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Spring 1994

## Revealing Res Publica: The Architecture of Democracy

Lea Ciavarra

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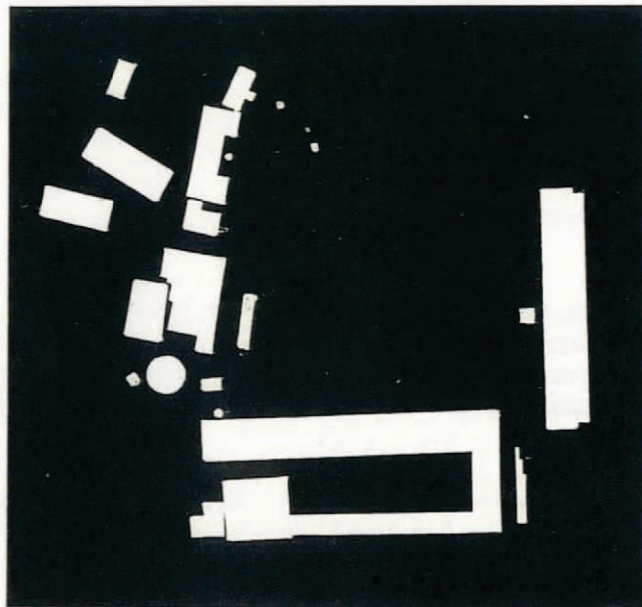
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**REVEALING RES PUBLICA**  
*The Architecture of Democracy*

*A Town Hall and Square for Georgetown*



**Lea Ciavarra**

**Thesis Proposal**  
April 21, 1994

**Thesis Advisor**  
Theodore L. Brown

**Thesis Committee**  
Christopher Gray  
Arthur McDonald

"...in addition to displaying power there is another essential meaning which an architecture of democracy can represent, which Greek architecture presented: that is **the public realm itself, what Hannah Arendt calls the 'space of appearances'**. This is the theatrical space which public architecture both actualises and symbolises at the same time. It is not the dramatisation of power, but rather the plurality of contending positions which struggle for power in public. **The hidden tradition of a democratic 'space of appearance' must be made visible...**"

-Charles Jencks & Maggie Valentine

"The Architecture of Democracy: The Hidden Tradition"

In a decade of cold wars ending, walls coming down and nations dividing, we are experiencing a "renaissance" of democracy, of sorts, worldwide. Nevertheless, Americans continue to remain politically complacent and somewhat jaded when confronted with the meanings and implications of even simply the word "democracy." Those who dare to speak it run the risk of sounding either incredibly naive, or incredibly cynical.

Despite the fact that today notions of Jeffersonian ideals of democracy are in many ways obsolete, there still exists a pervading sense that we [Americans] are continually trying to regain something we have lost. Perhaps it is not as far gone as we might think; or perhaps it just needs to be revealed...

The intention of this thesis is to explore how ideas of democracy can be revealed in architecture. Issues concerning the manner in which a democracy or representative government *represents* itself, as opposed to that of the autocratic structured government are central to beginning this study. This thesis will demonstrate that form is, indeed, informed by content in this opposition.

The constituent elements of an architecture of democracy will be identified by looking critically at the set of building types and expressions that have previously attempted to define such an architecture. The definition and creation of a public realm or public sphere will be proposed as the *fundamental element* in an architecture of democracy.

Today, this critical urban component, *res publica*, is no longer visible in many American cities. American representations of civic and public domain will, therefore, be revealed as a way to begin a process of recovery.

This thesis proposes that "democratic architecture", as it will be defined, is a viable model of urbanism for the American city.

The vehicle I have chosen for the exploration of this thesis is a town hall and a public square for Georgetown in Washington, D.C. Georgetown is not its own municipality but rather a community or neighborhood within Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, it is physically distinct and has all the necessary urban components of "civitas", *minus* those of civic government. It has a dense urban fabric composed of residential and commercial buildings of an intimate scale, fully integrated. Additionally, it has the campus of prominent Georgetown University on its skyline, as well as a significant amount of "greenspace" provided through parks such as Dumbarton Oaks and Rock Creek Park. Finally, it maintains a polemical relationship to Washington. A city that actually existed prior to the founding of the nation's capital, Georgetown has since been subsumed by and overshadowed by the dominating Washington, and continually struggles to maintain its own identity *and* political autonomy.

***The Nature of Representation***

General issues of political representation in architecture must be explored through ideas of form, composition, scale and space.

***The Architecture of Democracy***

A definition of the architecture of democracy will be attempted through a critical analysis of, and reaction to, the set of building types and expressions that have previously attempted to characterize such an architecture.

***The Public Sphere***

The public realm or "space of appearances" is the place of debate and action in the polis. It is the location of the power of the public. It defines the entire social field of the city. The creation of a public realm is the most fundamental element in an architecture of democracy.

***Local Identity***

The reconciliation of the more universal expressions of democratic architecture with specific local conditions is a critically necessary part in making "civitas".

***The Nature of Representation***

Through the documentation and comparison of Michelangelo's Campidoglio, Mussolini's Casa del Fascio, Speer's architecture for Hitler, and Kirkland and Jones' Mississauga City Hall, the implications of form, composition, scale and space with respect to political ideology will be revealed.

***The Architecture of Democracy***

Analysis of *successful* democratic architecture found in early American types such as the meeting house, county courthouse and village green will be contrasted with *unsuccessful* attempts at Brasilia, Chandigarh and Washington, D.C., to uncover a viable model for the American city today.

Additionally, the land-grid will be analysed extensively in terms of its capacity to connect and converse as opposed to its capacity to dominate or oppress. It will be applied to allow for the existence of a web of spatial relationships within some rational order, as opposed to its being misapplied as a fixed order.

***The Public Sphere***

Analysis of res publica in a variety of urban settings will be demonstrated both *abstractly* through figure-ground and figure-ground reversal studies, as well as *perceptually* through sections, perspectives and axonometric drawings.

***Local Identity***

An in depth study of building fabric, building construction, language and materials in Georgetown will be done in order to celebrate the specifics of place.

Georgetown is a community of approximately 10,000 citizens. According to Plato and Aristotle this was the ideal size for the typical "polis", precisely because people could then get to know each other and collect in the agora to formulate political opinion.\*

Georgetown does not have an "agora", nor does it have the proper indoor facilities for town meetings. Currently all civic meetings are held monthly in various locations, from churches to university facilities. There is a significant need for "res publica" in this community.

As previously mentioned, Georgetown is not its own municipality. However, it does have a certain voice in determining its destiny. The primary organization serving the community is the Citizens Association of Georgetown (CAG). This organization will be the primary client in the execution of this thesis.

***A Town Hall and Public Square***

<i>Public Space and Council Facilities</i>	Lobby	3,000 SF
	Town Meeting Hall / Assembly Hall	3,400
	Council Chamber	3,200
	Council Member's Office	200
	CAG (Citizen's Association of Georgetown) Offices	1,000
<i>Public Facilities</i>	Committee Rooms	3,150
	Outdoor Public Square	10,000
	Market Facilities	1,500
	Municipal Archives	800
	Historic Preservation Office	850
	Gallery	1,200
	Day Care Facilities	1,300
<i>Administrative Departments</i>	Georgetown Police Substation	750
	Municipal Court	650
	Historic Preservation Office	900
	Building and Planning Department	450
	Georgetown Business and Professional Association Offices	300
	<i>The Georgetown</i> Newspaper Offices	900
<i>Service Facilities</i>	Maintenance and Custodial	200
	Public Toilets	600
	[Clock Tower]	
	[Significant Outdoor Lighting and Trees]	
<b><i>Total Gross Area</i></b>		<b>34,350 SF</b>

\*Jencks, "The Architecture of Democracy: The Hidden Tradition," A.D., p. 10.

<i>1751</i>	<i>original plat</i>
<i>1789</i>	<i>georgetown university</i>
<i>1802</i>	<i>chesapeake and ohio canal</i>
<i>1871</i>	<i>end of government autonomy</i>
<i>1889</i>	<i>flood</i>
<i>1890s</i>	<i>waterfront shifts from port town to urban neighborhood</i>
<i>1895</i>	<i>street names changed to conform with washington</i>
<i>1920s</i>	<i>waterfront classified as industrial</i>
<i>1949</i>	<i>whitehurst elevated freeway</i>

Georgetown is the oldest urban neighborhood in Washington.

Originally an eighteenth-century Potomac River port town, Georgetown was included in the ten-mile square set aside for the federal capital in 1791. As the nineteenth century unfolded, Georgetown lost its political, social and economic independence and became just another neighborhood in Washington.

The waterfront area is bounded by M Street on the north, Rock Creek on the east and the Potomac River on the south and southwest (Fine Arts Commission and the Department of the Interior). This area is considered to be a mixed residential and commercial area, distinct in character and history from the more residential area north of M Street.

The original town hall of Georgetown was located on the south side of M Street, just west of the intersection of M Street and Wisconsin Avenue. At some point prior to 1871 it was relocated to the site of the present day post office on 31st Street, one block north of M Street. [The specifics of these two buildings has not yet been ascertained.]

The "Incinerator Site" is an operable building site in the heart of the waterfront district. The site of an abandoned incinerator from the waterfront's industrial era, it is located on the corner of 31st Street and K Street, one block east of Wisconsin Avenue, one block north of the Potomac and one block south of the C&O Canal. This site (the specific boundaries of which have not been decided) is the proposed site for this thesis.



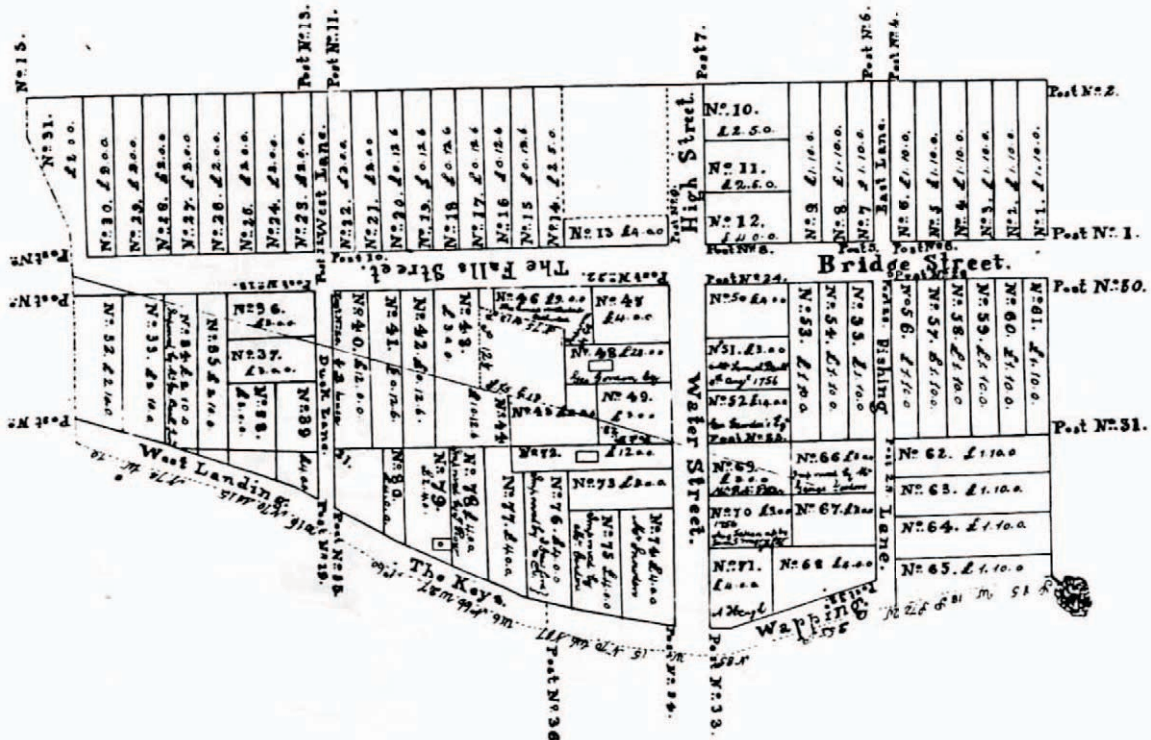








# Plat of George Town.



EARLY GEORGE TOWN





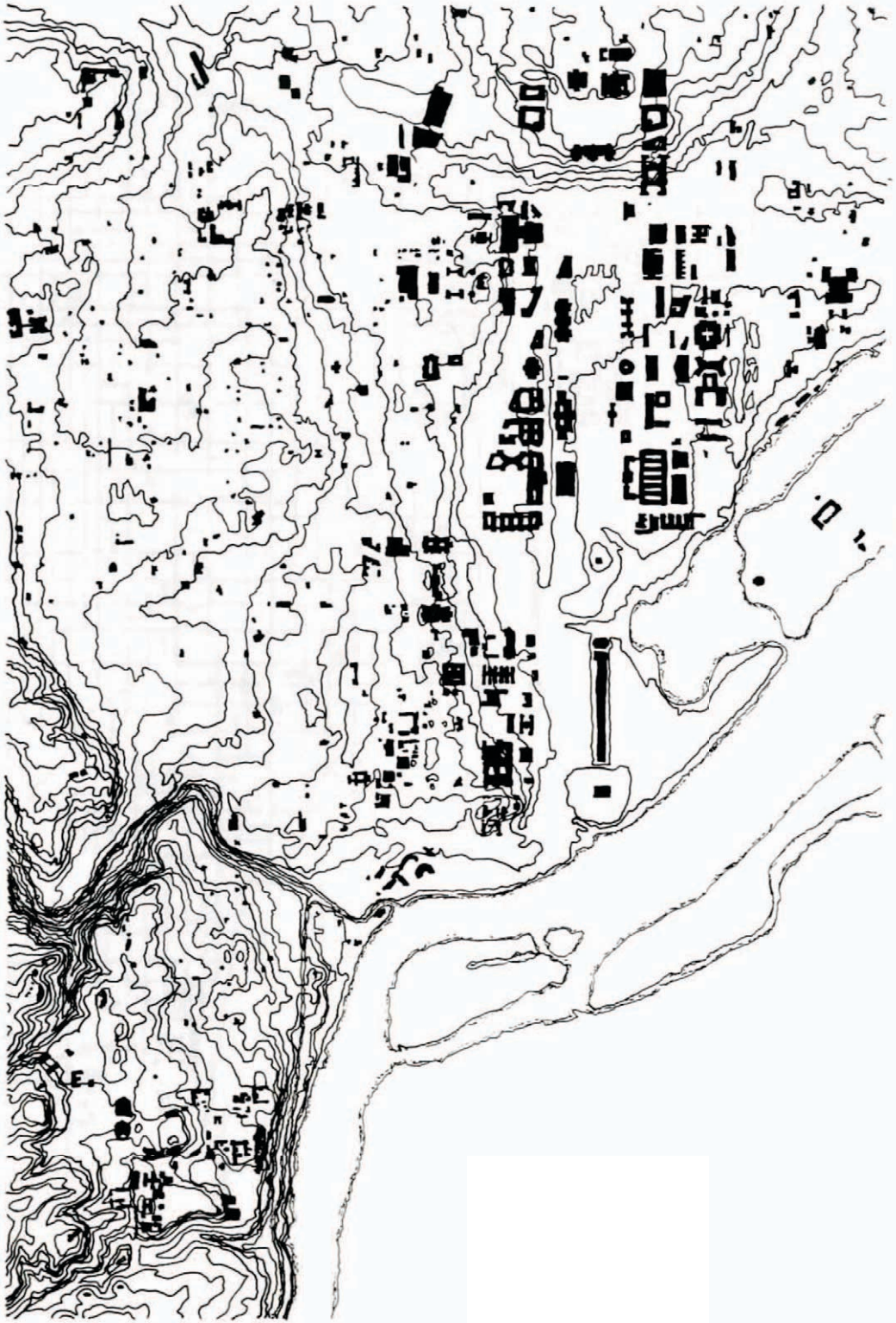


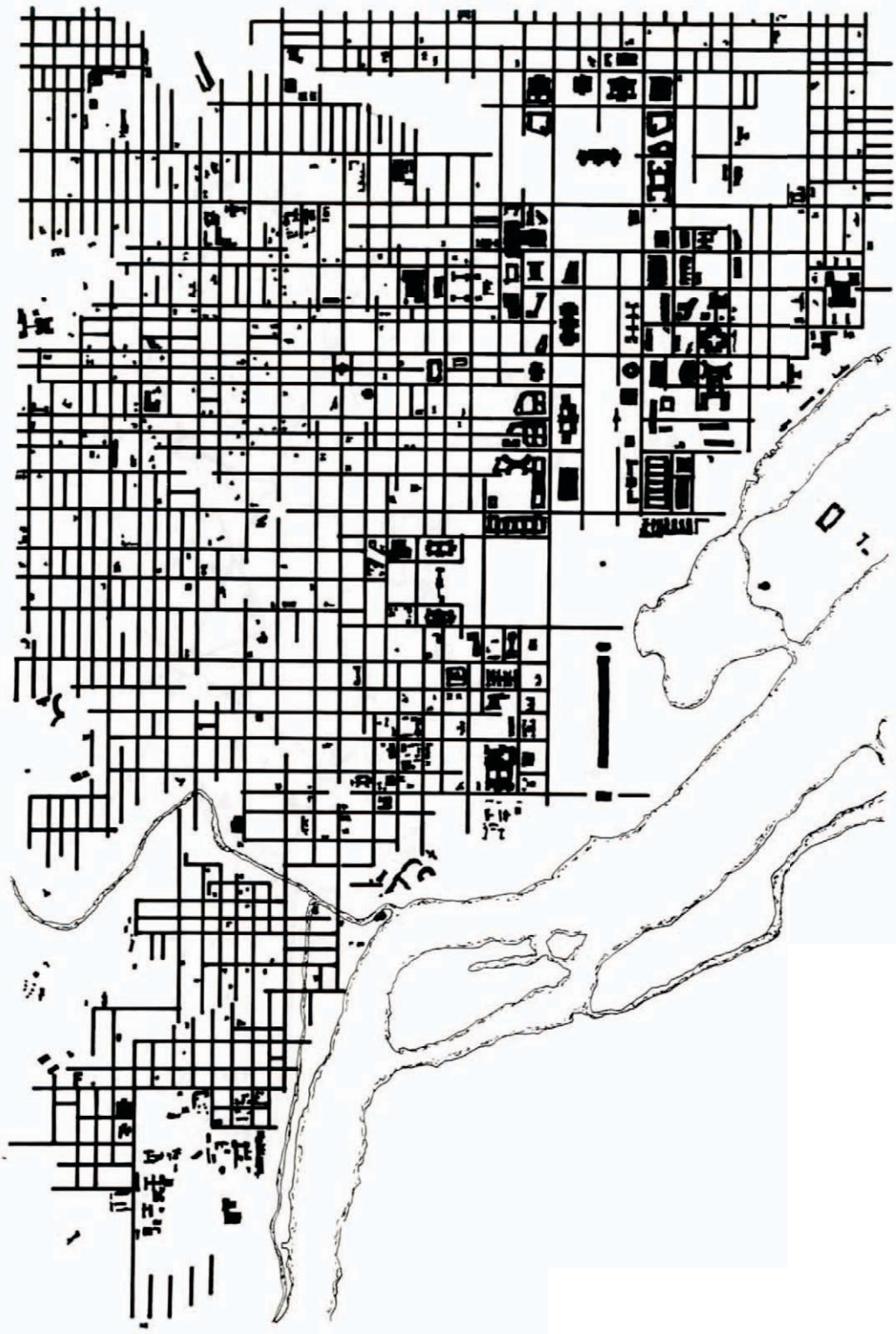


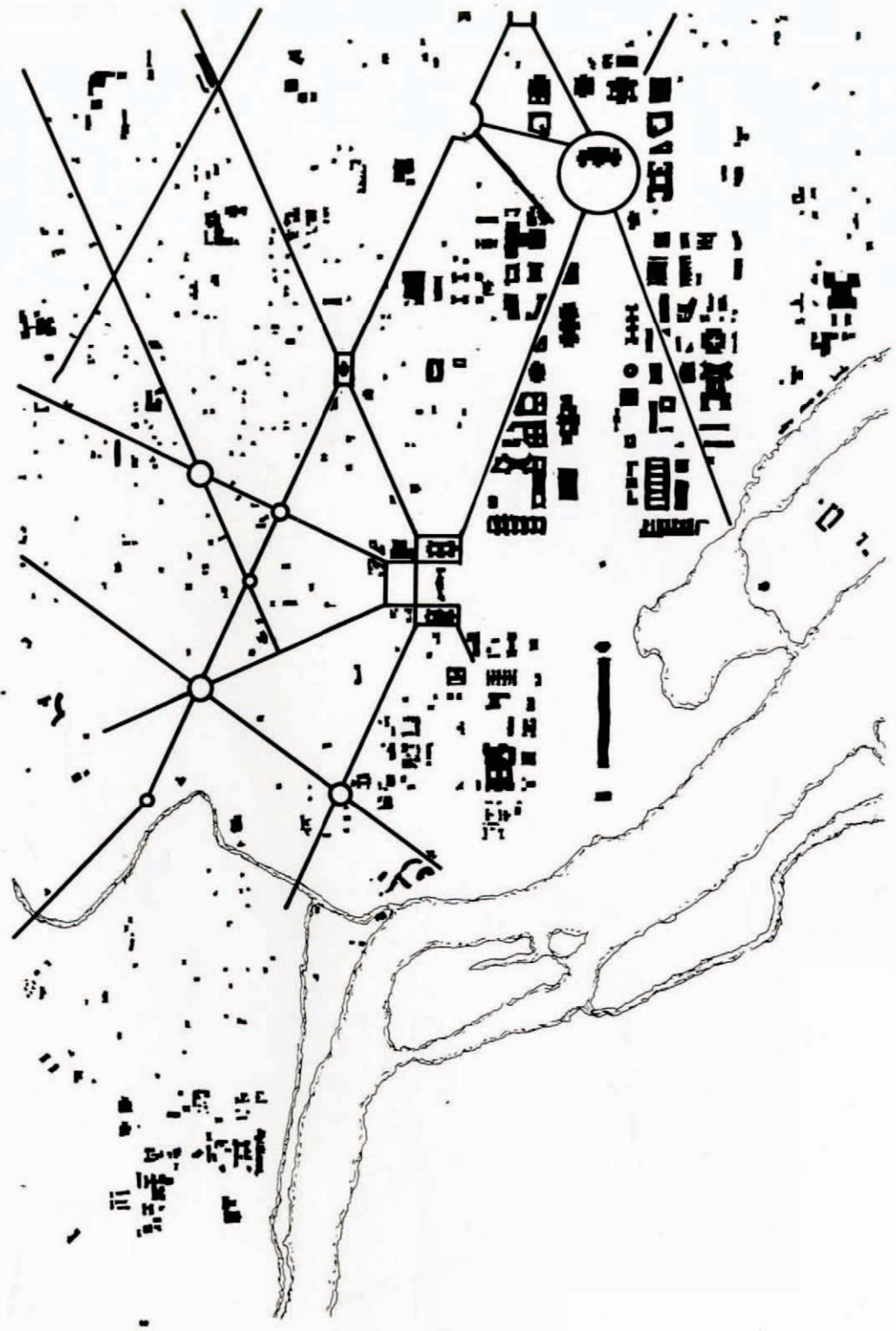




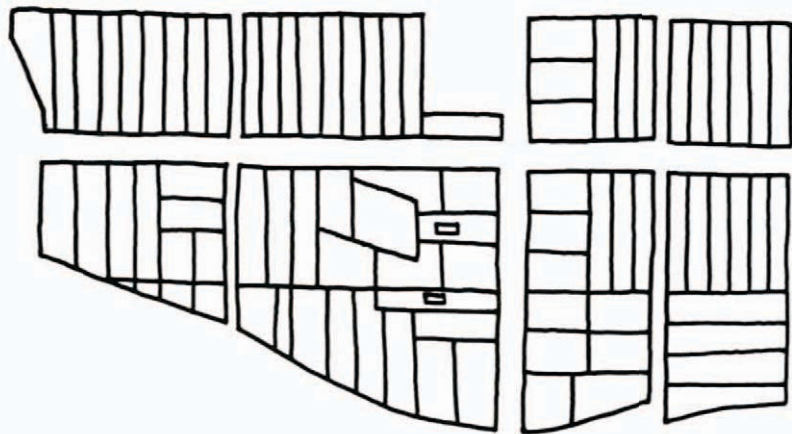
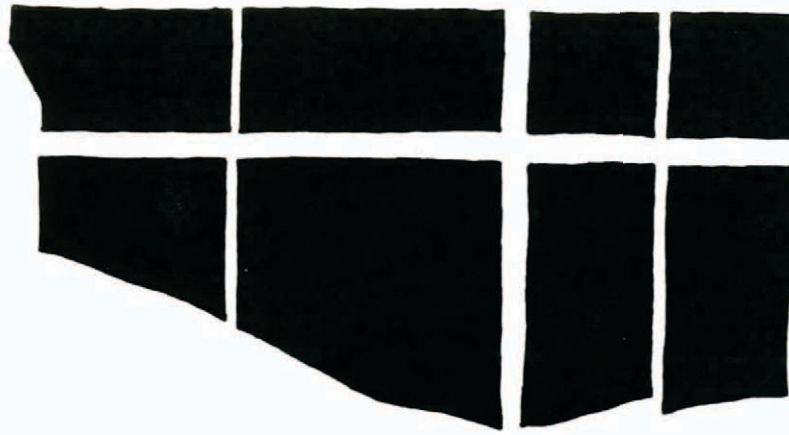




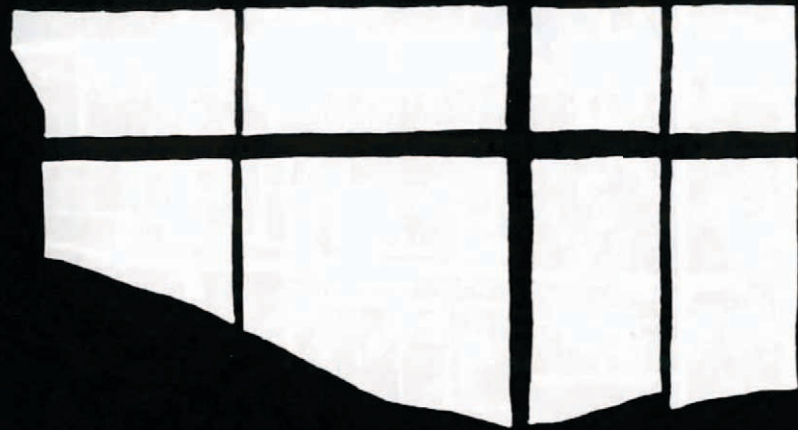


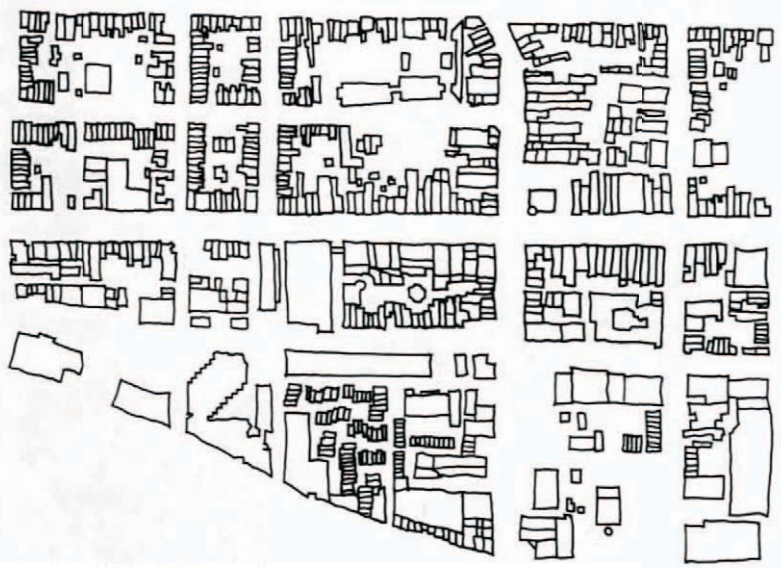
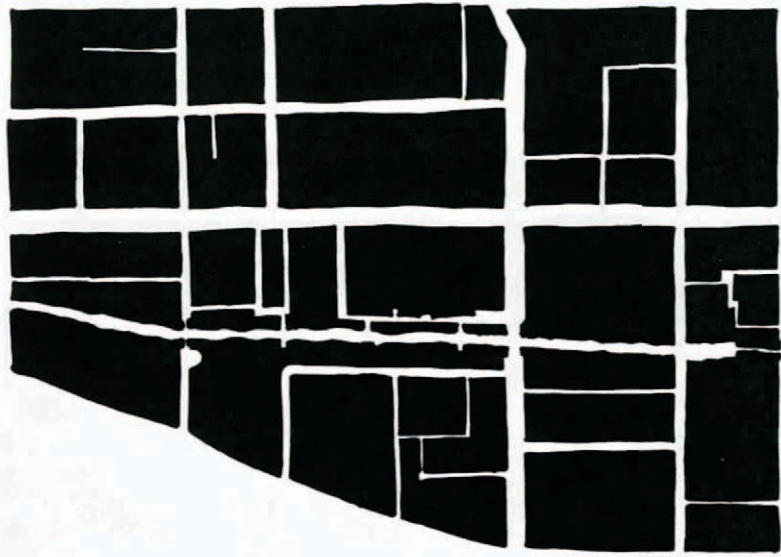


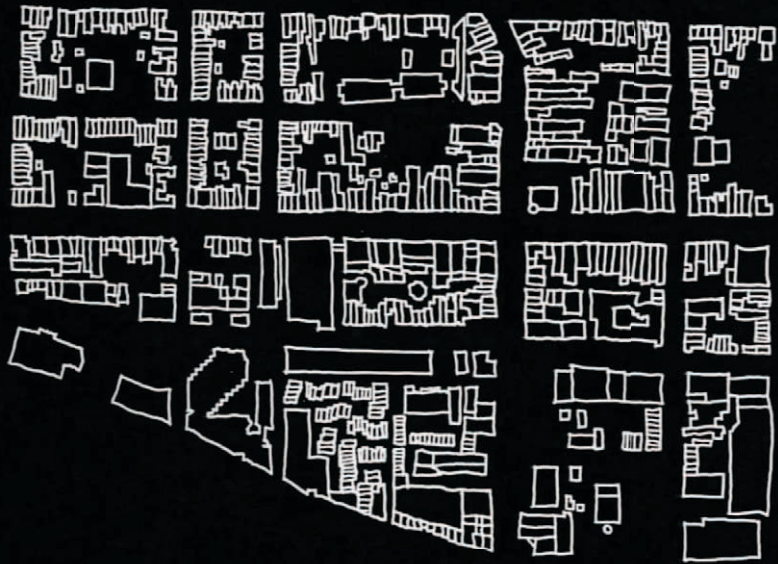




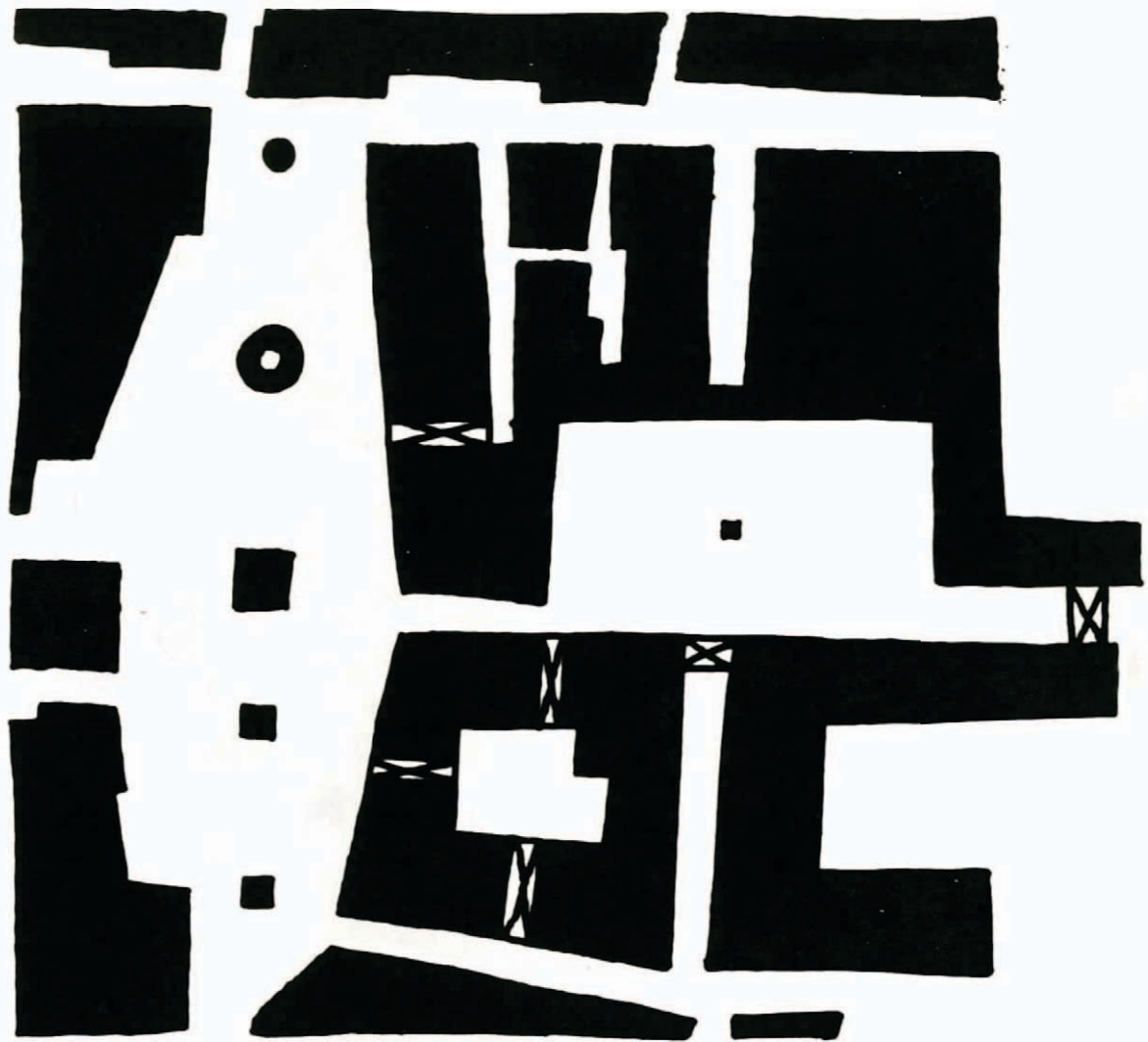


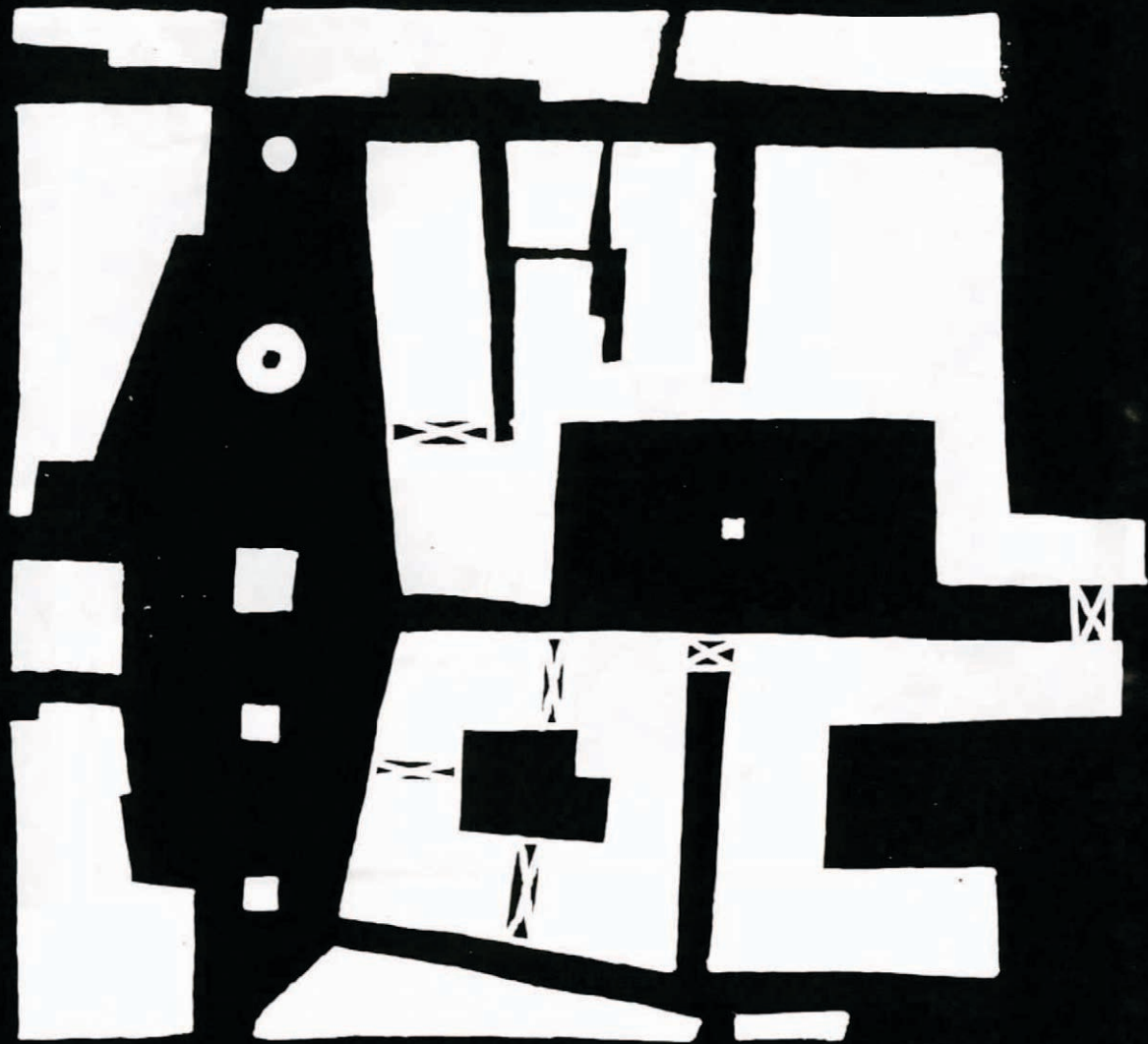


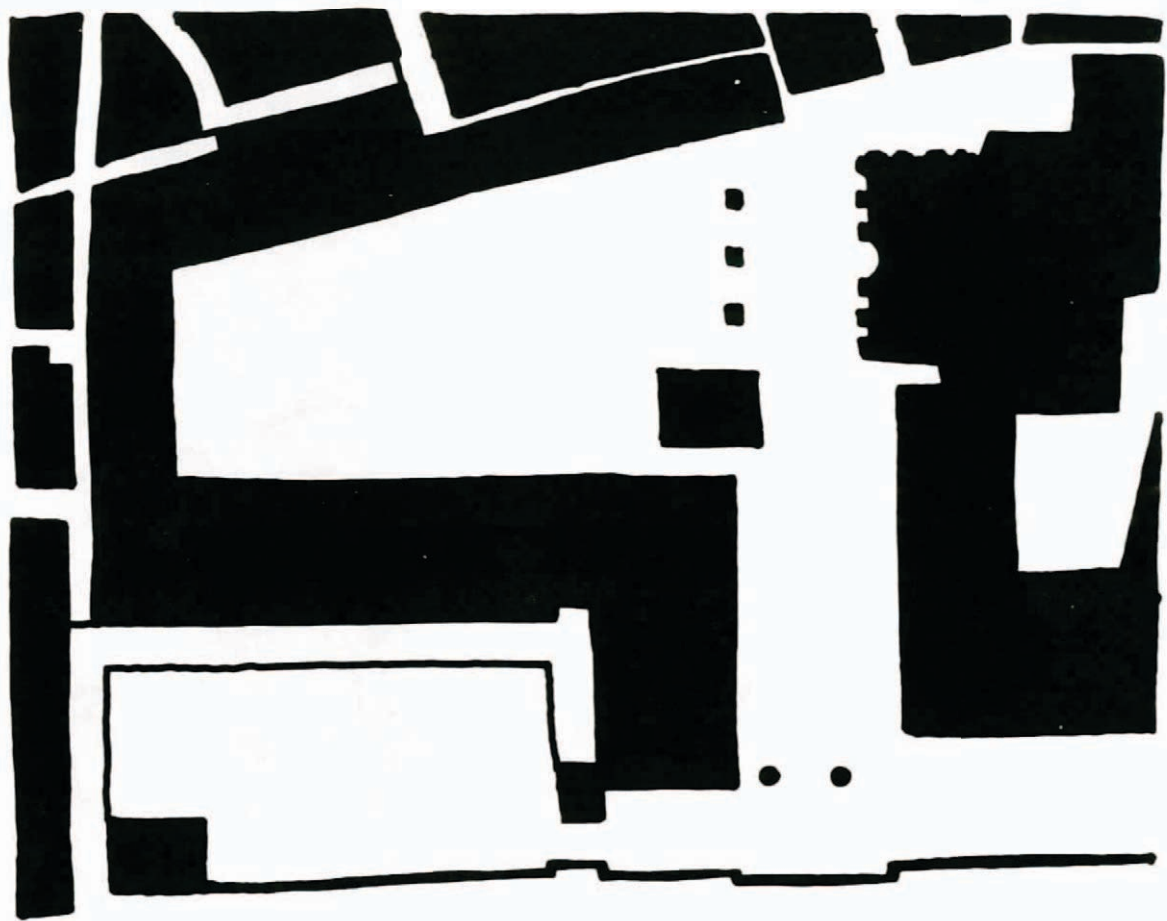


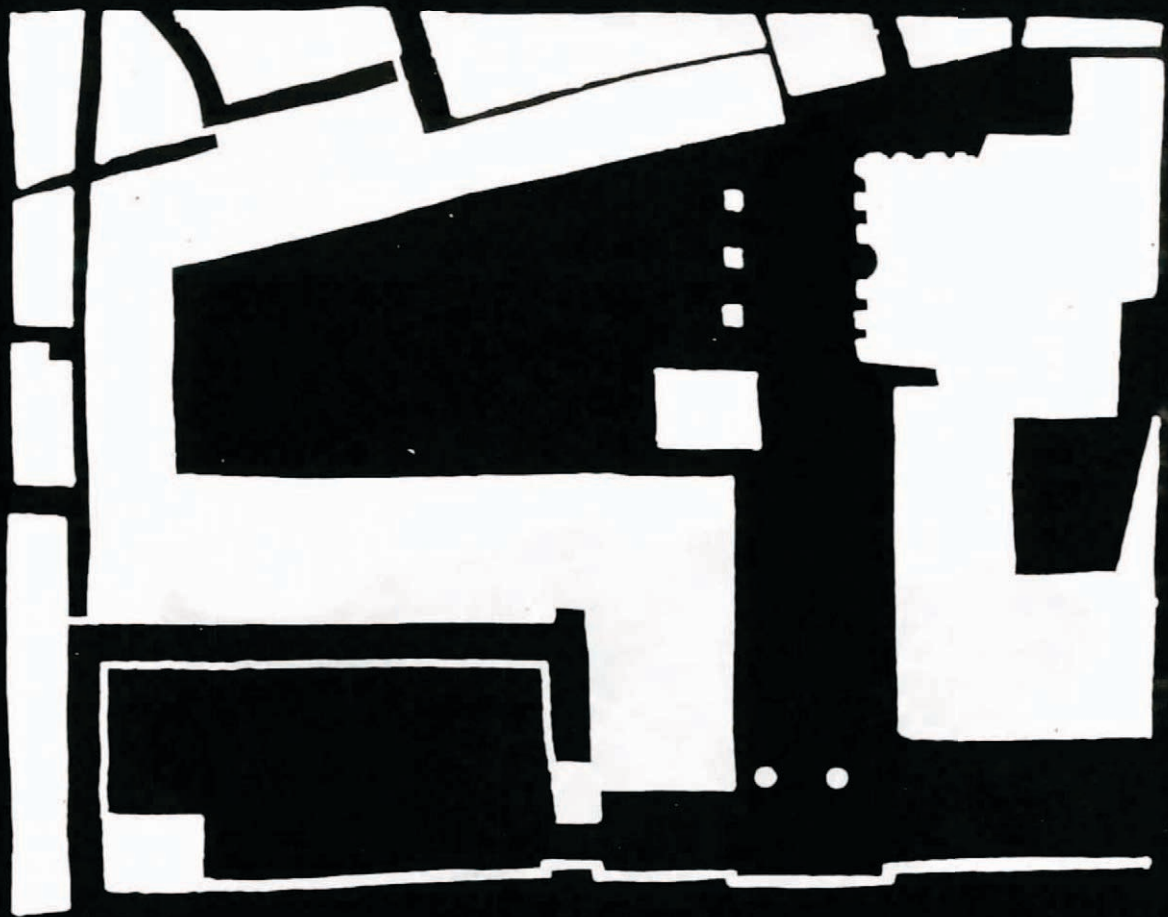




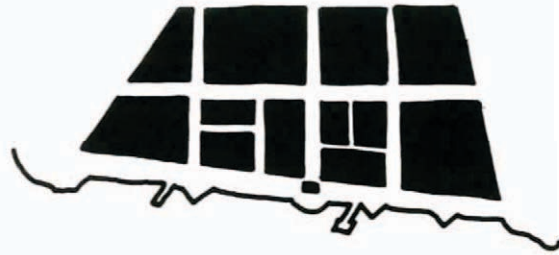










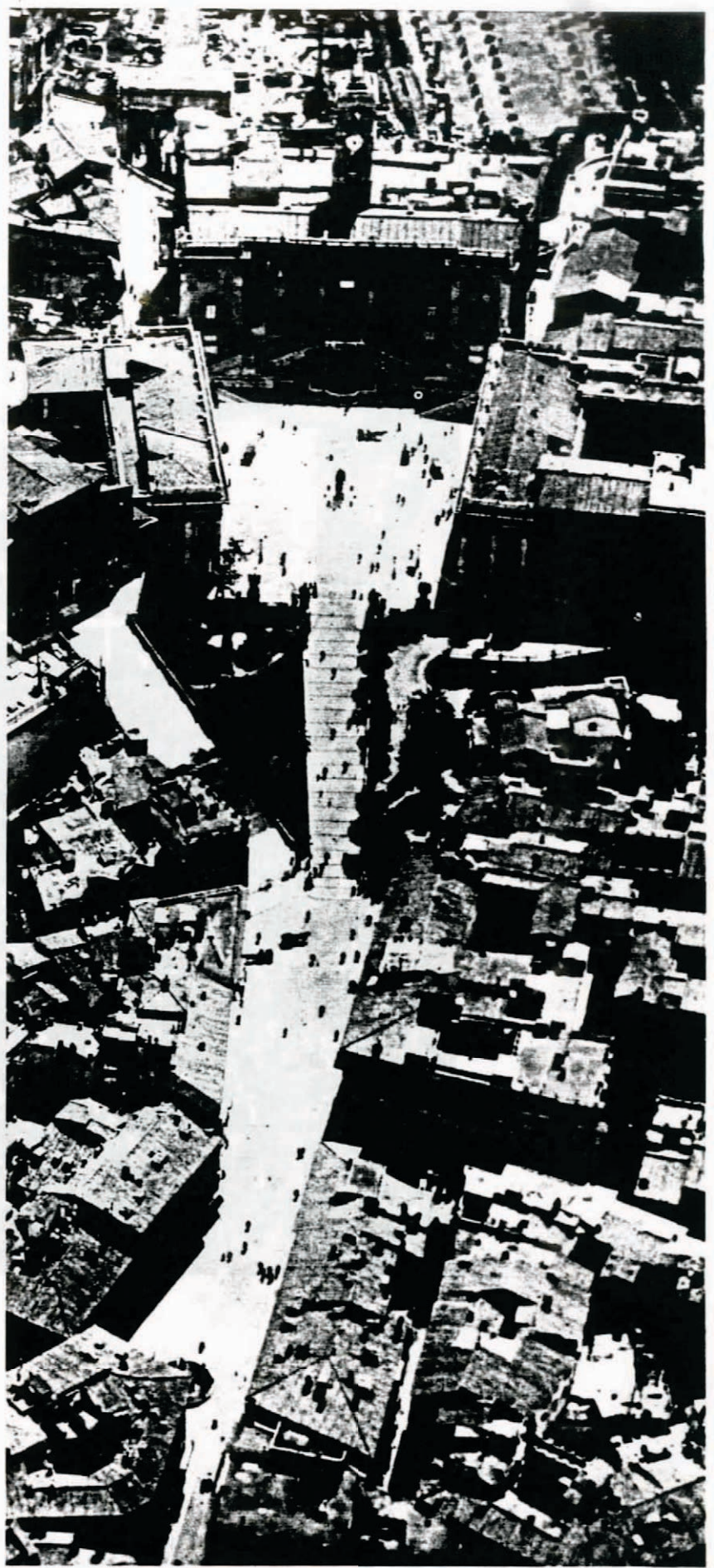
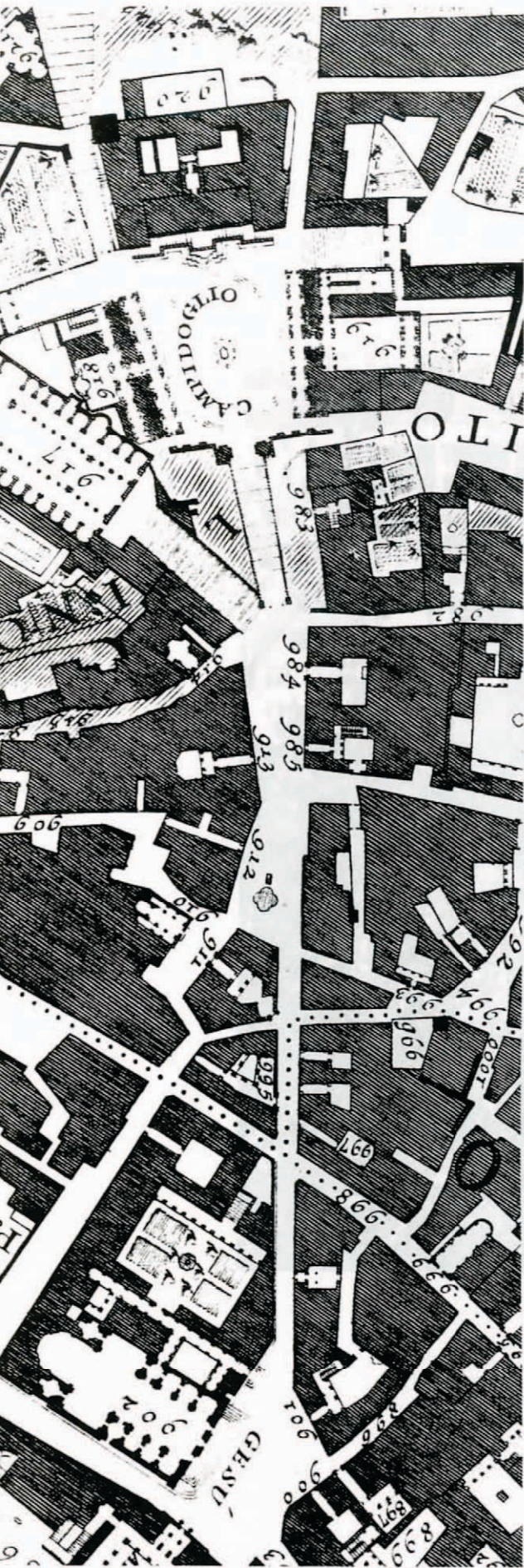




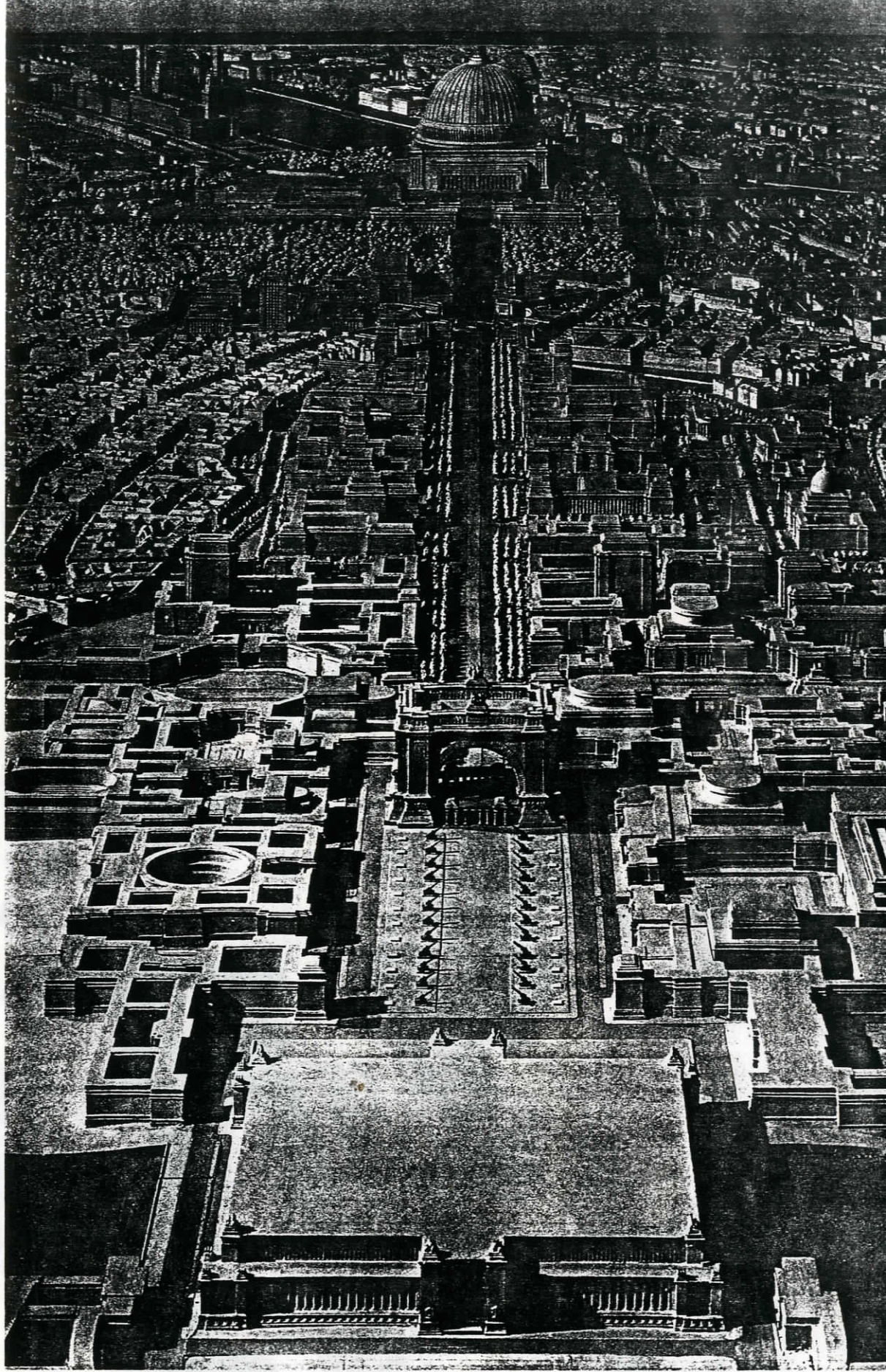
new england meeting houses  
casa del fascio  
piazza pubblico, siena  
wenceslas square, prague  
piazza, montepulciano  
s. marco, venice  
uffizzi  
palazzo vecchio  
hadrian's villa  
campidoglio by michelangelo  
greek agora  
roman forum  
royal chancellry by asplund  
speer's proposal for hitler  
kahn's complex at dacca  
chandigarh by corb  
st. quentin school proposal by krier  
idea of a social center by krier  
piranesi's campo marzio  
stirling's staatsgalerie  
mississauga city hall  
piazza dell'erbe in verona  
phoenix city hall competition entry by graves  
gonzaga family in mantova  
vatican city  
uva by jefferson  
maison carree and the virginia state capitol  
town hall in logrono by moneo  
roma interrotta  
machado and silvetti in providence  
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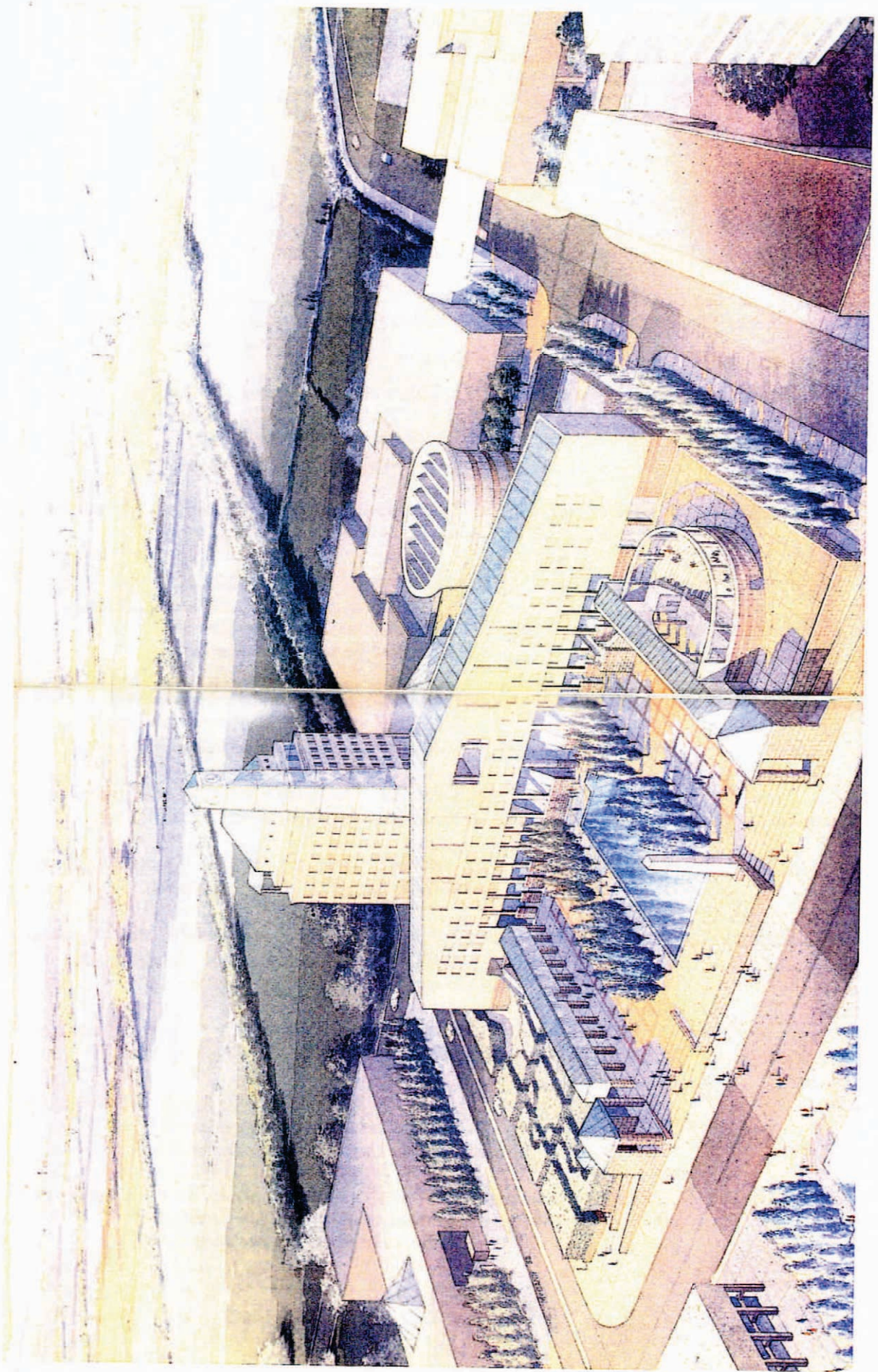
[\*Please Note: Analysis of precedents will be presented at the final review.]











- "The Architecture of Democracy," Architectural Design. Vol. 57, no.9-10, 1987.  
[Entire issue including critique article by Charles Jencks and Maggie Valentine provided a fundamental point of departure for this thesis.]
- Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958.  
[Critique text for this thesis. Helped in understanding and defining theoretical notions of the public realm.]
- Arnell, Peter and Bickford, Ted, eds. Mississauga City Hall: A Canadian Competition. Rizzoli, Inc., New York, 1984.  
[Helpful for program description of city hall buildings, as well as for discussion on critical regionalism and "city-identity-making".]
- Copjec, Joan. "The Grid and the Logic of Democracy." (Introduction to text on Mario Gandelsonas.)  
[Very interesting interpretation of the grid as "urban law of democracy."]
- Habermas, Jurgen. The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Mit Press, Cambridge, 1991.  
[The other critique text for this thesis. Provides extensive analysis of the development of the public realm in the Eighteenth Century.]
- Hegemann, Werner and Peets, Elbert. The American Vitruvius: An Architect's Handbook of Civic Art. Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1988.  
[Primarily used as a source of inspiration for images and analysis.]
- Hurt, Steven. "The American Continental Grid: Form and Meaning."  
[Excellent description and analysis of the land-grid, politics and small town America.]
- Lebovich, William L. America's City Halls. The Preservation Press, Washington, DC, 1984.  
[An encyclopedia of city hall buildings and their features.]
- Maxwell, Robert. "Mississauga Town Hall, Canada." Sweet Disorder and the Careful Careless Theory and Criticism in Architecture. Princeton Press, 1993.  
[Interesting analysis of Mississauga city hall.]
- Reps, John. Washington on View.  
[Outstanding source for color prints and maps of Georgetown and Washington, D.C.]
- Schumacher, Thomas. Surface and Symbol.  
[Provided insight into the relationship between architecture and politics, as well as critical analysis of Terragni's Casa del Fascio.]
- Schwartz, Jon Michael. "The Lessons Of Rome." Harvard Architecture Review. Vol. 2: 22-47, 1981.  
[Essay serving to provide an understanding of the critical principles of Rome that can be applied to the contemporary situation.]

Smith, Kathy Schneider. Port Town to Urban Neighborhood: the Georgetown Waterfront of Washington, D.C. 1880-1920. Center for Washington Area Studies, Washington, D.C., 1989.

[Invaluable source for the history of the Georgetown Waterfront Area. Draws upon a diverse array of interviews and data to document the economic and social changes that shaped the neighborhood. Includes maps and photographs, as well as listings of primary sources which enhanced further research.]

Solow, Guela A. "Pluralism and the Myth of Democracy: The *Ultra* Classical Position." Paper presented at the Syracuse University Symposium, 1992.

[Polemical paper very related to thesis, both in terms of "political position" and also the architectural representation of such.]

Vidler, Anthony. "Losing Face." The Architectural Uncanny. The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1992.

[Extremely interesting and insightful analysis of Stirling's Staatsgalerie building suggesting its use of forms ahistorically.]

Zucker, Paul. Town and Square: From the Agora to the Village Green. Columbia University Press, NY, 1959.

[Good historical source.]