

**EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE
IN OLD TOWN, ALEXANDRIA,
VIRGINIA**

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

APPROVED:

Prof. Susan Piedmont Palladino, Chairperson

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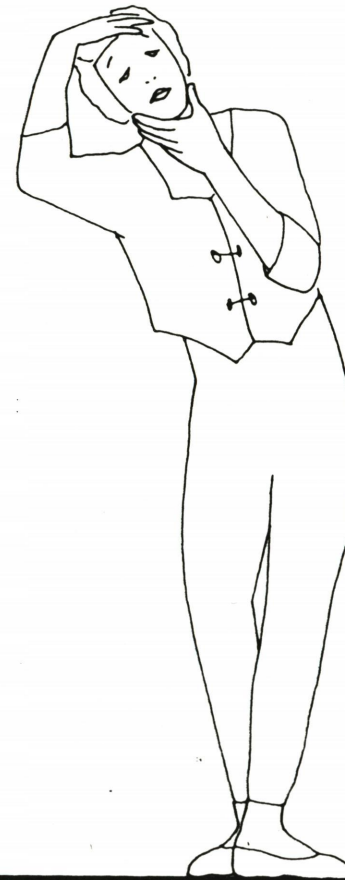
**November 1995
Alexandria, Virginia**

(ABSTRACT)

" Theatre would be radical,
arousing, inspiring,
challenging popular emotion,
presenting native problems.
Human strength and aspiration
would go there
for inspiration..."

- Frank Lloyd Wright -

Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Gerald Nordland:
Frank Lloyd Wright in the realm of ideas,
Bynum, NC: Southern Illinois University
Press, 1988, page 100



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

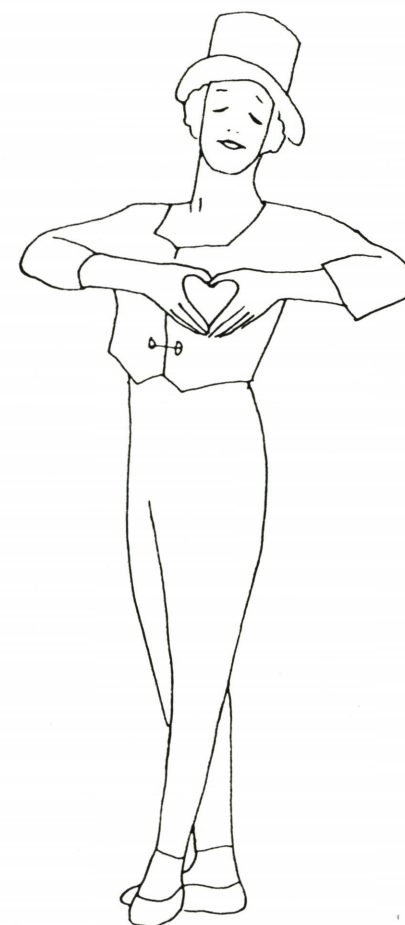
A Special Thanks to:

**Professors for being an encouraging
and inspiring thesis committee**

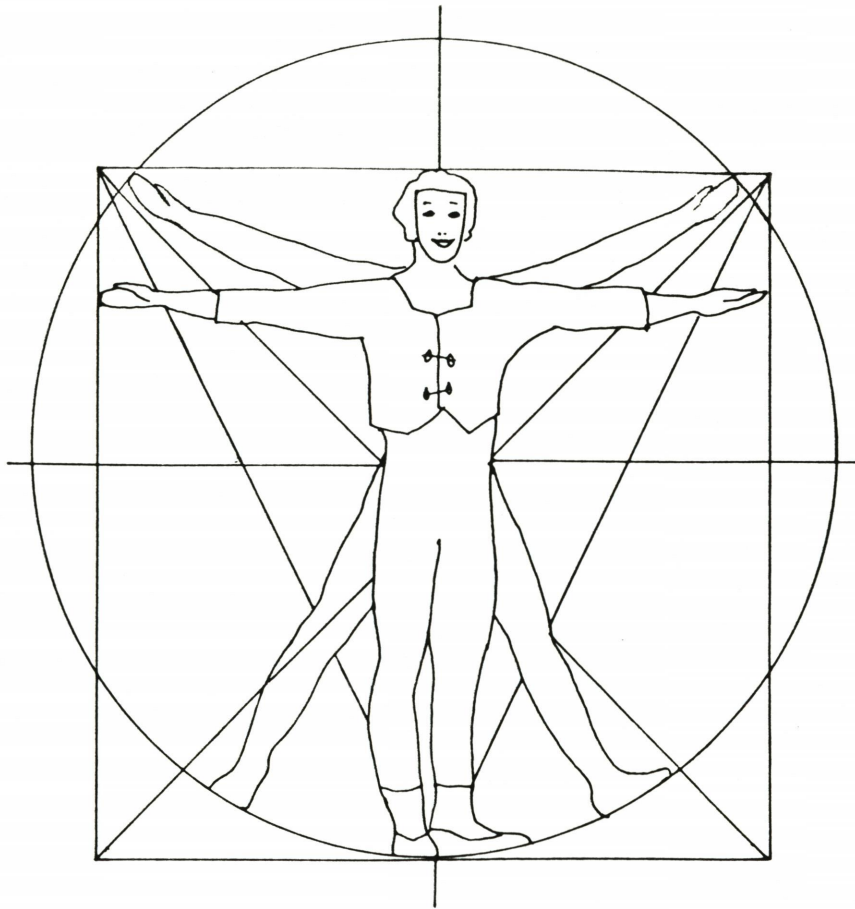
My husband for his patience and help

**My friends for their support
- especially Members of International
Tea Room
- Michel for endless criticism**

**Professor William Brown for giving me
the opportunity to study in VPI**

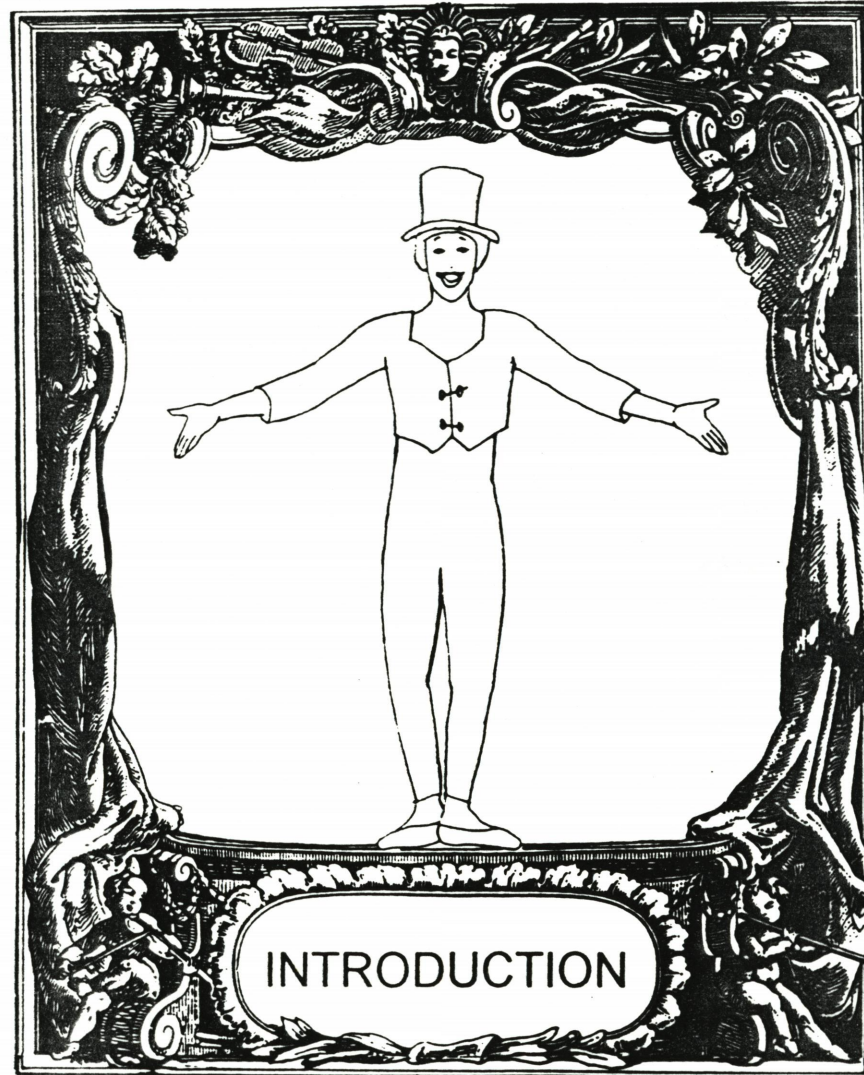


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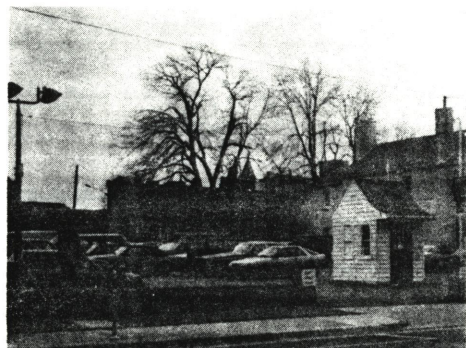
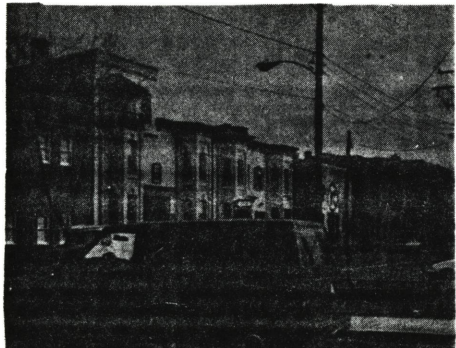
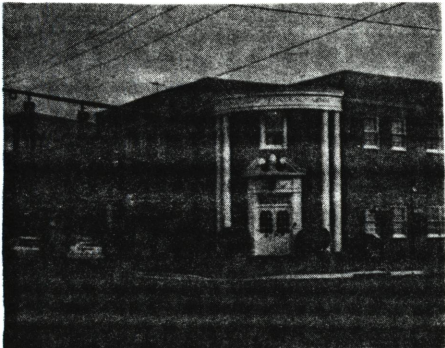
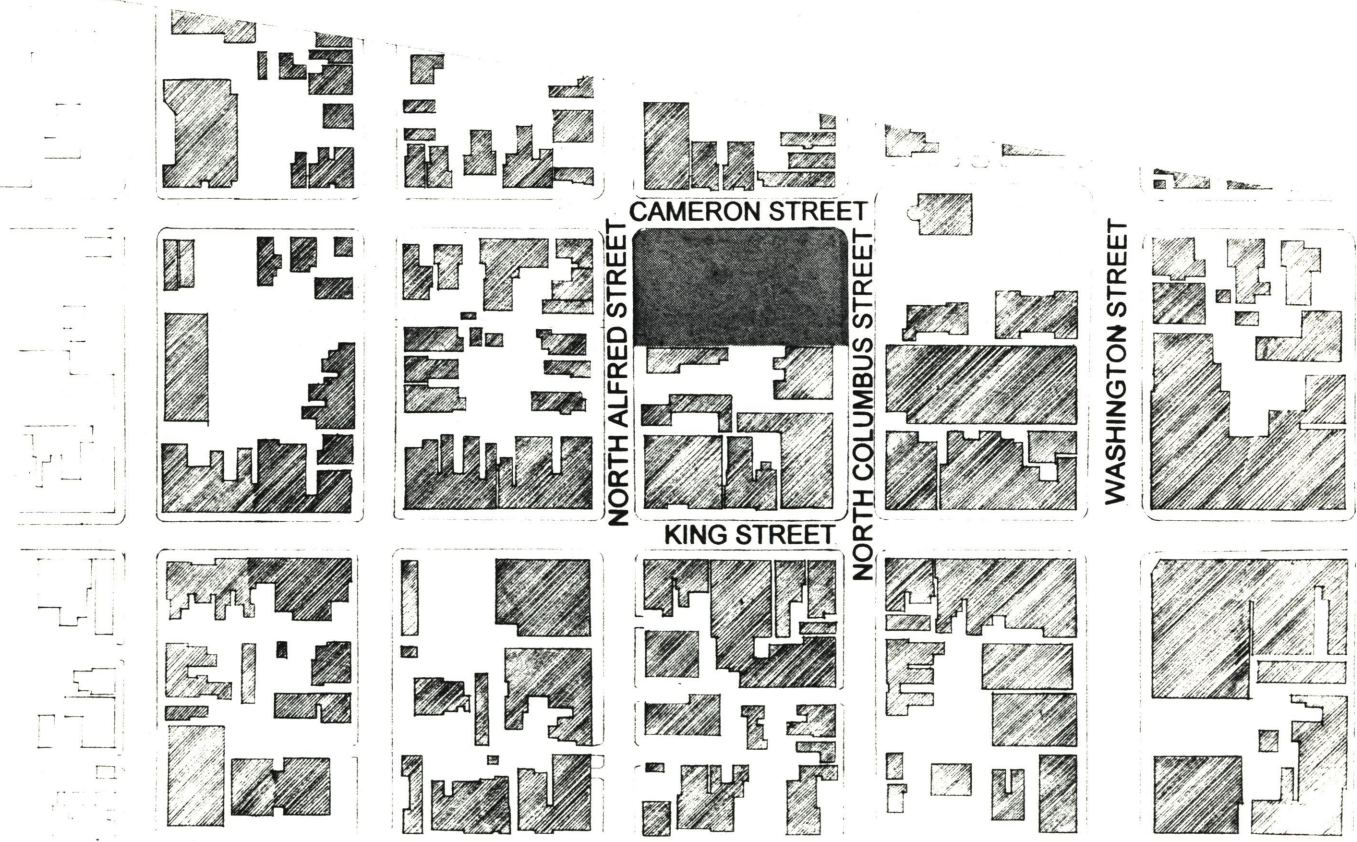
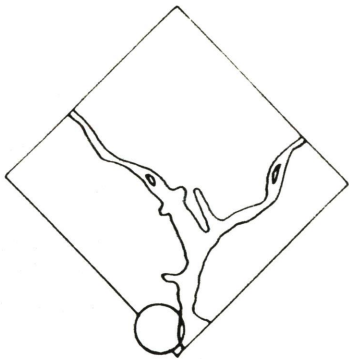
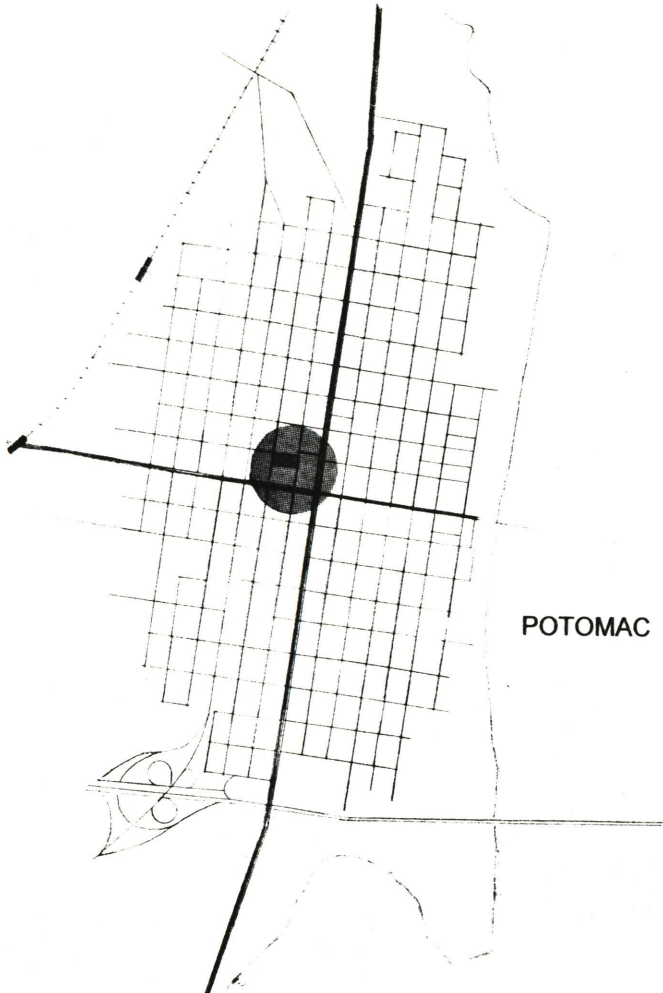
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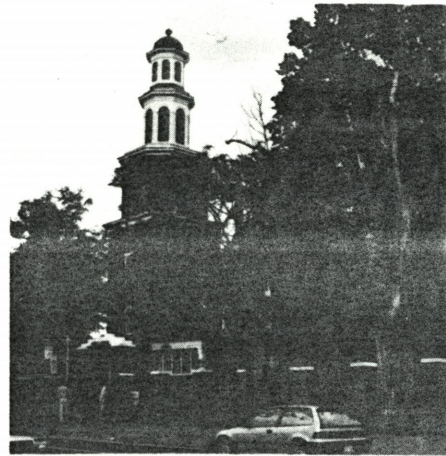
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CONTEXT: AREA-CITY-SITE

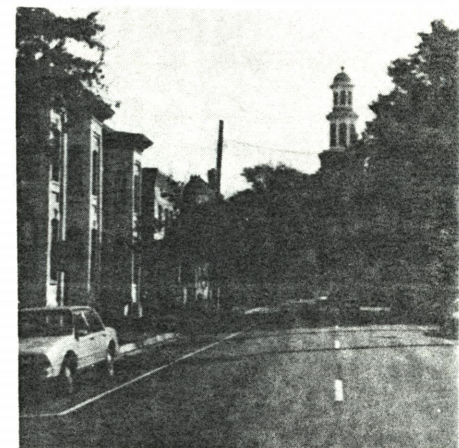
Old Town Alexandria, established in 1749, is located by Potomac River close to Washington, DC. The city plan of this old colonial port was based on a grid with rectangular blocks. Most of the buildings were 2-4 stories high red-brick houses. Nowadays the historic district is mainly a residential area - only the main streets (perpendicular to each other) and the river front are for shopping and entertainment. The site is located next to a historic land mark - Christ Church built in 1773. Currently it is used for surface parking.





CHRIST CHURCH (1773, tower 1818)

The landmark of the Old Town has its historic value with its weekly services and ceremonies. It is also a famous tourist attraction, while it has preserved most of its interior and exterior as original. The location of the church is emphasized by placing it at the end of the axis of Cameron Street both East and West - an exceptional location in the city grid where all the other streets continue straight from East to the West. The Church is surrounded by an old graveyard with trees and planting serving as an entrance to the church and a silent park to the neighborhood.



To be, or not to be, that is the question:

HAMLET, Prince of Denmark.
 CLAUDIUS, King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle.
 The GHOST of the late king, Hamlet's father.
 GERTRUDE, the Queen, Hamlet's mother, now
 POLONIUS, councillor of State.
 LAERTES, Polonius's son.
 OPHELIA, Polonius's daughter.
 HORATIO, friend and confidant of Hamlet.
 ROSENCRANTZ, } courtiers, former schoolfel
 GUILDENSTERN, }
 FORTINBRAS, Prince of Norway.
 VOLTEMAND, }
 CORNELIUS, } *Here are faces,*
 MARCELLUS, } *masks of the soul*
 BARNARDO, } *scrutinizing*
 FRANCISCO, } *anxious or calm*
 OSRIC, a foppish } *their destiny.*
 REYNALDO, a s

Here are eyes
unseeing eyes
visionary eyes
eyes which tame the invisible
held in the spell of the invisible
eyes which accept
eyes which refuse
their destiny.

The Life of Towns

How strangely limber these actors are!
 How good they are
 at living for us with their shirtsleeves rolled up!

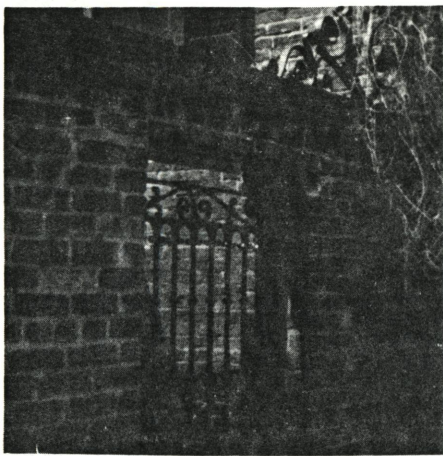
*Yet life flows on
 masks come alive
 masks dream,
 in their hand a flower.*

*Measureless destiny of tragedy
 measured destiny of man,
 we find you here
 and elsewhere
 exhaling silence
 in a timeless universe*



Ham. To be, or not to be, that is the question:

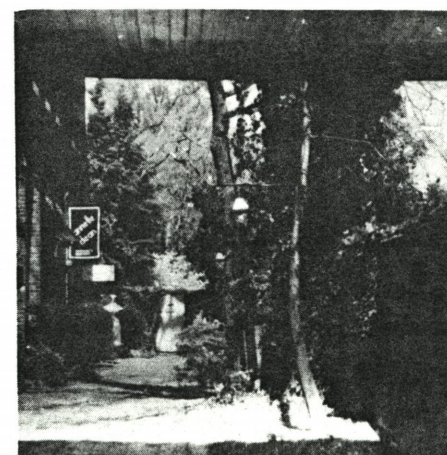
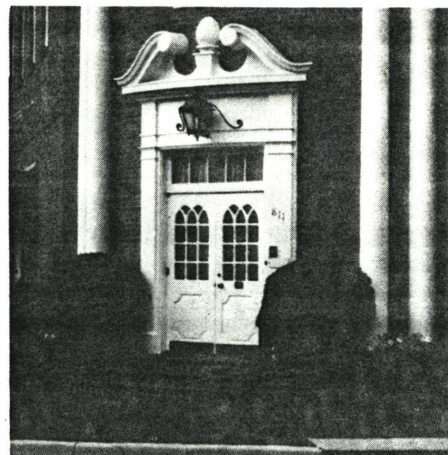
PARTI - manuscript



GATE - an entrance to a courtyard

Different elements of Old Town with their public and private character have influenced my architectural design.

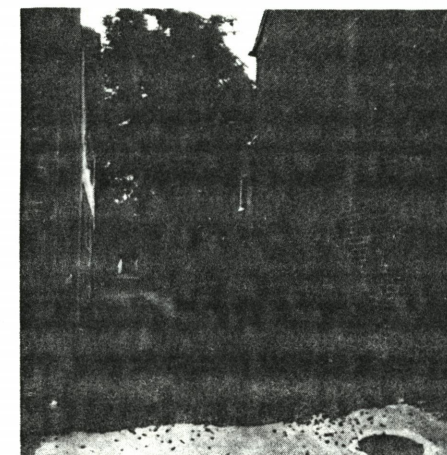
MAIN ENTRANCE - an invitation to a building.



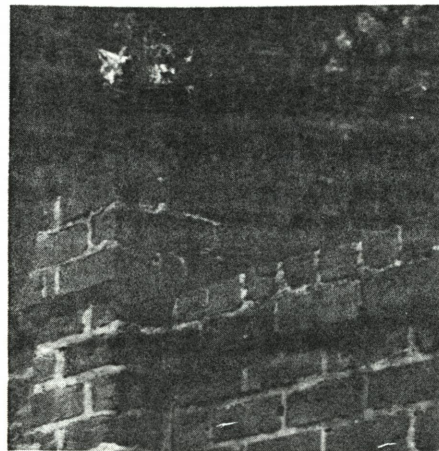
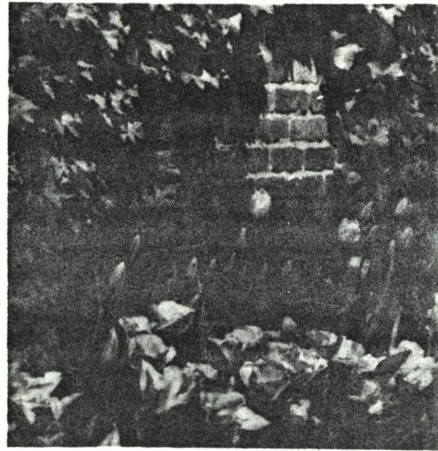
COURTYARDS - the lungs in the middle of the block

ALLEY - for pedestrians and service: a visible connection between two parallel streets inside a block.

- a gap: connection between a street and a court yard.

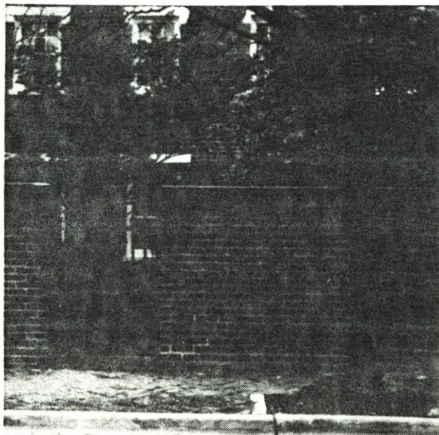
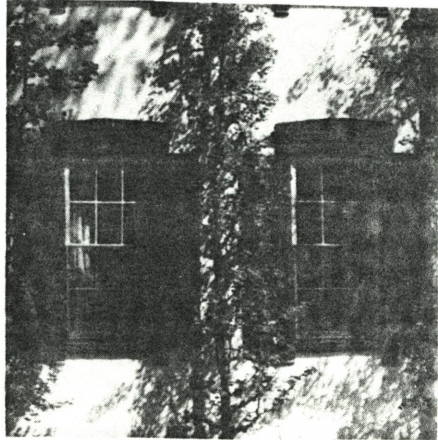


ELEMENTS
OF
OLD TOWN
ALEXANDRIA

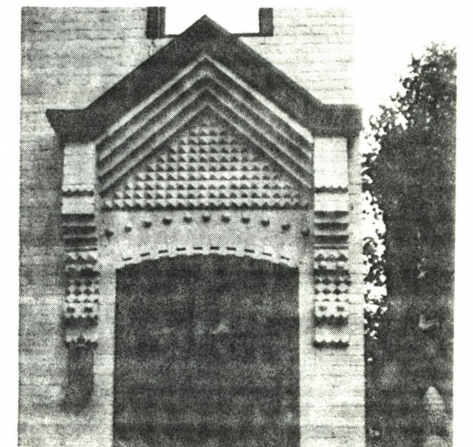
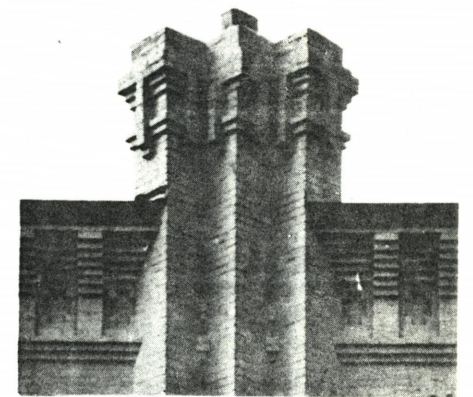
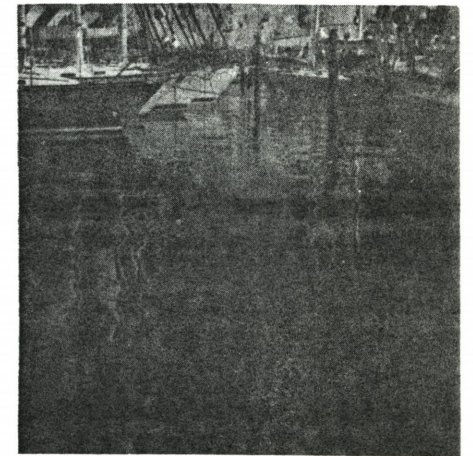
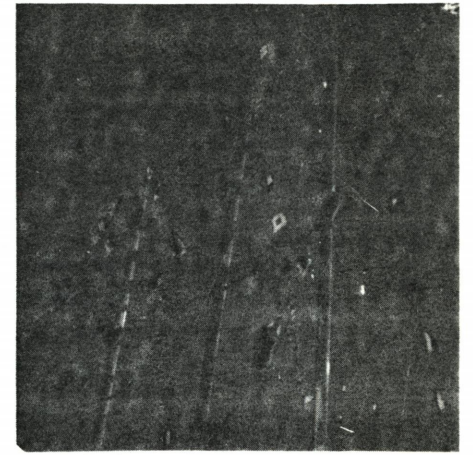


PLANTS -space creators, showing the change of seasons

STREET "WALL" - a row of town houses or a brick wall between a court yard and a street



THE WATER FRONT
- an old seaport
- a recreational area



BRICK
- sense of material
- sense of scale
- individual character
for each building

PARTI model in the city grid including six blocks of the neighborhood.

To the EAST -N.Columbus St.-
a transparent pavillion: across
the street from Christ Church.

The gate/ the main entrance -
through the North wall to the
court yard - an exceptional way
to enter in Old town, influenced
by the Church.

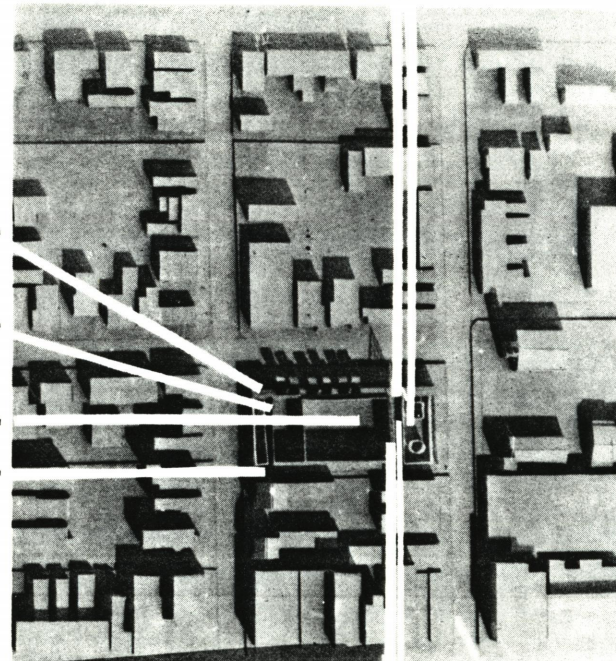
To the NORTH -Cameron
Street- enclosed wall for the
acoustic and climatic protection
including both administrative
part and gallery part for public
use.

To the WEST -N.Alfred St.-
private part for personnel
facing the town houses.

In the middle, the "heart" - the
auditorium, hidden by other
elements closer to streets.

To the SOUTH a theatre alley
separating the theatre building
from the next door neighbors

Parking underground.



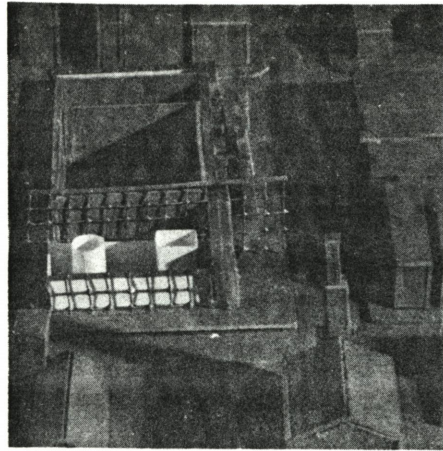
A plant wall - conceals the
auditorium behind it.

A courtyard - extension to the
Church courtyard on the other
side of the street.

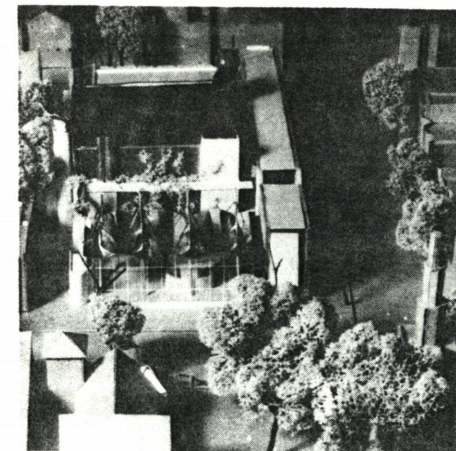
To adapt the new theatre building into the
old city context by not breaking the existing
scale dramatically the parti model consists
of different elements which appear in Old
Town. These elements are Walls, A Court-
yard, A Pavillion and An Alley. These
elements create a series of spaces between
the walls which have a character of their
own.



PROCESS - rehearsals

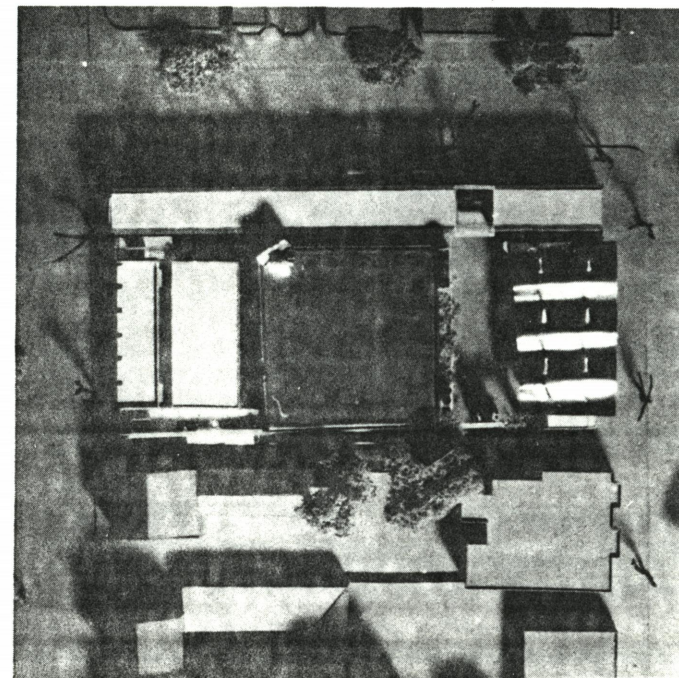
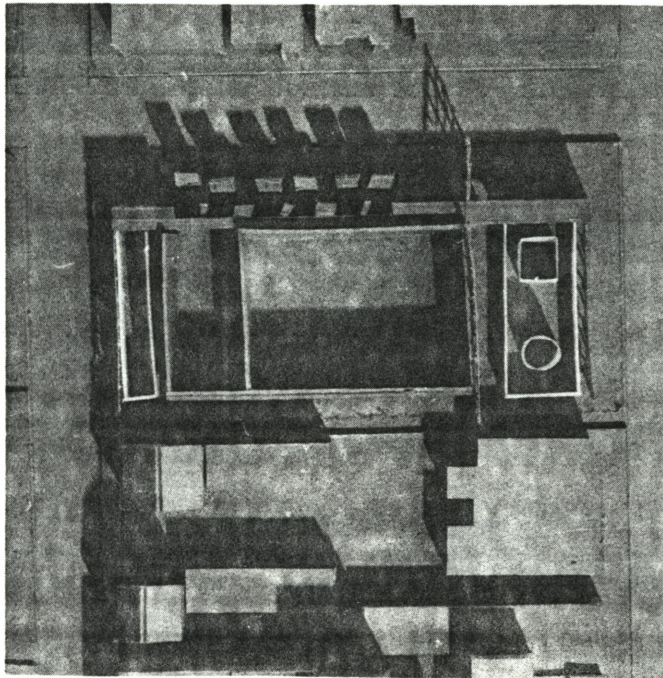


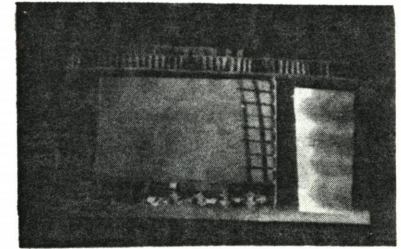
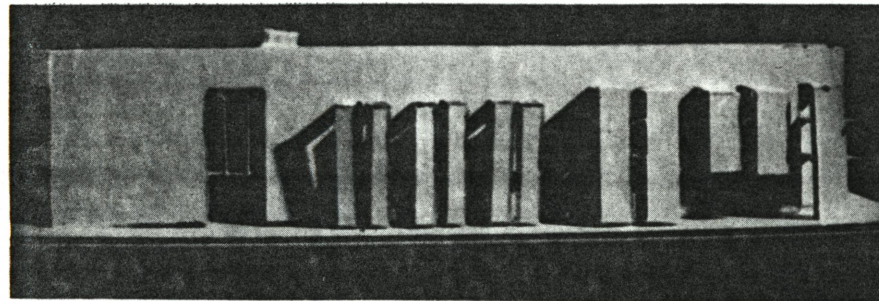
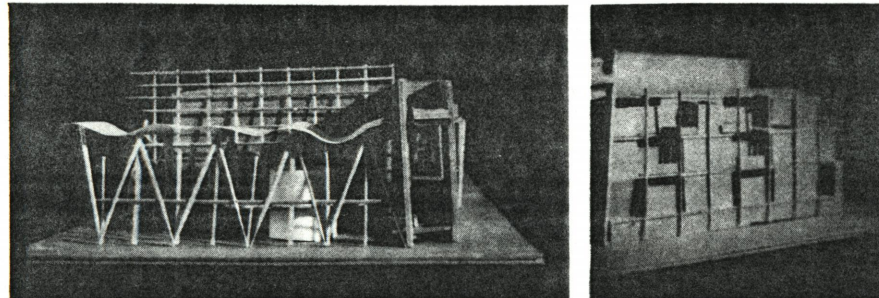
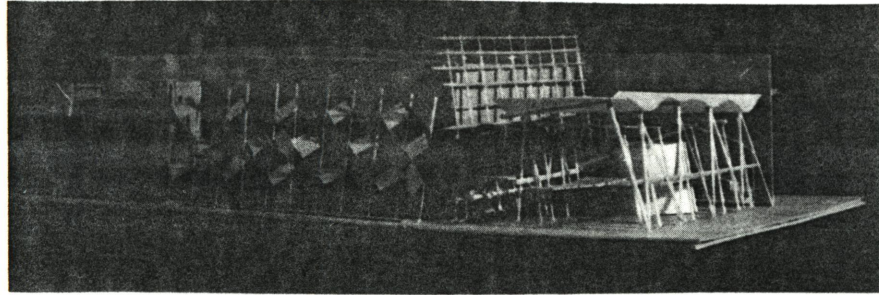
Parti model (original in 1:500 scale) shows the basic concept with different elements related to each other. The location close to Christ Church has an impact to the whole design from the beginning.



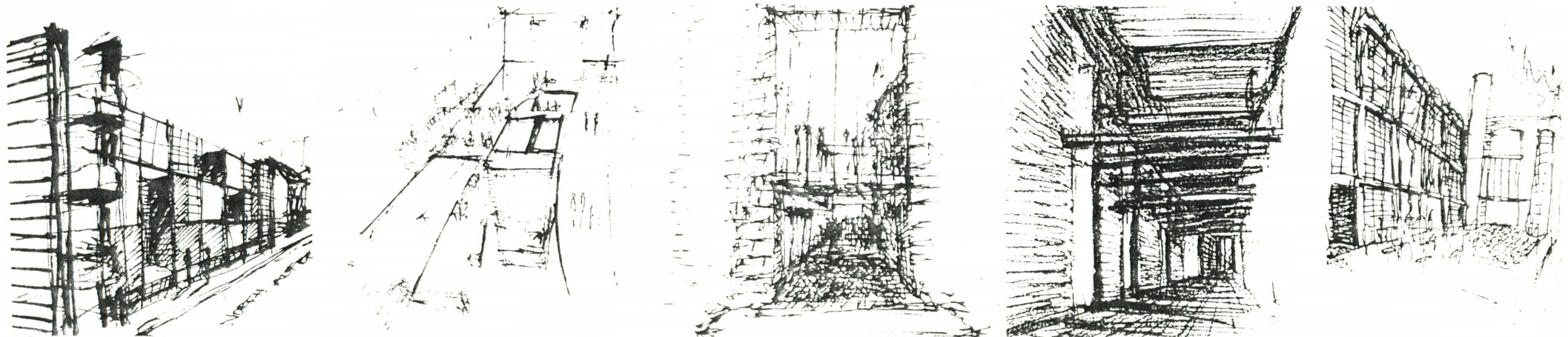
In the final model (original in 1:200 scale) the relation between different elements has developed yet the basic concept remains unchanged.

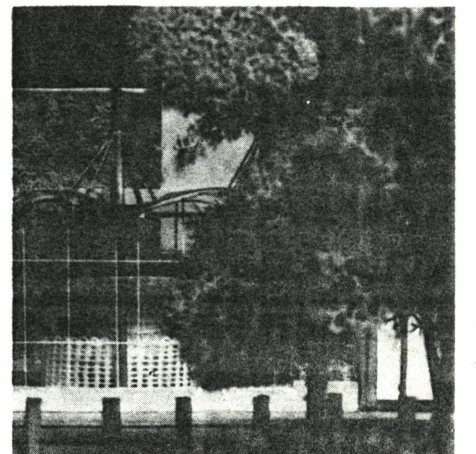
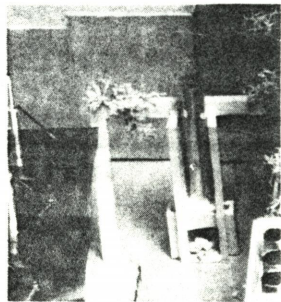
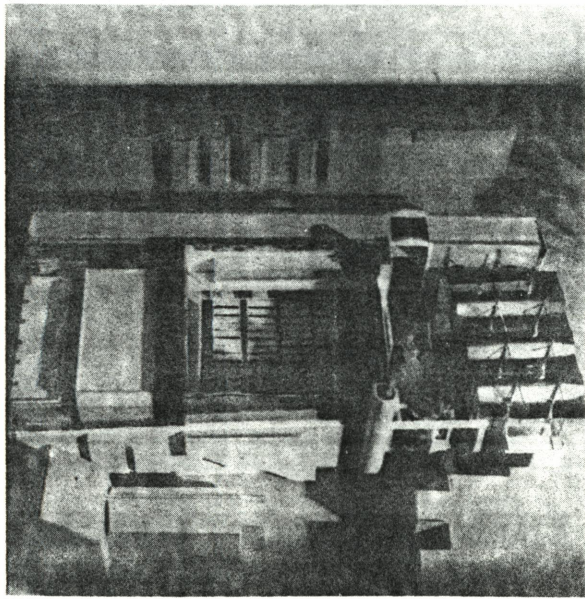
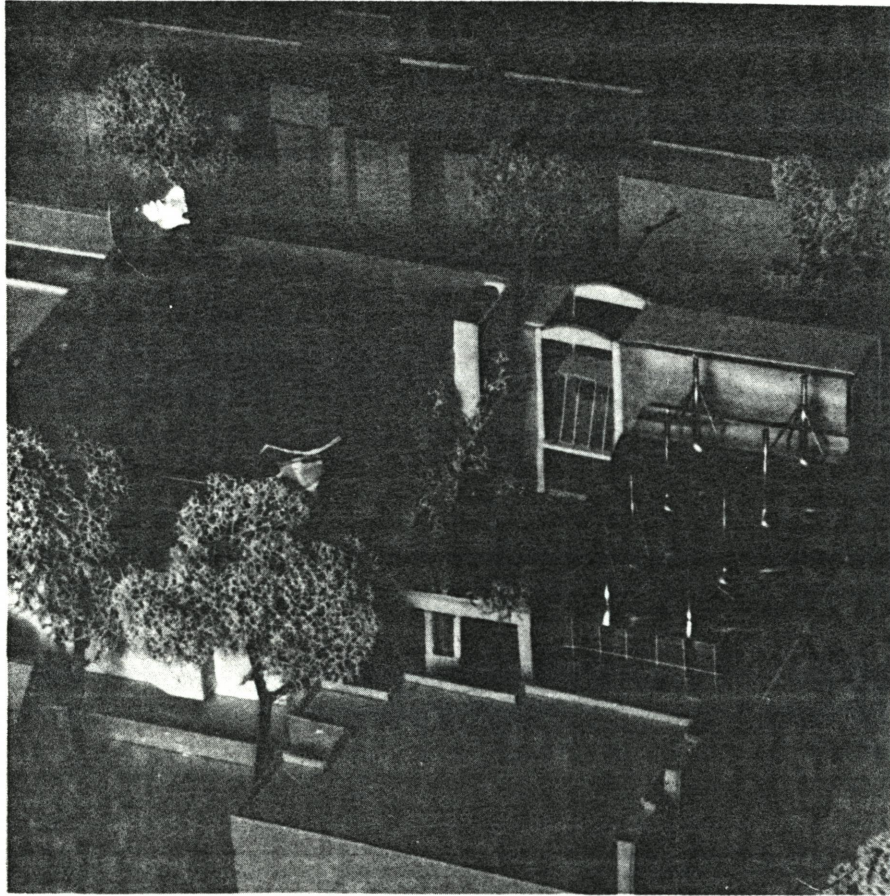
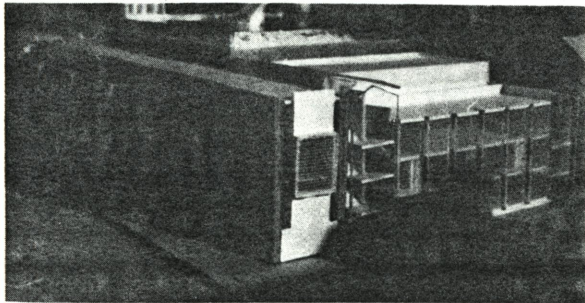
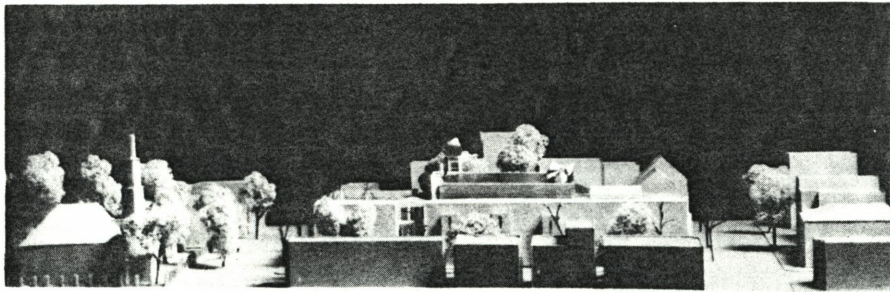
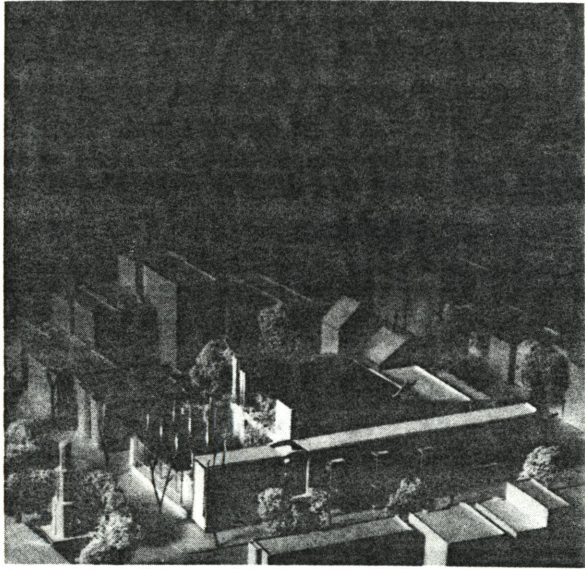
The building resembles a medieval city in a small scale, with its private and public buildings and city walls with narrow streets and town squares





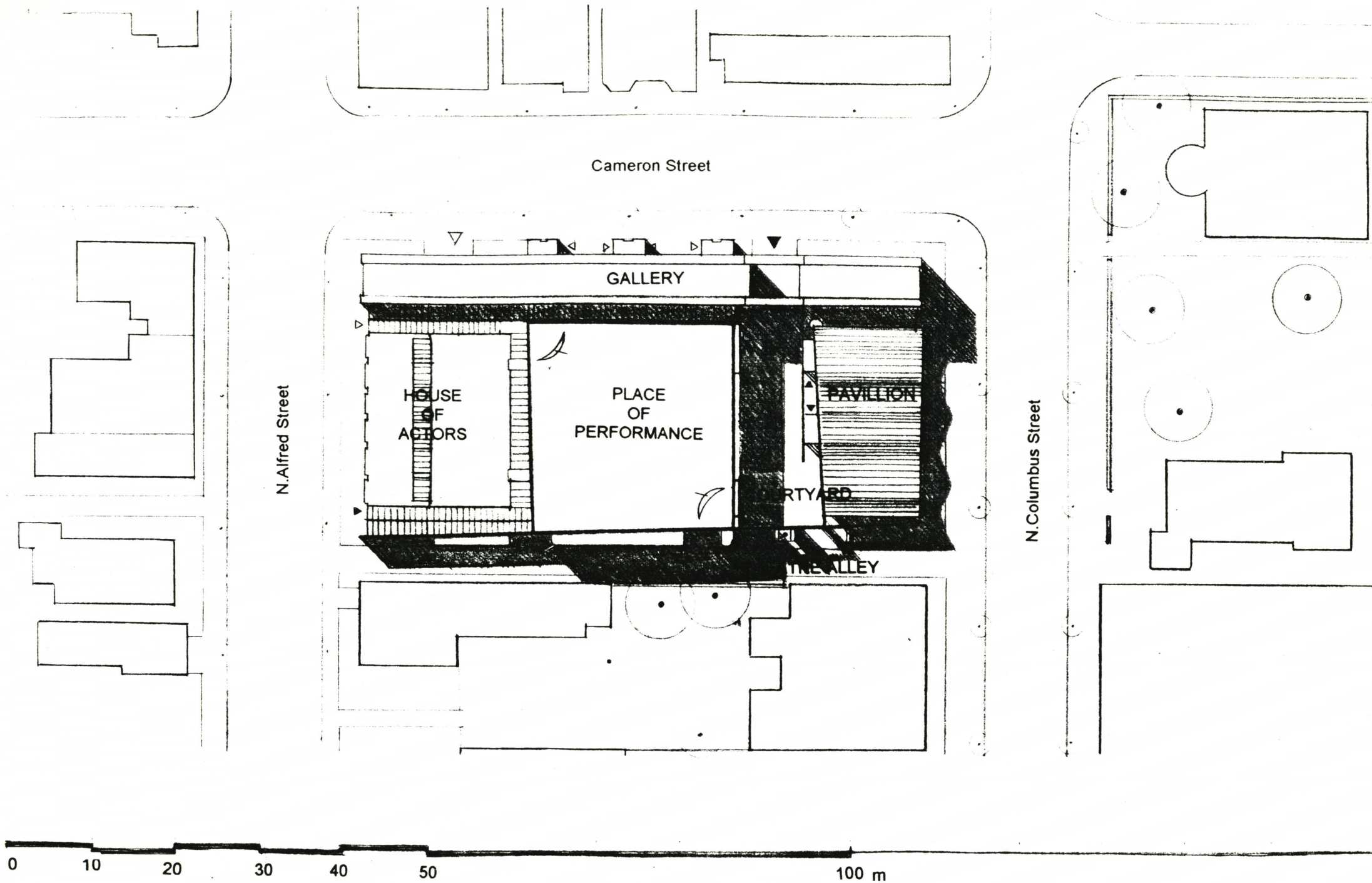
The working model during the process (original in 1:200 scale) contains the original elements with more specified characters and functions.







PRODUCT - performance



Following the order of entering the church, the theatre repeats this theme in the similar way: through the wall to the courtyard and into the Pavillion.

The enclosed Wall becomes a Gallery: the theatre foyer in the second floor.

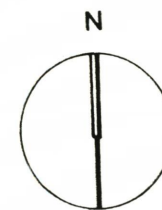
The transparent Pavillion, the lobby, reminds of the presence of the river and extends the interaction of the courtyards between the theatre and the church.

The Theatre Alley serves as a semi-private connection for the service and pedestrians.

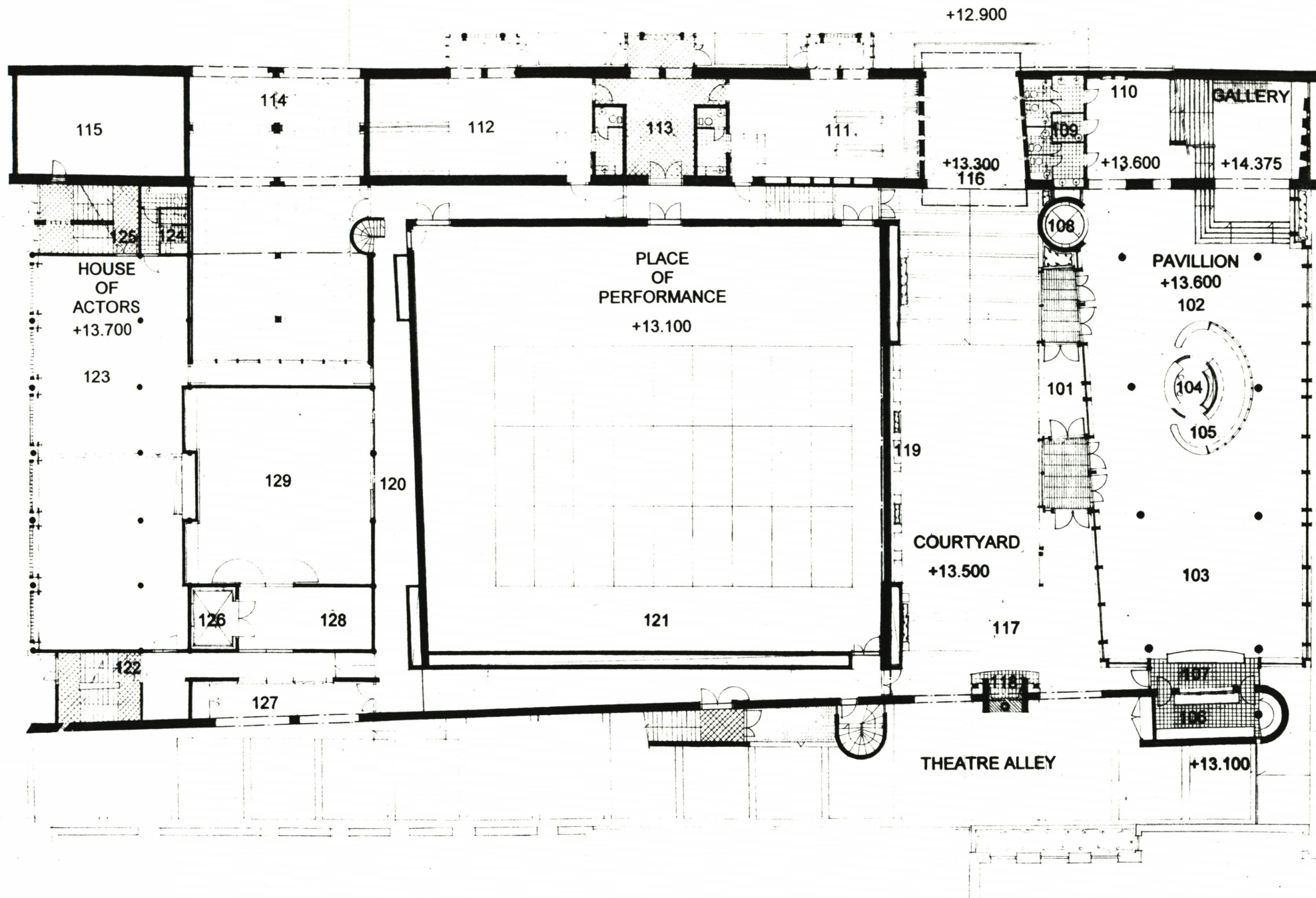
The row of glass block towers, the House of Actors, is populated by the administration part, dressing rooms, studios, workshops and property rooms; in this house the transparent glass of the Pavillion has been replaced by glass blocks, giving more intimacy to the people inside.

In the middle of the site the auditorium, the House of Performance, connected to the south wall, hides the performance inside.

The underground parking includes four parking levels - space for 140 cars.



SITE PLAN



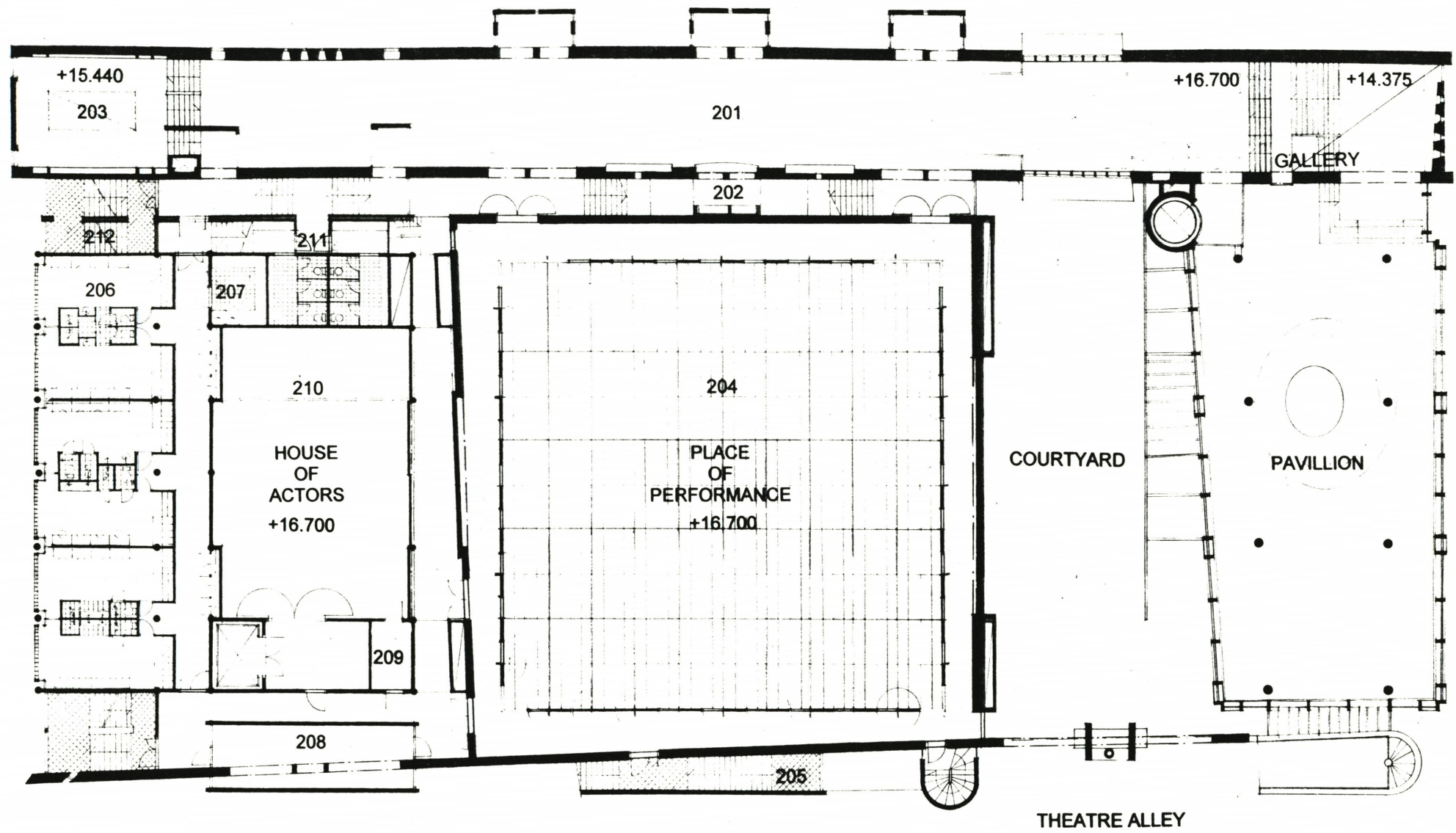
PAVILLION
 101 main entrance
 102 lobby
 103 cafeteria
 104 box office
 105 coat room
 106 kitchen
 107 service
 108 public elevator

GALLERY
 109 restrooms
 110 public phones
 111 theatre shop
 -books, posters, post cards
 112 theatre shop
 -costume rental, masks, make-up
 113 parking hall staircase
 114 parking hall entry
 115 files, archives

COURTYARD
 116 main entry to the courtyard
 117 open air cafeteria
 118 fire place
 119 plant wall
 PLACE OF PERFORMANCE
 120 staff
 121 storage

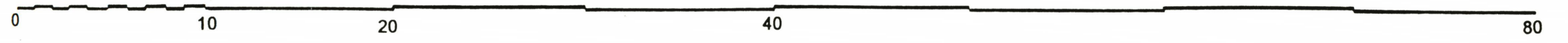
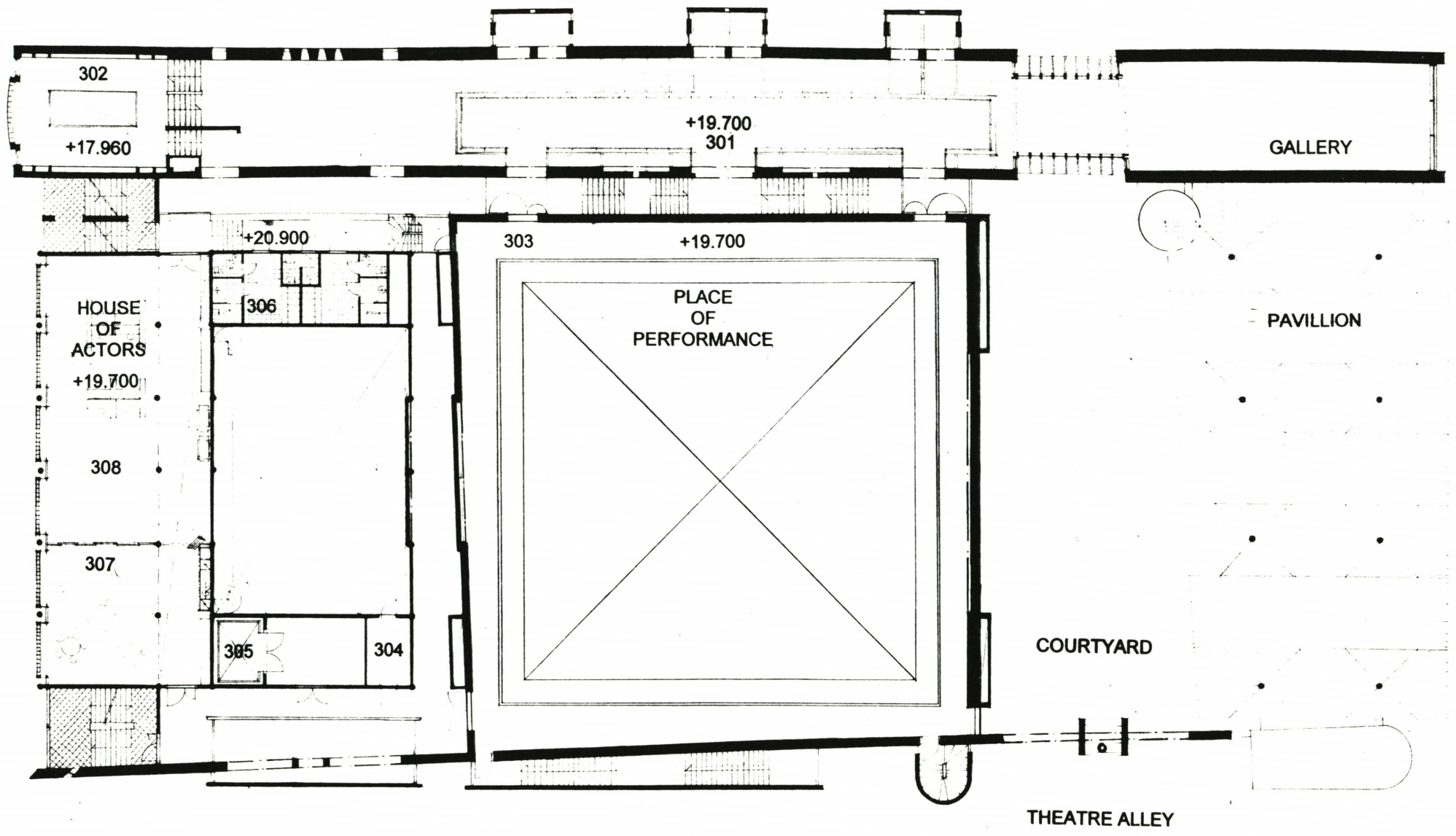
HOUSE OF ACTORS
 122 staff entrance
 123 rehearsal studios
 124 restroom, shower
 125 exit stair case
 126 service elevator
 127 loading
 128 storage
 129 metal-wood-paint
 work shop

FIRST FLOOR



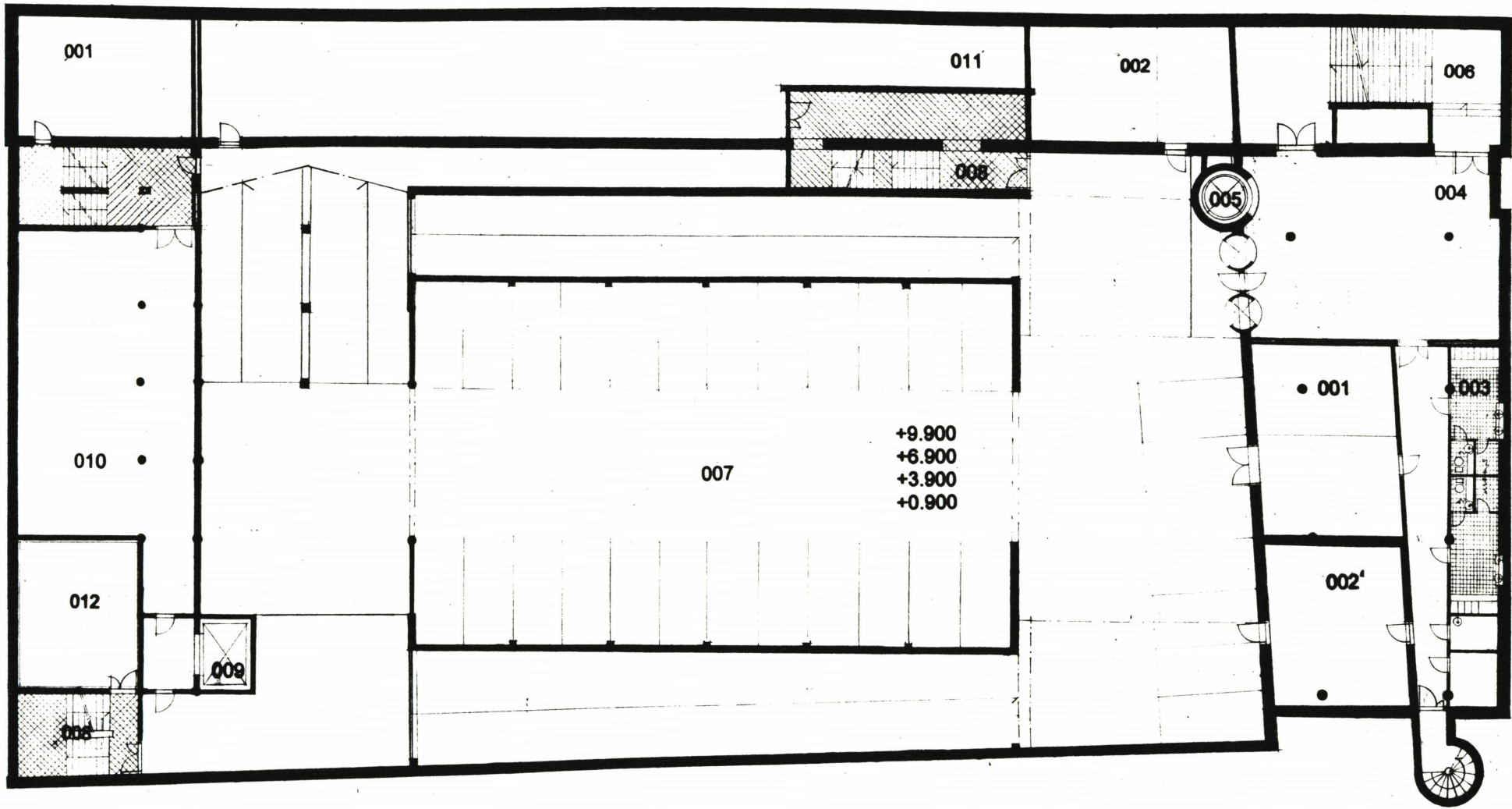
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| GALLERY | HOUSE OF ACTORS |
| 201 theatre gallery -foyer | 206 dressing rooms, make-up |
| 202 theatre bar | 207 laundry service |
| 203 theatre library, meeting room | 208 green room |
| | 209 storage |
| PLACE OF PERFORMANCE | 210 scenery, property |
| 204 auditorium | 211 public restrooms |
| 205 exit staircase | 212 exit staircase |

SECOND FLOOR



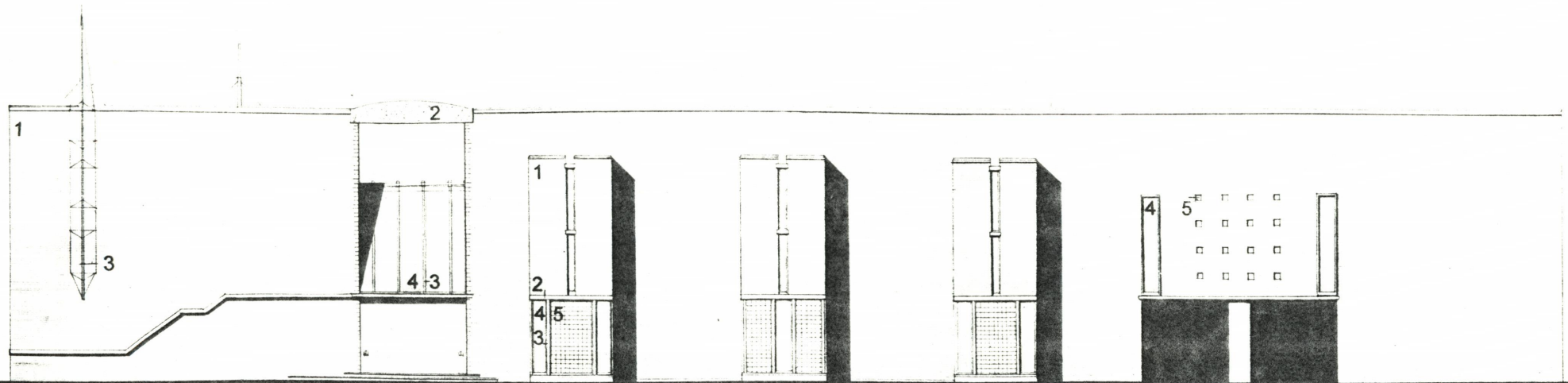
- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| GALLERY | HOUSE OF ACTORS |
| 301 balcony | 304 storage |
| 302 theatre library | 305 service elevator |
| | 306 rest rooms |
| PLACE OF PERFORMANCE | 307 cafeteria: personnel |
| 303 balcony | 308 administration office |

THIRD FLOOR

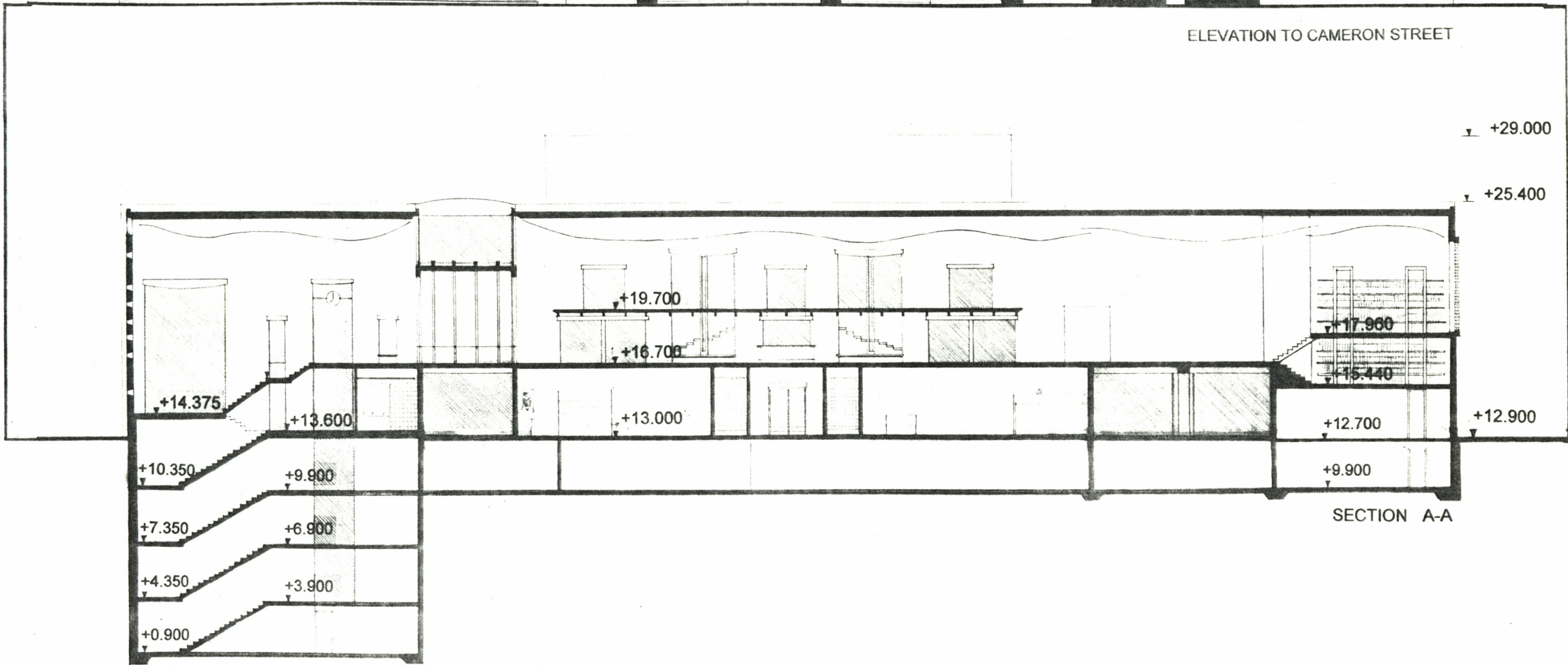


0 10 20 40 80

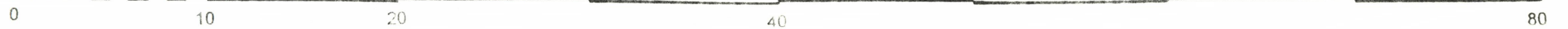
- 001 storage
- 002 mechanical room
- 003 staff
- 004 lobby
- 005 public elevator
- 006 staircase
- 007 underground parking
- 008 exit
- 009 service elevator
- 010 costume design
- 011 costume storage
- 012 studio



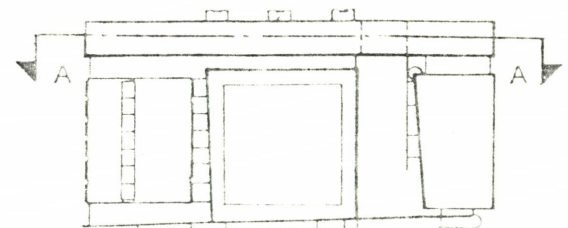
ELEVATION TO CAMERON STREET

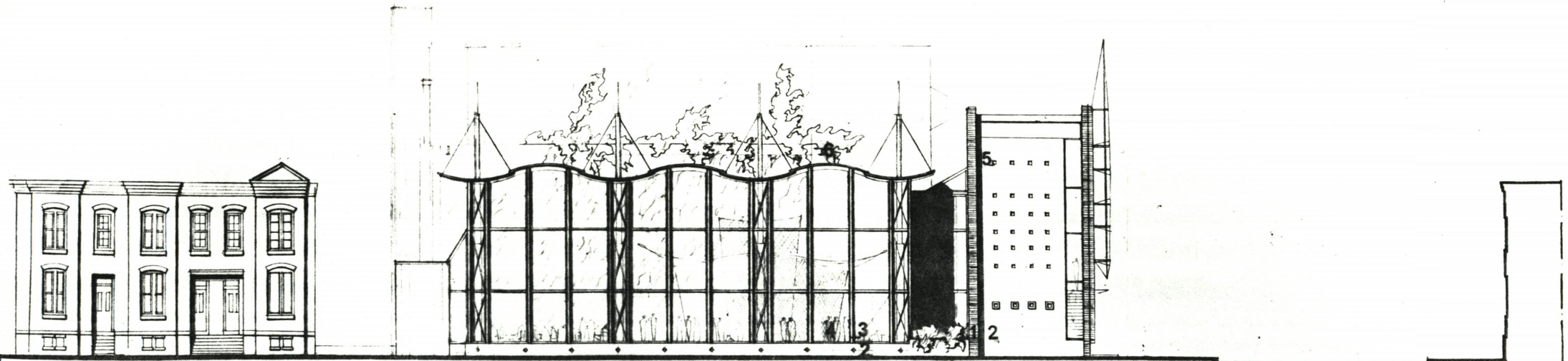


SECTION A-A

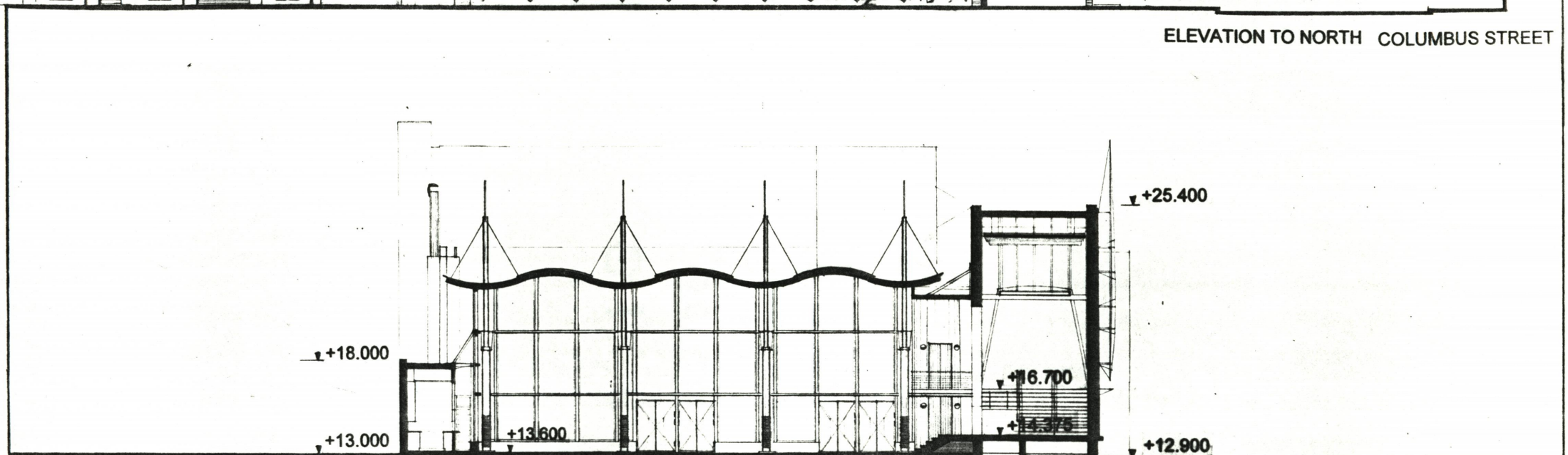


- MATERIALS:
1. brick
 2. concrete
 3. steel
 4. glass
 5. glass blocks

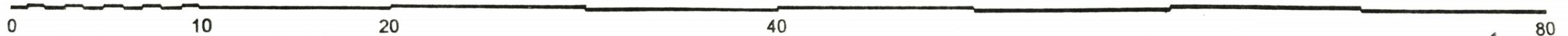




ELEVATION TO NORTH COLUMBUS STREET

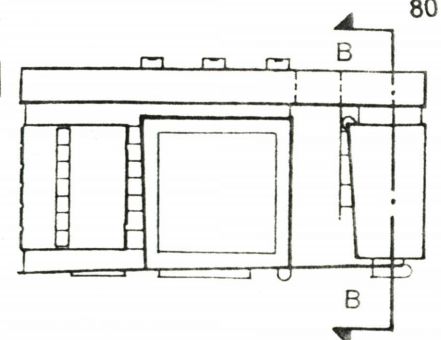


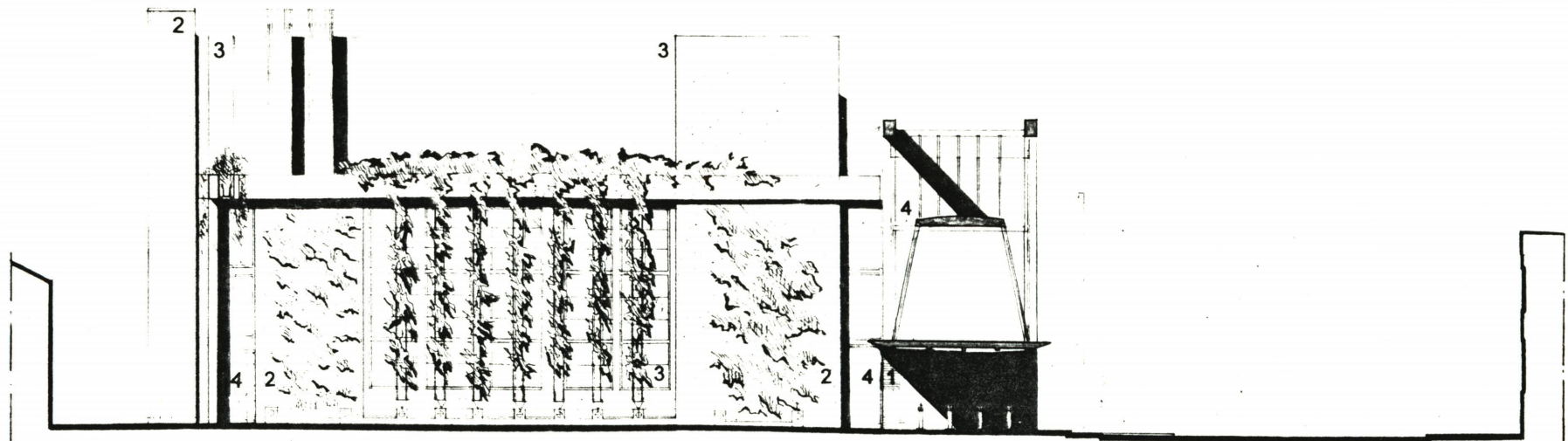
SECTION B-B



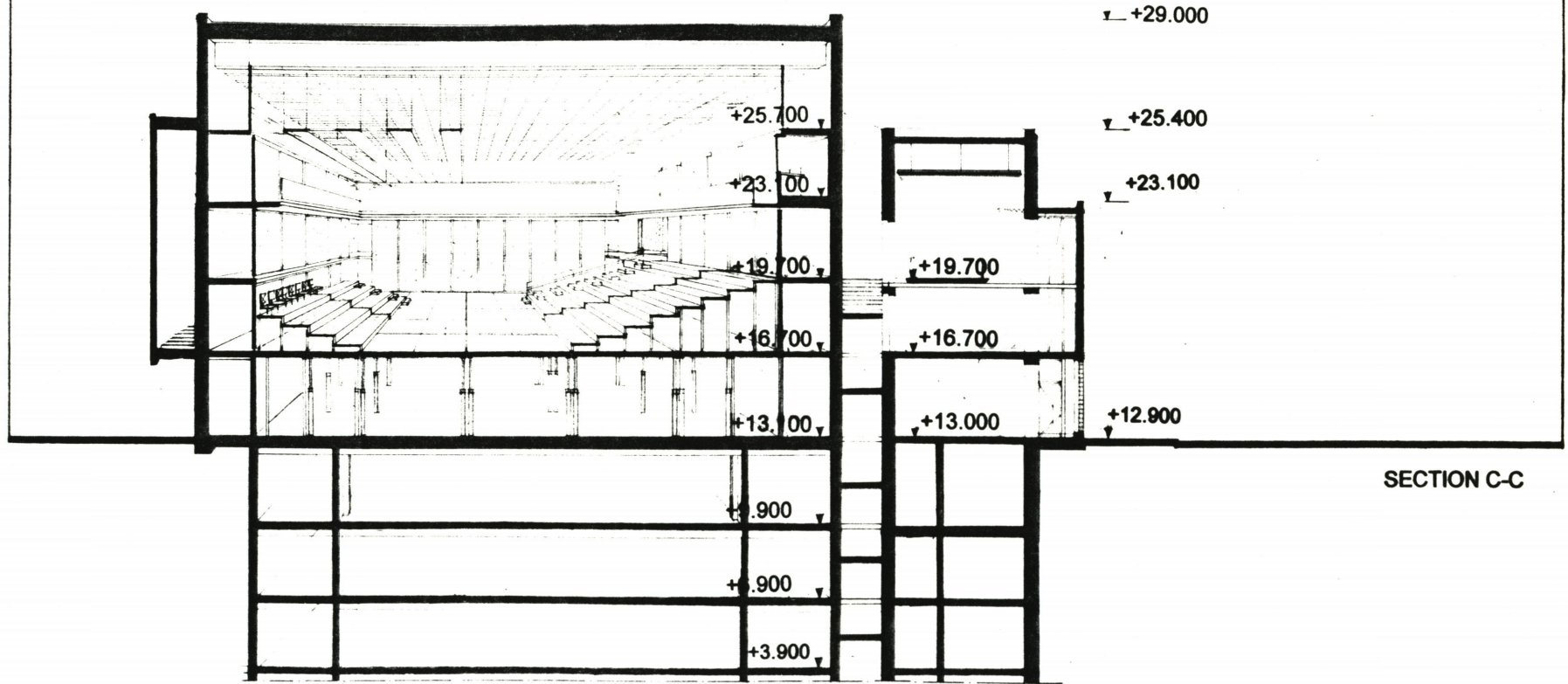
MATERIALS:

- 1. brick
- 2. concrete
- 3. steel
- 4. glass
- 5. glass blocks
- 6. steel roof element

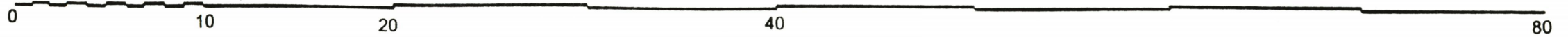




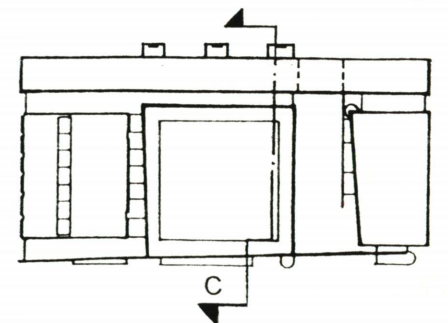
ELEVATION TO THE COURTYARD

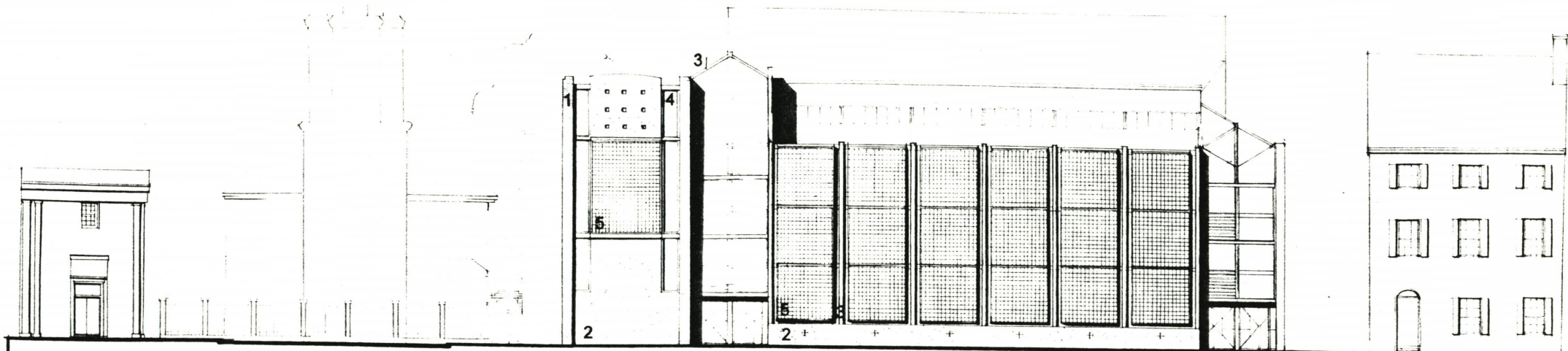


SECTION C-C

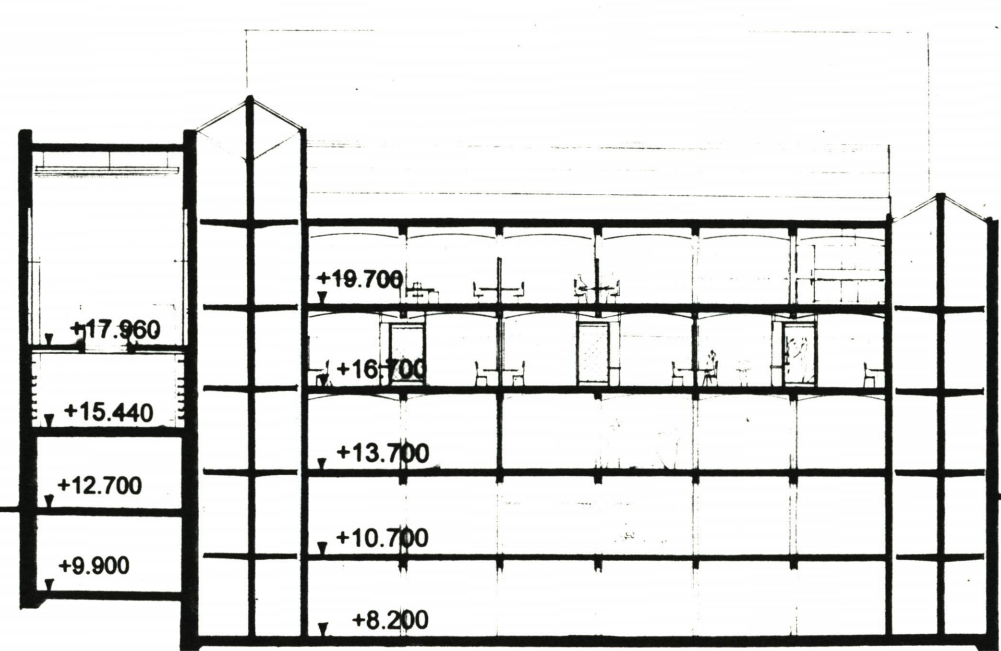


- MATERIALS:
- 1. brick
 - 2. concrete
 - 3. steel
 - 4. glass

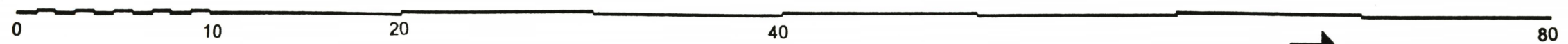




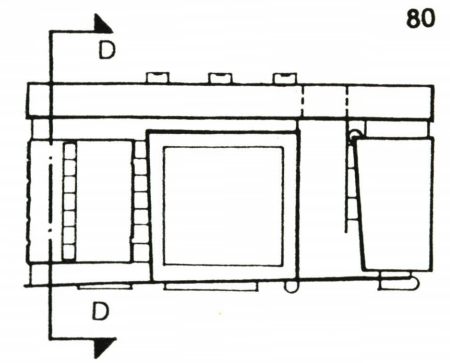
ELEVATION TO NORTH ALFRED STREET

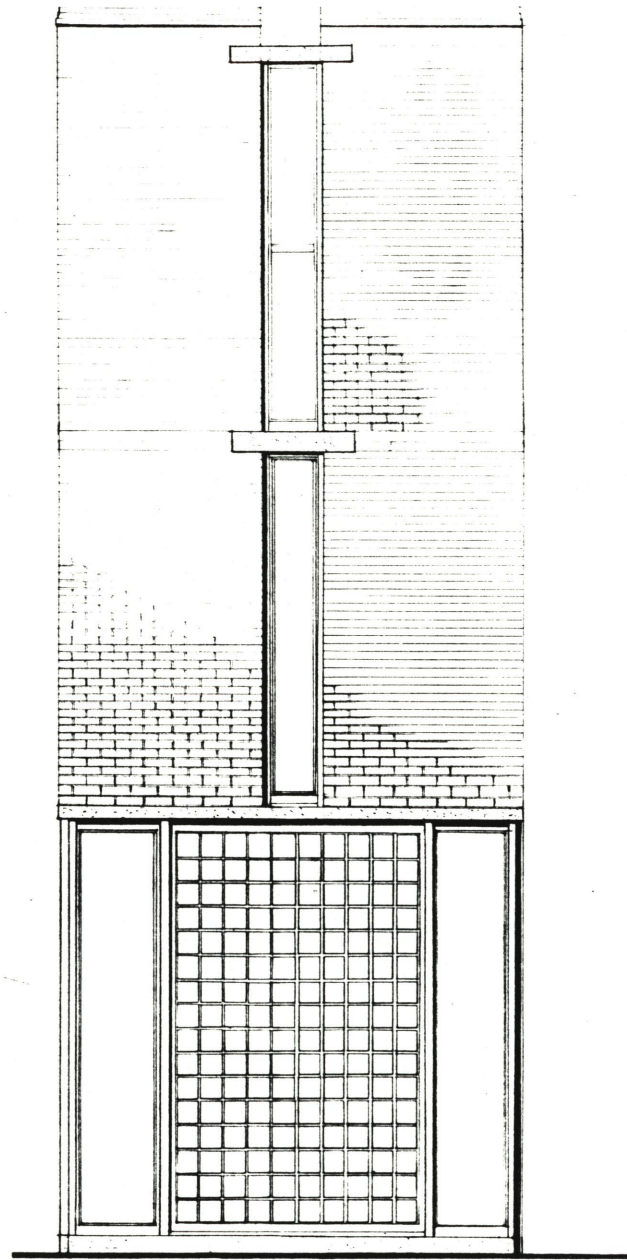


SECTION D-D

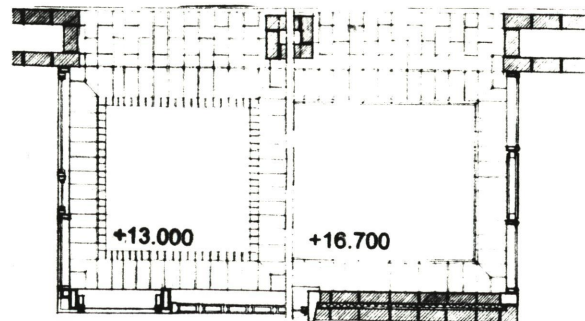
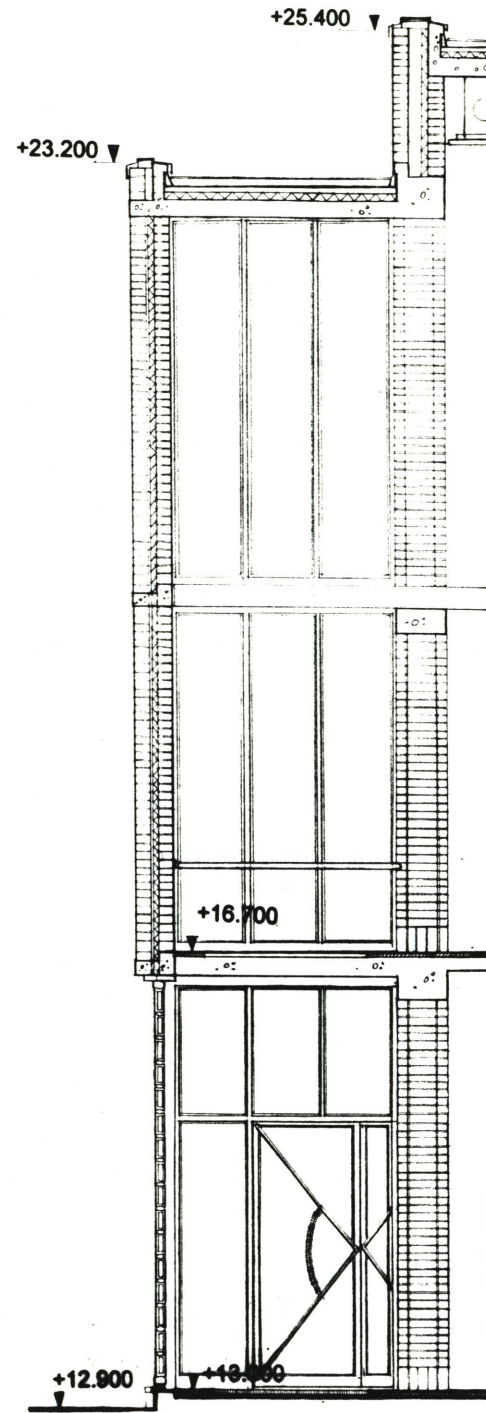


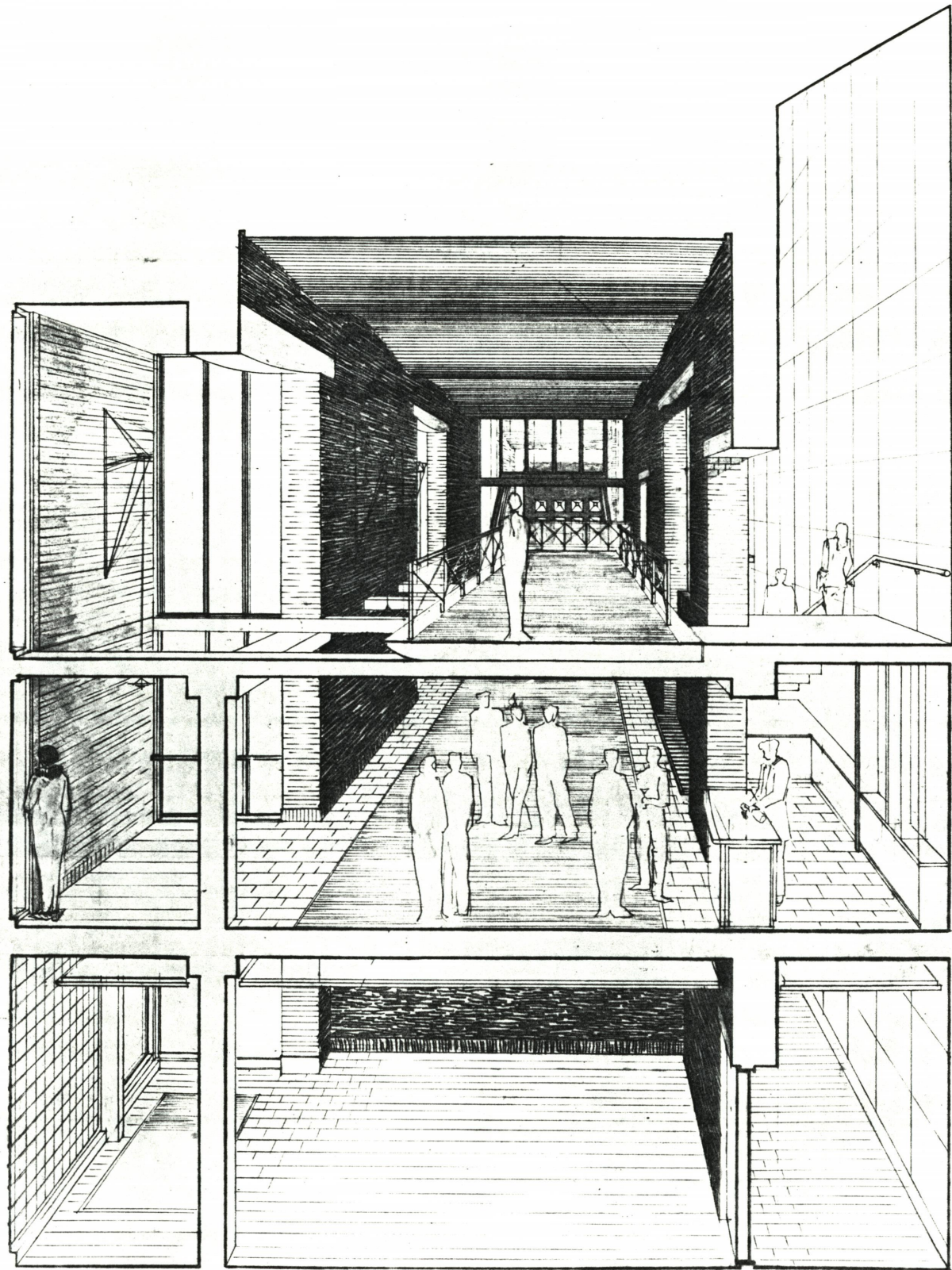
- MATERIALS:
- 1. brick
 - 2. concrete
 - 3. steel
 - 4. glass
 - 5. glass blocks



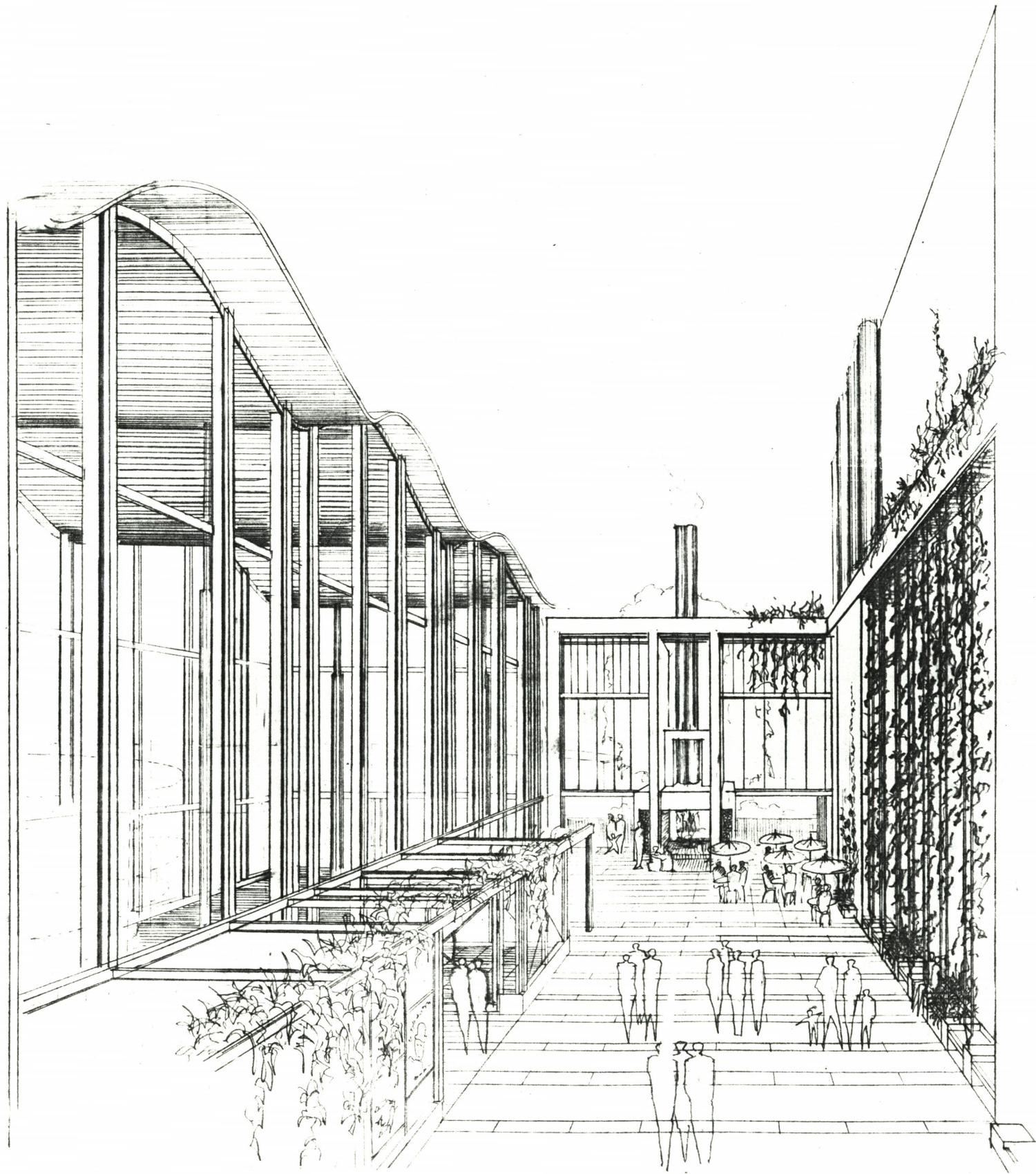


BAY WINDOW OF THE GALLERY





GALLERY FOYER

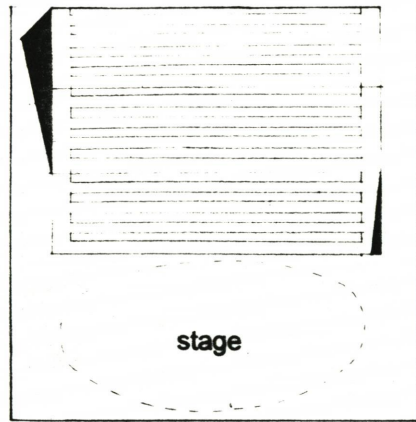
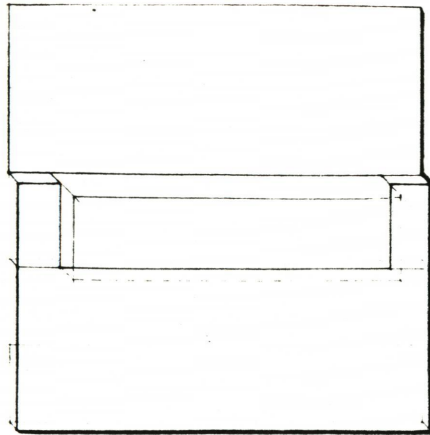


COURTYARD

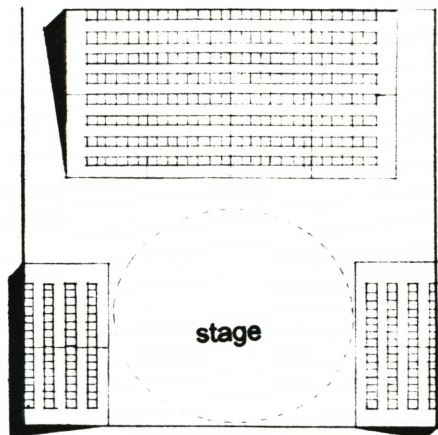
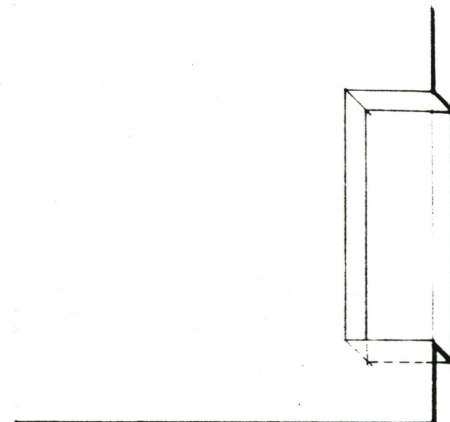


BLACK BOX - silence

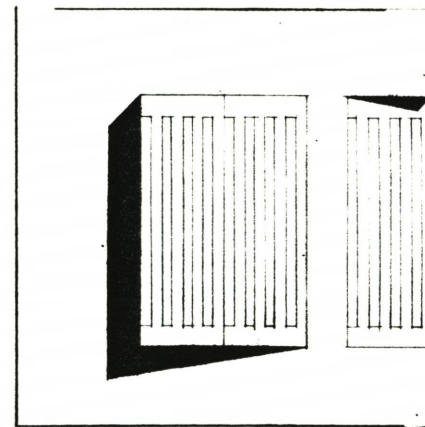
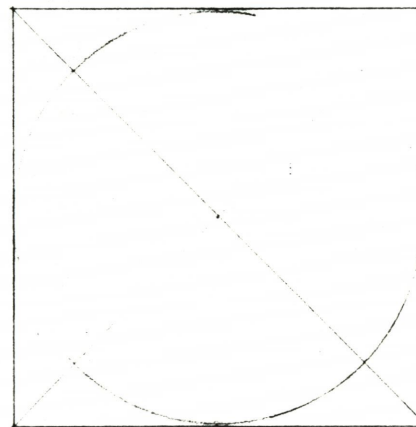
The flexibility of the Black Box depends on how the removable seats and floor elements are organized.



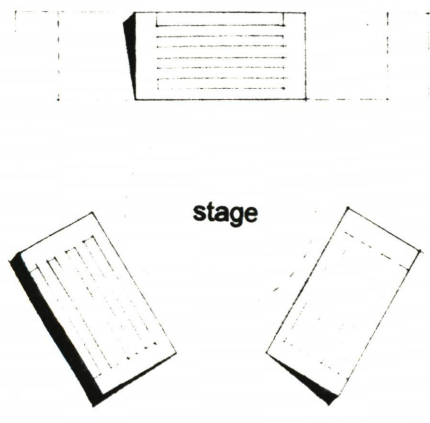
320 seats



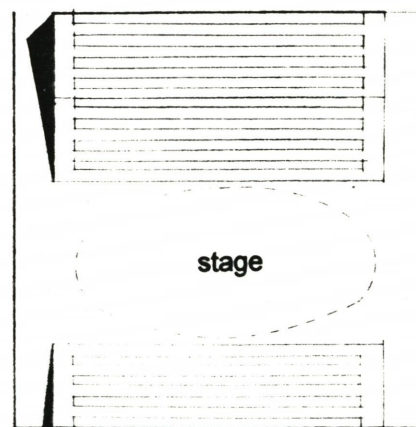
320 seats



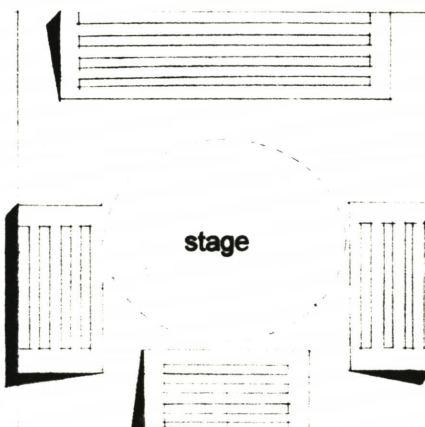
240 seats



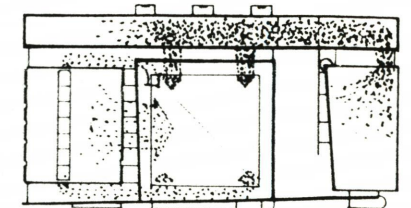
144/200 seats



320 seats



320 seats



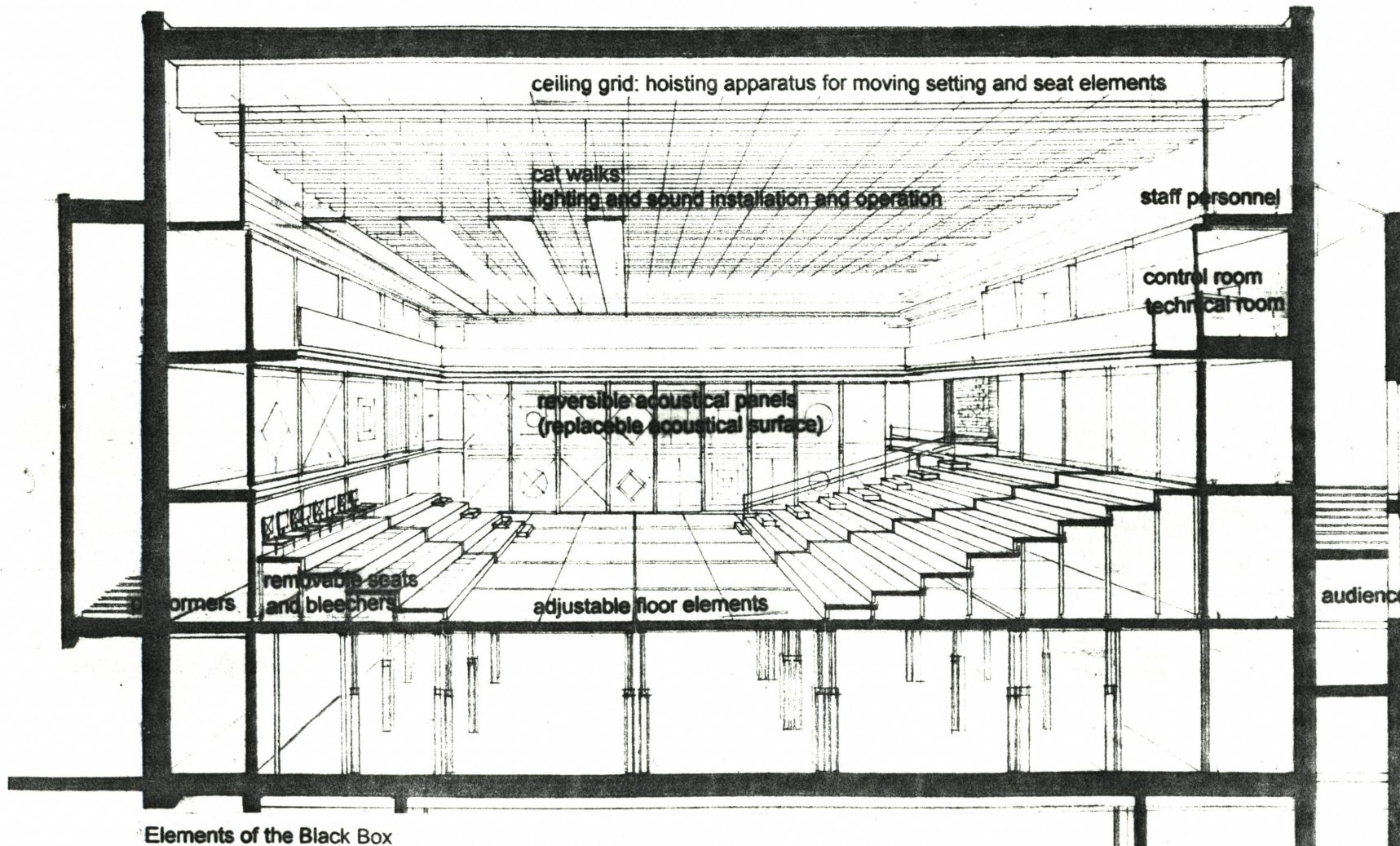
CIRCULATION

The circulation between the audience and the performers is separated from each other.

The public entry sequence to the auditorium starts from the main entrance at Cameron Street through the Gallery gate to the Courtyard and further on to the Pavillion. From the Pavillion, following the stairs of the Gallery, you will end up at the House of Performance.

The entrance to the underground parking exists also at Cameron Street. Elevator from the parking levels leads to the Pavillion.

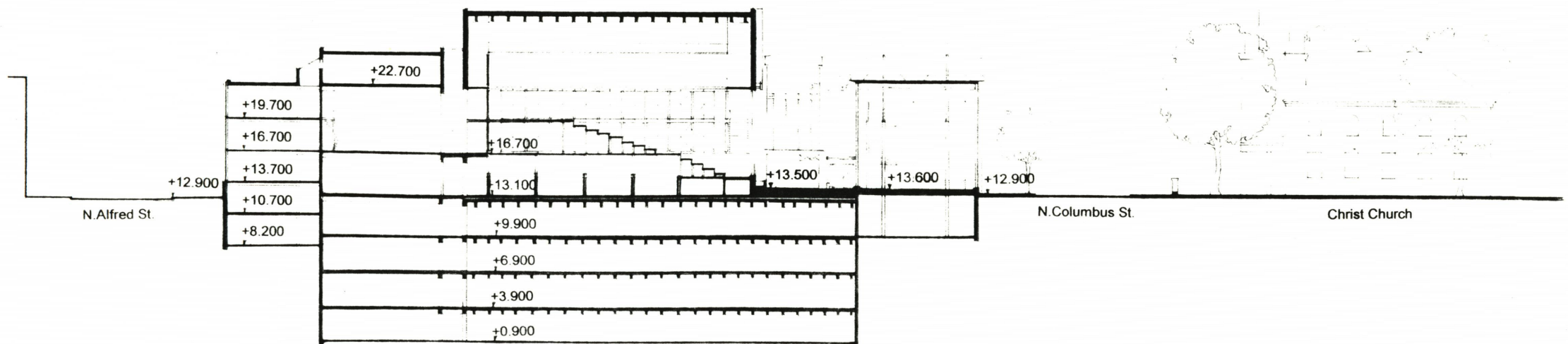
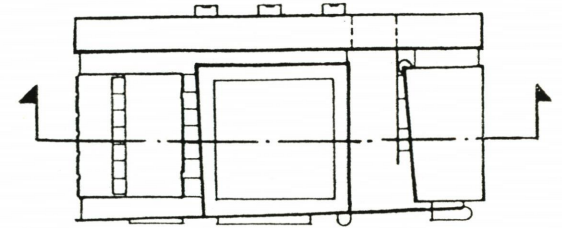
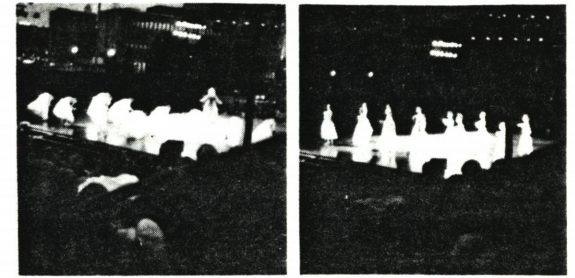
The staff entrance is from N. Alfred Street to the House of Actors. The staff and the performers/ visitors circulate in "private streets" into the House of Performance.



The Black Box is only a frame to a performance. The flexibility gives an opportunity to vary the appearance of the stage for each performance.

The interaction between the silent space and the open air is possible by opening the acoustical sliding doors to the Courtyard. The plants growing along cables and covering the sliding doors to the Courtyard can be raised up. The Courtyard creates a stage and the courtyard of Christ Church behind the transparent Pavillion becomes part of the scene.

The satellite dishes on top of the roof reach performances / performers on the other side of the world. In that way the performance communicates with sound and picture regardless of time or place. The individual elements - Pavillion, Courtyard, Gallery, House of Performance - may serve as places for performances.



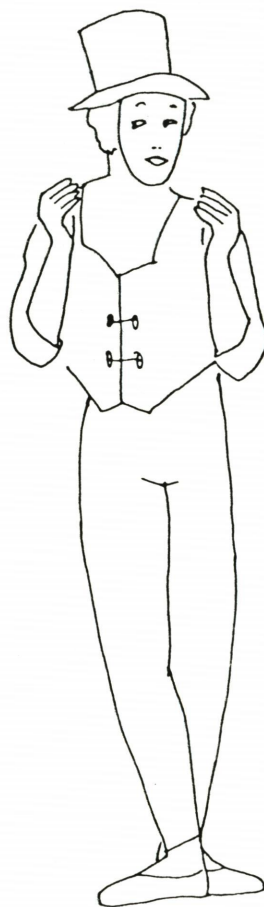
INTERVIEWS

Vaino Aromaki,
stage manager,
Intimiteatteri,
Helsinki, Finland, 1991

Patricia J. Bradford,
The Little Theatre of Alexandria,
Alexandria, VA, 1991

Anu Karlsson,
production manager,
Ryhmateatteri,
Helsinki, Finland, 1991

Maija Louhio,
stage designer,
Intimiteatteri,
Helsinki, Finland, 1991



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Andersens Trykkerier as, 1976

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Rehousing the Drama,
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