

A
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
and SCHOLAR'S COMPLEX
for
ROOSEVELT ISLAND

by

Franklin Barringer Swanson

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

in

Architecture

William Brown, Chairman

Jack Holt

Gregory Hunt

June, 1990

Alexandria, Virginia

A
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
and SCHOLAR'S COMPLEX
for
ROOSEVELT ISLAND

by

Franklin Barringer Swanson

Committee Chairman: William Brown
Architecture

(ABSTRACT)

Architecture is experience.

Man experiences the Architecture within which he lives, works, plays and worships. As a necessity this experience must include a successful response to the needs of its inhabitants in order to fulfill its stated and intended purposes. In this sense man experiences his Architecture in the physical realm of its existence. Yet Architecture is an experience of the spirit. Architecture, through its presence, must elevate man, beyond the physical sense, and strive to glorify the inner being.

In the opening section of this thesis I will briefly examine a few ancient ruins in an effort to explore the spiritual nature of Architecture. Following this exploration I will then move into the design portion of the thesis. The project is a theological library and scholar's complex located on Roosevelt Island in the Potomac River.

A
THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
and SCHOLAR'S COMPLEX
for
ROOSEVELT ISLAND

Table of Contents

SECTION 1 - Architectural Ruins

The Nature of Ruins

1-3

SECTION 2 - Design Project:

"A Theological Library and
Scholar's Complex for
Roosevelt Island"

Drawings:

Location Plan

4

Site Plan

5

Ground Floor Plan

6

Upper Floor Plan

7

Elevations - Main Building

8

South Elevation - Main Building

9

Building Section

10

Processional / Scholar's Cells

11

Axonometric Series:

No. 1 and No. 2

12

No. 3 and No. 4

13

No. 5

14

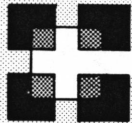
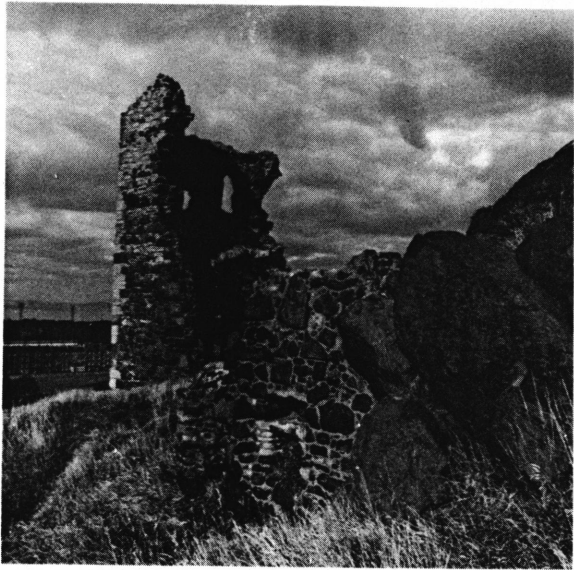
No. 6

15

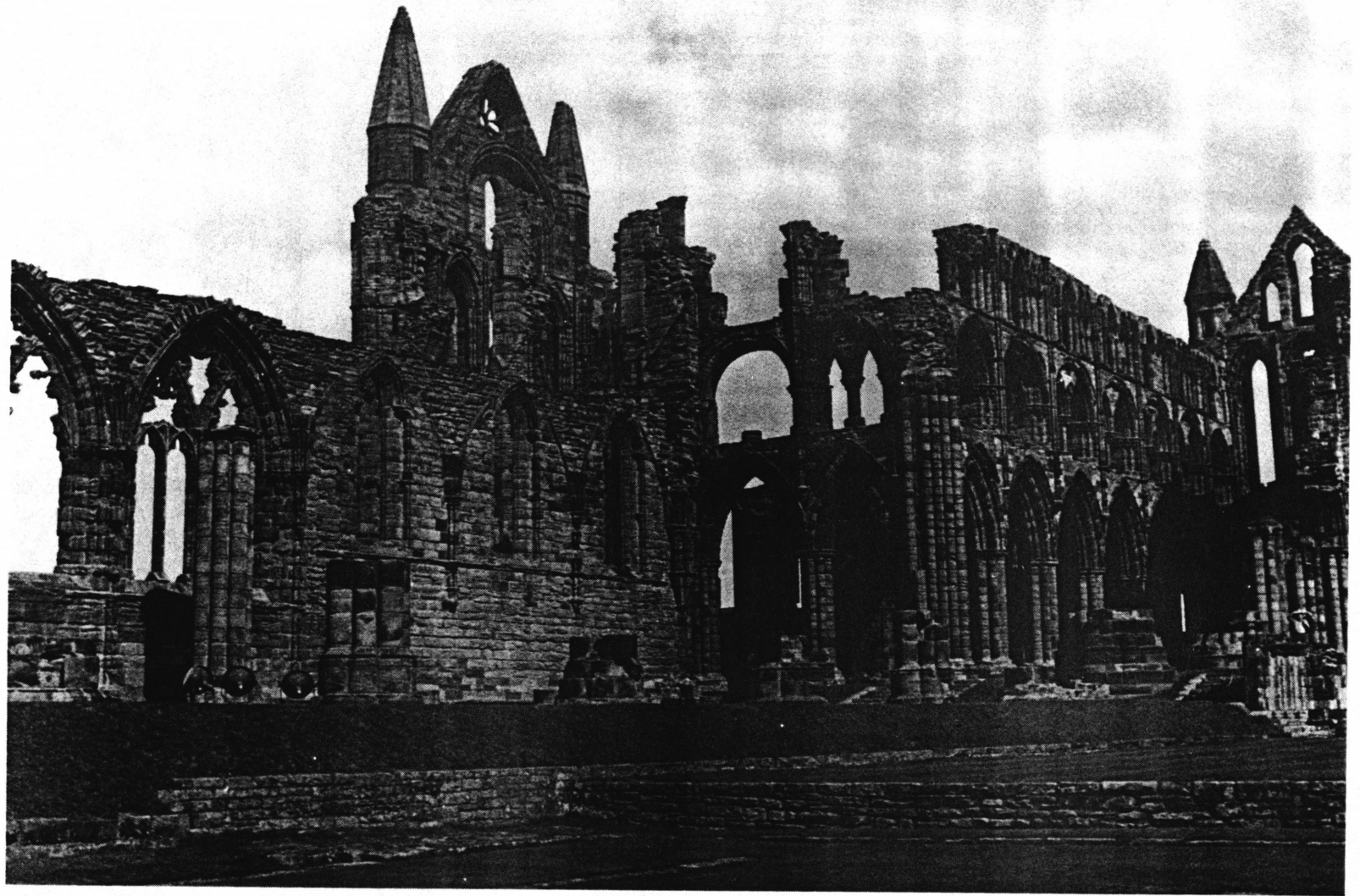
SECTION 3 - Vita

Vita

16



ruin, scotland



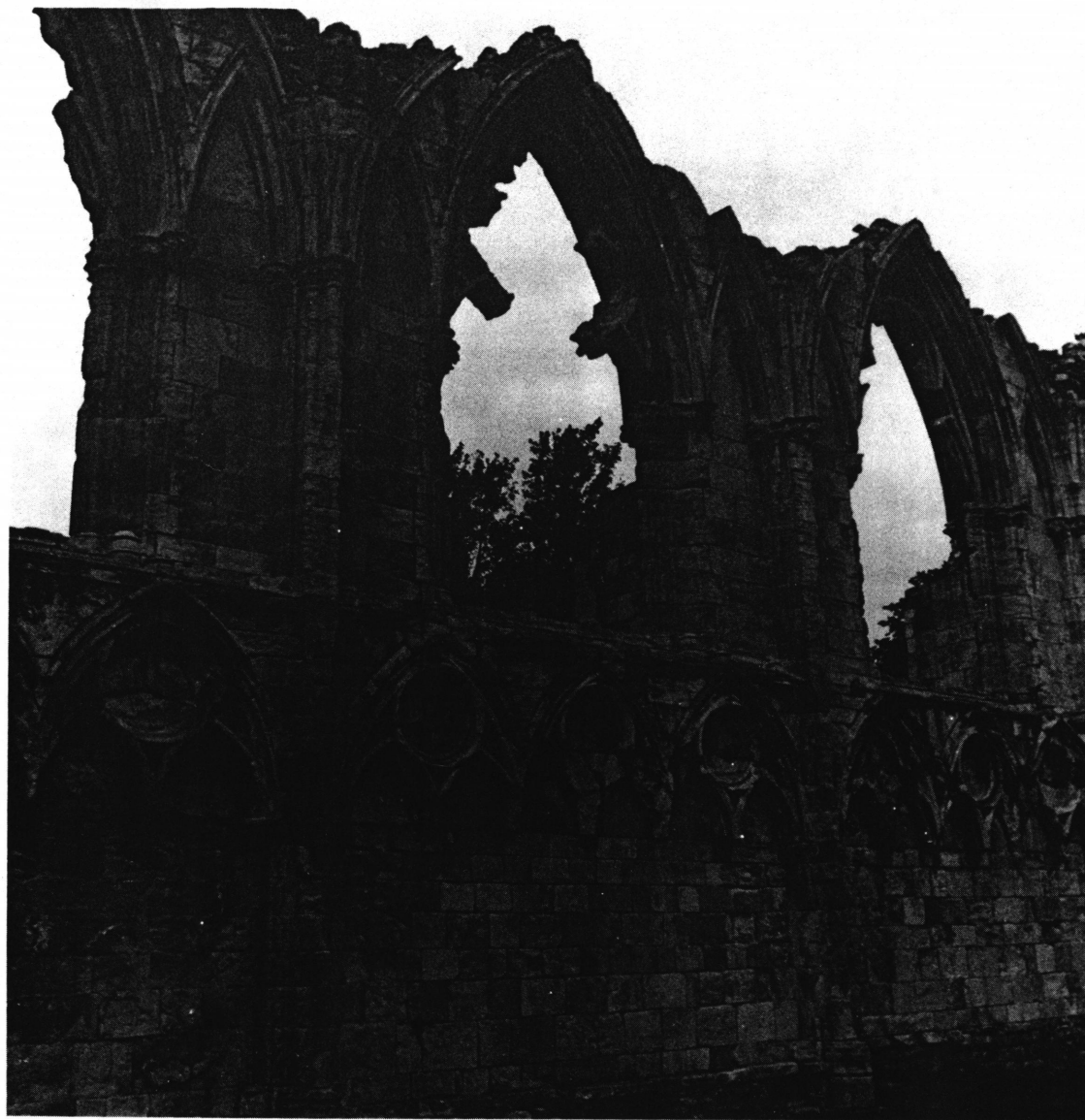
whitby cathedral. england

"....architecture in a ruined state often charms us, inviting our imaginations to supply the missing lintels, to see whole the broken columns, to erase the years of damage, to reconstruct its architect's intent, and - as with buildings of any age or condition - to imagine the life within it."

Stanley Abercrombie
from "Architecture As Art"

"Of all things, I honor beginnings. I believe, though, that what was has always been, and what is has always been, and what will be has always been. I do not think the circumstantial play from year to year, from era to era, has anything to do with what is available to you. The person of old had the same brilliance of mind that we assume we have now. But that which made a thing become manifest for the first time is our great moment of creative happening."

Louis Kahn



beaulieu priory, scotland



whitby cathedral

ruin, scotland



This thesis began a long time ago. As a boy I was always fascinated by ruins. I can remember exploring many of the old Spanish forts that lay abandoned along the Florida coastline. Many have been preserved and are now like so many museums, except for one which revealed more to me than any of the others. This fort stands alone, on a tiny island, protecting the mouth of a bay. It is slowly being worn away by wind and tide. This place is a quiet place where large gun emplacements still stand vigil against a long ago vanquished enemy. It is also a sacred place, a place composed of ominous, barrel-vaulted rooms made of concrete - concrete which is itself held together, not by stone, but by sea shells.

It is ideal.

Not until recently, while on a trip through England, was I reminded of these previous experiences. While visiting many of the ancient architectural ruins that remain standing throughout the English countryside (some of which are photographically represented here on these pages) I was reminded of my earlier experiences and emotions. I began to ask myself what is it about architectural ruins that can evoke such feelings of awe and wonder. What, indeed, is it about the nature of ruins that can help me to shape my Architecture?

ruin, scotland

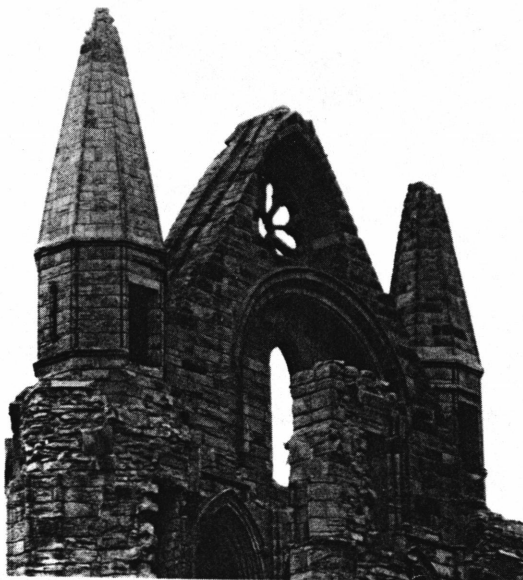
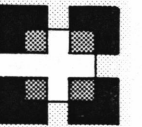




whitby cathedral

whitby cathedral

beaulieu priory

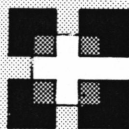
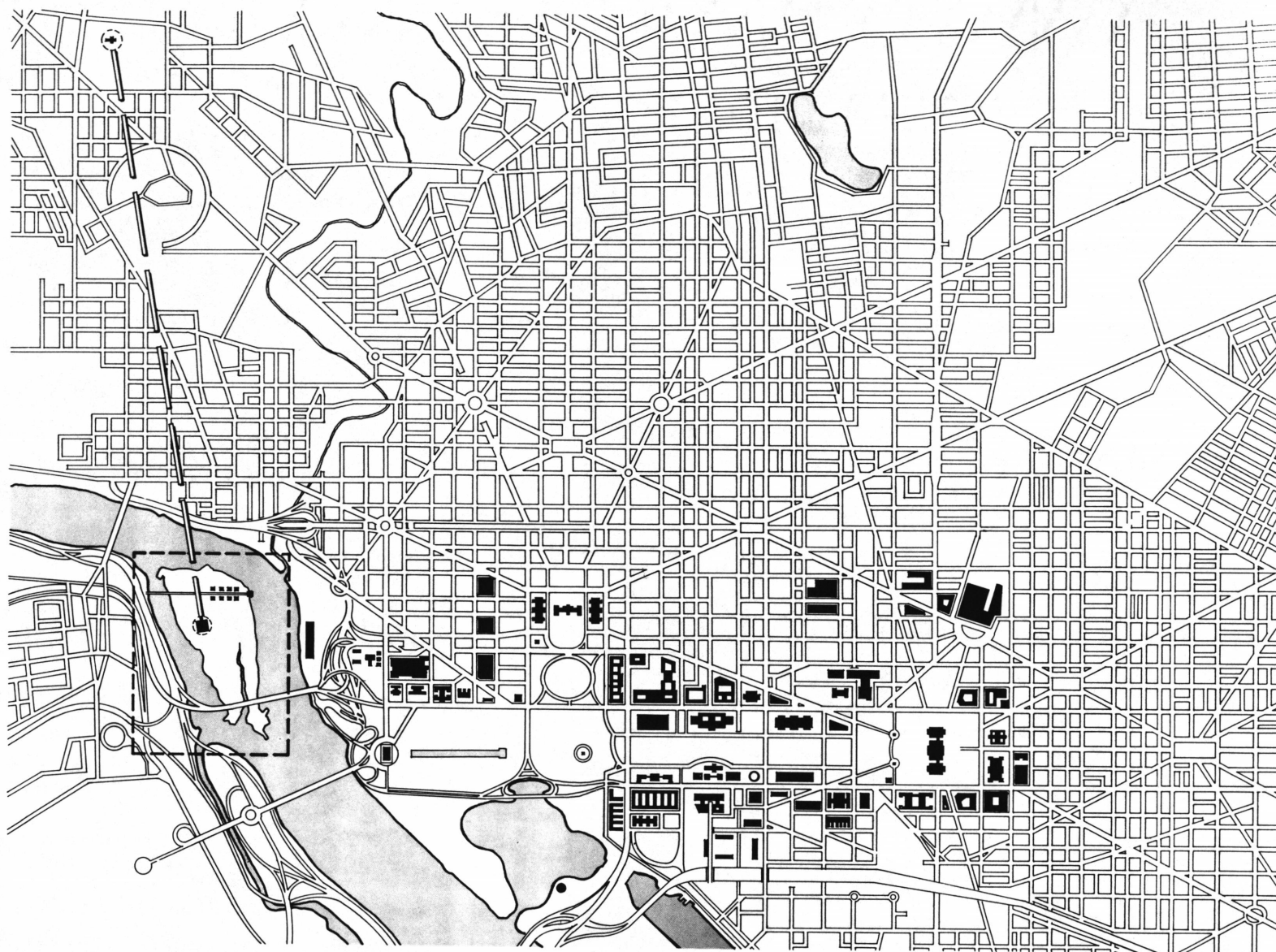
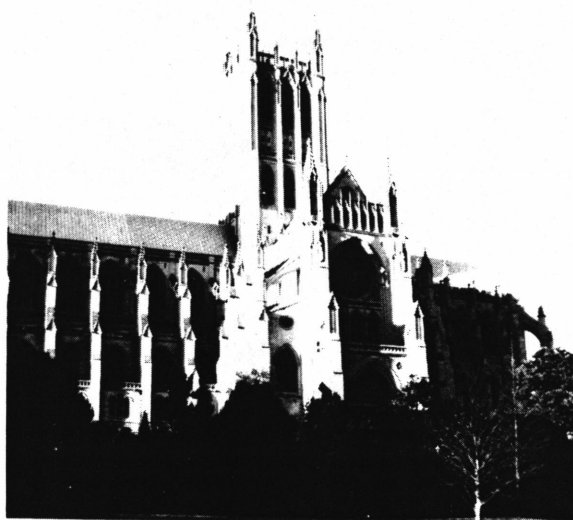
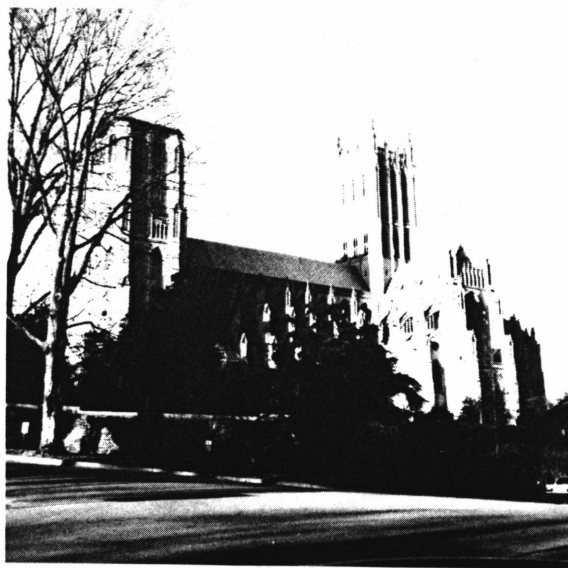


The Architecture of the ruin is the Architecture of the spirit. It is the essence of what was and of what is and of what shall be. A building in decay is a building stripped of its usefulness and reduced to its most elemental nature. We find in the ruin many valuable lessons - lessons about Architecture, lessons about Construction, lessons about Nature, and even lessons about Life. The building in a state of ruin lays bare its soul and allows man to gaze inside. It is an emotional time, a time of reflection and contemplation. And it is also a quiet time, a time for the shadows of the past to whisper to us in their soft voices - voices which we mistakenly believe to be the sounds of the gentle wind.

As an observer, we can more easily enter the mind of the master builder and understand his intentions as we look at the elements, now left exposed and naked. We can see how he made his arch, how the columns and walls were placed together stone by stone and are now returning to the earth one stone at a time. We can feel the quiet Order of the structure as it struggles to remain upright. We can see the basic elements and appreciate them for what they are - the spirit of the wall, the spirit of the column.

It is the Spirit of Architecture that the ruin reveals.
It is the Spirit of Man that Architecture reveals.





national cathedral

location plan

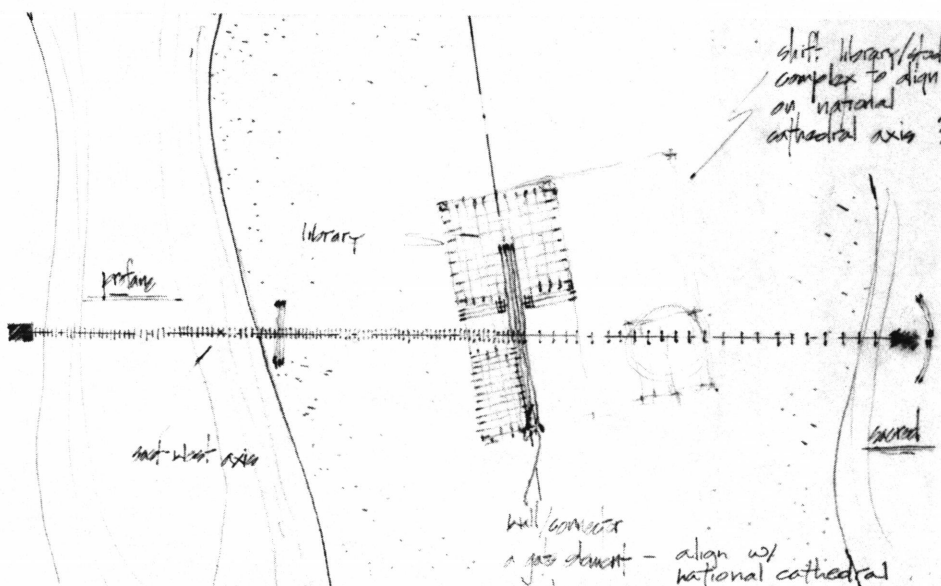
concept sketch

"The sun illuminates only the eye of man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

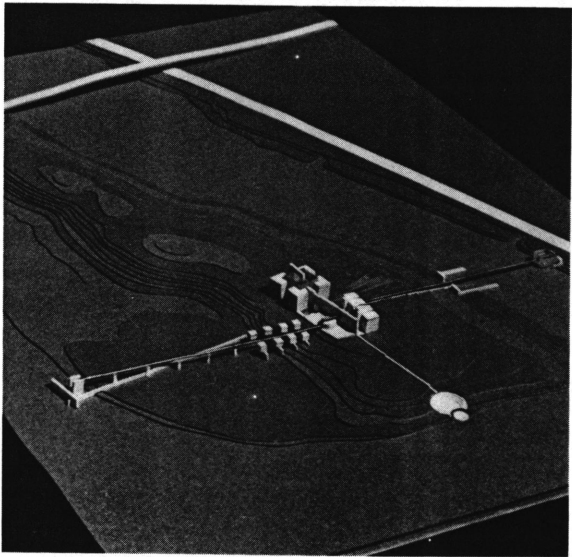
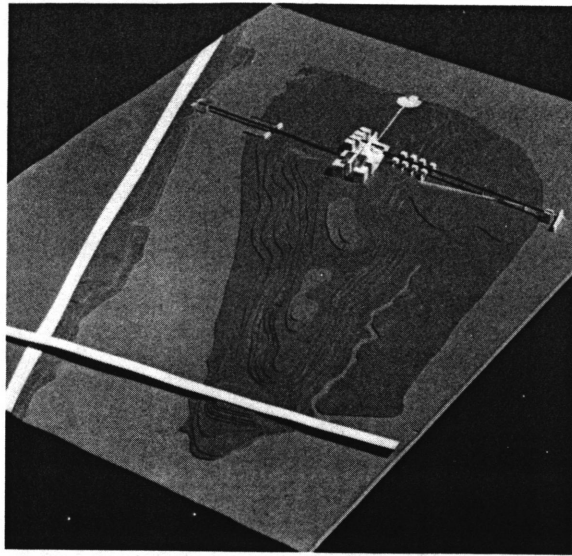
Henry David Thoreau



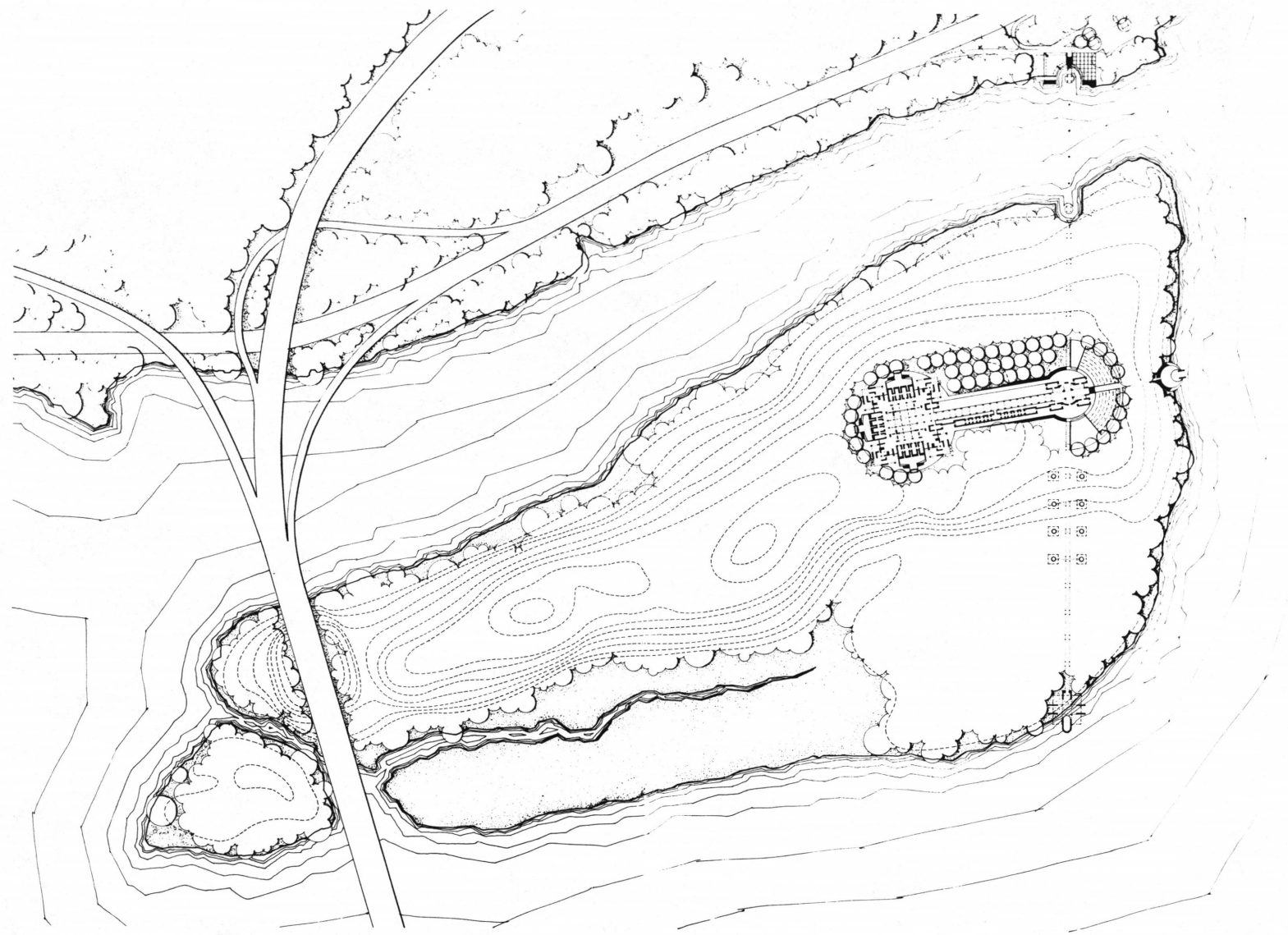
The design portion of this thesis is a **Theological Library and Scholar's Complex** designed for Roosevelt Island which is located in the Potomac River between Washington D.C. and Virginia. The location was chosen primarily for its proximity to the nation's capital and for the symbolic nature of the "island" as a sanctuary for theological and scholarly activities.

The organization of the complex is influenced by three major considerations:

1. The entry axis which aligns itself with the grid of Washington D.C.
2. The shifted axis of the main building which aligns itself with respect to the National Cathedral
3. The location of the main building mass within the old Theodore Roosevelt Memorial clearing.



site model

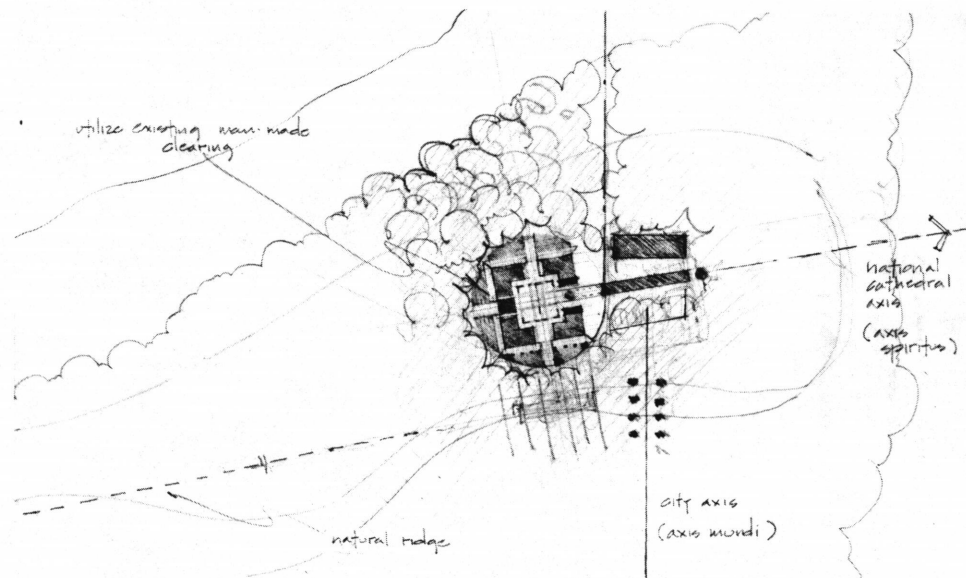


site plan

concept sketch

The site is an important organizer for this project. The order of the site must be reflected in the order of the building if harmony is to be maintained. The main structure is located along a naturally occurring ridge which acts as the backbone of the island. Stretching from west to east is a bridge which touches the island only at the entry platform. The library and the island are therefore connected at this point since it is only from here that one can gain access to either.

In a sense this is a pivotal point about which the project revolves. It establishes the place where two worlds meet - that is, the physical world, the island, and the spiritual world, the library. It is a poetic place, a place where one can catch a glimpse of each world and take away from there a little of both.

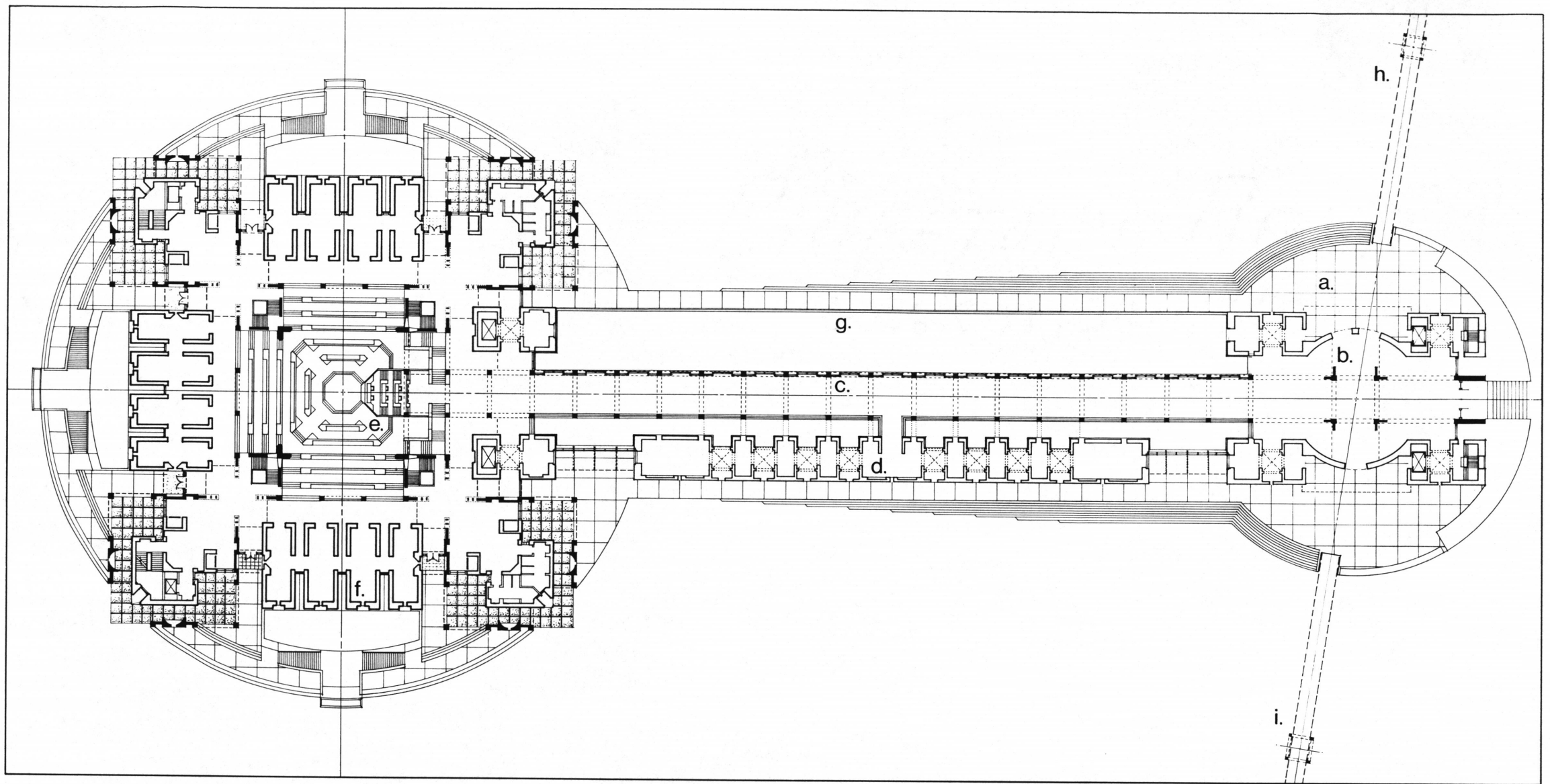


"The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds - and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.

"But it is especially the images of the bridge and the narrow gate which suggest the idea of a dangerous passage and which, for this reason, frequently occur in.... rituals.

"Those who have chosen the Quest, the road that leads to the Center, must abandon any kind of family and social situation, any "nest", and devote themselves wholly to walking toward the supreme truth, which, in highly evolved religions, is synonymous with the Hidden God, the Deus absconditus."

Mircea Eliade



ground floor plan

5 30

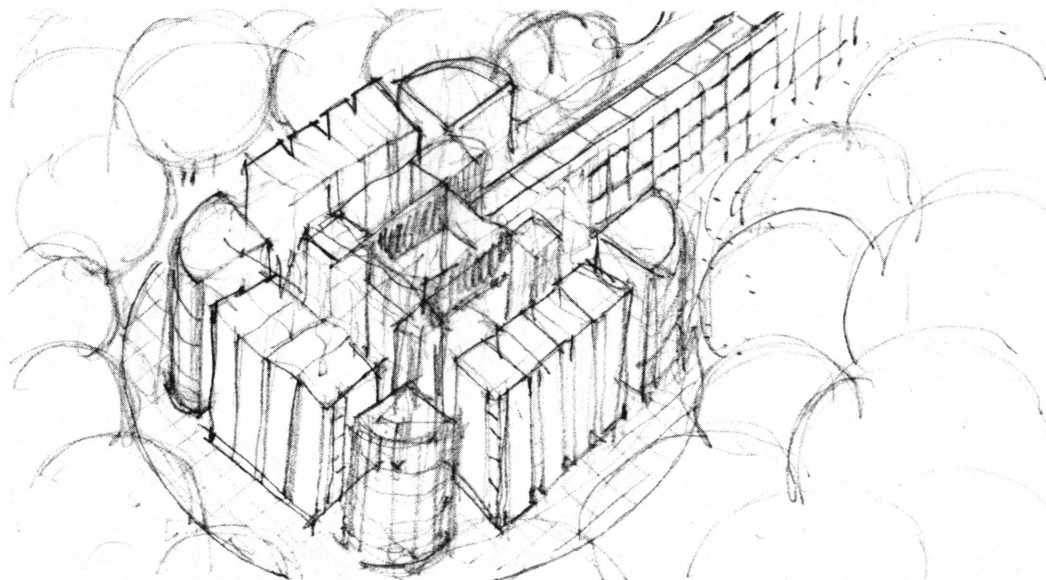
concept sketch

15 60

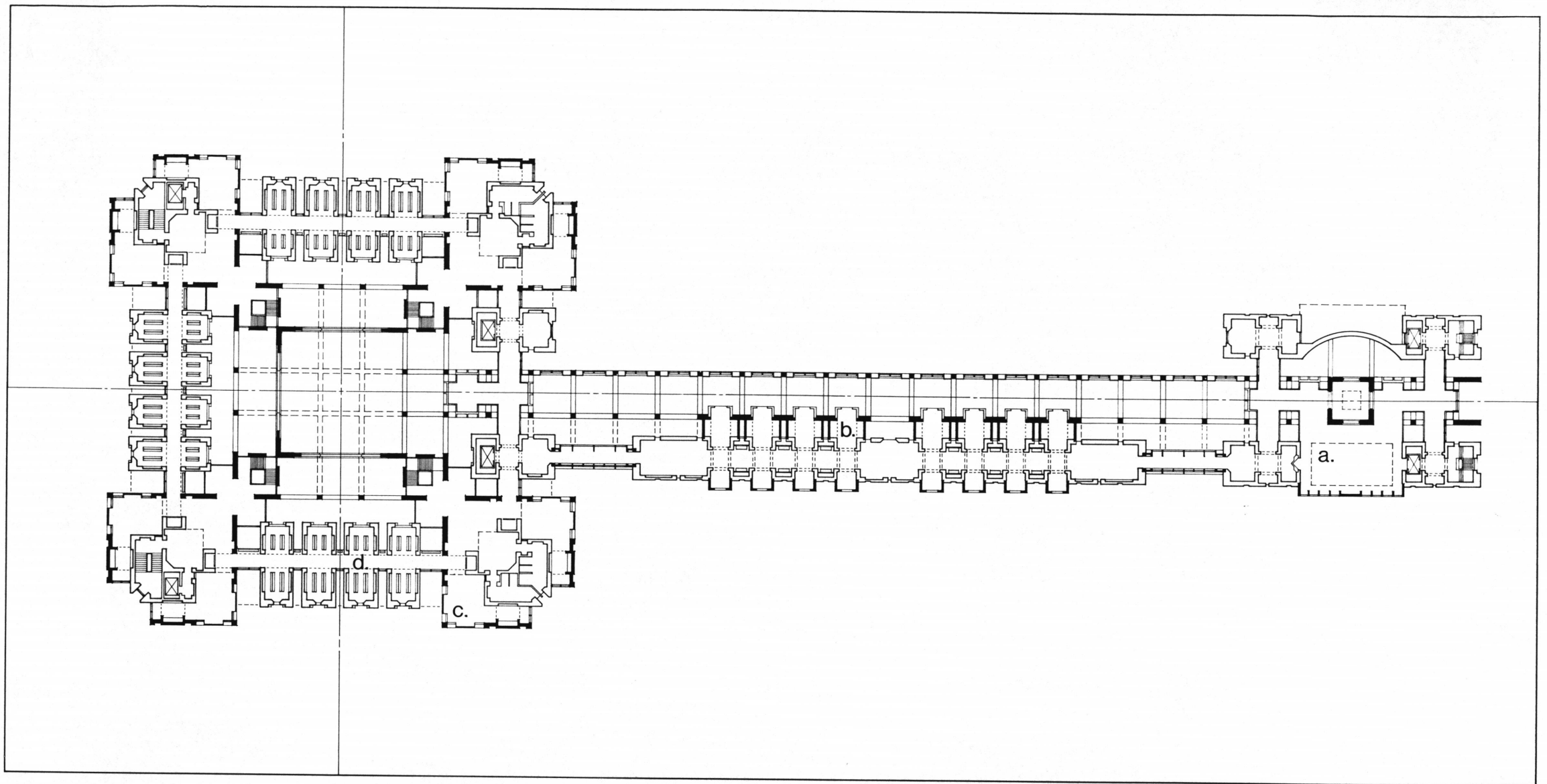
index

The plan consists primarily of two parts. The large building mass contains library facilities surrounding a central assembly hall, a forum, if you will, for theological issues. The extension acts as a processional while also housing the study cells for the scholars. The scholars can live for extended periods of time in housing provided elsewhere on the island.

There are two primary functions which the facility serves, each of which is expressed in different materials and structural systems. The building, as a library, is a masonry structure denoted by brick towers which house the books as well as the scholar's study cells. The building, as a forum, is a concrete structure denoted by a concrete frame structural system. The two systems are interlaced to reinforce their dependency upon each other.



- a.....entry platform
- b.....entry
- c.....processional hall/bridge
- d.....gallery
- e.....assembly hall
- f.....vault
- g.....reflection pool
- h.....bridge to parking
- i.....bridge to scholar's houses and chapel



upper floor plan

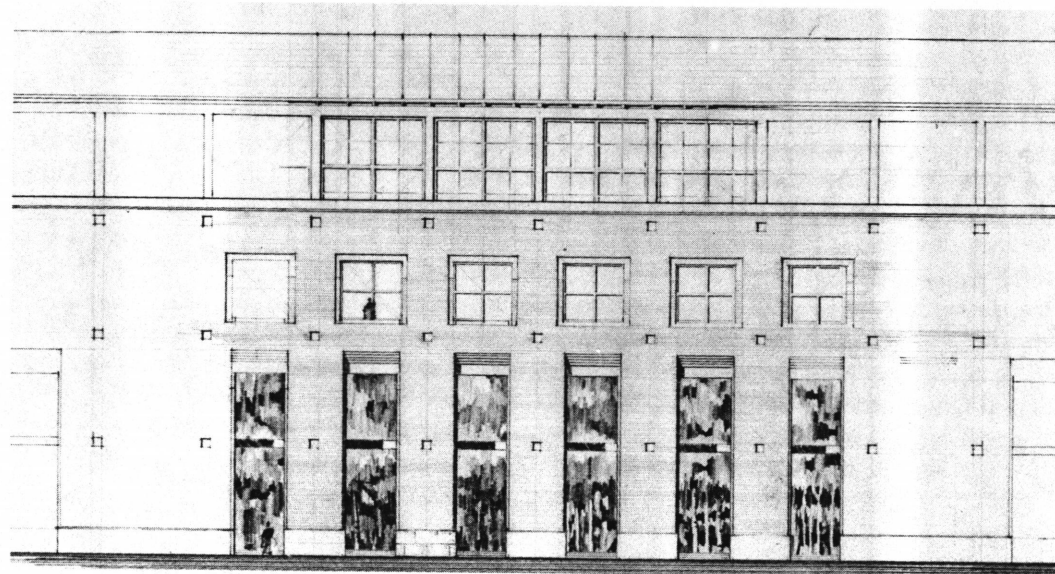
5 30

early study of scholar's cells

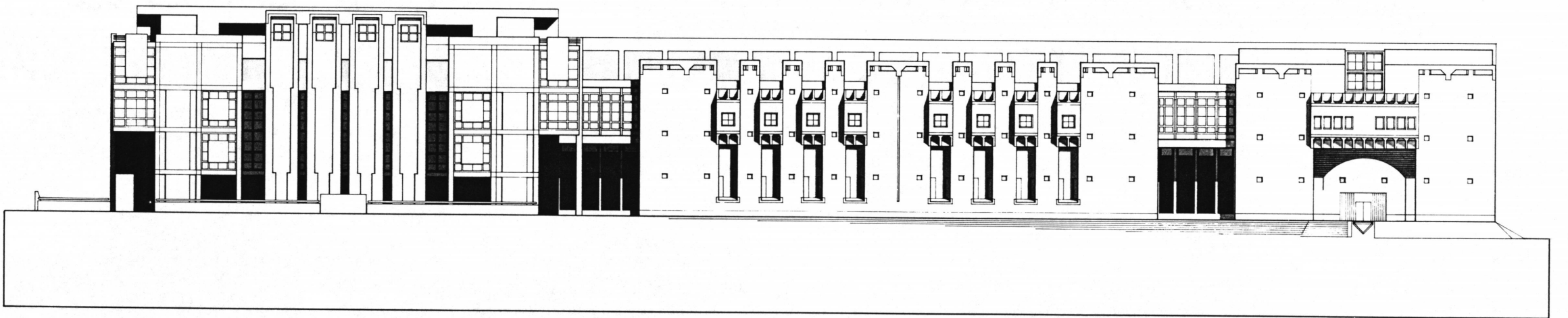
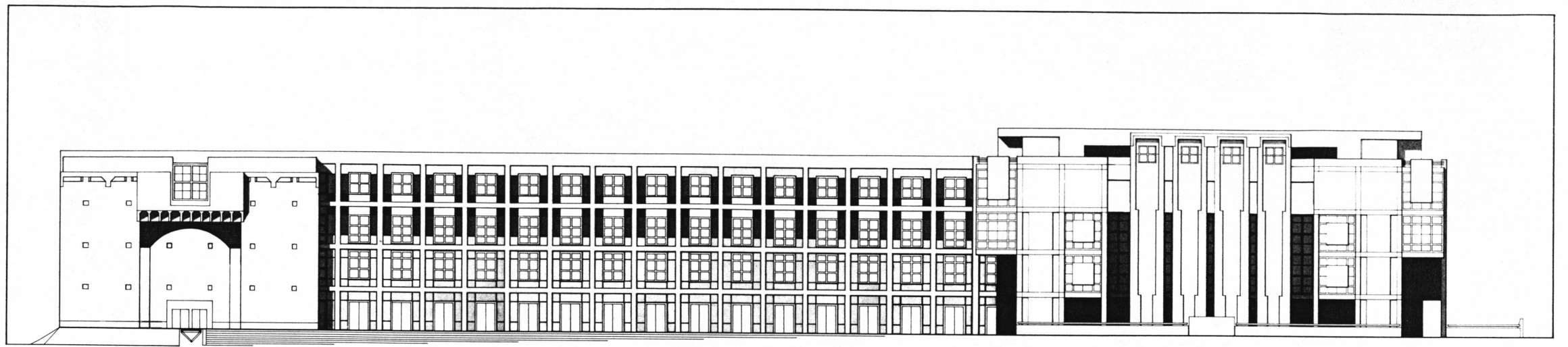
15 60

index

The organization of the plan also reinforces the concepts that the use of the two materials suggest. That is, the masonry towers, which house the religious books, surround the inner court, the concrete forum where religious leaders meet, and shelter it from the outside influences of the world. In a symbolic, or poetic sense, the inner sanctum where men can discuss and resolve religious issues and differences is protected by the accumulated theological knowledge contained within the books, the guardians of the court. At the corners are the study carrels where the books can be brought out into the light of the world to be studied in their proper context. The constant struggle between the spiritual and the physical, or the sacred and the profane, is further expressed in the order of the plan.



- a.....large conference room
- b.....scholar's study cell (typ.)
- c.....study carrels
- d.....book stack tower (typ.)



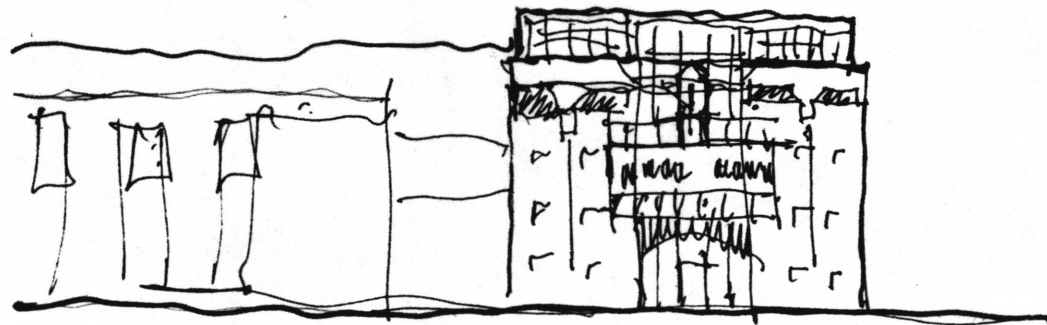
elevations – main building

west / east

study sketch of entry

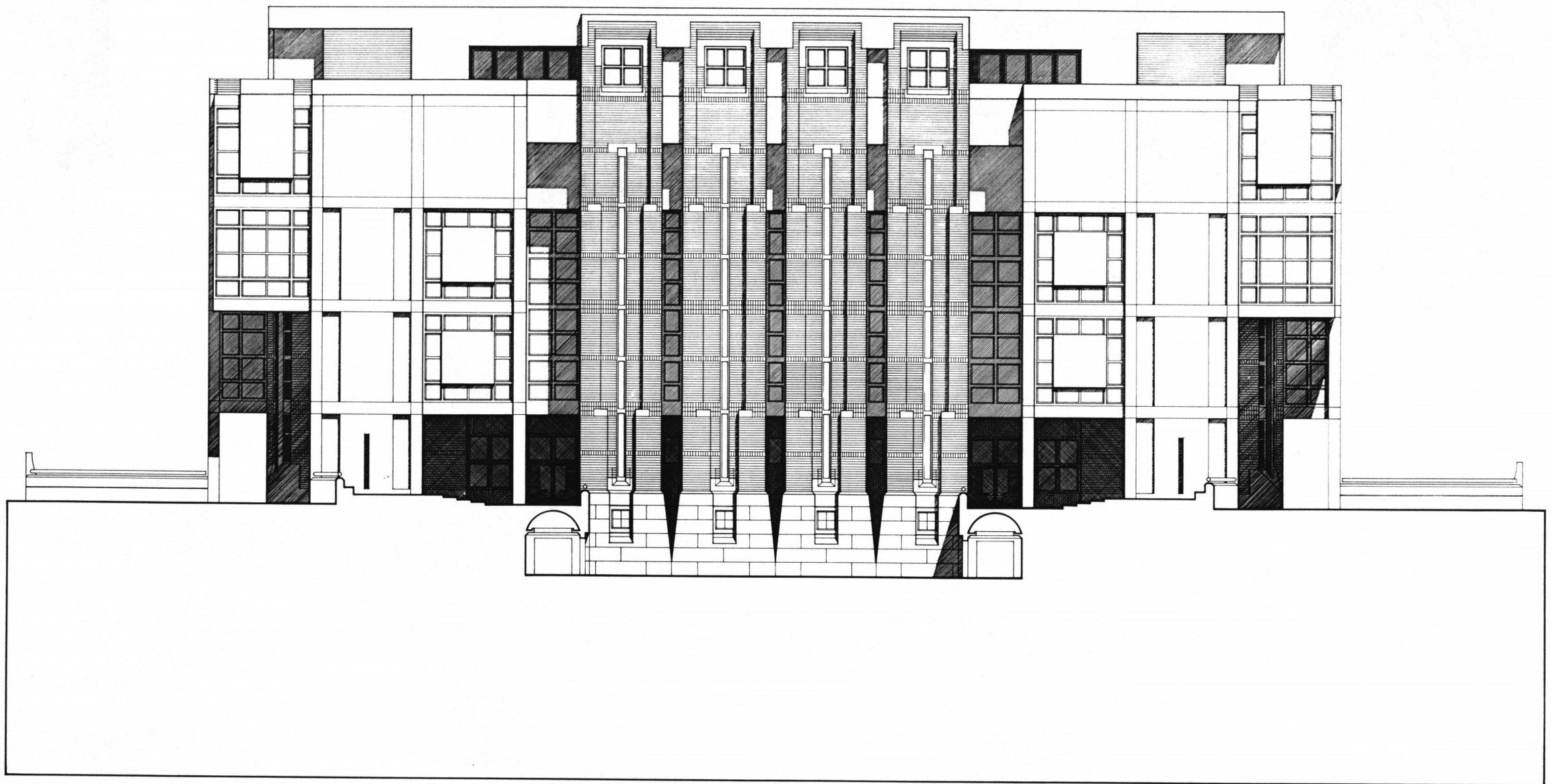
The relationship of the masonry structure to the concrete framework, or of the books to the assembly hall, is also expressed in the third dimension. That is, the masonry towers help to stabilize the concrete structure by providing lateral support. This idea, while solving many structural problems, also reinforces the many religious metaphors the design attempts to create and sustain.

The presence of the assembly hall as an open forum for theological debate requires that an atmosphere of intellectual understanding be created. Tradition is a difficult issue to overcome without arousing strong emotions. Men must ultimately search their intellect to resolve religious, theological and moral issues in an ever changing world. The books are a reminder to man of the intellectual process to negotiation.



"It is assumed that "liberals" are weak or hypocritical, or conceptually confused. There seems good reason to disagree. Religious traditions do develop, do draw upon the insights and arguments and experiences of all humanity. Those who refuse to develop may be, on occasion, right to hold on to some truth that is momentarily out of fashion, but in general, a priori refusal to develop is profoundly irreligious."

Stephen R. Clark
"The Mysteries of Religion"



south elevation – main building

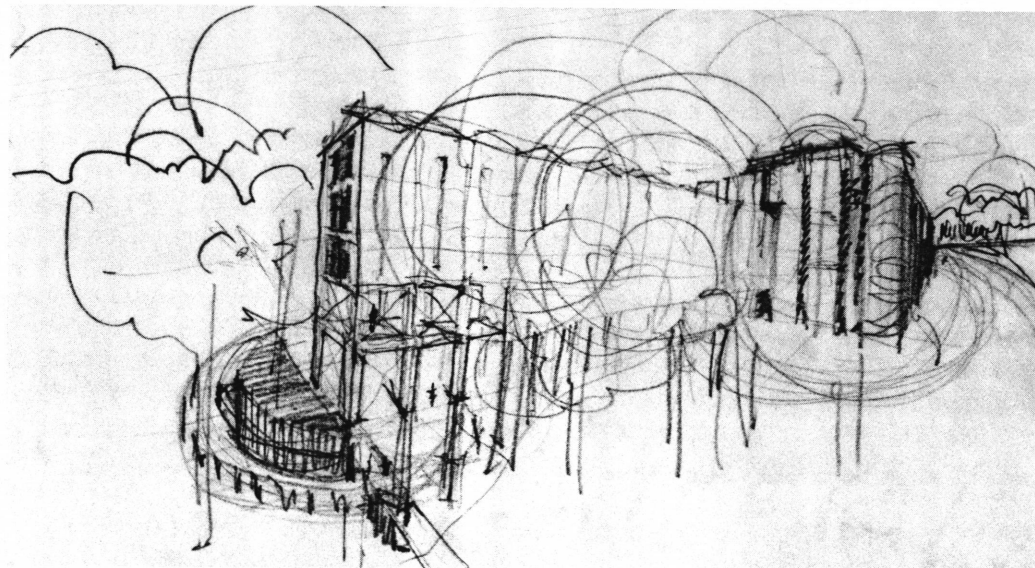
concept sketch

"You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces. That is construction. Ingenuity is at work.

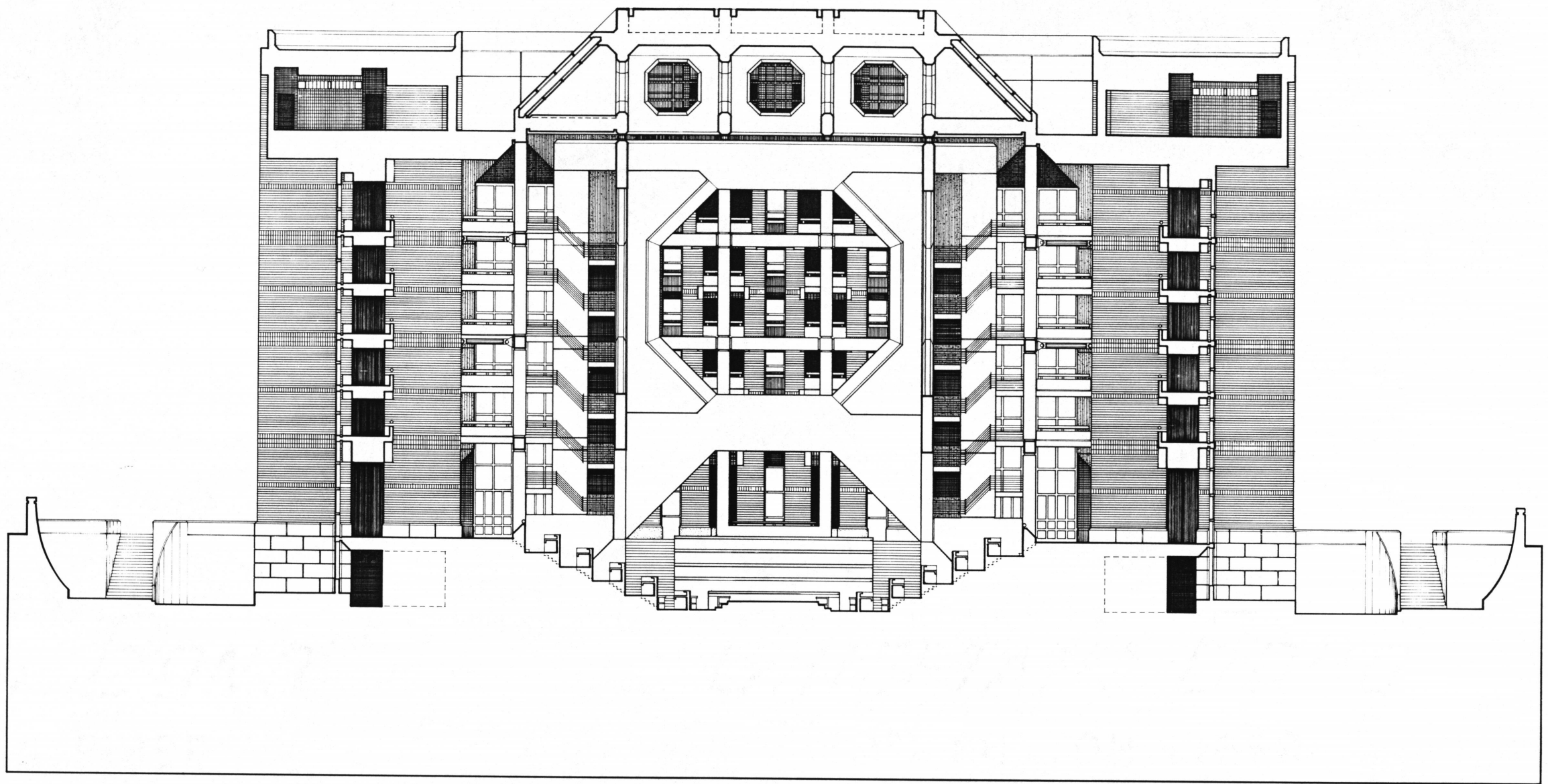
"But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: "This is beautiful." That is Architecture. Art enters in.

"My house is practical. I thank you, as I might thank Railway engineers, or the Telephone service. You have not touched my heart.

"But suppose that walls rise towards the heaven in such a way that I am moved. I perceive your intentions. Your mood has been gentle, brutal, charming or noble. The stones you have erected tell me so. You fix me to the



place and my eyes regard it. They behold something which expresses a thought. A thought which reveals itself without a word or sound, but solely by means of shapes which stand in a certain relationship to one another. These shapes are such that they are clearly revealed in light. The relationships between them have not necessarily any reference to what is practical or descriptive. They are a mathematical creation of your mind. They are the language of Architecture. By the use of raw materials and starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused my emotions. This is Architecture."



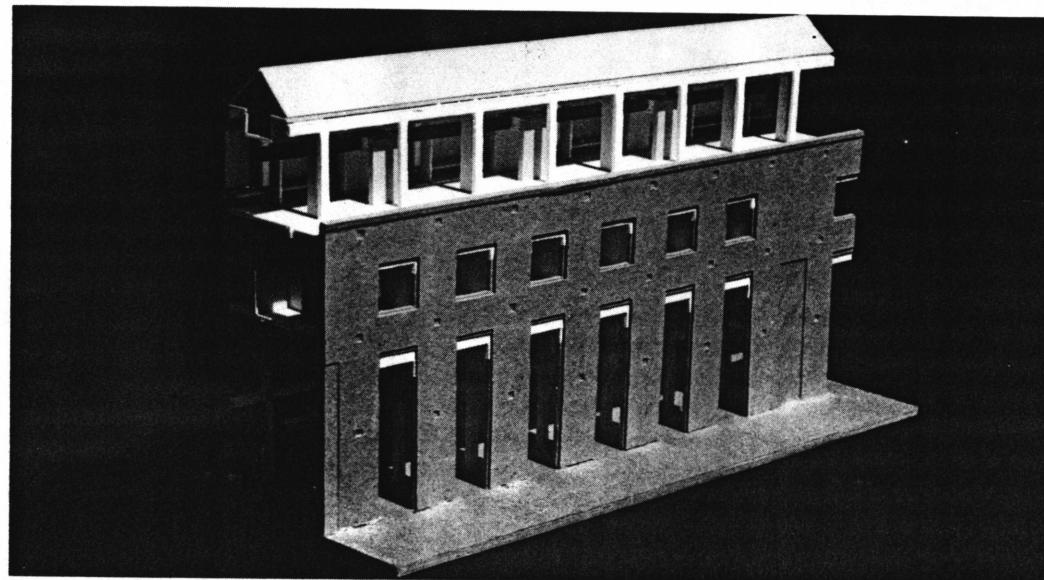
building section – thru library / assembly hall

study model

"The poet is one who starts from the seat of the unmeasurable and travels towards the measurable, but who keeps the force of the unmeasurable within him at all times. As he travels towards the unmeasurable, he almost disdains to write a word. Although he desires not to say anything and still convey his poetry, at the last moment he must succumb to the word after all. But he has traveled a great distance before he uses any of the means, and when he does, it is just a smidgen and it is enough...."

There is nothing about man that is really measurable. He is completely unmeasurable. He is the seat of the unmeasurable, and he employs the measurable to make it possible for him to express something."

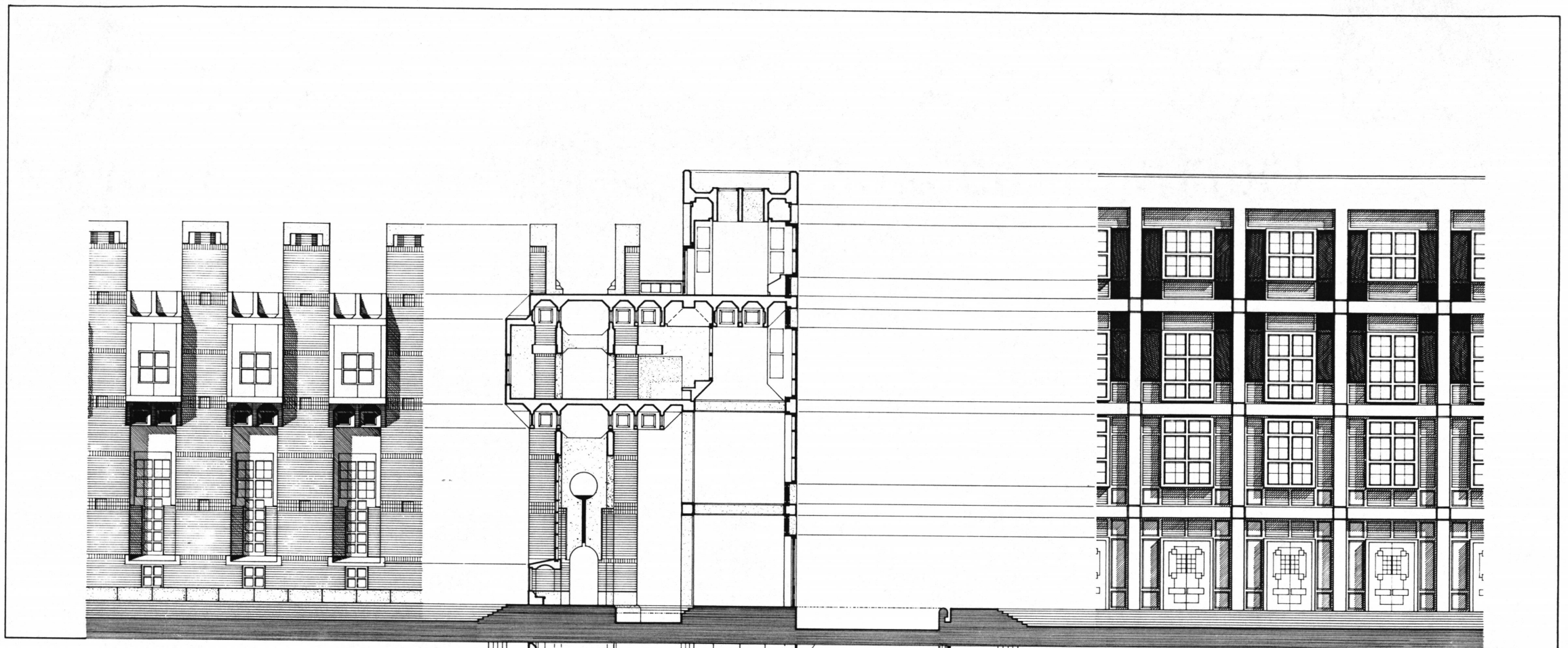
Louis Kahn



"The Engineer, inspired by the law of Economy and governed by mathematical calculation, puts us in accord with universal law. He achieves harmony."

"The Architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is pure creation of his spirit; by forms and shapes he affects our senses to an acute degree, and provokes plastic emotions; by the relationships which he creates he wakes in us profound echoes, he gives us the measure of an order which we feel to be in accordance with that of our world, he determines the various movements of our heart and of our understanding; it is then we experience the sense of beauty."

LeCorbusier



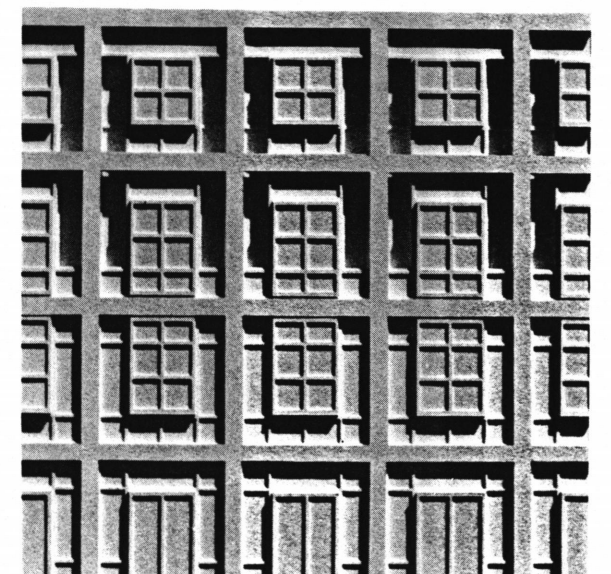
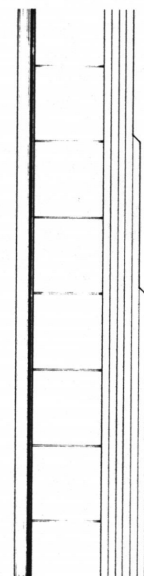
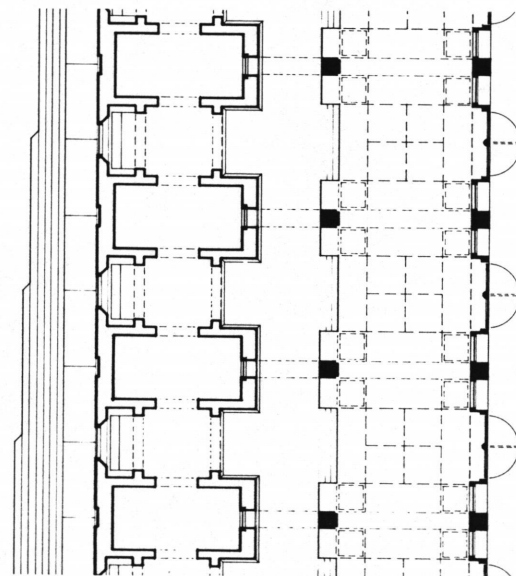
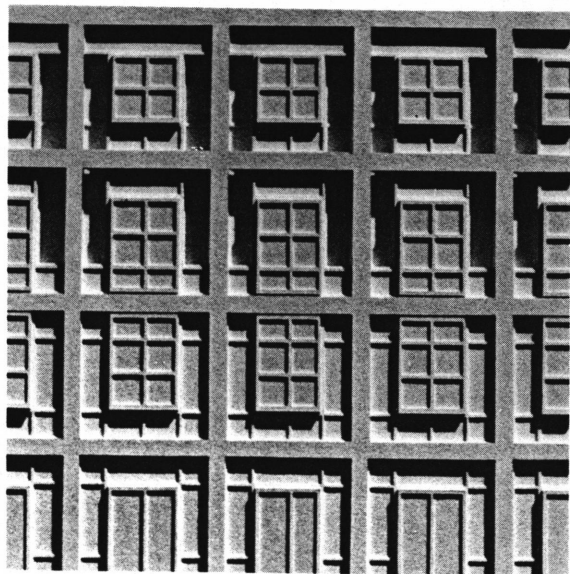
east elevation

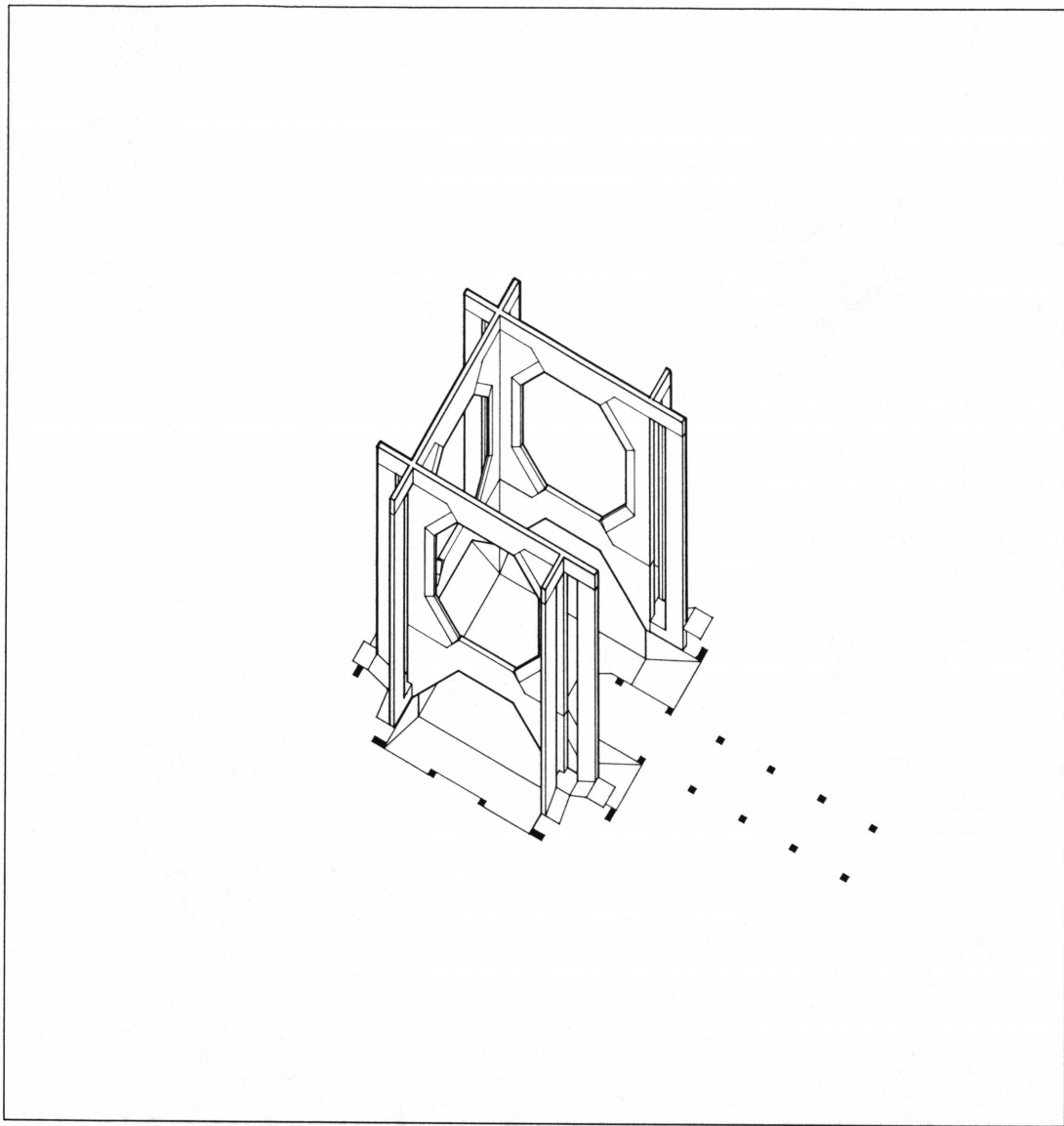
processional / scholar's cells

section

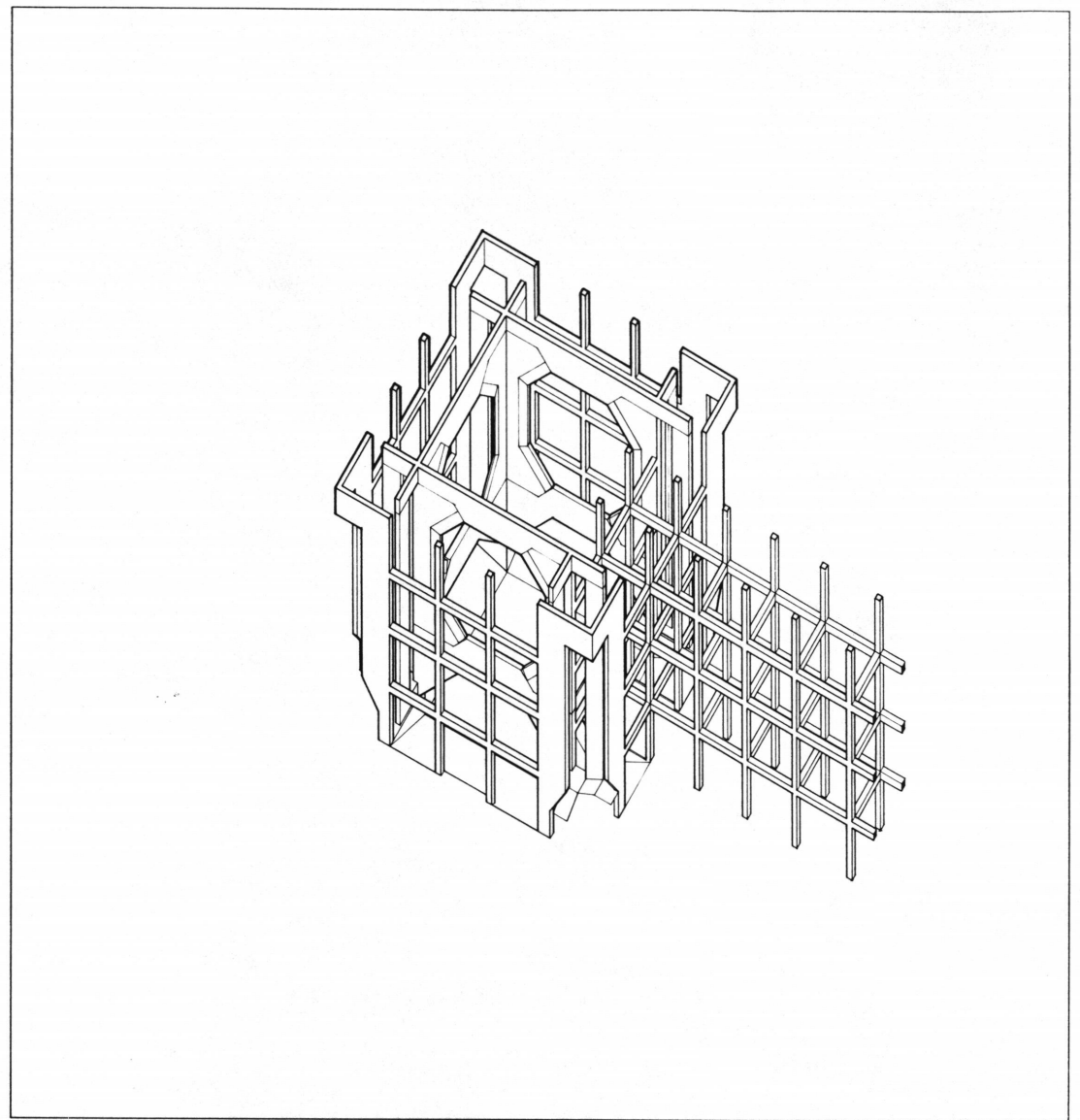
west elevation

plan

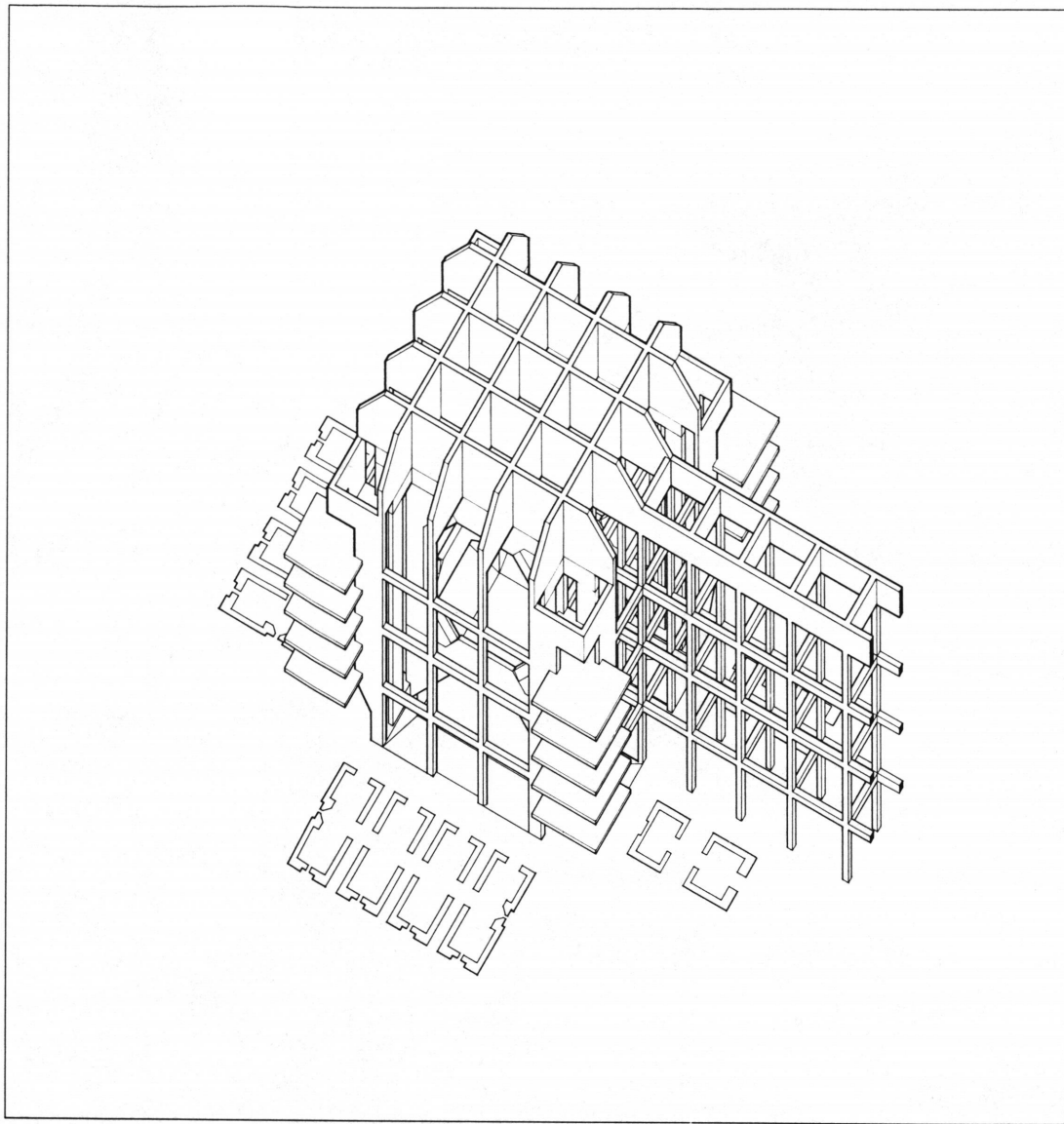




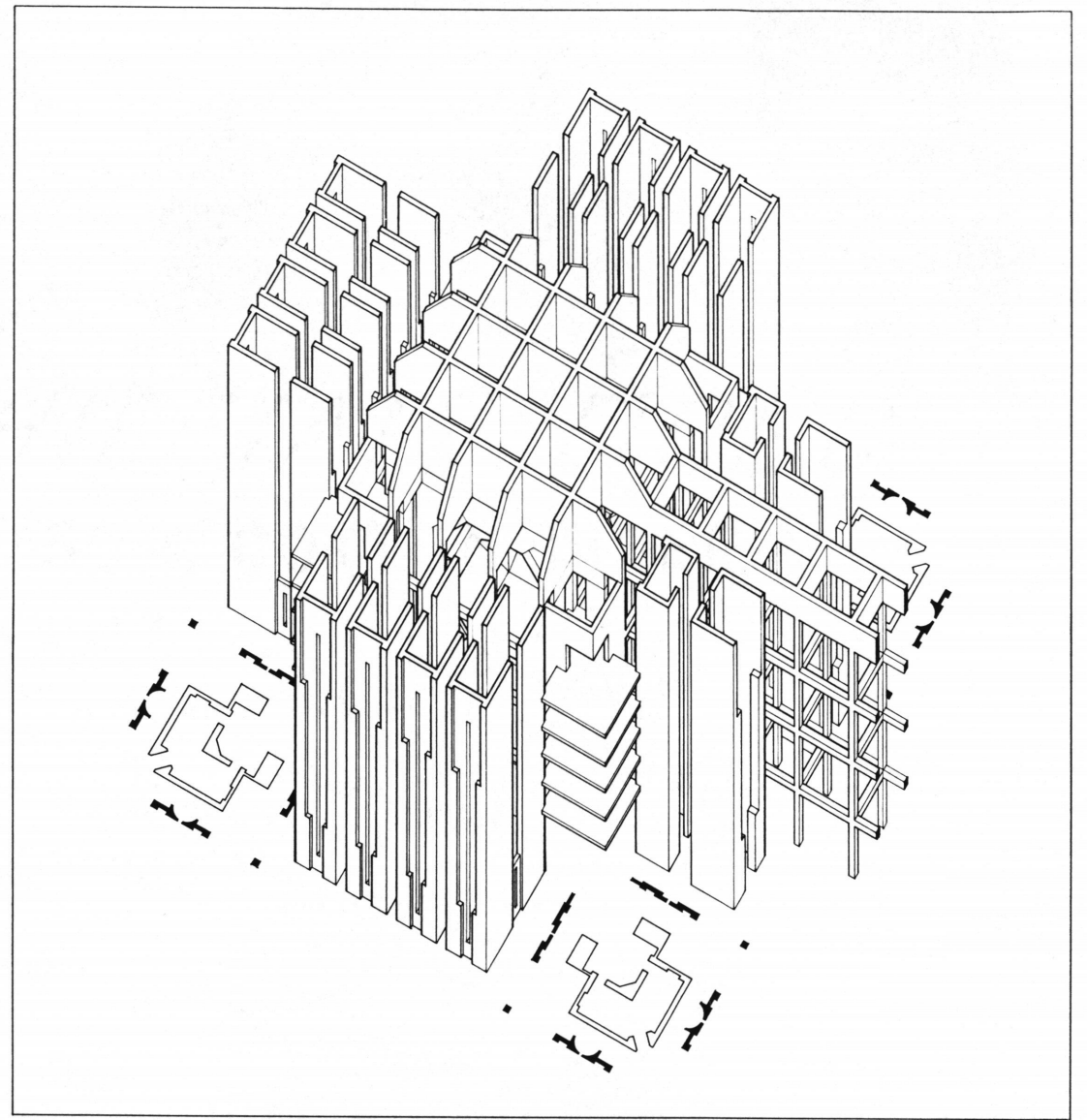
axonometric series - no. 1



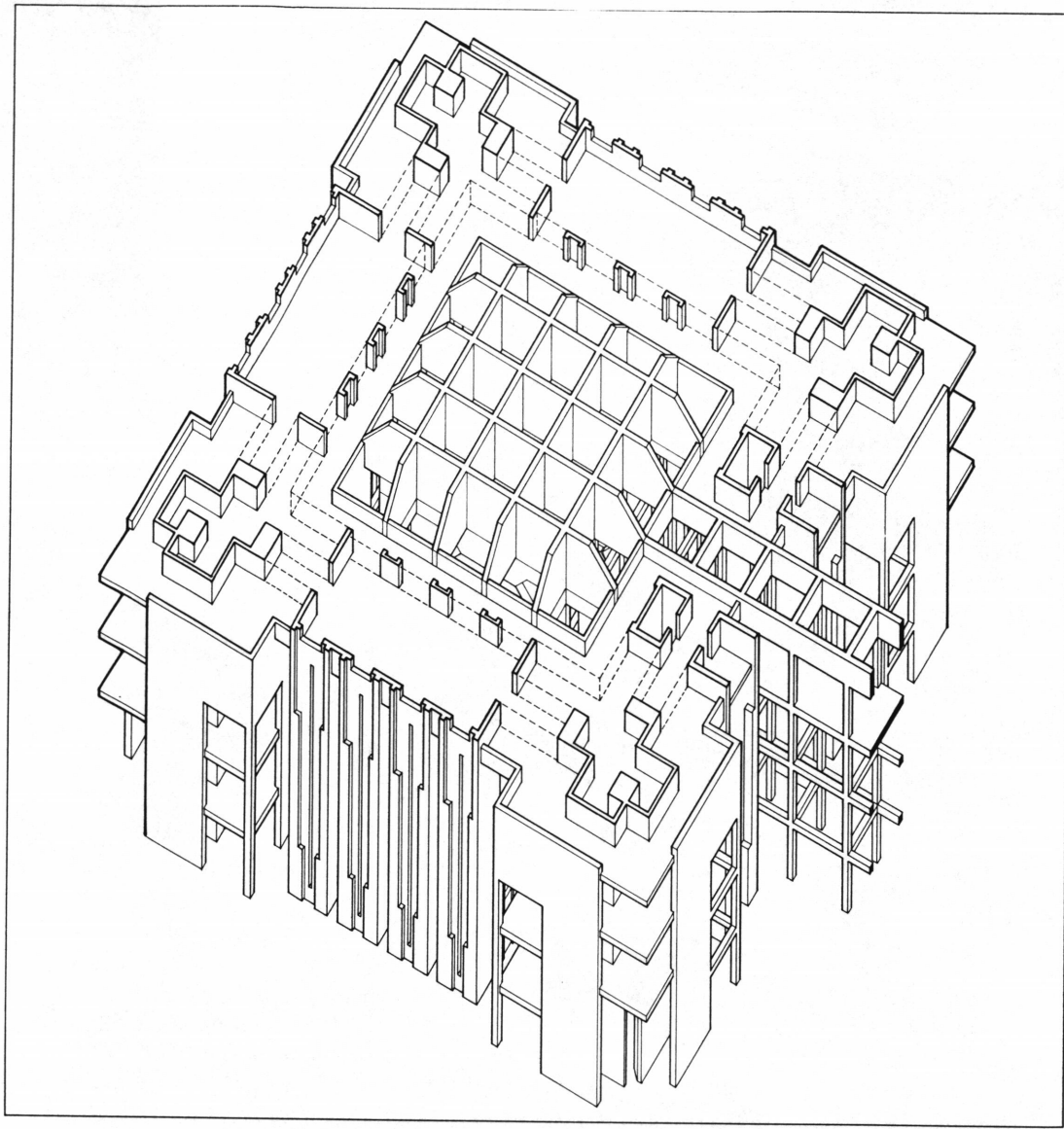
axonometric series - no. 2



axonometric series - no. 3

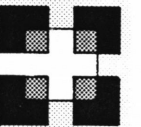


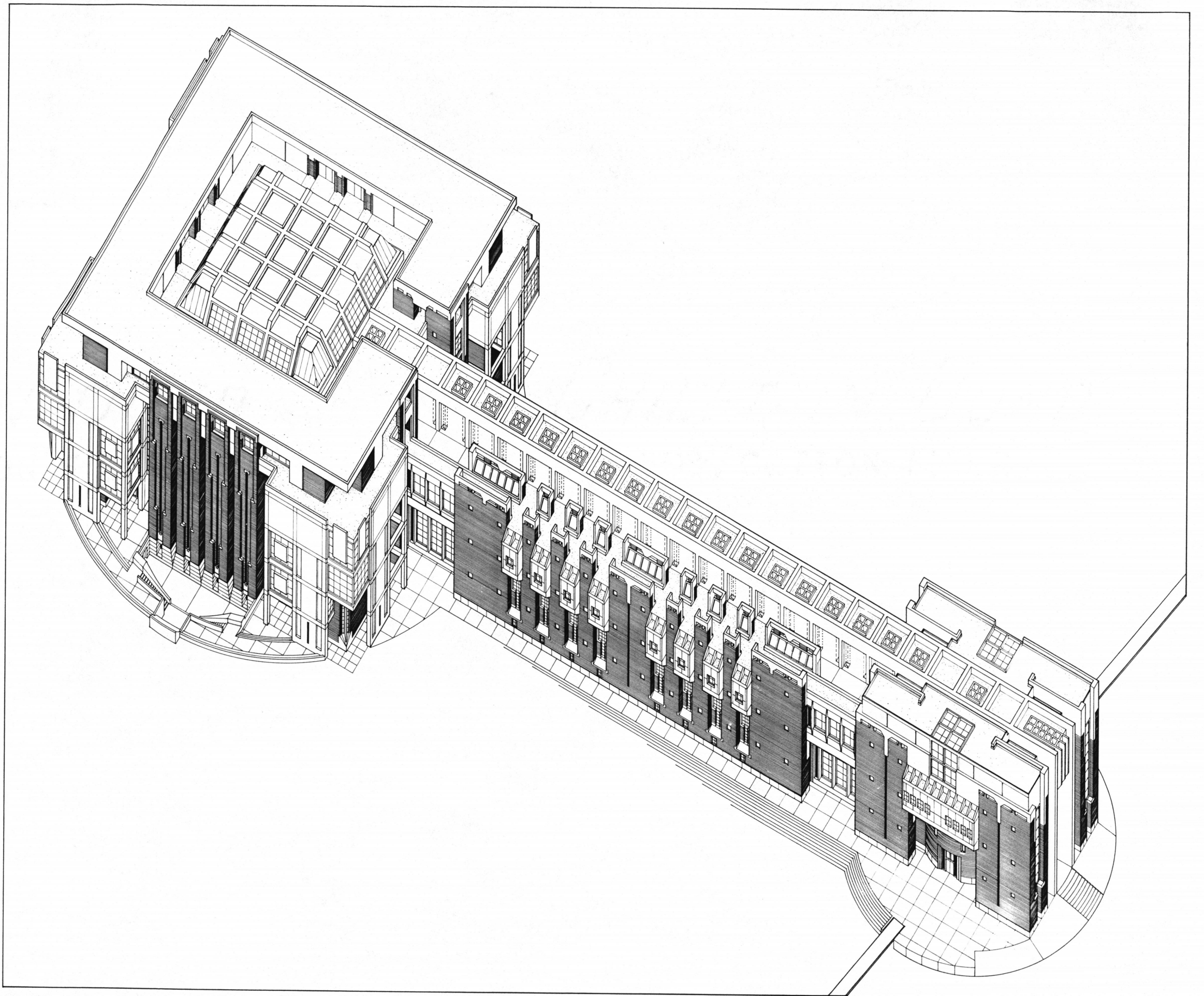
axonometric series - no. 4



axonometric series - no. 5

axonometric series - no. 6 (next page)





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