

A SEARCH FOR A SCHOOL

by Edward M. Denning

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of:

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

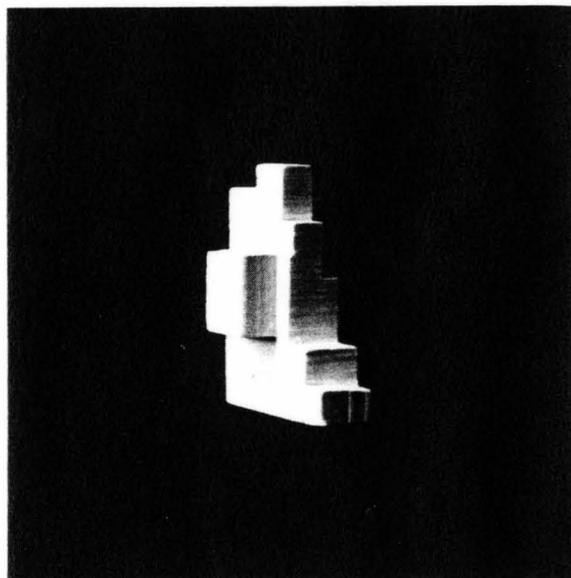
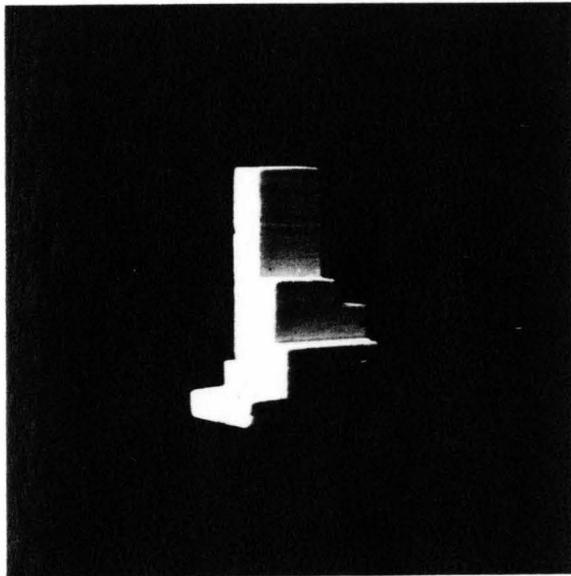
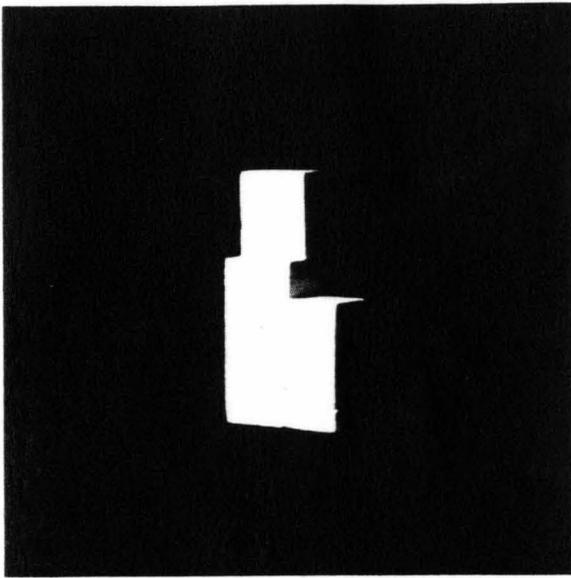
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Blacksburg, Va.
May 1990



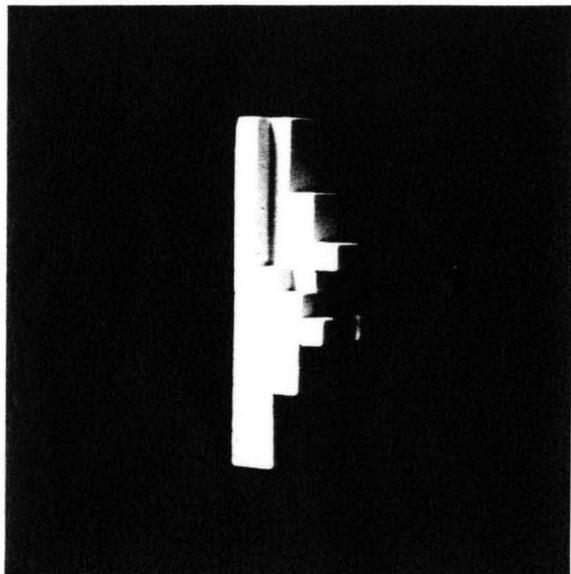
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Committee Chairman: Hans C. Rott

(ABSTRACT)

The School of Homeric Studies is thing apart; a numbered artifice of pieces, and this is a place apart: a place of song, a place of anger, a place of prayer.



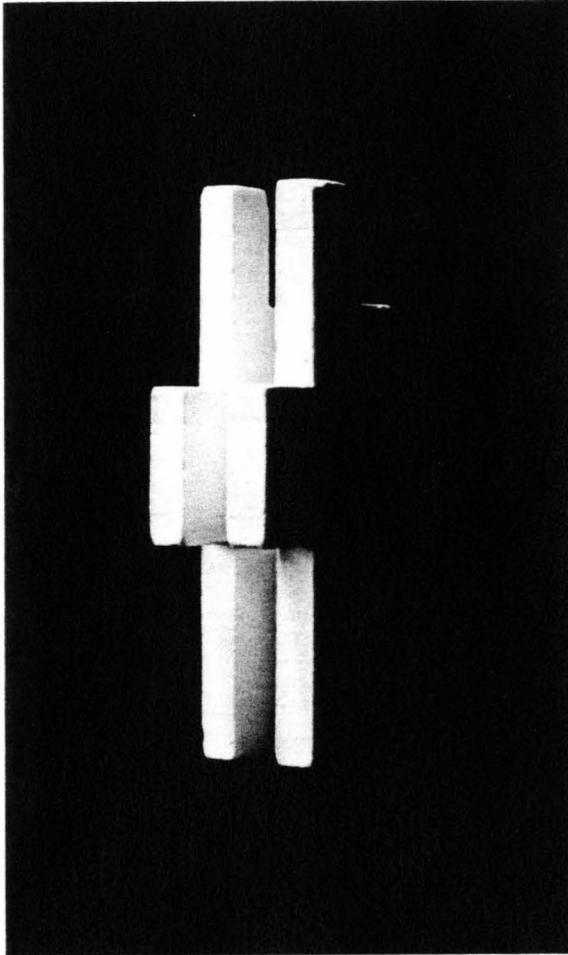
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To _____, whose help and support have made this all possible, thank you.



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Motivations

"In the beginning God gave to every people a cup of clay, and from this cup they drank their life."¹

Proverb of Digger Indians

"The conquest of the superfluous gives us a greater spiritual excitement than the conquest of the necessary. Man is a creation of desire, not a creation of need."²

"And the source of coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens, according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time."³

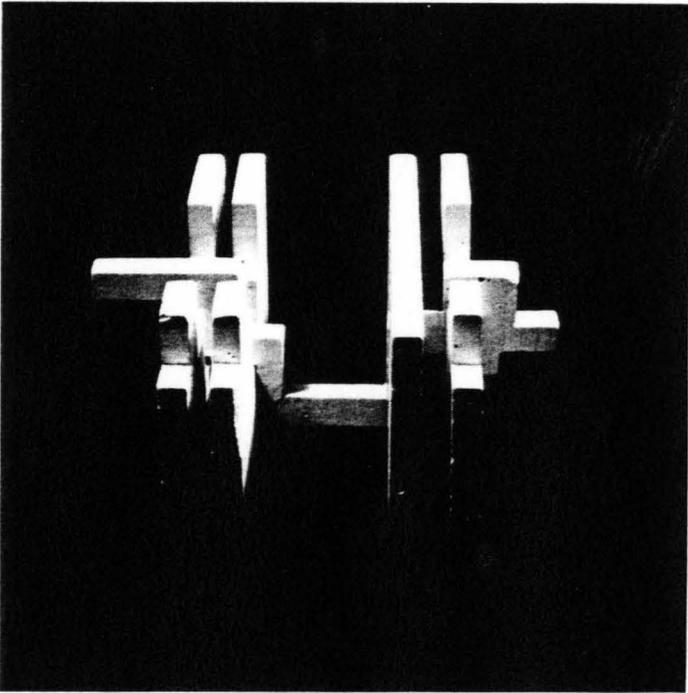
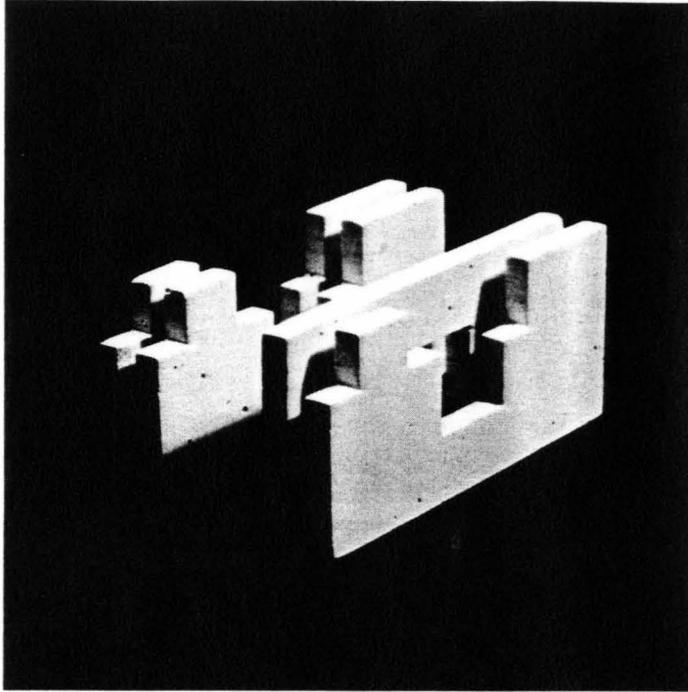
It is my desire to make a place which I will call Homer's school.

This school will be a construction that strives to certain attributes and these attributes are:

A place characterized by a language of formal parts; specific rudiments of architecture; steps and walls described with the quality of an object, an object as a cup, a spiritual vessel, elemental and apprehensive.

The formal language of rudiment will bear the argument of two desires which animate the project. First, the desire that the school be a place hewn from the earth as a garden; rooted in the manifold of nature. Second; the desire to express an articulate differentiated piece of artifice, an individuated thing of man.

Accept, that Homer's school, as Homer's art, is a construction of man, made according to the order of the things man makes; that is to say a thing of artifice.



Argument

"Every art or applied science and every systematic investigation, and similarly every action and choice, seem to aim at some good; the good, therefore, has been well defined as that at which all things aim. But it is clear that there is a difference in the ends at which they aim: in some cases the activity is the end, in others the end is some product beyond the activity. In cases where the end lies beyond the action the product is naturally superior to the activity."⁴

"Nor must we overlook the fact that arguments which proceed from fundamental principles are different from arguments that lead up to them."⁵

The thesis is presented here as a search in five parts. Each part is made as an argument in model and drawing of some fundamental principles of architecture.

The tectonic pieces on this and the preceding pages are the antecedents of the arguments which follow and are a first setting of limits to the discourse which ensues.

The argument is the set for the exercise of the thesis.

This search is a part that stands for a whole, not only because it is a selection, from a larger body of work, but also because it is meant to tell the story of a whole effort.

Indeed this journey is a conscious effort to understand its beginning and to return to a beginning; to its rudiments.

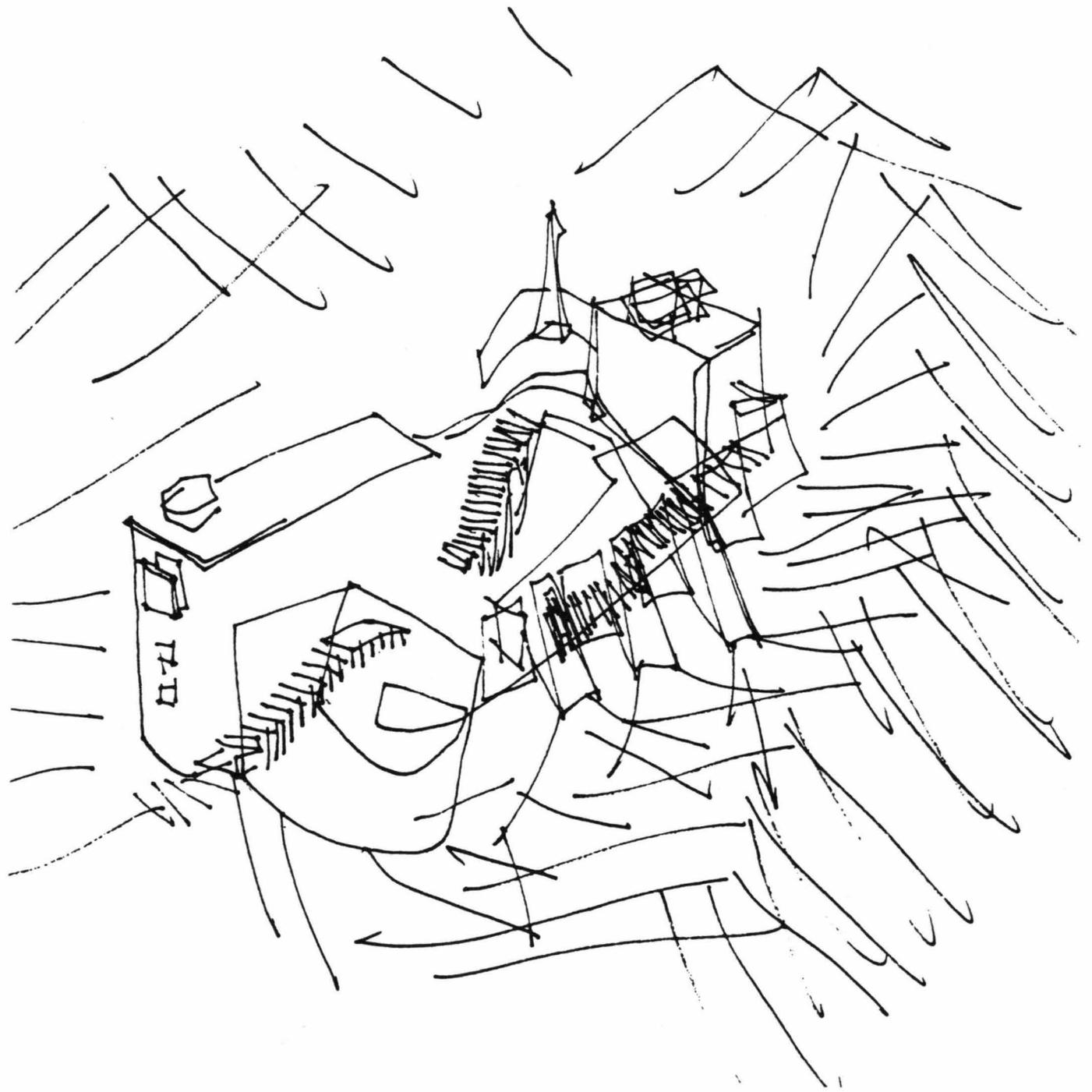
A special concern that threads through each of the arguments is the desire to understand a particular compositional aspect of the work of Le Corbusier, and apply that attribute to this project.

"Other writers have drawn attention to the fact that Le Corbusier tends to organize his internal and external surfaces so that they form a series of planes (actual or phenomenal) at right angles to the line of movement of the observer."⁶

The frontalized composition is an issue in each project detailed here. This difficulty is witnessed by the individual faces of each project; in its configuration of window on wall surface and in the struggle with the placing and layering of walls perpendicular to the direction of the piece.

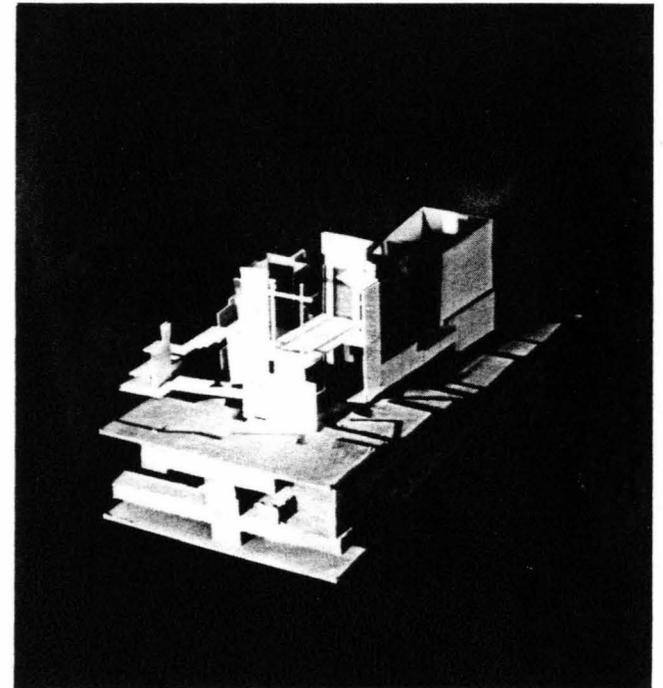
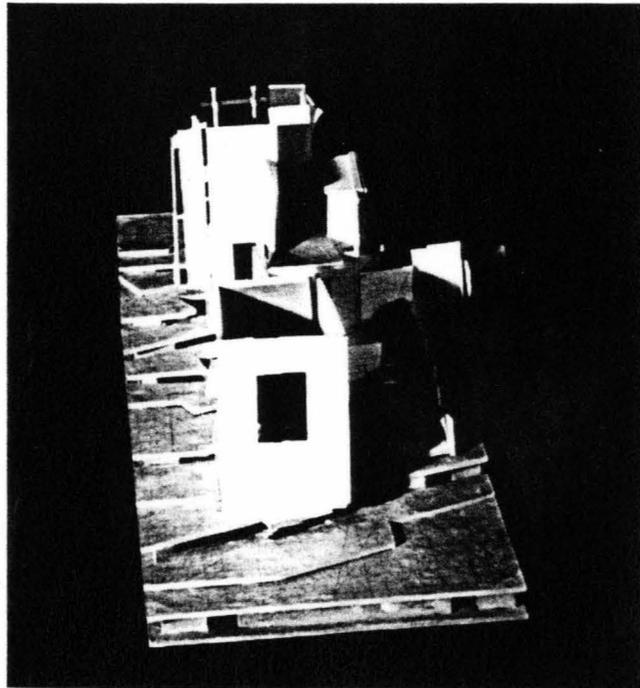
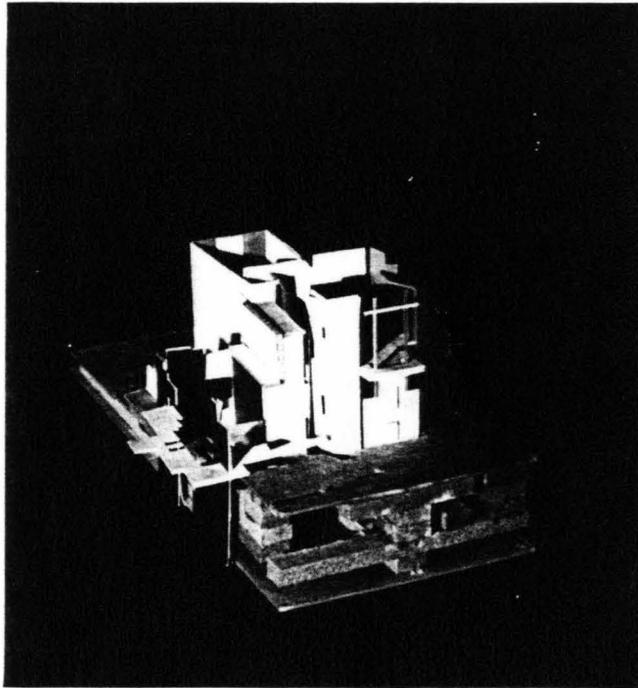
Place

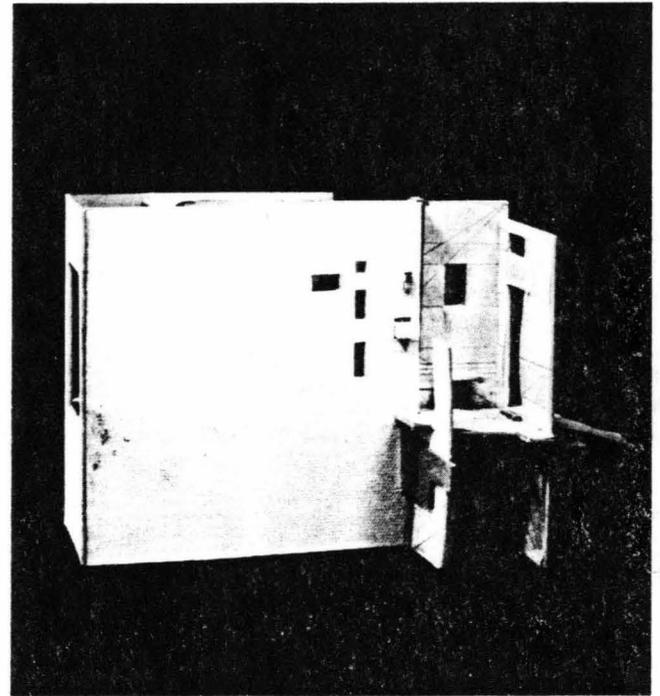
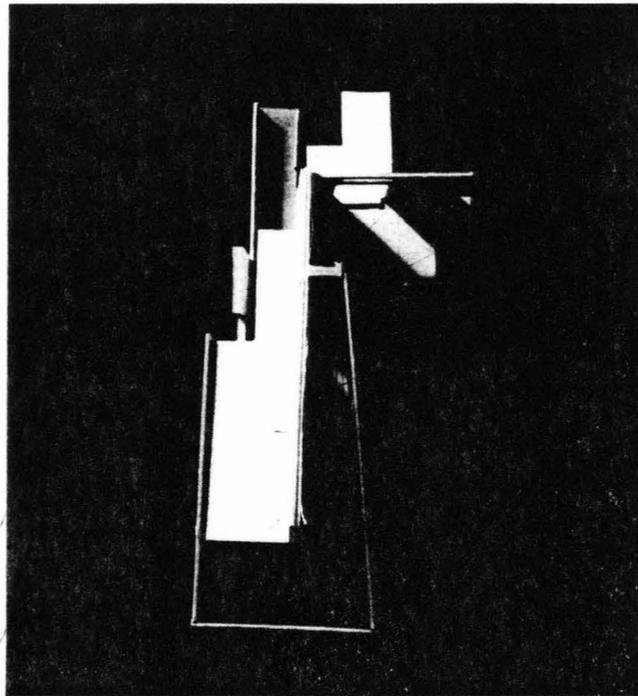
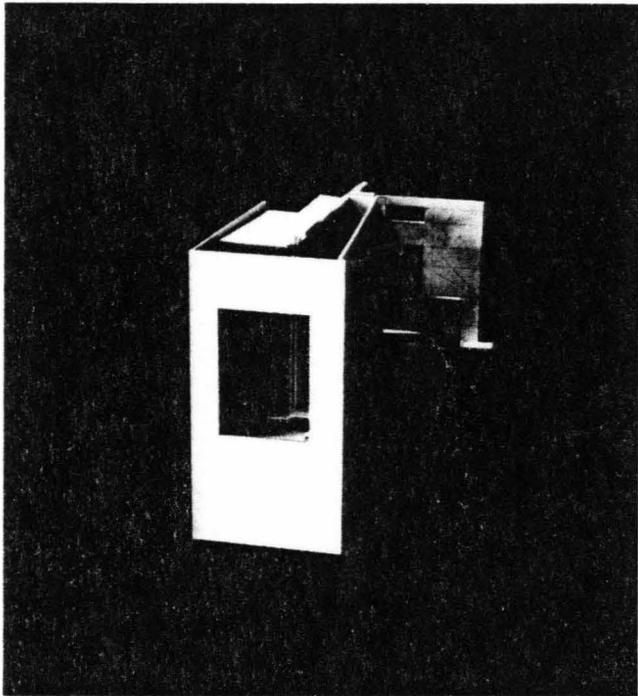
The school is situated upon a gently wooded hill overlooking a stream fed pond on the south side of the Virginia Tech campus. The school descends the hill from east to west perpendicular and apart from the main axis of the campus. A foot bridge crosses the stream as it meets the pond. From this point the front face and north elevation of the school are visible through the trees.

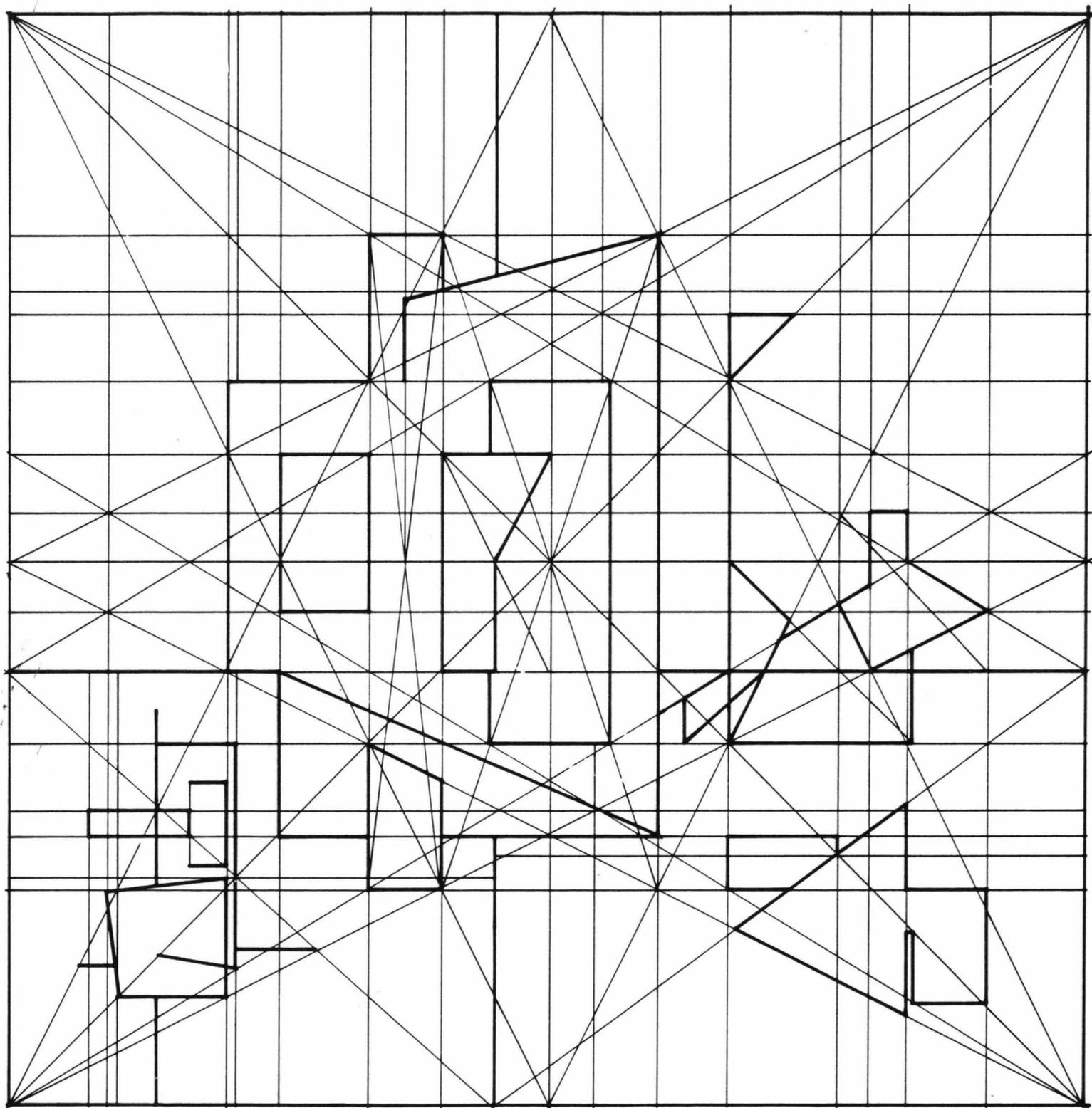


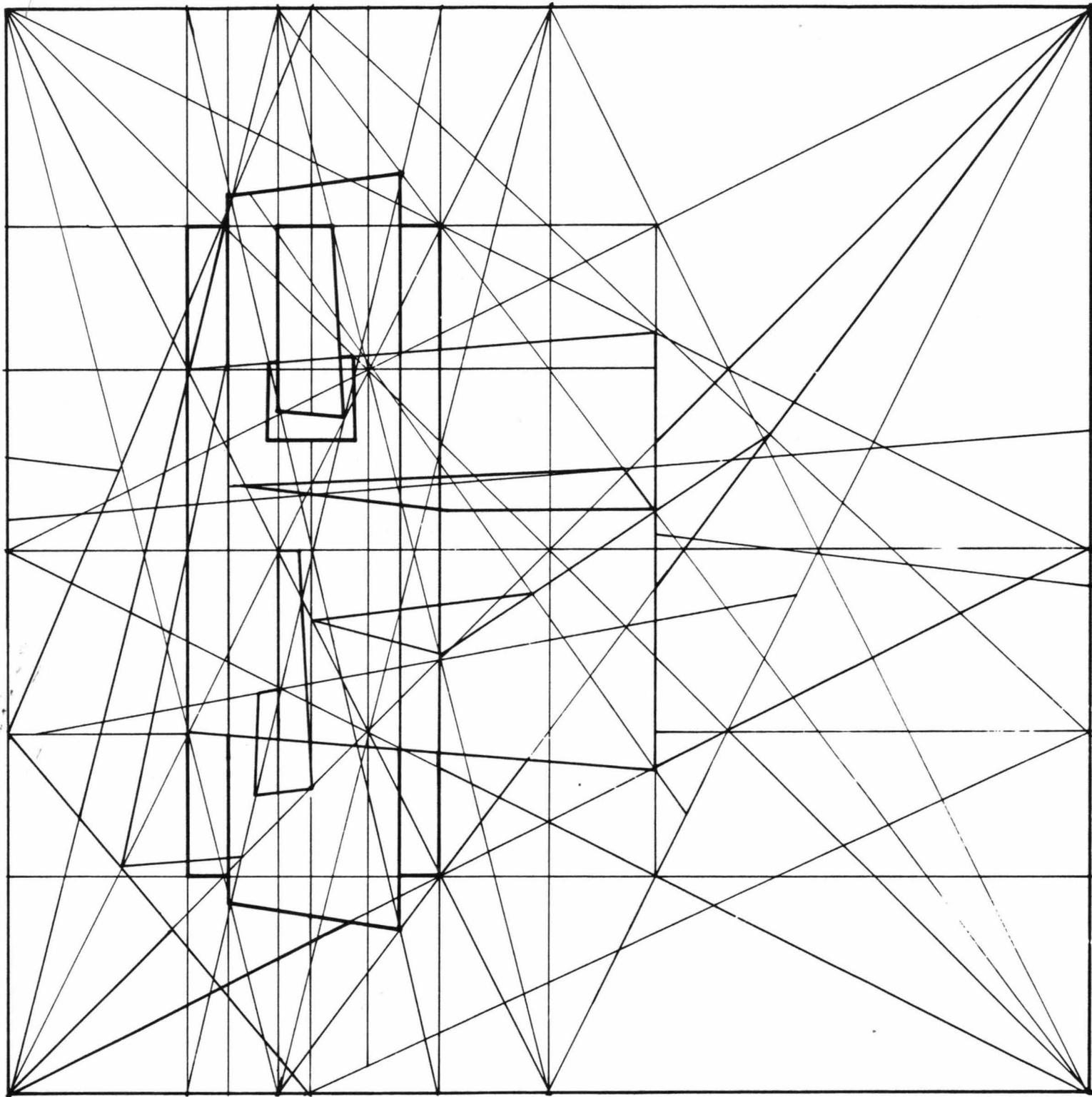
I. Argument of Whole & Part

"An architecture of complexity and accommodation does not forsake the whole. In fact, I have referred to a special obligation toward the whole because the whole is difficult to achieve. And I have emphasized the goal of unity rather than of simplification in an art "whose...truth is in its totality." It is the difficult unity through inclusion rather than the easy unity through exclusion."⁷



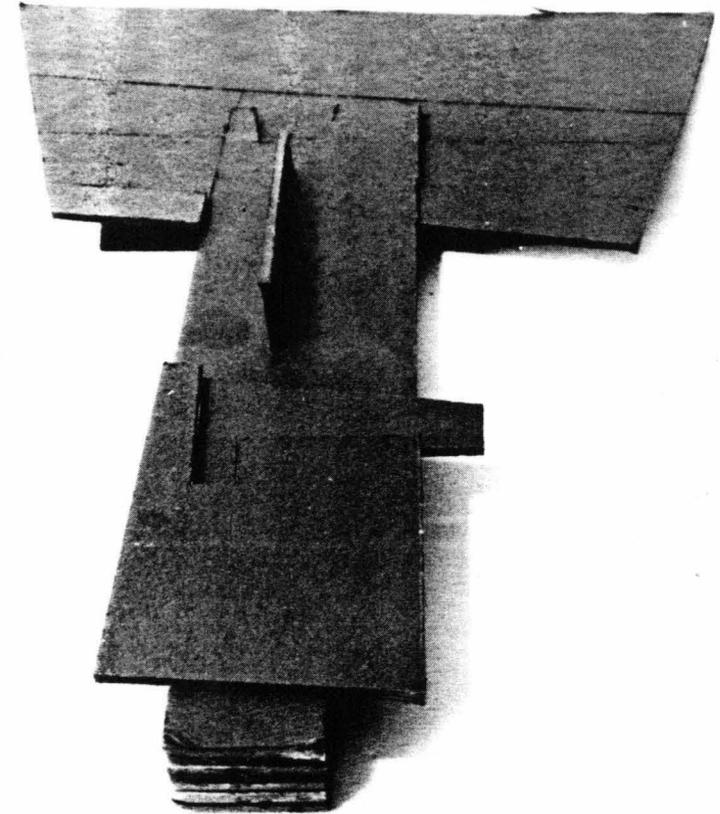


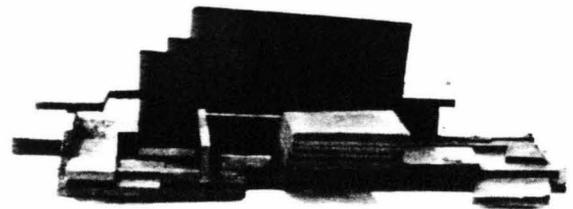
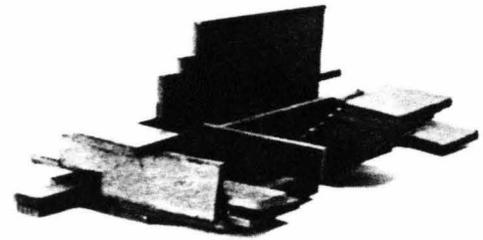
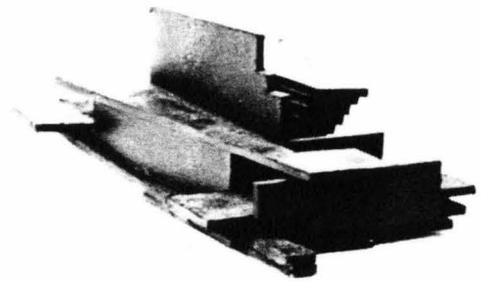


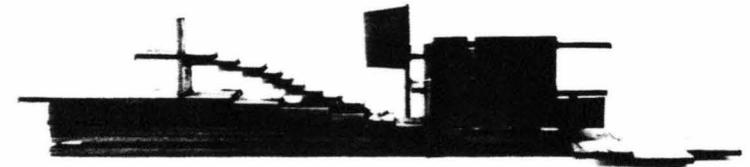
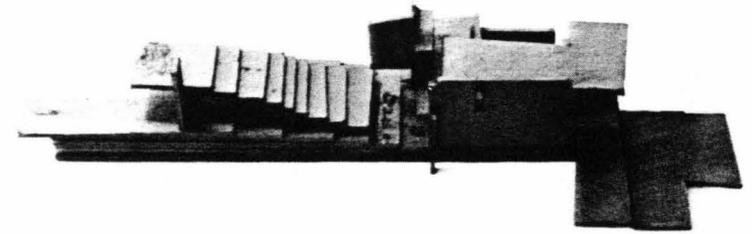
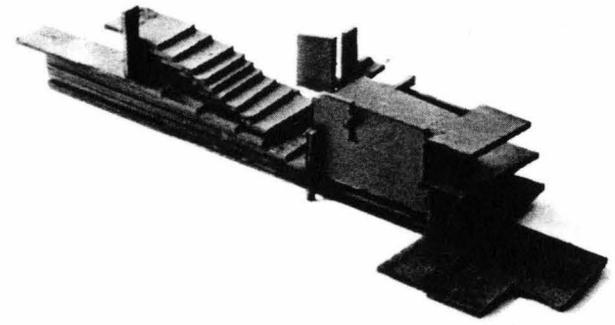


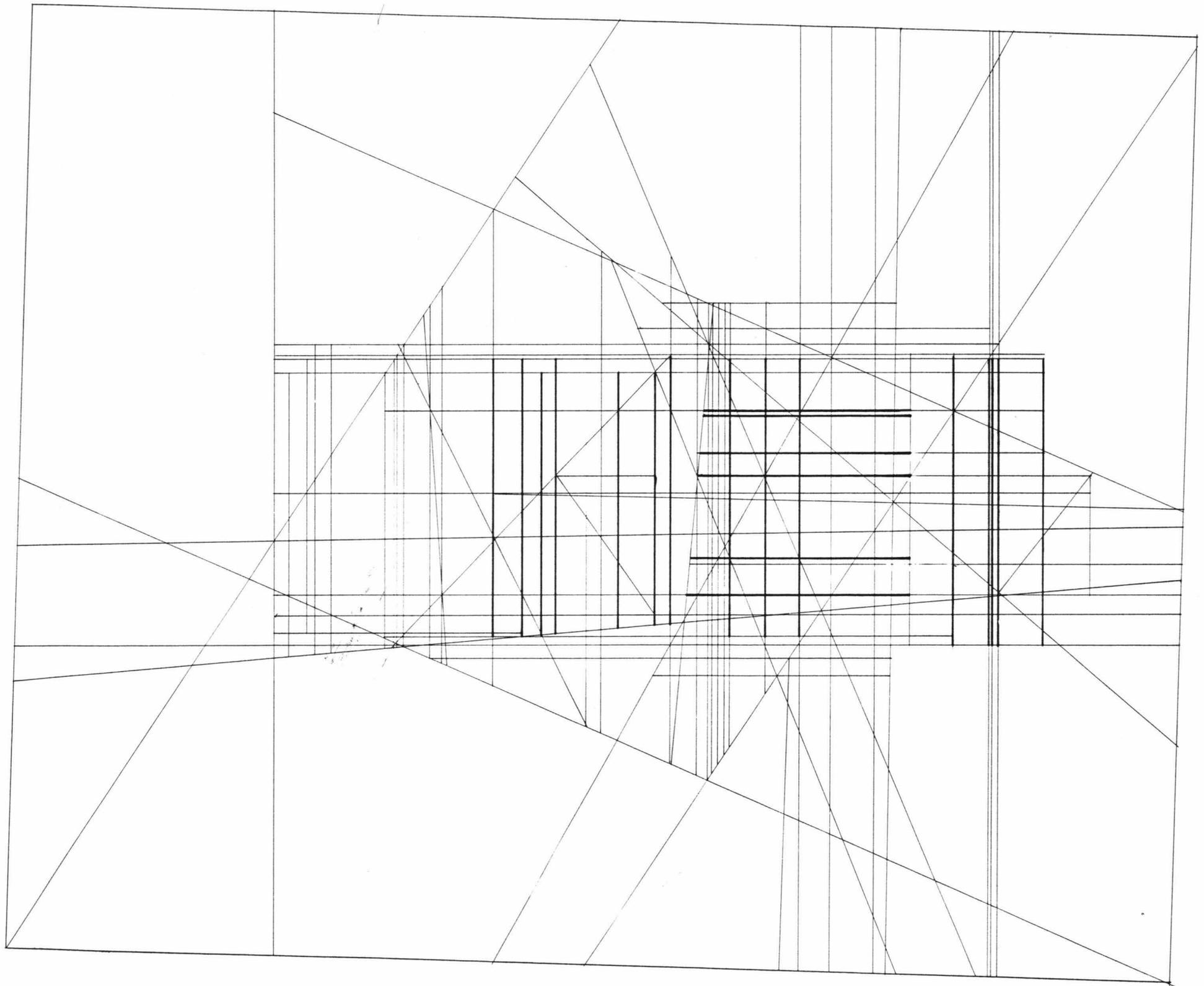
II. Argument of Composition & Form

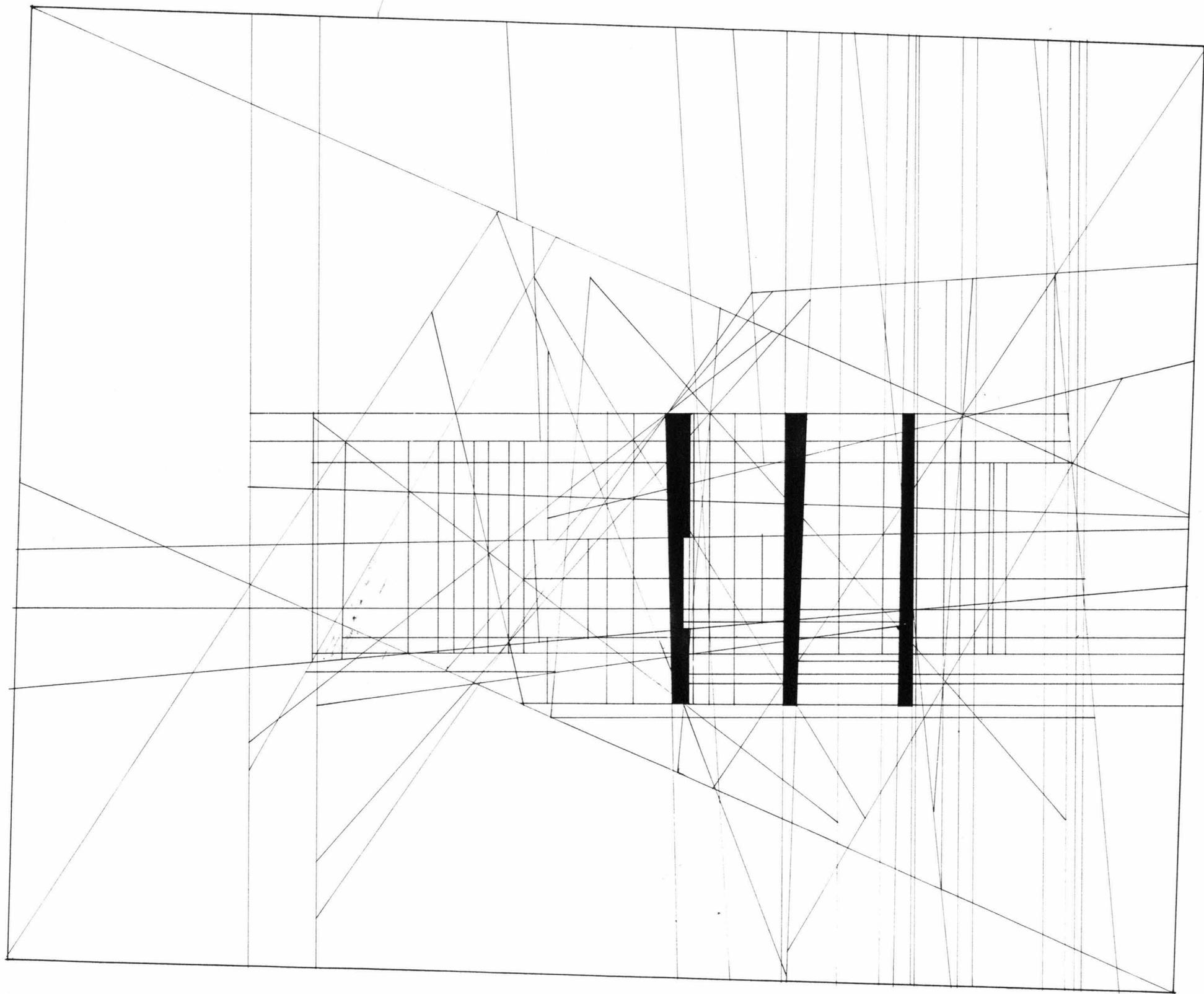
"The sculptor, as well as his brother, the epic poet, is committed to the pure contemplation of images."⁸

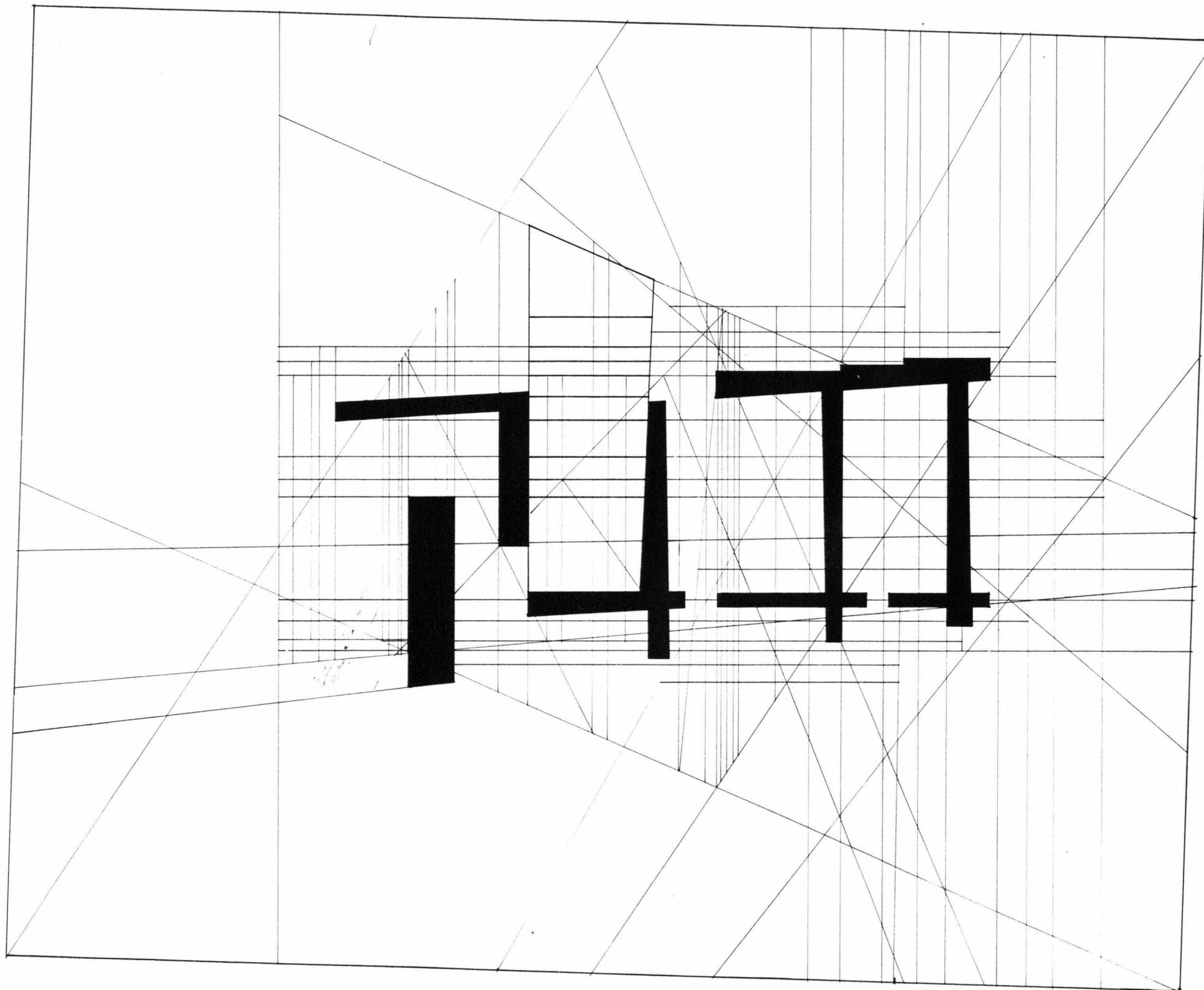








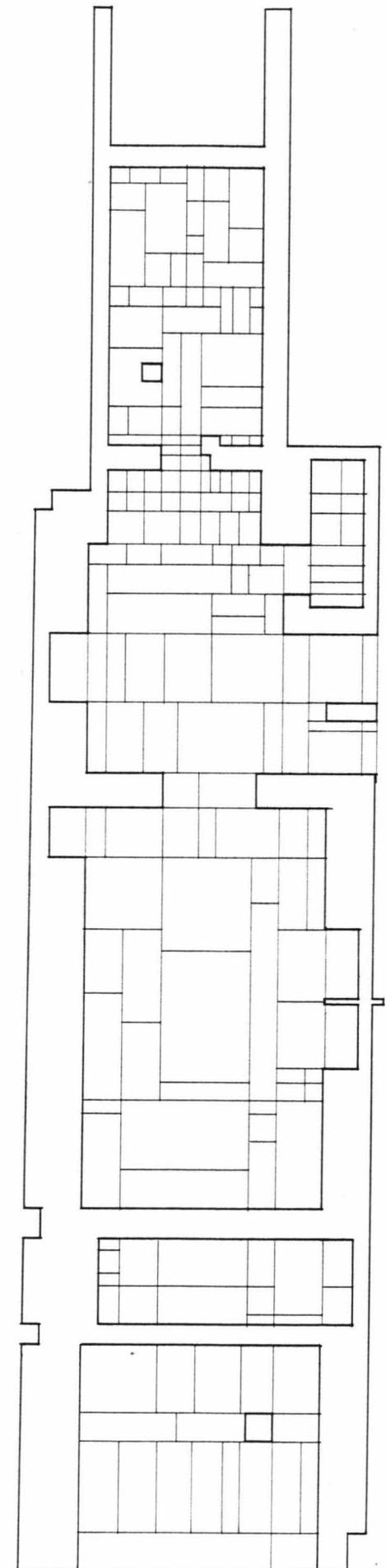


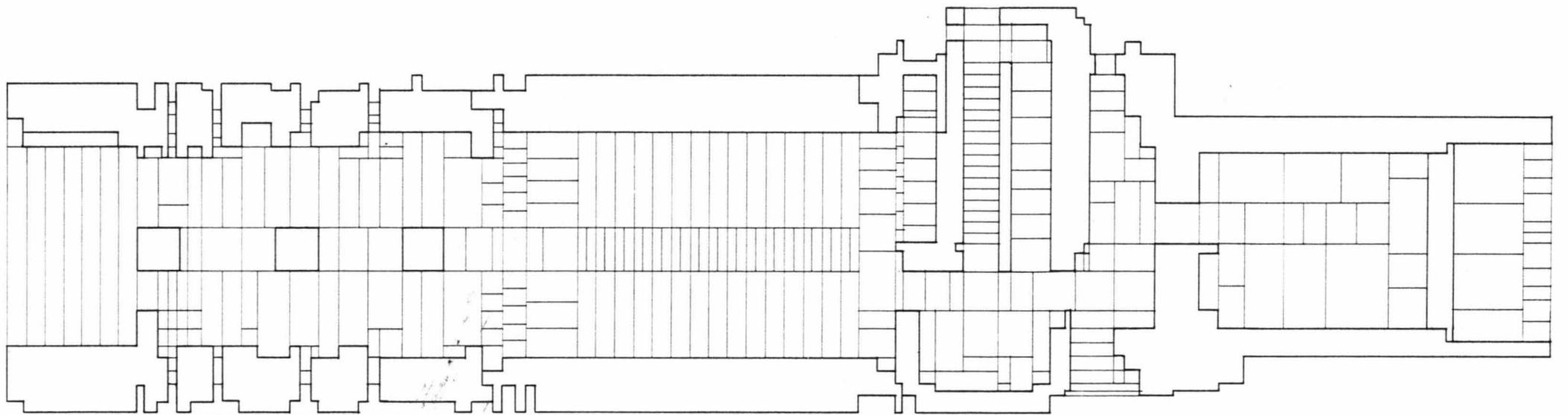


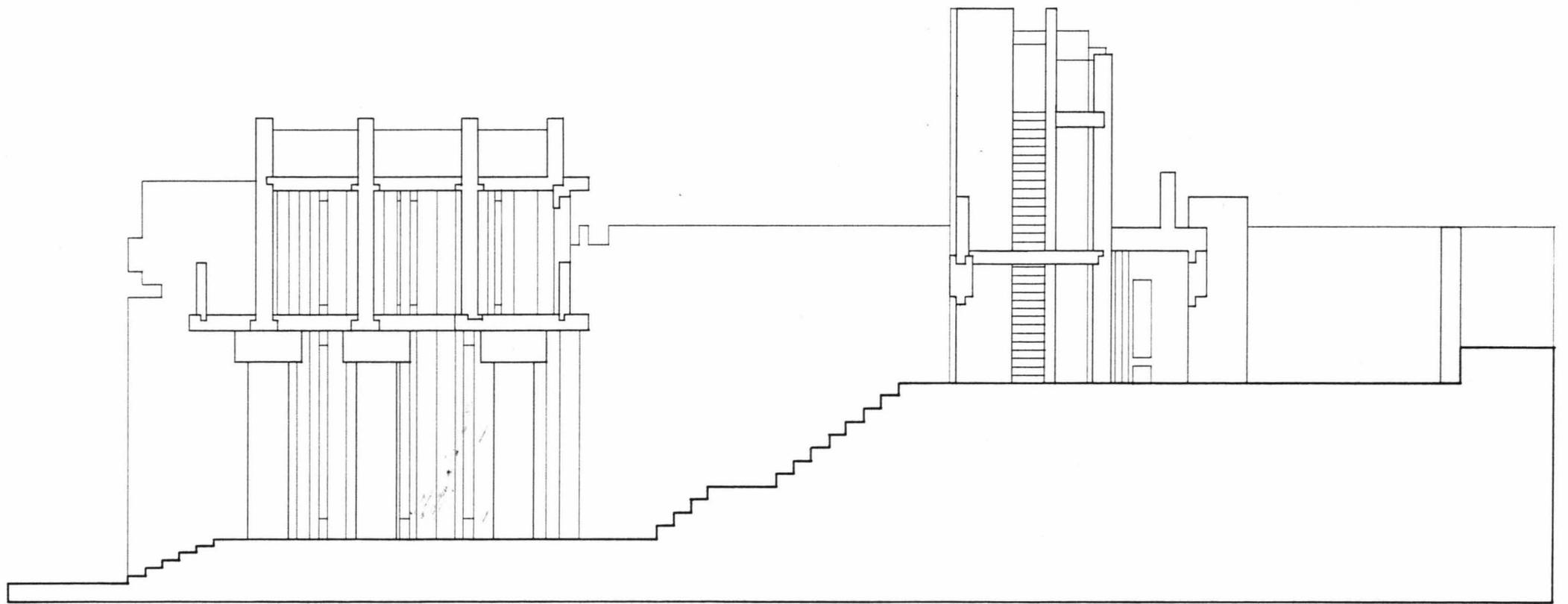
III. Argument of Object & Place

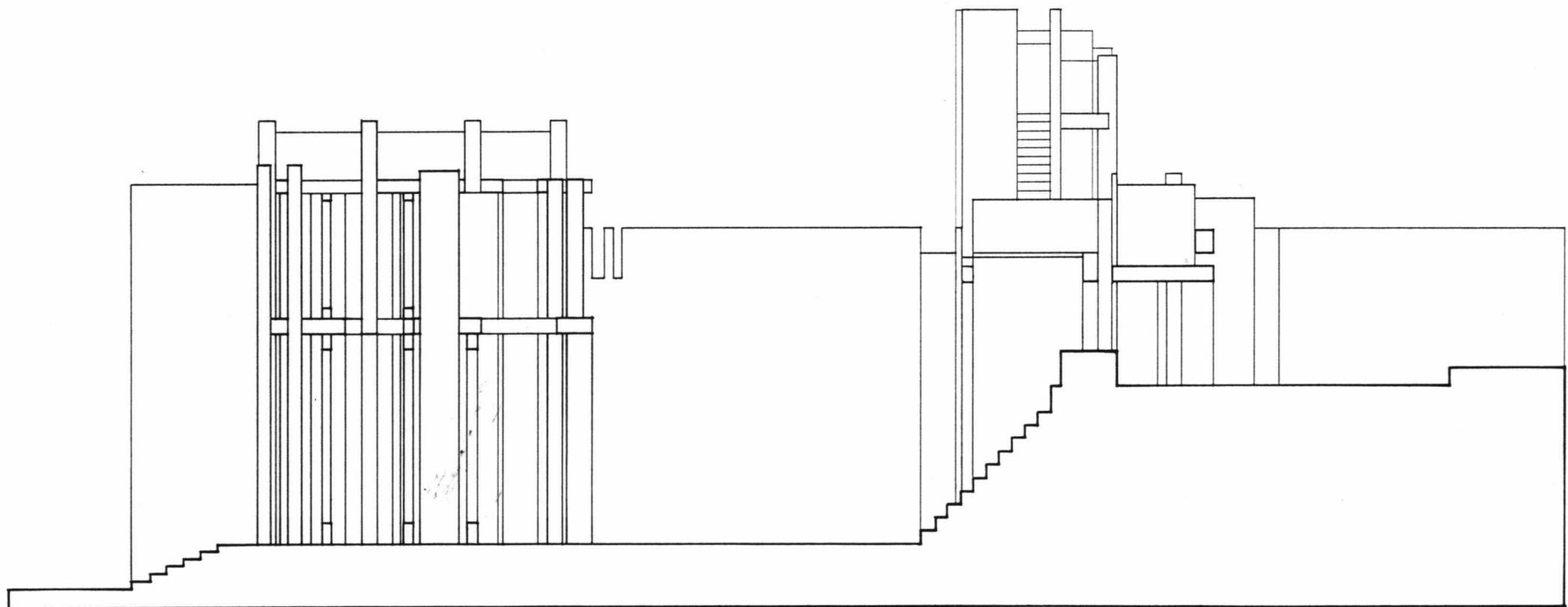
"...But meanwhile Achilleus went off into his shelter, and lifted the lid from a lovely elaborately wrought chest, which Thetis the silver-footed had put in his ship to carry, and filled it fairly with tunics and mantles to hold the wind from a man, and with fleecy blankets. Inside this lay a wrought goblet, nor did any other man drink the shining wine from it nor did Achilleus pour from it to any other god, but only Zeus father. He took this now out of the chest, and cleaned it with sulphur first, and afterwards washed it out in bright-running water, and washed his own hands, and poured shining wine into the goblet and stood in his middle forecourt and prayed, and poured the wine, looking into the sky, not unseen by Zeus who delights in the thunder: 'High Zeus, lord of Dodona, Pelasgian, living afar off, brooding over wintry Dodona, your prophets about you living, the Selloi who sleep on the ground with feet unwashed. Hear me. As one time before when I prayed to you, you listened and did me honour, and smote strongly the host of the Achaians, so one more time bring to pass the wish that I pray for. For see, I myself am staying where the ships are assembled, but I send out my companion and many Myrmidons with him to fight. Let glory, Zeus of the wide brows, go forth with him. Make brave the heart inside his breast, so that even Hektor will find out whether our henchman knows how to fight his battles by himself, of whether his hands rage invincible only those times when I myself go into the grind of the war god. But when he has beaten back from the ships their clamorous onset, then let him come back to me and the running ships, unwounded, with all his armour and with the companions who fight close beside him.'

So he spoke in prayer, and Zeus of the counsels heard him. The father granted him one prayer, and denied him the other. That Patroklos should beat back the fighting assault on the vessels he allowed, but refused to let him come back safe out of the fighting. When Achilleus had poured the wine and prayed to Zeus father he went back into the shelter, stowed the cup in the chest, and came out to stand in front of the door, with the desire in his heart still to watch the grim encounter of Achaians and Trojans."⁹



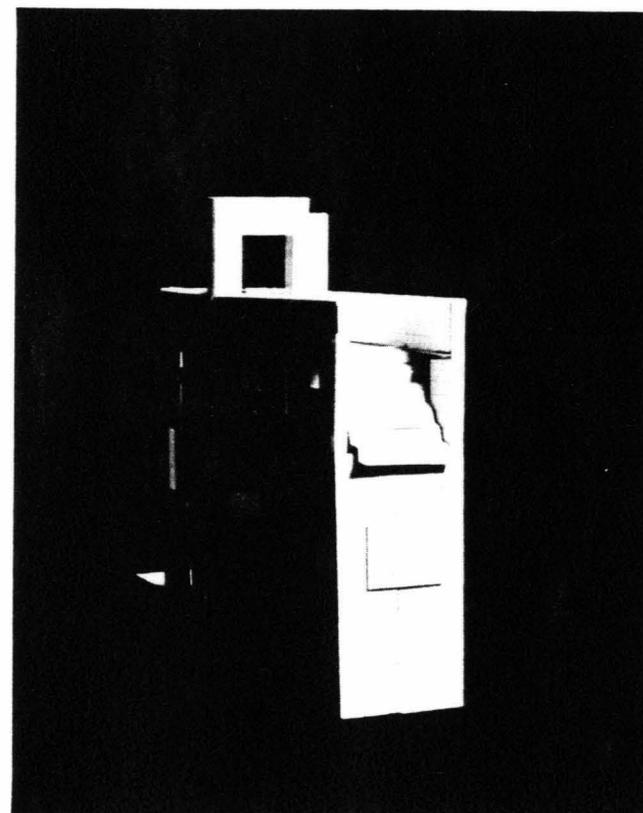
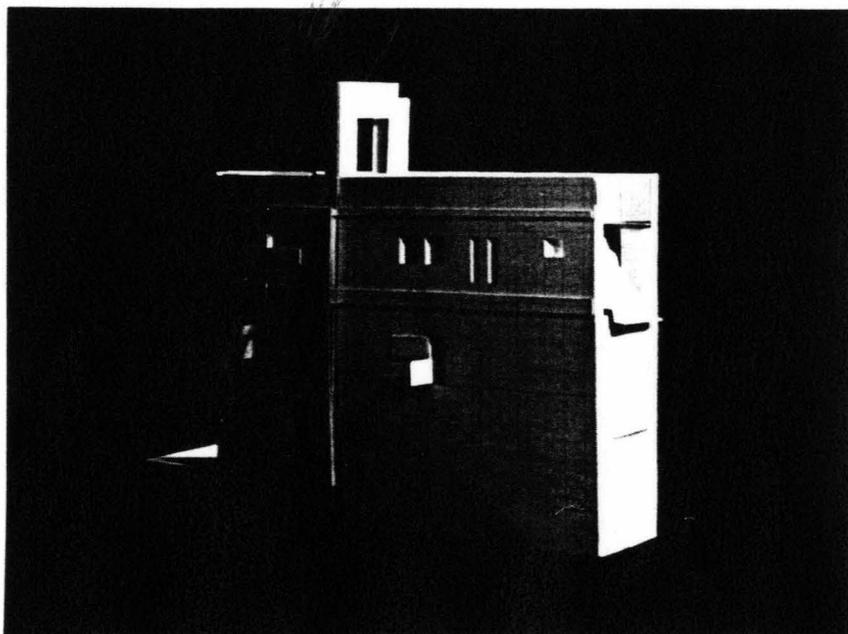
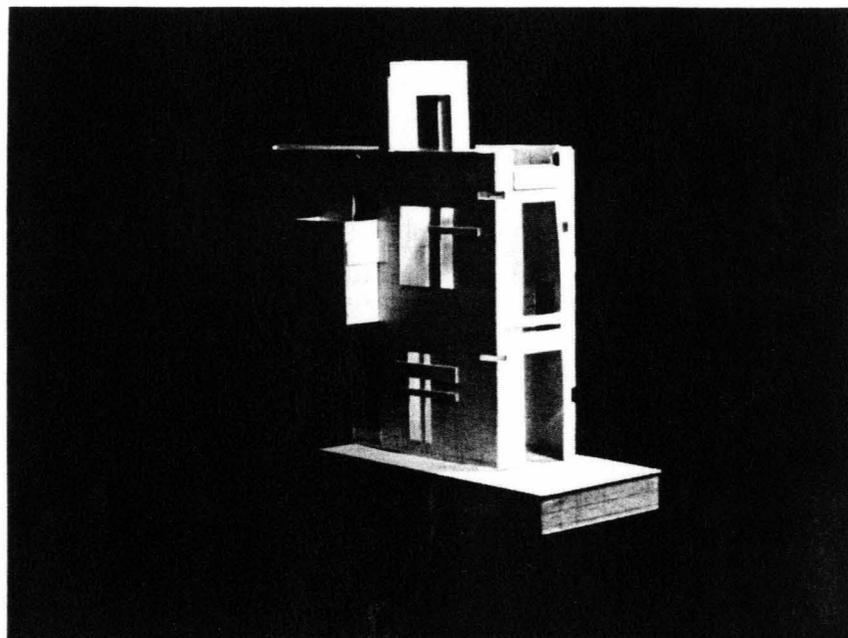


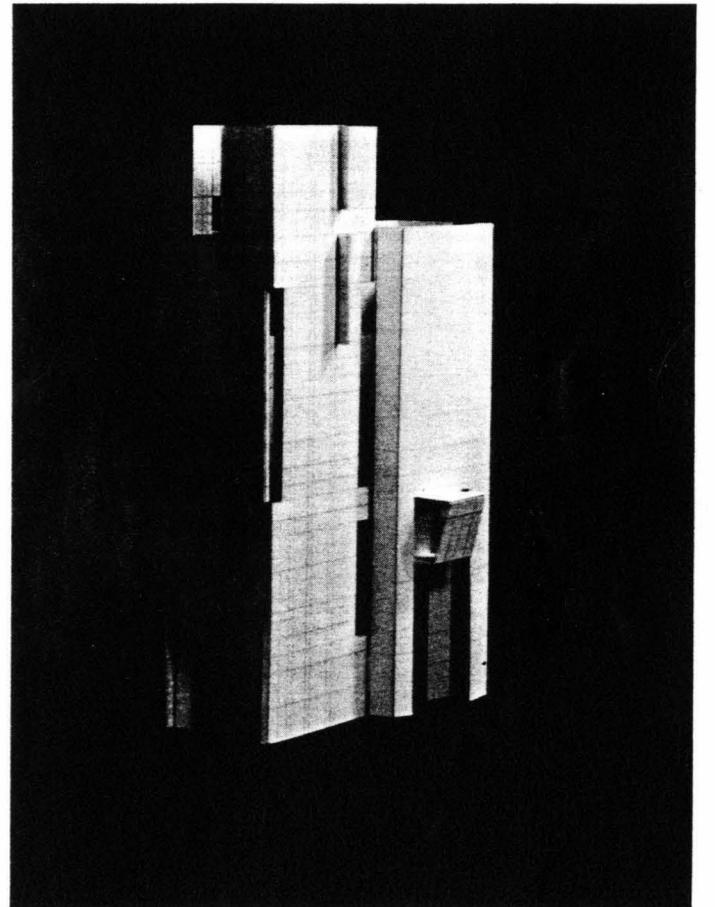
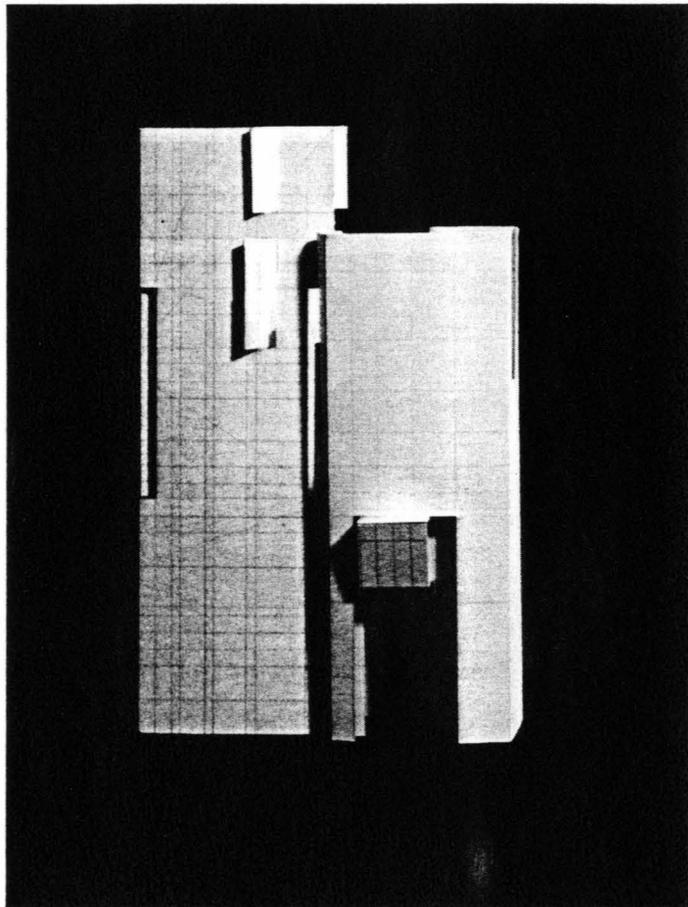
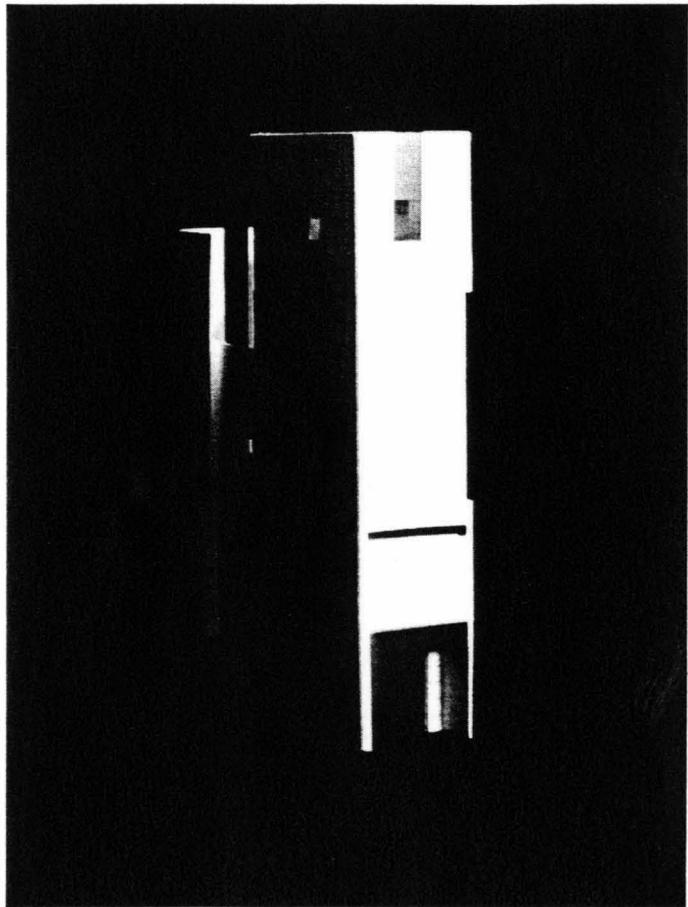


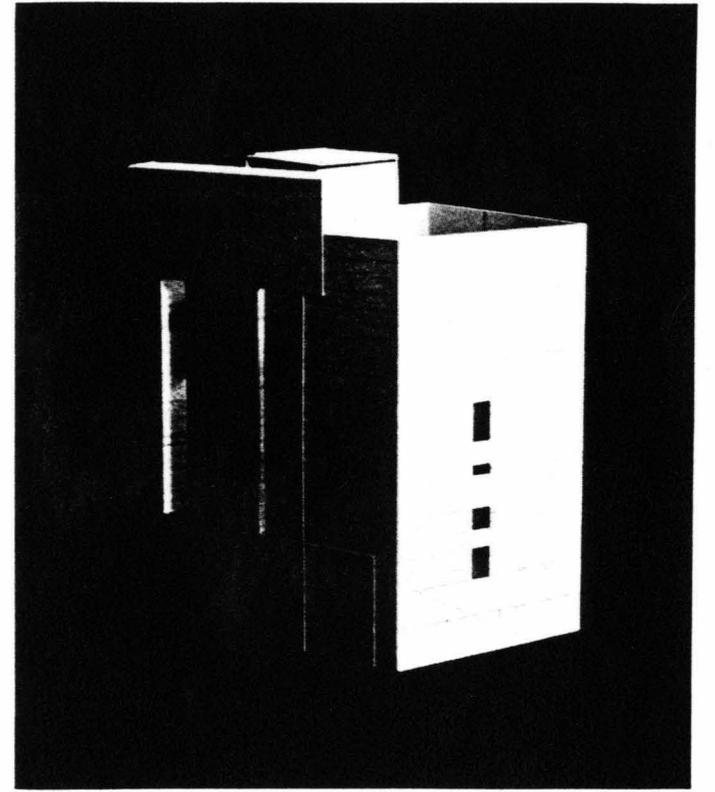
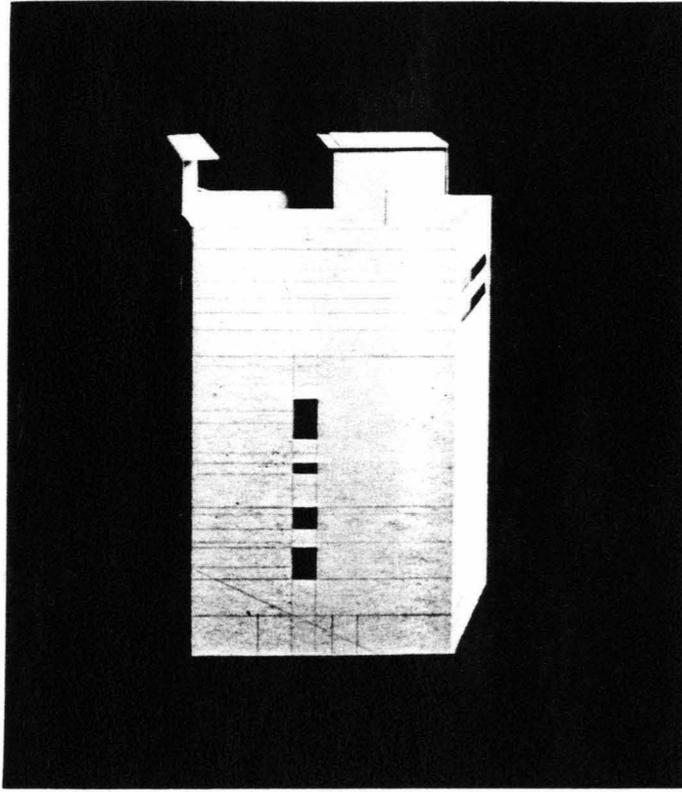
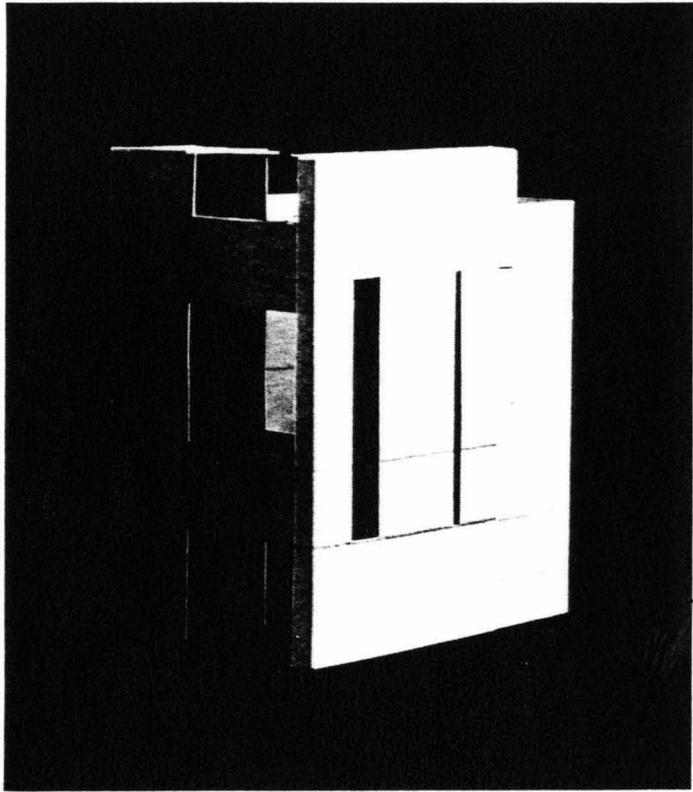


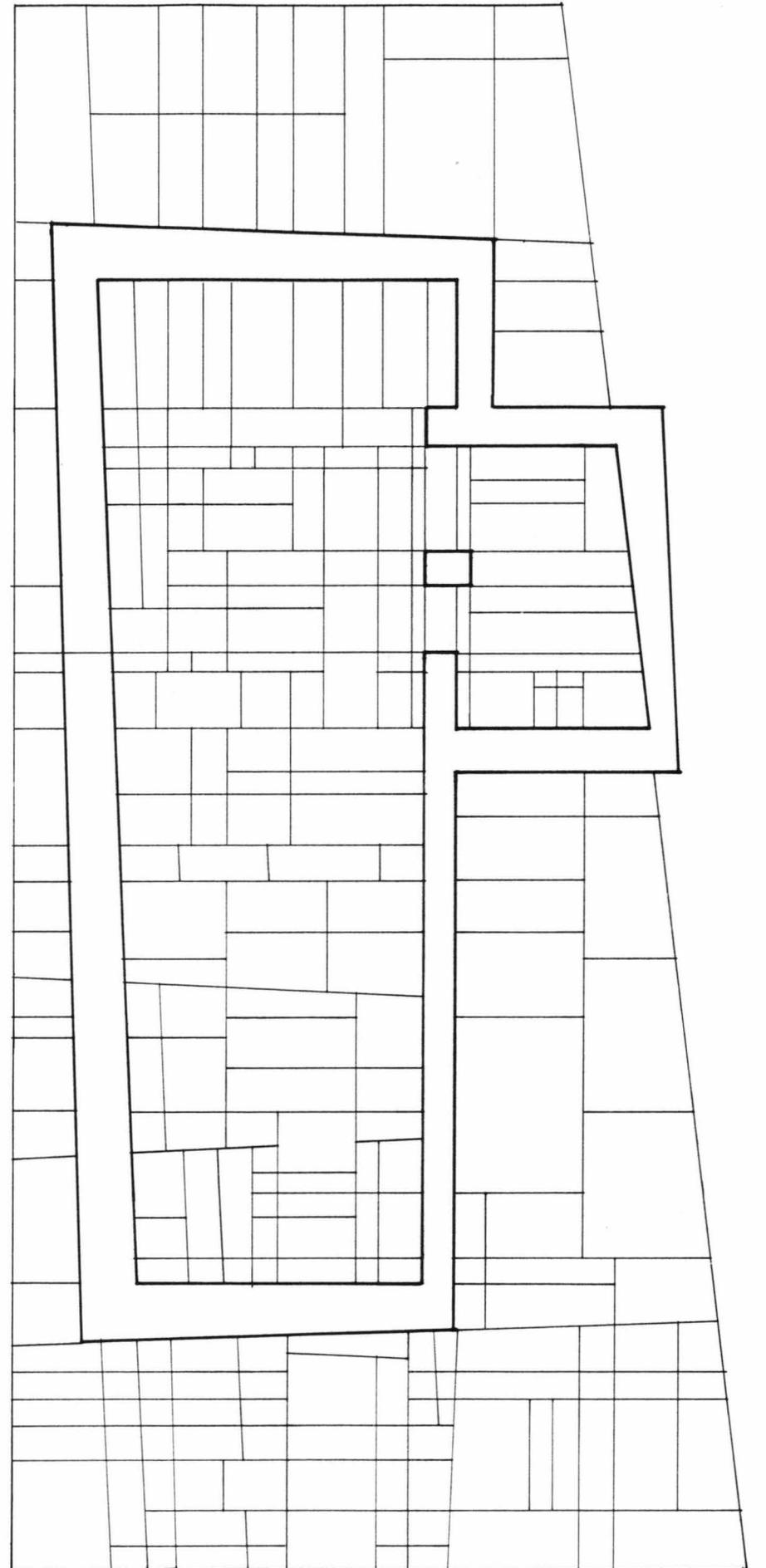
IV. Argument of Image & Plan

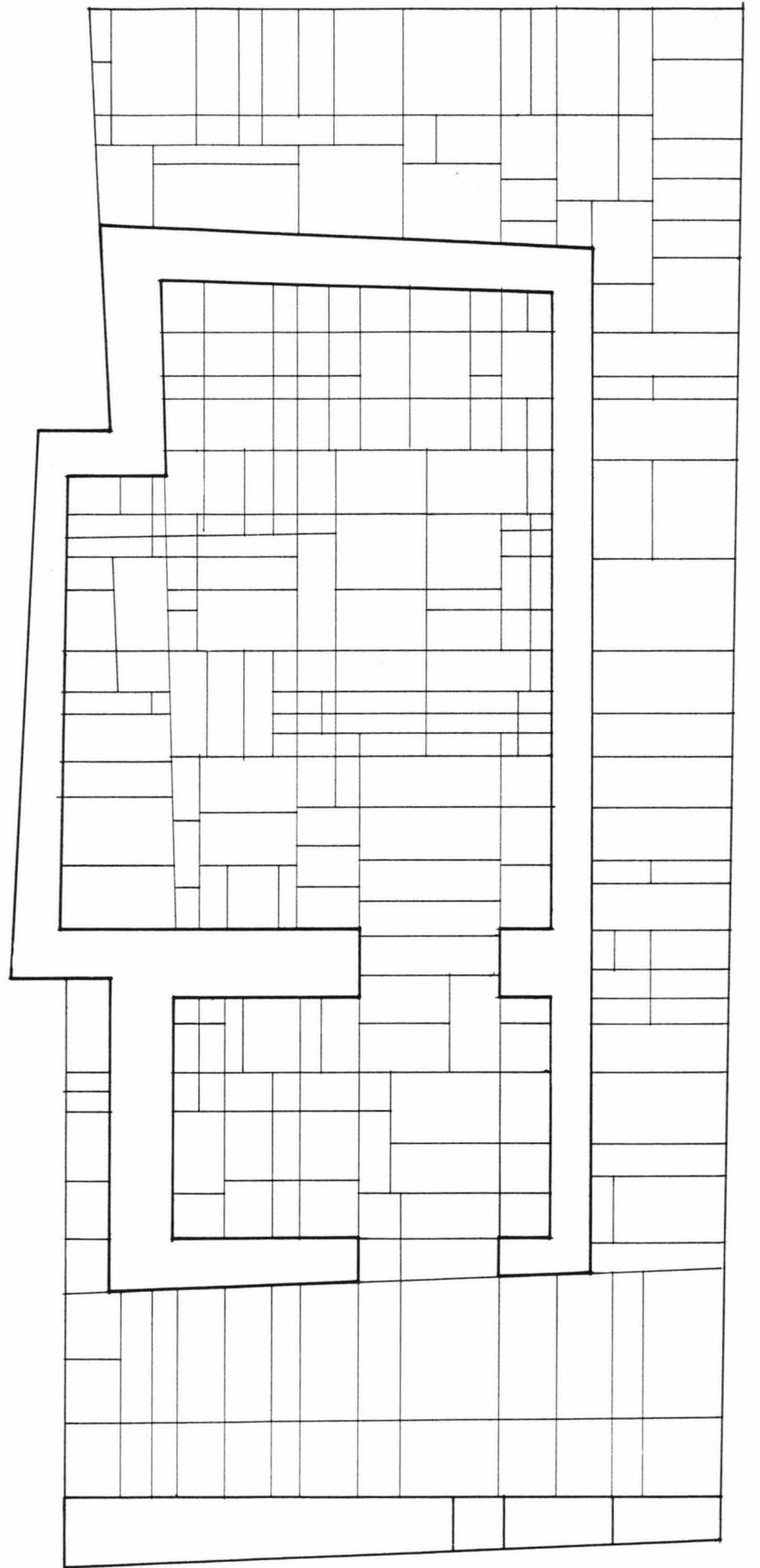
"All creation presupposes at its origin a sort of appetite that is brought on by the foretaste of discovery. This foretaste of the creative act accompanies the intuitive grasp of an unknown entity already possessed but not yet intelligible, an entity that will not take shape except by the action of a constantly vigilant technique."¹⁰

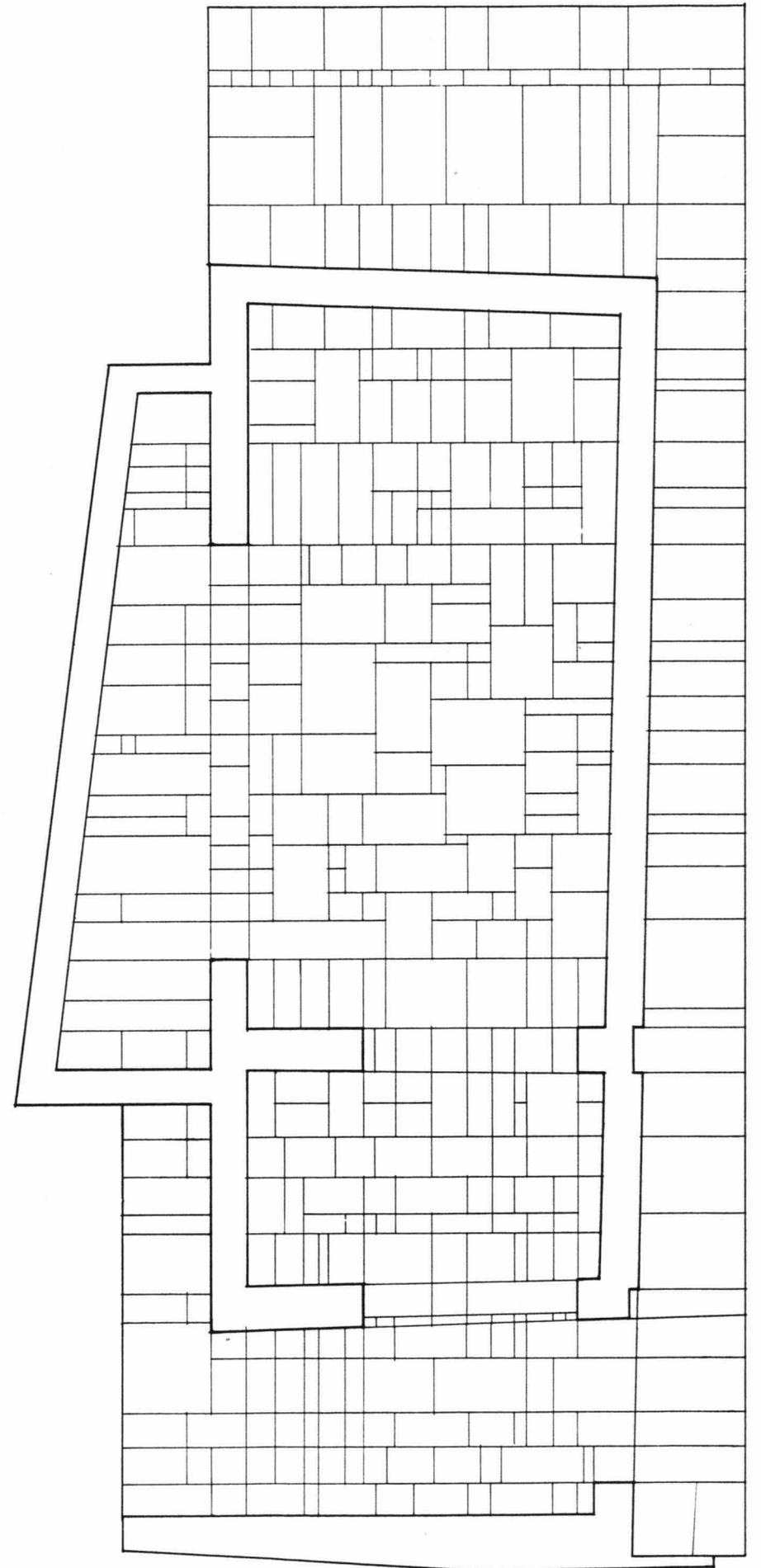






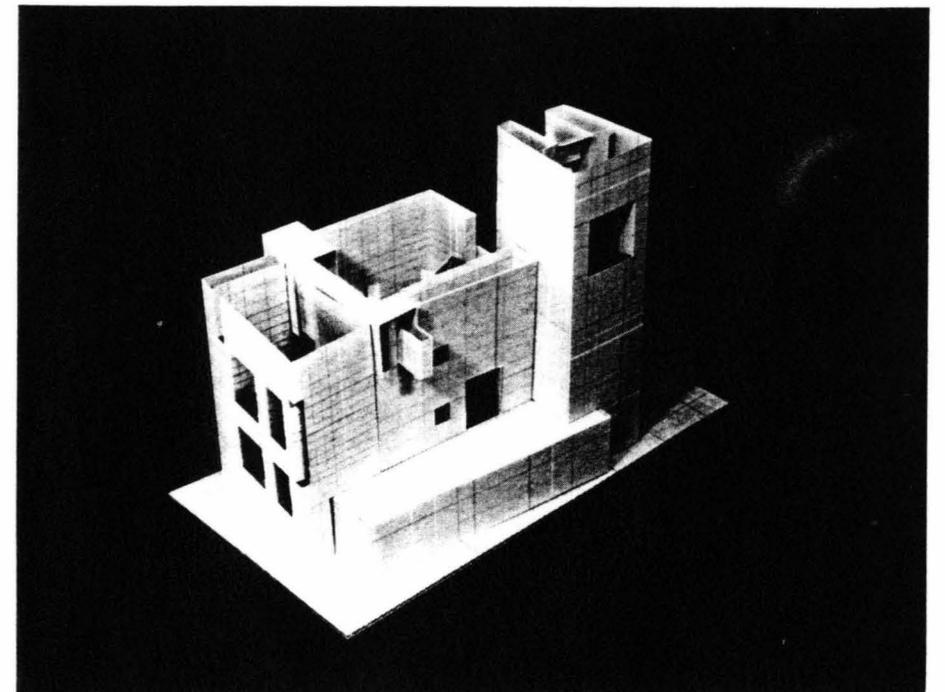
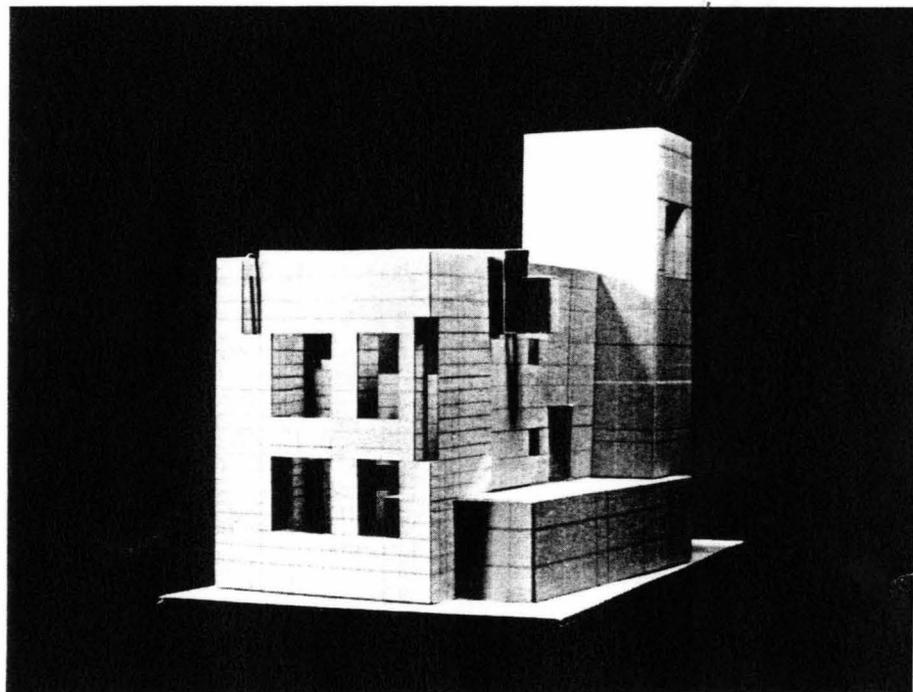
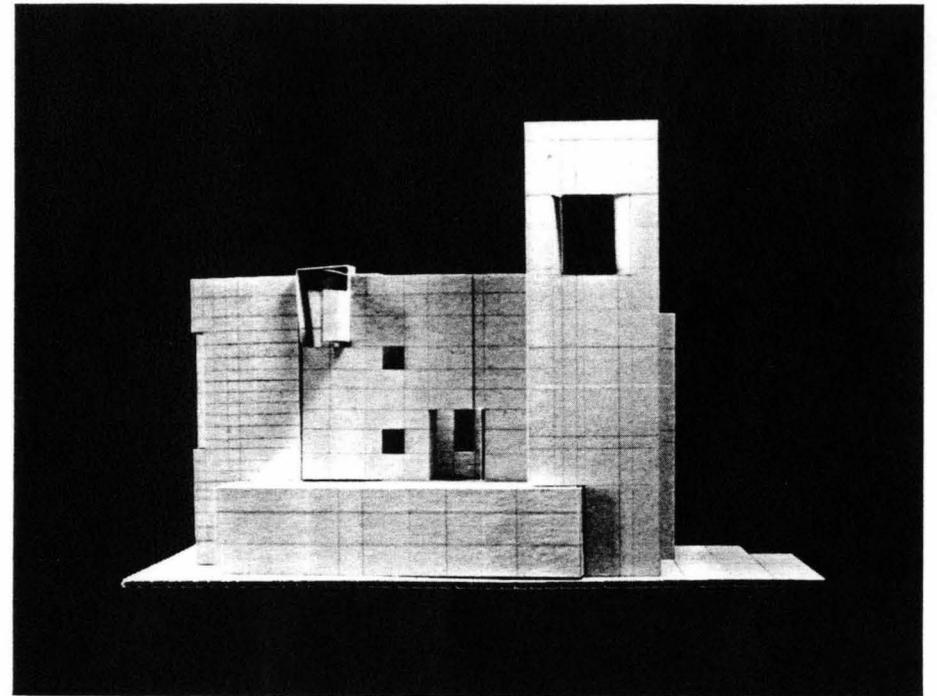




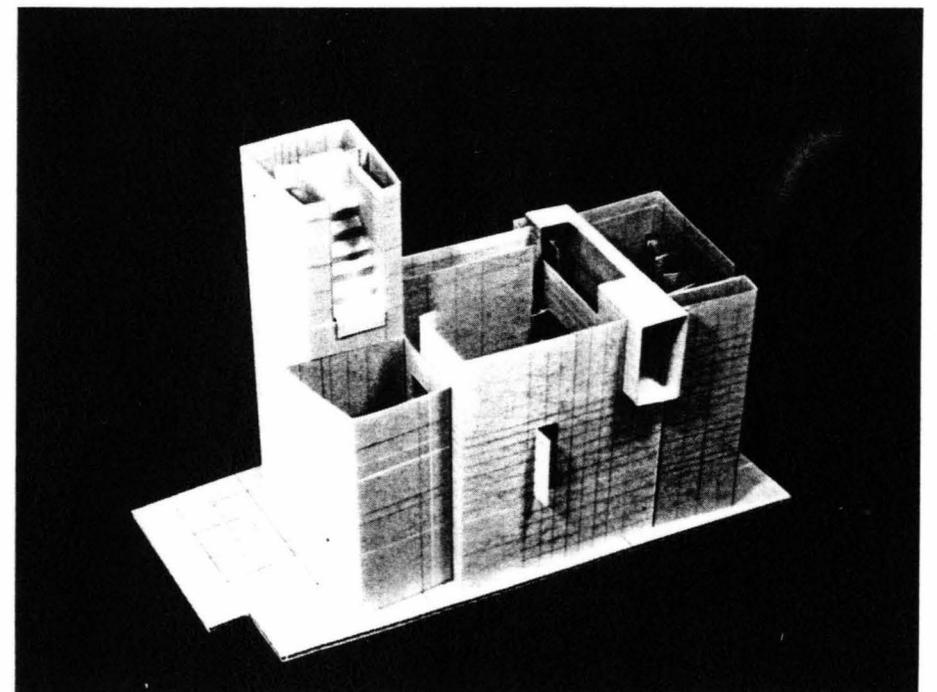
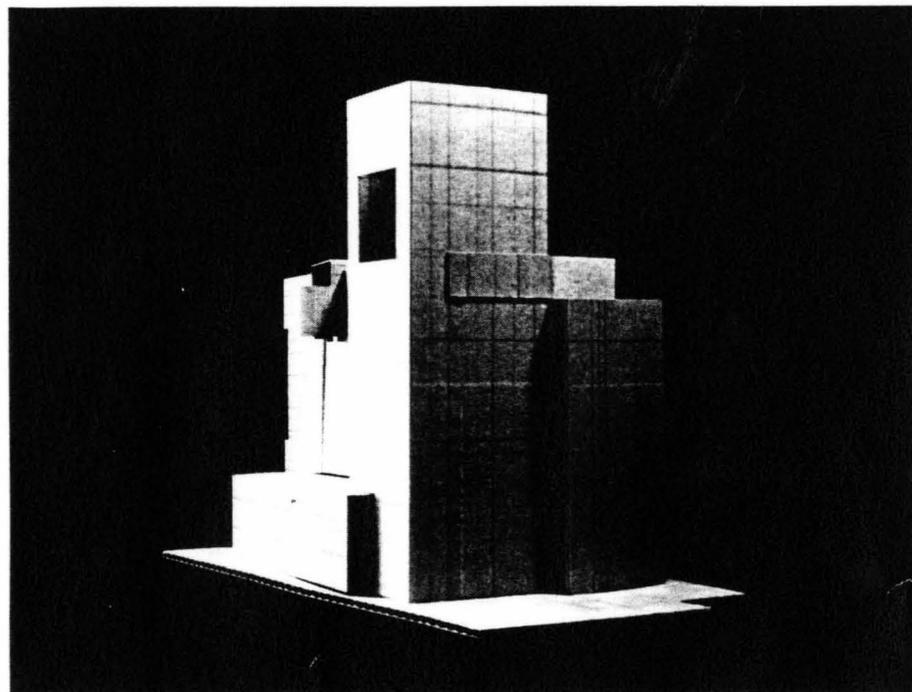
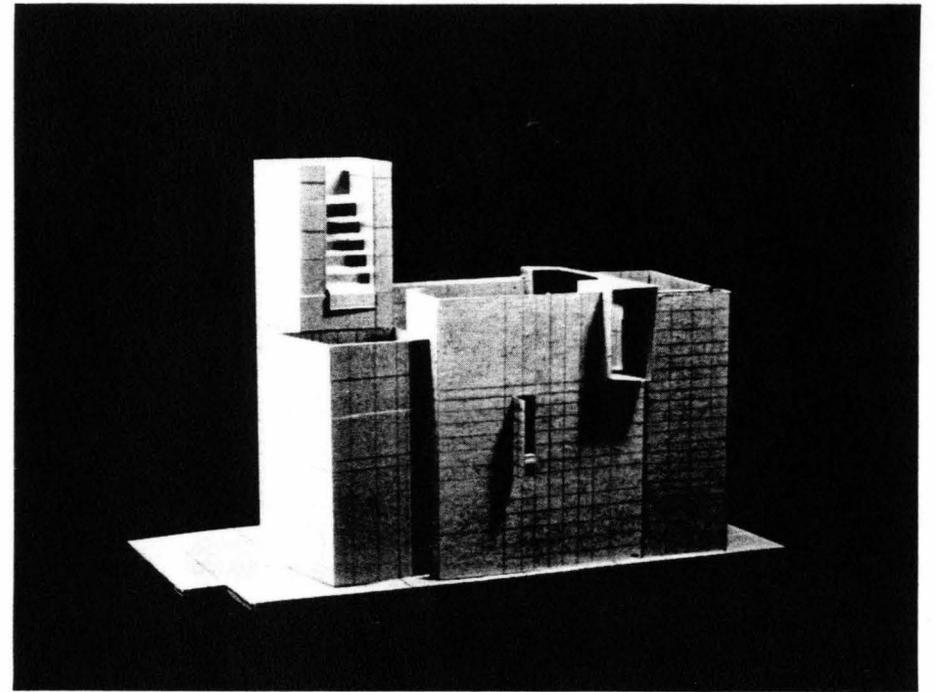


V. Argument of Number & Piece

"There the father of Gods and of mortals halted his horses,
and slipped them from their harness, and drifted close mist about them,
and himself rejoicing in the pride of his strength sat down on the mountain
looking out over the city of Troy and the ships of the Achaians."¹¹



"The hero dies, not so much for his own glory, not even so much for his friends, as for the glory of song, which explains to a spell-bound audience the greatness and fragility of the life of man."¹²



Notes

- 1 Ruth Benedict, "Patterns of Culture," Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1934.
- 2 Gaston Bachelard, "The Psychoanalysis of Fire," Translated by Alan C.M. Ross, Beacon Press, Boston 1964 pg. 16.
- 3 G.S. Kirk & J.E. Raven, "The Presocratic Philosophers," from the Extant Fragment of Anaximander, Cambridge University Press, London 1957 pg. 117.
- 4 Aristotle, "Nichomachean Ethics," Translated by Martin Ostwald, The Library of Liberal Arts, The Bobbs - Merrill Co. Inc. New York 1962 pg. 3.
- 5 Ibid., pg 7.
- 6 Alan Colquhoun, "Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change," The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1981 pg 55.
- 7 Robert Venturi, "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1966 pg. 88.
- 8 Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," Translated by Francis Goffing, Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co. Inc., Garden City, New York 1956 pg. 39.
- 9 Homer, "The Iliad," Translated by Richmond Lattimore, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1951 pg. 336.
- 10 Igor Stravinsky, "Poetics of Music, In The Form of Six Lessons," Translated by Arthur Kwoedel and Ingolf Dahl, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts pg. 51.
- 11 Op. Cit: Homer pg. 183.
- 12 Jasper Griffin, "Homer on Life and Death," Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980 pg.102.

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