

SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS

in Georgetown
Washington, DC

by

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Design 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

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Committee Chairman: William Brown.
Architecture

(ABSTRACT)

A building that lives in the mind of the people and
gives them a sense of belonging. It is the memory of
the town.

Para jpor todo su apoyo.

To the people of the International Coffee/Tea Room for their support and for the coffee breaks every afternoon.

i	Title
ii	Abstract
iii	Dedication
iv	Table of contents
1	Introduction
2	Considerations
	Site Plan
	Existing Building
5	The Process
	First Approach
	First Stage
	Second Stage
	Preliminary model
10	The Project
	Plans
	Elevations
	Section
	Entrance
	Walkway
	Amphitheater
	Gutters
	Final Model
25	Bibliography
26	Vita

structure -standing still as a reminder of the past of the town- made a strong impression on me. This first impression led me to develop this project.

Analyzing my present Architectural work, I can say that the most important influences on my way of thinking about architecture come from the Modern and the Post-modern movements. I admire the Modernists' ability to create a new Architecture with aesthetics based on the simplicity of the forms and their relationships. They brought us new forms of Architecture by venturing into the abstract, defining new parameters of beauty and giving Architecture the freedom to design without following the existing rules, but instead proposing their new set of rules. In any case, they promoted a fundamental change in architectural thought.

On the other hand, I find that my strongest concern about Architecture lies in the area where they failed: Modern Architecture is often impersonal and lacks historic content.

"Man may readily identify himself within his own heart, but not easily with the town in which it is placed. Belonging is a basic emotional need - its associations are of the simplest order. From belonging - identity - comes the enriching sense of neighborliness. The short narrow street of the slum succeeds where spacious redevelopments frequently fail". (1)

(From Kenneth Frampton's Modern Architecture, explaining how Team X, Structuralists, reacted to the CIAM VIII report)

From the Modernists we learn that we can not pretend to plan human life to adapt it to our idea of urban organization. Instead we have to analyze how human interrelations occur in order to design for the people.

"The neighborhood was provided with public parks, pedestrian paths and community services. It was planned according to the prescribed standards of modern urban science, with a large and immense repetitive architectural spaces. It became a sort of prison for the inhabitants..." (2)

(From Paolo Portoghesi's After Modern Architecture, referring to the Pruitt-Igoe project)

Architecture must be created considering the culture and the context in which it will be placed. But it has to go beyond the matching of materials and textures. It is not the dress that makes the person, it is the spirit.

I agree that Architecture does not have to be autochthonous to the region it is conceived for; it is perfectly logical to follow international philosophies when designing a building, but we have to think about their principles to make it possible in our work.

It is not hard to find examples of buildings that have been designed under rules of a dogma and have been failures. That is the case with some Modernists buildings designed in Caracas, my hometown, during the 40's and 50's. They are called 'bloques' and were sponsored by the government. They were built so that low income people could have the opportunity to live in two-story apartments with lots of comforts and services. But what happens when someone that is used to live on the ground on wide open areas, usually in the country side, *having as many kids as God sends*, is placed in a two bedroom apartment in city-size rooms, in a building twenty stories high with thirty apartments per floor, which is surrounded by many others of the same kind. It becomes a mess. People do not feel that that place belongs to anybody. The constriction of space (a family with five kids lives in a two bedroom apartment) causes a sense of prison.

The concern of designing with culture and context in mind makes me turn to the point of view of the Post-Modernists. What I like about them is that they consider the person when they design, and the importance of the context in which the Architect places his work.

"Post-Modern Architecture upholds the necessity of interaction between historical memories and traditions, and above all the 'recontextualization' of Architecture, the establishment of a precise relationship, or a dialectical nature, between the new building and the environment which sustains it, be it in the urban periphery or in the historic center". (3)

(From Paolo Portoghesi's After Modern Architecture).

A neighborhood is formed little by little, throughout the years, responding to the needs of the people. Therefore I think it is in the consideration of that context where we can find some of the answers about how Architecture should treat people.

I do not have in mind the copying of forms and shapes, nor the reproduction of a specific detail to make my building look like the surroundings. Submitting Architecture to context will lead us nowhere.

Other Post-Modernist Architects deal with the context by making references in their buildings. Often, these references will not be noticed unless they are explained, because they are expressed in a language comprehensible only to other Architects. Language is a basic issue for Architects today if we want to establish this Architect-user relationship.

I want to create places in which people can feel stimulated by the Architecture; places that deal with the past and the present.

Introduction

This work should not be considered an end point of my studies; instead it should be considered a reflection of what my thoughts are at this moment in time and a point from which I will continue to develop my Architecture.

As I walked one afternoon through the streets of Georgetown, trying to understand a place that was completely new to me, my attention focused on the strong presence of an abandoned building with the characteristics of a factory or a plant. Its brick

Considerations

It is hard to understand that Georgetown, a town that is so close to the Potomac River and that used to be a port, does not enjoy the benefit of having a well-developed waterfront.

The elevated highway constitutes a barrier that prevents the town from getting close to the water. The latest attempt, the Washington Harbor Project, tries to bring the life back to the water, but it succeeds only locally. To enforce this connection between the activity stream and the River, it is necessary to create intermediate points of interest in order to attract people gradually toward the waterfront.

A School of Performing Arts will complement the student atmosphere that predominates in Georgetown. It will constitute a reinforcement of the extension of Wisconsin Avenue to the waterfront, and at the same time it will constitute a break in the commercial activity of the Avenue, offering a cultural institution to the life of this active street. This will be a space for students to study and to expose their work to the city, and for the public to participate somehow in the life of the school.



The building is located in Georgetown, section of Washington DC.

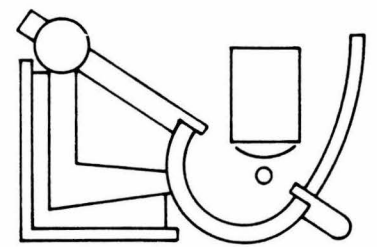
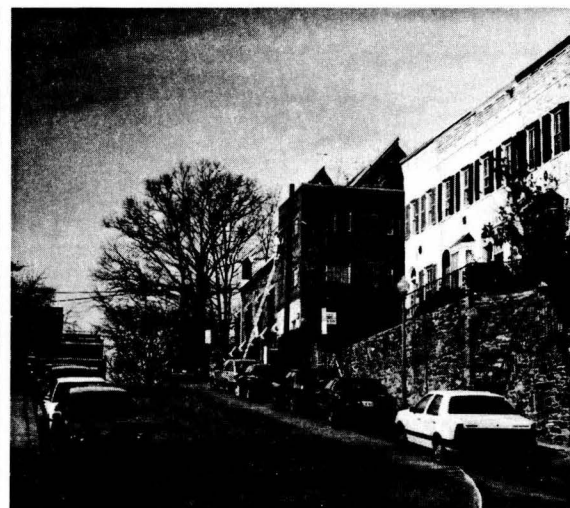
The focus of the commercial activity in this area occurs at the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and M Street. Shops and restaurants attract people from all over the Washington metropolitan area, making this one of the busiest commercial areas of the city. But it is mainly students from Georgetown University that constitute the center of the life in the area.

Southeast of this intersection is the abandoned building that used to be the incinerator plant of the town, easily noticeable from a distance by the brick stack that served as the plant's chimney. It is on this site that the School of Performing Arts is proposed.

The surrounding areas are a mixture of new and old buildings. The old ones are family houses, many of which have been readjusted to commercial uses; they are two or three storey townhouses made out of brick in the traditional American style. The new ones are large office buildings, four or five stories high, made out of brick. They are a not very successful attempt to preserve the characteristics of the area.

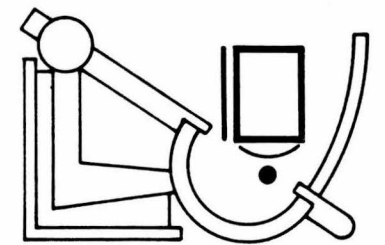
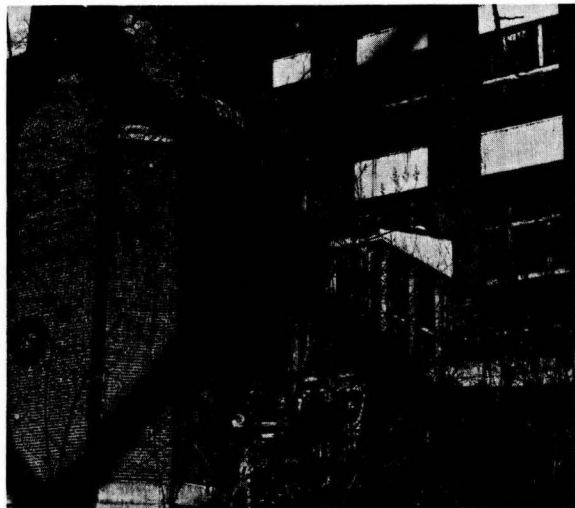
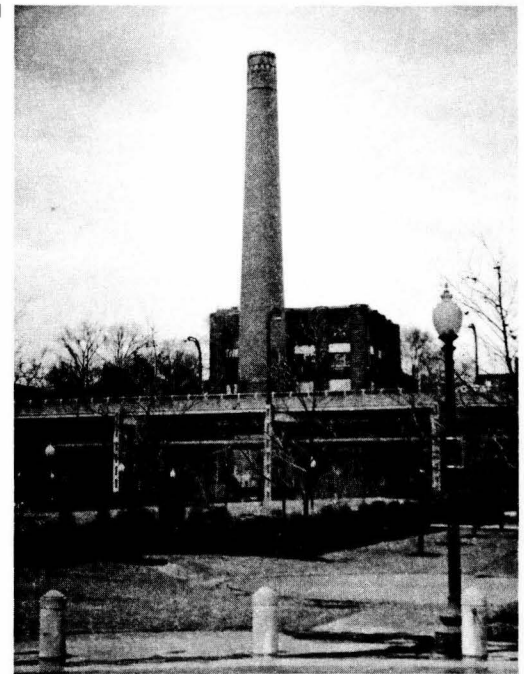
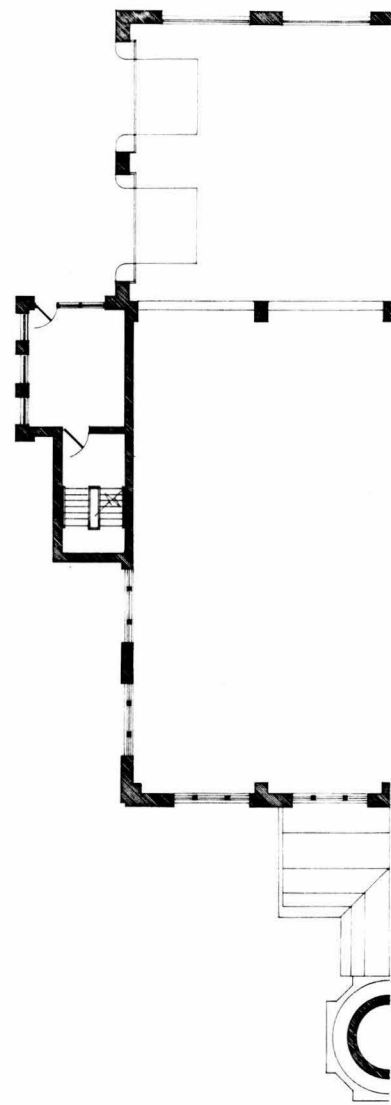
South of the site is the elevated highway, followed by a small park that borders the water.

The old building is placed on the highest point of the site, the rest of the land slopes down from this point, being the south part the lowest area.



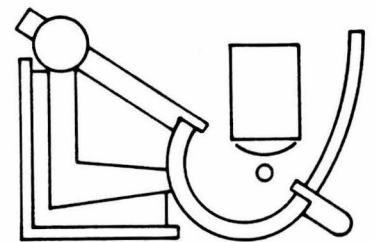
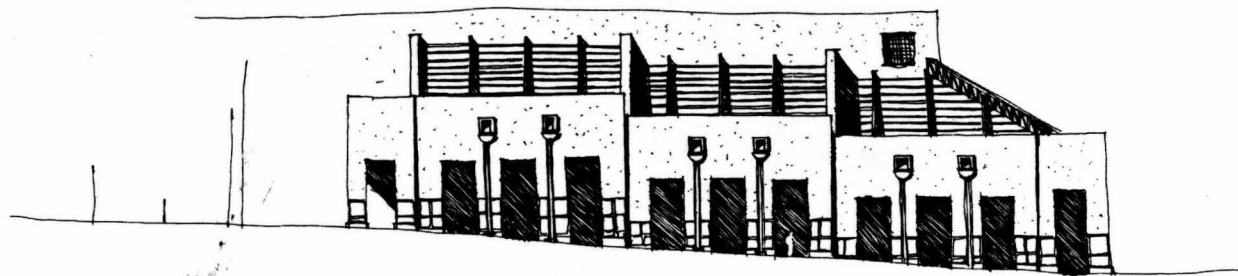
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Site



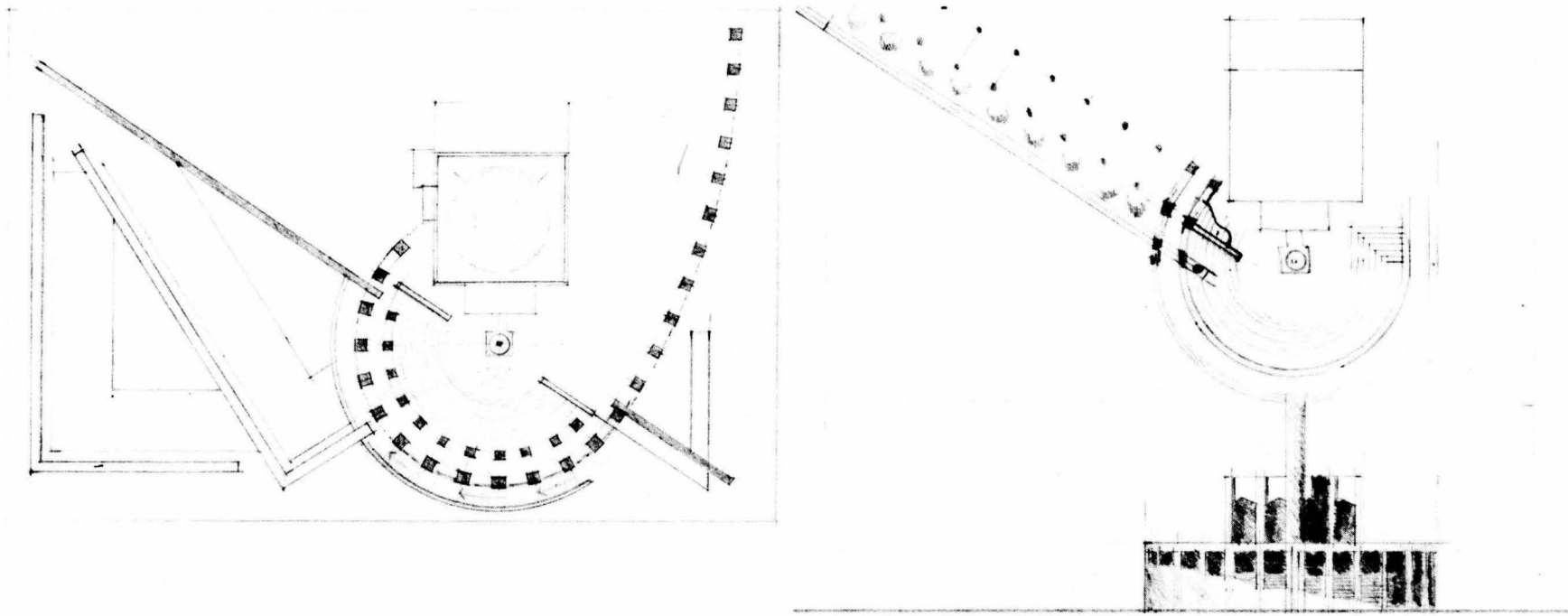
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Existing Building



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The Process

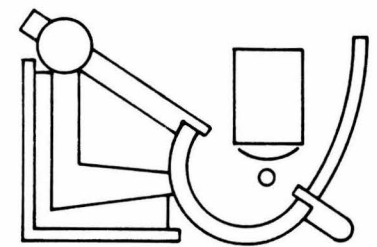
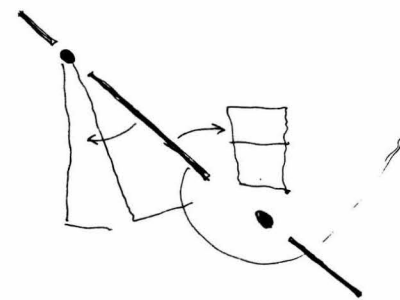
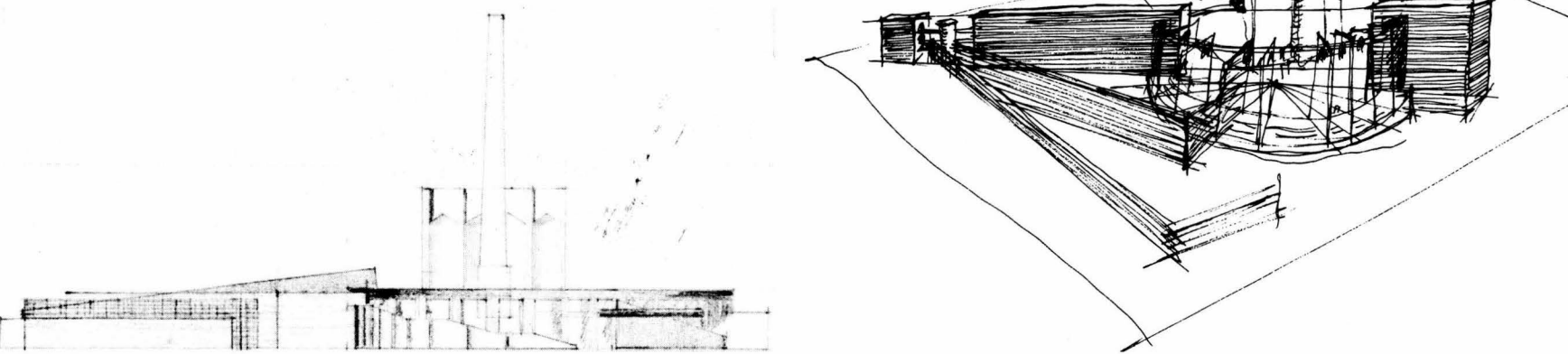


Facing the question of how to build next to an existing structure, I considered two options: one, to design a building that blends with the existing or, two, to create a relationship of contrast (differentiation) between the new and the old.

I chose the second option, because it is important that Architecture reflects the time in which it is being created. The aspect should be related to the time the building is placed in history. On the other hand there has to be respect for the architectural and urban values of the old structure.

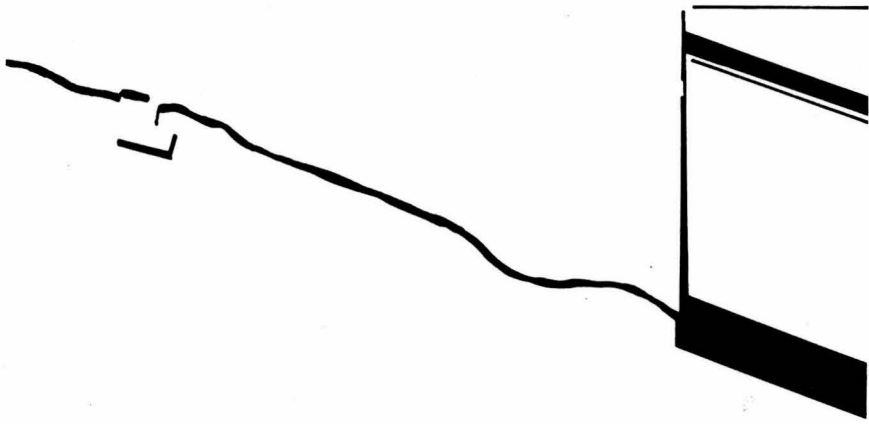
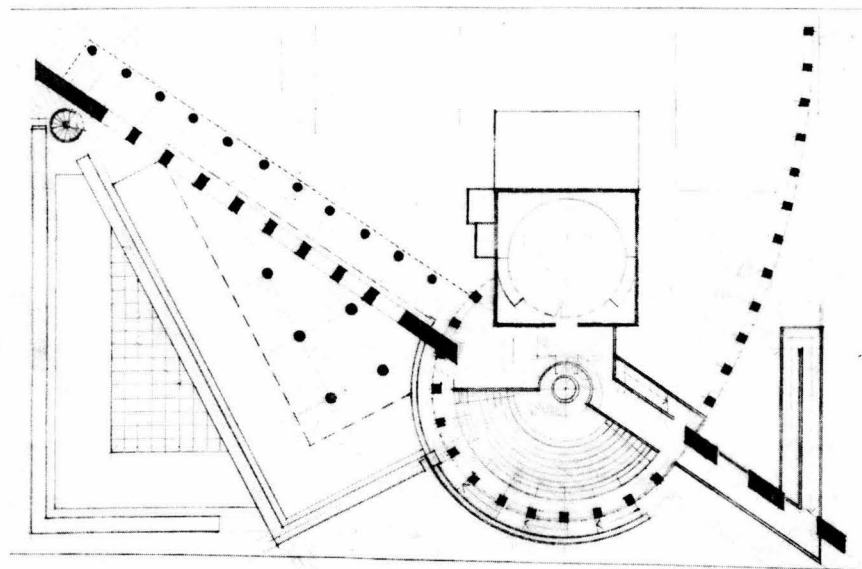
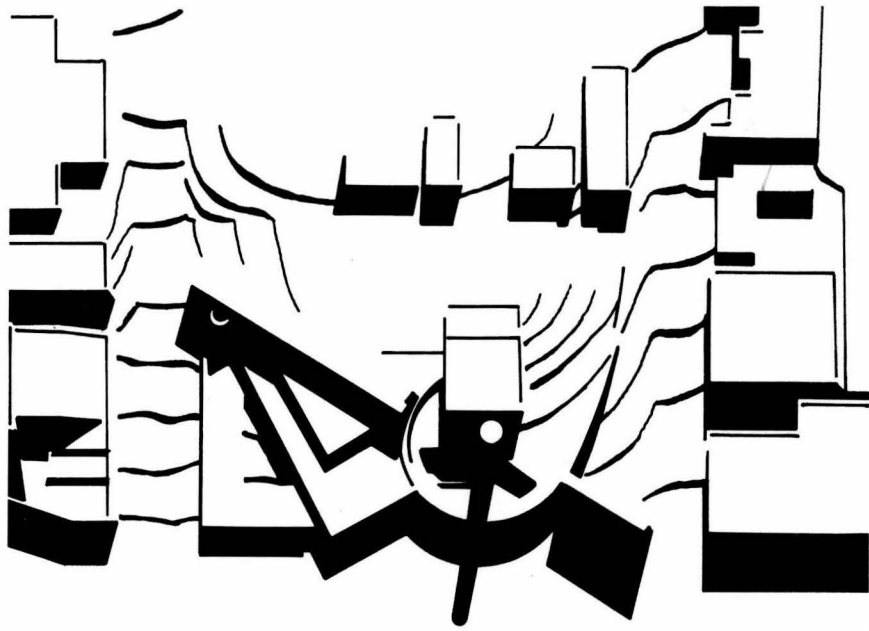
In order to respect the existing, older structure, I placed the new building on the opposite side of the site and use a diagonal as a "dividing line". When the new structure touches the old, the presence of the old plant is respected.

The diagonal starts to develop as a main distribution element that connects the various activities. It also conducts people to the large meeting plaza where students and public interact, in the amphitheater or in the main theater located inside the old structure.



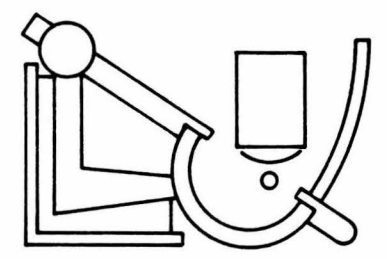
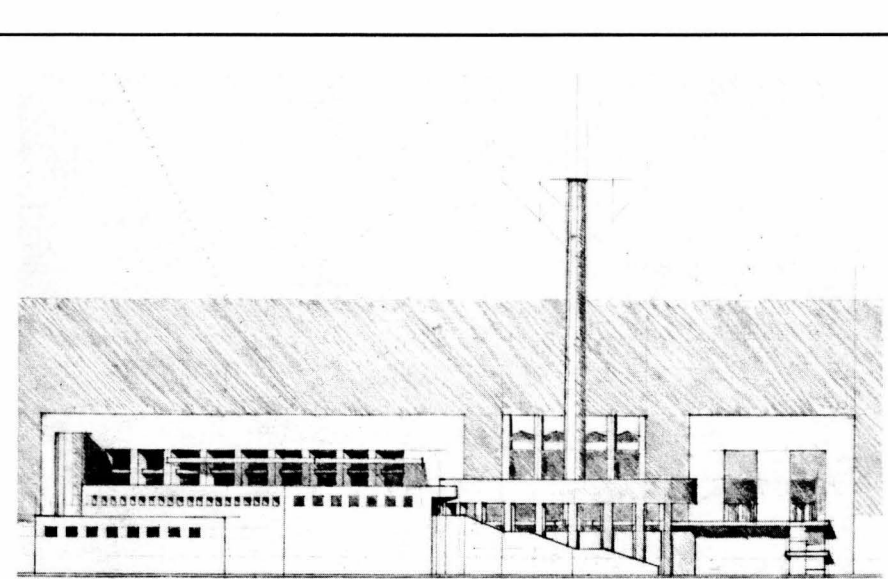
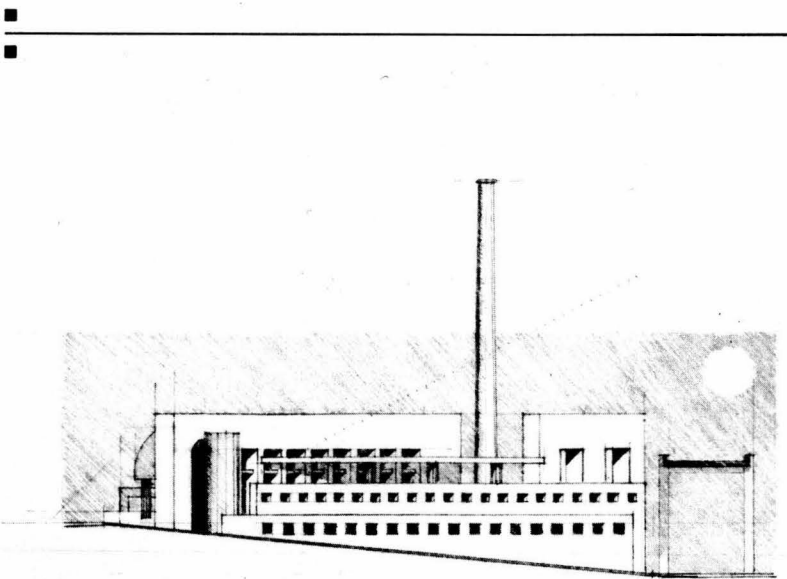
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First Approach



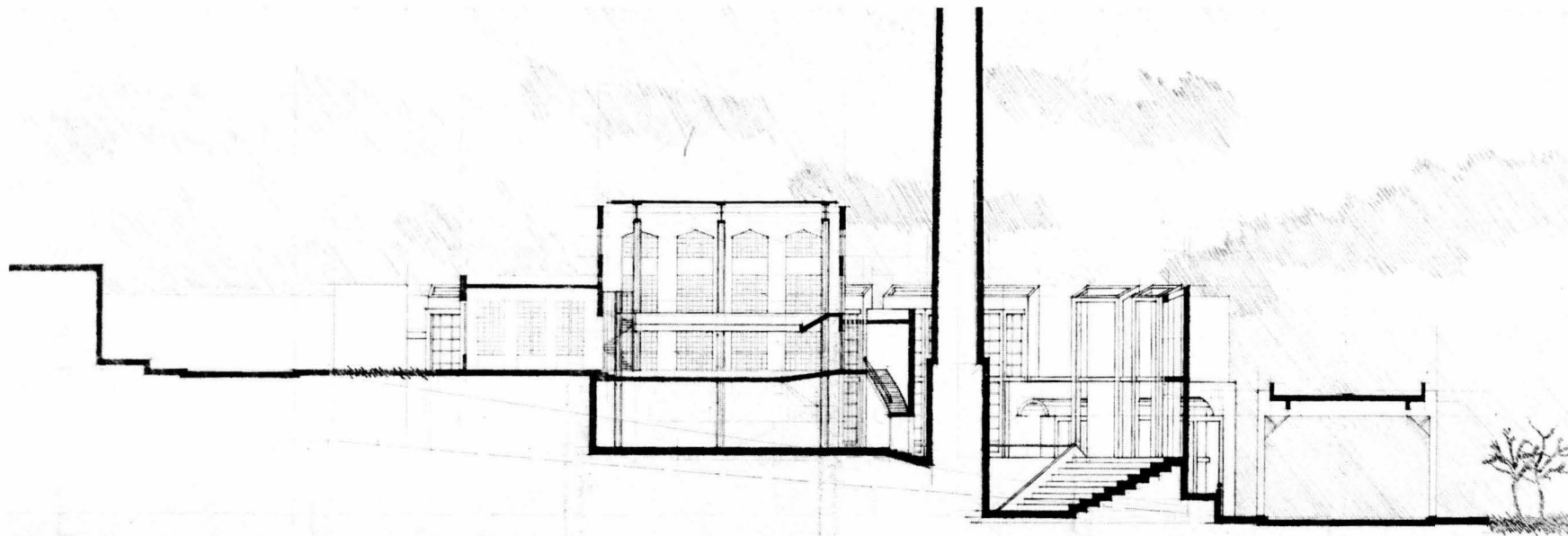
Approaching the building as a whole, and developing the two dimensional schemes, the volumes of the building start to emerge. They will modify later as the different activities of the school take their own shape and significance.

Top left:
Aerial view. Drawing made from an early model.
Top right:
Basic scheme of the plan.
Bottom:
West and south elevations.



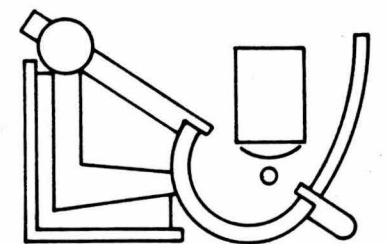
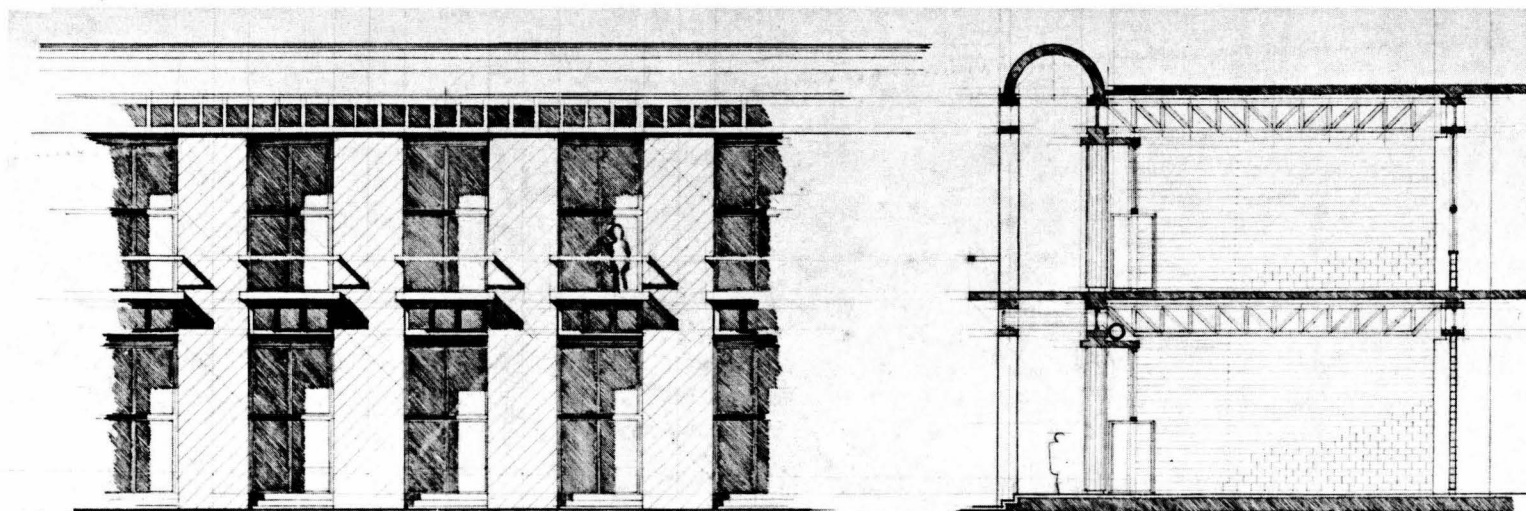
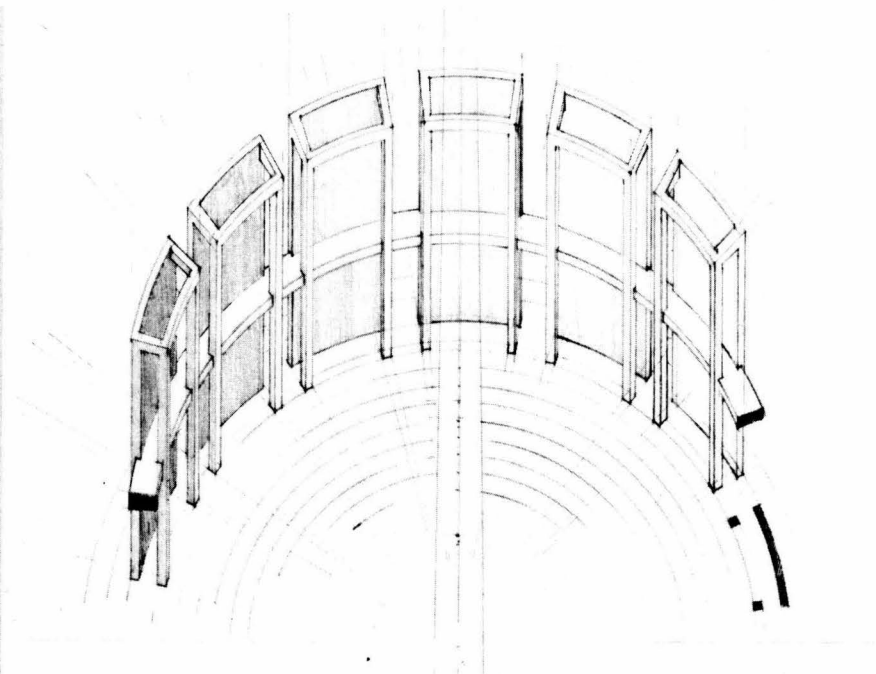
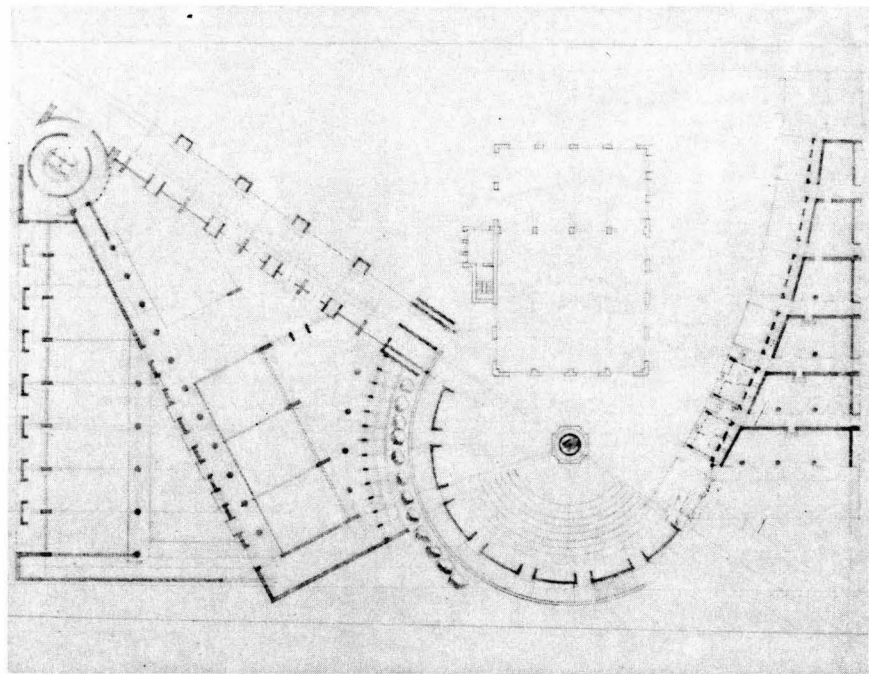
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First Stage



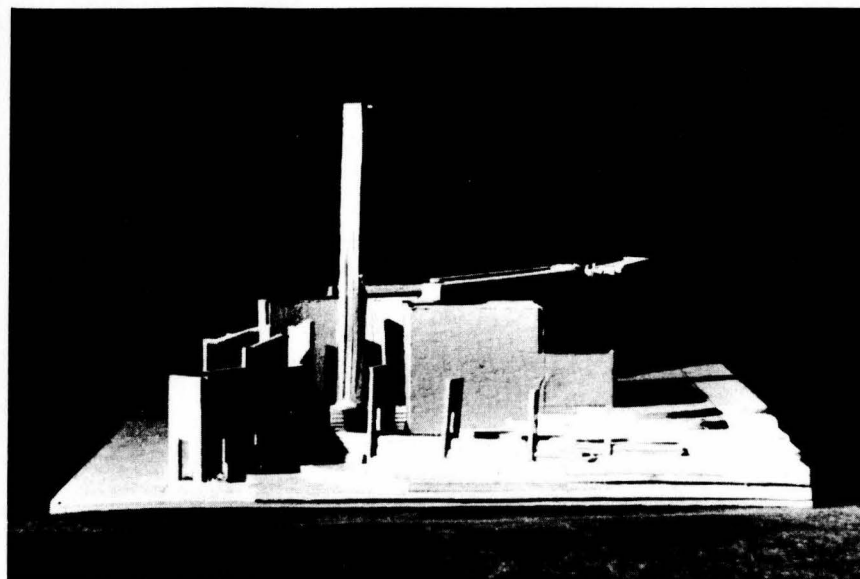
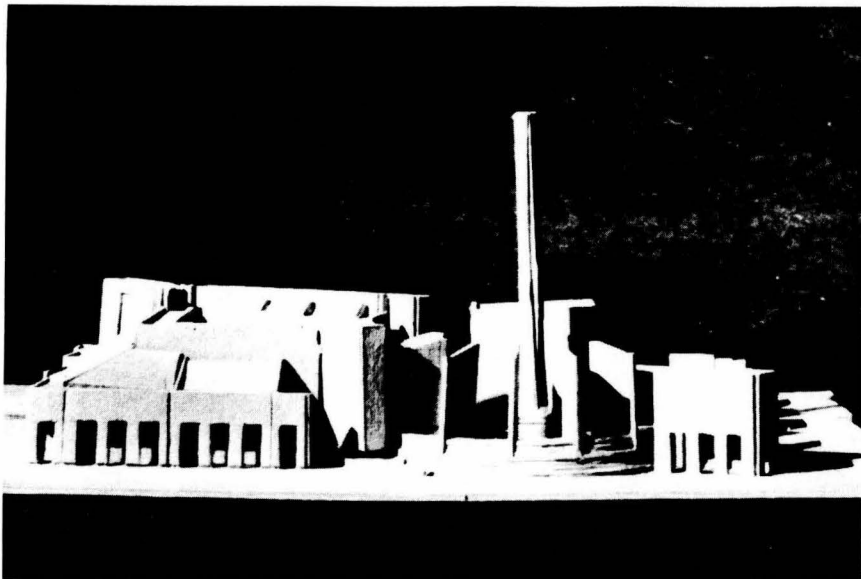
The elements of the building start to develop.

Top:
 Section through old building and amphitheater
 Center left:
 Basic scheme of the plan.
 Center right:
 The back walls of the amphitheater show a walkway
 that later will become the balcony seating.
 Bottom sketch:
 Study of the relation between walkway and
 classrooms.



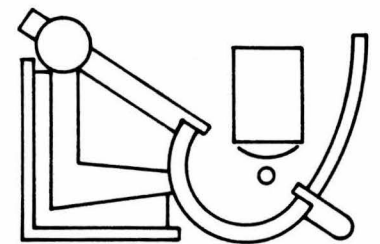
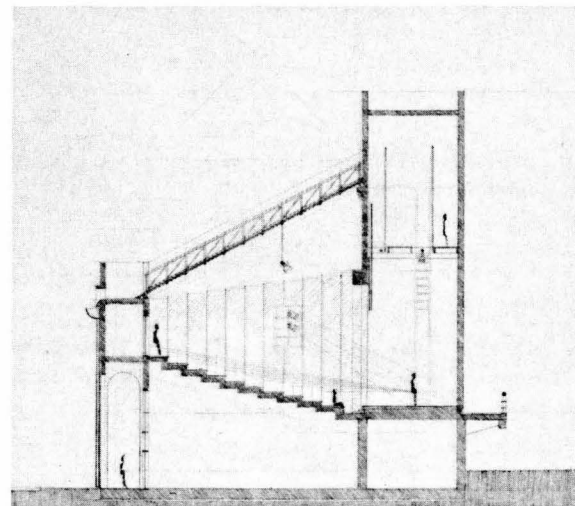
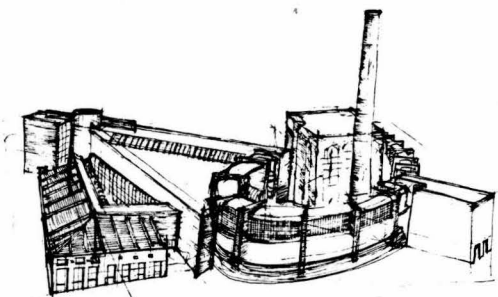
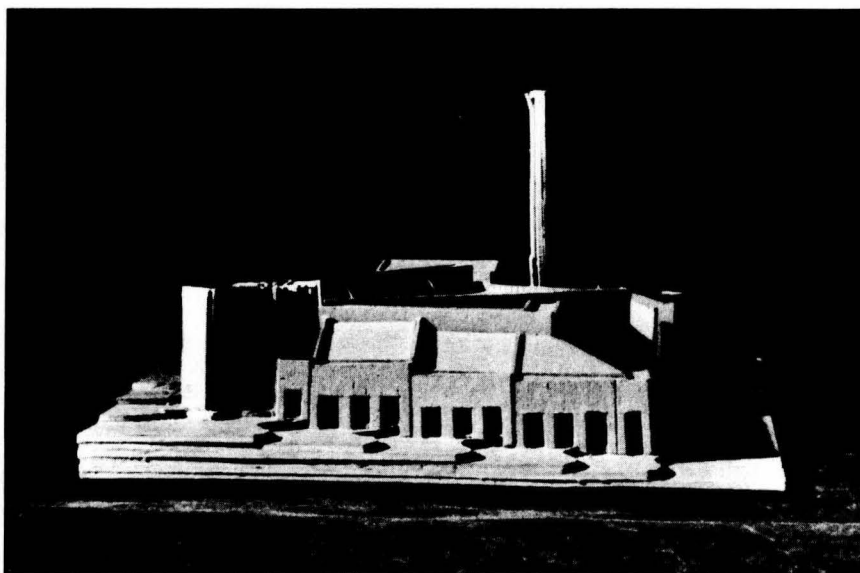
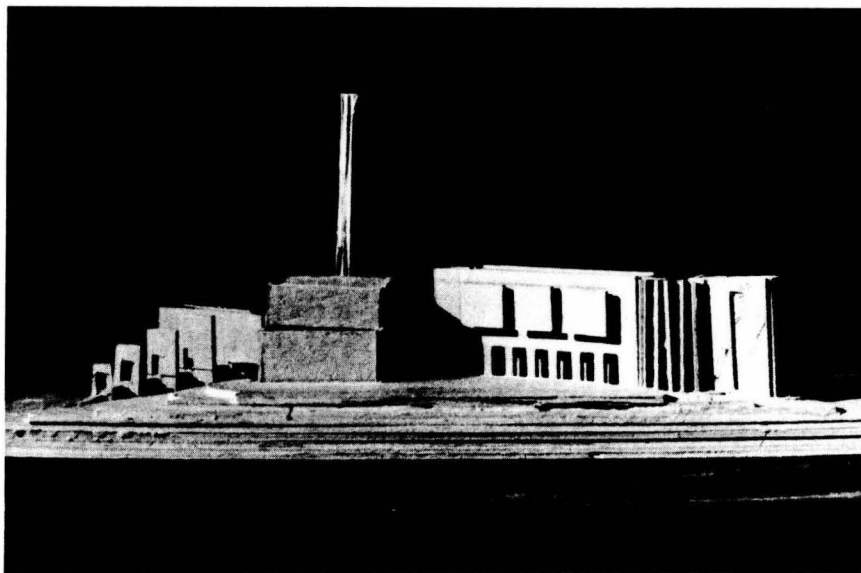
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Second Stage



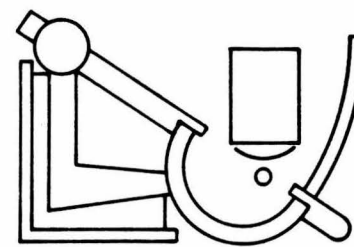
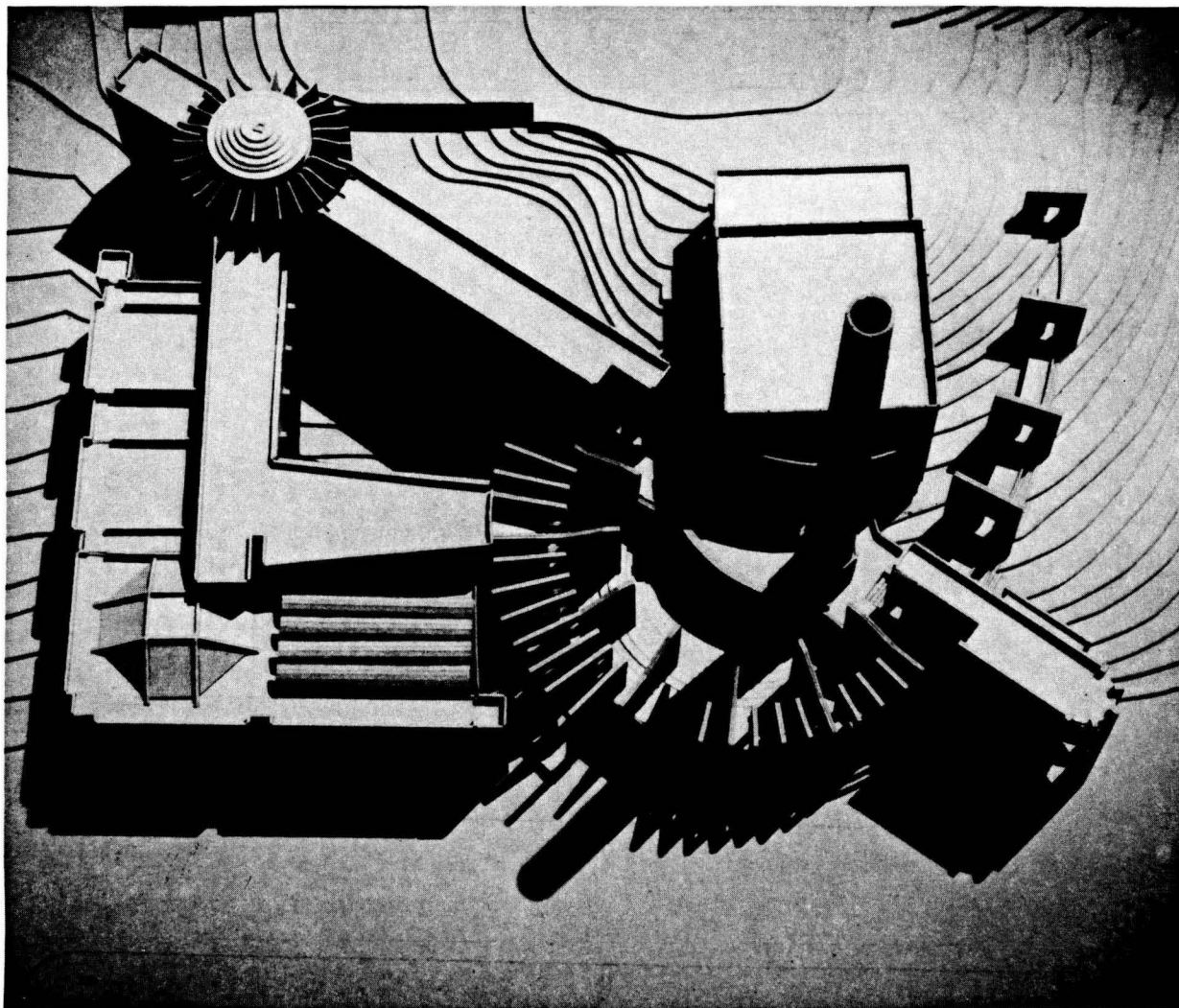
Bottom left:
 Sketch of the entire complex at this preliminary stage.
 Bottom right:
 Section through acting classrooms. This section will be modified later to give room to lecture classrooms on top.

South East
 West North



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Preliminary Model



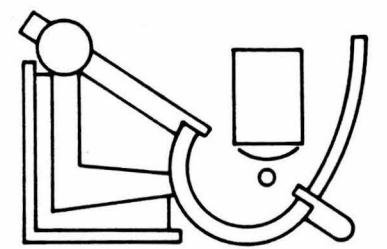
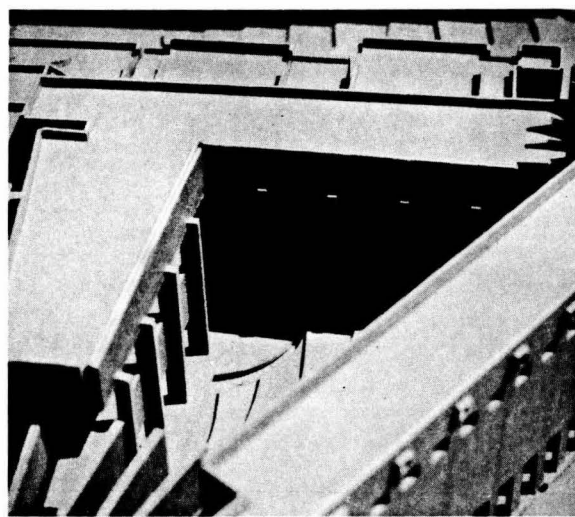
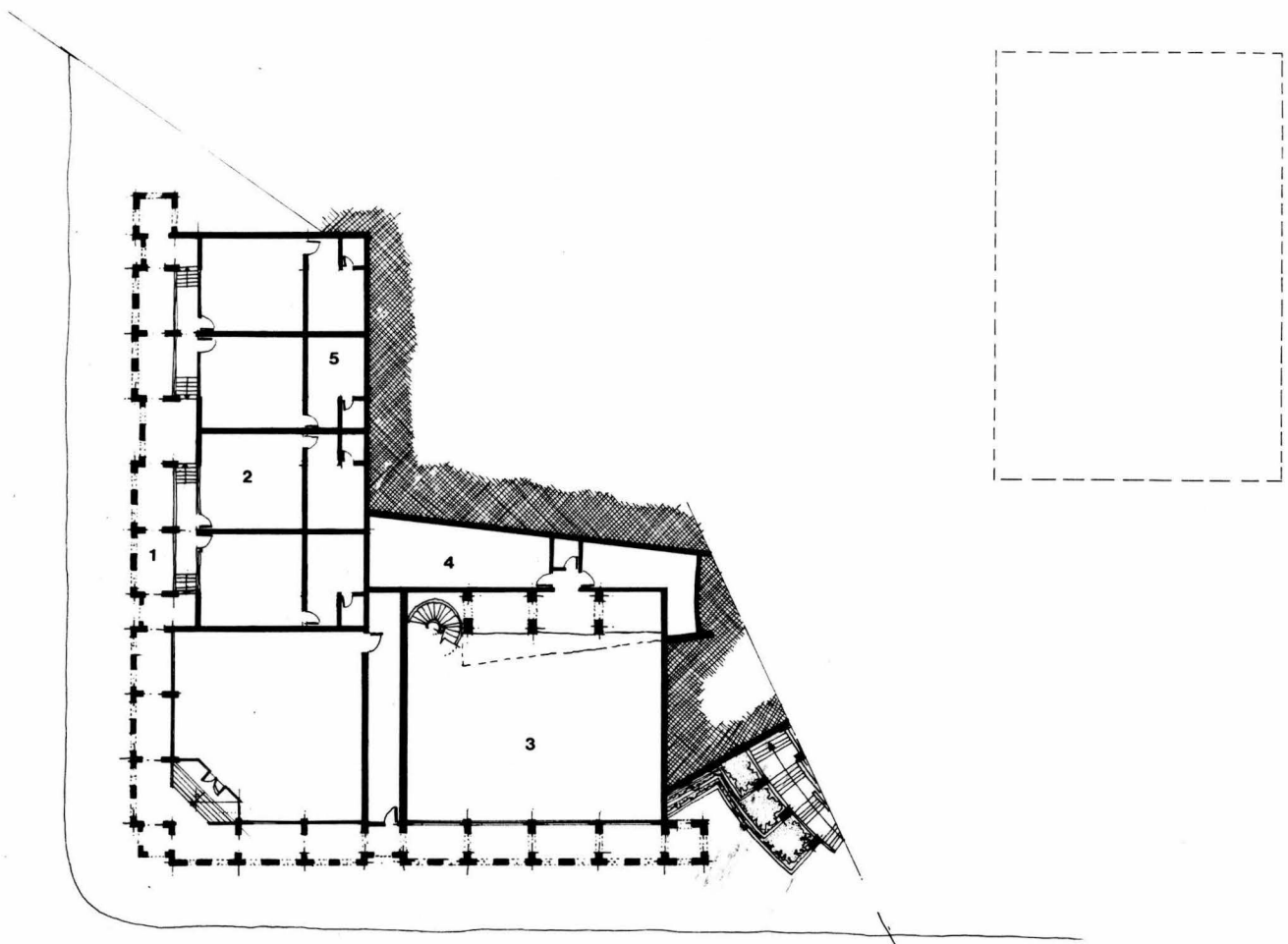
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The Project

- 1 Gallery
- 2 Shops
- 3 Ballet classrooms
- 4 Dressing rooms
- 5 Storage

This plan shows the shops that continue the commercial activity of Wisconsin Avenue. Also the visual relationship between the gallery and the ballet classroom can be noticed, even though they are at different levels

Bottom:
Partial view of the model. Interior courtyard area.



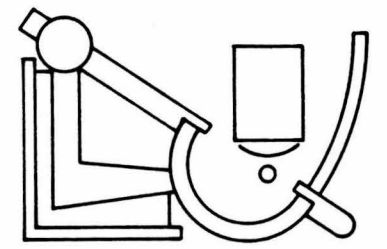
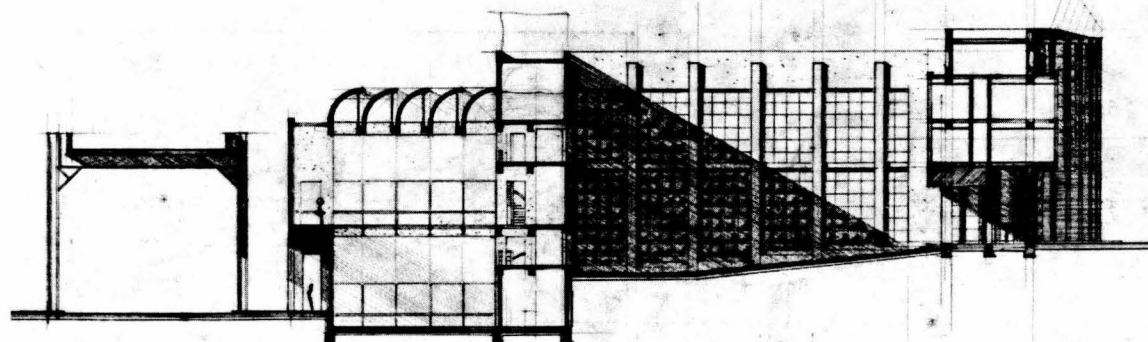
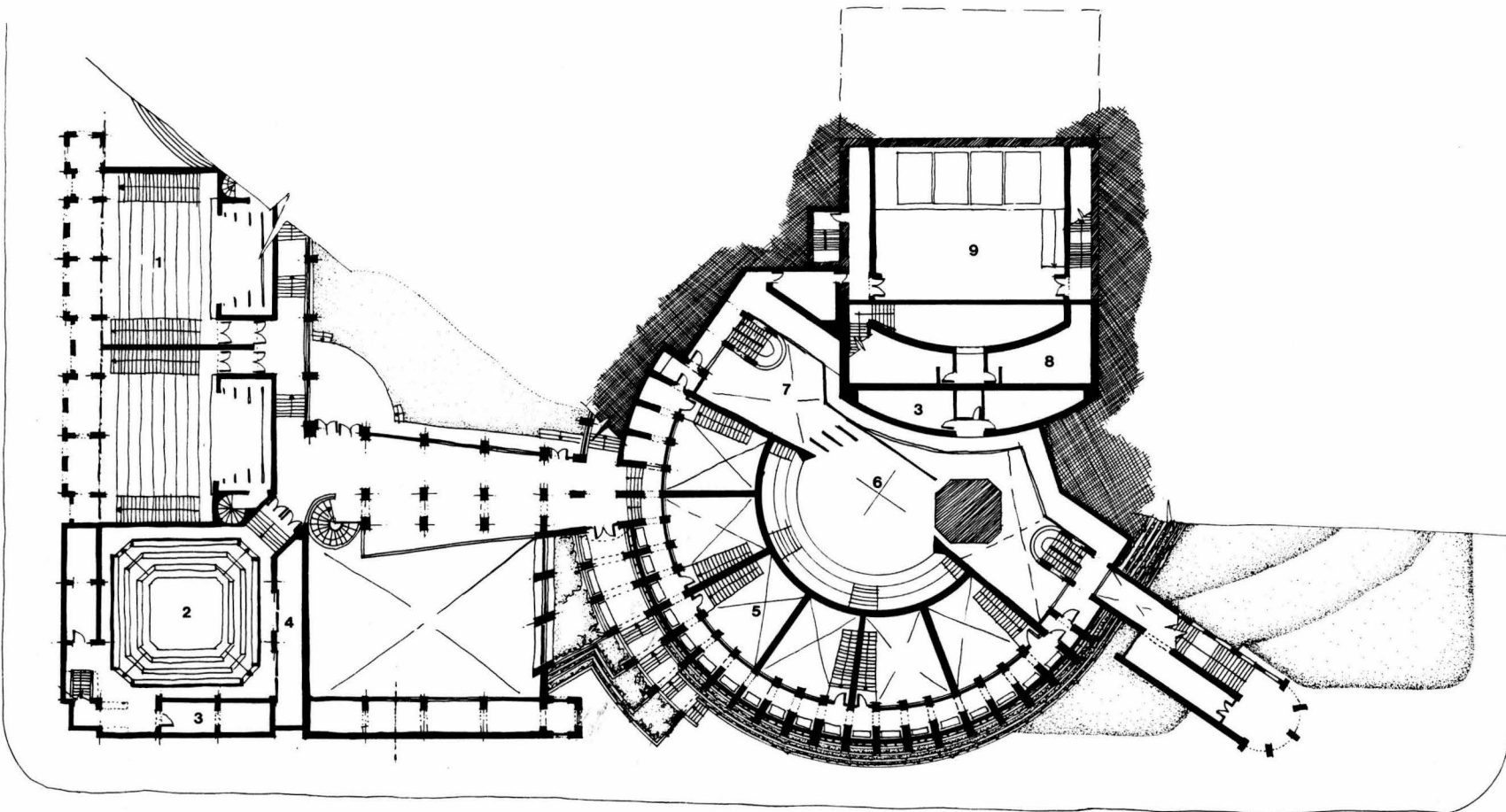
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**Floor Plan
Level 1**



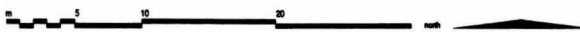
- 1 Acting classrooms
- 2 Black box theater (lower level)
- 3 Dressing rooms
- 4 Storage
- 5 Rehearsal rooms (upper level)
- 6 Amphitheater stage
- 7 Back stage
- 8 Main theater restrooms
- 9 Scenography shop

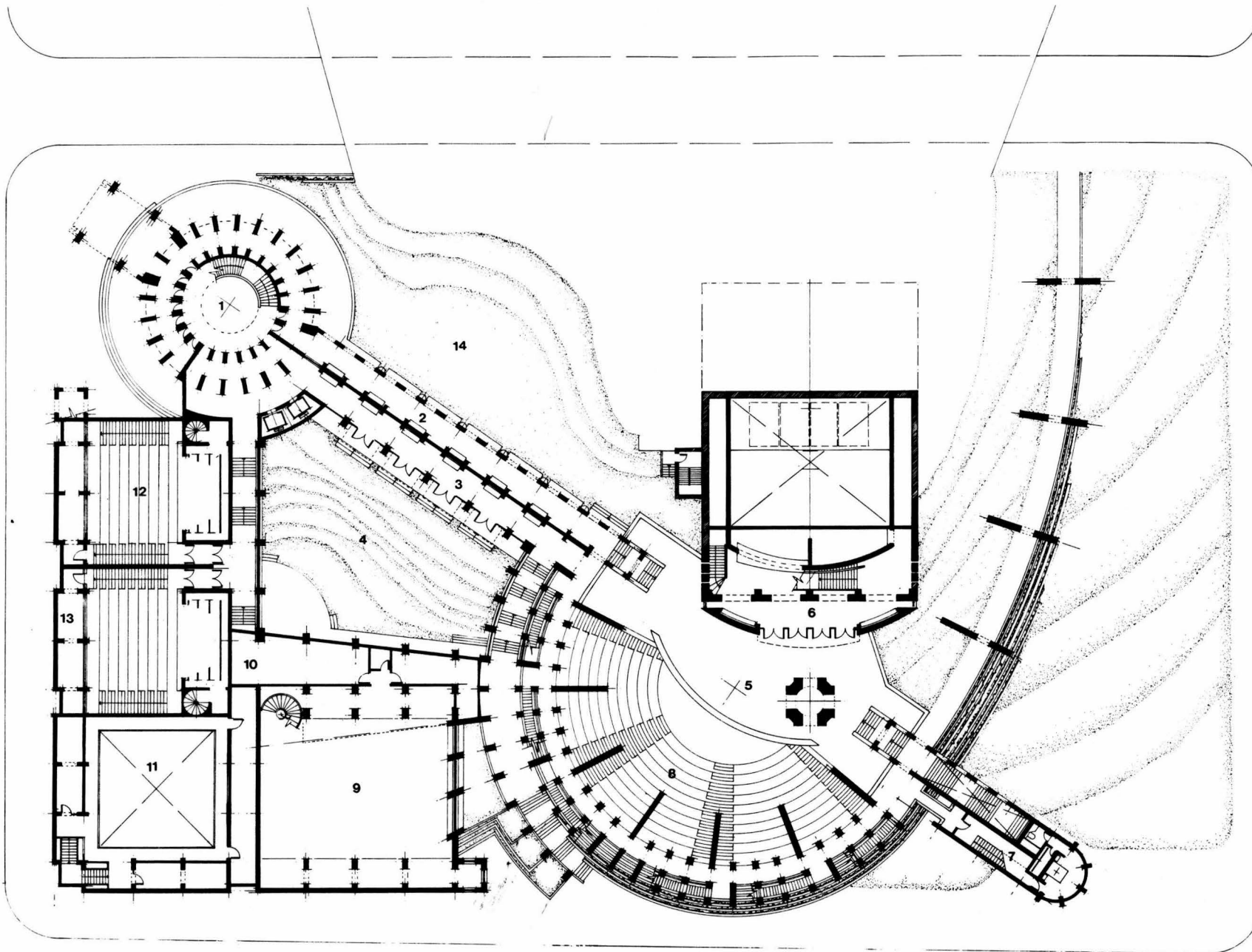
Bottom:
Section through ballet classrooms and courtyard at
an intermediate stage.



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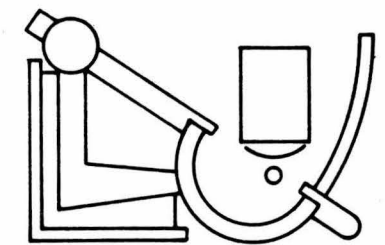
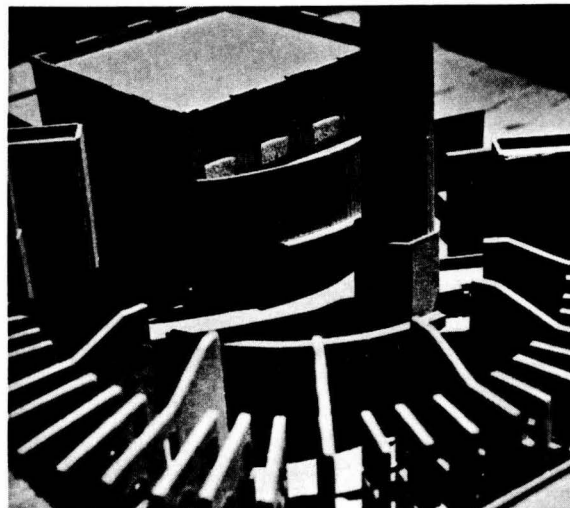
Floor Plan
Level 2





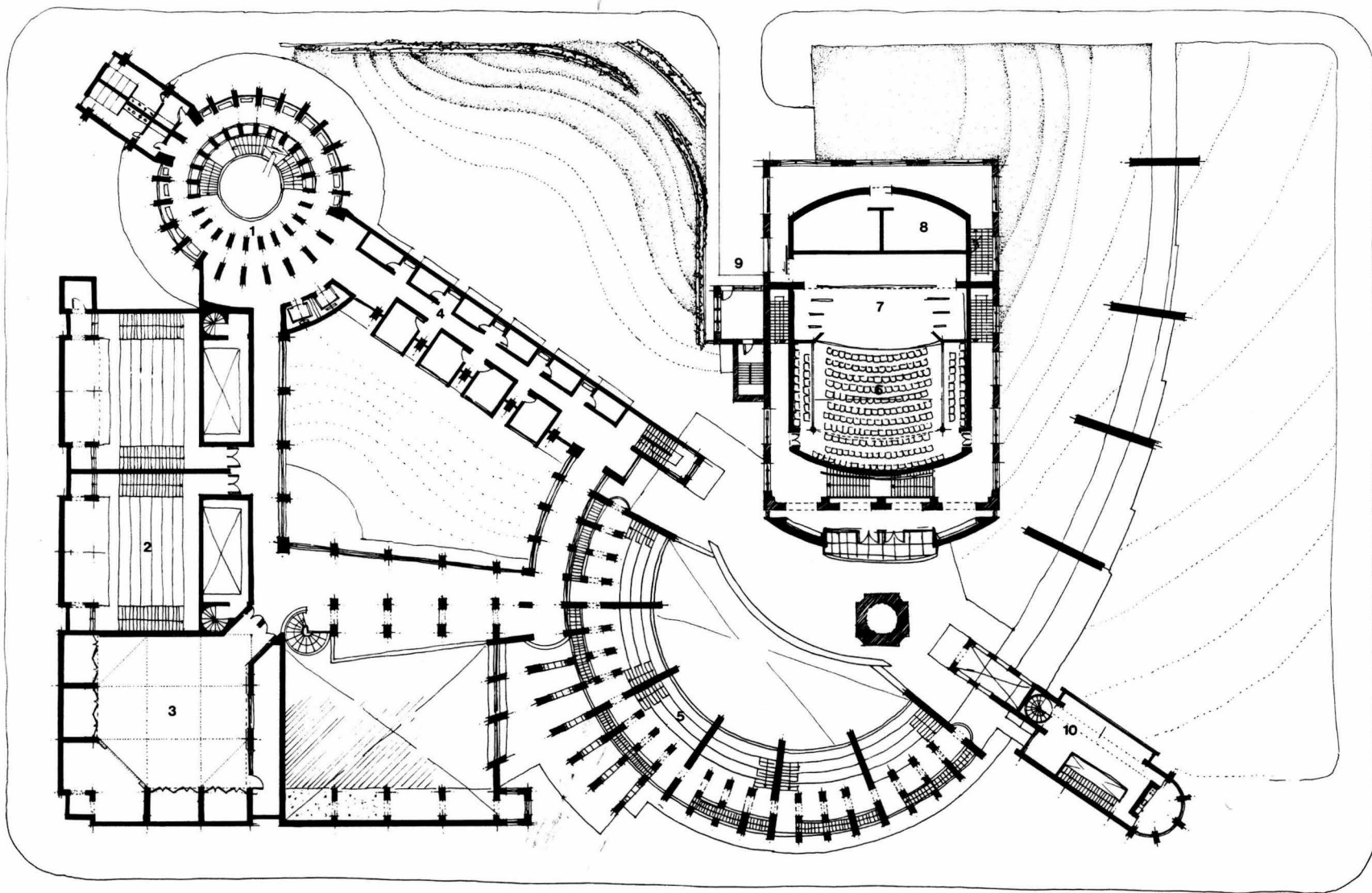
- 1 Main entrance to School
- 2 Public walkway
- 3 School's walkway
- 4 Interior courtyard
- 5 Plaza
- 6 Theater entrance
- 7 Visiting Professor's apartment
- 8 Amphitheater
- 9 Ballet classrooms
- 10 Dressing rooms
- 11 Black box theater (upper level)
- 12 Acting classrooms
- 13 Production cabin
- 14 Natural amphitheater

Bottom:
View of the model. Amphitheater area.



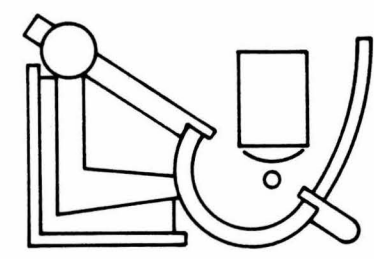
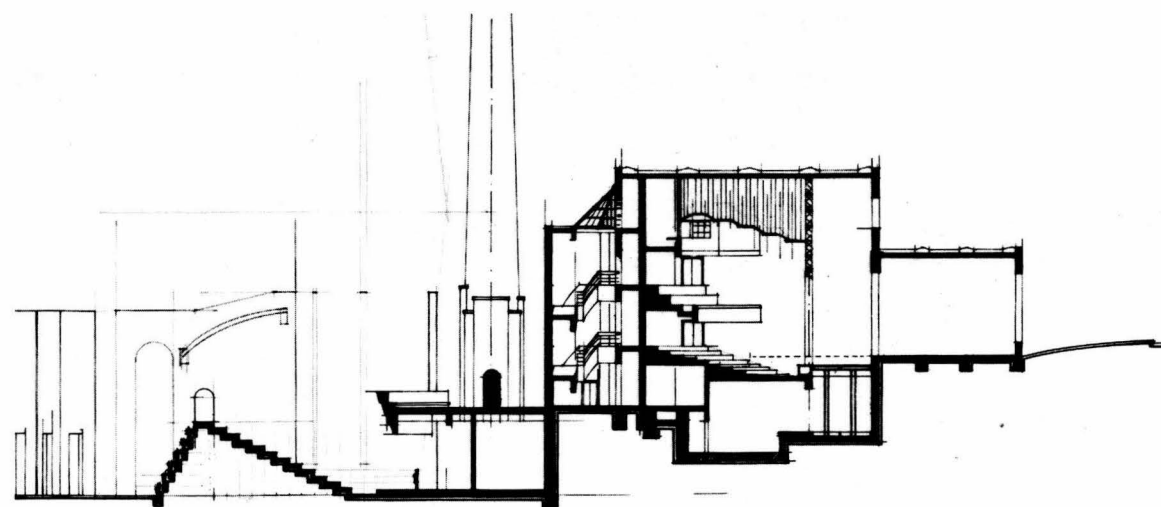
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Floor Plan
Level 3



- 1 Floor lobby
- 2 Lecture classrooms
- 3 Music classroom
- 4 Rehearsal rooms for music
- 5 Amphitheater balcony
- 6 Main theater, orchestra seating
- 7 Stage
- 8 Dressing rooms (lower level)
- 9 Service entrance
- 10 Visiting professor apartment

Bottom:
Section through main theater and amphitheater at an intermediate stage.



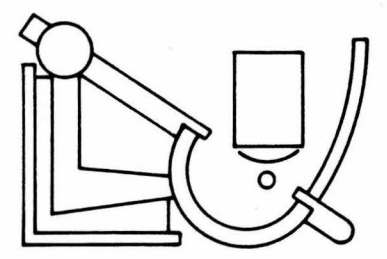
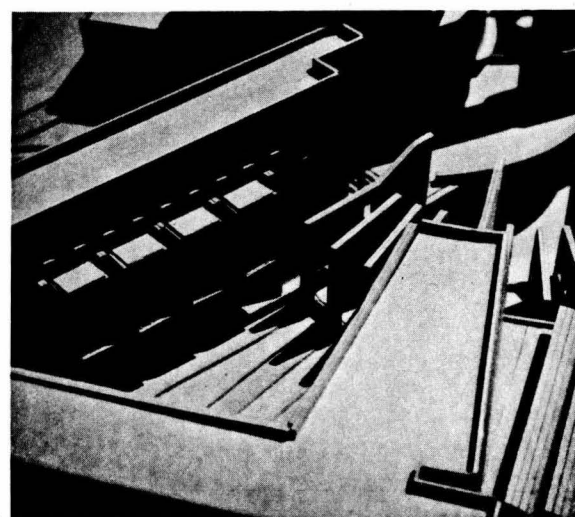
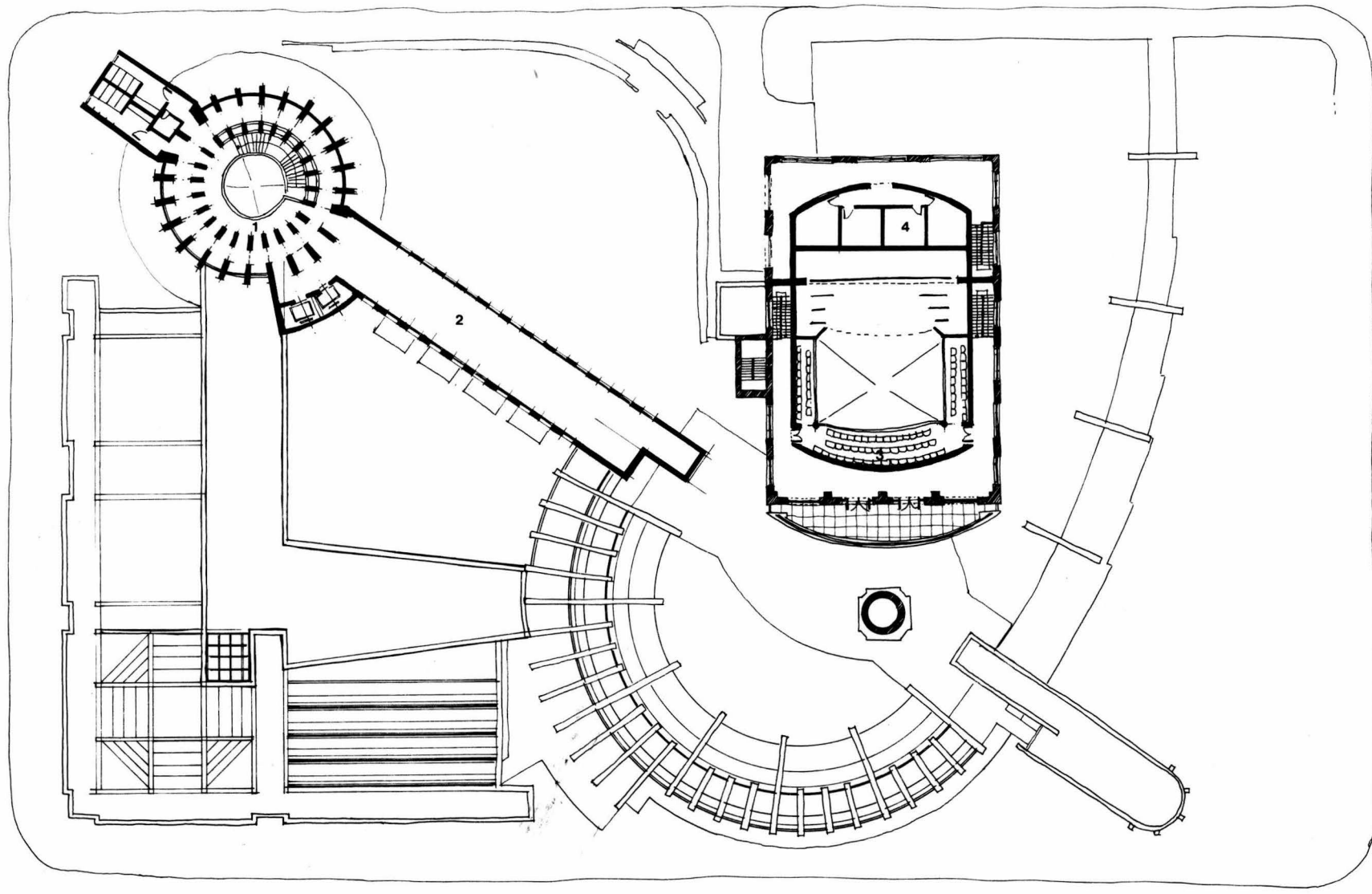
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Floor Plan
Level 4



- 1 Floor lobby
- 2 Administration area
- 3 Main theater, balcony seating
- 4 Dressing rooms (upper level)

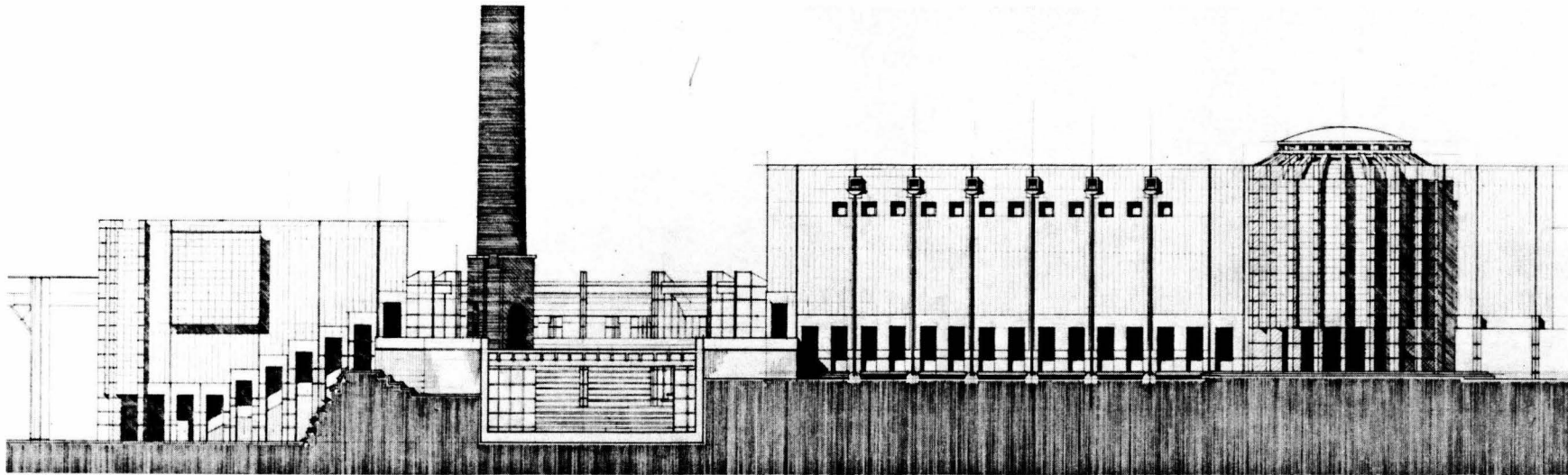
Bottom:
View of the final model. Interior courtyard area.



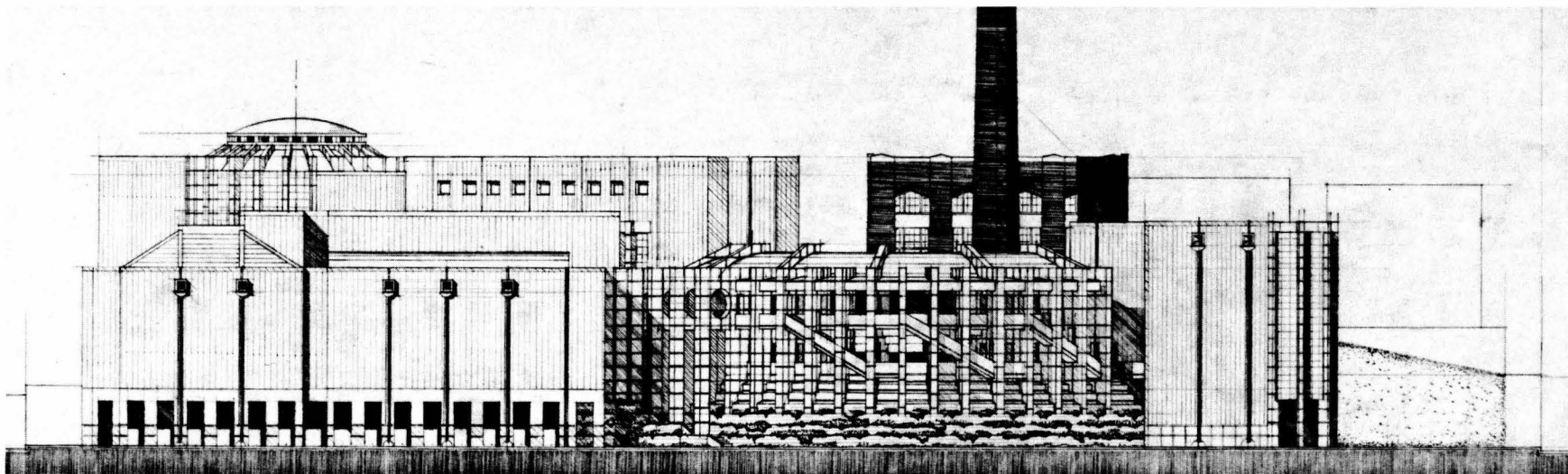
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Floor Plan
Level 5





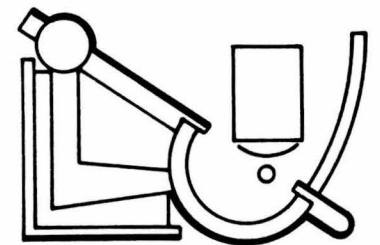
North Elevation
South Elevation



North:
The interior walkway crosses the site diagonally. This facade faces the half part where the old building is located. It can be appreciated completely only when one is in this area (as seen in the drawing). When walking on the street, this facade will be the backdrop for the old structure which will be on the foreground.

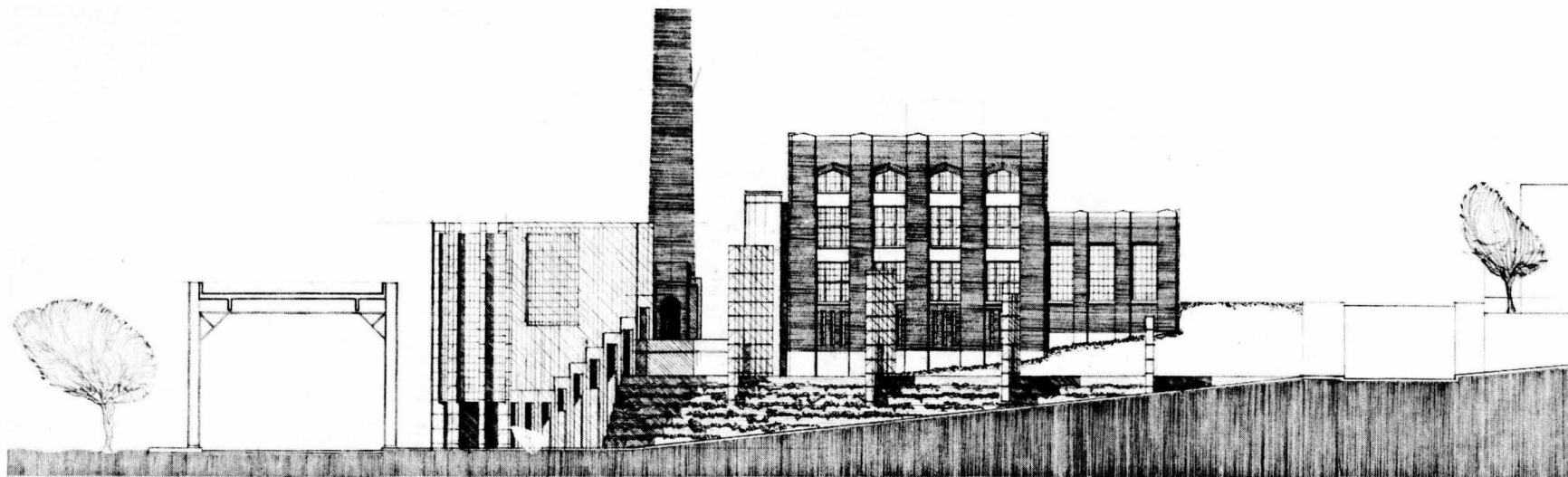
South:
This is the elevation that faces the river. The structure of the amphitheater constitutes a break in the facade, opening the building to the park and the river.

Bottom:
Partial view of the model.

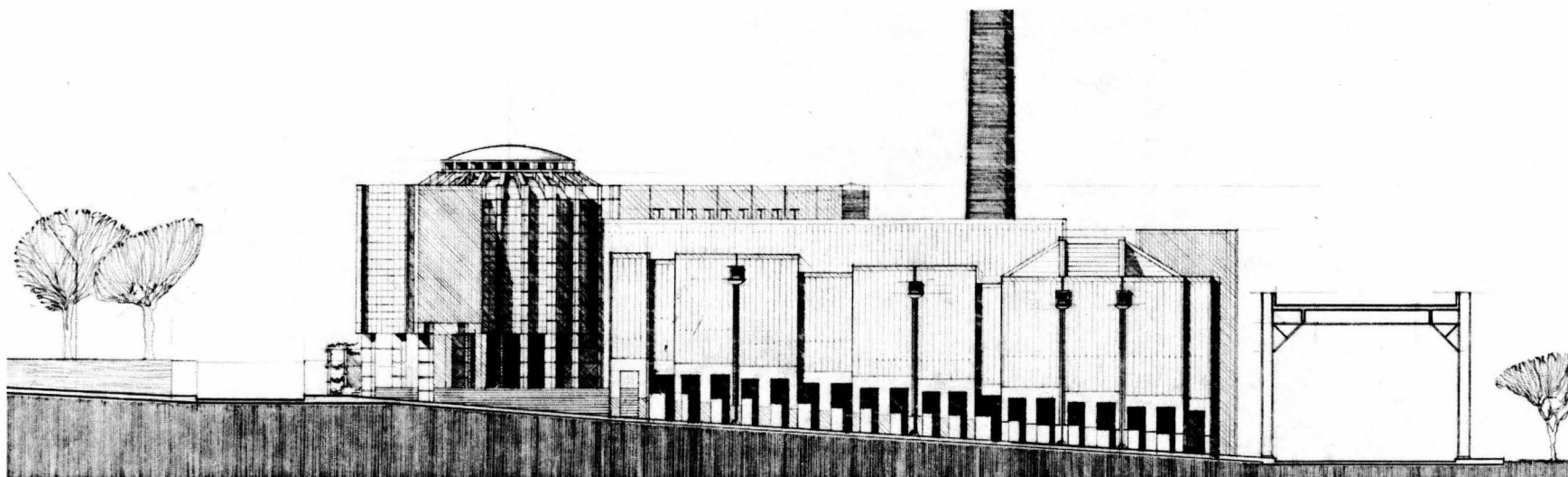


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Elevations



East Elevation
West Elevation



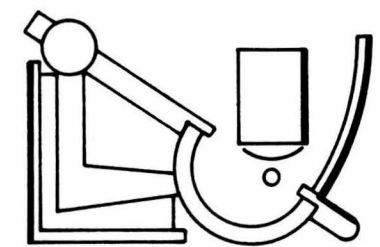
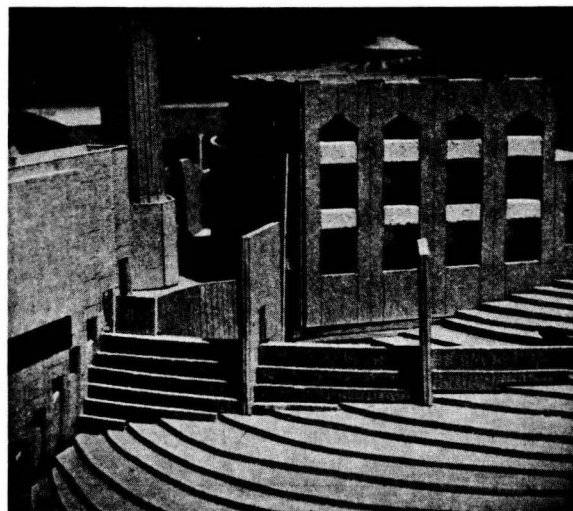
East:
This side of the site belongs to the old building. The landscape treatment serves as a base for the old structure, allowing its presence to be appreciated without interruptions.

On the right is the visiting professor's building.

West:
Following the tradition of the town, the west elevation steps down with the slope of the street, corresponding in scale and height with the old houses across Wisconsin avenue.

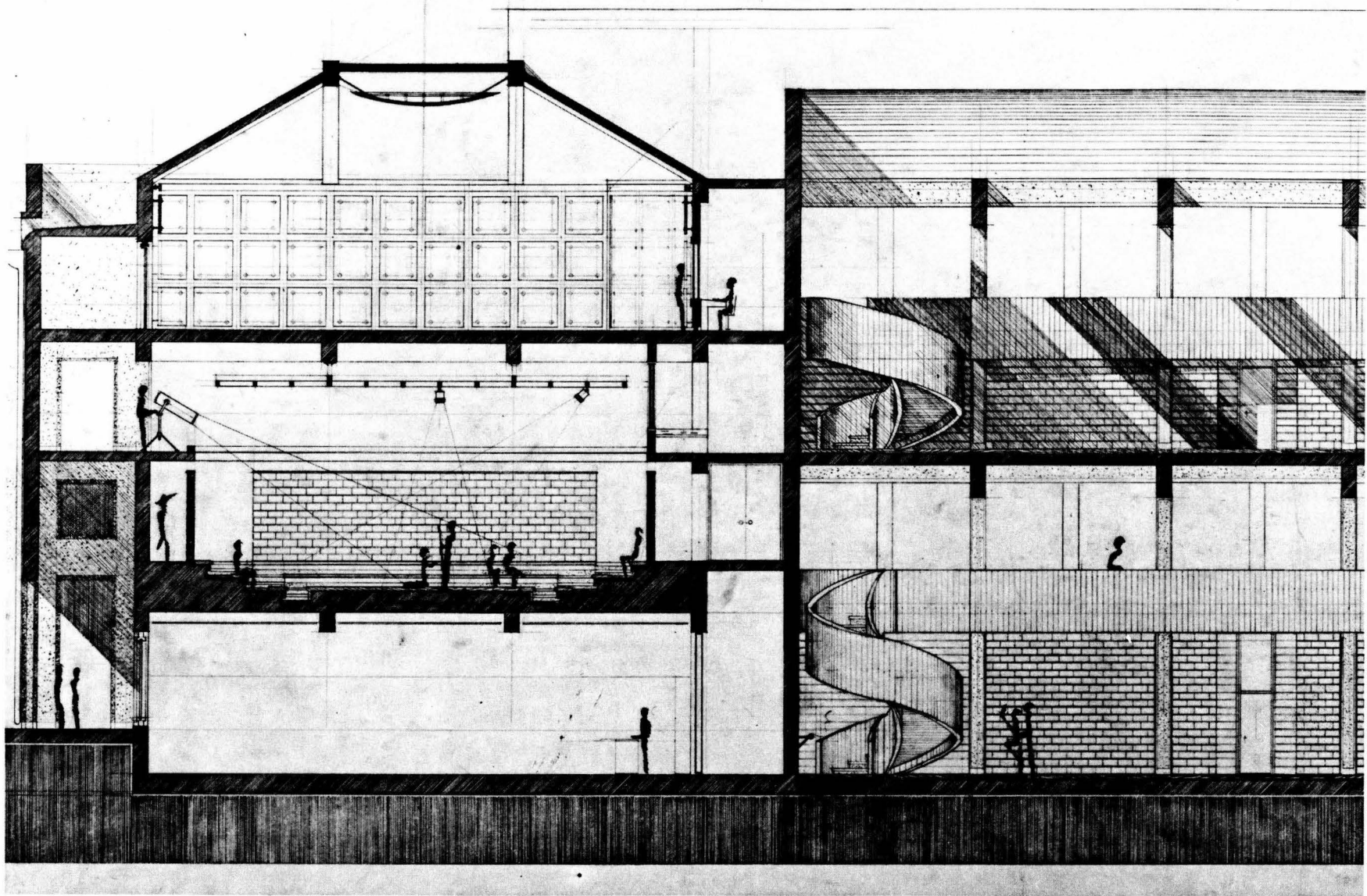
This side of the building offers commercial space behind the gallery as a continuation of Wisconsin avenue's commercial activity.

Bottom:
Partial view of the model.



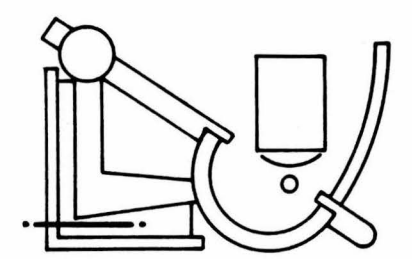
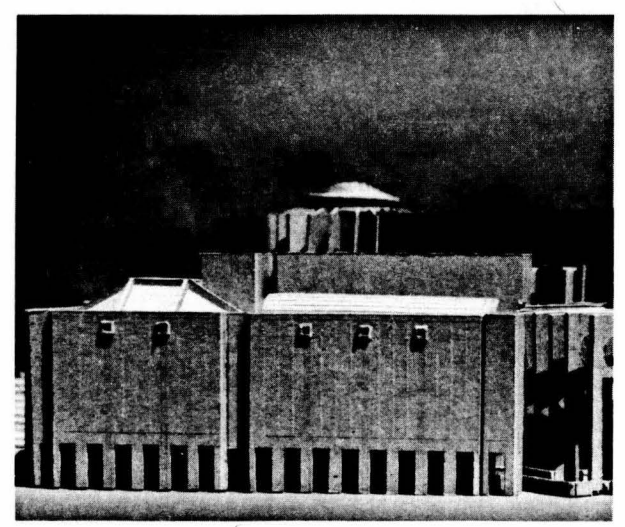
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Elevations



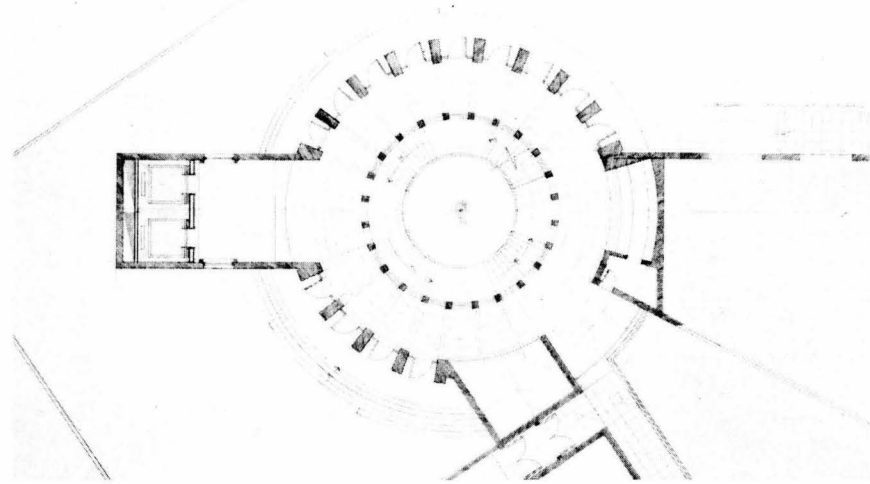
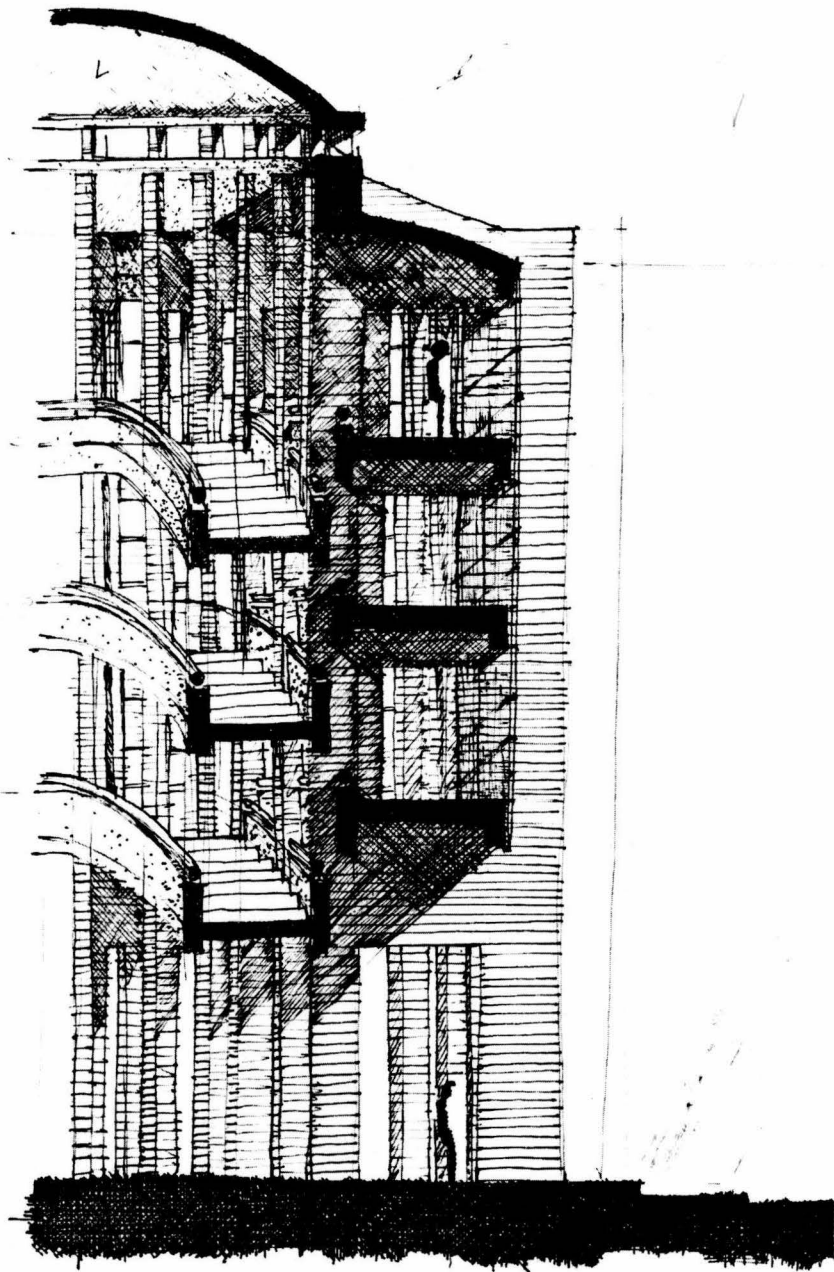
■ ■ This section cuts through the south area of the School, showing the configuration of various classrooms.
 On the left part of the drawing, from top to bottom is the music room, the black box theater, and a large commercial space on the first floor. On the right side of the drawing are the two ballet rooms.

Bottom:
 Partial view of the model.



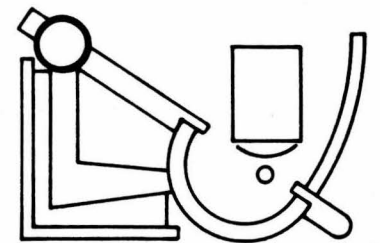
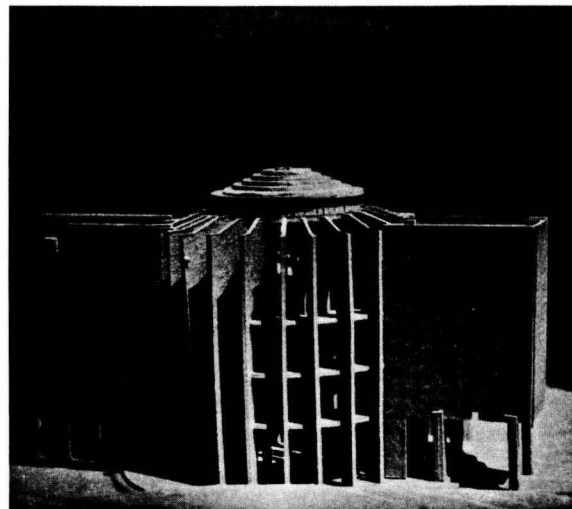
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Section



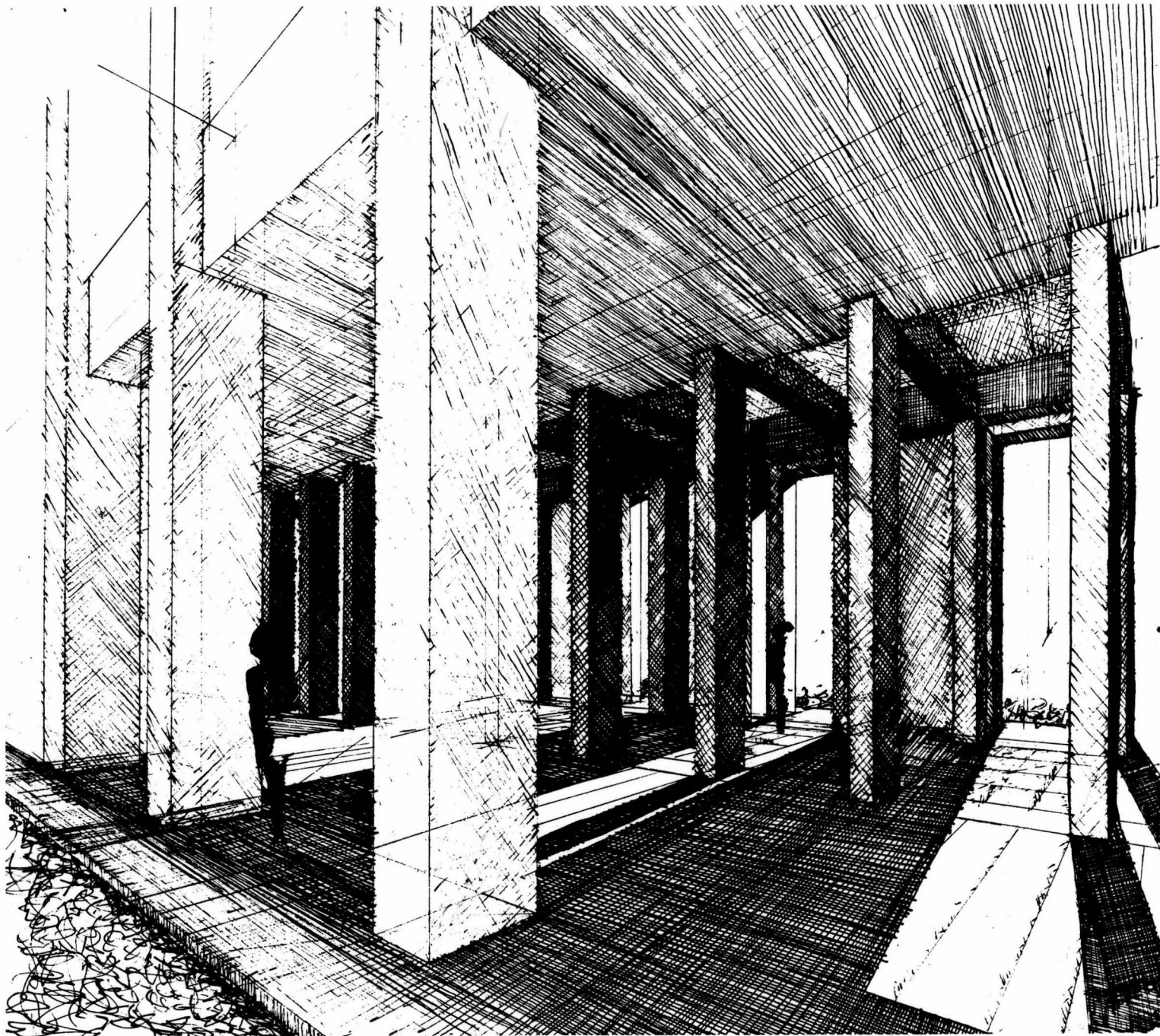
■ It is one of the events along the public walkway. It is a filter formed by radial walls that screen the entrance to the school. The center of the room is covered by a domed roof, and it contains the main stair that connects the three levels of the school.

Left:
 Sketch of section through the entrance element.
 Top right:
 Plan of the entrance at an early stage.
 Bottom:
 Partial view of the model.



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Entrance

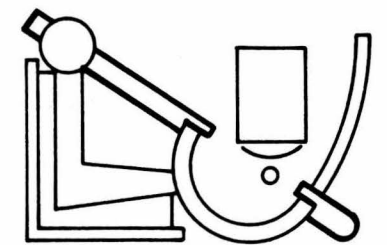
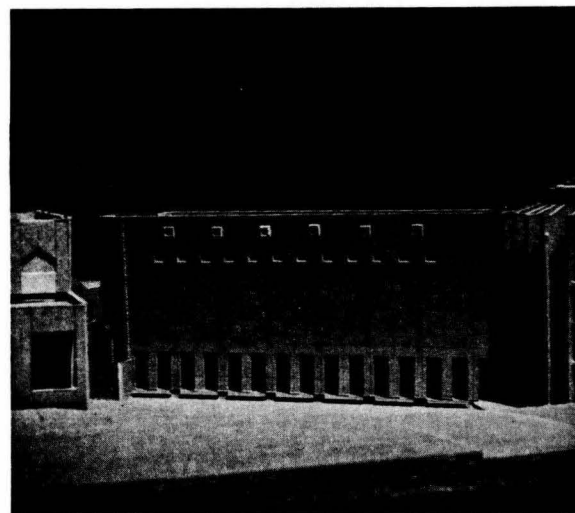
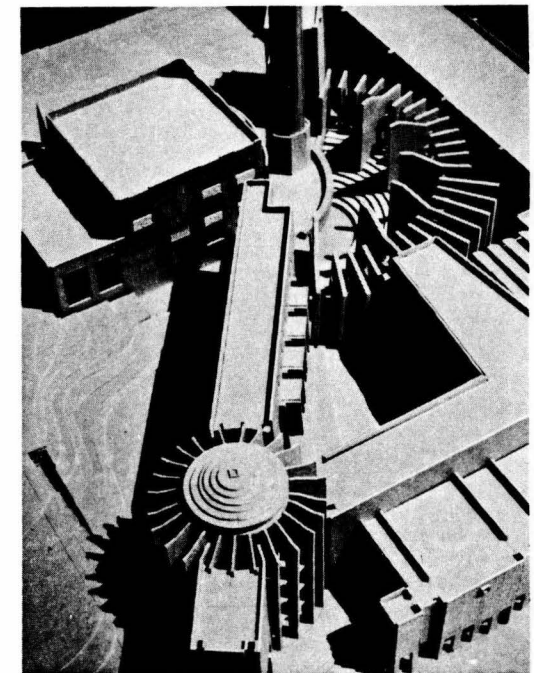


- It is the connection between Wisconsin Avenue and the waterfront area, and also the connection between the main parts of the building (entrance to school, amphitheater, main theater).

It is conceived as two walkways, one for the private use of the school, facing the interior courtyard, and the other one open to the free use of the public, facing the green area that surrounds the old building.

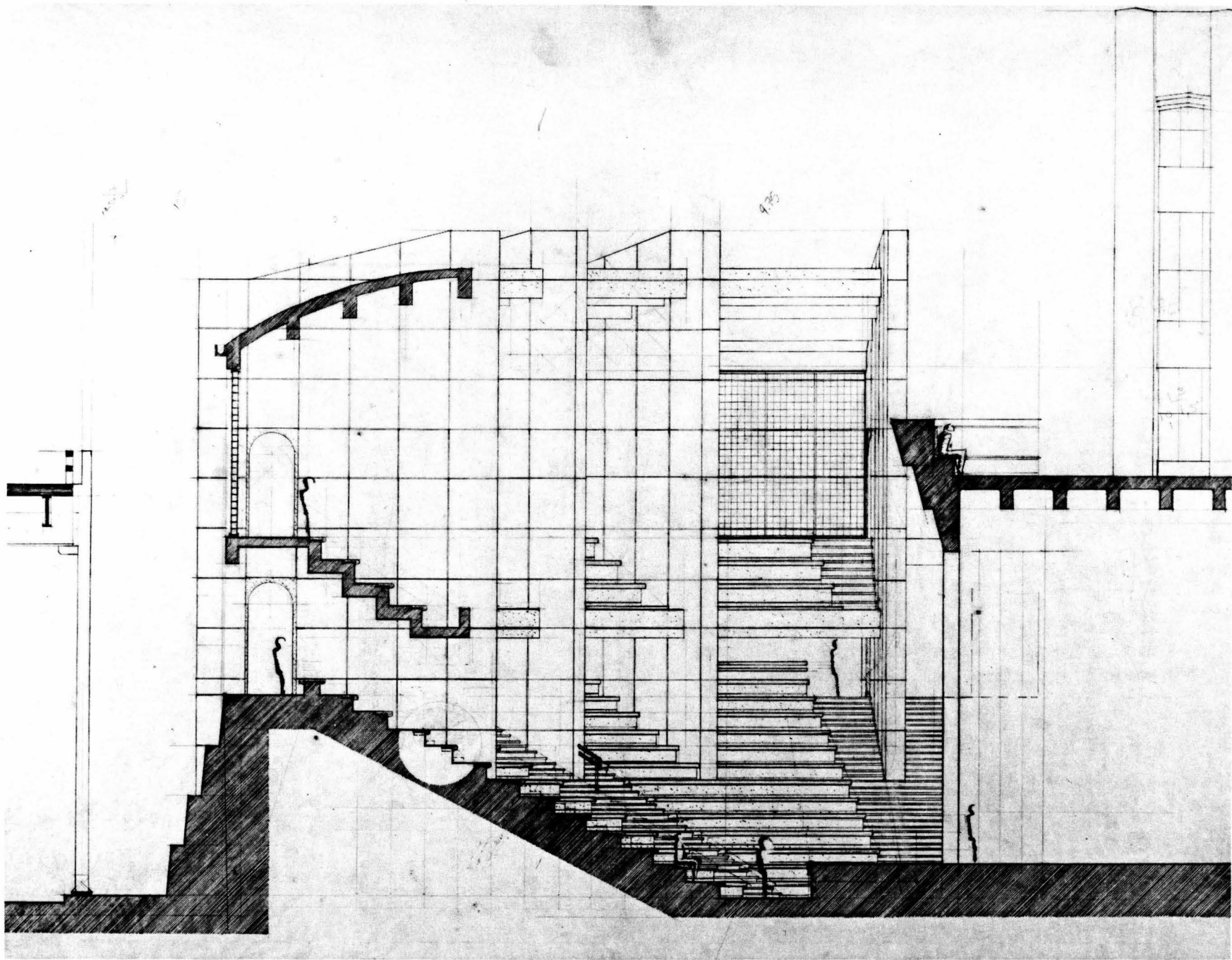
The two walkways are separated by a series of columns between which masonry and glass alternate. The glass will give the opportunity to see inside the school, and the masonry will provide places to sit along the walkway.

Right:
Aerial view of the model.
Bottom:
Partial view of the model.



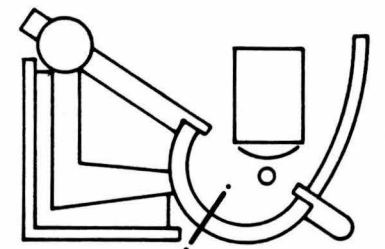
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Walkway



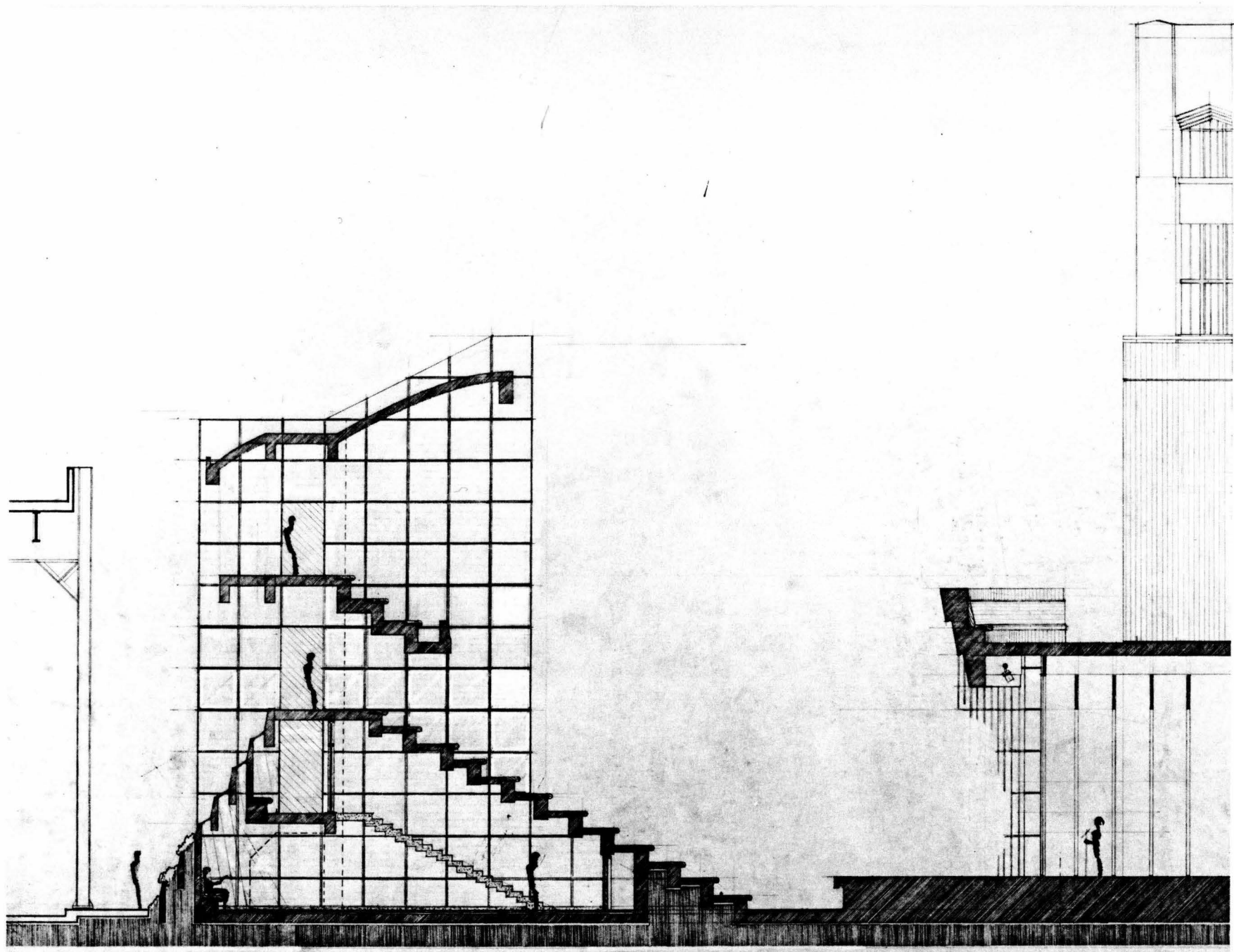
■ Section through the amphitheater showing materials and details.

Bottom:
Partial view of the model.



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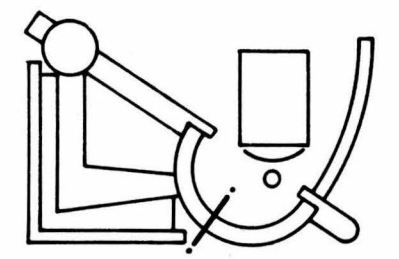
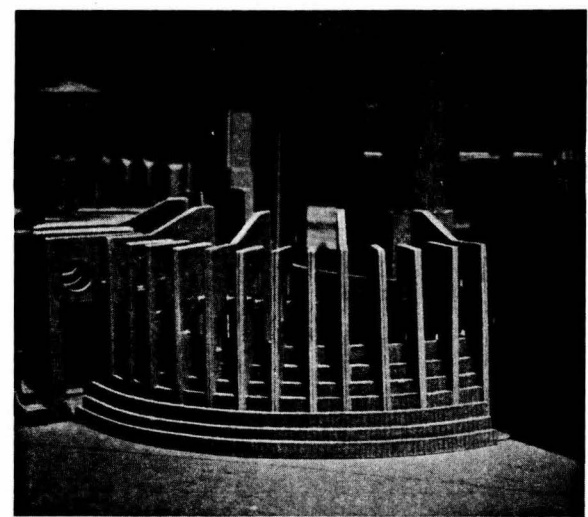
Amphitheater 1



■ ■ These are the modifications to the amphitheater to give space for the green rooms (for rehearsal and warm up before shows), taking advantage of the space underneath the seating area (see floor plan level 2).

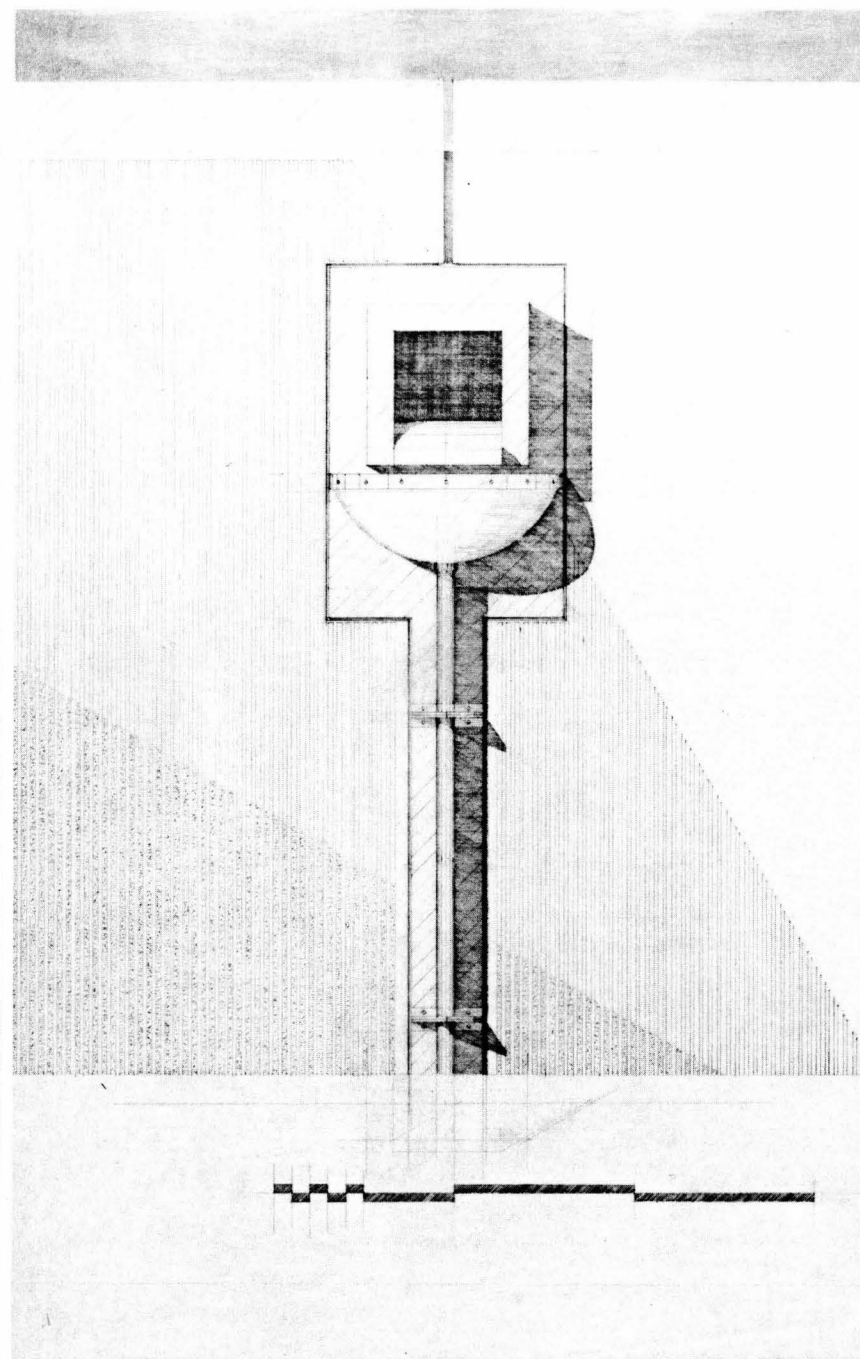
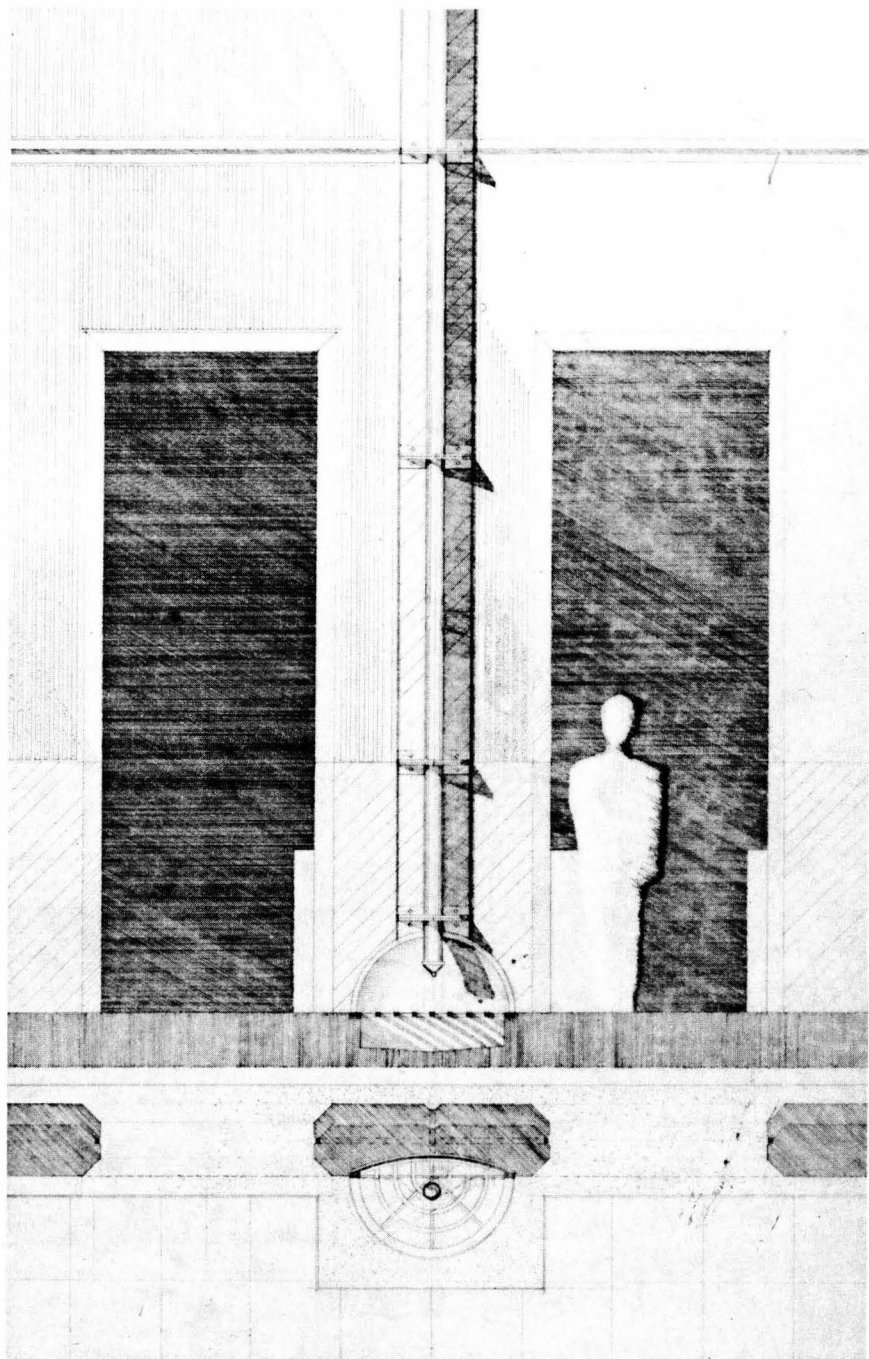
The height of the stage varies in order to avoid excessive stairs along the public walkway.

Bottom:
Partial view of the model.



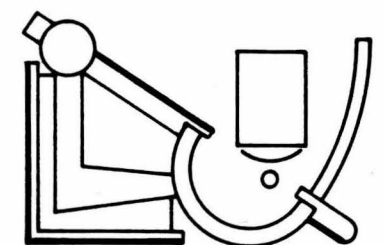
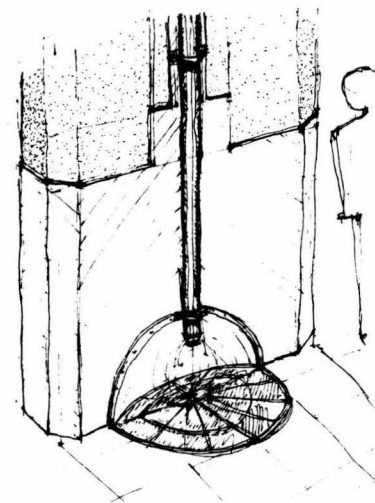
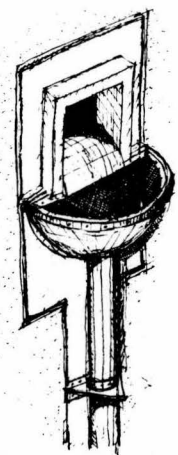
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Amphitheater 2



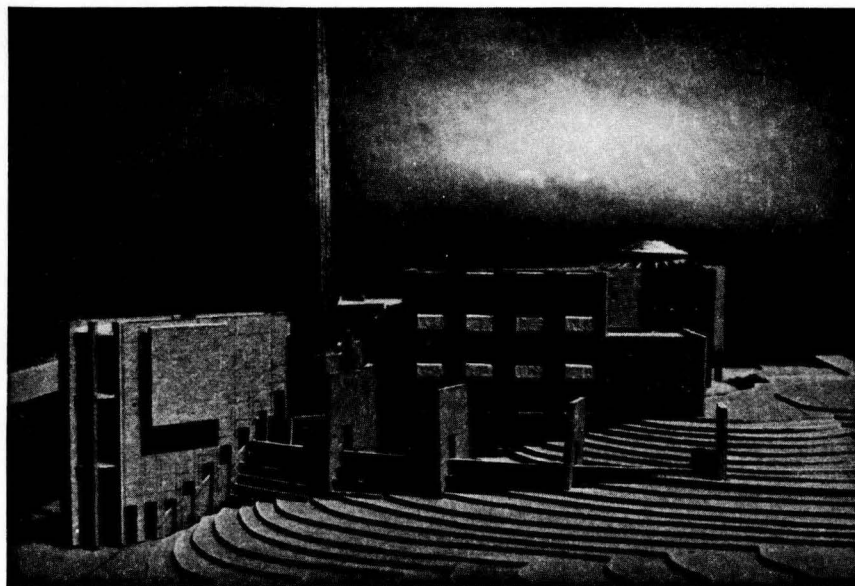
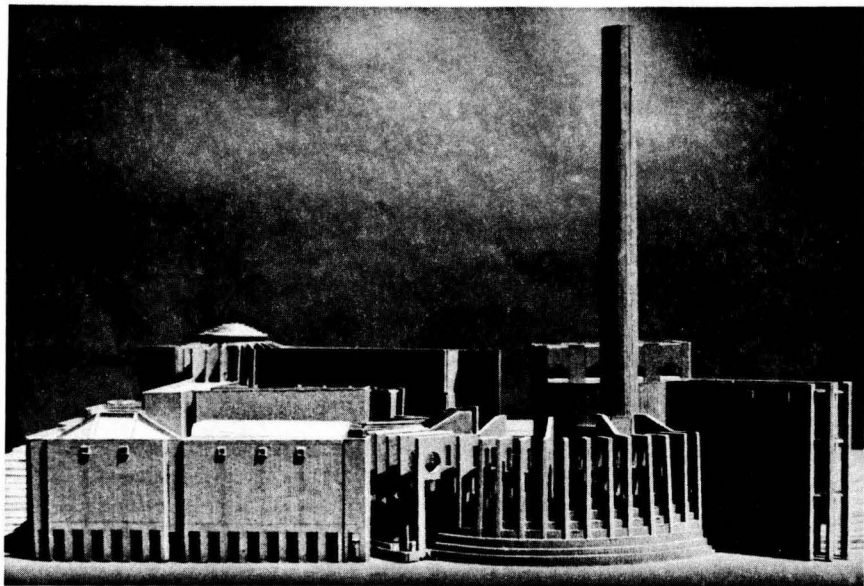
■ The collection of the rain water occurs in a three step process: the water leaves the roof of the building through concrete pieces (left drawing); it travels through metal pipes; and goes into the ground through semicircular drains placed in the sidewalk, right underneath the pipes (right drawing). This way the water can be seen when leaving the building and when going into the ground.

Bottom left:
Sketch of the top part.
Bottom right:
Sketch of the base.

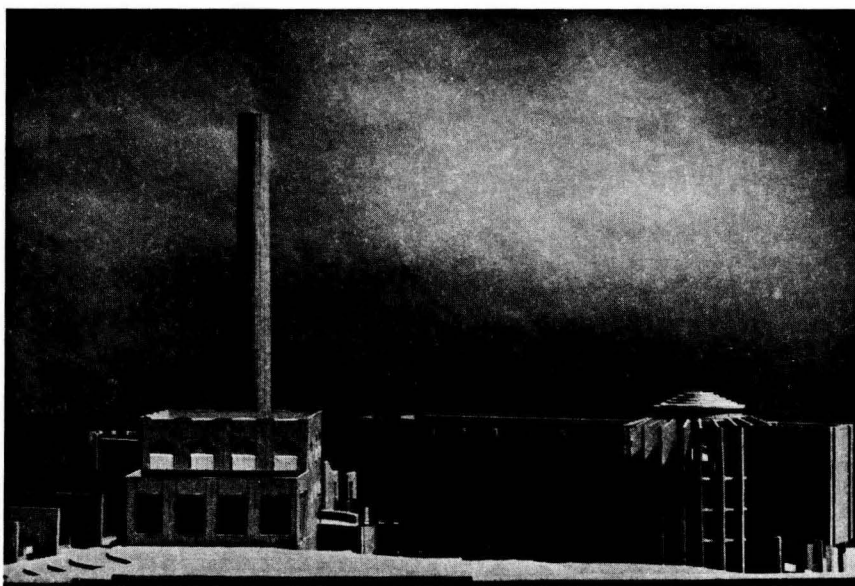
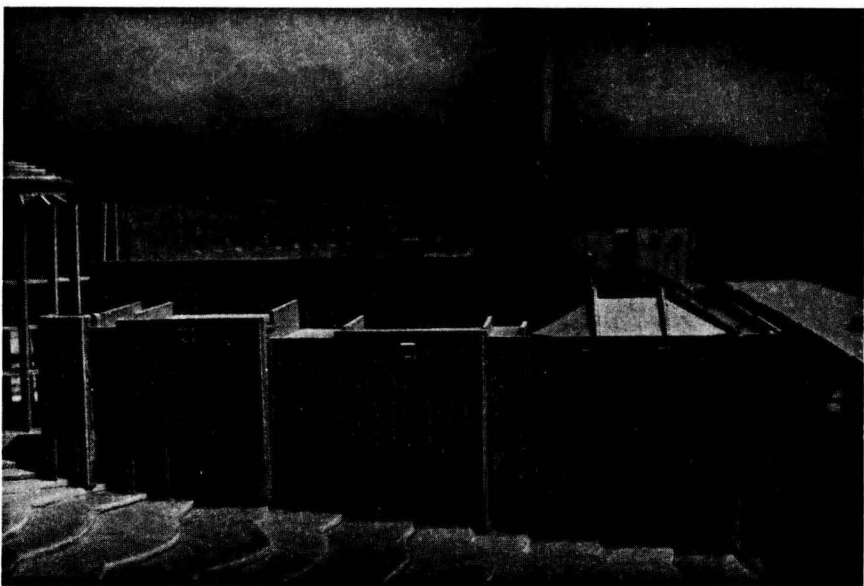


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Gutters

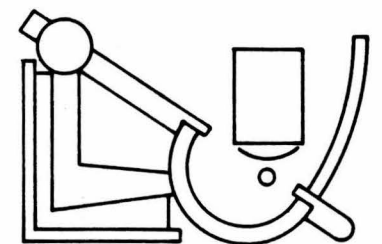
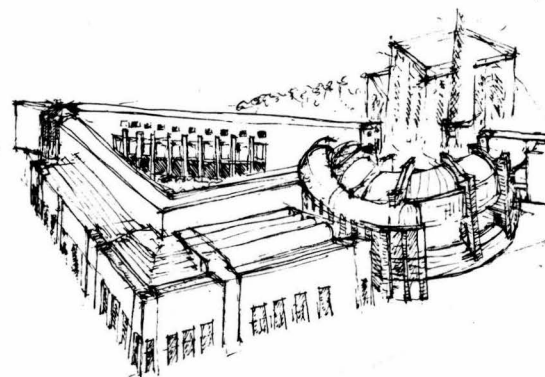


South East
West North



These are the four elevations of the project taken from the final model.

Bottom:
Sketch of the whole complex.



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Final Model

Quotes

(1) FRAMPTON, Kenneth. *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. Thames and Hudson Ltd. London, 1980. Part III, Chapter 3, p. 271.

(2) PORTOGHESI, Paolo. *After Modern Architecture*. Rizzoli. New York, 1982. Chapter 5, p. 61.

(3) PORTOGHESI, Paolo. *After Modern Architecture*. Rizzoli. New York, 1982. Chapter 5, p. 63.

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FORSYTH, Michael. *Auditoria*. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company Ltd. New York, 1987.

FRAMPTON, Kenneth. *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. Thames and Hudson Ltd. London, 1980.

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