

PERMANENCE AND POETICS
A Monument To Individual Achievement
Washington D.C.

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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

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August, 1993
Alexandria, Virginia

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ABSTRACT

PERMANENCE AND POETICS

Have we lost the Art of Architecture? In this post-industrial epoch economics, capitalism, apathy, and popular culture are causing modern man to neglect aspects of his humanity. The essence of his existence and the quality of his life are quietly becoming a superficial image, T.S. Eliot sees this decay as the desacralization of modernity:

" (the) assertion is that no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religionI see no reason why the decay of culture should not proceed much further...."

Modernity has blinded man, he is unable to see any significance between reality or representation, poetry or banality, the eternal or the temporal. The ontological view of man is being lost to a historical view of man. Thus the actuality which gives meaning, significance, and value to man's existence - the poetics; and the actuality that transcends man over time - the eternal, are slowly being dissolved in a solution of neglect, opinion, and apathy.

Architecture is the making of sacred space. Permanence and poetics are the signification for Architecture and the sacred. The poetics are man's desire to express, create and understand meaning in this world. Being a significant act of man, this expression of the infinite, manifests itself in Architecture. This is the ability to transcend beyond the need for a basic shelter toward something which expresses the aspirations, desires, wisdom and tragedies of man. The eternal has both physical and spiritual attributes. The physical aspect is man's skill and ability to make things. By joining together material, structure, gravity and geometry man assembles an artifact with the intent that it will endure and weather over time. The spiritual aspect is man's memory of things compelled by his own mortality which leads him toward permanence.

Modern Architects are faced with the fact that their abilities are disappearing. The ability to define meaning, to profoundly seduce materials, to perform the ritual of construction and to mark a place - the ability to make a work of Architecture is slowly becoming extinct. If permanence and poetics cannot be reconciled with modernity, if man cannot create an artifact which is transcendent, existential, and eternal; the Art of Architecture - a language of man - will be lost.

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THE NATURE OF MEMORY AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF PERMANENCE

This thesis is a search into the nature of memory and the making of Architecture. The intent was to investigate and discover a method using form, structure, geometry, detail and materials which could express an understanding of permanence and poetics and create a work of Architecture. This study does not invent or ascribe meaning, but only to reveal meaning specific to our culture.

Our memory of things; of the earth, knowledge and experience - constitutes our collective and relative memory. Collective memory is a creative process which allows man to project himself through time. Our relative memory comes from an understanding of objects, materials and culture and their bearing, at any specific moment, on the physical manifestations in our lives. Because man is mortal, both collective and relative memories are finite. Thus, this rational, pre-defined point becomes a terminus in time and space, when our memory will end. This absolute of nature - death - is what man desires to overcome. This becomes man's search to try and find meaning to this absolute; in a world which in appearance is timeless, a world which seems to spin endlessly on its axis whether man is here or not. Man discovers gods, ideas, and rituals which are immortal; which he celebrates by making artifacts, thus he participates with their immortality. To accept death and mortality, means to accept the end of culture, tradition, and himself. It is this need to transcend beyond his fatal and tragic life and discover the things which will endure. In a sense man's life is a struggle to be eternal. Ernst Cassirer in An Essay on Man writes;

" Even in the most primitive stage of human civilization, even in mythical thought, we find this passionate protest against the fact of death.....Man begins to detect in himself a new power by which he dares to challenge the power of time. He emerges from the flux of things, striving to eternalize and immortalize human life."

A memory of things is inherent in man's ability to understand his world. To define the world in terms, which in some aspect, are permanent; he invents methods of expression Art, Architecture, Writing, etc..... Man is a rational creature and is capable of creating and making artifacts; and it is this which allows him to stand outside the limits of time and mortality.

By defining a place, man makes and sets limits on his universe. These limits set-up the framework where his life can happen; making a hierarchy of things to reveal their importance to him. His surroundings are vast, conflicting and beautiful; as he begins to understand them his life is revealed in all of its beauty and wonder. In the midst of this ambiguity and complexity man explains his orientation and existence in the mysteries of the earth, gravity and materials. He asks questions about himself and his memory of things thereby gaining knowledge to transcend into the eternal. Eliade writes in The Sacred and Profane :

"Life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent: in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos.....The Roman *mundus* was a circular trench divided into four parts: it was at once the image of the cosmos and the paradigmatic model for human habitation."

Man needs a center to his world. Once this center is found and defined, he marks it with an artifact. This artifact can be as simple as a selected stone or as complex as a Gothic cathedral. The importance of this

object comes from three things. First, the object itself as a thing; second, the layers of meaning revealed by it and third, its ability to endure. Thus, this object is defined by man and expressed by his memory of things - geometry, order, pattern, religion, culture and materials - as a place/artifact it is significant, because it reveals the eternal. Ernst Cassirer again writes from An Essay on Man ;

"..... if he did not have the special gift of objectifying his thoughts, of giving them a solid and permanent shape..... By virtue of the work of art it has become durable and permanent."

A distinction must be made between history and the memory of things. History quantifies the past by collecting and explaining it with facts, nostalgia and learned terms. Ernst Cassirer's writes in An Essay on Man;

" But recollection does not mean merely the act of reproduction. It is a new intellectual synthesis - a constructive act."

Our memory can also be a record of things. As knowledge is passed down over the centuries it documents the rigor of our life. This documentation becomes a list of how things have been done. Man sees this as a transformation within his memory of things. This transformation becomes our desire to make and discover new methods. It is an endless cycle of knowledge and creation which is the spirit of man and the wonder of life.

No one today has a direct experience or knowledge concerning the pyramids. Yet, their presence overwhelms us by the power and rigor of human effort which manifests itself in this artifact. This too is a part of our relative memory. We are able to see their architect's and builder's knowledge for creating and making. We see their skill to cut stones and to move them over long distances, and finally to assemble the stones into forms and shapes which express their relative memory - their world. The pyramids are still here, enduring the ravages of time and weather because of a great precision, skill and effort which created a knowledge of building. This artifact is a direct expression of their world and culture, marking their place within the cosmos. However, this artifact is specific to a certain time, yet it transforms, thus allowing us to participate with it and its creation; as it becomes part of our memory of things it inspires us and our desire to create.

The erosion of memory and meaning is inevitable because it is related to things outside of our control. Culture, material, and weather have aspects of erosion which man cannot control, which creates ruins. Culture tends to have built into itself an aspect of obsolescent and neglect. Materials by nature go from their lowest state of entropy to their highest, stone and brick will become dust, wood will decay, as will metal, and other materials. The effects of weather slowly destroys both natural and man made artifacts. This desire for permanence is a battle to invent methods which make things endure.

The memory of things is such that it cannot be removed from the realities of the earth and man. It does not lend itself to becoming a representation as modernity would like it to become. The making of an artifact is difficult; it takes a tremendous commitment of time and effort. It seems to want the wealth and industry of a culture, before it will enrich man's life by relinquishing its beauty and wonder. It is this effort - our ability to make - which gives meaning to man's life. Modernity seems to be pushing the memory of things aside, however, I do not think that this can last forever. If only I could remember.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The essence of this project is the "monument"; its conception, function, and design. Documenting specific points in time; past, present and future and make a work of Architecture which becomes, simultaneously an artifact and a place. This project is the synthesis of two institutions of man; the museum (archive) and the memorial (spirit). The idea was to create a new museum of sorts which would holistically express and document specific moments of itself and our culture.

An individual would be selected by an elected committee from various fields of occupation. A contemporary artists would then be commissioned to make an object (present) that would express the individual's essence (past). This object would be displayed in the memorial. The Architecture of this room is one repose, offering a place for contemplation (future). In addition to this object for the current honoree, past objects which would represent the last five years of the memorials history would also be on display. Thus documenting the history of this place as revealed by these objects. After five years an object would be removed and donated to science. Simultaneously, the museum or archives would have an exhibit which displays the complete body of work and history of this individual. This room is one of reflection (past) and of movement (future).

The site is located on the Mall in Washington D. C. between 14th and 15th Streets, facing Constitution Avenue. I call this " the next to the last site on Mall". This site is still considered to be an active building site by the National Parks Department, but unlikely because of the conservative nature of our culture and government. This is the place where the Mall changes drastically in it's character, structure, and pattern. East of 14th Street the Mall is urban in concept and reality. It has both regulated building limits and classical planning which defines an axis from the Capital to the Washington Monument. West of 14th Street the Mall transforms itself from this urban rigor into a park typology while fragments of the original urban order continue the axis on to the Lincoln Memorial. Inherently the site's characteristics i.e.; duality, node, threshold, axis would be enhance by the presence of a work of Architecture. Presently, however, it lacks any definition and clarity in this transition such that any cohesive understanding of the two aspects is dissipated.

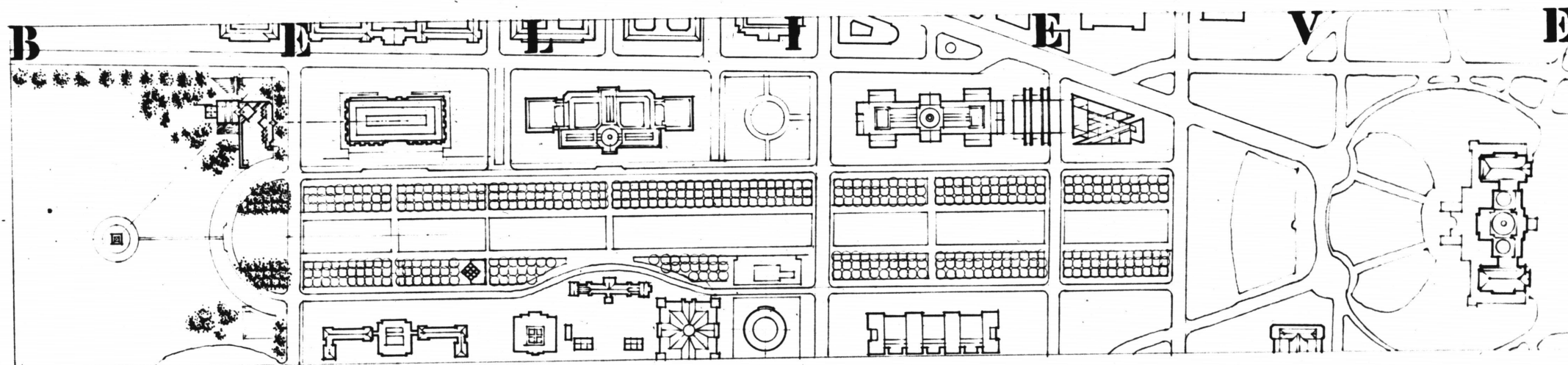
The project is divided into three areas, each with it's own form, the memorial (vault), the monument (cube), and the museum (tower-stair). In addition to these areas there is a complex of offices for administration, curator, storage, and cafe. The Architecture is defined by its structure, geometry, detail, and materiality. The geometry is derived by drawing a forty-five degree line through the Washington Monument toward the corner of Constitution Avenue and 14th street. This line creates a crystalline pattern of geometrical relationships and spaces, that weaves this tapestry through-out the design in both plan and elevation. Using a module of thirty inches a grid is created which determines structure and volume. The structure comes from the materials; concrete, brick, and stone. The idea was to juxtapose traditional building forms i.e.: the vault (which is typically continuous buttressed system) and build it with concrete using modern techniques and structure. By bearing only at the center spaced columns it is able to cantilever outward, thus the vault becomes an expression of modernity.

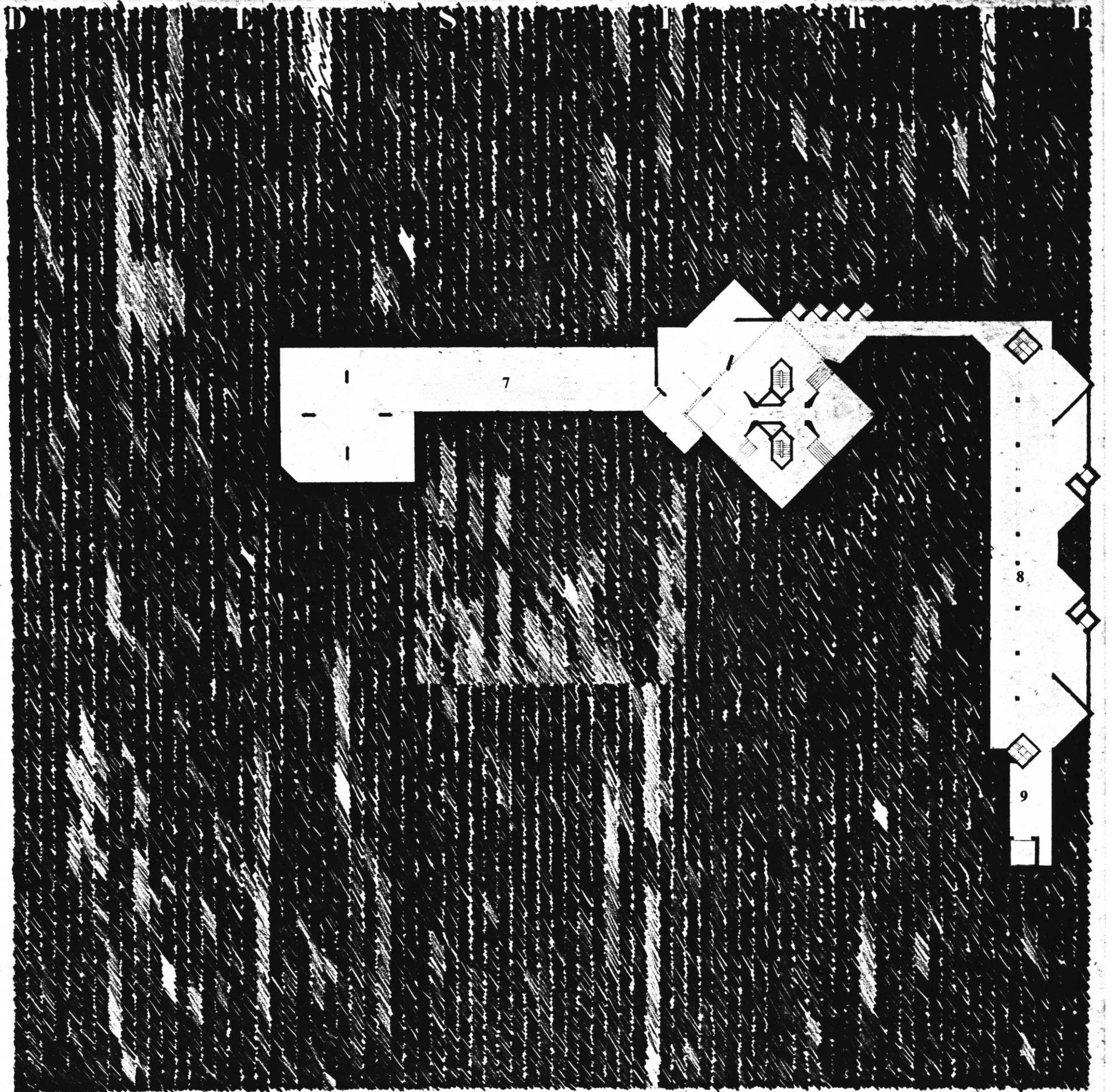
PROGRAM	#
Entry	1
Archive (tower-stair)	2
Memorial (vault)	3
Monument (cube)	4
Office	5
Meeting	6
Storage	7
Work area	8
Receiving	9
Cafe	10
Gallery	11
	4

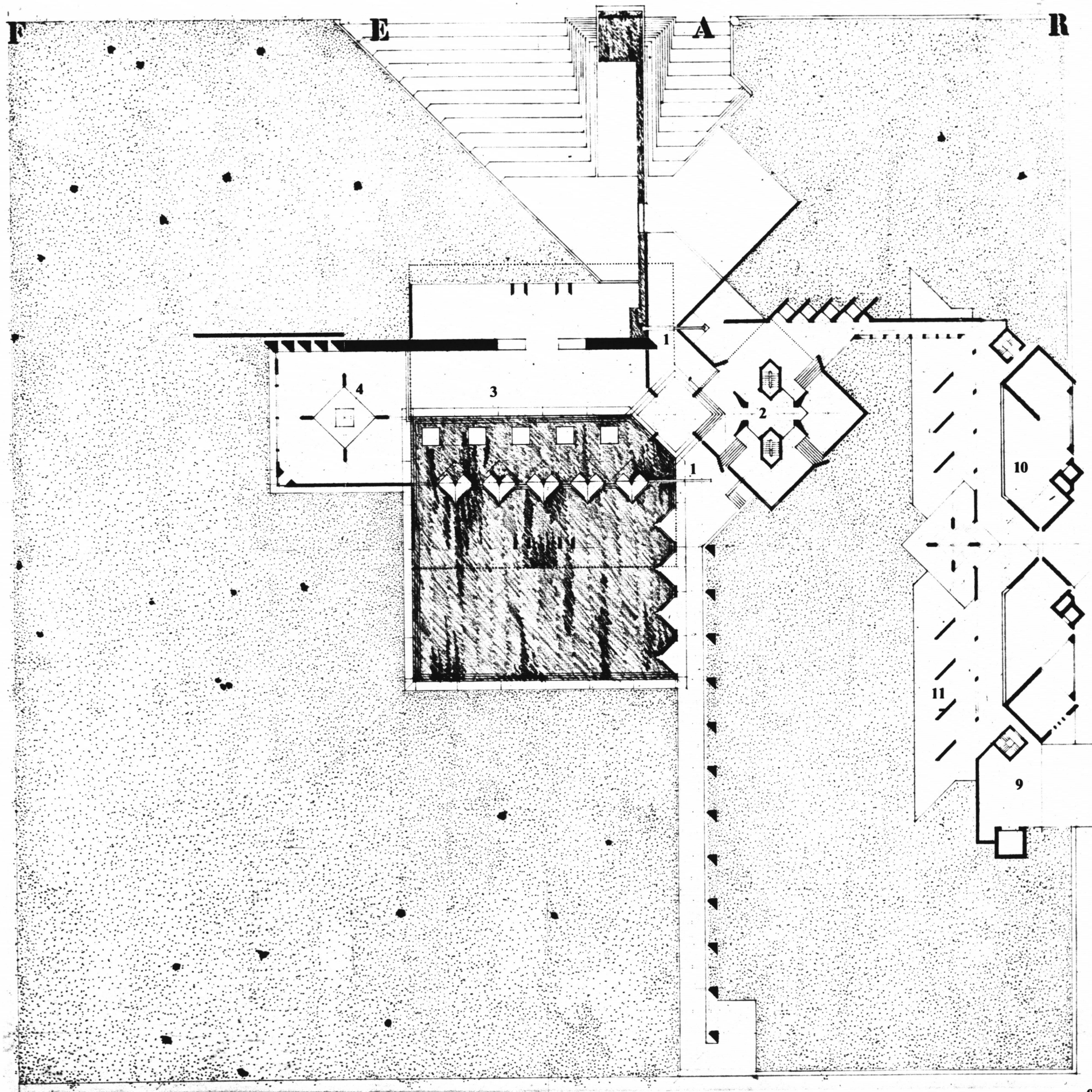
For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of
terror, which we still
are just able to endure,
and we are so awed
because it serenely
distrains to annihilate us

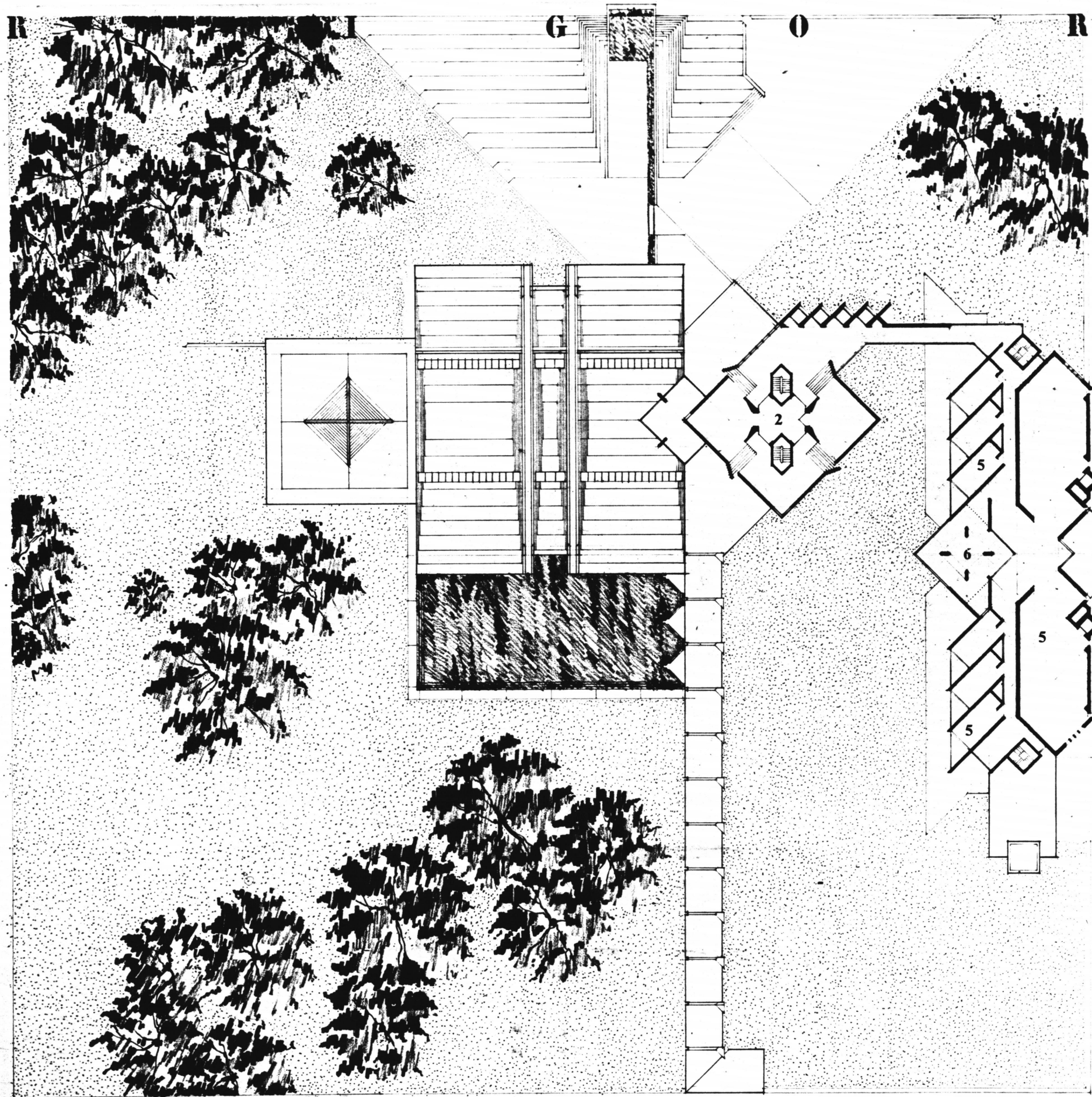
Rainer Maria Rilke

DRAWINGS - 1993

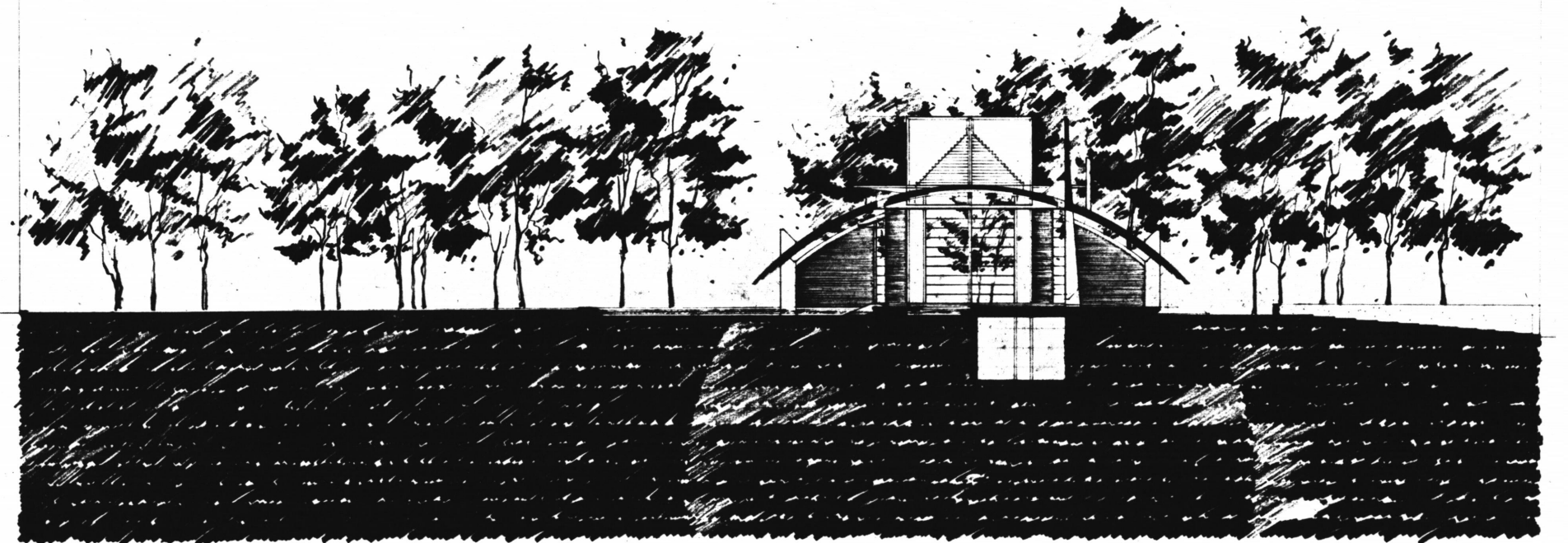


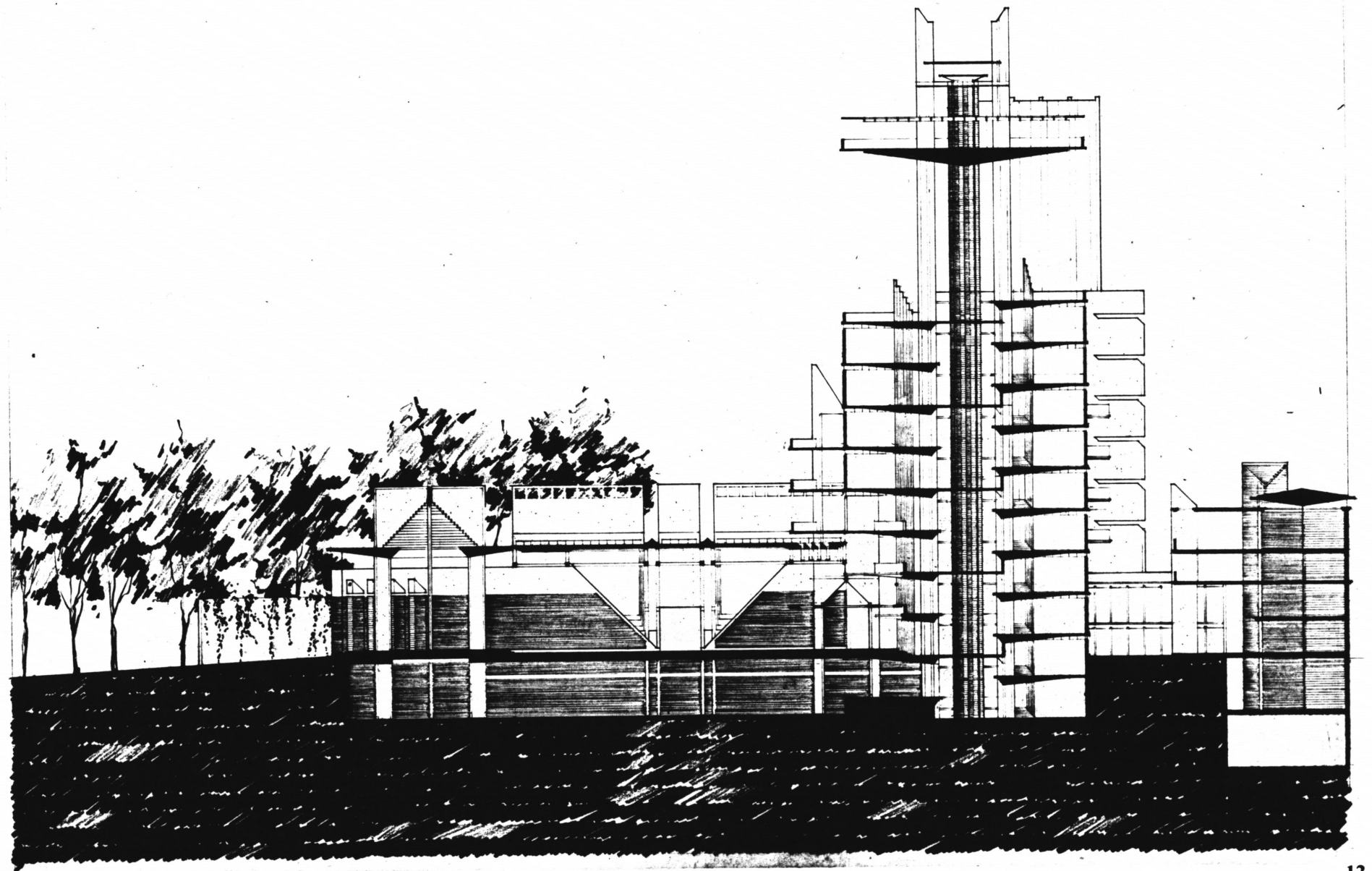




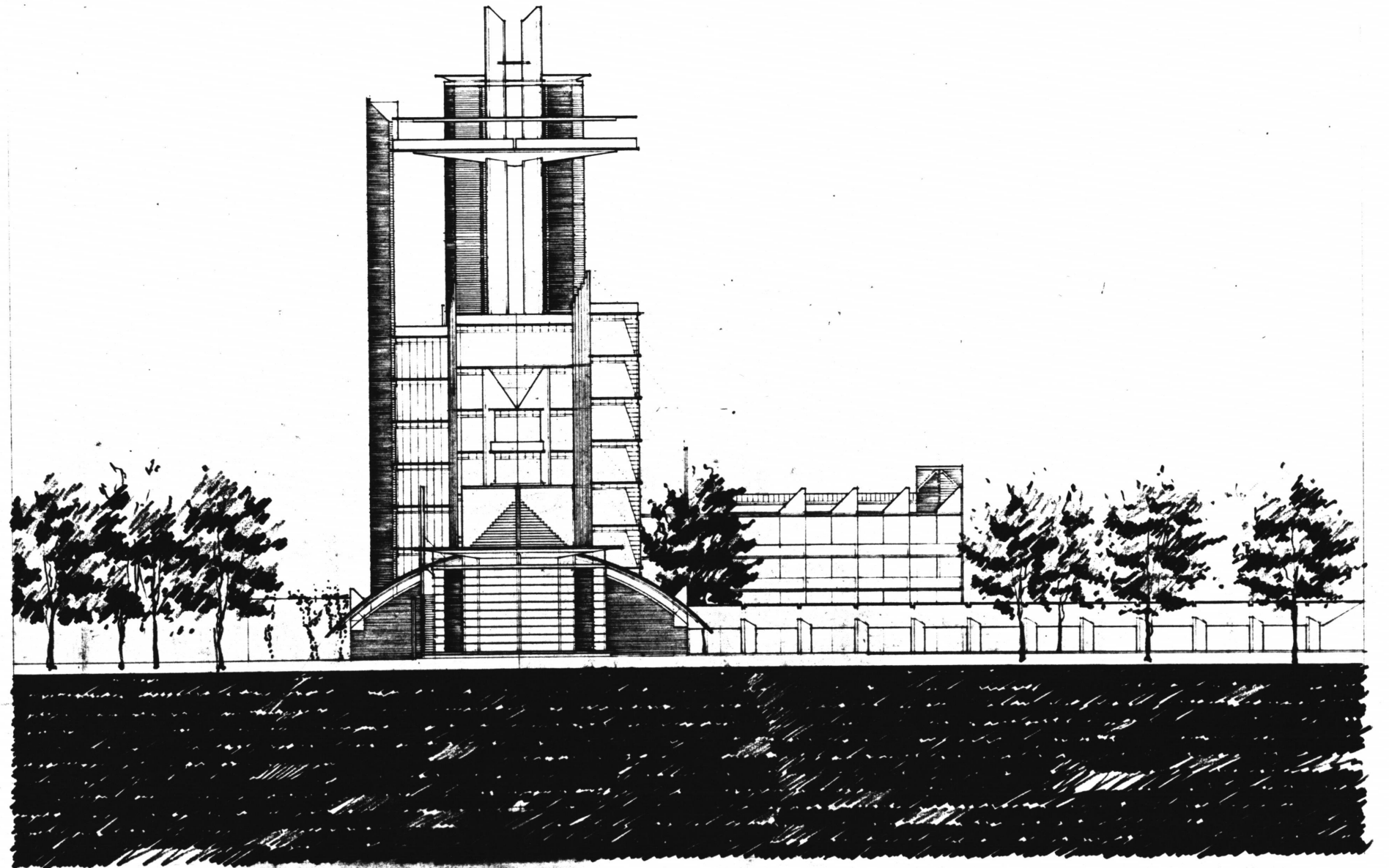


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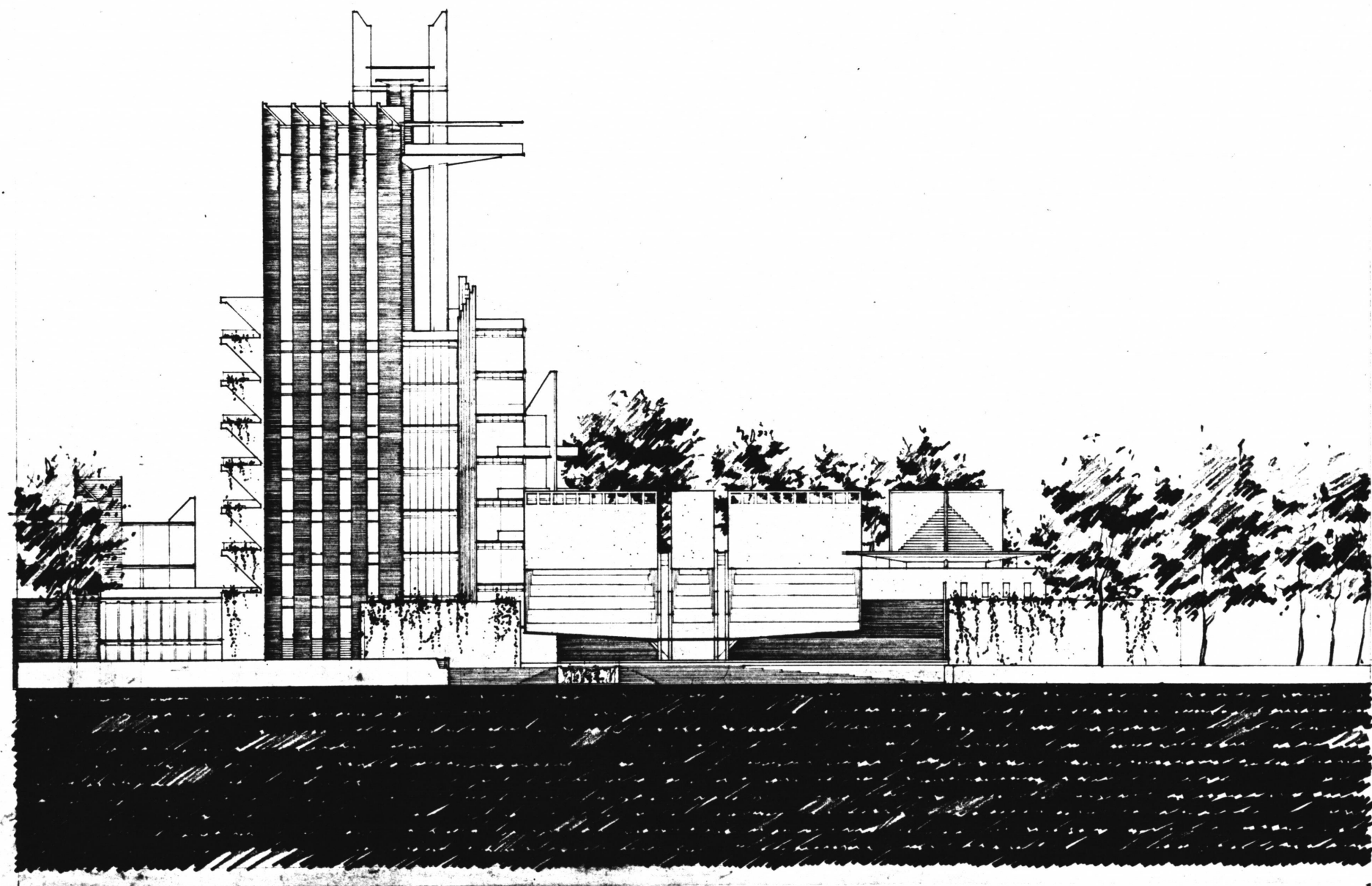


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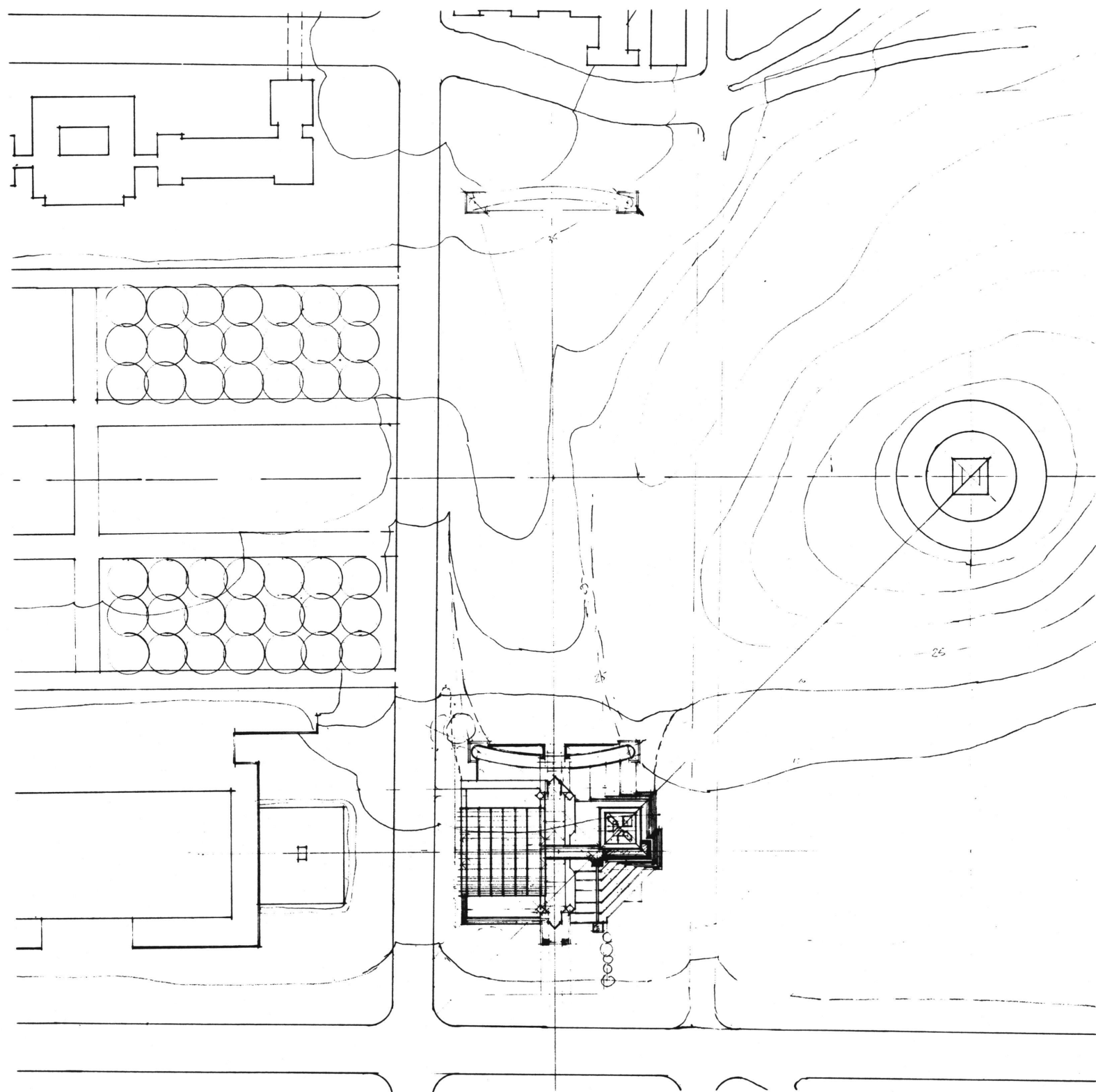
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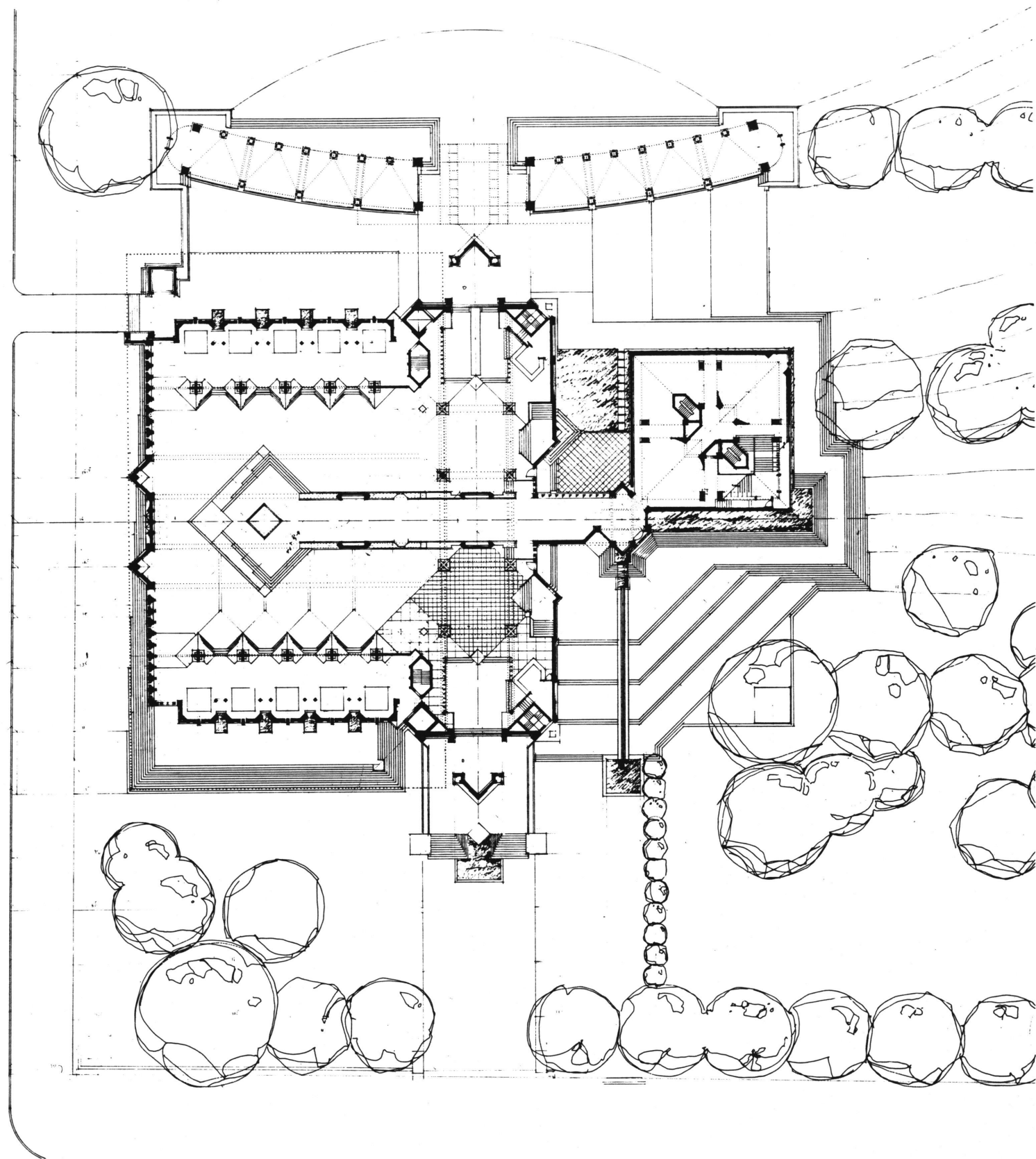
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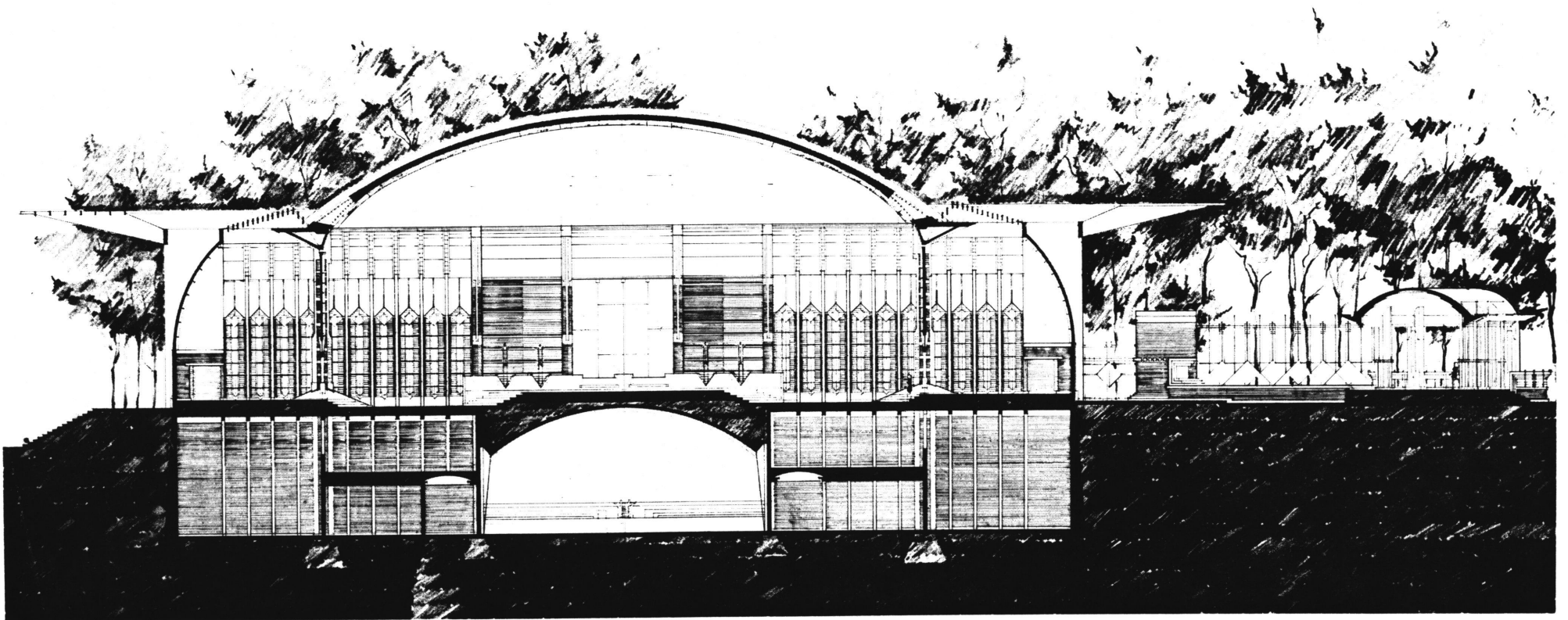
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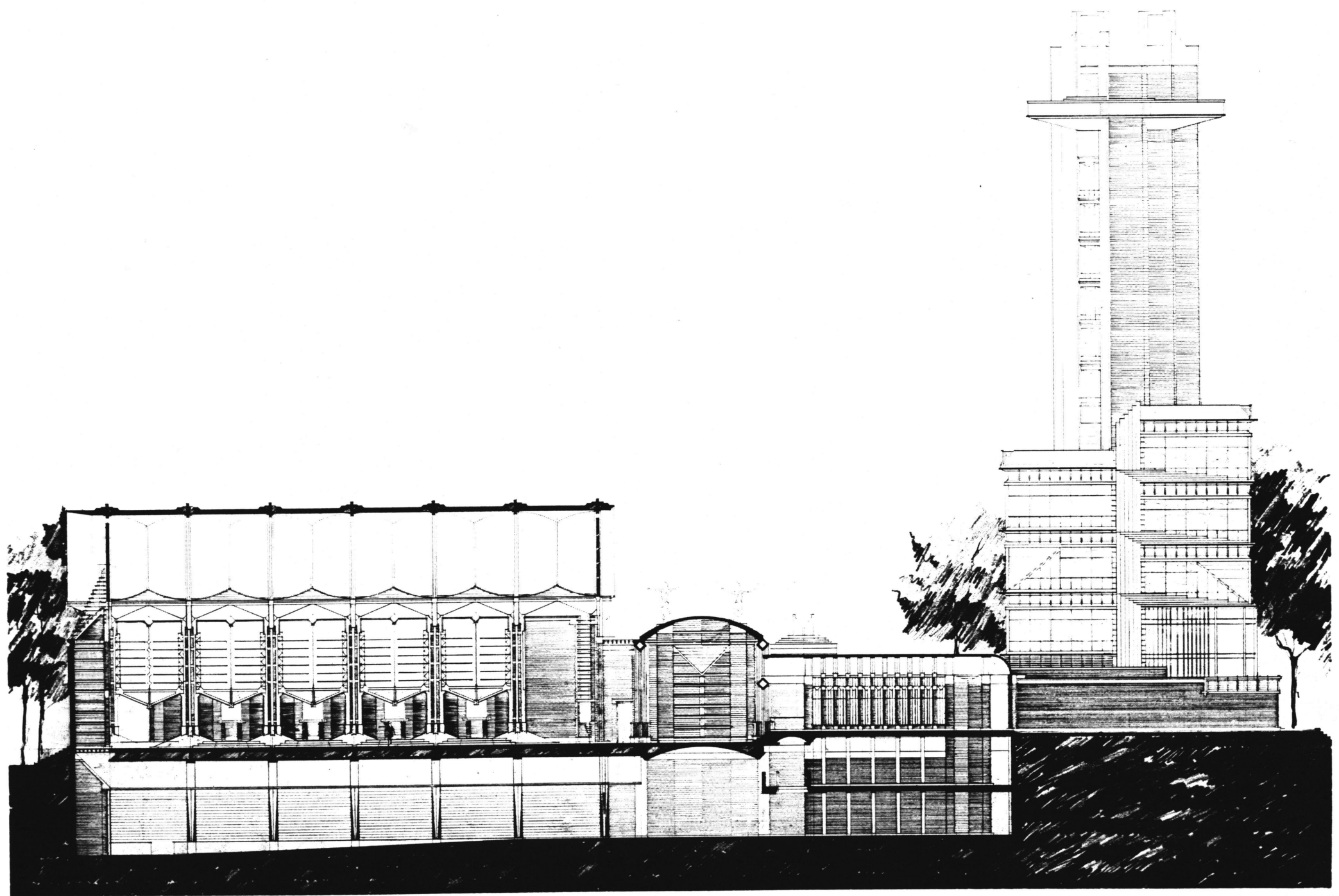


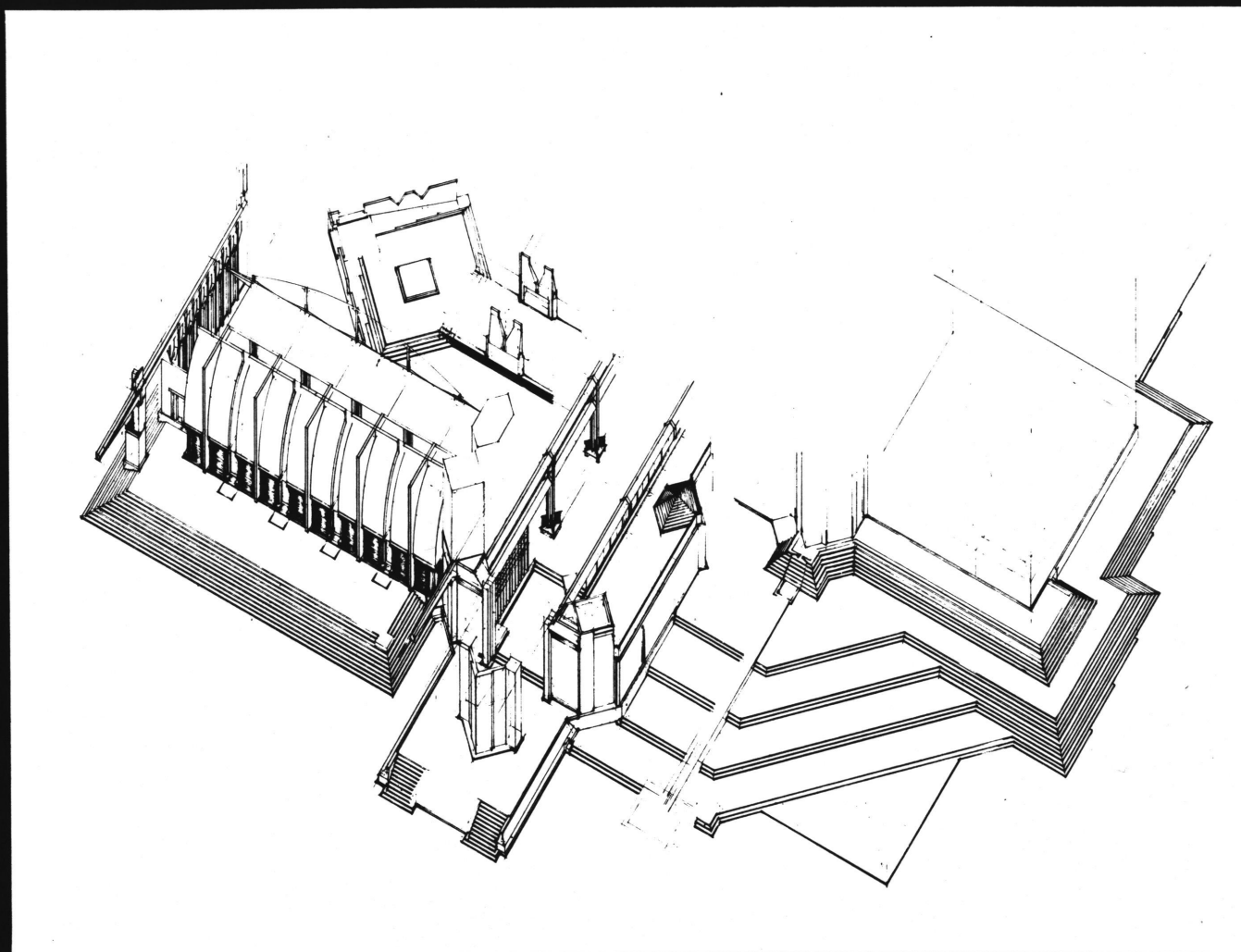
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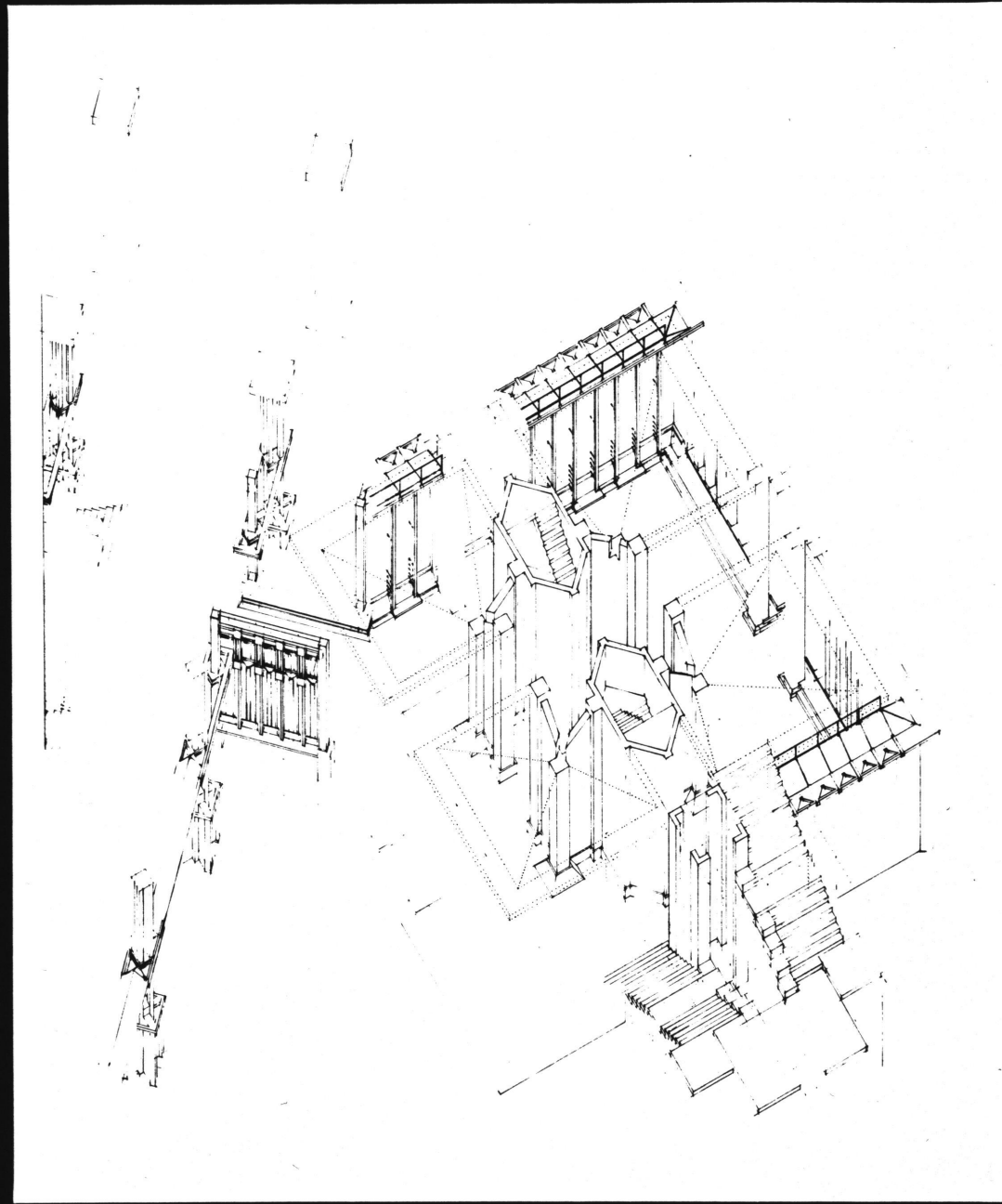
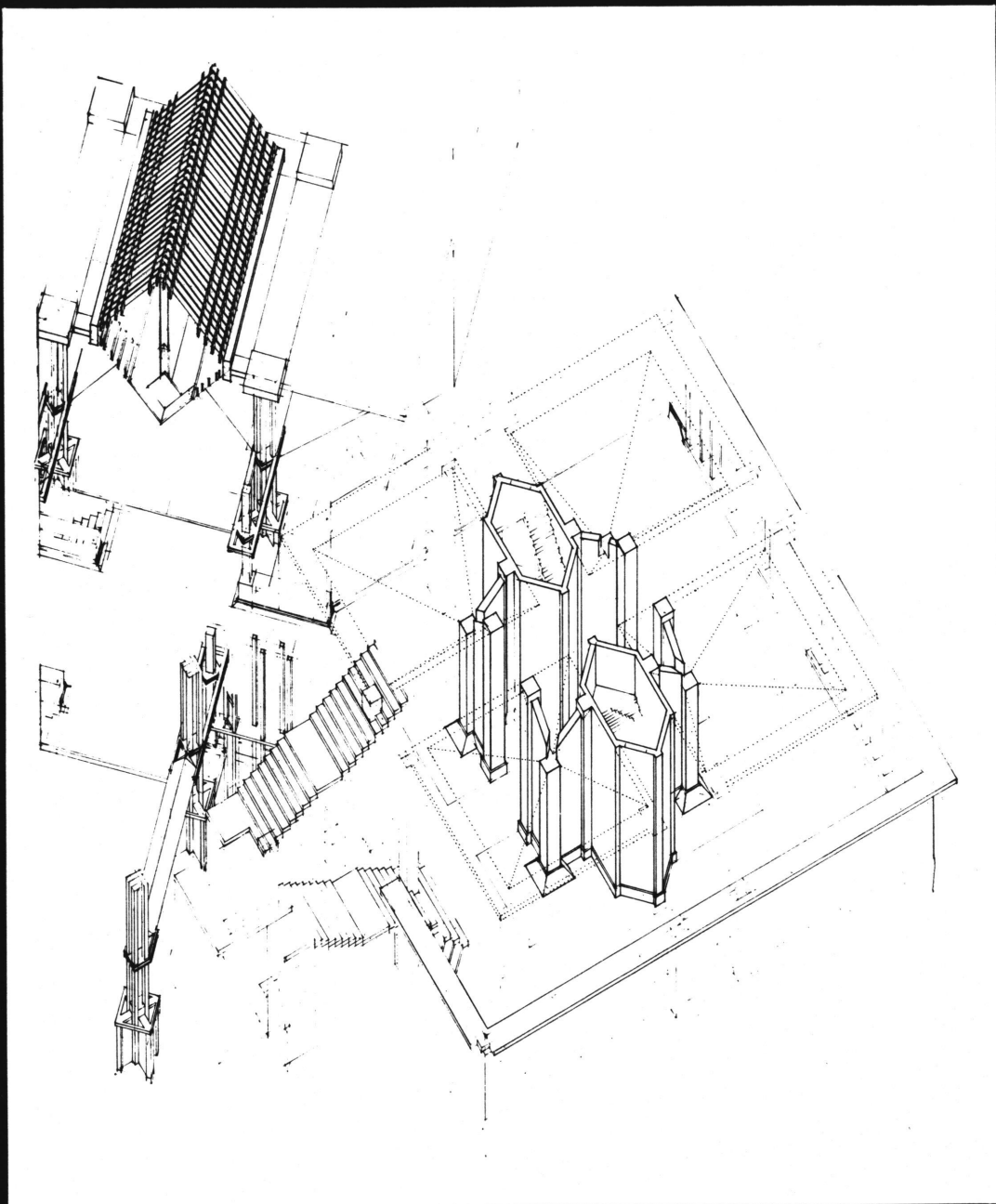






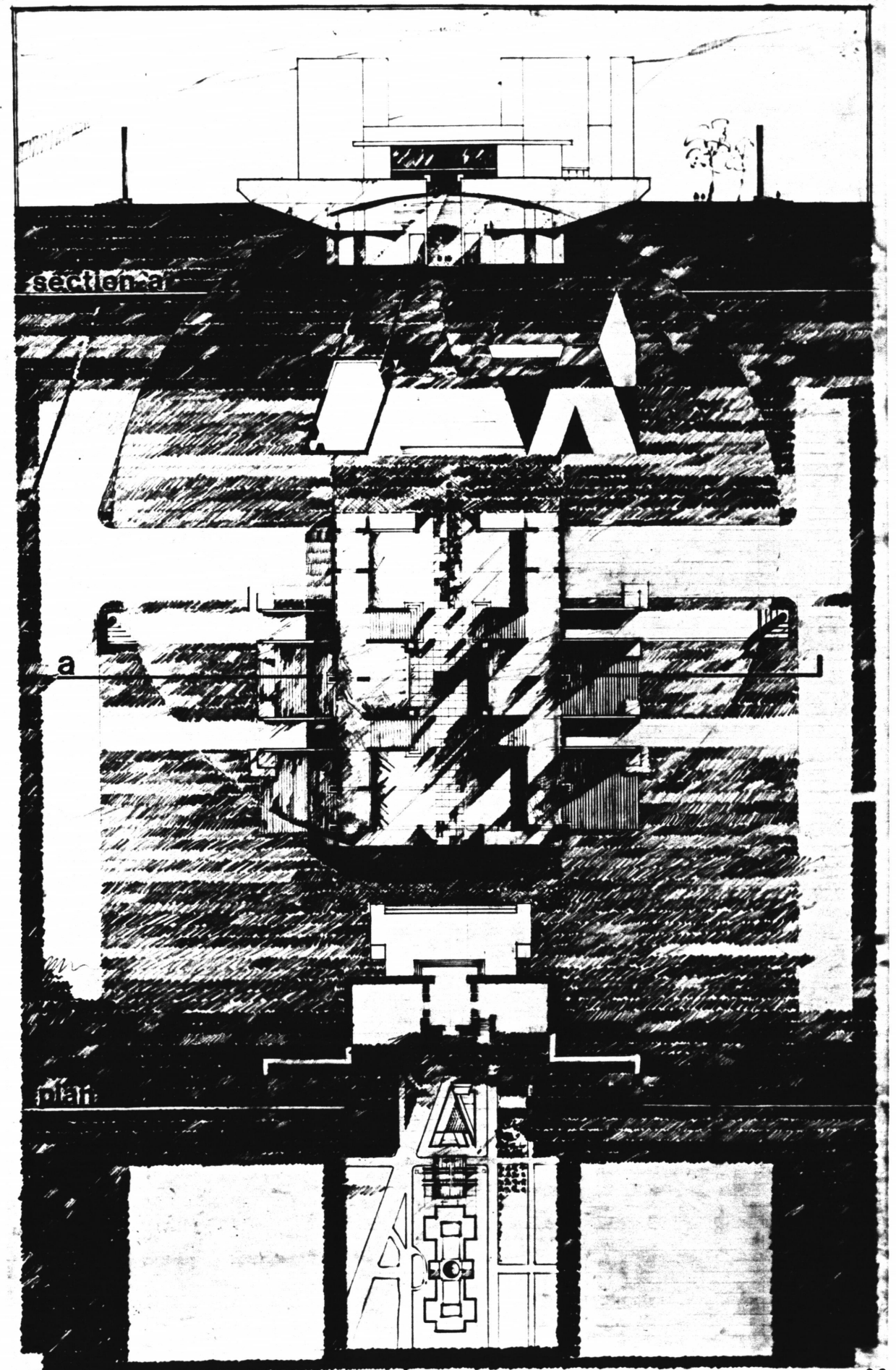


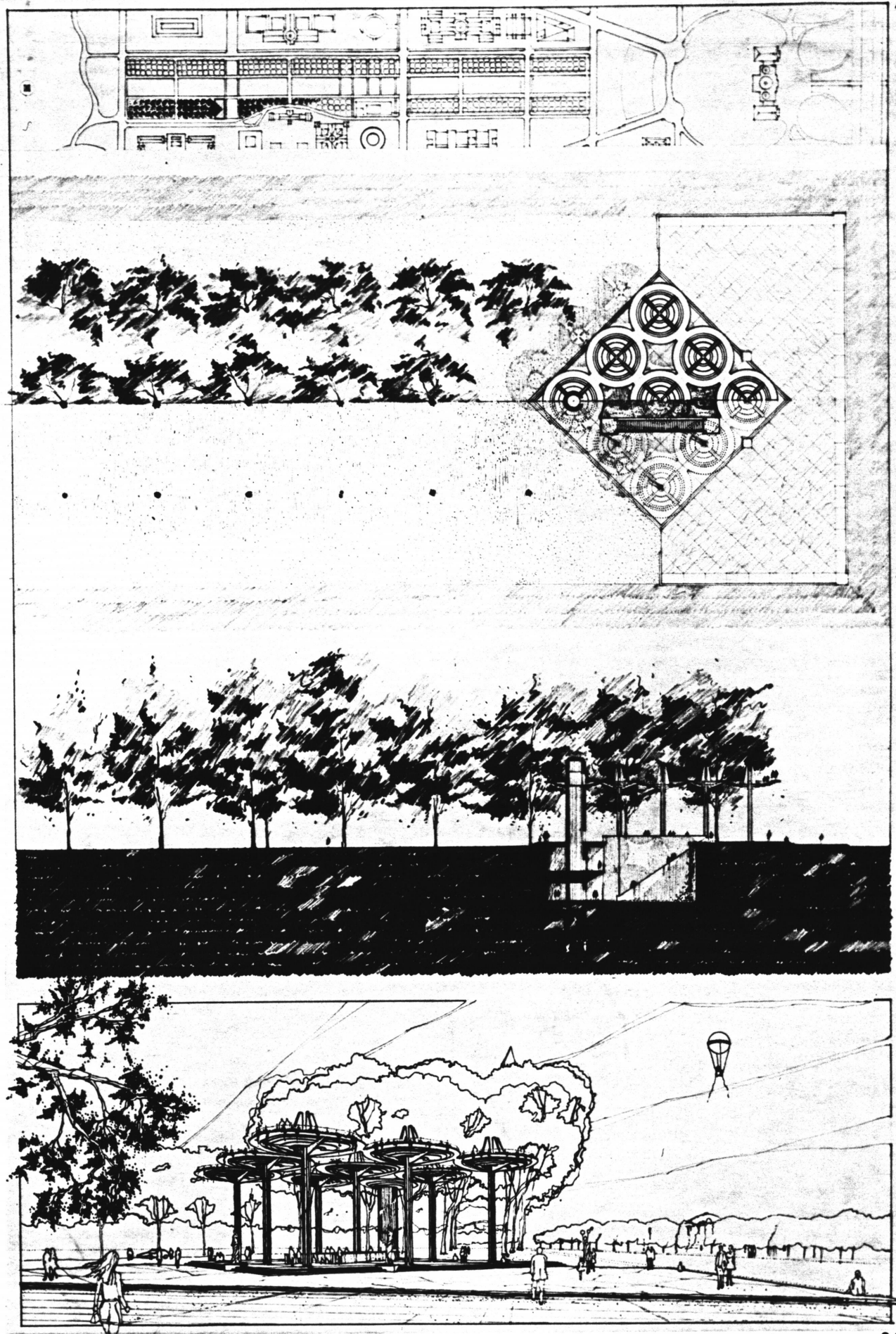




ADDENDUM

The following projects were completed while working on this thesis and offer an alternate expression for these theories.





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