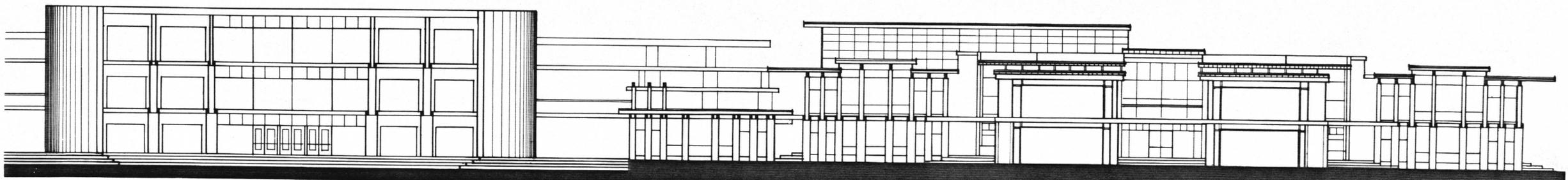


A P L A C E C A L L E D S C H O O L



A P L A C E C A L L E D S C H O O L

Carolyn Nancy Conrad

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

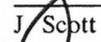
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

Approved:


Hans C. Rott, Chairman


William W. Brown


J. Scott Poole

Blacksburg, Virginia

November 1990

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

■ To Tom, for always standing by me.

■ Special thanks to my committee and my friends and classmates,
all of whom have helped me to see things in a new light.

Most of all, I would like to thank my parents who made this possible.

A B S T R A C T

■ The thesis is an exploration of architectural ideas. An exploration which is still ongoing. It is learning how the ideas are realized in terms of materiality and structure. It is how the ideas become the structural, visual language of the building.

The thesis is also the study of the institution of school. It is how the school, through it's architecture, becomes a place. A place to provide inspiration.

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"Joy is the key word in our work. If you don't feel joy in what you are doing, then you're not really alive."

L. Kahn

architecture

■ To be driven as an architect, one needs a position to work by and on which to experiment. The thesis project serves, to a large extent, as the vehicle of this position.

At the present point in time architecture for me is a structural, visual language. It is the coming together of architectural forms expressing beauty and integrity, being true to its materials and in agreement with its environment.

At the beginning lies the inspiration, the origin of an idea. Architecture can be seen as the celebration of an idea, an idea realized in terms of materiality and structure. Once the architectural idea becomes form, it then must be dealt with in the realm of form. The form must become the building.

My strongest position lies with the recognition of the building as being a thing; the building as being something "real". A beautiful building is one where the parts themselves are seen clearly and does not pretend to be something it is not. Materials are fully revealed for what they are or are not. It is well constructed with clear lines. It is straightforward. It is not contrived. It is a building at peace with itself.

A building with the quality of realness makes us more aware of our own presence. We know it is there, we know what it will be when we go back. It is not only visual, but involves our other senses as well. It should also be a place in which there is something new to discover; a building that is different at various times of the day; a building that accommodates many moods.

When referring to the building as a thing, it could also be thought of as the mute form. I want to enjoy a built form for what it is and not what it represents, or not what I am told it is supposed to represent. A building doesn't need an architect standing by giving it applied meaning. We need to distinguish between the qualities of a building and what the building is supposed to communicate, if anything at all. What the building should say is, "I belong to this place and I am proud to be here." A well crafted, ordered building will say this.

One can see in Louis Kahn's work some of the few buildings that do not need to be explained in order to reveal themselves. They stand proud and have a presence. It is ironic that Louis Kahn was also one of the few

architects who could talk about his work. We can fully enjoy his buildings through visual senses as well as enjoy them poetically. It is rare that an architect can so beautifully write about his work, therefore, rather than trying to poetically explain our work, why don't we concentrate our energies on making the most beautiful places we can?

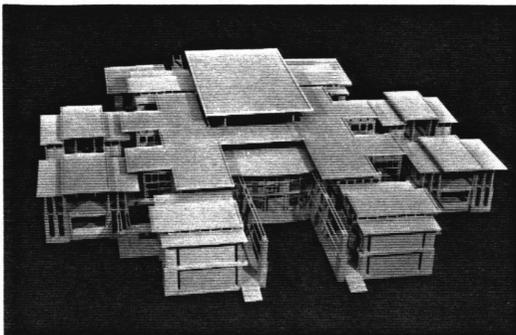
As part of our path of design, we often resort to the use of a metaphor to explain our project. The use of a metaphor is fine to start with in one's own mind, but does not necessarily need to be expressed. It can be a personal way in which to relate to one's design project. The metaphor may be useful in understanding our position and what we want to develop, but the inspiration for a project can only take us so far. At the point where we have a building we then need to deal with the building itself. The inspiration may help determine decisions, but the building needs to stand alone.

The problem with the public use of metaphor and applied meaning is that the metaphor fails to serve as the sole mediator to the building. Once established, a building can be experienced differently by each individual who comes in contact with it. Our perceptions as architects will never be the only ones.

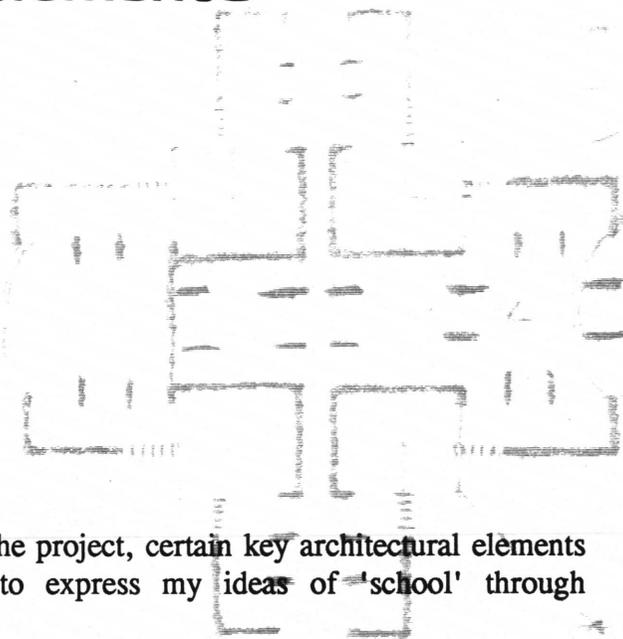
But beyond having a building trying to 'communicate' with us, a work of architecture can be a means of making our world more 'meaningful'. A building having presence and a character of its own; a building which lets you feel a sense of belonging; the beautiful building which finds order through the relationship of its parts. This order is meaningful.

There is also beauty in order based upon the sequential nature of experience. Each person who goes through the building can find importance, without the use of symbolic messages. A building has the potential to uncover meanings of an environment that would have never been known. It can bring order to a site and make that site a place. It can bring out that site's potential, not by ignoring the site, but having respect for the site and working with it.

Architecture is wonderful in that sometimes the unnecessary can be beautiful and provide such opportunity. Or sometimes an accident in design can be very special. I have found in designing that some of the best places just come to be.



elements

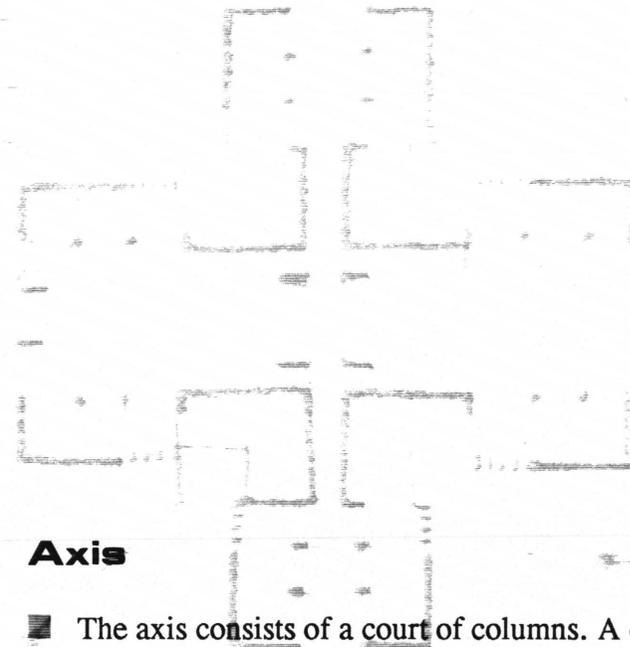


■ Through the design of the project, certain key architectural elements provided the opportunity to express my ideas of 'school' through architectural forms.

The elements relate to the school in that they provide spaces which give both students and teachers places that make a school special. A place in which through 'school' we can learn about architecture.

The architecture and ideas always came first in the design of this project - with the school itself being the formulation of the ideas. The inspiration for the work lies within the elements of architecture. How the elements, geometry, structure, materiality, and a strong sense of an inside/outside relationship all interact to constitute a whole, is the basis for the project and the beginning of an architectural study.

The elements themselves are timeless - being formed by the column, the beam and the wall. It is in this project that the elements which I studied came together to make a place called school.



Axis

■ The axis consists of a court of columns. A colonnade. An organization of structural forms. It is structure that organizes our experience as it leads us through the building. The axis serves as the core of the school building and it is from the axis that all other areas of the school connect.

The axis itself makes up a large central 'room'. Of great importance in the realization of school, is the transformation of long, locker lined hallways to a large central 'room' which has places to gather and small unnecessary spaces. These spaces give more to the individual. This central axis, its relationship to the classrooms and the way it links with the library, make up the heart of the school.

Corner

■ The corner is where the entire design for the project originated. Through the use of the structural elements of beam and column, a corner is made.

The space which is defined by the corner is formed by the meeting of two classrooms. Each classroom shares in this connection to the outside and the adjoining multi-purpose room. The corner serves as a gathering place made by the architecture.

The corner created by the cantilevered beams reaches out as if to capture a bit more of the site. It creates an inside/outside relationship by defining a place between the two. In this way, it allows the outside to be part of the building. The idea of the corner providing a place to gather was realized in numerous places throughout the building.

Curve

■ The curve as an element leaves the world of columns and beams and enters the realm of wall. It denotes hierarchy as it makes up the central focus of the campus as the library.

The curve begins at the front entrance of the school and is directional as it leads one to the remainder of the campus. In this way, one can walk all the way around the curve. It can be experienced as a whole; the curve is solid and strong and is not interrupted by intersecting walls. It is only penetrated at one point by a connecting walkway carving an opening through the wall thus making an entrance.

The curve again denotes hierarchy as it expresses entrance. This is revealed through the building as the curve of the library wall - made of rough board formed concrete - ripples down through the building marking entrances along the major axis and becoming transparent as it goes.

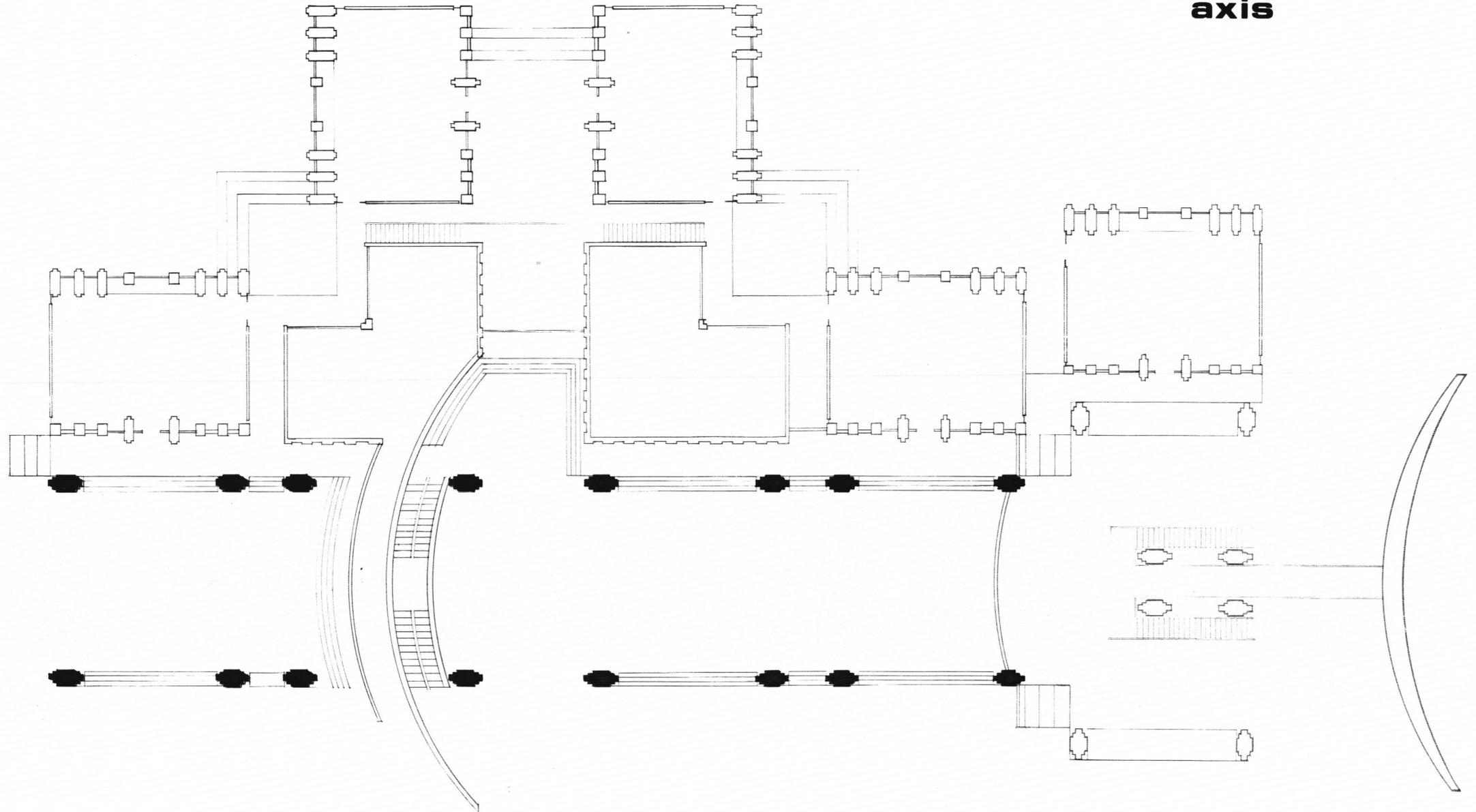
Connection

■ As the other three elements each pertained to specific areas within the building, the idea of connection relates more to an activity which occurs throughout the building.

Connection concerns the coming between; the most important connection being between the beam and the column. The connection serves as an intermediary that unites the beam of wood together with the column of concrete. It allows them to belong to one another rather than merely sit on top of each other. The beam and column can structurally be in harmony as the connection allows the beam to move. The actual structural design revealing itself, comes through as ornament for the building.

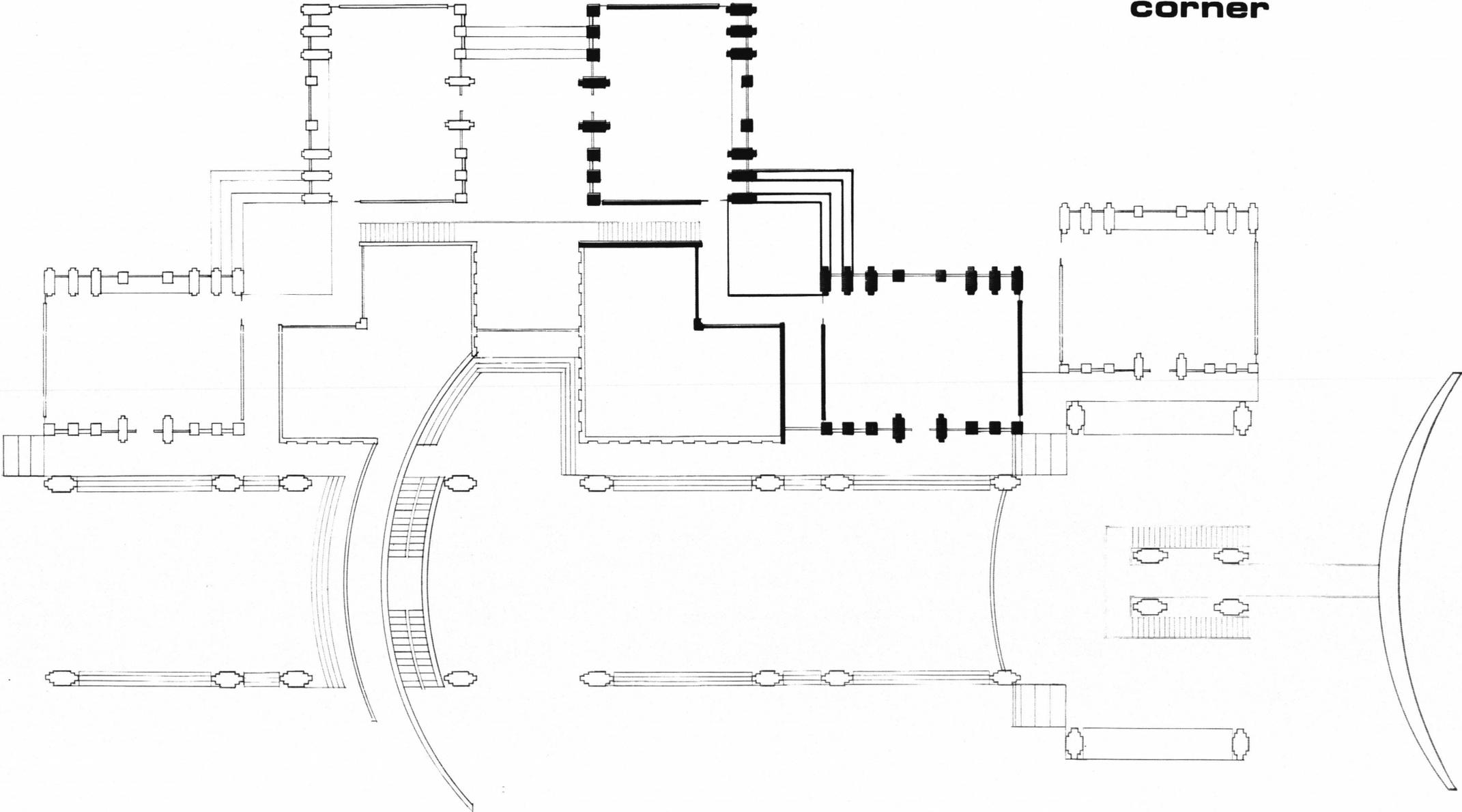
A second important connection is the relationship between the interior and the exterior. Something special happens at each connection between the inside and the outside. At the area of the building between the classrooms and the library both of these connections are evident along with the connection between the first and second floors. The idea of connection, whether it be between materials or spaces, is celebrated in many ways throughout the building.

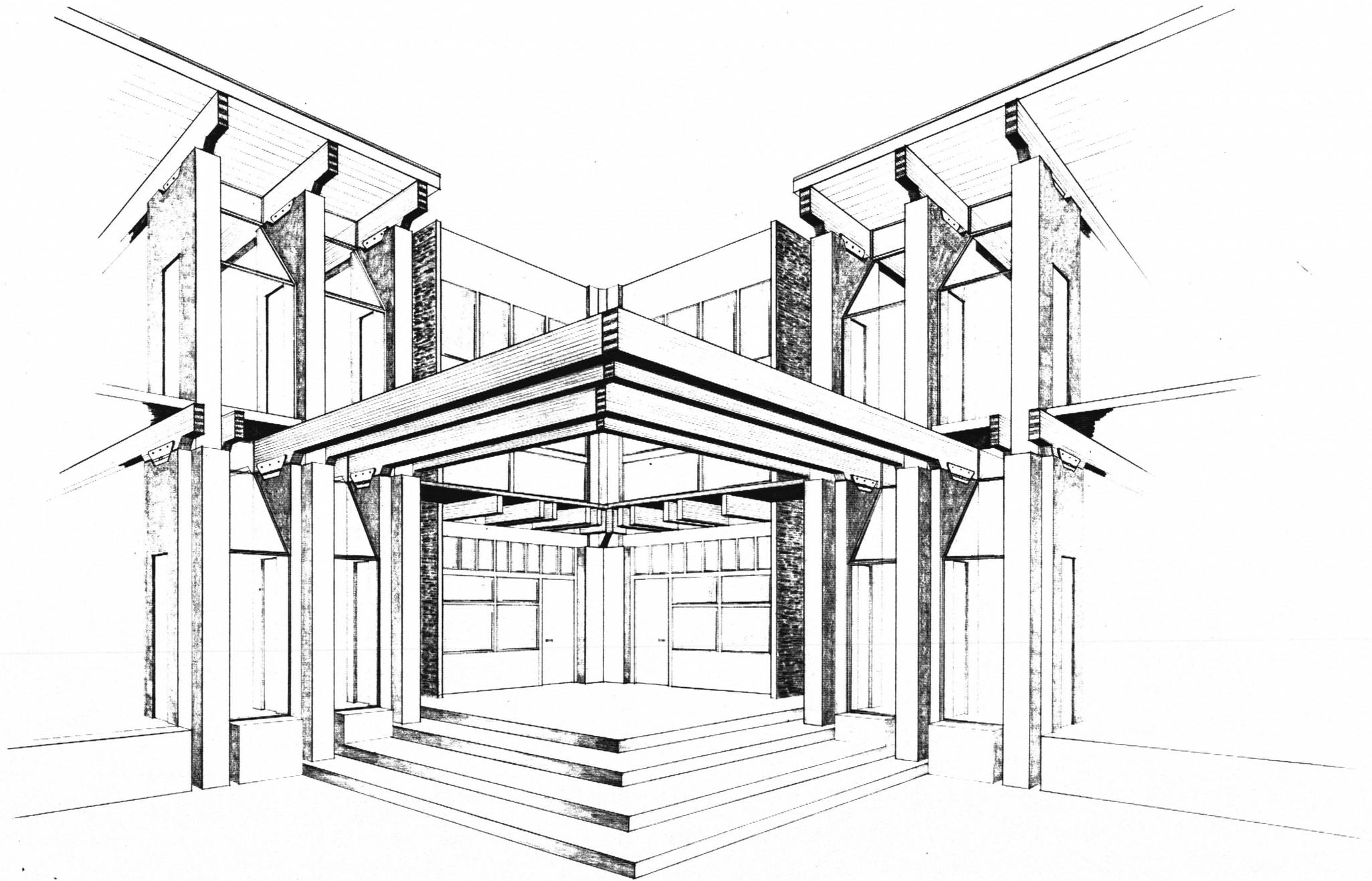
axis



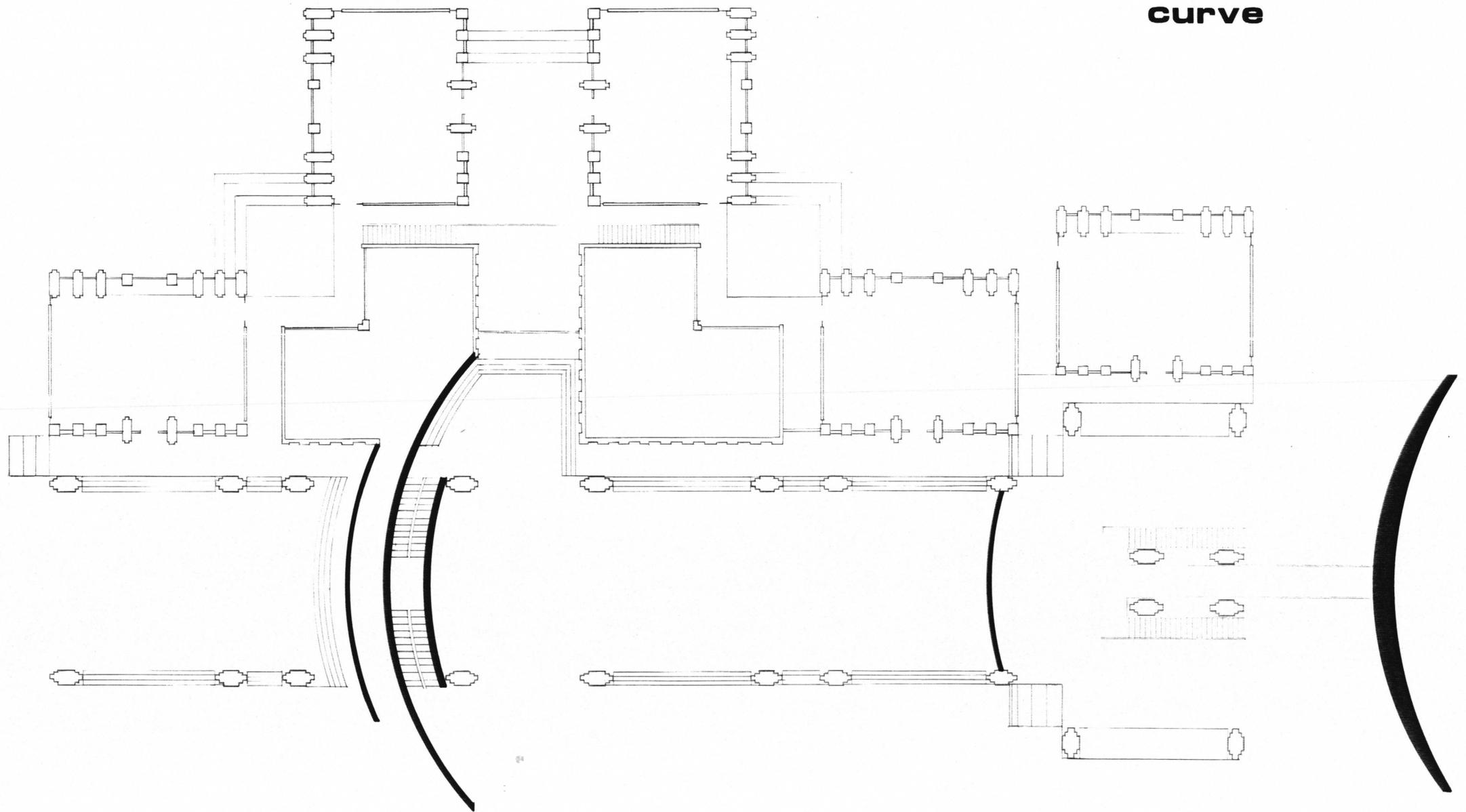


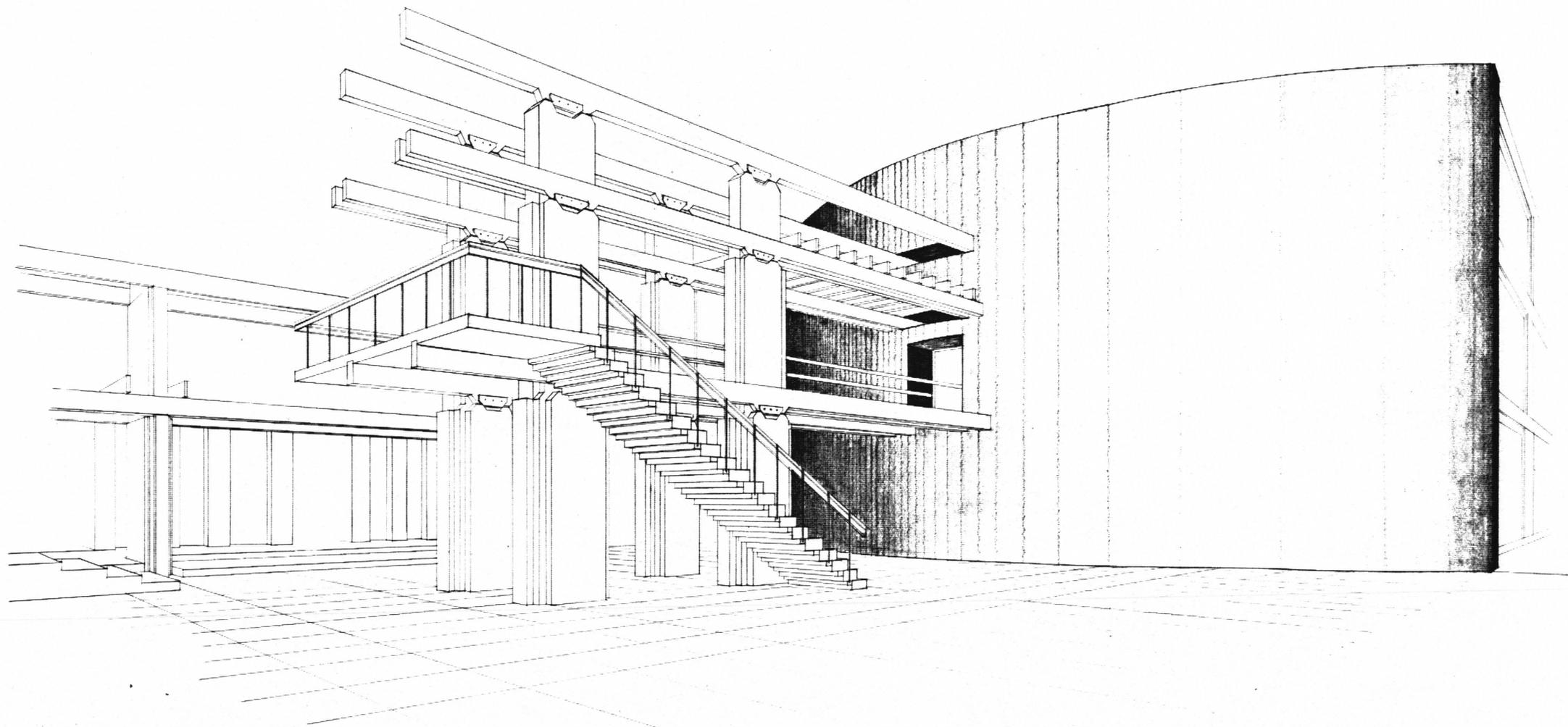
corner



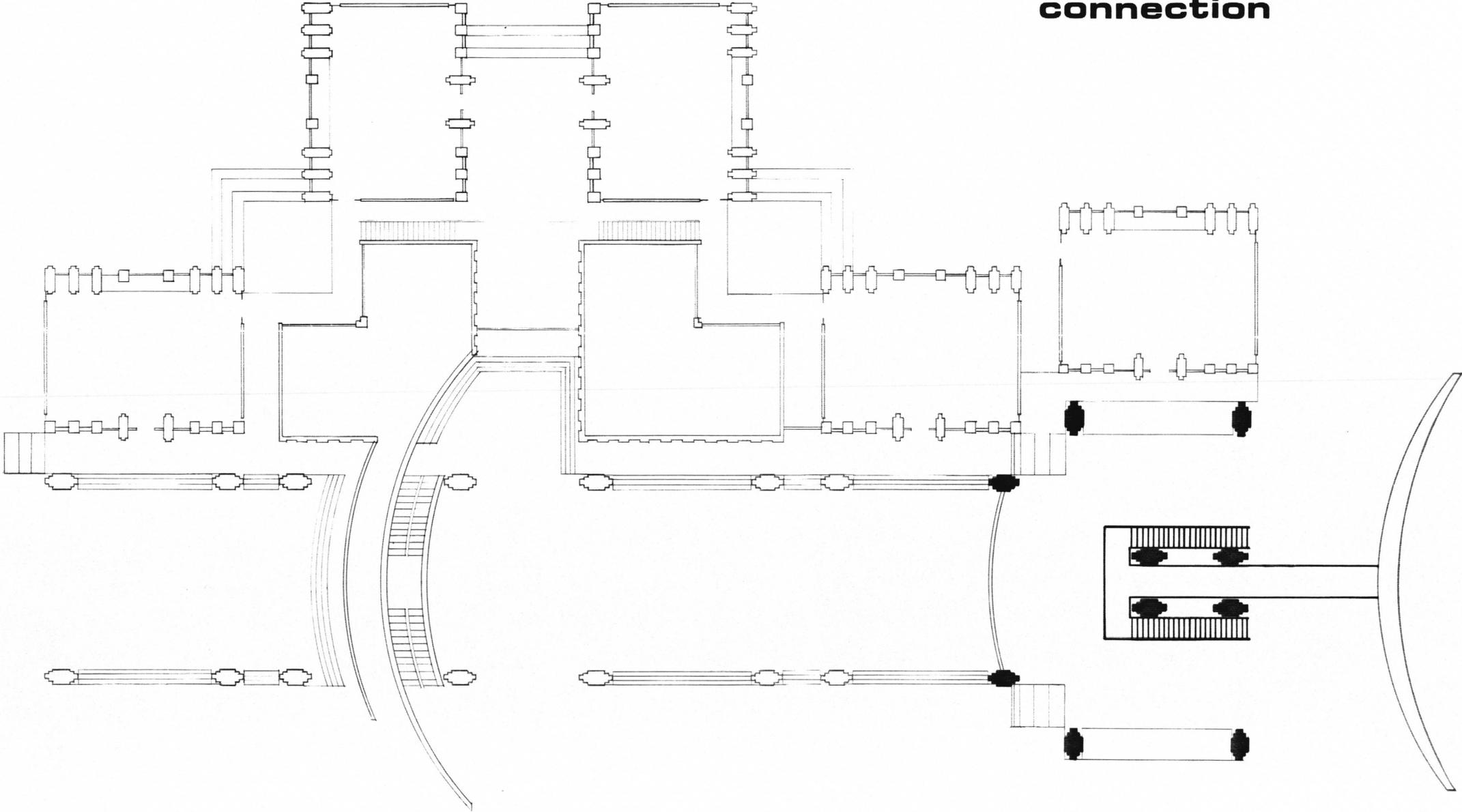


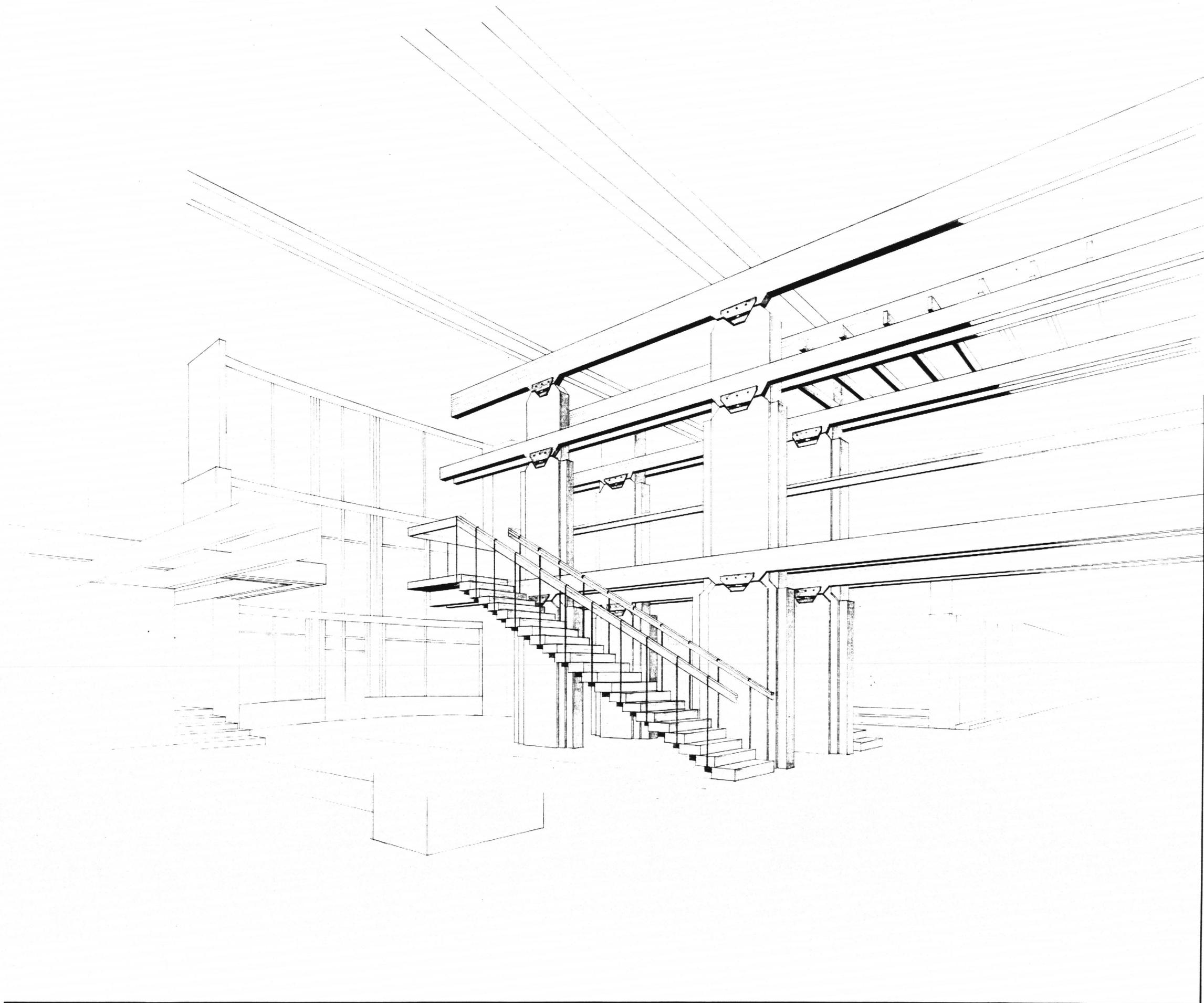
curve

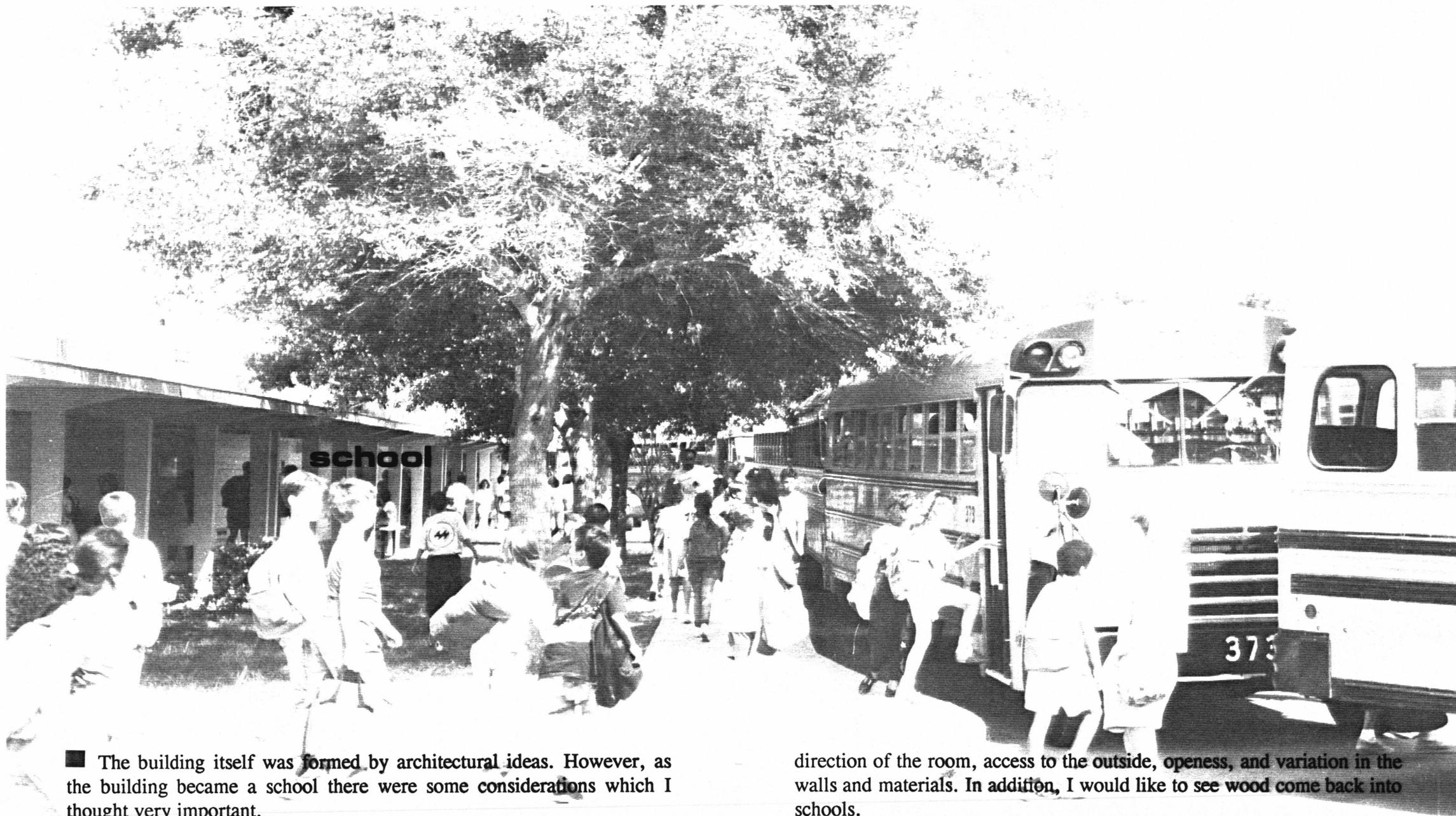




connection







■ The building itself was formed by architectural ideas. However, as the building became a school there were some considerations which I thought very important.

My approach to school has been a classical approach in that I see the building as something solid, longlasting and structured; something that is not temporary. We can count on buildings of this nature; we count on them to be there and to be stable.

A quality building in terms of design, materials and craftsmanship brings a greater appreciation from the students of the spaces around them. This all leads to a better atmosphere for both the teacher and the student.

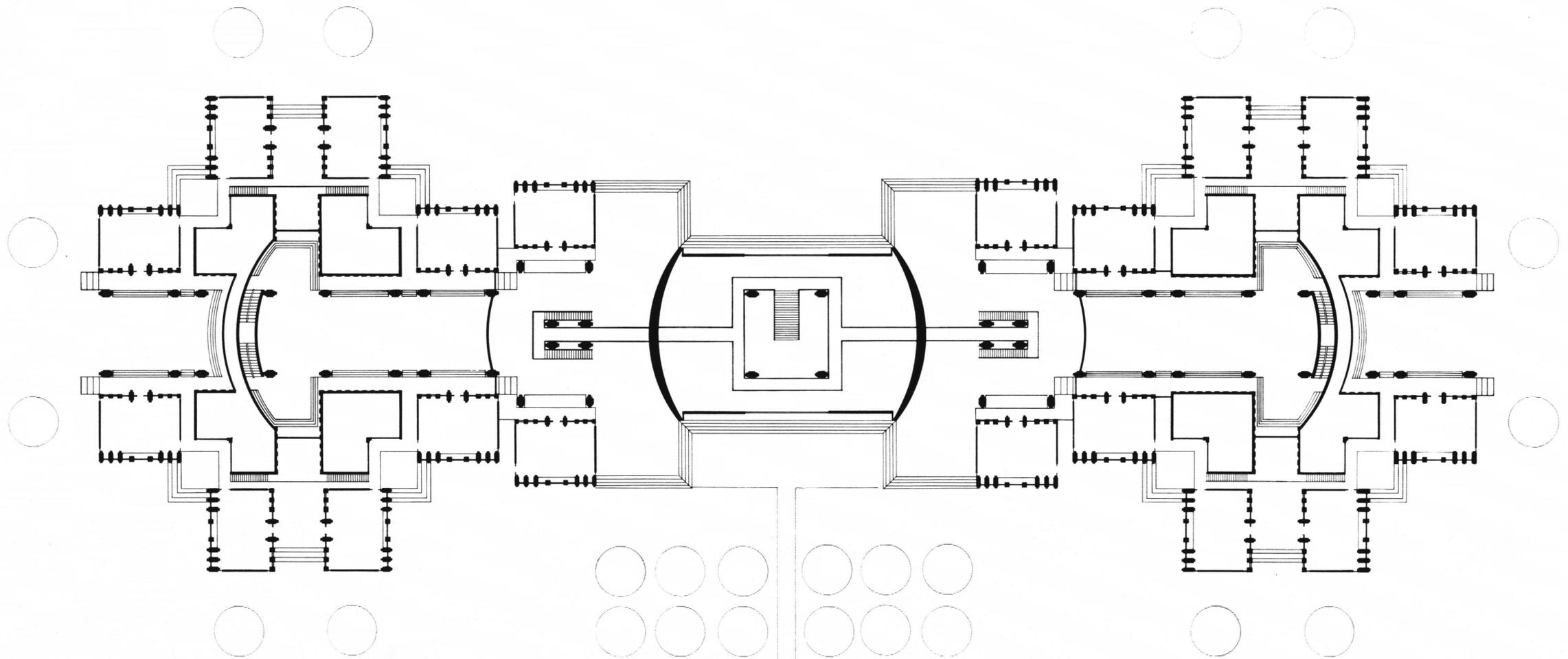
A school should be a place where students want to come. A place where they can learn about themselves, about others and about the world around them. A place that will provide inspiration.

The place of inspiration is in the classroom and the following were all important parts of the design of the classroom. These include high ceilings, a controlled amount of natural light, an inside/outside relationship, a work station that looks to the outside, flexibility, being able to change the

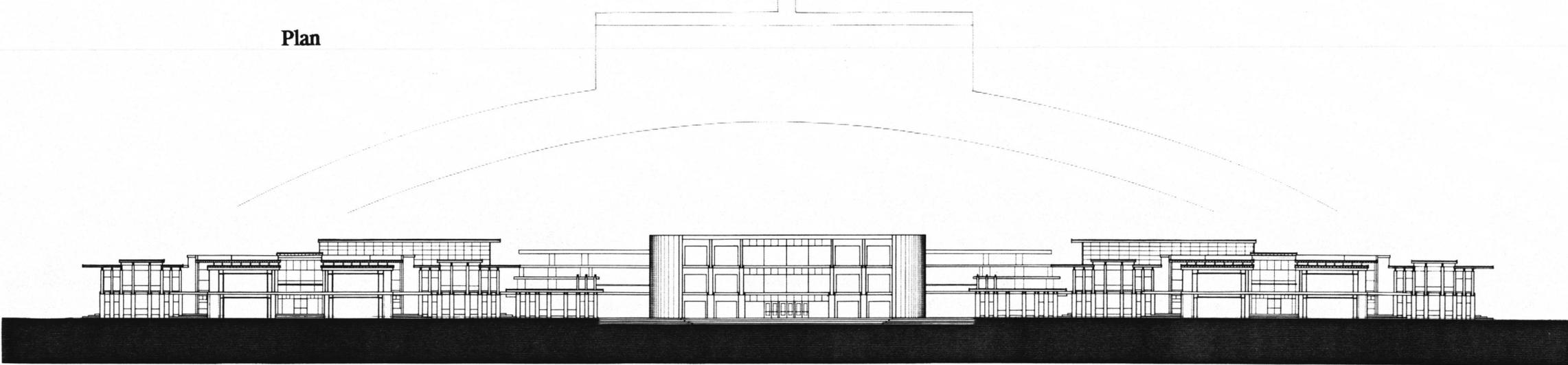
direction of the room, access to the outside, openness, and variation in the walls and materials. In addition, I would like to see wood come back into schools.

The basic structural approach to the building allowed for different things to happen within the classroom. The breaking down of the wall into piers allowed the light to enter and cast it's shadow. It created small "rooms" between the piers, large enough for a person. On the side opposite the windows, the columns create spaces in between for shelving, storage and mechanical systems. Movement into the classroom is emphasized by larger piers. The materials of wood and coralized concrete stimulate with color and texture.

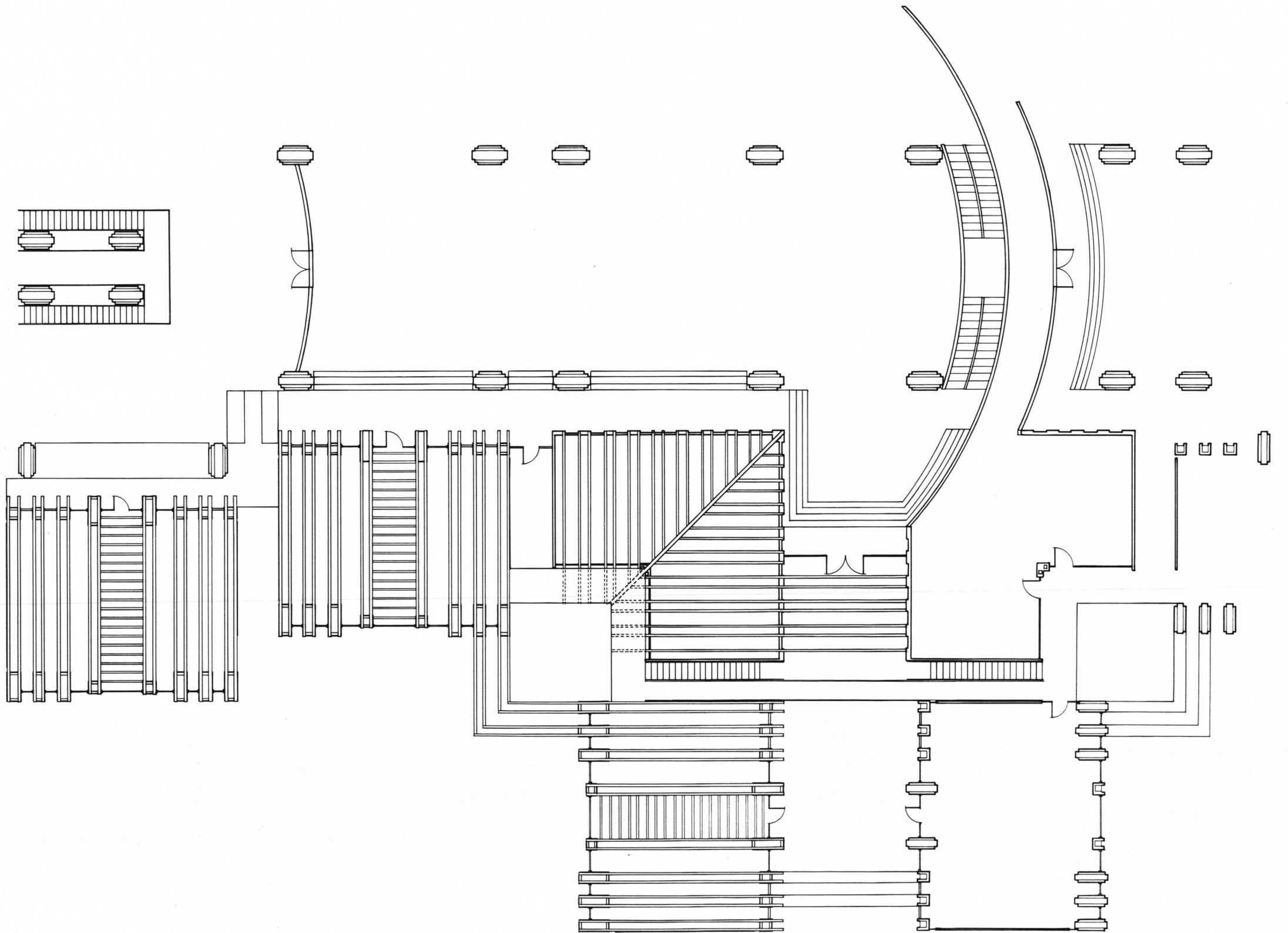
The classroom was the generator of the building; the classrooms relationship to one another formed the school. This is a building which reveals itself. You can experience the structure; you can see the connections; you can experience the change in scale and the strong sense of order. You can learn about a building.

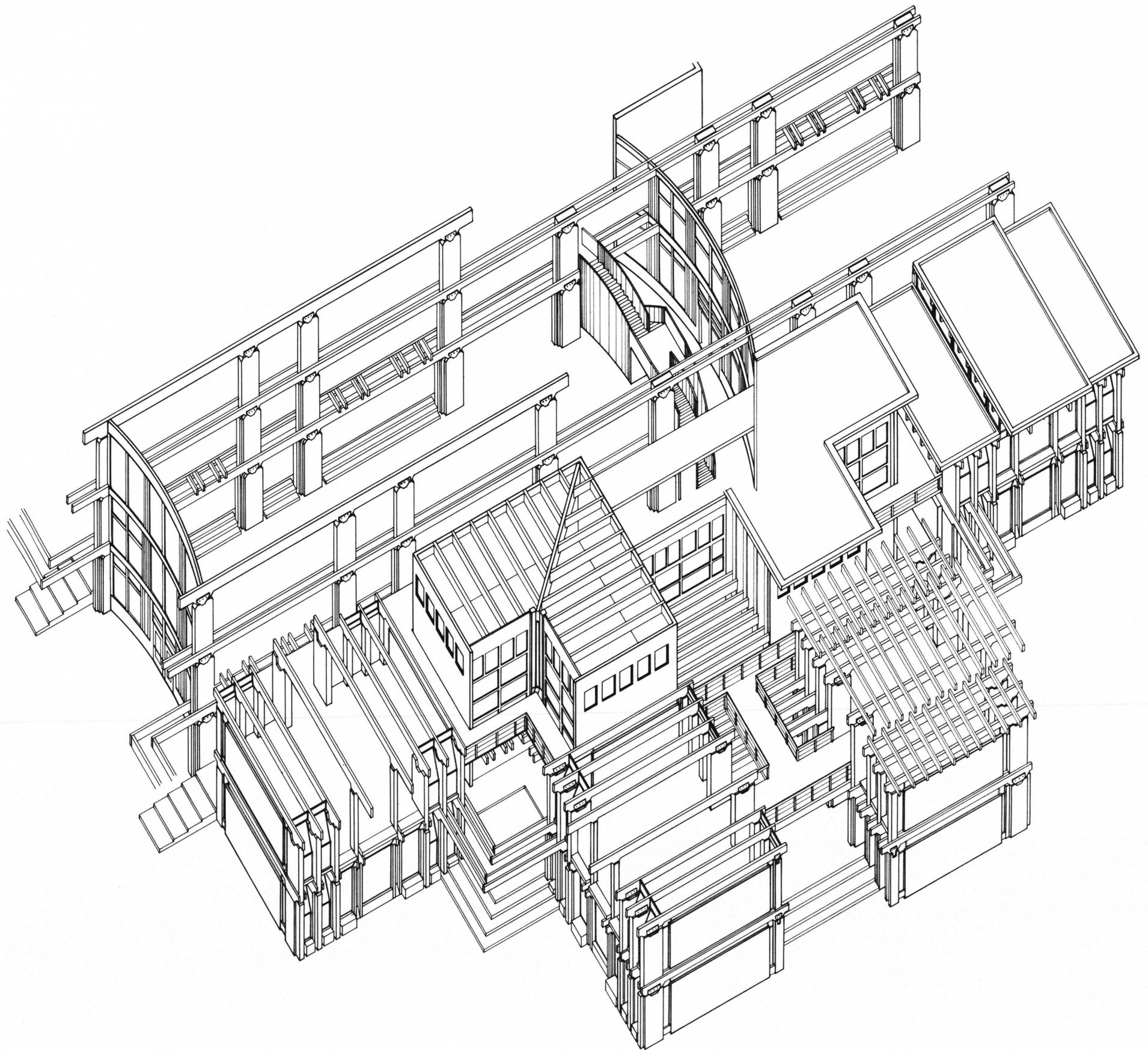


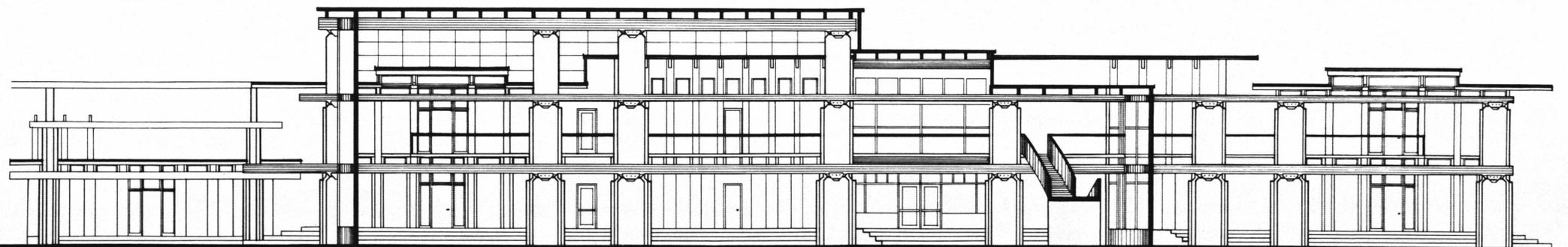
Plan



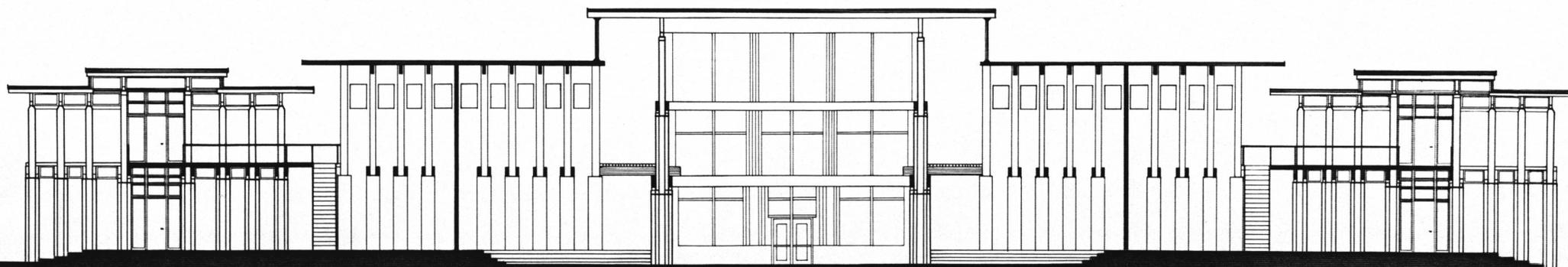
Front Elevation



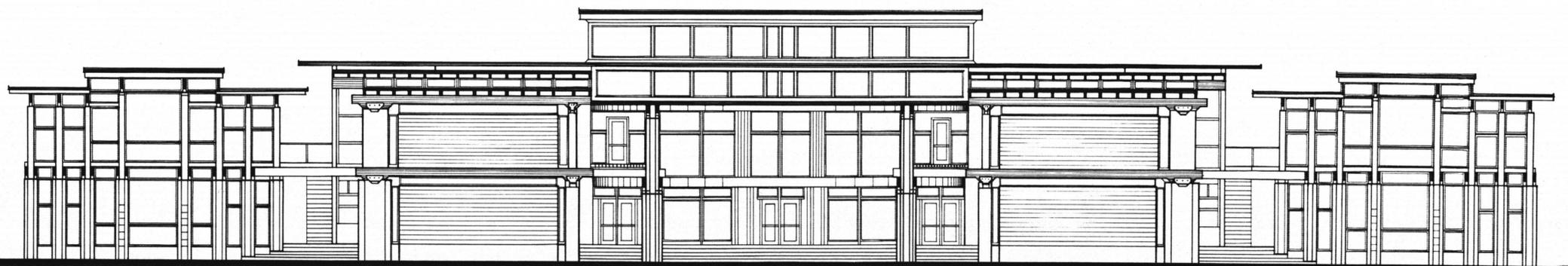




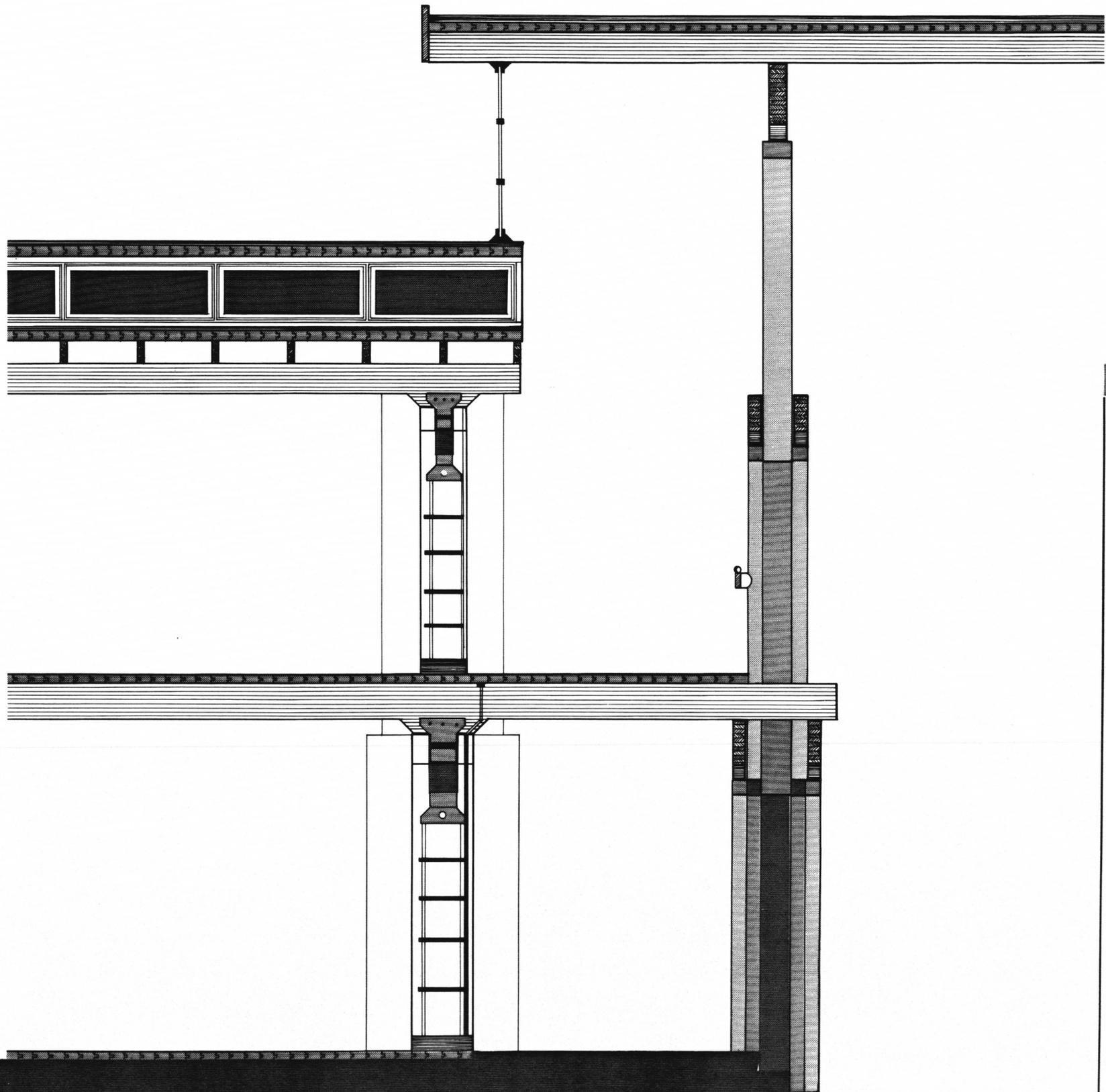
Interior • Major Axis Section



Interior - Minor Axis Section



Exterior - West Elevation



Interior - Section



place

■ The location of the school is in Winter Park, Florida, an older, established community in Central Florida. It is a town built around its many lakes with 100 year old oaks lining its streets. The site for the school is on the perimeter of one of the few remaining orange groves in the area. The 15 acre site is well defined as it is presently a school site.

However, it is not location I refer to when speaking of place. Place in this context refers more to the nature of the built environment rather than the proximity of the site. Place is the coming together of site, architecture, building and school into a totality. Not just a site with a building on it - but a building that turns a somewhat ordinary, flat suburban site into an environment. An environment for learning.

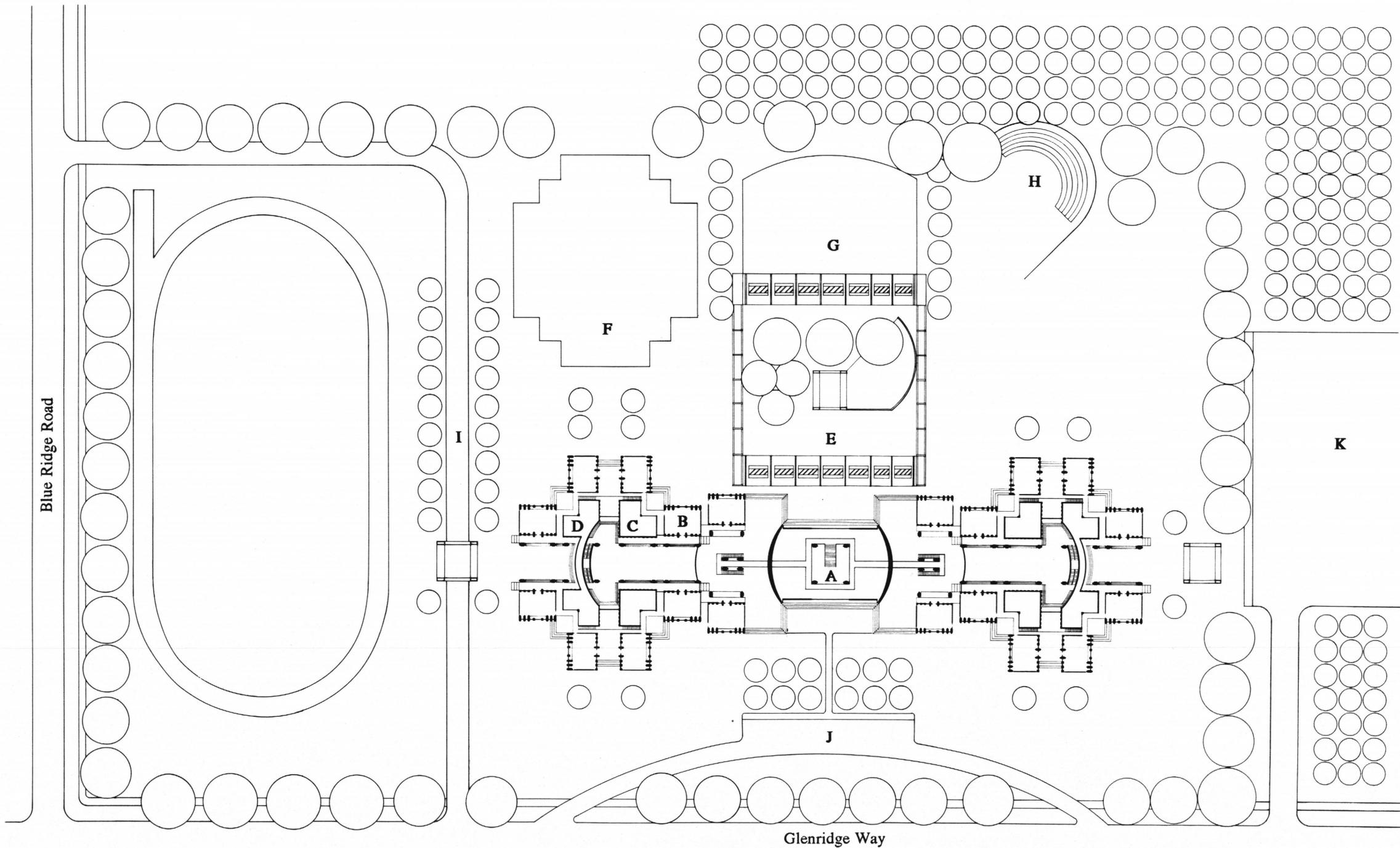
I have tried in this project to bring something special to the location. To bring order to the site so that it will make a lasting impression on those who come here to learn.

There needs to be a balance between the building having its implications on the site and the site having influences on the building. In

the latter respect, the site does bring to the project an initial order with the grove. The value of the grove lies in its regularity, sameness and thus order. The grove itself is meaning. It serves as orientation and identification. Without giving direction, the grove offered an opportunity to recreate an order on this adjacent site. The architecture of the school establishes its own order but remembers the site as there are orange trees planted on the site to maintain that sameness of order.

The order starts on the outside and becomes stronger on the inside as the structure of the building takes over, and materials, forms, textures, and colors, all unite to give the environment a character of its own. Their relationship to each other and to us makes a meaningful place.

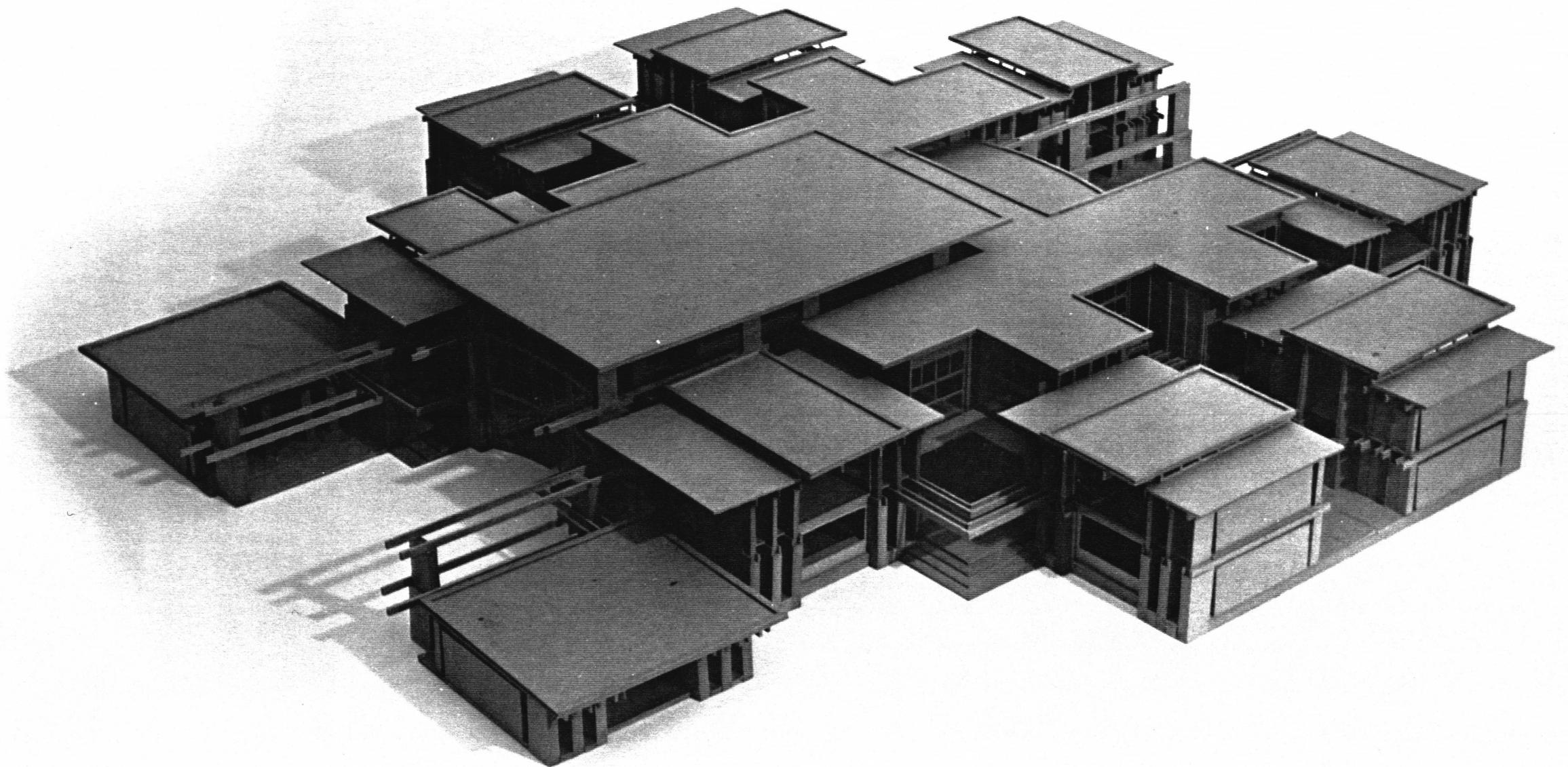
The following section consists mainly of model views. It is through the third dimension of the model that the building became more 'real' and I could better understand the idea of place. The model proved invaluable in the discovery of architectural ideas and together with the drawings the project became a more coherent story.

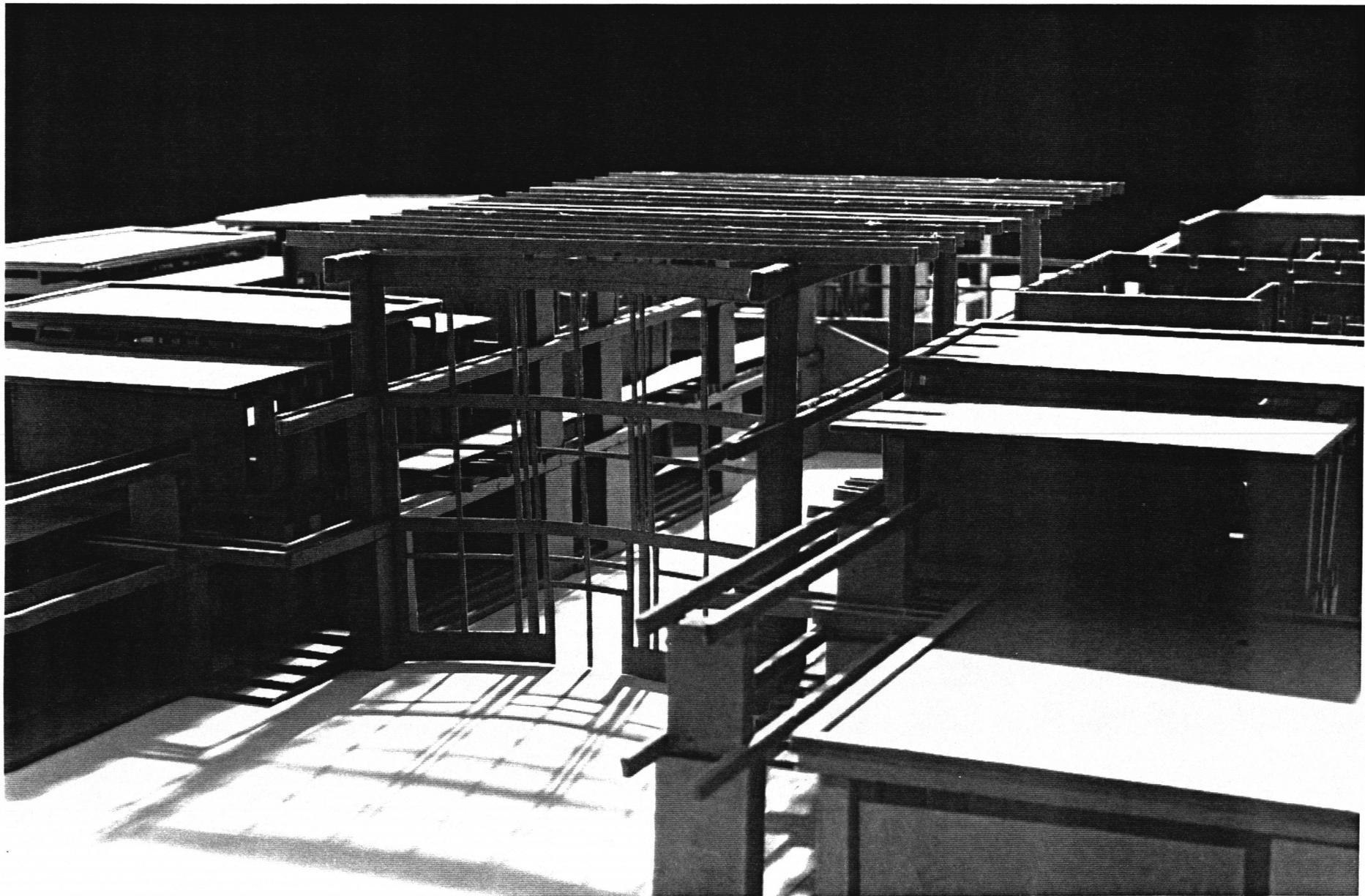


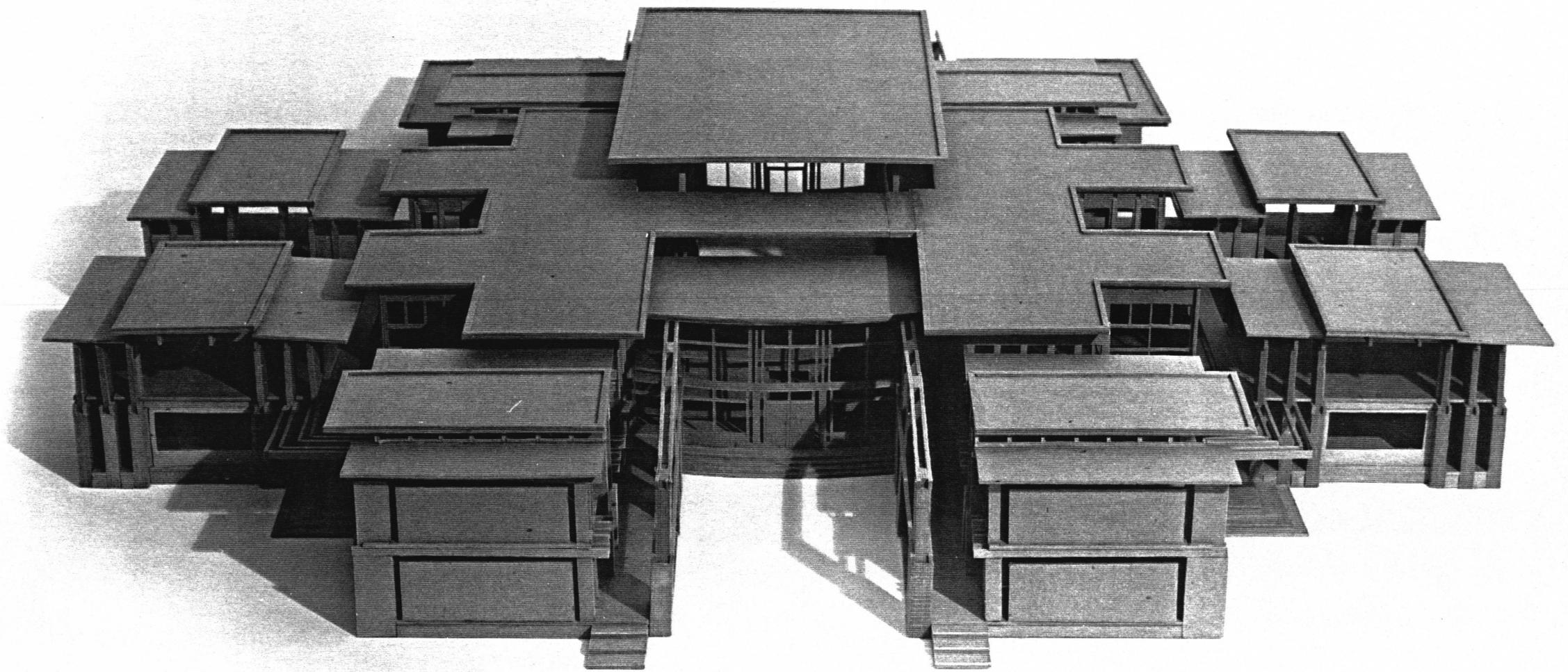
Site Plan Legend

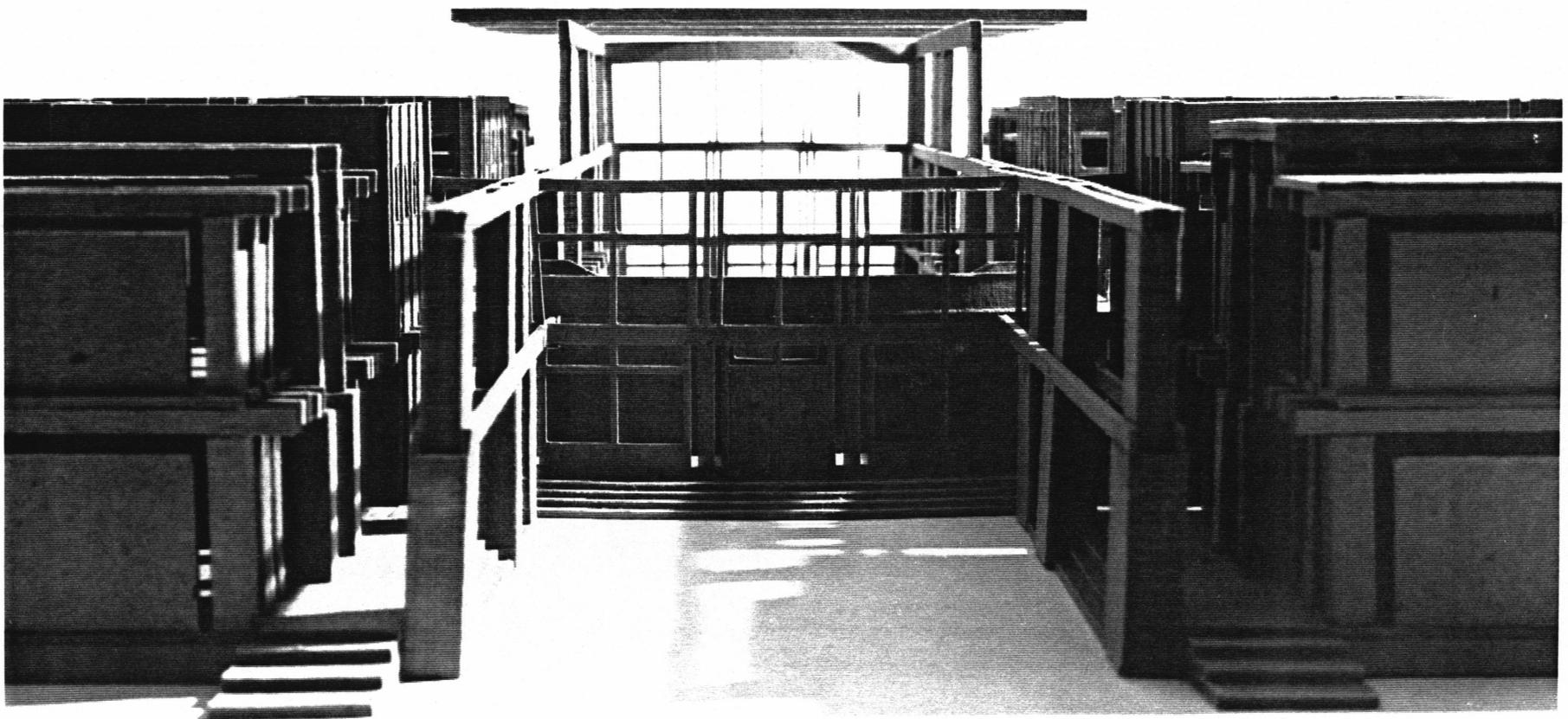
- A. First Floor - Administration
Second & Third Floor - Library
- B. Classroom - Typical
- C. Multi-purpose Room
- D. Student Lockers
- E. Outdoor Plaza

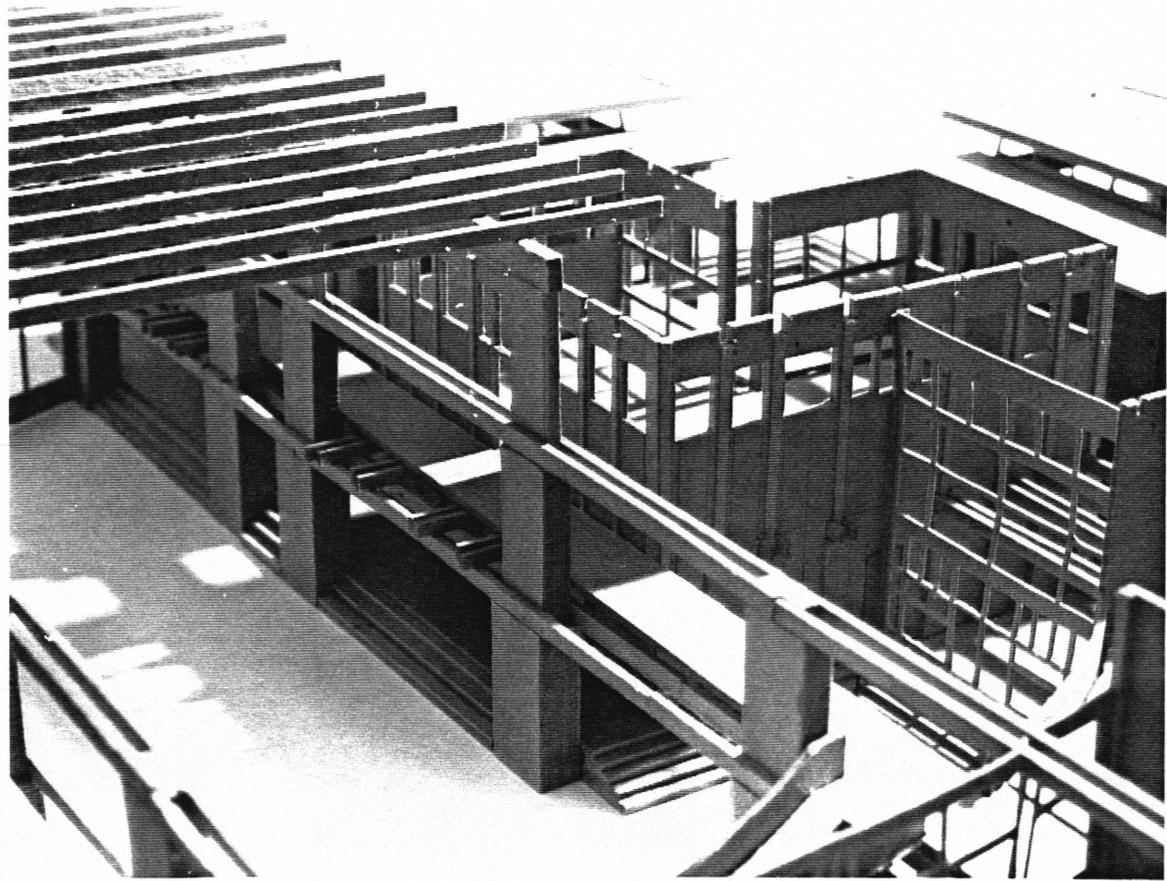
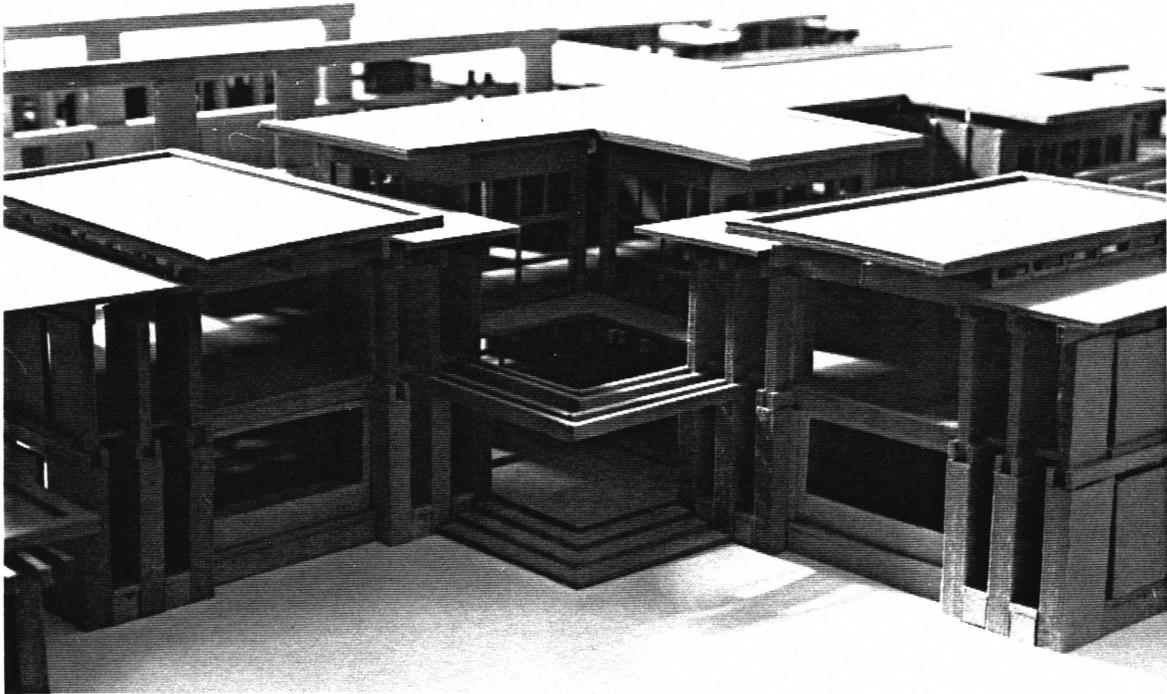
- F. Gymnasium
- G. Cafeteria
- H. Outdoor Amphitheater
- I. School Bus Drive
- J. Visitor Parking
- K. Faculty Parking

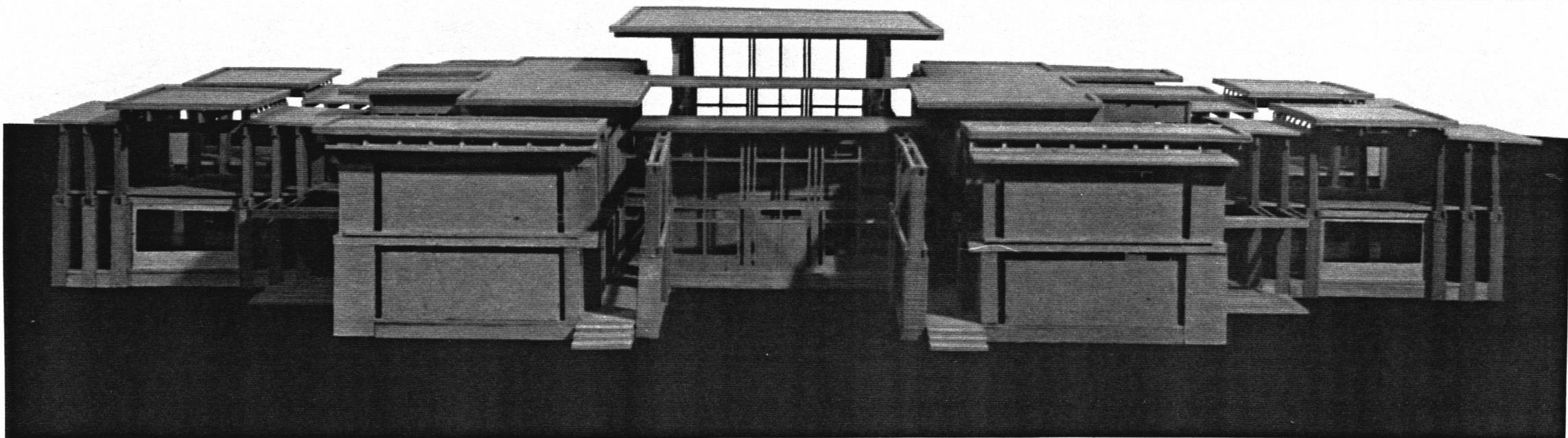
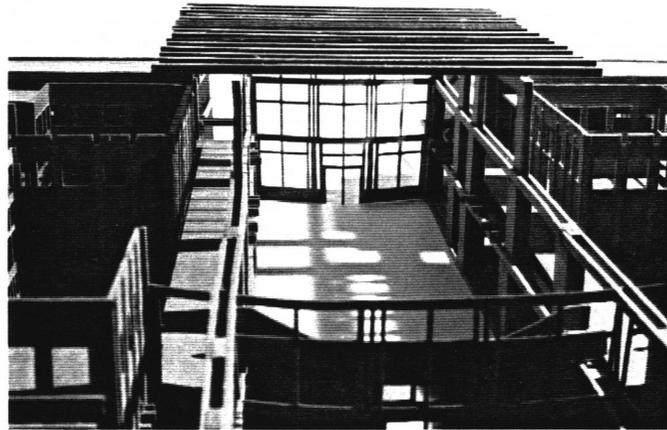


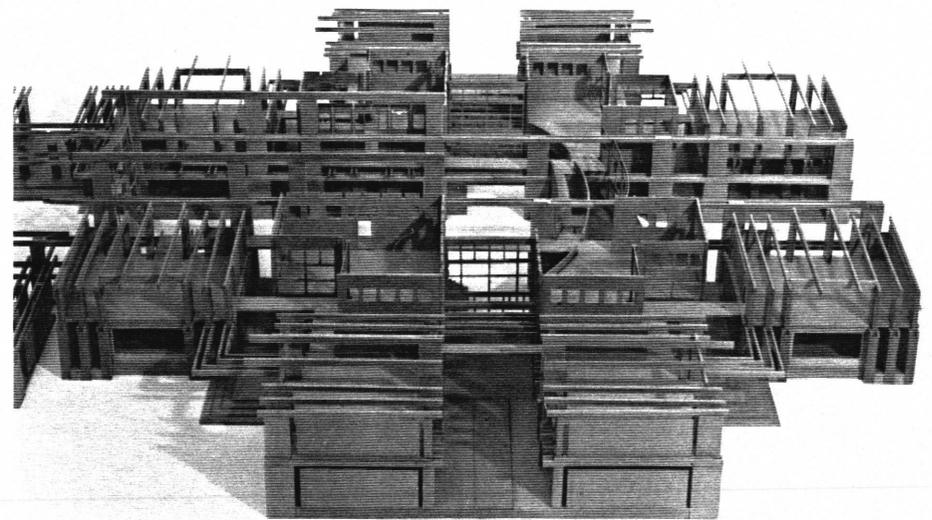
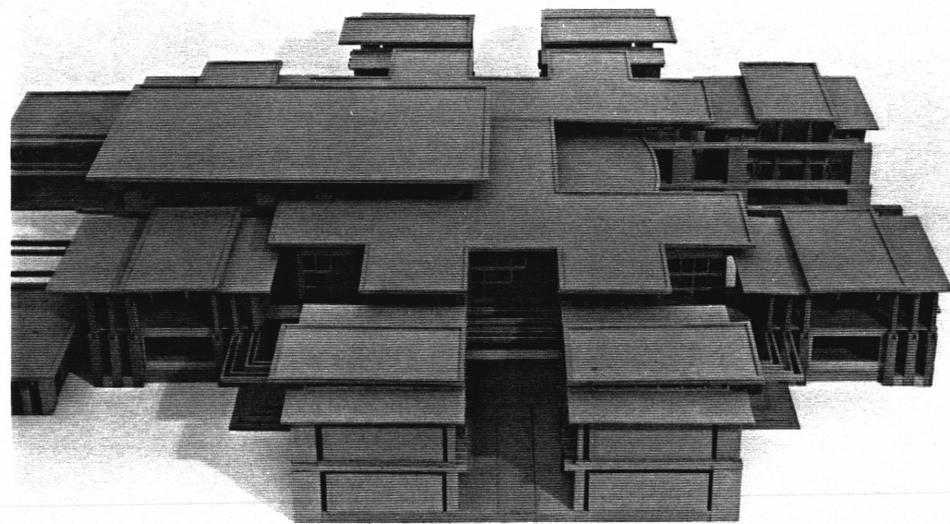


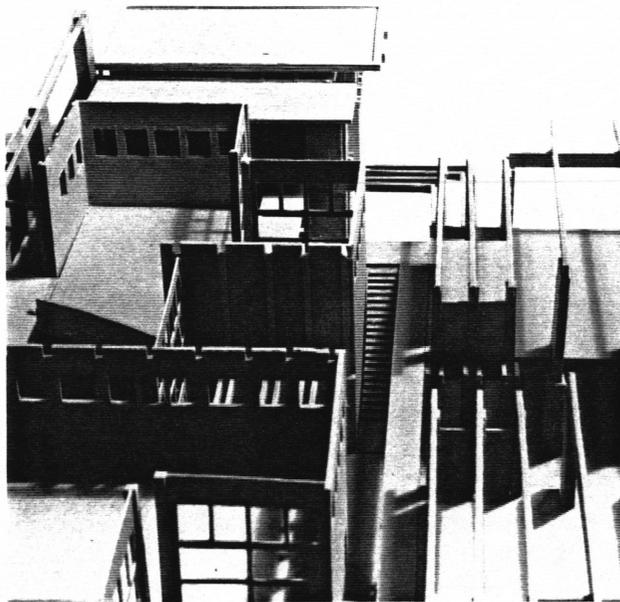
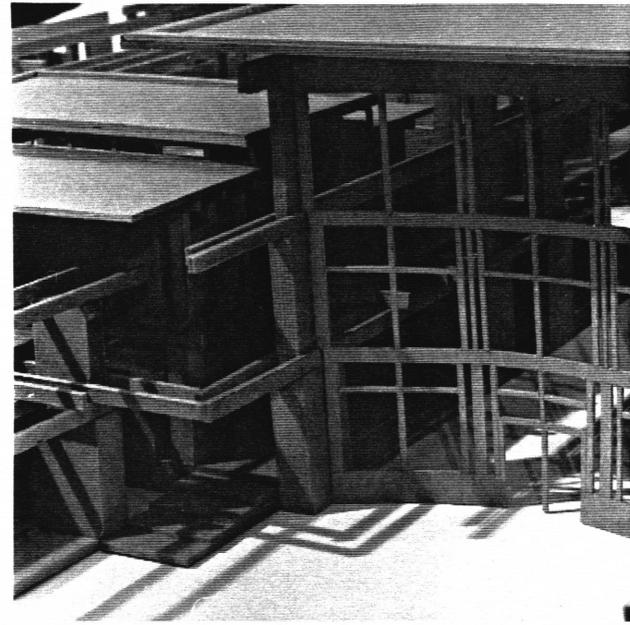
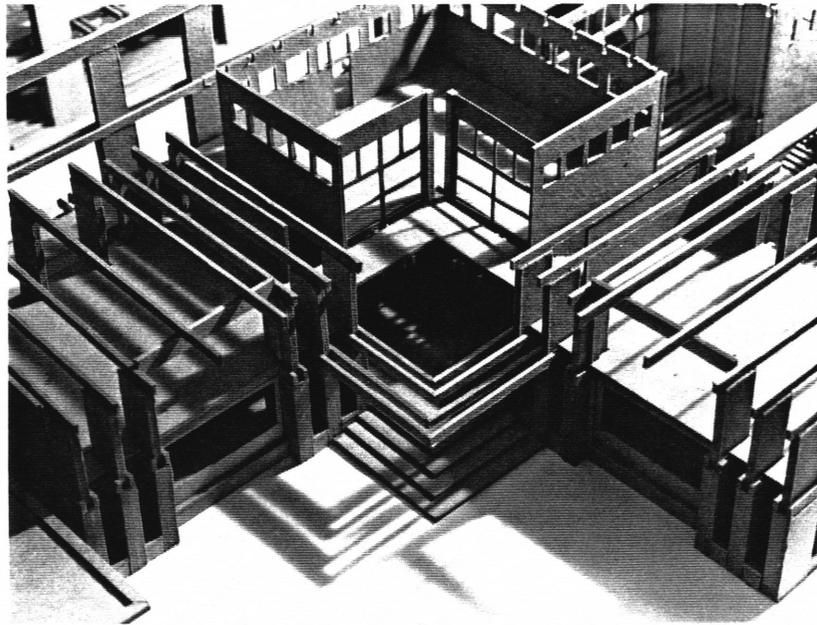


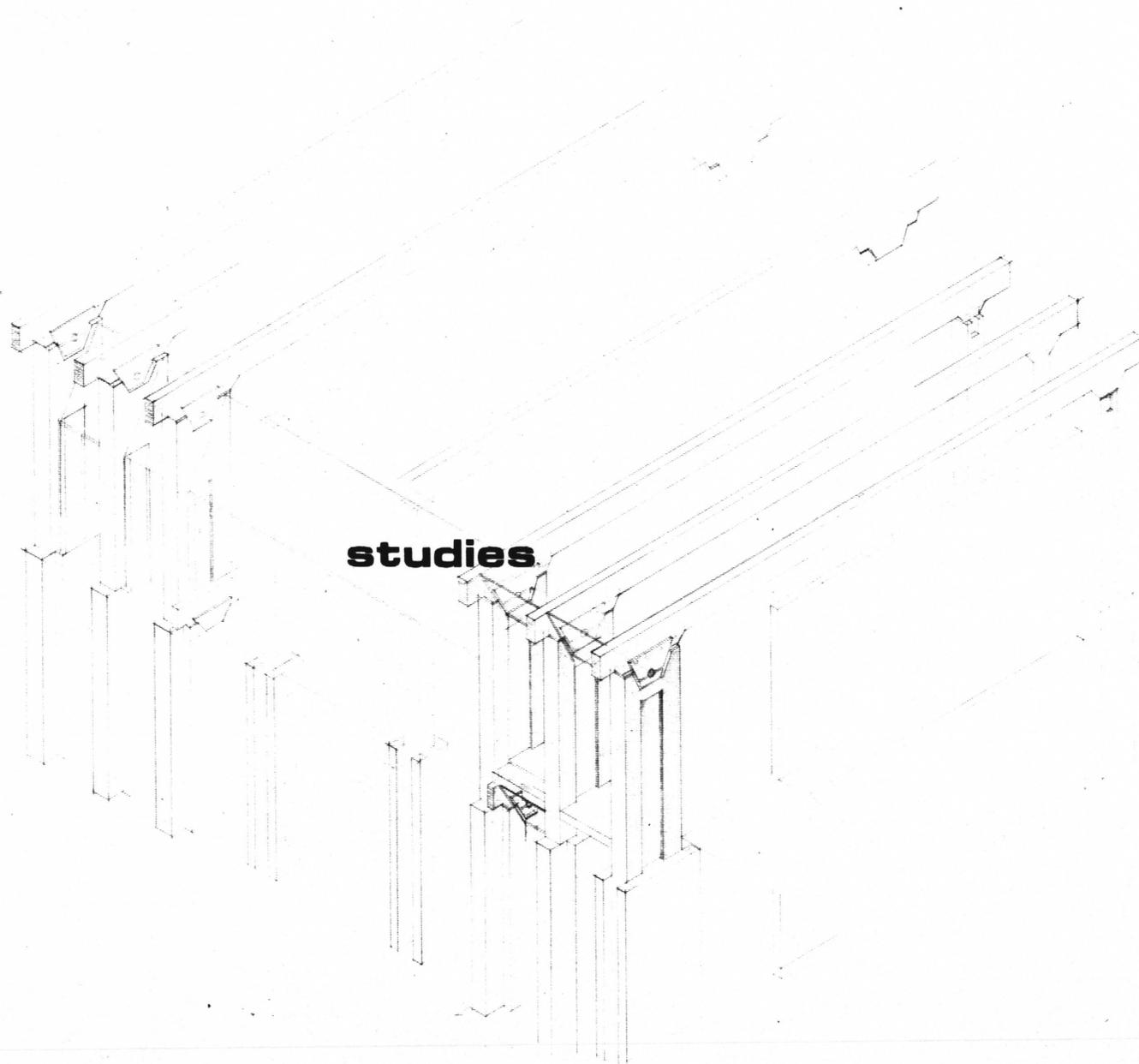




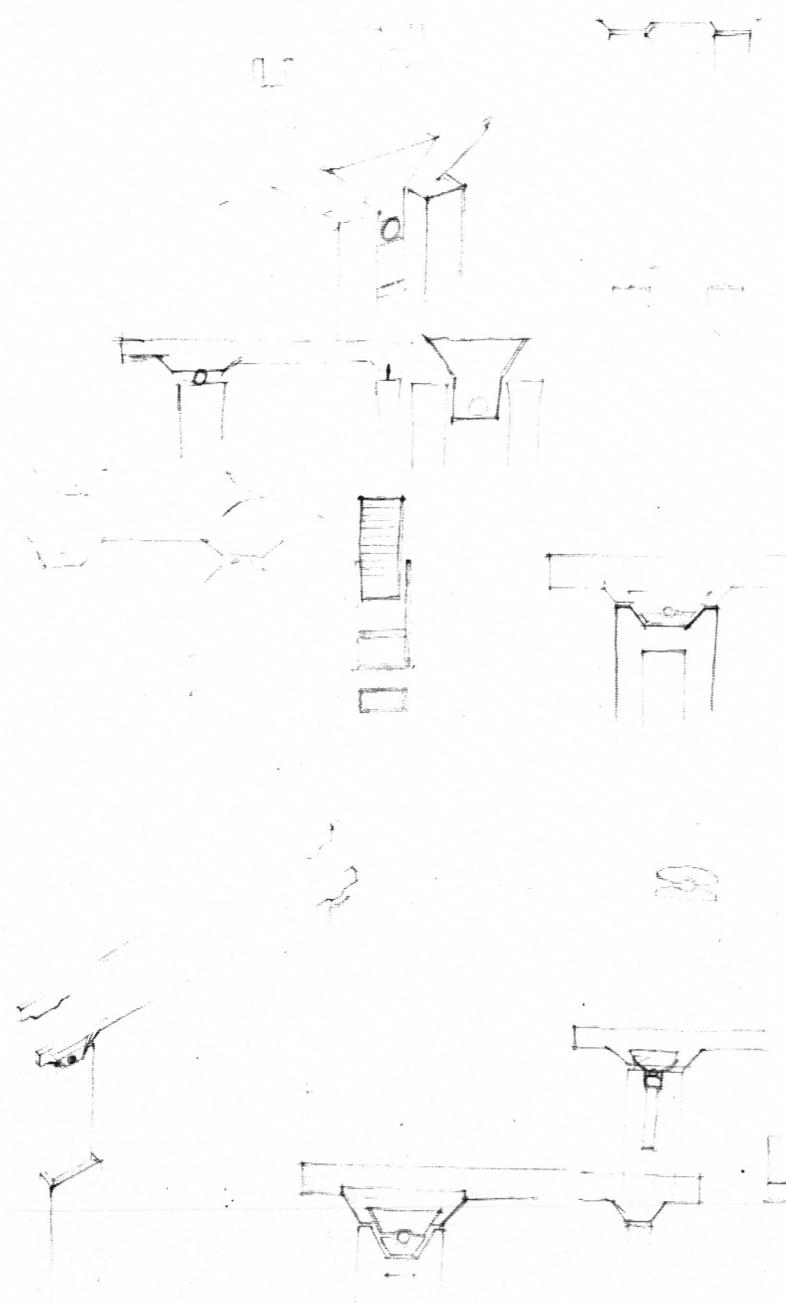








studies



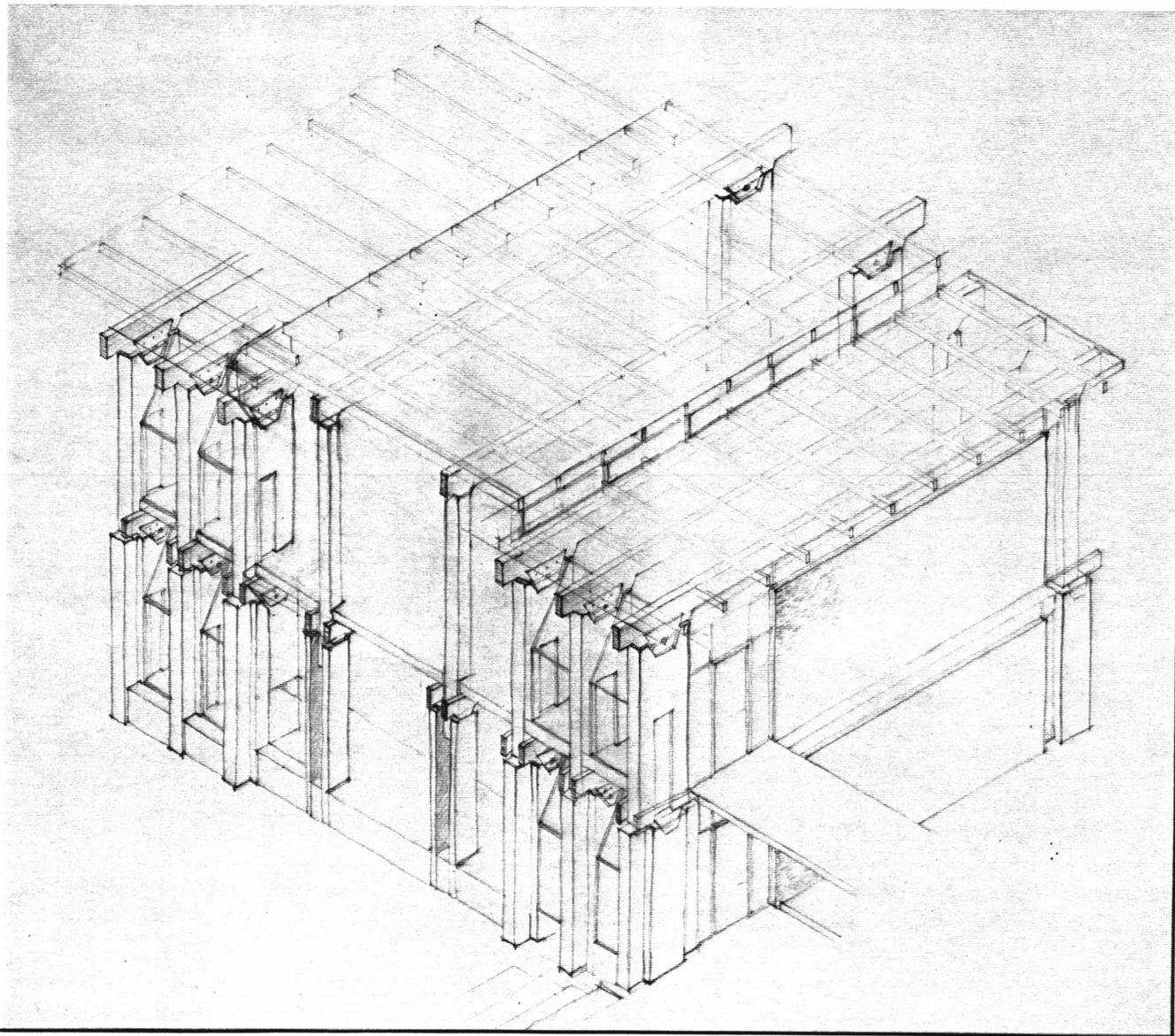
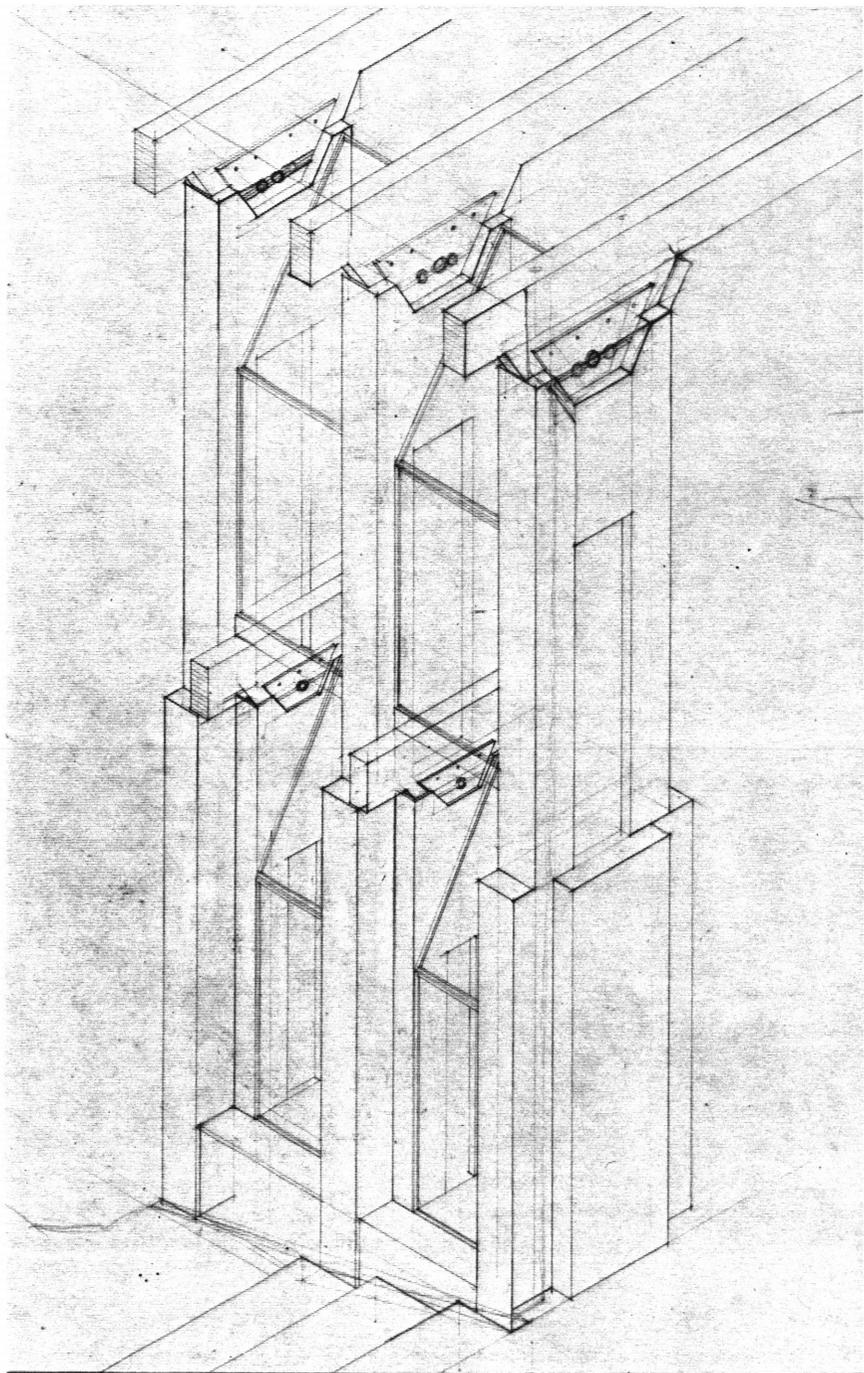
■ It is through the studies and sketches that the project is taken to a higher level and greater depth of understanding. I discovered that a wide range of study was necessary to explore what the elements could become and how the different conditions throughout each warranted a different design.

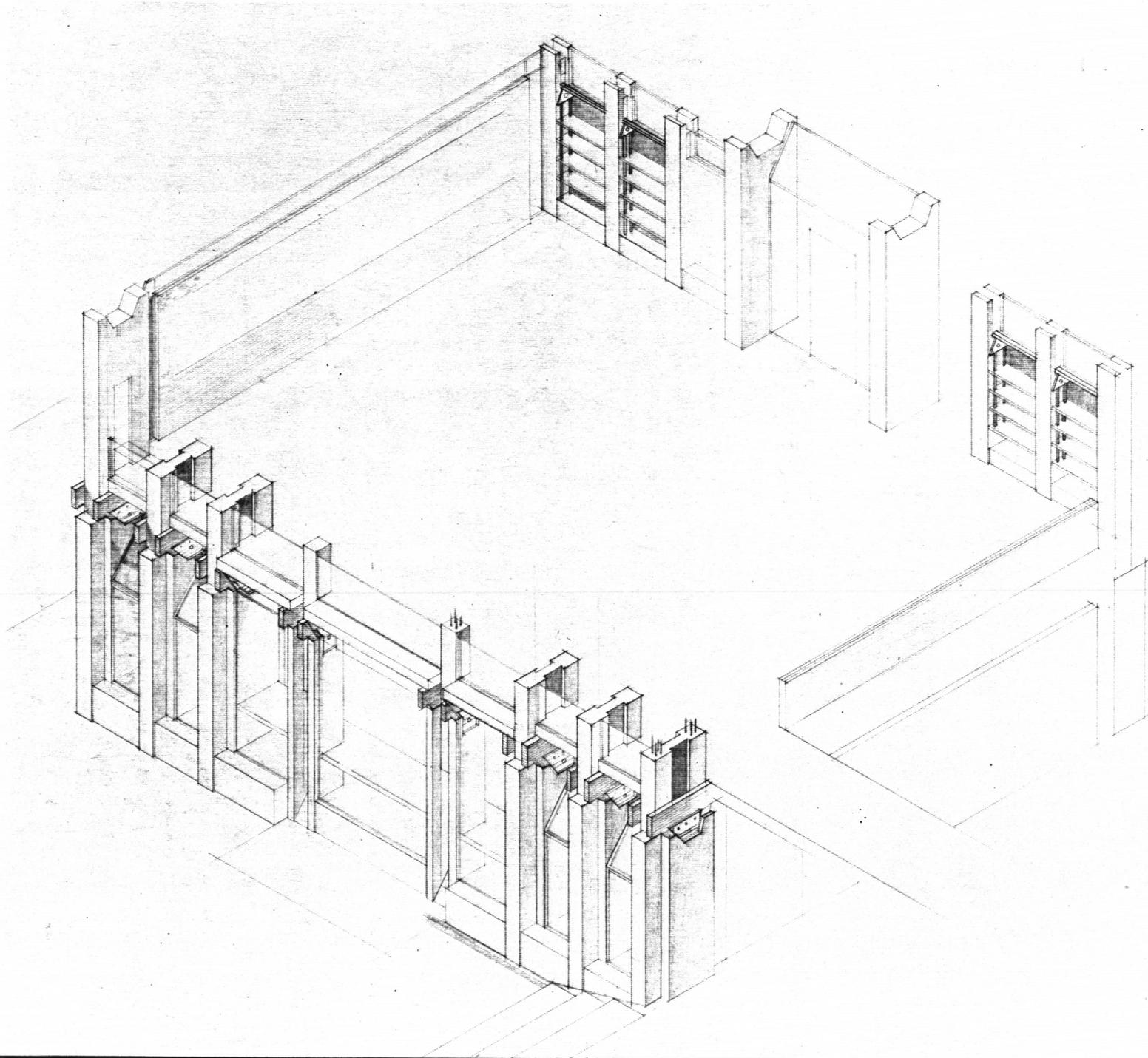
An important study was the exploration of the variety of the column; that is, the ability to change the column as it's location moved around the building. How the column and it's function changed from the outside to the inside and from the classroom to the building axis was one of the most important discoveries of the work. The project found order through the acknowledgement of these differences, thus not becoming homogeneous. By recognizing a hierarchy of structure, the project moves away from

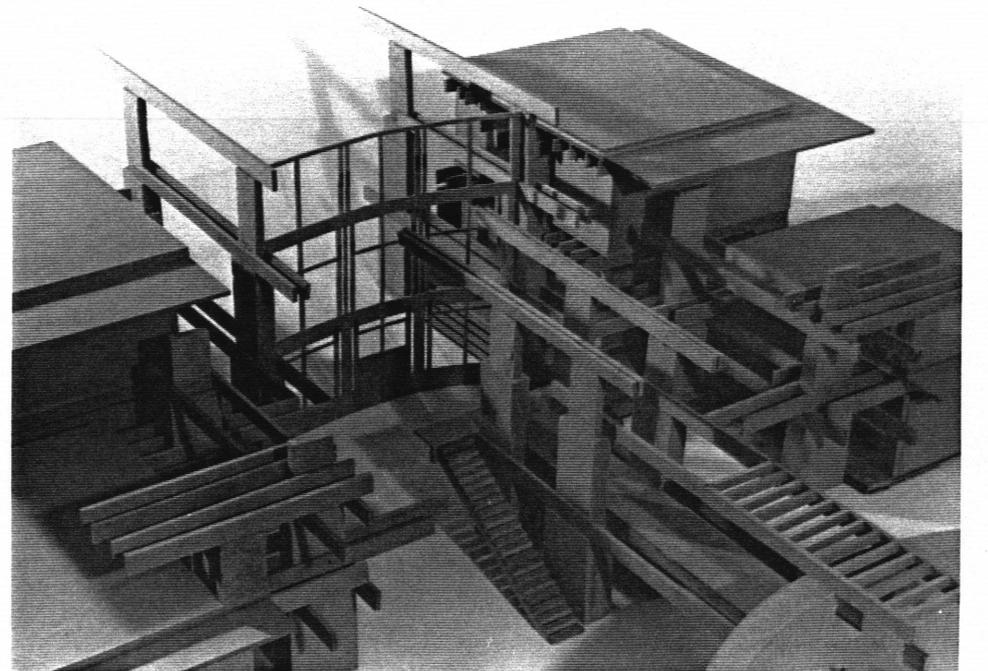
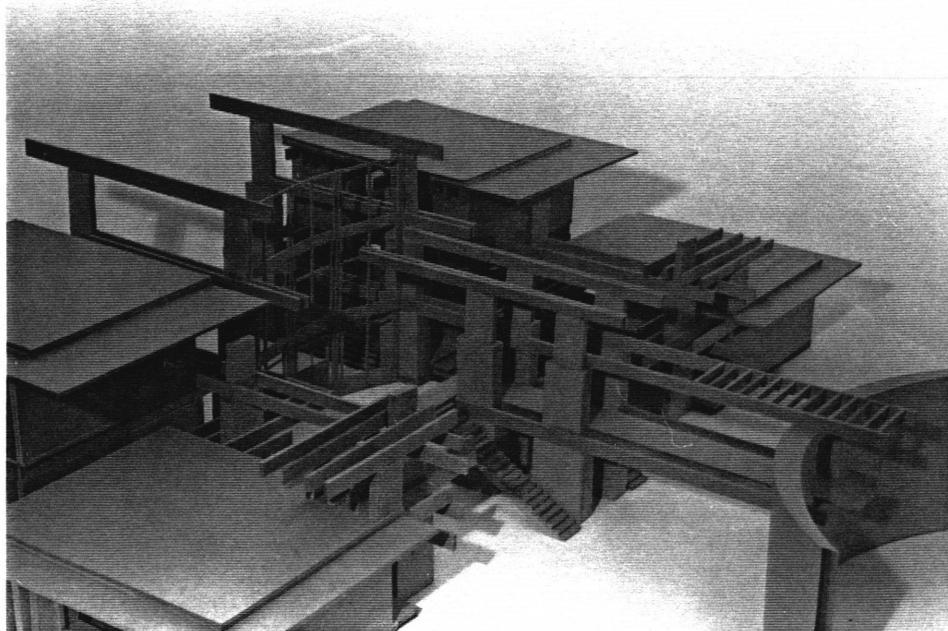
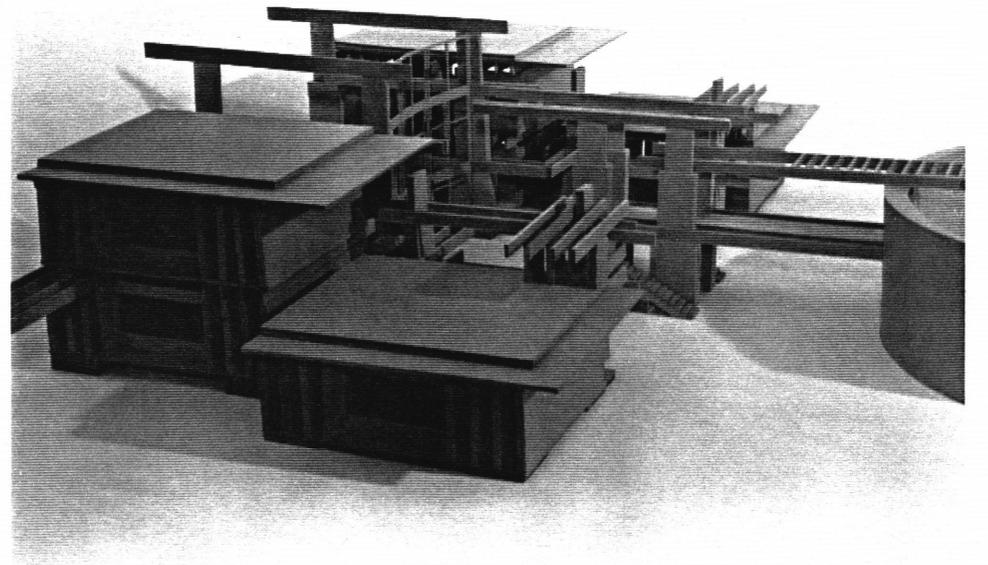
entropy and towards an inherent order. It is in the beauty of the differences that I have learned about architecture.

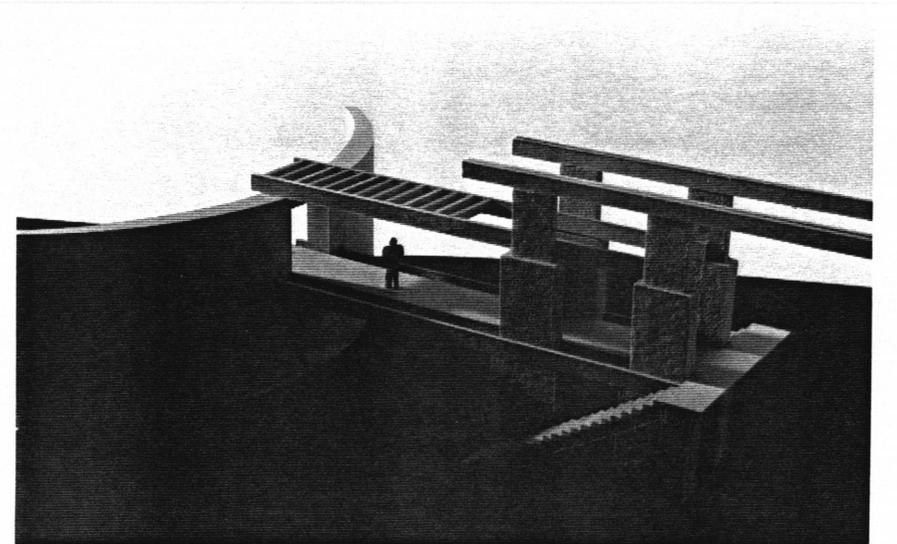
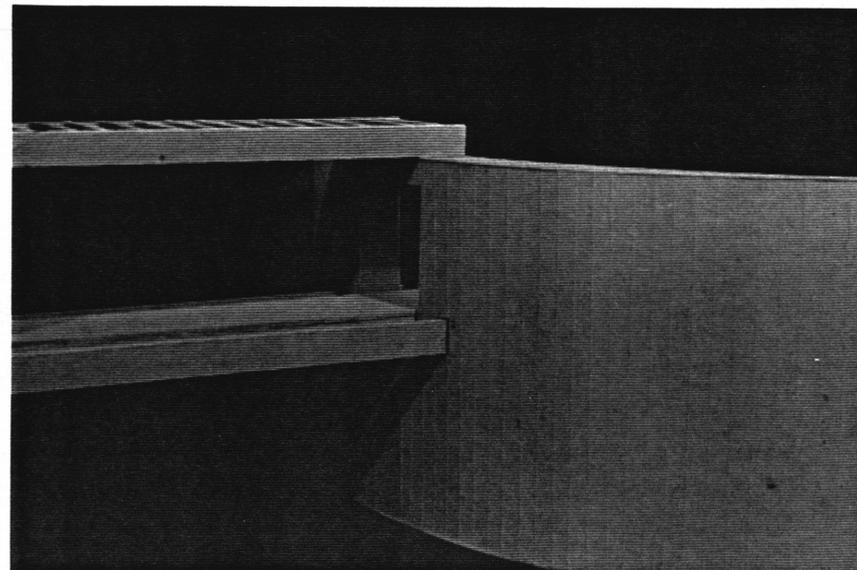
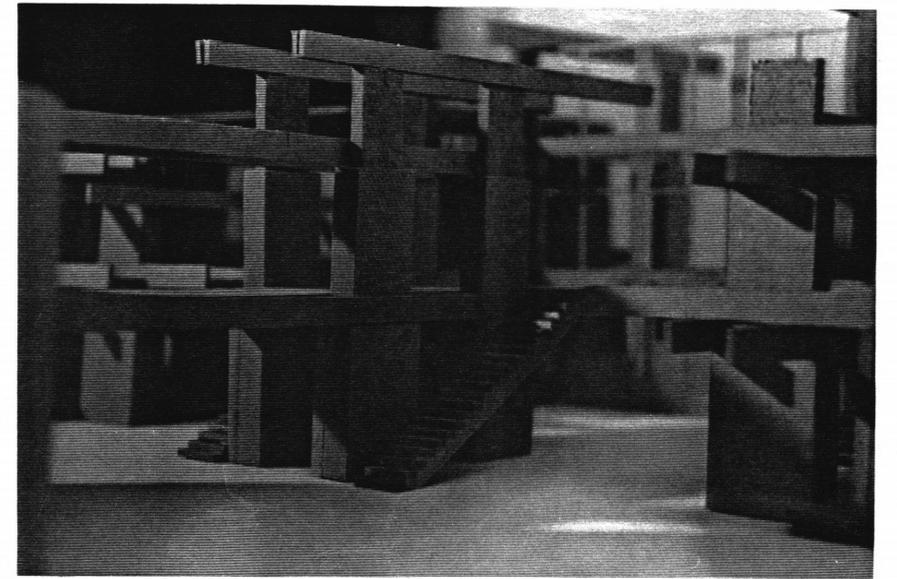
It is through the study of the details and innerworkings that the parts themselves can come together, creating a dialogue between one another and work as a whole. Each part becomes necessary to the whole. It is seeking opportunity and questioning how to make the ordinary beautiful. To think what could be done here. To define an attitude.

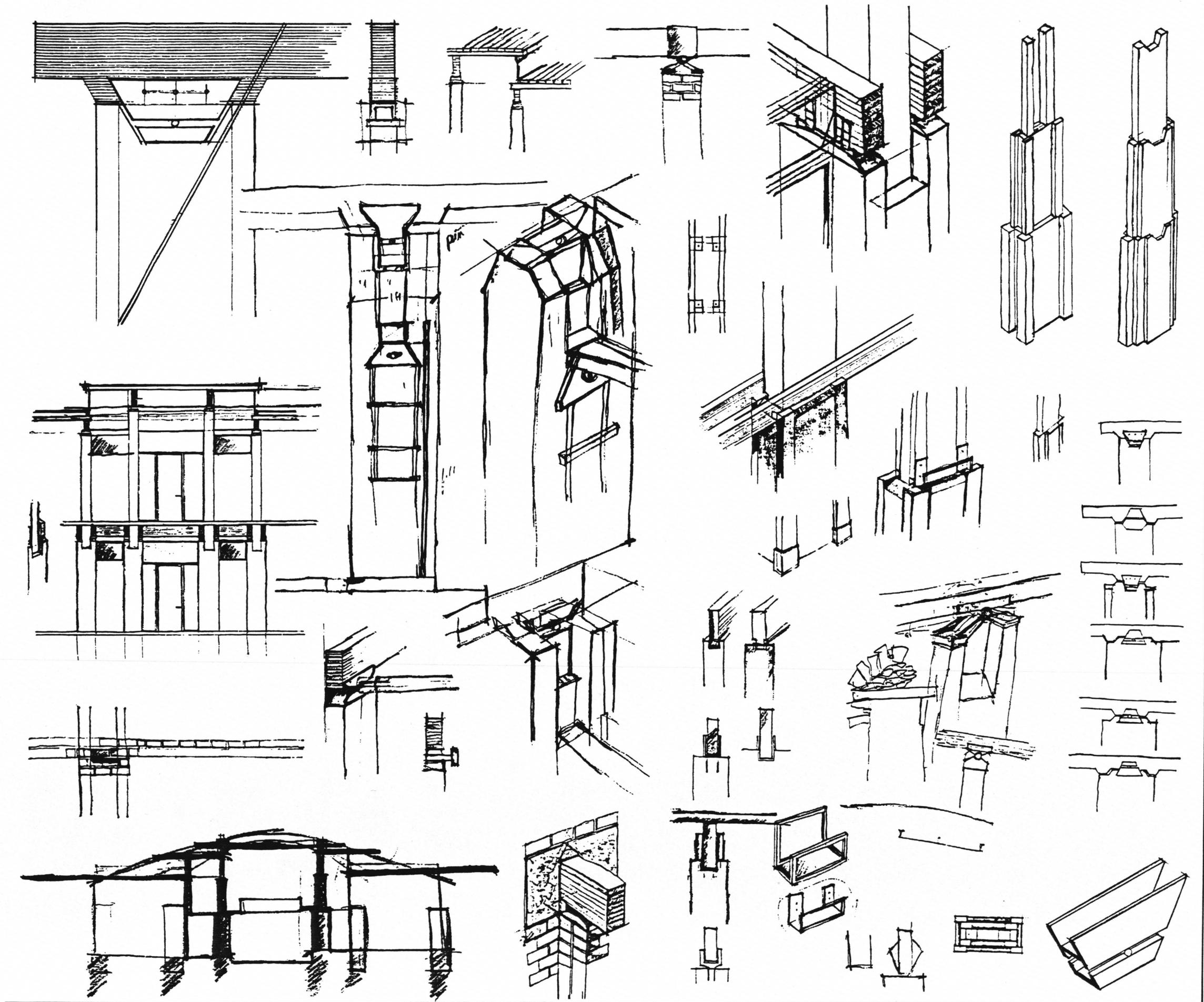
The following section includes studies and sketches which served as the foundation for the project, the generation of the classroom and the development of an idea. Having studied the elements in terms of structure, space, light and materiality, I can better understand the nature of the place.

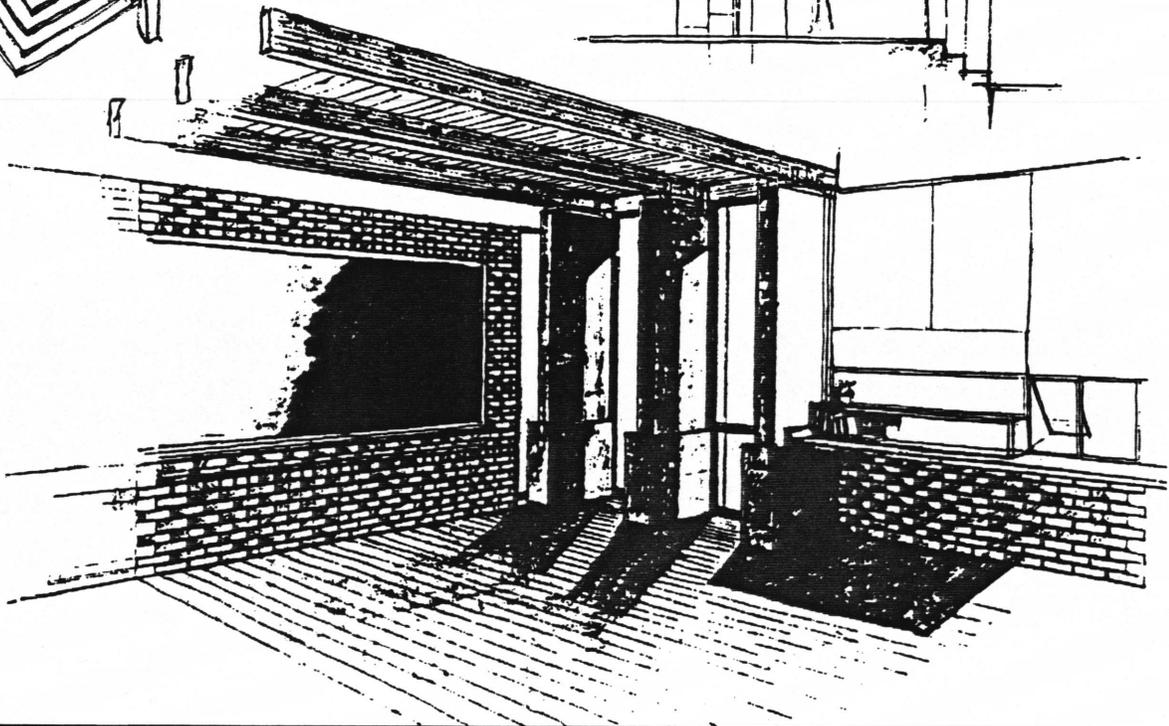
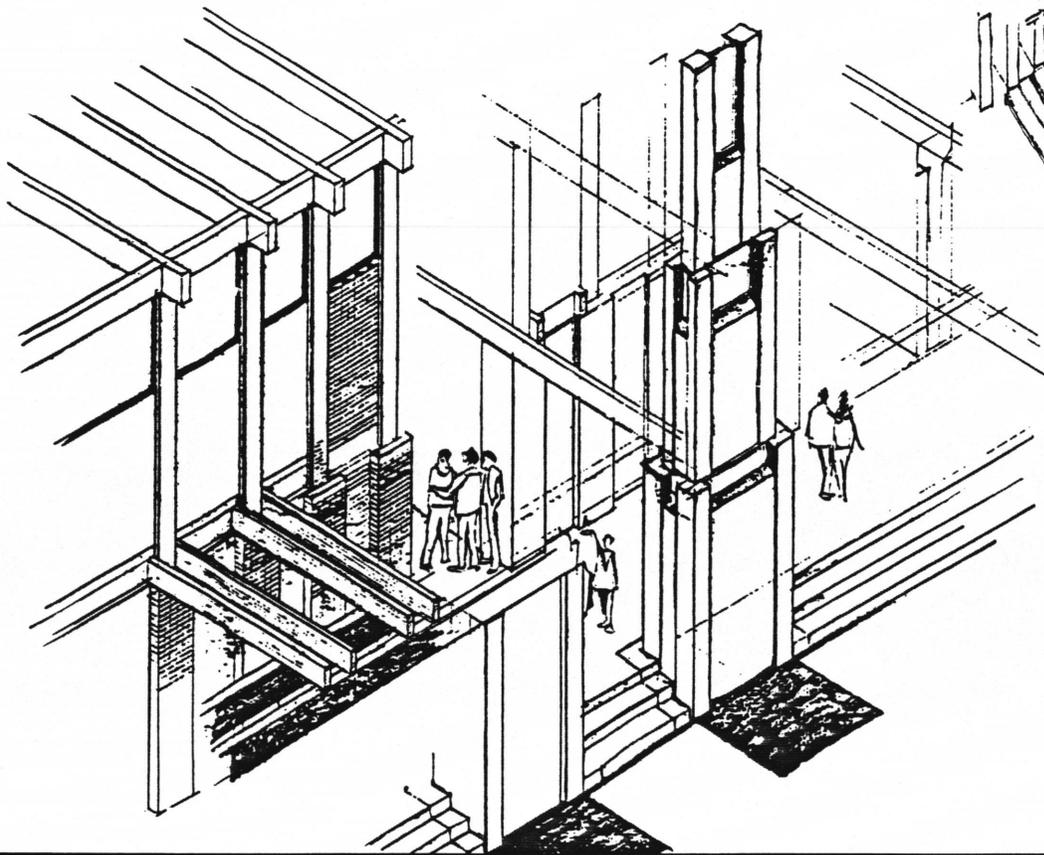
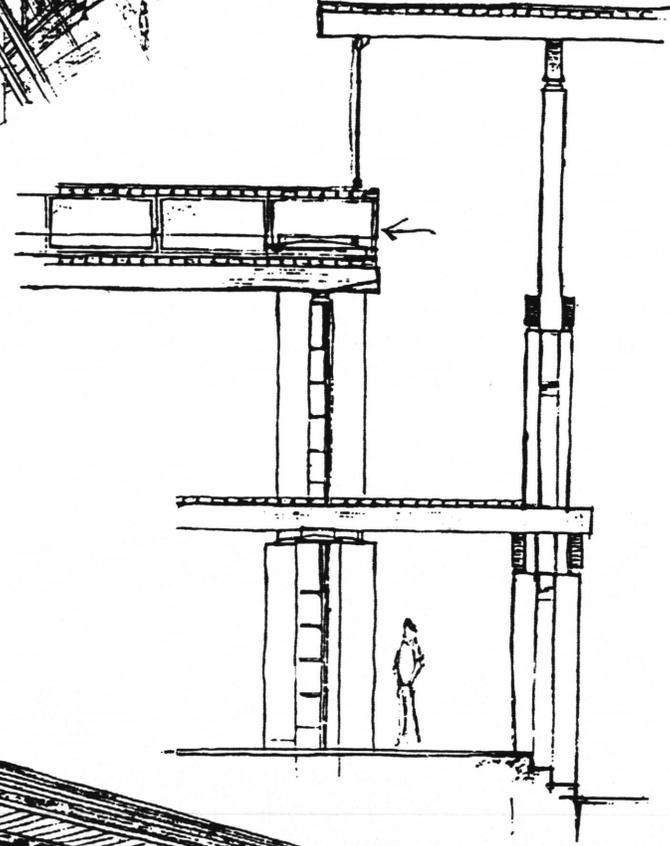
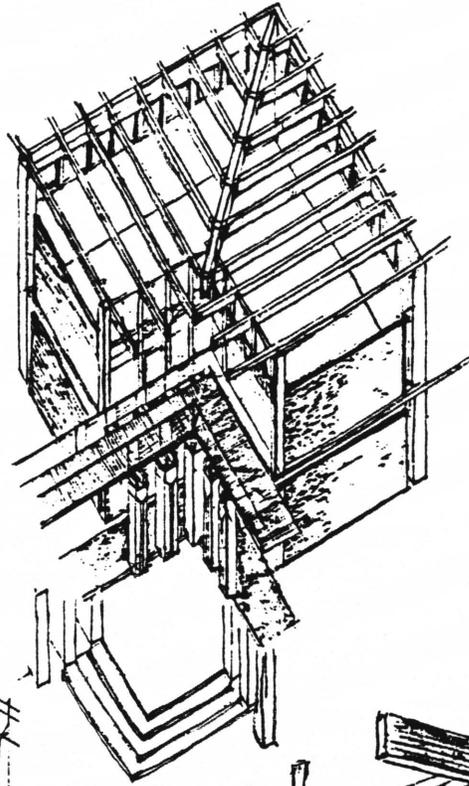
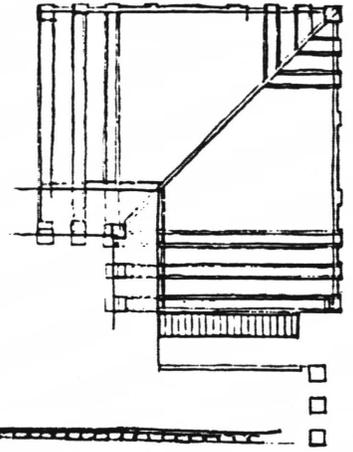
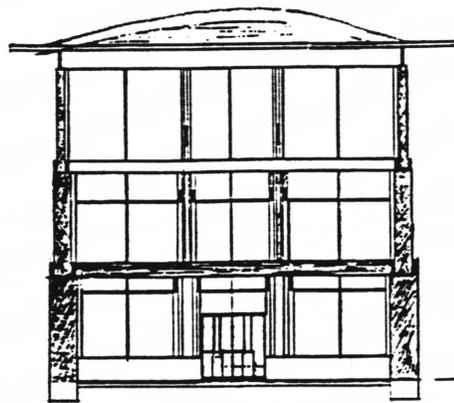
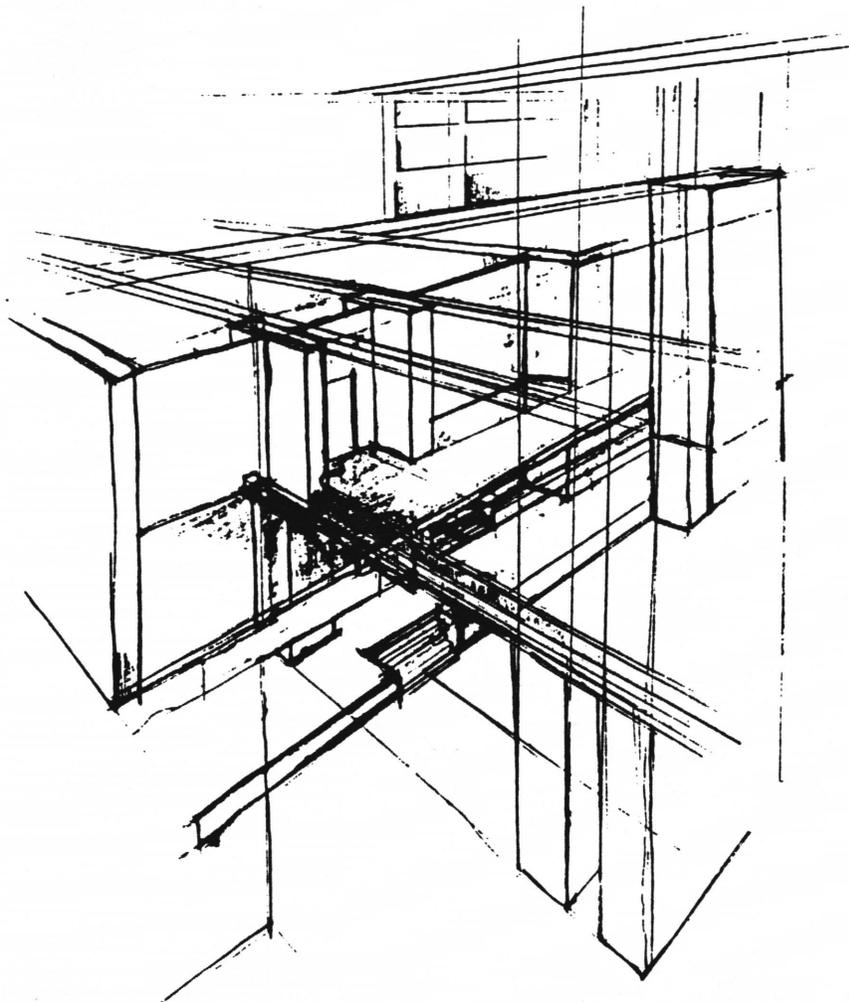


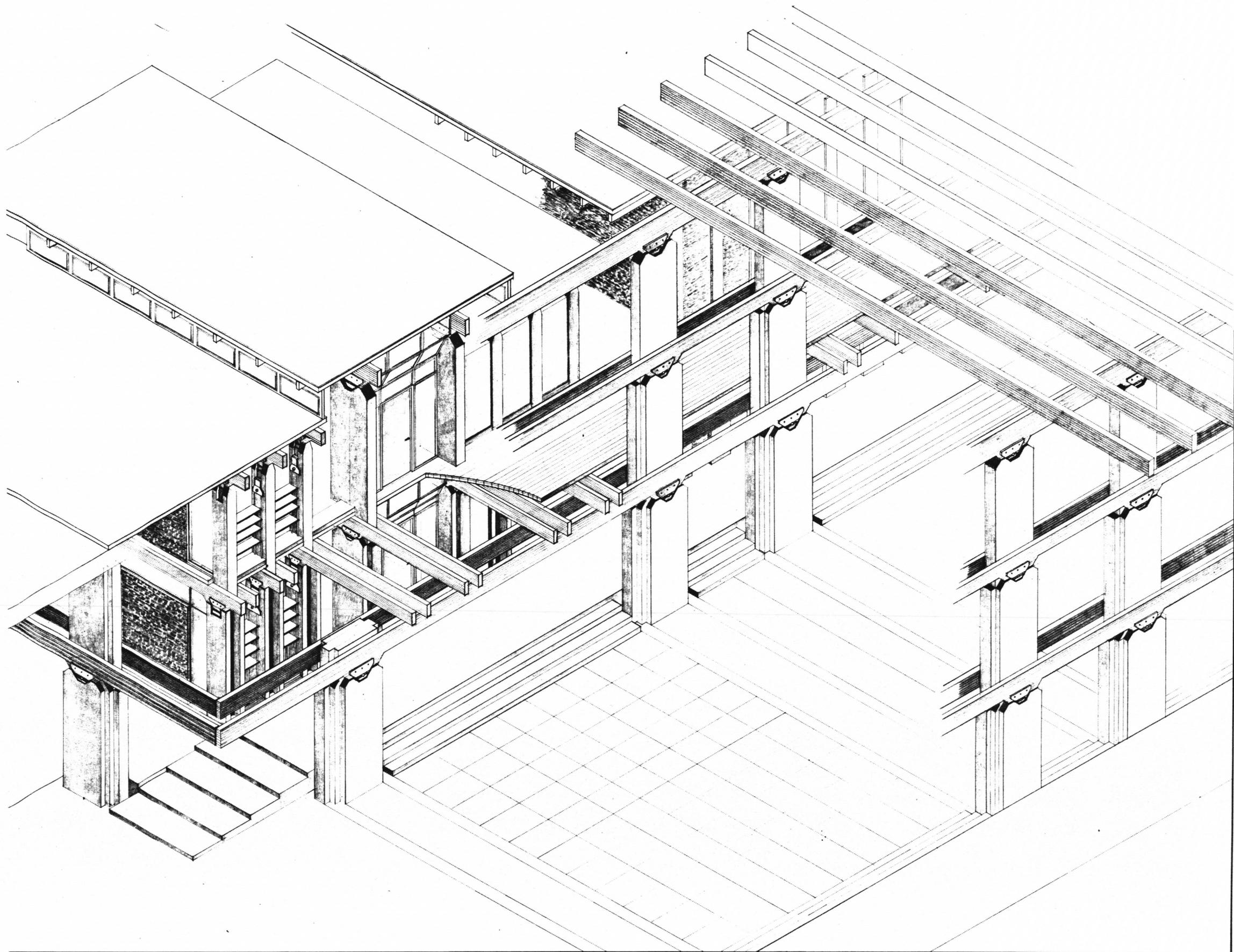




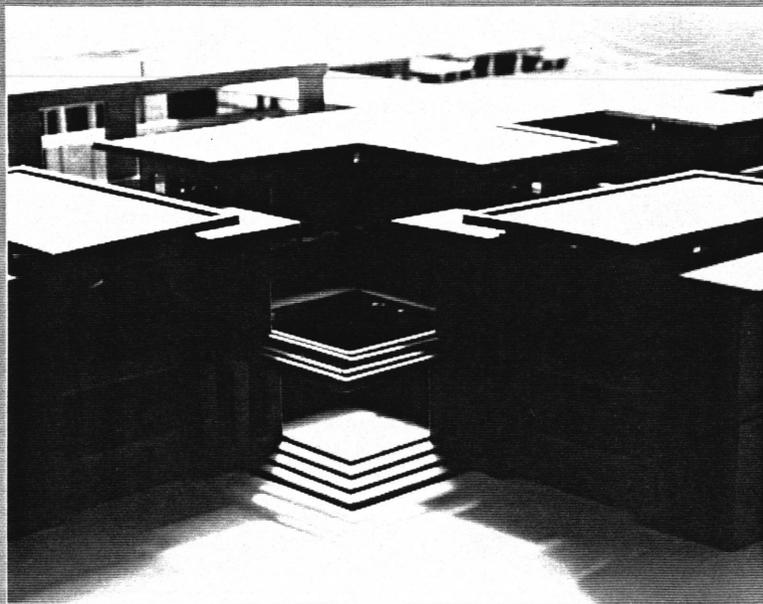








"A craftsman is someone who does whatever he is given to do better than others feel is necessary."



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