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Source: *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-), Vol. 49, No. 1 (Sep., 1995), pp. 10-21

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Public Institutions: Louis I. Kahn's Reading of Volume Zero

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In the work of architects like Louis I. Kahn or Frank Lloyd Wright, we discover imagination and profound understanding not only of architecture, but also of the societal forces that enable and employ architecture. Such imagination and understanding require critical, reflective, and imaginative minds—fueled by criticism of our present condition and hypotheses of what is best and most sustaining in our experience. Difficult as such an enterprise is, we have a right to expect this ambition in architects, particularly when they are entrusted to shape our civic and public realm.



1. Janus sculpture, Roman, Vatican Museums. (From *Taidehistoriallisa Tutkimuksia Konsthistoriska Studier* 4 [1978]:102.)

Volume Zero as a Temporal Concept

Louis Kahn frequently revealed his concern for institutions. He sought to understand what it is that people within a given community share. His search was not primarily for physical, built institutions, but rather for what underlies or motivates these associations. His intuitions or reconstructions of institutions were characteristically immaterial, abstract, formal. He sought to understand the patterns of human association and their reasons for being. Only then could an architect build properly—whether the great institutions of a society or the more humble institutions of house or street.

This paper came into being in response to two events recognizing major public institutions. It emerged in a conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that examined Kahn's own National Capitol Complex in Dacca, Bangladesh (1962–1982). Late in 1992, the article was further developed in a conference on public buildings, held on the occasion of the dedication of the new Supreme Court in Jerusalem, designed by Ada and Ram Karmi. The organizers of the Jerusalem seminar set forth two themes that they considered problematic in the creation of major institutions: "the form and language of the contemporary public building and its obligation to express the quality and identity of public institutions."

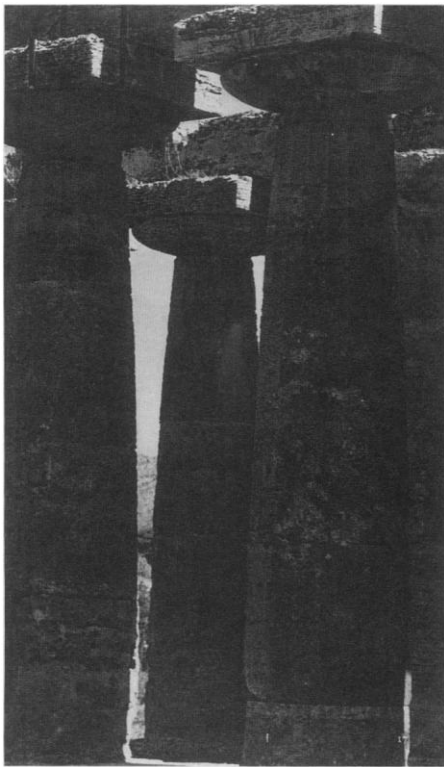
I propose that Louis Kahn addressed these issues well in both concept and production. The National Capitol Complex in Dacca documents Kahn's exceptional built work in this realm. However, I would argue that Kahn characteristically established his architectural position through a more abstract search. I propose that Kahn addressed these issues through a reading of history and law—in his case, English history and law: "I like English history. I have volumes of it,

but I never read anything but the first volume. Even at that, I only read the first three or four chapters. My purpose is to read Volume Zero, which has yet not been written. That's a kind of strange mind which causes one to look for this kind of thing. From such a realization, one thinks of the emergence of a mind. The first feeling is that of beauty. Not the beautiful, just beauty. It is the aura of the perfect harmony."¹

"Not the beautiful, just beauty," Kahn says. Rejecting an idealist position (the beautiful), Kahn attends to what is given (just beauty). Yet he also says, "It is the aura of the perfect harmony." In the end, Kahn knows *what is given* to our senses as the *evocation of something more*. Kahn walks a tightrope, seeking "the aura of the perfect harmony."

For now, I am specifically interested in Kahn's attention to English history. What is this strange mind of Louis Kahn, and what is it searching for? Eighteen months later, Kahn returned to the same theme and gave us more clues: "Then I thought, *What would be a harking back, starting from the beginning?* . . . I'm particularly interested in English history, which fascinates me. Though it's a bloody history, it still has this quality of a search. However, every time I start to read Volume I, I linger on Chapter One, and I re-read it and re-read it and always feel something else in it. Of course my idea is probably to read Volume Zero, . . . just to peer into this terrific thing—man, who has this great capacity for putting things into being that nature cannot put into being."²

Kahn's search, his harking back, is the search for a beginning—a beginning not in nature, but for that which man puts into being and nature cannot. It is a search for the archaic, for the prehistoric, as the number on his impossible book, Volume Zero, reveals. The search for the prehistoric is not



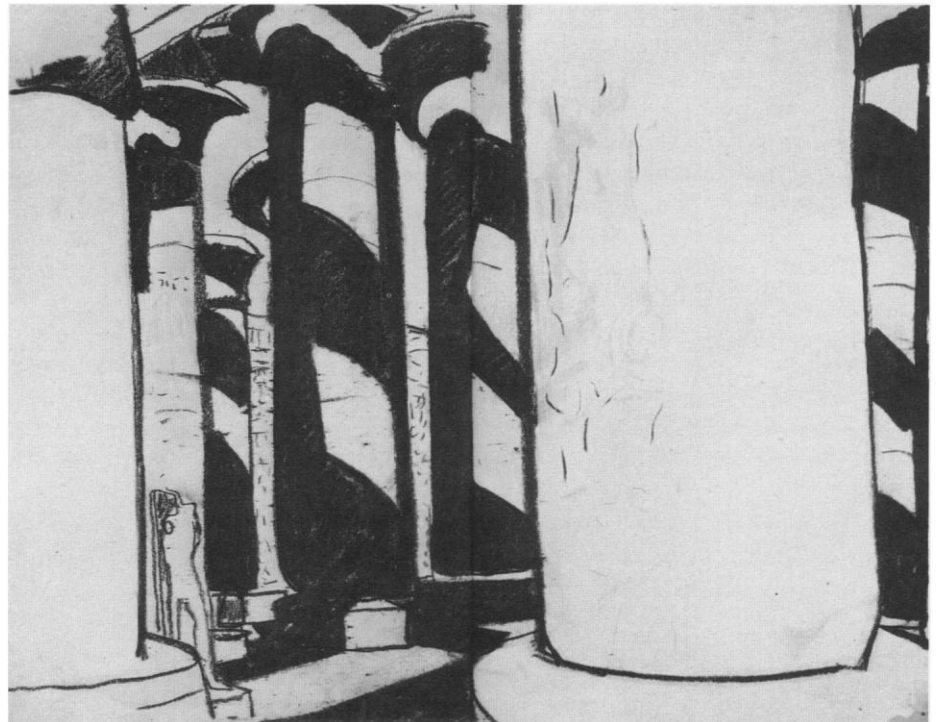
2. Paestum, Basilica. (Photograph by Serge Moulinier. From Elizabeth Ayrton, *The Doric Temple* [London: Thames & Hudson, 1961], p. 17.)



3. Louis I. Kahn, travel sketch of the Acropolis, Athens, 1951. (R. Wurman and E. Feldman, eds., *Notebooks and Drawings of Louis I. Kahn* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973], plate 18.)

implausible. That is what anthropologists sought, at least until recently. It was and still remains what archaeologists seek in the physical remains of ancient sites. One might imagine an architect, an architect with Louis Kahn's turn of mind, to be particularly interested to pursue his search among the physical, often architectural, remains of archaic societies. And, of course Kahn did; he preferred Paestum to the Parthenon (Figure 2).³ In a drawing of the Acropolis, Kahn gave a curious attention to what is non-canonical (Figure 3). Or again, there is his attention to still more archaic ancient sites (Figure 4).

Nonetheless, in the passages quoted, Kahn speaks of the books he collected and of his renewed searches for the archaic by turning to modern texts, to history. Why English history? Why should this Jewish man, who emigrated from Estonia to America as a boy, direct his attention to England? From the second quotation, we learn that this reference is more than incidental: He tells us that he is particularly interested in English history; it fascinates him.



4. Kahn, travel sketch of the hypostyle hall, Karnak, 1951. (Wurman and Feldman, eds., *Notebooks and Drawings*, plate 10.)

Then he offers a reason: "Though it's a bloody history, it still has this quality of a search." The search is now not only Kahn's search for beginnings; he reads English history as itself a search. This must also be a search extended in time, a search that is also directed forward.

Janus-like, Kahn's search for beginnings is not merely antiquarian nor merely the identification of sources for imitation, but rather the search for an impulse that may still inform us today. But again, why English history? I suggest two reasons, one quite ordinary and the other more profound, that stem from Kahn's own claim that English history has the quality of a search. The ordinary is this: Though an immigrant boy from another culture, Kahn grew up and worked in a society with English roots. He lived most of his life in Philadelphia and taught most extensively at Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania. His society was that of the eastern United States in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century—a society whose American roots were not sufficiently archaic for Kahn's program and yet a society whose English roots were palpable. For this American society, Volume Zero was most plausibly to be sought in England. If one were to identify an archaic impulse that still resonated in this society, it might come from England. For that matter, given Britain's then-recent world dominance, English sources might quite possibly have some resonance in much of modern world society.

However, I think Kahn may have had a more profound reason to say of English history: "Though it's a bloody history, it still has this quality of a search." Whether we look to the beginnings of the intellectual conception of history in Europe or to the conditions of the time before history writing, there is a close relationship of history and law. If we look to the European continent, there is written law, with its fixity and de-

ductive structure. Roman law and Catholic canon law are codified. Such law presides over historical change. Codified law is given, not searched—searched neither backward nor forward. The English conception of that moment is, however, very like the moment we are entertaining in Kahn's thought: a Janus-like construction in which we look back through the succession of events to a time immemorial in order that we may confirm an ancient, unwritten constitution and thus affirm the customs and institutions that also must be adapted as one meets the contingencies of the present and future. There is the English sense of law, custom, and institution, which relies on ancient, but constantly renewed, agreement rather than rule—reliance on agreement whether we search backward to the ancient constitution or forward in our historical unfolding. That agreement is given weight by appeal to precedent, from time out of mind, and maintained as agreement by adaptation to current conditions. It is the English appeal to the unwritten constitution and to tradition.

Tradition does not exist only in England, however. I must acknowledge that I have just now exaggerated the fixity of written law. Under such law, there may also be tradition. J.G.A. Pocock, whose writings inform the argument I am making, observed, "Roman law tended to become a tradition in continuous adaptation; and in such traditions the most recent expression of authority, . . . may come to be of more importance than the original form of the law."⁴ Here Pocock points to a tradition that maintains the authority of the law as *given*, even if newly formulated. Note the radical difference between an unwritten constitution and an authoritative code, whether old or new. Continuing with Pocock's Roman example, in this as in other traditions there may also come dissatisfaction and revolt. If, as in the Roman case,

there is an earlier, *original* form to which appeal can be made, this may well be a fundamentalist revolt. To continue from Pocock: Wherever it [the original form of the law] survives, *or even can be imagined*, there is the possibility of a fundamentalist revolt, a demand for return to the original sources. Such revolts, at once radical and reactionary, involve the repudiation of tradition; they raise the problems of how the original form of authority may be known, and what relation (other than traditional) it may bear to the present [emphasis added].⁵

Yet, at least in this passage, I think Pocock fails to emphasize the difference between (1) a fundamentalist revolt that relies on the survival of what is taken to be the original form of the law and (2) a fundamentalist revolt in which the original form must be imagined. In these two cases, fundamentalism based on *given* versus *imagined* form, "the problems of how the original form of authority may be known, and what relation . . . it may bear to the present," are quite different. It is in this difference that I see Kahn's attraction to English history, and especially his imaginative reading of Volume Zero, compared with an appeal to written law or the apparent authority of Volume One.

Under whatever law, for a truly traditional society, holding to its custom, working without question, its Janus-figure resides in the present. If the present comes to appear problematic, conviction in this traditional but contemporary Janus-figure is lost; if custom were sound, how could time have brought us to this problematic state? The projection of that custom into the future must appear doubly problematic. When such questions and revolt arise within a society that possesses a known original form of law or authority, the authority of Janus's backward view may be reaffirmed in ascribing to it a farsightedness and thus a capacity to retrieve and reinstate the fundamentals—to

reinstate the known original form of law. This is fundamentalism in the strict sense of the word.

In the English model, as long as tradition is unquestioned, Janus peers back through the long chronology of custom and institution with some posited grasp on the ancient, unwritten constitution. Here, too, when question and revolt arise, custom and institution must have broken down; but no long view to original authority is possible. The refraction of broken custom must obscure the gaze of Janus, while the distant view of a known original form is also denied. Janus must retreat in time to a moment when custom and tradition are as unsullied as possible and the imagination of the ancient constitution is as little distorted as possible. It is this form of learning from beginnings, this imaginative, probing quest, that Kahn attempts in reading Volume Zero.

Allow me to interpolate here a question and risk a speculative answer. How did Kahn invent this notion of Volume Zero? Why did it appeal to him? I am told that the six “orders” of the Talmud each begin with page 2; that the Talmud contains no page 1! Did this absence, suggestive of the absence of the concrete knowledge of ultimate authority, also suggest to Kahn a parallel with English history and its unwritten constitution? Or again, and now with the support of Jewish scholarship, the Hebraic tradition looks beyond Genesis for its sense of what went before:

Moreover, in the biblical universe, there is no point Omega for the simple reason, first, that there is no point Alpha. The Hebrew Bible begins not with the first letter of the alphabet, but with the second, *Bet-Bereshit*. History does not begin with Genesis; it is the Parousia of a history which is already mature, which carries

within it the remains, the wreckage perhaps, but also the vital germs and above all the irretrievably lost realities of the preceding Alpha. . . . The point of origin will always elude it; . . . From A to Z, biblical history in the Jewish conception remains open. A is not the beginning, but what went before. And Z is not the end, but the opening. . . . At the opposing doors of history, the entrance and the exit both remain free. Genesis and Exodus are infinite and eternal risks. And so are life and death—the Genesis and Exodus of individuals and communities alike, at every moment of their history.⁶

The Volume Zero of Architectural Form

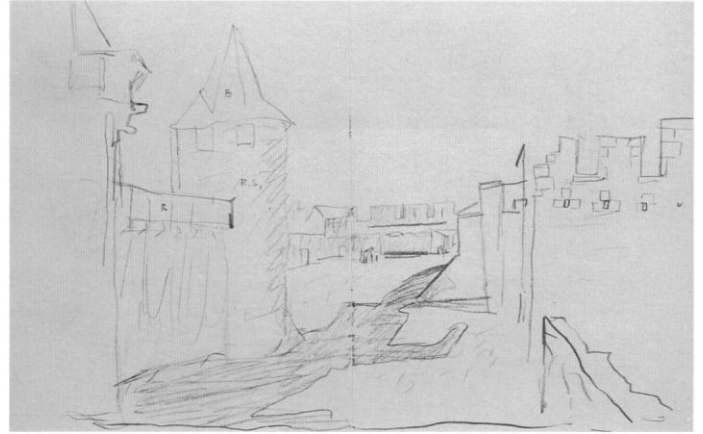
Drawings by Louis Kahn, especially when compared with those of other thinkers in architecture, clarify these observations while also making the argument more concrete architecturally. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, in his drawing of the Porte Narbonne at Carcassonne, France, had of course an immediate purpose different from that of Kahn: He was involved in the restoration of old monuments (Figure 5). Viollet-le-Duc also pursued a different intellectual agenda, the definition of architectural principle as revealed in original documents in contrast to Kahn’s search for the impulse for an imaginative projection (Figure 6). In his drawings of medieval fortifications and the war machines they had to resist, Viollet-le-Duc studied the reality of Volume One to provide the authority for principles he ascribed to that reality (Figure 7). Such principles, as learned in the study of medieval street types, buildings, and construction systems, inform his propositions for modern urban construction (Figures 8 and 9).

In Kahn’s drawings of Carcassonne, as in all drawings, there is of course selectivity and reductiveness, but there is more than this (Figures 10 and 11). Kahn draws battlements and towers with selective emphases that lead away from what would normally be recognized; he gives a counterintuitive emphasis to the battlements—to a system of form that is the slighter one in its context but that is, for Kahn, the more provocative one in a projective sense. Kahn enters Carcassonne imaginatively to propose beginnings and project a possible architecture. If we now compare drawings of Carcassonne by Viollet-le-Duc and Kahn, we may first be struck by their similarities (Figures 12 and 13), yet the older drawing can be seen to attend to the object, while Kahn’s penetrates it. It is Viollet’s search for Volume One compared with that for Volume Zero. Both architects look to early forms; both are rationalists. Neither Kahn nor Viollet-le-Duc seeks an unquestioned authority. Nonetheless, Viollet-le-Duc seeks to know the actual document—Volume One—so thoroughly that it will reveal its principles. As he himself argued, the modern architect should be able to build in his own day as the ancient masters would have done if they were placed in modern circumstances. So every detail of the ancient work may inform Viollet-le-Duc’s quest. Kahn seeks an imaginative projection beyond the detail, beyond the particularity of the ancient monument. It is *his* quest and *his* projection, one that may serve *his* vision in *his* circumstance. Kahn’s drawings of Sainte Cécile in Albi are still more rudimentary in their representation and more forceful in their imagined projections (Figures 14 to 16).

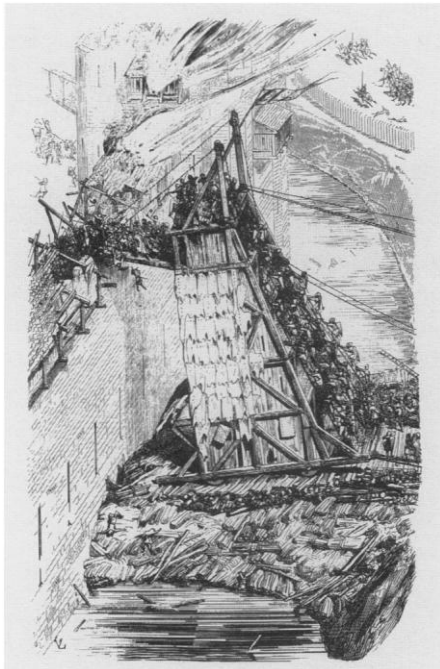
Kahn’s Volume Zéro contrasts with the texts of other architectural theoreticians as well. Consider for a moment the thought and the drawings of John Ruskin (Figure 17). Ruskin characteristically renders a portion of a building carefully, a telling detail in



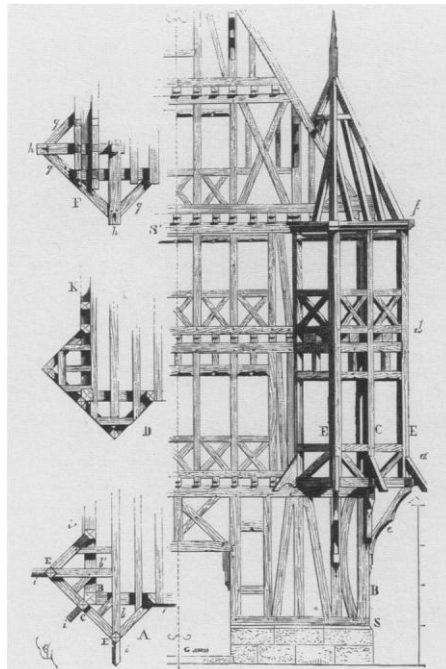
5. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, watercolor of Porte Narbonnaise, Carcassonne, France. (France; Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques et des Sites. © Arch. Phot. Paris/S.P.A.D.E.M.)



6. Kahn, travel sketch of a portal and surroundings, Carcassonne, 1959. (Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, LK 945.9. Gift of Richard Saul Wurman.)



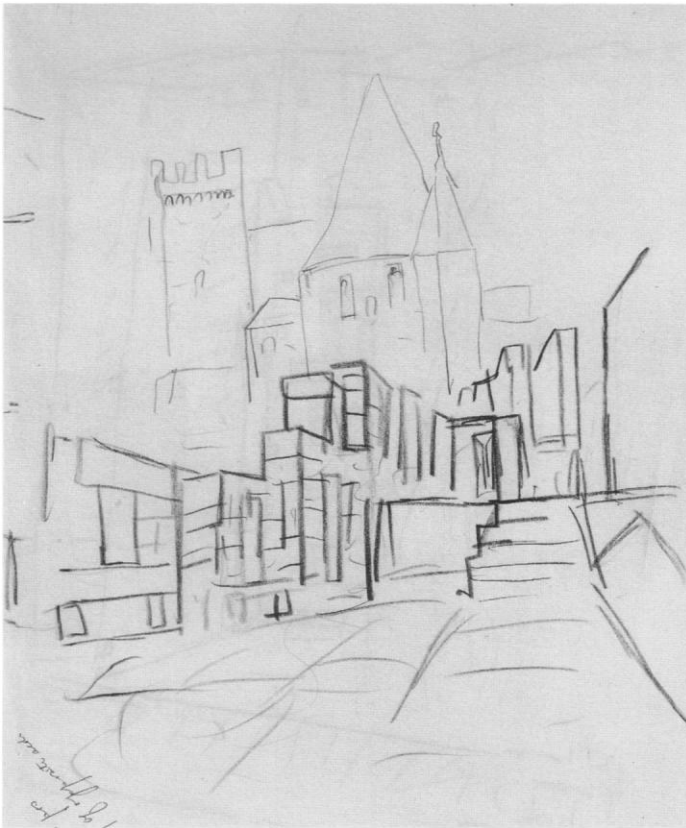
7. Viollet-le-Duc, drawing of a fortification and a war machine. (*Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture du XI^e au XVI^e siècle*, vol. 1 [Paris: A. Morel et Cie, 1875], p. 365.)



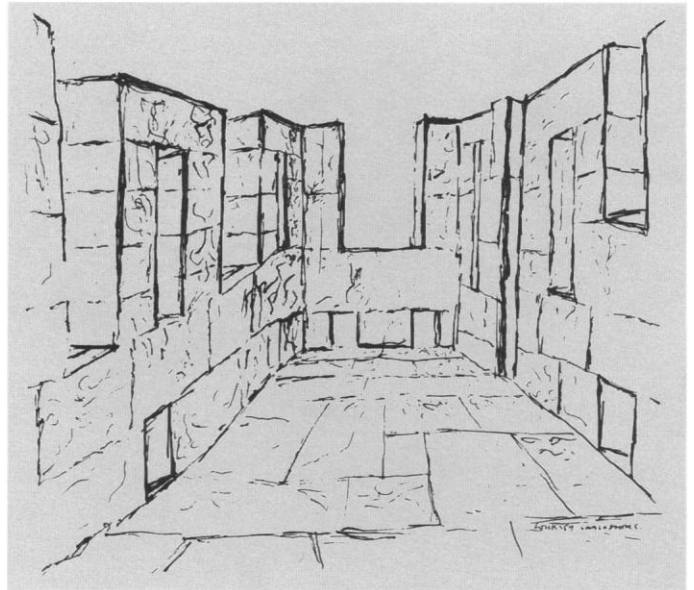
8. Viollet-le-Duc, drawing of medieval timber frame. (*Dictionnaire raisonné*, vol. 7, p. 48.)



9. Viollet-le-Duc, street building with a modern iron frame and ceramic infill. (*Entrétiens sur l'architecture*, atlas [Paris: A. Morel et Cie, 1864], plate 36.)



10. Kahn, travel sketch of battlements and towers, Carcassonne, 1959. (Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, LIK 945.7A. Gift of Richard Saul Wurman.)



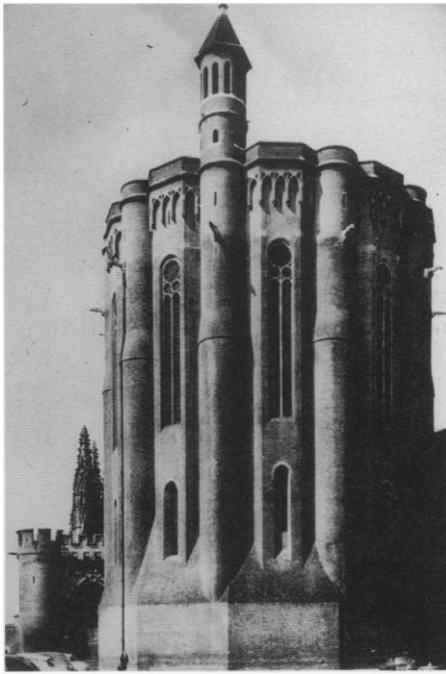
11. Kahn, travel sketch of battlements, Carcassonne, 1959. (Louis I. Kahn Drawings [Los Angeles, CA: Access Press, 1981], plate 10.)



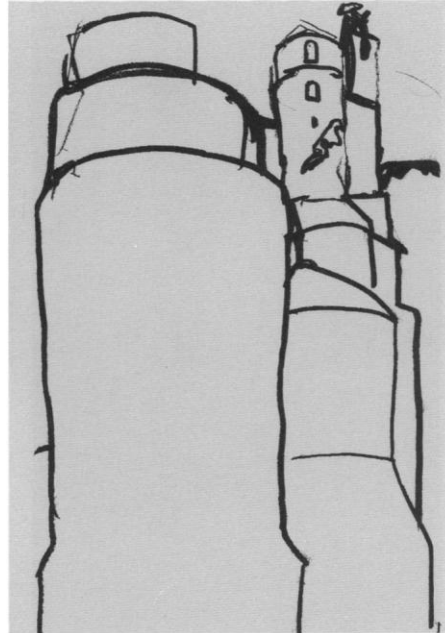
12. Viollet-le-Duc, drawing of Visigothic Tower and Porte de l'Aude, Carcassonne. (France: Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc 1814–1879 [Paris, 1965], plate 39.)



13. Kahn, travel sketch of Carcassonne, 1959. (Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, LIK 945.3.3. Gift of Richard Saul Wurman.)



14. Albi, Ste. Cécile, apse. (MIT, Rotch Visual Collections.)



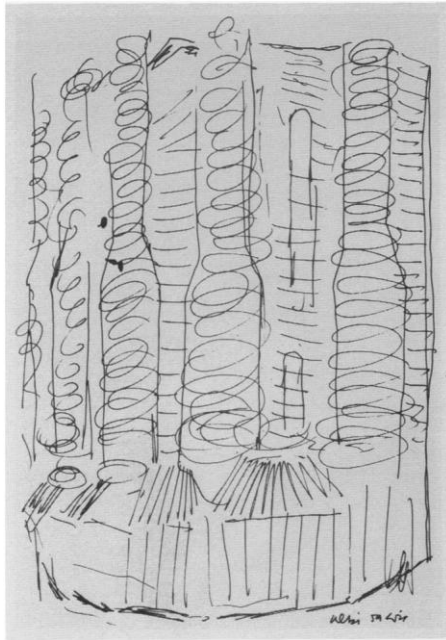
15. Kahn, travel sketch of apse of Ste.-Cécile Cathedral, Albi, 1959. (Wurman and Feldman, plate 23.)

which he seeks to embrace an entire social and aesthetic position, taken as truth. In his drawing of Pisa, as in others of San Michele in Lucca, the precious and varied work of the master masons represents the freedom, invention, and individual responsibility that assertedly bring joy to work. Kahn, in Pisa, takes a holistic view, encompassing not only the cathedral and tower, but even emphasizing the modern plantings in the distance (Figure 18). More urbanistically, Ruskin lavishes on his drawing the same rich detail as that of his Venetian subject while Kahn further simplifies the bold forms of San Gimignano (Figures 19 and 20).

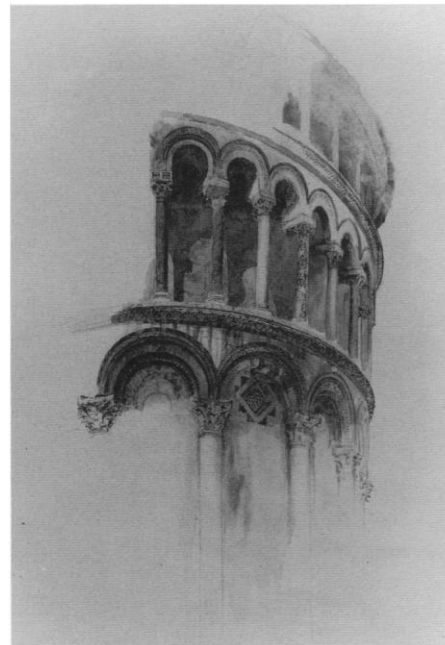
Relations to Beginnings

Now we will return to Pocock for further observations on the relation of these received environments, these ancient authorities, to the present: "In their [the fundamentalists'] belief that a document's original meaning could be directly applied, once found, to modern conditions, we recognise the humanist ideal of imitation, . . . [the] unhistorical ideal of imitation, which we may describe, in our terminology, as involving the rupture of a traditional relationship with a past and substitution of a new one."⁷

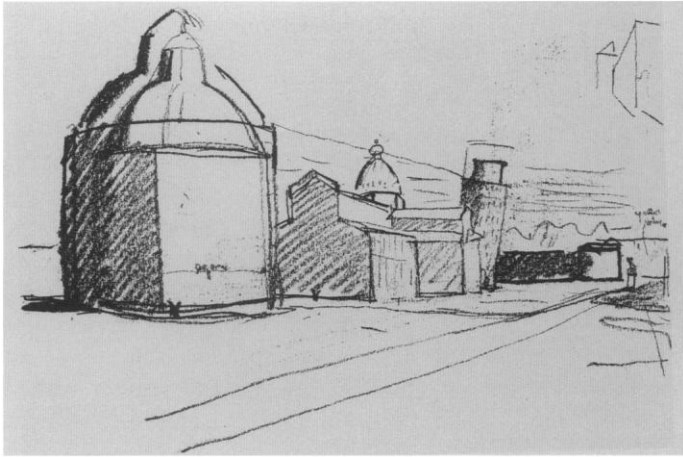
As we have known in revival movements in architecture, such imitation can be relatively literal. Quite otherwise, in the instances of Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin, that new relationship is the appeal to universal principles. These universal principles might ultimately rest on nature and reason, as they typically did in both French classicism and Viollet-le-Duc's gothicism. But consider again the English example, not just in architecture, but generally. There, too, appeals to nature and reason are not absent. Yet in England, lacking the authenticating original document, the appeal to principle could



16. Kahn, travel sketch of apse of Ste.-Cécile Cathedral, Albi, 1959. (Wurman and Feldman, plate 16.)



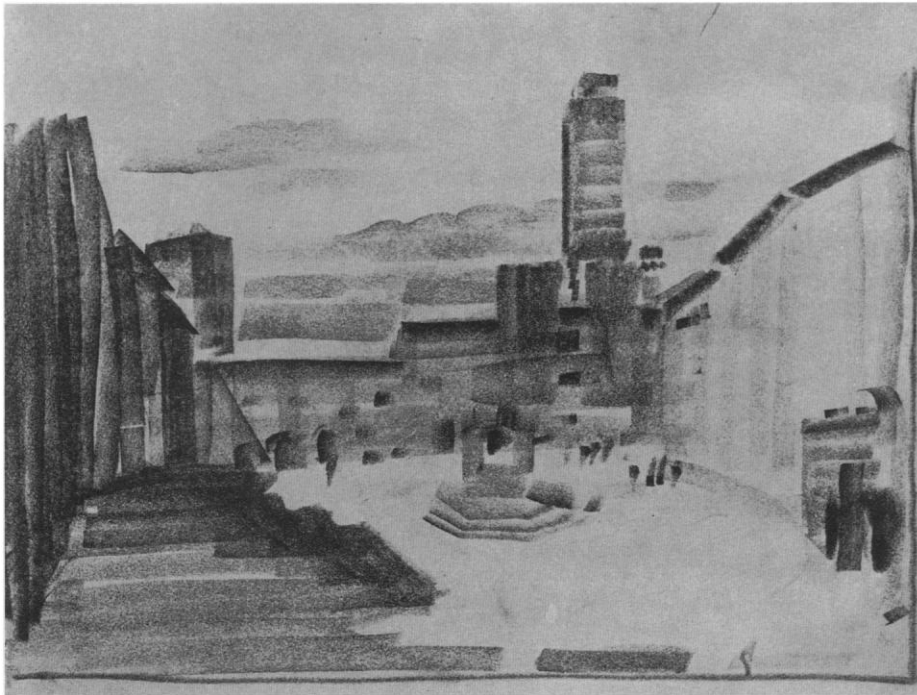
17. John Ruskin, wash drawing of a detail of the apse of the Duomo, Pisa. (© Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.)



18. Kahn, travel sketch of Baptistery, Duomo, tower and planting and buildings beyond, Pisa, n.d. (Wurman and Feldman, plate 19.)



19. Ruskin, wash drawing, Casa Contarini Fasan, Venice, 1841. (© Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.)



20. Kahn, travel sketch of the Piazza della Cisterna, San Gimignano, c. 1928–29. (*Architectural Record* [Jan. 1931], © 1931 by McGraw-Hill, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher.)

also rest on the assumption of immemorial agreements, in what Pocock, with specific reference to English fundamentalists, termed “a vehement conviction that *what ought to be had once been*.”⁸ Pocock thus gives a formulation to English fundamentalism that is very close to a later aphorism of Kahn’s that is so well known that it gave the title to a collection of his thoughts: *What Will Be Has Always Been*.⁹

In the passages quoted from Kahn, this form of the search for beginnings is revealed. Kahn reads Volume One only to intuit Volume Zero. Thus, typically, Kahn privileges the looking back, his “harking back, starting from a beginning,” for it is there that he locates the principles that he uses, ahistorically, both to chasten and to accommodate the current state of customs and institutions. Recall the end of the second quotation from Kahn: “just to peer into this terrific thing—man, who has this great capacity for putting things into being that nature cannot put into being.”¹⁰ What are these things that man puts into being? If Kahn, at that moment, had physical artifacts in mind, he would not have needed history books, nor would he have needed to intuit a Volume Zero. He would have turned to archaeology and the history of architecture. Although Kahn does not speak of institutions in the quotations given at the outset, he does so often enough. And for Kahn, it is institutions that fulfill the Janus role to which I have been referring.

I know that *institutions* is not a word to use, but it’s an excellent word. It tells you that there is an agreement in back of the making. Institutions are there because of the inspirational quality which made them at the moment when silence and light meet in a realization, but they have lost the inspirational impact of their begin-

ning and have become operational. They aren’t felt in the same way they should be felt. . . .

Human agreement is as simple as *Isn’t it a nice day today?*

Agreement is not equal in each, but there is a sense of unanimity without example. It is what made the school a school, or what inspired the first room. It was an undeniable agreement that this man who seems to sense things which others don’t should be near the children so they can benefit from such a man. This simple beginning when the teacher didn’t call himself the teacher and the student was not called a student was the beginning of the sense of school. So it is with other buildings that present themselves as belonging to the original inspirations.

. . . Institutions are quasi-meeting groups that want to uphold some aspect of our democracy.¹¹

In Volume One, chapter one, Kahn might learn of early institutional forms, but he seeks a still more archaic condition. He intuits the moment before any institution or any architectural setting: the inspiration, the moment of beginning when, beneath a tree, a man and a child found themselves as teacher and student without even knowing those words or this relation. It is a moment in nature, supported by reason, and may serve as the guide to action. From his position in Volume One, Kahn’s Janus-figure looks back and intuits the events of Volume Zero. From his position in Volume One, Kahn’s Janus-figure rejects the history, the later history, he has entered. He does not read on, for this could only be the historical story of how the charismatic moments of Volume Zero degenerated into the problematic present that set off the search in the

first place. Yet, with Kahn, there is a temporal subtext that does connect Volume Zero and his present—a connection which thus can, *must*, lead to current, effective action in which the impetus of the imagined moment of beginning breathes new life into our cultural forms.

Kahn appears as contemporary social critic and traditionalist, as a social inventor and a seeker of beginnings. If we were to compare Kahn with our array of fundamentalists, then his association is with those fundamentalists who rely on an intuited state of nature and rationality, not an authorizing text. Kahn sees the institution as the necessary mediating entity of agreement and custom; yet the institution is itself subject to criticism and reformation by the light of its inspiration.

Kahn’s move from the concept and form of an institution to design and building is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the process and realization of his Unitarian Church in Rochester, New York. Here, as generally, Kahn begins by intuiting institutions from time out of mind. He begins with a form diagram that locates a space of question within concentric zones of access to the community of searchers (Figures 21 and 22). From that intuition, he makes his well-known move back to architecture itself.

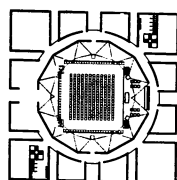
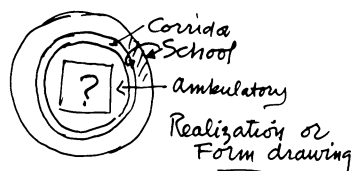
“To begin is the time of belief in form,” says Kahn.¹² His search for institutional beginnings provides the source of what Kahn calls “form.” It is the accommodation of that form to the contingencies of the present that he calls “design.” Probing the concept and, in Kahn’s sense, the *form* of an institution offers the means to propose beginnings. School has its beginnings in the quest for learning, which manifests itself in the special relation of two people whom we can only later recognize as teacher and student. Kahn argues, “A realization of what particularizes the domain of spaces ideal for

school would make the designing of an institution of learning challenge the architect and awaken in him an awareness of what *school wants to be*, which is the same as saying an awareness of the form: school.”¹³

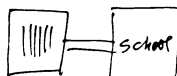
For Kahn, a church—and perhaps particularly the undogmatic Unitarian assembly—has its beginnings in associations that seek to answer the question “Why?” It is this primordial question, and the conditions under which a person might join the fellowship of those who share that question, that provokes the form that we later and dangerously give the name “church.” This was to appear in Kahn’s development of the Rochester church, but a very similar argument had already appeared in 1960:

If you were given the problem of designing a chapel for a university, certainly you would not bring out all your palette of stained glass and mosaics or devices which you know a chapel must have, but simply think of it as a place which for the moment you won’t define because it is too sacred. Then you put the ambulatory around, and then you put an arcade around the ambulatory so you don’t have to go into the ambulatory, and a garden around the arcade so you don’t have to go into the arcade, and then a fence around the garden so that you don’t have to go into the garden. Ritual is inspired, not set. I think it begins with the sense of a man who gets a criticism from a fine teacher and this instills in him a sense of dedication and he goes by the chapel and winks at it—he doesn’t have to go in. He doesn’t wink at the gymnasium, he winks at the chapel.¹⁴

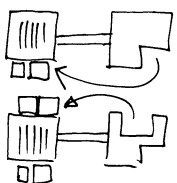
It is equally significant that, despite the search for beginnings that I am seeking



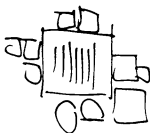
FIRST DESIGN
close translation
of realization in
Form



No!

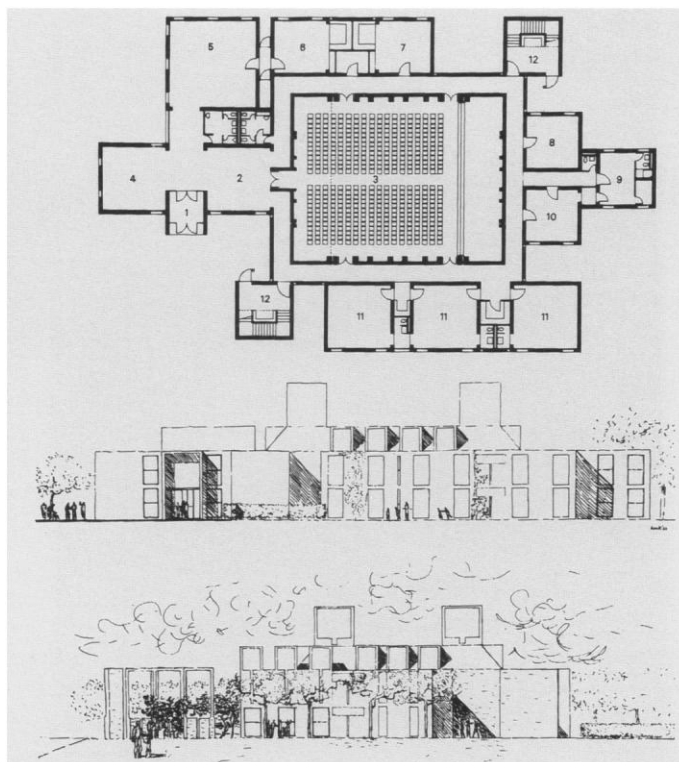


Test of the
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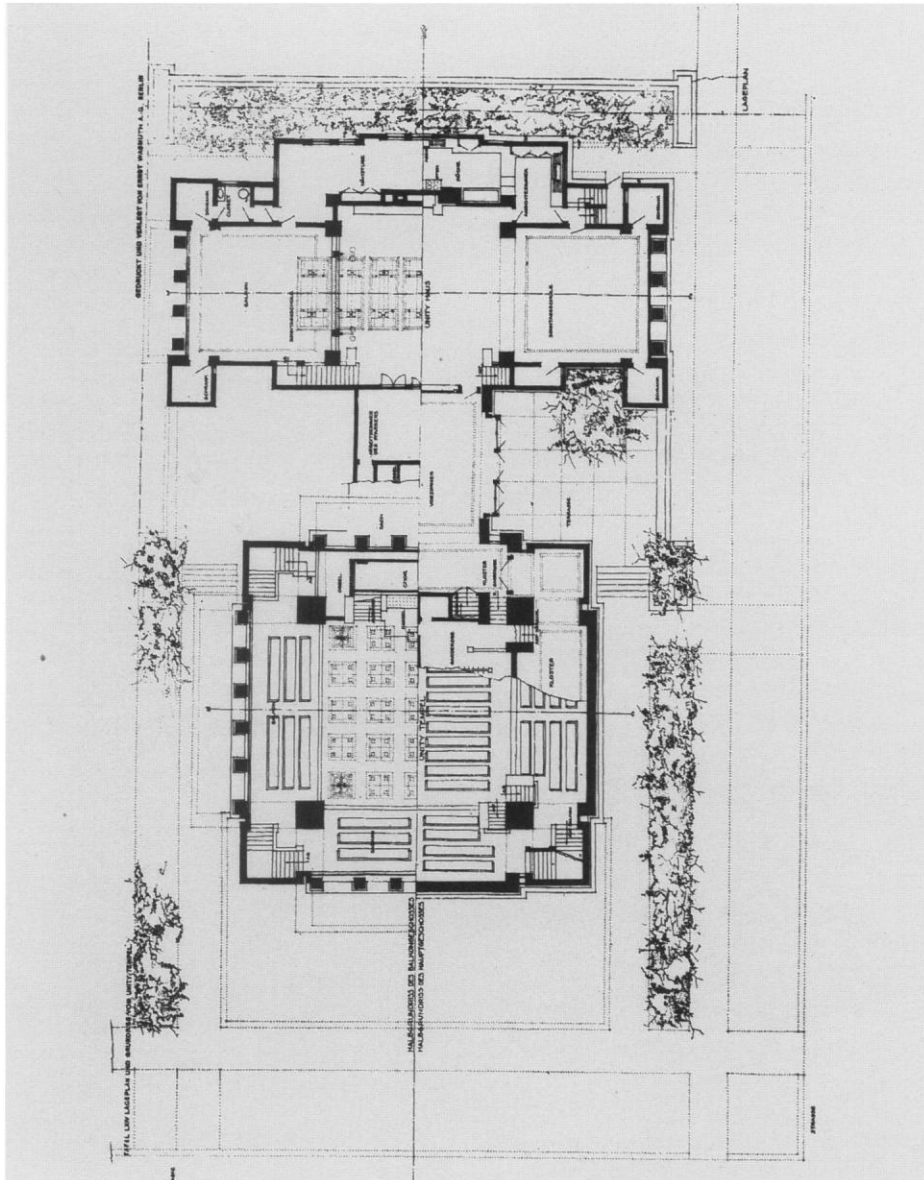


Design resulting
from circumstantial
demands

21. Kahn, form diagram with plan of first design, 1958, and diagrams of the design evolution. Unitarian Church, Rochester. (H. Ronner, *Louis I. Kahn: Complete Works 1935–74*, Basel: Birkhauser, 1977, p. 118.)



22. Kahn, plan and elevations of “Second Phase, First Version,” Unitarian Church, Rochester, 1960–61. (Ronner, *Louis I. Kahn*, p. 118.)



23. Frank Lloyd Wright, Oak Park, Unity Temple, 1906. (F. L. Wright, *Ausgeführte Bauten*, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1910, plate LXIV.)

to demonstrate in Kahn's thought, his position is exploratory, nonauthoritarian, not rigid. Although his search denies innovations that are offensive to the beginning form, it is nonetheless also malleable in response to those contingencies of time and place that give differentiation and contemporary effectiveness to the institution.

Conclusion

The impetus to write this essay came from a quandary. I have a deep mistrust both for fundamentalism and for appeals to origins. Such appeals do not have an ultimate, demonstrable basis, but are at best matters of agreement. Yet, in the hands of fundamentalists, they are invoked as authority to diminish inquiry and opportunity, to promote coercion and control rather than liberation. Nevertheless, in Kahn, I sense a related pursuit without the negative consequences. How can this be? I suggest an answer in distinguishing various kinds of fundamentalism—and indeed a similar enterprise (including that of Kahn) that I am distinguishing from fundamentalism.

As we have seen, the appeal to origins or beginnings differs according to the source to which appeal is made: authoritative origins versus malleable, interpreted beginnings. Such variants are further divided according to the mode of interpreting the source. A strict fundamentalism relies both on a known authoritative source and interpreting it literally or at least narrowly; this form is nontraditional. Pocock's interpretation of Roman law made of it a system with a known authoritative source that is nonetheless superseded by a succession, a tradition, of reformulated authoritative codes. If I may risk a comment on preliminary advice, Hebraic law and custom is different again; it is a strongly hermeneutical tradition, relying

on authoritative early documents while also according authority to later and even current interpretation. English law and history should be a highly traditional system with sources immemorial and unwritten; if the tradition finds itself in crisis, then the appeal must be to a noncodified source that is, in turn, subject to interpretation within the problematic present.

As opposed to fundamentalist appeals to authority, I have preferred to term Kahn's quest "a search for beginnings." It is, at least potentially, a less troublesome form—though perhaps only in the subtle hands and mind of a Kahn. This search for beginnings is one that has no authenticating document or form. Thus, unlike those versions of fundamentalism based on authority, this search for beginnings possesses no ultimate, demonstrable basis. In this it is like the Volume Zero that Kahn named but that indeed, ought to stand at the far side of English history. But Kahn is not interested in this Volume Zero as the source of an unbroken tradition. Tradition is hopelessly ruptured; institutions have lost their sense of purpose; society must be criticized and changed. Kahn's enterprise is little concerned with history or tradition; rather it is reciprocally critical and creative between the present and that imagined time immemorial. The present and Volume One (after all, there is some historical evidence) inform Kahn's vision of Volume Zero. This is an imaginative projection backward, the conjecture of a basis that may both chasten and create the institutions of our time. It is a search backward in time for a proposition that must win its claim on us

by persuasion, in being reasonable, in fitting to our inarticulate but engrained sense of justice and hope. In no small part, that search, and our conviction in its results, is set by the condition in which we find ourselves. Reciprocally, the fruits of that search must be reinterpreted for our present—and, in the case of architecture, also be given physical form. Our conviction in the search for beginnings is thus informed by its effectiveness in criticizing and then acting on our problematic condition—how we would like to chasten and create the institutions of our time. This search is Janus-faced. Kahn's search for the Volume Zero of English history pursued that goal; his will to hold our schools, churches, and libraries to their higher purposes, institutionally and architecturally, was both the cause and the fruits of that search.

Finally, I would reemphasize that Kahn's search was hypothetical: He did not so much *find* as *project*. Also, in his backward glance, he *projected*. He did not find truth, but propositions that he sought to make convincing for us—propositions that might win our agreement. What I am observing is not a matter of his being correct. When Frank Lloyd Wright, at Unity Temple, faced a very similar cultural program as that of Kahn's Unitarian Church at Rochester, Wright proposed not a concentric form as did Kahn, but a binuclear sanctuary and school (Figures 22 and 23). Both institutionally and architecturally, Wright and Kahn made quite different but equally compelling claims on our imagination and understanding of the place of such institutions and of ourselves in a social world.

Notes

1. Louis I. Kahn, *What Will Be Has Always Been: The Words of Louis I. Kahn*, ed. Richard Saul Wurman (New York: Access Press/Rizzoli, 1986), p. 151, from a speech by Kahn at Aspen, CO, June 19, 1972.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 245, from a speech at Tel Aviv, December 20, 1973.
3. Eugene Feldman and Richard Saul Wurman, eds., *The Notebooks and Drawings of Louis I. Kahn*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), p. 257.
4. J.G.A. Pocock, "The Origins of the Study of the Past: A Comparative Approach," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4/2 (1962): 226.
5. *Ibid.*
6. André Neher, "The View of Time and History in Jewish Culture," in L. Gardet et al., eds., *Cultures and Time* (Paris: UNESCO Press 1976), p. 156.
7. Pocock "Origins of the Study of the Past," p. 227.
8. *Ibid.*, 233.
9. Kahn, *What Will Be*.
10. Here Kahn does echo Ruskin. At the beginning of "The Lamp of Memory," chapter 6 of Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder, 1849), he waxes enthusiastic in a recollection of the natural beauties of a landscape in the Jura. Yet in a thought experiment that would place that landscape in the New World, the rich hues of flowers and river fade, for they are no longer part of a scene marked by the constructions of humanity nor "dyed by the deep colors of human endurance, valor, and virtue."
11. Kahn, *What Will Be*, p. 156.
12. Feldman and Wurman, *Notebooks and Drawings*, p. 258.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
14. Louis I. Kahn, "Philosophical Horizons," *AIA Journal* 33/6 (June 1960): 100.