The Unloved Campus: Evolution of Perceptions at the University of Illinois at Chicago

by

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Class of 2009

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors in History

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2009
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Acknowledgments

To my thesis advisor, Joseph Siry. There is absolutely no way I could have finished this endeavor without your editing or your research advice, among many other things. Talking with you consistently organized my often-chaotic thoughts.

To my history department advisor Claire Potter, for her advice and several for much-needed sanity checks.

To the staff at the UIC University Archives for their assistance with my research.

To Edmond Gueringer, for being as hospitable as a host as one could find while I was in Chicago.

To Paul McClelland, for his companionship on our journey to the Midwest. We’ll be back at Harold’s soon enough.

To Nick Miller. It really helped to have a person under similar mental duress to talk to during the final stretch. You, my friend, are a Great American.

To my sister Vanessa, and her fantastic ability, whether she realizes it or not, to bring levity to situations that desperately need it.

And finally, to my mother and father. Mom, your support, both tangible and intangible throughout this process has meant the world to me, and I don’t let you know this nearly enough. Dad, I just wish you were here so that I could share this with you.
Introduction

In 1965, the campus of the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle was opened to students. The new campus was a result of a years-long effort to relocate the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois from an overcrowded converted warehouse on Navy Pier on Lake Michigan, to a new permanent campus somewhere in Chicago. The design of the new campus, by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) architect Walter Netsch, who had just designed the iconic United States Air Force Academy (1956-62), was considered groundbreaking at the time, as no one had built a campus from scratch for such a large number of students on such a small parcel of land. The campus was a prime example of Brutalism, a subgenre of Modern architecture that featured buildings notable for their bulky volumes and rough-hewn concrete exteriors. Features like an elevated walkway system to transport students and faculty between buildings were brand new in university architecture. Later, he would develop a new, geometrically-based way of creating architecture, “field theory,” in creating buildings for the second and third phases of construction of the campus, a style that would eventually become his trademark. The new campus had an immense amount of press devoted to it in its first years.

Fast forward thirty years. The now University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), which was subject to critical acclaim in the sixties was now nearly universally abhorred by the general public, and was in the middle of a renovation that would tear the heart out of Netsch’s campus, making it more like a “conventional” college campus, yet at the
same time, harming the architectural integrity of the entire design. It was only among
the architectural community that there lived the concept of saving a seminal work of
modern architecture. The process showed not only how far out of favor modern
architecture had fallen within the space of twenty-five years, but also the divide
between the architectural community and the general public. My thesis will attempt
to show that Netsch’s UIC campus, while architecturally sound and forward-thinking
in its design, was an ultimate failure due to the inability of modern architecture to
communicate its premises to the contemporary public, especially in the setting of a
college campus. The campus’s dissimilarity from the building styles most commonly
associated with college campuses—neo-Georgian, Gothic, and Beaux-Arts—not to
mention the lack of a traditional quad or lawn, would help to seal its fate. In
determining the site's subsequent history, the lack of these qualities was second only
to unintended flaws stemming from the campus’s original design, and also a lack of
preventative maintenance.

In chapter one, I examine how the independent streak of Walter Netsch was a
factor in his eventual development of Field Theory. I review the history of American
campus planning, and the archetypes that would come to define it. I take a look at the
design and development of two previous campuses that would influence the design of
UIC: Netsch’s Air Force Academy, and the first campus to be designed with the
tenets of Modern architecture, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s campus for the Illinois
Institute of Technology, created from 1938 through the 1950s. I conclude with a
review of the urban planning theories of famed Modern architect Le Corbusier, and
examine their influence on Netsch’s ideas, as well as the development of another large urban planning program in Chicago, its infamous housing projects.

In the second chapter, I explain the political process that produced the eventual site for the UIC campus. I elucidate how Walter Netsch attempted to use a range of innovative ideas in order to not only build the campus of the future, but also to accomplish a measure of social engineering. I show how Field Theory works, and why Netsch felt it was such an improvement upon what he had done before. The section ends with an appraisal of the critical literature in the wake of the opening of the campus, showing how the architectural press was largely in concurrence with Netsch about his ideas for the future of campus planning.

The third and final chapter covers the design of the university in practice from after its opening until the present day. I begin with a study of the first twenty-five years after the campus opened, looking at the ways in which Netsch’s design, the university, and outside factors were all culpable in the reappraisal of the campus by the general public, faults that would lead to the campus itself being a liability to the university. I show how the university administration felt forced to act on the renovation of the campus in order to please faculty, staff, and the general public, as well as the administrators themselves, all of whom held the campus in low regard. I show that the architectural community mounted a defense—that was by no means universal—of preserving important architecture of the recent past that was presently unpopular. I look at recent design battles over new construction at the neighboring Illinois Institute of Technology, and how it shows that even Modern buildings widely acknowledged as being some of the most exemplary of their genre within the
architectural community have a hard time translating to the general public.

Finally, I review what has been a largely contentious relationship between urban universities and their surroundings, and show how UIC’s recent actions with regard to this show a desire by the university to continue moving away from the past.

**Historiography**

The most comprehensive and thorough work on the construction of the Chicago Circle campus to date is George Rosen’s *Decision-Making Chicago Style: The Genesis of a University of Illinois Campus*, published in 1980. Rosen constructs a historical case study that is not just a comprehensive record of events available for the site selection of the campus. More importantly, he uses that site selection as a study of public decision-making. As Rosen says, “This study has a broader purpose than presenting a history of this particular event: it is intended to throw light upon the more general issue of how public-policy decisions are made.”

Starting with the initial negotiations between the city and the University of Illinois, Rosen goes on to discuss the elimination of suburban sites, the gaming of the system by Daley and his allies in city and county government to ensure the city was in charge of the process when it came to site selection, and the opposition of the Harrison-Halstead community, the eventual site that was chosen, once they learned the site had been selected. The conclusions Rosen reaches are presented in a chapter entitled “The Effects of the Campus upon the City, the Neighborhood, and the University.”

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Dividing his findings into two parts, the choices between a city and suburban site, and the choice of different sites within the city, he first posits that the choice of an urban campus was beneficial to the university in the long run due to such factors as access, ability to attract top faculty, and net social gain for disadvantaged students, as many of them “would not have gone to college at all without an inner-city campus.”\(^2\) To gauge the effects on the neighborhood, Rosen’s primary method is to use census data from the tracts in Harrison-Halstead and its adjoining neighborhoods from the years 1950, 1960, and 1970, where he comes to the conclusion that land prices and rents had steadily risen with a concurrent decline in minority population, in the years since the opening of the University.

Rosen’s work is quite valuable as a piece of historical research. Despite not being a historian, Rosen has a vast array of historical research and primary sources to draw on. In addition to interviews, he draws upon the personal papers of university officials, Harrison-Halstead community leaders, state and local officials, reporters, and the files of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. The book’s age is not a significant handicap, as the focus is on events that happened before the opening of the university, and the relative closeness of the dates means that most of the principals were still available for interview. From the perspective of the present day, the book's most glaring deficit is the fact that it was written several years before the campus merged with the nearby University of Illinois Medical Center to become the University of Illinois Chicago in 1982, complete with separate governance from the main campus in Urbana-Champaign. As the book is written at a date so close to the original opening of the campus, when opinions regarding the formation of the campus were

\(^2\) Ibid., 124.
strong, the development of the young institution in general and what benefit it was perceived to have on the city, was omitted, other than a discussion of housing prices. As the book’s extensive historical research serves the purpose of enhancing what is, at its heart, a political science monograph, the goal of all the historical research contained within is not to enhance a history thesis, but one of political science. Its main historical goals seem to be keeping a record of history, not really tying it to any larger debates. In essence, while the history presented is indeed very valuable, the lack of a historical viewpoint handicaps the book in some ways. Rosen is also somewhat remiss in failing to cover the architecture and design of the site, as it merits only a few passing mentions.

The selection of the university’s site would end up permanently affecting its design and its character. Nonetheless, restricting one’s self to the political dealings that produced the campus ignores the importance that the unique design had on the campus and on its users. Walter Netsch had no intention of designing a campus that was bleak or oppressive; in fact, he desired just the opposite. Where design had been one of the great strengths of the campus upon its conception, it would eventually become a near-crippling weakness.
Chapter One
The American College Campus and the Ascendency of the Modernist Movement in American Architecture

“Less is more.”
- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

One needs a lesson in the history of campus architecture in the United States, and specifically modern architecture, to understand how Netsch would eventually deviate from both the standard pre-World War II archetypes in campus design, and the modern architecture that preceded his own design, including his design for the United States Air Force Academy, which he had designed not even a decade before UIC. This chapter demonstrates how the prevailing campus designs that preceded modern architecture came to be, and some of the most significant initial applications of modern architecture as a template for campus design. The failings of Chicago’s public housing projects are also examined to demonstrate how the theories espoused by modern architects were not only flawed, but could be easily corrupted by outside sources.

Netsch’s Biography

Walter Andrew Netsch, Jr. was born on February 23, 1920 on the South Side of the Chicago to Anna and Walter Netsch, Sr. As a young man, he was interested in architecture early, educating himself on the works of the leading modern architects while still in high school. He matriculated to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1939. He was attracted to the MIT program which was in the process
of transitioning from the Beaux-Arts style of architecture to more modern
functionalism. After graduating from MIT in 1943 with a bachelor’s degree in
architecture, he joined the Army Corps of Engineers in the Pacific Theater of World
War II. Following his service and a year working for Morgan Yost, he joined
Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in 1947, where he would stay for the next thirty-two
years. His first major project for SOM was the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in
Monterrey, California (1952–55), one of the earliest modernist campus plans. A few
years later, he was named to lead the design team on the iconic Inland Steel building
in downtown Chicago. The building became known for its open, column-free interior
spaces as well as its stainless-steel-clad exteriors. The construction of the United
States Air Force Academy came next, a career-making turn for Netsch. The geometric
designs he used for its chapel represented the first expressions of what was soon to
become Field Theory. The University of Illinois at Chicago was his next project, and
his first non-military campus, where he further articulated his evolving ideas on urban
design. He expanded his niche in architecture for education, as most of his
commissions over the next fifteen years would be libraries at places like the
University of Chicago, Northwestern University, the University of Iowa, and Wells
College, in Aurora, New York. His focus on higher education resulted, in part, from
dissatisfaction with SOM's corporate structure and a need to maintain his
individuality. This he found he could do with collegiate clients, who were “not
conservative,”⁴ and as a result, often more favorably disposed to the unconventional

buildings that usually resulted from the use of Field Theory. He retired from SOM in 1979.

Netsch left the day-to-day practice primarily due to health concerns, including open-heart surgery. Before he officially left the firm, though, he had been on the outside for some time, as he had established his own independent studio in 1956, to work on more experimental architecture with young and diverse architects for clients less corporate than the ones SOM was known for (“We were in the Civil Rights Movement in my studio. We had black staff members. We were not a WASPy, prejudiced group,” he said of his office.) His outspoken liberal political views further set him apart from many at the firm. In retirement, he remained devoted to his collection of modern art and consulted on other architectural projects. Particularly interested in Pop and Modern Art, especially the works of Roy Lichtenstein, Walter and his wife Dawn eventually ended up donating twenty-five pieces from their collection to the Miami University Art Museum, housed in a building he designed. Even with his interests in modern interpretations of old styles of art, he insisted that he “[didn’t] look for field theory” when selecting works to purchase. He was named as president of the Chicago Park Board in 1986, and after leaving that position, remained on the board until 1989. During his time on the board, he worked to dismantle the unwieldy bureaucracy that ruled the parks department, as well as to beautify and add more cultural events to the parks, but clashes with other board members made his term short-lived. His wife Dawn, then Illinois’s Comptroller, ran in an unsuccessful effort for Governor in 1994 as the Democratic candidate; her

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5 Walter Netsch, Interview with Detlef Mertins.
husband helped out by donating nearly a million dollars raised by the sale of some of his art. He died on June 15th, 2008, at his home in Chicago.

**The College Campus in America**

In the colonial era and the first few decades that followed the nation’s independence, most American colleges had little need to plan a campus. Only nine colleges existed in colonial America, and most were religiously affiliated. With their enrollments small and academic aims limited, there was no need for more than a few buildings. The first fully realized planned college was the campus at Union College, in Schenectady, New York, founded in 1795, which marked a break from American colleges’ previous emulation of the layout if not the architectural style of Cambridge and Oxford, the most reputable (and in many cases, only) institutions of higher learning they had known. The plan of Joseph Jacques Ramée “emphatically rejected the monastic self-containment of the Oxford and Cambridge traditions.”6 The design was broad and pastoral, featuring a colonnade linking a series of colonial buildings (Figure 1). The most famous campus plan of this period, and possibly the most significant of all American campus plans, was that of Thomas Jefferson for the University of Virginia, what he called the “Academical Village.” In this design, a central rotunda containing the university’s library headed a lawn that was flanked by “Pavilions” to house professors and classrooms, which alternated with living quarters for students (Figures 2 and 3). All of the buildings were connected with a continuous colonnade. The university reflects its founder’s Enlightenment attitude in its plan, which brought “European neoclassical urban design principals that were generally

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ignored in the spatially amorphous America.”⁷ Jefferson’s concept for having an environment for learning in the countryside would be widely emulated, but his plan for the ordering of buildings on campus would not take hold until the turn of the 20th century.⁸

The period between the Civil War and World War II solidified the ideas of what we think of as “college” architecture. Nearly every aspiring new institution, as well as quite a few expanding old ones, had few choices for style: Collegiate Gothic or Georgian were the most popular, usually underlaid with a Beaux-Arts campus plan. Neo-Romanesque and Greek Revival styles were also used occasionally. Richard Dober blames the preponderance of old styles on an era of clients willing to listen and carrying open pocketbooks to architects “blinded by affluence and conditioned by a foreign training that was itself impervious to its own condition.”⁹ These styles were all the architects knew, and often, exactly what their clients sought to emulate. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, institutional age carried prestige, as one Yale alumnus of the era noted that “younger colleges, whether they were ‘state’ or ‘privately-endowed’ institutions, modeled their life and aspirations on the older colleges.”¹⁰ The quadrangle-centered Gothic design, reminiscent of Cambridge and Oxford, became characteristic of older colleges such as Princeton and Yale, and was expressed in the forms of new campuses such as the University of Chicago, Duke University, and Washington University in St. Louis (Figure 4). The Beaux-Arts

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planning system, which made possible orderly, unified campuses on a large scale, was by far the most popular among newly planned colleges at the time. These colleges, ambitious and “thinking of themselves as cities of learning,” found much to like in the system intended for grand city planning.11 Jefferson’s Virginia campus became the most popular model for the Beaux-Arts designer, “an extended rectangular space, defining a longitudinal axis, with a dominant structure as focal point at one end and subsidiary buildings ranged along the sides.”12 Secondary axes were often created to accommodate the increased number of buildings now needed. This pattern was featured at Emory University, Rice University, and the University of Maryland, among many others (Figure 5). Concurrent with the campus construction taking place across the country was a burgeoning interest in campus life on the part of the non-collegiate public. By the early 1900s popular fiction centered on undergraduates was abundant. Magazine articles featured photo spreads of grand college architecture and inside looks at what went on behind the college gates.13 The images were of buildings that echoed times and cultures past, surrounded by abundant green space. These images would endure in the American collective mentality as what college should look like.

After World War II, the tradition of campus planning started on a permanent path for change as returning war veterans, and their children, would drive stratospheric gains in college enrollment over the next twenty-five years. This would be enabled by a booming economy and massive increases in federal funding for research, stimulated, in part, by the Cold War's need for scientists, engineers, and

11 Turner, Campus, 167.
12 Ibid., 191.
mathematicians to devise the weapons and strategies needed to keep ahead of the
Soviet Union. The postwar era also gave rise to the first state universities located in
urban centers, as nearly every major state university up to that time had been placed
far away from cities. The lack of urban universities reflected nineteenth-century anti-
urban biases, which meant that the state university was placed far away from the
state’s major cities to protect students from the “sins of the city.”¹⁴ As the pendulum
of political power (and population) had swung towards metropolitan areas after
World War II, urban leaders would then agitate in order to get higher education
located closer to their constituency.

This boom in the student population meant that existing campuses would see their
sites and physical plants greatly expanded, as they rushed to accommodate the
burgeoning numbers of students preparing for higher education. In the first half-
decade after the war, the most ubiquitous form of new architecture was the aluminum
Quonset hut, built quickly and cheaply to house students and classes until permanent
structures could be built. Previously, colleges were primarily for the education of
undergraduates, who mostly lived on campus at a time when 5,000 students was at the
high end of enrollments. Now were needed intramural fields, parking garages,
research facilities, and dormitories, libraries, and lecture halls on scales never before
seen. The pace of construction led to the emphasis on cost and utility in buildings; an
American Institute of Architects' survey of the late fifties sent to university presidents

revealed that beauty was not high on the list of their priorities for architects when
designing for the university.\textsuperscript{15}

In his 1962 book entitled simply \textit{Campus Planning}, noted campus planner Richard
Dober attempted to elucidate both how to make a campus plan, as well as what
facilities were needed for the future. The trends for instructional facilities that he saw
included, among others “the introduction of mechanical aids into the teaching
process” and “the design of multiple-function buildings, rather than a classroom or
laboratory building specifically constructed from one branch of learning.”\textsuperscript{16} He also
notes that in his opinion, “25,000 students is the maximum desirable enrollment for a
single campus,”\textsuperscript{17} a rule broken in the planning, but not execution of the new
university in Chicago. His principles for the planning of a new campus assumed that
they would primarily be sited on previously undeveloped land, as campuses near
heavily used highways were to be avoided. In addition, he advocated the purchase of
around 150 acres for every 5,000 students. Most new suburban and rural campuses,
despite being built around relatively dense cores of activities, were surrounded by
acres of open land for expansion and as a buffer from the outside community,
although rarely had they quite the low density that Dober advocated. Despite this, the
Circle Campus met his criteria for flexibility of design in building use and
construction economy. And, at the nascent stage when the plans were first being
announced, the drawings and models showed a rather abundant amount of green

\textsuperscript{15} Stefan Muthesius, \textit{The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College} (New Haven: Yale
\textsuperscript{16} Dober, \textit{Campus Planning}, 67.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 287.
space, echoing Dober’s comment that “urban scaled planting enrichens [sic] the design fabric and complements the connecting links between use areas.”

In a 1966 *Architectural Forum* article, Oscar Newman summarized the evolving movement in favor of the dense campus as an exercise in small-scale city planning. Saying that “the campus as we have known it will never be the same again,” Newman goes on to promote some of the same principles advocated by Netsch in designing the Circle Campus, including increased flexibility in the physical plant, and the grouping of buildings by functions such as lecture halls, laboratory space, and faculty and administration offices rather than by academic department. Even with the rise of planning as a practice that became part of the standard operating procedure of all colleges, this did not mean that there was a coordinated move by most colleges to bring a great deal of order across their entire campuses. The majority of colleges remained somewhat haphazard collections of buildings that often had a common material or architectural style that could be vaguely adhered to when expanding. Especially with larger older universities, the architectural unity and ordered spaces that could be found around the green/yard/quad at the center of the university often was the most ordered space on campus. When compared to the haphazard patterns of these campuses, UIC compares favorably as an exemplar of an orderly plan, and with the plan providing a way to maintain that order into the foreseeable future. Richard Dober decried the majority of heterogeneous campuses as places with “confused structure and visual disorder” due in part to the fact that the universities were aboard “the roller coaster of changing taste in architectural design.”

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18 Ibid., 298.
19 Ibid., 219.
Chicago Circle, much like its peers at the time, was intended to be the antidote to this slapdash manner of planning and building, with logically thought-out pedestrian conveyance plans, uniform architecture, and the ability to expand using the same template well into the future. With constantly climbing enrollment numbers, and colleges in the position to be increasingly selective, the modernist-derived plan was poised to enjoy prominence for years.

New “instant” universities were popping up across the country, built as fast as possible to accommodate enrollment. UIC, though, was one of the few fully master-planned examples of the type to be located entirely within a city. Most state university systems were choosing to build on previously undeveloped sites in suburbs or exurbs. This was the original preference of the trustees of the University of Illinois. The suburbs appealed to them, as the campus would be able to closely resemble the original campus downstate. (Figure 6) Mayor Daley’s machinations ultimately pushed the campus to the center of the city, but UIC’s peer universities, meanwhile, were being given massive outlying tracts with which to work. The University of California system added the San Diego, Santa Cruz, and Irvine campuses within two years of each other in the mid-1960s. All were comprised of huge acreage, enabling a great deal of future expansion on its campus and including a large buffer zone of land to remain undeveloped. Beyond this still extant interval of land, their now busy surroundings were by and large still farmland at the time.

These universities also differed from UIC in their emphasis on residential life. Because the University of California campuses took only the top students in every high school class, students would then be drawn from across the state, leading many
of them to live on campus. This need for complete residential environments was compounded by the relatively sparse populations of their surroundings. The plans for both San Diego and Santa Cruz called for both universities to have residential colleges, and Irvine put every academic division in its own quad ringing the park at the center of campus (Figure 7). University of California president Clark Kerr, knowing that all of the schools he was establish were to ultimately become massive in enrollment, sought to bring the scale of the colleges down by “combining the advantages of the large and the small.” Santa Cruz, in particular, was laid out to make the constituent colleges “as isolated as possible from one another and least disruptive of the natural character of the environment.”\(^\text{20}\) Whereas Netsch at UIC wanted (and needed) to take advantage of the urban environment, the California schools wanted nothing but to take as much space as possible for themselves. At Santa Cruz, a pedestrian expressway was unthinkable; pedestrian trails were more like it. Santa Cruz also featured another element hard to replicate anywhere else. Its colleges, designed for 600 students, were intended to increase faculty-student interaction, and, in their first two years, the students would take all of their classes at their college (Figure 8).\(^\text{21}\) The California plan aimed to embrace experimentation with large campus designs of all types in order to accommodate not just their exploding numbers of students, but also several educational modes for the future of higher education.

On the East Coast, the State of New York was embarking on its own building spree during the 1960s, both remaking old campuses and establishing new ones. Its

\(^{20}\) Turner, *Campus*, 281, 282.

\(^{21}\) Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 50.
new campuses for its university centers were much more compact than their California counterparts. For example, SUNY Albany (1962–66) was planned for 300 acres to UC Irvine’s 1,510. In addition, the design by Edward Durrell Stone condensed nearly every academic function into a raised central pavilion, surrounded by four towers ringed by pavilions to house students similar to the central one (Figure 9). *Architectural Record* praised the SUNY construction program at the time due to the “emphasis on design quality.” Reasons for the success of the SUNY campuses' respective plans included the provisions that “building groups as completed begin to reveal consistent and interesting architectural character, lakes are created or conserved, stands of trees are left as they are…campus greens and plazas and walks and bicycle paths appear, vistas emerge, cars are relegated to the campus perimeter.”22 This description was also be applicable to the aforementioned new universities in California. Architectural critic Mildred Schmertz praised many of the kinds of new campus forms that Netsch sought to perfect, such as the SUNY system’s construction of single-building lecture hall centers on many of their campuses. She essentially argued that the campuses succeeded largely due to the fact that they were an improvement upon the existing idea of what a campus should be, rather than any sort of new way forward in the realm of campus design that departed radically from tradition. The uniformity of the Albany program, and to a lesser extent, the developments at Purchase, begun in 1967 and Buffalo, begun in 1970, were a good deal more straightforward than the University of California schools, although the western schools were much more aggressive about integrating the physical plant with new styles of learning. Stefan Muthesius puts Albany and most of the New York

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campuses in general, at the vanguard of what he calls the “rectilinear” modernism also found in the plan for Chicago Circle. Most such campuses were rigid in their planning and stuck to well-ordered straight lines and right angles in sites that did not use up all of the land allocated for them. It would not take long for most of these campuses, and their buildings' styles of architecture, to fall from favor. Some later evaluators of campus design, though, felt that the achievements of some of these mid-century campuses went unappreciated.

In his book *The Campus as a Work of Art* (1991), Thomas Gaines attempts to define the combination of architectural design, landscaping and planning that makes a campus beautiful. This book was written after the end of the modernist consensus in architecture had broken down, and architecture was developing an array of new styles, grouped under the “Postmodernist” heading. Decrying the state of visual training extant in the eyes of students, university administrators and donors, the author endeavors to change the culture of “visual mediocrity” that plagues America’s campuses by delineating what does and does not make a successful campus. Success, especially architectural success, is quite subjective, though. One person’s success is a campus that efficiently moves traffic, while another’s may be a campus that augments the natural beauty of its surroundings. Gaines, for his part, defined the efficient use of space as his main criteria for what, on the whole, makes a campus work. With these criteria in mind, Gaines’ evaluation of UIC would put him in the minority of contemporary observers, even Netsch’s defenders. Gaines praised it as “a sculptural tour de force of a campus.” The design seemed to fit his criteria for space definition perfectly, from the negative space of the forum to the combination of uses for the
forum and its underlying lecture halls. The hated walkways “course in spatial
grandeur through much of the campus” and he commends the creators for turning “a
slum into stylistic gold,” although the residents of Harrison-Halstead would
probably dispute that claim. In his rankings of the top fifty campuses, grading on a
scale of one-to-five for urban space, architectural quality, landscape and overall
appeal, UIC lands just outside of the top tier, scoring eighteen out of a possible
twenty in four separate categories. The score put the campus on the same level as the
more iconic, and appreciated, Air Force Academy, as well as campuses that the
general public would normally think of as more aesthetically pleasing, such as the
universities of Virginia, North Carolina, Chicago, and Illinois. That UIC would be
placed on the same level in terms of design as the campuses of the University of
Chicago in Hyde Park and the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign would
come as a surprise to many residents of greater Chicagoland. To this, Gaines would
respond, “Much of America is artistically brain dead.” For him, the ordering of
space, rather than the buildings themselves, elevated the campus to high art. “Poorly
designed spaces bounded by good buildings do not a campus make.” UIC, with its
well-ordered plans for open space in the urban environment, fits Gaines’s bill for the
successful ordering of space. Gaines’s criticism of the great mass of campus design,
though, echoes that made by Richard Dober twenty-five years earlier when he noted
that the building styles of some colleges could be likened to the then-new Idlewild (now John F. Kennedy) airport in New York, that opened in 1948 with its major

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24 Ibid., 155-156.
25 Ibid., x.
26 Ibid., 3.
terminals completed 1959–63. Aside from the main terminal, the major airlines had all commissioned their own designs for their terminals. Dober felt that universities “have attempted to acquire every conceivable contemporary expression of the building arts. And like Idlewild Airport, in doing so, they have managed occasionally to get outstanding single buildings, but the total effect is a dismal failure.”

Midcentury modernist architecture would address the problems of disunity and chaos that seemed to be endemic to most campuses and groups of buildings.

**Mies Makes His Mark at IIT**

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe came to Chicago from Germany in 1938, fleeing the Nazi regime that had shut down the Bauhaus, the famous school of modern architecture he headed from 1930 to 1934. The Armour Institute of Technology (later IIT) hired him to lead their architecture department, and to plan their new campus on land acquired on the city's South Side. Mies’s buildings were characterized by an external lack of ornament and vertical lines that often came from the structural steel supports of the buildings. The modern architecture espoused by him and others came to be known as the “International Style,” referring to its universal applicability. Inside his buildings, he was fascinated with the concept of “universal space.” The concept hinges on the belief that structural steel can create large interior spaces flexible and endlessly adaptable. At IIT, this was most boldly expressed in the form of Crown Hall, the home of the architecture department. The building lacks interior

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support, so divisions of space are achieved using temporary walls, making an interior
that can change with academic programs (Figure 10).

Notwithstanding his unconventional ideas for interior design, Mies managed to be
rather conventional with regards to planning. Paul Turner notes that “the symmetrical
and axial arrangement of buildings, forming a central quadrangle and subsidiary
groups of structures, was not very different from Beaux-Arts collegiate designs,
except for the absence of a dominant focal point”²⁹ (Figure 11). One would have to
question, then, whether the campus's schematic planning was as important to Mies as
having a multitude of buildings with which to experiment and hone his ideas on space
and design. This is not to imply that Mies paid the spatial form of the site no mind at
all, but rather to say that he was relatively unconcerned or unaffected by the
precedents of campus design, preferring instead to draw on his own theories and
earlier works of urbanism. Free of the kind of knowledge of the history of campus
planning in American architecture, Mies remained unencumbered with prior
knowledge while making his plans. His method for planning the site was as such:
after determining that the twenty-four foot module would be the basic spatial unit of
his buildings, he made wooden blocks to represent the volumes, and would then move
them around the campus site plane, mixing and matching until he fell upon what
seemed right.³⁰ This was, to put it lightly, not quite the usual approach to planning,
wherein one building was given precedence above others, and the order of the plan
being established somewhat objectively. Mies's approach made for more order than
many plan-as-you-go older campuses, but less than later work such as Netsch’s,

²⁹ Turner, Campus, 251.
³⁰ Sarah Whiting, “Bas-Relief Urbanism: Chicago’s Figured Field” in Mies in America, ed. Phyllis
governed by and integrated planning structure. Mies was also faced with a challenge similar to that which would face the progenitors of UIC twenty years later, that of separation from the surrounding community. When Armour Institute of Technology merged with Lewis Institute of Technology to form the Illinois Institute of Technology, one of their goals was to improve their surroundings, which were less than desirable. At that point, though, there were no laws governing slum clearance or urban renewal, and as such, there was not the access to city, state, and federal funds that there would be later for such projects. Mies’s campus contrasts with the surrounding neighborhood, and the earlier buildings on the campus, exemplifying modernism’s disregard for context and desire to not reference past styles. Such dissimilarity with the styles of earlier campus buildings would prove to be a major obstacle for Walter Netsch when he designed his first major academic work.

**The Air Force Academy**

Netsch’s previous experience with campus planning before starting the Chicago Circle project was the planning and construction of the iconic United States Air Force Academy, outside Colorado Springs. A relatively compact complex of low-lying modernist buildings, with abundant use of glass and marble, the Air Force Academy was designed to convey the modern qualities and technological advancement of the newest branch of the nation’s defense. The difference in this campus’s design aesthetic owed to several factors, the first being that Netsch was not wholly in charge of the vision for the project, as he was the Director of Design, rather than a role with broader oversight. While he had the greatest amount of sustained

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31 Ibid., 656.
interaction with the Air Force Academy among SOM lead architects, he would not be able to have the same degree of influence on the planning or the function and design of the buildings for one large reason, wholly unrelated to his position. The client for the Air Force project was as powerful and influential a client as an architect can have, and the scope of the project meant that nearly everyone in a position to influence its direction tried to. The U.S. government intended for the Air Force Academy to be a national monument, and the entire process was under intense scrutiny for an institution that would have to stand comparison with the respective Beaux-Arts and Gothic styles of the Naval and Military academies (Figure 12). As most of the early officers of the Air Force attended the aforementioned service academies, particularly West Point, their experiences there would weigh heavy in their minds when considering the design of a new service academy.\(^3\)\(^2\) Congress, largely ignorant of modern architecture, made the process of design approval a labored and drawn-out affair. Netsch worked for a successful synthesis of contemporary ideas about campus construction and the needs of the cadets in the air wing. As he remarked shortly after the campus opened to its first cadets in 1958, “We were always worrying about the individual in the midst of discipline and trying wherever possible to provide changes of pace in the visual and other experiences of a regimented day.”\(^3\)\(^3\) The boundaries imposed on him by the University of Illinois were few in comparison, especially once what had been their main concern for a Chicago-area site—an abundance of land for a


\(^{33}\) “A Conversation about the U.S. Air Force Academy between Walter Netsch and John Burchard” in Modernism at Mid-Century, 181.
campus composed of many low-rise buildings—fell by the wayside as the City of Chicago influenced the process to achieve the selection of their favored site at Harrison-Halstead. Freed of the need to be anything but functional, Netsch could devise a system of planning to his specifications.

The needs of the Air Force Academy campus led to several key differences between it and the later Chicago Circle campus. For one, rather than being constrained, the SOM team was faced with an abundance of land with which to work. Nestled within the foothills of Colorado’s Rampart Range, the Academy site encompasses nearly twenty-seven square miles of rugged terrain. Neither site was chosen for its functionality, though. While Daley (in addition to the unstated need for a barrier to downtown) chose the Harrison-Halstead site due to the fact that it was eligible for a federal urban renewal grant, the Air Force Academy site selection committee chose its site for its natural beauty rather than concern itself with the location's functionality. In terms of architectural layout and style, the Air Force Academy has more in common visually with a complex of buildings such as those at IIT, for example, than that of UIC. This is in large part due to the site, since the UIC campus is compressed and stacked upon itself, while Air Force campus is vast and spread out. A modern casual observer might note that the Air Force's site resembles an office park to some degree, an assumption that has some basis in fact. The campus of the Connecticut General Insurance Company (1954–57), designed by SOM partner Gordon Bunshaft, as well as Eero Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center (1956)

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34 Rosen, *Decision-Making Chicago-Style*, 166.
in the suburbs of Detroit, were both strong influences on the finished design of the Air Force Academy.\textsuperscript{36} The buildings of the Cadet Area were low-rise steel framed structures with large expanses of glass, clad in limestone, granite and marble, around a central court paved with terrazzo (Figure 13).

The most iconic building at the Academy is undoubtedly the Cadet Chapel, whose striking line of tetrahedral spires connotes fighter jets in the eyes of many (Figure 14). The chapel had controversy attached to it from the beginning, as Congress rejected Netsch’s original design. Even after he submitted a new design three years later, Congress still balked, and the public voiced concerns about the appropriateness of such a modern building for worship. Some even voiced concerns about having places for worship for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the same building.\textsuperscript{37} The Chapel is now considered timeless, but the academy’s buildings themselves are dated. Unlike the dated buildings on Netsch’s Chicago campus, they would continue to endure as pristine examples of the architecture of the era in which they were created.

\textbf{Le Corbusier’s Urban Planning and Netsch's Campus Architecture}

Netsch, like many other architects of his day, felt buildings could be used for the purpose of social engineering. The concept of using buildings to re-engineer society was particularly appealing to a liberal architect such as Netsch. One source for the ideas and theorems of Netsch and most of his peers was the exceptionally influential work of Le Corbusier. For Le Corbusier, the city was “a problem to be solved.”\textsuperscript{38} Le

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{brugemann} Brugemann, “Military Culture,” in \textit{Modernism at Mid-Century}, 88.
\bibitem{olsen} Sheri Olsen, “Lauded and Maligned: The Cadet Chapel” in \textit{Modernism at Mid-Century}, 159.
\end{thebibliography}
Corbusier’s thoughts on urban planning between World Wars I and II were influenced by the environment of a damaged Europe. In the spirit of planning as problem-solving for a city, the plans he made do not bear a particularly strong resemblance to the city as we know it. Many contemporary American observers would compare the buildings in some of his plans to public housing projects or college dormitories, some of the only places in which Americans would see housing towers grouped together, although not nearly close to the scale that he was proposing. Le Corbusier envisioned the new urban spaces as vast high rises, bringing residences closer to offices, and consigning industry to the outskirts. He outlined four principles for city development in his 1925 book *Urbanisme*:

1) “Relieve the congestion of central districts to satisfy traffic requirements.”

2) “Increase the population density of central districts to facilitate business contacts.”

3) “Improve traffic flow. This means that we shall have to change totally the existing concept of a street, which is outdated by contemporary means of transportation: subways, cars, streetcars, airplanes.”

4) “Increase planted areas. This is the only way to promote healthy conditions and create a tranquil atmosphere that will offset the strain produced by the accelerated tempo of modern business.”

All of this made for a city in which space was maximized to its fullest extent (Figure 15). Residents would have their commute and the number of streets minimized, and the green space between buildings would be shared by all to

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maximize utility. The city's density was also meant to promote higher levels of human interaction. Known in France from the early 1920s, Le Corbusier's ideas on urbanism would have a broad effect on American developments, especially after his lecture trip to the United States in 1935.40

At the University of Illinois at Chicago, the walkways were the most obvious connection between Corbusian planning ideals and Netsch’s personal planning style. Netsch’s walkways were the most efficient way, in his mind, to transport the tens of thousands of people using the campus every day to and from classes, offices, and other university events. The cities of Le Corbusier were defined in part by their massive expressways, designed to take traffic away from ground level and pedestrians and have most of it to flow above the level of personal interaction and activity. While Netsch did not explicitly reference Le Corbusier when recalling the creation of the walkways, his desire to “not pave the entire area for 32,000 students”41 recalled Le Corbusier’s wish to maximize space by consolidating vehicle traffic on elevated expressways. While not envisioning the same scale as Le Corbusier’s expressways, Netsch did, however, have ideas on how to make the walkways more vital after the fact by building over them, under them, around them to make them a more necessary part of campus. Former UIC Dean of Architecture and sometimes Netsch antagonist Stanley Tigerman noted in a discussion with Netsch some time after the campus’s construction, that “some of us are interested in building buildings over it, maybe slipping buildings underneath. You heard him talk about it in doing that to get more of a town & gown relationship, one could interpret that even as a presence of

41 Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
commercial source—shops and cleaners and whatever, that might be underneath with
maybe housing over it.”42 Before the demolition of the walkways, there was indeed a
desire to make them work, and thus make a prominent part of Netsch's design live up
to its aims by further integrating the walkways into campus. Like Le Corbusier
before him, though, it was the scale of Netsch’s campus that made it unpopular. Their
technical and maintenance deficiencies aside, the walkways helped contribute to the
scale of the campus which came to be so reviled. This response recalls those earlier in
the century of residents of Corbusian projects who had been taken aback by an urban
design that sacrificed the usual loosely organized chaos of the modern city for one
whose scale solved problems at the expense of what felt familiar.

Le Corbusier’s ideas on also evidence themselves in the early buildings designed
for the Chicago Circle campus, before Netsch developed his Field Theory. These
include all Netsch-designed buildings on the campus excepting the Art &
Architecture, Behavioral Sciences, and Science & Engineering South buildings. The
example of Le Corbusier’s more recent buildings (and the lower cost involved)
induced Netsch to use concrete as the primary exterior building material. “We
worshipped the concrete block…the reality of life was in the simple things,” he would
later say.43 In addition, the original buildings, the tower chief among them, are
governed by the rule of the Golden Section. The tower of University Hall, the main
administration building, is defined by its odd, hulking shape, as it looks heavier on
the top than on the bottom (Figure 16). The Golden Section is achieved by inserting
intermediate columns between the main columns, rather than thickening them as they
soar upward from the bottom of the building. The divisions between the different columns sections of the building by floor, with five floors at the bottom, eight in the middle, and thirteen at the top, are an excellent representation of the Golden Section ratio. Similarly, Le Corbusier placed great value on proportion. He said, “if [the architect wishes] to divide the length of the building into two segments, the Golden Section provides a dividing point that is mathematically exact, the only dividing point that can create such a subtle proportion.”\(^{44}\) This resulted in reliance on the Golden Series, a geometric series in which each term equals the sum of the two previous terms. Hence, the 5, 8, 13 series of University Hall floor groupings (5+8=13). The observer's mental awareness of these visible ratios resulted in the impression of “a mathematical… rectification based on the Golden Section.” This resulted in an orderly work, a precise work which created “something definitive, sharp, true, inalterable, and permanent, which is the architectural moment.”\(^{45}\) Le Corbusier notes that “Some architects have distorted minds. They have come to prefer irregular sites, in the belief that these will help them discover original solutions.”\(^{46}\) As Netsch moved away from his early modernist buildings on the UIC campus, he indeed came upon a different style of architecture whose form was a new way of experiencing and circulating among spatially integrated buildings. This new method, which he called Field Theory, will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Public Housing in Chicago: Ideals Defeated by Reality**

\(^{44}\) Guiton, Guiton, *The Ideas of Le Corbusier*, 64.
\(^{45}\) Ibid, 27.
\(^{46}\) Ibid, 35.
Chicago’s history with public works projects could charitably be described as “complicated,” as with many cities. There are many great public works, including the McCormick Place Convention Center (initial building completed 1971) and O’Hare International Airport, opened in 1963. Even the Chicago River could count, its flow having been famously reversed at the beginning of the 20th century to drain into the Des Plaines River to the city's west. On the opposite end of the spectrum from those successful projects lies the city’s public housing, Chicago’s most prominent examples of the shortcomings of modern architecture. Chicago possibly has more infamous public housing projects than any other American city. Places such as the Henry Horner Homes (1957) and Robert Taylor Homes (1960–62) were some of the most violent, economically depressed patches of land in the United States. They were an overwhelming mess of broken homes, violent crime, and dysfunctional society, all pushed away into concentrated areas. By the 1980s, high-rise public housing had been declared a great failure, and Chicago’s high-rise family housing projects were all torn down, to the relief both residents and the city at large. What follows is an example of faulty planning, and worse policy. While the projects and UIC share the general ideas of modernism, whatever progressive ideology Netsch brought to his campus design was lost while creating the projects.

The story of public housing in Chicago began in a manner much like that in other American cities. It was a concerted effort on the part of a reform-minded city official to replace the incredibly substandard housing stock endemic to most American cities (which housed those too poor to afford decent housing) with public housing available to all at fair rates. The first head of the Chicago Housing Authority was Elizabeth
Wood, appointed in 1937, a former academic and housing activist. A progressive and an idealist, she was patently unwilling to let any of her agency workers, contractors, or tenants be selected with regards to the patronage machine. Furthermore, she was a strong advocate of using public housing to improve race relations and integrate neighborhoods.\(^{47}\) None of this, of course, sat well with most of the machine’s aldermen and assorted operatives within city and county government. During the 1940s, the CHA tried, often in vain, to get the city to integrate its projects. Until after the war, the authority was constrained by the Neighborhood Composition rule that stated that a housing project’s constituency had to reflect its neighborhood. After the war, the rule was rescinded, and the CHA went full-bore in pursuing integrated housing, to the “barely disguised panic” of most whites.\(^ {48}\) The selection of sites quickly became a heated issue between CHA administrators and the city council, now in charge of final approval for public housing sites. In 1949 CHA chairman Robert Taylor submitted a list of sites, rejected due to the fact that most of them were too close to white neighborhoods. After public hearings were held, the CHA and the council spent much of 1950 trading proposed lists with each other. The council’s chosen sites were often farfetched, the CHA’s too close to white neighborhoods for the council’s taste. After receiving a proposal from the CHA that was full of vacant lots, rather than slum-replacement sites, the most influential aldermen worked out a compromise of their own that put 2,000 units on vacant sites and 10,000 in former slums. This marked what Wim de Wit called a “turning point in the history of the Chicago Housing Authority” as it had decreed that “its developments were going to


\(^{48}\) Ibid, 77.
be hidden away in blighted areas that, although cleared of their slums, would remain unconnected to the rest of the city."\(^{49}\)

In 1954 the decision was made to push Elizabeth Wood out as CHA head. In short order, her board hired a consulting firm. Soon after, they issued a report calling for the creation of a new position that would effectively strip Wood of her powers. She then attacked the board for removing her, saying that “the differences that have arisen between the Commissioners and the Executive Secretary have been related primarily to the issue of the elimination of segregation in public housing projects and the opening of all public housing projects…to Negro and white persons without discrimination or segregation.”\(^{50}\) The CHA board met the next day and voted to fire her for her actions. With that, the final vestiges of progressivism and responsible design were extricated from public housing in Chicago. The following years of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s saw a city government that would always pay lip service to social reformers in the city when needed, and do not much else to placate critics. During the elder Daley’s administration, public housing became not just a way to more effectively warehouse poor blacks, but also to get as much federal money as possible from the government for housing. Federal money “meant more contracts for Daley and the machine to allocate to political supporters.”\(^{51}\)

UIC is the largest urban planning development outside of a housing project in Chicago. Both were governed, to differing extents, by the Corbusian urban planning principles that then shaped much of large-scale urban planning. The flaws in this


\(^{50}\) Cohen and Taylor, *American Pharaoh*, 109

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 183.
kind of planning and in these types of buildings eventually became evident, but UIC, unlike the projects, had the benefit of being somewhat of interest to politicians, and the campus was populated by more educated people able to take control of their situation and change it when the time came. The projects were only demolished after they had proven themselves to be abysmal living environments for years. The mistaken assumptions in modernist planning had some negative consequences for UIC. Bad planning in an already underprivileged and underrepresented neighborhood, though, can be disastrous.

Walter Netsch planned the University of Illinois at Chicago with the best of intentions, but some of his ideas ended up not panning out in real life, and some of them were marred by outside forces. Much of Chicago’s public housing, however, is simply bad planning, drawing from modernist urban planning ideas but devoid of its ideology, and too subject to tampering from politicians who were greedy, racist, incompetent, or some combination of the aforementioned. There is a reason that more recent public housing does not resemble these buildings, and it is not due to changes in technology and materials. As has been mentioned, the original projects of the 1930s were of a more human scale, rarely exceeding five stories. Early projects such as Ida B. Wells Homes or Jane Addams Homes, built in the early 1940s, were, while low in scale, undistinguished, as “they looked more like industrial buildings than residential buildings.”\footnote{De Wit, “The Rise of Public Housing,” 236.} Altgeld Gardens, finished in 1945 on the furthest reaches of the South Side near Lake Calumet, was composed solely of brick rowhouses. The construction of the infamous Cabrini-Green Homes on the near West Side illustrates a stark difference between the earlier pre-war and later post-war styles of Chicago's
public housing. The original Frances Cabrini Homes, built from 1942, featured six hundred units built over several years in two-and-three story brick buildings, which looked much like the prevailing rowhouse architecture at the time (Figure 17). The William Green Homes, built in 1955 and added to in 1962, were anywhere from ten to nineteen stories in height, and when all was said and done, twenty-three towers had been built (Figure 18).53

The ideas of Le Corbusier are often blamed for many of the failures of these particular forms of public housing. The massive, uniform buildings and eyes toward efficiency and seeing whether a problem can be easily solved indeed came from him. In fairness to Le Corbusier, his buildings were for everyone, assuming that the masses would all live in the same buildings, rather than a select number of buildings created to warehouse the poor and shield them from the rest of society. He also was not planning with American racist attitudes and long-held patterns of housing segregation in mind; his plans stemmed from the devastation suffered by post-World War I Europe. However, Witold Rybczynski contends that the problem in Chicago can be traced to a more local source. He lays the blame for the faulty design at the hands of Mies. His stripped-down design aesthetic appealed to planners who saw a model that could be cheaply imitated, robbed of their progressive ideology and roots in his design philosophy. Rybczynski also points out that “the plain architecture suited the puritan views of many Americans—and certainly of the housing reformers—who felt that social housing should not be fancy.”54 Mies’s adherents also populated Chicago’s big architecture firms, such as SOM, Holabird and Root and Burgee, and Shaw Metz

54 Ibid, 85.
& Associates, which made the tall modernist design the default first choice in building. Their architectural preference for sparsely adorned apartments and open concrete plazas happened to neatly coincide with the aims of the city leaders, who mainly saw such minimal designs as “cheap” and “easy."

An analogue to the not-quite-foreseen problems of the Chicago projects lies in St. Louis: the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project, initially completed in 1954, but which was ultimately a disastrous failure and demolished in sections from 1972 to 1976 (Figure 19). In 1965, *Architectural Forum* revisited an article it had published at the opening of the ultimately doomed Pruitt-Igoe housing project. “The Case History of a Failure” catalogued what went wrong in St. Louis. Great things were predicted for the complex that could “save not only people, but money.” The elevators, which stopped at every third floor, were initially lauded. The landscaping was “refreshing.”55 Yet, much like in Chicago, the project was done in by a combination of thrifty governments and design miscalculations. The landscaping was reduced to nil. The density was increased from thirty to fifty-five apartment units per acre in the final design. Elevators became centers for violent crime. And the architect, Minoru Yamasaki, said “It’s a job I wish I hadn’t done.”56 What can this teach us about what happened in Chicago? There is only so much that can be socially engineered by buildings. Planning can have a great effect on landscapes and lives, but if it is intended to improve the quality of life, it needs to be backed up by a government that is fully invested in it. The projects were failures of planning, to be sure. But no

56 Ibid, 23.
planner can bear the full blame when his plans fail to be fully realized by the client, as Walter Netsch would eventually protest when his plans for UIC fell out of favor.

The problems in the actual designs of the public housing buildings are numerous and well-documented. Most prominent among them is that the projects were designed as self-contained entities, miniature cities that didn’t interact with the world around them. Walter Netsch, talking about the ill-fated Pruitt-Igoe public housing complex in St. Louis, said that he would have converted that particular complex into “seven different little communities” using some of the existing buildings and surrounded by new townhouses and a new, artificially created topography.\(^\text{57}\) Quality was another problem. During World War II, a great amount of housing was needed for war workers, and quickly. This led to building quality being sacrificed in the name of expediency. Elizabeth Wood felt this led to a permanent lowering of standards, as they were never raised back to pre-war levels after the war.\(^\text{58}\) Cabrini-Green featured unenclosed elevator lobbies—“in frigid Chicago!” Rybczynski aptly notes.\(^\text{59}\) With the later high-rises, the CHA was also bewildered with unanticipated design flaws and construction materials not lasting as long as anticipated. In the Robert Taylor Homes, there was an array of flaws including inadequate public bathrooms, sprinklers that didn’t reach the entire building, and poorly built fencing in the galleries, through which some children fell to their deaths.\(^\text{60}\) Even when they tried, the sheer number of problems was too great for the CHA to repair. Open spaces were often large

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\(^{57}\) Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.


\(^{59}\) Rybczynski, 85.

expanses of asphalt or unkempt grass, leading to a lack of defensible space and difficulties rounding up kids. One former Robert Taylor resident noted that “you had to watch everywhere ‘cause there wasn’t no parks or nothin’ like that, just a lot of open space that [kids] would mess around in.” The lack of defined outdoor space meant that, with the lack of adult supervision, kids would turn more defined indoor spaces (elevators, stairwells, lobbies) into new playgrounds.

On top of all of this, the interiors of the larger buildings began to be considered unpoliceable by law enforcement. While city leaders didn’t consider policing the projects a priority, the officers assigned there felt vulnerable in the courtyards, where they were exposed to attack from the towers, and even more so inside, where the dim lighting and faulty elevators gave criminals a distinct advantage.

Of course, the authorities didn’t particularly want the projects—by the 1950s firmly associated with poor blacks—anywhere near their neighborhoods. This led to the problem of siting. Many of the projects, including the Robert Taylor Homes, were in a nearly unbroken line that stretches for miles along State Street, taking up thirty-four consecutive blocks, with the exception of the IIT campus (Figure 20). Almost 40,000 poor blacks lived there at the completion of the last project in 1966. This benefited nearly everyone in the city, yet these projects were to the severe detriment those living in them. The black population was kept inside the black belt, keeping the constituency of white ethnic politicians safe. The black politicians of the submachine

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61 Ibid, 22
62 Ibid, 24
63 Ibid, 73
kept their constituents voting the straight machine ticket, especially because the apartments were easily canvassable.64

The only housing project of architectural note was the Hilliard Center complex on the Near South Side (1966) (Figure 21), built by Bertrand Goldberg Associates, the designers of the unusual and groundbreaking Marina City complex on the Chicago River, completed in 1963 (Figure 22). Marina City was also a development designed to be more affordable than most downtown housing. Featuring a modification of Marina City's residential towers, the Hilliard Center's concrete buildings undulate in much the same manner, with the same petal-shaped apartments, although on a smaller scale due to the wage disparity of the occupants. Goldberg endeavored to show that high-rise living could still work for public housing, saying that height was not the cause of “environmental inadequacy.”65 Architectural Forum, though, was skeptical, deriding the open areas as “asphalted and fenced playground” and describing the project overall as “a limited success…in providing a proud environment for the urban poor.”66 Even if it represented better housing, it was still the northern anchor for the State Street public housing corridor, and initial CHA efforts to have some whites share the space failed, as the community was before long all black, like its neighbors.67

Conclusion

64 Cohen and Taylor, American Pharoah, 185.
66 Ibid, 32
67 Cohen and Taylor, 393.
Modern architecture was not necessarily meant to be impersonal by design, nor did its practitioners have little regard for users. Most architects intended modernism to be more practical, adaptable, and efficient than the styles that preceded it, and in the case of UIC, this style was a stark contrast with the monumental traditions of many college campuses. If the rather sparse nature of modern buildings was a detriment, Walter Netsch planned to change that at UIC by producing a campus full of features designed to enhance the college experience. With a blank slate and few architectural restraints, Netsch would attempt to apply a whole range of new ideas to the field of campus design.
Chapter Two
The Last Nineteenth Century Campus

“Completely unlike the traditional American campus, Chicago Circle of the U. of I has been planned as a highly efficient and functional facility…”

-Charles Havens, University of Illinois physical plant director

The development of the University of Illinois at Chicago was a complicated process involving a political battle between many disparate forces desirous of having a university for themselves, or conversely, afraid of the competition that a new major university might bring. After the site was selected, the university’s design developed into a conceptually groundbreaking and thoroughly modern campus. This chapter explores the tumultuous years-long process to find a home for the university, and Walter Netsch’s development of the novel ideas he would use when planning the campus. Throughout this process, we can see a pattern of disconnection between the architect’s intentions and their reception by the administrators and users of the campus that ultimately led to its transformation.

Beginnings

Some new universities of the 1950s and 1960s were hastily constructed, just so that the state could meet the surging demand for facilities. In other cases, though, university administrators took the chance to try to experiment with models in higher education, to try to create a university of the future. UIC was such a campus. However, the realities of politics in Chicago, and in Illinois, made its creation a rather imperfect process, complete with cronyism and racism on the part of city officials, as well as citizens groups involved with the process. The site selected as a result of that
process had a great deal of influence on the architectural outcome, shaping the unprecedented nature of the campus’s design.

In 1946, the University of Illinois established a two-year satellite campus on Navy Pier to serve Chicagoans, many of whom were now able to attend college for the first time thanks to the G.I. Bill. While centrally located, the “campus” was located in a warehouse on an active shipping pier. The constant noise and bustle, not to mention the inadequacy of the facilities, made it a less-than-ideal learning environment. A new campus, however, was not universally popular. The opposition centered among other institutions of higher education, who all felt threatened by the presence of a new competitor. While the university’s top administrators provided the impetus behind the development of a permanent campus in Chicago, others associated with the university felt that the existing campus at Urbana-Champaign would lose its primacy if a new campus were located in the middle of the state’s largest population center. In Chicago itself, the private universities of the city, DePaul and Loyola in particular, were opposed to the new competition of a large public university in the city. The opposition of these universities was important because, as Catholic schools, they had access to the political power of the local archdiocese. In addition, many leading Democratic officials, including Mayor Daley, were graduates. The concerns were assuaged, and planning continued apace.

Choosing a Site

There were four sites that ended up as the focus of considerations for site selection. Downtown were Northerly Island, the former site of the Meigs Field airport, and a

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68 Rosen, Decision-Making Chicago Style, 28.
site south of the Loop that held some of the downtown rail yards. To the west was a site in Garfield Park, in the middle of the city’s West Side. Further west, in the Cook County suburbs, lay the final location, at Miller Meadows, adjacent to the Riverside Golf Club (Figure 23). David Dodds Henry was the President of the University of Illinois at the time of the site selection for the new campus, beginning his term of office in 1955. His initial preference was for the suburban Miller Meadows site, located directly west of the eventual Harrison-Halstead site via Roosevelt Road. The main appeals of the site for President Henry included its low cost, attractiveness of the surrounding area for potential faculty, abundance of land for expansion, and location near the city’s shifting center of population.69 Chicago, like every other major American city, was seeing its (white) families make the move to the suburbs in impressive numbers. From 1920 to 1970, Chicago’s population rose from 2,702,000 to 3,369,000. Concomitantly, the area’s population outside of the city limits grew from 693,000 to 3,612,000.70 Those left in the city often lacked the means to leave, or in the case of African-Americans, they were unable to find a realtor to show them homes in white neighborhoods. Those who moved to the suburbs often ended up having little use for the central city afterwards. Office parks, new manufacturing plants, and shopping centers moved concurrently, aided by the new superhighways then being constructed. The board acted to move on the purchase of the Miller Meadows site on June 27, 1956.

The suburban site was not to be, though, as most within city government felt that this location was a non-starter. The lack of control was one issue; having the campus

69 Ibid, 43
outside city limits meant no infusion of state money into the city, and no building contracts to give to friends. A campus with close proximity to the Loop would have also brought benefits to the downtown businesses that were the mayor’s main allies at the time. Daley did have altruistic motives, as the mayor “seemed to be motivated by a genuine belief that Chicago needed and deserved the campus.”71 Daley and the rest of the Democratic organization went to work to try to ensure that the campus would be centrally located. Likewise, the Cook County Forest Preserve District had several key allies who felt strongly that the land at Miller Meadows should remain unspoiled. The Forest Preserve advisory board was also filled with representatives of downtown business interests, who “proved instrumental in preventing the sale of the Miller Meadows land to the University of Illinois.”72 Attention then turned to the Riverside Golf Club, directly to the south; there was also continuing interest the Northerly Island, Garfield Park, and South Loop sites. In February 1959, the city stepped in, and agreed to make up the cost differences between acquiring the land at the Golf Club and that of acquiring land at any city site, in effect making the two equally affordable.73 Northerly Island was then eliminated a few months later due to a report which cited, among other things, that that particular site would entail transportation difficulties for students and faculty, and that the infill required in the lake would be rather costly and would not insure getting the campus open for student use in an expedient manner.74 In May of that same year, the trustees then voted on the Garfield Park site as their first choice, and the next month, the state legislature passed a bill

71 Cohen, American Pharoah, 225.
that permitted the park department to sell its land to the university, which was signed by the governor the next month.\textsuperscript{75}

All the while, though, the mayor and his office were still trying to acquire the site at the railroad tracks south of the Loop, and eventually, they began looking at the site that would become the campus’s location on the near West Side. The mayor had never preferred the Garfield Park site, for a variety of reasons, which included his attachment to a site in the Loop, the business community’s preference for a Loop-adjacent site, and the opposition of Park District board members, who would lose patronage jobs by giving up a large park as part of their jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{76} A report produced by the Department of City Planning released the previous year touted the benefits of the South Loop site, with its then still operating railroad yards. This site, as the closest one to downtown, would, according to the report, “allow students of the University to utilize the facilities of mass transit, expressways, and major streets which converge here. Moreover, the extensive facilities of the Central Area would make available to students increased opportunities, culturally, educationally, recreationally. In addition, outlets would be provided for part-time employment.”\textsuperscript{77}

The added benefit of this plan was that “it would assist in the large scale redevelopment of vacated railroad land and blighted portions of the area immediately south of the Loop,” which would “greatly assist the Near South Side in reaching its highest level of potential development.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} Seligman, \textit{Block by Block}, 112-113.
\textsuperscript{76} Rosen, \textit{Decision-Making Chicago-Style}, 68–69.
\textsuperscript{77} Chicago Department of City Planning, \textit{Development Plan for the City of Chicago}, August 1958. UIC Archives, Record Group 000-02-01-00-01.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 21.
This site was most desirable in the city’s mind for the reasons that would become more readily apparent when the ultimate site was selected over Garfield Park: downtown and transportation proximity, opportunity for slum clearance, and a chance to establish a “barrier” area around the Loop in order to prevent the advance of more blight and poor neighborhoods closer to the central city. The Joint Action Committee, representing a variety of downtown interests and coalitions, then organized to covertly seek an alternative to the Garfield Park site, stalling for time with legal action that was endorsed by the city and the Park District. The stalling worked, and in August of 1960, the law passed the previous year enabling the Park District to sell the land was ruled unconstitutional. This decision would be overturned the following January by the State Supreme Court, but in the intervening months, Daley had finalized plans to acquire a site closer to the Loop.79

A Site is Selected, But Not All Are Pleased

Due to the continuing problems in acquiring land for the proposed sites in a prompt manner, the eventual site emerged: an urban renewal tract on the Near West Side, located in the Harrison-Halstead neighborhood (Figure 24). The site, unlike all of the others, was completely controlled by the city. This was important for the mayor and other city leaders as building could begin immediately. Furthermore, since the site was designated for urban renewal uses, the costs of acquiring the land could be charged to the federal government under the Urban Renewal Act.80 There was also another, more nefarious motive. The site sat between the central downtown and one

of the largest concentrations of housing projects in the city to the west. To place the university there would provide a natural barrier between those residents and the Loop, yet this site also gave the campus the downtown proximity that business leaders desired.\(^{81}\) The neighborhood was a working-class mix of mostly Italians, but also Greeks, Mexicans, and blacks. The area had already suffered some damage at the hands of urban renewal, as the Dan Ryan expressway had required the demolition of the eastern edge of the neighborhood.\(^{82}\) A group of neighborhood women led by local housewife Florence Scala formed the Harrison-Halstead Community Group (HHCG) in February 1961 in order to save the neighborhood from the city. The odds were overwhelmingly against them, as once the city decided on the Harrison-Halstead site, every other major group of note and influence proceeded to line up behind the mayor. The HHCG protested loudly and vocally. At one point, following the City Council’s vote in favor of the site in May 1961, they marched on Daley’s office and pounded on desks and threw things, filled with bitter invective directed towards the mayor and his administration.\(^{83}\) The effort was unsuccessful, as the mayor would pay lip service to the concerns of the HHCG, while trying to expedite the construction of the site. For his part, Netsch, clamed that he had a great relationship with Scala after the campus was built and that he was “sincere and did my best under a difficult situation.”\(^{84}\)

While the residents of Harrison-Halstead had no interest in hosting a new college campus in their neighborhood, the denizens of Garfield Park, further to the west, were

\(^{82}\) Ibid, 229.
\(^{83}\) Ibid, 231.
\(^{84}\) Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
more than interested in having the campus for themselves. The neighborhood was in
decline, and the residents viewed the placement of a university in their midst as a
potential godsend. The middle-class white residents of the neighborhood felt that
having a university would be a stabilizing influence for the neighborhood and its
home values, preventing further numbers of mostly poor black residents from moving
in. As Amanda Seligman notes, however, the desire to turn the neighborhood into a
university community was predicated on the assumption that all of the faculty and
students would be white. “It does not seem to have occurred to [campus supporters],”
she writes, “that an urban campus of the University of Illinois might attract
substantial numbers of African Americans into the student body.” As noted, though,
the Garfield Park community failed in securing the campus. This can be partly
attributed to the lack of coordination between different community organizations, and
partly due to strategy. While the Loop businessmen used financial and legal avenues
to rule out Garfield Park as a feasible site, the Garfield Park organizations
concentrated their energies on collecting statements of support from local citizens and
business. After their losing effort, the negative prophesy of the local organizations
about what would happen to their neighborhood began to come true. The
neighborhood quickly turned over to from white to black following the decision, and
by 1965, the area was the site of riots generated by a fatality induced by an out-of-
control fire truck. The fall of the Garfield Park neighborhood that had welcomed
university development was a sad byproduct of the site selection process.

85 Seligman, Block by Block, 101.
86 Ibid, 110.
87 Cohen, American Pharaoh, 232.
With the site selection conflicts in the past, the University of Illinois began construction on the new campus in 1963, after the Supreme Court refused to hear the HHCG’s case. The new campus was to be christened the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle. The name originated from the massive Circle interchange immediately to the site’s northeast, where the Eisenhower (originally Congress), Kennedy and Dan Ryan expressways met. The site selection played an important role in ultimately shaping the design of the campus, and its eventual fall from favor. Wherever the campus had ended up being placed, the buildings would have in all likelihood resembled the Brutalist buildings that were ultimately built. A larger, or more scenic site, however would have ended up affecting how Netsch had designed the campus plan as a whole. Any larger site, whether in the suburbs or at a location such as Garfield Park, would have probably not given him the impetus to design for the urban environment as he did.

**Conceiving the Campus of the Future**

When designing the campus plan, Walter Netsch felt little need to limit his ambitions or his scope to just the campus site. Beyond the new site, he was interested in new experiments in urban design. As he wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* of February 26, 1967:

> Chicago Circle is a forerunner of many other campuses throughout the world. It is, therefore, an early full-scale urban model that can aid in future models. Current new buildings and future buildings have

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already benefitted from the initial model. But, the campus is more than an academic institution; it is a microcosm of issues and answers for a new urban environment.89

Clearly, these are the words of a man uninterested in the status quo. The story of how he settled on the design shows that Netsch was interested in learning from history and was trying to reshape academia for the better. His future-oriented thinking, though, ultimately hurt his creation once that future actually arrived in ways that he didn't anticipate.

The buildings used in the early study models were rather standard glass boxes of three stories or less, reminiscent of the Air Force Academy. Netsch’s problem, initially, was his desire to not repeat what he had done at the Air Force Academy. The buildings in Colorado Springs were of the same International Style that Mies van der Rohe and most of the other partners at SOM adhered to at the time. (SOM was also committed to anonymity for their architects, that “you shouldn’t know who was doing what.”90) The buildings originally imagined for UIC were too reminiscent of Mies for someone who would eventually say “I could never be a Mies fan.”91 The constructed buildings would be part of a modernist style known as Brutalism, its name taken from the French béton brut, or raw concrete. The style is known for its rough unfinished concrete exterior, exposed interior functions, and massive scale, among other features. Netsch finally began to develop a solid concept when he came up with what he described as a “drop of water” circulating from the hub, with the density and most

90 Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
91 Walter Netsch, Interview with Detlef Mertins.
trafficked elements (library, student center, lecture halls) focused on the center of the site (Figure 25). Student interaction was intended to be increased by the close proximity of the non-department specific lecture halls. “What happens in between classes,” he said, “came to be regarded as being as important as what happens in classes. As the buildings fanned out, the ones placed on the periphery were the laboratories, where “the time spent in the environment is longer and where they don’t contribute to the intensity of the housing environment.”92 (Figure 26)

Also near the edge of campus was the 28-story University Hall. In addition to being the home of the university’s administration, all professors not associated with the natural sciences were to be located in the building. The president of the university, seeking to avoid the balkanization of the different academic departments, wanted all of the professors in the same building. Netsch designed a “building that had two floors for each discipline with a seminar room in the middle and some offices.”93

Elevated pedestrian walkways would connect all core buildings of the campus, with provisions to eventually expand the walkways to future parking decks on the sites periphery, which were never built. Since the walkways were raised, Netsch intended for the areas under the walkways to be used in the event of inclement weather (Figure 27). The giant Science and Engineering Laboratories at the south end of campus was possibly the most massive building on campus with regard to its bulk. Designed to be adaptable to the various programs needing lab space, fifty-square-foot standard modules in plan were enclosed in windowless brick blocks, alternating with narrower

93 Walter Netsch, Interview with Detlef Mertins.
auxiliary spaces (Figure 28). And at the middle of campus lay the student forum, a raised plaza covering the lecture halls. Of the original concept behind the design of the forum, Netsch said:

“My example was Ephesus and Miletus, the Greek city-states where in the center was the plaza. The people went to school in the plaza, and they went to the library and they went to church. We didn’t have a church, but we had a student center. So that was the origin of the scheme, and that’s why, of course, I feel so badly about the heart of the original concept being destroyed.”

The amphitheater at the center of the forum doubled as steps to access the lecture hall level down from the plaza level. On the top of the forum lay the exedrae, directly on top of each central lecture hall. The exedrae were placed between the library and the Chicago Circle Center, the student union. Each exedra was to provide “seating, viewing, steps and communal meeting in lieu of the usual line of benches.” (Figure 29) Three exedrae were inward-facing, intended for “open air lectures…choral rehearsals, or for just sitting.” The fourth had its steps face outward, for admiring the scenery, “sunbathing and girl watching,” as the designer called it. And at night, there was to be a space-age lighting system, something Netsch described as like “the brave new world—streaks of lighting coming out.” (Figure 30) The campus was also surrounded by a brick wall, something that, before the renovation, would become

94 Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
96 John Morris Dixon, “Campus City, Chicago,” Architectural Forum 123 (September 1965), 44.
97 Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum
a symbol of the campus’s disconnect with the community. Netsch, in response to the later allegation that the walls were constructed to keep people out, said that the wall was in place because “black and white young people would be sitting on the grass together, and we were protecting them from the hostile eyes of the neighborhood.”

All of this—the walkways, the forum—was intended to make the campus become a “one-building scheme,” or as close to that theoretical level as possible, by having a high level of interconnectedness among the buildings and the built environment, a “continuous network.” The buildings' interconnectedness appealed to Netsch, who in his desire to design the “last 19th Century campus,” wanted all future campuses he designed to work “as a single system, not as a group of objects.” After Chicago Circle, he hoped, tradition in university design could be fully shed, and the ideas of the twentieth century fully embraced.

The campus opened on February 22, 1965, to great fanfare throughout the city, and notice from around the world. Much of the attention focused on the new structural concepts and building types that formed the whole of the campus. Unlike the present day, the lack of regard for the surrounding building context that characterized modern architecture, and especially Brutalism, was then seen as a plus. The *Tribune* editorial page hailed the event, noting the benefits to business that large universities have, and expressing the optimistic hope that “perhaps within a dozen years it will rival its mother campus as one of the great universities of the world.”

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
101 Dixon, “Campus City, Chicago,” 44.
The campus’s dissimilarity to the traditional campus was, at the time, praised as its greatest asset. The rough concrete exterior was hailed as a triumph of efficiency, as there was no need to paint it. The architecture, in general, was described as “well-received”\textsuperscript{103} by visitors. The cultural changes within American higher education of the time, though, may have been the core reason why the lack of connection to tradition was seen as a positive quality. Going through their greatest change in its history, American universities were developing more new ideas and research than at any other time. Rather than emulate Cambridge and Oxford, new universities, focused on future growth and technology, largely lacked the incentive to look to past forms in university architecture. As *Time* noted shortly after the university’s opening, “The classic university campus is a grouping of quaint gothic or red brick Georgian buildings adrift on a rolling meadow of greensward. But the exploding population of the US demands less casual and rustic solutions.”\textsuperscript{104}

**Field Theory**

After early praise for its architecture, the UIC campus ended up having a disconnect with the public that used it, despite Netsch’s attempt at creating as user-friendly and efficient a campus as possible. His Field Theory, though, stands as a prime example of the intellectual barrier that lies between architectural theory and the public. The angular amalgams that are Field Theory buildings, can be bewildering from the outside (Figure 31) and even more so on the inside (Figure 32). The theory generates the kind of building that is a nightmare for a freshman on the first day of


classes. While it was borne from a desire to construct a different kind of user-oriented building, the design put in to practice was problematic, to put it kindly.

Field Theory found its origins with the geometric designs that inspired the Cadet Chapel at the U.S. Air Force Academy, completed in 1963. The Architecture and Art Building at UIC is the first formal example of Field Theory, but the ideas began to be shaped and applied in Netsch's work from the Air Force Academy Chapel to the Northwestern University Library (1970). As the idea underlying all Netsch buildings from the mid sixties onward, Field Theory relied on the overlay and rotation of complex, square-based geometries to create many-angled, multifaceted buildings. Netsch defines it as “a geometric and mathematic methodology by which you do nonlinear structures.” The process begins by taking a sheet with a transparent lattice and laying it on top of another lattice, rotated (Figure 33). The architect then “[does] a third drawing, and then [does] it all over again,” meaning that he adds another overlay of geometrically rotated lattice forms on top of the first two layers. The resulting patterns were traced to provide a framework from which to create the building’s actual spatial plan (Figure 34).

Field Theory was another manifestation of Netsch’s distance from the rest of SOM, as well as a statement of his general sense of personal iconoclasm. Netsch’s office operated out of his house, rather than the SOM main office, and his team operated outside the main sphere of the firm. SOM partner Gordon Bunshaft, normally an ally of Netsch, was skeptical of Field Theory. When Netsch was asked why he felt compelled to create a separate aesthetic, in this case one so markedly

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105 “Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
106 Ibid.
different from that which was the norm at the time, and different from the Mies-inspired buildings that predominated among the works of the firm until the advent of Postmodernism in architecture, he replied that he was “not developing an idiom that could be used only by specialists." In addition, Field Theory was endlessly adaptable, as the architect could experiment with their lattices until an appropriate form evidenced itself. There was a system to developing Field Theory buildings, and it was intended that most anyone could adapt the system it took to create a Field Theory building. Netsch envisioned a series of Field Theory adherents, or even just architects looking for something different, to use the system to solve design problems. Netsch also credits Field Theory for his departure from the AIA and SOM, because, as he put it, “what was the use of having to defend myself.” Although intended to be available to all, in the end Netsch was the only adherent to Field Theory among major architects, despite it being called at one point “as important as [Le Corbusier’s] Modulor or [R. Buckminster Fuller’s] dome.” Netsch was always well aware that Field Theory was not wildly popular among the architectural community. Asked why Field Theory hadn’t gained more acceptance among architects, he replied

“Very simple. It’s difficult…Everyone who wants to put a series of boxes in the orthogonal manner and has been trained to do that all their lives and most of the buildings have a corridor and a box and a box

\[107\] Ibid.
\[108\] Ibid.
\[109\] Mildred Schmertz, “A New Museum by Walter Netsch of SOM Given Order by his Field Theory,” *Architectural Record* 167 (January 1980), 111.
and a box—why should they explore the aesthetics of the square root of two?.”\textsuperscript{110}

The lack of imitation did not trouble him, though. “Most architects would rather be anonymous,”\textsuperscript{111} and he learned this firsthand, in part, working for a firm that valued its name over that of any individual architect that works for it. The lack of acceptance for Field Theory derived not only from its difficulty in execution but also from its difference from the norm. After noting that “it takes genius to create a complex aesthetic idea” he said, with a nod to himself, “I’m not sure we need a world all full of genius buildings.”\textsuperscript{112}

Netsch continued to use Field Theory throughout the late sixties and seventies, on largely academic buildings. His Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago (1970) (Figure 35) has gotten “consistently good reviews by users.” Architectural historian Jay Pridmore attributes this to the university’s library director specifically asking for a more restrained and “linear” design, combined with “the conservative influence of the Gothic all around.”\textsuperscript{113} His next major project would be three buildings at the University of Iowa, largely similar to the buildings at UIC in terms of materials used, although the fields used were all unique. His final Field Theory project while at SOM would be the Miami University (Ohio) Art Museum.

**The Architecture and Art Building**

\textsuperscript{110} Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
The Architecture and Art building at UIC (Figure 36) is exemplary of the Field Theory buildings at UIC, not only because it was Netsch’s first application of Field Theory, but also because the building’s struggles after its construction are representative of the problems for both architect and client at the site. Netsch contended that the fact that the building went unfinished lead to its failure and the current dissatisfaction with it, as the half-building doesn’t allow for his original circulation plans to be instituted. One of the casualties of the financial shortfalls that led to the University ultimately cancelling the later phases of the UIC, the Architecture and art building was originally supposed to contain the department’s offices, classrooms, studios, and a library. The building’s full plan (Figure 37) called for six squares surrounding a central core. The floors were to be laid out in a continuum, with each floor three feet above or below its neighboring units’ floors. In the completed building, Netsch intended for all the floors to be able to be accessed via a helical path through each interior square. Not even half the building was finished, leaving the department to make do with the space given them. The Architecture department was given their own building because they needed studios, and the building was supposed to function “around the concept of the studio.”\textsuperscript{114} The building also suffered due to the lack of offices. Netsch figured that the members of the architectural faculty “were humanists who would choose to have a drafting table out in the drafting room.”\textsuperscript{115}

Netsch’s remarks on the Architecture and Art Building years later continue a theme evident in many of his remarks on his works at UIC: a strong desire to defend

\textsuperscript{114} Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
his design philosophy against those who deride or disdain it, and some anger at university officials who he believes made his work there, and the perception thereof, suffer due to a misinterpretation or reworking of his original plans. He considered the failure of the Architecture and art Building to be the “loss of everything out there;”\(^\text{116}\)

that is, the failure of that building meant that the plans—his plans—were far less important, and he believes that provided an environment for the eventual destruction of the center of the campus. Netsch contended that the university administration, at least in the last twelve years prior to 1995, have “preferred to live in their own anger” with regards to the construction of the Architecture and art Building.\(^\text{117}\)

After cancelling the completion of the Architecture and art, UIC had begun the construction of dormitories on campus, choosing the site earlier intended for the other sixty percent of the Architecture and art Building. This decision effectively killed any future extension of Field Theory at UIC.

**Contemporary Critical Reaction**

As effusive as the praise from the civic institutions of Greater Chicago was, it mostly focused on the great improvement over the Navy Pier campus that the Harrison-Halstead site represented. Pure architectural praise came from the editors of *Architectural Forum*, and it came in unprecedented form. The twenty-five pages devoted to the new campus in the September 1965 issue was the largest write-up that the journal had ever done in a single issue on a project. Enamored with the campus, the publisher’s note said that Netsch had “underestimated the significance of his

\(^{116}\) Ibid.

\(^{117}\) Ibid.
project to the future of our cities.”\textsuperscript{118} The editorial commitment was far from a passing fancy: the \textit{Forum} followed up in December 1968 with a feature on the first completed stage of the Art & Architecture Building, and again in November 1970 featuring the Behavioral Sciences Building and Sciences & Engineering South. Netsch was hailed as a visionary, “not one to stand by the status quo.”\textsuperscript{119} All three articles based their generous praise not just on the design, but more importantly, what the design meant for the future of urban design in the century.

Fully embracing Netsch’s desire to design the “last 19\textsuperscript{th} century university,” the \textit{Forum} felt that the principles of the campus’s plan would logically extend to city planning at large, as evidenced by the original article’s title, “Campus City, Chicago.” UIC remains unique in that it is a large planned campus of the second half of the twentieth century, placed in an urban center, when most newly constructed peer universities lay in suburbs or rural areas with hundreds of acres set aside for expansion. Nearly every element of the campus was hailed as a new unique vision, a great innovation or improvement on what had preceded it in architecture. Chicago Circle represented “the most ambitious U.S. demonstration to date of the idea of a compact, stratified urban core.”\textsuperscript{120} The campus, from a distance, “could be a segment of a city skyline.” The forum was “redeemed from static symmetry by the eccentric pull of the walkways.”\textsuperscript{121} And the junction between the upper and lower levels of the walkway system, the central amphitheater of the forum, “became…a landmark among

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    \item \textsuperscript{118} “Publisher’s Note,” \textit{Architectural Forum} 123 (September 1965), 1.
    \item \textsuperscript{120} Dixon, “Campus City Chicago,” 44.
    \item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 27.
\end{itemize}
American stairways.”122 The editors stated that “as long as [field theory] remains identified with Walter Netsch, it cannot be considered ‘impersonal.’”123 Netsch always kept the concerns of the user in mind when designing, and in the case of UIC, frequently thought ahead of his users by trying to anticipate their desires and incorporating them into his designs. The editors were presumptuous, however, by assuming that an architect determines how easy to relate to a building is. Regardless of the architect’s intent, the way that the public can relate to a building can only be determined after an extended period of use.

When the UIC campus opened in 1965, the professional magazine Progressive Architecture weighed in, featuring a broad interview with Netsch that gave him a chance to elucidate his principles. The article discussed a variety of topics that would take on a greatly heightened importance in hindsight. Joining Netsch, and providing criticism were Chicago architect Edward Dart, and the dean of the UICC school of Architecture and art, Leonard Currie. Currie noted that the faculty and administrators of higher education, while “pushing the edges of knowledge in their own fields” were “reluctant to change their environment and the whole set of relationships they are used to in the university.”124 In another instance of a statement that would later become prophetic, Dart noted that his only problem with a system of exposed walkways was that with “[the walkways] in our damn climate, this thing will be vacated between December and March.” Netsch replied that that was what the lower

122 Ibid, 35.
123 John Morris Dixon “Campus City Continued,” Architectural Forum 129 (December 1968), 33.
level was made for. The architecture's uniformity was also praised, as the buildings, designed together, were perceived as a possible improvement on the traditional campus, such as Yale ("a mess," according to Dart) where the Gothic style of the core was being steadily augmented by a stream of modern architectural statements.

Conclusion

Architectural Forum wrote in its initial evaluation of the Chicago Circle campus that “The tension between theory and reality, between what is and what might have been (or might be next time), is strongly felt at Chicago Circle.” The magazine was referring to the unfortunate modifications Netsch was forced to make to his plan when faced with institutional and budget constraints. That statement, however, would eventually become true in a different and unanticipated way when Netsch’s many innovative and radical campus planning ideas were increasingly besieged by realities of institutional life that he did not foresee. Apart from later preferences for architectural styles other than Netsch’s, his buildings would eventually be deemed unsuccessful due to their creator’s insistence on advancing a theory that the users and the general public found largely unpractical.

125 Ibid, 225.
126 Dixon, “Campus City, Chicago,” 44.
Chapter Three
Changing Circumstances, Changing Buildings

“If they think this is brutal, they ought to see some of the buildings they’ve got in Europe.”
-Walter Netsch

UIC began on its road to architectural ignominy soon after its opening, when some of Netsch’s concepts quickly proved to be misconceived. Financial shortfalls encountered by the university compounded the erroneous assumptions in design. This chapter will look at the flaws that arose during the operation of the campus, and the change in public architectural tastes that created a backlash against modernism and many of its core design tenets at UIC and other modernist campuses.

Finding Flaws at Chicago Circle

Planning usually assumes a best-case scenario, or at least one of measured growth in line with meticulously made estimates. There is also often an implicit assumption of things being static, that unforeseen challenges won’t arise. After all, there is, no way to foresee all future circumstances. For the UIC campus, things quickly started to not go according to plan. Financial realities, the ever-present nemesis of the builder, began to set in. The decade 1968 to 1978 has been called the “stagnant decade” of American higher education.127 During those years, faced with an economy that was not growing for the first time since World War II, and confronted with declining enrollments, universities were forced to cut back on physical plant, research, professor salaries, and more, in order to stave off huge losses. UIC was planned

during a period of massive growth in higher education, but ended up spending many of its nascent years in financial purgatory. The funding from the government to purchase scientific equipment, build new laboratories and maintain existing ones declined from $126 million per year in the mid-sixties to $35 million per year in the seventies. This resulted in the cancellation of several third-phase buildings, such as abandonment of the Art and Architecture Building at forty percent completion. Funding also fell through for the secretive “Project Y,” commissioned by the Chancellor of the University of Illinois. The project was to be a massive arts center designed to span the Congress Expressway to the north, all designed in Field Theory. The space-age outdoor lighting system quickly fell prey to concerns about crime and vandalism. Netsch was particularly incensed about this, pointing to it as an example of his “architecture being absolutely crucified…in the name of security,” an “environmental disaster.”

Enrollment projections fell woefully short. Designed for 30,000-plus students, the campus’ total enrollment never exceeded the current 23,537. The shortfall in enrollment exemplifies what Netsch could not have anticipated while designing. The campus was created to ultimately meet the demands of a student population who would all commute to campus, and were all undergraduates. Initially, no one had said anything about a school where almost a third of the students were graduate students. There was also eventually a need for undergraduate housing on campus and students living in the vicinity. Speaking of the overall campus, Netsch “knew it would ultimately change,” but one would thing he did not quite anticipate was the change in architectural taste.

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128 Ibid.
129 Jim Pfister Task Group Meeting.
Indeed, there were budget cuts. But budget cuts don’t really explain the complaints that were being lodged against the UIC campus, even a mere ten years after it opened. When *AIA Journal* profiled the campus in January 1977, the criticisms and objections were myriad. Students cited the library as the only place to study, and the student union as the only place to socialize. One person cited the uniformity of campus, as “no one knows how to explain where buildings are except by other buildings. There are no visual reference points.” Closed-circuit televisions went unused and the non-disabled-friendly design was beginning to attract scrutiny from the government. Professors hated University Hall, with one English professor likening her feeling inside to a resident of a medieval castle frowning on the serfs outside.130 While Netsch had originally called it the university’s “ivory tower,” given that that particular term is usually used derisively by critics of academics for their so-called “elitist” attitudes and detachment from the realities of life, that image probably wasn’t what any of the professors were looking for.

By the mid 1980s, it was well known that something had to be done in order to rectify at least some of the complaints that were constantly being lodged against the campus, with the walkways at the center of the most of the complaints. The walkways “confined space without being defined.”131 They “[weren’t] the shortest way to get from one building to another.”132 The irregular settlement of the columns supporting the walkways created an “uneven walkway surface that creates tripping

131 “UIC East Campus—Positives and Negatives,” Campus Design Center, Art and Architecture Department, University of Illinois Chicago, 1990. UIC Archives, Record Group 003-18-02-00-01.
132 Miller, 28
hazards and complicates snow removal.”\(^{133}\) The walkways iced up during the winter and were leaky when it rained, rendering both the aboveground and grade level passageways unpleasant. Despite all of this, the walkways were not to be written off immediately. In a 1987 meeting, Stanley Tigerman suggested putting housing over the walkways and Netsch agreed, remarking that he hoped the walkways “would become linkages in which buildings would be built over them and that they could then continue the connection, and the would become more viable as a circulation system.”\(^{134}\) Interestingly enough, during the same interview, Netsch was concerned about the future status of the walkways, saying “I hope you don’t take down the walkway, I heard a rumor once that you were going to take down the walkway.”\(^{135}\) This was confirmed previously, in 1977, when the director of physical plant said “when the structure of the walkways weakens, we’ll tear them down. No one uses them anyway.”\(^{136}\) A report by the master plan committee, commissioned by the board of trustees in 1990, was sympathetic to the walkways, calling it and the forum “the most important ’structure defining’ elements on the east side of campus.”\(^{137}\) Ultimately, the master plan recommended that the university “retain the majority of the elevated walkway system” and “improve it by adding a transparent canopy and by constructing new buildings which will incorporate the walkway within them.”\(^{138}\) The plan also recommended building new walkways from the parking garages to the existing system. The authors noted, however, that “support from the central

\(^{133}\) “Elevated Walk System: Options and Issues,” Master Plan Committee at University of Illinois at Chicago, April 1990, 3. UIC Archives, Record Group 003-18-02-00-01.

\(^{134}\) Pfister Task Force Meeting.

\(^{135}\) Pfister Task Force Meeting.

\(^{136}\) Miller, 28


\(^{138}\) Ibid, 14.
administration and the Board of Trustees is essential” in the campaign to rehabilitate the walkways. That support never materialized. When it was announced that major changes would be made to the campus, Chicago Tribune architecture critic Paul Gapp took the opportunity to reassess the campus’s design. While noting that Netsch’s design was indeed quite groundbreaking, its “contextual defects” including an amphitheater that was “useless: outside of warm weather” and a campus with “[clumsy relationship] to the city street grid and the urbanity of the setting” gave the author a negative impression of the campus. His hope was that the new plan, which still aimed to remodel, rather than remove, would make “beauty a prime consideration” in a place where it was “nowhere evident.”

“This is known as historical re-evaluation”

Despite the flaws now evident in the campus, the University itself was not adversely impacted by it. The merger with the University of Illinois’ Medical Campus in 1982 instantly made the rechristened University of Illinois at Chicago a major player among research universities. The master plan of 1990 had called for the revitalization of the campus. Rather than remodeling it offered a chance to see if the best qualities could be brought out in structures that hadn’t worked so far, as well as improving preventive maintenance measures. It was not to be, however. In January 1993, the Board of Trustees, after hiring local architect Daniel Coffey to present new proposals for redesigning the campus, selected the most drastic proposal, removing the walkways and the student forum to create a grade-level plaza at the center of campus. The leaky roofs of the lecture halls were also to be reroofed. The then

139 Paul Gapp, No Article Title, Chicago Tribune, June 10, 1990.
president of the University of Illinois system, James J. Stuckel, called it a “hostile architectural environment.” And while he acknowledged the severity of the decision, he felt that a change had to be made for the good of the campus. “I put people over architectural design,” he said. “We’re trying to make an environment that’s comfortable for students.”

Likewise, former UIC Chancellor Donald Langenberg three years earlier had called the campus “a concrete wilderness, an inhuman, uncomfortable campus—grim, gritty, and cold.”

Walter Netsch, upon hearing the news took the rather extraordinary step of offering his services, _pro bono_, to remodel the campus, a request that the trustees politely brushed off. His suggestions included building fabric enclosures above the exedras, replacing half of the amphitheater with trees, skylighting portions of the walkways, reusing the granite slabs of the walkways on ground level, and installing vines on the existing walkway supports. The trustees, though, were dead set on the demolition of the walkways, as they were the most visible symbol of what had gone wrong with the campus, not to mention a legal liability due to their contribution to the unsafe environment on campus.

It had been only a few years earlier that the university had committed to maintaining and enhancing the core elements of the campus. With the board’s new judgment, the campus’s creator was, to put it charitably, less than pleased. True to character, he talked to all that would listen about his dissatisfaction. This must have pleased reporters looking for dissenting opinion, as he was virtually the only person in Chicago who thought the renovation was a bad idea. “The design is kind of a suburban mall revision. It has very little to do with the character and guts of Chicago

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140 Cheryl Kent, “Softening Brutalism: Is Anything Lost?” _Architectural Record_ 184, (August 1996), 21
area architecture,” he said, focusing on the “softening” about to occur as completely not in the character of the campus. He had “done a lot of campuses, and this is the only [controversial] one,” he said, with a chuckle. In Coffey, he saw a man who “feels no responsibility to show obeisance to the traditions of Chicago architecture.” Netsch took to the press without provocation. Writing to the Chicago Reader in response to a profile (“canonization,” he called it) of Coffey that included an interview with him, Netsch sought to burnish his liberal credentials after seeing himself portrayed, as a stubborn old codger unconcerned with public opinion or communities. He praised the interviewer for not taking their correspondence out of context, and offered a series of single-sentence defenses from the quality of the concrete he selected to his work with the Park District. He ended thusly:

“… (9) Personal disparagement by the press shows little understanding of my effort to maintain the essence and quality of the campus. (10) I received the same treatment about the design of the chapel [at the Air Force Academy].

I stand by my statements of this destructive act.

Walter A. Netsch

Chicago

It was to his credit that he was always so willing to respond to his critics, possibly due to the paucity of supporters, more likely due to his natural, heavily opinionated temperament, which did not lend itself to letting misinformation about him or his work go without reply. His words, though, did not exactly resonate with the local public.

Divergent Reactions

*Chicago Tribune* architectural critic Blair Kamin called the renovation part of the battle that “pits those who would preserve the powerful abstract forms of modernism against those who would alter those forms to make architecture more user-friendly or commercially appealing.” The supporters of the former overwhelmingly outnumbered the supporters of the latter. The general public had already come to an agreement that the campus was a pain to look at, a dampening experience. The frequent users, when asked what they like about the campus core, responded unanimously “We hate it!” according to Coffey. “Cold,” “Seems too hard,” and “Feels like a parking lot” were among the criticisms he heard. Some of opinions of students recorded during these group sessions are located on a wall in the campus center (Figure 38). Note the most prominent phrase in the center, “Not a monument to the Architect.” Most mainstream news sources, whose reporters were scarcely more trained in architecture than the general public, felt at ease with slamming the design of the campus with only a token response from its creator, the man who also happened to be its most staunch defender. The notion of preservation was anathema.

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to the editorial board of the *Sun-Times*, who found it “amusing” that Netsch was offering to redesign the campus. The campus was “cold, confusing and darn-right frustrating in its complexity and harshness.” That the creator was leading the charge for the landmarking of his work was deemed laughable, as “a landmark, especially in a city for world-renowned architectural landmarks, must have been judged to have stood the test of time and function—by someone other than the guy who put it there.”

Some local architects came to his defense, while others could not wait to be rid of the buildings, even if the designer’s body of work was otherwise admired. Chief among the architectural detractors was former UIC Department of Architecture dean and Chicago architectural gadfly Stanley Tigerman, who said that the campus’s overhaul was “a great decision which I absolutely support a million percent” and that he was “sorry it wasn’t done ten years ago.” That was among the nicer things he said about the campus. Upon seeing a photo of Netsch with his hand on the plunger at the Pruitt-Igoe demolition (Netsch had made new urban renewal plans for the complex before it was declared a lost cause), Tigerman “said something nasty like, ‘Maybe somebody should be at the end of the plunger at the U. of I. Circle Campus.’” According to Netsch, Tigerman told him that the campus was “shit.”

In a *Chicago Reader* feature story asking local architects which buildings they would blow up if they had the chance, local architect Karen Johnson said that, as an alumna, she felt qualified to call the architecture building there “the worst.” She went on to

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152 Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.
say that it was “one of the big things that most architects in the city, especially if they went to school there or have been there for any length of time, probably want to blow up.” She did qualify her statement by saying she had “a lot of respect of [Netsch] as an architect.”

In response to the proposed makeover, the architectural press came to a qualified defense of the campus, one which was more focused on which buildings did and did not deserve preservation. The redesign of campus was a starting point to discuss preservation of other recent local buildings. *Architectural Record* looked at the contrast between the campaign to preserve the Marina City complex from proposed changes by developers, as opposed to the lukewarm reaction to preserving UIC. James Krohe raised questions about how constantly evolving tastes meant that every type of architecture could eventually end up in danger, noting that it was “inherently unfair to judge 1960s projects with 1990s attitudes” and calling the campus itself “a powerful collection of forms whose coherence and internal logic could easily be marred by careless emendation.”

UIC architectural historian Robert Brugemann called the Coffey design “a Band-Aid solution,” and encouraged the public to consider whether “the problem lies with the original design . . . or whether it is the result of the original design never having been finished, poor subsequent maintenance and programmatic shifts at the campus.” Perhaps the strongest voice against the renovation was Cheryl Kent, who wrote in the *Architectural Record* to argue that the campus was now worse off now that its architectural integrity would be compromised.

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by a redesign that did not pay sufficient heed to Netsch’s original design. She placed a premium on trying to conform to the conventions of the university planning:

“The pressures on the university are very real, but this solution is very banal. This is not a traditional campus and planting a quadrangle in the middle of it won't make it one. If it once had the proud air of architectural militance, it now seems reduced, shriveled, as though it would like nothing better than for some vines to grow over it…”

Indeed, the chorus against the campus has been so loud and certain, even among architects, that the mere suggestion of protection could provoke laughter. The community may have been equally smug when building owners were ripping cornices off Louis Sullivan buildings in the 1960s and proposing postmodern petticoats be tied around the waists of Modern monuments in the 1970s. In 20 years will we regret having allowed this?  

That was probably the most full throated defense there was that did not come from someone named Walter Netsch.

The remodeling of the center of campus was completed in 1996 (Figure). The buildings, save for the central lecture halls, looked the same. Removing the walkways did not instantly ameliorate every problem inherent in the design, and while improved in the eyes of the general public, the consensus seemed to be that the campus, outside of the central area, had moved from “incredibly oppressive,” “disastrous” and “dungeonlike” to merely distasteful. Blair Kamin gave the most

156 Kent, 1996.
ringing endorsement to the redesign, calling the changes to the campus “nothing short of astonishing.” The revitalized campus was “a rejection of modern urbanism and a return to a traditional way of making cities,” and Coffey’s “modest way of city-building” proved an effective rebuke to “sprit-crushing urbanism.”¹⁵⁷ The website of Daniel P. Coffey and Associates notes that their redesign re-conceived what was “the worst public environment in Chicago.”¹⁵⁸ A 2002 article in the student newspaper, the Chicago Flame, called the original campus “a post-apocalyptic temple of doom,” even while trying to correct prevailing myths about the design, like “UIC was built to be riot-proof” and “The BSB is confusing because the architect was agoraphobic.” The fact that the author had to state that “There was never an evil dungeon master, staring menaciously out his penthouse lair on the 28th floor of UH, ordering his architect—a maniacal, agoraphobic hater of all things good and green—to build him a school that would instill terror and despair among the students” is a testament to the original design’s continuing dominance, even after renovation.¹⁵⁹ Even in 2005, a statement from UIC architecture professor Dan Wheeler statement noting that “one of the problems with UIC’s most recent work is that it’s tried not to understand it, but to make it go away” is countered by students saying “We need to tear this building down,” in response to their habitual inability to find their bearings in the Behavioral Sciences Building.¹⁶⁰ With no plans (and especially money) to replace University Hall, or any other original building, the students and faculty are essentially stuck with

the defining buildings of the campus, and the realization that the experience of the site was once worse. That opinion wasn’t monolithic, though. In a September 16th, 2003 *Chicago Flame* article on the history of the walkways, student Matthew Sutton had this to say:

“It looks like it would have been really cool to have on campus, but not just because the campus is a little boring, but more so because it’s something that not too many other places have. I think it would be awesome to have something on campus like that again.”\(^{161}\)

One could interpret that as someone whose lack of institutional memory shines through. Of course, one could also interpret Sutton’s imaginative longing as excitement for the theoretical walkways, ones that would be covered, where the pedestrian can go from the L subway train to the South Campus without having to stop in traffic. The statement is probably a testament, more than anything, to the original design, one which continues to sound reasonable in theory. The UIC campus shows that even the clearest theoretical idea can not only function poorly as built, but also have its intent completely escape the intended users. When the campus remodeling was completed Chancellor David Broski said “There [had been] no public gathering places for the students, very little grass.”\(^{162}\) Of course, the Forum was intended as a giant gathering space, one where classes could be taught, wares could be hawked, performances could be held, and protests could be shouted. None


\(^{162}\) Lee Bey, “UIC Campus Opens Up,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 16, 1996.
of this, of course, came to be, partly due to deficiencies in design, partly due to the lack of similarity between the Forum and the traditional college spaces where the such activities usually happen. Unfortunately for Walter Netsch, in the opinion of too many observers and users, something about the campus ended up being lost in its realization.

In 2005, a project was started to include small “oases” as places to rest and congregate among the harsh interior atmosphere of the buildings. They featured colorful furniture and ergonomic chairs. Bill Warren, the architect who designed the Oasis in University Hall, said the he just “tried to bring out the beauty that was already there.”163 Netsch, when shown pictures of the new classrooms, was the same as ever, saying “I really would suggest a shear drape instead of repainting those concrete panels.”164 As the present university continues to grow and expand, the classroom buildings outside the lecture hall center are now being renovated for greater energy efficacy, clad with a glass exterior (Figure 40). The university also recently finished construction of a new UIC Forum in the new University Village campus expansion (Figure 41). The new construction to the south provides for new dormitories and office space for the university, developer-built condominiums and townhouses, and new retail for the community. The new Forum and Netsch’s Forum are alike in name only, as the new construction is a conference and events center. Its creator gone, the campus continues a march into the future, and away from its original concept, in a manner that few would have expected upon its opening nearly forty-five

163 Brooks 2005
164 Ibid.
Protecting Modernism at IIT

Both UIC and IIT are regarded within the architectural community as landmark campuses for modern architecture, but IIT has historically been more highly regarded due to its association with Mies van der Rohe, arguably the most influential force in American modern architecture. Hence, the preservation of its architectural integrity has been regarded as especially important. By the 1990s IIT, for all of its architectural significance, was possibly in worse straits, both atmospherically and academically, than UIC is its peer to the northwest, as IIT was surrounded by a crumbling neighborhood. The modern university is largely a immobile institution, with regards to its physical plant. As opposed to earlier days when a the university, as a renter of buildings, could relocate across the city as its institutional needs changed, the modern college is comprised of so many buildings and functions that to move it would be virtually impossible, in terms of costs and logistics. While some companies can pick up and leave for a suburb or whatever municipality is offering a tax break, the university must stay. Which is why it was especially alarming when rumors circulated in the early and mid nineties that IIT would leave its Bronzeville campus for greener, less crime-ridden pastures. A commission report issued in 1994 suggested that the board of trustees look at “other location options” if the school was not able to adequately improve the neighborhood.\(^\text{165}\) The school, as well as the philanthropic community of Chicago, decided on saving the campus at its existing

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site, and restoring the historic Mies buildings that had fallen into disrepair due to insufficient funds. Now, with an infusion of new money, the university would decide to renovate five buildings, build a new student center, and new dormitories and student apartments.\textsuperscript{166} The revitalized campus would try to resurrect its surroundings, and in the process, try to revitalize IIT as an institution of higher learning.

As noted earlier, when UIC came up for redesign in the early nineties, the community at large, with the exception of a few in the architectural community, responded with a collective cheer. The process at IIT, though, was largely the opposite, as the questions of damaged architectural integrity that had barely been raised earlier in the decade came to the fore. A wide-ranging cadre of Mies supporters responded with a healthy dose of indignation and outrage when Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas was chosen in 1999 to design a new student center for the campus. What became the issue was not the design of the new student center, but its incorporation of the old building, which at that point was in disrepair and semi-disused (Figure 42). Koolhaas would be working with a site that was revered; the idea of getting as far away from the previous architecture as possible was not the intention. The change was not due to an ingrained antipathy to Mies; indeed, Koolhaas was on record as saying that he loved the man, although when asked about what inspired it, he responded, “Ironically, I don't really know. Maybe Mies is the largest possible opposite and therefore the most attractive. Apart from that, there is simply aesthetics and a deep liking for disappearance rather than minimalism.”\textsuperscript{167} Indeed, Koolhaas tries to embrace complexity and chaos rather than the order and

\textsuperscript{166} Fran Spielman, “$120 Million Gift to IIT,” \textit{Chicago Sun-Times}, November 22, 1996.
space driven minimalism of Mies. Critics, though, charged him with “architectural vandalism.” IIT professor and architect John Vinci led the charge against Koolhaas, writing in May 2000 to the Chicago Tribune, noting that the building was eligible for landmark status, and questioning whether the powers that be at IIT were so “blinded by the glamour of hiring outside celebrity architects that we accept [their] novel ideas at the expense of diluting the profound architectural contributions made by a towering figure of our time and city?”

Koolhaas, on his part, mounted a defense of his building, and his philosophy that accused the strict preservationists of being relative latecomers who had only come to preserve the buildings and the campus after years of neglect. Indeed, more than thirty different changes had been made to the original Miesian commons since its construction, in addition to its ratty and tired interior. Furthermore, the Mies defenders did not seem to recognize the irony of attacking a building for not respecting its context, while at the same time defending a building representative of a group of buildings that lack any regard for context. In his essay “Miestakes,” Koolhaas expands upon how leaving buildings static instead of adapting them can ultimately neuter them. “A preference for the embalmed over the authentic has fueled American culture in the 1990s,” he said. “Instead of using the Commons in a robust way, our critics proposed turning it into a ‘visitor’s center’ to enshrine its (retroactive) dignity.”\(^\text{168}\) Preservation, in his mind, meant keeping the vitality of the building, rather than a building that is being kept on life support as a museum piece, to be stared at and appreciated. Koolhaas portrayed himself as the true defender of Mies,

noting that when Mies’s famed Barcelona Pavilion was rebuilt in the mid-1980s, “its aura was killed” due to the building’s resurrection from myth status and its ensuing commercialization with a souvenir stand. In Chicago preservation needed to be active, and the “Miesians” were wasting time on a largely neglected building that no one had really given much thought to for decades.

The preservationists ultimately lost, as their demands to distance the Commons from the new buildings were not met when the state preservation agency decided that Koolhaas’s plan to build directly atop Mies’s building was sufficient. The new student center was opened without incident (Figure 43). Reviews ranged from incredibly positive to ones more dismissive of the style of Koolhaas in general, plus criticism due to reportedly poor workmanship and material quality. The renovation of some of the most prominent Mies buildings on campus also continued apace. And in a notable turnabout from its stance on the dubious landmark status of UIC back in 1993, the Sun-Times used the occasion to lament the lack of protection for Chicago’s modern architecture, a priority that had been a “mixed bag” in the preceding decade. Saying that not restoring the buildings the their original condition would be “a disservice to the architect—and to architecture,” the article noted that the renewed interest in modernism made the cause of renovating Crown Hall—home of the Architecture Department and widely considered as one of Mies’ finest works—as important as ever.  

According to all involved, IIT needed to be saved, even from others who were apparently trying to save it in the wrong way.

It goes without saying that Mies is one of the twentieth century’s seminal architects, and the IIT campus is a landmark in Chicago, as it is to university architecture.

architecture and campus planning. All of the preceding aside, without its royal architectural pedigree, the campus may have suffered the same fate as UIC. After all, IIT is a school that got ranked #11 among “Ugliest Campuses” in The Princeton Review’s 2009 rankings of its best 368 colleges (plus a #5 on “Town-Gown Relations are Strained,” among other less-than-rewarding categories IIT was placed in.) Mies is famous for coining the phrase “Less is more.” It seems as if today’s college students would disagree. It would seem as if modern architecture, even constructed by the greats, has a hard time translating to the modern student. If the public needs a fair amount of convincing as to the merits of IIT, its case does not bode well for UIC, or for any other modernist-derived campus that could soon face revision at the whims of public taste.

**Higher Education in the City: A Complex Relationship**

Modern ideas on campus planning, especially in the case of larger universities, see campuses less as self-contained academic entities, and more as large university districts with space for ever-expanding research facilities, housing needs, and retail and social attractions for students and those in the neighborhood. The campus plan is increasingly being integrated into the city’s plan, and as Wim Wiewel and David Perry note, it’s now common “for city-wide planning, design, and development goals to become key elements of university redevelopment plans.”\(^{170}\) Universities are also mixed-use developers, creating retail space for students and residents, constructing

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\(^{170}\) Wim Wiewel and David C. Perry, “From Campus to City: The University as Developer” in *The University as Urban Developer: Case Studies and Analysis*, David C. Perry and Wim Wiewel, eds. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 9.
new residences not just for students, but for the market, and creating office space for those whose practices would benefit from proximity to the university.

Perhaps most importantly, universities now have to take at least some part of community opinion into account, as they try to improve their surroundings, and as growing players in city politics, not rub any important group the wrong way. This is in part a response to initially hostile reaction from universities towards their communities when their surrounding neighborhoods started to decline in the fifties and sixties. This reached its nadir with the 1968 confrontation between Columbia University and the surrounding Morningside Heights neighborhood. In the midst of rising faculty and student unrest, the university administration decided to build a new gym, on what was previously a public park. Tired of never being consulted on expansion plans, residents staged rallies and protests until tensions came to a head in the spring with a massive student strike, combining student anger over the gym with anti-Vietnam War protests.

Throughout all this, the Columbia administration consistently retrenched when confronted with requests for further outside input. In the years following, many top faculty of all ideological stripes left, and the university became less appealing to students.\textsuperscript{171} The resulting lesson eventually learned was that the university rises and falls with the health of its neighborhood. To seal off the university from the neighborhood around it did nothing to improve its surroundings. Not only is a \textit{de facto} prison a sub-optimal working environment, it also serves to only engender resentment within the surrounding community. With this, university infrastructure

\textsuperscript{171} Maurice R. Berube, \textit{The Urban University in America} (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 55.
investment was no longer limited to merely the expansion and preservation of the
physical plant. One of the most successful plans was developed at the University of
Pennsylvania, a wide-ranging plan know as the West Philadelphia Initiative was
created in the mid-1990s in response to a crime wave in the surrounding area, as well
as a need to rectify the university's past urban planning mistakes which led to the
area’s decline. The plan included improving the area’s safety, housing stock, and
retail options, in addition to encouraging outside investment and improving local
public schools. 172 On their parts, universities usually want to be surrounded by
people and institutions sympathetic to their interests. Reciprocally “many of the
activities generated by the university are of great interest to the people of the
community,” wrote Martin Klotsche. “An attractive environment, therefore, will
encourage non-university people to move into the area to continue their education, to
find constructive avenues for their leisure, and to enjoy association with academic
people.”173 A modicum of control over the surroundings is important to most large
institutions. At urban universities, though, the decline of many of their surrounding
neighborhoods from mid-century has led to contentious battles between universities
seeking better environments and their existing, usually largely minority,
neighborhoods.

University expansion in the past fifty years has been the frequent target of
“NIMBYism” (Not In My Back Yard), as the neighbors become increasingly wary of
the traffic, constant construction and expansion, and misbehavior of college kids that

172 Judith Rodin, The University and Urban Revival (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,
2007), 22.
173 J. Martin Klotsche, The Urban University and the Future of Our Cities (New York: Harper and
Row, 1966), 70
the university brings with it. In recent years, this has led to either partnership between the university and its community to see what plans of expansion work best for both groups, or, in the case of schools with wealthier neighbors, residents often try to wield their more ample political power or litigation skills in order to hamper the university's expansion. One example of this happened at Georgetown University in 1991, where, in response to protests from Georgetown residents over a new heating plant, university administrators countered that the neighbors would benefit, as the cost savings from the plant would enable the university to take care of another longstanding complaint, and house all students on campus, alleviating neighbors’ concerns about sharing streets with rowdy students.174 The varying array of outside factors today make the imposition of a university or its major projects far more difficult than when UIC was originally constructed.

The university as agent of renewal in its surrounding neighborhood had precedent in Chicago. In the 1950s, the University of Chicago’s district, Hyde Park, was in the midst of enduring the same flight of white families to the suburbs that was affecting the entire South Side. The influx of black residents sparked both the existing residents, as well as the university, to created groups dedicated to the preservation of the area. Julian Levi, director of the university’s South East Chicago Commission, said at the time that a university “must be a community of scholars, not a collection of scholarly commuters.”175 His final plan for Hyde Park [date?] called for demolishing 20 percent of the buildings in the neighborhood, with some replaced with new housing, and some with open space. When poorer residents called for the inclusion of

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175 Klotsche, The Urban University, 69.
at least a modicum of public housing, Levi would not budge, saying it was “something harmful to the neighborhood which the people did not want anyway.”\textsuperscript{176}

The university, allied with Mayor Daley, managed to effectively eliminate what opposition existed, mainly from the NAACP (whose machine-friendly administration quashed the internal dissent) and the local Archdiocese (which didn’t spend much political capital on the issue and ended up ignored by the mayor).\textsuperscript{177} For its backers, the plan was a success, as the neighborhood became whiter and richer. A disturbing precedent, though, was established for the next few decades. Section 112 of the Housing Act of 1949, passed in 1959, in essence let universities write off the cost difference between paying for pre-cleared land and buying land that needed to be cleared and developed. This made expanding campuses far easier, and far cheaper. In six years after this change, 77 new urban renewal projects were started, and another 200 were being proposed across the nation.\textsuperscript{178}

**UIC Moves Away From The Past**

UIC has been in varying states of conflict with its surrounding neighborhoods since it was announced. In recent years, though, those conflicts have had less to do with the location and design of the original campus, and more to do with the growing pains that an upwardly aspirational university has with neighbors. The physical growth of the East Campus is not just a natural progression of the growth of the university, but a possible response to the inflexibility of the center of the campus. It is also an endeavor on the part of the current university to make its own stamp on the

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid, 210-11.
\textsuperscript{178} Berube, *The Urban University in America*, 51.
campus and the neighborhood, in response to the indelibility of the original campus. By doing so, though, the university’s administration ran up against the persistent divide of town and gown that is the main hindrance to university expansion plans across the country, and demonstrated that moving away from the old was a philosophy not limited to the removal of the Forum.

Concurrent to UIC announcing that they would be changing the core of the campus, university administrators were looking outward. Beginning in 1993, the university planned to expand on Maxwell Street, a tenement filled corridor known for its street vendors, expansive flea market, and historic connection to Chicago blues, among other things (Figure 44). Despite the fact that its residents were largely poor, the neighborhood was vibrant, full of large storefronts and shops. The university was motivated by the “desire on campus to create a 24-hour neighborhood, where everyone doesn't leave at night.” By creating a new surrounding neighborhood, the university could create an effective way to shed the stigma of the commuter campus, and in addition would be able to sell prospective students on attractive physical landmarks, as well as dictate the composition of the surrounding neighborhood. The two sides—university and community—took stances reminiscent of the original siting plan, as the supporters called the neighborhood a “slum” and an “eyesore,” while the community advocates claimed that a withdrawal of city services and other actions on the part of UIC were “[doing] everything they can to make it worse.”179 The university, though, was well-connected, and with the city on its side, got the land it needed and the tenants out of the way.

Once the neighborhood’s residents were “dealt with,” so to speak, the university

179 Raymond Coffey, “UIC, City Created Maxwell St. ‘Mess,’” *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 20, 1993.
then ran up against local preservationists determined to save the buildings of the
Maxwell Street neighborhood from the new development envisioned by the
university’s plan. The university was actually no stranger to having historic
structures in the way of building plans. Jane Addams’ original Hull House was a
casualty of the original campus development, although a replica was built on-site to
house a museum. With the flea market gone to a new location, preservationist groups
sought to save what was left of the neighborhood. Maxwell Street had been rejected
as a historic neighborhood because it was said that the architectural integrity of the
buildings had been damaged. For its part, the university said that the increased
demands placed upon it by having to preserve additional structures would add $15
million it did not have to the cost of the project, killing it. The two sides engaged in
intermittent gentle sparring, with one preservationist telling UIC to “use the buildings
any way you want” but also to stay true to their original purposes by “keeping [the
street] full of retail…people…music…[and] the aroma of grilled onions.”¹⁸⁰ UIC
would usually respond with bureaucratic statements noting that they appreciated the
concerns of the community and would take them into account. The university
emerged the winner in this case as well, when the Maxwell Street Coalition lost its
final bid to the National Register of Historic Places to have the area listed as a historic
district. UIC, on its part, agreed to save eight buildings east of Halstead Street, and
save thirteen facades on Maxwell, Roosevelt and Halstead Streets.¹⁸¹ The University
Village area, still under construction, is now home to thousands of students (although
the campus remains commuter-oriented: only 3,800 students lived on campus at the

¹⁸¹ Curtis Lawrence, “Coalition Loses Battle to Preserve Maxwell St.,” Chicago Sun-Times, August 26,
2000.
beginning of the 2007-2008 school year.)\textsuperscript{182} The neighborhood now also plays host to a multitude of retail options.

**Conclusion**

The decline of modern architecture was rather precipitous; the style, which was broadly popular among architects as late as the 1970s, had fallen into near-complete disrepute with the public by the end of the next decade, with the architectural community divided over their retrospective evaluations of the new campus. Universities, on their parts, had to become much more responsive to the needs and wishes of not just the members of their own campus community, but the surrounding communities as well. The decline of modern architecture on campus also meant a return, in many quarters, to more “traditional” architecture, as there revived respect and appreciation for the more historically distant past styles. The architecture of the recent past, on the other hand, would be left on its own. Modernism’s indifference towards the buildings that had preceded it was now reflected in the public’s indifference for its existence.

Conclusion

It is difficult to truly render a final verdict on whether the UIC campus should ultimately be judged as a failure. By what standards should it be judged? On the one hand, the walkways and forum, the defining features of the campus ultimately proved to be so harmful to the campus environment and reviled by the regular users that the university felt that the best course of action was to remove them. Yet, as a campus plan, as an example of the architecture of its time, the campus was meticulously thought out, with an incredibly comprehensive central plan. Some of the blame, if blame is to be assigned, needs to go to the university, whose poor maintenance made what was already turning into a problematic situation much, much worse. The institution also deserves blame for not giving more than a token look at the original architect’s plans for refurbishing his campus. Similarly, whatever criticisms of the buildings delivered by the masses did not end up tarnishing the legacy of Walter Netsch, who in his old age was as active as ever intellectually and his work in the community appreciated by it. Foisting culpability on him, however, is a complicated issue. On his part, he tried to design the campus for a maximum of user-friendliness and future adaptability when he originally created the design. He used the finest materials available to him within the budget, materials which were in style at the time. The circulation plan, and the plans for the Forum all were grounded in a deep logic. There was nothing slapdash or thrown together about it. There was no chance of him being able to anticipate the change in direction, both in the university’s mission, or the number of students. In addition, when it became apparent that the
design was an unsuccessful one, he offered to remodel it in a manner more amenable to the user. Still, his original campus contained quite a few flaws that cannot be put at the feet of the university, including the expectation that the Forum would be oft-used in a climate that is cold for much of the academic year, or that the non-intuitive floor plan of many Field Theory buildings would be a problem. There should have been more than an assumption of student and faculty needs, something Daniel Coffey would remedy later on by seeking extensive public comment. The university meeting its projected enrollment goals might have meant enough foot traffic to make the walkways a more viable option, and for the university to subsequently design the interiors of buildings to adapt to them. Similarly, were the campus well-maintained throughout the course of its existence, the trustees might have had less problems to complain about, and maintaining the campus in its original form could have been a more palatable option. None of the things can be stated as a certainty. But having some of these factors come to bear could have helped the original design stand up to shifting public tastes.

The idea of the traditional, more pastoral college has a firm hold on our minds. Yet this kind of campus is unsuited to the urban environment. “A campus in the Jeffersonian tradition, with large open spaces, elm-lined malls, and ivy-clad buildings, has little relevancy in most urban situations,” wrote J. Martin Klotsche.\footnote{Klotsche, The Urban University, 77.} At the same time, though, many urban universities, without large amounts of land in their control, and thus attempts to cordon off courtyards between buildings, try their best to achieve a facsimile of that ideal. Even a university as thoroughly woven into its surrounding urban fabric as New York University has Washington Park nearby to
function as the campus’s de facto lawn. Maurice Berube, on his part, argues that the American literary and folk tradition is an essentially anti-urban one, leading to the view of college as a “leisurely Socratic stroll in a small town, nestled with ivy and surrounded by elms, and isolated from the citizens.”\textsuperscript{184} The idea of the modern colleges; that is, the college complex governed by modernist principles, seems to have gone out the window with the demise of modern architecture itself. Postmodern buildings either seem intent on making a retrospective statement with their architecture, or blending into the campus’s dominant design ethos, which would seem to perpetuate the Georgian, Gothic, and Beaux-Arts styles.

The needs of students also changed, both on UIC's campus, and among students across the country. The original UIC campus was a commuter school, built for mostly first-generation college students from across the Chicago area, which would have otherwise not been able to afford a decent four-year education. That, combined with the contrast with their previous surroundings at Navy Pier, had made the new campus seem especially welcoming to the new students of 1965. Interestingly enough, Netsch, before settling on his original plan, conceived of a more temporary campus:

\begin{quote}
It was my concept that we should build phase one of UIC on what is the big parking lot primarily to the west of campus, and that we should find out what people want, and then build the permanent campus in
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{184} Berube, \textit{The Urban University in America}, 46.
phase two. That would also allow us to get close to the community in doing something, but it didn’t work.\(^{185}\)

He noted that such a strategy would have been an “expensive intellectual process.” Yet it shows a knowledge on his part that everything that he was endeavoring to do would not work, would not go exactly according to plan. In terms of radicalism, the concept is far more pathbreaking than the campus he originally came up with. He also noted, though, that in the case of the Japanese temple that was the inspiration for this concept, the temple is torn down every twenty years. Aside from the obvious cost and space impediments that would prevent a university from doing this, the constant change would lend the buildings of the institution a more fleeting nature, the architecture always up to date, perpetually breaking its bonds with the past.

Shortly after the campus opened, its student tour guides agreed that the eventual nickname of the new student center would be the “Country Club.”\(^{186}\) Of course, no student today would come close to calling it a country club, especially compared to facilities at some other schools. This is in large part due to the ongoing construction arms race among universities in America. Nearly every college campus has embarked on at least one major facilities improvement in the past decade or so. In a 2004 article on the campus building boom, *Architectural Record* noted that

> private donors like to give money for buildings, so elite universities are adding onto professional schools, creating high-tech laboratories and renovating historic structures. Schools that do not have the luxury

\(^{185}\) Walter Netsch, Interview with Betty J. Blum.

of turning applicants away are building well-equipped dormitories and accommodating student centers to make themselves more attractive than their competitors.\(^{187}\)

The acceleration in giving at the nation’s top schools has driven them to build more, and in response, the less-endowed public schools must build what they can to keep pace with the top schools, as well as peer public universities. Every campus, especially one whose administrators aspire to take its profile above its current level, must be able to take on large construction projects. UIC, in particular, is at a fundraising disadvantage as a new public university without a history of large private gifts (which made the low cost of the renovation all the more beneficial). In this context Coffey’s renovation of 1996 was as much to make the campus more functional on the inside as it was to make it more attractive from the outside. James J. Krohe pondered the questions raised by the university in letting the faculty and student body guide the architectural decisions:

Does the university have a responsibility to preserve Netsch’s work until such time as an historically informed judgment can be formed on it? What if doing so contravenes the wishes—however foolish or ill-informed—of the students who use it or the taxpayers (acting through elected trustees) who are paying for it? Thus, can an architecture that

was meant to expand democracy...be the occasion of some very undemocratic decisions?\textsuperscript{188}

There have been countless campaigns over the years to save buildings, districts, places, from the wrecking ball of an ignorant developer or a city concerned with the forward motion of progress. UIC itself ironically emerged from a similar situation. It would have been good if the original campus was able to be kept in as complete a form as possible. Architectural history, just like all history, needs to be kept and documented, in forms greater than mere photographs. The original design of the sixties was the largest, most densely packed urban campus of its day. It provided, and still does to a degree, a glimpse into where we as a society thought higher education was headed during a period when it had reached a peak of enrollment, funding, and influence not known even twenty years before. With all of that in mind, the university cannot be blamed for making the decision it did. The architecture of the campus was a liability, in terms of appearance, function, and vulnerability to crime. And of course, its primary users, when surveyed, had no particular affection for it. Given that the university couldn’t, as sometimes happens in preservation cases, get up and move to greener pastures so that the existing site could be repurposed, there was little choice for the administrators but to ameliorate the problem, and they chose tearing down the Forum as their route.

During construction for his IIT student center, Rem Koolhaas wrote that Mies’s campus was “a masterpiece invisible to the contemporary eye...unnoticeable without

\textsuperscript{188} Krohe, “Altered Visions,” 1993.
If that was the case for IIT, it probably applies even more so to UIC. The non-architects who use the campus must have it explained to them, a situation that eventually becomes untenable for a place always trying to attract new members of its community. When Koolhaas was building his student center at IIT, he claimed he won by trying to build for the students, making the main passages through the site match those made by the students when it was an empty site. A mostly negative review of the IIT Student Center in *Architecture* decried the “deliberately crass, commercial enterprise, intended to attract students to a campus that once ranked the ugliest in a nationwide poll,” and said the campus center “has more in common with casinos and shopping malls than it does with Mies.” Architect and student, for the most part, fundamentally differ in their appreciations of buildings; the architect appreciates the building on a much deeper and contextual level, as would anyone who creates. The campus, though, is the domain of the student, faculty, and staff, whose focus is on ease, and what they consider to be beautiful is of a more basic, and subjective, issue, rarely if ever connected with theory.

In the book *Suburban Nation*, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck’s seminal tract on the failures of community development in the post-World War II United States, the authors point to the “arrogance” of modern architects in thinking they could cure the ills of a community with a well-designed building, or series of buildings. They note that “Inspired by the unrealized utopias of the Enlightenment, early modern architects were convinced that they possessed the

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190 Ned Cramer, “‘Tunnel of Love: Rem Koolhaas's Student Center at the Illinois Institute of Technology Shows Admiration for the University's Patron Saint, Mies van der Rohe, but no Respect.” *Architecture* 92 (December 2003), 102.
means for solving society’s problems” and that they created “new forms of buildings and cities that they believed would transform their inhabitants into the most benevolent of creatures.”\textsuperscript{191} Their message was clear: the era of buildings as experiments in social engineering was over. And while the social experimentation of the UIC campus was not as drastic or disastrous as that happening at the city’s housing projects, it was indeed premised on the idea that radical change was needed in order to take the university into the future.

The authors also note that the public “[does] not appreciate or trust modern architecture.”\textsuperscript{192} Modernism is foreign to the common observer not only due to its being a non-traditional style, but also because it is a style that is now completely unfamiliar in the day-to-day lives of most Americans, especially ones who live and work in the suburbs, among largely bland buildings that largely lack a clearly modernist ideology, unlike those that use older architectural cues to give the image of an idealized past. Say the authors:

\begin{quote}
Somehow, for the perspective of the schools and the magazines, the default setting for unrestricted architecture appears to be modernism. If only this were the case! The default setting for architecture in America is not modernism but vulgarity. To confirm this assertion, the architecture magazines need only look at the advertisements that fill the pages between the masterpieces they display.\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid, 210.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid, 211.
There is, quite simply, an irreconcilable difference between the public and the architectural community, even when, in Netsch’s case, the designer is trying to address all the presumed needs of the community far into the future. When Netsch decried the redesign of his campus as a “suburban mall revision,” he was correct. Users wanted a campus that worked as well as the malls they frequent do, something designed with the needs and inputs of the consumer, something based on what has worked, rather than what is presumed to work but has not been proven to. Does this democratization of architecture amount to its ultimate decline? As long as governments, large corporations, private patrons, and any other groups looking to make a statement with a building still exists, the answer is no. Those who advocate for the preservation of buildings from the mid-twentieth century, though, will have to accept that the sheer unpopularity of the rough concrete forms of Brutalism in the contemporary United States is something that will not change overnight. And in the case of the institution that has to deal with the building(s) on a day to day basis, appeals to preservationist sentiment may fall on deaf ears. As Don Marshall, head of the UIC Department of English, said in 1992, “I don't feel any loyalty to an idea that just hasn't proved itself in actual human practice.”

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