



A LIBRARY FOR ALEXANDRIA

by

Annette Kaempfer

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

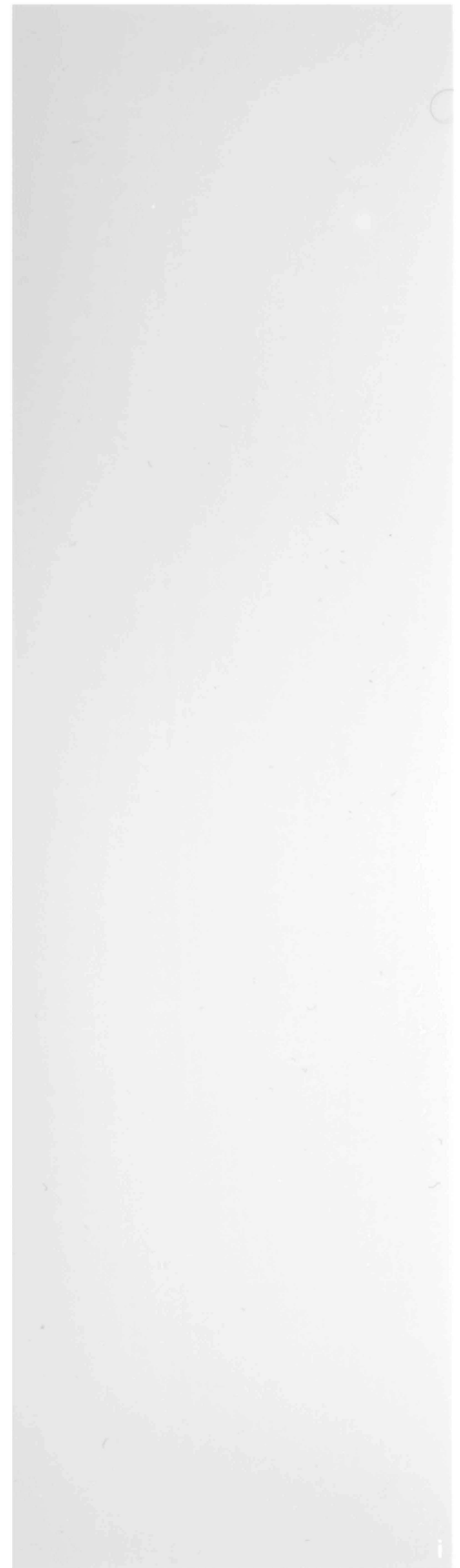
Approved:

William W. Brown, Chairman

Gregory K. Hunt

William U. Galloway

June, 1992
Blacksburg, Virginia
USA



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Comittee Chairman: William W. Brown
School of Architecture

(ABSTRACT)

A library is a building through which a town presents its public identity. The local library is not only a repository of information, but also of the town's unique cultural messages and values.

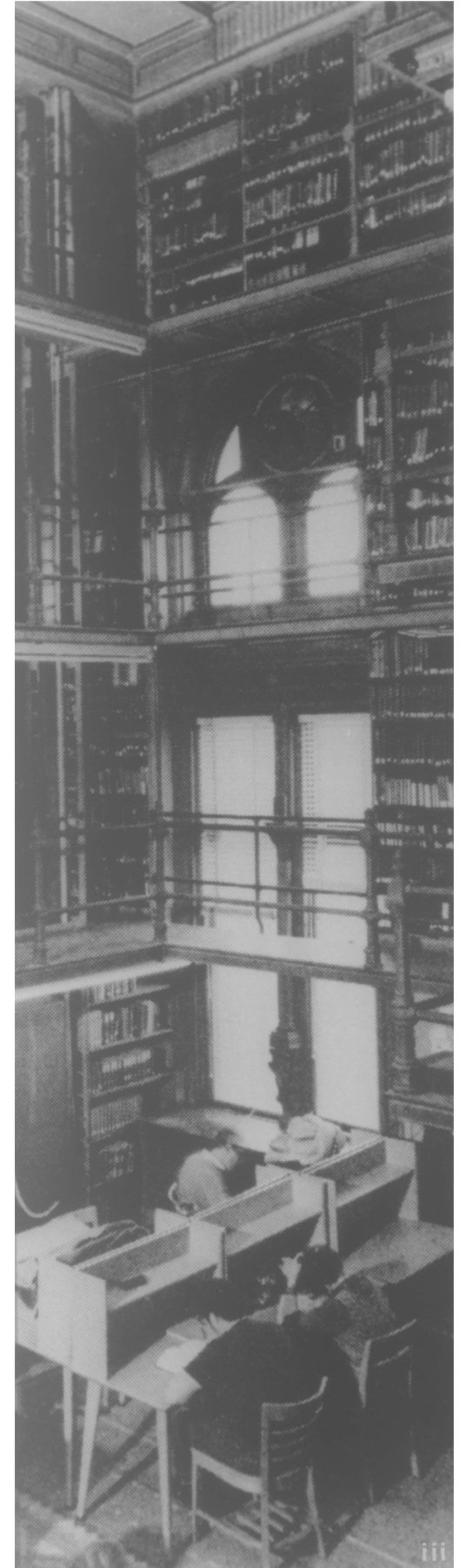
The Thesis Search:

How to make a building that emphasizes the architectonic qualities of Old Town?
How to integrate a large and complex public building into the fabric of an intimately scaled town?

... "I began my life as I shall no doubt end it: amidst books. In my grandfather's study there were books everywhere. It was forbidden to dust them, except once a year, before the beginning of the October term. Though I did not yet know how to read, I already revered those standing stones: upright or leaning over, close together like bricks on the book-shelves or spaced out nobly in lanes of menhirs. I felt that our family's prosperity depended on them. They all looked alike. I disported myself in a tiny sanctuary, surrounded by ancient, heavy-set monuments which had seen me into the world, which would see me out of it, and whose permanence guaranteed me a future as calm as the past. I would touch them secretly to honor my hands with their dust, but I did not quite know what to do with them, and I was a daily witness of ceremonies whose meaning escaped me: my grandfather - who was usually so clumsy that my grandmother buttoned his gloves for him - handled those cultural objects with the dexterity of an officiant. Hundreds of times I saw him get up from his chair with an absent-minded look, walk around his table, cross the room in two strides, take down a volume without hesitating, without giving himself time to choose, leaf through it with a combined movement of his thumb and forefinger as he walked back to his chair, then, as soon as was seated, open it sharply "to the right page," making it creak like a shoe. At times, I would draw near to observe those boxes which slit open like oysters, and I would see the nudity of their inner organs, pale, fusty leaves, slightly bloated, covered with black veinlets, which drank ink and smelled of mushrooms."...

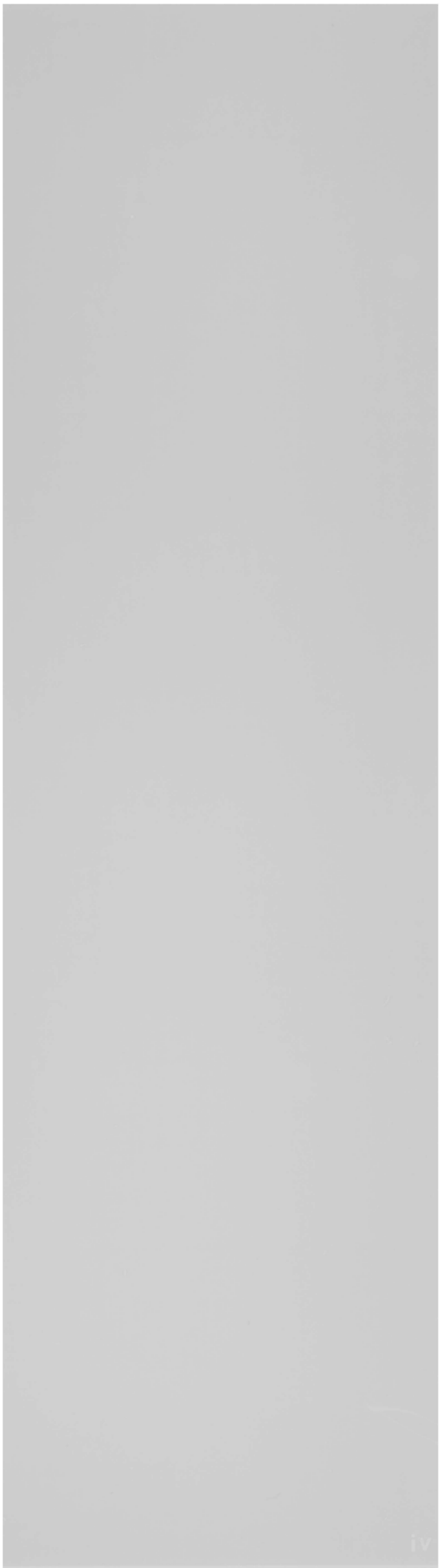
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translated by:
B. FRECHTMANN
George Braziller, Inc.
New York, 1964

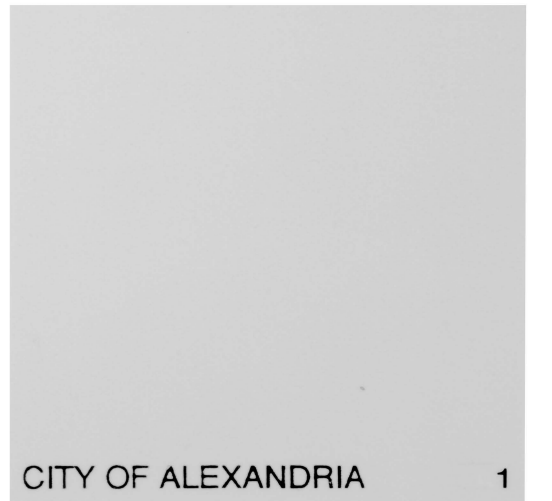
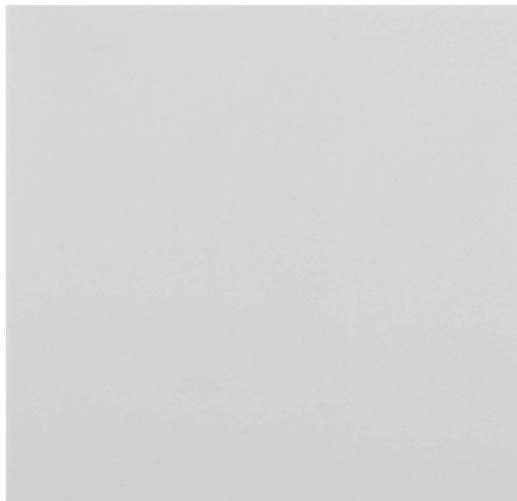
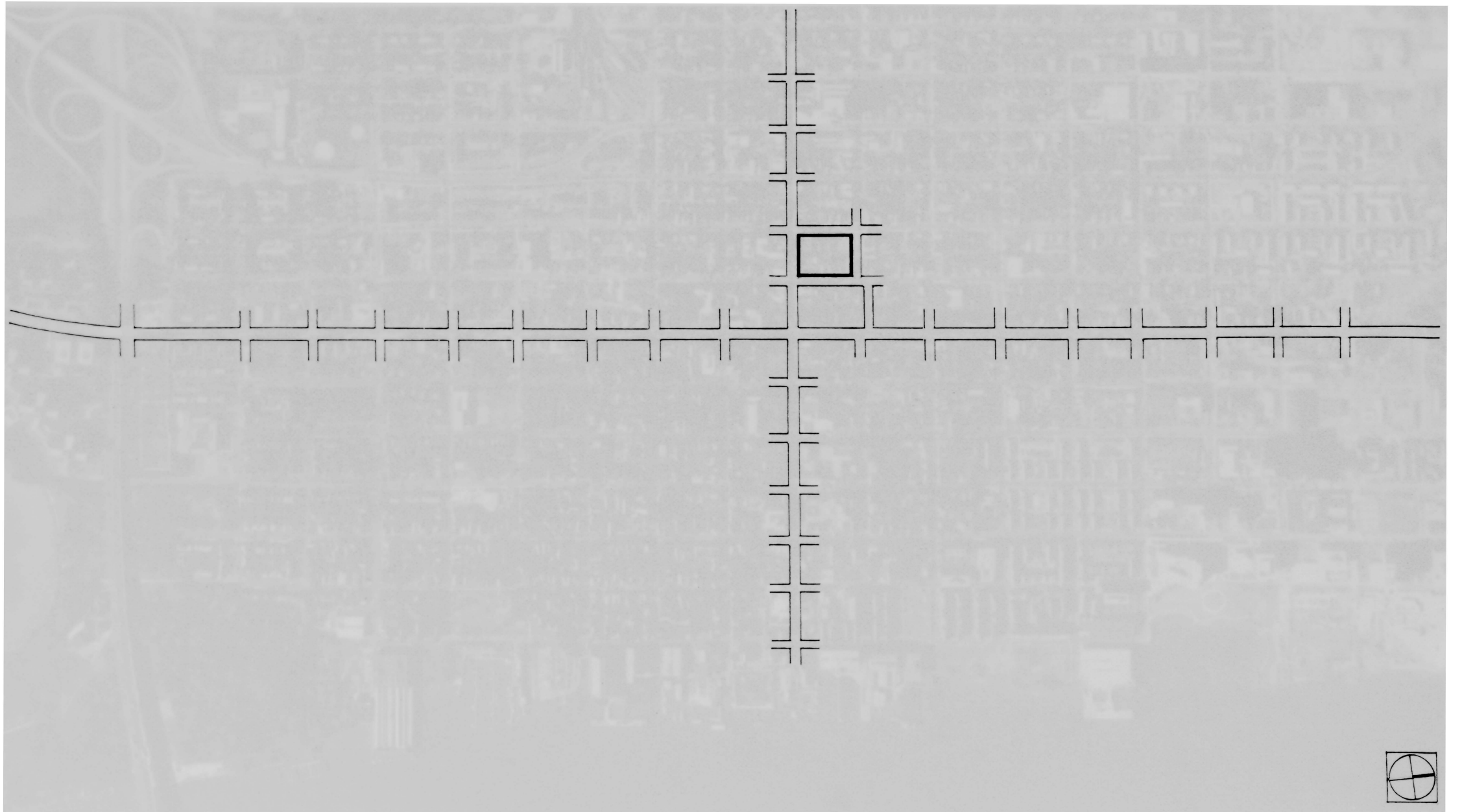


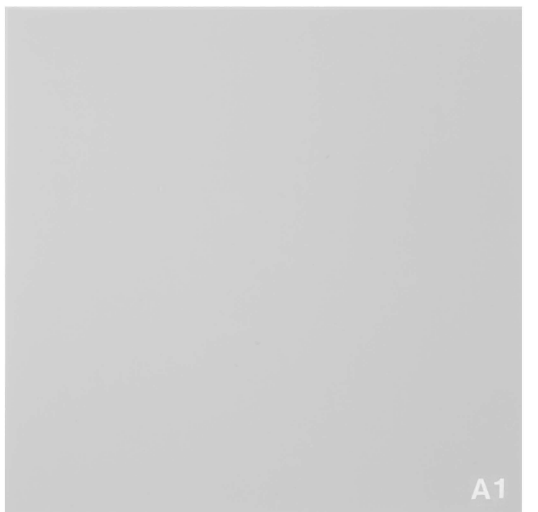
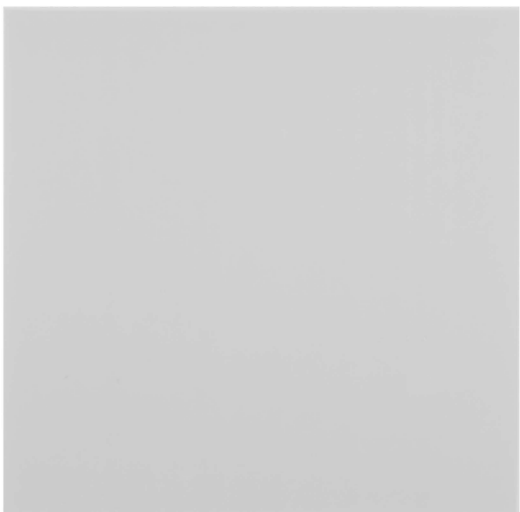
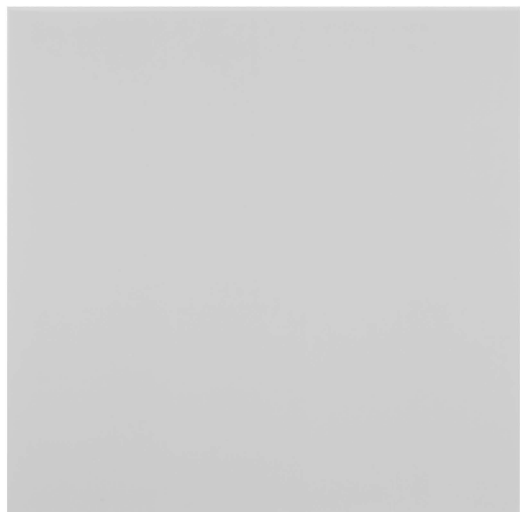
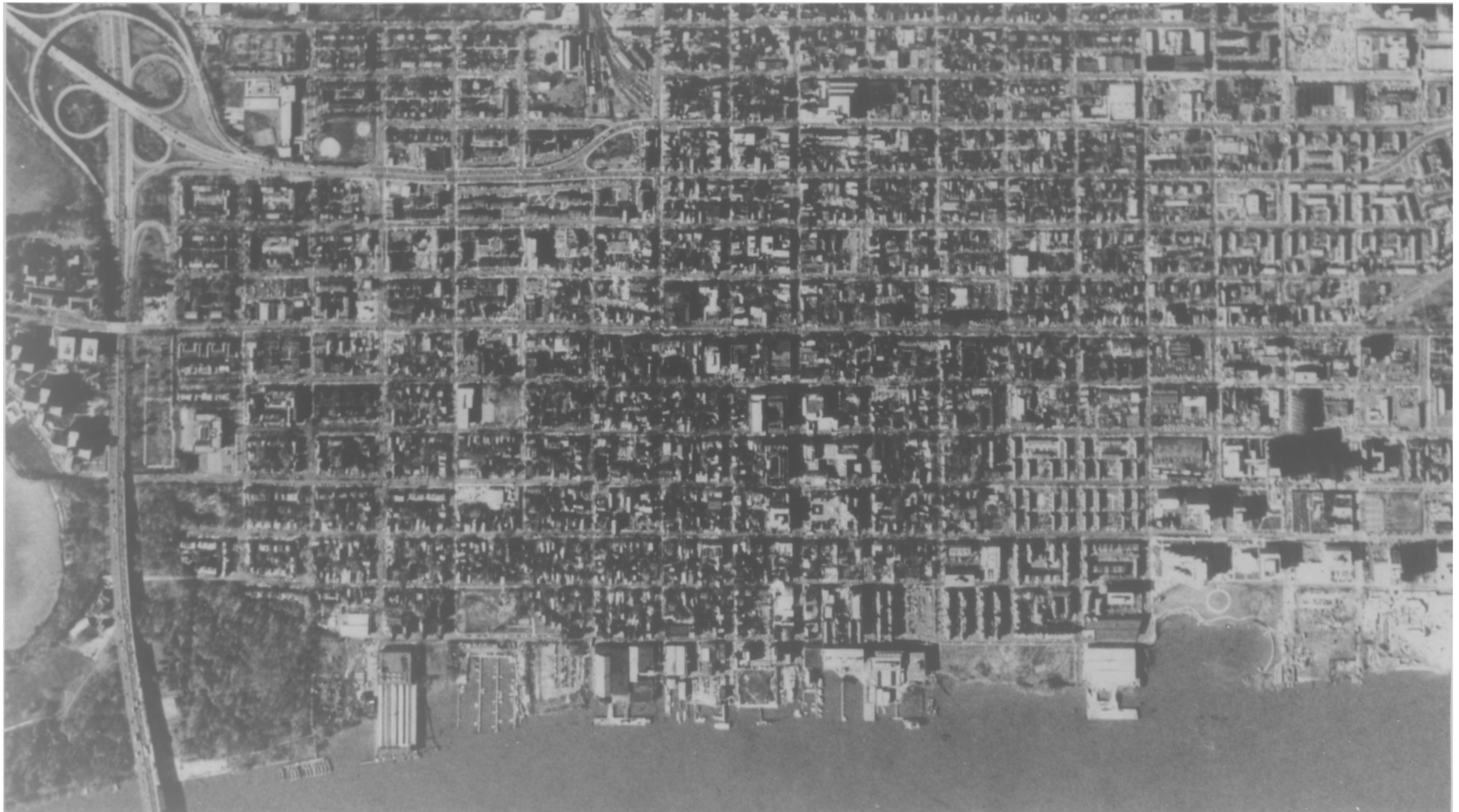


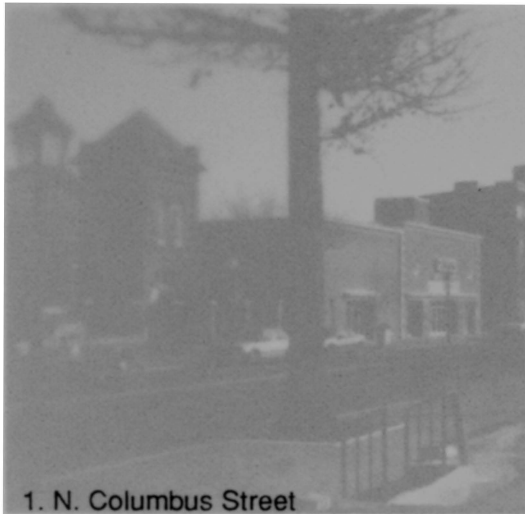


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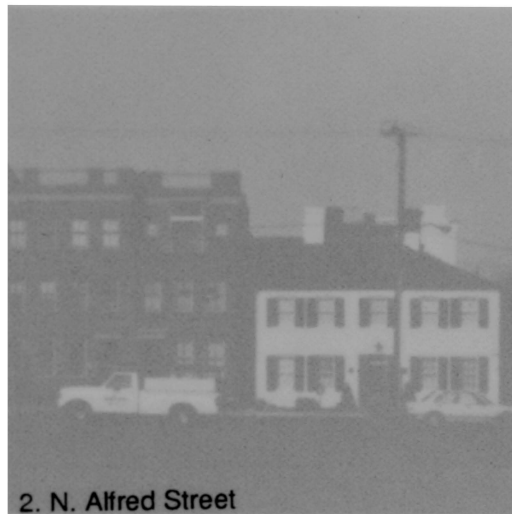




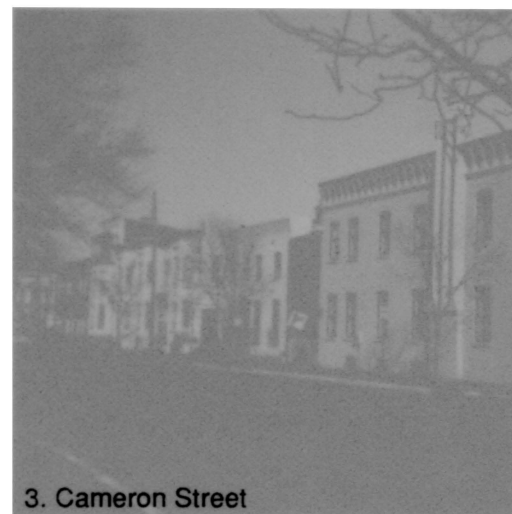




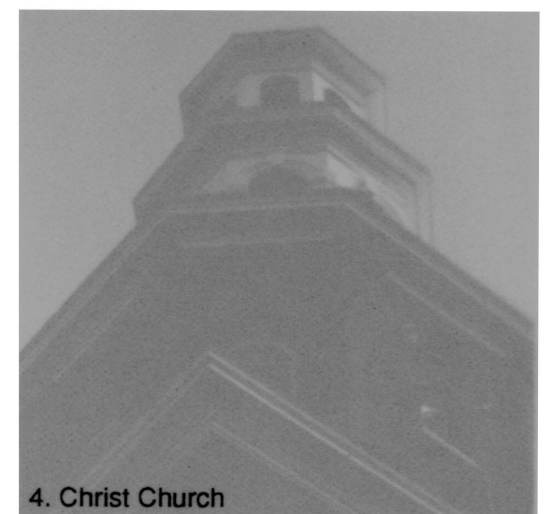
1. N. Columbus Street



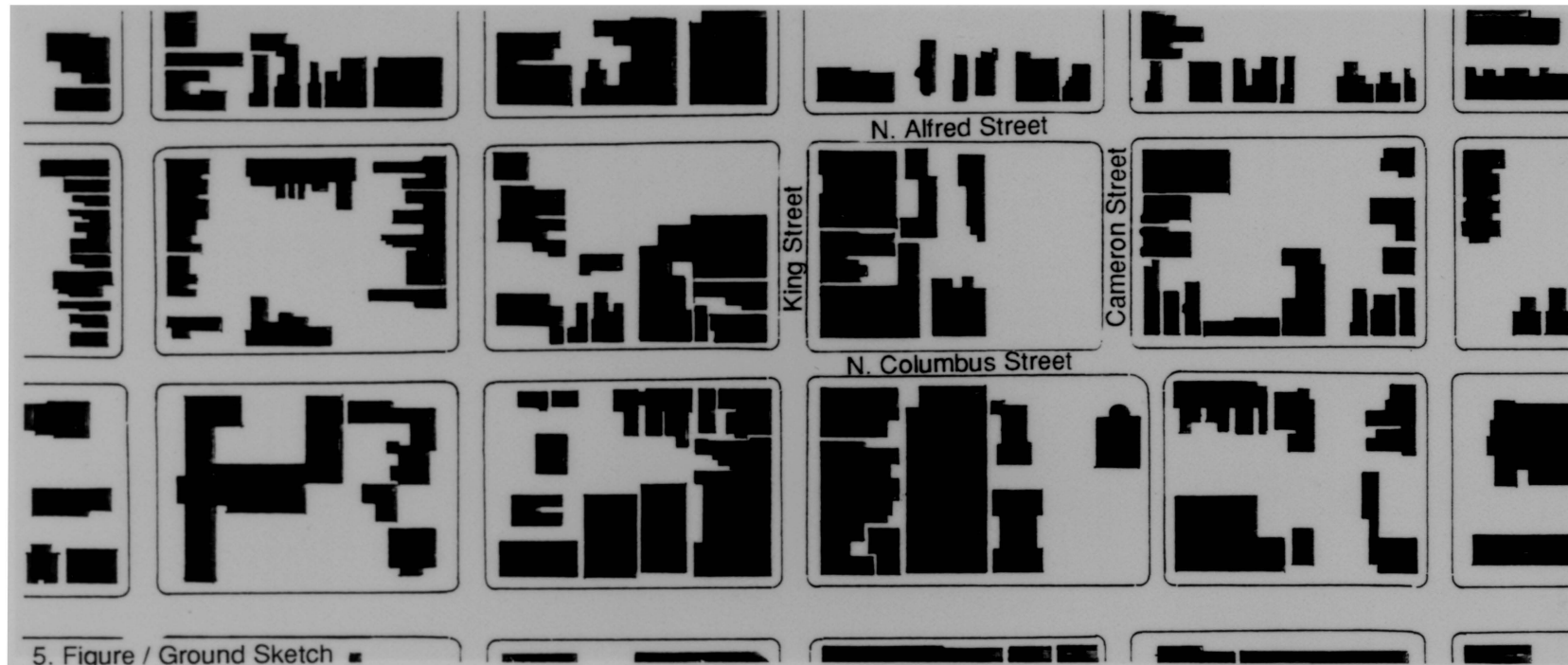
2. N. Alfred Street



3. Cameron Street

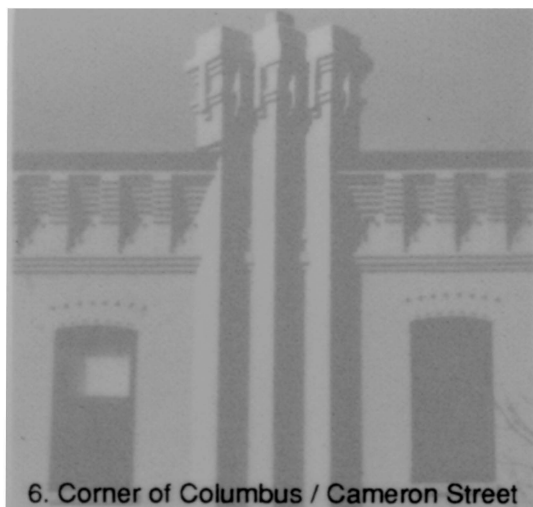


4. Christ Church



5. Figure / Ground Sketch

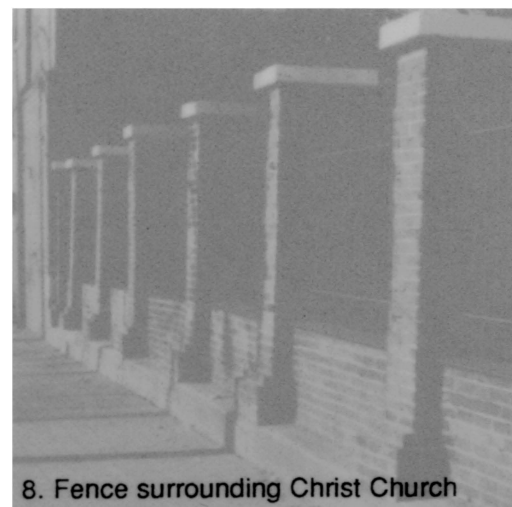
The project, a library for Alexandria, is located in the 'heart' of Old Town, on Cameron Street between North Alfred and North Columbus Streets. This large lot, west of Christ Church, occupies about half of the city block. Historically it was the site of a sugar refinery. Currently the lot is used for parking. The regular grid of the city is slightly shifted, at this site, in such a way that Cameron Street is on axis with Christ Church. Built from 1767 to 1773, this church is a major landmark and tourist attraction for Alexandria. For the most part, the buildings on Cameron Street, as well as on Alfred Street, are residential. South of the church there is a community meeting house and, next to it, a warehouse. The dense city fabric surrounding the site is characteristic for Old Town. Narrow "gaps" separate some of the row houses and allow views into the interiors of the blocks. The common material is brick, often delicately detailed.



6. Corner of Columbus / Cameron Street

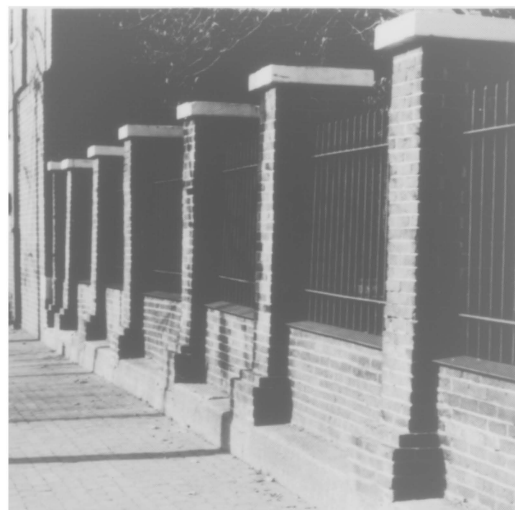
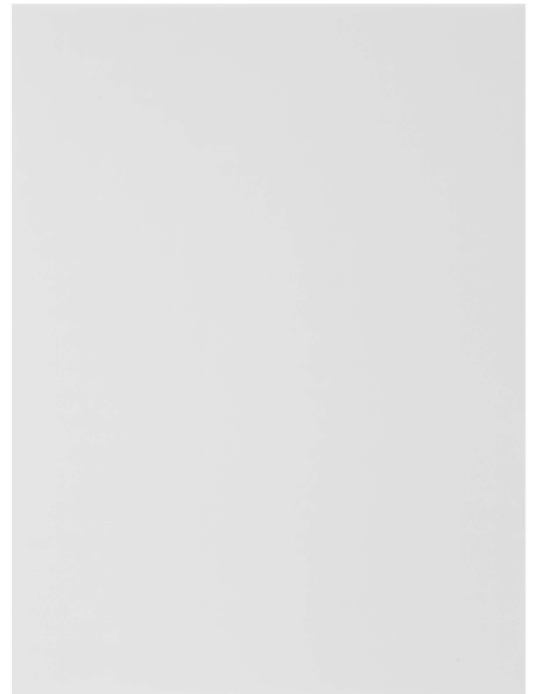
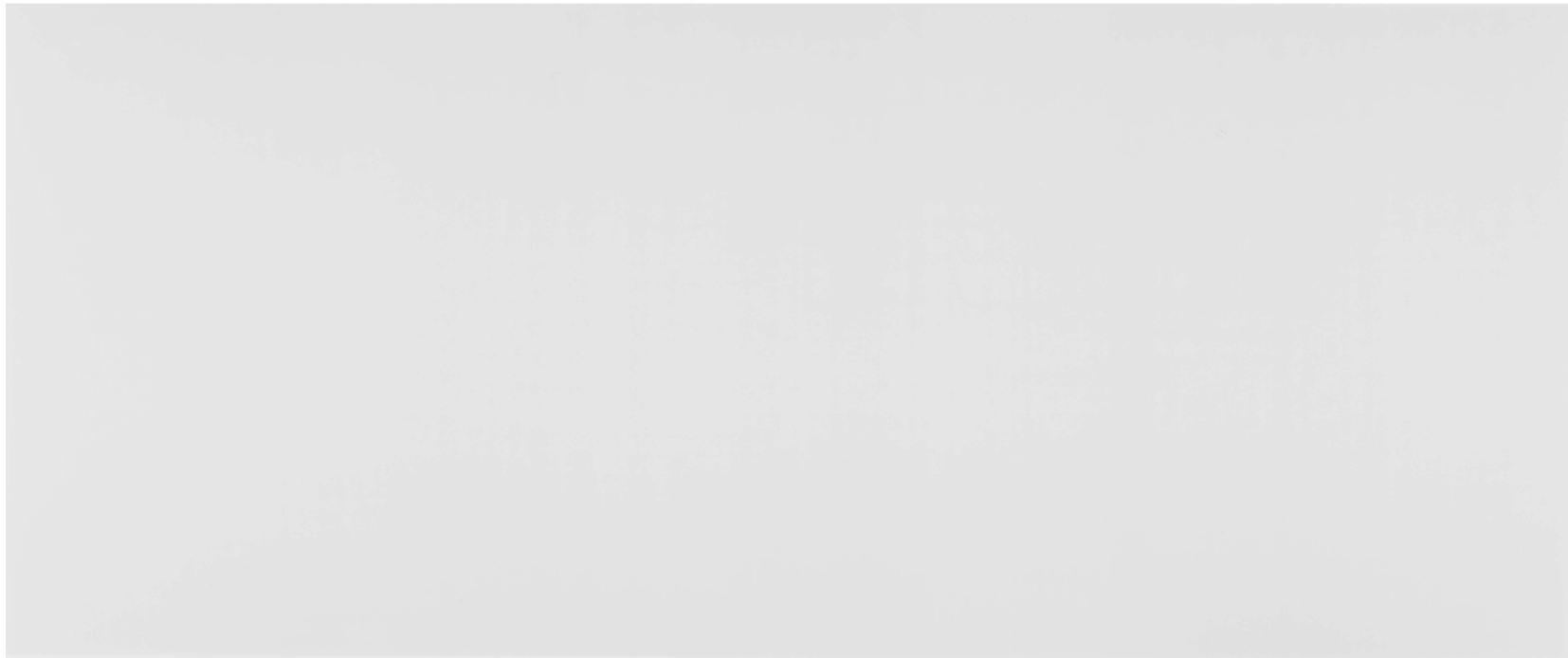
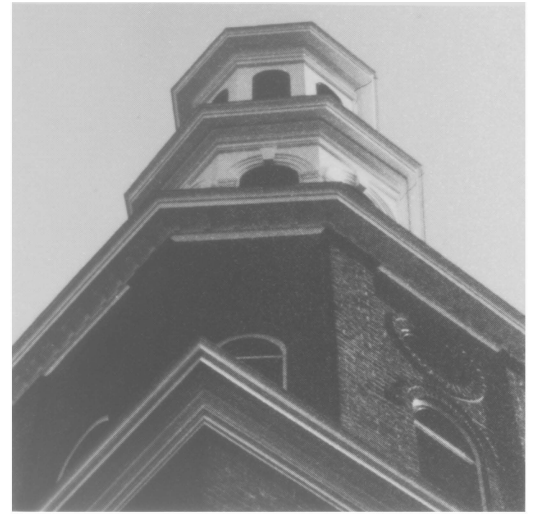


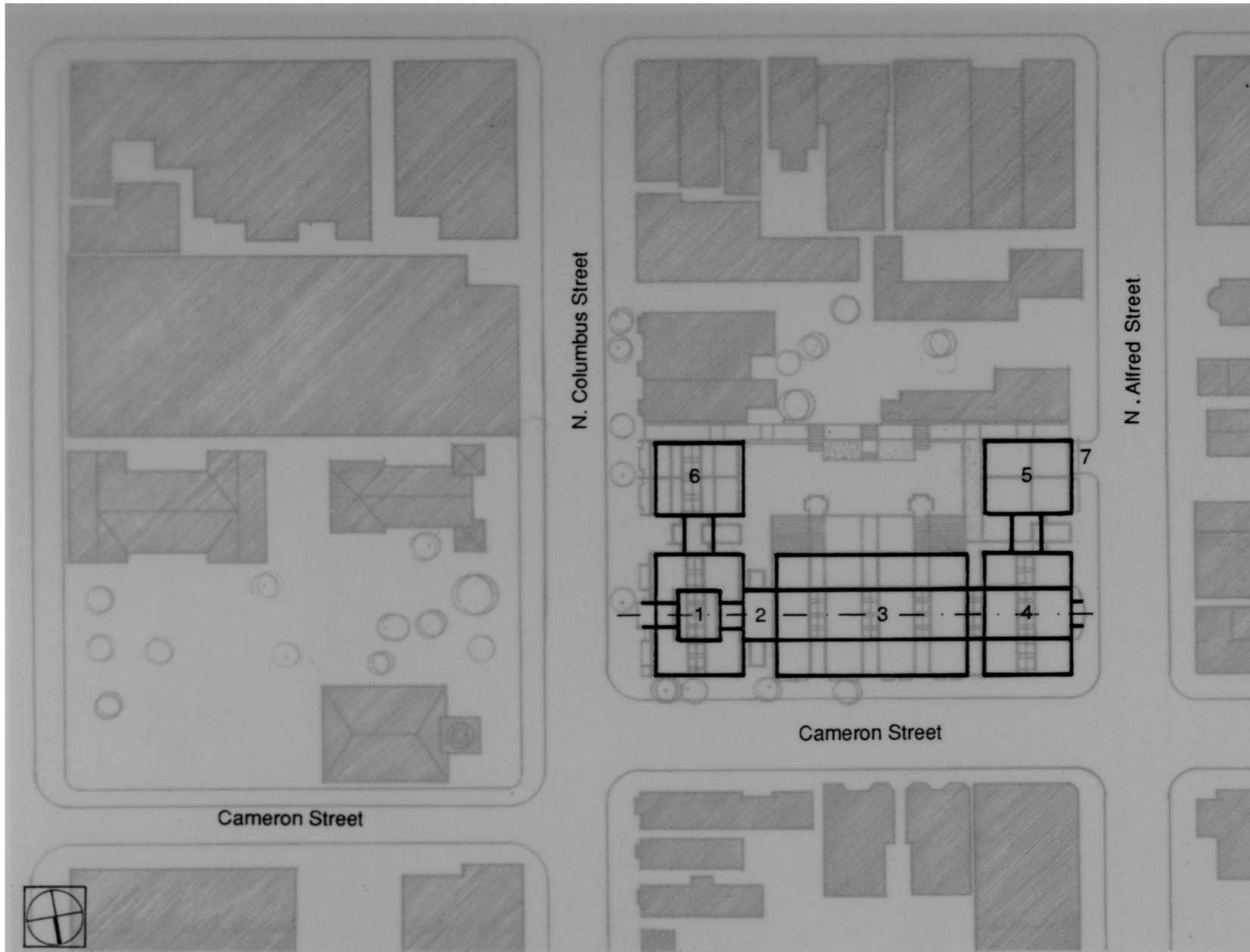
7. "Gap" on Cameron Street



8. Fence surrounding Christ Church







Old Town, with its brick walls, alleys and view connections through the blocks, is a source of inspiration for this design. The project creates a design for a large building, an institution for the town, in a small scale environment. Emphasizing the architectonic qualities of Old Town, while considering the technical and urban functions of a library, was central to the search.

From the beginning I tried to break down the scale of the library by introducing an a-b-a-b rhythm of the building volumes. A main idea of the design was to create an "Alley of the Books." There is a view connection through the whole building and this axis organizes the major spaces. The organizing scheme for the library is quite simple:

First there is an "active zone" which contains an entrance hall (Information, Checkout etc.) and a children's library on the upper levels. [1]

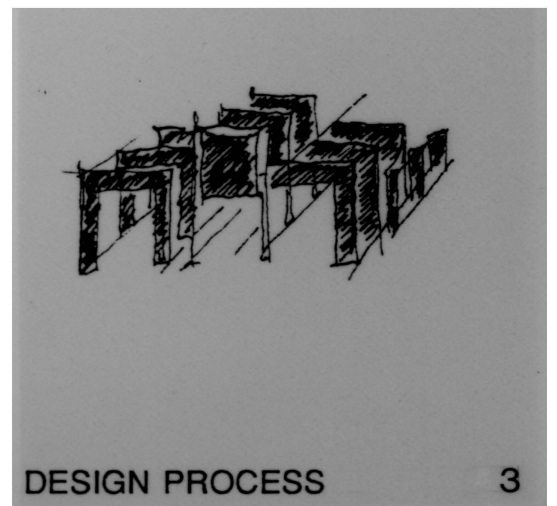
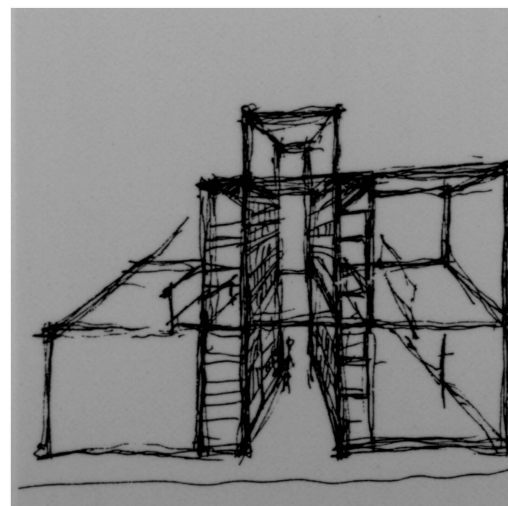
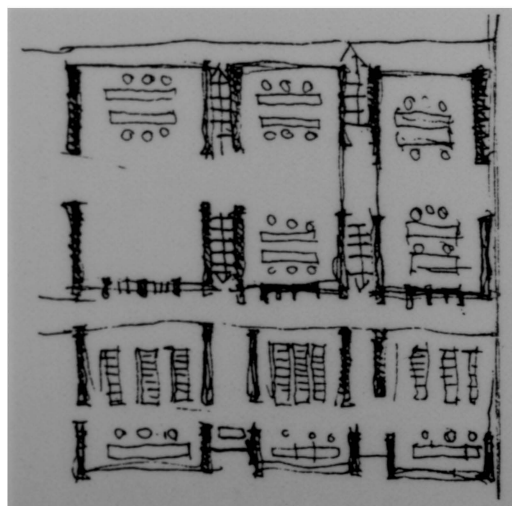
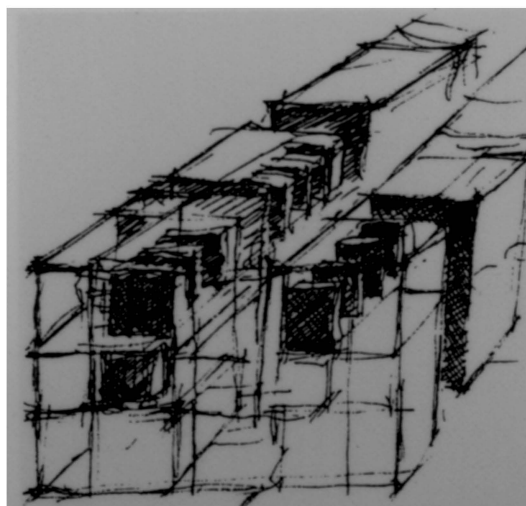
Following a small transitional zone [2], there is a main hall with stacks on both sides, "the Alley of the Books". There are informal reading spaces at the peripheries of this main hall. [3]

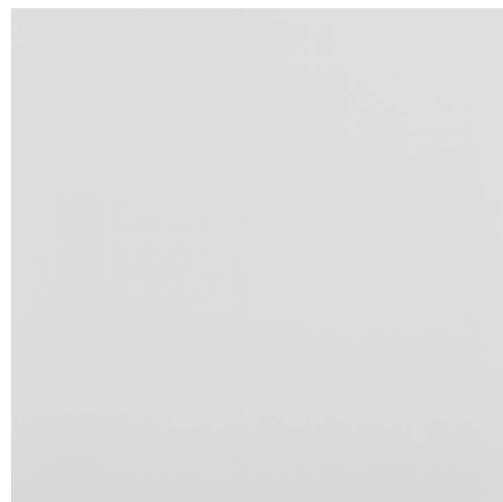
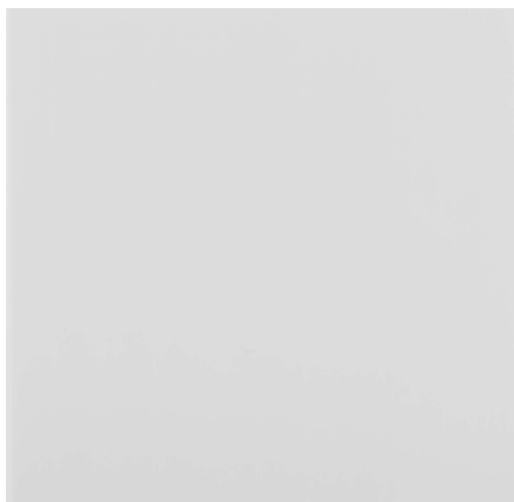
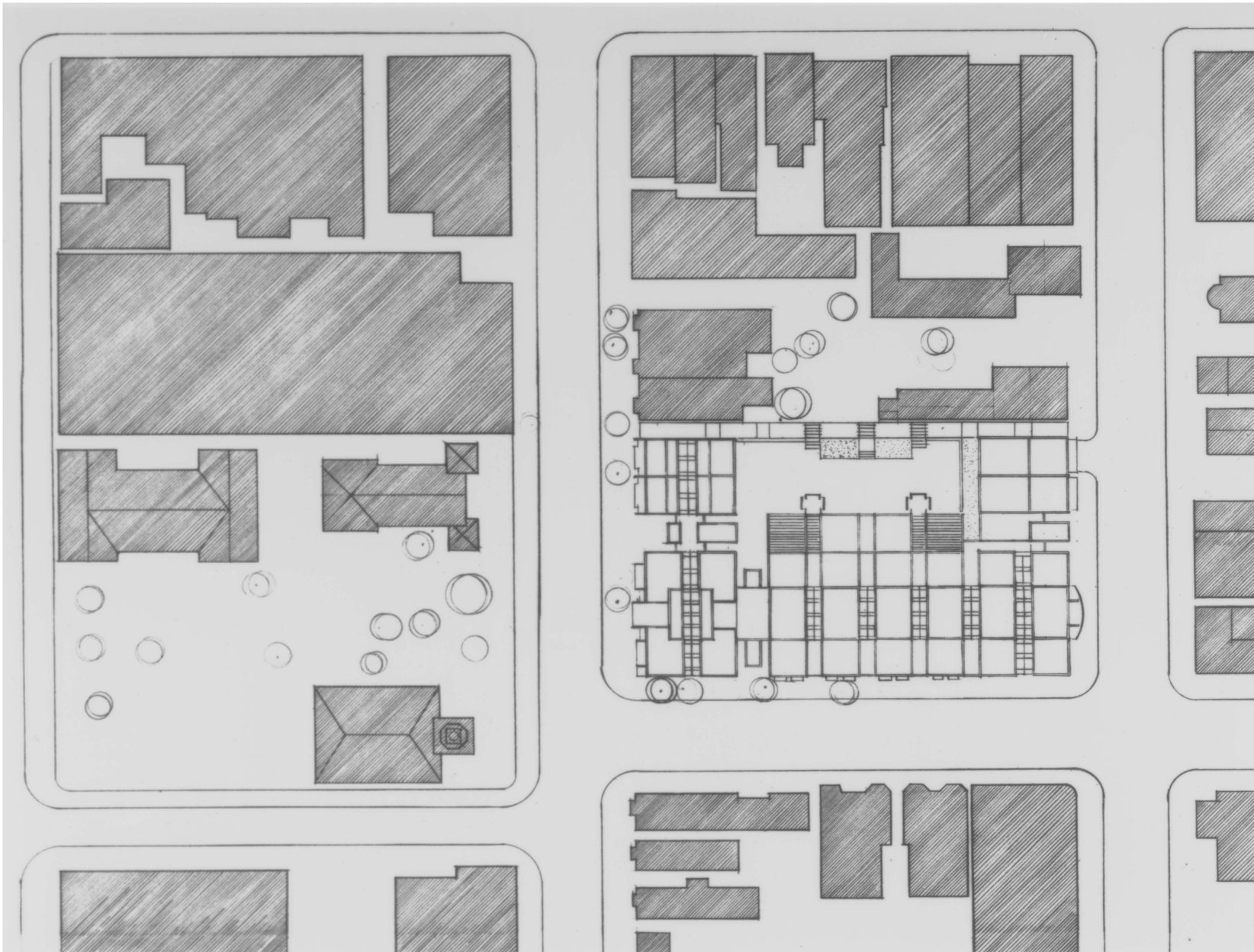
The other 'pole' of the building is a "quiet zone", the spaces designed for study and reading. [4]

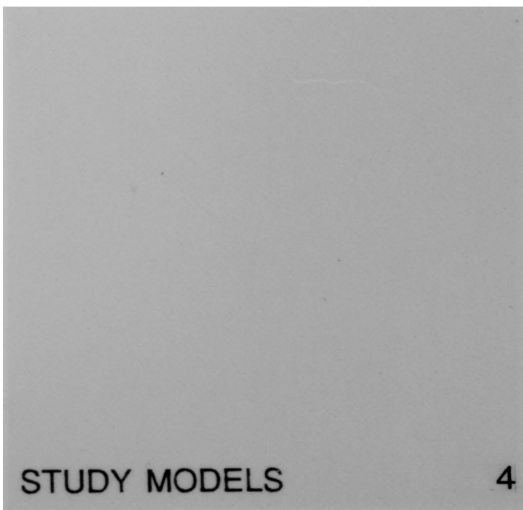
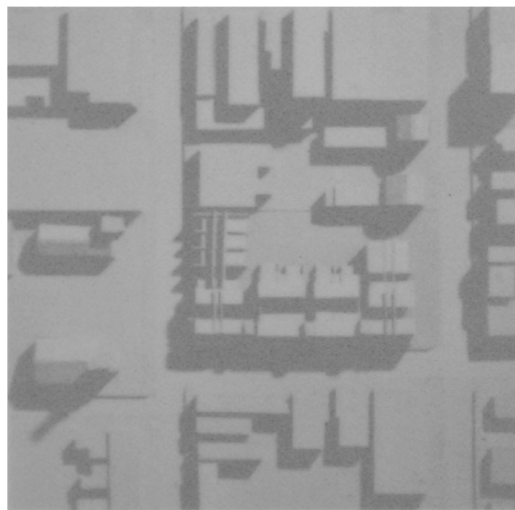
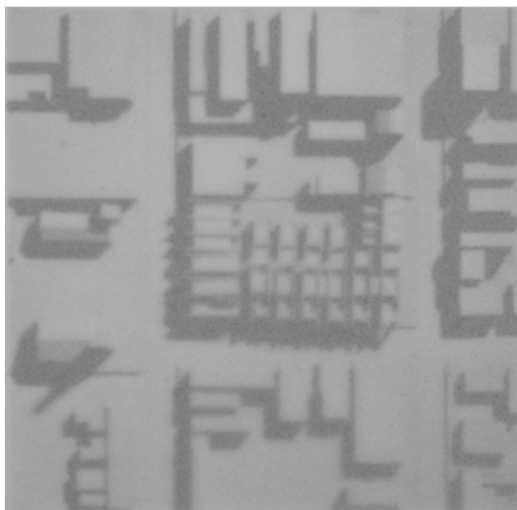
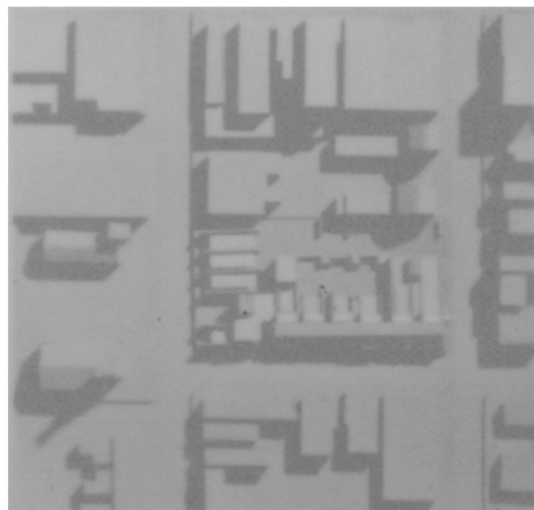
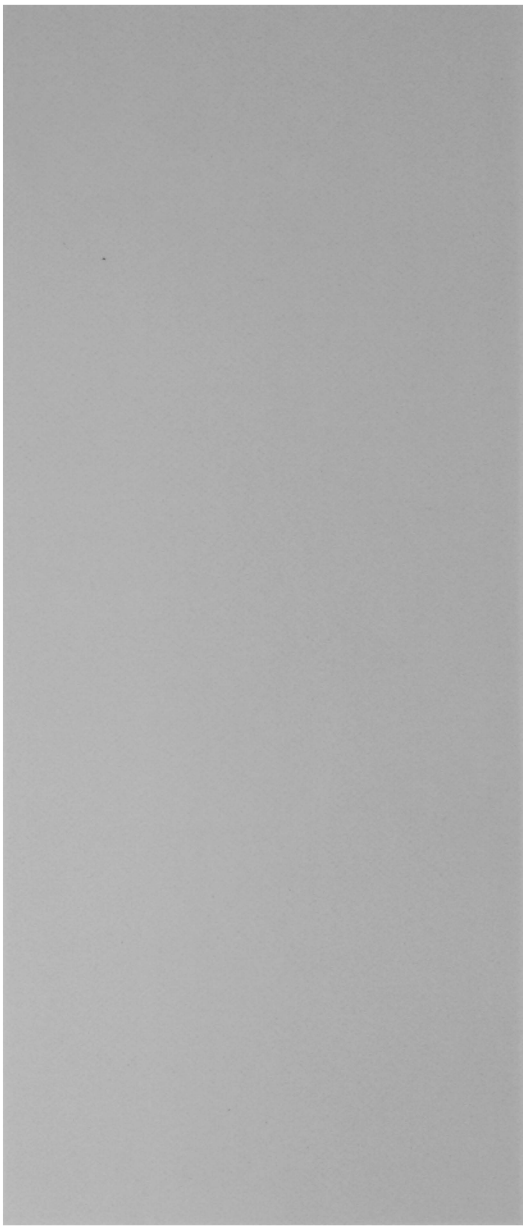
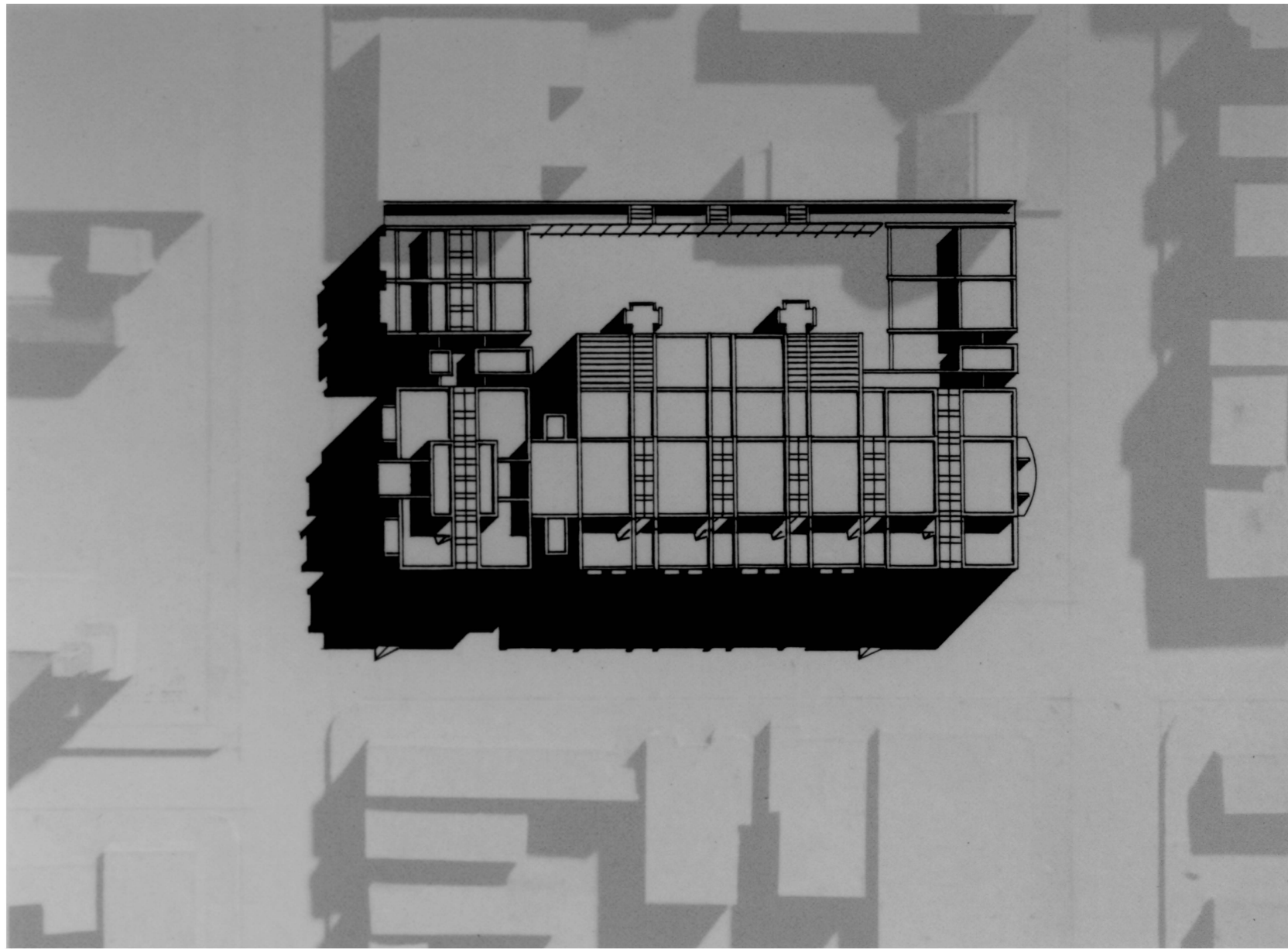
Seminar rooms are located next to the "reading tower". They have a separate entrance. [5]

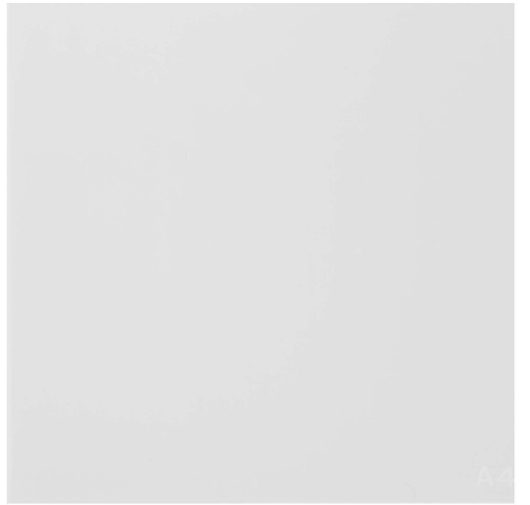
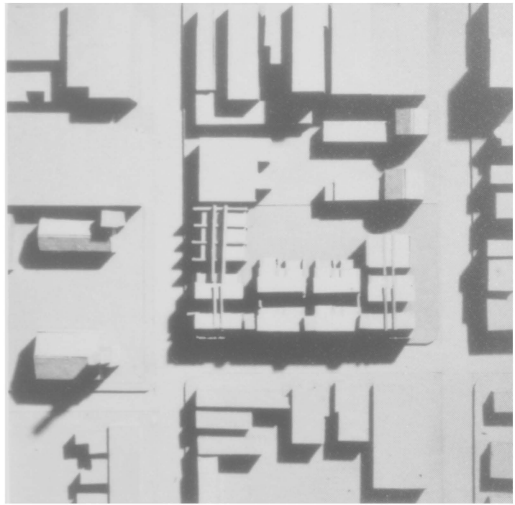
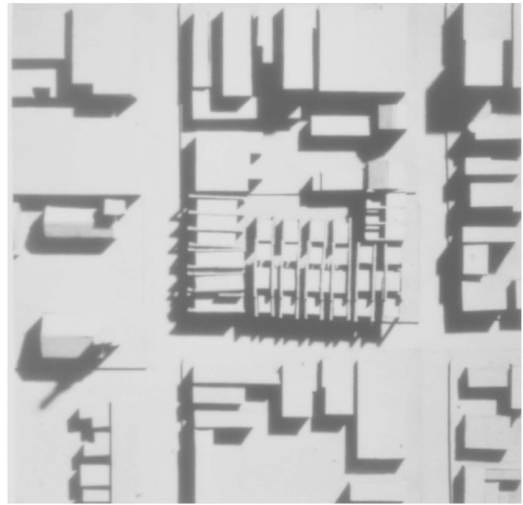
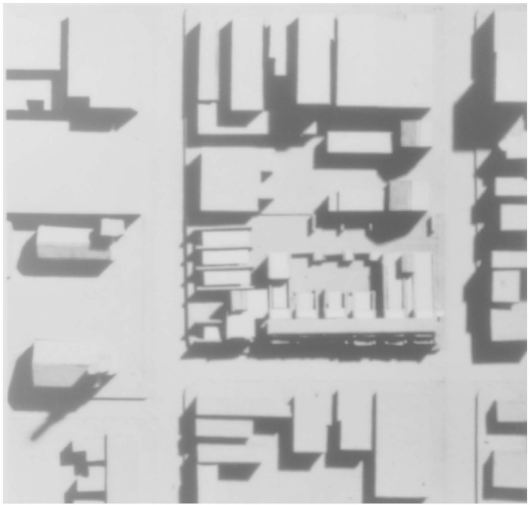
The administrative section is connected to the entrance building. [6]

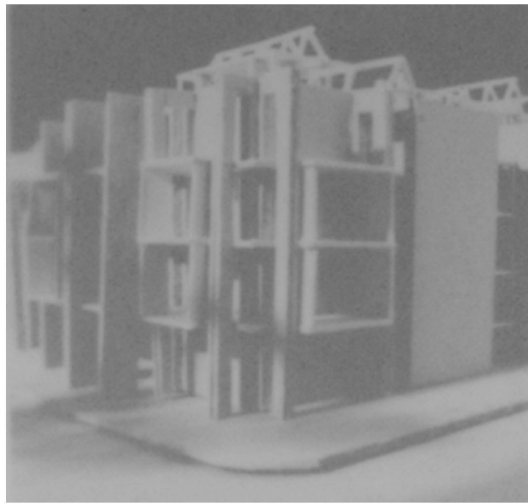
A parking garage in the basement level can be entered from Alfred Street. [7]









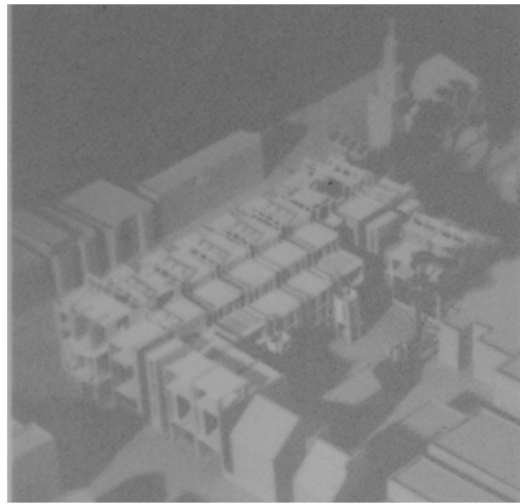
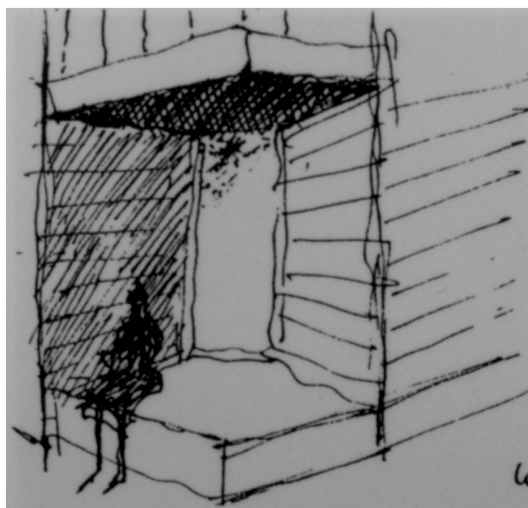


Entrance Hall:

The the corner of the building facing Christ Church is a critical part of the design. A path through the cemetery, coming from Washington Street, past the church, leads directly to the main entrance of the library on this north-east corner.

There is a sequence of entering: from a two story arcade, under the administrative offices and children's library, the visitor enters into a lobby space, then into an entrance hall with a large open space (four floors up to a skylight).

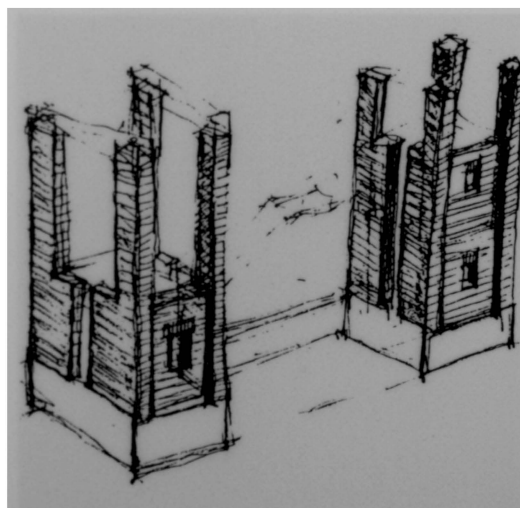
On the upper levels of the entrance building is the children's library. Reading balconies, that look toward the church, surround a story-telling room.



Main Space:

Two parallel stairs rise through "the Alley of the Books" transforming the space (the alternating stair-landing-stair-landing rhythm emphasizing the a-b-a-b order of the building). The stairs "land" at the small "bays" and "rise" at the large bays. The small bays are further punctuated by bridges crossing the open space at the landings. The spaces below the stairs are "closed" in nature: there are infill walls between the structural pillars. The spaces above the stairs are more "transparent" being open to the sky lit main hall.

In this hall one can perceive, through structure, the connections between the lower level (parking) and the "world" above ground. Concrete columns, at the garage level, rise into this hall, visible as the base of the brick pillars, which, in turn, carry the roof.



Main Space:

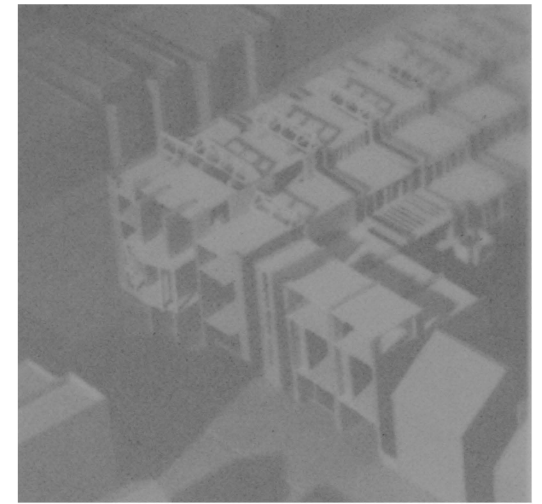
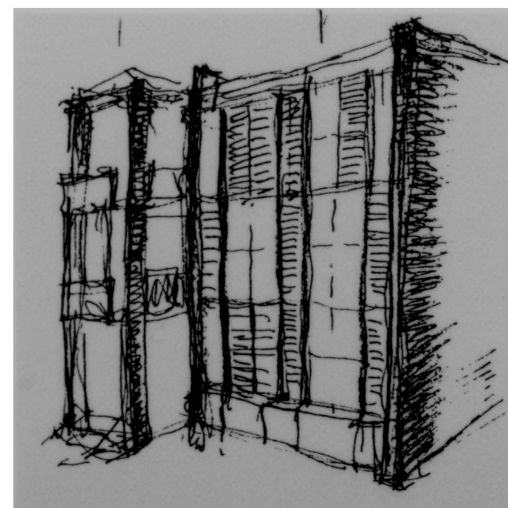
The level transitions slightly between "the Alley of the Books" and the book/reference area. The alley thereby forms niches where people can sit or work (computer-stations).

The stack areas, on both sides of the open space, form walls of books.

On every level there are balconies, at the small bays without bridges, overlooking the large open space.

Study carrels are located on the periphery of the main space, next to the stack zone.

There is a ambulatory, overlooking the main space at the roof level with small reading spaces. Steel bridges, with glass-block infill, cross the space.

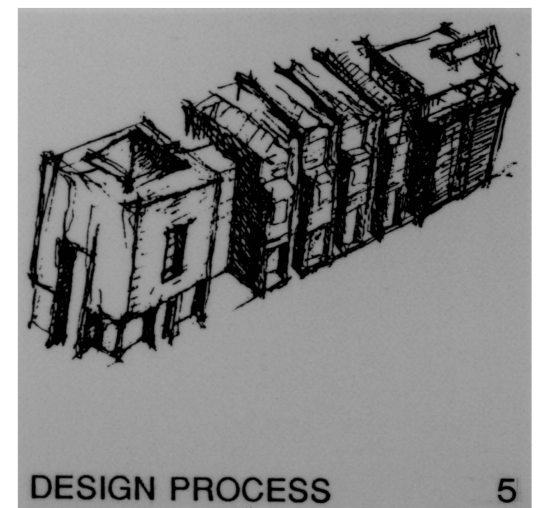


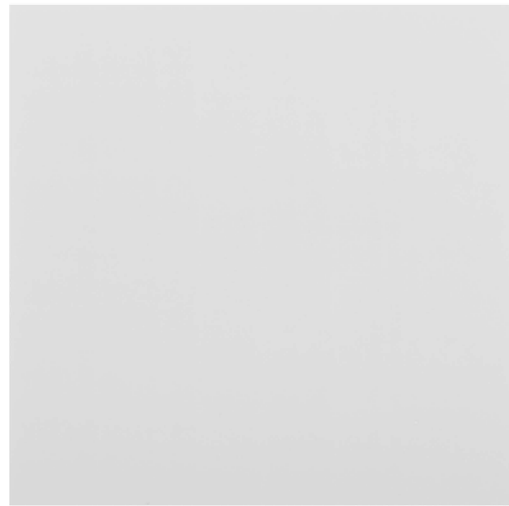
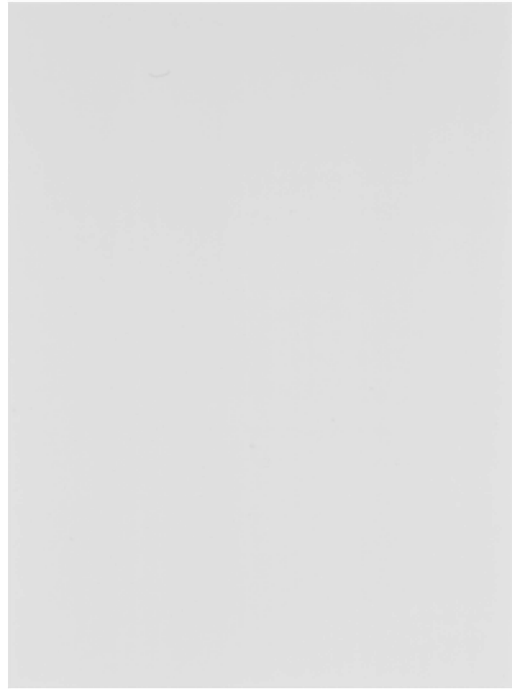
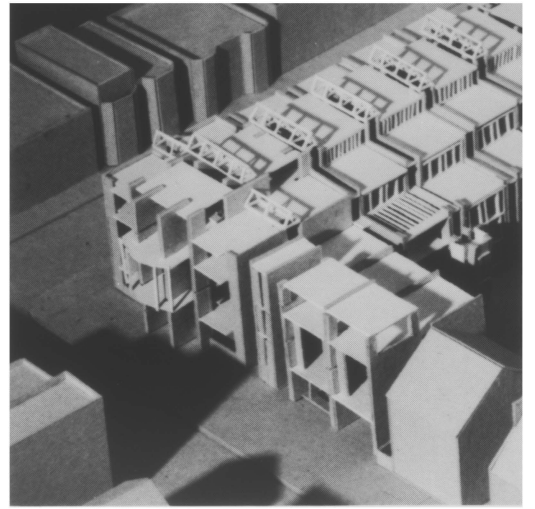
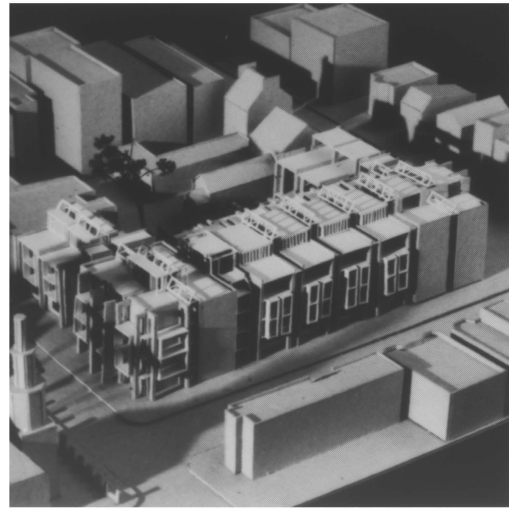
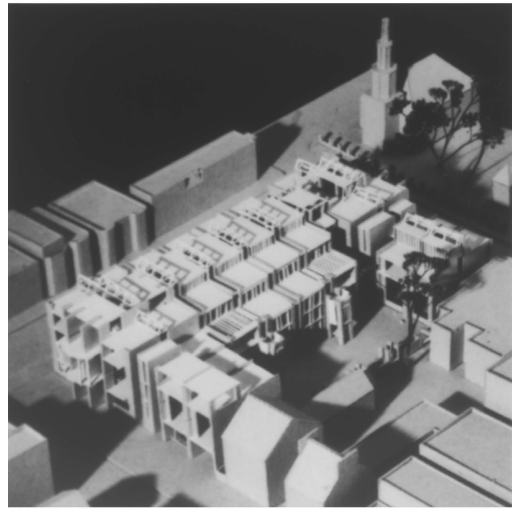
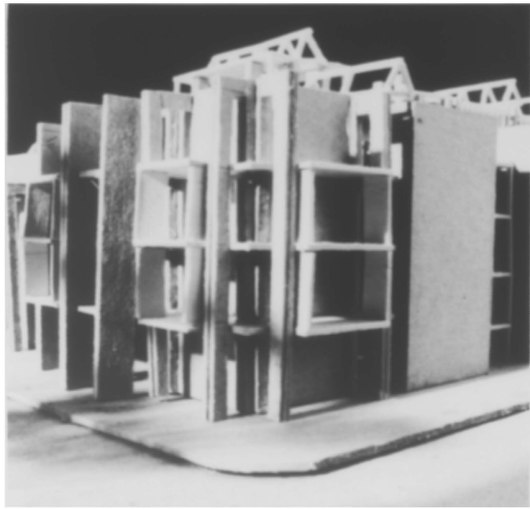
Reading Tower

As the other "pole" terminating the main axis of the building, the reading tower develops around a large staircase. This terminus is expressed further, on both the exterior and interior, by a large curved window illuminating a reading area. People can sit here or adjacent to light slots next to the stairs.

Winter Garden

Places for informal reading are provided at the south side of the building, which can be conceived of as a "winter garden" for the building. Study carrels look into this two and three story space protected from the south sun by movable louvers. The facade can be "opened" or "closed" according to the weather conditions.







1

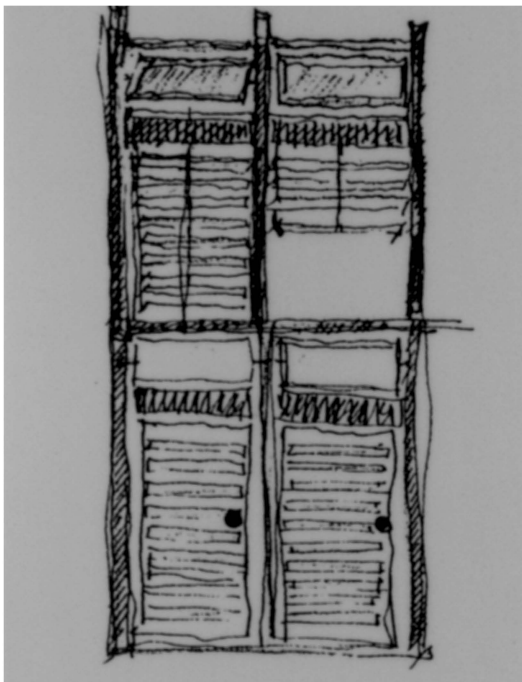


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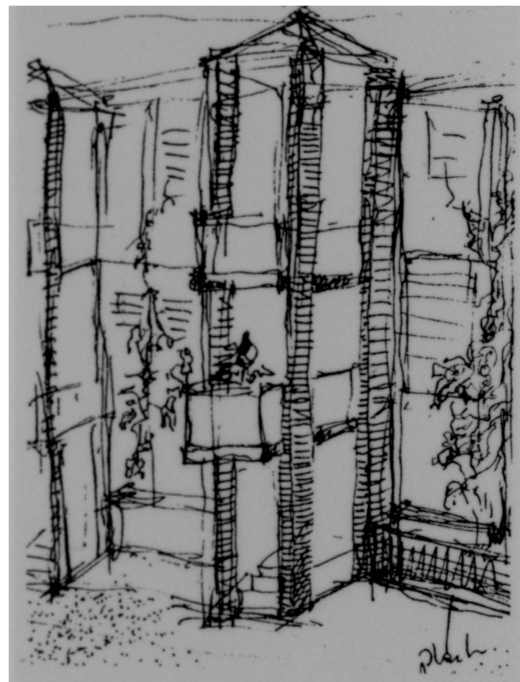


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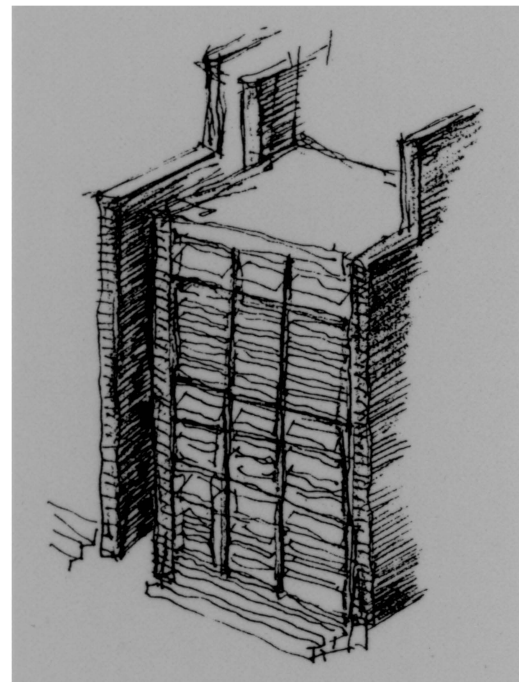
- 1. Cemetery of Christ Church
- 2. Public Garden on Columbus Street
- 3. Porch on Columbus Street
- 4. Garden / Reading Tower
- 5. South Facade
- 6. Garden



4



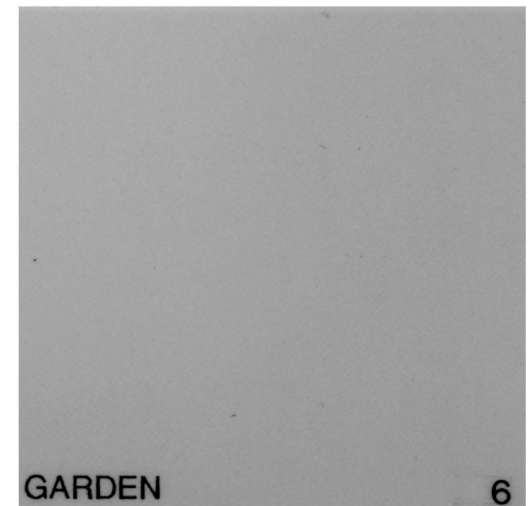
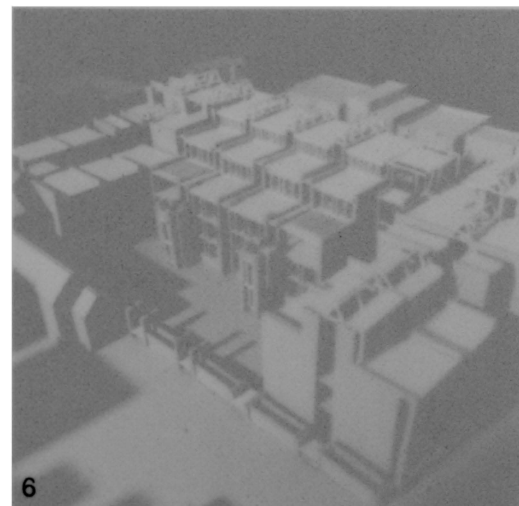
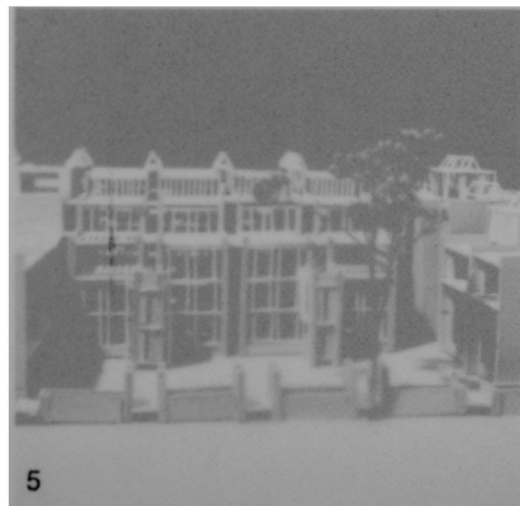
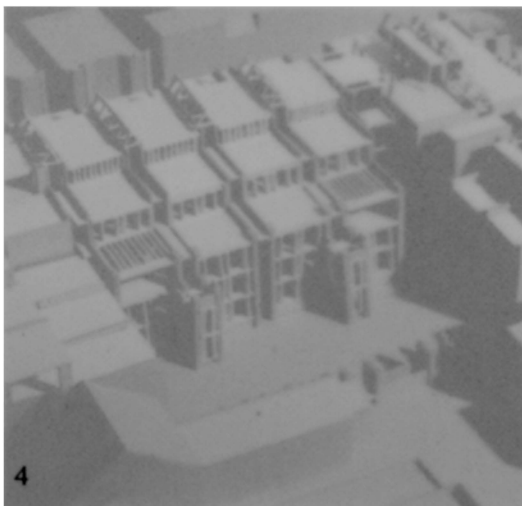
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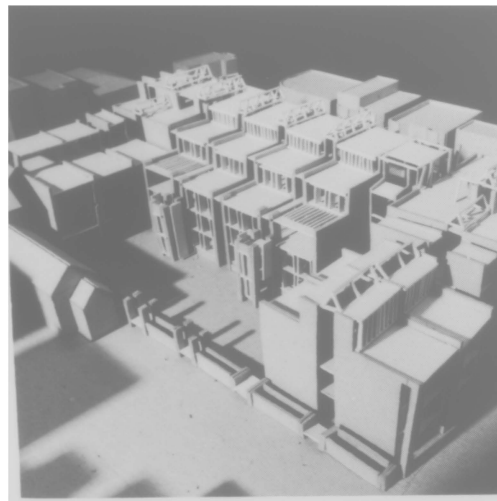
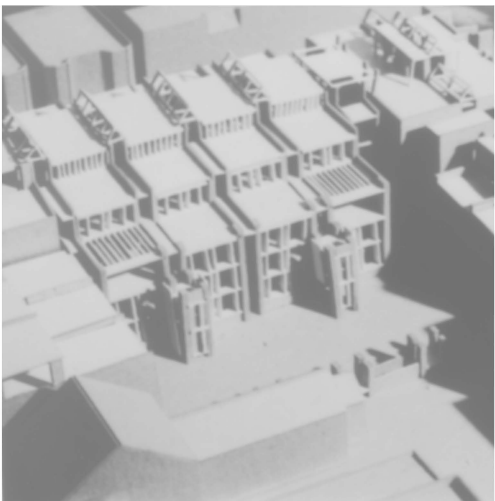
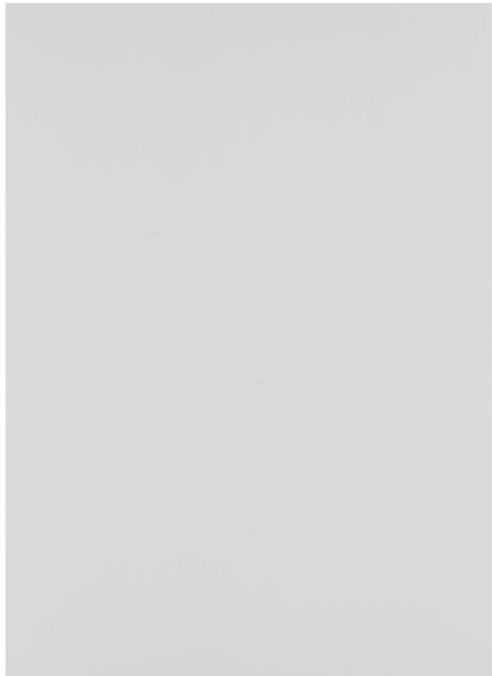
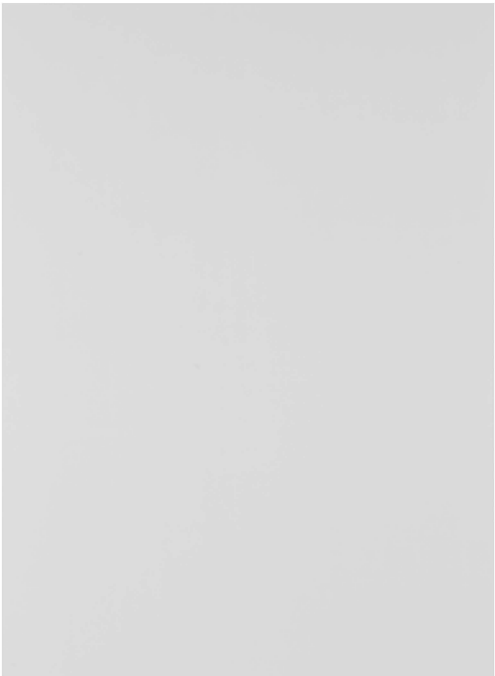
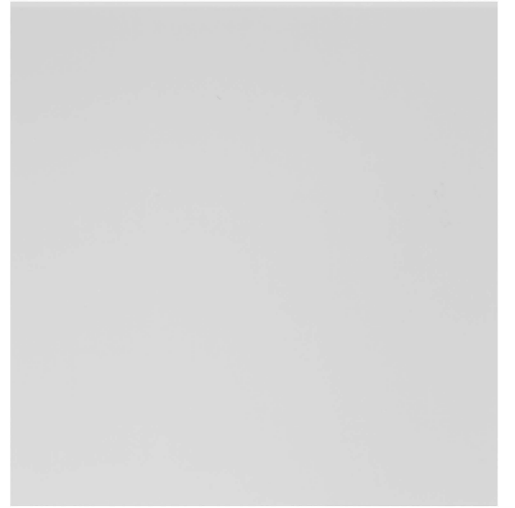
Garden

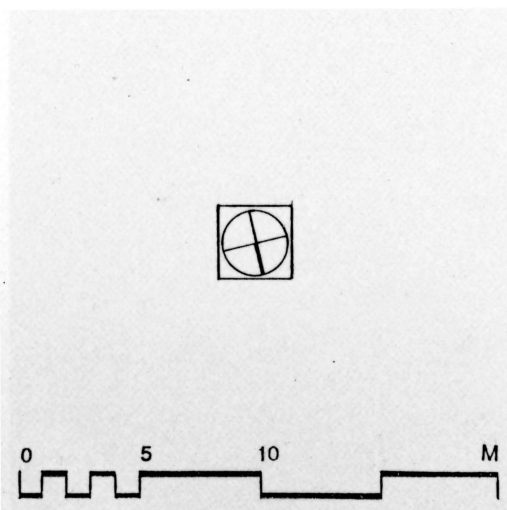
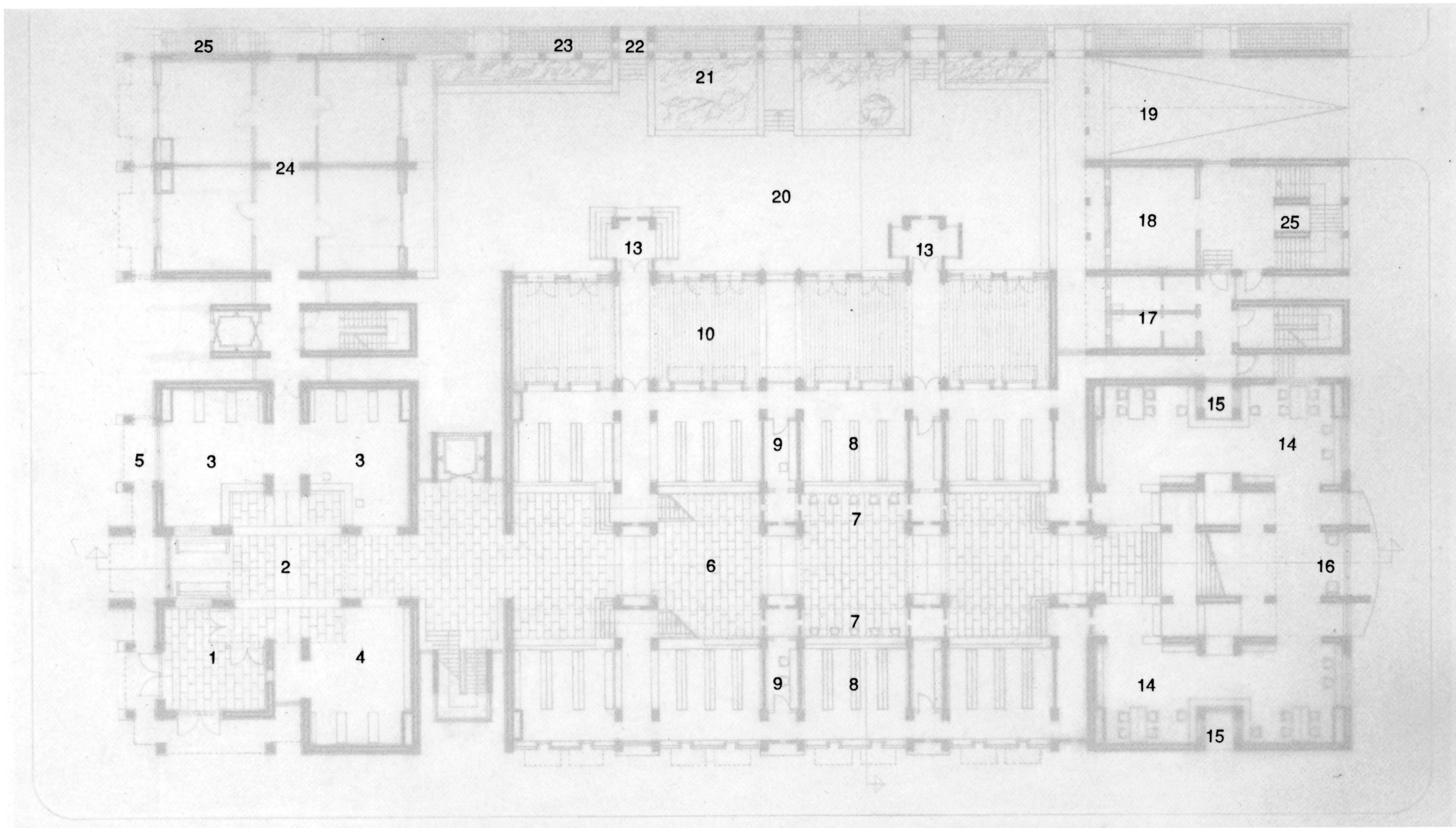
The garden provides intimate places to read in a designed and sheltered exterior environment. Little towers in this garden, reached via bridges through the winter garden, offer the most secluded of the reading rooms in the project. A double screen wall closes the garden on the south side creating small reading pavilions. The front row of columns, forming the screen of the double wall, would be planted to create a green edge to the garden. Between the two walls, light penetrates to the parking garage below.



GARDEN

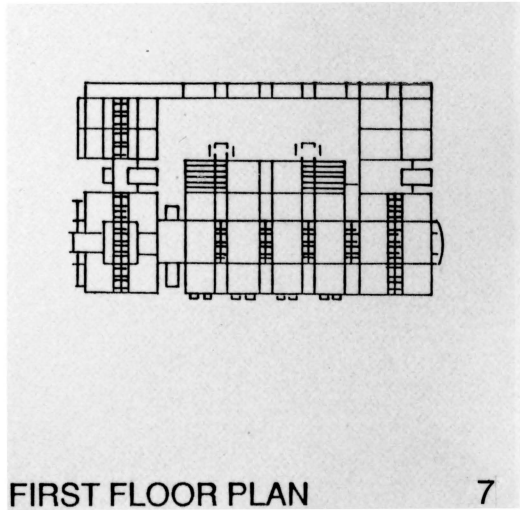
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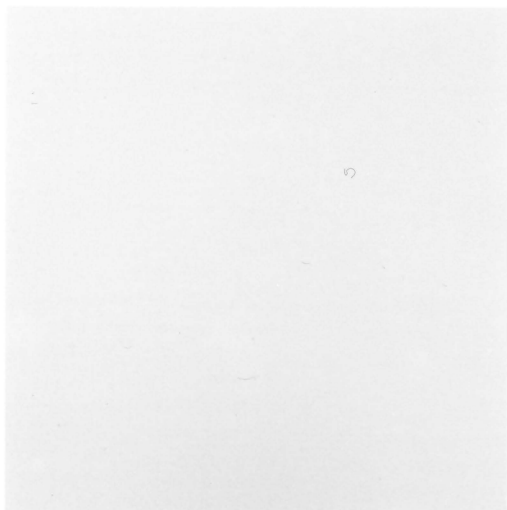
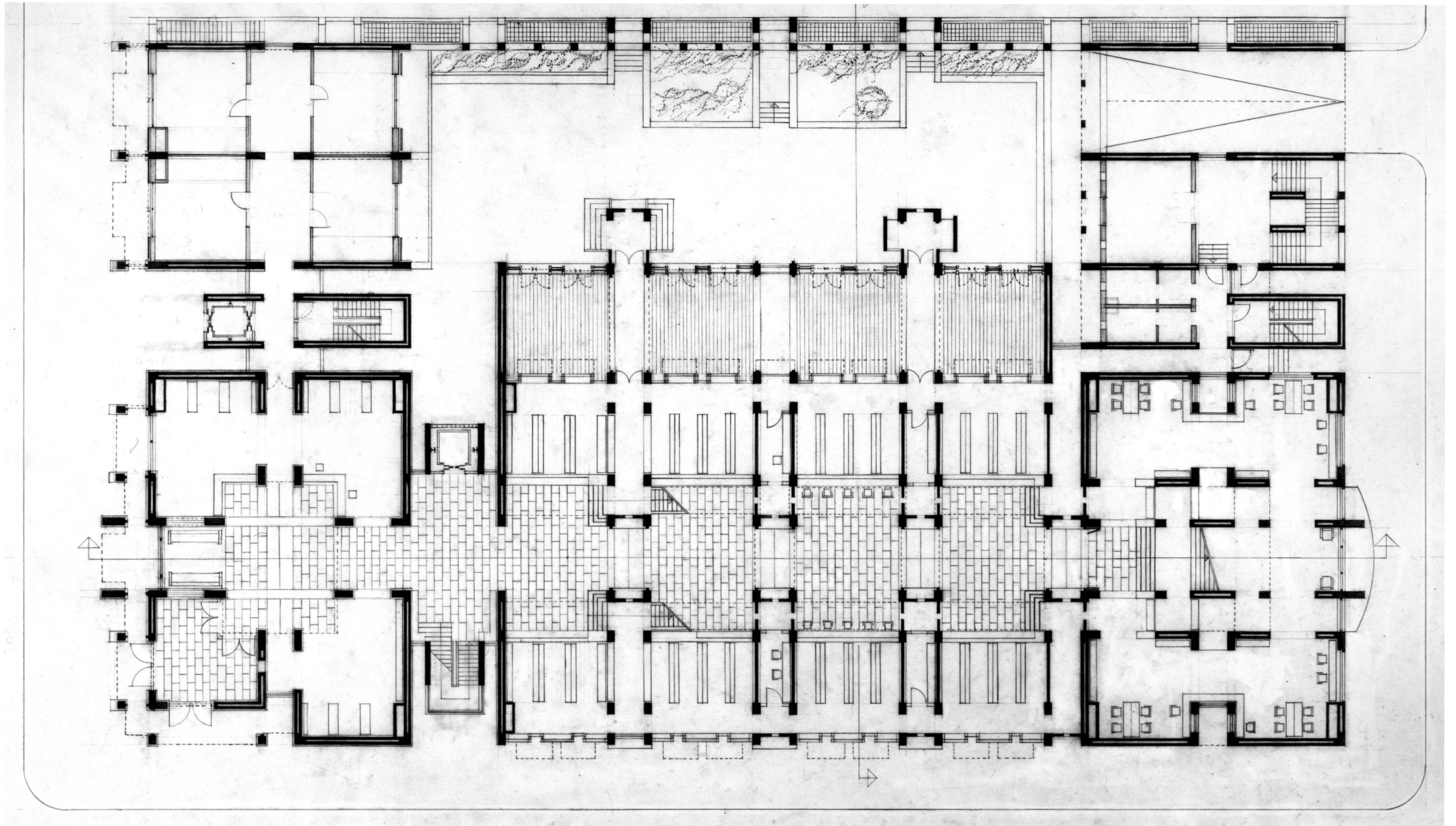


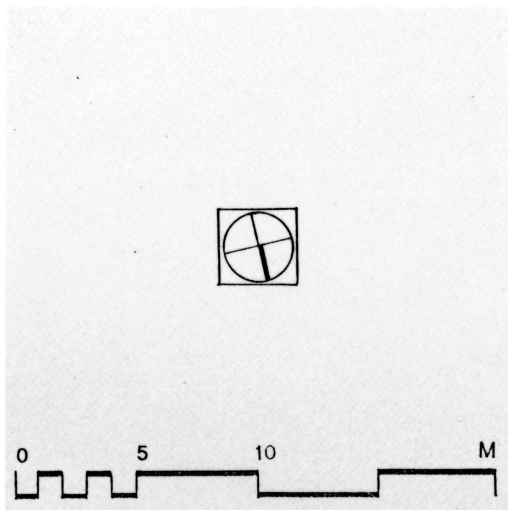
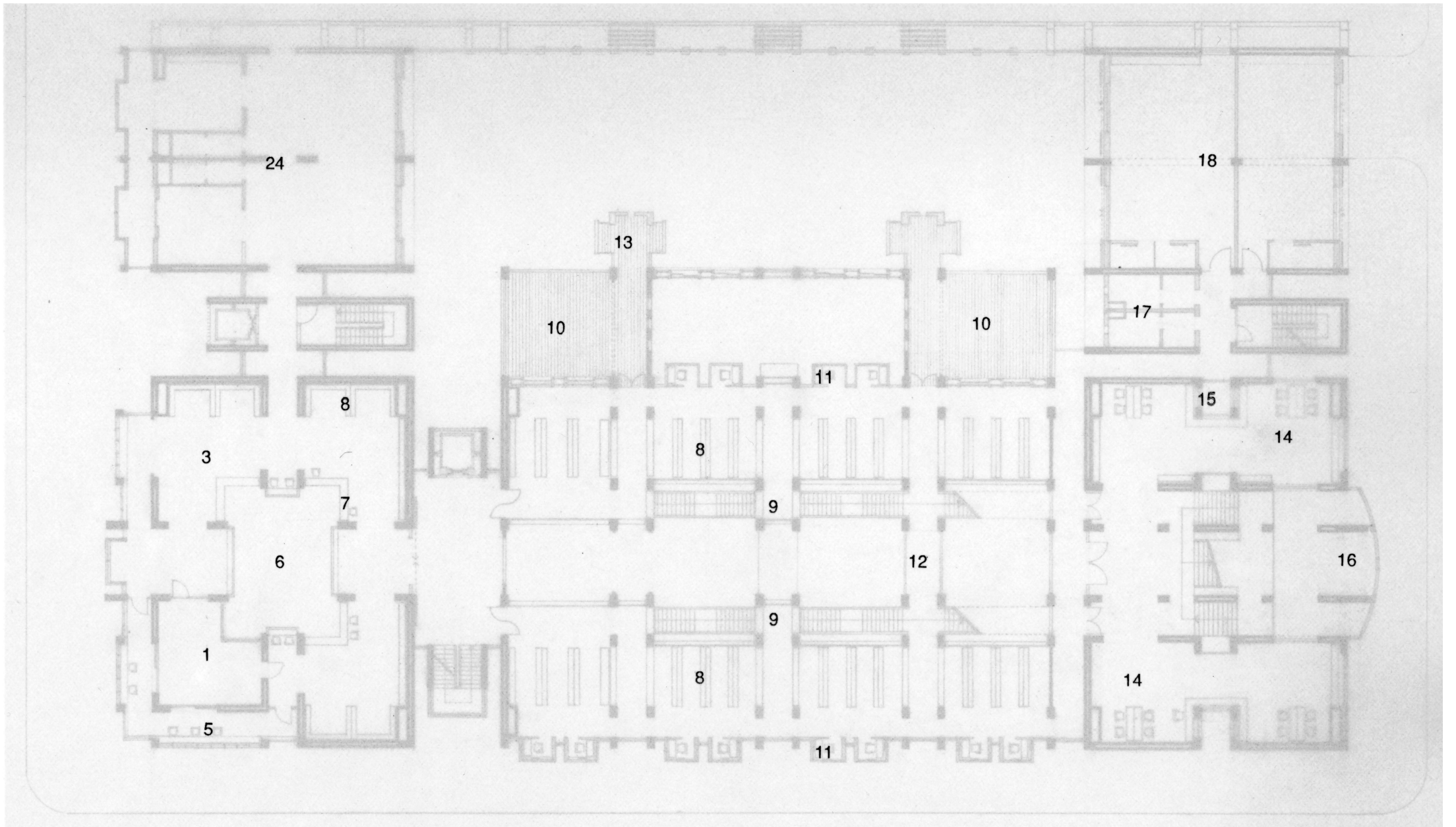


- 1. Lobby
- 2. Entrance Hall
- 3. Staff Area
- 4. Catalogue
- 5. Arcade
- 6. Alley of the Books
- 7. Computer Stations / Niches
- 8. Stacks / Reference
- 9. Storage / Typewriter / Copy
- 10. Winter Garden
- 13. Outside Reading Tower
- 14. Study Room
- 15. Light Slot
- 16. Niche
- 17. Bathroom
- 18. Housekeeping
- 19. Garage Entrance

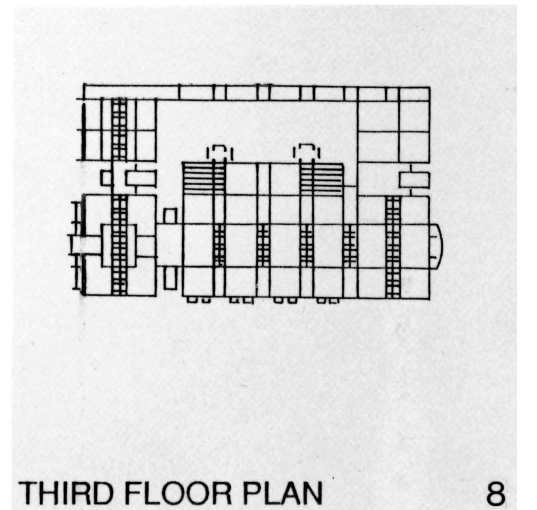
- 20. Garden
- 21. Planter Boxes / Green Wall
- 22. Reading Pergola
- 23. Light Slot to Garage
- 24. Administration
- 25. Garage Exit



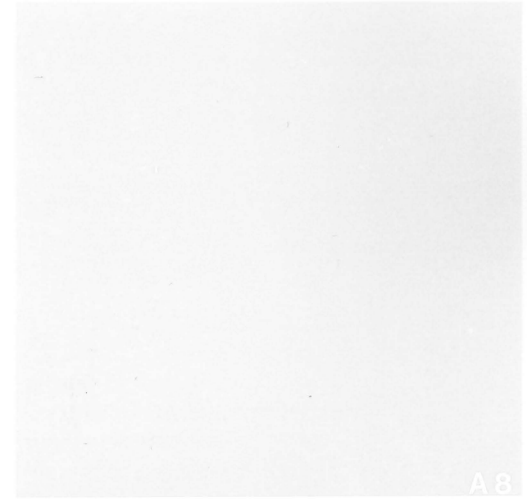
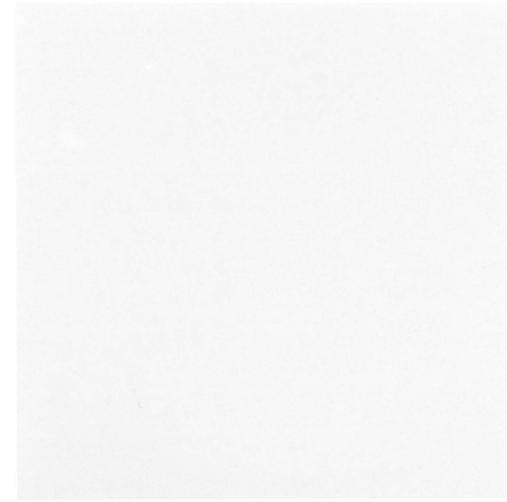
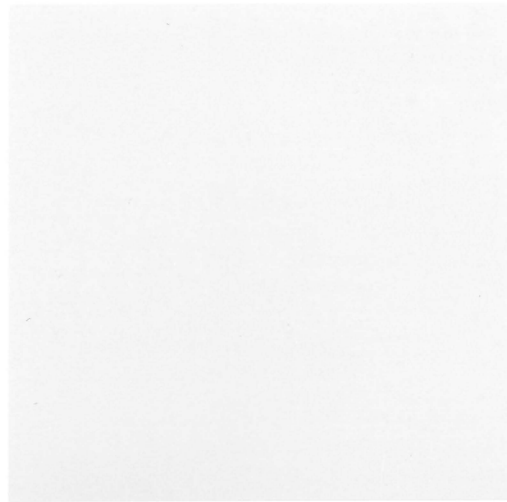
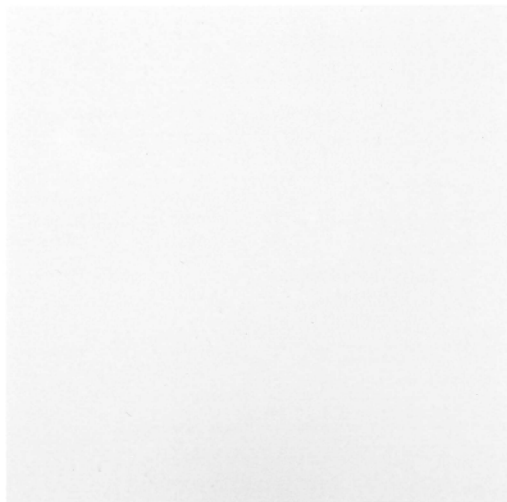
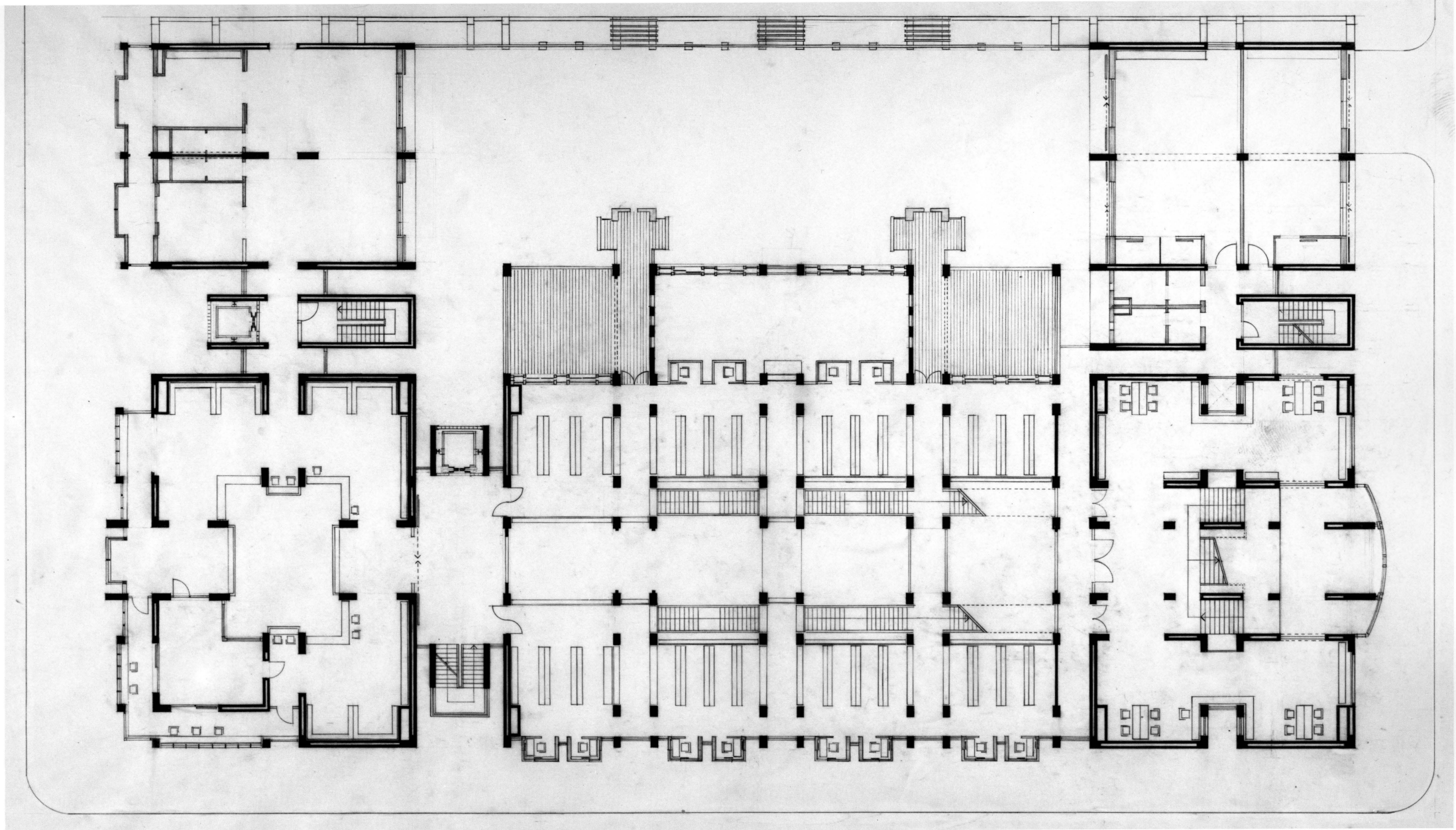


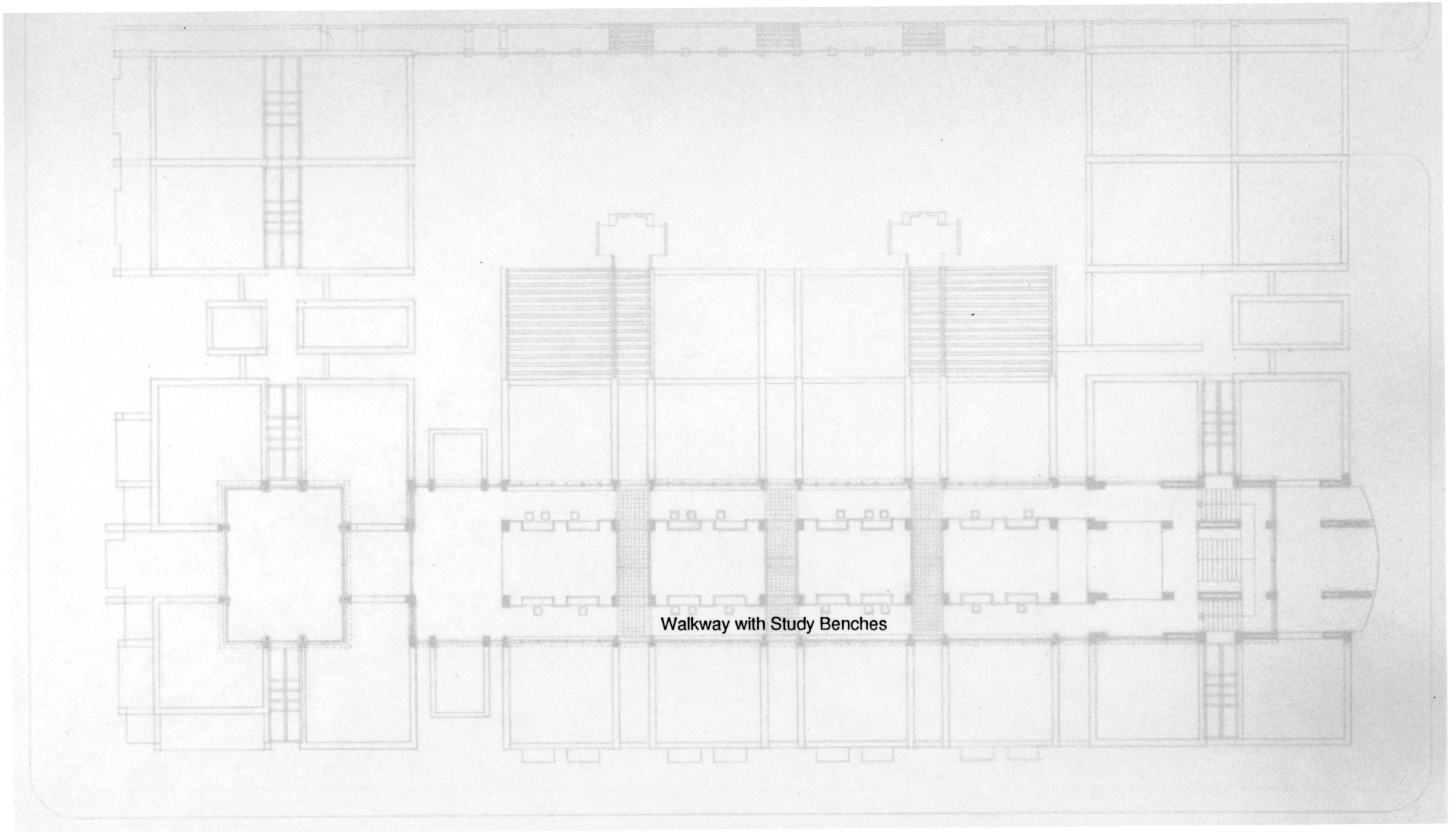


- 1. Story Telling Room
- 3. Children's Library
- 5. Reading Balcony
- 6. Void
- 7. Railing with Study Benches
- 8. Stacks
- 9. Overlook
- 10. Terrace
- 11. Study Balcony / Carrel
- 12. Bridge
- 13. Outside Reading Tower
- 14. Study Room
- 15. Light Slot
- 16. Curved Window
- 17. Bathroom
- 18. Seminar Room
- 24. Librarian / Staff

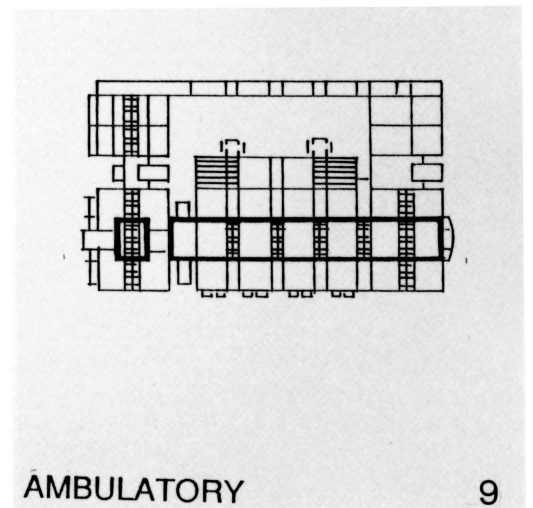
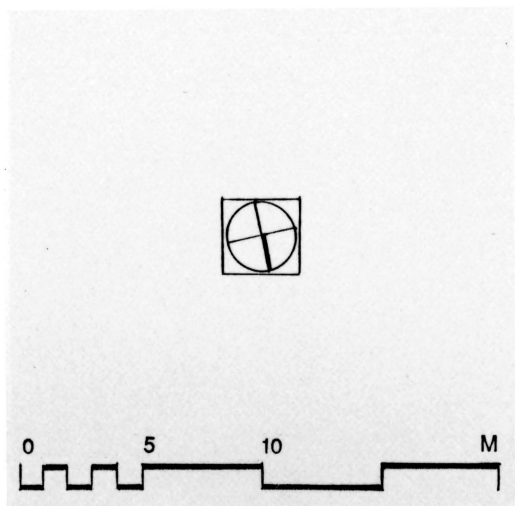


THIRD FLOOR PLAN

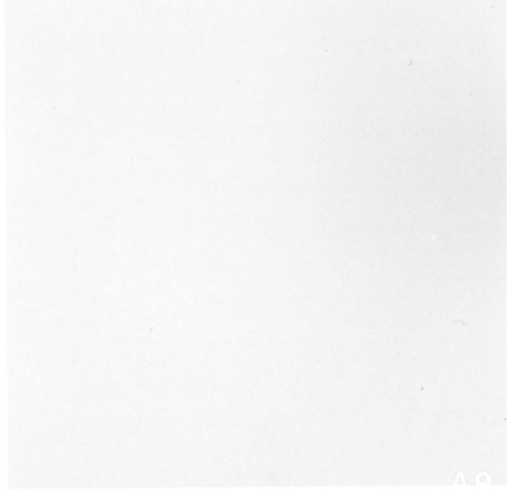
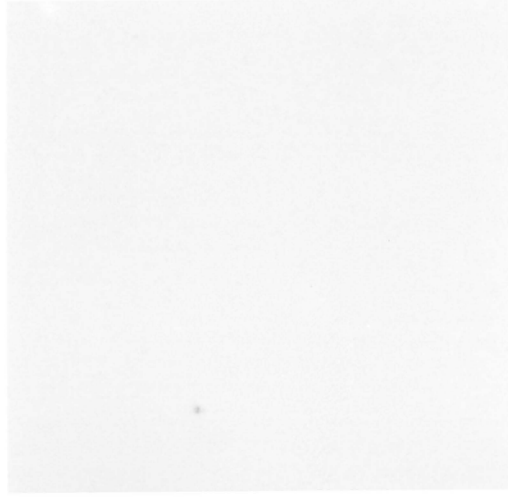
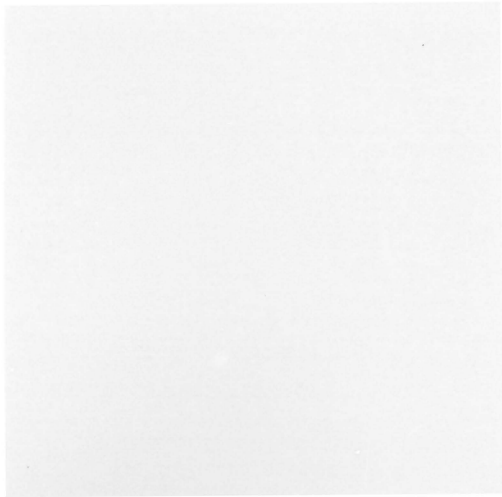
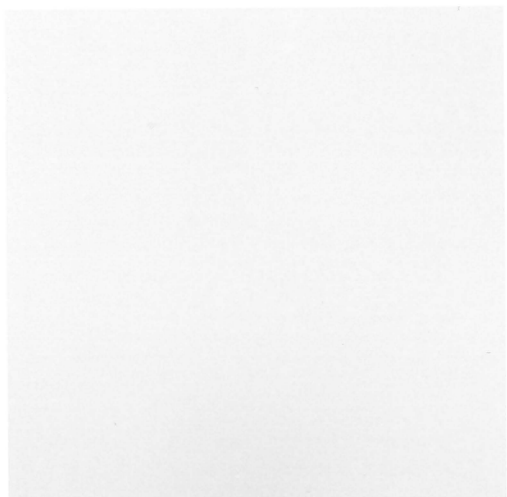
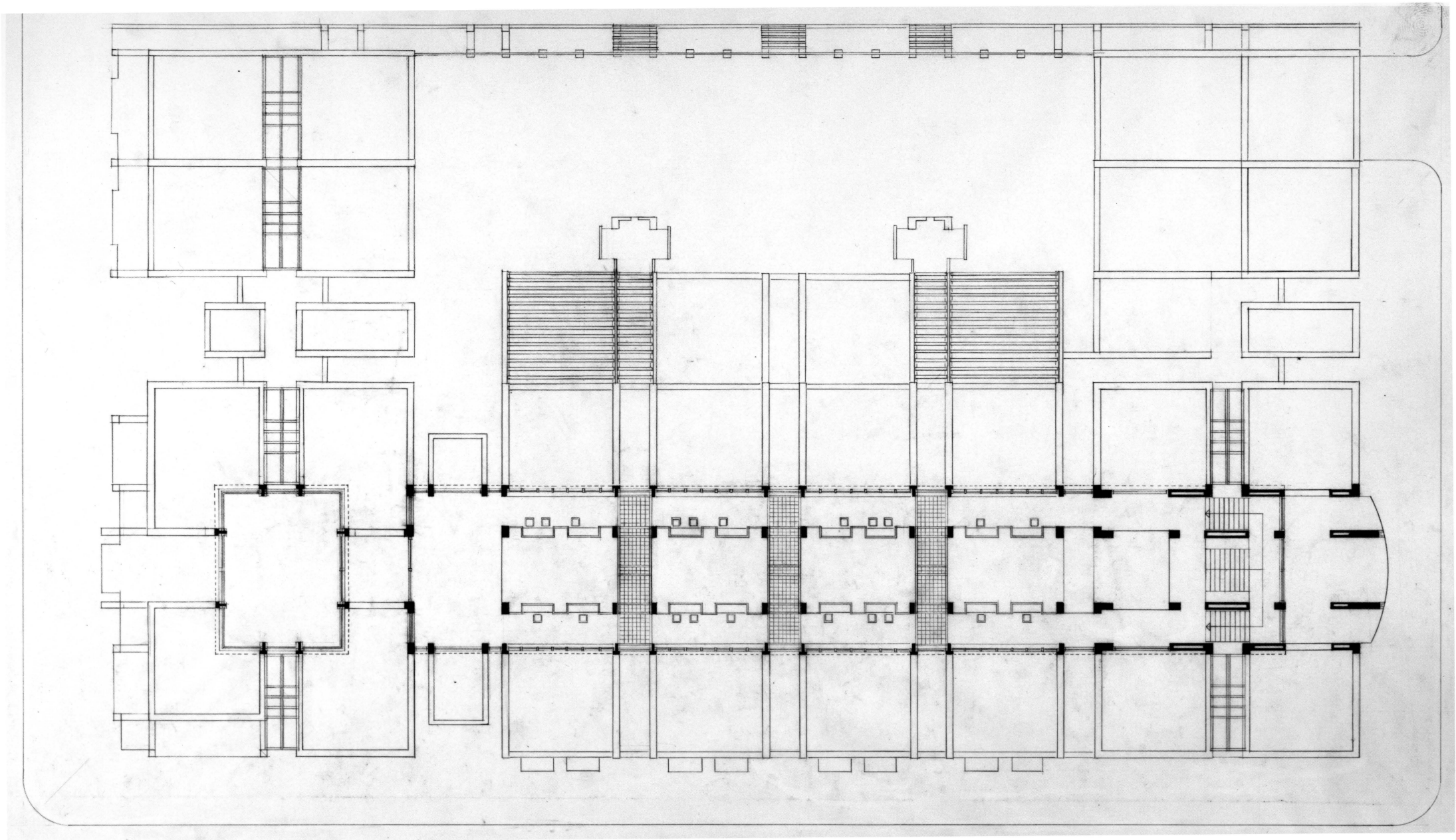


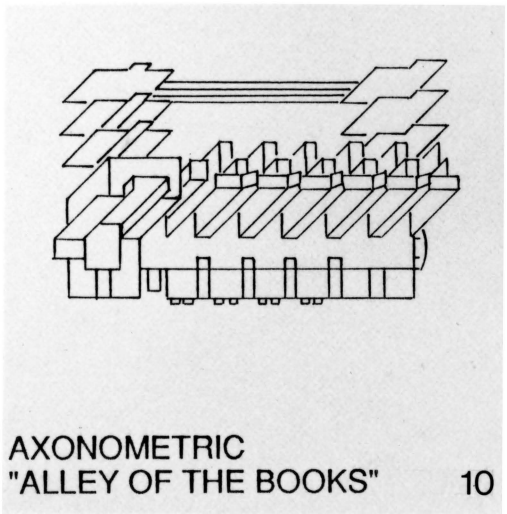
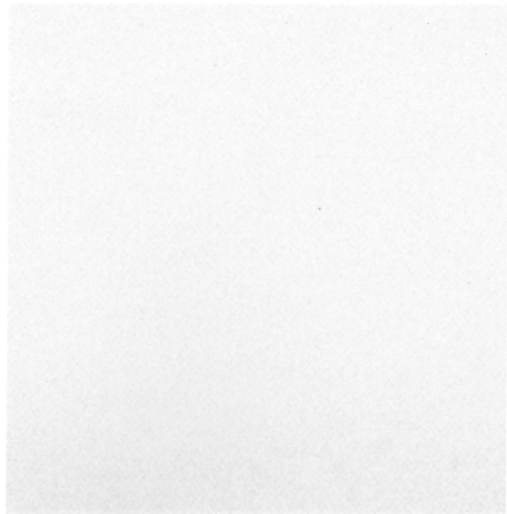
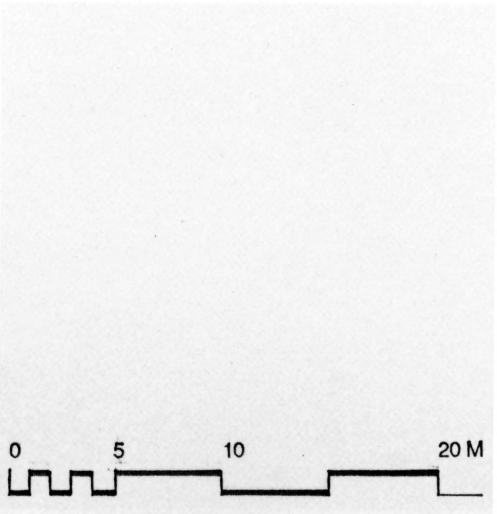
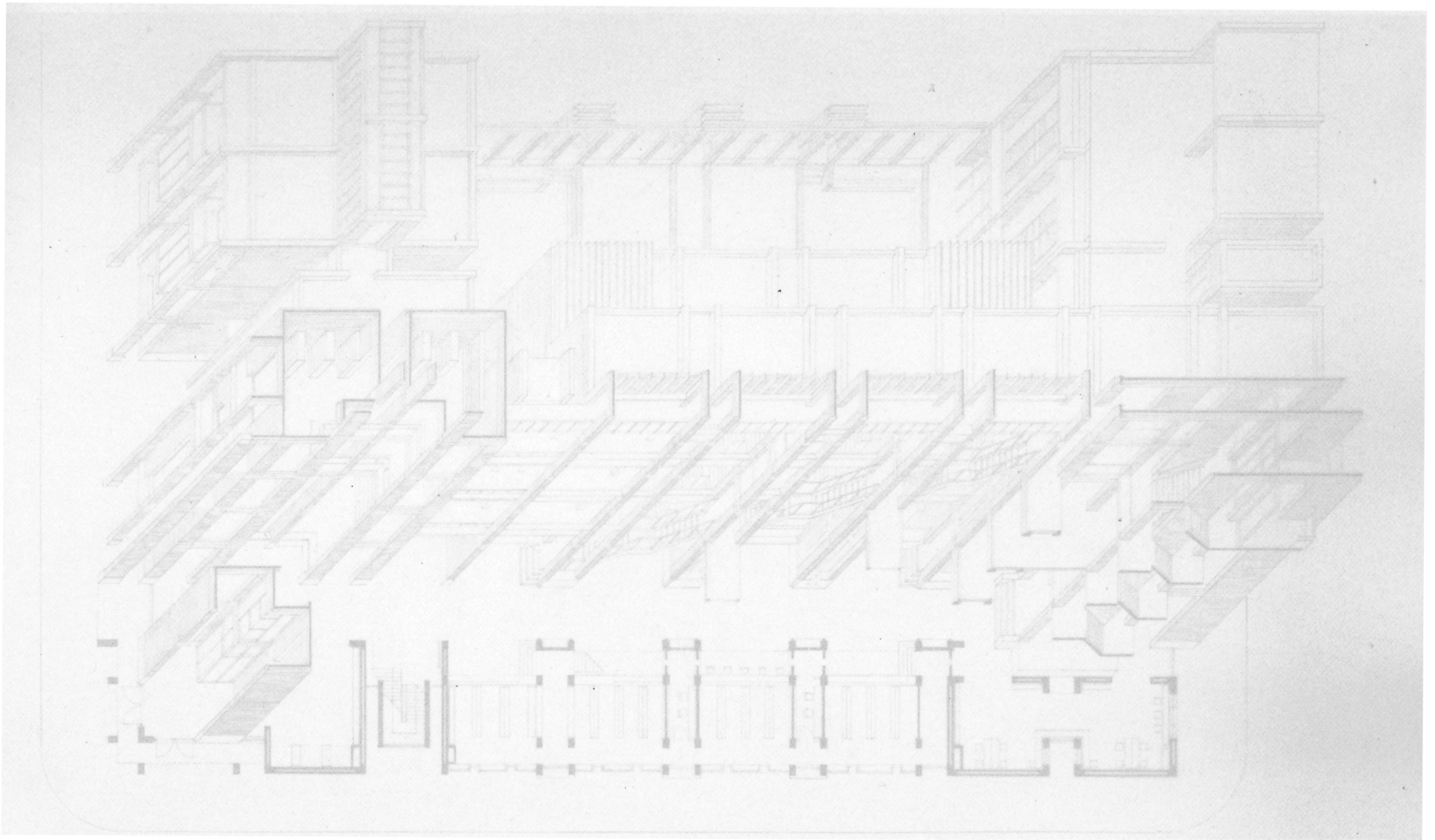


Walkway with Study Benches

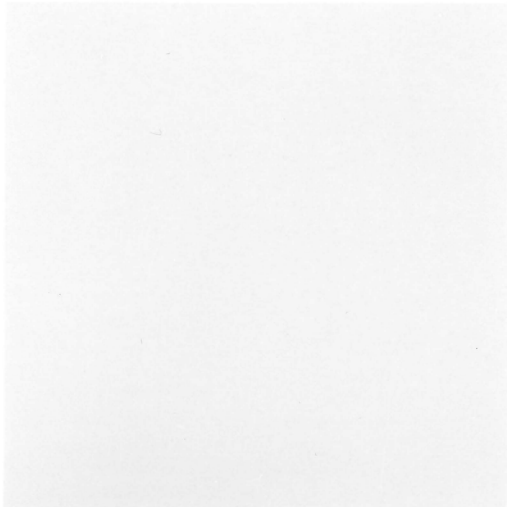
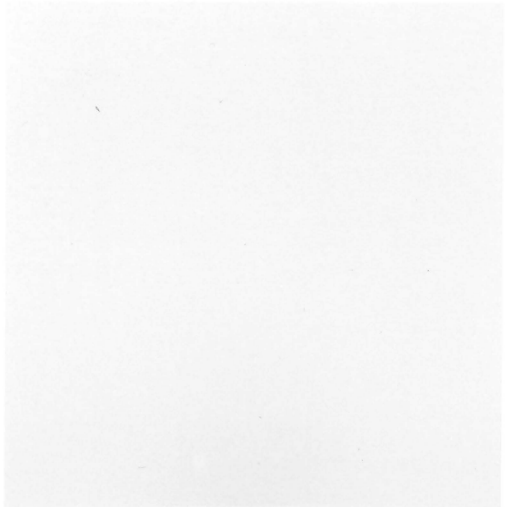
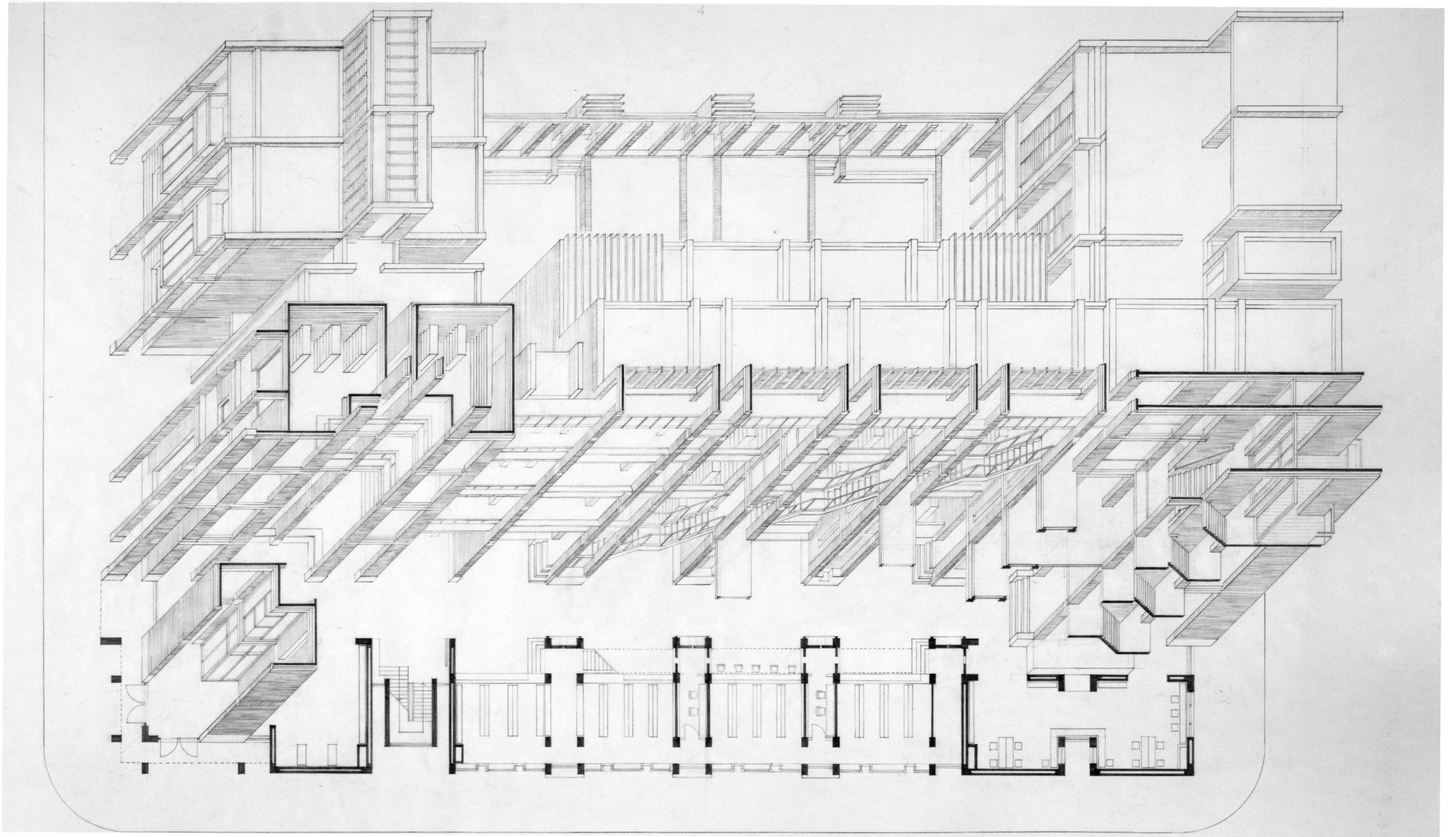


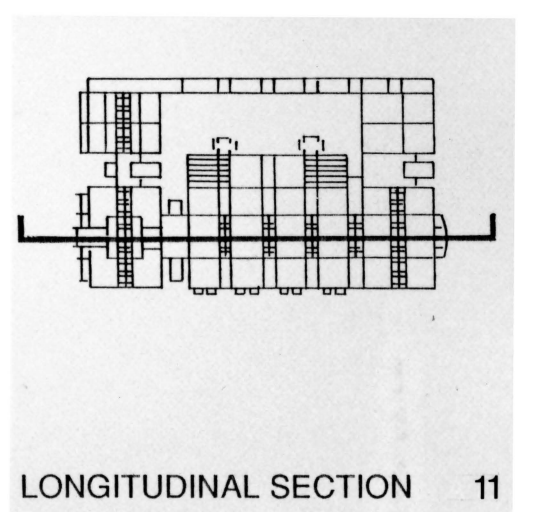
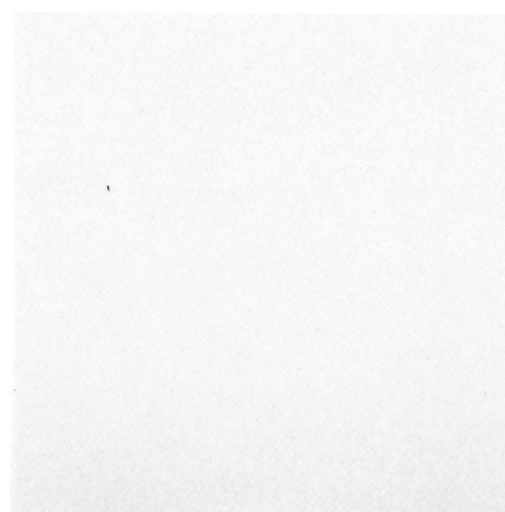
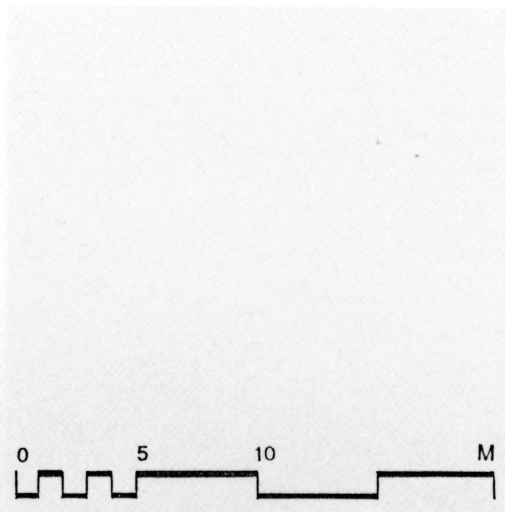
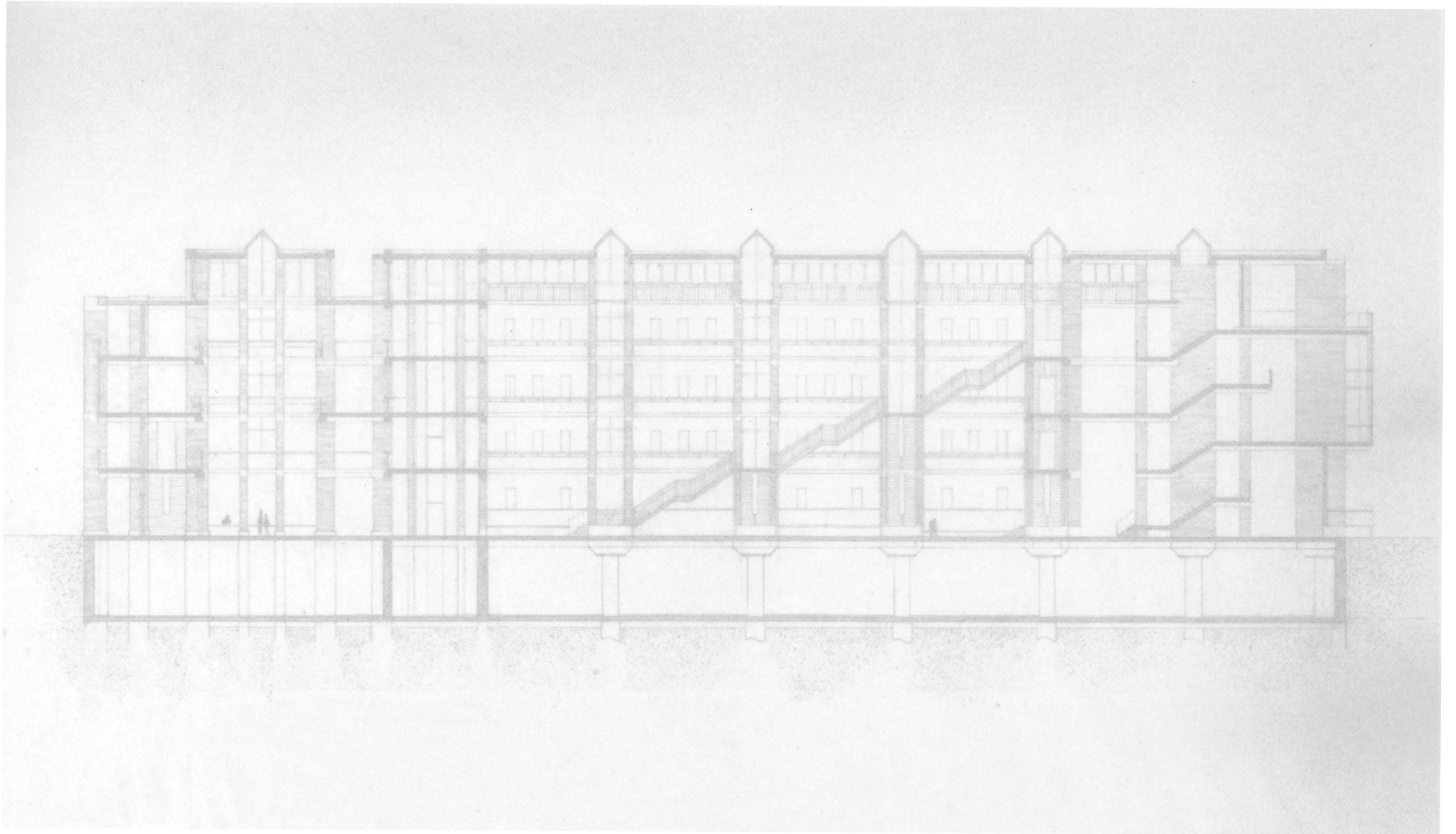
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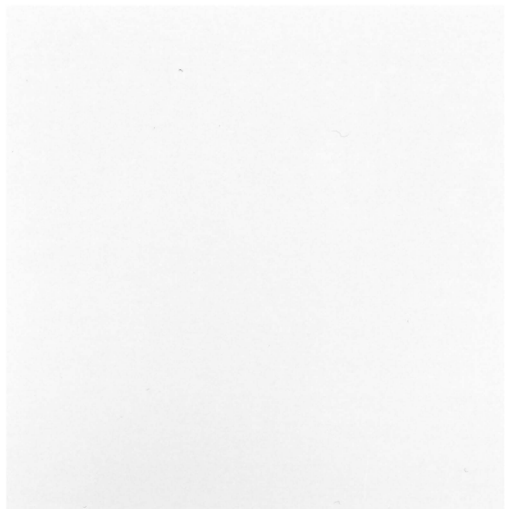
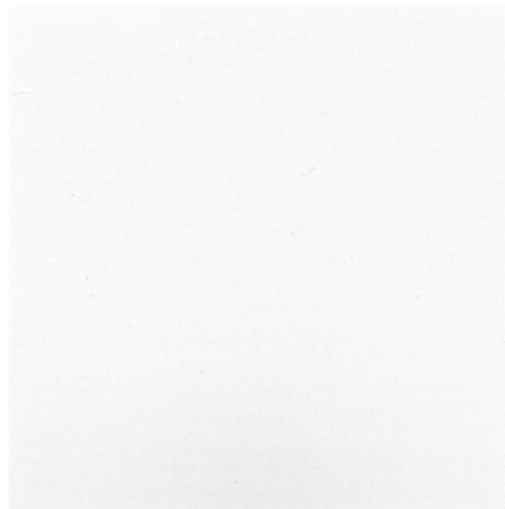
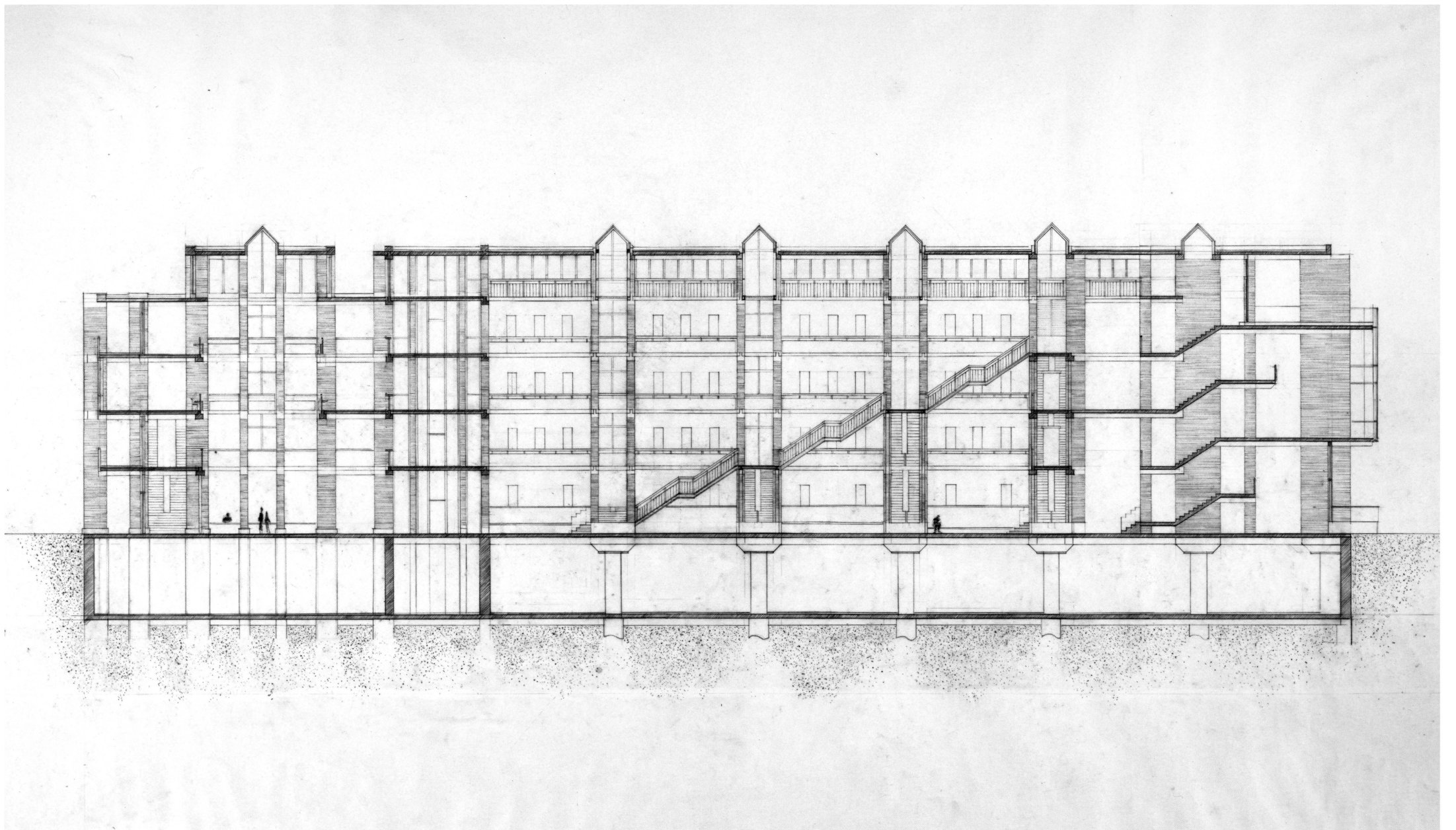


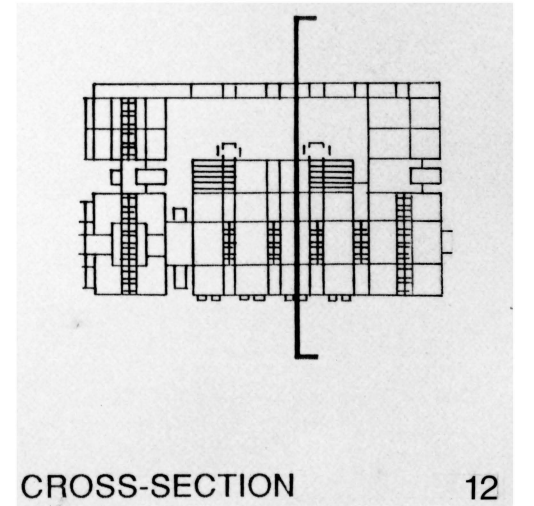
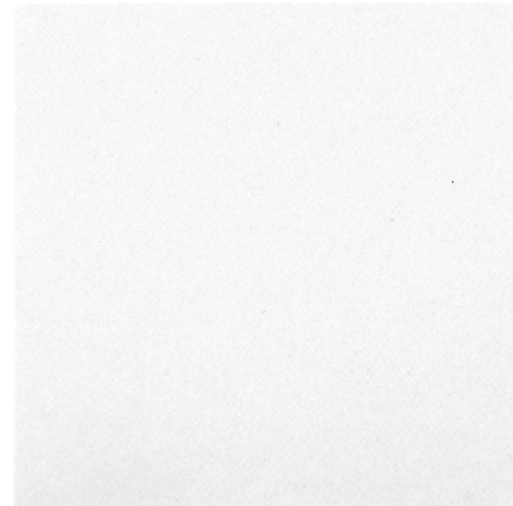
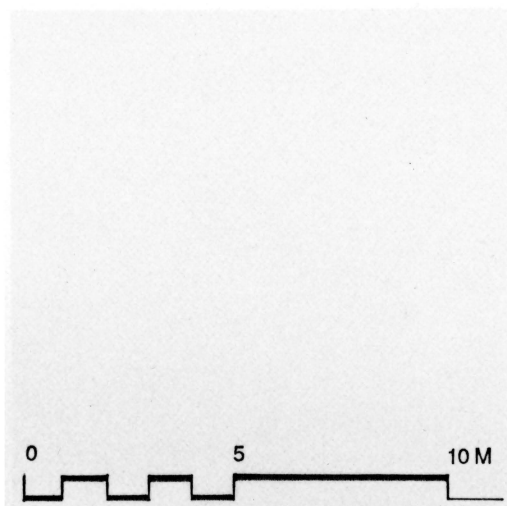
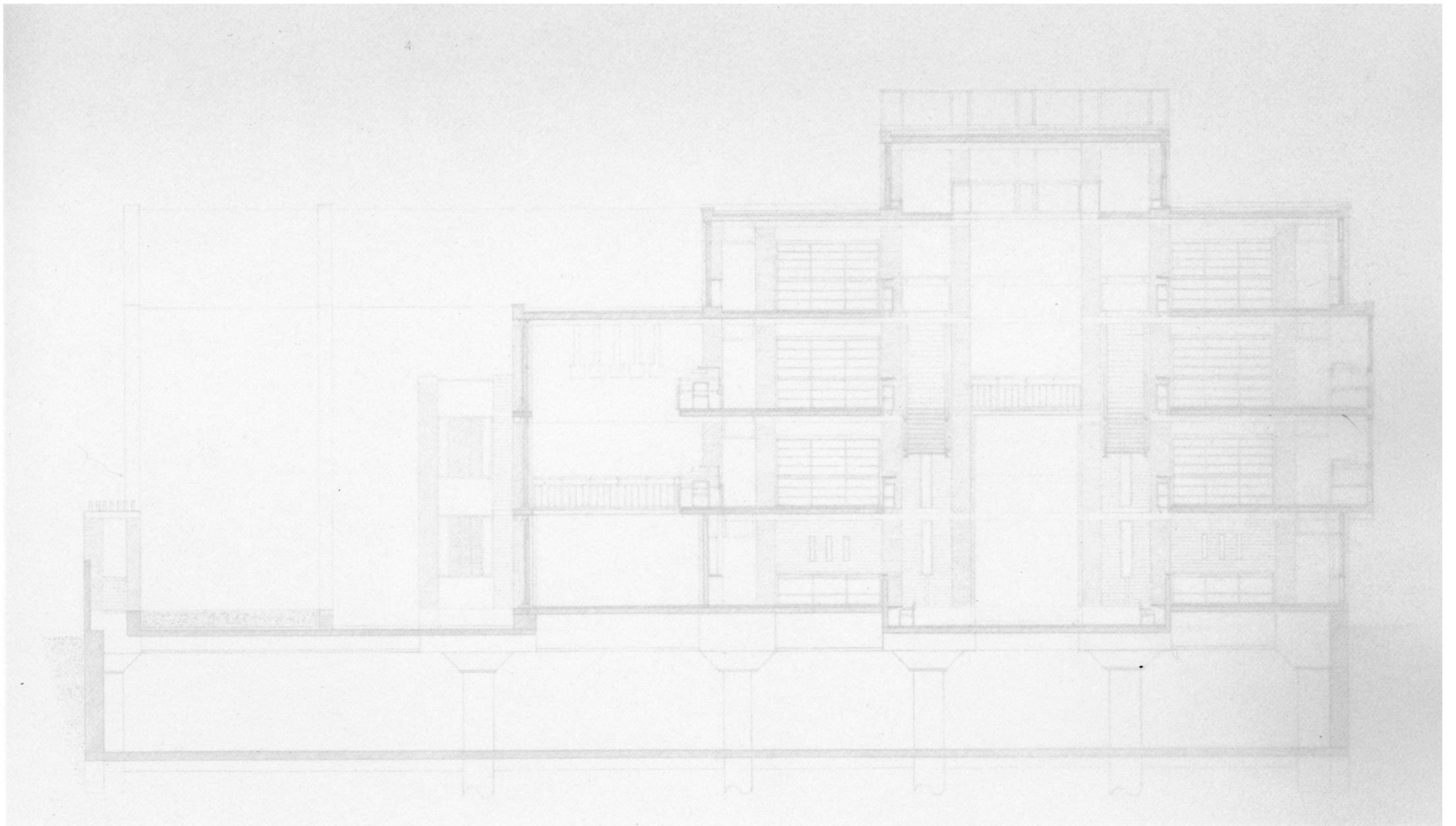


AXONOMETRIC
"ALLEY OF THE BOOKS" 10

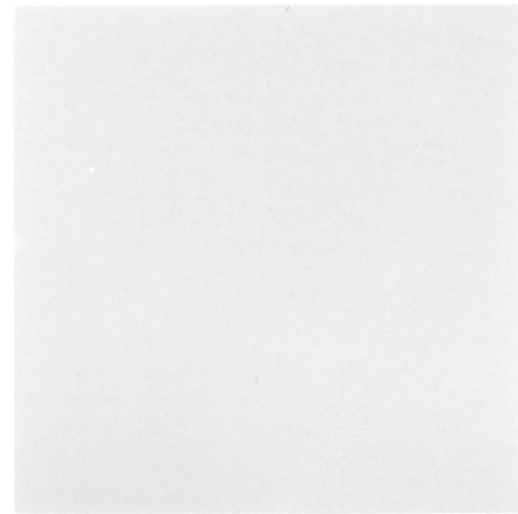
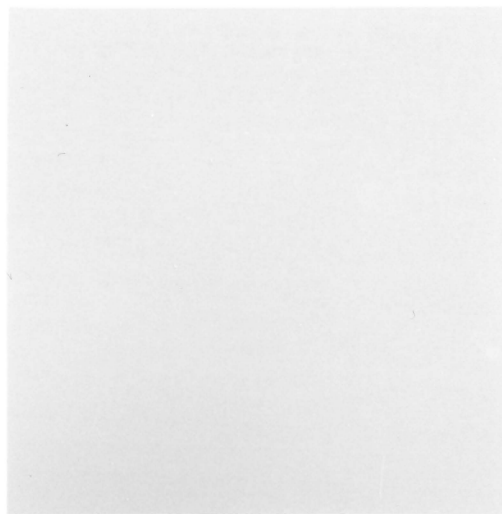
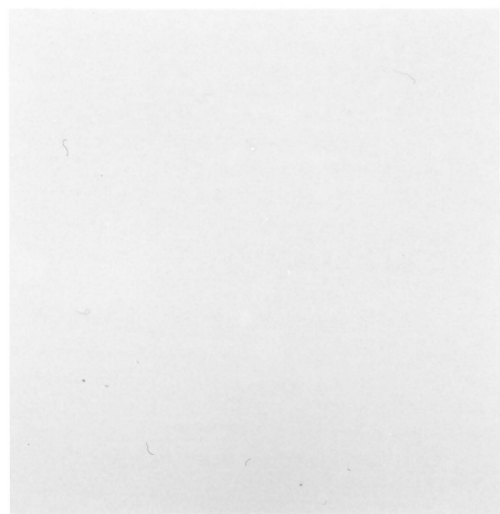
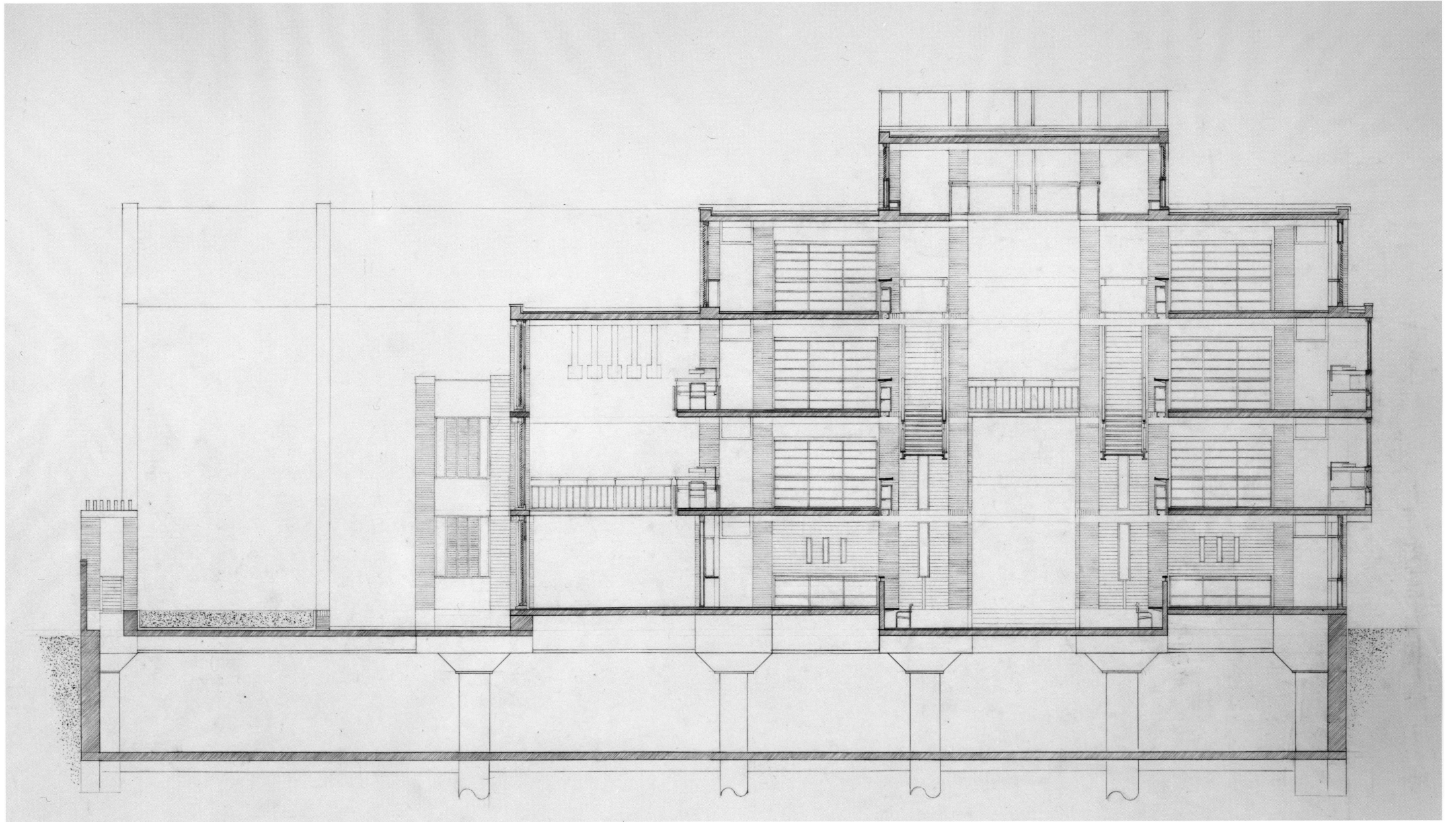


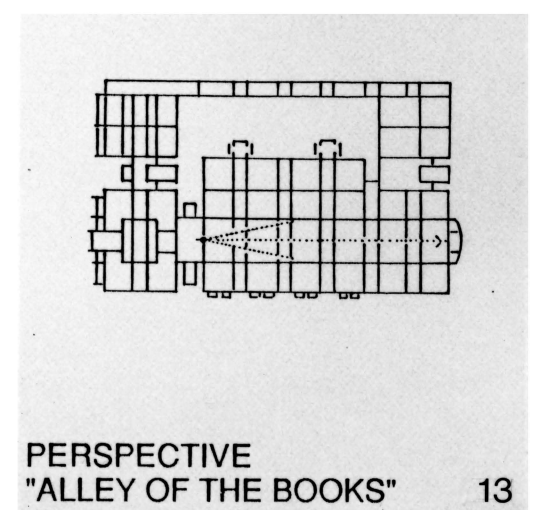
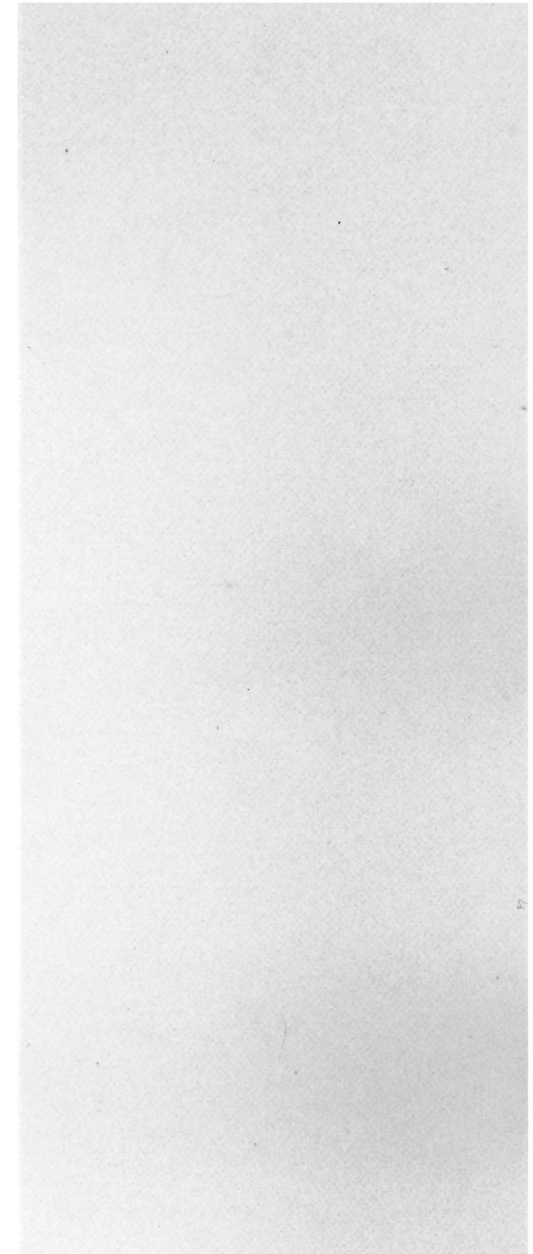
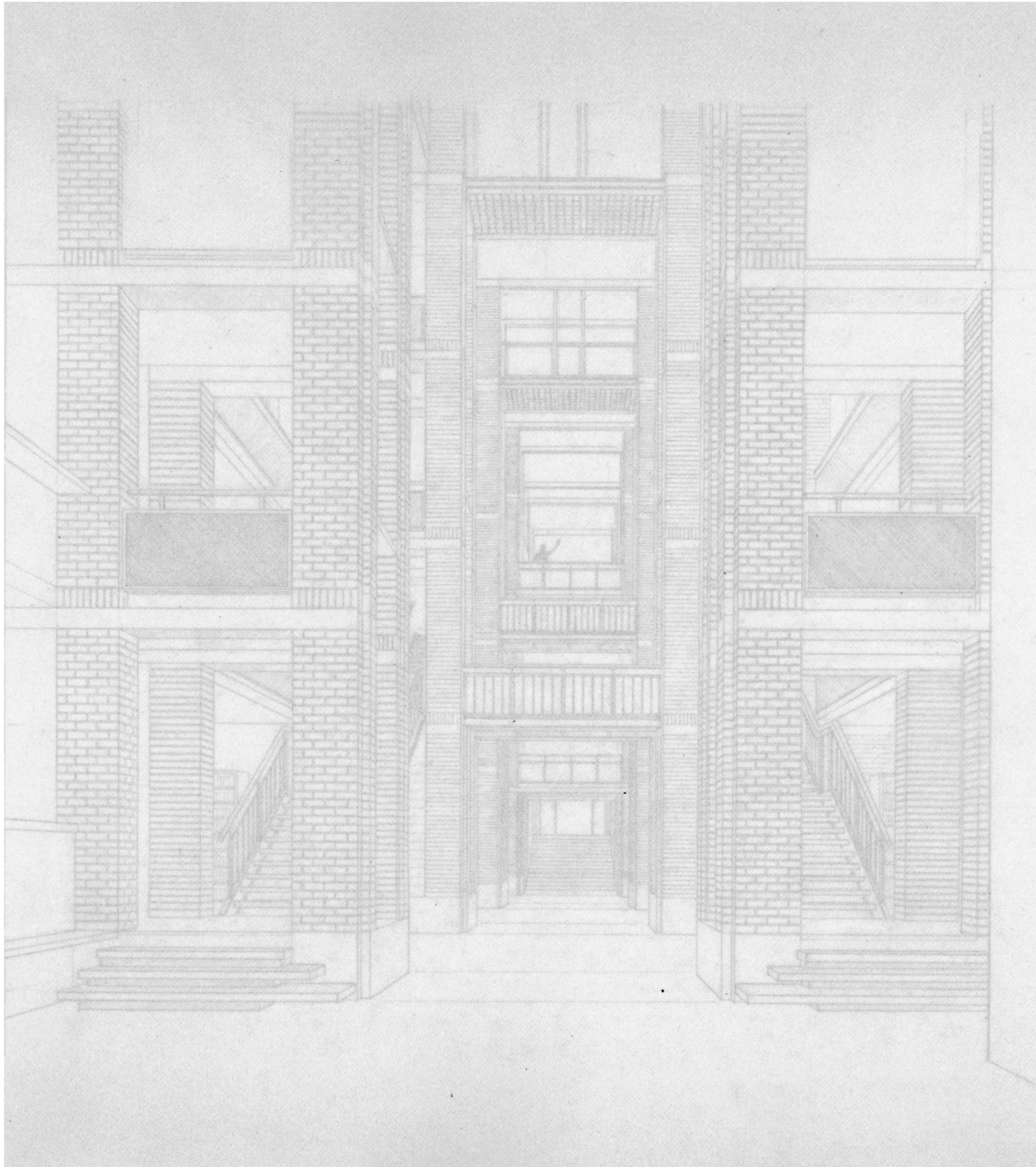






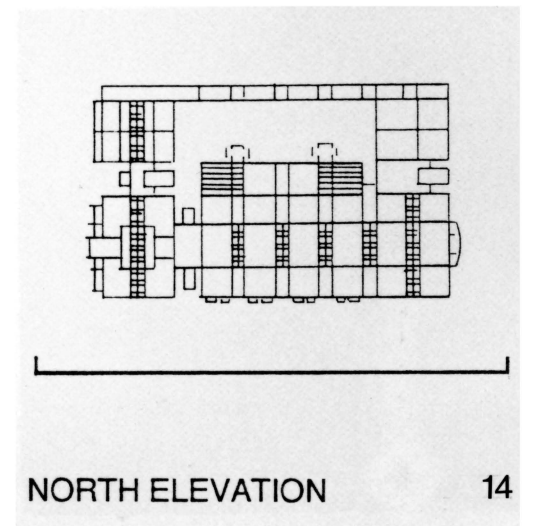
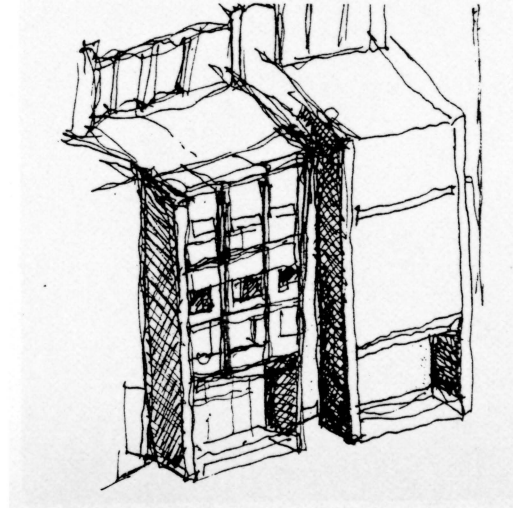
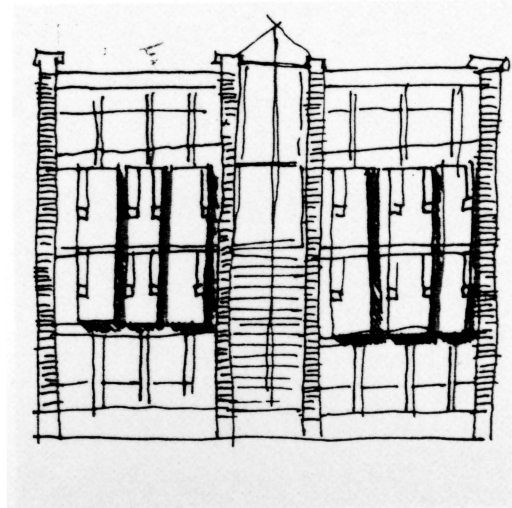
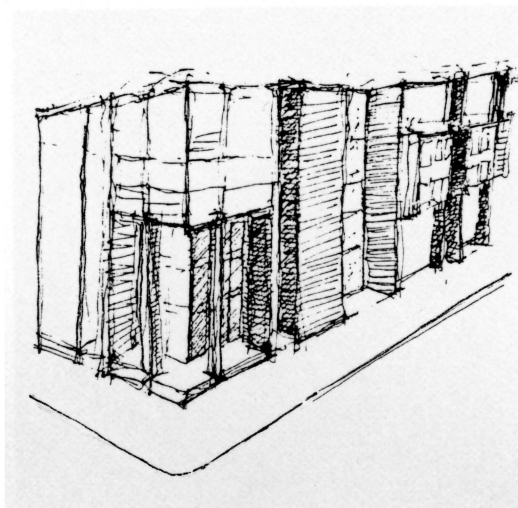
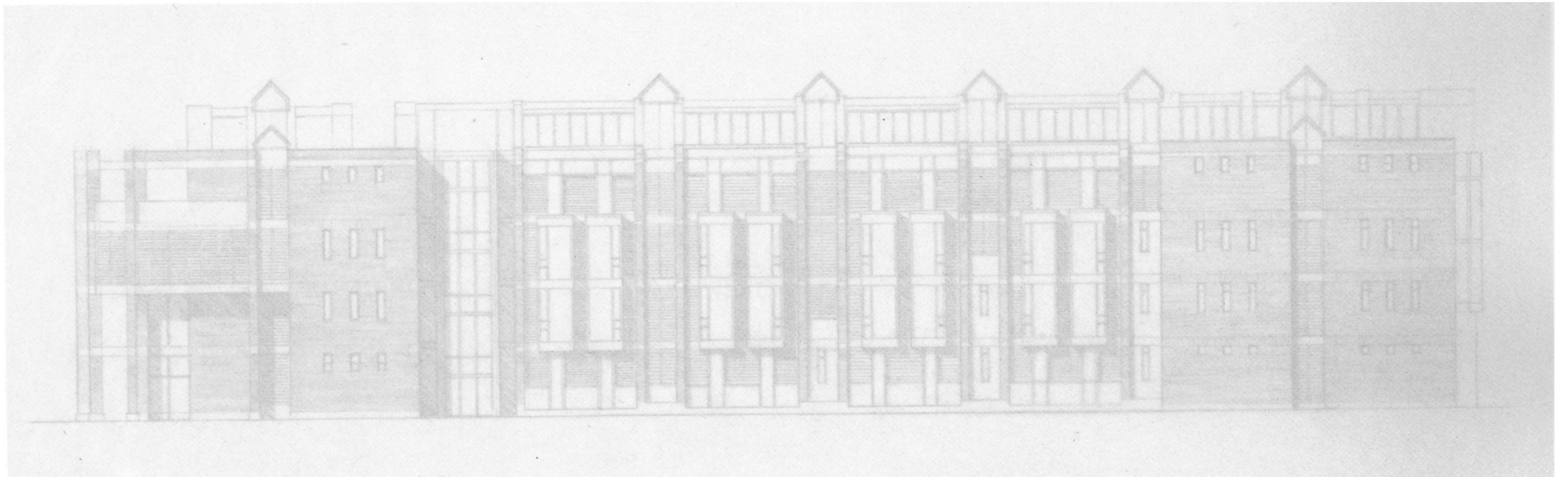
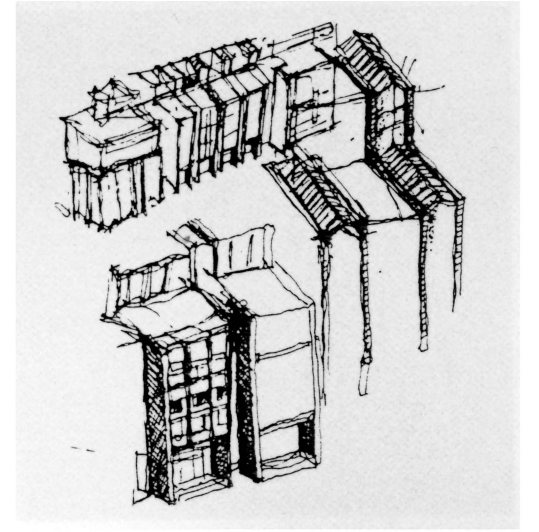
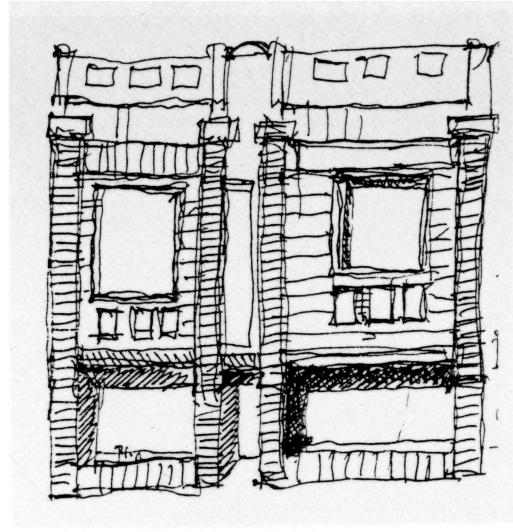
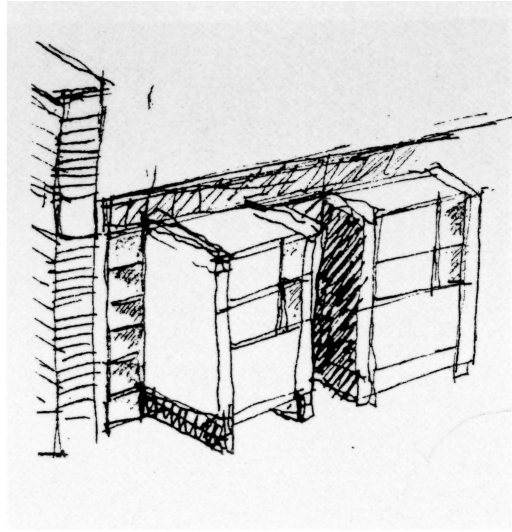
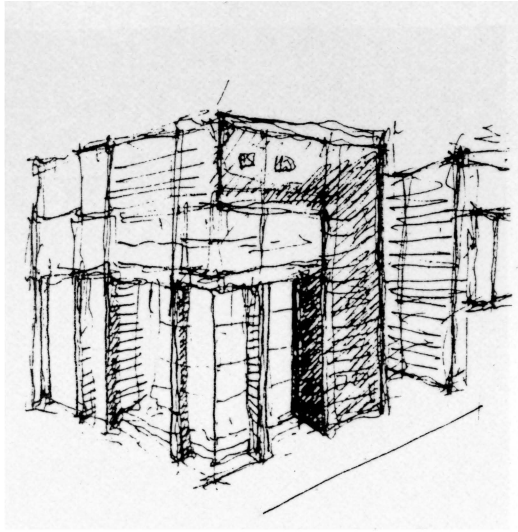
CROSS-SECTION



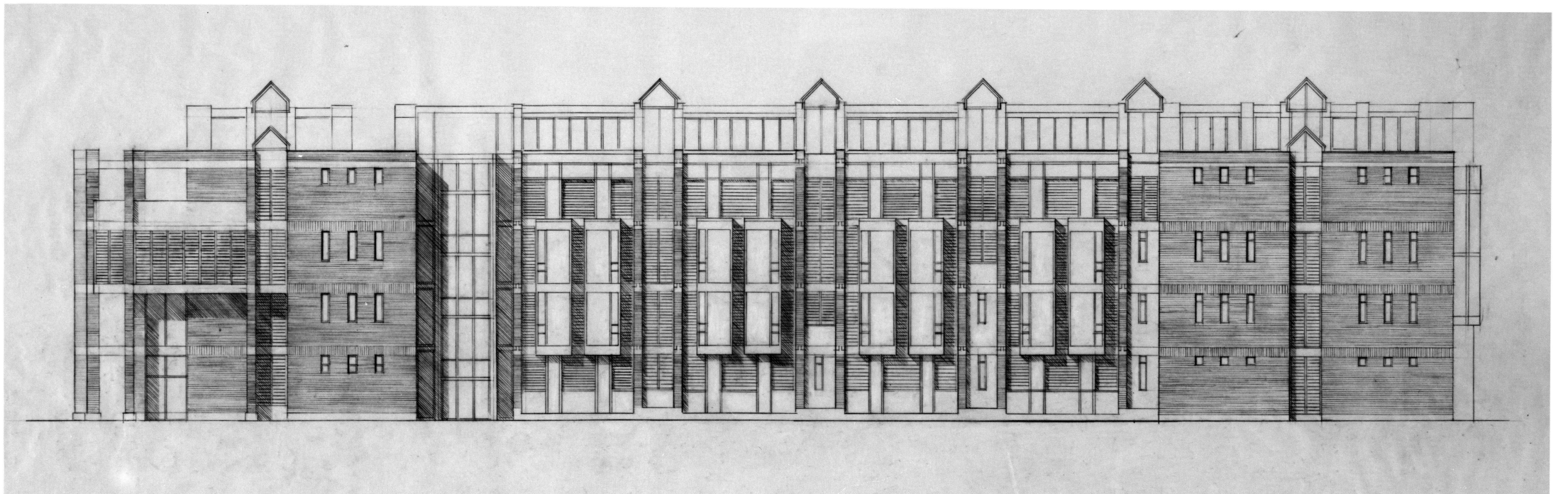
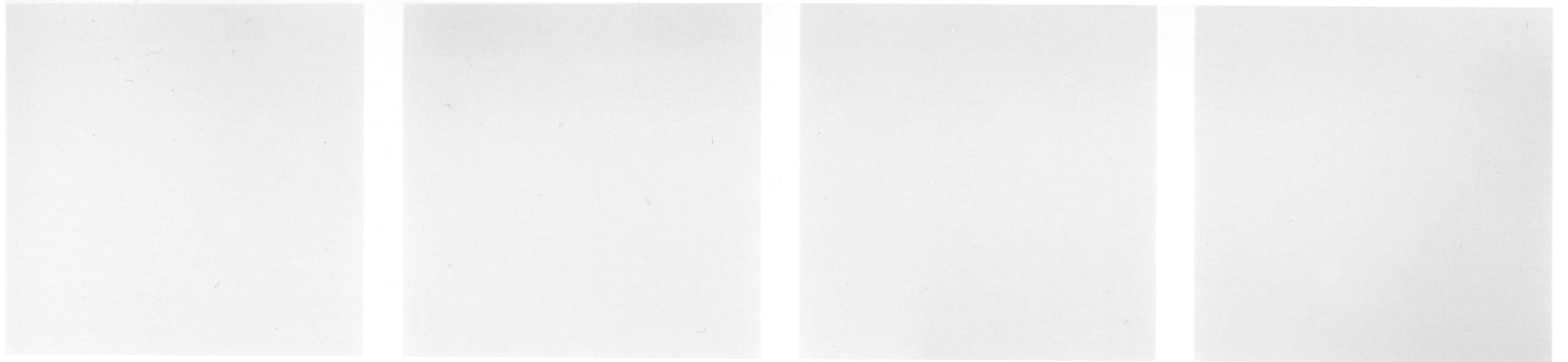


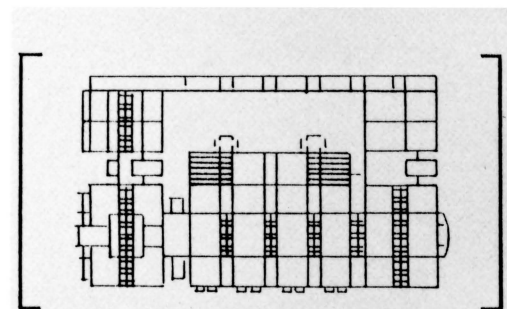
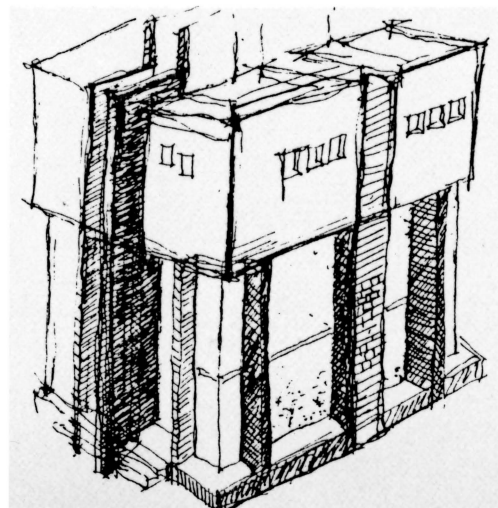
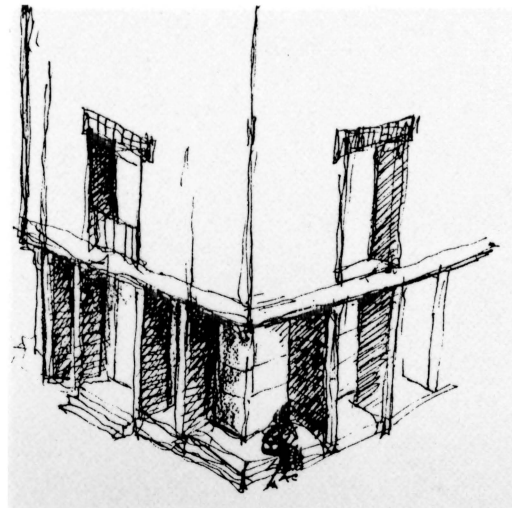
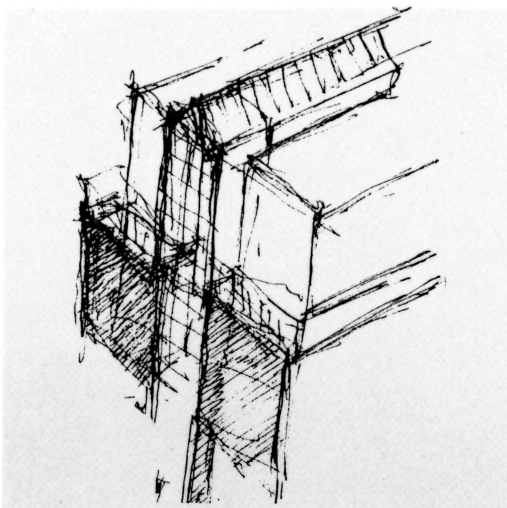
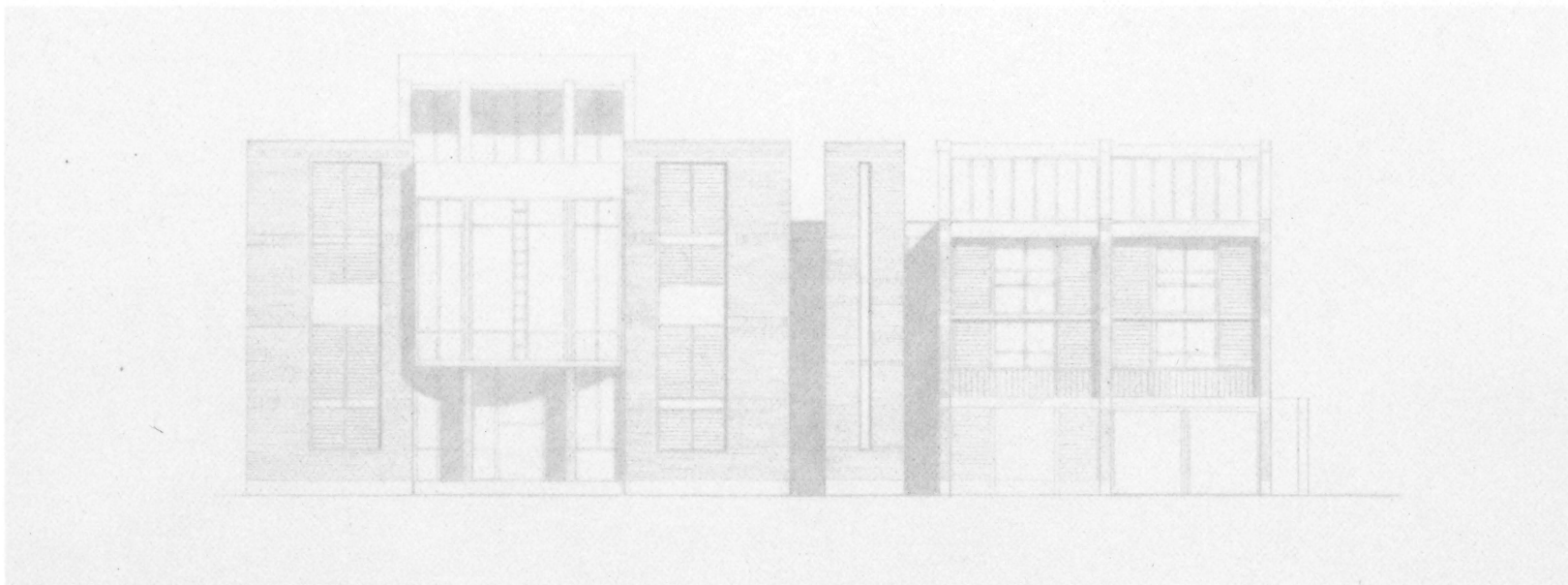
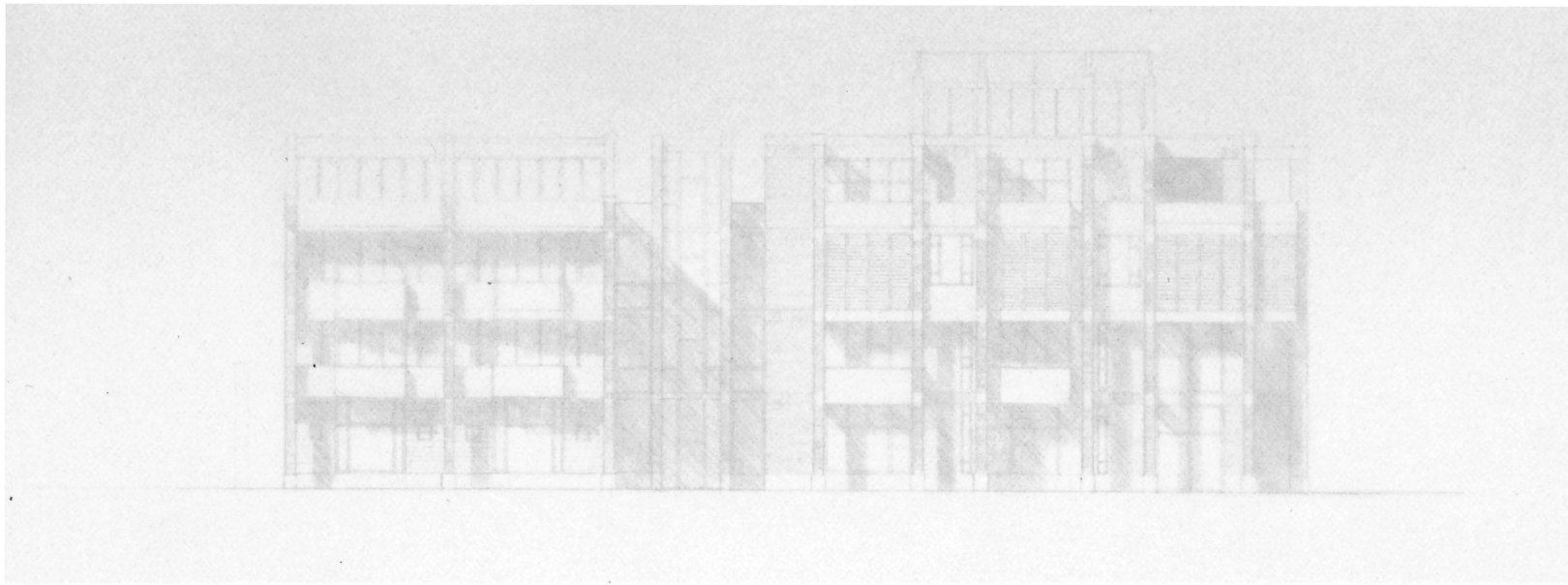
PERSPECTIVE
"ALLEY OF THE BOOKS"



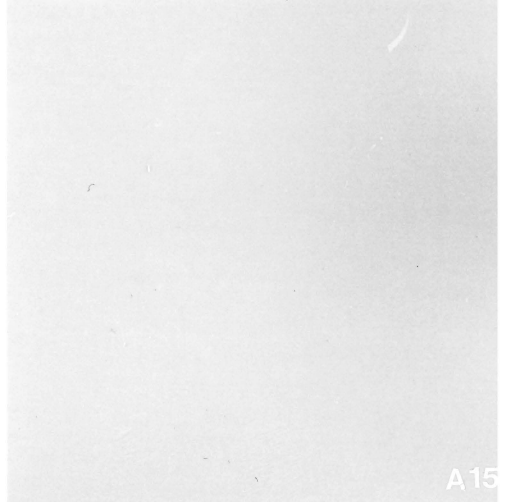
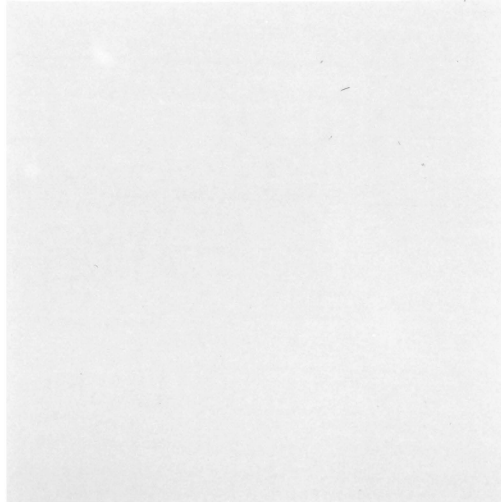
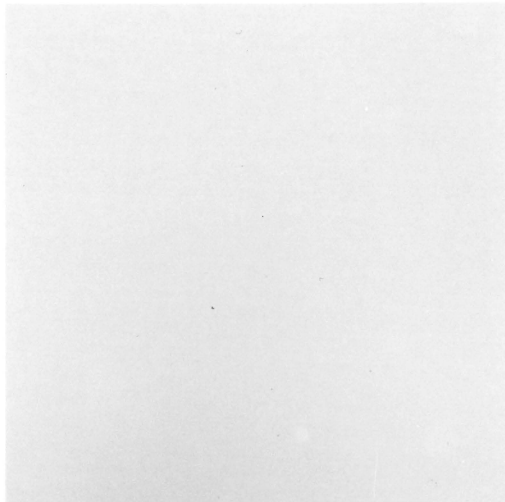
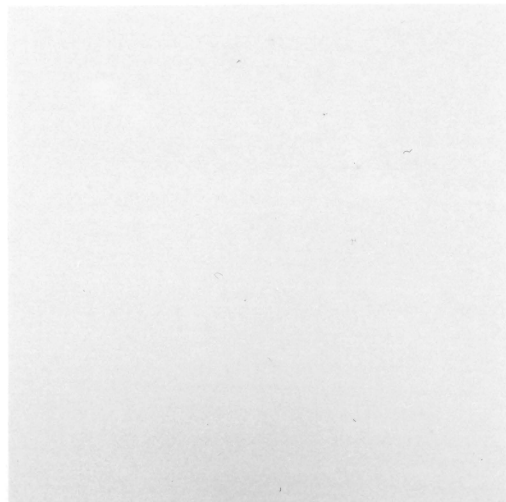
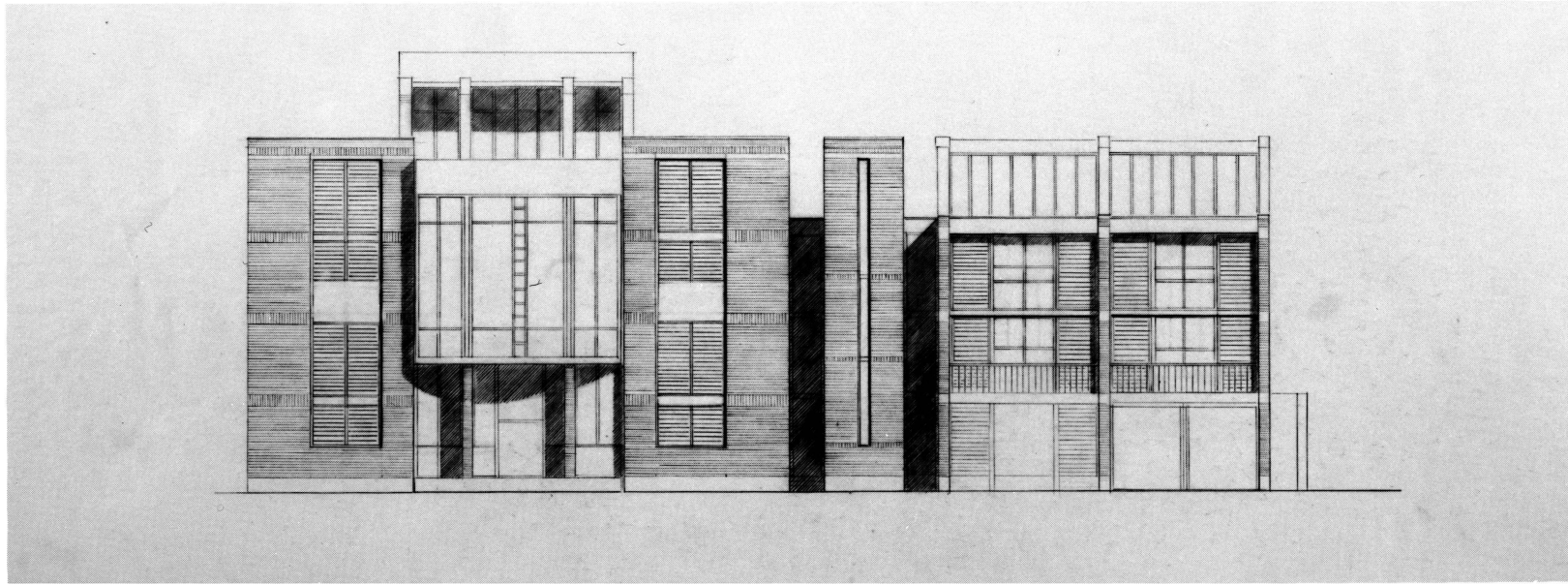
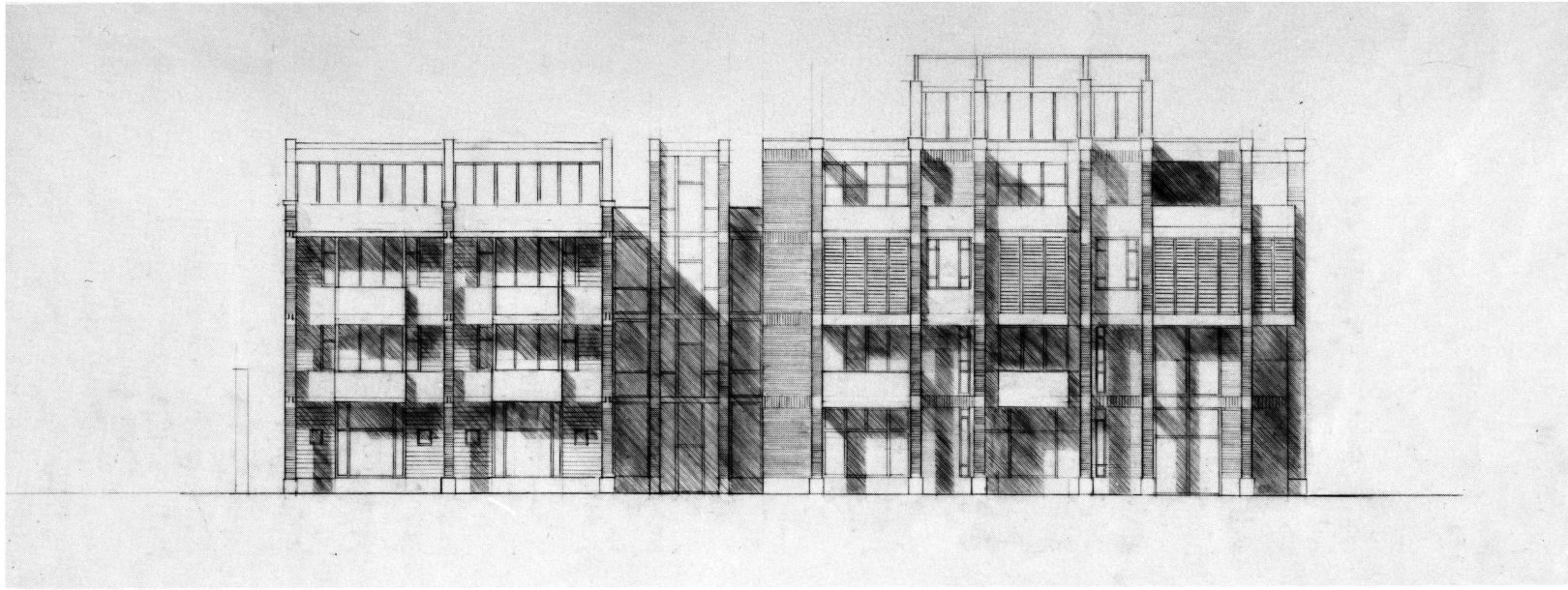


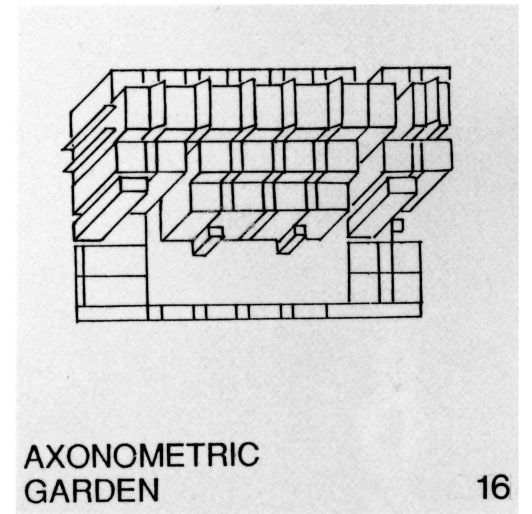
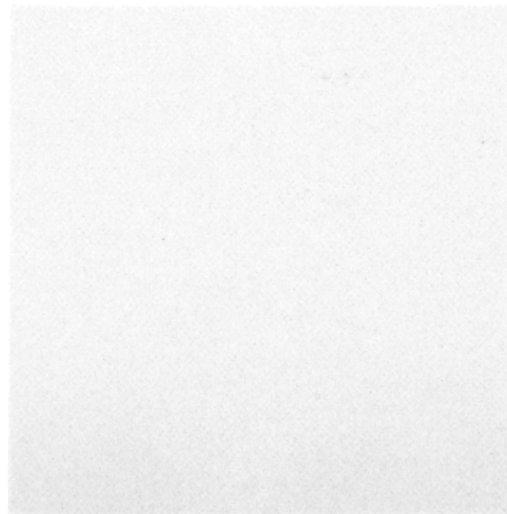
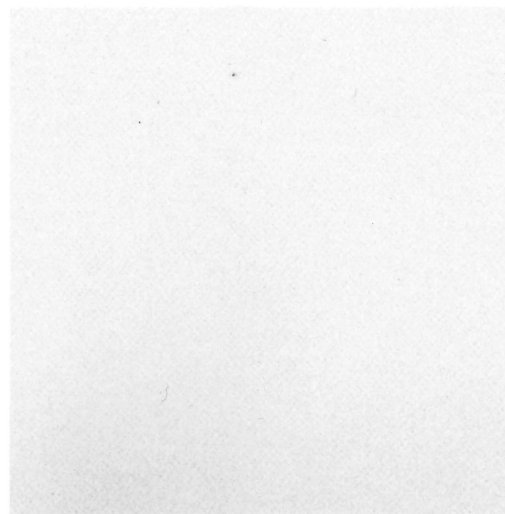
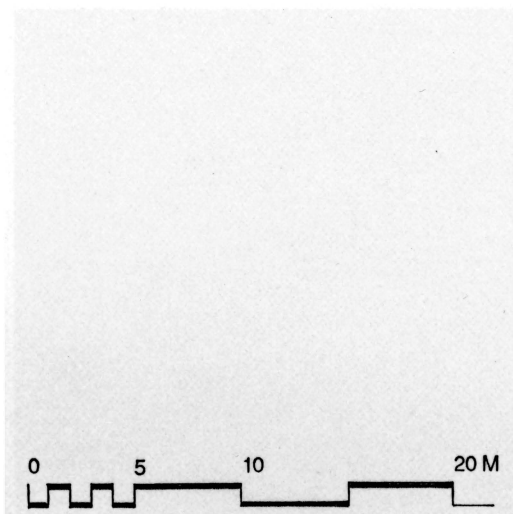
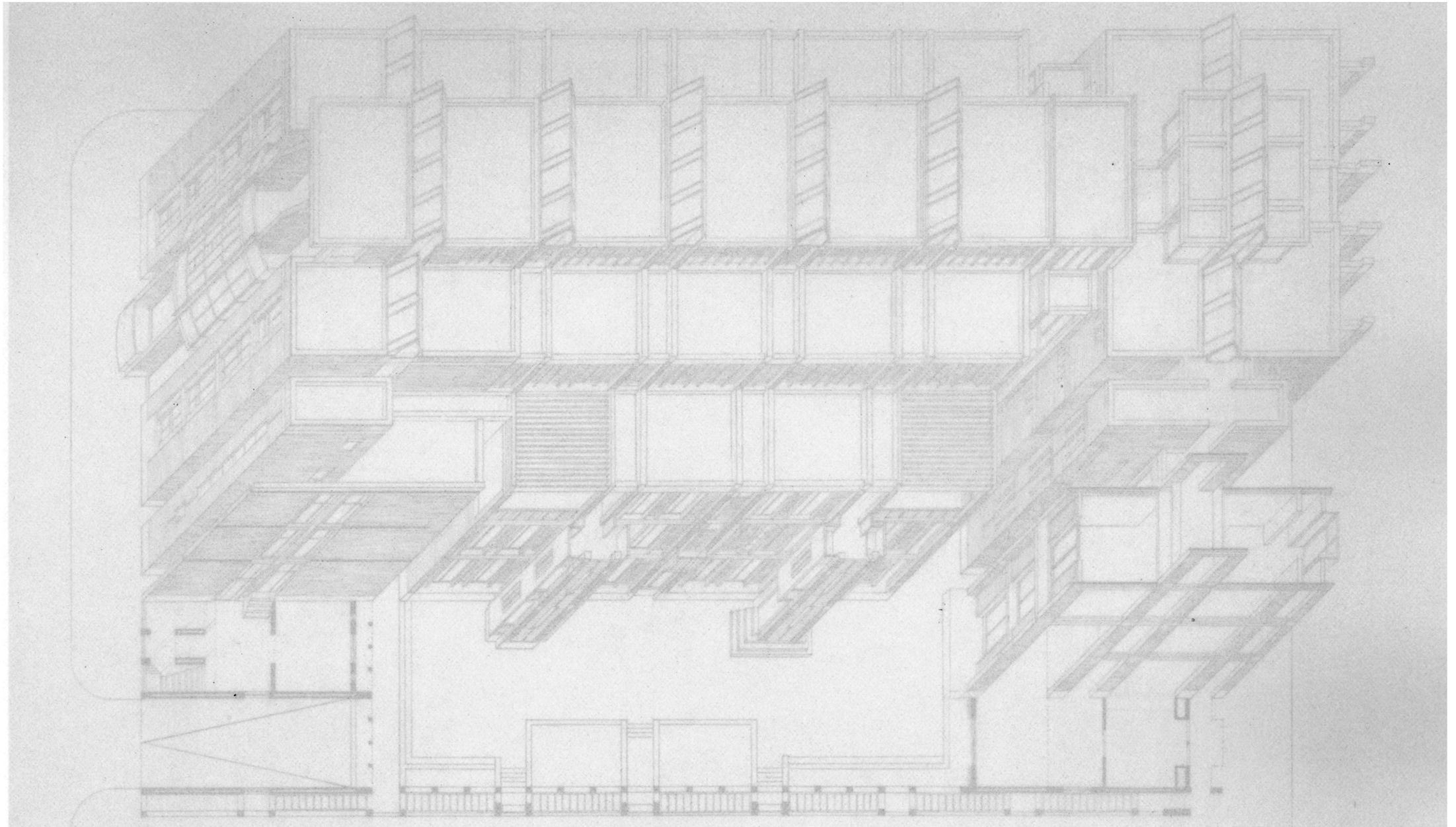
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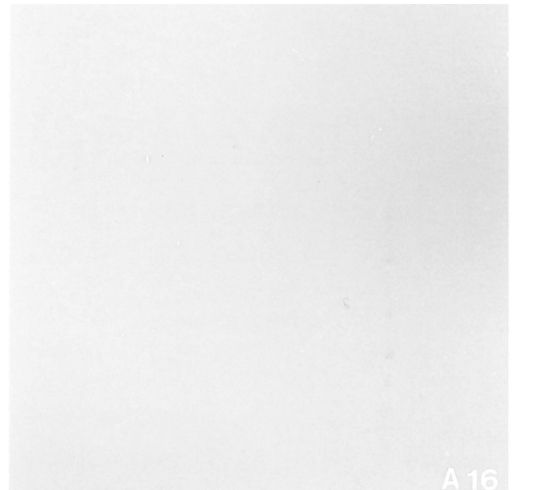
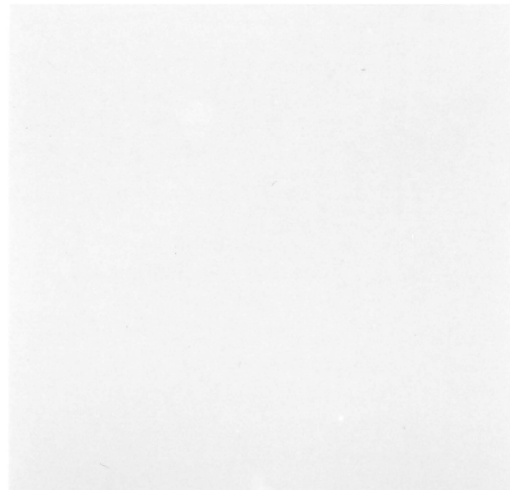
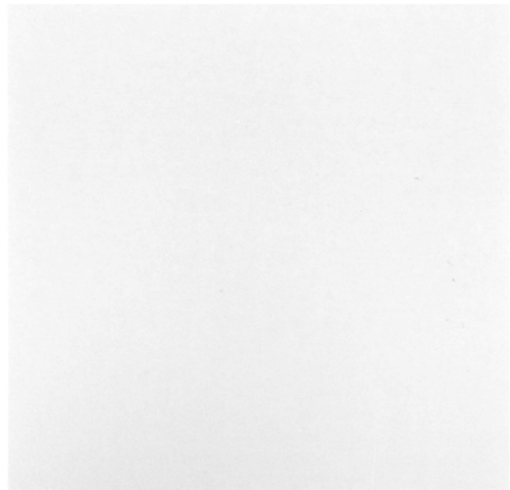
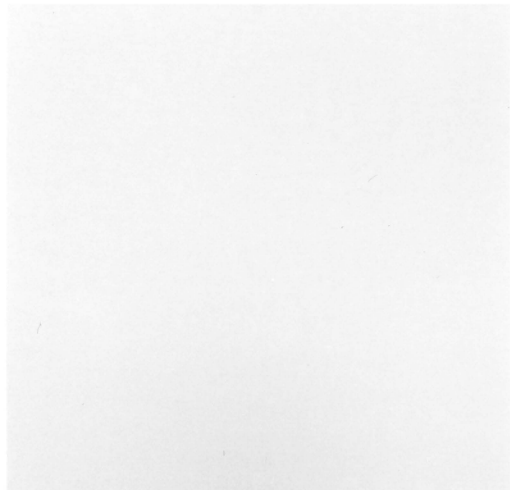
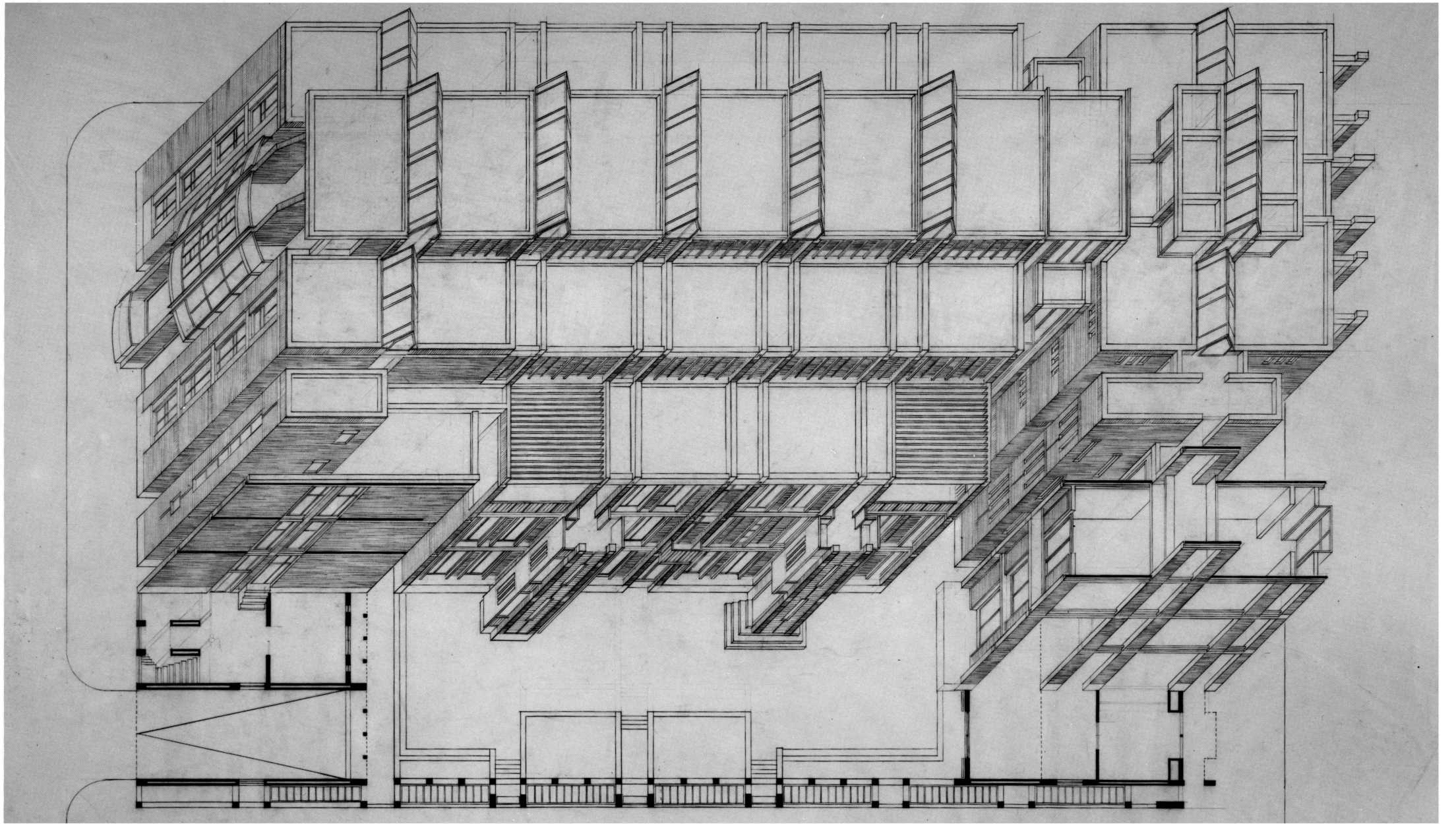


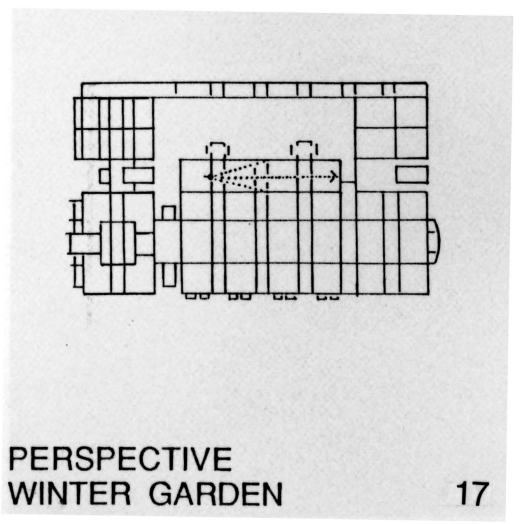
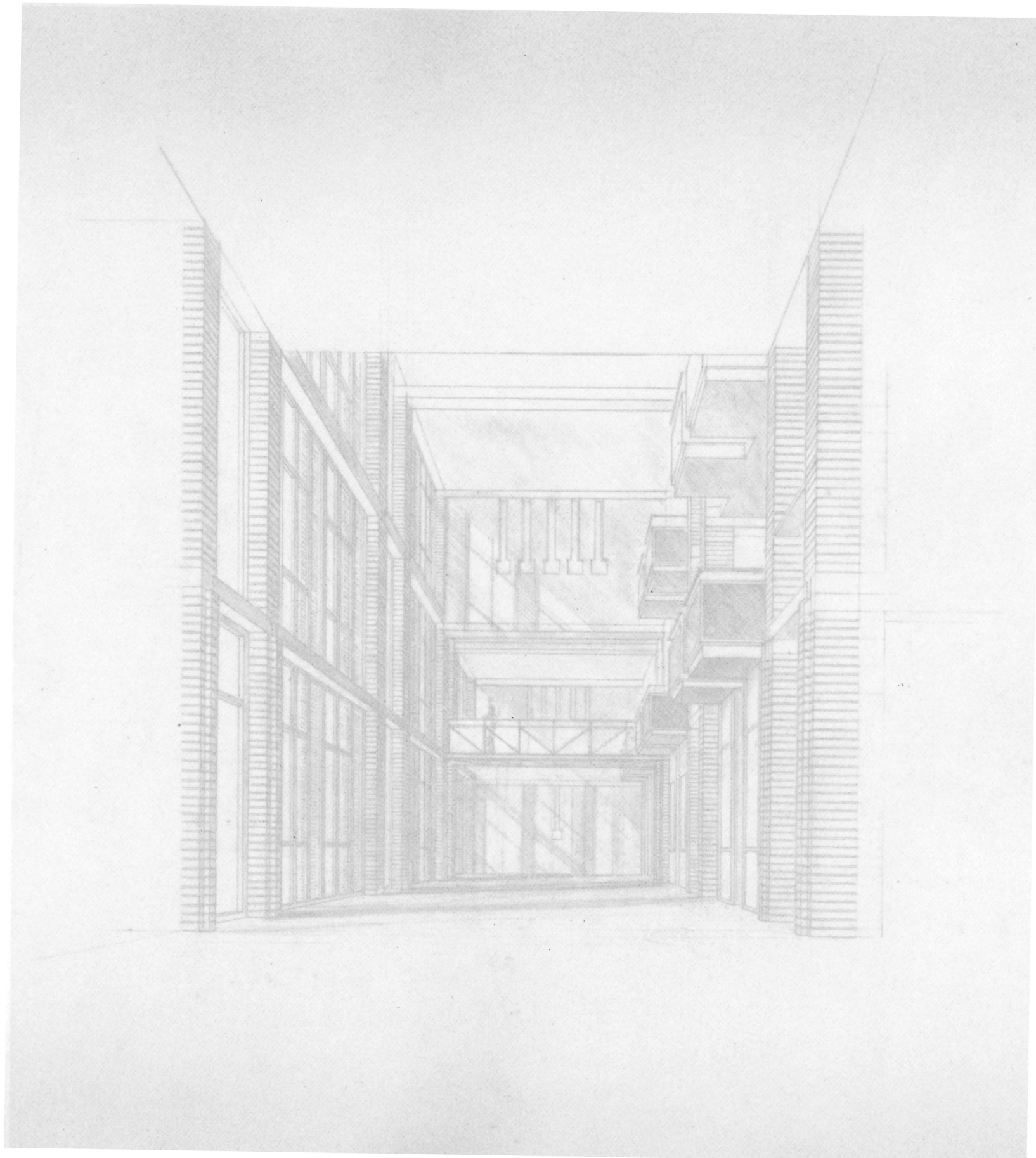


EAST ELEVATION
WEST ELEVATION

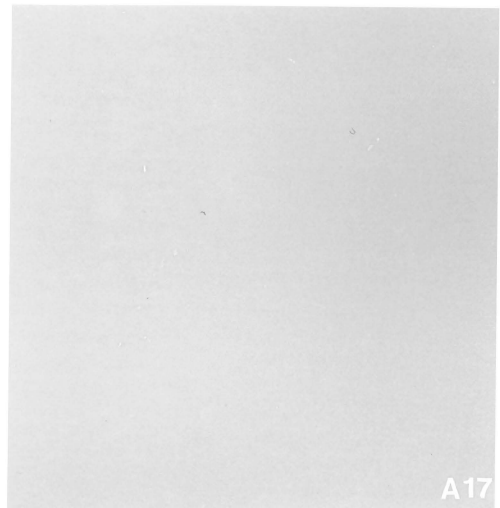
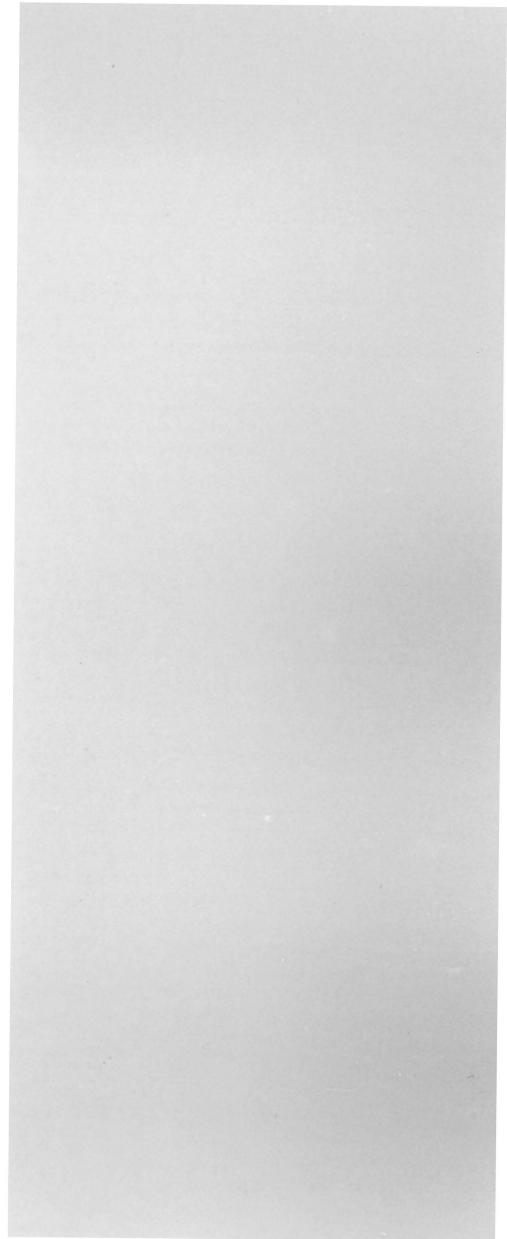
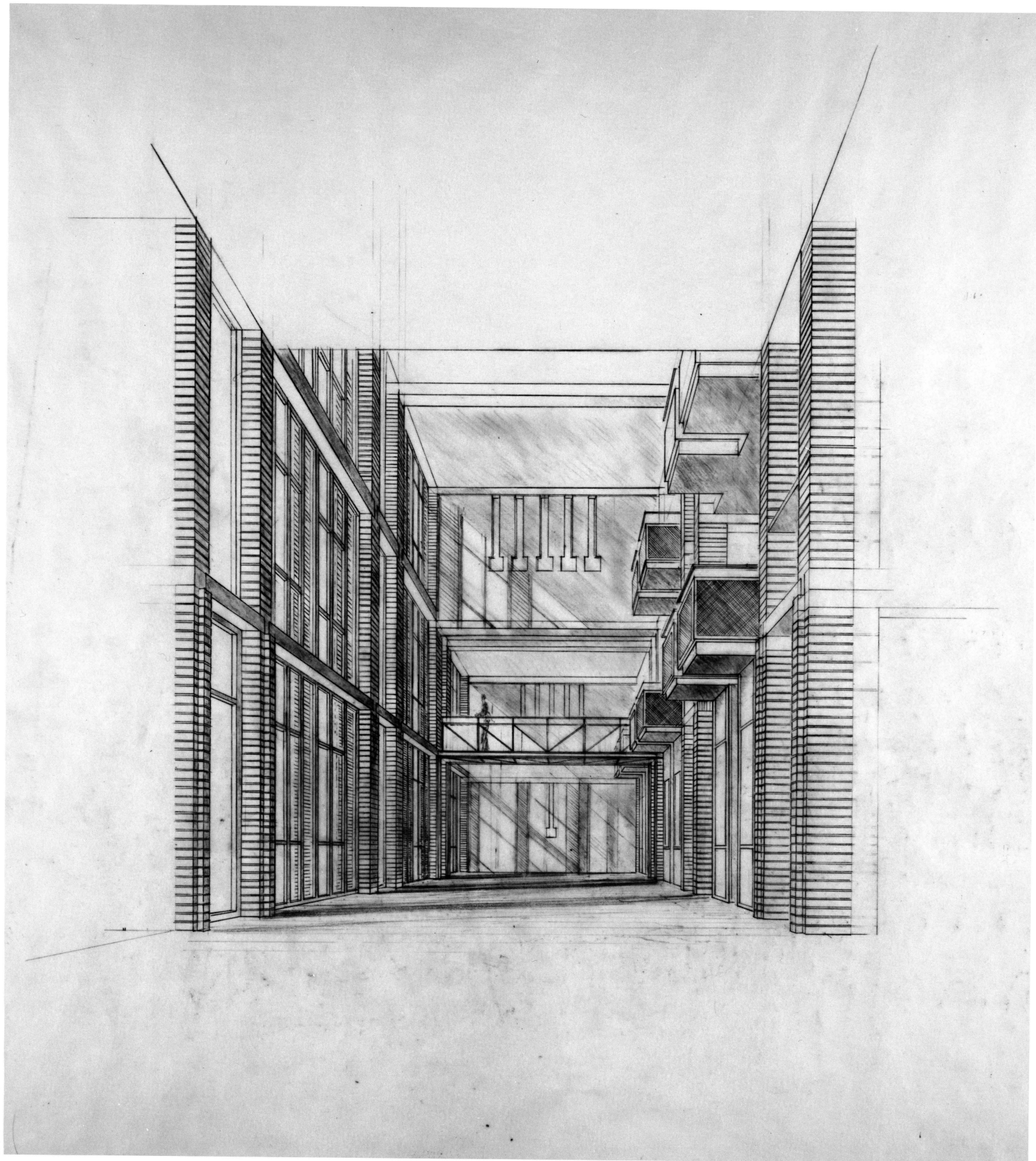


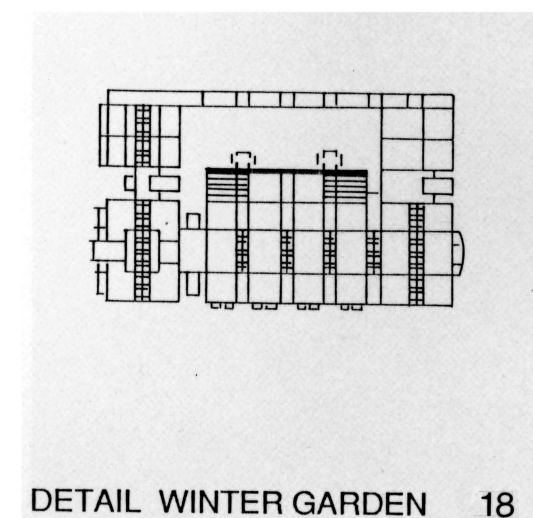


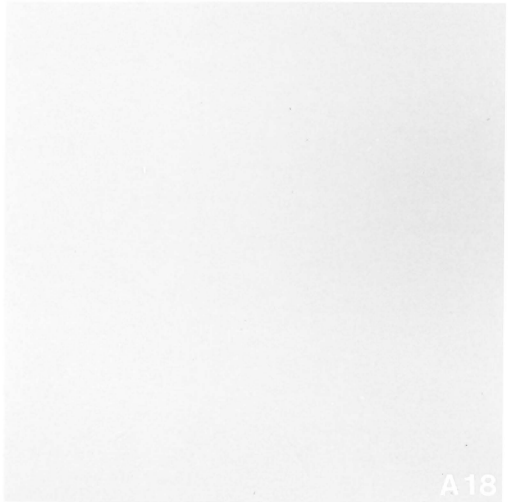
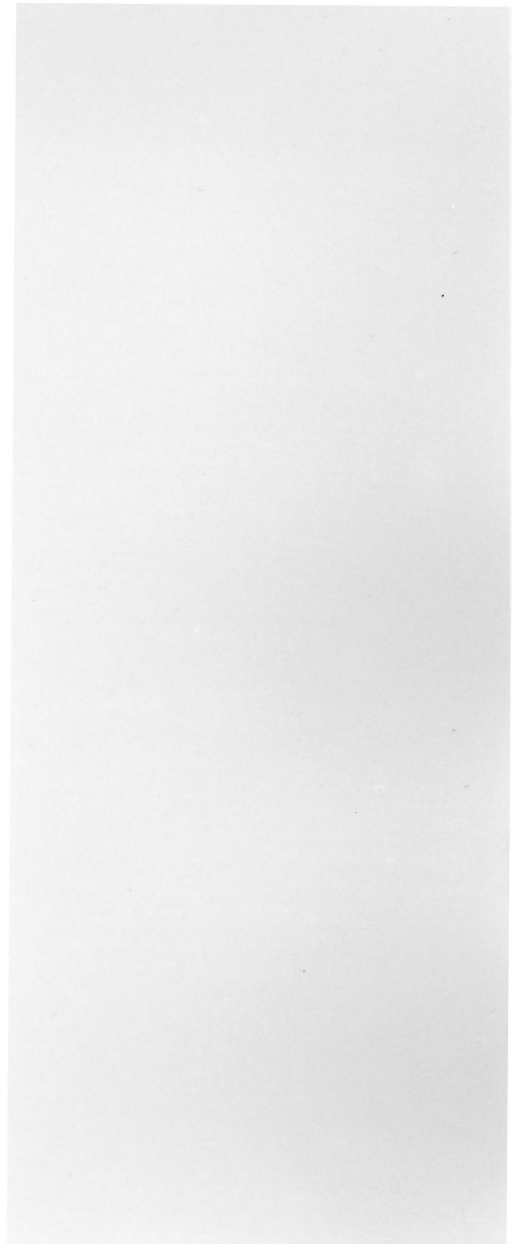
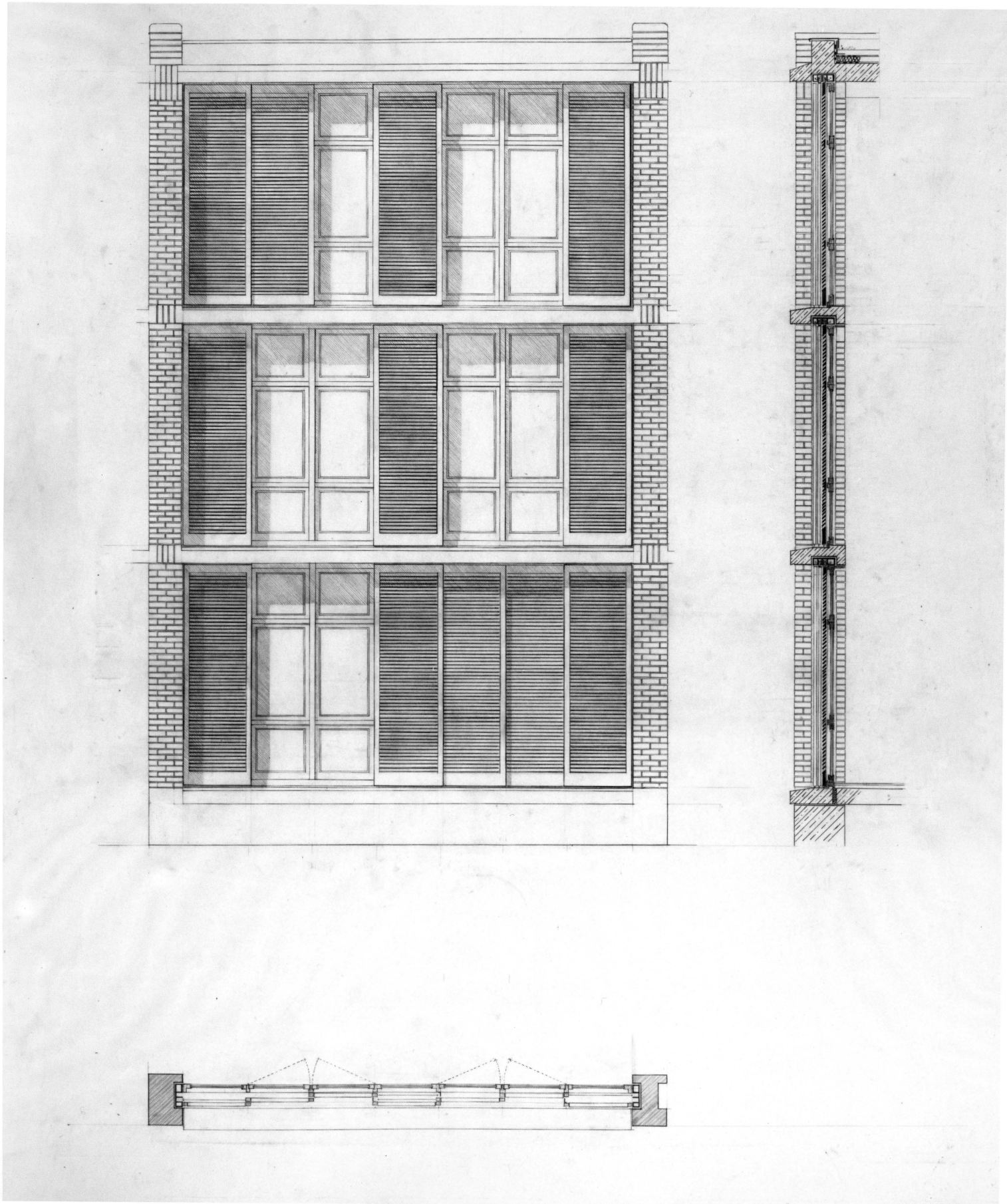


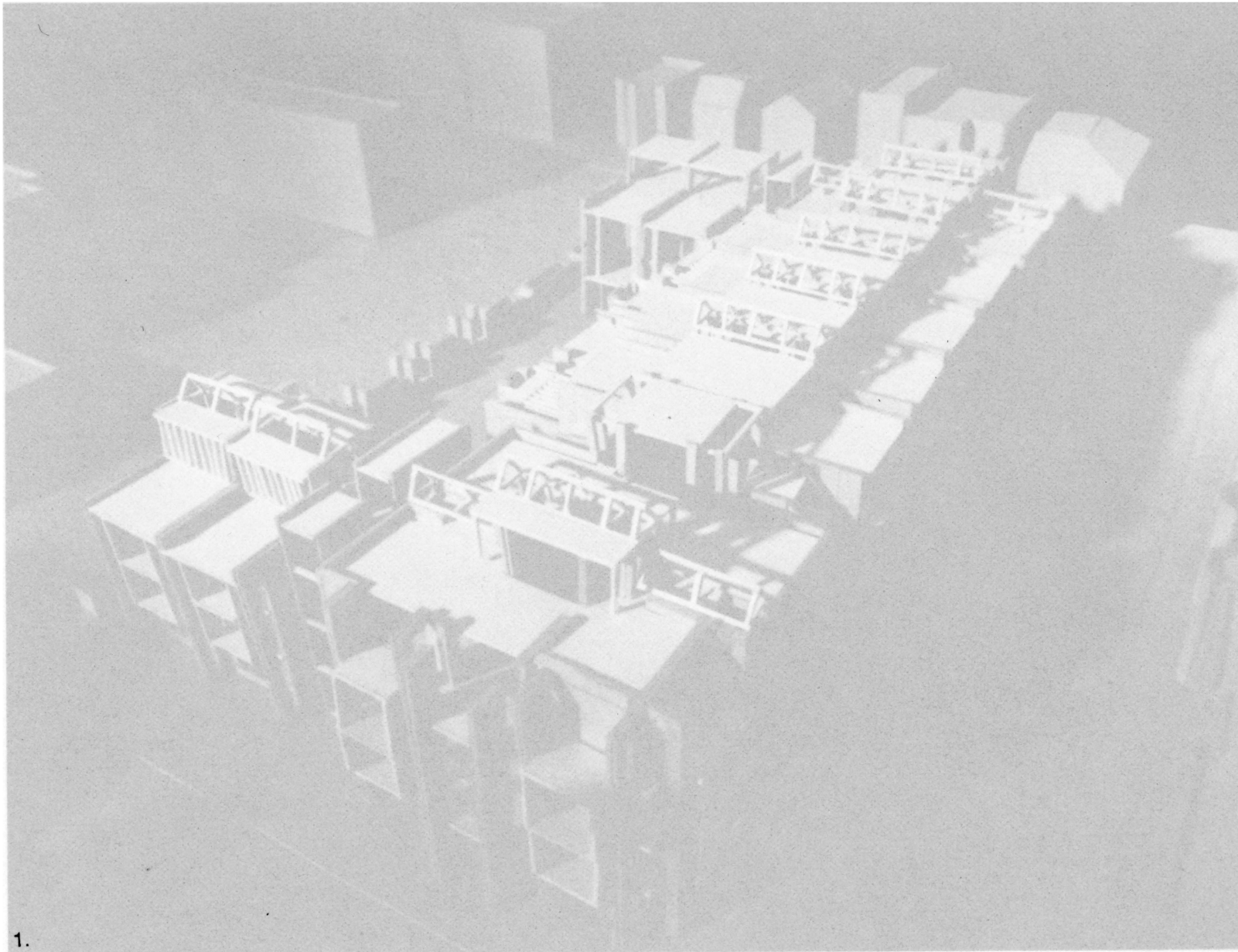


PERSPECTIVE
WINTER GARDEN



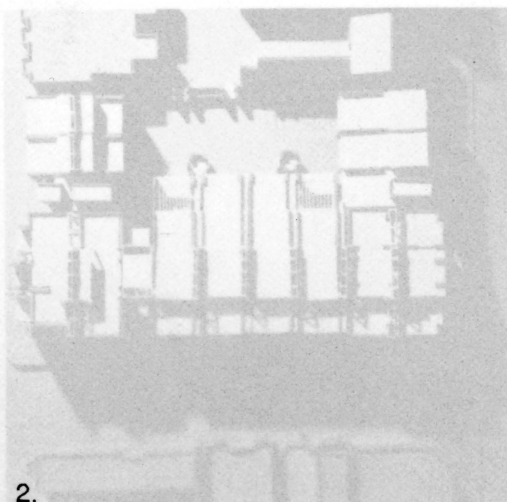




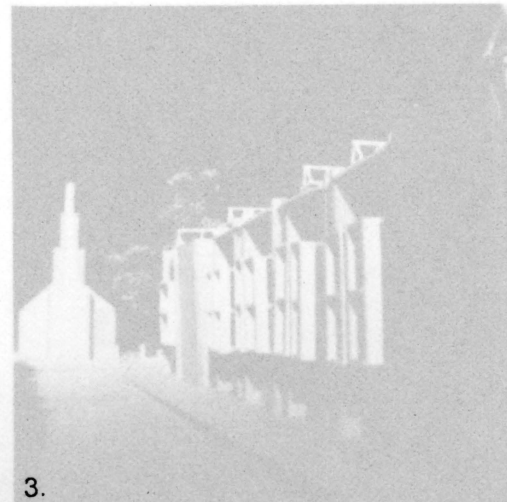


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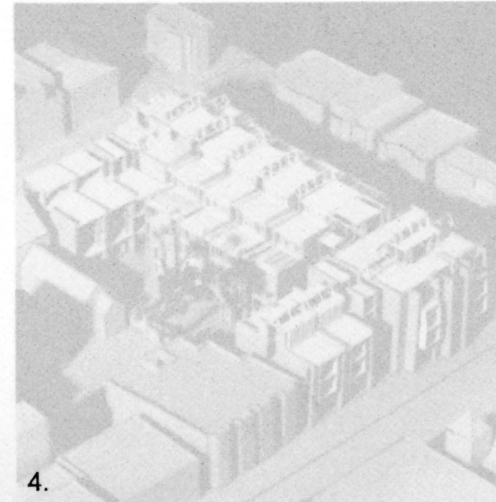
- 1. North-East Corner facing Christ Church
- 2. Roofs / Skylights
- 3. View towards Christ Church (Cameron Street)
- 4. Garden View



2.

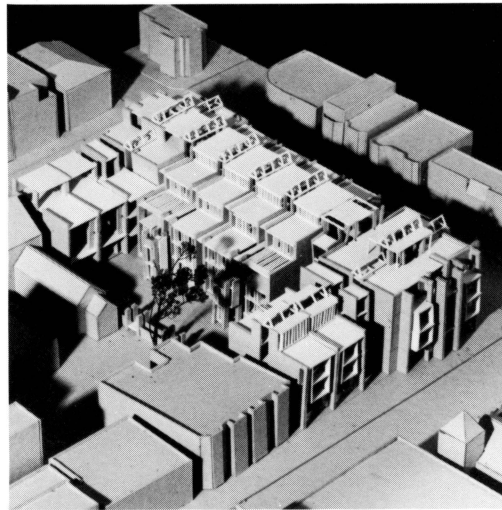
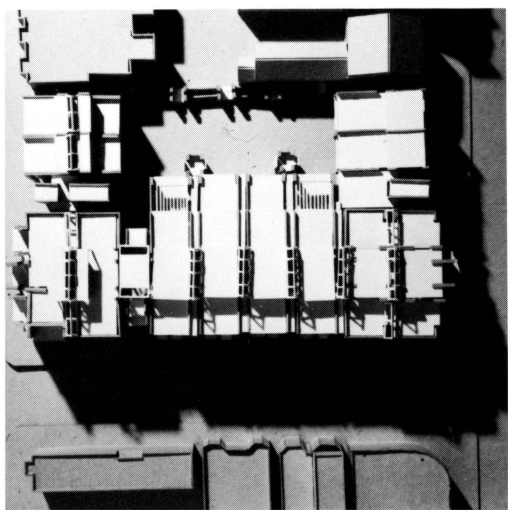
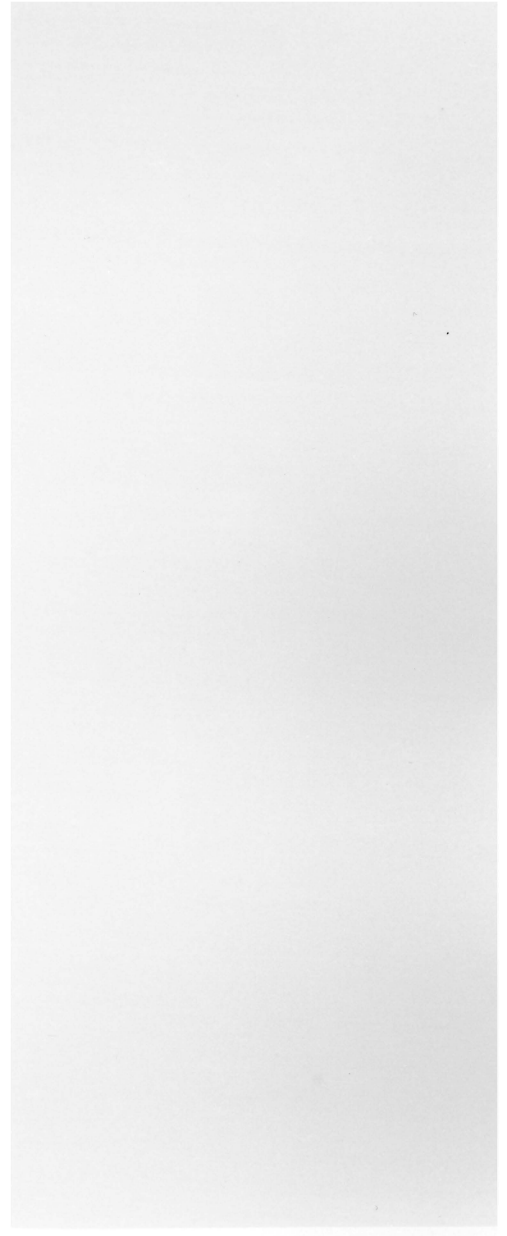
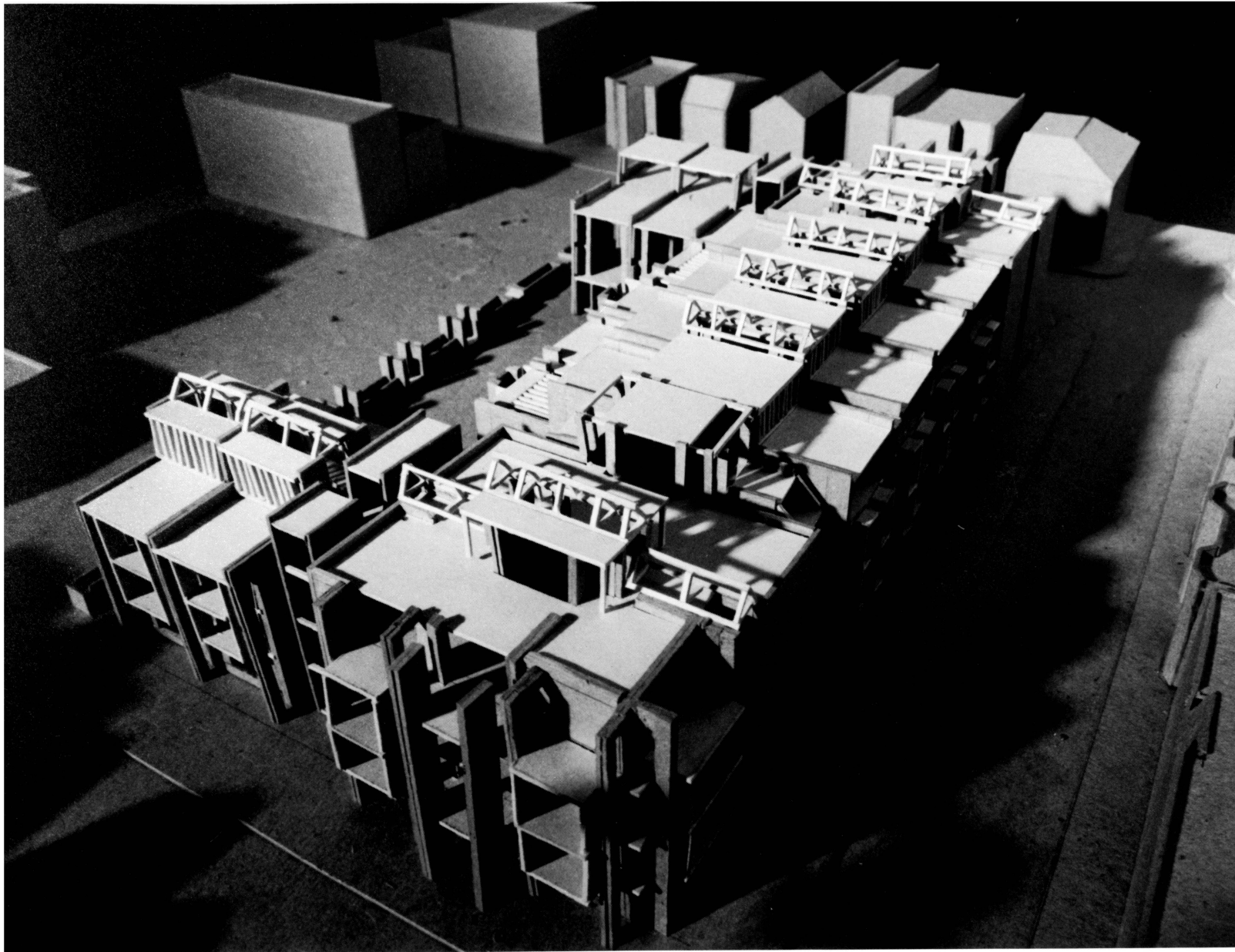


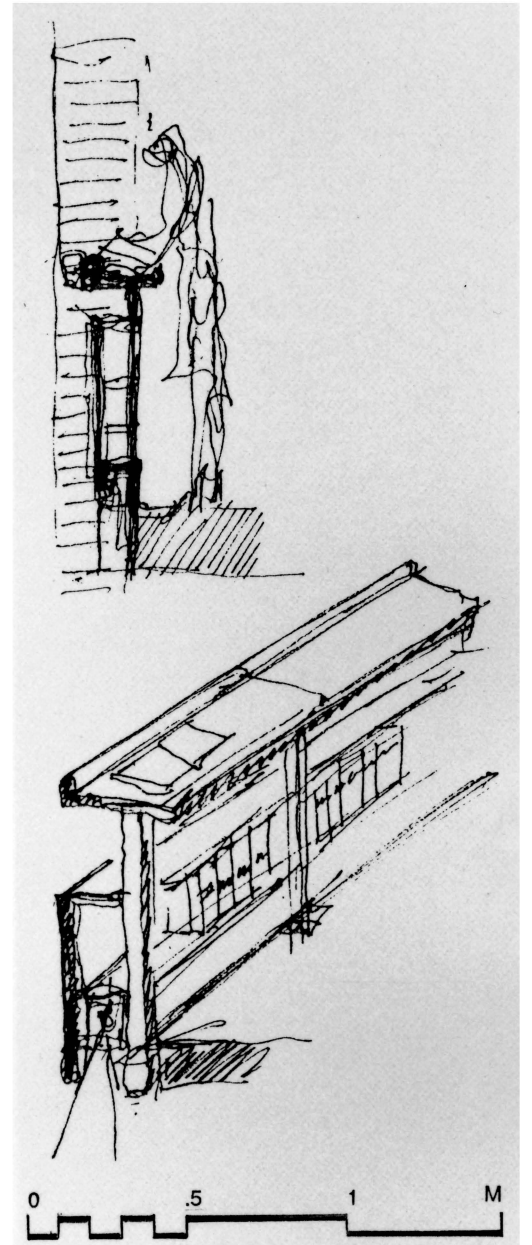
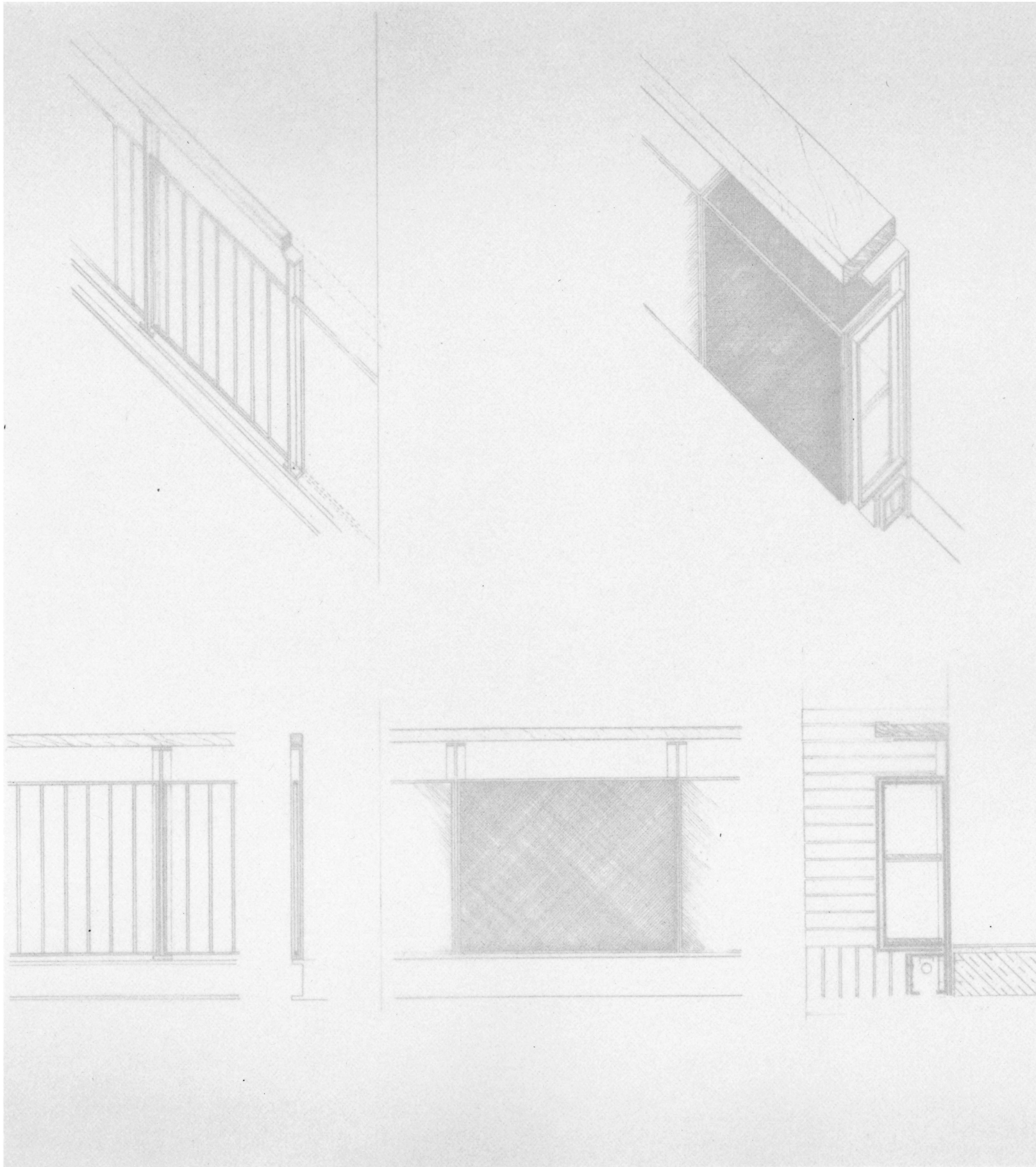
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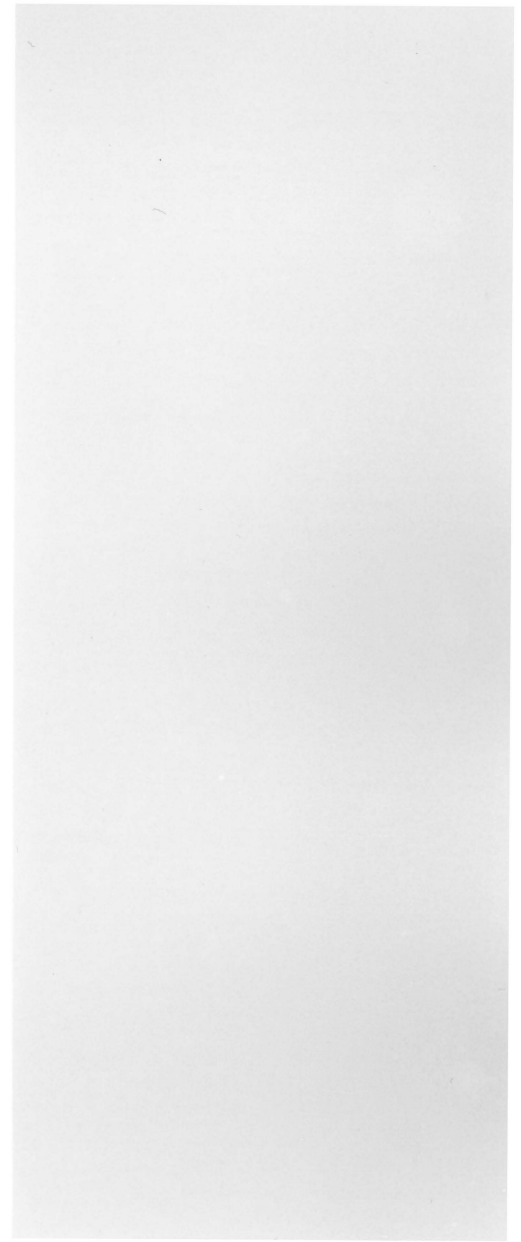
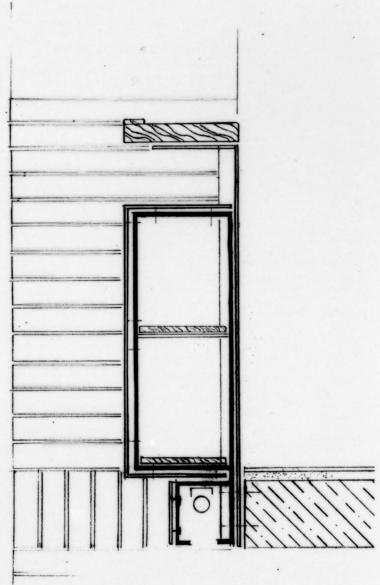
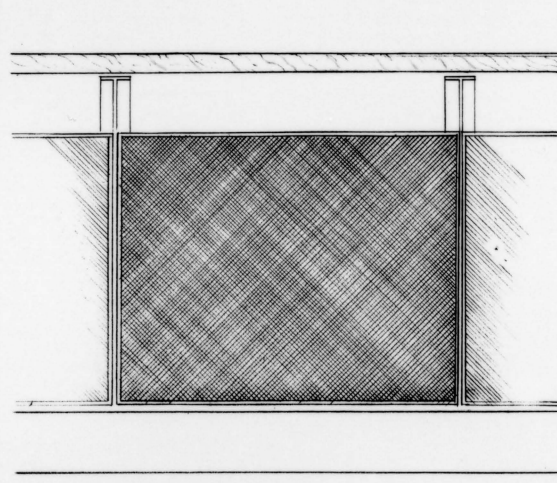
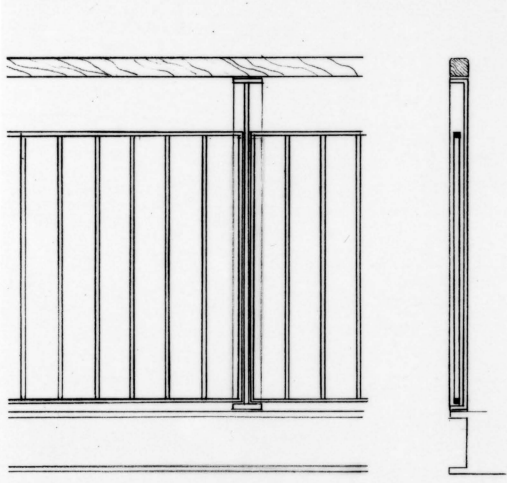
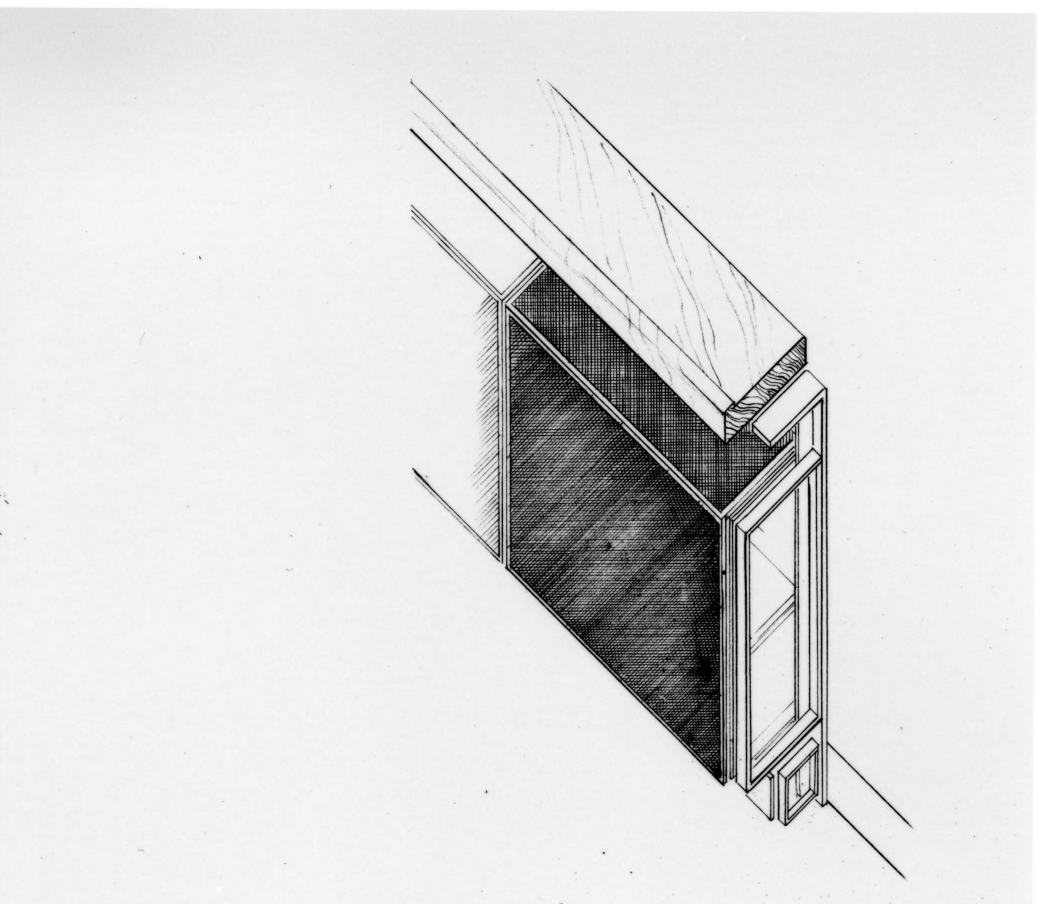
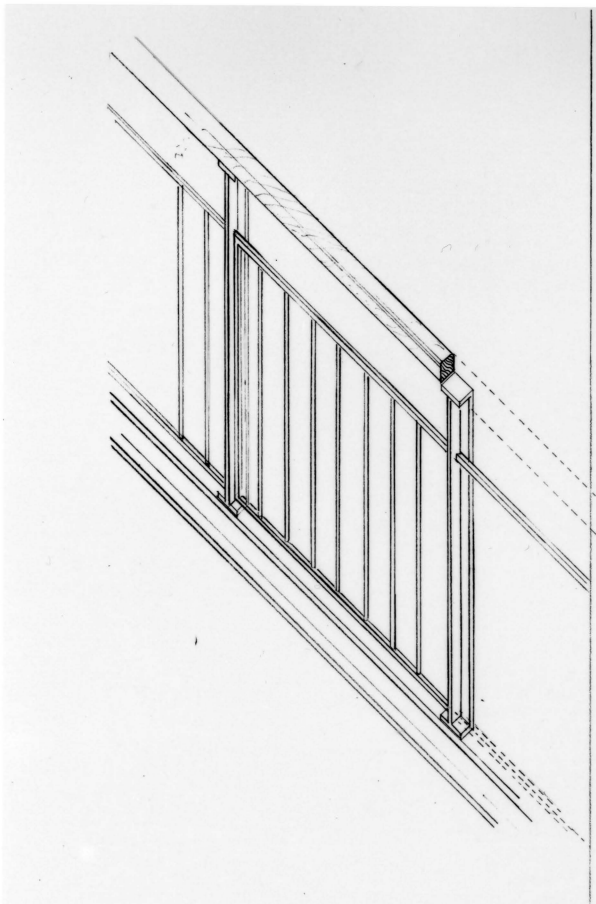


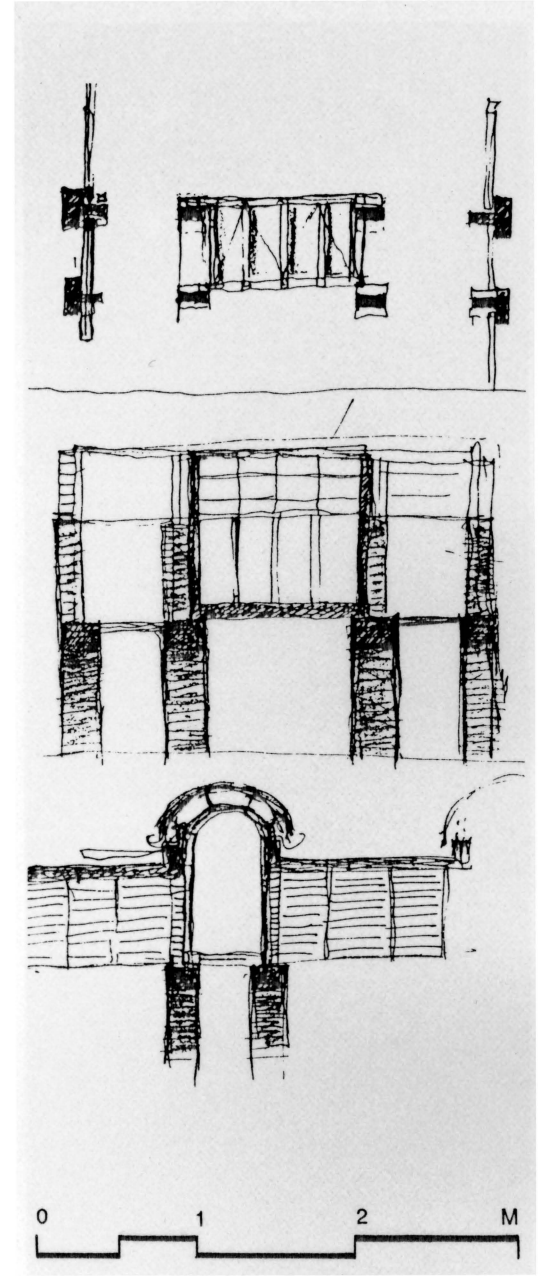
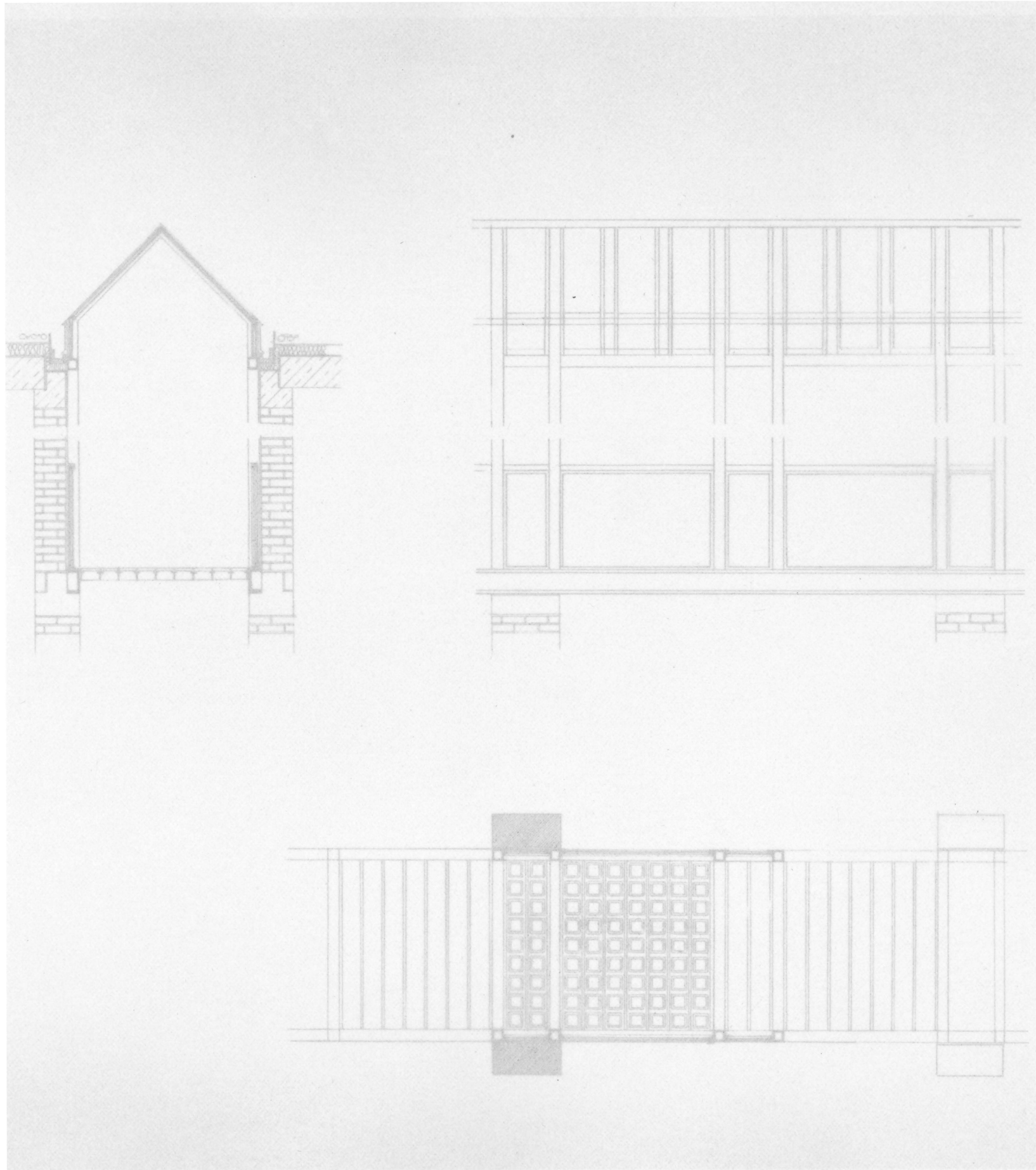
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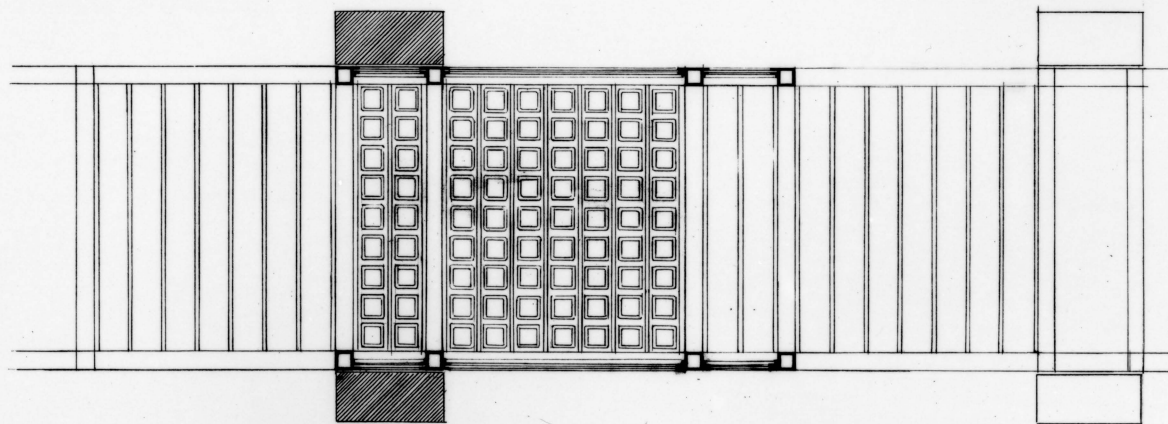
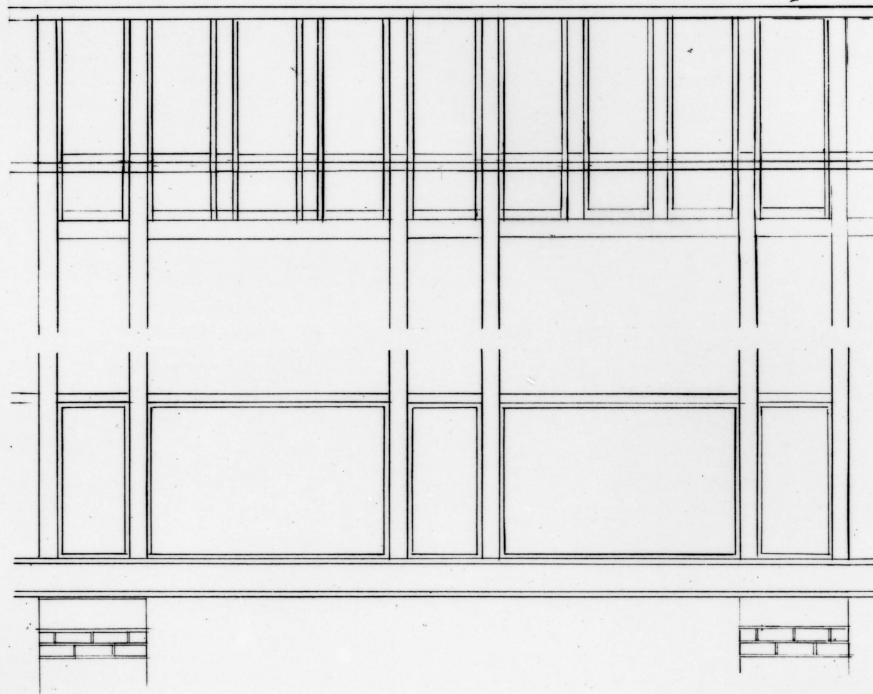
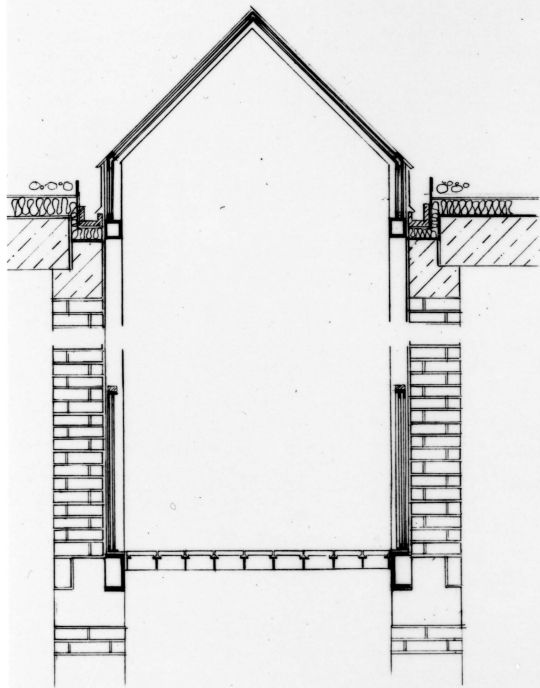
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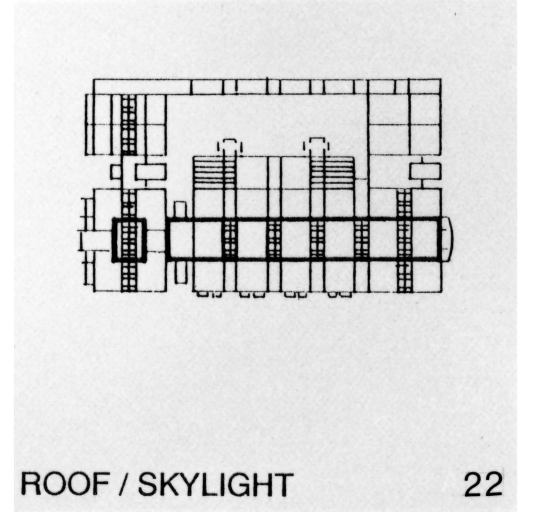
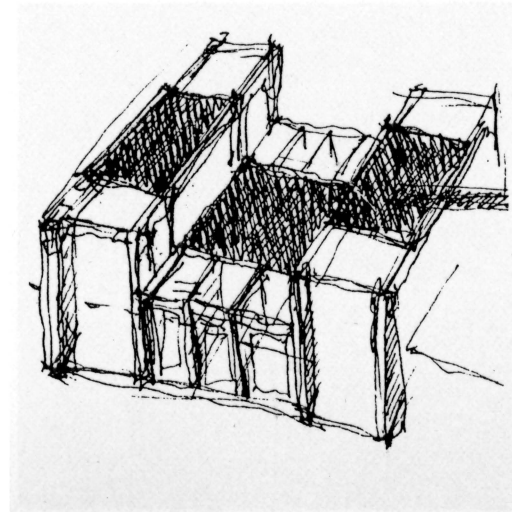
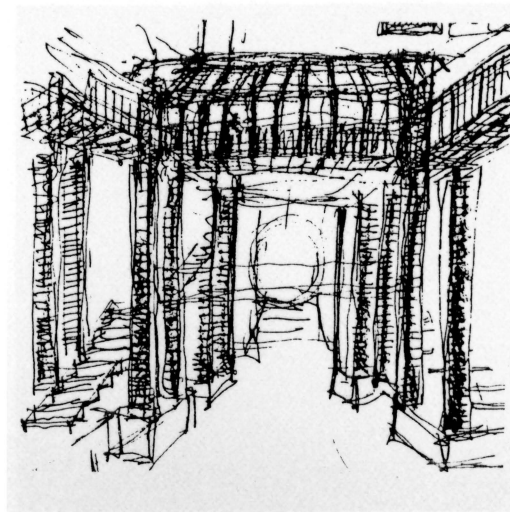
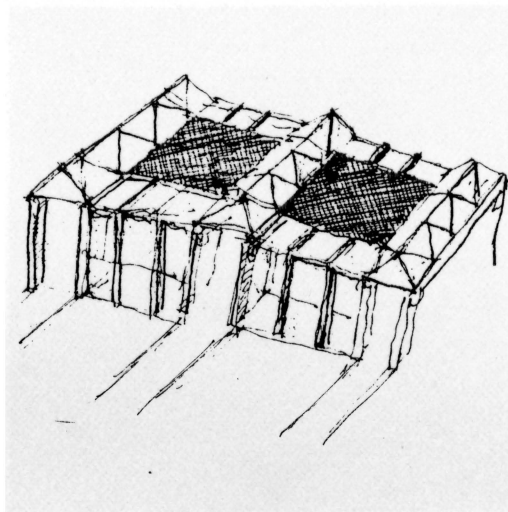
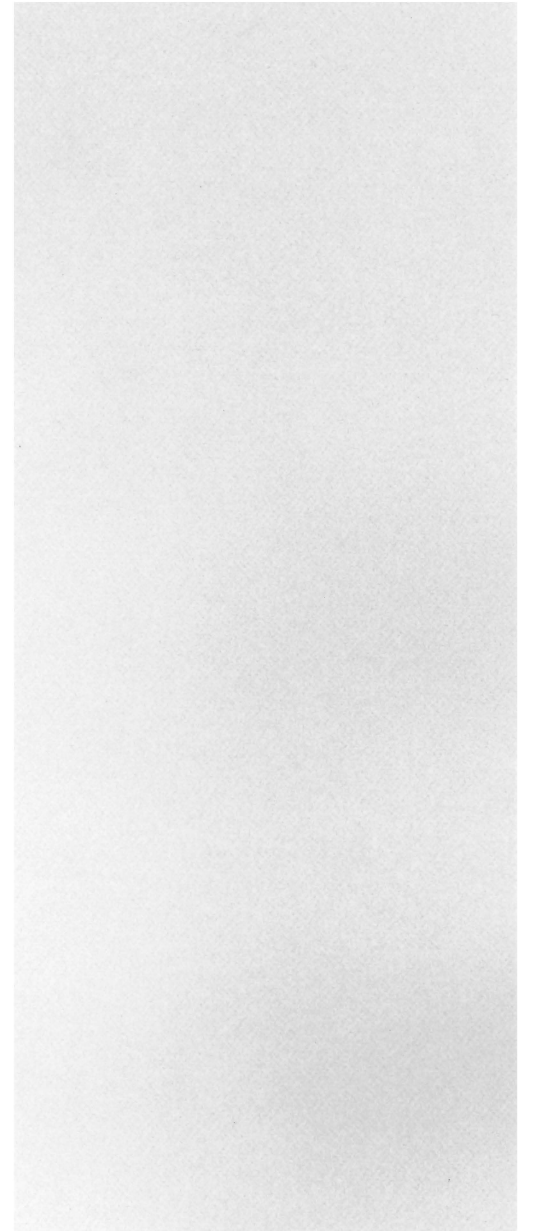




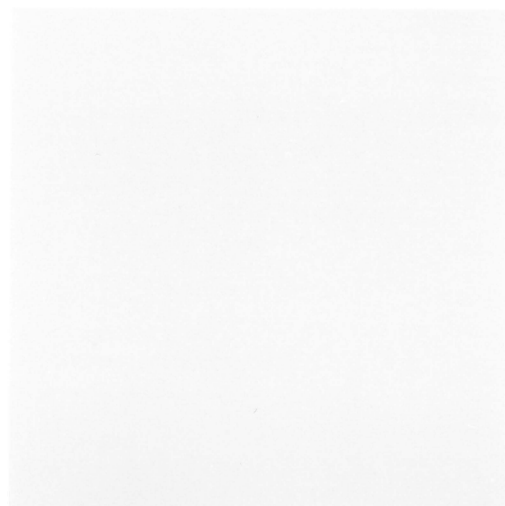
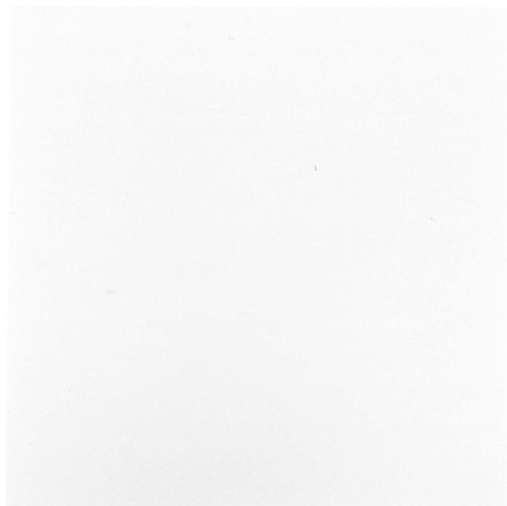
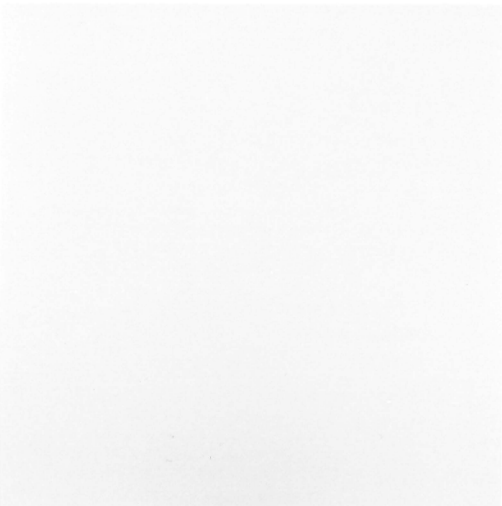
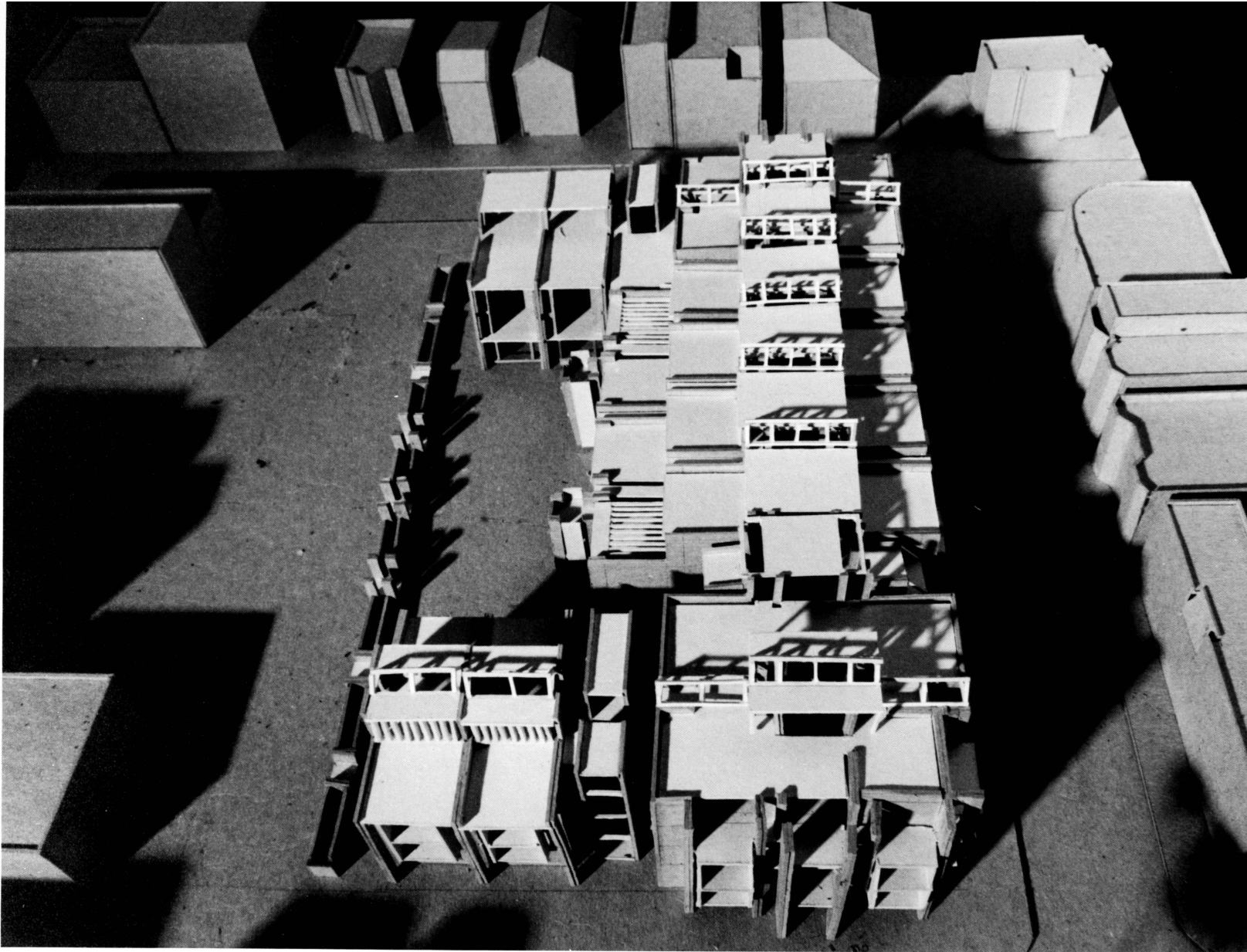








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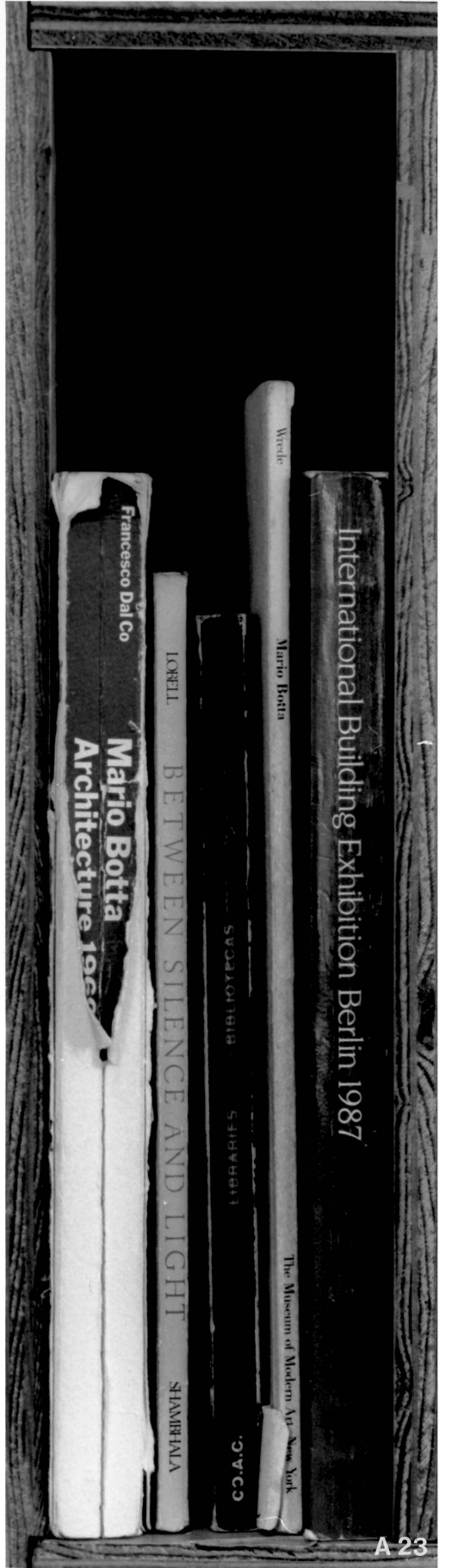
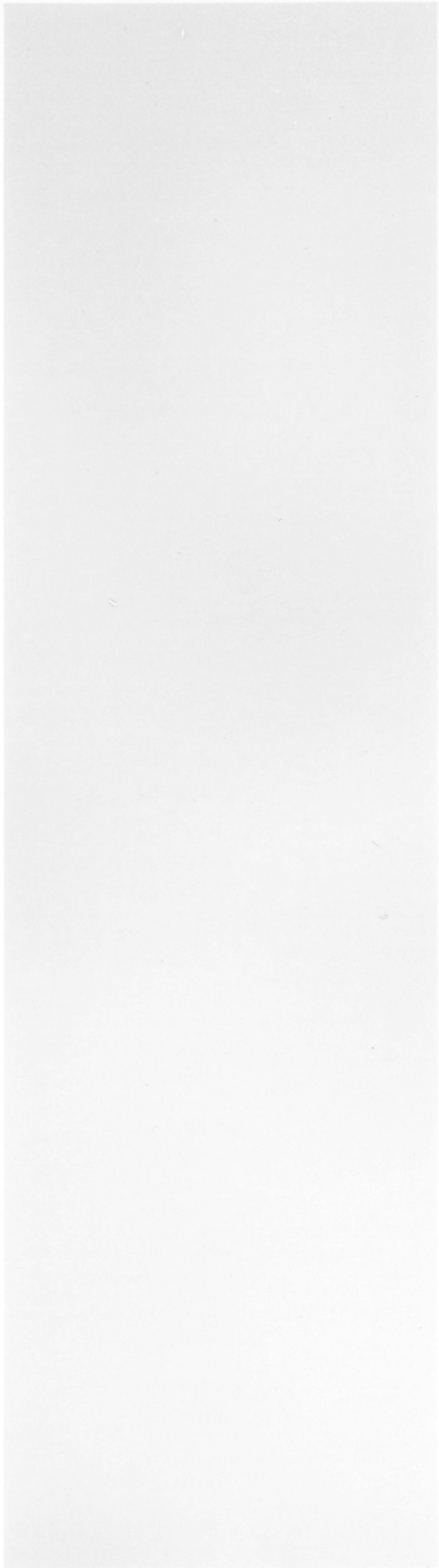
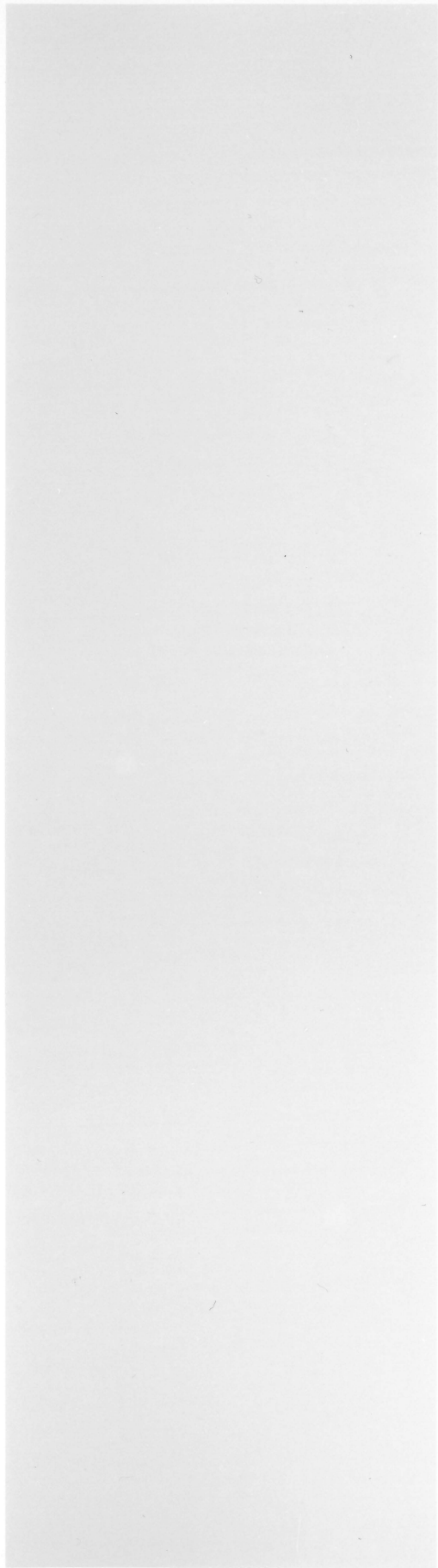
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