

A Conversation With Allan Temko

The following conversation was taped during a luncheon in the Alvarado Hotel dining room. The occasion was a recent visit to New Mexico by Allan Temko. Mr. Temko is presently conducting the Twentieth Century Fund's study of the industrialized urban environment at the University of California, Berkeley. He is also architectural and urban critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, and was formerly West Coast Editor of Architectural Forum.

Tom Popejoy, President of the University of New Mexico, had invited Mr. Temko to revisit the campus in order to continue their discussions concerning the University and its physical development, with particular reference to the future course of the Department of Architecture. The Department's chairman has resigned and a new chairman must now be chosen. But before a man can be hired, the whole purpose of the Architectural School as a teaching facility and as a possible important influence in relation to the University, to the City of Albuquerque, and to the State must be studied and defined.

The conversation recorded here concerned itself with some of these problems. The tape has been edited and somewhat re-arranged. It is the hope of the editors that it has lost none of its spontaneity, while it has gained in clarity.

John P. Conron

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Temko:

What are the main issues facing the State, the University, and the cities? Obviously, in a period of rapid growth, there are a number of vexing problems some of which are probably insoluble. However, New Mexico has the tremendous advantage of a small population that is still of manageable size. This growth can be guided, and, if the State is worth its salt, it will do this. I am told that the Governor is good. Some people say that he is the best in the history of the State.

Quinlan:

That's not saying much, though.

Temko:

The Department of Development is a laugh, isn't it? Isn't it simply a Chamber of Commerce sort of "Booster" operation? And the State Planning Office doesn't seem much better. What New Mexico needs is a combined agency for planning and development, di-

Present at the luncheon were:

Allan Temko, Center For Planning and Development Research, University of California, Berkeley, California

Harold Benson, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, University of New Mexico

Charles Quinlan, Lecturer, Department of Architecture, University of New Mexico

Dudley Wynn, Professor, Chairman, Homer Awards Program, University of New Mexico

Morris Freedman, Professor, Department of English, University of New Mexico

Mrs. Morris Freedman.

John P. Conron, Co-Editor, NEW MEXICO ARCHITECTURE

rected by a big man — a brilliant man. He should be a special assistant to the Governor, such as in Illinois, where they have a very good man. Several of the states have good people.

New Mexico should undertake a state development study for which it could get federal funds. The study should be ably done and it should lead to a state plan. This agency must have the full weight of the state government behind it, and it must also be ably staffed. You can't have incompetence there.

Conron:

The University is cooperating in a state resources inventory study which was started under the previous administration. I don't know the present status of this study, but certainly, the Architectural Department is not involved.

Shouldn't the University's Architectural Department be the experimenting and designing force upon which city and state planning departments rely — or at least, use and possibly be influenced by?

Temko:

I feel that the University is the appropriate place for these studies, and also, that it should uphold the idea of excellence for the rest of the community. The University of California is doing a large share of the California State Development Study.

I was shocked by the Albuquerque City Planning Commission operation. The Land Use Plan for 1985 is the crudest sort of traffic diagram and zoning. This is not planning. Real planning has to be a definition of human goals in this part of the world. You could have unanimity upon many issues — for example: clean air. You could, I think, get widespread support for an ordinance on advertising. You know, Yahoo advertising is offensive any place, but in New Mexico, it is so tragic.

Quinlan:

Here in the South Valley, we can't even convince people that they are about to drink their own sewage, and that they are contributing to the dust problem. Most of their roads are unpaved and they burn most of their own trash. Burning is against city ordinance, but they are not in the city.

Temko:

When I said that Greater Albuquerque is not governed, this is an example. There must be a resolution of the problem of metropolitan government and there must be a realization of the value of good planning.

Quinlan:

I have kept very close touch with planning here, particularly in the downtown area, and the attitude for planning has changed 180 degrees in the last three years. Businessmen now feel that they need it.

Temko:

Do they really? The place is a shambles. It is eviscerated by these parking lots. The only decent, civilized place in downtown Albuquerque is the Alvarado Hotel, and not just the courtyards, but the whole place — it is the only thing that one can say is on a grade with decent living in other cities.

Quinlan:

We are on the brink now of some very significant planning in the downtown area.

Temko:

This is certainly hopeful, and one must say that there are nice things. Some of the sub-divisions, although they are not architecture, are rather decently done. One which I saw has a little square. There are several comely conventional developments with some effort made at layout. However, there is no Radburn, New Jersey. Dale Bellamah and his sub-divisions seem to me to indicate everything that is now wrong, anarchically wrong, in the City of Albuquerque. This kind of uncontrolled, leap-frogging building operation is bad. When I said Albuquerque was ungoverned, I

meant it. No self-respecting community that had a decent government would permit such excrescences to sprout up in the most beautiful landscape in the world.

Wynn:

Oh, but some of the houses are like those in "Hansel and Gretel!"



a "Hansel and Gretel" house

Temko:

Let's talk about the Architectural Department. When high University officials tell me that "the architectural department is not quite ready for accreditation," I say, "Dear sir, do not use the word 'ready' in connection with the architectural department in any sense." The architectural department at present is virtually a *tabala rasa*, woefully under-staffed and under-equipped, and its expenditure per student, is, I believe, below the A.I.A. minimum level, isn't it?

Wynn:

If the A.I.A. has a level, this is below it. I say this because our per student expenditure throughout the University is far below that of first-rate State Universities.

Temko:

The state colleges in New Mexico get almost as much money per student as the University here. This shows a confusion of values in the State. The ratio in California is 2 to 1; two dollars are spent in the University for every one dollar spent in the state colleges. But the state colleges in California have, I think, twice the per student budget of the University here. Yet this University is supposed to have a complete graduate program and research program.

Wynn:

For the first time, the State Board of Educational Finance appears willing to accept the idea that, because the University of New Mexico carries the big graduate load in the State, it deserves more money per student than the other institutions.

Temko:

Well, in any case, good architectural education is expensive. Planning education is even more expensive — as expensive as medical education. What can be done about the Architectural Department? First of all, I hope that the new chairman can be appointed this Spring and will come to New Mexico July first. However, the University is not in a strong position to get a chairman. Columbia University has been unable to get a dean, U. C. L. A., and the University of Illinois have new schools of architecture. The one in Chicago is at the new urban campus of the University of Illinois, and they want to make it a great school of architecture. How can the University of New Mexico bid against formidable institutions like those. I think it impossible to get an eminent architect — you know, one with a great reputation, to take this job. But you can get a brilliant, younger man.

At the present stage of the School, I think that he should be an architect, but an architect with a keen understanding as well as a sympathy for planning. He should be a man who has done some designing and working. He probably will be someone who went to architectural school in the early fifties.

Conron:

It seems to me, that often those schools which have paid heavily for big names in the architectural world have really not become so good a school as a result.

Temko:

Look at the men who studied under Walter Gropius at Harvard. First of all, as someone with so strong a philosophy of his own, Gropius aroused a counter-philosophy, or a counter-ideology — I wouldn't call it a philosophy. So, you have John Johansen and Paul Rudolph. The only one of the now famous men who continued as a Gropian rationalist is I. M. Pei. Actually, if Pei alone had come out of Harvard in the Gropius period, it would have been worth it. But, as it happens, about twenty excellent architects and a couple of hundred very competent professionals came out of it, and they had a famous man, as chairman. The best run departments in the country, from my observation, are at the University of Pennsylvania and M. I. T. Although M. I. T. has had a big star, Pietro Belluschi, as dean, it has had Anderson as a self-effacing chairman with a rationalist philosophy, but who is very open-minded, and is himself, a very cordial and fine person. A younger Anderson may be the type of chairman you need.

Mrs. Freedman:

Do you think that he should come from around here?

Temko:

He has to come from outside. A completely fresh man who has not been involved in anything locally is what you want.

Mrs. Freedman:

You haven't suggested any names.

Temko:

No, because I think the job has first to be defined.

Wynn:

When you offer a job to a man you have to tell him what you want to do, how much money you've got, and where you're going.

Temko:

It is necessary that a courageous young architect, who is also aware of general urban and social problems, come to give a new focus to the entire curriculum. My feelings is that the curriculum should be revised a year at a time, starting with the first year. Each year, an appointment should be made in connection with the new curriculum. At the end of five years, you will have five new professors and you will have a new five-year course. The first year now is not even an architectural program. You might try the M.I.T. approach, where the student is supposed to be a man of the world, as well as a highly trained professional person. This can be done. In five years you can set up the infra-structure, and a great school can develop rather swiftly under the proper person. Illinois Institute of Technology was nothing until Mies Van der Rohe came, and then it suddenly attracted excellent students. The improvement at I.I.T. has had spectacular results in Chicago. Mies' students are building and, I think, they are the best corps of architects, taken collectively, in the world today.

They are working in big firms in Chicago without any ego problems; the public rarely hears of them as individuals, even though they are in charge of very big projects. There is a deep commitment among these men; they are serious architects. They are not money-grubbing salesmen. They are not promoters, but are in the strictest sense architects. It is true that the principal partners in some of these firms are promoters, but we should consider if the serious architect does not have more true freedom in such organizations than when he is out beating the bushes for clients.

I believe that in Berkeley, whatever the failings of the rest of the architectural department, we have an excellent first year — probably the best first year in the country. What do we ask the student to? We ask him to forget conventional ideas of architecture. For example: give him a problem of the alphabet. What makes the letter A an A? What is the characteristic of the various letters? We have hundreds of ways of writing the letter A. Printing it. Some with serif, some without. But what makes an A an A? What is the basic form of the A? How can we distinguish it from a P? These are the kind of problems that don't appear on the surface to be architectural problems, but are in fact a valid part of architectural education. Now, what should the architect be? You can't take him out of Roswell, New Mexico, and say, "Hey, you, you are a Leonardo da Vinci." You want to make him competent professionally — the way doctors, by and large are competent. One of my favorite comparisons is between architects and doctors. If you have an ordinary ailment — say appendicitis — you are likely to survive the operation pretty well, even though the doctor may not be Paul Dudley White. In the case of most architects, on the other hand, you die on the table with these butchers. Because of the complexity of modern

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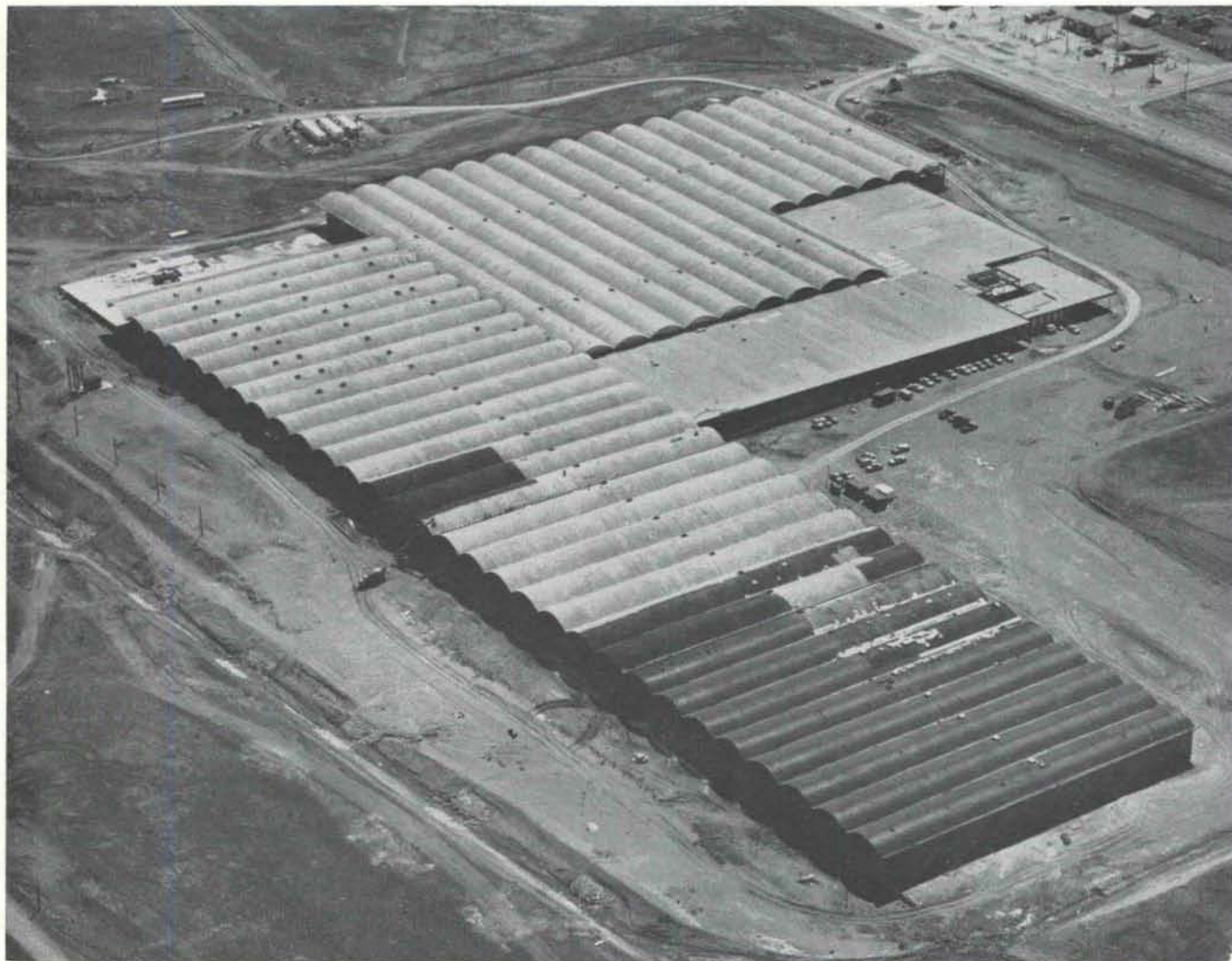
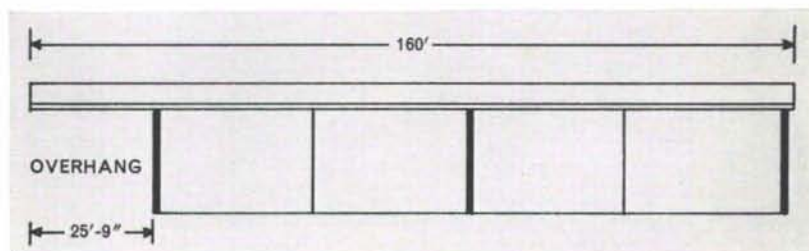


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technological civilization, they are not only unequal to the technical considerations, but also unable to cope with the evolving life of man, in an age of unprecedented aspirations and new needs, besides traditional needs.

So, the first year could, I think, try to give this intellectual frame of reference to the boy. In this way he would become a man of the world, too. What else does he need? He needs first-rate equipment and facilities. He needs a decent architectural library. He needs a shop. We have a typical problem in the first year at Berkeley, which requires extensive use of the shop.

We give the boy or girl (and, incidentally, women should have a greater place in architecture and bring many new perspectives to the profession) a sheet of metal and say, "How can you get a maximum volume out of this sheet of metal by using a repetitive pattern of cutting that is suitable to an industrial operation?" Or wood, "How do you jigsaw this piece of wood to get the maximum volume out of it?" Well, there are all kinds of things you can do, but it should not be capricious; it should have a rationale. Moreover, the student should do this with his own hands in a beautiful shop. I guess the budget for the Berkeley shop is about the budget for the whole Department of Architecture at the University of New Mexico. But you need a beautifully equipped shop with wonderful equipment, and a model shop, of course. The models should be fastidiously made, not slapped together, as I saw them here last Spring. And there should be a mood in the school: the instructor should be ready to say to a slovenly student, "F — you flunk." You have to be more severe. Meticulousness builds up in the drawings and everything else. The students want this. I think the students react well to intelligent discipline.

You should also have a beautiful darkroom and a camera shop. Photography is an essential part of the design process, especially urban design. And the student should use photographs in his presentation. The University should provide the Leicas. Students need good cameras. They need to learn how to use them as a design instrument. This is not cheap but neither is it expensive in the long run. And the real profit will be for the people of New Mexico when this begins to pay off in the next generation. The stakes are very high because the people the Department is training are going to do most of the architecturally designed buildings in New Mexico in the coming generations. These students, with whom I met, are very eager to learn. They are like desert soil that needs to be watered and it will bloom.

Quinlan:

What is this idea of developing a student to be a man of the world? This need is one of our serious problems.

Temko:

This problem is closely tied to campus development, and campus development must include the development of the very considerable real estate that the University owns in other parts of Albuquerque and elsewhere in the State. For example: the 2,000 acres near the airport. If that land isn't properly developed with the highest standards, if it is not a great design, I think it would be criminal negligence. It is one of the finest sites in this region and it can be some-

thing better than General Motors Technical Center. And they can do it. The University not only must be a better custodian of its own property than it has been so far, but it must help to develop the expertise for the entire State to take better care of itself.

I have recommended to President Popejoy and other people at the University that a magnificent residential complex be developed on the south campus. What should these dorms be? They should be the very opposite of the present intentions to incarcerate students in bureaucratic barracks. They should have the comeliness of the great private universities, such as Yale. They should have a true academic atmosphere and, also, a cordiality such as Eero Saarinen's new colleges at Yale. They should have libraries. They should all have a wide variety of accommodations. If students wish to live privately in single rooms, they should have that option; if they want to share a suite, they should have that option, too. Should young faculty members and their wives live in this group? Should seminar rooms be provided? Should they have the kind of courtyard life that the court at the Alvarado shows us would be possible, and can this be done for the first time on the campus of the University of New Mexico in an uncompromisingly contemporary manner?

Conron:

What is the value of a regional architecture? Is not the College of Education the first attempt to express on the campus the essence of the New Mexico architectural heritage in a contemporary manner, but without resorting to Pueblo Style clichés?

Temko:

Yes, you are not going to build Miesian glass buildings in New Mexico.

Wynn:

The College of Education is a step in the right direction.

Temko:

It is a decided improvement, and Max Flatow deserves credit for injecting a new idiom.

the College of Education



Benson:

The problem is, though, that the buildings put up after that, such as Onata and Santa Clara dormitories, revert to the previous philosophy of the eclectic buildings.

Temko:

Well, you know, those are middle-browism triumphant. I am afraid that it is no accident that so much has been done badly; it is a reflection of internal events in the University.

I have in mind an entirely different standard in which the College of Education (grateful as we are for it) will seem a pretty modest start in this direction.

Santa Clara Hall



Wynn:

What do you see as the next "bold step"?

Temko:

The next "bold step," first of all, would be to recognize the buildings as the physical expression of a spiritual and intellectual program. I was shocked to see at the University a model submitted by local architects with two mammoth symmetrical blocks, (something like a Soviet Pavilion at a World's Fair in the thirties) with which they proposed to fill out the dormitory complex. And quite apart from the unsuitability and impropriety of this kind of concept, was the impropriety of the method. Before you have a drawing of a building or a model of a building, you should have a pretty substantial document (and this should go for every building, including the new Humanities facilities) asking, essentially, what are we living for in this part of the world? How should we live? Objectives should be high. High objectives are more easily achieved than is commonly thought possible around here. And the first thing we need is definition of the highest possible goals for the State, for the University, for the City of Albuquerque, and for the degraded but potentially exquisite City of Santa Fe. To identify the problem is to take the first step towards solving it. The dorms should be integrated with the teaching program.

Mrs. Freedman:

Do you think that the dorms should have classrooms?

Temko:

No, not classrooms, but seminar rooms. George Bernard Shaw once said a meaningful thing "All people would live the way the rich live if they had money." Why is Yale so pleasant? Why is Cambridge in England so pleasant? This is the way the upper classes have lived for centuries, and educated their young people. The big problem of our society — the true moral educational problem in our society — is to do in a free, public, egalitarian institution, not merely as well as, but better than the great private aristocratic universities. If we can do this in a democratic framework, without hereditary wealth and privilege, we will have achieved a civilized thing; and we can do it. You should know the cost, and there are many ways that you can meet the cost. A good, expensive thing is always better than a good, cheap thing, but you can do very well within the budgets available, I believe, much better than the University is doing now.

Wynn:

In state universities, we have two cultures pulling against each other: the every-day student life is totally at odds with the academic purposes. Until we can get these together, we're flunking.

Temko:

Right. Students are treated as numbers. Frank Lloyd Wright once said a very wonderful thing, "How do you expect to get a liberal education in illiberal buildings?"

Wynn:

Or in a totally illiberal environment.

Mrs. Freedman:

To get back to the spirit of what a student should have in order to become a man of the world. He should be able to meet with his friends and have jam sessions and a place to study. He should have places where he can build up background.

Temko:

As President Popejoy once said, the students should be able to have a place to read the *New York Times*. They should have beautiful rooms in which to play the piano or some other musical instruments. They should be able to read books quietly, and hear the splash of water. They should have views of mountains. Nowhere on the campus do you have architecturally-controlled vistas of the mountains. Your views of the mountains are by hazard. I cannot tell from Garrett Eckbo's drawings for the landscaping on the campus, what the three-dimensional result will be in the context of mountains. But the University, if it had been a good client, would have demanded of Garrett that he study this phase of the problem. I am not denigrating Garrett. He is a good landscape architect and he's done a pretty good job within the constraints of the problem. But no one had a study model of the University with photo montages of the Sandia Mountains.

You know, an architect must have a good client. I believe that the new chairman of architecture should be the client. He should act for the University precisely the way that Belluschi, Saarinen, and other eminent architects acted as the client for the State Department in the case of the new embassies. They picked the architects; they set down the policies for the embassies, determined what the buildings should express, and then they dealt with the architects. Now, whatever is wrong with some of the embassies, they constitute the finest group of modern public buildings that our country has ever done. Some of them are really marvelous, for instance: Harry Weese's African Embassy is one of his best buildings, and its chief virtue is the very absence of the ponderous approach of most official architecture. Recent Federal architecture has been generally bad, and yet, the State Department Foreign Building Program shows that you can achieve a great deal simply through changes in policy and administrative procedure. You need a new approach here. The new dormitories, the campus, properties near the airport, and other University properties, represent essentially new problems in an area of rapid growth. Such problems have never been dealt with adequately in New Mexico or, for that matter, anywhere else in the country. And we're only now grappling with them.

Well, the jet airport was also a new problem. How did Saarinen approach it with the Dulles airport? Before he designed a building, he studied the passenger handling procedure and decided that there had to be a revolutionary system of passenger handling to save people from walking the enormous distances of conventional airports. So, before he had a building, he had a program, which, I think, is a pretty good one.

Now, this is the direction one could go with the dormitories, with the whole campus development. What

do we want to do? Never mind what is being done now. Let's attack this problem freshly. Sure, we should learn from great achievements of the past. Probably the best cityscape and the most gracious pedestrian environment in the United States is Yale. Where else can you walk from court to court over such an enormous area in handsomely-done buildings? Yale is only superficially romantic. I know it has phony Gothic-on-steel, but those buildings are beautifully scaled. There is consistent use of fine materials and walks; it is all tied together. Harvard Yard is tied together with brick. Harvard has many different kinds of buildings, but it is all one thing; it's a great unity.

On the New Mexico campus, you have superficial unity, but it is fundamentally discordant. I'm not saying that in color and, perhaps, massing and certain other respects, you can't follow the lead of the older electric buildings. But this need not be slavishly done, as in the new Library Annex. The addition to the Library has a very decent roof structure with pre-cast, pre-stressed "T"s. But the colonade will simulate Santa Fe wooden columns with wing-like capitals — all pre-cast in concrete. Well, this is an irrational form. So, too, is the irrational curvilinear shell that is wrapped around a rectilinear building. This is quite different from Ronchamp, where Le Corbusier had a frankly sculptural anti-rational religious shrine. The Library is supposed to be an emblem of rational inquiry. It's supposed to be logical. I would say that the University should be more uncompromising. I don't mean to write off the Library Addition completely. It may be a very fine facility in certain ways, but it is structurally a lie. And to compel the students to live with a lie, is to me, morally indefensible.

End



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