

# IMMERSION IN WATER, STEAM, AND LIGHT

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## ABSTRACT

The built environment impacts and impresses itself upon the body and spirit. Our senses reveal and interpret these experiences. I am interested in the experiencing of architecture at a point where the material and permanent collide and cooperate with the immaterial and impermanent.

Through the design and transformation of a Russian bath in an urban American context, this thesis investigates how the elements of building react to and shape the natural elements. How together they are assembled and manipulated into an architecture of form and texture, light and dark, scale and rhythm, and sound and silence; thus recreating and reinforcing the body, its senses and rituals, within our environment.

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Title: Lecturer

I feel fusion of the senses. To hear a sound is to see its space. Space has tonality, and I imagine myself composing a space lofty, vaulted or under a dome, attributing to it a sound character alternating with the tones of the space, narrow and high, with graduating silver, light to darkness. The spaces of architecture in their light make me want to compose a kind of music, imagining a kind of truth from the sense of a fusion of the disciplines and their orders. —Louis Kahn<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Saul Wurman, ed., *What Will Be Has Always Been: The Words of Louis I. Kahn*, (New York, N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1986), p.15.

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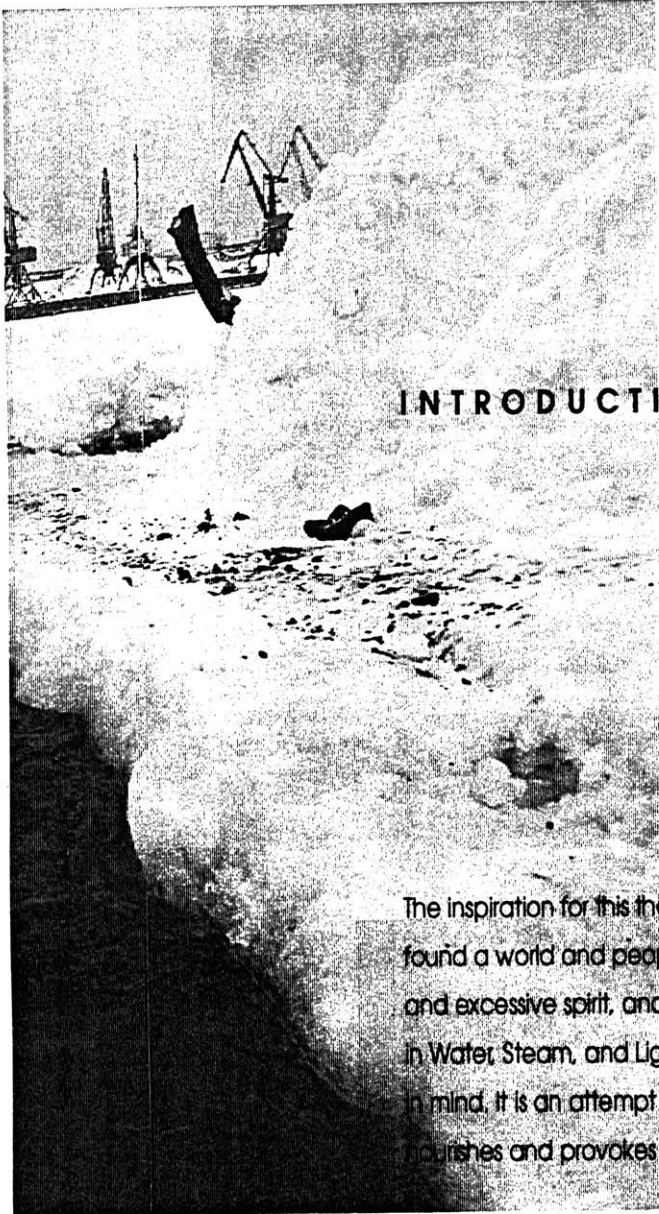
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Fig. 2. Member of Russia's Walrus Club in Moscow  
"Russia's Cold Kiss," *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 May, 1994, pp. 50-51.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Feher et al., *Fragments for a History of the Body, Part 2*. (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1986), p. 369.

Perhaps one could enter a plea on behalf of Narcissus (or at least invoke extenuating circumstances in his favor). In a world in which technological mastery has made such rapid strides, can one not understand that the desire to feel oneself—should arise as a compensation, necessary, even in its excesses, to our psychic survival?  
—Jean Starobinski <sup>2</sup>



## INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this thesis is based in Russian literature. In their novels I found a world and people described by broad extremes, generous and excessive spirit, and an intense and specific physicality. Immersion in Water, Steam, and Light enters the design process with these qualities in mind. It is an attempt to invest in architecture and life that which nourishes and provokes the senses, body, and spirit.

Drawing on the bathing tradition of Russia, the *Banya*, or steam bath, is used as a model to explore and reinterpret an institution which contrasts with our own culture's rhythms so dominated by production and consumption. Here, the bath becomes a place to wash, a place to escape, but also a place to be with oneself, friends, and others. The body, placed in this timeless ritual, is given an agenda, similar to a car wash or assembly line, and asked to participate. The construct of events allows one to move in and out of private and shared experiences, from a person naked with oneself to a place of public appearance.

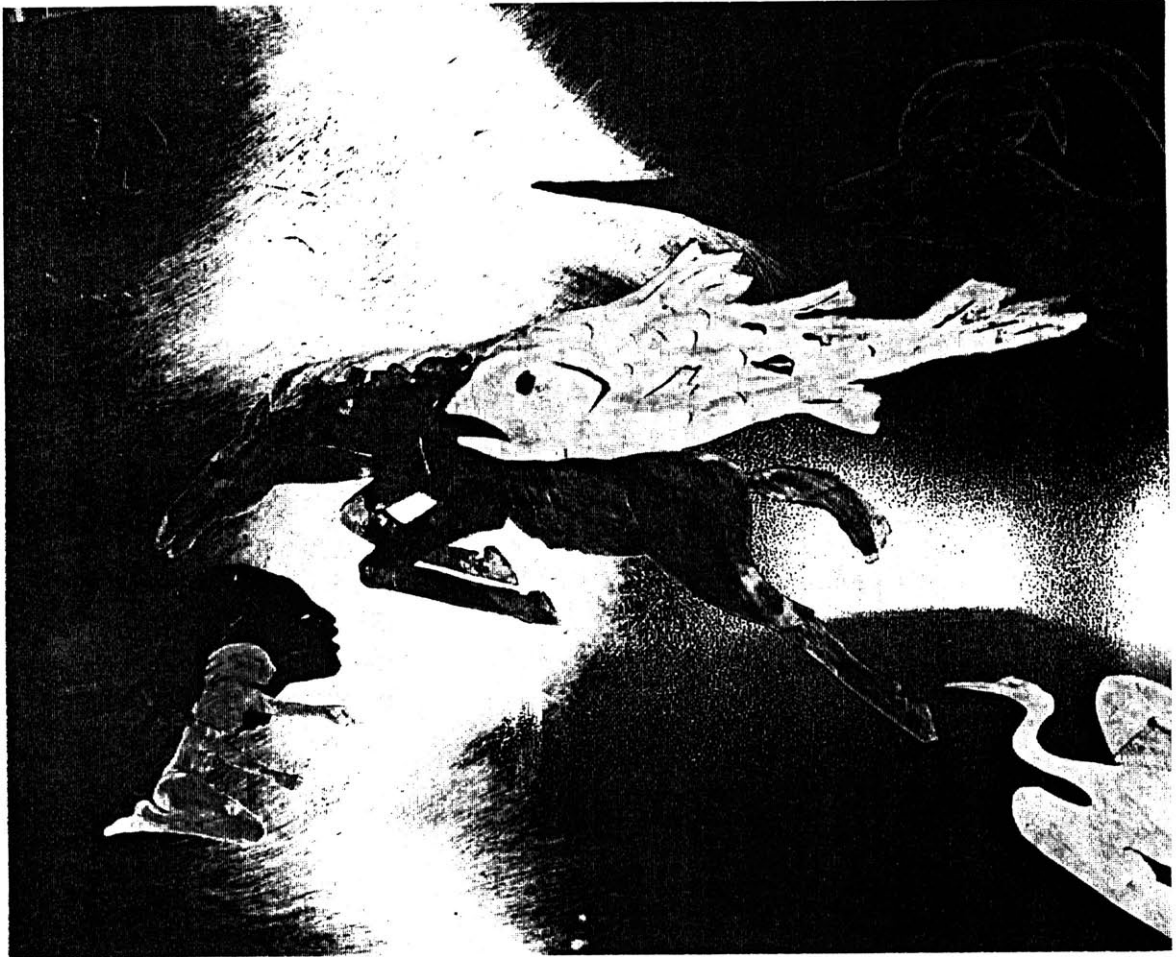


Fig. 3 Mary Frank, *Origins*, 1984. Watercolor on Paper.



In the early stages of human culture, water, like all the elements, was seen as a mysterious force of nature to be both feared and worshipped. It could protect and at the same time destroy —giving birth to gods and goddesses as well as wholesale devastation. Consequently, its use was widespread as a worker of magic and purifier for body and soul. Bathing was inherently part of this and entered into many of water's traditions and rituals. To this day water and bathing are credited with powers of revitalization, renewal, and rebirth.<sup>3</sup>

Reasons for bathing and the bath's purposes have held different meanings over time and for different cultures. These meanings include associations with the spiritual, hygienic, therapeutic, and social. Society's values and beliefs, their environment, climate, and technology have all helped to determine what sort of role the bath would or would not take in people's lives.

The role that bathing plays within a culture reveals the culture's attitude towards human relaxation. It is a measure of how far individual well-being is regarded as an indispensable part of community life.<sup>4</sup>

In general, one may distinguish today between two forms of bathing: ordinary personal washing to get rid of dirt; and, bathing for the well being of the whole person. The first, defined by Giedeon as "external ablution", is performed most often quickly and as an isolated act. Whereas the latter, defined here as "total regeneration", is generally part of a broad ideal and performed for reasons of hygiene, relaxation, and revitalization of the spirit and body.<sup>5</sup> In the United States external ablution, the morning shower for example, is the dominant form of bathing and can be seen to reflect our culture's stress on bathing for cleanliness and hygiene versus relaxation, revitalization, or even spiritual or social meaning. On the other hand, the Russian vapor bath, or *banya*, represents total regeneration's archetype.

<sup>3</sup> George Ryley Scott, *The Story of Baths and Bathing*, London, England: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1939, pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 628.

<sup>5</sup> Giedion, p. 628.

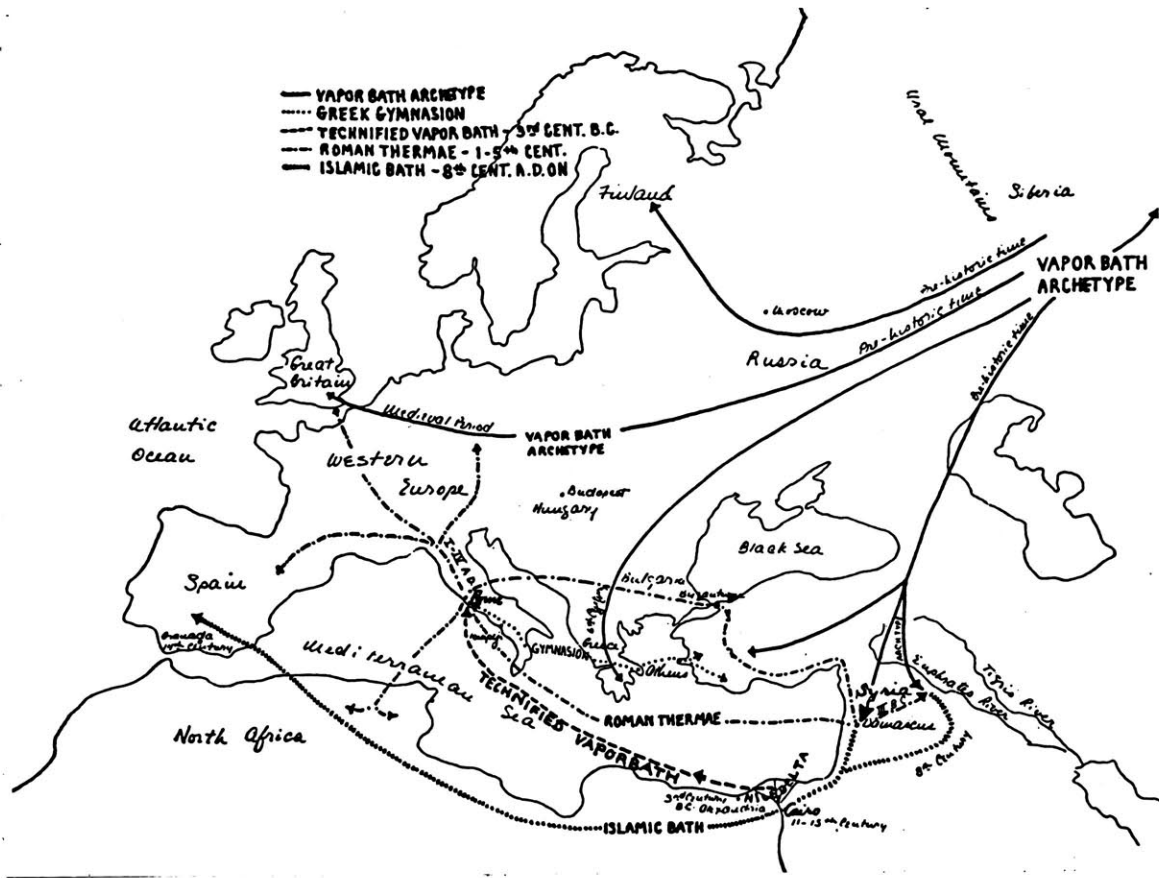
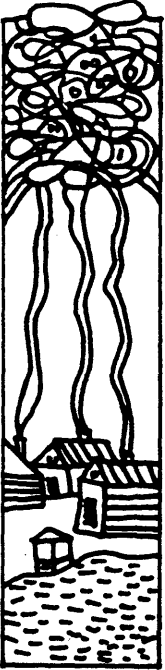


Fig. 4 Itinerary of the Vapor Bath Archetype  
 Giedion, p. 635.



## THE RUSSIAN BATH

### Origins of the Vapor Bath Archetype

Fig. 5 Bathhouse Smoke  
Anatoly Rubikov, (*Sanduny*, Moscow,  
1990), p. 98.

The total regeneration archetype, or vapor bath, originated, according to Giedion, in the interior of the Asiatic Continent, and spread centrifrically outward from this point in pre-historic times.<sup>6</sup> Forms of this archetype were also used for medical and ritualistic purposes by the native North American and Eskimo tribes. Although the Greek gymnasia and Roman thermae incorporated, technified, and elaborated on the vapor bath archetype, it was not their origin. Herodotus, the first Greek historian writing in the fifth century BC, claims that "the idea of this type was derived from the Orient or from the Scythians, who possessed such vapor baths ..."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Giedion, pp. 634-635.

<sup>7</sup> Giedion, p. 646.



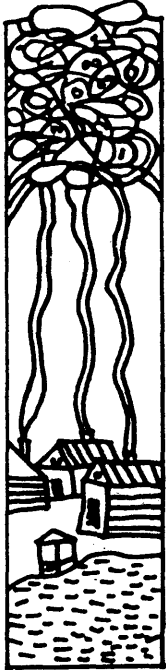
Fig. 6 19th Century Bath  
Giedion, p. 649.

The Scythians, with whom the Greeks traded, were an ancient nomadic tribe who wandered from southern Russia east towards central Asia, and west into Eastern Europe. Other early accounts in Russia describe a combined winter dwelling and vapor bath built partially underground. The Arabic explorer, Ibn-Rusta, reports in 922 AD about such a place:

In the land of the Slavs, dominated by overwhelming cold, everyone must dig a kind of cellar. And like what we see in the Christian churches, they cover it with a pointed roof with earth poured on top. The family then makes a fire upon which they place stones. When the stones begin to glow, water is sprinkled over them and a great steam is emitted. The dwelling becomes so warm that the family must quickly undress. In such quarters they stay until spring.<sup>8</sup>

From Russia, the archetype spread north and west to Finland, Western Europe, and Great Britain. Whether invented by the Russians themselves or borrowed from others is not known. However, it is not the question of who invented it, but rather the fact that this simple early form of total regeneration has preserved itself longest in Russia.

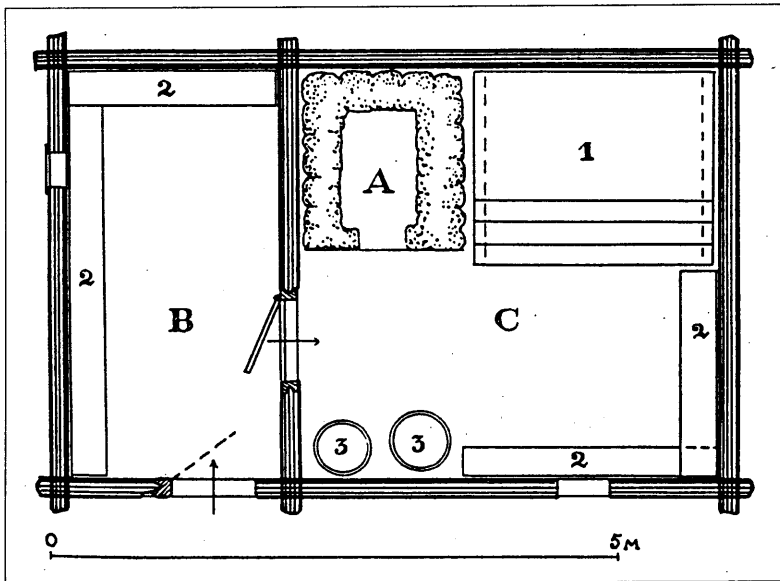
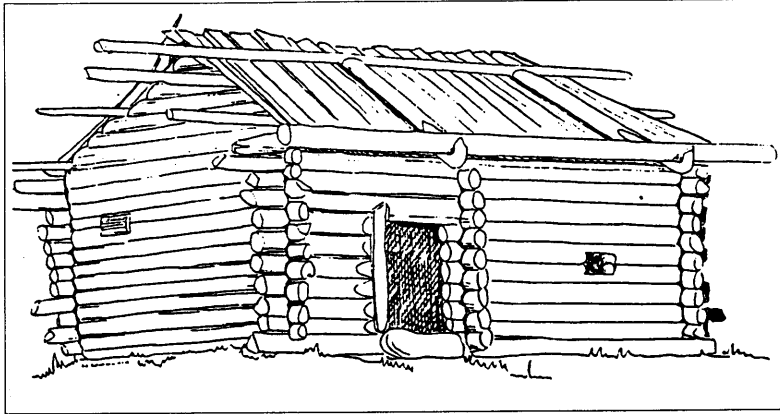
<sup>8</sup> Vahros, p. 26.



## The Building

The banya's common form is a small one to three-room log-hut, about four to six meters long, four meters wide, and two to two-and-a-half meters high from the floor to the bottom of the roof. The walls are built from round logs, preferably from pine, and their chinks filled with moss. The interior is often finished with pine, which gives the room a pleasant aroma. The roof is a low gable covered with wooden shingles, boards, tree branches, or animal skins. Originally, the floor remained bare earth and was laid with straw before one bathed. Another building variation, popular near Moscow, stood above the ground on four posts.

As a precaution against fire, the bathhouse was often located away from the house and barn. And if the village was on a river or by the sea, the bathhouses were built near this water, often forming their own street. In villages, the fountain, well or spring was always near the bathhouses. One seldom finds a bath within the farmyard itself, and even then it stands away from the house, on the property's edge near the fruit trees and vegetable garden.



Inside the banya is the source of the bath's steam—an open-hearth oven built in the form of a barrel vault. It is made from large stones. And above it rest smaller rocks which become glaring red from the oven's heat. The largest known ancient oven measured one-point-two by one-point-seven meters, and stood in a room about twenty square meters. Opposite the oven are tiered benches against the wall. These regulate the temperature by allowing the bather to move further up into the heat or lower down for a respite.

There are two main ways to vent the oven's poisonous carbon-monoxide and smoke, either through a small dampered opening in the steam room itself or through a chimney. This first type, the so-called "black" bath, was preferred by most people up until the nineteenth century. Reasons for this included the fact that it burned fuel more efficiently and had a "sweeter" smelling steam.

Voska banjusku toplt,  
Gnidka - soelok varit,  
Tarakan - drova rubit.<sup>9</sup>

(The lice the banya they do heat,  
And caustic water is cooked by the nit,  
While the roach, fire-wood, he does split.)

Fig. 7 Traditional Log Cabin Bath, plan and perspective

Judging by this children's rhyme, however, conditions in the "black" bath by the 1850's had deteriorated into an unsanitary and vermin infested environment. The "white" bath variation helped to resolve some of these problems. By adding a chimney as well as a changing room, ventilation increased as black soot and dirty clothes were left behind.

Except for some instances in the cities, the vapor bath never developed into a luxury institution. But, rather, remained rooted with the farmers and peasants in the countryside where it attained and preserved its common form. As a social institution, it remained independent of slave labor, unlike Greece, Rome, or Islam. One bather helped the other. Often neighbors would get together and build a bathhouse. It was said: "when there are few banya, one lives in harmony, but when there are many, then one lives badly—for one cannot bathe alone."<sup>10</sup> Today, the banya exists everywhere there are Russian settlements.

<sup>9</sup> Igor Vahros, *Zur Geschichte und Folklore Der Grossrussischen Sauna*, (Helsinki, Finland: Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, 1966), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Vahros, p. 13.

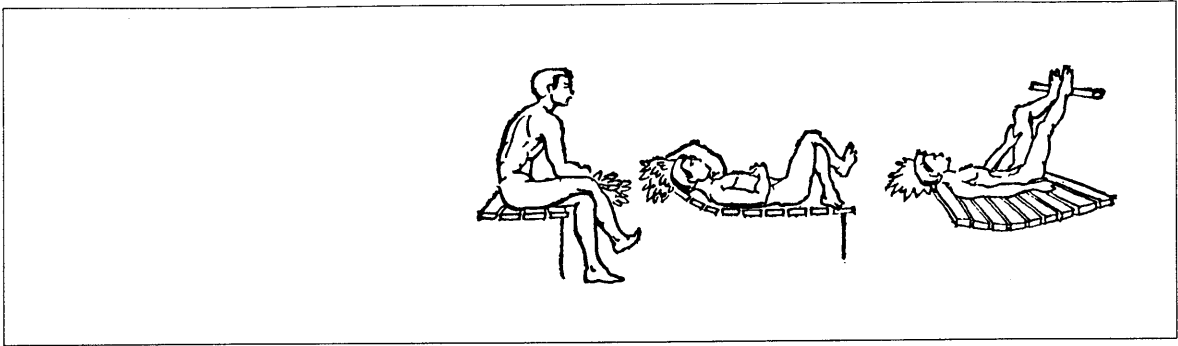
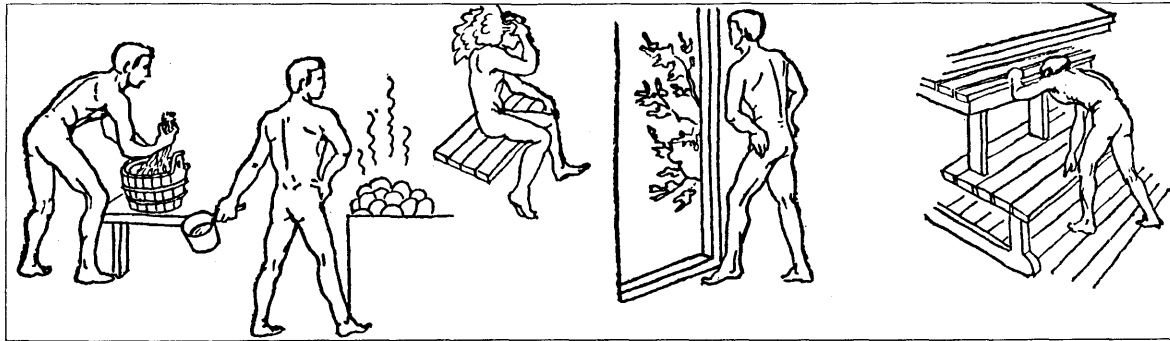
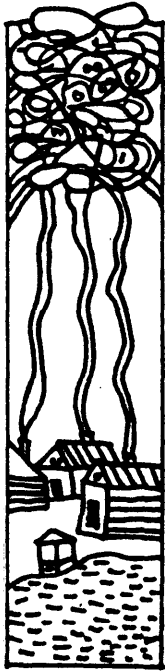


Fig. 8 Taking the Steam  
Konkov and Tokarev, *1,000 Words of Advice to the Master*, (Irkutsk: Eastern Siberian Book Publishers, 1992) pp. 88-89.



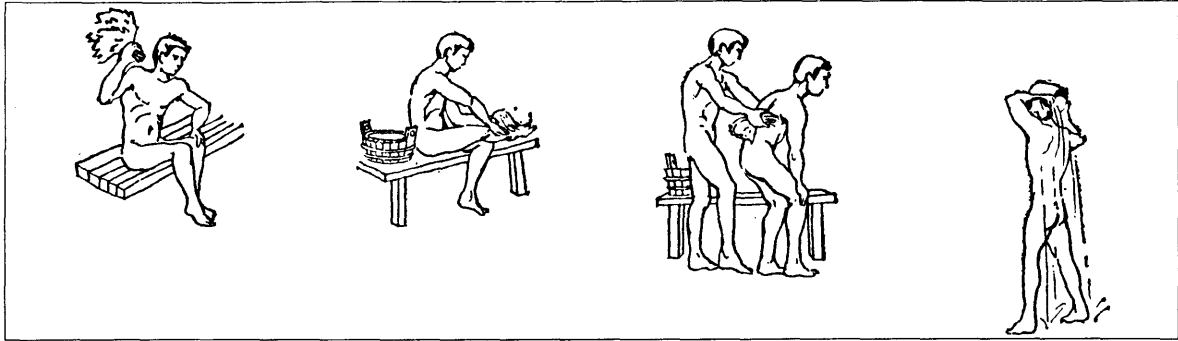


## Taking the Steam

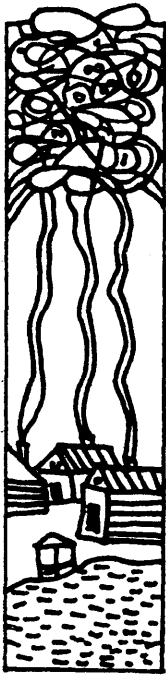


In its most simple form, all one needs for the Russian vapor bath are red hot stones, water, a basin, and a birch or oak-leaf brush. Either sitting or lying down, the idea is to provoke intense perspiration by pouring water over the glowing rocks thus creating a steam drenched atmosphere. Beer, brandy, honey or herbs were also sometimes thrown onto the rocks, an early version of "aroma-therapy" which made the steam smell even better. In order to obtain the right amount of steam an abundant amount of water must be thrown onto the glowing rocks. Hence, the Russian saying —"he drinks as if he were an oven", comparable in meaning to our saying —"he drinks like a fish". To further stimulate the skin, one hits oneself, or better still, a fellow bather, with the leaf brush. Because Russians use this brush so ardently, many stories and riddles have developed around it —"What is small and shaggy, all people are beaten by it, and not even the czar is spared?"

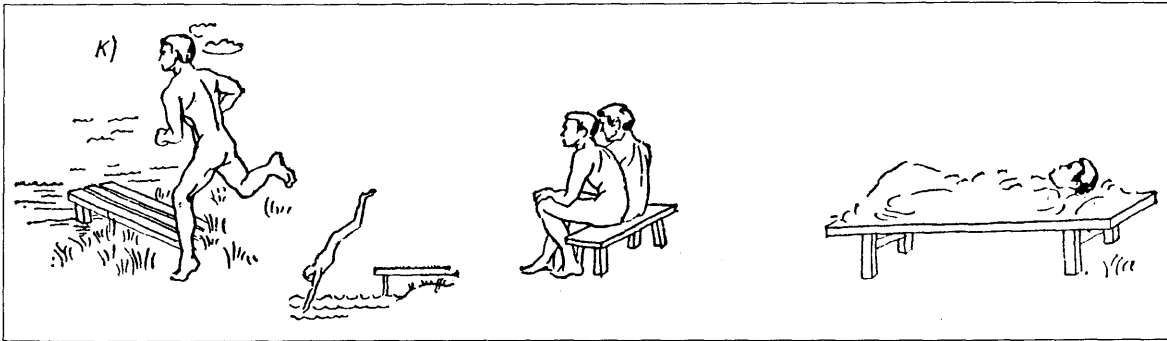
When there was no separate wash-room, washing oneself with soap was done in the same room where one steamed. On the floor was a water barrel and wash basin, and the water was heated by throwing some of the hot stones directly into the basin. Today, the water tank is built directly into the oven. Washing helps to remove the dirt loosened by the leaf-brush and perspiration from the skin's surface. Another method uses the brush dipped in a soapy lather as a washcloth. To rinse, several basins of clean water are poured over the body. To cool off, a plunge in a nearby river or pool, a roll in the snow, or a quick cold-water shower is still the tradition.



## Folklore and Literature



Many references to the banya and its use can be found in Russian folklore and literature. The twentieth century writer, Vasily Shukshin, in his short story titled *Alyosha Bezkanvoye*, describes Alyosha's experiences with life and in the bathhouse. Shukshin is well known for this story, and through his hero, Alyosha (whom other people take to be a fool), his philosophy of life is revealed (as only a fool can do). Paraphrased from the Russian, the bathhouse portion of this story goes:



Using only birch wood, Alyosha started the fire and brought into the banya a large basin of water. Watching the logs as they were burning, he thought to himself —how is it that two different people could live the same life, but two different logs will never burn the same way?

After stirring the new coals, he left the banya for a couple of hours. This allowed the poisonous air to dissipate, and the good air to ripen.

Reentering the banya, Alyosha first steams the dry birch brush by placing it in hot water. Then he pours water onto the oven's glowing stones. It being very hot, he sits down and waits (for the good sweat). Climbing up further into the heat, he carries the birch brush with him. Alyosha knows that it is a big mistake to at first beat yourself vigorously with the brush. So, instead, he begins to brush very lightly, whisking it along his body, and barely touching the skin. After splashing a basin of cold water all over himself, he repeats the same procedure all over again —this time beating ardently with the brush.

It was already dark as Alyosha returned home. He quietly lay down on his bed. He did not feel his body, and the whole world was spinning around his heart.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Aleksei V. Galitskii, *Jedrogo Para*, (Moscow, 1980), pp. 87-89.

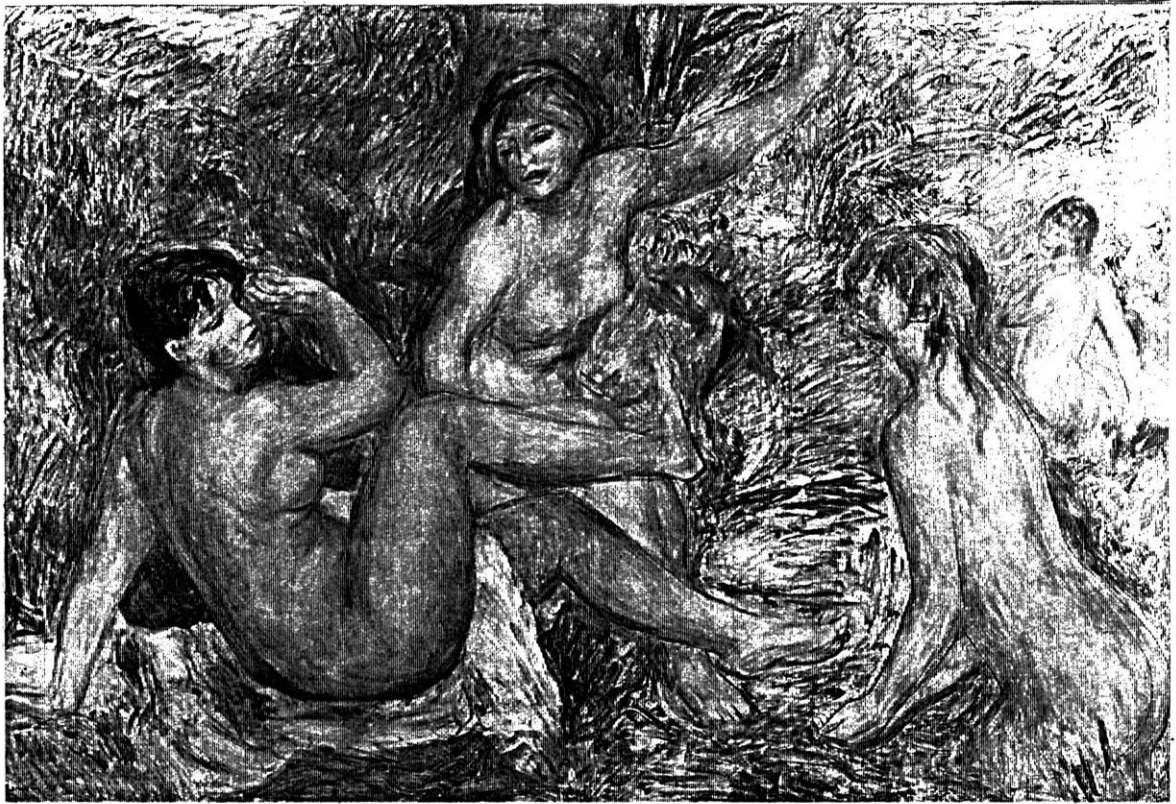


Fig. 9 The Bathers II, August Renoir  
Arts Council of Great Britain, *Renoir*,  
(Great Britain: Jolly and Barber, Ltd.,  
1985).

On a lighter note, the Soviet poet Andrei Voznesensky, acts as an on-looker and gives a vivid description of a winter banya as well as the women who use it.

#### Siberian Bathhouses

Bathhouses! Bathhouses! The door bangs like a shot!  
Women, no shift to the lot, jump into a drift.

From the heat, from the steam to the snow-  
So, so!

Renoir would be crude  
Trying to catch these Siberian nudes!

What madonnas! Those shoulders,  
Those powerful rumps, molded  
As if in cast iron  
Blast furnaces spewed.

Breathless with running —  
Here purity: snow's, fire's,  
Is three-and-thouing  
Nakedness' purity.

A clean, frosty day.  
We stand there, four fellows, steaming,  
In sheepskins, blood and fire,  
And make like stampeding those dames - what a  
game!

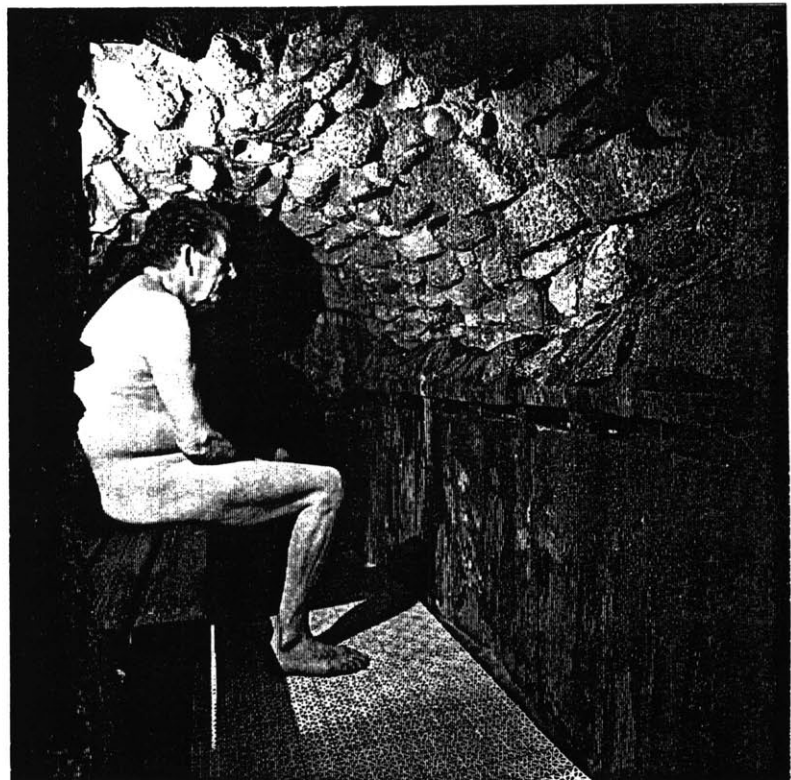
Oh, the scare!  
Oh, into the hut  
At full speed, like a cannon volley.  
Ugh!

But golly! Lingerin', one, leaning against the jamb,  
Will stoop  
And with a laugh fling

A snowball at a boyfriend —bam!<sup>13</sup>

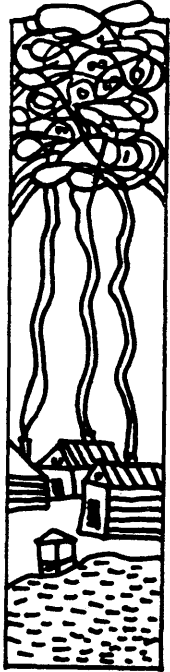
<sup>13</sup> Avram Yarmolinsky, *Two Centuries of Russian Verse*, (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 278.

In general, the Russians visited the bathhouse at least once a week, especially on Saturdays before the evening vespers. It was customary for whole families to bathe together, and even very small children were taken along. On holidays and family festivals, bathing was always done the night before as part of the ritual or in preparation for the ceremony. It is common hospitality to prepare the bathhouse for visitors, and one definitely bathed after returning from a long trip. As Pushkin writes in 1832: "The Russian does not change his clothes during a trip, and when he has reached his destination—he is like a total pig. And he gets into the banya, for it is like a second mother."<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Vahros, p. 25.

Fig. 10 Man in Bath  
Ignasi Sola-Morales, *Arquitectura  
Balnearia a Catalunya*, Barcelona, 1986),  
p. 158.



## European Accounts and Attitudes

Foreign guests were also treated to this form of hospitality. Giedion relates the experience of an eighteenth century Frenchman, Abbe Chappe d'Autoroche, who visited Tobolsk in Siberia in 1761. Having heard much about the banya's effect, he was very interested in testing it on his own body.

... sledded to the bath hut by the river, he opened the door, but such "clouds of smoke" swirled around him that he quickly shut it again. "I thought that a conflagration had broken out in the bath house ... the amount of heat was far from what I was prepared to meet with, for I had supposed that these baths were intended for cleansing." They eventually gave him to understand that he was expected to perspire. But, he adds, "As I was quite satisfied with my state of health, I resolved to leave straight away." Not wishing, however, to offend the good people who had heated the bath overnight for his benefit, he made a third attempt. "I undressed quickly and instantly fell to sweating." The heat goes to his head; he imagines he is sitting on a red hot iron, falls from his bench, shatters his thermometer, and is unable to dress again, for while he cannot force clothes on his damp body within the bathhouse, it is too cold to do so outside. In despair he slips on his nightgown and asks to be sledded back to his room. "This venture left me so displeased with the Russian baths that I remained in Tobolsk five months without trying them again, in spite of all the representations that were made to me."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Giedion, pp. 648-649.



Fig. 11 The Russian Bath Through 18th  
Century Eyes  
Giedion, p. 647.

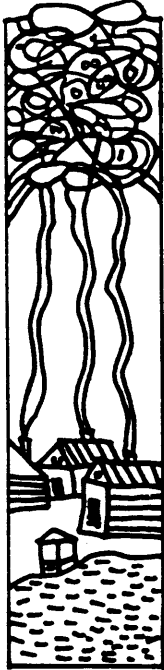


By the late sixteenth century, bathing as a social institution had been abandoned in Western Europe, largely as a result of the Reformation and Counter Reformation. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, the public bath was neither a place for cleansing or regeneration, but, rather, linked to houses of prostitution where sex and bathing were on sale together. Except in these places, nakedness was regarded as a sin, and, consequently, bathing was also considered a sin, rarely enjoyed or even taken.<sup>15</sup> This attitude may explain in part d'Autoroche's curiosity as well as his astonishment and uneasiness. An earlier report written by a German, Adam Olearius, in 1639, after his second visit to Moscow, confirms the belief that the bath was a place for promiscuity, enjoyed by both women and men.

They (the Russians) can endure a lot of heat. Lying on the sweaty bench, they allow the heat to seep into their bodies, and further rub it in through brushing and thrashing—which was unbearable to me. When the heat finally makes them all red and they can no longer stand it in the bathhouse, the women as well as the men run out quickly and pour cold water over themselves. In the winter they roll around in the snow and rub their skin with it as if it were soap. Then, quickly once again, back into the hot bath they go. Since the bathhouses are commonly situated near rivers or streams, the people run naked between the hot and cold baths. The married women were not at all sensitive or modest, and they never became angry even when a young German bachelor sprang with them into the baths. Unlike the furious goddess Diana, who in her games would spray the man with water, thereby turning him into a stag—they did not react in anger, although they had every right and opportunity to do so.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Giedion, pp. 653-654.

<sup>16</sup> Vahros, p. 24.



## Tradition and Purpose

Above all, the Russians visited the bathhouse to perspire. It revived the bather's spirit and brought much pleasure: "Tobacco, the bar, a good marriage, and the banya all bring the same pleasures."<sup>17</sup> From time immemorial, its diverse functions included those of social institutions and source of personal hygiene, relaxation and good health. Flax, hemp, and other grasses were dried in the bathhouse, clothing was washed and the sick went there to get better. A few common proverbs go:

In the banya you sweat, and in the banya you are cured.

The banya will wash away all your sins.

The day you take the steam, you don't grow old.

You'll hear nine (all the) news in one bath.<sup>18</sup>

Most common was the belief in the healing and rejuvenating powers of the banya's steam and intense perspiration. Having observed that one perspired more when ill, it was believed that through the elimination of bodily perspiration, all that is evil and bad in the body also leaves. Consequently, the bathhouse came to be known as a place with strong curative and mystical powers, and was inextricably bound with life's rituals, ceremonies, and critical times of transition. The bathhouse was also believed to be inhabited by spirits whose characters were often malicious. Healers, bathers, and witches sought to maintain a good alliance with these supernatural powers through the use of spells, incantations, and various prohibitions on the use of the sauna. For example, bathing alone was not allowed and the third shift was always

<sup>17</sup> Vahros, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Galitskii, pp. 74-76.



Fig. 12 Still from the Film *The Dawns Are Quiet Here*  
Rubikov, p. 112.

reserved for the spirit. These rules can be partly explained by the fact that there did exist potential dangers such as carbon-monoxide poisoning, staying too long in the heat, accidental falls, etc. Other areas of Russia, however, attributed positive characteristics to the banya spirits, naming them 'little sauna mothers' and offering them sweet-milk soup.

Since ancient times the banya was also associated with death, engagement, and marriage ceremonies. Rituals for the dead were preserved up through the 1850's. Along with the practice of leaving meals in the bathhouse for the dead, it was customary to 'warm their souls' after the fortieth day when, it was believed, the soul finally left its mortal frame. Of special significance was the bride's bath - a part of the marriage ceremony which ritualized the separation from the bride's family and the beginning of her passage into marriage. Here, in the form of a lament, the bride sings of her lost freedom and symbols of youth.

## The Bath

On the eve of her forthcoming wedding, according to the custom, her girlfriends awaken the bride who in turn begins to lament:

Get to work my dear friends,  
Heat the steaming bath,  
Young girl, wash me up,  
For these are my last hours,  
Time is growing ever shorter,  
I have only one day left.  
Heat the bath my dear friends.

The girls go to heat the bath. While heating the bath they tell fortunes by digging up hot stones with a hook and placing them into water with tongs. If the first stone whizzes loudly, it means the husband will be cross, if it hisses softly, he will be good-tempered.

With a new spoon they taste the alkaline solution for the bath, to see whether it is sweet or not. If it is sweet the pair will have a good life, if not, the husband shall beat the wife.

When the bath is heated, the girls go to the betrothed with the tongs, the hook, a broom, etc.; they stand in the hall and chant:

The doors opened by themselves,  
The doors were standing on pivots,  
Up to this and before that  
The doors opened by themselves,  
The doors were standing on pivots.

The betrothed lets the girls into the house. Then they chant:

To the father:

Wish us well, our uncle provider,  
And you get to the steamy bath,  
Water from the spring is heated,  
The silken twigs are steamed up,  
A dish of soap is there,  
But don't you get ready, dear uncle,  
The bath was not heated for you,  
Not for you was the bath prepared.

Fig. 13 Still from the Film *The Dawns  
Are Quiet Here*  
Rubikov, p. 112.



To the bride:

Where is our dear friend?  
We've prepared a steaming bath,  
We've heated the spring water,  
Steamed up silken twigs,  
And a dish of soap is there.

The bride to her girlfriends:

Thank you my dear girlfriends,  
You have heated the steaming bath  
Before the last few hours approach.

After the invitation to the bath, the father and mother bless the bride with an icon. During the blessing ceremony the bride is veiled and stands on a coat lined with fur, the fur itself being turned up. The father, the brother and the girlfriends take along beer, wine, dumplings and cookies and lead the bride accompanied by a professional wailing woman to the bath; they sing:

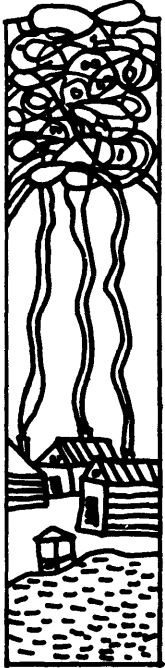
The horn has been blowing early at dawn,  
A pretty girl was crying over her fair plait:  
"Soon my fair plait will be braided in two,  
They will braid my plait around my head,  
I am sorry to part with my fair plait,  
My heart will be aching until I die,  
I shall never forget my youth, joy and freedom."<sup>19</sup>

This lamentation poetry is in the same tradition as the slow lyrical folk songs of Russia. However, in an age of rationalism, the banya's ritual functions have all but disappeared and the rich poetry is gradually being lost.

<sup>19</sup> Alex E. Alexander, *Russian Folklore*, (Belmont, MA.: Nordland Publishing Company), pp. 63-65.



Fig. 14 Bathing in the Kitchen Oven  
Vahros, p. 33.



## In the City

The vapor bath archetype, a single-log hut near water if possible, remains to this day in the Russian countryside. However, in places where wood was difficult to obtain or land was not available, the poorer peasants and city dwellers still had to have their bath. For many of them it was an essential bodily and spiritual need. Consequently, the custom of bathing in their own apartment in the large "Russian oven", especially after baking bread, became widespread. In a few of the larger cities, this type of vapor bath was well known and commonly used. In Russian literature and life, the kitchen with its oven is often the most important place in the dwelling. The oven is often used as a warm place to sleep upon as well as the setting around which family and friends gather. In this context, it is easy to see why the practice of bathing in the oven was also adopted. A description on how to build and use the oven as a bath comes from a 1856 Moscow journal:

When the oven is used for a bath, it should be especially spacious with a wide opening and inside height of one meter or more ...one then drags oneself along feet first into the oven and stretches out upon the straw with the head facing towards the oven's opening. After closing the damper, dip some straw or a cloth into the prepared basin of water and wet the warm (inside) vault to produce steam. When there is sufficient steam, hit oneself with a brush soaked in hot water. After the bath, pour a basin of cold water over yourself in the hallway or yard.<sup>20</sup>

In this form, the vapor bath was available to most city dwellers, at a minimal cost, and with good energy efficiency. However, as there was room enough for only one in the oven, it was a private act and lacked the pleasures which came from sharing the experience with friends.

<sup>20</sup> Vahros, p. 27-28.

Fig. 15 Facade of the Sanduny Baths in Moscow  
Rubikov, p. 112.



As the cities became more crowded, the government encouraged the building of more public baths by exempting them from taxes. The difference between these city baths lay more in how clean and well kept up they were than in their form—which in the nineteenth century still closely resembled their countryside origins.

On, Saturday afternoon, you perceive an extraordinary bustle among all the lower classes of Petersburg. Whole companies of soldiers, who have obtained leave of absence, troops of mechanics and laborers, families of poor working people, men, women and children, are busily running to and fro in the streets, with towels under their arms and birch twigs in their hands.<sup>21</sup>

Private bathhouses, built within or adjoining wealthier dwellings, as well as more expensive public establishments, differed from the others in that there were often at least two additional rooms—one for washing and others for rest and refreshment after the bath.

In 1806, a famous bathing establishment was built in Moscow called Sanduny, named after its original owners. It is still in operation, yet was wholly renovated and expanded at the turn of the century. Very little is known about the first Sanduny, except that it was a “white” bath. The building was made of brick and survived the Napoleonic war, when almost all of Moscow burned down. Sanduny could accommodate six-

<sup>21</sup> George Ryley Scott, *The Story of Baths and Bathing*, (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd.), 1939, p. 108.



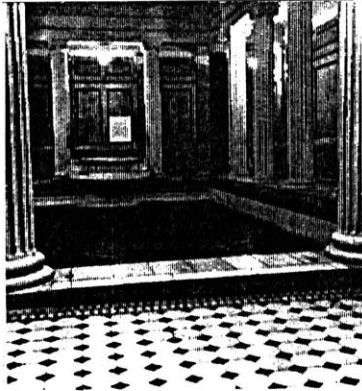


Fig. 16 Cold Pool at Sanduny  
Rubikov, p. 112.

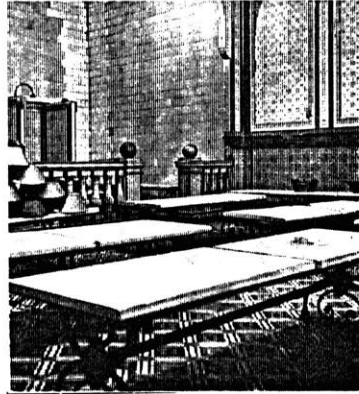


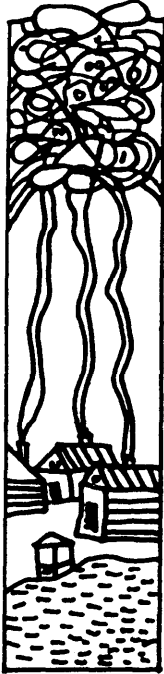
Fig. 17 Dressing Room  
Rubikov, p. 112.

hundred-and-fifty people, and had two separate areas—one for the nobility and the other for poorer people. It was enjoyed by artists and intellectuals. When in Moscow, Tolstoy liked going there, and Pushkin was said to have visited often.<sup>22</sup>

The present Sanduny was completed in 1895 by its new merchant owner. He tore down the existing building, bought additional land, and tripled its size. Unlike the more simple and traditional Russian bathhouse, this new building was an amalgamation of many foreign types and styles adapted from ideas gathered by the merchant on his travels to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, and Rome. It surpassed in opulence any existing baths in Russia. Composed of three separate buildings, connected by a glass-covered winter garden, the new Sanduny distinguished itself by being very clean, with good ventilation, electricity, and hot and cold running water. The first building contained apartments on the second floor, one rented for a short time in 1901 to Anton Chekhov, and small shops on the first floor through which one had to pass in order to reach the baths in the second and third buildings. It was and still is an important social institution. Large groups of friends could spend an entire afternoon there amusing themselves in the great variety of activities, and the most famous people in Moscow would visit there, seeing each other and being seen.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Anatoly Rubikov, *Sanduny*, (Moscow, 1990), pp. 3-25.

<sup>23</sup> Rubikov, pp. 98-139.



## In Russia Today

Although the Communists abolished all rituals associated with the banya, they still endorsed it as an "important instrument of national hygiene". People who love the steam, and those who live in housing without baths, have currently helped to keep a large number of bathhouses in operation. Today, the "white" bath is the most prevalent type, and is found in the largest cities of western Russia as well as the most remote regions of Siberia.

Although the city baths have preserved the elements most basic to the Russian banya—red glowing rocks, hot steam, cold water, and the birch-leaf brush, they have also been modified and expanded. In keeping with the Communist ethic, they still do not represent a luxury institution and are available to all. However, the incorporation of additional services, new technology, and prevailing western attitudes towards the naked body have all influenced their transformation in the city. In general, these urban facilities are located in buildings constructed using the preferred Soviet method of pre-cast concrete panels, and technology has replaced the traditional wood-burning oven with a gas or electric furnace. In the larger bathhouses other services often include a barbershop or hair salon, massage, dining area, and separate bathing facilities for men and women. Some baths are also located within sport complexes. For foreign visitors, the larger hotels will often have a banya rather than a swimming pool or spa typical in the United States.

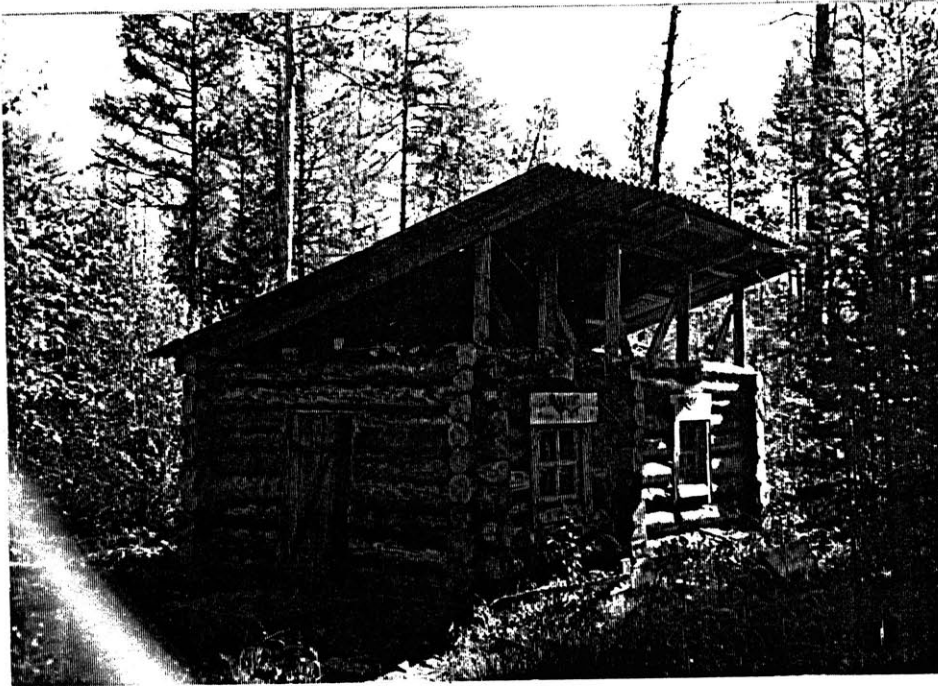


Fig. 18 Bathhouse in Siberia

In the countryside the banya's transformation has not been as extensive. Many Russians still get together with their neighbors and build a bathhouse near their dacha (a simple summer house often surrounded by a vegetable garden). One can find in the book shops a number of 'how-to' books describing for the urbanite how a banya is built. These range in size from the simple single room log-hut to the now more popular and typical three-room bathhouse.

As a social institution the bathhouse today appears more popular with men than women, and can often take on the atmosphere of a men's club. This, one can say, has been encouraged. While laws in the former Soviet Union allowed (and even forced) women into the workplace, they didn't free them from their second and third jobs as home-maker and child-rearer. Men have had more free time, and, consequently, use the bathhouses more often as social clubs and alternative places to do business. This is well illustrated by a 1993 television segment on 60 Minutes, where Mike Wallace was filmed in a bathhouse with Russian military personnel before reporting on their nuclear weapons arsenal. However, the idea of putting guests or co-workers at ease by sharing meals and cultural traditions is not new. It has always been, for both men and women, an important part of the banya's role in Russia.

For a man traveling at bullet or supersonic speed to his destination, it is difficult to comprehend wounded honor, the grid of class barriers, the contemplation of a single tree, or ambivalence at prayer. Yet such was the stuff of (Russia's) nineteenth century poetry, concerned with the movements of the individual soul, whose evolution turned out to foreshadow all the laws of thermo—and aerodynamics. —Joseph Brodsky

<sup>24</sup> *An Age Ago: A Selection of 19th Century Poetry*, pp. 8-9.

From *Ruslan and Liudmila* :

Into a bath of Russian splendor.  
Already steaming floods are fed  
Into the silver vats with splashing;  
Cool founts, in turn, come hissing, plashing.  
They spread rich fabrics of Iran,  
Whereon reclines the weary Kahn;  
Fine wisps of steam about him loop;  
Fond eyes cast down, the lovely troupe,  
All eagerness to serve him, press  
Their charming all-but-nakedness  
About his couch, a playful group.  
Above him, one of them is waving  
The supple birch-twigs tender points,  
His frame with fervent freshness laving;  
Another cossets, silky palms  
Perfumed with rose, his stiffened joints  
As she most winsomely anoints  
His dusky curls with fragrant balms.  
'Mid such delights, Ratmir, enraptured,  
Has lost all memory of captured  
Liudmila's lately dreamed-of charms;  
What roving eyes light up to see  
He craves with pangs of sweet desire,

His heart is molten, caught on fire  
With passionate expectancy.

Here from the fountain house he issues,  
Is gently swathed in velvet tissues,  
And by these lovely hands released  
But to be seated to a feast.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Pushkin, *Ruslan and Liudmila*, (Ann Arbor: Ardis Inc., 1977), pp. 62-63.

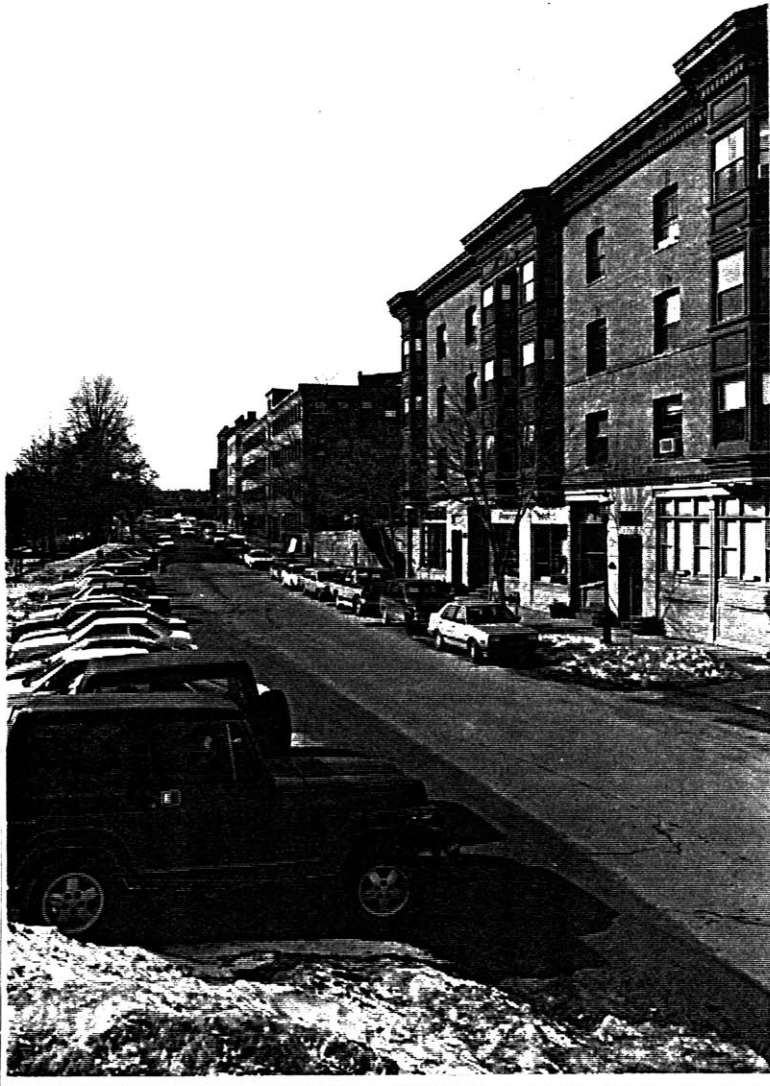
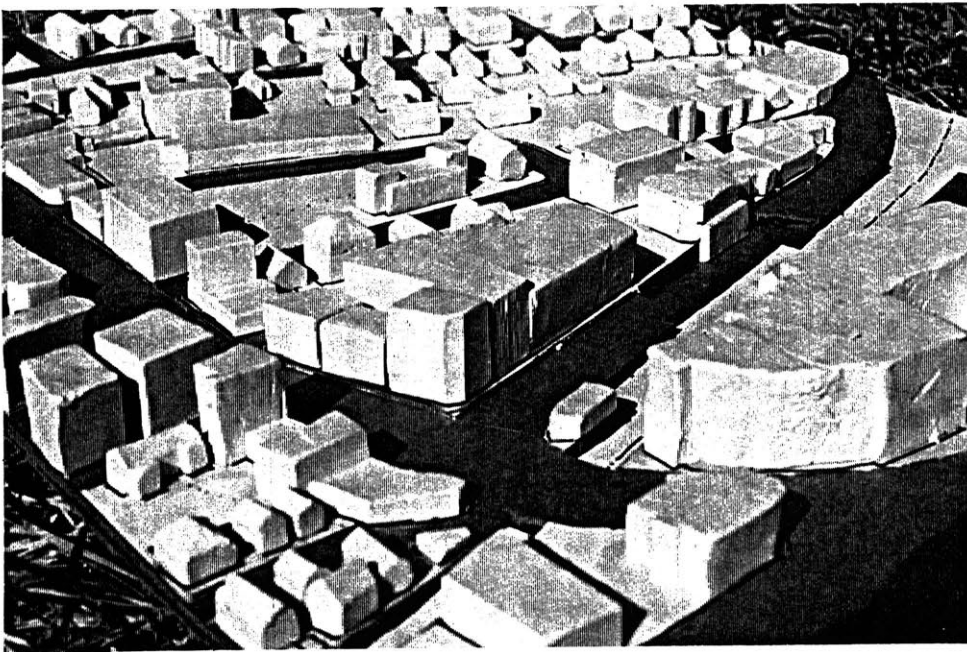


Fig. 19 View West Towards Commercial  
Center on Station Street

## SITE



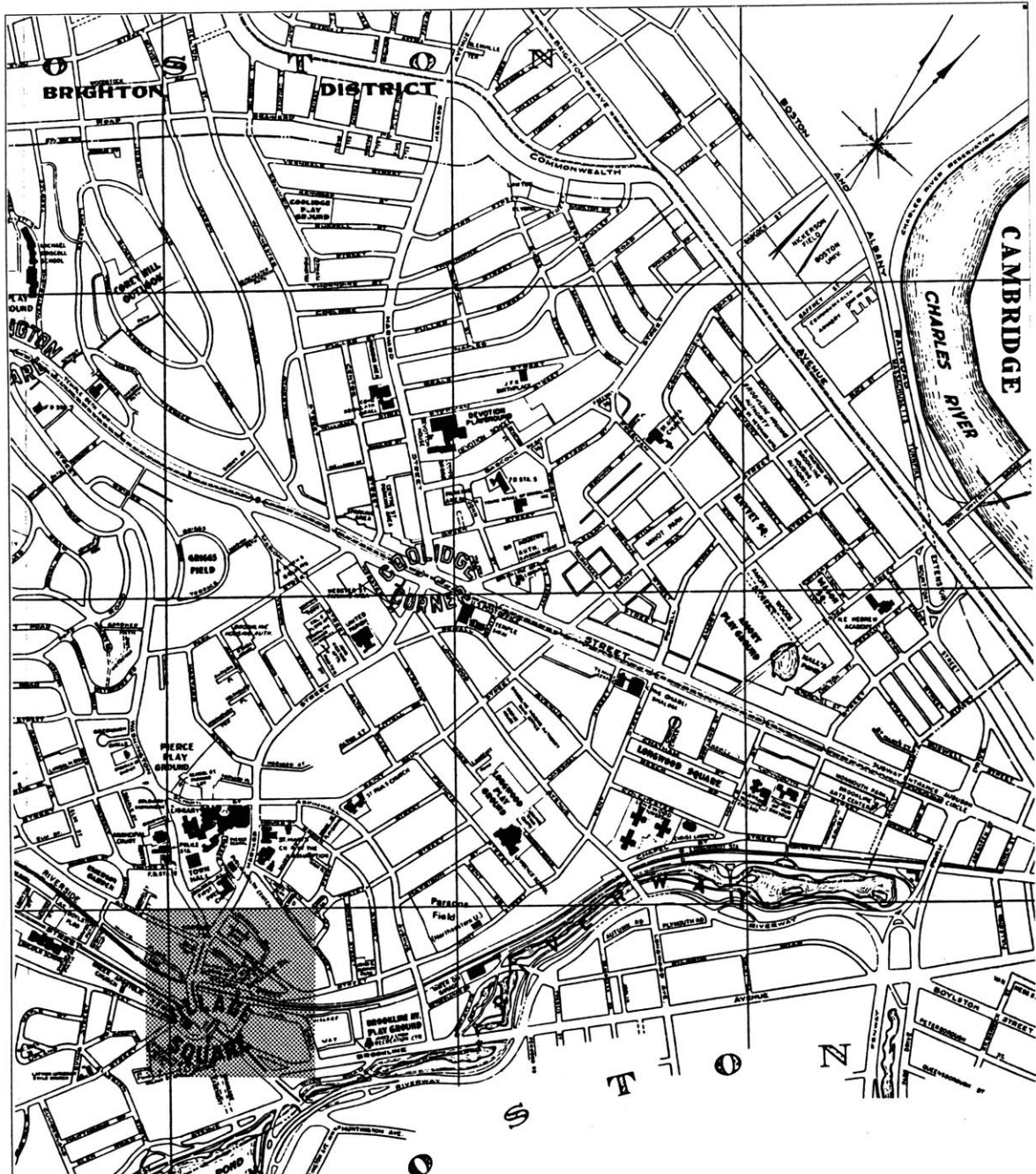
Brookline Village is one of several commercial pockets in the Town of Brookline, Massachusetts. It is composed of mainly three to four story contiguous brick buildings with apartments above first floor commercial shops. The area is a combination of both gritty and gentrified building blocks. Behind this street facade, the brick gives way to a finer grain of wood-framed Victorian houses. Many of these residences, closest to the commercial center, have either been turned into small offices or torn down.

Fig. 20 Site Model Looking North-East



Fig. 21 Map of Brookline

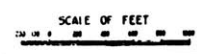




MAP OF THE  
**TOWN OF BROOKLINE**  
 MASSACHUSETTS.

Wilcox T. Griffiths  
 COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS

1991



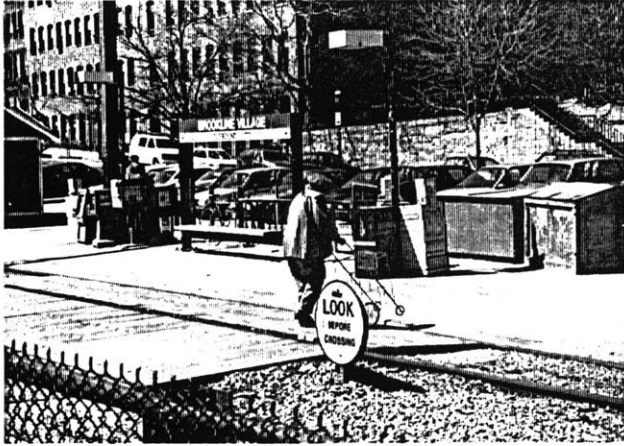


Fig. 22 Pedestrian Crossing



Fig. 23 Site from Station Street



Fig. 24 Kent Street looking East Towards Site

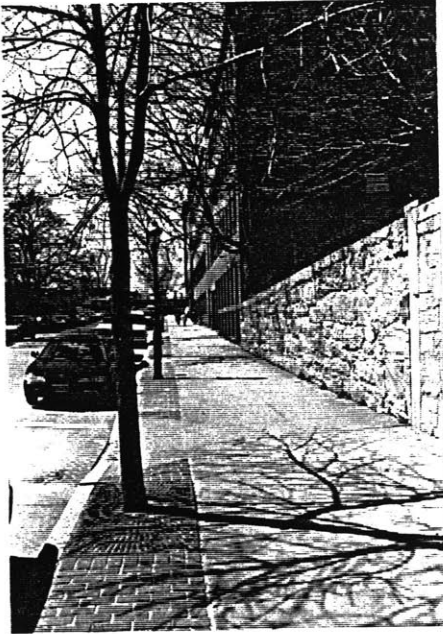
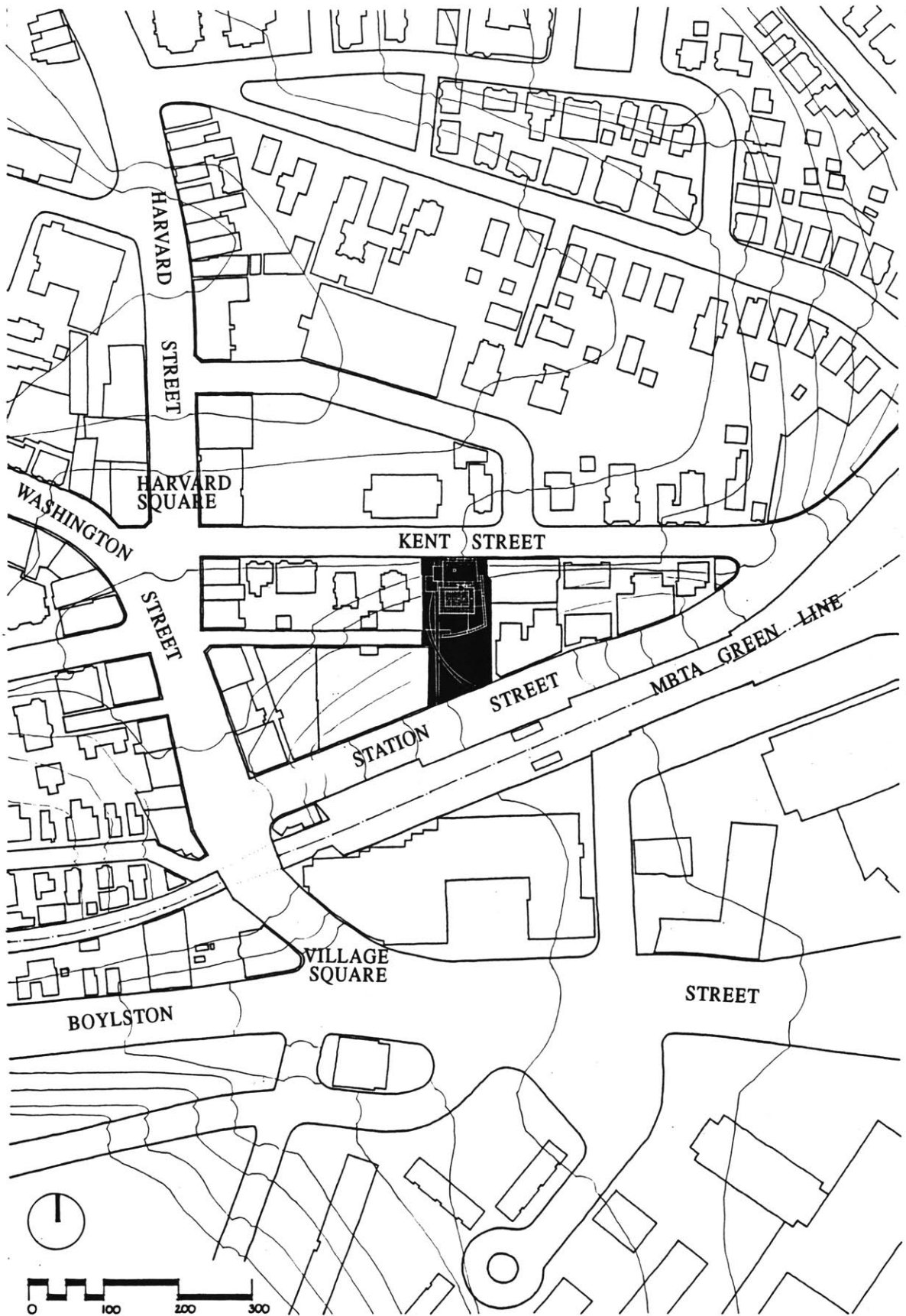
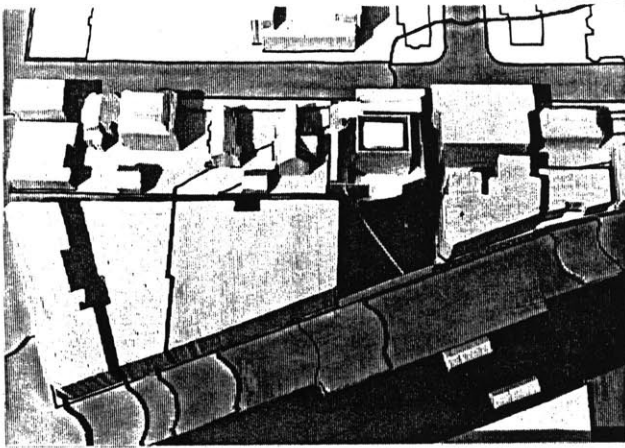


Fig. 25 Retaining Wall

The site chosen for the bathhouse straddles this edge between wooden residential and masonry commercial. Currently a small parking lot, it is bounded by Kent Street to the north and Station Street to the south. Residential and commercial buildings flank both sides to the east and west. Its southern edge is raised above Station Street on a granite retaining wall, once part of Boston's railroad corridor. This contributes to a sectional change of over twenty feet between Station and Kent Street.

Boston's Green Line runs above ground and parallel to Station Street with a stop directly across from the site. It connects Brookline Village with downtown Boston and Newton Center. The stop is also the only on-grade pedestrian crossing between Boston's Boylston Street and Brookline. From this crossing people often take a short-cut across the site and into the commercial center.





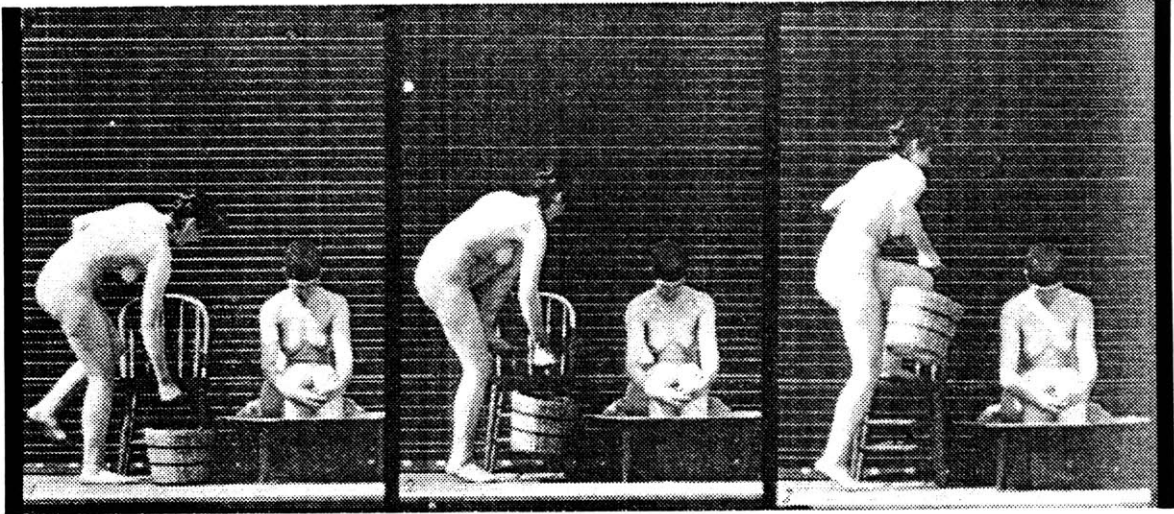
Site challenges to the project's design include the large section change and issues of privacy. Windows from the neighboring buildings look down on the site and depend on this open pocket for light and air. There is also the issue of what sort of connections to and through the site should be maintained. Some of the reasons for pushing the building back from Station Street and sheltering it with walls and screens originated from these concerns.

Other challenges include the notion of the bath as a hybrid, encompassing both commercial and institutional aspects. By looking at other institutions in the area, it can be seen that most are set back from the street, often sited on corner lots, and surrounded by green areas. Unlike commercial buildings, which must draw in new customers by their location on the street with open doors, the institutional building is for the initiated—in this case, Boston's Russian immigrant community of over 35,000 people; 25,000 or so of whom live nearby to the northwest of Brookline Village in Brookline and Brighton.

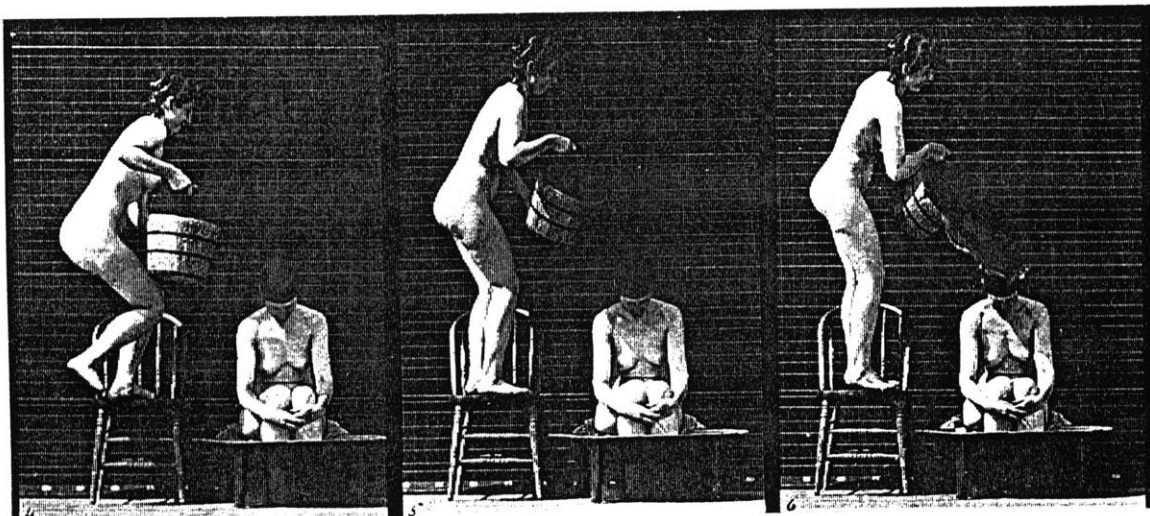
By locating the bath on the edge of this community as well as the edge of Boston's medical area, the intention is to break this edge and allow for the inclusion of the unfamiliar and uninitiated. Here, the transformation of a foreign element put into America would reflect the differences between the private act of bathing alone to remove dirt versus a communal act of bathing for revitalization of body and spirit.

Fig. 26 Site Plan

Fig. 27 Detail of Site Model



Where are the institutions of well being? Where are the adult clubs, besides the boys' clubs or other clubs the city needs? A city like this could easily stand four Baths of Caracalla.  
—Louis I. Kahn<sup>26</sup>



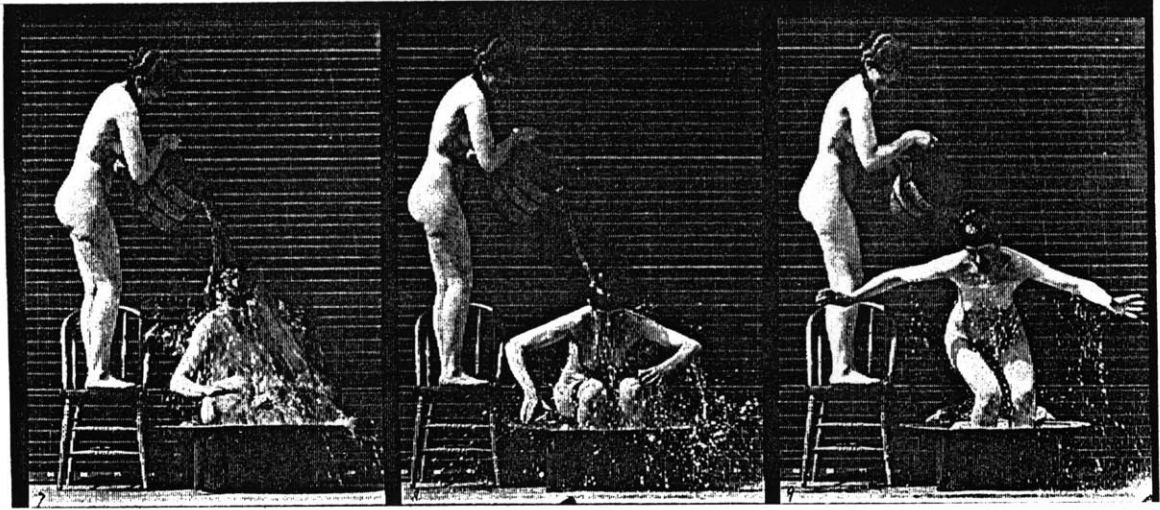
## CLIENT AND PROGRAM

The bath's program is an adaptation and translation of the traditional Russian banya. In order to gain a better perspective and to take advantage of my resources I asked a small group of Russians living in Boston to act as clients and help establish the program.

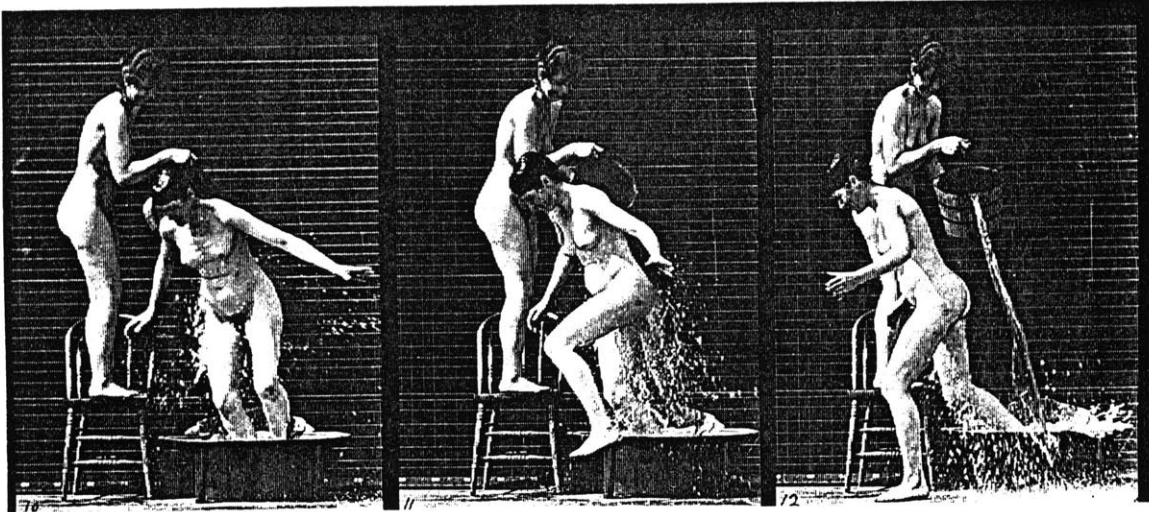
A synthesis of my talks with them showed that most saw the banya as good place to gather, swap stories, and meet and make friends. They thought a bath in Brookline could be successful since the other two baths in greater Boston (Norwood and Chelsea) were too far away to get to on a regular basis. They saw the banya as a social institution very different from, for example, an American health club. Separation of men and women was important for them, since one must be naked to fully enjoy the effects of the bath. Additional services, such as an exercise room and snack bar, were also deemed necessary, and seen as a way to attract more people. From a more nostalgic perspective, some wanted the building to remind them of the traditional wooden hut beside a river.

<sup>26</sup> Wuman, p.72.

Fig. 28 Woman Pouring a Bucket of Water Over Another Woman  
Eadweard Muybridge, *Muybridge's Complete Human and Animal Locomotion*, (New York: Dover, Inc., 1979), pp. 524-525.







Given this information and the size of the site I was better able to establish the programming requirements, and tried to include most of the clients' requests. Although there is no separation of women and men, I felt that this allowed for more flexibility in terms of both how the place would be run. For example, some days could be only for women and at other times only for men. The coed option interested me as a means to enrich the user's experience by heightening one's sense of body in those places of public appearance

#### PROGRAM:

- Reception
- Office
- Changing Room and Lockers
- Showers and Toilets
- Juice Bar and Reading Room
- Steam Room
- Cold Plunge Bath
- Garden
- Exercise Room
- Meditation and Massage
- Hairdresser
- Mechanical Room and Laundry

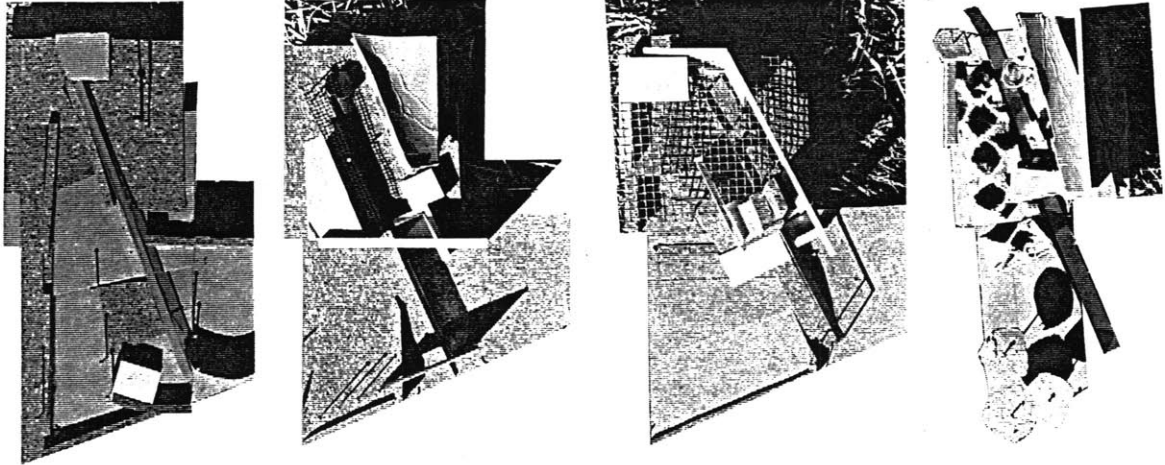


Fig. 29 Study Model 1

Fig. 30 Study Model 2

Fig. 31 Study Model 3

Fig. 32 Study Model 4

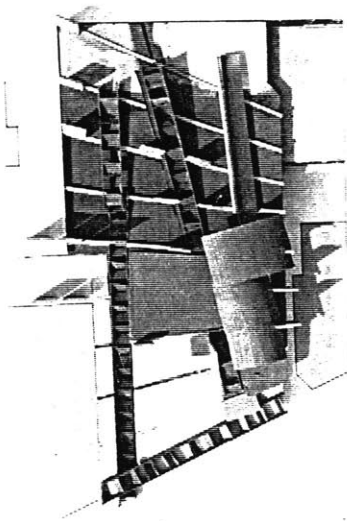
Fig. 33 Study Model 5

Fig. 34 Study Model 6

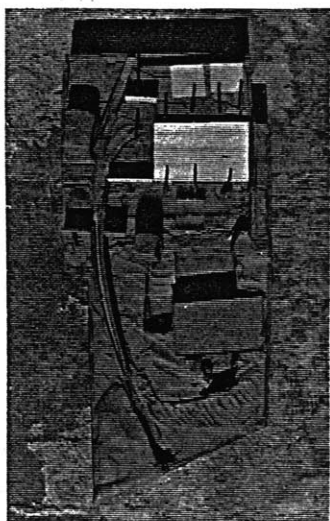
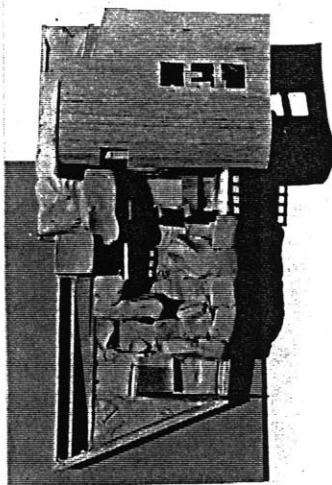
Fig. 35 Study Model 7

This means that in spite of everything, notwithstanding the hopes and the promises, we really only learn by doing: and in the work the how becomes more than a trail to follow, an encouragement. We only learn by experience and we realize that only the object in front of us, the object of the project, is capable of giving us the indications that we need.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Giorgio Grassi, *Architecture, Dead Language*, (New York, N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1988), p. 29.



## PROCESS AND INTENT



When writing about the creative process one is tempted to describe and define it in a linear manner. In fact, however, this is rarely the case. In looking back on my own process, I find many threads that have carried through. I also find moves derived from a deeper understanding of the problem as I worked further into its solutions. The leaps and transformations, in contrast, happened seemingly spontaneously and unconsciously. They were a recognition of the intuitive. A recognition of what had happened earlier when my hands and eyes were busy moving lines, colors, and shadows around on paper, or pieces of clay and wood around in space. The ability to stand back from this work, to see what is happening, and to find in it the poetic, is one of the most challenging tasks in the process.

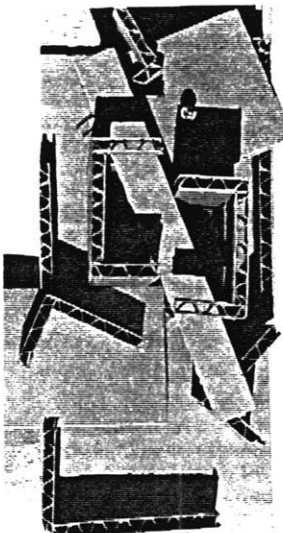
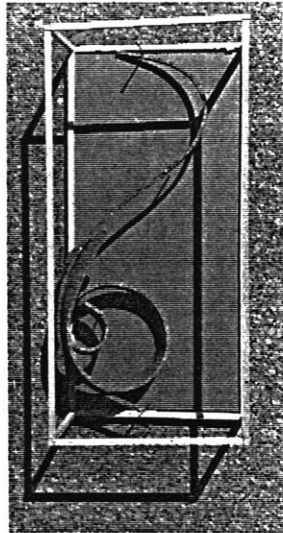


Fig. 36 Peeling Layers

Fig. 37 Moving to the Center

The bath's standardized routine and progression of events interested me as a way to structure my intentions and explorations. As a model it provides a place where nakedness is not inappropriate and consequently the sense of body is more acute, stripped of its protective layers and styles.

Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication.  
—Bataille<sup>28</sup>

Fig. 38 Folding and Unfolding

The design must establish what forces occur on the body, and when and how these events unfold. This unfolding occurs as one moves between the built transitions and joints of the city, street, site, and bath. My intention was to look at it as a peeling back of layers, similar to the act of undressing, where at last the core is revealed. The building is an onion, with the steam bath at its heart. The layers are a series of walls, planes, and screens revealed by water and light, and becoming more densely packed at the center where water hits fire.

<sup>28</sup>Michael Feher, ed., *Fragments for a History of the Body, Part 2*, (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1986), p245.

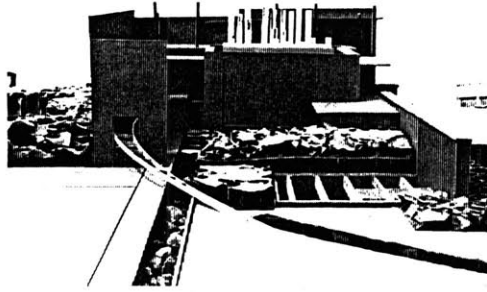


Fig. 39 Study Model 8

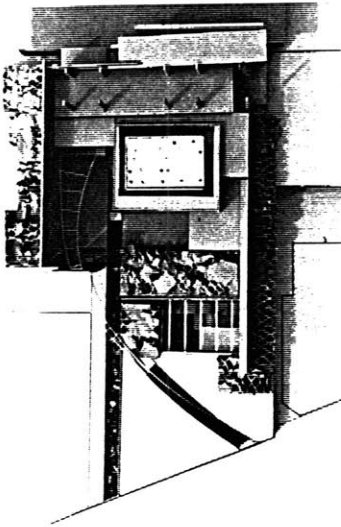


Fig.40 Study Model 8

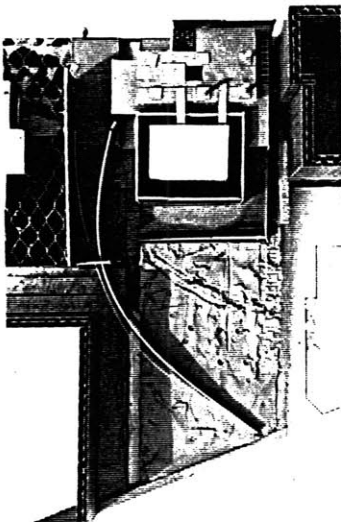


Fig. 41 Study Model 9



Fig. 42 Wall, Tadeo Ando  
*Architecture and Body*. , (New York:  
Rizzoli International, 1988).

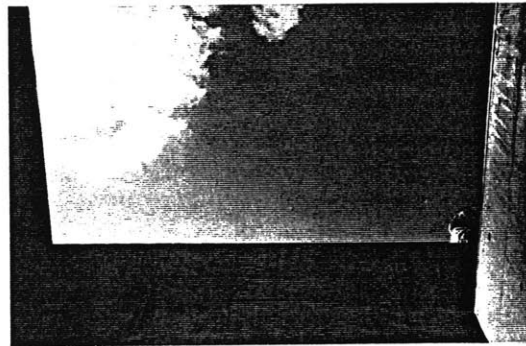


Fig. 43 Walls, Tadeo Ando  
*Architecture and Body*. , (New York:  
Rizzoli International, 1988).

Walls within walls unfold in places to allow pieces of the outside world in, or open up to the sky and bury themselves in the ground. One layer protects the next, and entering into this place is like moving into a tunnel, where light, noise, and memory of scale follow you in. At several points of strong contrast and unending sameness you are very aware of the tunnel itself. Like the beginning's abrupt change from daylight to dark. Or the middle, where you feel a dense and heavy compression from all sides. And, the tunnel moves by as fellow travelers are motionless beside, in front, and behind you. Finally, the light at the end pulls you forward once again and the new side reveals variety and change.

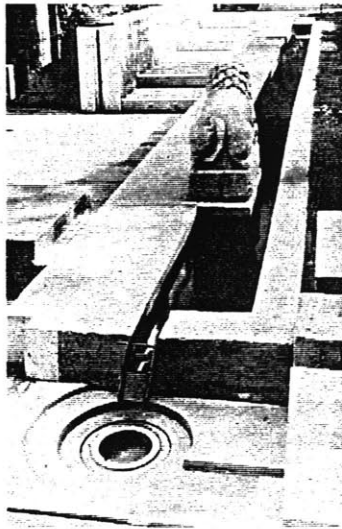


Fig. 44 Querini Stampalia, Carlo Scarpa  
*Architecture and Body*, (New York: Rizzoli  
International, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> David Seamon, ed. *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*, (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), p. 263.

<sup>30</sup> Tadeo Ando, (New York, N.Y.: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p.76.

Water, essential for life, is also essential for the bathhouse. When brought into contact with heat or cold, or placed in stillness or turbulence its multiplicity of reactions duplicates in some ways bodily sensation and response. Consequently, the senses are filled with layers of impressions, and these help to create the richness of sensual experience.

Water appeals to the whole: it can be seen, felt, smelled, touched, and tasted. —Anne Buttimer

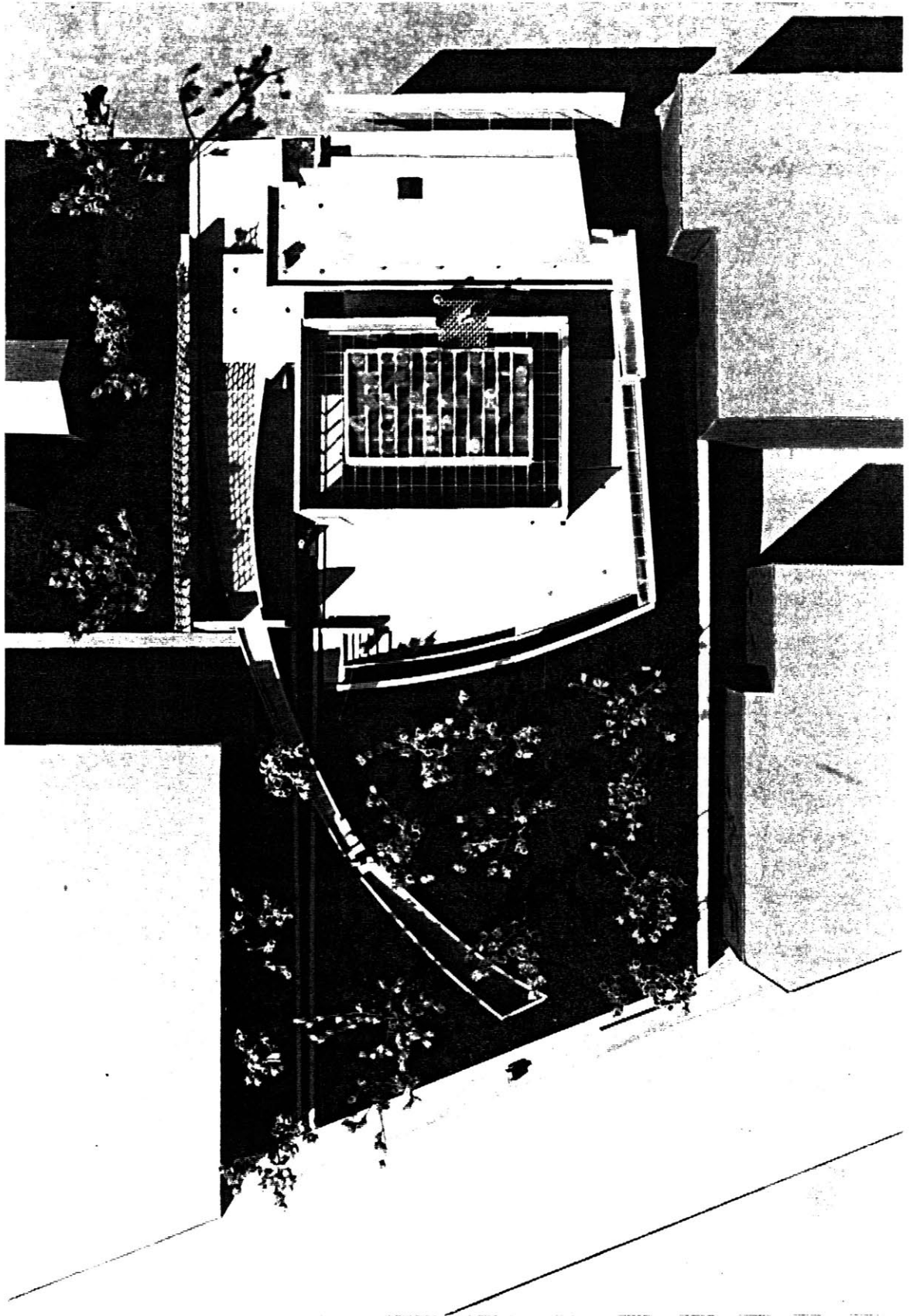
The nature of water is to move down and spread out. It takes its form from gravity, climate, and container. The container marks the length and slope of the sight. Water, collected from the sky by the cupping form of the roof, moves outside, down, and into the building and grove. And the channel narrows to a thin slit as the water is used. Together, the water and container mark transitions, and are themselves transformed. To get in, one must move against and across the current. Here the building itself becomes the container, and receives life from the source and the people that cross into the process.

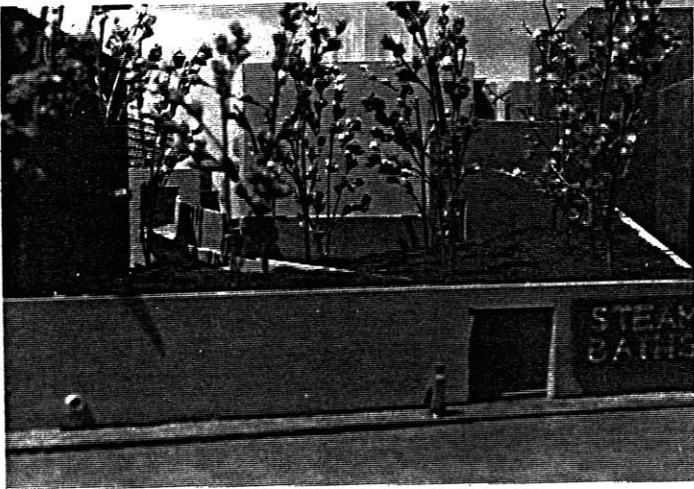
The elements of nature — water, wind, light, and sky — bring architecture derived from ideological thought down to the ground level of reality and awaken man-made life within it. —Tadeo Ando <sup>30</sup>





Fig. 45 Crossing  
Pierre Bouffard, Fountains, (Geneva, Switzerland: Bonvent and Fontainemore, 1973),  
p.41.





## DESIGN AND BUILDING

The rigors of translation. These were not mere flowers for the plucking. They had to be transplanted into strange soil, which was not hospitable to them at all....The three bright balls of Substance, Form, and Spirit were not always easy to keep in the air at once.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup>from *Russianness*

Fig. 46 Plan View of Model

Fig. 47 View from Station Street Model

Progression through the site and into the building begins at Station Street where a bright sign advertises the bath's presence. Here, the granite retaining wall is pierced open and the earth pushed back to form a ramp into the site. To enter, one must step over the slit of water between sidewalk and threshold. The ramp curves and narrows, and emerges from the roots and earth into a small grove of birch and oak trees. Their leaves offer a canopy of sound and filtered light between building, sky, and ground. In the Autumn they are collected to make brushes used in the bath's massage.

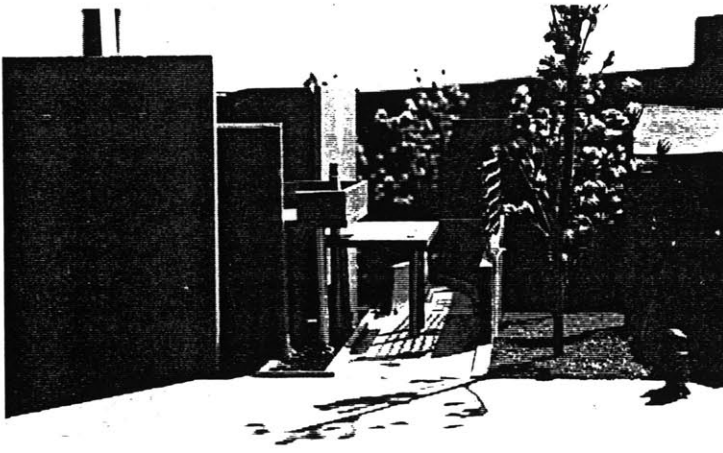
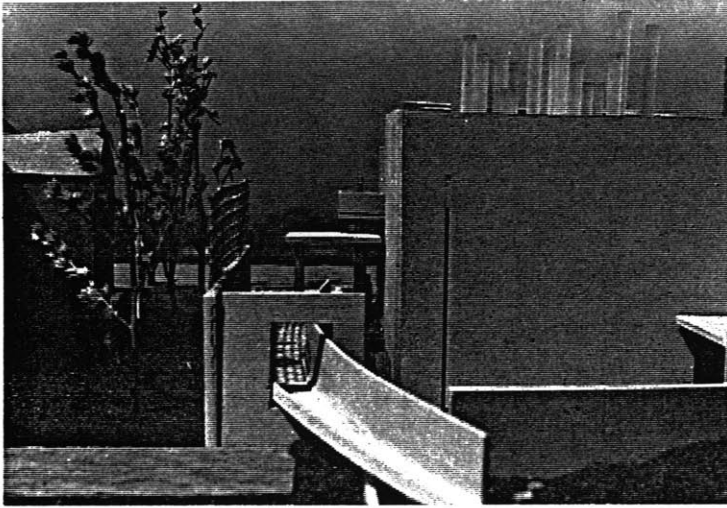
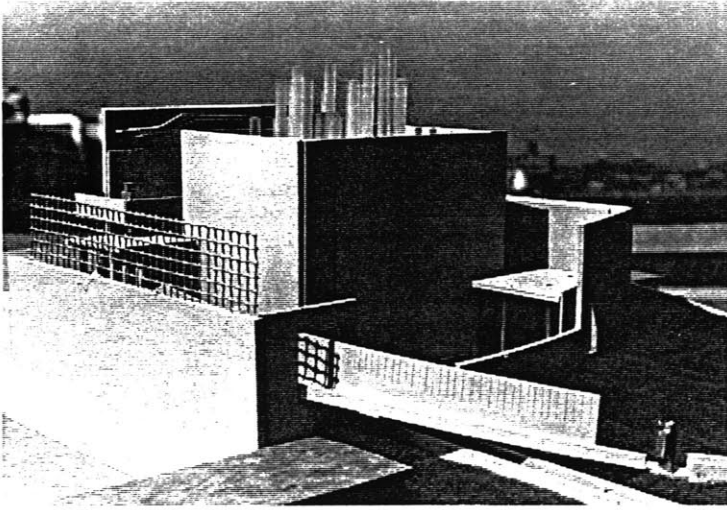


Fig. 48 Model

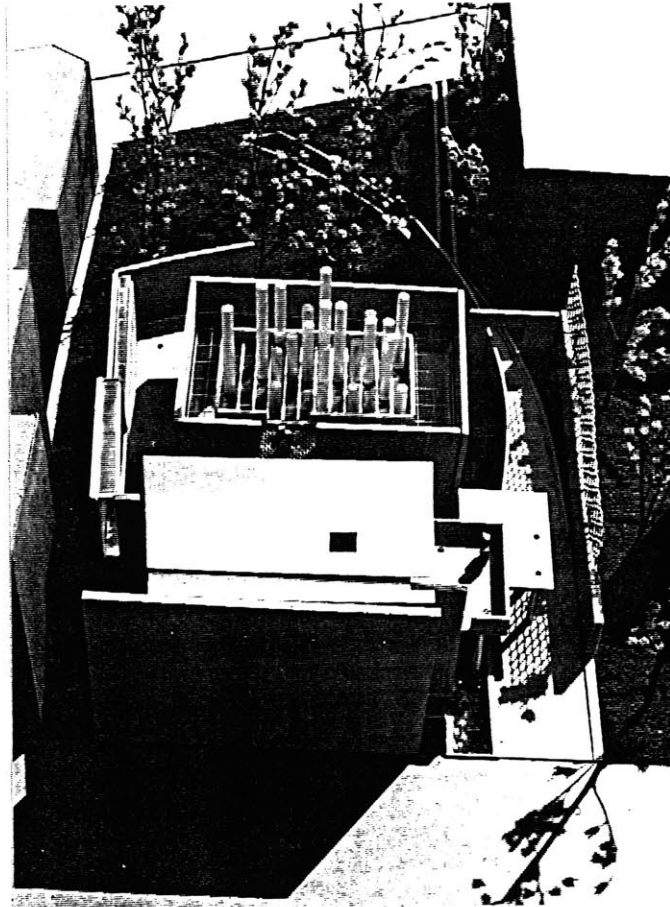



Fig. 49 Model

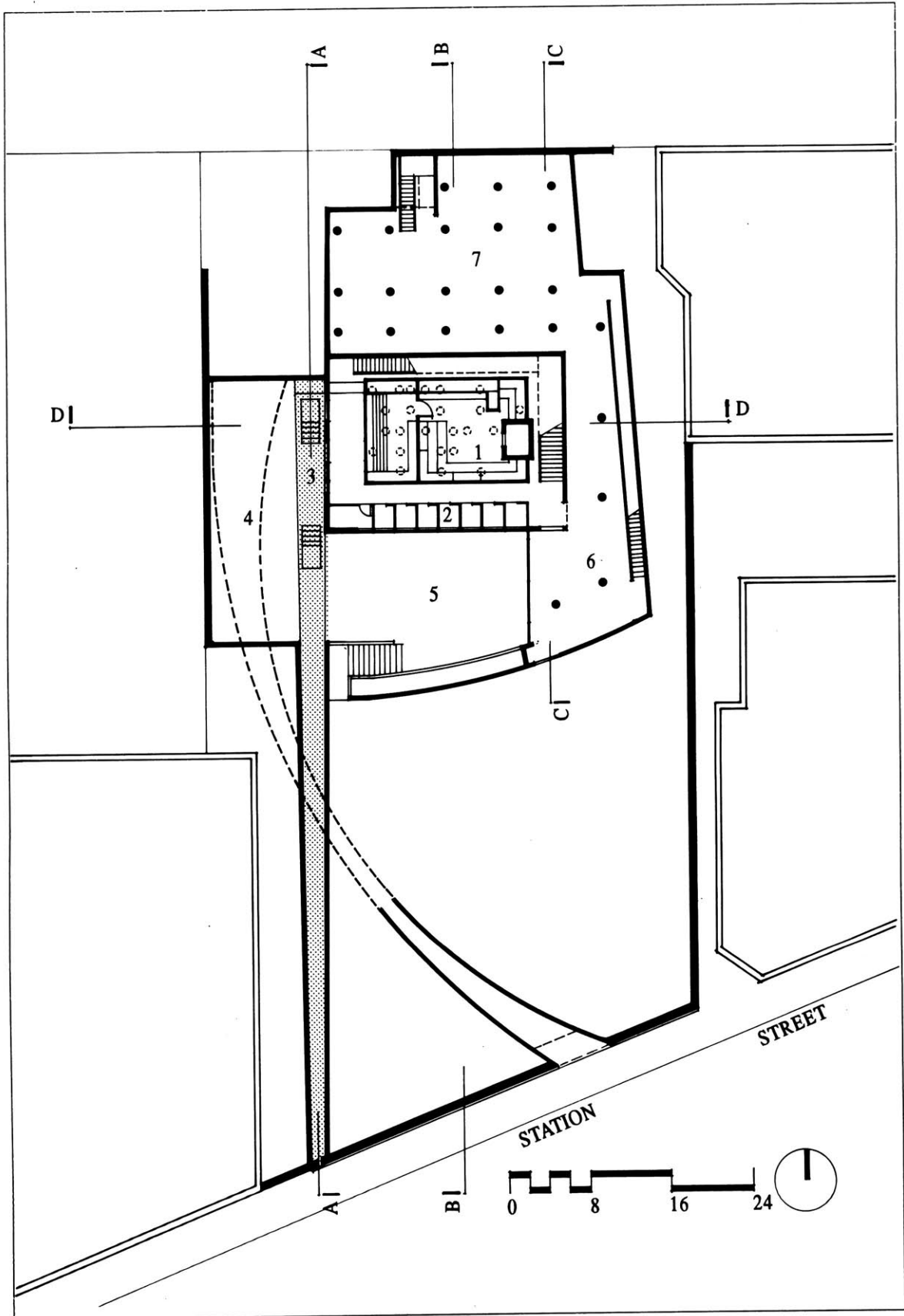
Fig. 50 Model  
Entrance from Kent Street

From the grove, one may continue up the ramp which rises off of the ground, crossing above the channel of water and through an opening in the first layer of wall. The ramp's high railing shields the view into the building, but distorted shadows appear through the ramp's translucent paving and sounds of water falling and people splashing may be heard below. The curve of the ramp gradually opens up moving parallel with the vine-covered site wall and lands at the level of Kent Street. A low roof moves out over the channel and landing, providing shelter for the entrance. A stepping stone, sunk into the water and framed by columns, allows one to cross over and into the building. Alternatively, one may continue next to the water and out onto Kent Street. This is the way out, but also entrance for the initiated. A plain concrete wall maintains the scale and continuity of the street's facades. It gives privacy from the street, and indicates the structure behind.


Fig. 51 Model  
View South

## GROUND FLOOR PLAN AT STATION STREET

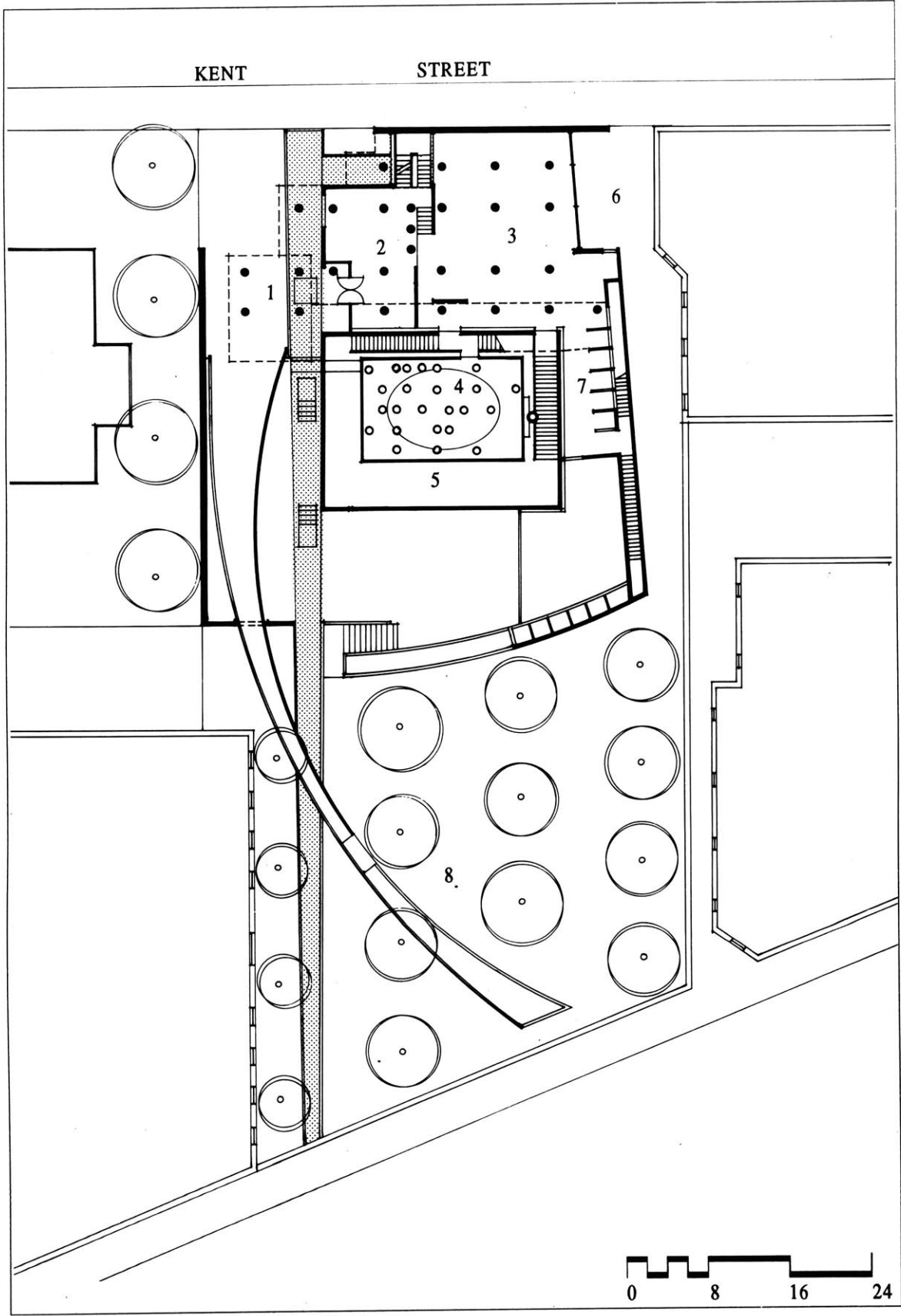
1. STEAM ROOM
  2. SHOWERS
  3. OUTDOOR PLUNGE POOL
  4. MOSS & VINE GARDEN
  5. TERRACE
  6. EXERCISE ROOM
  7. MECHANICAL ROOM & LAUNDRY
-  WATER CHANNEL



## GROUND FLOOR PLAN AT KENT STREET

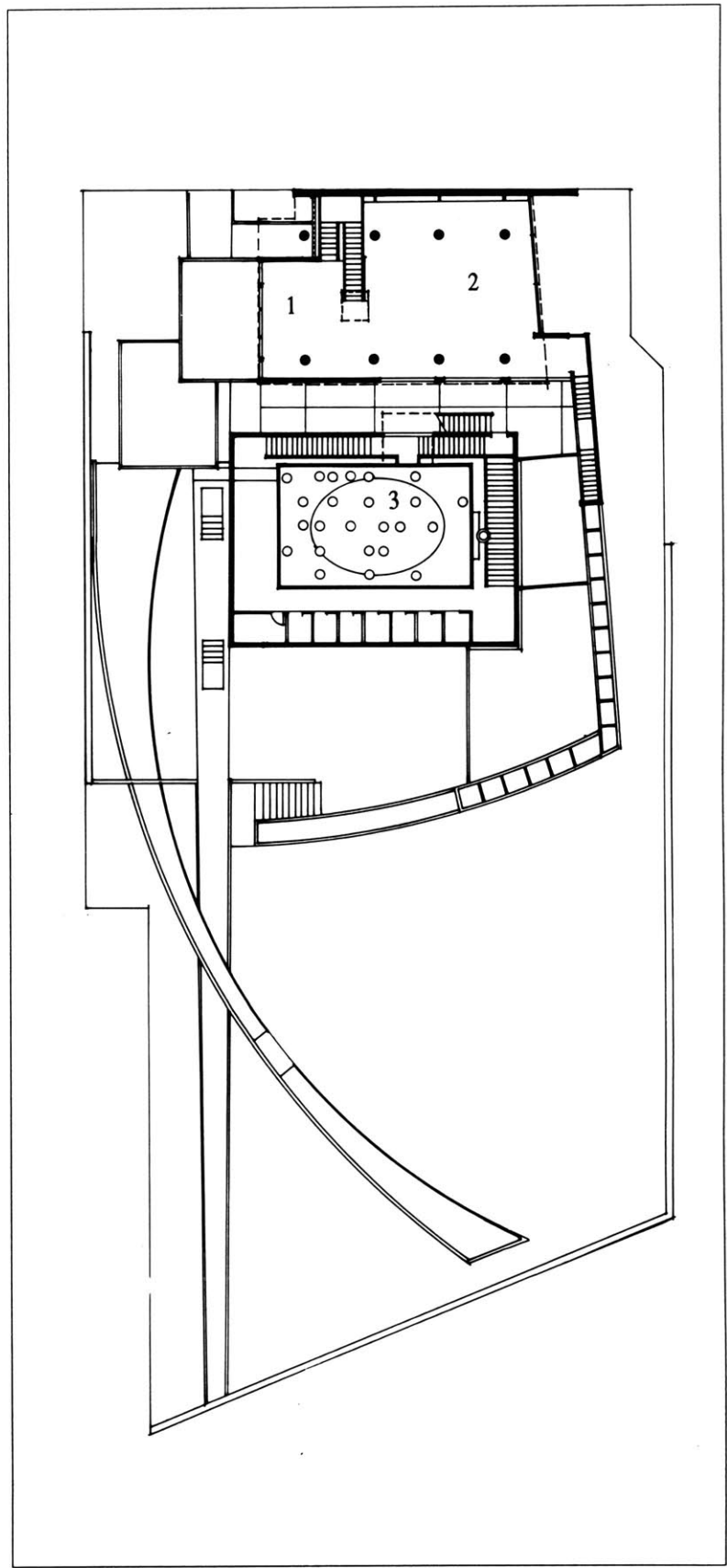
1. ENTRANCE
  2. RECEPTION
  3. DRESSING
  4. MEDITATION & MASSAGE
  5. OPEN TO BELOW
  6. GARDEN
  7. HAIRDRESSER & BATHROOM
  8. BIRCH & OAK GROVE
-  WATER CHANNEL





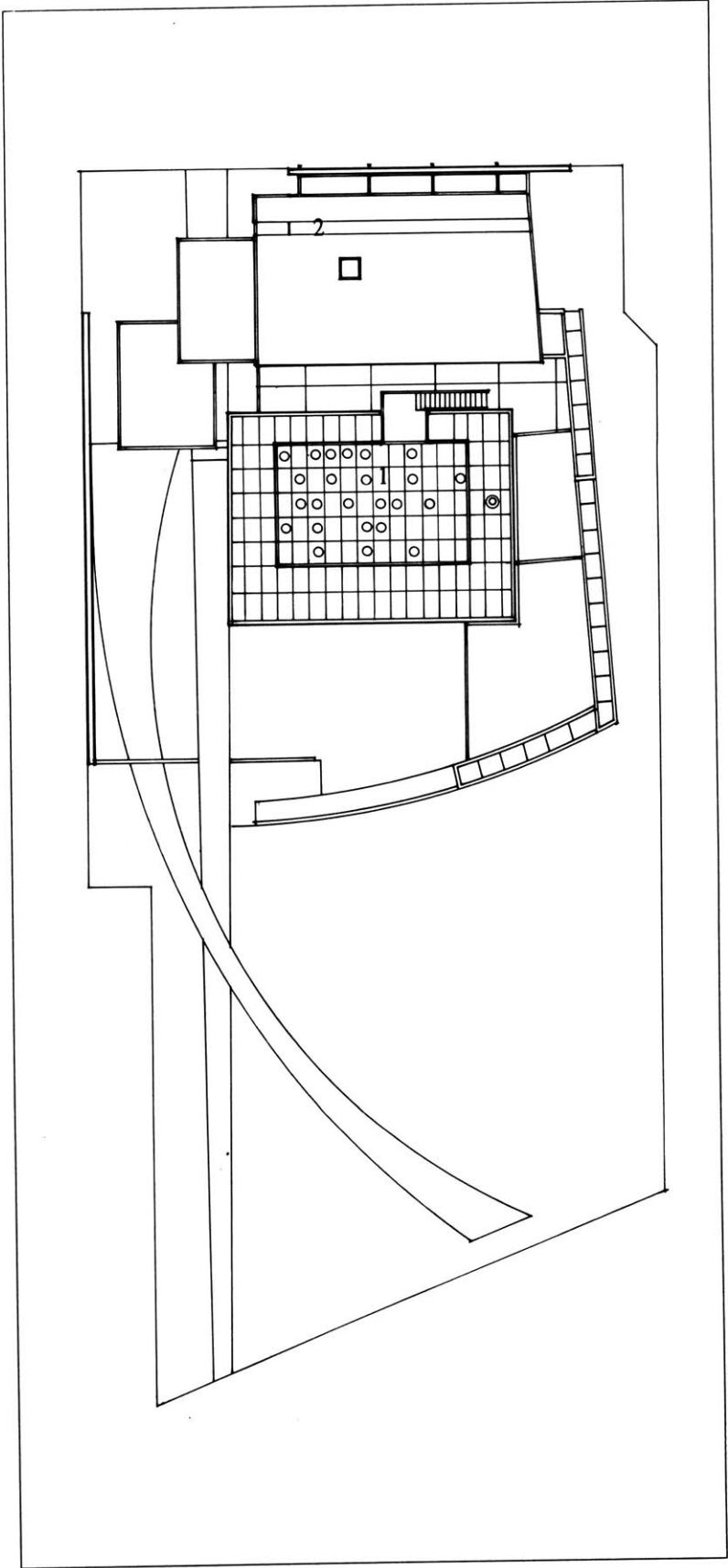
SECOND FLOOR  
PLAN

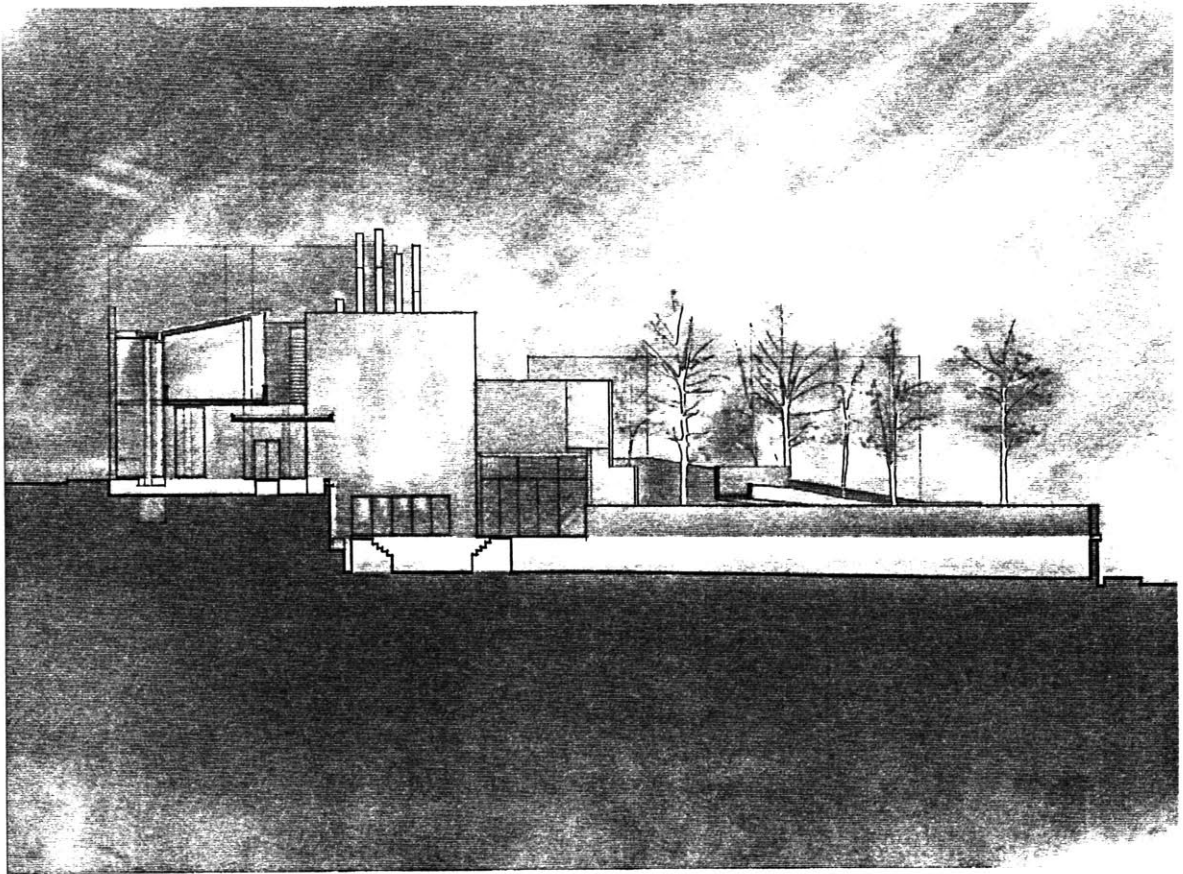
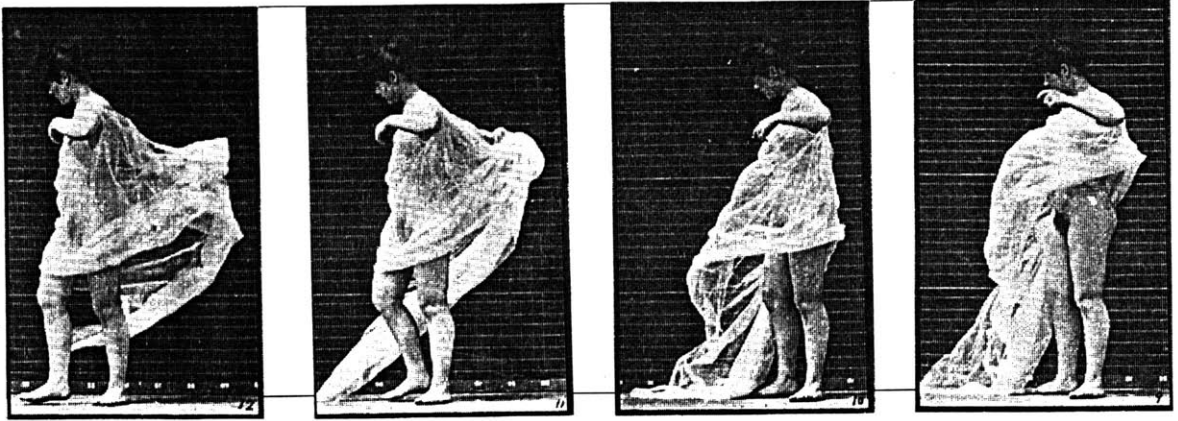
- 1. OFFICE
- 2. CAFE
- 3. OPEN TO BELOW



ROOF PLAN

- 1. ROOF TERRACE
- 2. GUTTER





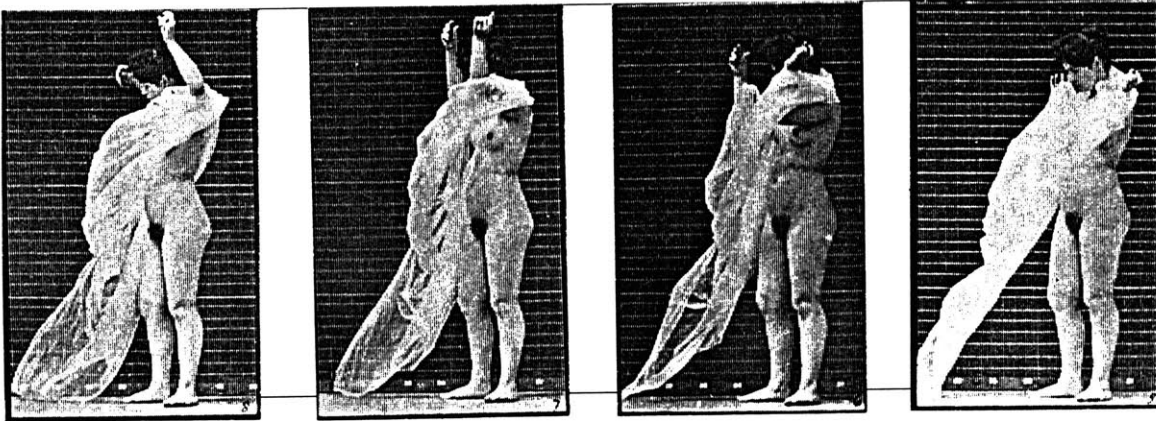
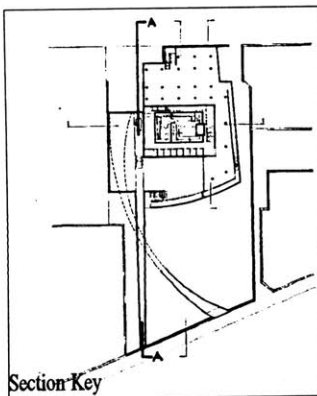


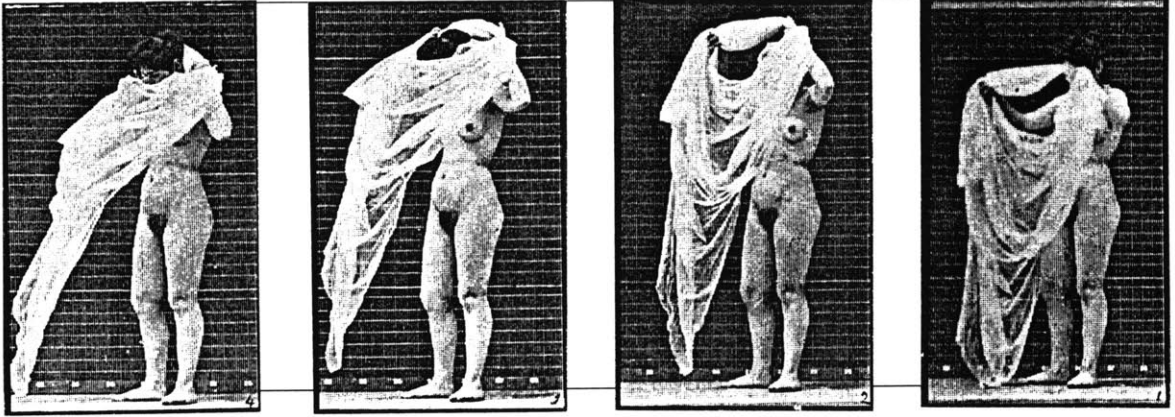
Fig. 52 Woman Undressing  
Muybridge, pp. 544 -545.

Fig. 53 Section A-A  
Through Water Channel



Within the building the outside world dims as movement into the bath continues in a spiral motion drawing closer to the center. One passes through a screen of columns and next to, but not touching, the concrete shell that protects the bath's wooden core.

After undressing, a small opening in this shell allows passage into and down between the concrete skin and the warm outer wall of the steam bath. Light comes from above and streams onto the stairs. Ahead, an opening marks the turn with light and offers a glimpse out through the layers of wall and grove and back onto the street.



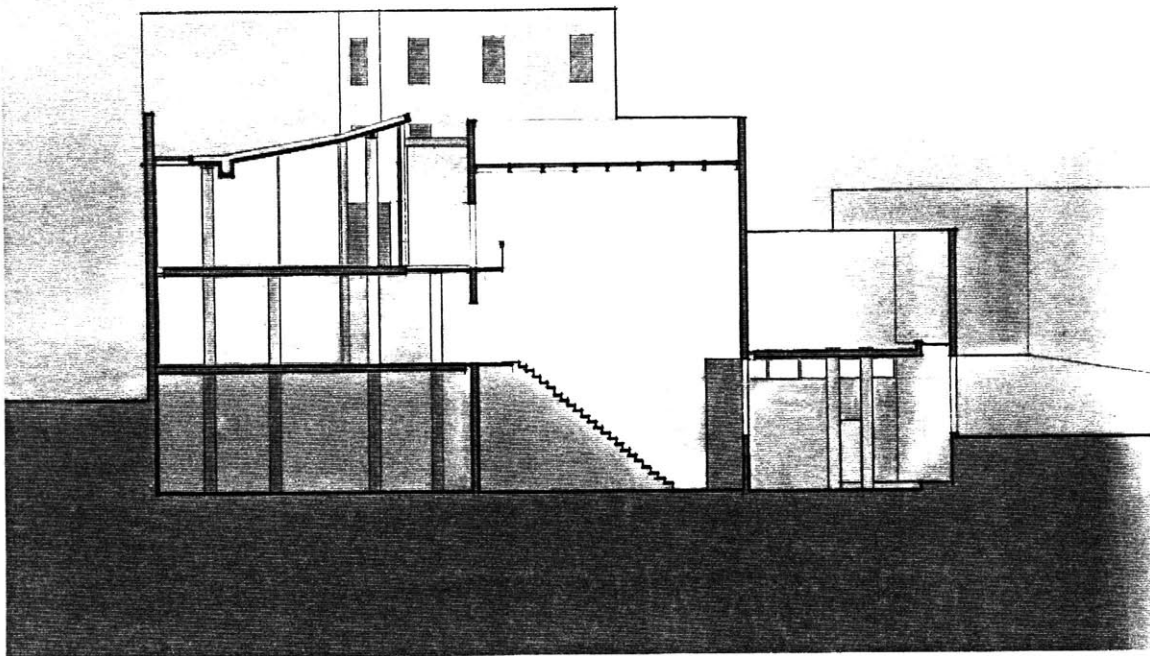
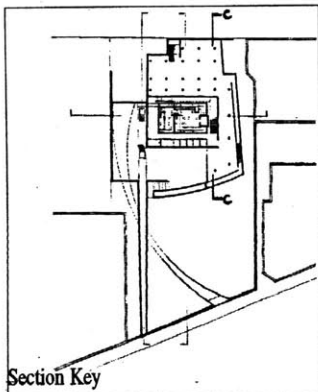


Fig. 54 Section C-C  
Through stairs between shell and core



Still moving around the core warm showers give the opportunity to wash alone before stepping into the steam.

The inner volume is a simple rectangle framed and clad in wood. It is sunk partially into the earth and reaches up to the sky with crystal fingertips, whose heights are a mapping of what happens below. These fingers move down past the structural grid of roof and ceiling through a space for massage and meditation and into the steam bath. They pull down the sun, dispersing particles of light from their sanded surfaces, and pull up the steam's heat.

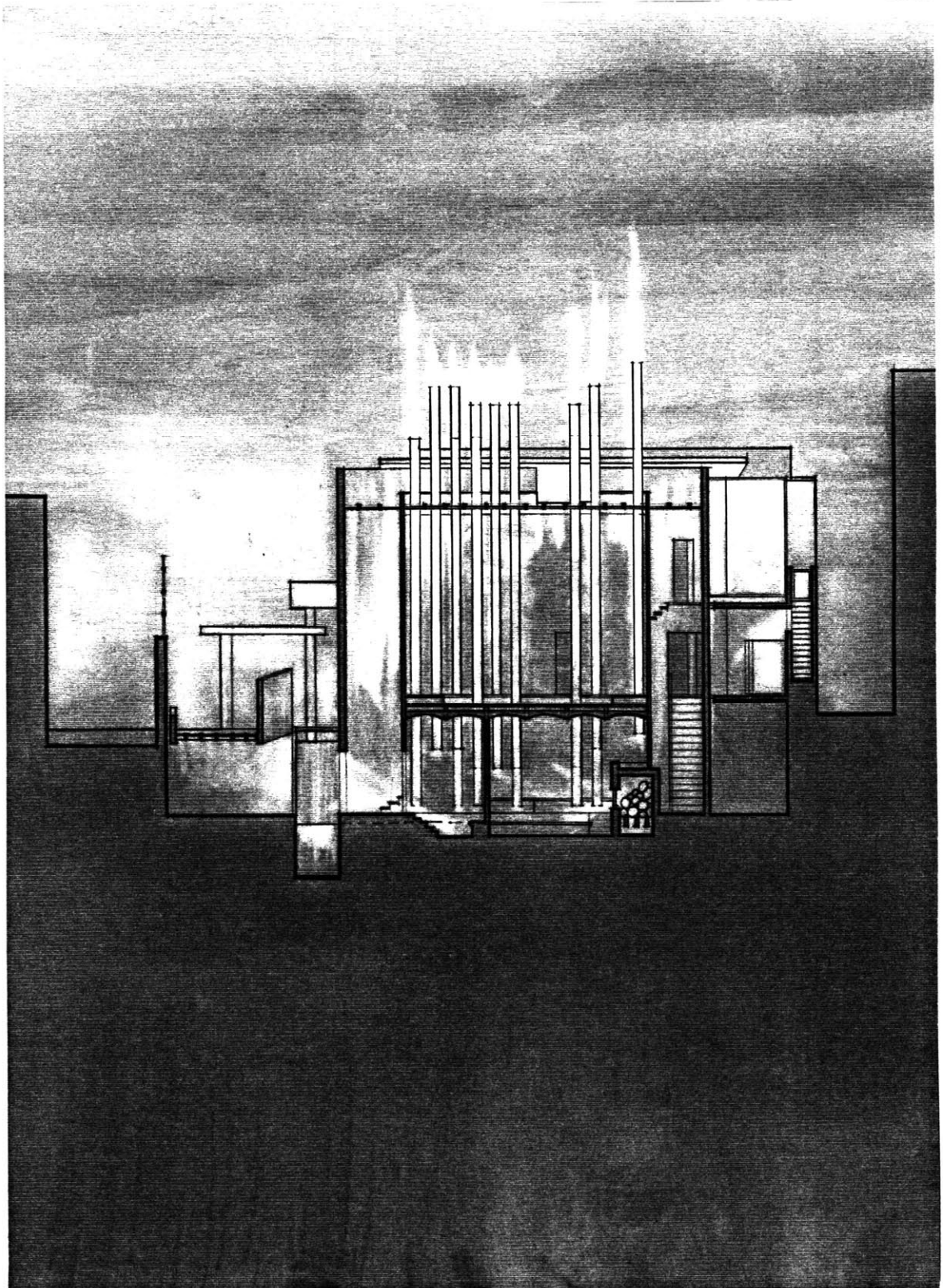


Fig. 55 Section D-D



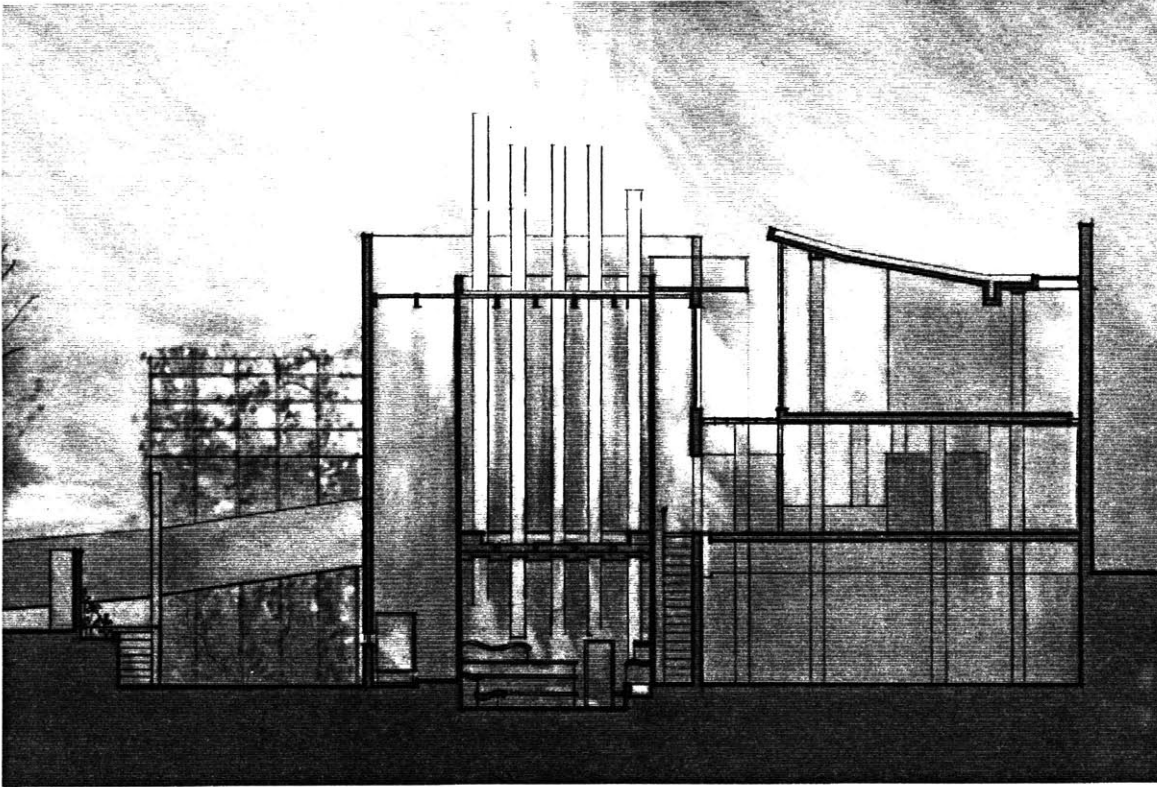
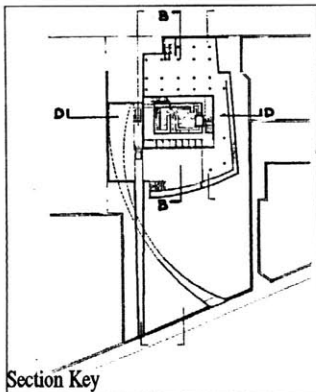


Fig. 56 Section B-B  
Detail

In the steam bath, the fingers of light stop short and the sun is transformed into little spotlights reflected on the surfaces of water, bench, and body. They map the core's terrain.

Inside this terrain the body is hit by an intense heat, and the senses are immersed in the humid atmosphere. The warmed pine gives off its scent of fragrant resin, water hisses into steam as it hits the oven's fire, and salty drops of perspiration form above the lip. Then the heat takes over, numbing thought and sensation.



Section Key

To escape from this heat one leaves through the same heavy wooden door, moving against the water, and out to the channel. Here, the channel's floor rises up to form steps that lead down into the relief of the cold water plunge. Or, allow passage over the water into a garden of moss, rock, and vine. Light, filtered by the ramp overhead, is deep and soft. In winter, the snow lingers longest here, and may be used by the bathers to roll about in, providing the sharpest contrast to the heat inside.

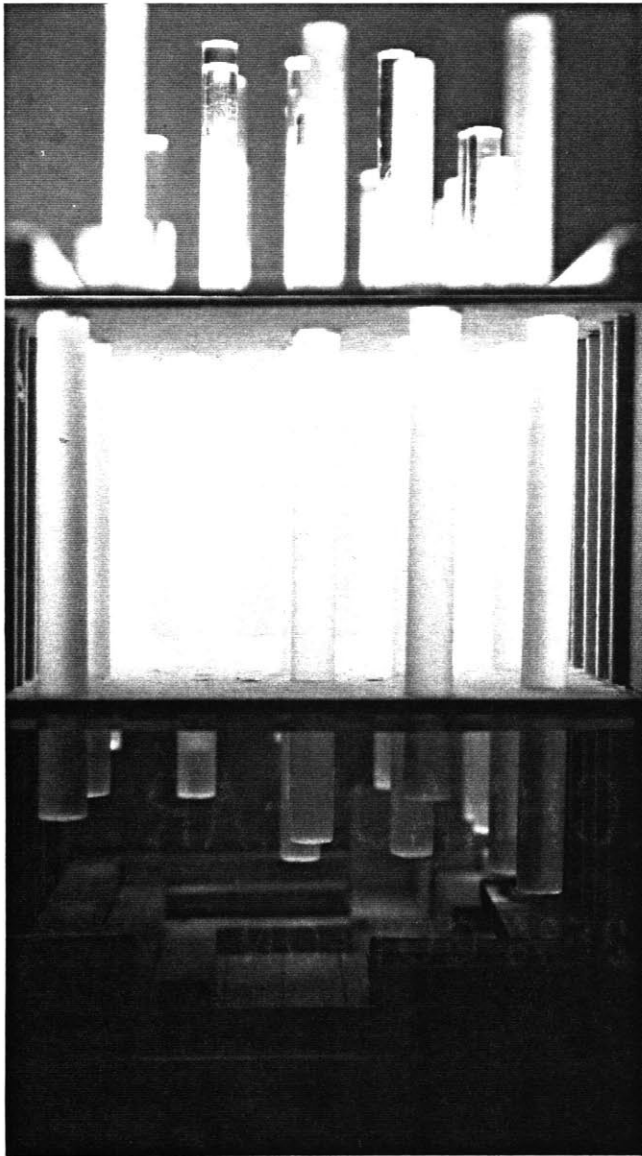


Fig. 57 Model  
Section through core

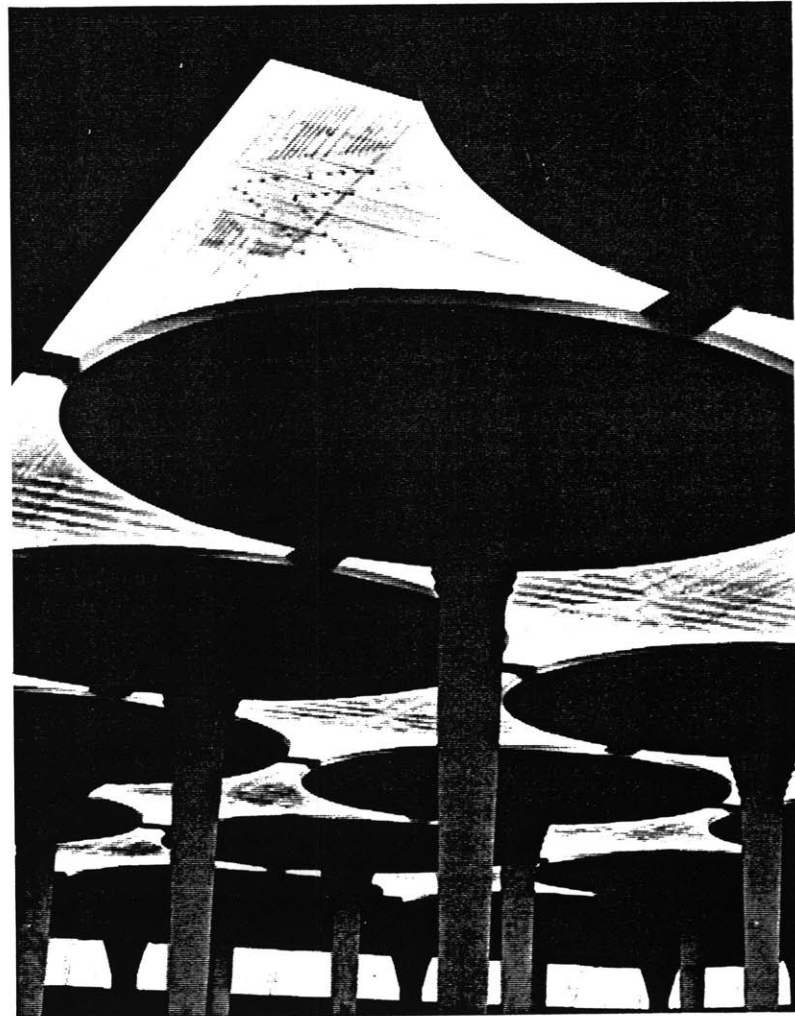


Fig. 58 Johnson Wax Building  
Detail of Columns  
Jonathan Lipman, *Frank Lloyd Wright and  
the Johnson Wax Buildings*, (New York,  
N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 10.

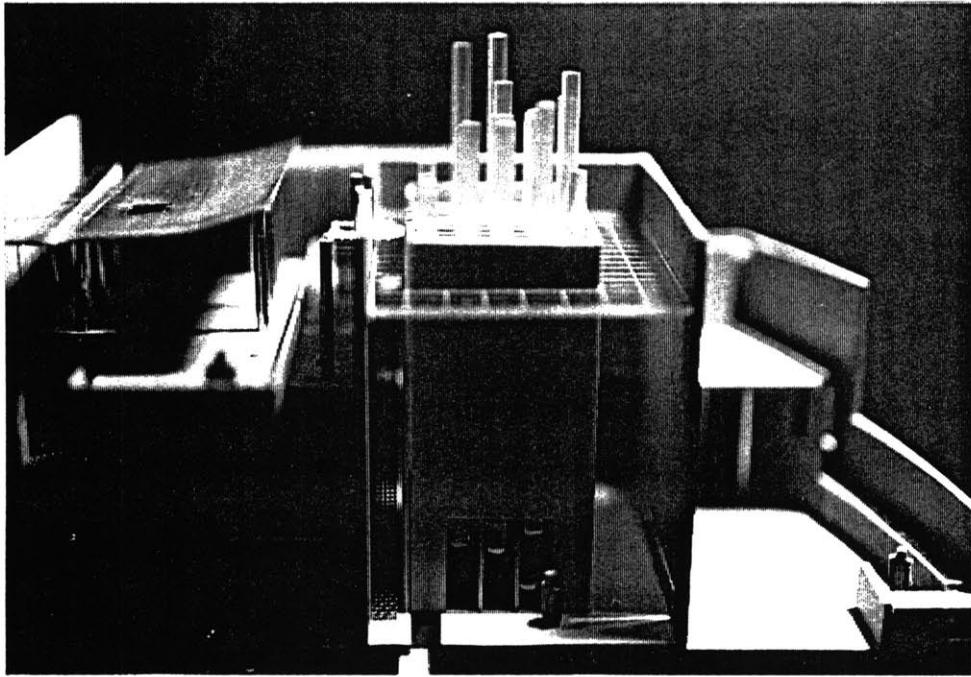
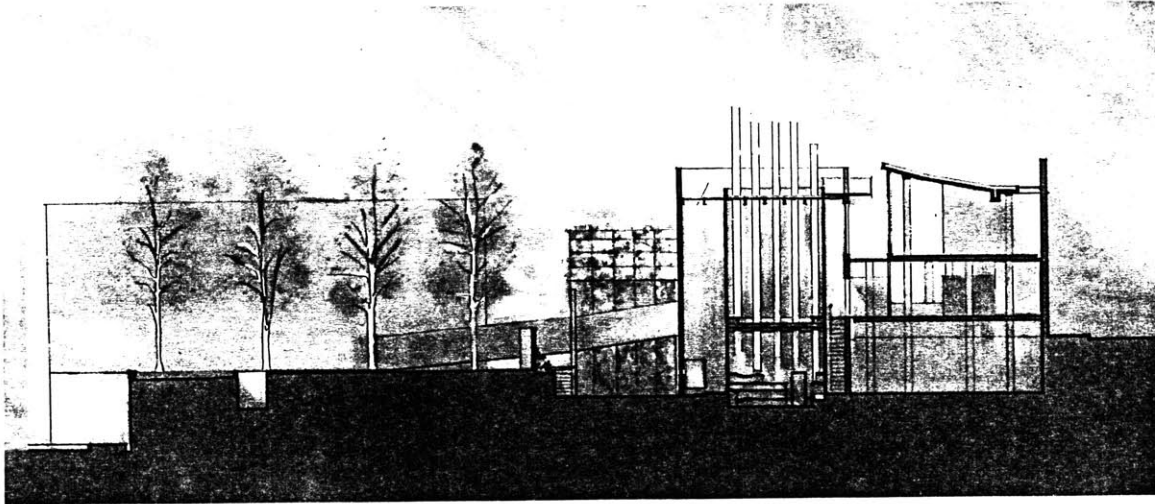


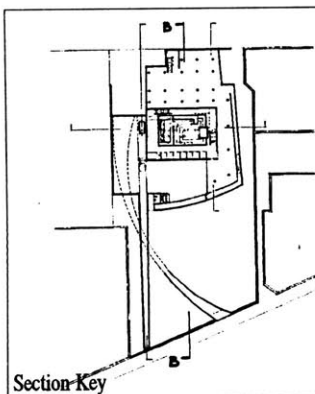
Fig. 59 Model  
Section

Fig. 60 Section B-B

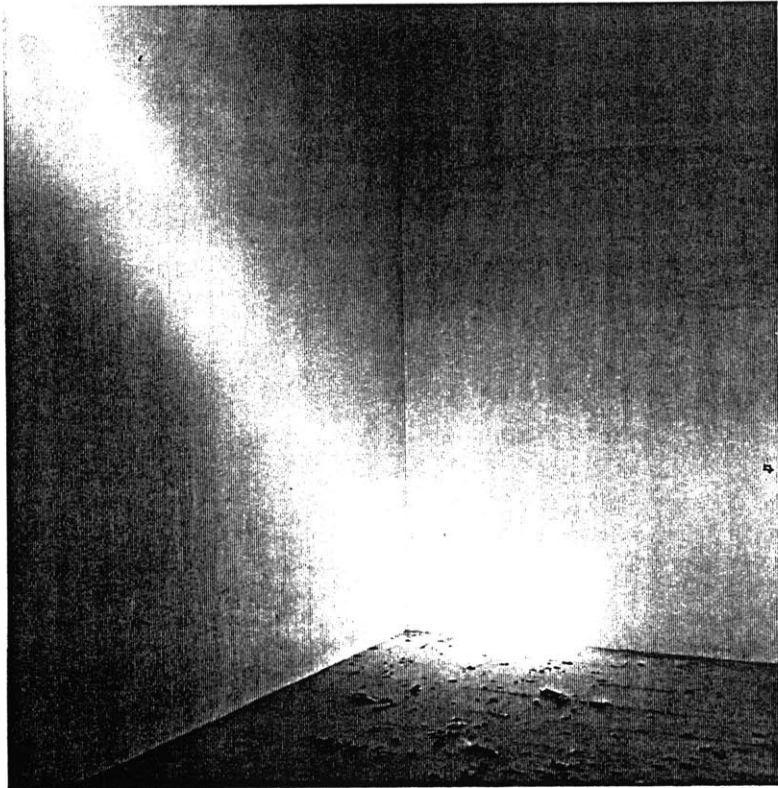


As in the traditional bathing process, one is invited to move back and forth between these two worlds of hot and cold—for however long one wants or the body can take it. Afterwards, the spiral's path moves out of the core, around, and up between the two walls of wood and concrete. They have narrowed here, allowing only one person to pass at a time, as preparation for the meditation space above.

This is the middle world. Entered into through a small opening in the wall and onto a raised wooden platform that circles the lofty room's edges. The built elements reveal what is above and below. The many warm columns of light move through from the roof above and past into the steam below. They are warmest nearer the source of the steam room's heat, and cooler towards the channel of water. And, brightest nearer the roof and sky, and darker before disappearing through the floor. Flickering shadows of people moving on the roof terrace above are brought down through the roof's thick smoked glass surface. Sound, however, is muffled by the core's thick structure, and so provides a quiet place for rest and introspection.



From the middle world, one may move out and back into the dressing room, or continue up the stairs and out onto the roof or in to the cafe. The layers of the core, shell, and program open up to the light and world outside. Under the curved form of the cafe's roof the eye is pulled up to a sky punctuated crystal fingertips. Above, the roof is cupped like two hands catching water and snow.



## ENDQUOTES

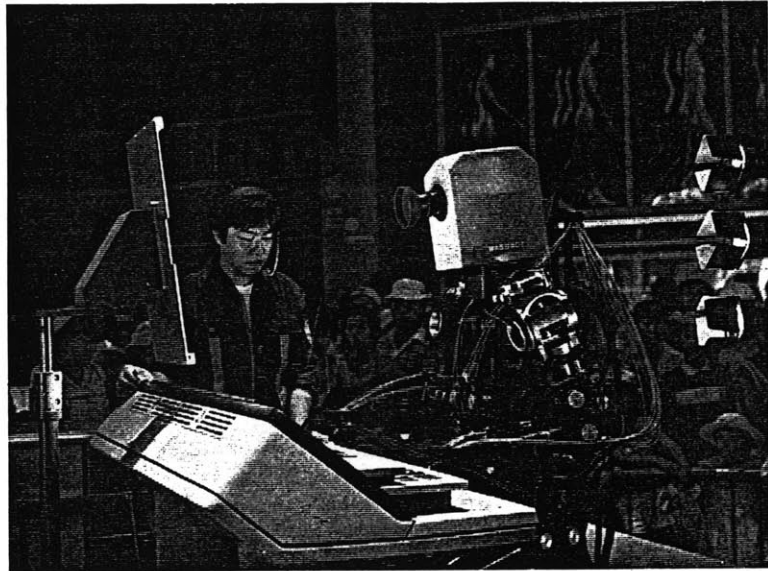


Fig. 61 Light and Wall

Fig. 62 Mechanical Musician  
Tadeo Ando from *Body and Architecture..*

<sup>32</sup> Michel Feher, *Fragments*, p. 397.

..if we divest what we call our life of everything we have considered as replaceable—if its organs, forms, functions are replaced by artificial devices and so related to the rank of useless accessories (we are reminded of the cases of atrophy that have occurred in the course of evolution)—life is reduced to nothing or next to nothing; then sensation, feeling, thought, are not essential to it, but mere accidents. —Paul Valéry<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 63 Clothes on a Wall



Man articulates the world through his body. Man is not a dualistic being in whom spirit and flesh are essentially distinct, but a living corporeal being active in the world....The world that appears to man's senses and the state of man's body become in this way interdependent. The world articulated by the body is a vivid, lived-in space. —Tadeo Ando<sup>33</sup>



<sup>33</sup>Tadeo Ando, p.21.

<sup>34</sup> Denis Lasdun, ed., *Architecture in an Age of Skepticism*, (Great Britain: William Heinemann Ltd., 1984), p. 214.

You can study architecture from many angles...evaluating a building purely from the sensation of joy it gives you—you experience the building with your senses only and you become a user of the building in a way the architect had conceived it...  
—Jorn Utzon<sup>34</sup>

Fig. 64 Children Playing  
Aldo Van Eyck from *Body and Architecture*.

Sight paints a picture of life, but sound, touch, taste, and smell are actually life itself.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Tom Sullivan, *If You Could See What I Hear*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 181.

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NOTE:

All illustrations by author unless otherwise noted.



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