

**The Use and Abuse of Architecture:
History, Elements, and Conditions**

by

Joseph Steven Obritz

**Thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE**

in
Architecture

APPROVED BY:


Olvio Ferrari, Chairman


Frank Weiner


Salahuddin Choudhury

**August, 1991
Blacksburg, Virginia**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
3

HISTORY AND ITS ROLE IN ARCHITECTURE
6

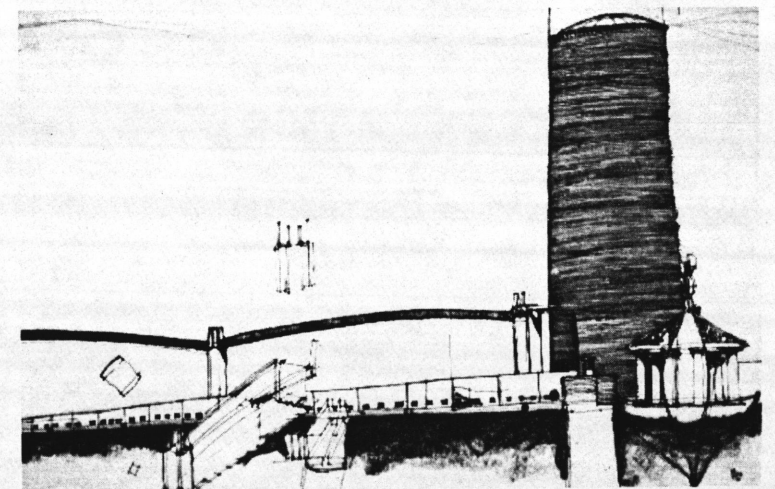
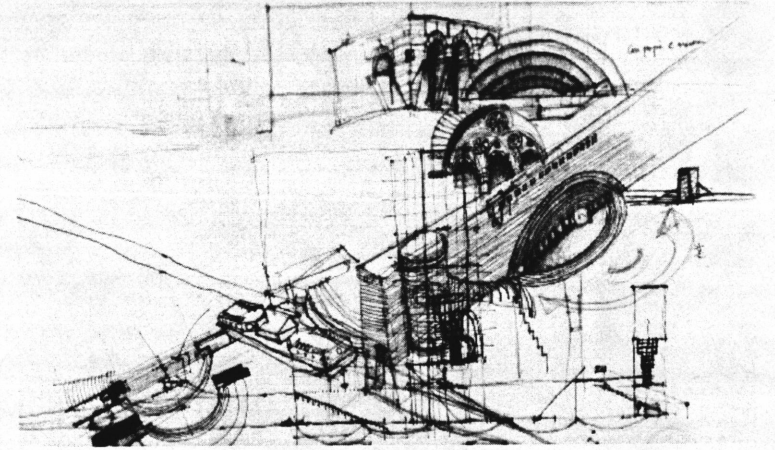
PROJECT
9

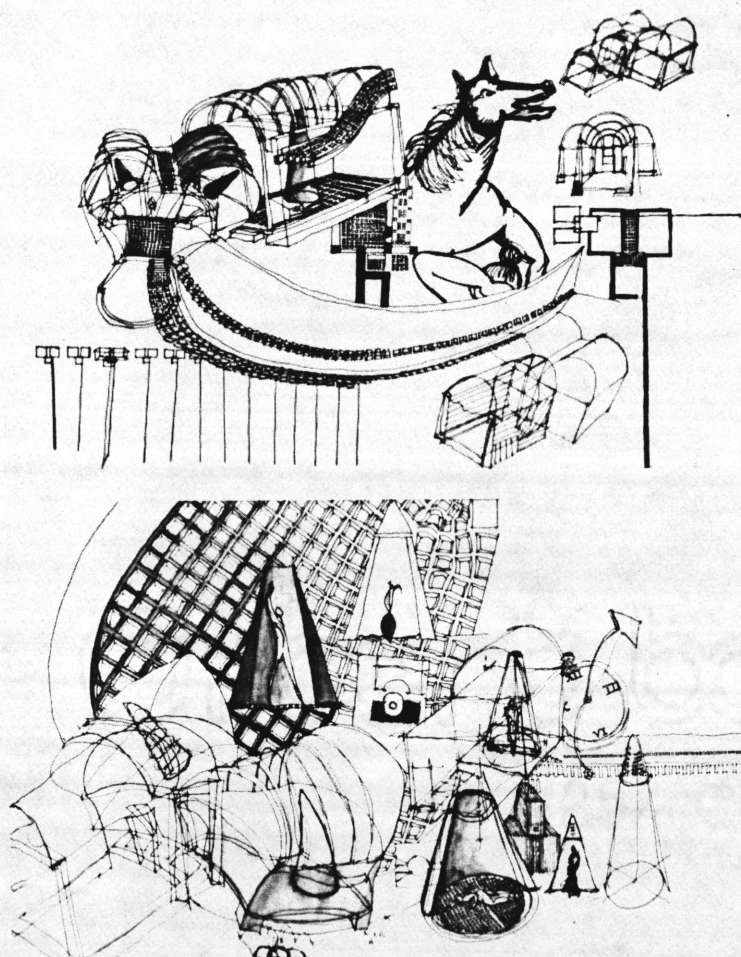
BIBLIOGRAPHY
25

VITA
26

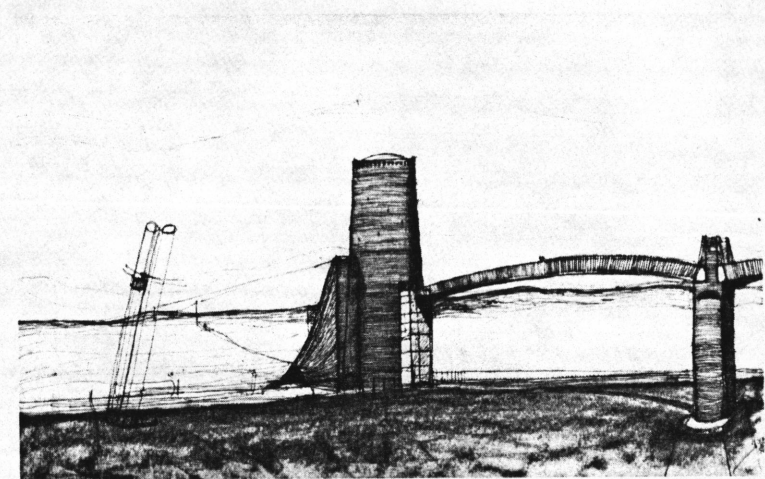


Architecture is a way of making that enables man to present his world. This making allows him to find his relationship to architecture and himself. The history of architecture is a part of the history of man and demands our attention if we are to make a contribution to the life of man. Nietzsche states that history is necessary above all to the man of action.... who needs examples, teachers, and comforters he cannot find among his contemporaries.¹ "We would serve history only so far as it serves life."² He also feels that the imitation of the past will only lead to a stagnant and degenerate life. There is a contradiction between these statements concerning imitation. In philosophy imitation has been defined as having two forms positive and negative. Negative imitation would be making an image of an original that reveals all that is immanent in the original. This act is redundant and therefore unnecessary. Positive imitation involves an understanding of things or ideas inherent in the original and lets us present our understanding which may expand the original or lead to a shift in the original paradigm. We must observe the history of man's making and gather things that inform us about the world of architecture. History becomes a tool to facilitate architecture. We gather that which for us carries some essential meaning.³ This meaning may

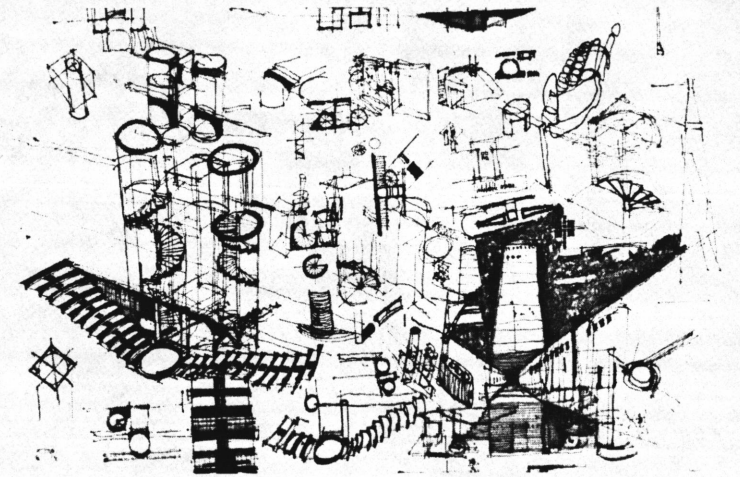




be manifested in our understanding of types, elements, or conditions of a particular culture as well as a personal desire to understand them in relationship to ourselves. For example, the elements and conditions that compose the house in some African tribes are considered as metaphors to parts of the human body i.e. door as mouth, window as eye, etcetera. When a family member loses a body part the corresponding element is removed or altered. Throughout history typologies have contained the models and archetypes of man's ideas and ways of thinking, which are revealed through making. These remain with us and contain elements and conditions that change depending upon our focus. In the scale of the city there exists other types such as houses, churches, and libraries that become elemental when discussing the city as a whole. The conditions occur when analyzing the relationship of the elements with each other and the results that their organization produce. If we translate the scale to building types the wall, column, and stair become the elements and the conditions become the mediation between these elements. Desire urges memory and imagination in our making of a re-presentation of that desire and a transformation of our observation. Imagination transforms our observation of what we find

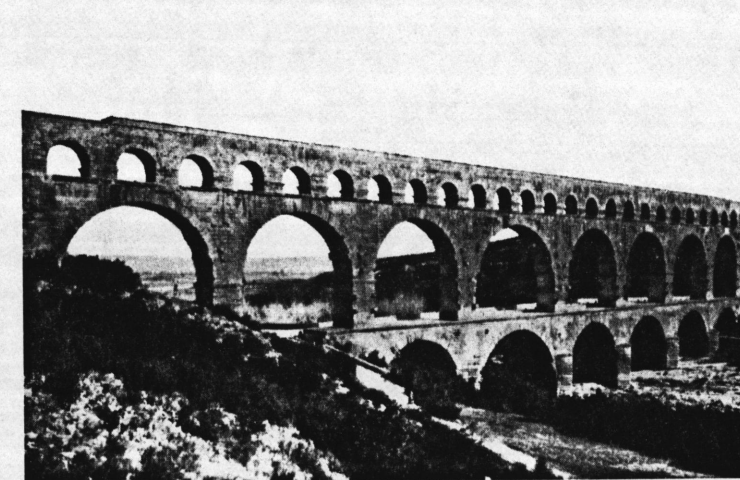
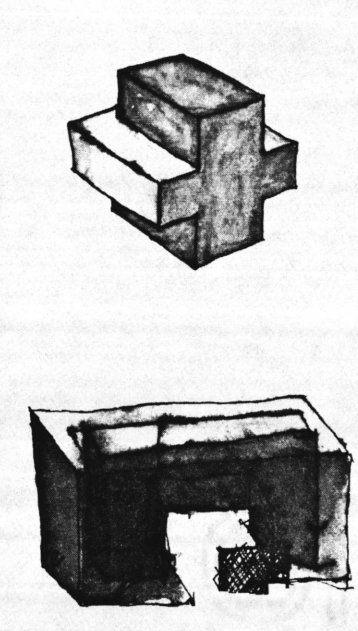
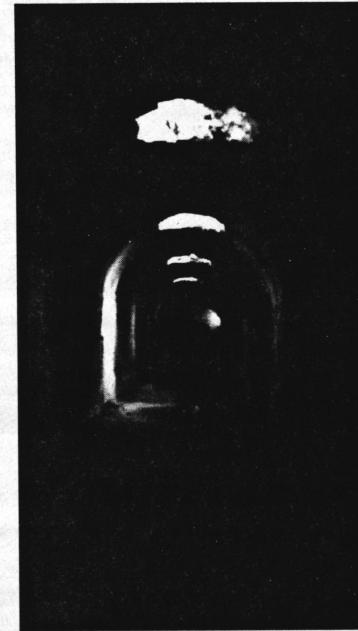
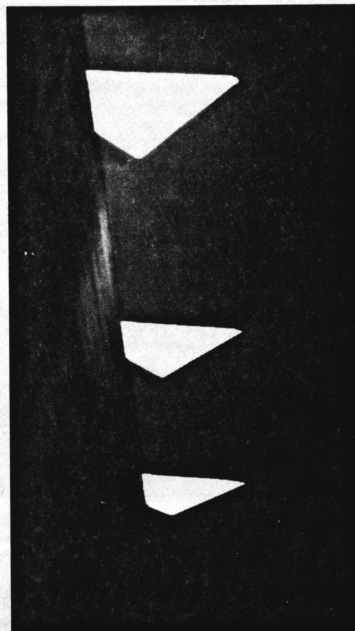
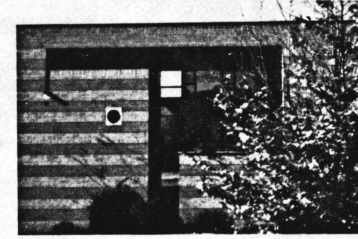
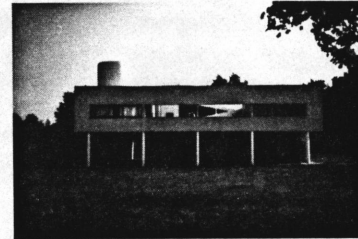
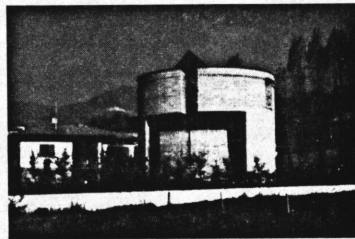


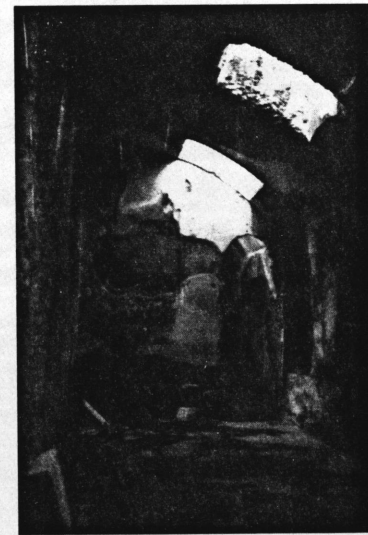
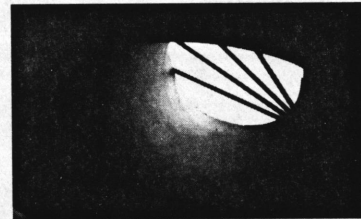
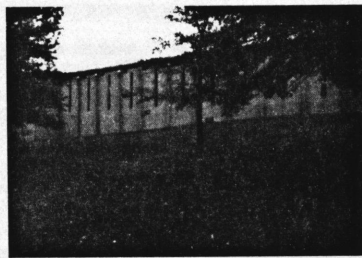
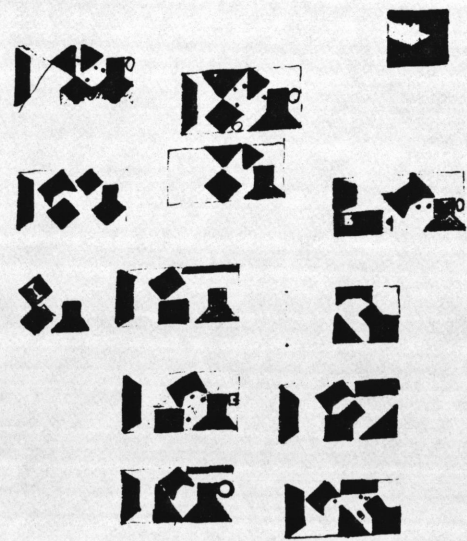
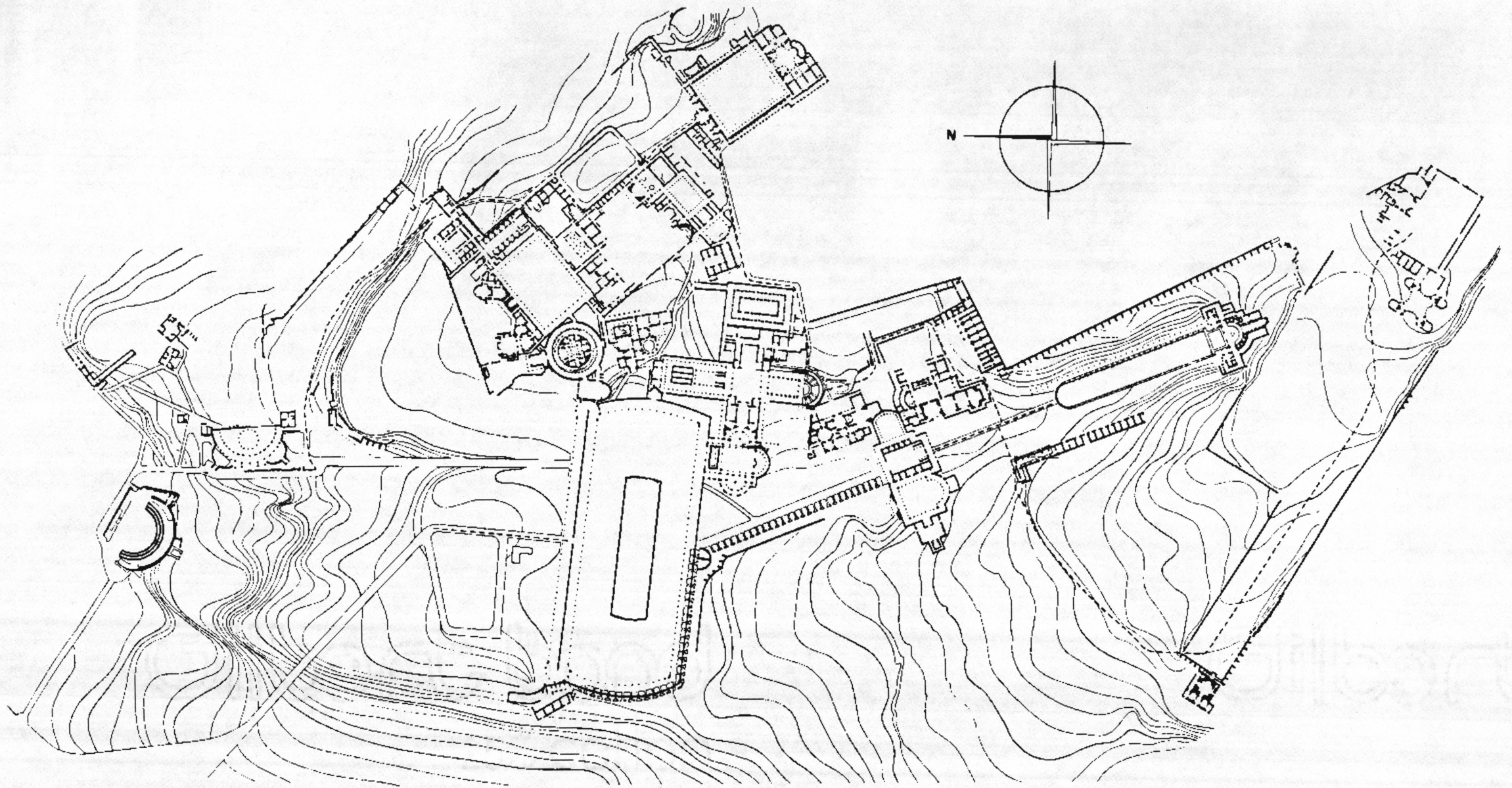
essential in history. We understand our relationship to things when we make them and through the revealing of things we come to understand ourselves. Memory recalls things or events that carry some meaning to us, but it also contains the more complete knowledge of things that we may come to know through making. Art is the imaginative appropriation of the essential strivings of historical man.⁴ The actuation of the idea is through the made object. We do this by painting, drawing, sculpture, and poetry. The object is two fold. It contains within it the idea of the reality of the thing and the drawing itself as a thing. An idea of a thing contains some elements common to all the other realities of the thing which makes them thinkable.⁵ When we speak of these things we bring to them some of its history that is known to us. Making allows us to re-present a thing which best actuates our idea and understanding of the thing, and enables us to redefine our world.

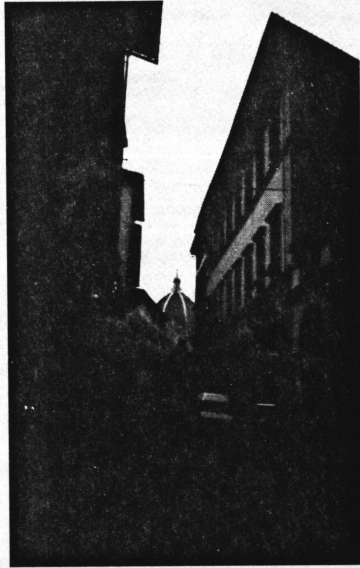


- | | | |
|------------------------|---|------------|
| 1 Nietzsche, Friedrich | Use and Abuse of History, The | p.12 |
| 2 Ibid., p.3 | | |
| 3 Desmond, William | Art and the Absolute: A study of
Hegel's Aesthetics. | p.61 |
| 4 Ibid., p.61 | | |
| 5 Aristotle | On the Soul. | bk.1, ch.4 |

The role of history in architecture is undeniable. We look to it for inspiration and for lessons that can define one's architecture. Elements and conditions act as fixed points that we can come to understand through observation. When the perception and interpretation of these ideas and things are manifest in the restatement of the elements and conditions a paradigm shift may occur. It is through this restatement that the imitation of history is used positively. We bring about a shift in the paradigm through our observation and change in perception. The Villa Savoye clearly represents a restatement in the understanding of the house type. A new paradigm has been made, which allows for experimentation to happen within the paradigm. In the houses Bianchi and Rotunda, Mario Botta is investigating and manipulating ideas set forth by Le Corbusier in the Villa Savoye—the house in opposition to the landscape, and a frame that defines a boundary and encloses the living area. Botta uses the frame to support the living area of the house while Le Corbusier uses the frame to reinforce the boundary and chooses to let the living area rest on the earth. Invention has its roots in imitation and transformation. Ideas are imitated but transformed and restated in the architects own epoch. Le Corbusier's great facility for invention has its origins in history. The ideas discussed in the three houses can be traced in one way or another to the architecture of the Greeks and Palladio. We can look to Hadrian's Villa as the source for transformations in plan, condition, and element in the works of Louis Kahn, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier etcetera. H.H. Richardson's design for the Allegheny County Courthouse borrows the typology of the Ducal Palace in Venezia and uses the proportions of the Roman aqueduct, Pont du Gard to regulate the elevations of the interior courtyard. These transformations of types, elements, and conditions enable us to work with a

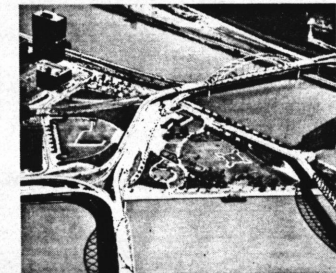




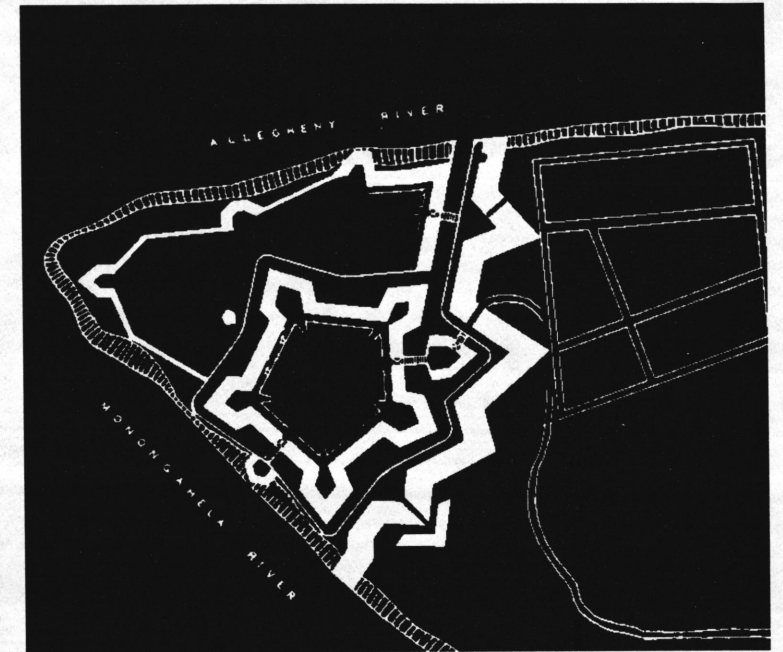


respect for history without being historical, and allows for the experimentation that can bring about the change in the perception of things.

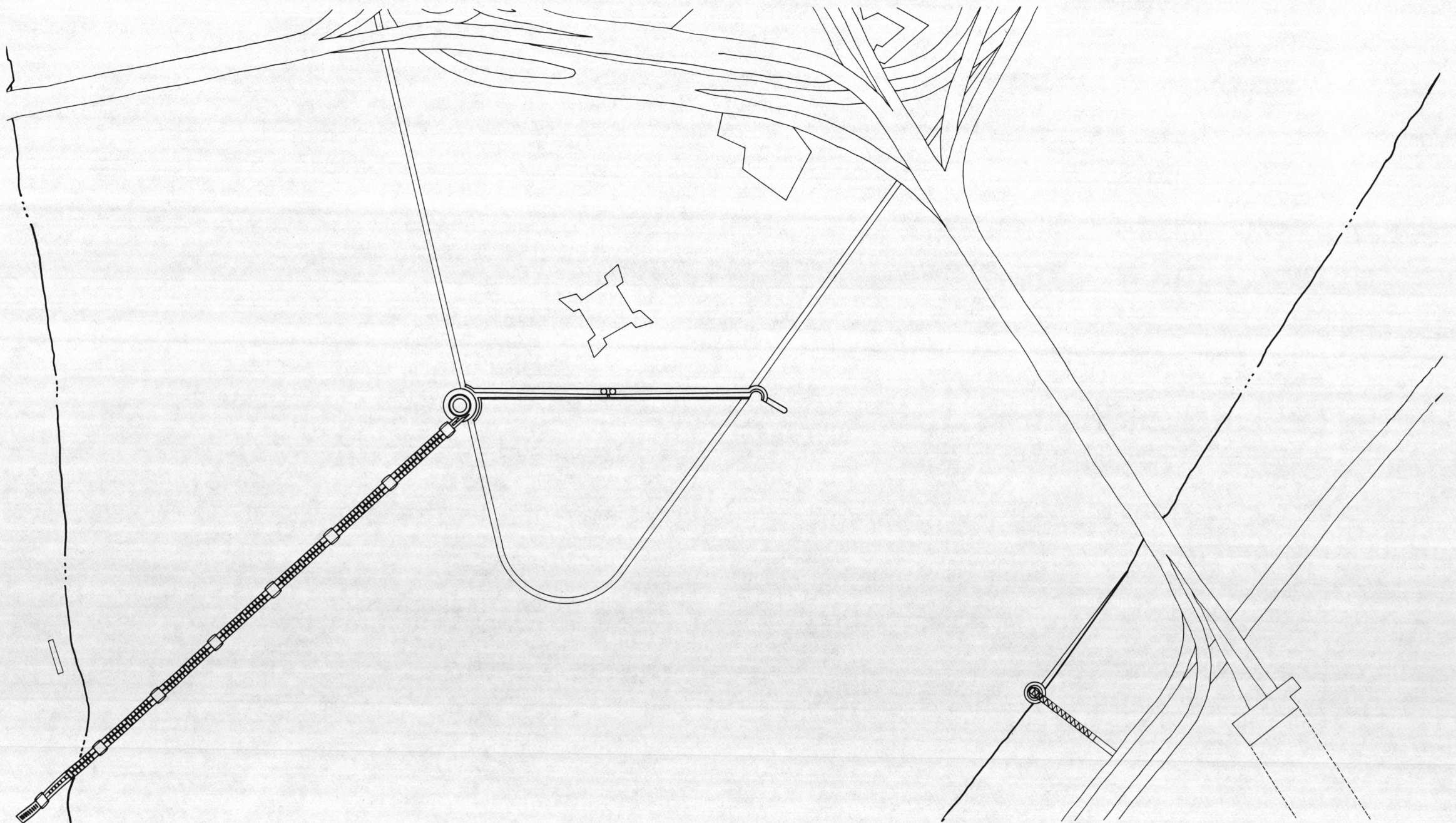
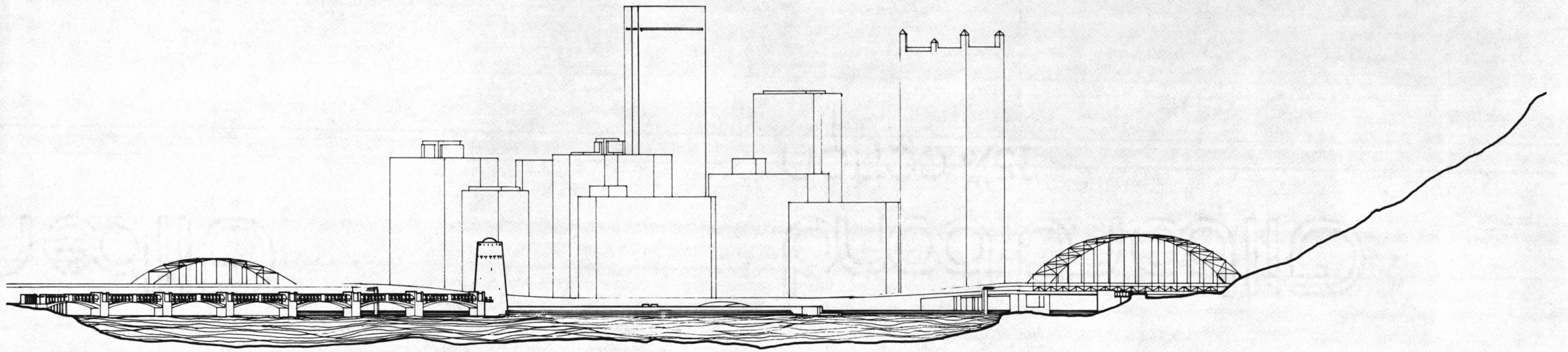
In 1753, George Washington was dispatched as an emissary to the governor to order the French to leave the Ohio Valley. He was also asked by the Virginia Land Company to choose a site for a fort to be built. He chose the point of land where the Allegheny and the Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio. The Virginians set about to constructing the fort which was completed April 17, 1754. On the same day the French, obviously not persuaded by Washington, attacked and captured the fort dismantling the timbers and using them to build their own fort [Fort Duquesne]. The fort was named for Marquis Duquesne the then governor-general of New France [Canada]. The French and British met for battle at the site two more times in 1755 and 1758 respectively. The latter battle proving to be defeat for the French army. With the British in control the fort was renamed Fort Pitt and by 1763 the French had finally been driven from America with a treaty signed in Paris. Fort Pitt helped the British defend Pittsburgh from Indian attacks until the British and the Shawnees signed a peace treaty on May 10, 1765. The British continued to occupy the fort peacefully for ten years until their defeat in the Revolutionary War. This act ended the history of Pittsburgh as a walled city.

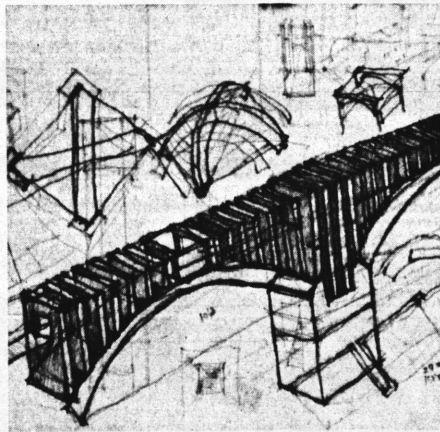
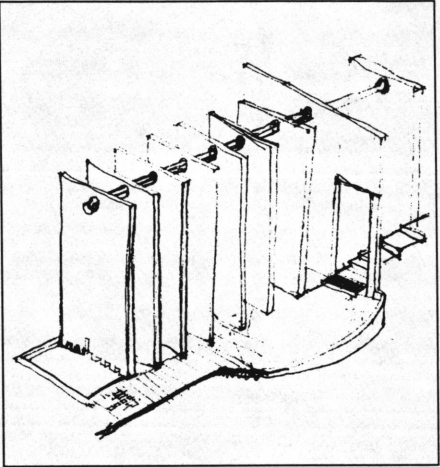
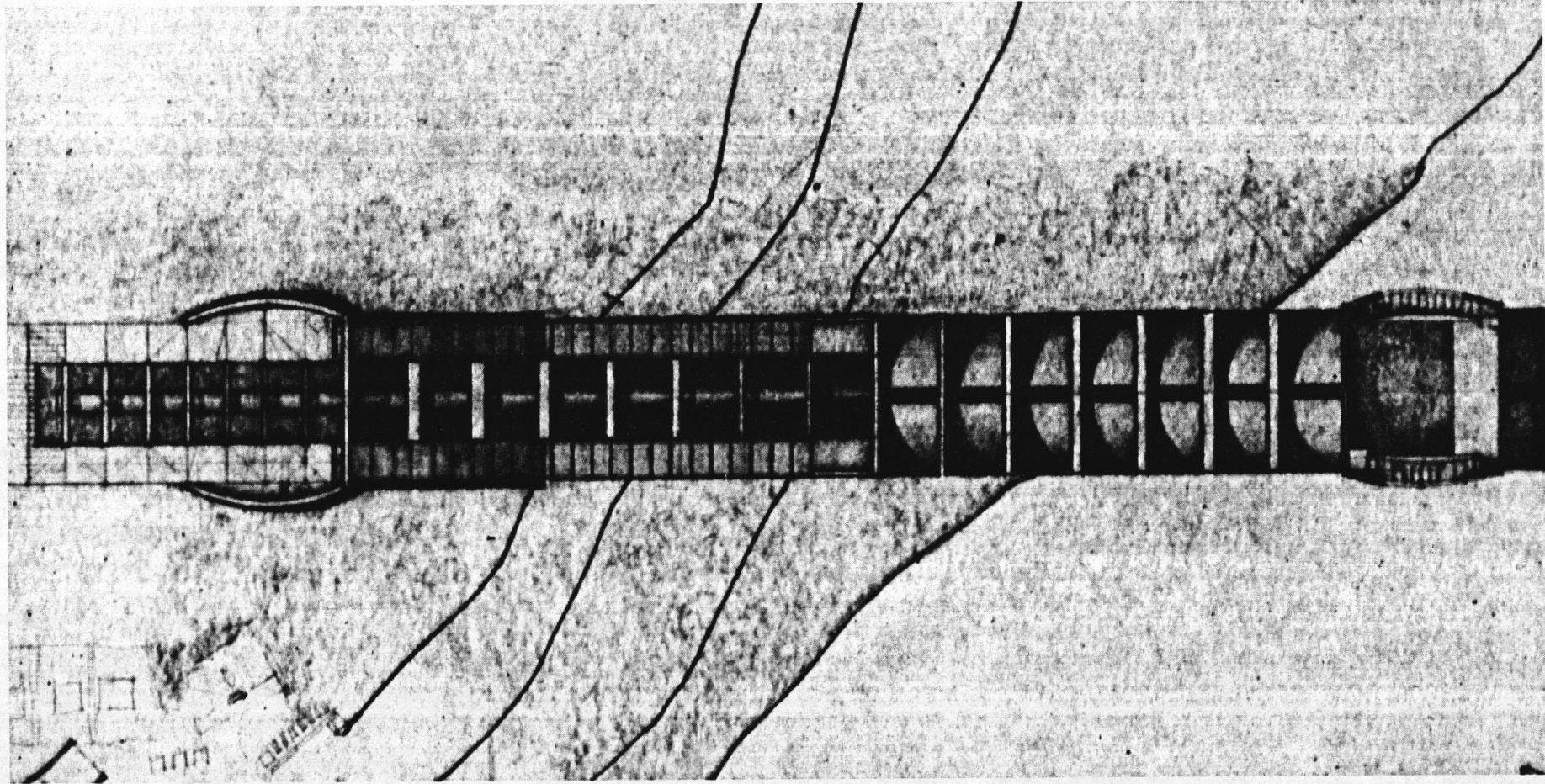


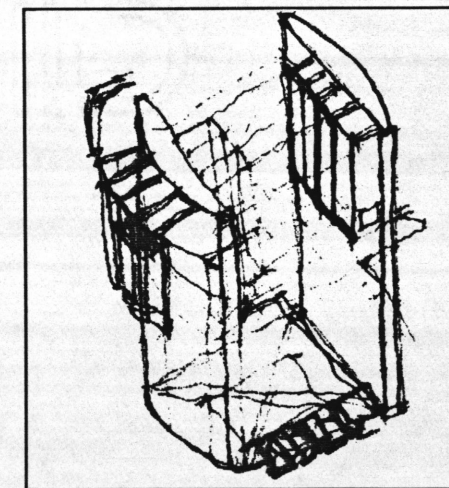
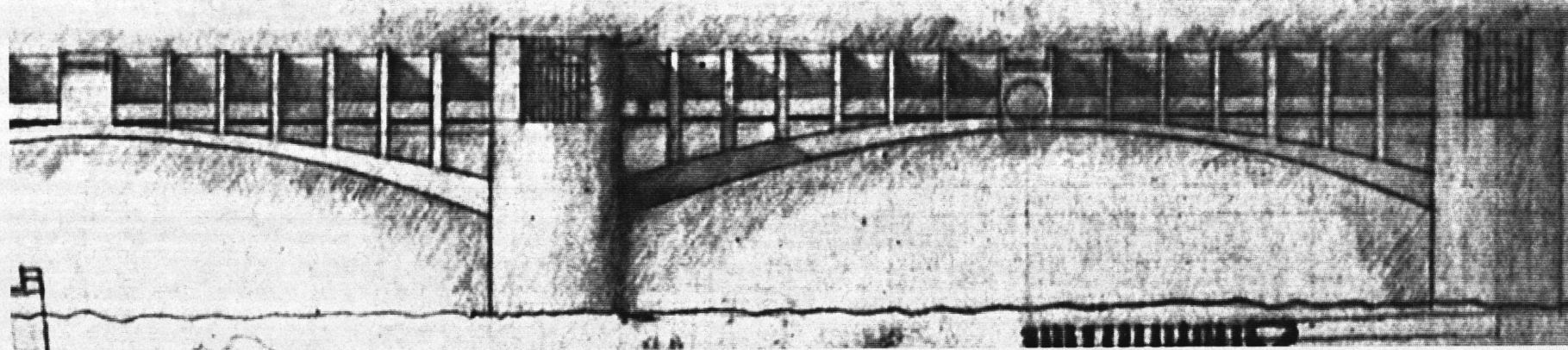
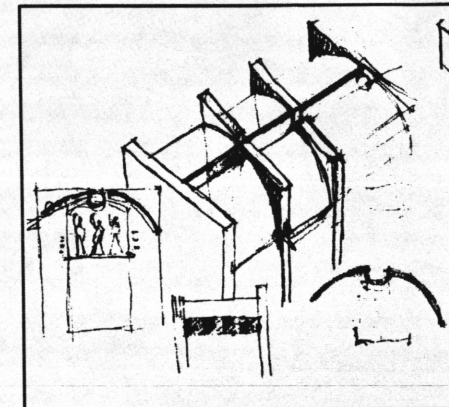
The original city had a boundary, an edge demarked by a wall, In this wall an opening,a gate, the means of entering the city. The wall a presence that creates the opportunity for the act of entering the tower a mediator as well as terminus for the walls. These events are fragments of the typology of walled cities. They present a meaning that the subject brings to the experience of these events as well as the meaning inherent in things that are a part of the history of man. In Roman times the entrance to the city represented the mark of the heavenly stronghold, a triumphal entrance to sun and sky worship.¹ In Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt walled cities and towered enclosures were considered the stronghold of the divine king and his god. Today these meanings have become a part of history. They may not play a part in the meaning for man today, but their remains within man a desire to speak of things. He speaks of the concerns.for things that remain with him. Ideas of gate, wall, tower, house have arisen in him from man's telling, through his making,of their histories. He acts on his desires and again the retelling of things begins.



¹ Smith, E. Baldwin
Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome.



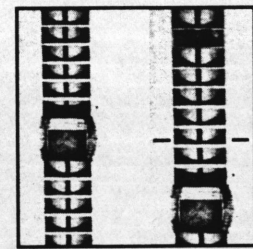
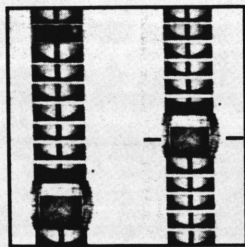
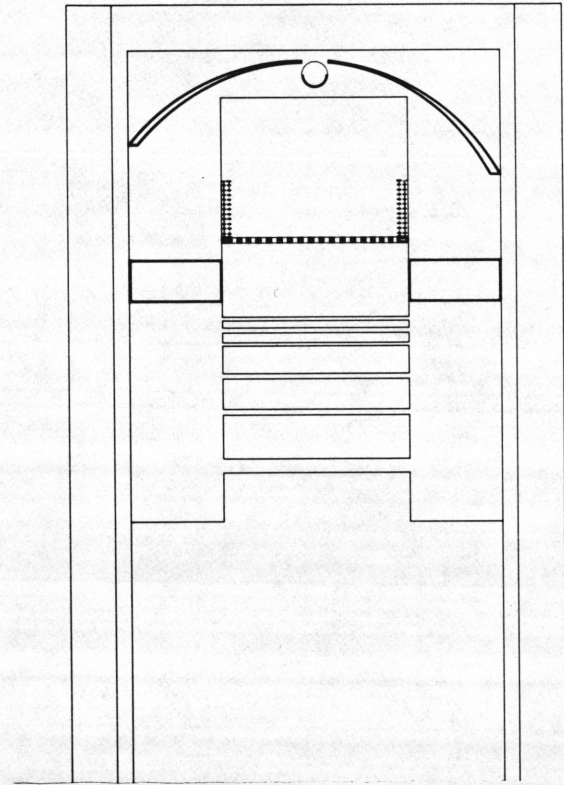
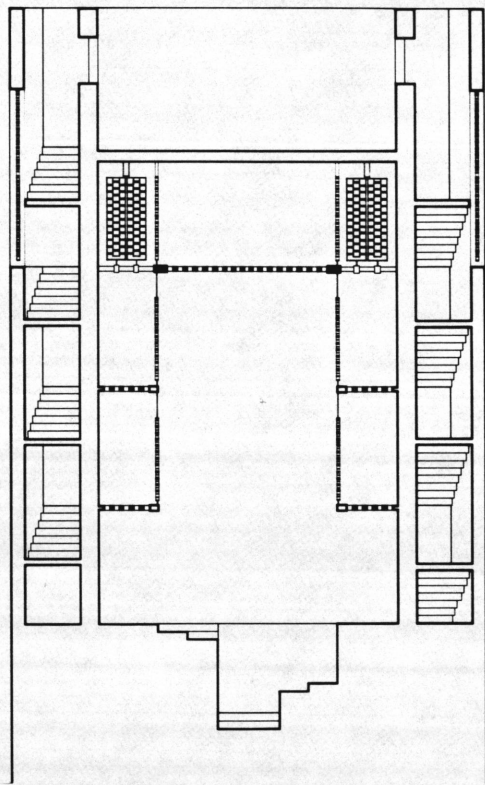


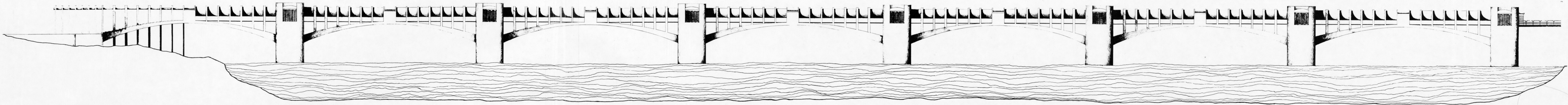
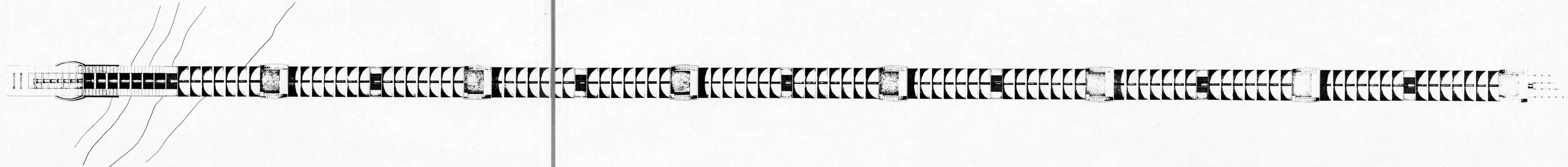


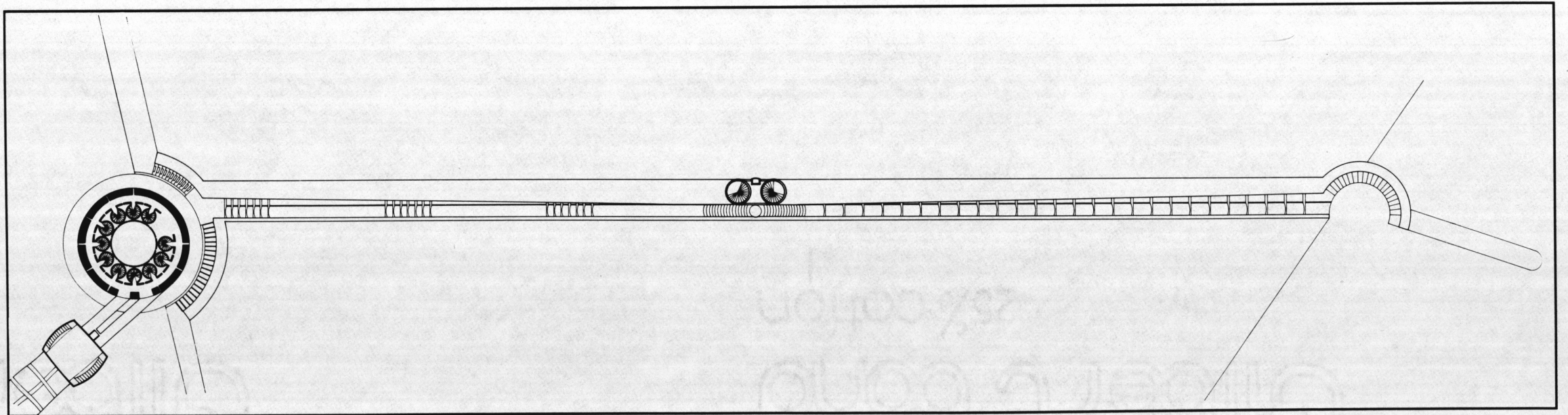
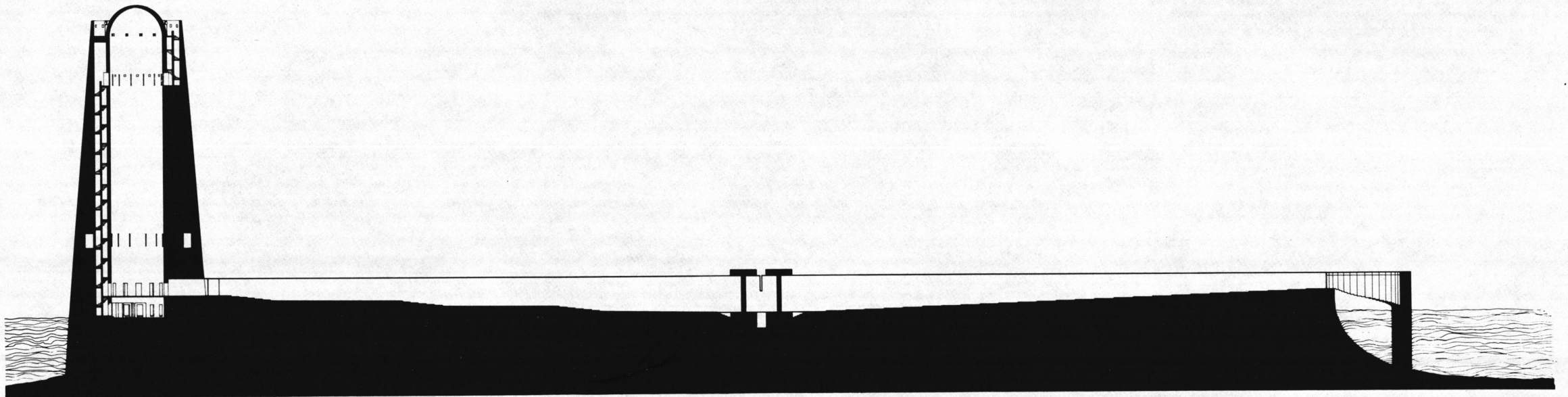
Gilbert bond

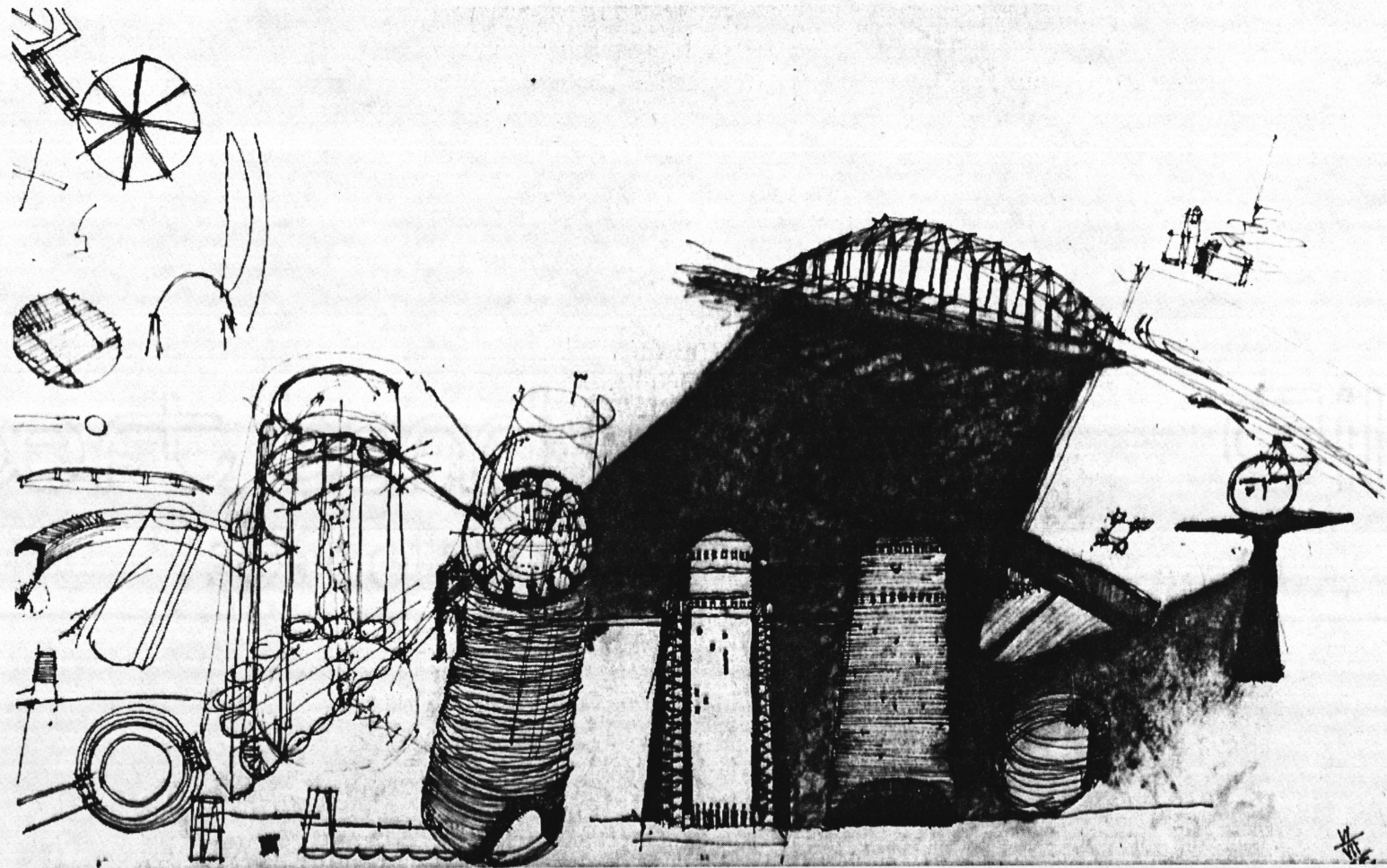
2 1/2" column

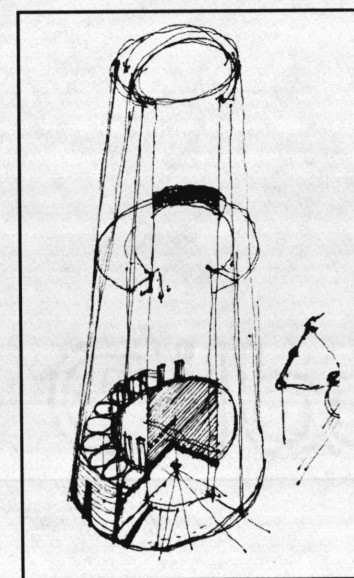
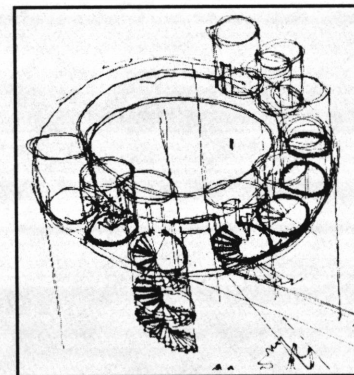
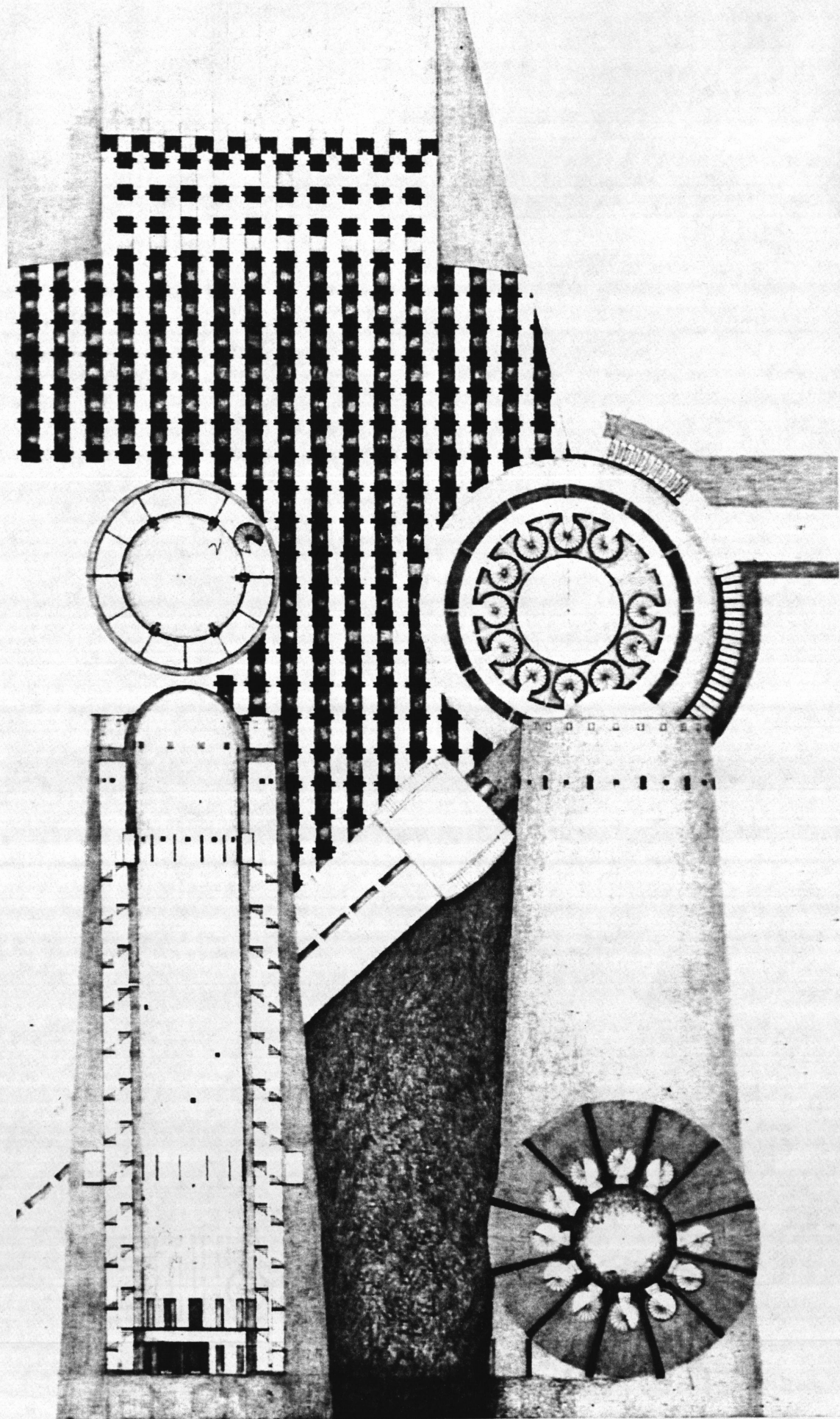
Gilbert

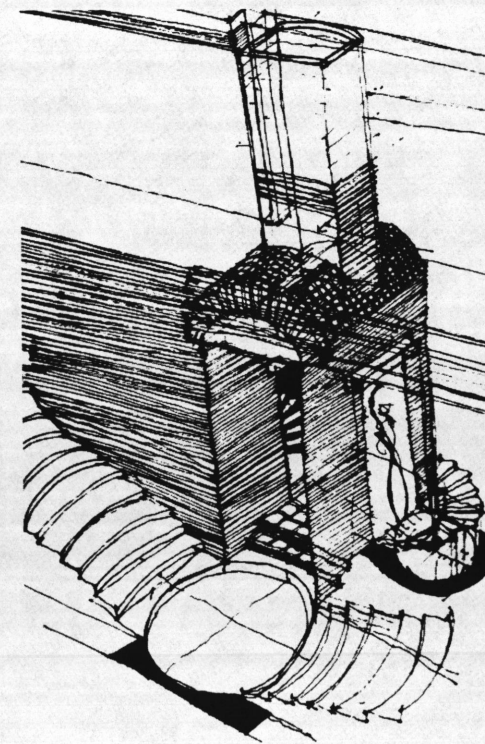
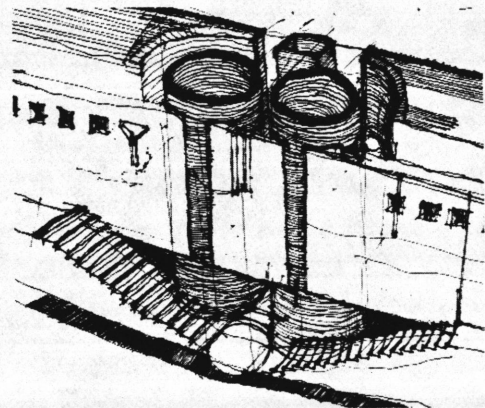
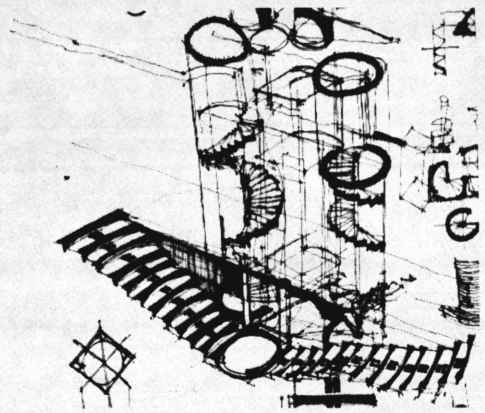
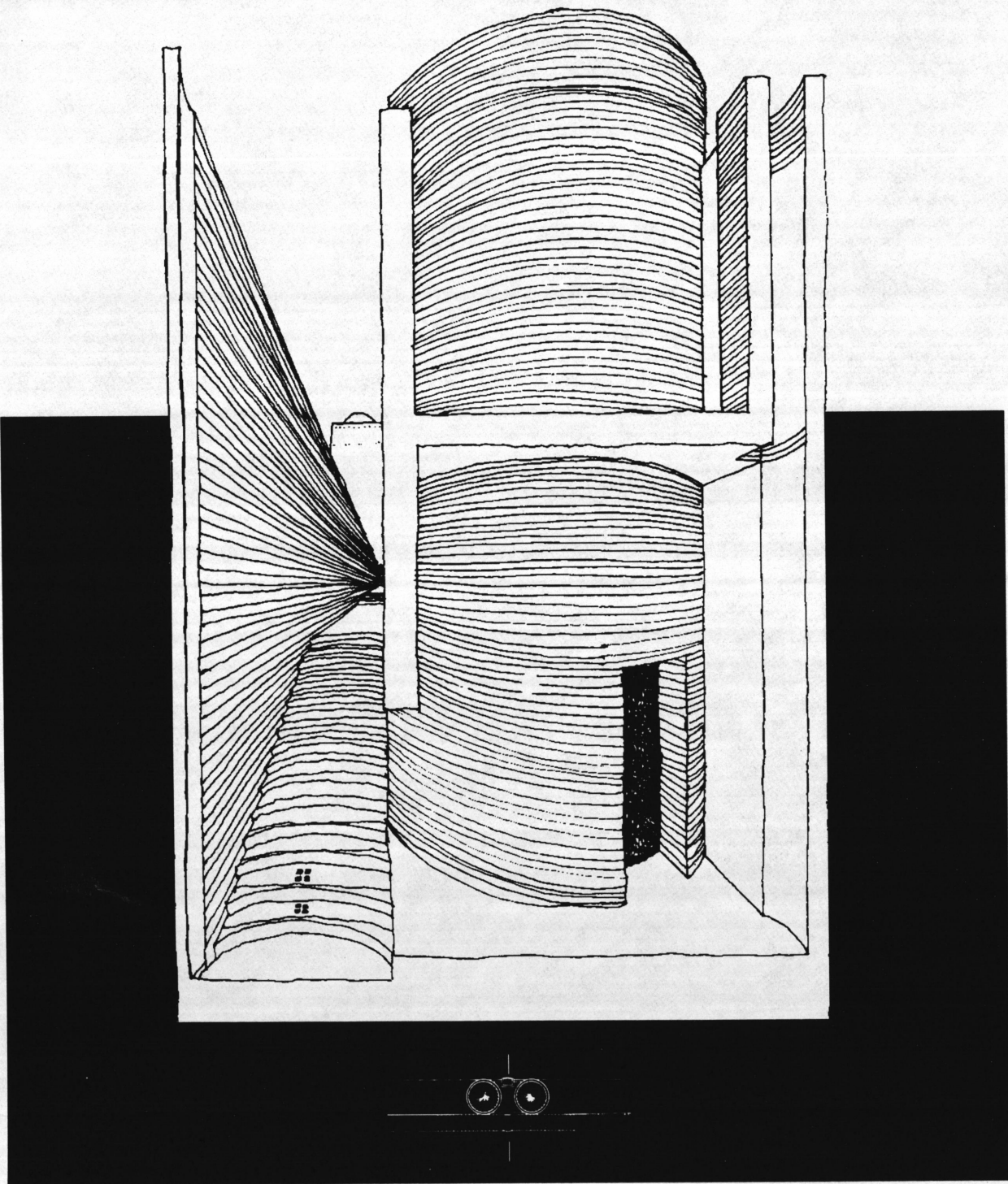


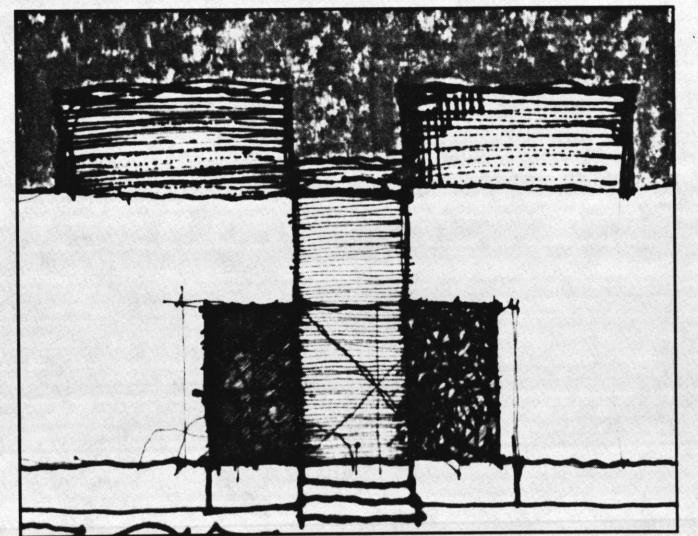
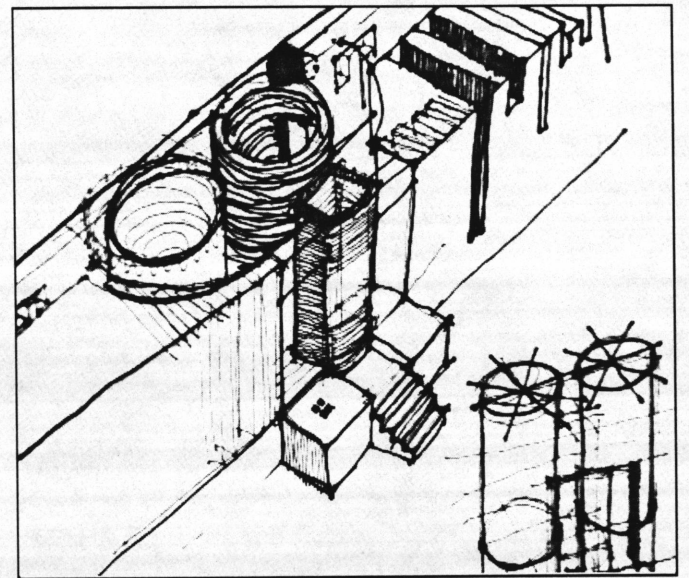
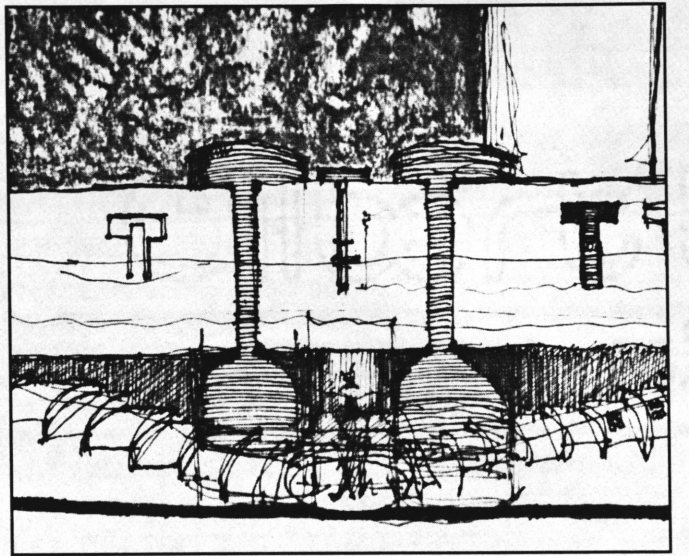
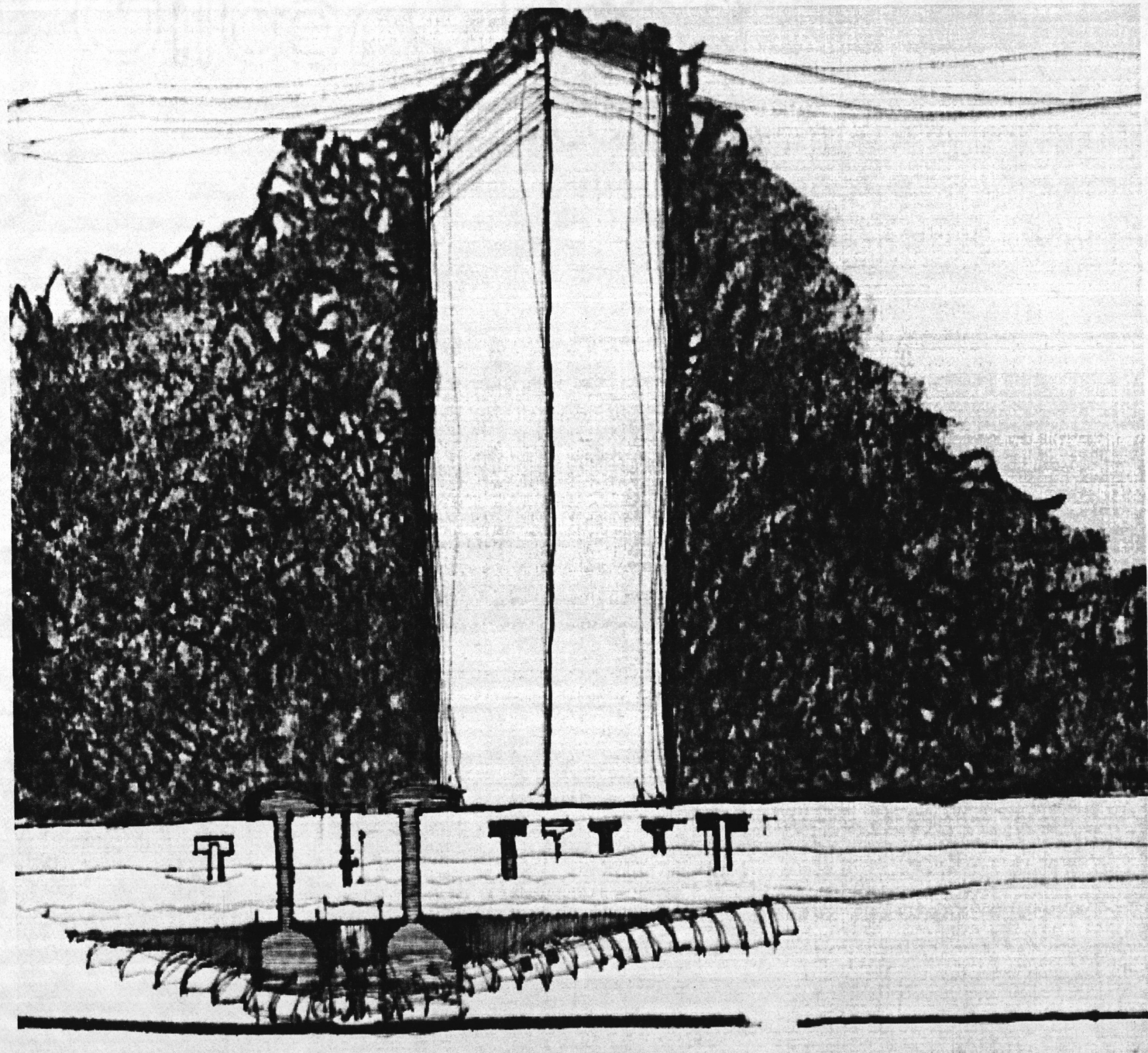


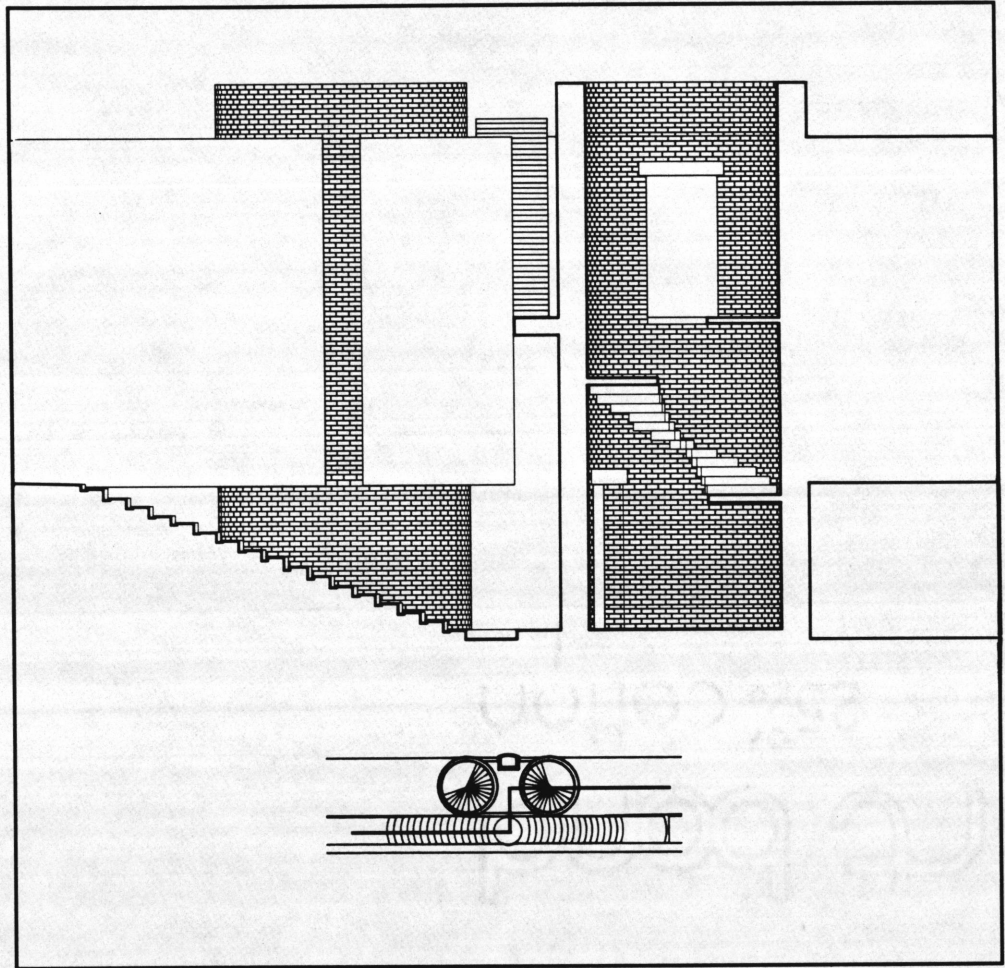


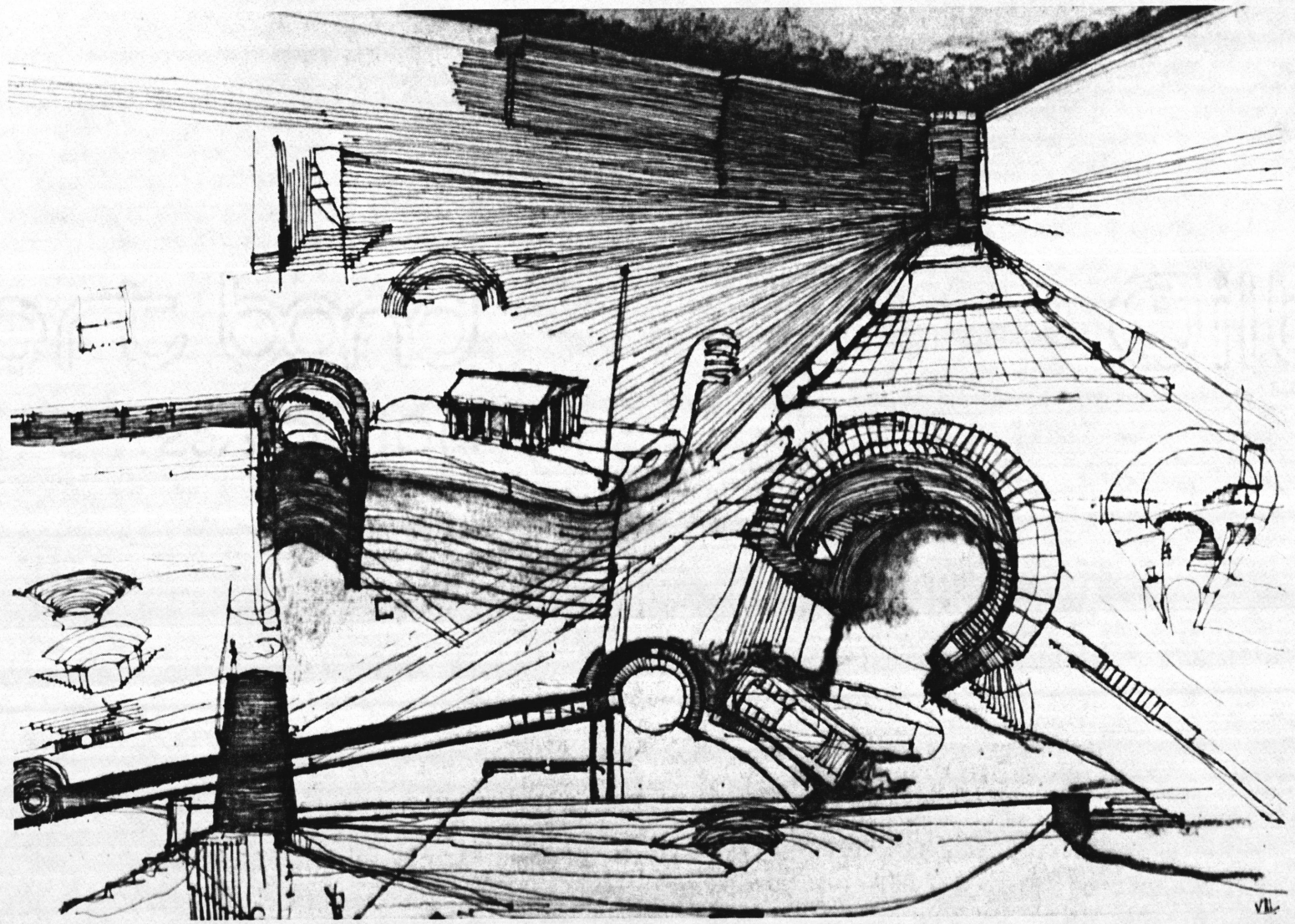


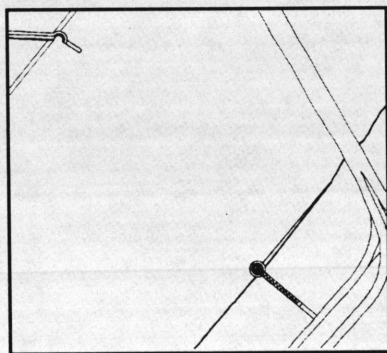
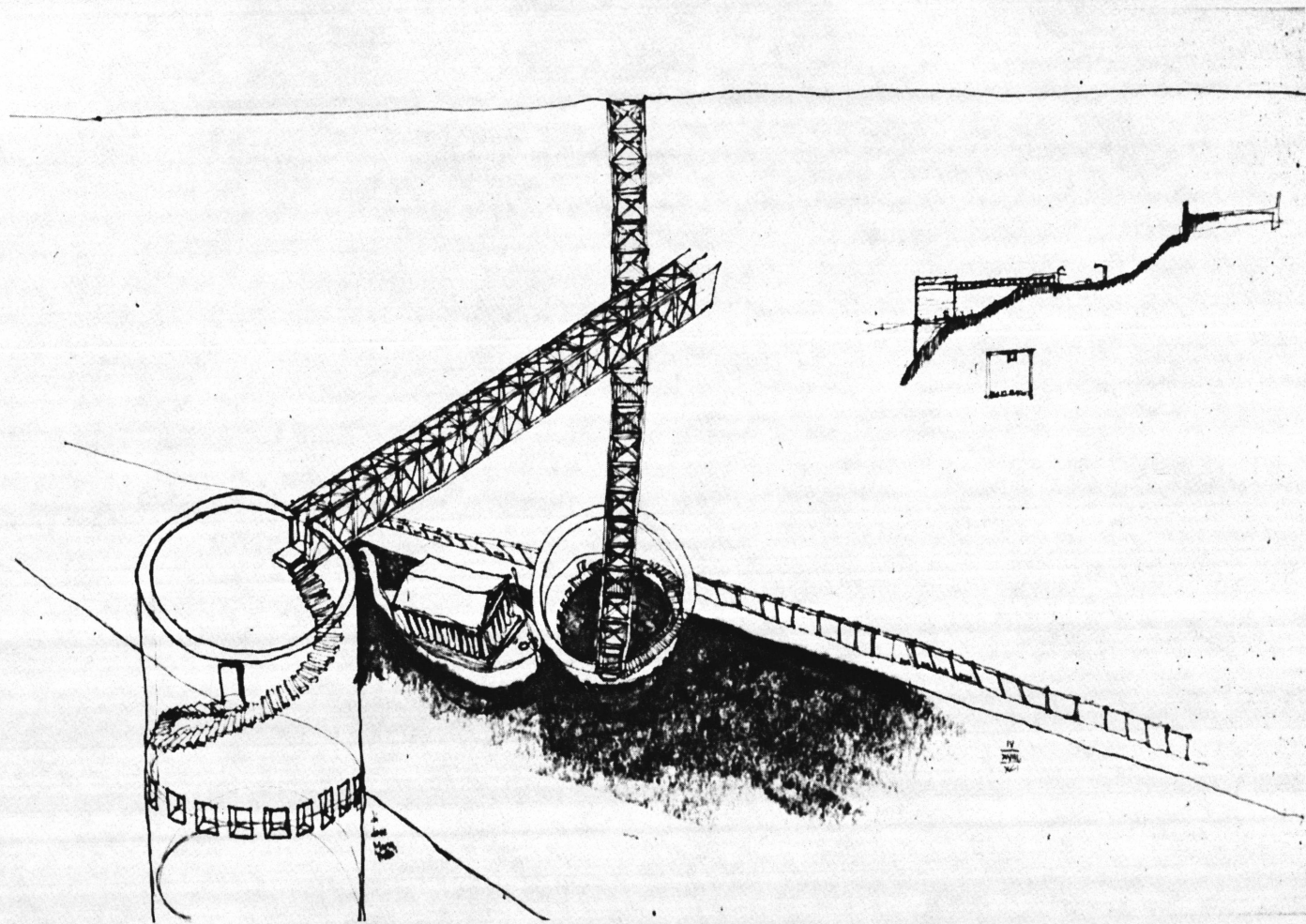












casa rotunda, mario botta
villa savoye, le corbusier
casa bianchi, mario botta
lightwells, la tourette
lightwells, hadrian's villa
diagram, villa savoye
diagram, casa bianchi
allegheny county courthouse, h.h. richardson
pont du gard, roman aqueduct
hadrian's villa, tivoli
charcoal studies ft. wayne
performing arts center, louis kahn
tribune review building, louis kahn
light well la couvent
de la tourette, le corbusier
slaves quarters, hadrian's villa
lightwell, hadrian's villa
underground passage, hadrian's villa
street, florence, italy
stair, carcassone, france
bryn mawr college women's dormitory, louis kahn
street, pompeii, italy

page 6

page 7

page 8



Alberts, Robert C.

Shaping of the Point: Pittsburgh's Renaissance Park. The
Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980

Aristotle

Poetics.
New York, E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1934

Calvino, Italo

Invisible Cities.
New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974

Desmond, William

Art and the Absolute: A study of Hegel's Aesthetics.
Albany, New York, State University of New York, 1986

Eco, Umberto

"Architecture and Memory."
"Via" 1986, no.8, p.[88]-95

Eliot, T.S.

Selected Essays.
Harcourt Brace and World Inc., 1960

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm

Philosophy of History. The.
New York, Dover Publications, 1956

Heidegger, Martin

Poetry Language and Thought.
New York, Harper and Row, 1975

Krier, Rob

Elements of Architecture.
London England, AD Publications Limited, 1983

Nietzsche, Friedrich

Use and Abuse of History. The
Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1987

Plato

Republic. The
Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1955

Rilke, Rainer Maria

Duino Elegies. The.
New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1963

Rossi, Aldo

Scientific Autobiography. A
Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1981

Rossi, Aldo

Architecture of the City. The.
Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1984

Smith, E. Baldwin

Architectural Symbolism Of Imperial Rome.
Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1956

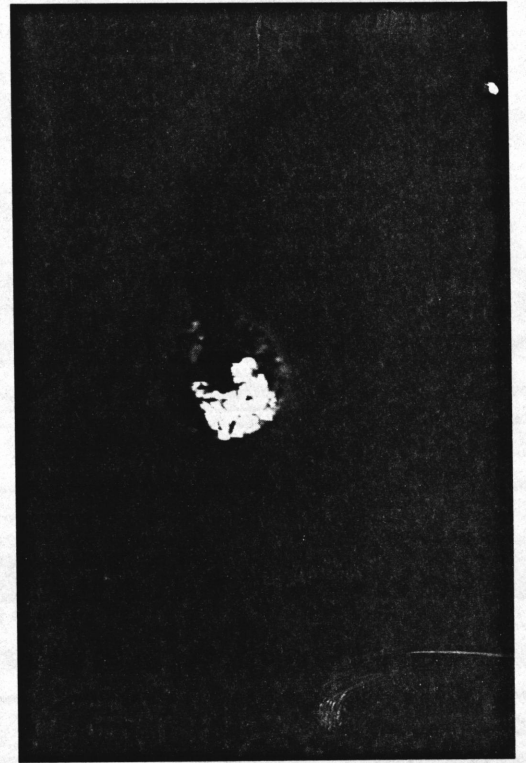
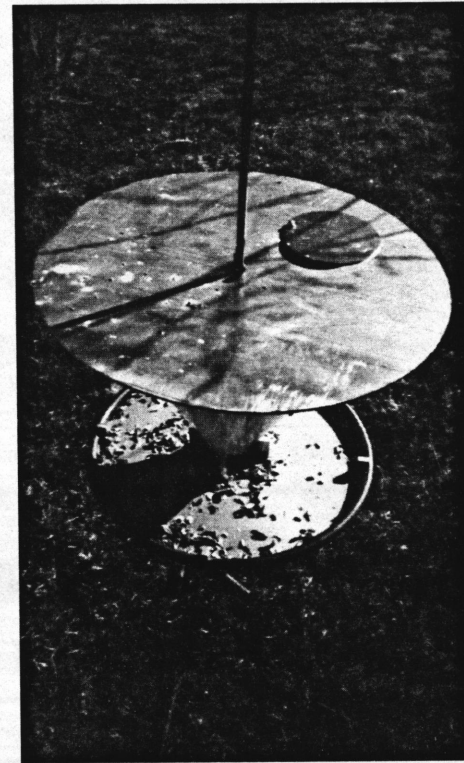
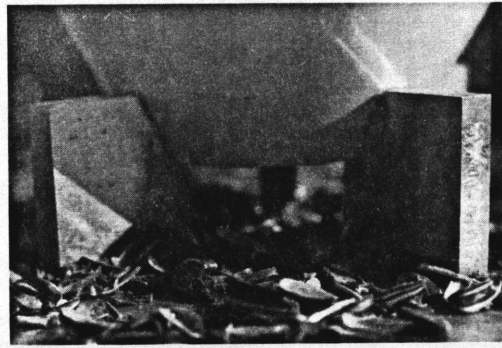
Stein, Gertrude

Picasso: The Complete Writings.
Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1985

St. John Wilson, Colin

"The Historical Sense." (T.S. Eliot's concept of tradition,
and its relevance to architecture.)
The Architectural Review. 176: 68-70 October, 1984

**The vita has been removed from
the scanned document**



b

i

r

d

f

e

e

d

e

r