in 1943, and the debate largely had to do with his continuing influence over the school.

On one side of the ideological divide, therefore, was the group Bonatz called the "Döcker gang," comprised of modernist designers including Schneck, Hugo Keuerleber and Rolf Gutbier who had allied themselves with Döcker. On the other was a group of traditionalist designers who followed the footsteps of Schmitthenner (who was permanently barred from teaching because of his close association with the Nazis), including Wilhelm Tiedje, Heinz Wentzel and the faculty's resident historian Harald Hanson. Several members of this latter cohort were temporarily suspended during denazification, but returned after only one or two years.[43] Birkerts's student records indicate that members of both factions of this second Stuttgart School played significant roles in his education.[44]

Of particular interest is Hanson, who was among those suspended for his connections to Schmitthenner and the Nazi party. Originally appointed to the TH in 1938, Hanson was a practitioner with an interest in the history of building practices and the conservation of historic buildings rather than an architectural historian. Unsurprisingly given his association with the technically oriented Stuttgart school, Hanson ascribed to the more pragmatic of two German pedagogical traditions in the history of architecture, *Bauforschung*, which emphasized technique and construction over style. Dietrich Neumann has differentiated this tradition known interchangeably as *Bauforschung* and *Baugeschichte* (building research or building history) from *Architekturgeschichte* (architectural history) by pointing to the latter's art historical methods that narrate

[43] Ibid.
[44] Birkerts's instructors included Schneck for interior architecture (*Innenausbau*), Keuerleber for technical courses covering topics like building materials and construction specifications (*Baustoffkunde*), Gutbier for housing (*Siedlungswesen*), Tiedje for technical drawing (*Techn. Zeichnen*) and design (*Entwerfen*), Wentzel for art history (*Kunstgeschichte*) and Döcker for courses on standardization, agricultural buildings, and urban planning.

stylistic change over time, and the former's foundation in archeological study of historic buildings. Neumann writes that departments teaching in the *Bauforschung* tradition

> [Are] more practice oriented, teach courses in surveying and measuring, and emphasize research on vernacular architecture, usually by examining the actual structure, or they teach ways of looking at architecture that privilege the typical over the exceptional, a history of long-range developments rather than architectural 'events," and so on.[45]

Birkerts completed courses titled *Baugeschichte*, *Bauforschung*, and *Bauaufnahme* (building documentation) taught by Hanson. It is likely, therefore, that he participated in surveys of Stuttgart's historic buildings that contributed to preservation and reconstruction efforts. Hanson's *Bauforschung* emphasis on documenting historic buildings and learning from historic building techniques suggests Birkerts may not have received the kind of stylistic survey typical at American schools of architecture.[46] His knowledge of historic buildings may have been confined to the subjects of Hanson's own research at the time of his education, but ideas imparted by instructors like Gutbrod, Keuerleber, Döcker and Günter Wilhelm (not to mention proximity to the Weissenhof) emphasized the primacy of contemporary modernism for architecture's future. The main ingredients of Birkerts's Stuttgart education, therefore, were a thorough understanding of the technical aspects of building construction and a commitment to the aesthetic project of modernism.

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[45] Dietrich Neumann, "Teaching the History of Architecture in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland: 'Architekturgeschichte' vs. 'Bauforschung,'" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 3 (2002): 374. Its commitment to *Baugeschichte* and *Bauforschung* differentiated TH Stuttgart from schools more indebted to the Bauhaus, which had included no instruction in either of the aforementioned traditions.

[46] Those holding Hanson's professorship in fact have a double mandate to act both within the school and as a consultant to the government preservation office. See "Das Institut 1938–1968 – Harald Hanson," http://www.ifag.uni-stuttgart.de/downloads/geschichte-ifag/hanson.pdf, Accessed 16 March 2017. In fact, the interwar Stuttgart School was recognized partly for its creative preservation of monuments, informed by the research of historians like Hanson but conducted by designers like Schmitthenner. Neumann notes that Hanson's connection to preservation groups is more typical of departments teaching architectural history or *Architekturgeschichte*. See: Neumann, 374.

These were the primary ingredients for postwar West German architecture. Despite the example of more flamboyant figures like Gutbrod, this so-called *Nachkriegsmoderne* was distinguished by its modesty and pragmatism.[47] Burchard, for example, found that "the first impression is of a Germany with a monotonous style of which the examples could be multiplied indefinitely, if not very well recalled." He attributed West German architecture's repetitiveness to the education of its architects, which, due to its firm grounding in engineering and science, formed a "restrained attitude with respect to innovations, sometimes too restrained."[48] Burchard's judgment may have been too swift. After the war, German architects were overwhelmed by urgent pragmatic needs, and knowledge necessary to meet these needs was, quite understandably, the primary goal of architectural training at the time. Allied bombing and ground warfare had devastated the country's building stock so thoroughly that the practice of architecture was, according to Ulrich Conrads, "an operation judged by quantity … a problem of statistics."[49] Moreover, the Nazis' enlisting of monumental architecture for propaganda purposes complicated its postwar status.

Because the education of many would-be architects had been delayed by the war, Birkerts recalls being one of the youngest members of his class at 21. His enrollment had been enabled a quota set by the occupying Allied powers that 10% of students at German universities were to be DPs. This status added cultural distance to his apparent

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[47] See: Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War*, 64–65. See also Roman Hillmann, *Die Erste Nachkriegsmoderne: Ästhetik Und Wahrnehmung Der Westdeutschen Architektur 1945–63* (Petersburg, Germany: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2011). Hillmann discusses Rolf Gutbrod extensively, particularly his LOBA-Haus office building in Stuttgart, completed in 1950 about two blocks from where Birkerts resided.

[48] Burchard, *Voice of the Phoenix*, 7. Burchard's book mentions developments in East Germany only in passing. He seems to have assumed that the GDR's architecture was derived from or determined by USSR formulas.

[49] Ulrich Conrads and Werner Marschall, *Modern Architecture in Germany*, trans. James Palmes (London: Architectural Press, 1962), 5.

philosophical isolation. Birkerts's feeling of relative youth and isolation was further reinforced by differing beliefs about what was most urgent for the architecture of postwar Germany. Though Birkerts's classmates at Stuttgart included notable German architects like Harald Deilmann, Günter Behnisch, Erwin Heinle, and Bruno Lambart, they seemed from his perspective overwhelmingly focused on pragmatic questions of reconstruction, and therefore primarily interested in obtaining useful technical knowledge at the expense of art. Because technical expertise was, at least by reputation, the pedagogical priority of the Stuttgart School, the TH must have attracted a large number of students who were highly motivated to contribute to their country's reconstruction.

Though he received several letters of support from Stuttgart faculty including his thesis supervisor Gutbrod, Birkerts's recommendation for employment with Saarinen seems actually to have come from Wilhelm.[50] At one time an apprentice of Heinrich Tessenow in Berlin, Wilhelm taught Birkerts as a student in his advanced course in building construction (*Baukonstruktionen II*) during the spring of 1949, Birkerts's penultimate term at the TH. Wilhelm had in 1948 taken over the chair in building construction once occupied by Schmitthenner. According to none other than Richard J. Neutra, Wilhelm was a master of the "objective problems" of building, exemplary for his command of contemporary building materials and methods as well as the biological needs of building occupants.[51] Though Wilhelm's designs of the late 1940s evince a

[50] The letter from Wilhelm was the only one translated to English, and the only to address Eero Saarinen personally.

[51] Richard J. Neutra and Richard Heyken, "Die Schubaugruppen am Gänsberg in Stuttgart-Rot," *Architektur und Wohnform, Innen-dekoration* 63 (February 1955): 105. Wilhelm was architect of the Silcherschule in Zuffenhausen near Stuttgart (1950-53), billed as the first modern-style school building in the area. The Silcherschule is a rationalist campus of seven pavilions with ample daylighting on their upper floors enabled by clerestories. Its distinctiveness is found in the relationship between the carefully designed hybrid structure, shallow pitched clerestoried roofs, and the gently sloping landscape.

much less experimental mindset than the convention-flouting work of Gutbrod, the priorities he set nevertheless seem to have leaked into Birkerts's architectural principles.

Birkerts eventually reframed his education to position Gutbrod as the primary influence during his time at Stuttgart. This may have been the result of a later affinity for Gutbrod's design work and aversion to the less adventurous work done by Wilhelm and others. Aligning himself with a particular branch of the Stuttgart school provided a pedigree that made his eventual design work seem predestined and inevitable.

Emigration, Assimilation, Authorship

The departure of his soon-to-be wife—a fellow Latvian DP named Sylvia (née Zvirbulis)—from Nördlingen for the US motivated Birkerts to find his way there.[52] He had been primed for emigration to the US at Stuttgart's Amerika Häus, one of many cultural centers of its kind established in West Germany during the postwar occupation. The purpose of these centers was overtly propagandistic. With their ample reading material and events, they advertised the American way of life. It was at Amerika Häus that Birkerts was first exposed to US architecture journals and was likely given advice on his prospects for emigration.[53]

While the US did not take in as many DPs as other countries of its size, immigration policy at that time did offer several paths to legal residency and, eventually, citizenship. Birkerts seems to have failed on one of these paths but succeeded on another.

[52] Sylvia Birkerts's father Mike Zvirbulis was an accomplished painter and later became a curator at the Cranbrook Museum of Art.

[53] At the time, Stuttgart's Amerika Häus was located on Stafflenbergstrasse, not far from Birkerts's residence on the city's east side. For an account of the Amerika Häus program see Edsel W. Stroup, "The Amerika Häuser and Their Libraries: An Historical Sketch and Evaluation," *Journal of Library History* 4, no. 3 (1969): 239–52. For the role of Amerika Häuser in the so-called "Cultural Cold War" see Reinhold Wagnleitner, "Propagating the American Dream: Cultural Policies as Means of Integration," *American Studies International* 24, no. 1 (1986): 67–68.

At this point Birkerts's autobiographical recollections are misaligned with dated archival documents. It is nevertheless clear that he first seems to have applied for admission to the University of Michigan's school of architecture, presumably for a Masters degree program and perhaps with proximity to the Saarinens in mind. Admission would have enabled him to reside in the US and eventually to establish permanent residency. He was evidently not admitted. After this failure, it seems a rancher from one of the Western states sponsored him to come to the US as a manual laborer.[54] The story goes that this rancher failed to retrieve him in New York, sparing him an uncertain cattle-tending fate. Sylvia arrived instead and welcomed him in Princeton, New Jersey, where her parents were settled at the time, while Birkerts plotted his next steps.

Based on the recommendation letter he received from Wilhelm, it was already decided that he would make his way to Bloomfield Hills, Michigan and the Saarinens. Addressed directly to Eero Saarinen, Wilhelm's letter notes a June 1949 tour taken by Wilhelm of the Cranbrook campus with the elder Saarinen, and a brief visit to the younger Saarinen's office. Given his obvious familiarity with Saarinen's work at the time Birkerts was his student, Wilhelm could have been the one who introduced the young Birkerts to Saarinen's work in the first place. Birkerts, in Wilhelm's view, was "a very independently thinking and highly talented young architect. His designs made in our Designing-Seminar have – almost all of them – been worked into practice all by

[54] This arrangement was most likely facilitated by one of the many voluntary social service agencies (abbreviated as VOLAGs) that played an outsize role in resettlement programs under US immigration law starting in 1948. See Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882*, 103; 107–8. Sven Birkerts credits an "American Lutheran relief organization." Birkerts and Schwartz, *Metaphoric Modernist*, 13.

himself."[55] Birkerts evidently made an impression on his teachers, making them aware of his commitment to resist the undue influence of trends or tendencies.

After traveling from Princeton a few months after his arrival in the US, Birkerts evidently arrived unannounced at Saarinen and Associates with letters and his portfolio in hand, and was instructed to return late at night:

> When I arrived at the Saarinen office I was told that I would have to talk to Eero himself. As Eero kept strange working hours, I would have to come back between two and three o'clock in the morning.
>
> I talked to Eero at three a.m. He told me that [General Motors Technical Center] had temporarily stopped and that the firm was not planning to add any new people in the near future … The next day, with some recommendation from Eero, I set off for Chicago to have an interview with Perkins and Will. They seemed to like what I was saying and what I had done. I was offered a job. I accepted.[56]

Despite misgivings about his highly technical education, Birkerts's preparation in material and structural systems was highly valued by his employers in the 1950s starting with Perkins & Will, where he quickly found himself in charge of a hospital project near Chicago at Rockford, Illinois.[57] Not long afterward, he was called back to Bloomfield Hills to join the Saarinen office.

In doing so, Birkerts hoped to work not with Eero, but with his father Eliel Saarinen, who was something of a personal hero, even if he never met the man:

> [My] interest was in the father. I knew less of Eero. When I arrived in Bloomfield Hills, however, I learned that Eliel had died just the month before … I regretted it

[55] Günter Wilhelm to Eero Saarinen, December 23, 1949, "Personal Correspondence + Files, 1951-1959," Box 15, Gunnar Birkerts Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. It's possible he also carried a recommendation from Gutbrod, but such a letter is not (or perhaps *not yet*) included among Birkerts's personal papers. More material was donated to the Bentley Historical Library on Birkerts's death in August 2017, and as of Fall 2018 is still being processed and added to the two archival collections.
[56] Birkerts, "Autobiographical Notes," in Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates*, 215.
[57] This hospital was published in *Architectural Record* with special attention to its programmatic performance, including a kind of post-occupancy evaluation one year after completion: Emerson Goble, "200-Bed Hospital Studied in Actual Use - Rockford Memorial Hospital, Rockford, Illinois," *Architectural Record* 117 (March 1955): 197–208.

> deeply that I would never be able to work with this Master. I was lucky, nevertheless, that Cranbrook was so close by.[58]

The elder Saarinen implored young architects to "search for form" instead of merely imitating the buildings of the past. He used biological metaphors to underline the importance of this tireless search, stating that each individual "must—so to speak—digest his own food" and likewise that learning only rote historical fact fosters "**parasitic** minds—instead of **creative** minds".[59] He suggested that the kind of food to be "digested" was the individual's prerogative, but illustrated his book *Search For Form* with the diverse and influential interests that nourished his own individual search, ranging from the buildings and sculptures of ancient civilizations to representations of organic growth to contemporary discoveries in biology.[60] The elder Saarinen's writing seemed to offer all the aspects Birkerts felt were missing from his education at Stuttgart—theory, philosophy, and methodology.

Birkerts didn't find in Eero Saarinen the kind of artist-architect he wanted to emulate. Initially asked with detailing curtain walls and interiors of the GM Technical Center, Birkerts paid as much attention to his colleagues as to the "Master":

> The designers and drafters were formidable, to say the least. It was like starting all over again. The architectural talk and philosophizing that I had missed in Stuttgart was here in abundance. The current flowed less from Eero, more from the peers in the drafting room.[61]

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[58] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates*, 216.
[59] Eliel Saarinen, *Search for Form: A Fundamental Approach to Art* (New York: Reinhold, 1948), xvi. Emphasis in original.
[60] While hardly the most obvious of reference points for architecture, the interests Saarinen lists were common among first-generation European modernists. In the late 1970s Birkerts adopted this digestive metaphor for the creative process, as seen in lecture notes including those for a University of Michigan seminar titled "Knowing Yourself," from September 1980. Gunnar Birkerts, "Knowing Yourself," (Professional Papers, Speeches, Lectures, and Seminars, Gunnar Birkerts Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan).
[61] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates*, 216.

He found in his peers, then, what he had hoped the Saarinens might provide—intellectual nourishment that made the tiresome day-to-day labor of drafting and administering projects more tolerable. The younger Saarinen was evidently more of a realist when it came to the division of labor. Many members of Birkerts's generation likely found similar divisions of labor from intellection in the offices of architects like Saarinen, who was infamous for his reliance upon a small army of subordinates to play out endless alternatives until he was satisfied with a design. As one former employee put it, "[the] task was to help him investigate as many ways as possible to do something."[62] The use of subordinates to test alternatives was not new or unusual, but, according to Birkerts, what distinguished Saarinen's process from other architects was his indecisiveness. He later described the limitations of Saarinen's approach:

> His process was one that relied a great deal on visual approval or visual observations … I believe now—and each of us is different, of course—that the selection process was too direct, that it did not rely enough on the subconscious process of creativity. Still, after looking at scheme upon scheme, he would pick the right one.[63]

When Birkerts later made the jump to Minoru Yamasaki and Associates, Yama proved more worthy of emulation in this regard.[64]

Though this individualistic conception of an architect's cultural role has deep cultural roots, it was in abeyance at the time Birkerts stated his allegiance to it. Indeed, the prevalent "image of the architect" in the early 1960s was closer to "organization man" than heroic artist.[65] With the influence of first-generation modernists waning and the

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[62] Richard Knight, *Saarinen's Quest: A Memoir* (San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2008), 51.
[63] Sven Birkerts, ed., *Gunnar Birkerts: Buildings, Projects, and Thoughts, 1960-1985* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, 1985), 30.
[64] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 218.
[65] Frank Lloyd Wright—who perhaps embodied this archetype more than any other American architect—went unmentioned by Birkerts until the arrival of the commission for the Domino's Farms development in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Domino's Pizza founder Thomas Monaghan commissioned Domino's Farms. He

profits and prestige of corporate architecture firms growing, a cohort of postwar architects conceived their role as participants in a collaborative process rather than individual artists. This attitude was so widespread that influential *Progressive Architecture* editor Jan C. Rowan wrote at the time that when '60s architects spoke of their image,

> [the] "image" they are talking about is of an architect as a sensible, serious, competent, businesslike technician—a sort of well-qualified, pseudo corporation-man who thinks, talks, and acts in the manner of the committee-encrusted corporation-men whom he usually serves.[66]

Because of this, artistically inclined architects saw uncertainty on the horizon. A symposium of prominent architects convened by Rowan in 1961, for instance, concluded that despite a seeming decline in opportunities for "pure" architects, "there are few specific suggestions as to how methods of practice should change; rather, there is a feeling that the architect must find ways to work within the present framework, and shape it to his own ends."[67]

The reasons for this flickering architectural identity are varied. One of the most important factors may have been the unprecedentedly large generation of newly minted architects graduating from architecture programs under the G.I. Bill in the years after WWII.[68] These new graduates were college educated but were less likely to be members of the elite class from which past architects had primarily come. Because of their large

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was a Wright obsessive who requested an office building in the form of a Prairie Style house. The Wright comparison is discussed extensively in James Graham, "Usonia, Americanized: Gunnar Birkerts Goes Underground," *Manifest*, no. 1 (2014): 134–53.

[66] Jan C. Rowan, "Editorial," *Progressive Architecture* 46, no. 7 (July 1965), 125.

[67] Thomas H. Creighton, ed., "The Sixties: A Symposium on the State of Architecture, Part II," *Progressive Architecture* 42, no. 4 (April 1961): 169.

[68] See Garry Stevens, *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 212–14. Stevens calls this trend "the expansion of the subordinate sector" (212).

numbers, many found themselves forced into subordinate roles long-term.[69] Compounding this sea change, pedagogical trends away from the Beaux Arts model meant the value system inculcated by these postwar architects was different from those of prior generations—they emphasized the rational, practical decision-making of functionalism over individual artistic expression.[70]

The ideal of creative genius nevertheless remained a persuasive ideological instrument. During the Cold War, notions of heroic artistic genius were recruited in support of US claims to cultural supremacy over Soviet collectivism. Freedom and independence as values were bound up with the capitalist system. This impacted the kind of story Birkerts could tell about his past. Much as he might have liked to foreground his foreign origin as part of his authorial signature, Latvia's status as a socialist republic during the Cold War elicited staunchly anti-communist political attitudes from Latvian-Americans. Anti-communism was a widespread attitude among the Latvian community in postwar America. As his mother languished in Riga, Birkerts was no different. He viewed the Soviets in Latvia as oppressors and unwelcome occupiers. And yet he and his family were a kind of isolated island, not only exiled from their home country but also from the émigré community. Birkerts himself imposed a kind of self-exile even from his peers in the architecture community.

Birkerts feared accusations of "parasitism." For him, the first sign of such parasitism was being influenced not by predecessors but by contemporaries. This fed his

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[69] Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), 67; 126. Gutman writes that "the distressing feature of the current system is that many architects with professional degrees may remain locked in relatively routine, menial, and low-paying jobs for most of their career." (67)

[70] See Joan Ockman and Avigail Sachs, "Modernism Takes Command," in Joan Ockman and Rebecca Williamson, *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America* (Cambridge, Mass. : Washington, D.C.: MIT Press ; Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 2012), 134–35.

desire for isolation and ultimately justified staying in the Detroit area despite the departure of fellow Saarinen disciples and the consequent decline of the city's place in American architecture culture. The advantage, in his view, was that the Midwest "is a platform from which I can observe or absorb as much as I wish and when I wish to do so."[71] Whether he truly believed this or preferred to stay in Southeast Michigan for other reasons, he was based in the Detroit area for the remainder of his career.

Autonomy and *Izglitiba*

The difficultly of balancing individuality with conformity was one of the central cultural issues of American society in the 1950s and 1960s. Sociologists and psychologists studied it in various contexts throughout the 1950s. The best-known and most nuanced observer of problems with conformity was David Riesman. We turn briefly to his work because some of his conclusions can shed light on the issues Birkerts and other architects faced. In his celebrated 1950 book *The Lonely Crowd* (more widely read in its abridged 1961 version), Riesman observed that those who, like architects, seek autonomy through commitment to a craft do so through "difficulties in execution and privacies in vocabulary." For Riesman, the primary pitfall of this is a descent into a "concern for sheer technique."[72] His full passage paints a striking picture of the problems faced by young architects:

> Those who seek autonomy through the pursuit of a craft must keep an eye on the peer-groups (other than their own immediate one) and on the market, if only to

[71] Birkerts, *Buildings, Projects, and Thoughts*, 8.
[72] David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, Abridged and revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 294. I cite Riesman here not because I view his treatment of American social psychology as authoritative, but rather because its premises were found to be revealing by contemporaries outside sociology and by a general readership.

> keep out of their way. But this in turn may involve them in a steady search for difficulties in execution and privacies in vocabulary (in some ways, like the "mysteries" of medieval craftsmen) in order to outdistance the threatening invasion of the crowd. Then what began more or less spontaneously may end up as merely effortful marginal differentiation, with the roots of fantasy torn up by a concern for sheer technique.[73]

This reflection comes near the end of a book in which Riesman proposed that an evolution within what he called the "social character" was underway—a kind of phase-change in the American mind. He identified several phases in the American social character's evolution, each corresponding to a particular socio-economic arrangement and value system. At the time of his study, Riesman argued, a shift was underway from what he called an "inner-directed" social character to an "other-directed" social character. This shift played out in the changing social behavior of individuals. Whereas the inner-directed individual internalized a set of principles early in life, a kind of moral gyroscope, other-directed individuals depended upon signals from peers to make decisions, which Riesman likened to social radar. The book concluded with Riesman's speculations for a subsequent phase-shift, autonomy, combining the positive aspects of inner- and other-direction. For Riesman, the primary problem in American social character—which he hoped would be addressed through a turn toward autonomy—was that "Both rich and poor avoid any goals, personal or social, that seem out-of-step with peer-group aspirations."[74]

In a discussion of entrepreneurial capitalism early in the book, Riesman differentiated between the approaches of inner- and other-directed individuals by reference to the problems they took on in their work life. The inner-directed

[73] Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, 294.
[74] Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, 305.

businessperson focused on nonhuman, technical problems, while the other-directed focused on people and interpersonal relationships. Thus, for the inner-directed,

> [P]roduction is seen and experienced in terms of technological and intellectual processes rather than in terms of human cooperation … The problem of marketing the product, perhaps even its meaning, receded into the psychological background before the *hardness of the material*—the obduracy of the technical tasks themselves.[75]

For architects like Birkerts, these "technical tasks" perhaps included not only pragmatic questions of building, but also the design process, which Birkerts ultimately saw as the core of his vocation.

Arriving from Latvia, a less industrialized society that, in Riesman's terms, inculcated an inner-directed character in its young people, Birkerts may have felt out-of-sync with his neighbors and peers. According to Riesman, the inner-directed in urban America were holdovers from a socio-economic arrangement and value system that was based on production rather than consumption, on entrepreneurial individualism rather than corporate conformity. They were unprepared for the demands of urban life and might be "forced into resentment or rebellion … may refuse to adapt because of moral disapproval."[76]

This holds true with Birkerts. A memoir by his son Sven offers a window into Birkerts's disapproving attitude toward the mainstream American culture he faced in suburban Detroit. The son reports that while his parents, and especially his father

> took pride in what they called their 'Europeanness' … I saw only the disdain my father had for the trappings of our suburban American life—the bulb-and-pennant extravaganzas of the car lots, the neon exuberance of the fast-food joints springing up everywhere. I read into his quips and pronouncements a rejection of everything that thrilled me."[77]

[75] Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, 111; 112.
[76] Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, 33.
[77] Birkerts, *My Sky Blue Trades*, 5.

This attitude provides some justification for the family's frequent visits to Cranbrook Academy, where, Sven Birkerts recalls, the Sunday strolls mentioned by *P/A* took them through "a dream of aristocratic Europe set down in southeastern Michigan."[78]

What comes through in the son's recollections of his father is something akin to what some Latvians call *izglitiba*, an aloof personal bearing that communicated one's cultural refinement and education.[79] Historian Valdis O. Lumans has found this to be a common attitude among Latvian immigrants, a significant number of who were members of the bourgeois or cultural elite. Whether we interpret Birkerts's bristling attitude toward influence and context as a desire for autonomy in Riesman's terms, a cultural bearing akin to *izglitiba*, or merely nostalgic connection to a distant culture, its influence on his approach to architecture was considerable.

His isolation was cultural as well as creative—a Latvian-American whose foreign origins forged an essential and insoluble part of his identity. This was something to be embraced rather than something to be assimilated or written off. This "recalcitrant" status is described in Sven Birkerts's memoir:

> To be among Americans but not of them, this seems best. I feel myself as something recalcitrant inserted into a host tissue, a grain of resistance. I will do what I am asked, I will play all the required roles, but I will not come over. I couldn't if I wanted.[80]

Over time, Birkerts became increasingly hostile not only to conformists but also to those he perceived as "parasitic," in Eliel Saarinen's terms. He positioned his work as a synthesis of influences akin to America's mythical melting pot.

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[78] Birkerts, 53.
[79] See Lumans, *Latvia in World War II*, 29; 391.
[80] Birkerts, *My Sky Blue Trades*, 46. Ironically, this was written from Sven's perspective, who was not an immigrant but a native-born US citizen.

To avoid "parasitism," Birkerts had to forcefully excise the design signatures of the younger Saarinen and Yamasaki. The path away from Yamasaki was more obvious that away from Eero. Distancing himself from "Yama," as Birkerts called him, meant the URC design would be a return to fundamentals. As such, its reductive, simplistic details emphasized architectural form while avoiding the elaboration of material systems that had become his former employer's trademark. This becomes clear when one compares URC to the projects Birkerts designed while working under Yamasaki—the Reynolds Metals Building in Southfield, Michigan (1955-59), the unbuilt Dhahran Civil Air Terminal in Saudi Arabia (1958) and the Wayne State College of Education Building in Detroit (1958-60). Reynolds was a kind of suburban modernist temple, a transparent box on a plinth and surrounded by reflecting pools. Its glass exterior walls were shaded from sun glare by metal screens built-up from bronzed aluminum cylinders (Figure 1.16). The Dhahran terminal design called for a hypostyle hall of tree-like concrete columns creating rows of *iwan*-like openings along its edges that were to be enclosed with Islamic-inspired mullion patterning (Figure 1.17). At Wayne State, tree-like, three-story precast concrete elements form rows of pointed openings with an abstract, almost Czech Cubist texture. Concocting a pseudo-Gothic image from contemporary materials, the predominantly vertical orientation of these elements suggests that the architects wanted to make this stout building appear much lighter than it otherwise might (Figure 1.18).

Some of the common characteristics of Yamasaki's designs were inverted in the URC design. Whereas his buildings almost always appeared to sit lightly on the ground, URC is firmly planted in its site. Whereas Yamasaki's buildings showed careful attention to decorative effects, URC's cast-in-place concrete is treated in a matter-of-fact manner.

Whereas the exterior walls of Yama's buildings were the primary sites of design attention, URC's walls are almost entirely blank. These inversions show that, to a certain extent, Birkerts differentiated himself through negation. And yet, each inversion also brought Birkerts closer to then-current trends in architectural design toward the perceived honesty and wholeness enabled by reinforced concrete. He was at one and the same time negating Yamasaki and adopting qualities of the fashionable Brutalist style.

Saarinen, on the other hand, prided himself on his firm's adaptability to client needs, therefore his buildings were singular and had few obvious stylistic tropes in common. Many critics decried this "style for the job" approach as devoid of convictions or principles. Indeed, instead of a distinctive personal style that could be applied to numerous building types or scales, Saarinen offered clients a distinctive process that guaranteed a unique product. Birkerts's response was to move away from this working method. Whereas Saarinen was seemingly indecisive and developed endless design variations, Birkerts strove to be instinctive and resolute (at the same time internalizing Saarinen's aversion to repeating a signature style).[81] Birkerts's understood his own process as more internalized: "I don't have five choices in front of me. I eliminate them already in the thinking process—they don't reach the visual stage … I produce a conceptual sketch—that is, from there on, the direction."[82] In the end, Birkerts's "search" led him to distill, from his early projects, that which Eero Saarinen seemed to be lacking—firm principles carried from project to project.

[81] Leading a team of associates, Saarinen often directed them to generate as many variations on a few ideas as possible. He would then select one or more, and repeat the process. See: Knight, *Saarinen's Quest: A Memoir*, 28; 34–35. As Knight put it, Saarinen "could never have too many alternatives." (28)
[82] Tsukasa Yamashita, "Interview with Gunnar Birkerts," quoted in Birkerts, *Buildings, Projects, and Thoughts*.

In Riesman's terms, these principles served as Birkerts's "moral gyroscope"—they would guide his design conduct without reference to the conduct of others. A later Birkerts lecture slide on the design process analogizes the gyroscopic function of these principles (Figure 1.20). In it, the profile of a human bust is populated with the terms and concepts that Birkerts saw as influences on his work. Within the torso are education, heritage, and various academic disciplines that help to situate a person in their "times." Feeding into the left and right sides are verbal, analytical and pragmatic concepts, and visual, intuitive, and creative ones respectively. Within the "mind" is an intertwined set of circular gears balancing and channeling the inputs into a unified output—more like Riesman's moral gyroscope than his social radar.

The most important "gear" for Birkerts was his conception of the architect as artist. Andrew Saint has traced this particular "image of the architect" to a belief in a persistent and pernicious myth that the creation of architecture relies on the qualities of an individual. This myth "attracts architects because it enables them to see themselves not only as top dogs in the construction process but also as creators and romantics, heirs to a tradition that offers them a chance of fame and remembrance from posterity."[83] Pursuing this kind of authorship has long been a path to success because, as Saint notes, "the greatest praise has traditionally been kept for those architects who came closest in logic" to the ideal of individualist expression.[84]

Magali Sarfatti Larson has likewise concluded that contradictions within architecture's professional status encourage veneration of those who adopt the desired identity. She found that because architectural creation is contingent upon clients' needs

[83] Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 6.
[84] Saint, 18.

and demands—and because, simultaneously, architects are faced with suspicion of "both their probity and their competence"—attempts to solidify the status of architects are fundamentally ideological.[85] As Larson puts it, "expertise is established and justified by ideological persuasion and ritualization of uncertainty," meaning that architects build credibility through subjective judgments more than through objective assessments of performance.[86]

Particularly revealing with regard to this "ritualization of uncertainty" is the role of sketching in Birkerts's creative process and the increasing value he attributed to sketches as material things. For the URC only a handful of sketches were retained. Some of these were drawn on the backside of correspondence (Figure 1.20), a practice Birkerts stopped by the late 1960s. As is discussed in Chapter 4, sketches eventually became the prime document of his role in the design process as GBA associates and partners acquired more responsibility.

Progressive Architecture **as Birkerts Promoter**

Under Jan C. Rowan's editorship (Managing Editor, January 1961–February 1963; Editor, March 1963–February 1969), *P/A* covered Birkerts's work regularly between 1960 and 1964. After winning a 1961 *P/A* award (for an unbuilt swimming club for Troyton, Michigan), the Birkerts & Straub firm was included in a feature article in August 1961 that celebrated ten young architectural practices in the Detroit area. Birkerts & Straub were given more substantial coverage than the other architects and firms in the

[85] Magali Sarfatti Larson, "Emblem and Exception: The Historical Definition of the Architect's Professional Role," in Judith R. Blau, Mark La Gory, and John Pipkin, eds., *Professionals and Urban Form* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 50.
[86] Blau, La Gory, and Pipkin, 76.

article. Included were the initial designs for their Schwartz Summer Residence in Northfield, Michigan (Figure 1.21), Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Albion, Michigan (See Figure 1.06), 1300 Lafayette Apartment Tower (Figure 1.22) and People's Federal Savings & Loan branch in Royal Oak, Michigan (Figure 1.23). This was a nearly complete catalog of the firm's ongoing work at that time.

From there, *P/A*'s support for the firm intensified: an early version of the URC design was covered in the December 1961 issue; Birkerts & Straub's first completed building—the Haley Funeral Home in Southfield, Michigan (1960-61)—was featured on the cover of the magazine's June 1962 issue (Figure 1.24); Rowan's first issue as editor-in-chief in March 1963 featured People's Federal on its cover (Figure 1.25); and a month later in April 1963, *P/A* covered a Birkerts-designed law office interior in Detroit. At the time, *P/A* articles were not attributed to a particular author, but one might deduce from this chronology that it was Rowan who made the magazine a staunch Birkerts supporter. Based on correspondence, however, it was in fact another editor, John Morris Dixon, who was Birkerts's primary supporter at *P/A*.[87] The two men likely met when Birkerts served as the a primary media contact for Yamasaki's office in the late 1950s.

Dixon wrote to Birkerts as early as July 1963 to discuss a potential "personality piece" that covered "one or two newly completed buildings [as well as] some of your unrealized projects, competition entries, etc., that otherwise might be lost forever."[88] Even with this history of support from Dixon and Rowan, the September 1964 cover story is surprising and highly unusual. *P/A* rarely gave such extensive coverage to

[87] No authorship was attributed to feature articles in P/A at the time, but letters from Dixon confirm this attribution. See: Birkerts and Schwartz, *Metaphoric Modernist*, 19.
[88] John M. Dixon to Gunnar Birkerts, July 2, 1963, "Personal Correspondence + Files, 1960-1969," Box 15, Gunnar Birkerts Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

individual architects, and when they did, biographical details were scarce.[89] And yet, for Birkerts, the magazine afforded a full spread of text with slides illustrating his influences and his experience.[90]

One equally lengthy treatment of an architectural "personality" was *P/A*'s famous "Philadelphia School" article of April 1961, which introduced the magazine's readership to Louis I. Kahn protégés Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Geddes, and Robert Venturi among others. Birkerts wrote to Rowan to compliment him on this article, and his interpretation is telling:

> It was inspiring to read the wise words of a great doer. There are not many great men today who can preach and also do architecture. How may of our leading architects of the last, say, five years, have been able to utter more than a few words of slogans, announcing their philosophies, which did not even reach beyond the facades of their buildings.
> The greatest contribution your article did to the profession, I think, is that it made quite clear that Mr. Kahn's work is not free-for-all to copy or mimic. In a way you copyrighted the form-language of Mr. Kahn, at the same time indicating that, using the ideology he has formulated, one should be able to arrive at a different form or expression true to oneself. Unless this kind of variation will exist, a fine a strong movement like the announced "Philadelphia School" will suffer, as we have experienced before, from the dogma of one man's architecture.[91]

Here, Birkerts's anxieties about copyism and philosophy come together to condemn Rowan's "Philadelphia School" by faint praise. While allying himself with Kahn's beliefs

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[89] It was exceedingly rare for *P/A* to dedicate such extensive coverage to a young architect. During Rowan's tenure as managing editor and later as editor, articles similar in length covered more familiar names, but rarely provided personal biographical detail. These other lengthy articles included an interview with Frederick Kiesler (July 1961), an introduction to the postwar work of Bruce Goff (December 1962), and school designs by Hugh Stubbins (February 1963).

[90] It may have been that Birkerts was pursuing a personal kinship with Rowan, which would have benefitted his prospects for publication in *P/A*. Both men were immigrant architects from Eastern Europe whose nations languished behind the Iron Curtain. Born in Warsaw in 1924, Rowan was educated at the London School of Economics and the Architectural Association before immigrating to the US in 1949, the same year as Birkerts; both received United States citizenship in 1955. Rowan ultimately took a degree in architecture at McGill University in Montreal, and worked as an architect for Le Corbusier and I.M. Pei until taking up an editorial position with *P/A* in 1959. See: "Jan C. Rowan, Former Editor of P/A [Obituary]," *Progressive Architecture* 66, no. 6 (June 1985): 30.

[91] Gunnar Birkerts to Jan C. Rowan, April 22, 1961, "Personal Correspondence + Files, 1960-1969," Box 15, Gunnar Birkerts Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

about the basis of architecture in the individual creative mind, Birkerts perceived the work of the architects working in his wake as too closely following the aesthetic example Kahn set. Birkerts paid closer attention to Kahn's means than his ends. The article's most suggestive illustration, in this regard, finds Kahn diagramming his design process as an immeasurable synthesis of thought and feeling into form (Figure 1.26). His strong reaction to Kahn's "school" may have been elicited by the somewhat inauspicious debut, in Rowan's article, of his one-time Saarinen and Associates coworker Venturi as an independent architect.[92] And yet, this belies the clear influence that Kahn's diagram had on Birkerts's view of the design process (See Figure 1.19).

Authorship was also a point of contention for architectural critics. Birkerts wrote to Rowan in July 1964, perhaps at Dixon's behest, to complain that the magazine's articles went uncredited. He did so in response to a Rowan editorial formatted as a preemptive "obituary" for *P/A*'s competitor *Architectural Forum*. For Birkerts, authorial anonymity put a strain on the relationship between critics and architects, effectively giving critics the upper hand:

> Regardless of how much I enjoy P. A., there were certain things FORUM handled rather well, and I enjoyed them, also. One of these was the criticism that the different writers expressed, and it was always fun to read who thinks what about a certain thing, building, etc. It may put a greater strain on the writer to come out of the anonymity that faces the profession. We have the same strain on us when we have to face you--critics.

[92] Venturi's comments in the article, however, point to at least one principle that these two architects had in common, namely what Birkerts called the "stratification of walls": "Juxtaposed layers, always contrasting, contribute to the sense of enclosure; buildings often are things in things. These enclosing surfaces, structural and protective at the same time, tend to need openings rather than interruptions; the nature and position of holes, determined by the very particular and diverse wants of space and light, material and structure, help make architecture." Robert Venturi, quoted in Jan C. Rowan, "Wanting to Be: The Philadelphia School," *Progressive Architecture* 42, no. 4 (April 1961): 157.

> I came to think about this when I tried to insist that John [Morris Dixon] initial or sign his presentation for the September issue. John explained to me that P. A.'s present policy was not to identify the authorship of their articles.[93]

It seems that the purposes of this letter were twofold: on the one hand, Birkerts was upset that Dixon didn't receive appropriate credit for the article about him, and on the other hand, he wanted to be sure he could to meet and answer his critics if and when they became less friendly to his work. In his view, *P/A*'s pretense to critical objectivity was an impediment to "fun" personal intrigue. Anonymity also, it seems, prevented architects from distinguishing friendly critics from enemies.

P/A turned away from "personality pieces" after their article on Birkerts, perhaps as a result of Rowan's attitude toward this biographical style of writing, as documented in a 1967 editorial, where Rowan stated that "[m]eaningful architectural journalism" was much more than simply public relations but instead functioned to "further professional knowledge." His advice to architects was that "Architectural journals do not reach the general public and should not be considered vehicles for personal advertising … The next time you think of the possibility of being published in P/A, you might give a thought or two to this subject."[94] That this particular editorial came after Dixon's 1965 departure to serve as Senior Editor at a rejuvenated *Architectural Forum* suggests a possible rift between the two editors over the role of architectural magazines.[95] The kind of lengthy

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[93] Gunnar Birkerts to Jan C. Rowan, July 22, 1964, "Personal Correspondence + Files, 1960-1969," Box 15, Gunnar Birkerts Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Rejuvenated by new editor-in-chief John Morris Dixon in 1965, *Architectural Forum* would continue to publish until 1972.
[94] Jan C. Rowan, "Editorial," *Progressive Architecture*, no. 02 (February 1967): 89. The editorial's sting was lessened by its being followed on the very next page by an article discussing a project by accomplished self-promoter Philip Johnson (the Kline Science Buildings at Yale University, 1963-66).
[95] *Architectural Forum* changed ownership several times in the final decade before it ceased publication in 1974, and Rowan's "obituary" may have been in response to the first of these sales, when Time, Inc. sold *Forum* to a non-profit organization called Urban America, Inc. in 1964. *Forum* was later sold to Whitney Publications and then to Billboard Publications. Both of these sales occurred in 1972. Editor-in-chief Peter Blake and most of the other employees departed when it was acquired by Billboard to start the short-lived

biographical/monographic article Dixon wrote about Birkerts was entirely absent for the remainder of Rowan's tenure at *P/A*.

The rift between Rowan and Dixon may have manifest in a disconnect within "A Search for Architectural Principles"—Rowan may have wanted the principles instead of the personality. The article delivered more of the latter than the former. Though its title suggested that Dixon's article would outline Birkerts's design principles, it instead began by articulating some of the reasons why Birkerts was skeptical of architects who philosophize. The article makes plain that in his case, in a clear echo of the elder Saarinen, works must precede thoughts: "[He] is not a speculative thinker. He does things first—in the most direct way he knows—and examines them for principles later."[96] Though he had no clear agenda of his own to promote, Birkerts was careful to distance himself from the most influential "maxims" of early 1960s architecture:

> [Birkerts] has no pretensions to a "philosophy of architecture," feeling that "nowadays too much is said by architects about their work and their philosophy." He questions the validity of formulas such as "wanting to be" ("There is often conflict between what a building wants to be and what you want it to be") and "serenity and delight" ("Exuberance sells well, but it is not lasting"). He prefers to exercise restraint in his work, but finds the maxim "less is more" as inadequate as these other oversimplifications.[97]

These clever retorts respond directly to three of the most revered figures in the field at the time, Louis Kahn ("wanting to be"), Minoru Yamasaki ("serenity and delight"), and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe ("less is more"). In place of these maxims, Birkerts offered a few "consistent methods": "subordination of structure to spatial needs, simplification of

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Architecture Plus, which also ceased publication in 1974. Carter B. Horsley, "End of Magazine on Architecture: Architectural Forum Halting with Its March Issue," *New York Times*, March 26, 1974.
[96] Rowan, "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts," 173.
[97] Rowan, 173.

detail, stratification of the wall, and use of indirect daylight."[98] Carried from project to project, these design methods could, at least in theory, tie together disparate building types, scales, and sites.

In place of form or style, therefore, Birkerts sought firm principles and flexible methods. He believed that these were the ingredients for an enduring signature (as opposed to a fleeting *style*). With the endorsement of *P/A*, Birkerts redoubled his commitment to this formula.[99] Wary of doctrinal maxims, he was equally careful to avoid being pigeonholed into a recognizable and repetitive style. His projects were therefore difficult to fit into categories derived from other architects. Unlike style, these architectural principles and compositional methods could be adapted to any project with diverse results and with little compromise. Critic Esther McCoy gave credence this approach, writing that Birkerts "did not have the compulsion, typical of one who had spent ten years working in the offices of other architects, to establish at once a strong personal style with which he could be identified … He was hard to classify neatly."[100] It therefore seems that this approach was successful at least in temporarily deferring the need for a recognizable style. Foregrounding his biography was a strategy Birkerts used to reinforce his distinctive authorial identity while delaying the need for "strong personal style." The principles outlined in Dixon's article also helped to suspend this need.

In the article, URC is used as an illustration of "indirect daylight," which, Dixon concluded, "has been apparent in all of his work." URC offered "a particularly

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[98] Rowan, 173. Stratification of the wall may have derived from comments by Robert Venturi in the Philadelphia School article. See note 90 above.
[99] This is evidenced by his frequent restatement of *P/A*'s terms of engagement for his work—space before structure, minimum of details, stratified walls, indirect daylight—in subsequent writings and lectures.
[100] Esther McCoy, *Gunnar Birkerts & Associates: IBM Information Systems Center, Sterling Forest, New York, 1972; Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1973*, ed. Yukio Futagawa, vol. 31, Global Architecture (Tokyo: A. D. A. Edita, 1974), 6.

appropriate occasion to work with indirect daylight" because of its function and form.[101] But whereas Dixon saw it as significant primarily for its careful management of daylight, Birkerts viewed the URC design as a position statement intended to embody each of his architectural principles and test out his design methods.

Conclusion: Biographical and Architectural 'Beginnings'

Biographies of individual architects often narrate stories of development and achievement, of goals met and wisdom gained. Failures, missteps and detours are left out or set aside in order for a professional identity to shine through clearly. The case of Gunnar Birkerts exaggerates and clarifies these patterns. From the beginning, his personal biography held a prominent place in discussions of the architecture he produced, and this life history underwent frequent reframing and retelling over time. His autobiographical statements at first traced the pedigree that qualified him for architectural success, and later attempted to predetermine his place in the historical lineage of modern architecture.

Birkerts saw his success as an architect to be predestined by fate. His son Sven recalled him as "a ceaseless proselytizer for his own brand of destiny … how it was meant from the first that such and such a client should have come to him, or how some design solution should have announced itself in just the way it had."[102] His biographical statements reveal that Birkerts wanted his life's patterns of growth and change to appear as comprehensible and cohesive as a good floor plan (Figure 1.27).[103] The conspicuous

[101] Rowan, "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts," 186.
[102] Birkerts, *My Sky Blue Trades*, 159.
[103] Later in life Birkerts frequently redrew a "life-sketch" that rendered his experiences as a synthesis akin to the diagram by Louis Kahn discussed below. A version of Birkerts's sketch is published in Eva Franch i

absence of those figures who didn't gel with the outcome of this life-sketch—Stuttgart's Wilhelm, Hanson, and Döcker, as well as Eliel Saarinen and Kahn—show that this pedigree was curated for clarity. Birkerts, therefore, is an architect preoccupied with reinterpreting his own past, assembling handy genealogies that channel the reception of his work while reframing that of his teachers and masters. A search for traces of the master in the student is commonplace but, as Michael Baxandall has argued, the agency of influence also runs in reverse—the student interprets the master and appropriates from them in a way that changes our view of the past.[104] Birkerts's biographical synthesis might therefore cause us see his chosen influences differently.

Following Edward Said, we might choose to refer to this not as Birkerts's origin, but rather his beginning. As Said explained it, "beginning is making or producing difference … the result of combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work"[105] Following Said, we might conclude that it was precisely because of Birkerts's resistance to passivity (manifest in a preference for "doers" over "thinkers") and his predisposition toward differentiation fed a preoccupation with biographical beginnings.

Gilabert et al., eds., *OfficeUS : Atlas* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2015), 604. The "life-sketch" is also reproduced and discussed in Birkerts and Schwartz, *Metaphoric Modernist*, 8.

[104] Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 58–59. Baxandall's premise, that later artists have a great deal of agency over our view of earlier ones, is apropos when considering the subsequent success of Saarinen's apprentices, which has shifted how we perceive his office's output. Because of the office's working method, it is tempting to search for traces of the formal vocabularies of its numerous "thoroughbreds" in works attributed to Saarinen, working, with Baxandall, backwards in time rather than forwards. Such a retrospective view is encouraged by that particular office's working method, wherein a few designers effectively competed for the attention and approval of the eponymous "genius" at the center of the practice.

[105] Using a logical analogy, Said has differentiated between these two words by calling attention to the passivity implied by origination (i.e. "X *is the origin of* Y") as opposed to the more active meaning carried by beginnings (i.e. "The beginning A *leads to* B"). Said, *Beginnings*, xiii.

Importantly, Said suggests that beginning is not only an action, "it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness."[106] This attitude or consciousness of pervaded the "third generation" of modernists whose careers began the 1950s.[107] In *Anxious Modernisms*, Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault located this conscious state of beginning—or, perhaps more accurately in this case, *beginning again*—in the work of postwar architects. As they described the situation of this group, "Propositions for the direction that architecture should take were tentative … they led to no identifiable set of stylistic tropes of the sort that produced the putative uniformity of early modernism."[108] Without the certainty afforded by a set of doctrines or a style, postwar architects were always beginning again—in the words of Dutch architect Jacob Bakema (quoted by Goldhagen and Legault), "we can put on paper what has to be done and in the next moment we do quite another thing."[109] This uncertain footing is palpable in Birkerts's early statements and designs.

Birkerts saw biographical narration as a way to avoid affixing his work to a particular school of thought or design style—biography could fill the gap until a more identifiable signature developed through work. He perceived this signature gap as early as 1962. Commenting on the status of young architects for an article on new talent in *Art in America*, Birkerts remarked that "he must close his eyes to certain spectacular, superficial styling that is now catered to him monthly by easy communications … [he] may not yet have theories as clear as the master's. Let him do first, explain later. Give

[106] Said, xi.
[107] Philip Drew, *Third Generation: The Changing Meaning of Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1972).
[108] Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 13.
[109] Quoted in Goldhagen and Legault, 13.

him time to mature."[110] He inherited this belief in doing first and explaining later from Eliel Saarinen. The opening passage of *Search for Form* lays out this reflexive practice of creativity: "In the search for form—when sincere and honest—the action is twofold: to create form; and to diagnose the created form." Saarinen emphasized that this diagnosis must be "a natural discipline springing from the work itself—**for myself only**—and not an intentional systematizing of thought for others to follow."[111] Instead of establishing binding theories or dogmas, then, an architect should seek independence or autonomy through internalized self-discipline and reflection.

Despite his commitment to independence, Birkerts's early projects were self-conscious and derivative—he began by imitating others. Birkerts & Straub's first building, the Haley Funeral Home, appropriated its distinctive green-painted, steeply pitched roof and outward-projecting windows from Gunnar Asplund's staff building at Woodland Cemetery near Stockholm (Figure 1.28). The firm won a national AIA award for their second completed building, the Schwartz Summer Residence, but Birkerts was perhaps anxious that it rehashed too many elements from Saarinen's masterful Miller House in Columbus, Indiana (Figure 1.29) to truly qualify as a signature design. Like the Miller House, the Schwartz Residence featured a square plan, wide eaves, prominent skylights providing diffuse light over unevenly spaced bookshelves, and even a miniature version of the Miller House's famous conversation pit. It was designed with bulky exposed concrete in mind but was ultimately built in whitewashed wood—Birkerts later

[110] "New Talent USA: Architecture," *Art in America* 50, no. 1 (1962): 52.
[111] Saarinen, *Search for Form*, vii. Emphasis in original. This book is one of the only underlined and annotated texts in Birkerts's personal library, which is now housed at the National Library of Latvia in Riga. Though Birkerts never met Eliel, his writing and design work was arguably a more profound influence than Eero, Eliel's son and Birkerts's employer.

called this compromised materiality "frustrated concrete"—further correlating it to Saarinen's design.

Two other early designs were positioned as point-by-point responses to the distinctive characteristics of Mies van der Rohe buildings. In the first case, the firm's housing tower at 1300 Lafayette Avenue subverted the modularity and regularity Mies's apartment towers at Lafayette Park across the street. In place of what Birkerts perceived to be a repetitive grid of steel columns indifferent to programmatic needs wrapped in a mute glass wrapper, he and Straub designed an irregular reinforced concrete structural system that responded to interior walls and was exposed on the exterior. Instead of wrapping the building with a curtain wall, glass window boxes project outward between the exposed columns. 1300 Lafayette's window boxes and gently tapering columns made its apartments less subject to glare and its exterior less monotonous. For the People's Federal branch in Royal Oak, Birkerts & Straub reversed the typical relationship between frame and glass, such that the building's wall and ceiling planes float independent of one another, separated by bands of dark glass. On the interior, this reduced the glare that plagued other modernist bank branches while nearly dissolving the structural columns into the bright clerestory level. *P/A*'s editors obviously recognized the distinctiveness of this strategy, publishing a detail of the building's corner on their magazine's cover. Birkerts & Straub inverted the concave steel corners of Mies's buildings at Illinois Institute of Technology and turned them into projecting glass boxes.

Because these early buildings were (to varying degrees) derivative, Birkerts perhaps believed that biographical details provided stronger evidence of his maturation as an architect than his designs. His authorial maturity rested, therefore, on pedigree—a

shaky foundation for the construction of the individuality seemingly demanded for disciplinary renown. Perhaps, as Roxanne Kuter Williamson has asserted of the importance of working under significant architects at significant moments, Birkerts felt that having been present at particularly dynamic years at the Saarinen and Yamasaki offices during his apprenticeship gave him the "courage and conviction … necessary to produce the sort of designs that attract the attention of fame makers".[112] The inclusion of his professional pedigree also suggests a kind of disbelief in the traditional artistic genius—the suggestion that architectural talent and creativity are social phenomena, not psychological ones.[113] This pedigree described the conditions of Birkerts's *entrance*, to borrow a term from George Kubler.[114] His inclusion of pedigree suggests he was aware of, if not sensitive to society's shifting valuation of architects away from innate talent and toward objective, almost quantitative experience.

The first elements of his biography—his childhood in Riga, his experiences as a DP and immigrant, his education at Stuttgart—proved his immutable foreignness. Later elements—his apprenticeship with Saarinen, his large firm experience under Yamasaki, his entrepreneurial partnership with Frank Straub, and ultimately his decisive move toward independence—demonstrated his full assimilation into American architectural culture. The story as a whole, one might say, attempted to prove his maturity and individuality while at the same time firmly establishing his pedigree.

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[112] Roxanne Kuter Williamson, *American Architects and the Mechanics of Fame* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 10. Williamson points to the importance of apprenticing under a famous architect during a "dynamic shift" in their career, though she was not particularly specific what constitutes these shifts besides "fame," which she defines by recognition by critics and historians.

[113] For a sociological perspective on the social basis of talent and genius, see Stevens, *The Favored Circle*, 8–9; 194–95.

[114] George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 5–10.

For Birkerts, designs like the URC demonstrated independence and autonomy from influence, ritualizing the uncertainty (to paraphrase Larson) of beginning anew.[115] He overcame the "anxiety of influence" through a process based on ritualized repetition.[116] Birkerts knew that one never recognizes, in the moment, which trends will achieve predominance and which will fade into obscurity. Fleeting fashion was never his goal, and yet, as Chapter 2 will show, his forms and concepts were still decidedly of their time and place. His independence and autonomy were illusions fostered by privilege and substantiated by circumstance. Though it was somewhat anachronistic for Birkerts to embrace the conception of the architect as a solitary genius who imparts an individual creative signature to his buildings and projects, he nevertheless went about establishing his signature through both biographical differentiation and what Riesman called "privacies in vocabulary." As we have seen, the former came more readily than the latter. While not necessarily the prototypical American story of self-made success, Birkerts's biography nevertheless reveals the many advantages and privileges afforded to white male architects of his generation, even—perhaps particularly—immigrants like him with stubborn accents and Modernist pedigrees.

[115] Architectural authorship, for Birkerts and other midcentury architects, was perhaps much like Judith Butler's description of the performativity of gender: "a stylized repetition of acts." Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519. In this context, Butler's formulation seems strikingly similar to Larson's explanation that architectural authorship is achieved through what she called the "ritualization of uncertainty." That architects—and particularly those architects whose signature was connected to building designs in the media—were overwhelmingly white and male makes Butler's phrase doubly appropriate.
[116] The phrase "anxiety of influence" comes from literary critic Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

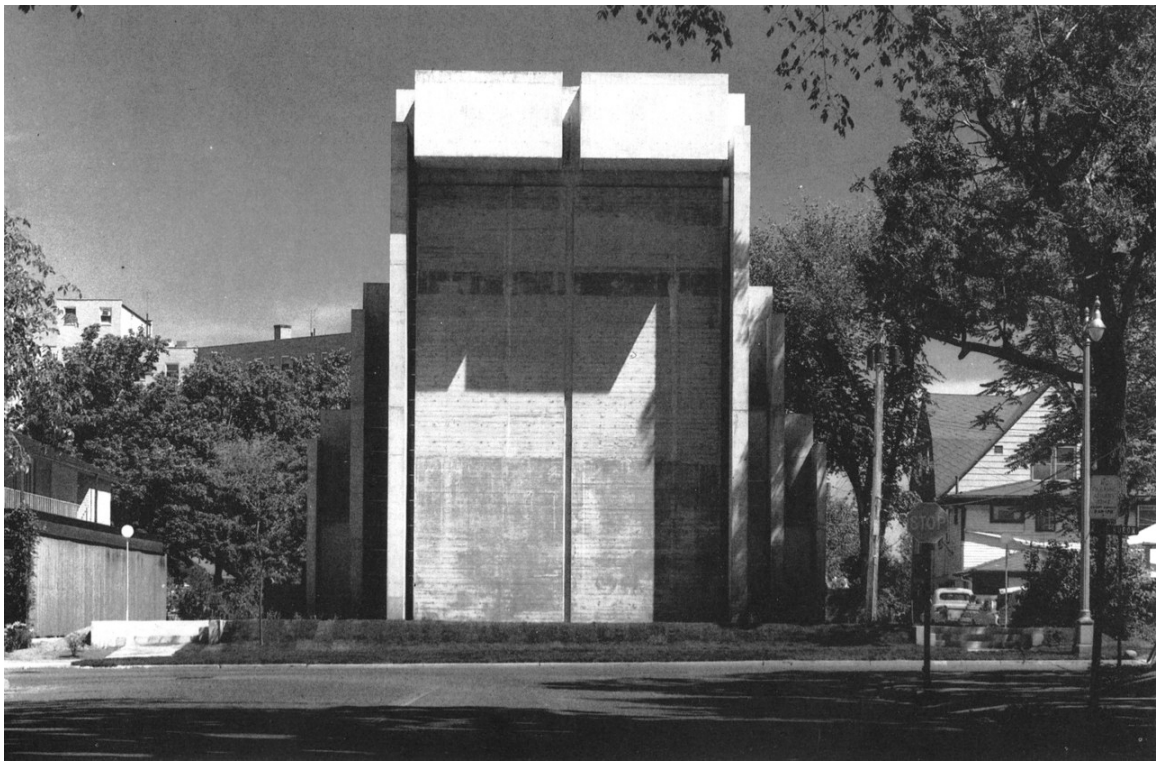

Figure 1.01 Gunnar Birkerts and Associates (GBA), University Reformed Church (URC), Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1962-64. View looking North from center of Fletcher Street. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: Kay Kaiser, *The Architecture of Gunnar Birkerts* (Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects Press, 1989), 40.

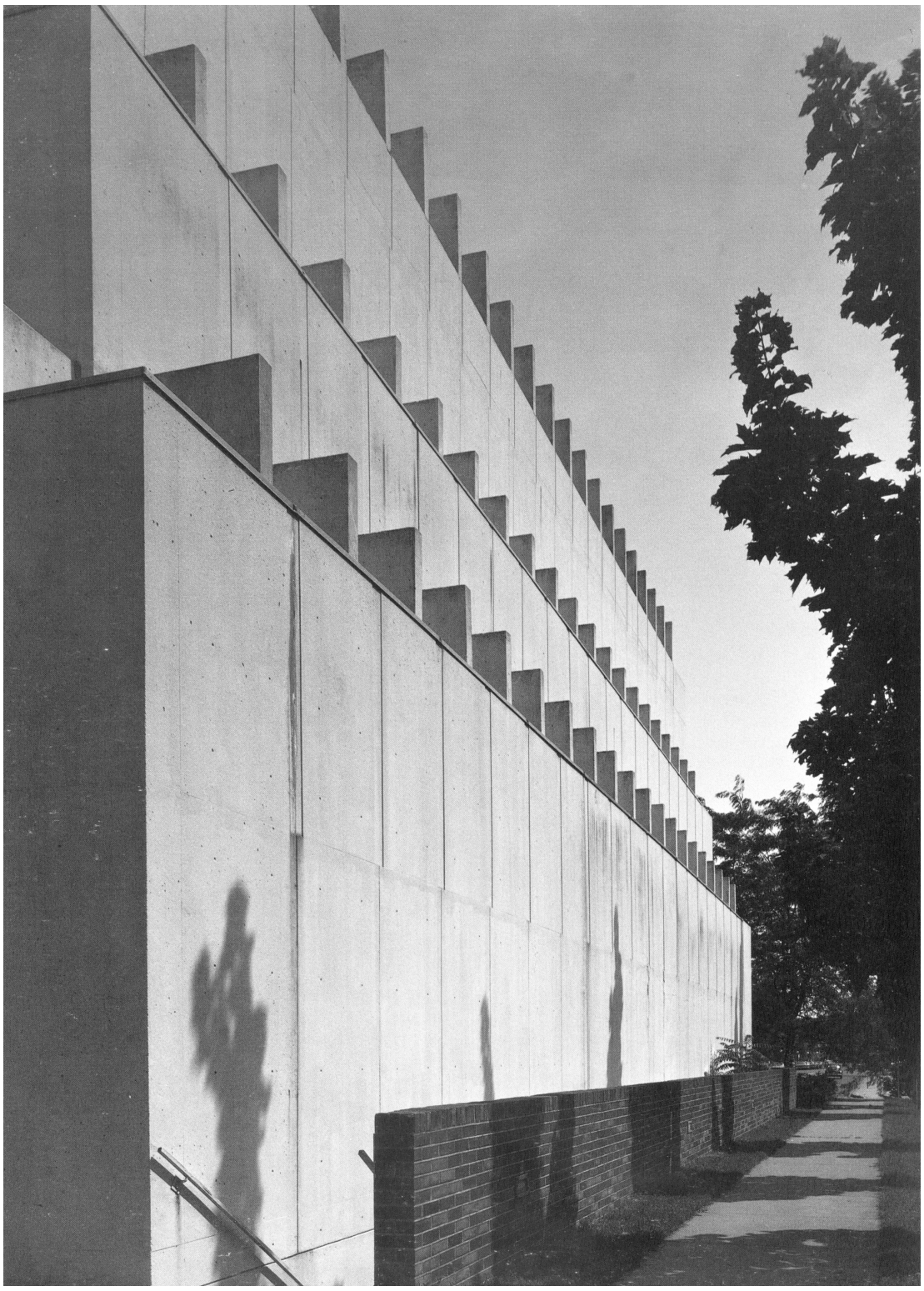

Figure 1.02 West exterior wall of URC showing monolithic concrete and crenellation. Photograph by Toshiharu Kitajima (RETORIA). From: William Marlin and Yukio Futagawa, eds., *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates* (Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. Edita, 1982), 54.

Figure 1.03 URC narthex. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: Sven Birkerts and Martin Schwartz, *Gunnar Birkerts: Metaphoric Modernist* (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2009), 40.

Figure 1.04 GBA, URC worship space, ca. 1964. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: Birkerts and Schwartz, 41.

Figure 1.05 GBA, URC worship space, ca. early 1980s with pulpit, altar, and pews reorganized. Photograph by Toshiharu Kitajima (RETORIA). From: Marlin and Futagawa, 56.

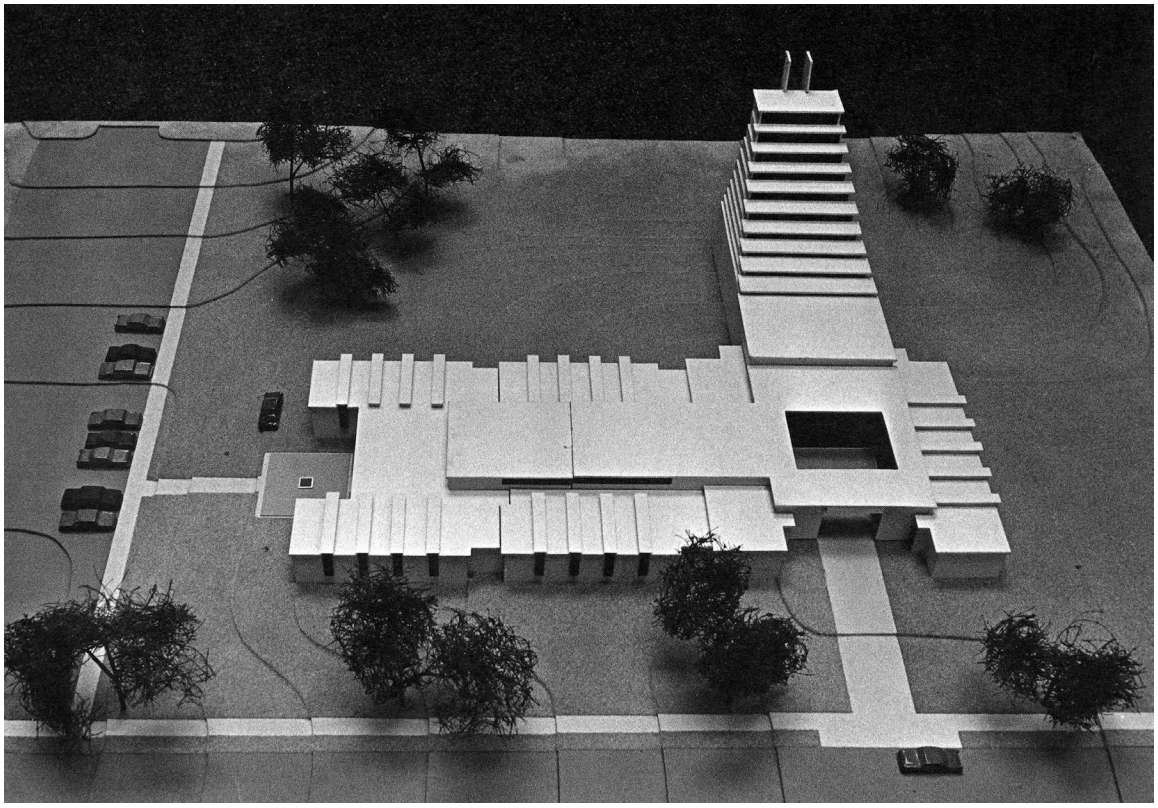

Figure 1.06 Birkerts & Straub, Grace Lutheran Church, Albion, Michigan, 1960 (unbuilt). Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: Marlin and Futagawa, 39.

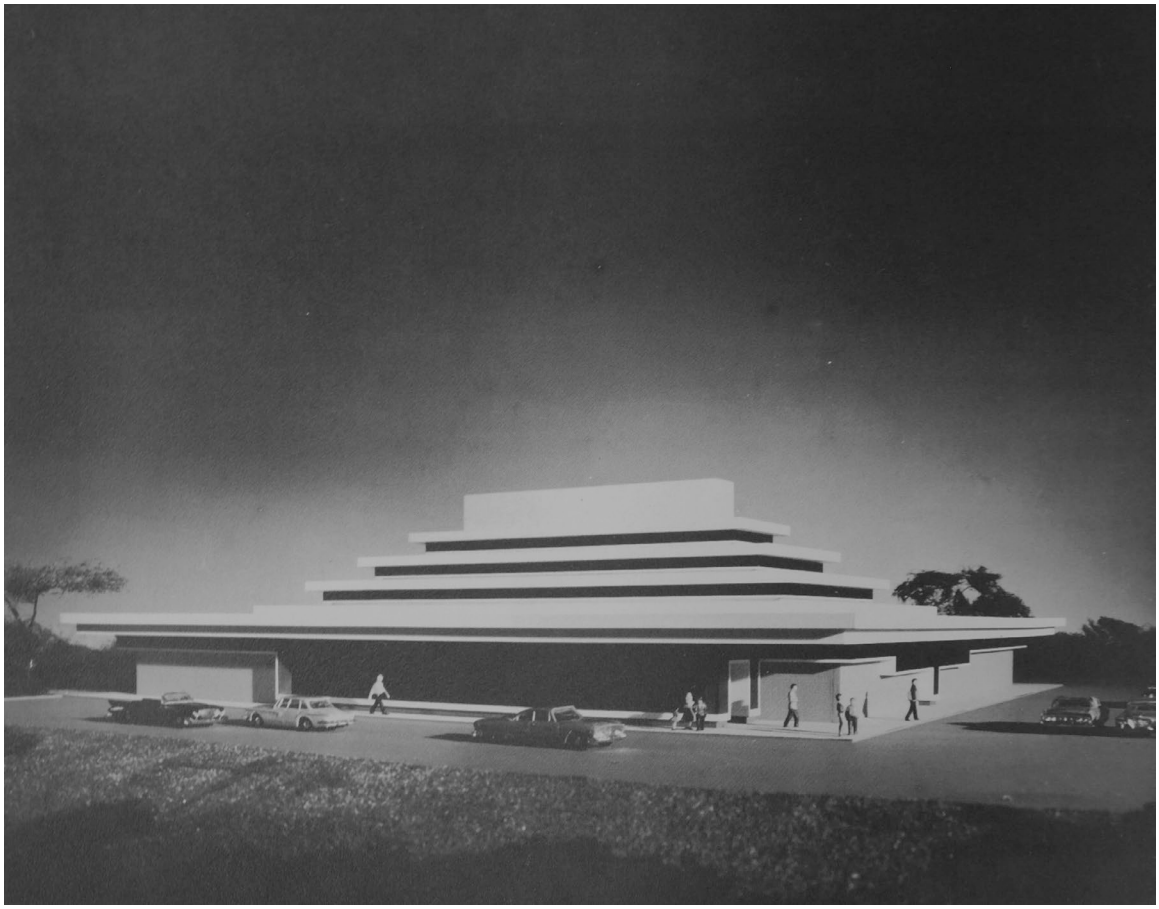

Figure 1.07 Birkerts & Straub, Supermarket, A.G.F. Wrigley Stores, Detroit, Michigan, 1962 (unbuilt). Birkerts & Straub Office Brochure, ca. 1962. Box 2, Gunnar Birkerts Papers (GBP), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (BHL).

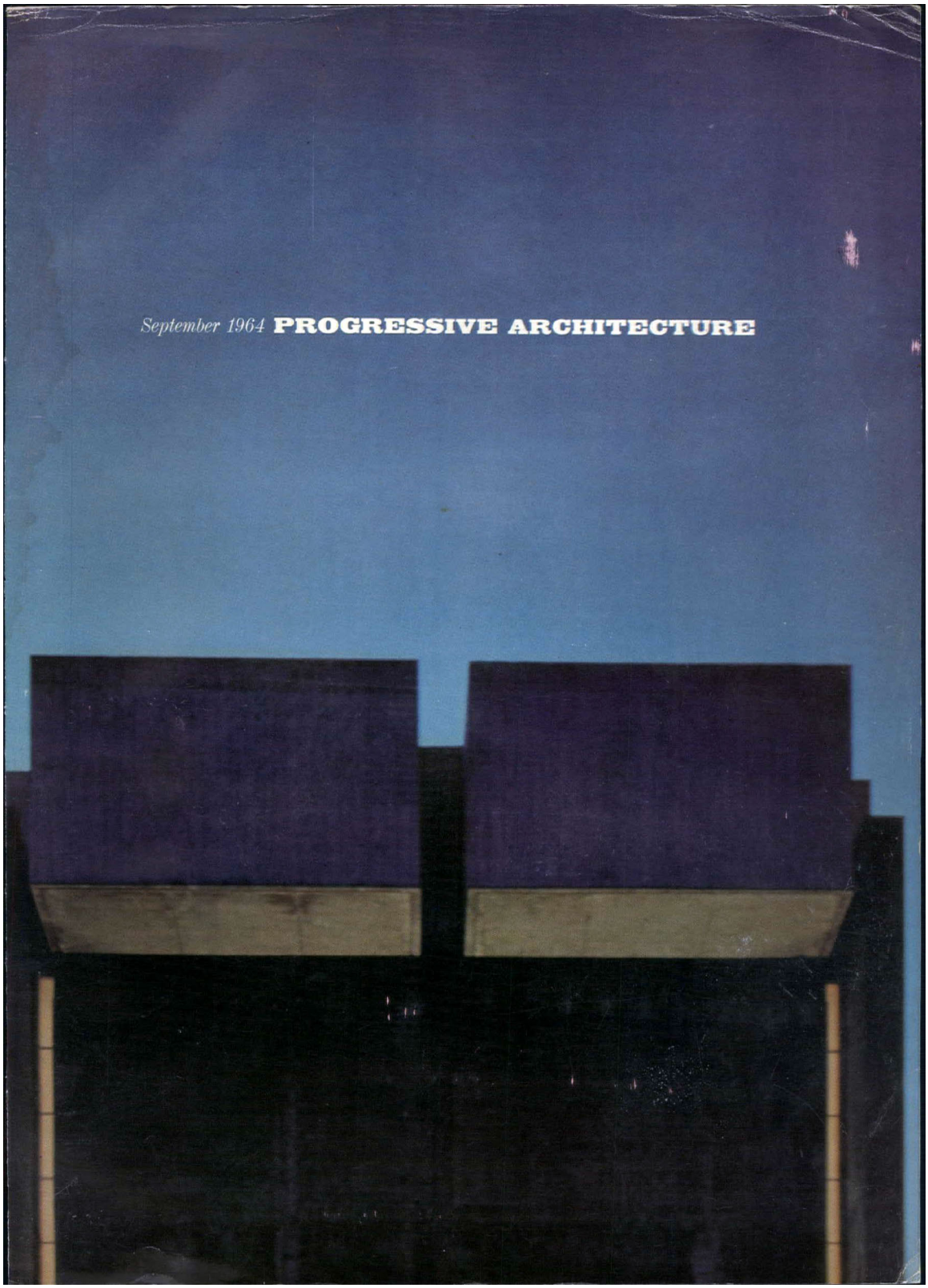

Figure 1.08 Huron Street facade of URC featured on the cover of *Progressive Architecture* 45, no. 9 (September 1964).

A SEARCH FOR ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES—

Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts

The political turmoil of Europe in the 1930's and 1940's brought many people to America who have made significant contributions to our intellectual and artistic development. In the field of architecture, our course since the late 1930's has been largely shaped by men of strong convictions who fled from hostile governments—men such as Gropius, Breuer, Mies, Mendelsohn, and Sert. But there were many younger men among these immigrants whose capabilities are only now coming to light.

Gunnar Birkerts left his native Latvia in 1944, at the age of 19, and was borne westward with the sweep of the Soviet armies to Stuttgart, where he was able to pursue his long-standing ambition to study architecture. After four years there at the Technische Hochschule, where he received his Diplom Ingeneur-Architect, Birkerts continued his westward migration by coming to the United States in 1949.

So impressed had he been with the published work of the Saarinens that he went straight to Bloomfield Hills. He recalls with a smile how he arrived at Eero's house unannounced, having walked up from the nearest bus stop, only to find that there was no opening for him in the Saarinen office. Following Eero's advice, he went further west to Chicago, where he spent a year and a half in the office of Perkins & Will. In 1951, after the elder Saarinen's death, Gunnar was invited back to Bloomfield Hills to join Eero's firm, where he remained as a designer until 1955, working on such projects as the G.M. Technical Center (*right*) and the Milwaukee War Memorial Building.

A brief period of employment with a firm in Milwaukee was terminated in mid-1956, when Minoru Yamasaki asked him to return to Birmingham once more to join Yamasaki, Leinweber & Associates, where he later became Chief Designer. Among the buildings he worked on as Chief Designer for Yama were the Reynolds Metals Building (*below*), the Educational Building at Wayne State University, and the Dhahran Air Terminal.

While in Yama's office, Birkerts designed two houses on his own, both of which won P/A Design Award Citations (in 1957 and 1959), and neither of which were built. (In 1960, he won a third Citation for a swimming club, also unrealized.) With Douglas and Astra Haner (who were with him in Yama's office), he won third place in a competition for a Belgian Congo cultural center. His furniture design, begun while he was in the Saarinen office, gained him a prize in the First International Design Competition at Cantu, Italy.

When Yama's firm was reorganized as Minoru Yamasaki & Associates in 1959, Birkerts became one of the principals. Before the end of the year, however, he had left the Yamasaki office, along with Frank Straub, another principal, and some of the junior members of the firm, to set up the office of Birkerts & Straub in Birmingham.

Birkerts' first works as an independent architect showed a definite reaction to the increasing delicacy of Yama's work at that time. Gunnar was finally able to fulfill a desire to build plain, solid walls, pierced by strongly articulated windows. He admits that his firm's first completed building, the summer house at Northville, Michigan (*below and* AUGUST 1961 P/A), was a wood building with a "massive concrete aesthetic".

This discrepancy, however, did not spoil it for the AIA awards jury, which gave it a First Honor Award. The Haley Funeral Home (*below and* JUNE 1962 P/A) was an exercise in the design of windows (an interest of Birkerts') and steep roofs (a request of the client's).

However strongly these first two jobs differ from the work of Yamasaki, they both retained his Palladian symmetry of plan. Although Birkerts' approach as a whole has changed little in his five years of independent practice, he has reconsidered the matter of symmetry, designing a symmetrical building today "only when it is really called for."

Birkerts' urge toward larger scale and bolder forms was part of a world-wide disillusionment with the machine aesthetic; but it was based in part on his personal admiration for the work of Wright, the early industrial buildings of Albert Kahn around Detroit, and—in particular—the work of Eliel Saarinen at the Cranbrook institutions in Bloomfield Hills (*below*). Birkerts still makes a custom of strolling around the Cranbrook campuses every Sunday with his family—enjoying the fine landscaping and examining the profuse and varied details of buildings, courtyards, and passages.

A tour of Finland during a European trip in 1962 gave Birkerts a new source of inspiration. He attributes the unrivaled quality of modern Finnish architecture (*below*) partly to the fact that the Finns "can't afford showmanship." But the excellence of their work goes far beyond the effect of this economic limitation. "It is hard to explain," he says, "but their architecture speaks to me in a language that I understand. It says the same things I am trying to say, but much better—with greater eloquence and much more appropriately." He fears the day—apparently almost upon us—"when American architects discover Finland and plunder elements of its architecture for superficial application."

The partnership with Frank Straub was dissolved in 1963, with both architects establishing independent practices. Their design associates for the projects shown on the following pages were Harold F. Van Dine, Jr., and Jack Hilberry, both of whom came from Yamasaki's office. Van Dine remains as a Design Associate of Gunnar Birkerts & Associates. The firm's second-ranking designer is Keith A. Brown—a graduate of the University of Michigan, where Birkerts has been a design critic for five years. Birkert's office has recently moved to the sprawling Pontiac showroom building on Woodward Avenue, into space once occupied by Eero Saarinen & Associates.

Birkerts has no pretensions to a "philosophy of architecture," feeling that "nowadays too much is said by architects about their work and their philosophy." He questions the validity of formulas such as "wanting to be" ("There is often conflict between what the building wants to be and what you want it to be") and "serenity and delight" ("Exuberance sells well, but it is not lasting"). He prefers to exercise restraint in his work, but finds the maxim "less is more" as inadequate as these other oversimplifications.

His major criterion is that a building be "appropriate" to its specific program. To achieve this, he makes a point of starting each job without preconceptions. "I like to 'fertilize' myself with information and requirements—program, site, budget, etc. —then proceed into a period of gestation." He also expects each building to show a kinship with his other projects. "The greatest compliment for me is to be told, 'We recognized that it was your work right away'—but of course that only counts if the building is appropriate."

Birkerts is not a speculative thinker. He does things first—in the most direct way he knows—and examines them for principles later. If anyone analyzes his work to date, certain consistent methods of approach are revealed: subordination of structural to spatial needs, simplification of detail, stratification of the wall, and use of indirect daylight. While these principles recur—where appropriate—throughout his work, it is possible to choose examples in which they are most clearly demonstrated. On the following pages, these points will be taken up one by one, and each will be illustrated in one of his recent buildings. (*For photo credits this and facing page, see p. 290.*)

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SEPTEMBER 1964 P/A

SEPTEMBER 1964 P/A

A Search for Architectural Principles 173

Figure 1.09 Biographical and philosophical narrative spread illustrated by slides of buildings by Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki, Birkerts, Eliel Saarinen, and Alvar Aalto. Jan C. Rowan, ed., "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts," *Progressive Architecture* 45, no. 9 (September 1964): 172-73.

Figure 1.10 Jugendstil detailing by Mikhail Eisenstein incorporating industrial and natural motifs, Albert Street no. 2a, Centrs District, Riga, Latvia, 1906. Photograph by the author, 2016.

Figure 1.11 Ģertrūdes Street, Riga, Latvia, terminates into the East front of St. Gertrude Old Church, built 1866-69. Photograph by the author, 2016.

Figure 1.12 Aerial view of Nördlingen, Germany. Photograph: GeoBasis-DE/BKG, Google. From: http://fromabove.altervista.org/picture-141/ (Accessed October 13, 2018).

Figure 1.13 Photograph of Weissenhof-Siedlung, Stuttgart, Germany, taken from roof of building occupied by TH Stuttgart architecture department after WWII. Postcard, 3 x 5 inches.

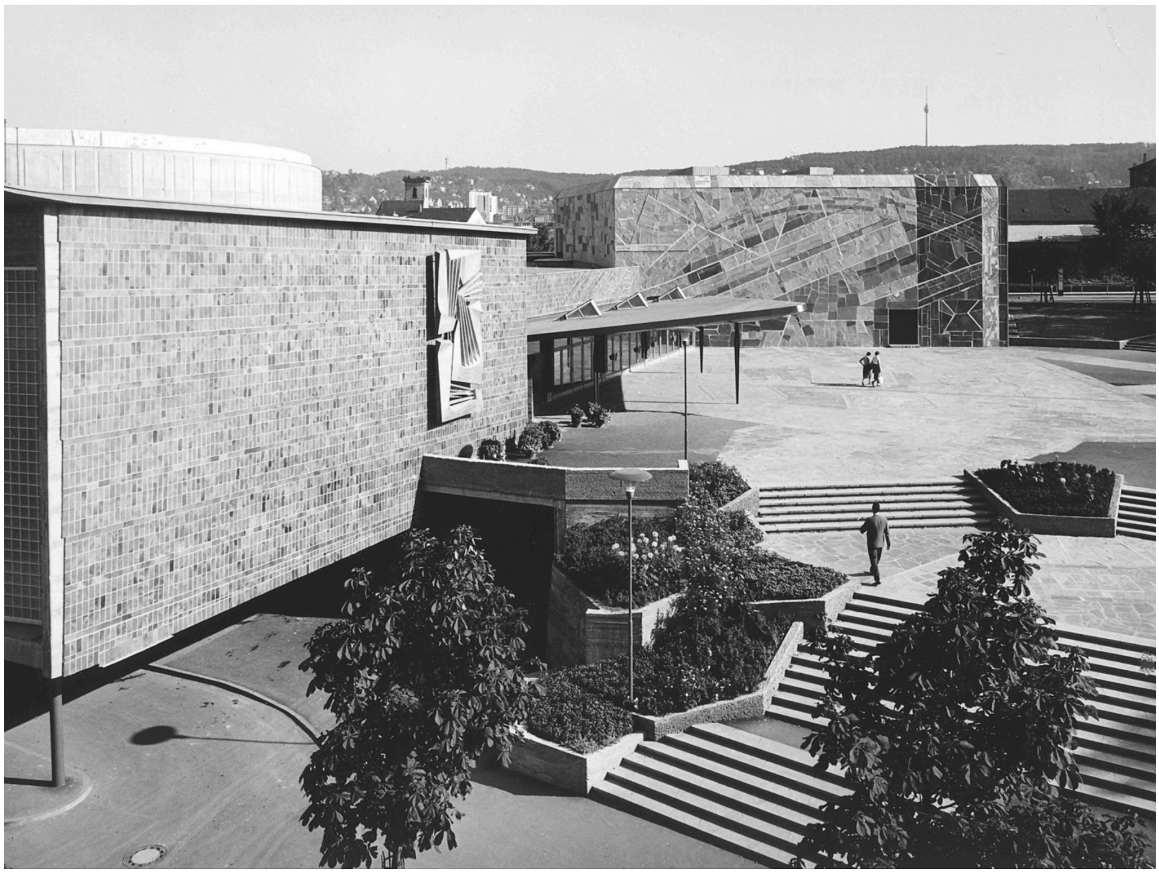

Figure 1.14 Rolf Gutbrod and Adolf Abel, Liederhalle, Stuttgart, Germany, 1949-56. Photograph by Gustav Hildebrand (Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek). From: https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/TH3HQ4DWSFOCYX2M73BROZGLPPT2HXFZ (Accessed October 13, 2018).

Figure 1.15 Paul Bonatz and Friedrich Eugen Scholer, Stuttgart Main Station, Stuttgart, Germany, 1911-27. Photograph by Norman Charles Westwood. Copyright Bryan & Norman Westwood / RIBA Collections.

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Figure 1.16 Minoru Yamasaki & Associates, Reynolds Metals Regional Headquarters Building, Southfield, Michigan, 1955-59. Photograph by G. E. Kidder Smith. (c) Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Figure 1.17 Minoru Yamasaki & Associates, Dhahran Civil Air Terminal, Saudi Arabia, 1958. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. Black and white photographic print, 8 x 10 inches. Box 12, GBP, BHL.

Figure 1.18 Minoru Yamasaki & Associates, College of Education Building, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1958-60. Photograph by Jason R. Woods.

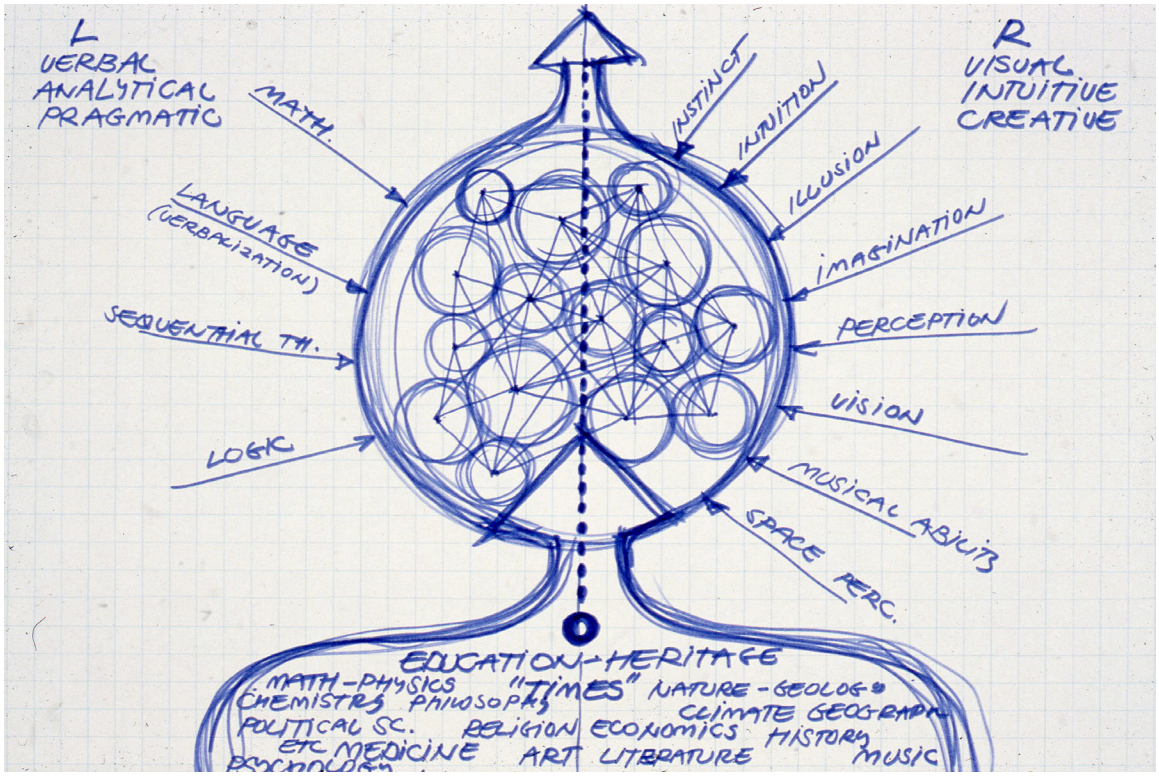

Figure 1.19 Undated lecture slide showing Birkerts's depiction of the design process. Likely ca. 1980s. 35mm slide. Box 84, GBA records, BHL.

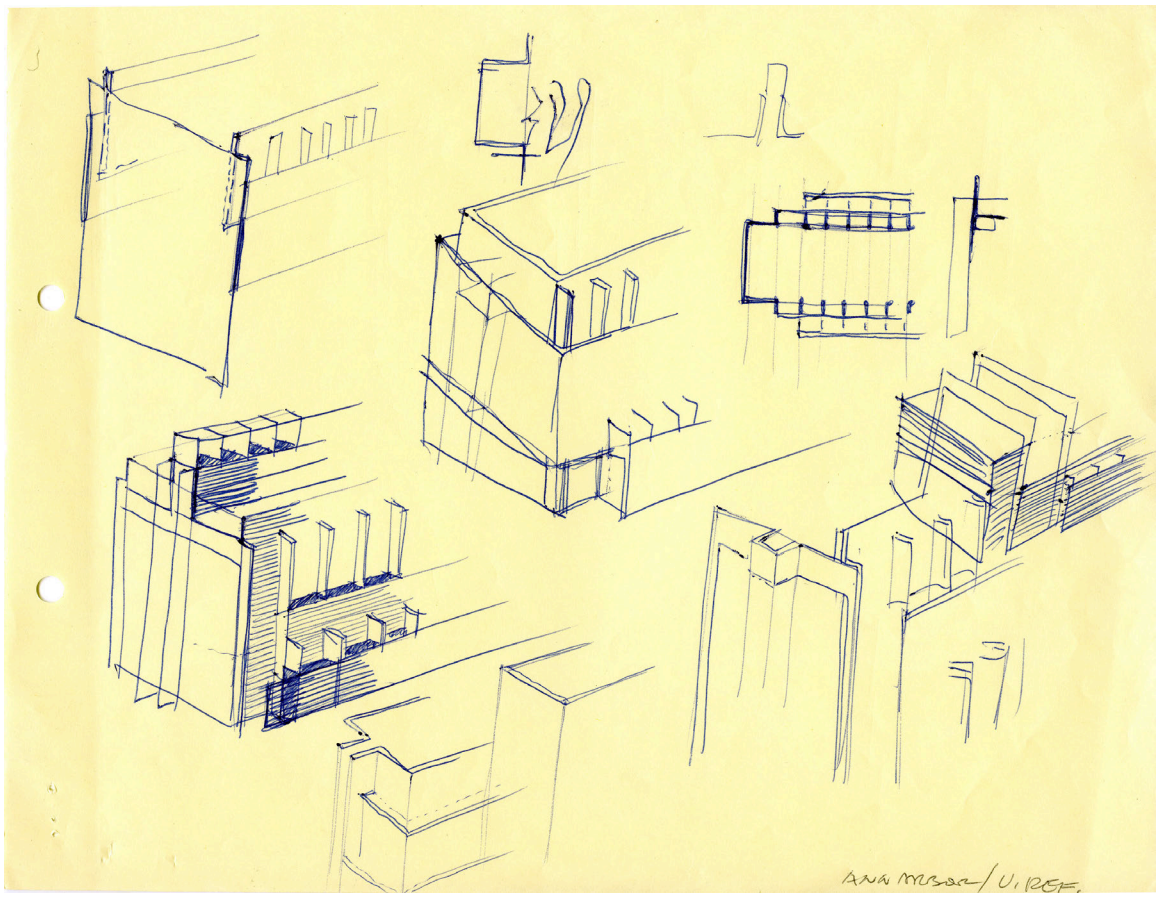

Figure 1.20 Sketches for URC, on verso of unrelated correspondence. Box 8, GBP, BHL.

Figure 1.21 Birkerts & Straub, Schwartz Summer Residence, Northfield, Michigan, 1960-61. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: "Record Houses 1961: Sculptural symmetry distinguishes design for inexpensive house," *Architectural Record* 129, no. 6 (Mid-May 1961), 123.

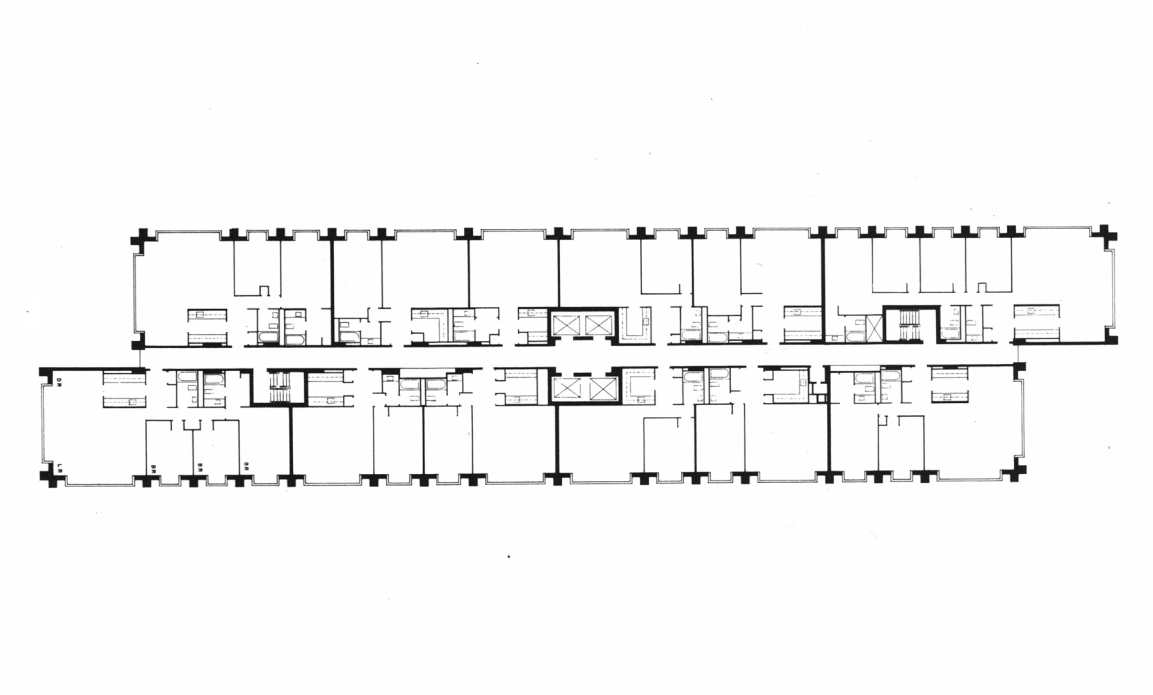

Figure 1.22 Birkerts & Straub, Typical Floor Plan, 1300 Lafayette Apartment Tower, Detroit, Michigan, 1961-63. Note irregular column grid and window boxes. From: Marlin and Futagawa, 40.

Figure 1.23 Birkerts & Straub, People's Federal Savings & Loan Branch, Royal Oak, Michigan, 1961-63. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: Birkerts and Schwartz, 197.

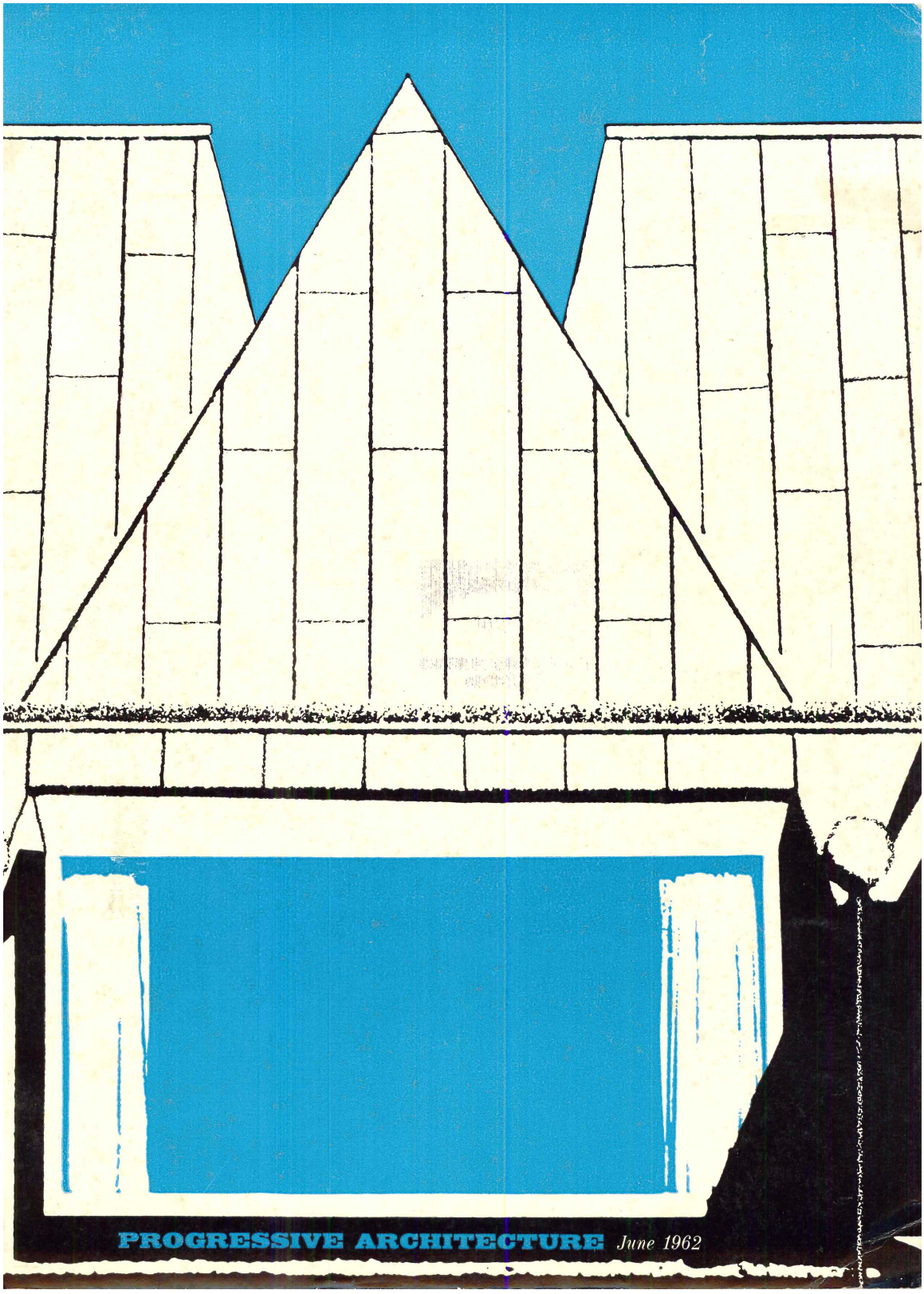

Figure 1.24 Drawing of Birkerts & Straub's Haley Funeral Home (Southfield, Michigan, 1960-61) featured on the cover of *Progressive Architecture* 43, no. 6 (June 1962).

Figure 1.25 Interior corner detail of Birkerts & Straub's People's Federal Savings & Loan featured on the cover of *Progressive Architecture* 44, no. 3 (March 1963).

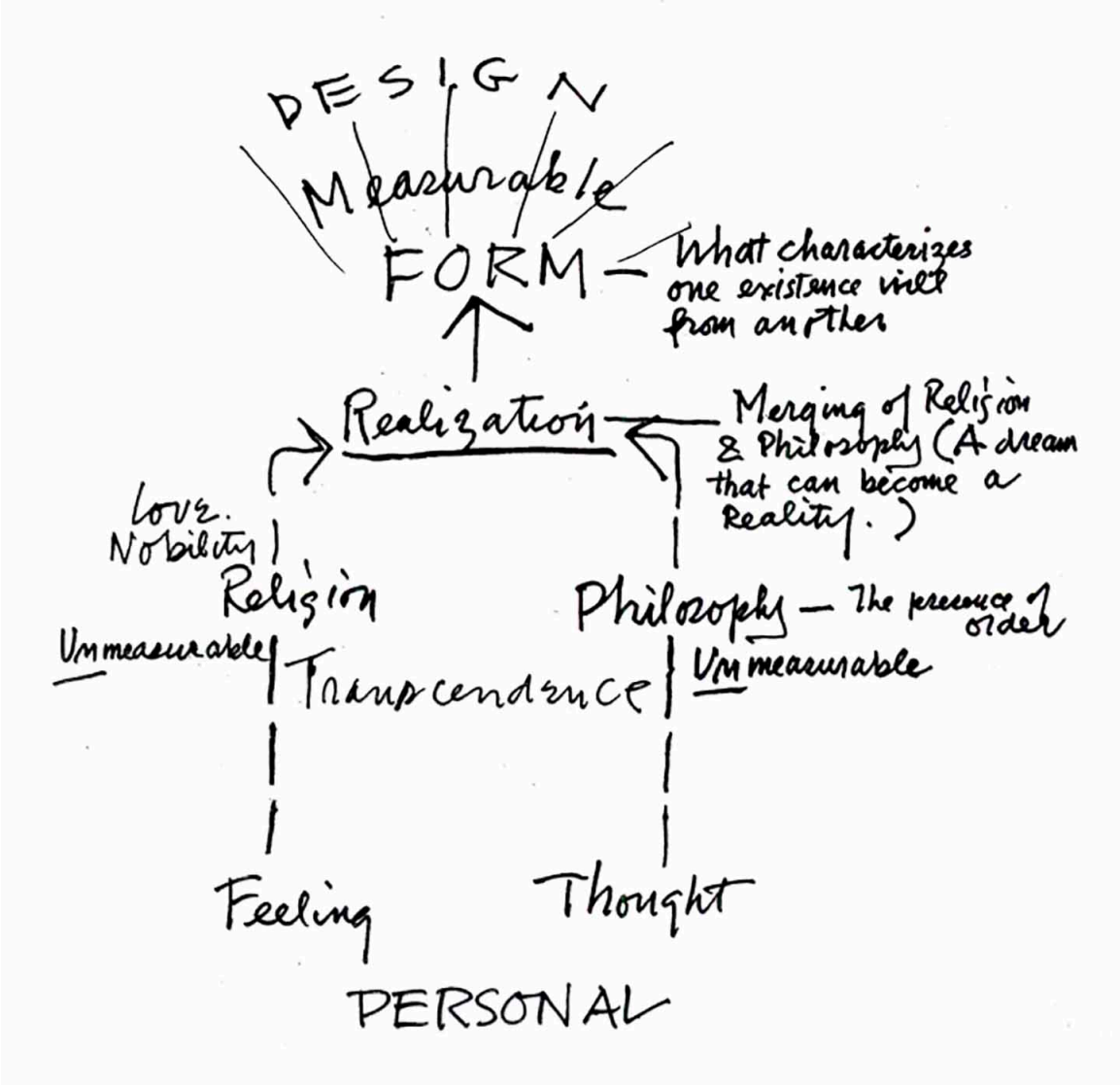

Figure 1.26 Diagram by Louis I. Kahn from Jan C. Rowan, "Wanting to be: The Philadelphia School," *Progressive Architecture* 42, no. 4 (April 1961), 132.

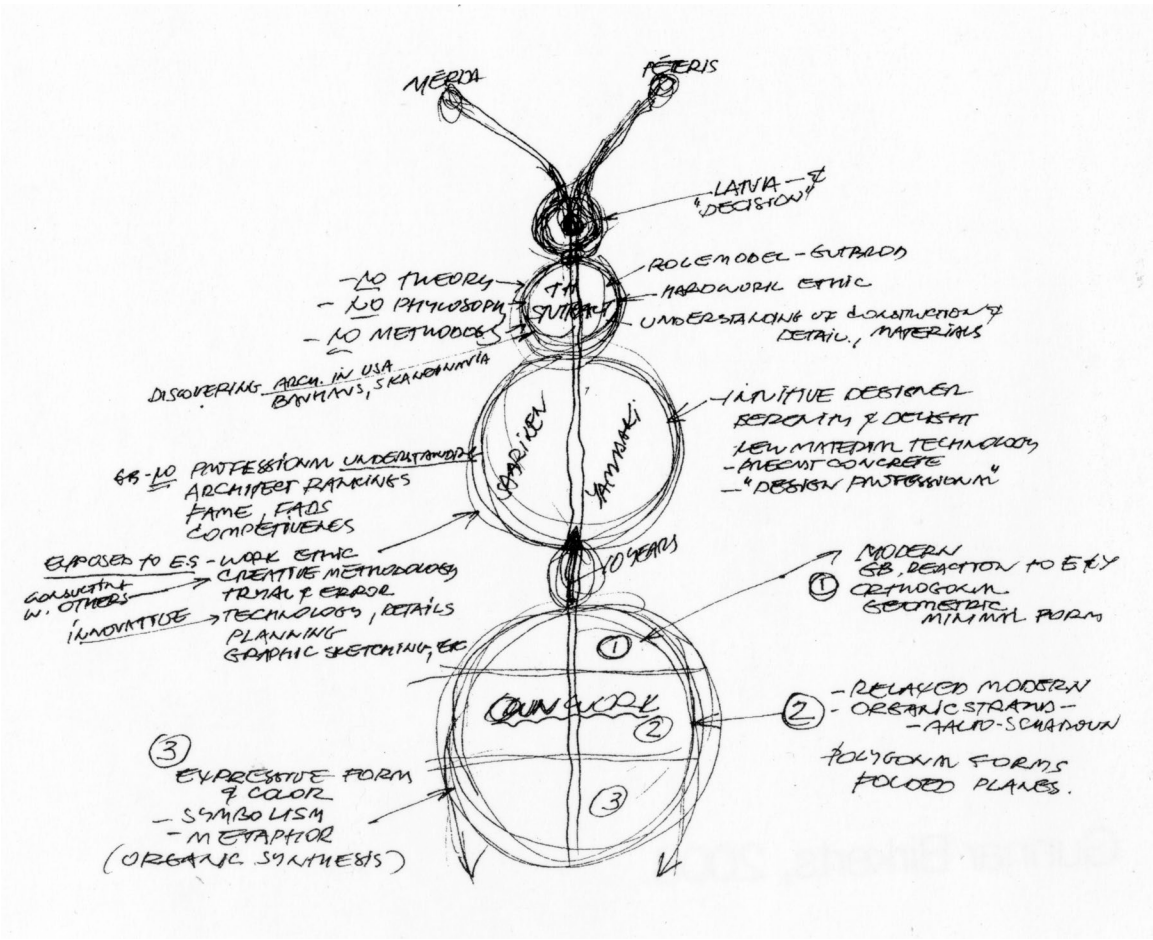

Figure 1.27 Gunnar Birkerts, "Life-Sketch," from Birkerts and Schwartz, 8.

Figure 1.28 Erik Gunnar Asplund, Staff Building, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, Sweden, 1923. Photograph by Arild Vågen courtesy Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tallum_Pavilion_2012b.jpg (Accessed 3 April 2017).

Figure 1.29 Eero Saarinen & Associates, Miller House, Columbus, Indiana, 1953-57. Photograph by Balthazar Korab, courtesy Library of Congress.

CHAPTER 2 (SOURCES)

Freedom and Flexibility: Tougaloo College, Mississippi, 1965-66

> *[Most] of the megastructure generation had their eyes on North America as the part of the world that had problems vast enough to require 'visionary' solutions and the biggest technological resources for dealing with them.*
>
> – Reyner Banham[1]

> *At best we are involved with the design of the ideal while the refuse of the real accumulates around us.*
>
> – Oscar Newman[2]

Among the many ambitious campus plans produced during the 1960s, Gunnar Birkerts's design for Tougaloo College stands out because of the vast problems it hoped to address and the unusual architectural techniques deployed to address them. Commissioned by a Historically Black College (HBCU) in Mississippi—the most stubbornly segregated state of the former confederacy—the plan was designed not only to transform Tougaloo's educational environment, but also to sow the seeds for a more equal and more integrated society. Bridging Birkerts's early, Detroit-centered success and the increasingly national profile he had built by the mid-1970s, the Tougaloo master plan and the three buildings eventually completed on the campus offer a view into a transitional period in his career, when commissions increased in size and complexity while he fought to retain design control. Because of its fraught context, the Tougaloo project found Birkerts entering into

[1] Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 196.
[2] Oscar Newman, "The New Campus," *Architectural Forum* 124, no. 4 (April 1966): 43.

spaces already dense with procedures, practices, and ideas. Despite assertions of originality, the images and concepts traveling through various discourse networks had a decisive impact on the plan's form and its conceptual foundations.[3] My ambition in this chapter is to trace the networks of visual and intellectual sources that influenced the Tougaloo design, ultimately arguing that 1960s architects and college administrators conflated flexibility with freedom, and that this conflation hampered efforts at integration.

Centering on Birkerts's work at Tougaloo College while connecting it to an array of contemporaneous architectural projects, social histories, and intellectual debates, in this chapter I question the authorial autonomy so important to Birkerts's personal narrative. He may have been designing an architecturally progressive campus, but, to paraphrase Oscar Newman, "the refuse of the real" had already accumulated around him, channeling his project. Mapping the particular networks of ideas and images that influenced the design reveals the intricate ties between architectural form and political ideology in the 1960s, manifest in a shared enthusiasm for the concepts of flexibility and integration. I'll begin with a discussion of the built outcomes of Birkerts's master plan, questioning the effectiveness of the material chosen to capture the desired flexibility in built form—namely, concrete.

[3] See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990). In his foreword to the book, David E. Wellbery characterizes Kittler's use of the word discourse as referring to "positive modes of existing of language as shaped by institutions of pedagogy, technical means of reproduction, storage and transfer, available strategies of interpretation, and so on." (xxi) It is this sense of the word that I am adopting here.

The Master Plan and its Built Outcomes

Like many megastructural campus plans, Birkerts's Tougaloo design is based on a complex arrangement of rectangular blocks (Figures 2.01 & 2.02). The boldest, most distinctive move is the design's vertical programmatic layering. On the top level are dormitories dramatically suspended in air, reaching out from the crest of Tougaloo's hilly site toward the canopy of an uncleared forest to the west. Below them, teaching spaces run north-south, spreading outward from a central square containing library and chapel, the two key buildings for this Christian college. On the east side of the plan, two dormitory wings splay outward to welcome automobiles, which are elsewhere confined to the lower reaches below the teaching space. The campus was designed to bring together 2500 students and 200 faculty members (along with their families) on only 25 acres, or 5% of the total college acreage. Located on the same site as the existing campus, the plan called for the gradual replacement of all but the two newest college buildings with modular, multifunctional structures in what Birkerts called an "academic matrix." Phasing drawings mapped the growth of this matrix from a few isolated bar-shaped buildings into complex figures on a ground of irregular courtyards (Figure 2.03). It is a dramatic, dense, urbanistic ensemble that recalls the city and campus plans of European Team 10 architects and the Japanese Metabolists, toward whom Birkerts often looked for inspiration. The design's visual rhyme with the work of these better-known architects has meant it is often dismissed as just another megastructure.

Indeed, it shared certain conditions and concepts with other megastructural designs—an institution dealing with unprecedented growth, uncertainty about future functional needs, an aesthetic of modular irregularity, a desire to instill an idea of

freedom in architectural form, and, perhaps most importantly for the built outcomes, the monolithic use of concrete. As Adrian Forty has written, "Mid-century architects and engineers often seemed to want their works to prove something about concrete, to show that concrete could do things that other materials could not."[4] Following this trend, the design was supposed to demonstrate that concrete could speed up the construction process by acting as a material integrator, holding together usually separate elements like door bucks, electrical wiring, plumbing, waterproofing, and insulation. This kind of integration appealed to Tougaloo not only because it could expedite construction, but also because it might allow them to wrestle the construction of campus buildings from the control of segregated Mississippi trade unions. Training workers of color in an integrated system of construction at Tougaloo would give the college freedom from condoning discriminatory employment practices and build a new class of skilled concrete tradesmen for Black-owned businesses in the state.[5]

Sometime after the plan's initial presentation in May 1966, it was decided that the first phase of GBA's master plan for Tougaloo's new campus would consist of a library and two dormitories, one male and one female, which were identified as the most urgent of the college's needs by their facilities study. As early as July, the architects were instructed to focus their attention almost exclusively on the three buildings that

[4] Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 287.
[5] Such manual training was an important part of the "Hampton-Tuskegee Idea" for black education, developed by Samuel Chapman Armstrong at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute beginning in the 1870s and implemented by his pupil Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute beginning in 1881. See James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 33–78. Hampton and Tuskegee's founders emphasized manual labor (even in the training of future teachers under the program of a Normal School) as part of "an ideology of 'self-help' as the practical and moral foundation of their teacher training process." Both Hampton and Tuskegee reformed their curricula in the late 1920s, bringing them, "closer to the ideological mainstream of black education." (34) A more conventional Normal School, Tougaloo had never "Hamptonized" and didn't intend for their own students to participate in the construction of campus buildings, as Washington had implemented at Tuskegee. (134-35)

comprised this "mini-plan." This immediate turn toward built outcomes was intended to provide a demonstration of the master plan's premises at a small scale relatively quickly. Good news arrived in late 1967, when Tougaloo learned that it would be awarded a $640,000 loan for the construction of one dormitory from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and a $511,000 library construction grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).[6] These votes of financial confidence, it was hoped, would help the trustees drum up additional support from private donors. For the construction of the two dormitories, about another $900,000 was required; for the library, they needed another three quarters of a million. With these limited budgets in mind, GBA prepared schematic designs for each. The first two dormitories were to be located on the east side of campus, framing the primary vehicular entry and Woodworth Chapel (Figures 2.04 & 2.05). Even this initial design required substantial reneging on the three-dimensional complexity of the master plan.

In the master plan, seven dormitory blocks were suspended in air on bulky caissons containing vertical circulation. Arranged on a tartan grid, these caissons would have required nearly 60' spans. The proposal to raise student housing above the academic buildings was driven by several factors, the most important of which was the tremendously unstable Yazoo clay soil on Tougaloo's campus (Figure 2.06). It was well known that soil conditions near Jackson were incredibly difficult because of a geological outcrop of this highly expansive clay. Yazoo had caused problems for foundations and basements on Tougaloo's campus for decades. Expansive clay swells immensely when

[6] Though initial designs for the dormitories and library were prepared following the guidelines of Title I of the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, Tougaloo was never able to acquire funding through the mechanisms established therein. This was because those mechanisms were administered at the state level, and therefore controlled by the racist state government of Mississippi.

exposed to water, and shrinks when drying. This creates *slickenside* cracks that make moisture distribute unevenly, and allowing surface water to penetrate ever deeper into the group. A report from the Mississippi Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) states that Yazoo exhibits an extreme version of this geologic behavior:

> The lateral and upward forces generated during expansion are tremendous and are capable of lifting tons of concrete and of disrupting the structural integrity of roadways and buildings. Also, during the process of desiccation or drying, this clay exhibits sufficiently strong adhesion or suction on overlying foundations to pull them down as the soil shrinks. Heave and shrinkage due to expansion and desiccation are rarely distributed evenly under a structure, causing differential movement.[7]

Hoping to skirt these issues, the architects proposed a physical separation between new buildings and the troublesome Yazoo, with concrete caissons resisting the clay's massive force. Ultimately, they realized that the massive caissons they proposed were financially unrealistic. In their 1967 design, GBA instead placed dormitories on round concrete pillars at 30' spans, in line with the planning module of the master plan. They likely recognized that these relatively slender piers would be more vulnerable to heaving clay, the revised design would also expedite construction substantially, a desirable outcome given that Tougaloo required new facilities for student accommodation as quickly as possible. According to the MDNR report, buildings on pier foundations are indeed more susceptible to Yazoo, but also make it easier to detect problems and repair damage.[8]

The revised dormitory design lent them an infrastructural quality that was also evident in the library design. More than a conventional residential building, the dormitories resembled highway overpasses. This aligned with the master

[7] Curtis W. Stover, Ross D. Williams, and Charles O.M. Peel, "Yazoo Clay: Engineering Aspects and Environmental Geology of an Expansive Clay," (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Geology, 1988): 1.
[8] Ibid., 8.

plan's megastructural ambition, with concrete treated as a kind of neutral medium where one might, in Forty's words, "lose sight altogether of the buildings as individual objects, and instead … allow them to merge into a generic urban infrastructure."[9] Composed of repetitive concrete members within the planning grid, the library design is comparable to tinker toys. To be built of cast-in-place circular columns with precast beams, wall panels, and "capitals," it stayed relatively stable while the dormitories underwent various redesigns.

The first designs were put out to bid in early 1968, with the HUD loan amount as an unspoken budget cap for the dormitories. Unfamiliar with both the architect and the stilted design, contractors responded with a low bid around $1 million, more than $300,000 over the predetermined limit. In response, GBA was asked to substantially economize the dormitories, which they accomplished by relocating and straightening the bar-shaped buildings, placing them astride the library along the western edge of campus (Figure 2.07). There, they reached dramatically outward from the apex of the hill and into the adjacent deciduous forest, while still conforming to the layout of the original master plan (Figure 2.08).

Even the second set of bids remained too high, and uncertainty surrounded the project until the college was put in contact with the Winston A. Burnett Construction Company of New York (Figure 2.09). Originally a demolition contractor that "specialized in gutting and then renovating apartment buildings," Burnett had recently formed a joint venture with Boise Cascade called Burnett-Boise.[10] The trustees were

[9] Forty, *Concrete and Culture*, 282.
[10] David W. Russell, "Report to the Trustees on Tougaloo's Master Plan and "Mini Planning," Undated draft, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Box 4, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

drawn to the prospect of supporting Burnett, a black-owned business, in their new venture. Burnett-Boise had acquired the rights to a patented concrete panel system that had been used in Europe for over twenty years. Under the system, concrete panels containing all required fixtures would be cast, smoothed, vibrated, cured, and finished all on a single conveyor. Promising that, "[whole] buildings could be constructed in a fraction of the time and at lower cost than with conventional methods," Burnett was awarded the contract in December 1969, with the understanding that they could deliver a completed dormitory in time for Tougaloo's new class of incoming freshmen the next year.

Until late in 1969, GBA had two distinct designs for the dormitories developing in parallel. Both rested on the same superstructure of round caisson columns and precast concrete beams, but differed above. The design preferred by Birkerts and his team (Figure 2.10) was to be assembled from horizontal concrete window units that featured an integrated desk. Similar to the library design, his version depended upon the ability of a precast plant to make 30' long, 6' tall concrete beams. The less distinctive second design (Figure 2.11), based on a more conventional use of wall panels of about 12' length and 10' high with 6" thickness, was eventually selected because it was more economical and Burnett was more comfortable with its proposed construction process. In both designs, a concrete deck within the substructure would provide stairway access to each "house" of around twenty students from below (Figure 2.12). This format was based on the existing system of student housing in shared houses on campus.

Setting up the industrialized building system required the purchase of existing machinery from Germany and its assembly on the Tougaloo campus (Figure 2.13). To

expedite this process, the college provided a $300,000 interest-free loan to Burnett as a down payment. It was believed that this plant would be flexible enough to produce both concrete members for the library and wall panels for the dormitories with little lag time. The college's Business Manager David W. Russell would later write of the arrangement:

> […] two Black institutions would be cooperating to bring a new construction process to the U.S., Black Mississippians could be trained in skilled trades, and the plant could solicit other business in the area. There appeared to be no alternative, given the twin constraints of time and money.[11]

Burnett proved to be incapable of delivering the product Tougaloo had hired them to provide. Over the course of the project the brittleness of concrete proved to be as significant a problem as the site's troublesome Yazoo clay. After several months' delay while the precasting plant was set up, Burnett informed GBA that because of the thinness of the panels they were capable of producing, they would be unable to fabricate the 30' long panels required for the library, and withdrew from that contract. The library was rebid and awarded to Frazier-Morton Construction, a Mississippi firm, who would order the panels from an established precast plant. Progress on the dormitories proved slower than expected as well, because Burnett's first test panels were improperly mixed and inadequately vibrated, resulting in brittleness and breakage at connection points (Figure 2.14).

This system of panelized precast concrete walls and floors depend heavily on the impermeability and flexibility of sealant in order to make the connection between interlocking panels weathertight. A faith in the capabilities of new synthetics led many architects and contractors to design inadequately robust precast systems, and many institutions are still dealing with the repercussions today. The durability and longevity of

[11] Ibid.

the polyurethane and polyvinyl adhesives used at Tougaloo were low, and the assemblies designed by GBA depended upon their permanent impermeability. Yet like the Yazoo clay on which these buildings rested, the curing and drying of this sealant almost immediately produced cracks, and even before the library opened in 1972 its carpets and furniture were wet.

Attempting to prove that a system of concrete construction could be “flexible” and “integrated” enough to make formally adventurous and technically advanced buildings, GBA and their contractors saddled the cash-strapped college with three leaky buildings (Figure 2.15). Given Tougaloo’s progressive ambitions, materializations of Birkerts' master plan were destined to be disappointing, but the material brittleness of clay soil, concrete, and sealant derailed the success of GBA's buildings. The architects’ misplaced faith in the permanence of particular materials contributed to the failure of both the buildings and the construction companies. The guiding premises of the plan turned out to be misguided as well. Though each of these buildings was designed and constructed with expansion in mind, they were never expanded because the expected growth in Tougaloo’s enrollment never came to pass.

Paradoxically, actually building the megastructures of the 1960s—which were intended as flexible, adaptable, and expandable—usually meant making them monumental, permanent, and of concrete. A cartoon drawn by one of Frazier-Morton’s carpenters makes light of this contradiction (Figure 2.16). It depicts the shaky process of assembling the precast concrete frame. Columns, beams, and connectors teeter and slip as a sleepy crane operator positions the next piece of the frame. Wrestling with the paradox of making the flexible permanent, architects and their clients overestimated certain

material qualities at the expense of others. Overlooking the mutability and brittleness of architectural materiality, attention was primarily focused on the speed at which buildings could be completed. This was ultimately to the long-term detriment of the buildings themselves.

The Campus Megastructure: Flexibility or Control?

From poverty to political violence, Tougaloo College presented a context for Birkerts's commission that was suffused with vast, seemingly intractable problems. All seemed to trace their origins back to race. Though Supreme Court decisions and Federal statutes had officially outlawed racial segregation by the time Birkerts became Tougaloo's architect, Jim Crow practices were so deeply ingrained in the state that historian John Dittmer was hardly exaggerating when he called them "a Mississippi 'folkway.'"[12] Because of stubborn prejudice and a lack of economic opportunity, prospects for black Mississippians were severely constrained. The state's economy still largely funneled African Americans into menial, low-wage jobs in agriculture or housework despite decades of mechanization in those fields. By the 1960s, 90 percent of laborers in the state's cotton fields had been replaced by machines, resulting in widespread poverty and unemployment because most other careers remained closed to former field workers.[13] To improve their prospects, nearly 400,000 African Americans left Mississippi between

[12] John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 13. Dittmer's is the most thorough account of Civil Rights activism in the state. He taught American History at Tougaloo in the 1960s and 1970s.
[13] Dittmer, 19–20, 363–65.

1940 and 1960.[14] Most followed the well-trod paths of the Great Migration into northern and western industrial cities.[15]

In this fraught racial climate, the role of the historically black college remained important. Despite desegregation being mandated at the federal level, Mississippi's higher education institutions remained effectively closed to African Americans until the mid-1960s. Moreover, though integration had opened many careers to southern blacks, postsecondary education was often a barrier to entry. Increased consciousness of racial inequality meant many in the north affirmatively sought out African Americans for administrative and management positions, but the dearth of qualified individuals was a frequent refrain.[16] The low caliber of the South's still de facto segregated high schools hampered students' hopes for admission to selective majority-white institutions, so bolstering black colleges was seen as a temporary but necessary salve.[17] Hence, investment in the restructuring of the curricula, faculties, and campuses of these colleges

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[14] Census of the Population, 1950, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population, Part 24, Mississippi* (Washington: Government Publishing Office), 192; Census of the Population, 1960, vol. 2, *General Population Characteristics, Part 26, Mississippi* (Washington: Government Publishing Office), 26. 1950 statistics cited in Dittmer, 19.

[15] The definitive history of the Great Migration is Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010). See also: Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1965), 126–50. Based on census data, these authors conclude that 1960s black migration to cities increasingly included those of "high socioeconomic status … particularly in Northern and border cities." (150).

[16] For example, the 1966 United Negro College Fund Convocation adopted the theme "Business and Government: Partners for Progress in Higher Education for Negroes," and one of the questions on the agenda was "How can higher education for Negroes be advanced, accelerated, and enriched so that greater numbers of Negroes can be qualified in the shortest possible time for the new and expanding job opportunities which are open to them right now?" See: "Announcement: 1966 United Negro College Fund Convocation," Undated, 1, Box 408, Folder 10, Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Family Papers, Indiana Historical Society.

[17] For a lengthy justification of this attitude to HBCUs, see: Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 425-475. The authors conclude that, "If illusions were eliminated on all scores, we think fewer Negroes would attend Negro colleges. But so long as some continue to attend, whether for good or bad reasons, their choice should be respected. This means that efforts must continue to improve the intellectual and human conditions under which they spend their undergraduate years." (475)

poured in from northern foundations and philanthropists. Tougaloo was subject to these more widespread desires for restructuring, but it was highly unusual in that there, unlike at other black colleges, these vast problems were addressed through architecture.

And yet, as Banham recognized, optimism about America's technological prowess—and, likewise, its ability to address social problems through technical means—was at its high point in the 1960s.[18] Banham himself had been caught up in this same optimism when, in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, he called for his contemporaries to account in their designs for the "fairly high rate of scrapping … inherent in the technological approach."[19] A more wholehearted embrace of rapid change, he believed, would free modern architecture from the straightjacket of academic formalism and open a wider scope for the influence of design on everyday life. Architects responding to this call found themselves in a strange position: committed on the one hand to creating authored works of architecture (with all the control over appearance this implies), and on the other to setting out systems that enabled obsolescence.[20] This generation of designers—most of whom were born during the interwar period—were interested, first, in the visual aspects of growth and change at all scales from microorganisms to cities, and second, in the structuring of societies, at least as far as these structures could be visually communicated to non-experts. An apparent convergence between the organic, the technological, and the social (or at least images and diagrams of each) inspired designs that hoped to coax inevitable functional growth and

[18] Arindam Dutta has referred to this as the "techno-social" moment. Cf. Arindam Dutta and et al., eds., *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the "techno-Social" Moment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013).
[19] Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age.* (London: Architectural Press, 1960), 329.
[20] See Daniel M. Abramson, "Chapter 4: Fixing Obsolescence," in *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 79–106.

change into comprehensible formal patterns.[21] The visionary quality of these plans was justified through references to visualizations appropriated from the sciences. At a moment when this "third generation" of modernist architects sought to free themselves from the dogmas of postwar modern architecture, these designs sought an escape trajectory.

Yet this generation's visionary, idealist designs were more than just seductive images circulated among architects. They also met the needs of certain groups of architectural clients. Administrators and trustees of postsecondary educational institutions were one such group. In its disciplinary usage, the word megastructure names a late modern trend in urban and campus planning that Banham described succinctly as "the repetition and agglomeration of seemingly standardized folk-building elements into settlements of conspicuously clear plan or striking silhouette."[22] Though seen as a relatively radical approach in the early 1960s, it became a dominant mainstream tendency in campus planning from the mid 1960s until just after 1970. For the "megastructure generation," who were, at least for a time, wholly convinced that this novel approach was both appropriate and realistic, college or university campuses were prime commissions because of the scale at which architects were permitted to operate. And at a moment when the size of the country's educational complexes was growing faster than ever before, architects' interest in irregular form and organic growth found practical application on campus. Modeling of growth and change were operative at the social level as well. Because of their clear hierarchies and disciplinary divisions, college communities

[21] Gyorgy Kepes's Vision + Value book series is perhaps the best document of these interests among designers, and of the seeming visual convergence between these three realms.
[22] Banham, *Megastructure*, 9.

easily lent themselves to the kind of structural, diagrammatic modeling that megastructures visually mimicked.

Each of these conditions made the campus plan a desirable commission for architects, despite the seemingly inevitable disappointment of seeing one's vision abandoned over time. Young architects pursued these projects through occasional competitions, but they were often awarded to large corporate firms who had extensive master planning or urban planning experience to bring to bear. It was rare for an architect as young and untested as Birkerts to receive a commission like the Tougaloo master plan, and he was more than aware of its importance, later reflecting that the project was wholly unique and that his firm "may never be involved in another effort requiring such dedication, enthusiasm, and total participation."[23]

Like many of Birkerts's contemporaneous projects, the master plan was widely published at the time of its preparation, appearing in the American journals *Progressive Architecture (P/A), Architectural Record* and on the cover of *Architectural Forum* (Figure 2.17).[24] *P/A* and *Forum* reported on the plan in April 1966 when it was first presented to the college, and both journals found its social goals as compelling as its form. Hewing close to the architect's own descriptions, *P/A* observed that for students, "matriculation in the college will represent their first 'urban' experience … they will, for the first time, become part of a much higher density community than the red clay farms and small towns they call home."[25] *Forum*'s John Morris Dixon likewise found that the

[23] William Marlin and Yukio Futagawa, eds., *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates* (Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. Edita, 1982), 99.
[24] Jan C. Rowan, ed., "Matriculation Matrix," *Progressive Architecture* 47, no. 4 (April 1966): 211–13; John Morris Dixon, "How to Grow a Campus, 1: Tougaloo College," *Architectural Forum* 124, no. 3 (April 1966): 56–61; "Designed for Mobility, Both Social and Physical: Three Colleges by Gunnar Birkerts," *Architectural Record* 144, no. 4 (October 1968): 129–44.
[25] Rowan, "Matriculation Matrix," 211.

design's most distinctive aim was "to find better ways—academic, administrative, and environmental—to prepare young rural Negroes for responsibilities in an urban world."[26] Comparing Tougaloo to two subsequent Birkerts campus plans, *Record* saw its allowance for both social and physical mobility as its most notable accomplishment, memorably referring to it as a "way station" for students on the way to "the urban environment into which their careers will take them."[27] Campus plans by other architects were lauded in these publications for their complex circulation patterns and systematic management of growth—both of which were aspects of Birkerts's flexible, megastructural design—but the Tougaloo context seemingly required that writers recognize the social dimension of college design.[28] More broadly, Birkerts's plan was singular because, as *P/A* recognized, it showed how "architecture can—perhaps only in isolated cases such as Tougaloo—be a major factor in creating a preparedness for [social and cultural] change."[29] The campus design was thought of not only as a backdrop for change, but also an acclimatizing environment that could prepare students for the difficulties of their urban future.

In these publications, the most frequently reproduced images are photographs of a model representing the first projected phase of construction designed to accommodate 1250 students (Figures 2.01, 2.18 & 2.19).[30] These photographs—credited to Birkerts's longtime friend and confidant Balthazar Korab—are intended to emphasize the dense,

[26] Dixon, "How to Grow a College," 57. Dixon had by this time moved from his position at *P/A* discussed in Chapter 1 to a job at *Forum*.
[27] "Designed for Mobility," 129.
[28] *Architectural Record*'s late 1960s articles on buildings and master plans for college campuses are collected in: Mildred F. Schmertz, *Campus Planning and Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972). Section four of the book, which covers "Architecture which gives a campus the unity of a single building," is particularly relevant. (161-233)
[29] Rowan, "Matriculation Matrix," 213. The qualifier in *P/A*'s statement reveals a patronizing, subtly racist view of the rural and black students—their "isolated cases"—who the editors believed would be more susceptible to change elicited by the campus environment than students from more cosmopolitan urban settings.
[30] The model was built for display during George A. Owens's inauguration as Tougaloo College president in May 1966.

urban quality of the design, but also its modularity and seeming mastery of change. The models overall shape was based not on the specific functional needs of the school (as these were constantly changing during the design process), but instead demonstrated architecture's ability to pliantly accommodate shifting needs. As Reyner Banham similarly observed of Archigram's designs, Birkerts's plan "derived its aesthetic" from a demonstration of its flexible nature.[31] With specific functional requirements absent, *Record* recognized that Birkerts's primary task was to capture architecture's capacity for flexibility in "a bold and memorable image."[32]

Later publications of the Tougaloo design have treated it as a singular example of once-common approaches to campus planning. In an essay by editor and architect Jim Burns published in Gyorgy Kepes's *Arts of the Environment* (a belated entry in the Vision + Value series), the Tougaloo design was cited as a case wherein "opportunities for vital interchange between people" and "the lessons the environment itself can teach" would contribute to a process of community learning.[33] Burns echoed *Record*'s assertion that megastructures generally, and Tougaloo's plan in particular, could enable both a social and a physical mobility. "Socially," he wrote, "the megastructure can have the possibility of increasing chances for individual change," adding that "As community processes become more visible and are shared by more and more people, it will be possible to envision a positively fluid system of social mobility coming into being."[34]

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[31] Banham, *Megastructure*, 96.
[32] "Designed for Mobility," 129. The plan's image stayed in circulation for some time after Tougaloo had abandoned its tenets, even appearing on the college's letterhead for several years.
[33] James T. Burns, Jr., "Social and Psychological Implications of Megastructures," in Gyorgy Kepes, ed., *Arts of the Environment*, Vision + Value Series 7 (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 146. Burns was a collaborator of landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and the choreographer Anna Halprin in the development of their groundbreaking "Take Part" process for community participation. See: Halprin and Burns, *Taking Part: A Workshop Approach to Collective Creativity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).
[34] Kepes, 146–48.

Burns expected Tougaloo to be a pedagogical environment in two ways—first, a location where academic instruction took place and second, an environment that was itself both instructive and transformative.

In Paul Venable Turner's 1984 book *Campus: An American Planning Tradition*, however, Tougaloo serves as merely an example of the preoccupation among postwar campus planners with creating clear, hierarchical patterns of circulation. For Turner, the Tougaloo design seemed driven by this preoccupation, evidenced by the dense, pedestrian-only "academic matrix" at the center of campus and its banishment of cars to the edges and underbelly. The design also illustrated the seemingly ubiquitous requirement for flexible growth because it set out "a process" rather than the final campus form.[35] More recently, Stefan Muthesius has situated Birkerts's design within a bevy of global campus formalisms, placing it alongside projects by Jaap Bakema, Candilis Josic Woods, and Oswald Matthias Ungers, among others. Muthesius only classifies Tougaloo as a centrifugal plan, one of several ways of achieving designs "of breathtaking complexity, as well as diversity."[36] In each of these publications, flexibility is seen as a defining characteristic of Birkerts's design.

Judging by the explanations of architecture journalists and historians, most of the problems megastructures were purported to solve—often related to accommodating change and obsolescence—were urban in nature, and always treated highly technically. Simultaneously, many such proposals would also have promoted social transformations by creating a kind of mixing chamber for different classes or different professions. Each

[35] Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Architectural History Foundation ; MIT Press, 1984), 267, 271.
[36] Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 252–57.

of these proposals can be situated on a spectrum from radical to pragmatic. On the radical end, in proposals like Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood's Fun Palace—frequently cited as the first megastructure—the visitor was expected to set aside everyday behavioral mores and transform the building in order to participate in a communal performance. On the other, one finds a more pragmatic approach in buildings like Candilis Josic Woods's design for the Berlin Free University campus, where academic disciplines and student spaces were loosely and irregularly distributed on a grid. Through this planning strategy, the architects hoped to break down barriers between siloed researchers, their colleagues, and students.[37] In these and other cases, "flexibility" became a watchword and a mandate for architecture.[38]

The word flexibility united two separate but related demands in architecture discourse: the first was for spaces that allow multiple functions or can be easily adapted; the second was for plans that could allow for expansion and growth without losing their identity. As an architectural concept, it therefore straddled the divide between technical and social: it was technical because many clients demanded that architects anticipate future growth in their designs; it was social because increasingly standardized buildings starved users of the experiential variety and personal interactivity that more flexible

[37] Perhaps the most fully realized example of this planning approach is Denys Lasdun's campus for the University of East Anglia, but unlike Birkerts's design for Tougaloo, Lasdun's design separates residential from academic functions in plan rather than section.

[38] It wasn't only in the realm of architecture that the concept of flexibility became important at this time. Indeed, "flexible response" was perhaps the defining doctrine for John F. Kennedy's foreign policy on military intervention. See James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, Oxford History of the United States 10 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 489. Similarly, organization theorist Tom Burns found the bureaucratic model of industrial management obsolescent because of "The new demands … made by large-scale research and development and by industry's new relationship with its markets. Both demand much greater flexibility in internal organization." Tom Burns, "Mechanistic and Organismic Structures," [1963] in Derek S. Pugh, *Organization Theory: Selected Classic Readings*, Fifth Edition (London: Penguin, 2007), 102. Burns's observation might be understood as an early indication of the transition within capitalism, identified famously by David Harvey, from Fordism to "flexible accumulation." See: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 141–99.

buildings would supposedly enable.[39] The flexible megastructure—which would be able, according to its proponents, to grow with time and also adjust to accommodate changing functional requirements—was therefore perfectly situated as a techno-utopian object for a time of rapid change. It was unclear at the time whether buildings that were intentionally left incomplete or buildings that had enough excess capacity to serve multiple purposes would better accommodate these newfound needs.[40] Though the concept wasn't a new one in the 1960s, the demand for flexibility became widespread during that decade, as technological and social change seemed to accelerate. A brief digression through the concept's architectural historiography can show exactly what clients were requesting when they asked for flexibility, and how architects understood their request.

A discussion of flexibility's use in modern architecture discourse can begin with its use in Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture*. For Giedion, flexibility described a particular approach to planning that he attributed to American domestic architecture. Here, flexibility wasn't a quality inherent to spaces but rather described their ability to be collected together into "informal" plans (Figure 2.20). For Giedion, 19th century house plans like those of E.C. Gardner showed a loose aggregation of parts rather than a regulated system. This compositional understanding of the concept offered a respite from the symmetries and hierarchies of the Beaux Arts and fed directly into modernist functionalism. In Giedion's narrative, flexibility was more a habit of mind than

[39] Reinhold Martin has likewise described the social function of flexible postwar office spaces by stating that "In the name of the corporation as productive organism, offices [became] social condensers." Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 91.
[40] Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 142.

an architectural characteristic.[41] This compositional understanding of the concept produced results that were more like a conventional campus plan than a megastructure.

Peter Collins, in *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, similarly saw this informal mindset as a reaction against the standardized planning doctrine instilled by neoclassicism. Yet he sought the birth of architectural flexibility elsewhere, and, with characteristic techno-determinism, attributed its parentage to structural steel and reinforced concrete framing, which freed walls from both their load bearing and their representational function.[42] Frame construction, Collins argued, offered architects some freedom from the need to express a building's function on its exterior—a problem that had been foregrounded by standardization. It also rendered interior walls impermanent.

Giedion and Collins seemingly understood the concept from opposite extremes: Giedion saw it in unsystematic collections of discrete spaces (from part to whole or *compositional* flexibility), Collins through an ample though modular frame (from whole to part or *systematic* flexibility). One might perceive both of these meanings of flexibility in megastructures like Birkerts's Tougaloo College master plan. It proposed generic, modular buildings in its "academic matrix" that might accommodate any number of pedagogical formats, while the overall system was designed to allow for irregular growth.

Adrian Forty, in his later encyclopedic review of the concept, tried to reconcile these extremes through their common relation to modernist functionalism finding that flexibility was used both to extend functionalism by making it more viable in changing

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[41] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture; the Growth of a New Tradition.* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, 1941), 285–301.
[42] Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998), 234. Admittedly, these interpretations aren't interchangeable, as Giedion tends toward New England Colonial houses for his examples, unlike the 19th Century Victorian buildings Collins references.

times, and later to resist that same functionalism by encouraging the appropriation of spaces through unsanctioned use.[43] Forty ultimately offers three definitions of architectural flexibility. The first boils down to the idea that a building with excess capacity is more flexible than one with what Rem Koolhaas described as a "deterministic coincidence between form and program."[44] The second is flexibility attained by technical means, typically achieved by making parts of the building moveable, as in Price and Littlewood's plan for the Fun Palace.[45] The third interprets flexibility as a political strategy—as advocated by Henri Lefebvre—where it is "not a property of buildings but of spaces; and it is a property which they acquire through the uses to which they are put."[46] In the third case, flexibility is not subject to the will of a designer, but is instead produced by a collective of users.

If this third definition has been seen as the concept's primary political valence, its use in the Tougaloo master plan (and other similar projects) suggests there are other ways it has been deployed politically. One reading of its political function has been advanced by Reinhold Martin, who draws a connection between the rise of systematic flexibility in architectural plan making and a transition in Western political ideology toward what Gilles Deleuze called the "control society."[47] For Deleuze, political subjects in a control society increasingly internalize that society's regulatory mechanisms. This differs from the older model of disciplinary society, described by Michel Foucault as based primarily on regulation through enclosures.[48] Deleuze wrote, "Enclosures are molds, distinct

[43] Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 142–48.
[44] Rem Koolhaas, quoted in Forty, 144.
[45] Forty, 145.
[46] Forty, 148.
[47] Martin, *The Organizational Complex*, 4–7.
[48] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (1992): 3–7.

castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point."[49] Following this concept, Martin describes the rectangular grids of postwar office buildings as both representations and instruments of this newly "modular" subjectivity. Instead of disciplining subjects by constraining them, the newfound flexibility inherent to control societies required greater self-discipline. This was manifest in modular office plans that, through standardized components, reduced the amount of time required to adjust to changing spatial needs.

Like modular office floors, master plans are typically understood to be flexible documents within which growth and the unexpected can be pliantly accommodated. One might think of both as mechanisms for regulating change by offering a limited allowance. This was the seemingly eternal problem of the master plan, for as a report by Educational Facilities Laboratories put it in 1962, "the more rigid the master plan, the sooner circumstances dictate its being rejected."[50] Ultimately, the most obvious thing all architectural uses of flexibility have in common is their informal appearance, which architects adopted to effectively represent flexibility.[51] To create this effect in the Tougaloo design, programmatic requirements were split into broad categories, and the form of the plan was composed to create the visual effect of irregularity. This perhaps offers a fourth, image-based definition, which was perhaps the most true to 1960s

[49] Deleuze, 4.
[50] John X. Jamrich and Educational Facilities Laboratories, *To Build or Not to Build; a Report on the Utilization and Planning of Instructional Facilities in Small Colleges*, ed. Ruth Weinstock (New York, 1962), 18.
[51] One of the best explanations of this visual effect was Peter Cook describing his Plug-In City project as "Craggy but directional. Mechanistic but scaleable [*sic*]." Quoted in Banham, *Megastructure*, 94.

megastructural designs. Above all, megastructures looked like they could accommodate multiple uses and grow irregularly.

Though it may not immediately appear so, Birkerts's Tougaloo plan is in fact organized on a three-dimensional 30' x 30' x 15' planning grid (See Figure 2.08). This was an entirely pragmatic response given the vague programmatic requirements and unclear scale of the project. For Birkerts's master plan, this gridded flexibility and the irregularity it fostered had both technical and social valences. It was technical because Tougaloo's trustees expected that the college would expand its enrollment fivefold within twenty years, necessitating an architecture capable of accommodating this growth. It was social because the trustees also believed the right college environment could be a place where a predominantly black student body and a predominantly white faculty would learn to live together "by doing it," forming a test site for integration in a stubbornly segregated state.[52] If in office planning both flexibility and integration were thought of primarily as aesthetic concepts, at Tougaloo they had deeper connotations.[53] The tight integration of programs in the campus design was intended to foster and enable a social space of racial integration.

Before Birkerts began preparing his plan, the campus already served as a kind of integration laboratory, as college activities regularly brought black and white Mississippians together to discuss alternatives to the state's segregationist society and develop networks to resist it.[54] The master plan was expected to concretize and formalize

[52] Inaugural Address by George A. Owens, "Inauguration of George A. Owens as President of Tougaloo College," April 21, 1966, 32, Box 3, Folder 8, George A. Owens Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.
[53] Martin, *The Organizational Complex*, 95.
[54] One such regular activity, Tougaloo's Social Science Forums, is discussed in Maria Lowe, "'Sowing the Seeds of Discontent': Tougaloo College's Social Science Forums as a Prefigurative Movement Free Space, 1952-1964," *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 6 (2009): 865–87; Maria Lowe, "An Unseen Hand: The Role of Sociology Professor Ernst Borinski in Mississippi's Struggle for Racial Integration in the 1950s and

the spaces where this kind of interaction occurred into a new, integrated form of campus life. When completed, the college's new, modern campus was expected to help students overcome what Owens diagnosed as "the 'oppositional' mentality which is likely to beset anyone who has been on the outside looking in for most of their lives," while preparing predominantly rural alumni for the faster-paced urban life of the north.[55] Therefore, the Tougaloo College master plan offers a view of the interface between megastructural planning and the political values of its time. It embodies the hopes for racial integration and educational equality, and the belief that the right kind of architecture could bring them about.

Tougaloo College, Civil Rights, and the Integrationist Project

When Gunnar Birkerts was hired in June 1965, it was far from a foregone conclusion that Tougaloo College's new campus design would be a megastructure. In fact, Jackson-based Reich Earle Cuellar Landscape Architects had prepared a more normative campus plan in November 1964 (Figures 2.21–2.23). Like Birkerts, these designers proposed the replacement of almost every existing building. Separated into zones for academics, dormitories and faculty housing, the buildings in their design are arranged loosely, and at a suburban density. The design called for 21 new academic buildings, a faculty housing complex of 47 new units, and a new dormitory complex of 10 buildings (5 four story, 1

1960s," *Leadership* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 27–47; Maria R. Lowe, "An 'Oasis of Freedom' in a 'Closed Society': The Development of Tougaloo College as a Free Space in Mississippi's Civil Rights Movement, 1960 to 1964," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no. 4 (2007): 486–520.

[55] Owens, "Inaugural Address," 31.

eight story and 2 ten story dormitories with one commons building) intended to house a total of 850 students.[56]

The most important difference between this earlier design and Birkerts's megastructure was that Birkerts provided clear edges for the campus, marking it off from the territory that surrounded it and isolating the college in a fortress-like enclosure. This defensive posture was appropriate because of the college's uncertain status within the white supremacist society that surrounded it. Birkerts's design allowed for all students to live on campus, which would further defend the college community from efforts to intimidate or undermine. In this way, the dense, urban quality of the plan functioned to isolate the college for reasons of safety, because Tougaloo's prominent place both locally and nationally in the Civil Rights Movement had unfortunately resulted in its being targeted by racist violence.

Historians have frequently singled out Tougaloo as a key location for the Civil Rights Movement and especially its Mississippi sub-movements (Figure 2.24).[57] From its founding by the American Missionary Association just after the Civil War, the campus had served as a site for the education and empowerment of black Mississippians, but after WWII it became more prominent as some activist faculty increasingly viewed their role not only as the betterment of students' lives, but also to instigate resistance to Mississippi's Jim Crow segregation regime. For some, this meant direct participation in Movement activities, while others took on a more advisory role.[58] An important turning

[56] Reich Earle Cuellar Landscape Architects, *Tougaloo College Master Plan*, November 1964, November 1964, Drawer 5, Folder 1, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library.
[57] Even former Tougaloo History faculty John Dittmer, who has a more measured opinion of Tougaloo's role, remarks that although the college's reputation "as a hotbed of movement activity has been exaggerated", the movement there "did have an impact far beyond its numbers." Dittmer, *Local People*, 225–26.
[58] For a discussion of one professor's important role, see: Lowe, "An Unseen Hand."

point came with the appointment of A.D. Beittel as college president in 1960. Beittel opened the campus's gates to Movement activists, inviting leaders to visit and speak, allowing Council on Rights Equality (CORE) "Freedom Riders" to stay in vacant student rooms during their first summer campaign in 1961, and even offering enrollment to student activists expelled by other colleges and universities. These and other Beittel initiatives not only made the campus an increasingly important coordination point for outsiders, but also mobilized a number of Tougaloo students to participate in protests and organize their own nonviolent actions. When in 1961, nine Tougaloo students staged a "read-in" at the segregated Jackson Public Library, Beittel declined to punish them, and allowed them to make up the exams they missed while jailed for their participation. And when in May 1963 three black Tougaloo students and their white social science professor sat-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Jackson, it was Beittel who came to their aid after police declined to escort them out through the crowd that had formed outside.[59]

Earlier, in the 1950s, the college had already served as kind of test site for racial integration, particularly through the Social Science Forums organized by professor Ernst Borinski beginning in 1952 (Figures 2.25 & 2.26).[60] This monthly series brought Movement luminaries to lecture and philosophize with students, faculty, and the public, offering a rare chance for white and black Mississippians to converse and form the social networks that were so important to coordinating Movement activities. This was, for some participants, the first time they had ever shared space or spoken with people of the other

[59] The most thorough published account of Beittel's Civil Rights activities (and his subsequent removal) is Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 97–109. Another key figure in Tougaloo's Civil Rights story is chaplain Ed King, a white northerner who was a key figure in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and of the 1964 "Freedom Summer" protests.
[60] Lowe, "Sowing the Seeds"; Lowe, "Oasis of Freedom."

race. Beittel expanded the scope of this free space for conversation and fellowship, but his efforts attracted unwanted attention from segregationists, who stepped-up their haphazard campaign to intimidate the Tougaloo community and discredit the college.

Mississippi's white supremacist State Sovereignty Commission was the most powerful of Tougaloo's opponents. Set up by the State Legislature in 1956, the Commission was responsible for specious investigations of Civil Rights Movement organizations and leaders, and backroom intimidation tactics meant to maintain the state's Jim Crow regime. Joy Ann Williamson has revealed that during Beittel's tenure as Tougaloo president, the Commission had an informant within the Tougaloo faculty who fed them the names of influential trustees.[61] More publicly, Mississippi's State Legislature also singled out Tougaloo through a bill to revoke the college's charter, taken up in 1964. The bill did not pass, but the message to Tougaloo's trustees and community members was clear. The most terrorizing events, however, were the frequent drive-by shootings that took place at Tougaloo, most directed at faculty housing from County Line Road on the southern edge of campus. These violent events came to a head in June 1963 around the time of the assassination of local NAACP organizer and frequent Tougaloo visitor Medgar Evers at his home only a few blocks from campus. Years later in 1967, a bombing targeted the home of President Owens and his family. Fortunately no one was injured in the attack.

Tougaloo's role in the Movement also attracted the attention of northern philanthropy, but funders' intentions were often far from altruistic; philanthropic funding may have flowed to Tougaloo in the mid-1960s, but it came with many unwelcome

[61] Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 105–6. Evidently the Commission arranged a meeting with a group of trustees, and later claimed responsibility for Beittel's removal.

stipulations. Major grants and agreements arrived from the Ford Foundation, the Cummins Engine Foundation, and from Brown University, but like many northern liberals, the leaders of these institutions valued order above all and saw the Movement's nonviolent instigations of southern white violence more as delinquency than as effective political action. While far from directly undermining the Movement's efforts, these institutions did use their influence to require Tougaloo to dissociate itself from the Movement through mandates and oversight. One particularly infamous outcome was to force Beittel into an early retirement in order for the college to enter into a valuable faculty, student, and administrative exchange program with Brown.[62] The trustees saw the connection with Brown as groundwork for a transformed college with an increased national profile. In their view, Beittel had to go for the connection to be established. Beittel himself described the domino effect feared by the trustees in a letter to Brown's president Barnaby Keeney:

> It was indicated that Brown University would not continue our promising cooperative relationship unless I am replaced, and that without Brown University the Ford Foundation will provide no support, and without Ford support other Foundations will not respond, and without foundation support the future of Tougaloo College is very uncertain."[63]

Owens—the college's first African-American president, who had previously served as Tougaloo's business manager—came to replace Beittel, first on a temporary then on a permanent basis. Whether because of his temperament or due to outside influence, Owens proved to be much less friendly to Civil Rights activism on campus. This change in leadership was foreshadowed by shifts in the college's administrative structure that began

[62] Williamson, 105–9; Clarice T. Campbell and Oscar A. Rogers, *Mississippi, the View from Tougaloo* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979), 196–217; Dittmer, *Local People*, 234–35.
[63] A.D. Beittel to Barnaby Keeney, 5 April 1964, quoted in Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 102.

in 1963. Influenced by threats from Mississippi's white supremacist regime but also by the dire financial straits in which the college found itself, the Tougaloo Board of Trustees began to expand their membership, with many new trustees coming from the ranks of corporate leadership in the Northeast and Midwest.[64] This was a concerted effort to access philanthropic funding through personal social networks. The effort was successful in establishing a more solid financial footing for Tougaloo, at least for the length of the initial grants. Among the new Trustees were Merle H. Miller (appointed 1962), a prominent Indianapolis lawyer and civil rights advocate who would come to lead the committee charged with expanding the campus, and Henry W. Abts (appointed 1965), Vice President of Business Administration at Cummins Engine, who even before he was appointed had attended architects' interviews for the campus master plan project on behalf of Cummins.

Among the initiatives funded by major grants were an increase in the number of faculty and a boost in their pay, with the goal of attracting more qualified and more permanent professors to the college. Previously, the average tenure for faculty members at Tougaloo had been short, with annual attrition rates between 30 and 40 percent in the mid-1960s.[65] Another key initiative was the above-mentioned Brown-Tougaloo Exchange. The Exchange not only offered Tougaloo students the opportunity to spend a semester at Brown (and likewise, a few Brown students spent semesters at Tougaloo), but also brought Brown administrators to Jackson to assist with Tougaloo's financial,

[64] Board of Trustees membership in 1963-64 was 15, and by 1968-69 it had grown to 27. See: Board of Trustee membership lists, Tougaloo College catalogs, Tougaloo College Archives.
[65] Tougaloo College, "Continuity, Change and Commitment – An Institutional Self-Study," April 1968, 170, Box 4, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library.

managerial, and development affairs.[66] Slowly, under Owens's leadership and with Brown administrators' guidance, Tougaloo came to adopt the management practices expected by northern philanthropy, expanding its development and finance departments, and establishing financial as well as academic master plans for the college. Nevertheless, Tougaloo failed to meet the trustees' goals for growth and financial stability.

In 1965, the Cummins Engine Foundation granted $75,000 to support the academic plan and an architectural master plan. The trustees' planning committee and Cummins representatives interviewed architects for the master-planning job in New York in June of that year, ultimately deciding to commission Birkerts, who had an established relationship with Cummins that resulted in his Lincoln Elementary School in their small headquarters town, Columbus, Indiana.[67] According to committee chair Merle Miller (no relation to Cummins Engine chief executive J. Irwin Miller), trustees felt that despite his comparative lack of experience, Birkerts offered the college its best chance to acquire "relevant and distinctive design and beauty."[68] Yet the trustees sought more than these traditional markers of architectural value. In a subsequent letter to Birkerts setting out the institution's goals, Miller explained that

> Our dream for Tougaloo is to provide an institution that will in one generation make up the cultural and educational lag caused by the deprivation of some citizens of their inherent rights over the past several hundred years.[69]

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[66] The cooperative exchange was brokered by Brown president Keeney, who denied the accusation that he had demanded Beittel's removal. Conspiracy theorists have argued that Keeney was doing the bidding of federal counter-intelligence operatives to undermine Civil Rights organizations. He has admitted working for the CIA during the period of his presidency, but no evidence has emerged that either the CIA or FBI meddled in Tougaloo's affairs. For a speculative account of Beittel's firing, see: Will Tucker, "Who Fired Dan Beittel?" *Freedom Now!* Undated, Accessed September 2, 2016, http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/FreedomNow/themes/beittel/index.html. For a more thorough and well-researched account see Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower*, 101–5.

[67] Whether or not then-President Owens was involved or included in these interviews is unclear. Owens is not mentioned in GBA correspondence until Birkerts's initial in-person visit to the Tougaloo campus.

[68] Merle H. Miller to Gunnar Birkerts, 25 June 1965, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library, Box 4.

[69] Ibid., as quoted in: Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 99.

Such was the ambition of the mid-1960s that a single small college might hope to overcome generations of inequality. Importantly, it was expected that architecture would have a powerful role to play in this rapid societal progress. Above and beyond mere beauty or utility, Birkerts was expected to provide an environment for integration and equality. Miller added a sense of urgency to his call for transformative change, writing that, "It simply cannot be done as a practical matter," and, "[it] must be done and we are the ones to do it." They must, he concluded, "be as practical as our dreams will permit," and allowed the architects leeway to avoid "a conventional answer to most unconventional problems and opportunities."[70] To facilitate integration, the plan was to be designed "to maximize communication—conversation, dialogue and exchange—between students, faculty, community and staff"; it would be "an education center—where all of one's experiences contribute to the learning process."[71]

As should be clear from the above, it was into a situation of institutional and political flux that Birkerts and his associates entered.[72] Deciding which facilities should be prioritized was a particularly murky process for the college. Because of the emphasis on improving and growing its faculty, it would have been obvious to push for the construction of new faculty housing on campus. Indeed, Brown-Tougaloo Exchange director Harold Pfautz put plans in motion for new apartments as early as summer 1964. These plans were set aside because, as a later Pfautz report on the Exchange put it, "the Board … became increasingly captivated by the long-run vision of 'the new Tougaloo,'

[70] Ibid.
[71] Inaugural Address by George A. Owens, in "Inauguration of George A. Owens," 32.
[72] Miller's letter arrived during the painfully brief peak of liberal optimism between President Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965, and the start of the Watts riots only five days later on August 11.

especially in its physical aspects."[73] This thrust the physical aspects of the college's future ahead of its academic aspects and was evidence for Pfautz that, "The air was rife with good intentions and large-scale visions."[74] Miller had made it clear that the primary role of the Planning Committee he chaired would be to provide a plan that would "architecturally depict [Tougaloo's] role in education in the state of Mississippi and in the nation and that practically will best utilize the resources to meet the needs now and in the future."[75] Pfautz was concerned that the Cummins Engine Foundation's grant would be used primarily for architectural plans, because he felt that academic planning must precede physical. Ultimately, $50,000 from the Cummins grant was dedicated to the physical master plan, and the remainder supported an institutional "self-study" directed by Owens that unfortunately was not completed until well after Birkerts's plan.

For Pfautz, Miller's overemphasis on physical planning came from his acquaintance with the Ford Foundation-supported Educational Facilities Laboratories (EFL). Founded by members of the AIA and the Teachers College of Columbia University in 1958, this group produced reports for administrators on the benefits that architecture could have not only on the educational environment but also on learning outcomes. The group believed that in order to overturn outdated teaching methods it was easier "to change buildings and what went into them than to change people."[76] For EFL,

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[73] Harold Pfautz, "History of the Tougaloo - Brown Cooperative Program (DRAFT)," August 1978, 41, Tougaloo-Brown Exchange Files, Tougaloo College Archives. This report indicates that Pfautz saw Merle Miller and his emphasis on physical planning as an impediment to Tougaloo's progress.
[74] Pfautz, 43.
[75] Merle Miller, quoted in Pfautz, 48. In the first letter confirming Birkerts's selection to design the master plan, Miller referred the firm to publications by EFL for information about programming a new campus.
[76] James Arnsey, quoted in: Judy Marks, *A History of Educational Facilities Laboratories (EFL)*, ed. Educational Resources Information Center (U.S.) (Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse, 2009), 1, http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED508011. Accessed 9 September 2016.

it seemingly went without saying that better facilities would have an effect on student outcomes.

Federal funding played a role in deciding the hierarchy of facility needs. Because it was uncertain whether the substantial grants made available for campus construction by provision of the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 would continue, it was ultimately decided that a library and student dormitories—which trustees felt were the most urgent and most immediate of Tougaloo's needs—should be planned and built as quickly as possible. On-campus faculty housing would not have been eligible for these grants, and was set aside indefinitely. As early as November 1966—six months after the public presentation of the master plan at Owens's inauguration—the Birkerts firm was developing a detailed design for the student dormitory buildings that would frame their proposed automotive entry court (See Figures 2.04 & 2.05).[77]

As the college's trustees and administrators recognized, concrete outcomes are a good way to attract capital through campaigns, and can function as a spur for future progress. If the first phase of dormitory construction could be completed relatively quickly, the college would be on track to transform their campus according to Birkerts's design. This immediate turn toward the preparation of concrete building plans freed Birkerts and his team from the requirement to take the campus master plan any further than the schematic stage. They in effect separated the two aspects of master plans described by Robert P. Dober in 1963:

> Plans should aid the architect in successfully completing his commission, give design form to the entire campus, serve as symbol for friends and alumni to

[77] *Schematic Drawings for Tougaloo College Dormitories*, November 1966, November 1966, Drawer 7, Folder 7, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library.

> support emotionally and financially. Plans must be practical and plans must be imaginative.[78]

Assuming that the college's immediate practical needs would be met in short order, the master plan was free to function as an imaginative symbol that made the vision for an integrated life a little more concrete.

Cummins Engine As Corporate Patron of Architecture

The Tougaloo College project also offers a window into the relationship Birkerts had with one of his earliest supporters—J. Irwin Miller, and the Cummins Engine Foundation behind which he was the major force. Cummins was among the most important corporate patrons of postwar modern architecture in the US, and undoubtedly the single most important in the country's geographic middle. The corporation's chief executive, Miller was a well-known patron of modernist architecture in his own right who had commissioned two houses from Eero Saarinen and Associates during the 1950s. The company's patronage expanded to public buildings when, unsatisfied with the lackluster design of schools in its headquarters town Columbus, Indiana and hopeful that high-quality design would help employee recruiting efforts, Miller initiated a philanthropic program to pay architects' fees on behalf of the School Board in Columbus. The first school for which they covered architect's fees was the Harry Weese-designed Lillian C. Schmitt Elementary, completed in 1956. Weese was a friend of Miller's and had already worked with Cummins and the Irwin Union Bank & Trust Company (which Miller's family owned) on a few other projects including bank branches and a new logo for the engine company. In order to avoid overcommitting Weese to Columbus or appearing to

[78] Richard P. Dober, *Campus Planning* (New York: Reinhold Pub. Corp., 1963), 45.

play favorites, after Schmitt Elementary the Foundation took steps to bring new architects to Columbus for each project. Beginning in 1958, they provided the school board with a list of six or more architects selected by two respected national practitioners. Initially, the curators of this list were Eero Saarinen and Pietro Belluschi, and their first list consisted of Paul Rudolph, Minoru Yamasaki (whose firm's top designer was at that time happened to be Gunnar Birkerts), Eduardo Catalano, Victor Lundy, John Carl Warnecke, and John Lyon Reid. From among them, the school board selected Warnecke, whose Mabel McDowell Elementary School was completed in 1960.[79]

There were several key conditions connected to the Cummins gift: first, in order to avoid the feeling of paternalism, the school board had to formally request financial assistance; second, the architect had to be selected from a list of six architects provided by the Foundation who had not previously completed a building for the program; third, any additions to the schools were to be designed by the original architect.[80] The second condition proved to be the most important because the list was rewritten each time a new building was commissioned. The Foundation thereby spurred the careers of a younger generation of architects—which included Birkerts, Robert Venturi, James Stewart Polshek, Paul Kennon, Hugh Hardy, and others—who were eventually included on the constantly changing list of six. The program also raised the stakes for buildings in Columbus, such that even while rejecting the fee program, the Columbus Public Library

[79] A 1960 letter from Eero Saarinen to J. Irwin Miller confirms he and Belluschi's role in the program, and revised their first list for the next round of interviews to include Edward Larrabee Barnes, Louis Kahn, The Architects Collaborative (specifically Norman Fletcher), and Eliot Noyes. Rudolph, Catalano, and Reid were never selected for a school design. Yamasaki was said to have been too busy to compete. Eero Saarinen to J. Irwin Miller, May 31, 1960, 1, Box 393, Folder 6, Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Family Papers, Indiana Historical Society.

[80] For a brief summary of the inception of the Cummins Engine Foundation's architecture program, see: Jeffrey L. Cruikshank and David B. Sicilia, *The Engine That Could: Seventy-Five Years of Values-Driven Change at Cummins Engine Company* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 179–81.

commissioned I.M. Pei to design their central branch. Birkerts and Venturi undoubtedly benefited from their association with Saarinen, yet the foremost beneficiary in this regard was Kevin Roche, whose position was cemented by his work on the design of Miller's house in Columbus, and Roche's subsequent work completing the North Christian Church in Columbus after Saarinen's death in 1960. Roche's firm, which he founded with fellow Saarinen associate John Dinkeloo, would come to complete nearly a dozen buildings for Cummins by the end of the century.[81]

Roche, Belluschi, and Barnes served on the selection committee for Lincoln Elementary School in 1965. The list they developed for the school board in this case included Birkerts, the New York-based architects Ulrich Franzen, John M. Johansen, and Eliot Noyes (who was then best known for his leadership of architectural and industrial design work for corporate giant IBM),[82] Chicago architect Edward Dart, and the firm of Whittlesey & Conklin, who were then engaged in the design of a new town at Reston, Virginia. Birkerts won the commission, making him—after Weese, Warnecke, Fletcher, and Barnes—the fifth and by far least established architect commissioned through the Cummins Foundation's Columbus school program (Figure 2.27).[83] Though the list of architects interviewed for the Tougaloo master plan commission in June 1965 is not extant, the role of Cummins and the contemporaneity of interviews for it and Lincoln Elementary suggest the two lists may have been similar. After Lincoln, Birkerts's

[81] Miller's influence also percolated through his membership on the board of directors of the Ford Foundation, who commissioned their headquarters in Manhattan from Roche in the late 1960s.
[82] For a thorough rereading of the IBM Design Program and its architectural outputs, see "IBM Architecture: The Multinational Counterenvironment," the third chapter of John Harwood, *The Interface: IBM and the Transformation of Corporate Design, 1945-1976* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). Birkerts did design two buildings for IBM, but they were commissioned after he was already well established, in the early 1970s.
[83] See: J. Irwin Miller, "Speech: Cummins Engine Foundation Architectural Program," October 1, 1973, Attachment D: List of Architects, Box 535, Folder 14, Sweeney-Irwin-Miller Family Papers, Indiana Historical Society.

sustained relationship with Cummins is illustrated not only by the Tougaloo College master plan commission, but also by the school board's consideration of him for a 1969 addition to the Central Junior High School (unbuilt) and his much later completion of the St. Peter's Lutheran Church building across the street from Lincoln Elementary.[84]

Once peppered with ambitious modern buildings, Columbus's townscape became a challenging context for architects. Looking back over his several decades documenting the town's architecture, photographer Balthazar Korab observed that

> [Perhaps] the hardest proposition … was to moderate the highly individualized approaches of architects coming from distant places with varied backgrounds. And the fact that a commission in Columbus became a high prestige challenge to a profession where humility is a virtue rarely rewarded did not make things easier.[85]

Indeed, the Foundation's accomplishment has been to select architects who, while producing buildings of a high quality, have been able to keep their egos in check. The result, according to architect Edward Larrabee Barnes, is "a museum of good, unrelated architecture—like pictures on a wall."[86] Barnes's analogy highlights modern architecture's status as something that could be *collected*. Ultimately, revealing this new status may be Cummins's most important contribution to architecture culture.[87] Yet their headquarters town hasn't always been friendly to Cummins's efforts. In the design of Lincoln Elementary, Birkerts reported that the public was resistant to another outsider

[84] On the proposed 1969 addition to Central Junior High School, see: Dr. Clarence E. Robbins to J. Irwin Miller, August 28, 1969, Box 535, Folder 14, Sweeney-Irwin-Miller Family Papers, Indiana Historical Society.
[85] Balthazar. Korab, *Columbus Indiana: An American Landmark* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Documan Press, 1989), 22.
[86] Edward Larrabee Barnes, quoted in Sandy Heck, "Community Architecture, Columbus Style," *Architects' Journal* 184, no. 43 (October 22, 1986): 36.
[87] The proliferation of corporate and institutional architecture collections in recent decades highlights the persistence of this trend. The Novartis headquarters campus in Basel, Switzerland is one prominent instance. One might also point to annual programs like MoMA's PS1 Warm-Up pavilions and the Serpentine Gallery's summer pavilions as two equally important examples.

architect drastically affecting the feel of their town. As a result, Birkerts decided to sink the building below street level, and surround it with a planted berm that would "soften, if not conceal altogether, the mass."[88]

None of this explains why Tougaloo College would be the beneficiary of the Cummins Engine Foundation's architecture program. The reason for the foundation's gift to Tougaloo can be traced back to college trustee Merle Miller, an Indianapolis native who knew J. Irwin Miller through his involvement with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). Both J. Irwin and Merle Miller served on the Indiana branch of the UNCF beginning in the late 1950s, and both were members of the Fund's national council as early as 1963. Because of his trusteeship at Tougaloo, it was undoubtedly through Merle Miller that the Cummins Foundation came to be involved with the college, and it is likely that their influence contributed to the decidedly architectural bent of the college's planning program.

This wasn't the only front on which J. Irwin Miller demonstrated his commitment to racial integration. While serving as President of the National Council of Churches in the early 1960s he had pushed for the integration of southern churches and attended President John F. Kennedy's National Conference on Religion and Race. He viewed segregation as a growing crisis that was bound to economic issues, and wrote to Kennedy on behalf of the Conference, stating that

> We support you in your approaches to business, labor, education, and the professions, all of whom must be moved to attack those manifestations of the problem which still exist within their ranks … It is our opinion that in this matter attention should also be given to the problem of unemployment, for the two are intimately related. The difficulty which young persons and others experience in finding good job opportunities, and the resulting competition for available

[88] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 76.

> openings aggravate racial tensions, and constitute an important part of today's problem.[89]

This statement ties together Miller's belief that racial integration was a moral imperative with his equally strong commitment to overcoming it through policies like affirmative action in corporate hiring. As he put it in a later speech on "Social Responsibilities of the Corporation and the Corporation Executive," Miller felt that

> Heads of business for their own self-interest have as much reason to do what is in their power to set right those things which are wrong with society as they have to set right those things which are wrong in their business. And further, they neglect such a concern to the peril of their business.[90]

Analogizing the management of a business to the management of a society, Miller offered "enlightened self-interest" as a prime motivator at both scales. He exhibited precisely this kind of interest in the prospects of African Americans, feeling that more diversity in the employment ranks at Cummins Engine would benefit the individual, the company, and society. He hoped that Columbus's diverse modernist architecture would draw a talented pool of workers to the company. These two missions preoccupied Miller during the 1960s, and they came together in the grant to support Tougaloo's master plan and curriculum restructuring.

Campus Planning for an Era of Rapid Change

As a walk around Columbus, Indiana would reveal, the early- and mid-1960s were a time of broad agreement about the proper aesthetic character for American buildings. In the years after WWII, modernism had quickly become the style of choice for almost all

[89] J. Irwin Miller to President John F. Kennedy, Draft, Undated, 2-3, Box 334, Folder 4, Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Family Papers, Indiana Historical Society.
[90] J. Irwin Miller, "Social Responsibilities of the Corporation and the Corporation Executive," Address at Young Presidents' Organization, Columbus, Indiana, September 14, 1970, 2, Box 533, Folder 2, Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Family Papers, Indiana Historical Society.

public buildings. Adopted first by corporations, it later became the default mode for government buildings of all scales and in all places, from embassies in faraway locales to local libraries on Main Street.[91] These years also brought unprecedented economic growth, and with it came grander expectations for the lives of future generations. One consequence of these expectations was that postsecondary education became a goal or even an expectation for more and more of America's youth. Between 1955 and 1970, the number of students enrolled in America's colleges and universities grew from 2.7 to 7 million.[92] To accommodate this growth, many new educational institutions were established, while at others, enrollments seemingly grew ever larger.

Expansion of access to all levels of education was among the key tenets of both national political parties in the early 1960s, and architects found ample need for their services not only among primary and secondary schools, but also colleges and universities. Whereas in the 1950s, the "baby boom" caused an overwhelming need for elementary and high school facilities, the next decade brought unprecedented demand for postsecondary educational facilities.[93] But it was difficult to anticipate exactly what kind

[91] For a history of the transition to modernism in US Embassy design, see Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998). For a discussion of the way modernism was deployed as a weapon of "soft power" in cold war exhibitions of domestic design, see Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). For modern design's connections to the consumerist desire for glamour, see Alice T. Friedman, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[92] This statistic is cited in Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 14.

[93] The career of Anthony G. Adinolfi—school planning expert, construction administrator, honorary Fellow of the AIA, and twice a Birkerts client—closely followed this transition. As an assistant superintendent and Director of School Housing for Detroit Public Schools in the early 1960s, Adinolfi supervised the design and construction of a large slate of buildings including an addition to Lillibridge Elementary by Birkerts. In 1962, Adinolfi left Detroit to serve as Manager of Planning at the State University of New York's newly established Construction Fund. He later served as CEO of the Fund, during which time he commissioned Birkerts to design the SUNY Purchase Dance Building. He died prematurely at the age of 40 in 1971. Birkerts has lamented that Adinolfi's death (along with the similarly premature death of Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis chair Hugh Galusha, also in 1971) sapped the upward trajectory of his career. See "Dr. Anthony Adinolfi, 40, Dies; State University Building Chief," *The New York Times*, April 1, 1971.

of facilities would be needed as colleges and universities grew larger than ever before. As a result, as one university administrator put it, "investment in future flexibility is of high order in my scale of importance. The more highly refined the layout, the more advanced its decay."[94]

Architects with more established reputations competed for the chance to provide ground-up plans for new universities, while the less established found opportunities for smaller community colleges or freestanding buildings. The major initiatives from this period are still staggering in their scale and architectural ambition. For example, the SUNY Construction Fund—spurred by Governor Nelson Rockefeller's statewide investment in New York's educational infrastructure—managed a massive expansion on campuses across the state, enlisting famed architects like Edward Durrell Stone, Pei, and Barnes to provide master plans. Meanwhile, the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill led by Walter Netsch provided detailed plans for the an entirely new University of Illinois campus at Chicago Circle and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado. On the west coast, the University of California system also expanded rapidly, establishing new campuses at Irvine (with a master plan and central buildings by William L. Pereira and Associates) and Santa Cruz (master planned in a suburban manner by Warnecke, and executed by a diverse array of architects).[95]

While certain of these plans were like megastructures in their use of layered circulation and exposed reinforced concrete, the majority remained within a mainstream

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Discussed by Gunnar Birkerts in interview by Michael Abrahamson, Needham, Massachusetts, July 28, 2015.

[94] W.N. Hubbard, Jr., "Flexible Bricks – Building for a Change," in *Architecture and the College: Presentations from the 1968 Conference* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Department of Architecture, 1968), unpaginated.

[95] These and other campus plans are discussed in "USA: Campus vs. College," the first chapter in Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 11–58.

modernist idiom. One can distill the tenets of this mainstream idiom from Richard P. Dober's 1963 guidebook *Campus Planning*.[96] While the majority of Dober's book was dedicated to a highly technical discussion of functional needs in campus building types and the proper planning process, he also provided a brief history of American campus planning, and described what he saw as an ideal approach. For him, "The first requirement for an adequate campus design is a general design form which can adapt itself to future change, and at the same time maintain its integrity as a design."[97] Dober believed that a campus's growth must be managed and structured in an intensive way. Instead of growing "like a baby, in all directions" (a humorous simile that Dober attributes to Saarinen), the campus should be thought of more like a family, wherein both "youthful vitality" and "elderly wisdom" were welcome, while both education and physical form could progress and transform in balance. Importantly, he felt that a campus's "general design form" should follow from developments in education, and not the other way around.

Overall, Dober found that the "order, coherence and beauty" of past campus plans was missing from those of the present.[98] His reference points for good quality contemporary planning, compiled at the end of his book, included projects by Saarinen and Warnecke, among others. Dober praised Saarinen's Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana for its "tranquil atmosphere of self-sufficiency, not the containment of a monastic enclave, but more like a North European village with the chapel as the

[96] Dober was a nationally recognized expert on campus planning, educated at Harvard under Josep Lluis Sert, and later apprenticed under Hideo Sasaki of Sasaki, Walker & Associates, one of the premier site planning and landscape architecture firms in the country. His own firm (Dober, Walquist and Harris) focused exclusively on campus planning.
[97] Dober, *Campus Planning*, 40.
[98] Dober, 40.

dominant center, and the other buildings grouped around the symbol" (Figure 2.28).[99] Of Warnecke's San Mateo Junior College (Figure 2.29), he observed that, "particular care was taken in developing a pleasing transition between the structural rhythm of buildings and colonnaded courts and an informal site."[100] In both cases, rectangular buildings sit in rigid perpendicular relation to one another, and are situated so that the border between campus and site is a fluid one. Because his book was published just prior to the megastructure boom, the most integrated and systematic design selected by Dober was SOM's University of Illinois, Chicago Circle (Figure 2.30). He remarks positively that this design was "guided by the requirement for flexible buildings, economy in construction and great interchangeability," and that buildings in the campus center are "clustered" to form a "self-contained entity."[101] This indicates the extent to which even mainstream planners like Dober were influenced by concepts we now associate with megastructures. Nevertheless, it was the doctrinaire approach Dober outlined to which Birkerts was responding in his Tougaloo design.

These mainstream modernist principles found wide corporate and institutional patronage, and their hegemony in architecture circles was only starting to be resisted. Birkerts was introduced to these principles in his education at Stuttgart and later inculcated them under Saarinen and Yamasaki. Yet he also, like most young architects, found much to which he objected in his employers' practices.[102] One of the sharpest turns he took was away from the pavilion-type plans praised by Dober—which might best be illustrated by Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center (Figure 2.31)—toward plans

[99] Dober, 293. Birkerts worked as a designer on the Concordia project and retained some drawings of the campus in his personal records.
[100] Dober, 294.
[101] Dober, 298.
[102] To be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

with a more integral relationship between and among buildings. At the Tech Center, Saarinen's plan consisted of low buildings arrayed around a large 22-acre reflecting pool in a gridded but nonetheless rather picturesque manner. Each function was segregated and given its own form within a strict 5'2" planning module. As Louise Mozingo has argued, because the Tech Center had to compete with university and government facilities to attract talented engineers and designers it was designed to mimic the leafy environs of college campuses while being friendlier to the automobiles on which employees worked.[103]

On college campuses themselves, this postwar modernist planning tendency manifested itself as a "new permissiveness" that freed the individual building from responsibility to a unified whole. According to Turner, this new permissiveness was "convenient for institutions that needed to erect new buildings, often in limited space, and for whom visual considerations of campus unity or spatial composition were merely annoying obstacles," while also permitting the construction of large and unconventional new building types to accommodate their growing student populations.[104] Minoru Yamasaki's buildings on the campus of Wayne State illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. His Wayne State buildings included the McGregor Memorial Community Conference Center of 1958, the Prentis Building and DeRoy Hall, both of 1964, and the precast concrete School of Education Building (discussed in Chapter 1), completed in 1961. Though these were built largely as freestanding pavilions, Yamasaki's earlier master plan for the superblock campus called for a loosely organized array of small rectangular courtyards along a central pedestrian boulevard (Figure 2.32).

[103] See: Louise A. Mozingo, *Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 72–86.
[104] Turner, *Campus*, 260.

Dober described this new permissiveness as a situation where architectural style trumped planning, "due to the fact that higher education is again in the process of engineering new modes of education, and the forces behind the change are not fully understood."[105] The increasingly decorative turn in Yamasaki's academic buildings of the late 1950s might be cited as evidence of Dober's opinion. At Wayne State, Yamasaki's designers overwhelmingly focused their attention on exterior design, developing intricately patterned facades in metal and precast concrete.[106] Yet for Birkerts—committed as he was to expressiveness in planning if not necessarily in facades—this new permissiveness may have seemed merely chaotic, and a swing back toward campus integration was predictable.

Unlike the social meaning the word had for his clients, here integration takes on a different, more pragmatic valence. In Birkerts's words, the Tougaloo project called for "a small, densely-knit urban environment unit with integrated teaching and living facilities."[107] This programmatic integration between living and learning was a means to bring about the kind of second-order education that dense, urban living engendered. Formally, this integration suggested the layered planning approach Birkerts took for the design, with classrooms on the ground level and living spaces suspended above. The two were knit together in a tartan grid of circulation and public space where students and teachers might meet one another and talk. Like Oscar Newman, he saw the megastructural campus plan as "a conscious rejection of current planning policy" and as a

[105] Dober, *Campus Planning*, 40.
[106] This is not, however, to suggest that buildings like the Wayne State Education Building were only skin deep. On the contrary, the technical mastery evidenced by its three-story precast "tree" elements reveals a skillful coordination of structure with envelope.
[107] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 99.

way for he and other architects to "express their faith in high-density urban environments."[108]

The most familiar reference points for this integrated, circulatory approach to planning are the projects of Alison & Peter Smithson, Candilis, Josic and Woods (CJW) and other architects associated with the Team 10 group. Birkerts had encountered dispatches from these contemporaries in journals, and they along with Japanese Metabolist designs seem to have had a strong influence on his master planning projects of the 1960s, including Tougaloo. A few specific publications quite clearly contributed to the Tougaloo design, based on the similarity between its forms and those of published designs. It is apropos, then, to mention that Birkerts has been described as an avid consumer of images, able even later in life to recall and select particular pages and photographs from his bookshelf as conversational aids.[109] He would have encountered journals where these projects appeared at the University of Michigan Architecture Library, then located alongside the school's studios in Lorch Hall. Answering a call from the growing faculty and student body, librarians had expanded the school's subscriptions to publications in the early 1960s.[110]

Claire Zimmerman has shown how the Smithsons and other postwar architects similarly worked from sources as varied as advertising, popular culture, and high architecture like the buildings of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe that circulated through images with increasing speed during the 1950s and 1960s. One doesn't find rote

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[108] Newman, "The New Campus," 43.
[109] See Sven Birkerts's biographical essay in Sven Birkerts and Martin Schwartz, *Gunnar Birkerts: Metaphoric Modernist* (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2009), 11.
[110] For a narration of this history, see the closing chapter of: Nancy Bartlett, *More than a Handsome Box: Education in Architecture at the University of Michigan, 1876-1986* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan College of Architecture and Urban Planning, 1995), 71–111. Birkerts had begun teaching at U of M in 1960, and by 1963 had been appointed to the tenure track as an Assistant Professor.

reproduction of existing models in their work, but instead projects that integrated and synthesized (but hardly concealed) their diverse influences. The architecture that resulted was intended to have—adopting Reyner Banham's famous descriptor for New Brutalism—"memorability as an image." According to Zimmerman,

> The quality of being imageable was embedded in the architecture not solely because it would be reproduced in books, magazines, and slide lectures, but also because the act of understanding architecture as part of culture had become inseparable from immediately graspable images—which in turn refracted back onto the design procedures of architects themselves.[111]

In other words, as access to images became more widespread, architects increasingly designed buildings so that they would function more so as reproducible images circulating in a broad cultural milieu than as buildings located in a particular site. If this was true of the Smithsons, it was certainly also true of their Team 10 comrades, who were just as dependent upon this image culture for inspiration and for their reputations. Birkerts was similarly avid in his consumption of images, even if he was more reticent to reveal his sources.

If he did not already know of it, it is likely that Birkerts was exposed to the work of Team 10 and the Metabolists through two journal articles published in the fall of 1964, mere months before he began the Tougaloo design. The first is a lengthy article in the October 1964 issue of *P/A*.[112] Dedicated to the "aesthetics and technology of preassembly," it presented projects by Kenzo Tange, Kisho Kurokawa, Fumihiko Maki, Yona Friedman, Shadrach Woods of CJW, and others. The form of Friedman

[111] Claire Zimmerman, *Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 290.
[112] Jan C. Rowan, ed., "Aesthetics and Technology of Preassembly," *Progressive Architecture* 45, no. 10 (October 1964): 162–222. A selection of Birkerts's early buildings was published in *Progressive Architecture* only one issue before in September 1964. See: Jan C. Rowan, ed., "A Search for Architectural Principles–Some Thoughts and Works of Gunnar Birkerts," *Progressive Architecture* 45, no. 9 (September 1964): 172–91. Under Rowan's editorship from 1963-69, *P/A* was unusually friendly to Birkerts's work, suggesting a personal acquaintance between the two men.

collaborator Eckhard Schulze-Fielitz's entry to the Bochum University campus plan competition seems to have been particularly suggestive for the Tougaloo design, as were Woods's matrix-like development proposals for Bilbao and Frankfurt-Romerburg. Because of the blocky, circuit board appearance of the Tougaloo academic matrix, Birkerts must also have seen CJW's mat-building entry to the Bochum competition, prepared in 1962 (Figure 2.33). Alison Smithson's August 1964 publication of Team 10's work in *Architectural Design* is the most likely source for images of that project.[113] The zigzag elements of CJW's design for Bochum are very similar to the bent bars of Tougaloo's proposed dormitories, and the modular design of the academic matrix is likewise similar to CJW's irregular blocks. The dormitory blocks suspended in air may have been influenced by Van den Broek & Bakema's YAFO Central Area project for Tel Aviv, published in Smithson's *AD* article. There, two bar buildings bend outward, bearing an uncanny resemblance to the entry court in the Tougaloo design.

Conceptually, we might say that Birkerts's approach mirrors that of Aldo Van Eyck, who pursued a comprehensible visual structure in his designs that he referred to as "configurative discipline." In a 1962 essay, Van Eyck colorfully distinguished between his preferred approach, which he characterized as "audacity of form and articulated place-clarity within a closely knit compound," and its negative opposite, "an amorphous texture of inevitably oversized items … additively arranged in space-emptiness."[114] Subjecting the elements of a program to his "configurative discipline," he aimed at "the

[113] Alison Smithson, ed., "The Work of Team 10," *Architectural Design* 34, no. 8 (August 1964): 373–93.
[114] Aldo Van Eyck, "Steps Toward a Configurative Discipline," [1962] in Joan Ockman and Edward Eigen, eds., *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, Columbia Books of Architecture (New York: Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation; Rizzoli, 1993), 350.

development of new urban fabrics," better able to accommodate growth and change.[115] In Van Eyck's most famous building, the Orphanage in Amsterdam (1958-60), this configurative discipline is manifest in the gridded planning and repetitive, modular form of the building (Figure 2.34).

Yet one cannot sell Birkerts short as an entirely derivative designer either. Looking backwards to two competition projects from the late 1950s—while he was still employed at Minoru Yamasaki's firm—one finds evidence that Birkerts (along with his collaborators) was moving toward the mat-building, megastructure approach even before he was exposed to the projects of Team 10. These precocious designs may not quite have been megastructures *avant la lettre*, but they do suggest strong tendencies toward systematization and the modulation of form, two primary characteristics of the megastructure approach. In a competition entry for a Cultural Center at Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo (now Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo),[116] Birkerts and his collaborators arranged square modules along a central circulation spine shaded by a large trellis reminiscent of Paul Rudolph's contemporaneous projects in Florida, which they must have seen in a 1957 publication (Figure 2.35).[117] In between each module was a skylit walkway, amply shaded by gently curving eaves. As Birkerts later described it, the modular plan "accommodated different spatial needs … without changing the

[115] Francis Strauven, "The shaping of number in architecture and town planning," in Max Risselada and Dirk Van den Heuvel, eds., *Team 10: 1953-81: In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: Netherlands Architecture Institute, 2005), 298.
[116] Who hosted this competition for Leopoldville, which architect(s) won the competition, and how Birkerts and his collaborators would have heard about this competition are all unknown.
[117] "The Current Work of Paul Rudolph," *Architectural Record* 121, no. 02 (February 1957): 161–75. Here I am referring not to the zigzag canopies of Rudolph's Sarasota High School—which bear a resemblance to the Leopoldville project but would not have been seen by the designers—but instead the cantilevered eaves (with skylights) of Rudolph's unbuilt design for the Sarasota airport and the screens of his Jewett Arts Center for Wellesley College, both of which were published in their early stages in this article.

architectural coherence."[118] Their project was awarded second prize, an outcome that encouraged the collaborators to continue working together with a design for the Technical University at Ankara, Turkey (Figure 2.36). There, a limited set of robust architectural elements were distributed over a group of rectangular buildings in an irregular gridded pattern, stepping away from the Rudolph-esque Léopoldville design toward bolder forms more reminiscent of the Yamasaki firm's own contemporaneous academic work. In both the Leopoldville and Ankara projects, we find an integration of various functional blocks into an extendable, modular system where growth would be a matter of adding more units using standardized parts. Brilliant atmospheric renderings in colored pencil by Birkerts's collaborator Astra Zarina were produced for each project, lending a sense of humanism to what might otherwise seem dryly technical (Figure 2.37). Birkerts never showed skill in this kind of rendering; he almost exclusively sketched ground plans, which clarifies his role in these competition entries and helps to account for the similarity between these earlier campus plans and Tougaloo.

After Tougaloo, two subsequent campus plans show that the approach taken there was no passing trend for Birkerts. For the Vocational Technical Institute (VTI) in Carbondale, Illinois, Birkerts produced a similarly modular plan intended to accommodate growth, but instead of extending blocks in all four cardinal directions, he proposed finger-like wings for each department (Figure 2.38). These were tied back to central community spaces, which formed a triangle with a sizable courtyard in the center. Faculty offices were to be located in slender towers where the wings met the courtyard. Each classroom wing was to be constructed of lightweight steel framing with an envelope

[118] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 25.

of modular metal panels. The interiors were to be color-coded with bright shades of red, blue, green, and yellow, and were skylit or supplied with ample diffuse light.[119]

For the Glen Oaks Community College in Southwest Michigan, Birkerts returned to the modular planning system of the Léopoldville plan, this time with a Piranesian lobby located at the point where the structure crosses an access road instead of Léopoldville's shaded central axis (Figure 2.39). This was the only one of Birkerts's campus plans to be built at anything resembling its proposed scale. Nestled into a cleft between two small hills, it was designed for growth in that it could be extended through the simple addition of more modules; unfortunately, subsequent extensions have instead run counter to the plan's intentions (Figure 2.40). With modules constructed of custom-made precast concrete units covered in brick-colored tile two- and three-stories in height, Glen Oaks is the culmination to a decades' worth of research on modular campus planning.[120] Its symmetrical layout lacks some of the intended dynamism, but the experience of ascending to its central space more than makes up for the project's limitations (Figure 2.41).

Because none of these were produced for liberal-arts colleges, neither the earlier nor later designs required the incorporation of student housing. They instead belonged to the growing genre of commuter-driven facilities that sprang up during the car-crazy postwar decades. Like Birkerts, the designers of other new commuter campuses found themselves without precedent and therefore had to invent new models. The going model for new postsecondary institutions was the so-called "multiversity," a term that described

[119] Though it went unrealized, VTI was a pioneering design because in it, Birkerts precociously adopted the High Tech aesthetic that would later dominate his buildings of the 1970s.
[120] The precast units have bowed outward considerably over time, compromising the building's weatherproofing and causing significant problems on the interior.

large campuses of semi-autonomous clusters for research and teaching, and is usually associated with large state-funded institutions.[121] Unlike commuter-driven community colleges or the "multiversity," whose planning issues were largely unprecedented, the liberal-arts college had strong planning traditions on which designers could draw. In the past, these colleges were thought to benefit from two factors—their small student population and generous, leafy environs. The postwar decades put new pressure on both. It was increasingly necessary for student populations to grow, and for the campus environment to become denser in response.

Existing Tougaloo student accommodations were for the most part provided in large multi-unit houses. The buildings were decades old and slowly being undermined by the site's expansive Yazoo clay soil, but the college wanted to maintain the style of living they enabled even as they upgraded to new dormitory facilities. The existing housing (and the close-knit community structure it enabled) was one of the strongest similarities Touglaoo had with the Ivy League institutions. Tougaloo trustees were reticent to lose this similarity to the colleges they hoped to emulate, and passed this requirement on to Birkerts, who interpreted it as a desire to make Tougaloo no less than "the Harvard of the South for blacks."[122] Unlike the often-dehumanizing corridor-accessed housing built at large state-run universities, Tougaloo's dorms would be accessed by a network of walkways, with individual access stairs for each individual unit housing around 20 students (Figures 2.42 & 2.43). These units would provide students with a network of familiar peers to provide roots for them in the "urban" environment of the new campus.

[121] The most famous text setting out the advantages of the multiversity is: Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, Godkin Lectures at Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).
[122] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2: Gunnar Birkerts and Associates*, 99.

With faculty housing in the undercroft below student dormitories, the groundwork would be in place for the "total academic community" toward which the college aspired.

The fact that the Tougaloo master plan was designed as a "total academic community" where students and faculty would live an integrated life distinguishes it from Birkerts's earlier designs and clarifies the social ambition of the project.[123] Administrators felt that an essential step toward creating this integrated life was to break down barriers between academic disciplines and likewise between faculty and students. This would be accomplished not only through architecture—the completion of which was far in the future—but also by involving students in the definition of the college's curriculum and goals.

Curricular Restructuring and Academic Freedom

"What is the future of the black college?" was a question many asked in the 1960s, as the Civil Rights Movement transitioned from slow legislative progress spurred by nonviolent protest to the more urgent demands of the Black Power insurgency. While the nation and its universities gingerly stepped toward integration, many saw predominantly black colleges (now more formally referred to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities or HBCUs) as anchors to a segregated past that must be left behind. Others, however, felt that HBCUs remained an important alternative for African American youth who had been underserved by their childhood education or desired a stronger connection to their cultural heritage than could be provided at majority-White schools. George A. Owens offered Tougaloo's official answer to this question in a 1967 convocation speech, arguing

[123] Gunnar Birkerts and Associates, "Master Plan for Tougaloo College," March 31, 1967, 32, Box 4, Gunnar Birkerts and Associates Records, Bentley Historical Library.

that in order to achieve full citizenship—the one true goal he believed was shared by all black activists—the most essential step was to provide equal access to educational opportunity.[124] In that regard, Owens believed, the HBCUs were far from outliving their function because decades of educational inequality had left African Americans under-qualified for admission to most predominantly White universities. In response, he felt that HBCUs like Tougaloo should remain committed not only to a more flexible admission policy, but also to offering a rigorous slate of remedial coursework to bring students up to speed. In the composition of its student body and in its curriculum, Tougaloo College embodied this essential role of HBCUs in the 1960s.

It was a common refrain about black colleges that they could serve as "a decompression chamber to ease a difficult transition … modulating and lubricating [students'] escape from the segregated past to the partially integrated future."[125] Integration, most believed at the time, would only ever be partial in the south. But Christopher Jencks and David Riesman—in whose book *The Academic Revolution* this sentiment was clearly articulated—pointed to an ambivalence about integration among African Americans, noting that for some "it was feared in practice at the same time it was coveted in principle." Resistance to full integration increased as the Black Power movement grew in strength across the country (and on campus at Tougaloo) because many expected it would result in the dissolution of authentic black culture.[126] Efforts toward integration continued nonetheless, including the short-lived establishment of a "Free University of Mississippi" by students from Tougaloo and nearby majority-white

[124] George A. Owens, "Convocation Speech, Bethany College," February 9, 1967, 1, Box 6, Folder 20, George A. Owens Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.
[125] Jencks and Riesman, *The Academic Revolution*, 417.
[126] Jencks and Riesman, 407.

Millsaps College. Students wanted to have access to courses too controversial for their conservative colleges, while Jencks and Riesman hoped this "free university" would become "a creative forum for interracial confrontation," putting white and black students "in touch with a world very different from the one they find on campus." Their hopes that greater student participation in academic decisions could lead to "new ways of learning," it seems, mirrored trustees' belief that a transformed campus would accomplish the same.[127] The shared goal among both groups was to restructure the curriculum and relations between groups in order to create a "total academic community."

The expected path of Tougaloo alumni after graduation had also changed by the time Owens acceded the college presidency. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Tougaloo faculty had catered the college's curriculum to the expectation that the majority of its graduates would become primary or secondary school teachers. Hence, the few available majors tended to funnel them into teaching specializations—i.e. English, history, mathematics, science—rather than offering the chance to decide their own trajectories. By the 1960s, the board of trustees and philanthropists believed that this approach overdetermined Tougaloo students' futures. Providing more flexibility would enable students to follow more diverse postgraduate paths, including graduate school and/or professional employment in northern cities. This change in curricular expectations was motivated at least in part by the needs expressed by northern corporate executives, who faced a dearth of qualified minority candidates for leadership ranks. Their desires filtered through funding organizations and college trustees into Tougaloo's educational

[127] Jencks and Riesman, 463. Because only one other mention of a "Free University of Mississippi" remains, the venture must have been incredibly short-lived. In fact, the other mention is a direct response to Jencks and Riesman. See: Henry David Aiken, *Predicament of the University* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 173.

priorities. Hence, instead of training their students to be educators in Mississippi's schools, Tougaloo began pushing its high achievers northward.

Partly, this was inspired by a shift in the performance expectations for HBCUs. For many, it was no longer sufficient to provide southern blacks with equal educational access (as Owens argued), HBCUs must strive to offer a truly equal education. In 1965, the college hosted L. Richard Meeth, an education researcher who made precisely this point in an article in the *Journal of Negro Education.*[128] Answering Meeth's call for equality, Tougaloo set the ambitious goal of becoming the "Harvard of the South" by the time the new campus was completed, and passed this goal along to their architects.[129]

Not everyone agreed that the goal for HBCUs should be to compete with established majority-White schools. The campus and curriculum should instead aim integrate life and learning into a distinctive form of "education" instead of a mere acquisition of established bodies of knowledge. Seeing the choice for HBCUs as essentially being between community service and Black Nationalism, Jencks and Riesman believed their ultimate goal should be

> […] to devise a form of education that helps young Negroes cope with the white adult world without making them either completely alienated from it or completely subservient to it. This is part of a larger problem, namely devising forms of upward mobility that allow able Negroes to maintain creative tension between themselves and the white world instead of being wholly co-opted by it.[130]

Indeed, it wasn't only admission to majority-white universities with which black students struggled, but also tokenism. Even at supposedly more integrated northern colleges like

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[128] L. Richard Meeth, "The Transition of the Predominantly Negro College," *The Journal of Negro Education* 35, no. 4 (1966): 494–505. Owens and Birkerts also met with Meeth in New York in July of that year, hoping to recruit him as an education advisor to expedite the preparation of an educational plan for the college. Meeth visited as part of a research trip, and his visit corresponded to a campus visit by Birkerts and his associate Jack Hilberry, who summarized Meeth's speech in a project memo.
[129] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 99.
[130] Jencks and Riesman, *The Academic Revolution*, 467.

Brown—where Tougaloo students had the opportunity to study through the Exchange—experiences underlined their subordinate status. Gwendolyn Hayes, who spent the fall of 1968 at Brown, found that whereas at Tougaloo "the usual subjects [were] 'Racism' and 'Black Subordination,'" in Providence she "had to think twice about someone coming into [her] room and leaving only to go tell their friends that they were now 'liberal' merely because they sat down in a Black girl's room for thirty minutes."[131] Experiences of this type underlined some militant students' belief in the inevitably partial, one-directional nature of racial integration.

Tougaloo trustees' educational priorities were tempered by difficulties caused by the poor preparation of many of its students. Tougaloo remained committed to a mandate established in the college's charter that they should admit students who were denied entry to more selective colleges and universities. Moreover, decades of unequal educational access—even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision overturned the "separate but equal" standard—meant that a substantial percentage of incoming students required remedial coursework. Tougaloo was being pulled in both directions at once: funders expected students to be high-achievers who could take jobs or graduate degrees in the north, while most of the students who matriculated came from deficient Mississippi schools that left them with substantial work to get up to speed. As Owens saw things, this was the "unique educational problem" that Tougaloo was tasked with solving.[132] To

[131] Gwendolyn Hayes, quoted in "Brown-Tougaloo Impressions, 1969," 29, Tougaloo College-Brown University Exchange Records, Tougaloo College Archives. Cited in James D. Graham and Michael Abrahamson, "Designing the Great Migration," *The Aggregate website* (Not Peer Reviewed), Volume 2, March 2015, Accessed October 29, 2016, http://we-aggregate.org/piece/designing-the-great-migration.
[132] George A. Owens, "An Educational Policy for Tougaloo College" (February 8, 1967), 1, Box 6, Folder 20, George A. Owens Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.

simply become more selective in admissions in order to have higher performing students would be a betrayal of the college's heritage.

For Owens, the solution was to address the college's teaching to its students' strengths by building on "what the students bring to the learning situation from their total life experience."[133] This required flexibility, which he believed must be "the paramount feature of our program … so as to emancipate the individual student so that he can grow and develop at his own rate of speed."[134] To accomplish this flexibility, Owens proposed that "[the] total life of the campus must be a learning experience," and that there be an emphasis on "independent study and learning as an introduction to the lifelong process of self-education."[135] At Tougaloo, curricular and pedagogical flexibility would allow administrators to determine their educational priorities or learning outcomes, tailoring them to suit the relative lack of preparation among their incoming students. Framed by Owens, it would allow the college room "to identify what is uniquely Tougaloo and Negro," that students might contribute to an integrated society.[136] Effectively, he tried to locate the college between Jencks and Riesman's extremes of community service and Black Nationalism. This, Owens hoped, would allow students to assimilate into the middle class workforce.

Black Power activists who frequently visited campus had other ideas. Speaking to an audience of Tougaloo students in April 1967 (Figure 2.44), Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture) asserted that, "the move in this country today is to destroy the Black colleges and the Black ideology. Tougaloo College used to have a Black ideology

[133] Ibid.
[134] Owens, "An Educational Policy," 2.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Inaugural Address by George A. Owens, in "Inauguration of George A. Owens," 32.

and then you became a brown baby."[137] Carmichael's rhetoric points to the Black Power movement's resistance to integration—as a group, they believed that for HBCUs to take on characteristics of predominantly white institutions was, unavoidably, to compromise aspects of their well-established black identity. Carmichael's complaint was that the practice of integration was one-directional—Tougaloo took Brown's advice and its students were given the opportunity to study at a prestigious Ivy League institution, but Brown itself changed little as a result of the Exchange. This led him to assert that integration, when initiated by African Americans themselves, was "an insidious subterfuge for white supremacy."

Indeed, curricular restructuring at Tougaloo instilled an important aspect of the liberal-arts model: offering students freedom to determine their course of study. In the early 1960s the German concept of *Lernfreiheit*, the freedom of students to determine their own educational path, had returned to the center of discussion among prominent educators including University of California president Clark Kerr, who advocated for the "multiversity" as a way to enable it.[138] Hoping to offer students more of this type of freedom, the Cummins grant supported an academic plan intended to broaden the Tougaloo curriculum and give students a wider array of course offerings. A committee headed by history professor John Dittmer developed this plan over the 1966-67 and 1967-68 academic years, with the changes taking effect for 1968-69. As part of an effort to refashion Tougaloo on the liberal arts model, the restructured curriculum drastically

[137] Stokely Carmichael, *We Ain't Going - Remarks at Tougaloo College, April 11, 1967* (Greenwood, IN: Educational Video Group, 1968). The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized Carmichael's talk in response to a speech the night before by Robert F. Kennedy. The "brown" in this sentence no doubt referred to Tougaloo's relationship with Brown University, though the available transcript does not capitalize the word.
[138] See: Kerr, *The Uses of the University*.

reduced the number of required general education courses as well as the number of courses in which each student enrolled per semester. The intention was to focus students on learning a few things more deeply and help them avoid the feeling of constantly catching up fostered by the previous regime. This more flexible curriculum entailed a rethinking of the content and assignments for all courses, and the development of entirely new, more specialized courses for advanced students.

One of the pedagogical trials undertaken during this curricular restructuring was a requirement that each incoming freshman enroll in a new Freshman Social Science Seminar (FSSS). Supported by a Ford Foundation grant, the FSSS initiative was an effort to rapidly bring students up to speed intellectually and socially by undertaking detailed explication of novels through small group discussions led by an interdisciplinary team of instructors. Early in the 1968 academic year, students who were unsatisfied with the FSSS—specifically the fact that it didn't adequately focus on the experiences of African Americans—revolted against the program. From the perspective of faculty members like Julie Preis, this revolt consisted mainly of talk:

> [Political Action Committee] people talk to each other; white faculty talk to each other; roommates talk to each other; seminar students talk to each other; occasionally you'll find students and faculty talking at each other. Lots of talk. Much of it happens to be idle chitchat, joking, brushing-aside; or rumor-mongering, bitching, accusing. Yet … the issues have not been made available to the campus in a manner that could produce more than fleeting results and temporary emotional highs.[139]

Preis's objection was to the lack of measured public discourse among militant students. Instead of judging the effectiveness of their activism by "the number of times the chapel bell rings during a given week," Preis felt that students ought to recognize "the potency

[139] Julie Preis to "Staff of the student newspaper, and all other Tougaloo students," December 3, 1968, 1, Box 4, Folder 16, George A. Owens Papers, Tougaloo College Archives.

of the printed word."[140] They should, in her opinion, not only bring the writings of black leaders like Carmichael into the classroom—which was evidently one of the students' demands—but also put their own opinions into writing. Unfortunately, the students' objections to FSSS remained ephemeral, as Preis's letter is the lone reference to their revolt in the college's archive. In the end, they seem only to have heightened the tension between Tougaloo's largely black student body and predominantly white faculty.

At a symposium commemorating Owens's inauguration two years earlier in 1966, Harvard College Dean John U. Munro had advised the administrators in attendance to "learn to think of the familiar institution of the college in somewhat unfamiliar terms, and much more flexibly, in the years ahead."[141] Munro's sentiment became active at two scales for Owens and Tougaloo: first, the college itself stretched its identity to fit new expectations and outcomes; second, the college's students fought for the freedom to determine their own path within and outside the existing curricular structure. Authority figures like Owens and Preis were often unfriendly to the methods they used in their fight, but students saw paternalism and hierarchy hidden in the way integration was being put into practice by these same authority figures. Ultimately, instead of a way to integrate Tougaloo's constituencies, the work of imagining a new campus and curriculum made the distance between them seem even greater. While administrators viewed freedom as an academic right, students viewed it as a utopian goal.[142]

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[140] Ibid. Ringing the chapel's bell was evidently a strategy used by student activists to register their frustration.

[141] Remarks by John U. Munro at Symposium on "The Future of the Predominantly Negro College in the U.S.," in "Inauguration of George A. Owens," 14–15.

[142] In this, the students followed other Civil Rights leaders, who often deployed the word freedom to differentiate their organizations from those of the white establishment. Examples include SNCC's Lowndes County Freedom Organization in Alabama, a local political party that offered an alternative to the racist Democrats in a rural, majority-black county, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which protested racist voter suppression by insisting on replacing Mississippi's all-white delegation at the

Setting the Agenda: Social Science and Campus Planning

There was a fundamental contradiction inherent to the architectural agenda given to Birkerts—a contradiction between, first, the desire for an "urban" campus environment expressed by the trustees and second, the liberal arts educational model desired by the faculty. If an urban campus would prepare students for their expected moves to the north, then a leafy college campus was thought to be more effective at retaining faculty. At its heart, this showed a disagreement about the appropriate density for Tougaloo's campus environment. In the end, it was the trustees' desire to simulate a dense, integrated environment that drove Birkerts's design. This enabled him to contribute to an ongoing debate, which preoccupied urban sociologists and urban designers alike in the mid-1960s, about whether population density increased or decreased social cohesion, and how density might properly be regulated.[143] Fortunately for Birkerts, contemporaneous research in the social sciences provided some hints at how to reconcile the college's

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1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. On the MFDP see: Dittmer, *Local People*, 272–302.

[143] College campuses were sometimes directly implicated in this debate and its related research agendas. Josep Lluis Sert, founder of the first program in urban design at the Harvard GSD, took the view that "a university campus is a laboratory for urban design." Josep Lluis Sert, as quoted in Turner, *Campus*, 271. Similarly, institutions like UIC saw it as their mandate not only to "produce urban citizens," but also "to research social and urban forms that will lead to new ideas." Sharon Haar, *The City as Campus: Urbanism and Higher Education in Chicago* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xiv. The comparison between city and campus was also made by social scientists, who often likened the campus to "neighborhoods in a large metropolis, each with a distinctive ethnic character and architecture." Benson R. Snyder, "College as a New Environment, in Leonard J. Duhl, ed., *The Urban Condition: People and Policy in the Metropolis* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1963), 76. Some even saw the design of campus environments as a way to participate in "a higher order of planning" by serving as "a model of the kind of environment that the students can later aspire to when they become involved in planning our future communities." Frank J. Matzke, "Physical Planning for the Changing Campus," in Frederick W. Mayer and Carl V. Schmult Jr., eds., *The Changing Campus: People and Process*, Selected Papers from the Third Annual Conference, Society for College and University Planning (New York: Society for College and University Planning, 1968), 31.

contradictory desires. The debate took for granted that there should be a fluid, reciprocal transfer of ideas between social science and the design of the built environment.[144]

The exchange of ideas between social scientists and designers may have been mutually reinforcing. Representative in this regard are the writings of anthropologist Edward T. Hall and urban sociologist Herbert Gans. In his 1966 book *The Hidden Dimension*, Hall incorporated contemporary architectural ideas as part of his argument in favor of close-knit, urban units as engines for assimilation. Writing of Bertrand Goldberg's famous Marina City complex in Chicago while also praising the "humanly congenial" work of the lesser-known Washington, D.C. architect Chloethiel Smith, Hall offered what he called the "contained community building" as a model for future urban development.[145] It's clear that what he was writing about was the megastructure. Hall believed these "radical new, integrated forms" that "hold an entire community" had the potential to overcome both the material wastefulness and social atomization of postwar suburban development and the "behavioral sink" effects supposedly brought about by extreme population density in older urban centers.[146] Hall's seeming enthusiasm for megastructures hints at a brief, overlooked consensus between city development discourse (among architects, urban designers, and urban planners) and progressive social science in the American academic establishment of the early 1960s. Far from a mere endorsement of profit-driven urban redevelopment, Hall and other thinkers aimed to

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[144] This was particularly true among advocates of megastructures, such that architect Danforth Toan remarked plainly, "The problem of megastructures is one of social theory and practice, not one of architecture and technology". Quoted in Kepes, *Arts of the Environment*, 150.

[145] Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 177–78. Hall's book would later appear on readings lists for several courses Birkerts co-taught at the University of Michigan in the late 1970s, which are discussed in Chapter IV.

[146] Hall often used the phrase "behavioral sink," coined by the animal ecologist John B. Calhoun to describe a finding from his studies of rat and mouse colonies, to pessimistically describe the deleterious effects of excessive population density. See: John B. Calhoun, "Population Density and Urban Pathology," [1962] in Duhl, *The Urban Condition*, 33–43.

maintain and encourage genuine social cohesion among ethnic communities residing in urban centers through the design of the built environment. What made Hall's writing unusual was his proposal of a spatial, architectural fix for the problem of cultural assimilation, something other social scientists were unwilling to offer.

This shows that the exchange of ideas went both ways: social scientists like Hall looked to architecture for test cases, while architects and urban designers referenced popular science like *The Hidden Dimension* or John B. Calhoun's famous studies of population density to legitimize planning decisions.[147] At its best, this exchange emboldened architects and urban designers to offer visions for future cities that were friendlier to newcomers, and affirmed the social benefits of urban life. At its worst, it was an attempt to use architecture to inculcate upper-middle-class mores.[148]

Critiquing precisely that kind of prescription for the urban environment, architect Robert Goodman later wrote, "What is tacitly accepted is the 'conversion' of 'country folk' by the planners, rather than a process determined by the people themselves … [the planners' job] is to make the situation of the oppressed tolerable by keeping them

[147] For a discussion of Calhoun's broad cultural influence, see: Edmund Ramsden and Jon Adams, "Escaping the Laboratory: The Rodent Experiments of John B. Calhoun & Their Cultural Influence," *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 3 (2009): 761–92.

[148] Even Herbert Gans, whose participant-observation method left him sympathetic to his working- and lower-class subjects, could not avoid making a striking value judgment in a concluding chapter of his book *Urban Villagers*: "If society could be reconstructed from top to bottom, if man could alter his physical and social environment at will, if resources were unlimited, if opportunities could be created and distributed without restriction, and if people could choose their subculture freely, I believe that the professional upper-middle-class subculture would be the most deserving of choice." Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers; Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans.* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 264. Gans does, however, chide planners for their frequent assumption that all are equally mobile when it comes to their class identity and cultural preferences. He concluded that more than one generation is required for a family or small group to adapt to a new social structure. For African Americans hampered by discrimination and prejudice, the process would no doubt take even longer. Gans nevertheless pointed to the important function of low-rent neighborhoods and the resilient ethnic communities that resided there as engines for the assimilation of new residents, particularly those arriving from rural areas. (316; Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, 170–71; 174).

healthy."[149] Like other politically sensitive architects, he recognized that without properly engaging the public in the processes that determine their environment, one descends into authoritarianism. For Goodman, to write a recipe for urban assimilation based on the right balance of density and cohesion was to take power away from everyday people and put it in the hands of "the planners," among whom he counted politicians, social scientists, and architects alike.

One might contend that not all of these concerns must be brought to bear on the college campus, which, because of its temporary residency and relative demographic uniformity, isn't subject to the same issues. Banham summed up the situation thusly:

> An intense body of serious study and arrant wishful thinking about urban problems was brought to bear on a design situation which is not significantly comparable to urban planning, however similar the dimensions of the task and the population-density of the resulting structures may appear.[150]

For the generation of architects addressing the megastructure's interconnected social and technical goals, the ambition was nonetheless to create a model urbanity that captured the advantages of cities while avoiding their drawbacks. Unfortunately, the image and ideological rhetoric of the megastructure proved to be as flexible politically as it was designed to be architecturally, and over the course of the 1960s, the megastructure swung between the extremes of social liberation and social engineering. While originally conceived as a machine for liberation, it was later seen as a way to strictly regulate density and growth, thereby "ordering" the unruly city or campus.[151]

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[149] Robert Goodman, *After the Planners* (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1972), 176.
[150] Banham, *Megastructure*, 131.
[151] This extreme later morphed into attempts to instill law and order through urban design. See: Joy Knoblauch, "The Economy of Fear: Oscar Newman Launches Crime Prevention through Urban Design (1969–197x)," *Architectural Theory Review* 19, no. 3 (September 2, 2014): 336–54.

For his part, Birkerts was committed above all to aesthetic modernism, but was also sympathetic to the social goals of his clients at Tougaloo and elsewhere. Though he was not a reader of social theory or urban sociology, it is likely that the most widely held ideas made their way into his intellectual context. By creating an "urban" plan for Tougaloo that compacted previously separated functions into a dense area, he hoped to contribute to the integration of the college community. And yet, whereas other campus planning initiatives of the postwar years aimed to transform not only the learning environment but also the surrounding city, the Tougaloo design would have furthered the college's already distinct separation from its urbanizing setting.[152] As discussed above, the motivation for this fortress-like posture came partly from the college's threatening context, but this isolation was also justified by contemporaneous social scientific beliefs, particularly the idea that a campus environment might mimic the function of urban ethnic neighborhoods.

Conclusion: 'The refuse of the real'

Anticipating a massive investment in new college and university buildings, Educational Facilities Laboratories warned in 1963 that

> [Unless] there is better planning by the educators and a greater financial commitment by society, there is danger that the needed facilities will be provided in a series of crash programs. Expediency rather than quality will be the byword. And our campuses will be crowded with misplaced academic slums, educationally self-defeating and a drain both educationally and economically on future generations.[153]

[152] Michael Carriere has demonstrated that these goals were interdependent, and that they had indelible ties to the political values of postwar liberalism. Michael H. Carriere, "Between Being and Becoming: On Architecture, Student Protest, and the Aesthetics of Liberalism in Postwar America" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010), 4–5.

[153] James J. Morisseau, "Foreword," in Educational Facilities Laboratories, ed., *Bricks and Mortarboards: A Report on College Planning and Building* (New York, 1963), 16.

Architects' response to this call seems to have been to design not buildings but systems, and administrators were so fearful of accumulating irregularly-planned "academic slums" that they were easily seduced by the models architects produced. Unfortunately, the built outcomes of this moment were never as flexible or as extendable as they aspired to be, and expediency certainly reigned wherever budgets were slim. Tougaloo was no exception. There, Birkerts eventually supervised the construction of a library and two dormitories, which weren't completed until 1973 and 1974, respectively. This delay was a result of Tougaloo's limited access to financing—an essential but often overlooked node in the network of influences that always inform architectural practice.

By 1968, ambitions had already been constrained: the Tougaloo "Self-Study" described future construction projects at the college as follows: "We will construct only those facilities which are basic and absolutely necessary so that the maximum of increased funds can be used to support personnel and programs."[154] As mentioned above, what had occurred in the interim were several doses of reality—two aborted construction bids and a protracted struggle for adequate funding. GBA's expandable campus master plan set in motion a process that ended with these three technically adventurous but functionally unsatisfactory buildings. Actually completing this group of buildings required the architects to adapt their designs to local conditions both geological and financial. In the process, dreams of a transformed campus were obstructed by political and material contingency. These conditions and contingencies could have been anticipated, but Tougaloo's future-oriented trustees and its modernist architect remained too myopically attached to the grand ambitions articulated by Merle Miller—to administer a final jolt of transformation to the southern education system and therefore

[154] "Continuity, Change and Commitment," 6.

the Jim Crow south, to literally overcome centuries of mistreatment in a single generation, to mobilize the built environment as an agent in these social transformations. Ultimately, these ambitions pushed the college into financial difficulty.[155]

Originally conceived as machines for freedom, megastructures like this one were later understood as a means to strictly regulate density and growth, thereby maintaining order in the unruly city or the riotous campus. By the time both campuses and cities became sites for uprisings and protests in the late 1960s, architects and planners had found in the megastructure a ready-made mechanism if not quite for social repression, then at least for maintaining visual order.

While architects like Birkerts saw freedom in this architectural form of flexibility, their clients and patrons saw something else entirely, a difference emphasized by photographs of Birkerts and Owens presenting GBA's model in April 1966 (Figures 2.45 & 2.46). They both gesture toward the campus center, but saw this future scenario in different ways. Though Birkerts described the master plan as "an image that would belong to Tougaloo alone," the concepts of flexibility and integration that undergird the project were more than visual metaphors, they also pointed to particular educational philosophies and social ideologies.[156] Paying visual homage to the need for a campus that could accommodate changing needs, Birkerts offered an unrealizable vision to a vulnerable community in need of much more immediate, much more practical solutions.

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[155] Readying itself for increased enrollment, and encouraged by its relationship with Brown to aim higher academically through faculty and student recruitment, Tougaloo found itself flush with foundation support. But all of this financing had strings attached, and the basic functioning of the college remained difficult. Reaching a new level of desperation in 1968, president George Owens drafted an application to the Ford Foundation (which had conditionally supported the Tougaloo-Brown Exchange and the Freshman Social Science Seminar) for unconditional support totaling $2.5 million. It is unclear whether this application was ever actually submitted, but the funding never materialized and the college refocused its efforts on educating its student body rather than expanding it. "Draft of Special Emergency Appeal to The Ford Foundation," [Undated] George A. Owens Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, Tougaloo College Archives.

[156] Marlin and Futagawa, *GA Architect 2*, 99.

The blame for this outcome rests not with the architect, but perhaps rather with patrons whose priorities were misaligned with the college they supported. Unfortunately, the problems Birkerts was tasked with solving were too diffuse, and the vision he provided too architecturally ambitious to have the impact all parties desired.

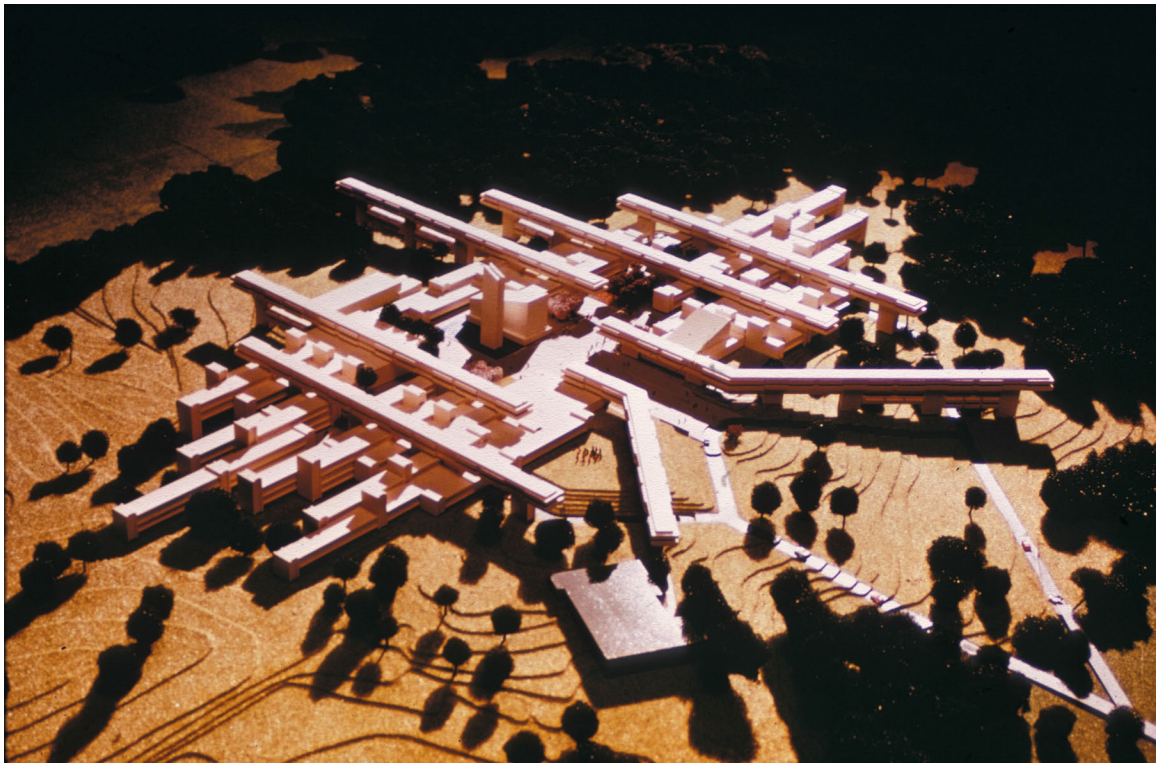

Figure 2.01 GBA, Presentation model for Tougaloo College Master Plan, 1966. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. 35mm Slide. Imageworks, Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan.

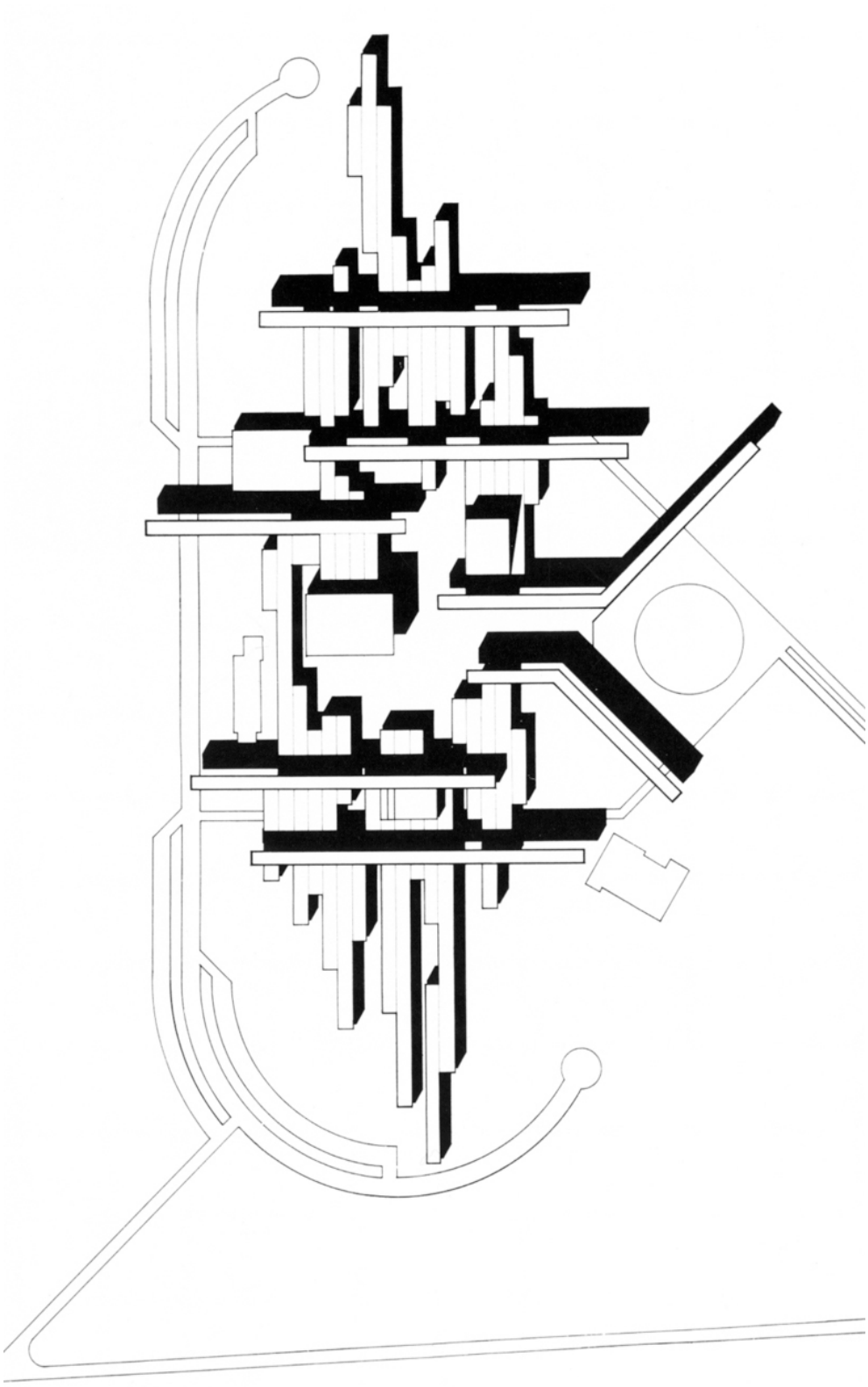

Figure 2.02 GBA, Site Plan, Tougaloo College Master Plan, 1966. Drawer 5, Folder 3, GBA records, BHL.

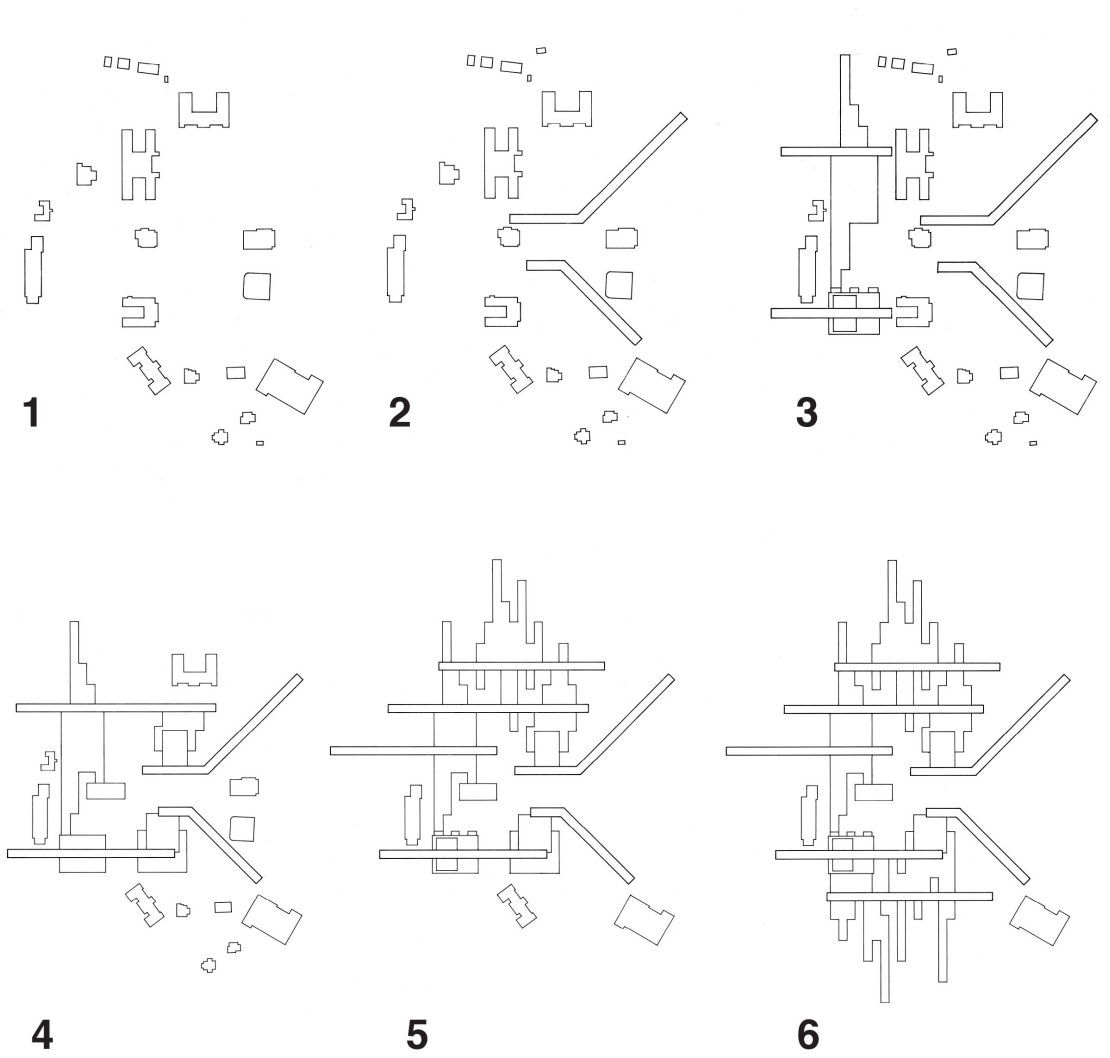

Figure 2.03 GBA, Phasing Drawings for Tougaloo College Master Plan, 1966. Drawer 5, Folder 3, GBA records, BHL.

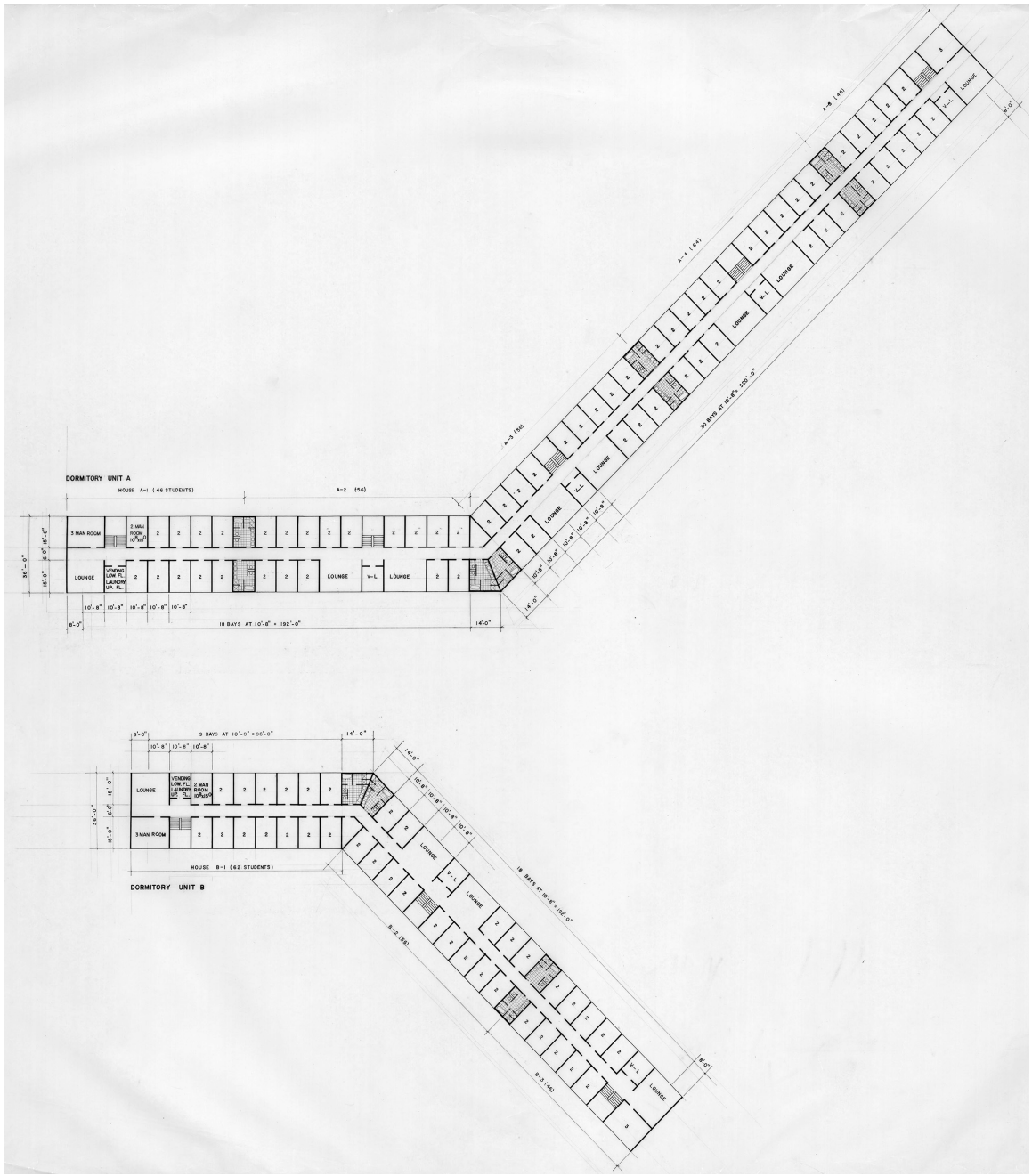

Figure 2.04 GBA, Schematic upper-floor plans for dormitories on east side of Tougaloo campus, November 1966. Folder 2, Drawer 7, GBA records, BHL.

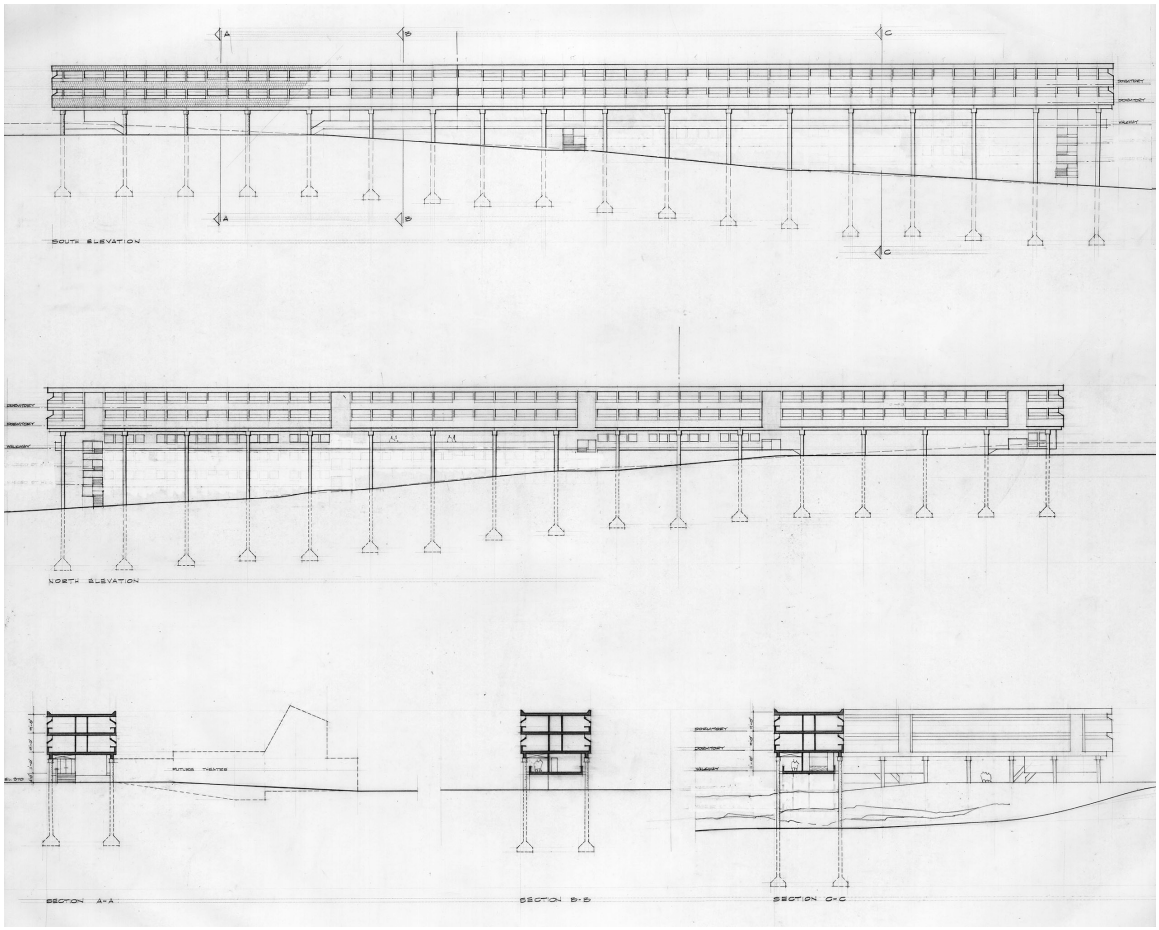

Figure 2.05 Schematic elevations and sections for dormitories on east side of Tougaloo campus, November 1966. Folder 2, Drawer 7, GBA records, BHL.

Figure 2.06 Tougaloo College construction photograph showing muddy Yazoo clay soil on library construction site, with dormitory in background. Box 5, GBA records, BHL.

Figure 2.07 GBA, Presentation model of "Mini-plan" for Tougaloo College. From: Marlin and Futagawa, 92.

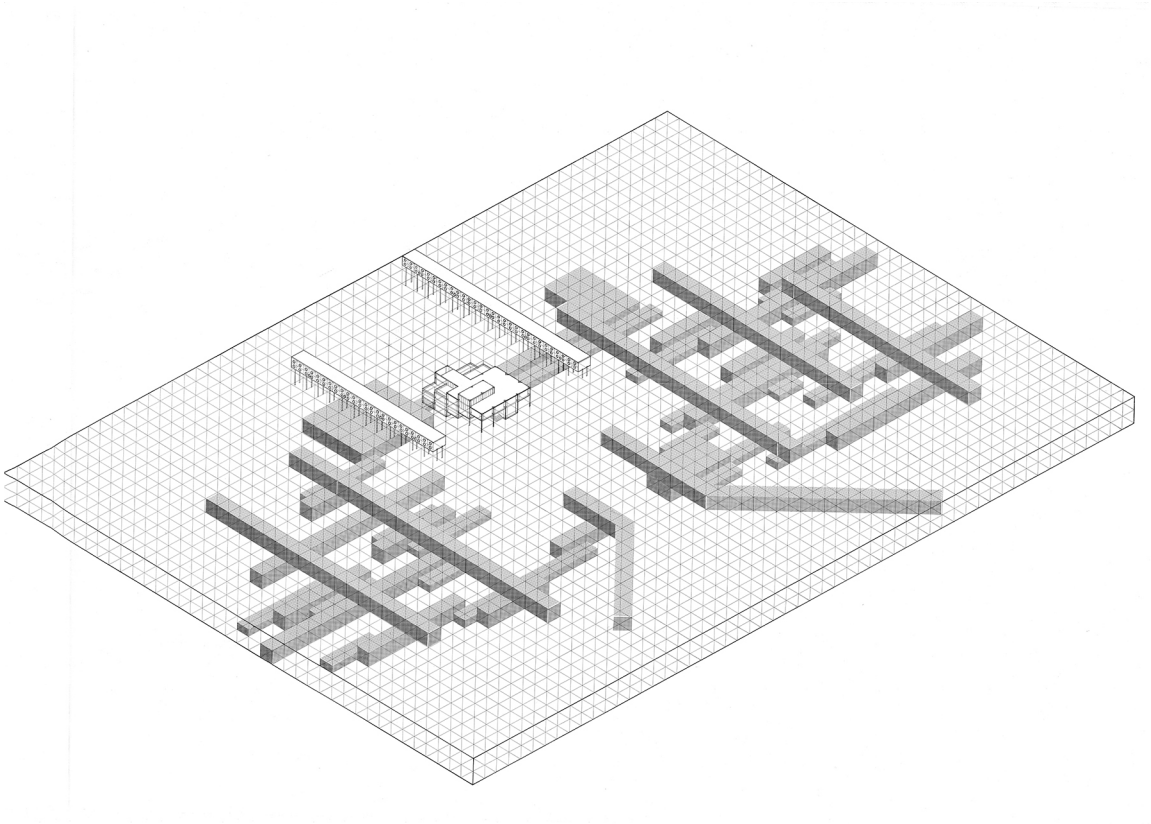

Figure 2.08 GBA, Planning grid showing location of "Mini-plan" within larger Tougaloo College Master Plan, ca. 1966-71. Drawer 5, Folder 5, GBA records, BHL.

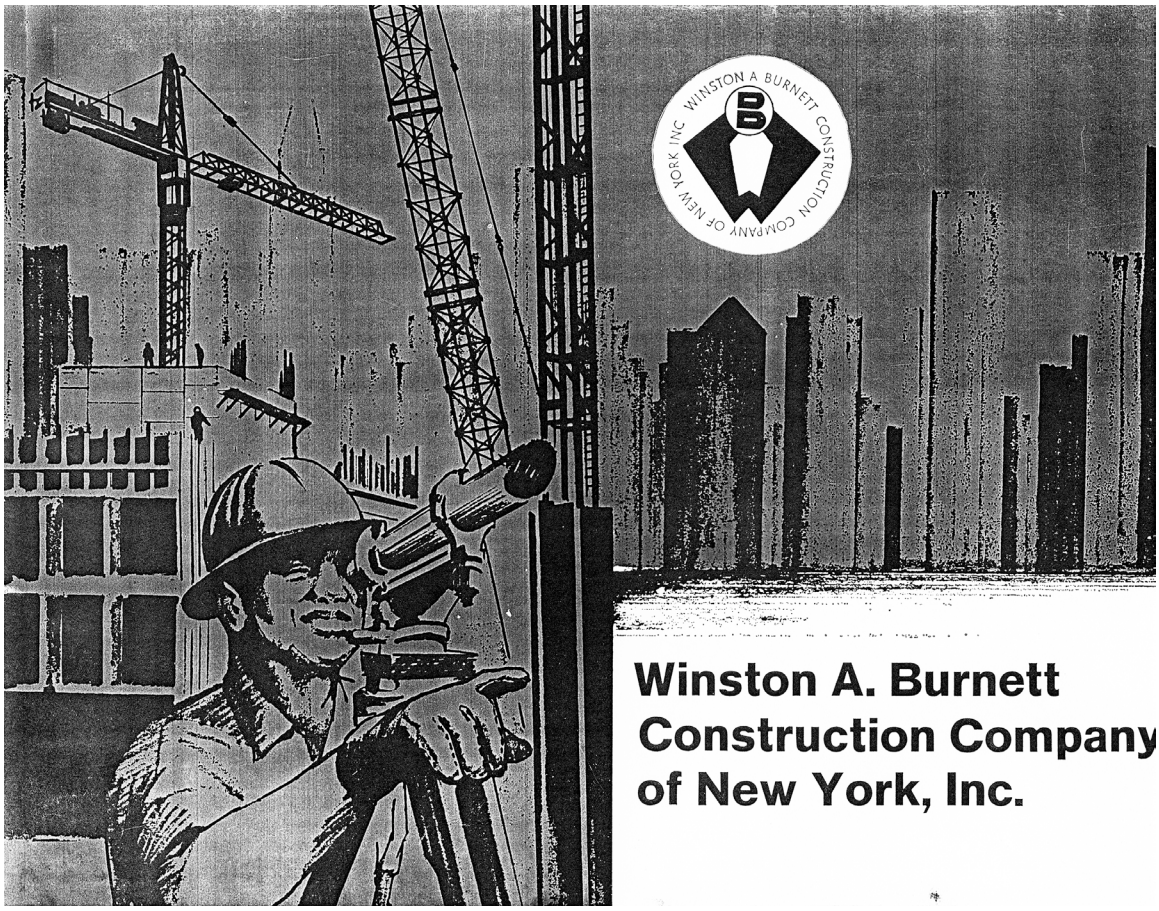

Figure 2.09 Promotional brochure for the Winston A. Burnett Construction Company. Box 5, GBA records, BHL.

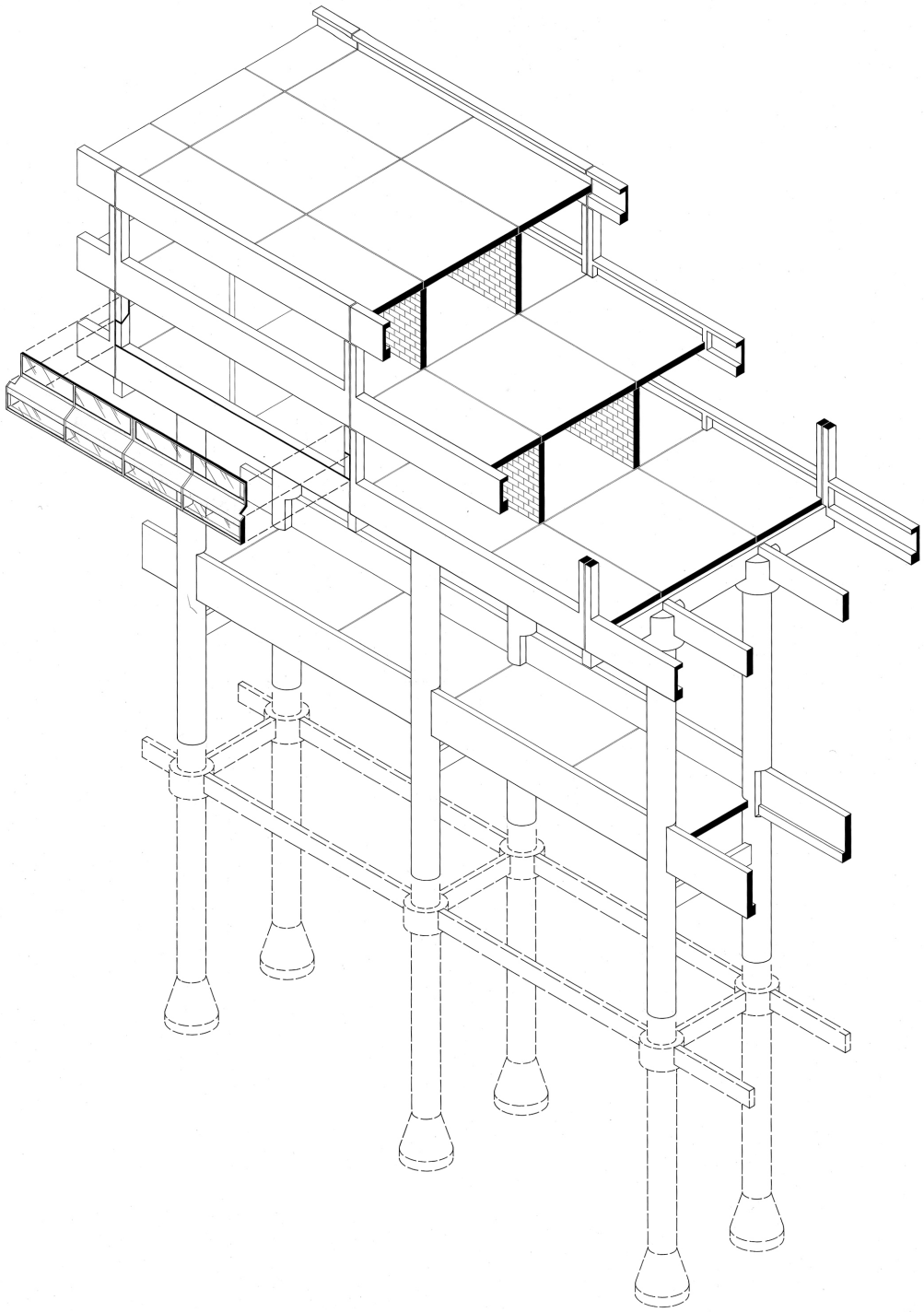

Figure 2.10 GBA, Assembly diagram of Tougaloo College dormitory, Version 1, 1968. Folder 8, Drawer 7, GBA records, BHL.

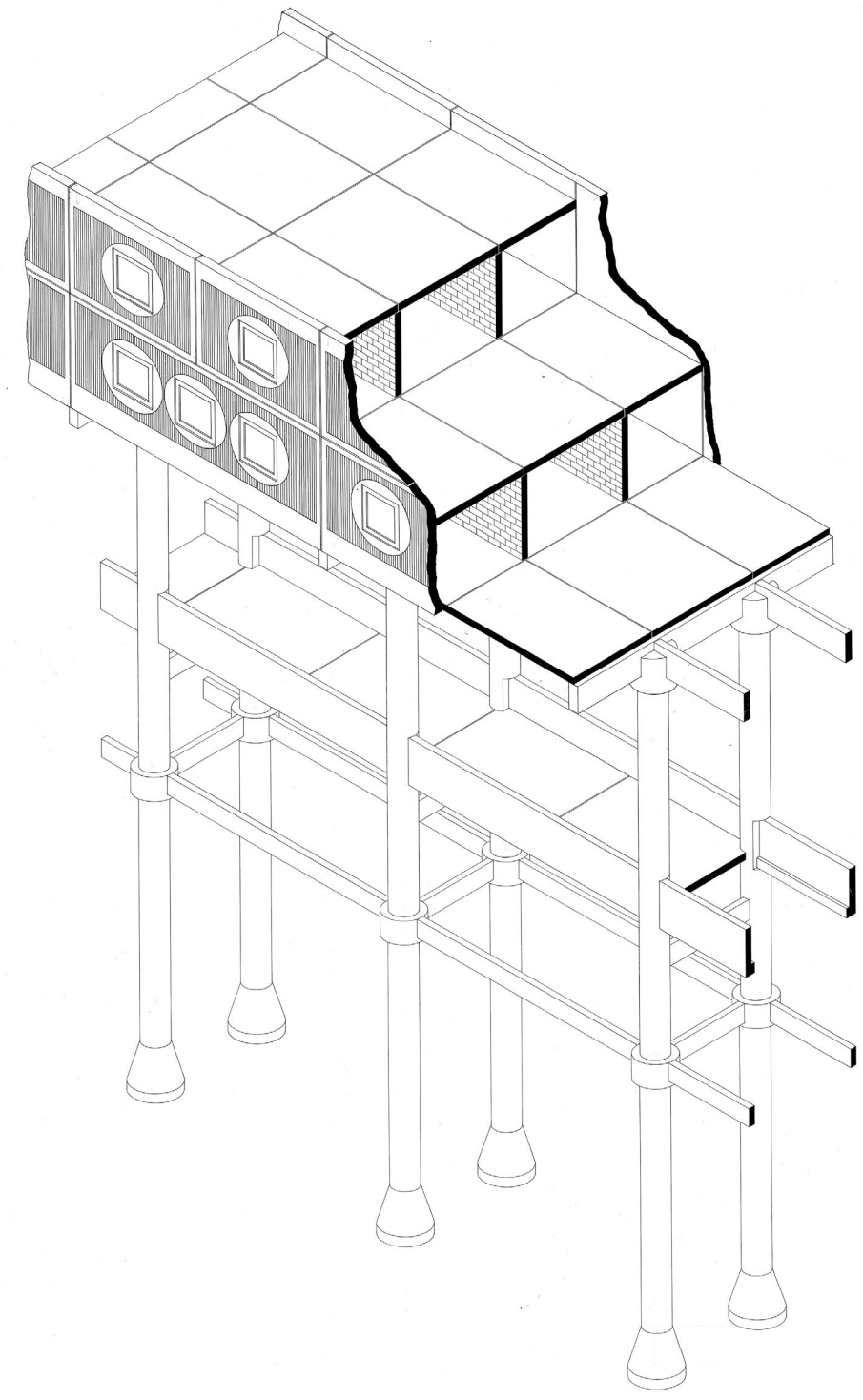

Figure 2.11 GBA, Assembly diagram of Tougaloo College dormitory, Version 2 (built version), 1968. Folder 8, Drawer 7, GBA records, BHL.

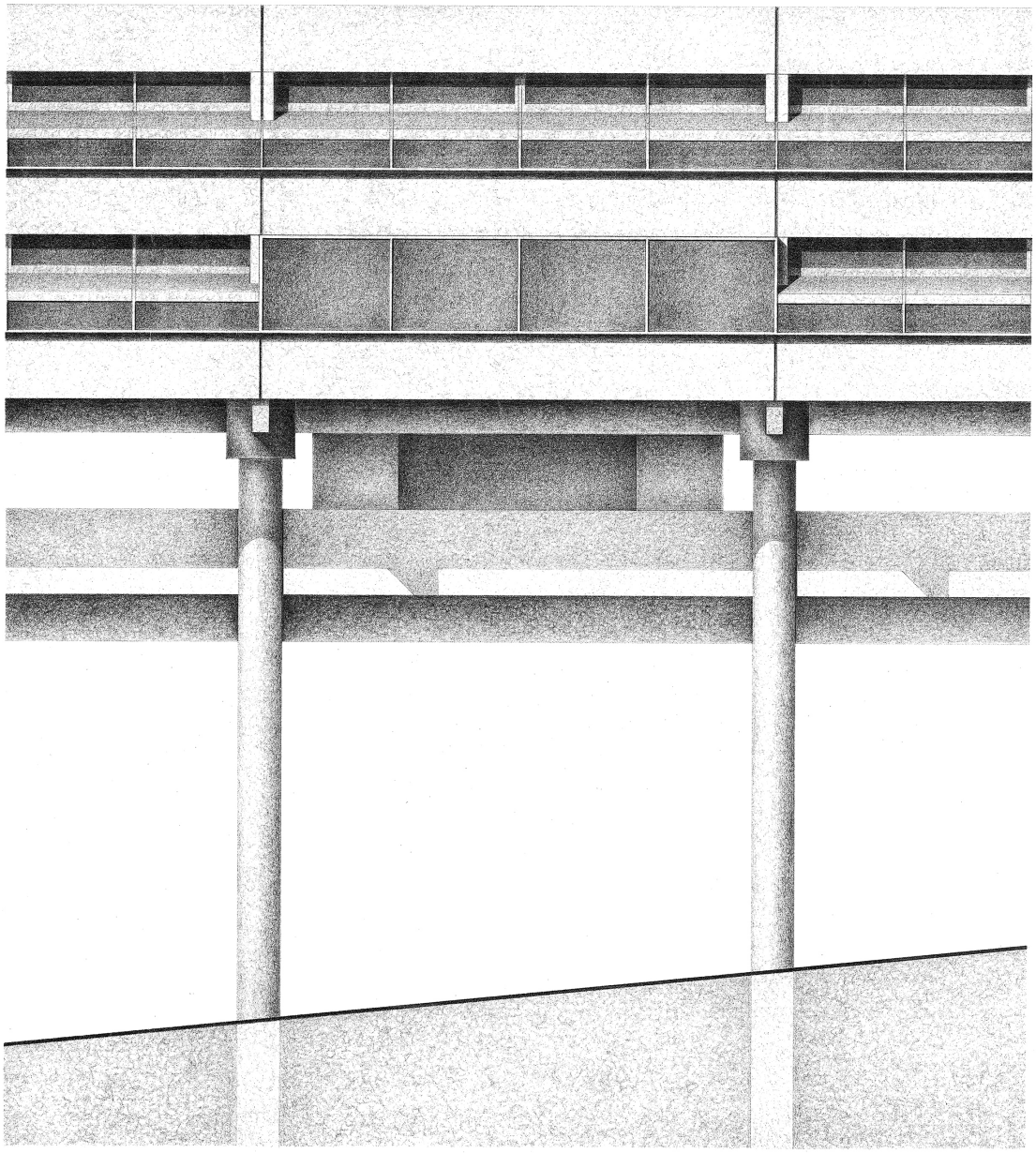

Figure 2.12 GBA, rendered elevation of schematic dormitory design, Tougaloo College, ca. 1968. Elevated pedestrian circulation system in center showing access point for 20-person dormitory "house." Folder 4, Drawer 7, GBA records, BHL.

Figure 2.13 Detail of Tougaloo College construction photograph showing Burnett precasting plant set up on campus, next to the water tower, to produce panels for dormitory construction. Box 5, GBA records, BHL.

Figure 2.14 Tougaloo College dormitory construction photograph showing positioning of wall panel atop first residential floor. Box 5, GBA records, BHL.

Figure 2.15 GBA, Dormitory, Tougaloo College, 1966-74. L. Zenobia Coleman Library seen in distance. Photograph by Balthazar Korab. From: Kay Kaiser, 65.

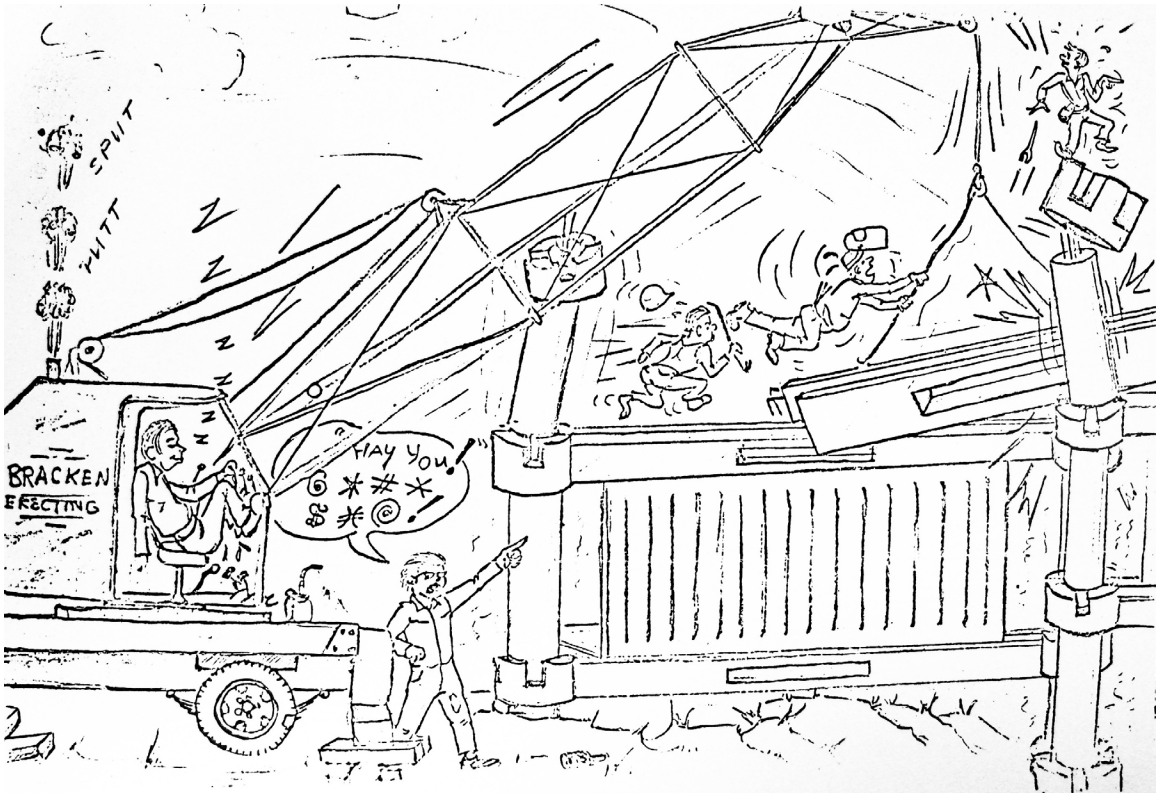

Figure 2.16 Cartoon of Tougaloo Library construction process, drawn by an unnamed carpenter. Box 5, GBA records, BHL.

Figure 2.17 Cover of April 1966 issue, *Architectural Forum*, showing artist's illustration of GBA's Tougaloo College master plan.

Figure 2.18 GBA, Presentation model of Tougaloo College Master Plan, 1966. Photograph by Balthazar Korab, 35mm Slide. Imageworks, Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan.

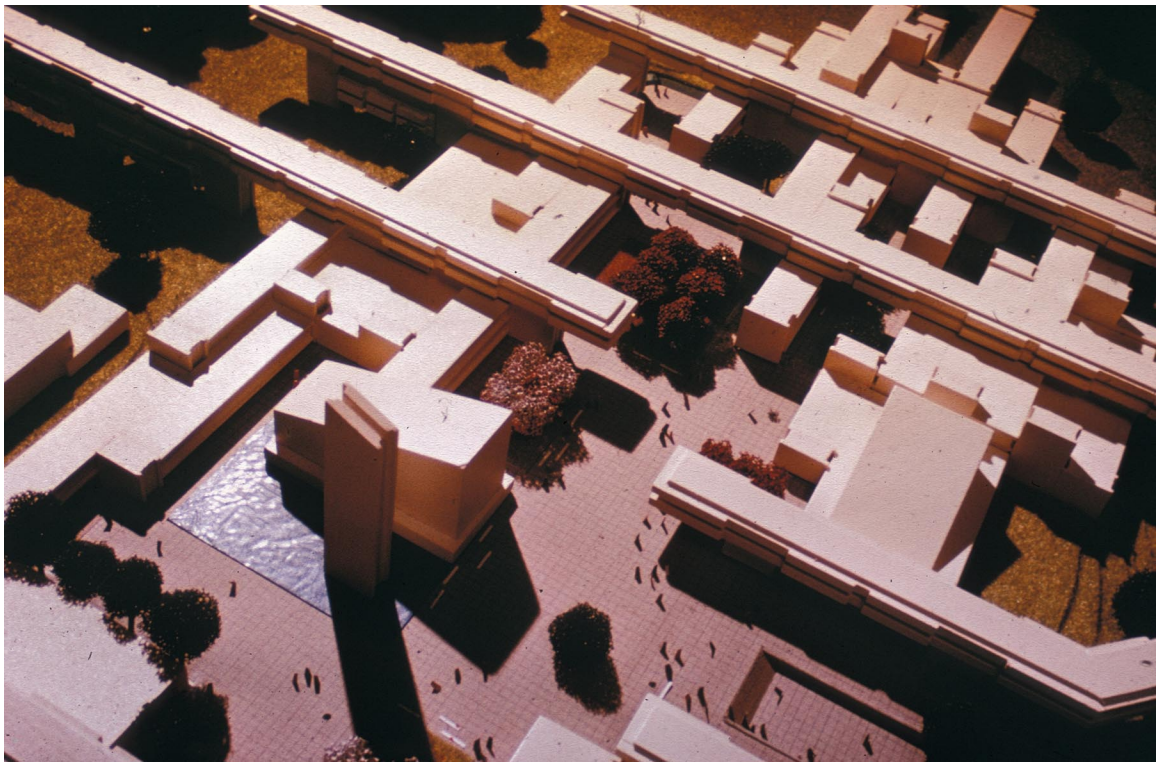

Figure 2.19 GBA, Presentation model of Tougaloo College Master Plan, 1966. Photograph by Balthazar Korab, 35mm Slide. Imageworks, Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan.

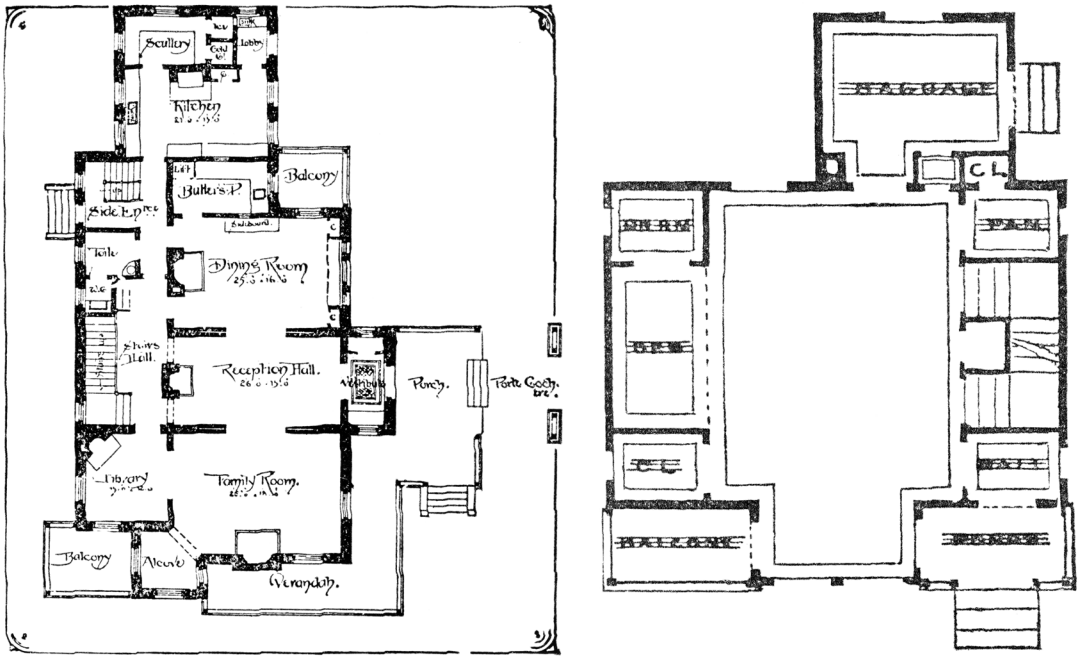

Figure 2.20 Sigfried Giedion's examples of "flexible and informal ground planning" in late 19th century American houses, both from E.C. Gardner, *Illustrated Homes, Describing Real Houses and Real People* (Boston, 1875), published in: Giedion, *Space Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1941), 288-289.

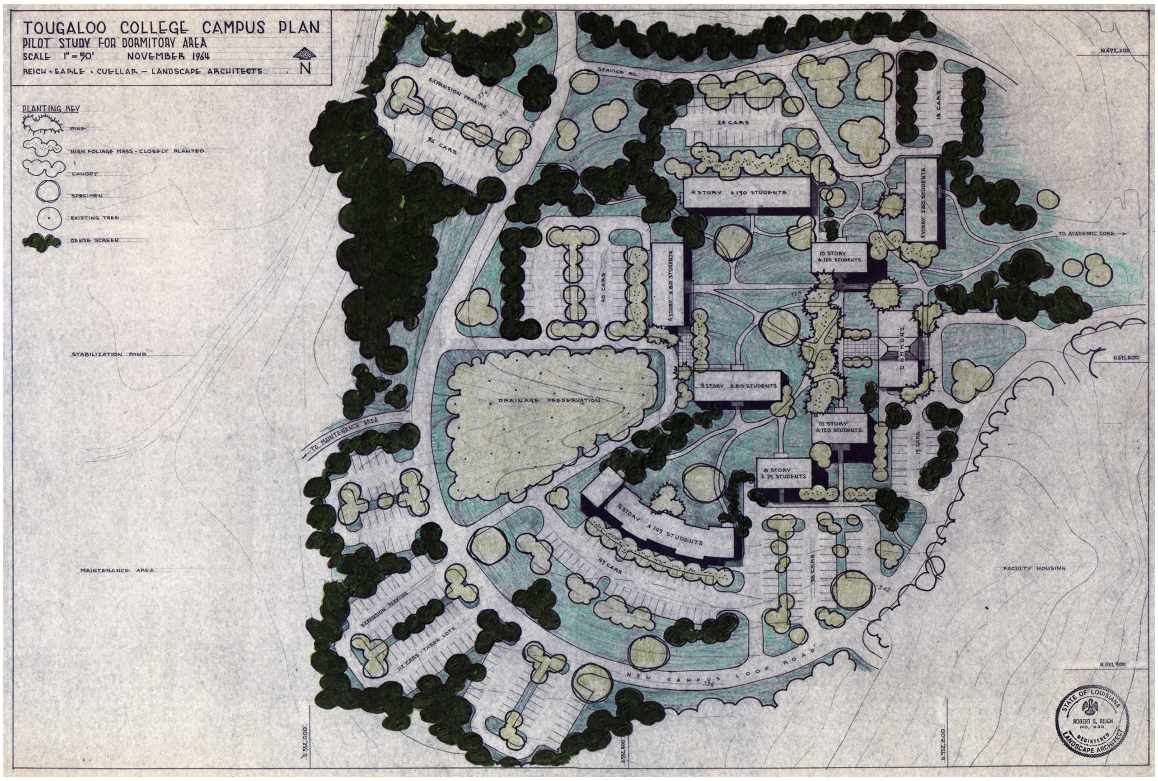

Figure 2.21 Reich Earle Cuellar Landscape Architects, Tougaloo College Campus Plan, Pilot Study for Dormitory Area, 1964. Drawer 5, Folder 1, GBA records, BHL.

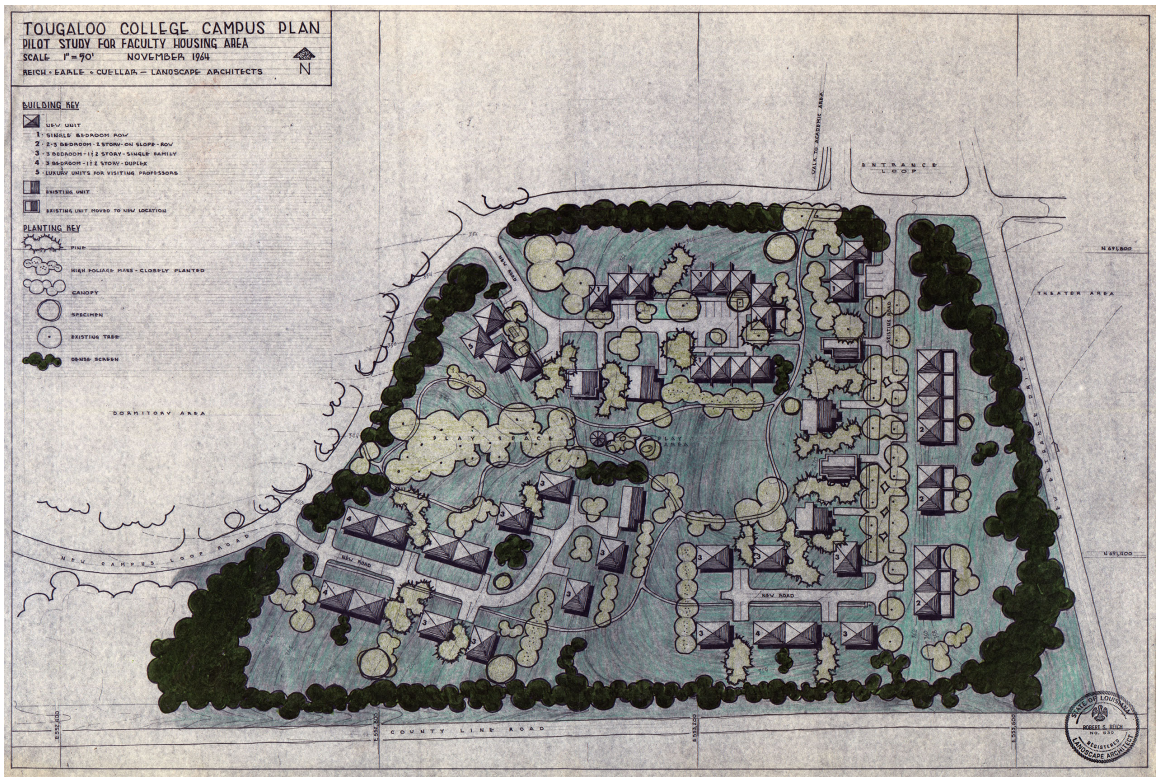

Figure 2.22 Reich Earle Cuellar Landscape Architects, Tougaloo College Campus Plan, Pilot Study for Faculty Housing Area, 1964. Drawer 5, Folder 1, GBA records, BHL.