

The politics of campus planning: How UT architecture restricts activism

"From the earliest colleges of the colonial era to the land-grant universities of the frontier, the American campus has been a simulated city that is distinctly unlike European models. Loose arrangements of freestanding buildings meld with the landscape to suggest an almost urban space ... On campus one has a veiled sense of being in some kind of primitive urban laboratory..."

- Michael Dennis, *Court and Garden*

By Mark Macek

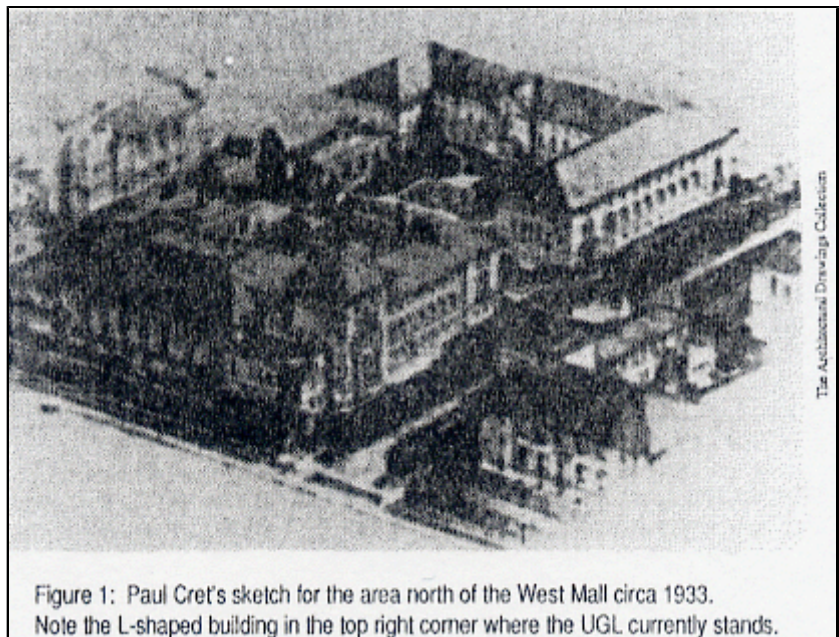
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[Polemicist](#)

Architects since Thomas Jefferson, who designed the campus of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, have believed that the physical beauty of a campus symbolized the democratic aspirations of the work going on there. Yet the activities which take place inside American universities are not necessarily democratic. The resulting environment is a contrived space, a mini-city which is meticulously controlled by its designers so that it is more (or less) conducive to the social, cultural, and political activities of its users.

The University of Texas at Austin hired Paul Cret of Philadelphia as Consulting Architect in March 1930, and the comprehensive plan he submitted in 1933 was the important influence on the character of the campus for thirty years. Space such as the South Mall and West Mall and buildings such as Goldsmith (Architecture), the Texas Union, Hogg Auditorium, and the Main Building are examples of Cret's best work. He felt that the character of the U.T. campus should be humane and should receive "an architectural treatment which designates it as the repository of human knowledge."

Cret's master plan included quadrangles (large, open spaces surrounded by buildings), malls (long spaces along directional axes), and informal connecting paths between them. Figure 1 shows his sketch for the area north of the West Mall, including an L-shaped building on the top right where the Undergraduate Library was eventually built. Cret developed this plan from his strong ideals about the nature of education and place, including the avoidance of "the monotony and institutional character inherent in the repetition of similar units." But Cret's influence was supplanted and undermined by the administration's expansion goals in the early 1960s.



Expansion was probably inevitable for state universities after the baby boom. Between 1958 and 1973 the student population at

U.T. doubled from 20,000 to 40,000. Within the same fifteen year period the UGL, Calhoun, the West Mall Office, the HRC, East Mall Computation, Burdine, Communications, Student Publications, Business Administration, the Huntington Art Gallery, the Ex-Students' Association, Belmont and the Upper Deck, RLM, Engineering Science, Patterson Labs, Geology, the LBJ Library, Richardson Hall, and Jester Center were all completed and occupied. And the Graduate School of Business, extensions to the Gregory Gym and Law School, Disch-Falk Field, Education, and the U.T. Press (the first U.T. building east of I-35) were about to be constructed.

The growth of the U.T. campus indicated a shift in curriculum away from the liberal arts education towards professional and prestigious training. Its changing character no longer reflected Cret's ideals. A recruitment pamphlet from 1958 touted U.T. research in biochemical and defense fields; flat-topped youth in the Research Lab were proudly developing guided missile systems.

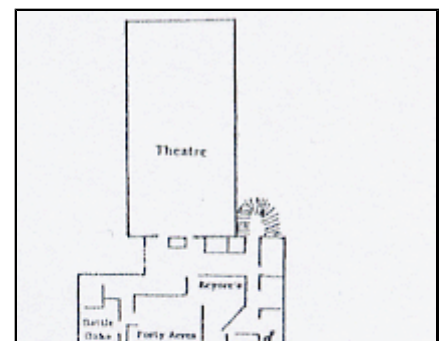
Early Maneuvers

On the morning of Monday, October 2, 1969, about 50 students and non-students (some elderly) decided that U.T.'s campus growth policy required direct participatory response. They climbed into the branches of a stand of pecan and elm trees on Waller Creek slated for destruction to make room for equipment needed to build the new Upper Deck to Memorial Stadium. Then-Chairman of the U.T. Board of Regents Frank C. Erwin attended the affair to guarantee that the protestors would not delay construction. Erwin ordered the bulldozers to push over the trees with the people still in them. He declared, "Arrest all the people you have to. Once the trees are down they won't have anything to protest." To Erwin's applause, the machines pushed and the protestors were forced to jump down to the ground for safety. Police arrested 27 on the scene.

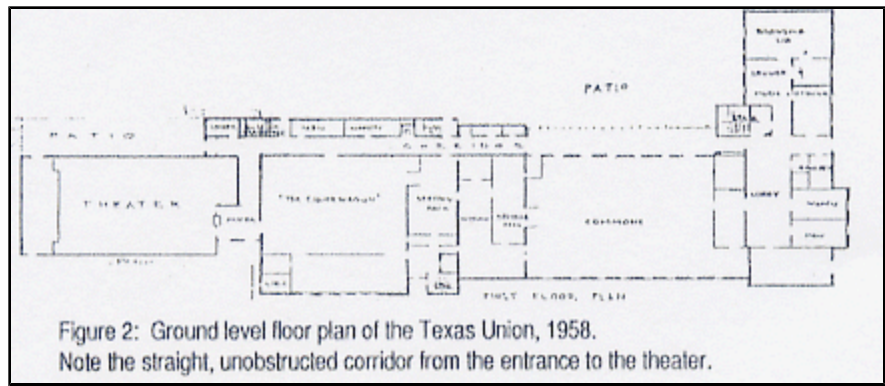
Most of the students participating in the tree-sitting were from the School of Architecture and were joined in the trees by their dean, Alan Taniguchi, in open defiance of Erwin's orders. Taniguchi declared that "Waller Creek is characteristic of Austin's topography and should be retained as it is." For their outspoken opposition to the Regents' plans, Taniguchi and the Architecture students and faculty were rewarded for years thereafter with stiff bureaucratic pressure, including cut-backs in office supplies. While they "recycled paper clips," Erwin shelved plans for the new Architecture building, located near the Nursing School, a project nearly ready to be constructed. Taniguchi resigned in 1972, and the School of Architecture remained housed in the most poorly maintained buildings on campus.

Panopticism and the Texas Union

Students took direct issue with U.T. physical planning on other occasions, as well. In 1968 and 1970, there were organized boycotts of the Texas Union food services in support of the United Farm Workers, who were denied labor rights by grape growers and, later, lettuce growers. The boycotts devastated the sales of all food on campus, forcing the Texas Union to stop serving those products until the demands of the migrant workers were met. (The Texas Union board of directors recently voted to boycott California table grapes in support of the current boycott.)



On November 10, 1969, another event severely disrupted normal activities at the Union. The arrangement of spaces on the Union ground floor was much different then, as demonstrated by comparing the floor plans (see Figures 2 and 3). The dining areas were large, open rooms, brightly lit and noisy. One was called the Commons, but the most popular and "grungy" by far was the Chuck Wagon, located nearest to the Union Theatre and frequented by a lively combination of students, non-students, lolligaggers, and agitators. Some of the most vital discussions taking place in the University took place at the Chuck Wagon; it was a leftover space in the campus master plan.



On that November day, Frank Erwin called in the Austin Police Department and the Texas Department of Public Safety to the Chuck Wagon to arrest a runaway teenage girl named Sunshine, who had been seen there. Tables were overturned, mace was sprayed, windows were shattered, and people ran, especially out of the door by the Theater, to escape arrest. Police arrested eight persons - five students - on the scene, and later arrested 22 more.

The Regents retaliated swiftly and harshly. The Union Board of Directors voted to keep the Chuck Wagon open to all people, including non-students. But, in a telephone conference on the weekend of November 14, the Regents reversed the Board's decision. They declared their authority to "modify each such action by the Union Board" and based the prohibitions on inadequate guard against drug use and "public hygiene problems." This decision marked the Regents' first attempt to segregate the non-student and student populations on campus. On this occasion, a suit was filed against the Regents for violating the Texas Open Meetings Act but was soon dropped due to the lack of cooperation from County Attorney Ned Granger. Besides, Erwin claimed, it was not a meeting but a "consultation."

Further prohibitions followed. In December, the Regents limited the power of the Student Attorney such that she or he could no longer defend any student or group with alleged offenses against the University. Specifically, Student Attorney Jim Boyle had represented Gay Liberation, a group requesting status as a registered student organization. Regent Joe Kilgore defending the decision: "Well, Boyle put himself in a precarious situation by defending homosexuals."

In February, 1970, the Texas House Higher Education Committee studied a bill on Campus Disrupters. If found guilty of disruption by a one-person hearing, a student could be permanently ineligible for state loan or scholarship and suspended from campus for one year, under this proposed law. The Regents also passed a rule, that summer, prohibiting non-students from participating at the meetings of listed student groups, although the rule was heavily protested and later dropped.

These actions parallel certain repressive regulations the Regents make today, such as the Regents' April 1990 amendment to the disciplinary code. The Regents have declared it unlawful for any person on U.T. System property to refuse to identify her or himself to a representative of the System, punishable as a misdemeanor crime by a fine of \$200. Between the terms of Chancellor Hans Mark and Chairman Frank Erwin there has been a tremendous continuity.

But legal rhetoric couldn't control student activities, and the Regents knew this. In 1972, photo I.D. cards were issued to all students. The rationale for an I.D. was that it demonstrated that a student had paid the "blanket tax," now called the athletic fee for discount ticket prices. In a larger sense, the photo

I.D. served as a technique for segregating non-students from students, a new, institutionalized social distinction that did not exist before. It turned a student into a Social Security number, a person into an object, in ways that no mere library card could do.

Other physical controls followed. The Faculty Senate committee appointed to study the Chuck Wagon riot concluded in its March 1970 report that the lack of coordination between the Union Board and local police had "contributed to the violence of the afternoon." The Regents, Erwin especially, must have found this language horrible weak. The best solution, in their terms, would be to rebuild the Union so that any variety of student congregation would be impossible. The renovation of the Texas Union began in October 1974 under the guidance of Jessen Associates, architects. Anken Construction was the builder, and by the time the Union reopened in March 1977, the total cost came to \$5.7 million.

Why the redesign? Director Shirley Bird Perry pleaded the need for better ventilation and circulation. The odors from the food service had been notorious and the expanded food line received a new waste system and covered loading dock. Three new doors were built to the West Mall and to UGL Room 21. Toilets, elevators, TV monitors, a sweet shop, copy center, and elevated dance floor were all new additions. The design featured "flexibility and multiplicity" by including 19 more meeting rooms which could be opened or closed down wing-by-wing as needed. The Union was also "designed to control liquor services and student crime," noted Ms. Perry, citing some \$7,000 in stolen dishes.

This last explanation seemed most likely to Fred Phillips, doctoral student and guest columnist in *The Daily Texan* in March 1981. His version, though, was somewhat larger in scope: "The main reason for most of the alterations was security, crowd control, and repression." The student crafts and carpentry area was eliminated. Comparing the floor plans in Figures 2 & 3, we see just how much the new Forty Acres Dining Room was restricted in size from the Chuck Wagon. Eeyore's, the Copy Center, Battle Oaks Room, and Pearce Hall all chop into the former room space. Also, glass partitions, heavy lockable doors, and complex passageways which regulate circulation all surround the new room.

Michel Foucault used the term "panopticism" to describe the micro-politics of institutional power over human bodies. In the 18th century, the architect Jeremy Bentham invented the Panopticon, the most efficient prison ever, featuring an arrangement of cells in a huge circular plan. In the center of the open circle stood a guard tower with views of every prisoner in every cell. In a current sense, panopticism refers to all the social sciences - psychiatry, criminology, pedagogy, and anthropology, to name a few - which provide technical information on the body to the legal and political apparatus.

Observe the minute technologies of control at work in the Union dining areas, such as the dim lighting which discourages studying, the revolving doors which let people in but not out, and the fixed or crowded furniture that cannot be rearranged for groups. The TV monitors in the halls do more than display the day's events; they call attention to themselves as omni-present signs of the Board's vision. No one would want to gather in rooms like these, and no one does. Like the panopticon, the new layout of the Union is the diagram of a space which surveys and polices itself.

The Union patio was similarly amended. Formerly a notorious location for spontaneous colloquia, Figure 4, the patio was reduced in size by the new skylit dining area and the addition of Room 21 to the UGL, Figure 5. These new constructions may have served legitimate needs, but the resultant space demonstrates that student need could be dovetailed to administrative control. The new auditorium, Room 21, could have been located anywhere on campus. Access to the patio is through either of two narrow openings between buildings. In Paul Cret's plans, Figure 1, this space was generous and clearly accessible, by a



minor axis, to the West Mall and on through past the Architecture building. Such a simple, straightforward pattern of motion is no longer the current configuration.

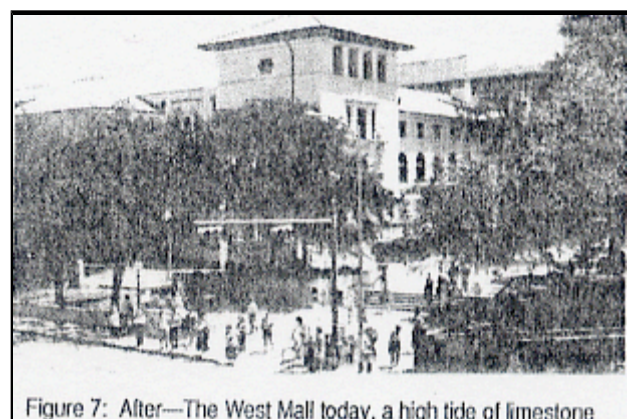
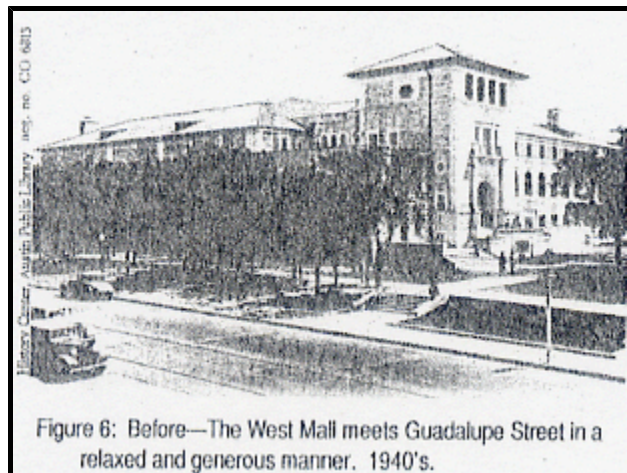
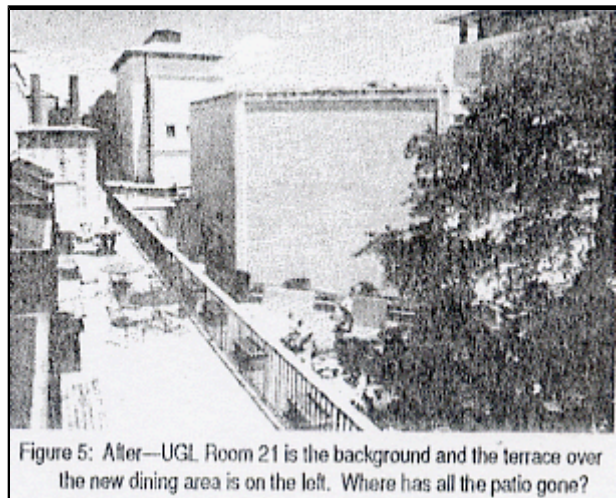
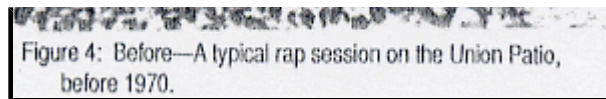
Divide and Conquer

By far the largest site of conflict over control of student activities was the exterior space of the campus. On Monday, May 4, 1970, students called for a boycott of classes and congregated in front of the Main Building to protest the U.S. involvement in Cambodia, the trial of Black Panther Bobby Seale, and the arrest of ten anti-R.O.T.C. demonstrators. Hundreds of people spent the night. That day four students were killed by police on the campus of Kent State. On May 5th, the crowd grew to 3,000 demonstrators, and 5,000 the next day. On Friday, May 8th, 20,000 protestors gathered in front of the Tower, see back page, and peacefully marched to the Texas Capitol. The largest demonstration in U.T. history, it illustrates the scale with which students could exercise power over their environment.

The character of the west campus was thoroughly different at the time. Craftspeople sold their products up and down the sidewalk on Guadalupe Street. The West Mall was mostly grass with low informal sidewalks, like Harvard. There were no trees in front of the UGL, so the whole mall was more spacially open. People ate, relaxed, and smoked pot on the lawn. The Regents must have been sickened by all of the skin, hair, and happiness on display in the most public gateway to the UT campus. Their first alteration to that environment was ominous.

In June 1971, the University built perimeter walls along Guadalupe St. from 24th St. to 21st St. and down 21st St. past the Littlefield Fountain, encasing "virtually the entire western perimeter of the campus," according to the *Austin American-Statesman*, see figure 7. The double limestone walls contained trees and bushes between them, and they separated two sidewalks, one at street level and one above. The perimeter walls were designed by John C. Robinson and built by J.C. Evans Construction for a cost of \$550,000.

Reasons for the project included "facilitating traffic flow," "preventing soil erosion," and "beautification." But compared with the original



arrangement in Figure 6, none of these rationales make sense. This project was the environmental counterpart of the photo I.D.'s, a physical segregation of student and non-student populations, a consciously-designed barrier to circulation on to, or out of, the campus.

and concrete.

Like the new patio to the Texas Union, the walls create funnel-shaped passageways from which crowds must exit. In the event of an uprising like the Chuck Wagon's, people running to escape arrest would be forced through these narrows exits and easily apprehended. This case might seem extreme, but the consistent repetition of this funnel-like passage in all of the outdoor space of the U.T. campus is a formal indicator of the walls' defensive use as riot control.

In 1975, such walls were also constructed on 26th St. from Whitis to Guadalupe Sts., then up Guadalupe to 27th St. for a cost of \$335,000. Later walls run down Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd from the Education Building to Red River St. then up to the LBJ Library complex, nearly completing the encasement of campus. In one instance, State Representative Senfronia Thompson blocked the building of perimeter barriers proposed in 1974 on Guadalupe between 25th and 26th Sts. - thus demonstrating that the walls are not necessary and that organized opposition can affect the pattern of campus growth.

Meanwhile on the West Mall, the only method available to the administration to disperse gathering crowds was to turn on the sprinkler system, and this could be more fun than trouble if the protestors were prepared. During the summer of 1973, construction began on the West Mall "renovation" by Stokes Construction and James E. Keeler, Landscape Architect, to the tune of \$280,000. It involved removing the existing grassy areas and replacing them with limestone planter boxes around the trees and a paved court and fountain in front of the Union. Eight trees were planted in the center, raised boxes. The paved area of the mall increased over 50%, and a later Student Senate resolution dubbed the project the Frank C. Erwin Memorial Highway.

The administration argued that the renovation was "necessary to relieve the congested flow of students" and to "beautify the area." The project, while under construction, drew opposition from faculty, students, three state representatives, and two Austin city council members. Complaints included the loss of grass, the wastefulness of a new fountain when other ones on campus had been turned off to save energy, and the 140% increase in student building use fees. Student Attorney Frank Ivy was unable to legally stop construction. The Ad Hoc Committee to Save the West Mall then submitted an alternative plan to make the inevitable changes more humane.

On July 31, the Regents agreed to some of the alternative proposals, such as retaining some grass in front of the Architecture building and filling the fountain with a flower bed. They would not agree to remove the fountain or to substitute grass for bushes in the planter boxes. In terms of the *appearance* of beauty, like flowers and grass, the Regents had made a compromise. In terms of the ways that the mall could be *used* by its dwellers, no compromise was acceptable.

The huge area covered by bushes and water has been rendered unusable; thus, over a third of the mall is *off limits* to students. The fountain in front of the Union was strategically located. Impromptu speakers, such as Jeff Nightbird, a founder of Students for a Democratic Society, would speak from the platform on the steps of the Union's main entrance. No listeners can meet there now with the fountain placed dead center in front of those stairs, Figure 8. The leftover space in the mall is easy to survey and manage. The limestone planter boxes have subdivided the large space and thereby subdivided the crowds, so that the West Mall, essentially, polices itself.

In Foucault's terms, these are tactical partitions that distribute bodies



in space and discipline their minutest movements. The University paved the mall, and later the rest of campus, in bumpy pebblestone concrete which makes barefoot walking painful. As Frank Erwin, Chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee at the time of the renovation, once said, "I don't fund anything I can't control."

Present and Accounted for

In honor of the First Amendment, the administration has designated certain areas "Free Speech Areas." One in front of the Drama Building on the East Mall was eradicated by the large circular driveway now in place. One in the Union patio was moved to the steps of the Main Building facing the West Mall. It currently operates between the hours of 12 and 1 P.M. It isn't necessary for the University to declare these areas "free speech zones" unless, in the space of this contrived city, U.S. federal law does not apply. The implication that public gathering is not allowed on the rest of the campus has been periodically enforced, up to and including the arrests of hundreds of students during the 1986 divestment rallies.

Architects and Power

The School of Architecture has changed a lot since the experimental, politicized days of Taniguchi. Current Dean Hal Box was appointed by his friend former U.T. President Loraine Rogers in 1978. The current curriculum emphasizes professional training so that its graduates will be marketable to the corporate architectural industry, not criticism and awareness of how those industries operate. While Taniguchi would stick his neck out to save some beautiful trees, Box refuses to raise any official objections to the proposed destruction of the Anna Hiss Gymnasium, a building of significant historical importance to the campus.

Using his close ties to the administration, Box secured funding for the renovation of Sutton and Goldsmith Halls, the latter costing \$16.3 million. Apparently, there was no formal dedication to mark Goldsmith's reopening for fear that the lavish materials used to do the renovation, completed at the same time as library hours and required courses were being cut, would inspire negative questions. Dean Box recently sold 8" x 12" pieces of the Goldsmith courtyard, a space that was forbidden to be altered during the renovation, for \$250-\$500 each in the form of clay tiles inscribed with the donor's name. As if the School didn't already have one the best endowments on campus.

Do architects have a moral obligation to criticize the ways in which their buildings are used politically, above and beyond the way they look? Not at this school. Likewise, this emphasis on the physical component of education - equipment and buildings - rather than the active component - teachers and students - is a tendency created by the University's financing structure. The Permanent Building Fund is endowed by land and oil revenues, and its astronomical wealth is controlled by the Regents. Funds for salaries and personnel, however, come from the state treasury and are doggedly controlled by the Legislative Budget Board and the Texas Higher Education Coordination Board. They deserve our wrath for the current degradation of undergraduate education even more than President Cunningham does.

In 1975, some progressive state representatives, including Sarah Weddington, proposed a constitutional amendment to place the legislature in control of the building fund and redistribute its wealth more accountably. They didn't stand a chance in hell.

Currently, Architecture graduate students are fighting for control of



Figure 9: Frank C. Erwin plants a tree near
Waller Creek. Fall 1971

the ways in which their newly-doubled tuition will be spent. Maybe they should take over Dean Box's office. If they did, maybe the undergraduates, next on the tuition hit list, would organize to demand the dismantling of the perimeter walls.