

PARALLEL WALLS FOR THE FOURTH ESTATE  
A Building for a Newspaper in Roanoke, Virginia

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the  
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(ABSTRACT)

As man arrived, so he will leave: in solitude.

In between, through necessity or desire, he  
associates with others.

Yet he resides as he is, alone with his soul.

Inseparable yet distinct.

He can neglect the soul, allow it to become  
obscured through the noise of others.

It will wither, but not die.

He can nourish the soul; grant it all his  
attention and obscure the man.

The man will wither and die.

Man and soul can coexist and flourish through  
the association of mankind.

Architecture should celebrate this coexistence.



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## Introduction

Man and Soul  
Physical and Spiritual  
Temporal and Timeless

They represent a dichotomy evident in many human endeavors. Can architecture encompass and succeed in balancing such a dichotomy?

Yes. Louis Kahn did it at the Salk Institute and the Kimbell Art Museum.

How is it done? Maybe Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was hinting at the same thing when he spoke of God being in the details. Maybe it's scale. The huge, grandiose, incomprehensible skyscraper can stir someone's imagination only when broken into comprehensible parts.

Maybe it's the levels of articulation, as Louis Sullivan shows in his later bank buildings.

Maybe it's a spatial quality, the kind that Frank Lloyd Wright uses in his entries into rooms, where he accommodates the individual and the group.

All of these maybes seem to point toward one idea: understanding. The level at which someone understands -- a building, a poem, a painting -- is the threshold of the soul. That is the brink of knowledge, which in turn can lead to wisdom.

## Background

We owe a great debt to James A.H. Murray, the self-educated Scot, who became the first editor of the Oxford English Dictionary. It is through his work that we can trace beginnings of such terms as the Fourth Estate.

Left to my own devices, I looked up the word fourth and induced all sorts of dubious etymological beginnings for my first profession, journalism. Under fourth, I found these examples: fourth-hand, fourth-class, fourth-rate. Incorrect, to be sure, but some would find them poignant.

But Murray's work comes to the rescue, sort of. The first reference doesn't involve journalists. In 1752 the Covent-Garden Journal quotes Henry Fielding as saying "So none of our political writers . . . take notice of any more than three estates, namely, Kings, Lords, and Commons . . . passing by in silence that very large and powerful body which forms the fourth estate in this community: The Mob."

Edmund Burke is reported to have hung

the moniker on journalists in 1841 when he said "there were three Estates in Parliament, but in the reporters' gallery . . . there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all."

From its inception, then, The Fourth Estate has been linked to common people and separated from government. Journalists loosely define themselves as representatives of the people. The people define them in a variety of ways; politicians in others.

Be that as it may, the business of journalism, especially newspaper journalism, presents a rare and perhaps unique opportunity for architects. Where else do manufacturing and office work entwine so inextricably? Where else do deadlines occur so often every day? Where else is a different product manufactured every day? Where else are the group (the newspaper) and the individual (the reporters and photographers) so apparent to the public?



This group/individual dichotomy intrigues me. Being able to accommodate both architecturally, primarily in the newsroom, is a concern of this thesis.

The newsroom forms one hub of a newspaper. In it work the editors, reporters and photographers most closely associated with the day-to-day production of the news/sports/features material of the paper.

The groups work autonomously. That is, sports, news and features staffs have little direct correlation with each other. They could be in separate rooms or on different floors of a building. Yet their jobs are essentially the same: to discover and write about significant events of the day. Within the groups are the individuals: the reporters, the photographers, the editors.

The editors refine the individual stories and organize the whole into the sections of a newspaper based on their estimation of the stories' and photographs' relative merits. The more important issues go on the front pages, the less important ones inside.



Charlotte (N.C.) Observer newsroom



These people work in large rooms built like storage spaces, warehouses for desks. In fact, warehouses, with their higher ceilings and exposed beams, would offer a better sense of place than many newsrooms.

The open spaces appeal to most journalists as a way to improve communication -- especially near deadlines. The open office also augments the feeling of excitement and anxiety that builds throughout a newsroom with the approach of those deadlines.

Therefore, visibility among journalists is appreciated, but in such a litter of desks the individuality suffers.

Can architecture provide for the individual while maintaining the sense of group? Can it do so while maintaining the intensity of deadline pressure?

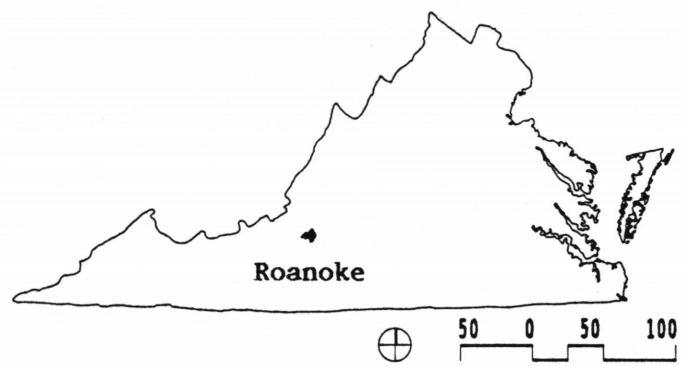


The Plain Dealer newsroom



SHENANDOAH VALLEY  
MOUNTAIN SCENERY

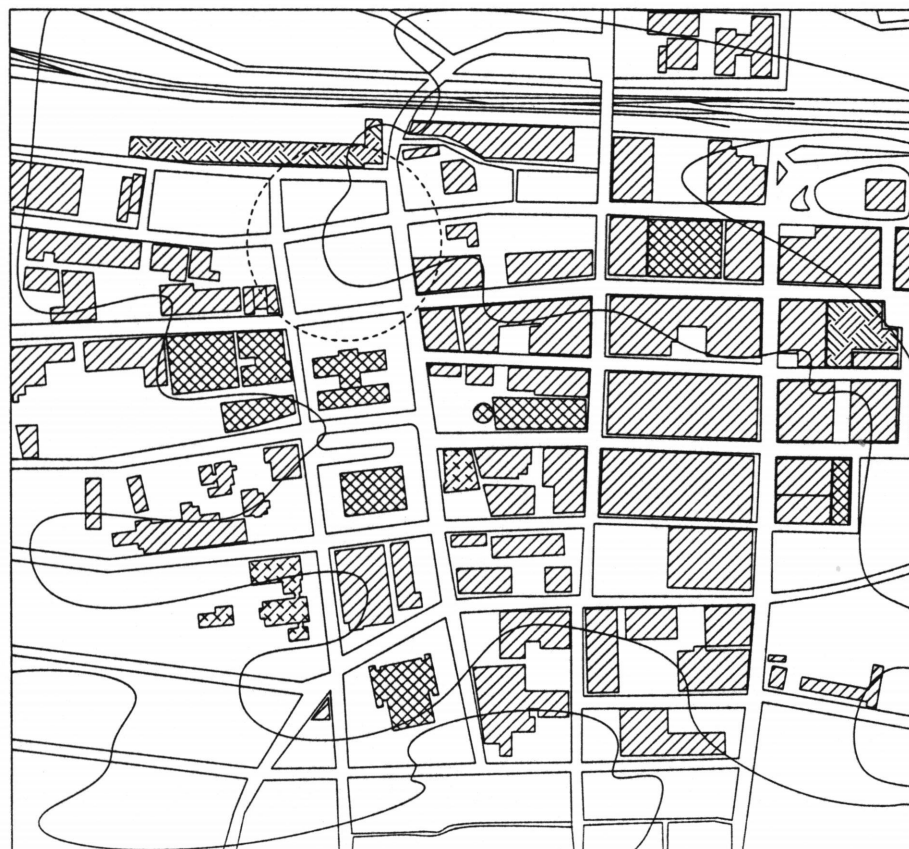
# Site



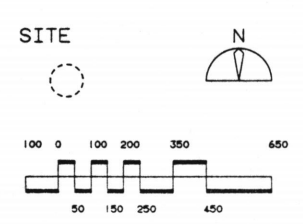
Roanoke nestles among the mountains at the southern tip of the Shenandoah Valley in western Virginia. The Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail meander within minutes of the community, which is home to about 180,000 people.

The Roanoke Times & World-News reports on events happening in western Virginia. The vast majority of its staff operates from its building in downtown Roanoke. It occupies the two-block site I propose for my building.

The site is oriented along a north-south axis. Across the street from the front, to the south, is the former city courthouse, a neoclassical building with a monumental front staircase. City employees' desks now block the doors at the top of that staircase. To the north is the Virginia Transportation Museum.



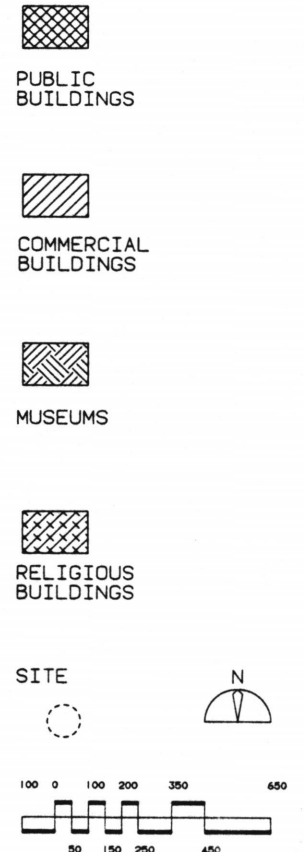
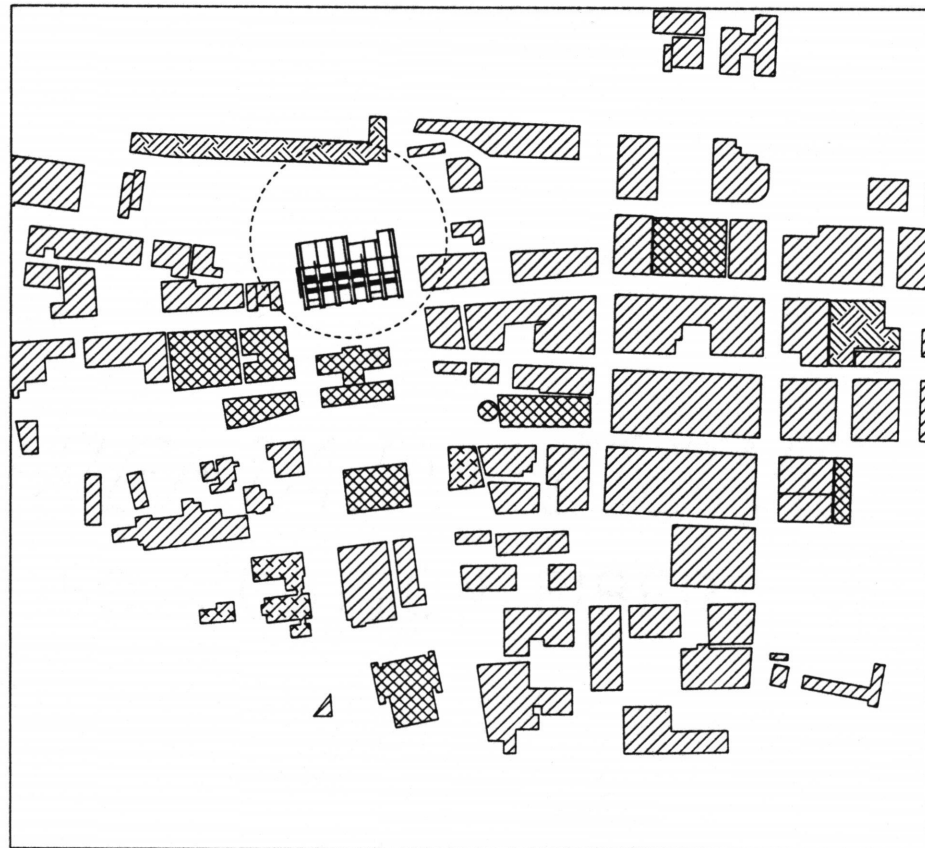
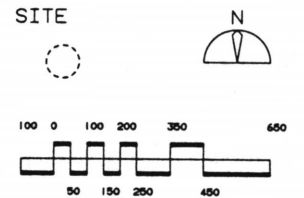
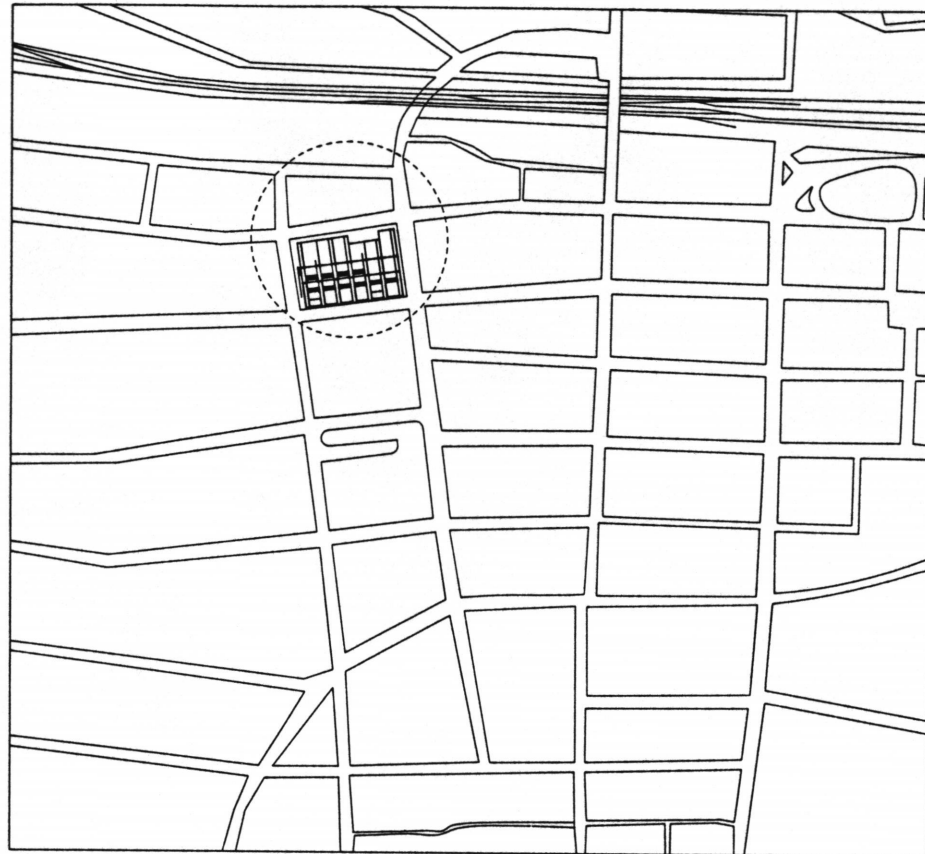
-  PUBLIC BUILDINGS
-  COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS
-  MUSEUMS
-  RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

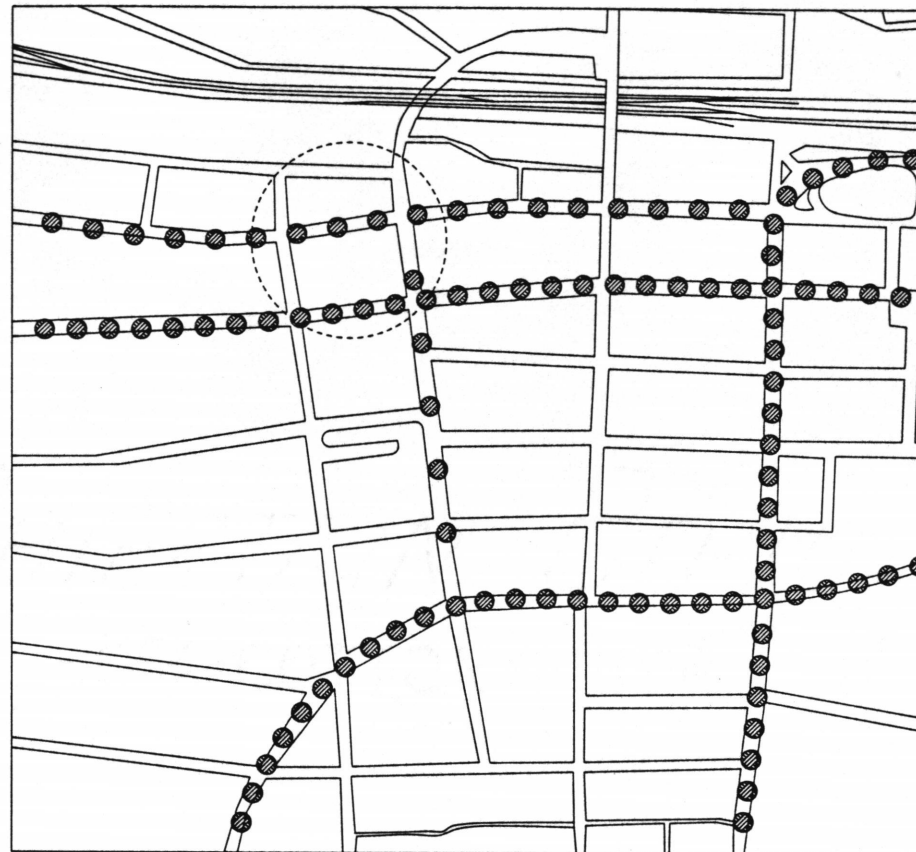


I propose building on the southern block, leaving the northern one for a parking structure to be shared with the museum. The southern block sets between 2nd Street to the east and 3rd Street to the west. To the south is Campbell Avenue, a one-way major artery funneling traffic east toward the central business district. To the north is Salem Avenue, a one-way street sending traffic away from downtown.

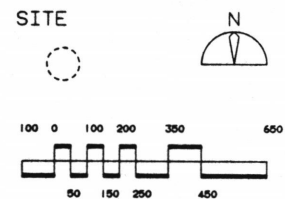
The site affords easy access to major roads and the railroad. Newsprint, shipped in rolls about 5 feet high and 4 feet in diameter, can be sent by rail almost to the loading dock. Trucks hauling the many advertising supplements have a short run from Interstate 581 to the docks. The newspaper circulation trucks take the same short route to the interstate to make deliveries a hundred miles or more from the building.

The property is across the street from city government offices and within blocks of city, state and federal courthouses. Entertainment centers and the business district, which includes offices for state financial institutions and the Norfolk Southern Corp., are within easy walking distance.



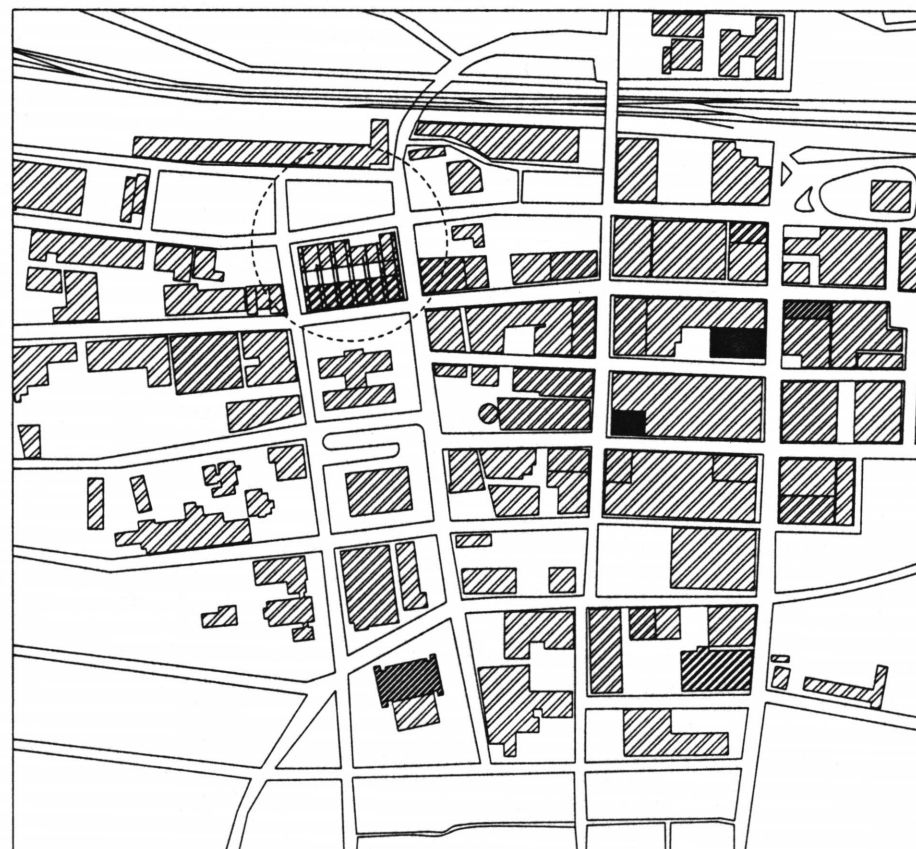


● ● ●  
VEHICULAR  
CIRCULATION



The location offers high visibility because of Roanoke's traffic pattern and the siting of the nearby government offices well off the street.

The front of news building will form the northern boundary to a spine of government buildings that begins with the old city courthouse and ends at the federal courthouse four blocks to the south. All of the buildings to the east and west of this spine -- with the exception of a church -- abut the sidewalk. All of the government buildings set behind moats of grass and trees.

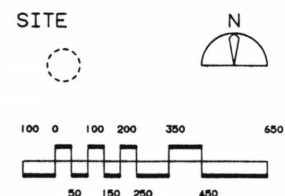


BUILDING  
HEIGHTS

▨  
LOWRISE  
1-3 STORIES

▨  
MIDRISE

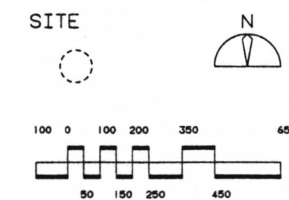
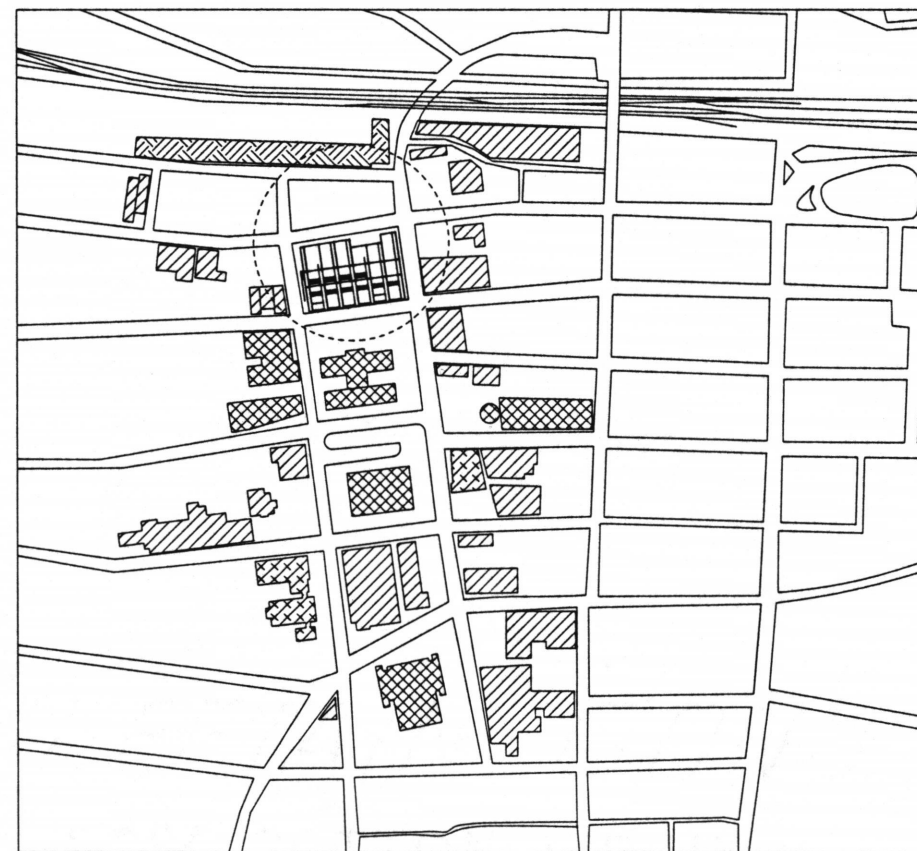
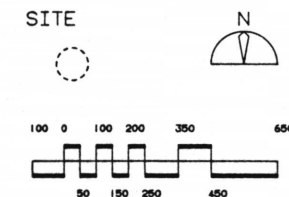
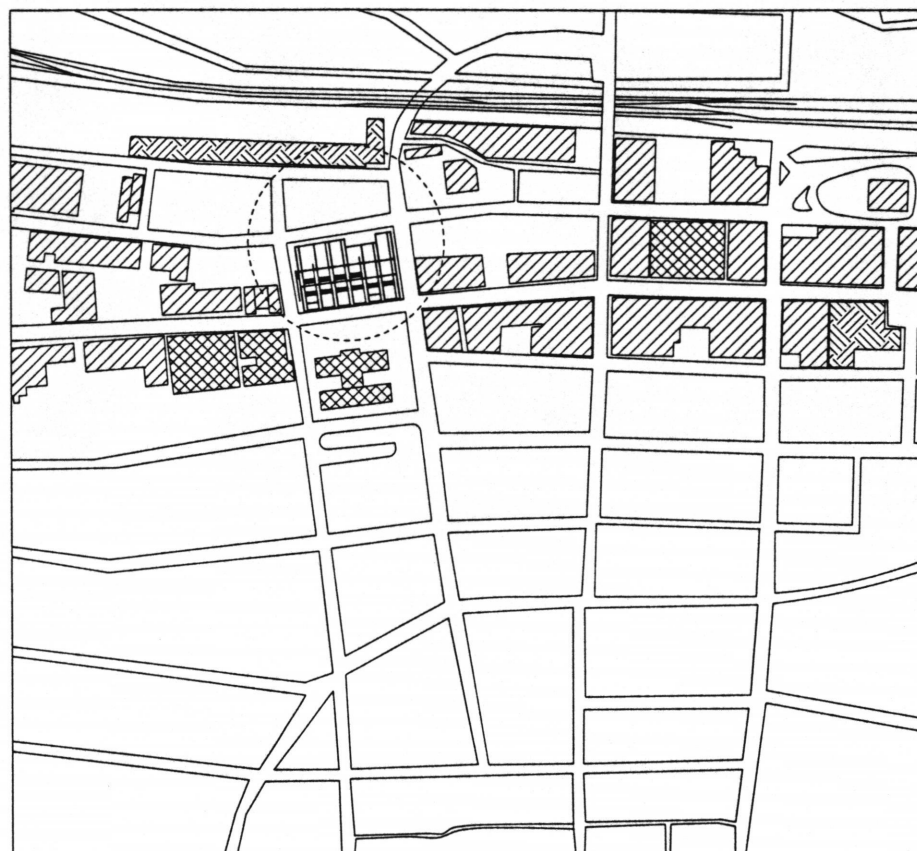
▨  
HIGHRISE  
12 OR MORE STORIES



The site also holds a strategic position at the west entrance to the downtown business district. The blocks to the east of 2nd Street along Campbell Avenue showcase Roanoke's commitment to the rejuvenation of the city.

Concrete sidewalks have been repoured and outlined with brick pavers; trees and benches have been added. The city picked a strip of about a half dozen buildings for face lift. Their brick facades were repaired while the insides were gutted and combined to form a parking garage and bus depot. A four-story furniture store in the middle of the city was renovated to become Center in the Square, the home for the city's museums, art galleries, theaters and a planetarium.

The Market Building, also on Campbell Avenue, stands as the centerpiece of the rejuvenated downtown. With its European-like square in front, it is the focal point of a retail-entertainment district that includes Center in the Square, the spruced-up outdoor farmers' market and remodeled stores, galleries and boutiques.



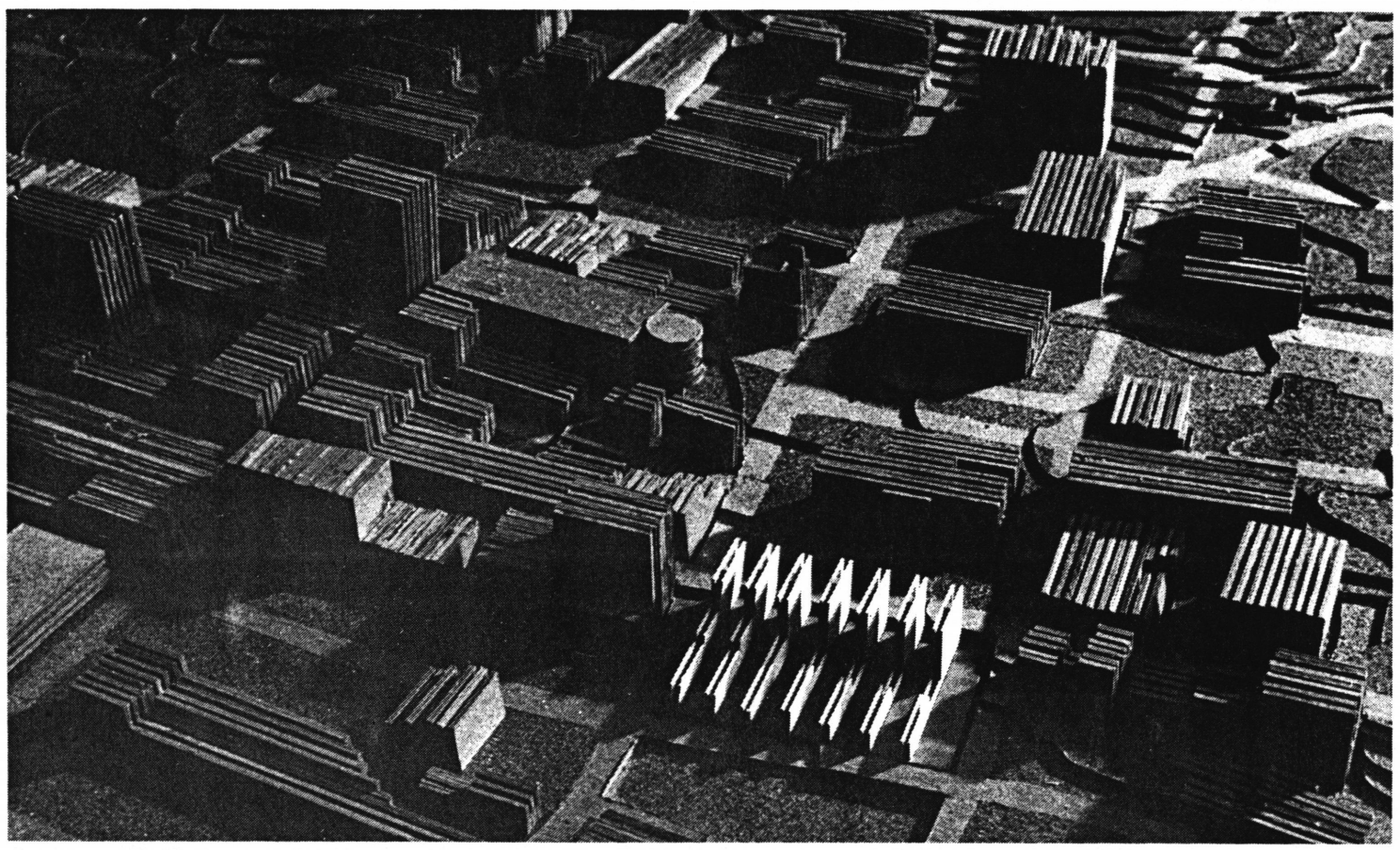
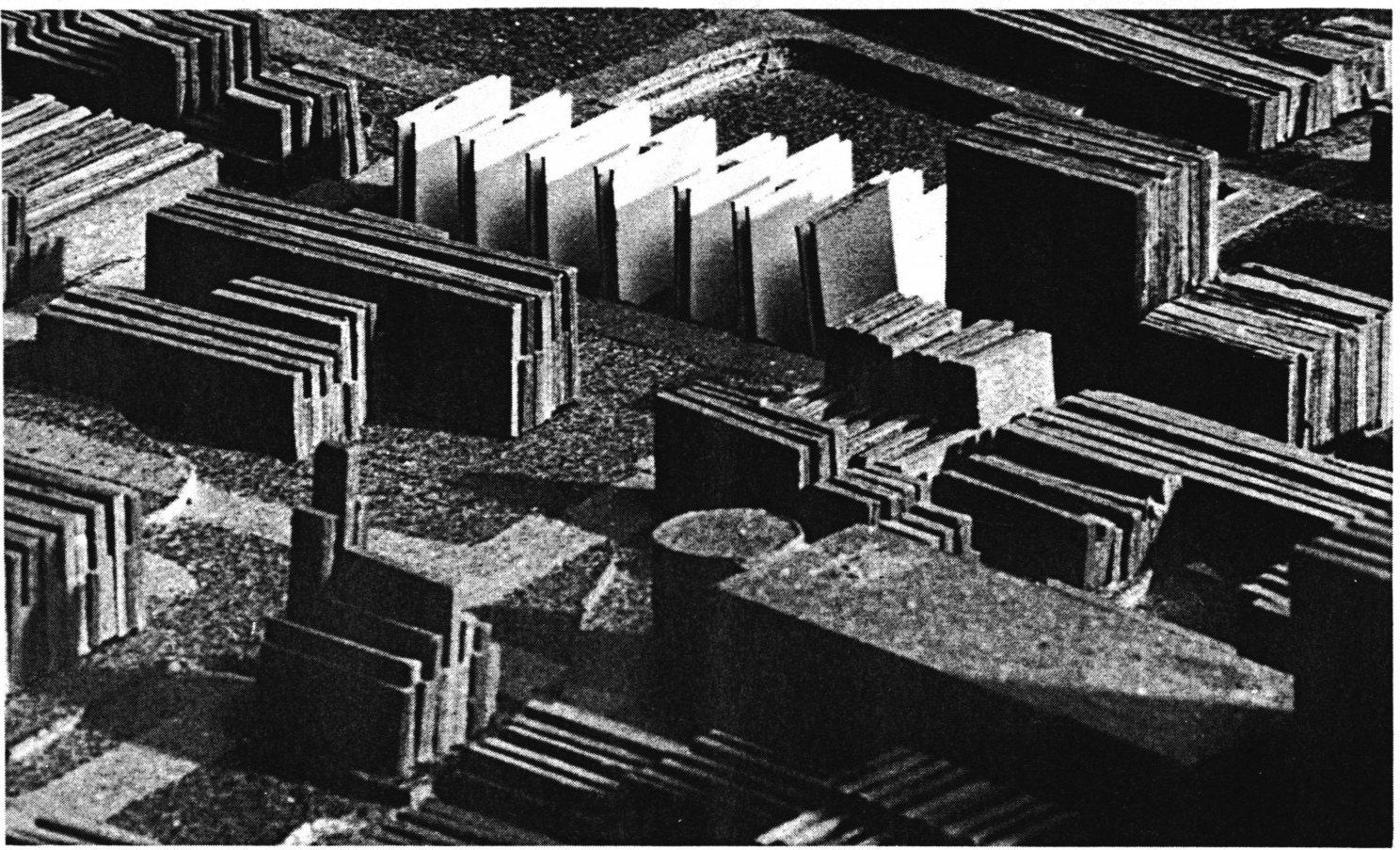
# Proposal

The exploration for this thesis begins and ends at the wall because the wall fulfills many of the requirements for the institution of newspaper.

As architecture the wall carries the complexity of being simple and obvious along with the capability of avoiding the superficial. Among other qualities, the wall separates spaces, acts as a filter between spaces, encloses space, provides an edge and supports weight. It can be as overpowering as a glacial cliff or as comforting as a shallow, south-facing cave.

The building uses a series of parallel walls, which are metaphorically suited to the institution of newspaper: a place to exchange opinions and ideas under a constant time constraint. Walls can either open to embrace people and ideas or close to keep those inside in, those outside out. A series of walls perpendicular to the path opens to allow visual or physical entry at any point. A wall parallel to a path is a border, a barrier.

Excitement comes in reversing -- at a monumental scale -- these properties of the wall: the ends of the walls forming the edge and the faces embracing the entry.



In this project -- offices and printing facilities for a medium-size newspaper -- the ends of the walls provide a skeleton for the front facade. Placed at the road's gutter, they form a hard edge for the room of the street opposite the soft edge made by the government building. They also set up a rhythm at a scale large enough to be perceived by passing motorists.

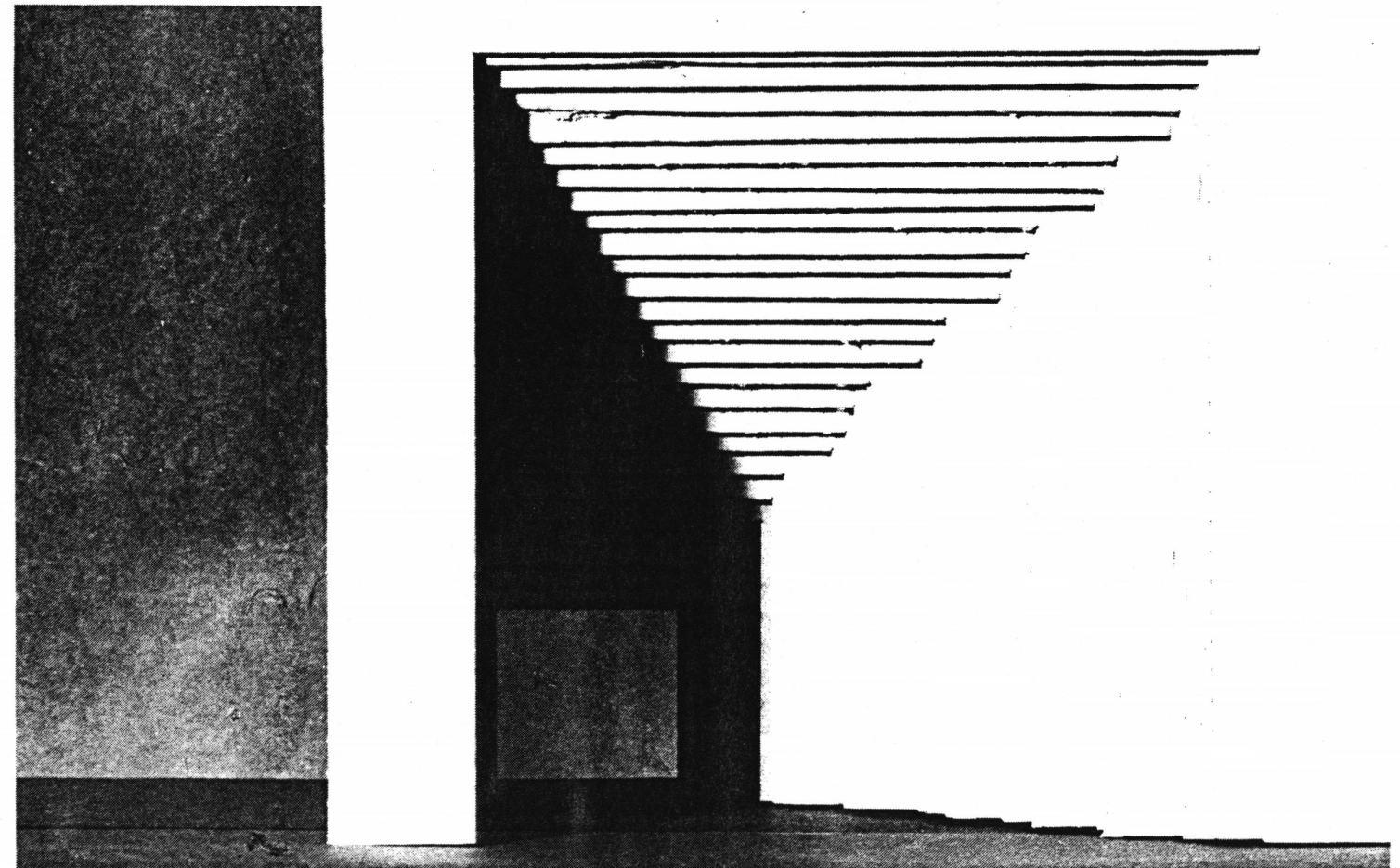
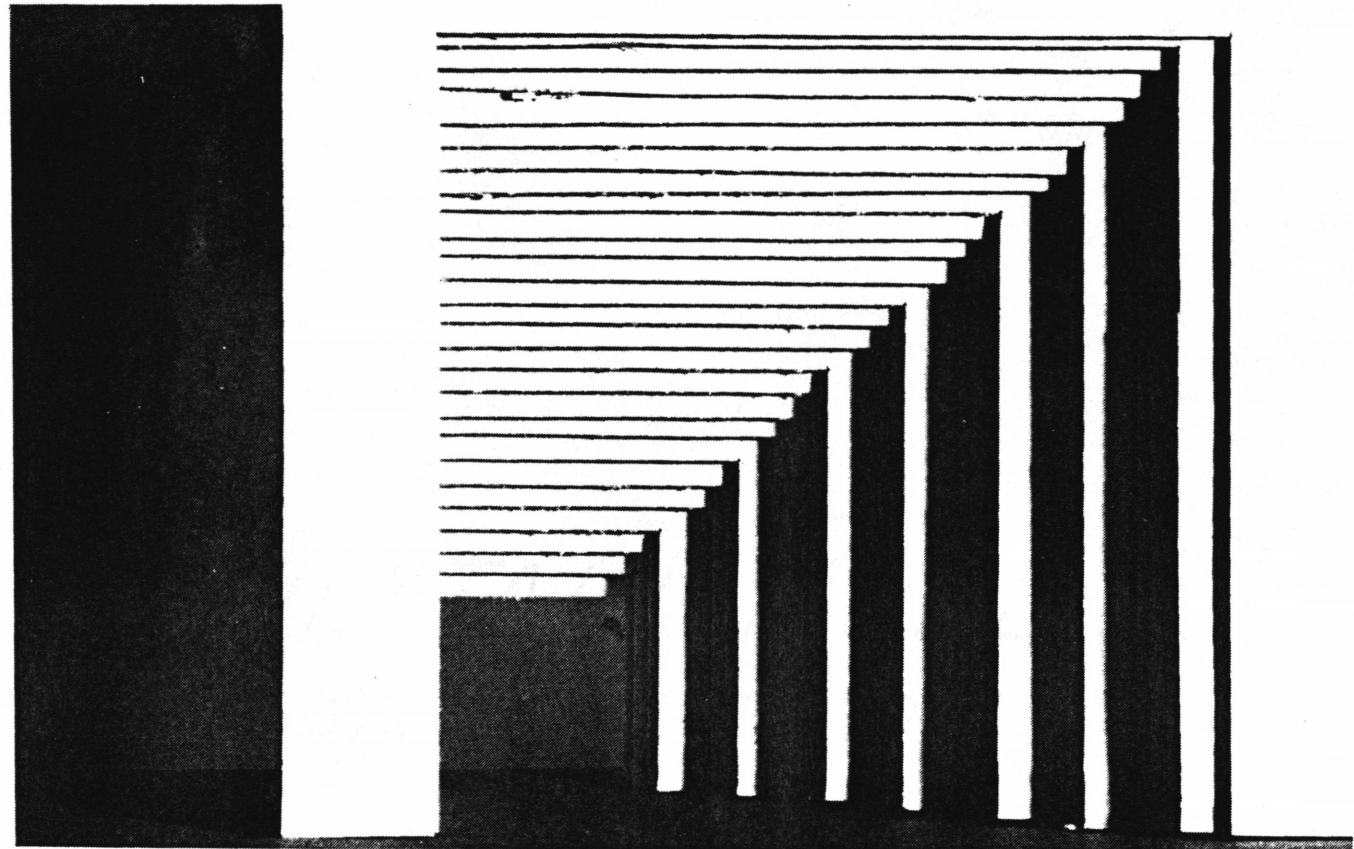
The border or barrier walls along the side streets are penetrated with an asymmetrical series of corbeled steps. This reduces the wall from its city/building scale to an eight-foot square entry and begins a path perpendicular to the walls. The walls then become an abacus marking time and distance as one passes through each wall in turn.

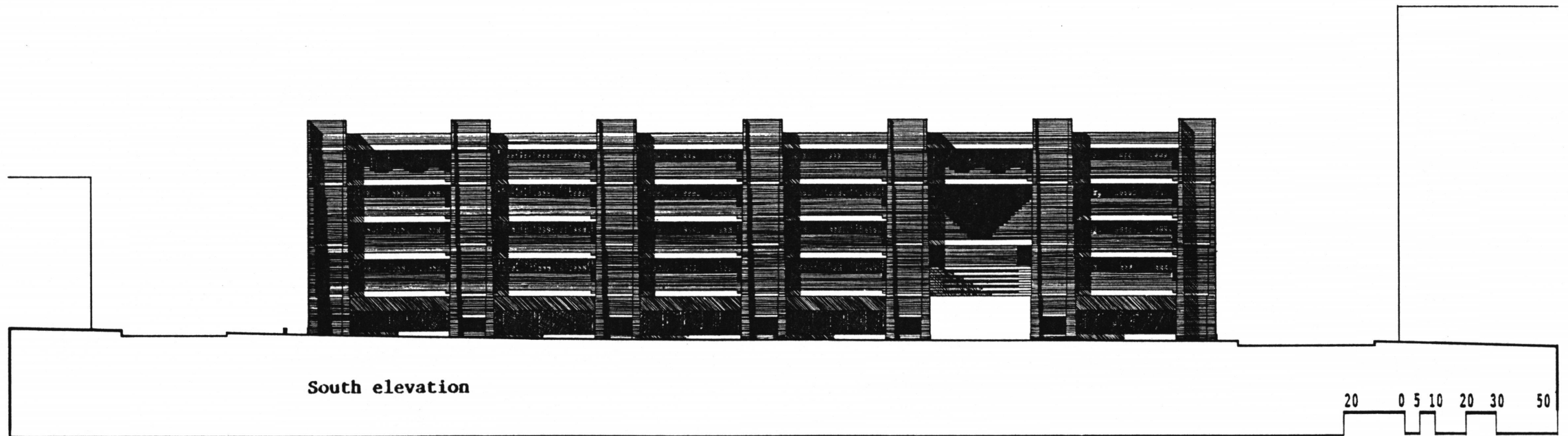
To enter the building proper, two 90-degree turns must be made. Once inside, circulation paths again pierce the walls. It is this inside path that corresponds to journalists' preoccupation with time. The path is time, the walls the clicks of a clock. The news -- so dependent upon time -- follows the path through each step, through each click of the clock, through each wall. Stories written by reporters at one end pass to editors in the middle to the composing room at the other end.

Along this route the walls squeeze the path but never obstruct it, forming more of a visual than physical definition for the rooms and reinforcing the press of time.

The path, and therefore the stories, stops before the last pair of walls.

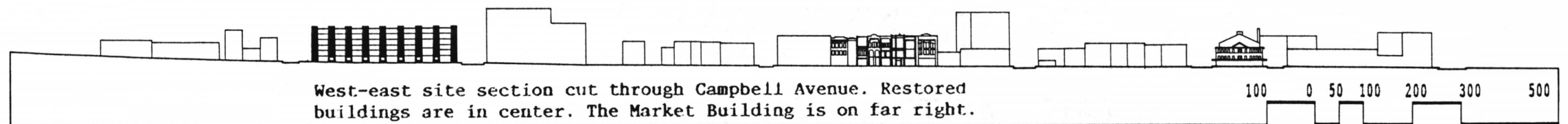
Here is the final deadline; here the news must be printed, recorded. It must become history. The presses print the news in an instant, and therefore they must be within one set of walls. They cannot penetrate to the next minute. As the presses begin, the news-gathering process ends.





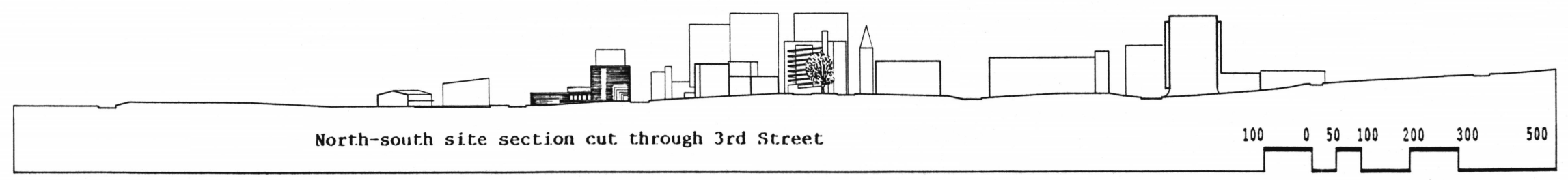
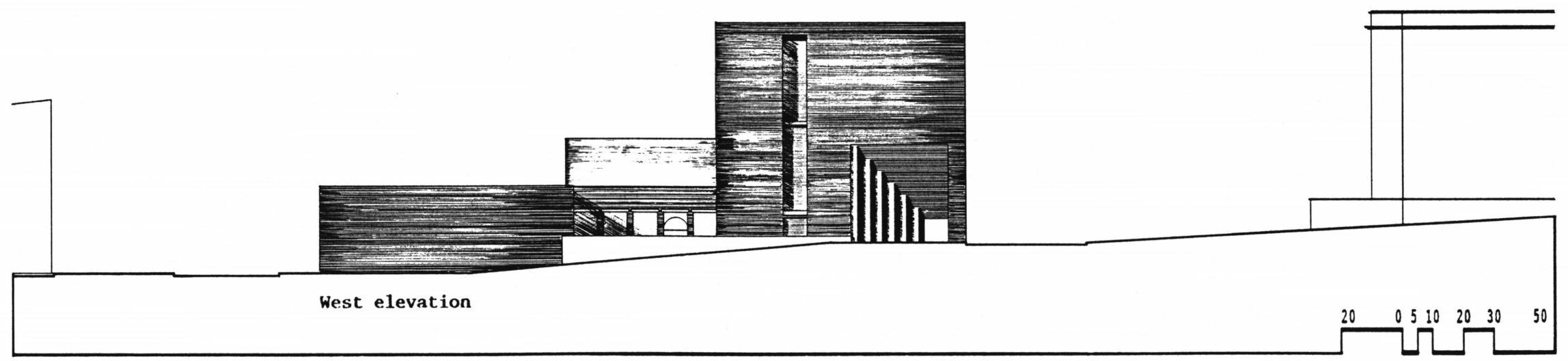
South elevation

20 0 5 10 20 30 50

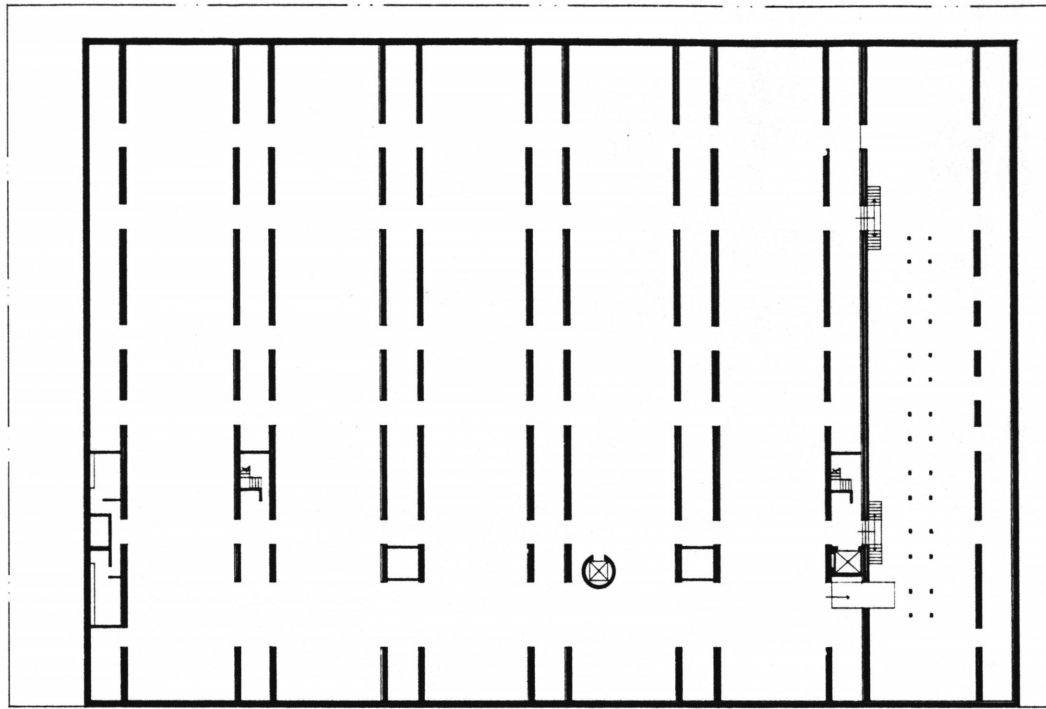


West-east site section cut through Campbell Avenue. Restored buildings are in center. The Market Building is on far right.

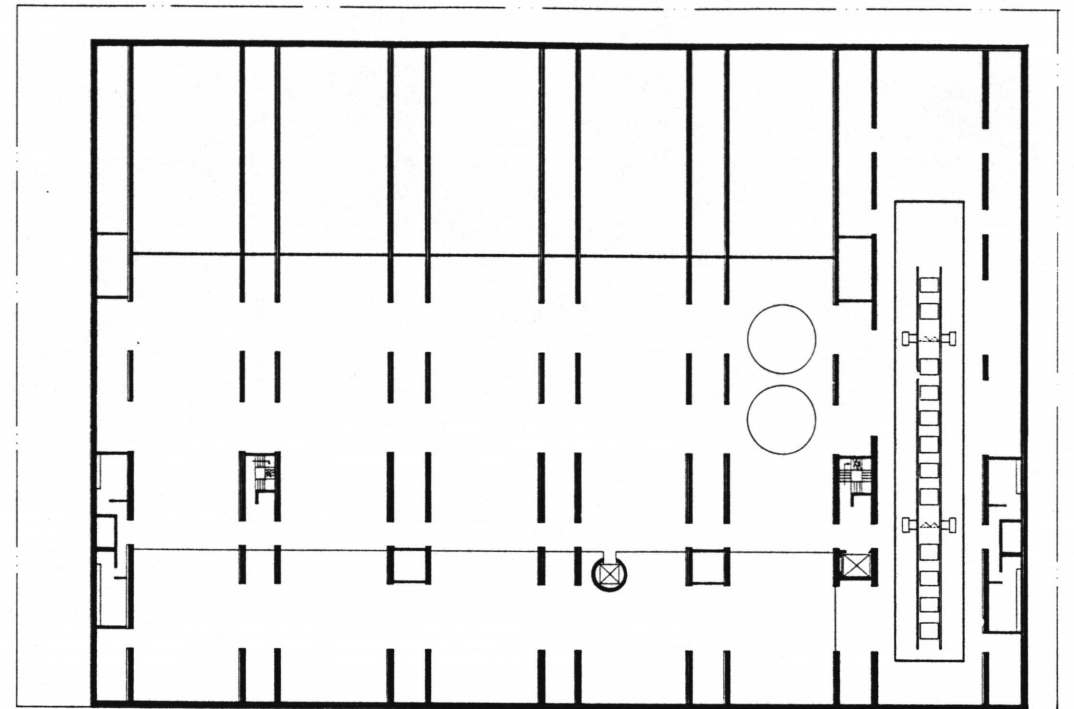
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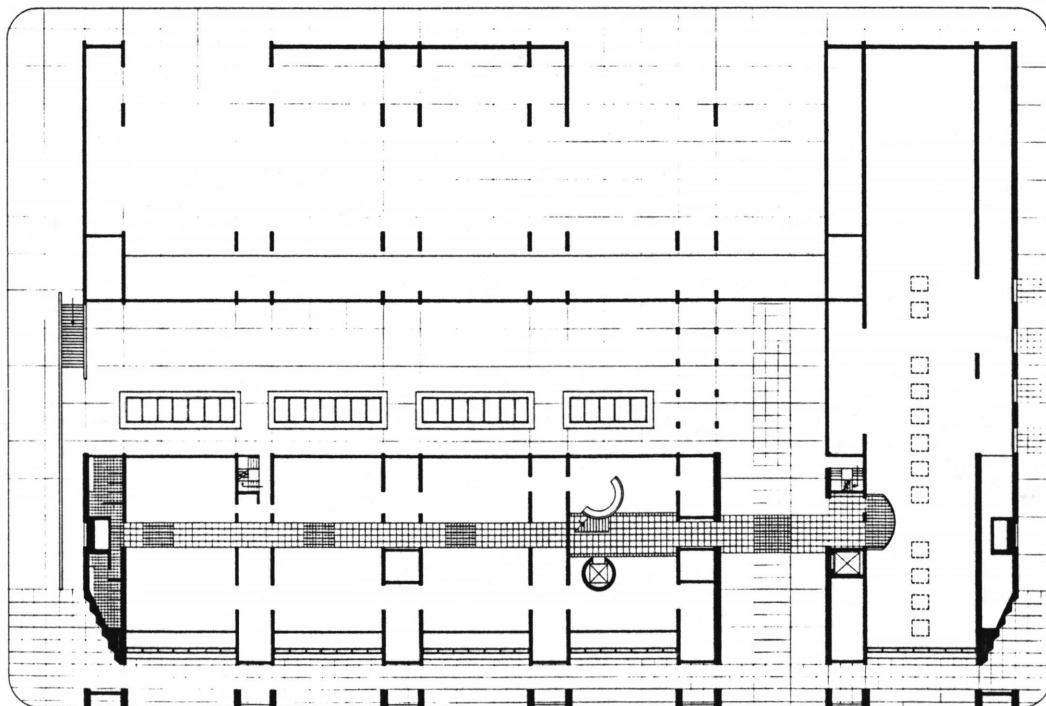




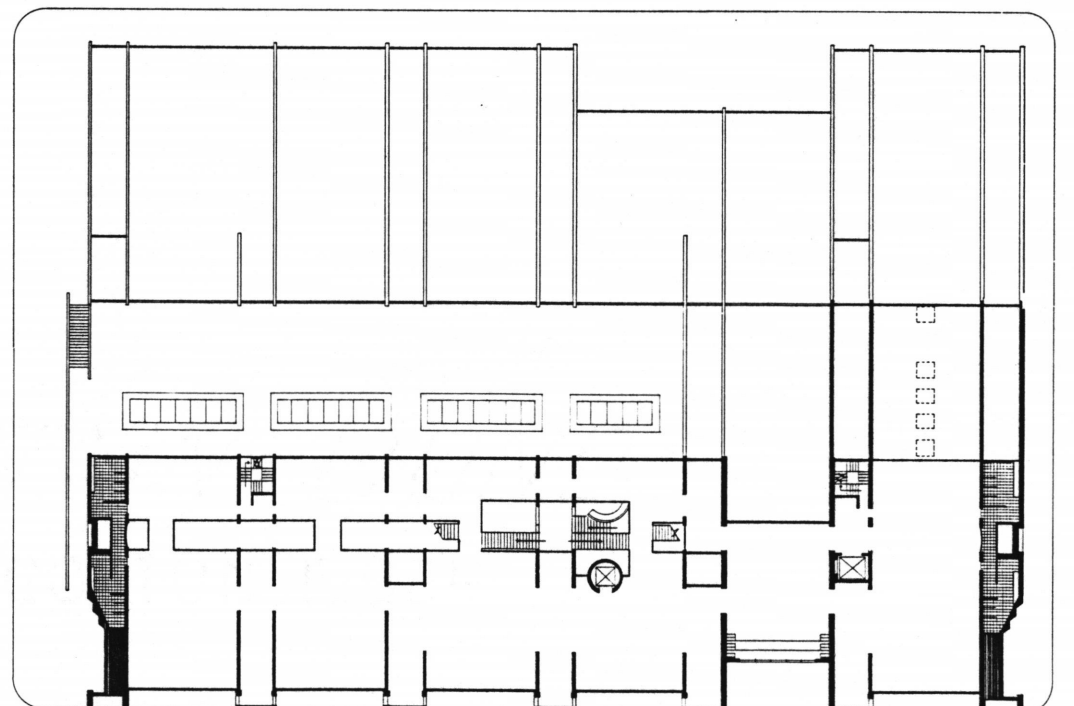
Basement 2. elevation -30 feet



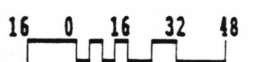
Basement 1. elevation -15 feet

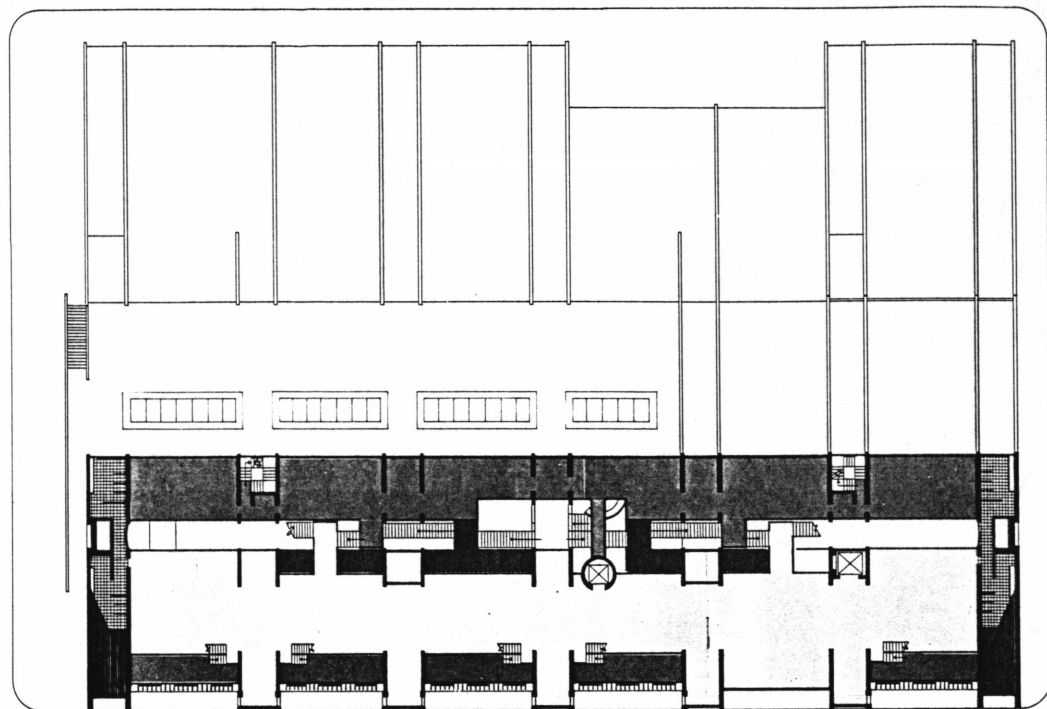


Ground floor. elevation 0 feet

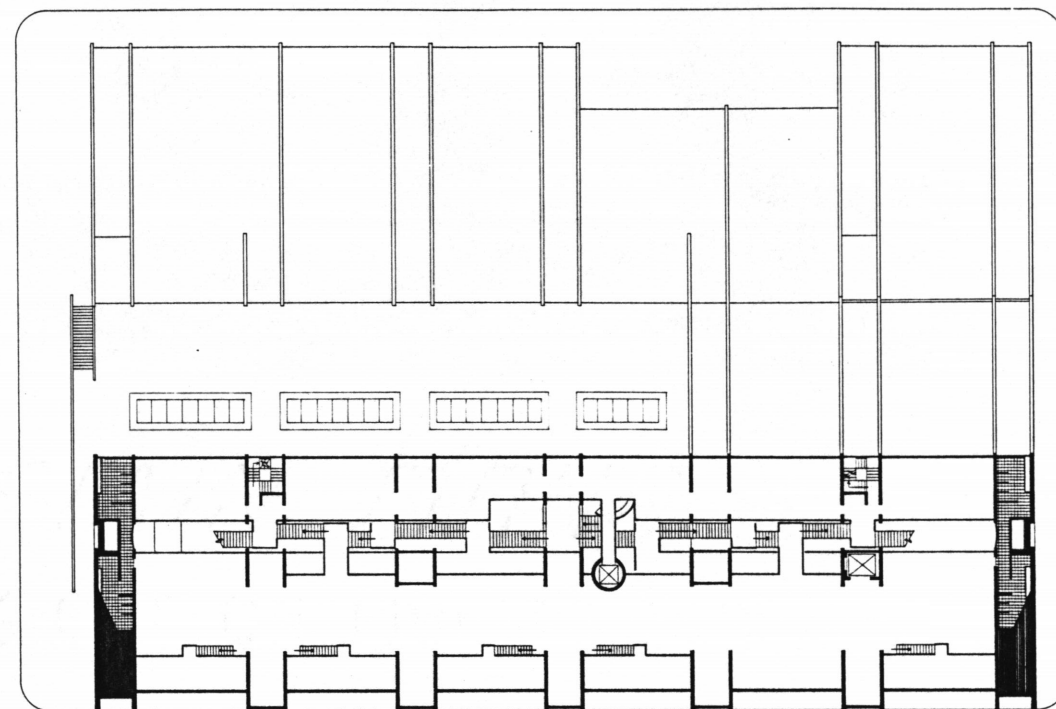


Second level. elevation 16 feet

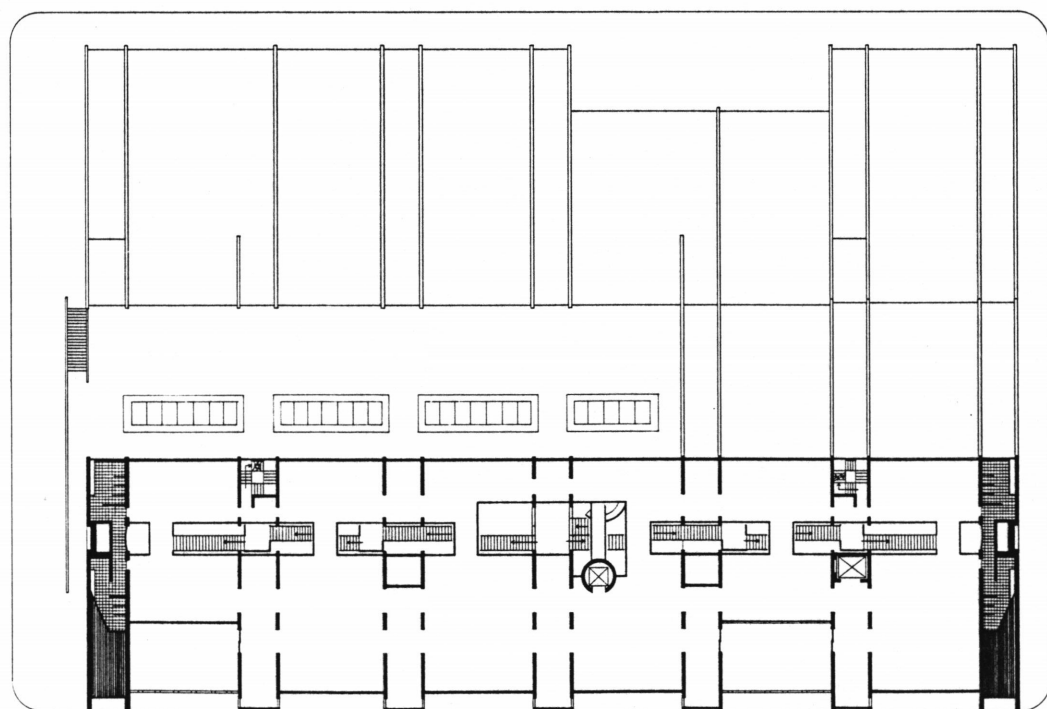




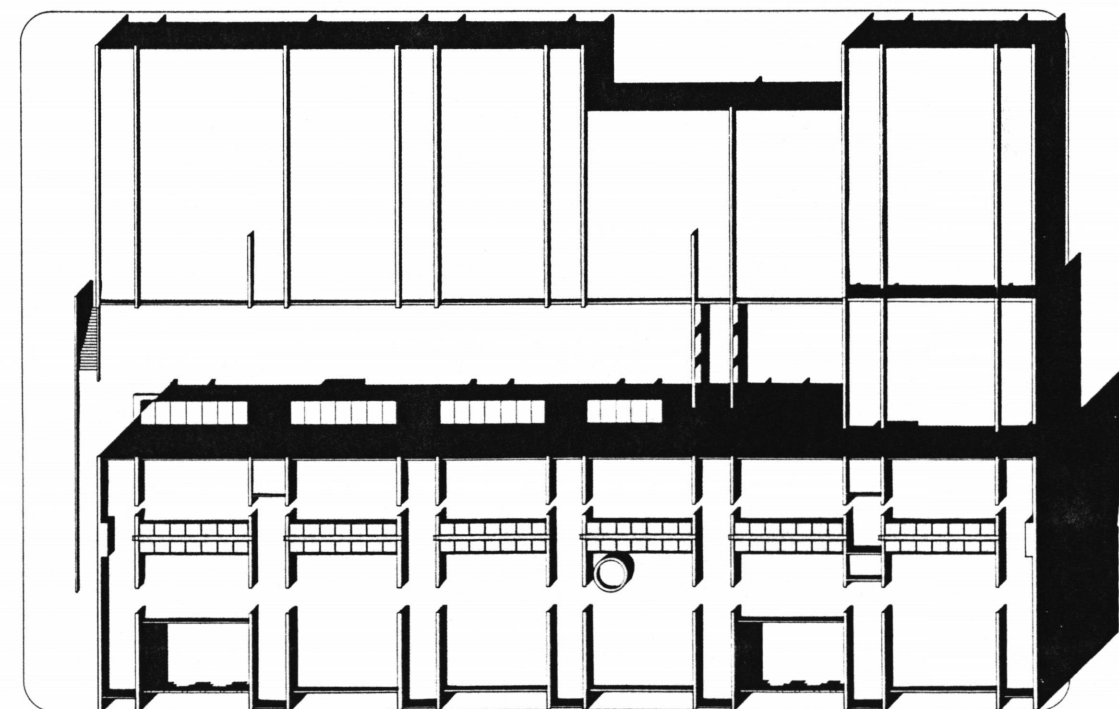
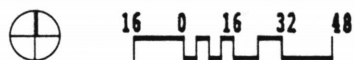
Third and fourth levels,  
elevation 28 and 32 feet



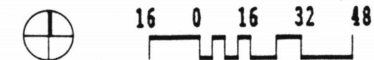
Fourth and fifth levels,  
elevation 32 and 40 feet

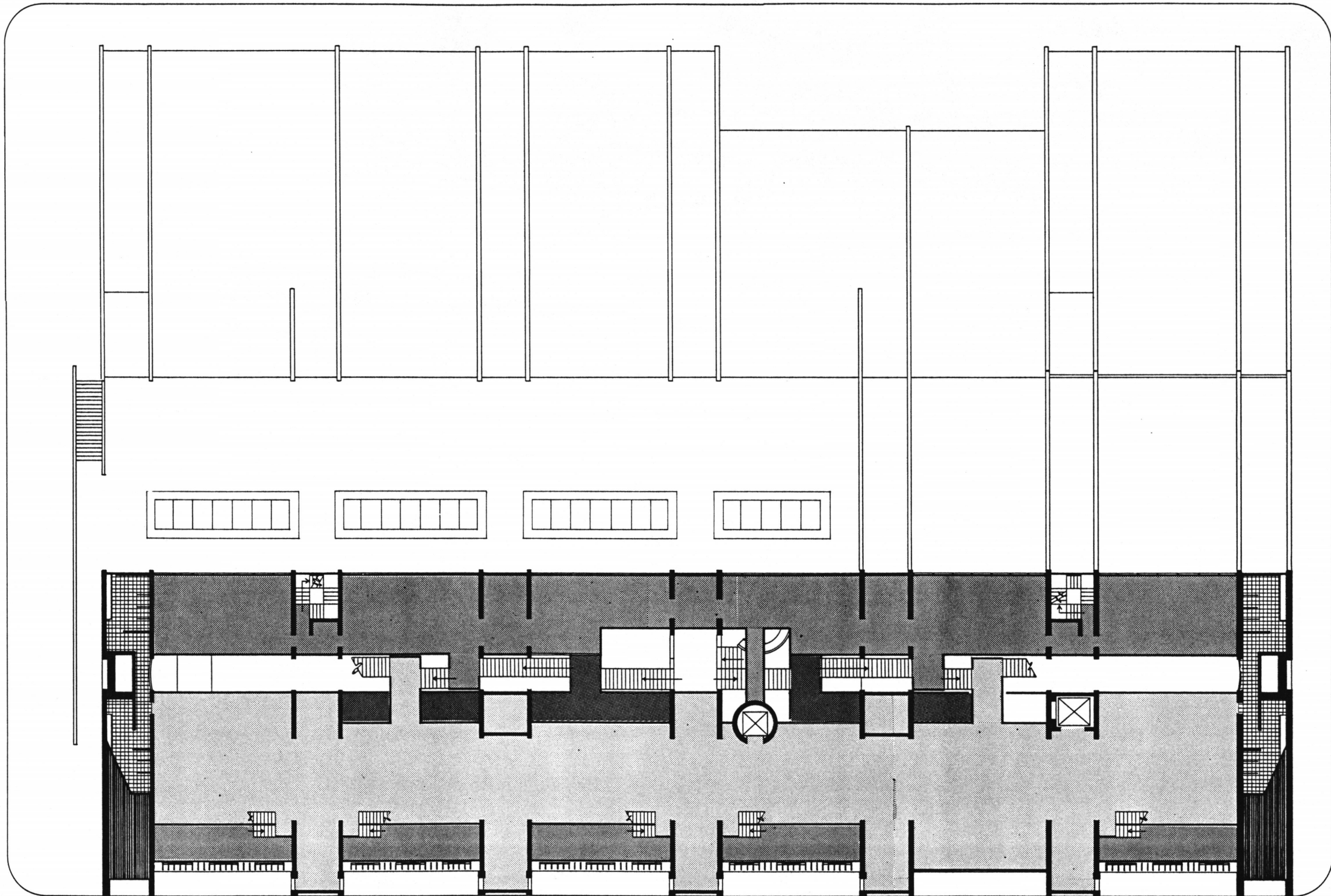


Sixth level, elevation 52 feet



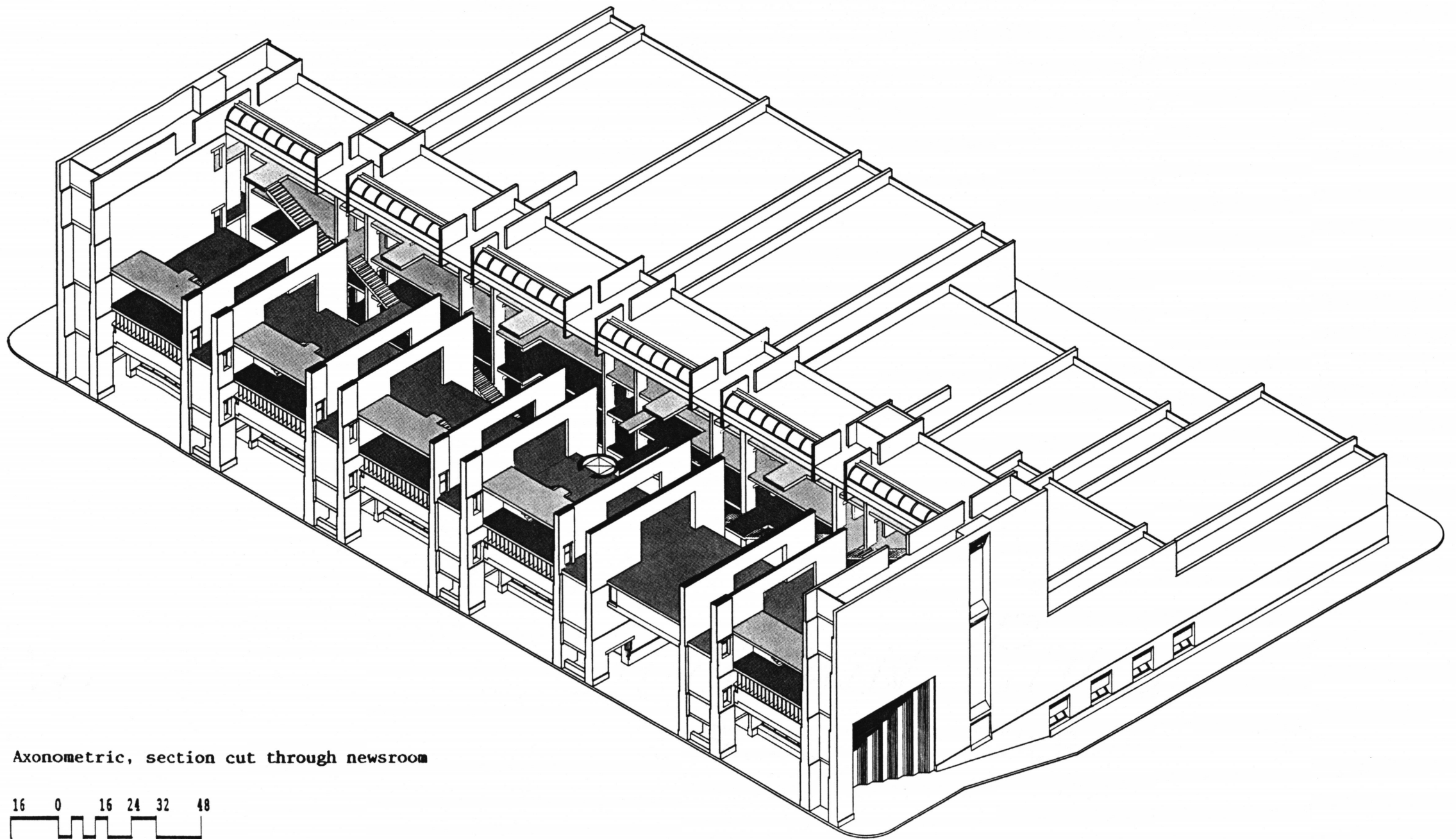
Roof level, elevation 65 feet



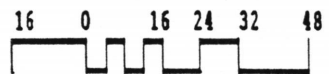


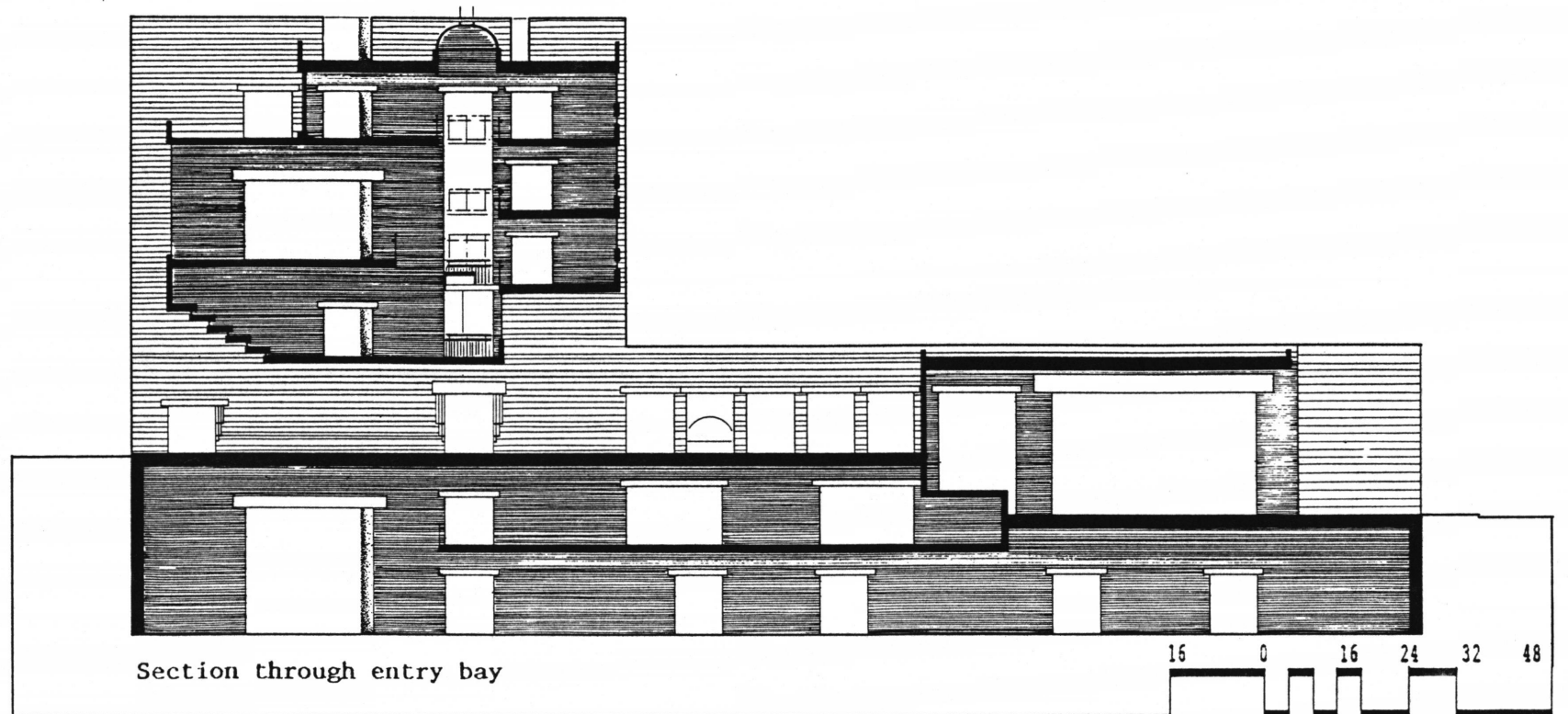
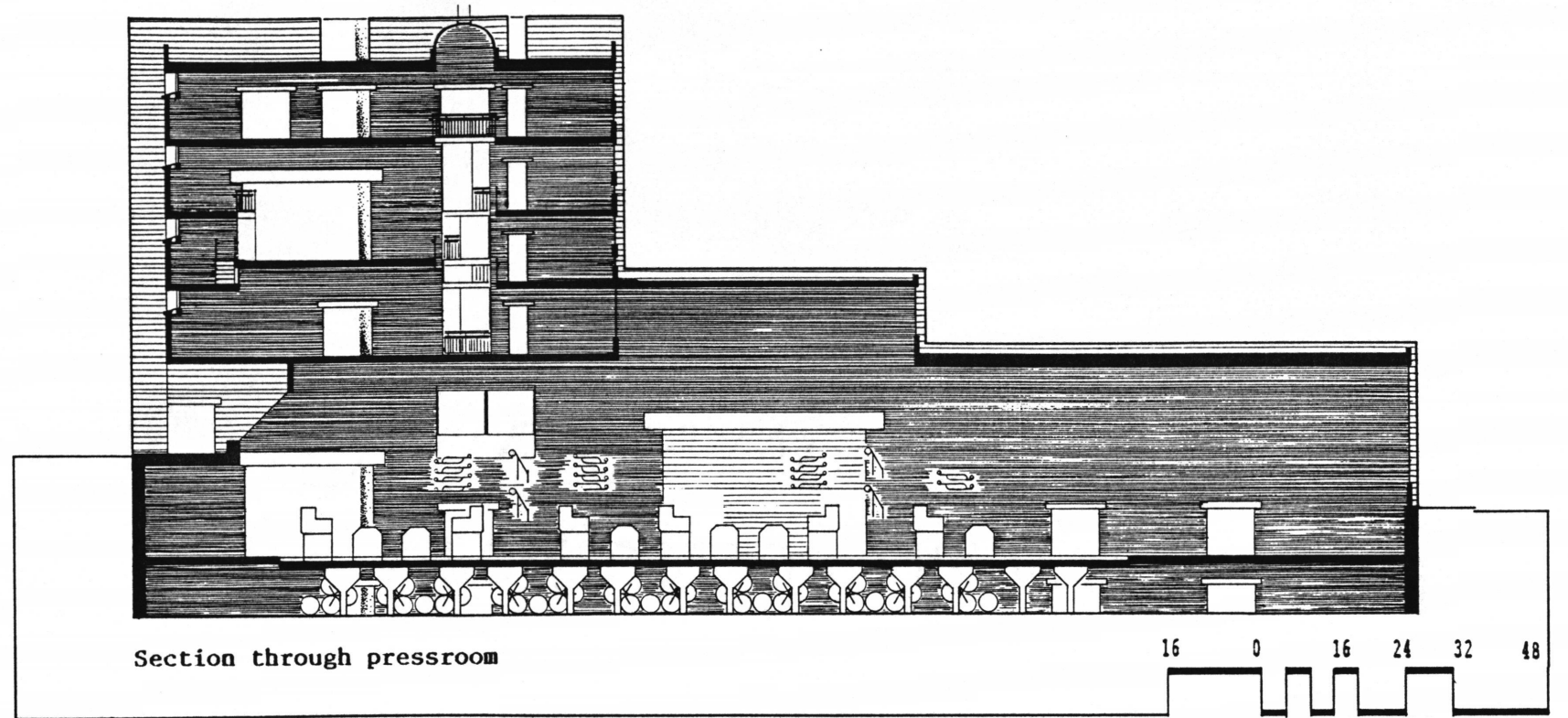
Third and fourth levels, elevation 28 and 32 feet

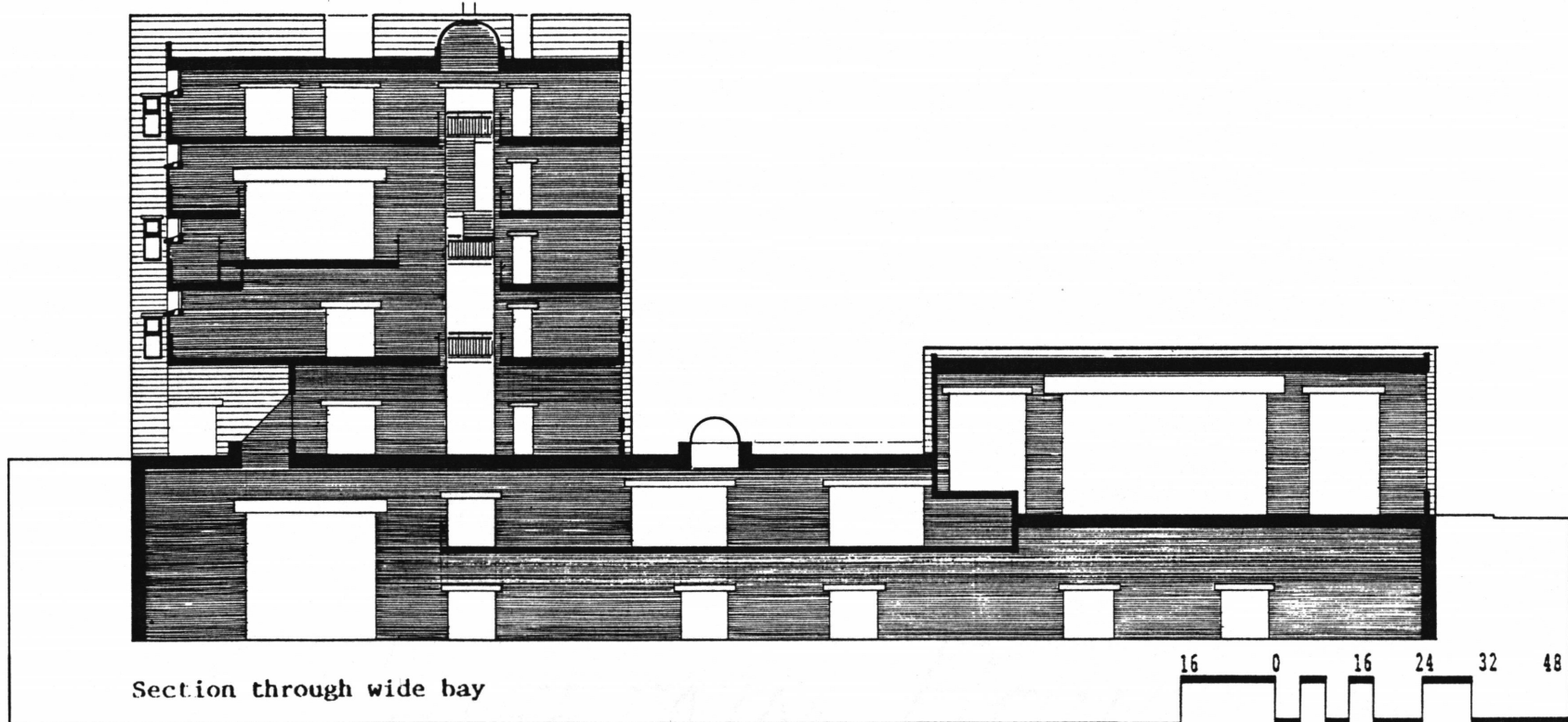
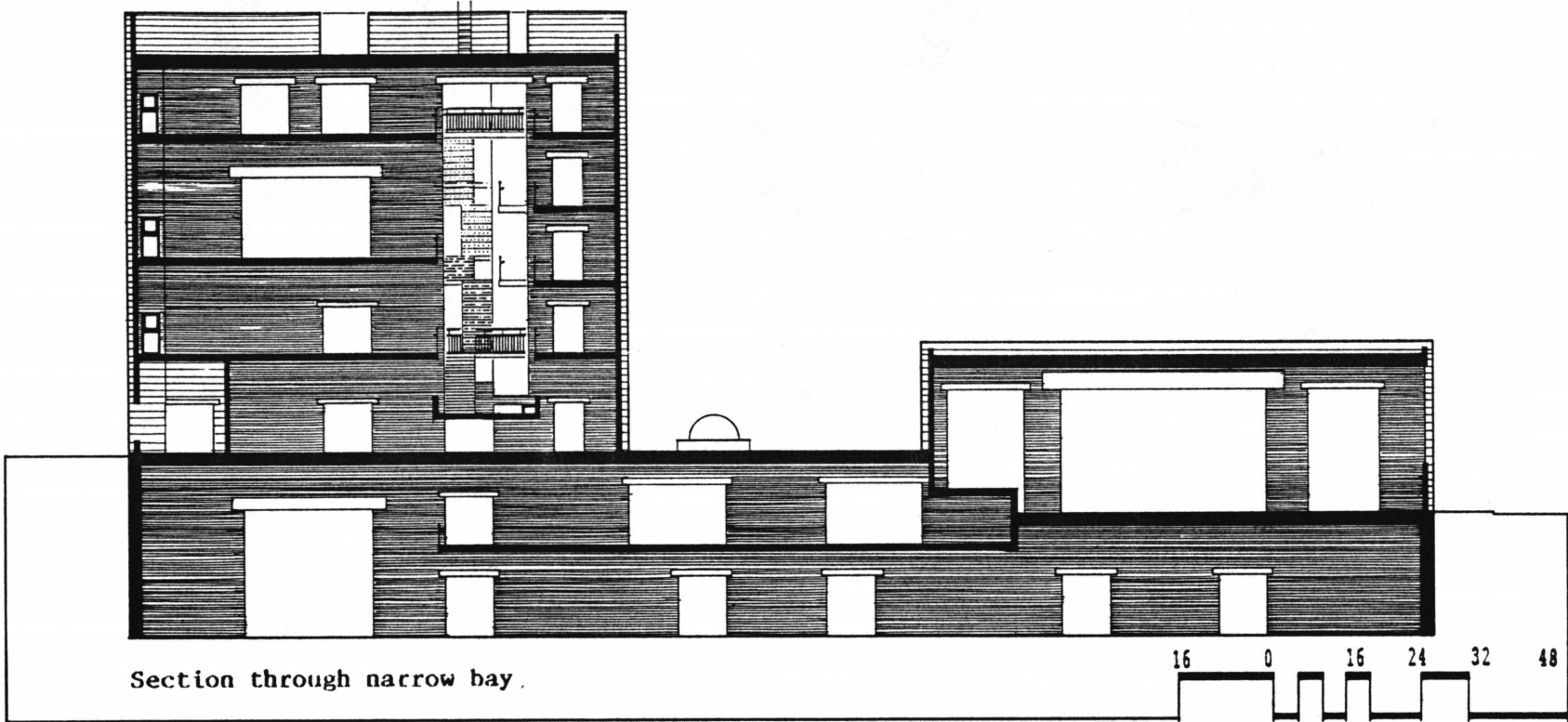


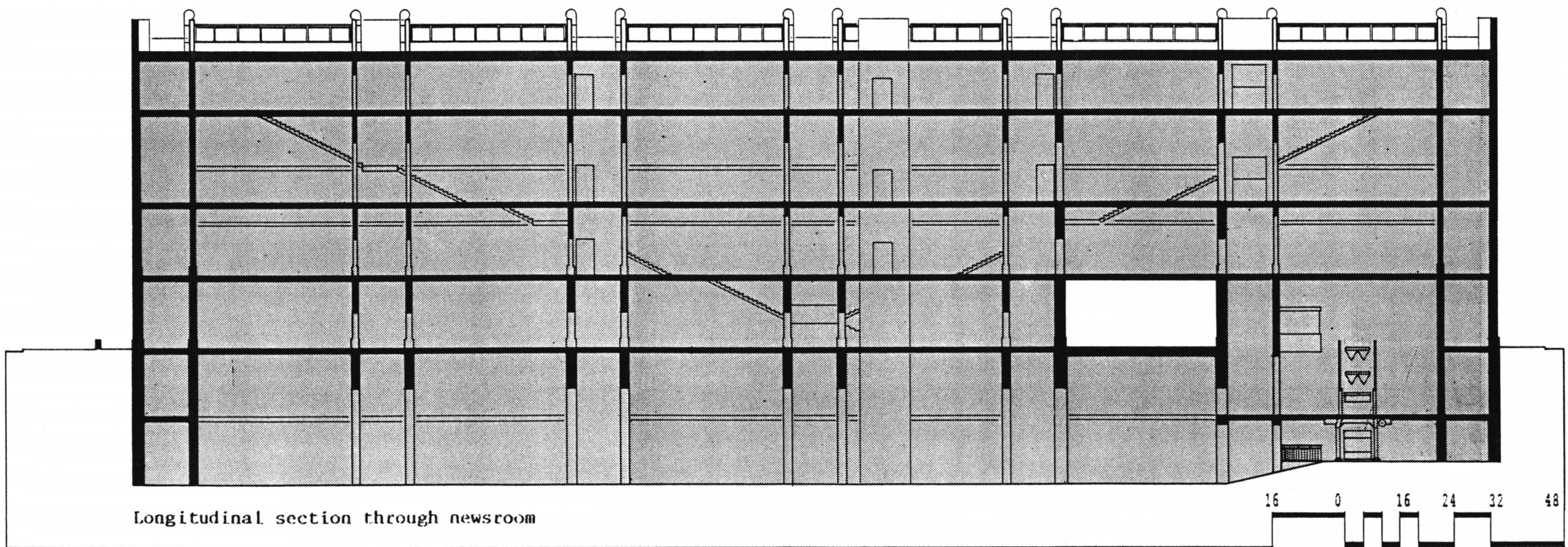


Axonometric, section cut through newsroom









Longitudinal section through newsroom

16 0 16 24 32 48

## Accommodation to Individual

To be comfortable in a space, an individual must be made welcome. Solid, brick walls widen near the ceiling as a column's capital does to receive the load over a greater area. They are thicker at the bottom almost like a column's base or even a plinth. The bricks' scale and familiar qualities provide one a sense of strength and warmth, especially in Roanoke, where most construction is brick.

It is pleasant to reach for a stair rail and touch warm wood rather than cold metal or nondescript plastic.

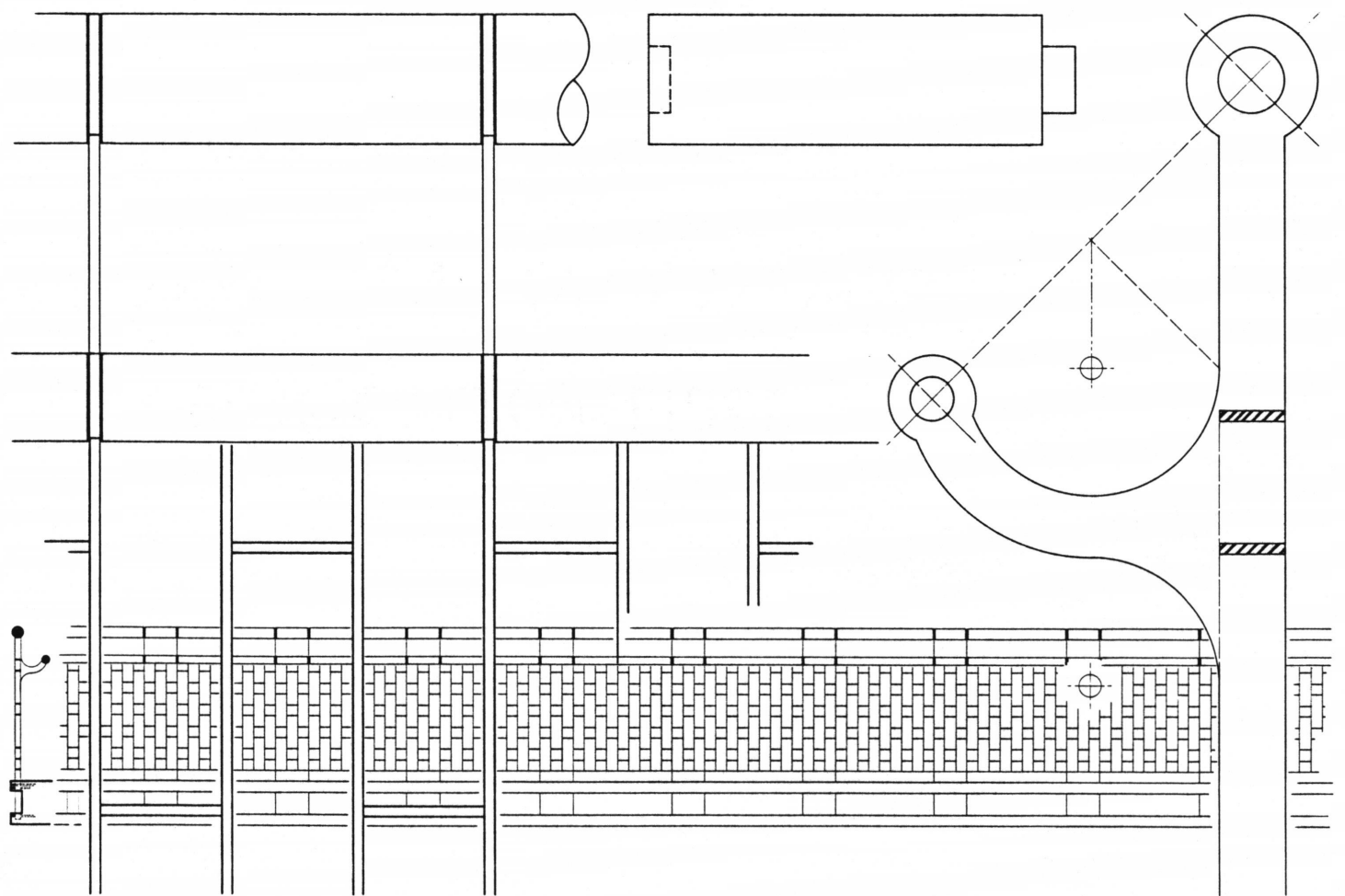
For a journalist, it's a welcome change to be able to work with the group under a high ceiling or by oneself under a much lower one.



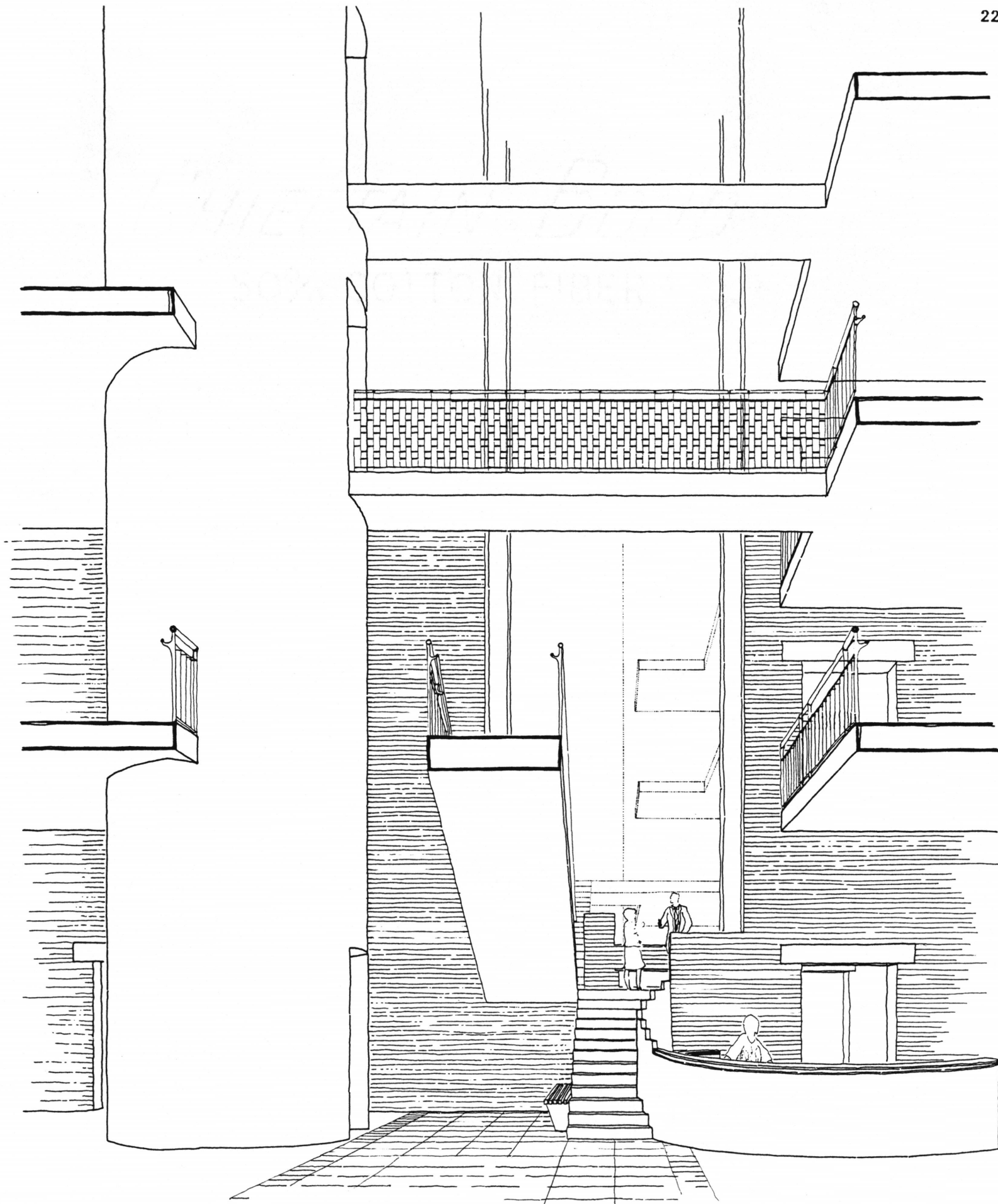
To allow the melding of individual and group, one must provide places for both within the whole. Frank Lloyd Wright built benches around the outside of his living rooms and lowered the ceiling above them for the individuals. Yet the middle of the room welcomes the group with its higher ceiling and extra light entering through clerestory windows between the two levels of ceiling.

Herman Hertzberger places benches at the ends of his entry portals into the auditorium of the Vredenburg Music Centre in Utrecht. The benches, despite facing away from the stage, have become favored seats to many attending the concerts.

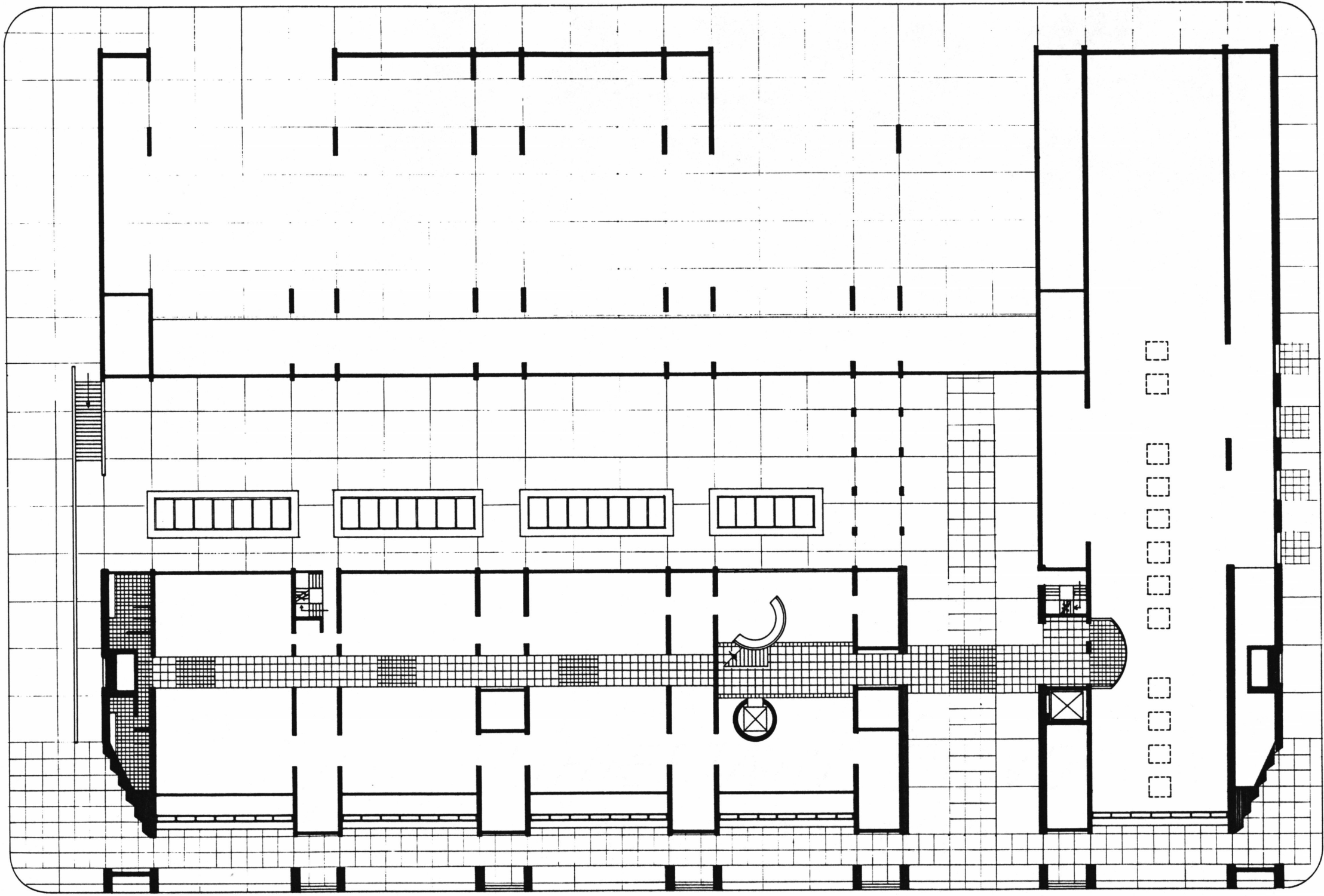
They are small things, but when combined with other small things they add up to a building that welcomes man and mankind equally well.



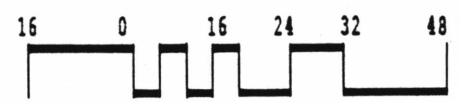
Handrail

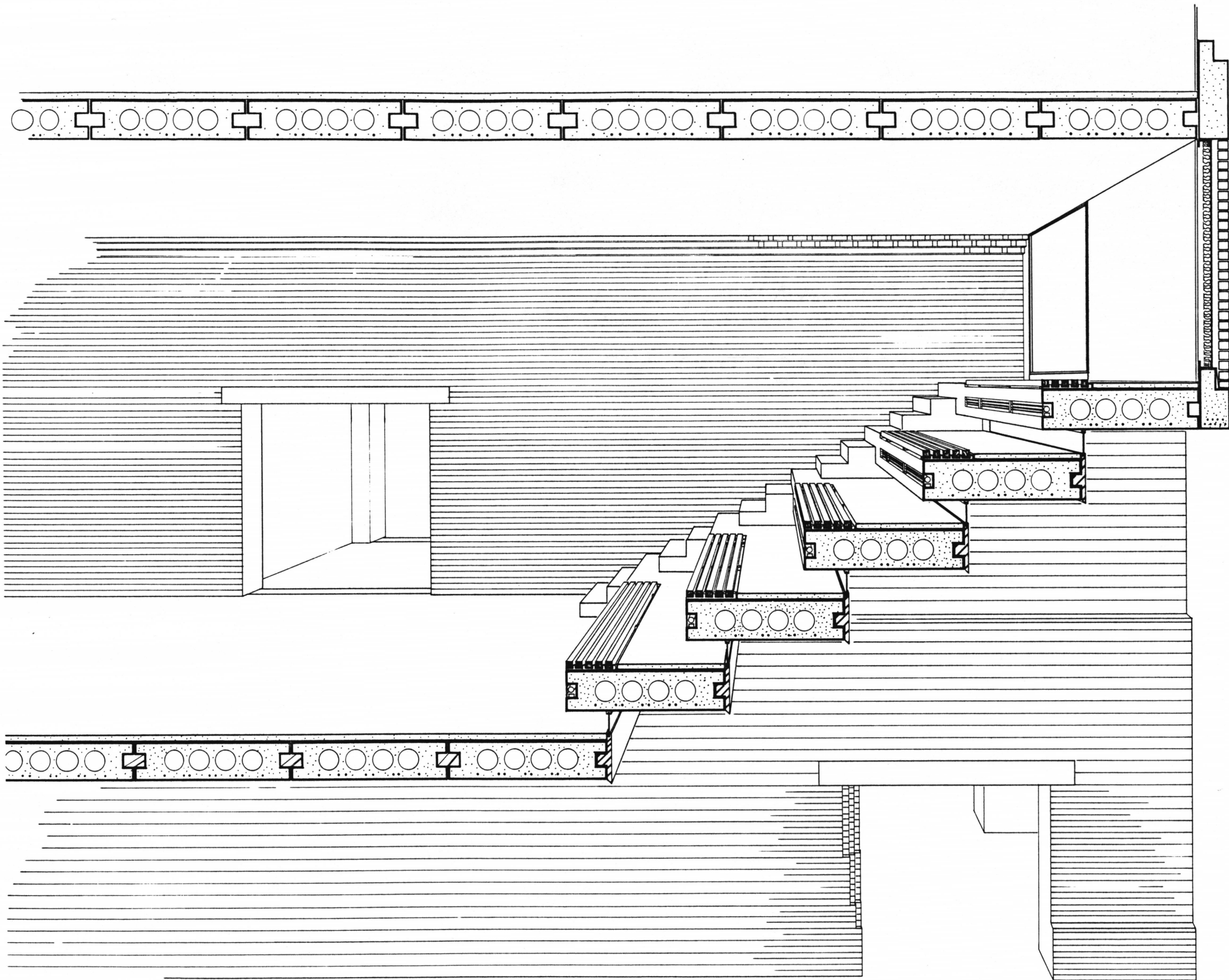


Reception area

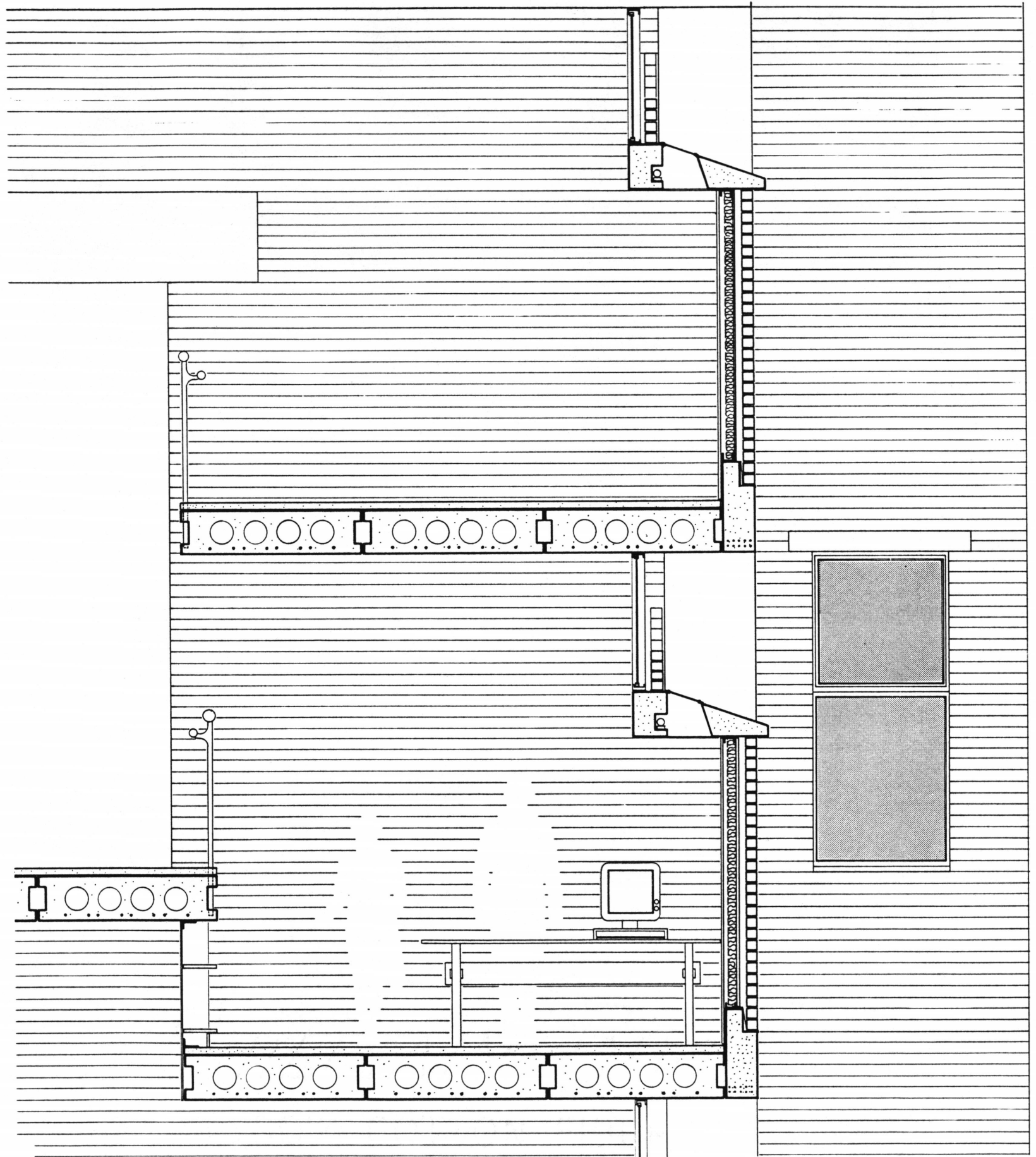


Ground floor, elevation 0 feet.

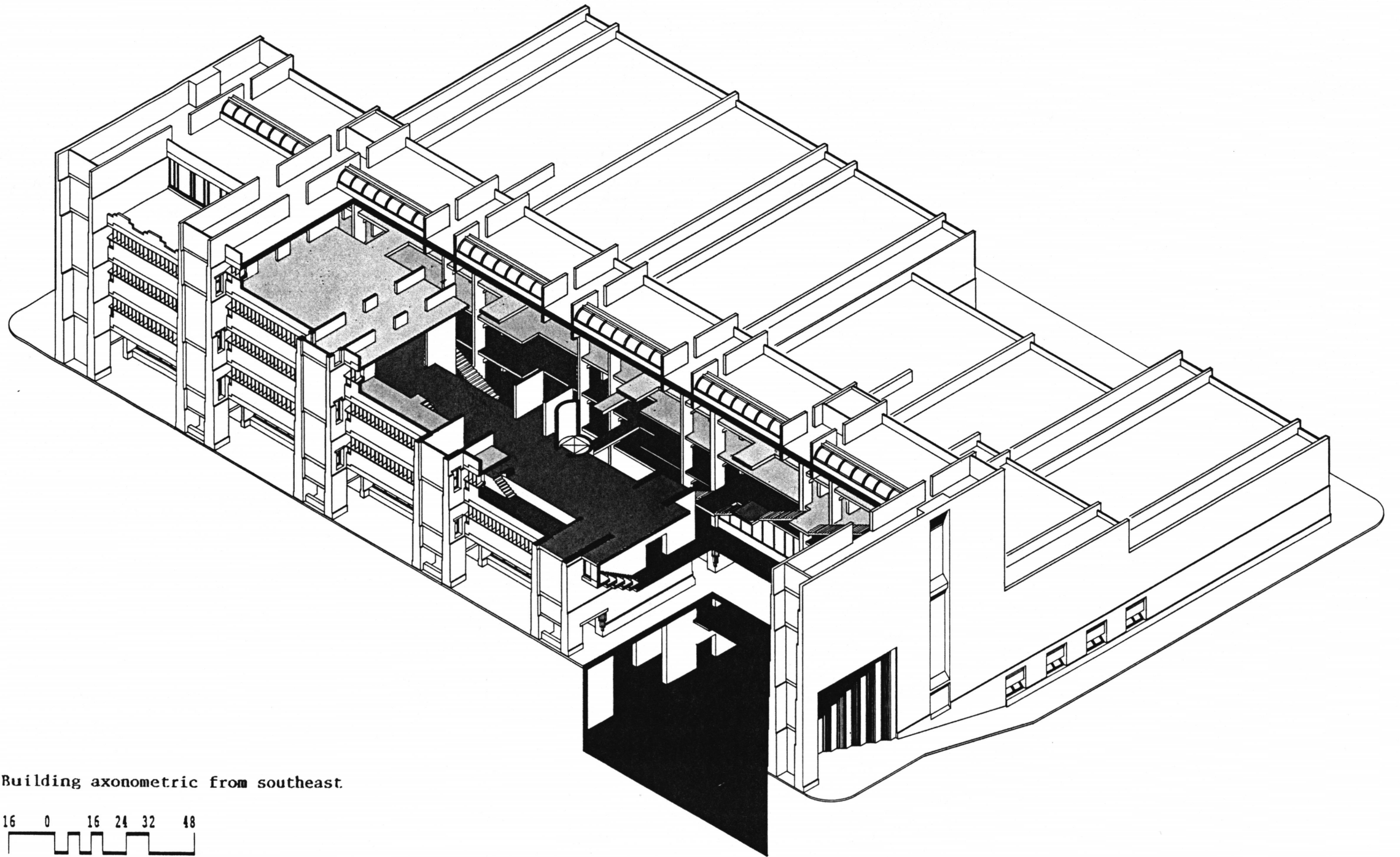




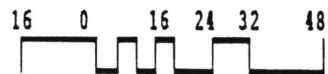
Section through auditorium on second level



Section through small work areas  
off main newsroom



Building axonometric from southeast.



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the scanned document**