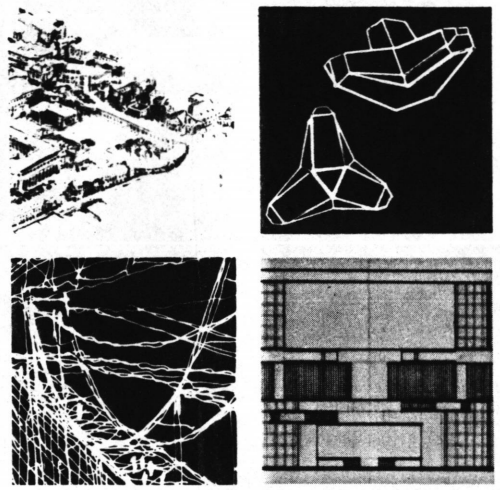

FOUR PROJECTS

gate ◆ island ◆ square ◆ airport

by

Melinda Susan Humphry

Thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Approved:

Jaan Holt, Chairman

William Brown

Salahuddin Choudhury

June 1987
Blacksburg, Virginia

FOUR PROJECTS

gate • island • square • airport

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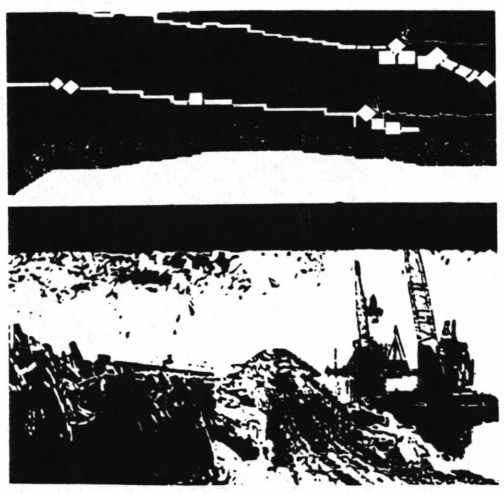
(ABSTRACT)

"When we go wandering....it is ourselves we desire to have translated into stones and plants, and it is in ourselves that we wish to walk."
- Nietzche

What happens when a building speaks to you?

The structure makes a simple statement. That statement is reinforced by the light, the space, and the primary materials and how they are connected to the secondary materials and the tertiary materials. Attention is given to the scale of a large group of people, as well as to the scale of a man and to the size of his hand.

Unlike the familiar image of a machine, architecture retains the complexities of life and is founded on them. It develops in a variety of episodes, situations, and possible conditions. The relative juxtaposition of structured elements (walls, surfaces, structures, windows) conveys a sense of the whole. It is harmonious because it is related to a purpose. It is beautiful because it is a poetic manifestation of life. Thus, a building is a reasoned fragment, the sign of a presence. Its aesthetic is a condition discovered, not a starting point.



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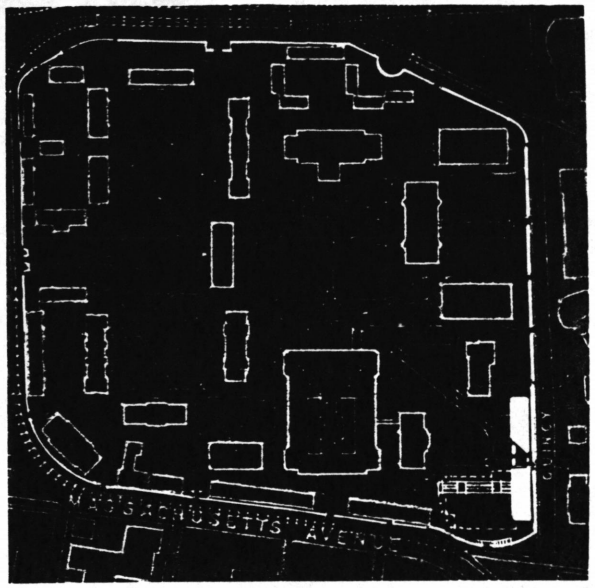
- my friends for their suppport and patience with me

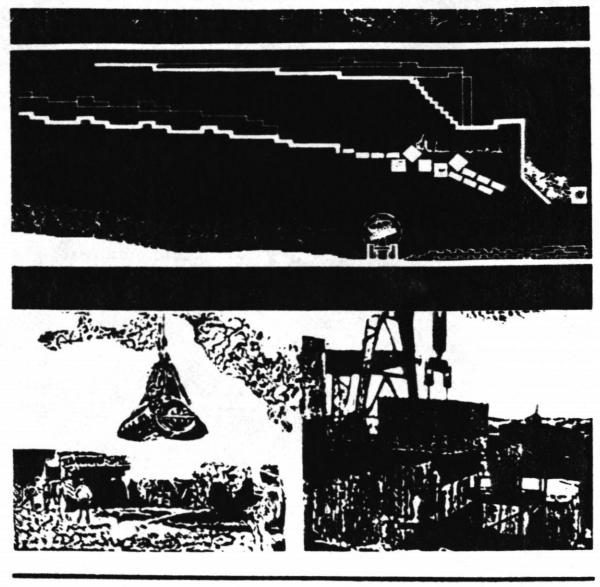
- Professors Jaan Holt, Tom Regan, and Olivio Ferrari for their guidance and example

- my mother and father for their faith in me

I would especially like to thank , without whom this book would not have been possible.

This book is dedicated to my sisters



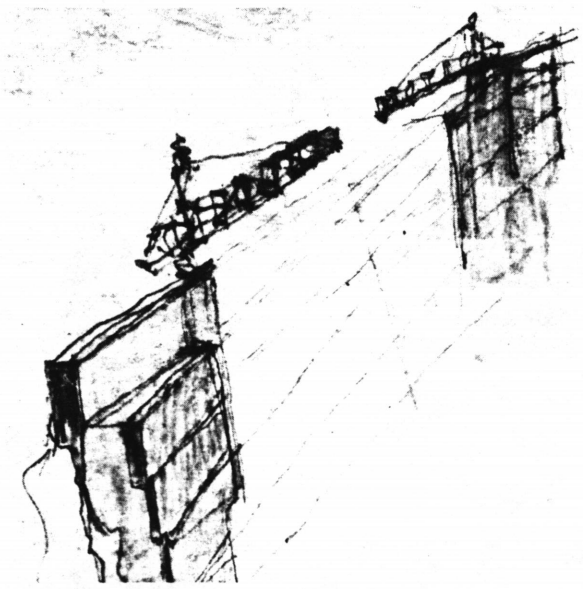


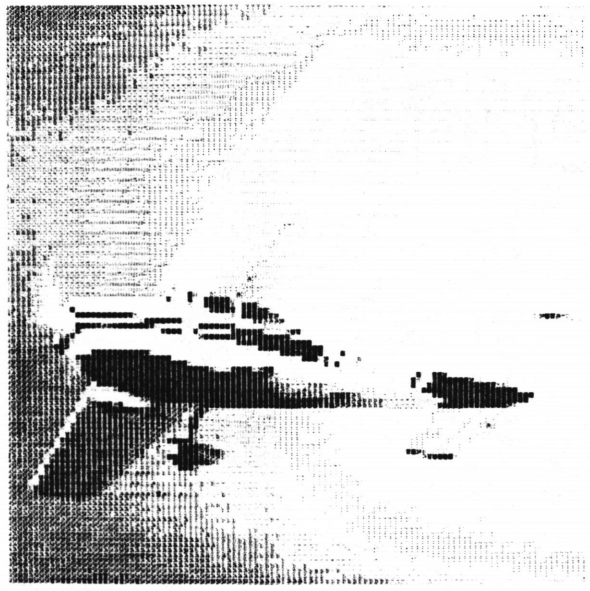
INTRODUCTION

"Design ideas emerge of themselves when a designer establishes profound connections between architecture and himself and conducts his investigations on the basis of them. Self-established frameworks fall away, and something emerges that runs counter to all former notions. A similar effect is produced on others. Because of its profundity, no matter how it may be reduced to diagrams and patterns, architecture that is the outcome of this kind of investigation continues to run counter to preconceived ideas."

-Tadao Ando
1986

This thesis contains four projects which I feel best illustrate my approach to design. I desire to make places which are unique and non-reproducible, places which exist in harmony with their surroundings. Architecture does not consist exclusively of an object but involves the intention, the will, the program for life, and the process. Each of these projects emerges through observation of their unique situations, in order to find out what is essential to their design.





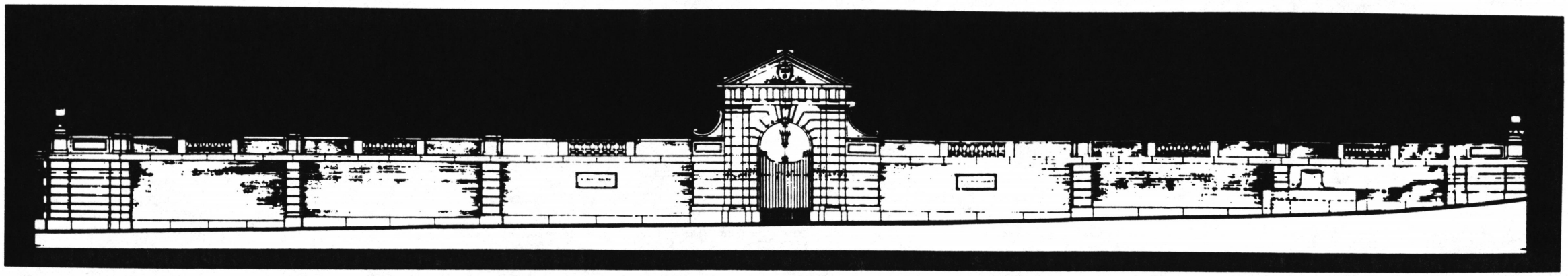
"The unfamiliar must be approached through the familiar, the unreal drawn from the real. Nothing is too mundane to provide a base for poetic construction. By divining resemblances or analogies, one may find intimations of immortality in an object on the mantelpiece itself.

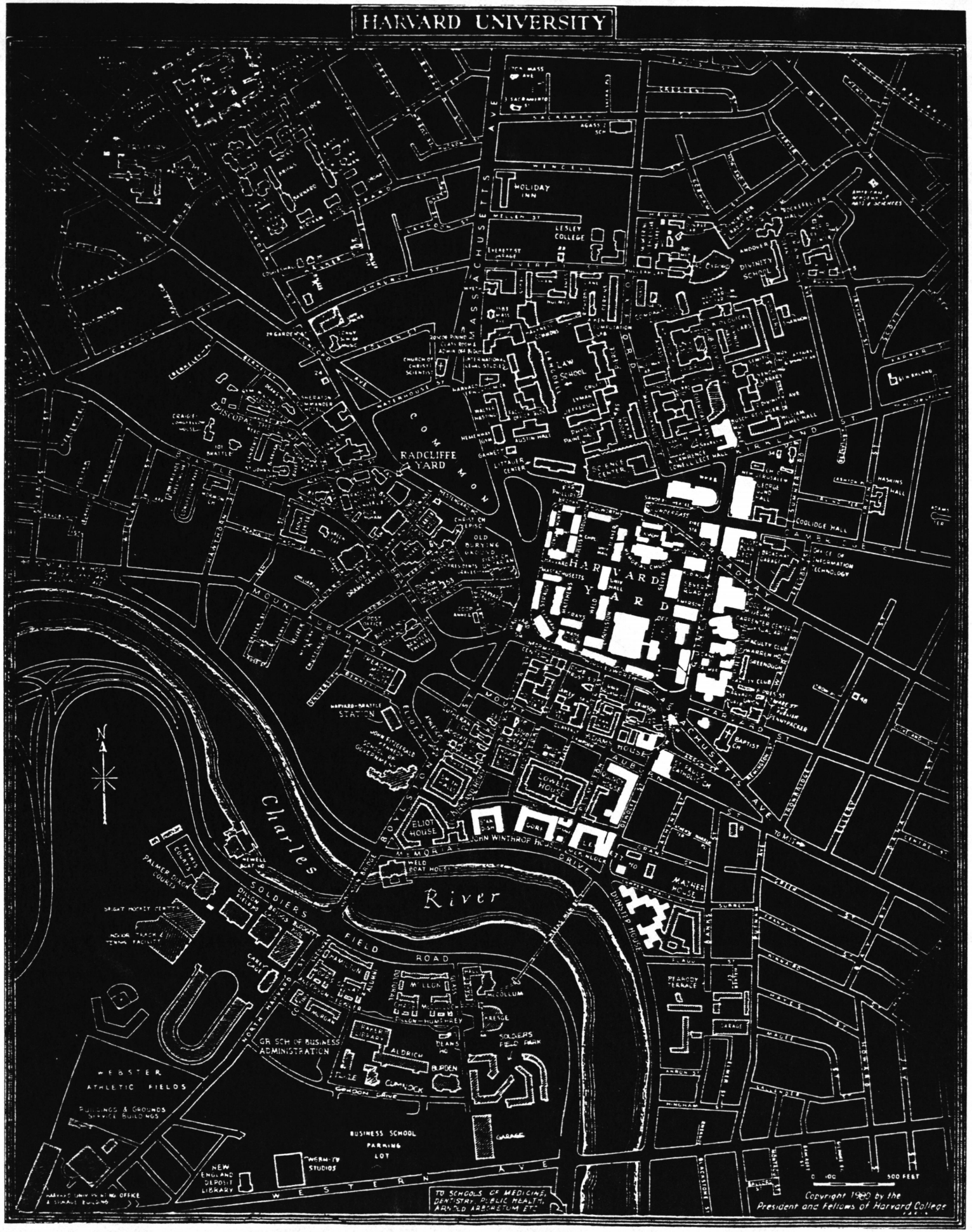
"True imagination, 'the sum of our faculties', is a power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos."

Wallace Stevens

HARVARD GATE COMPETITION

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

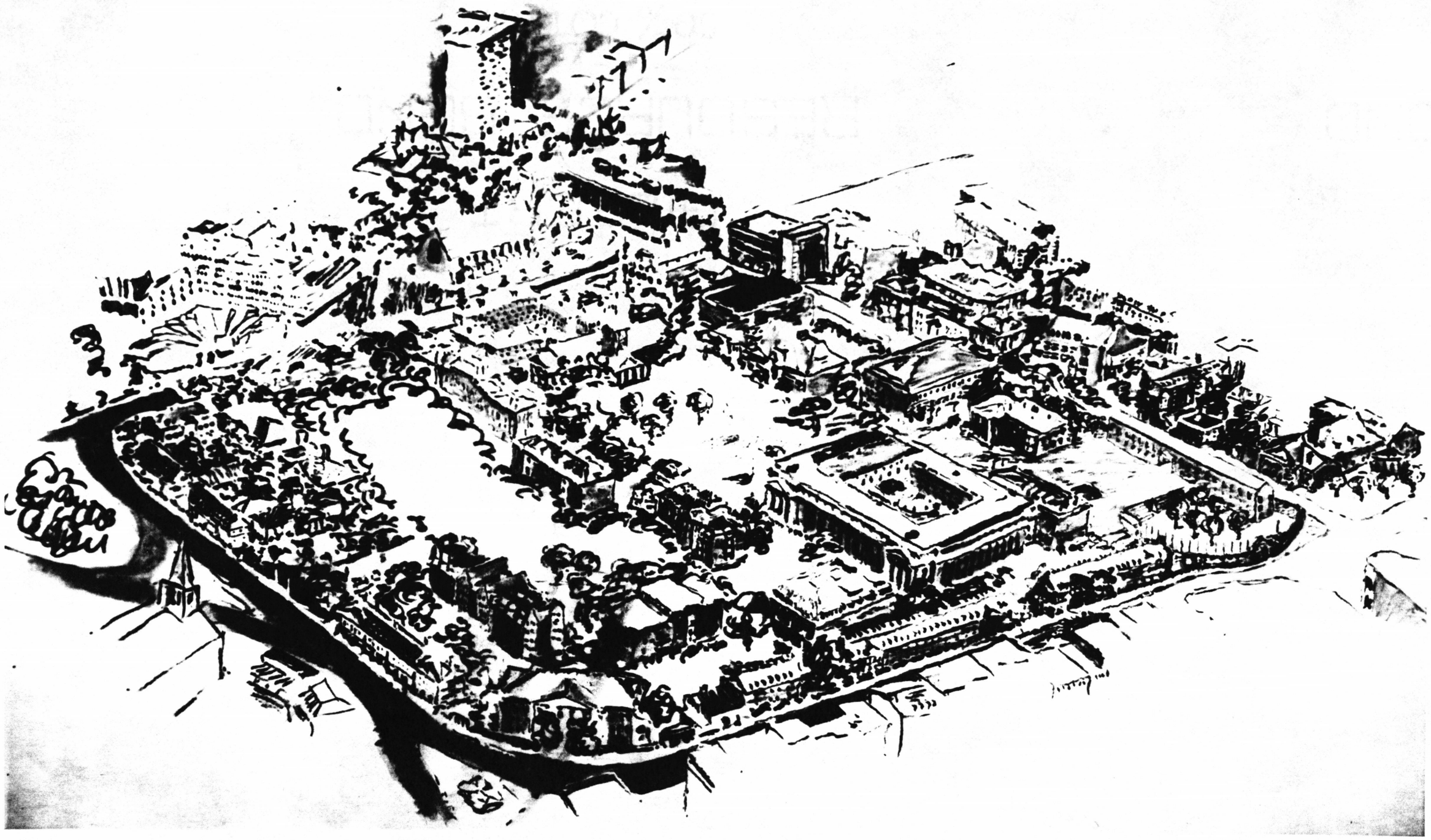




The intention of this exploration into precedent and invention resulted in a decision to make the site more of what it already is, rather than building a superfluous monument. The result is an implicit gate, rather than an explicit gate.

The competition program asked for a gate at the end of Quincy Street, Harvard's outstanding architectural promendade. However, I determined that erecting one there would be redundant and counterproductive from the standpoint of urban design. The crux of the design came when I realized that a gate already existed on the site adjacent to the competition site. It was designed by McKim, Mead, and White in 1880.

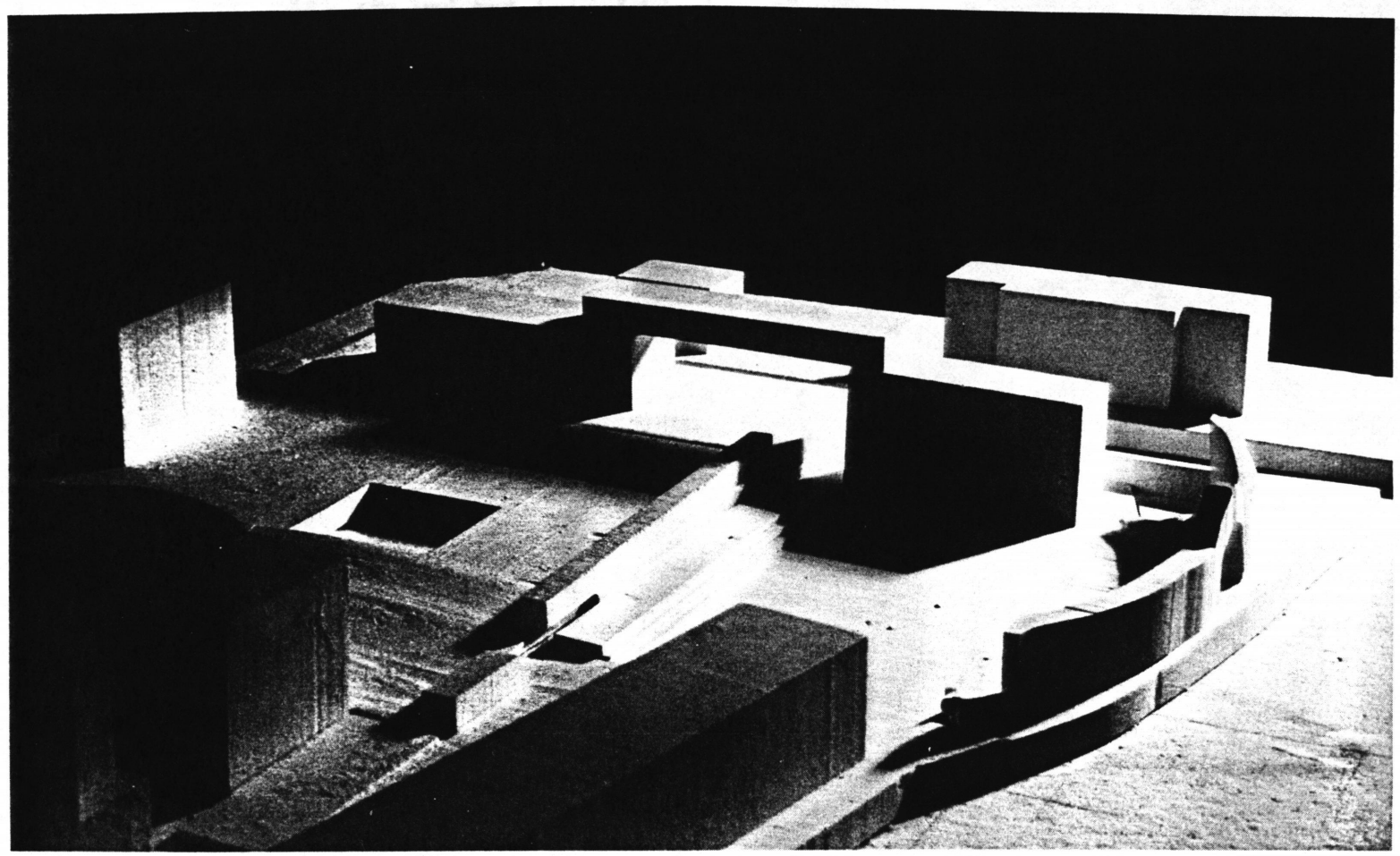
The existing gate very successfully expresses the poetic function of a gate -- to join two disparate realms -- which in this case is the university and the city. The form of this gate is quite elegant in that it has outstretched walls which mimic the bend of the Charles River at the end of the street. Unfortunately, the impact of this original gate was nullified by the thoughtless placement of a mediocre building, called Lamont Library.

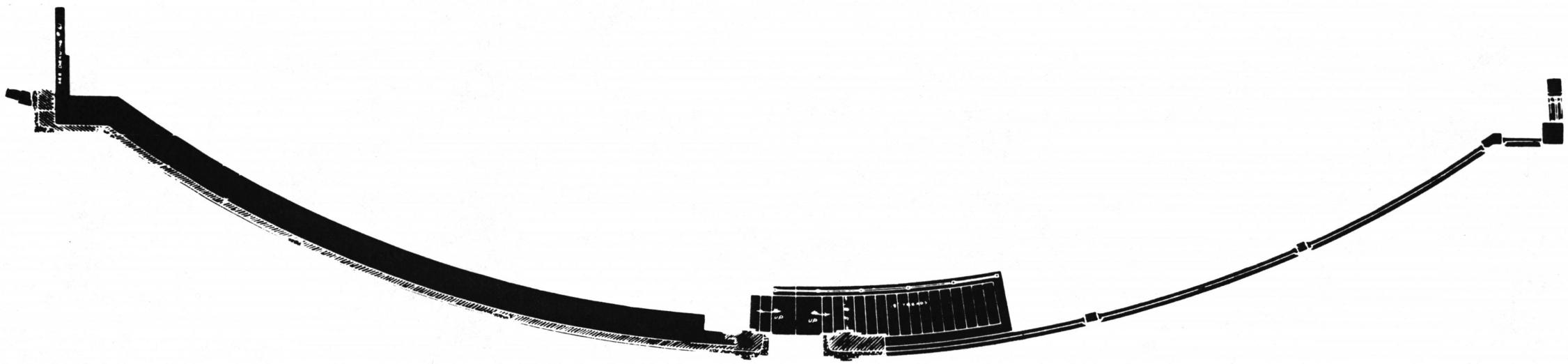


The gate already exists along with the precedent, Harvard Yard. My invention represents an attitude which respects the site. My solution proposes that Lamont Library, which is considered an intrusive and annoying element along the architectural promenade, be demolished.

A new wall building is built along the eastern boundary of the yard, thereby continuing the system of building volume to void which forms Harvard's yard. The new courtyard enclosed by the new building element is a southern reading room for all of the surrounding libraries. This includes a lower court which opens to the southern wall of Hugh Stubbins underground library. Having all of the university's prestigious library around a new court makes a cornerstone to the yard as well as a foyer to the city.

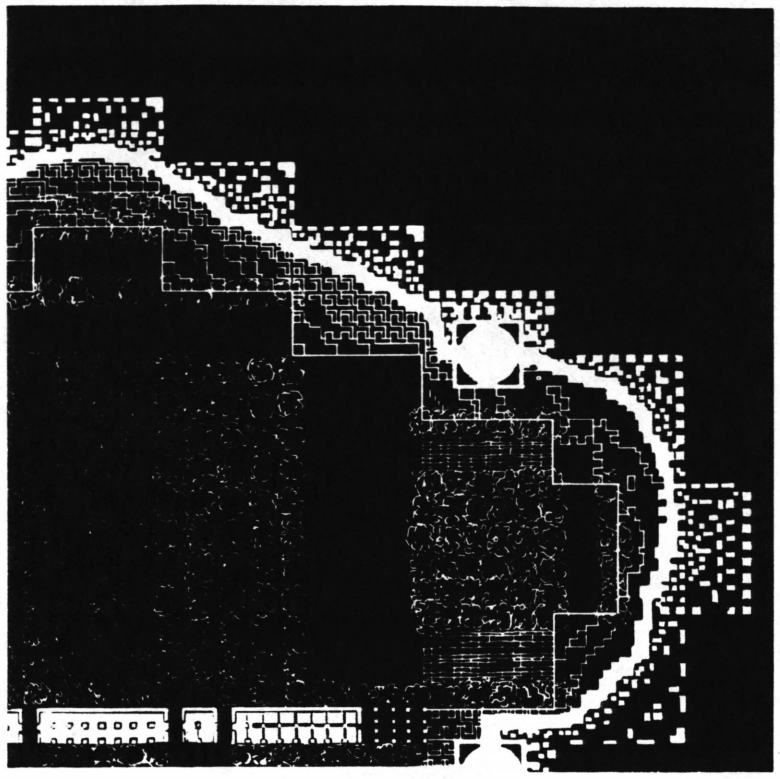
In true keeping with the idea of an outstanding architectural promenade, the new wall building running parallel to Quincy Street should be designed by a notable international architect. The narrow, rectilinear building is in itself a ceremonial threshhold to the university's architectural museum. Thus, the new building adds to the intent of the street while the original intent of the McKim, Mead, and White gate is now realized.





"We are all of us participators in a world of concrete music, geometry, and number - a world, that is, of sounds, odors, forms, motions, colors, so mathematically related and coordinated that our pigmy bodies, equally with the farthest star, vibrate to the music of the spheres. There is a Beautiful Necessity which rules the work, which is a law of nature and equally a law of art, for art is idealized creation: nature carried to a higher power by reason of its passage through a human consciousness."

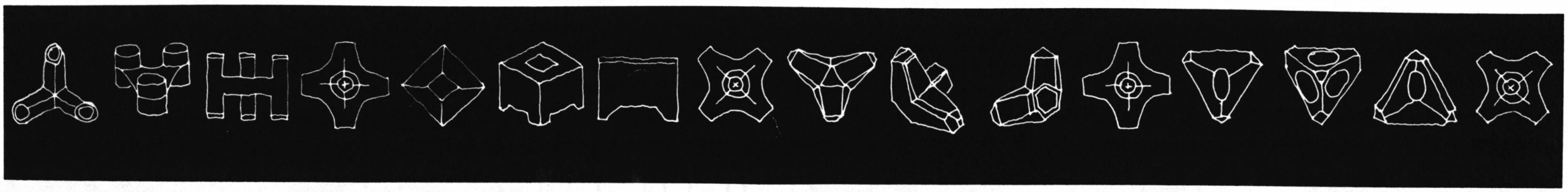
Claude Bragdon
"The Beautiful Necessity"
1910

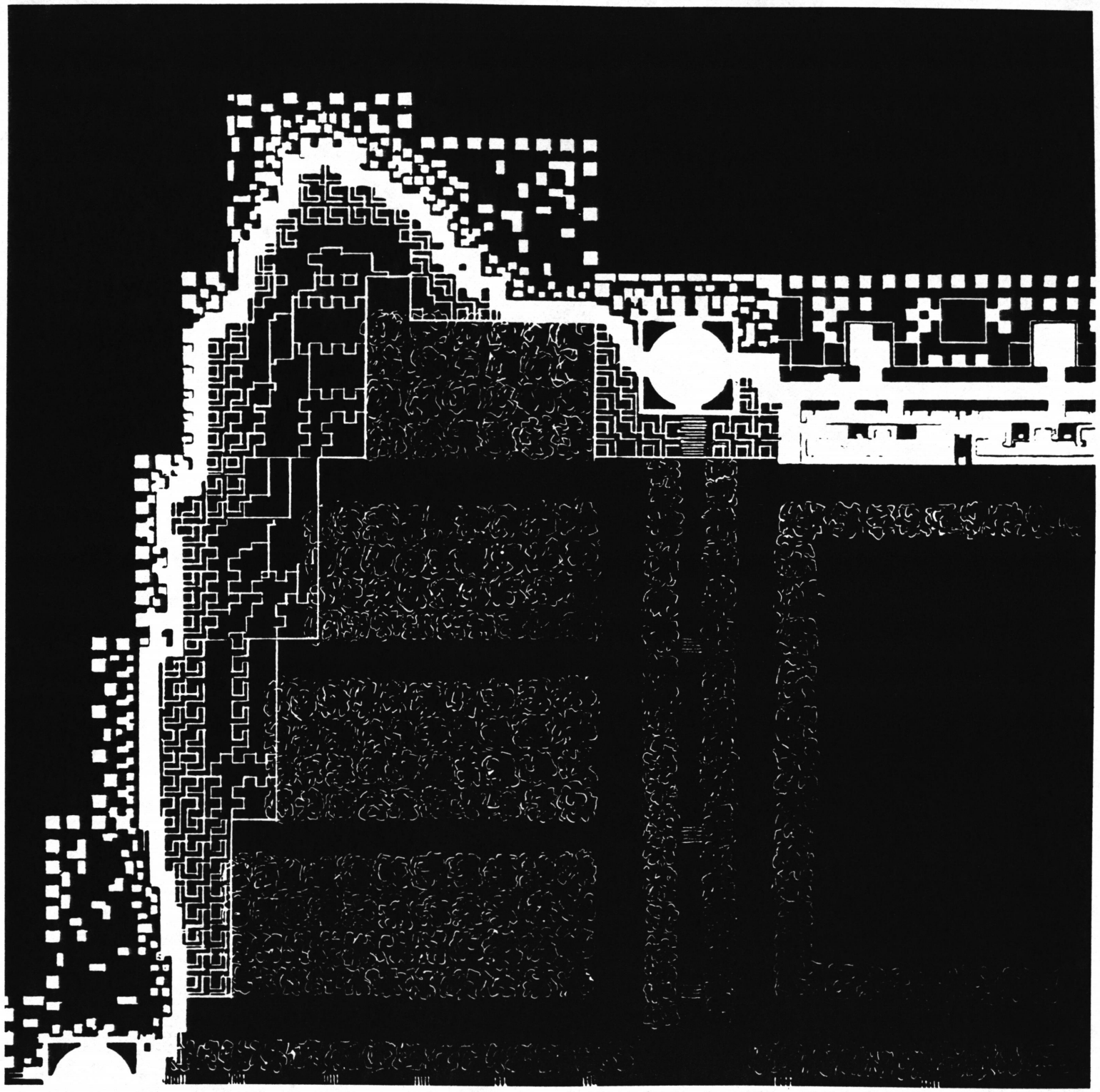


SPECTACLE ISLAND COMPETITION

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

with Jaan Holt

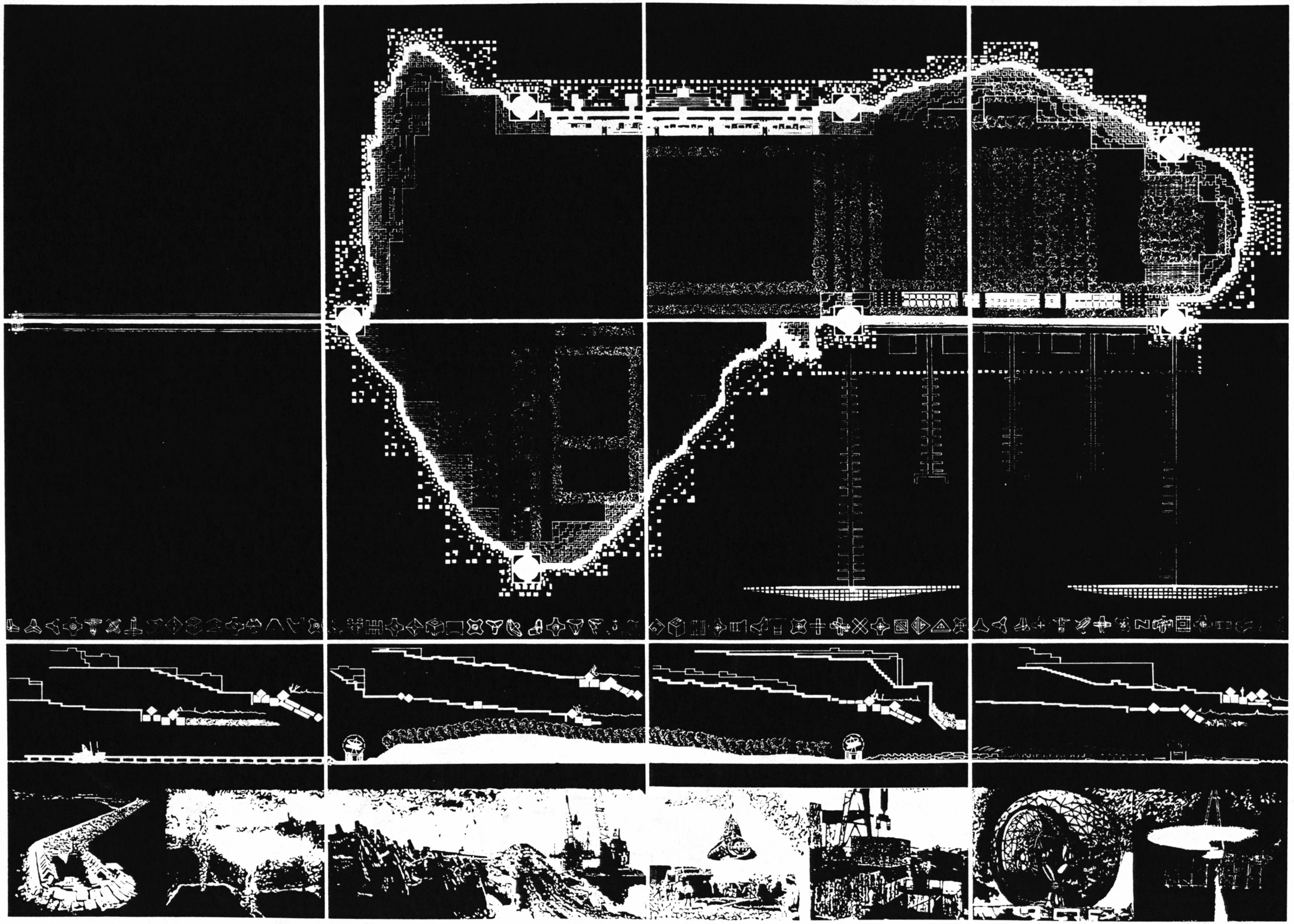




The reestablishment of the island edge is essential to the preservation of the land and provides the opportunity to explore the meeting of elements. By emphasizing and reinforcing this boundary, it becomes a realm for people to inhabit. Concrete dolos (large Turkish stabilizing blocks) form a protective barrier from tidal erosion, while providing piers for fishing and climbing. The varied and complex geometries of the dolos become an alphabet of elements that poetically redefine the meeting of land and water.

The level of high tide is marked by dolos stacked side-by-side, forming a continuous path around the island. They extend past a visitor's center made of concrete units, along a marina defined by breakwaters, and by a long ferry boat dock that stretches to the deep waters of the Harbor Channel. At certain intervals, large satellite dishes form an array of receiving stations which relay information to many of Boston's universities. The top of the island is preserved for orchards and lawns for visitors to bask in the noonday sun.

Through the use of one type of element, the confluence of public and private domains is achieved. Architecture expresses a sense of public order which contains the experience of the individual possibility.

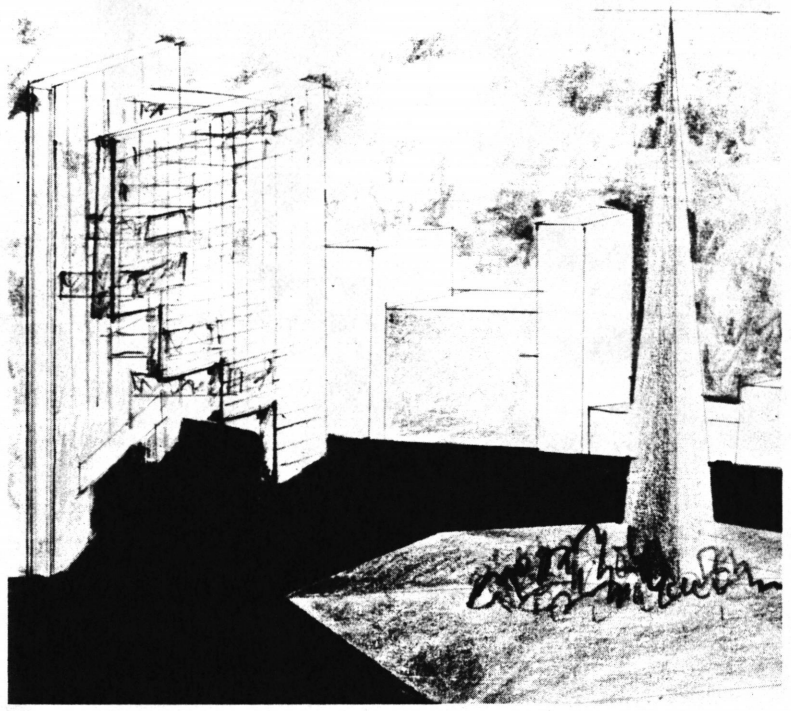


"Perhaps if the future existed, concretely and individually, as something that could be discerned by a better brain, the past would not be so seductive: its demands would be balanced by those of the future. Persons might then straddle the middle stretch of the seesaw when considering this or that object. It might be fun.

"But the future has no such reality (as the pictured past and perceived present possess); the future is but a figure of speech, a specter of thought....

"When we concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object. Novices must learn to skim over matter if they want matter to stay at the exact level of the moment. Transparent things, through which the the past shines."

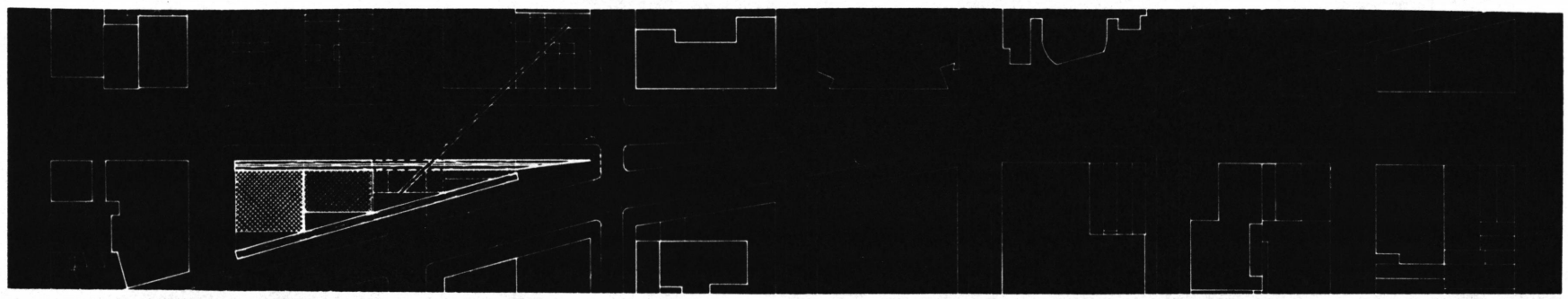
Vladimir Nabokov
"Transparent Things"
1972

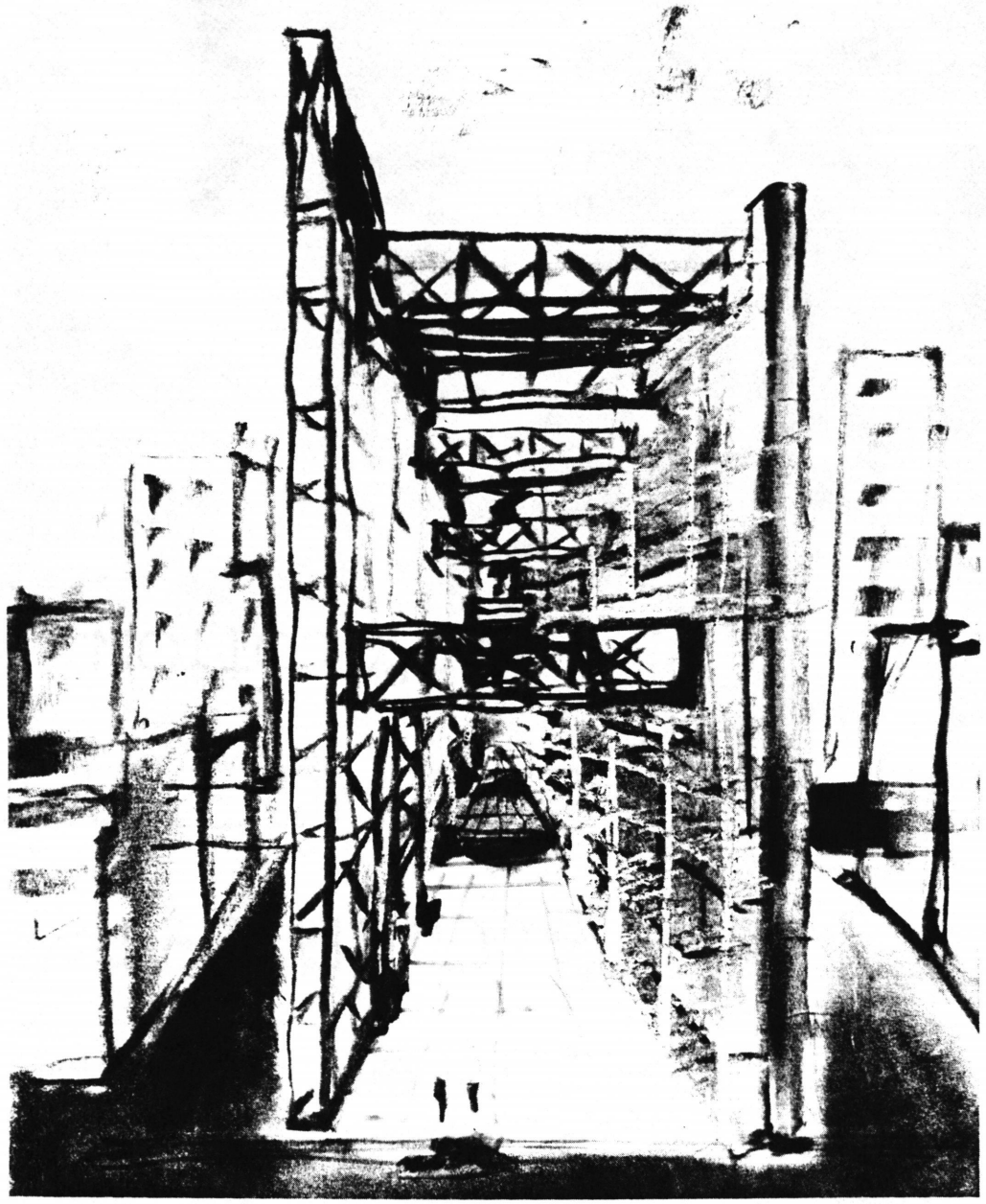


NEW YORK TIMES SQUARE COMPETITION

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

with Cary Dunn





The Avenue = the presence of the walls.

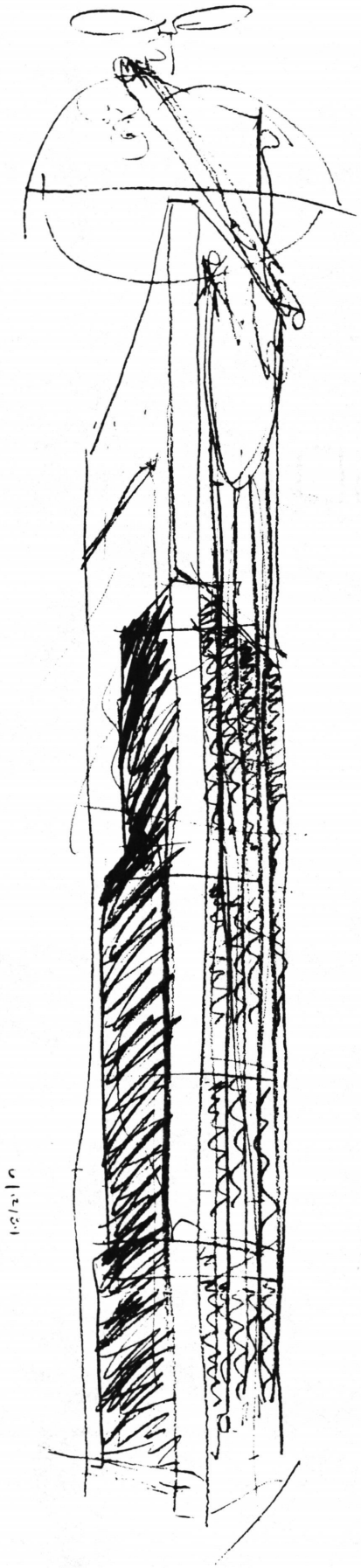
The Square = a break in the wall.

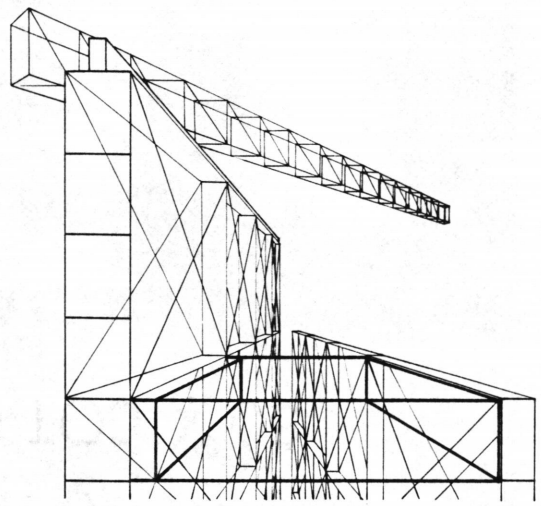
The Times site is a beginning to the Square and an ending to the wall.

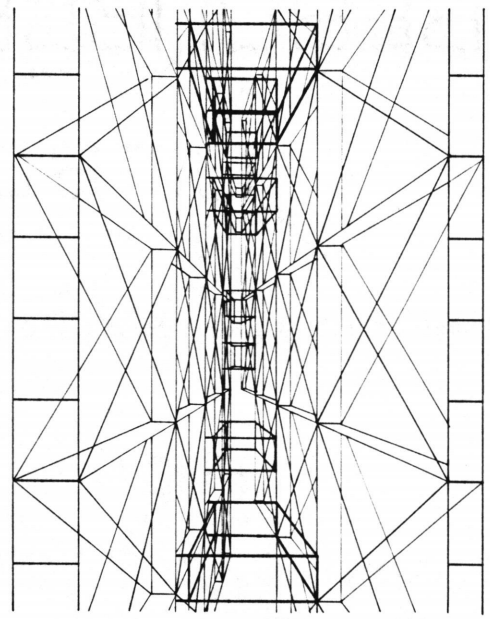
My first desire for this competition was to make a public place from which to view the center of the city -- a gantry-type structure that would become the museum of New York.

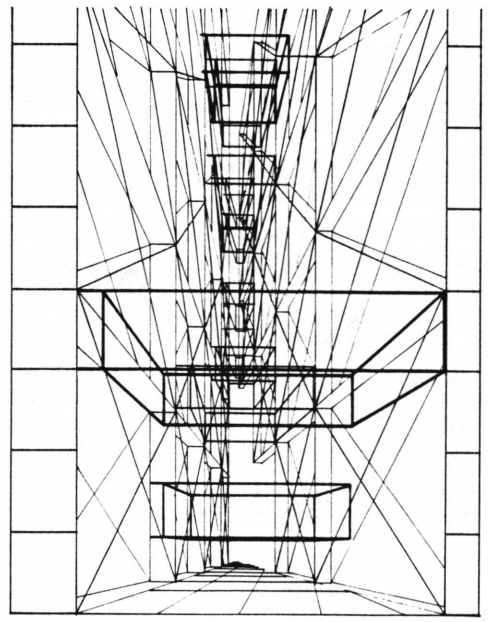
The building is a physical section through the many levels of city space. It provides the people an opportunity to experience the scales of the city by creating outdoor rooms in the square.

Two walls straddling Broadway are braced by stabilizing elements large enough to be rooms. These rooms are the steps and balconies of a huge urban theater.









Three rooms created by the thoughtful arrangement of crossbracing elements.

ABOVE THE STEPPING:

A crane to build the city and set the zoning limits.

A temporary element of the city given a permanent position.

A 20th century cornice.

A balcony to the city.

The arm is the baton in the symphony of the city.

BETWEEN THE STEPPING:

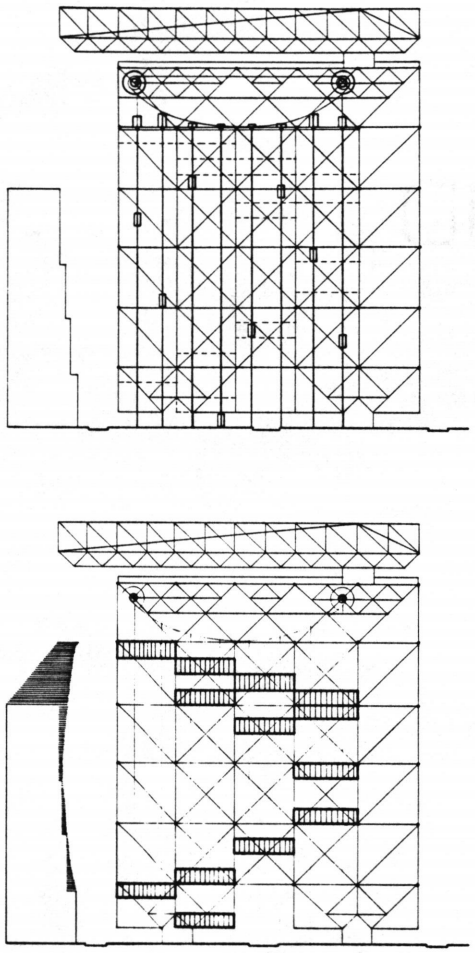
A theater from which to view a re-presentation of the square and the city beyond.

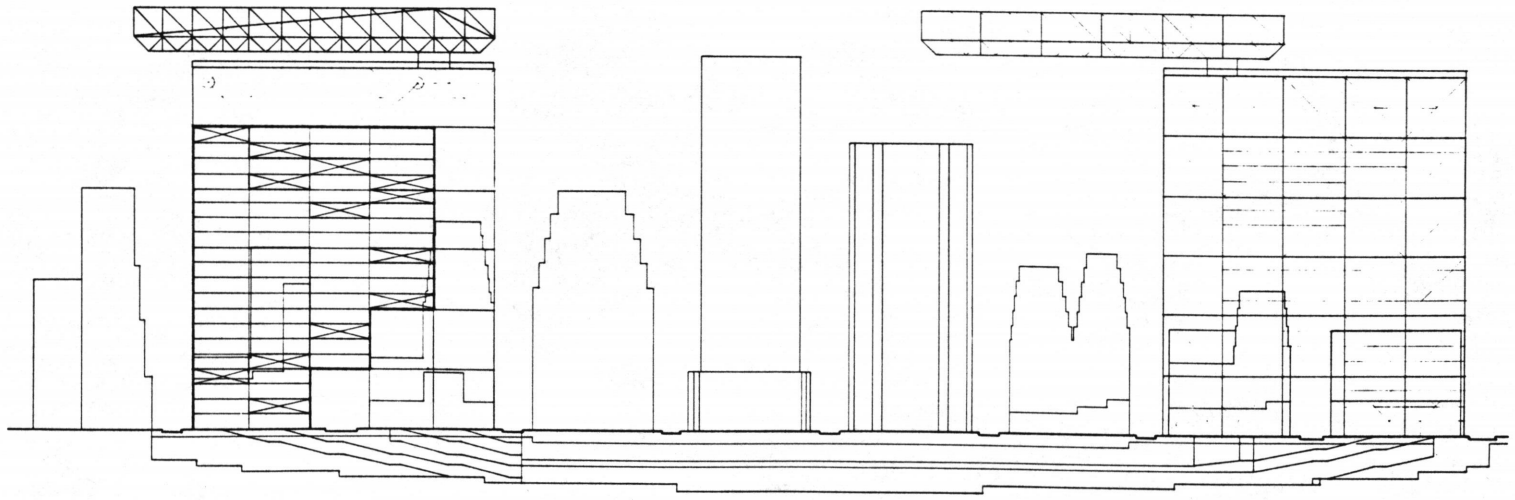
BELOW THE STEPPING:

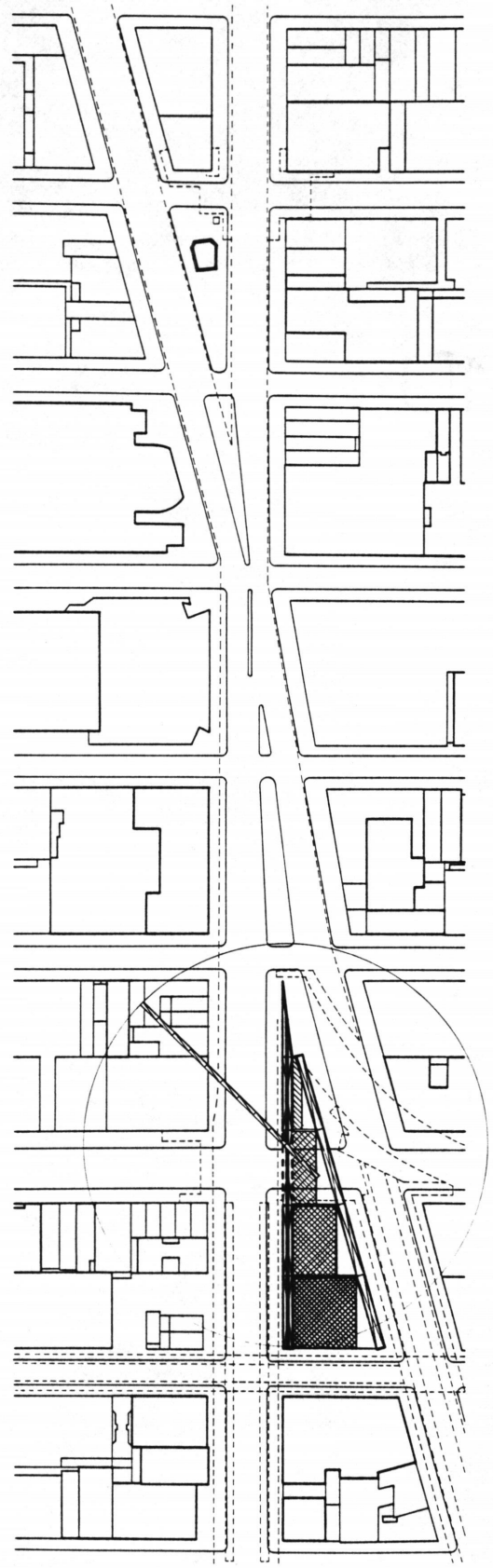
A foyer in proportion to Times Square.

A place to stop, buy tickets, put up posters, and enter elevators to the theater.

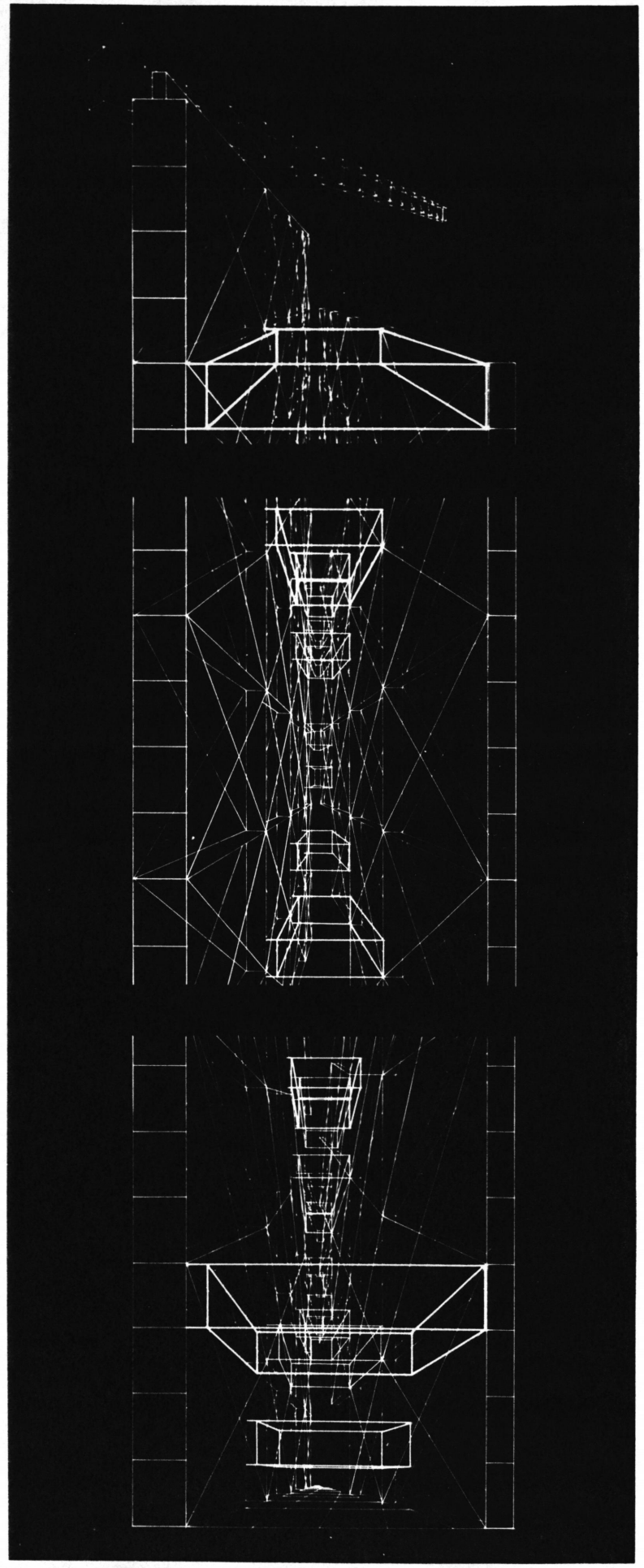
A place to exit the subway.







Times Square at Night. New York City

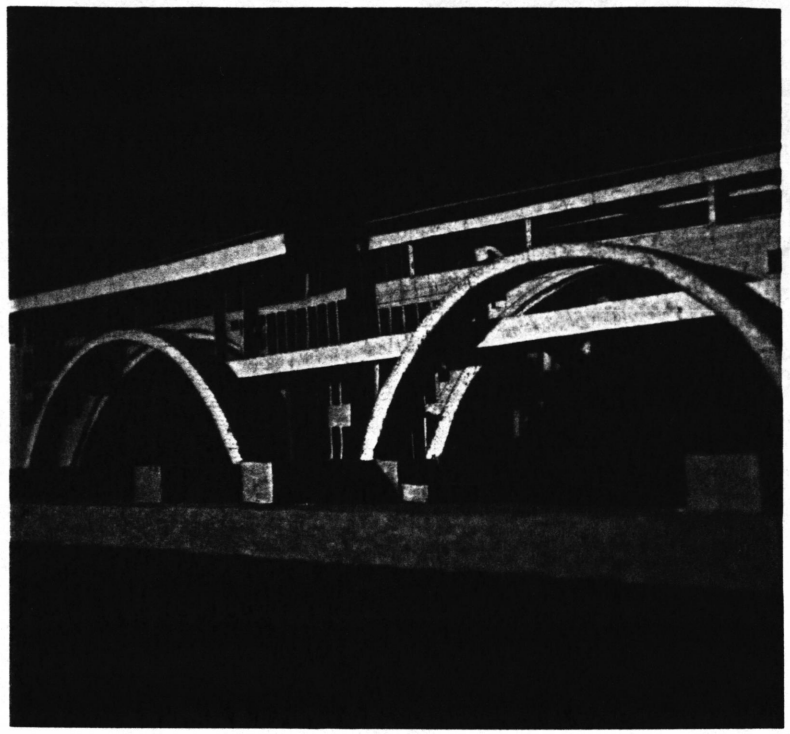


"In painting - the fourth dimension (time) is a quality inherent in the representation of an object, an element of its reality which a painter may choose to project on a flat surface without requiring physical participation on the part of the observer.

"The same thing is true of sculpture: in sculpture the 'movement' of a form, for example by Boccioni, is a quality inherent in the statue we are looking at, which we must relive visually and psychologically.

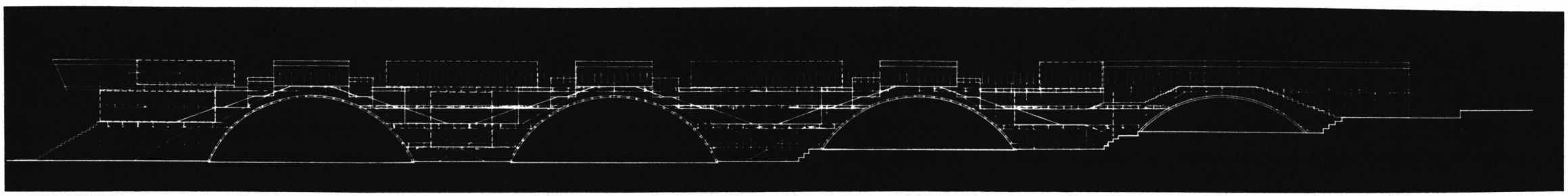
"But in architecture we are dealing with a concrete phenomenon which is entirely different: here, man moving about within a building, studying it from successive points of views, himself creates, so to speak, the fourth dimension, giving the space an integrated reality."

Bruno Zevi
"Architecture as Space"
1957



AIRPORT FOR BLACKSBURG

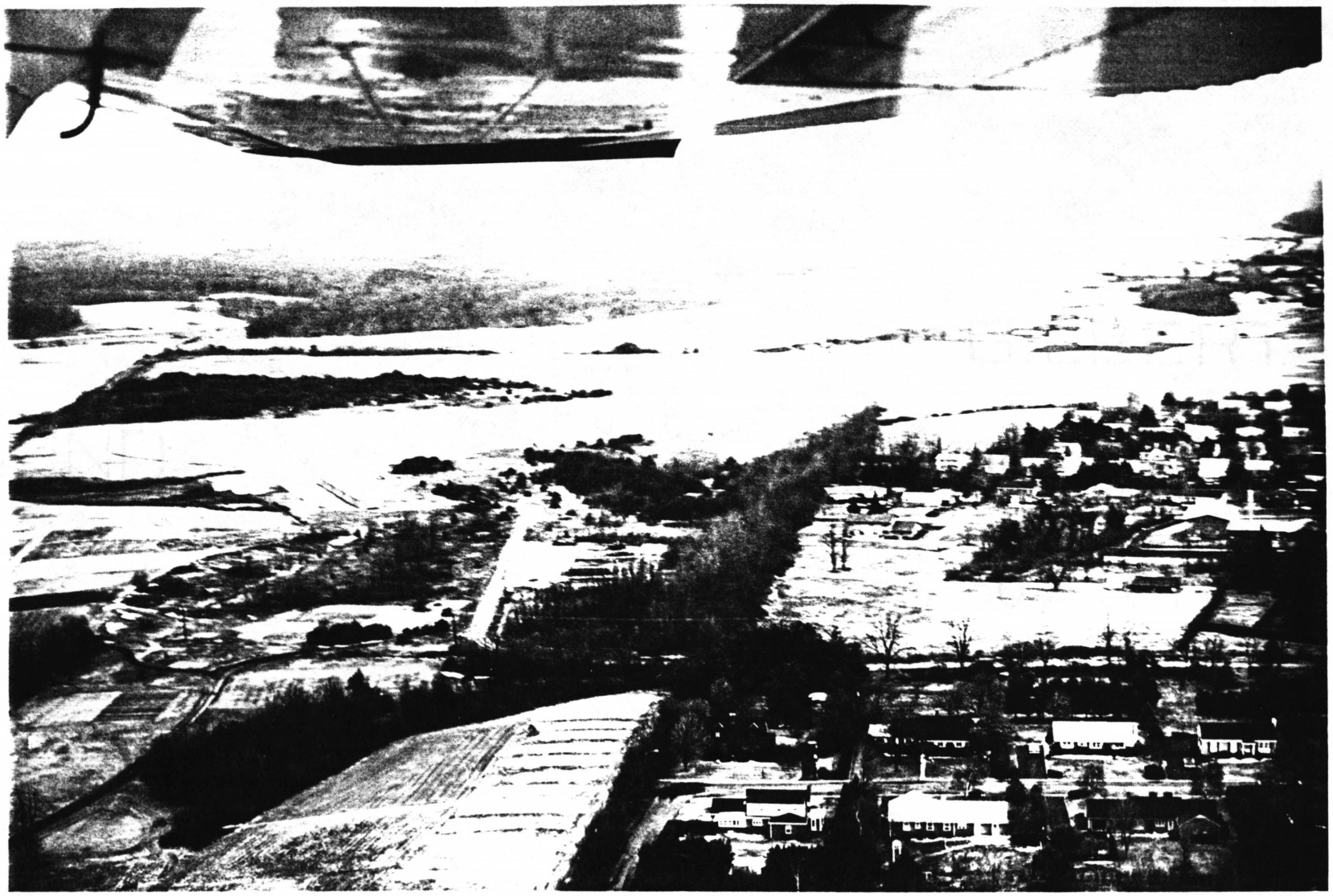
BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA



CONCEPT

When I was in high school, I lived in a small town. One of the most exciting things to do at night was to travel 20 miles to the local airport to watch planes take off from our seats in the Cloud Nine Lounge.

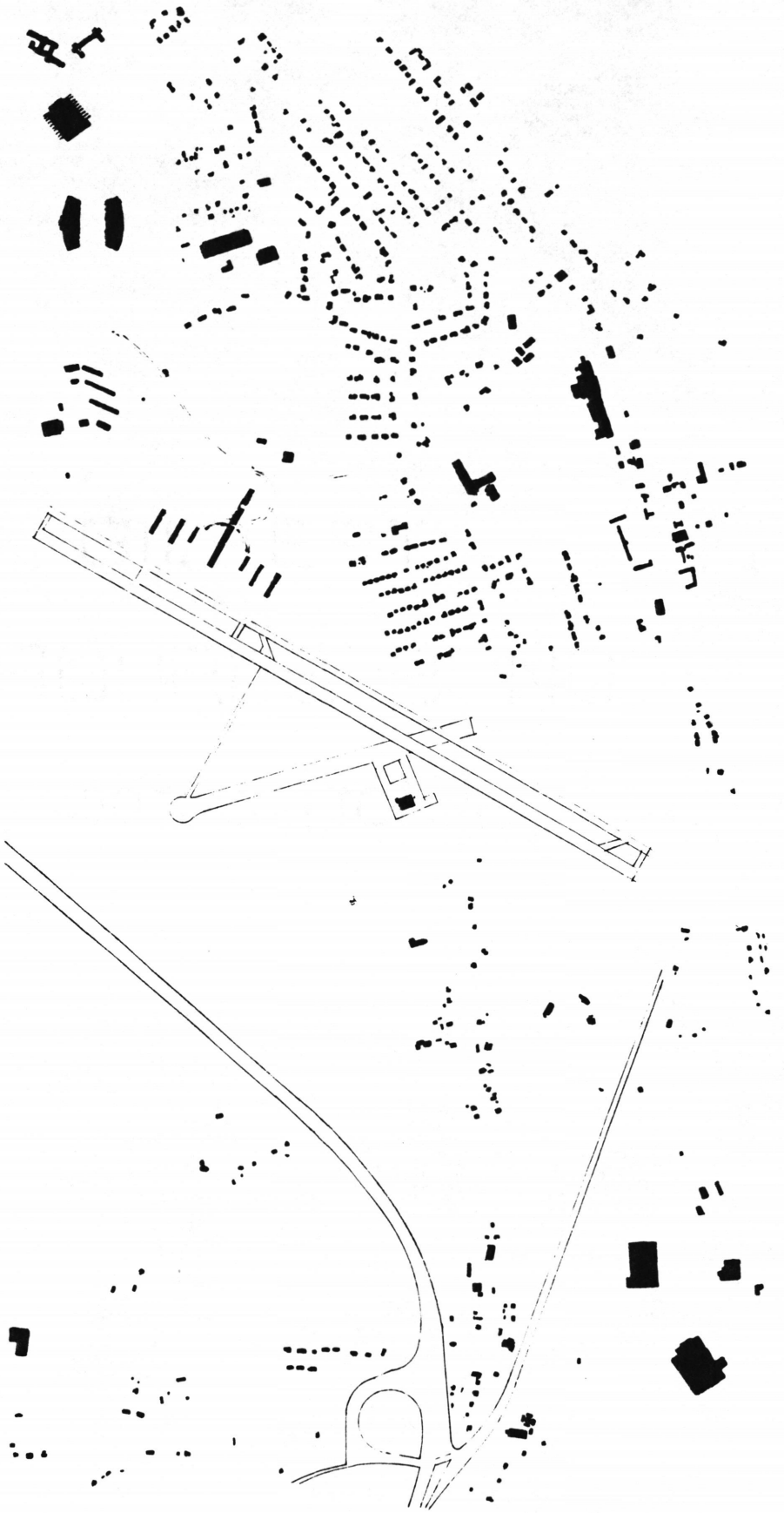
While attending the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia, I realized the need to expand the existing general aviation airport. I decided to propose a structure that could accommodate small commercial flights as well as private planes. I also hoped to capture the sense of departure which is so unique to air travel, and to define it in architectural terms. I wanted to create a place to arrive and to depart, as well as to create a place for those who wished to experience that sense of departure without leaving their seats.



PROGRAM

The airport serves as a new link to the city and provides a variety of services which are now lacking. Because of its location between larger surrounding cities, Blacksburg is a favored site for business meetings. Creating an airport which also houses conference rooms and restaurants helps support and encourage these exchanges of information.

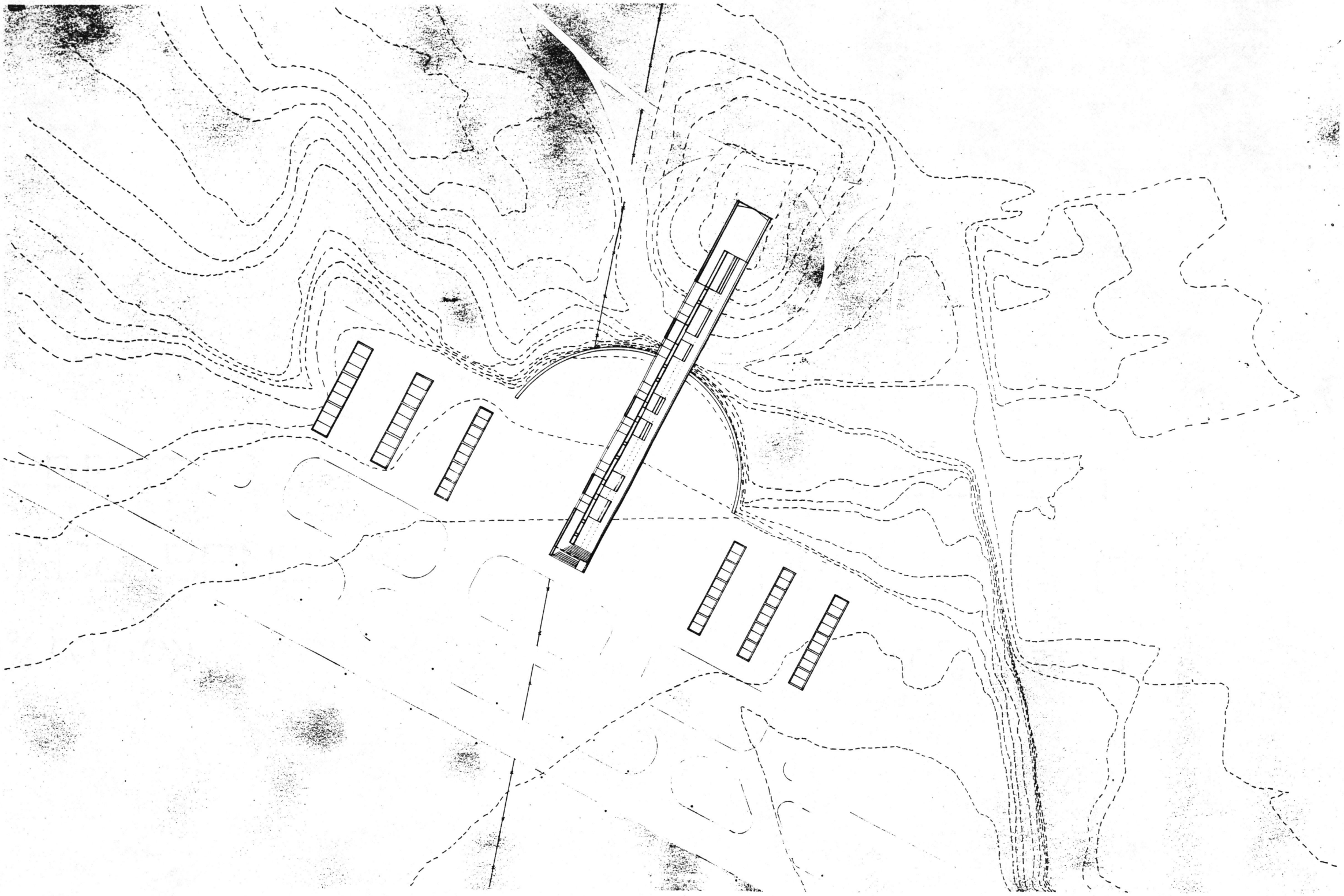
The university also benefits by being more accessible to visiting professors and by the connections to major metropolitan cities, including Washington, D.C. A new flight school is located within the airport, providing additional lecture halls and state-of-the-art flight simulators.



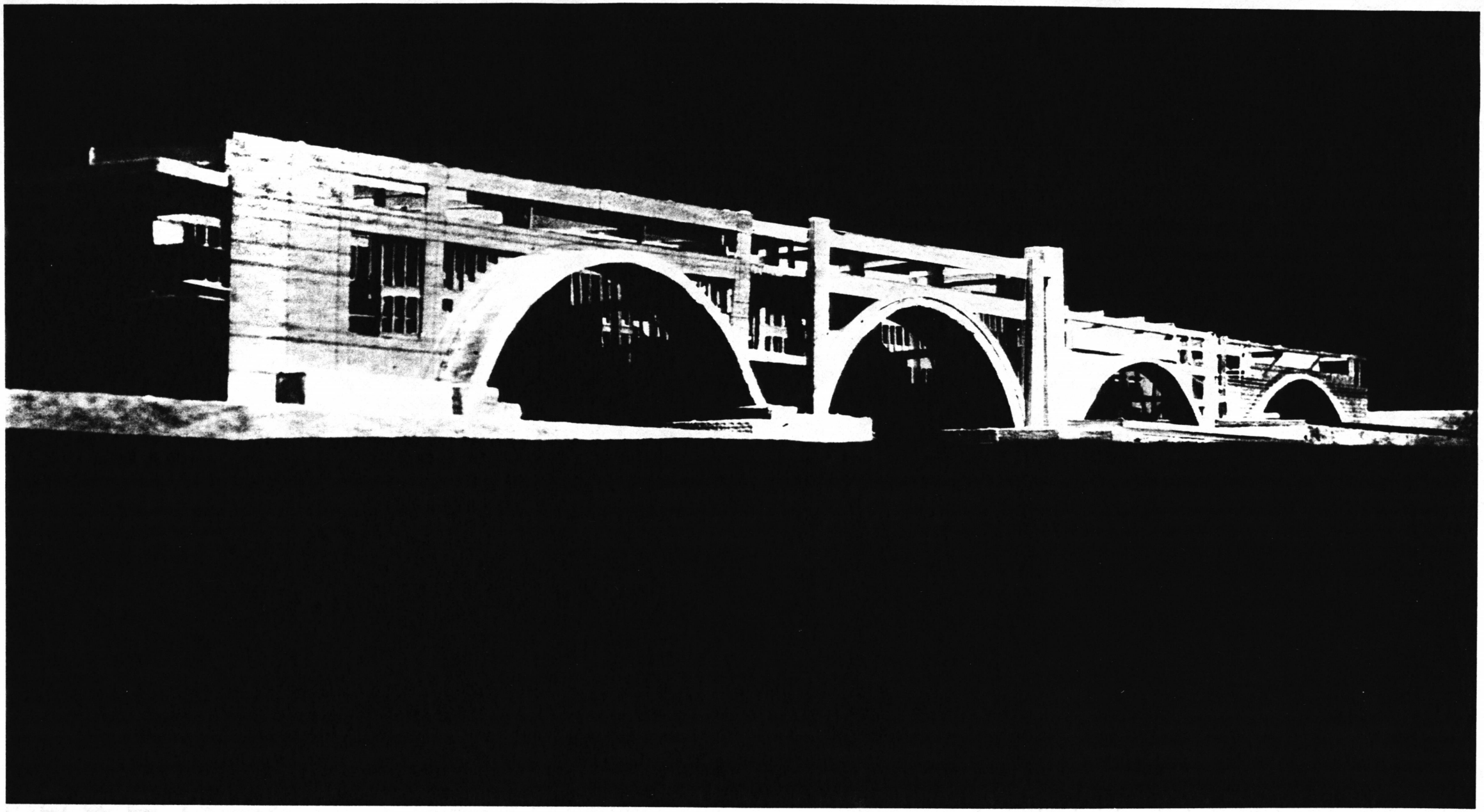
SITE

Located in the flat farmland on the outskirts of town, the terminal building is oriented along an abandoned railroad easement. There it pays homage to the past mode of transportation which was once so essential to the town's existence.

The form of the site plan was generated from the turning radius required for a plane pulling off the taxiway. A berm was developed to shield neighbors from noise and to create a harbor to protect small planes from strong cross winds. Rows of T-hangars line the taxiway parallel to the main terminal building and can be extended as the city and airport grow. Cars travel on a circular ramp which rises above the central parking lot and arrives at and then proceeds through one of the large vaulted rooms.



Site Plan

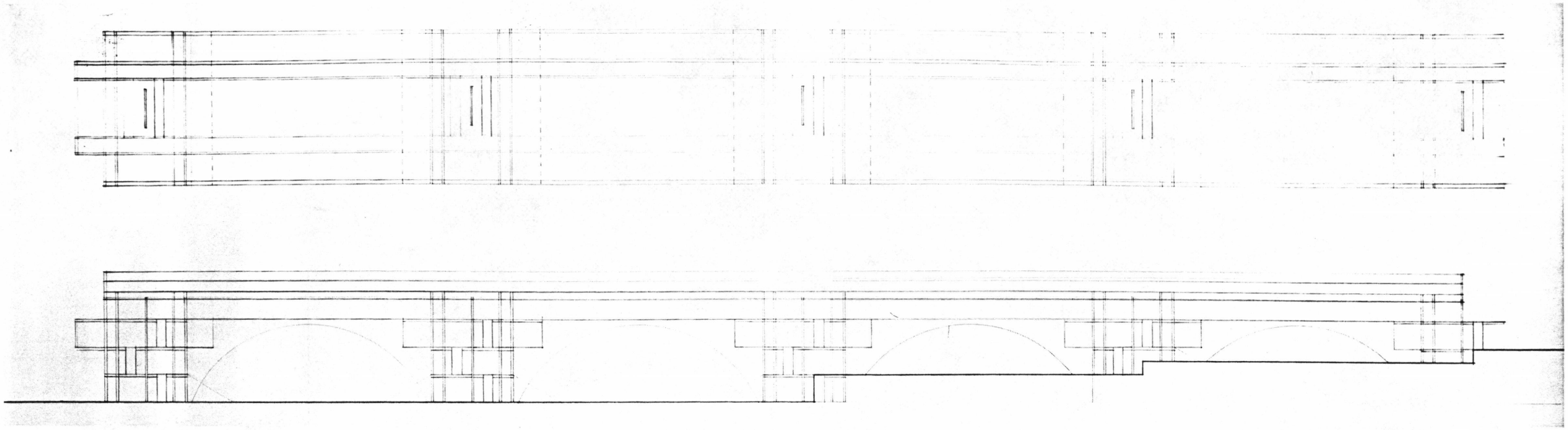


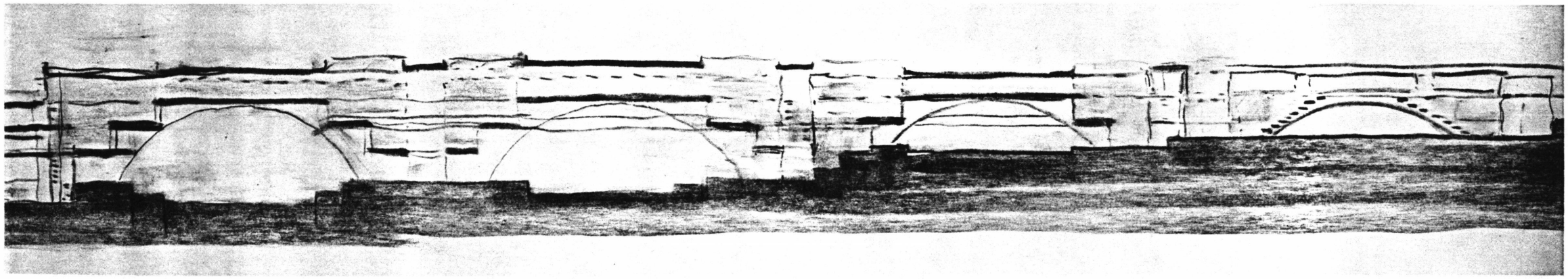
BUILDING

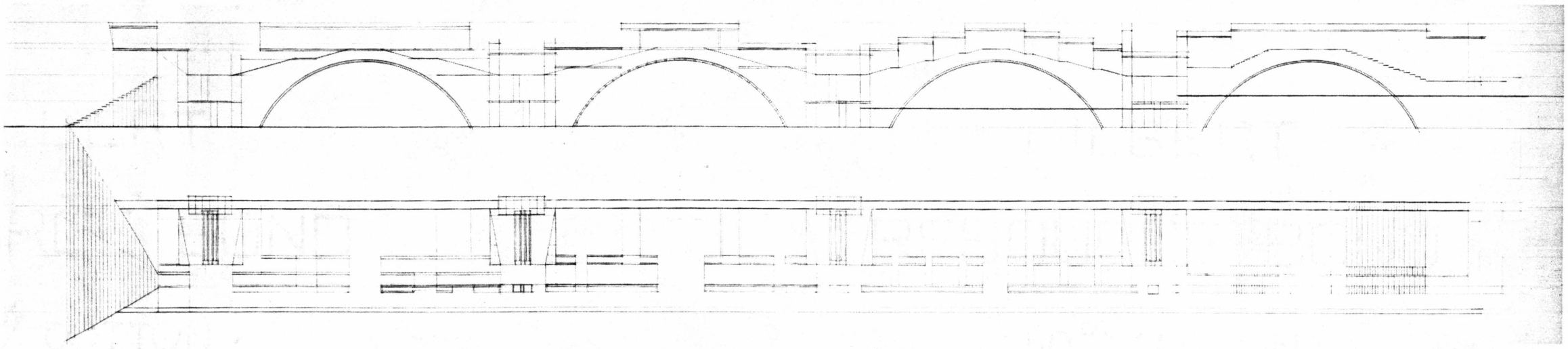
The building is linear in plan. Parallel walls share responsibility of structure, define a series of paths, and afford a variety of rooms. Large glass vaults occur between the walls to house the waiting planes, cover the entry, and enclose the large lecture hall. The spaces between the vaults are devoted to services and circulation.

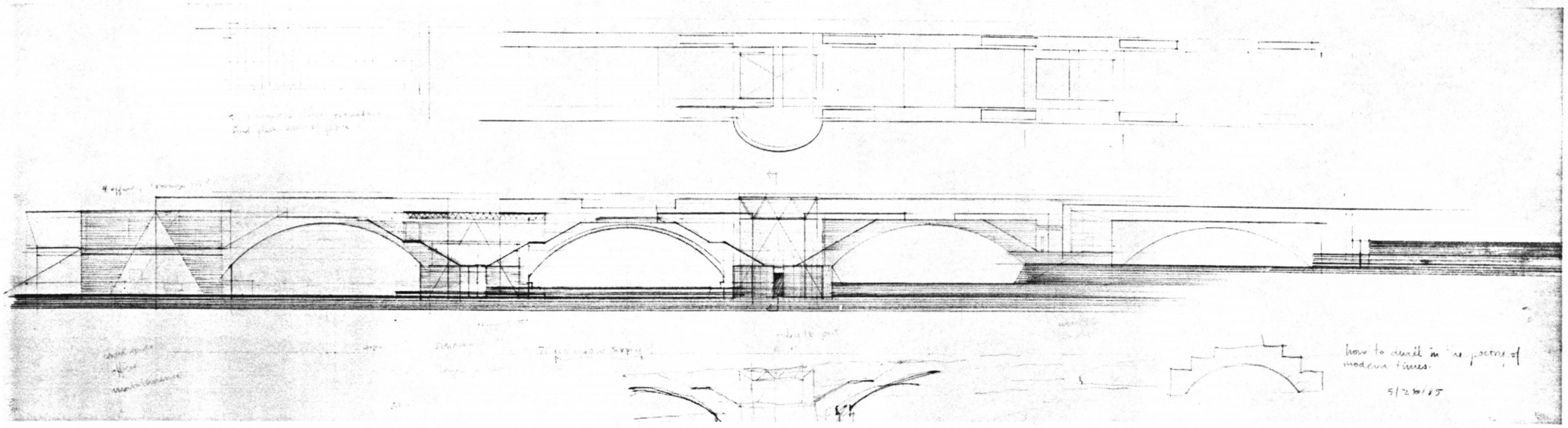
The scheme is essentially a study in three-dimensional order. I became intrigued with the Pirenasean-type space under, above, and between the vaults. The vaults are constructed of concrete coffers and glass blocks which allow light to penetrate into the conference rooms and airport activities above them. All circulation is along the central spine -- a journey in and of itself. While traveling on an escalator, one gets glimpses of the planes and surrounding landscape through narrow slit windows framing a series of views and animating movement.

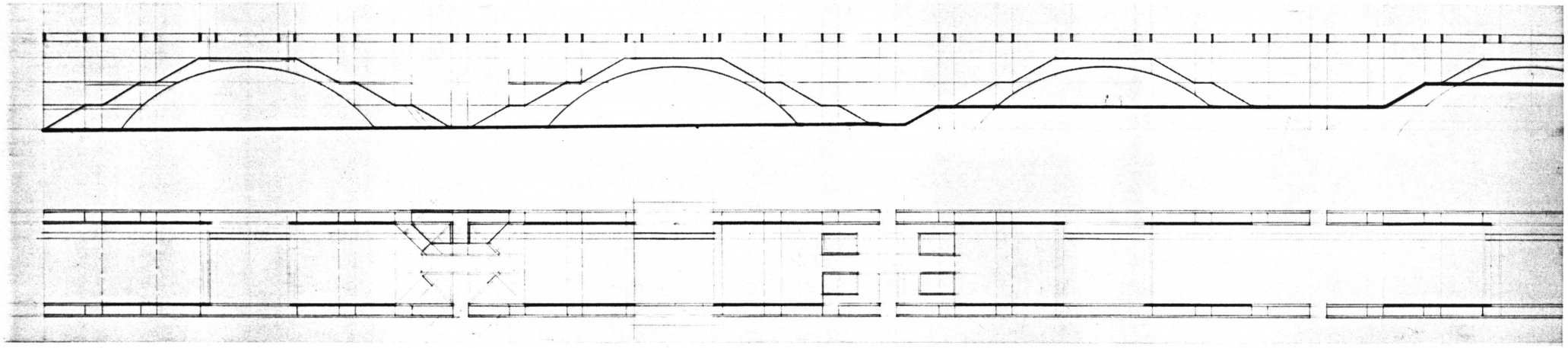
The building exploits movement. It is organized vertically for conference spaces and horizontally for the concourse which links all large vaults. The escalators and stairs are the diagonal elements, the former being for fast travel and the latter for the connection to rooms.

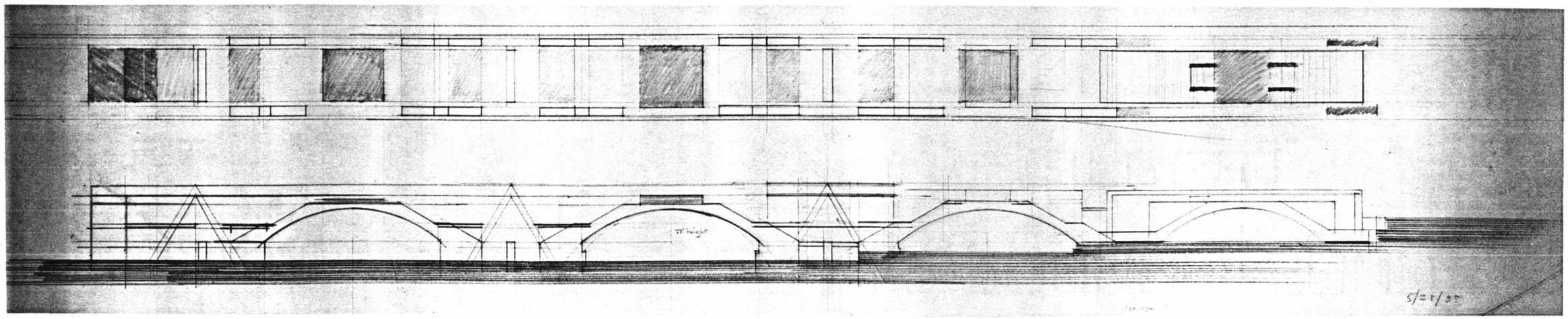


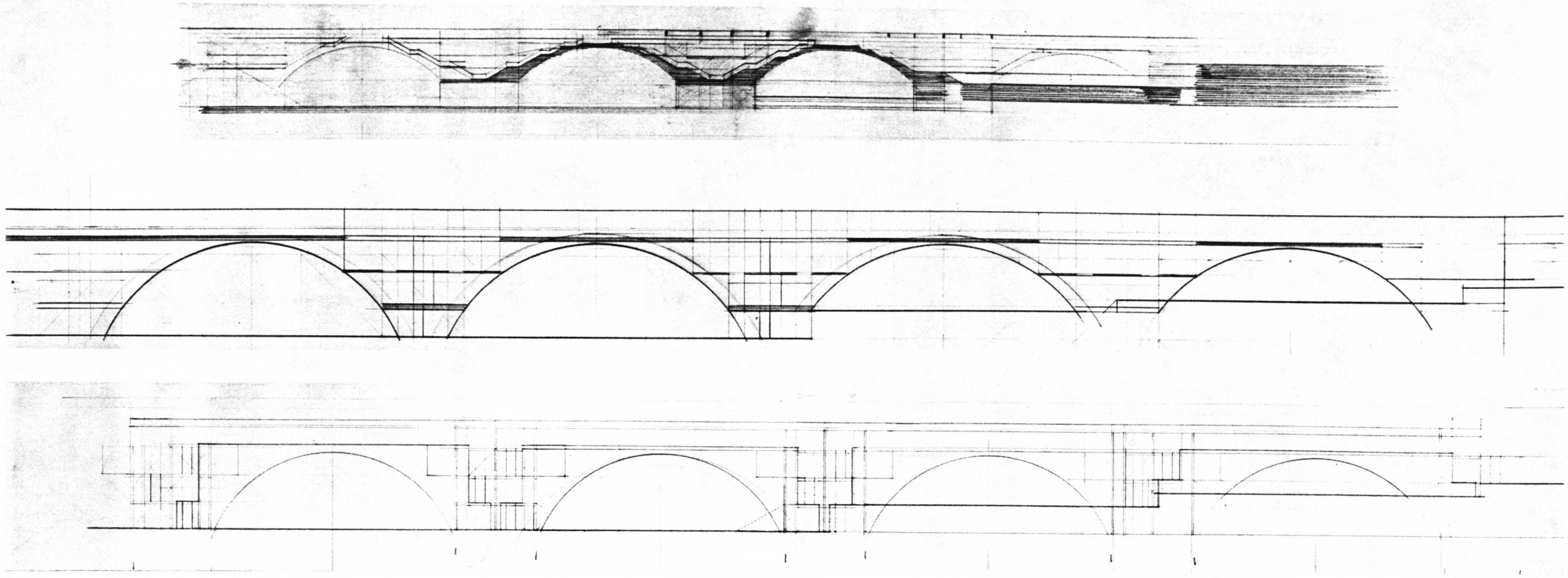




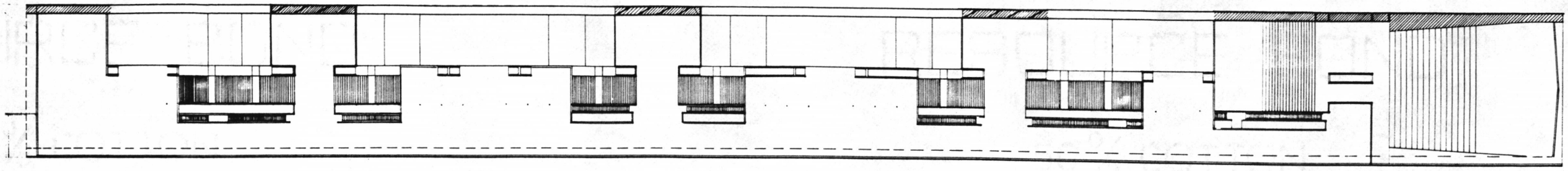

how to distill in the poetry of
modern times.
5/28/85



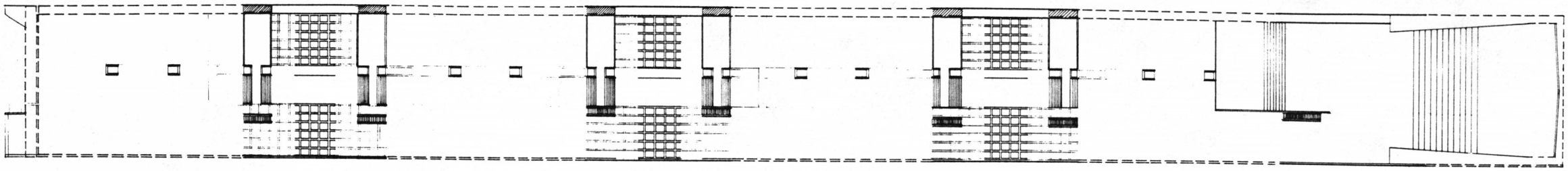

5/28/85



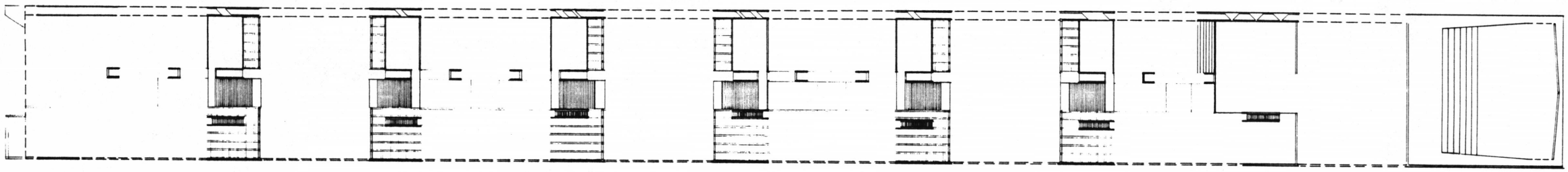
4/4/86



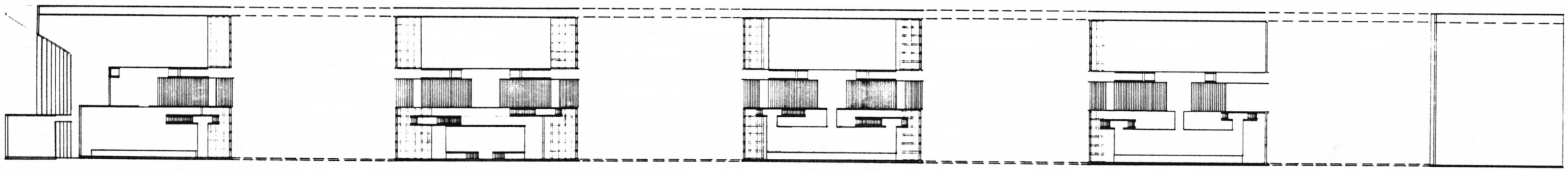
Level 5-Concourse, Ticket Counter, Restaurant, School



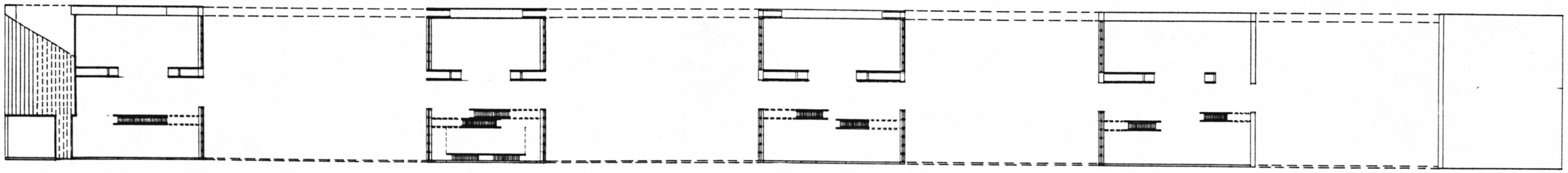
Level 4-Offices and Pilots Lounges



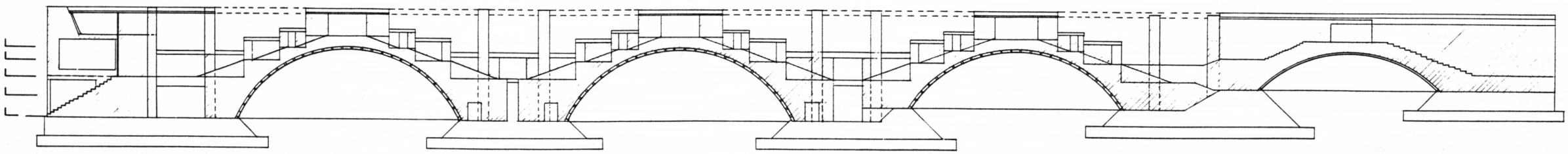
Level 3-Small Conference Rooms

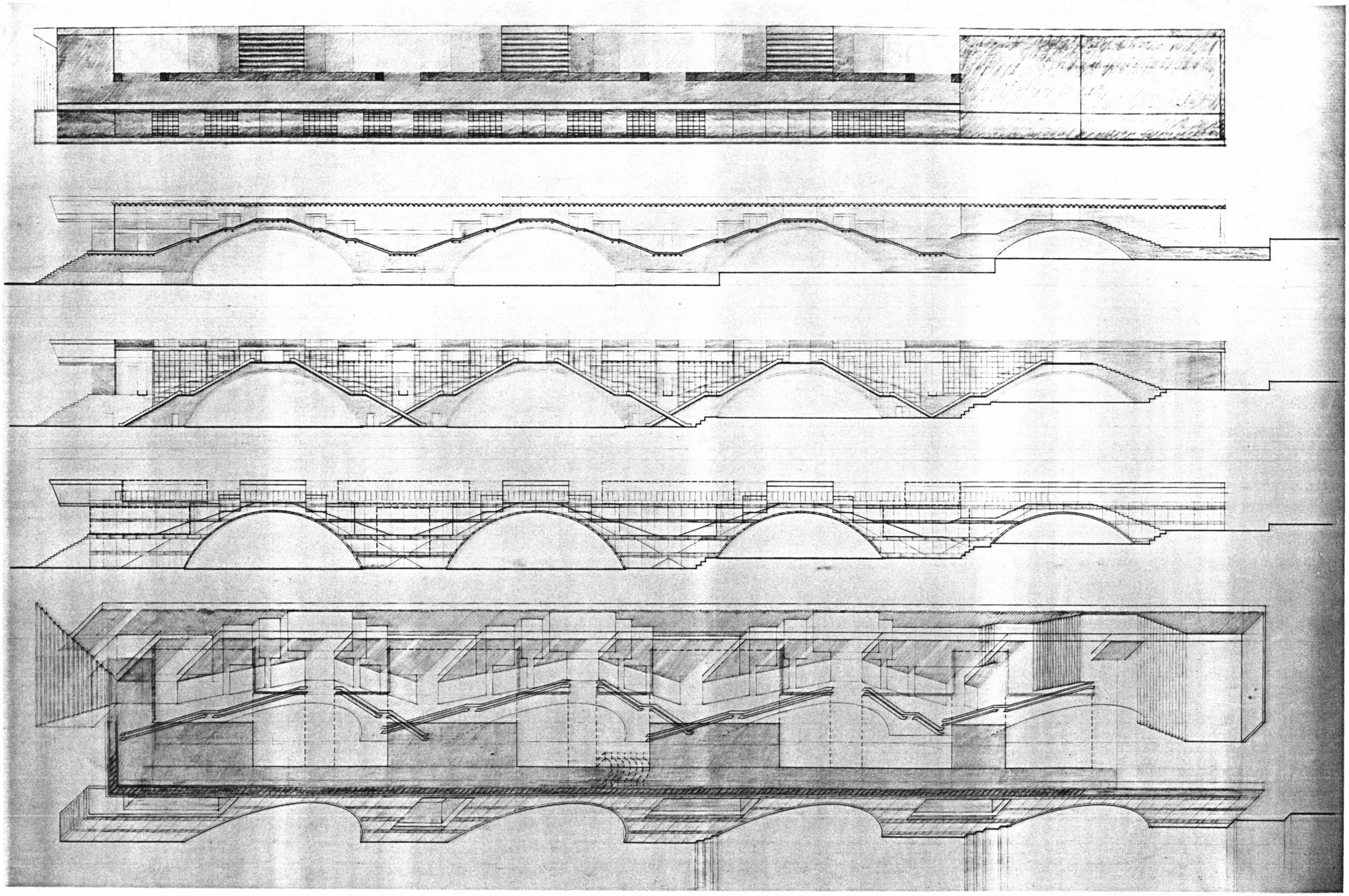


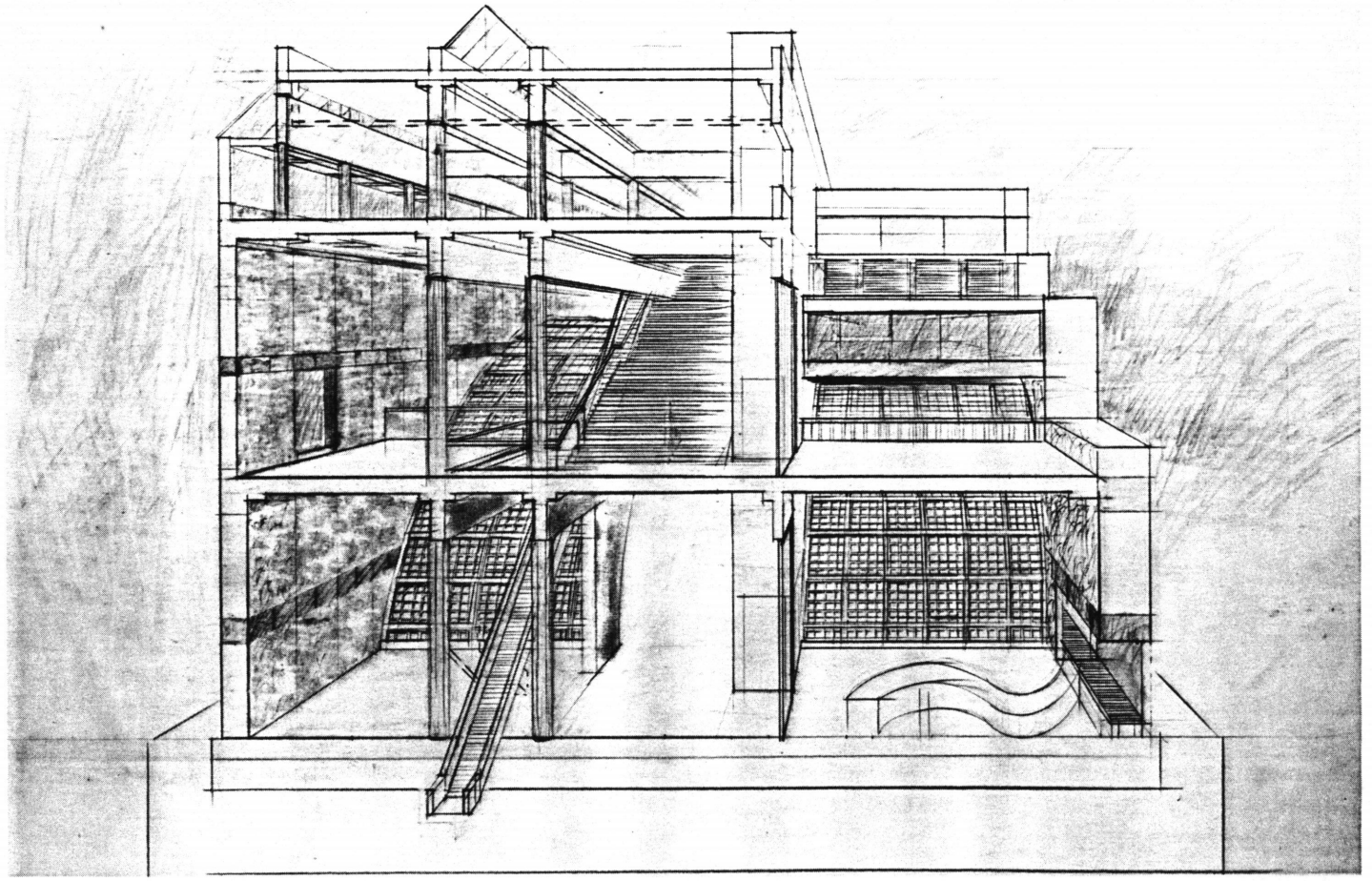
Level 2-Large Conference Rooms

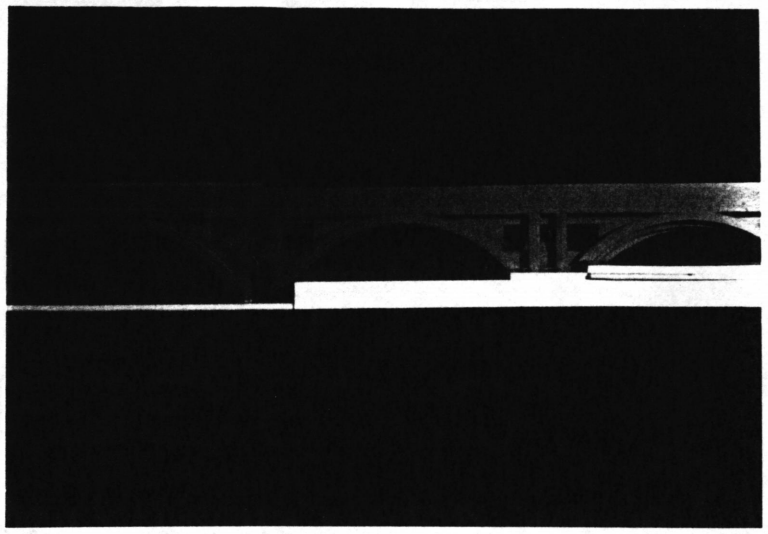


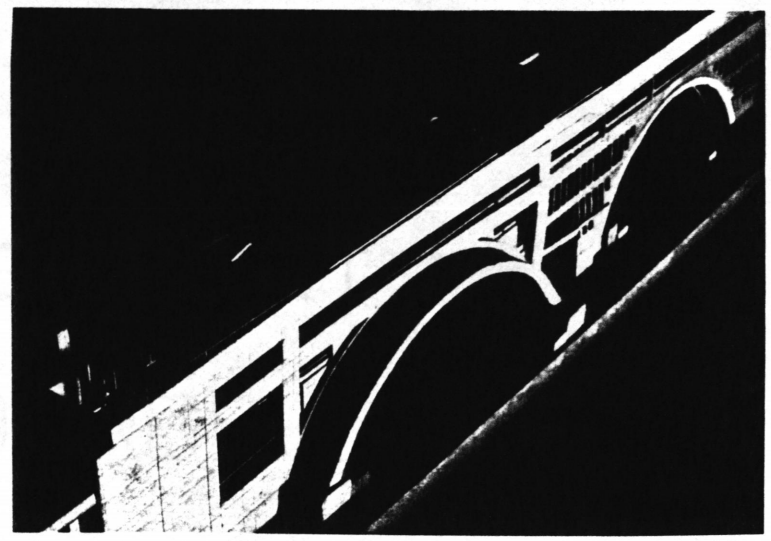
Ground Level-Baggage and Plane Rooms

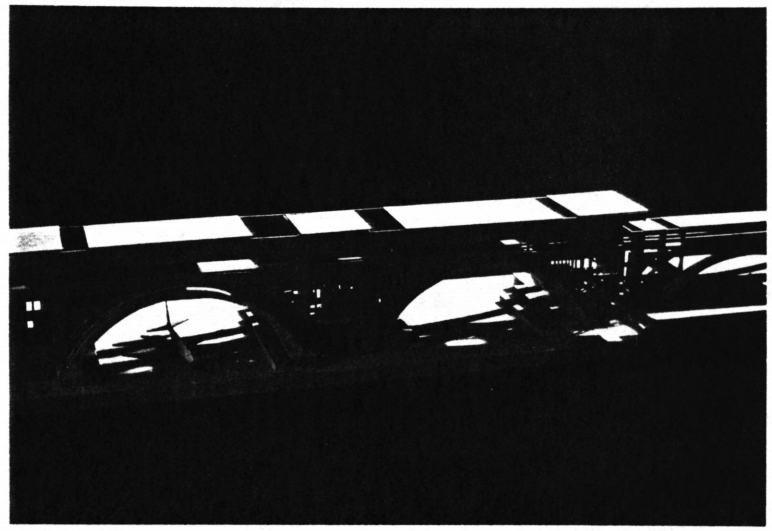


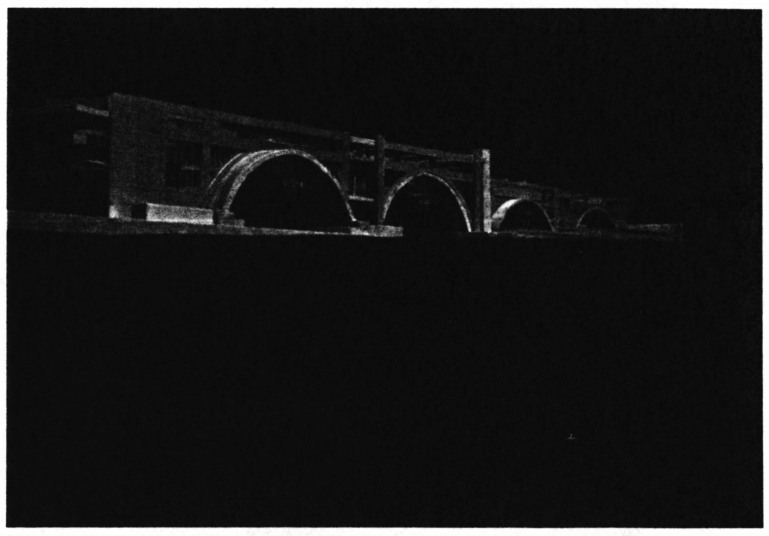


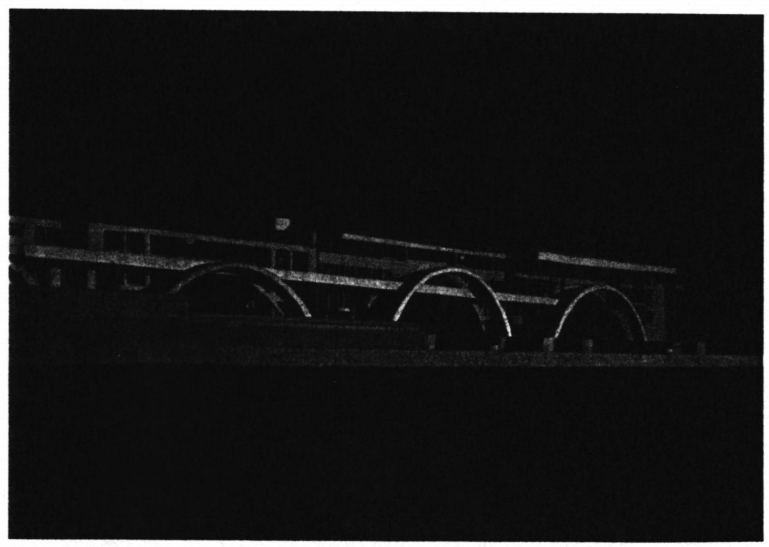


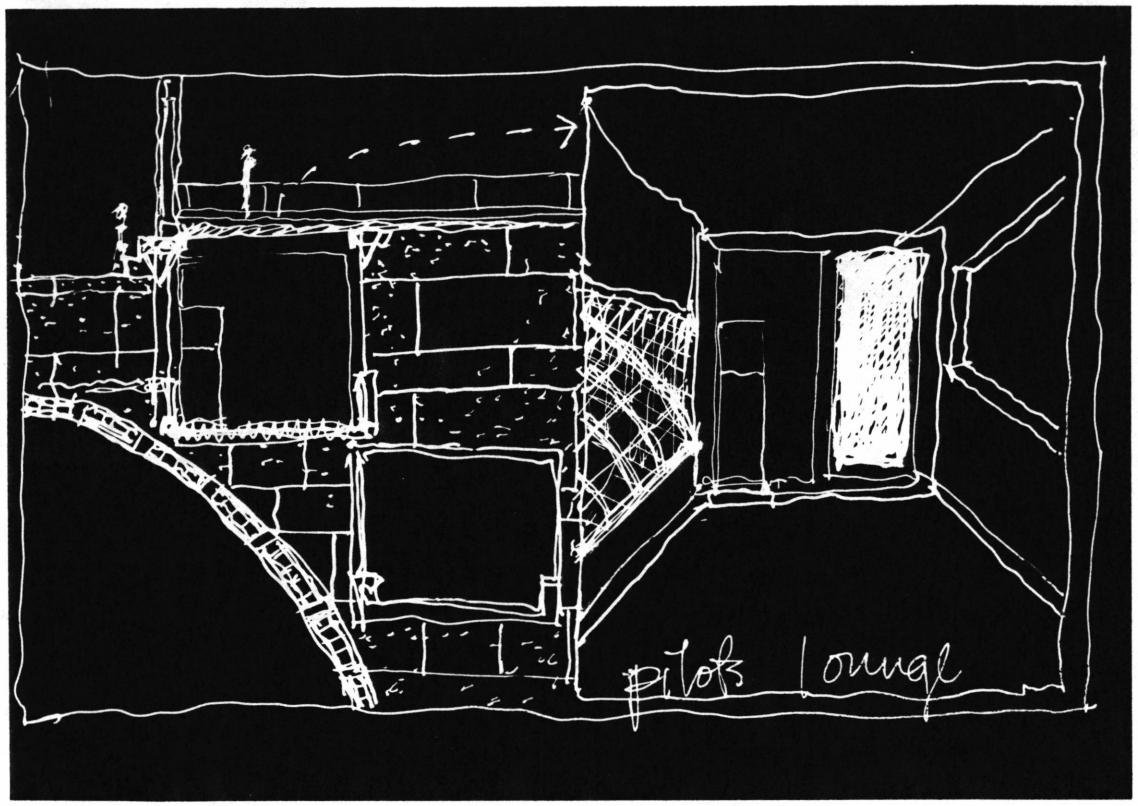


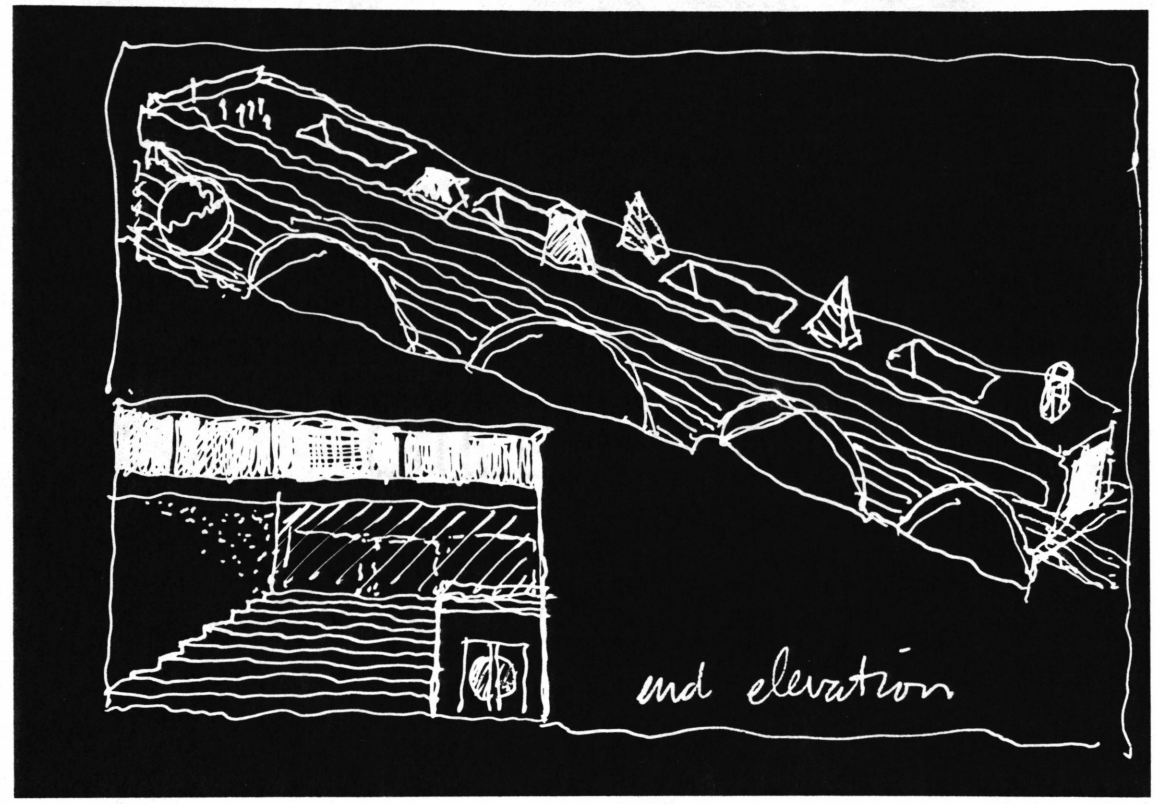


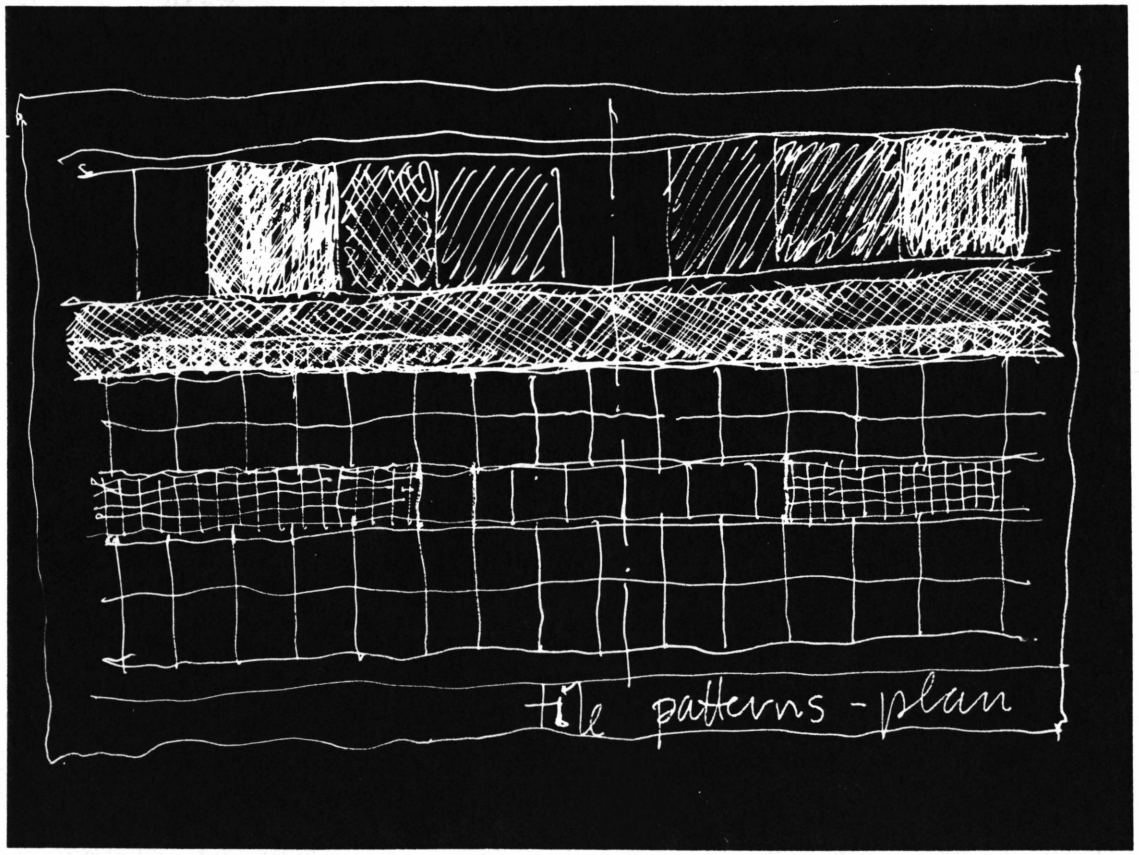


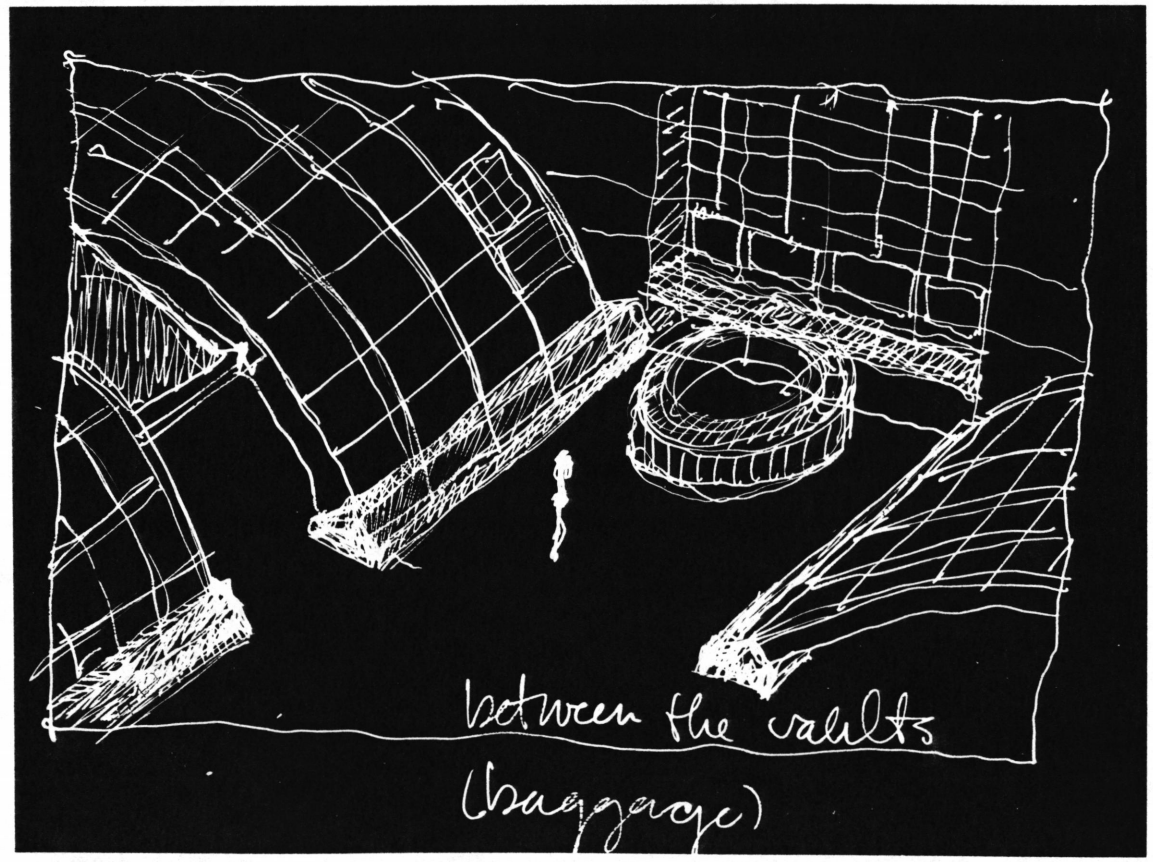


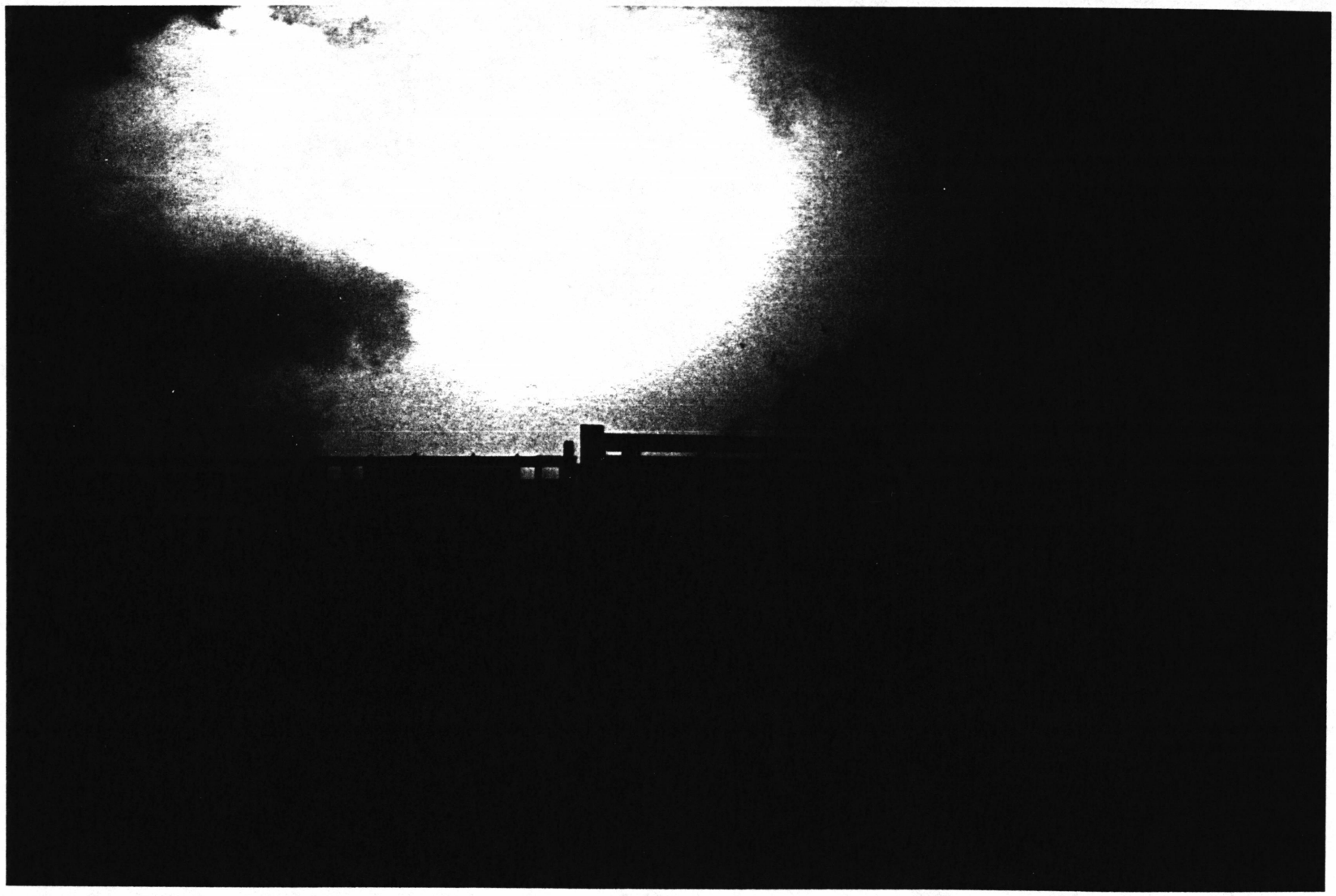



pilots lounge


end elevation


tile patterns - plan


between the vaults
(baggage)



"America is an arcadian ideal -- a beginning condition. Europe is a utopian ideal -- an end condition."

Emilio Ambaz

"Simplicity will never reveal the effort it required."

W. Somerset Maughm

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