573 AD/9/74

How to recognise and read MAT-BUILDING

Mainstream architecture as it has developed towards the mat-building

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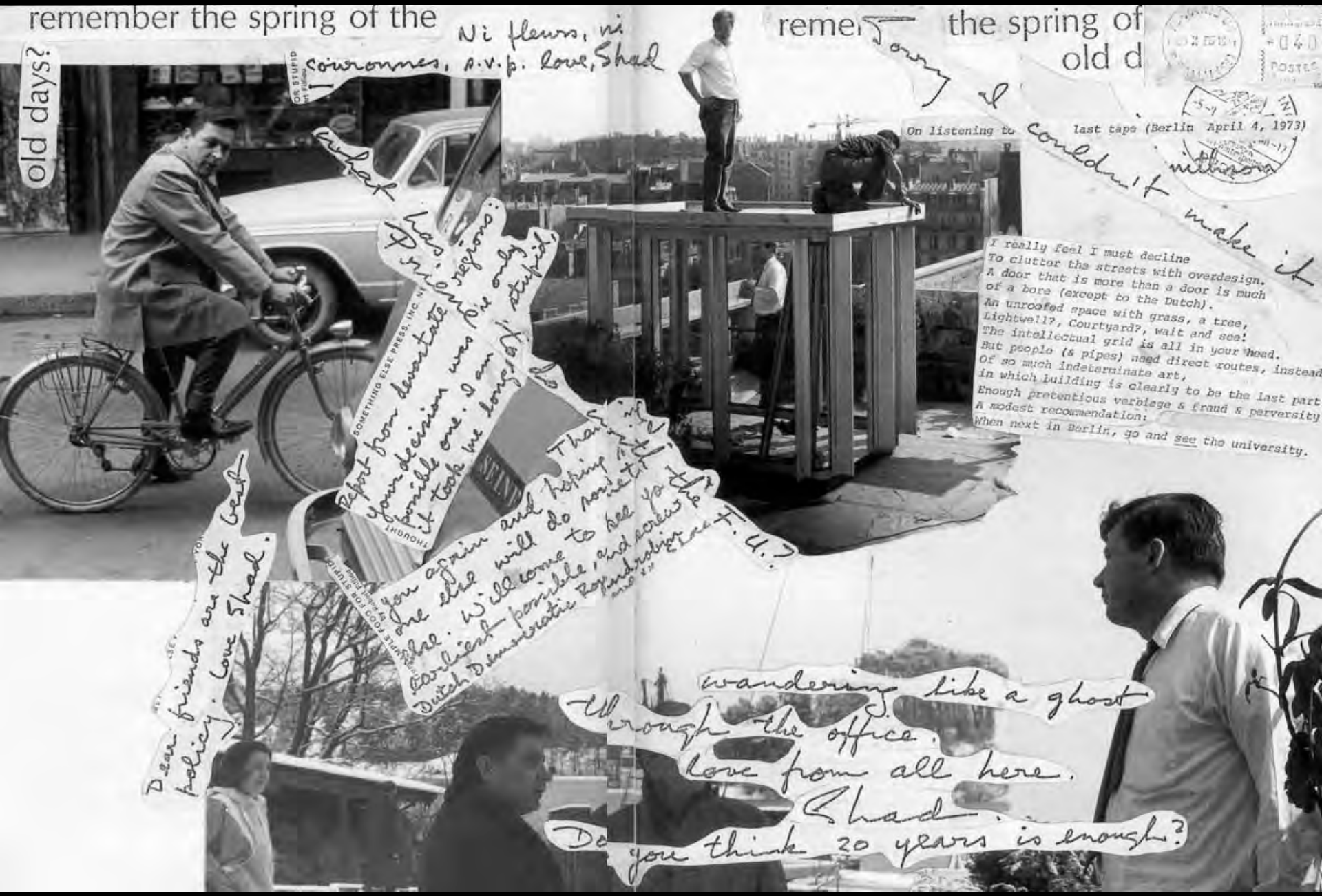
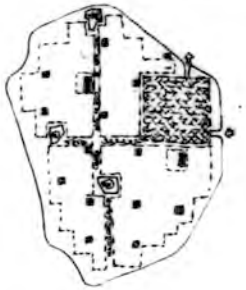
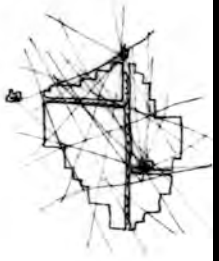

remember the spring of the
old days?
Ni fleurs, ni couronnes, s.v.p. love, Shad
remem the spring of
old d
Sorry I couldn't make it
On listening to last tape (Berlin April 4, 1973)
I really feel I must decline
To clutter the streets with overdesign.
A door that is more than a door is much
of a bore (except to the Dutch).
An unroofed space with grass, a tree,
Lightwell?, Courtyard?, wait and see!
The intellectual grid is all in your head.
But people (& pipes) need direct routes, instead
Of so much indeterminate art,
in which building is clearly to be the last part
Enough pretentious verbiage & fraud & perversity
A modest recommendation:
When next in Berlin, go and see the university.
what has Prime regions:
Report from devastate
your decision was the only
possible one. I am
it took me long to do
Dear friends are the best
policy. Love Shad.
wandering like a ghost
through the office.
love from all here.
Shad.
Do you think 20 years is enough?

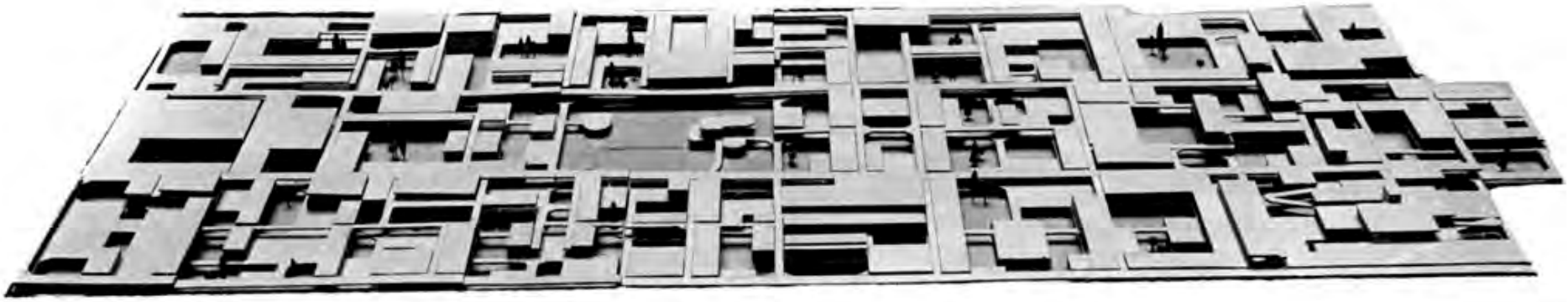
Diagrams of the ground floor of the demonstration building.

Peter Smithson presenting the model of the mat-building to the Crown Prince of Kuwait.





Site plan showing the minarets fixed to the galleries in the mat-building.



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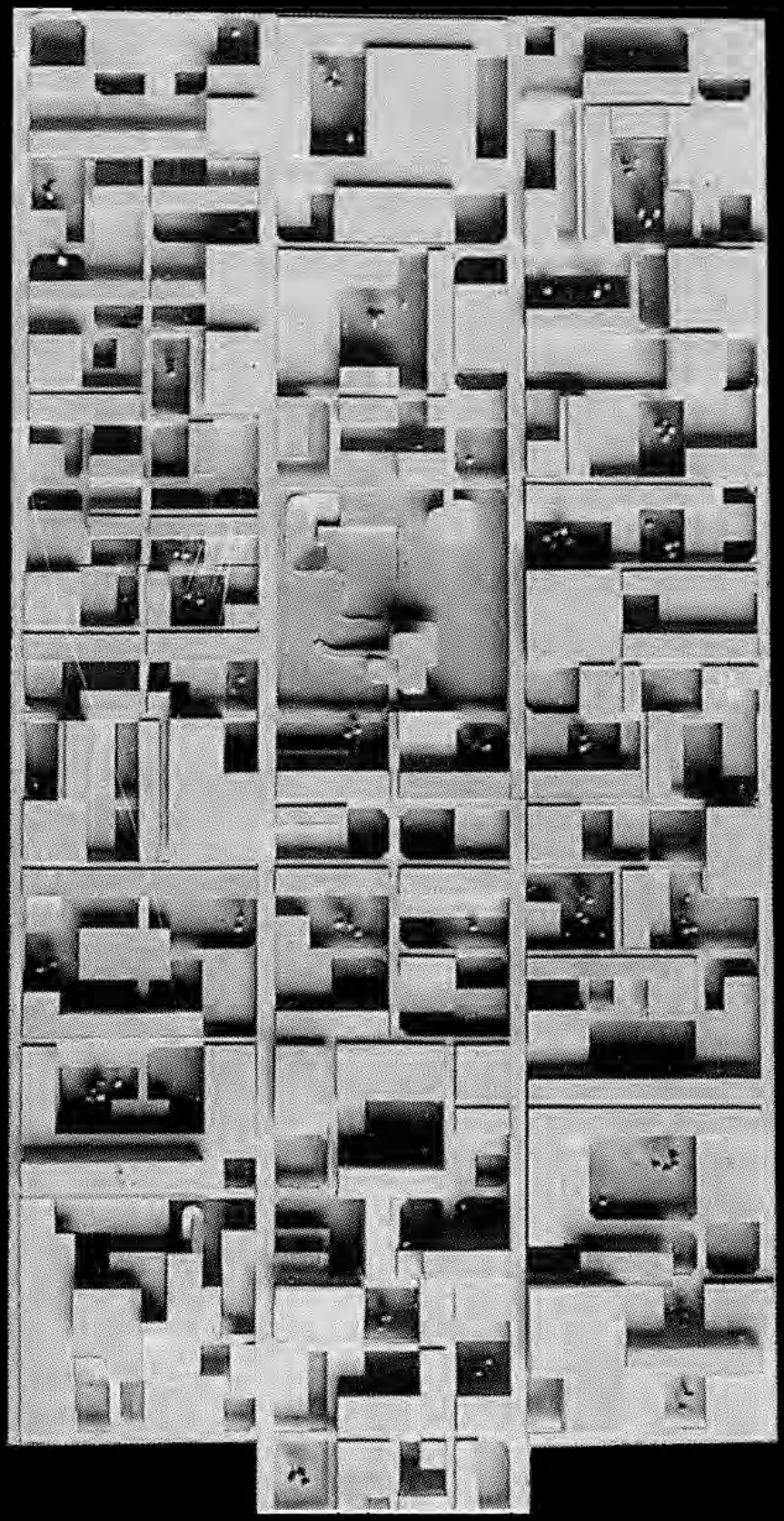

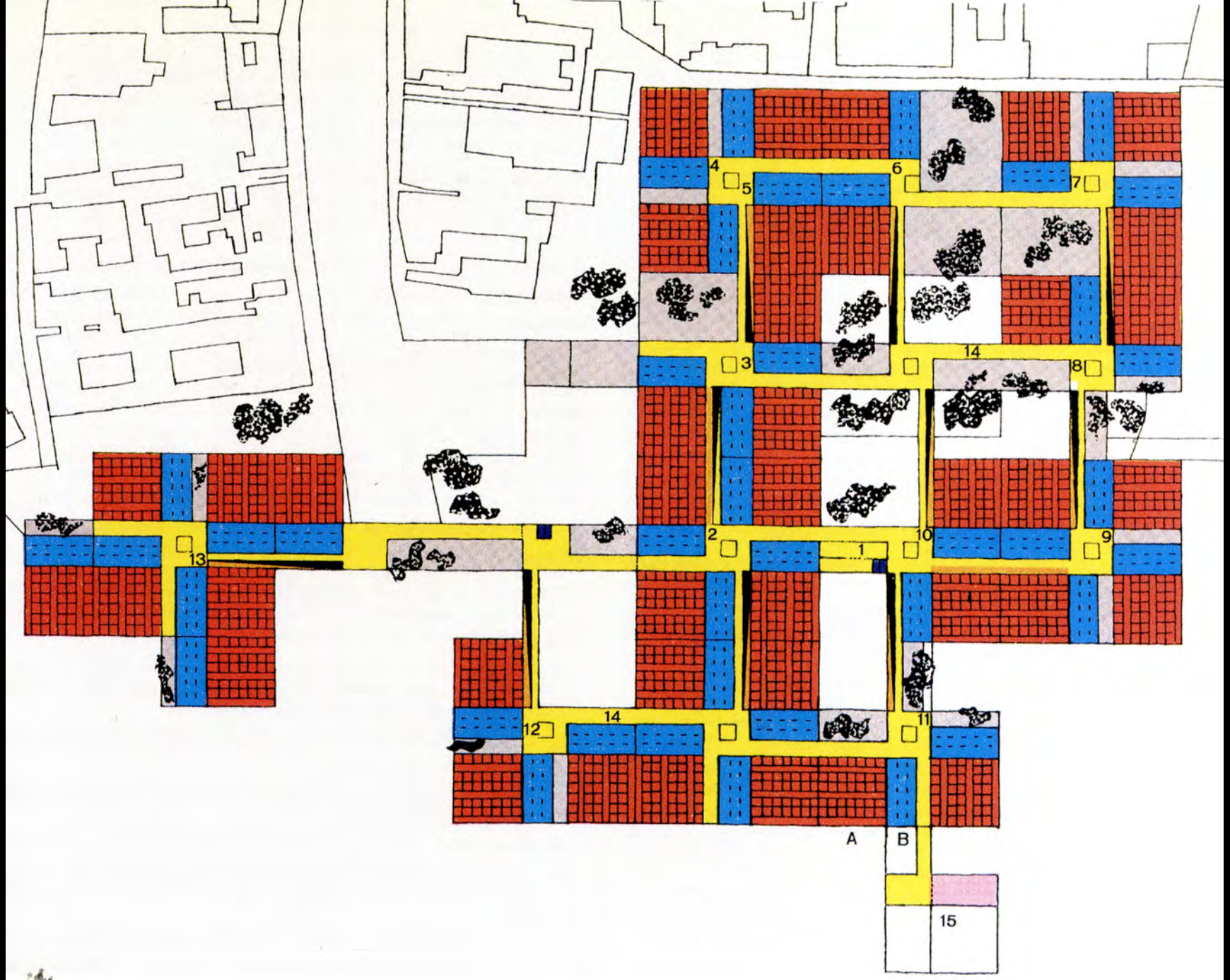
4
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A
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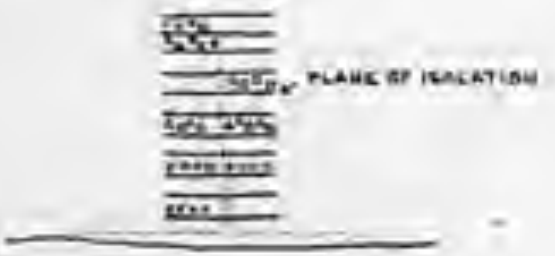
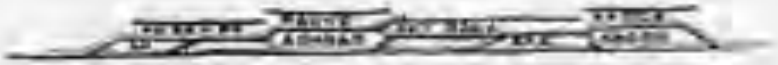
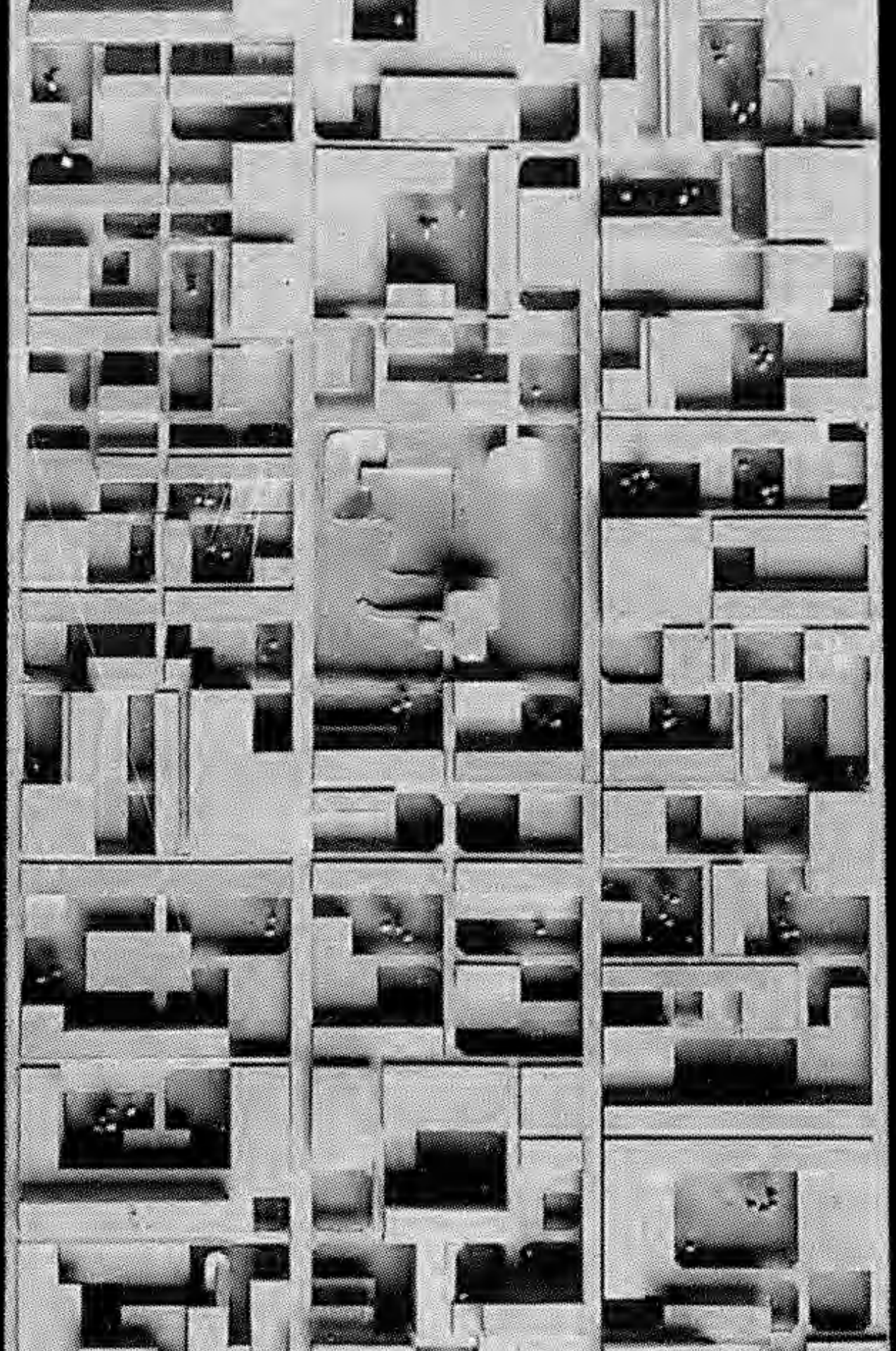
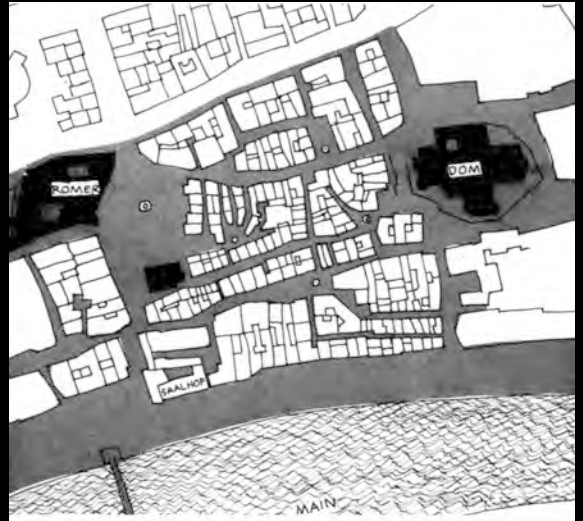
(8) In skyscraper type buildings disciplines tend to be segregated. The relationship from one floor to another is tenuous, almost fortuitous, passing through the space-machine-lift.

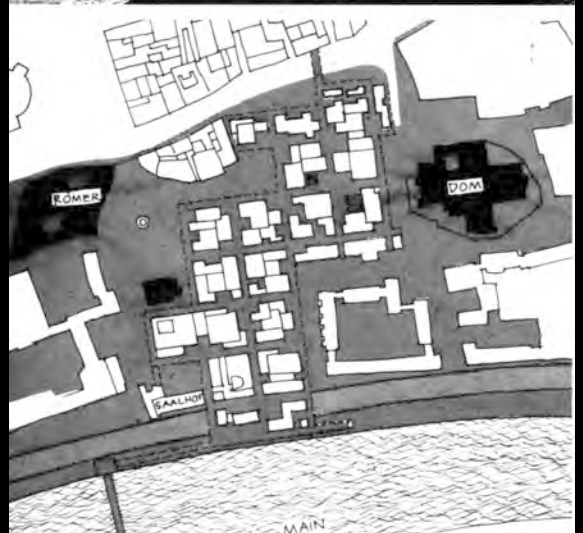


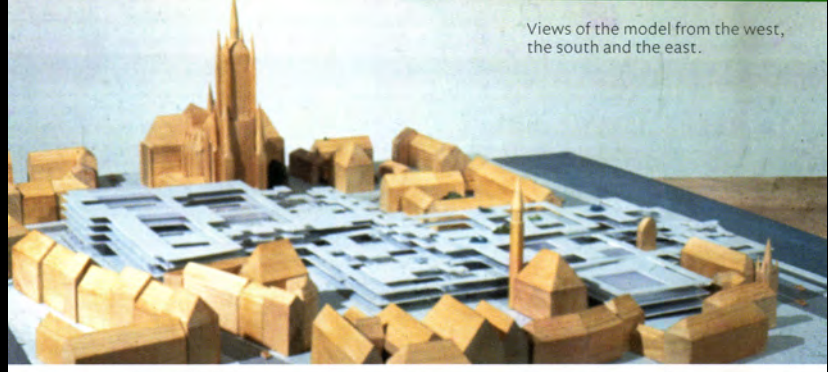
(9) In a groundscraper organisation greater possibilities of community and exchange are present without necessarily sacrificing any tranquility.



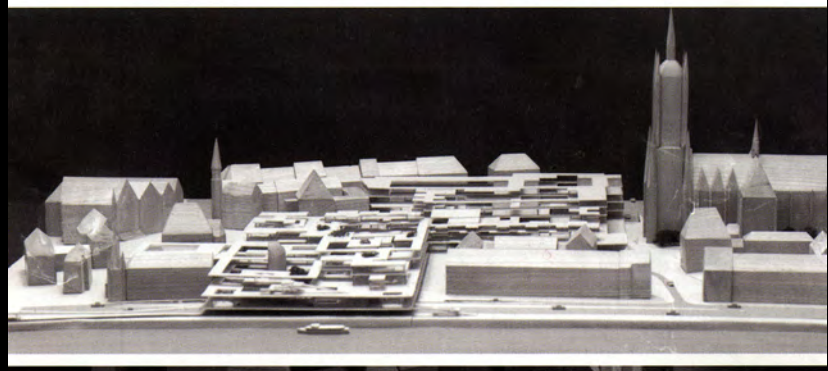


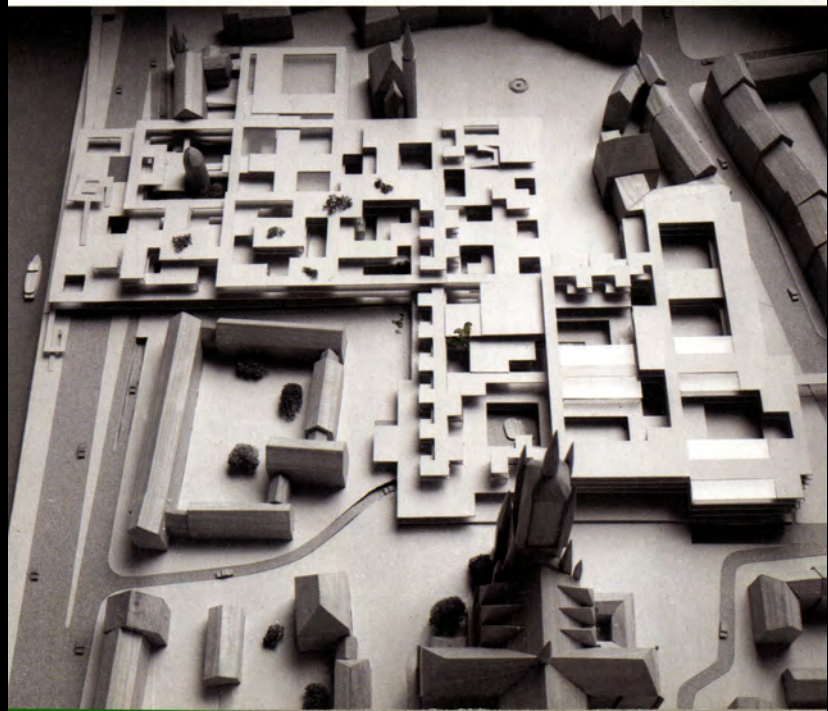






Views of the model from the west, the south and the east.





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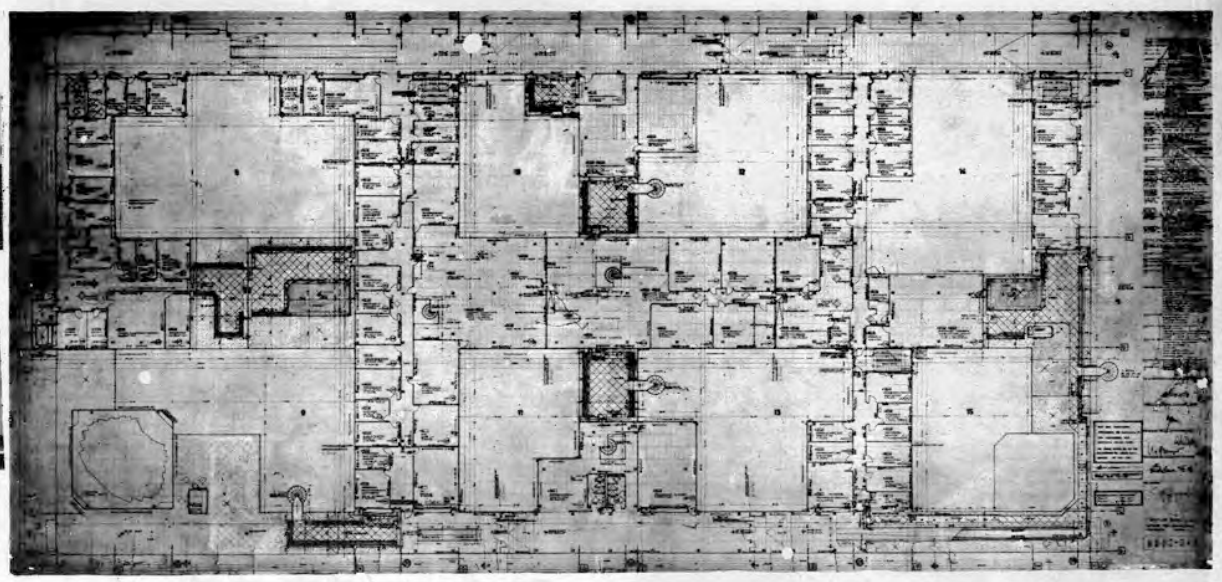
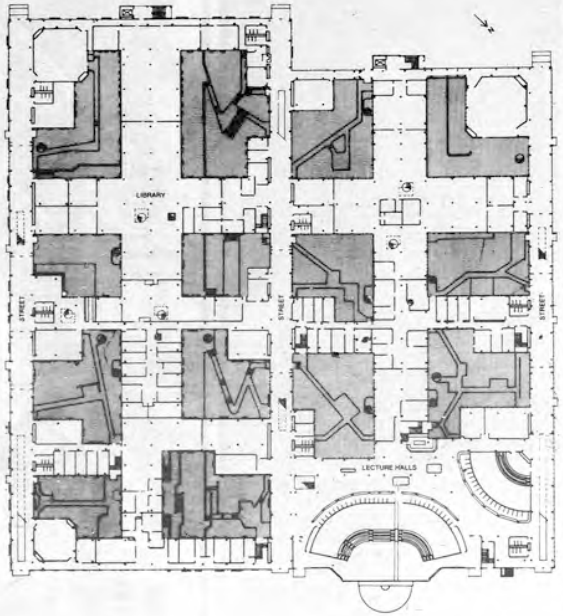


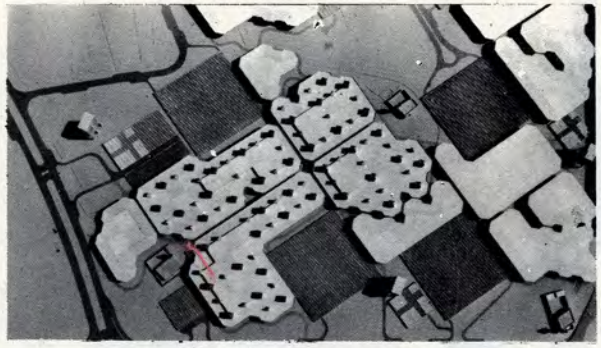


The Berlin FU as realised, enables us to recognise what has gone before and, allowing for personal receptivity, recognise those things that led up to it.

The calmer, mainstream mat-building, not in the consumer's terms *normalised,* is what attracts our personal attention and we tend to like the FU for the very reasons Aldo van Eyck does not like it to paraphrase badly . . . the impenetrability of Corten steel . . . on the inner face the same impenetrability of the white skin . . . the changeable facade that does not change the overall effect . . . the carpet that changes its colour but not the effect of the corridor street. We don't resist the fire doors (which ruin, Schiedhelm claims, the corridor streets); the problematic detail can be brain-washed out of what one is trying to *get* from the FU . . . again wearing protective-visual-clothing in order to see better what might be there; what might be in it for us. The FU built makes mat-architecture recognisable, and now, by tracking back down selected antecedents – as *we* see them, not necessarily as Woods, or Candilis, or Josic, or Schiedhelm would severally see its antecedents – it should be possible to make clear how signs of mat-architecture can be *read.* Remember . . . we are tracking *back* . . .

'70 – '72
Kuwait Ministries: A. & P.S.

Mat-building for use as Government Offices; an aesthetic tailored to the rigorous Gulf climate here worked out in detail.



The Charged Void text

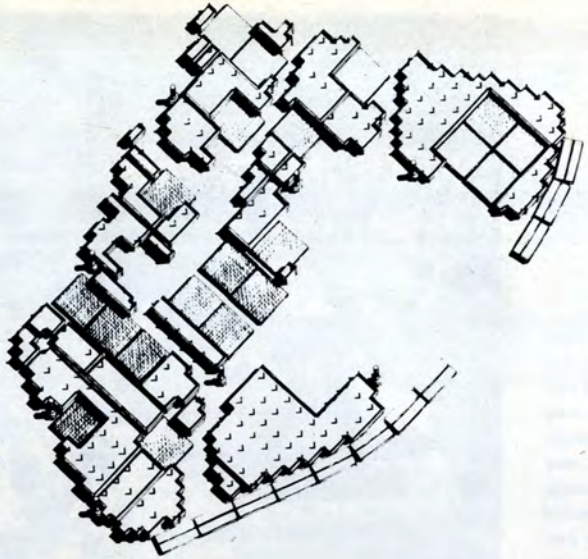
The urban study for the Old City of Kuwait began with a search for the underlying will to urban-form in the instincts that underpin the true Arab cities built in contrast to the desert: airviews of cities as far apart as Kairouan, Cairo, Isfahen, Aleppo, seem a broadcast of houses, mosques, bazaars, with a currant-bun consistency. This is a loose scatter of an especial sort new to our Roman-seeded urbanism. The Arab sense of space can be felt strongly in the surviving works from the earliest period of Arab building: the uniqueness of its typal-space was felt by Charles V when he visited Cordova in 1526 and saw what had occurred when part of the Great Mosque was rebuilt as a chapel. That Arab sense of space can be put into words as being low enclosure carried lightly above the user. In folk-buildings this is un-monumental, full of stops and starts and shadow-particularly at the point of entry — with a high degree of connectedness to allow for change of mind and the in-roads of time ..... Arab cities are full of building started and never finished, and finished and then abandoned, for it would seem the Arabs are more spontaneous, less worldly in the long term that cultures either to their east or west. Still existing in the simple Arab town, an interchangeability in which the neutral cube contains a calm cell that can change; from home to workshop; green-grocery to paraffin store; an alley of houses in whose midst is a baker, made into a Souk by simple expedient of adding pieces of fabric over the public way ..... as needs grow. These changes still happen in simple places because the cell structure, organisation of access, and the gentle servicing by man and donkey are suitable for all that has to be done there. The attractions of inter-changeability — its loose-fit — guided the character of the new proposals for Kuwait to reinforce and inject new life into the poor remnants now left of the historic urban-fabric of Kuwait Old City. The idea re-worked towards a new sort of interchangeable cell-structure, the size of the cell unit and its organisation being devised as equally suitable for several of the new functions of the Old City; for example Government Ministries, or University Faculties.

'71
Toulouse le Mirail: Candilis, Josic, Woods

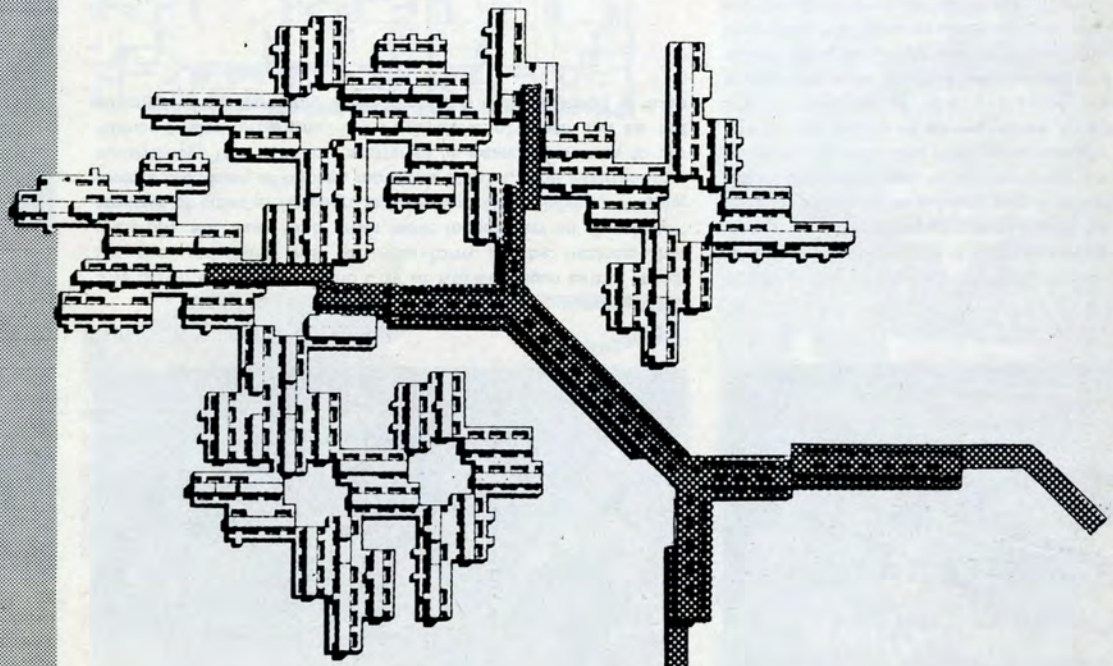
As built; garage top here shows the form of the muted mechanism served society, the anonymous face of the shelter for the 2nd house-on-wheels: read with Honan, Matmata.

'68 – '70
Kuwait urban form study. A. & P.S.

Urban-form mat-building; extending the particular spatial contributions of Arabic cultures.

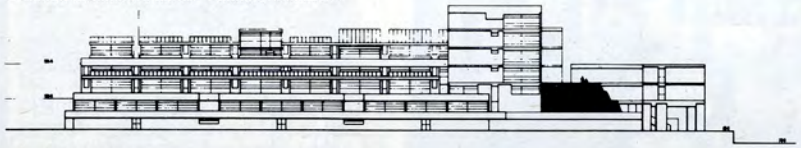


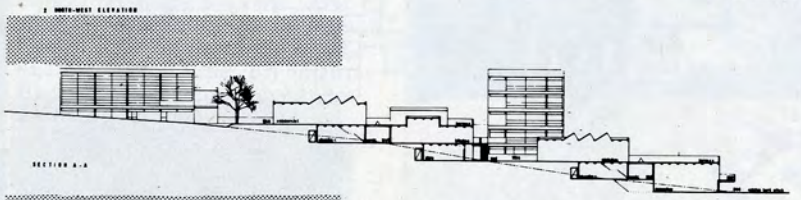
'64 – '65
Fort Lamy: Candilis, Josic, Woods

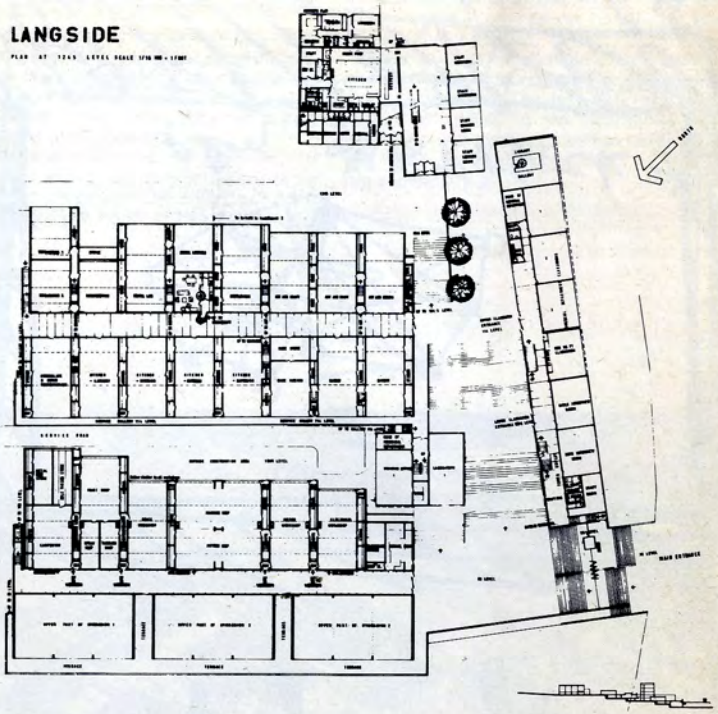


'58
Langside competition: A. & P.S. with P. Sigmonde.

Continuity, connection: except where noises such as impact . . . use patterns requiring privacy, say for interviews . . . security for filing . . . 9 to 5 use, etc . . . made physical isolation still desirable.

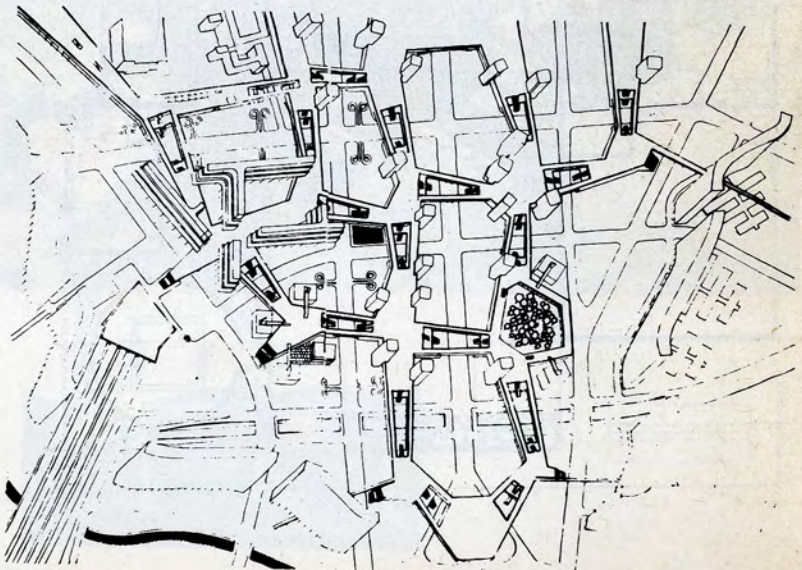






'57 – '58
Berlin Hauptstadt Competition: A. & P. S. with P. Sigmonde.

Existing roads on rectangular parti; pedestrians walked directly point to point, play between the two circulation nets.



'60
STEM: Woods

For architects mobility has several connotations: in terms of movement it signifies the shift from 2½ miles per hour to 60, 100 or 500 miles per hour. In terms of time it means the appreciation of a fourth dimension, i.e. change on a short time cycle. In terms of economy, it means rapid mass-distribution, consonant with the potentialities of mass-production and mass-consumption. In terms of housing, it means the easy, unquestioning rootlessness of the urban population.

In view of the failure of the traditional architectural tool, *plan masse,* to cope with the accelerated creation of habitat, it is proposed that planning be reconsidered as proceeding from *stem* to cluster (rather than from cell to symbol), as in the design of cells one proceeds from core to cluster.

In this way it is felt that a basic structure may be determined: this structure or *stem* includes all the servants of homes, all the *prolongements du logis;* commercial, cultural, educational, and leisure activities, as well as roads, walkways and services.

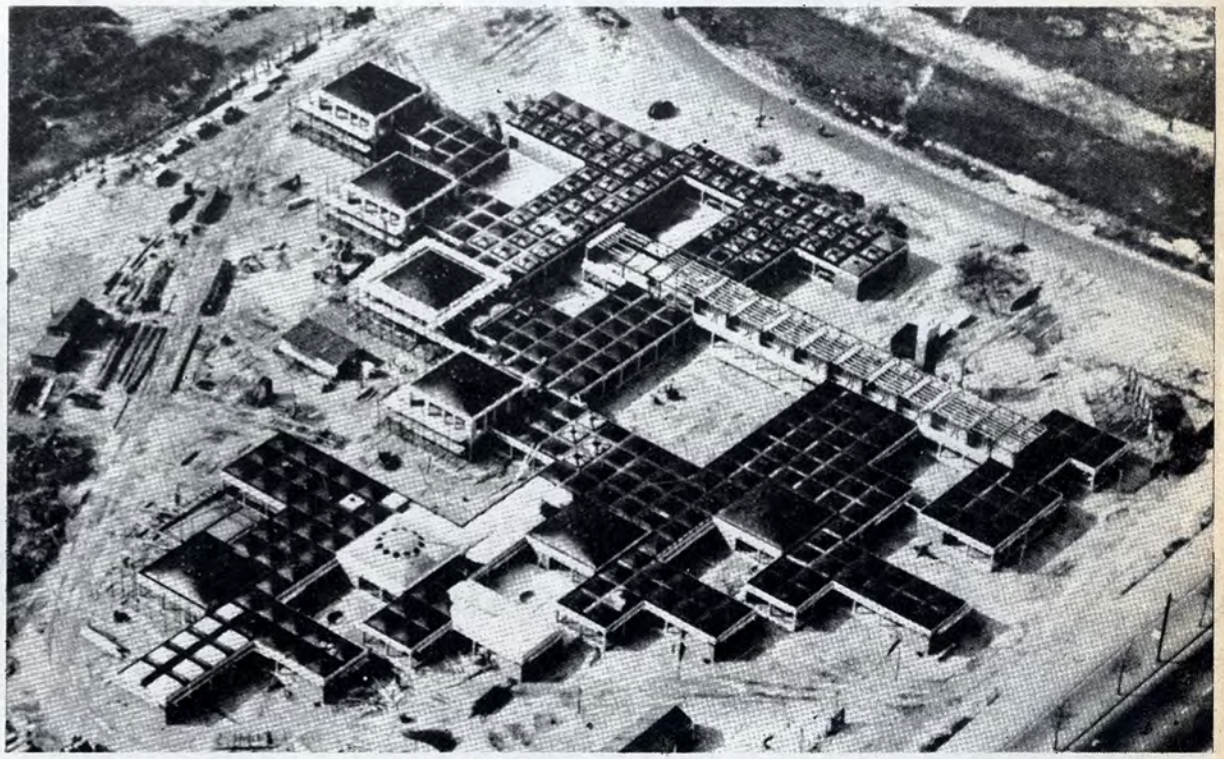
These are the factors which vary from place to place and from year to year; and, if taken as determinants of a scheme can give it organization and identity of a higher order than that obtained solely from plastic arrangement.

Stem is conditioned by mobility. Its dimensions are given not in measures of length but of speed: 2½ miles per hour and 60 miles per hour. It can provide the link between these measures of speed as it can between the measures of validity (the 25-and 5-year cycles).

The process of planning from *stem* to *cluster* will tend to re-establish density and scale in habitat. The principle of equalization of spaces in the occupying of a given site will disappear and exterior space can again be small or medium as well as big and empty.

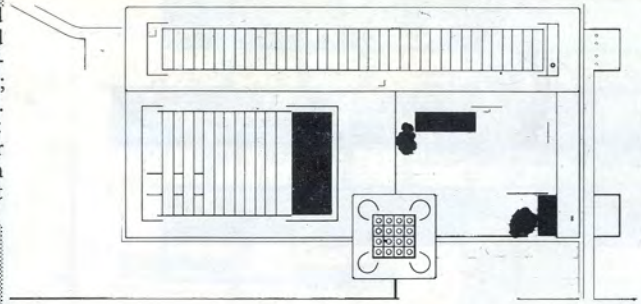
'57 – '60
Children's House, Aldo van Eyck

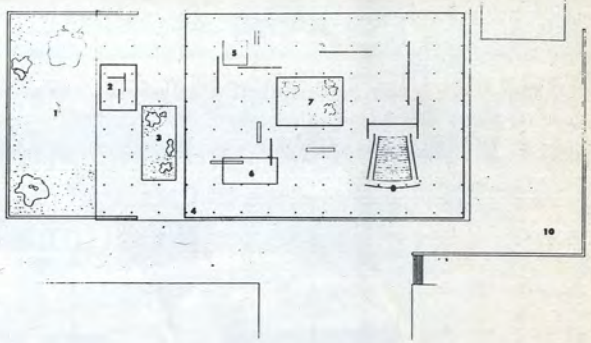
Not so recognisable for the mat it undoubtedly was – its import as harbinger of change – for the internal language was very dense, and the skin extremely impenetrable in all senses of the word. So soon after the Brynmawr Factory, its factory overtones are heavy on the eyes.

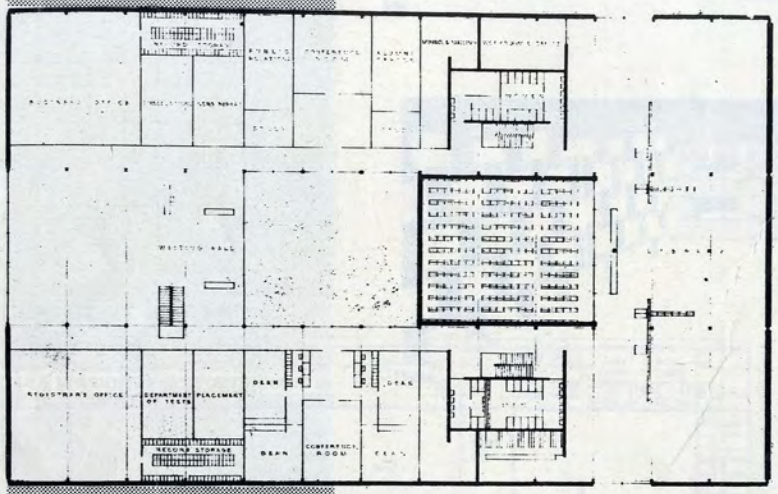


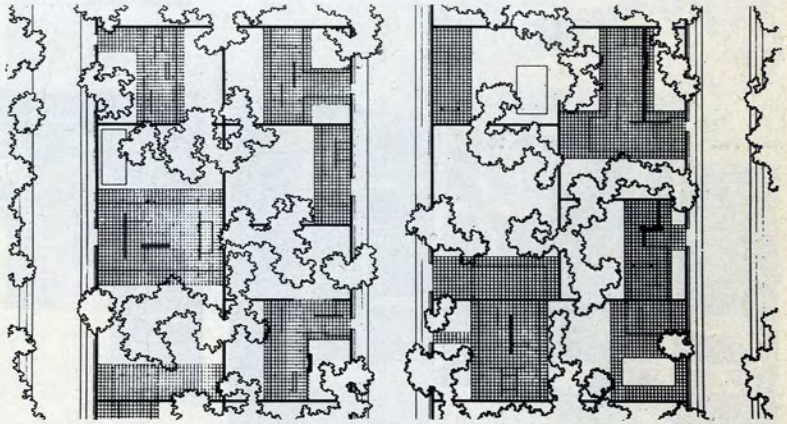
'50
Fitzwilliam, R.A. scheme: P.S.

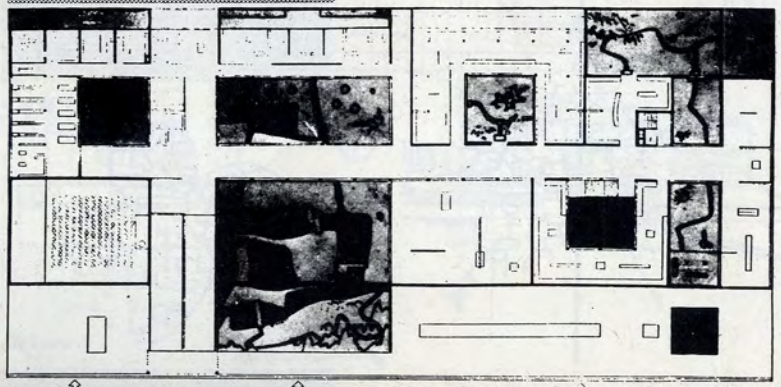
The FU makes it possible to read early exercises in a new way, and to read fragments of Le Corbusier and Mies in this new way; based on publication of P. Johnson's Mies van der Rohe: Mus. Modern Art. Mueseum for small city: idea for an exhibition of Picasso's Guernica; also court houses.[5]

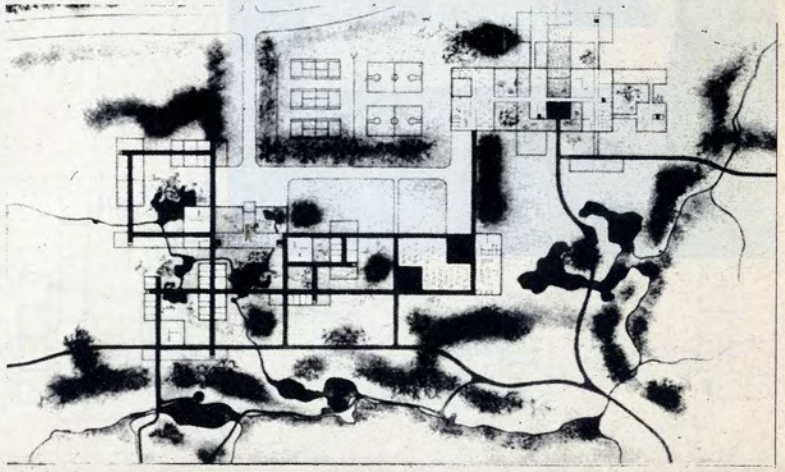






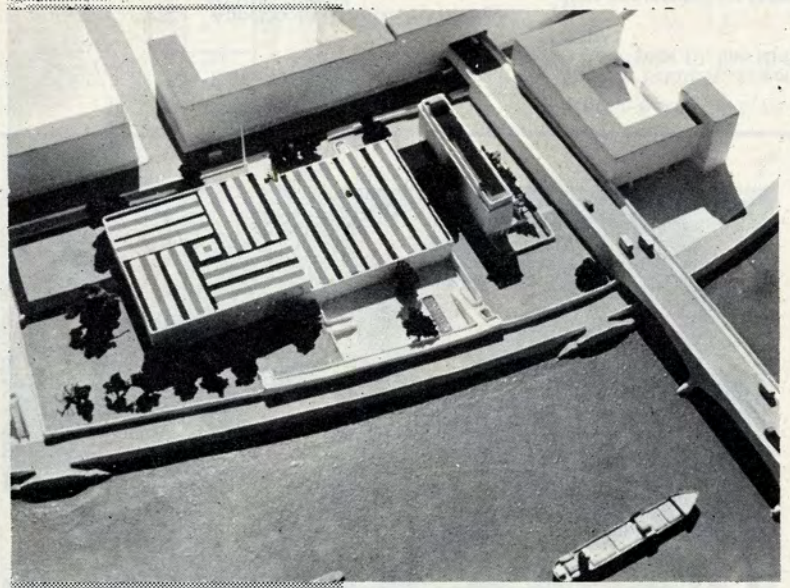


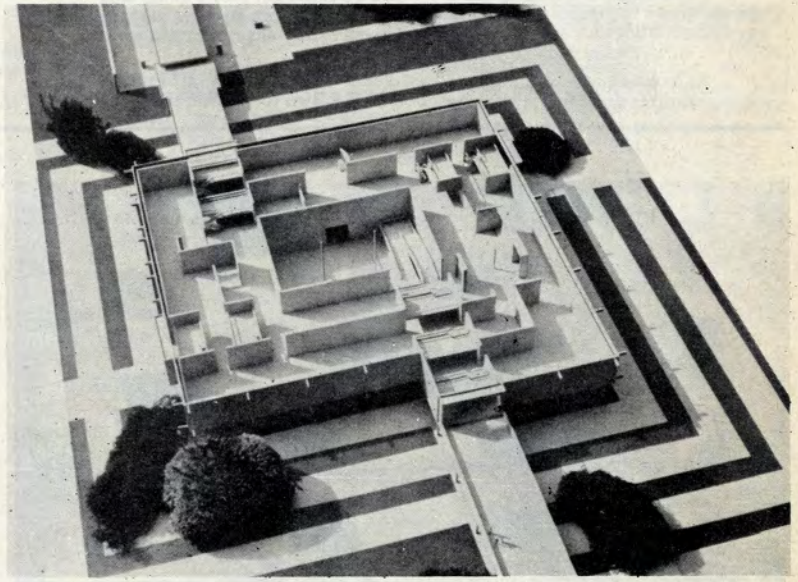




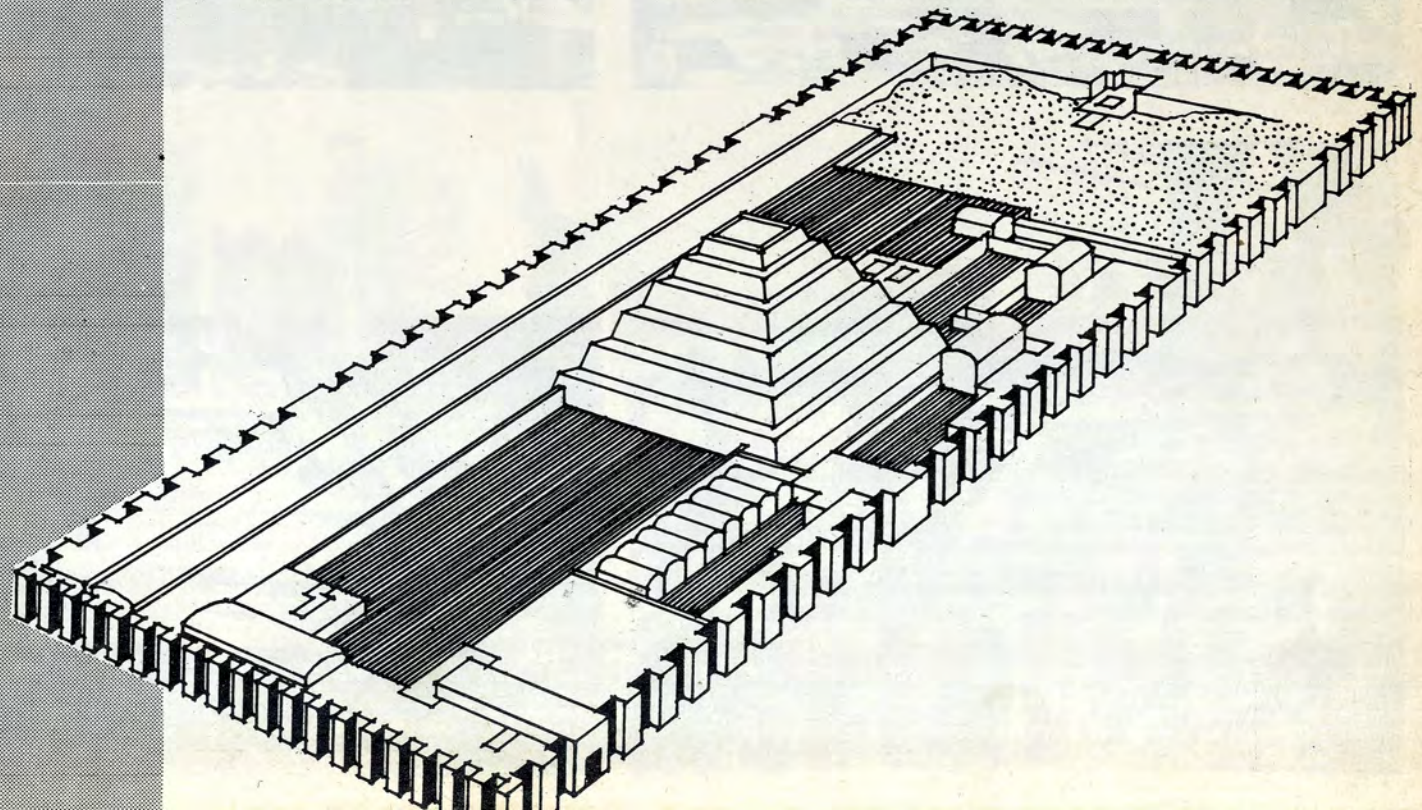
Royal Academy thesis scheme: A.S.

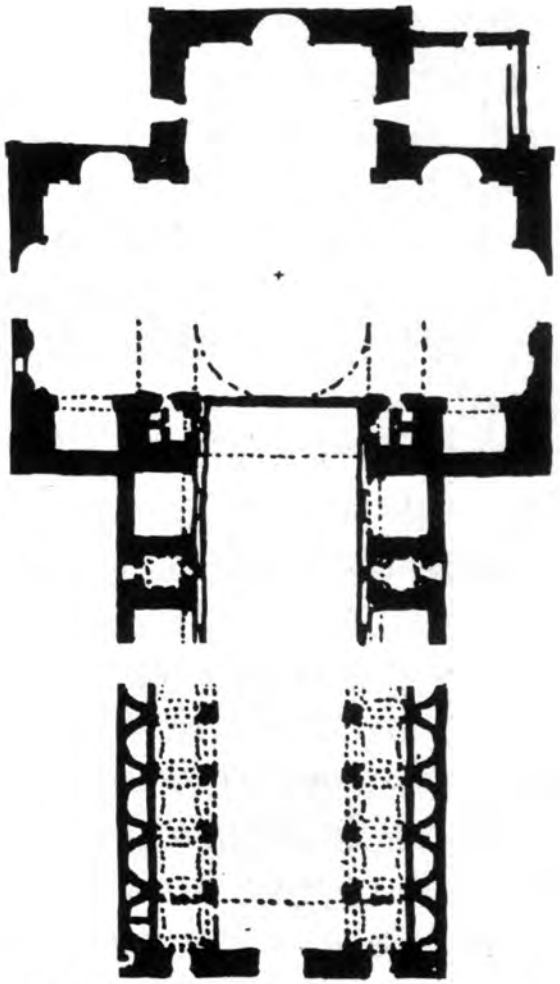
Based on *Musée à Croissance Illimitée.* ⟶





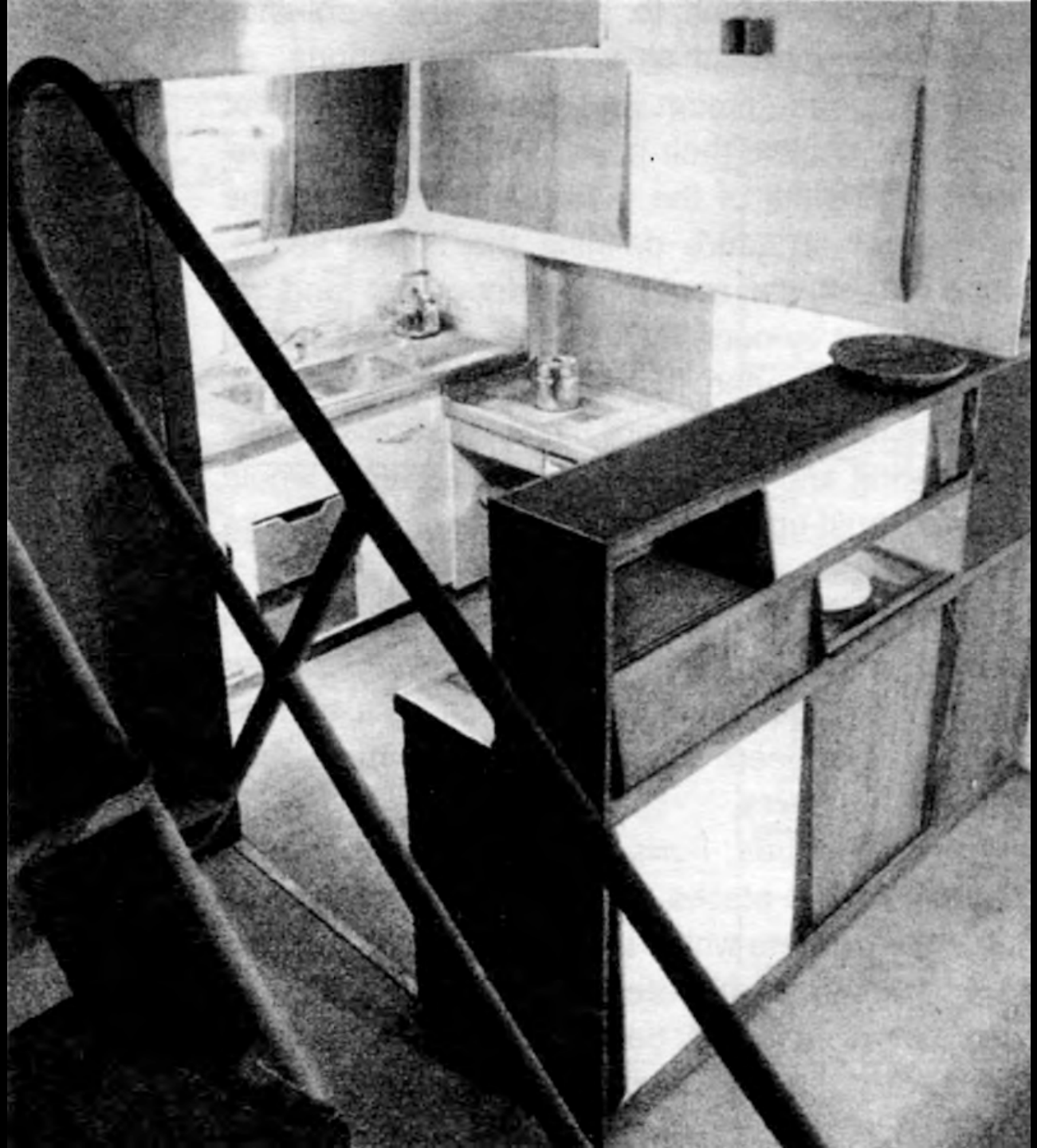
Saquarra (Imhotep)

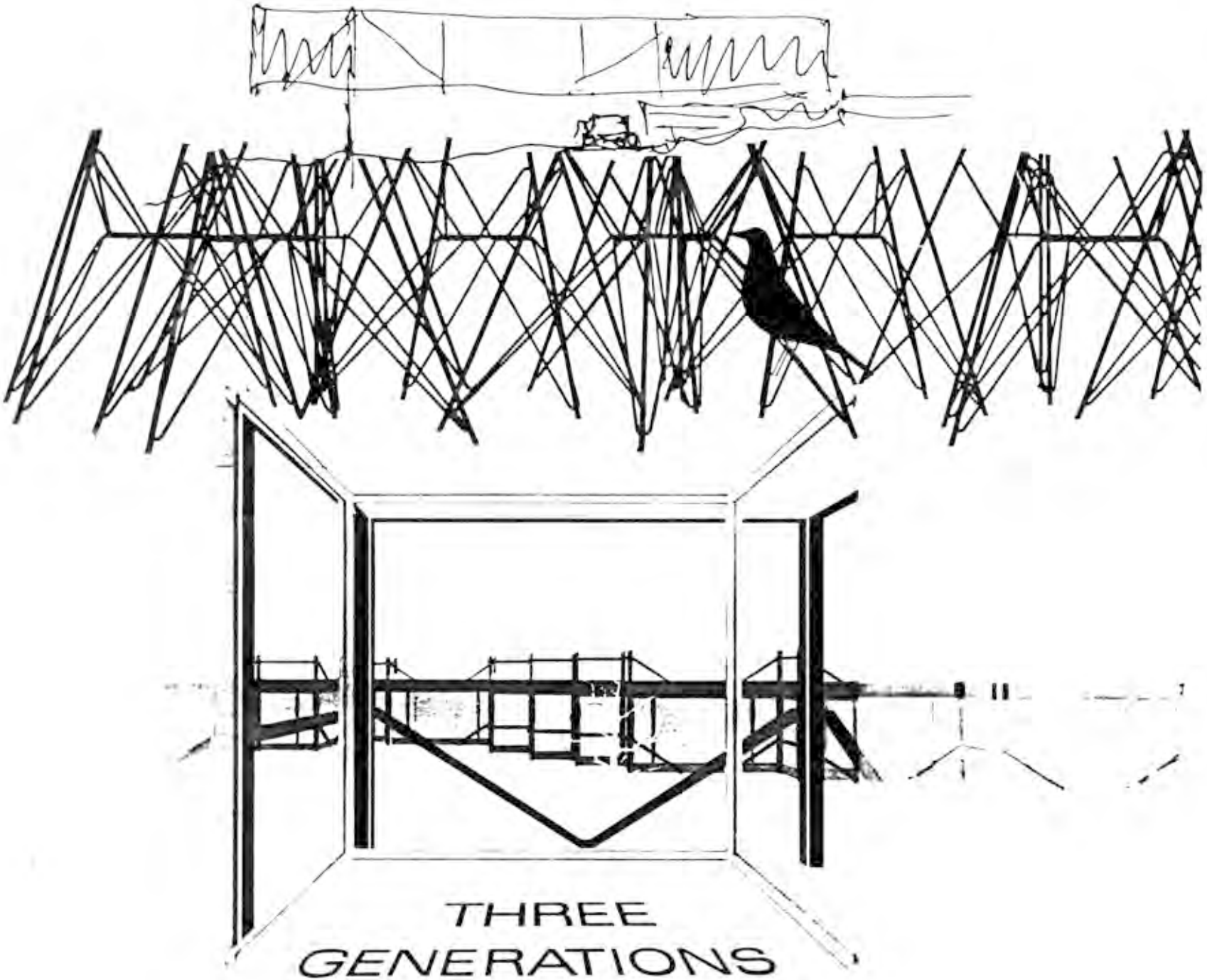


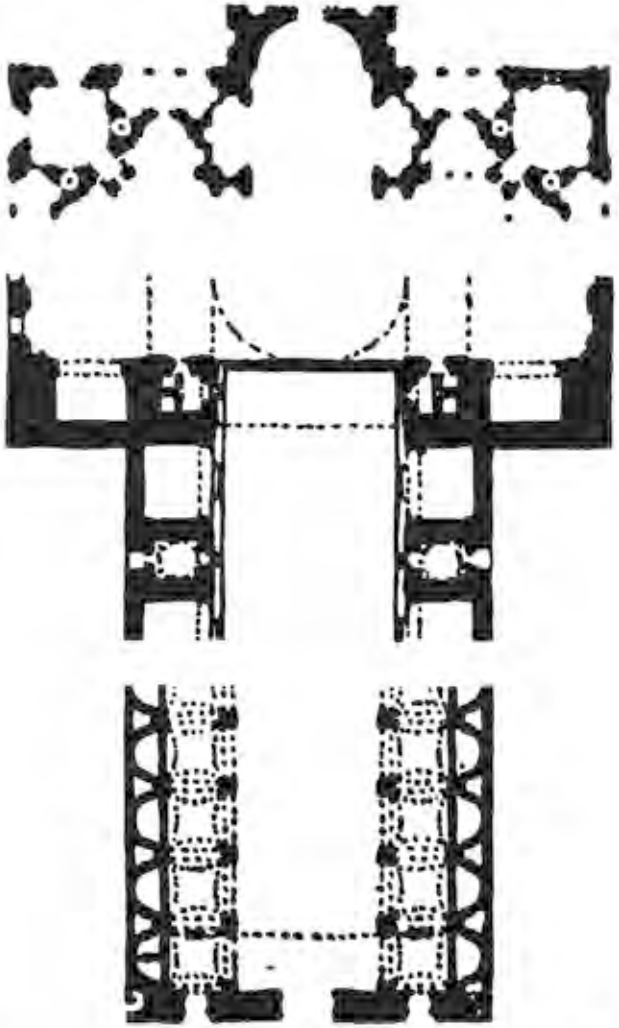


PETER SMITHSON
Architect, London

"THREE GENERATIONS"




THREE
GENERATIONS

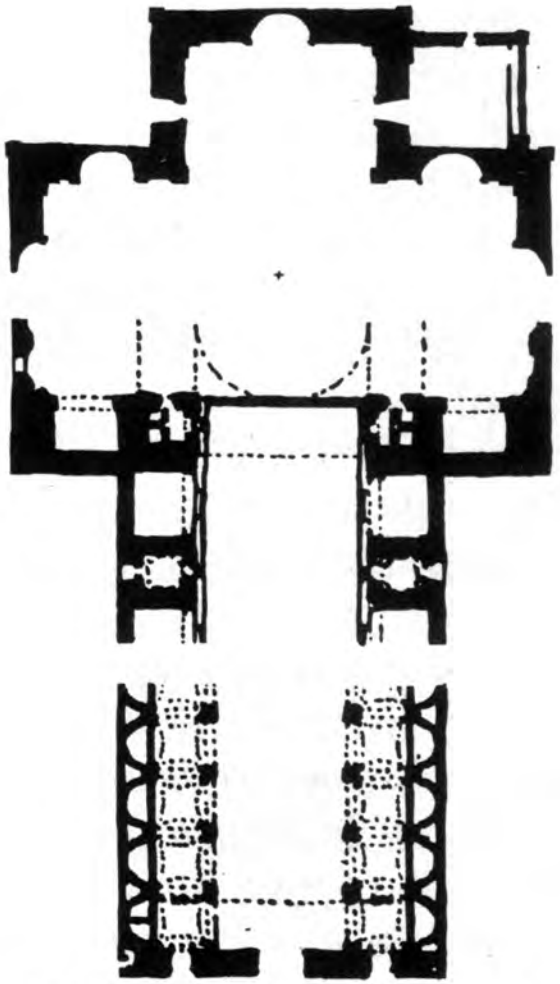


PETER SMITHSON

Architect, London

"THREE GENERATIONS"

Friday, March 13, 1:00 p.m.
Piper Auditorium



PETER SMITHSON
Architect, London

"THREE GENERATIONS"

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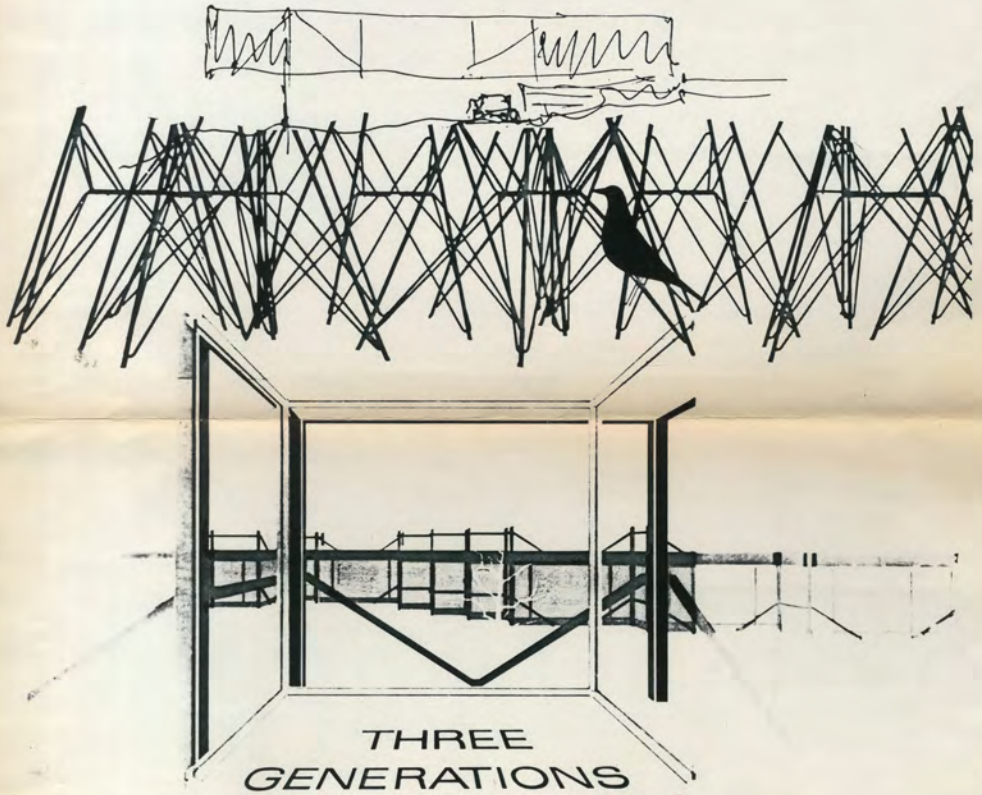
P.S. tel. (correction) Mox. R. 24:2:83 (never corrected!!)

woensdag 2 maart 10.45 uur zaal B

PETER SMITHSON



THREE GENERATIONS

BRUNELLESCHI

baptiste alberti | francesco di-giorgio | ~~donato bramante~~

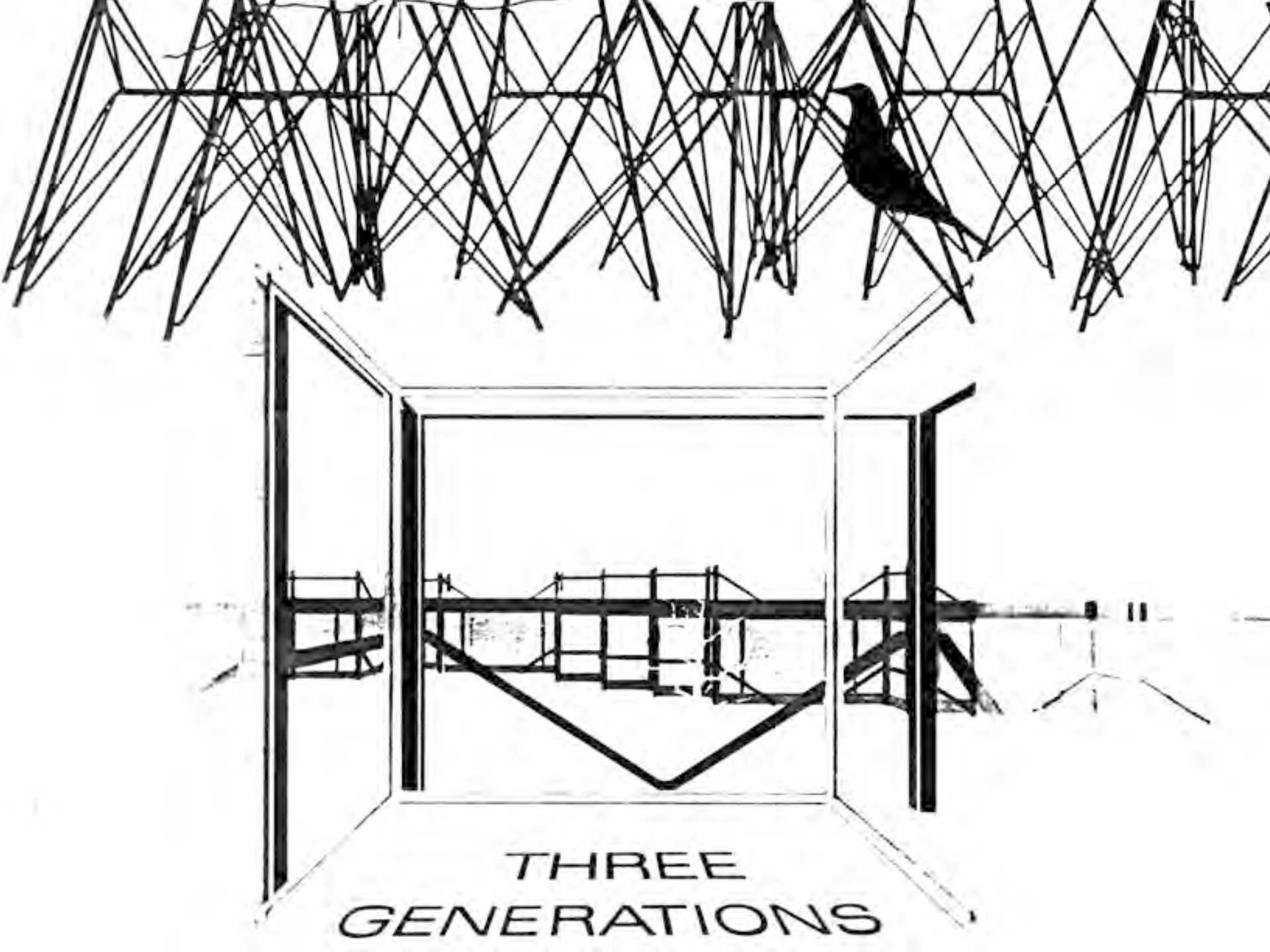
mies van de rohe | charles eames | a en p smithson

BRINKMAN, MAASKANT,

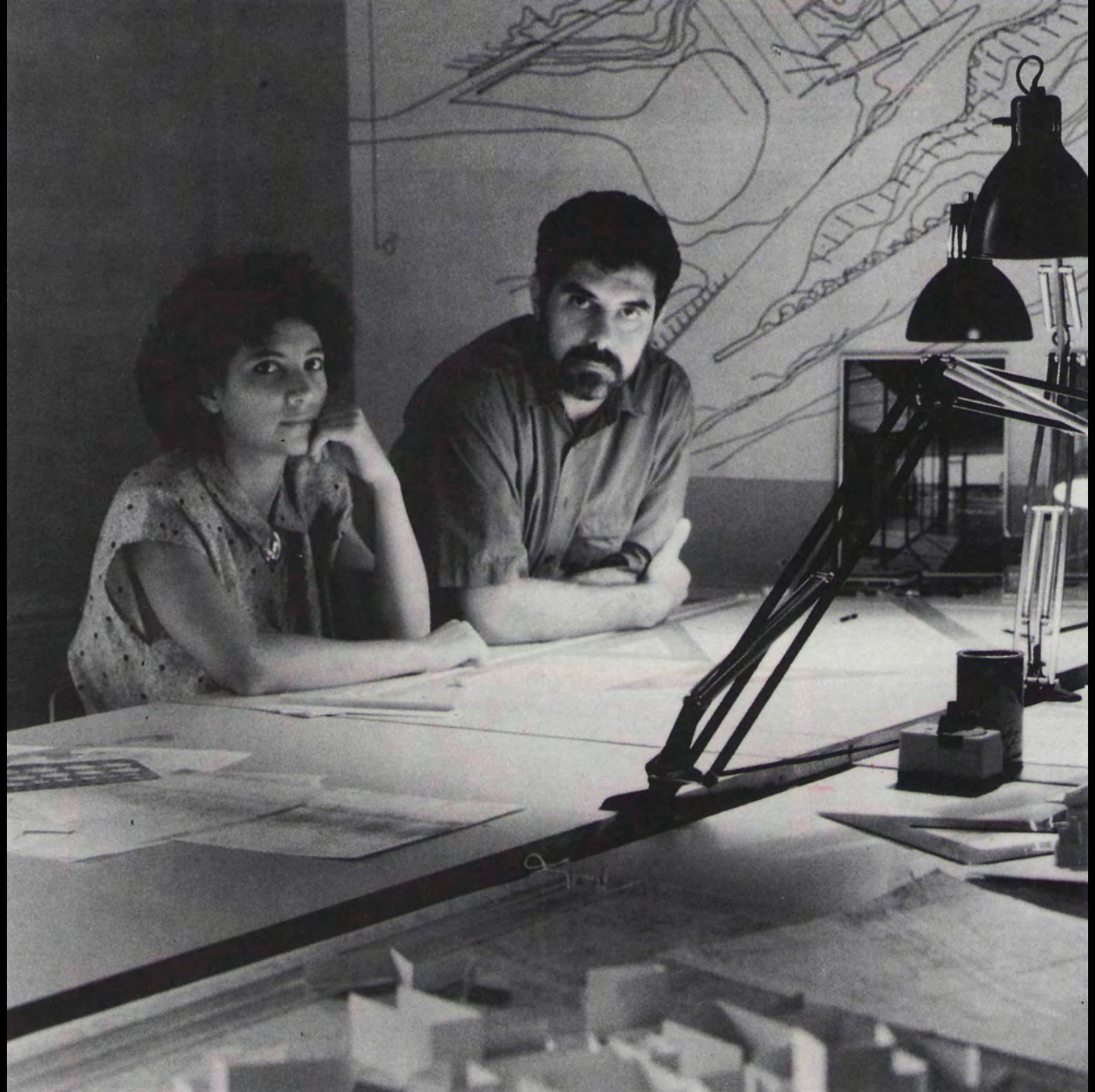
g rietveld | lc van de vlught | ~~m stam~~ | m van tijen | a van eyck

Alison
and
Peter
Smithson

Changing the Art of Inhabitation



THREE GENERATIONS



573 AD/9/74

How to recognise and read MAT-BUILDING

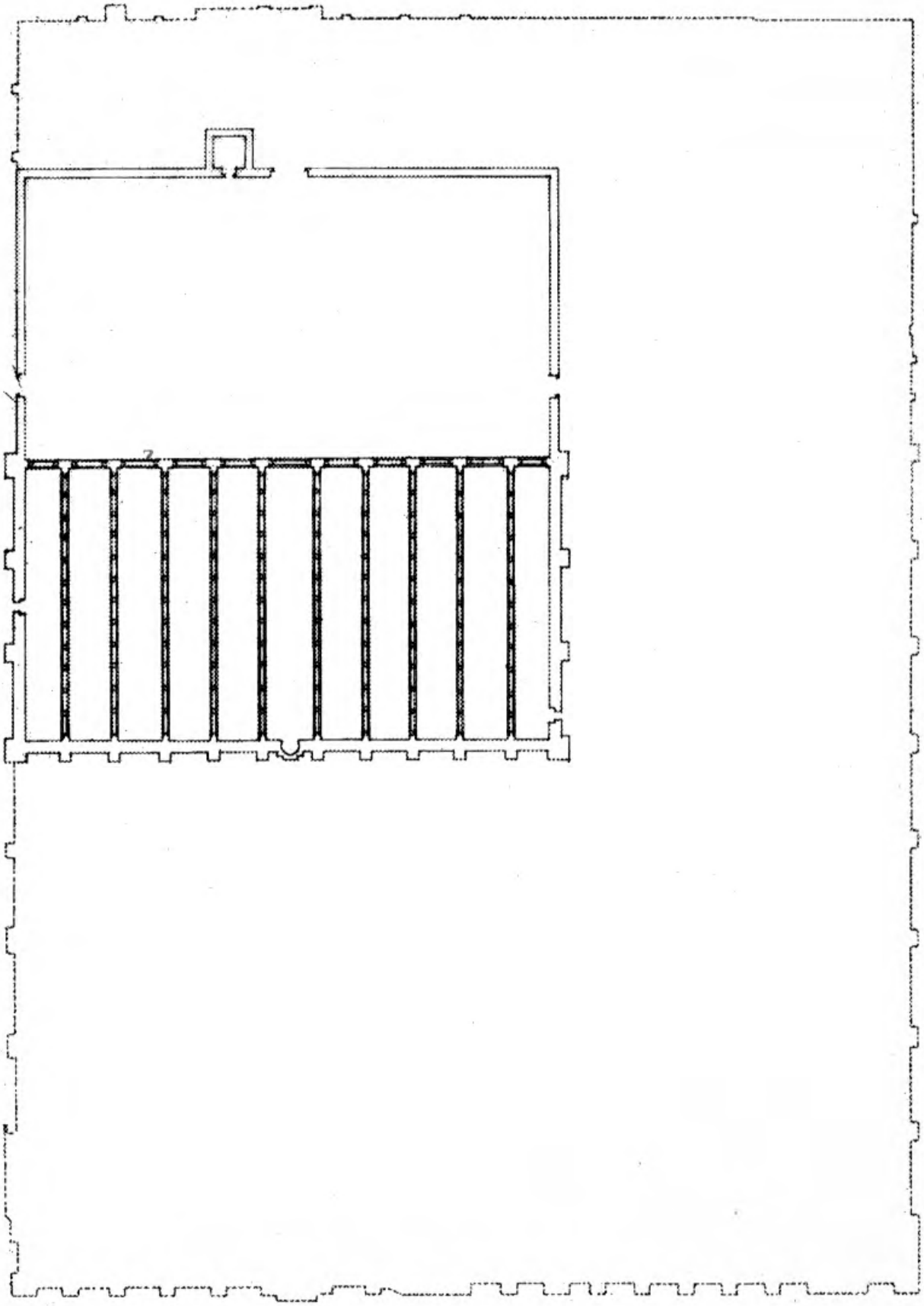
Mainstream architecture as it has developed towards the mat-building

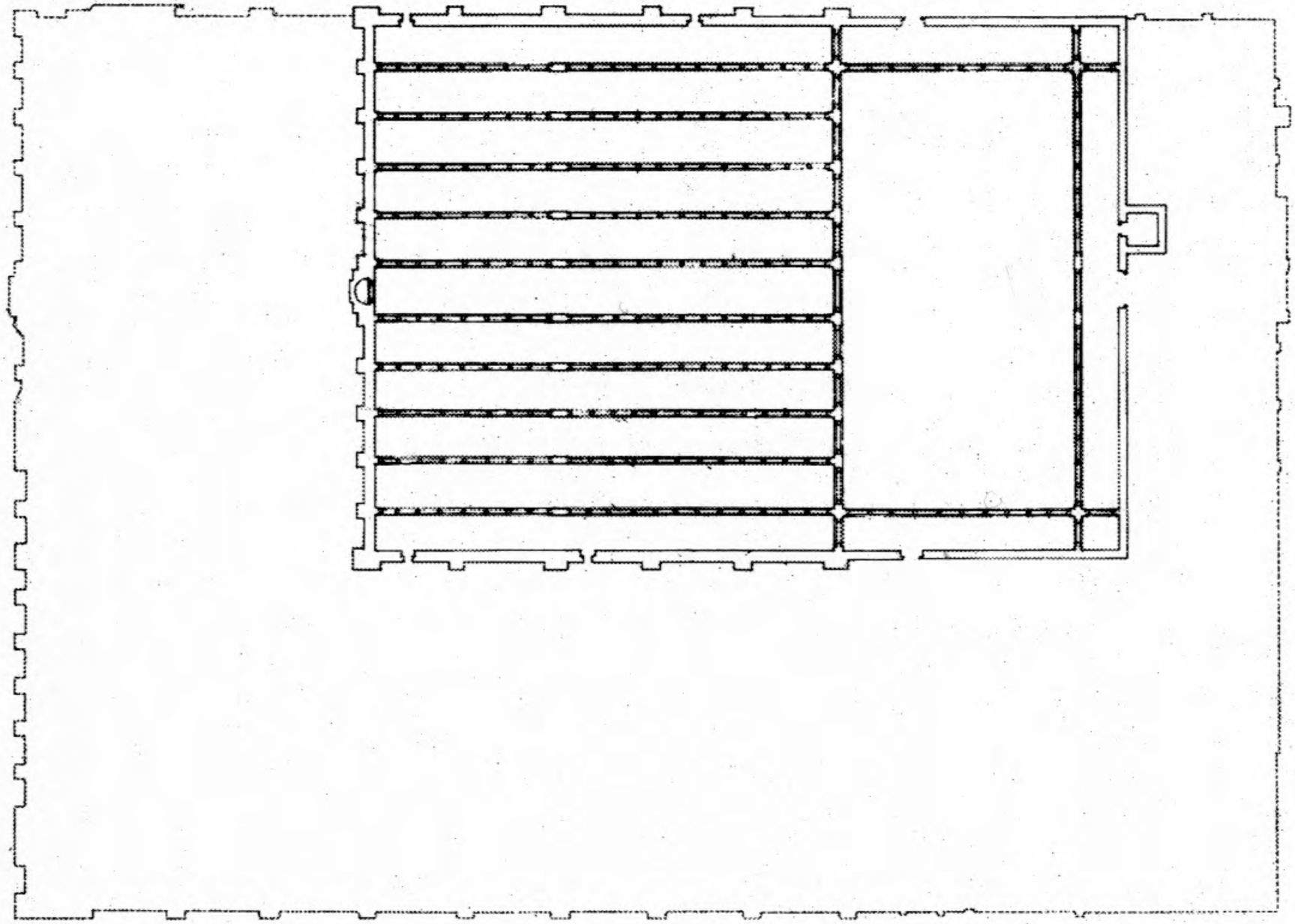
ALISON SMITHSON

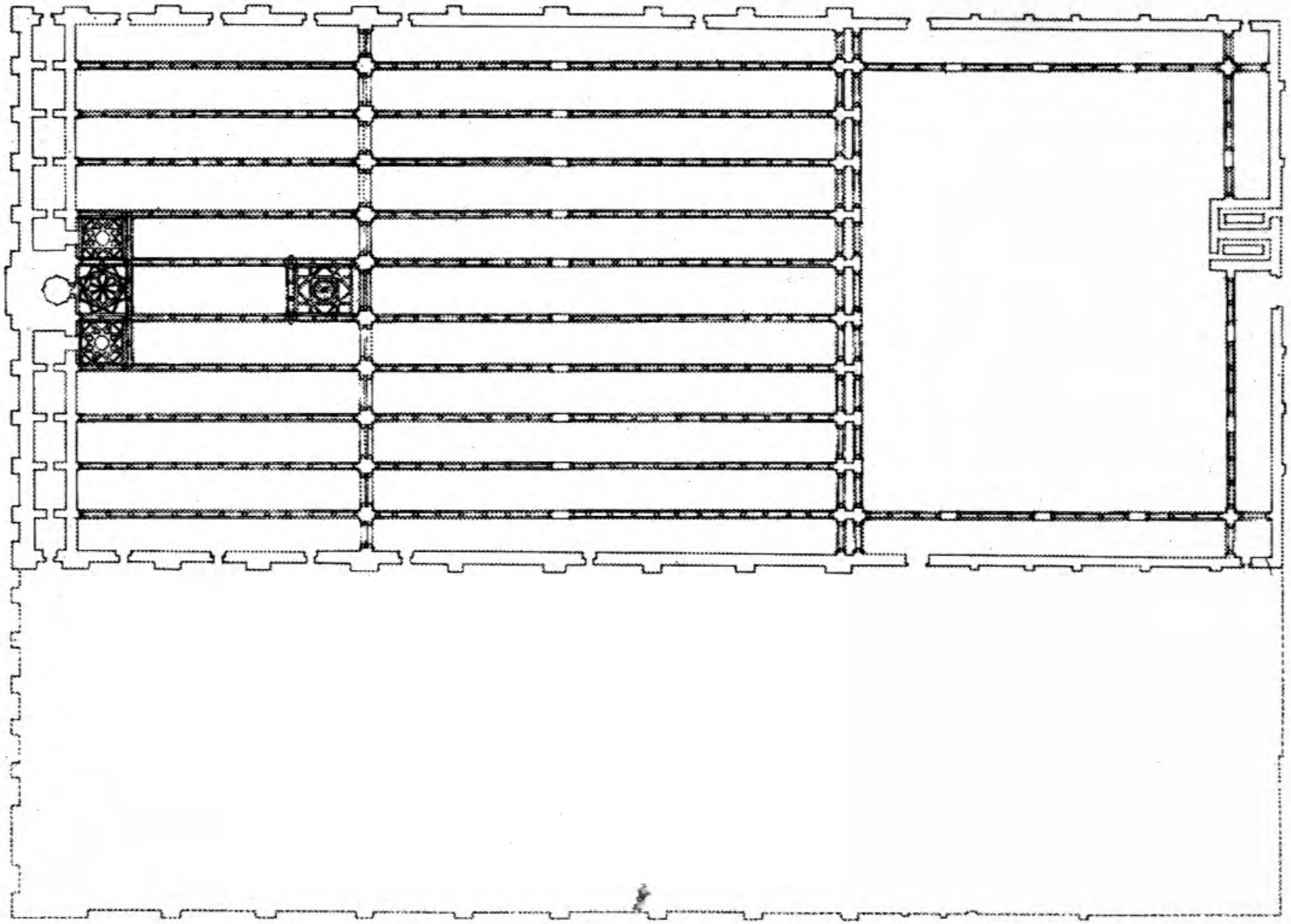
Mat-building can be said to epitomise the anonymous collective; where the functions come to enrich the fabric, and the individual gains new freedoms of action through a new and shuffled order, based on interconnection, close-knit patterns of association, and possibilities for growth, diminution, and change. The way towards mat-building started blindly enough: the first Team 10 review of the field of its thought became collectively covered in the Primer (*AD* 12/61). The thought gradually got further bodied-out in projects, and these in the early 'seventies began to appear in built-form. At this point mat-building as an idea becomes recognisable. To be able to recognise the phenomenon at the end of this, its first, primitive phase, calls for a specially prepared frame of mind . . . to deliberately *not look too closely* at the detailed language, for this is still developing. And some practitioners, to achieve something through the bureaucratic machine of their country, have chosen to *normalise* their language . . . (you might say so that the client did not become frightened by the appearance of the mat proper). So at present the built-field is rather mixed, and realised examples on the whole tend to have something of the not-quite-recognisable-order of the Olympian Zeus temple, all different wood/stone columns; or the crazy-paving terrace that is the top surface of the platform of the Argive Heraeum. Mainstream mat-building became visible, however, with the completion of the F.U. (Berlin Free University)[1]

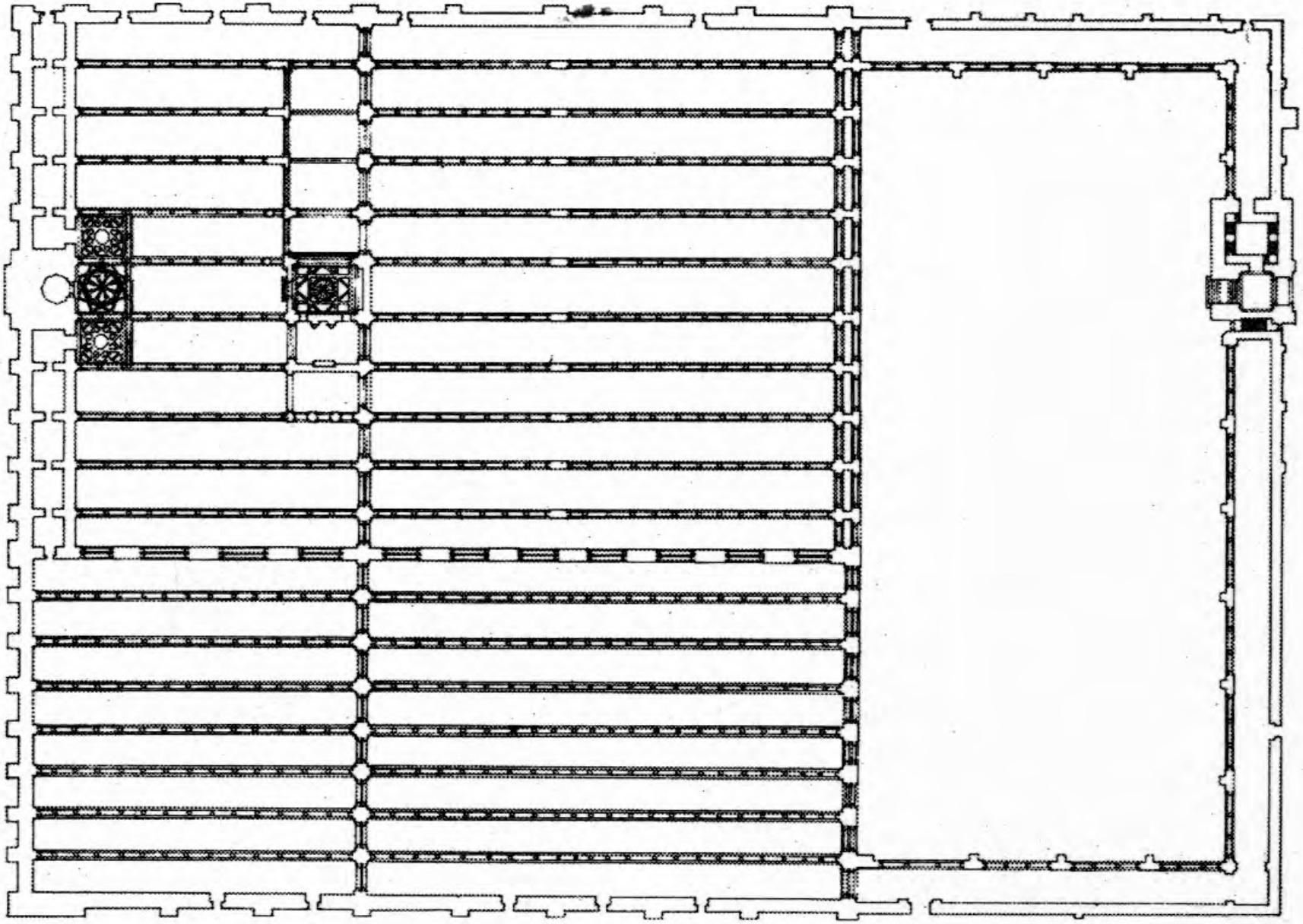
A building that co-dates the finishing of the FU[2] – the Insurance Building at Appeldoorn – is, in its form, an off-shoot of the mat-building phenomenon (to deal with the off-shoot first, and perhaps therefore with 'casbahism' as a formative influence from the immediate past). Appeldoorn's architect, by using his own particular inheritance – the Children's House . . . the Schroeder roof – utilised a heavily loaded language to produce what can best be described as Giant's Causeway architecture . . . but you have to enter with special protective-visual-clothing, and to want to see it as part of the new phenomenon of mat-building. Causeway-architecture can most easily be seen to be *this something else* if walked into (in the mind) and compared with similar mental-walking-into, the Ford Foundation Building NY or the Boston City Hall, where, in both, quite different Central American historical-food is being drawn on, and has in the end produced old-style civic monuments. If still unconvinced that these are *isolates*, acting as such on the area around them, unto themselves alone, think of the Trenton Bath House (early '50s but first personal awareness '57), in which there is a clear indication of the mat-building urge towards collective grouping, and firm but recessive compatibility – seen again in the Baltimore Inner Harbour Project (1970)[3]

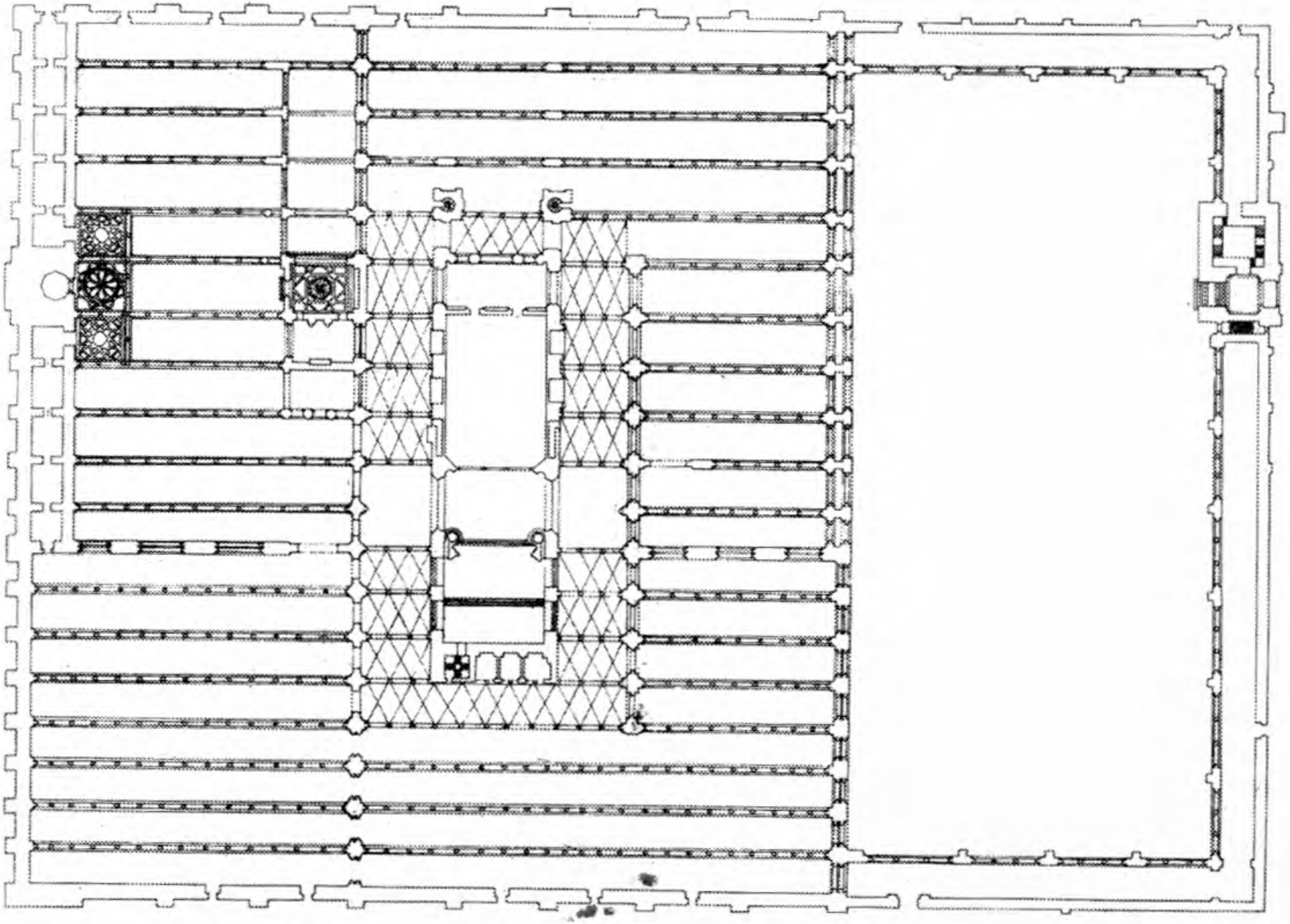
Google

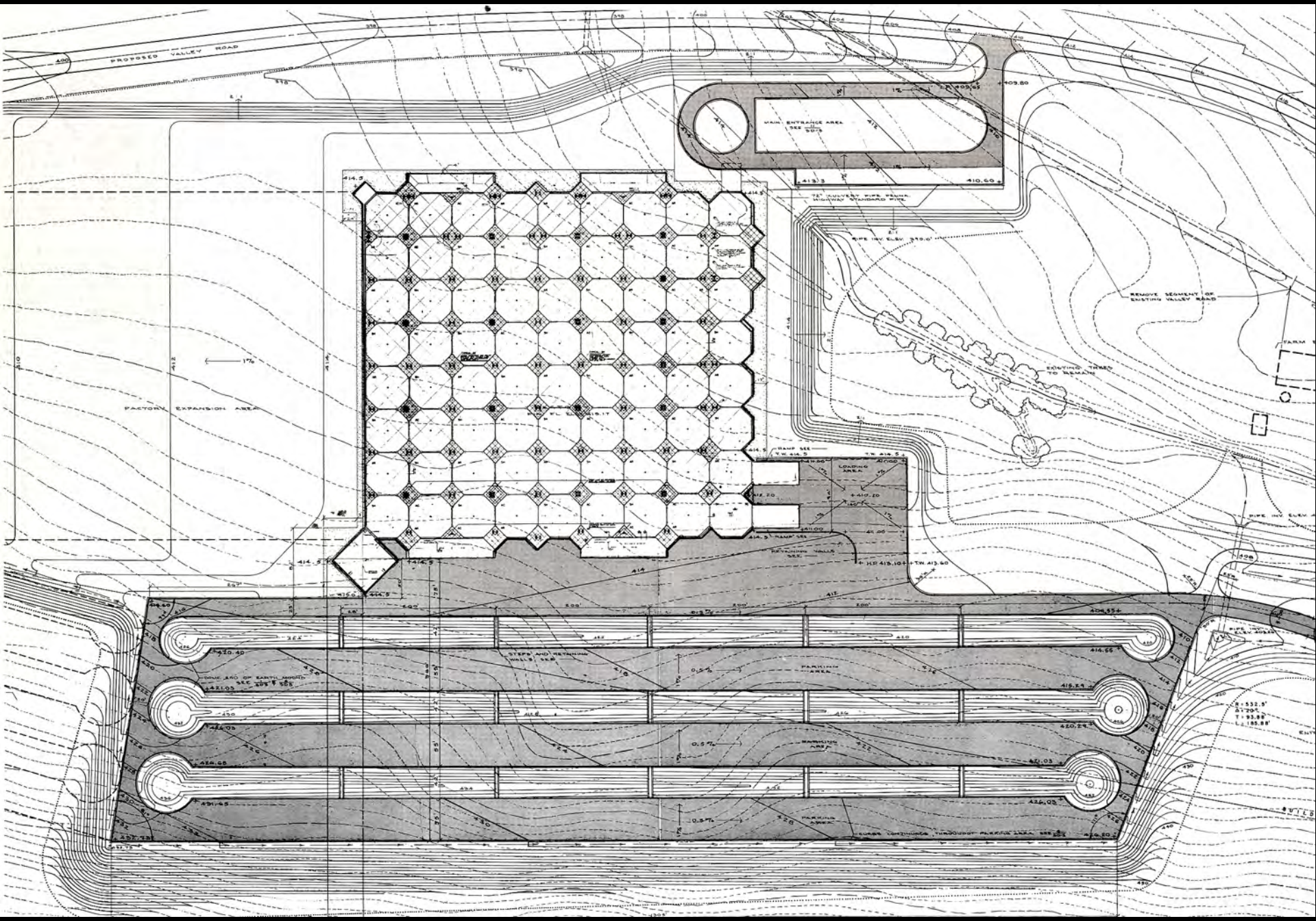


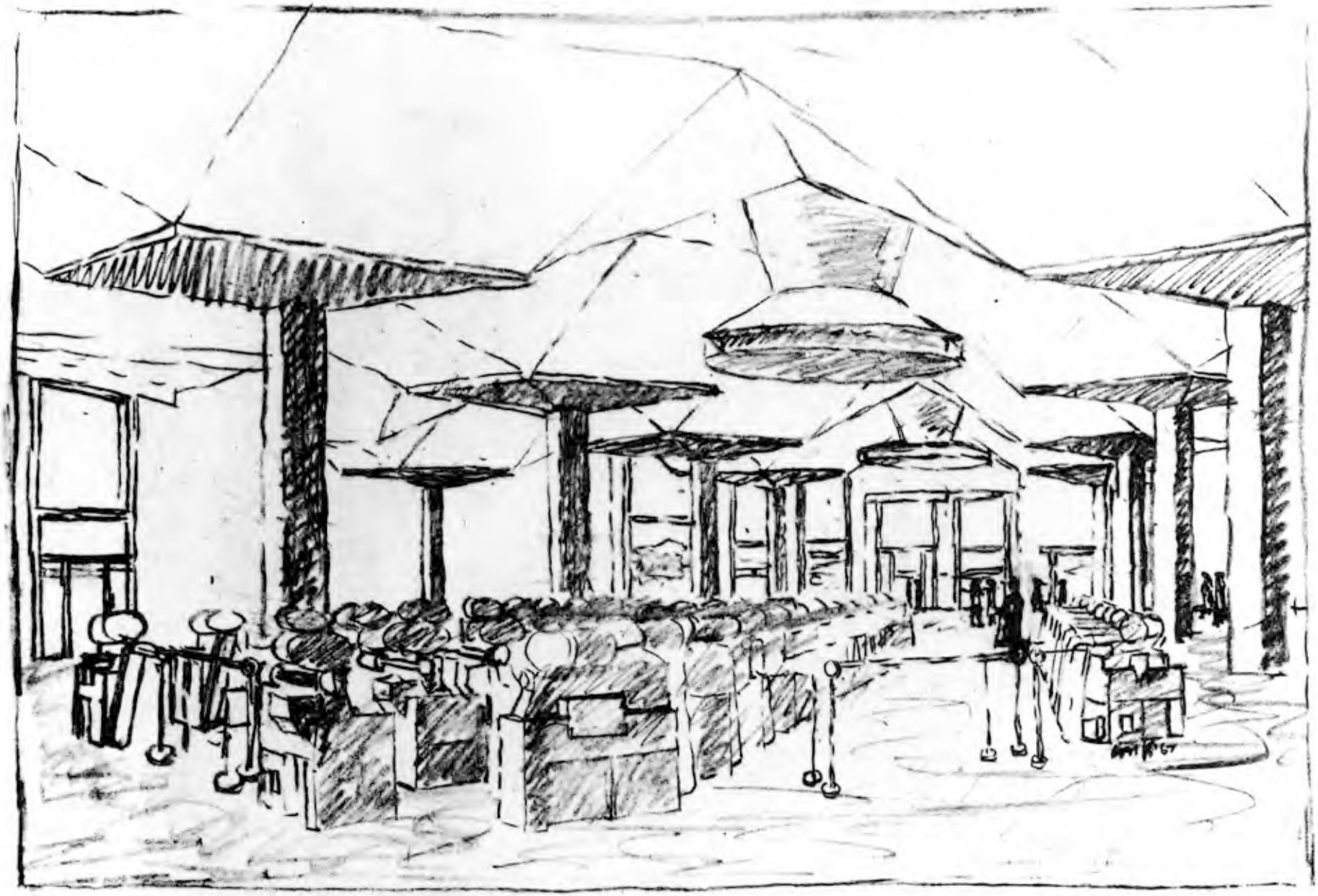




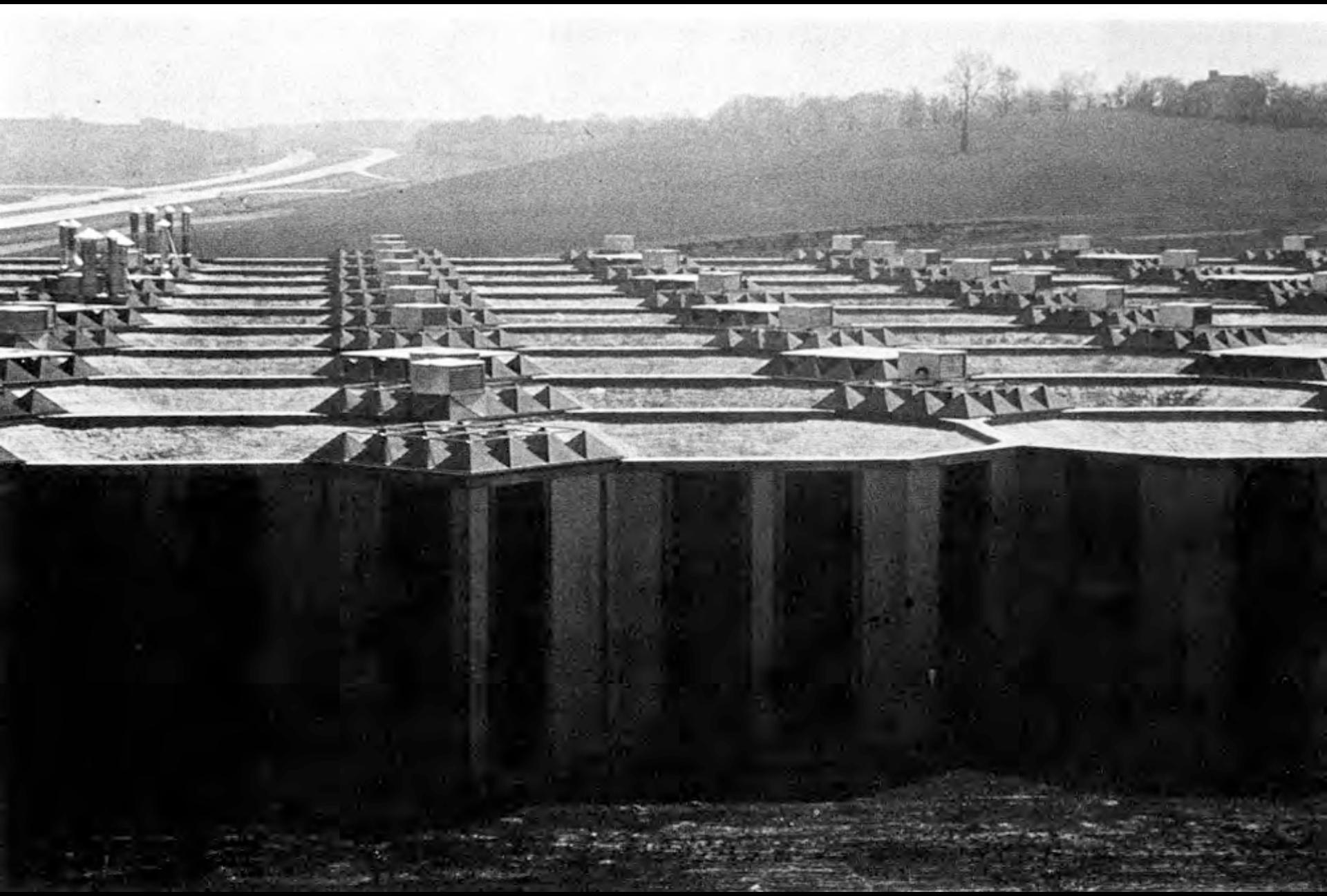


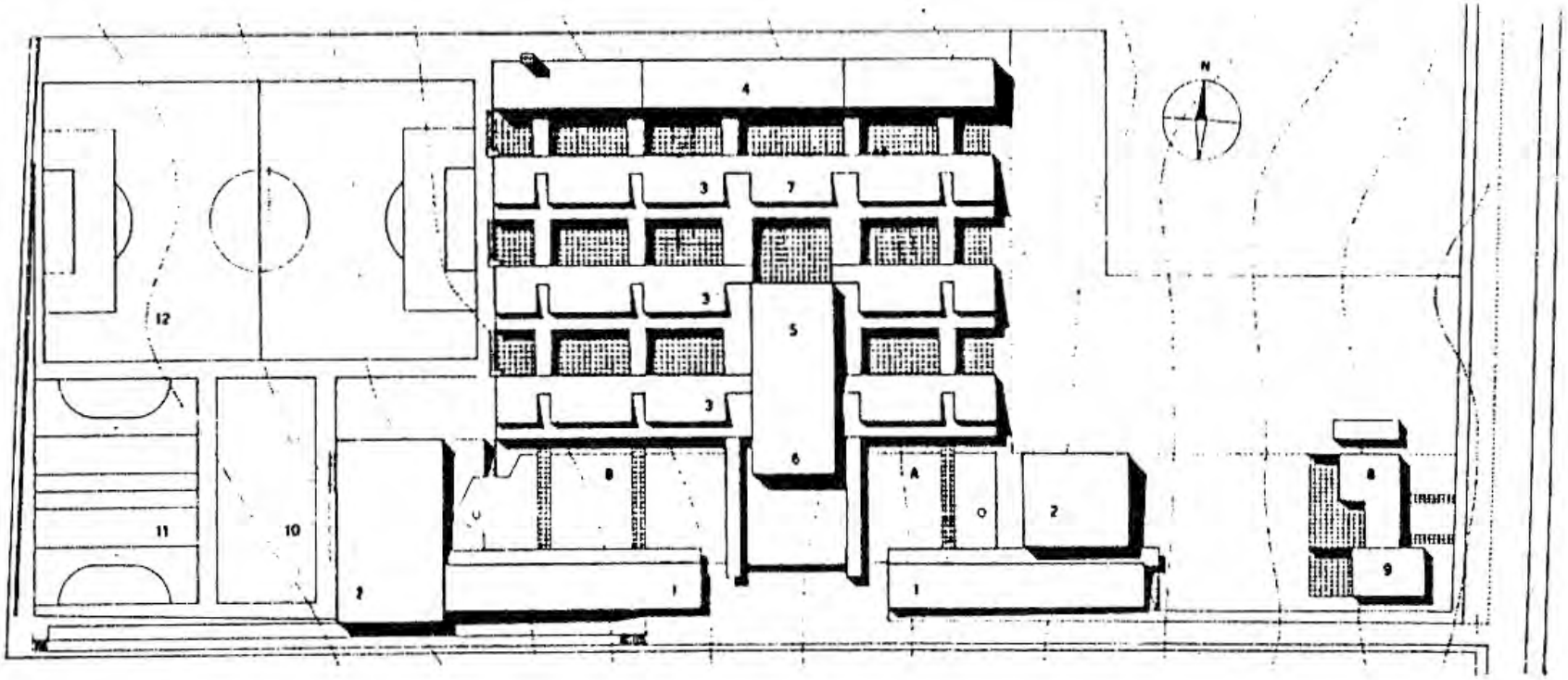



PROPOSED VALLEY ROAD
MAIN ENTRANCE AREA
72" CULVERT PIPE PENNA HIGHWAY STANDARD PIPE
PIPE INV. ELEV. 390.0'
REMOVE SEGMENT OF EXISTING VALLEY ROAD
EXISTING TREES TO REMAIN
FACTORY EXPANSION AREA
RAMP SEE
LOADING AREA
RETAINING WALLS SEE
STEPS AND RETAINING WALLS SEE
PARKING AREA
PARKING AREA
PARKING AREA
CURBS CONTINUOUS THROUGHOUT PARKING AREA SEE



Interior sketch

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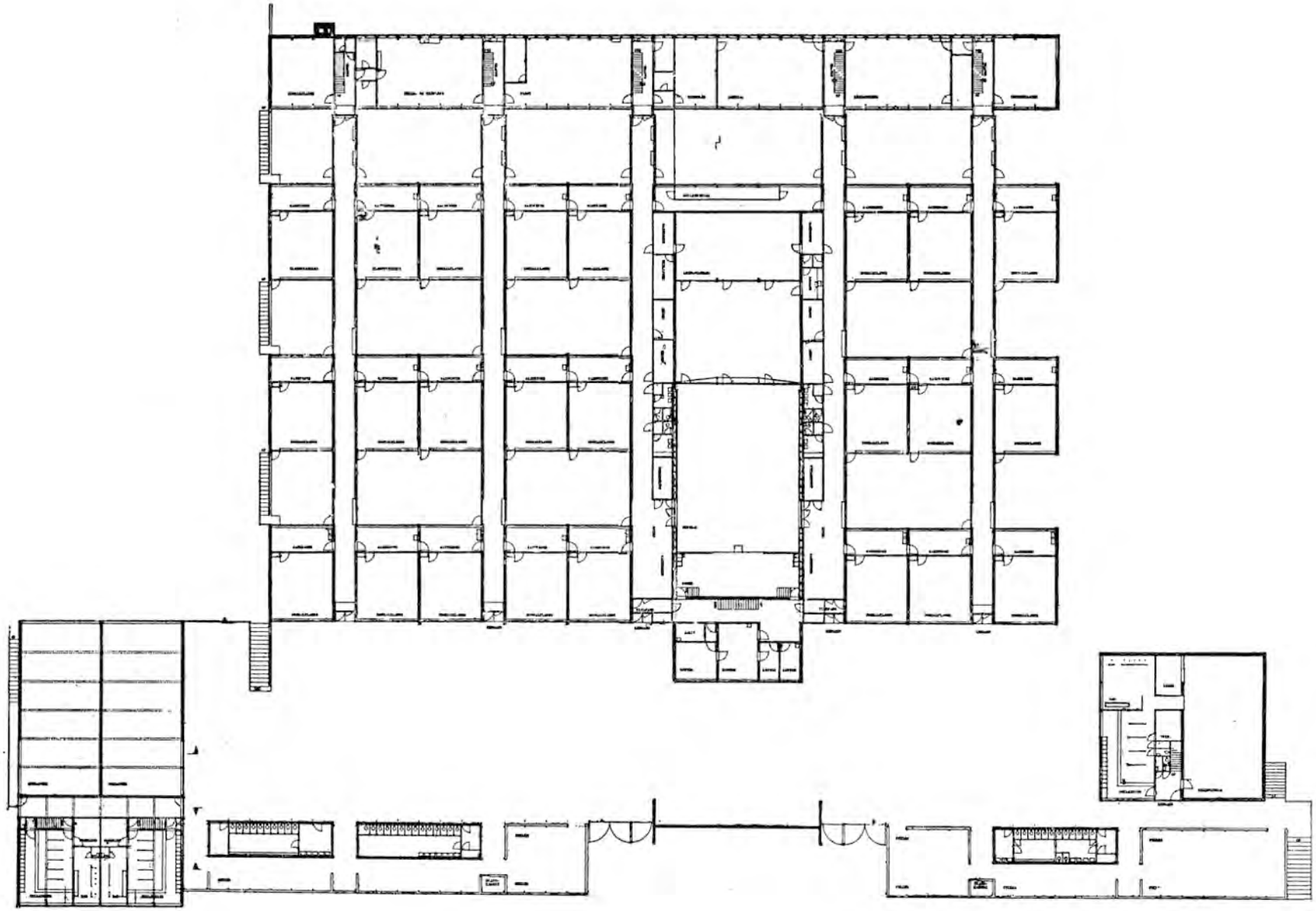
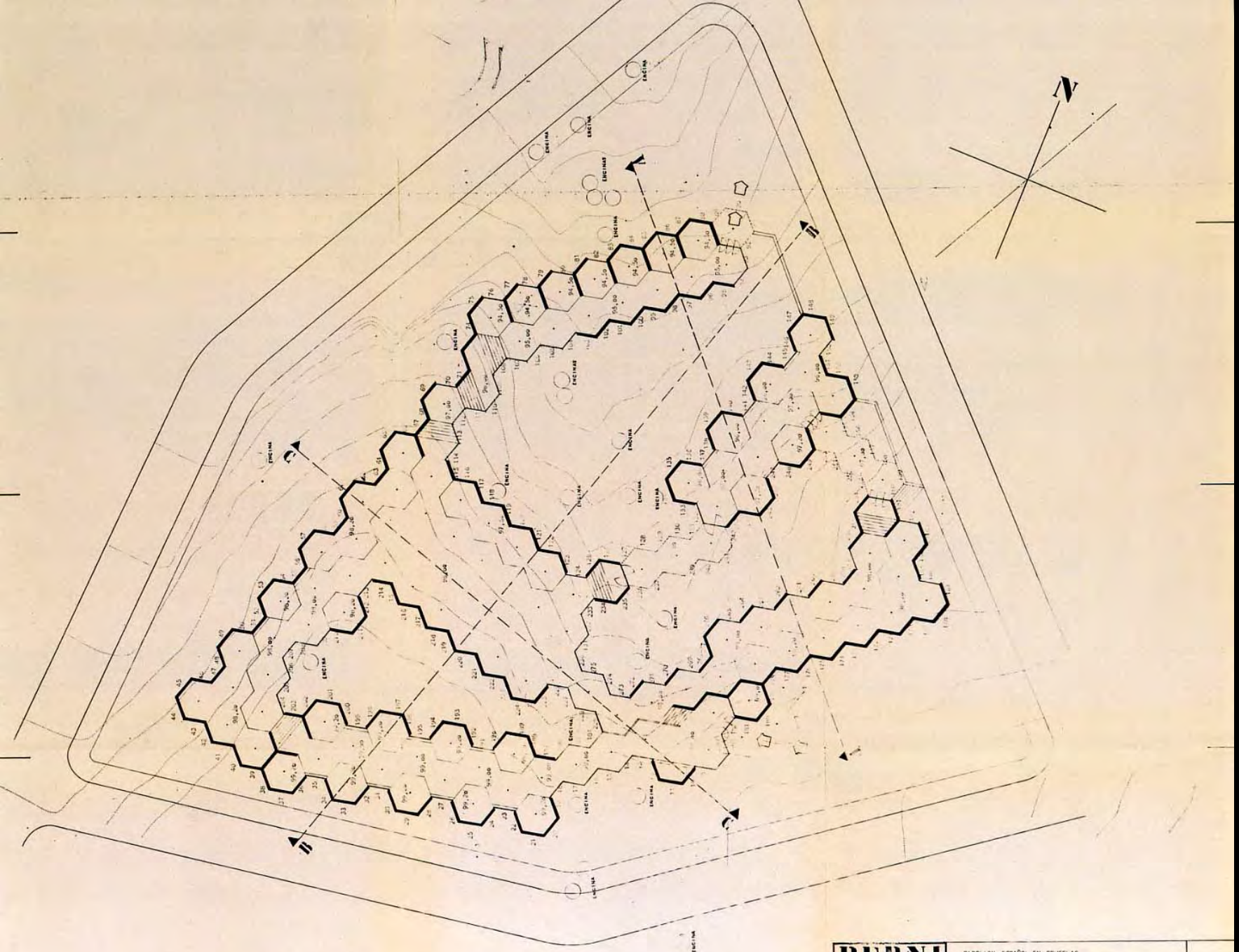


ESPAÑA RESUMIA LOS ACTOS
LOS UTENSILIOS DE TRABAJO
LOS ELEMENTOS DEL TRABAJO

345535
J.A.CORRALES, R.VÁZQUEZ MOLEZÚN
1r premi



PEBNI

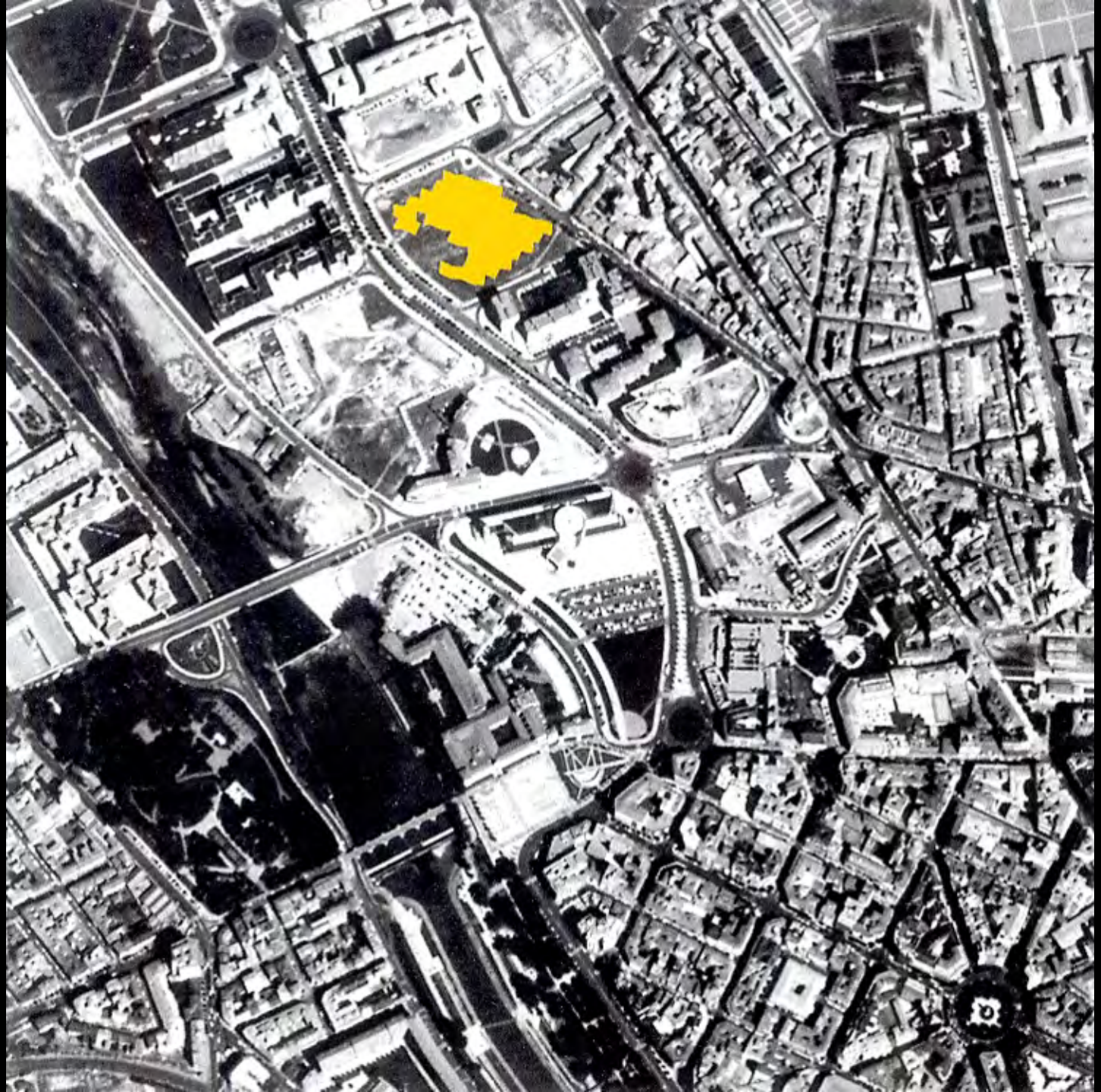
PABELLON ESPAÑOL EN BRUSELAS
NUEVA INSTALACION EN LA FERIA INTERNACIONAL DEL CAMPO

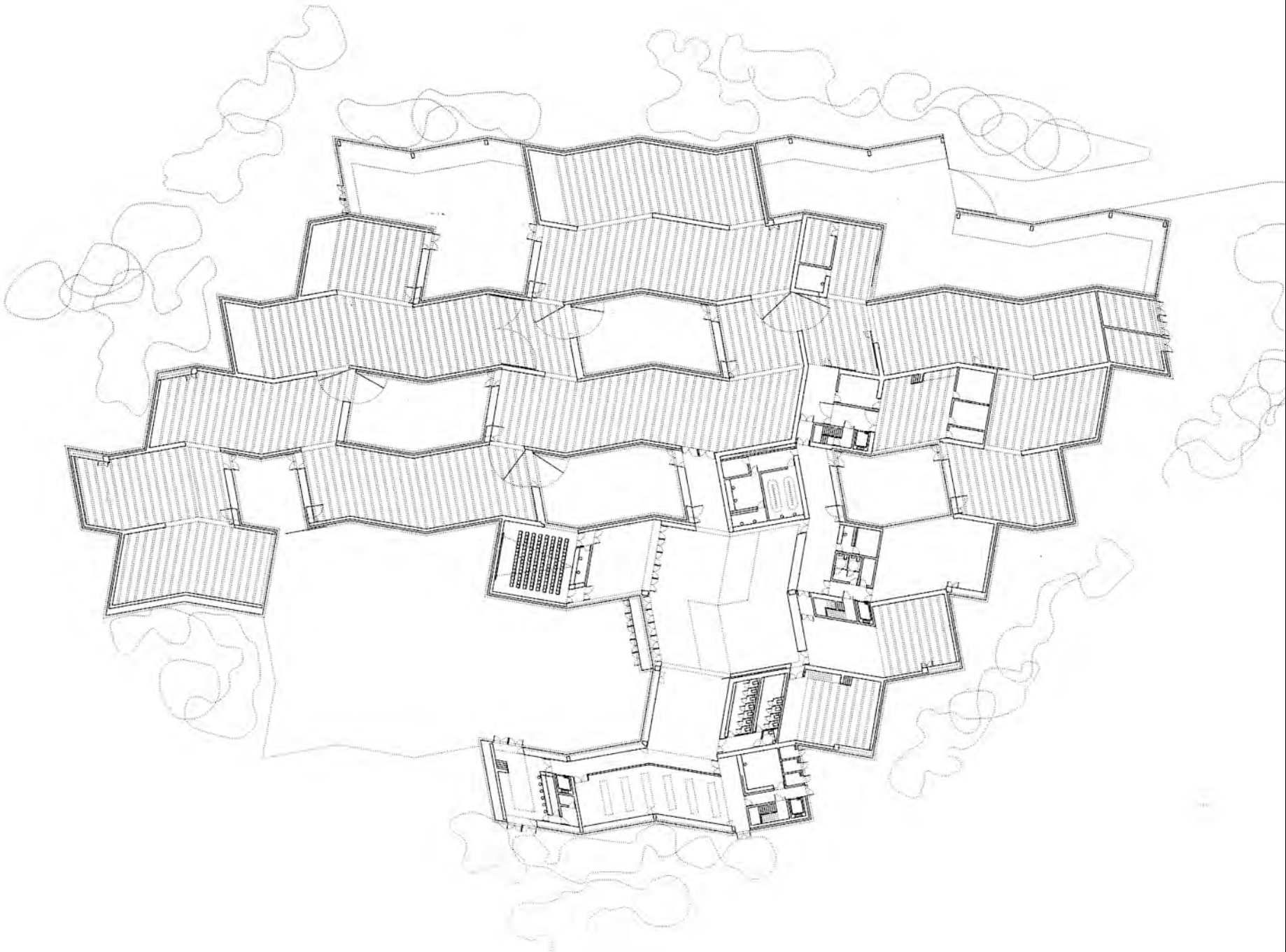
PLANTA BAJA

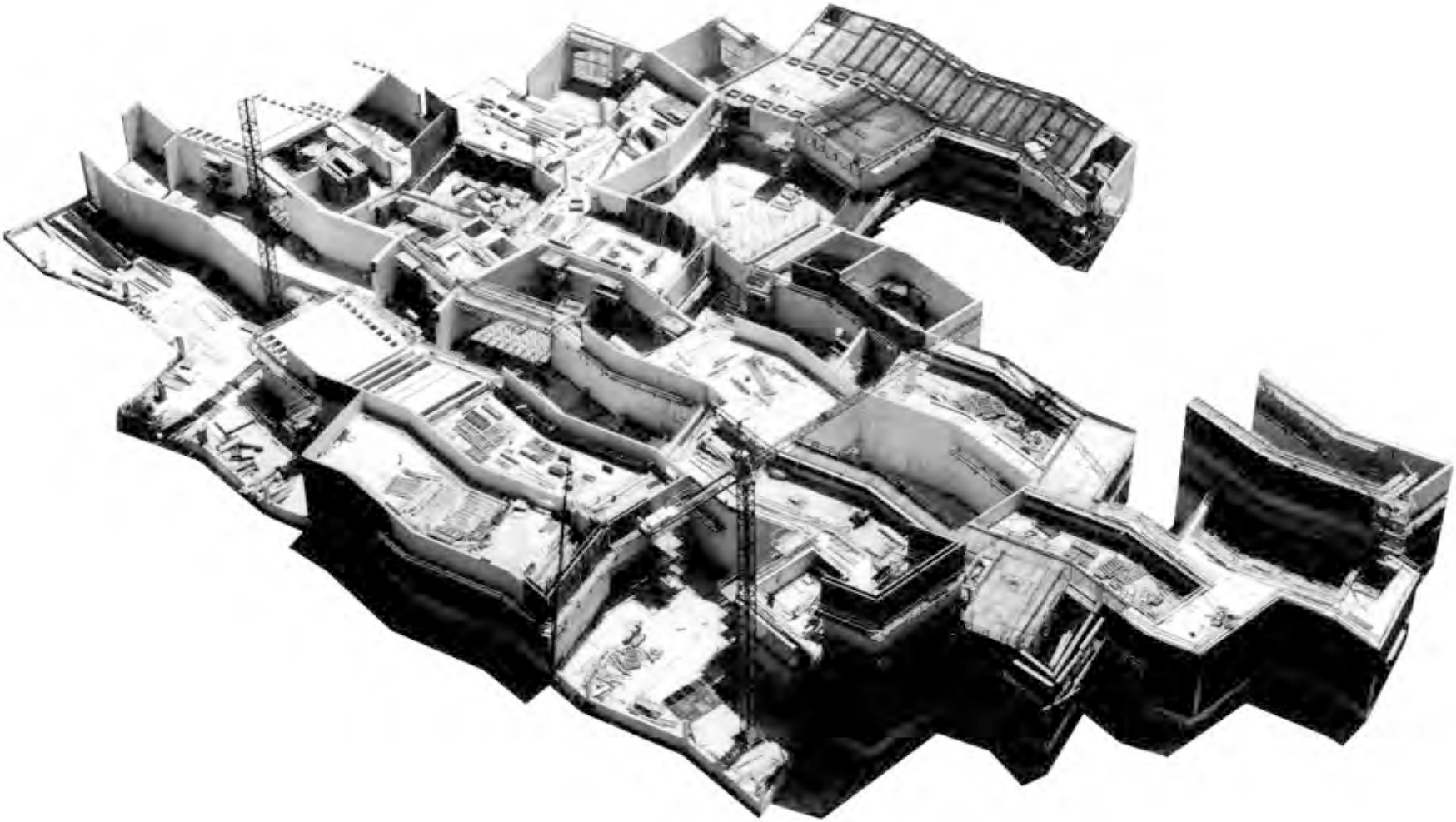
ESCALA 1:200

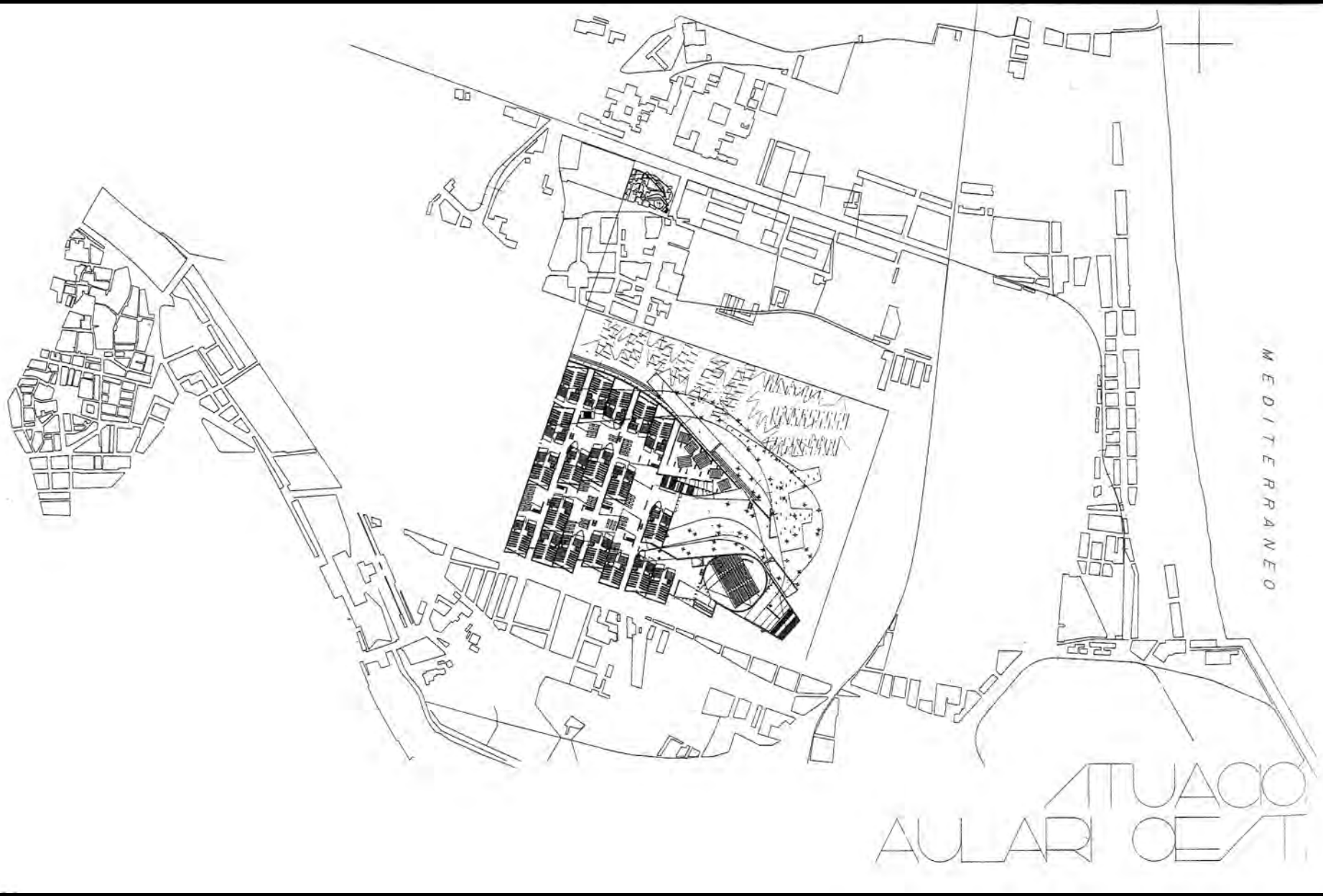
MADRID ENERO DE 1959

3





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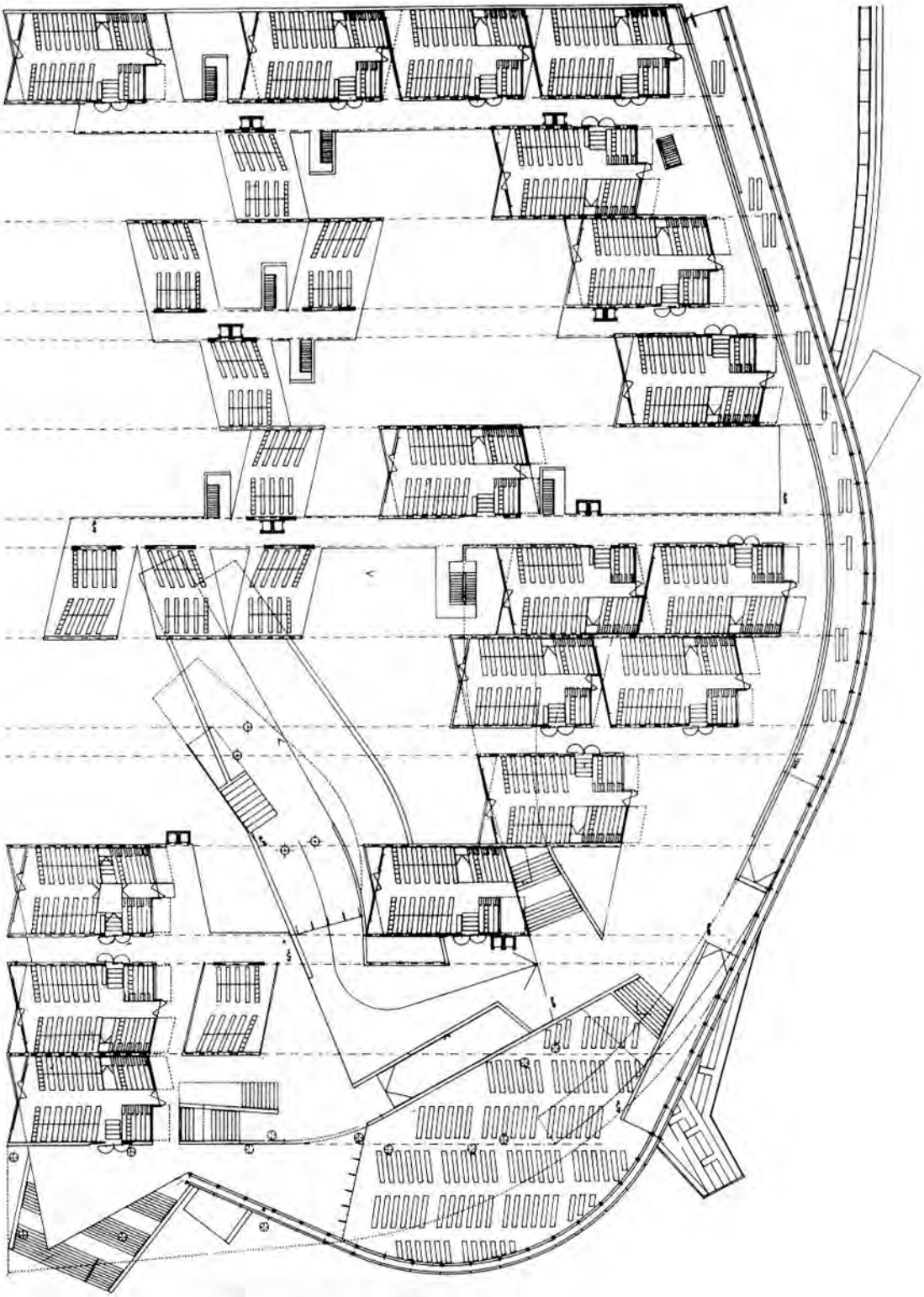

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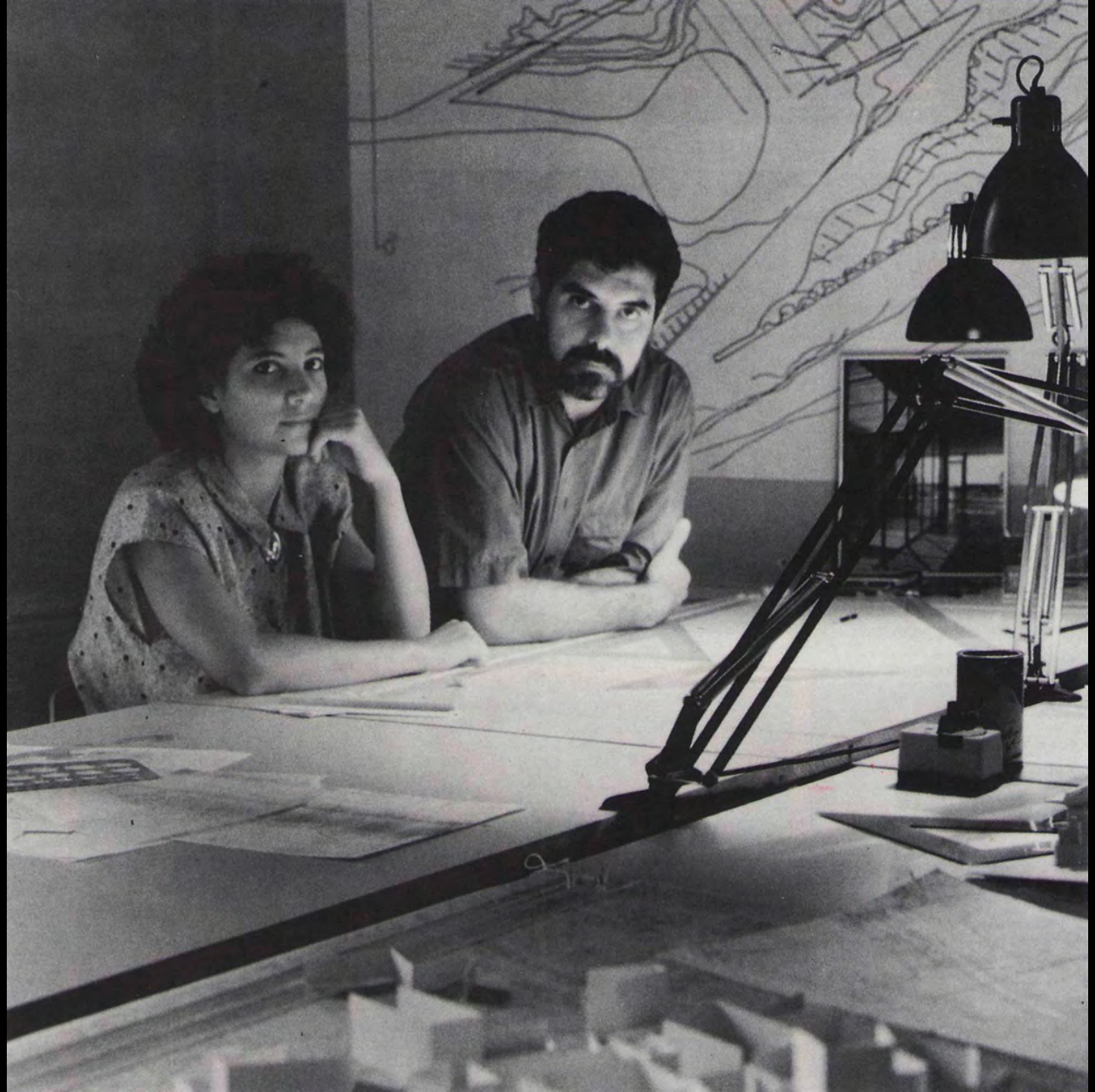
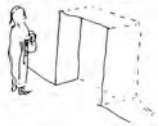


SMALL PLEASURES OF LIFE

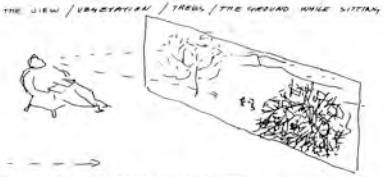
TO WORK OR WRITE AT A CREEPER BORDERED WINDOW

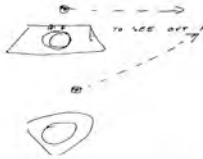
TO SEE THE SUNLIGHT SPREAD ACROSS THE FLOOR

TO STAND AND LOOK OUT WITHOUT GLARE

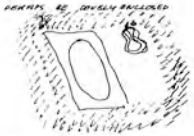


TO SEE THE VIEW / VEGETATION / TREES / THE GROUND WHILE SITTING

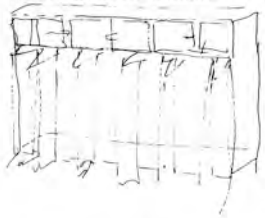




TO SEE OUT FROM THE BATHROOM
OR PERHAPS BE QUITE ENCLOSED

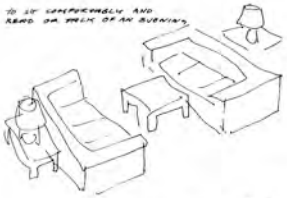


TO HAVE EASY ACCESS TO MEDICINES WITHOUT SEEING THEM PRESENTLY ALL THE TIME

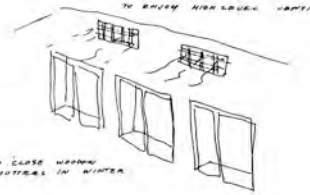


TO READ IN BED

TO SIT COMFORTABLY AND
READ OR WALK OF AN EVENING



TO ENJOY HIGH LEVEL VENTILATION, IN SUMMER

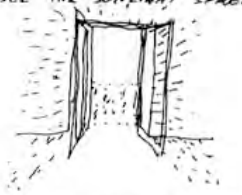


TO CLOSE WOODEN
SHUTTERS IN WINTER

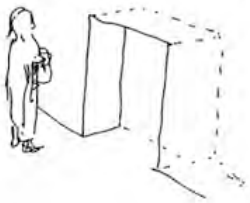
SMALL PLEASURES OF LIFE

TO WORK OR WRITE AT A CREEPER BORDERED WINDOW

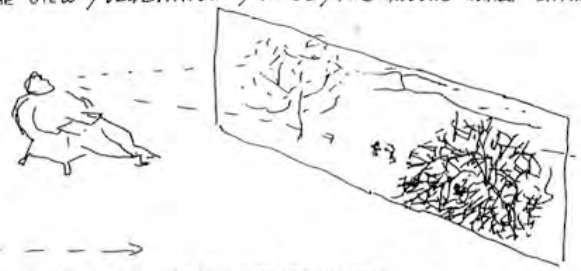
TO SEE THE SUNLIGHT SPREAD ACROSS THE FLOOR



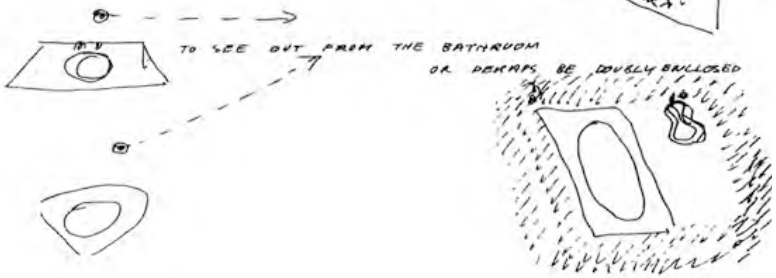
TO STAND AND LOOK OUT WITHOUT GLARE



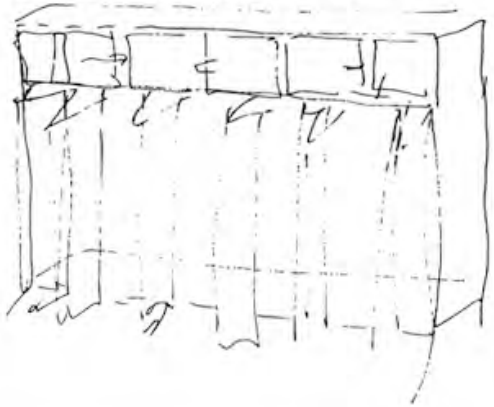
TO SEE THE VIEW / VEGETATION / TREES / THE GROUND WHILE SITTING



TO SEE OUT FROM THE BATHROOM
OR PERHAPS BE DOUBLY ENCLOSED

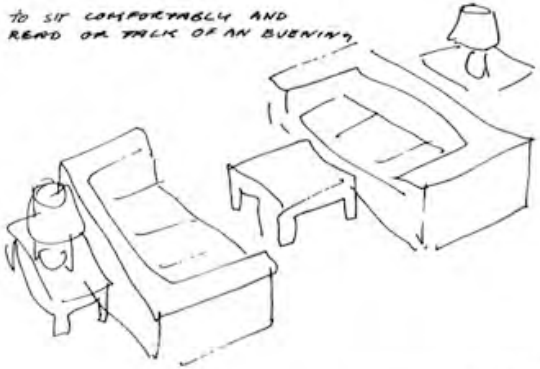


TO HAVE EASY ACCESS TO POSSESSIONS WITHOUT SEEING THEM PRESENCE ALL THE TIME

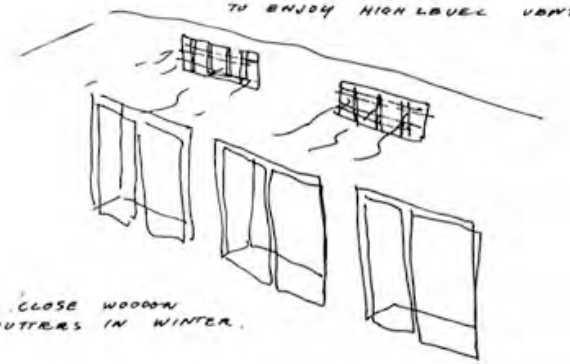


TO READ IN BED

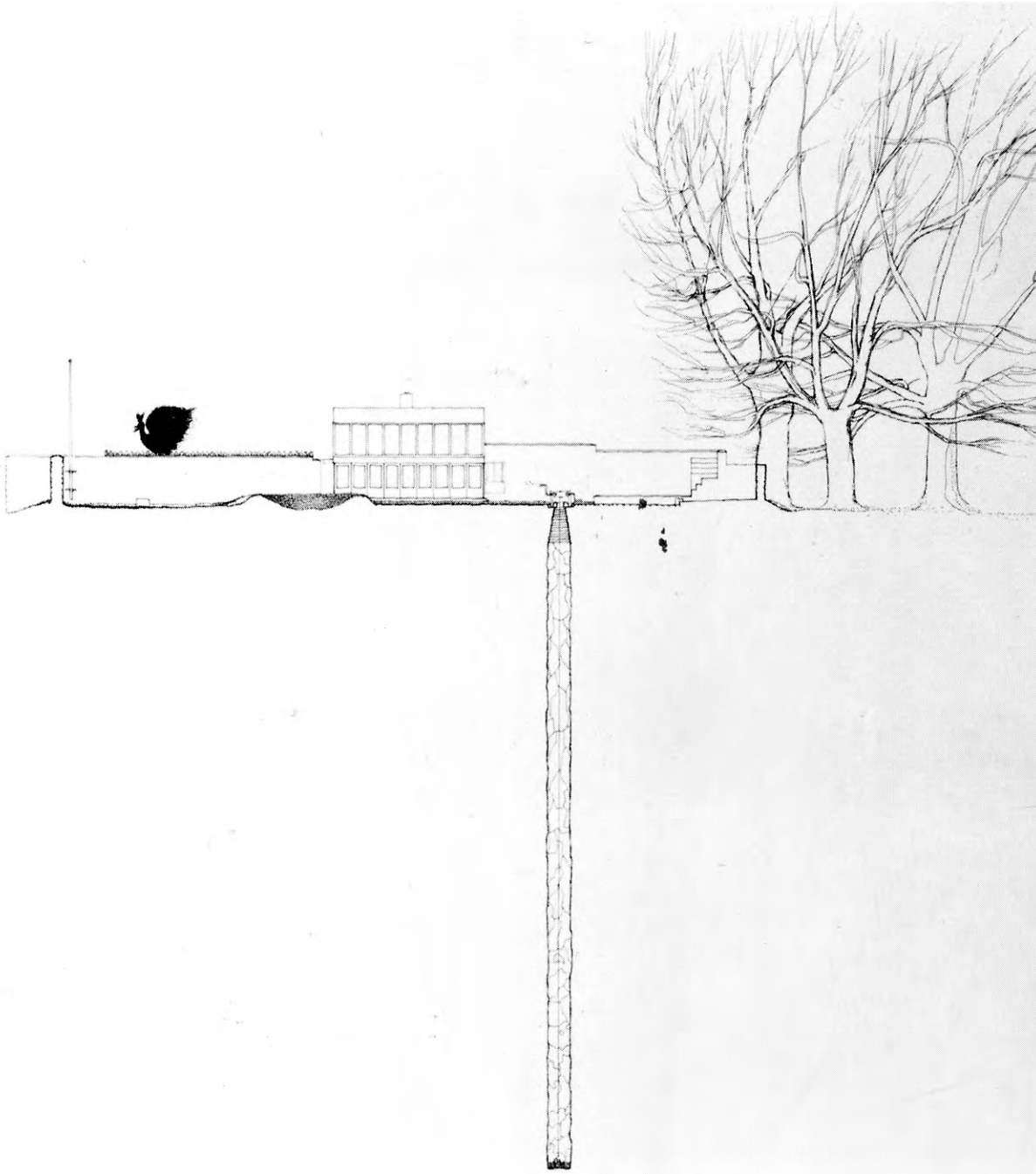
TO SIT COMFORTABLY AND
READ OR TALK OF AN EVENING

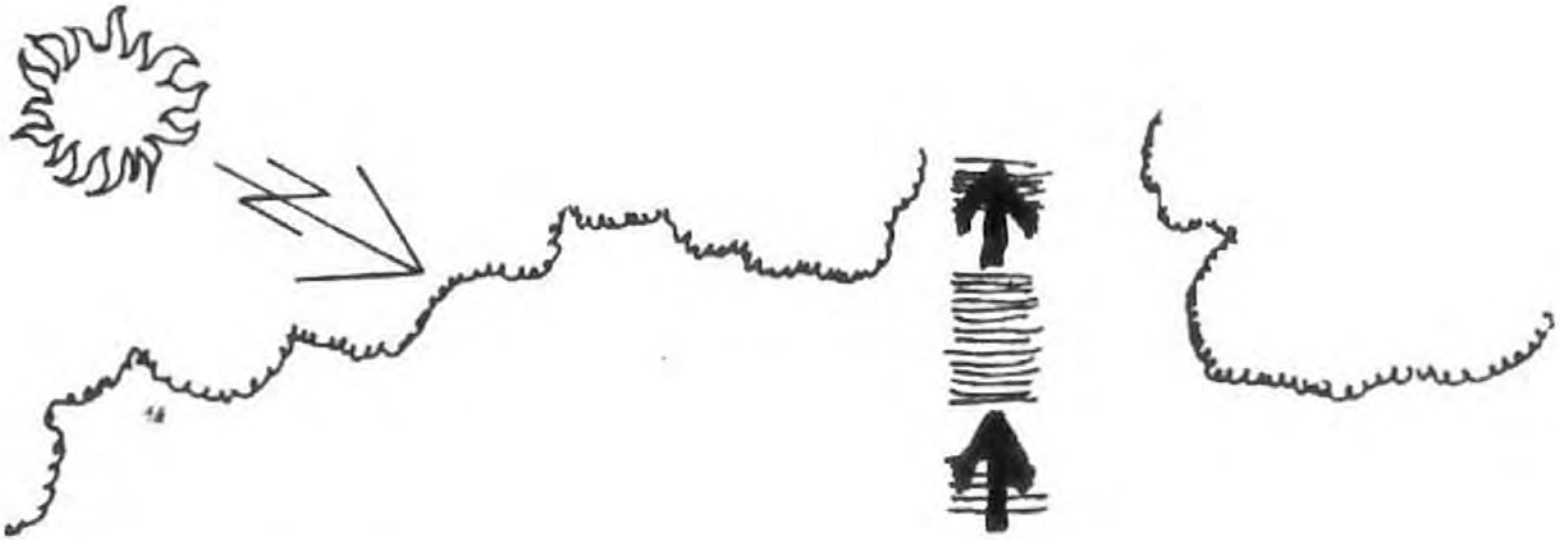


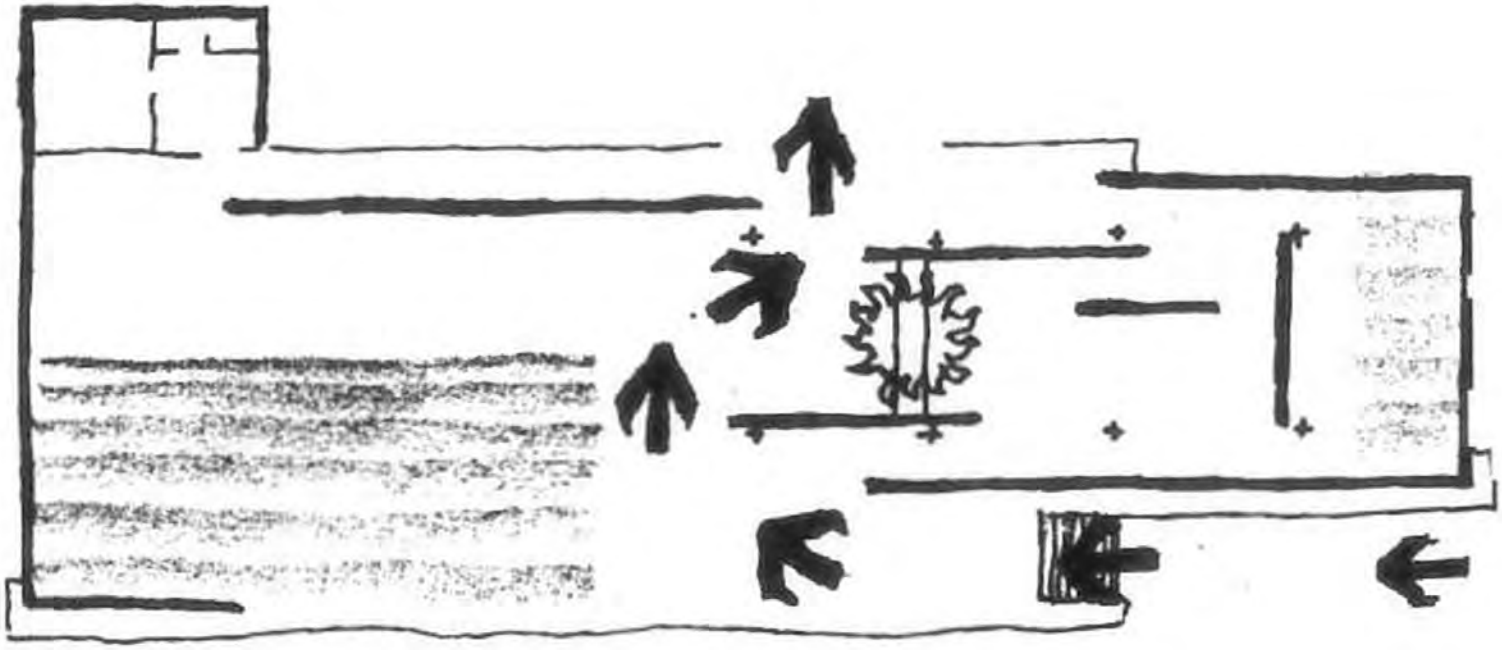
TO ENJOY HIGH LEVEL VENTILATION, IN SUMMER

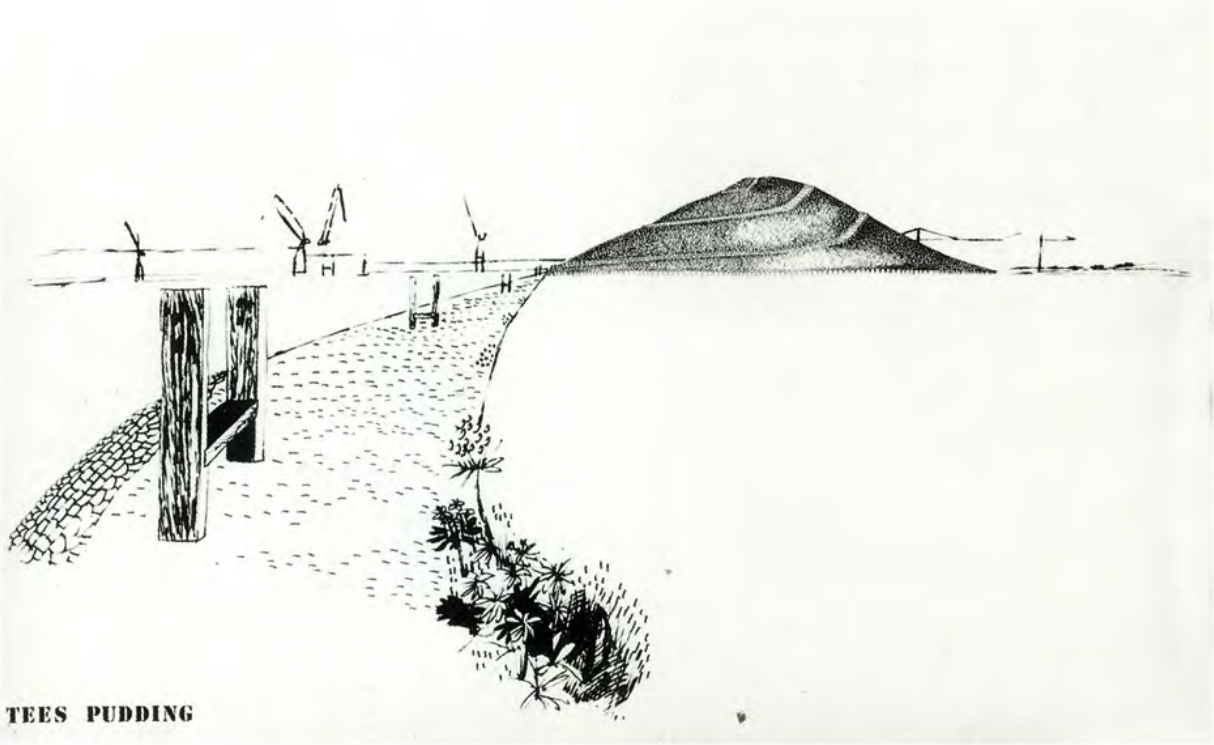


TO CLOSE WOODEN
SHUTTERS IN WINTER.









TEES PUDDING