3-14-1963

Community Theatre for Albuquerque, New Mexico

Anthony Charles Bloch

COMMUNITY THEATRE FOR ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO • BLOCH

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INTRODUCTION

COMMUNITY THEATRE

FOR

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

BY

ANTHONY CHARLES BLOCH

FOR

BACHELOR'S THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Division of Architecture, University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Architecture.

The University of New Mexico

March 14, 1962 3

THESIS COMMITTEE

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George S. Wright

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACHELOR'S THESIS PROPOSAL

by

Anthony Bloch

TITLE:

A Legitimate Theatre

PURPOSE OF THESIS:

Due to the rapid growth and absence of cultural facilities in Albuquerque, the need for a small Theatre is apparent. An investigation will be made into the intricate backstage workings, the relationship of the actors to the audience, the stage to the seats, and the relationship between space and sound. The materials and form will be studied from a functional and esthetic standpoint, expressive of a Theatre.

LOCATION:

Albuquerque, New Mexico (location will be within the Civic Auditorium site)

THESIS CONTENT:

1. Proposal
2. Research
3. Statement of Problems
4. Preliminary Deisgn
5. Final Design and Drawings
6. Model (Preliminary)
7. Bibliography

COMMUNITY THEATRE

(Synopsis)

The community theatre will contain 500 seats and serve amatuers, semiprofessionals, and visiting professional groups. Most scenery and costumes will be designed and made at the theatre and require a special type of work area. Because of its varied use and the rather indeterminate responsibility of its management, its planning should be as simple and as foolproof as possible. This study will not include experimental theatres since these present special problems.

BASIS of DESIGN

BASIS OF DESIGN

For a Community Theatre

The community theatre is characterized by active community participation in its productions. Individuals in the community not only compose the audience, but many of them take part both in actual performances and preparations for them. Because of this, presentation of the community theatre becomes a social occasion; contact with the theatre acquires an intimate and personal character that is lacking in the types of entertainment offered by commercial theatres and movie houses. Although most community theatres are not at present dependent on profits for their existence, there are many opportunities for them to become at least self-supporting.

In many cases, the community theatre may be only a part--though an important and highly specialized part-- of a larger development which houses varied cultural activities, arts and crafts, galleries for local, traveling, or permanent exhibits, a small museum, club rooms, and similar spaces. The theatre is a form of extrascholastic educational activity in which both minors and adults engage. Its development, its activities value, and, to an extent, its needs have been noted in widely varying fields such as educational institutions, civic groups, and private organizations. Provisions for such activities may be grouped in one or more buildings

about the theatre as a center or may be decentralized and spread over the community which they serve. Again, theatre facilities may often be provided in cooperation with established institutions. A program which permits multiple use of the theatre plant obviously increases its usefulness; also, its cost, both initial and maintenance, may be allocated to several organizations rather than assumed by one.

Stage presentations in the community theatre are widely varied in type; each may require special combinations of auditorium and stage spaces. Dramatic productions may include puppet shows, straight drama or comedy, musical comedies, revival of the classics, or may range far beyond the accepted conventional drama to encompass impressionistic drama, space-time presentations, and possibly others not yet evolved . Musical performances may range in form from the Greek through ballet to such moderns as Martha Graham; dance forms are constantly changing. Other types of presentations, such as poetry reading, also have to be included.

Since it is obviously impossible to provide individual accommodations for all these kinds of productions, it is best to provide a theatre as flexible as possible.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Requirements for community theatres, although derived from the same sources and from the same historical background as those of the commercial or professional theatre, exhibit fundamental differences. Emphasis upon creative effort leads to demands for a different type of accommodation than does the necessity for financial profit. Two general types of creative community activity directly related to the theatre require special provisions.

Audience Activity:

Audience activity is intense before and after a performance and between acts due to the social nature of the occasion. Spaces for lounging, talking, smoking and for viewing exhibits of back stage work are all necessary. Easy access to such spaces is of prime importance. At times, audience and actors may intermingle; for this, a combination of lounge and rehearsal room is needed. Since refreshments may be served, a small kitchen or commercial booth is needed.

Production Activities:

Production activities consist of preparation for and presentation of the performance. In a community theatre, scenery, costumes and properties are mostly prepared within the theatre plant. Separate workshops are ordinarily provided--one for costumes and one for scenery and properties. Used materials are salvaged insofar as possible, stored

within the plant, and reused. Ample storage space is needed.

Presentation problems may be solved differently in the community theatre than in its commercial prototype. Both types demand ample storage space; but, whereas in the professional theatre, urban real estate values have forced a vertical development with lofty stage houses for lifting scenery vertically (flying), tiered dressing rooms, and often inadequate wing space, the community theatre built on less expensive land or on public land can expand horizontally. Scenery can be shifted horizontally, perhaps on wagons or on a revolving stage. Proscenium size and shape may be variable. Walls between stage and auditorium may be built up of movable sections to provide a multiplicity of proscenium arrangements. The seating arrangement can be changed in innumerable different ways. Multi-level acting areas may be provided. The audience may surround the stage, or the stage may at least partly encircle the audience. A forestage (acting space in front of the usual proscenium location) may be built on elevators to permit its use as an orchestra pit, seating space, or acting area. The stage proper may be of the conventional type with lofty gridiron; it may be horizontal, with wagons for shifting scenery, or both types may be combined. Flexibility and multiplicity of use are not only financially desirable but some theatre

authorities call them essential for the theatre's progress. Types of stages, such as the intimate and Leob flexible type, which are considered impractical in the average commercial theatre, become possible in the community theatre.

Capacity:

Capacity of the auditorium of the type of theatre to be studies will be approximately 500 persons. If, for financial reasons, provisions for road shows must be included, minimum seating capacity must be increased to 800, preferably 1000, persons. This increase brings many disadvantages, among which are lack of intimacy and lack of flexibility in auditorium shape and storage type.

Stage Lighting:

Stage lighting must provide for four functions: visibility, naturalism, design, emotional control. Lighting instruments and control apparatus provide for the control of: (1) intensity, (2) color, (3) direction, (4) movement of light. Some flexibility in provisions is necessary to achieve those elements of naturalism, emotional control and the arbitrary elements of design which depend upon light for their effect.

GENERAL AREAS

GENERAL AREAS

Transportation and Parking:

The first concern of the theatre-goer is transportation to and from the theatre. The easier and more pleasant the patron's progress from his home to the theatre's seat, the better the chances of making and holding a repeat customer. Many prefer the neighborhood movie or watching TV to the theatre, for, although access to metropolitan areas is usually easy on parkways and superhighways, traffic congestion and the absence of parking facilities in the immediate vicinity of the theatre make the trip an ordeal. Most theatre-goers are car owners, and most of them would drive to the theatre if they could park in preference to using public transportation at additional cost and inconvenience. The average car (owner-driven, taxi) carries three theatre patrons to the theatre which is patronized by owner-drivers. Patrons come irrespective of the weather if there is convenient parking space. Usually, the party dismounts at the entrance, and the car is then parked; or the car is parked first, and the whole party walks to the theatre.

Curb-loading and parking facilities constitute an extremely important consideration in the original siting of the theatre, in architectural planning of the plant, in policy concerning acquisition of abutting property and in collaboration with enterprises in the neighborhood and the municipality. The two main problems, loading facilities

and parking, are easily solved in this study because the theatre site is adjacent to a large municipal parking area.

Public Circulation:

A primary requisite for public areas in the community theatre is ease of movement. Access between the various parts needs to be as free as possible, to permit their full use by the audience before the show, between acts, and after the final curtain. Code requirements as to doors and exits are minimum for safety. The community theatre needs even greater circulation facilities. Depending upon the site, nature of surrounding developments, disposition of plan elements, and requirements of acoustics, lighting, etc., the number of openings to the foyer, lobby, auditorium and lounge may increase far beyond the minimum.

Access to Auditorium:

If possible, the principal entrances from the lobby to the auditorium should be arranged without doors. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to make a careful acoustical analysis; in all probability, sound-deadening material will be required on the walls of approaching corridors to lobbies to prevent reverberations.

Types of Spaces:

It is always desirable to have both foyer and lobby. In most cases, it would be well to provide a separate lounge which, on occasion, may be used for social meetings, lectures,

discussion groups. The lounge may also serve as rehearsal space.

Foyer:

The lighting in the foyer adjoining the street may be quite brillant. Telephone booths which are accessible from the foyer should be provided. In general, the addition of other features, such as small bookstore, coffee, etc., which will attract the public to the theatre as a part of their daily lives, might be desirable.

Ticket Office and Windows:

They should, if possible, command the inner lobby and at the same time permit the lines to form without obstructing them. There are perferably two ticket windows, one for reserved seats and one for current seats. Also necessary is sufficient space for a small ticket office.

Lobby:

While the theatre in the large city has no particular need for an oversize lobby, in the community theatre, the performance must be considered as a social occasion as well as a dramatic entertainment. Therefore, the lobby should be arranged to show off groups of people and their clothes to advantage. A combination of exhibition space and lobby is easy to achieve. It is hoped the community will take an interest in the production of the play as well as in its presentation, and, therefore, space is desirable to show the various developments: costume design, sketches for stage

settings, etc., even though the space is not used as an art gallery.

Checkroom:

The checkroom should be either adequate or omitted entirely. If included, it should open from the main lobby and have a sufficient number of attendents and a sufficiently large opening to the lobby so that standing in long lines after the performance is avoided. In community theaters, the expense of the proper number of attendents may become a problem.

Auxiliary Spaces:

This includes areas not always essential to the theatre but usually desirable. Projection rooms are fairly well standardized. If provisions are to be made for the instruction and study of new dramatic techniques, or actual televising or broadcasting, extra space is necessary. Playwrights' rooms have seldom been incorporated in community theatres.

Maximum Seating Distances:

Even in theatres of 1200 to 1500 seating capacity, the last seat is preferably not over 75 to 100 ft. from the stage, and much less in smaller houses. When balconies are used, the front of the balcony is preferably within 50 ft. of the stage.

Sight Lines:

The apron of a forestage may be excluded from view to prevent sight lines angle sharply downward from the rear

seats. In auditoriums of 800 or less capacity when balconies are not used, a complete view of the forestage should be possible. Side proscenia of encircling stages do not require perfect sight lines; balconies may help improve them. Sight lines for the side seats in the auditorium should permit a minimum of two-thirds of the main acting space to be seen through the conventional proscenium; conversely, care should be taken that areas beyond the acting space be masked.

Seating Facilities:

Seat spacing preferably always exceeds the minimum of the New Mexico code of 18 in. between the front of the cushion to the back of the seat. Use of the "continental" seating, in which each seat row becomes an aisle, is limited to small auditoriums where it does not force the rear row to be located too far from the stage. Aisle widths and numbers of aisles are generally determined by building code.

Auditorium Capacity and Type:

Need to vary the capacity of a 500 seat auditorium is not urgent; however, when necessary, this may be accomplished with curtains, placed, perhaps, at a natural break in the auditorium so they do not appear to change the essential proportions of the auditorium. Empty seats visible to actors are a detriment to good performances. Experts should be consulted as to the acoustical effects on the

auditorium. Advantages or disadvantages of stadium houses versus balconies are subject to much discussion. The best opinion seems to agree that a stadium house for a capacity of over 800 or 1000 will have a rear row too far from the stage for comedies although satisfactory for the spectacles.

Stage Area:

Stage area is the most vital consideration. It is necessary that the stage be so arranged that up to five sets be set up and stacked in succession without being seen during the performance, and that this can be done without acrobatics on the part of amateur stage hands. Furthermore, open-air scenes require the appearance of great height. Again, a high stage loft and an expanse of unimpeded wall space are desirable for storing current sets. Openings should be confined to one wall if possible or, at the most, two. It is also necessary that the stage provide a crossover, a passage for actors across the stage, either behind the stage or through a corridor, possibly through the stageshops or behind the cyclorama.

Acting Facilities:

The acting area extends slightly more than the width of the proscenium and is at least 20 ft. deep. It should be trapped through its extend with unimpeded space below. All types of stages are preferably provided with an ample forestage even though not carried to an extreme. It is desirable

for performances which are to be seen in the "round" rather than through a picture frame, and for soloists or lecturers. The forestage can include provisions for removable seats, thus varying the auditorium capacity. The stage manager requires at least a desk with access to the stage and to dressing rooms. The prompter needs a small space from which he can follow action without being seen.

Scenic Provisions:

Cycloramas or background surfaces are essential and are susceptible to great variation as to material, number of units, and shape. In planning for the type of cyclorama to be used, provisions must be made for moving scenery horizontally. The gridiron consists of a number of structural steel shapes, suspended from 70 to 90 ft. above the stage floor. Its exact location and composition are determined by stage equipment. The pinrail is located along one wall of the stage and serves as a means of securing gridlines. Two doors, each at least 8 by 12 ft., are usually required for loading scenery. One should open to the scenery shop, the other to the street or alley. The latter door is made for road shows. Revolving or elevator stages may also be used but have not been completely accepted.

Nonconventional Stages:

If great flexibility is required in the stage as would seem desirable for the community theater, a greater amount of stage area and cubage may be added to the wings or side areas. The result may be a long, circular, low stage surrounding a better part of the audience. It can be closed off from the auditorium by a series of panels which may be shifted at will. The recently completed Harvard Theater uses a flexible seating arrangement to achieve different types of stages.

Outdoor Stage:

Sizes of outdoor auditoria vary considerably. The stage is, of necessity, somewhat formalized. If possible, it should have immediate access to the inside stage, preferably through the back wall unless this arrangement is prevented by a built-in cyclorama.

Stage Shop:

Adequate area is of prime consideration; equally important is the height to be allowed for the paint frames. When the conventional type of stage with gridiron is used, the height is at least 30 ft. Even with the comparatively low encircling stage, a 30 ft. paint frame is necessary since the effective height of the scenery remains the same. It is possible to rig the paint frame on the rear wall of the auditorium or on the stage wall; however, when this is

done, no scenery can be painted on this frame during productions or during rehearsals. The shop is the center of most of the dramatic activities and includes subdivisions for carpentry, electrical, metal and painting work. It should be provided with good outside light, preferably diffused. It should immediately adjoin the stage storage space. The desirable clear ceiling height is 15 ft. Less height can be used in storage spaces, but this necessitates placing flats on their sides which is considered unsatisfactory.

Dressing Rooms:

Requirements for individual dressing rooms vary, depending upon the probability of professional shows and the funds available. Most satisfactory provisions would be for eighteen to twenty actors and two chorus rooms (one for men and one for women), each providing for about twenty actors. One chorus room may be used as a green room or as a lounge for actors.

Rehearsal Rooms:

The number of rehearsal rooms is determined entirely by how much use is made of the building and how often the stage is available for rehearsals. Rehearsal rooms should be in the same proportion but somewhat larger than the acting area of the stage and, acoustically, should reproduce

stage conditions as closely as possible. The public lounge, adjacent to the auditorium lobby, may also serve for rehearsals.

REQUIRED AREAS

SPACE REQUIREMENTS

of a

COMMUNITY THEATER OF

500 SEAT CAPACITY

Foyer:

The foyer is the first part of the theater the audience enters. It should provide the transition between the outside and the theater. The main concern is in providing an arrangement of foyer and ticket windows that makes the sale of tickets as quick as possible to avoid long waiting lines.

Lobby: 1000 sq. ft.

The lobby is principally a distribution area. It can be combined as lobby, lounge and gallery, for which 1000 sq. ft. is adequate. Less area would hamper the use of the space as a gallery and meeting room.

Check Room: 240 sq. ft.

The check room requires 240 sq. ft. minimum unless it does not serve the auditorium or unless the patrons do not wear overcoats.

Ticket Office and Ticket

Windows: 50 sq. ft.

50 sq. ft. is the minimum. The space is additional to the administration office. Two ticket windows are adequate; a ticket counter may also be used.

Lounge: 750 sq. ft.

The lounge can be combined with the lobby or it can be used for rehearsals. If used for rehearsals, it should equal the size of the stage.

Administration: 350 sq. ft.

Mens' Toilets: 250 sq. ft.

Womens' Toilets: 250 sq. ft.

Consult codes. Either mechanical vent or outside light and air is needed.

Auditorium: 5600 sq. ft. (Approx. 600 - 800 seats)

This is minimum for conventional seating and may increase to 7000 - 8000 sq. ft. for aisle seating. Area includes fore-stage (removable seats can be incorporated). Outside light is undesirable.

TV Studio: 300 sq. ft.

This can be reduced to 200 sq. ft. No outside light; mechanical ventilation needed.

Control Room: 70 sq. ft.

Minimum; mechanical ventilation needed.

Director's Room: 70 sq. ft.

Minimum but adequate.

Projection Room: 200 sq. ft.

Ample.

Spotlight Booth: 400 sq. ft.

The area may be divided into three booths; one on center with stage and one at each side of auditorium.

Stage: 3500 sq. ft.

Ample, 2800 sq. ft. minimum, depending on type of stage. Air conditioning in conjunction with auditorium is desirable; outside light is not desirable. Top of stage should be louvered (consult codes). If conventional stage, minimum height, floor to grid is 70 ft.

Stage Workshop: 1500 sq. ft.

Sometimes reduced to 1200 sq. ft.; outside light, if clear glass, preferably from the north; if opaque, orientation is unimportant.

Scenery Storage: 1000 sq. ft.

Minimum; larger if possible.

Costume Storage: 210 sq. ft.

Minimum; no outside light. Preferably ventilated; must be dry.

Costume Dyeing: 80 sq. ft.

Minimum; no outside light required. Unless outside air is provided, must be mechanically ventilated.

Six Dressing Rooms: 680 sq. ft.

Each room requires access to lavatories; size not changed with size of building. Stars' dressing rooms each need private toilet and shower; all preferably air conditioned.

Two Chorus Rooms: 440 sq. ft.

Reasonable minimum; three lavatories needed in each; preferably air conditioned.

Two Bathrooms: 300 sq. ft.

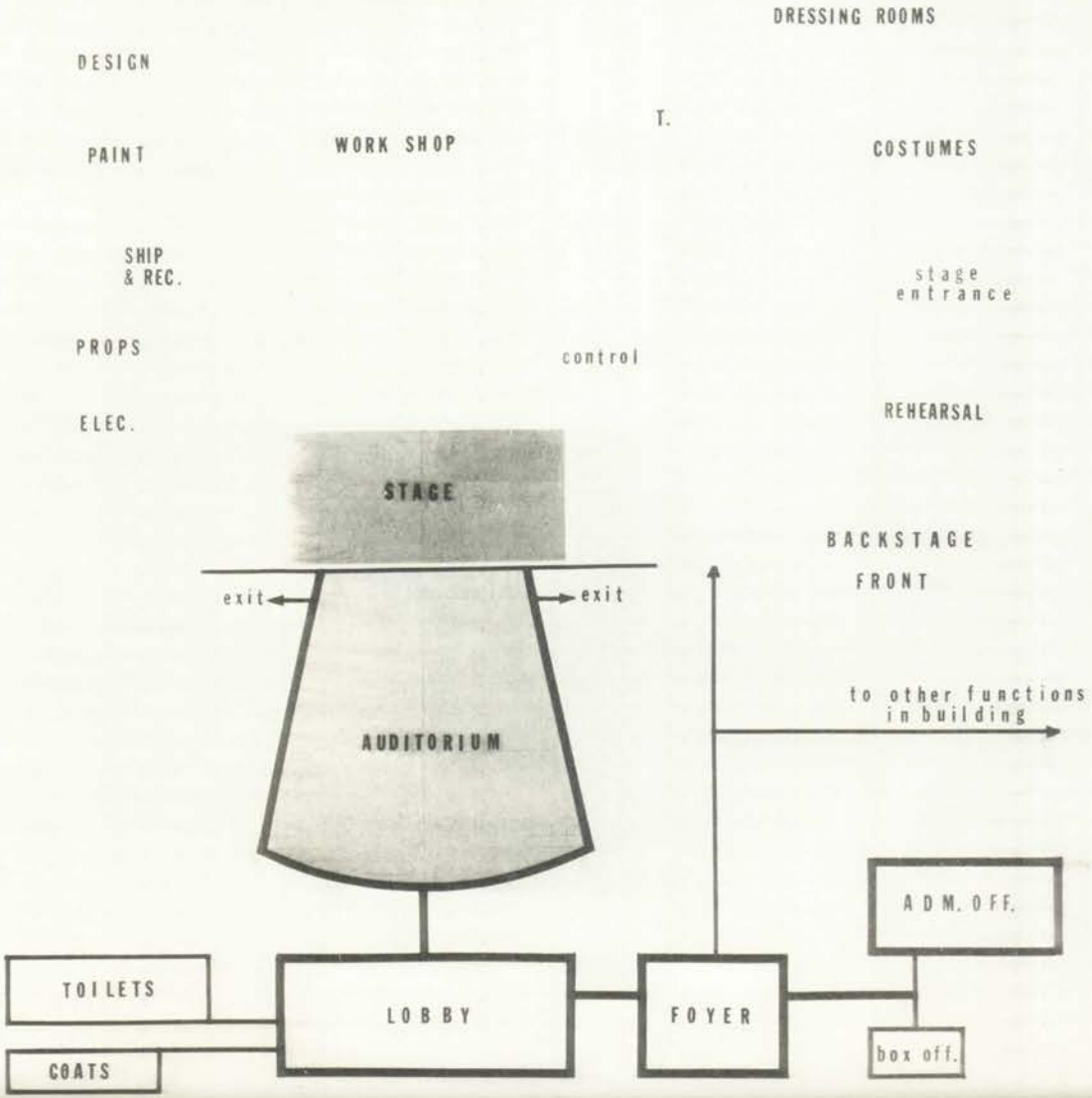
Reasonable minimum.

Stage Manager: 150 sq. ft.

Discussion Room: 750 sq. ft.

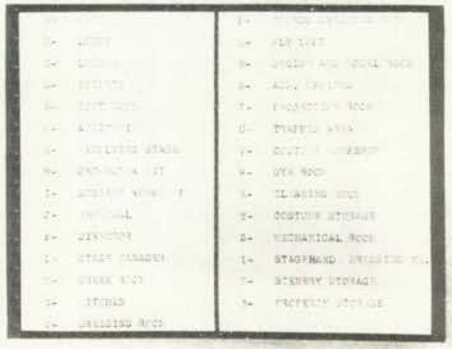
Can be used for rehearsals; area determined by acting area.

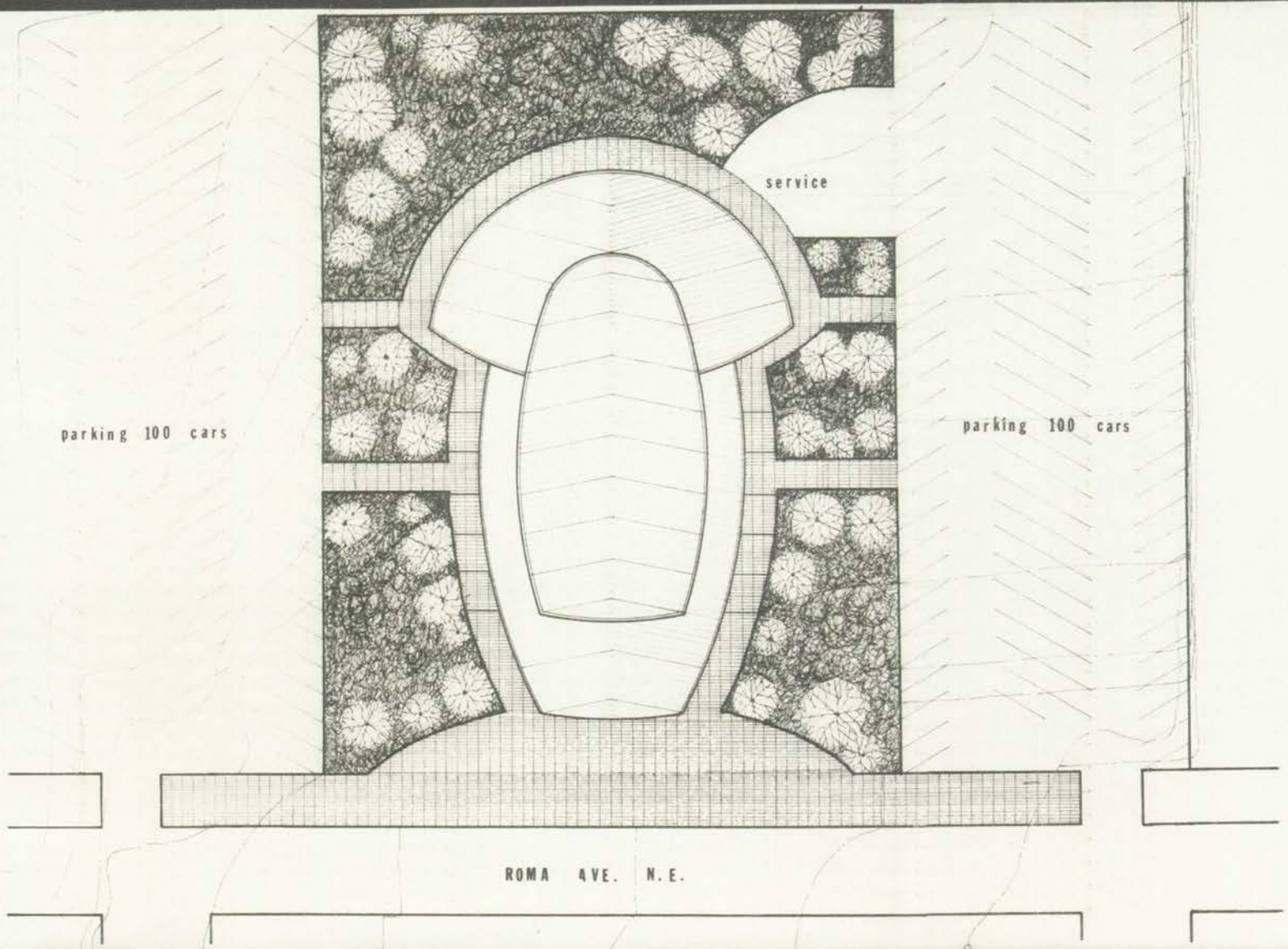
SOLUTION



A COMMUNITY THEATER FOR ALBUQUERQUE

by ANTHONY C. BLOCH





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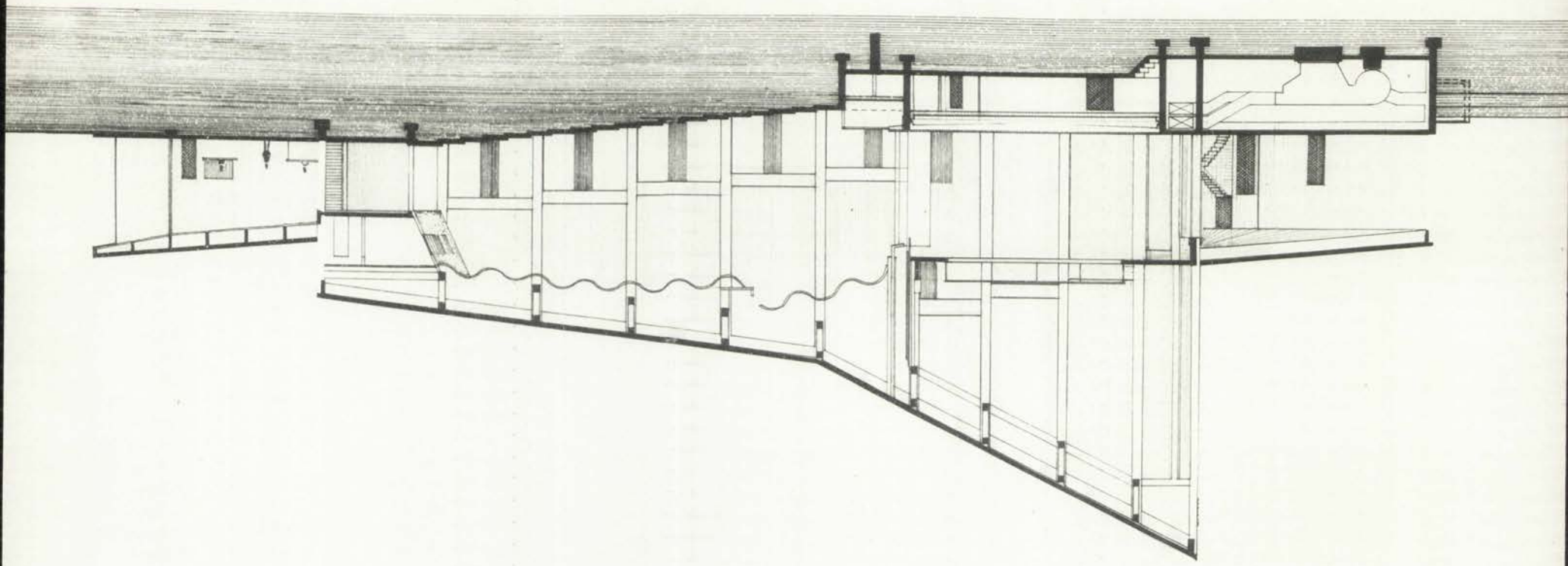

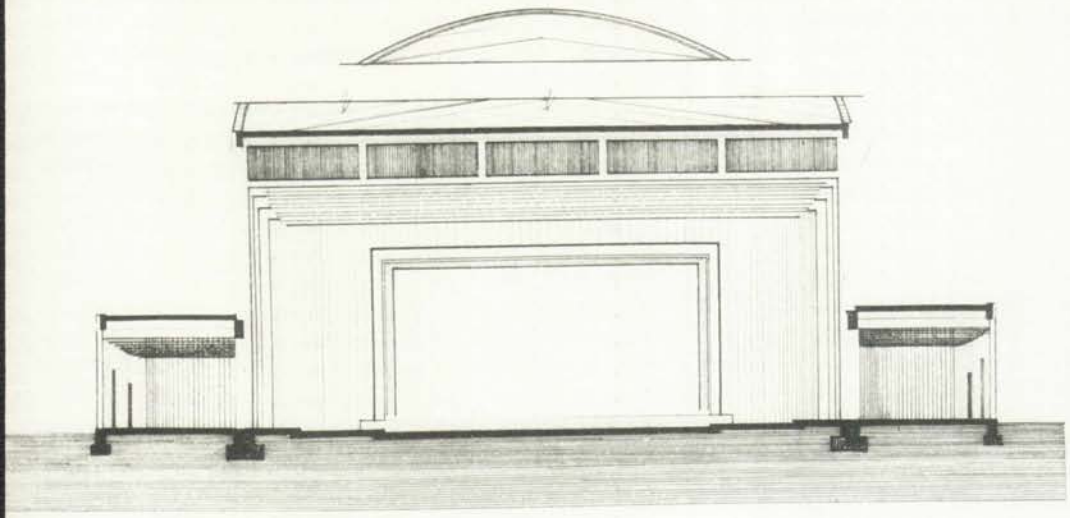

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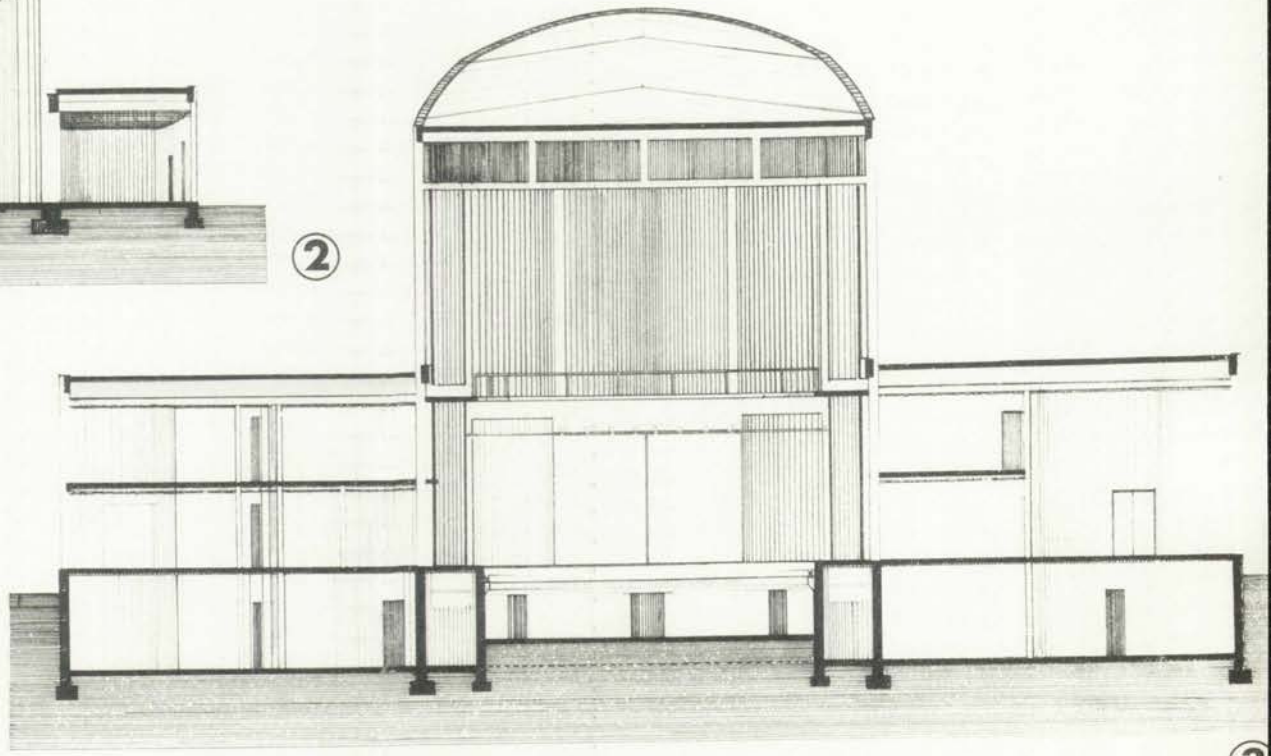

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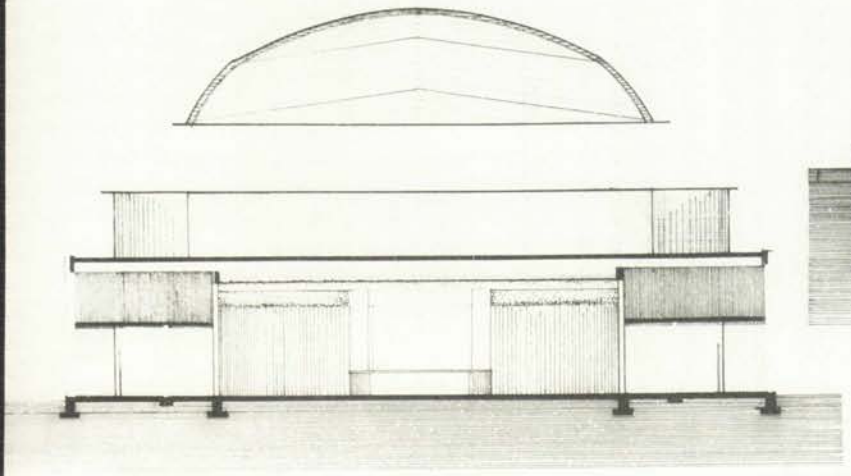

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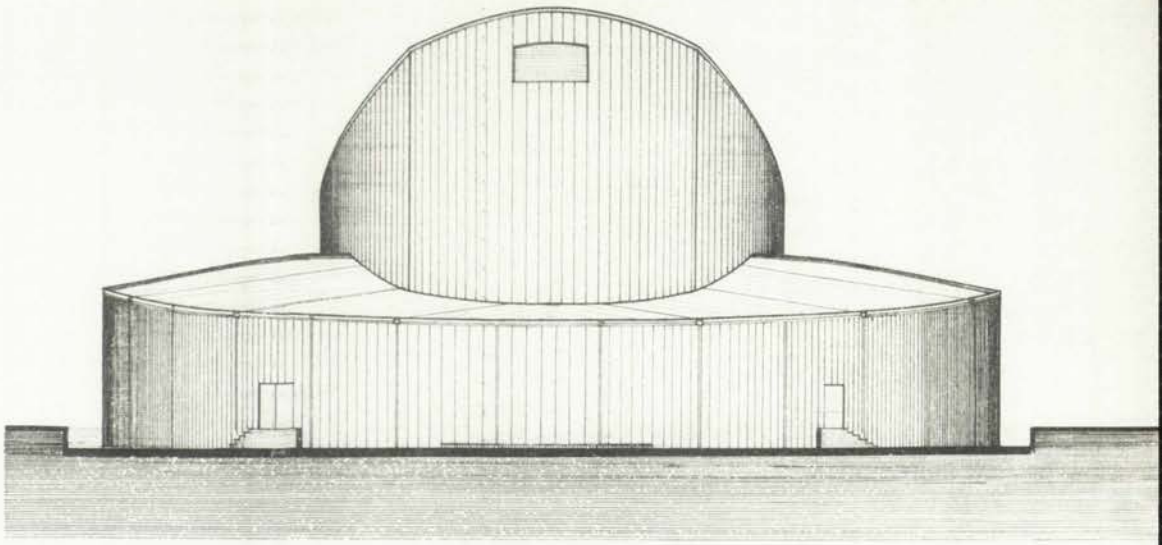

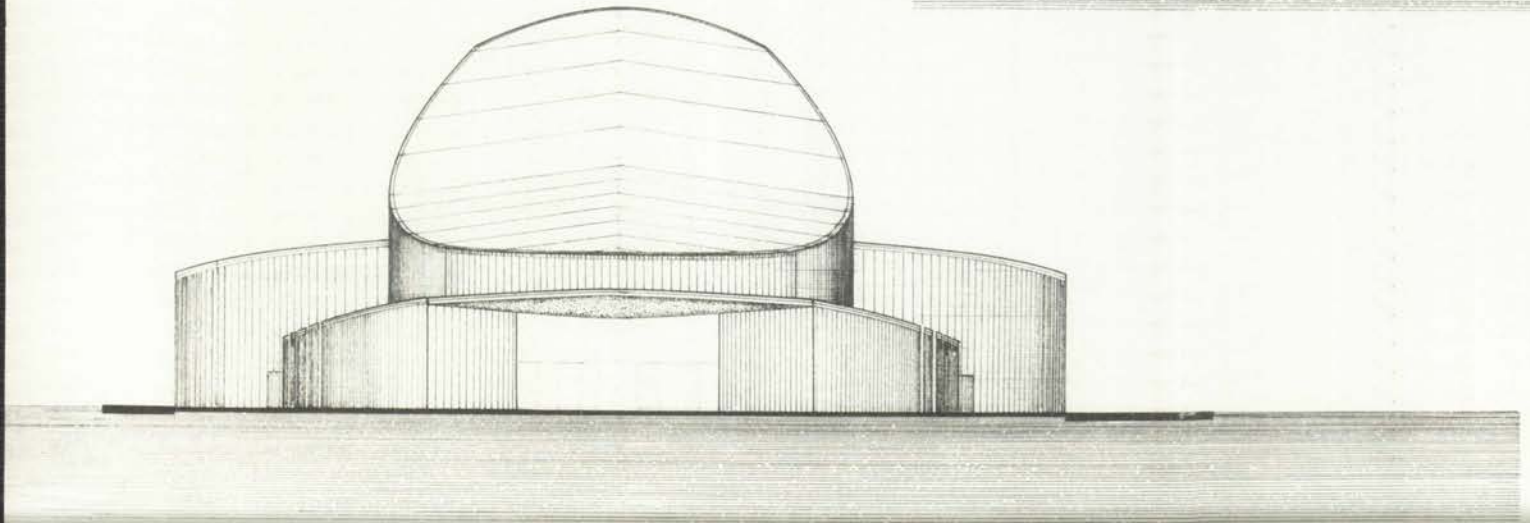

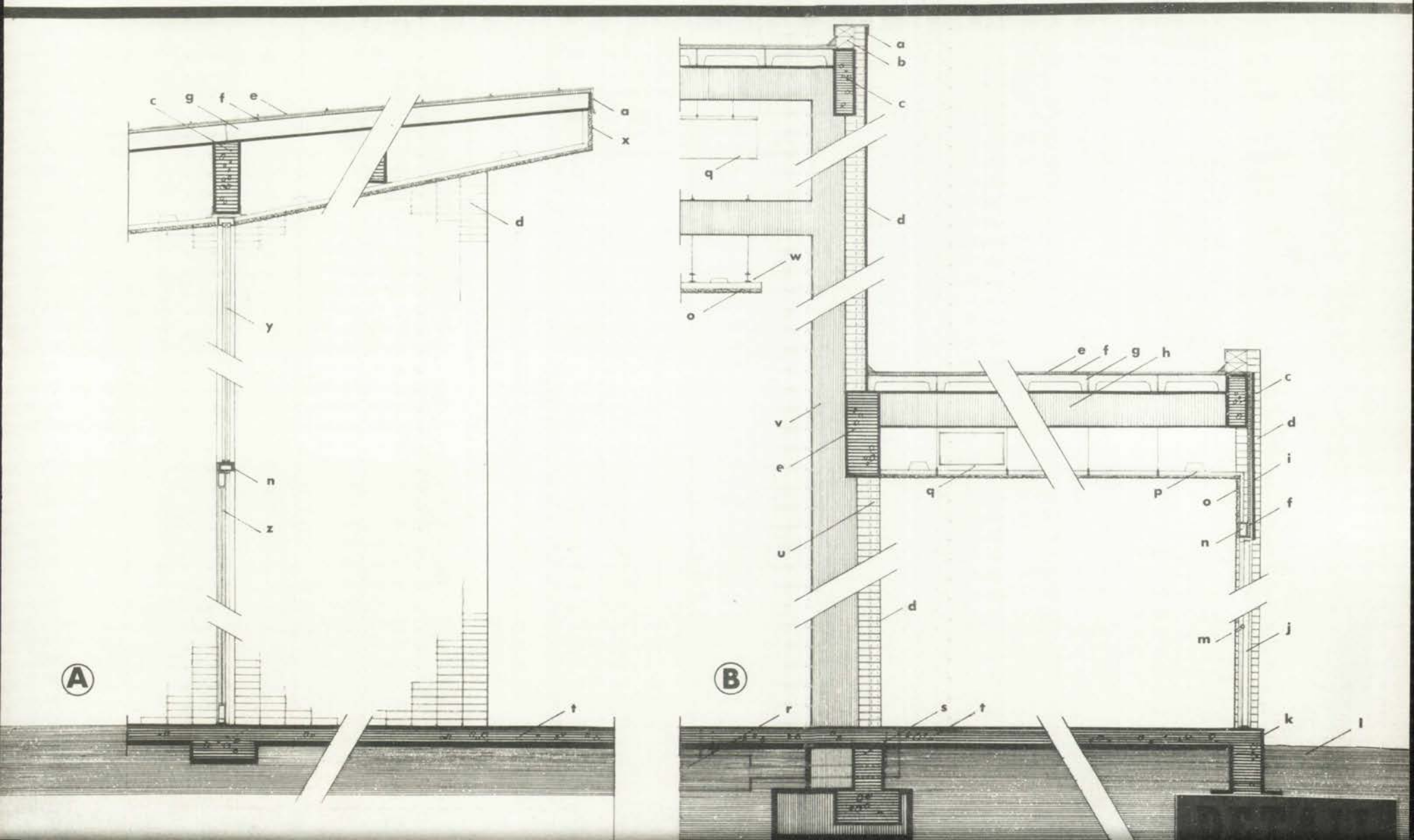
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