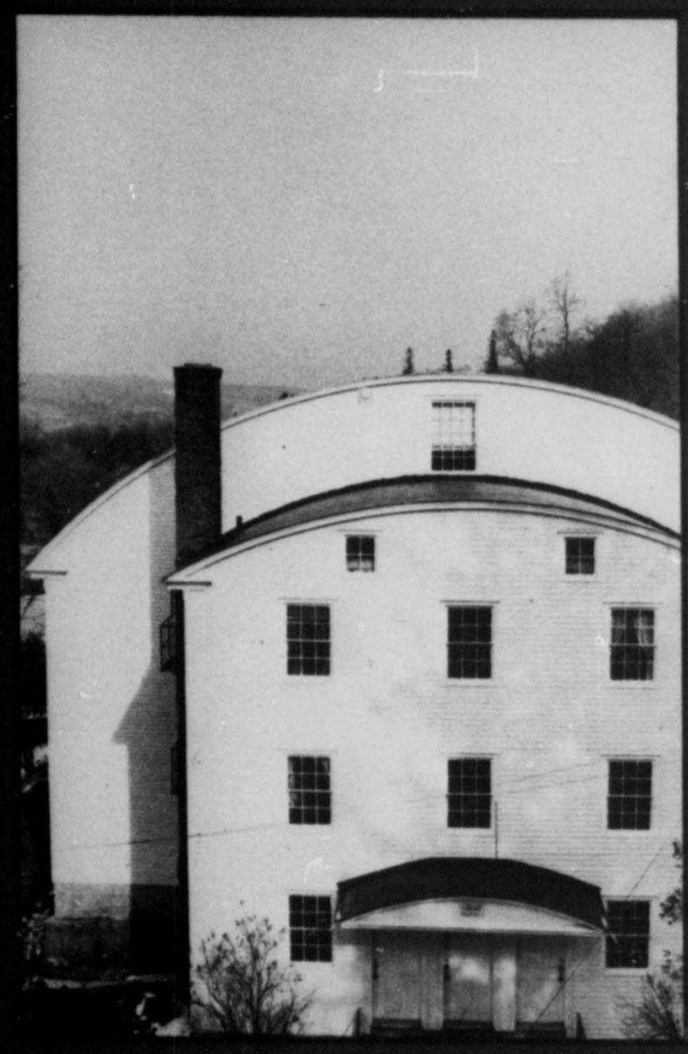
Perspecta 21



Perspecta 21

The Yale Architectural Journal

Petition

W. H. Auden

Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will its negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown virginity.
Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
And gradually correct the coward's stance;
Cover in time with beams those in retreat
That, spotted, they turn though the reverse
were great;
Publish each healer that in city lives
Or country houses at the end of drives;
Harrow the house of the dead; look shining at
New styles of architecture, a change of heart.

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Architecture is not an isolated or autonomous medium; it is actively engaged by the social, intellectual, and visual culture which is outside the discipline and which encompasses it. Though grounded in the time and place of its making, architecture is capable of reshaping the cultural matrix from which it rises. A vital architecture is one that resonates with that culture. It is this resonance, not reference to some locus left behind or yet to be found, which gives architecture its power.

Perspecta 21 is a collection which examines how architecture is affected by concerns outside those inherent to building. It is based on a premise that architecture is inevitably involved with questions more difficult than those of form or style; questions arising in literature, politics, philosophy, painting, and sculpture influence the work of architects in America today.

The essays included herein study today's architecture in relation to the wider cultural field of our time, and also consider how the architecture of the past is reconceived and repossessed according to the knowledge of our own day. By examining the unsure ground at the edge of the discipline's established precincts, by advancing new theory, or by re-evaluating important work of the past according to new criteria, this journal considers architecture as an artifact embedded in the cultural matrix of the present. To free the discussion of architecture from entrenched patterns, Perspecta 21 presents an examination of the forms and ideas at hand in America today from which fresh patterns may originate to make architecture new.

Carol J. Burns
Robert Taylor

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The Continuity

of the Modern

A window in the apses
of St. Peter's from
«Towards a New Architecture»
by Le Corbusier

Some critics have claimed that modern architecture is bankrupt and that we have entered a postmodern era. Others believe that at present we are in a postfunctional period. Then there are those who have formulated a neorationalist position. Still others see the need for a return to traditional classicism. Each of these approaches attempts to put architecture on a new theoretical footing after the collapse of long-held beliefs. Works of beauty have been produced according to the premises of all these theories; yet, none can admit as valid work produced according to any of the alternative theories. This exclusion renders each of them suspect, and the very diversity of contemporary architecture jeopardizes them all. An approach is needed that begins with an acknowledgement of this diversity. I believe that such a condition can be described as a new period of modern architecture.

While modern architecture has by no means come to an end, it has undergone profound transformation. We no longer focus on the revolutionary will to achieve utopia through technology. Instead we are concerned with the effects of industrial civilization on the human spirit. Thus modern architecture has become an architecture of reflection on the present rather than an architecture of direction toward the future.

Now that the rush to condemn the architecture of technological reference has lost its novelty, it becomes possible to be more objective in analyzing the relation between the earlier and the present periods. What connects them is the monumental fact of industrial civilization. However, it is no longer the shared belief in a technological paradise that is the unifying force in architectural form; it is now the loss of belief in that paradise which unifies.

There are two ways in which change can be experienced. Either one can be deprived of what one had, or one can be rid of it. When the modernists of the 1920s lost their belief in the values of the Beaux Arts, they were not deprived of these values; they rid themselves of them. They could do so because they had an alternative world to turn to– a world of astonishing new forms, materials, politics, processes: in short, the modern world.

We have no such other world to turn to now. It is the same as it was then, if now suspect in subtle and tragic ways. We have not rid ourselves of utopia, as the first modernists rid themselves of their supposed baggage; we have been deprived of it. It has been taken away from us by culture itself, by the effect of those very facts which seemed so full of promise to the earlier modernists.

It is this sense of deprivation that has led to the reflective character of our own modernism. There is no «other» world to which we can turn; there is only our own industrial one, now so familiar to us. We can have no new and better architecture of direction, no common commitment to another, improved vision of the future. Rather, what is widely shared is the apprehension that the present can be comprehended, not as an indication of the future, but only as itself. There are as many ways to comprehend this present as there are minds to comprehend it. Our current situation in architecture is distinguished first and foremost, therefore, by diversity, the self-contemplating reason of many individuals. There can no longer be one sensibility that reveals the truth of the age. Instead, many sensibilities compete to express our industrial culture with validity.

Utopian modernism

The modern architecture from which we have at last been released was founded on the ideology defined by Karl Popper as historicist.[1] Historicism is not the application of stylistic motifs borrowed from history; it is a theory of history. It is the view that the principal aim of the social sciences should be historical prediction, achieved by discovering the trends that underlie the evolution of history, by laying bare the «spirit of the times.» As elaborated by modern architects, that doctrine resulted in the view that every new epoch of history should unfailingly produce a totally new and homogeneous expression of collective humanity as the result of inexorable laws of historical development. History was seen as consisting of discrete ages, each characterized by a different spirit, which invalidated all previous traditions and cultural patterns created by other ages. Modern architects were thus committed to the revelation of the essential spirit believed unique to their time. This is the ideology of what may accurately be called the utopian period of modern architecture.

Three principal themes can be said to dominate this period: memory, expression, and morality.

Memory

The concept of a spirit that expresses the essence of a time and invalidates previous traditions depends on a progressive view of history in which history is thought to improve art incrementally. Le Corbusier expressed this view of the role of memory in architecture when he wrote, «the house has always been the indispensable and first tool that (man) has forged for himself . . . tools are the result of successive improvement . . . we throw the out-of-date tool on the scrap heap.»[2] Because this evolutionary argument regards the future as morally superior to the past, the forms of the past come to be regarded as contaminating. In *The International Style* Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson acknowledge that it is possible to learn the «healthiest lessons» from the past; but such learning can be achieved only if the study is scientific;[3] that is, if it is conducted according to a historicist view of historical development, in which to go back to the visual attributes of past architectural forms or to acknowledge that such styles express sensibilities that may still be valid is to regress socially and morally. To the extent that the past is addressed at all, it is seen competitively—as a catalogue of peaks to be equaled or surpassed; a rival, not a mentor. By these means «the great styles of the past» were to be emulated «in their essence without imitating their surface.»[4]

This is an inversion of the romantic view, by which architectural history was thought to contain periods in the distant past whose values were superior to those of the present and could be recalled by the use of styles. Instead, a teleological view prevailed, in which a superior force was thought to direct the present toward an incontrovertible, utopian future. The utopian period could not model its forms on those of this favored period, however, as the romantics could do by looking to Greece or Egypt, since the forms did not yet exist. Instead, it gave up the pursuit of form altogether by seeking refuge in the program through the doctrine of functionalism.

Expression

Although the spirit of the age may have demanded such amnesia, the utopian modernists recognized that a simple antihistorical functionalism, based on materials and program, was insufficient to generate expressive buildings. Since they could not call upon the past as

1
See Karl Popper «The Poverty of Historicism» London, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1957

2
Le Corbusier «Towards a New Architecture» London, Architectural Press 1927 p17

3
Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson «The International Style: Architecture Since 1922» W. W. Norton and Co. 1932 p19

4
«The International Style: Architecture Since 1922» p19

a source of formal inspiration, they were forced to resort to the designer's intuition to provide architecture with artistic power.[5] «One may refuse to admit,» as Hitchcock and Johnson put it, «that intentionally functionalist building is quite without a potential aesthetic element. Consciously or unconsciously the architect must make free choices before his design is completed.»[6] These free choices were, of course, highly constrained; they were limited to a palette of novel forms endorsed by the historicist theory of history with its blinkering of memory. Apparent freedom came from the exercise of intuition in the pursuit of this novelty. The expression of the utopian building was therefore to be engendered by that complex of superstitions and prejudices called the spirit of the age, supposedly operating through the intuitive faculties of the designer, like a weathervane recording the passing winds.

Morality

But the full strength of the utopian period is incomprehensible without a third factor to connect the rivalry with history to the myth of intuition; this is the power accorded to morality as a justifying agent. In the historicist conception there could be only one style–the «styleless style»–since there was but one essence of the age. Historical styles were literally «a lie» in Le Corbusier's words, because the essence of the age applied as much to conduct as to art, and an architecture of abstract expression could be justified by the conduct of modern people. For just as it was believed that good people «in tune with the times» would make good architecture, so it was believed that this architecture would make the people good. «Architecture,» proclaimed Le Corbusier, «is a thing which in itself produces happy peoples.»[7] With the belief that the welfare of nations was at stake, it is understandable that moral sanctioning of abstract form could acquire such power at the expense of what now seem legitimate expressive impulses embodied in traditional forms. As Geoffrey Scott had rightly warned in *The Architecture of Humanism*, «the moral judgement, deceived by a false analogy with conduct, tends to intervene before the aesthetic purpose has been impartially discerned.»[8]

The circle of historicism was thus complete: the moral analogy with conduct provided a justification for the expressive potency of novel abstract forms produced through the intuition of the utopianist, and this expressive capability was deprived of all memory connected with place or with artistic traditions by the «progressive» relation between history and morality. This triumvirate of themes made possible the central, most destructive characteristic of the utopian period–the intuitive abstraction of so-called essence from form, and in turn, the abstraction of essential form from place. As a result buildings became abstracted essences, set down on little slices of utopia, like canapes for a feast at the end of the world.

The once powerful interaction of these themes has collapsed under the weight of its own logical and spiritual inadequacies. The failure clearly shows that the historicist underpinnings have collapsed as well. At last modern architects have regained sovereignty over their experience of culture; the impartial discernment of aesthetic purpose is again possible.

5
See Alan Colquhoun «Typology and Design Method» in «Arena» vol. 83, June 1967

6
See «The International Style: Architecture Since 1922» pp36–7

7
«Towards a New Architecture» p19

8
Geoffrey Scott «The Architecture of Humanism, A Study in the History of Taste» London Architectural Press 1980 pp158–9 (First published by Constable and Co. London 1914)

Formal content

In *The International Style* Hitchcock and Johnson analyzed the architecture of orthodox utopian modernism produced in Europe and America between 1922 and 1932 purely on its formal content. Their principles–Architecture as Volume, Regularity, and Avoidance of Applied Decoration–were stylistic principles by which an outward expression of the true zeitgeist could be insured. Because the new architecture was thought to be the direct expression of this universal force they saw no need to consider the capacity of form to convey other interpretations of culture. We can no longer claim such license. We see now that blind faith in such assumptions leads only to the illusion that formal content can be separated from meaning. There is a lesson that we must learn from this unfortunate tendency, for it is the Trojan horse of our present architecture of reflection. On the one hand it is responsible for the spurious stylistic eclecticism which has bedeviled recent work, and on the other hand it has turned into a doctrine what should instead be among the most useful tools of post-historicist criticism: typology. Since this doctrine is a subtle enemy it deserves our close attention.

Typology is the classification of buildings and urban spaces according to inherent characteristics of form, a field of investigation popular in the first half of the nineteenth century and resurrected in the 1960s. Instead of classifying architectural and urban phenomena in terms of function, typological doctrine categorizes them by form.

Though this approach is extremely useful as a tool and is far saner than that of functionalism, since forms endure where functions change,[9] the rationalist doctrine which is founded on typology is of limited use. The doctrine is fatally flawed because it falls short of addressing the diversity of meaning in different buildings derived from the same type. It may, in fact, be said to have substituted a tyranny of form for a tyranny of function. Functionalism deprived architects of their liberty with respect to form by imposing a spirit of the age. Typological doctrine exerts the same restraint by an autonomy of form supposedly found in the type. Rather than reducing form to the shape of an epochal essence, typology demands the reduction of form to a typological essence–that form which endures through the greatest changes of function thereby becoming autonomous. Such forms must be stripped of anything that would compromise the purity of the type and encumber it with the unfortunately inescapable cultural experiences of the architect. Where previously the superhuman force was in the will of history, now it is in the world of objects. In short, neither functionalism nor typology permit us to deal directly with the problem of meaning.

9
See Aldo Rossi «The Architecture of the City» Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press 1982 (First published as «L'Architettura Della Citta» Padua Marsilio Editori 1966)

Representational content

As we have seen, the collapse of historicism now permits a diversity of cultural representations. The attempt to separate form from that meaning which stems from cultural representation can no longer be credible as a result of this collapse. The embodiment of such meaning in form may be called representational content.

In the ideology of the utopian period representational content was deliberately kept consistent; otherwise it would have denied the idea of a homogeneous zeitgeist dispersed throughout civilization. That is why very few historians of modern architecture writing during the utopian period consider the total architectural production of the years with which they are concerned. Their examinations do not consider Lutyens with Le Corbusier, Bacon with Meis, or Cram with Gropius. That is also why the utopianists did not look at architecture as a matter of equally valid expression by different individuals; they saw it rather as an expression of the «terms of the day,» as Hitchcock and Johnson described the zeitgeist. And that is also why, in *Towards a New Architecture*, the rightness of the expression of the historicist view through the principles of Mass, Surface, and Volume is a fundamental «question of morality,» the phrase that opens Le Corbusier's book.

That we may now, with the benefit of time, look back on the great buildings of the utopian period and see their representational content as inconsistent is simply the reflection of our own preoccupations. Great buildings always transcend the ideology that brings them into being, allowing each new generation to find itself within them.

For the first time a sufficient body of post-utopian evidence is now available to allow a comprehensive study of a modern architecture based on representational content—on the representation of diverse, opposing interpretations of modern industrial culture.

Because we have been unused to looking at architecture as a medium of cultural representation, and unused to thinking of its principal themes as deriving from such representation, the profusion of styles in contemporary work may seem disunified and chaotic. In fact, however, this profusion should be seen as the outward form of the self-contemplating reason of many individuals seeking to comprehend the tangled meanings of industrial culture. The unity of this work is in the terms by which buildings can be usefully distinguished from one another. Such works are distinguishable according to the sensibilities they embody concerning the psychological effects of modern industrial culture on man. It is from examining and interpreting representational content—rather than simply glossing over formal diversity—that current production in architecture can be understood as a continuation of modernism. This continuation can be shown to exist even when the formal content of this architecture defies description as «modernist» in the narrow historicist terms of the utopian period.

This point of view allows us to reassess the validity of the entire production of the early twentieth century as modern architecture. It also allows an integration of what may appear to be unreconcilable strains in contemporary work. To approach the problem of modernism in this fashion—as cultural representation rather than historicist ideology—provides us with the key to understanding how the themes of memory, expression, and morality that run through the utopian period continue into what may now be described as the *psychological* period of modern architecture. To stress the Greek derivation of both terms, one might say that we are no longer the visionaries of an architecture of no place, but the inhabitants of an architecture of the mind—no longer pioneers, but urban dwellers.

The critical tools appropriate to utopian modernism and based on a historicist view of the concepts of memory, expression, and morality will not reveal the representational content of psychological modernism; they are of no use to the contemporary critic. Methods based on a reevaluation of these concepts are required before representational content can be understood. Only in this way can the impartial discernment of aesthetic purpose again be possible.

Psychological modernism

Memory

If we free ourselves of the historicist view that there is a single legitimate sensibility by which the uniqueness of our time can be revealed, we instantly make of history a repository of meanings relevant to the present; this is because we are also liberated from the belief that whatever was meaningful in past ages is meaningful only to those ages and to no others, least of all our own. Thus history becomes transparent to the architect. It takes on a new reality as a mentor that can reveal aspects of ourselves we could not have perceived otherwise; it is no longer made opaque by antagonisms to a rival, who, though possibly admired, is not embraced. This attitude of history as a mentor makes available the historical repository of two fundamental concepts: type and style.

10
Antoine Chrysôtome Quatremère de Quincy «Dictionnaire historique d'architecture comprenant dans son plan les notions historiques, descriptives, archaeologiques, biographiques, théoriques, didactiques et pratiques de cet Art, 2 vols.» Paris 1832
Quoted from the section on type, second volume

Type is that formal characteristic of any building or city that cannot be further reduced. It is, in Quatremere de Quincy's well-known words: «not so much the image of a thing to be copied or perfectly imitated as the idea of an element that must itself serve as a rule for (a work of architecture) . . . Type is an object according to which one can conceive works that do not resemble one another at all.» [10] Different periods have produced different types, such as those of the centrally planned church or the Georgian townhouse. Established types were rejected by the utopians in favor of novel ones, such as the German *siedlung*; they are rehabilitated by the embrace of history.

Style is what must be fused with type to make buildings or cities. It is the means by which, from the same type, «one can conceive works that do not resemble one another at all.» Just as there can be no styleless style, so there cannot be type without style. Freedom from historicism gives contemporary culture access to the mysterious complex repository of means by which types have been transformed into artifacts.

Expression

This memory of the past now permits us two distinct vehicles of expression, both of which were denied by the ideology of the utopian period. They derive from the simple fact that as human beings we have both physical and intellectual memory. From these two kinds of memory we may derive two kinds of expression in architecture: that which stems from an analogy with the physical memory of the effects of natural forces on the body, and that derived from an analogy with the intellectual memory of places and events. We are here presented with the poles of post-utopian expression: empathy and association. Both reject intuition as a basis for creation, for it is not intuition but precedent on which they depend; where empathy demands a constant reference to the human body, association finds its reference in human culture. Whereas the expressive inclinations of the utopian period were intuitive and sought to fathom the mysteries of the zeitgeist, those of psychological modernism are based on scholarship and seek to turn precedent to creative ends by permitting and encouraging a diversity of representational content.

Morality

Obviously, therefore, we can no longer speak of a moral sanction for any single form of representational content. Neither, however, may we speak of the representation of facets of cultural experience derived from history and expressed through empathy and association without considering how such expression gains legitimacy.

Though ethical and aesthetic values may be related, we have learned from the failures of the utopian period that there is not the slightest possibility that the moral instinct–that instinct by which we judge human behavior–can independently create or discern aesthetic value. We must ask as Geoffrey Scott did in *The Architecture of Humanism*, about the extent to which an analogy exists between these realms.

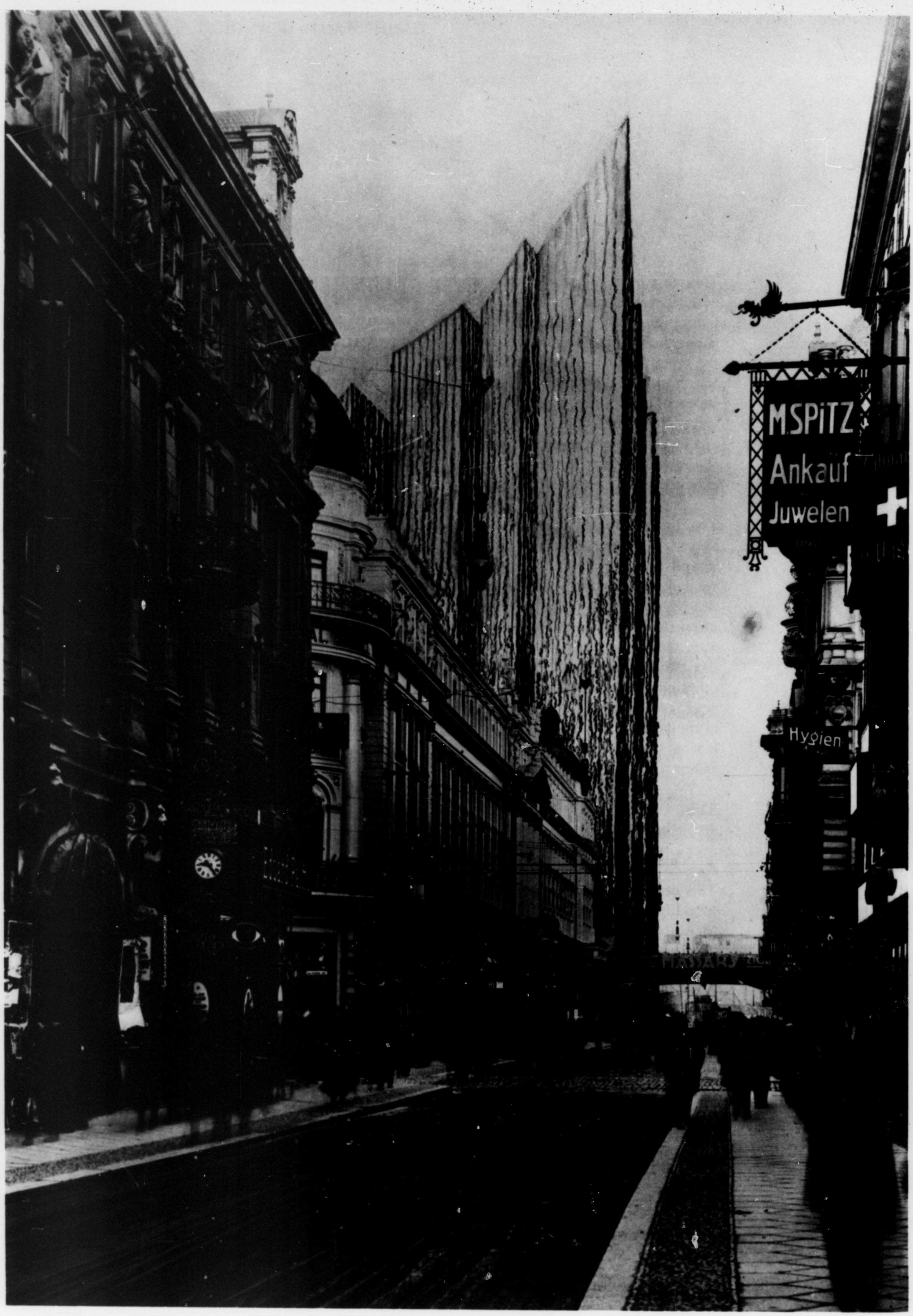
11
Scott p162

«The dignity of architecture,» wrote Scott, «is the same ‹dignity› that we recognize in character. Thus, when once we have discerned it aesthetically in architecture, there may arise in the mind its moral echo.» To put it another way, the aesthetic and ethical realms are like two bells; when we strike one, the other may ring in harmony; but we can never strike one bell with the hammer of the other. The fact of this resonance is what Scott called «the true ethical analogy.»

This is what makes it possible for architecture to move us to the core. «Morality,» as Scott said, «deepens the content of architectural experience.»[11] This deepening is the very role of morality in psychological modernism. Morality is no longer a justifying but a deepening agent. It is exactly this deepening that creates representational content and prevents a spurious eclecticism or a dry and meaningless rationalism. For the deepening of architectural content by the true ethical analogy returns the diverse interpretations of culture to the moral world, the world of human conduct. This return of meaning from the aesthetic world to the moral world, achieved through the resonance of one with the other when the first is sounded by its own means, is what confers legitimacy on form.

We may now posit a restructuring of the themes of the utopian period. The rejection of historicism makes of history a mentor rather than a rival, permitting us to see the meanings of all past forms as instructive and relevant to the present. This release of memory makes possible the expression of such meanings through empathy and association, whether separately or in combination. Finally, these meanings can be deepened by the true ethical analogy to create diverse representational content which, returned to the moral world, is legitimized by the industrial culture it reflects and describes.

Therefore, the psychological period does not seek the abstraction of essence from form, but rather the representation of culture through form. In turn, it does not seek the abstraction of essential form from place, but rather the urban discourse which is unique to architecture. Since cities are the greatest material expression of culture and are created over large periods of time, it is a basic fact that urbanism is the record of cultural diversity, both over time and in the present. Any theory of architecture that disregards this fact and does not permit diversity in its theoretical structure fails to take account of the uniqueness of architecture and does not take advantage of its principal strength. Architecture must be capable of urban discourse, of drawing from culture that power which infuses the discipline of architecture, its traditions and its logic, with significance, and breathes life into its speech. After years of famine, modern architecture is at last capable of such discourse.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K. Michael Hays

Critical Architecture

Between Culture and Form

That architecture, as activity and knowledge, is fundamentally a cultural enterprise may hardly seem a contentious proposition. And yet questions concerning the precise nature of the reciprocal influences between culture and architectural form bring opposing theories of architecture and its interpretation into forceful play.[1]

In this essay I shall examine a critical architecture, one resistant to the self-confirming, conciliatory operations of a dominant culture and yet irreducible to a purely formal structure disengaged from the contingencies of place and time. A reinterpretation of a few projects by Mies van der Rohe will provide examples of a critical architecture that claims for itself a place *between* the efficient representation of preexisting cultural values and the wholly detached autonomy of an abstract formal system. The proposition of a critical realm between culture and form is not so much an extension of received views of interpretation as it is a challenge to those views that claim to exhaust architectural meaning in considerations of only one side or the other. It will be helpful, therefore, to begin with a brief review of two prevalent interpretive perspectives that make just such a claim.

Mies van der Rohe
Friedrichstrasse
project
charcoal drawing
1919

Architecture as an instrument of culture

The first position emphasizes culture as the cause and content of built form; the task of the interpreter, then, becomes the study of objects and environments as signs, symptoms, and instruments of cultural values. On this view architecture is essentially an epiphenomenon, dependent on socioeconomic, political, and technological processes for its various states and transformations. Moreover, as a functional support for human institutions and as a reification of a collective volition, architecture ennobles the culture that produces it; architecture reconfirms the hegemony of culture and helps to assure its continuity. Accordingly, the optimum relationship to be established between culture and form is one of correspondence, the latter efficiently representing the values of the former.

The temporal convention of interpretation is, on this view, retrospective. Architecture is seen as already completed; the critic or historian attempts to restore an architectural object to its original meaning. Misunderstanding is presumed to arise naturally because of the changes in architecture, language, and world view that have taken place in the time separating the architectural object from the interpreter; the meaning must therefore be recovered by a disciplined reconstruction of the cultural situation in which the object originated. Starting from the documents, recorded actions, and artifacts which are the base material of the historical world, understanding is seen as essentially a self-transposition or imaginative projection backward in time. When this historical method is of sufficient fidelity, an «objective and true» explanation of the object in question results. It is supposed that the only alternative to the strict methodological recovery of the cultural situation at the time of the object's origin is the denial of any historical objectivity and capitulation to the idea that all schemes of interpretation are hopelessly subjective.[2]

Architecture as autonomous form

The opposite position begins with the assumption that the only alternative to a strict, factual recovery of the originating situation is the renunciation of a single «truth,» and advocates a proliferation of interpretations based solely on form. Interpretations made from this second position are characterized by the comparative absence of historical concerns in favor of attention to the autonomous architectural object and its formal operations–how its parts have been put together, how it is a wholly integrated and equilibrated system that can be understood without external references, and as important, how it may be reused, how its constituent parts and processes may be recombined.

The temporal convention of interpretation here is that of an ideal moment in a purely conceptual space; architectural operations are imagined to be spontaneous, internalized–that is, outside circumstantial reality–and assimilable as pure idea. Architectural form is understood to be produced in a particular time and place, of course, but the origin of the object is not allowed to constrain its meaning. The intent is precisely to dismiss any of the worldly, circumstantial, or socially contaminated content of history, because such subject matter would necessarily impinge upon the intellectual liberty of criticism and the availability of the formal strategies for reuse. Architectural form can be read and interpreted, of course, yet misreadings and misunderstandings are understood to occur routinely, and with benefit. In any case, there is a conscious avoidance of any historical or material fact other than those of a dislodged formal system. The way in which a building as a cultural object in time is possessed, rejected, or achieved is not addressed.[3]

Such an approach has not been entirely unhealthy for architectural interpretation. It has done away with testimonials rhetorically proclaiming a work's greatness and humanistic worth on the basis of its accurate representation of the dominant culture. It has developed a specialized vocabulary enabling critics to talk seriously, technically, and precisely about the architectural object as distinct from other kinds of objects. Furthermore, so long as we construe architecture as essentially dependent on or representative of something else, we cannot see what it does itself; so long as we expect to understand architecture in terms of some anterior process, we cannot see an architecture that is, paradoxically, both the end of representation and the beginning of something quite its own.

Nevertheless, the absolute autonomy of form and its superiority over historical and material contingencies is proclaimed, not by virtue of its power in the world, but by virtue of its admitted powerlessness. Reduced to pure form, architecture has disarmed itself from the start, maintaining its purity by acceding to social and political inefficacy.

Moreover, this formalist position risks collapsing into an interpretive scientism not unlike the one it seeks to criticize. If attempts to recover «history as it really happened» display a quite overt emulation of the positivist methodology of the natural sciences, the formalist attitude too often falls unwittingly into its own scientism as formal categories become more rigidly defined and entrenched. When priority is ascribed to formal categories and operations that claim to be free of history and circumstance, interpretive analysis risks simply reaffirming what its formal categories predict. The supposed universality of any one kind of formal analysis obscures the fact that critical methods are formed through examination of a necessarily limited set of exemplars, and that these paradigms emanate from a specific culture–they do not come to us untainted. It also obscures the fact that the methods of study of these objects are themselves part of a larger complex ensemble of relationships, are contaminated by their own worldliness, and are legitimized by some other cultural authority. A perhaps unforeseen consequence of this idealization of object and method is that architecture is denied its special status as a cultural object with a causation, presence, and duration of its own.

The worldliness of architecture

The two positions sketched above are symptomatic of a pervasive dichotomy in architectural theory and criticism. One side describes artifacts as instruments of the self-justifying, self-perpetuating hegemony of culture; the other side treats architectural objects in their most disinfected, pristine state, as containers of a privileged principle of internal coherence. An alternative interpretive position which cuts across this dichotomy would bear not only a more robust description of the artifacts, but also the more intricate analysis demanded by artifacts situated explicitly and critically *in the world*–in culture, in theories of culture, in theories of interpretation itself.

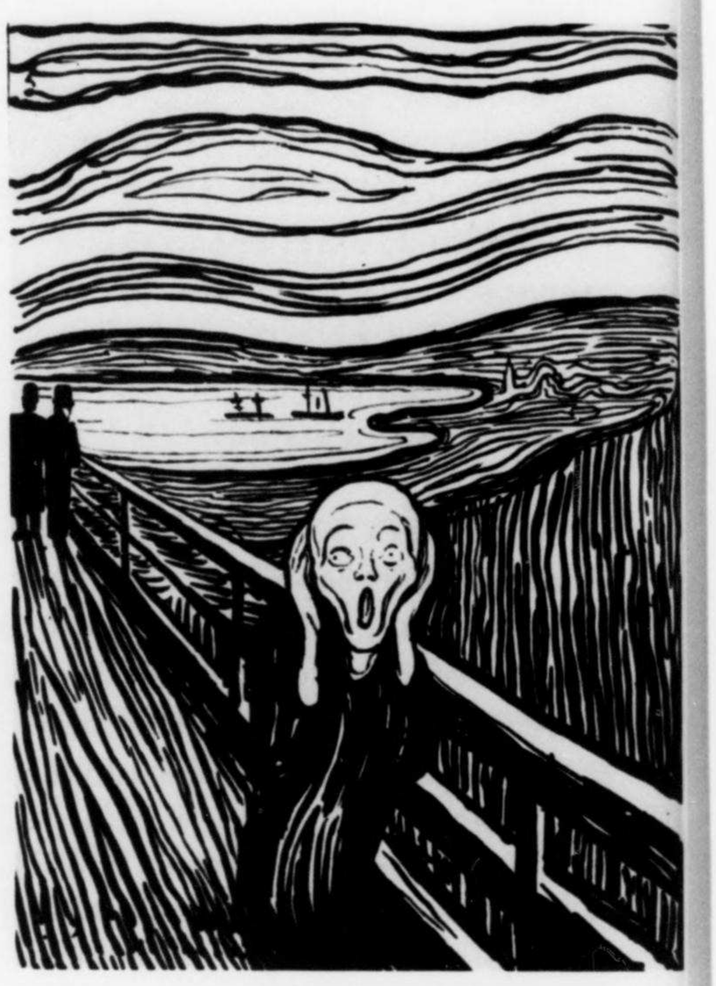
A discussion of a few projects by Mies van der Rohe will draw attention to the fact that an architectural object, by virtue of its situation in the world, is an object whose interpretation *has already commenced* but is *never complete*. Historical contingency and circumstantiality, as well as the artifact's persisting sensuous particularity, must all be considered as incorporated in the architectural object; they saturate the very essence of the work. Each architectural object places itself in a specific situation in the world, so to speak, and its manner of doing this constrains what can be done with it in interpretation. The particular works by Mies to be examined are those I would describe as *critical*. They might also be called *resistant* and *oppositional*. This is an architecture that cannot be reduced either to a conciliatory representation of external forces or to a dogmatic, reproducible formal system. If a critical architecture is to be worldly and self-aware simultaneously, its definition is in its difference from other cultural manifestations and from a priori categories or methods.

Kurt Schwitters
view of the Mertzbau
Hanover
1920–1936

The critical architecture of Mies van der Rohe

Among the principal problems the intellectual faced in the first half of the twentieth century was the acute anxiety that derived from the chaotic metropolitan experience. In the essay «The Metropolis and Mental Life,» the sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel described this condition as «the intensification of nervous stimulation» resulting from the «the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.» The typical consequence of this *nervenleben*, according to Simmel, is a blasé attitude–a blunting of discrimination, an indifference to value, a languid collectivity. «In this phenomenon the nerves find in the refusal to react to their stimulation the last possibility of accommodating to the contents and forms of metropolitan life. The self-preservation of certain personalities is bought at the price of devaluating the whole objective world, a devaluation which in the end unavoidably drags one's own personality down into a feeling of the same worthlessness.»[4]

The problem for the intellectual, then, was how to oppose this debilitating dismay, but first how to reveal it–how to provide a cognitive mechanism with which to register the intense changes continually experienced in the modern city. Many of the century's early artistic experiments, from the woodcuts of Edvard Munch to the novels of Franz Kafka, may be seen as attempts to articulate the abject despair of the individual caught by impersonal and incomprehensible forces. The *reklamearchitektur* (advertising architecture) of Eric Mendelsohn and the factories of Hans Poelzig made manifest, as if to pin down and contemplate, the dynamism, the contradictions, and the disjunctures in the processes and reasoning of commerce and industry. On the other hand Dada's ferocious nihilism was an explicit attempt to demonstrate the futility of conventional modes of reasoning in the face of the chaotic city. As Jean Arp put it, «Dada wished to destroy the hoaxes of reason and to discover an unreasoned order.»[5] And Mondrian named the city itself as the ultimate form toward which de Stijl tended. «The genuinely Modern artist sees the metropolis as Abstract living converted into form; it is nearer to him than nature.»[6] It is against this metropolitan predicament that the early work of Mies van der Rohe should be seen.



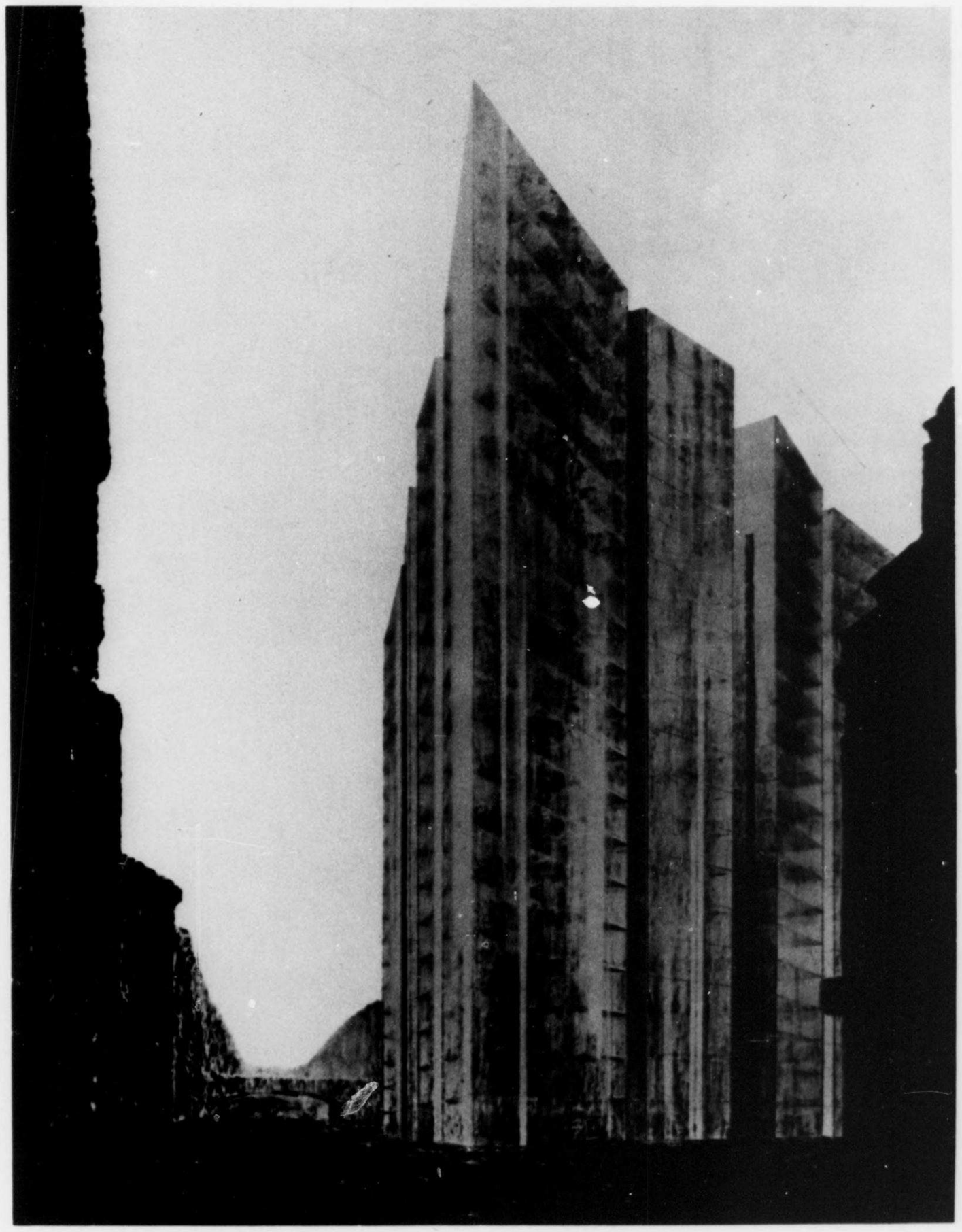
Edvard Munch
«The Scream»
1895

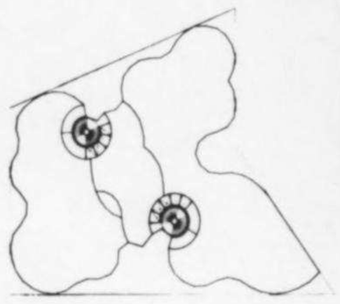
Eric Mendelsohn
Schocken
Department Store
Stuttgart
1926–29

Georg Grosz
«Friedrichstrasse»
lithograph
1918

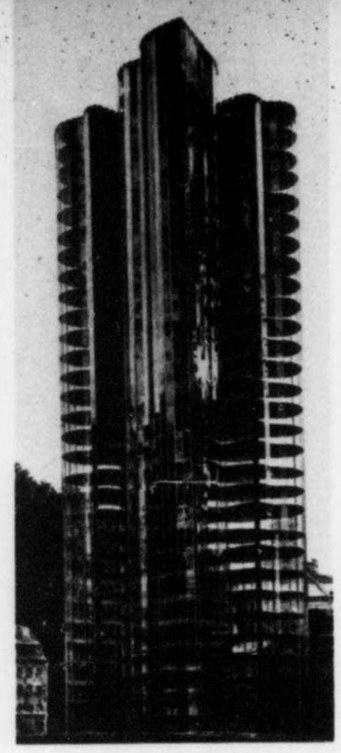
The rather startling image of the 1922 skyscraper project, published in the second issue of *G*, comprises two architectural propositions. One, a result of experiments already begun in Mies's Friedrichstrasse project, is a building surface qualified no longer by patterns of shadow on an opaque material but by the reflections and refractions of light by glass. The other, a radical departure from even the earlier skyscraper studies, is a building form conceived not in terms of separate, articulated masses related to one another by a geometrically derived core, but as a complex unitary volume that does not permit itself to be read in terms of an internal formal logic. With these two related propositions Mies confronted the problem of physically and conceptually relating the architectural object to the city. The glass curtain wall–alternately transparent, reflective, or refractive depending on light conditions and viewing positions–absorbs, mirrors, or distorts the immediate images of city life. The convex, faceted surfaces are perceptually contorted by the invasion of circumstantial images, while the reflection each concavity receives on its surface is that of its own shadow, creating gaps which exacerbate the disarray.

Mies van der Rohe
Friedrichstrasse
project, charcoal
drawing
1919





Mies van der Rohe
Skyscraper project plan
1922



Mies van der Rohe
Skyscraper project
model
1922

These surface distortions accompany and accentuate the formal inscrutability of the volumetric configuration. In classically derived form, the viewer can grasp an antecedent logic of the object, deciphering the relationships between its parts and connecting every part to a coherent formal theme; the alternative posited by Mies is an object intractable to decoding by formal analysis. It is impossible, for example, to reduce the whole to a number of constituent parts related by some internal armature or transformed through some formal operation; indeed, no such compositional relationships exist. Neither is it possible to explicate the object as a deflection from some type; Mies has rejected the meanings that such classical design methods tend to promote. Instead he has invested meaning in the sense of surface and volume that the building assumes in a particular time and place, in a contextually qualified moment.

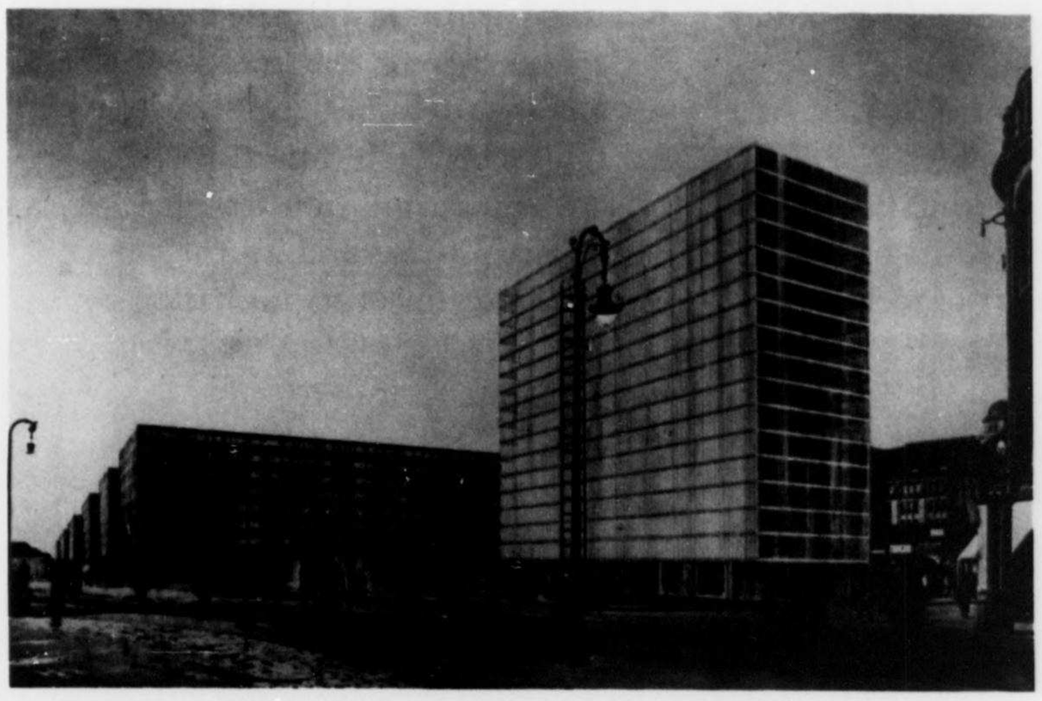
Mies insists that an order is immanent in the surface itself and that the order is continuous with and dependent upon the world in which the viewer actually moves. This sense of surface and volume, severed from the knowledge of an internal order or a unifying logic, is enough to wrench the building from the atemporal, idealized realm of autonomous form and install it in a specific situation in the real world of experienced time, open to the chance and uncertainty of life in the metropolis.[7] Mies here shares with Dada an antagonism against a priori and reasoned order; he plunges into the chaos of the new city and seeks another order within it through a systematic use of the unexpected, the aleatory, the inexplicable.[8]

This solicitation of experience is intrinsic to the meaning of the work; it serves to identify and individuate the work itself as an event having sensuous particularity and temporal duration, both of which are infrangible to its capacity for producing and conveying meaning. Nevertheless, Mies's skyscraper project is not conciliatory to the circumstances of its context. It is a critical interpretation of its worldly situation.

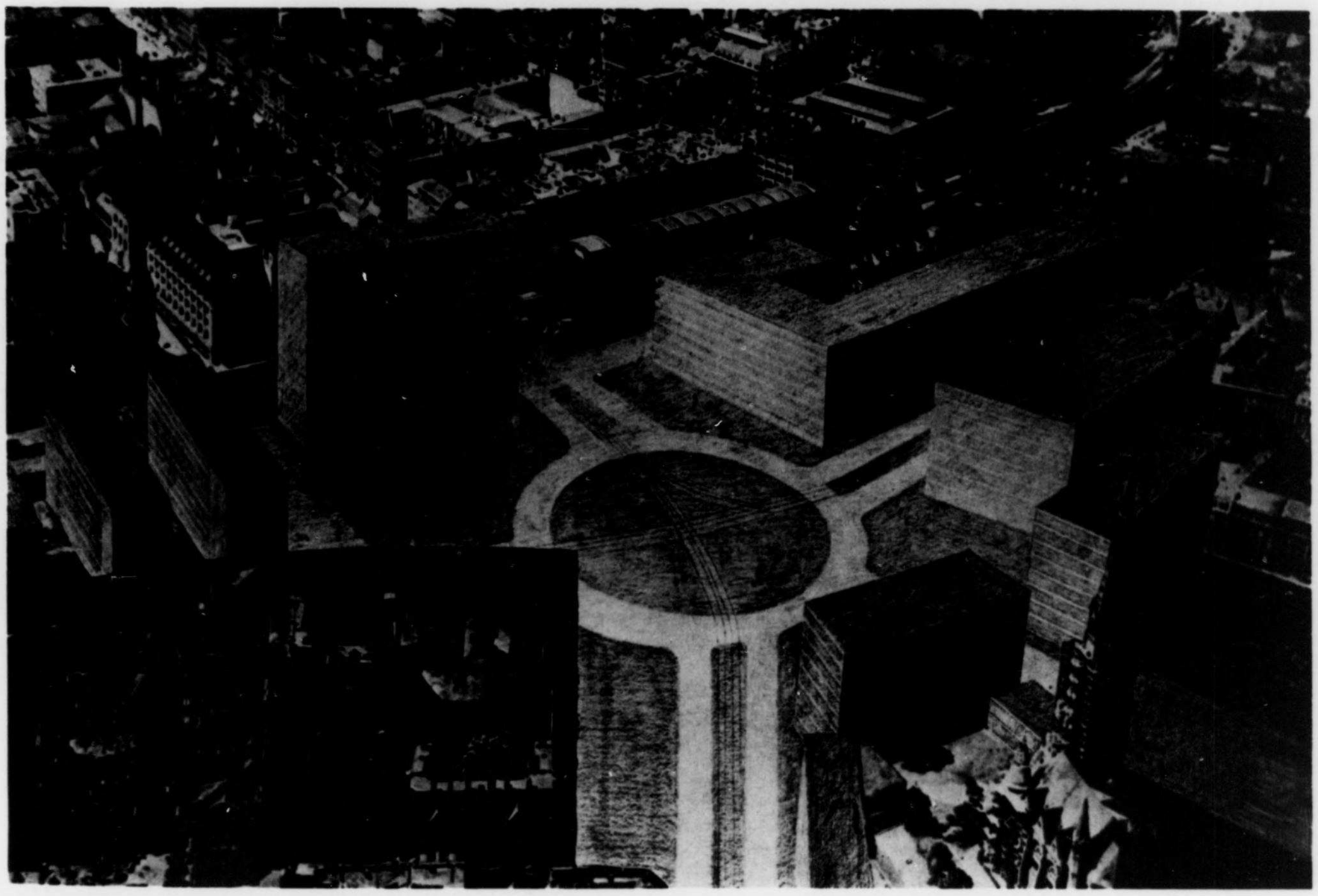
Mies van der Rohe
Skyscraper project
charcoal drawing
1922

In the skyscraper project of 1922 Mies approached a radically new conception of reciprocity between the corporeality of the architectural object and the images of culture that surround it; by 1928—in projects like the Adam building on the Leipzigerstrasse in Berlin, the bank in Stuttgart, and the competition for the Alexanderplatz in Berlin—he seems to have diverted his efforts. These projects abstain from any dialogue with the physical particularities of their contexts; as peremptorily demonstrated in the drawings, the glass-walled blocks could be reproduced on any site with no significant manipulation of their form. Though each building unit has been adapted to the shape and size of its own lot (for example, the Alexanderplatz project), the relentless sameness of the units and their undifferentiated order tend to deny the possibility of attaching significance to the placement or arrangement of the forms. But the repudiation of a priori formal logic as the primary locus of meaning is precisely what is at issue; it is this repudiation that links the projects of 1928 to the research of 1922. Meaning is made a function of impersonal productive systems rather than of formal operations or of representational devices.

Mies van der Rohe
Stuttgart Bank project
collage
1928



Mies van der Rohe
Alexanderplatz project
1928



Mies van der Rohe
Alexanderplatz project
collage
1928

Here we must take Mies at his word. «We refuse to recognize problems of form, but only problems of building. Form is not the aim of our work, but only the result. Form by itself does not exist. Form as an aim is formalism; and that we reject.»[9] As hypothesized by Mies, modern building production requires that each building unit be complete in itself yet identical to all others, disallowing either hierarchical relationships among units or predetermined points of focus or termination. Rejecting the specifications of the Alexanderplatz competition, for instance–which favored a curved, peripheral building that would enclose and centralize the space of the preexisting traffic circle–Mies's objects are disposed in such a way that no resolute center can be found. Across the *Platz* or across the intervals of space between the serial building units, each glass-walled block confronts and recognizes nothing but its double. Like two parallel mirrors, each infinitely repeats the other's emptiness. The space is duplicitous, but the motivation is inescapable. Mies's achievement was to open up a clearing of implacable silence in the chaos of the nervous metropolis; this clearing is a radical critique, not only of the established spatial order of the city and the established logic of classical composition, but also of the inhabiting *nervenleben*. It is the extreme depth of silence in this clearing–silence as an architectural form all its own–that is the architectural meaning of this project.

Both conceptions of the architectural object–as the efficient embodiment of a dominant system of values, and as the uncircumstanced existence of autonomous form–are seriously challenged, if not defeated, by the way in which this silent clearing claims a place in the world. First there is the recognition of the reciprocity between the culturally qualified, empirical conditions of building production and the practice of architecture. Mies's obdurate refusal to manipulate his objects to conform to any a priori formal logic has the effect of repudiating internal formal operations as a source of the objects' meaning. Second, though Mies succeeds in directing the architectural meaning to the outside–to what might be called cultural space–there is the insistence that architecture does not «honestly» represent the technical, social, or economic conditions that produced it. Indeed, Mies's architecture conceals the «real» origins of its formation by displacing them with a material substitute–an irreducibly architectural object. It effectively cancels the complex network of colliding forces in which architecture originates to present us with the silent fact of its existence. «Since the facts have the floor, let anyone who has anything to say come forward and keep his mouth shut,» wrote Karl Kraus.[10] Mies's silent architecture, following Kraus's dictum, comes forward to occupy its cultural space actively; it displaces what would have been in its place. Critical architecture pushes aside other kinds of discourse or communication in order to place before the world a culturally informed product, part of whose self-definition includes the implication of *discontinuity* and *difference* from other cultural activities.

Distinguishing architecture from the forces that influence architecture–the conditions established by the market and by taste, the personal aspirations of its author, its technical origins, even its purpose as defined by its own tradition–became the objective of Mies. To achieve this, he placed his architecture in a critical position between culture as a massive body of self-perpetuating ideas and form supposedly free of circumstance.

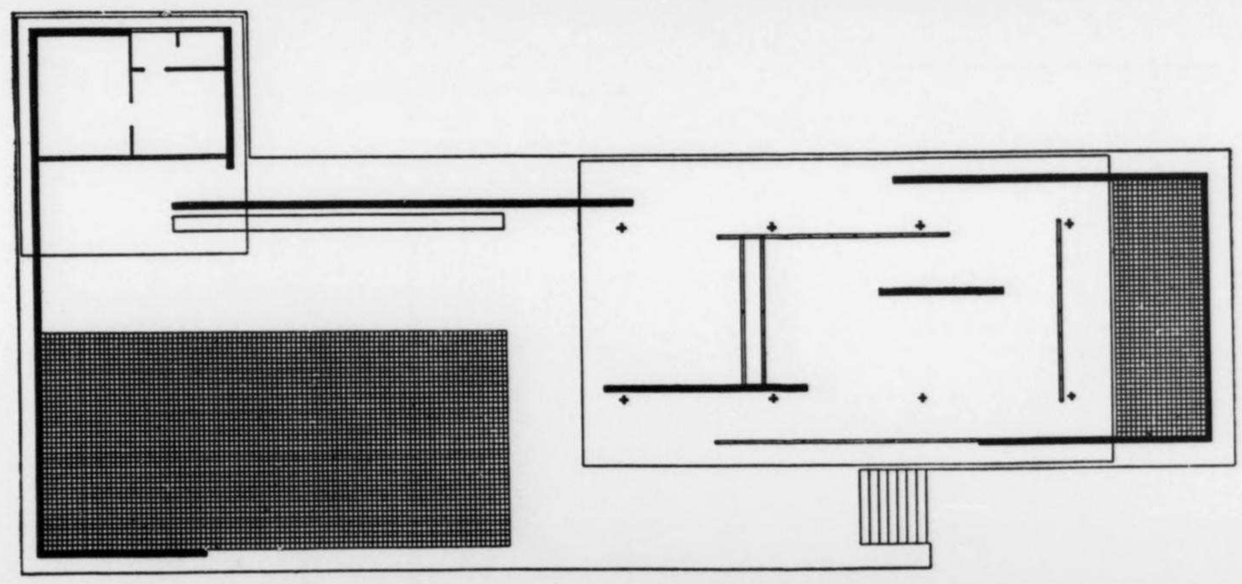
Our observations can be verified against the masterwork of Mies's early career, the 1929 German Pavilion in Barcelona. With respect to our analysis thus far, this project initially appears polemical and self-critical. The Pavilion has been widely regarded as the most immaculate transcription of the modern spatial conception: a synthesis of Wright's horizontal planes and the abstract compositions of the Suprematist-Elementarists; with honorific nods to the walls of Berlage («let alone from floor to cornice»), the materials of Loos, and the podium and columns of Schinkel; all processed through the spatial conceptions of de Stijl. This seems to claim for the Pavilion a rarefied spatial order that presents itself as an a priori mental construct rather than a palpable worldly object.

However, this is precisely *not* the order of Mies: «The idealistic principle of order . . . with its over-emphasis on the ideal and formal, satisfies neither our interest in simple reality nor our practical commonsense.»[11]

The Barcelona Pavilion begins with a horizontally extended space which is described by the uninterrupted roof slab, its relation to the columns and walls, and the corresponding constancy of section and volume implied by the floor plane. Space is, quite literally, continuous between the Pavilion and the plaza in front of the Palace Alfonso XIII. The Pavilion more specifically engages its site through the careful contrast between the long travertine walls, the roof slab, and the unbroken palace wall. All this solicits the viewer to walk through the building, but the limpid harmony of the exterior is confounded in the experience of the spatial succession of the interior.

Mies van der Rohe
German Pavilion
in Barcelona
1929

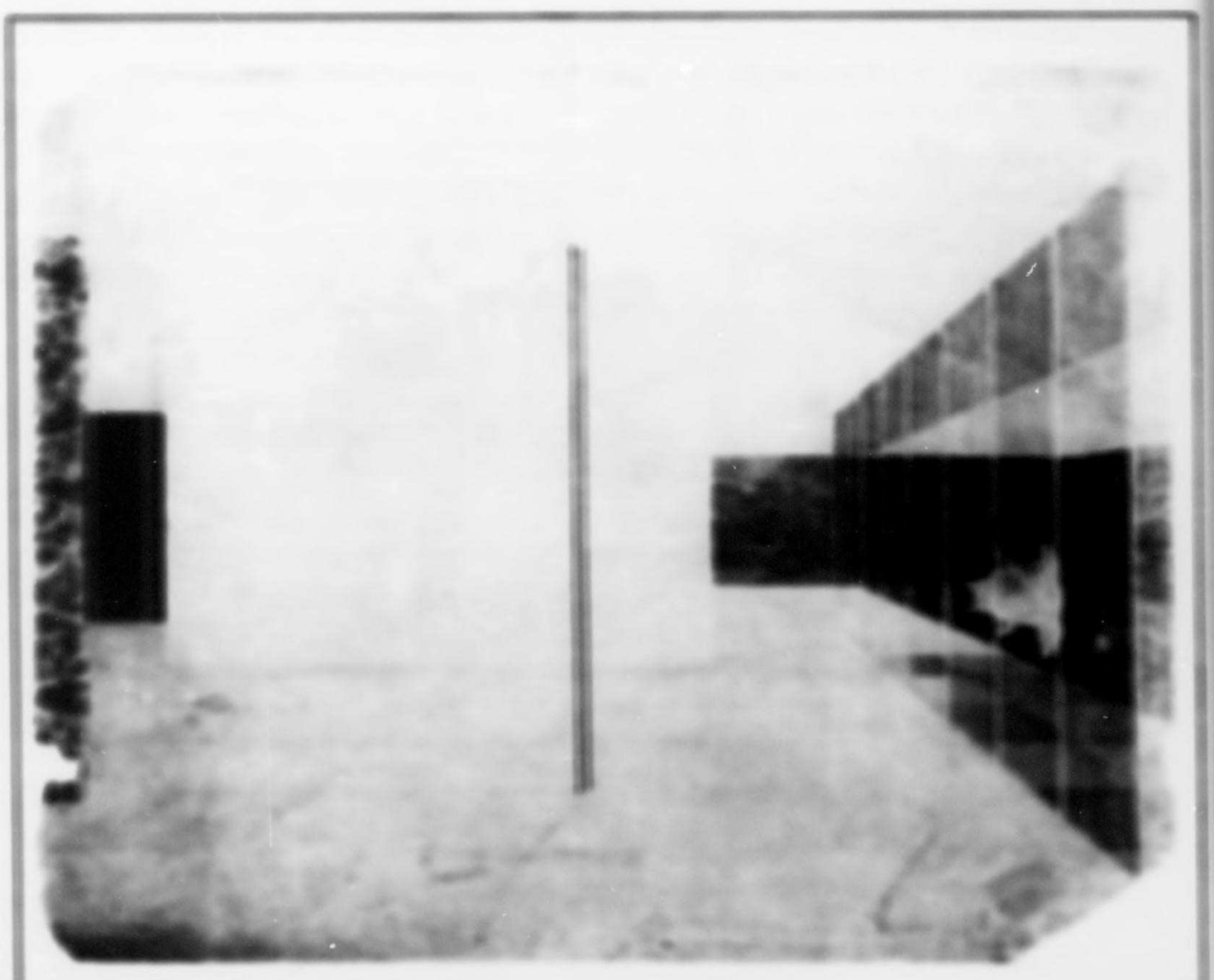
German Pavilion
in Barcelona
interior



German Pavilion
in Barcelona
interior

There is no prescribed logic of passage; the composition is neither a relational hierarchy of component parts nor a series of identical units repeated in a potentially endless chain. What is presented instead is an assemblage of different parts of disparate materials: the travertine pavement and walls surrounding the large pool, the marble walls facing the court, tinted glass diaphragms, the onyx slab and light wall, the chromium columns and glazing bars. The relationships among these parts are in constant flux as one moves through the building. Because there is no conceptual center to organize the parts or transcend our perception of them, the particular quality of each material is registered as a kind of absolute; space itself becomes a function of the specificities of the materials.

The normal system of expectations about materials, however, is quickly shattered as materials begin to contradict their own nature. Supporting columns dissolve in an invasion of light on their surfaces; the highly polished green Tinian marble reflects the highlights of the chromium glazing bars and seems to become transparent, as does the onyx slab; the green-tinted glass, in turn, becomes an impenetrable mirrored screen; the pool in the small court—shielded from the wind and lined in black glass—is a perfect mirror, in which stands George Kolbe's «Dancer.» The fragmentation and distortion of the space is total. Any transcendent order of space and time that would confer an overarching unity onto this assemblage is systematically and utterly dispersed. Mies has constructed a labyrinth that denies us access to the ideal moment of organization lying beyond the actual experience of this montage of contradictory, perceptual facts. The work itself is an event with temporal duration, whose actual existence is continually being produced.

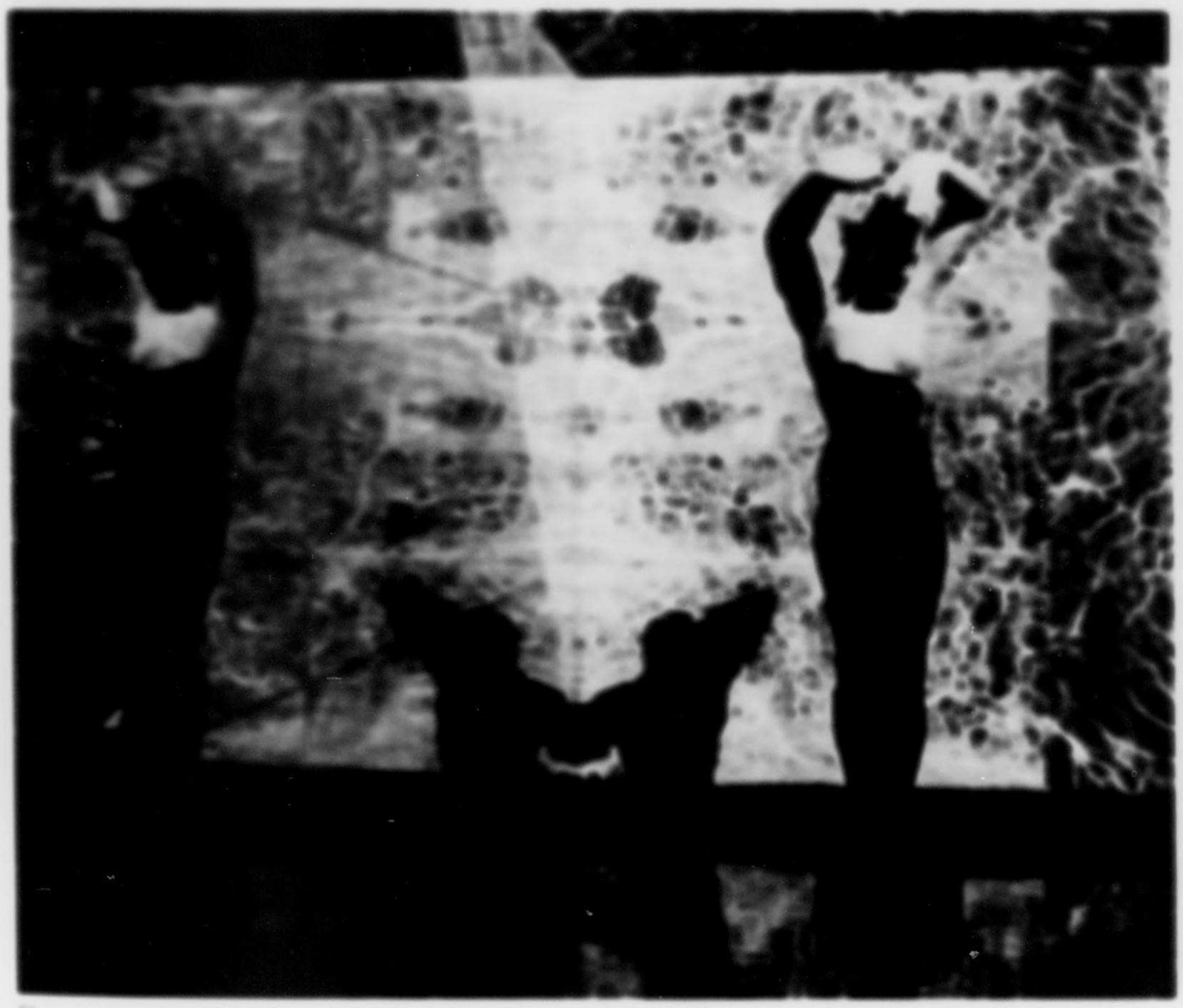


a

b

What should strike us forcibly, then, is that the artifact is nothing less than a *winning of reality*.[10] Though it exists to a considerable extent by virtue of its own formal structures, it cannot be apprehended only formally. Nor does it simply represent a preexisting reality. The architectural reality takes its place *alongside* the real world, explicitly sharing temporal and spatial conditions of that world, but obstructing their absolute authority with an alternative of material, technical, and theoretical precision. A participant in the world and yet disjunctive with it, the Barcelona Pavilion tears a cleft in the continuous surface of reality.

c



d

a
Mies van der Rohe
German Pavilion
in Barcelona
1929
drawing of
interior

b, c
German Pavilion
in Barcelona
interior

d, e
George Kolbe
«Dancer»
German Pavilion
in Barcelona
1929

Max Ernst
«Tous les vendredis, les
Titans parcourrant nos
buanderies» from
La Femme 100 Tetes

A brief analogy will perhaps afford these points added clarity. In 1929 Max Ernst published his pictorial novel, *La Femme 100 Têtes* (The Hundred Headless Woman), a purely metropolitan inspiration comprising a series of collages made from scenes gathered from popular nineteenth-century illustrated books and magazines onto which Ernst grafted objects or occupants foreign to them. What results in such collages as «Tous les vendredis, les Titans parcourront nos buanderie» (Every Friday, the Titans will invade our laundry) is a laconic display of two incommensurable experiences interlocked across the surface of the work. Like Ernst, Mies was able to see his constructions as the place in which the motivated, the planned, and the rational are brought together with the contingent, the unpredictable, and the inexplicable. This vision persisted even in Mies's later works. The campus of IIT, for example, can be construed as a redistribution of some of the design strategies of the Alexanderplatz project and the Barcelona Pavilion—a subtle grafting of an alternative reality onto the chaos of Chicago's South Side.

Mies van der Rohe
Illinois Institute of
Technology (IIT)
1939

Authorship as a resistant authority

From the skyscraper project of 1922 to the Barcelona Pavilion, Mies's architectural program was a persistent rewriting of a few themes. Beginning with a set of arbitrary propositions, Mies rationalized his initial choice of themes by demonstrating the range of their applicability. He reused them in changing circumstances; he modified and refined them over time. This sort of repetition renders the issue of origins or first causes unproblematic, one arbitrary *cantus firmus* being imitated and repeated so many times as to lose its primacy.

Though the beginning of his authorship is arbitrary, repetition demonstrates the consistency of Mies's authorial motivation; it establishes the constancy of his intent. A persistently rearticulated intent accumulates knowledge—more specific and more precise—of the general architectural program and allows the growth of that knowledge according to its own special beginnings and conventions rather than according to those derived from some prior authority. Mies does not accept a preexisting frame of reference; he represents neither an authoritative culture nor an authoritative formal system.

Repetition thus demonstrates how architecture can resist, rather than reflect, an external cultural reality. In this way authorship achieves a *resistant authority*—an ability to initiate or develop cultural knowledge whose absolute authority is radically nil but whose contingent authority is a quite persuasive, if transitory, alternative to the dominant culture. Authorship can resist the authority of culture, stand against the generality of habit and the particularity of nostalgic memory, and still have a very precise intention.

Critical architecture and architectural criticism

One crucial issue remains unclear: what is the precise realm of theoretical interest in a critical architecture? How does one define or demarcate the spatial or temporal interval that is the focus of a critical examination of architecture? This discussion of Mies suggests that the realm of interest is in the distance established between architecture and that which is *other* than architecture.

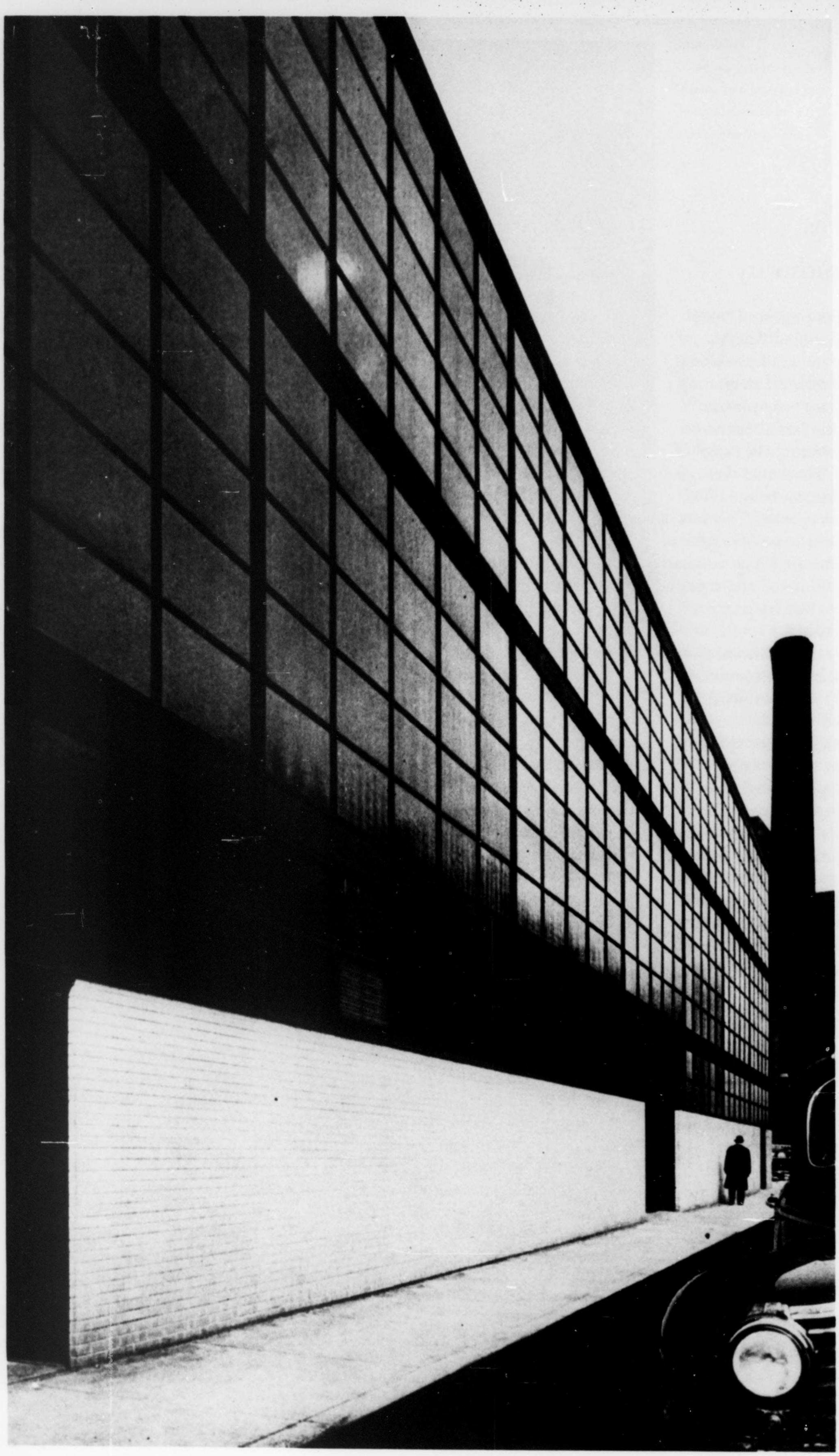
No single building—neither the most distinguished nor the most pedestrian—can reflect a preexistent cultural reality with perfect fidelity. To the extent that a work is architecture, it differs qualitatively both from a representation of reality and from a reduplication of other cultural activities. But the difference carries ideological motivation; it produces knowledge both about culture and about architecture. It should be possible to recognize both the means by which architecture maintains its distance from all that is outside architecture and the conditions that permit the existence of that distance.

The kind of theoretical study suggested here does not assume the prior existence of unchanging principles for interpreting architecture. Instead what is assumed is a specific situation from which came the decision to make architecture. This means that each architectural object places restraints upon interpretation, not because the situation is hidden within the object as a puzzle, but rather because contingent and worldly circumstances exist at the same level of surface particularity as the object itself. Interpretive inquiry lies in an irreducibly architectural realm between those conditions that seem to generate or enable the architect's intention to make architecture and those forms in which the intention is transcribed.[13]

The contingent authority of the individual architect exists at a sensitive nodal point. The individual consciousness is a part of and is aware of the collective historical and social situation. Because of this awareness, the individual is not a mere product of the situation but is an historical and social actor in it. There is choice and, therefore, the responsibility of a critical architecture.

But what, then, is the responsibility of architectural criticism or of critical historiography? Is it to teach and to disseminate information about the monuments of culture? Is it to deliver technical insights and opinions about the capabilities of the architect or the form of the building? Or is it, as has been suggested here, to concentrate on the intrinsic conditions through which architecture is made possible? In order to know all we can about architecture we must be able to understand each instance of architecture, not as a passive agent of culture in its dominant ideological, institutional, and historical forms, nor as a detached, disinfected object. Rather we must understand it as actively and continually occupying a cultural place—as an architectural intention with ascertainable political and intellectual consequences. Criticism delimits a field of values within which architecture can develop cultural knowledge.

Architectural criticism and critical historiography are activities continuous with architectural design; both criticism and design are forms of knowledge. If critical architectural design is resistant and oppositional, then architectural criticism—as activity and knowledge—should be openly contentious and oppositional, as well. We must seek alternatives to entrenched modes of operation and canonical forms. We must strive to invest critical discourse with something more than compensatory, appreciative reflections or methods of formal analysis for objects whose cultural meaning is thought to be undecidable. It is precisely the responsibility of criticism that this cultural meaning be continually decided.



I have benefited from the questions and criticisms of RISD students who participated in my seminar, «Interpretations of Modern Architecture,» where many of the ideas presented here were formulated; and from the responses of colleagues who read earlier versions of this paper. I especially wish to thank Stanford Anderson and Rodolfo Machado for their continued support and encouragement.

K. M. H.

Mies van der Rohe
Minerals and Research
Building, IIT
1939

1
By culture, as I shall use the term here, I understand a conceptual unity comprising, on the one hand, those theoretical and practical systems which authorize, promote, or constrain the production and use of ideas and objects and by which a society or a place differentiates itself and maintains its hegemony; and on the other hand, the artifacts and environments which endure as resourceful physical precedents or exemplars of systems of production and become transmitters of culture. Thus, it is in the purview of culture that the production of architecture is overseen from above by a dominant system of values saturating downward, and generated or validated at its base by normative standards of practice and methodologies which may themselves become cultural agents.

2
The historicism of this position has been criticized by numerous authors, most notably Stanford Anderson, Colin Rowe, and David Watkin. Watkin uses a Popperian argument against historicism without noting Anderson's earlier study «Architecture and Tradition» in «The History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture» Marcus Whiffen, ed. Cambridge, MIT Press 1965.
Watkin does mention in a different context Anderson's review of Pevsner's «Sources . . .» in «Arts Bulletin» vol. 53 Sept. 1971 pp274–275.
I shall not rehearse these criticisms here. For a recent discussion of interpretations that emphasize the object's origins see S. Anderson «A Presentness of Interpretation and of Artifacts: Toward a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts» in «History in, of, and for Architecture» John E. Hancock, ed. Cincinnati University of Cincinnati 1981.

3
The unfortunate oversimplification, packaging, and consumption of Colin Rowe's «collage city» approach by various epigones is indicative of the prevalence of this attitude. Though Rowe could not be fitted easily into the architecture-as-autonomous-form mould, such statements as the following are often misleading to those inclined toward uncritical consumption of images of the past: «It should be obvious by this point that present arguments have little to do with ‹history.› ‹History,› so far as we are aware, relates to concatenation of events and their stylistic profile. In the framework of this discussion it can only interest us very little; and, if we are interested in the usefulness of particular morphologies, we are correspondingly unconcerned with the provenance of specific models.» Fred Koetter and Colin Rowe «The Crisis of the Object: The Predicament of Texture» «Perspecta 16» 1980 p135 and n15

4
«The Metropolis and Mental Life» (English translation of «Die Grosstadt und das Geistesleben» Dresden 1903) in «The Sociology of Georg Simmel» Kurt H. Wolff, trans. and ed. New York, Free Press 1950 p415

5
Jean Arp «On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912–1916» New York, Wittenborn 1948 p91

6
Piet Mondrian «De Stijl»

7
Rosalind Krauss makes a distinction between what she calls analytic or narrative time–in which the viewer can grasp the a priori transcendent structure of the object–and real time–in which the viewer encounters form open to change and circumstance. The development of each in modern sculpture is discussed in «Passages in Modern Sculpture» New York, Viking Press 1977

8
Mies's well-known friendship with the Dadaists Kurt Schwitters and Hans Richter and his collaboration with the editors of «G» support this reading of the 1922 skyscraper. The implications of Mies's affiliation with the Dadaists have yet to be fully explored.

9
In Philip Johnson «Mies van der Rohe» New York, Museum of Modern Art 1947

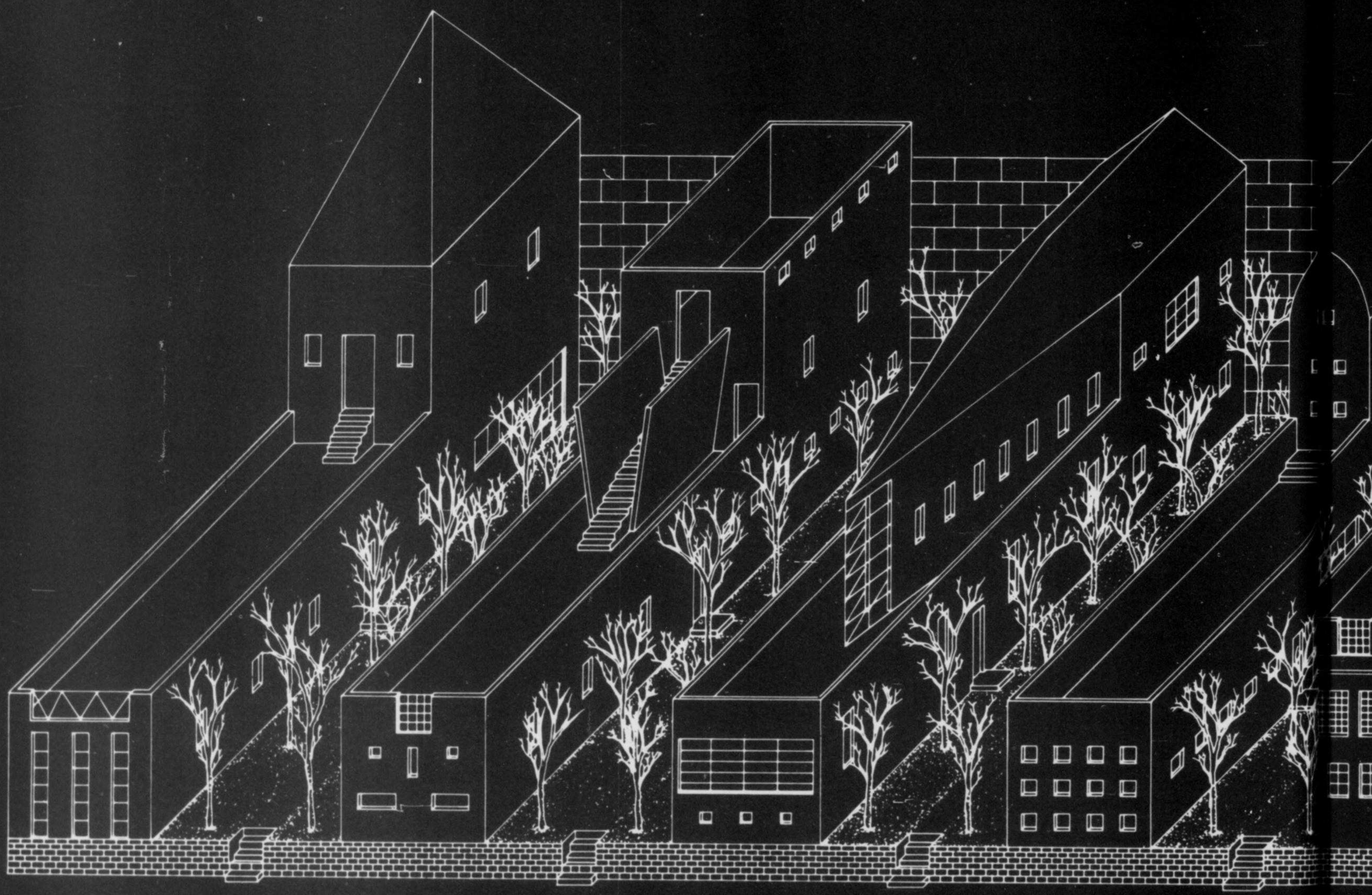
10
Karl Kraus quoted by Walter Benjamin in «Reflections» Edmund Jephcott, trans. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1978 p243

11
Johnson p194
Also see Mies's disavowal of de Stijl in Peter Blake «A Conversation with Mies» in «Four Great Makers of Architecture» G. M. Kallman, ed. New York DaCapo Press 1970 pp93ff

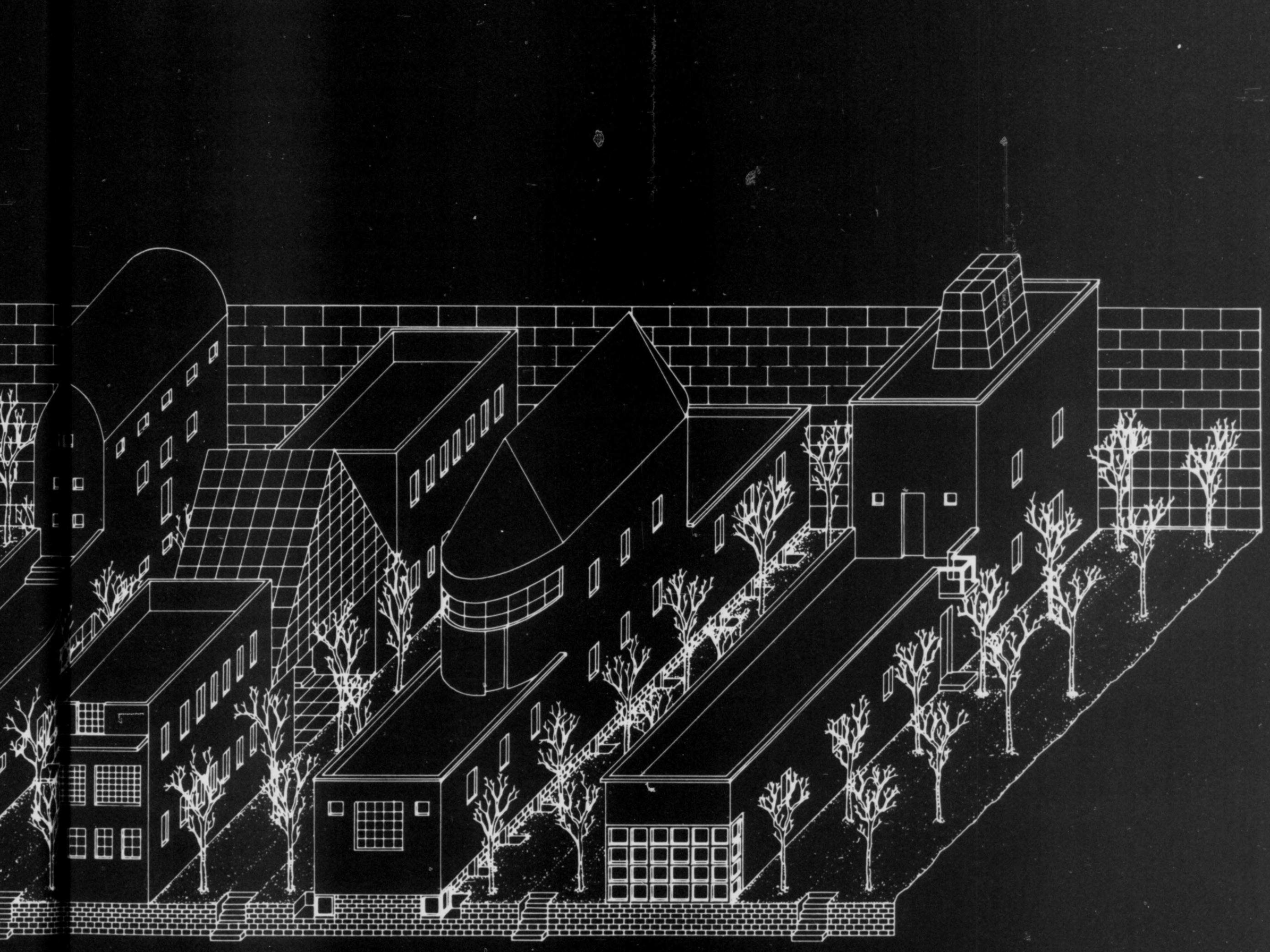
12
Stanford Anderson uses the phrase «winning of reality» to emphasize the reciprocity between an object, its creation, and its interpretation. The phrase captures the notion that the understanding of a building unfolds and may change in time. See Anderson, «A Presentness of Interpretation and of Artifacts . . .»

13
I owe my understanding of intention–as all that which follows from a special beginning–to Edward Said «Beginnings, Intention and Method» Baltimore John Hopkins University Press 1975

Steven Holl

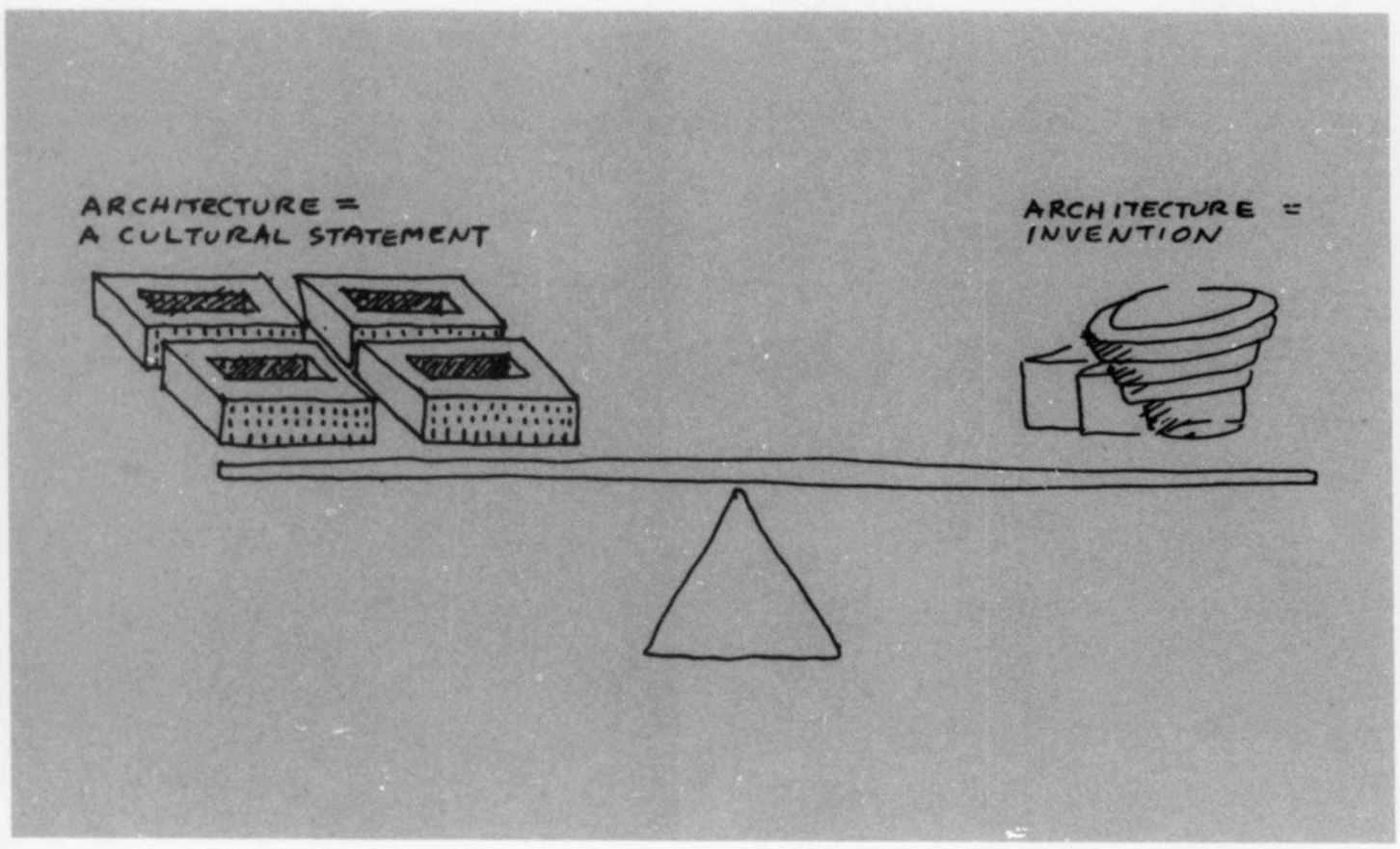


Tower Principles



Avondstreets Artisans'
Housing project
Screen Island
1982–1984

The architecture of a particular culture depends on the dialectic between historical and contemporary forces—between architecture as statement of existing culture and architecture as inventive art. Between an architecture of recurring cultural models and architecture as the spontaneous result of poesis lies an architecture that is neither antimodern nor antihistorical. This argument is for synthesizing oppositions, not weakening otherwise extreme positions; the aim is a synthesis that intensifies instead of a blend that compromises. A teeter-totter diagram illustrates the discussion: architecture as a cultural statement at one end is balanced by architecture as invention at the other; at the fulcrum are principles around which the ends pivot.



Vernacular architecture

Research in vernacular here excludes monumental architecture, public building types, and technologically specialized constructions; it excludes the majority of examples from which academic texts derive the «basics» of architecture. Vernacular architecture develops from the characteristics of a place rather than from the imposition of external meanings. It exhibits fundamental and unchanging properties: the laws of gravity, the properties of materials, the interlocking plan-section aspects of recurring building types, and the physical link between earth and sky, all of which are essential elements of architecture.

It is the vernacular which most clearly expresses the unique in a culture. Architecture indigenous to a particular landscape stands as counterpoint to academic historical models. Vernacular models—which historians have called the «lower» forms of architecture—are deeply rooted in their sites, cultural backgrounds, and materials. Academic models—the «higher» forms of history—have been applied cross-culturally in many places, with the result that meanings are displaced both from the local culture and from the culture of the model's origin. Transplanted high models fail to evoke the history of the new site, landscape, or culture. Their most meaningful existence is in a detached historical framework. Nor do subsequent imitations improve or develop a form; what is built instead are caricatures. With a culturally specific vernacular model as a point of departure, a reinterpretation or transformation of the original in a refined version can avoid caricature to become a positive recreation.

At least four vernacular traditions prevail in North American architecture:

1
urban vernacular—the contiguous recurring building types of urban fabrics;

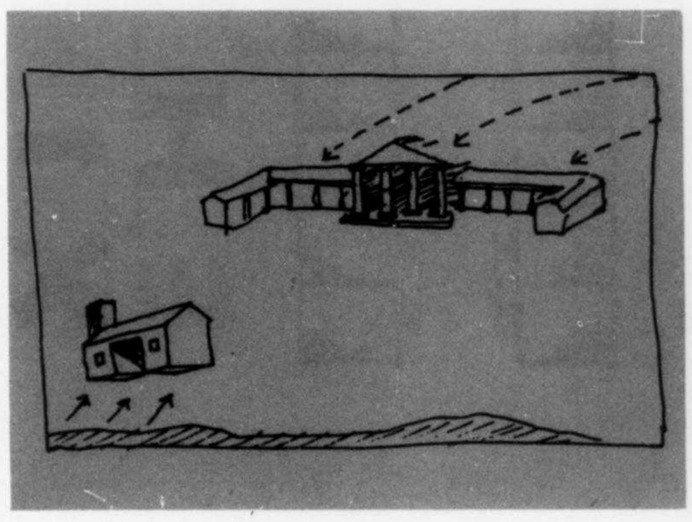
2
rural vernacular—the indigenous architecture of the carpenter-architect;

3
commercial strip vernacular;

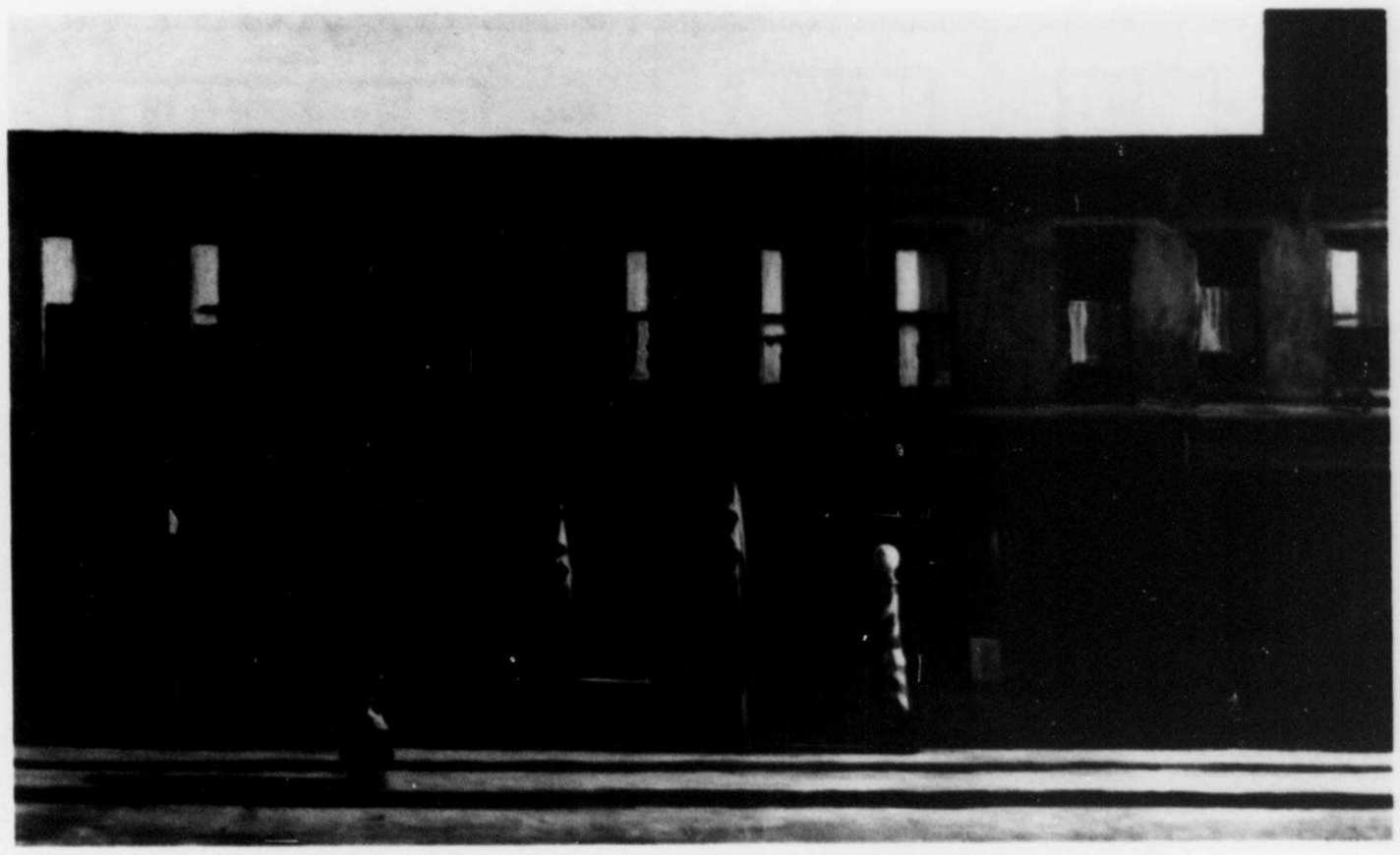
4
suburban housing and speculative office vernacular.

One aim here is to analyze anonymous vernacular architecture to find cultural models that clarify what is urban and what is rural. The arguments in favor of this clarification are many, ranging from preservation of natural landscape and animal life to concentration of human settlements for enriched social interaction. This investigation concentrates on the first two vernacular traditions. Models have not been sought in the vernacular of the commercial strip or suburb because their multiplication further weakens, rather than refines, urban and rural distinctions.

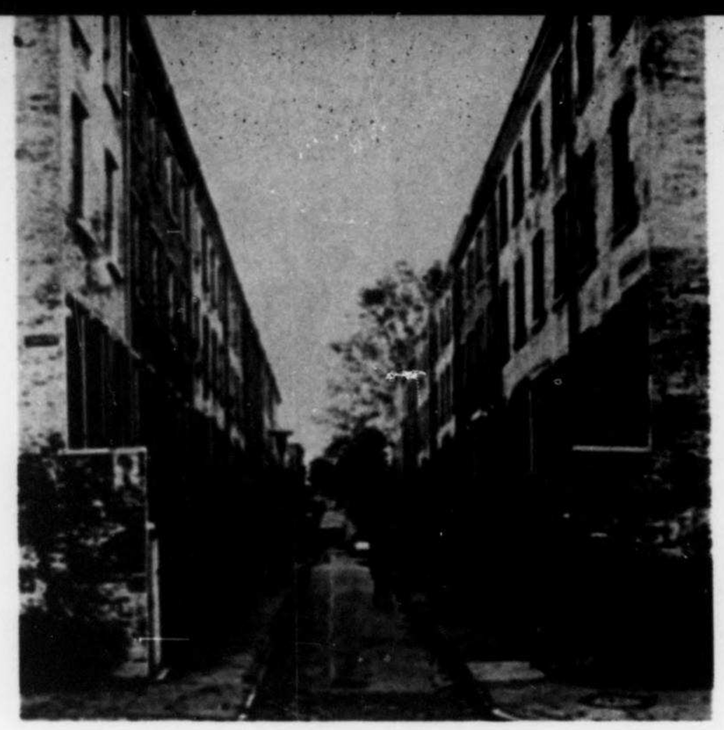
There are also subjective reasons for concentrating on the clearly urban and purely rural. For example, the poetic intensity of Edward Hopper's painted views—the clapboard-covered cube of a solitary house by the sea or the geometric block of a farmhouse sitting in golden ripples of long grass—captures the silent quality of American rural form. Hopper also selected subjects from purely urban form, with sun streaming onto aligned blocks of buildings, each with a chisel stair and a chimney box casting long shadows on the roof. Sublimity of architectural form often depends on its relation to surrounding landscape or urban geometry.



«Route 6 Eastham»
Edward Hopper
1941

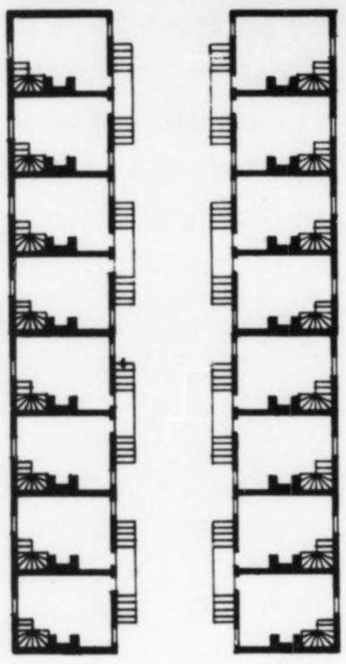


«Sunday Morning»
Edward Hopper
1930



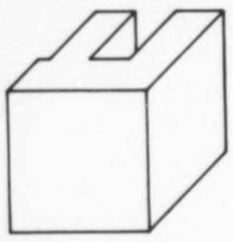
Urban vernacular

The contiguous buildings in the gridded city plans of the first half of the twentieth century exhibit certain positive characteristics that may serve to direct the reassessment of today's urban building patterns. A kind of urban vocabulary, these structures were built according to plan-section patterns that were repeated in many different cities. As a result nearly every gridded city in North America has U, E, L, or H type structures. The individual buildings form a fabric that is sustained and completed by the lines of adjacent buildings. Continuous patterns make blocks with clearly formed edges of public streets, avenues, and parks. Collective definition provided by private structures is often lost in modern detached constructions.

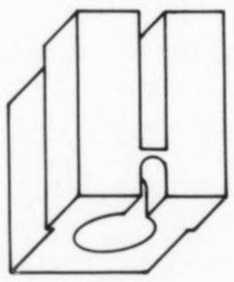


Contiguous walk-up
Philadelphia
ca. 1750

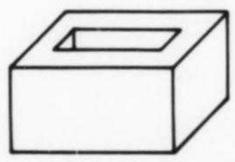
Three stages of evolution of these contiguous building types yielded three general categories: the contiguous walk-up types, plan-extrusion or letterlike types, and tower types. In the first group the lot size was the predominant influence. In the second group light and air and the shape of the plan were determinant. In the third category the dominating characteristics are sectional, determined by increased height. These widely varying types often coexist on a single urban block; order is maintained by the continuous wall of the street. Definition of public and private space is achieved together with variations in individual buildings.



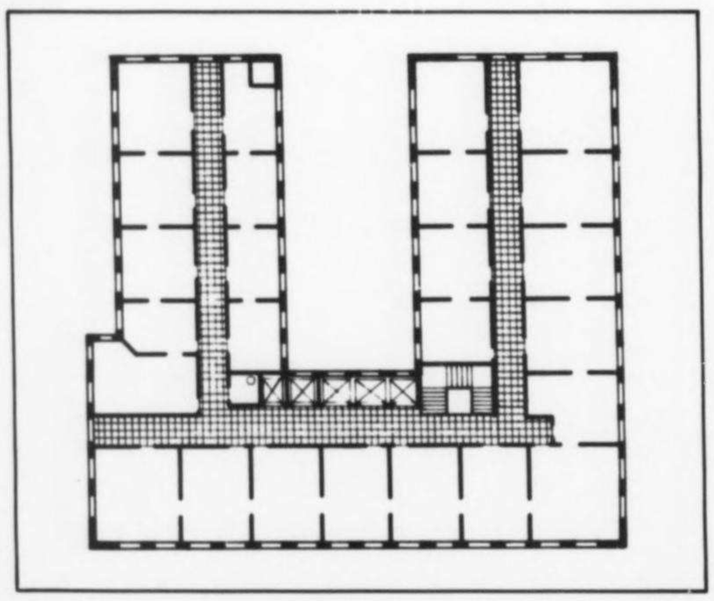
Wainwright
Building
Chicago
Adler and Sullivan
1891

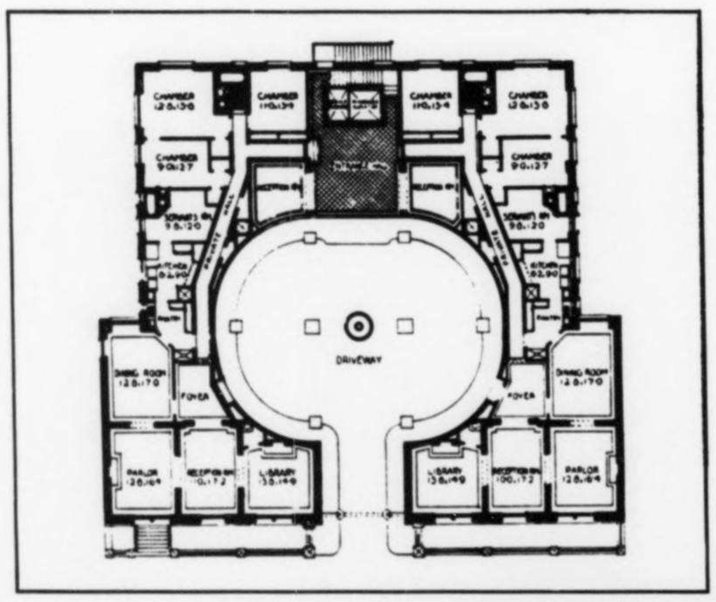


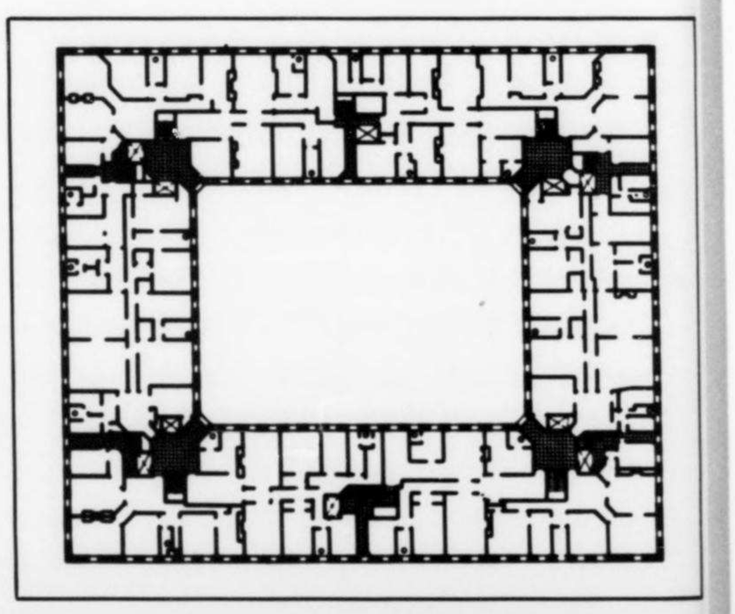
Lasanno Court
New York City
Schwartz and Gross
1907

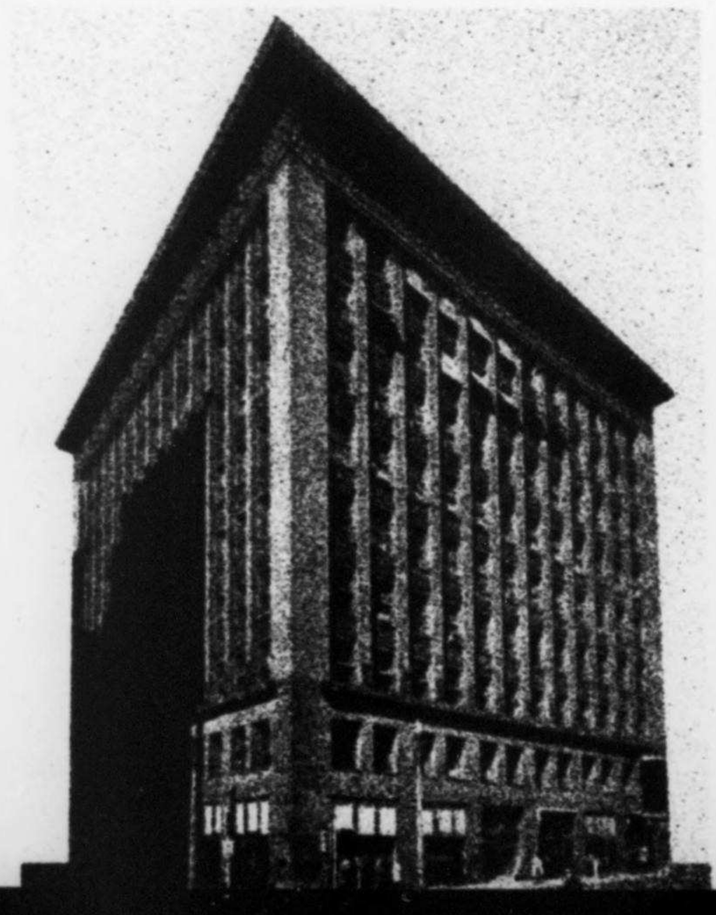


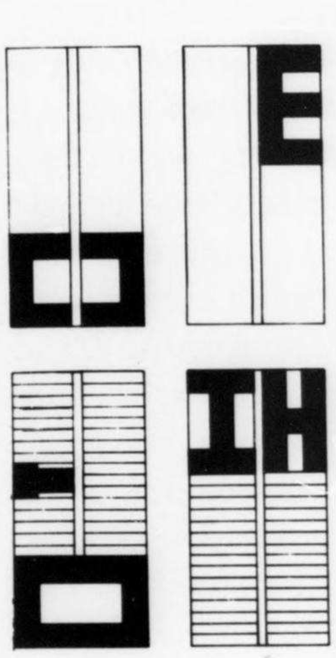
The Apthorp
New York City
Clinton and Russell
1908



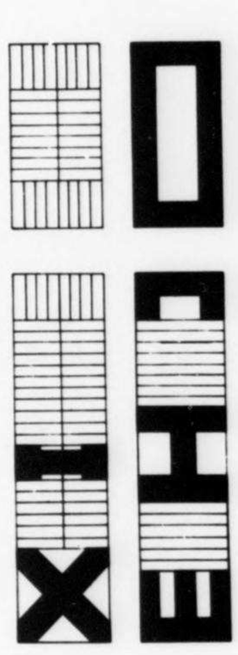




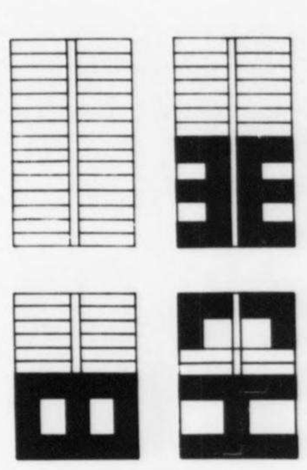




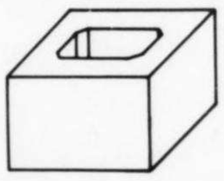
Typical block size
Chicago
300′ × 600′



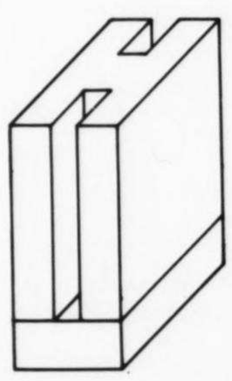
Typical block size
New York City
200′ × 800′



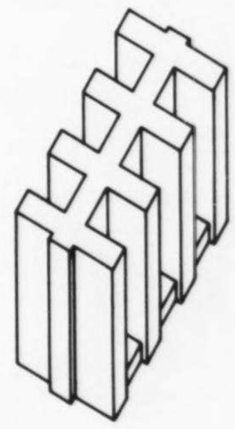
Typical block size
Seattle
200′ × 360′



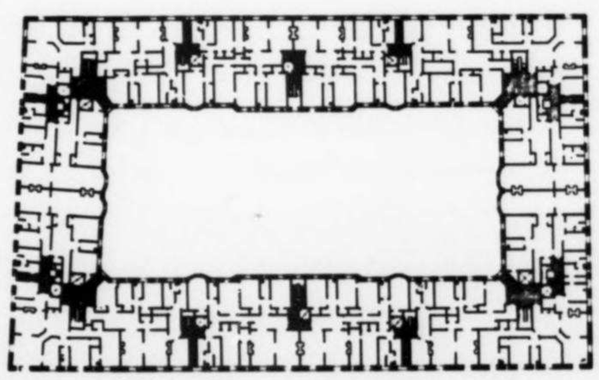
The Belnord
New York City
H. Hobart Weekes
1908

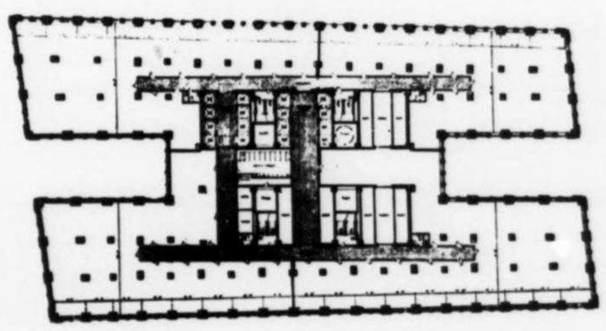


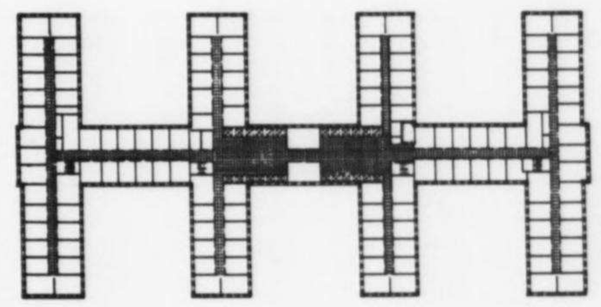
Equitable Building
New York City
E R Graham
1915

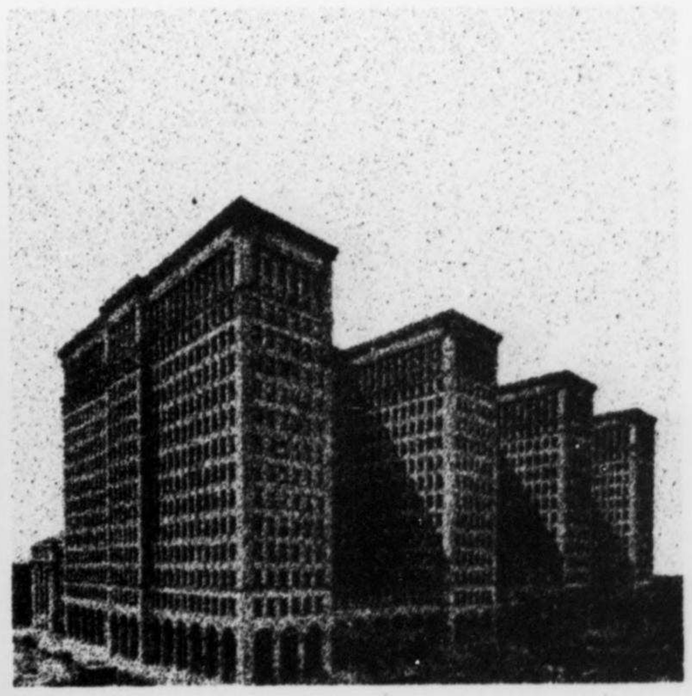


General Motors
Building
Detroit
Albert Kahn
1921

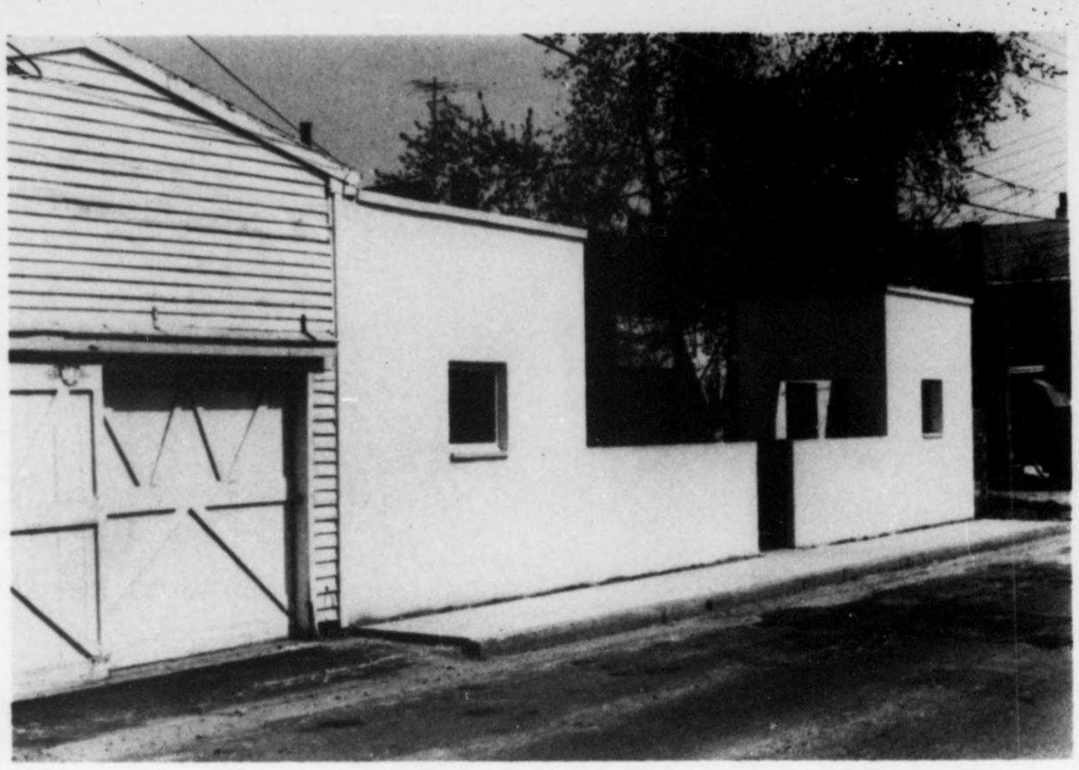






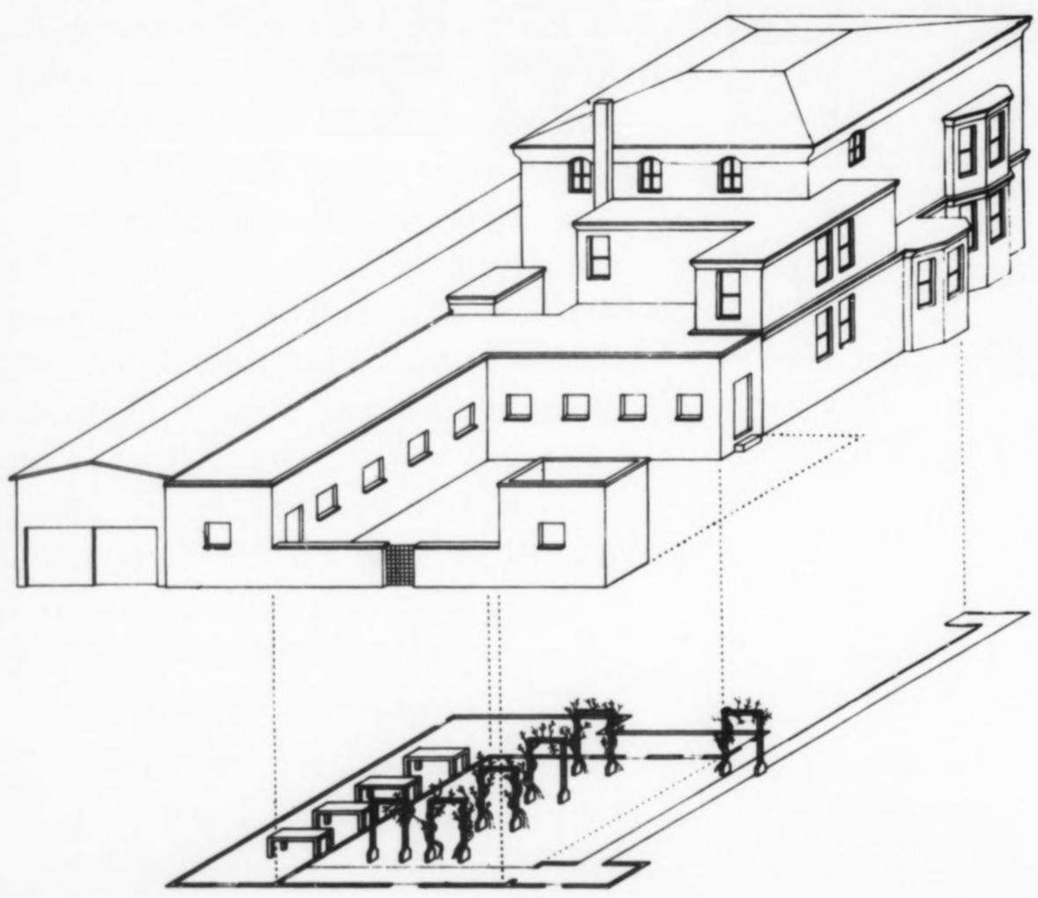


Steven Holl



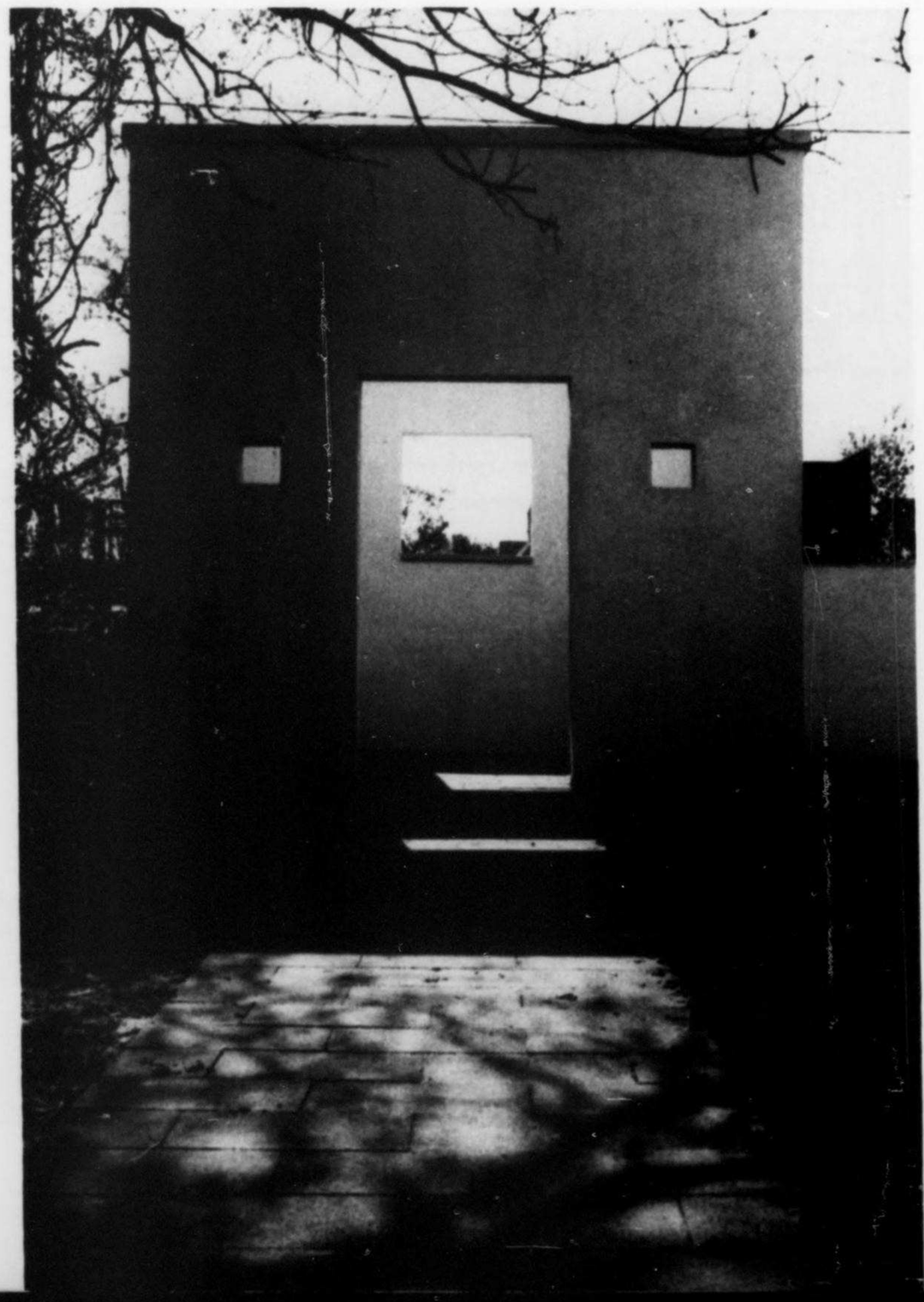
Courtyard Addition
Millville
New Jersey
1978

In 1978, while we were researching urban vernacular building types for pamphlet catalogues, we had a small commission for an addition in Millville, New Jersey. An extension of graphic-art workspace on the rear of an existing nineteenth-century house used as offices, the new structure gave cause for organizing the rear—and sunny—side of the lot into a courtyard. This addition of a defined space appealed to the employees, who feared that the necessary rebuilding would destroy existing grapevines under which they take lunch in summer. Since the entrance to the building was to be restructured to the rear, the formal courtyard included an entrance-exit pavilion. Typologically the project hovers somewhere between an L and a U. Even in a tiny project, we hoped that architecture could be effective in establishing a microcosmic urban unit that both exalts and intensifies the existing greenery and reinforces the form of this small town.



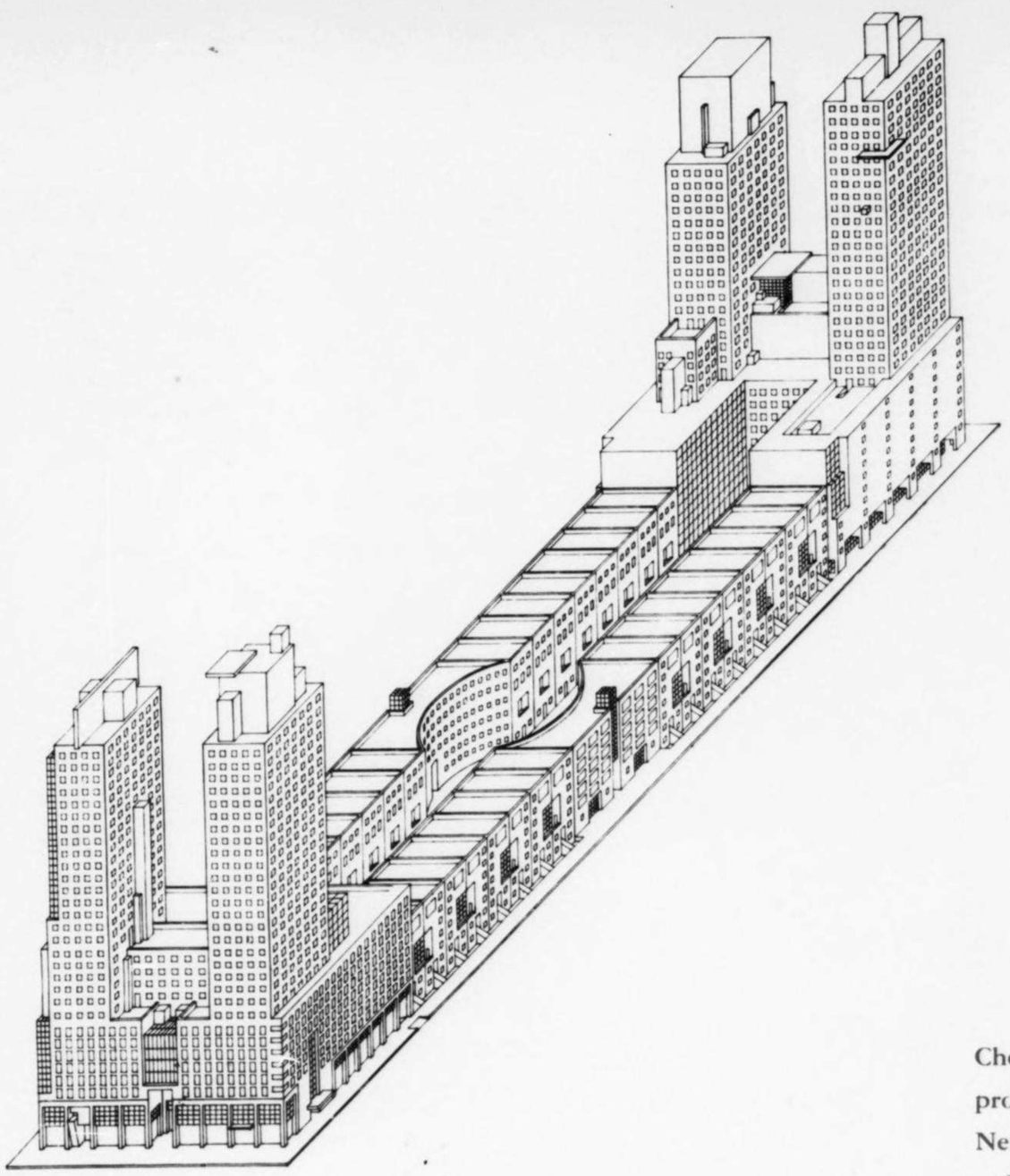
Courtyard Addition

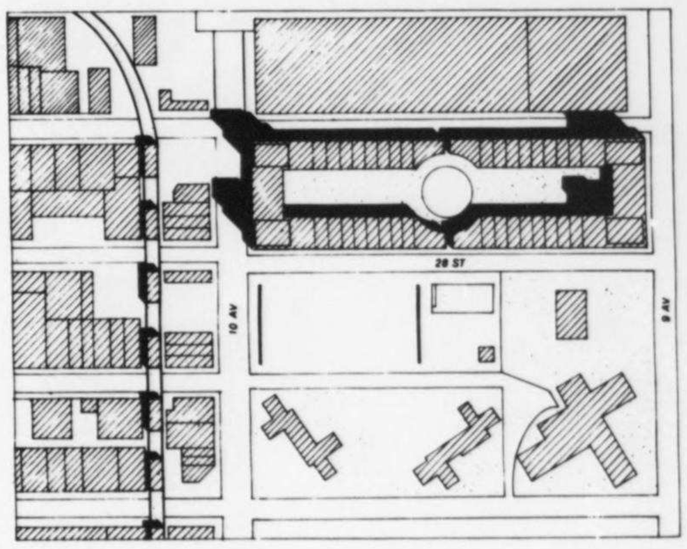
Parallel to collecting and making drawings of the plans of twin-tower buildings along Central Park West in New York, we made a proposal in 1981 for a vacant block in the city's Chelsea area on Twenty-ninth Street and Tenth Avenue. The project for an ideal residential block in Manhattan is based on a central public space. The twin-tower type is recharged; it is doubled and aligned toward a public space at the interior of the urban block. A slot of sky between the towers is indicative of the block interior and throws a strip of sun down into it. From the interior public court the east-west view through the gardens is extended to the adjacent skyline through the void between the towers. At the center of the side streets, where the adjacent buildings are lowest, sunlight is maximized, while building development on the avenues is dense. The areas of the apartment floors in the row houses would be large enough to accommodate families.



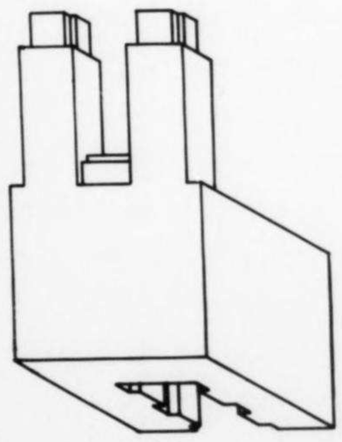
Courtyard Addition

The project advocates the coexistence of several building types to form a block—row houses, twin-tower types, and a C type widened at the public open space. It advocates the collective assembly of individual buildings to define publicly-held exterior space on the street sides as well as in the block's interior.

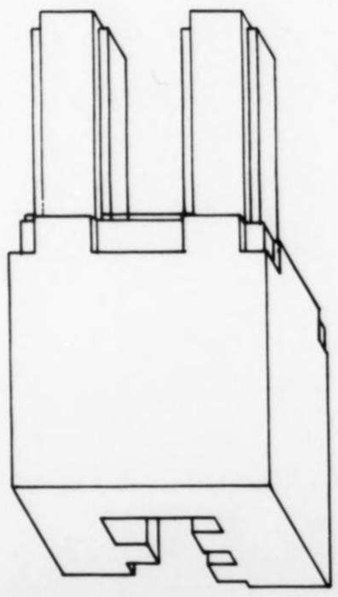




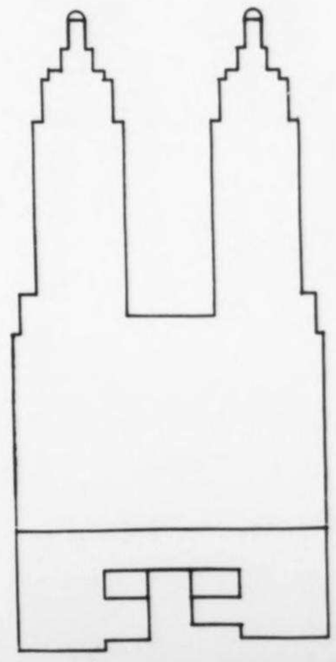
Chelsea Block
project
New York City
1981



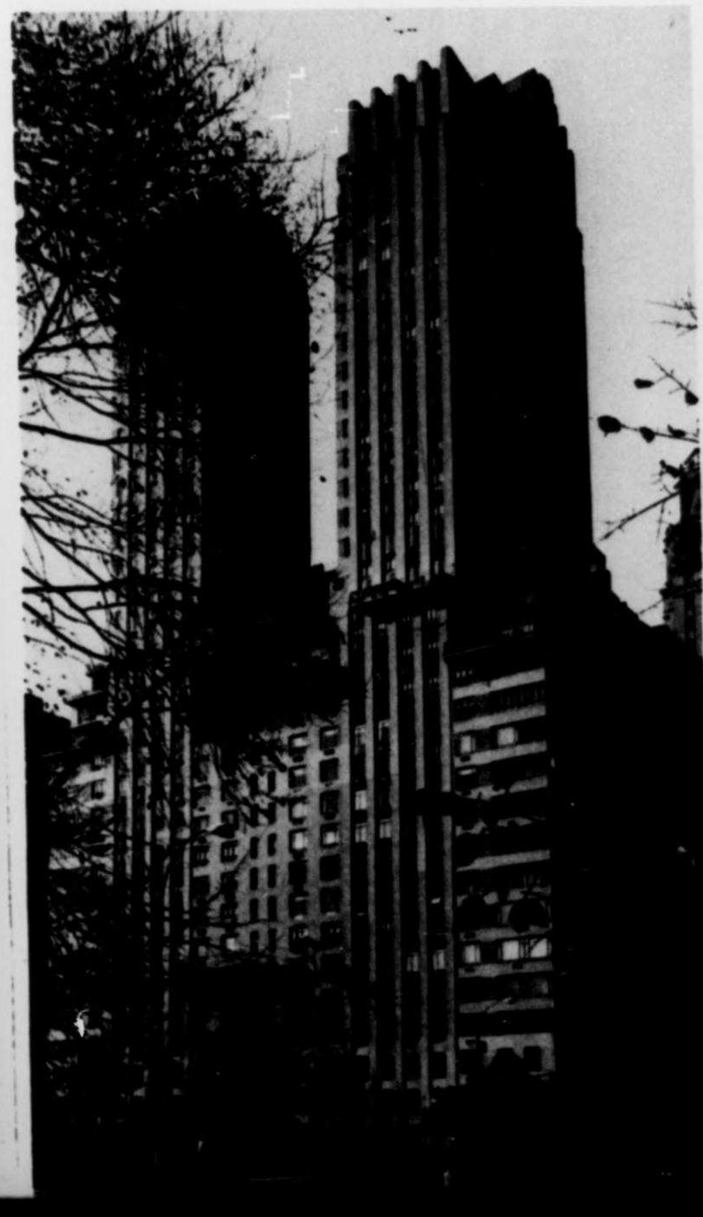
The Century
New York City
Irwin Chanin
1931



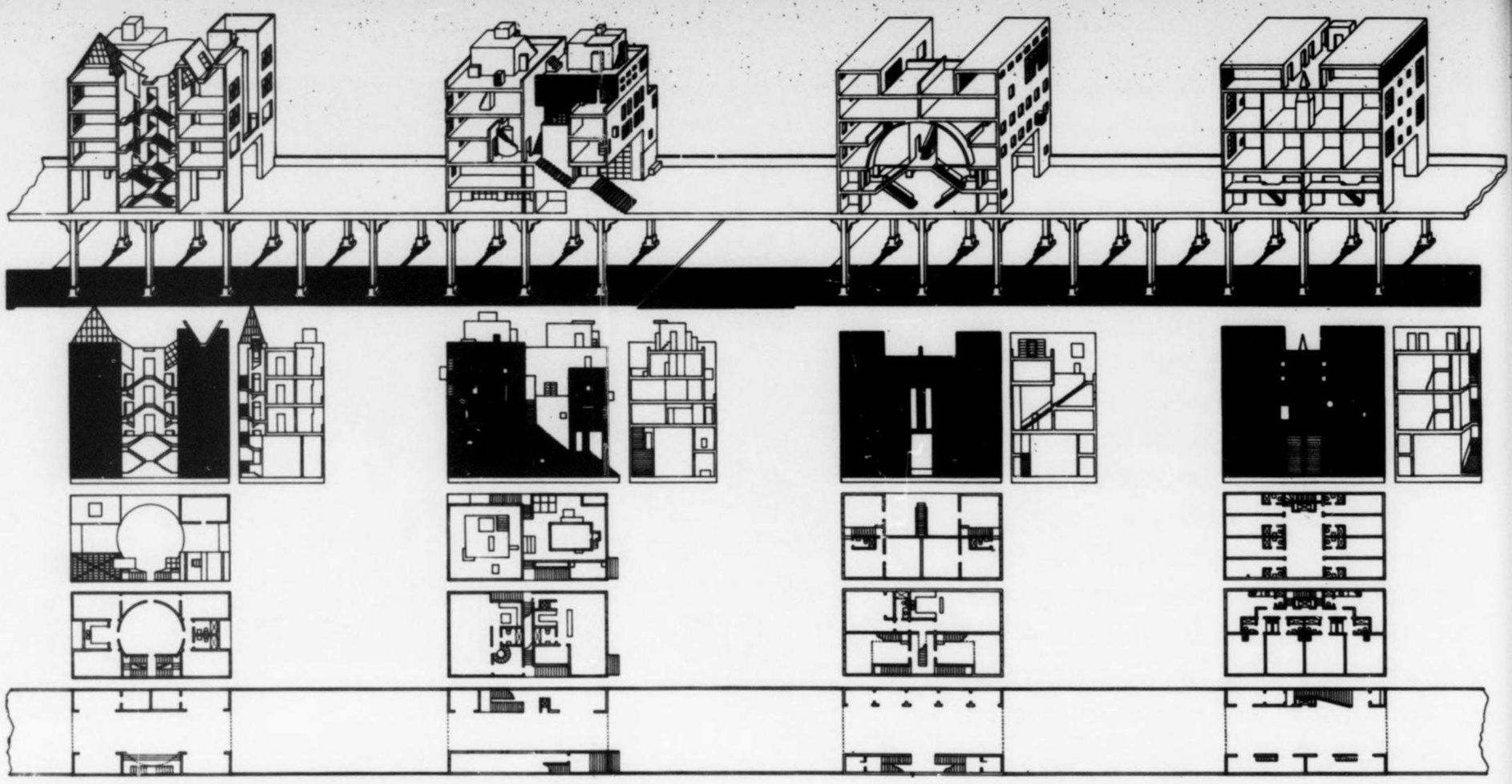
The Majestic
New York City
Irwin Chanin
1930



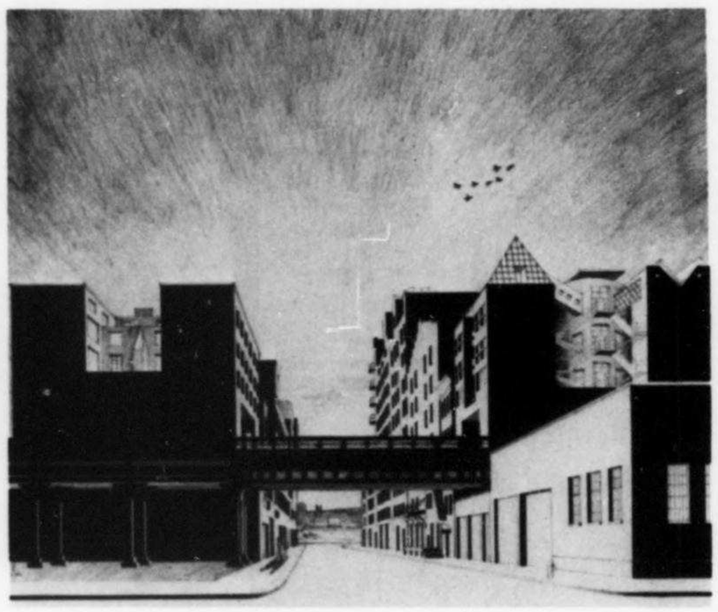
The San Remo
New York City
Emery Roth
1930



Bridge of Houses
project
1979–1982

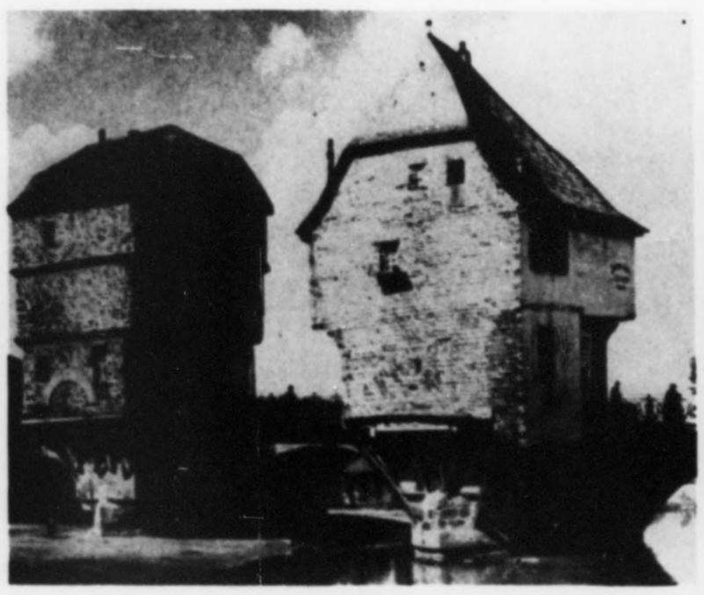


Bridge of Houses
project

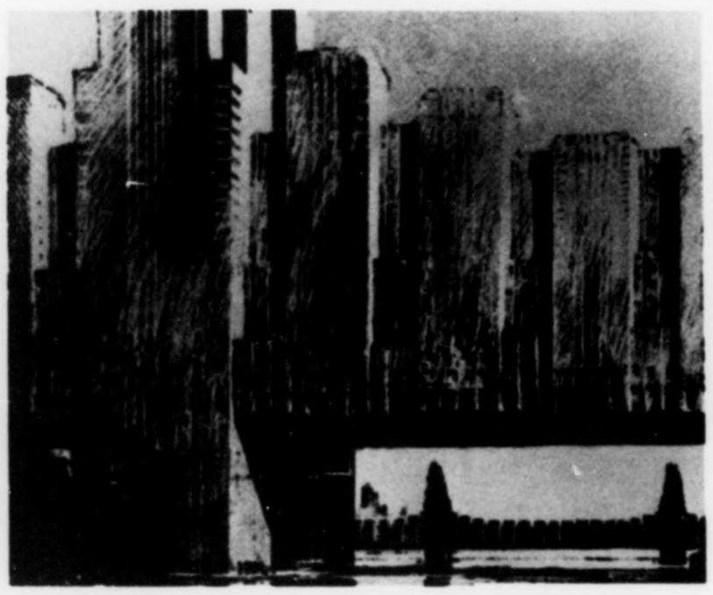


A reinterpretation of a more unusual urban vernacular type was proposed in the Bridge of Houses project of 1979–1982 for a series of houses to be built over an abandoned elevated-rail link in the Chelsea area of Manhattan. Ancient examples of the type can be seen on the bridge at Bad Kreuznach, Germany, and the old Pont au Change and the Pont Marie in Paris. Modern examples include Hugh Ferris' proposal for apartments on bridges as well as Raymond Hood's residential bridge project for New York.

Ancient houses on
the bridge at
Bad Kreuznach
Germany
ca. 1650

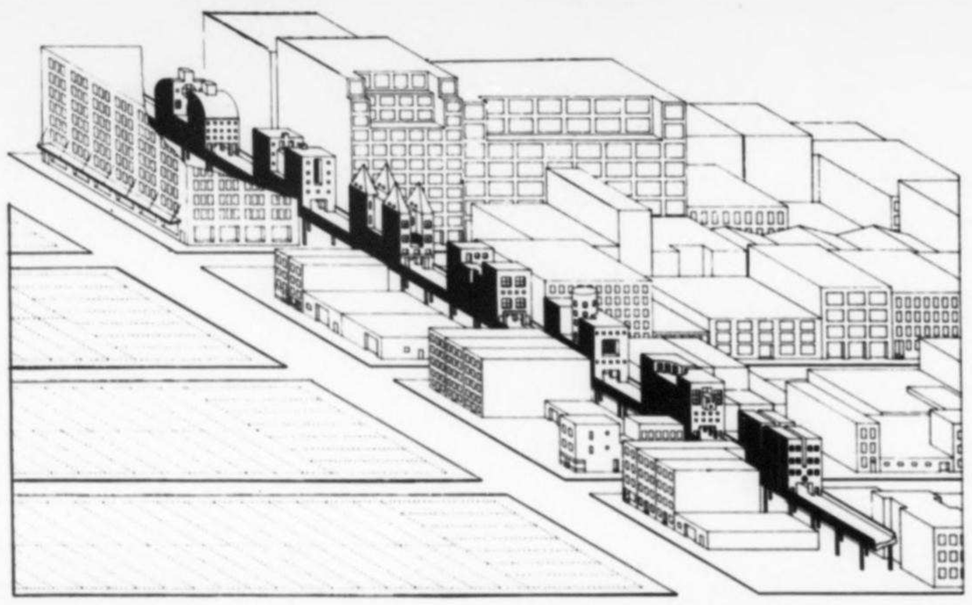


«Manhattan 1950»
project
Raymond Hood
1929



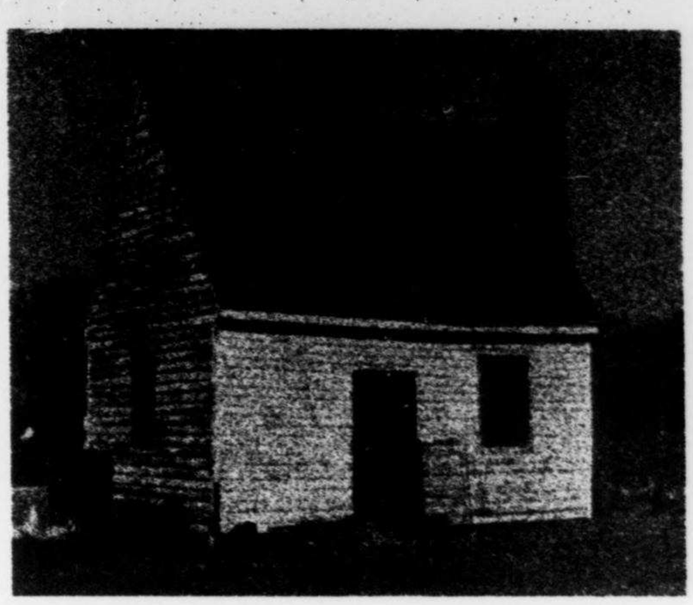
The Chelsea scheme proposes nineteen houses over a continuous public promenade linking the New York Convention Center (at present under construction) and the West Village district. This plan would create a public place of unique character: covered arcades lined with shop stalls and sitting areas alternate with open elevated squares or gardens. The alternating plans and sections of the houses reflect their different uses; student housing, luxury flats, economy studios, and housing for older people would be mixed in a proportion determined by the eventual financial program of the public agencies involved.

Bridge of Houses
project



The urban and architectural issues addressed in the proposal include reinforcement of the urban pattern by maintaining a street wall, advocacy of hybrid forms or combined architectural types, and the preservation of specific site history by building on the foundations of disused structures.

One room house
Northhampton
County, Virginia
19th century



Cabin
Cap Martin, France
Le Corbusier
1952

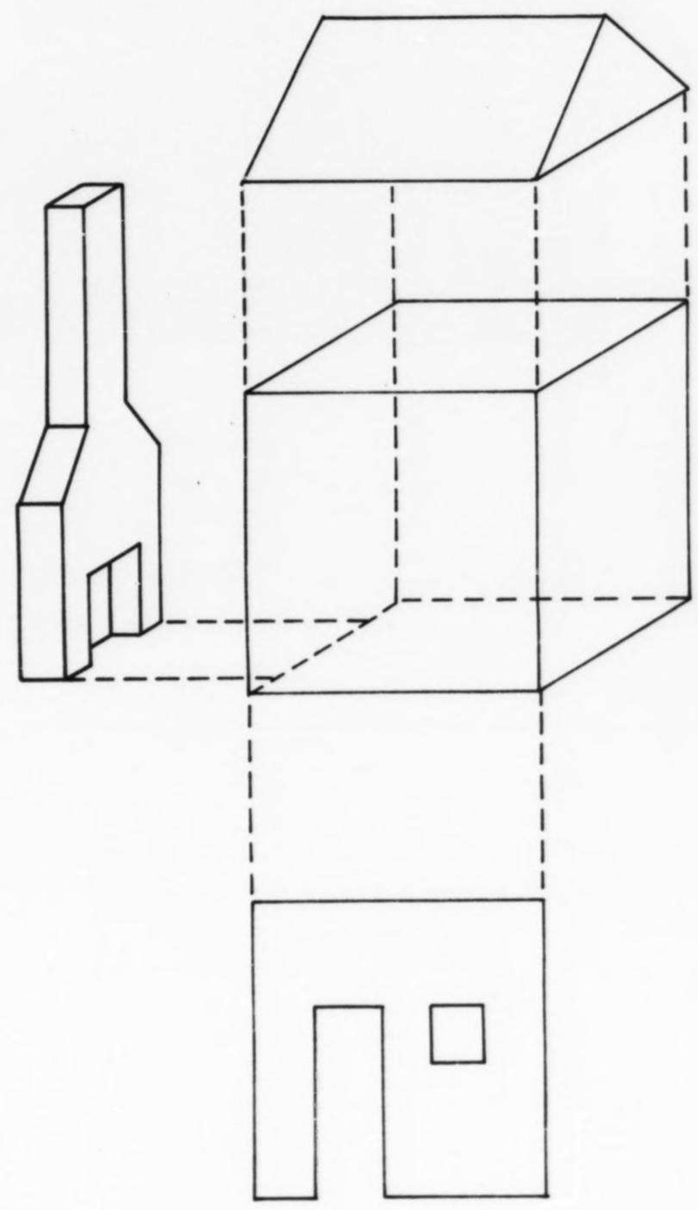
«And yet, I thought, as I walked home along the little path from Cap Martin, how strange that this architect who had spent a lifetime dreaming of radiant cities for thousands of inhabitants, of ‹machines for living› for the masses, who thought that cities were never populous enough or skyscrapers ever high enough, how strange that this man can be truly happy only in the solitude of his 13-square metre cabin on a lonely cliff above the Mediterranean.»

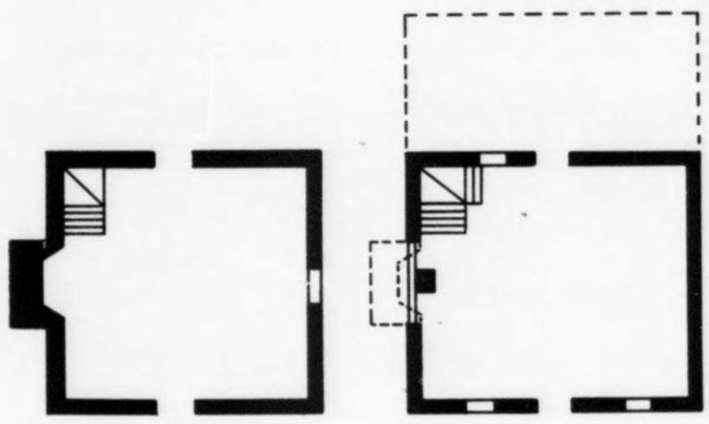
Brassai on Le Corbusier

Rural vernacular

A focus on the simple elements of indigenous rural buildings presents fundamental principles. Vernacular methods of construction are determined by the natural materials used. Identical building type forms (plan-section schemata) frequently recur in different regions but materials vary depending on those most readily available. For example, the basic one-room house recurs throughout the country, made of clapboard in New England, stone in Utah, brick in Virginia, and sod in Nebraska. The early-twentieth-century architect's belief in adherence to the nature of materials (Frank Lloyd Wright) or adherence to basic building types (John Welborn Root) lurks hundreds of years earlier in the latent messages evident in the work of the carpenter-architect.

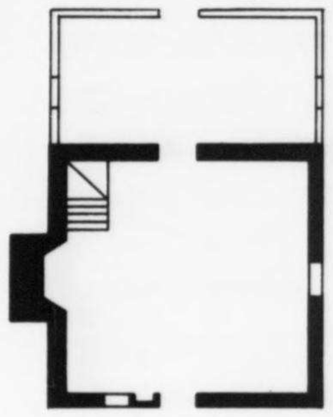
Elements of one
room house



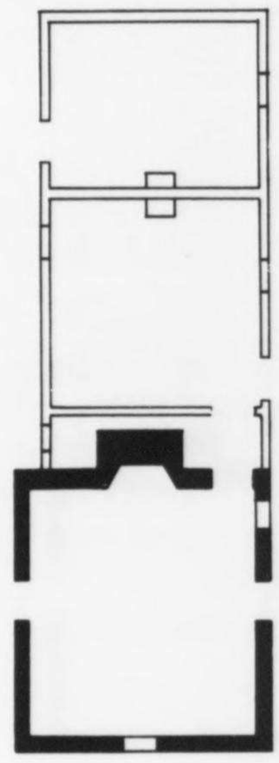


Sappington house
Howard County
Missouri

House
Boone County
Missouri



Martin house
Audrain County
Missouri

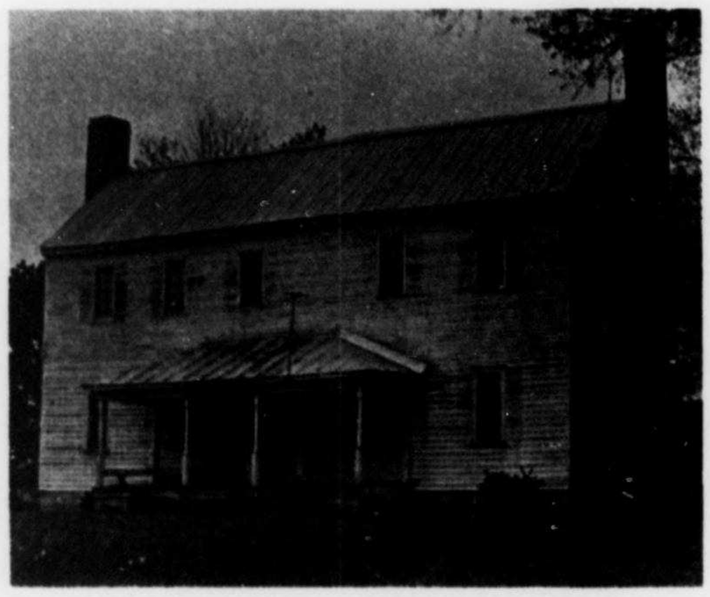


Kivett farm
Howard County
Missouri

The forces shaping primary vernacular models unite the extrinsic and the intrinsic, establishing a basic unified character. The interior organization of space often gives order to the exterior. For example, the freely arranged window pattern of the rear and side walls of a rural house responds to the interior organization of the rooms, while the symmetrical window arrangement of the entry facade provides frontality. Additions are placed on the freely organized sides, so as not to disrupt the simple front. The inherent restraint of the indigenous rural house unifies its various elements; exterior, plan, and section are a compositional whole. In contrast, the forces determining commercial-strip vernacular tend to separate the intrinsic and extrinsic. The plan-section character of a building is often relegated to a dependent position behind the extrinsic commercial signage. It is necessarily an architecture of appearances rather than essences. At its most elemental, architecture is mass, line, plane, and space organized by adherence to type and geometry. The elemental rural house is not decorated with a representational facade or other symbols. Adherence to the schemata of plan-section and geometric form unites the entire house as a single representation.

a
Young house
Vance County
North Carolina
19th century

b
Pinet house
Callaway County
Missouri
1883

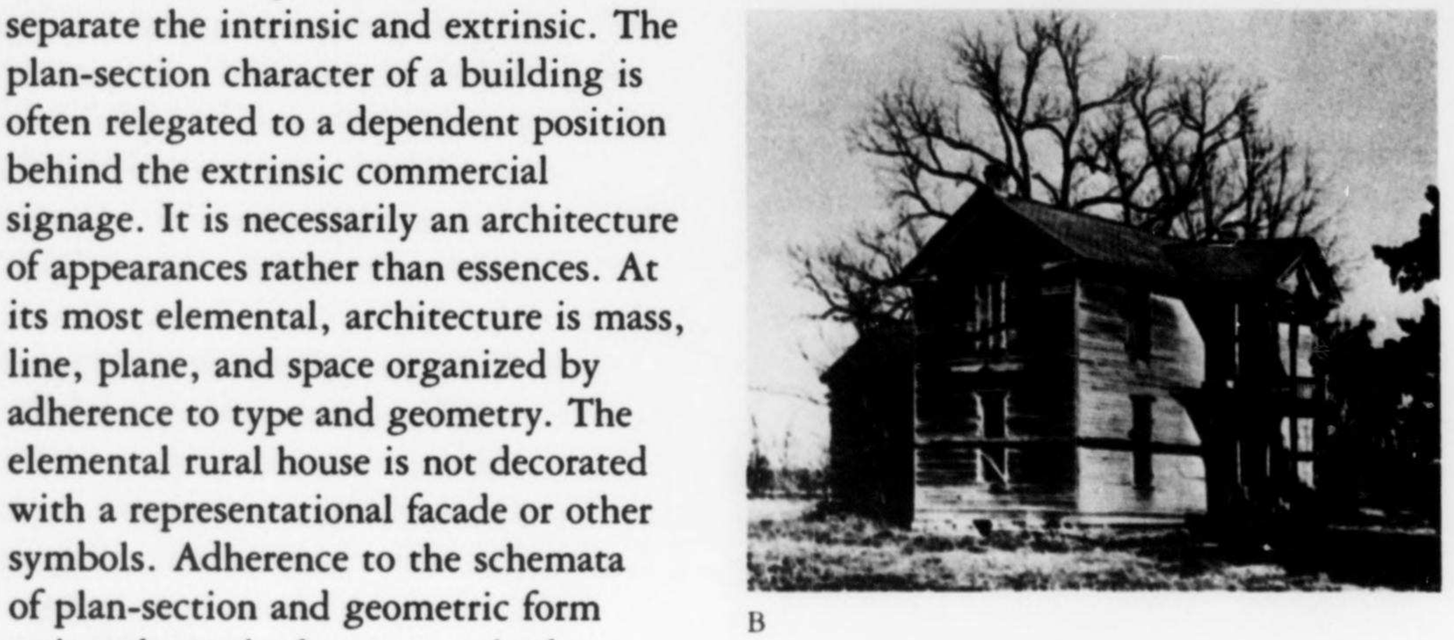


A

B

c
I type house

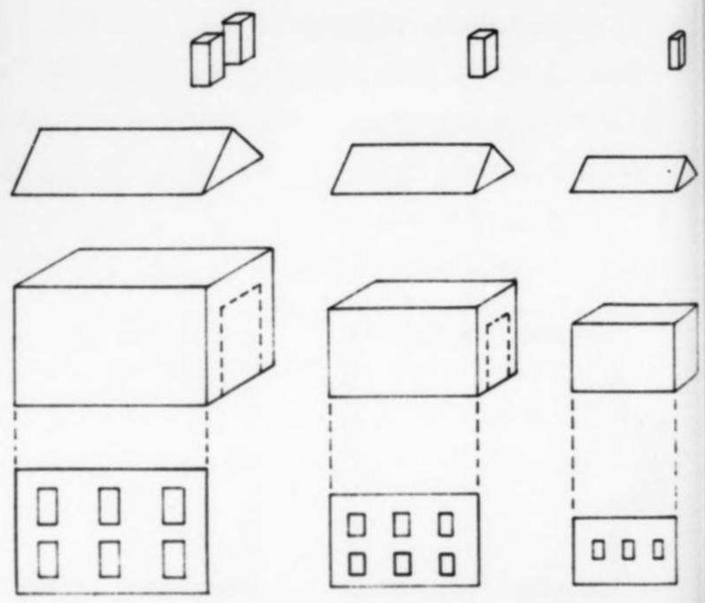
d
Elements of the telescope house



C

Telescope house

While designing a residence in Still Pond, Maryland, on Chesapeake Bay, during the winter of 1978, we encountered numerous examples of houses of the telescope type. A telescope house has three main characteristics: roof lines that are all about the same pitch; outside walls making nearly regular setbacks in a progression of adjoining volumes; and overall form in descending masses, so that theoretically the sections of the building could collapse neatly into each other. In a pure telescope type the size of the window opening is directly proportional to the building mass in which it occurs. Fireplace chimneys are generally located on the wall of adjoining segments. In some of the telescope houses the large section was built first, then added to in a descending order. In others the small section came first, with the larger added on. In still others all sections were built at the same time.



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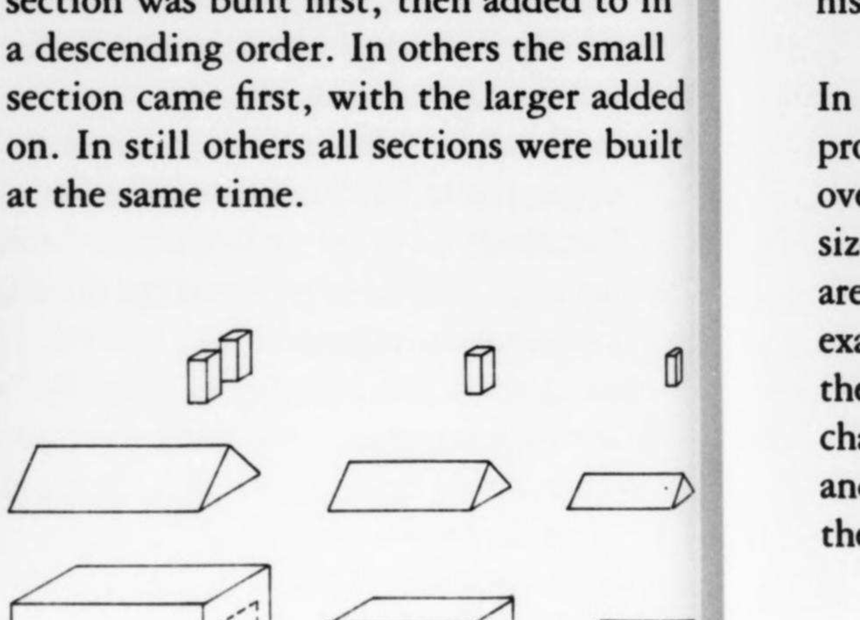


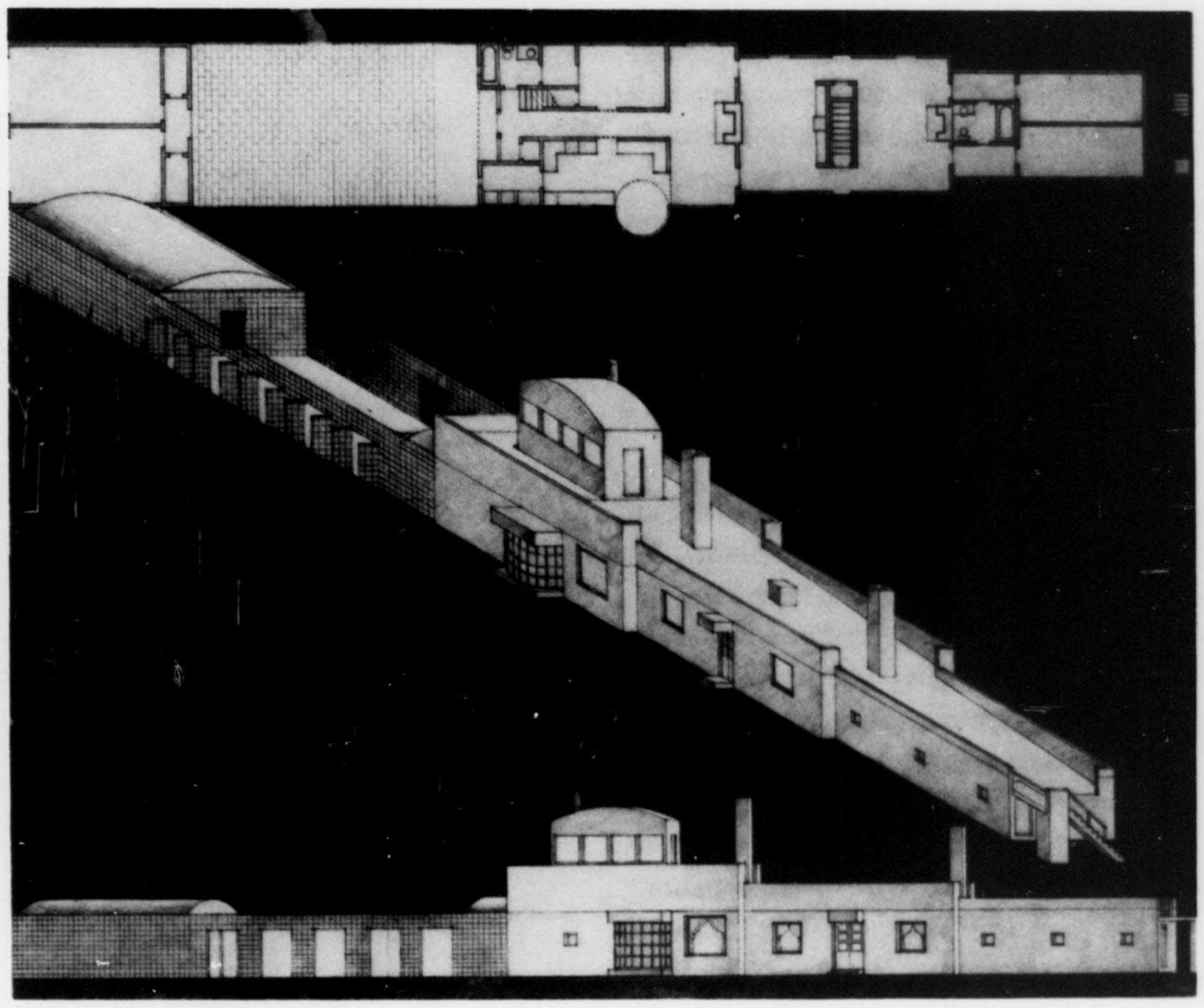
E

F

Our given circumstances—a long, narrow site (approximately 350' x 45') and a program that called for divisions—seemed well suited to a modern interpretation of the historic type. The clients, a retired couple, required a house divisible into three parts. The largest would constitute the basic year-round quarters. The middle third—a formal dining room and living room—and the smallest part—bedrooms—would be used only when there were guests; for most of the year both would be closed off to save on fuel and maintenance. In order to have south sun as well as a north view to the bay from each room, a one-room-wide plan set parallel to the water's edge worked perfectly and was consistent with the historical model.

In developing the design, golden section proportions were used to determine overall massing as well as location and sizes of smaller elements. Though they are obscured in many of the built examples collected in the research, the primary massing and plan-section characteristics of the type are developed and refined with proportional rigor in the modern parallel.

g, h
Wyble residence
Still Pond, Maryland
1978

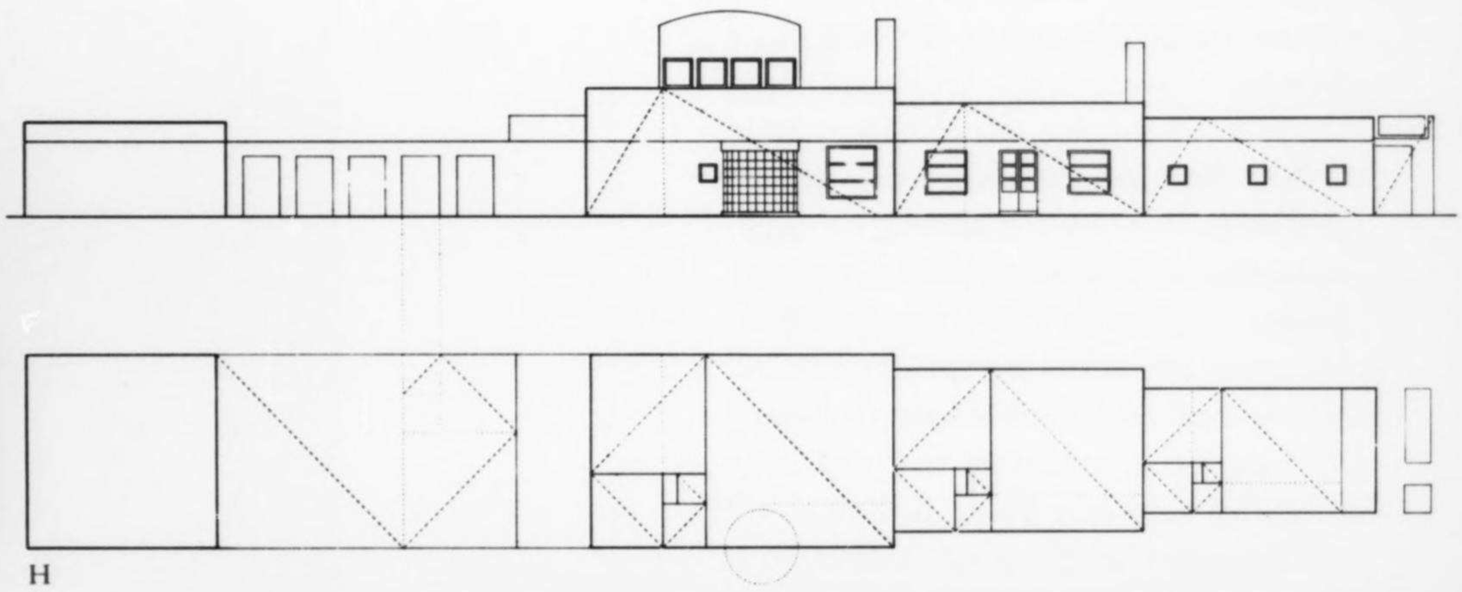


G

e
Hard Bargain
Charles County
Maryland
1780

f
Mt. Airy
Harborton, Virginia
1849

F



H

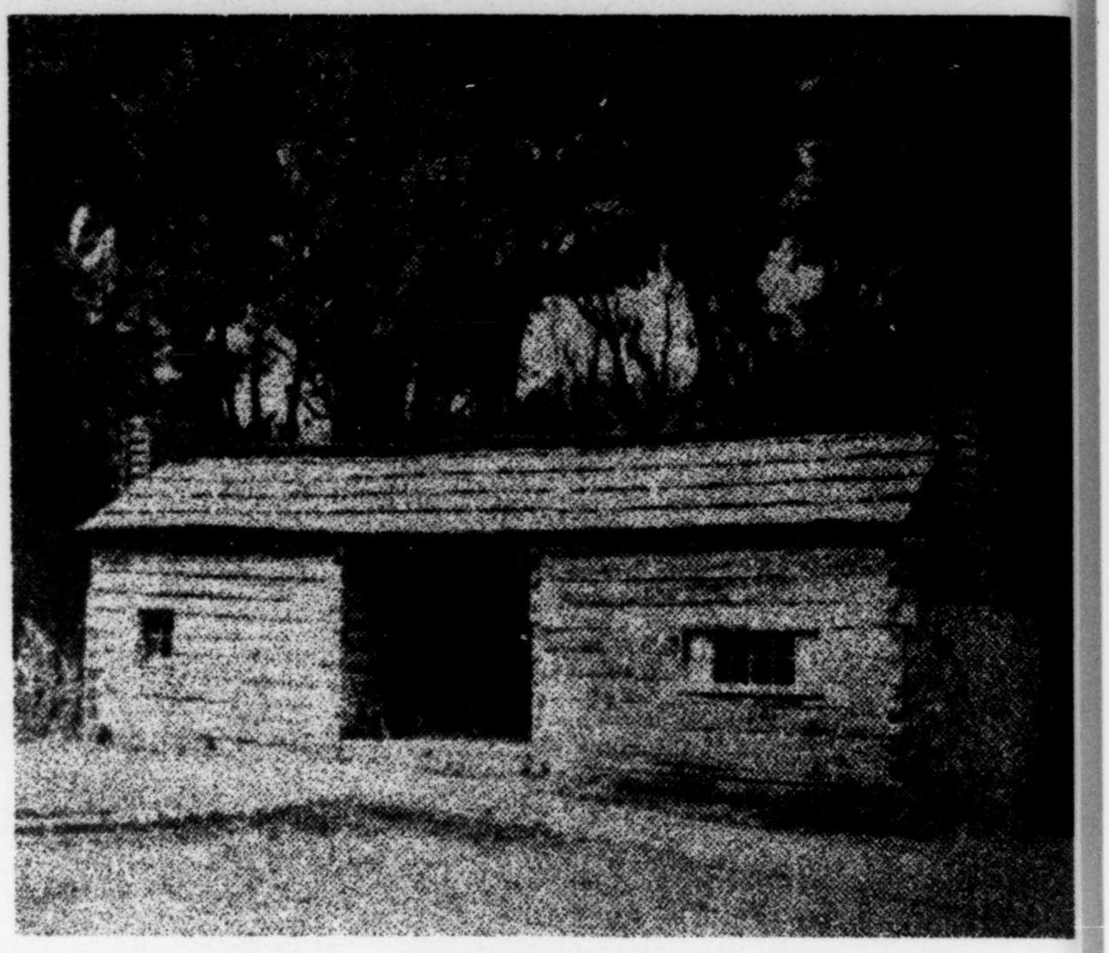
Dogtrot house

The dogtrot house consists of two rooms on either side of an open passage joined by a common gable roof. In some examples a sleeping loft is added in the roof over the open passage and in others this central hall passes through a two-story house. This type was prevalent in the South and Southwest; the passage functioned as a shady breezeway, where meals could also be taken in hot weather. The dogtrot or possum trot was named by early observers who saw the purpose of the passage as an animal shelter—a place where dogs could run through the house.

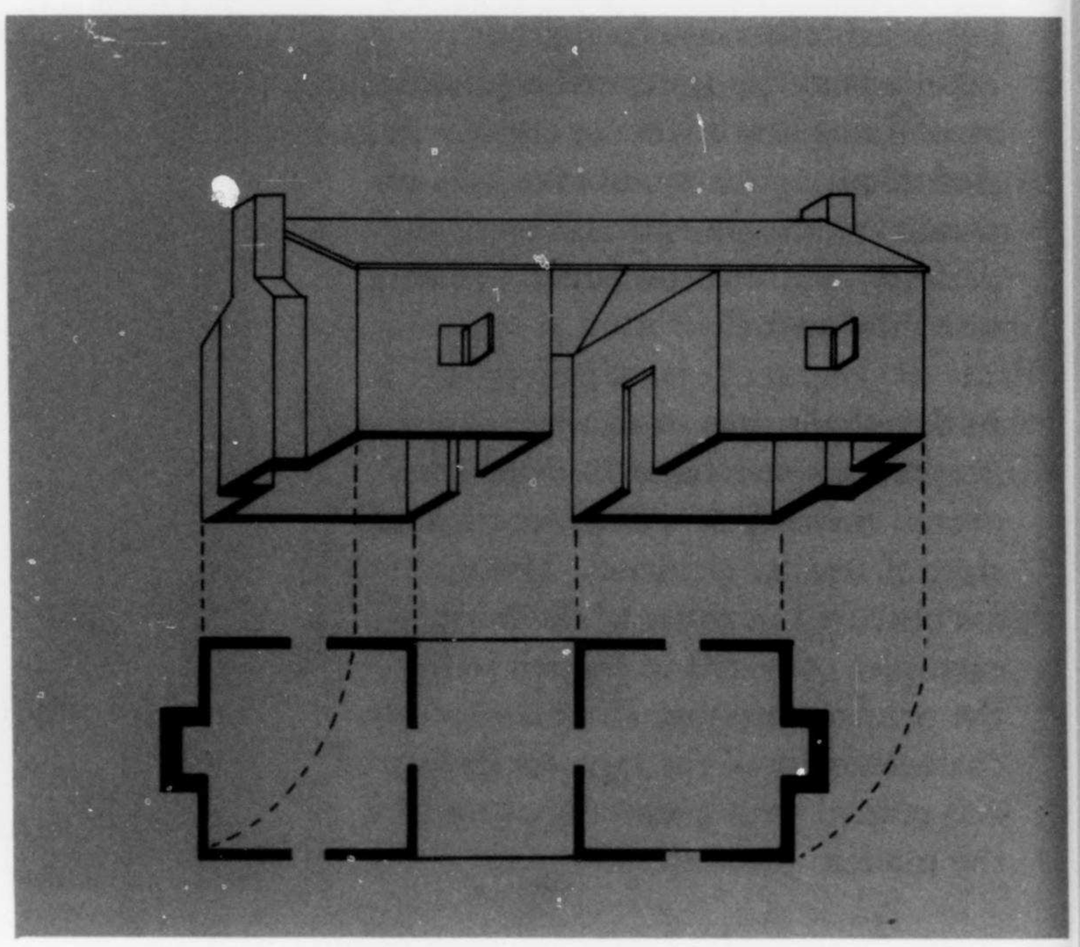
The dogtrot type was the abstract analogue for the design of a house on a heavily wooded site near a potato field on the South Fork of Long Island. The client's requirements included a «lap pool» (an 18' x 60' pool for swimming exercises) as well as a separation between the guest rooms and the owner's quarters. The house and guest house are divided by the pool running east-west, while views from the houses are to the north and south. This plan provides many different views into the trees and maximum privacy for each room. The second floor living room of the main house allows for breezes through the windows facing north and south. The kitchen is located between the winter dining room and a screened porch at poolside for summer meals. End walls of the houses, aligned with the edge of the pool, are doubled in the water's reflection from either direction of approach. The buildings contain a little urban place, like a slice of Venice in the forest.

When approaching a dogtrot, one sees the landscape beyond through a large opening, which establishes an empty center of gravity. The Long Island House is a transformation of this vernacular model, retaining the idea in the central void with the pool. Two building elements frame this void which is intensified by the pool's reflection of the site's old trees and the sky.

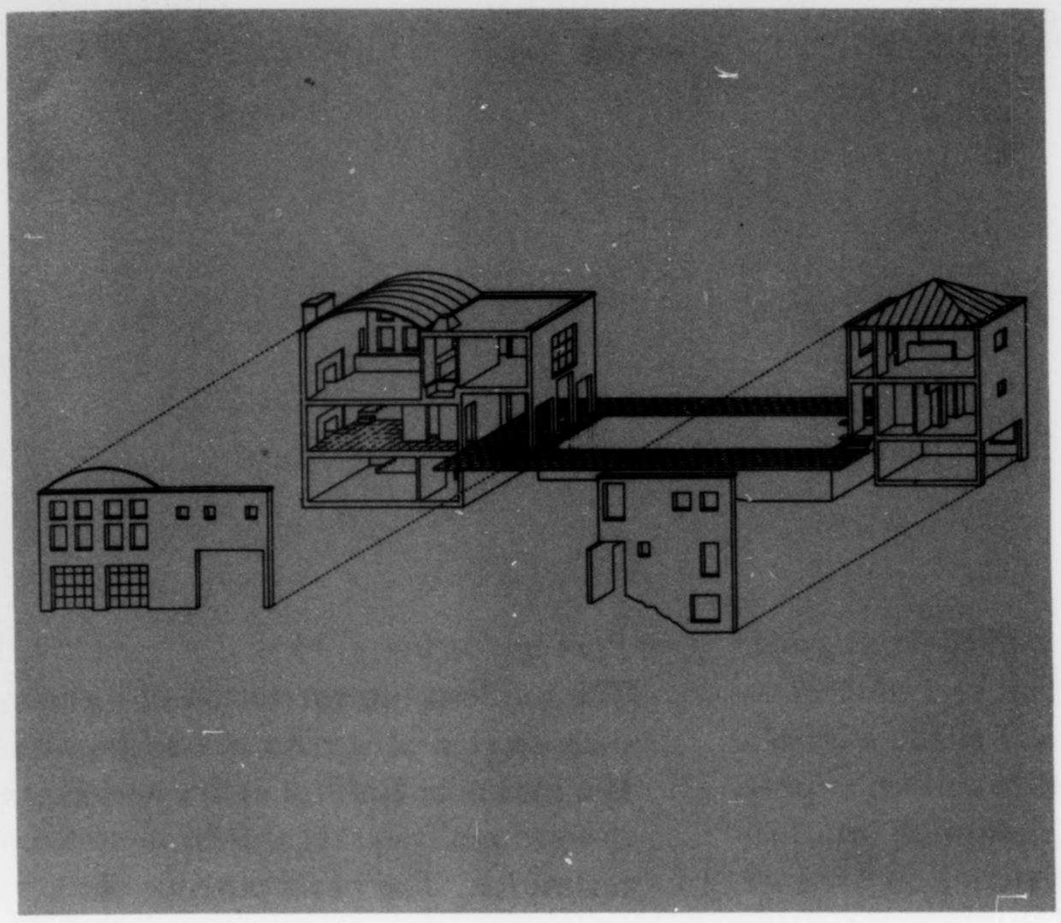
Steven Holl



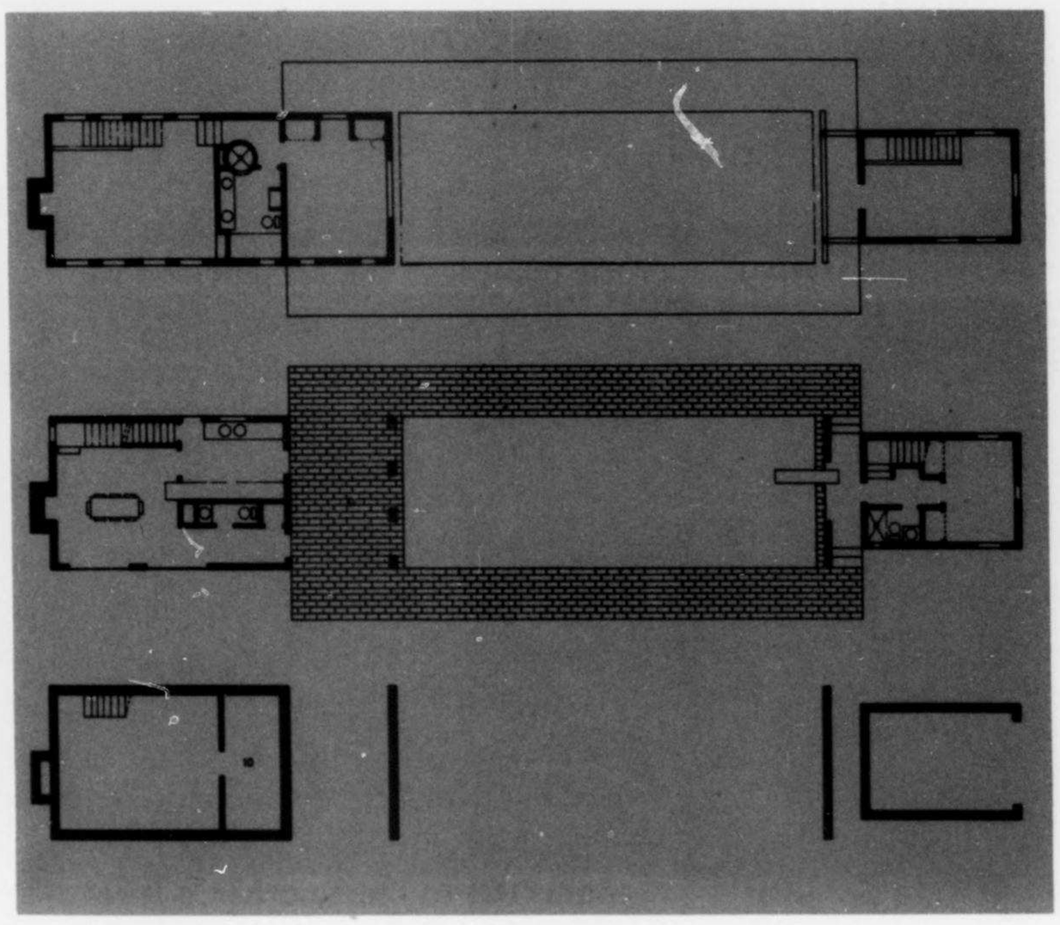
Dogtrot house
Tennessee



Upturned dogtrot house

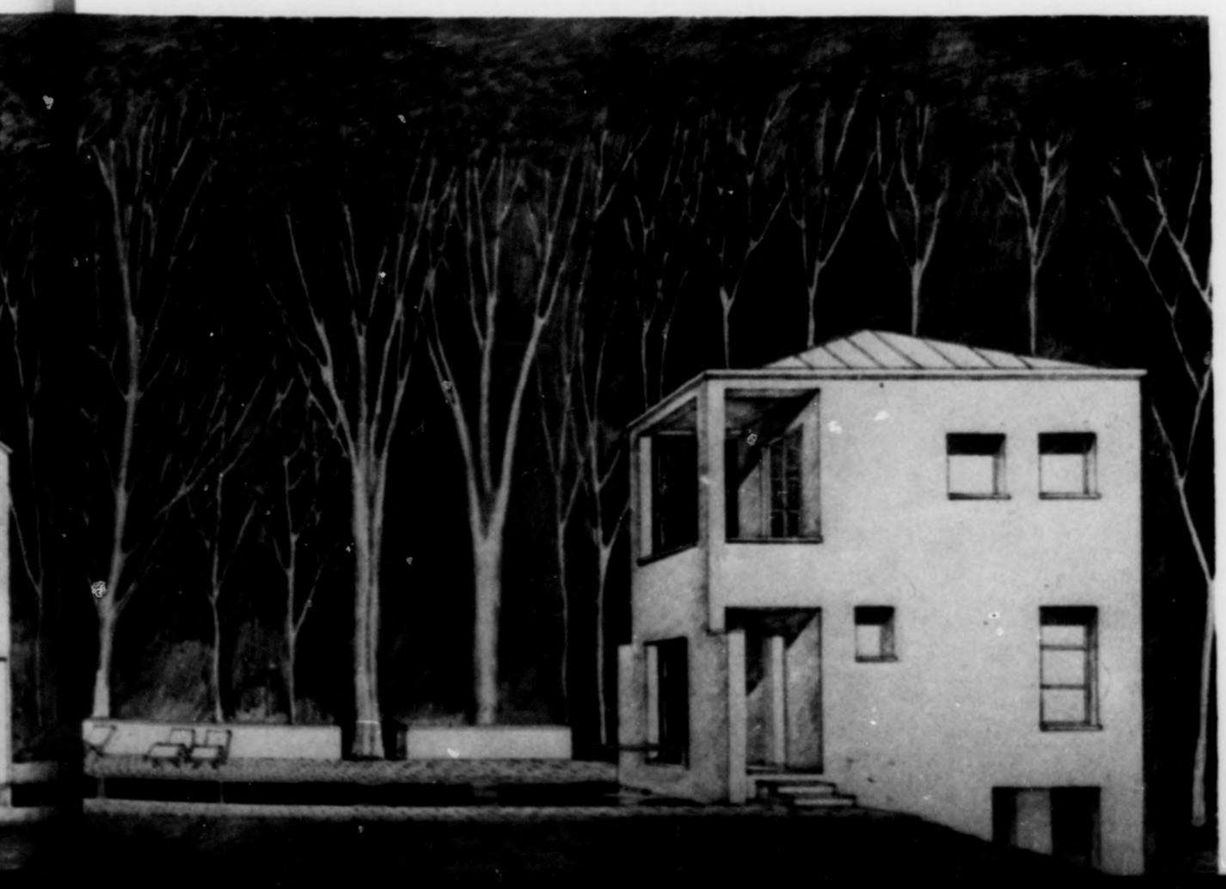


Van Zandt residence
Long Island
New York
1983



Van Zandt residence
plans

Van Zandt residence



Questioning regionalism

How is a cultural statement made in a modern building? The question is bound up with the impossibility of recreating true regionalism. The local materials and traditional craft of the simple rural house have given way to industrialized products, and the carpenter-architect has disappeared as rapid population migrations have transformed North America into a vast nonregional mass. Cost-effective mass-produced items (windows, exterior siding, appliances, mechanical systems, and the like) give local builders in California, New England, and Florida a similar palette, supplied by a few nationwide companies.

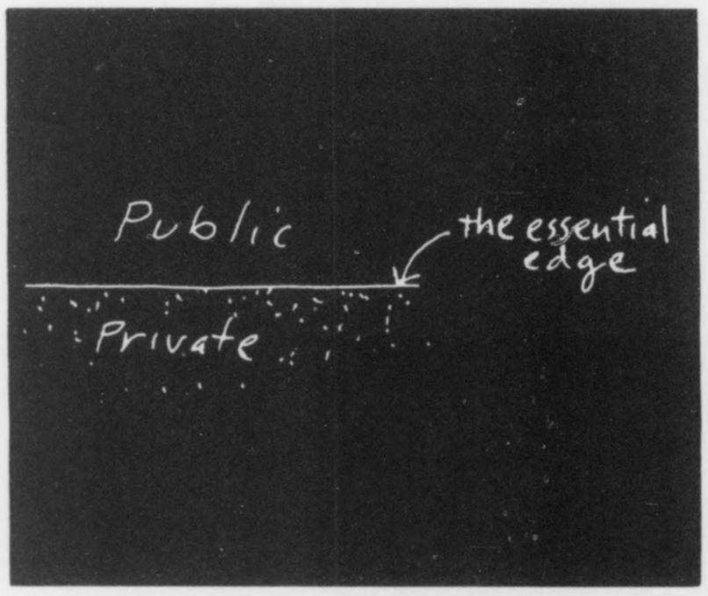
It is counterproductive to seek a return to preindustrial technique when a more efficient and cheaper building component can be made to fit a given design. Regardless of the possibilities and constraints of industrialized construction, local typological prototypes can inspire new forms. Infusing current building techniques with the essence of traditional building types might strike a balance between new forms and traditional roots, reestablishing internal cultural connections in architecture. Whether the original type is entirely transformed or is merely reformed, the attempt is aimed not at regionalism or style but at cultural reflection.

The mobility characteristic of the population of North America today is echoed in the mobility of designers and architects. The nature of our contemporary culture finds the would-be regionalist with simultaneous commissions on the east coast, on the west coast, and in the South. Given the antiregional forces of industrialization and mobility, other ways to preserve local meanings and cultural continuity must be sought. Illumination of specific site history and transformation of culturally rooted types are two possible strategies.

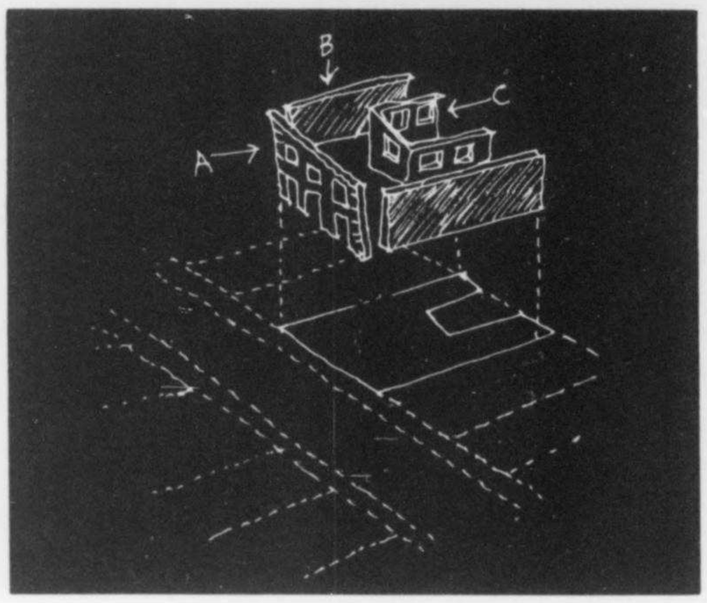
Seven principles for the interpretation of urban and rural vernacular

A traditional vocabulary of culturally based building types can be transformed and reinterpreted with invention; but invention needs limitations—principles. Distinct from ideology or doctrine, principles form the basis on which other decisions are made. Rather than unbendable laws, these are determining characteristics for integrating vernacular research with domestic projects.

1
Public and private
Definition of the public space is the essence of urban construction; the line separating public from private is the primary edge. Even a rural house has a public and a private side.



2
Urban form
An urban building or building group has a direct relation to an overall city plan or grid. As part of the overall city fabric, a building has three types of walls: the public facade—most important as it establishes frontality; blind or party walls, possibly semi-open; and walls internal to a block or courtyard. Interlocking urban buildings forming the geometric solids and voids of a city are characterized by various relations of these three basic outer faces, subordinating them to the larger urban pattern. In the modern American city the sheer size of new nonpublic constructions which fill out an entire block (for example, developer skyscrapers) may make them automatic monuments. A monumental building standing in contrast to surrounding fabric distinguishes itself—all sides are public facades with civic responsibility.



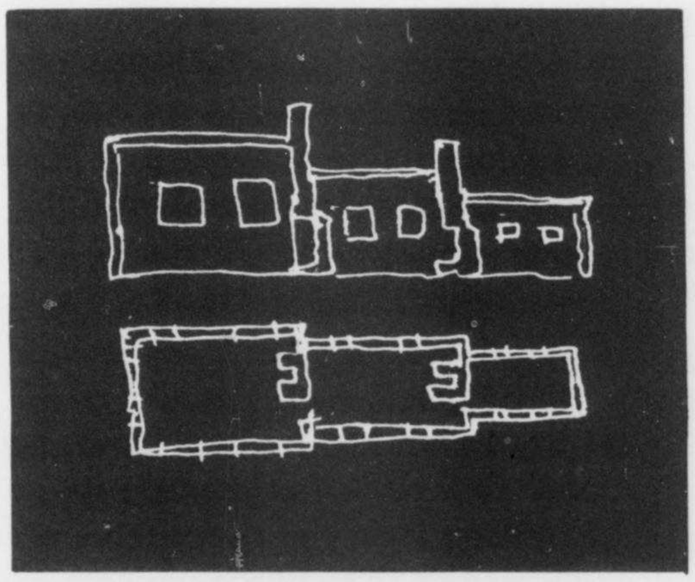
3
Plan and section
The modern interpretation of recurring plan-section schemata of building types is a means of linking architectures (and designing cities) regardless of style or technique. The basic potency of an architectural form is in plan and section, which yield internal and external relations of mass and space.

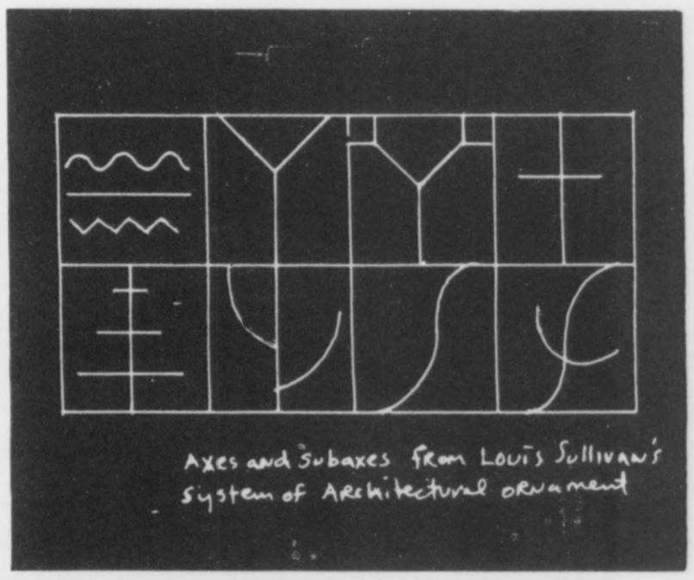
4
Geometry
Indigenous constructions consistently adhere to geometric simplicity in everything from overall mass to such elements as porches, windows, and doors. The geometric relations in architecture connect the simple and the complex, the ancient and the modern. Clear geometry has always embodied timeless goals, independent of fashion.

5
Idea
Every work of architecture must have a concept. Architecture is intuitively and intellectually experienced. Architecture adheres to Immanuel Kant's description, «The unity of rule by which a manifold of contents are held together and connected to one another.» Intuitive passion joins the intellectual spirit when an architectural whole is more than a collage of parts.

6
Ornament
Architecture has an emotional life if it is born from an idea; the purpose of ornament is to amplify the idea. The common alternative is to overlay a lifeless architecture with arbitrary patterns. Louis Sullivan explained, «While the mass-composition is the more profound, the decorative ornamentation is the more intense. Yet both must spring from the same source of feeling.»

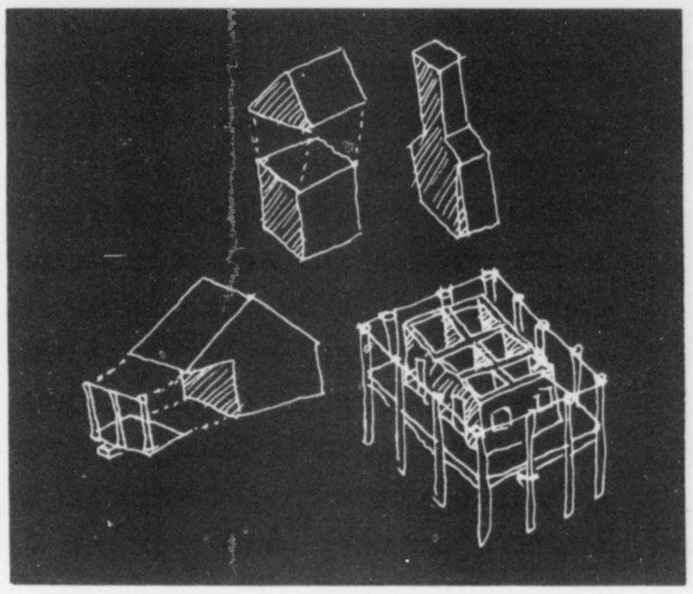
The principle that detail or ornament be subordinate to mass is ancient. From the obelisks of the Fourth Dynasty to the simple masses of thirteenth-century Europe, dominating clarity of mass is never obliterated by detail. This principle, evident in the work of many masters, for example Ledoux, Schinkel, and Sullivan, is also evident in vernacular architecture. The cubic form of a carpenter-architect's house is pierced by windows and doors whose surrounding detail is restrained and proportioned to the mass.

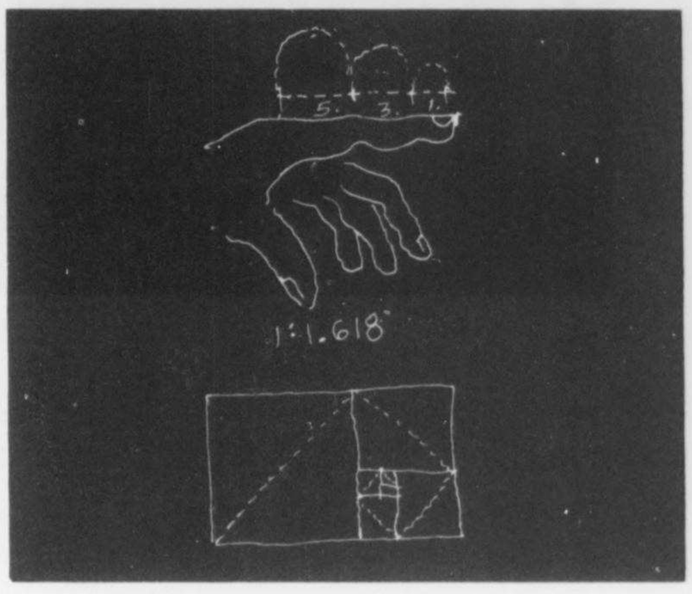




7
Proportion

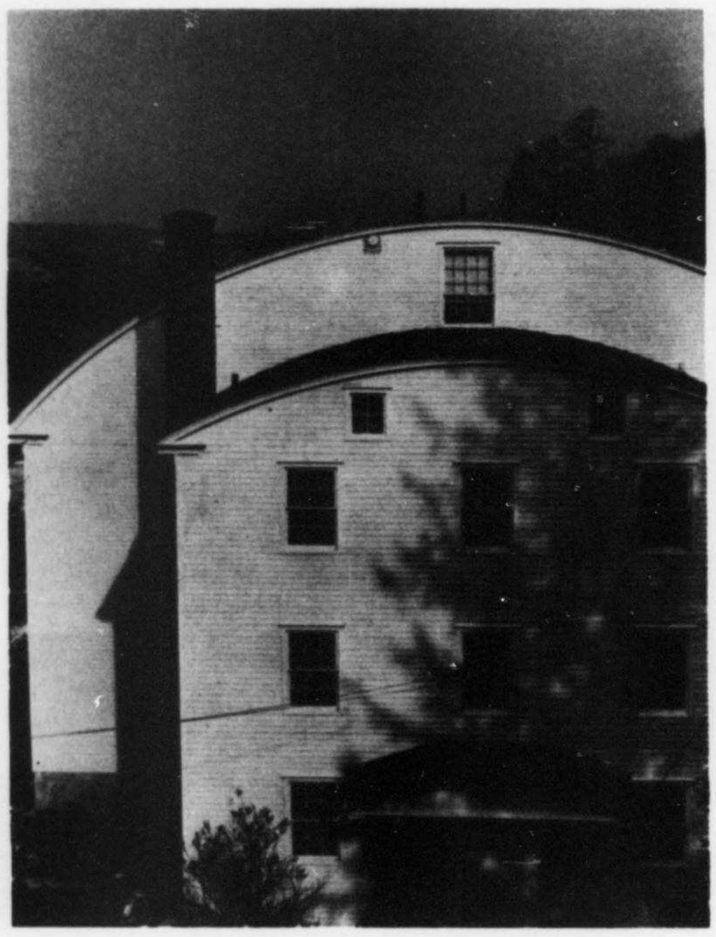
The division of a measurable whole into parts—the establishment of mathematical relations in a building—was intuitive for the vernacular architect. The refinement of architecture has depended since ancient times on the establishment of harmonic interrelations in a building; masterpieces have reflected a chain of related proportions. Of the various proportional systems, the role played by one proportional number in particular—1:1.618 (the Golden Section)—stands out. Its prevalence in plant and animal forms brings us closer to nature; the spiral of growth in the nautilus shell, the proportion of joints in the fingers of a human hand, the branching limbs of a tree or leaves of a flower, all hinge on this proportional number. Kepler called it «a precious gem, one of the two treasures of Geometry.» A proportional order can refine architecture with an ancient mathematical harmony and reconcile it with nature.





Invention and modernity

Shaker Meeting
House
New Lebanon
New York
ca. 1850



Modernity in its most positive sense has been a great liberator. In the twentieth century, literature, art, music, and architecture have moved toward freer expression. For North American architecture this thrust has an intrinsic link to architectural beginnings; ignoring convention and relying on invention was natural to the vitality of the country. Early carpenter-architects were essentially early moderns in their creation of new types and forms. There were few books and no photographs, and because travel was difficult and slow the early settlers could not study previous architectural models. The ingenuity of carpenter-architects was soon overshadowed in a society with a sense of cultural inferiority. Imported models fostered the «American Renaissance Style.» However, the earliest vernacular forms remain linked to modern architecture by a liberating sense of invention.

Invention did not always mean the imposition of individuality. The benefit of the whole community inspired the inventions of the New England Shakers, for example. This group invented the circular saw, the metal pen nib, window sash weights, the common clothes pin, and the flat broom, among other things, without crediting any individual. The architecture expressed a will to invent restrained by a wonderful sense of purity; strangely idiosyncratic, it seems nevertheless to return to universal elements. Invention in architecture need not degenerate into a contest of merely formal or stylistic consequences. Balanced with cultural connection, invention must intensify, enliven, and give strength to architecture.

Idea and modernity

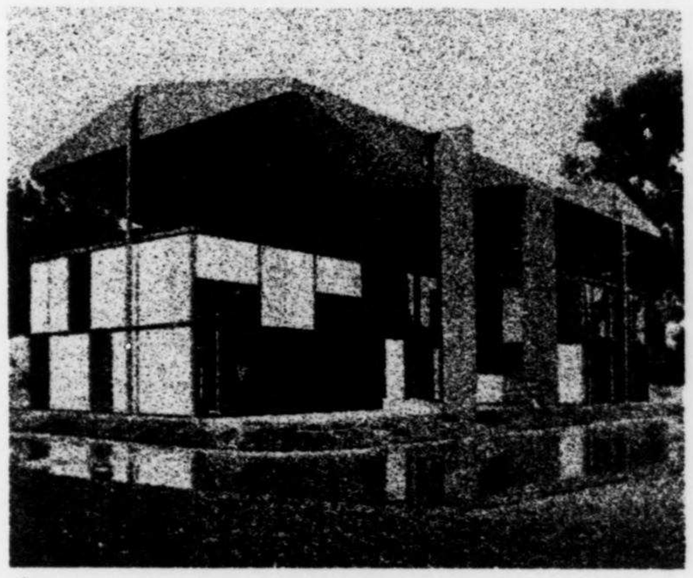
In continuing the modern pursuit of open vocabulary, expression does not follow directly either from an interpretation of a historical style or from a literal expression of function. Many of the expressive methods of mid-twentieth-century practitioners may be critically examined as a narrowing, rather than an opening up, of architectural vocabulary. Exit stairs pulled out of a building envelope as a massing device, or expression of the structural frame or the mechanical systems, for example, do not have positive meaning in themselves. They are the results of a single idea about the literal exposure of function as a formula for architectural character. This attitude is derived from Louis Sullivan's axiom «form follows function,» but he was never merely literal about it. Sullivan's great contributions were lyrical expressions in form which grew out of ideas rather than the physical display of function.

It is precisely the realm of ideas—not forms or styles—that presents the most promising legacy of twentieth-century architecture. The twentieth century propels architecture into a world where meanings cannot be completely supplied by historical languages. Modern life brings with it the problem of the meaning of a larger whole. An increase in the physical size and programmatic complexity of buildings amplifies the innate tendency of architecture toward abstraction. The tall office building, the urban apartment house, and the hybrids of commercial complexes call for larger, more open ideas to organize an architectural work. The organization of overall form depends on a central concept around which other elements remain subordinate. A concept unites whereas application of an historic style fragments. When a clear idea is the heart of architectural expression, it can be individually related to the circumstance while remaining distinct from a general theory or style. Examples of meaningful form molded by abstract concept, the idea-based constructions realized by Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Eero Saarinen remain clear expressive works today. Their meaning does not require a consistent language or style that must be repeated from one project to the next.

The uncompromising realization of an intuitively held idea is manifested in the simplest house of a carpenter-architect, for whom there was no difference between intuition and theoretical thinking. As Ernst Cassirer clearly put it, «All intuition is bound up with theoretical thinking.» For today's architect the same goal must be held conceptually; where numerous individuals work as a team to achieve a construction, a unified result demands a concept as well as strategy for realization. A clear architectural idea, frankly stated, is analogous to the intuition that marked the path for the carpenter-architect.

a
Pavilion for
Heidi Weber
Zurich
Le Corbusier
1965

b, c
Board of Trade
Building
Kansas City
Missouri



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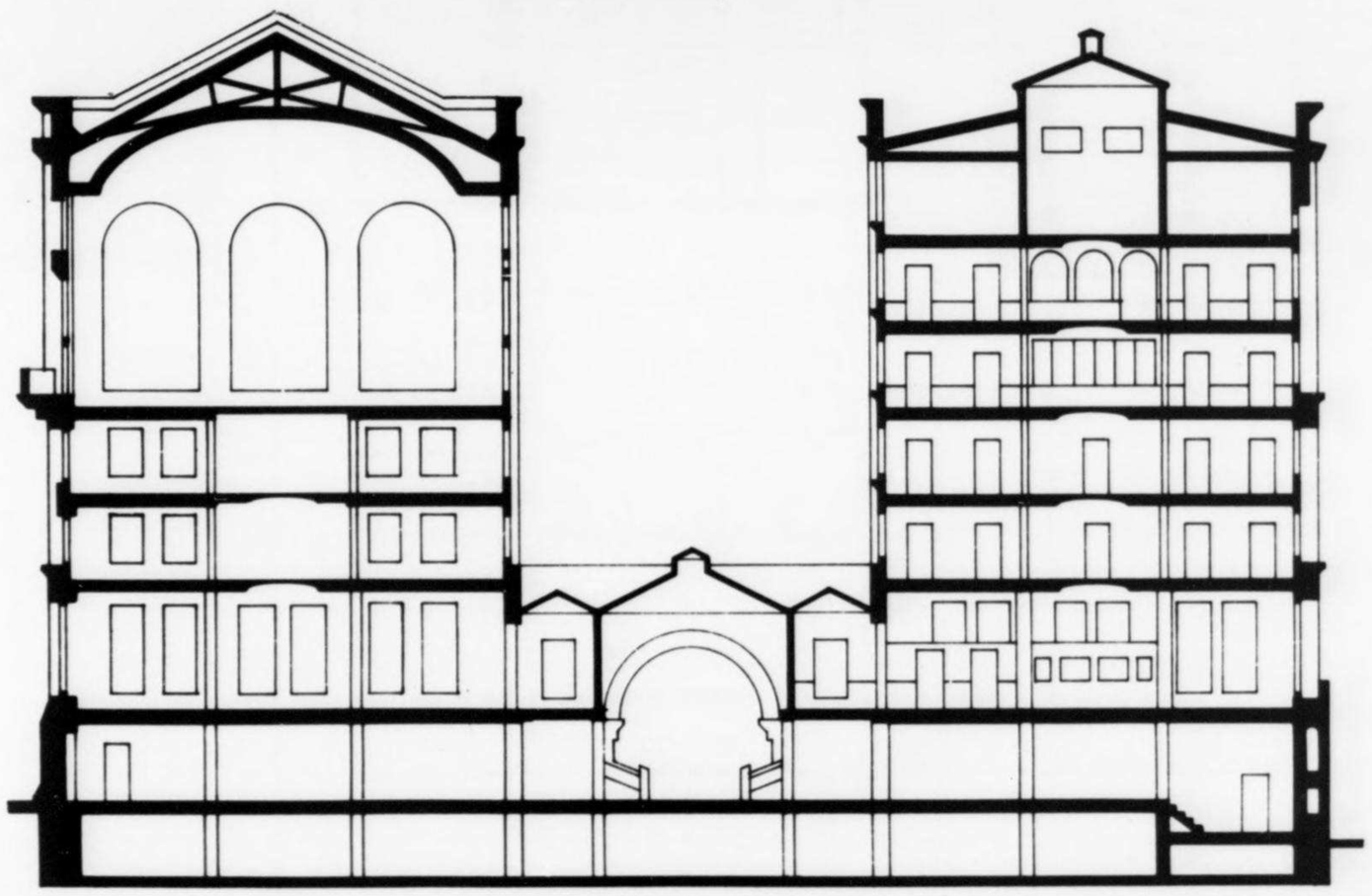
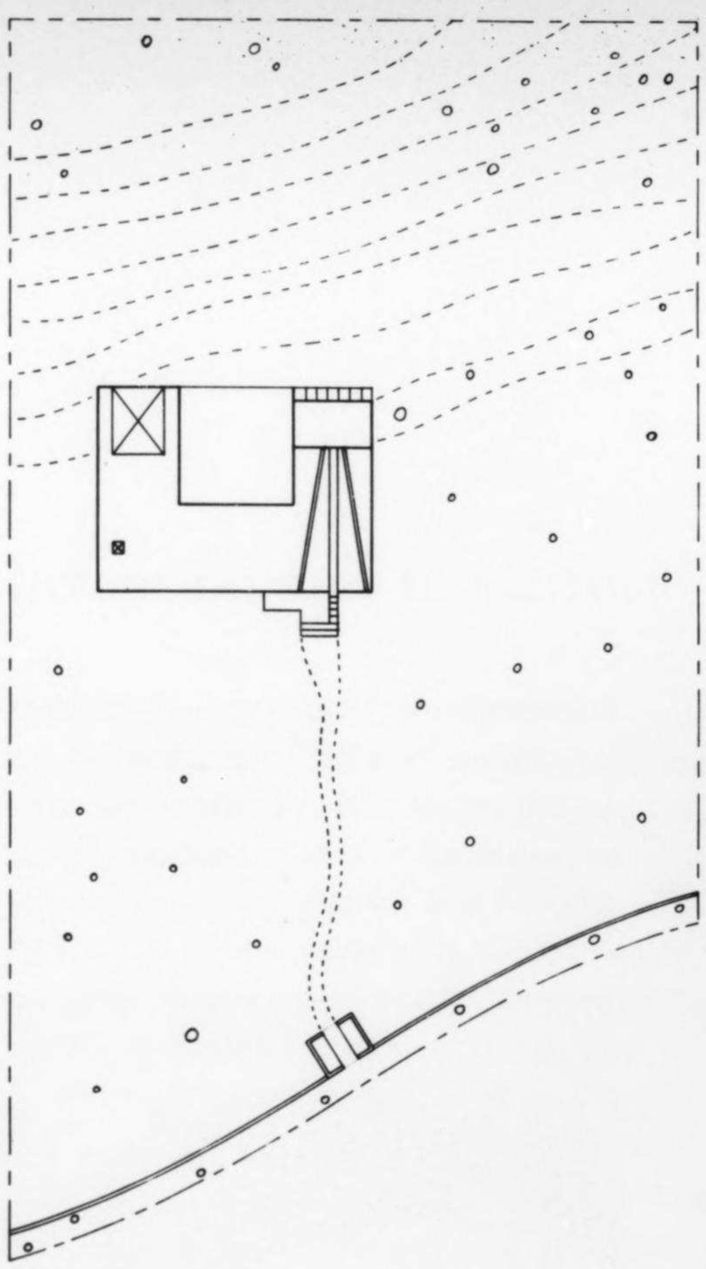


Internal opposition as an organizing idea

Opposition of forces is an organizing idea which can yield a dialectical architectonic form. For example the Kansas City Board of Trade building by Burnham and Root is charged with counterpoint: the two wings of the H type building have differing internal arrangement, and the expression of the trading hall atop one wing is in asymmetrical contrast to the other. A similar counterpoint can be seen in the asymmetry of twin towers in medieval cathedrals such as the Trier Cathedral in Germany. Among the clearest modern structures organized around the idea of counterpoint is the Pavilion for Heidi Weber by Le Corbusier in Zurich.

A radical departure from a typological model was taken for a studio-house we designed in the summer of 1980. The plan type was transformed through the internal counterpoint of program. The site, a thickly wooded lot on Staten Island, overlooks a 60-foot ravine. The studio-house for a young couple, both artists, has no conventional living or dining room, in favor of two larger studios and a large kitchen. The studios were intended to respond to the nearly opposite sensibilities of the artists. She paints floral landscapes, loves sunlight, and keeps cats in her studio. He makes black concrete sculptures, hates pets, and does not care for sunlight. The clients suggested that the best way to respond to suburban surroundings was to preserve all trees and natural vegetation and isolate the building at the edge of the ravine.



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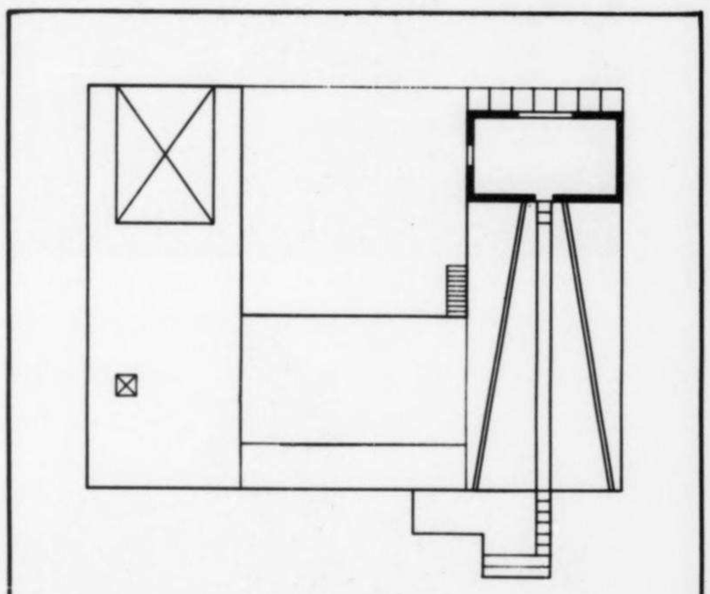

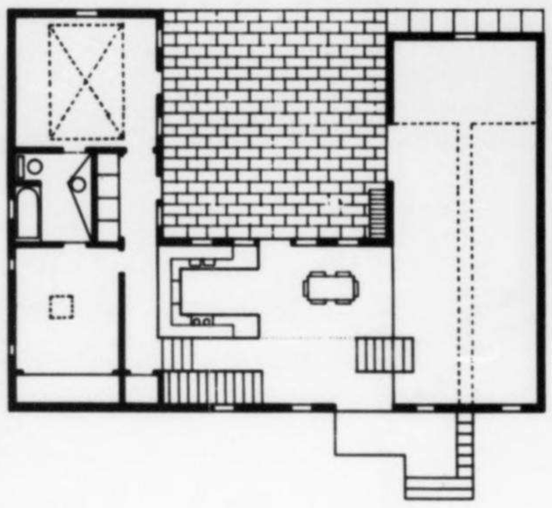

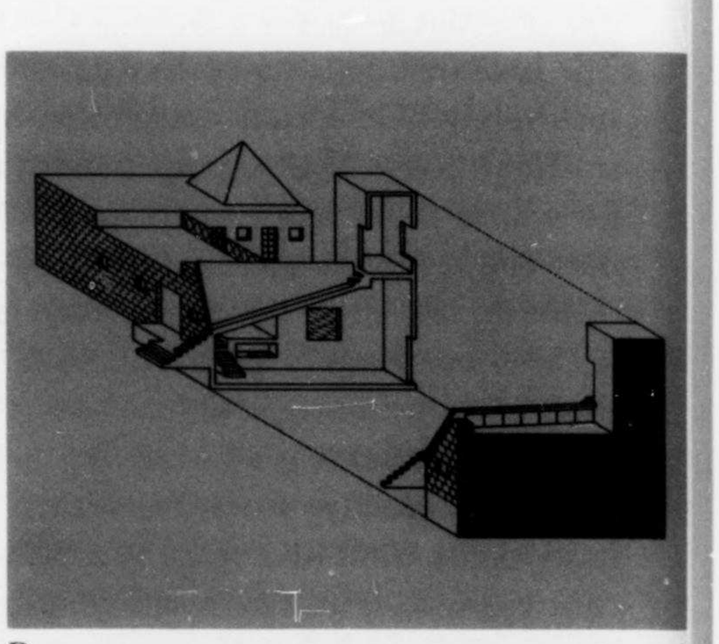

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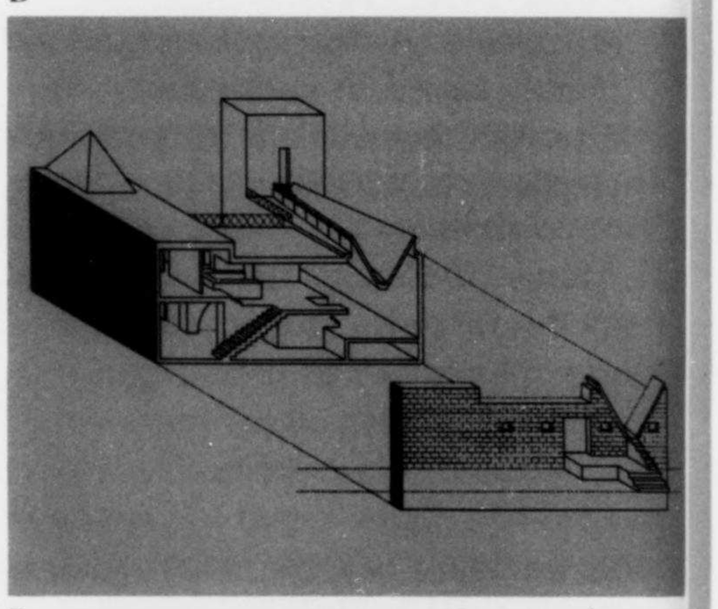

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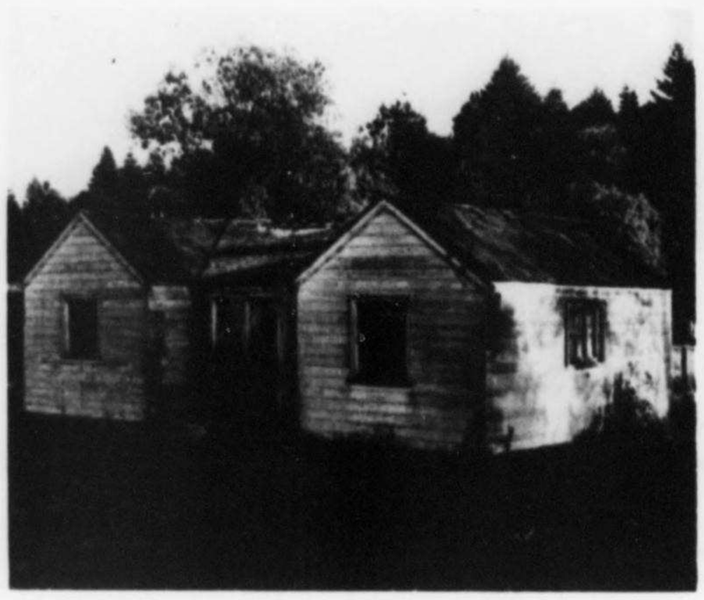

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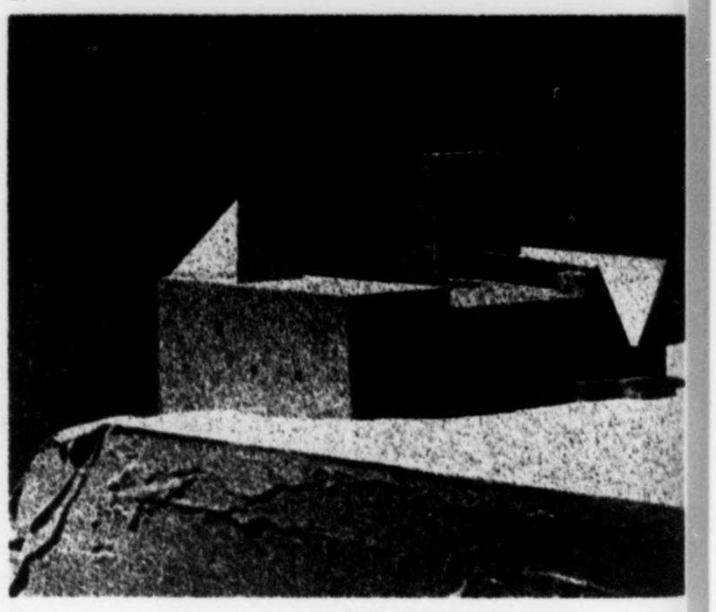

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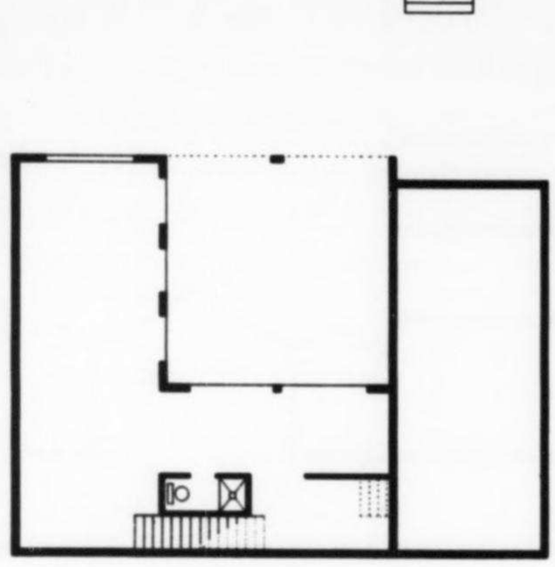


C

a
U type house
b
Metz House
Staten Island
1980
site plan

c
Metz House
plans
d–f
Metz House

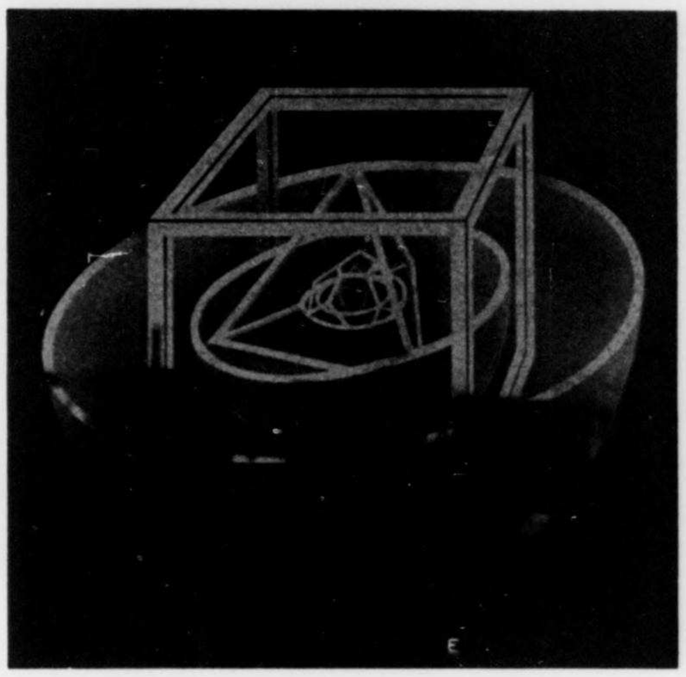
Extension of ancient concepts as an organizing idea

The traditional U type plan was used, with the courtyard facing the ravine. The theme of an urban building type, an island in the forest, is carried out in all elevations: the front facade is articulated in integral-color concrete block; the side walls are painted black, like party walls in a city; the courtyard is painted white for maximum light.

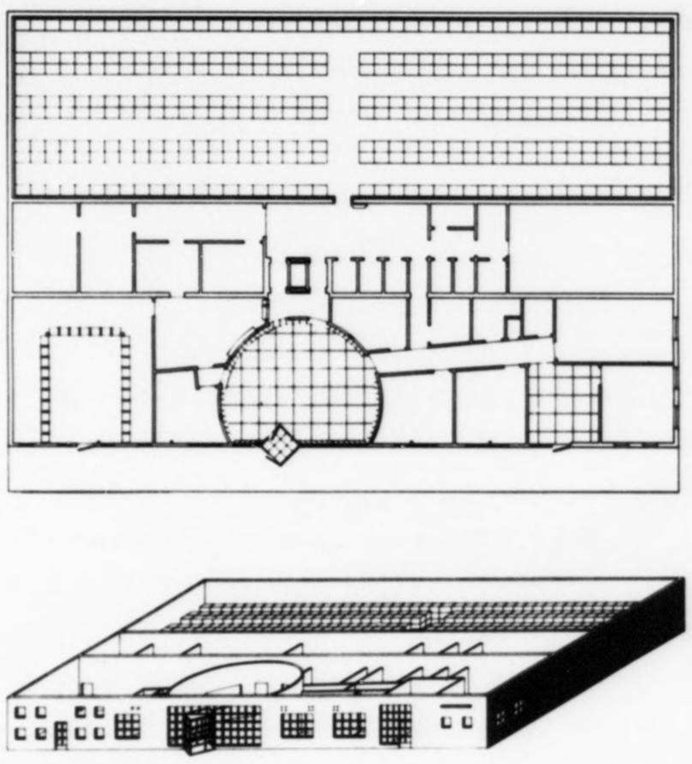
Because of the unique nature of the clients' needs, we explored a major transformation of the neutral U type by charging each wing with opposite characteristics. The painting studio in the north wing is lit by a continuous clerestory window under the butterfly roof, which acts as a light diffuser. This roof also serves as a ramp leading to a small room overlooking the ravine, used for solitude and study. In the opposite wing the sculpture studio on the lower level opens on a grotto and an outdoor work area. On the upper level of this wing the child's bedroom has a special roof to give the feeling of a separate little house.

While the U is generically a symmetrical type, this house explores the potential of asymmetry conceptually as well as formally in the dialectic between light and dark space, open and closed space, and down and up sections.

A



B



C

a
Safe Depository
Fairlawn
New Jersey
1982

b
Etched glass
Kepler's *Mysterium Cosmographicum*

c
Safe Depository

Metaphorical or abstract concept was a basis for architecture in many ancient cultures. Ancient Chinese architecture, for example, contained a geometric idea of the universe: heaven was round, earth was square, and the ideal town was quadrilateral with walls pierced by gates corresponding to the twelve months of the year.

The ancient Egyptians organized plans around the concept that east meant rebirth of the sun and life, and west was the direction of death—another metaphorical structure of an ancient cosmology. Vico observed that even the tiny constructions of the most primitive people begin in metaphor and imaginative ideas. They begin in poetry, not in science.

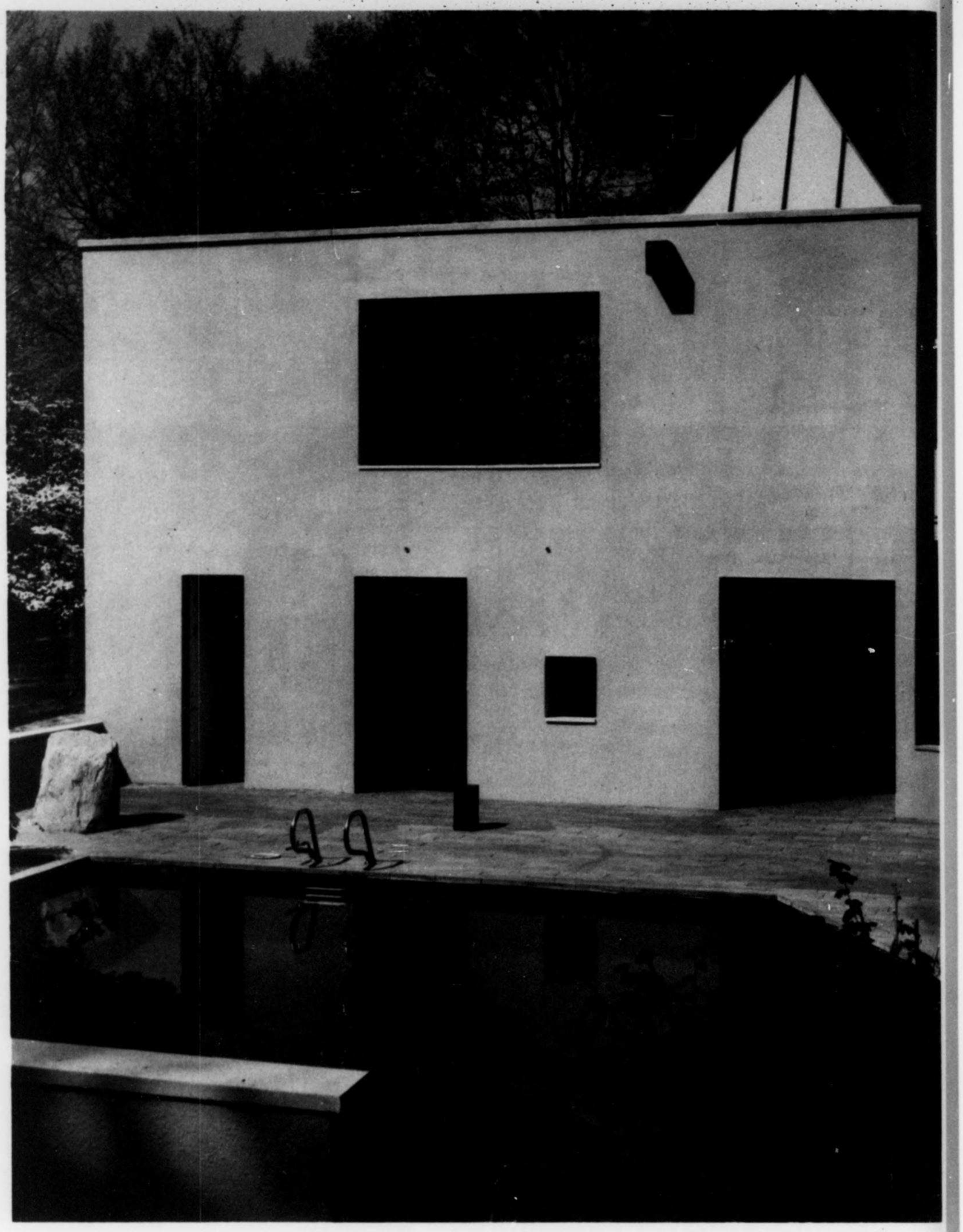
In the renovation of an existing concrete-block building into a safe-depository bank which we completed in 1983, the building plan was organized from the most rational and dense at the rear (rows of steel safe-deposit boxes) to the most irrational and thin at the front (public lobby). The site, an existing commercial strip in Fairlawn, New Jersey, dictated constraints yielding a plan with no special qualities other than organization on logarithmic proportions.

The elements of the public lobby record proportional and cosmological concepts. The seventeenth-century concept of the harmony of the spheres (the ideas that the separate spheres of the cosmos move around the earth at different velocities, producing the basic musical intervals) together with the ideas on harmony and proportion of Johannes Kepler (depicted in his diagram of the five regular solids inserted into the orbits of the planets) inspired a planetary frieze circling the top of the lobby wall. Cubic interpretations of the nine planets are bent by the curvature of the space. Ornaments carved into the glass of the vestibule explore similar celestial themes.

Traditional bank lobbies were once richly characterized with classical allegories recorded in ornament. Louis Sullivan's midwestern bank lobbies, for example, embody a lyrical interpretation of his idea of the organic transcendental seed germ. The aim of our project was to suggest that the architectural character of a public space may be based on a modern interpretation of an ancient idea.

History of site as an organizing idea

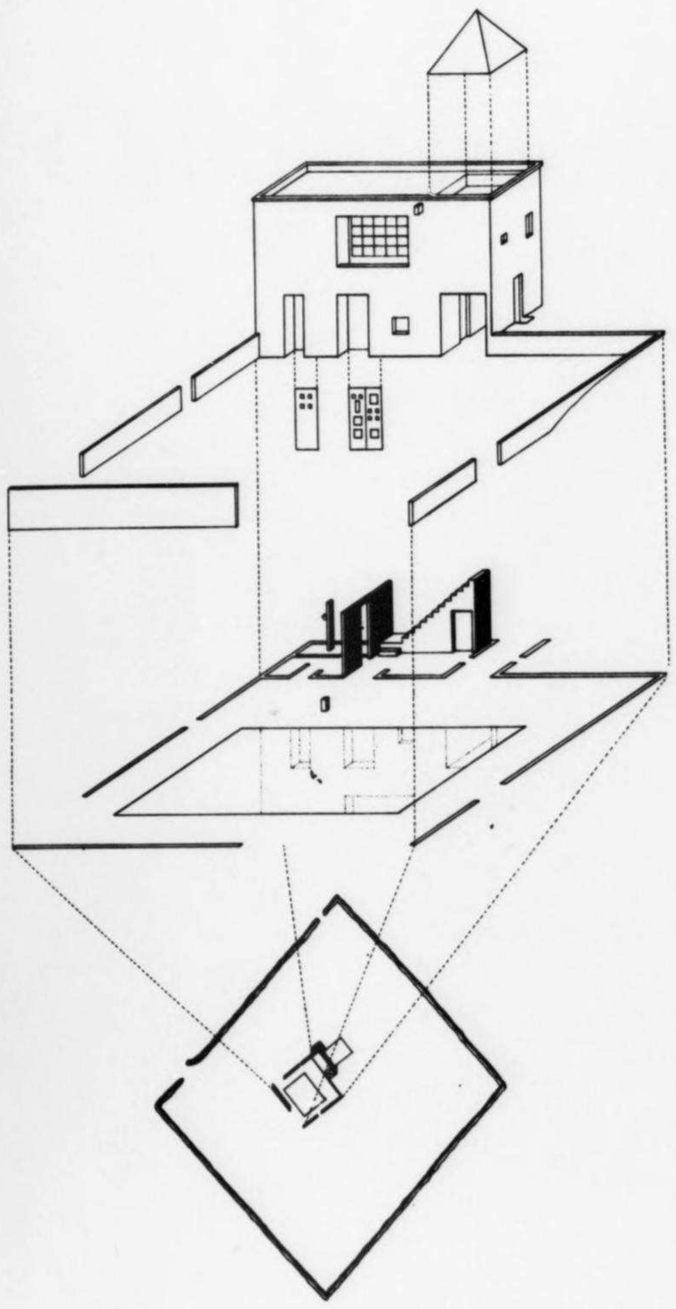
The history of a particular site can be illuminated (using a modern open vocabulary) to communicate local meanings. This idea was suggested by Rudolf Steiner when he argued in the 1910s that any site has a physical history of its own and that we have a critical choice whether or not to acknowledge it. A physical connection with history is established, for example, in Cuszco, Peru, which has suffered periodic destruction by earthquake. However, the pattern of the town remains a testament to its oldest culture because the rubble-built upper portions sit on first-floor foundations of giant stones set with razor-gap precision by the Incas. Whether it is the reuse of foundations forming a composite history of a site, the transformation of existing structures, or a modern construction reflecting something that has long since disappeared, the history of a site can be the basis for new constructions with local historic connections.



Poolhouse
Scarsdale
New York
1981

The idea of illuminating the history of a site organized the plan for a small sculpture studio-poolhouse addition we made in 1981. The suburban site in Scarsdale, New York, dates from the transference of property rights by King George in the early eighteenth century. The land is marked by stone walls placed to define boundaries at the time of the original transference. The newly constructed walls enclose an existing pool and form a courtyard at the center of the site in recollection of the older stone-wall boundary. A large rock found during excavation was upended in the middle of the courtyard as a material microcosm of the history-of-the-site idea. The poolhouse building is stretched thin to form the north wall, with an entry portal to the courtyard cut through it. The whole project is organized in a chain of proportions that begins in the overall 55-foot square of the pool court and descends to the smallest window openings.

Poolhouse
interior



Poolhouse
site projection

Poolhouse
Existing stone wall

The equilibrium between cultural connection and modernity in these projects leans toward invention in some cases and cultural connection in others. Rather than a thesis-antithesis, these forces coexist in a teeter-totter suspension. If the heavy side of this seesaw shifts in response to a particular place, in another circumstance a tip in the other direction would not be contradictory. This balance holds clarity as an essential, mysterious, and marvelous quality of architecture. However, architecture manifests itself beyond our verbal or diagrammatic representation of it; in a sense it is outside of anything we have discussed.

The ultimate aim of any art does not occur within it, but elsewhere—in a spiritual search. While this quest joins architecture to that which is beyond the purely physical, the requirements of physical material connect it to something before its physicality: a material essence.

Material has «absence» in the positive sense that Paul Valery wrote of it in the dialogue *Eupalinos*. Literal absence is evident in the cavernous void in a limestone mountain in Indiana which exists as the testament to a limestone skyscraper in New York. But the essence of material should not be confused with the material reality of building. Whether stone, sand, wood, or glass, the material of architecture is a link to the natural and human.

The Chinese painter Wang Wei (699–759), painting in words instead of colors, connected the natural essence of physical materials to painting in this poem, *In the Hills*

White pebbles jut from the river stream
Stray leaves turn red in the cold autumn
No rain is falling on the mountain path
But my clothes are damp in the fine green air.

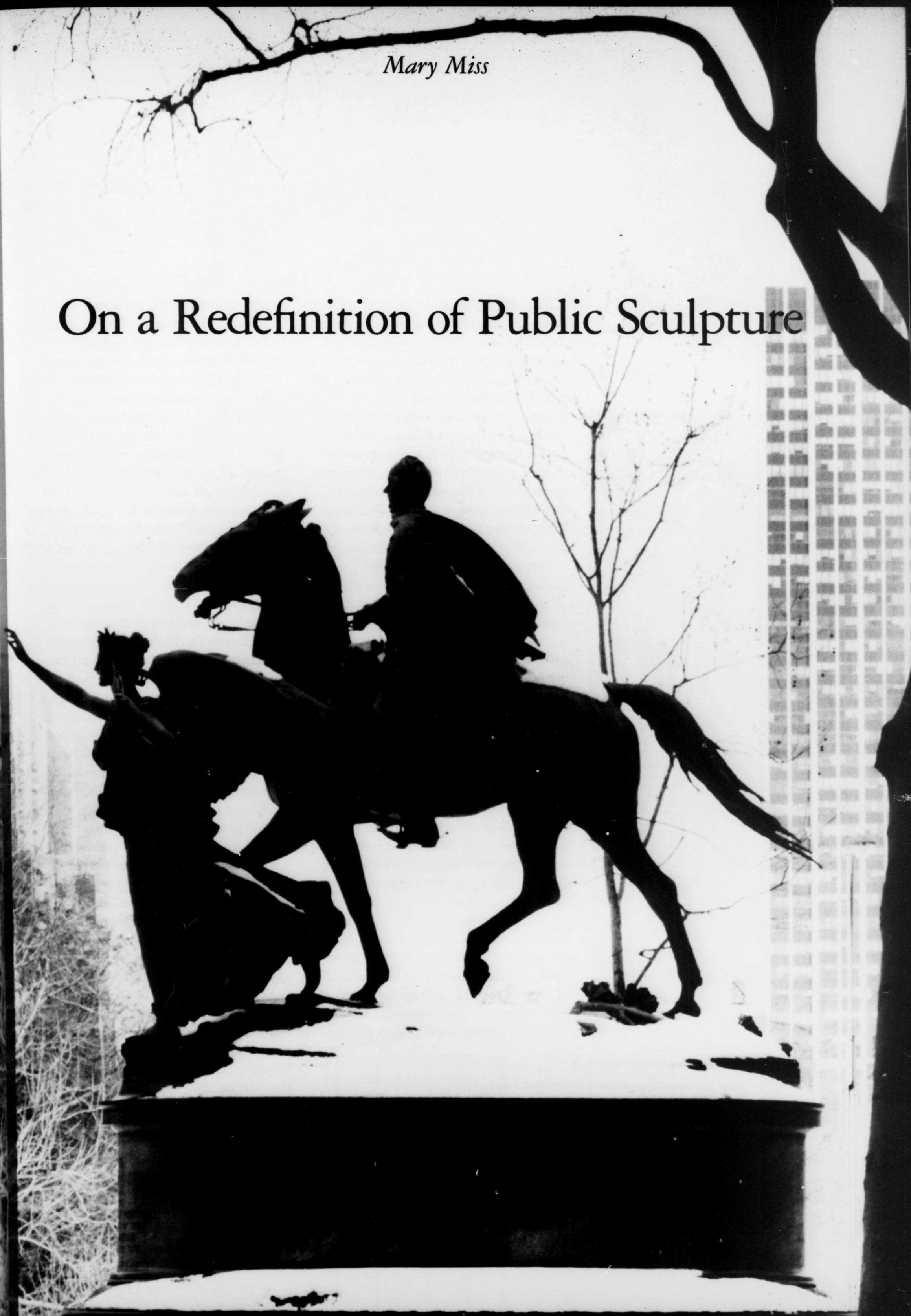
This selection of research and projects, done between 1976 and 1983, was presented in 1983 as a slide lecture at Southern California Institute of Architecture, at Princeton University, at New York University, and in the CAUSA series in Calgary, Alberta. I have tried to incorporate into this synopsis the questions and comments from those audiences. The material is not a synthesis of theory and practice but summarizes research (published in Pamphlet Architecture *5 and 9), proposed projects, and a few built works.*

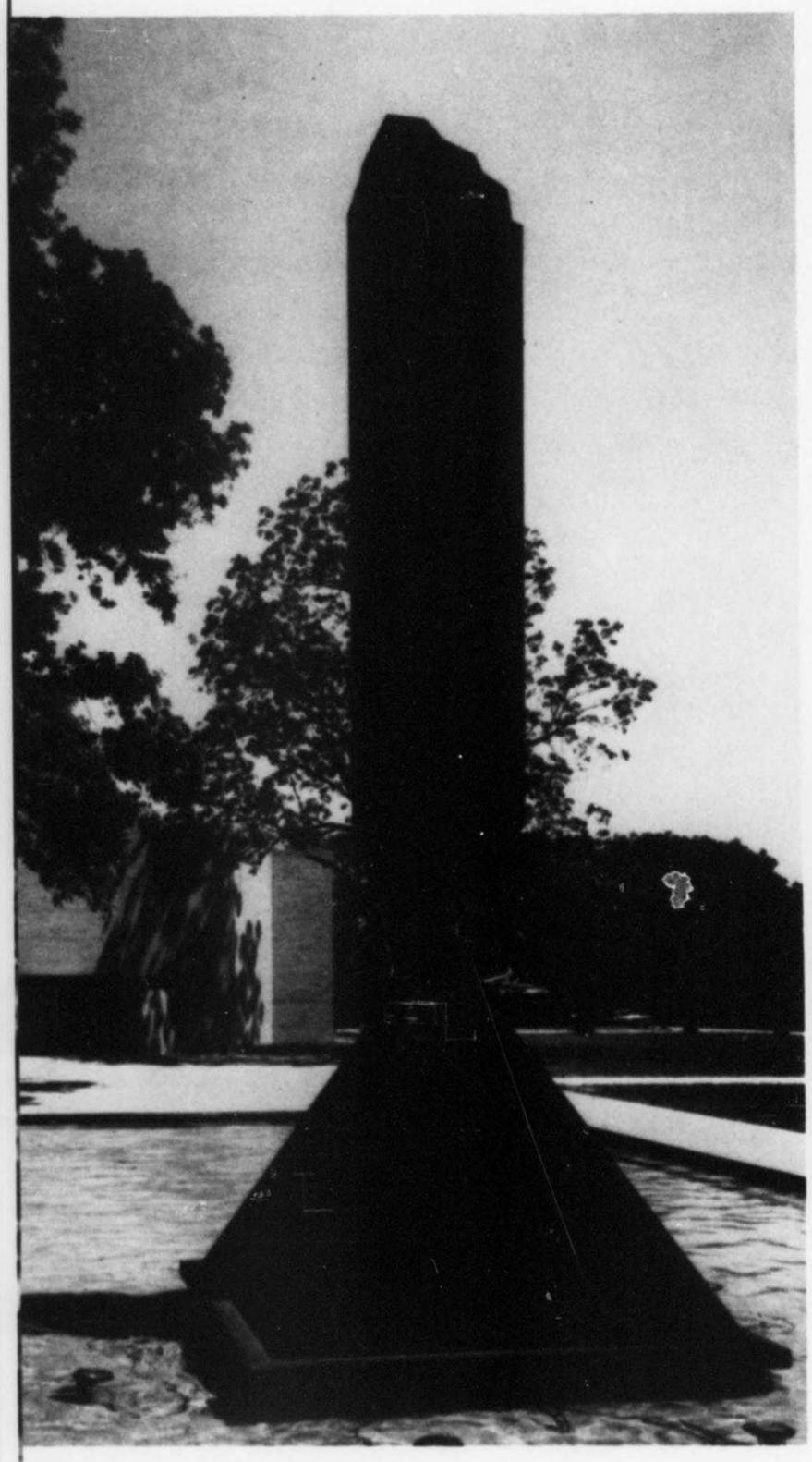
The research, undertaken with grants from the Graham Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, focused on collecting American building types that complete the geometry of the typical gridded city («The Alphabetical City») and recurring house types from across the country («Rural and Urban House Types in North America»). Concentration on American vernacular examples is circumstantial. In India, China, Australia—in any culture—an intention to illuminate local history with modern means would yield physically different but philosophically synonomous results.

Steven Holl

Mary Miss

On a Redefinition of Public Sculpture





Barnett Newman
«Broken Obelisk»
Houston, Texas
1963–67

Frontis
Statue of William
Tecumseh Sherman
Grand Army Plaza
New York City
© Philip Trager

If an artist is asked to create a sculpture for a community, the public usually expects something only slightly less impressive than the Statue of Liberty, or at least a monument reminiscent of the statue of General Kosciuszko remembered from childhood outings in the local park. «Monuments»: the public expects the commemorative (literally speaking) and, if possible, the majestic. In the meantime sculpture has become «nonobjective» (it cannot commemorate), and it is always physically less impressive than our twentieth-century engineering monuments.

The commemorative function that has traditionally been associated with public sculpture poses various difficulties today. First, it is difficult to find agreement on a subject worthy of commemoration. It is equally difficult to reach consensus on how to represent the chosen subject. Such public commissions raise questions concerning aesthetic accessibility. Demands for figurative sculpture and overt symbolism are often imposed on the unwilling artist; conversely, the public frequently feels that personal and inaccessible art forms have been placed where a civic monument had been expected.

The recently completed Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington reflects some of these problems. The guidelines stated very clearly that the monument should avoid provoking any of the activities of the Vietnam war protest era. The space should not encourage large gatherings of people; it was to be integrated into a discreet corner of the Mall in Washington. The final selection was the most invisible sculpture-monument. It is cut into the ground to blend totally with the landscape; the antithesis of the heroic monument had been requested and received. Naturally, some members of Congress and veterans' groups were rather upset by the controversy, and they decided to place a statue and a flagpole within the finished work.

The artist can also be seen by the public as a producer of luxury items–commodities for an elite and privileged group. In this view art is something that can be traded almost like stocks and bonds.

Then, too, there is the tradition whereby art reinforces the values of church and state; today that view is seemingly expressed by government-sponsored art projects. But the public will usually be extremely suspicious of the intrusion of government directives into community projects. (A federal agency that often places such projects is the Government Services Agency, or GSA; a certain percentage of its building budget is allocated to art.) But such works are not necessarily welcomed by the public. In fact, people often find that the art that appears in their communities has no relation to their daily lives, and they consider these projects as examples of wasteful government spending. What shifts of the last eighty years are responsible for these problems?

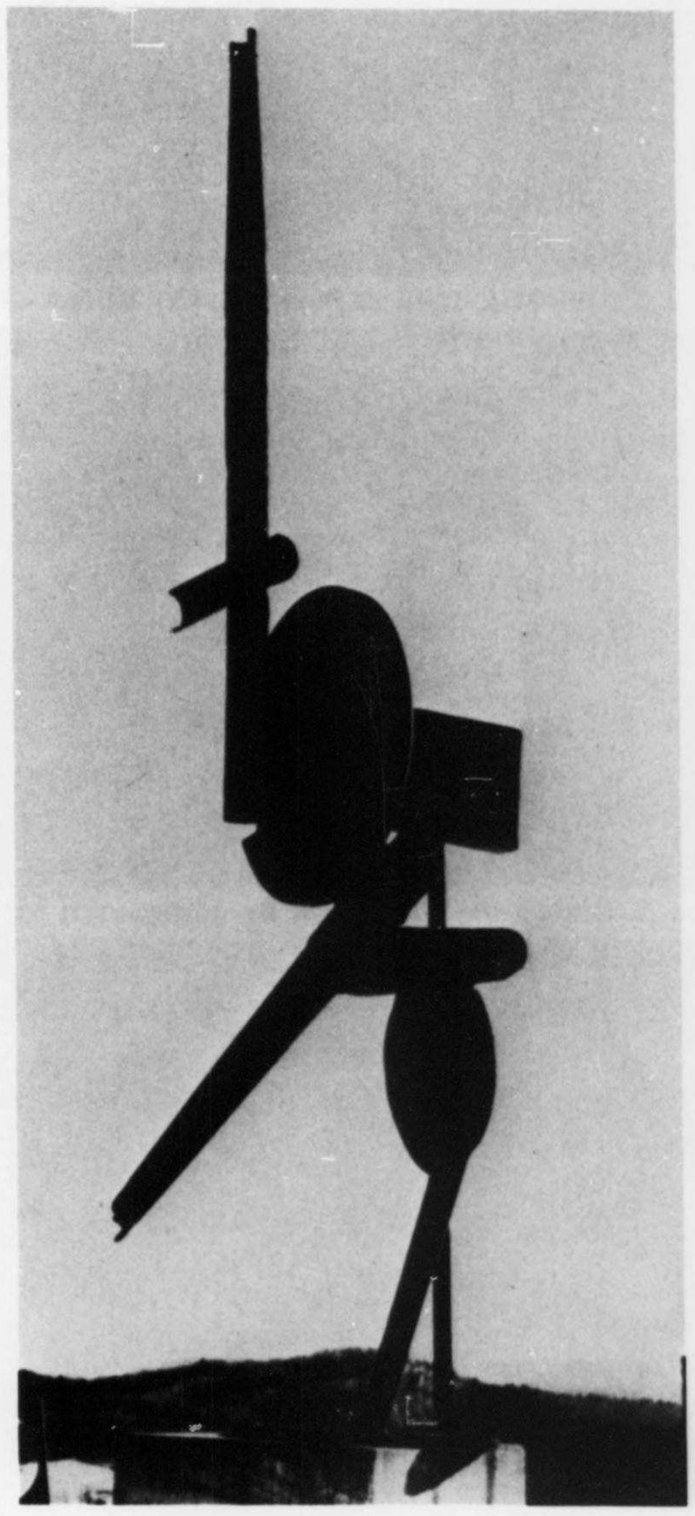
At the beginning of the twentieth century, sculpture began a rather self-reflective investigation of form, which resulted in the reduction of referential content. The so-called avant-garde continually rejected historical roles as it sought a new base of operations for the individual artist. Any consideration of the public or its needs was seen to be antithetical to this view.

At the same time, while there were great changes in attitude and in the actual forms of twentieth-century sculpture, little consideration was given to the context in which sculptures would be seen. Though the content and image had altered radically from the traditional sculpture as monument, the artist and architect continued the tradition of placing works outdoors, usually in close proximity to buildings. Everyone seemed to presume that, since buildings and sculptures had been seen together in the past, there was no reason to abandon the practice. Most artists felt no need to consider whether a site was appropriate or how the work might be altered for the site. This attitude, which prevailed in the works that came to be seen most often in public places, is clearly expressed by the British sculptor William Tucker: «If you have to change a sculpture for a site there is something wrong with the sculpture.» To architects, these works were merely baubles that served to add a final touch to the fronts of buildings or to a plaza. The historical alignment of sculpture with the church or state was replaced by a relation with business, which used abstract sculpture as a corporate symbol or at least as a touch of class.

Today, the worst of this sculpture in public is «software.» Architects love it because of its strictly unobtrusive, lightweight effect. The best sculpture–David Smith's «Tanktotems» and Barnett Newman's «Broken Obelisk,» for example–might refer to monuments of the past, but on the whole they stand as independent objects. They are involved in a language of form and space that has little to do with any plaza, and they seem only demeaned and belittled by placement in such a context.

Many of the concerns of the minimalist and earthwork artists of the 1960s have informed current work. But there are important differences as well. The investigations of these artists led to a greater concern with establishing an interaction among object, space, and viewer. This interaction was an important point of departure for later artists interested in contextual concerns. The context in which minimal art was made, however, was limited; it was usually seen within the confines of a gallery or museum.

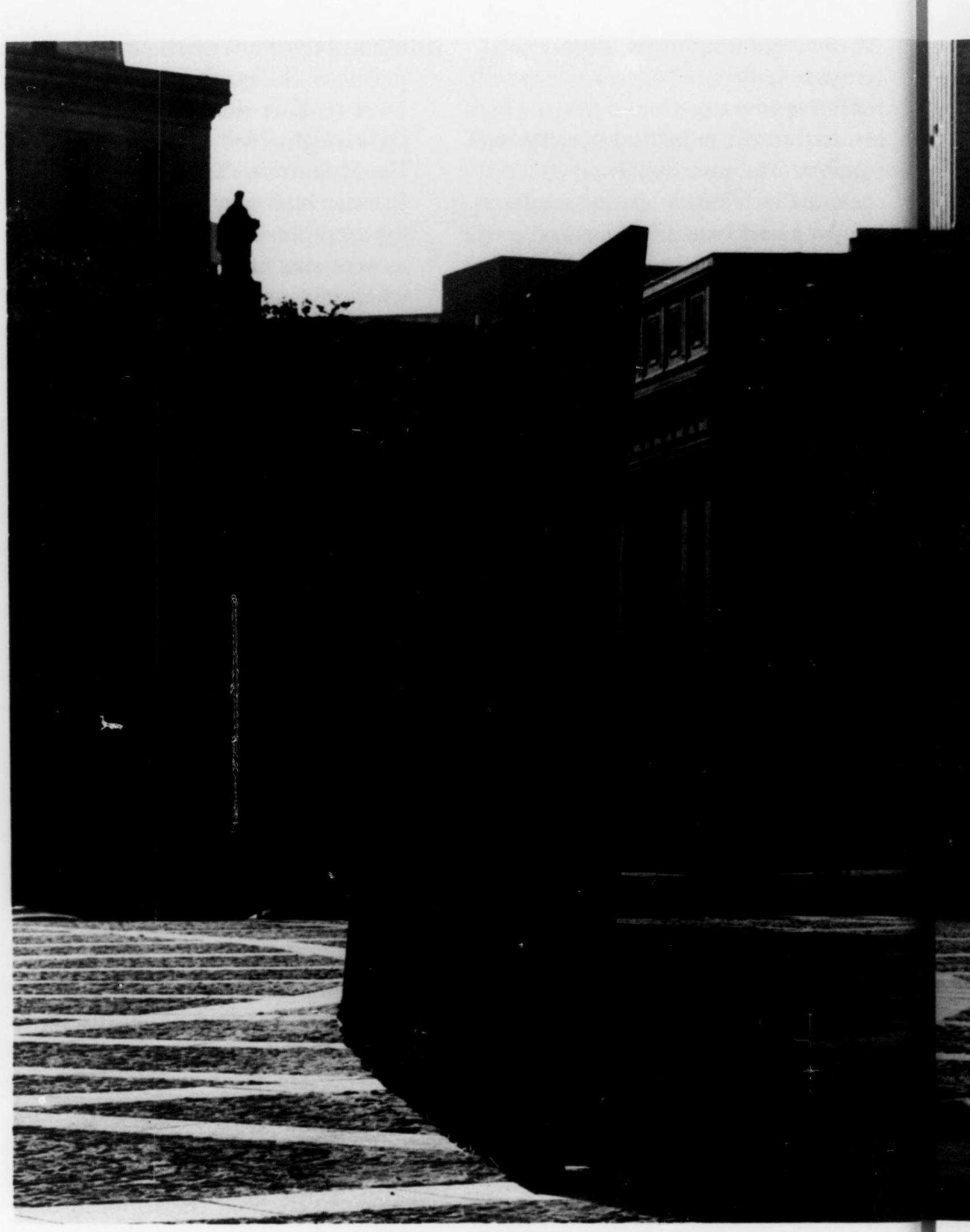
Minimal artists attempted to undermine and negate the object qualities of sculpture and divest it of its referential content. The forms were often monolithic, continuing the tradition of sculpture as monolith. The work was authoritarian in nature, forcing the viewer to confront the sculpture and make sense of it; it was also inaccessible to the uninformed viewer.



David Smith
«Tanktotem V»
1953–56

An example of current work in public spaces that is an extension of this aesthetic is the work of Richard Serra. In some ways Serra's piece in Manhattan's Foley Square continues the tradition of the monument. While investigating experiential qualities of space, it is a monolithic form that relies on its overwhelming physical presence.

Robert Morris, one of the earliest artists involved in the development of minimalist ideas, continues to be the analytic thinker and outside commentator, always reflecting the shifts of ground within the discipline. His proposals for public sculpture are based on this role as outside observer involved in commentary rather than on dialogue. The work he completed for a Seattle land reclamation project was a wry statement: earthwork in the form of a strip mine–presumably just what many people in the land reclamation business were trying to get rid of.

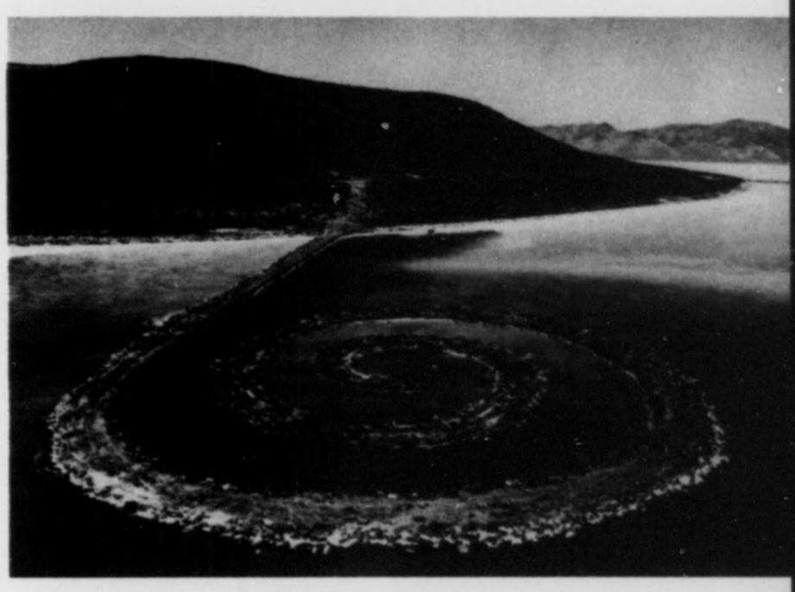


Richard Serra
«Tilted Arc»
New York City
1981

Earthworks completed in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to develop and respond to the particular qualities of site, incorporating that information into the sculpture. They moved outside the usual context of the art world, often into the vast spaces of the West. Though the images of these works (such as Robert Smithson's «Spiral Jetty») were often appealing to a larger audience, the pieces were not within the public domain. They were privately sponsored works on private land, not readily accessible. The artists still maintained the sensibility, if not the scale, of the studio; there is something gestural about Michael Heizer's «Double Negative,» using a bulldozer as a paintbrush on the vast scale of the desert. This work, like Smithson's, was perhaps better experienced through aerial photographs or film. The magnitude rather than the immediacy of the space was the main focus. There seems to be a connection with the nineteenth-century romantic tradition of the American West in these pieces.

Robert Morris
Untitled
Seattle, Washington
1979

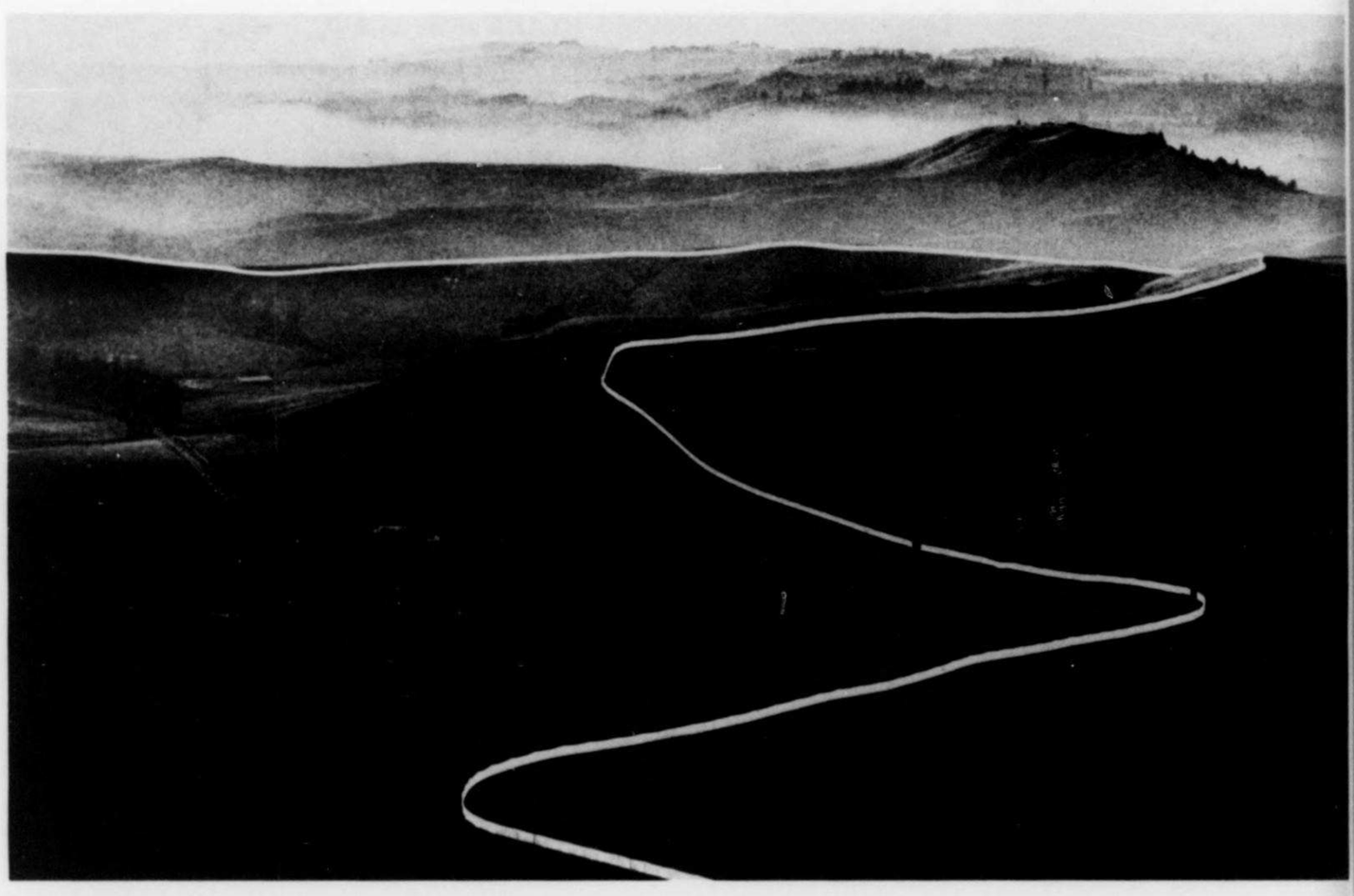
Robert Smithson
«Spiral Jetty»
Great Salt Lake, Utah
1971



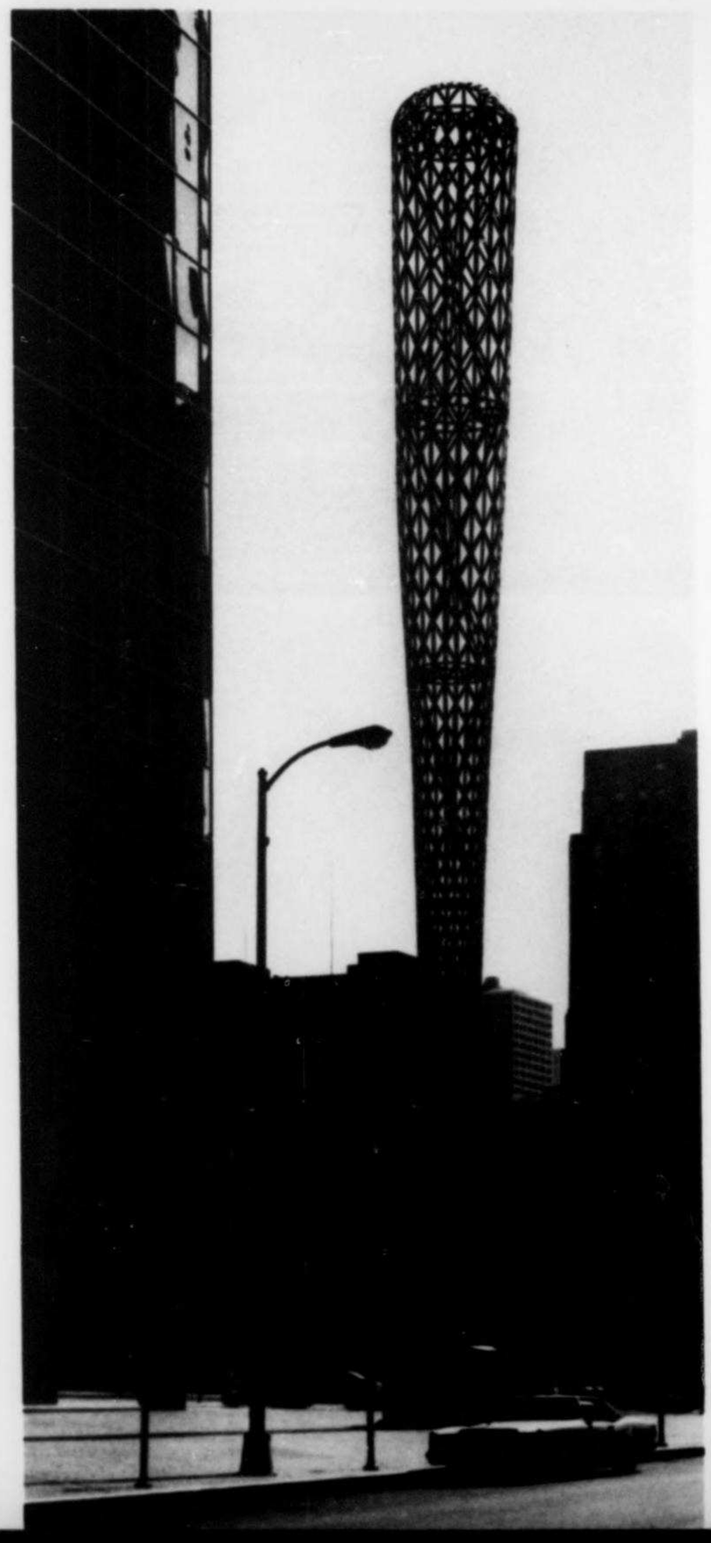
Michael Heizer
«Double Negative»
Virgin River Mesa
Nevada
1969–71

Several sculptors have met the public head on. Christo's involvement of the media, millions of dollars, and masses of people in «Running Fence» is one example; Mark di Suvero's huge pivoted pieces incorporate swings, moving chambers, or bells; Claes Oldenburg's numerous overscale objects in plazas comment with wit on the public's need for recognizability while posing as traditional monuments.

These artists have captured the public's attention; sheer spectacle has established an awareness of sculpture as an active force. In a choice of entertainment between art and baseball, however, art will come out on the losing side. It seems that public sculpture needs more «function» (or integration) to maintain a truly public place for itself.



Christo
«Running Fence»
Sonoma and Marin
Counties, California
1972–76



Claes Oldenburg
«Bat Column»
Chicago
1977

For many architects art is in the service of architecture–as a handmaiden: the art chosen by the best architects of our time is so often second-rate or reactionary compared to the architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright chose the sculptor Richard Bock to do works for his buildings; these sculptures have not fared well with the passage of time. It is ironic to see Georg Kolbe's «Dancer» placed in the corner of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion–a rather ambivalent image within that building. The artist is seen as a decorator in the tradition of the medieval craftsman, making additions to buildings. But unlike decoration of the Middle Ages, the images, materials and scale do not fit–the artwork lacks that total integration of form and context.

Looking at recent public sculptures in an urban environment, one finds few examples that seem successful. At the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan there is a huge sculpture by Fritz Koenig. The plaza itself is a starkly inhuman space, and the work of Koenig is successful only in that it compounds that inhumanity. At Lincoln Center the works by David Smith, Marc Chagall, and Henry Moore seem totally ineffectual and overwhelmed by the setting, which transforms them into guardians of high culture. Recently George Segal made a work intended for the park in Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village. Its subject matter was to reflect the gay community's presence in that neighborhood. The residents became outraged at the possibility that this sculpture would be placed there; the gays were offended because they felt the images represented stereotypes that did not reflect their diversity; others did not wish to have their park identified with gays. Once again the sculptor confronts the problem of conflicting goals and attitudes within a community.

How is art to be integrated into our culture? How can it be made accessible, appearing outside the restricted confines of museums? Is it necessary for our definition of «culture» to be so divided between the official culture of Lincoln Center and the popular culture of Times Square or Central Park? What role can art have in the development of a built environment? Artists in the twentieth century have been working in a rather isolated situation, responding to certain developments in our society but having very little interaction with it. We are specialists working on what has come to be viewed as an arcane type of communication assumed to be inappropriate to our society.

How can we respond to the autocratic architecture in our built environment? Can we provide some sort of physical or psychological relief and create intimate spaces that are approachable in such a context? Can we introduce alternatives into our culture–reintroduce human scale or time for reflection?

Fritz Koenig
«Kugel Karyatid»
World Trade Center
New York City
1972

Think about building structures that can be integrated into this context–physically and visually integrated, not just an afterthought. Alter the context by introducing transition zones from street to building (human scale); construct spaces where slow motion is possible. Give people the luxury of engagement, not confrontation. Think of spaces/structures that would allow people to be the connectors between the open space–parks, waterfronts–and the dense areas of midtown. Their experience of open space might change the character of the dense space.

Priorities: breathing space, human scale, firsthand experience, focusing on the strong visual elements of the city.

It seems that these needs are recognized and are being addressed by the city's fringe culture, its street culture.

A vacant lot in Harlem has been carefully laid out with a series of paths, walkways, a small bridge. Next to this is a miniature red house, a pavilion with a front porch. People sit on the small porch. They don't live there, just visit.

The graffiti artists are working at street level. The blank walls abutting the sidewalk take on texture, pattern, depth. The dismal space of the subway is invaded by the fluorescent cars covered with personal signatures.

On the wide sidewalk on the south side of Fourteenth Street racks of clothes, boxes, stands take up most of the space, offering another kind of transition between blank wall and sidewalk. It is impossible not to become engaged physically and visually.

There are also the gates–folded protectors covering store fronts–that have been wildly painted: at night you see them; during the day they roll up and disappear.

How to enter this situation?

There was a «Twilight Zone» story about a man who spent a great deal of time trying to figure out how to walk through a brick wall. With all his resources summoned, he stepped forward and actually walked into the wall–but there was a problem: it was not possible for him to come out on the other side. He remained encased in that brick wall.

Artists interested in doing «public art,» working in the context of the built environment, share something of the predicament of this character. As much interest as they may have, it is very difficult in this culture to find an access route to public situations.

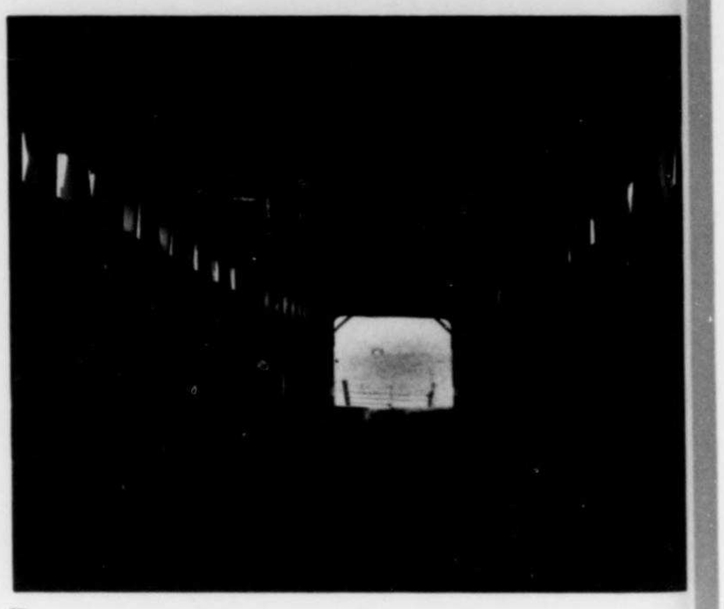
Art must be experienced directly. The public today lives in a world animated by electronic communications (which perhaps dampen or discourage direct experience). Meanwhile the image of art, as conveyed through the popular media, remains historical. It is something to be labeled and put away.

How can the current ideas of artists emerge within a media culture?

A

B

C



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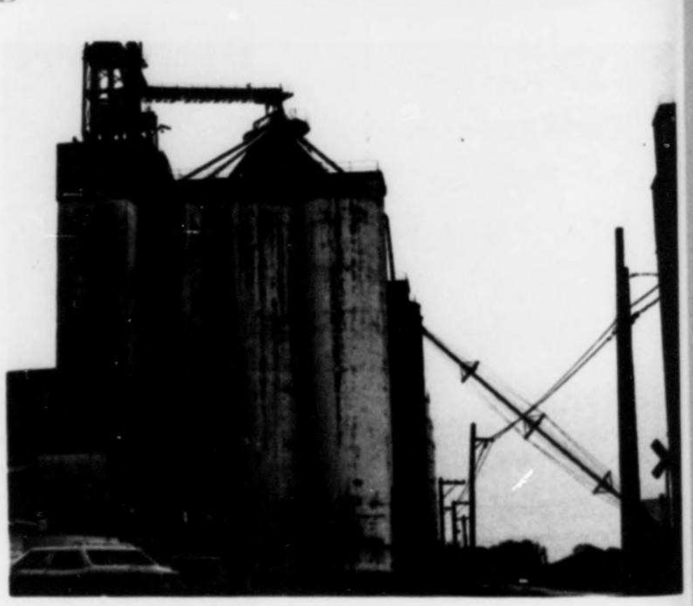

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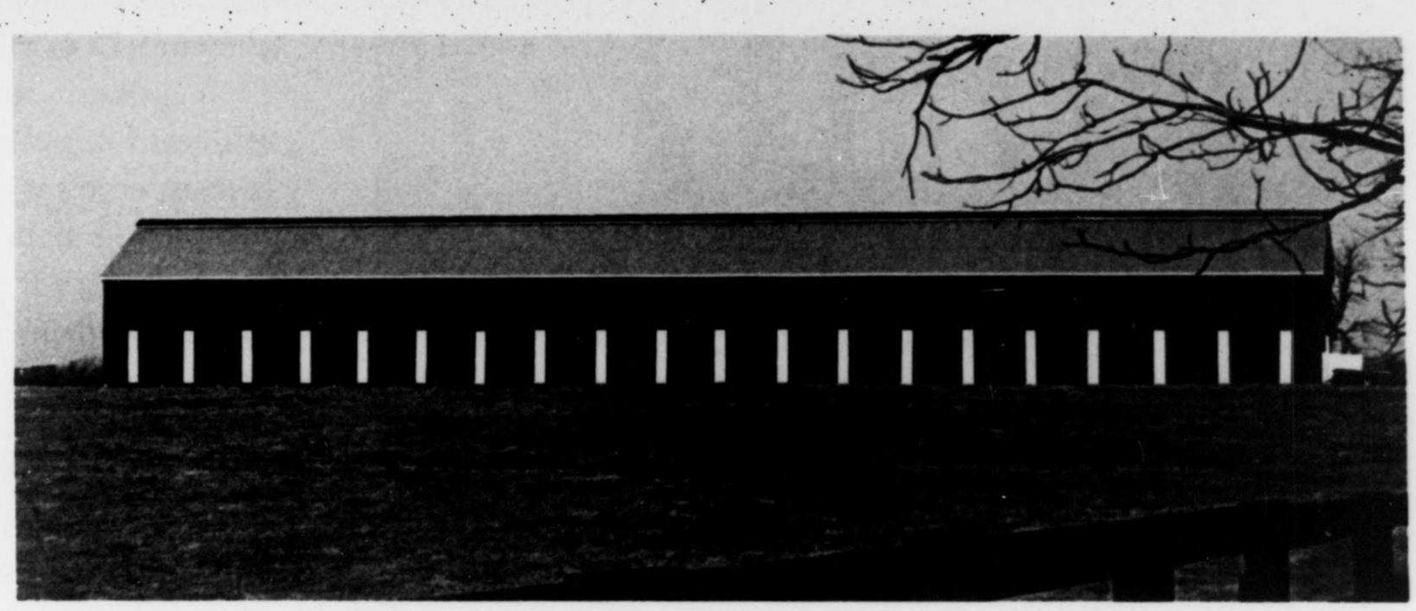

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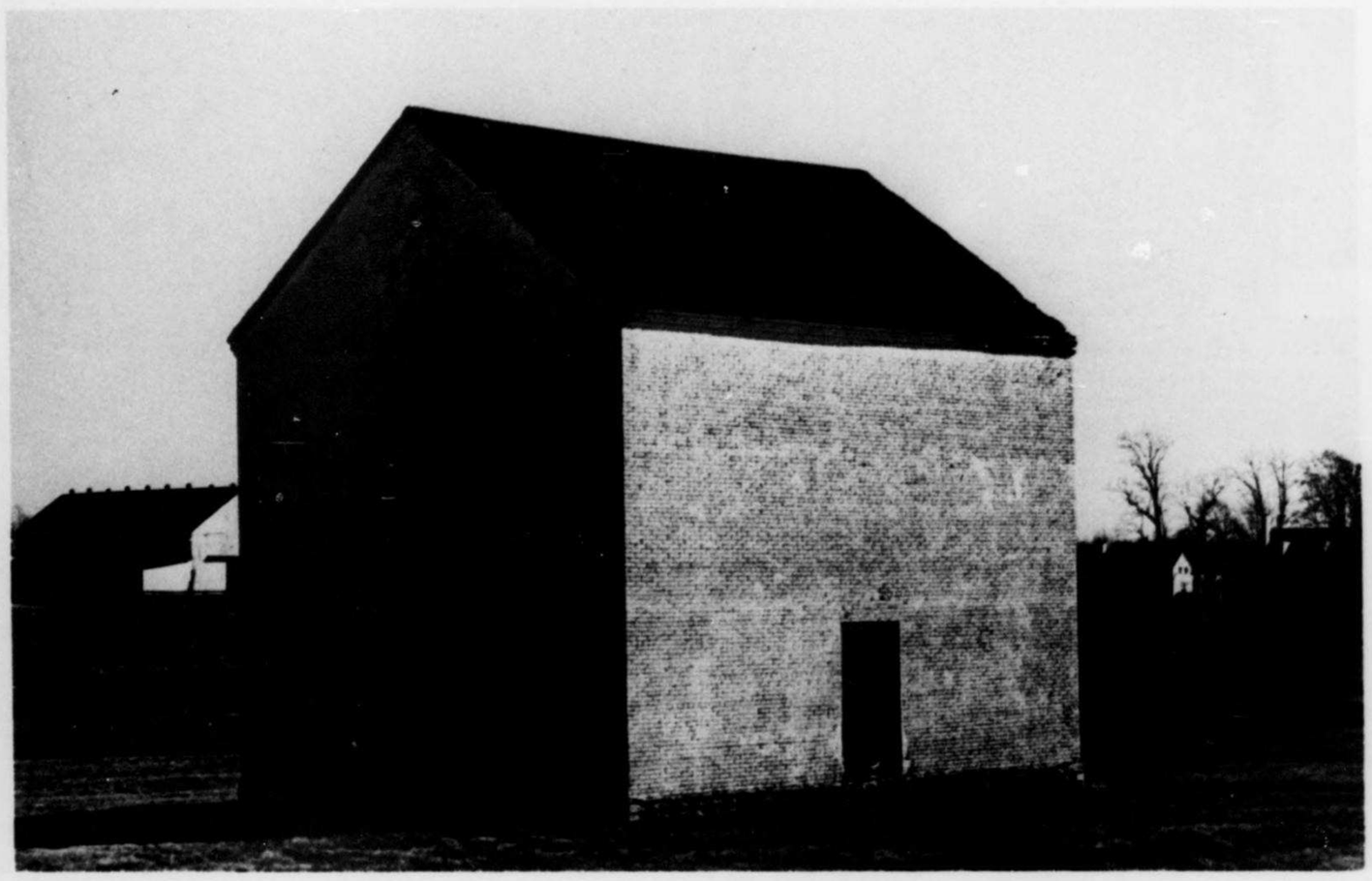


a
Scaffolding
Milan, Italy

b
Construction site
Southern California

c
Abandoned sets
Culver City, California

d
Covered bridge
Ohio

e
Grain storage silos
Illinois

f
Tobacco barn
Lexington, Kentucky

g
Farm building
Kentucky

h
Amusement park
Long Beach, California

G

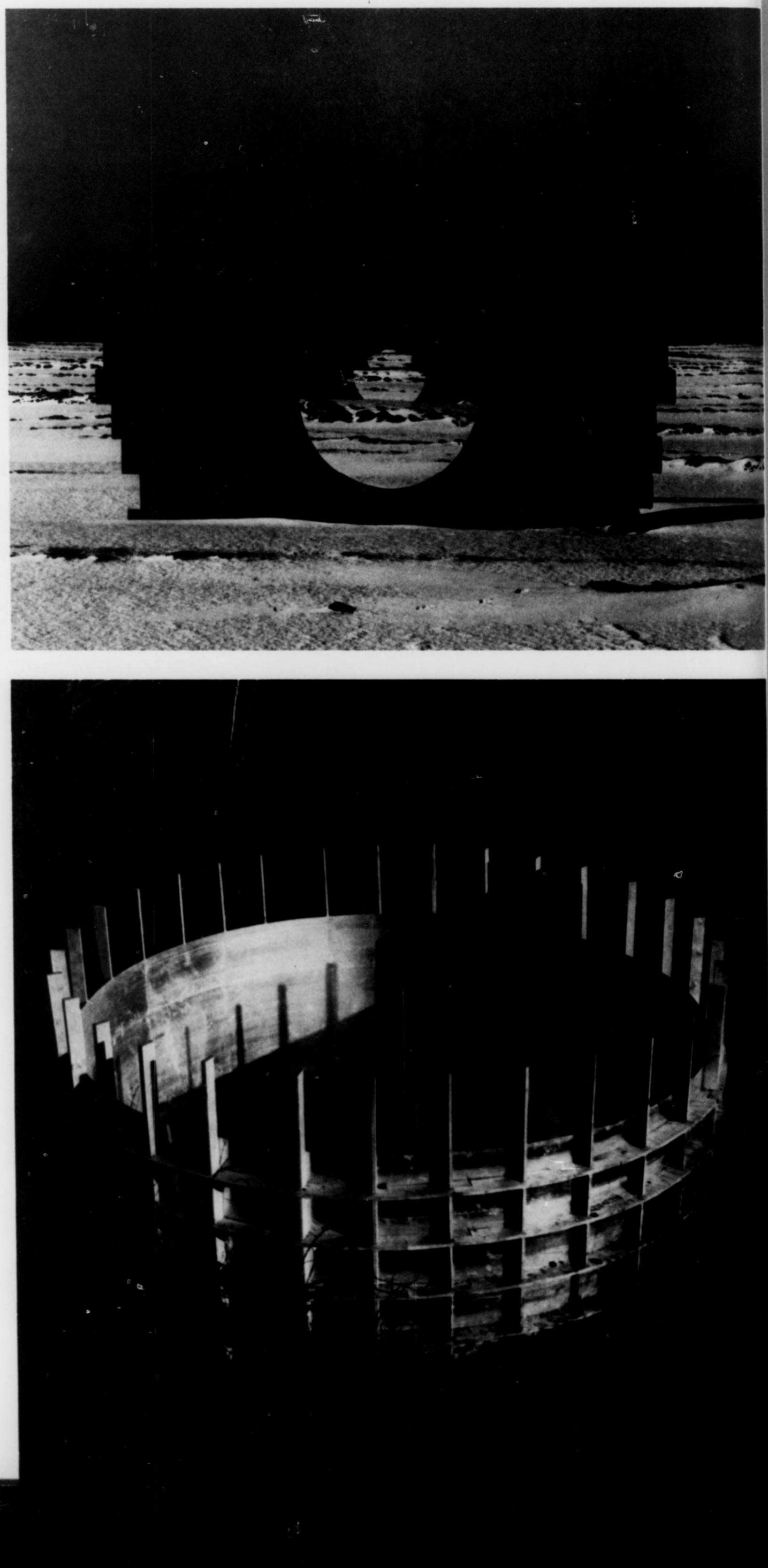
H

The potential promised (and given) by the electronic media is great. Our television-shaped society has the asset of a strong visual orientation, well adapted to a multiplicity of signs. But there are problems as well. The electronic media present the artist with a difficult time frame: immediate but always connected to the future. Advertising and television offer unlimited possibilities; they are always a step ahead, letting us know what to do and desire next. Our expectations are increasingly without limits.

How to divert this gaze from a constant focus on a distant view to an immediate time and space? Is a present tense of some complexity impossible? Are we unable to experience anything beyond its sign?

The importance of actual experience as opposed to reproductions or simulations, a need already recognized by fringe cultures, is difficult to establish today. These immediate spatial experiences are often found historically in vernacular architecture, old cities, gardens, and the like. How can we reintroduce them into our own built environment in a way that is appropriate for today, using the imagery and vocabulary of our current surroundings?

Untitled
Battery Park
New York
1973



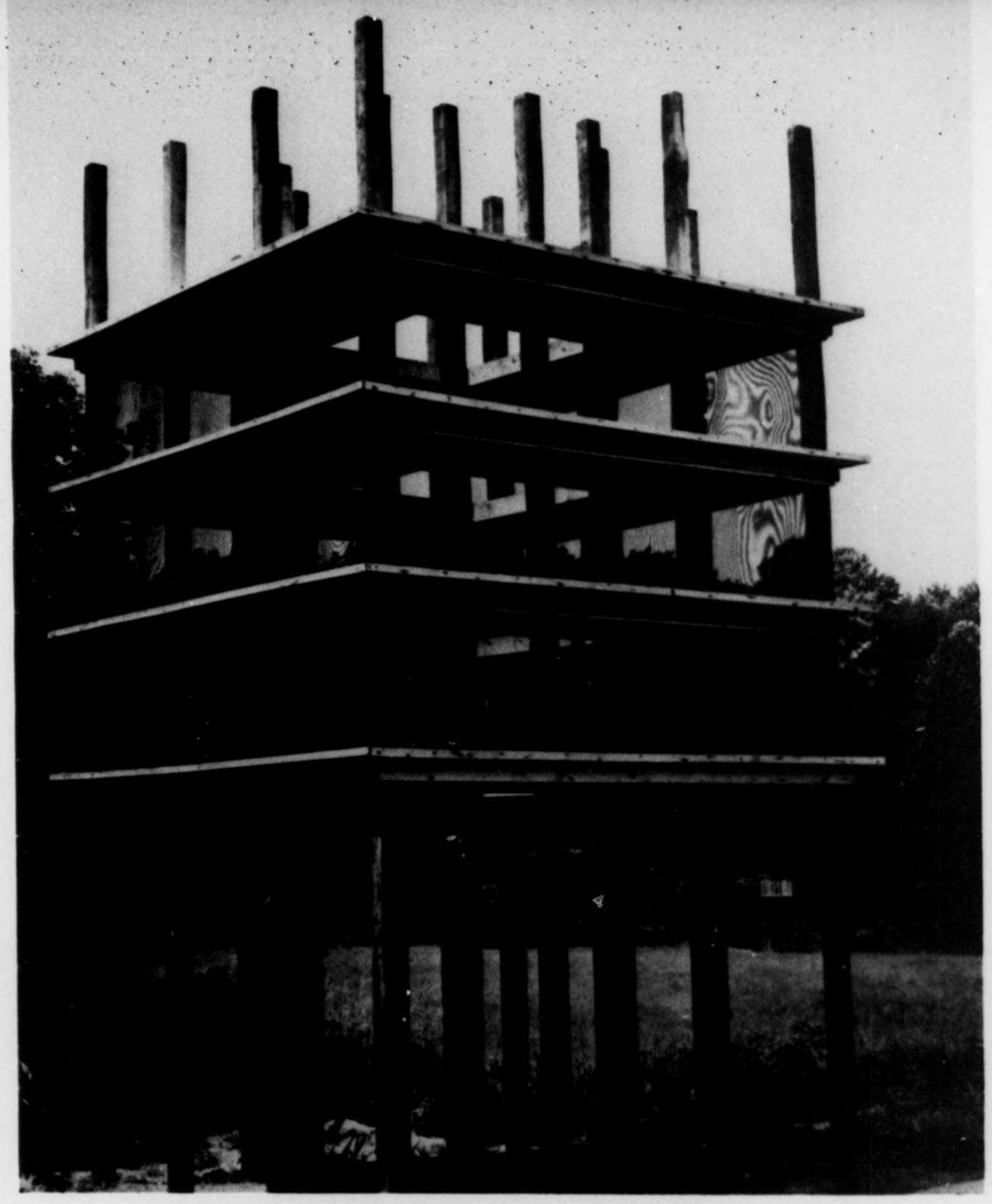
The development of my interest in public sculpture has been a gradual one. My earliest works, done in the mid-1960s, were small constructions that depended on skeletal forms and common materials (screen, canvas, pipe) to form a content. The pieces were linear, lightweight, and nonmonolithic, using the images of our everyday environment as references.

The sculptures expanded in scale as I began to work on outdoor projects. I placed them in open fields, on hillsides, and in rural settings, avoiding the limited situations usually offered for sculpture (plazas, concrete pedestals, the lawn around a building). The pieces were physically and visually integrated into their sites, in opposition to the image of sculpture as object or statue. Part of the impulse for this work was related to my childhood experience of the landscape of the West, where the freestanding object, the monolith, is easily overpowered. Miles of fencing or fields of oil rigs appear as modest elements against that extended horizon.

In the early 1970s I built a piece on the Battery Park landfill in lower Manhattan, one of the few large open spaces in the city. Approaching the site, one could discern five equally spaced wood elements; the sculpture materialized only as the viewer walked to the front and saw the five concentric circles descending into the ground–physical engagement was necessary to see the work, and the viewer's involvement was emphasized.

«Sunken Pool»
Greenwich, Conn
1974

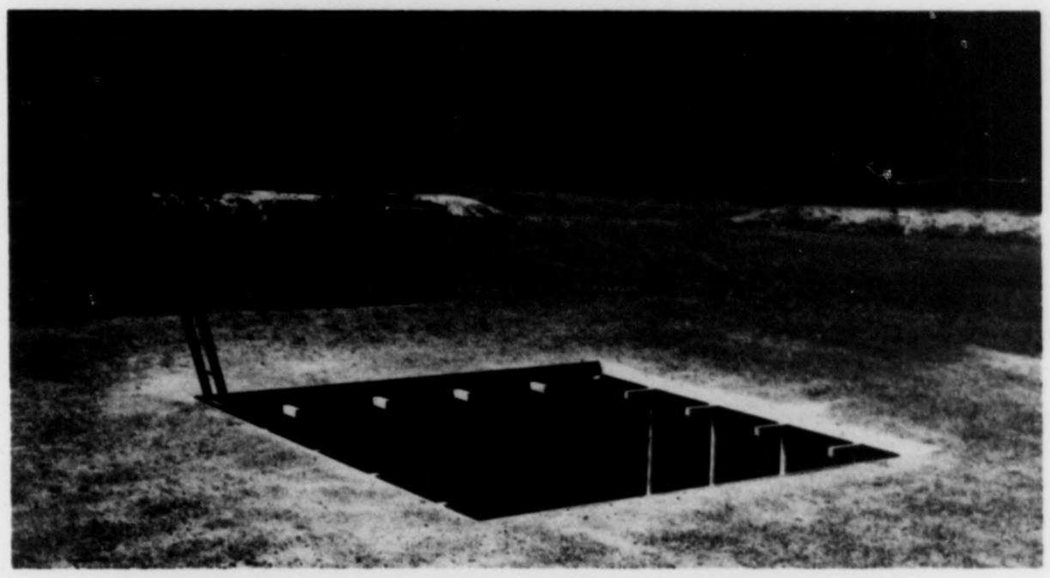
«Sunken Pool» was built in Greenwich, Connecticut. Only after crossing a stream and walking through brambles and pines did the viewer come to this structure, which provided a very still reflecting pool within the dense growth. The viewer's progression through these different areas was an important element of the sculpture. The imagery of «Sunken Pool» was taken from the built environment. All of us are affected by the complex visual elements of our surroundings; my interest in focusing on them took me to construction sites, mines, and power plants as sources of imagery. Our visual impulses (the decorative impulse, for instance) are as strong now as they have been in the past, and it does not seem appropriate to return to such historical forms as elaborate plasterwork, carved rosettes, or wrought iron. The present-day environment offers forms of equivalent complexity, available for artists' and architects' use.



«Perimeters/ Pavilions/Decoys» Nassau County Museum, Long Island 1978

«Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys» was made for the Nassau County Museum in Long Island, New York. Three towerlike structures, two earth mounds, and an underground courtyard were built on a four-acre site. To see the work, the viewer had to walk through the whole field: there were changes of scale in the towers and inaccessible spaces in the underground structure; boundaries and perceptions of distance were brought into question, as were the limits of illusion and reality. But it was up to the viewer to assemble these images, draw comparisons, and structure the information.

«Perimeters/ Pavilions/Decoys»

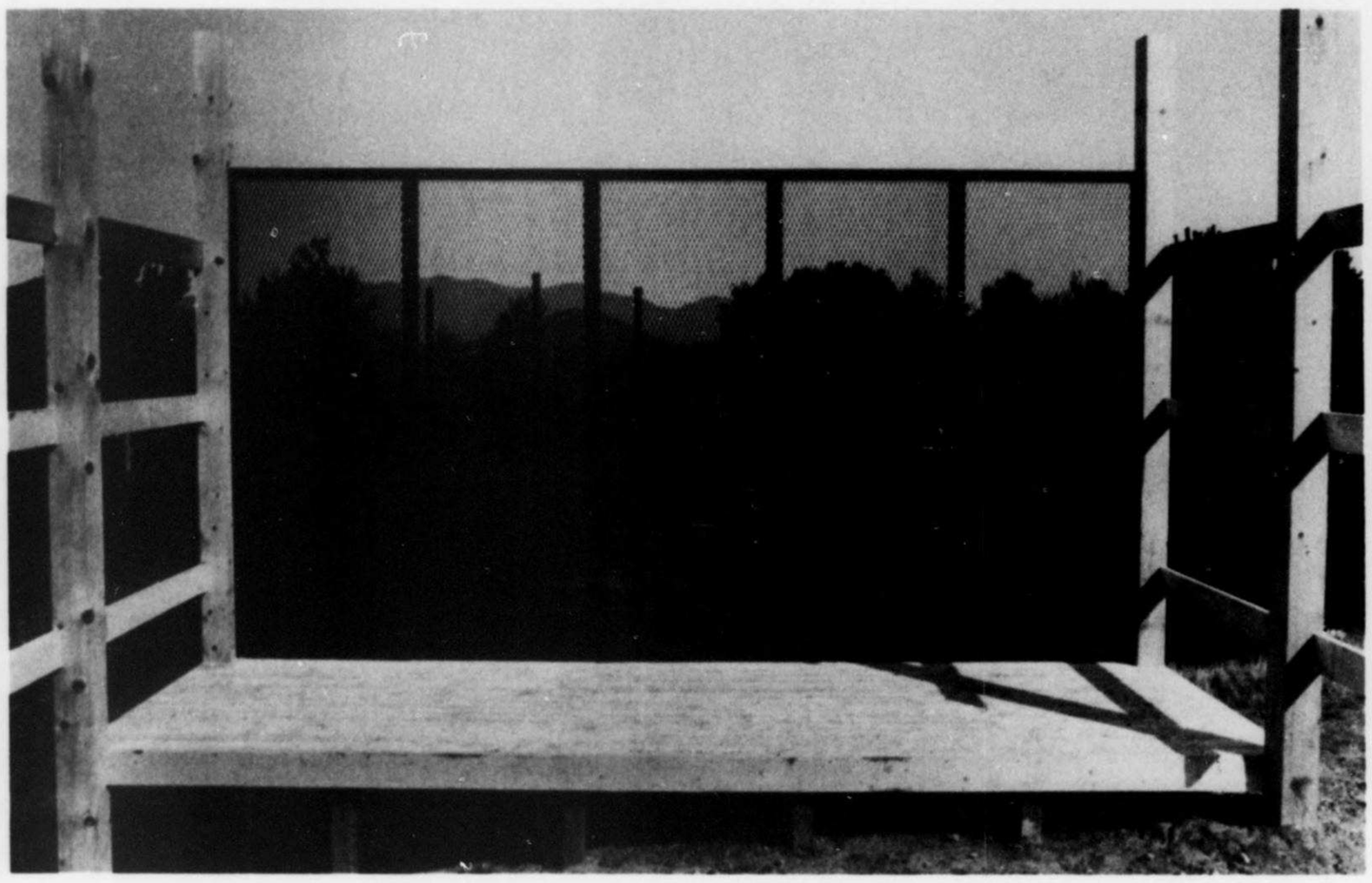


«Perimeters/ Pavilions/Decoys»

With «Staged Gates» in Dayton, Ohio, as in the Nassau County project, I became more aware of how this work was received by the public. When something is set apart and called a sculpture, it is often not accepted if it is unrecognizable as a statue. However, I saw that people would approach these works with a great deal of interest: climb towers, walk through underground courtyards, sit on platforms. They became engaged with the sculptures. The physical involvement, the images, the integration of the work with the site (it looked as if it belonged) provided some level of accessibility. These sites offered me, as an artist, a great complexity of information—historical, physical, and cultural. I could extend the formal issues of visual language to a broader context than is usually possible in museum and gallery situations.

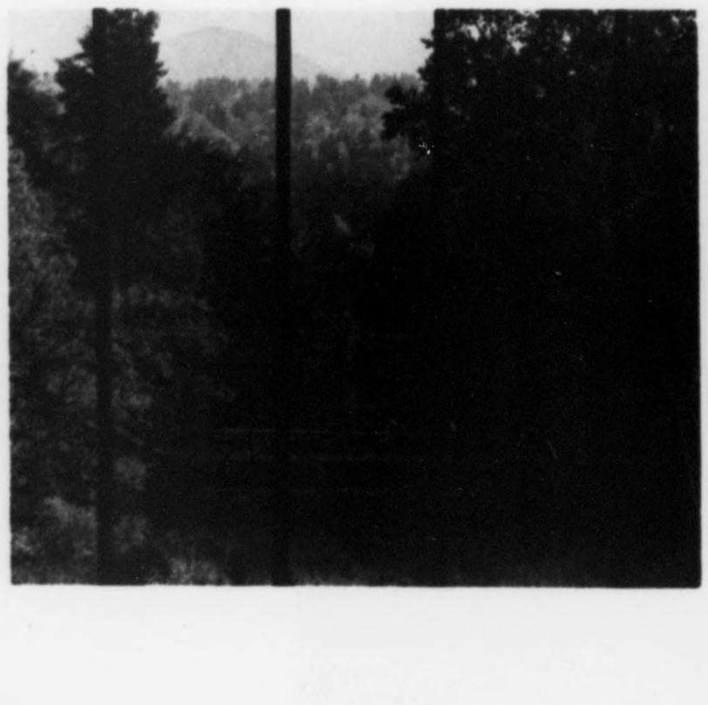
«Staged Gates» Dayton, Ohio 1979

«Veiled Landscape» was done in Lake Placid, New York, for the 1980 Winter Olympics. A viewing platform focused on the Adirondack mountain landscape in the distance. The whole structure was an introduction to that landscape: as one continued walking beyond the platform down the hillside, the view was blocked by a curtain of posts–the landscape was behind bars; proceeding, there were further physical and visual barriers. Finally the observer arrived at a gateway, which had appeared very small from the platform but which was 20 feet high and 60 feet wide and framed a pathway going into the distance. I looked to historical sources for information in developing this piece– the borrowed landscape of the Japanese garden, the formal procession through the landscape in Italian paintings and gardens. My concern is to reintroduce these historical ideas about space, place, and scale within our own context.



«Veiled Landscape»
Lake Placid, New York
1979

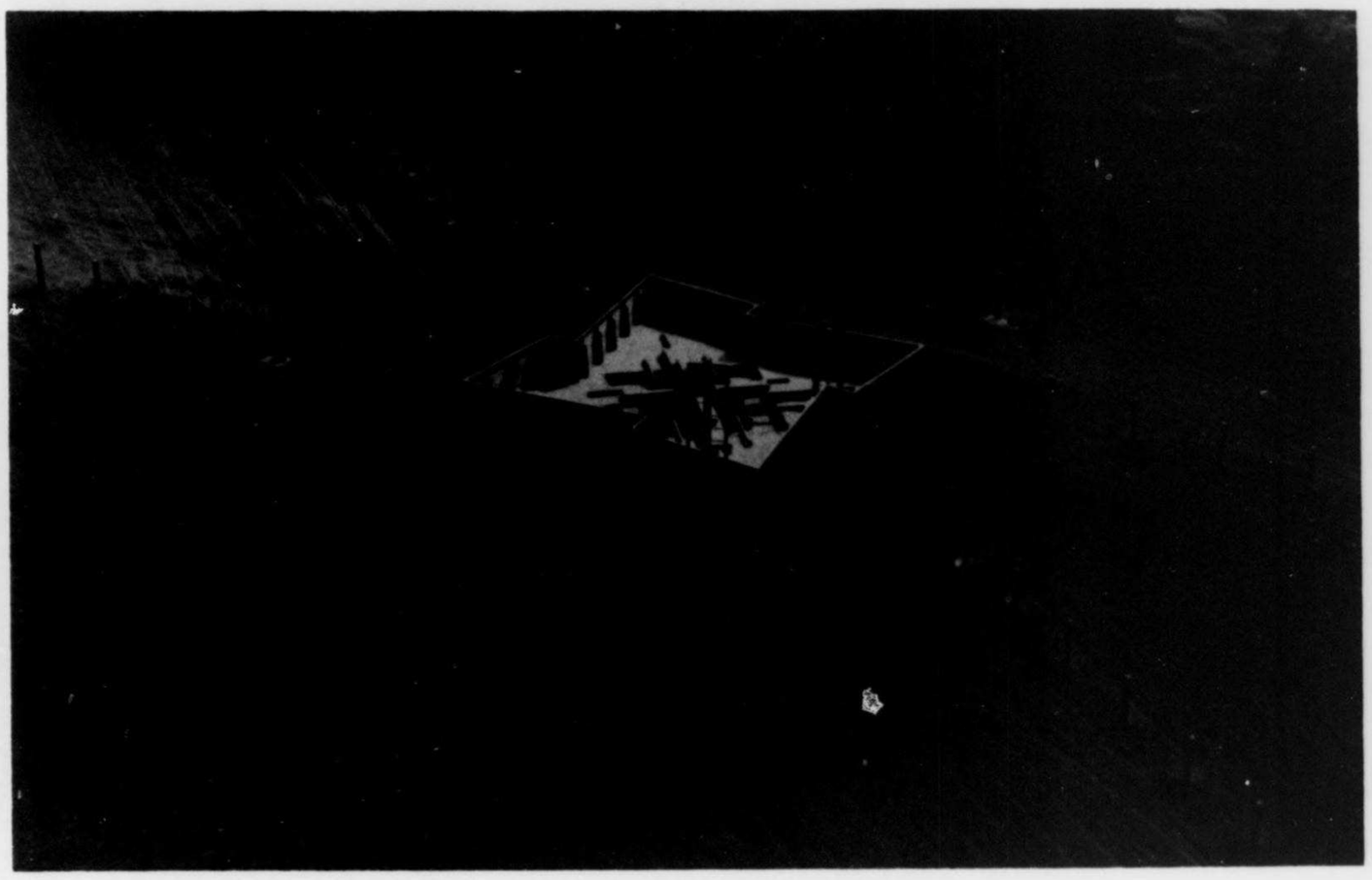
«Veiled Landscape»



«Veiled Landscape»

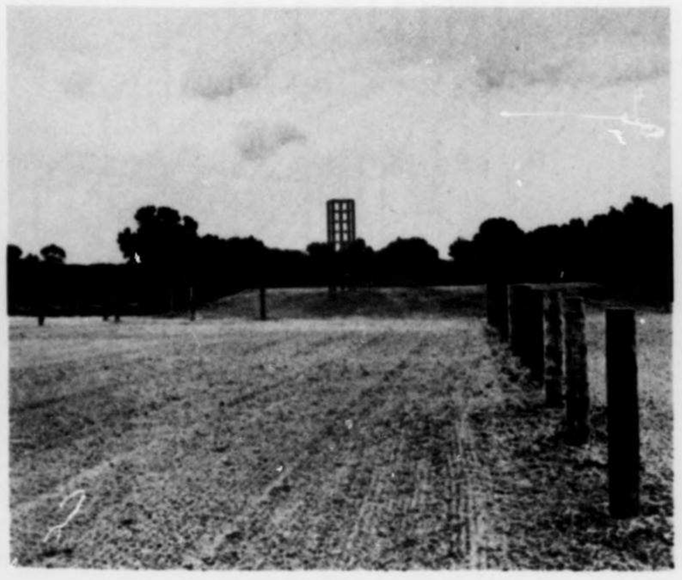
«Veiled Landscape»

In 1981 «Field Rotation» was built for Governors State University outside Chicago. The university, a small complex of buildings, sits in the middle of 700 acres of farm land. The surrounding land is flat prairie with an open skyline in every direction. People arrive and go from their cars straight to the buildings. To find a way to take them from the parking lot into the environment, I wanted to furnish a reason for entering that environment, for focusing on surroundings normally taken for granted; and I wanted to provide a destination, an area of intimacy or protection in that vast open landscape. The piece changed considerably as the viewer moved around it. The parking lot gave a view of a large mound and a tower in a field of posts that had been cut to a perfectly level plane to contrast with the slight contouring of the land. Approaching the top of the mound, one found a sunken court of irregular shape with ladders for entry. Within this area were platform walkways and a central well with a protruding ladder. The whole structure acted as a step well. Climbing the tower, one saw that the field of posts formed a pattern of spokes radiating out from the central mound and that the courtyard was a pinwheel.



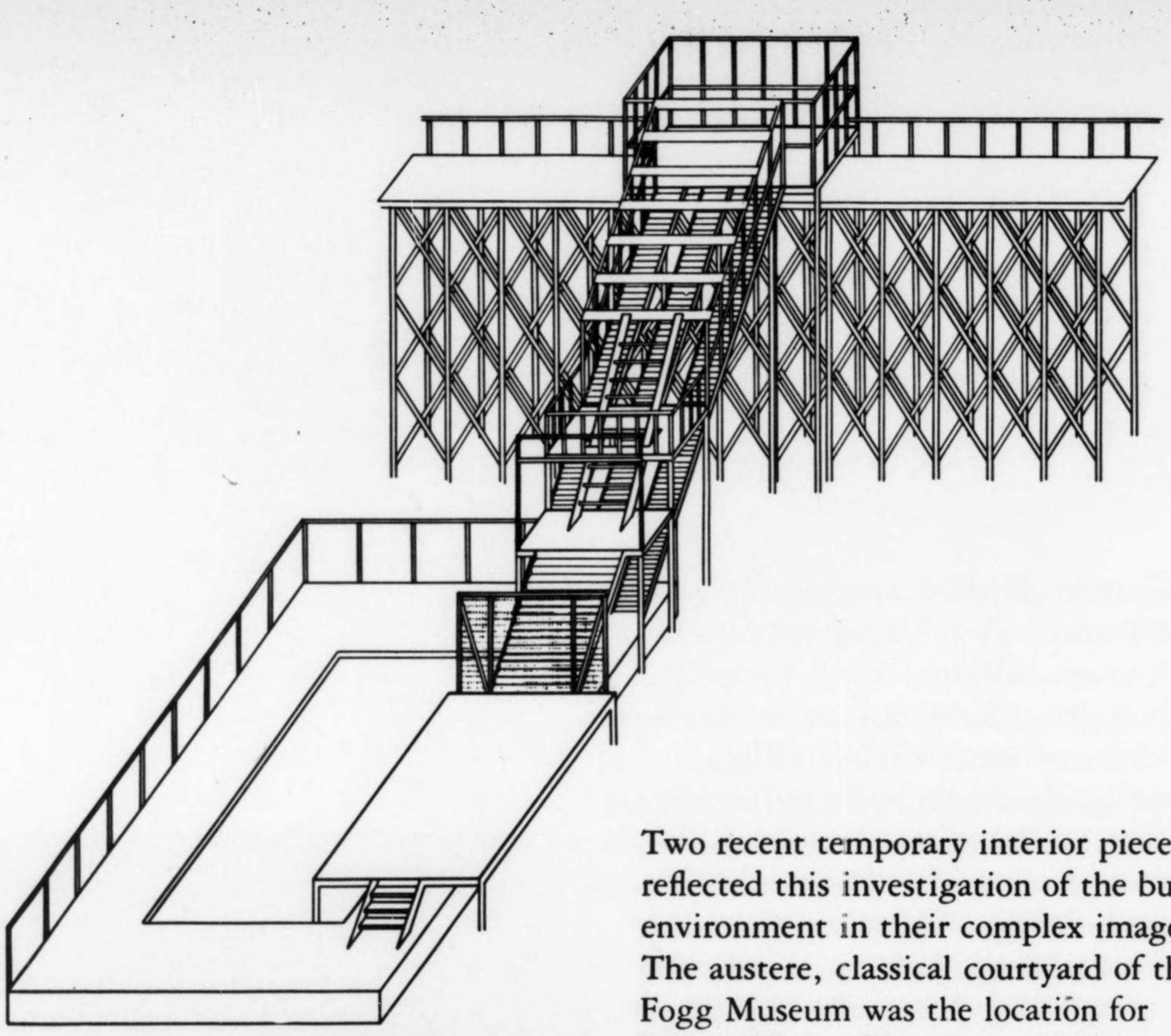
«Field Rotation»
Governors State
University, Illinois
1981

«Field Rotation»



Step Well
Ahmedabad, India
14th Century

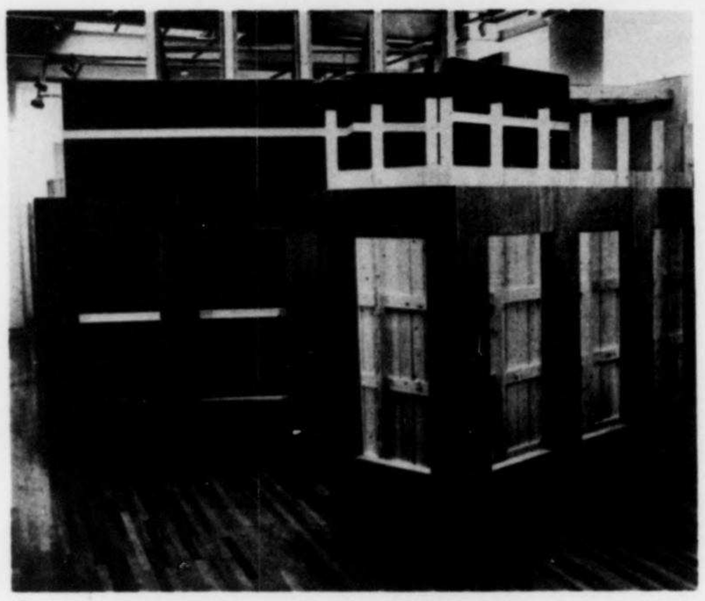
«Field Rotation»



A

I left the built environment at an early point because of the limited situations for sculpture; but the ideas that developed in the sited works have brought me in a circle. With these concerns–the importance of the viewer, integration with the site, the use of architectural sources–I developed new attitudes about how sculpture might be integrated into the city. The urban landscape suggests many interesting possibilities: building a work on one of the blank walls of the city (a three-dimensional relief one can enter), the scaffolding or protective walkway of a construction site, the awning over the door of a building, a rooftop garden, or a temporary celebratory facade on a building. The engagement of the public is part of the motivation.

B



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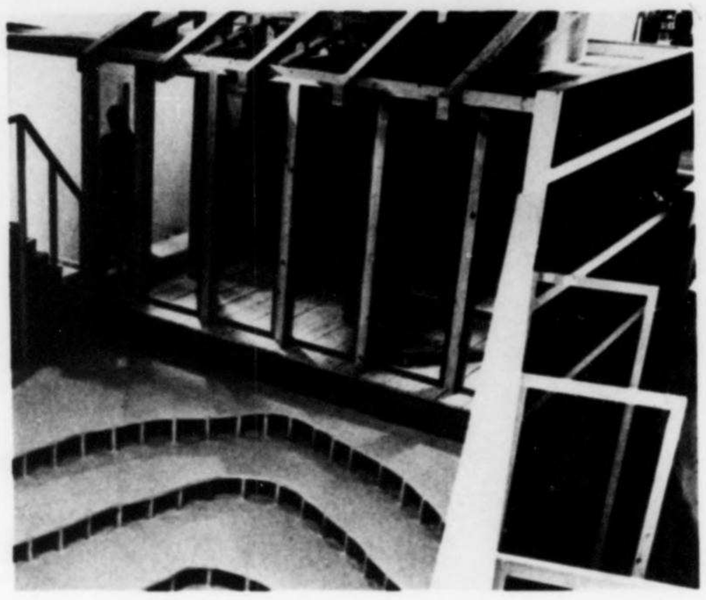
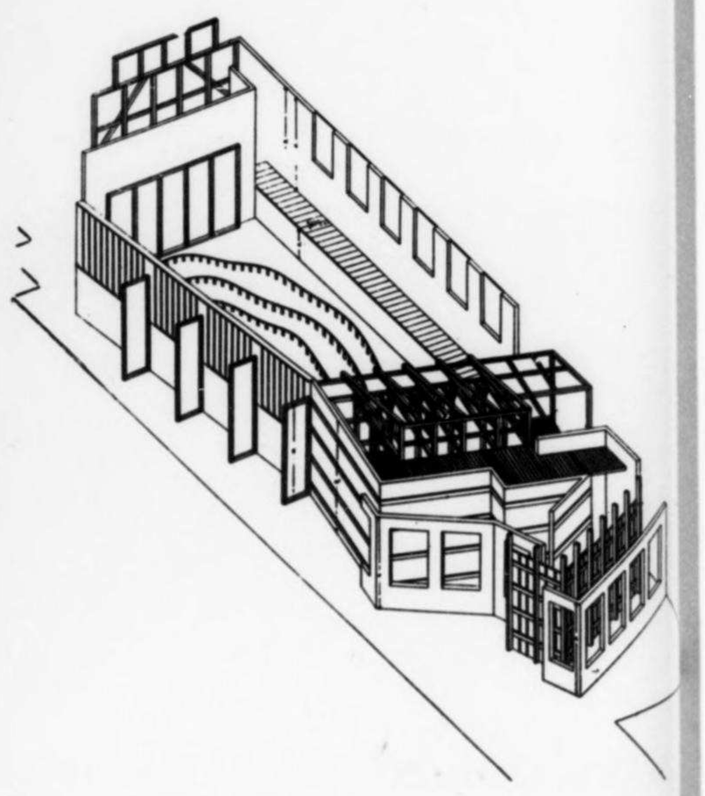


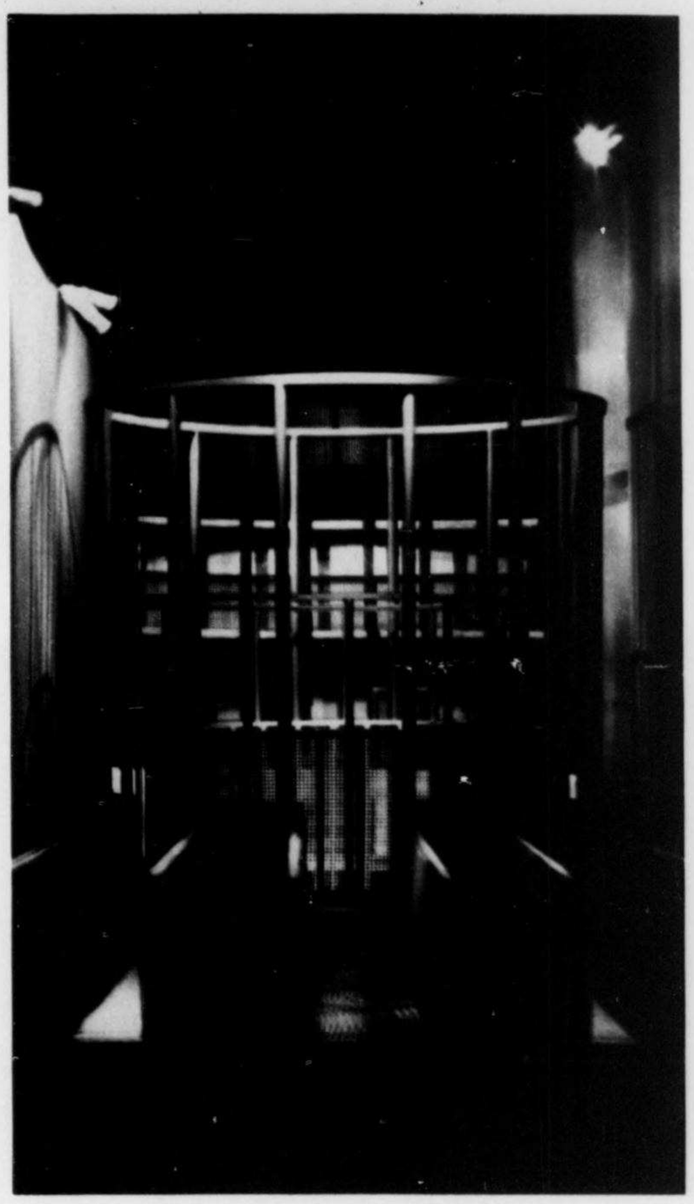
D

Two recent temporary interior pieces reflected this investigation of the built environment in their complex imagery. The austere, classical courtyard of the Fogg Museum was the location for «Mirror Way.» The piece was like a complex set, its temporary quality contrasting with the stone arches. It could be viewed from the balcony much in the way pageants or parades were viewed in medieval towns. This multilayered stairway combines the imagery of the wood framing of building sites, abandoned stage sets, and the stairs of a dream.

«Study for a Courtyard: Approach to a Stepped Pool» was built at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. It was a full-scale study of an enclosed court intended for a built environment. Entering the work was like walking through a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle–turning unexpected corners, being brought up short. The experience was much like walking through the streets of London, layering one experience upon another.

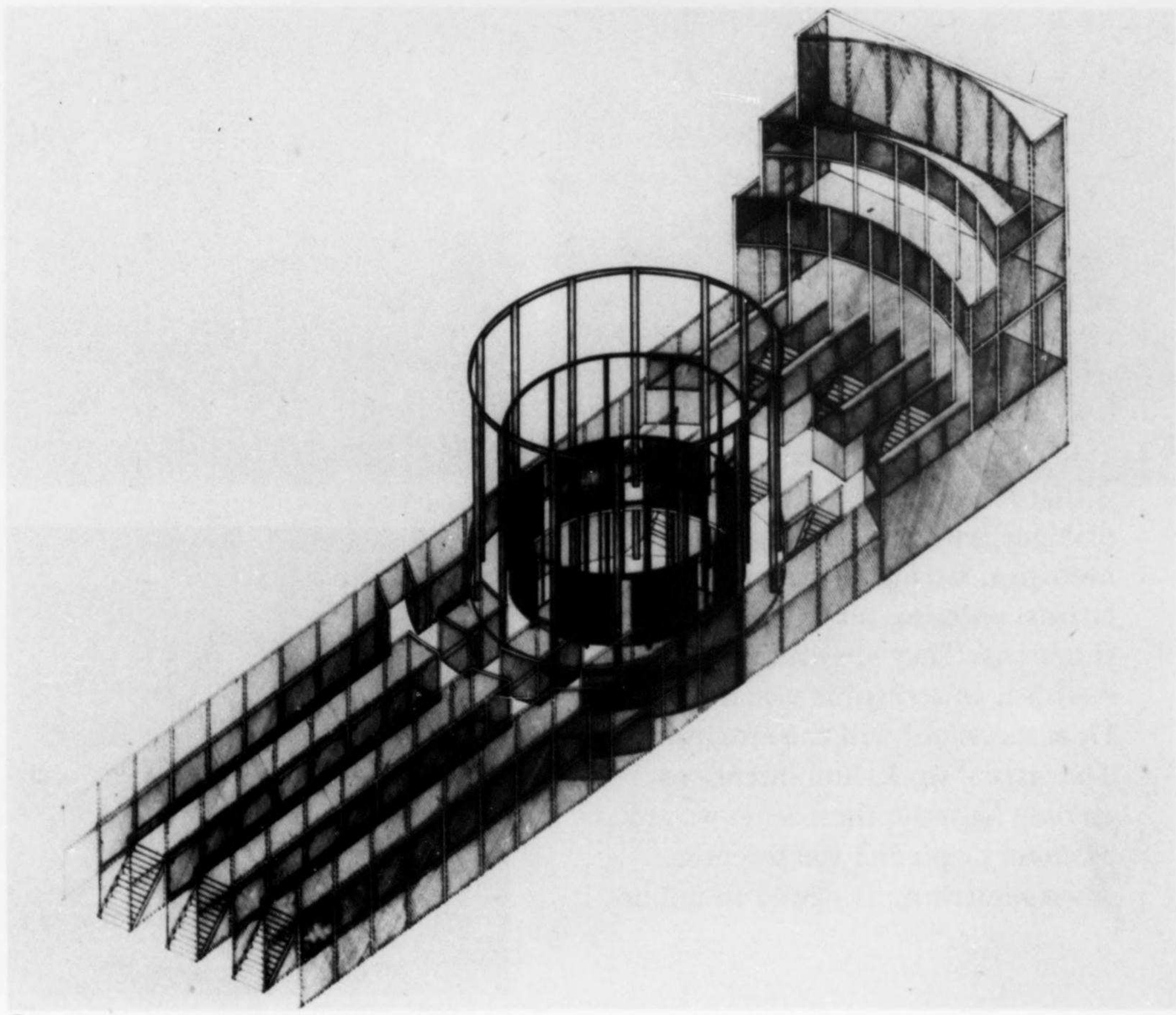


E



F

Recently I completed a proposal for a 20′ x 80′ lot on Forty-second Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues. Trying to reflect elements within that environment, I arrived at a final plan for a series of walkways, a central circular structure, and a balcony area at the rear where one can look down on the preceding elements. The piece is made of wire mesh and steel posts. From the street one looks into a densely structured, complex space. At night the work will be lit rather dramatically; the lighting and balconies relate to the setting within the theater district. The materials and density are reminiscent of construction sites—fascinating spaces in the city that one is allowed to observe from the sidewalk but never permitted to enter.



G

a
«Mirror Way»
Fogg Museum
1980
axonometric

b
«Mirror Way»

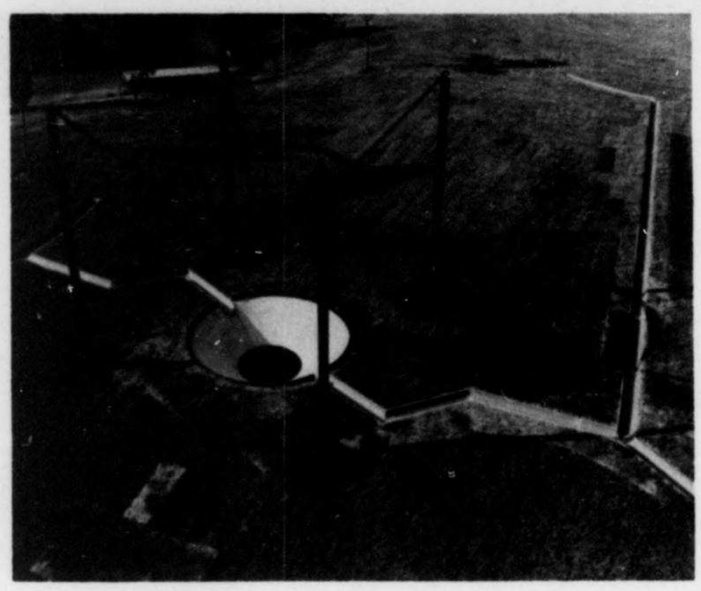
c
«Study for a Courtyard»
Institute of
Contemporary Art
London
1983

d
«Study for a Courtyard»

e
«Study for a Courtyard»
axonometric

f
«42nd Street Project»
New York City
1981–

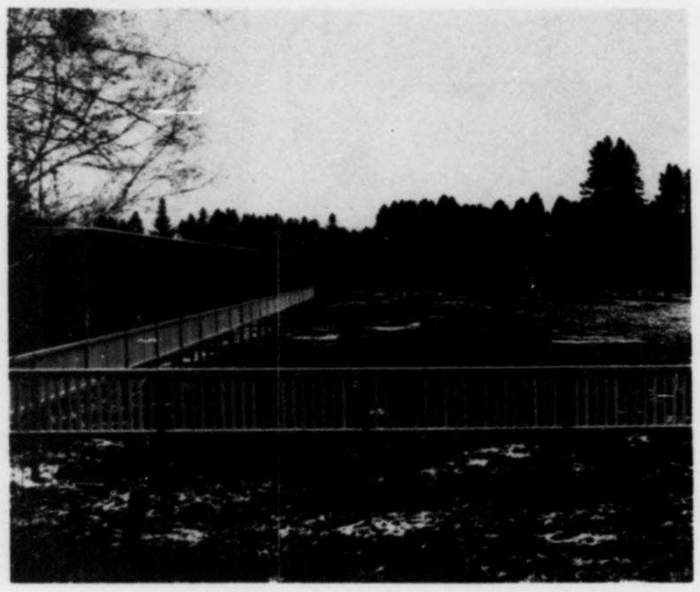
g
«42nd Street Project»
axonometric



A

The idea of large-scale works that are once again referential is being investigated by a number of artists; Nancy Holt, Richard Fleischner, Alice Adams, George Trakas, Alice Aycock, and Siah Armajani are some of them. Few precedents exist for nonfigurative referential work that is integrated into context. One person who has investigated this area is Isamu Noguchi; at the UNESCO Park in Paris he was responsible for creating a total environment–the walls, walkways, and benches.

These artists are more interested in ways the viewer can be involved in the structures than in making objects that are merely looked at. These works are less authoritarian than former styles of sculpture; they are no longer monolithic, and their imagery makes them accessible, calling to mind bridges, courtyards, or newsstands. The most important difference in attitude is that the artists are attempting a dialogue with the public, going to town meetings, sitting down with planning boards, entering into very pragmatic situations. They are making an effort to establish an accessible visual language. How successful will the attempt be? The artists' works and intentions go only halfway; there is no way to program or predict the response when something is placed in public.



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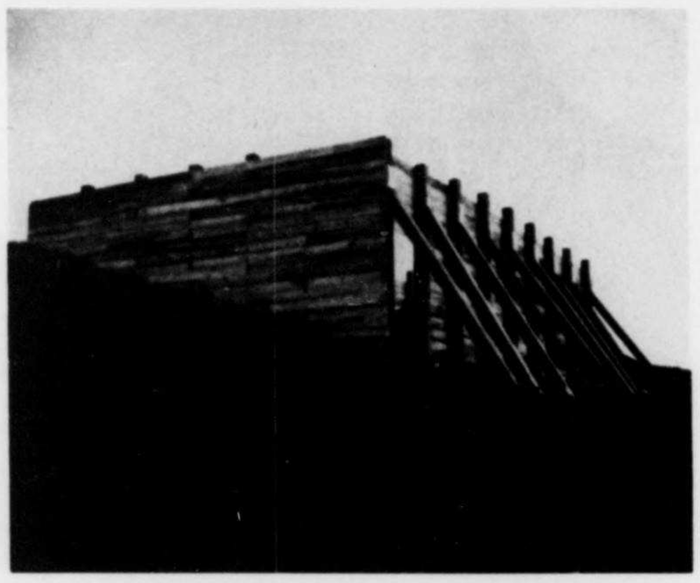

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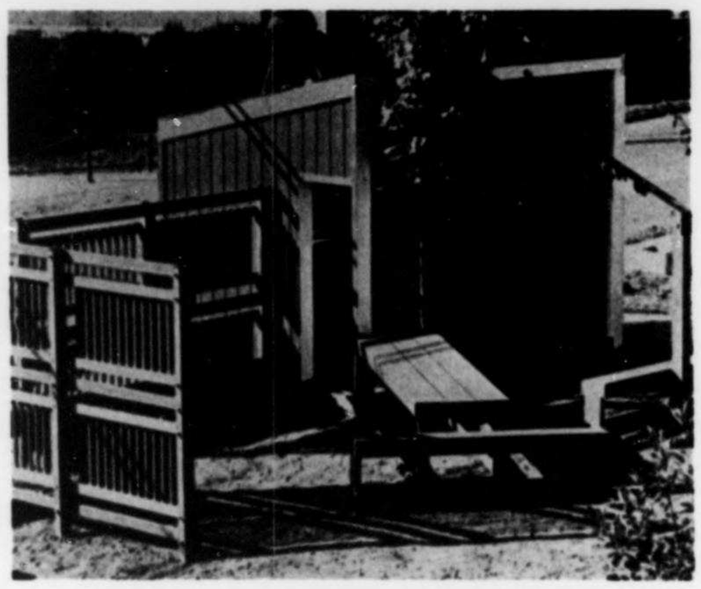

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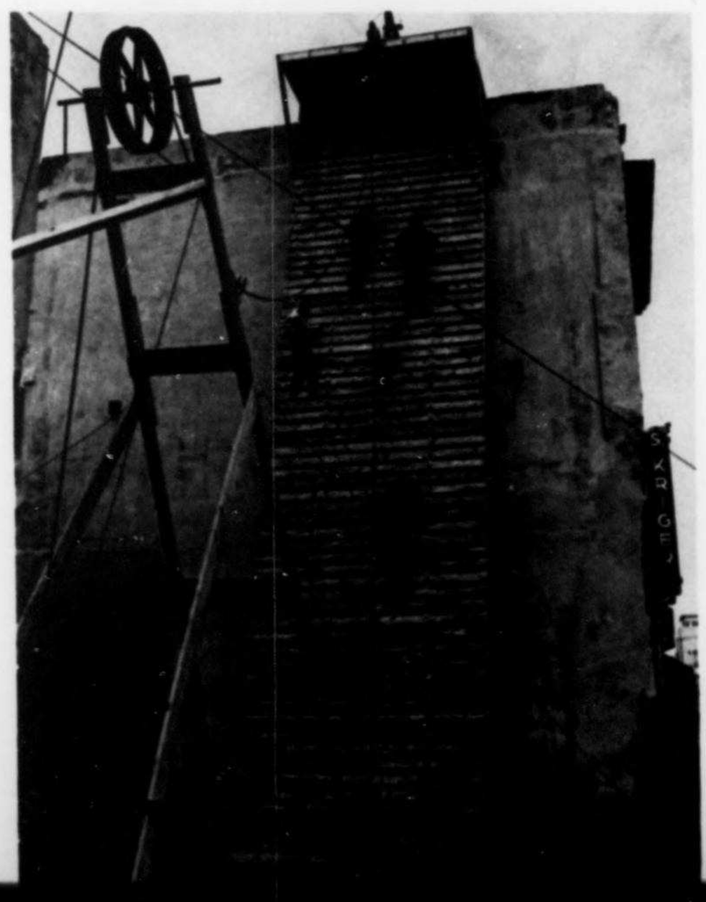


E

A number of recent projects recognize a more important role for the artist. Several sculptors were asked to submit proposals for the development of Duncan Plaza in New Orleans, a park at the center of the city government complex where art is to be the focus. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, four artists have worked in collaboration with I. M. Pei and Partners to develop works that will be an integral part of a new building at MIT. And three artists were recently invited to make proposals for Mount Royal Center, a cultural complex that is part of an urban renewal project in Baltimore.

Art and artists will remain on the periphery of our culture until they are allowed to become actively engaged. In their work and investigations they have attempted to develop a more integrated role. But their efforts must be recognized and supported–by developers, architects, arts councils, local governments, and the communities themselves. The visual sensibility of the artist can provide insight into our complex environment and possibly help to provide a pathway through it.

Mary Miss

a
Nancy Holt
«Catch Basin»
1982

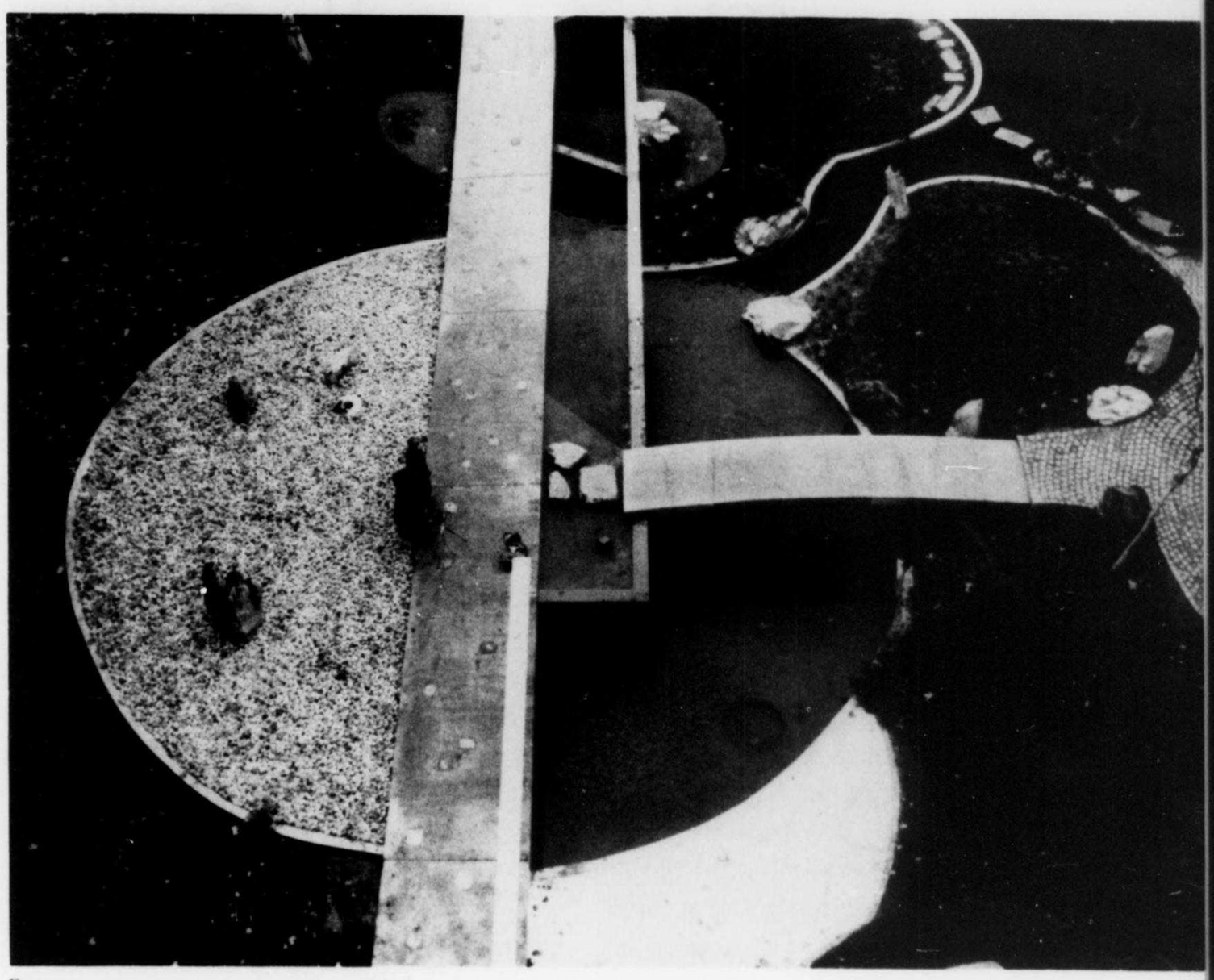
b
Richard Fleischner
«Fence/Covered Fence»
1979

c
Alice Adams
«Shorings»
1973

d
Siah Armajani
«Red School House for Thomas Paine»
1978

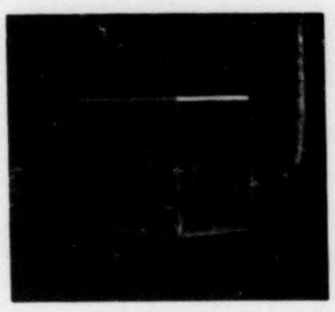
e
Alice Aycock
«The Game of Flyers»
1980

f
Isamu Noguchi
UNESCO Gardens
Paris
1956–58



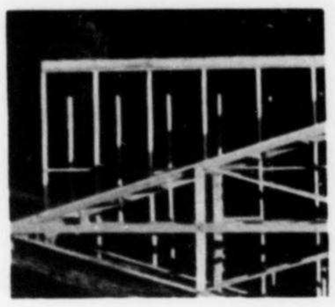
F

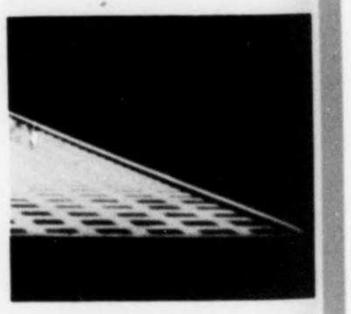
The Norfolk Projects



The Norfolk Projects in Architecture and Sculpture try to probe that area where forms are at once abstract constructions and organic creatures, shaping environments and populating them. The tension between architecture and sculpture endows their relationship to the natural setting with a peculiar ambiguity. They cross a frontier between different modes of sensation and meaning. They are a protean species, and their scale is accordingly strange, hard to pin down, so that as they lift, or bound, or float, or sit in silence, they modify the natural world in startling ways.

Vincent Scully





The Norfolk Projects are an experiment to test the ground that lies between the disciplines of architecture and sculpture. The aim was to provide a fertile environment for the realization of individual projects proposed by four young artists in each of the two fields. It was considered important that the invited participants communicate and interact as within a seminar situation, so that similarities and differences between the two disciplines could come to light.

To further this end without making the undertaking programmatic, only two ground rules were set down: that the installations be within the same locale, and that the participants build their pieces on site over the same time period.

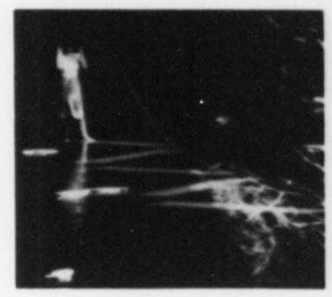
The Ellen Battell Stoeckel Estate in Norfolk, Connecticut, was chosen because it provided a wide variety of settings–from water sites to small clearings and broad expanses of open field–all within a short distance, while also providing on-site living accommodation. Each artist was given a modest budget for materials.

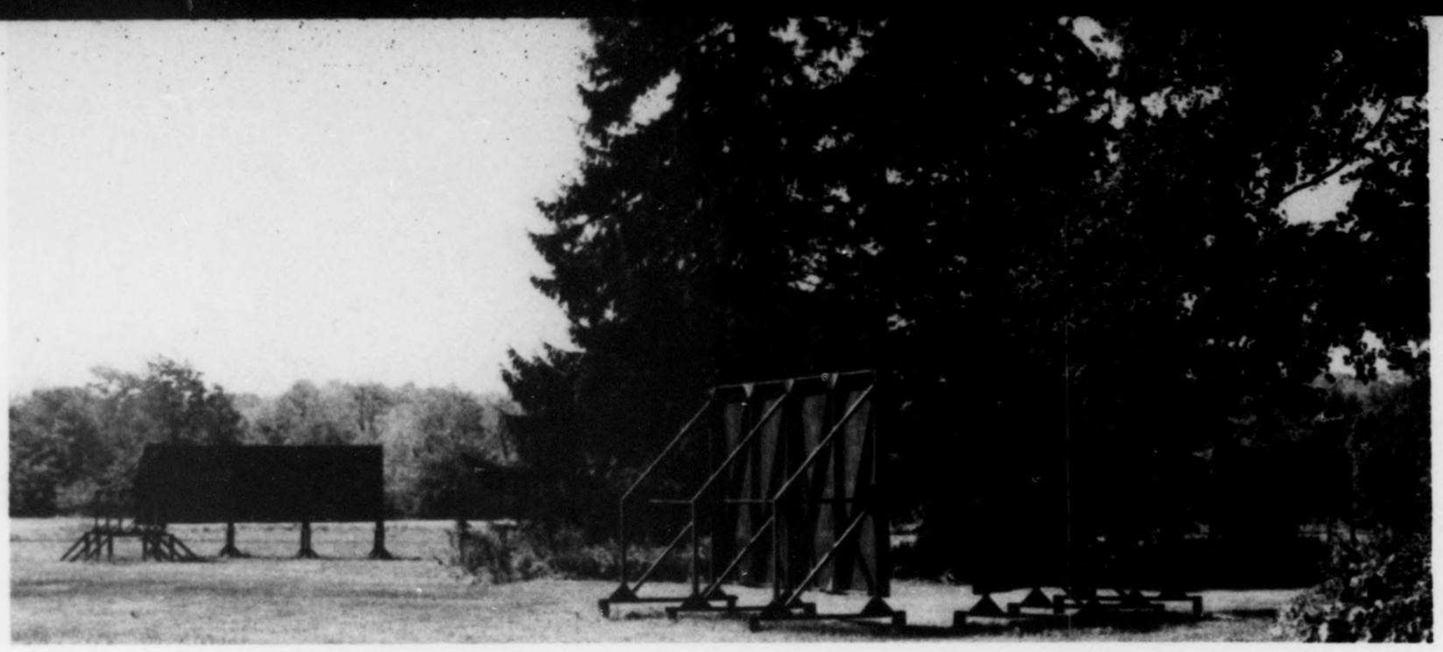
A tendency when assessing such an undertaking is to analyze, categorize, and cross-reference constituent parts, seeking specific conclusions much as in a scientific experiment. This approach runs the risk that initial concerns may prejudice and circumscribe an understanding of the outcome. The original intent of the Norfolk Projects promotes just this procedure; there was a strong feeling that the exercise should clarify certain fundamental questions concerning the relationship between sculpture and architecture. However, art is primarily a questioning process, and the questions are invariably more pertinent and interesting than any answers they may elicit. Thus a difficult situation is created: the experiment was proposed in order to find answers, but the subject matter prohibits such results.

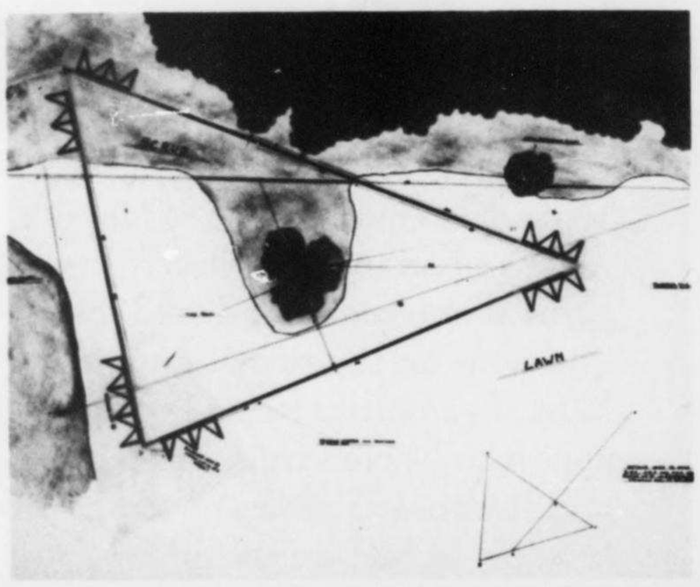
The Norfolk Projects are presented here as a collection of raw material gleaned from a controlled setting; the material questions preconceptions concerning the interaction and coexistence of the two media. Architects and sculptors have traditionally had a somewhat oppositional relationship, primarily because of the common ground claimed by both groups. In recent years this situation has become exacerbated: sculptors draw freely on architectural references, even using architectural language in their work; architects have veered from the limitations of the past 30 years and many now accept ideas from diverse sources, contemporary sculpture among them. The Norfolk Projects mirror the true complexity of the current relationship, for there is no easily discernible division between the built results of the two groups. Rather than reflecting on the two disciplines, the extreme differences among the individual pieces testify to the differing concerns of the individual participants. One architect, for instance, has used a hillside, much as a painter would a canvas, on which to position a number of glyphs or calligraphic shapes comparable to brush strokes. Several of the structures built by sculptors are not habitable or functional, but hint that they could be.

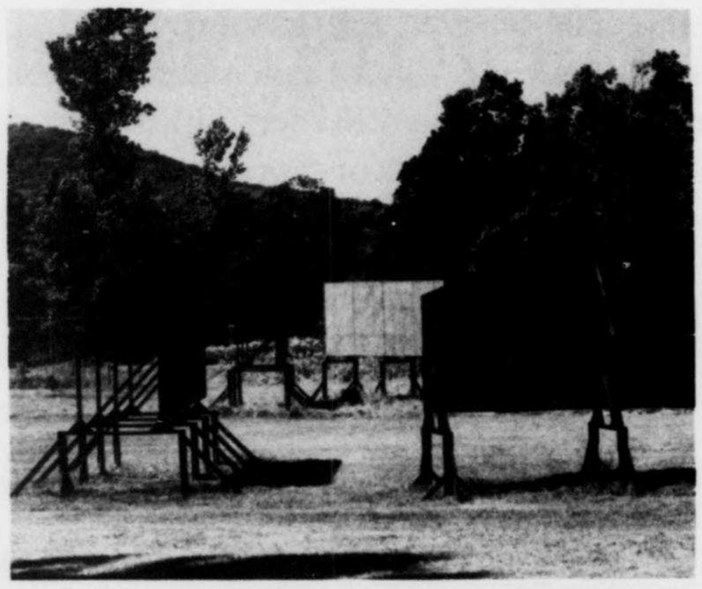
The documentation of the individual projects–in photography, drawings, and written statements–should be considered with reference to the controlled environment of Norfolk. More importantly, however, they should be used as a sounding board for questions on the two disciplines:
Why do architecture and sculpture appear to be converging in certain areas?
Can the critical values of one field be brought to bear on the other?
When do they undermine their respective disciplines by beginning to merge? (Artists have held fast to the idea that a work must be nonfunctional, existing solely on its merit as art, whereas architects consider architecture to be an art, even though their structures serve a functional need.)
Is it possible now–as it has been in the past–for artists and architects to actively pursue both disciplines?
What relationship can the two disciplines now have with each other?

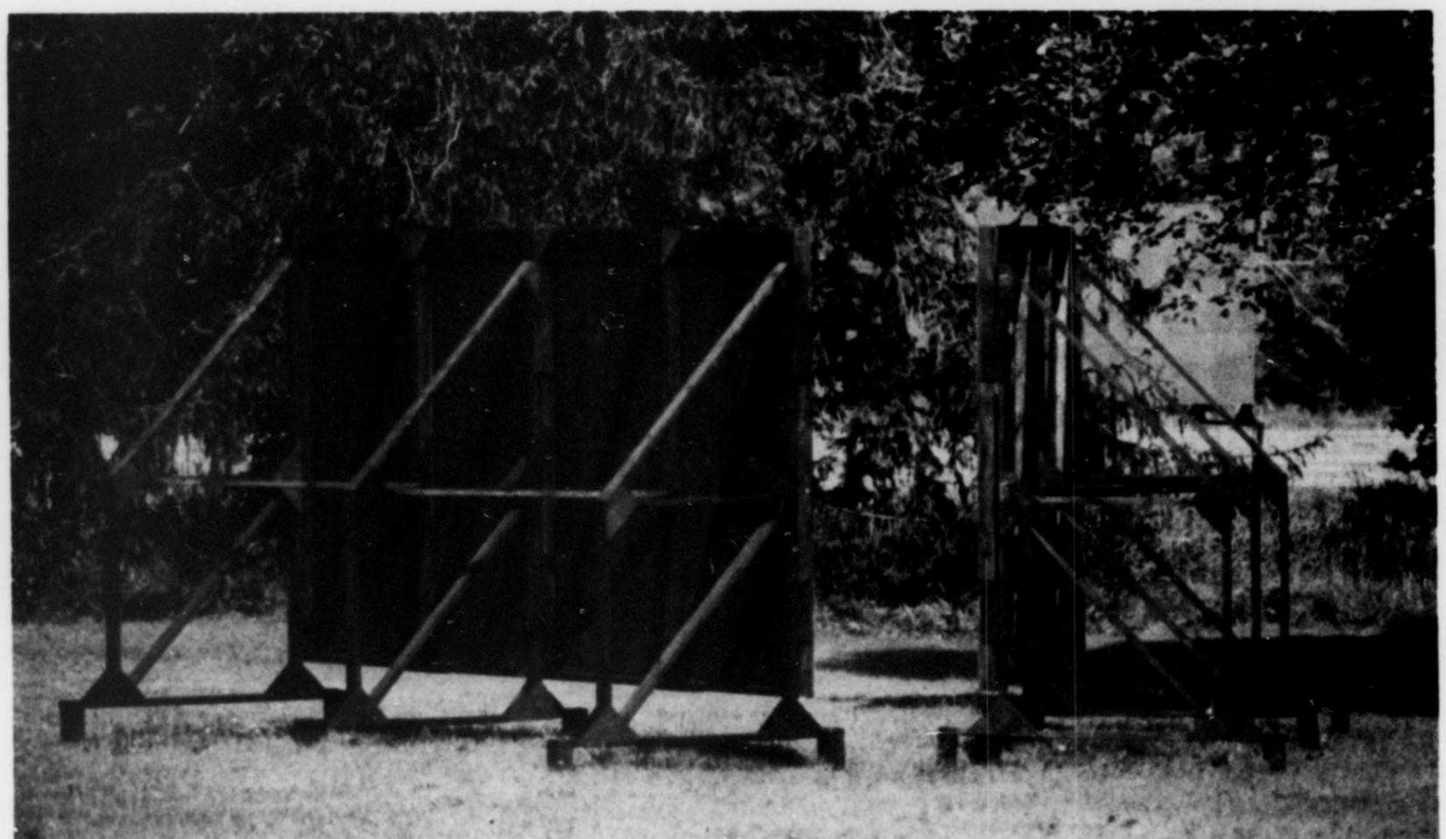
William Diaz-Albertini

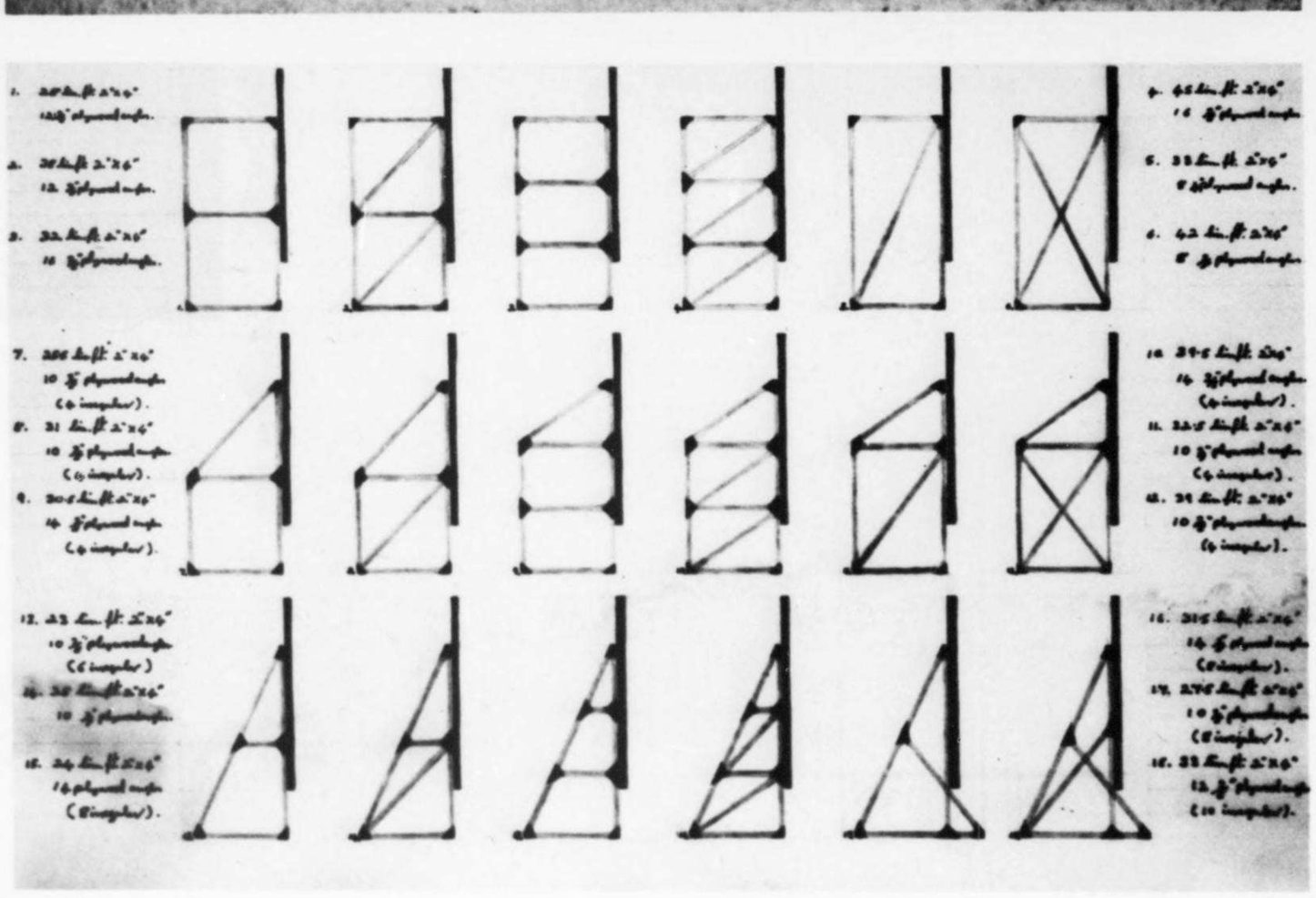










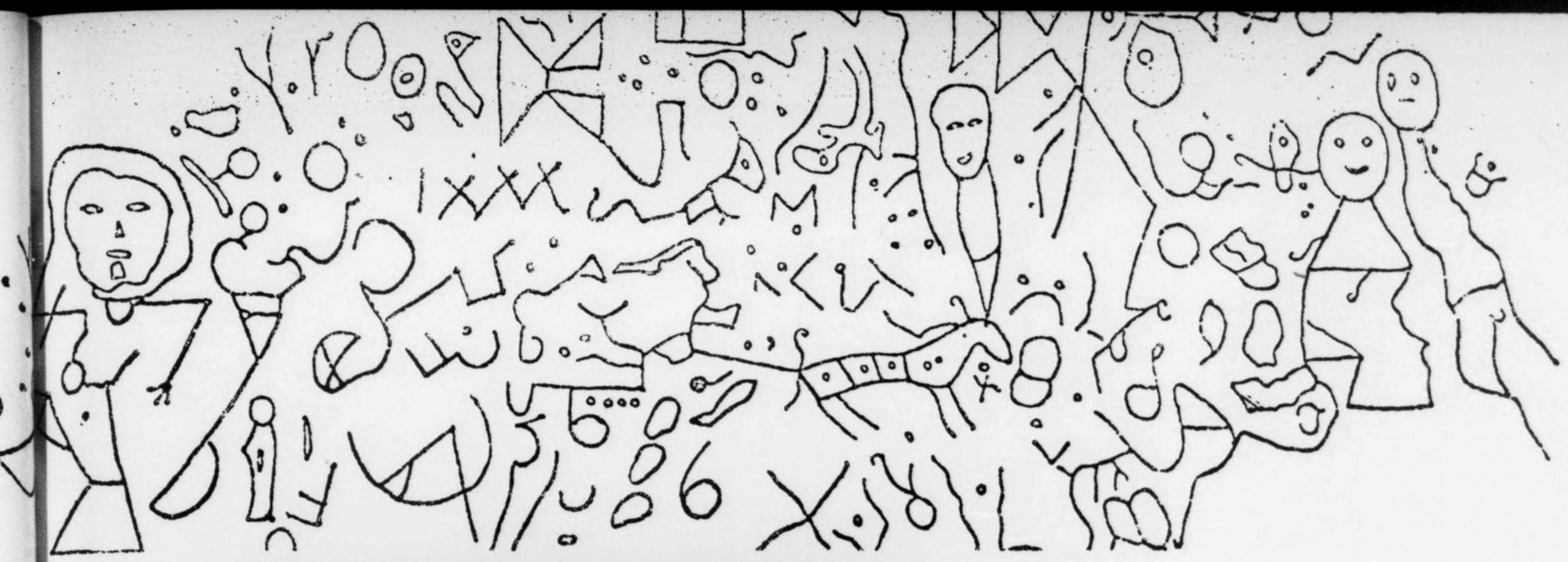


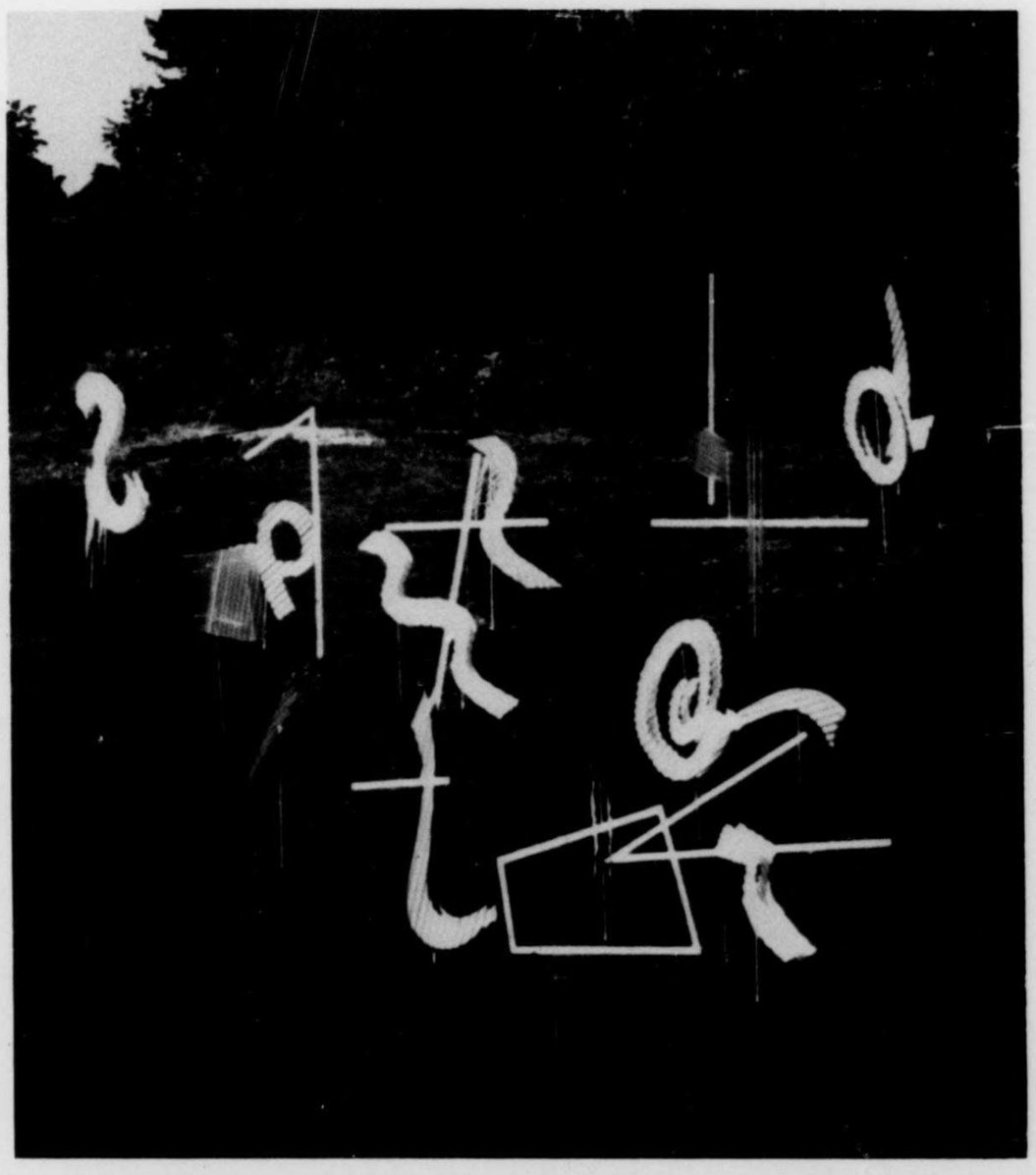
I am directly concerned with those artifacts that are the physical result of human reaction to and adaptation of the natural environment. Specifically, I deal with objects that result from functional need rather than from prescribed aesthetic intent.

My work tends to take form as temporary installation, primarily because I feel that the ever-changing memory of visual experience is more important than the continuing existence of a piece. I like to think of my work as a trigger which sets off a series of associative analogies within the viewer's mind, altering the perceptive process. I also feel that every space allocated a permanent installation becomes occupied and thus no longer available. An ongoing program of temporary works is preferable to «public sculpture,» which too often becomes merely another piece of dormant furniture, similar to the ubiquitous park bench or fire hydrant.

«Redan X 3» uses the generic billboard form, an easily recognizable object incorporating two elements–facade and structure. Since the sole purpose of the billboard structure is to support the facade, the two coexist as distinctly separate but equal parts. Through a deliberate process of grouping and positioning I have subverted the normal purpose of the billboard. The blank facades are not focused at the viewer, but are used to delineate and enclose space. As a result, there is no longer any reference to front and back; they read collectively as inside and outside.

William Diaz-Albertini





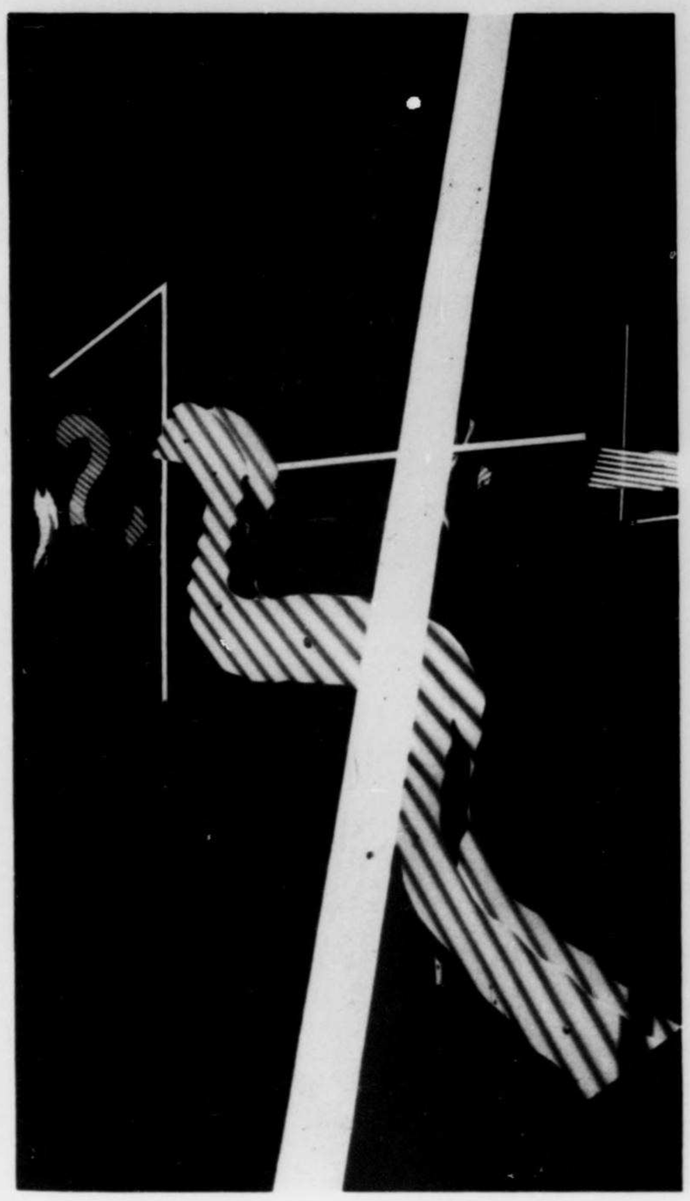
James Winthrop
Drawing of a
rock engraving
Dighton Rock
near Berkeley,
Massachusetts
1788

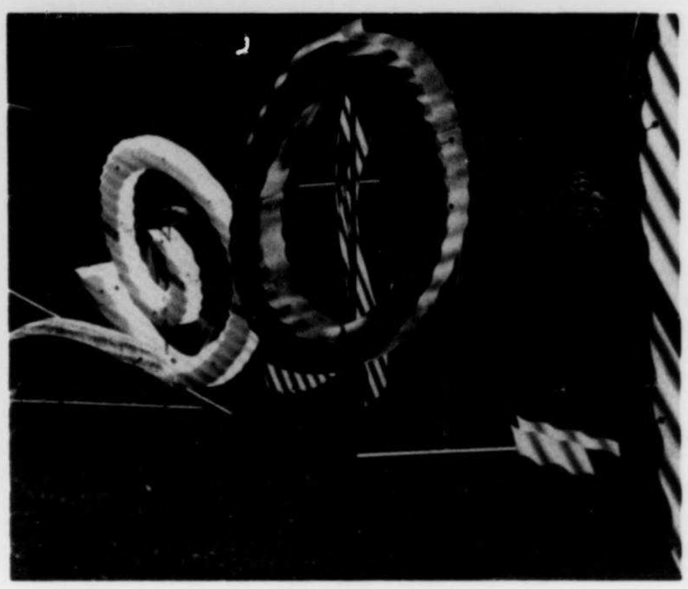
«One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.»

Ludwig Wittgenstein
Philosophical Investigations

Primitive art employed a language of images by which observed phenomena were closely related to the unconscious mind. This once potent language of images has been slowly translated into the language of arbitrary word signs with so little perceptible relation to the object signified that visual language has become essentially indecipherable.

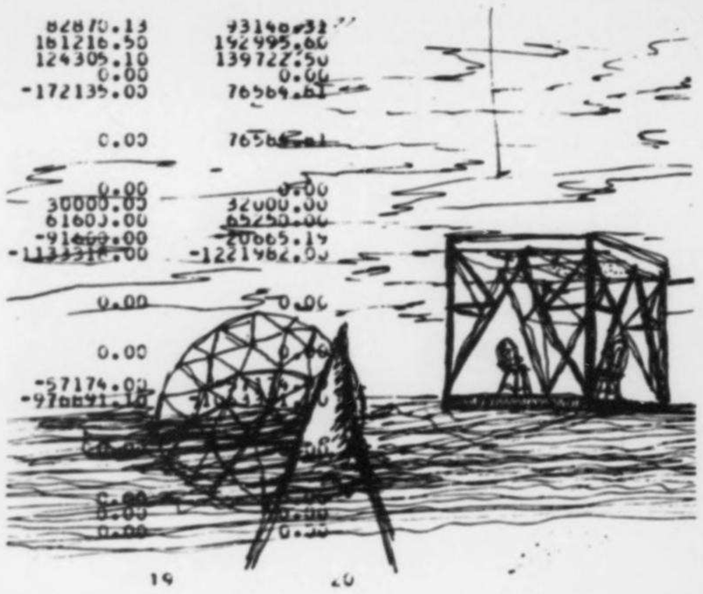
The aesthetic object today appears immune to criticism based on fixed principles. Criticism's role is reduced to fluxile interpretation, ever-changing and open to dispute. Examination of primitive genius reveals a model for the depiction of the dialogue between subject and object.





This sculpture takes the recourse of a language reduced to primordial glyphs in order to observe the viewer's reaction to gestures evocative of distant signs. It is designed with the perspectival and temporal bias of the viewer in mind. The meaning of the sculpture seems to depend on another system of absent signs, against which those present attain their significance. The viewer's integration with the sculpture is a process of simultaneous perception/misperception of those signs which are present/absent in the work.

Roy Barris

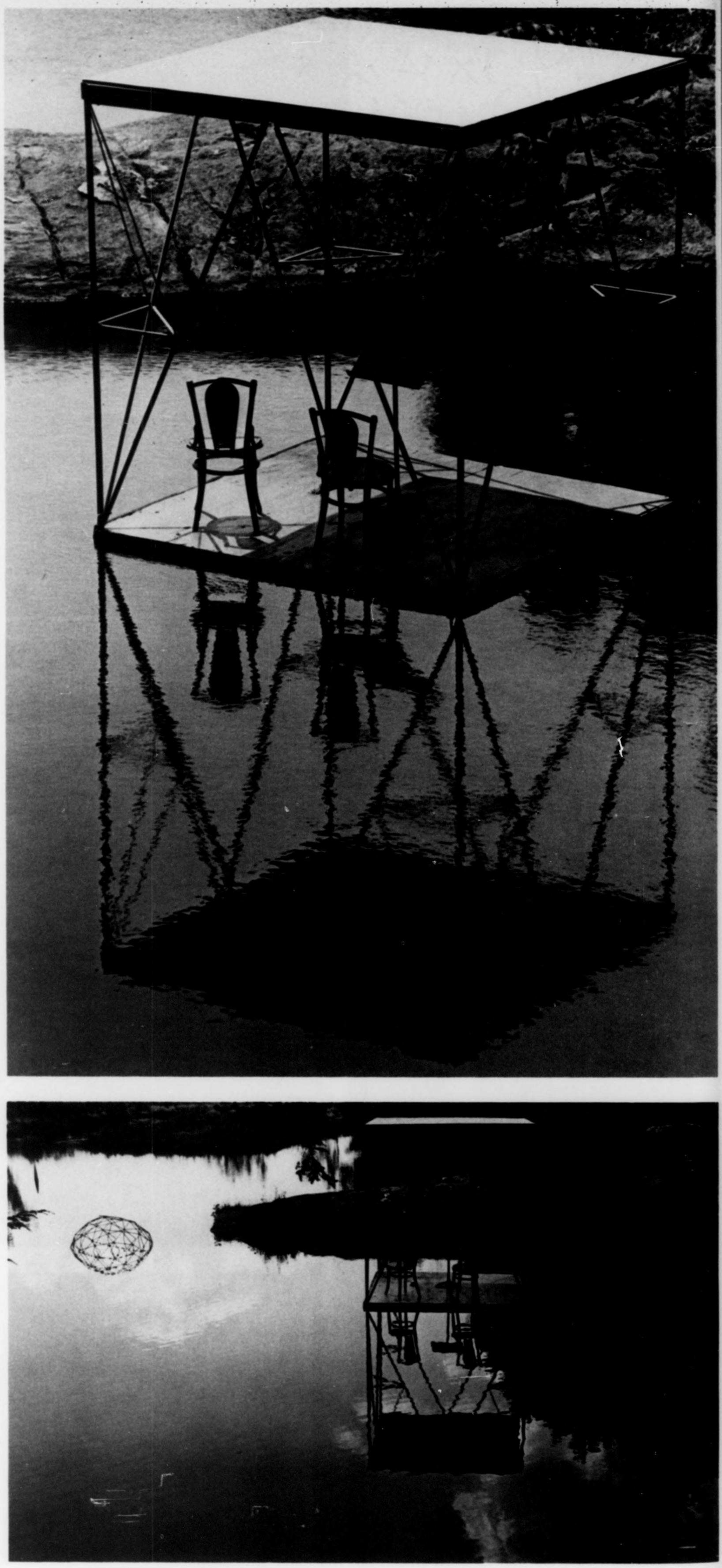


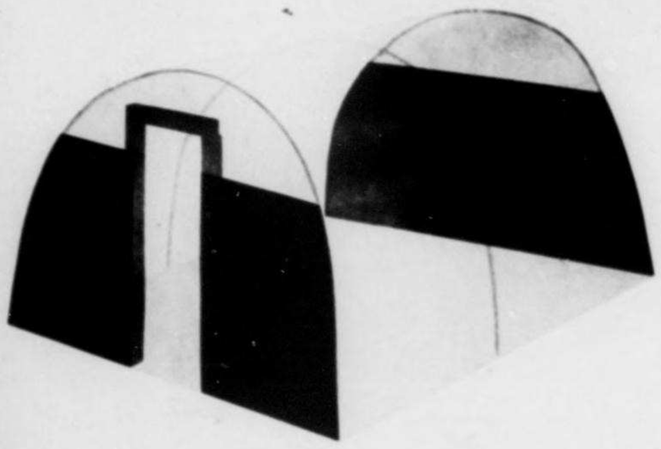
As they floated down the river, there were routine arguments as to whether it would have been better to launch the pavilion on a lake instead; or perhaps they should have said to hell with it all anyway and taken it to the ocean; or just simply said to hell with it. It had never been clear whether they would be making music for themselves, or for someone else, or whether they would be playing to each other. They reveled in an unarticulated ambivalence that thinly masked the presence of an insidiously concealed intention.

At the point where the river widened above the dam they stopped to consider how the pavilion might be brought to the other side. The only point of agreement was to seek shelter from the current behind a small rocky peninsula, where they found two distressingly foreign objects. The partially submerged skeleton of a sphere lay on a shelf near the rock. The other object was bright and conical, poking above the surface like a shark's fin. Its bottom could not be determined, even with their longest pike.

When the presence of the pavilion was first reported, only two chairs, a music stand, and a bunch of flowers were indicated to be on board. Coordinates were set off the rock, the sphere, and the cone. When we came to investigate, the pavilion lay on its side in a shallow area. This and subsequent investigation failed to locate the cone. The sphere had also disappeared.

Joe Chadwick





In making a work of art, the artist acts as the initial viewer. This relation must be kept alive and fertile in the piece itself, for it gives the work enduring vitality. If this aim is successfully achieved, a new viewer no longer looks at a description of what the artist wants to see but experiences the focal point of the artist's perception.

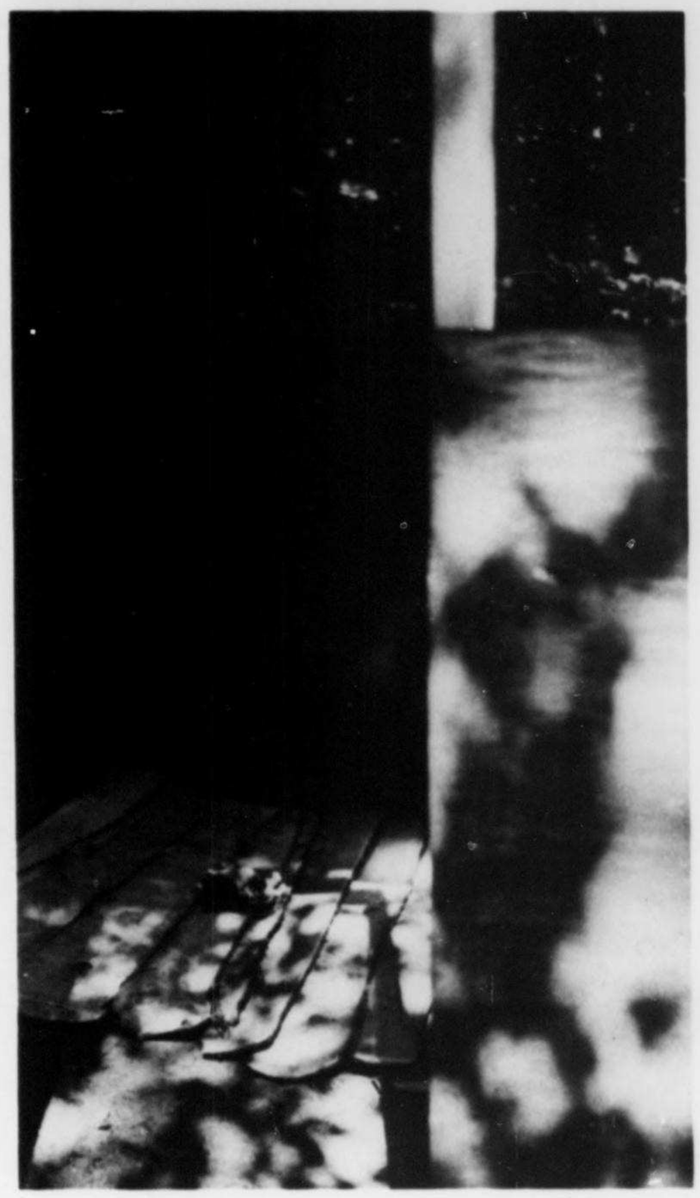
Viewers must make assumptions in order to understand a work. I wish to make the viewer conscious of these assumptions by creating the awareness of other assumptions. This effort automatically limits the original assumptions.

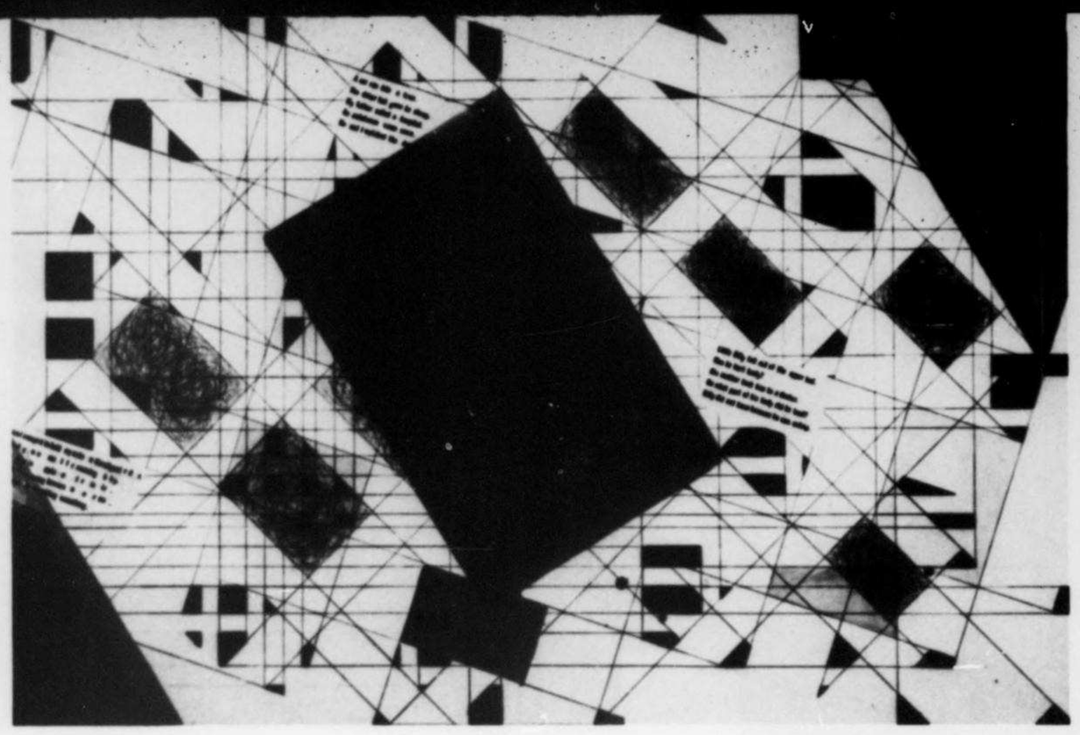
On first encountering my piece at Norfolk, the viewer is aware of a juxtaposition of primitive and modern elements. Four primitive structures are placed without systematic alignment in a marginal space between woods and lawned clearing. The wooded area has been cleaned, the lawn scattered with forest debris. Related through form and material, each structure creates a space analogous to the whole: natural indigenous materials (rock, dirt, wood, leaves) and synthetic materials (linoleum, carpet, wood paneling, foam rubber) with parallel denotations of function comprise the floor and an arch respectively; colored front and back walls complement the floor and arch. The fragile spatial definition of each structure is made more tenuous by the plastic sheeting that softens distinctions between inside and outside. At this point the piece is precariously defined, and formal. Then you notice the burned objects.

The material of these objects, their subject, placement, and burning, all support the primitive-modern theme. The literality of the objects, affected by their setting, forces an immediate reaction based on assumption; this is determined by the relations between the objects, their immediate surroundings, and the viewer's assumptions regarding these elements. It is important to question what caused this reaction, why the viewer is affected in a specific way, and how we attribute a specific explanation to this effect.

The work only becomes whole as the viewer takes responsibility for his or her own condition. The viewer must rethink assumptions and realize possibilities stemming from other perspectives. To acquire a unified understanding, the viewer must entertain several contrary assumptions simultaneously.

Curtis Mitchell





If the plastic arts are to have any communicable significance, it must be through the recognition that the fixity of the sign as well as the accessibility of the code is problematic in all artistic endeavors. Indeed, the arts are often irrelevant to society at large, constituting a «private language» elitist in the claim to privileged representation, a formal endeavor with «special knowledge» loftily implicit. To resist a strictly individual interpretation would involve a rejection of the fabulous tear in the veil of ideas and the dismissal of idealistic counterparts. In other words, for art to have any meaning other than as a utopian fabrication, an understanding of the capacity of art to convey meaning must be reached.

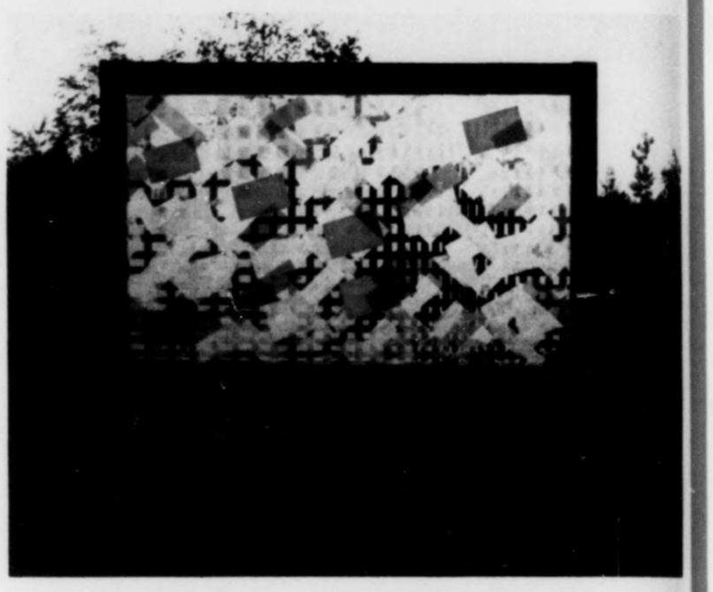
A distinction need be made between the conventional use of traditional orders and the difficult formulation of a new and useful artistic language. Such a new or reformed language is not a reformation in a restorative or amending sense, but rather is a re-formation of perpetually new investigations. It is with this assumption that artistic production–in response to the mutations of various social conditions–provides access to a dialectical process while avoiding a standardization that would result in cultural canonism.

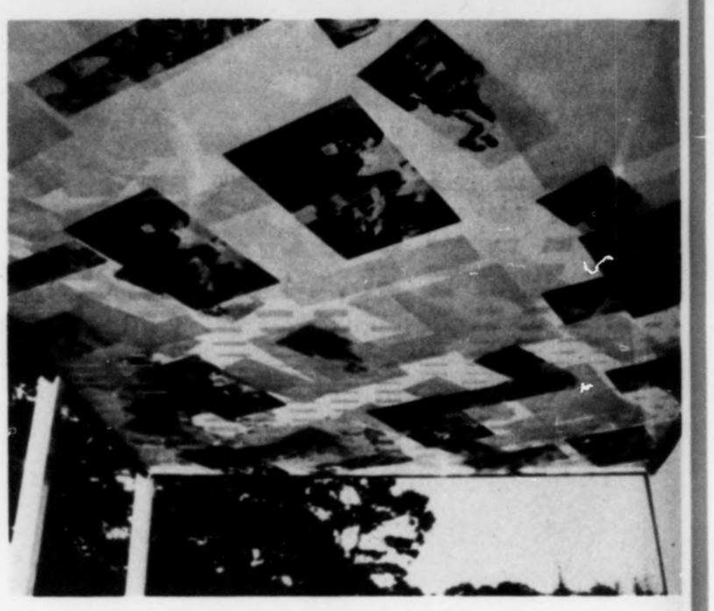
This notion of perpetual adaptation is certainly foreign to normal discourse, which entails a splicing of the established code and the subsequent arrangement of word points into linear sentences. This act not only restricts our investigations to those answers possible within the limits of the code, but also categorizes the artistic endeavor as primarily aesthetic: an elitist frivolity, separate from the living of life. Thus the concept of a visual language is alien to the given means of communication, and confrontation with art is usually limited to a verbal translation (which is restrictive by definition) or to nostalgia for stagnant codification. Emphasis should not necessarily be placed on translation, but rather on the act of communication through codes that contain a pluralistic montage of visual and verbal grammars.

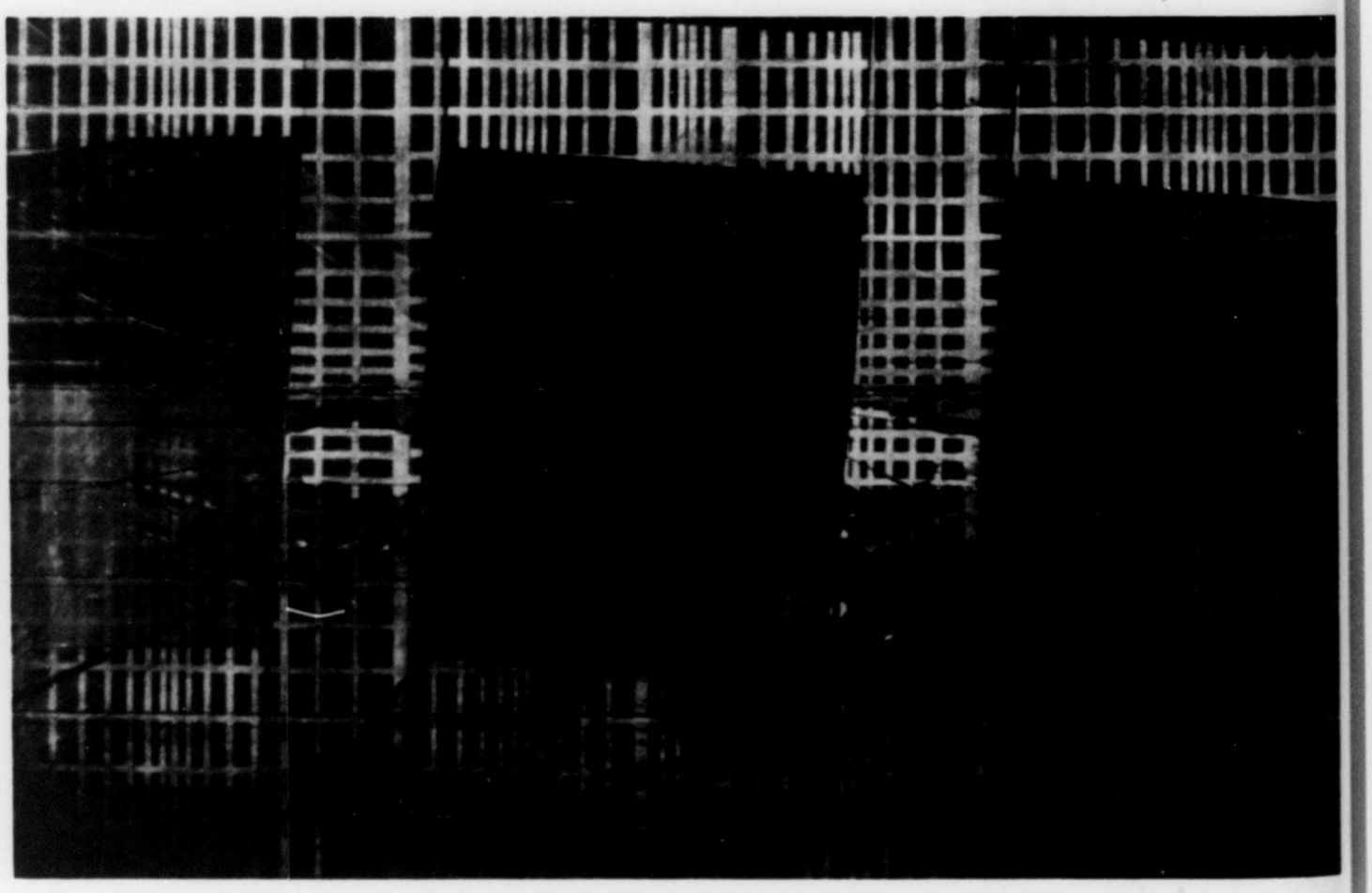
With issues of the justification of art legitimately behind us, and the use of common language enabling us to mean what we say, the question can be phrased in all earnestness: what is going on? «*Okay. Enough of this plastic pablum,*» utters the theoretical specialist, «*Direct talk is naive proliferation.*» «*Out with philosophic palaver,*» grunts the butcher, «*Difficult texts are baloney.*»

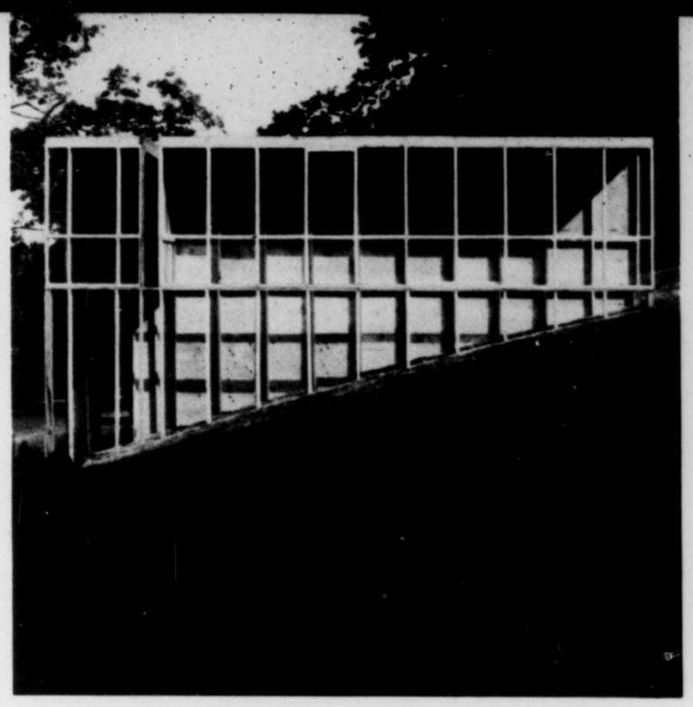
What does all this talk have to do with the sight before our eyes? In the case of this /piece/, method was predetermined and took such precedence that the site was considered virtually insignificant. And yet an account of procedure is unimportant unless it is advantageous to the investigations of both the butcher and the theorist, offering a language that is simultaneously normal and abnormal.

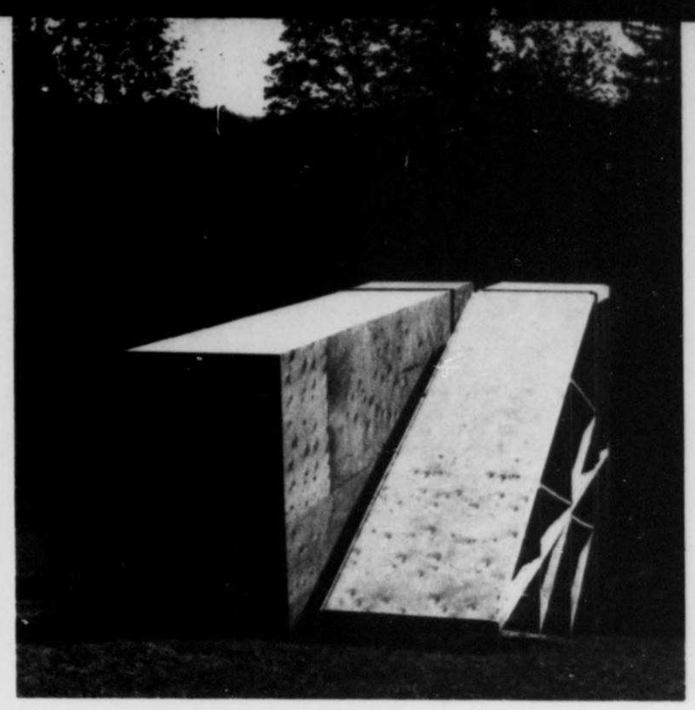
Martha Burgess









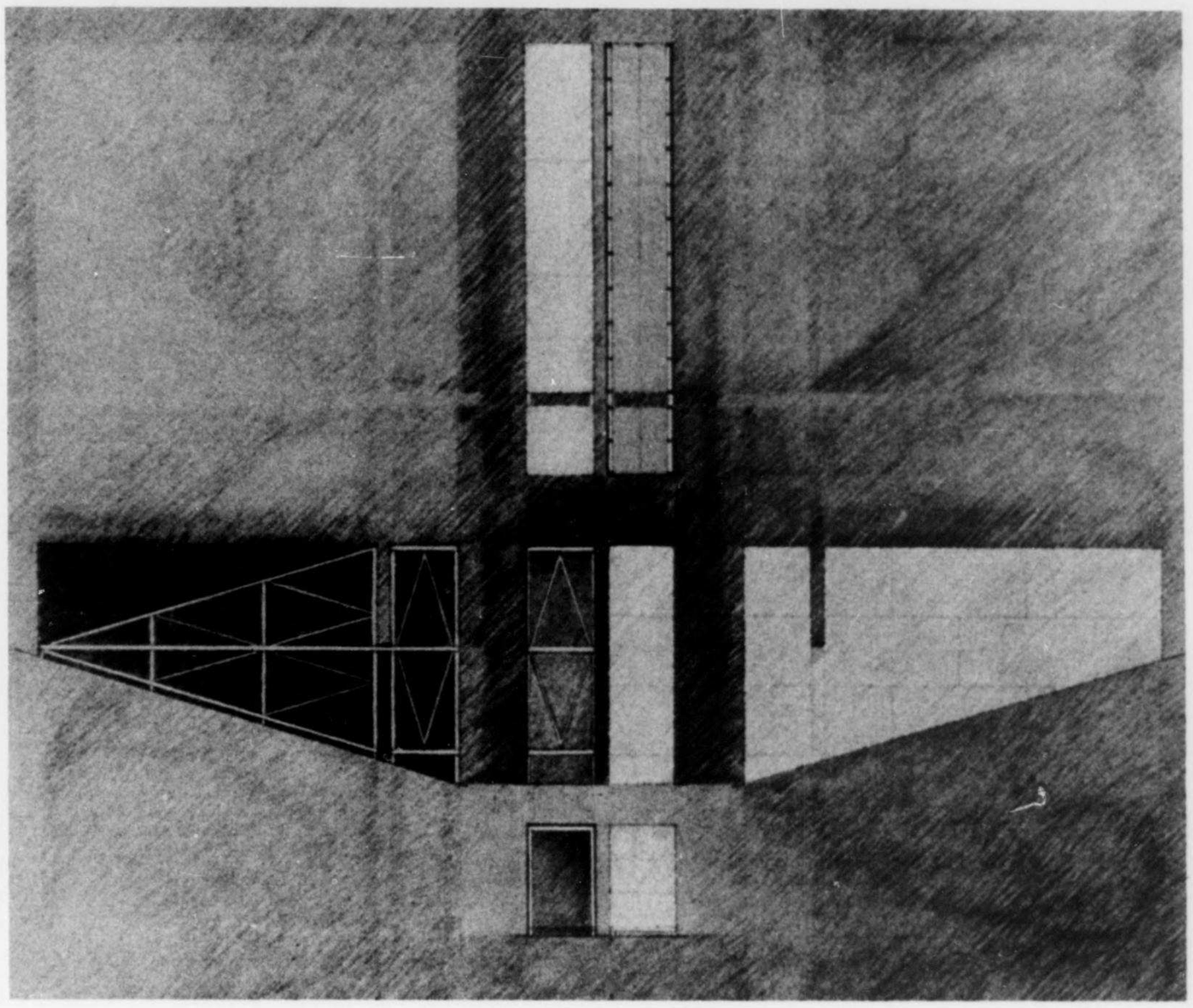


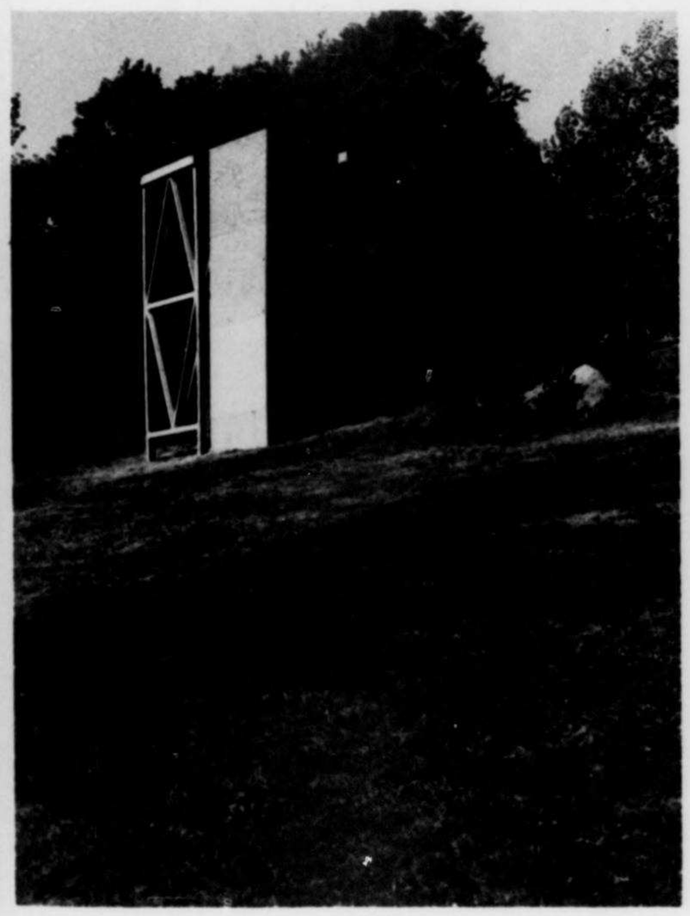
The children enter and leave
The territory breathes.
There are stories lost among the trees
And thousands of voices unroll beneath the skin of the earth.

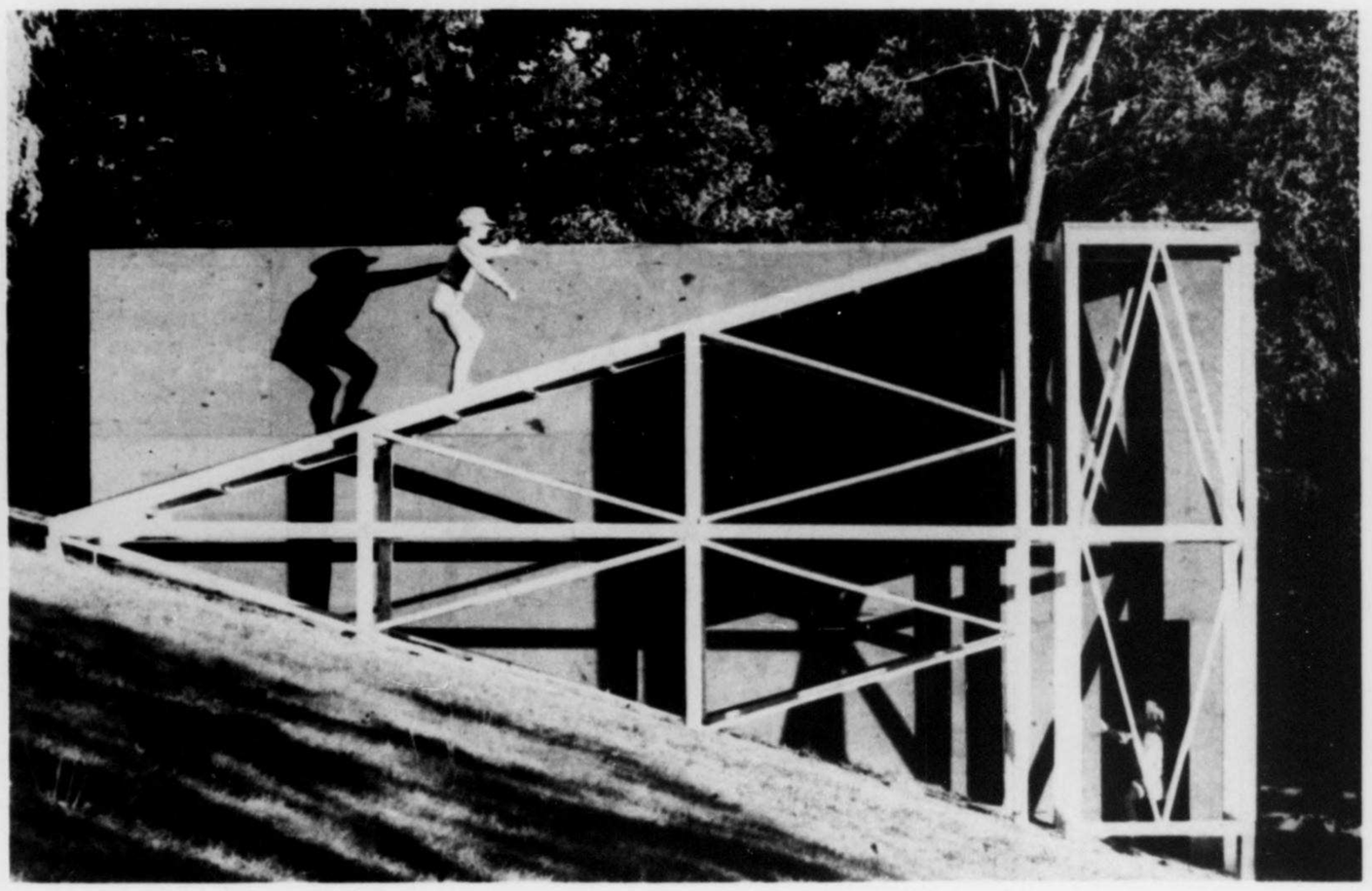
from a folktale

Responding to the myriad possibilities suggested by a sloping site, this is an attempt to isolate and intensify physical awareness of walking uphill and down. The piece is divided three ways: a longitudinal gap separates a tunnel enclosed in sheathing and an open truss ramp; a lateral gap isolates vertical towerlike forms on the downhill side; true horizontal is marked by a datum about which the slope of the hill is reflected. Though the plan is simple, the structure juxtaposes the volumetric and the planar, the darkness of enclosure and the open view, symmetry and the imbalance of up and down.

Carol Burns







The small building contains two rooftop banquettes and a ladder-back chair from which a waterfall is revealed.

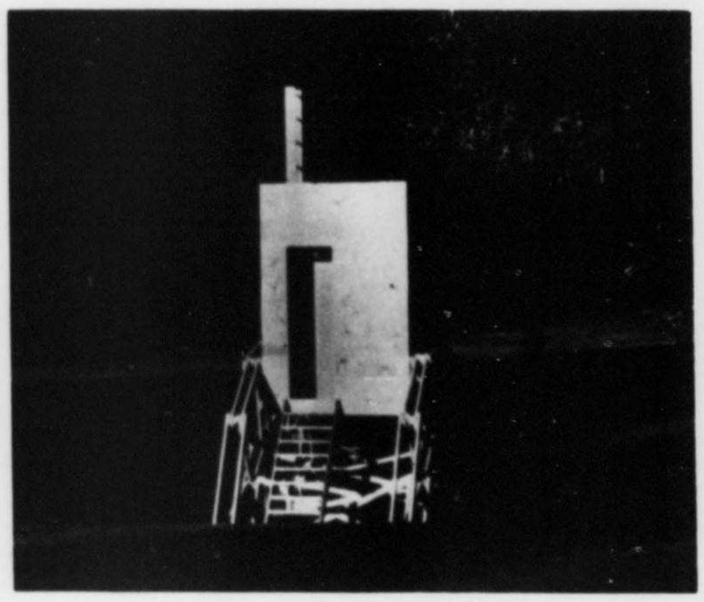
The building is experienced not only as a collection of associative images but also as a series of spatial, audial, and visual events oriented to the earth, the stream, and the sky.

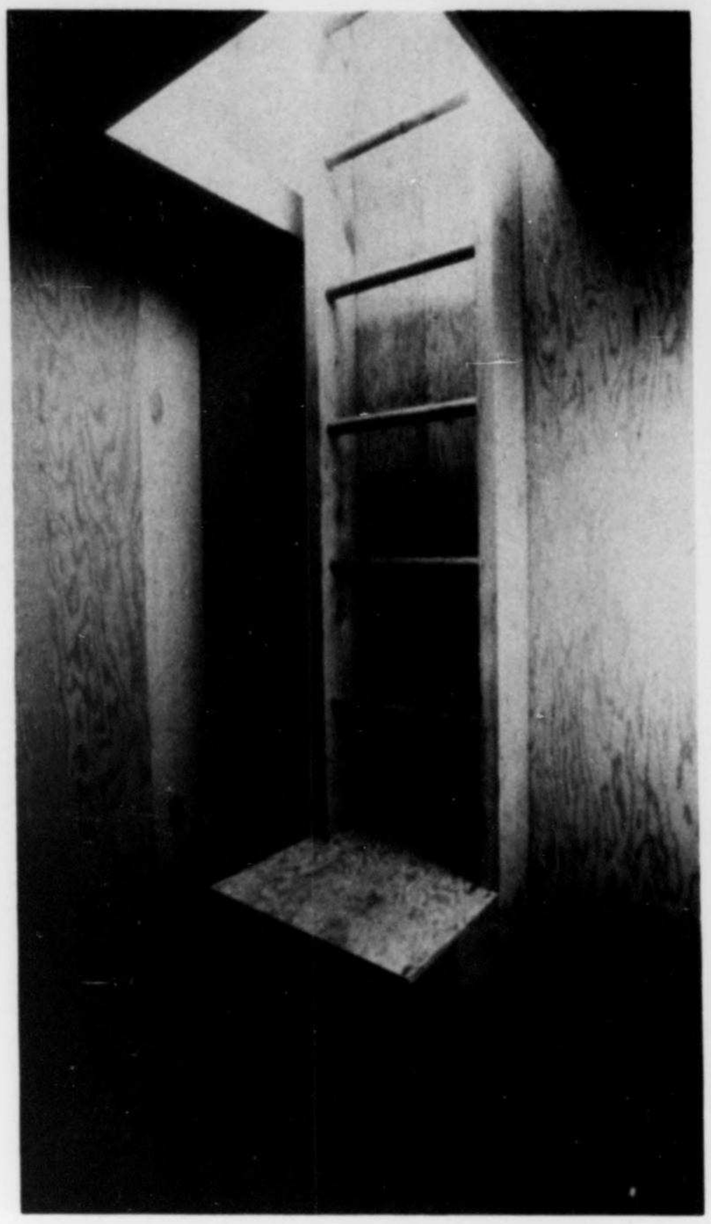
embark
enter sit focus
ascend sit release
descend enclose exit
depart

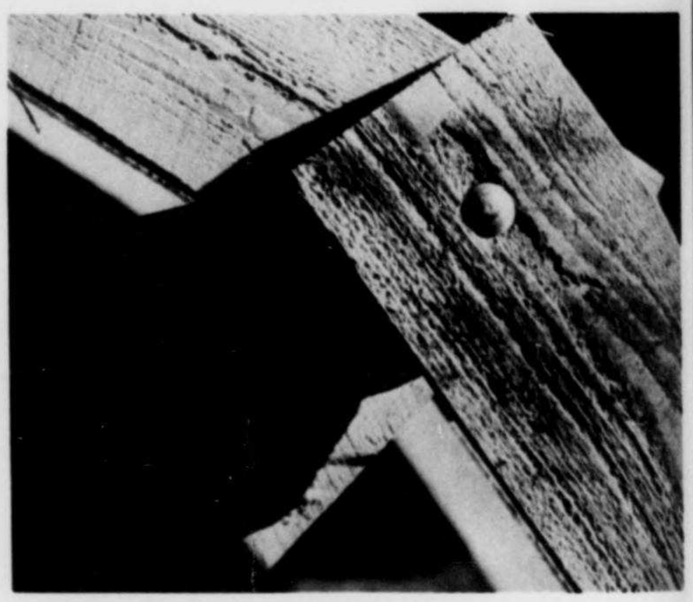
The major material is wood which becomes more finished as the building turns in on itself.

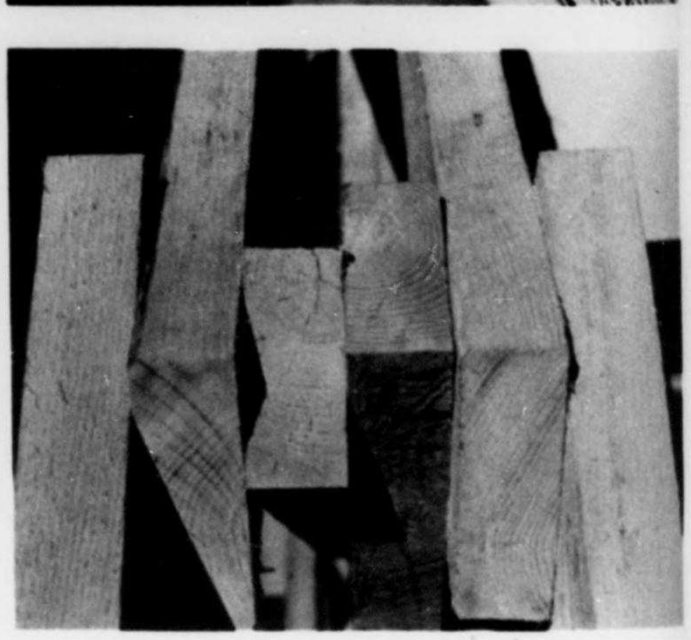
My thanks to Dick Brown, Jason Cadwell, Martin Gehner, and especially Jane Murphy.

Mike Cadwell







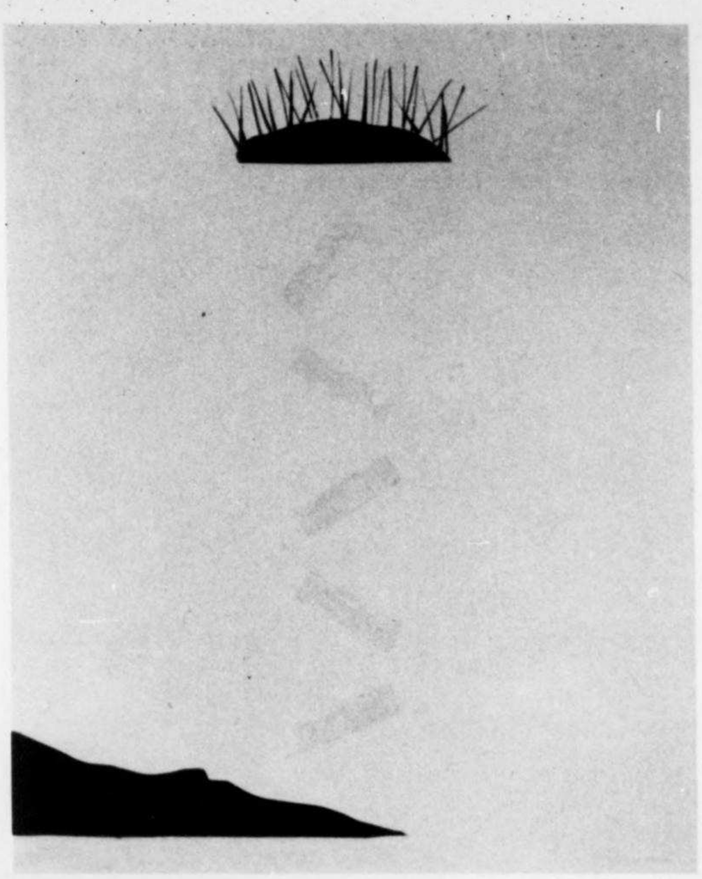


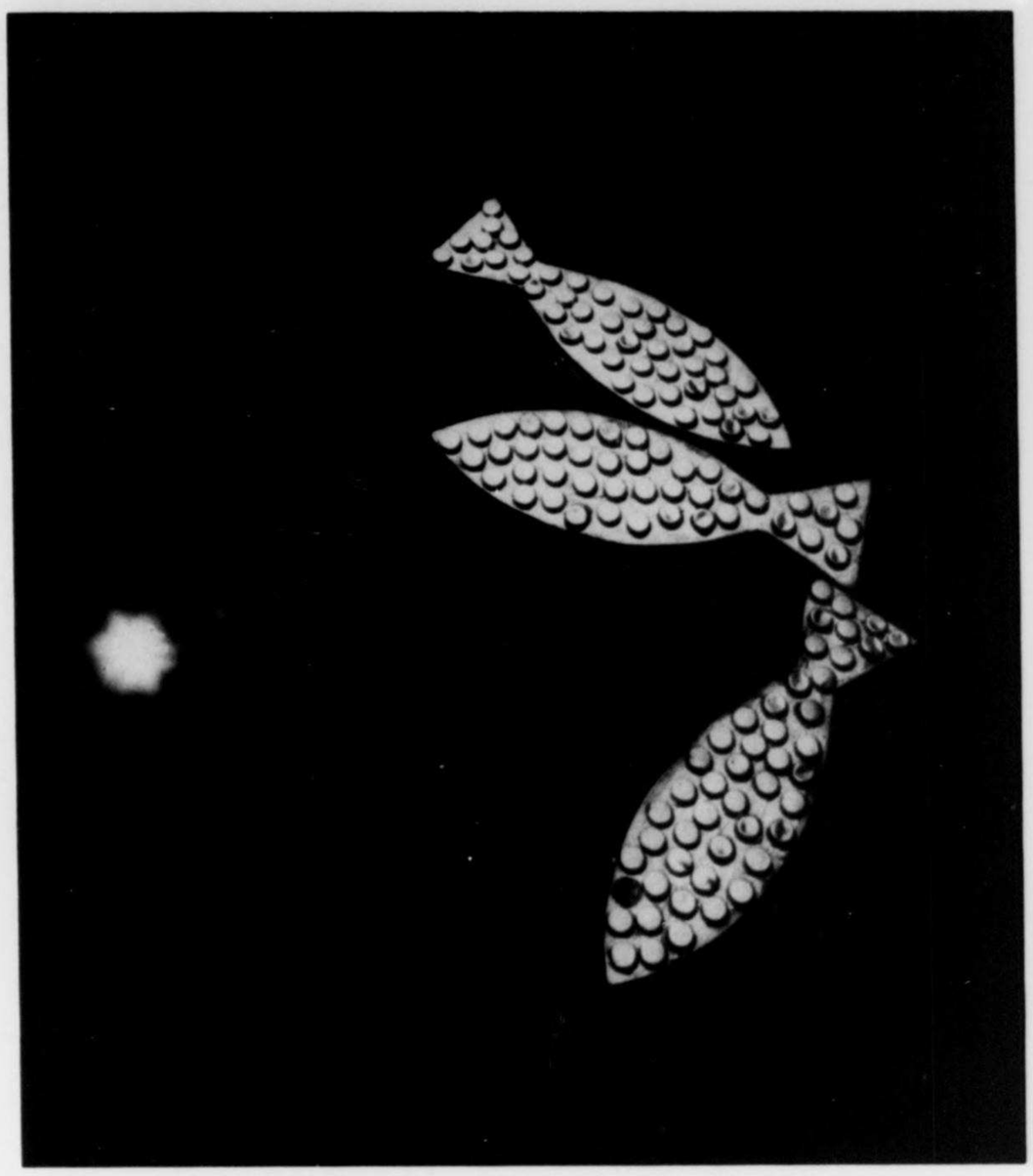
It has been my experience that work of this nature does not easily lend itself to documentation by photographs alone. The work must speak for itself, and only a first-hand experience of the work can be the true one. In this instance, therefore, I will offer but a brief description of my work and try to give some basis for my ideas and the existence of the piece entitled «Cranog.»

The word *cranog* means «small tree» and is used to describe the fortified lake dwellings of the early Irish settlers. This reference, though not necessarily obvious on viewing the work, is of utmost importance. The work is comprised of three main parts: a sectioned walkway submerged 2 inches beneath the surface of the lake, extending 40 feet from the bank; an island 8 feet in diameter, upon which is a small pool full of blue water; and approximately 20 fish shapes floating near the walkway and island. The individual sections of the walkway are separated by a gap of 2 feet, to make progress along them somewhat precarious.

The work signifies a contrast between the new and the very old and a personal struggle with the two—an acceptance of the new and an unwillingness to relinquish the past.

Ronan Halpin





10 Architects

New Work

W. G. Clark

Charleston, South Carolina

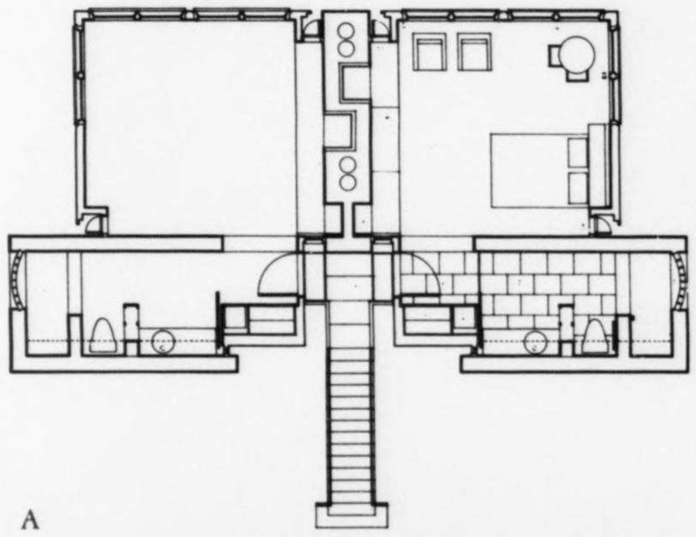
Middletown Inn

Charlestown, South Carolina

W. G. Clark in association with
Charleston Architectural Group
Maynard Ball, assistant
Dian Boone, interior design

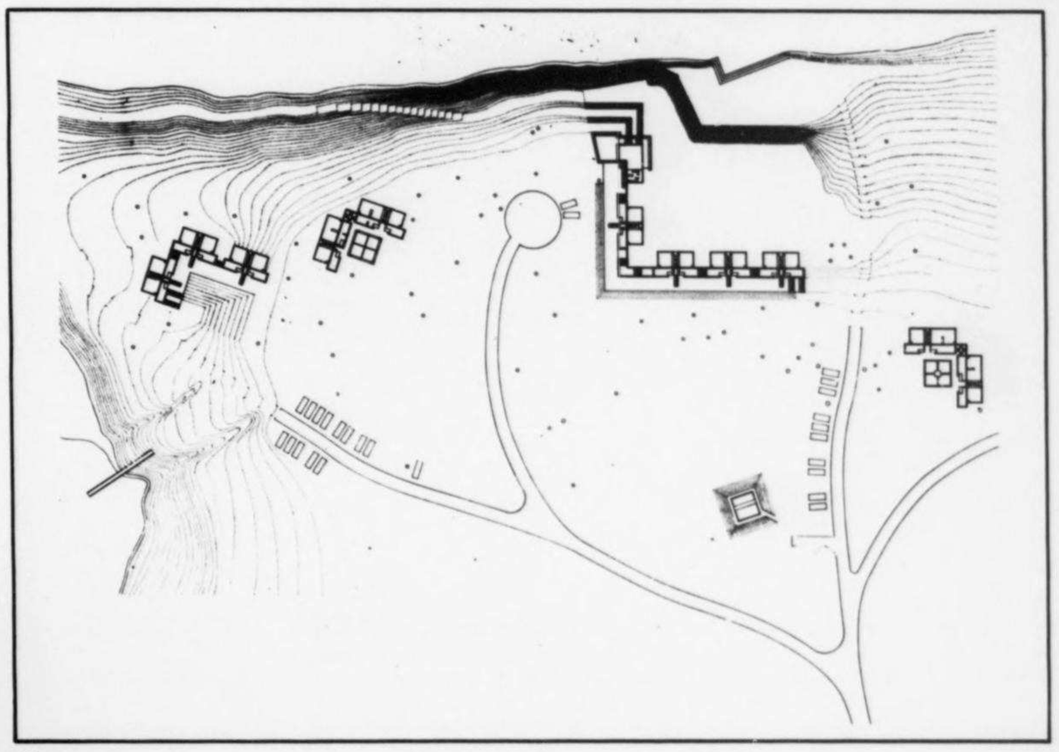
Sited on a wooded bluff overlooking the Ashley River and its marshlands, this project is for an inn at Middletown Place, a National Historic Landmark noted for its gardens. The guestrooms are glass porchlike projections from a masonry wall that contains within its thickness entries and bathrooms. Interior wooden shutters provide privacy. Ivy will cover the masonry.

a
typical unit plan
b
model
c
perspective
d
site plan
e
plan

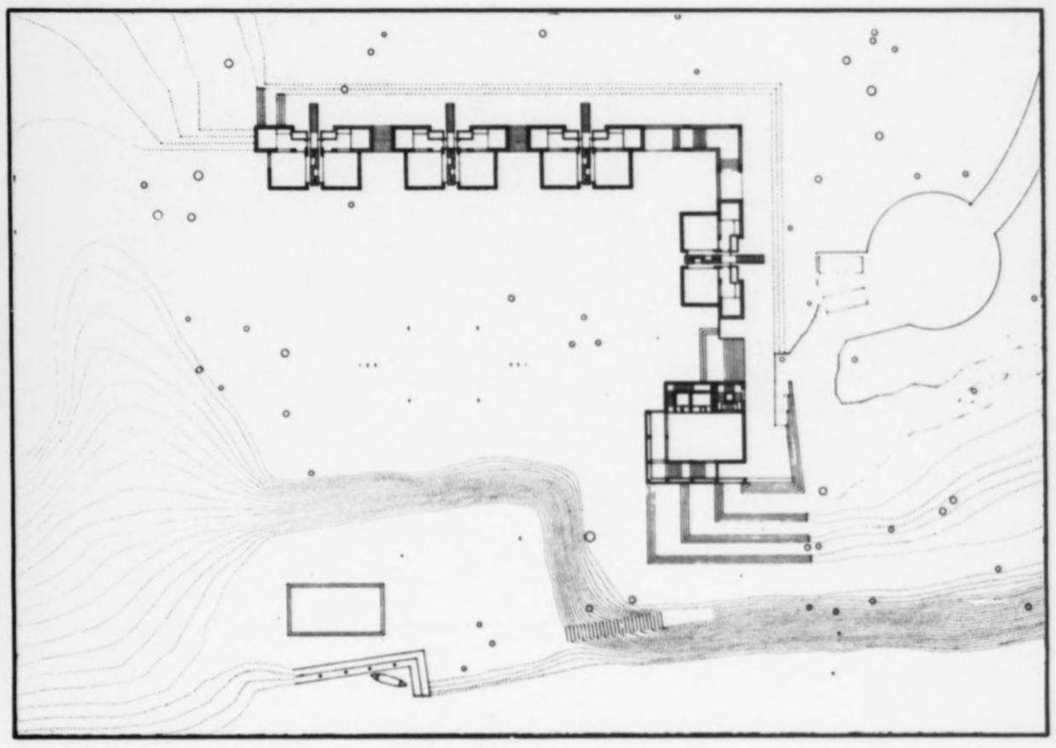


A

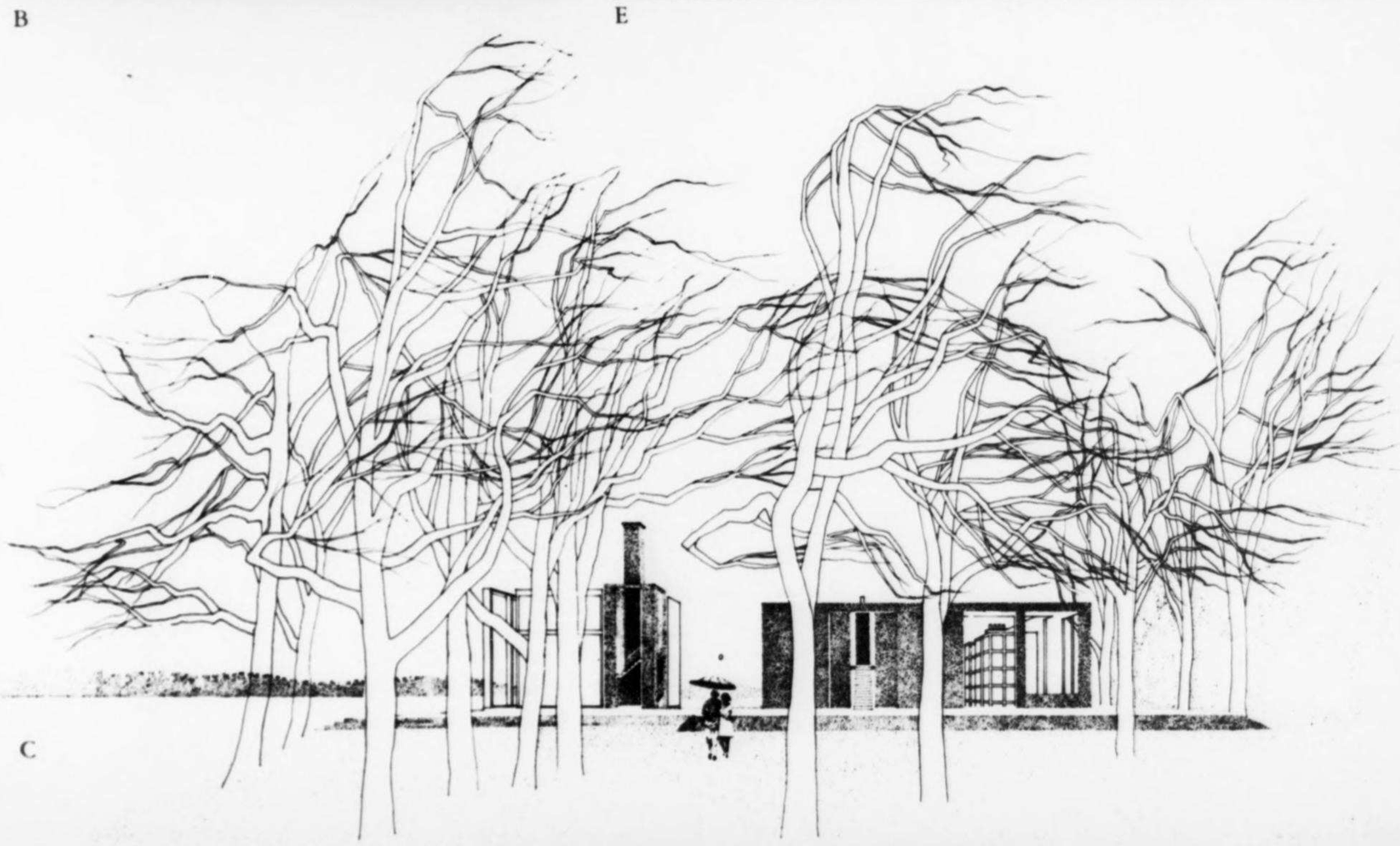
B



D



E



C

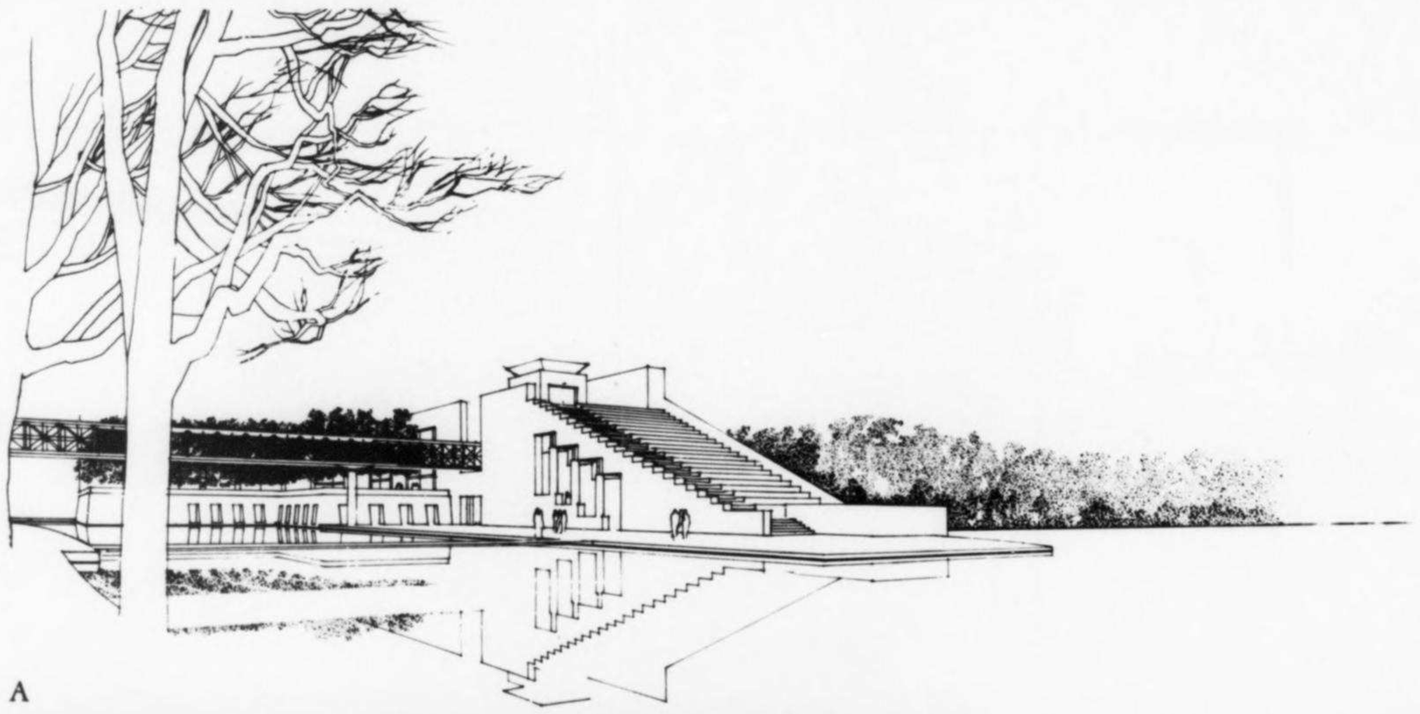
W. G. Clark

Charleston, South Carolina

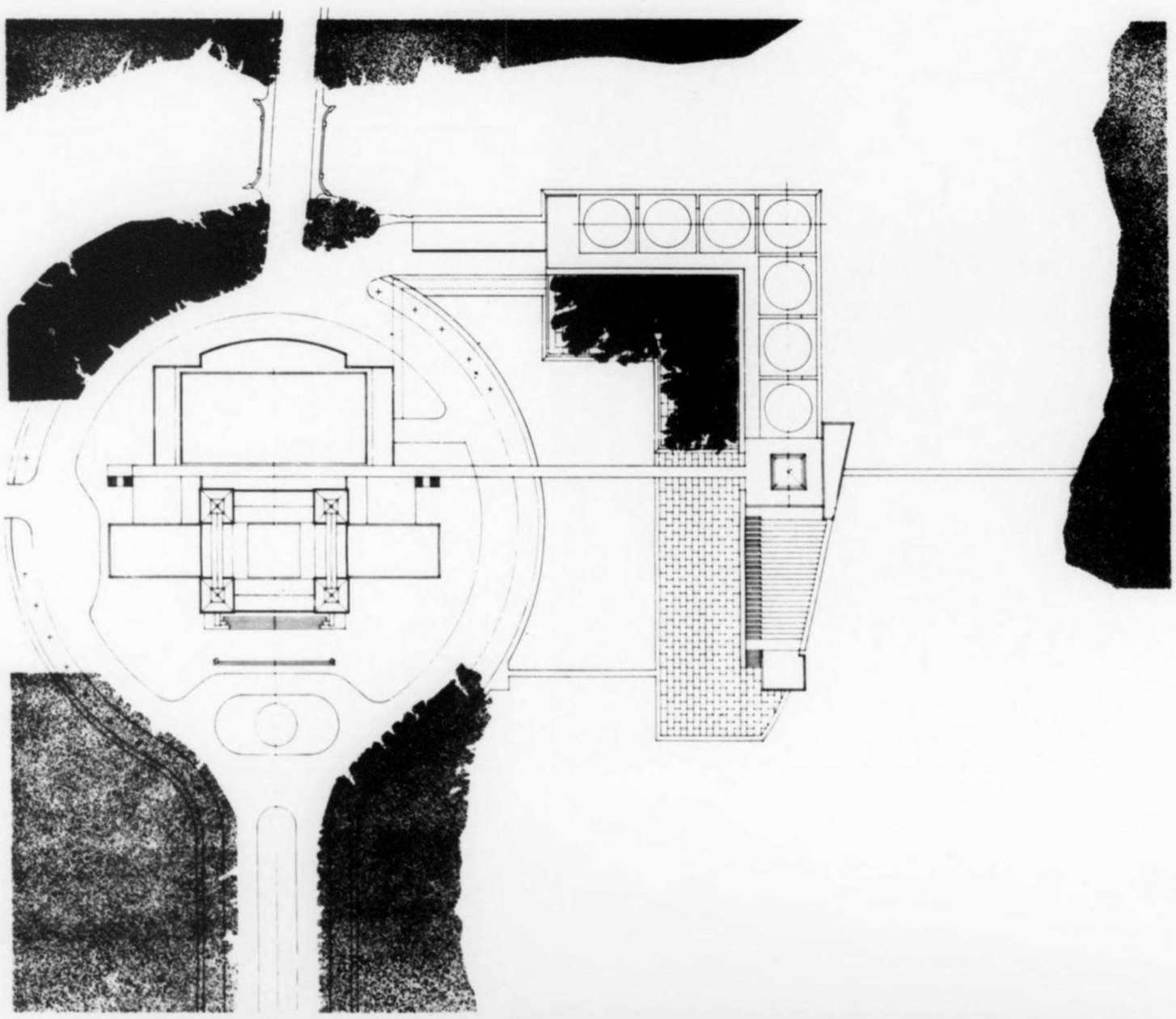
New Orleans Museum of Art

W. G. Clark in association with
Charleston Architectural Group
Frances Humphreys, design associate

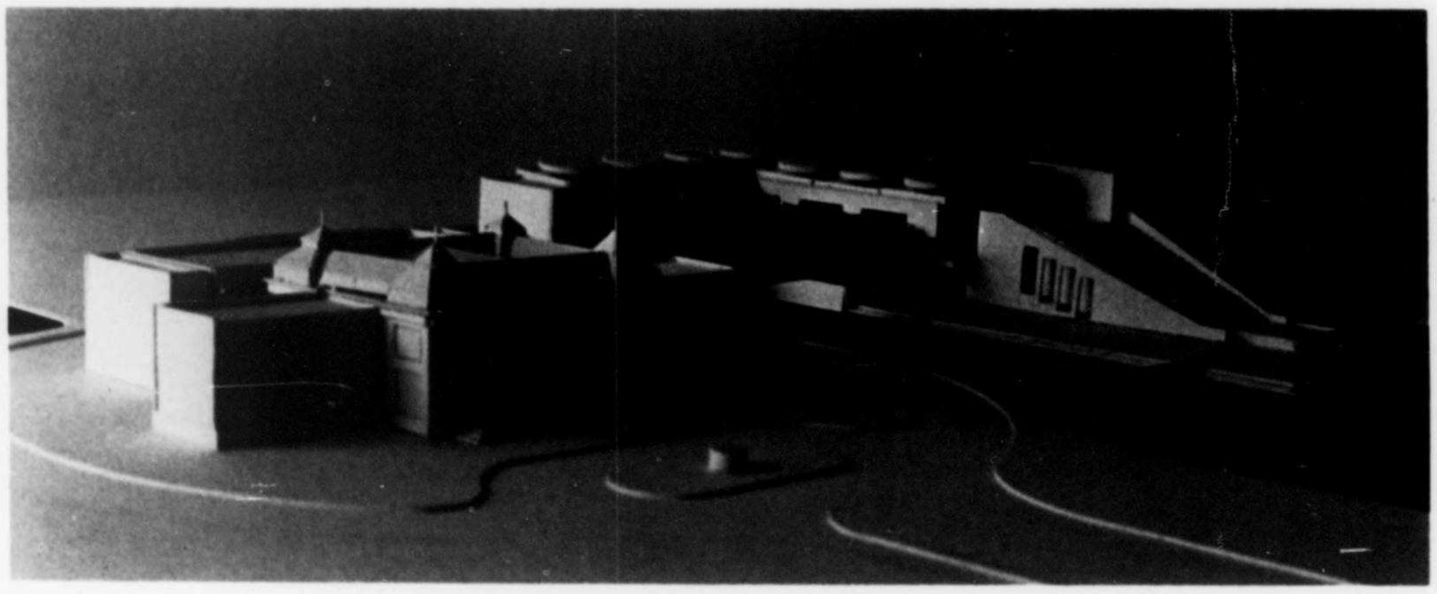
An addition to the existing museum is designed to sit in the lagoon of a large city park. Gallery spaces are allied with a garden, a sculpture court, and a theater, making the building a usable, integrated part of the park landscape.



A



B



C

a
perspective

b
site plan

c
model

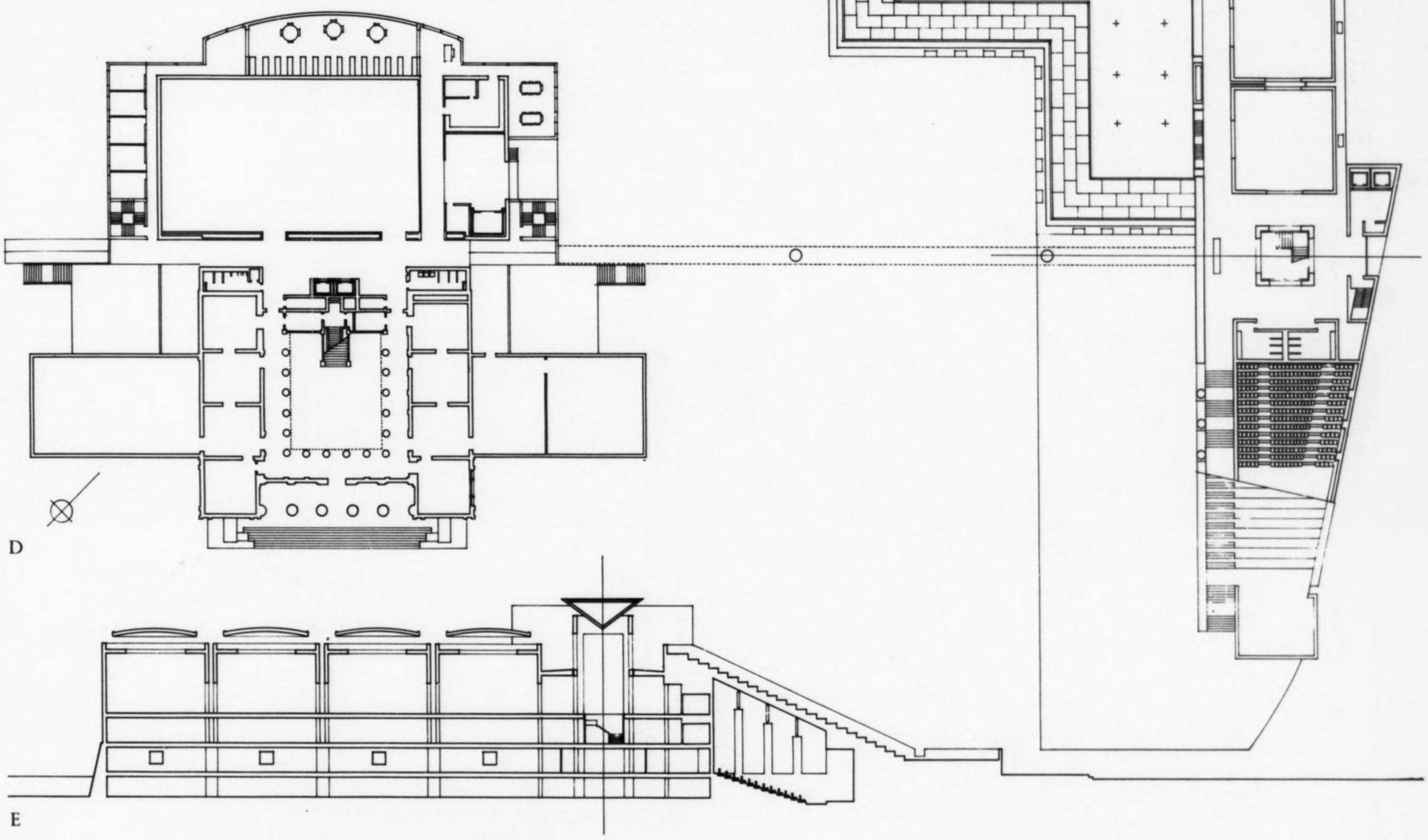
d
first floor plan

e
section

f
south elevation

g
section

h
east elevation



D

E

F

G

H

Robert S. Livesey

CUH2A

Princeton, New Jersey

Nabisco Brands, Inc.

East Hanover, New Jersey

Robert Livesey, director of design
Kurt Anderson, principal in charge
Michael Landau, project designer
Richard Henry, project manager
with Ron Cox, Guy Geier, Jeffrey Hill, John Reagan, Paul Reiss, Mark Schlenker, John Scott, Ed Starke, Robert Thrun

This laboratory and research building is juxtaposed against an existing corporate headquarters building on the site of a former golfcourse. The wings radiate in a pinwheel around a 4-story rotunda, to maximize daylight within, to provide views down the old fairways, and to allow for future expansion. The building is entered at separate levels, either from the front lawn or from the parking lot. The laboratories are planned with circulation and utility shafts along one side and work stations along the other; the elevations reflect this difference in material and fenestration.

a
main level plan–
visitor entry

b
lower level plan–
staff entry

c
site plan

d
typical lab elevation
typical lab plan

e
model

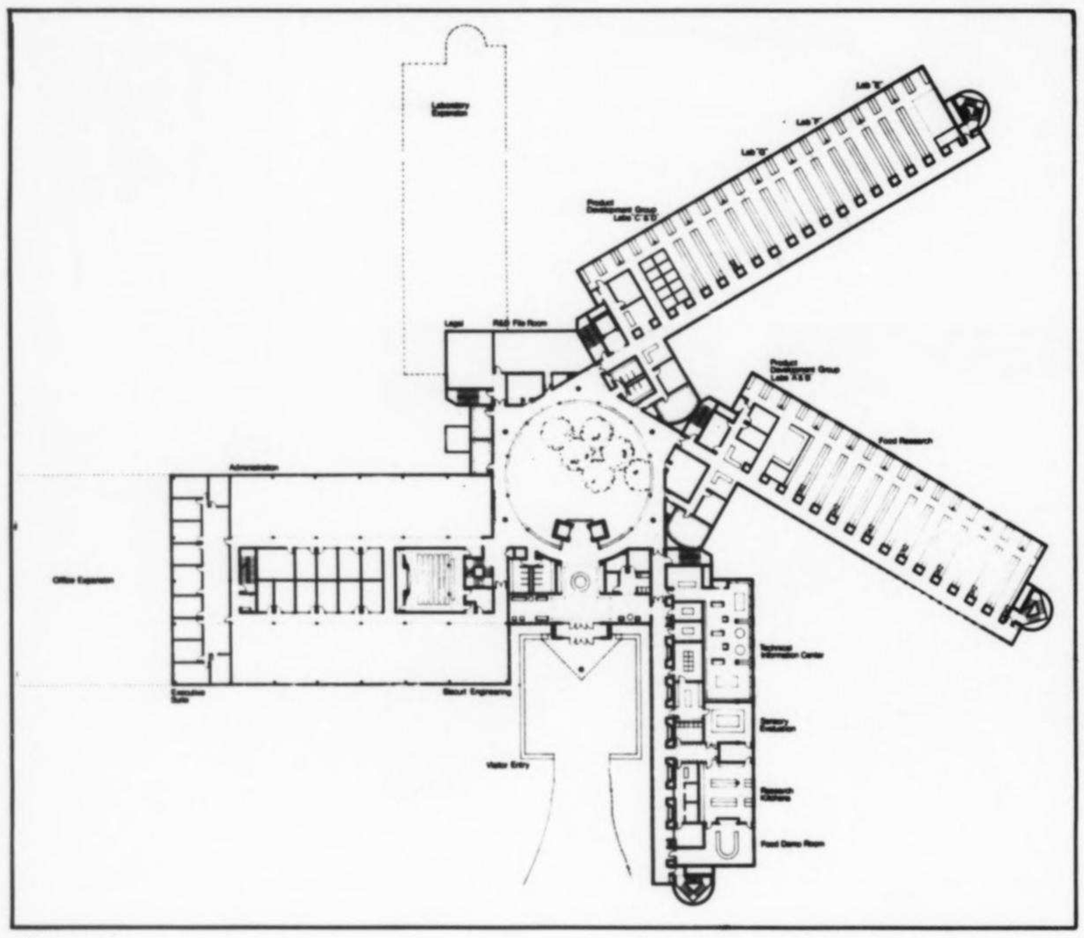
f
perspective

g
south elevation

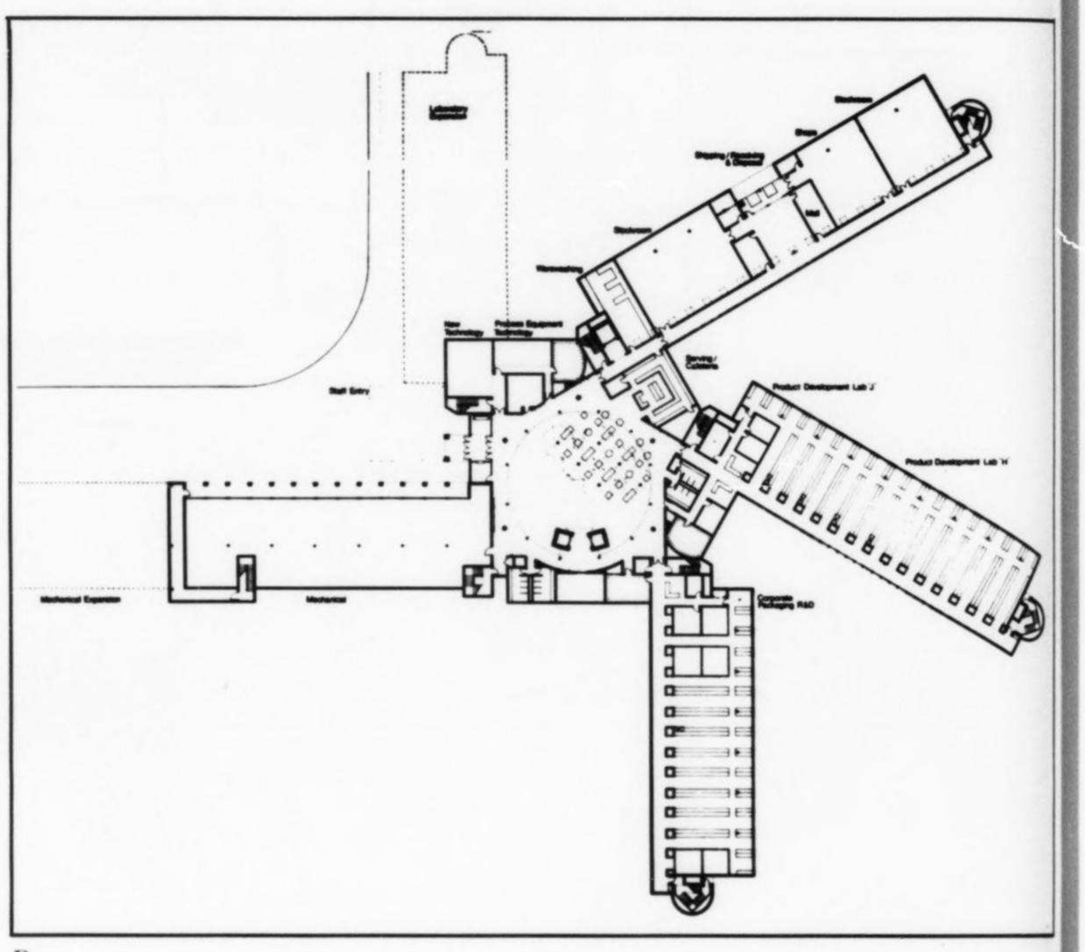
h
north elevation–
section through court

i
west elevation
section through entry

j
west elevation–
section through
administration area



A



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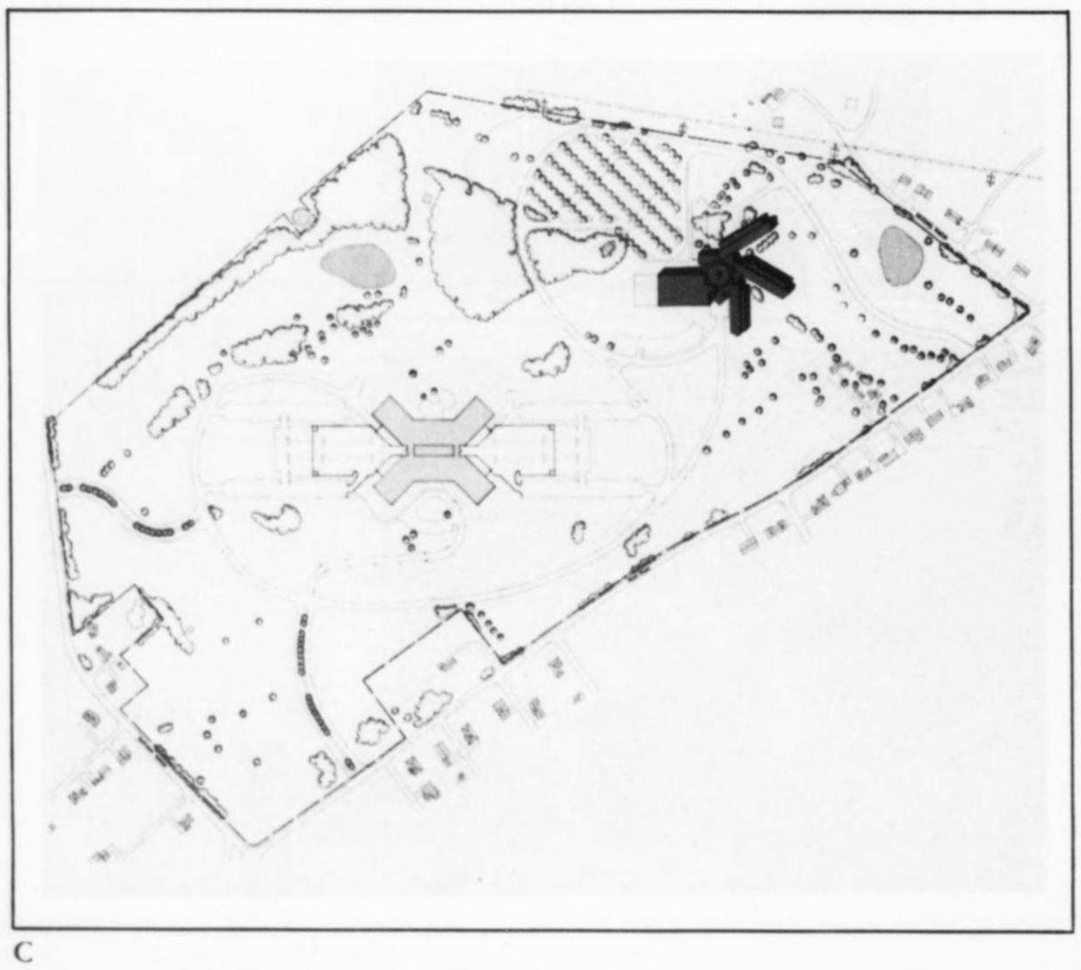
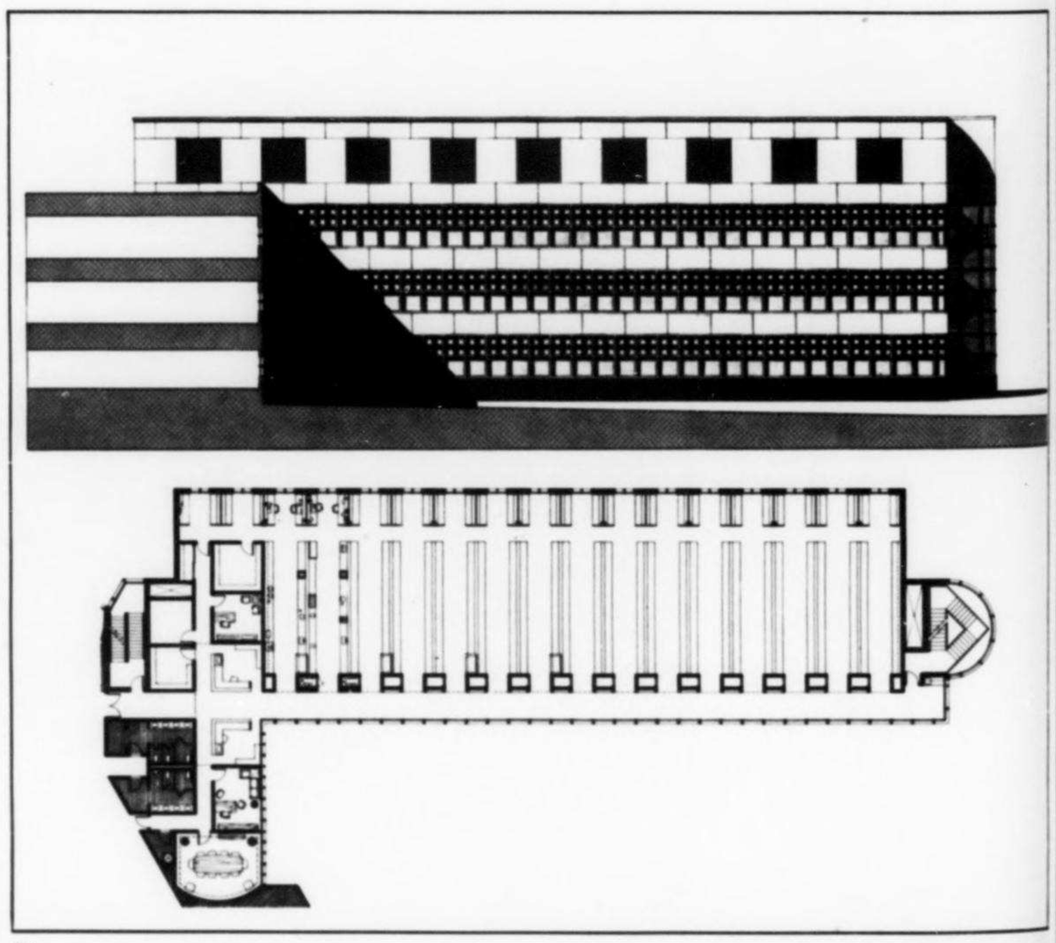


C



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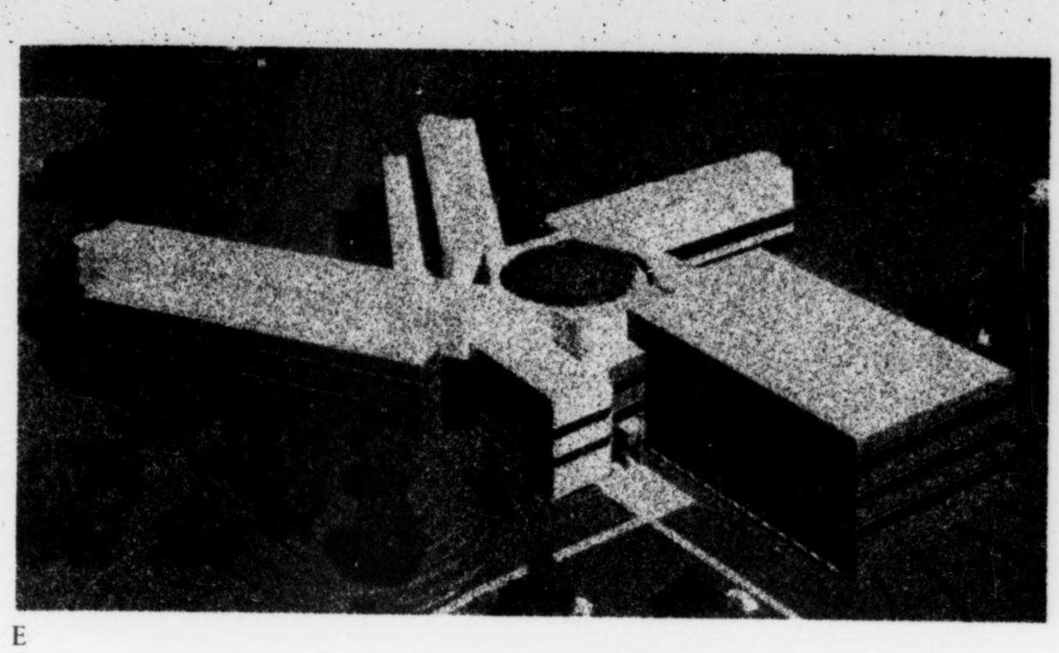

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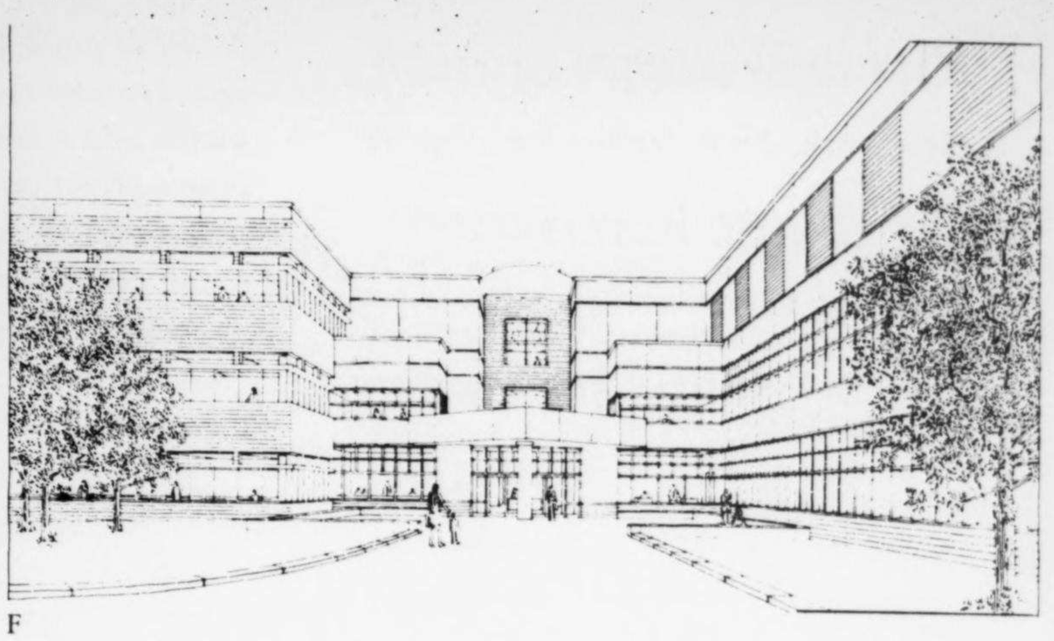

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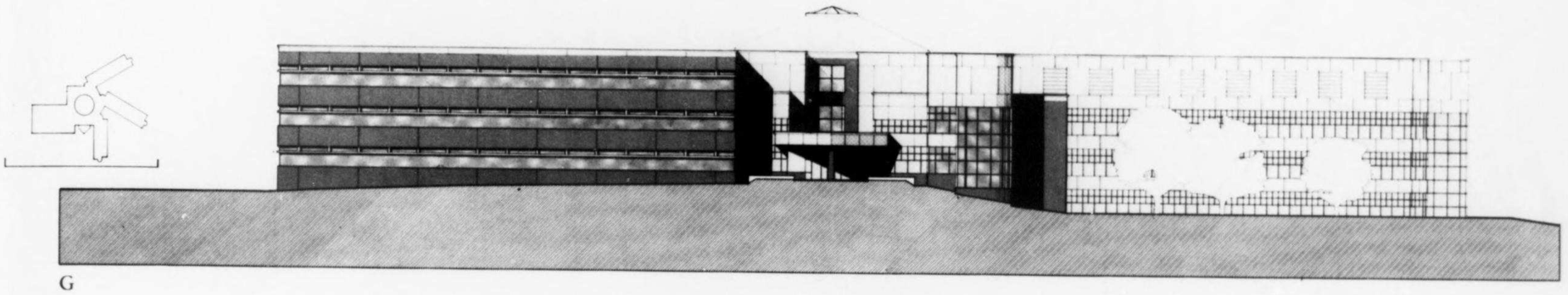

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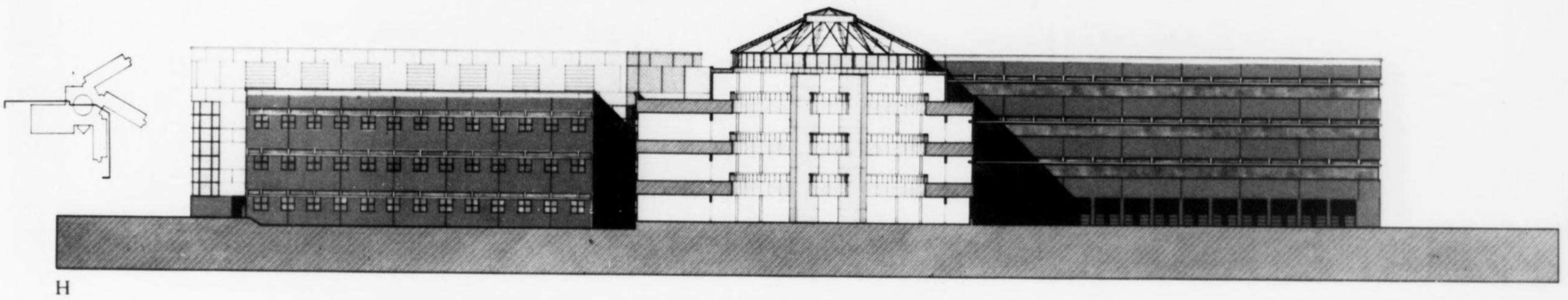

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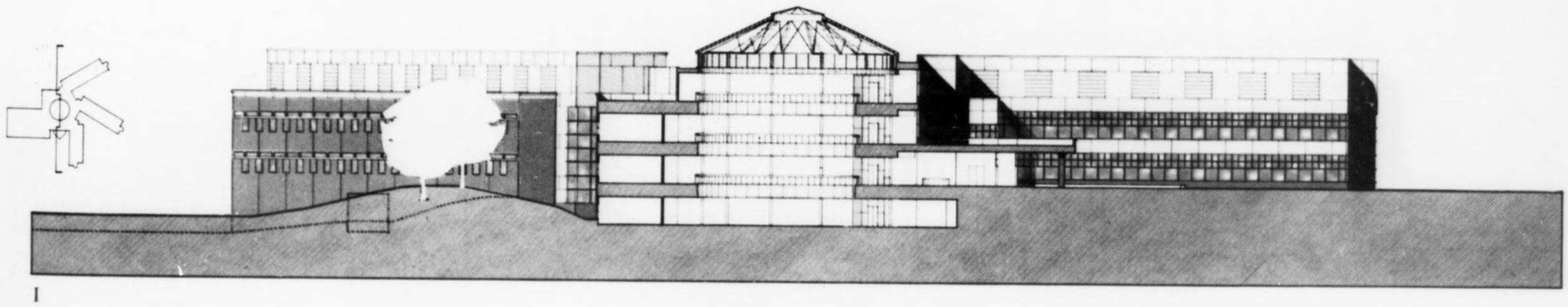

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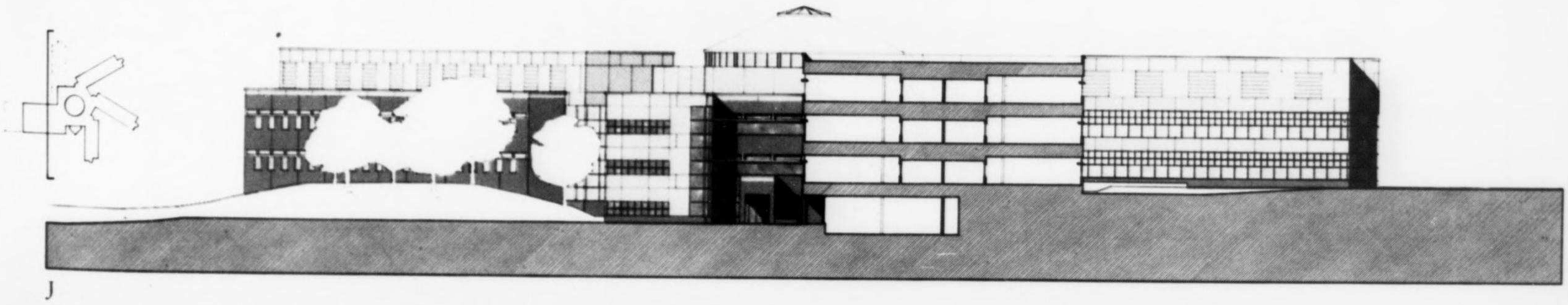


J

Rivkin/Weisman

New York, New York

Penthouse Renovation

New York City

William G. Rivkin, Steven A. Lesser, Phillipe Dordai, Helen Lee

A rooftop penthouse wih terraces is altered and expanded to accommodate two new studies and additional terrace space. A new double-height entry volume is intersected by the circulation gallery and provides a focus for an extensive art collection.

a
axonometric

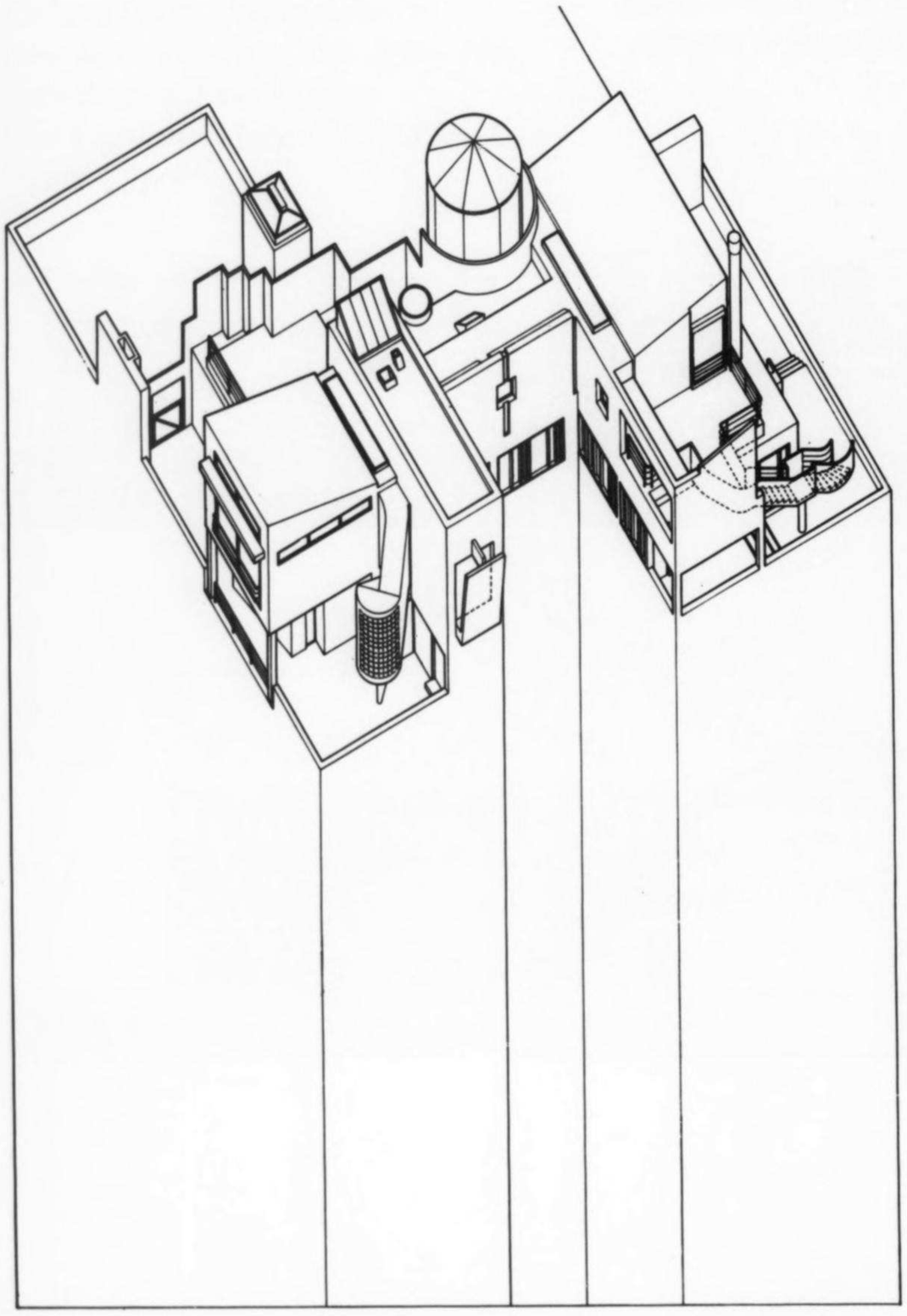
b
perspective

c
first floor plan

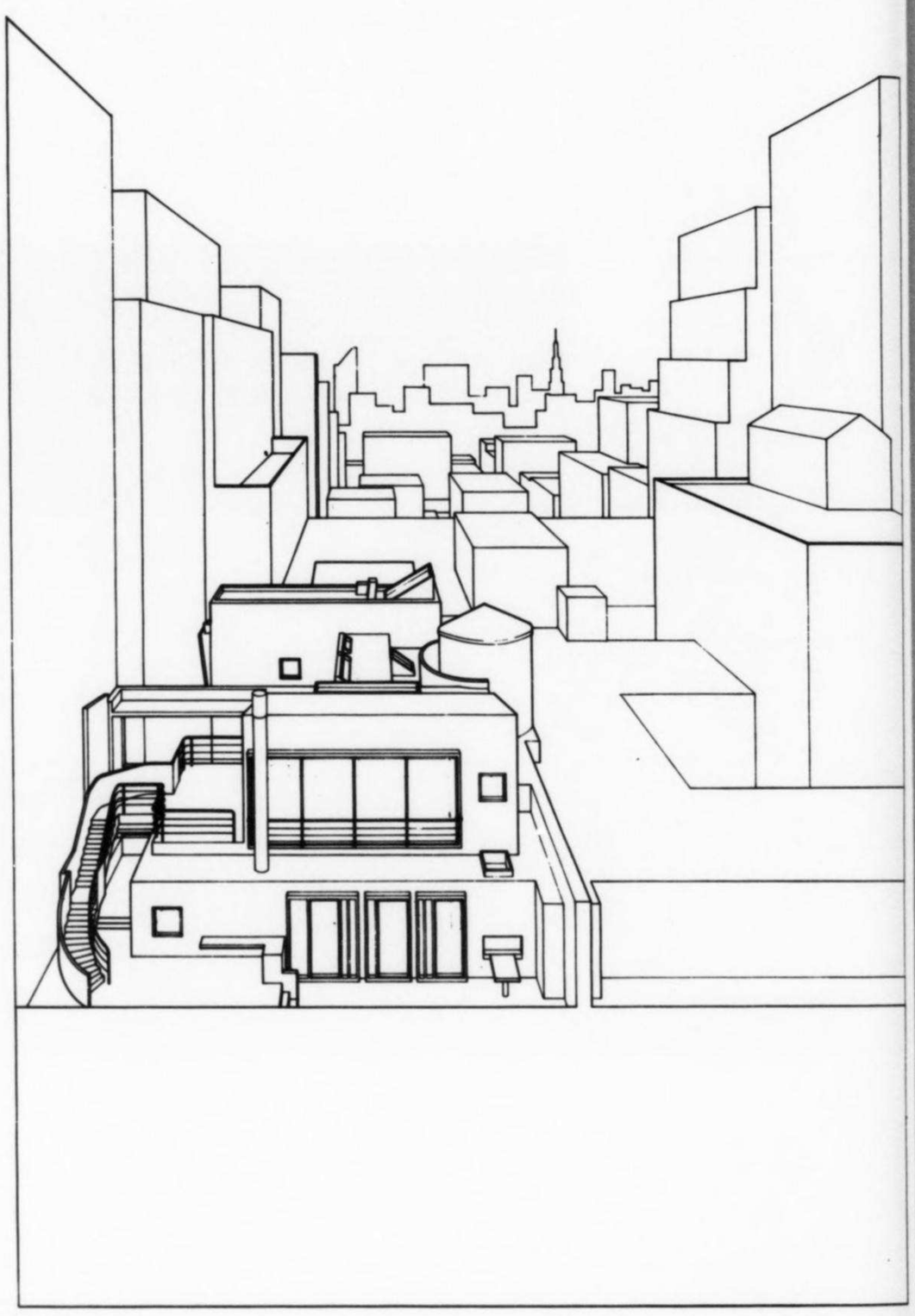
d
elevation

e
perspective

f
second floor plan



A



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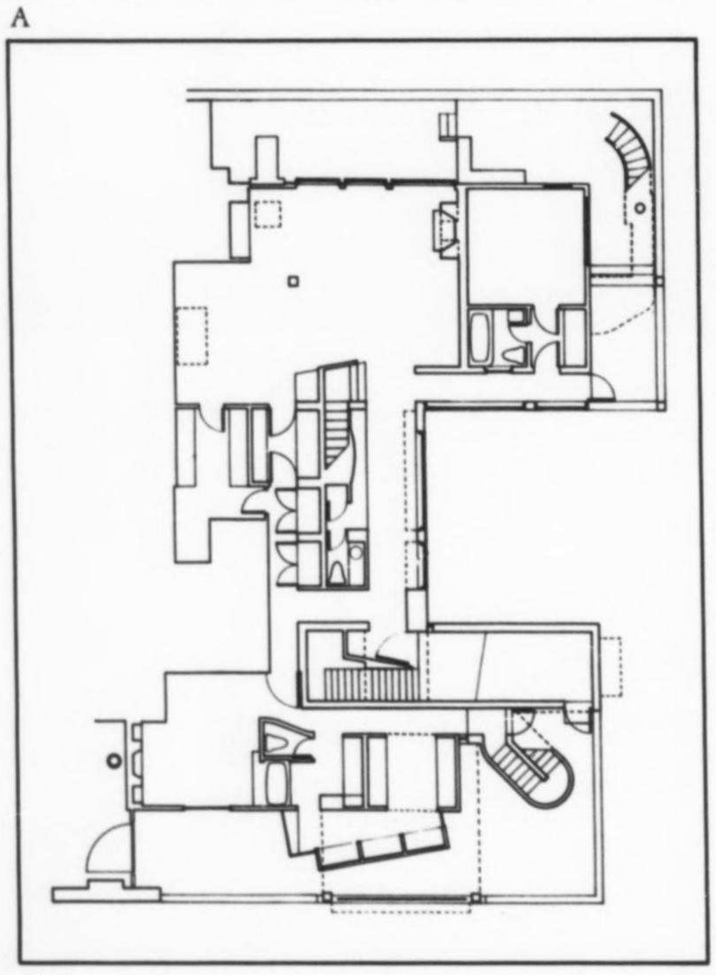

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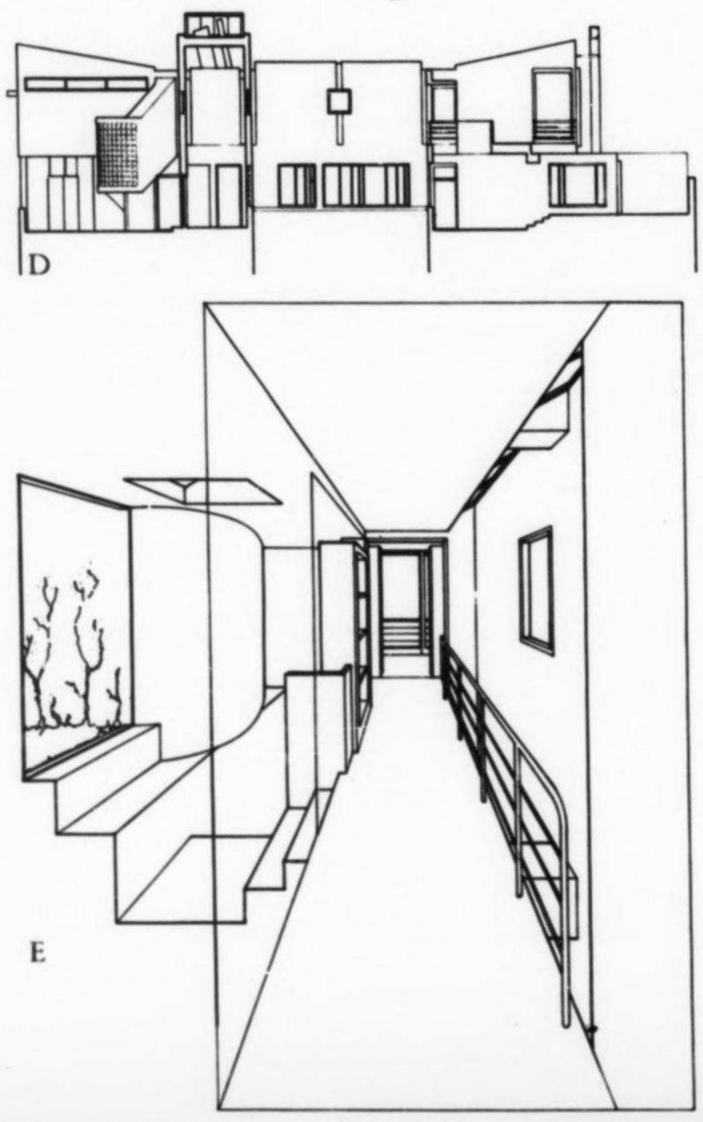
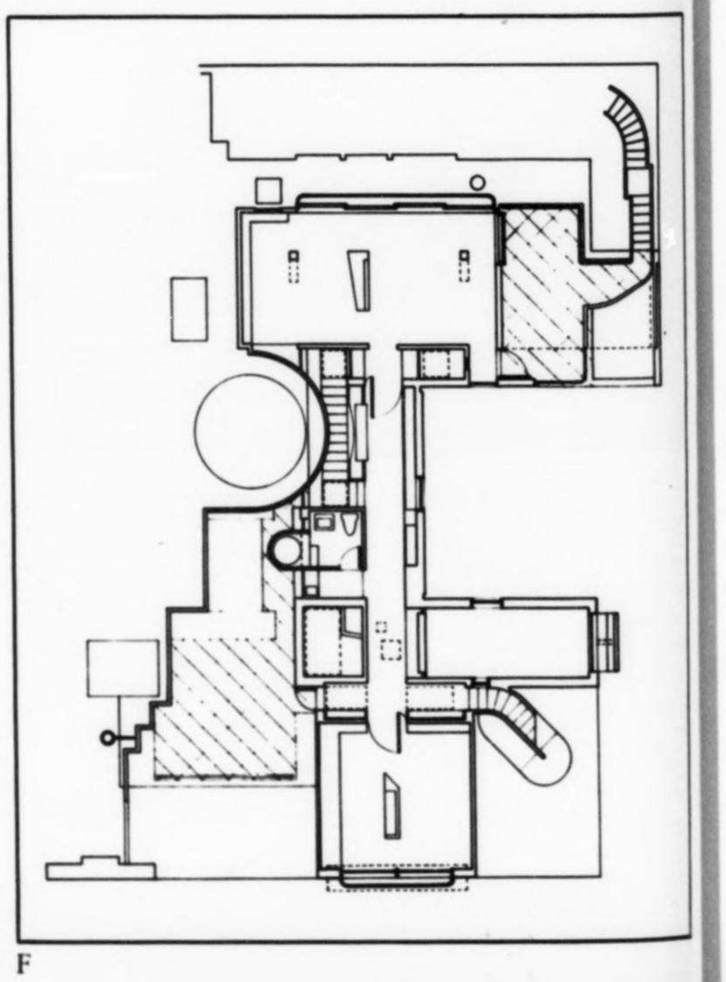


D E



F

Henry Smith-Miller

New York, New York

Vidol Loft

New York City

Henry Smith-Miller, Miles Cigolle, Nana Henry

This studio for a photographer is an architectural apparatus, an aperture of passage and observation developed from the idea of a camera obscura.

axonometric

Marino Apartment

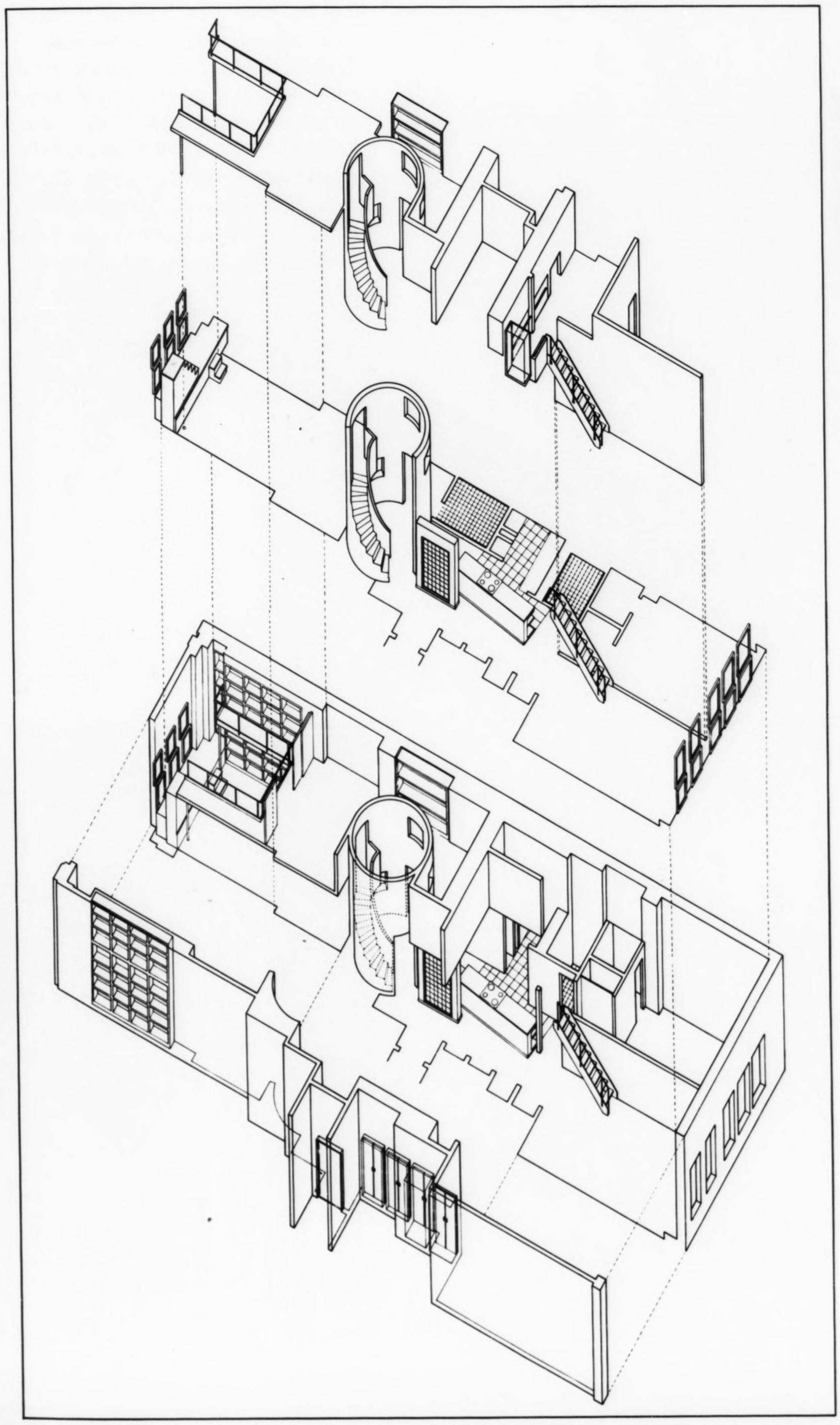
New York City

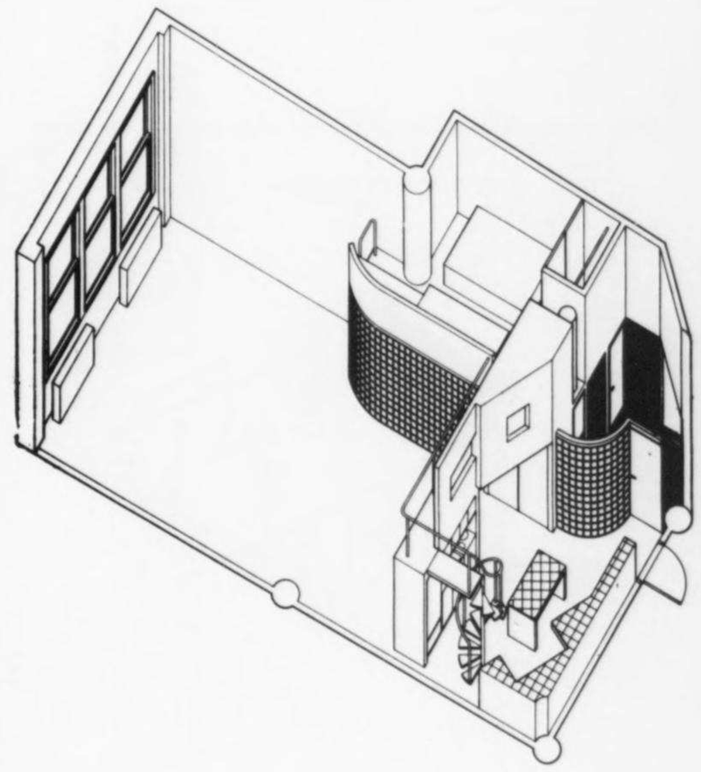
Henry Smith-Miller, Steven Theodore, Anna K. Thorsdottir

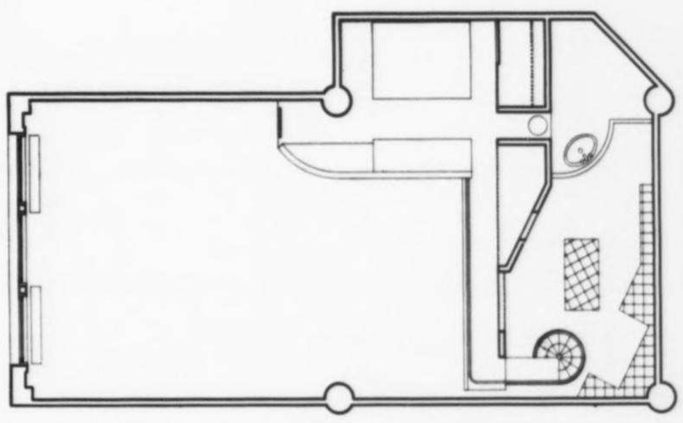
In this renovation two apartments are combined into one. Precise formal figures are arranged according to sight lines within the given perimeter.

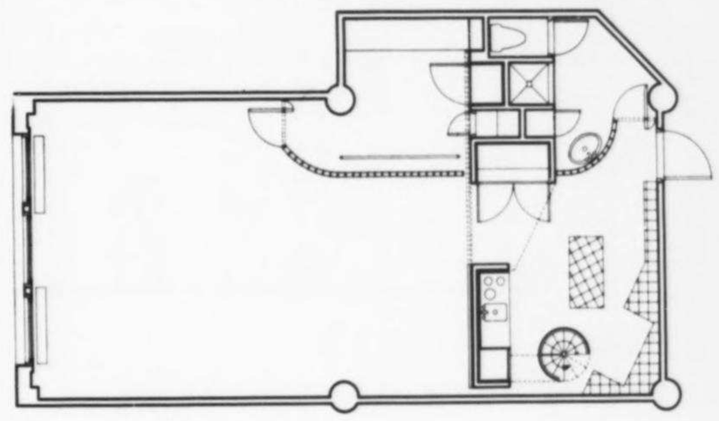
axonometric

plans









Jon Michael Schwarting

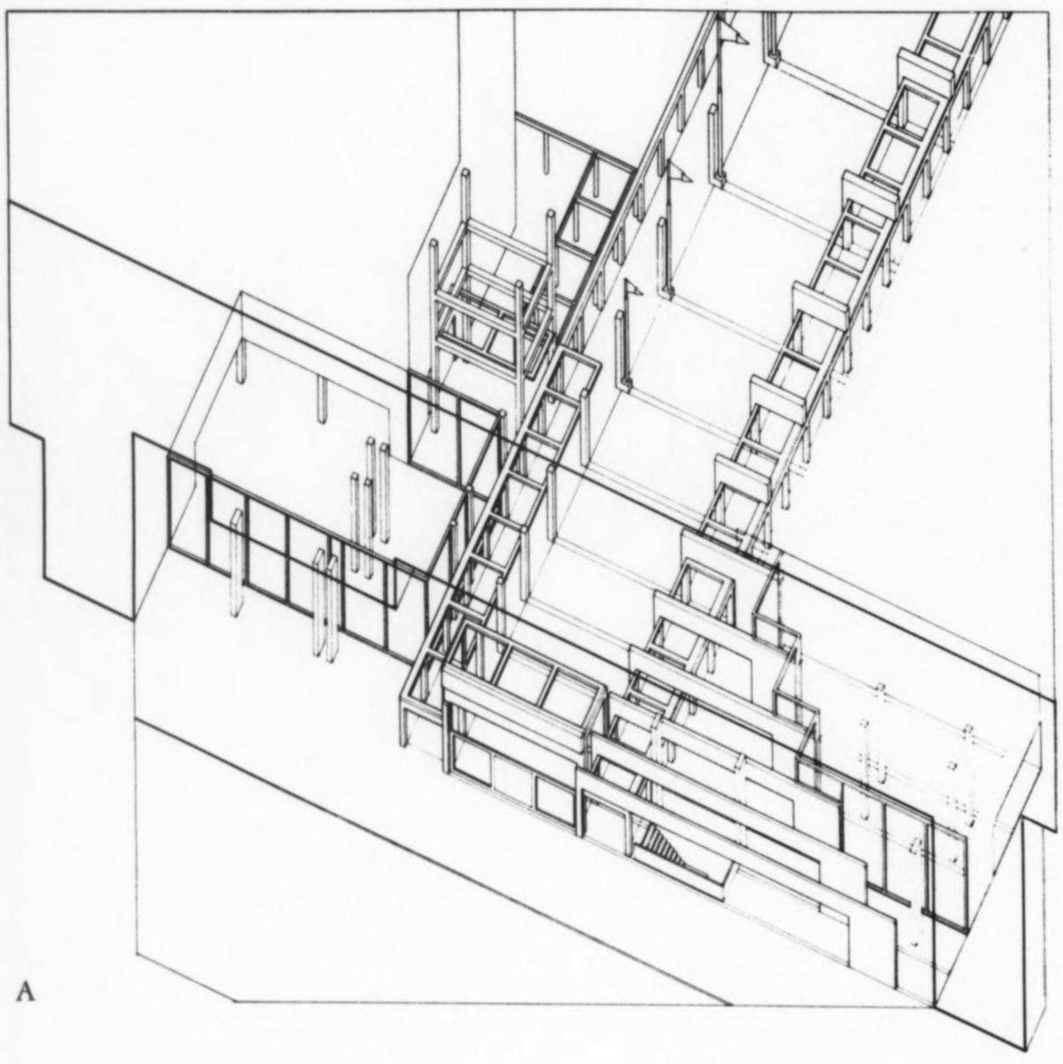
Piero Sartogo

New York, New York

Fashion Institute of Technology

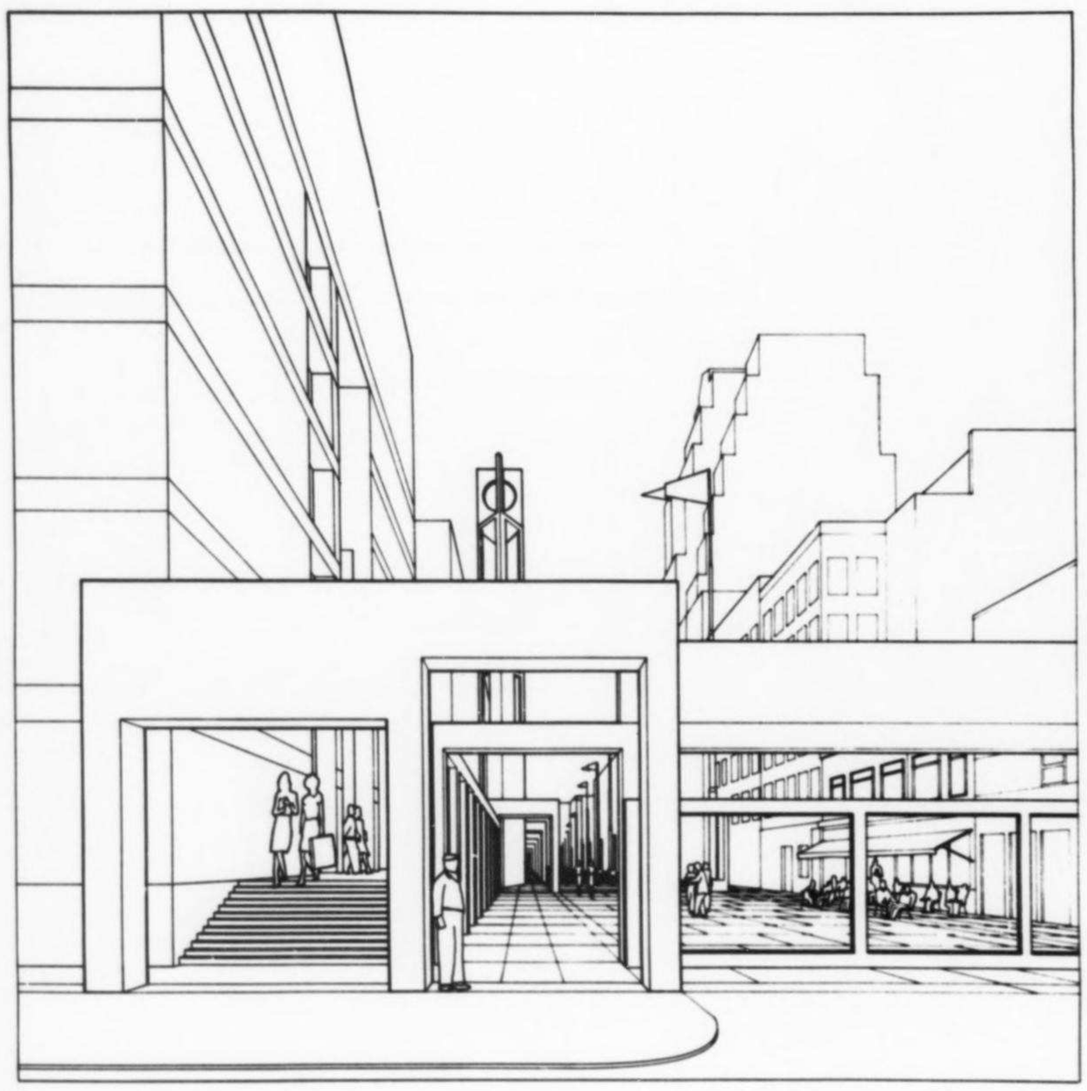
Andrea Brown, project manager
Jack Cain, project architect

The Fashion Institute of Technology—a college for studies in the textile and apparel trades—is located in a diverse group of buildings along Twenty-seventh Street, in the garment district of New York. This proposal to unify the various buildings and irregular spaces attempts to give strong identity to the urban campus and to provide well-defined public spaces in a congested area. A simple and comprehensive order is established by means of strategic architectural insertions.



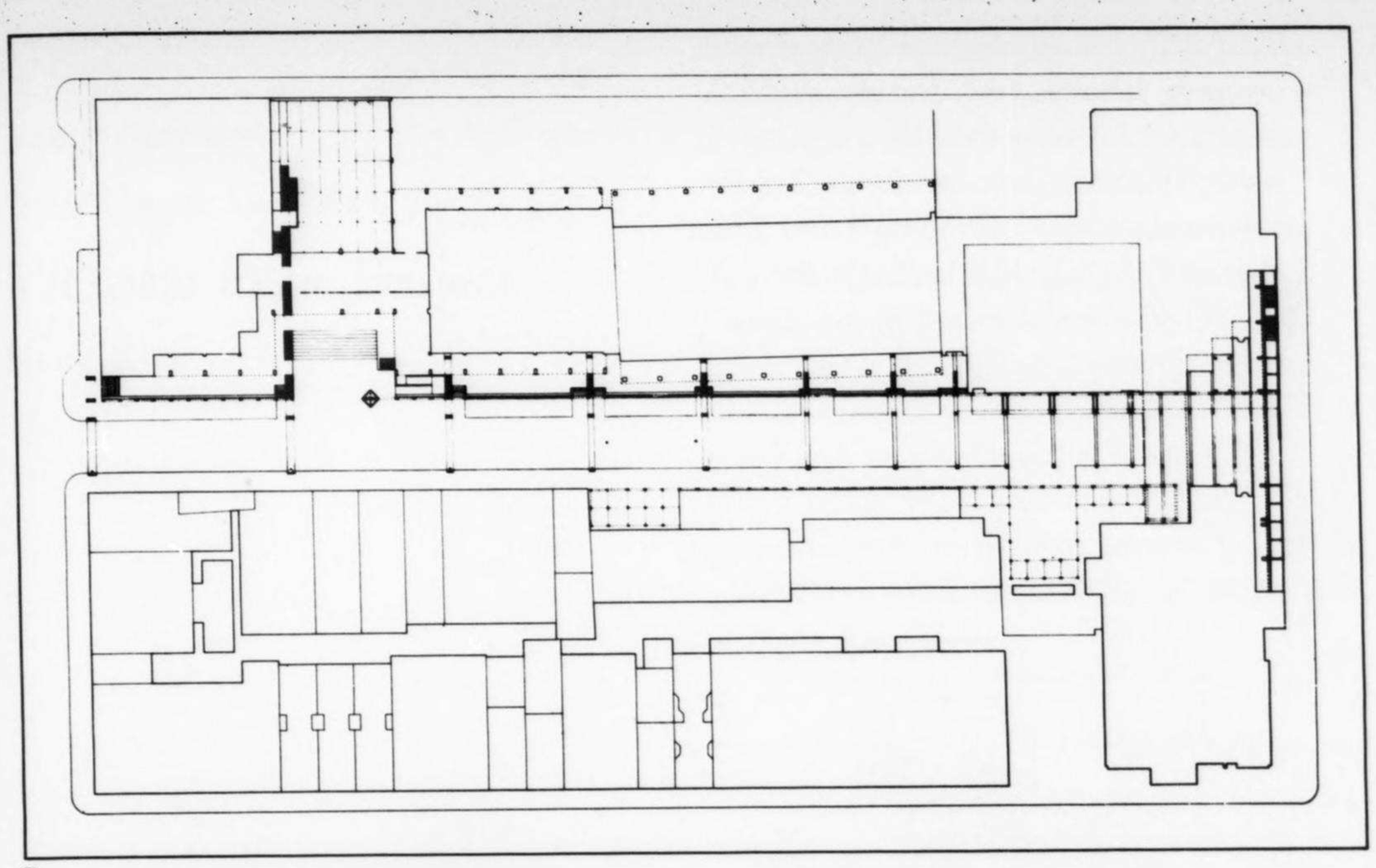
A

The new street space is entered through gates; along its length are colonnades, flagpoles, and crosswalls, all organized according to a rhythmic interval related to the columns and windows of the flanking buildings. This rhythm emphasizes the perspectival quality of the street. The central space is juxtaposed with more complex lateral spaces between the incidental building edges and the new colonnades, which are covered by awnings. The colonnade is interrupted by a tower element, marking the entrance to a raised plaza.

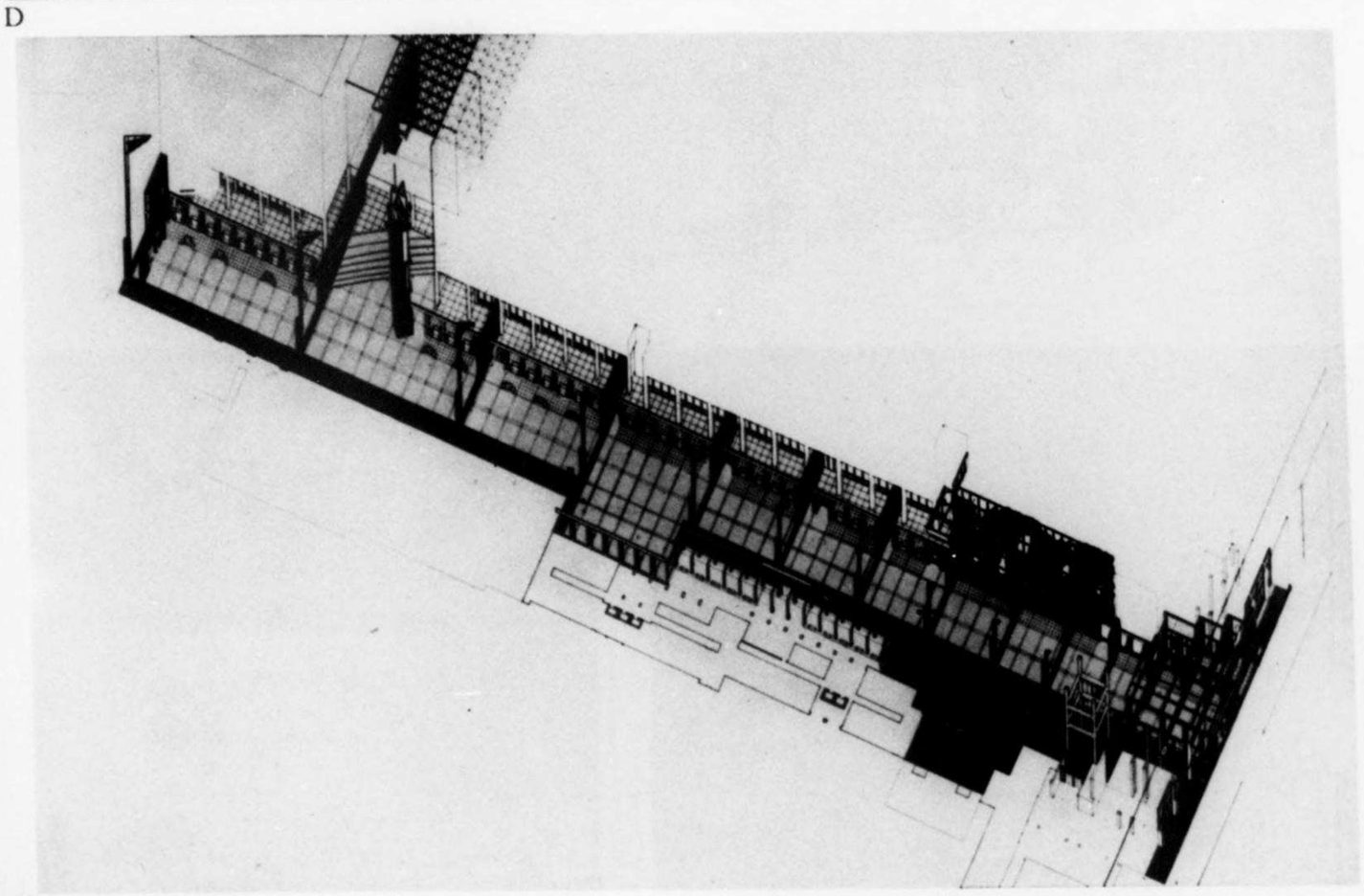


B

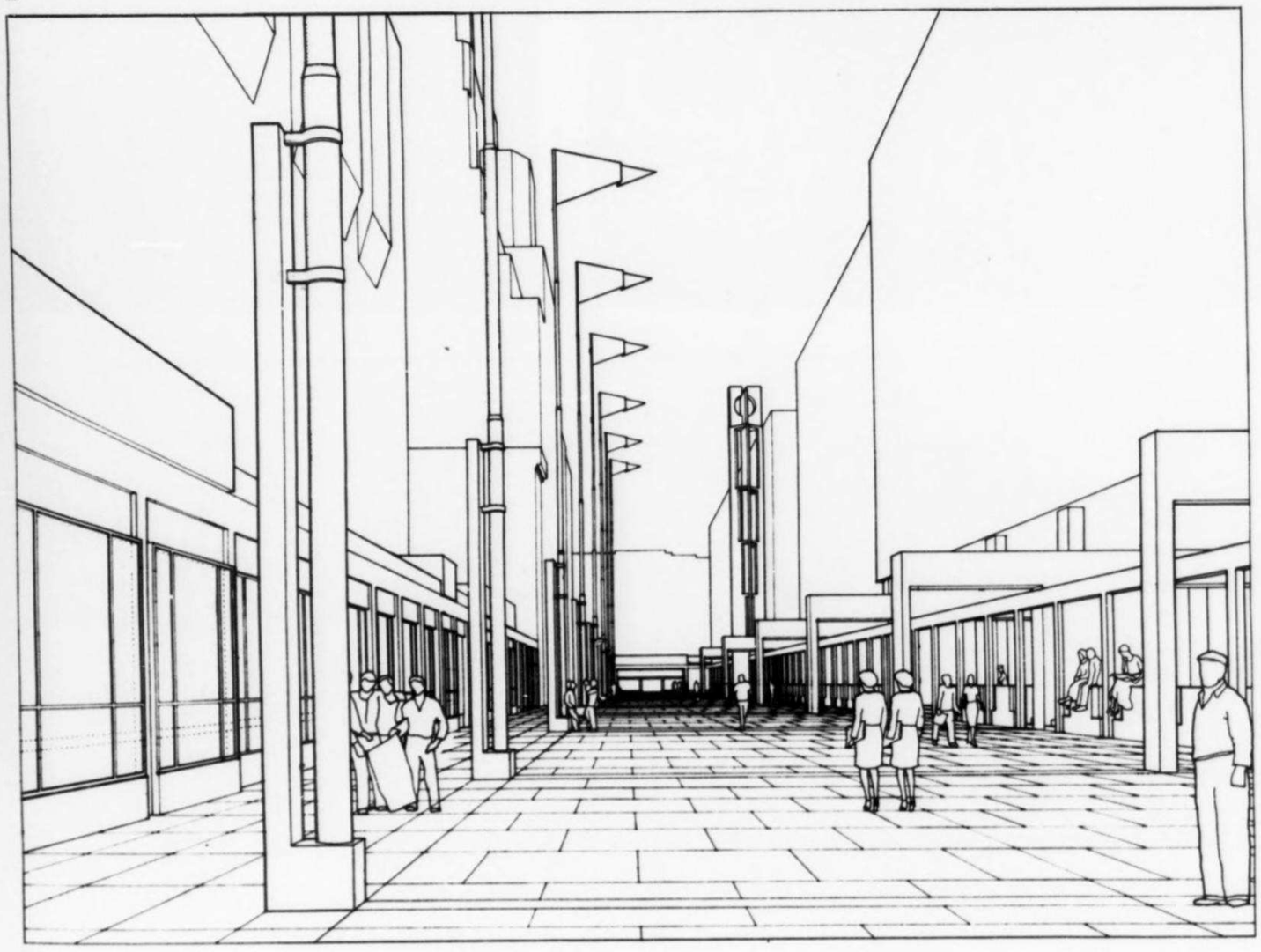
C



D

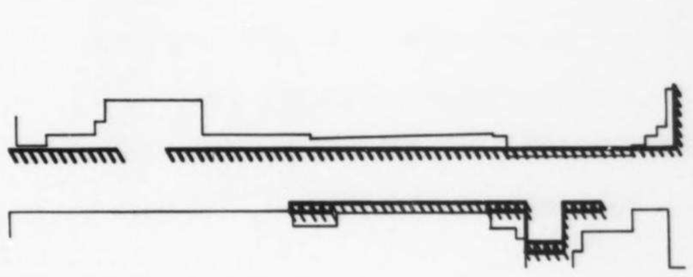


E

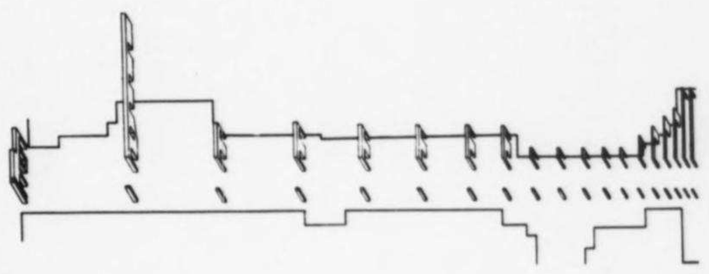


F

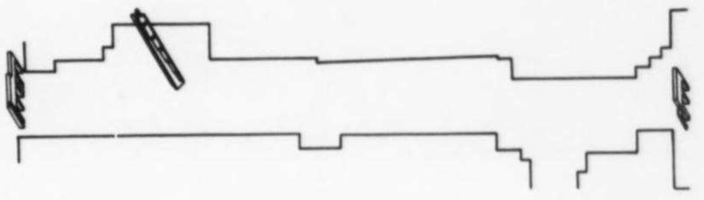
a
axonometric of
entrance on
7th avenue



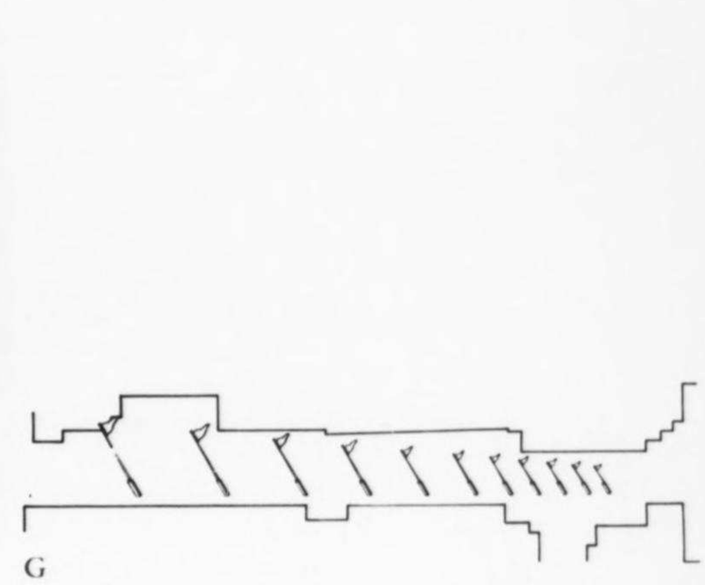
b
view east at 8th avenue



c
view east
toward 7th avenue



d
ground floor plan



G

e
axonometric

f
view west
toward 8th avenue

g
design elements:
arcade system
crosswalls
gates and tower
flagpoles

Dagit-Saylor Architects

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Lourdes Library Addition

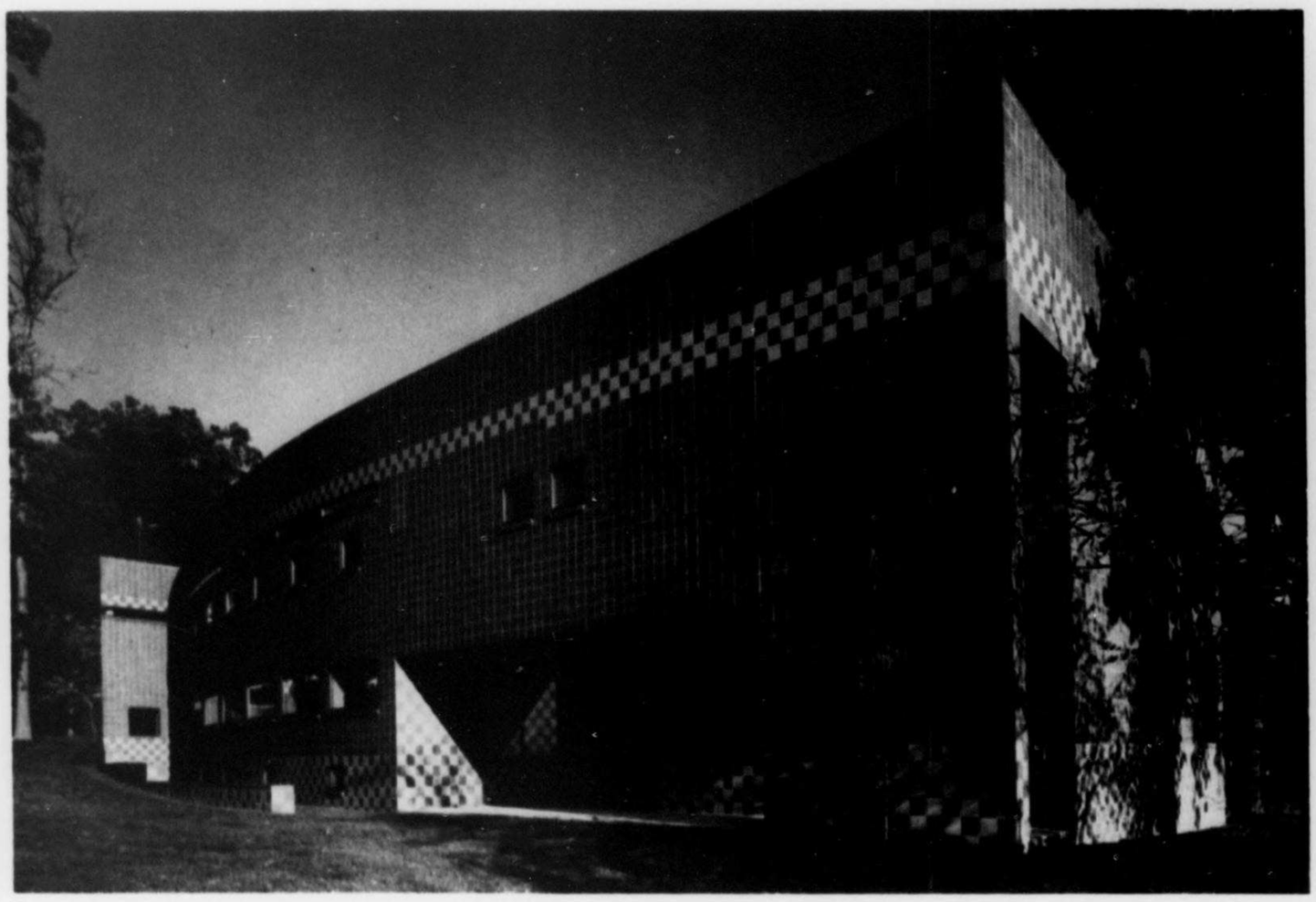
Gwynedd Mercy College

Charles E. Dagit, Jr., partner in charge
Daniel J. Freeman, project architect
Gianne P. Conard, Frederick Wiebelhaus, Timothy Lisle

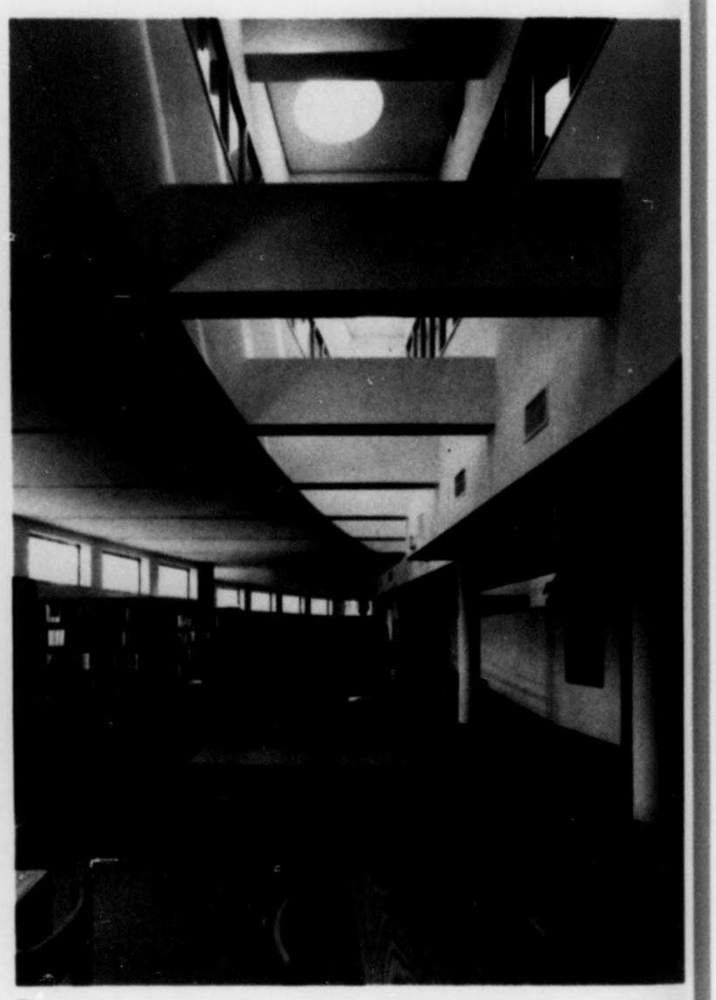
This addition interlocks with the existing one-story library, providing new facilities and spatial continuity within a given order. Reading alcoves and study carrels surround the new reading room and follow the curve of the facade, which is finished in tile colored to relate to adjacent campus buildings.

a
site plan
b
exterior view
c
interior view
d
ground floor plan
e
second floor plan

A



B



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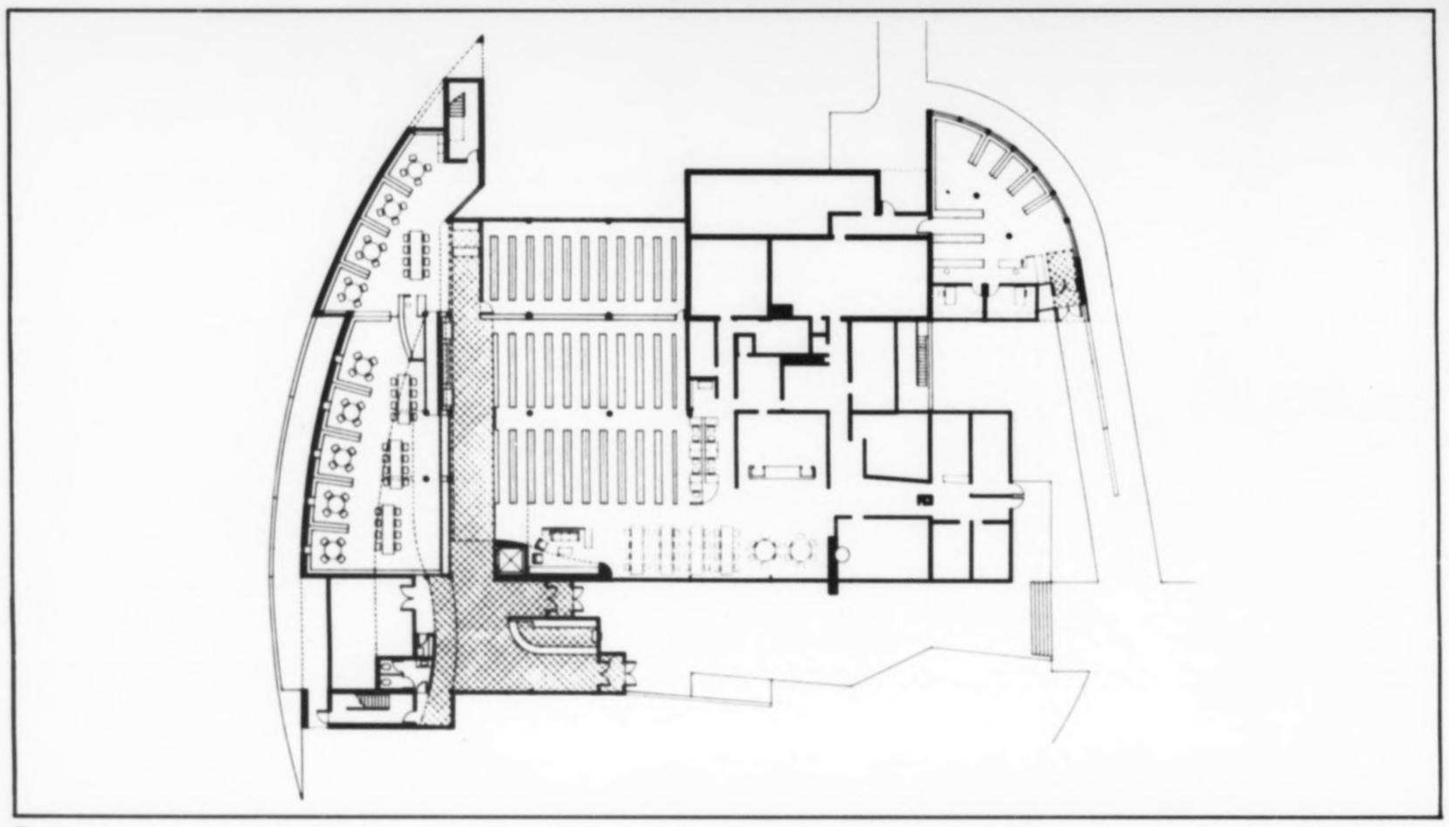
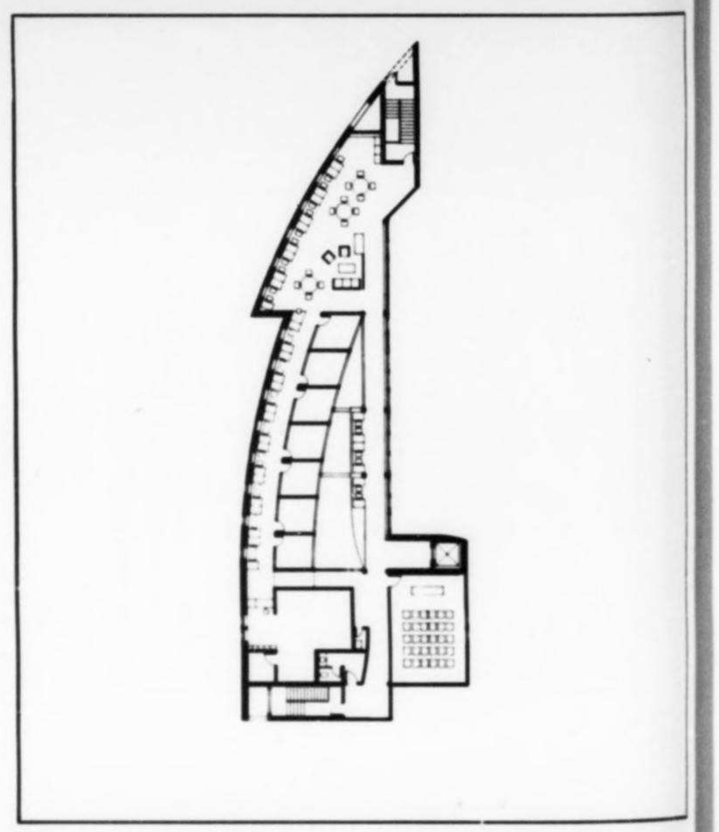


D



E

UKZ

Ithaca, New York

Simon Ungers, Lazlo Kiss, Tod Zwigard

Victoria Peak Project

Hong Kong

This project for a business executives' retreat on Mount Austin is intended as an event on an otherwise natural hillside. Visible from Hong Kong harbor, it is a series of spaces built into the hill and provides views of the Kowloon Peninsula. Although the project is proposed as an indivisible whole, the variations of height and contour imply that it is a fragment of some greater structure. It is left open to interpretation whether the larger whole recalls history or is purely speculative; the project both alludes to past growth and anticipates the future prosperity of Hong Kong.

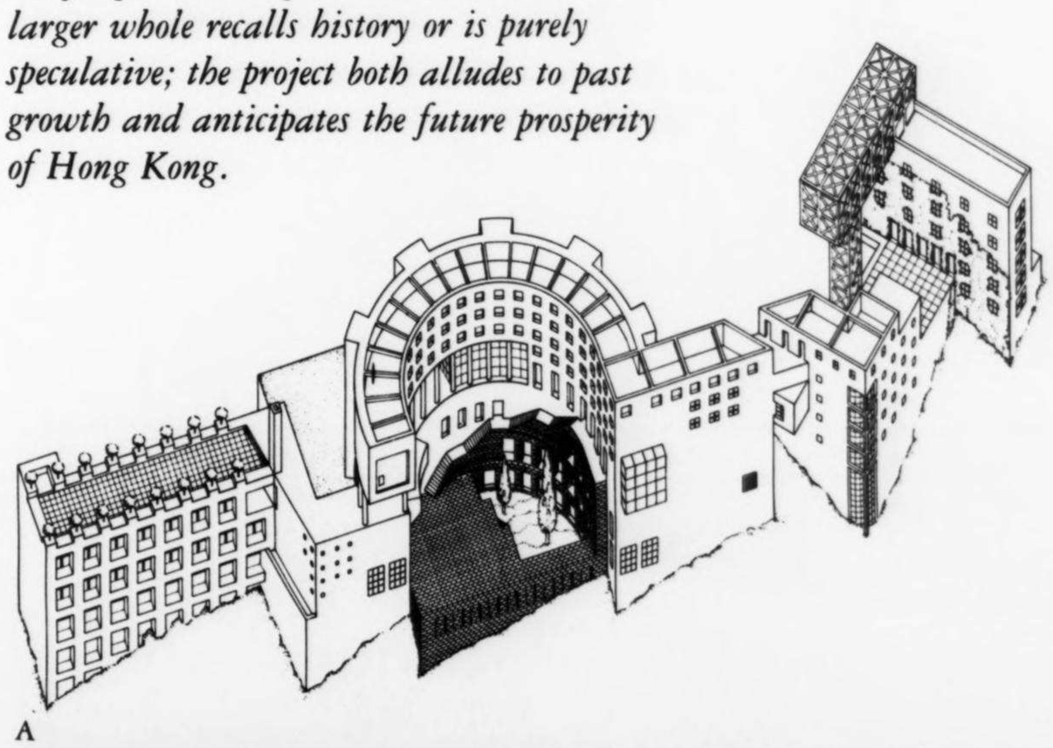
a
axonometric

b
section B–B

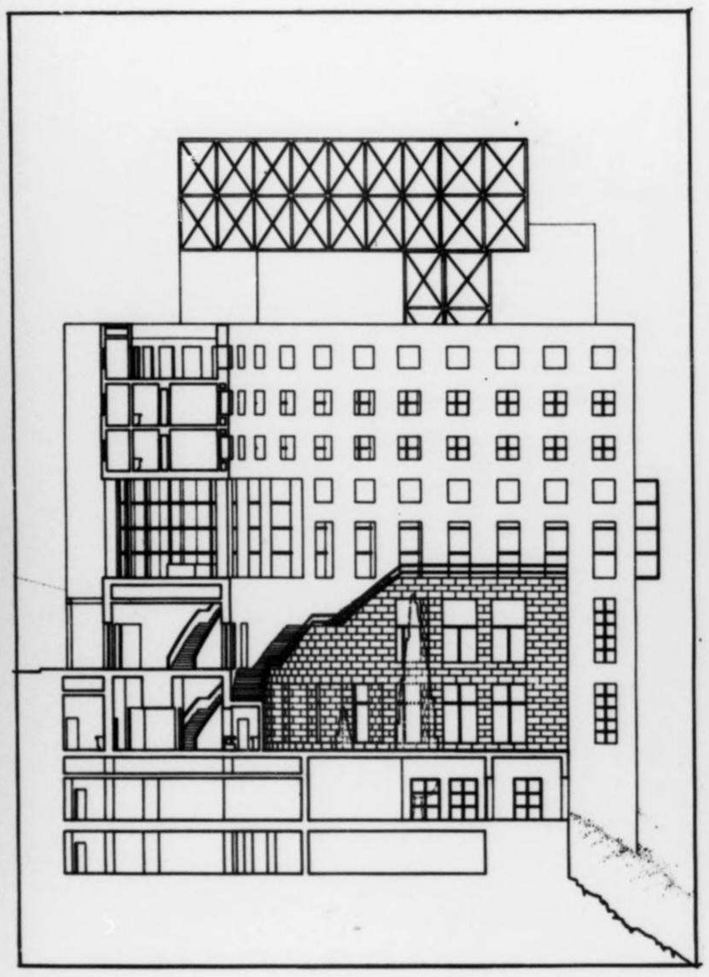
c
elevation

d
perspective

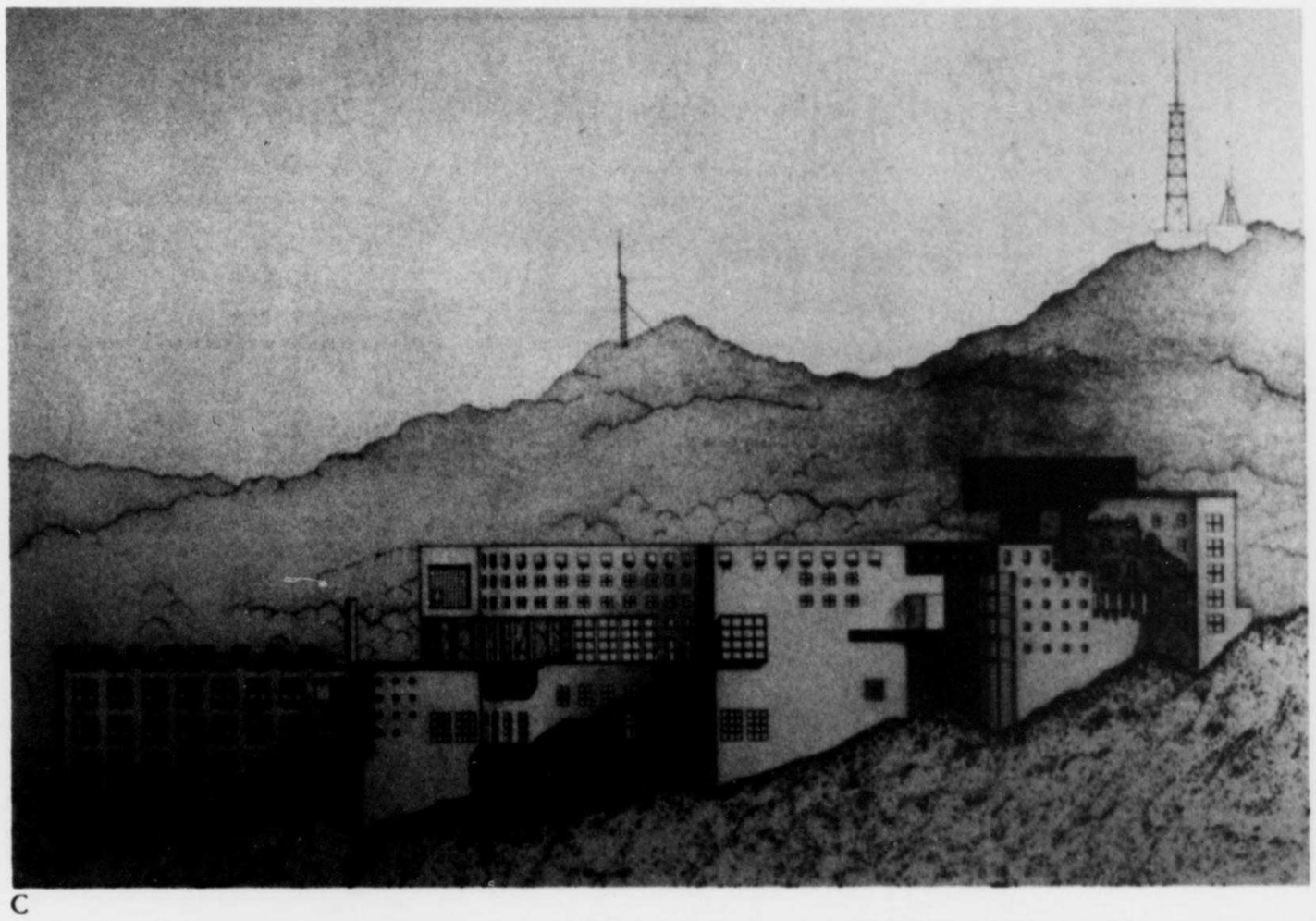
e
plans



A



B



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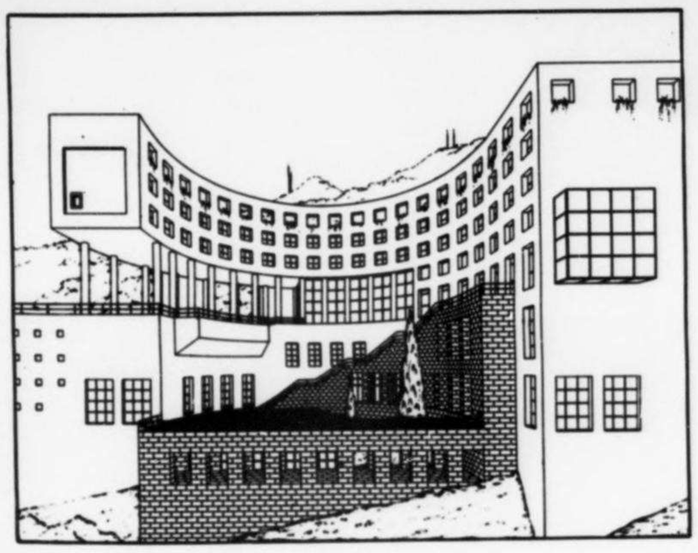

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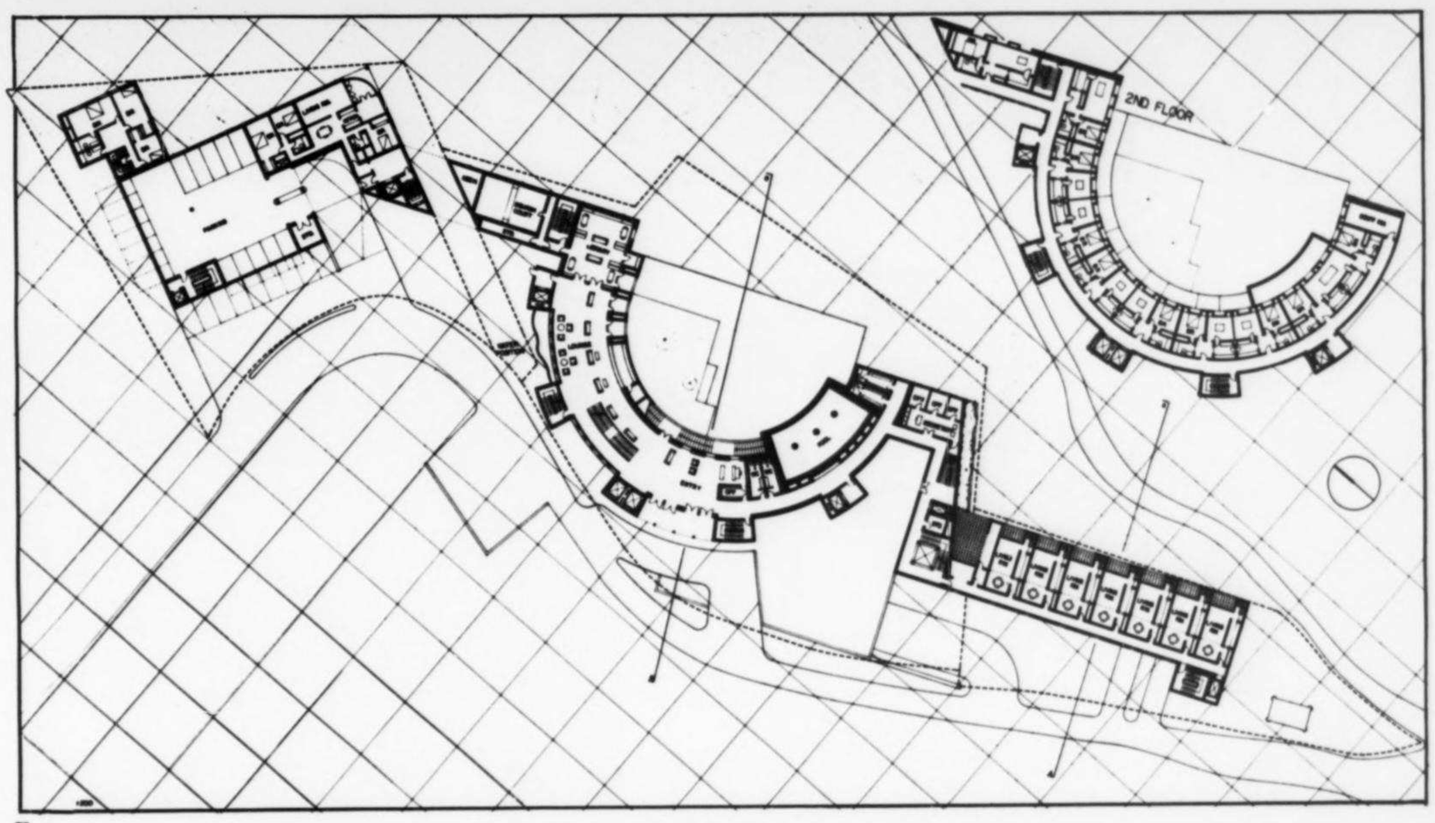


E

UKZ

Ithaca, New York

Simon Ungers, Lazlo Kiss, Tod Zwigard

Prinz Albrecht Palais Memorial Project

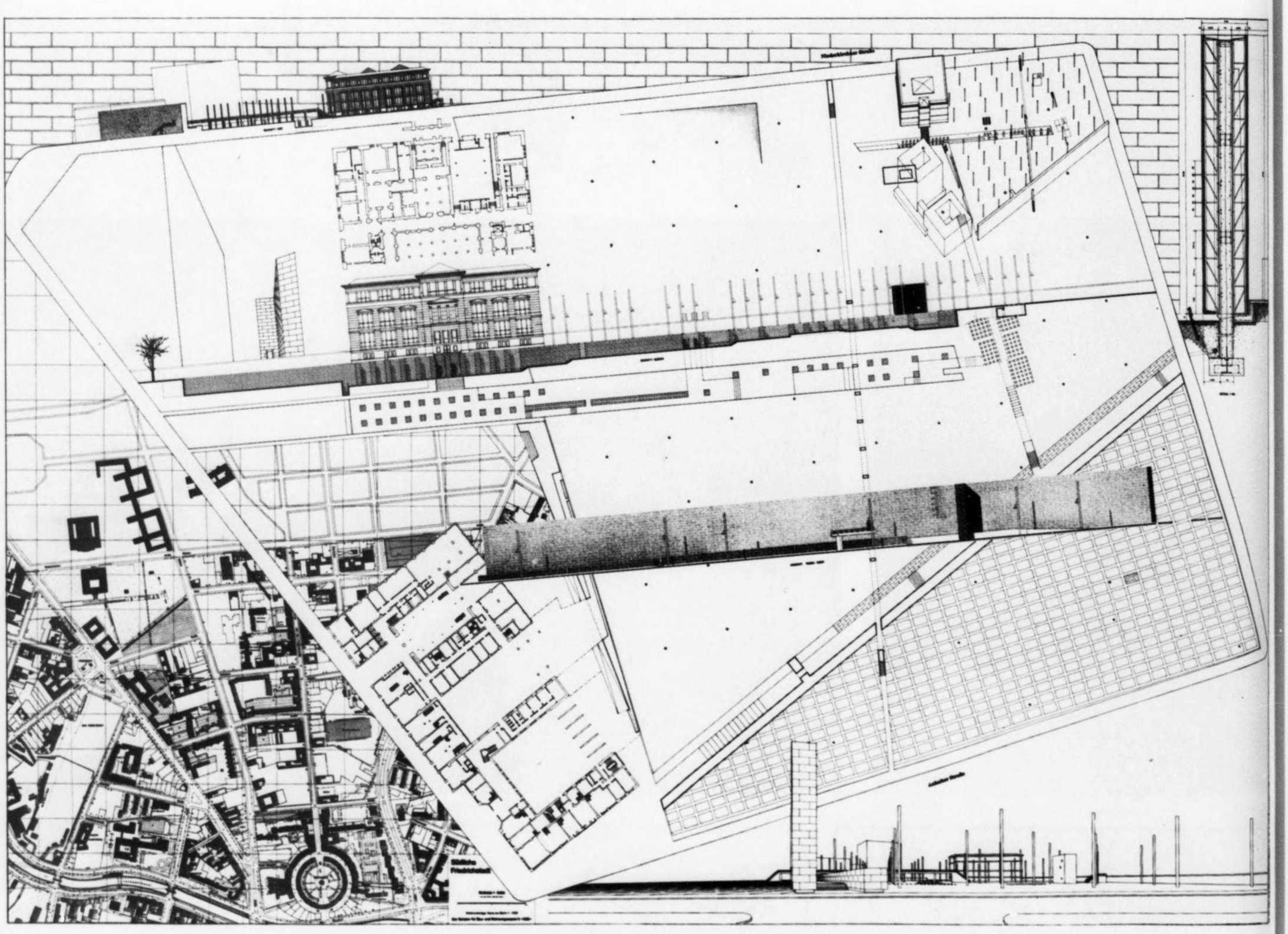
West Berlin, Germany

A unique place in the city of Berlin is proposed in a series of distinct spatial experiences on, above, and below the ground surface. Integrating the Martin Gropius Museum and responding to a complex urban situation, it proposes an architectural language that is sober and ambiguous to allow for metaphorical interpretations–reflections on events that were initiated at this site.

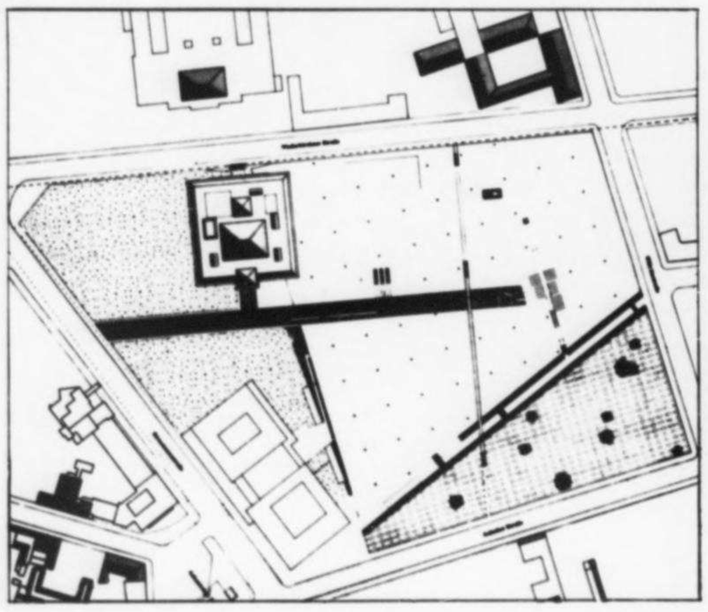
a
composite drawing

b
site plan

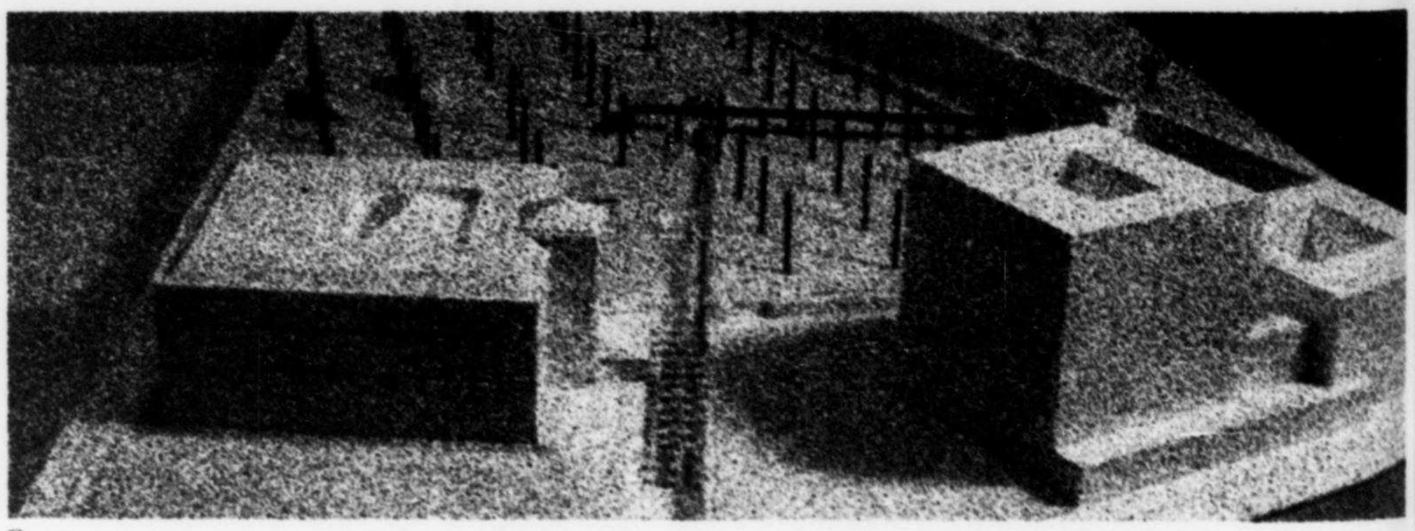
c
model



A



B



C

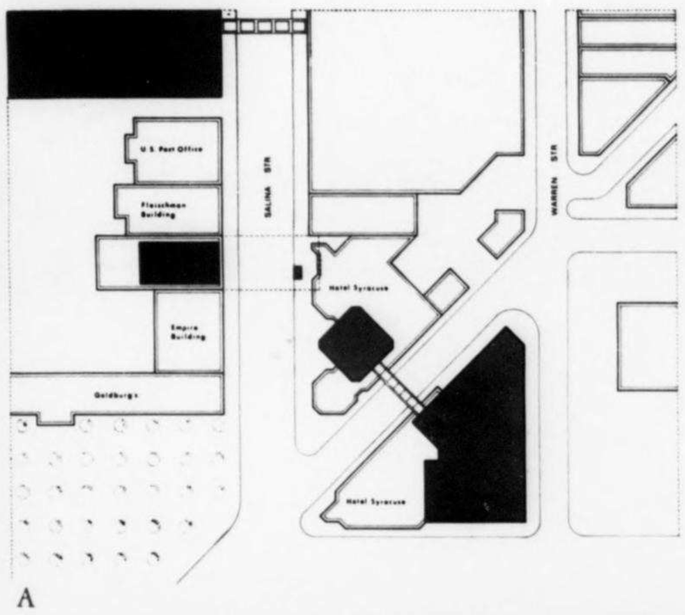
South Salina Street Tower Project

Syracuse, New York

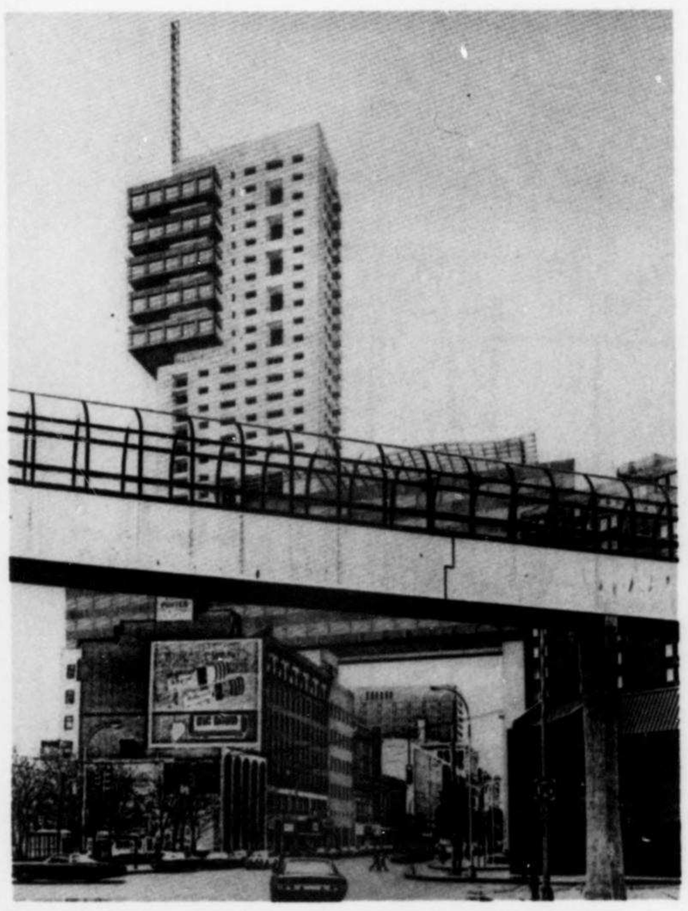
The architecture of the high-rise building is reformulated within a given envelope; rather than a simple towerlike extrusion, the project is an ensemble. Each element of the program is articulated by a specific architectural language and plays a distinct role in the urban context: the retail space maintains the existing urban wall; the housing is in a tower; and the office space, held above the height of neighboring buildings, bridges the street.

a
site plan
b
perspective

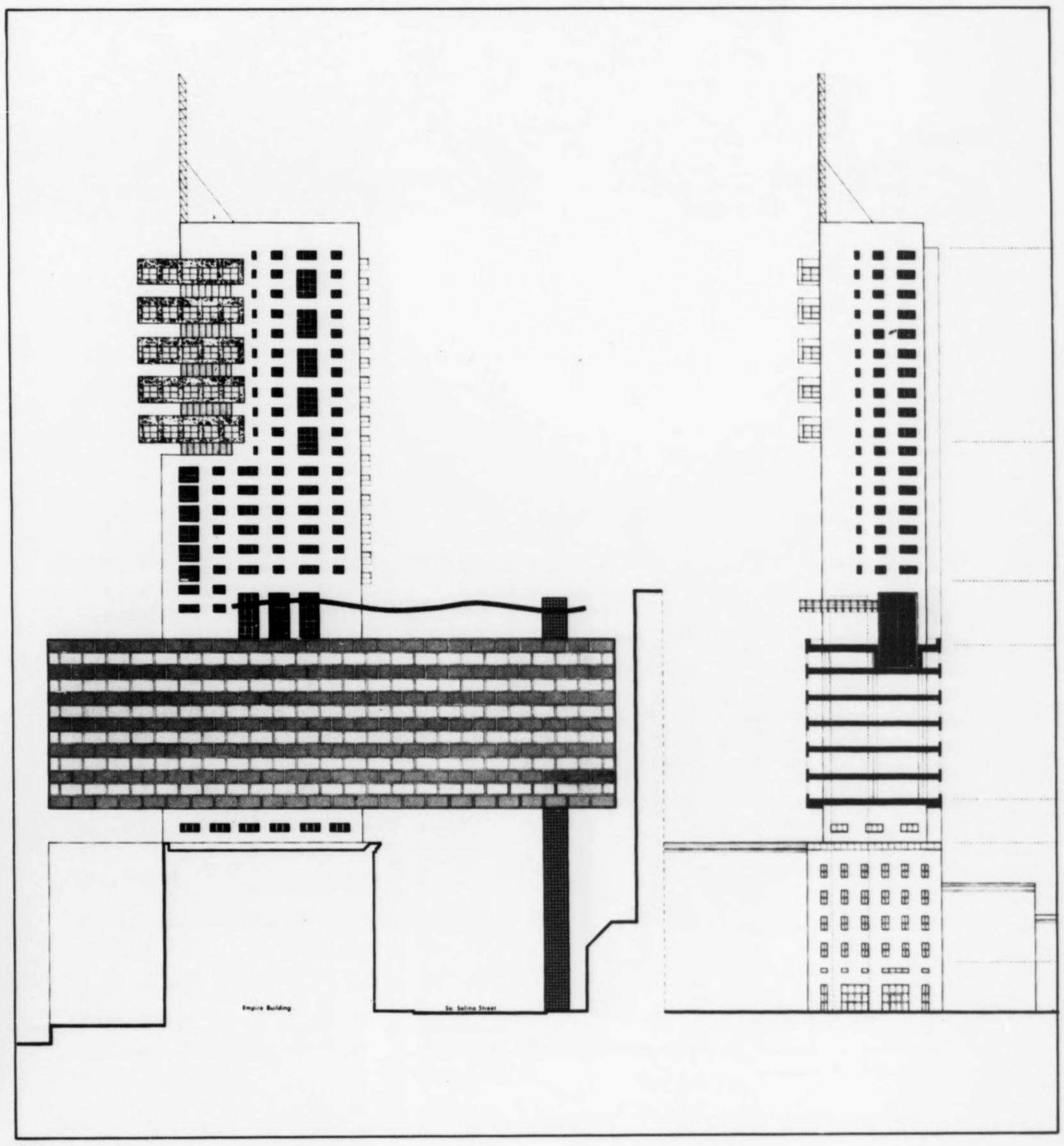
c
elevation
section–elevation
d
plans



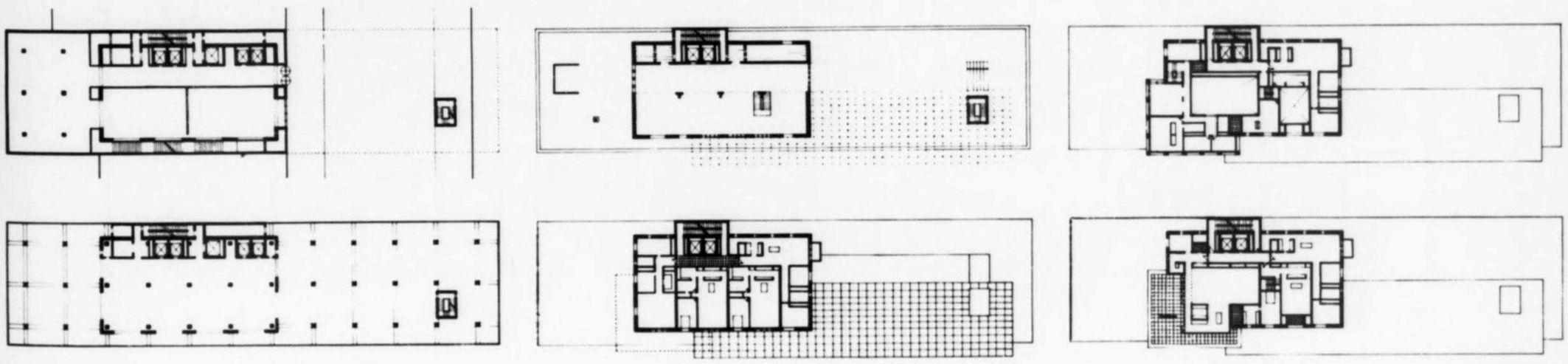
A



B



C



D

Andres Duany

Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk

Coconut Grove, Florida

Charleston Place

Boca Raton, Florida

The traditional urban pattern executed here is that of the American small town, which is understood to contain the following elements: an orthogonal street grid, which is an ordering device for public and private spaces; housing types, which are individual objects and define the public space of the street; and a landscape pattern, which is formally integrated with the order of the street.

Because these elements are at variance with the «marketing principles» of postwar development, they are rigidly regulated by the zoning codes. It is only through the manipulation of certain bureaucratic definitions that traditional urbanism is possible: a street is labeled a parking lot in order to circumvent the required setbacks, and an alley is called a jogging tract.

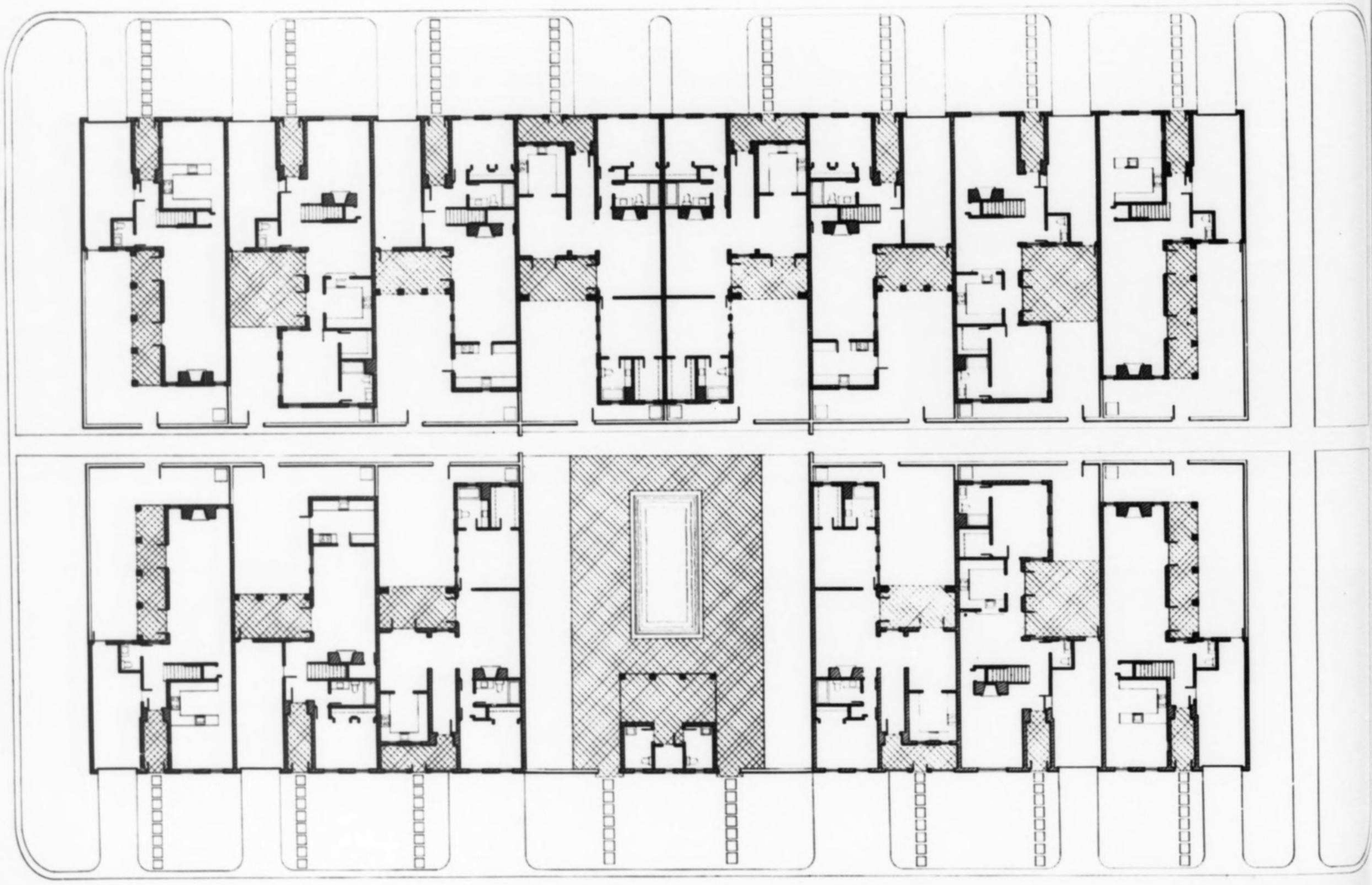
a
street elevation

b
block plan

c
aerial view

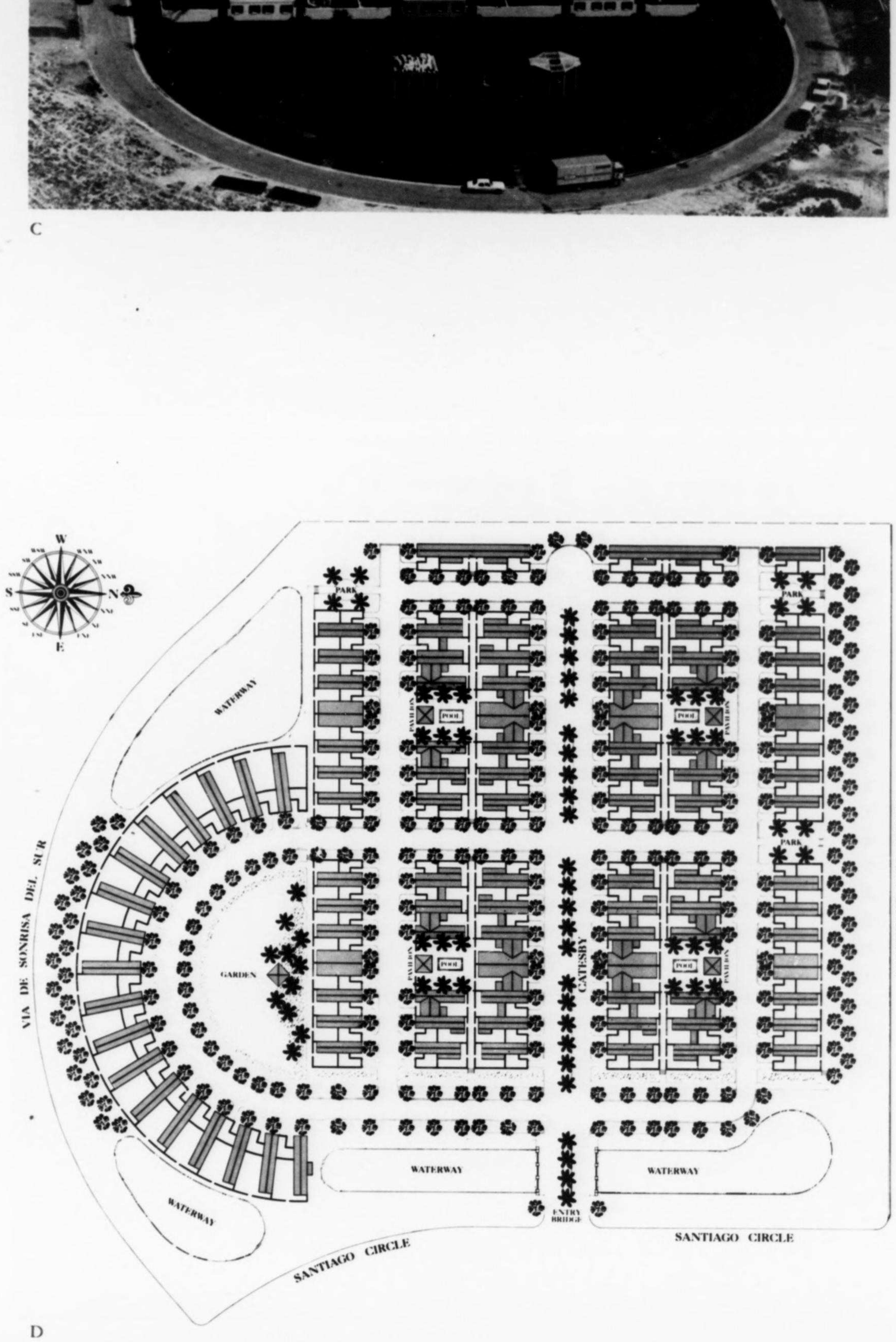
d
site plan

A



B

C


W
S
N
E
WATERWAY
VIA DE SONRISA DEL SUR
GARDEN
PARK
PARK
PARK

Jennings + Stout

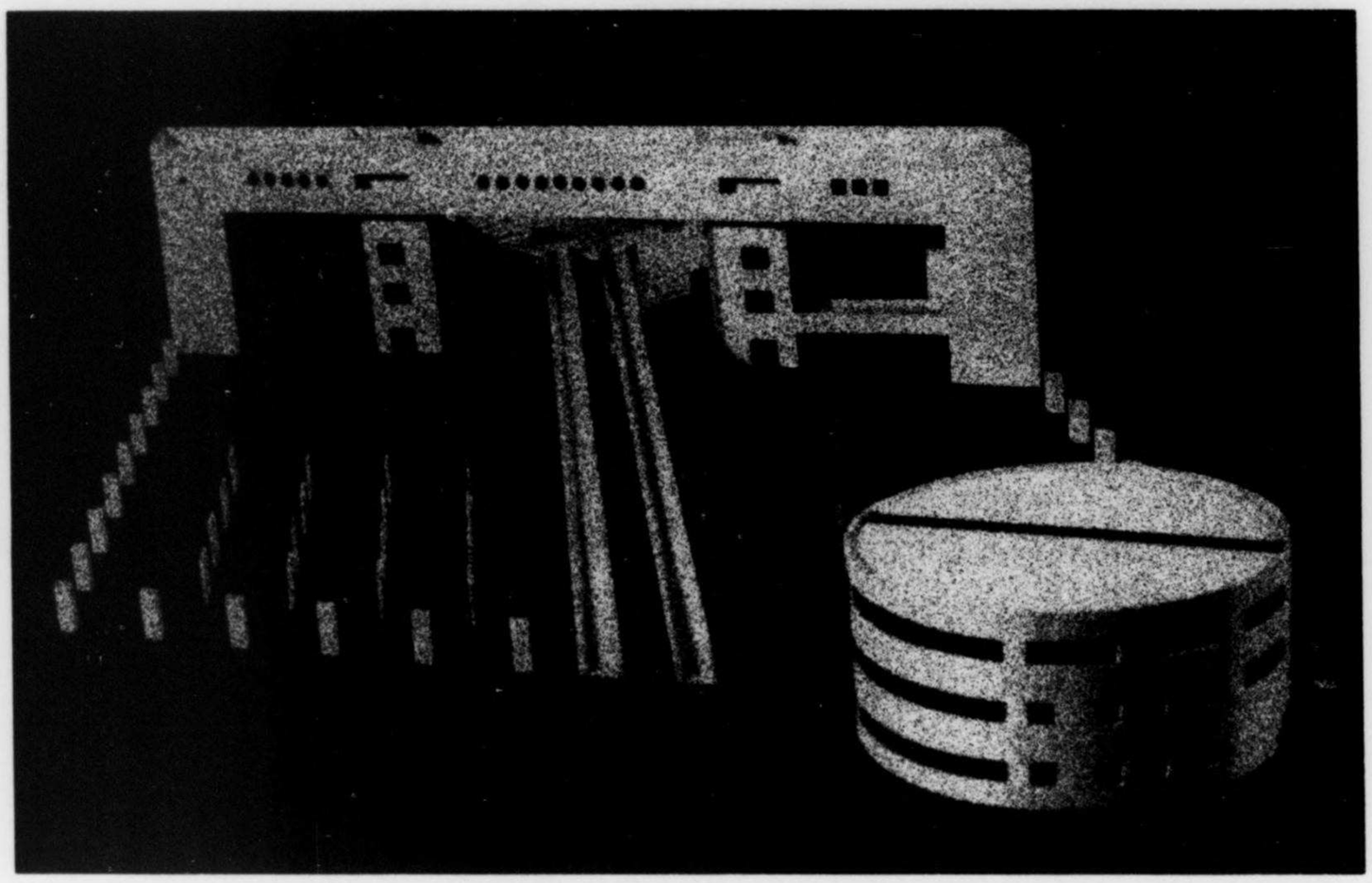
San Francisco, California

Riverfront Project

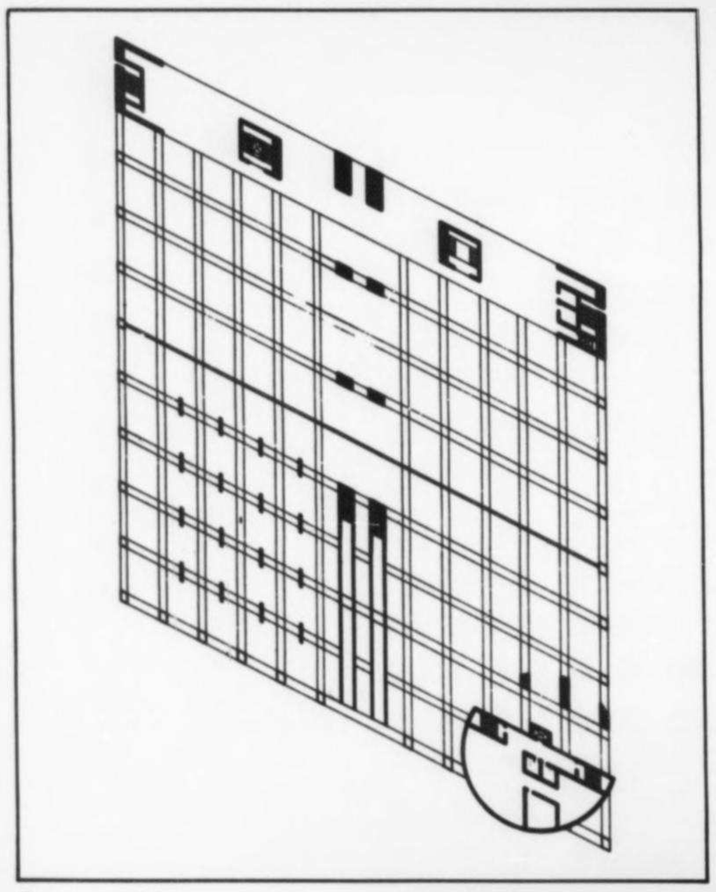
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

A small outdoor theater and other public spaces are provided on a site where the river skews the urban grid. The bridge, the pedestrian ramp, and the strip of water define the plaza space and reinforce existing features of the nearby area.

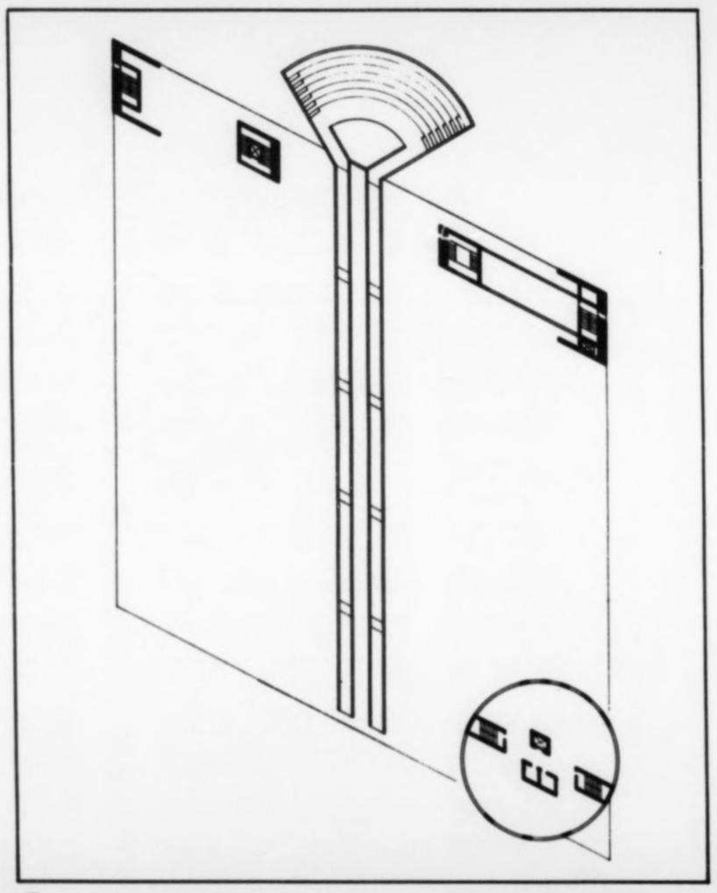
a
model
b
plaza level plan
c
third floor plan
d
fifth floor plan
e
section
elevation



A



B



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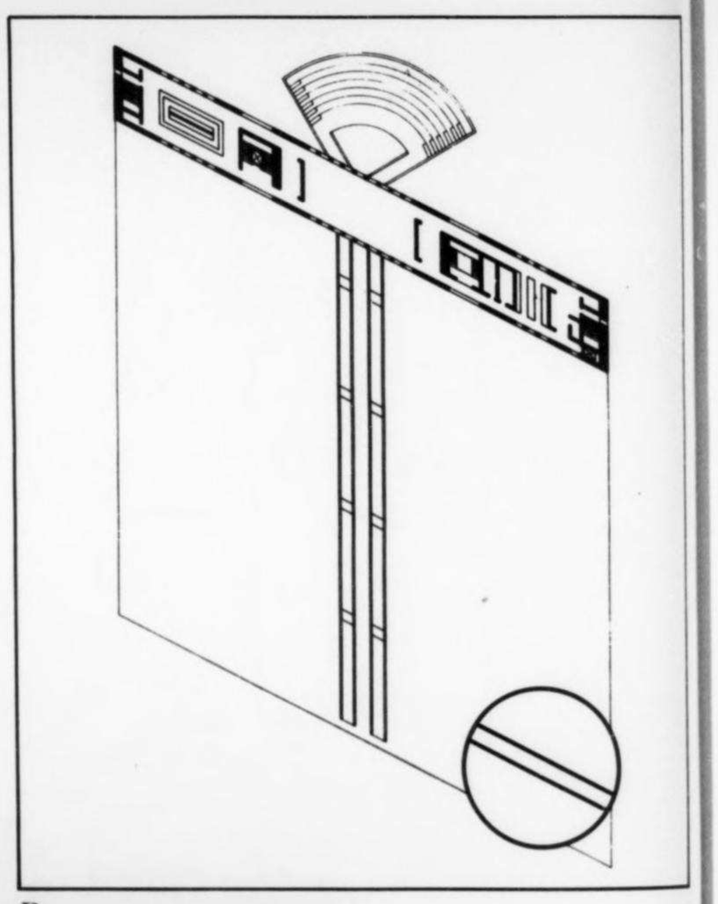
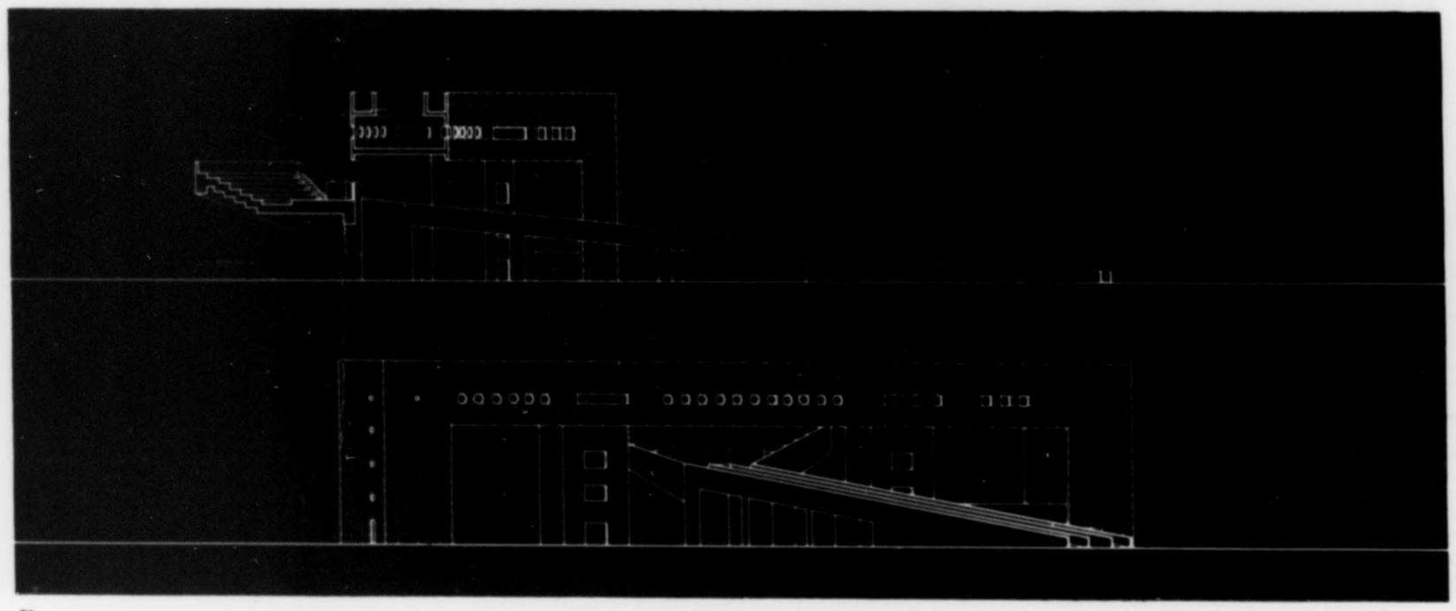


D



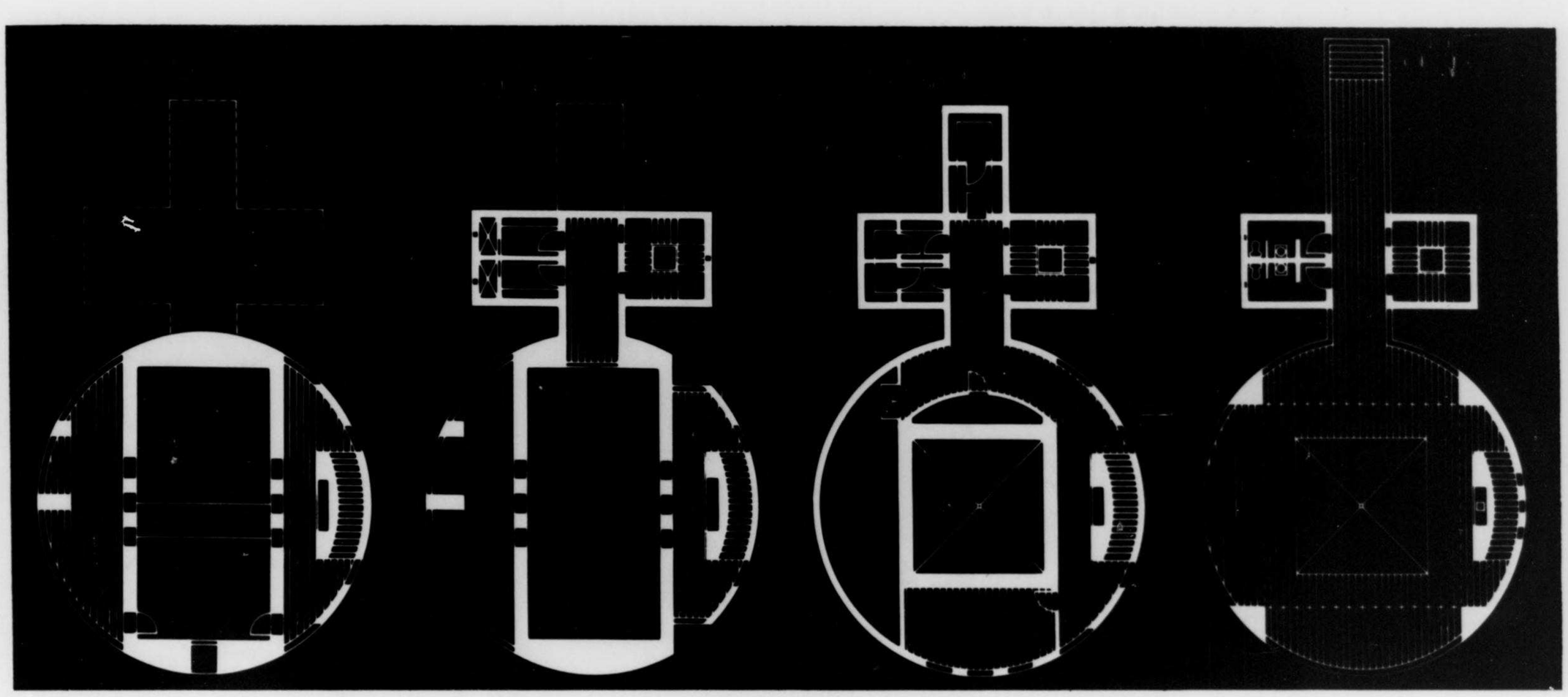
E

East Face Athletic Club

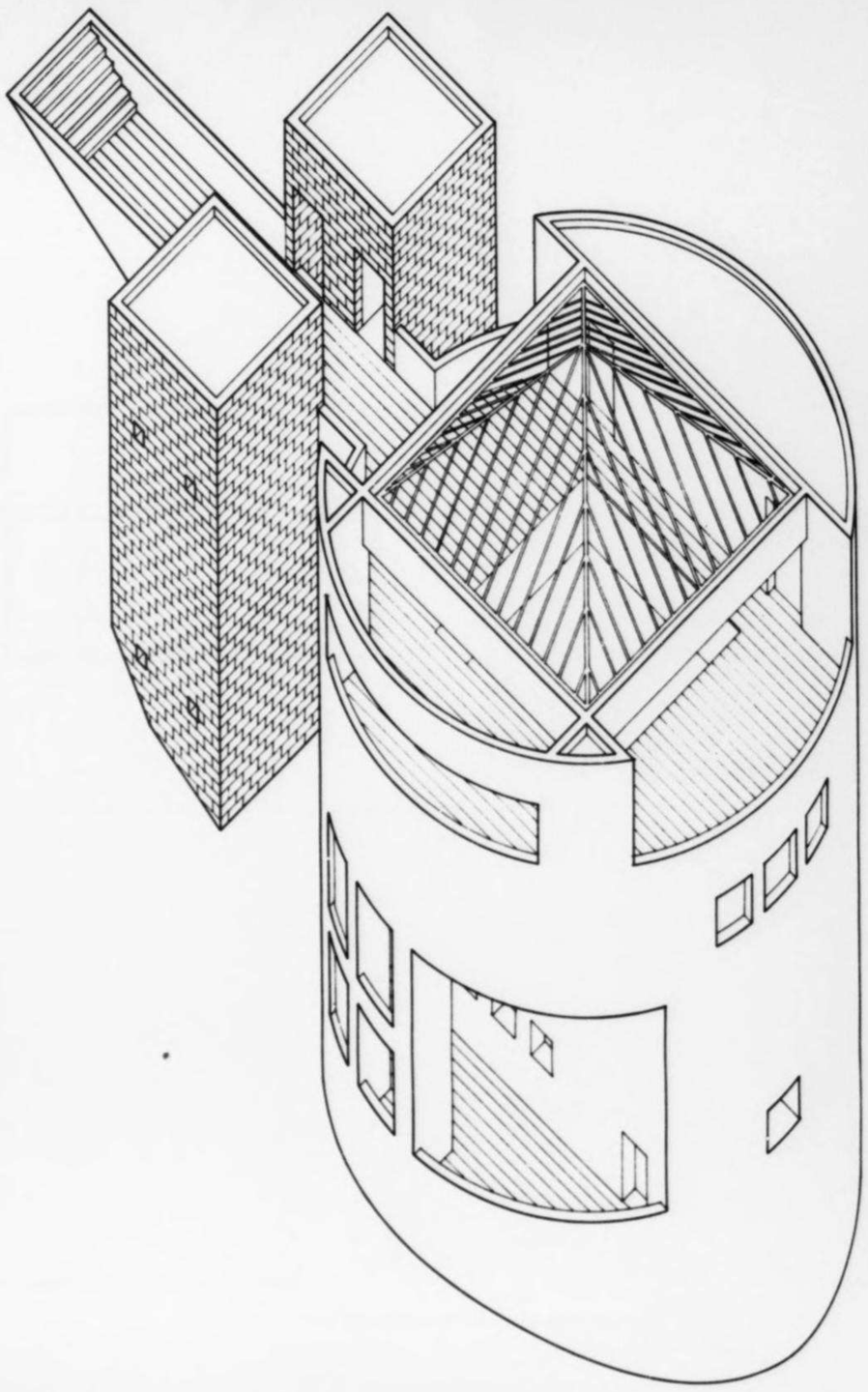
Stateline, Nevada

A private athletic club for local residents is a cylinder on a wooded hillside. The bridge and flanking service towers align the axis toward the valley to the east.

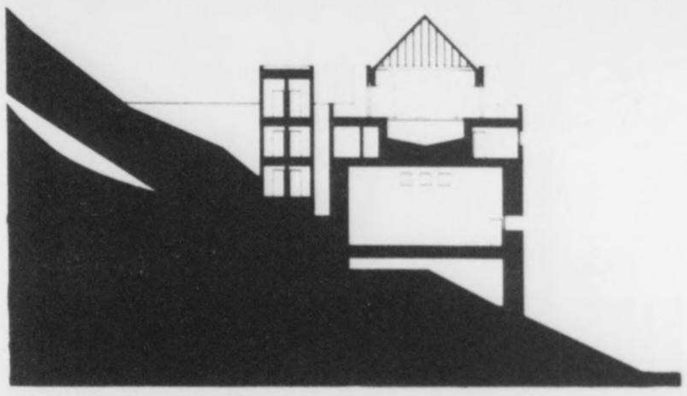
a
plans
b
axonometric
c
section
exploded axonometric

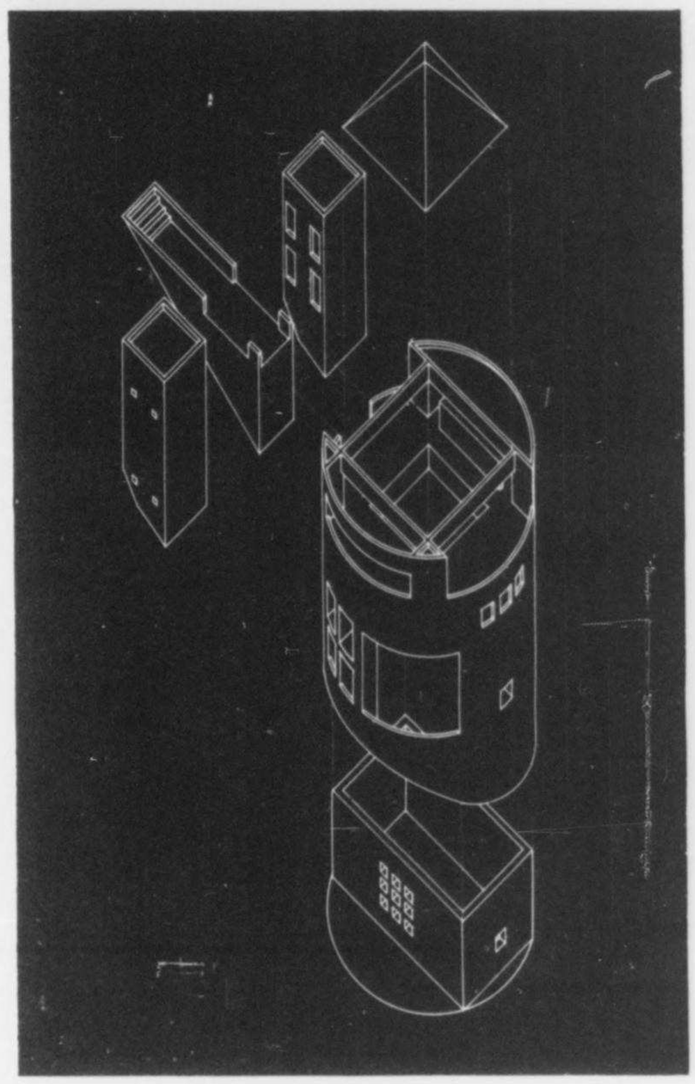


A



B





C

Jennings + Stout

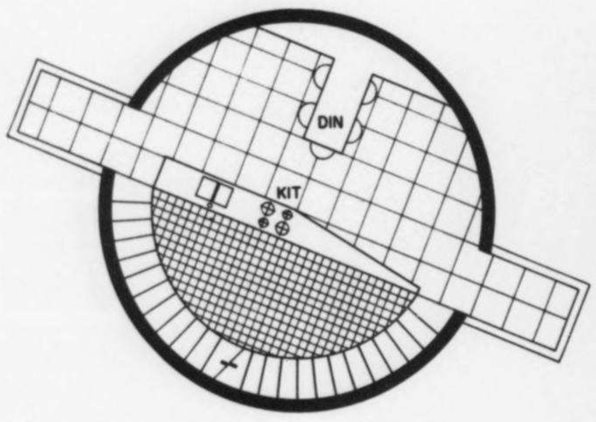
San Francisco, California

Sanchez Residence

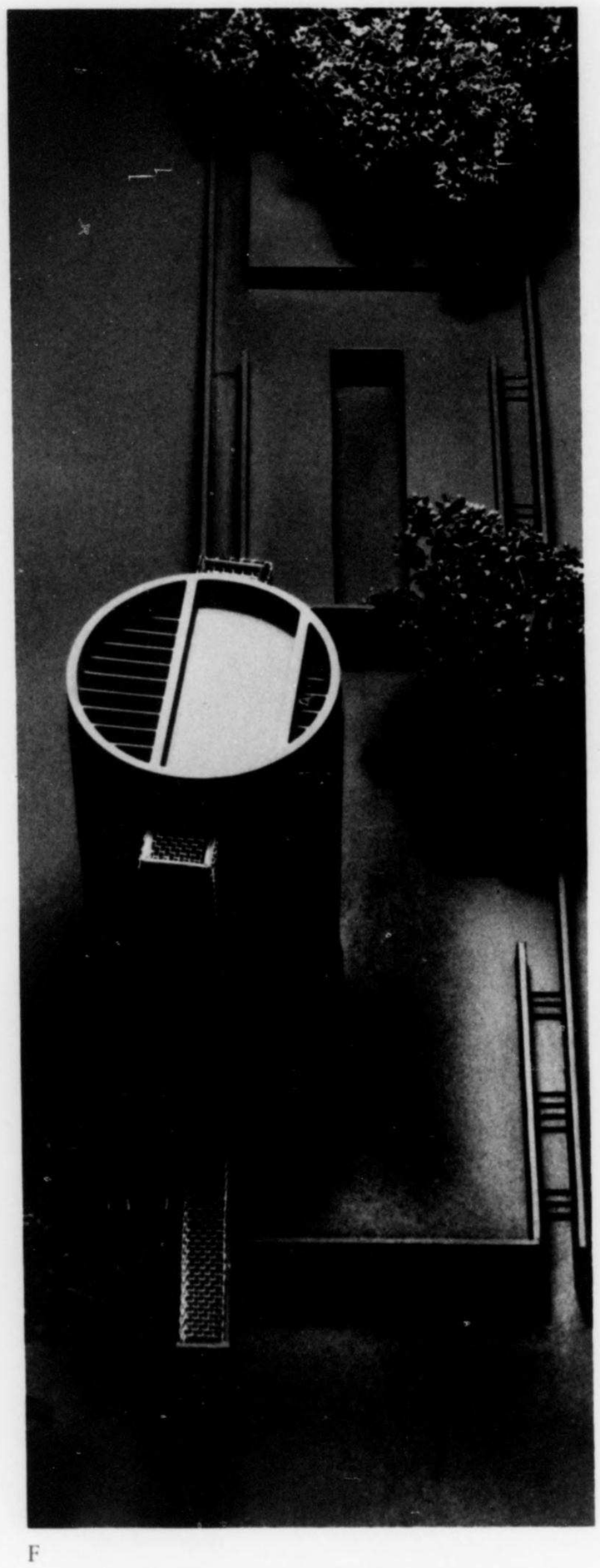
Los Gatos, California

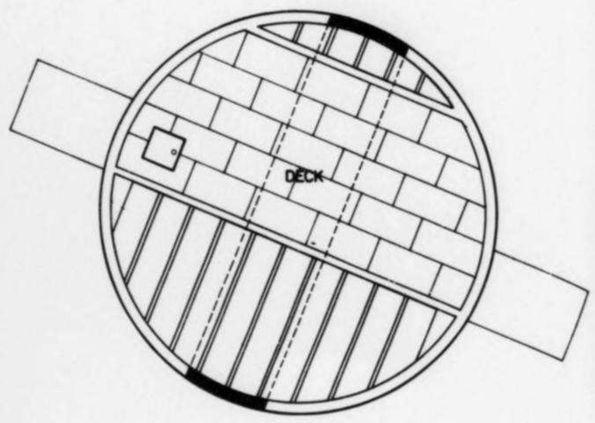
This small house is designed as a viewing tower on a terraced slice of hillside overlooking Silicon Valley.

a
second floor plan
b
roof plan
c
first floor plan
d
third floor plan
e,g
schematic diagram
f
model
h
section
i
elevation



A





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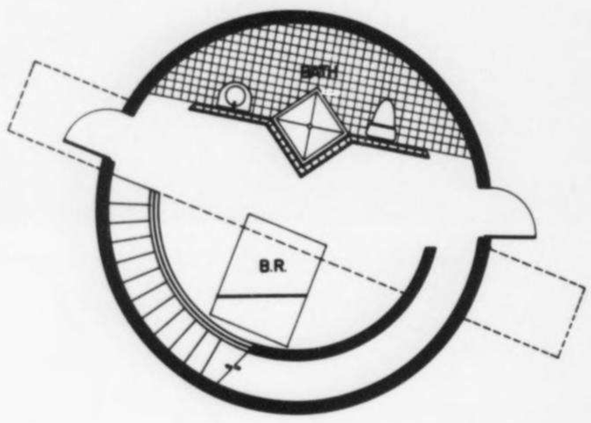

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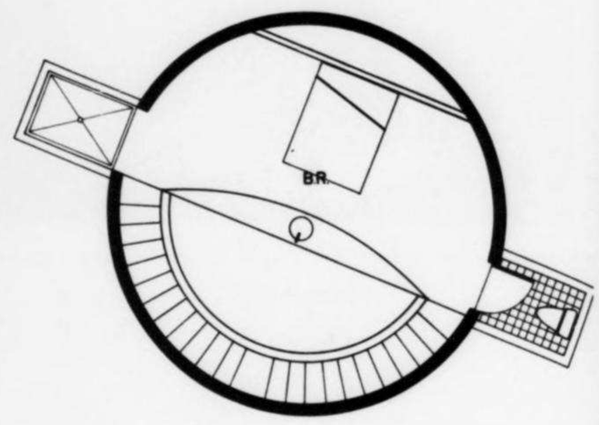

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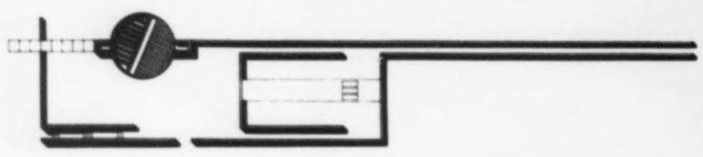

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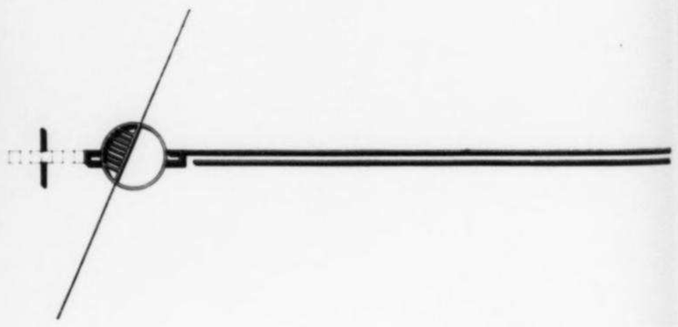

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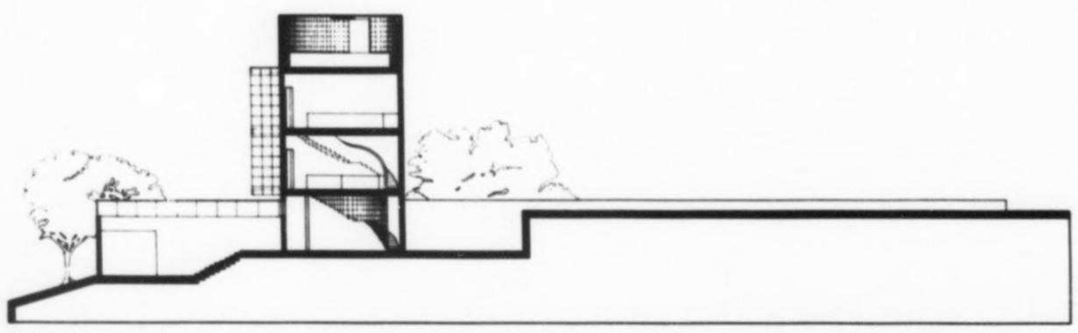

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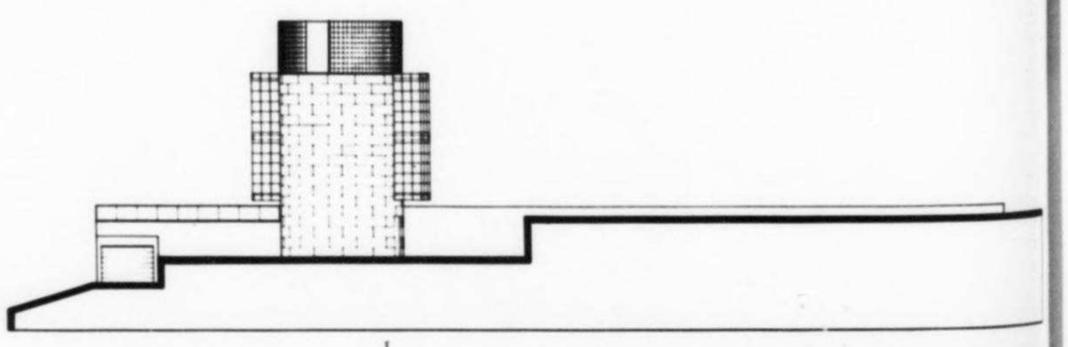


I

Hartford Design Group

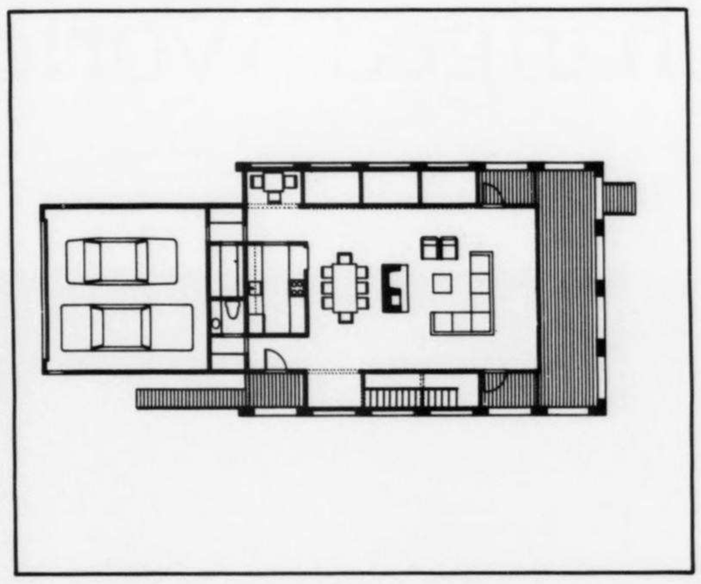
Tai Soo Kim, architect

Berson House

Avon, Connecticut

This house is sited on a steep wooded hillside with spectacular westerly views. The heavy masonry perimeter walls, open at the upper living level and closed at the lower bedroom level, create a simple and strong presence when seen from a distance. Porcelain-panel construction completes the enclosure.

a
upper level plan
b
site plan
c
lower level plan
d
axonometric
e
model



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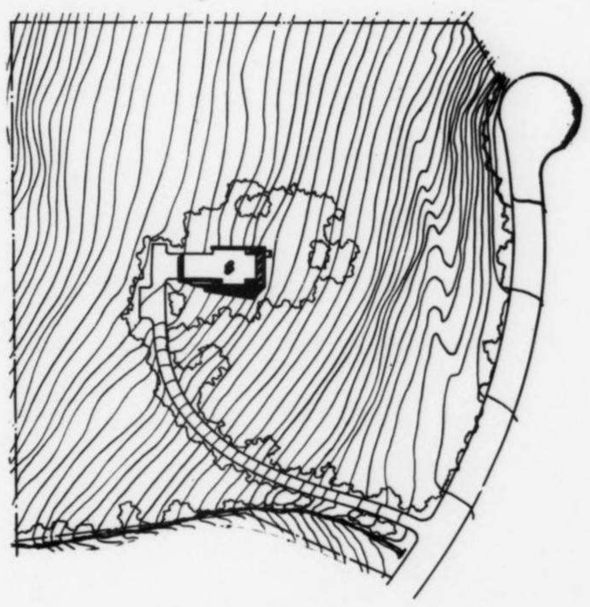

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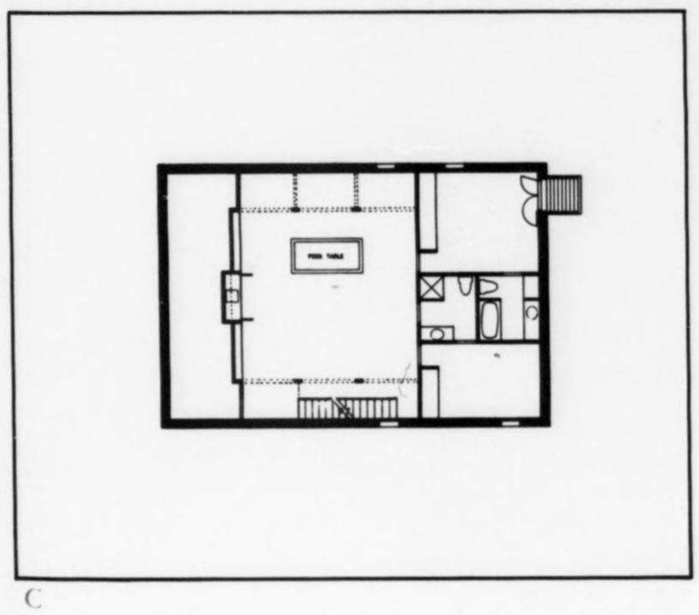

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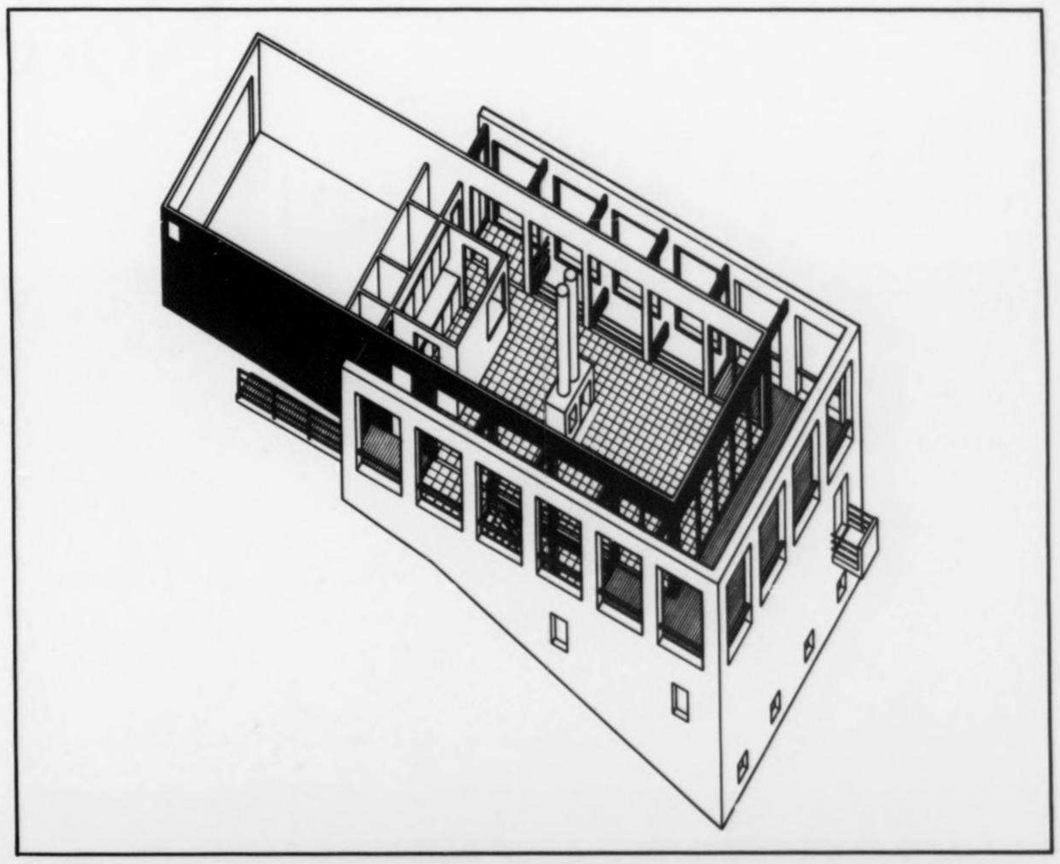

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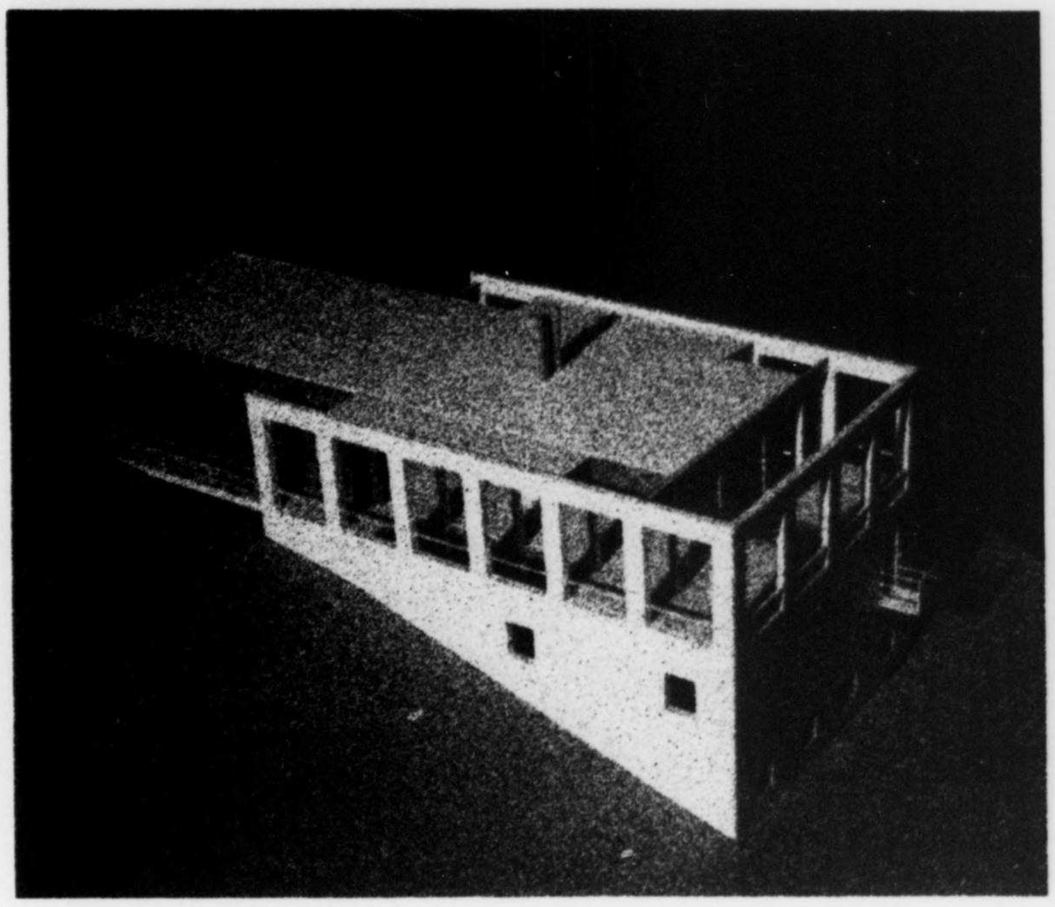
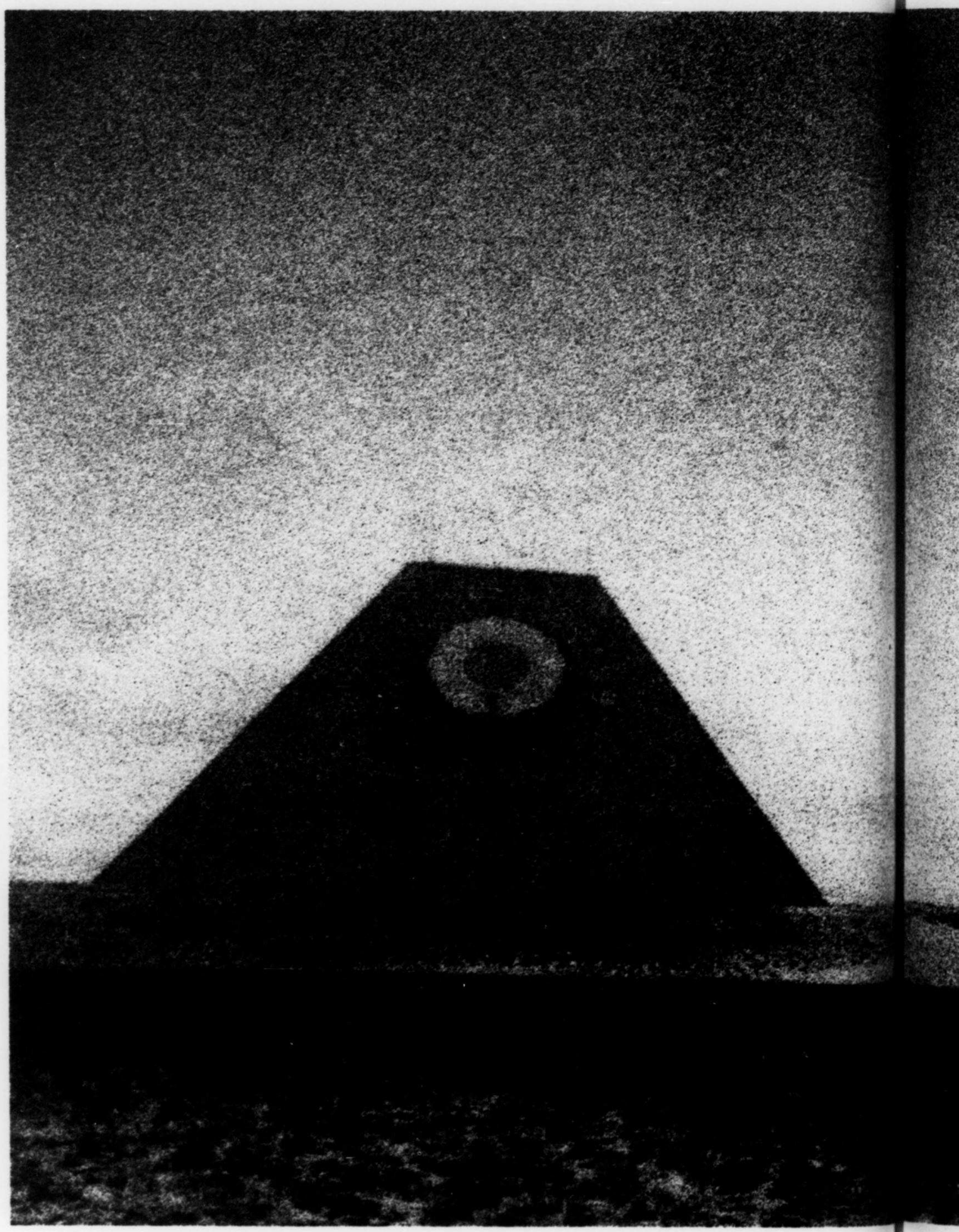


E

Notes on a Changed World

In the case of the ABM structures, we are assaulted; our senses are shattered. The architectural power, the imagery and the symbolism, are overwhelming. . . . We are dealing with the death of optimism rather than the death of art. All of that engineering elegance and efficiency born of rational, industrial solutions that was to make a better world . . . did not bring a new dawn. It brought an era of more gigantic problems in the nature of life and survival than history has ever known. . . . Next to the reality that produces an ABM, the monuments of architects often seem like arbitrary toys.

Ada Louise Huxtable
«A Bizarre Monument to Non-Architecture»
The New York Times, 14 December 1975



Abandoned ABM
missile site
Grand Forks,
North Dakota
(NYT Pictures)

The pervasive influence of the military on the economic and social realms in the United States after the Second World War is widely recognized. For example, in *The Permanent War Economy* (1974) Seymour Melman suggested that the relentless predatory effects of the military economy have steadily eroded industrial productivity; similarly, Adam Yarmolinsky in a study for the Twentieth Century Fund (1971) concluded that the military establishment is the largest single feature in the American economic and political landscape. The effects of the military in other realms has been less widely acknowledged. As the United States has become reliant on nuclear defense, the scale, expense, and technical complexity of the nuclear program has placed increasing demands on the environment and technology. Such demands have radically altered the nature of architecture and the city as well as the relationship between humanity and the objects of its making.

In the nuclear age the security of the United States is maintained through a strategy of deterrence, enforced by the presence of nuclear arsenals. Conventional weapons are built to be used. Paradoxically, nuclear weapons are built to be not used; while their function is to destroy, they are intended to be inactive. Peace is maintained through the threat of their use—they exist suspended in a condition of imminence.

The forms of nuclear artifacts appear to be solely determined by pragmatic intent. Uncontaminated by the rhetoric of ideologically motivated design, they exist without an intended aesthetic content; form and function are apparently congruent. But because they are useful only if they are not used, this expression of use is itself a sort of negative rhetoric that conceals the function of non-use in the very clarity of form expressing the function of use.

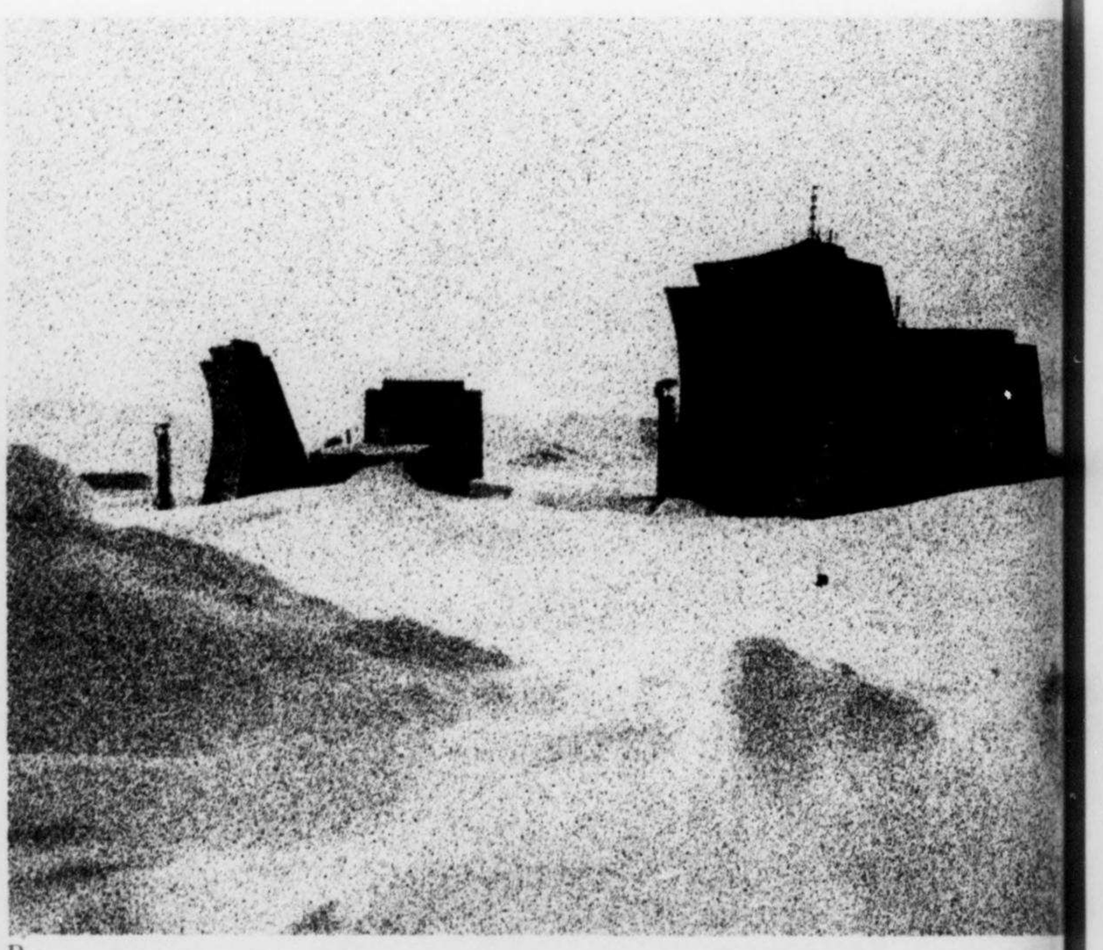
Entrusted with the preservation of the state, nuclear artifacts incorporate the highest possible levels of technological development; they can be seen as the clearest expression of applied technological and scientific capability. Because they have no specific function to fulfill, they remain open to continuous technological refinement and development. In this situation science and technology are captive to an absurd and meaningless forward motion, each

a
Pave Paws radar site
Beale AFB, California

b
Billboard antennas
Dye Main, Canada

c
Pave Paws radar site
Beale AFB, California

A



B

C

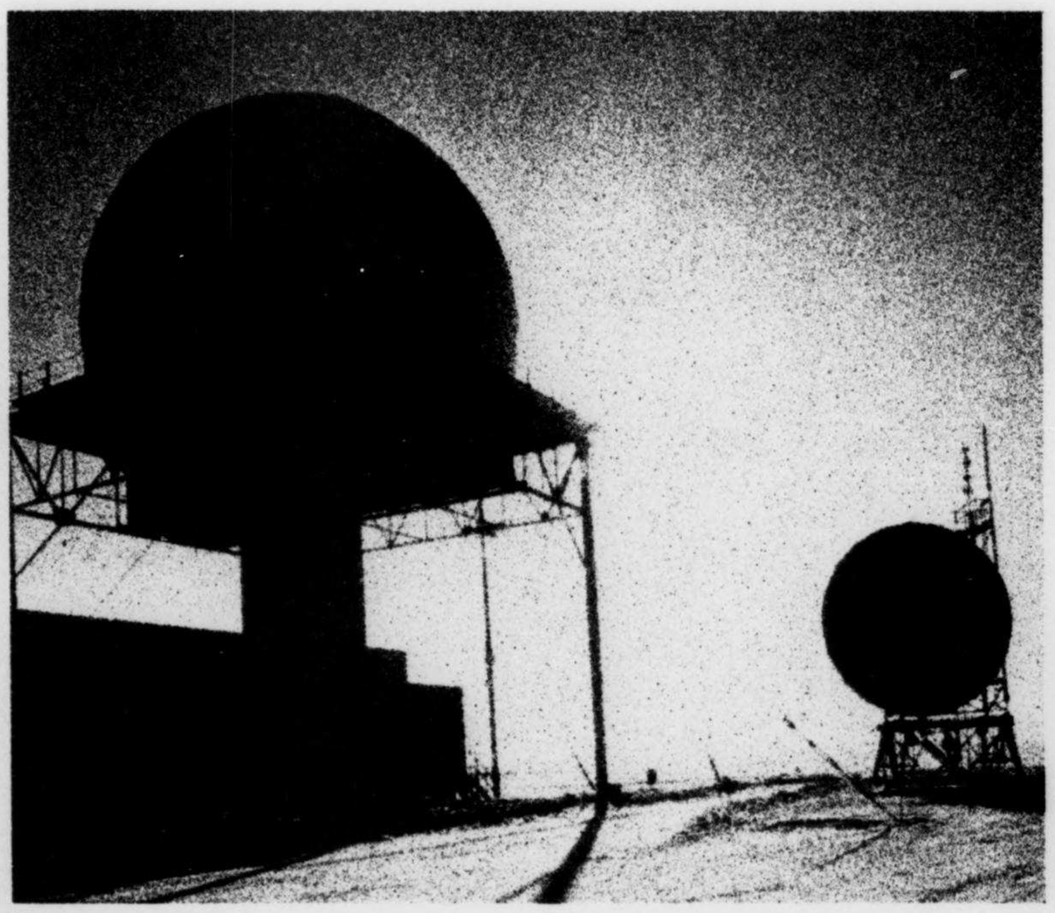
new refinement rendering the previous one obsolete, in a self-propelling process with no foreseeable end. Charged with non-use but susceptible to accidental or internally motivated operation, the potential of nuclear weapons will be unlocked when the internal logic of use overrides that of non-use. Eventually the political doctrine that supports their existence will be incapable of restraining their inherent function. This point is approached as the time between warning and retaliation tends toward zero.

The momentum of this continuous refinement has profound implications on the larger field of technology as well. For example, the space program–one of the major projects of the twentieth century and often seen as expressing the highest achievements of mankind–has promoted massive developments in ballistics, computers, and communications systems closely related to military purposes. The research and development that continually refine these programs are at the apex of a technological wake that endlessly floods the domestic realm with technology for incorporation into everyday life.

d
DEW Line radar dome
and antenna disc
Cam Main, Canada

e
Air Force rocket
propulsion laboratory
Edwards AFB,
California

f
Dew Line radar dome
Dye 1, Greenland



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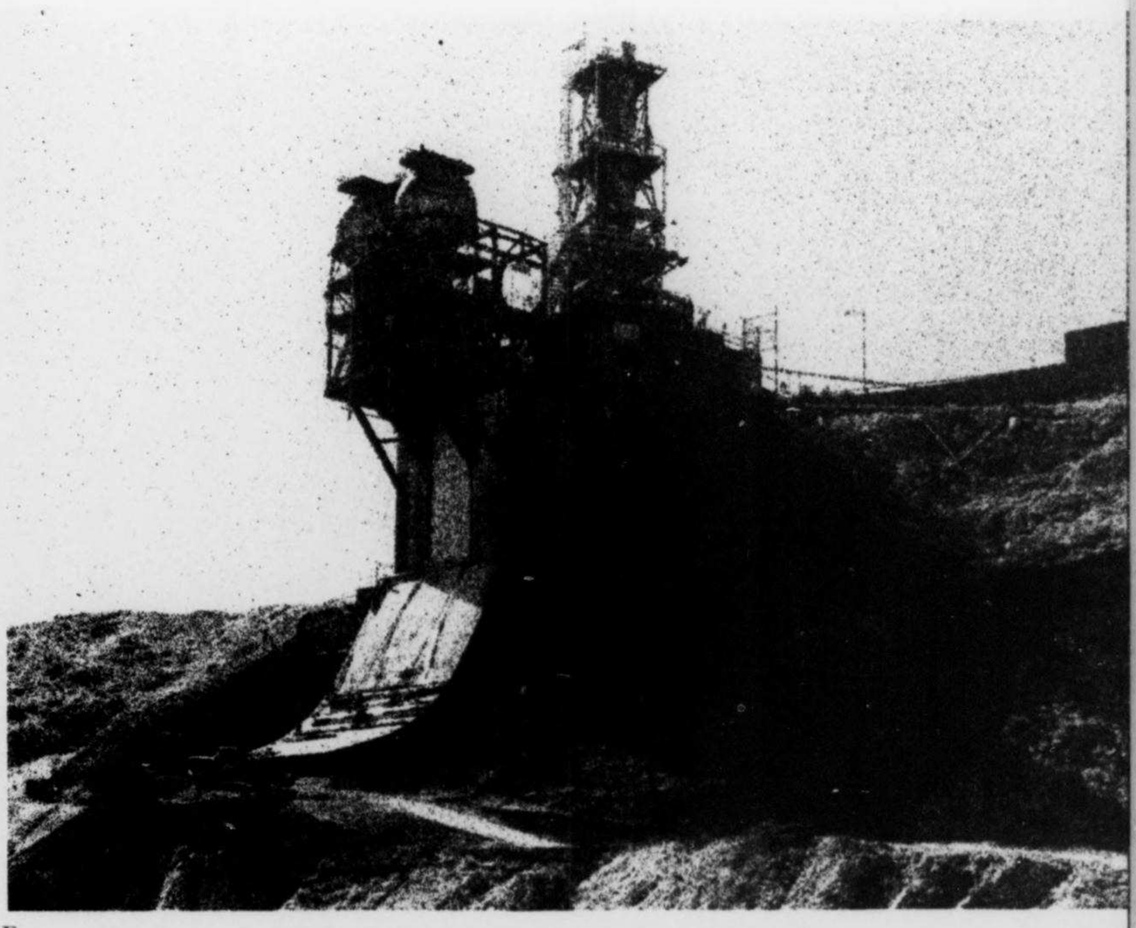

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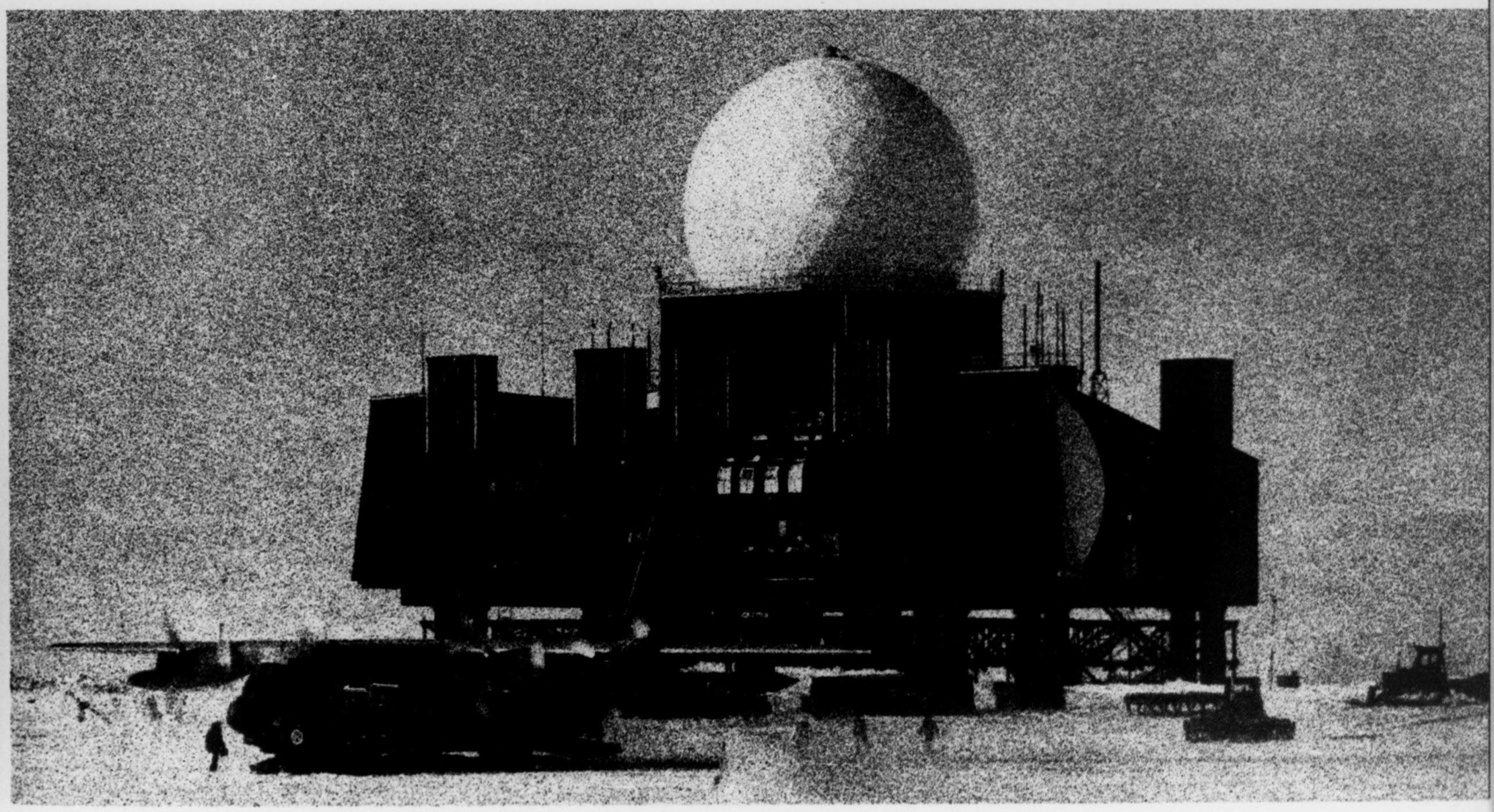


F

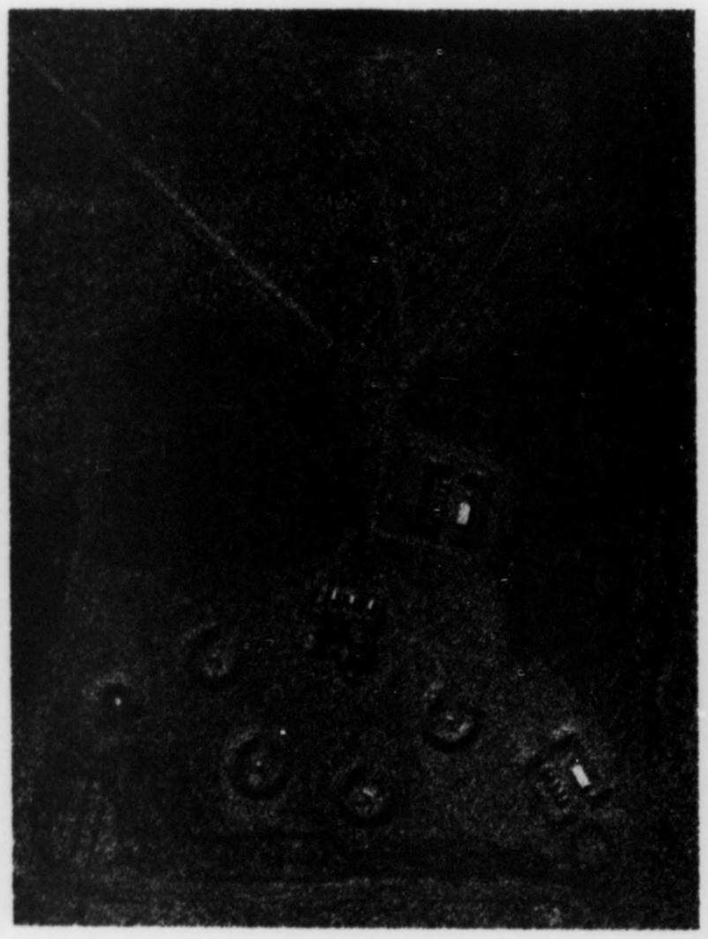
The artifacts of active defense have considerable presence in the landscape. As the progeny of nineteenth-century cannons and forts, intercontinental ballistic missile and early warning systems are present in every region of North America. Passive defense policies have had even more far reaching implications on the configuration of the urban environment. In the postwar years of the late 1940s and early 1950s various new measures were considered to protect industry and the population against possible nuclear attack. They included the hardening of structures, the building of private and public fallout shelters, the dispersion of population and industry over vast areas, and an increase in mobility facilitating the rapid movement of civilians and troops. The hardening of structures was eventually recognized as an impractical measure, being too expensive to warrant implementation. The construction of private fallout shelters in the backyards of suburban houses and the designation of countless public fallout shelters in existing buildings continued for two decades, but it was eventually realized that these shelters were unlikely to provide real protection.

Dispersion and mobility, however, became important factors in planning programs of the early postwar years. Lois Craig illustrates in *The Federal*

a
Aerial view of defense suppression
Holloman AFB,
New Mexico

b
Titan missile launch site under construction
Vandenberg AFS,
California

c
Early warning radar station
Fylingdales,
Great Britain



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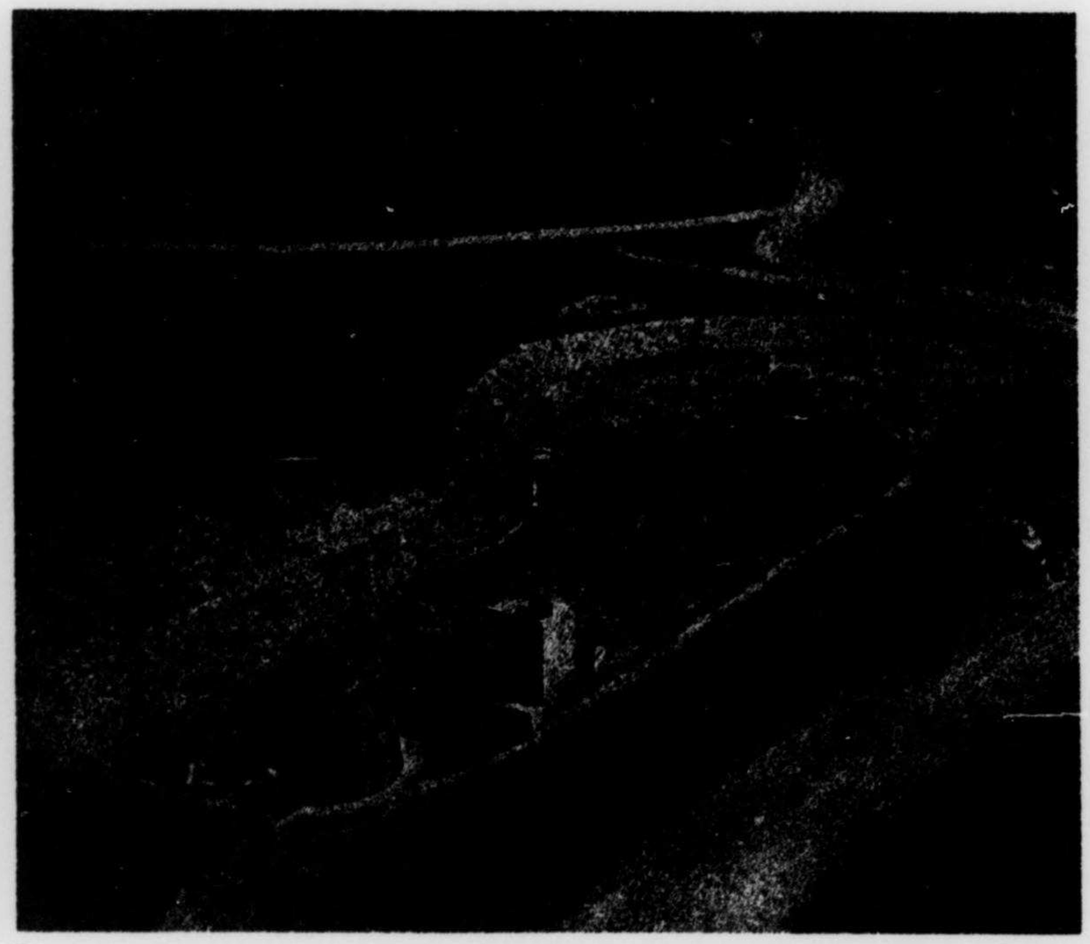

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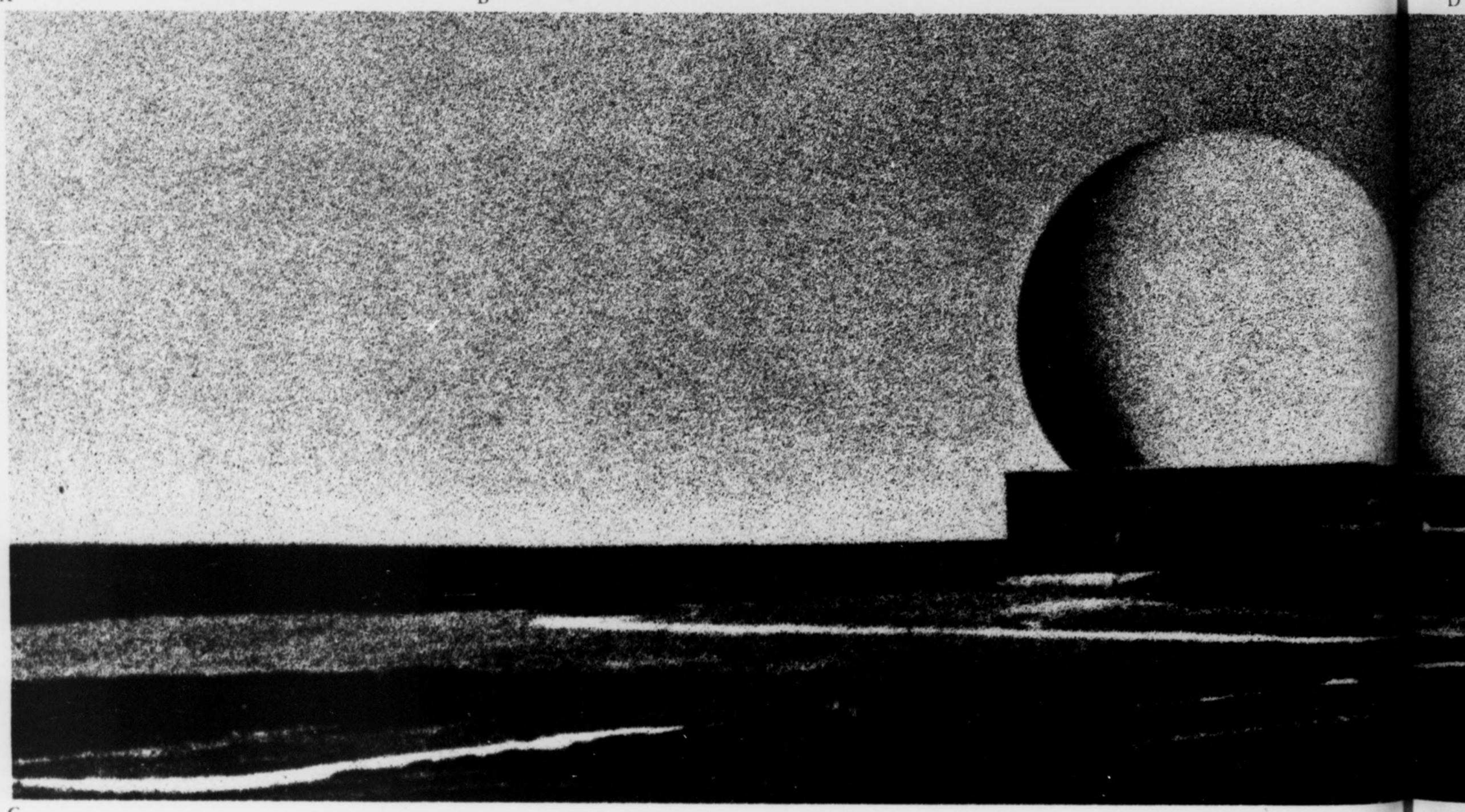
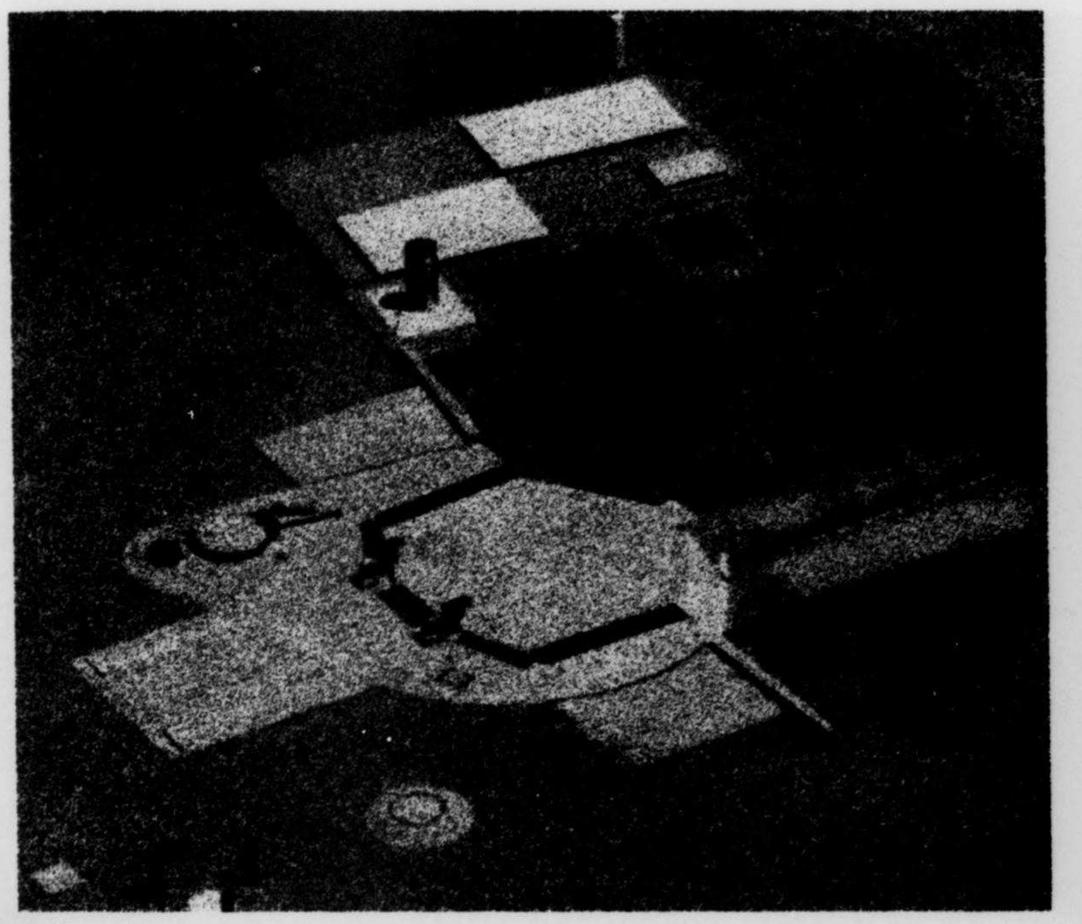


C

Presence (1978) how the government influenced the physical environment of America through programs that satisfied defense needs but also embodied other public values as well. One such program was the National Defense Highway System. Justified in the civilian realm as providing increased convenience, mobility, and economic efficiency, it also facilitated the military program of strategic target dispersal. The population, infused with the pioneering myth and encouraged by the Mortgage Subsidies Act, the Housing Act of 1949, and postwar prosperity, began relocating in previously underdeveloped regions. This migration, made possible only by the highway network, spawned the suburban environment and concomitant social fabric characteristic of America today. Suburbia, which defines so many aspects of the American «bomb culture,» has been determined as much by the strategic dispersal of civilian and military targets as by notions of social betterment. Even in planning such developments as shopping malls, the criteria determining location, construction, and facilities also included considerations that would allow the malls to serve as «defense welfare» centers following a nuclear attack.

The legacy of this defense-motivated policy has been the dissolution

d, e
Boeing Minuteman III
guided missile
launch site
Ellsworth AFB,
South Dakota



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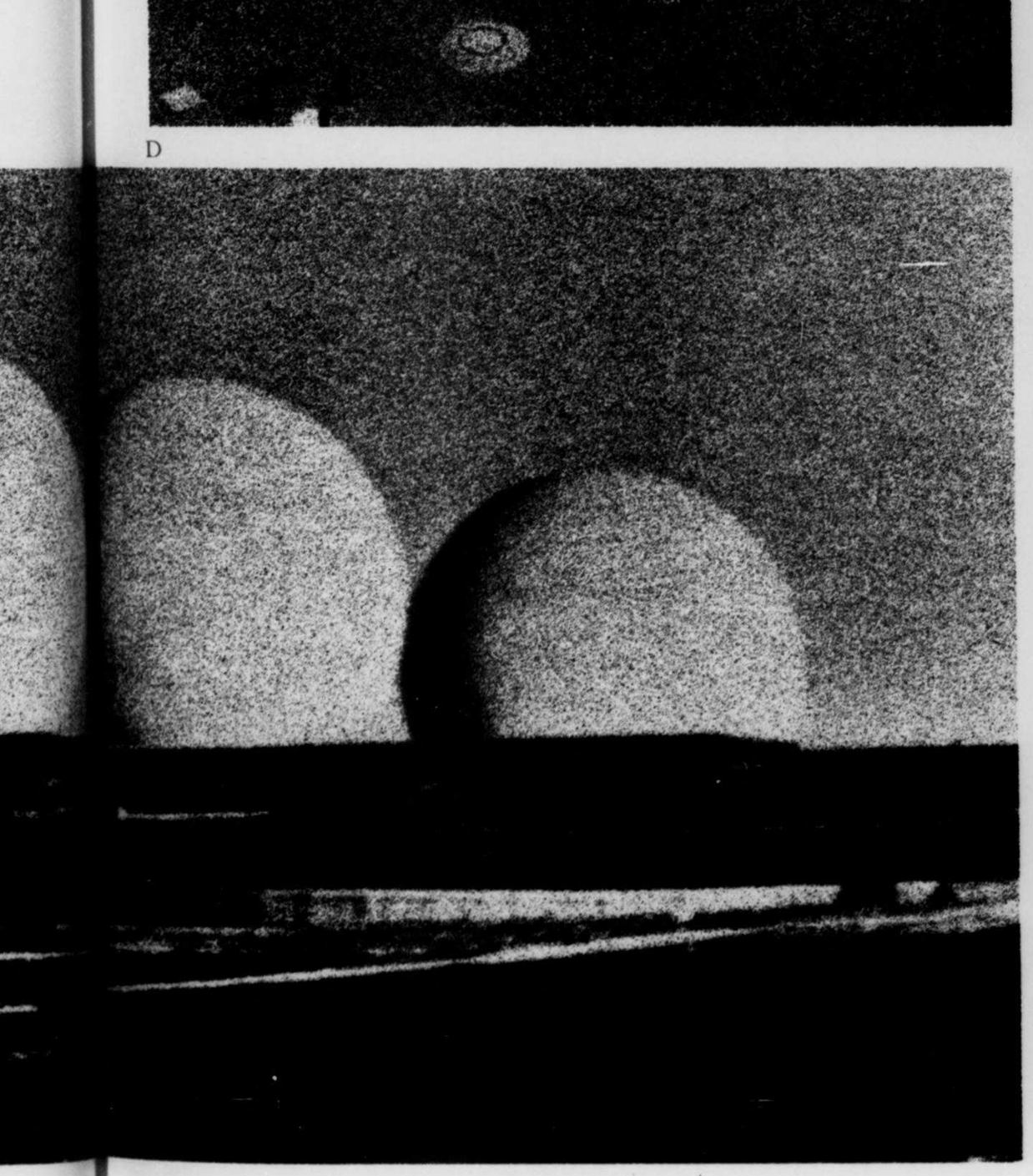
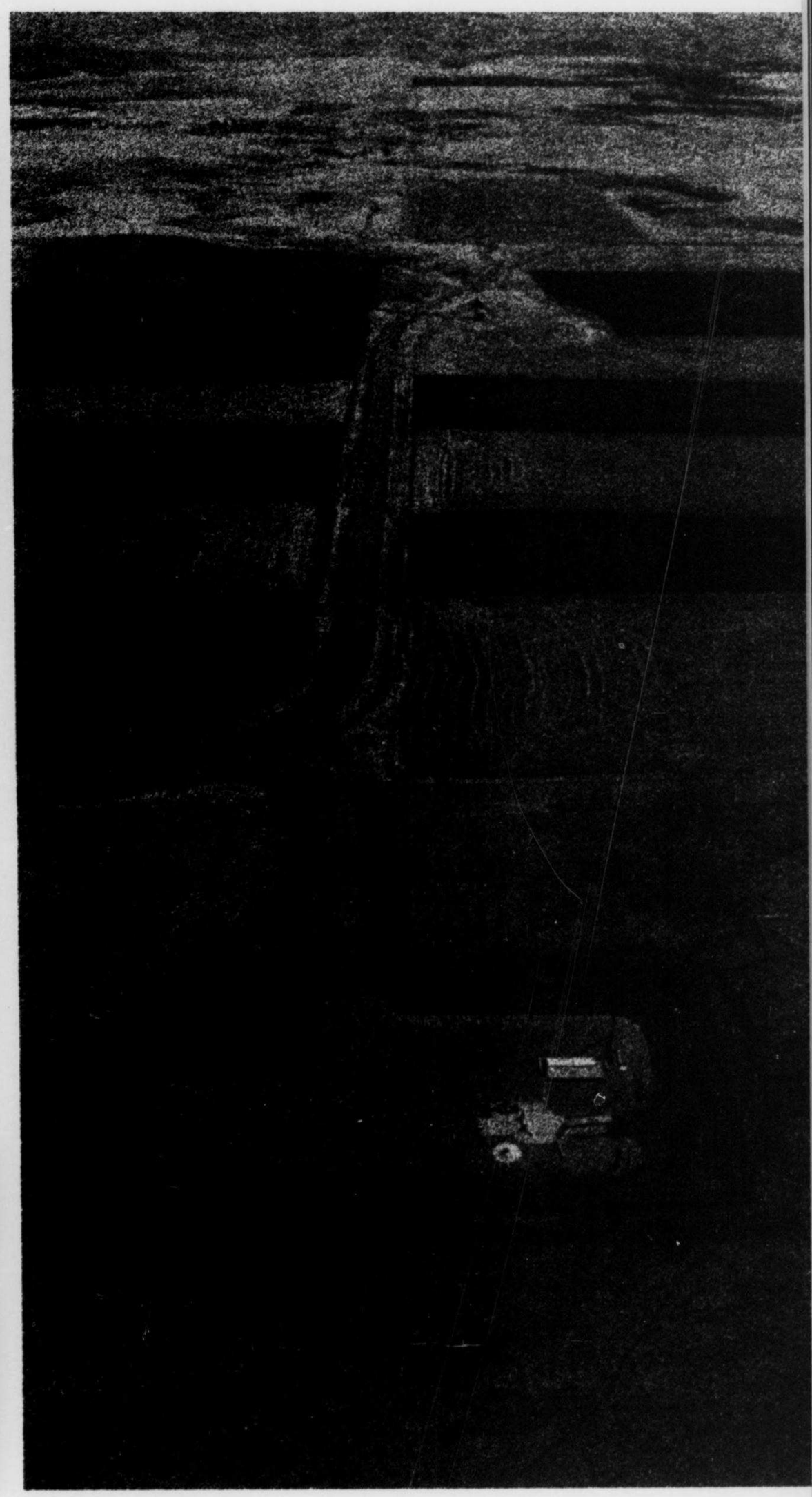




E

and consequent decay of the city. Historically the vessel of the public realm, the city once embodied a kind of organized remembrance through its structure of finite definition. Though traditionally associated with defense and configured as much by the military engineer as the philosopher, the city was the place where people might gather to constitute the body politic of the state. The city's finite definition gave value to the permanence and continuity of the public realm thereby permitting the transcendence of individual existence. It offered memorial content and the possibility of preservation as a means of projecting the past into the future.

The fracturing and disintegration of the city that began with the perfection of ballistics and the advanced development of roads and railways has been greatly accelerated by the defense requirements of the nuclear age. As the only means of passive defense against nuclear attack, dispersion has become the tenet of an antiurban ideology, causing the erosion of the public realm through direct and indirect means. The city can no longer be the site for immortality. It is now the setting for organized suicide, identified as the ground-zero target. Endless expansion and maximized dispersion are understood to be the only methods for minimizing the damage of a single nuclear bomb; they are the sole means

The juxtaposition of so-called visionary architecture and the accomplishments of the engineers of the space program demonstrates a serious gap between even the farthest-out fantasies of architects and the reality accepted daily in advanced, non-building technology.

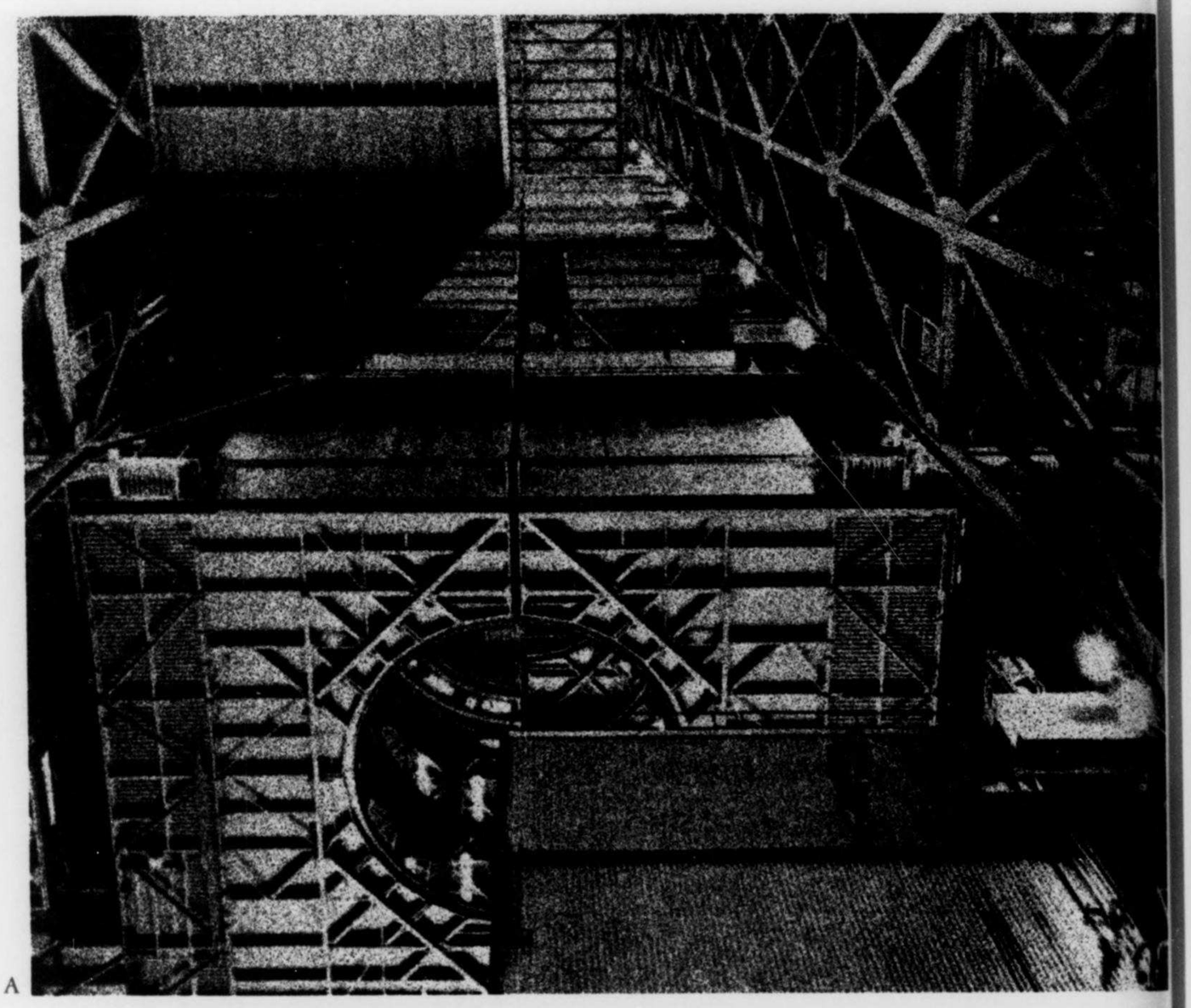
Peter Blake
«Cape Kennedy»
«Architectural Forum,» February 1967

The refinery and the space capsule may serve as models of technical and formal perfection but if they become the objects of a cult the lessons they can teach will completely miss their mark. This unlimited confidence in the potentialities of technology goes hand in hand with a surprising degree of disingenuousness concerning the future of man . . . Such visions as these are soothing to many architects; braced by so much technology, or such confidence in the future, they feel reassured and justified in their social and political abdication.

Claude Schnaidt
«Architecture and Political Commitment»
«Ulm,» August 1967

The proud achievements at Cape Kennedy are proof of our ability to tackle the most staggering problems; and by implication they are an indictment to those who would not expend the same kind of effort on our urban ills. . . . The U.S. has only twice in recent history committed itself to such efforts—and in both instances, one motivation was fear. The other program, of course, gave us the H Bomb.

Peter Blake
«Cape Kennedy»
«Architectural Forum,» February 1967



A

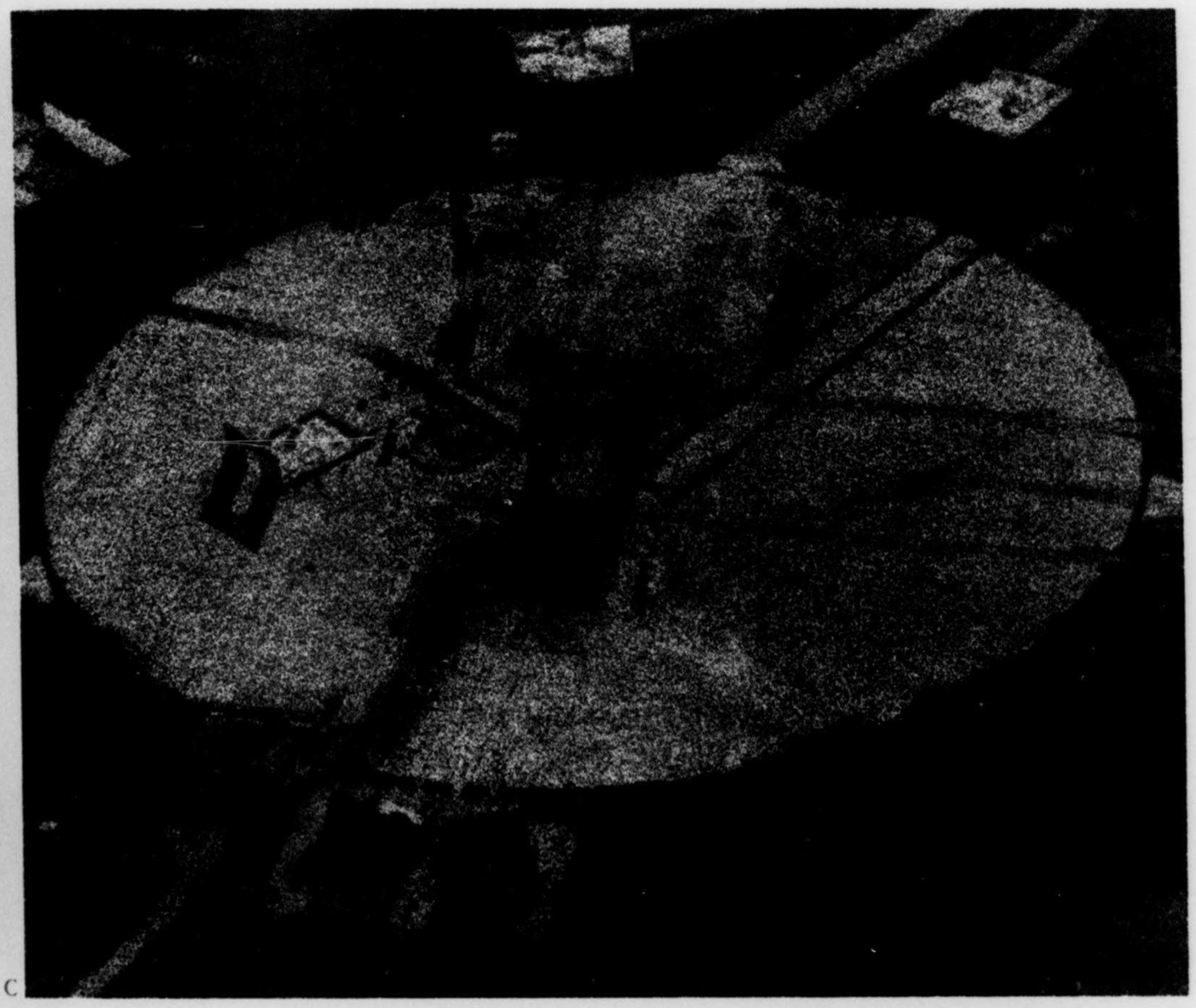
B

C

D

of survival. As the spatial dimension of war expanded, however, the temporal dimension decreased. The needs of the military have come to exceed the available environmental resources: the limits of warfare have been extended into space, but target dispersal is limited by the boundaries of the state. Today the number and power of nuclear weapons has outstripped the ability of the military to defend targets through dispersion. An environment configured on the basis of defense has become irrelevant; the antiurban ideology that caused the dissolution of the finite city has become impotent in the face of current nuclear arsenals. This erosion of the finite city, of organized remembrance and public life, signifies in every sense a crisis in the common world.

This crisis can be understood through the profound effects of military objects and related hardware on the nature of civilian life. In the present day a process has been set in motion, the result of which is unpredictable; uncertainty has become the principal characteristic of human affairs. The denial of a certain future has belied the possibility of transcendence. In *The Fate of the Earth* (1982) Jonathan Schell points out that the present is a fulcrum on which the future and the past are balanced. If the capacity to believe in the future is lost,



C

a
Vertical Assembly Building
Cape Kennedy AFB, Florida

c
Abandoned launch pad
Cape Kennedy AFB, Florida

D

b
Solid Motor Assembly Building
Cape Kennedy AFB, Florida

d
Aerial view of launch facilities
Cape Kennedy AFB, Florida

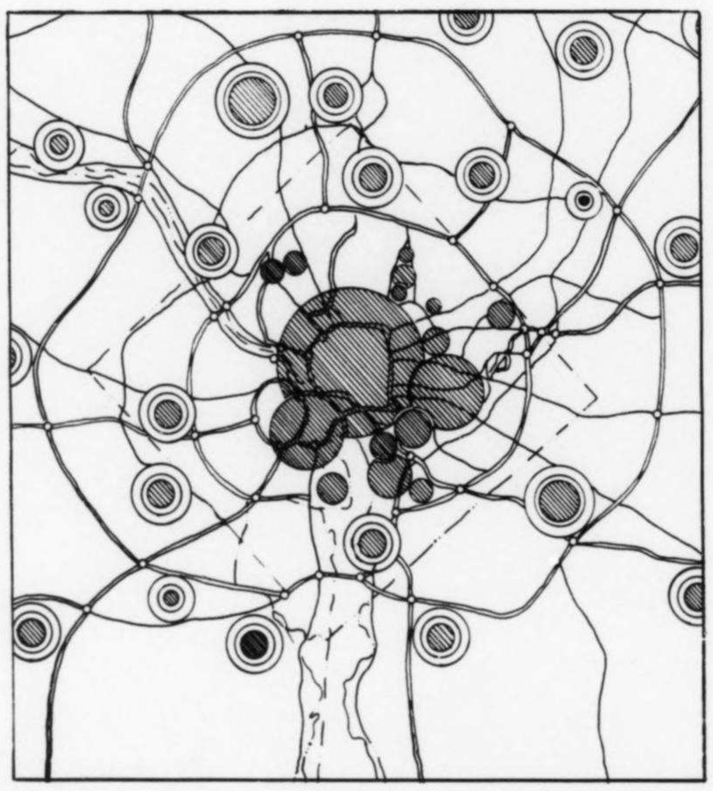
any relation to the past must also fall away. In the nuclear age the future has collapsed into the present with the threat of imminent destruction. The ability of humanity to cancel its own future and the concomitant loss of certainty have radically altered the human condition.

The loss of a certain future brought about by nuclear weapons has locked objects into the present, denying them any possible relation to the pattern of cultural succession and rupturing their relation to precedent and their reason for permanence. An artifact as an end in itself is meaningless in the absence of any permanent measures or values that can precede and outlast its production. The end has collapsed into the means; objects can no longer be valued for their intended use but only as means to further production. The process of production thus becomes the only constant that can have value. The durable object is rendered obsolete, its conservation being a greater impediment to the cycle of production and consumption than its destruction.

The incertitude of the present moment, suspended between an irretrievable past and a precarious future, undermines the

Dispersal of industries and workers into limited-sized, low-density communities, surrounded by open country, is the only realistic protection against atomic attack . . . . There is no alternate. First things come first means: All expansion outside important bomb areas in dispersed communities . . . . Meanwhile, within old metropolitan centers: No addition to congestion—no building. Slum clearance to provide for open spaces serving as fire stops and evacuation lanes. Redevelopment postponed, while all obtainable materials, labor, ingenuity creates new towns.

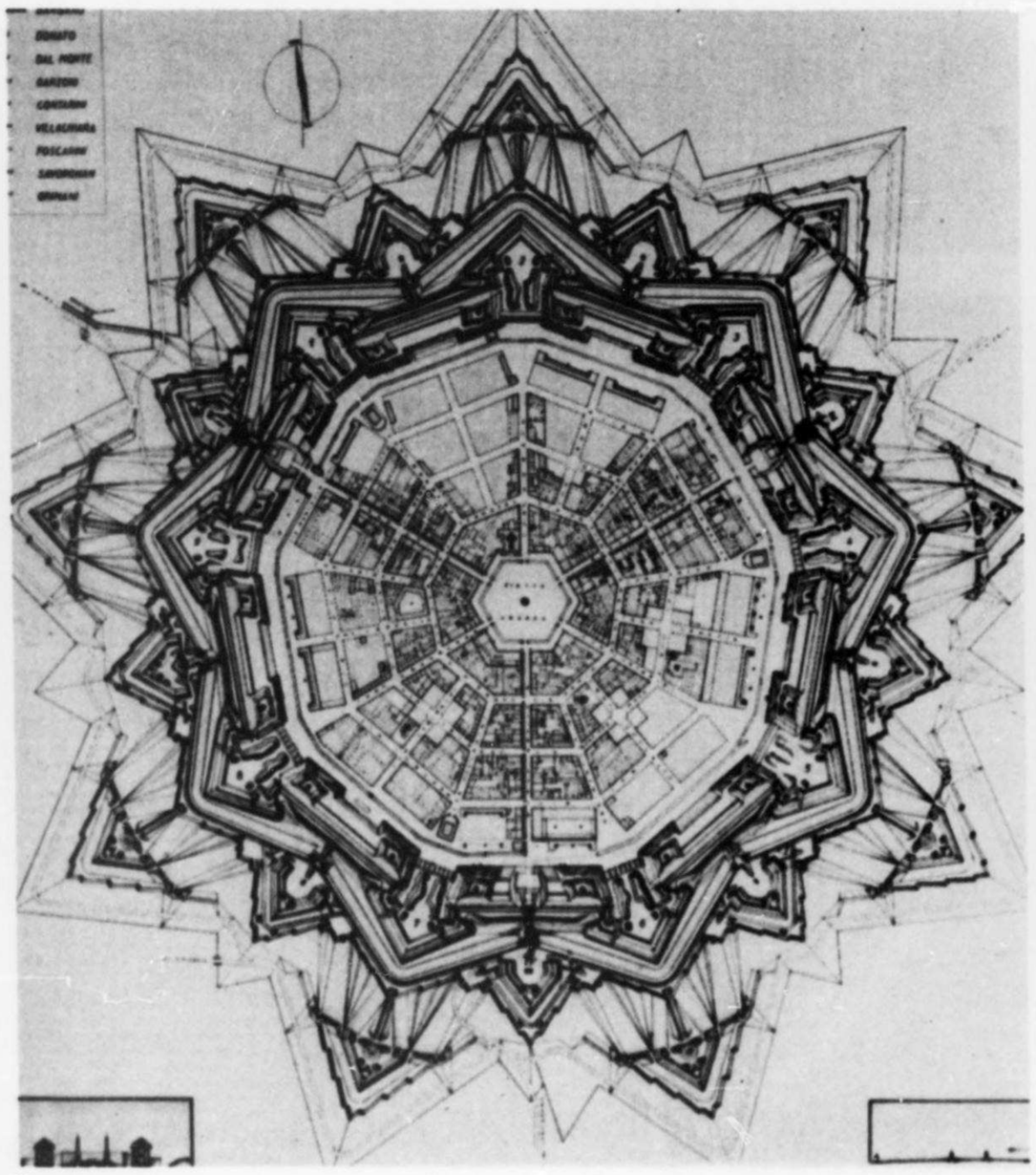
Clarence S. Stein
«Do New Towns Provide Safety? Yes»
«Progressive Architecture,» September 1951



A

The pattern begins with the direction of practically all new construction into widely spaced, optimum-sized new towns, properly sited on the existing metropolitan rail and highway transport grid. At the same time these satellites are connected with the existing metropolis by wide new expressways cut through the present urban mass—expressways which will be the escape and access routes in an attack and which form the beginning of fire breaks.

Donald Monson
«The Pros and Cons of Architecture for Civil Defense»
«Progressive Architecture,» September 1951



B

C

Marc Hacker

purpose of any lasting endeavor such as architecture. When doubt is cast on the simple possibility of living out one's own life–let alone the possibility of an enduring cultural succession–the cultural value of the architectural object becomes questionable. If architecture can no longer exist as a resolution of memory and possible future, any pretense to the building of architecture as such must be suspect.

The current fascination with ephemeral imagery, the primacy of the process of building over any ideal or permanent architectural product, and the loss of belief in building for posterity, are all symptomatic of this crisis. Unable to sustain permanent values, current architecture attempts either to signify value through the representation of buildings with historical pedigree or to achieve definition using little more than advanced building technology.

The uncertainty of the current condition, caused by the futility of nuclear weapons, threatens the complete paralysis of culture. Unless the future is restored to us, the only meaningful program for any cultural artifact, including architecture, is to expose the eschatological dilemma of the age.

To stay will be suicide. Evacuation is the only way to survive. And the best way to evacuate the millions of people in America's target cities is by motor vehicles–on our highways.

Val Paterson
«Traffic Quarterly,» January 1956

The society that has accepted the threat of its utter destruction soon finds it hard to react against lesser ills, for a society cannot be at the same time asleep and awake, insane and sane, against life and for life.

Jonathan Schell
«The Fate of the Earth»
1982

D

a
Pattern of proposed decentralized government centers for Washington DC prepared by the National Capital Park and Planning Commission

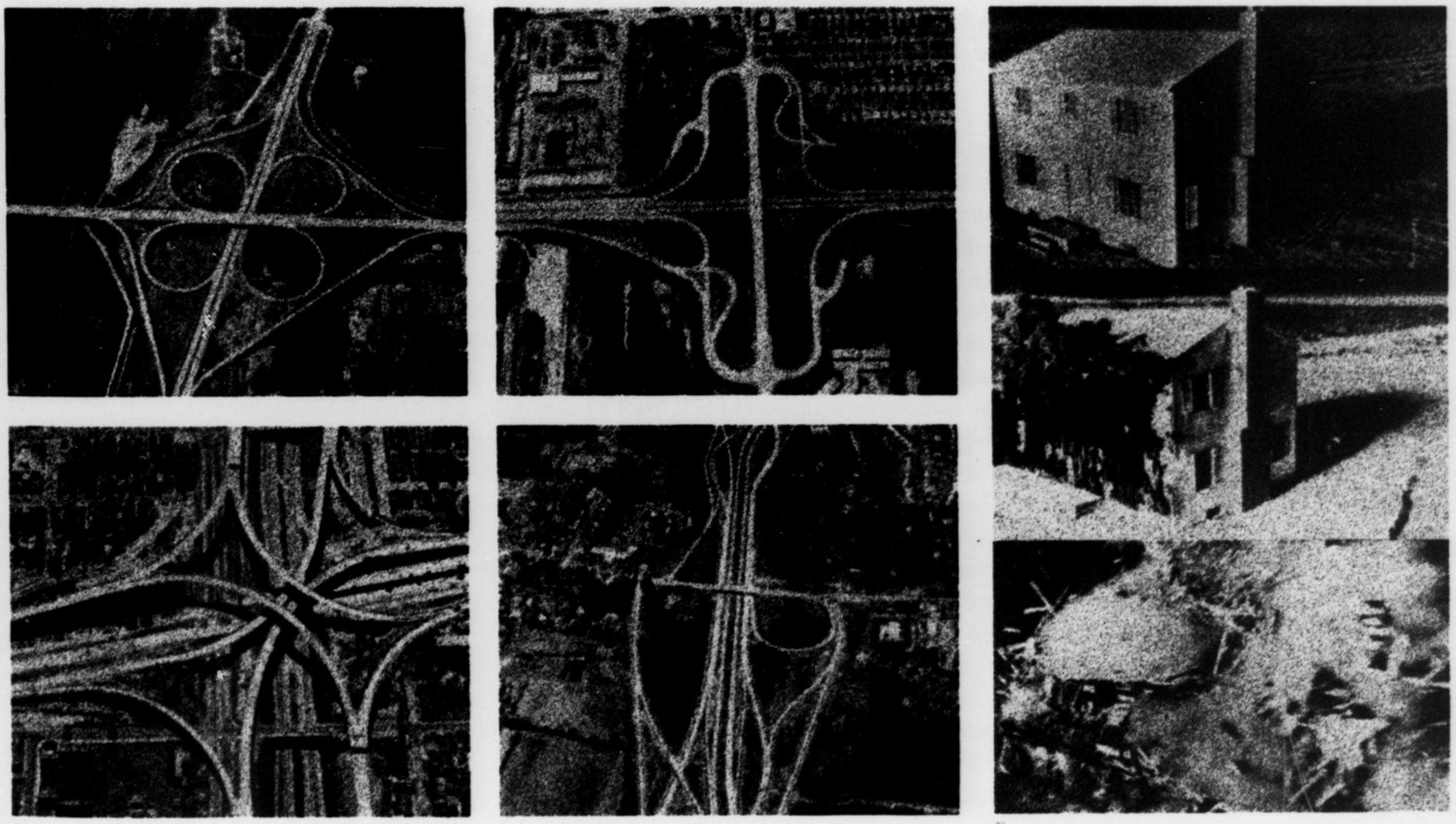
b
Plan of Palmanova, Italy

c
Fallout pattern Detroit, Michigan

d
New suburban development Washington DC

e
Freeway interchanges

f
Destruction of a typical suburban house Operation Doorstep March 1953



E

F

Diane Ghirardo

Architecture of Deceit

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that someone can live in it for years and travel into it and out of it daily without ever coming into contact with a working-class quarter or even with workers—so long, that is to say, as one confines himself to his business affairs or to strolling about for pleasure. This comes about mainly in the circumstances that through an unconscious, tacit agreement as much as through conscious, explicit intention the working class districts are most sharply separated from the parts of the city reserved for the middle class. . . . Manchester's monied aristocracy can now travel from their houses to their places of business in the center of the town by the shortest routes, which run right through all the working class districts, without even noticing how close they are to the most squalid misery which lies immediately about them on both sides of the road. This is because the main streets which run from the Exchange in all directions out of the city are occupied almost uninterruptedly on both sides by shops, which are kept by members of the middle and lower middle classes. In their own interests these shop-keepers should keep up their shops in an outward appearance of cleanliness and respectability; and in fact they do so. . . . Those shops which are situated in the commercial quarter or in the vicinity of the middle class residential districts are more elegant than those which serve to cover up the worker's grimy cottages. Nevertheless, even these latter adequately serve the purpose of hiding from the eyes of wealthy gentlemen and ladies with strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and squalor that form the completing counterpart, the indivisible complement, of their riches and luxury. I know perfectly well that this deceitful manner of building is more or less common to all big cities. . . . I have never elsewhere seen a concealment of such fine sensibility of every thing that might offend the eyes and nerves of the middle classes. And yet it is precisely Manchester that has been built less according to a plan and less within the limitations of official regulations—and indeed more through accident—than any other town.[1]

1
Friedrich Engels
«The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844»
Stuttgart 1892
reprinted Moscow 1973
pp84–86

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, Friedrich Engels exposed the effects of capitalism on the laboring classes. In his analysis of Manchester he also offered one of the first sustained critiques of the built environment. Engels discerned a relationship among political intentions, social realities, and building. Although he was not the last to perceive the nature of this relationship, his approach to building has had little influence on the architecture, construction, and real estate industries in the twentieth century.

Both as a profession and as an academic discipline, architecture prefers not to be directly associated with the construction and real-estate industries. All three deal with building and enjoy an enormously beneficial symbiotic relationship, and all three share an atrophied social conscience. Architecture offers itself as different from the other two by virtue of being an «art» rather than a trade or a business, and to this end contemporary practice–through highly refined mechanisms of dissimulation–conspires to preserve that precarious pretense.

Architecture as art

William Curtis articulates a particularly cogent version of what amounts to a traditional art-historical position in his *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. Curtis insists on «a certain focused interest on questions of form and meaning.» He selects what he believes to be the masterpieces of modern architecture–«I make no apologies for concentrating on buildings of high visual and intellectual quality»–and sets out to write «a balanced, readable overall view of modern architecture from its beginnings until the recent past.» To Curtis, balance implies exorcizing political, social, and ideological considerations of the sort that he finds in the versions of history offered by Kenneth Frampton or Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, who «emphasized ideology at the expense of other matters.»[2]

This critical position–which is by far the dominant one in America–at most admits only passing reference to any larger cultural, political, and social considerations. Instead it involves extended visual analysis, concentrating primarily on a few «important» buildings–the Robie House, the Villa Savoye, the Kimball Art Museum. Such singular masterpieces transcend not only political, social, and ideological contingencies, but their own time as well. In Curtis' words, «To slot them into the modern movement is to miss much of their value.»[3] Set like jewels into the diadem of architecture, they become aesthetic objects par excellence and above reproach.

However appealing it may seem, a critical position predicated on formal qualities remains problematical. The standards of judgment are reduced to categories–«formal resolution,» «integration,» and «authenticity»–concepts which are more opaque than most critics will concede. Except on the most general level, none of these categories denote an objectively verifiable criterion, despite an unspoken assumption to that effect. Even if, in the best of cases, there is general agreement to canonize a few works, considerable disagreement usually attends the decision about the particular works to be so embalmed. Indeed, the criteria for selecting one work over another are often arbitrary precisely because judgments based on formal analyses boil down to nothing more than matters of taste. One critic may find a certain degree of mathematical complexity necessary to make a building great; another may focus on the effects of massing techniques; and yet a third may demand an elegant series of

2
William J. R. Curtis «Modern Architecture Since 1900» New Jersey 1982 pp6–11, 389–92

3
Curtis, p388

references to or comments upon buildings of the past. Though there is no denying the interest or significance of any of these aspects, it remains clear that assessing them depends as much upon personal taste as do preferences for a particular style.[4]

Edoardo Persico remarked on this situation nearly half a century ago, when he surveyed the bitter factional rivalries in Fascist Italy between classicizing traditionalists and modern movement rationalists. Persico concluded that, although they appeared to reflect dramatically different positions, the polemics in fact masked an underlying consensus. Since all sides took their cues from Fascism, the stylistic debates that flourished in the architectural press concerned matters of taste rather than substance.[5] It was no more than a preference for white walls and ribbon windows competing with a predilection for traditional columns and arches. Persico's critique addressed an unspoken corollary–that both factions fell over themselves to give architectural expression to the ideals of Italian Fascism: to provide luxury apartments for the bourgeoisie, or to design urban settlements that permitted close surveillance of the lowest classes.

Lobotomized history surfaces in contemporary criticism in a variety of guises. Curtis, for example, faults the «whites» (formalists) and the «greys» (informalists) of the 1970s for having nothing to say about the current state of American society; and he does this in a 400-page text devoted to formalist analysis.[6] Other historians laboriously criticize the naive and utopian visions of early European modernists who associated their architecture with radical opposition to existing political and social systems; at the same time they lament the fate of the modern movement under the totalitarian pressures of Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany.

To be sure, the high aspirations of the European early modernists were often unrealistic, as were their exaggerated claims for the role of the architect in shaping the new societies they envisioned. Further, many critics have correctly diagnosed an authoritarian strain in the social programs of Le Corbusier and others. Yet the extraordinary power of Le Corbusier's architecture–and indeed, that of Frank Lloyd Wright–sprang in part from their passionate searches for an architecture that would confront contemporary social realities.

Architecture as fashion

A telling contrast can be drawn between the responses of contemporary architects to the economic decline of the 1970s and the attitude adopted by the radical architects who confronted the economically uncertain aftermath of the First World War. In the immediate postwar period architects turned to dreaming up new worlds to replace the old one; Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius come to mind as architects who attempted to reformulate architecture's role in society, and they are only two of a large and distinguished group active in Weimar Germany.

Conversely, when building opportunities dwindled in the United States in the 1970s, architects turned to drawings–not even designs of a different and better world, but instead a set of increasingly abstract, pretty (and marketable) renderings of their own or of antique works and recycled postclassical picturesque sites. Like much building of the decades just preceding, these aesthetic indulgences simply masquerade as architecture. They reveal architects in full retreat from any involvement with the actual world of buildings.

4
Postmodernists defend the use of formal elements from ancient or Renaissance classicism, for example, with the argument that meaning inheres only in historical forms–that is, premodern forms. With this claim they impale themselves on the horns of a dilemma since it leads them to incorporate historical forms into their work in such a way as to drain the forms of their highly precise historical associations. (In the designs of Michael Graves, for example, the keystone is hollowed out to become a window or raised high to become a scupper.) However contradictory the two positions, postmodernists do indeed want it both ways, and the point remains that they stand on the shifting grounds of arbitrary fashion.

5
Edoardo Persico «Punto e da capo per l'architettura» Domus VII 1934

6
Curtis, p355

Architecture as feeling

Another approach attempts to evade the trap of taste and fashion by explicitly setting itself apart from current postmodernist discourse. Christopher Alexander, an ardent advocate of this view, maintains that «the core of architecture depends on feeling.» Alexander talks about the «primitive feeling» evoked by a steeply pitched roof; he believes that the pitched roof may be the «most natural and simple» thing to build, and he contrasts it with the arid forms of contemporary architecture, which are prized precisely because they lack feeling. The task of the architect, Alexander argues, is to produce a harmonious work that feels «absolutely comfortable—physically, emotionally, practically,» and indeed, «architects are entrusted with the creation of that harmony in the world.»

Like the formalists, this group arrogates to itself the power to decide what you and I will find «authentic,» «integrated,» «natural,» and «comfortable.»[7] Underlying this archaeology of primitive forms is a desperate search, shared with the formalists, for a universal architecture and a universal standard of value; there is a concomitant aggressive hostility toward critical positions that engage in dialogue with the unresolved, uncomfortable, politically explosive, and unharmonious.

The contemporary discourse on architecture thus fashions the discipline's own neutron bomb, which promises to leave nothing but the vacant buildings intact—an empty bric-a-brac landscape in both style and substance, a literally empty reminiscence of a bygone culture.

The critic's complicity

The responsibility for having cultivated this hardy bloom belongs at least as much to critics and historians as it does to architects. Because they assign priority to the unique formal features of individual monuments, historians and critics diminish interest in anything else. Criticism today borrows the already inadequate tools of art history as traditionally practiced, substitutes description for analysis, and turns architecture into a harmless but ultimately meaningless and consumable artifact. As society's arbiters of taste, critics also help to distribute society's rewards—prestige and money—to those architects who are willing to produce fresh new fashions destined for elite consumption.

The architectual profession seems deeply divided between those who conceive it as an art and those who perceive it as a service. Few would argue that either of these components can safely be jettisoned, but exactly what their proper relationship ought to be is not clear—nor is it likely to become so. Moreover, anything beyond purely formal concerns in the work of architecture is seen as sullying architecture's purity and rendering it no more than a billboard for political beliefs or the tool of class conflict and competing ideologies.[8] While banal or badly built work presents less of a problem (Speer's Berlin, for example), a widely acclaimed, complex, and interesting work such as Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio in Como is deeply troubling, for its explicit and undeniably political matrix cannot successfully be evaded.

Sometimes architecture *is* an explicit political billboard; at other times it sets itself in opposition to dominant class interests; and still elsewhere it constitutes an unconscious—but no less real—expression of political and social realities and aspirations. Certainly aesthetic and formal considerations come

7
Christopher Alexander in debate with Peter Eisenman in HGSD News March/April 1983 pp12–17; Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein «A Pattern Language: Towns, Building, Construction» New York 1977; Alexander «The Timeless Way of Building» New York 1979

8
If we look at the recent Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas building in Buenos Aires, for example, we recognize the references to historical forms that avoid banal imitation, and we can appreciate it as a highly intelligent, accomplished structure, with a high degree of sensitivity to the site, to the urban context, to contemporary building practice, and specifically, to building traditions in Buenos Aires. But what if we ask for whom it was built or inquire into its urban context in the political turbulence of Buenos Aires? Altogether too many critics and architects today would dismiss this line of questioning as irrelevant.

into play in any understanding of a building; but the inescapable truth is that these categories are culturally conditioned, often arbitrary, and only two among a number of components that determine the value of architecture.

Architecture and evasive maneuverability

What accounts for the architectural community's pervasive refusal to confront real issues in the realm of architecture and the world that circumscribes it? When so much energy is devoted to maintaining architecture's privilege and its purity, one has to wonder what is being concealed.

Academic politics are so bitter because the stakes are so small; in a case where stakes are immeasurably larger–as in the politics of building–the apparent strategy is to place something innocuous at center stage in order to divert attention from more important concerns. Formal elements–style, harmony of parts, call them what you will–are sufficiently trivial to be awarded top billing in architectural discourse. It is also far easier and far more tidy to persevere in formalist critiques, thereby avoiding the risk of antagonizing moneyed interests. In turn, architects choose the safer course by designing buildings that evade issues of substance.

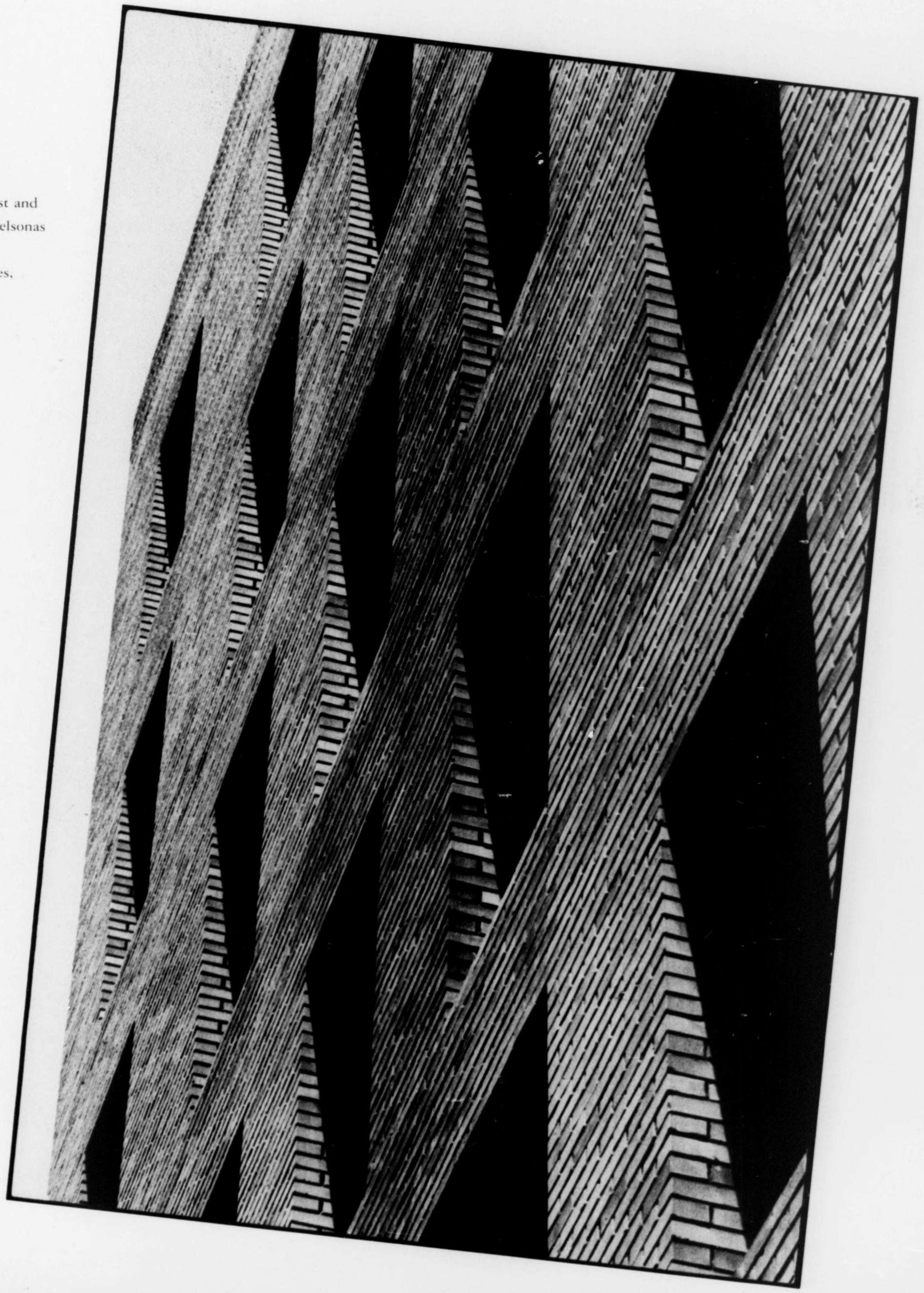
The position that only formal elements matter in architecture bespeaks a monumental refusal to confront serious problems; it avoids a critique of the existing power structure, of the ways power is used, and of the identity of those whose interests power serves. To do otherwise might entail opening a Pandora's box of far more complicated issues: racism and white flight, exploitation and the manipulation of land values, prices, resources, building permits, zoning, and taxes on behalf of a small power elite–as well as larger questions about our current cultural situation. At the same time, to suggest that the world contains an ineluctable harmony which an architect need only discover in the realm of forms and feelings is dangerously naive.[9] An architecture predicated solely upon such principles finds its objective correlative in a Walt Disney movie: soothing in the promise of happy endings, simplified with clear-cut villains and heroes, and seductive in the presentation of a world that in so many ways simply does not correspond to the one in which we live.

In none of its manifestations does the profession dare question the politics of building: who builds what, where, for whom, and at what price. Although arguably one of the most important issues for all architects to consider–and for the discipline to emphasize–it is addressed by few. Certainly as professionals, architects do little to gain a voice in these important decisions–they do not, for example, organize political action committees; by default they are left with the trivial issues of fashion and taste. The anemic architecture that issues from this acquiescence overwhelms our cities. Nowhere is this more grotesquely apparent than in the tenements of the South Bronx in New York. Officials chose to deal with socially troubled, abandoned, and physically scarred public housing projects by spending thousands of dollars to replace broken and boarded up windows with decorative panels depicting houseplants and window shades, thereby avoiding a serious confrontation with the community's problems. Public officials in effect aped the activities of prominent architects who currently undertake the same kind of window dressing in their own work.

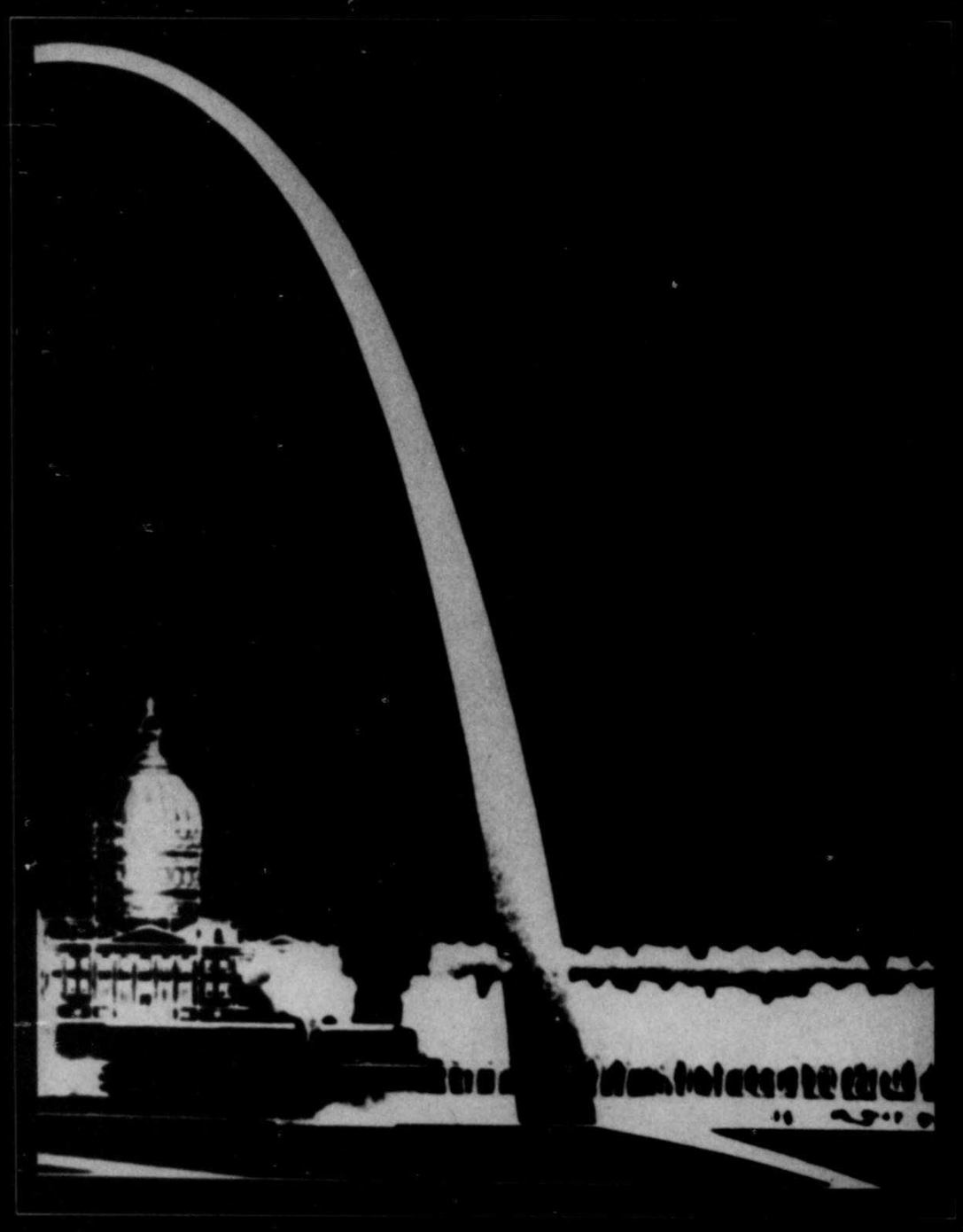
Only when architects, critics, and historians accept the responsibility for building–in all of its ramifications–will we approach an architecture of substance.

9
Louis Sullivan «The Young Man in Architecture» address to the Architecture League of Chicago June, 1900; «Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings» New York 1947 p223

Diana Agrest and
Mario Gandelsonas
Building I
Buenos Aires,
Argentina



Coming of Age



Eero Saarinen and Modern
American Architecture

Eero Saarinen's career is commonly understood to represent about a decade of production, from 1951 to 1961. His sudden death occurred in the midst of construction of ten of his major buildings and at the beginning of a relocation of the office from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan to Hamden, Connecticut, now the home of the successor firm, Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. This move to the East Coast was to be Saarinen's coming of age, a step from the industrial Midwest to the heart of culture and the home of major corporations. Eero Saarinen did not suddenly appear as a fully developed architect at the age of forty, however, his evolution is the story of diverse directions in design during the maturing years of modernism.

Born in Europe, Eero was an architect whose life paralleled the transformation of America, an immigrant nation looking back upon its European roots became Kennedy's New Frontier, where innovative vitality and technological prowess characterized every field, especially architecture. His career spans the middle years of twentieth-century architecture, from the premodernist craft traditions of his father's atelier to the questioning of modernism exhibited in his later work. This critique has been continued and variously practiced by the third generation of modern architects, many of whom began their careers in his office.

Of the leading architects of the 1950s Saarinen remains one of the most enigmatic. At the height of his career he was characterized as "the most interesting of the second generation of modern American architects." . . . it seems to be Saarinen's secret that he, more than most of his contemporaries, recognizes that the valid approaches to modern architectural problems are vastly more varied than any single-minded approach would indicate."

Saarinen's career resists simple characterization, since it does not present an identifiable "look" or an easily discernible unity as a body of work. It is as if several architects were at work within Eero Saarinen, each pushing the limits of modern architecture in a different direction. As Peter Carter observed, "Saarinen was aware of today's technology in its widest sense and he used its potential as a means of achieving a many-faceted architectural expression within the tradition of the modern masters. To advance the symbolic and environmental content of that tradition he explored special architectural vernaculars for each project . . . it precluded the possibility of a personal style, a fact which set him apart from any of his contemporaries."

With the critique of modernism during the late 1960's and into the 1970's, however, Saarinen's work fell into disrepute. As Reyner Banham noted, "Practically everything that seemed wrong with U.S. architecture was illustrated by pointing at Eero. . . . His position raises some embarrassing questions about the correct stance for an architect in a society that has the kind clients we do. . . . Saarinen's work for large corporate and institutional clients presents most clearly the problems faced by an architect committed both to the principles of pragmatic modernism demanded of a large design practice, and to the freedom and innovation afforded by a small atelier.

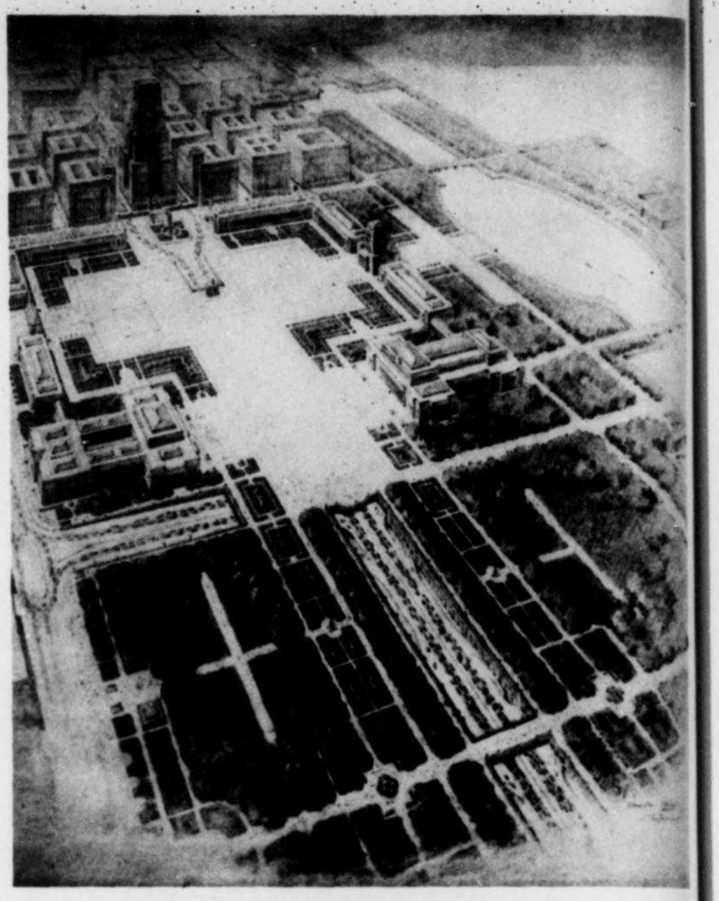
Eero Saarinen was initiated into architecture in the family atelier of his father and mother, Eliel and Loja Saarinen. In Finland the Saarinens had developed a joint career in close intellectual dialogue with friends and other architects, and their work represented a style of life centered around their milestone house, «Hvitträsk.» There a *salon* atmosphere prevailed, encouraging participation by all members, including Loja, a weaver, as well as daughter Pipsan (Eva-Lisa) and son Eero, both of whom «came to accept as a matter of fact the professional problems which were the daily concern of their parents and the associates who worked at Hvitträsk. . . . Eero was able before he reached early teens to draw freehand and draft. ‹I learned while crawling around under my father's drafting table.›»[4]

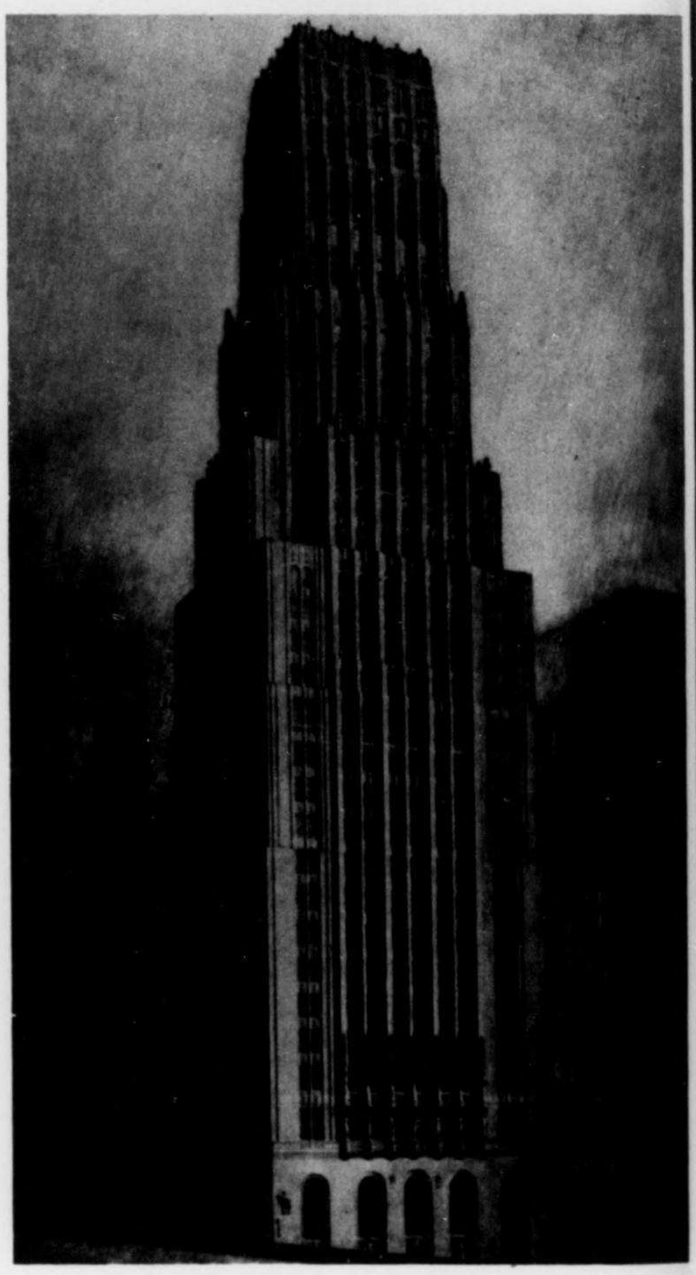
It was the 1922 competition for the *Chicago Tribune* that brought Eliel and his family to America. Saarinen placed second with a design many consider superior to the winning gothic tower of Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells. Eliel Saarinen's next work in America was the 1923 scheme for Grant Park on the Chicago Lakefront. The boulevard's edges were to be marked by towers based on the *Tribune* model, and they were developed in relationship to the plazas and adjacent lower buildings «to define urban space rather than merely occupy it.»[5]

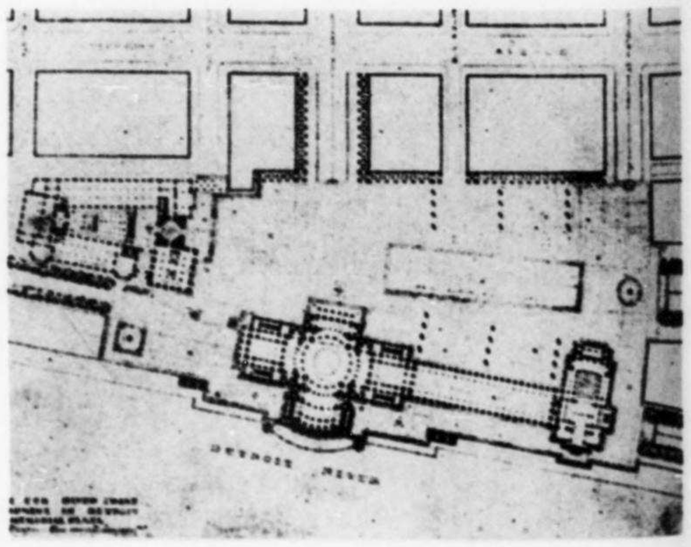
The Chicago project was followed in 1924 by a proposal for a civic center on the Detroit riverfront. This, like the earlier project, was typical of Eliel Saarinen's use of history. Its precedent was Piazza San Marco in Venice, with a symbolic tower facing the water. The design brought Saarinen in contact with Detroit newspaper magnate George Booth, who sponsored the project. This support led to the series of commissions from Booth that evolved into the institutions comprising the Cranbrook Educational Community.

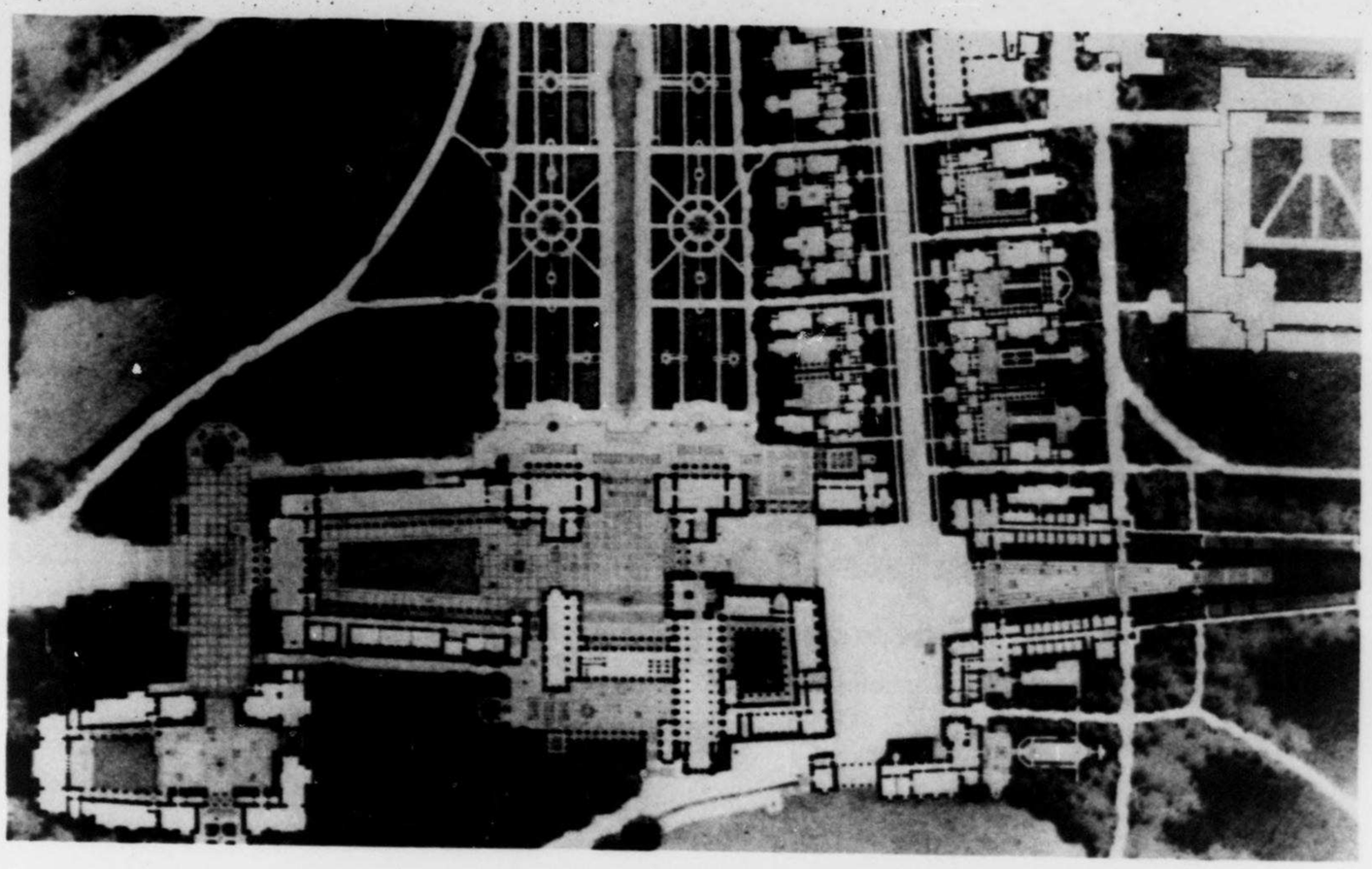
Cranbrook became a synthesis of the elder Saarinen's concepts of architecture and urban design as well as a realization and expansion of his vision of a style of life. The overall plan, developed during 1924–1925, shows a positive concern for exterior space. The courts and gardens, defined by buildings and linked by roads and walkways, are organized axially, with a rich interplay between localized symmetry and compositional balance; subtle shifts and loose connections articulated by variation of shape and departures from strict orthogonal regularity provide endless variety.

Eliel Saarinen's architecture underwent a gradual evolution, beginning with the design of the Kingswood School in 1929. Simplified massing and more sparing use of ornament distinguish the ensemble from earlier work. It was during this period that Eero began his collaboration with his father.[6]



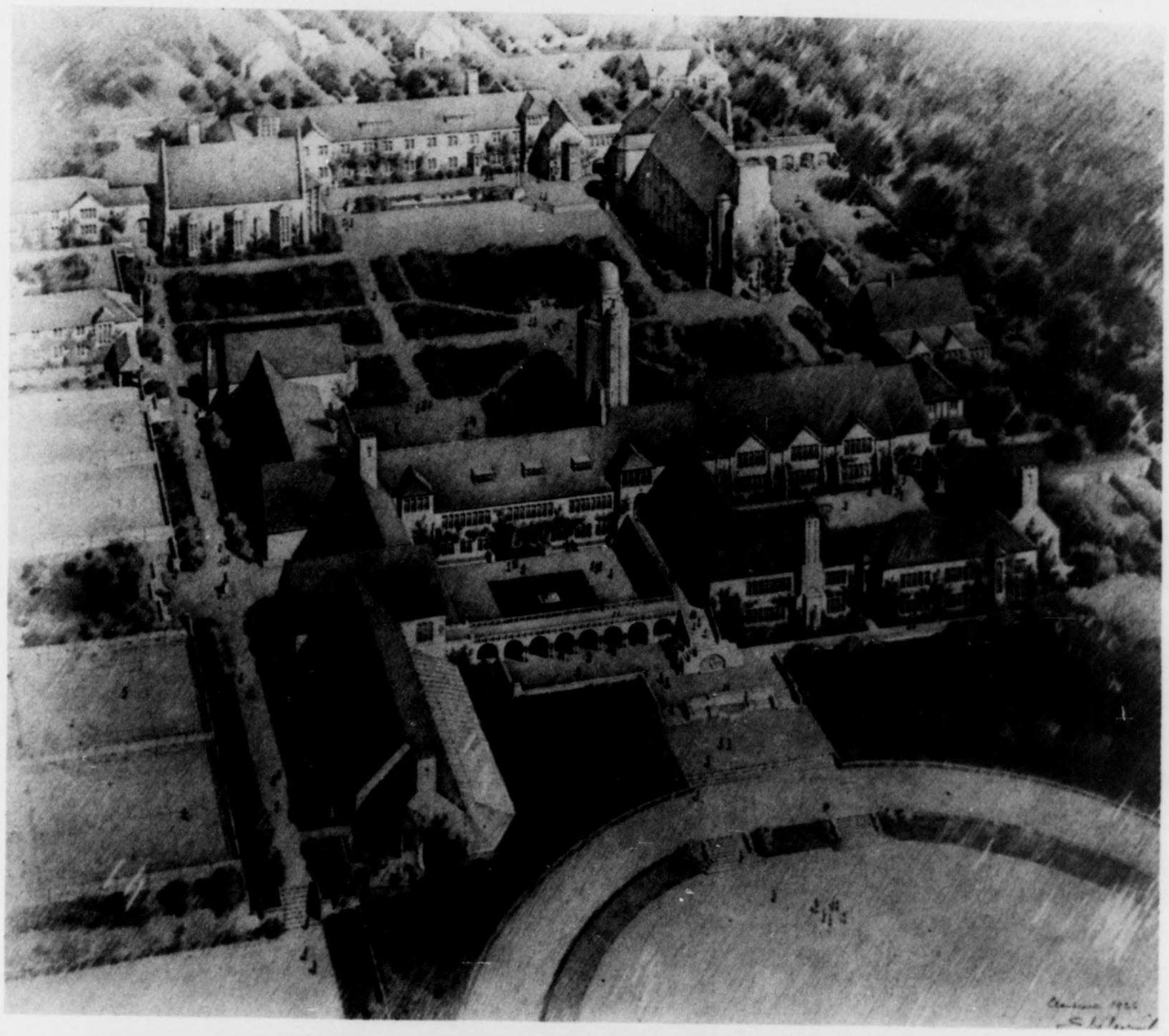






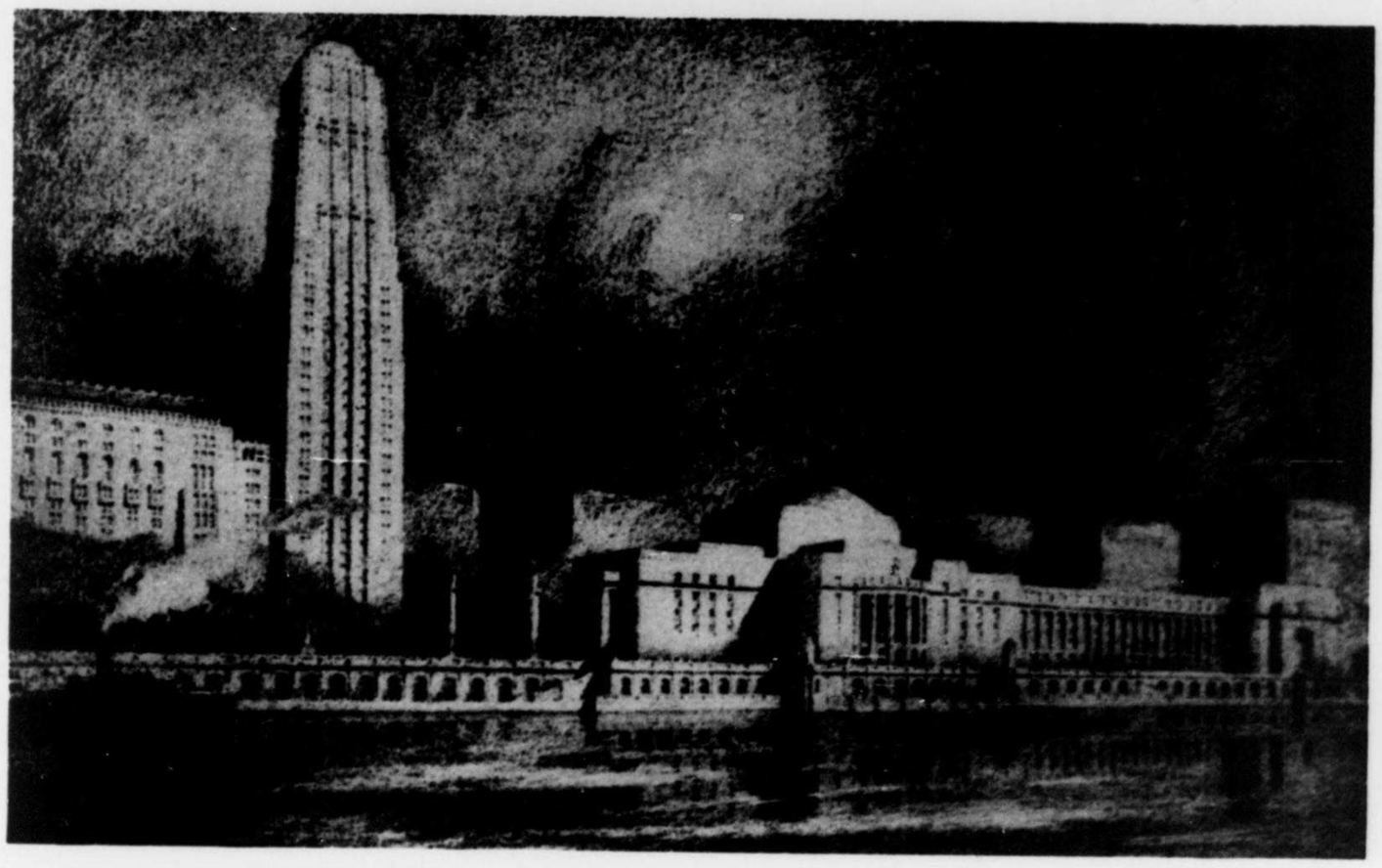
Chicago Lakefront
project
Eliel Saarinen

Cranbrook Academy
of Art
Bloomfield Hills,
Michigan
proposed site plan
Eliel Saarinen



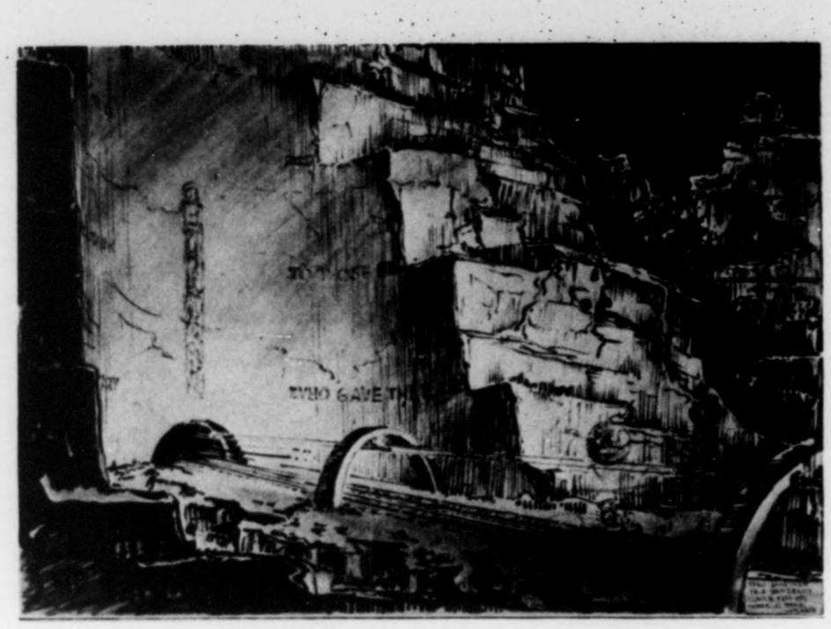
Chicago Tribune
Tower competition
project
Eliel Saarinen

Cranbrook School
Bloomfield Hills,
Michigan
Eliel Saarinen



Detroit Riverfront
project
Eliel Saarinen

Detroit Riverfront
project
Eliel Saarinen



Memorial Tunnel
Entrance project

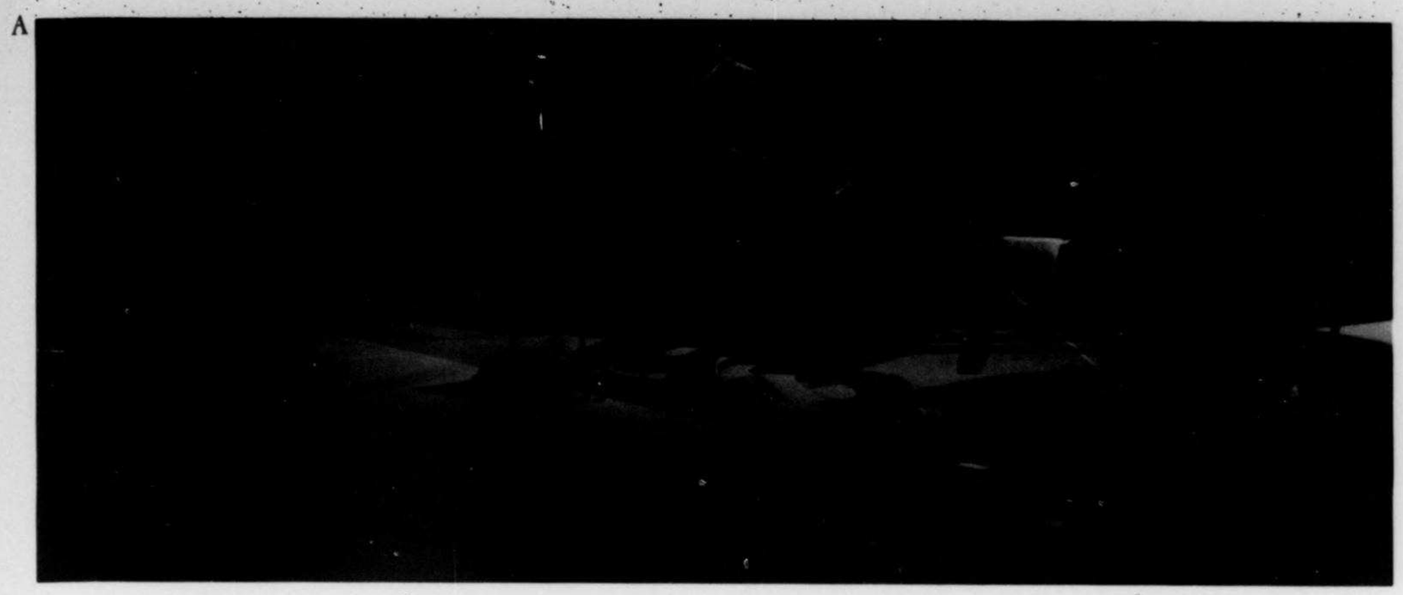
As a proper European son, Eero honored the natural deference that meant developing in his father's shadow. However, the paternalistic relationship was also one that valued the growth and achievements of progeny. The ensuing collaboration of Eliel and Eero Saarinen–which lasted until Eero was nearly forty–determined the primary characteristics of Eero's eventual independence. He did not reject his father's principles but refined them and grew through them.

These principles were based on a respectful sense of the past, with an emphasis on evolution from a conservative formal tradition. Foremost was a concern for design of the whole environment. More than a process of making beautiful objects, design was an attempt to shape each artifact with respect for «the next largest thing.»[7] Eliel's production, ranging from tableware and textiles to urban planning, was always characterized by a unique sensitivity to craftsmanship and detail. Perhaps his greatest contribution–only now being reassessed with the demise of modern urbanism–was his work concerning the urban environment.[8] The elder Saarinen was committed to the emotive potential of architecture through the use of symbolism and allusive forms, the play of light upon surfaces, and the narrative sequence of space. His work demonstrates a desire for a culturally resonant architecture that would be both highly articulate and widely accessible.

Eero Saarinen initiated his own career by pursuing a professional education independent of the family atelier. This began in 1929, with a year at the Acadèmie de la Grande Chaumiére in Paris, where he studied sculpture. Though the Cranbrook Academy of Art opened in 1930 and began to admit graduate students of architecture in 1931, Eero entered Yale University instead. The choice was a conscious decision to avoid formal participation in a program conducted by Eliel Saarinen. In contrast, Yale offered a traditional program in the Beaux-Arts method. Eero was a consistent winner of design prizes during 1931–1934, his years at Yale. Saarinen's academic projects generally exhibited a clarity in basic *parti* which made them attractive. His sculptural directness was shown in his winning entry for the Spiering Prize for «A Memorial Tunnel Entrance,» which «by simply scooping out the rock in a semicircle at the tunnel entrance for a great height, and cutting back huge steps in the face of the mountain at either side, produced an approach monumental though primitive in character and as enduring as the mountain itself.»[9] Saarinen's approach was to see the problem as one of direct integration with landscape.

After graduation from Yale, Eero spent the years 1934–1936 visiting the great monuments of Europe and Egypt, eventually going to Finland, where he worked in the Helsinki office of Jarl Eklund. The return to Finland brought Eero in more direct contact with Scandinavian functionalism and certain works of the International Style. Among these were new projects by Gunnar Asplund in Sweden, such as the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, Bredenberg's Department Store, and the Gothenburg Law Courts. Alvar Aalto, whose work had earlier impressed Eliel Saarinen, had just completed the Paimio Sanatorium and the Viipuri Library, and it is likely that Eero studied these important buildings. The European influence became immediately apparent in his work; while in Helsinki he produced several competition projects, all of which exhibit an interest in the formal concerns of modernism.[10]

A



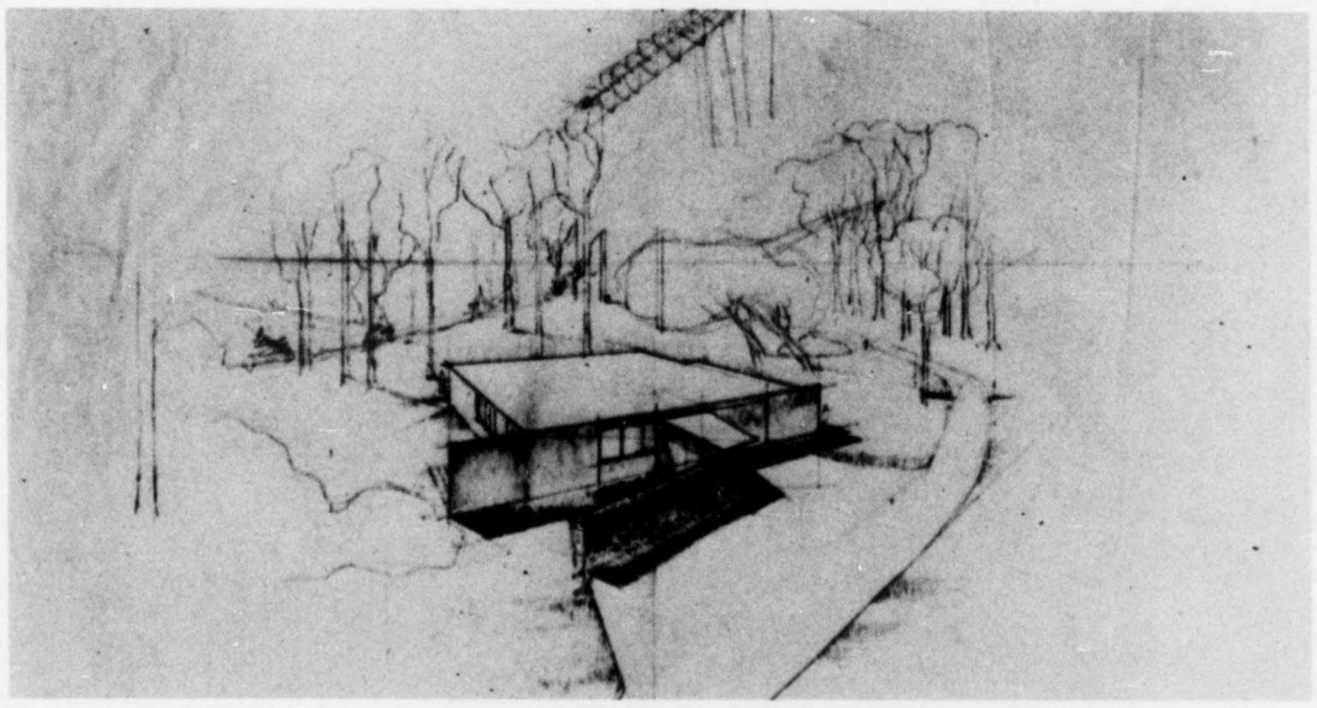
a
Demountable space project

b
Case Study House 8
Eames House

c
Case Study House 9
Entenza House

d
Case Study Houses 8 and 9

B



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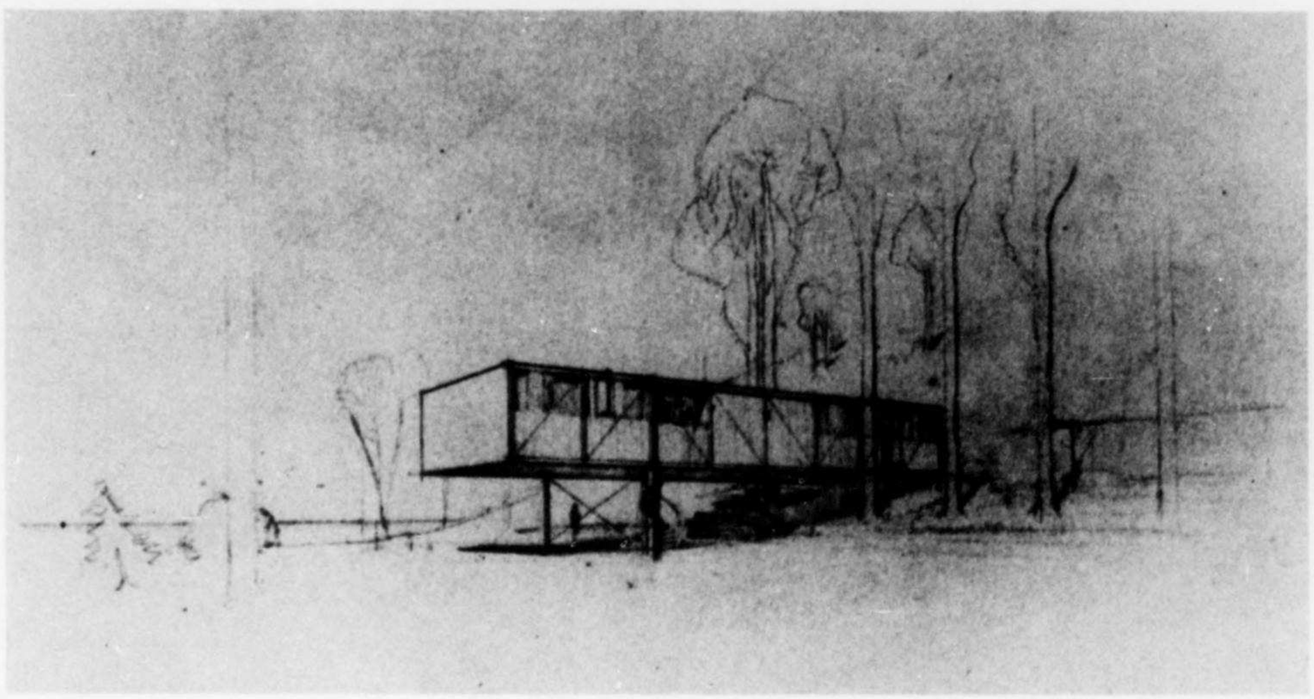

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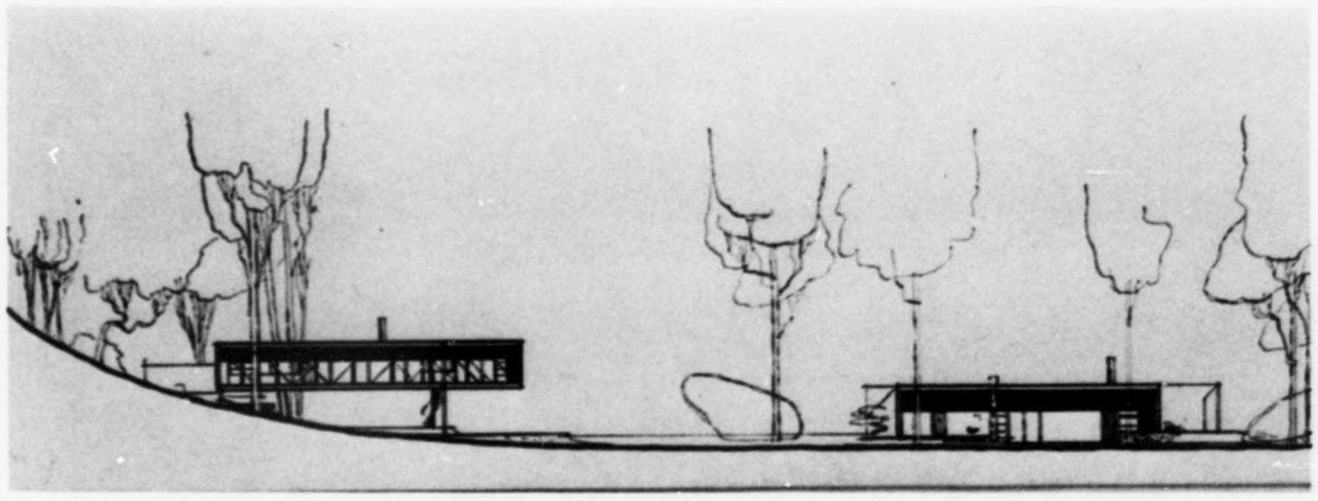


Upon his return to America in 1937, when he was twenty-six, Eero began to establish his professional independence. In this transitional phase he participated in diverse design activities, including individual works and collaborative projects with those at Cranbrook, as well as joint work with his father and with his brother-in-law, J. Robert Swanson. These projects reflect a broad range of interests and solutions, from competitions and investigative studies to community planning and design.

Under his own authorship was a project designed in 1942 for the United States Gypsum Company: a «demountable space» modular building based on a central mast and tensile roof system related to Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House of 1927–1930. Designed to serve a variety of needs for postwar communities, the building could be extended, and its facades could be reconfigured; services were handled as «plug-on» elements. The project reveals an ideological indifference to composition, suggesting instead a variety of combinations both conditioned by the process of industrialized production and ordered by the needs of circumstance.

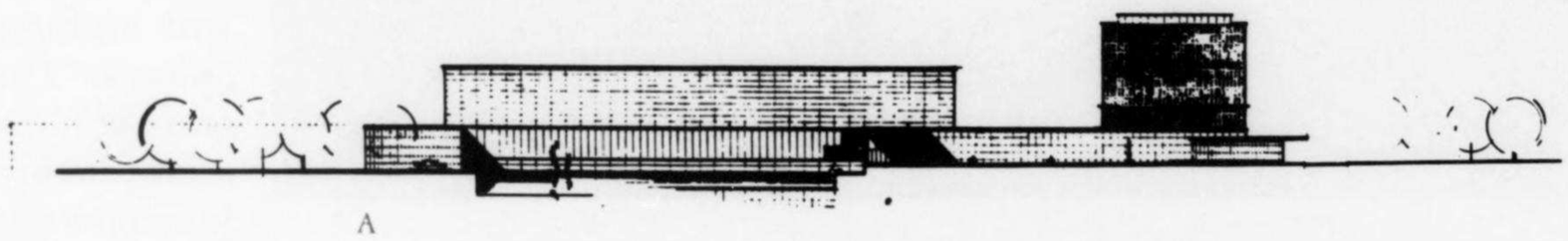
In 1943 Eero won a design competition sponsored by California Arts and Architecture magazine for a postwar house. His proposal called for preassembled components in a variety of combinations around a basic preassembled core.[11] Another pair of projects for California Arts and Architecture were Case Study Houses 8 and 9 in Pacific Palisades (1948–1950) designed in collaboration with Charles Eames. The first, eventually redesigned as the Eames House, was initially to be a bridge structure between two trusses, prefiguring Philip Johnson's Leonhardt House of 1956. The second, built for John Entenza, the magazine's editor who conceived the experimental program, was «to be anti-structural, to be as anonymous as possible.»[12] Both used a standard module and were of steel-and-glass construction with flat roofs.

a
Smithsonian Gallery of Art competition project elevation from the mall

b
Smithsonian Gallery of Art competition project ground floor plan

c
Smithsonian Gallery of Art competition project model

d
Theater and Arts Building competition project
William and Mary College



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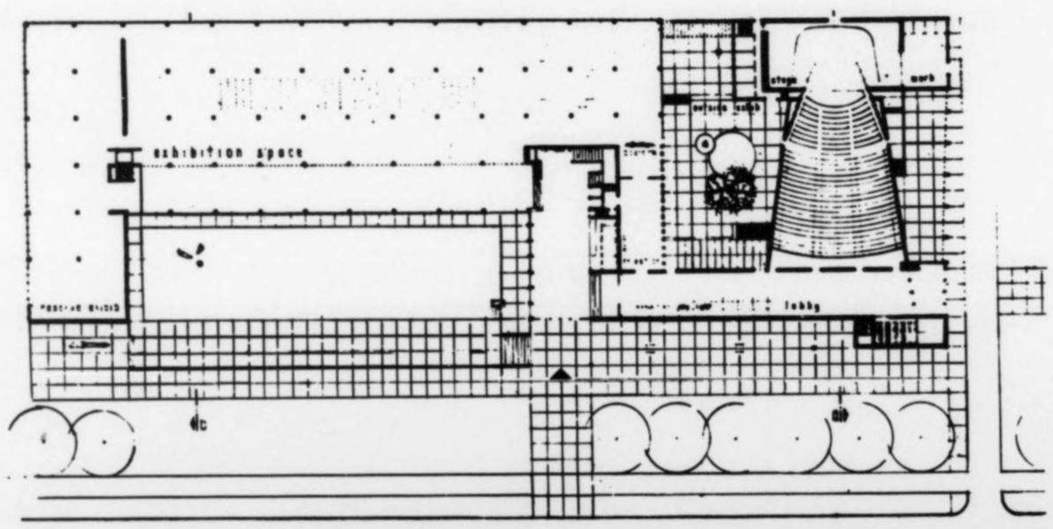

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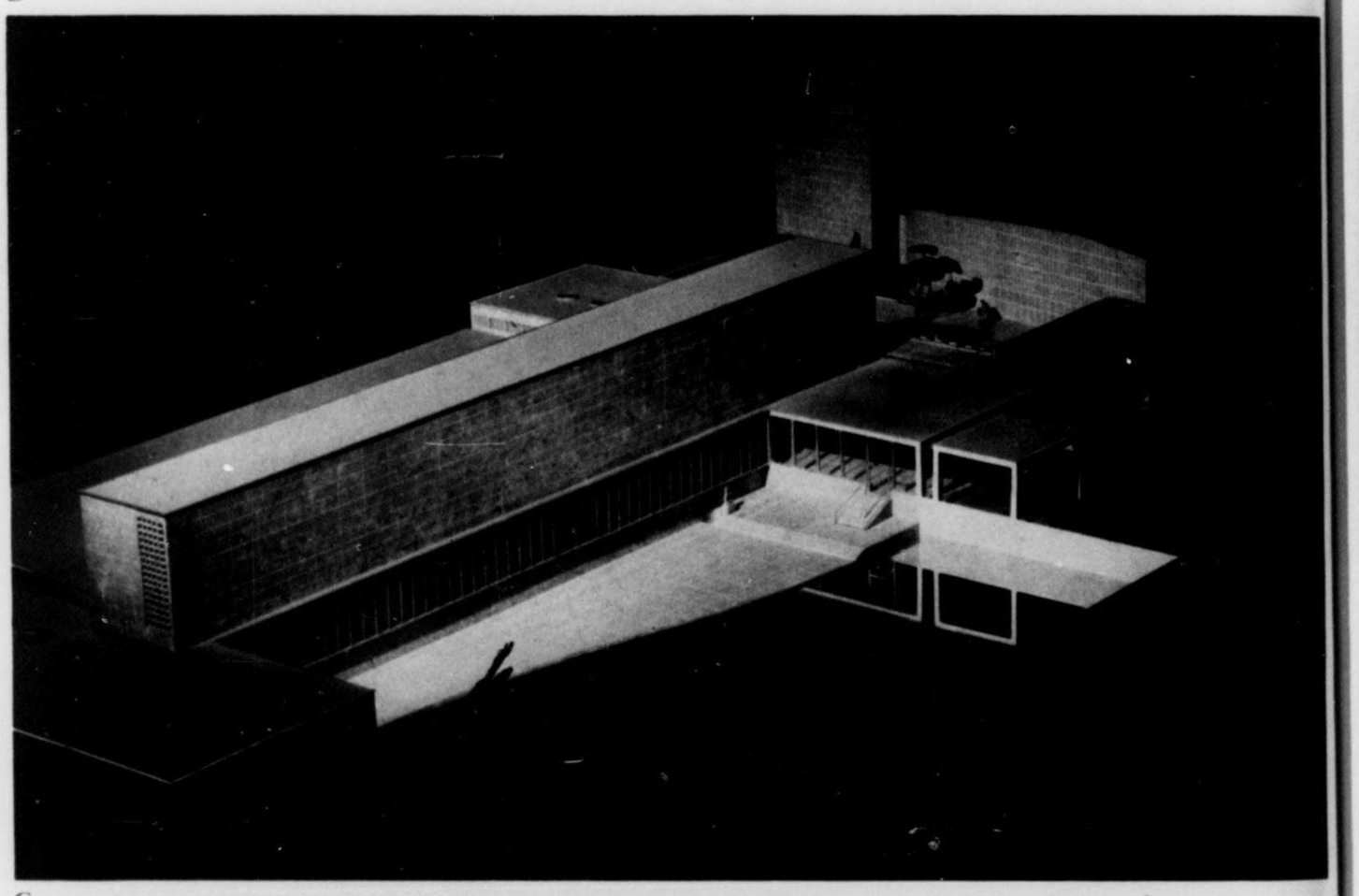

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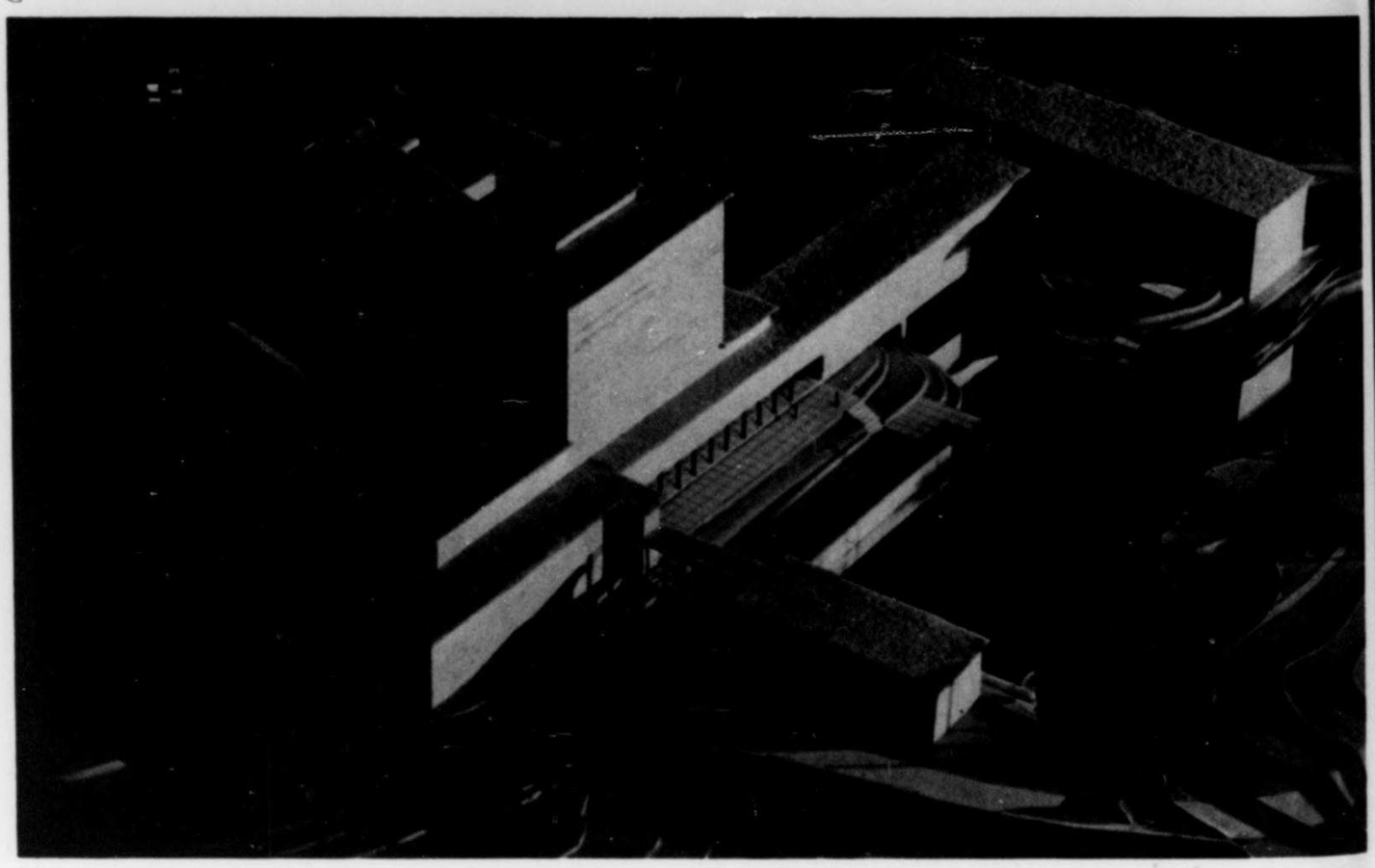
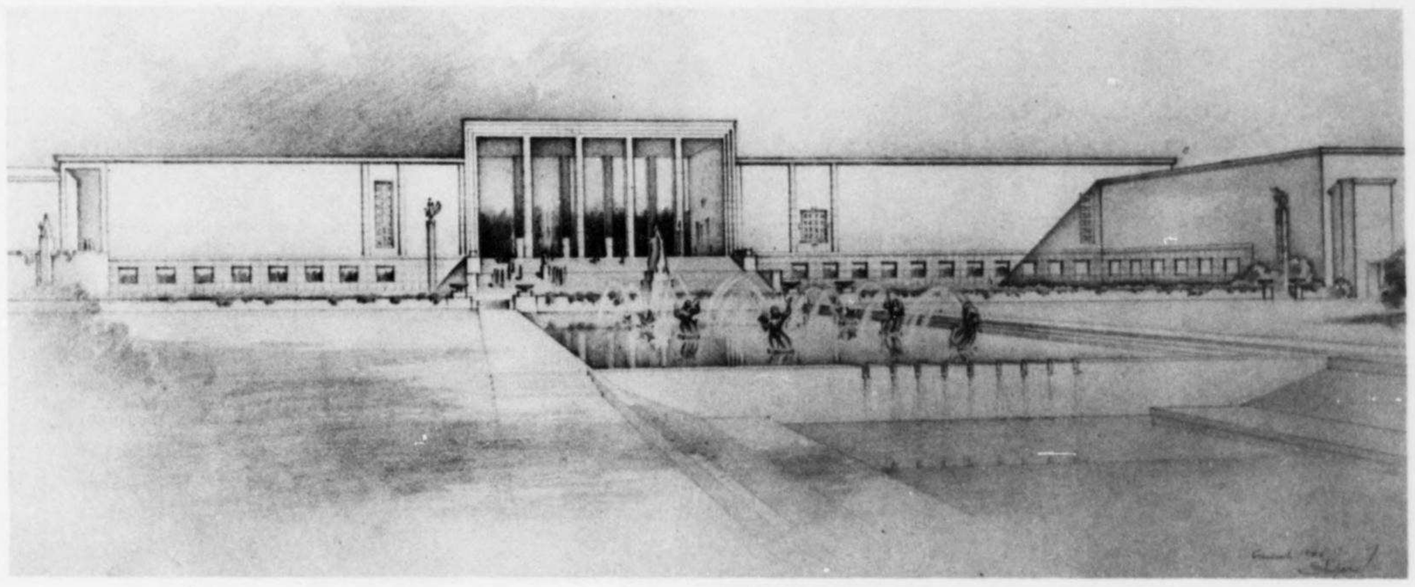


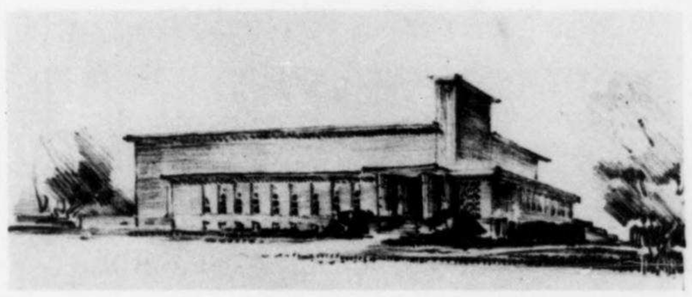
D

Parallel with these projects, a series of competitions provided other opportunities for the incursion of Eero's modernist sensibilities into his collaborative work with Eliel and others. In the mid-1930s changes in attitude both among architects and the American public toward architecture were reflected in a series of national design competitions, the first since the *Tribune* competition. In part they were intended to revitalize architecture in a society determined to recover from the Great Depression. The shift toward modernism in American architecture was a clear manifestation of this change within society.

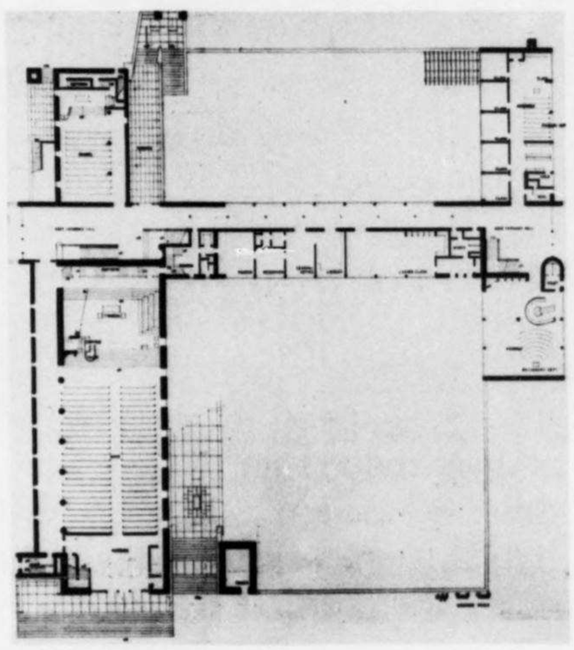
The first instance of an American college actively seeking a modernist building was the Wheaton College Art Center competition of 1938 cosponsored by the Museum of Modern Art, in which Eero placed fifth. At William and Mary College the 1938 competition for a festival theater and fine-arts building delivered a promodernist slate of winners through the involvement of A. Conger Goodyear, president of the Museum of Modern Art. Eero Saarinen, in collaboration with Ralph Rapson and Frederic James, won first place with a clearly articulated scheme praised as being «consistent, clear, logical, and straight-forward throughout.»[13]

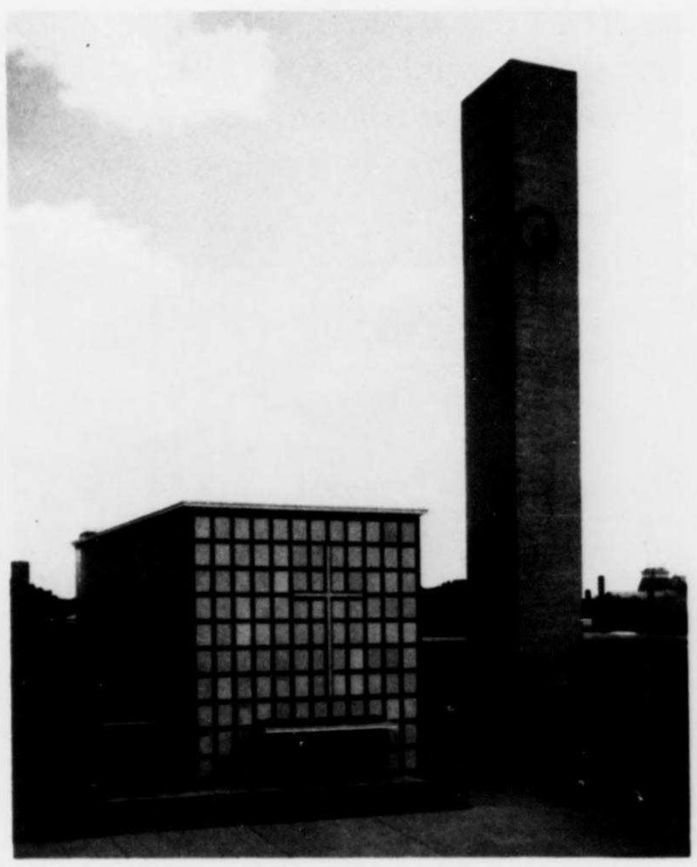
The most sensational of the competitions during this period was that for a contemporary art museum in Washington, D.C., to complement the National Gallery of Art. The Smithsonian Gallery of Art competition was announced in 1939 with a dynamic program to educate the public about living American artists. Over four hundred designs were submitted in a first stage, with ten selected for final competition; the jury included the promodernists Walter Gropius, George Howe, John H. Holabird, and Joseph Hudnut. The Saarinen entry placed first. For the more progressive spirits, «The great virtue of the winning design, aside from the technical excellence of its solution . . . shows beyond the possibility of denial that the monumental tradition of Washington can be given appropriate expression, and new vitality, within the framework of modern architecture,» and that «The future of a strong courageous American architecture seems to lie in the direction of the Smithsonian rather than that of the National Gallery.»[14]





The design, undertaken by a team that included Eliel Saarinen and Robert Swanson as well as such other Cranbrook people as Charles Eames, was essentially dominated by Eero. He pursued a fairly pure modernist strategy, rationally exploring each element within the program and resolving functional relationships, rather than following a predetermined formal image. The functional areas in the project were closely arranged but clearly and separately articulated, and certain components were left open to future expansion, in a refinement of principles first evidenced in earlier projects. The long horizontal expanses of glass; the precise, thin-walled volumes; and the open, flexible spaces organized along a consistent module–all suggested affinities with the International Style. However, the balanced volumetric composition, the applied decoration, and the inclusion of a reflecting pool work in a way characteristic of the Saarinen collaboration, modifying what might otherwise be severe.





The Smithsonian project was controversial, and for a complex set of reasons it was never realized. In fact, the Saarinens only received their fee after the matter was resolved by an Act of Congress.[15]

The participation in competitions brought both acclaim and commissions to the Saarinens' joint practice, which by 1940 had begun to attain national significance. In building the practice, however, caution was taken to preserve the spirit of an atelier. Eliel maintained that «an architectural office should not be a design factory,» and stated, «I think it unwise to develop specialists in design.»[16] A relaxed atmosphere and a casual attitude toward authorship is reflected in projects dating from this period.

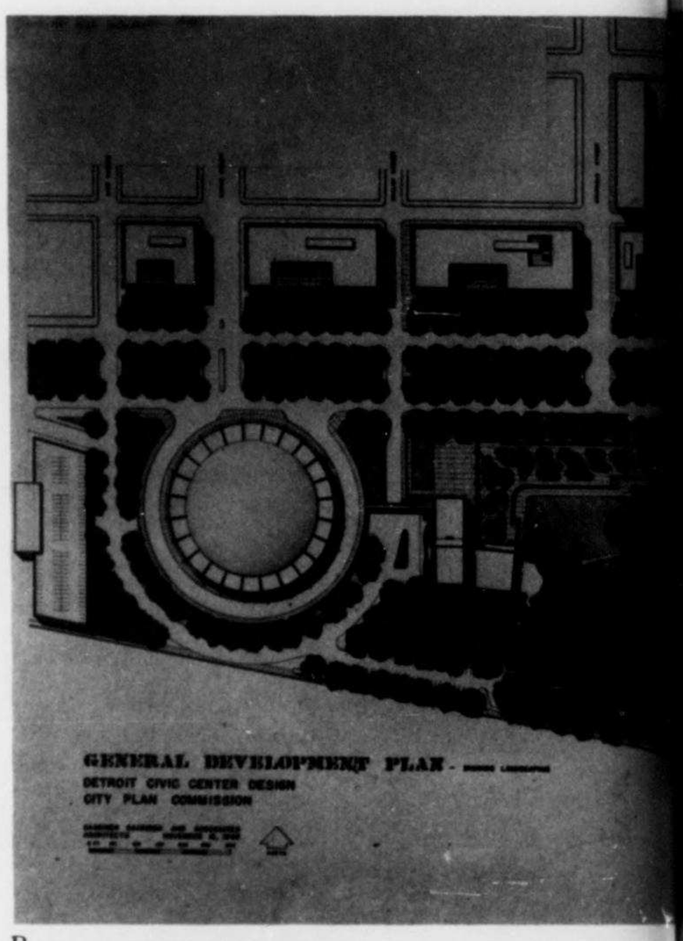
The Community Center in Fenton, Michigan (1937–1938) formalized the partnership between father and son. In his membership application to the American Institute of Architects Eero listed this project as his prime responsibility.[17] Other joint projects–such as the Kleinhans Music Hall (1938–1940) and the Cranbrook museum and Library (1938–1942)–exhibit Eliel's simplified classicism. These stand in contrast to others that are purely modernist, such as the Tabernacle (now First Christian) Church of Christ at Columbus, Indiana (1940–1942) and the Crow Island School in Winnetka, Illinois (1939–1940).

The Crow Island School may represent the finest built achievement of the father-son collaboration. Although it exhibits the manipulation of light and materials typical of Eliel, the modernist tenets upheld by Eero are clearly evident in overall organization and massing and in the spareness of detail. It is composed of a series of articulated parts, which functionally represent the educational program.

By this time the firm had an influence out of proportion to its actual size, primarily through a reputation gained in urban design. The philosophical concern for urban issues which the elder Saarinen was known for combined with the nation's concern for public institutions and civic improvements to attract commissions to the firm. This reputation for large-scale conceptions can be attributed to Eliel's earlier work; but the capacity for grandly conceived architecture and planning became Eero's trademark. A series of large projects–beginning with wartime defense workers' communities and followed by many postwar civic and campus planning projects–completely transformed the Saarinen firm and the nature of the work it produced.

The most comprehensive complex produced at the time was the Center Line Community in Michigan (1941–1943); the overall form reflects the principles of decentralization Eliel considered appropriate to America, while the layout suggests a Scandinavian sensitivity to specific placemaking. Eero observed, «If the architect stresses the practical at the expense of the psychological, the result will be barracks. . . . The problem is to *house* not only an aggregate of people but also to give them a *home* and the realities and beauties of community life.»[18] While the planning strategy of these projects was based on rational and incremental growth, their scale and character grew out of traditions Eliel had established at Cranbrook, with buildings subordinated to exterior spaces.

The Saarinens also received some of the first civic commissions of the postwar period. The Des Moines Art Center and Edmundson Memorial Museum (1944–1948) shows Eliel's sense of classical form along with Eero's articulation of function. The largest of these civic projects was the third scheme in 26 years for the Detroit Civic Center; the 1949 version was significantly different from that which Eliel had proposed upon his arrival in America. In place of the earlier skyscraper, a more unified edge wall of buildings creates a backdrop to a clearly defined open park at the edge of the Detroit River, containing «installations of a social nature, which dominate the large open space.»[19] This project illustrates the postwar concern for the redesign of America's central cities and provides an early example of grand urban space achieved within the language of modernism. It was «urban renewal» in a positive sense, for even with the more realistic program determining the scope of the project, the principle ingredient remained a public «place» defined by architectural form; its eventual realization retained the essential intentions of the Saarinens' plan.



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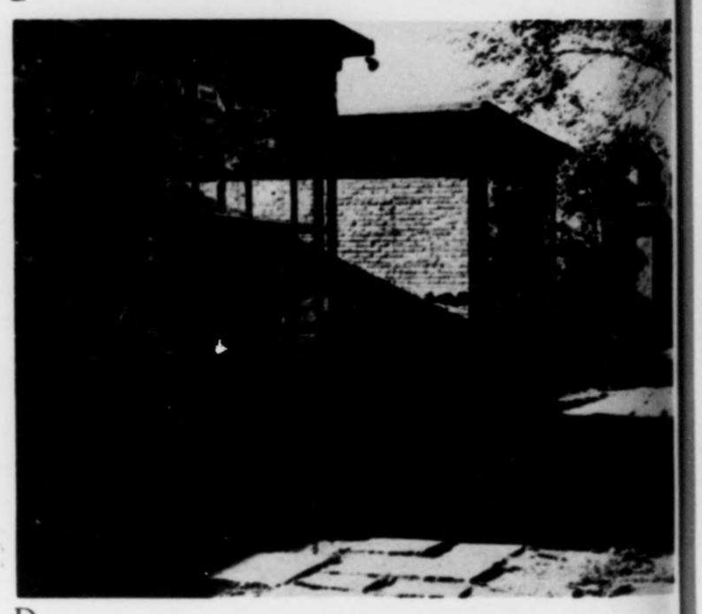

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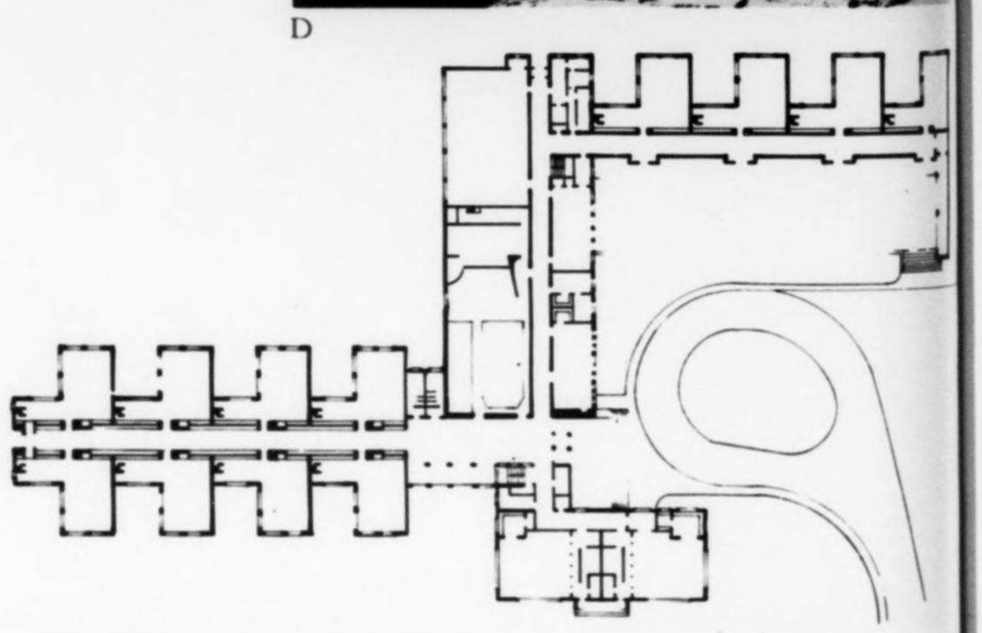

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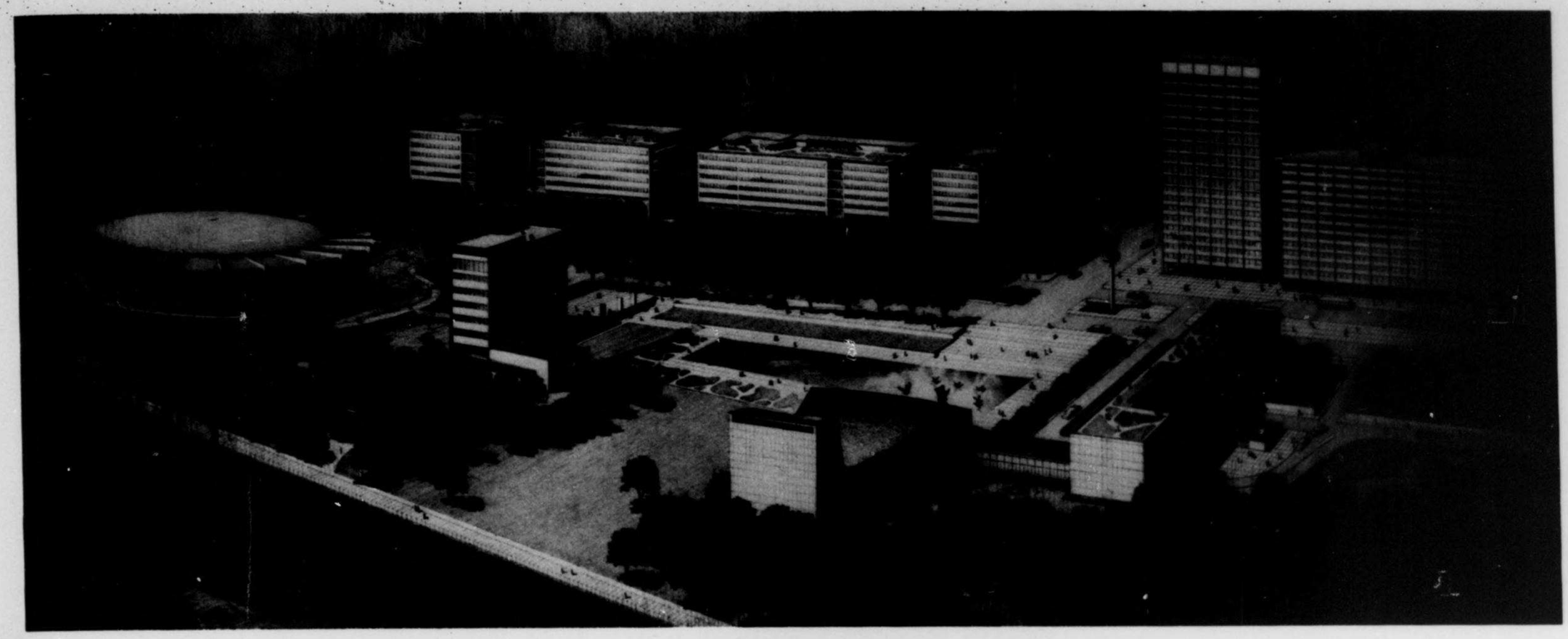

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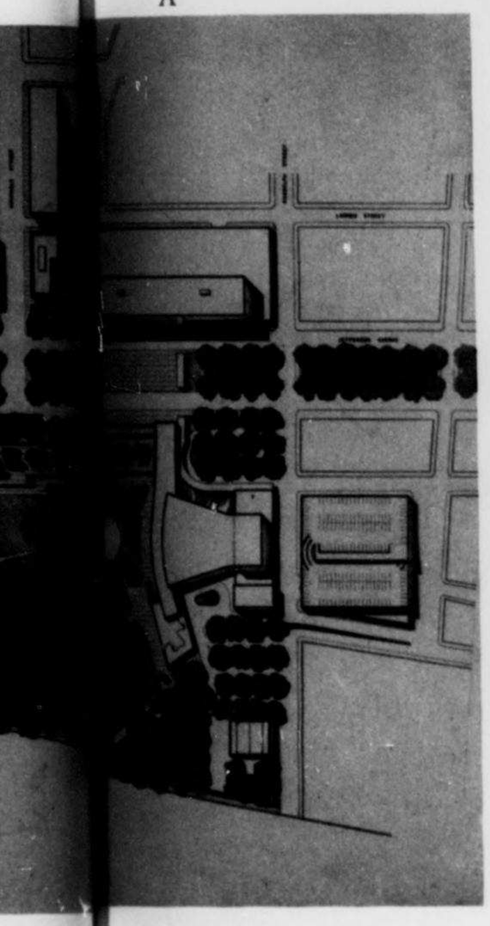
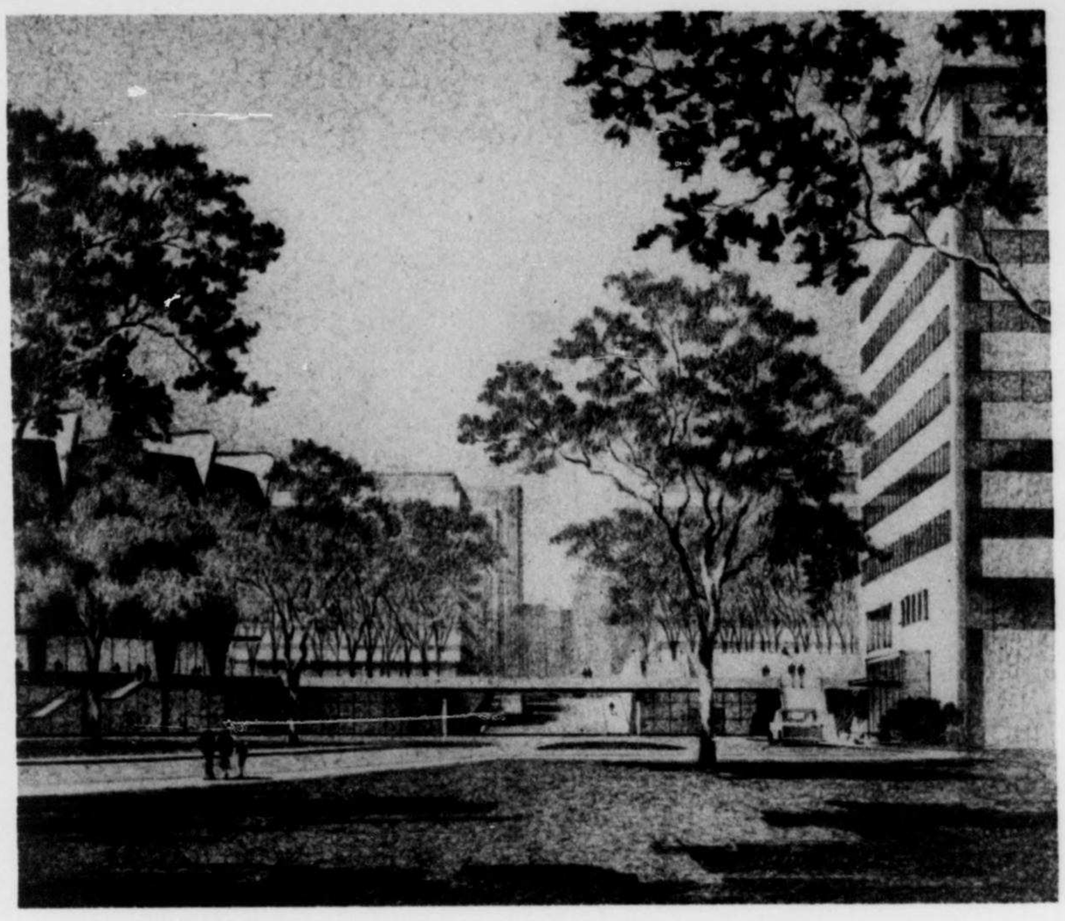




C

a
Detroit Civic Center
aerial view

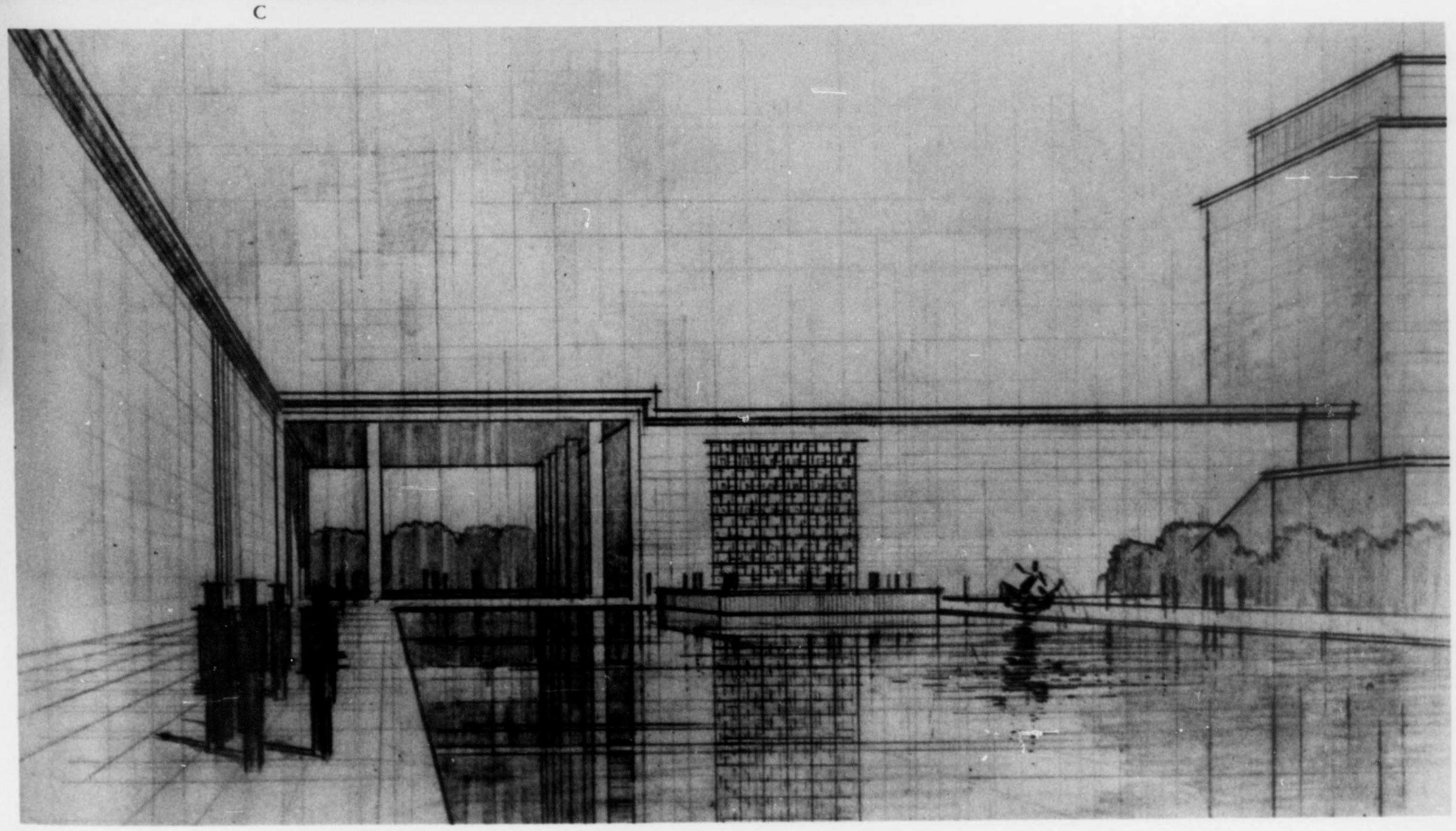
b
Detroit Civic Center
proposed site plan

c
Detroit Civic Center
plaza level view

d
Crow Island School
Winnetka, Illinois
ground floor plan

e
Crow Island School

f
Des Moines Art Center
and Edmundson
Memorial Museum
Des Moines, Iowa
court interior



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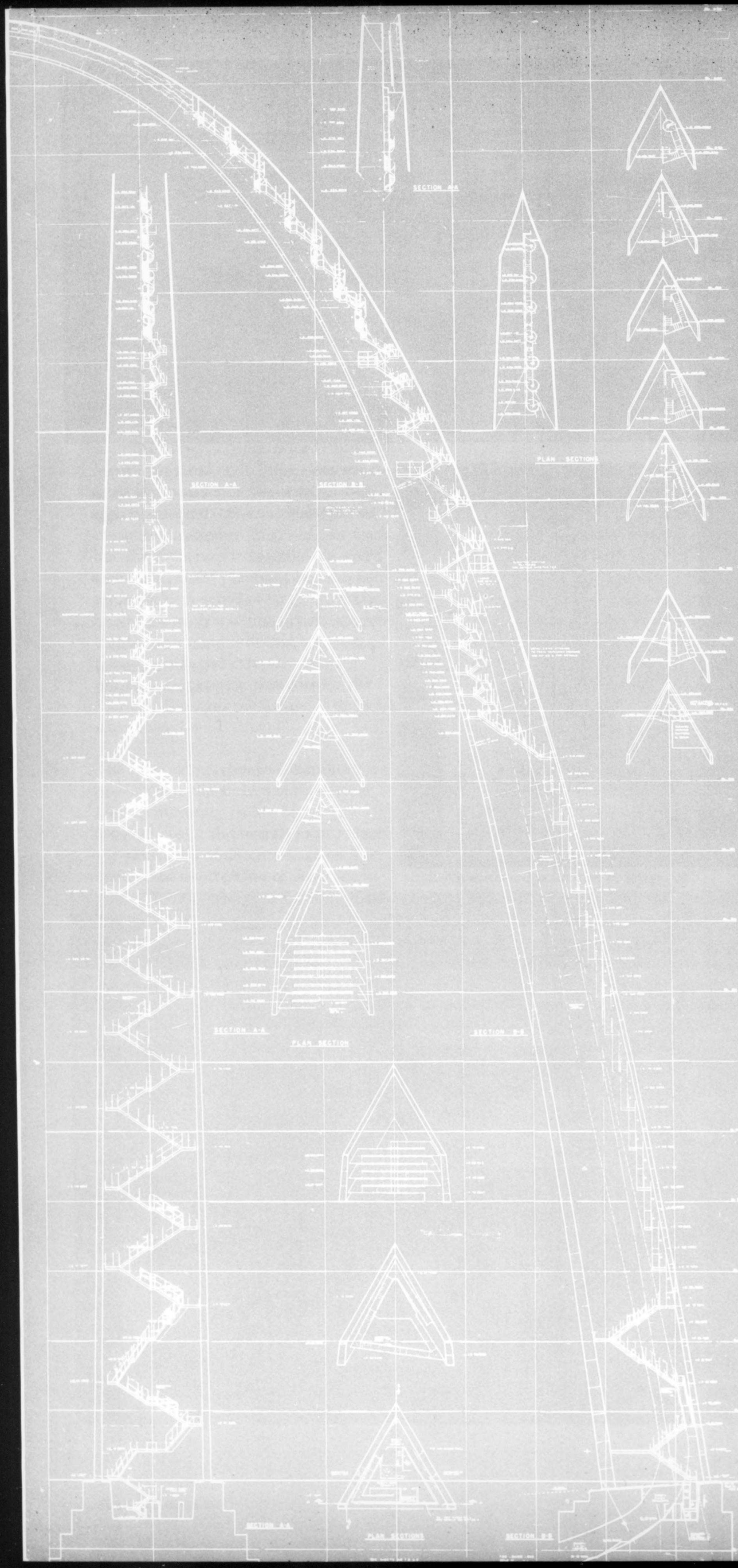
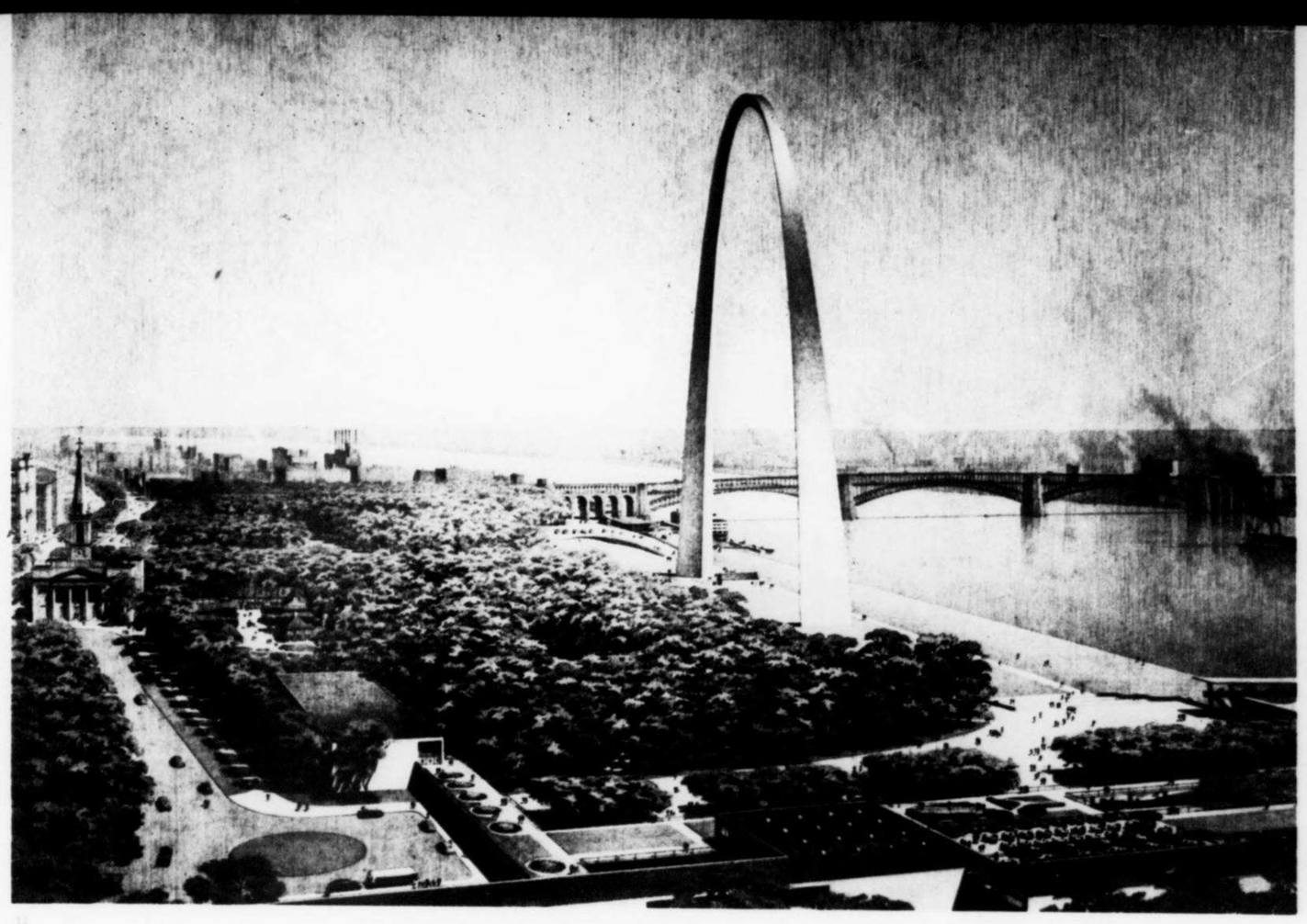
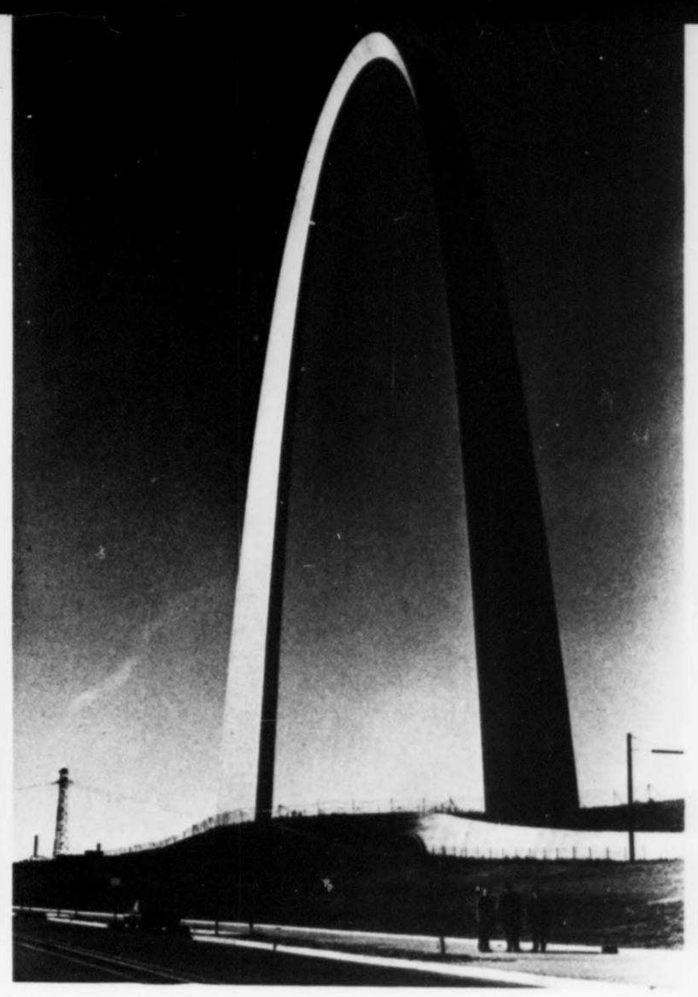
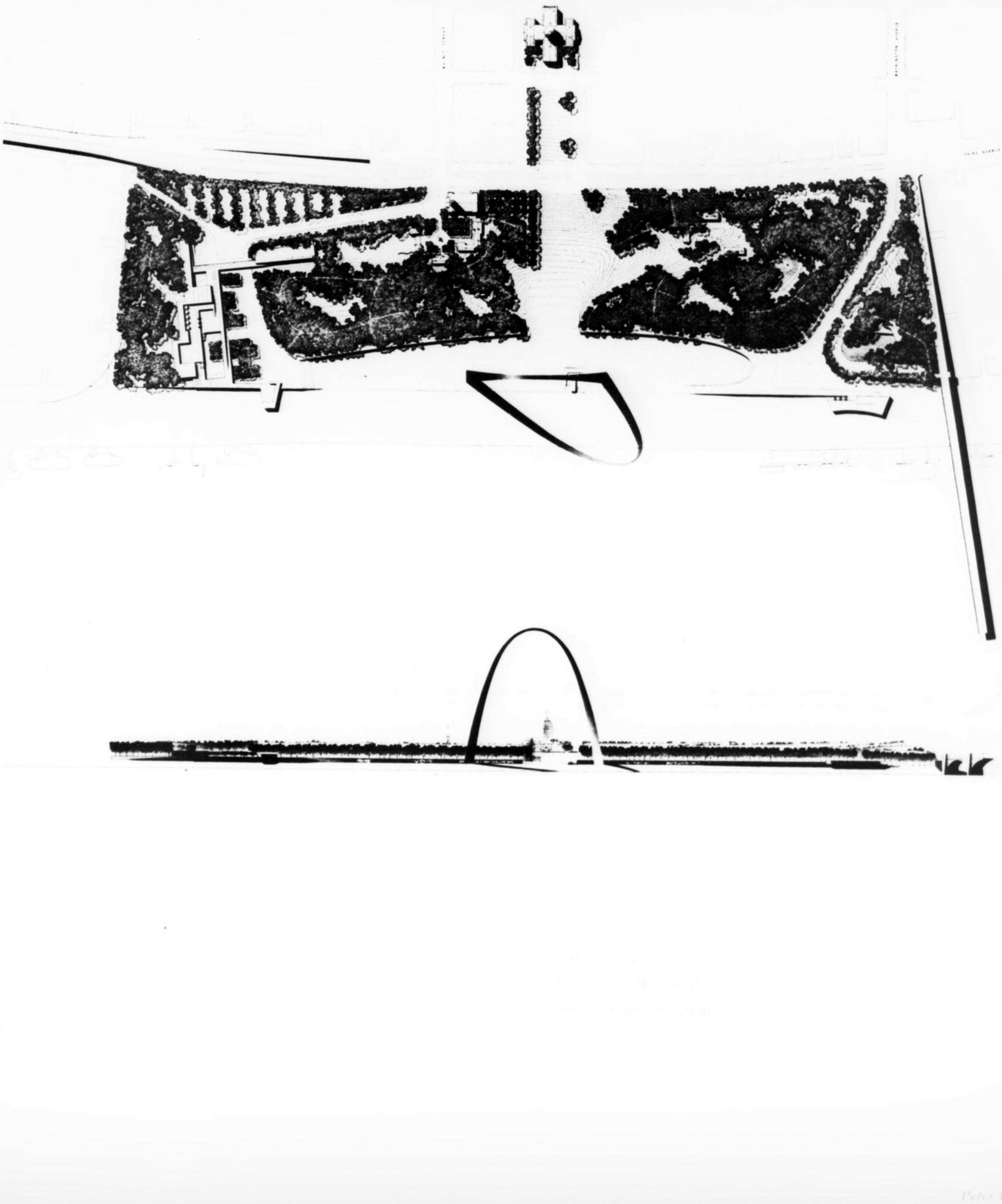


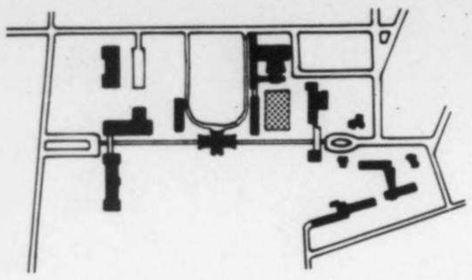
While the Detroit project was in the office, the Saarinens entered separate submissions to the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Competition of 1948; the act signified the parting of ways for father and son. Eero's winning design of the St. Louis Arch has been acknowledged as the ascendant moment in his relationship with the family atelier. This structure's eventual 630-foot-high catenary curve in stainless-steel-clad segmental sections symbolized in a singular way the idea of a «gateway to the West» and demonstrated the prowess of Eero's metaphorical and symbolic imagination. Thoroughly progressive in its technology, the arch constitutes a rare instant in the history of modern architecture when true monumentality is achieved and a gesture on a comprehensible urban scale is rendered. Saarinen stated, «The major concern here was to create a monument which would have lasting significance and would be a landmark of our time. . . . Neither an obelisk nor a rectangular box nor a dome seemed right on this site for this purpose. But here, at the edge of the Mississippi River, a great arch did seem right.»[20]







Peter Papademetriou



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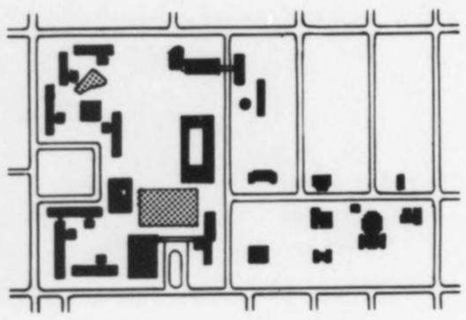

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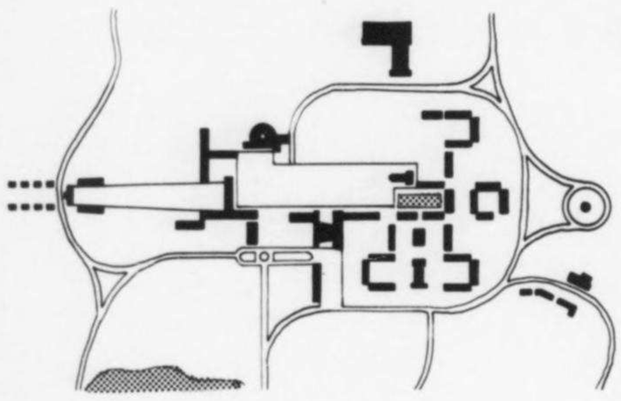

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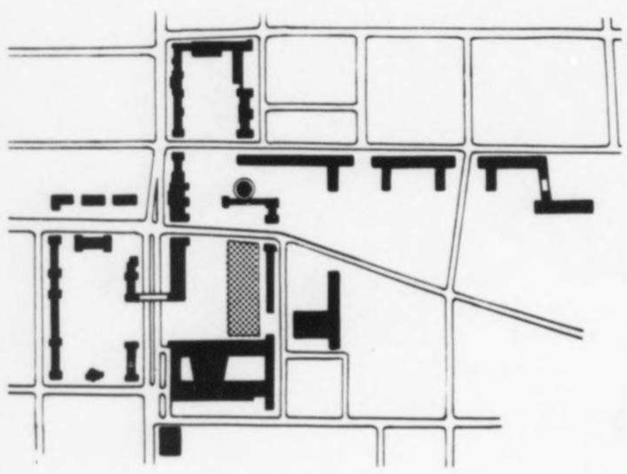

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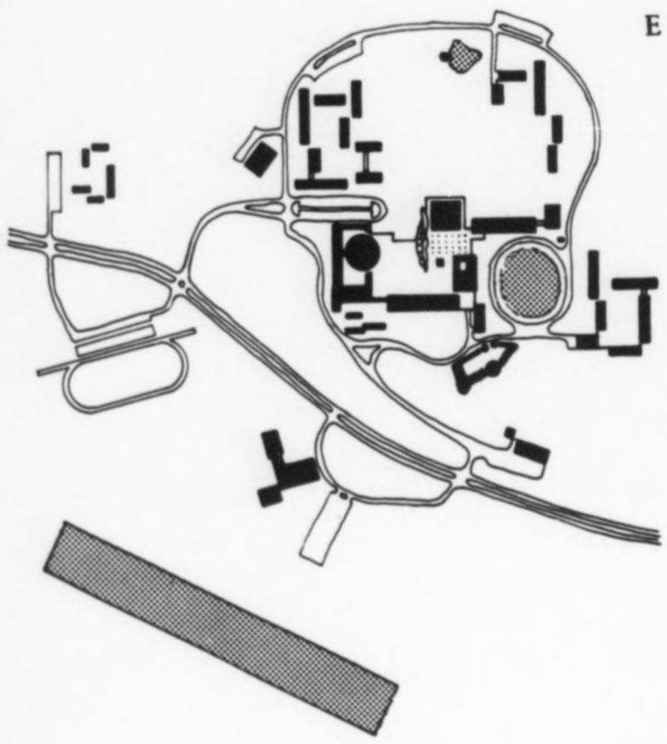

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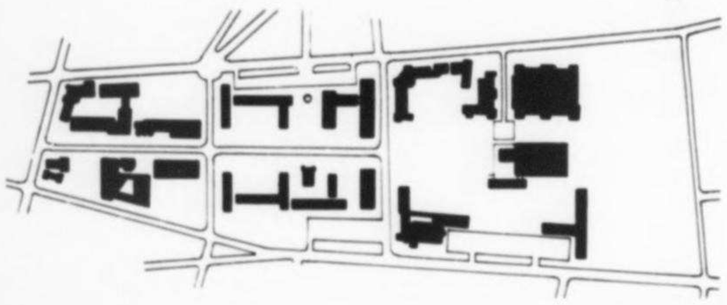


F

The return of Second World War veterans and the economic boom that followed brought about the new construction of collegiate institutions across the country. A great deal of this work was designed in the Saarinen office, establishing it as perhaps the most prominent campus planning and design firm of the time. The first of these projects was for Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio (1945– 1949). The master plan developed an identifiable campus space adjacent to an existing building, Antioch Hall. Subsequent college projects included Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa (1947–1958), Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri (1948–1955), and Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts (1949–1952). In the new campus for Brandeis, the volumes required by the complex program were generally clad in technological skins to form unified groupings with figural elements as counterpoint.

a
Antioch College
Yellow Springs, Ohio

b
Drake University
Des Moines, Iowa

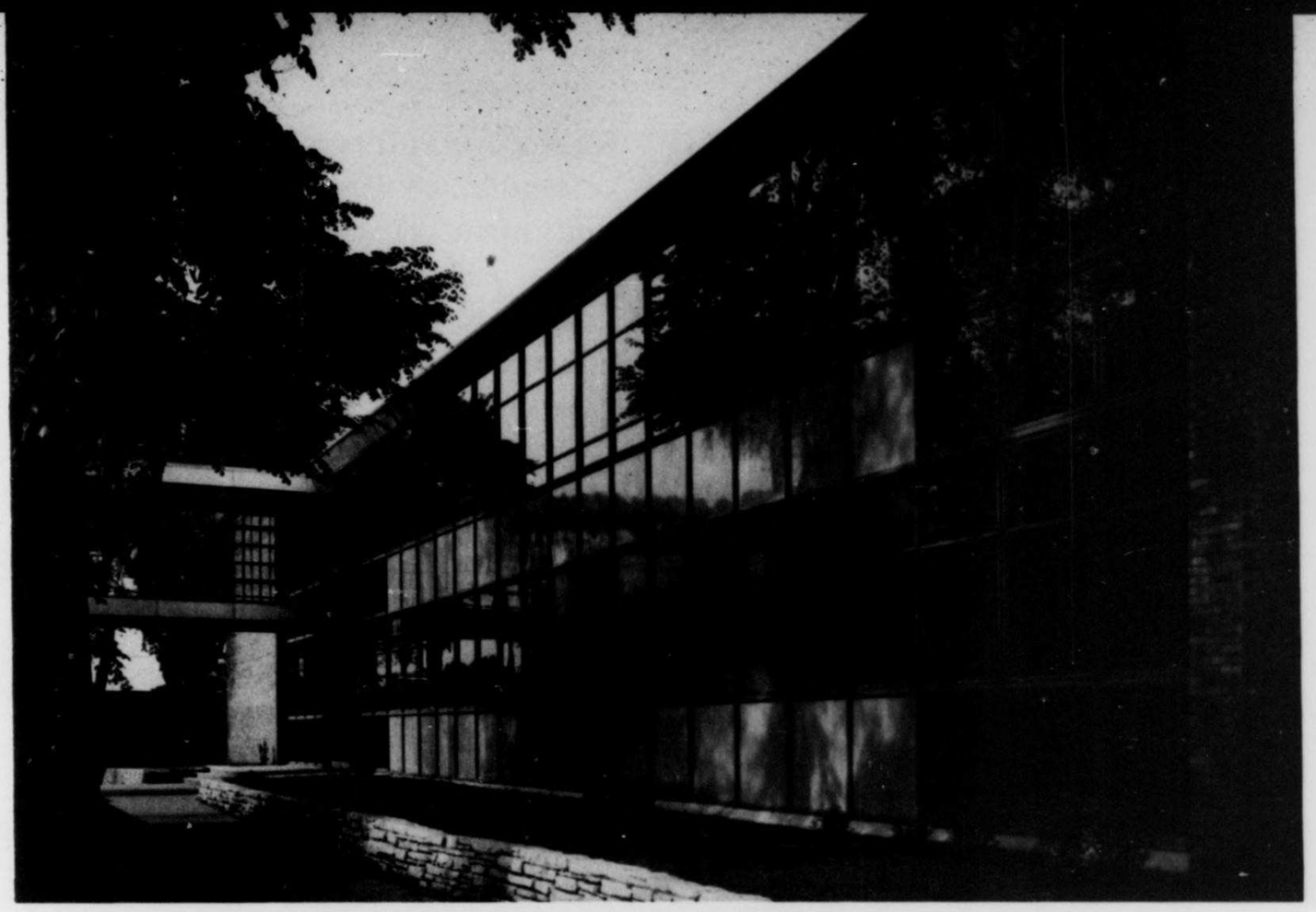
c
Goucher College
Towson,
Maryland

d
Stephens College
Columbus, Missouri

e
Brandeis University
Waltham,
Massachusetts

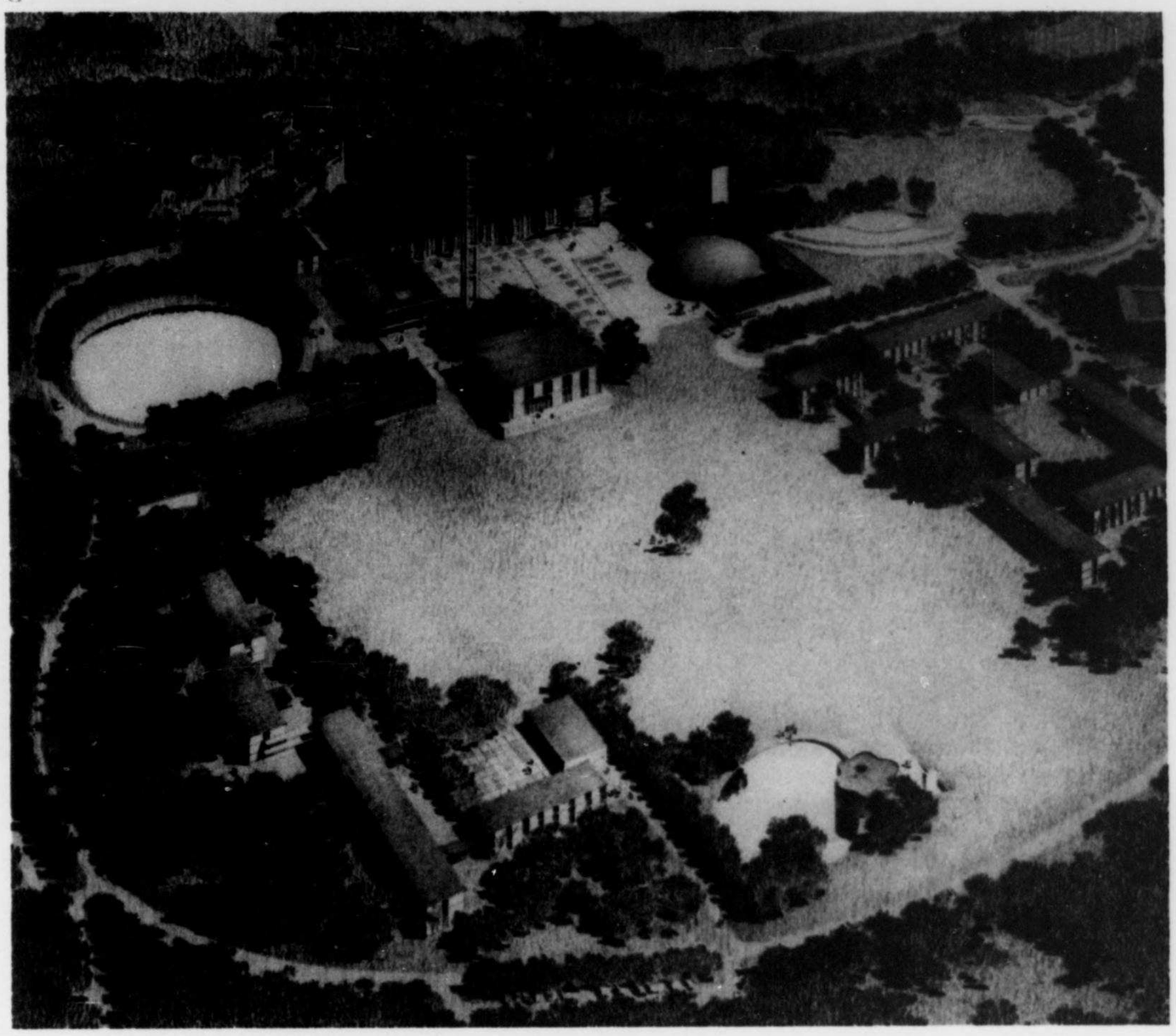
f
Hillhouse Avenue
and Science Hill
Yale University
New Haven,
Connecticut

After Eliel's death in 1950, campus planning work proceeded under Eero's direction for the North Campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (1951–1956) and the Yale University Physics Building in New Haven (1951). Generally, he derived from Mies van der Rohe a formal system that lent itself to the development of large, cohesive environments. Although never radical in design, this vocabulary was compatible with both conservative institutional clients and progressive architectural intentions; it provided a clear and certain style while Eero assumed direction of the firm. The number and scale of planning projects in the office at the time shifted Eero's attention away from the design of individual buildings, which suffered a resultant loss of particularity and character. This reflects not only the caution with which Eero proceeded on his own in the design of large institutions, but also a tendency toward conformity which was pervasive in the postwar years.



G

Saarinen's medium became that of background architecture. He observed, «On new campuses there is the opportunity of achieving total, beautiful twentieth-century environments that have unity and order. On existing campuses, there is the challenge of building proud buildings of our own time that are in harmony with the outdoor space and with the existing buildings of other times. . . . Different areas of a campus can have different characters. But we could stand more unity within each area. I am beginning to long for monotony.»[21] Concerned with the lack of order in the visual environment of postwar America, Saarinen declared, «I have come to the point where I would welcome more dullness and monotony in our cityscapes instead of all the visual clashes typical of our time . . . not the esthetics of a single building, but the esthetics of the whole organism.»[22]

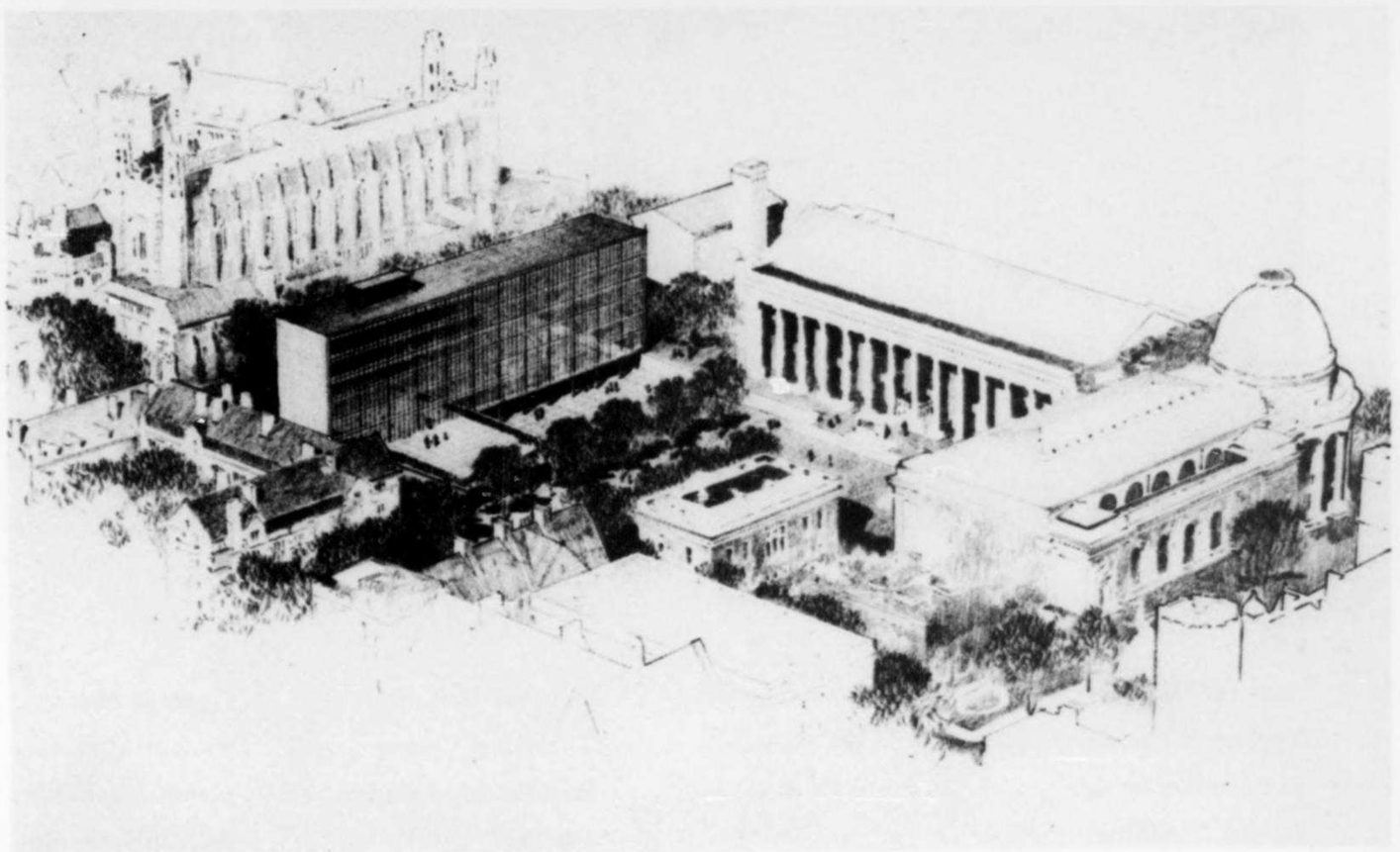


H

g
Science Building
Drake University
Des Moines, Iowa

h
Brandeis University
Waltham,
Massachusetts

i
Physics Building
project
Yale University
New Haven,
Connecticut



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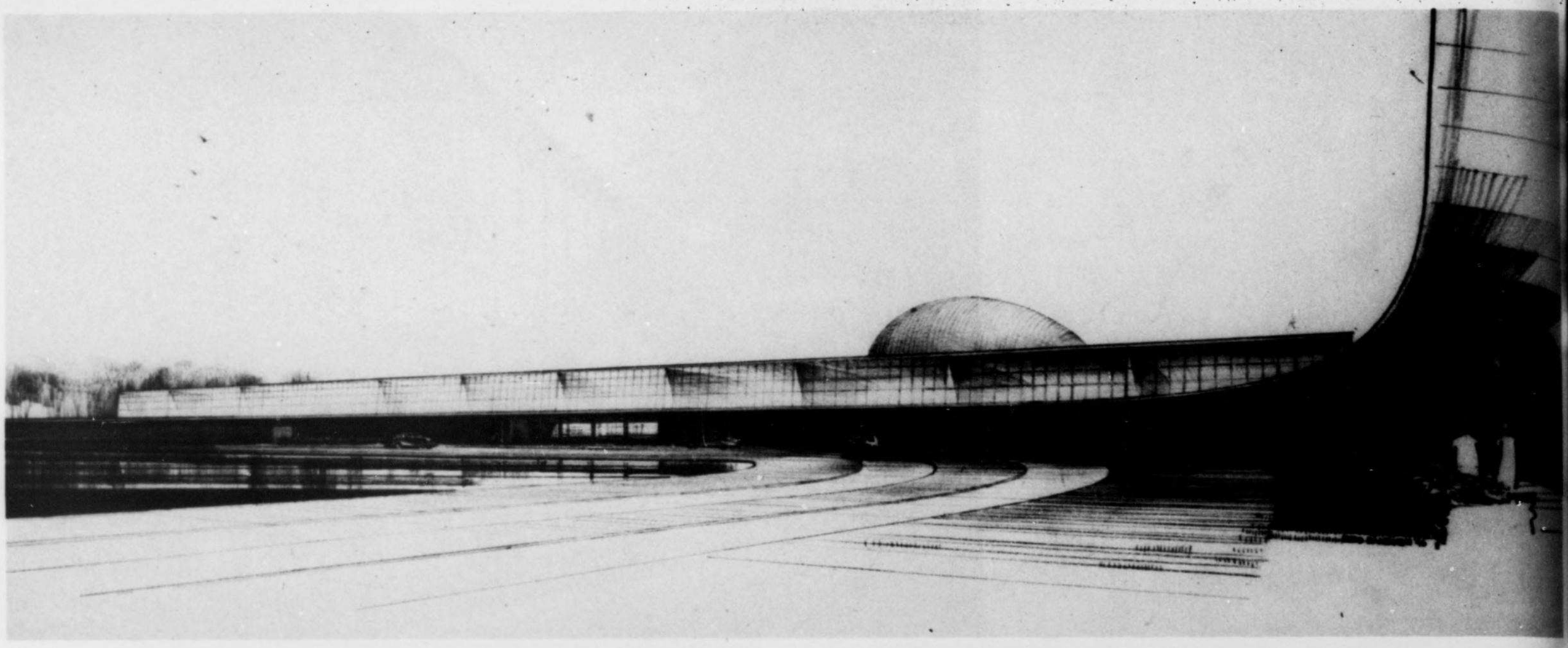

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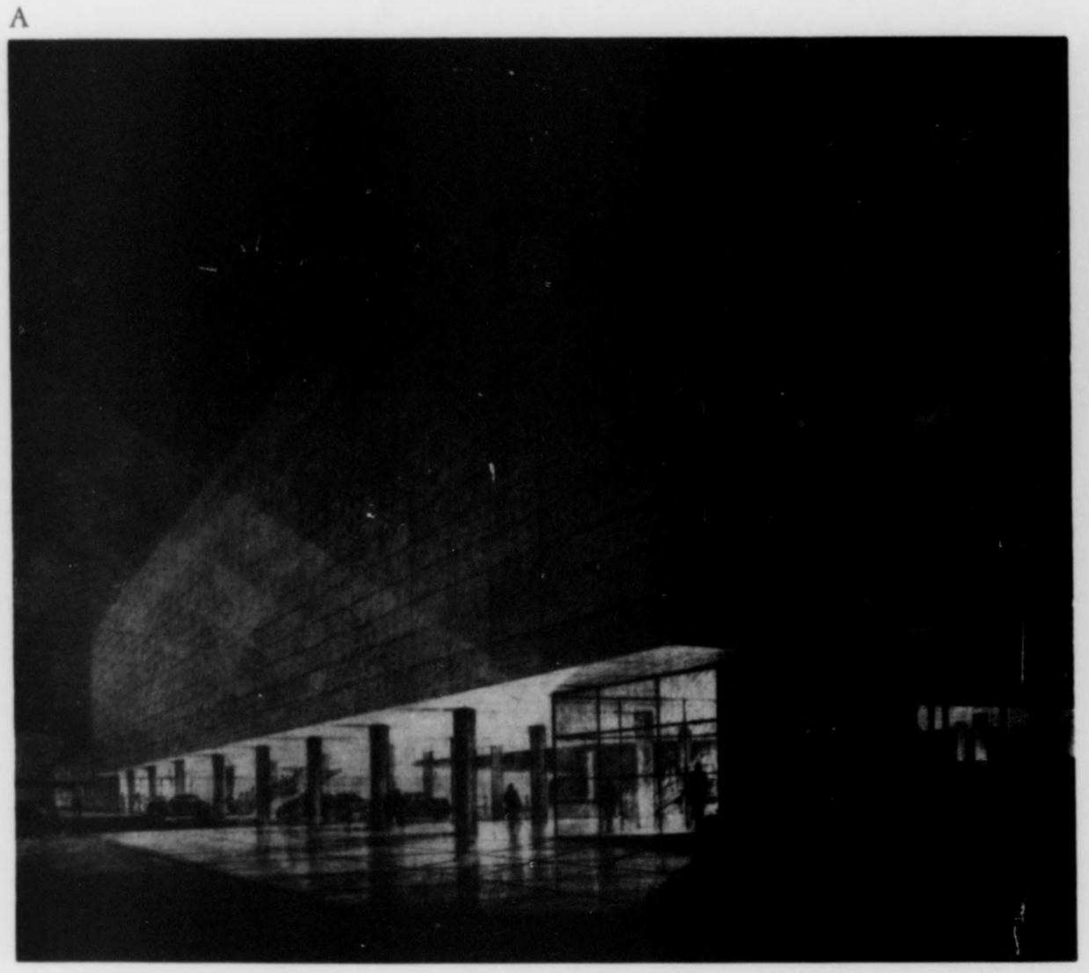

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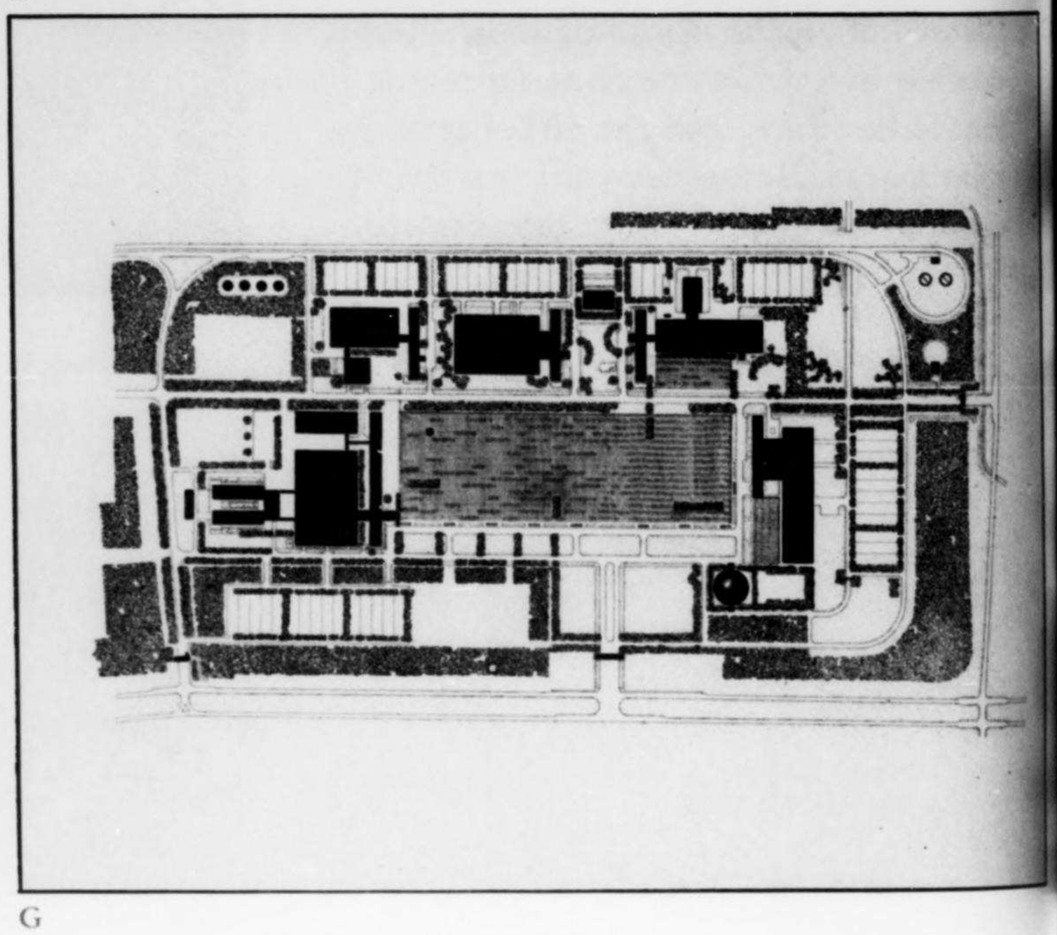


G

a
General Motors
Technical Center
preliminary design
Styling Building

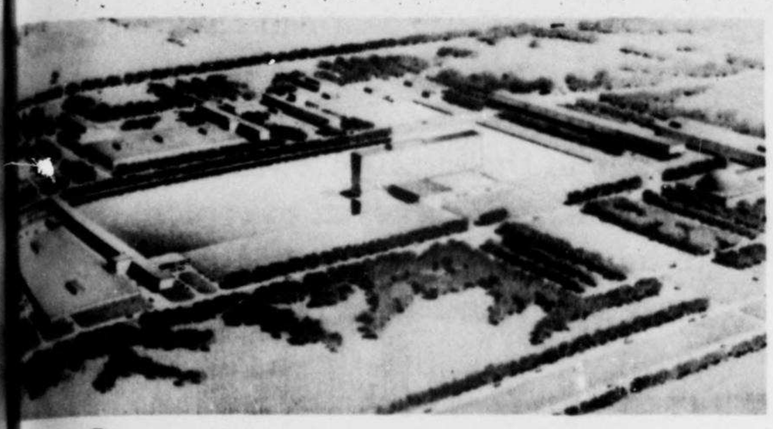
b
General Motors
Technical Center
intermediate design

c
General Motors
Technical Center
intermediate design
site plan

d
General Motors
Technical Center
preliminary design
Administration
Building

e
General Motors
Technical Center
final design

f
General Motors
Technical Center
Ezra Stoller © ESTO



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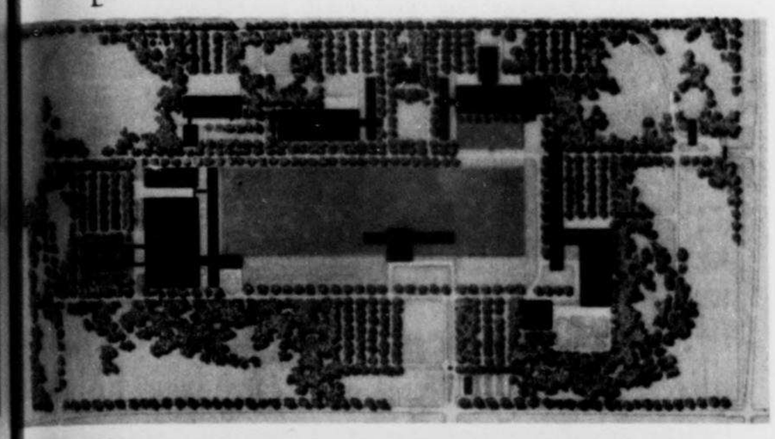

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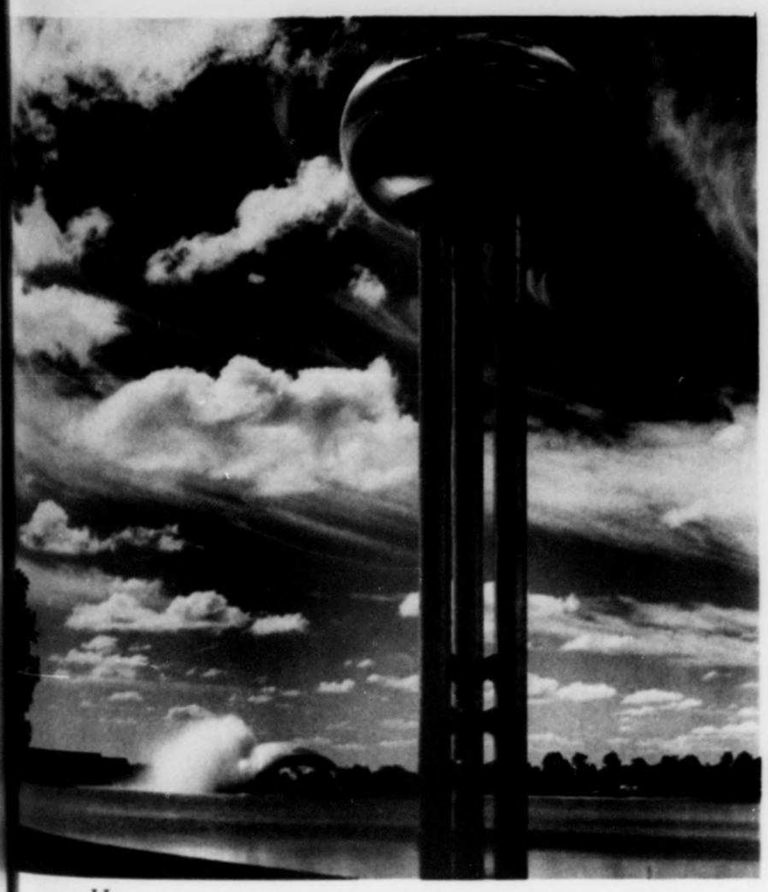


H

g
General Motors
Technical Center
final design
site plan

h
General Motors
Technical Center
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

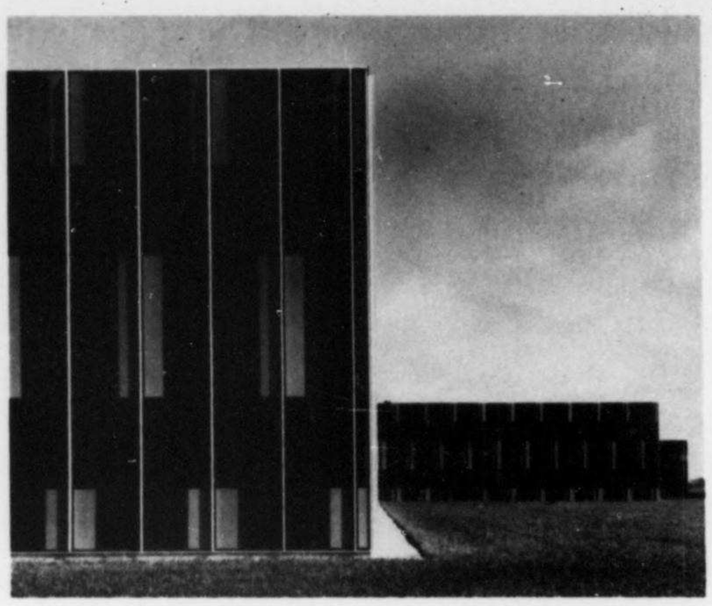
The collegiate projects set the stage for the job that established Eero Saarinen as one of the leaders of postwar American architecture: the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan. As early as 1945 GM had approached the elder Saarinen. The company was looking for something akin to Cranbrook, but Eero countered with the concept that the project should be «an expression of a high-precision, mass-production, metal industry.»[23] An initial proposal, described in dramatic renderings by Hugh Ferris, was a unified continuum of streamlined forms. But the corporate nature of GM was based on autonomy among divisions, and as the design passed to Eero the differences became acknowledged in a complex wherein movement among parts depended on actual use of the company's principal product, the automobile. This project was clearly based on Mies van der Rohe's Illinois Institute of Technology, though metaphorically it referred to the image of a test track. GM Tech Center is a synthesis of that nearly neoclassical order with Eliel's romantic placemaking. The lake is the dominant gesture, vertically accented with a water tower. In the intermediate 1949 version a 10-story office slab on *pilotis* appeared along the axis of a crisply straightened lake configuration, and the buildings, now separately articulated, took on a Miesian appearance through the consistent use of a curtain wall and a standard 5-foot grid. In the final scheme the slab on the lake was eliminated, replaced in spirit by a 115-foot-long, 50-foot-high fountain wall of water.

A refined architecture tending toward pure industrial design was the realization of a decade of design research. By the time its first phases were completed in the mid-1950s, the technical aesthetic of GM was becoming widely accepted in America. But more than any other building of its time, the purity and progressive technology of GM represented the apolitical institutionalization of modernism, here uncompromisingly embraced by the largest corporation in postwar America. The efficiency and the organization of both the corporate institution and its architectural containers heralded a brave new world that was positive in its faith in technology and was geared to production. Kenneth Frampton has suggested of this approach: «minimalism exploits both the sensational and the mute nature of modern production—a ‹silence› that can be neither masked nor significantly transcended . . . the imperative task of the architect today is to master the means of production, not only for the sake of regaining control over the act of building but also, presumably, so as to be able to participate consciously in the production of meaning.»[24]

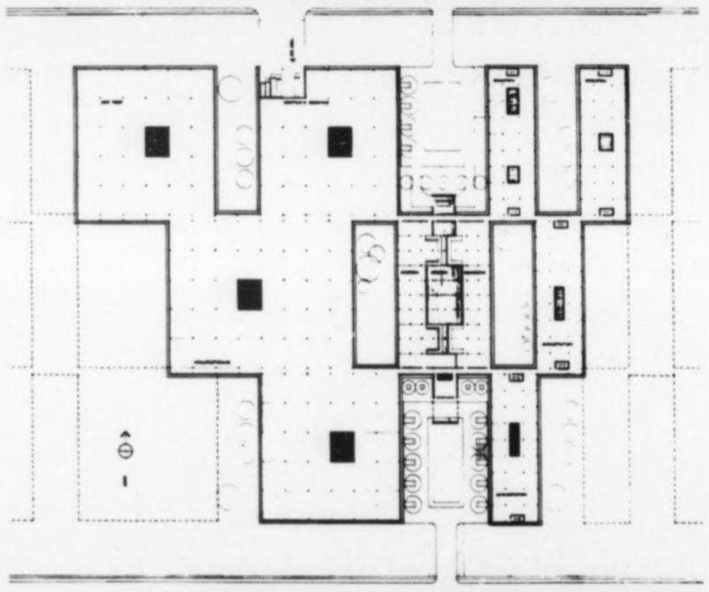
Innovation was a mandate for the «new» American corporation, and at GM new developments in the technology of building fabrication included the use of a neoprene «zipper» window gasket already in use on automobile windshields, and the development of a thin insulated panel with porcelainized sheet metal serving as both external skin and interior finish. Beneath this technological veneer at GM was a symbolic, metaphorical reference. The «meaning» of its technology lay in the fact that «the design is based on steel—the metal of the automobile. Like the automobile itself, the buildings are essentially put together, as on an assembly line, out of mass-produced units.»[25]

Saarinen not only proposed an idiom that could cohere to a larger order, but also drew from other traditions. There is as much homage to Eliel's great friend Albert Kahn as there is to Mies. The unblinking endlessness of Kahn's factory glass walls prefigure the Saarinen project, and the exhaust vents of the GM Dynamometer Building clearly refer to the cluster of stacks at Kahn's River Rouge Ford Plant. The Cranbrook traditions of craft can also be seen in such diversions from pure Mies as the brightly glazed color bricks used on end walls, the ornamental metal craft of monumental staircases, and the detail on the interior partitions and ceiling systems.

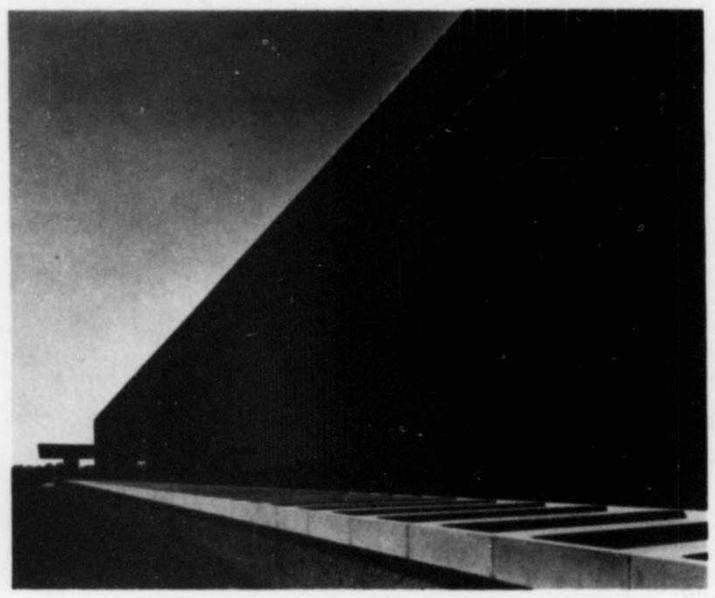
IBM Manufacturing
Rochester, Minnesota



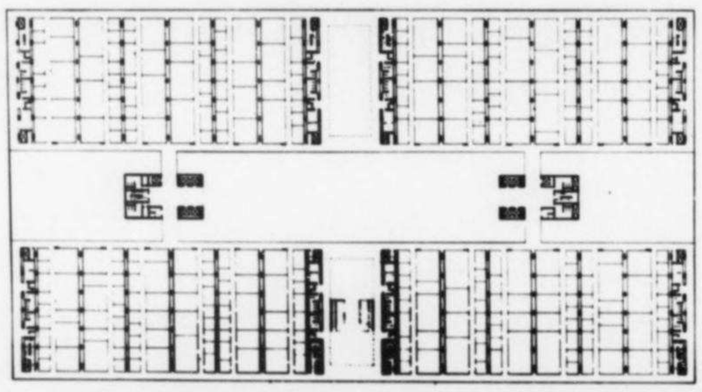
IBM Manufacturing
plan



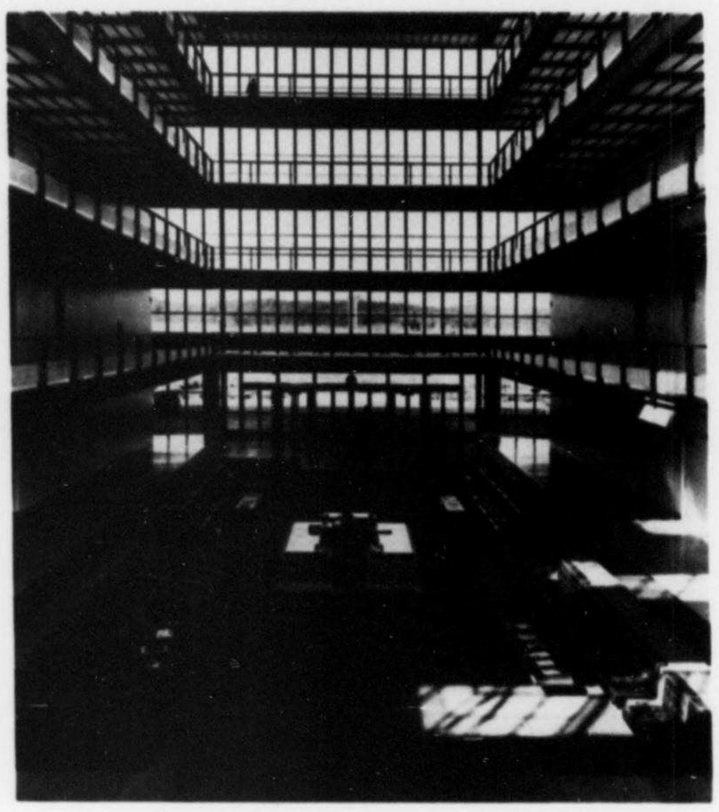
Bell Telephone
Laboratories
Holmdel, New Jersey
Ezra Stoller © ESTO



Bell Telephone
Laboratories
second floor plan



Bell Telephone
Laboratories
entry hall



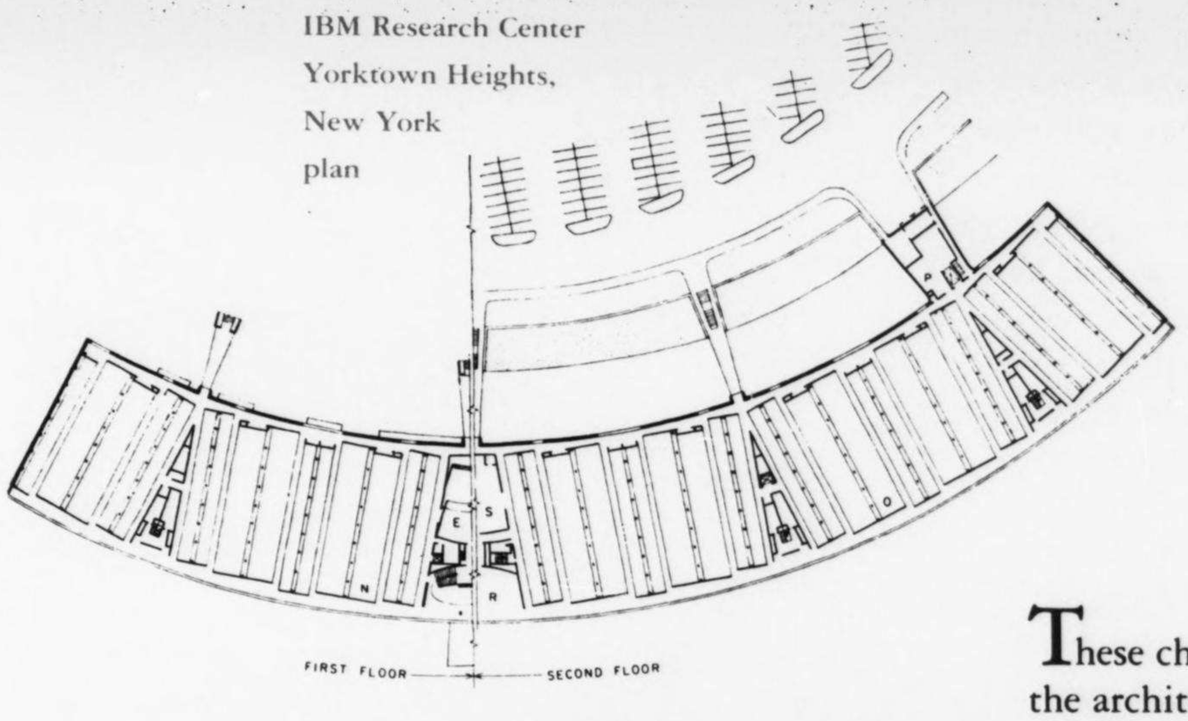
The wide acclaim Saarinen received for the GM project brought a series of commissions for corporate research centers in the late 1950s. In these projects Saarinen began to explore the technical and expressive possibilities of glass-skin architecture.

The neutral use of the curtain-wall aesthetic may be seen in the IBM manufacturing plant at Rochester, Minnesota (1956–1959). Both glass and solid panels were 5/16 of an inch thick, eliminating distinctions between solid and transparent portions of the enclosure. The aesthetic here was of a potentially endless system whose whole form was comprised of volumetric units that could combine and be articulated in random configurations.

The visual and technical culmination of this aesthetic was achieved at the Bell Telephone Laboratories Development Center in Holmdel, New Jersey (1957–1962). The plan organization of parallel bars was fully consistent with the neutral elevations, permitting unlimited phased expansion. The sheer wall of the exterior, one of the earliest uses of solar mirror glass, is a precursor of the all-glass skins of the late 1970s. The undifferentiated enclosure membrane is revealed to be entirely mute as one passes through it to the vast multistory entry hall hidden behind–an odd if dramatic event in an otherwise linear diagram.

In the same period Saarinen also experimented with the form of the container, suggesting the potential for a departure from absolute neutrality as a means of responding to local conditions. The Thomas J. Watson Research Center for IBM (1957) at Yorktown Heights, New York, was initially conceived in a scheme similar to the Bell project, with internal courts enclosed within a grid of linear wings. The final scheme, however, became a grandly sweeping landscape gesture, employing a continuous curtain wall of gray heat-absorbing glass along its 1090-foot length. The glass skin enclosed a curved «trunk-corridor» oriented to views, eliminating endless internal vistas and, more significantly, accommodating the building form to the crest of its hillside site.

IBM Research Center
Yorktown Heights,
New York
plan



The character of this architecture reflected profound changes in American society. As Alan Gowans observed, "For just as the blank walls and steel columns and glass curtains of the great new plants that American corporations were constructing in the late 1940s and 50s marked the disappearance of Victorian traditions in American art, so the transformation of the ideal executive from rugged individualist to bland blend-with-the-group marked the final collapse of the Victorian spirit in American business and social life." [26]

IBM Research Center
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

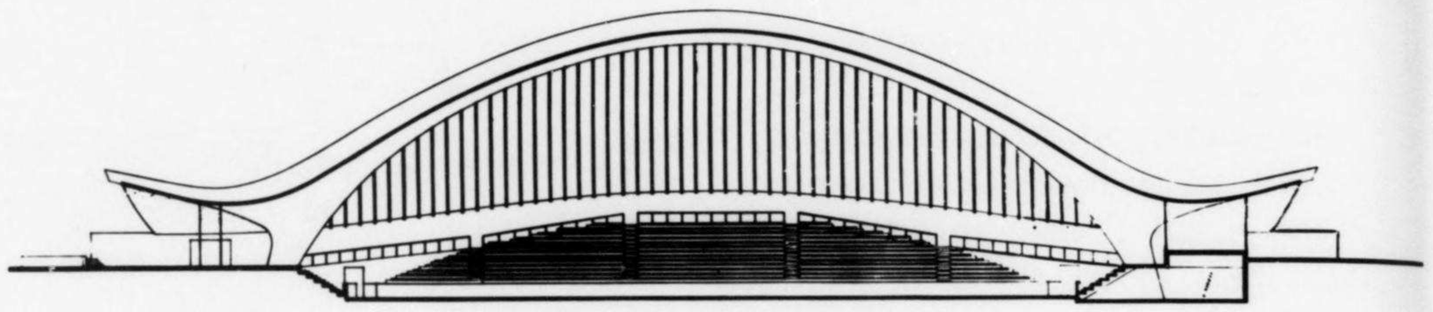
IBM Research Center
laboratory
corridors

These changes became apparent in the architectural profession and were reflected in Saarinen's practice. The office grew rapidly through the mid-1950s as commissions were received for increasingly large and complex institutional and corporate structures. Of necessity the practice became highly organized to handle many projects simultaneously in diverse locations across the country. Despite the scale of operation, however, Saarinen's office retained the character of the atelier, a balance of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* with Sloan Wilson's *The Man in The Gray Flannel Suit*. While the practice was methodical, if not methodological, it stood in contrast to much of American practice where the method of work moved from collaboration to division. Through this period of growth, Saarinen managed to redefine the architectural practice, for his did not evolve into a highly specialized office, like those modeled after corporate business. Though his clients were often large corporations, his own practice retained a creative atmosphere with a level of energy akin to an architectural school.

Saarinen built up one of the most talented design staffs in architecture, including a broad range of individuals who have gone on to become important figures in their own right.[27] The diversity of this group testifies to the range and vitality of ideas entertained within Saarinen's office.

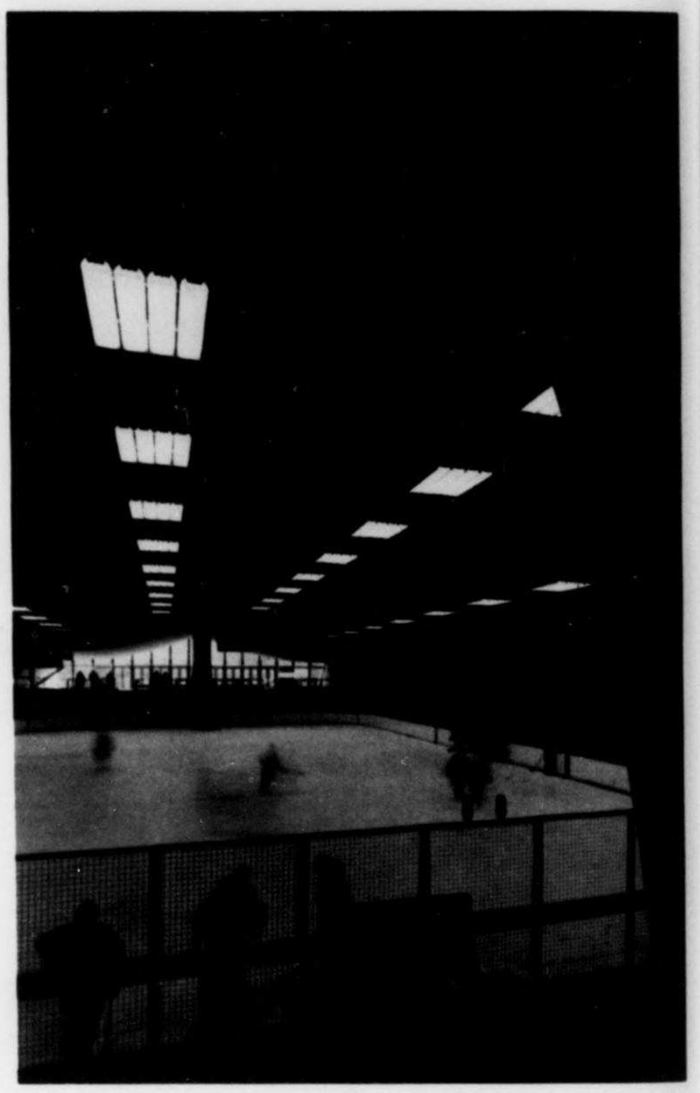
Saarinen often spoke of his commitment to «the three great principles of modern architecture: functional integrity; honest expression of structure; and the awareness of our time.» Recognizing the limitations of this basis, however, he sought to widen the possibilities of modern architecture through the exploration of other concerns. Foremost of these was that «the conveying of significant meaning is part of the inspirational purpose of architecture, and therefore, I believe, one of the fundamental principles of our art.»[28] This intent went beyond the usual desire to portray the spirit of the day or the program within. Using the metaphoric, symbolic, and representational potential of modern architecture, his intent was to articulate the essential nature of the institution or activity being housed. The artifacts produced also reflect the aesthetic culture of the time. The search for form, the new monumentality, abstract expressionism, hard-edge precision, and new materials dominated the concerns of the period. Saarinen's architecture exhibited all these preoccupations; he was a hard-line formalist in steel at the same time that he pursued gestural dynamic form in concrete. His work never evolved into a single aesthetic, nor did it evidence the «signature» consistency of other artists and architects of the day; the «style for the job» evolved from the unique qualities of program and site.

Despite the diversity of his architectural interests, each building demonstrates a rigorous adherence to the chosen parti. He believed that «architecture must make a strong emotional impact on man. I've come to the conviction that once one embarks on a concept for a building, this concept has to be exaggerated and overstated and repeated in every part . . . so that wherever you are, inside or outside, the building sings with the same message.»[29] He later added, «In any kind of design, one has to go fearlessly ahead to the most rational, most clear and most intense consequence.»[30]

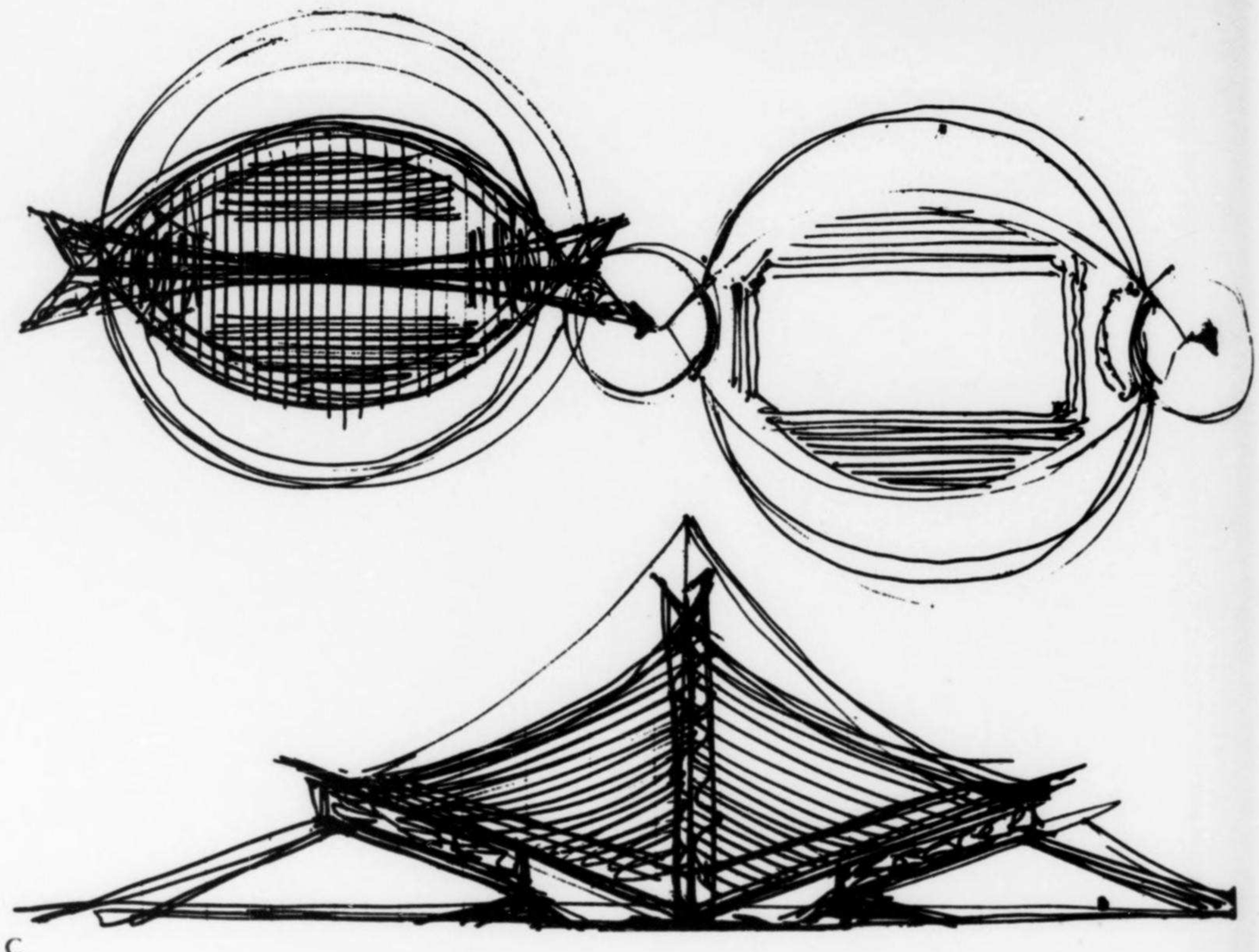


A

The David S. Ingalls Hockey Rink at Yale (1956–1959) marked a significant break in Saarinen's career. Although clearly related to previous works, such as the St. Louis Arch and the MIT Auditorium, the complex plasticity of its form and the dynamic space within were the result of new interests. Breakthroughs in engineering made possible the «search for form,» in which Saarinen was joined by many of his contemporaries at mid-century. He remarked on the pivotal place of Ingalls in his own production: «The Hockey Rink marks an important moment in my work. You could say it strengthened my convictions about making everything a part of the same form world, and gave us confidence about handling vaults and suspended roofs. . . . It influenced both TWA and the Washington Airport.»[31]

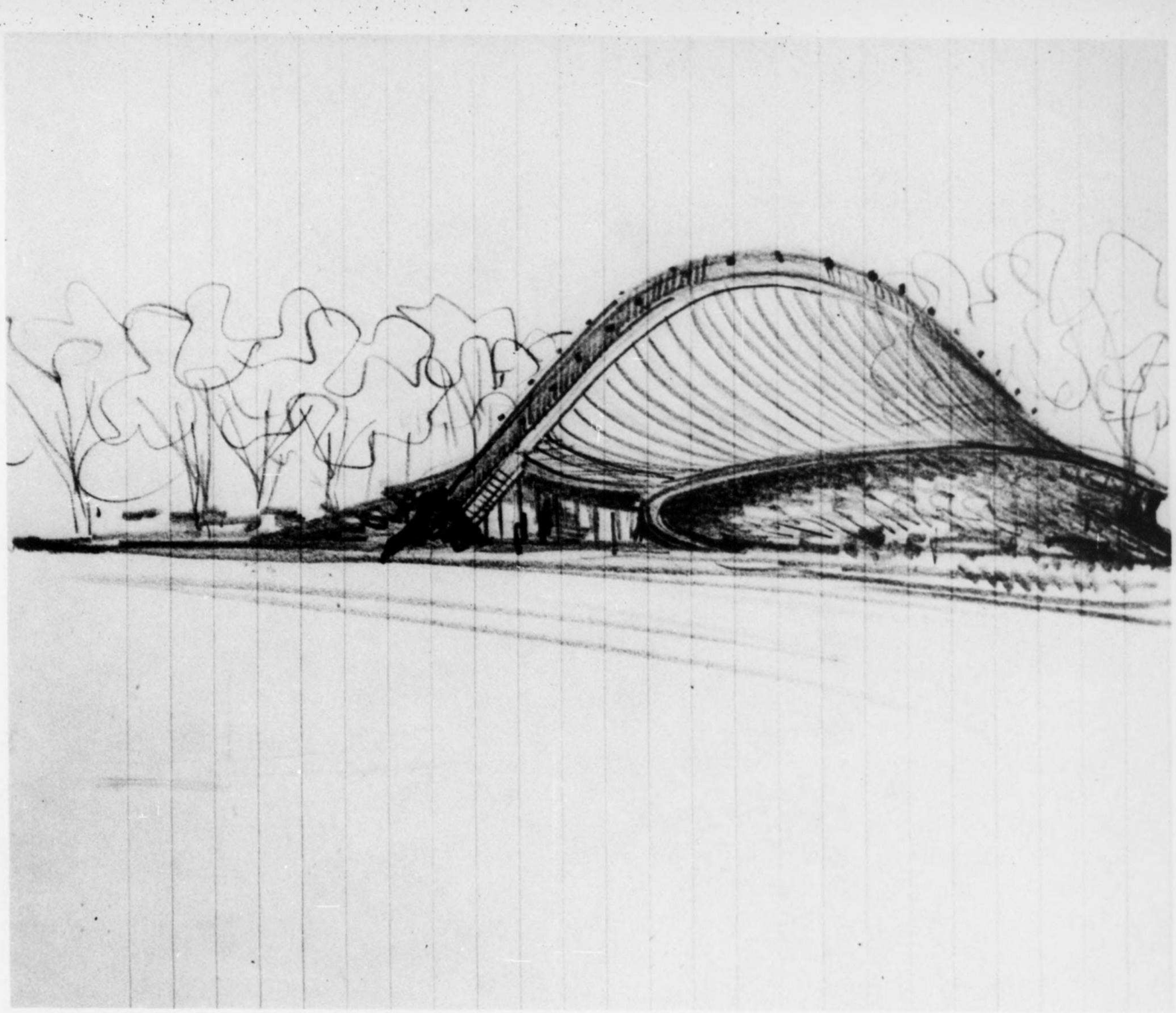


B

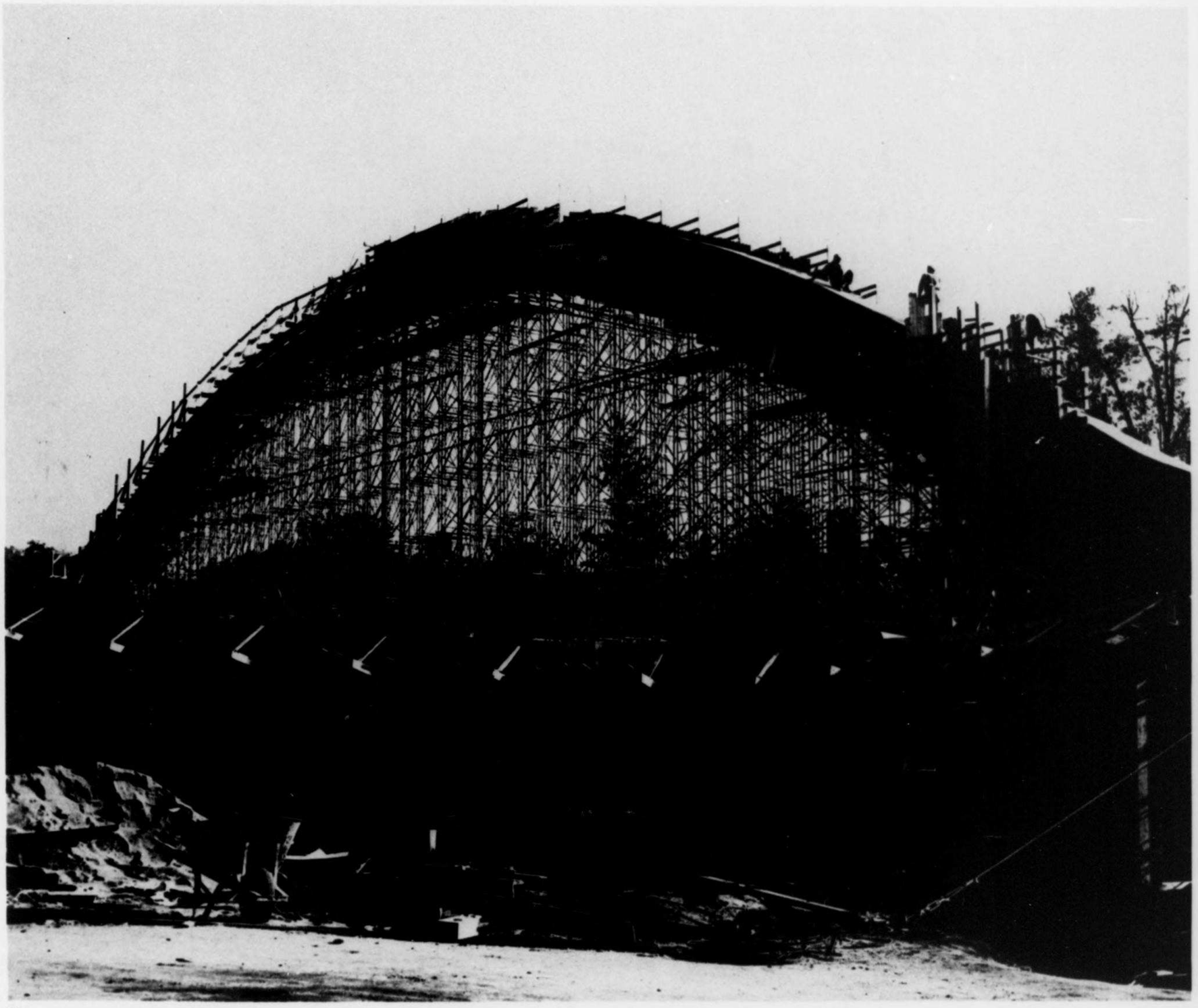


C

a
David S. Ingalls
Hockey Rink
Yale University
New Haven,
Connecticut
section
b
David S. Ingalls
Hockey Rink
Ezra Stoller © ESTO
c
David S. Ingalls
Hockey Rink
preliminary
sketches
d
David S. Ingalls
Hockey Rink
perspective
sketch
e
David S. Ingalls
Hockey Rink

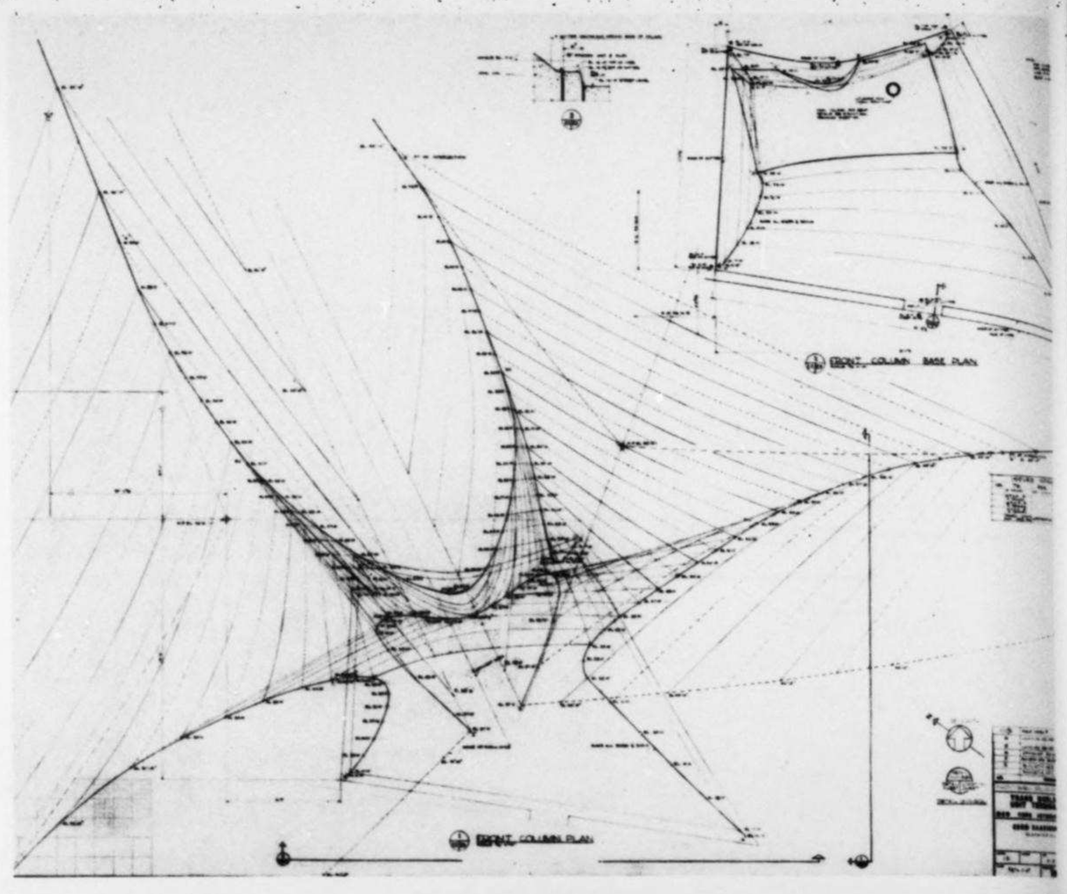


D



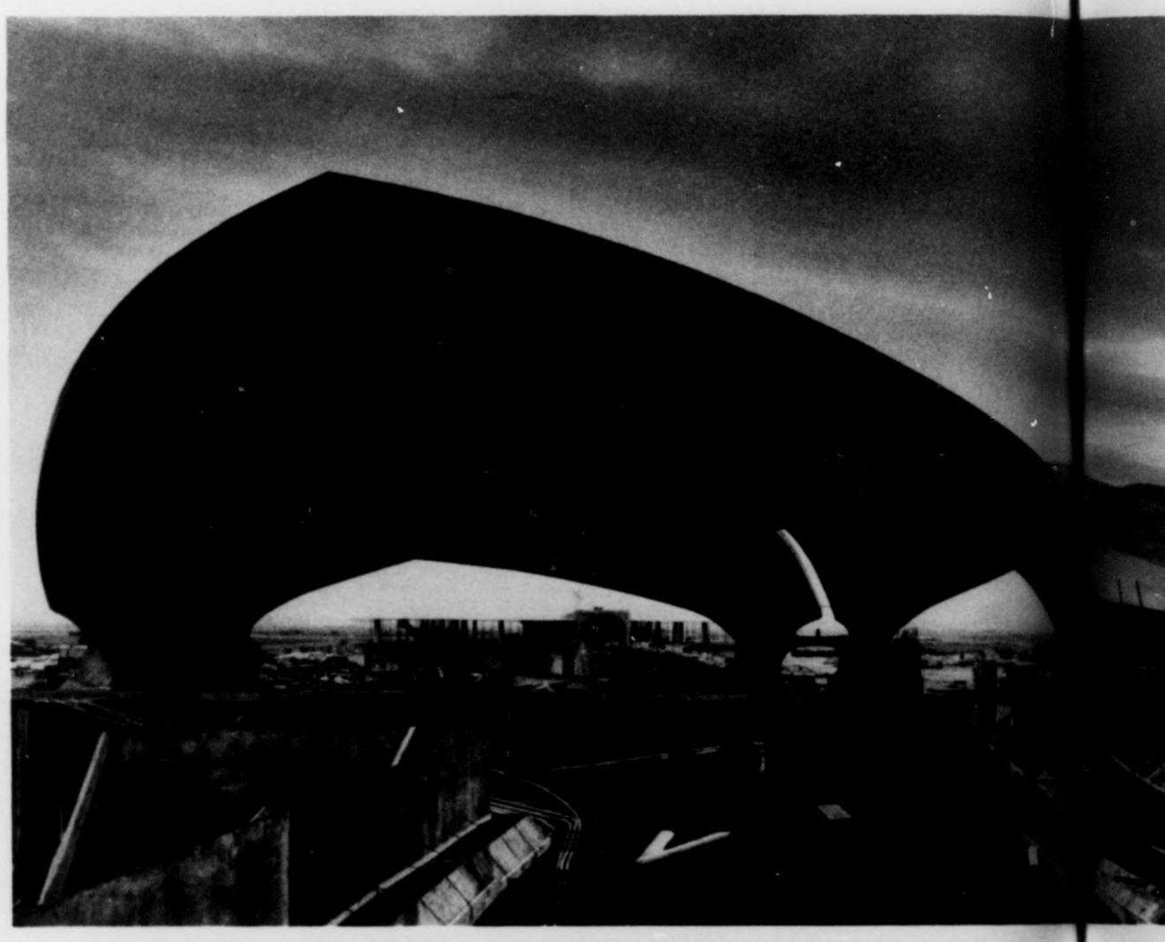
E

TWA Flight Center
Kennedy Airport
New York City
concrete pier study



The TransWorld Airlines Flight Center at Kennedy Airport (1956–1962) is perhaps the most advanced of Saarinen's sculptural forms, providing a fluid continuity of space, shape, and surface to celebrate the purpose of passenger flow. As a mesmerizing environment, the structure succeeds as few other twentieth-century buildings have. Saarinen explained, «In studying the problem in model after model, both exterior and interior, we realized that having determined on this basic form for the vaulting, we had committed ourselves to a family of forms and must carry the same integral character throughout the entire building. . . . It is our strong belief that only through such a consistency and such a consequential development can a building make its fullest impact and expression.» [32]

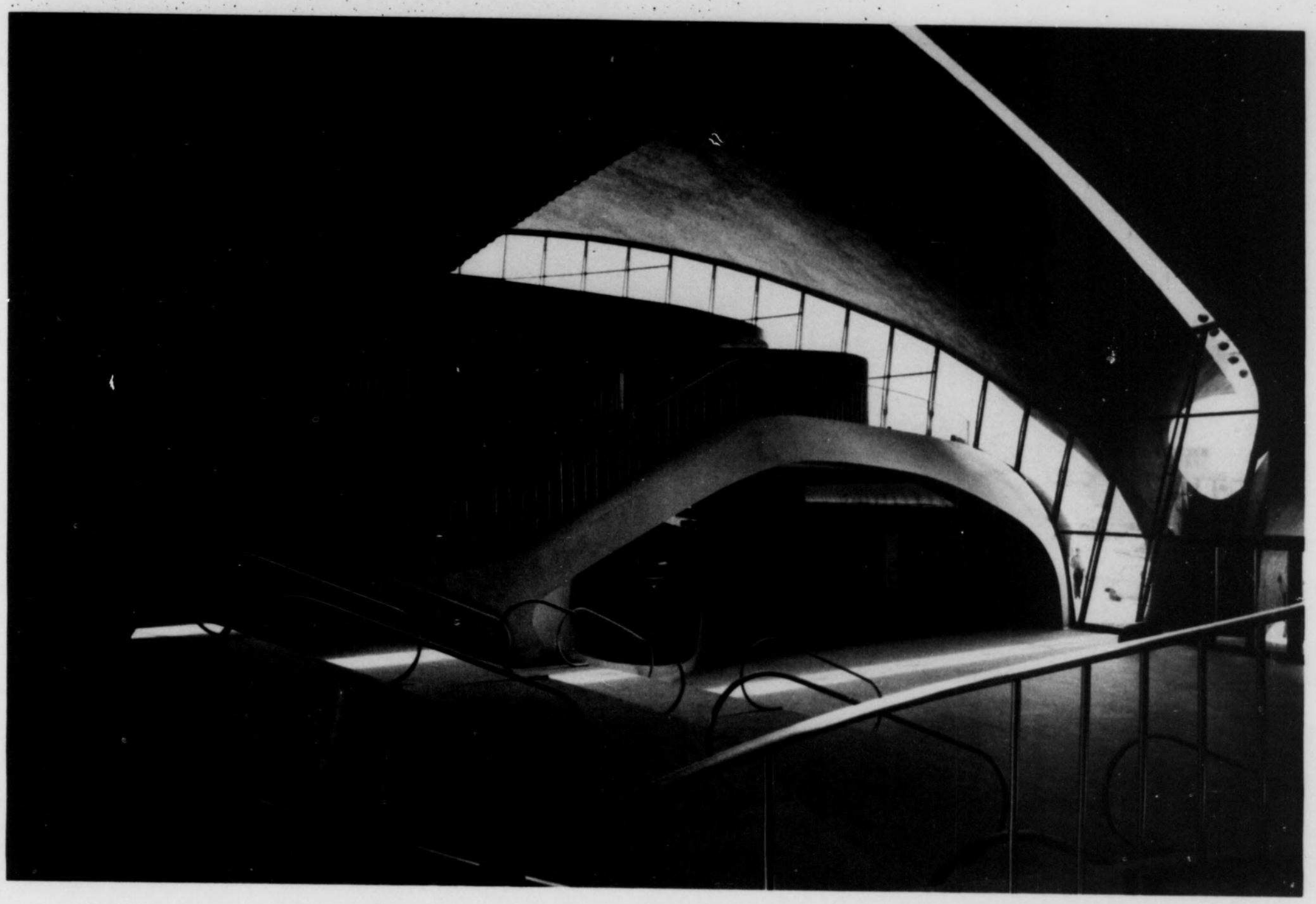
TWA Flight Center
Kennedy Airport



TWA Flight Center
Kennedy Airport
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

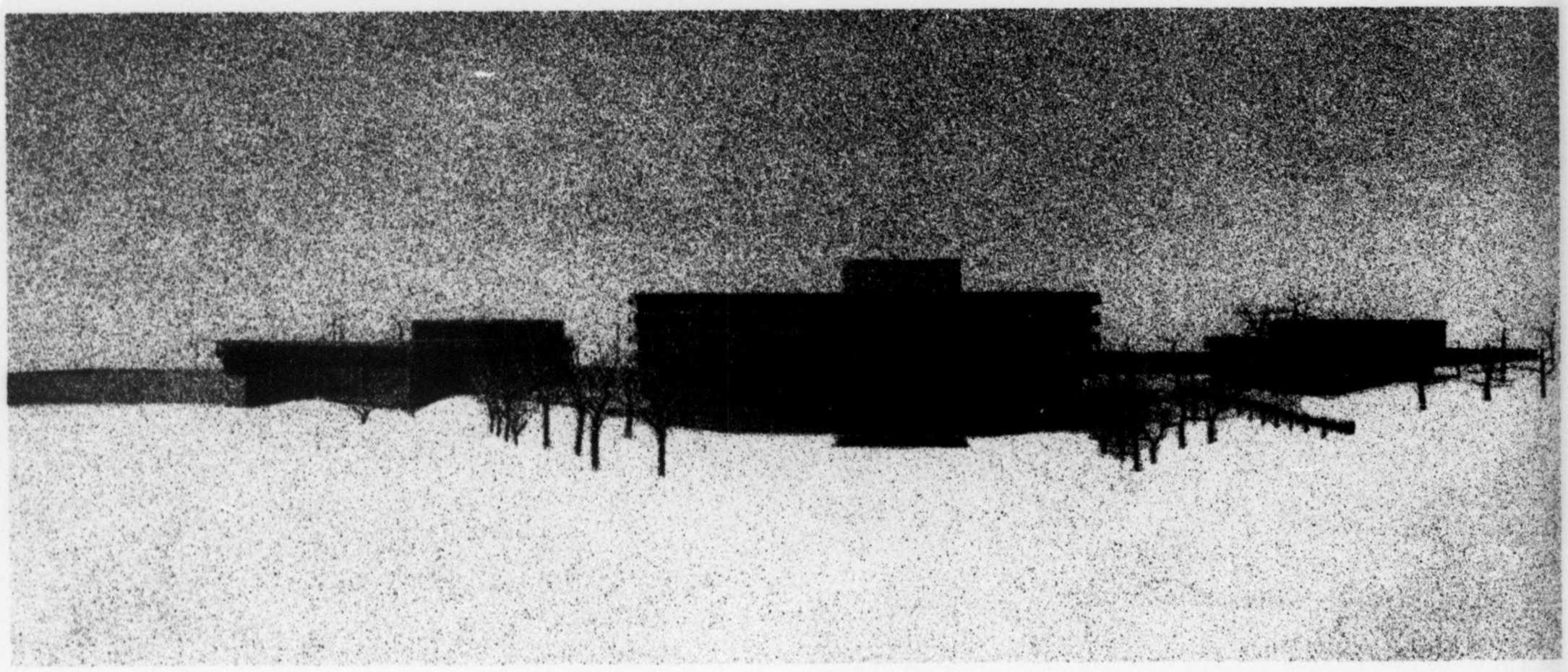
Saarinen acknowledged that the upward-soaring dynamism he sought was akin to baroque sensibilities; but he achieved it by extending the limits of modern concrete-shell construction and avoiding direct historical allusion. The building's complex curves were fabricated from an ingenious formwork constructed of standard straight pieces. Allegorically, TWA suggested flight and was quickly labeled «Eero's Bird.» The metaphor was deliberate, for as John Jacobus noted, «Indeed, what the architect sought was an updated *architecture parlante*, not a style but, in a curious return to eighteenth century methodologies, a literary architecture that would arouse emotions and affect sentiments.» [33]

TWA Flight Center
Kennedy Airport
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

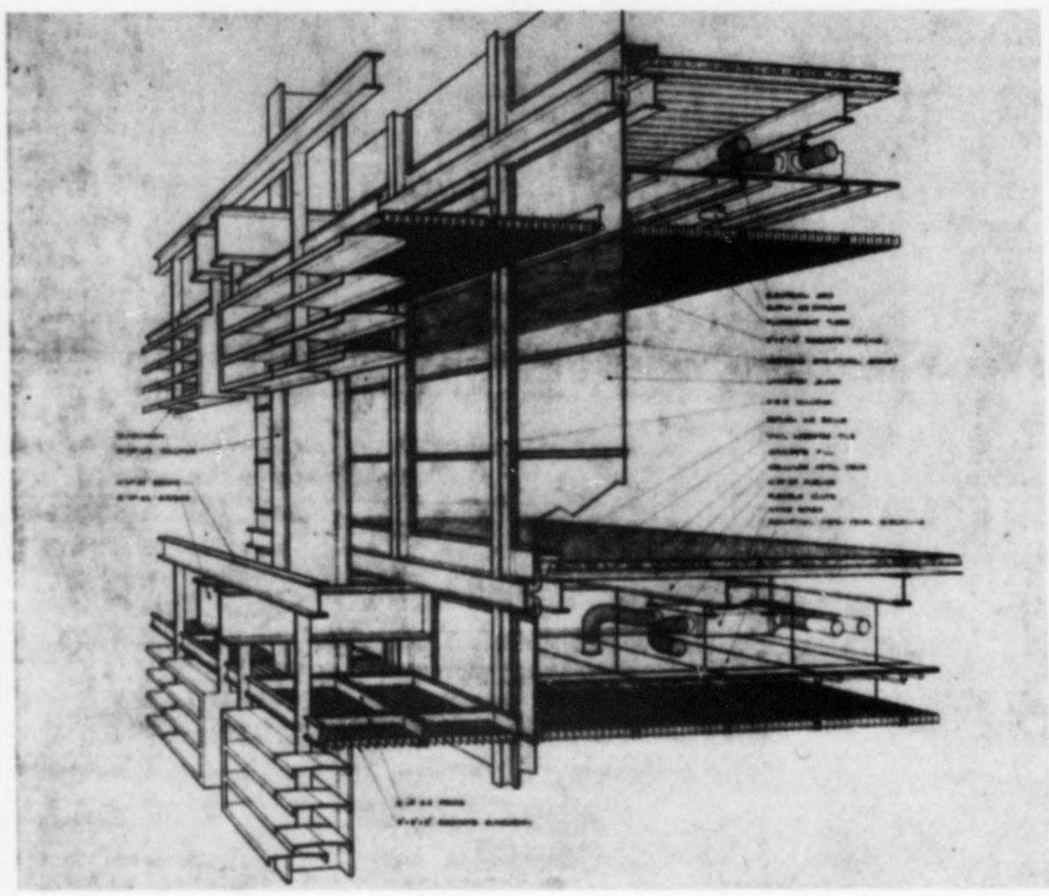


TWA Flight Center
Kennedy Airport
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

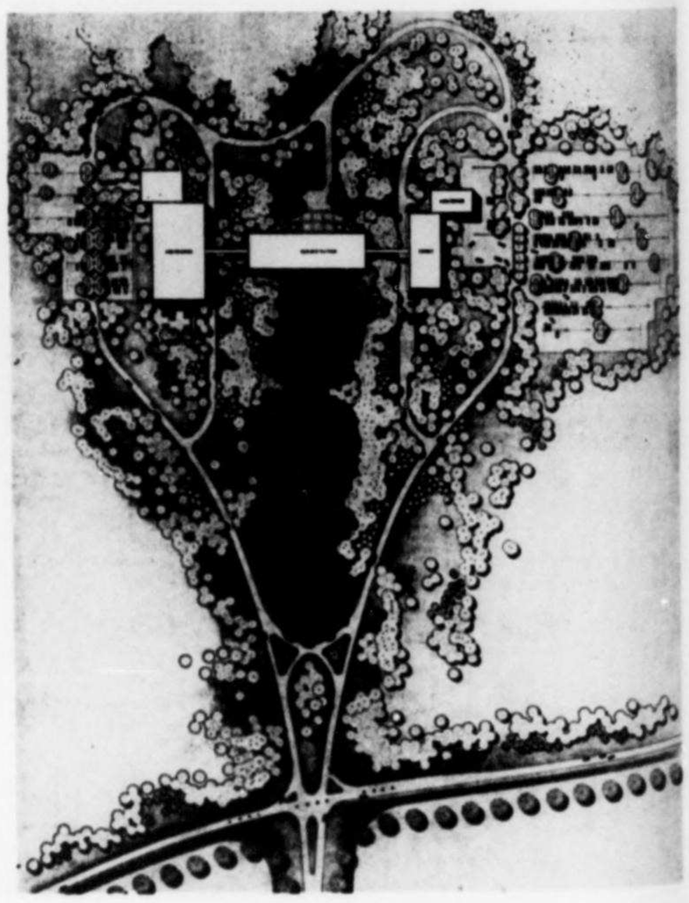
John Deere and
Company
Moline, Illinois
Ezra Stoller © ESTO



John Deere and
Company



John Deere and
Company
building system detail

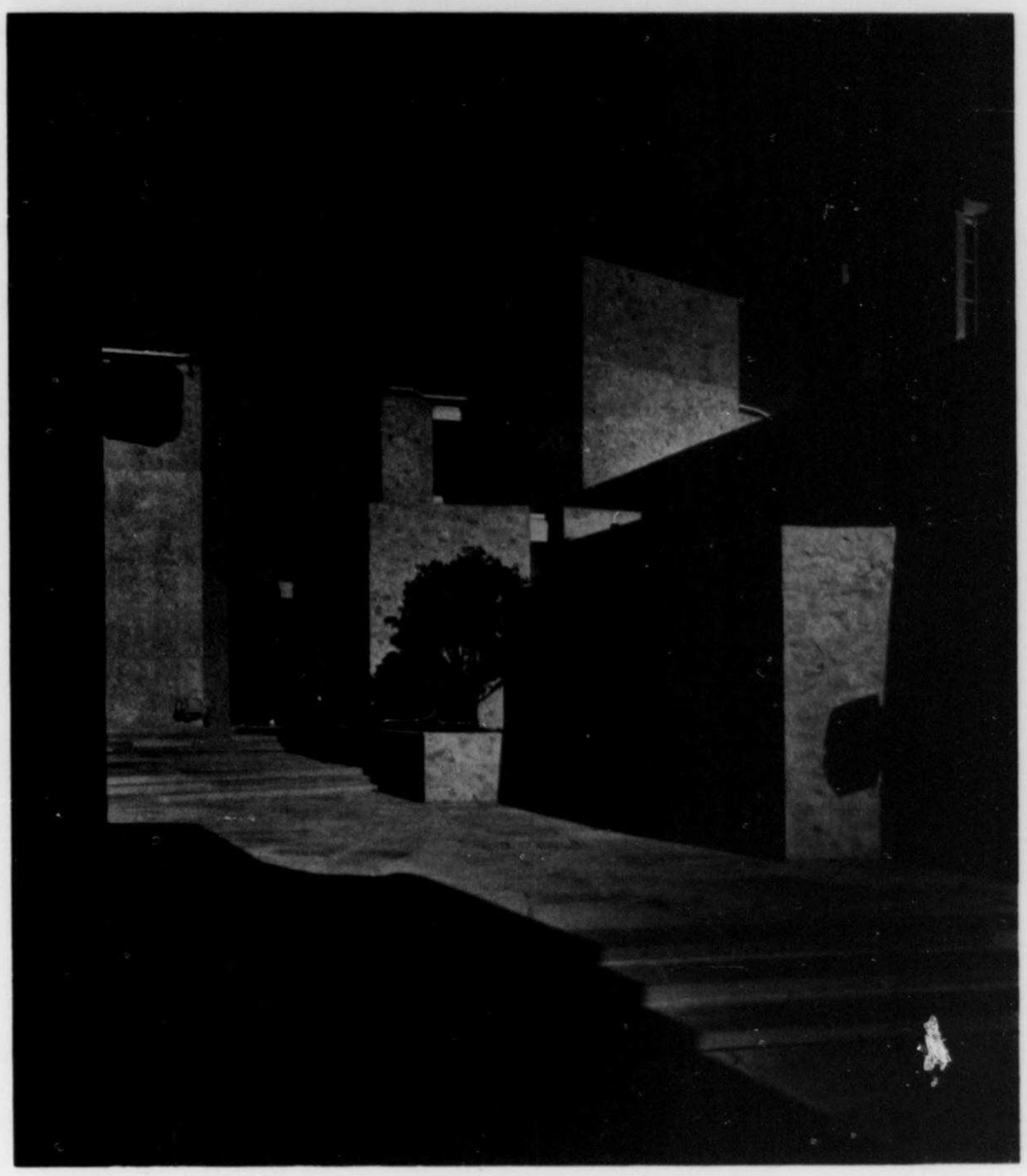


John Deere and
Company
site plan

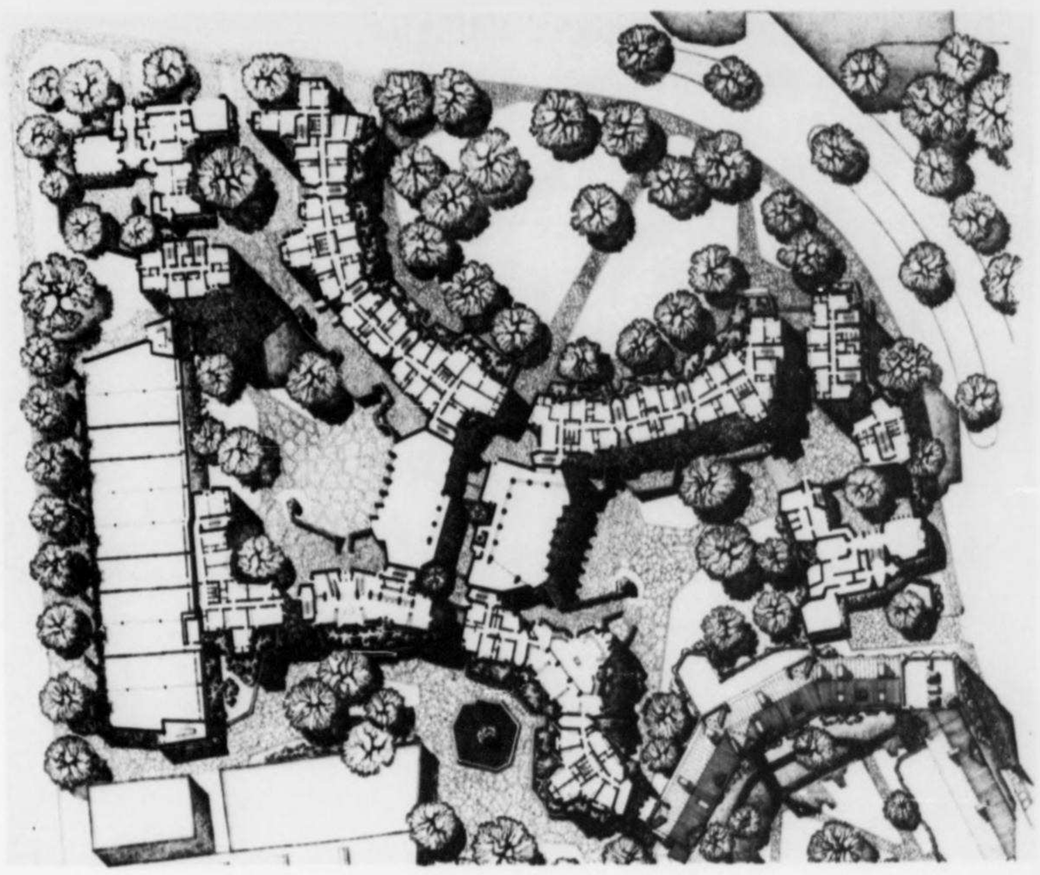
The irregular geometry of the site for the Ezra Stiles and Samuel F. B. Morse Colleges at Yale (1958–1962), adjacent to the Gothic Revival Payne Whitney Gymnasium and the Hall of Graduate Studies, was cause for the evolution of a new vocabulary; the colleges were intended to be sympathetic to their antimodern neighbors without betraying their own modernity. Saarinen said, «A way must be found for uniting the whole, because the total environment is more important than the single building. . . . Now this does not mean that the building has to succumb to the total. Any architecture must hold its head high. . . . The single building must be carefully related to the whole in the outdoor space it creates. In its mass and scale and material it must become an enhancing element in the total environment.» [34] The use of cast-in-place concrete employing fieldstone in the formwork made possible the expression of both individual variety and collective order, in keeping with the spirit of the existing masonry colleges. The theme of diversity within unity gave each college a particular character; compositional adjustments were made to the basic diagram to draw in elements of context, while the vertical counterpoints of the residential towers act as markers of place, recalling the formal accents used by Eliel. Throughout, the architectural form serves to define open space. Stiles and Morse remain true to the courtyard model of the Yale colleges: the dining halls focus the internal courts, and student rooms are organized vertically around separate entryways. The requirement of a common kitchen to serve both dining halls, resolved by sloping the internal courts and terracing the walkway between the colleges, creates a picturesque allusion to Italian townscapes. These design solutions lend an intimate scale and personalized place to an urban university.

Morse and Stiles
Colleges
Yale University
New Haven,
Connecticut
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

Morse and Stiles
Colleges
Ezra Stoller © ESTO



Morse and Stiles
Colleges
site plan



The Dulles International Airport at Chantilly, Virginia (1958–1962) was a synthesis of the multiple directions of the last decade of Eero Saarinen's career as well as an indication of his possible future course. As a new airport for the nation's capital, Dulles was the product of advanced technological experiments, providing both a monumental scale appropriate to the program and an evocative symbolic image users perceive in relation to the landscape.

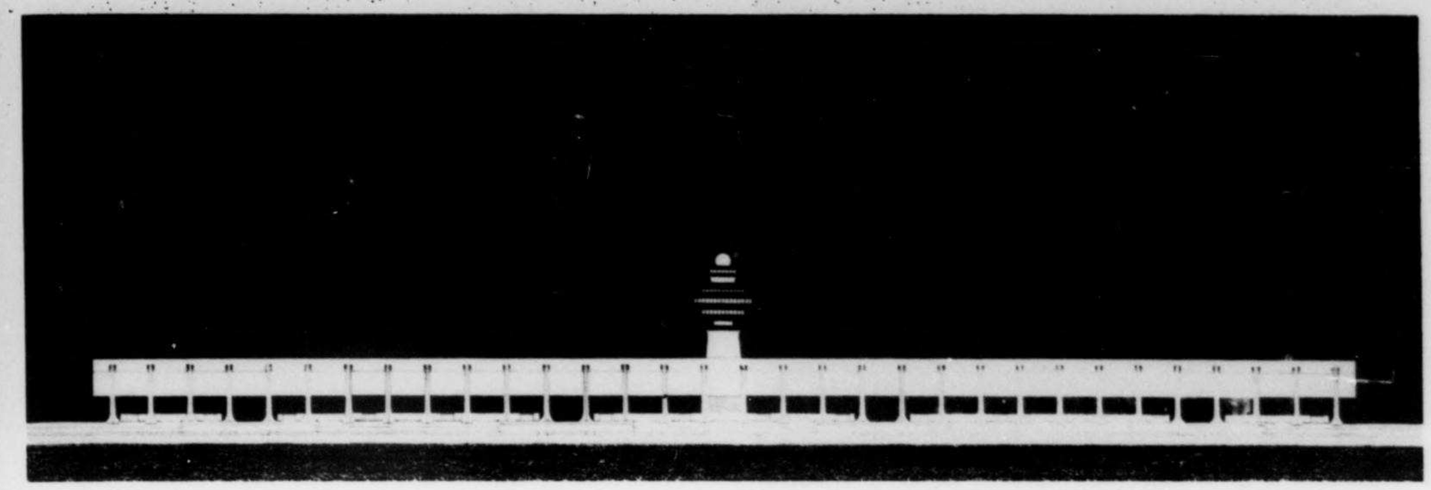
Dulles International Airport
Chantilly, Virginia

The great interior space, with a clear span of nearly 170 feet, is articulated by an integral slab roof. Suspension steel cables are slung between sloped pylons; no scaffolding was used in the concrete roof, as the slab was poured between concrete planks placed on the cables. At the time of its planning, Dulles was the largest airport facility in the country and included 9,600 acres of site. Its design required an extensive analysis of runway development and expansion, in addition to a building that would allow for growth.

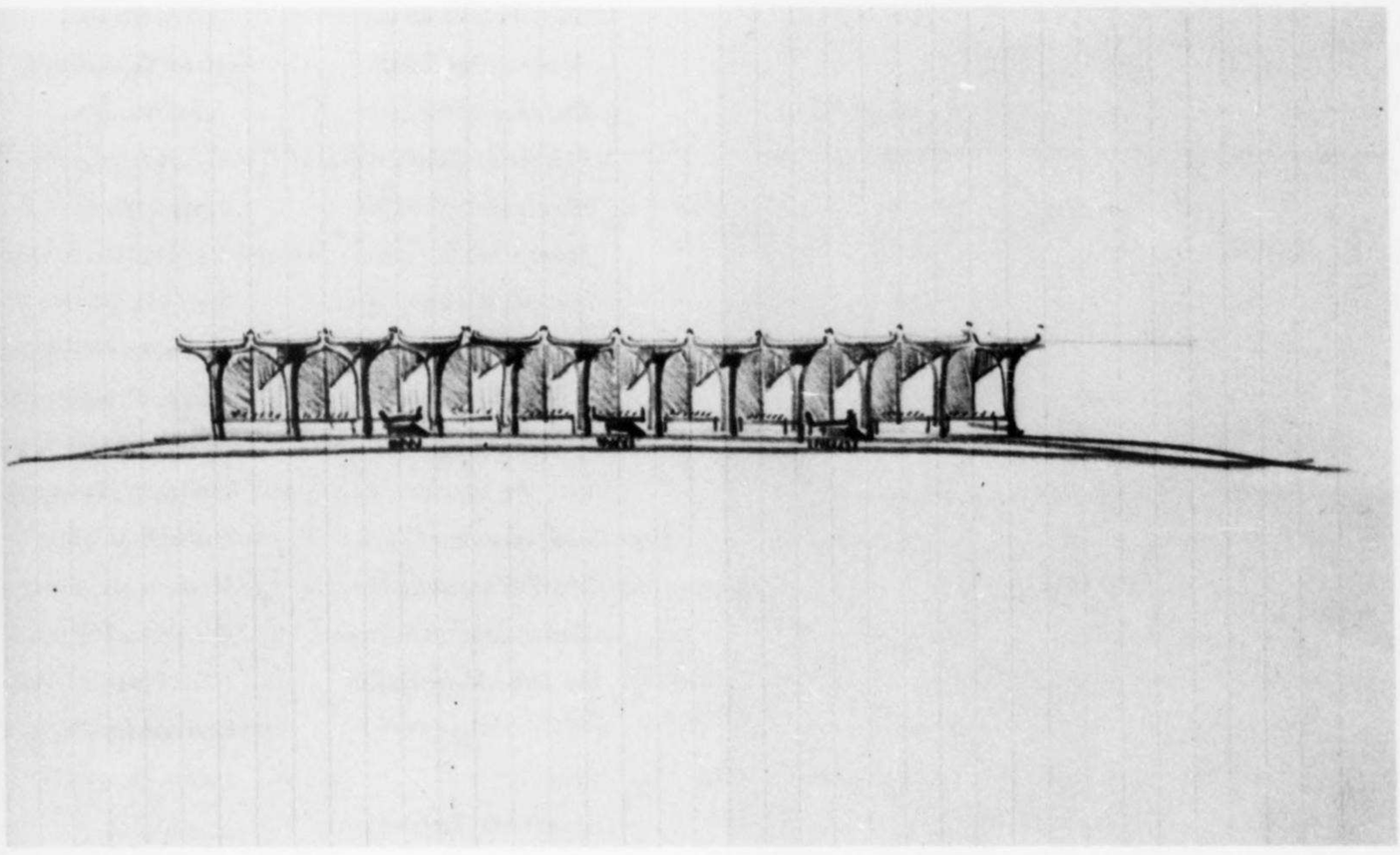
Dulles International Airport
Chantilly, Virginia

The strategy for the design was dictated by the need to accommodate growth while limiting the distance passengers had to traverse within the airport; the solution was to separate the arrivals building from the connection to aircraft, thereby facilitating a flexible relationship. The means to this end was development of the so-called mobile lounge, with a potentially random service function which freed users from the fixed boundaries of an architectural container. The building was designed to accommodate potentially indeterminate, linear extension. Symbolically, the forward thrust of the pylons and canopy project into the landscape to represent the act of departure; conversely they present a great embracing umbrella which gathers the arrival lounges under itself. This spiritual embellishment of the experience of travel recalls the terminals of previous technologies.[35]

Dulles International Airport
Ezra Stoller © ESTO

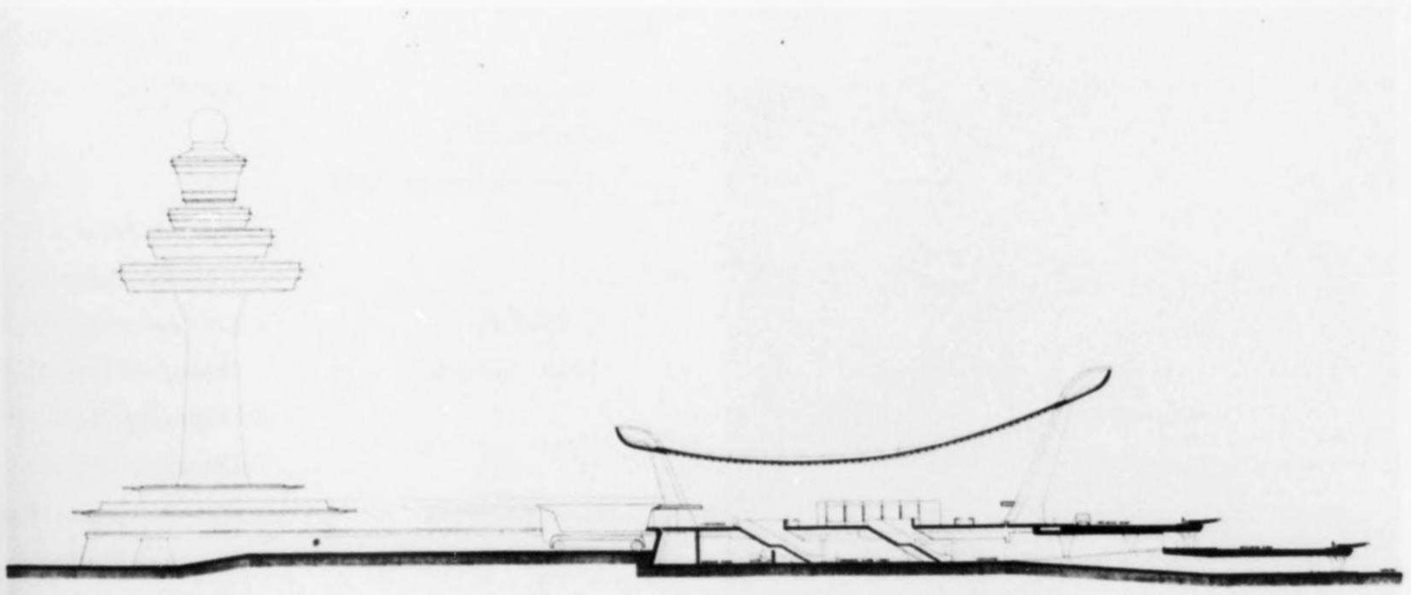


Dulles International
Airport
elevation study for
future expansion



Dulles International
Airport
elevation study

Dulles International
Airport
section



These important later works exhibit Saarinen's remarkable proficiency at building highly experimental and innovative architecture for American corporations and institutions. He had become a truly powerful architect, one who gave shape to the ideas and values of his society. His career represents the progress of a second-generation architect who synthesized a multiple range of traditions. Saarinen was fortunate to have a critical distance from the ideological and formal manifestoes of early modernism, with an allegiance to the conservative traditions of his father Eliel and faith in the physical and psychological liberation made possible by technology. Saarinen's later work personified the brash boldness of American modernism in its big gestures and unfailing optimism, a synthesis of progressive high technology with emotive, abstract expression.

As Henry-Russell Hitchcock noted in a 1962 memorial to Saarinen, «Certainly it is true, however, that the extreme insistence on a sort of modernism in architecture that should be in its every aspect as different as possible from earlier architecture has diminished. Architects today are less afraid of continuity and partial identity in theory, in materials, and in emotional content with buildings of the past than in the twenties. But it creates confusion, I believe, to call these tendencies ‹post-modern,› ‹anti-modern,› or ‹neo-traditional,› however badly some generic name for them has evidently come to be needed.»[36]

At the time of his death Saarinen appeared to be on the edge of a new synthesis. As John Jacobus observed, «Stripped of its literary complications, however, it at last becomes a form of universal strength. It is, indeed, extraordinary that Saarinen finally arrived at this triumph, having traversed the strange uncertain path started a decade before . . . Eero Saarinen did more than reflect the changing tastes and passion of his time: he truly found himself as an architect and as an individual.»[37]

Notes

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Peter Carter
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3
Reyner Banham
«The Fear of Eero's Mana»
«Arts Magazine» Vol. 36
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4
Albert Christ-Janer
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see also Eva E. Raun
«Eliel Saarinen in Finland 1897–1923»
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David G. DeLong
«Eliel Saarinen and the Cranbrook Tradition in Architecture and Urban Design»
«Design in America: The Cranbrook Vision 1925–1950»
Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts
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See Craig Miller
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7
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Aline Saarinen (ed.)
«Eero Saarinen on His Work»
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«The City»
New York, Reinhold Publishing Corp, 1943
and also Marc Treib
«Urban Fabric by the Bolt: Eliel Saarinen at Munkkiniemi-Haaga»
«Architectural Association Quarterly» Vol. 13
Nos. 2/3
January–June 1982

9
«Bulletin of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design»
Vol. 8 No. 10
August 1932 p3

10
These projects include a third place entry for the Helsinki Central Post Office and Telegraph (1934), which Aalto also entered, as well as the so-called «Forum» project (1934) with Jarl Eklund, and a design for the Finnish Pavilion in the 1937 Paris World's Fair, which Aalto won.

11
See «California Arts and Architecture» Vol. 60, August 1943, and «Architectural Forum» Vol. 79, September 1943, and «Architect and Building News» July 14, 1944

12
Edgardo Contini, engineer consultant, quoted in Esther McCoy
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13
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«The Smithsonian Gallery of Art Competition»
«Architectural Forum»
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see also Joseph Hudnut
«Smithsonian Competition Results»
«Magazine of Art»
Vol. 32, August 1939;
and Lorimer Rich
«A Study in Contrasts»
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«Eliel Saarinen in America»
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17
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Box 160 Folder 25a

18
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«Architecture and Defense Housing»
«National Association of Housing Officials Journal»
No. 165, 1942 p5;
see also «Center Line Defense Houses»
«Architectural Forum»
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19
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in Giorgio Ciucci, Francesco Dal Co, Mario Maiveri-Elia, and Manfredo Tafuri
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26
Alan Gowans
«Images of American Living»
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27
Among them are Charles Bassett, Gunnar Birkerts, Michael Brill, Niels Diffrient, John Dinkeloo, Olav Hammerstrom, Paul Kennon, Balthasar Korab, Raymond Lifchez, Anthony Lumsden, Leonard Parker, Cesar Pelli, Kevin Roche, Harold Roth, Robert Venturi, and Willhelm von Moltke.

28
Eero Saarinen address at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania December 1, 1959 Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library Manuscripts and Archives Eero Saarinen Papers Manuscript Group 593 Series VII Box 11 p4–5

29
Eero Saarinen address at Dickinson College p6

30
Quoted in Aline Saarinen p11

31
Quoted in Aline Saarinen p54

32
Quoted in Aline Saarinen p60

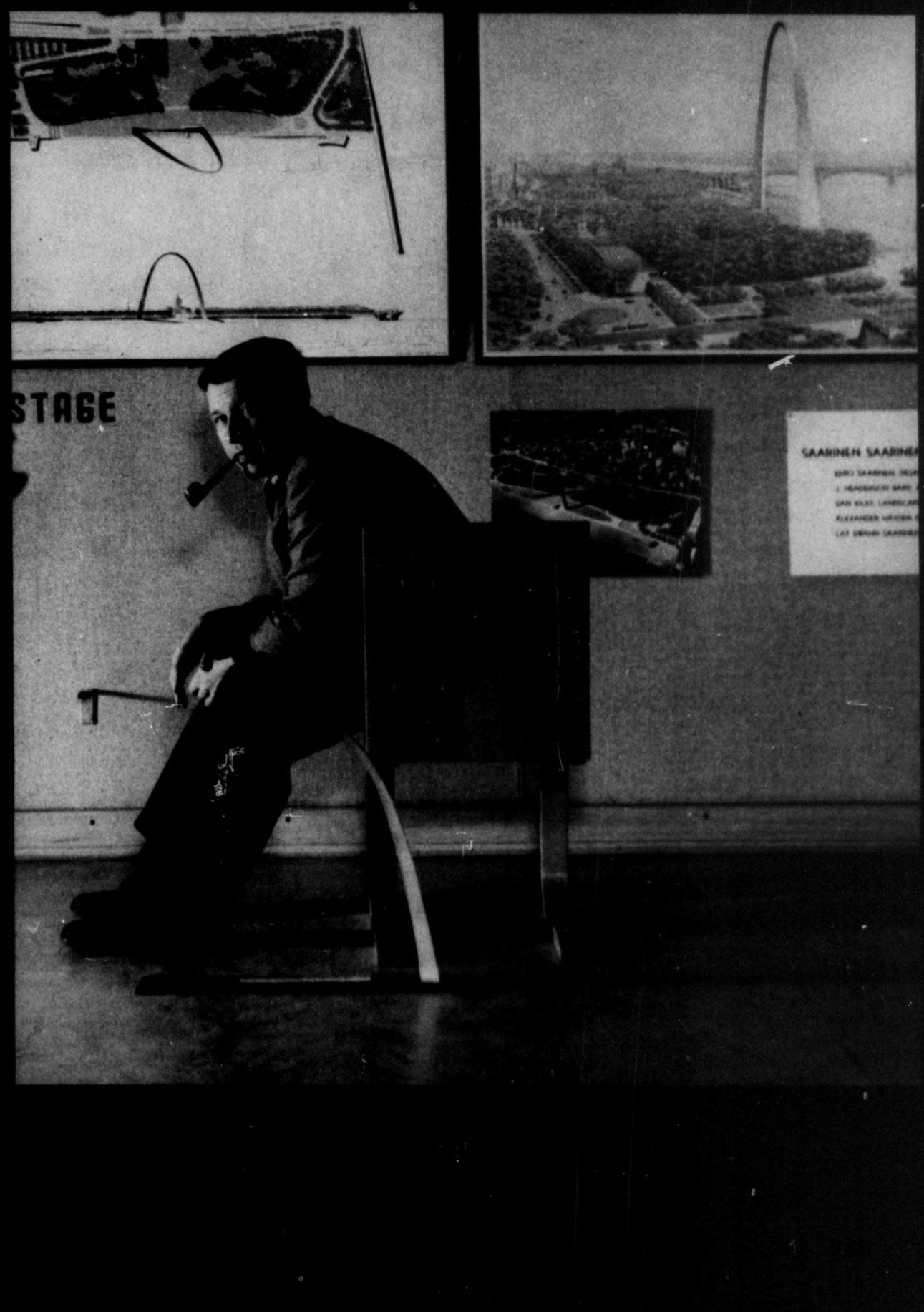
33
John Jacobus «Twentieth Century Architecture: The Middle Years 1940–65» New York, Frederick A. Praeger 1966 p160

34
Eero Saarinen address at Dickinson College p6

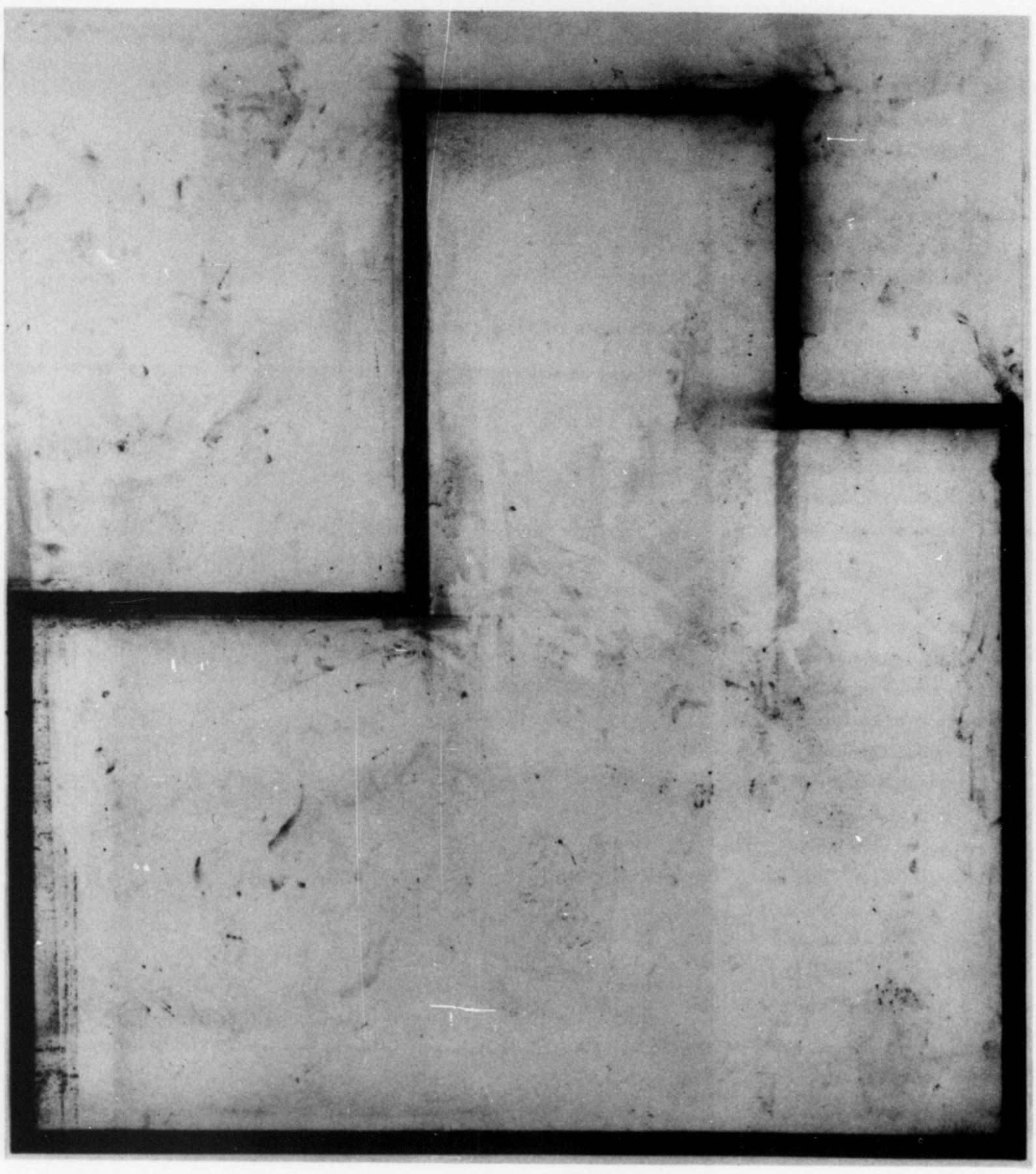
35
See Walter McQuade «The Birth of an Airport» «Fortune» Vol. 65 March 1962; and «A New Airport for Jets» «Architectural Record» Vol. 127, March 1960

36
Henry-Russell Hitchcock «American Architecture in the Early Sixties» «Zodiac 10, Edizioni di Communita,» 1962 p7

37
John Jacobus p161



Joel Shapiro
Untitled
1976–77



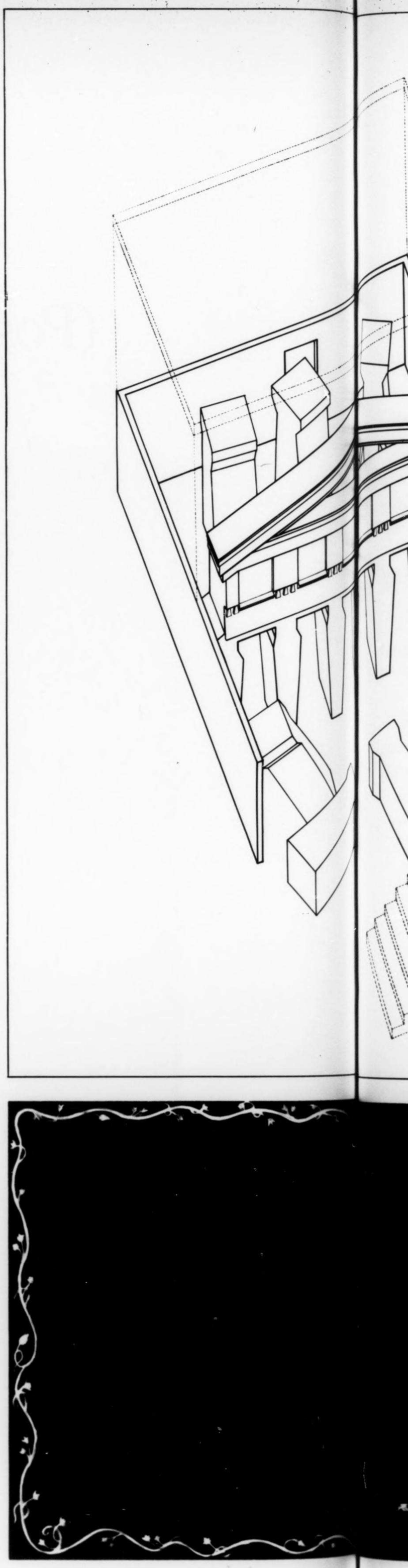
Hal Foster

(Post) Modern Polemics

In American cultural politics today there are at least two positions on postmodernism in place: one aligned with neoconservative politics, the other derived from poststructuralist theory.

«Neoconservative» postmodernism is the more familiar of the two: defined mostly in terms of style, it depends on modernism which, reduced to its own worst formalist image, is countered with a return to narrative, ornament, and the figure. This position is often one of reaction, but in more ways than the stylistic–for also proclaimed is the return of history (the humanist tradition) and the return of the subject (the artist/architect as *auteur*).

«Poststructuralist» postmodernism, on the other hand, assumes «the death of the author» not only as originary creator, but also as privileged subject of representation and history. This postmodernism, as opposed to the neoconservative, is profoundly antihumanist; rather than a return to representation, it launches a critique in which reality is shown to be constituted by our representations of it. (This critique accounts for the poststructuralist connection). And yet, however opposed in style and politics, it is my contention that these two concepts of postmodernism disclose a historical identity.



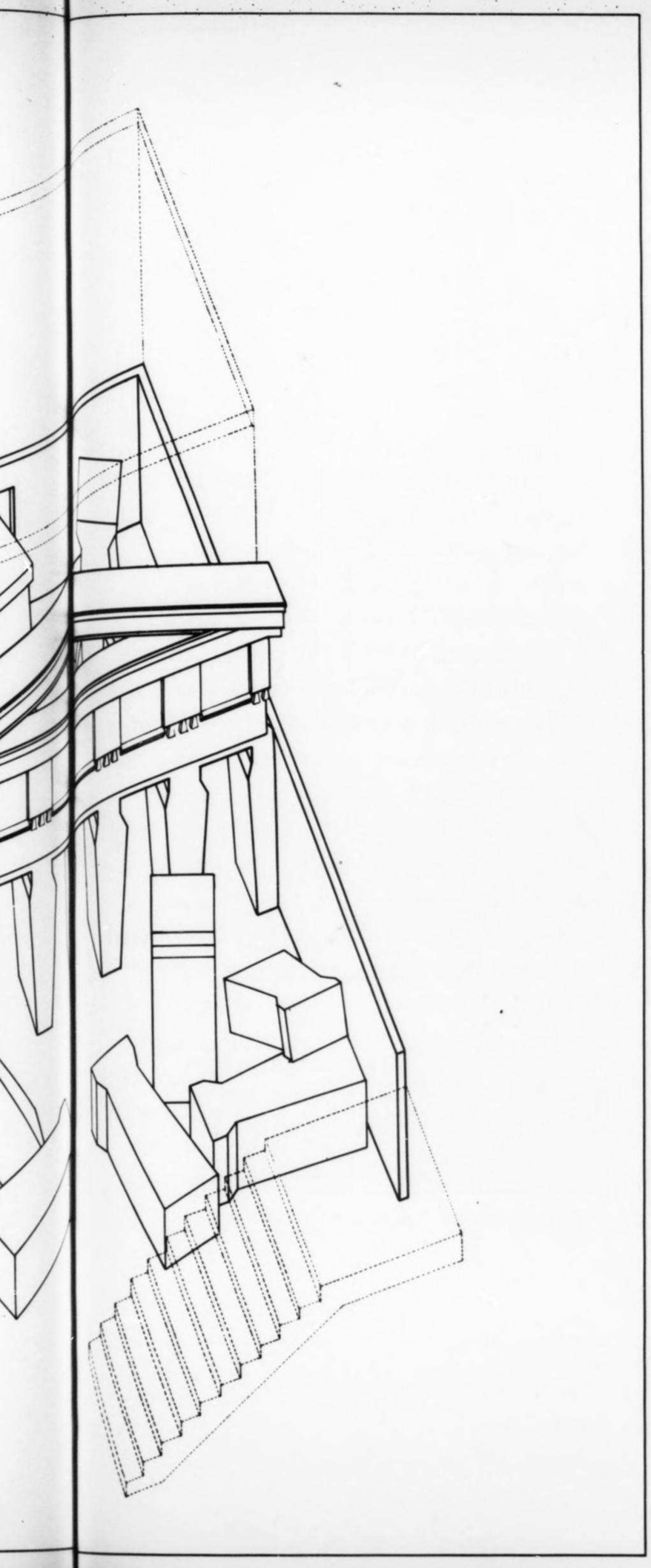
In art and architecture neoconservative postmodernism is marked by an eclectic historicism in which older and newer modes and styles (used goods, as it were) are retooled and recycled. In architecture this practice tends to the use of a campy classical order to decorate the usual shed (for example, Charles Moore, Robert Stern) and in art to the use of pop-historicist references to commodify the usual painting (Julian Schnabel is the inflated signifier here). But in what way is such work *post*modernist? It does not argue with modernism in any serious way; indeed, to a great degree its postmodernism seems a front for a rapprochement with the market and the public–a rapprochement that, far from populist (as is so commonly claimed) is alternately elitist in its allusions and manipulative in its clichés.

The postmodernist status of such art and architecture is unsure on other grounds too, for reactions against the modern were common enough within its own period: for example, the *retour à l'ordre*, the traditionalist turn of art in the late 1910s and '20s. As with that antimodern return, so with this postmodern one: it comes in the guise of a new humanism and traditionalism.

But this return to history must be questioned. What, first of all, is this «history» but a reduction of historical periods to ruling-class styles that are then appropriated freely? A history, in short, of victors. And what, secondly, does this return imply if not a flight from the present? Clearly this was the thrust of eclectic historicism in nineteenth-century art and architecture–a flight from the modern, from the industrial present into a preindustrial past. But then, at least, such flight expressed a social protest, however dreamy; now it seems simply symptomatic of *post-histoire* escapism.

Of course this postmodern return is conceived otherwise–as a redemption of history. Yet, I would argue, it is only in certain works of modernism, so commonly seen as antihistorical, that such redemption is glimpsed–and through critique, not pastiche. What I have in mind are works that recall a repressed or marginal source in such a way as to disturb or displace the given institutional history of an art or discipline. This critical strategy goes back at least to David; certainly it is strong in art from Manet to Frank Stella and in criticism from T. S. Eliot to Greenberg. Such displacement–an illumination of a demoted past–has a political, even utopian edge (as is clear from the writings of Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch). And yet, in Anglo-American culture, this critical enterprise is often reduced to an abstract, ahistorical opposition between «tradition and the individual talent»; its redemptive quality meets its parodistic inversion in such a work as Philip Johnson's Glass House, in which the reinscription of historical forms becomes a matter of mostly dandyish connoisseurship.

If history is not returned, let alone redeemed in this postmodernism, how is it treated? For one thing, the use of pastiche in postmodern art and architecture deprives styles not only of specific context, but also of historical sense: husked down to so many emblems, they are reproduced in the form of partial simulacra. In this sense «history» appears reified, fragmented, fabricated. It is also highly edited–not only a history of victors, but a history without modernism (which appears, if at all, in bowdlerized form). Finally then, such postmodernism seems less a dialectical supercession of modernism than its old ideological opponent, which then and now assumes the form of a popular front of premodernist and antimodernist elements.



Robert Stern
Forum Design Pavilion
Linz, Austria
1980

This popular front is more than a stylistic program; it represents a cultural politics, the strategy of which is basically to reduce modernism to an abstraction (in architecture the international style and in art formalist painting) and then to condemn it as a historical mistake. In this way the adversarial, even negational aspects of modernism are suppressed: apparently, in the neoconservative scheme of things, culture after modernism is to be affirmative–which means, if postmodern architecture is any indication, a more or less gratuitous veil drawn over the face of social instrumentality.[1]

Such a reading may seem shrill, but consider the implications of a program that elides premodern and postmodern elements. Not only are the signs of modernism excised, but lost traditions are imposed on a present which, in its contradictions, is far beyond such humanist pieties. Such a program of reference to quasi-cultic traditions, moreover, is not a historical novelty; it is often used to beautify reactionary politics.

Julian Schnabel
«Accatone»
1978

It is in regard to this return to tradition (in art, family, religion) that the connection to neoconservatism proper must be made. For in our time it has emerged as the new political form of antimodernism; such neoconservatives as the social critic Daniel Bell charge modern (or adversary) culture with the ills of society and seek redress in a return to the verities. In this sense they oddly overrate the effectivity of culture; for, according to them, it is largely modernism–its transgressions, shocks, intensities–that has eroded our traditional social bonds. Now such erosion cannot be denied (nor should it be, at least on the left, for it is as liberative as it is destructive); but what is its real, salient cause? Is it the «shock» of a Duchamp urinal, long since gone soft (say, with Oldenburg), or does it lie in the decoded «flows» of capital? Certainly it is capital that destructures social forms–the avant-garde only fenced with a few old artistic conventions.

Yet here the neoconservatives confound matters–and to advantage. First, cultural modernism is severed from its base in economic modernization and then blamed for its negative social effects (such as privativism). With the structural causality between cultural and economic modernity confused, adversary modernism is denounced and a new, affirmative postmodernism proposed.[2] This is the classic neoconservative position: there are variants. For example, though Hilton Kramer also views avant-gardism as more or less infantile, he is not so sanguine about postmodern production, most of which he sees as kitsch. This leaves him to uphold modernism as the new/old «criterion»–but it is a modernism long ago purged of its subversive elements and set up as official culture in the museums, the music halls, the magazines. Meanwhile the politics of this program remain much the same–mainstream neocon.

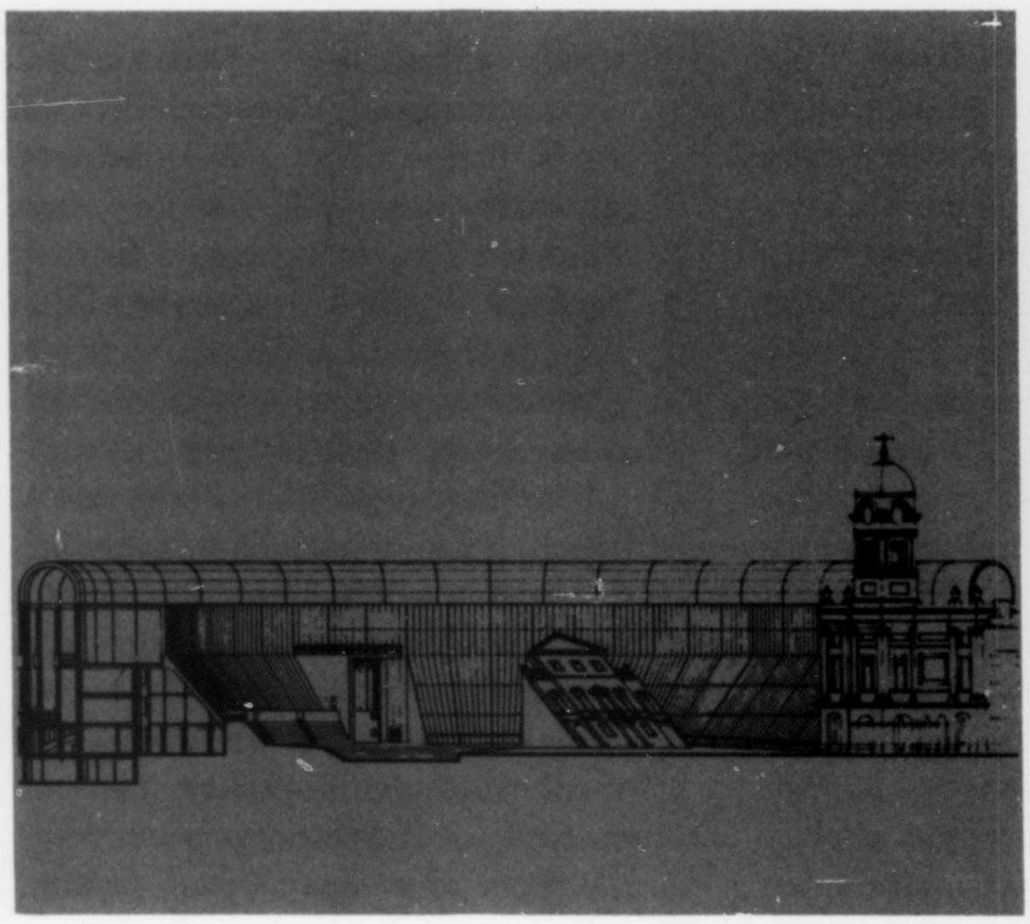
If culture from the neoconservative position is a cause of social anomie, it can also be a cure. And so, in the old American tradition of therapy over analysis, tendentious diagnoses are offered and proscriptive prognoses proposed. Robert Stern, for example, has called for a new «cultural synthesis»–a recipe of such conservatives as John Gardner in fiction, Daniel Bell in social criticism, and Stern in architecture.[3] In short, symptoms are taken for diseases and treated cosmetically.

These cosmetics, however, finally reveal more contradictions than they resolve. For example, contextualism is to postmodern architecture what traditionalism is to postmodern painting and sculpture–a program that seeks to redress the ruptures of modernism and to restore continuity with historical forms. This again is a reactive reading of modernism: its ruptures were posed against historicism, not history–in order to transform the past in the present, not to foreclose it. But the disruptions of the modern are real enough, and indeed the rhetorical urgency of contextualism owes much to the «catastrophe» of modern architectural utopias.

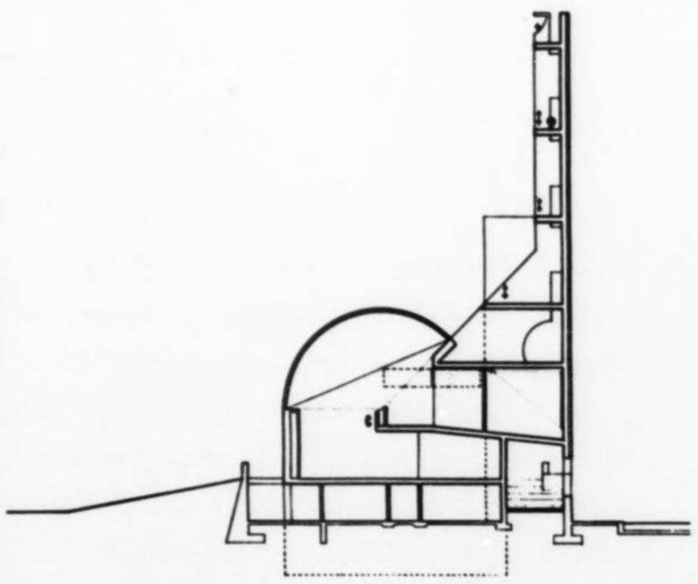
Surely no one can deny that, when executed, the great modern utopian projects were changed utterly. Manfredo Tafuri has argued that these utopias in effect produced *tabulae rasae*, which actually served the ends of both «social planning» and capitalist development.[4] And Robert Venturi has demonstrated how such projects were reduced to autonomous monuments–to fragments that rent rather than transformed the social fabric. Strangely, these two very different critics «agree,» for, as Fredric Jameson has noted, the Tafuri and Venturi positions are dialectically one: both read architectural modernism as a failure, from which «Tafuri deduces the impossibility of revolutionary architecture, whereas Venturi . . . decides to embrace the other side of the opposition, the fallen city fabric of junk buildings and the decorated sheds of the Las Vegas strip.»[5]

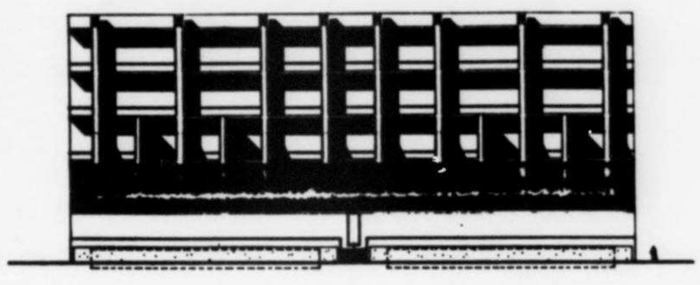
We must ask what contextualism, posed against such utopianism, intends. Is it not, in part, a policy that would reconcile us to our Las Vegases–to the chaos of contemporary urban development? Here, the preservationist aspect of contextualism appears in a new light, as both a symptomatic reaction to this chaos and a sympathetic policy that acts as its public (relations) cover or compensation. Thus, as landmarks play the part of «history,» postmodern facades assume the role of «art.» And the city, as Tafuri writes, is «considered in terms of a superstructure,» with its contradictions resolved–that is to say, dissimulated–«in multivalent images.»[6] In this way, such architectural postmodernism exploits the fragmentary nature of late-capitalist urban life; we are conditioned to its delirium even as its causes are concealed from us.

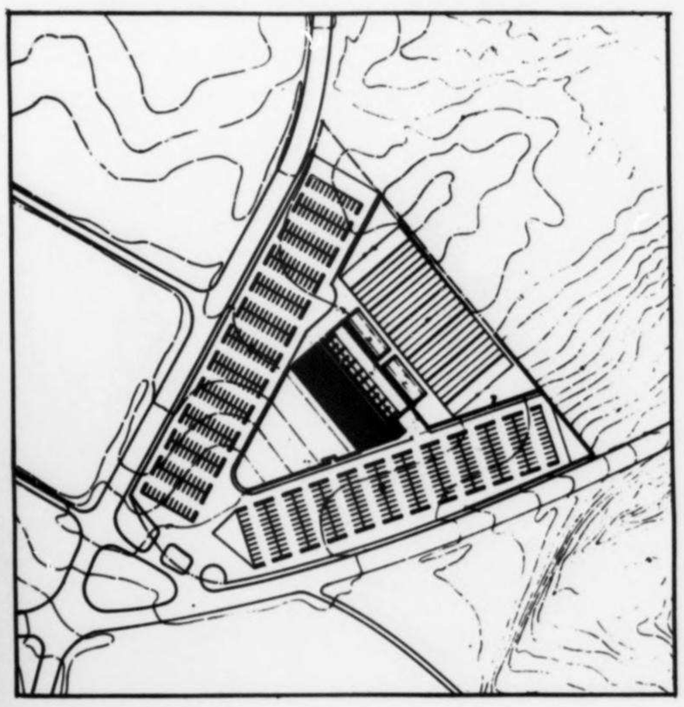
James Stirling
Derby Town Centre
project
1970



William Bailey
«Monterchi»
1981





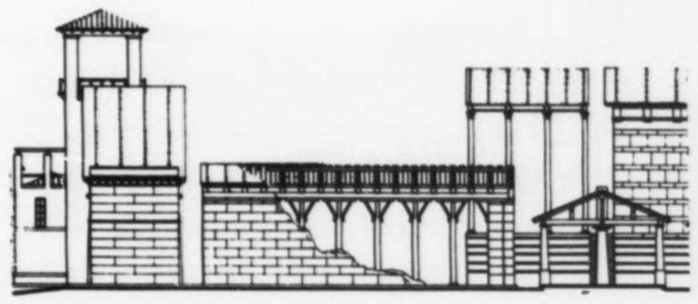


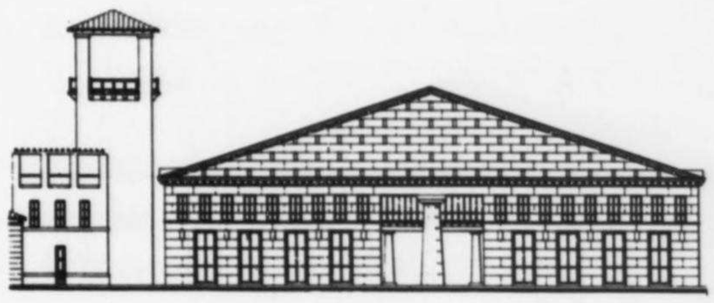
Venturi and Rauch
A Bill-Ding Board for
the National Football ·
Hall of Fame, project
1967

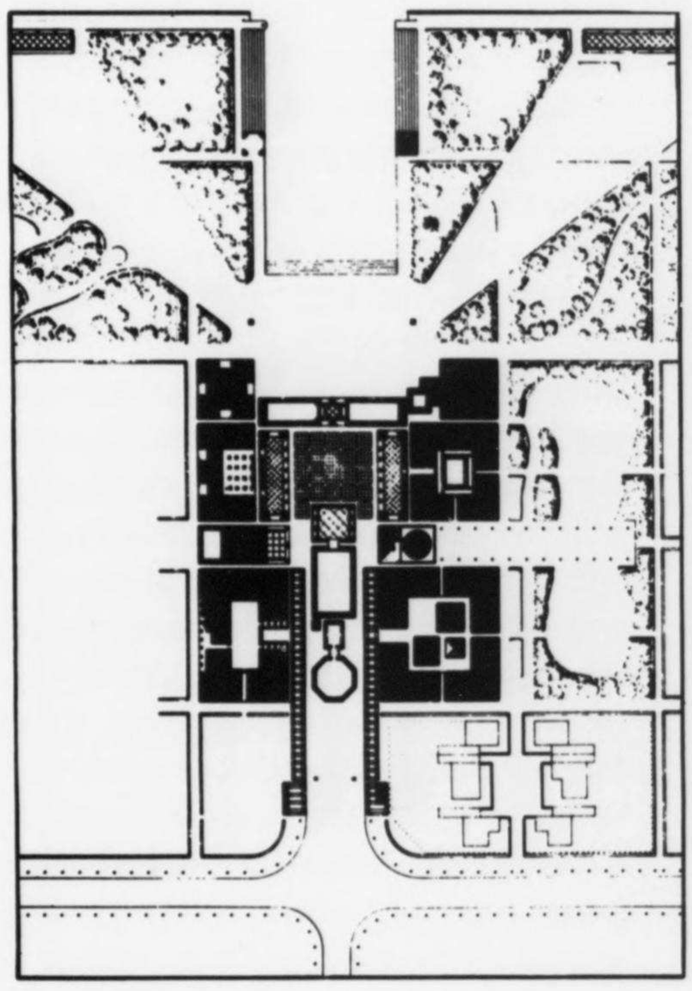
On one side, then, there is a delight in the contemporary cityscape of capital (Las Vegas Venturi); on another a nostalgia for the «imageability»–and the very typology–of the historical city (the Paris Krier brothers); and mixed in with both, the fabrication of more or less false (inorganic, commercial) regionalisms. Here the contradictions of neoconservative postmodernism begin to cry out, and in relation to history they fully erupt.

This postmodernism privileges style–in the sense both of the signature of the artist/architect and of the «spirit» of the age. This style, articulated against «less is a bore» modernism, further proclaims a return to history. Thus the postmodern zeitgeist. Yet nearly every postmodern artist and architect has resorted, in the name of style and history, to pastiche; indeed, it is fair to say that pastiche is the official style of this postmodernist camp. But does not the eclecticism of pastiche threaten the very concept of style, at least as the singular expression of an individual or a period? And does not the relativism of pastiche erode the very ability to place historical references–indeed, to think historically at all? To put it crudely, this postmodern style of history may, in fact, signal the disintegration of style and the collapse of history.[7]

My point is a basic one: dialectically–which is to say, necessarily and in spite of itself–neoconservative postmodernism is revealed by the very cultural moment it would otherwise flee. In turn, this moment is revealed to be marked not by a renascence of style, but by its implosion in pastiche; not by a return of a sense of history, but by its erosion; and not by a rebirth of the artist/architect as *auteur*, but by the death of the author as origin and center of meaning. Such is the postmodern present of «hysterical, historical restrospection» in which history is fragmented and the subject dispersed in its own representations.[8]







Leon Krier
School at St. Quentin
en Yvelines, project
1979

But lest this criticism seem too tilted, much the same can be argued about «poststructuralist» postmodernism, with one proviso: that it assumes the fragmentation of history and the dispersal of the subject as given—but for its own ideological reasons. Yet this observation is anticipatory; we must first see how the two postmodernisms are different.

They differ, first of all, in opposition to modernism. From the neoconservative position, modernism must be displaced because it is catastrophic; from the poststructuralist position because it is recuperated. The two also differ in strategy: the neoconservative opposition to modernism is a matter chiefly of style, of a return to representation; whereas the poststructuralist opposition is of a more epistemological sort, concerned with the discursive paradigms of the modern—and indeed, with a critique of representation.

But more important here is the mutual opposition of these two postmodernisms. From the poststructuralist position the neoconservative style of history is doubly misconceived: style is not created of free expression but is spoken through cultural codes; and history, like reality, is not a given «out there» to capture by allusion, but a narrative to construct—or better—a concept to produce. In short, from the poststructuralist position, history is an epistemological problem, not an ontological datum.

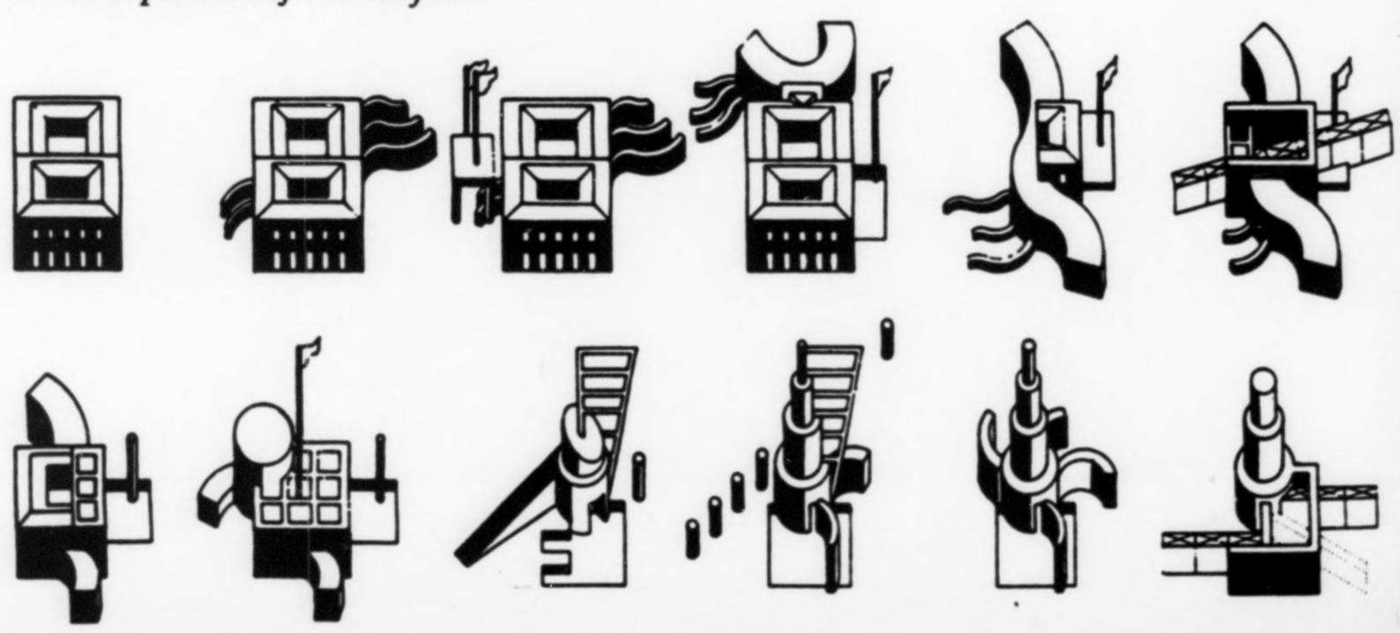
It is on the question of representation, then, that the two postmodernisms differ most clearly. Neoconservative postmodernism advocates a return to representation; it takes the «truth content» of its images and meaning, its signs and referents, largely for granted. Poststructuralist postmodernism, on the other hand, rests on a critique of representation; it seeks «to undermine the referential status of visual imagery, and with it, its claim to represent reality as it really is, whether this be the surface appearance of things (realism) or some ideal order lying behind or beyond appearance (abstraction). Postmodernist artists demonstrate that this 'reality,' whether concrete or abstract, is a fiction, produced and sustained by its cultural representation.»[9]

It is the critique of representation that aligns this postmodernism with poststructuralism. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive the one without the other. As Jameson writes:

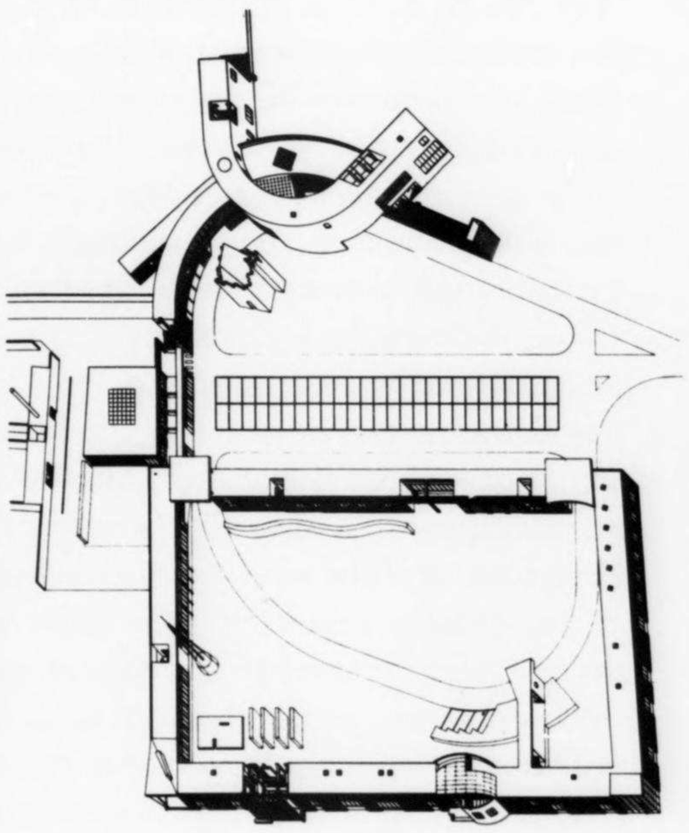
The contemporary poststructuralist aesthetic signals the dissolution of the modernist paradigm—with its valorization of myth and symbol, temporality, organic form and the concrete universal, the identity of the subject and the continuity of linguistic expression—and foretells the emergence of some new, properly postmodernist or schizophrenic conception of the artifact—now strategically reformulated as «text» or «écriture,» and stressing discontinuity, allegory, the mechanical, the gap between signifier and signified, the lapse in meaning, the syncope in the experience of the subject.[10]

This theoretical redefinition of the artifact can also be seen as a historical passage from modernist «work» to postmodernist «text.» I use these terms heuristically—«work» to suggest an aesthetic, symbolic whole sealed by an origin (the author) and an end (a represented reality or transcendent meaning); and «text» to suggest an a-aesthetic «multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.»[11] The difference between the two rests finally on this: for the work, the sign is a stable unit of signifier and signified (with the referent assured or, in abstraction, bracketed); whereas the text reflects on the contemporary dissolution of the sign and the released play of signifiers.

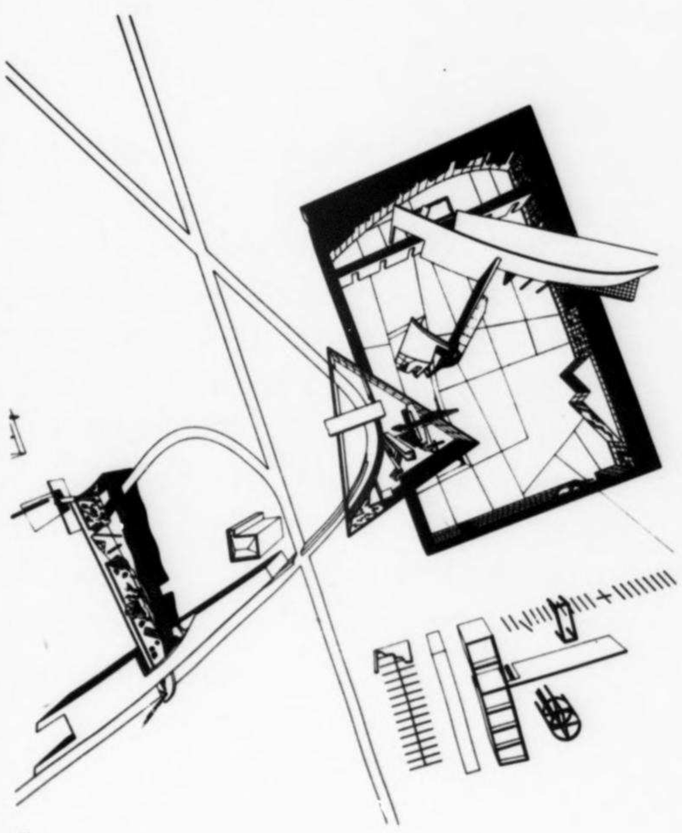
For our purposes, however, only two questions are important here: How does the postmodernist text differ from the modernist work as a model of discourse? And how does (poststructuralist) textuality differ from (neoconservative) pastiche as a form of representation?



A



B



C

a
Bernard Tschumi
Joyce's Garden, project
1980

b
Rem Koolhaus
Irish Prime Minister's
Residence, project
1979

c
Zaha Hadid
Irish Prime Minister's
Residence, project
1979

After the failure of utopian, protopolitical modernism (for example, in Constructivism and the Bauhaus) on the one hand, and the recuperation of the transgressive avant-garde (as in Dada or Surrealism) on the other, a new model of modernism was needed. There were other pressures as well: the diaspora of the moderns under fascism and the rise of an instrumental mass culture far beyond the blandishments of kitsch. The response (at least in the United States) was an apolitical, adamantly high-cultural paradigm of art, which shifted the discursive «essence» of modernism from utopianism and transgression to self-criticism and aesthetic purity. «The essence of modernism, as I see it,» Clement Greenberg wrote in 1965, «lies in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline itself not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.» [12]

Here, in brief, is the model that came to dominate American art and criticism at mid-century–a self-critical program (Greenberg refers specifically to the Enlightenment) pledged to maintain the high quality of past art in current production; to stem the reduction of art in general to entertainment; to ensure the aesthetic as a value in its own right; and to ground art–the medium, the discipline–ontologically and epistemologically. On the Greenbergian account, modernism turned within «to keep culture *moving*,» to resist on the one hand the Alexandrianism of the academy and on the other the debasement of kitsch. [13] But in time this critical turn atrophied into withdrawal pure and simple. Postmodernist art is posed, at least initially, against this modernism become monolithic in its self-referentiality (and «official» in its autonomy).

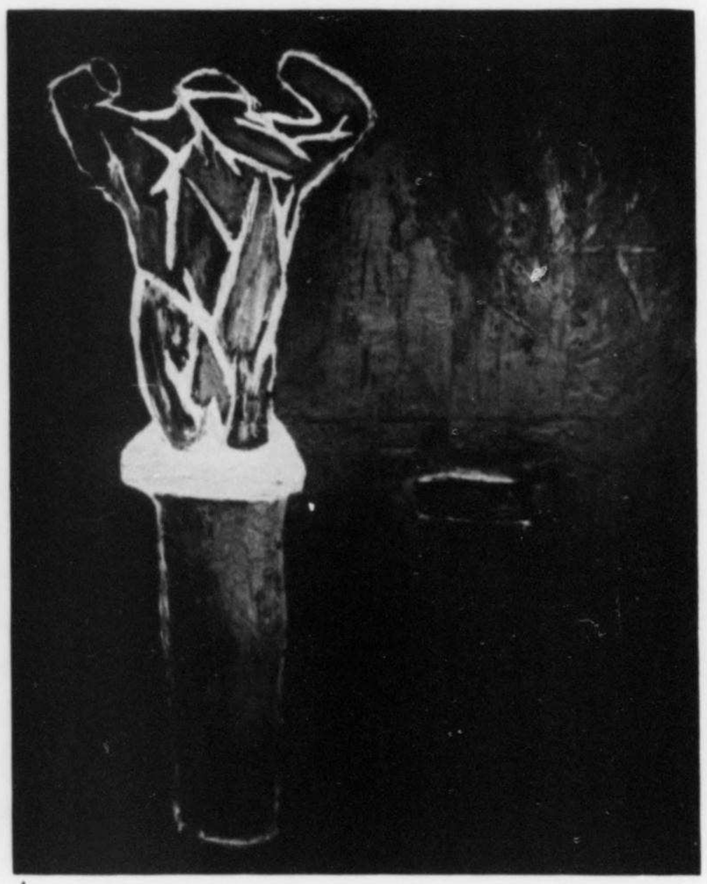
But of course, postmodernism also derives from this modernism, and nowhere is this more apparent than in its discursive orientation. What self-criticism is to modernist practice, deconstruction is to postmodernist practice: if the «essence» of modernism is to use the methods of a discipline in order «to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence,» then the «essence» of postmodernism is to do the same but in order, precisely, to subvert the discipline. Postmodernist art «disentrenches» its given medium not only as an autonomous activity, but also as a model of representation with assured referential value and/or ontological status.

In general, then, postmodernist art is concerned not with the formal purity of traditional artistic mediums, but with textual «impurity»–the interconnections of power and knowledge in social representations. It is in these terms, then, that the art object–indeed, the art field–has changed. The old Enlightenment «decorum» of distinct forms of expression (visual versus literary, temporal versus spatial) grounded in separate areas of competence, is no longer obeyed. And with this destructuring of the object and its field has come a decentering of the human subject, both artist and audience.

As paradigms, then, the postmodernist text and the modernist work are distinct. But what of (poststructuralist) textuality and (neoconservative) pastiche? Stylistically and politically the deconstruction of an art or discipline is quite other than its instrumental pastiche, and a critique of representation is wholly different from a recycling of pop—or pseudohistorical images—but as forms of knowledge how distinct are they?

As examples of opposed postmodernist practices one can take the «decomposed» architecture of Peter Eisenman and the cubistic-classical architecture of Michael Graves, or the multimedia image-spectacles of Laurie Anderson and the macho painterly confections of Julian Schnabel. Both Graves and Schnabel pastiche art-historical and pop-cultural references; though they collide different signs, they do so not to question them as representations or clichés. For example, Graves seems to invest as much meaning in his typical keystone motif as Schnabel does in his thoroughly reified expressionism. Indeed, in the work of both, modernist practices of critical collage have become mere devices, instrumental tricks. The traditional unity of architecture or painting as a discipline is reaffirmed, and the same holds for the old sovereignty of the architect and artist as expressive origin of unique meaning.

The practices of Eisenman and Anderson are articulated quite differently. Unlike Graves, Eisenman reflects on architecture not as a repository of stylistic attributes to be glued together in collage, but as a discipline to be deconstructed precisely with its own methods. In effect, he uses the very modes of architectural representation (primarily the axonometric) to generate the actual structure—which is thus both object and representation. And unlike Schnabel, Anderson uses the art-historical or pop-cultural cliché against itself in order to decenter the (masculine) subject of such representation; to pluralize the social self; and to render cultural meanings ambiguous, indeterminate.



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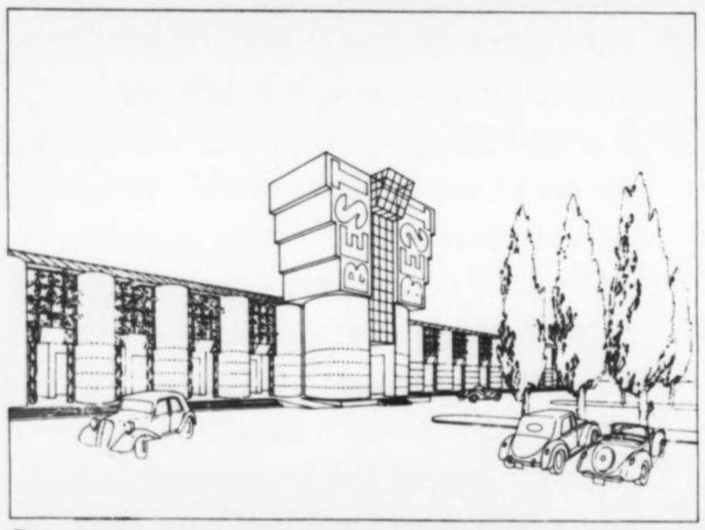

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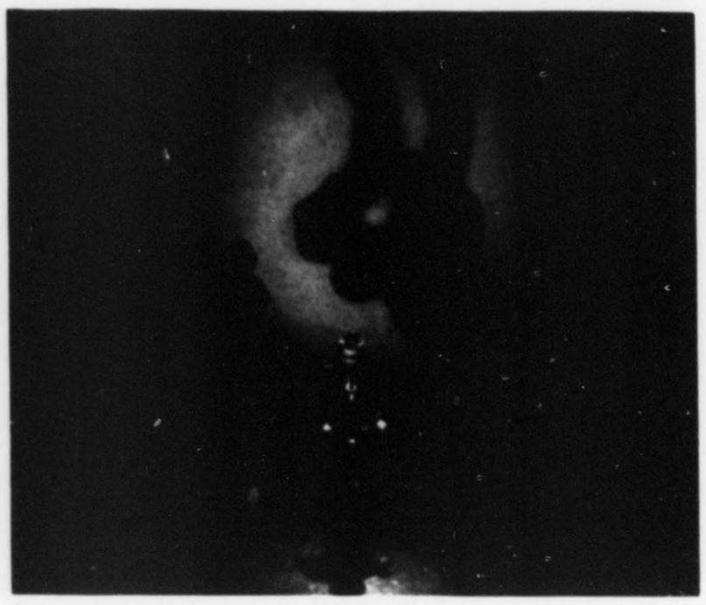

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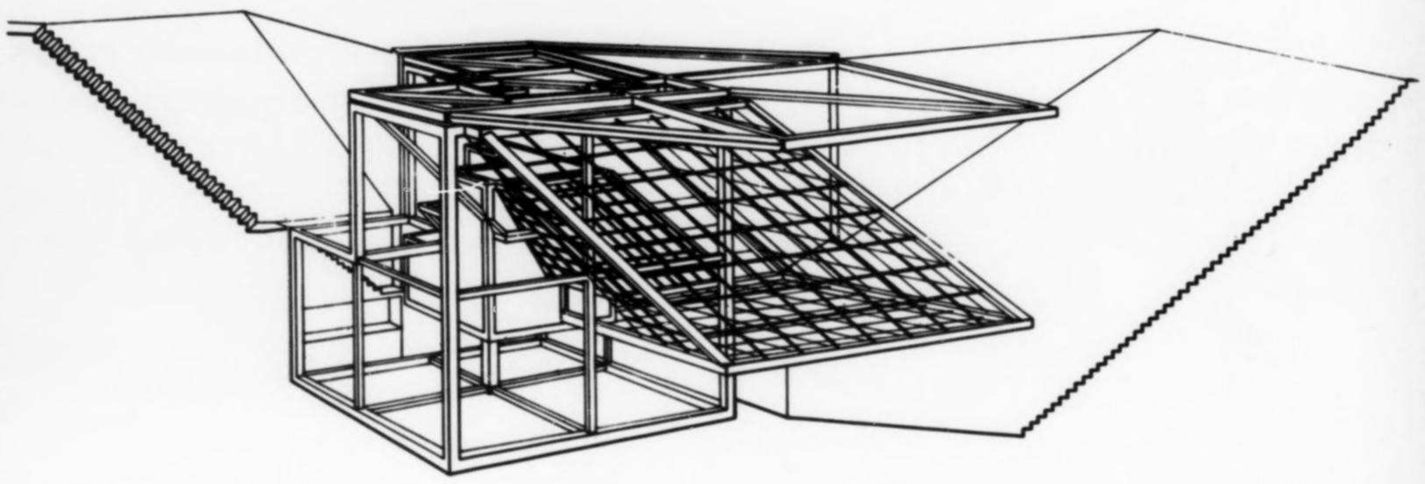


D

a
Julian Schnabel
«Painting for Ian Curtis»
1980

b
Michael Graves
Building for Best
Products, project
1979

c
Laurie Anderson
«United States Part I»
Orpheum Theatre
New York City
1980

d
Peter Eisenman
House EI Even Odd
project
1980

Do these opposed practices of textuality and pastiche differ in any deep epistemic way? Whatever else is claimed for them, is not the subject decentered, representation «disentrenched,» and the sense of history eroded in both? Granted, one may explore the traditional language of art or architecture critically; the other may exploit it instrumentally; but both practices reflect its breakdown. If this is the case, then the neoconservative «return» to the subject, to representation, to history may be revealed–historically, dialectically–to be one with the poststructuralist «critique» of the same. In short, pastiche and textuality may be symptoms of the same «schizophrenic» collapse of the subject and historical narrativity–signs of the same process of reification and fragmentation under late capitalism.[14]

And if these two models of postmodernism, so opposed in style and politics, are indeed aspects of one historical process, we need to consider more deeply what (post) modernism might be. That is beyond the scope of the present essay, but the questions that arise in the (post) modern problem are now clear: the status of the subject and its language, of history and its representation.

Notes

1
See Kenneth Frampton «Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance» in «The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture» ed. by Hal Foster Port Townsend, Wash Bay Press 1983

2
This diagnosis of neoconservative postmodernism owes much to Jürgen Habermas «Modernity–An Incomplete Project» in «The Anti-Aesthetic»

3
See Robert Stern «The Doubles of Post-Modern» in «Harvard Architectural Review» 1980

4
See Manfredo Tafuri «Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development» Cambridge, Mass MIT Press 1976

5
Fredric Jameson, unpublished paper on postmodern architecture and architectural theory. Jameson concludes, «On any dialectical reading, these two seemingly so distinct positions are really one and the same, and Tafuri's rigorous pathos is at one with the celebrations of postmodernism. Perhaps, in that case, something is to be said for the search–beyond the closure of this particular double bind–for a properly Gramscean architecture after all.»

6
Tafuri

7
On the implications of pastiche so pervasive in cultural production today see Jameson, «Postmodernism and Consumer Society» in «The Anti-Aesthetic»

8
For more on this «retrospection» see Jean Baudrillard «Simulations» New York «Semiotext(e)» Foreign Agent Series 1983

9
Craig Owens «Representation, Appropriation & Power» «Art in America» May 1982 p21

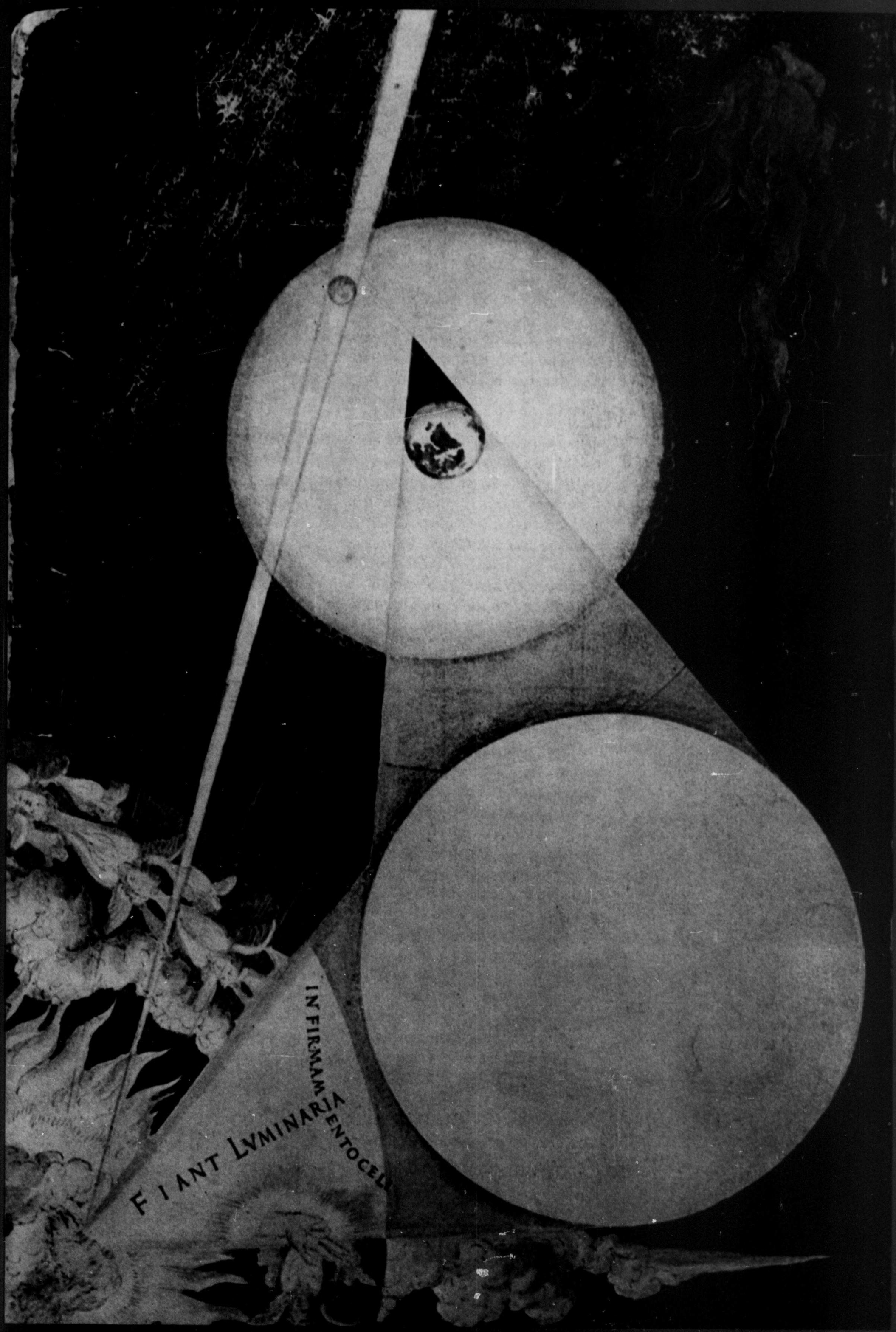
10
Jameson «Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist» Berkeley, University of California Press 1979 p20

11
Roland Barthes «The Death of the Author» in «Image/Music/Text» trans. by Stephen Heath New York, Hill & Wang 1977

12
Clement Greenberg «Modernist Painting» «Art and Literature» Spring 1965

13
Greenberg «Avant-Garde and Kitsch» in «Art and Culture» Boston, Beacon Press 1961

14
See Jameson «Postmodernism and Consumer Society»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The End of the Classical:

the End of the Beginning, the End of the End

Architecture from the fifteenth century to the present has been under the influence of three «fictions.» Notwithstanding the apparent succession of architectural styles, each with its own label–classicism, neoclassicism, romanticism, modernism, postmodernism, and so on into the future–these three fictions have persisted in one form or another for five hundred years. They are *representation*, *reason*, and *history*.[1] Each of the fictions had an underlying purpose: representation was to embody the idea of meaning; reason was to codify the idea of truth; history was to recover the idea of the timeless from the idea of change. Because of the persistence of these categories, it will be necessary to consider this period as manifesting a continuity in architectural thought. This continuous mode of thought can be referred to as *the classical*.[2]

It was not until the late twentieth century that the classical could be appreciated as an abstract system of relations. Such recognition occurred because the architecture of the early part of the twentieth century itself came to be considered part of history. Thus it is now possible to see that, although stylistically different from previous architectures, «modern» architecture exhibits a system of relations similiar to the classical.[3] Prior to this time, the «classical» was taken to be either synonymous with «architecture» conceived of as a continuous tradition from antiquity or, by the mid-nineteenth century, an historicized style. Today the period of time dominated by the classical can be seen as an «episteme,» to employ Foucault's term–a continuous period of knowledge that includes the early twentieth century.[4] Despite the proclaimed rupture in both ideology and style associated with

1
Jean Baudrillard, «The Order of Simulacra,» «Simulations,» New York City, Semiotext(e) 1983 p83.
Jean Baudrillard portrays the period beginning in the fifteenth century by three different simulacra: counterfeit, production, and simulation. He says that the first is based on the natural law of value, the second on the commercial law of value, and the third on the structural law of value.

2
The term «classical» is often confused with the idea of the «classic» and with the stylistic method of «classicism.» That which is classic, according to Joseph Rykwert, invokes the idea of «ancient and exemplary» and suggests «authority and distinction»; it is a model of what is excellent or of the first rank. More importantly, it implies its own timelessness, the idea that it is first rank at any time. Classicism, as opposed to the classical, will be defined here as a method of attempting to produce a «classic» result by appealing to a «classical» past. This accords with the definition given by Sir John Summerson, for whom classicism is not so much a set of ideas and values as it is a style. *He maintains that while much of Gothic architecture was based on the same proportional relationships as the «classical» architecture of the Renaissance, no one could confuse a Gothic cathedral with a Renaissance palazzo; it simply did not have the look of classicism. In contrast, Demetri Porphyrios argues that classicism is not a style, but instead has to do with rationalism: «as much as architecture is a tectonic discourse, it is by definition transparent to rationality . . . the lessons to be learned today from classicism, therefore, are not to be found in classicism's stylistic wrinkles but in classicism's rationality.» Porphyrios here confuses classicism with the classical and the classic, that is, with a set of values privileging the «truth» (that is, rationality) of tectonics over «expression» and error. The fallacy of this approach is that classicism relies on an idea of historical continuity inherent in the classical; therefore it does not produce the timelessness characteristic of the classic. The classical, by implication, has a more relative status than the classic; it evokes a timeless* past, *a «golden age» superior to the modern time or the present.*

the modern movement, the three fictions have never been questioned and so remain intact. This is to say that architecture since the mid-fifteenth century aspired to be a paradigm of the *classic*, of that which is *timeless*, *meaningful*, and *true*. In the sense that architecture attempts to recover that which is classic, it can be called «classical.»[5]

The «fiction» of representation: the simulation of meaning

The first «fiction» is representation. Before the Renaissance there was a congruence of language and representation. The meaning of language was in a «face value» conveyed within representation; in other words, the way language produced meaning could be *represented within* language. Things *were*; truth and meaning were self-evident. The meaning of a romanesque or gothic cathedral was in itself; it was *de facto*. Renaissance buildings, on the other hand–and all buildings after them that pretended to be «architecture»–received their value by representing an already valued architecture, by being simulacra (representations of representations) of antique buildings; they were *de jure*.[6] The *message* of the past was used to verify the *meaning* of the present. Precisely because of this need to verify, Renaissance architecture was the first simulation, an unwitting fiction of the object.

By the late eighteenth century historical relativity came to supersede the face value of language as representation, and this view of history prompted a search for certainty, for origins both historical and logical, for truth and proof, and for goals. Truth was no longer thought to reside in representation but was believed to exist outside it, in the processes of history. This shift can be seen in the changing status of the orders: until the seventeenth century they were thought to be paradigmatic and timeless; afterwards the possibility of their timelessness depended on a necessary historicity. This shift, as has just been suggested, occurred because language had ceased to intersect with representation–that is, because it was not *meaning* but a *message* that was displayed in the object.

3
Michel Foucault, «The Order of Things,» New York City, Random House, 1973.
It is precisely Michel Foucault's distinction between the classical and modern that has never been adequately articulated in relationship to architecture. In contrast to Foucault's epistemological differentiation, architecture has remained an uninterrupted mode of representation from the fifteenth century to the present. In fact, it will be seen that what is assumed in architecture to be classical is, in Foucault's terms, modern, and what is assumed in architecture to be modern is in reality Foucault's classical. Foucault's distinction is not what is at issue here, but rather the continuity that has persisted in architecture from the classical to the present day.

4
Foucault, pxxii.
*While the term «episteme» as used here is similar to Foucault's use of the term in defining a continuous period of knowledge, it is necessary to point out that the time period here defined as the classical episteme differs from Foucault's definition. Foucault locates two discontinuities in the development of Western culture: the classical and the modern. He identifies the classical, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, with the primacy of the intersection of language and representation: the value of language, «*its meaning,*» was seen to be self-evident and to receive its justification within language; the way language provided meaning could be represented within language. On the other hand, Foucault identifies the modern, originating in the early nineteenth century, with the ascendance of historical continuity and self-generated analytic processes over language and representation.*

5
«The End of the Classical» is not about the end of the classic. It merely questions a contingent value structure which, when attached to the idea of the classic, yields an erroneous sense of the classical. *It is not that the desire for a classic is at an end, but that the dominant conditions of the classical (origin, end, and the process of composition) are under reconsideration. Thus it might be more accurate to title this essay «The End of the Classical as Classic.»*

Modern architecture claimed to rectify and liberate itself from the Renaissance fiction of representation by asserting that it was not necessary for architecture to represent another architecture; architecture was solely to embody its own *function*. With the deductive conclusion that form follows function, modern architecture introduced the idea that a building should express–that is, look like–its function, or like an *idea* of function (that it should manifest the rationality of its processes of production and composition).[7] Thus, in its effort to distance itself from the earlier representational tradition, modern architecture attempted to strip itself of the outward trappings of «classical» style. This process of reduction was called *abstraction*. A column without a base and capital was thought to be an abstraction. Thus reduced, form was believed to embody function more «honestly.» Such a column looked more like a *real* column, the simplest possible load-carrying element, than one provided with a base and capital bearing arboreal or anthropomorphic motifs.

This reduction to pure functionality was, in fact, not abstraction; it was an attempt to represent reality itself. In this sense functional goals merely replaced the orders of classical composition as the starting point for architectural design. The moderns' attempt to represent «realism» with an undecorated, functional object was a fiction equivalent to the simulacrum of the classical in Renaissance representation. For what made function any more «real» a source of imagery than elements chosen from antiquity? The idea of function, in this case the message of utility as opposed to the message of antiquity, was raised to an originary proposition–a self-evident starting point for design analogous to typology or historical quotation. The moderns' attempt to represent realism is, then, a manifestation of the same fiction wherein meaning and value reside outside the world of an architecture «as is,» in which representation is about its own *meaning* rather than being a *message* of another previous meaning.

Functionalism turned out to be yet another stylistic conclusion, this one based on a scientific and technical positivism, a simulation of efficiency. From this perspective the modern movement can be seen to be continuous with the architecture that preceded it. Modern architecture therefore failed to embody a new value in itself.

6
Franco Borsi, «Leone Battista Alberti,» New York City, Harper and Row, 1977
The facade of the church of Sant' Andrea in Mantua by Alberti is one of the first uses of the transposition of ancient building types to achieve both verification and authority. It marks, as Borsi says, «a decisive turning away from the vernacular ‹to the Latin›.» (p272) It is acceptable in the «vernacular» to revive the classical temple front because the function of the temple in antiquity and the church in the fifteenth century was similar. However, it is quite another matter to overlay the temple front with the triumphal arch. (See R. Wittkower, «Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism,» New York City, W. W. Norton, 1971, and also D. S. Chambers, «Patrons and Artists in the Renaissance,» London, MacMillan & Co., 1970) It is as if Alberti were saying that with the authority of God in question, man must resort to the symbols of his own power to verify the church. Thus the use of the triumphal arch becomes a message on the facade of Sant' Andrea rather than an embodiment of its inherent meaning.

7
Jeff Kipnis, from a seminar at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 28 February 1984.
«Form cannot follow function until function (including but not limited to use) has first emerged as a possibility of form.»

For in trying to *reduce* architectural form to its essence, to a pure reality, the moderns assumed they were transforming the field of referential figuration to that of non-referential «objectivity.» In reality, however, their «objective» forms never left the classical tradition. They were simply stripped down classical forms, or forms referring to a new set of givens (function, technology). Thus, Le Corbusier's houses that look like modern steamships or biplanes exhibit the same referential attitude toward representation as a Renaissance or «classical» building. The points of reference are different, but the implications for the object are the same.

The commitment to return modernist abstraction to history seems to sum up, for our time, the problem of representation. It was given its «Post-Modern» inversion in Robert Venturi's distinction between the «duck» and the «decorated shed.»[8] A duck is a building that looks like its function or that allows its internal order to be displayed on its exterior; a decorated shed is a building that functions as a billboard, where any kind of imagery (except its internal function)–letters, patterns, even architectural elements–conveys a *message* accessible to all. In this sense the stripped-down «abstractions» of modernism are still referential objects: technological rather than typological ducks.

But the Post-Modernists fail to make another distinction which is exemplified in Venturi's comparison of the Doges' Palace in Venice, which he calls a decorated shed, and Sansovino's library across the Piazza San Marco, which he says is a duck.[9] This obscures the more significant distinction between architecture «as is» and architecture as message. The Doges' Palace is not a decorated shed because it was not representational of another architecture; its significance came directly from the meaning embodied in the figures themselves; it was an architecture «as is.» Sansovino's library may seem to be a duck, but only because it falls into the history of library types. The use of the orders on Sansovino's library speaks not to the function or type of the library, but rather to the representation of a previous architecture. The facades of Sansovino's library contain a message, not an inherent meaning; they are sign boards. Venturi's misreading of these buildings seems motivated by a preference for the decorated shed. While the replication of the orders had significance in Sansovino's time (in that they defined the classical), the

8
Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, «Learning from Las Vegas: the forgotten symbolism of architectural form,» rev. ed., Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 1977 p87

9
See the film «Beyond Utopia: Changing Attitudes in American Architecture,» New York City Michael Blackwood Productions, 1983

replication of the same orders today has no significance because the value system represented is no longer valued. A sign begins to replicate or, in Jean Baudrillard's term, «simulate» once the reality it represents is dead.[10] When there is no longer a distinction between representation and reality, when reality is only simulation, then representation loses its a priori source of significance, and it, too, becomes a simulation.

The «fiction» of reason: the simulation of truth

The second «fiction» of postmedieval architecture is *reason*. If representation was a simulation of the meaning of the present through the message of antiquity, then reason was a simulation of the meaning of the truth through the message of science. This fiction is strongly manifest in twentieth-century architecture, as it is in that of the four preceding centuries; its apogee was in the Enlightenment. The quest for origin in architecture is the initial manifestation of the aspiration toward a rational source for design. Before the Renaissance the idea of origin was seen as self-evident; its meaning and importance «went without saying»; it belonged to an a priori universe of values. In the Renaissance, with the loss of a self-evident universe of values, origins were sought in natural or divine sources or in a cosmological or anthropomorphic geometry. The reproduction of the image of the Vitruvian man is the most renowned example. Not surprisingly, since the origin was thought to contain the seeds of the object's purpose and thus its destination, this belief in the existence of an ideal origin led directly to a belief in the existence of an ideal end. Such a genetic idea of beginning/end depended on a belief in a universal plan in nature and the cosmos which, through the application of classical rules of composition concerning hierarchy, order, and closure, would confer a harmony of the whole upon the parts. The perspective of the end thus directed the strategy for beginning. Therefore, as Alberti first defined it in *Della Pittura*, composition was not an open-ended or neutral process of transformation, but rather a strategy for arriving at a predetermined goal; it was the mechanism by which the idea of order, represented in the orders, was translated into a specific form.[11]

10
Baudrillard pp8, 9.
In referring to the death of the reality of God, Baudrillard says, «. . . metaphysical despair came from the idea that the images concealed nothing at all, and that in fact they were not images, . . . but actually perfect simulacra. . . .»

11
Leone Battista Alberti, «On Painting,» New Haven Yale University Press, 1966 pp68–74

Reacting against the cosmological goals of Renaissance composition, Enlightenment architecture aspired to a rational process of design whose ends were a product of pure, secular reason rather than of divine order. The Renaissance vision of harmony (faith in the divine) led naturally to the scheme of order that was to replace it (faith in reason), which was the logical determination of form from a priori types.

Durand embodies this moment of the supreme authority of reason. In his treatises formal orders become type forms, and natural and divine origins are replaced by rational solutions to the problems of accommodation and construction. The goal is a socially «relevant» architecture; it is attained through the rational transformation of type forms. Later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, function and technique replaced the catalogue of type forms as origins. But the point is that from Durand on, it was believed that deductive reason–the same process used in science, mathematics, and technology–was capable of producing a truthful (that is, meaningful) architectural object. And with the success of rationalism as a scientific method (one could almost call it a «style» of thought) in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, architecture adopted the self-evident values conferred by rational origins. If an architecture *looked* rational–that is, *represented* rationality–it was believed to *represent* truth. As in logic, at the point where all deductions developed from an initial premise corroborate that premise, there is logical closure and, it was believed, certain truth. Moreover, in this procedure the primacy of the origin remains intact. The rational became the moral and aesthetic basis of modern architecture. And the representational task of architecture in an age of reason was to portray its own modes of knowing.

At this point in the evolution of consciousness something occurred: reason turned its focus onto itself and thus began the process of its own undoing. Questioning its own status and mode of knowing, reason exposed itself to be a fiction.[12] The processes for knowing–measurement, logical proof, causality–turned out to be a network of value-laden arguments, no more than effective modes of persuasion. Values were dependent on another teleology, another end fiction, that of rationality.

12
Morris Kline, «Mathematics, The Loss of Certainty,» New York City, Oxford University Press, 1980 p5

Essentially, then, nothing had really changed from the Renaissance idea of origin. Whether the appeal was to a divine or natural order, as in the fifteenth century, or to a rational technique and typological function, as in the post-Enlightenment period, it ultimately amounted to the same thing—to the idea that architecture's value derived from a source outside itself. Function and type were only value-laden origins equivalent to divine or natural ones.

In this second «fiction» the crisis of belief in reason eventually undermined the power of self-evidence. As reason began to turn on itself, to question its own status, its authority to convey truth, its power to prove, began to evaporate. The analysis of analysis revealed that logic could not do what reason had claimed for it—reveal the self-evident truth of its origins. What both the Renaissance and the modern relied on as the basis of truth was found to require, in essence, faith. Analysis was a form of simulation; knowledge was a new religion. Similarly, it can be seen that architecture never embodied reason; it could only state the desire to do so; there is no architectural image of reason. Architecture presented an aesthetic of the experience of (the persuasiveness of and desire for) reason. Analysis, and the illusion of proof, in a continuous process that recalls Nietzsche's characterization of «truth,» is a never-ending series of figures, metaphors, and metonymies.

In a cognitive environment in which reason has been revealed to depend on a belief in knowledge, therefore to be irreducibly metaphoric, a classical architecture—that is, an architecture whose processes of transformation are value-laden strategies grounded on self-evident or a priori origins—will always be an architecture of restatement and not of representation, no matter how ingeniously the origins are selected for this transformation, nor how inventive the transformation is.

Architectural restatement, replication, is a nostalgia for the security of knowing, a belief in the continuity of Western thought. Once analysis and reason replaced self-evidence as the means by which truth was revealed, the classic or timeless quality of truth ended and the need for verification began.

The «fiction» of history: the simulation of the timeless

The third «fiction» of classical Western architecture is that of history. Prior to the mid-fifteenth century, time was conceived nondialectically; from antiquity to the middle ages there was no concept of the «forward movement» of time. Art did not seek its justification in terms of the past or future; it was ineffable and timeless. In ancient Greece the temple and the god were one and the same; architecture was divine and natural. For this reason it appeared «classic» to the «classical» epoch that followed. The classic could not be represented or simulated, it could only be. In its straightforward assertion of itself it was nondialectical and timeless.

In the mid-fifteenth century the idea of a temporal origin emerged, and with it the idea of the past. This interrupted the eternal cycle of time by positing a fixed point of beginning. Hence the loss of the timeless, for the existence of origin required a temporal reality. The attempt of the classical to recover the timeless turned, paradoxically, to a time-bound concept of history as a source of timelessness. Moreover, the consciousness of time's forward movement came to «explain» a process of historical change. By the nineteenth century this process was seen as «dialectical.» With dialectical time came the idea of the zeitgeist, with cause and effect rooted in presentness—that is, with an aspired-to timelessness of the present. In addition to its aspiration to timelessness, the «spirit of the age» held that an a priori relationship existed between history and all its manifestations at any given moment. It was necessary only to identify the governing spirit to know what style of architecture was properly expressive of, and relevant to, the time. Implicit was the notion that man should always be «in harmony»—or at least in a non-disjunctive relation—with his time.

In its polemical rejection of the history that preceded it, the modern movement attempted to appeal to values for this (harmonic) relationship other than those that embodied the eternal or universal. In seeing itself as superseding the values of the preceding architecture, the modern movement substituted a universal idea of relevance for a universal idea of history, analysis of program for analysis of history. It

presumed itself to be a value-free and collective form of intervention, as opposed to the virtuoso individualism and informed connoisseurship personified by the post-Renaissance architect. Relevance in modern architecture came to lie in embodying a value other than the natural or divine; the zeitgeist was seen to be contingent and of the present, rather than as absolute and eternal. But the difference in value between presentness and the universal–between the contingent value of the zeitgeist and the eternal value of the classical–only resulted in yet another set (in fact, simply the opposite set) of aesthetic preferences. The presumedly neutral spirit of the «epochal will» supported asymmetry over symmetry, dynamism over stability, absence of hierarchy over hierarchy.

The imperatives of the «historical moment» are always evident in the connection between the representation of the function of architecture and its form. Ironically, modern architecture, by invoking the zeitgeist rather than doing away with history, only continued to act as the «midwife to historically significant form.» In this sense modern architecture was not a rupture with history, but simply a moment in the same continuum, a new episode in the evolution of the zeitgeist. And architecture's representation of its particular zeitgeist turned out to be less «modern» than originally thought.

One of the questions that may be asked is why the moderns did not see themselves in this continuity. One answer is that the ideology of the zeitgeist bound them to their present history with the promise to release them from their past history; *they were ideologically trapped in the illusion of the eternity of their own time.*

The late twentieth century, with its retrospective knowledge that modernism has become history, has inherited nothing less than the recognition of the end of the ability of a classical or referential architecture to express its own time as timeless. The illusory timelessness of the present brings with it an awareness of the *timeful* nature of past time. It is for this reason that the representation of a zeitgeist always implies a simulation; it is seen in the classical use of the *replication* of a *past time* to invoke the timeless as the *expression* of a *present time*. Thus, in the zeitgeist argument, there will always be this unacknowledged paradox, a simulation of the timeless through a replication of the timeful.

Zeitgeist history, too, is subject to a questioning of its own authority. How can it be possible, from within history, to determine a timeless truth of its «spirit»? Thus history ceases to be an objective source of truth; origins and ends once again lose their universality (that is, their self-evident value) and, like history, become fictions. If it is no longer possible to pose the problem of architecture in terms of a zeitgeist–that is if architecture can no longer assert its relevance through a consonance with its zeitgeist–then it must turn to some other structure. To escape such a dependence on the zeitgeist–that is, the idea that the *purpose* of an architectural style is to embody the spirit of its age–it is necessary to propose an alternative idea of architecture, one whereby it is no longer the purpose of architecture, but its inevitability, to express its own time.

Once the traditional values of classical architecture are understood as not meaningful, true, and timeless, it must be concluded that these classical values were *always* simulations (and are not merely seen to be so in light of a present rupture of history or the present disillusionment with the zeitgeist). It becomes clear that the classical itself was a simulation that architecture sustained for five hundred years. Because the classical did not recognize itself as a simulation, it sought to represent extrinsic values (which it could not do) in the guise of its own reality.

The result, then, of seeing classicism and modernism as part of a single historical continuity is the understanding that there are no longer any self-evident values in representation, reason, or history to confer legitimacy on the object. This loss of self-evident value allows the timeless to be cut free from the meaningful and the truthful. It permits the view that there is no one truth (a timeless truth), or one meaning (a timeless meaning), but merely the timeless. *When the possibility is raised that the timeless can be cut adrift from the timeful (history), so too can the timeless be cut away from universality to produce a timelessness which is not universal.* This separation makes it unimportant whether origins are natural or divine or functional; thus, it is no longer necessary to produce a classic–that is, a timeless–architecture by recourse to the classical values inherent in *representation*, *reason*, and *history*.

The not-classical: architecture as fiction

The necessity of the quotation marks around the term «fiction» is now obvious. The three fictions just discussed can be seen not as fictions but rather as simulations. As has been said, fiction becomes simulation when it does not recognize its condition as fiction, when it tries to simulate a condition of reality, truth, or non-fiction. The simulation of representation in architecture has led, first of all, to an excessive concentration of inventive energies in the representational object. When columns are seen as surrogates of trees and windows resemble the portholes of ships, architectural elements become representational figures carrying an inordinate burden of meaning. In other disciplines representation is not the only purpose of figuration. In literature, for example, metaphors and similes have a wider range of application–poetic, ironic, and the like–and are not limited to allegorical or referential functions. Conversely, in architecture only one aspect of the figure is traditionally at work: object representation. The architectural figure always alludes to–aims at the representation of–some *other* object, whether architectural, anthropomorphic, natural, or technological.

Second, the simulation of reason in architecture has been based on a classical value given to the idea of truth. But Heidegger has noted that error has a trajectory parallel to truth, that error can be the unfolding of truth.[13] Thus to proceed from «error» or fiction is to counter consciously the tradition of «mis-reading» on which the classical unwittingly depended–not a presumedly logical transformation of something a priori, but a deliberate «error» stated as such, one which presupposes only its own internal truth. Error in this case does not assume the same value as truth; it is *not* simply its dialectical opposite. It is more like a *dissimulation*, a «not-containing» of the value of truth.

Finally, the simulated fiction of modern movement history, unwittingly inherited from the classical, was that any present-day architecture must be a reflection of its zeitgeist; that is, architecture can simultaneously be about presentness and universality. But if architecture is inevitably about the invention of fictions, it

13
Martin Heidegger, «On the Essence of Truth» from «Basic Writings,» New York City, Harper & Row Publishers, 1977.
«Errancy is the essential counter-essence to the primordial essence of truth. Errancy opens itself up as the open region for every opposite essential truth. . . . Errancy and the concealing of what is concealed belong to the primordial essence of truth.»

should also be possible to propose an architecture that embodies an *other* fiction, one that is not sustained by the values of presentness or universality and, more importantly, that does not consider its purpose to reflect these values. This *other* fiction/object, then, clearly should eschew the fictions of the classical (representation, reason, and history), which are attempts to «solve» the problem of architecture rationally; for strategies and solutions are vestiges of a goal-oriented view of the world. If this is the case, the question becomes: What can be the model for architecture when the essence of what was effective in the classical model–the presumed rational value of structures, representations, methodologies of origins and ends, and deductive processes–has been shown to be a simulation?

It is not possible to answer such a question with an alternative model. But a series of characteristics can be proposed that typify this aporia, this loss in our capacity to conceptualize a new model for architecture. These characteristics, outlined below, arise from that which can *not* be; they form a structure of *absences*.[14] The purpose in proposing them is not to reconstitute what has just been dismissed, a model for a theory of architecture–for all such models are ultimately futile. Rather what is being proposed is an expansion beyond the limitations presented by the classical model to the realization of *architecture as an independent discourse*, free of external values–classical or any other; that is, the intersection of the *meaning-free*, the *arbitrary* and the *timeless* in the artificial.

The meaning-free, arbitrary, and timeless creation of artificiality in this sense must be distinguished from what Baudrillard has called «simulation»:[15] it is not an attempt to erase the classical distinction between reality and representation–thus again making architecture a set of conventions simulating the real; it is, rather, more like a *dis*simulation.[16] Whereas simulation attempts to obliterate the difference between real and imaginary, dissimulation leaves untouched the difference between reality and illusion. The relationship between dissimulation and reality is similar to the signification embodied in the mask: the sign of pretending to be *not* what one is–that is, a sign which seems not to signify anything besides itself (the sign of a sign, or the negation of what is behind it). Such a dissimulation in

14
Gilles Deleuze, «Plato and the Simulacrum,» «October,» no. 27, Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, winter 1983.
Deleuze uses a slightly different terminology to address a very similar set of issues; he discusses the Platonic distinction between model, copy, and «simulacrum» as a means of assigning value and hierarchical position to objects and ideas. He explains the overthrow of Platonism as the suspension of the a priori value-laden status of the Platonic copy *in order to: «raise up simulacra, to assert their rights over icons or copies. The problem no longer concerns the distinction Essence/Appearance or Model/Copy. This whole distinction operates in the world of representation. . . . The simulacrum is not degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates* both original and copy, both model and reproduction. *Of the at least two divergent series interiorized in the simulacrum neither can be assigned as original or as copy. It doesn't even work to invoke the model of the Other, because no model resists the vertigo of the simulacrum.» (pp 52, 53)*
Simulation is used here in a sense which closely approximates Deleuze's use of copy or icon, while dissimulation is conceptually very close to his description of the pre-Socratic simulacra.

15
Baudrillard p2.
In the essay «The Precession of Simulacra» Baudrillard discusses the nature of simulation and the implication of present-day simulacra on our perception of the nature of reality and representation: «Something has disappeared; the sovereign difference between them (the real and . . . simulation models) that was the abstraction's charm.»

architecture can be given the provisional title of the *not-classical*. As dissimulation is not the inverse, negative, or opposite of simulation, a «not-classical» architecture is not the inverse, negative, or opposite of classical architecture; it is merely different from or other than. A «not-classical» architecture is no longer a certification of experience or a simulation of history, reason, or reality in the present. Instead, it may more appropriately be described as an *other* manifestation, an architecture *as is*, now as a fiction. It is a representation of itself, of its own values and internal experience.

The claim that a «not-classical» architecture is necessary, that it is proposed by the new epoch or the rupture in the continuity of history, would be another zeitgeist argument. The «not-classical» merely proposes an end to the dominance of classical values in order to reveal other values. It proposes, not a new value or a new zeitgeist, but merely another condition–one of reading architecture as a text. There is nevertheless no question that this idea of the reading of architecture is initiated by a zeitgeist argument: that today the classical signs are no longer significant and have become no more than replications. A «not-classical» architecture is, therefore, not unresponsive to the realization of the closure inherent in the world; rather, it is unresponsive to representing it.

The end of the beginning

An origin of value implies a state or a condition of origin before value has been given to it. A beginning is such a condition prior to a valued origin. In order to reconstruct the timeless, the state of *as is*, of face value, one must begin: begin by eliminating the time-bound concepts of the classical, which are primarily origin and end. The end of the beginning is also the end of the beginning of value. But it is not possible to go back to the earlier, prehistoric state of grace, the Eden of timelessness before origins and ends were valued. We must begin in the present–without necessarily giving a value to presentness. The attempt to reconstruct the timeless today must be a fiction which recognizes the fictionality of its own task–that is, it should not attempt to simulate a timeless reality.

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Baudrillard p5.
Distinguishing between simulation and what he calls dissimulation, Baudrillard says that «to dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. . . . ‹Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms. (Littre)› Thus feigning . . . is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between ‹true› and ‹false,› between ‹real› and ‹imaginary›. Since the simulator produces ‹true› symptoms, is he ill or not?» According to Baudrillard, simulation is the generation by models of a reality without origin; it no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. While this sounds very much like my proposal of the not-classical, the not-classical is fundamentally different in that it is a dissimulation and not a simulation. Baudrillard discusses the danger in the realization of the simulacra–for when it enters the real world it is its nature to take on the «real» attributes of that which it is simulating. Dissimulation here is defined differently: it makes apparent the simulation with all of its implications on the value status of «reality» without distorting the simulacra or allowing it to lose its precarious position, poised between the real and the unreal, the model and the other.

As has been suggested above, latent in the classical appeal to origins is the more general problem of cause and effect. This formula, part of the fictions of reason and history, reduces architecture to an «added to» or «inessential» object by making it simply an effect of certain causes understood as origins. This problem is inherent in all of classical architecture, including its modernist aspect. The idea of architecture as something «added to» rather than something with its own being–as adjectival rather than nominal or ontological–leads to the perception of architecture as a practical device. As long as architecture is primarily a device designated for use and for shelter–that is, as long as it has origins in programmatic functions–it will always constitute an effect.

But once this «self-evident» characteristic of architecture is dismissed and architecture is seen as having no a priori origins–whether functional, divine, or natural–alternative fictions for the origin can be proposed: for example, one that is *arbitrary*, one that has no external value derived from meaning, truth, or timelessness. It is possible to imagine a beginning internally consistent but not conditioned by or contingent on historic origins with supposedly self-evident values.[17] Thus, while classical origins were thought to have their source in a divine or natural order and modern origins were held to derive their value from deductive reason, «not-classical» origins can be strictly arbitrary, simply starting points, without value. They can be artificial and relative, as opposed to natural, divine, or universal.[18] Such artificially determined beginnings can be free of universal values because they are merely arbitrary points in time, when the architectural process commences. One example of an artificial origin is a *graft*, as in the genetic insertion of an alien body into a host to provide a new result.[19] As opposed to a collage or a montage, which lives within a context and alludes to an origin, a graft is an invented site, which does not so much have object characteristics as those of process. A graft is not in itself genetically arbitrary. Its arbitrariness is in its freedom from a value system of non-arbitrariness (that is, the classical). It is arbitrary in its provision of a choice of reading which brings no external value to the process. But further, in its artificial and relative nature a graft is not in itself necessarily an achievable result, but merely a site that contains *motivation* for action–that is the beginning of a process.[20]

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What is at issue in an artificial origin is not motivation (as opposed to an essential or originary cause, as in an origin of the classical) but rather the idea of self-evidence. In deductive logic reading backward inevitably produces self-evidence. Hence the analytic process of the classical would always produce a self-evident origin. Yet there are no a priori self-evident procedures which could give one origin any value over any other. It can be proposed in a not-classical *architecture that any initial condition can produce self-evident procedures that have an internal motivation.*

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The idea of arbitrary or artificial in this sense must be distinguished from the classical idea of architecture as artificial nature or from the idea of the arbitrariness of the sign in language. Arbitrary in this context means having no natural connection. The insight that origins are a contingency of language is based on an appeal to reading; the origin can be arbitrary because it is contingent on a reading that brings its own strategy with it.

19
Jonathan Culler, «On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism,» Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982.
This is basically similar to Jacques Derrida's use of graft in literary deconstruction. He discusses graft as an element which can be discovered in a text through a deconstructive reading: «deconstruction is, among other things, an attempt to identify grafts in the texts it analyses: what are the points of juncture and stress where one scion or line or argument has been spliced with another? . . . Focusing on these moments, deconstruction elucidates the heterogeneity of the text.» (p150) The three defining qualities of graft as it is used in this paper are: (1) graft begins with the arbitrary and artificial conjunction of (2) two distinct characteristics which are in their initial form unstable. It is this instability which provides the motivation (the attempt to return to stability) and also allows modification to take place. (3) In the incision there must be something which allows for an energy to be set off by the coming together of the two characteristics. Culler's discussion of deconstructive strategy contains all of the elements of graft: it begins by analysis of text to reveal oppositions. These are

Motivation takes something arbitrary–that is, something in its artificial state which is not obedient to an external structure of values–and implies an action and a movement concerning an internal structure which has an inherent order and an internal logic. This raises the question of the motivation or purpose from an arbitrary origin. How can something be arbitrary and non-goal oriented but still be internally motivated? Every state, it can be argued, has a motivation toward its own being–a motion rather than a direction. Just because architecture cannot portray or enact *reason* as a value does not mean that it cannot argue systematically or reasonably. In all processes there must necessarily be some beginning point; but the value in an arbitrary or intentionally fictive architecture is found in the *intrinsic* nature of its action rather than in the direction of its course. Since any process must necessarily have a beginning and a movement, however, the fictional origin must be considered as having at least a methodological value–a value concerned with generating the internal relations of the process itself. But if the beginning is in fact arbitrary, there can be no direction toward closure or end, because the motivation for change of state (that is, the inherent instability of the beginning) can never lead to a state of no change (that is, an end). Thus, in their freedom from the universal values of both historic origin and directional process, motivations can lead to *ends* different from those of the previous value-laden *end*.

The end of the end

Along with the end of the origin, the second basic characteristic of a «not-classical» architecture, therefore, is its freedom from a priori goals or ends–the end of the end. The end of the classical also means the end of the myth of the end as a value-laden effect of the progress or direction of history. By logically leading to a potential closure of thought, the fictions of the classical awakened a desire to confront, display, and even transcend the end of history. This desire was manifest in the modern idea of utopia, a time beyond history. It was thought that objects imbued with value because of their relationship to a self-evidently meaningful origin could somehow transcend the present in moving toward a timeless future, a utopia. This idea of progress gave false value to the present; utopia, a form of

juxtaposed in such a way as to create movement, and the deconstruction (graft) is identifiable in terms of that motivation. This paper, which concentrates on transposing these ideas from a pure analytic framework to a program for work, is more concerned with what happens in the process of consciously making grafts than finding those that may have been placed unconsciously in a text. Since a graft by definition is a process of modification, it is unlikely that one could find a static or undeveloped moment of graft in an architectural text; one would be more likely to read only its results. Graft is used here in a way that closely resembles Culler's analysis of Derrida's method for deconstruction of opposition: «To deconstruct an opposition . . . is not to destroy it. . . . To deconstruct an opposition is to undo and displace it, to situate it differently.» (p150)

«This concentration on the apparently marginal puts the logic of supplementarity to work as an interpretive strategy: what has been relegated to the margins or set aside by previous interpreters may be important precisely for those reasons that led it to be set aside.» (p140) Derrida emphasizes graft as a non-dialectic condition of opposition; this paper stresses the processual aspects which emerge from the moment of graft. The major differences are of terminology and emphasis.

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Culler p99.

«The arbitrary nature of the sign and the system with no positive terms gives us the paradoxical notion of an ‹instituted trace,› a structure of infinite referral in which there are only traces–traces prior to any entity of which they might be the trace.»
This description of «instituted trace» relates closely to the idea of motivation *as put forth in this paper. Like Derrida's «instituted trace,» motivation describes a system which is internally consistent, but arbitrary in that it has no beginning or end and no necessary or valued direction. It remains a system of differences, comprehensible only in terms of the spaces between elements or moments of the process. Thus, motivation here is similar to Derrida's description of* difference*–it is the force within the object that causes it to be dynamic at every point of a continuous transformation. Internal motivation determines the nature of modification for the object and is rendered readable through trace.*

fantasizing about an «open» and limitless end, forestalled the notion of closure. Thus the modern crisis of closure marked the end of the process of moving toward the end. Such crises (or ruptures) in our perception of the continuity of history arise not so much out of a change in our idea of origins or ends than out of the failure of the present (and its objects) to sustain our expectations of the future. And once the continuity of history is broken in our perception, any representation of the classical, any «classicism,» can be seen only as a belief. At this point, where our received values are «in crisis,» the end of the end raises the possibility of the invention and realization of a blatantly fictional future (which is therefore non-threatening in its «truth» value) as opposed to a simulated or idealized one.

With the end of the end, what was formerly the process of composition or transformation ceases to be a causal strategy, a process of addition or subtraction from an origin. Instead, the process becomes one of *modification*—the invention of a non-dialectical, non-directional, non-goal oriented process.[21] The «invented» origins from which this process receives its motivation differ from the accepted, mythic origins of the classicists by being *arbitrary*, reinvented for each circumstance, adopted for the moment and not forever. The process of modification can be seen as an open-ended tactic rather than a goal-oriented strategy. A strategy is a process that is determined and value-laden before it begins; it is *directed*. Since the arbitrary origin cannot be known in advance (in a cognitive sense), it does not depend on knowledge derived from the classical tradition and thus cannot engender a strategy.

In this context architectural form is revealed as a «place of invention» rather than as a subservient representation of another architecture or as a strictly practical device. To invent an architecture is to allow architecture to be a cause; in order to be a cause, it must arise from something outside a directed strategy of composition.

The end of the end also concerns the end of object representation as the only metaphoric subject in architecture. In the past the metaphor in architecture was used to convey such forces as tension, compression, extension, and elongation; these were qualities that could be seen, if not literally in the objects themselves, then in the relationship between objects. The idea of the metaphor here has nothing to do

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Jeff Kipnis, «Architecture Unbound,» unpublished paper, 1984.
Modification is one aspect of extension which is defined by Kipnis as a component of decomposition. While extension is any movement from an origin (or an initial condition), modification is a specific form of extension concerned with preserving the evidence of initial conditions (for example, through no addition or subtraction of materiality). On the other hand, synthesis is an example of extension which does not attempt to maintain evidence of initial conditions but rather attempts to create a new whole.

with the qualities generated between buildings or between buildings and spaces; rather, it has to do with the idea that the internal process itself can generate a kind of non-representational figuration in the object. This is an appeal, not to the classical aesthetic of the object, but to the potential *poetic* of an architectural text. The problem, then, is to distinguish texts from representations, to convey the idea that what one is seeing, the material object, is a text rather than a series of image references to other objects or values.

This suggests the idea of architecture as «writing» as opposed to architecture as image. What is being «written» is not the object itself–its mass and volume–but the *act* of massing. This idea gives a metaphoric body to the act of architecture. It then signals its reading through an other system of signs, called *traces*.[22] Traces are not to be read literally, since they have no other value than to signal the idea that there is a reading event and that reading should take place; trace signals the idea to read.[23] Thus a trace is a partial or fragmentary sign; it has no objecthood. It signifies an action that is in process. In this sense a trace is not a simulation of reality; it is a dissimulation because it reveals itself as distinct from its former reality. It does not simulate the real, but represents and records the action inherent in a former or future reality, which has a value no more or less real than the trace itself. That is, trace is unconcerned with forming an image which is the representation of a previous architecture or of social customs and usages; rather, it is concerned with the marking–literally the figuration–of its own internal processes. Thus the trace is the record of motivation, the record of an action, not an image of another object-origin.

In this case a «not-classical» architecture begins actively to involve an idea of a reader conscious of his own identity as a reader rather than as a user or observer. It proposes a new reader distanced from any external value system (particularly an architectural-historical system). Such a reader brings no a priori competence to the act of reading other than an identity as a reader. That is, such a reader has no preconceived knowledge of what architecture should be (in terms of its proportions, textures, scale, and the like); nor does a «not-classical» architecture aspire to make itself understandable through these preconceptions.[23]

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The concept of trace in architecture as put forward here is similar to Derrida's idea in that it suggests that there can be neither a representational object nor representable «reality.» Architecture becomes text rather than object when it is conceived and presented as a system of differences rather than as an image or an isolated presence. Trace is the visual manifestation of this system of differences, a record of movement (without direction) causing us to read the present *object as a system of relationships to other prior and subsequent movements. Trace is to be distinguished from Jacques Derrida's use of the term, for Derrida directly relates the idea of «difference» to the fact that it is impossible to isolate «presence» as an entity. «The presence of motion is conceivable only insofar as every instant is already marked with the traces of the past and future . . . the present instant is not the past and future . . . the present instant is not something given but a product of the relations between past and future. If motion is to be present, presence must already be marked by difference and deferral.» (Culler p97) The idea that presence is never a simple absolute runs counter to all of our intuitive convictions. If there can be no inherently meaningful presence which is not itself a system of differences then there can be no value-laden or a priori origin.*

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We have always read architecture. Traditionally it did not induce reading but responded to it. The use of arbitrariness here is an idea to stimulate or induce the reading of traces without references to meaning but rather to other conditions of process–that is, to stimulate pure reading without value or prejudice, as opposed to interpretation.

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Previously, there was assumed to be an a priori language of value, a poetry, existing within architecture. Now we are saying that architecture is merely language. We read whether we know what language we are reading or not. We can read French without understanding French. We can know someone is speaking nonsense or noise. Before we are competent to read and understand poetry we can know something to be language. Reading in this context is not concerned with decoding for meaning or for poetic content but rather for indication.

The competence of the reader (of architecture) may be defined as the capacity to distinguish a *sense of knowing from a sense of believing*. At any given time the conditions for «knowledge» are «deeper» than philosophic conditions; in fact, they provide the possibility of distinguishing philosophy from literature, science from magic, and religion from myth. The new competence comes from the capacity to read per se, to know how to read, and more importantly, to know how to read (but not necessarily decode) architecture as a text. Thus the new «object» must have the capacity to reveal itself first of all as a text, as a reading event. The architectural fiction proposed here differs from the classical fiction in its primary condition as a text and in the way it is read: the new reader is no longer presumed to know the nature of truth in the object, either as a representation of a rational origin or as a manifestation of a universal set of rules governing proportion, harmony, and ordering. But further, knowing how to decode is no longer important; simply, language in this context is no longer a code to assign meanings (that *this* means *that*). The activity of reading is first and foremost in the recognition of something as a language (that *it is*). Reading, in this sense, makes available a level of *indication* rather than a level of meaning or expression.

Therefore, to propose the end of the beginning and the end of the end[25] is to propose the end of beginnings and ends of value—to propose an *other* «timeless» space of invention. It is a «timeless» space in the present without a determining relation to an ideal future or to an idealized past. Architecture in the present is seen as a process of inventing an artificial past and a futureless present. It remembers a no-longer future.

This paper is based on three non-verifiable assumptions or values: timeless (originless, endless) architecture; non-representational (objectless) architecture; and artificial (arbitrary, reasonless) architecture.

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C. F. Franco Rella
«Tempo della fine e tempo dell'inizio»
(The Age of the End and the Age of the Beginning)
«Casabella,» 489/499 Jan/Feb 1984 pp106–108
The similarity to the title of Franco Rella's article is coincidental, for we use the terms «beginning» and «end» for entirely different purposes. Rella identifies the present as the age of the end, stating that the paradoxical result of progress has been to create a culture that simultaneously desires progress and is burdened with a sense of passing and the chronic sense of irredeemable loss. The result is a culture which «does not love what has been but the end of what has been. It hates the present, the existing, and the changing. It therefore loves nothing.» Rella's article poses the question of whether it is possible to build today, to design in a way that is with *rather than* against *time. He desires the return to a sense of time-boundedness and the possibility of living in one's own age without attempting to return to the past. The mechanism by which he proposes to re-create this possibility is myth. He differentiates myth from fiction, and it is this difference which illuminates the opposition between his proposal and the propositions of this paper. Myth is defined as a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people in the traditional value-laden sense, giving history and thus value to timeless or inexplicable events. Rella dismisses fiction as verisimilitude, merely creating the appearance of truth. Instead of attempting to return to the past, myth attempts to create a new beginning merely situating us at an earlier, and less acute, state of anxiety. But a myth cannot alleviate the paradox of progress. Against both of these, «The End of the Beginning and The End of the End» proposes dissimulation, which is neither the simulation of reality as we know it nor the proposal of an alternate truth, which appeals to the identical verifying structures of belief—that is, origins, transformations, and ends. «The End of the Classical» insists on maintaining a state of anxiety, proposing fiction in a self-reflexive sense, a process without origins or ends which maintains its own fictionality rather than proposing a simulation of truth.*

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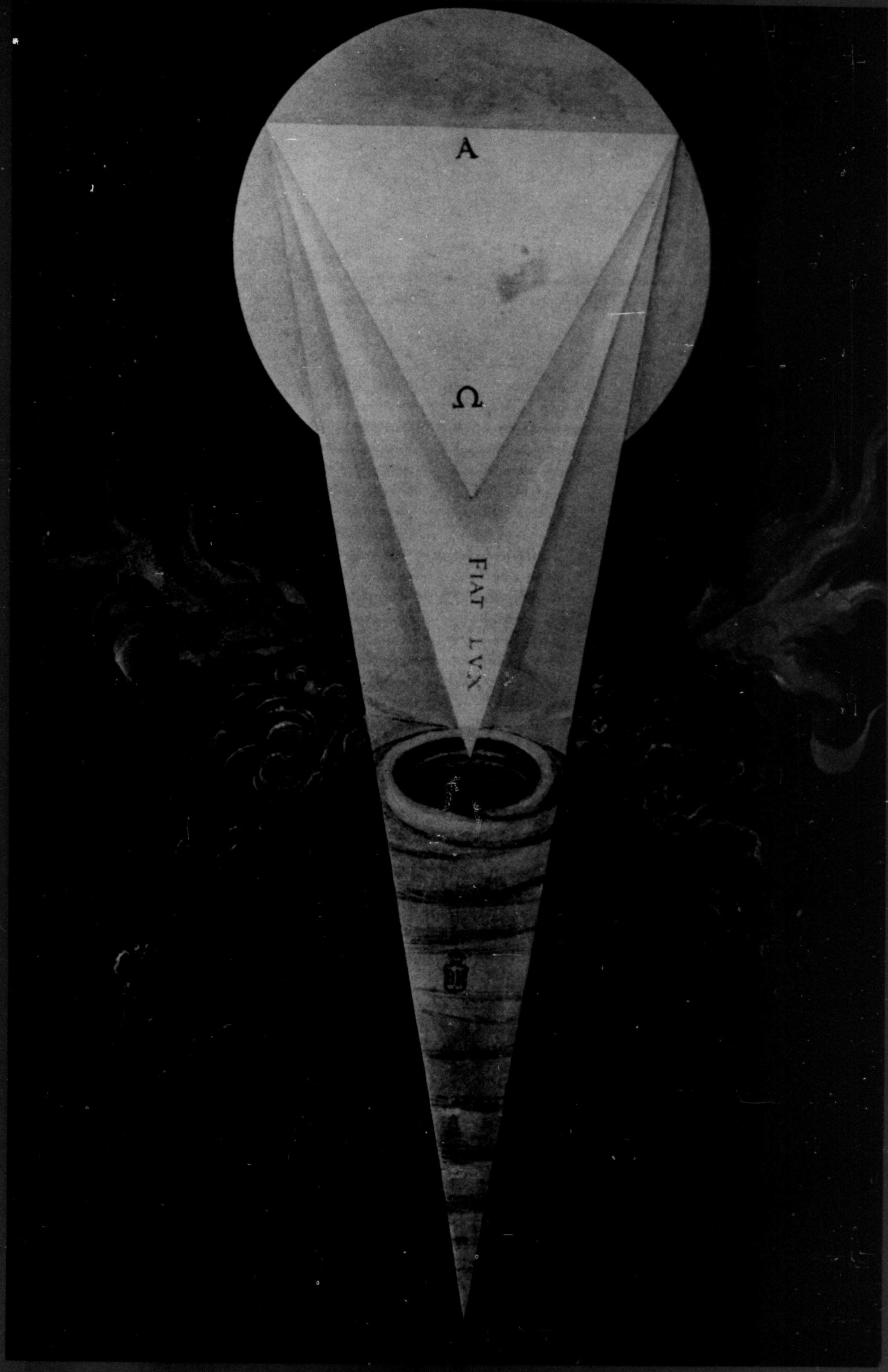

Peter Eisenman

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Cover

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Critical Architecture Between Culture and Form

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(Post) Modern Polemics

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The End of the Classical: the End of the Beginning, the End of the End

Frontispiece and endpiece from facsimile of codice «De Aetatibus Mundi Imagines» (Book of the Ages) by Francisco D'Ollanda.