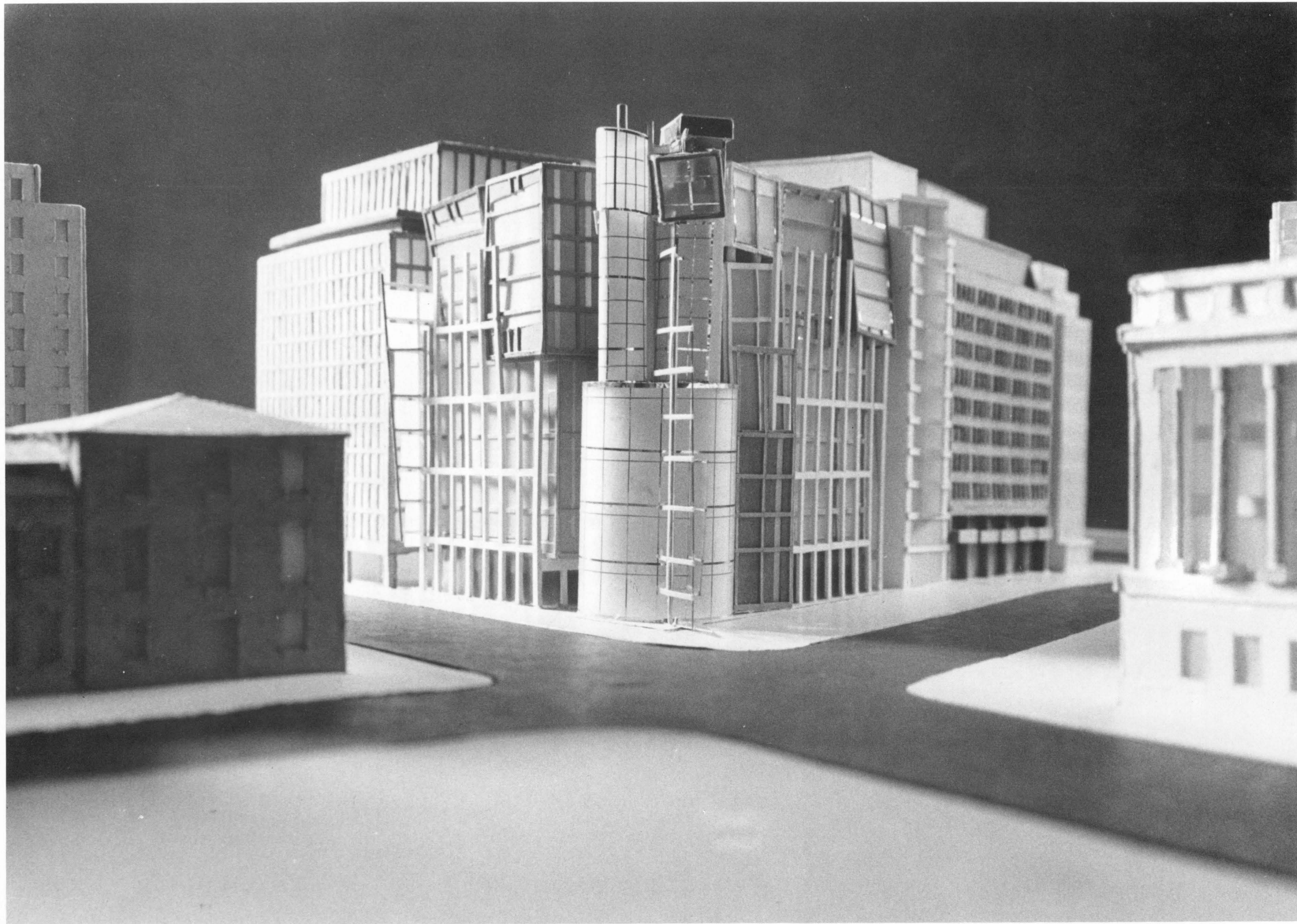


# UNBUILDING ARCHITECTURE

## A NON-NORMATIVE EXPLORATION



## THESIS PROJECT

SIGNATURES/ VITAE/ ETC.

DECONSTRUCTION  
ABSTRACT

GEOMETRIC ANALYSIS  
OF CENTRAL WASH., D.C.

LEVEL ONE CONTEXT PLAN

AERIAL CONTEXT PLAN

MODEL PHOTOGRAPHS  
(FOUR PAGES LARGE) +  
(TWO PAGES SMALL)

LEVEL ONE PLAN

LEVEL SIX PLAN

LEVEL ELEVEN PLAN

FULL BUILDING AXONS

H ST. ELEVATION

CONNECTICUT AVE. ELEV.

SERVICE ALLEY ELEV.

STRUCTURAL SECTION

ATRIUM PERSPECTIVE

MAIN CIRCULATION  
PLATFORM

PARTIAL BUILDING AXON

CORNER AXON

MEN'S CLOTHING SHOP  
PERSPECTIVES

BUILDING FRAGMENTS

PROCESS DRAWINGS

IMPROVISATIONAL TABLE:

BUILDING ANALYSIS DWGS:

## UNBUILDING ARCHITECTURE

FROM: JOSEPH F. McMANUS, JR.

TO: GRADUATE FACULTY,

Virginia Polytechnic Institute  
And State University.  
Blacksburg, Va.

ON: April, 1994.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for a Master Of Architecture degree.

### APPROVED BY COMMITTEE:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Hans C. Rott, Chairman.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael J. O'Brien

\_\_\_\_\_  
Heiner Schnoedt

### AWARDS:

**2nd Place:**  
Travelmasters competition.  
(Blacksburg, Va. 1990).

**2nd Place:**  
Search For Shelter competition  
(Gainesville, Fl. 1988).

This book is dedicated to my family,  
and to the memory of

## INTRODUCTION:

On the following pages are images of an architecture which pushes the limits of design. Conceived as an amalgamation of semiautonomous fragments, the thesis project strives to decompose into complete disarray. At the verge of structural (compositional) collapse, the building asks the question 'where does structure break down, and chaos begin?'. A table I have designed and built is an experiment in spontaneity, and questions the validity of traditional ways of building furniture. Building analysis drawings I have included at the end of the book are compositional exercises and have, from a graphic perspective, some of the density and formal complexity of the images of the thesis.

While I have relied upon Deconstructionist terminology to describe the building represented, I must admit that the building is not truly Deconstructed. It is fragmented. Some visual continuity between design elements remains. If I were to produce a deconstructed building, I would have to go beyond playing formal games and question what forms signify. Then, perhaps, I could find alternative significations; I might also be able to make a new link between the signifier and the signified. I think I would be searching for a new conception of form, one free of convention, of precondition.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

#### THANKS TO:

My Sister  
My Mother  
And Father

Sunday Phone Calls  
Financial And  
Emotional Support  
The Truth, Always  
Catia Instruction  
Helpful Pointers  
Theoretical Advice  
Technical Expertise  
Technical Expertise

### VITAE:

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

# DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is not a theory, style or method. It is applicable to various discourses (art, philosophy, architecture, etc.). It is a way of thinking within a discourse; it questions the repression inherent in such discourse, especially any repression which limits the production or interpretation of discourse. Jacques Derrida is the acknowledged father/figurehead of Deconstruction. Through writings such as Speech and Phenomenon, Writing and Difference, Of Grammatology and Disseminations, Derrida attacks and attempts to invalidate metaphysical philosophy (which attempts to determine the structure/nature of the universe through application of pure reason). Derrida refutes the argument of the author by proving that the premises of the argument are self-defeating when taken to their logical conclusions. Derrida's subversion of metaphysics opens up new ways of thinking not based solely on logic.

Architectural metaphors are pervasive in Derrida's writings, and a number of Deconstructionist Architects have tried to link Deconstructionist philosophy/writing to a relatively new aesthetic known loosely as Deconstructivism. Deconstructivism is a term manufactured by the media and architectural critics in order to group together Architects who have certain common aesthetic tendencies. This term fails to recognize the widely divergent motivations of the Architects. It is unfair, perhaps, to compare the visceral architecture of Frank O. Gehry and Coop Himmelblau with the intellectual formalizations of Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi. The former physically attack the integrity of pure form, while the latter treat form as visual text which can be manipulated to produce dissociation.

Deconstructionist architecture appears to have certain traits: decentralization, dispersion, fragmentation, distortion and superposition. The combination of these traits produces indeterminacy.

The attack on determinacy is perhaps Deconstruction's most important contribution to architectural discourse. When architecture becomes nearly indeterminate, the connection between cause and effect becomes obscure; any number of conditions or constraints can together determine the nature of the forms produced. Any single condition or constraint, however, cannot be said to produce form because the conditions or constraints exist in an open system. In such a system, the relation of cause/effect cannot be absolutely determined; however, the cause/effect relationship can be approximated through probability. Probability introduces chance, and thus discontinuity (gaps or ruptures in the system's theoretic structure where the rules do not apply). It is this discontinuity which Deconstruction actively promotes through dissociation and fragmentation.

The meaning of form, as well as its' structure, may become indeterminate. Deconstruction's attempts at altering our interpretations of form may be perceived as moves in the direction of Post-Structuralism. In a deconstructed system, many alternative interpretations exist which do not depend upon differentiation of elements within the system. Similarity rather than dissimilarity, for example, may form a basis for signification. The application of "différance" could produce alternative meanings. In such an application, interpretations would not rely upon opposition (differentiation), but upon commonality (equivalence).

**DIFFERENCE:** A play between Difference and Deference. The acknowledgment of the difference between elements is postponed. In the instant before elements' differences are distinguished, dissimilarities are not evident, and similarities between elements may form the basis for comparison.

Meaning is variable. One element (word, form) may have many significations. Certain meanings, however, become dominant as a result of convention. Deconstruction eschews convention so that other repressed meanings may receive priority and may become equivalent to the previously dominant meanings. Under Deconstruction, such concepts as structure, order, function and form may be reinterpreted once convention is abandoned...

In Deconstructionist architecture, structure is dissociated, or deconstructed. Elements do not build up to a unified whole, but act as independent fragments which, through coincidence (collision, superposition, overlap), combine to provide coherence. This coherence is minimal, with internal disruptions preventing synthesization of fragments.

Order, as interpreted by Deconstruction, is close to disorder or chaos. Conventional concepts such as unity, harmony, balance and rhythm are discarded. The net effect is a non-hierarchical, destabilized system where connectivity (induced by synthesization) is replaced by disjunction (disconnectivity). The disjunctions or interruptions between (as opposed to the intersections of) elements begin to organize such elements within the system.

Function in Deconstruction is reinterpreted as accommodation. Usage (by occupants) is accommodated by but not restrictive upon design. Jacques Derrida proposes that, within Deconstruction, function can be relieved if its' conventional associations through reinscription. Conventional conceptualizations could be devalued to the point where non-conventional conceptualizations could be inscribed within (attached to) an overall notion of function. Conventional and non-conventional conceptualizations can then together redefine function. One possible reconceptualization is that to function is to provide pleasure. If something is pleasing, then it is in some way beneficial; i.e., services the user. Bernard Tschumi utilizes pleasure in his 'folies' in Parc de Villette in Paris, France. The individual folies exist to provide visual excitement, while function varies in response to changing programmatic requirements. In La Villette, the normative concept of function (programmatic response) is destabilized by its' fluctuation over time; this destabilization allows the concept of pleasure to take on precedence.

Deconstruction assails form both literally and conceptually. Architects such as Frank O. Gehry, Coop Himmelblau, Zaha Hadid and Daniel Libeskind break apart forms into shards or fragments. It must be noted that the fragments are woven together so that a certain degree of order does exist. Essentially, the individual shards are woven together into a kind of spatial net. Conceptually, form can be perceived as wavering, as fluctuating between alternate material states. Peter Eisenman has described these conditions as absence and presence.

He also has suggested that these conditions are not in opposition. For him, absence and presence are part of a spectrum of existence. Also within the spectrum is a condition which he has coined "absent presence". This condition exists (for him) in between absence and presence, wavering constantly between the two extremes. In Eisenman's intermediate state, form is not stable; it remains forever fluctuating. Eisenman is preoccupied with denying the materiality of form.

Hiromi Fujii, a Japanese Architect, shares Eisenman's belief in the instability of form. Fujii, in the article "Dispersed, Multilayered Space", suggests that one's views of elements in space are constantly shifting. The instability of one's views of elements prevents one from systematizing the differing perceptions, and forces one to mesh the sequence of views into an incomplete, open formal construct. Fujii's basic argument is that form is opaque, that the shifting of views prevents a complete (transparent) perception of form. Instead, form (in relation to the observer) remains in a state of flux.

Assessing the validity of Deconstruction using conventional standards is futile because Deconstruction operates outside conventional realms. However, assessment is possible if one believes that the questioning of convention is necessary. If convention can be proved to be based upon arbitrariness, then Deconstruction provides an alternative to conventional approaches to Architecture. As previously stated, Deconstruction is not a style, method or theory. Amateurish reproductions of its' aesthetics yields chaos; a system of rules for production is anti-deconstructive. Deconstruction is a way of thinking about or conceptualizing which frees one from convention and which allows the possibility of reinterpretation and redefinition of Architecture.

**BASIS OF DECONSTRUCTION:** The basis of deconstructive thought is uncertainty, inherent in an open system. Deconstruction attempts to find exceptions to established systems (theories, traditions, norms, etc.) in order to prevent closure. If closure is denied, then the validity of the system remains in doubt; unforeseen exclusions may invalidate the system's theoretical framework.

## UNBUILDING

The architectural profession searches for ways to put buildings together, not pull them apart. Architects generally attempt to synthesize the elements of design into an ordered construct, a "composition". It is possible, however to "decompose" a building, to destructure the formal interrelationships of the elements of a design. A building may be conceived as an amalgamation of elements dispersed within a 3D field (building envelope). Within this field, elements are compared not according to their differences, but according to their commonalities. The objective is to maintain equivalence between fragments in order to prevent their synthesization. In a state of perpetual fragmentation, a design becomes a loose collection of shards which are tied together visually by similarities in size, shape and articulation.

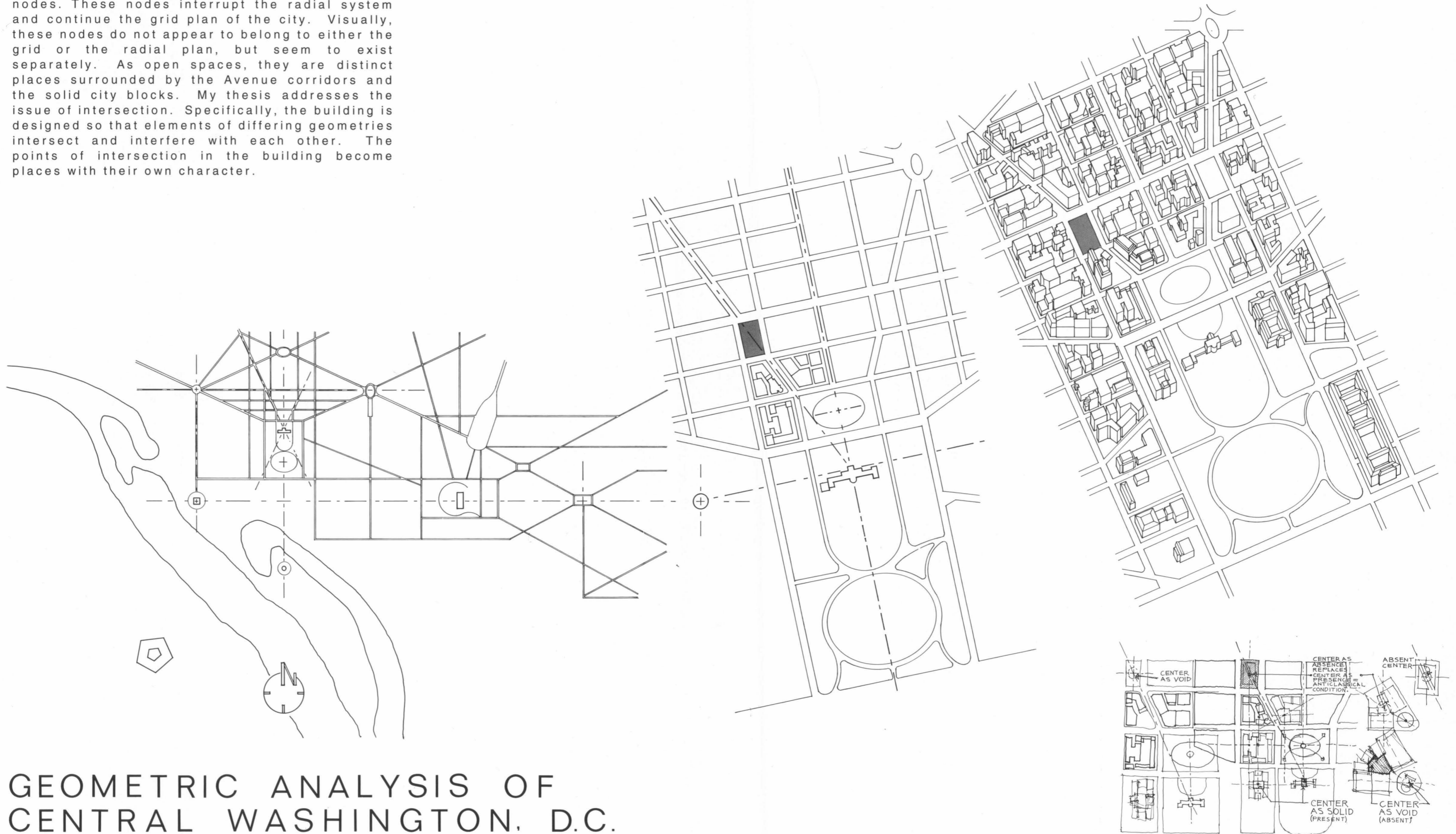
There appears to be an "other" order at work in the deconstructive process. This order, I believe, relies upon intuition, and operates in conditions of near-chaos where discontinuities are the rule, not the exception. There appear to be certain signatures which hint at the existence of this order; disconnectivities, voids and gaps begin to destroy formal integrity. In my building, I have actively searched for discontinuity in the hope that the abandonment of structural (Saussure's conception of order) integration would yield unforeseen connectivities and forms. I had to accept that the building would never reach closure (would never be complete), and that it would never achieve perfection. By perceiving the building as a loose collection of semiautonomous fragments, I was able to maintain a high degree of discontinuity without the design devolving completely into chaos. The fragments (rectangular and curvilinear steel and concrete constructions) were woven together in a way such that the fragments maintained their individual identities and yet somehow accommodated each other.

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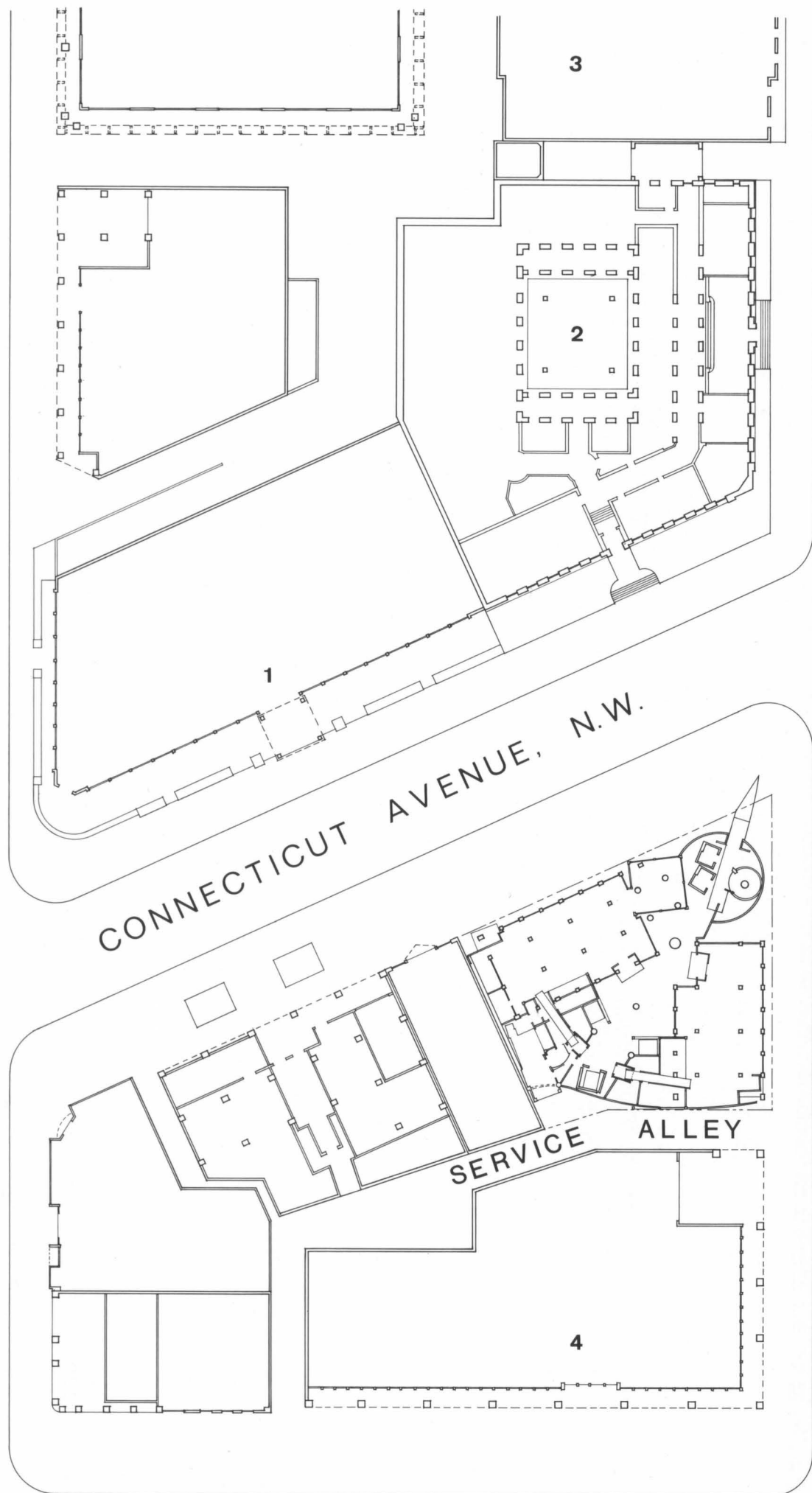
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Part 3: "Deconstruction and Art"  
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Andrew Benjamin
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## URBAN CONTEXT:

Downtown Washington, D.C. is simultaneously organized by a radial and a grid system. Points of intersection between the two systems act as nodes. These nodes interrupt the radial system and continue the grid plan of the city. Visually, these nodes do not appear to belong to either the grid or the radial plan, but seem to exist separately. As open spaces, they are distinct places surrounded by the Avenue corridors and the solid city blocks. My thesis addresses the issue of intersection. Specifically, the building is designed so that elements of differing geometries intersect and interfere with each other. The points of intersection in the building become places with their own character.



## GEOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF CENTRAL WASHINGTON. D.C.



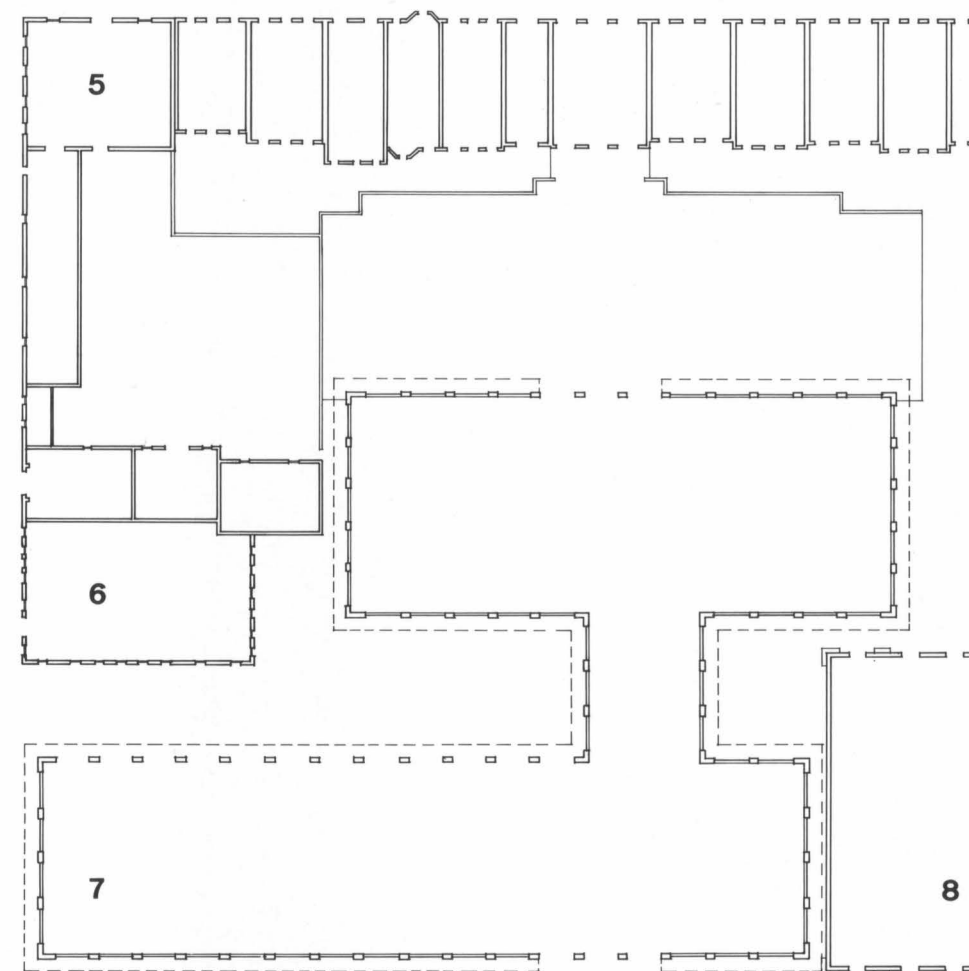
# LEVEL ONE CONTEXT PLAN



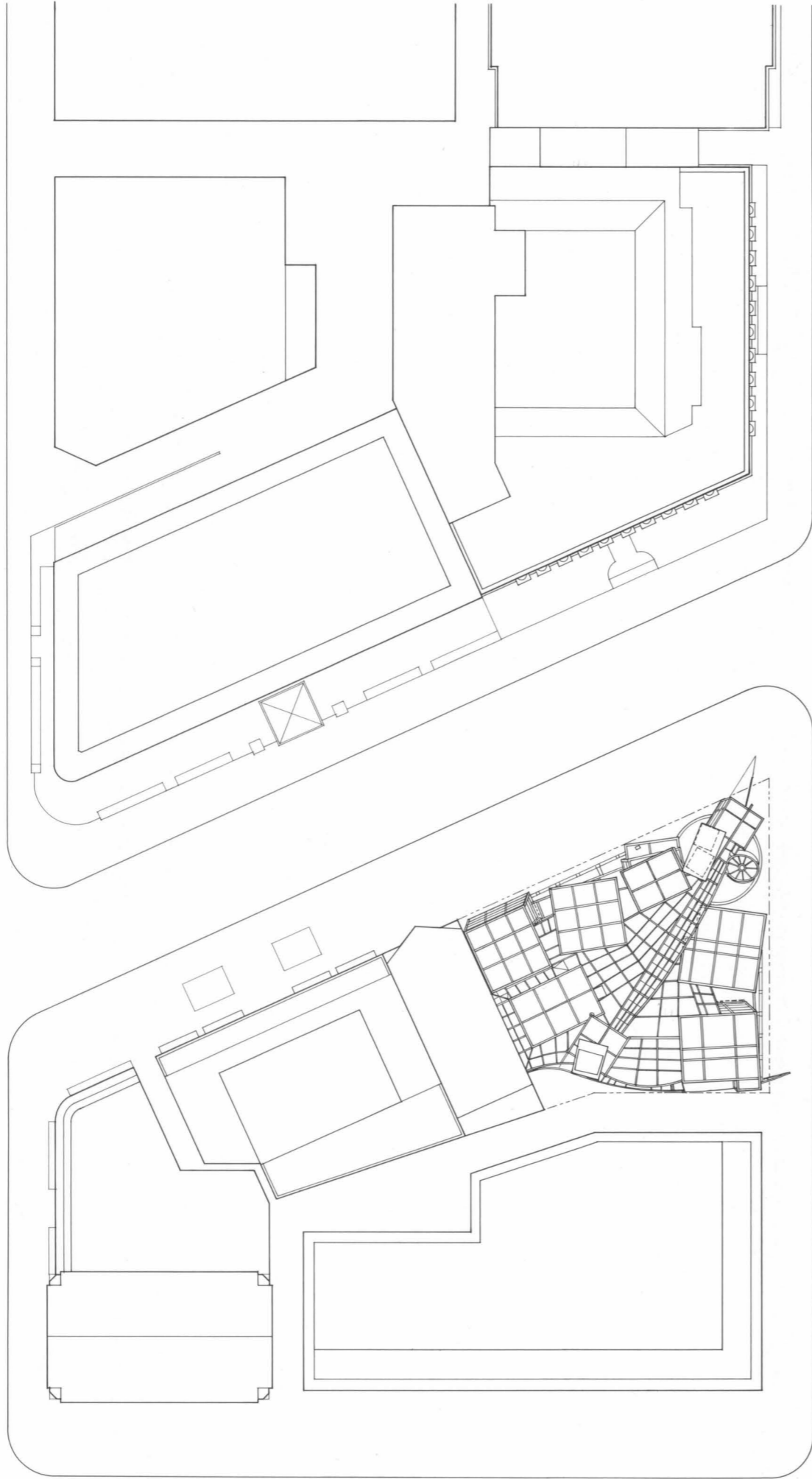
## CONTEXT BUILDINGS:

1. CHANIN BUILDING
2. U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
3. HAY ADAMS HOTEL
4. LAFAYETTE OFFICE BUILDING
5. DECATUR HOUSE
6. NATIONAL GRANGE BUILDING
7. LYNDON B. JOHNSON BUILDING
8. RENWICK GALLERY

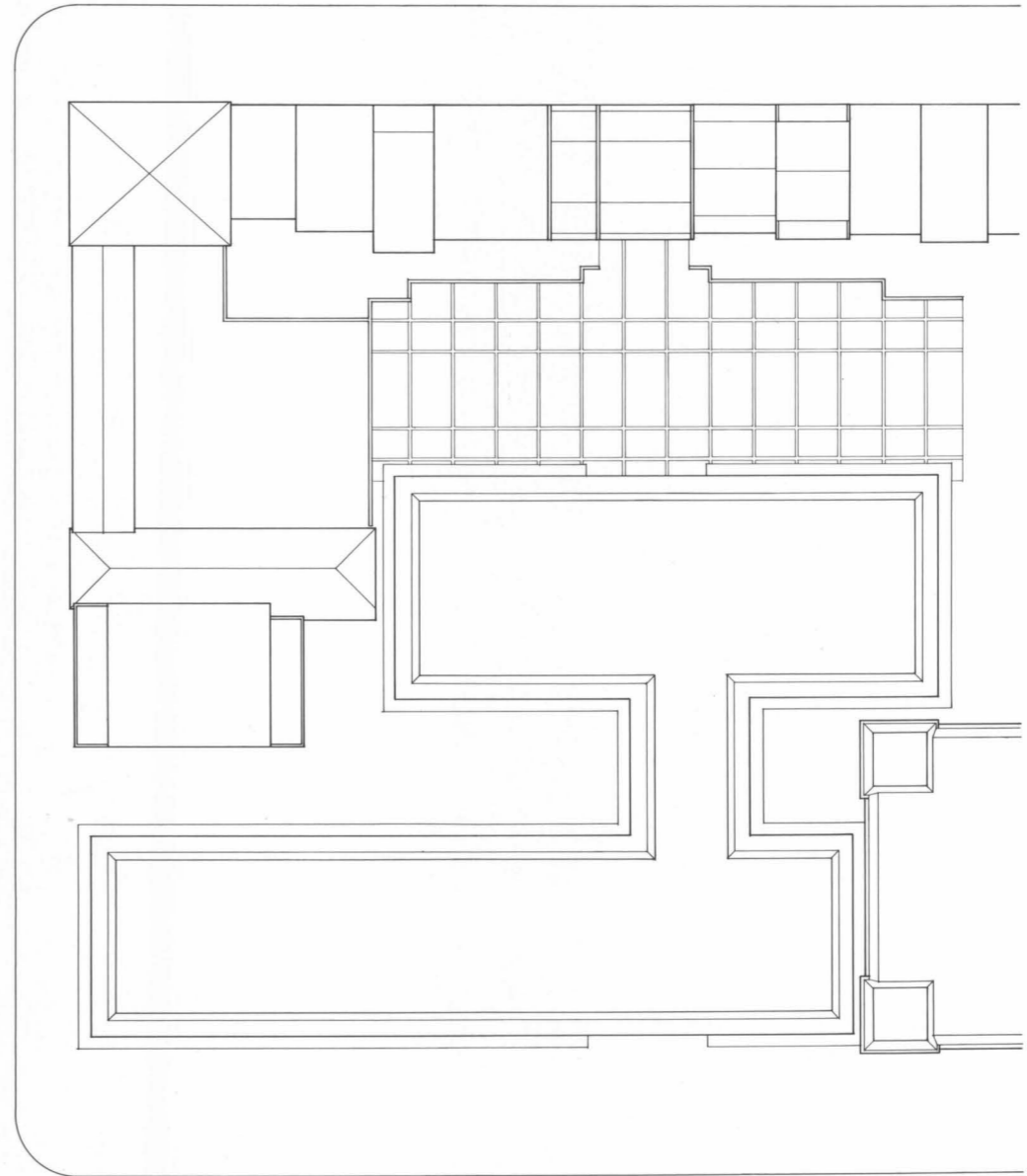
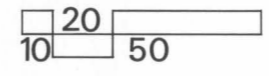
## JACKSON PLACE

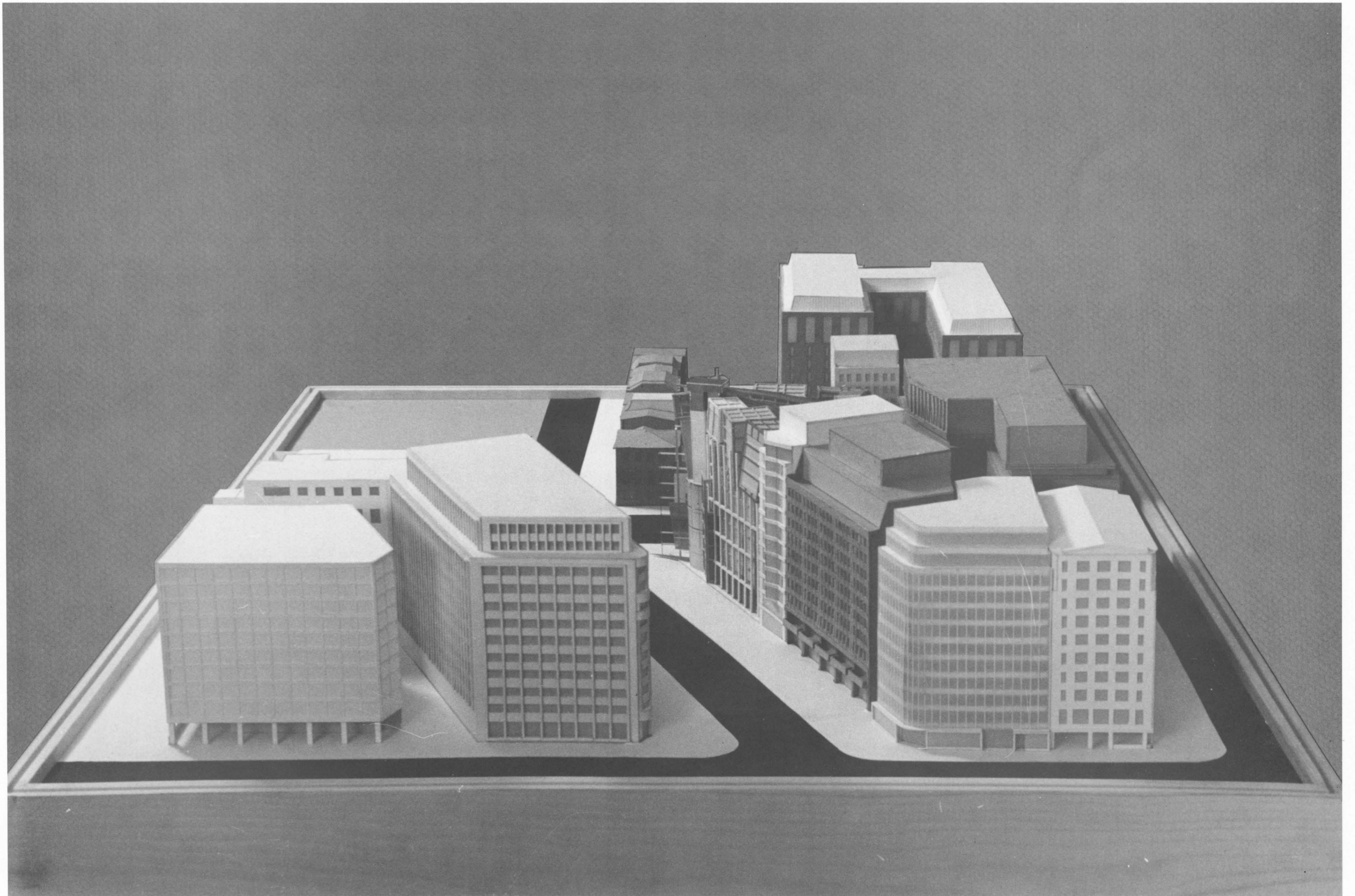


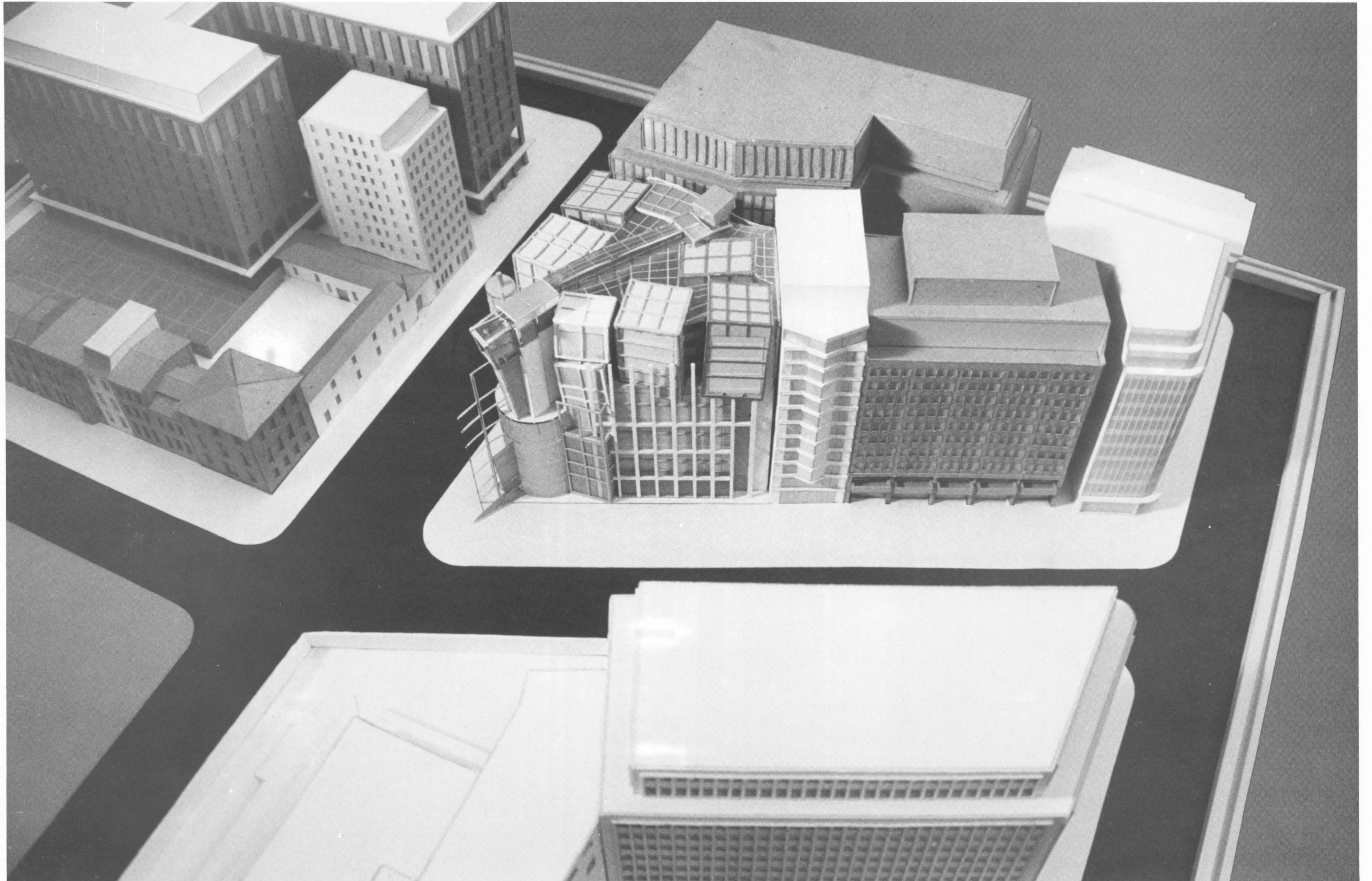
H STREET, N.W.



# AERIAL CONTEXT PLAN

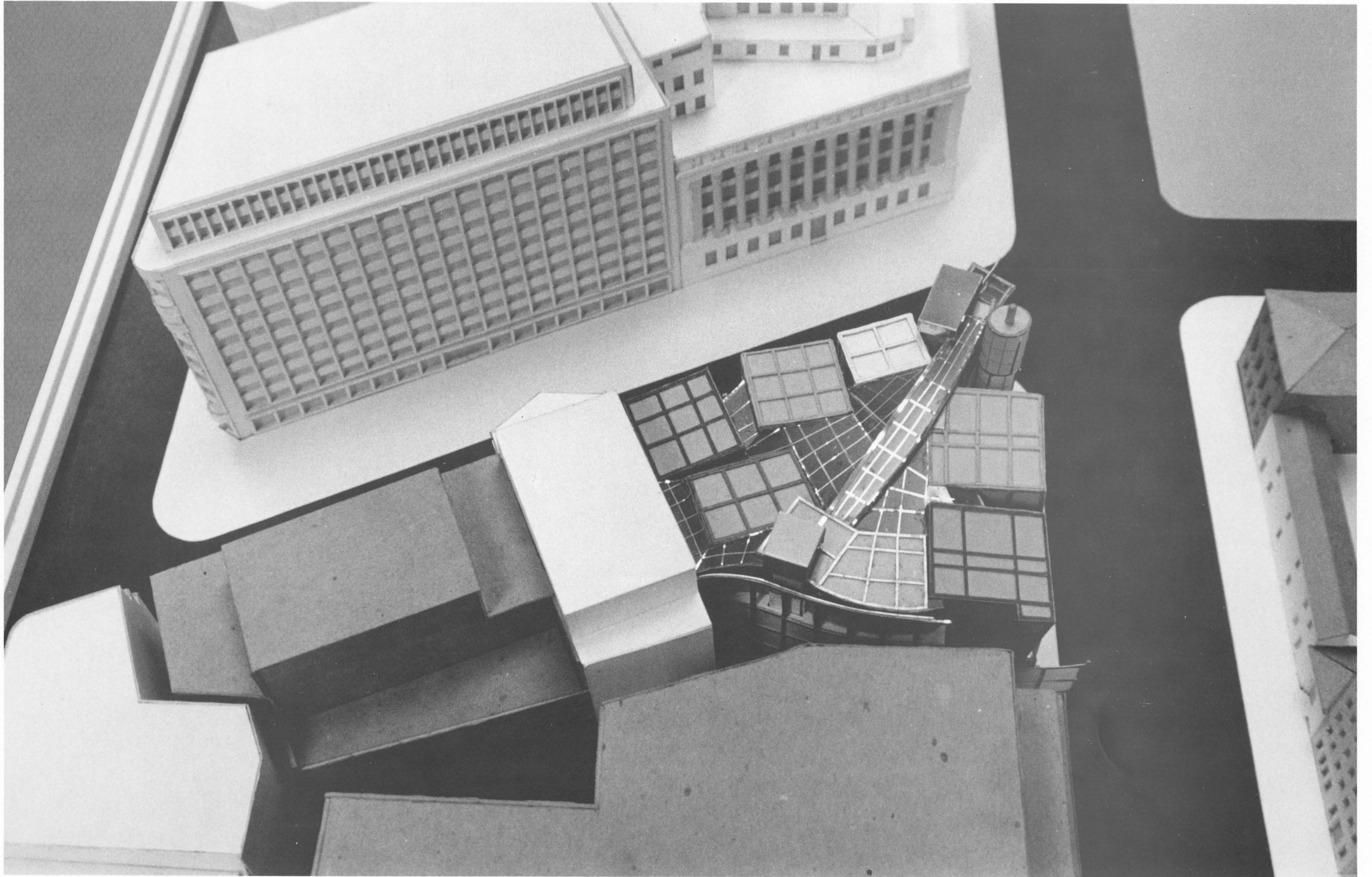


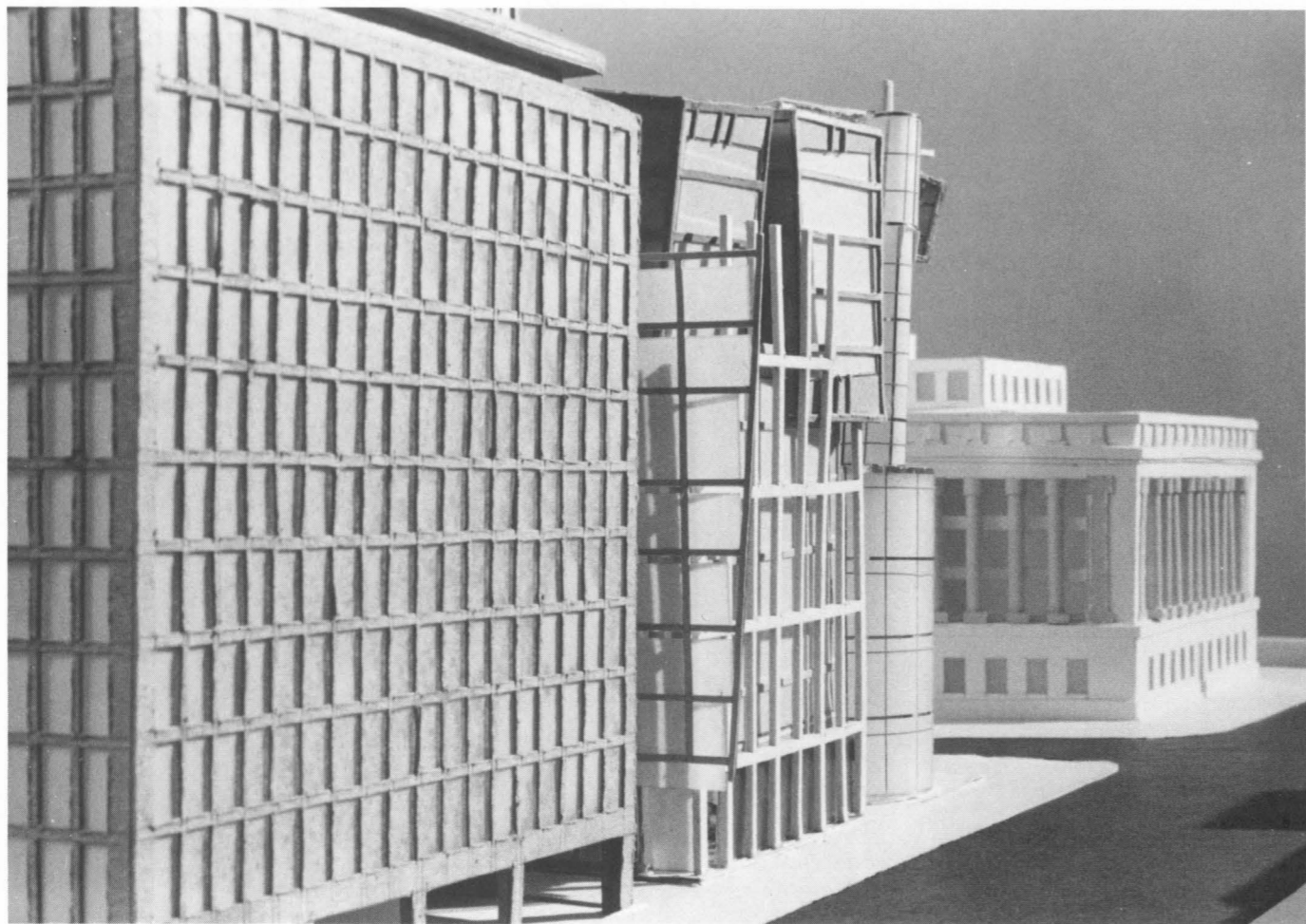
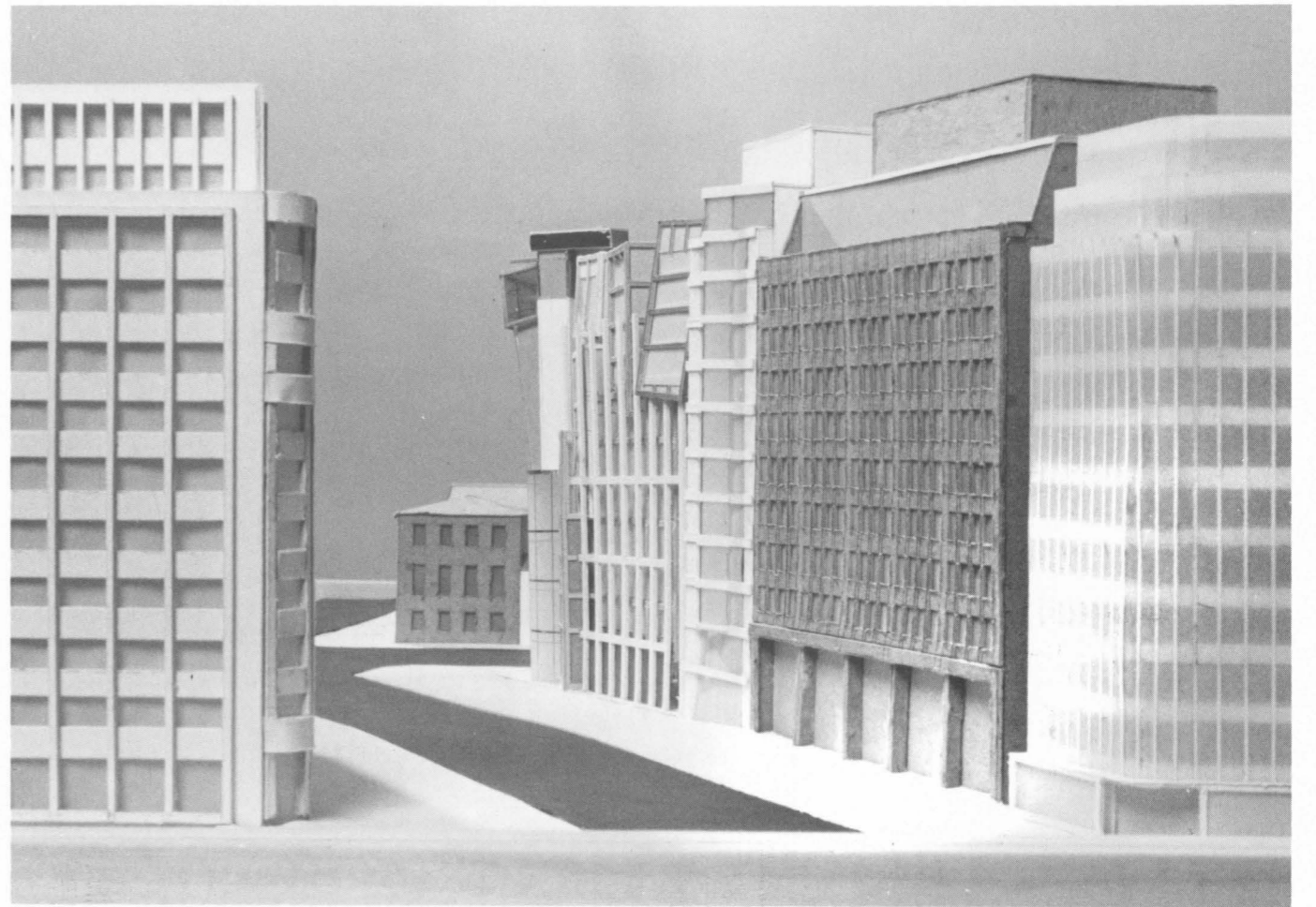
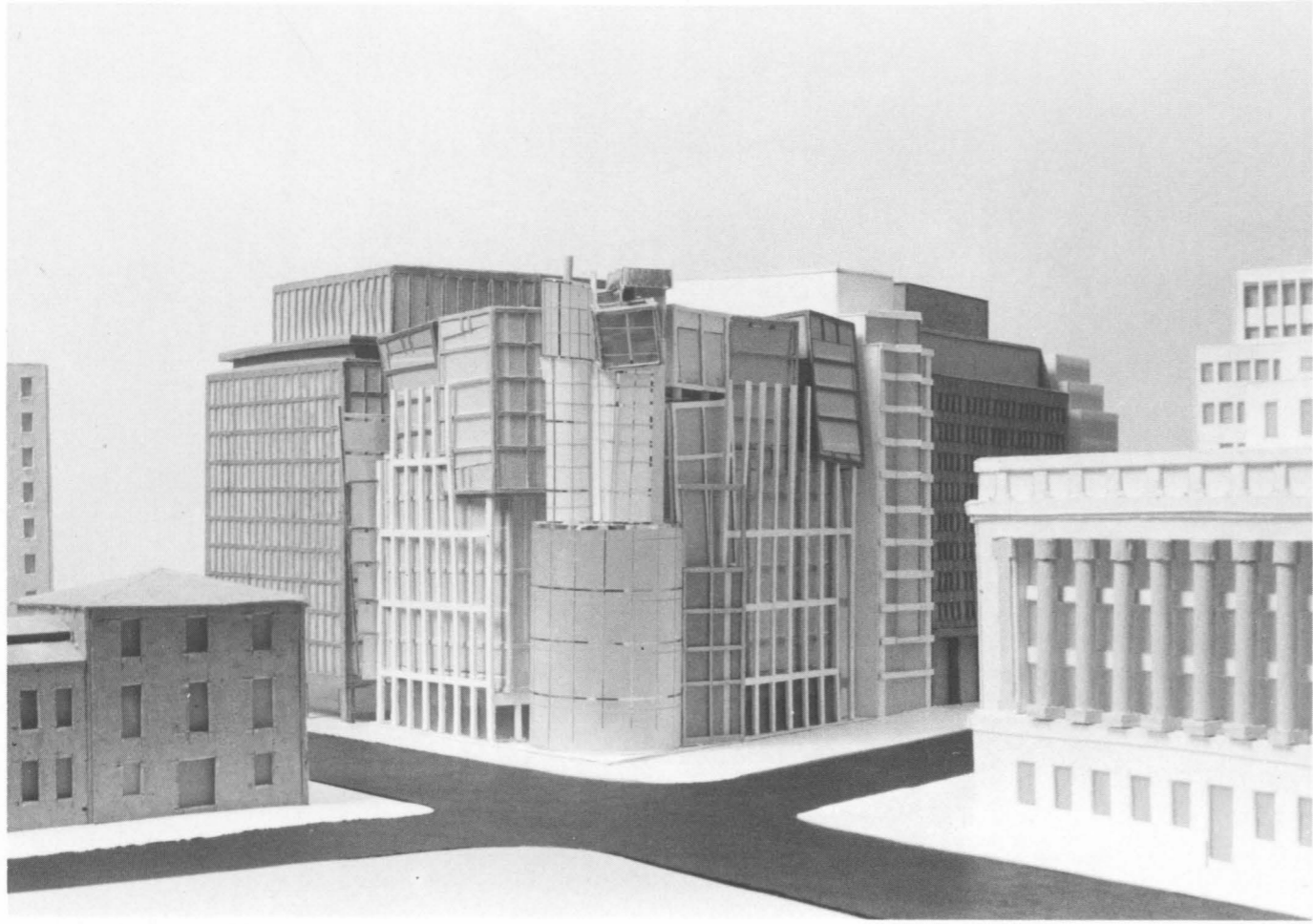


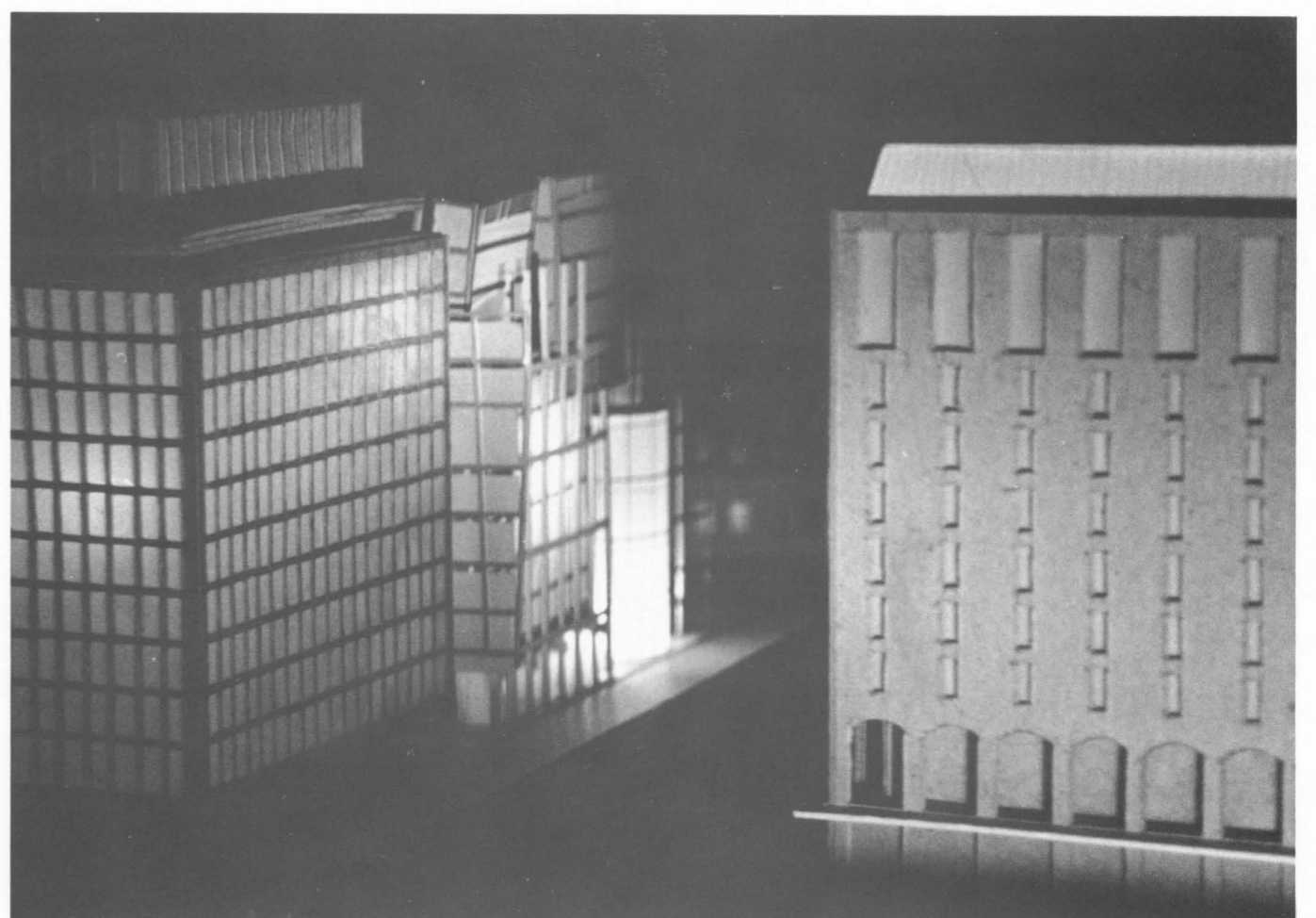
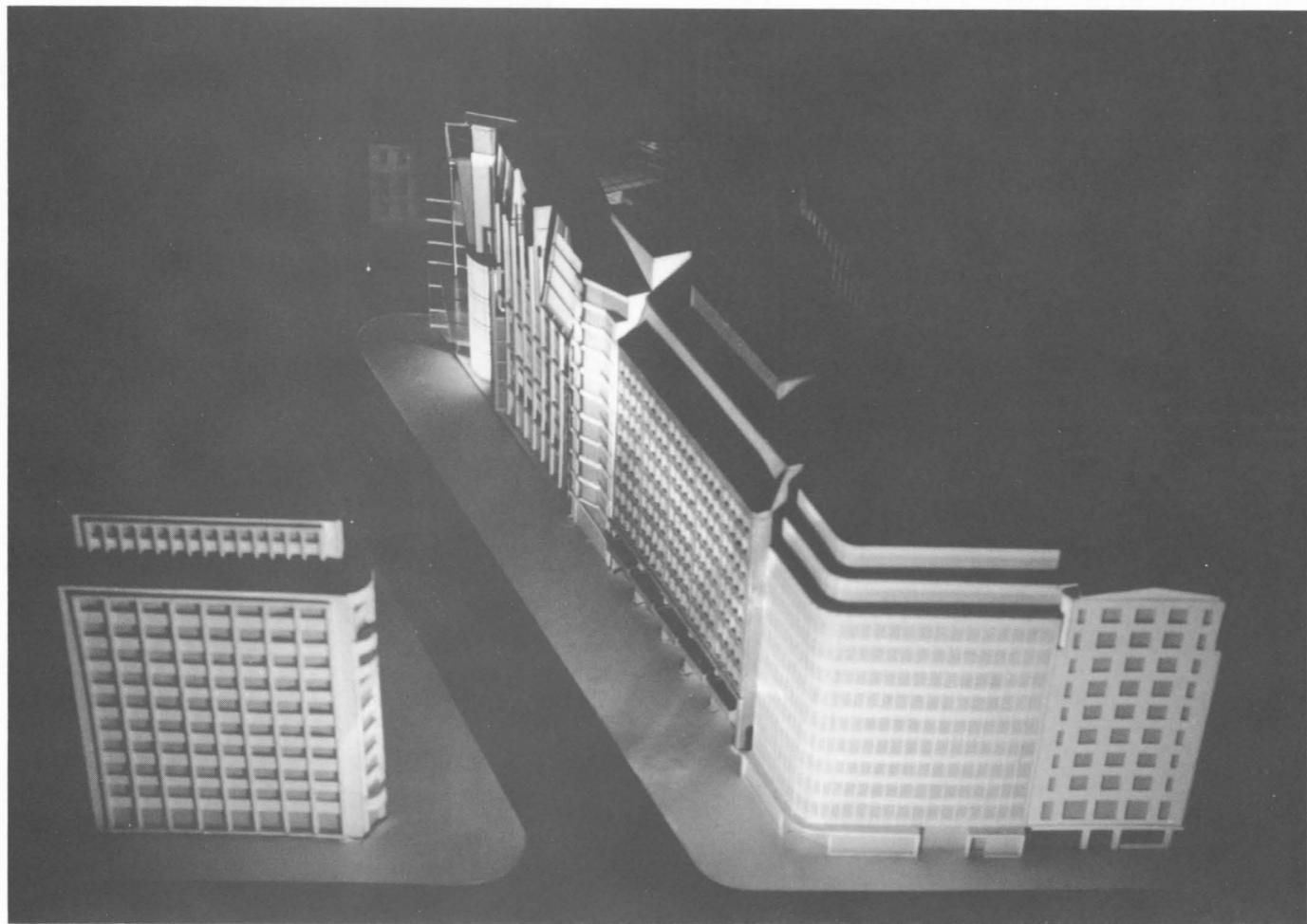
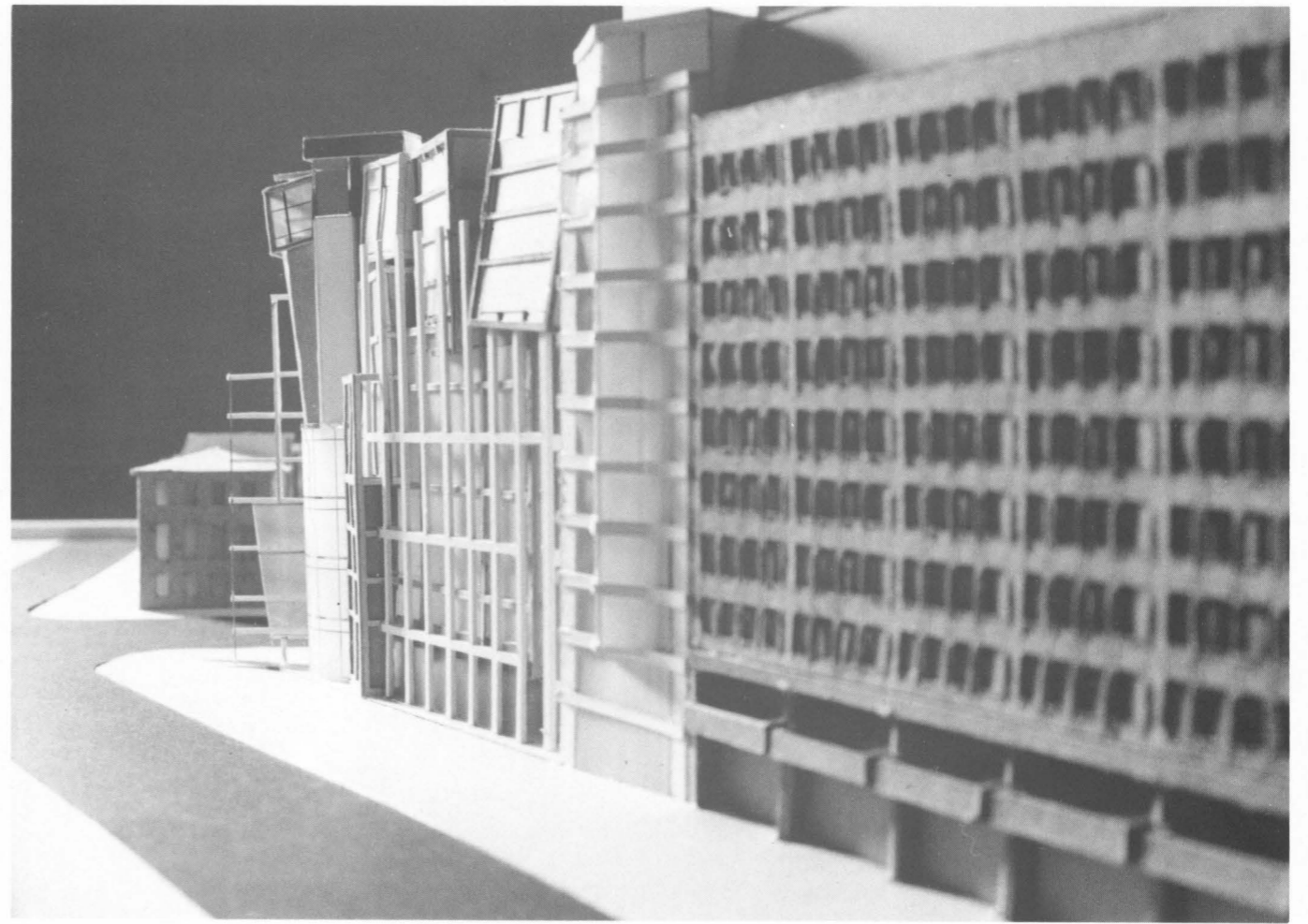






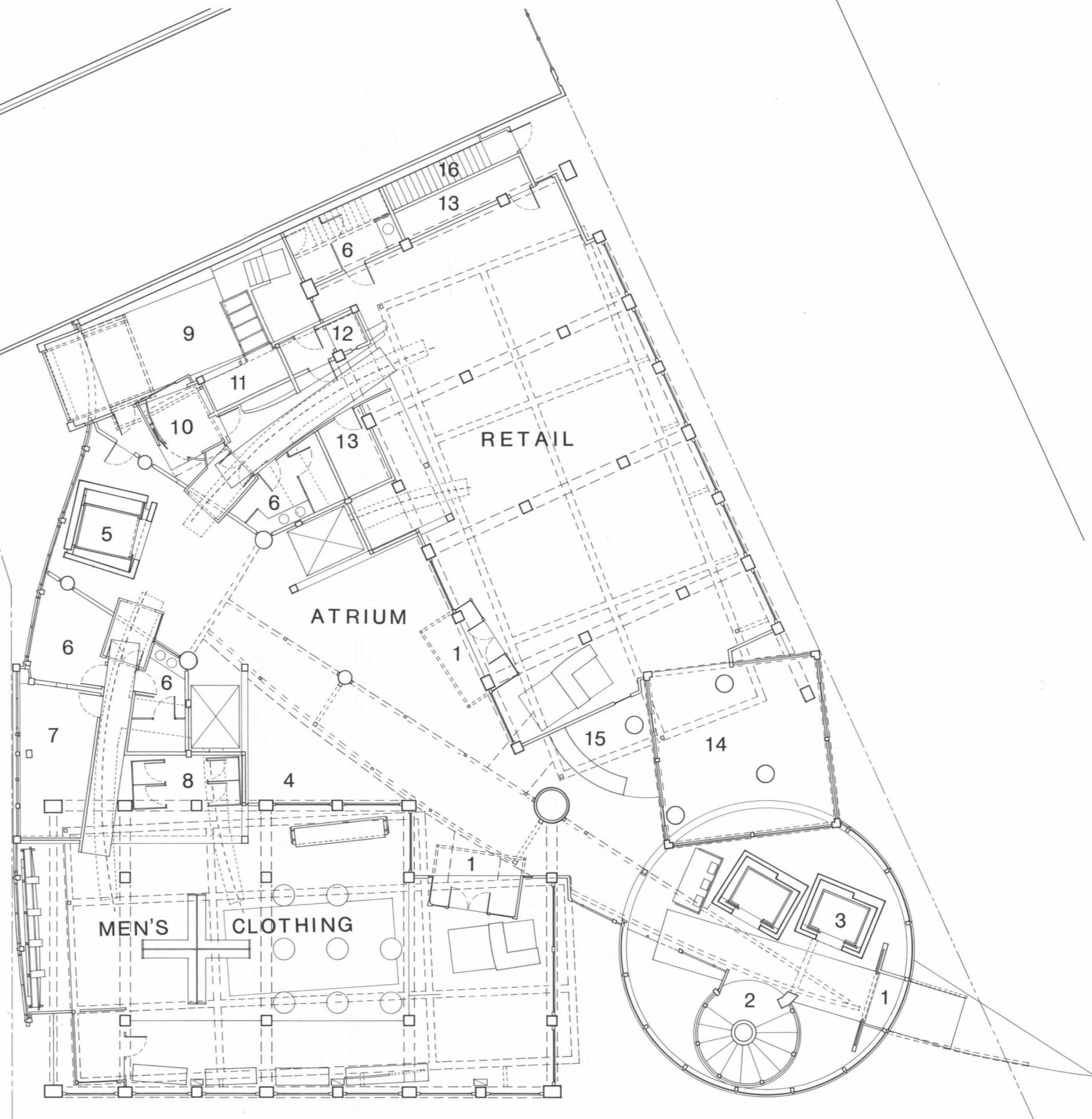




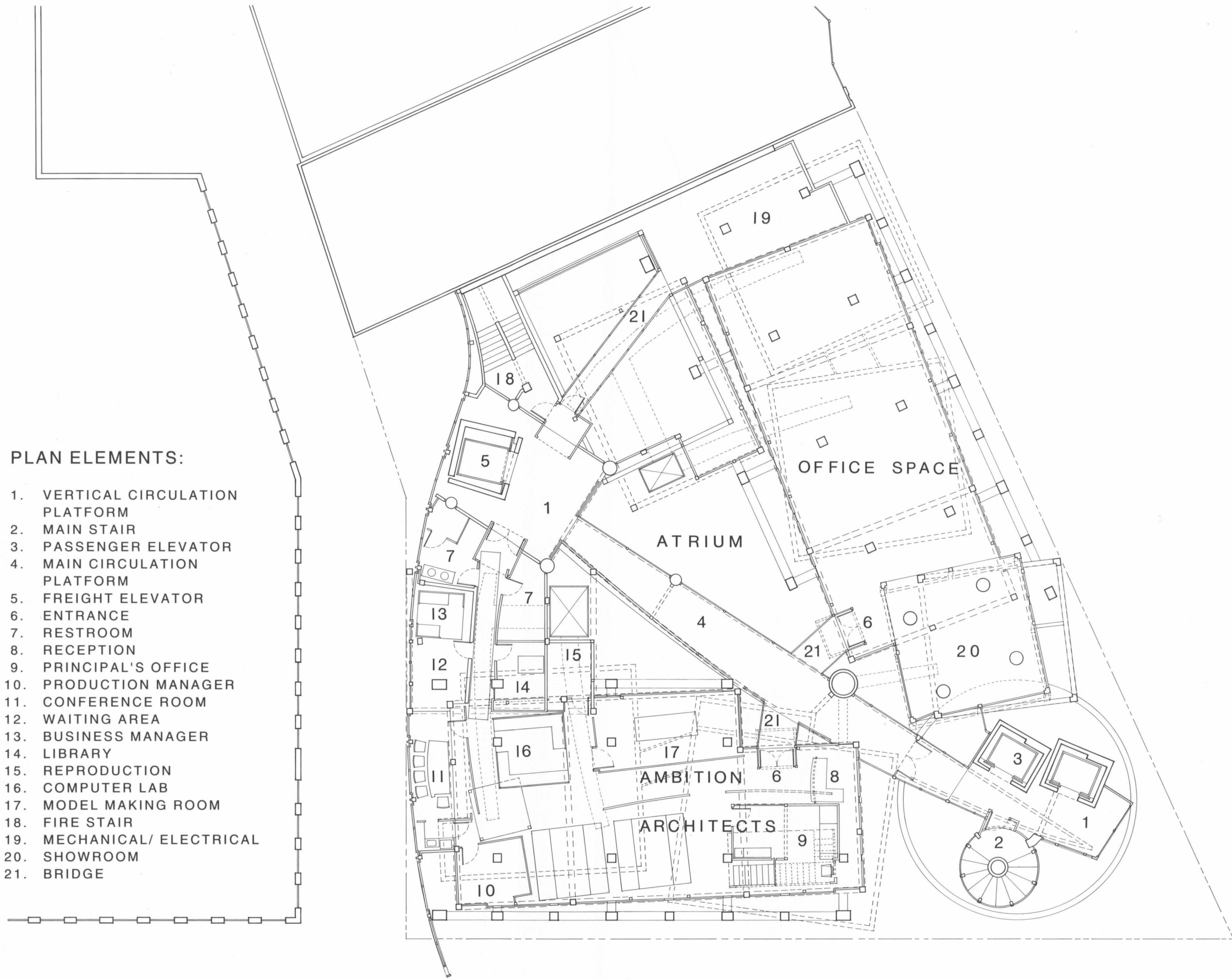


**PLAN ELEMENTS:**

- 1. ENTRANCE
- 2. MAIN STAIR
- 3. PASSENGER ELEVATOR
- 4. ATRIUM
- 5. FREIGHT ELEVATOR
- 6. RESTROOM
- 7. MANAGER'S OFFICE
- 8. CHANGING ROOMS
- 9. RECEIVING DOCK
- 10. RECEIVING CLERK
- 11. WASTE STORAGE
- 12. TEMPORARY STORAGE
- 13. STORAGE
- 14. SHOWROOM
- 15. INFORMATION
- 16. FIRE STAIR



**LEVEL ONE PLAN (CUT AT 3FT)**



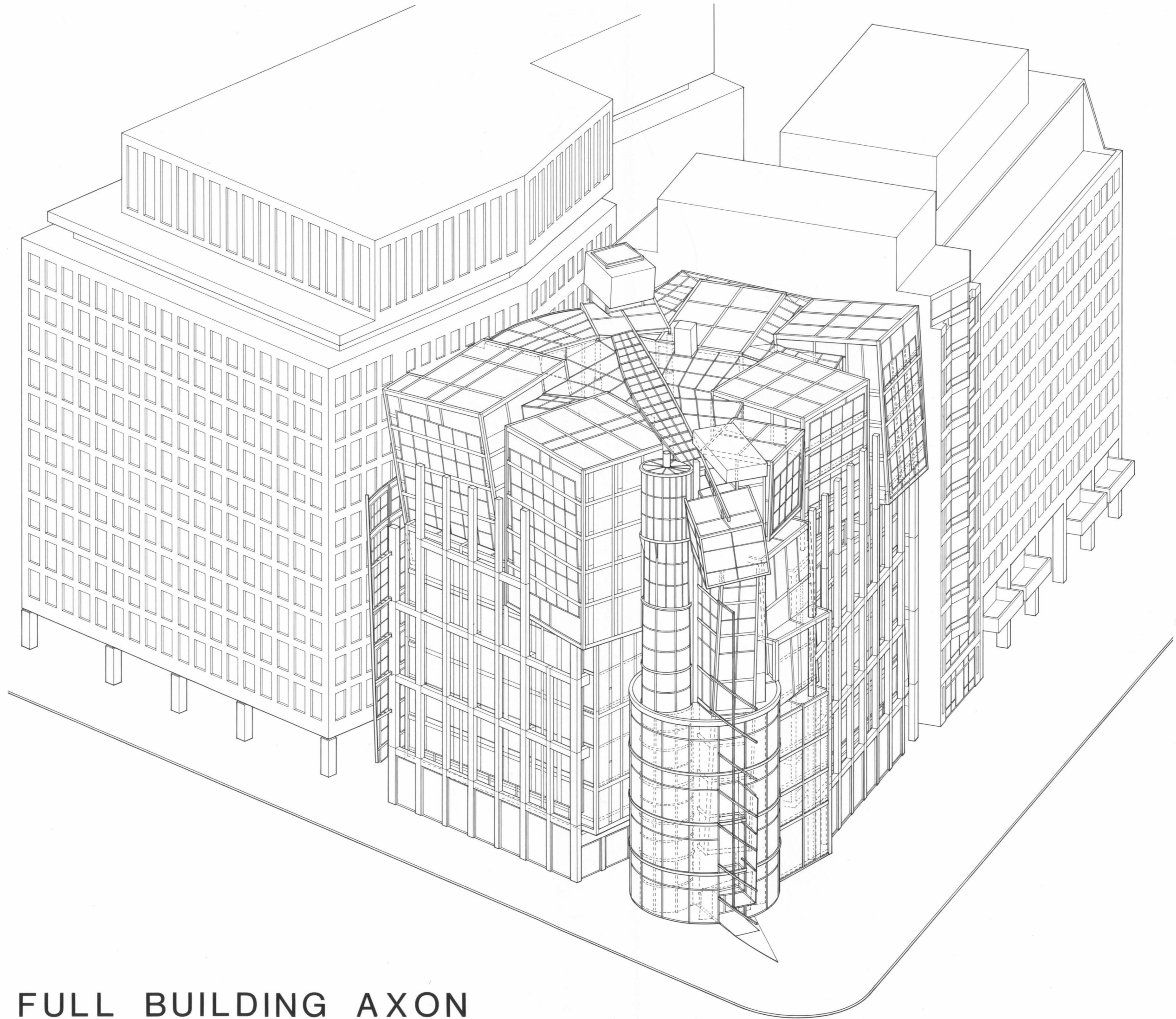
LEVEL SIX PLAN (CUT AT 65 FT)

PLAN ELEMENTS:

1. VERTICAL CIRCULATION PLATFORM
2. MAIN STAIR
3. PASSENGER ELEVATOR
4. MAIN CIRCULATION PLATFORM
5. ENTRANCE
6. FREIGHT ELEVATOR
7. RESTROOM
8. STORAGE
9. MANAGER'S OFFICE
10. FIRE STAIR
11. BALCONY
12. BRIDGE

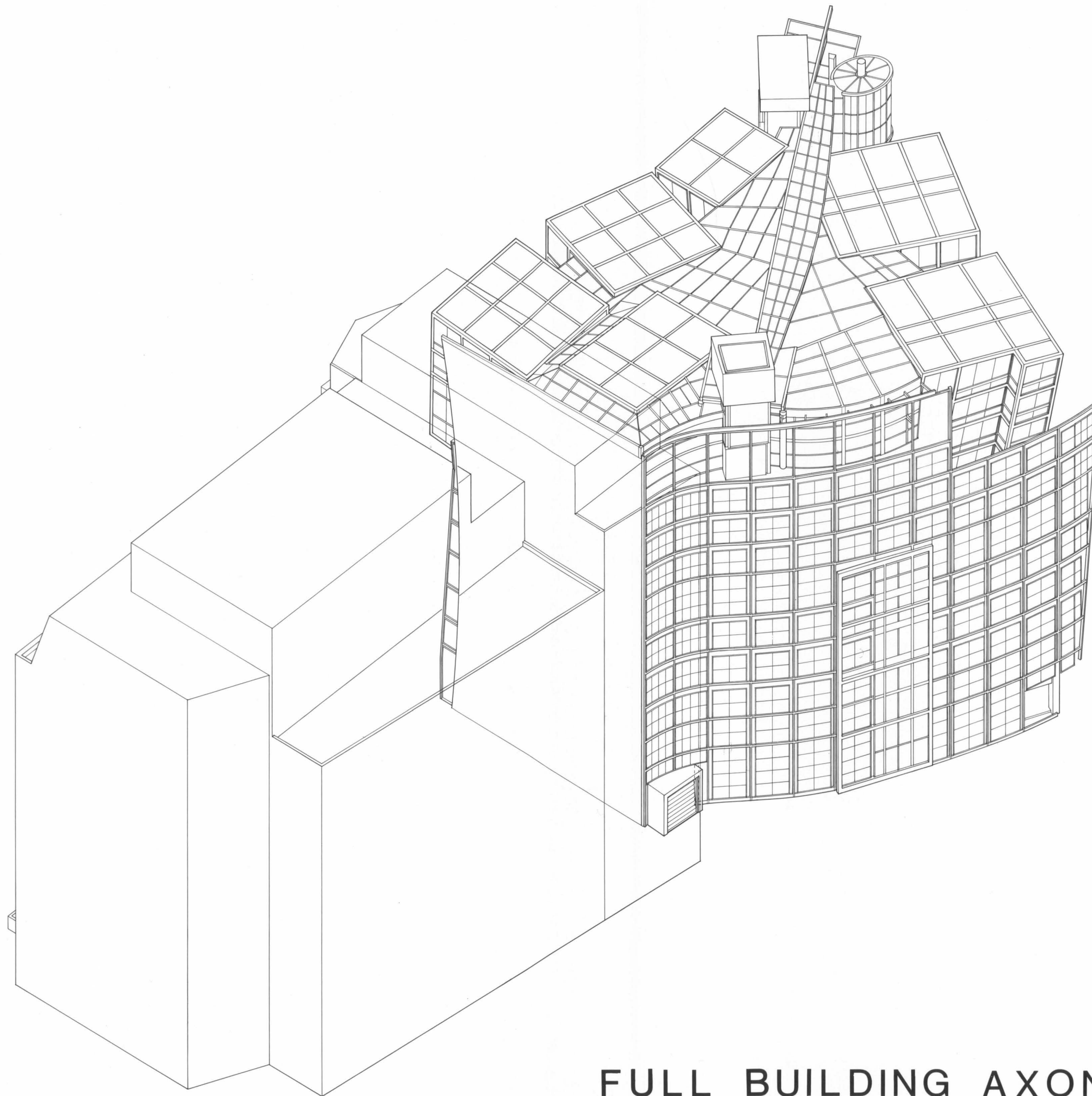


LEVEL ELEVEN PLAN (CUT AT 123 FT)



FULL BUILDING AXON



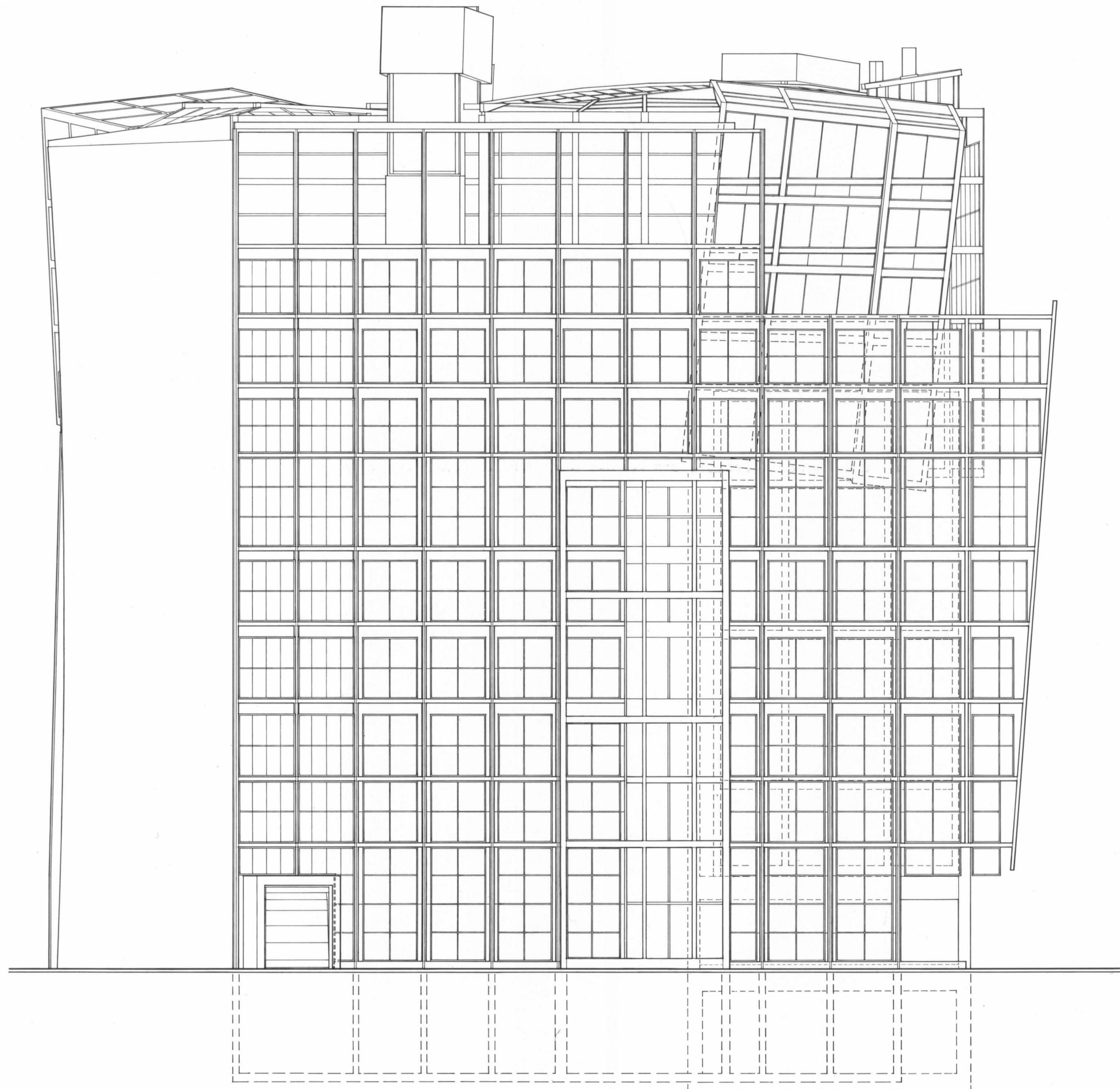


FULL BUILDING AXON



H ST.  
ELEVATION





SERVICE ALLEY ELEVATION



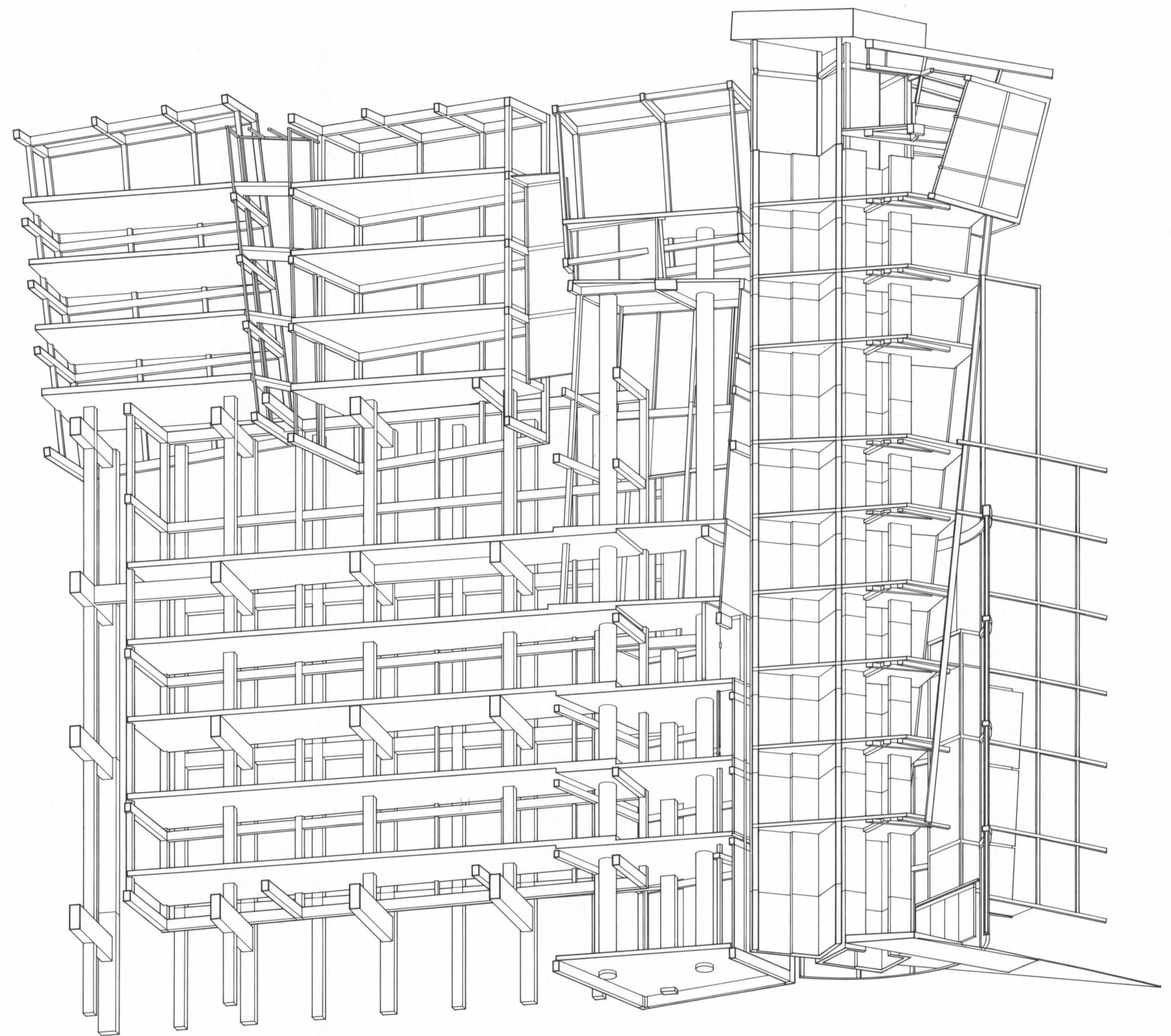
LEVEL ELEVEN



LEVEL SIX



LEVEL ONE



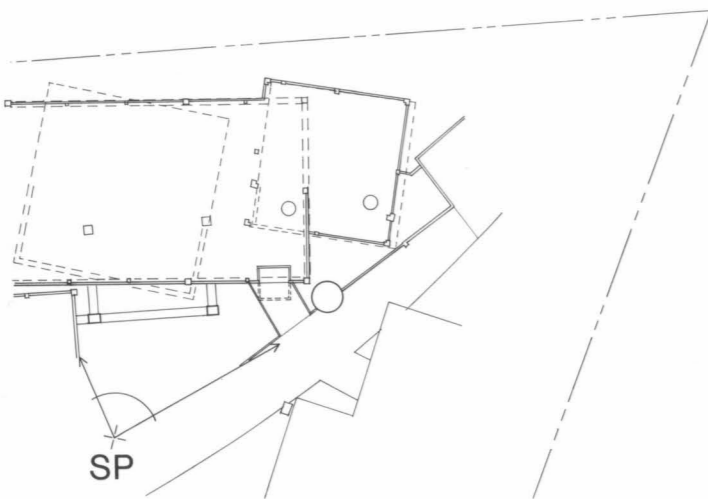
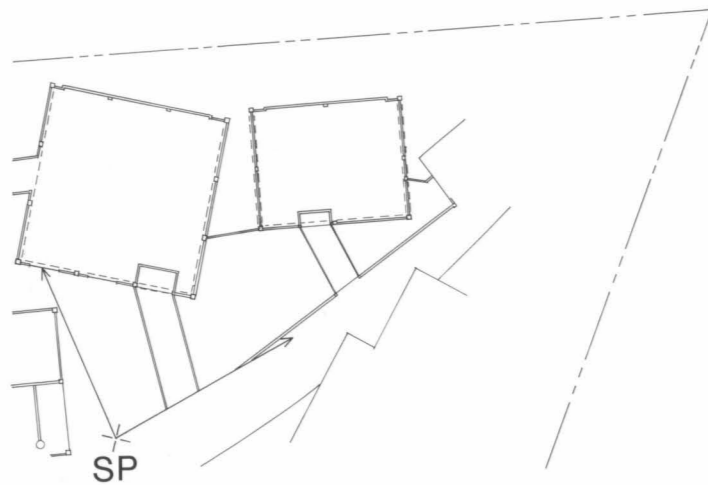
STRUCTURAL

SECTION

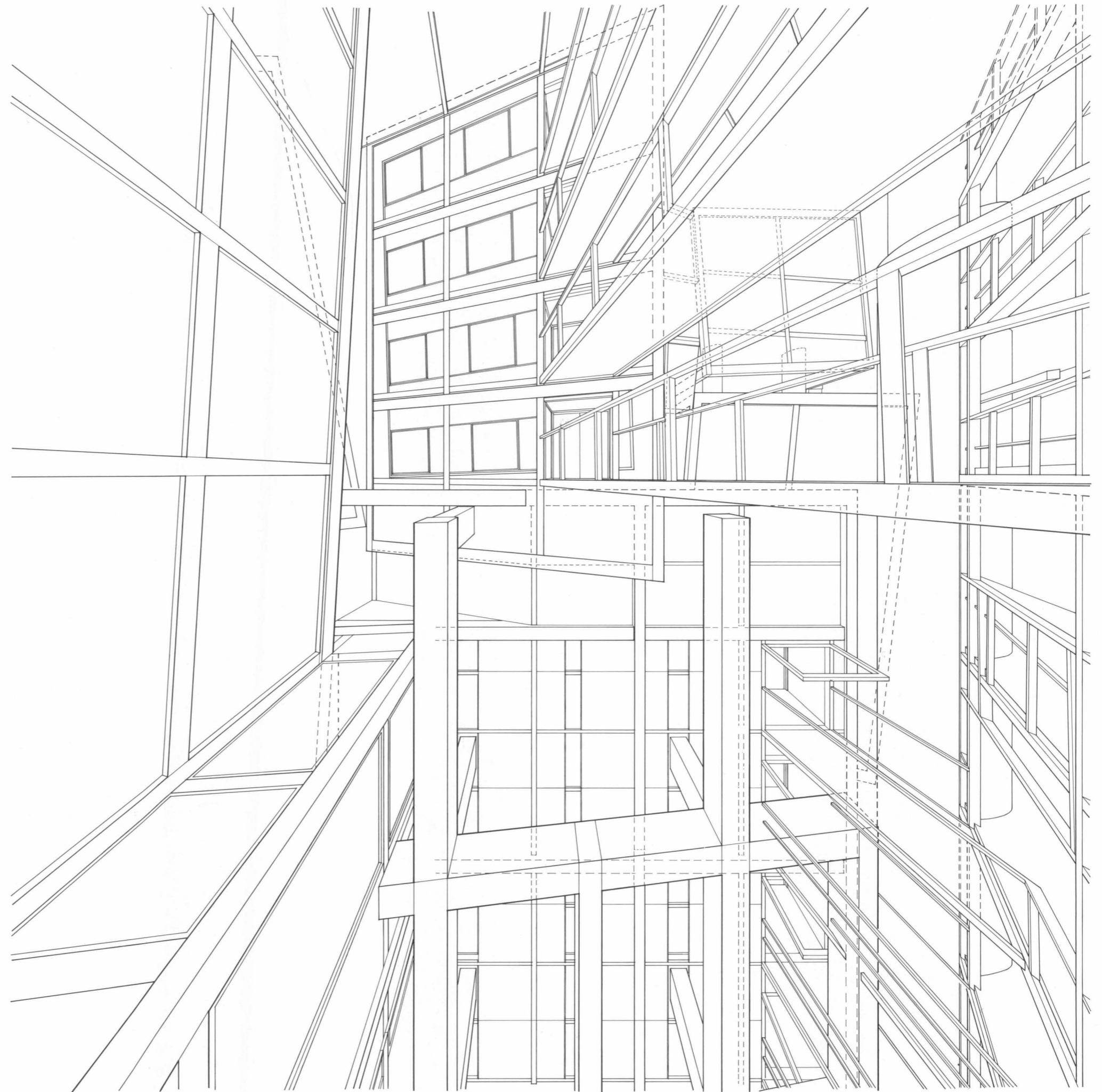
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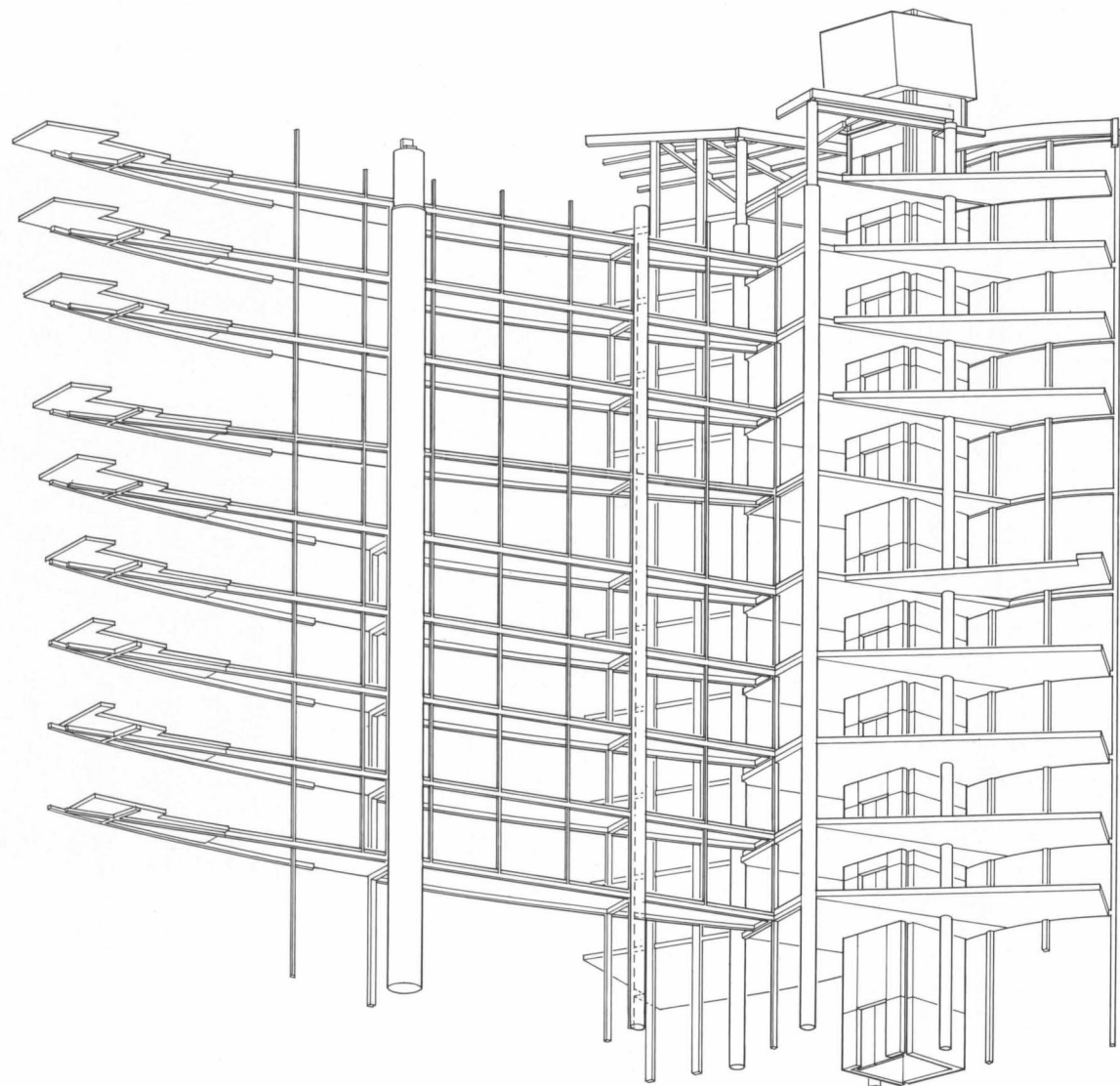
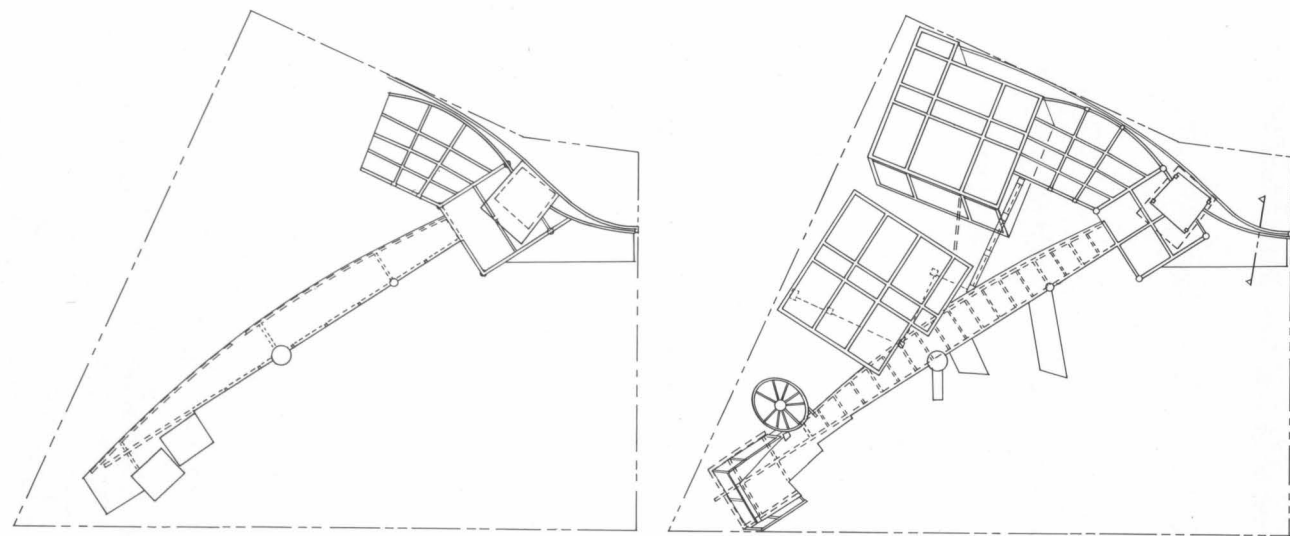
The perspective on this page shows to some extent the interconnection of elements in the building. The drawing also gives a sense of the dynamic character of the atrium space, which rises 130 ft.

PERSPECTIVE STATION POINT  
AT +86 FT. (8th. FLOOR)



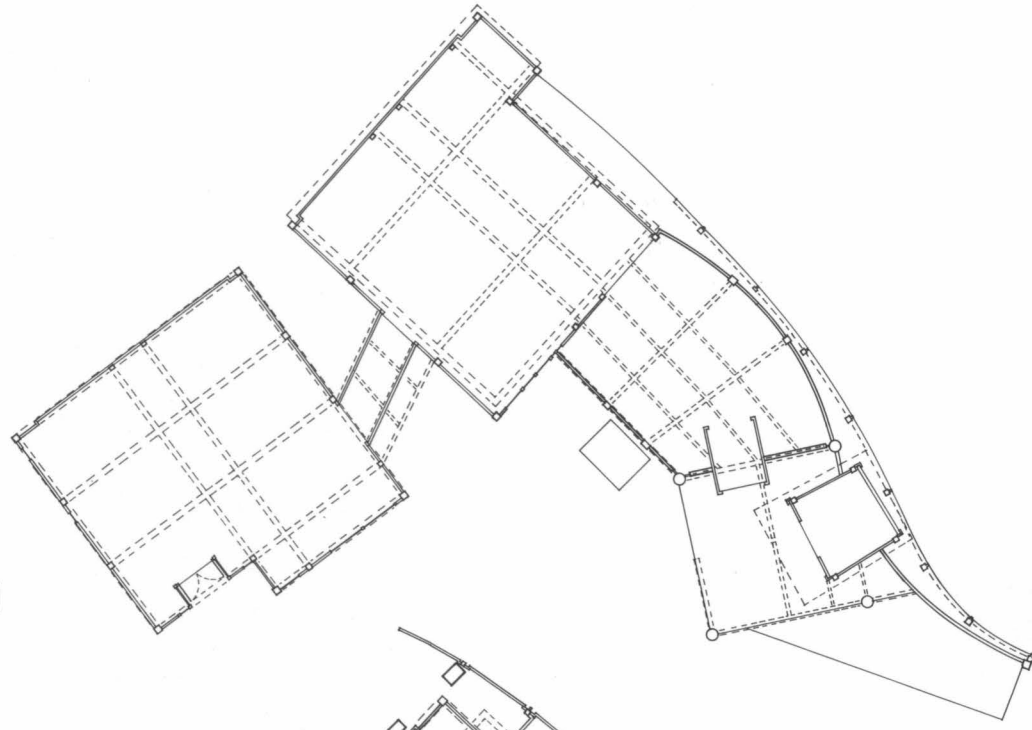
## ATRIUM PERSPECTIVE



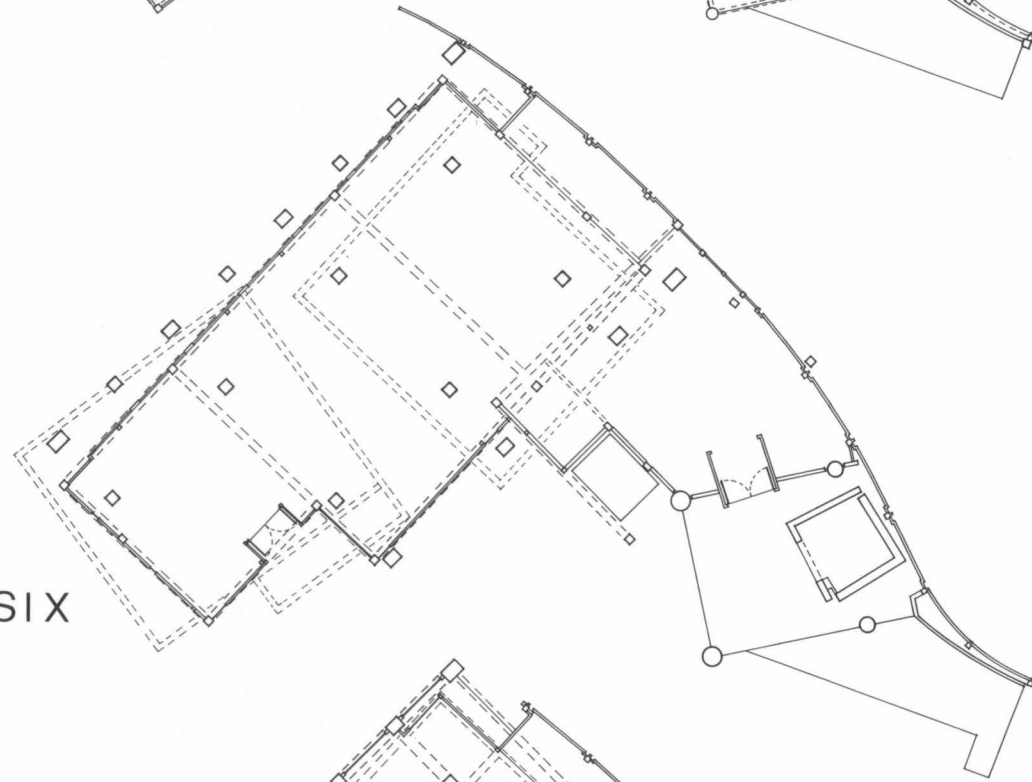


MAIN CIRCULATION PLATFORM

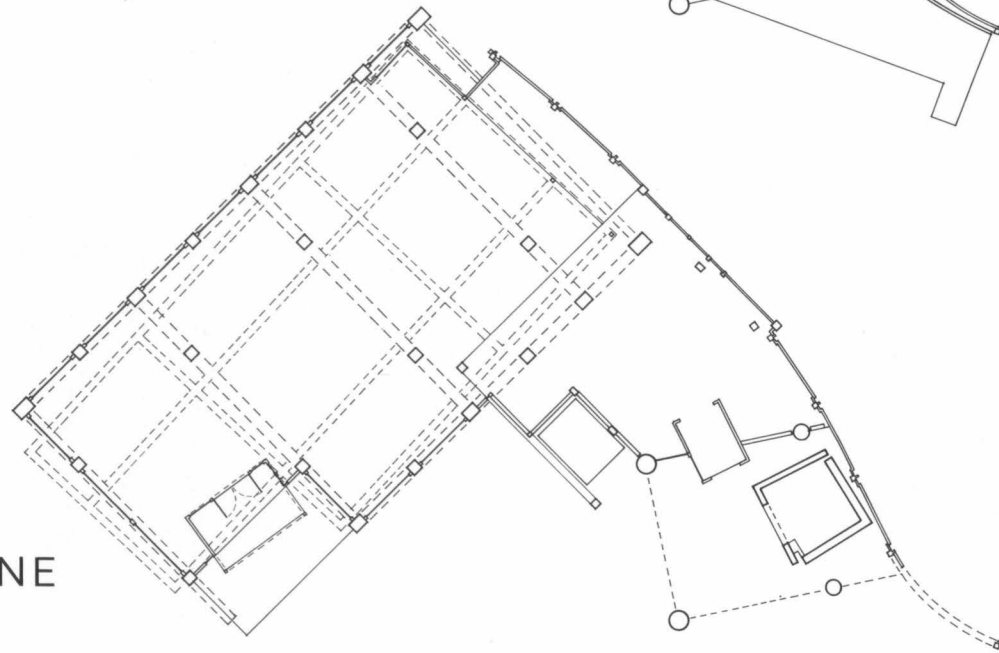
LEVEL  
ELEVEN



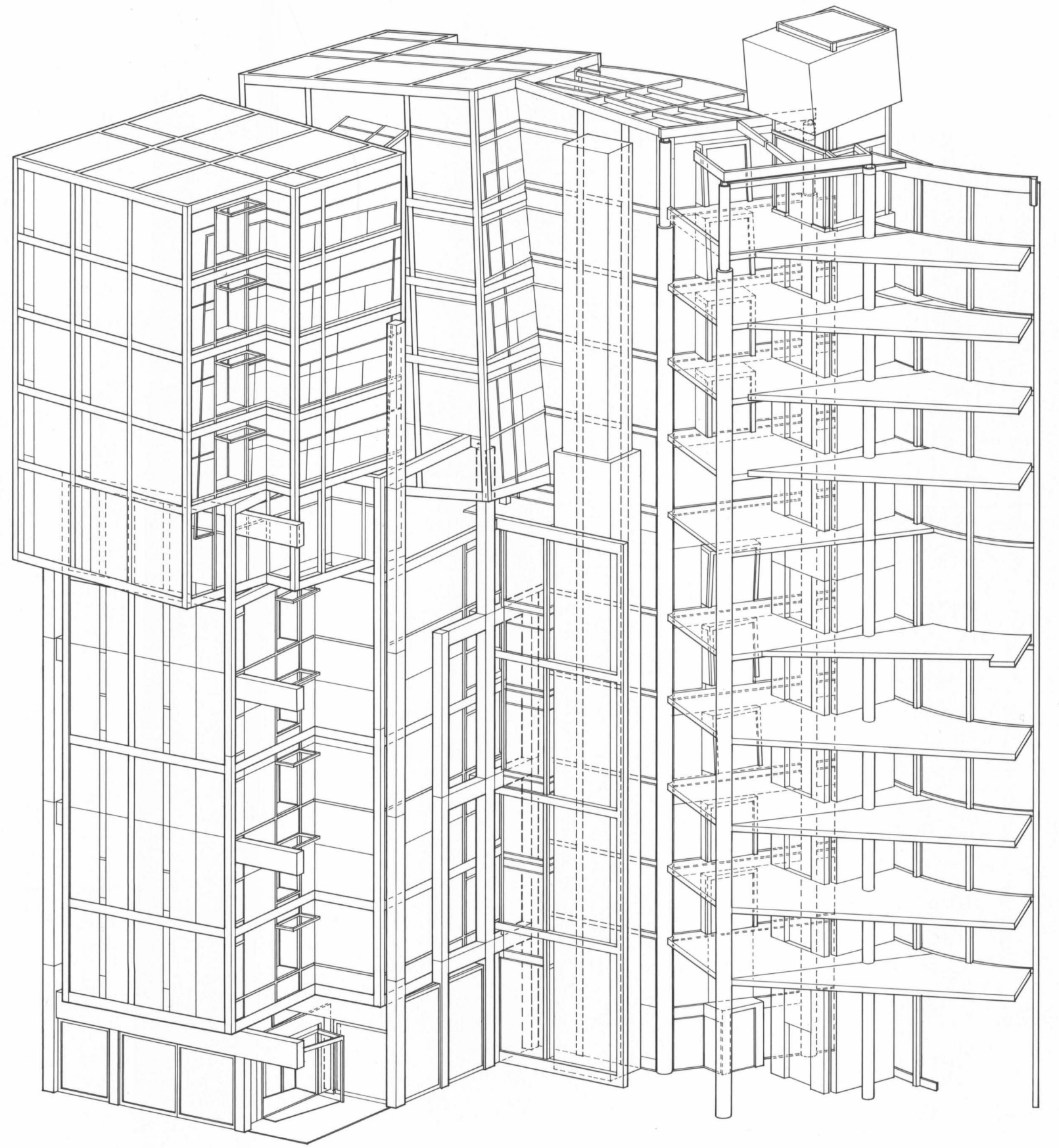
LEVEL SIX



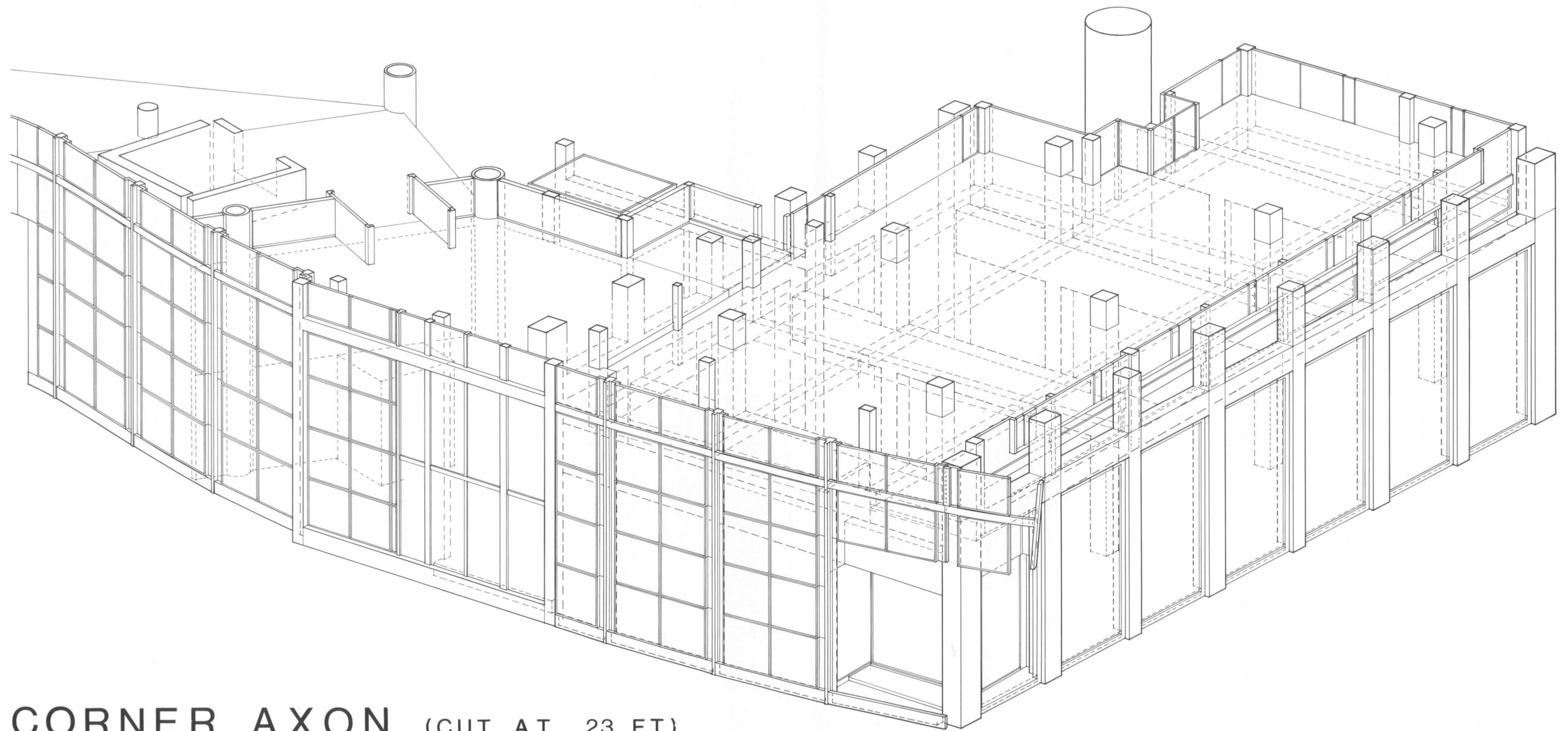
LEVEL ONE



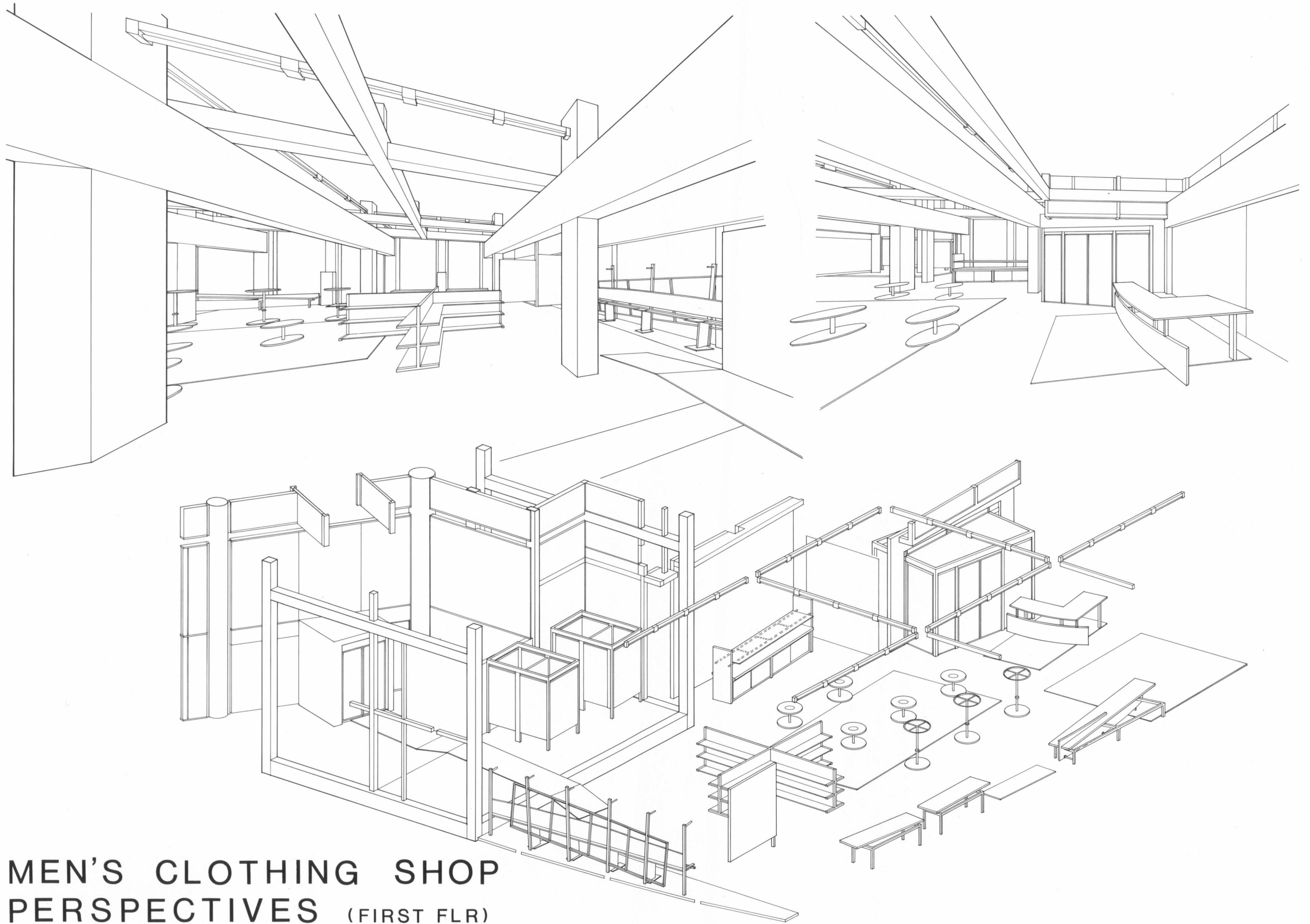
PARTIAL BUILDING AXON







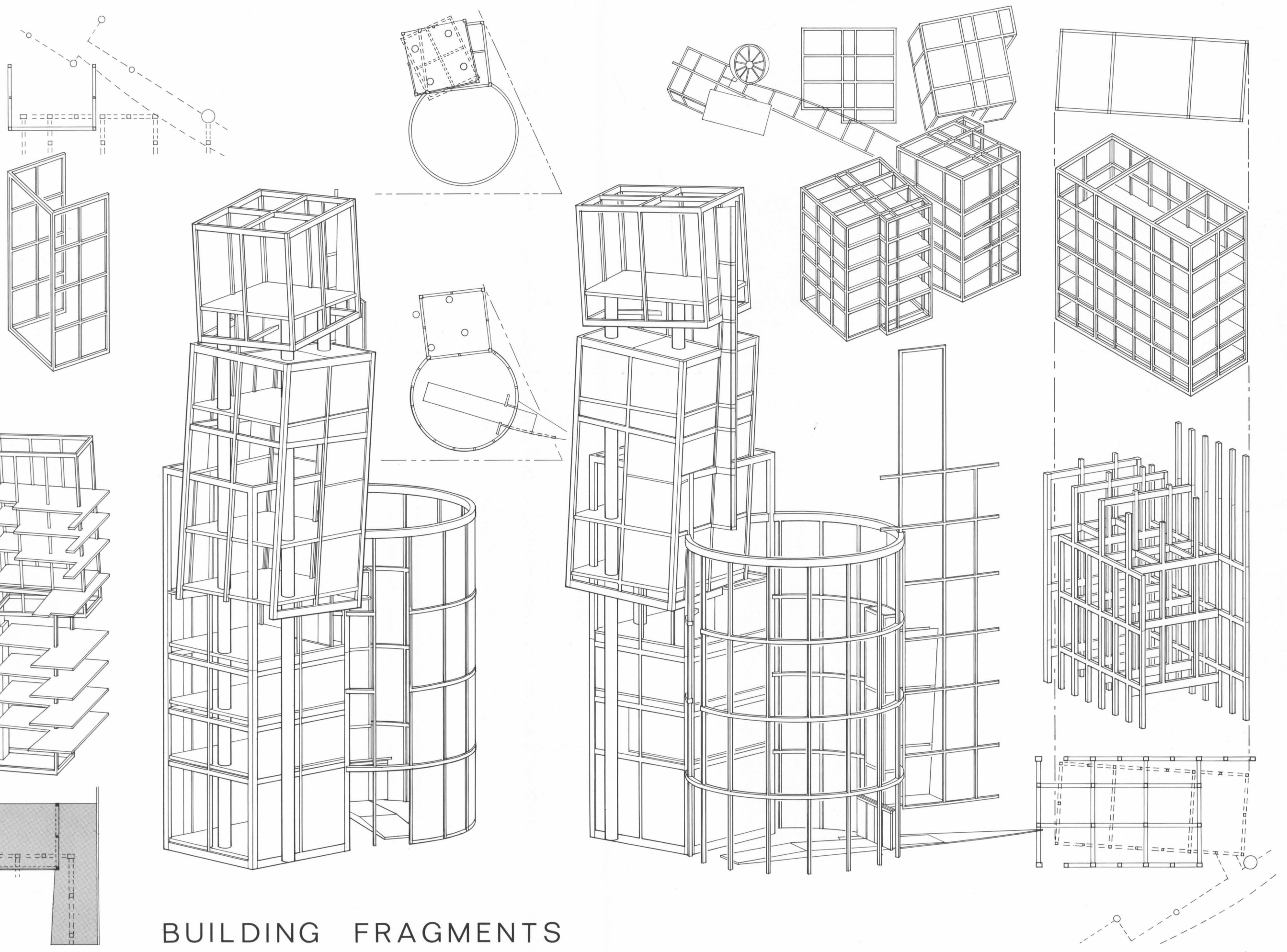
CORNER AXON (CUT AT 23 FT)



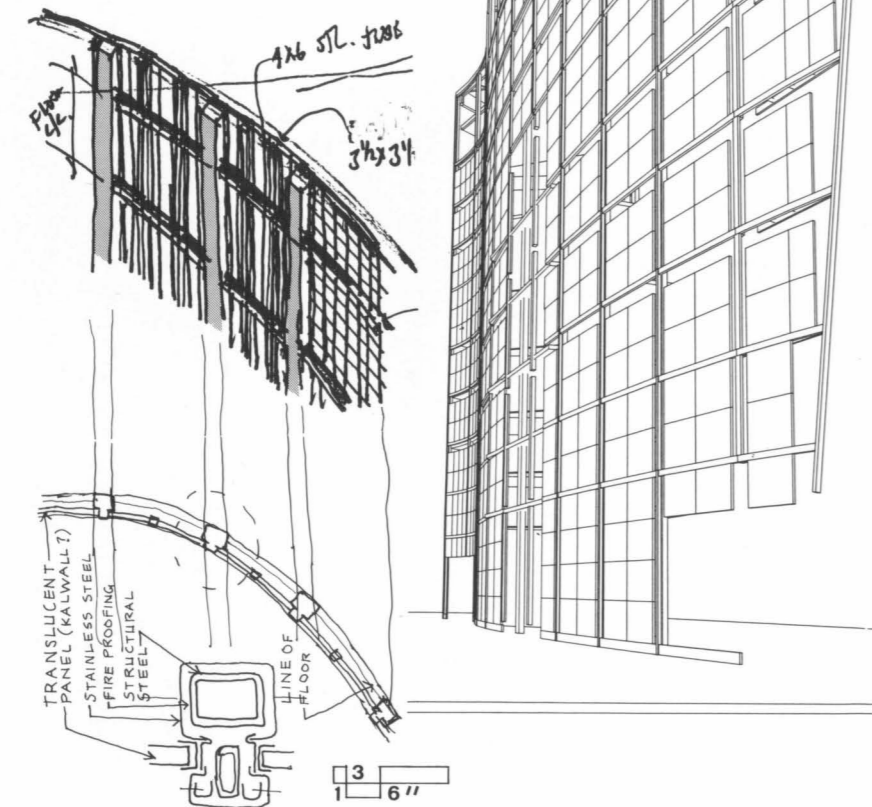
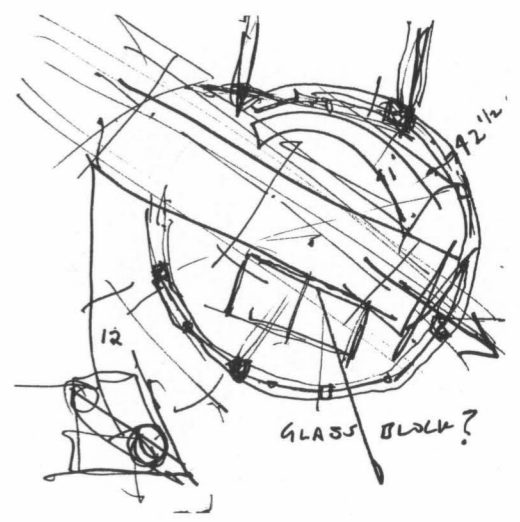
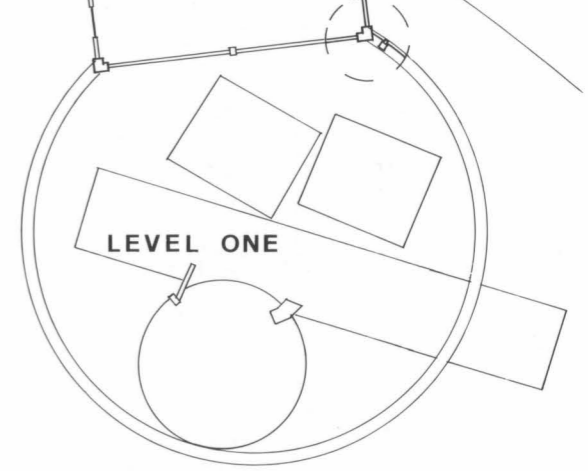
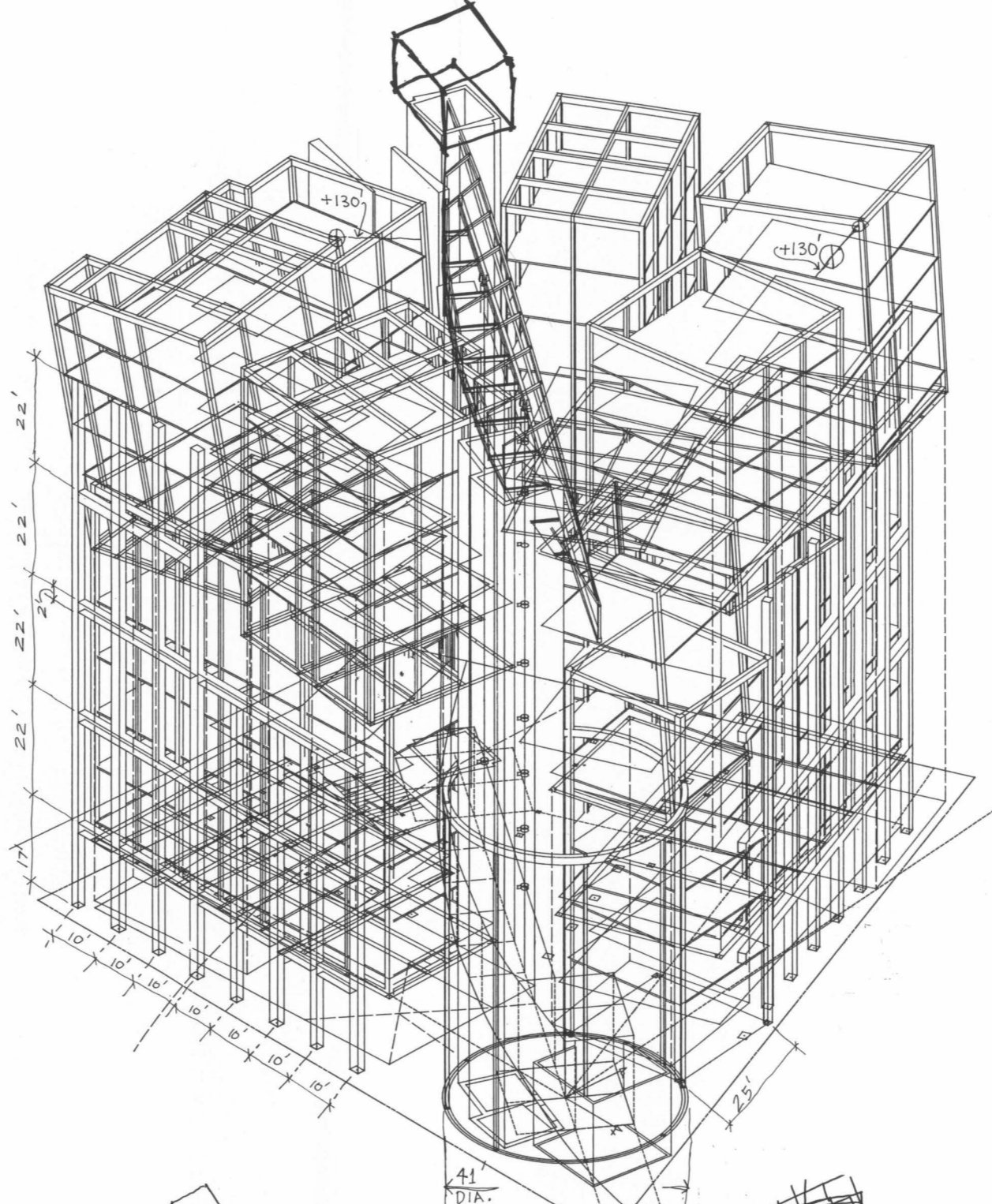
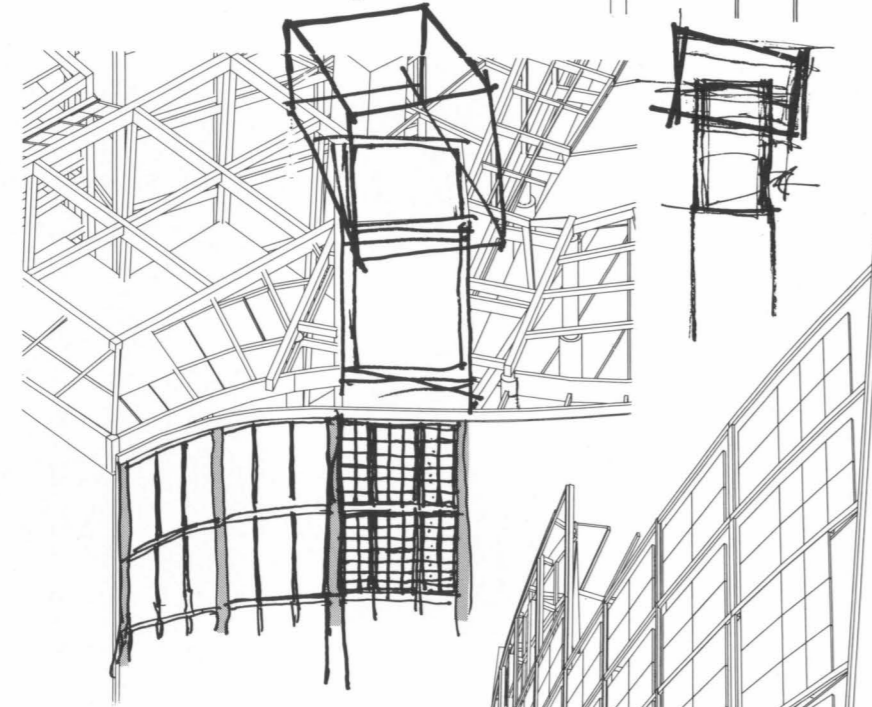
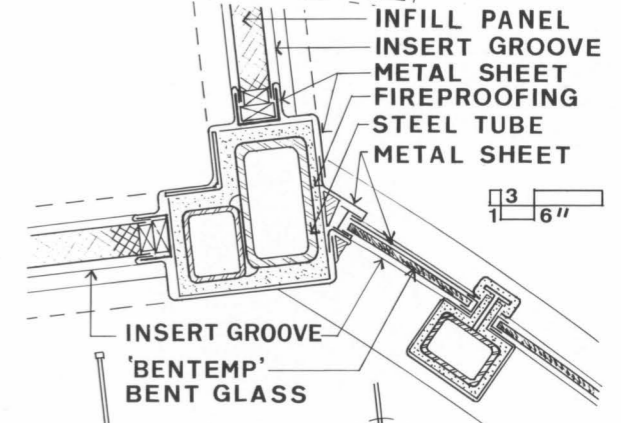
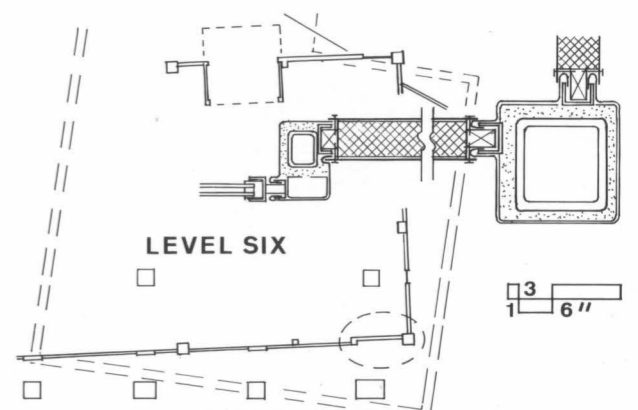
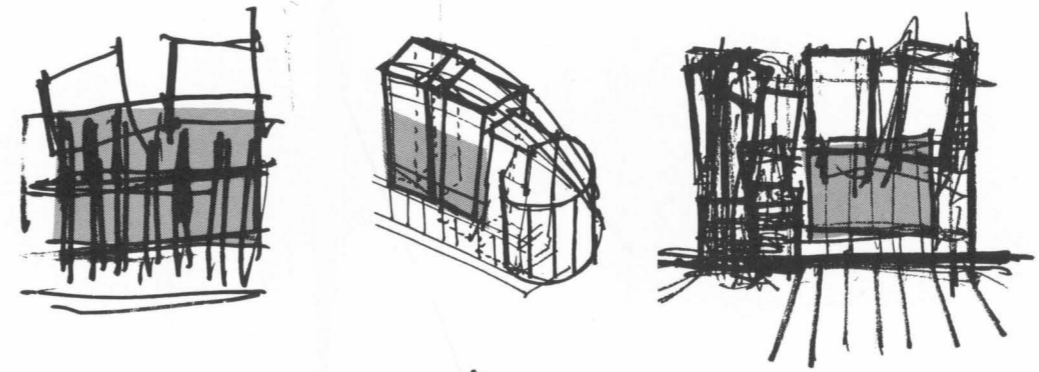
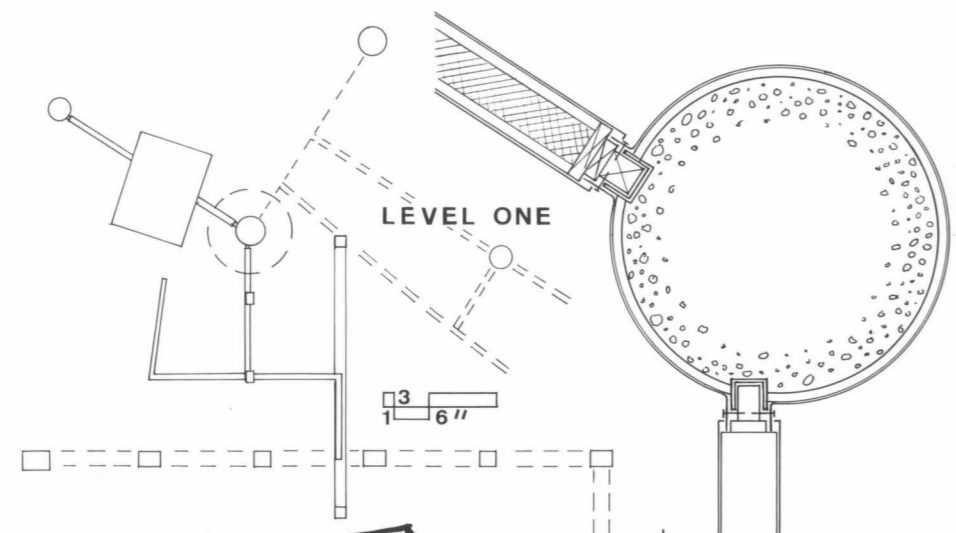
**MEN'S CLOTHING SHOP**  
**PERSPECTIVES (FIRST FLR)**

**NOTE:**

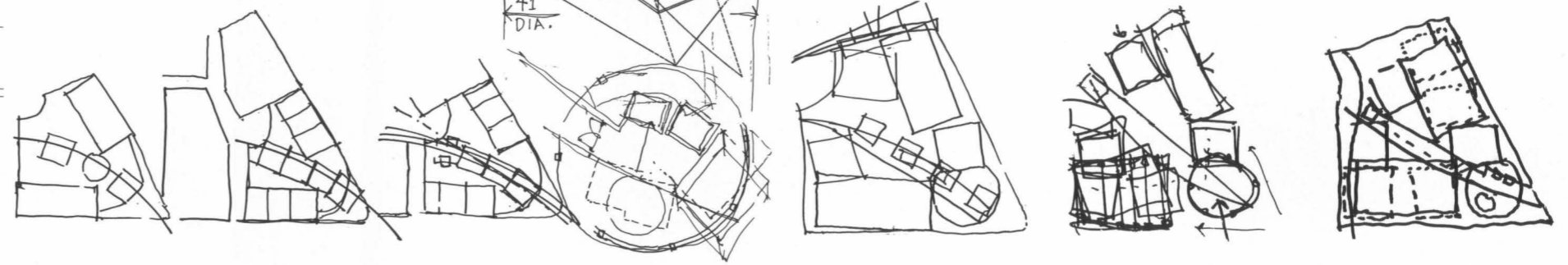
The images on this page are representations of different structures which interweave to form the building. The two larger drawings (center) show how these structures interconnect; a primary structure of concrete columns and beams supports an intermediary system of concrete floor plates, which in turn support structures (steel cages) not resting on the ground

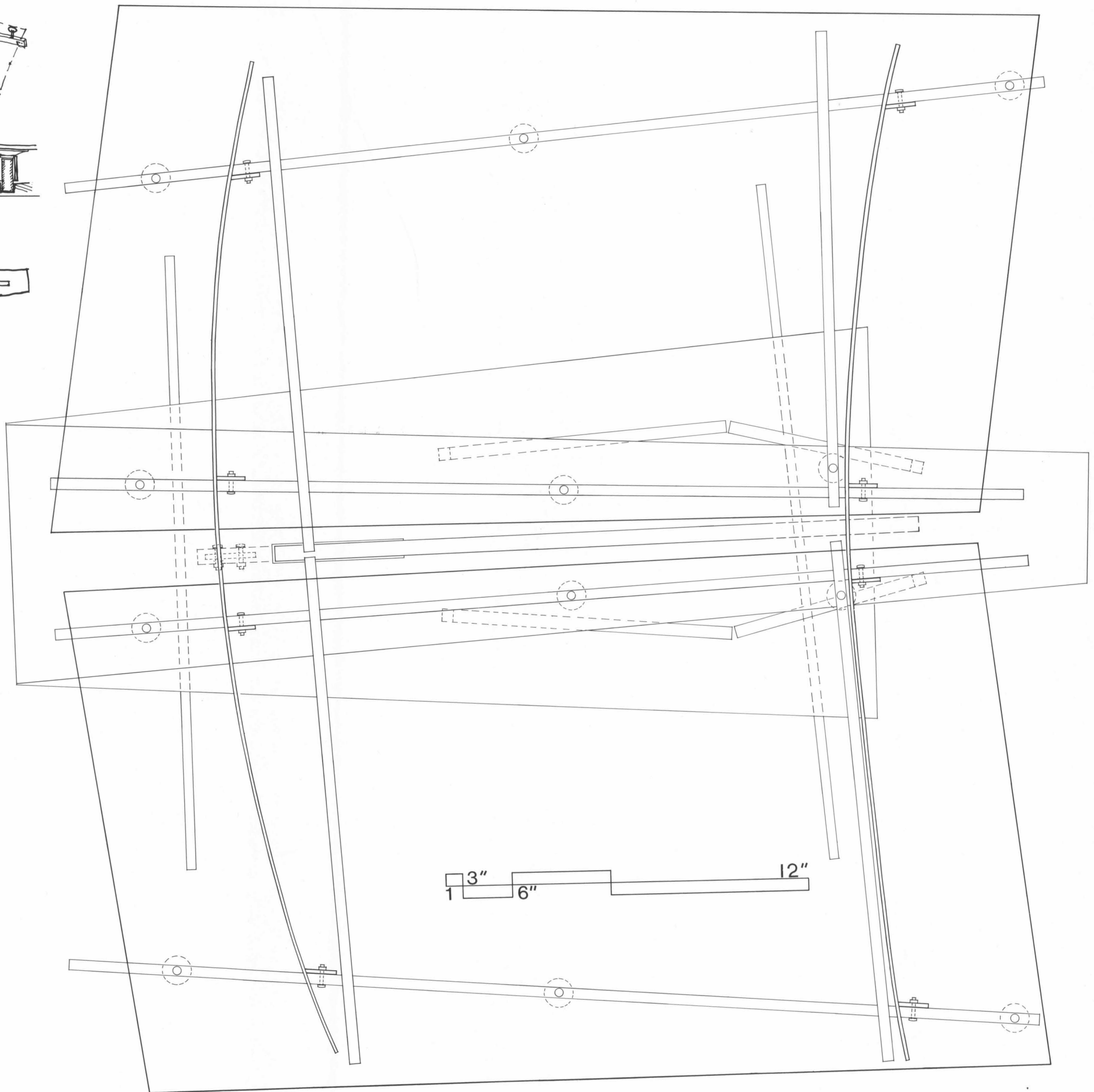
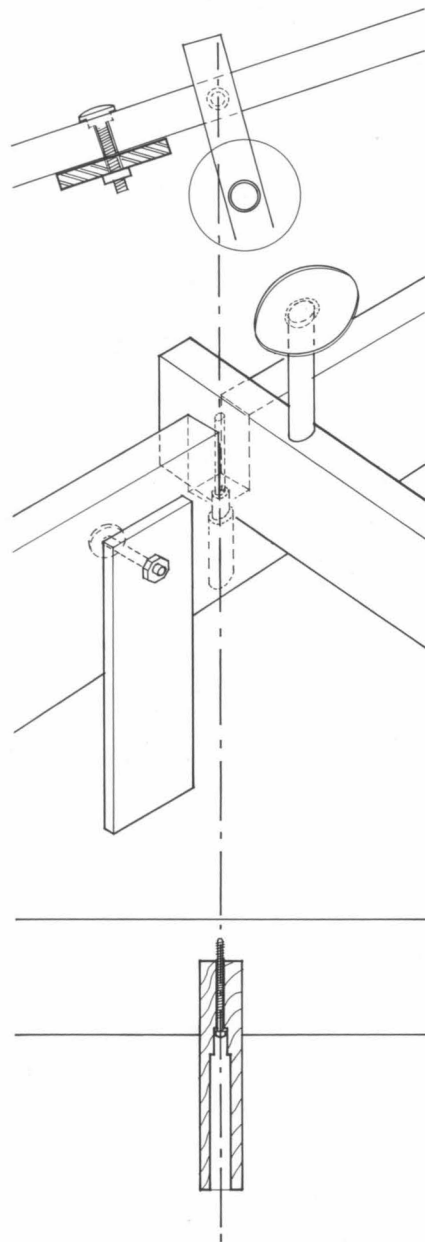
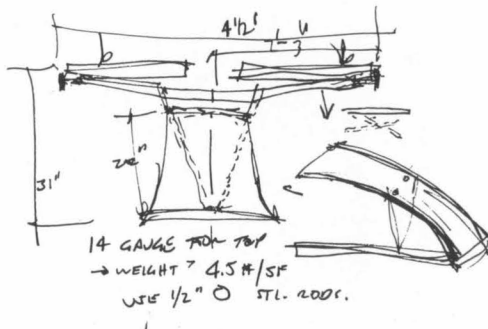
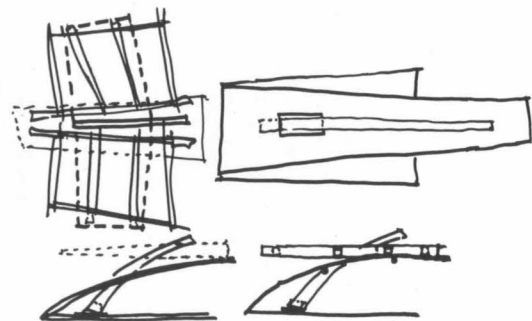
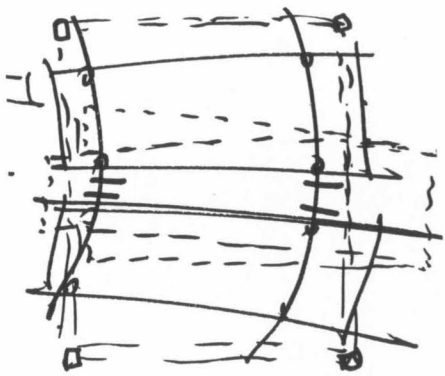
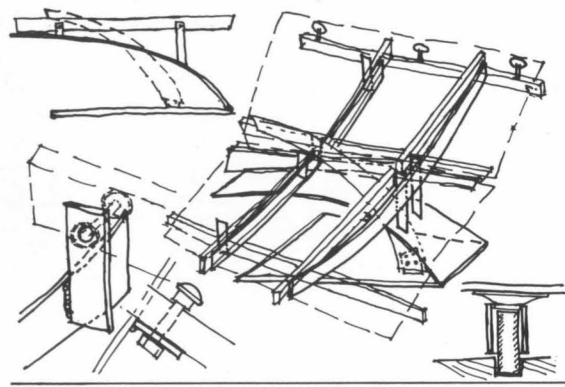
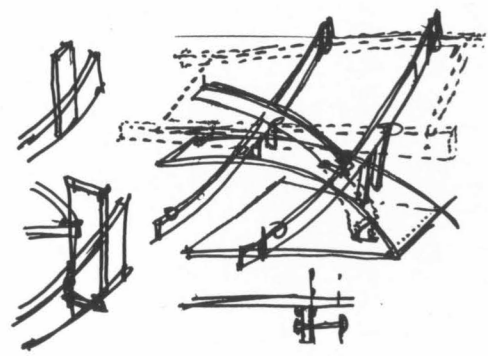


**BUILDING FRAGMENTS**



PROCESS DRAWINGS





Does a table have to be useful?

Does it need legs?

Do I need measured drawings to produce it?

No, No, and No!

A table can be a piece of sculpture which coincidentally functions.

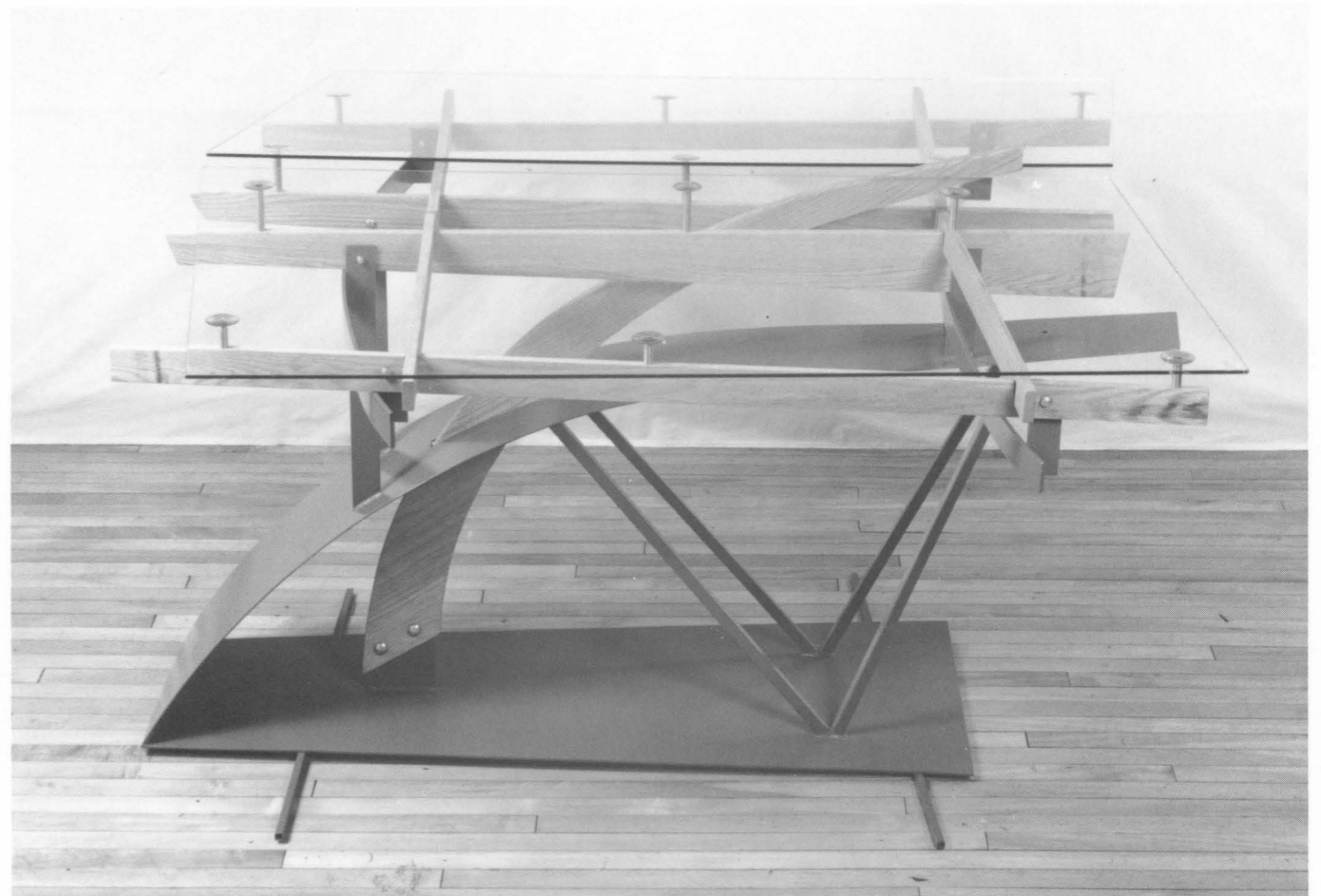
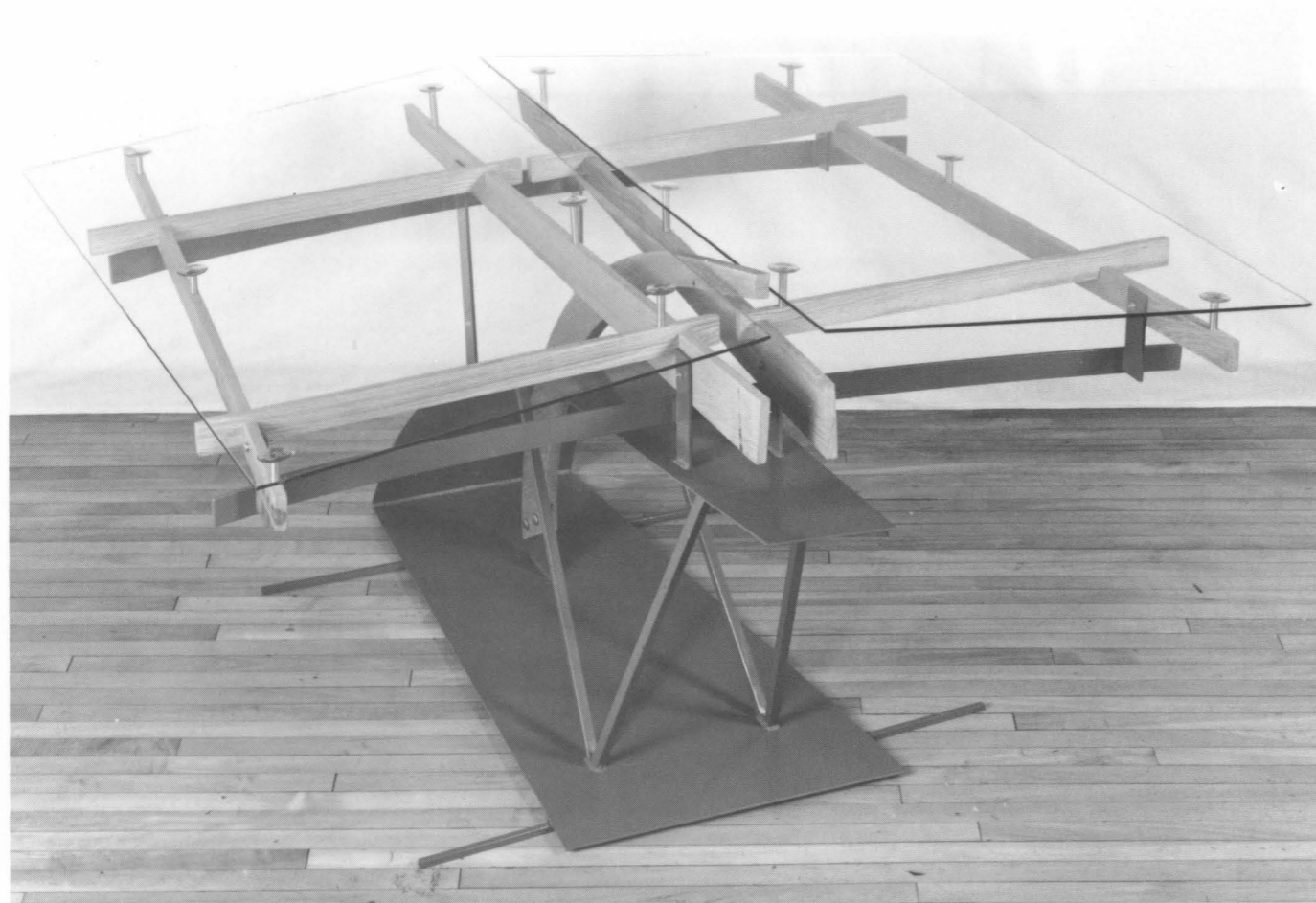
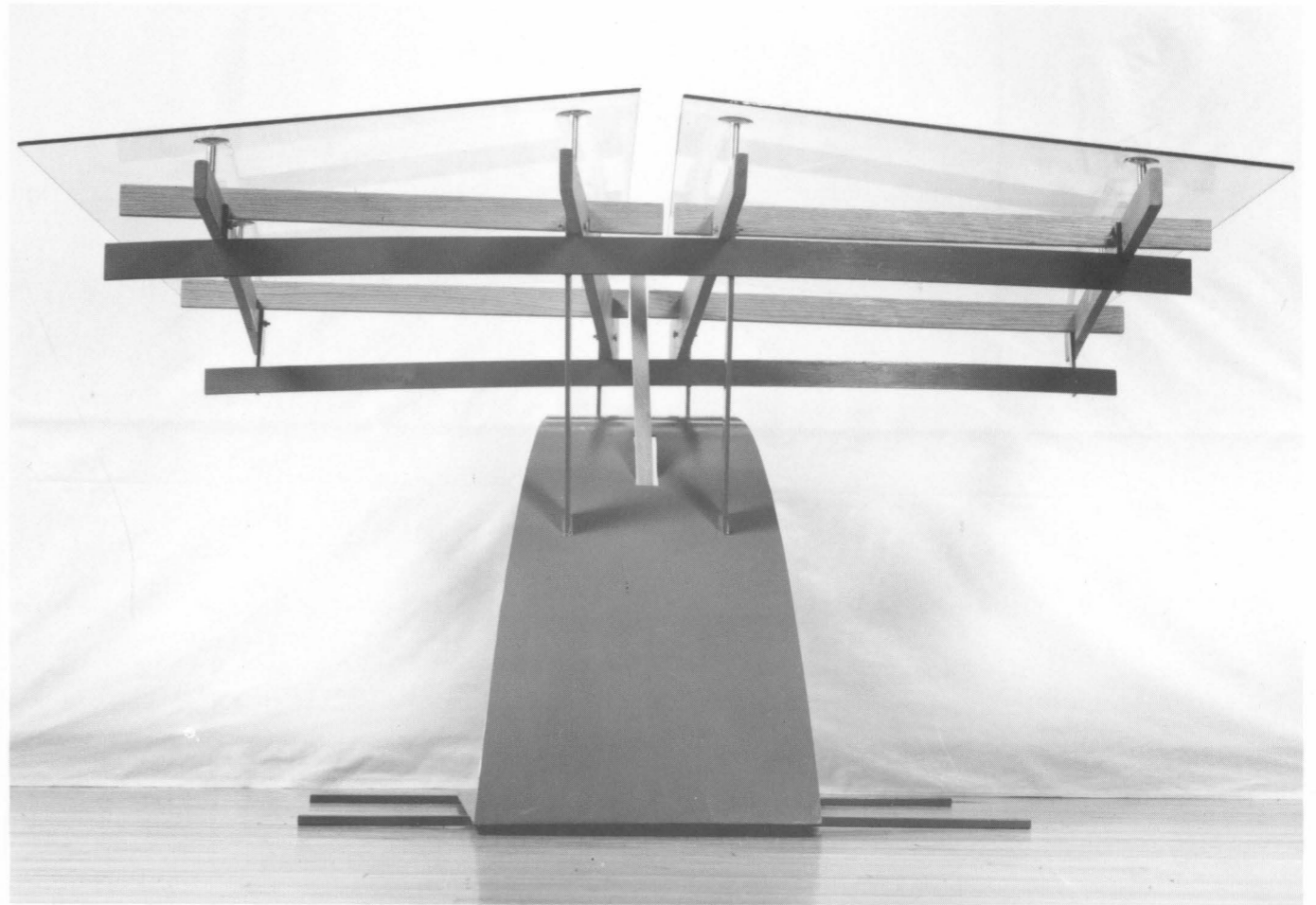
A table can have one big leg. It can be built from sketches in an improvisational manner.

There is no need to rely upon stylistic (4 legs and a top?) or constructive (build in a sequence using accepted standards of detailing) preconception.

There is only the need to produce something of beauty and of worth.

IMPROVISED

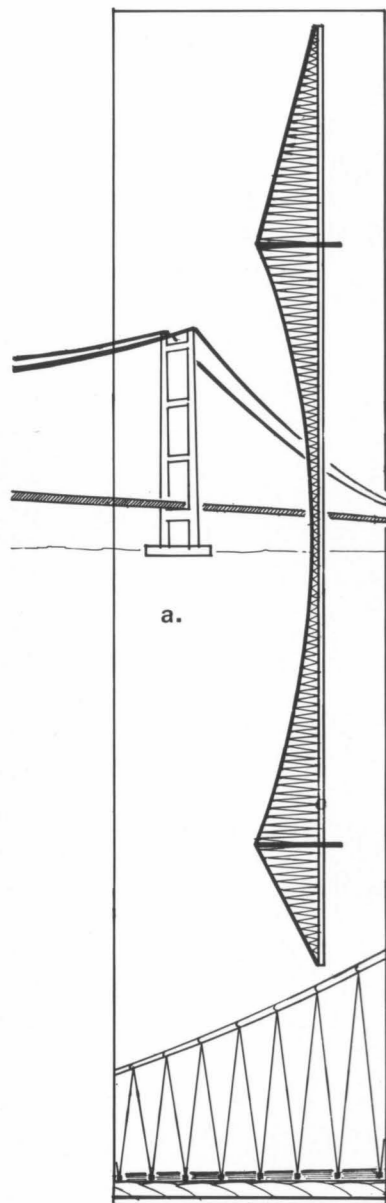
TABLE



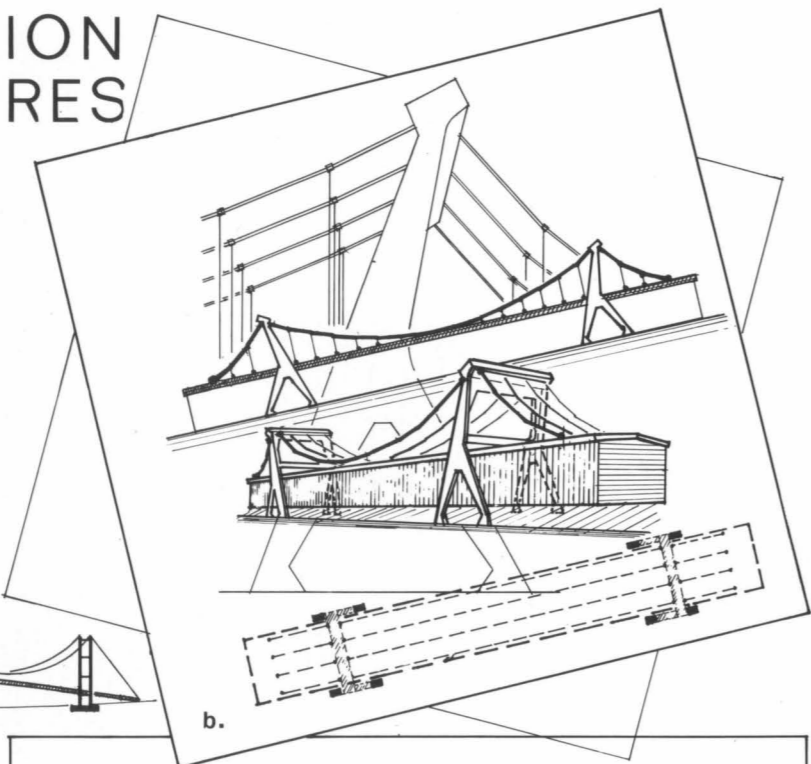
STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS



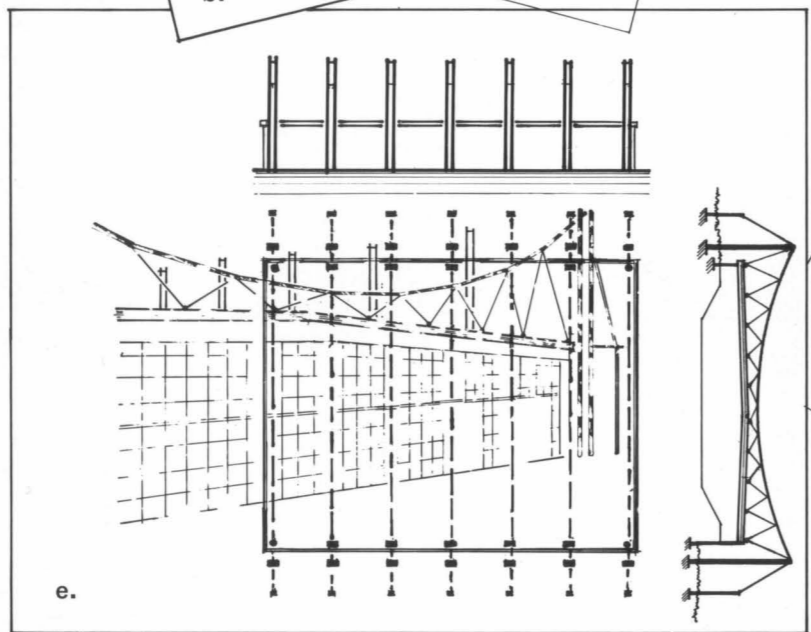
# SUSPENSION STRUCTURES



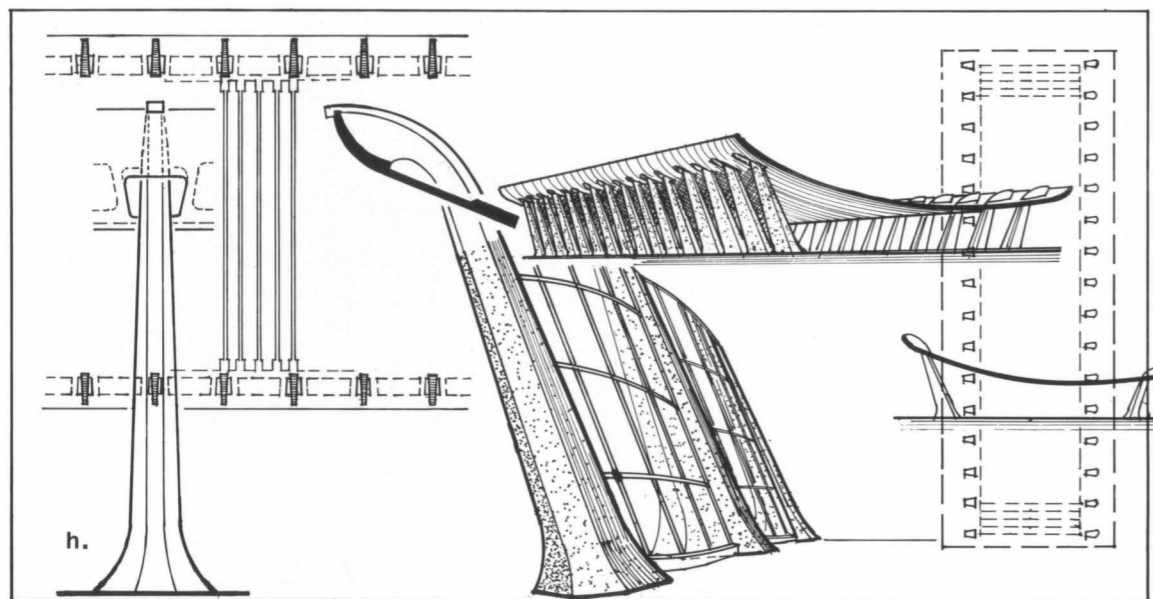
a.



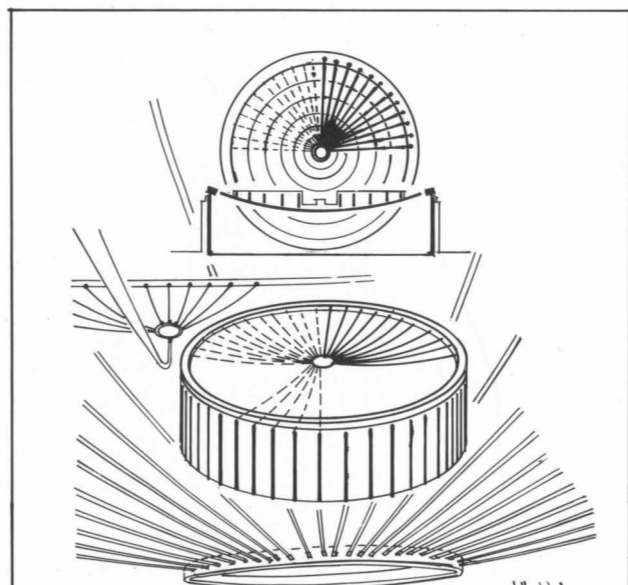
b.



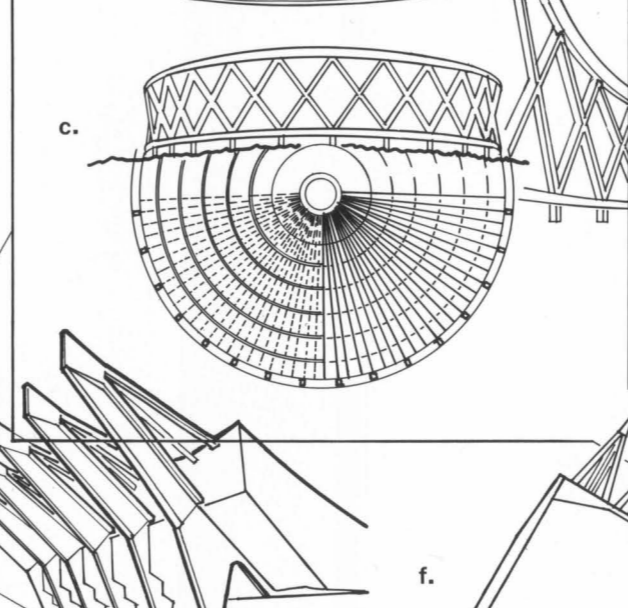
e.



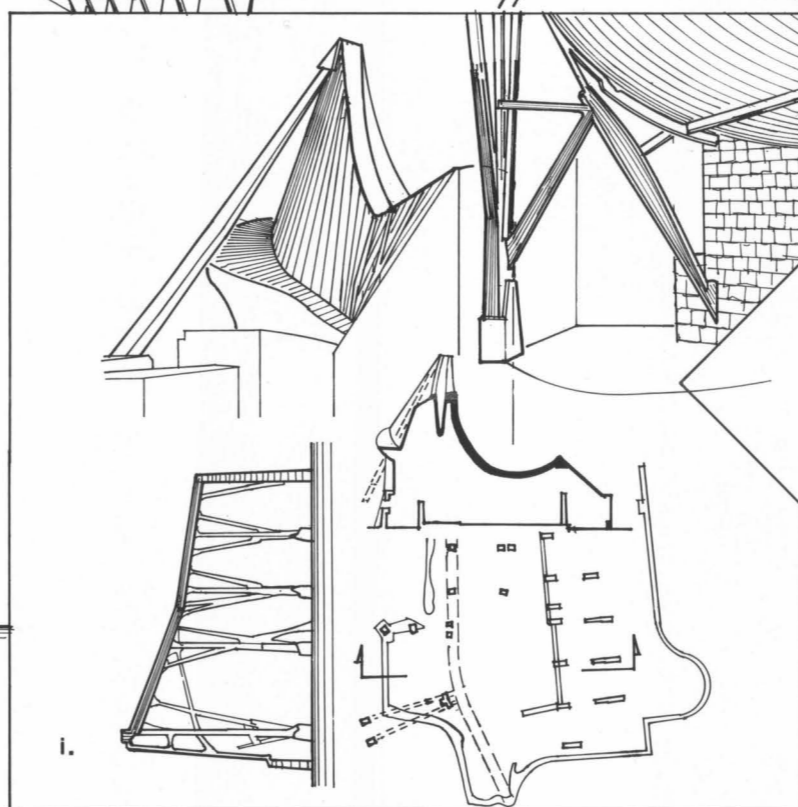
h.



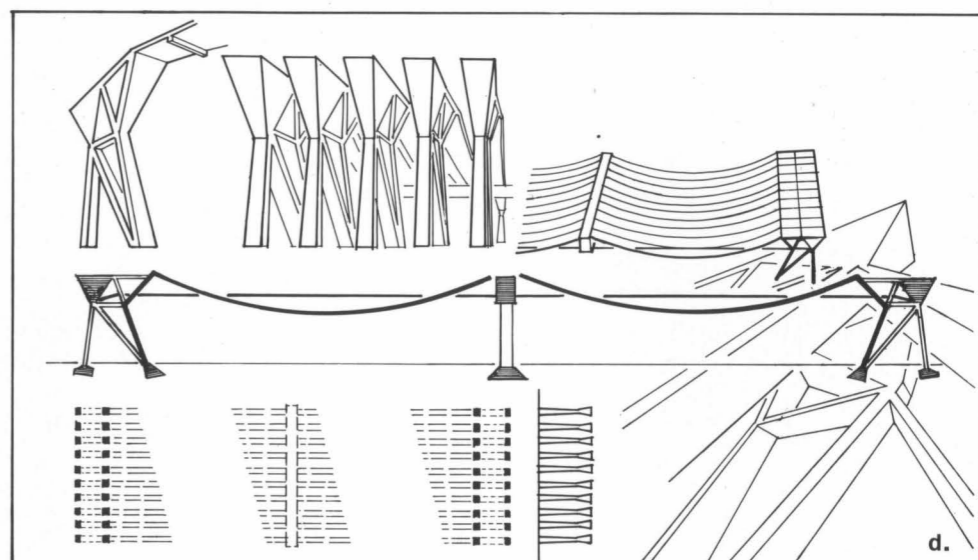
c.



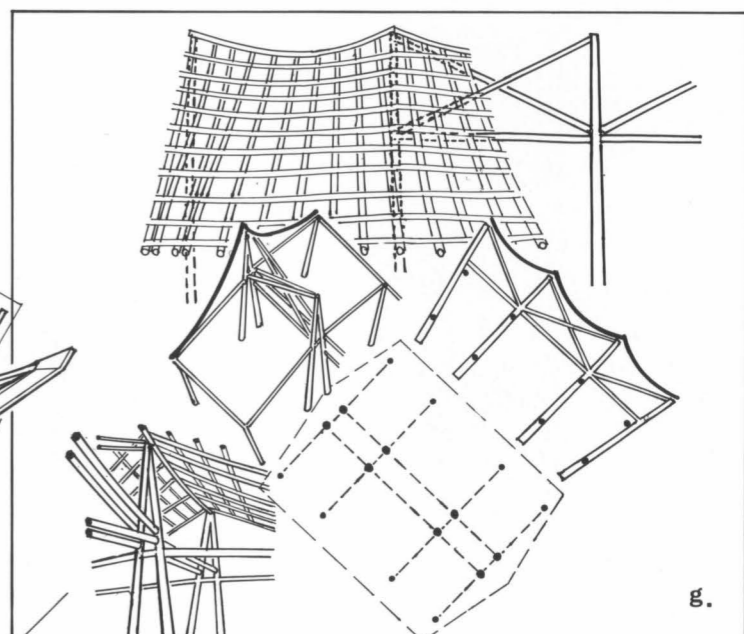
f.



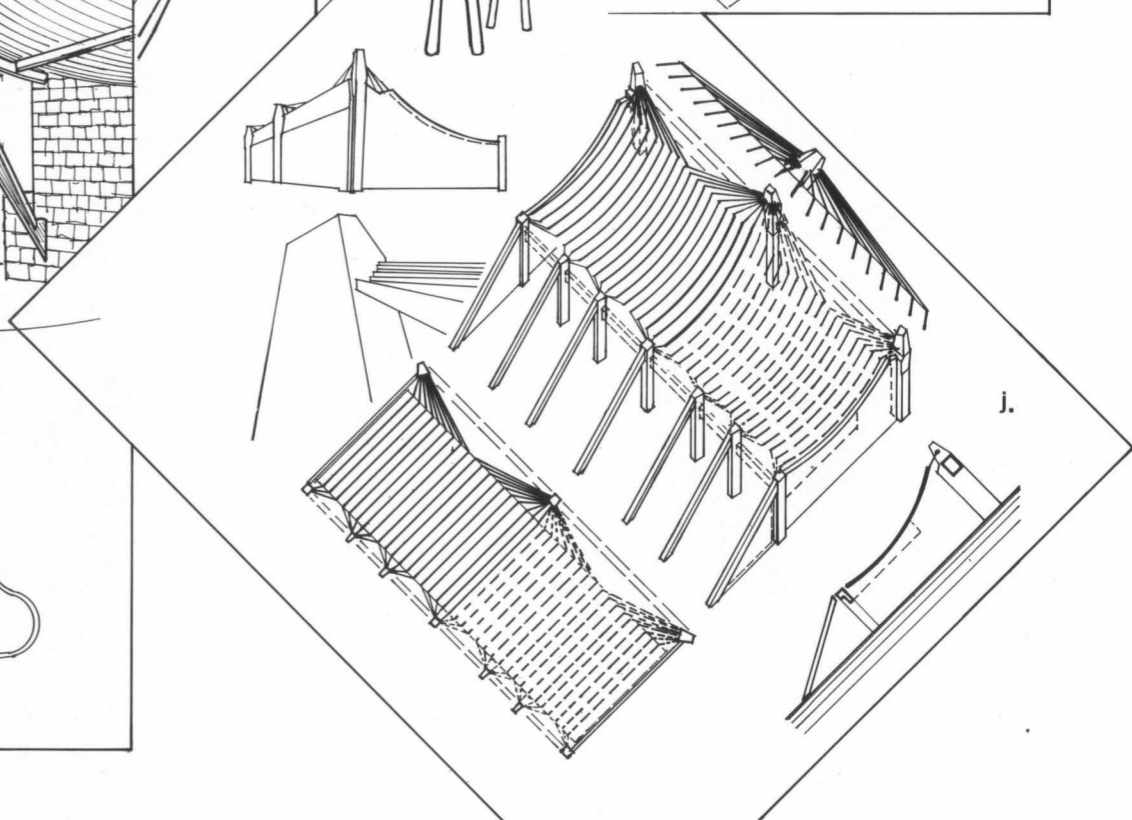
i.



d.



g.



j.