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SPATIAL SENSATIONS - AN ARCHITECTURAL PROPOSITION


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ABSTRACT

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Reading architecture through experiencing spaces is, perhaps, the richest way in which architecture touches our lives. Embedded within the act of producing architecture are suppressed idiosyncrasies and subjective, a-rational logic structures. These structures are suppressed by the traditional means of establishing criticality within a rigorous frame of historicity. By acknowledging both the suppression and the mechanism through which the suppression operates, a supplement to traditional practices and theories of space making can be proposed which, by elevating the subjective events of production, challenges the traditional discursive structure and can lead one to propose spaces that enrich the depth spatial experience.

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PREFACE

The initial considerations that preconditioned this thesis concerned themselves with the way in which I would critically place myself within the discipline of architecture. With this in mind, the work immediately became infected by both my desire and my ambivalence. The methodology contained within could be read as a conditional strategy for making architecture, and thus be interrogated for its general propositions. This would invite each reader to construct the way in which this work can inflect individual processes of making. On the other hand, the text could be explored as a documentation of my own "flight pattern". It is this reading that could unearth the events embedded into the production of this as an individual work in such a way as to provide for a re-construction of those events.

CHAPTER ONE: MULTI-DIMENSIONALITY AND CRITICALITY

... and would thus lead one to assert that it is this multi-dimensional approach that is implicitly spatial.

Multi-dimensional Architecture, as I am defining it here, takes as a beginning point insights that are generated from a specific site. Whether this insight is concrete or conceptual, it is developed through a process of actions and re-actions that continually enrich the insight by adding layers or dimensions that both develop and refine the insight as well as overlay other concerns onto the insight site. The process establishes a constructed depth within the site of architectural production. Architecture takes on a multi-dimensional character by accessing this construction of layers as it develops, continually constructing and reconstructing both the conceptual projection of ideas as well as the physical manifestation of structure. While all architectural objects, by virtue of interpretation, are subject to many readings, this approach tries to critically capitalize on that multiplicity. By posturing itself towards the existence of many discourses, this architecture desires the ability to respond to many levels of inquiry. Embracing the so called "valid" parameters of architecture as well as the seemingly personal operatives of idiosyncrasy, subjectivity and poetics, this production of architecture attempts to build itself up to a critical state in order to yield an experience that carries, within the multiplicity, a thread of that original insight into a material presence.

By way of elaboration and in order to substantiate the way in which this assertion operates, it is important to discuss criticality. The reason that this discussion is necessary is that there is an attempt to go beyond the traditional means through which architecture maintains rigor. It is important to make note of the word usage - 'go beyond'. This implies that the traditional means of establishing criticality are not dismissed, but rather used as foundations for exploration. This, it should be stated clearly, is the intention.

Criticality is a willful act. It is contrived. This should not lead one to believe it is fabricated - invented out of nowhere [though it may be]. To operate critically [or complacently] is decided. Underlying the act of deciding is one's own rationale, one's own subjectivity. When one decides to operate critically, one has committed to being self-reflective, and self-reflexive, confrontational, and thoughtful. Critical thinking [self-criticism] involves questioning and exploring. It involves casting doubt on one's own activities. It may mean a certain agony, but always for the purpose of understanding better. To make a critical decision is to confront the forces acting on that decision, as well as confronting the ramifications of *deciding*. To be critical while producing architecture is to be careful [full of care], to carefully assess one's activity. Self-criticism is wary/aware of the contradictions implicit in one's own actions. One engages in critical thinking productively. In other words, critical thinking, though it seemingly complicates things, ultimately makes one's work better.

Critical architecture pushes aside other kinds of discourse or communication in order to place before the world a culturally informed product, part of whose self-definition includes the implication of *discontinuity* and *difference* from other cultural activities. [his emphasis]¹

This quote by K. Michael Hays offers us a hint at the role of the Subjective in relation to critical architecture, a role that he somewhat substantiates in the article "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form". One hint is present in the word "discontinuity". By this, I feel Hays means that the critical work sets itself aside from its complacent counterparts [thus, his other word "difference"]. But, if the critical work sets itself aside, how? And why would he not have offered a categorical distinction for a critical architecture? The answers to these questions lie at the heart of my position. The critical dimension of architecture is taken on subjectively, and therefore varies within its definition from one architect to another. So each critical work maintains its criticality on its own terms, terms set forth by the author. The more obvious clue in the above quote becomes the placement of the term "self-definition". To use this term to describe the *product* could mean that Hays believes that no over-arching frame or underpinning discourse can define critical architecture. Later in the article Hays asserts this much more definitively. He states that the specific situation from which the decision to make architecture is what is important. He says this choice to make architecture, and how to make it, is what brings on the critical dimension. This also begins to gesture towards criticism occupying roles within the process of design that are perhaps related less and less to the established, traditional, and privileged roles.

[Critical architecture is] resistant to the self-confirming, conciliatory operations of a dominant culture...²

Within this quote, we see Hays beginning to articulate a resistance to operating per a dominant culture or a dominant discourse, as well as questioning

the traditional claim that this lends criticality to one's operations. I think that it is important to highlight this assertion, especially when it begins to tie itself to the importance of one's subjective reasoning. It would then seem that subjective thinking can begin to occupy roles that were once reserved for criticality per a privileged discourse.

I believe that architects can place themselves in a position of freedom when initiating the process of making architecture. Though not taken into account by all architects, this ability to act freely is one of the possible reasons why a client would select an Architect and not a Builder. This freedom is immanently present in the search for appropriateness, the questioning of the program and the site, and is certainly embedded in the act of establishing criticality. The freedom to open one discourse and not another is inevitably what all architects engage in. It is the recognition of that freedom as well as the extent to which the freedom is actually *freeing* that helps establish the critical practices from the complacent practices. One could assert that overcoming the fear of acknowledging and accepting this freedom is very much a precondition of critical architecture. At the beginning of the design process, there are simple decisions that must be made concerning what is of paramount importance and what can be addressed later. There are also decisions regarding the way in which one shall proceed. Within the decision to do *this* and not *that*, the Subjective enters architectural production. Subjective decision making relies on individual, personal experience for its rationale. The time, then, is ripe for architects to enjoy the freedom implicit in personal rationale in order to dismantle any preconceived, over-arching framework that is believed to hold the discipline.

Recognizing the important role that the subjective, idiosyncratic, a-rational decision-making process holds, it is equally important to establish how this subjectivity will lead to a critical architecture. In an article appearing in *Scientific American*, Per Bak and Kan Chen provide us with a model of "Self Organized Criticality". The model is as follows.

Sand is poured uniformly, slowly onto a circular disk.

At first grains remain close to their landing position.

As the grains increase, they rest on top of one another creating a gentle pile.

When the slope of the pile is too steep, a minor avalanche occurs.

As more sand arrives, a steeper slope is attained and the avalanche size increases.

When the amount of sand added equals the amount of sand falling off of the disk due to avalanche, the system has reached its critical state.

In this critical state, the next grain of sand may cause a minor avalanche, no avalanche, or a major catastrophe.

It is in this condition that the system is most robust.³

With this model in mind, I propose that a self organized critical architecture is one that results from many dimensions, or layers, that richly build up a depth allowing the architecture to address multiple levels of critical inquiry without exhausting itself. The compilation of many dimensions allows for either a systematic build-up - one in which any new layer could strengthen the construction by extending the qualities of the previous layers - or an excessive build up - one in which a new layer would be added consciously [or

unconsciously] despite the fact that the new layer contradicts in some way the quality of the construction. With the depth of many layers of information constructed on the site of architectural production there is the opportunity to access this information in order to make design decisions. Both the decision to construct the assembly and the choice to access it through one's imagination are underpinned by personal, subjective thinking. But, what is occurring here is that both the subjective and the objective as mediated by a subject are being treated as equal. The benefit to a multidimensional approach to architecture is located in its *inclusive* character [as opposed to exclusionary discourse of the privileged]. In other words, the notion of privileging one discourse over another is liquidated in multi-dimensional architecture by the coexistence of many discourses within the production. This architecture can maintain, then , discussion on many levels without burning itself out. In other words, its "meaning" constantly dislocates itself upon manipulation of the limits of the inquiry.

In order to make this notion of multi-dimensional architecture more lucid and more critical, it is important to offer some hint as to what is meant by "dimension". The way in which I'm thinking about the compilation of layers or dimensions within the site is that a dimension accounts for one's concerns. For example, one's urban agenda would be a dimension as would concerns with the topography, local light conditions, relationships of the site and its context, facts about the site and program, fictions concerning the circumstances surrounding the site, history, typology, etc. This list can become quite lengthy. The idea is that a number of these dimensions figure into the decision-making process and yield an architecture with richness and depth. It becomes more important for the

original position to be maintained. This position is as follows: as each entity is determined to be influential or worthy of concern, the freedom [once again] to pick and choose is of prime importance. In other words, the process accounts for and, possibly, encourages the occupation of a discourse that brings certain issues to bear and then abandon that discourse for another while appropriating the issue. Dimensionality contrasts the way in which a design process can exclude - by concerning itself with limited parameters.

By compiling conventional and "inventional" concerns, an architecture of self-organized criticality through multi-dimensionality reaches a critical state whereby it may lead to a sudden uncovering or unlocking of readings that were previously not available due to suppression or sublimation. It is of some note here that the process may also lead to avalanche. In other words, there is inherent risk in the methodology. The work, however, maintains its critical dimension through constantly confronting itself and the status of its multi-dimensionality.

Space is real, for it seems to affect my senses long before my reason. The materiality of my body coincides with and struggles with the materiality of the space.⁴

Bernard Tschumi, in an essay entitled "the Architectural Paradox", speaks of the impossibility of escaping the experience/reason paradox of architectural space. After establishing that the real experience gets in the way of the overall vision, and that the overall vision gets in the way of the feeling, he outlines a dislocation [of sorts] from this dilemma by realizing that: Like

Eroticism, Architecture needs both system and excess.⁵ It would seem that a critical approach towards making space would include both system and excess, the Pyramid and the Labyrinth, reason and experience, and that the two could engage one another in many relationships. In other words, if one were relying too heavily on the analytical thinking [the Pyramid], one could suddenly turn the focus of the exploration towards the perception of space [the Labyrinth] in order to avoid excluding one discourse or the other. This of course is done in order to remain multi-dimensional. This mode of operating is tough but not tough-skinned as osmosis is a preferred means of travel. The sudden role reversals from the reasonable to the imaginative are difficult to make as one gets seduced by the project and begins to develop it via one discourse. Likewise, the whole strategy of multi-dimensionality becomes sacrificed by any inability to dislocate, thwarting the seduction, and assessing the state of the project.

So, why, given the ways in which the multi-dimensionality can be lost are numerous, engage in the making of architecture in this way? Is it not the Great Work, the Masterpiece, that responds to many people in many different ways? Is it not the Great Work, the Masterpiece, that continues to seduce through time and varying levels of inquiry? Is it not the Great Work, the Masterpiece, that attains its elevated status of greatness through its accessibility to many people regardless of their demographics or their interests?

But, the motive here is not necessarily one of greatness. It is much more *pedestrian* than that. The motive behind this inquiry is to better understand the relationships between the spaces within the process of making architecture and the spaces of lived experience. It is the Multi-dimensional approach that skirts

questions of Ideology, of Philosophy, and allows one to operate *locally*. Though this could be placed ideologically, it is not interested in such.

CHAPTER TWO: OCCUPYING A DISCOURSE

Given the asserted methodology for approaching the making of architecture, it is important to begin articulating some of the concerns of this architectural proposal. Of primary interest is the way in which the experience of space is conditioned by the architect and the way in which the sensations of space implicitly separate themselves from universalized conditions of understanding. In other words, the sensations of space are subjectively conditioned by place. It is for this reason, as well as the desire to articulate an architecture that operates *locally* that I look to the discourse of Critical Regionalism.

An essay on Critical Regionalism, before addressing questions of criticality, must deal with the conditions of regional and vernacular thinking. It is therefore important to establish the tenets of regionalism in order to understand that which lies beyond. Regionalism can be understood quite simply as the set or sets of characteristics that exist with a specific intensity or with a specific elevated status within a particular region. Regional characteristics are those that would separate *this* place from *that*. They include issues of topography, climate, light conditions, tradition, culture, and other entities that lose their degree of importance when categorized into a universal condition. Certain peculiarities of a context or a place can be held up as proof of a regionalism. Though many of the same peculiarities could be seen as vernacular or indigenous, it is important

to realize the differences implicit in the terms. As Thomas Schumacher explains, though Regionalism and the Vernacular inform each other, they are not one in the same. Regionalism supersedes the Vernacular or the Indigenous.⁶ Notions of vernacular architecture center themselves about inborn, intrinsic, or immanent preconditions of place. Though Regionalism takes advantage of such qualities it does not limit itself to them. For example, a vernacular architecture grows out of concerns such as available means of construction, local building materials, and climatic concerns. A Regional architecture may be born from similar concerns but unlike vernacular, it moves beyond these basic conditions. Conditions of Vernacular architecture are in response to the locale. Regionalism supersedes a response with a desire to express.⁷ Regionalism has as its operative an *intention* to reflect local culture, time, and space. This intention is a movement beyond the concerns of the vernacular to merely respond.

Within the spaces of this *intention*, what distinguishes Critical Regionalism from regionalism presents itself. Schumacher is quick to point out that with the intent to be regional comes the threat of being nostalgic, sentimental or romantic. He explains that within the present situation of global economy, advanced technologies, availability and mobility of materials, as well as the universalization of the building industry there is pressure on the result of intending to be regional in a situation where we find the regional qualities and characteristics substantially reduced. This pressure becomes overbearing as the intent to be regional acquires a scenographic or stylistic attempt to represent the traditions of the locale that have been displaced.⁸ Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre echo Schumacher's concerns. They point to the reduction of regional identity in the face of universalizing tendencies as well as a loss of

community and a loss of space associated with the dispersal of collective representation. Tzonis and Lefaivre warn of a "cozy nostalgia" that can easily slip into what has been previously occupied by tenets of regionalism but has been liquidated due to the practice of "architectural pornography" - stylistic pastiche, appropriation of image, et al.⁹ Kenneth Frampton, further establishes what on one level calls into question whether or not we can intend to be regional, but at another level further establishes the need for regionalism as a critical act. He, in a manner similar to Tzonis and Lefaivre, as well as Schumacher, speaks of the continuing modernization in the face of the reduction of the romance of discovery and invention. He also brings up the issue of the values of the Multinational Corporate World being centered on standardization and universalization. He speaks of these tendencies as forces acting contrary to the success of intending to be regional.¹⁰ It has become clear to see that it will be the role of Critical Regionalism to resist these pressures that are coexistent with one's intentions. Critical Regionalism should resist the tendency to be sentimental or scenographic but still permit regional adaptations and peculiarities of the place to reveal themselves within the architectural act.

In "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", Kenneth Frampton builds a foundation for understanding how a Critical Regionalism operates.¹¹ He calls for a return to pre-industrial tectonics without nostalgic sentimentality. In elaborating on this tectonic, he calls for an architecture that resists the tendencies mentioned above as well as a resistance to being universalized through image conscious appropriation, thus establishing the importance of the sensations of a place - sensations that can not be easily transferred, ideologically or otherwise, from one site to another. It is important to

add that it does not seem that Frampton is clearly supporting a return of the profession to the pre-industrial Master Builder, though the craftsman may be a closer link to understanding the resistance. By this I mean simply that with the craftsman an attitude about making is more readily identifiable. A carry-over to this attitude, or discipline, of making is an engagement between what is made and the way in which it is made. The craftsman historically being local perhaps operates most effectively as a metaphor to what is being expressed here. What is fairly explicit is that the role of Critical Regionalism is to challenge and confront the site and the region in order to better understand the way in which the most salient characteristics of the place can be incorporated into the architecture. Through confronting the context and history, as well as those things bearing directly or indirectly on a sophisticated understanding of the forces at work on the site, a critically regional architecture legitimates the claim that the specificities of the site, the program, and the circumstances surrounding both can provide identity and expression of those forces without the crutch of an overarching ideological framework and without retreating to stylistic, nostalgic or sentimental scenography. Architecture takes on a critical dimension through confronting itself via self-examination and self-evaluation. Architecture is critically regional when it takes on its critical dimension in relation or response to the peculiarities or conditions of the region in which it operates.

Within the condition of Critical Regionalism there is an implicit questioning of the limits of the region in terms of the climate, the locale and the culture.¹² This questioning of the limits is a large part of the confrontation that is discussed in relation to architecture's criticality. This critical confrontation is not meant to be taken in a negative manner. It is designed to better understand a multiple

layered conception of the site and its circumstances. This multidimensional framing of the architecture and its site leads to a self-conscious architectural endeavor that lies beyond image, beyond style, and takes on a tactile and tectonic presence.

This level of criticality is a willful construction. By this I mean that within a region, a context, and a site the frame for this criticality must be located, identified and defined in order to articulate an architecture that operates critically and in resistance to appropriation.¹³ This need to define the frame or the boundary does not imply fabrication. It serves as an indicator not of unrealistic activity but of deeper understanding of what the region can yield. The identifying of this frame or boundary is analogous to the setting of parameters for a debate, a discussion, and for an essay. In the following quote by Tzonis and Lefaivre, it is clear that critical activity is that which moves deeper into the subject matter in order to better understand.

Critical works challenge not only the established actual world as confrontational works do, but the very legitimacy of the possible world views which interpret it in the mind.¹⁴

Critical architecture, as well as Critical Regionalism can acquire a critical dimension from any of a number of layers of concern. Such multi-dimensional thinking is imperative to the critical work. Within the multiplicity, the critically regional work exists. Critical Regionalism, therefore takes on qualities of the vernacular, indigenous, and regional, but are not limited by them. Critical Regionalism often takes aspects of the non-critical response and re-configures them in an unexpected or unforeseen way. Tzonis and Lefaivre refer to this as

"defamiliarization". Defamiliarization acts critically against the tendency to over familiarize prominent formal relationships of a region. This over familiarization is implicit in Sentimental or Romantic regionalism. The process of defamiliarization is effective only when it is critical. In this case, to be critical is to wisely select properties that are potentially rich in terms of supporting a presence and tactile dimension of architecture within the region and then to incorporate the properties in an unexpected manner making them appear unfamiliar, and somewhat disturbing or perplexing. This activity disrupts sentimental embrace and allows a richer discourse, on the level of the imagination, between the architecture and the user.¹⁵ This discourse can be accounted for by pointing to the distance between expectations and actualities. In other words when one encounters the unexpected, there is a propensity for interaction in the form of curiosity, exploration and imagination per trying to account for the unexpected element. Thus by over layering the architectural project with many concerns of the site and the region as well as overlaying the project with re-configurations of properties indigenous to the region, something extraordinary materializes.

As touched on earlier, Frampton suggests that this discourse between the user and the architecture and between the ordinary and the extraordinary can reveal itself on the level of the tectonics. The "ligaments of the construction" as Frampton calls it provide the revelation towards a poetic understanding which operates on the level of the individual work as opposed to on any representational understanding that would exist *a priori* to the individual work.¹⁶ This consideration for the tectonic quality presupposes a tactile understanding [or experience] of the work which resists the tendency to be wholly visual. This then establishes a basis for the assertion that the status of critical regionalism is

not easily established by casual observation.¹⁷ Instead, one would have to conduct a critical inquiry into the architecture to establish its role within the region as critical. The use of critical exploration and questioning is only to be expected after the discussion of Critical Regionalism that has been presented here.

CHAPTER THREE: APPROPRIATION

Critical Regionalism as a discourse has been used to help establish the frame for this proposition, but, as the initial discussion suggests I might do, it is time to vacate the discourse of Critical Regionalism as such. Appropriating entities from the discourse, the methodology is not interested in following verbatim the doctrine. So while what lies [are] ahead are propositions conditioned by Critical Regionalism but not simple executions of that line of thought.

The first entity to be discussed is Tactility. Brought to bear in the discussion of Critical Regionalism, the idea of tactility can also be located in Walter Benjamin's canonical essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". It is in this essay that Benjamin discusses two ways of appropriation related to art and architecture. These two operatives are *touching* and *seeing*.¹⁸ This total-sensory understanding is what separated, for Benjamin, the work of architecture from the work of art. And thus saves architecture from the fate of the work of art. Of the two, seeing and touching, it is the act of touching or the tactile dimension that, for Benjamin separates architecture from art. According to Benjamin the work of art was reliant on the visual and could thus be reproduced ad infinitum. Tactility disallows this easy, casual appropriation. Benjamin believed in the complexity of this tactile dimension. He asserted that the work of architecture could best be understood

through habitual occupation. This differs from his view that the work of art could be understood per a more casual observation. Habitual occupation of the spaces of architecture lead one to a deeper knowledge of the nature of the work.

It is important to note that in Benjamin's essay the lesson of tactility is one of minor emphasis. So, while it is applauded by some, it is overlooked by many.

Despite the limited impact of the part of Benjamin's essay being privileged here, it is important [for the time being] to maintain the separation of touching and seeing in order to isolate the tactile dimension. The tactile, or haptic, is defined simply as that perceptible through the sense of touch. An example that fits rather easily here could be someone touching a hot surface and through that touch, perceiving the surface as hot. But, there is more. The sense of touch is crucial to bodily balance, movement, and positioning. The sense of touch is also the means through which one is aware of the interior of one's body. Underlying all of the body's senses is the transformation of physical pressure or sensation into electro/chemical energy.¹⁹ But it is the act of touching that gets closest to one actually being aware of this transformation. This immediacy to that bodily transformation is what postures the sense of touch as the sense that underlies all others. Likewise, the tactile dimension is immanent, yet it normally goes unnoticed - sublimated or edited out of one's immediate concern until something brings it out, highlights it, and makes it evident.

As was evident earlier in the discussion, Kenneth Frampton helps establish the position that tactility assumes in architecture.²⁰ According to Frampton, Critical Regionalism relies on those characteristics that lose their

importance if they are simply visually appropriated, or institutionalized and removed from a certain place. What becomes evident here is that *the touch* is immanent to the place. In other words, the architecture frames salient features of a site and reveals them at the level of the experience.

The tactile returns us literally to detail, to handrails and other anthropomorphic elements with which we have intimate contact...²¹

Thus, for Frampton, concerning oneself with tactility or touch presupposes a critical care towards the way in which the user can/could position his or her body in the space, as well as a concern that the architecture exhibits towards the experience of a place. To touch, then, is to resist the tendency to visually appropriate in order to presence one's body in a place.

By elevating Tactility to a level of discussion the tendency to suppress the smell, the sound, the taste, as well as the touch that is immanent to spatiality could be reversed and the more direct or immediate experience of space could be allowed to more fully assert itself.

Tactility and the idea of tactility hold a position that is very compelling and seductive. It is also a very difficult position. It is quick in eluding understanding. All space has a tactile dimension inherent within its nature. But, a clean definition of this tactility is virtually an impossibility. Thus, to attempt to fully control the nature of tactility is a useless activity [This is a very crucial point and should be remembered.]. One dislocates from this situation by realizing that while every space has tactile qualities, not every space allows access to the

compelling character of its tactility. Some places sublimate or suppress their tactility in order to privilege the visual. This is a suppression of the body as well. To privilege a space's tactile dimension in an attempt to unlock a deeper experience, and to overcome the suppression of the body is yet another willful act. This willfulness need not aspire to control the experience, but it does aim to leave traces, imprints of its becoming, that can release the poetic dimension of the touch - the critical touch that separates the space from its mediocre counterparts.

The preceding isolation of the tactile dimension of space was necessary in order to elevate its role. Upon reaching an understanding of its importance, tactility can re-join the visual, as well as the other senses in order to achieve a discourse on the Sensuality of space.

Sensuality can be taken quite literally at this point. It is meant as an excessive devotion to sensual pleasure. This implies a conception of architecture that not only responds to one's senses but *arouses* them. Space, then, can be discussed per its tactility, but it also can maintain a discussion on the level of total sensorial perception. In other words, what one hears, smells, tastes, as well as feels or touches combines with what is seen in order to condition the way space is experienced. Even thoughts and mental images that are formed in one's mind can affect the way space is perceived and remembered. What speaking about spatiality in this manner does is to make it into something that simply cannot be dealt with, let alone controlled. But, even though it seemingly "straps" spatiality into terms that can't be adequately explained, it puts the conception of space on a more phenomenal level which

can condition a more poetic reading. For example, if one constantly frames a discussion of space on a functional, diagrammatic level, it suppresses the poetic phenomena of sensual understanding. But it is important to stress that poetic space can be functional. In other words, it is the functionalist who excludes poetics and it is the poet who includes both.

There is a wide range of readings and interpretations that any one work of architecture can provoke. It is when a work of architecture reaches a level of comprehensive development -- one that includes spatiality beyond diagrammatic function -- that this range can reach its largest breadth. It is this wide range of readings and misreadings that can locate inadequacies in a discursive, rational, and measurable conception of architecture. What the presence of a diverse range of interpretations does, if one is open to the multiplicity, is dislocate the architect from a position of control. In other words, the architect, when making a decision to reveal the poetic dimension of spatiality that is so often concealed under basic concerns of program, function, and clarity of diagram, relinquishes the assumed power to control. So, the architect has dislocated from wanting to totally control the experience while accepting the multiplicity and polyvalent way in which the architecture will actually be experienced. By dislocating, the architect places him or herself into a position of willful indeterminacy.

In a published interview with the firm of Coop Himmelblau there is a taste of what is being pursued here.

Wolf Prix: There is power in space, which comes from light, extensions, transitions, images and other elements. This power is sometimes very strong, sometimes muted. There is also the

psychic- we call it psychic planes of space. We try to catch that emotionally, because when you enter a space you perceive it like that, and not analytically. The quality of the space is perceived through the eyes.

Alan Boyarsky: So you want to communicate with the people who use the space?

Wolf Prix: They cannot feel it as we do - perhaps it can truly be felt once - but there is a special quality, nevertheless.²²

The importance of the quote is in its realization that what the architect feels when making the architecture won't be duplicated in the feelings of the occupants, but there will be a thread of the energy and passion present in the experience. This presupposes my [and Wolf Prix's] assertion that the intentions - or better yet the *hand* of the designer is felt in the work of architecture but being in total control of that presence is a tired and worn out notion.

As I touched on earlier, to deal with sensuality of space, one must be willing to relinquish the notions of power associated with the privileged discourse [this privilege being ultimately a part of the greater power structure of society]. What I'm getting at is that to set the discourse on the path towards spatial sensations, one must be willing to disarm the tendency to frame the discourse of space per representational, reifying, institutionalizing parameters. The power then becomes less deterministic and can be focused on a more personal exploration of space making. It is worth mentioning John Hejduk at this time. John Hejduk is a very influential [perhaps powerful] figure in architecture who has focused on throwing the production of architecture back into a poetic frame. One needs only to look at Vladivostock to see the way in which Hejduk is operating.²³ It is perhaps Hejduk who has totally relinquished all power of

representational, codified meaning and reinvested the power in himself as maker.

...new perceptions of spatiality often seem to arise with the aid of something akin to mystical insight, flashes of revelation or aesthetic instinct rather than proceeding neatly and logically from cerebral reasoning alone. ²⁴

It is quotes such as these that reinforce my assertion that it is the subjective, the personal parameters of decision making that can **supplement** the traditional ways of practicing architecture and further the cause of making richer spaces. This would require one to learn to trust one's intuitive reasoning and risk the power of the imagination to lead one to a more complete understanding of the sensations of space. This would also be a re-investment of architecture's power into one's self. It also thwarts the notion that the power of the architect results from embracing the established institutions. While this exploration is not aimed directly at the politics of establishment, it is important to speak about the way in which weakening the established, or the privileged can affect how architecture is made. Perhaps the first effort of breaking down establishment needs to occur *within* the architect. This would allow the architect to act more freely by not feeling constrained by what is uncertain.

This weakening of the fear of the uncertain is something that lies beyond what we are taught in schools of architecture. Once again, it is important to emphasize that my questioning of the established or the Conventions is not aimed at doing away with them. It is quite the opposite. I question to better understand. I do, however, think its important to leave oneself exposed to the

influences other than those limited to the traditionally framed discipline. This means always being accepting of accidents, chance occurrences or the arbitrary.

You are more knowledgeable in your ignorance than you are if you engage in a ritualistic activity simply to alleviate your ignorance.²⁵

The second entity that is appropriated from the discussion of Critical Regionalism is the notion of Defamiliarization. As was discussed earlier, Defamiliarization is a mechanism to dislocate the tendency, when operating locally, to be stylistic or, wholly visual. The intent of Defamiliarization is to make strange the familiar. Defamiliarization challenges the nature of the readings of the site or the region. Its potential power comes from the way in which Defamiliarization tropes expectations and prompts one to experience the architecture via curiosity, imagination, and exploration. My intention in extracting Defamiliarization as a method or a mechanism is to problematize and challenge the condition of Tactility or Sensuality.²⁶

CHAPTER FOUR: APPLICATION

This turning loose of one entity onto the other is perhaps a phenomena specific to this particular demonstration, but it should be noted that it is evidence of the free play within the methodology. More importantly, what does this defamiliarization of tactility/sensuality bring with it?

Thus far, the importance of tactility has been expressed in terms of physical dimension. Conditions of texture - rough versus smooth, hard versus soft, dull versus sharp, hot versus cold and so on - are essential to the notion of tactility and sensuality. To make this strange, peculiar, to defamiliarize it is to challenge this definition of tactility/sensuality, poke at it at see if it can offer more. The tactile dimension could/does offer much more than physical dimension. It can be consider conceptual. Tactility, it would seem, has a metaphysical dimension as well.

You employ stone, wood and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is construction. Ingenuity at work.
But suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: "This is beautiful." That is Architecture.²⁷

It is in this in this quote by Le Corbusier that we can begin to feel this touch - this tactility of space is something that is both touched and is touching. It becomes clearer, somehow, how this sensual nature of architecture can compel one, how it can move one, how it animates both space and those experiencing

the space. Not only has space been occupied, but the space has occupied. It is in that moment Le Corbusier refers to - *But suddenly you touch my heart* - that the architecture transcends itself, its objectivity, and *touches* and impresses a memory on the subject. It is at this moment that tactility has been made strange. As this experience of space transcends the easy, convenient, visual reading in favor of a deeper, more immediate experience, the presence of one's body in space moves beyond the level of awareness and approaches a level of appreciation. There is still doubt. Has tactility/sensuality really been defamiliarized?

The issue here is the touch. Both what one touches and how one is touched. To touch is to activate one's hand and mind - to move one's body both physically and mentally. To touch is to search for that which eludes sight, to map the surface with one's imagination. To touch is very much like to draw. Both are done in order to understand, to know. What is also brought to bear is that things that one cannot touch can touch one, can influence one, can condition the way in which space is experienced, is felt. the defamiliarization has led tactility away from itself. The touch is still in operation, but the limitation of physicality has been lifted.

It seems as though what the proposition is inherently about is maintaining an *attitude* about making Architecture. This attitude asks, of itself, to be critical - always with respect to assessing how the project is operating and how it would be affected by change. This, of course is criticality on the level of one's own activity, it doesn't worry so much with external, over-arching frameworks [though

it could be placed in relation to one]. This attitude about making, while being responsible for its internal logic, aims to always remain open to the accidental, the chance occurrence that changes the way one feels/acts.

The process also maintains the attitude that Architecture is the production of Space. With this in mind, the attitude about making is to be established during production and is to be present in all of the artifacts. The multi-dimensional articulation begins inside my body and connects itself with the site. The construction begins then as a site specific exercise that is intended to build upon the conditions of the site by adding other dimensions. Subjective rationale is relied on to provide a supplement to the parameters of making architecture that a traditional framework brings to bear. The proposition is by definition full of doubt.

CHAPTER FIVE: DEMONSTRATION

CIRCUMSTANCE

In 1910, L.L. Walker, Sr., popularly known as "Shorty", emerged from his downtown Houston garage with a home built monoplane constructed from plans for the French Bleirot aircraft. Walker removed the wings from his machine and loaded onto a train and transported it to South Houston. Upon reaching South Houston, Walker, who knew of Daedalus and Icarus, the scientific pursuits of Leonardo DaVinci, as well as the triumph of Wilbur and Orville Wright, re-constructed the aircraft and became the first Houstonian to realize the dream of flight.

His enthusiasm for flight kept Walker involved with aviation for the rest of his life. Not only did he run a propeller shop out of his downtown garage, but he also became a local figure head among those with an affinity for overcoming the weight of the city.

It is the group of aviators that Walker initiated into the dream-world of flying that preconditioned this architecture.

SITE

Located Northeast of downtown Houston, there is a derelict sector of the city that has been relegated to the industrial loud and the economically deprived. In an area where Gravity was king and still is, one can fly away from the city yet

never escape it. North of the rubber house and East of the purple bridge, I found seven walls embedded into the ground. Amongst the fragments of its former self, these heavy walls offered me a place to go and dream. For what greater reason had these walls been spared the destruction surrounding them.

PROGRAM

The Aviation Institute is, quite simply, a place where people can learn to fly. The program makes provisions for a Aeronautical Library - a modest sized library containing both scientific and mythic books on flying, a Workshop - which provides space for the production of Flying Machines, and seven dwelling units to accommodate seven aviators that are permitted to live within the site while becoming consumed by the dream of escaping the heavy city for the freedom of the air. In addition to these three Wings, there is an airstrip and a large tilted plane for the tethering of flying machines.

To fly, it is imagined, is to be one with the city.

ENDNOTES

1. Hays, K. Michael, "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form", *Perspecta* 21, p. 22.
2. Ibid, p. 27.
3. Bak, Per and Kan, Chen, "Self Organized Criticality", *Scientific American* Vol. 264 # 1, Jan. 91, p. 48.
4. Tschumi, Bernard, "The Architectural Paradox", Questions of Space. [AA Publications, London, 1990], p. 20-21.
5. Ibid, p. 29.
6. Schumacher, Thomas, "Regional Intentions and Contemporary Architecture: Critique". CENTER A Journal for Architecture in America. Volume 3 [Rizzoli, NY, 1987], p. 54.
7. Ibid. p. 51.
8. Ibid. p. 55.
9. Tzonis, Alexander and Lefaivre, Liane, "Why Critical Regionalism Today?", *A+U*, May 1990. p. 25.
10. Frampton, Kenneth, "Ten Points on an Architecture of Regionalism: A Provisional Polemic", CENTER A Journal for Architecture in America, Volume 3,[Rizzoli, NY, 1987], p. 20.
11. Frampton, Kenneth, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture. Hal Foster, Ed. [Bay Press, Port Townsend, Washington, 1983], p. 16-30
It is important to note here that the foundation for understanding Critical Regionalism at this point is largely my own. In other words, Kenneth Frampton did not coin the term, nor is he solely responsible for its understanding, but he has provided the way into the material for me.
12. Frampton. "Ten Points...". p. 24.
13. Ibid. p. 24.

14. Tzonis/ Lefaivre. p. 29.
15. Ibid. p. 31.
16. Frampton. "Towards a Critical Regionalism...". p. 29.
17. Tzonis/ Lefaivre. p. 33.
18. Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Illuminations, p. 240.
19. Decker, Roy T., "Reciprocity: Architecture and the Inner Image in Form", unpublished paper presented at the ACSA Conference in Baton Rouge, La. Nov. 2, 1991, p. 5-6.
20. Frampton, Kenneth, "Towards a Critical Regionalism..." p. 28-29.
21. Frampton, Kenneth, "Intimations of Tactility", Architecture and Body. [Rizzoli, NY, 1988].
22. Boyarsky, Alvin, "Projects by Coop Himmelblau", *AA Files* 19, p. 71.
23. Hejduk, John, Vladivostok, [Rizzoli, NY, 1986] .
24. Benson, Robert, "The New Spatiality", *JAE* Vol. 40 #2, Jubilee Issue, p. 6.
25. Kipnis, Jeffrey, Quoted from a lecture given at Georgia Tech College of Architecture in the Spring of 1988.
26. It is important to note that the term tactility/sensuality is in response to criticism recieved from Jennifer Bloomer. She pointed out that the term 'tactility' was literally defined by the physicality of touching and therefore suggested that the use of 'sensuality' would be more appropriate.
27. Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, [Dover Publications, Ny, 1931, (1986)], p. 203.

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- Fuermann, George, Houston, The Feast Years, Premier Printing Co., 1962.
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- Hejduk, John, Vladivostok, Rizzoli International, New York, 1986.
- Le Corbusier, Aircraft, Universe Books, New York, 1988.

Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, Dover Publications, New York, 1931, 1986.

Lefaivre, Liane and Tzonis, Alexander, "Why Critical Regionalism Today?", *A+U*, May 1990.

Schumacher, Thomas, "Regional Intentions and Contemporary Architecture: Critique", CENTER A Journal for Architecture in America, Vol. 3, Rizzoli International, New York, 1987.

Shevell, Richard S., Fundamentals of Flight, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1983.

Tschumi, Bernard, Questions of Space, AA Publications, London, 1990.

APPENDIX ONE: PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

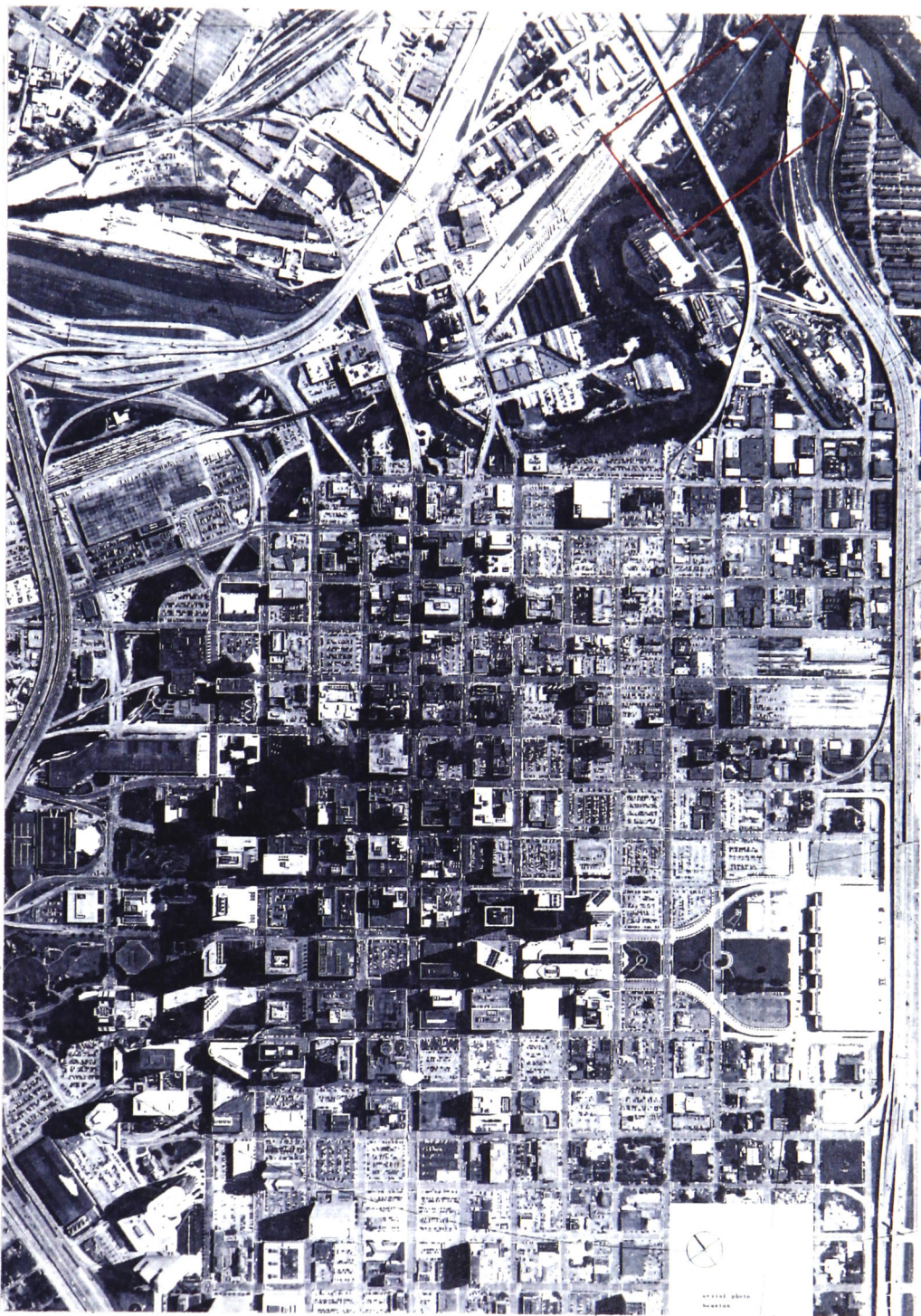


Plate 1 Aerial Photograph of Houston, Texas

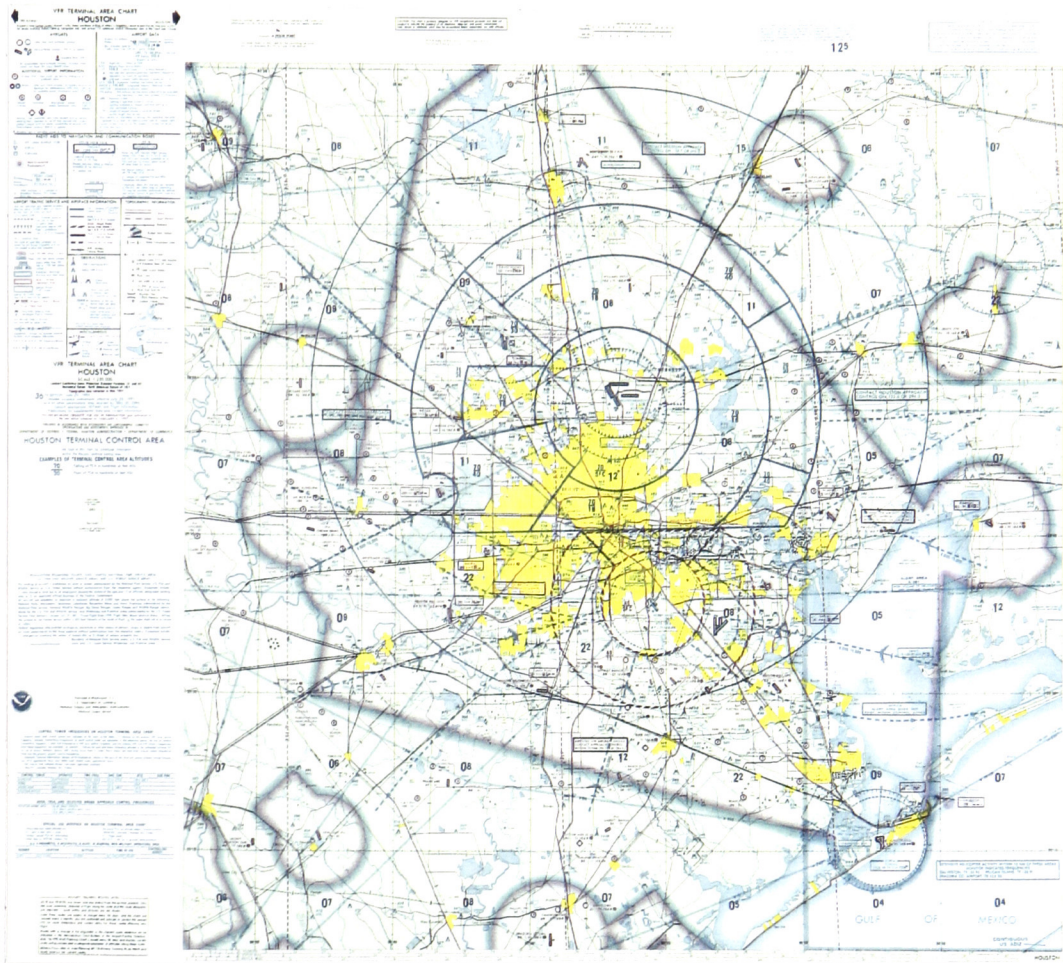
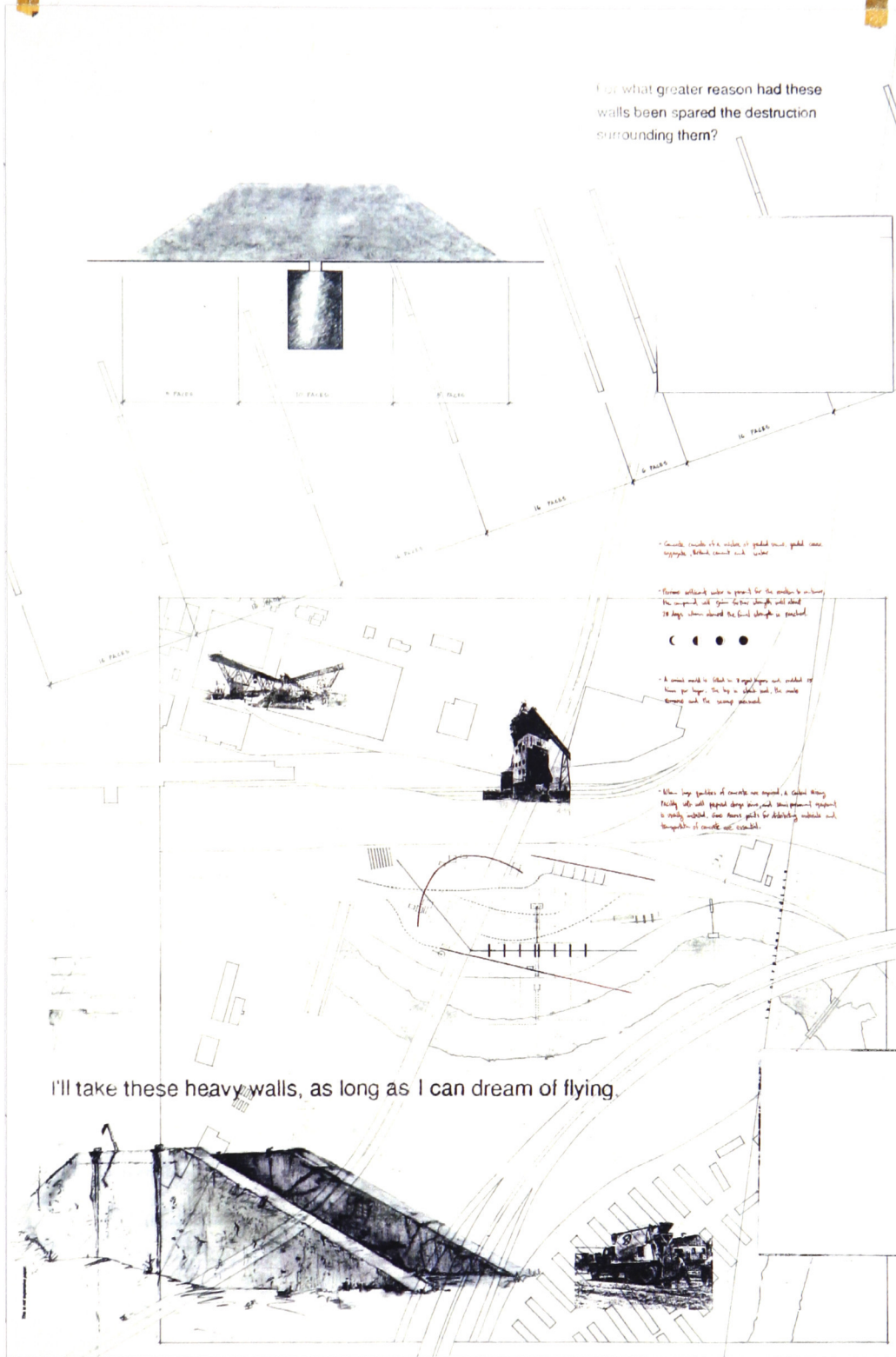


Plate 2 Pilot's map of Houston, Texas



Plate 3 Photographs of the Site

For what greater reason had these walls been spared the destruction surrounding them?



I'll take these heavy walls, as long as I can dream of flying.

Plate 4 Speculation One - Concrete

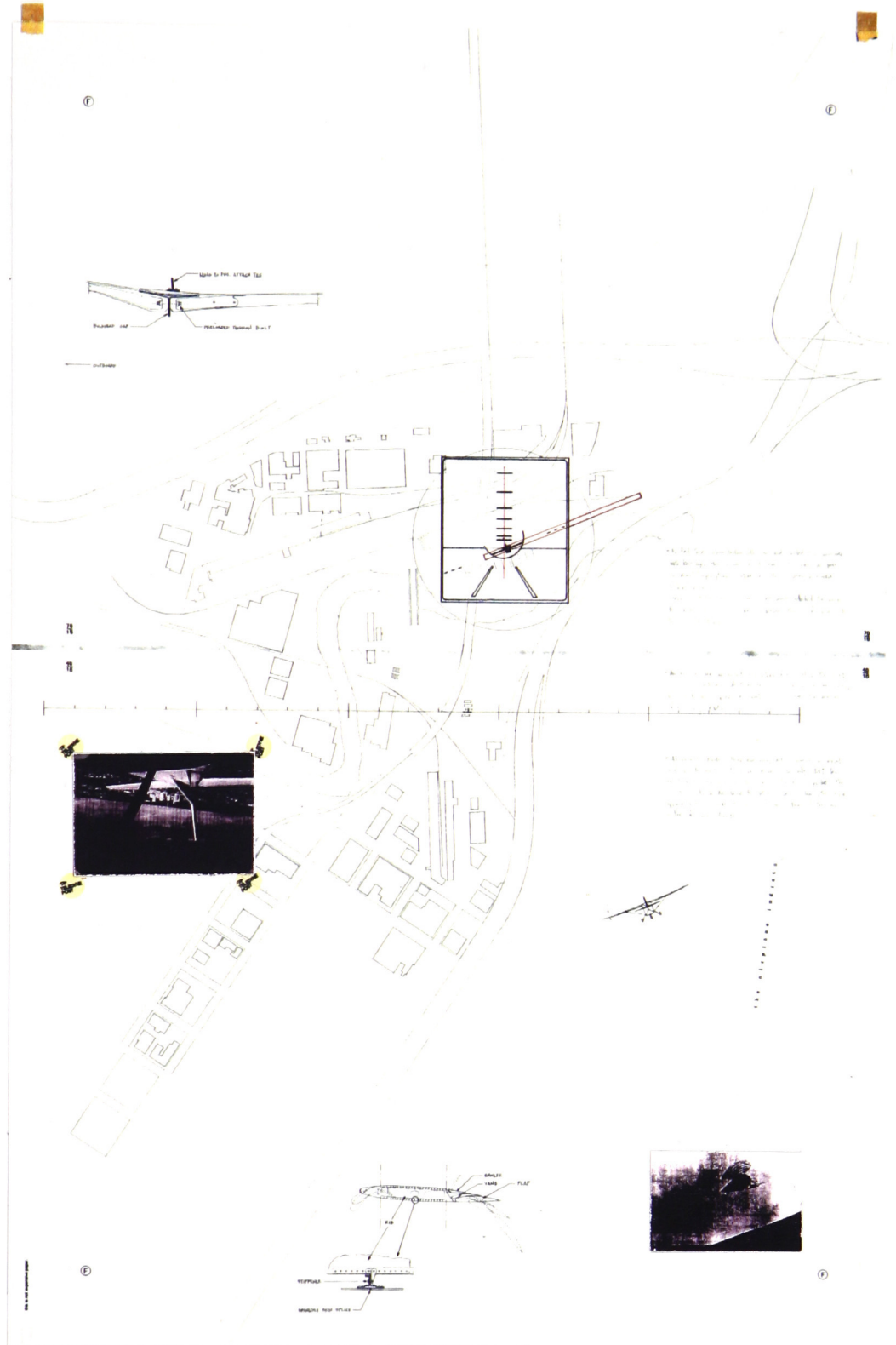


Plate 5 Speculation Two - Airplane

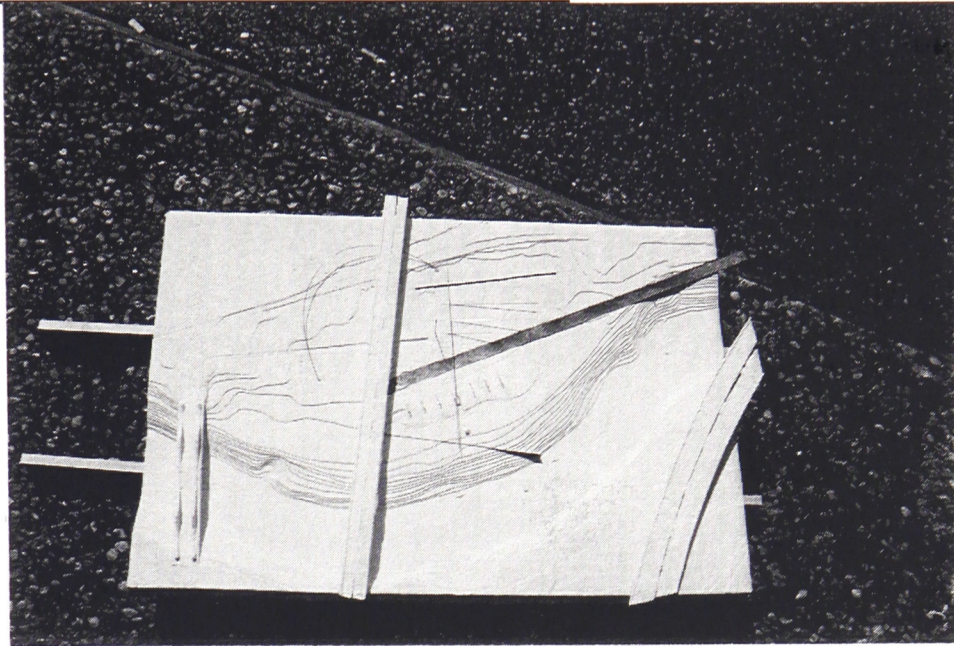


Plate 6 Model One - Strategy for Occupation

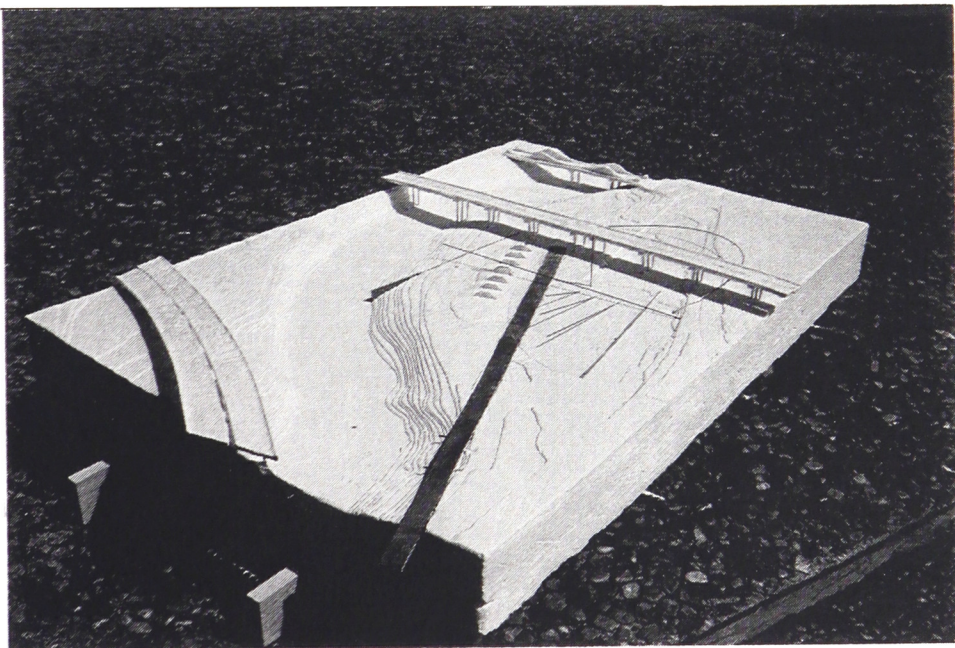
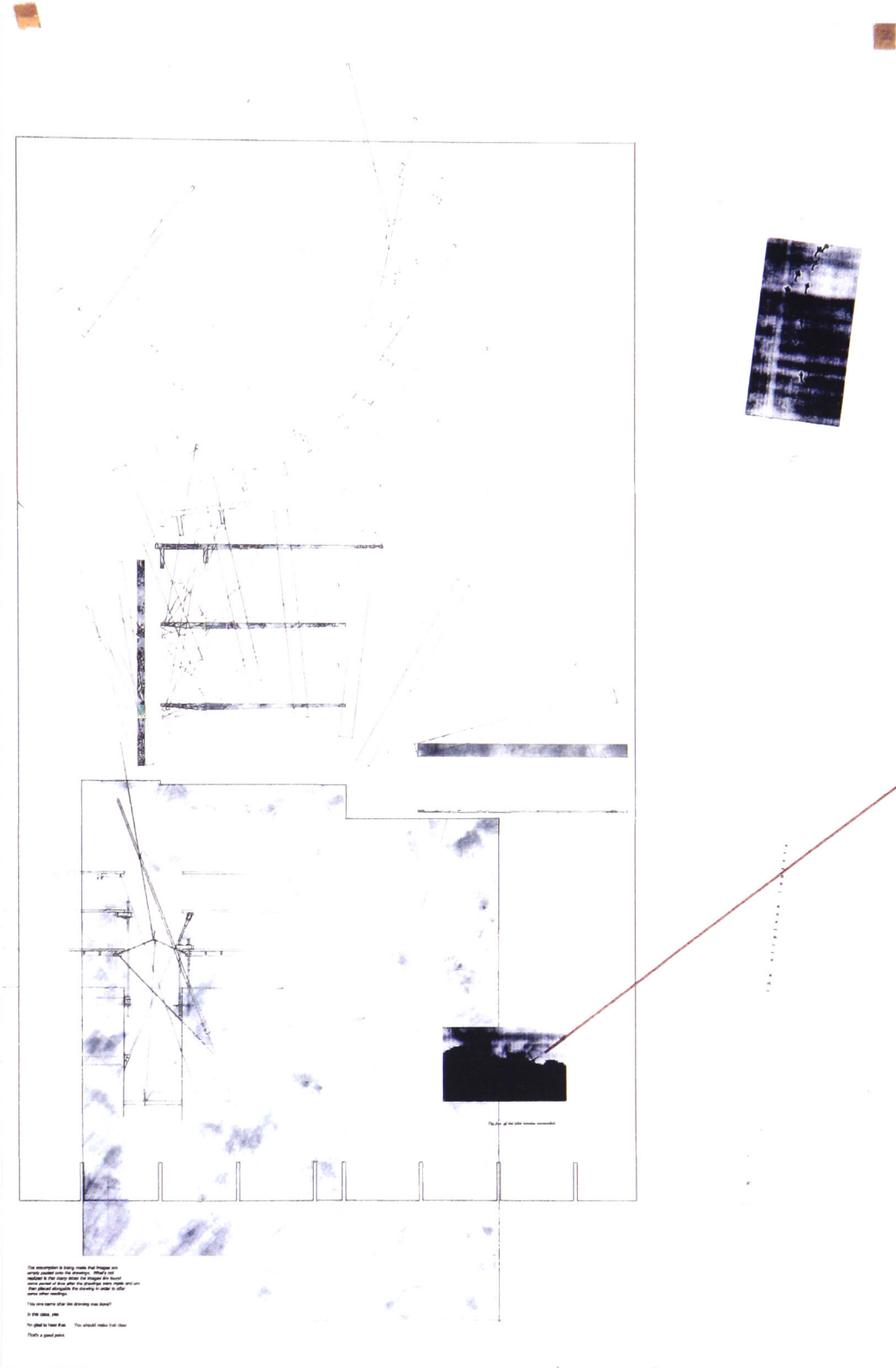


Plate 7 Model One - Strategy for Occupation



The description of today's events from the perspective of the witness is a reconstruction of the events. It is not a record of what actually happened. It is a reconstruction of what the witness believes happened. It is not a record of what actually happened. It is a reconstruction of what the witness believes happened.

Plate 8 Event One - Reading Room

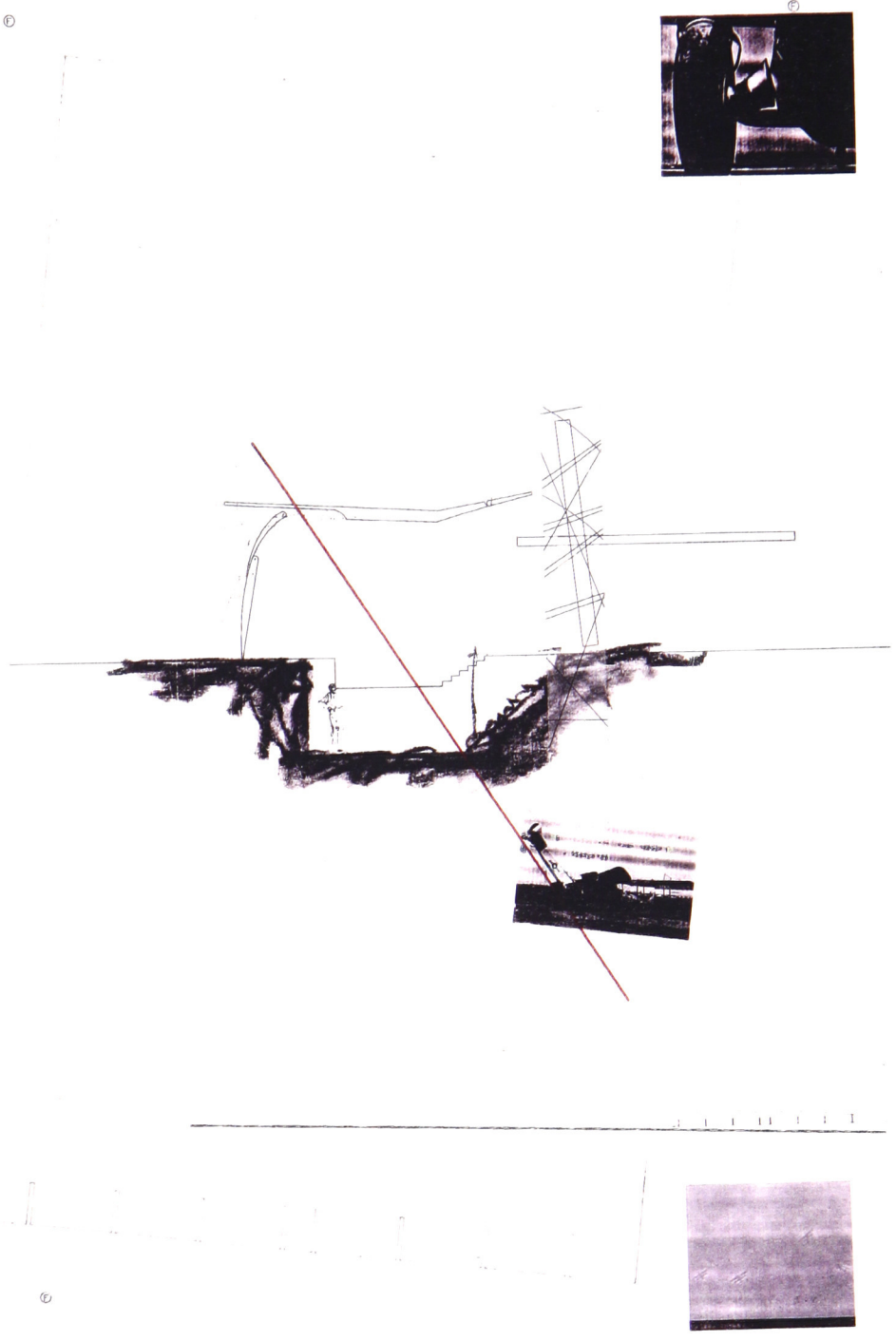


Plate 9 Event Two - Making Room



Plate 10 Event Three - Dreaming Room

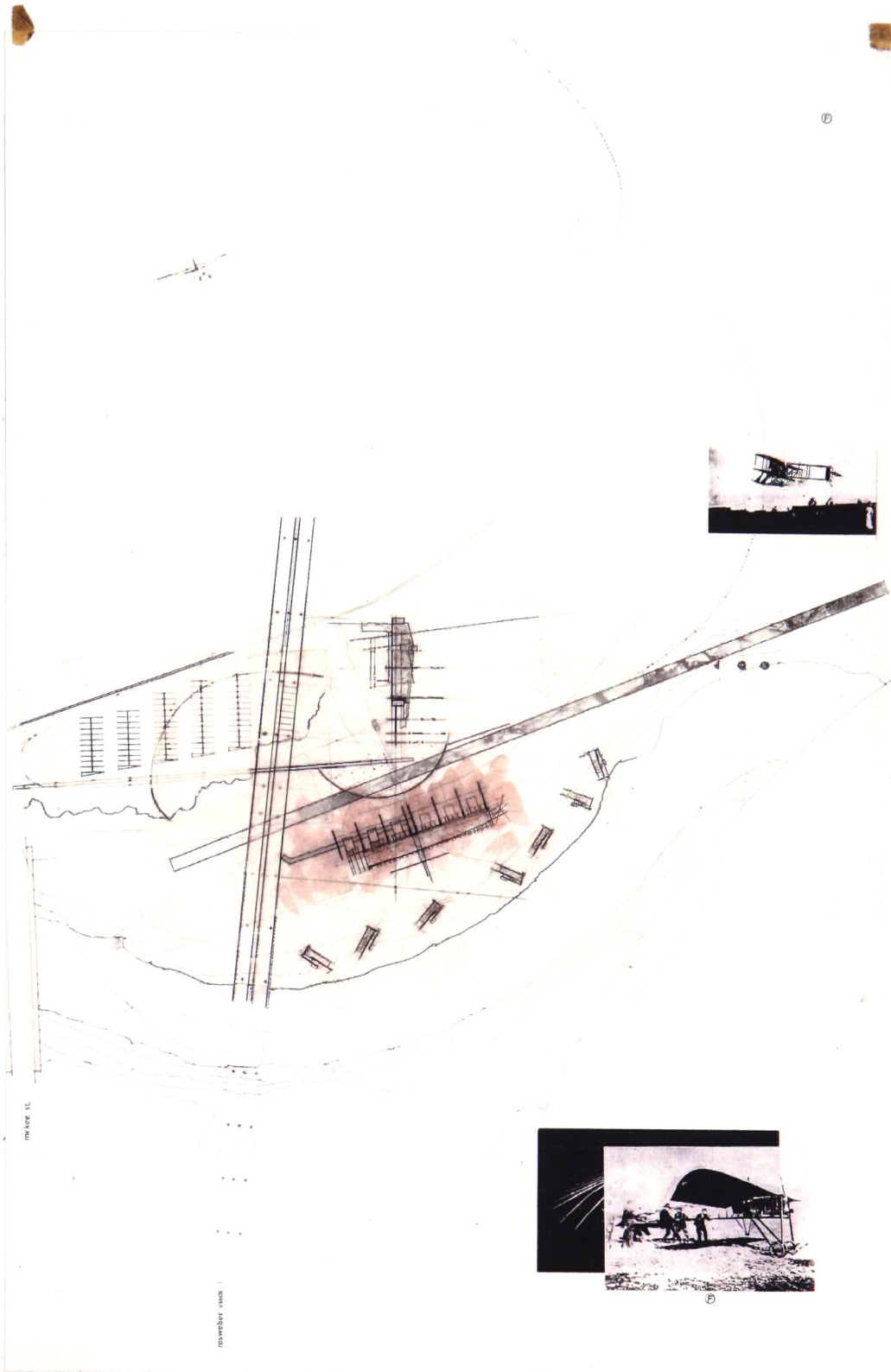
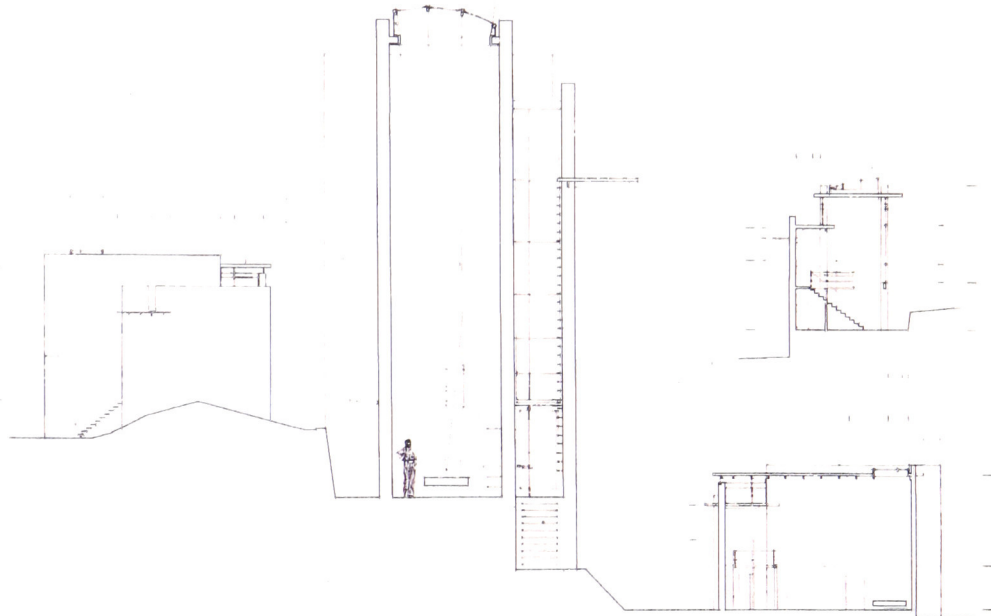


Plate 11 Drawing One - Site Plan



I'll take these heavy walls as long as I can dream of flying.

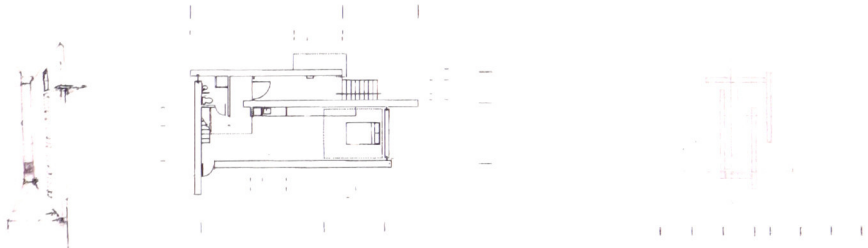


Plate 12 Drawing Two - Dwelling

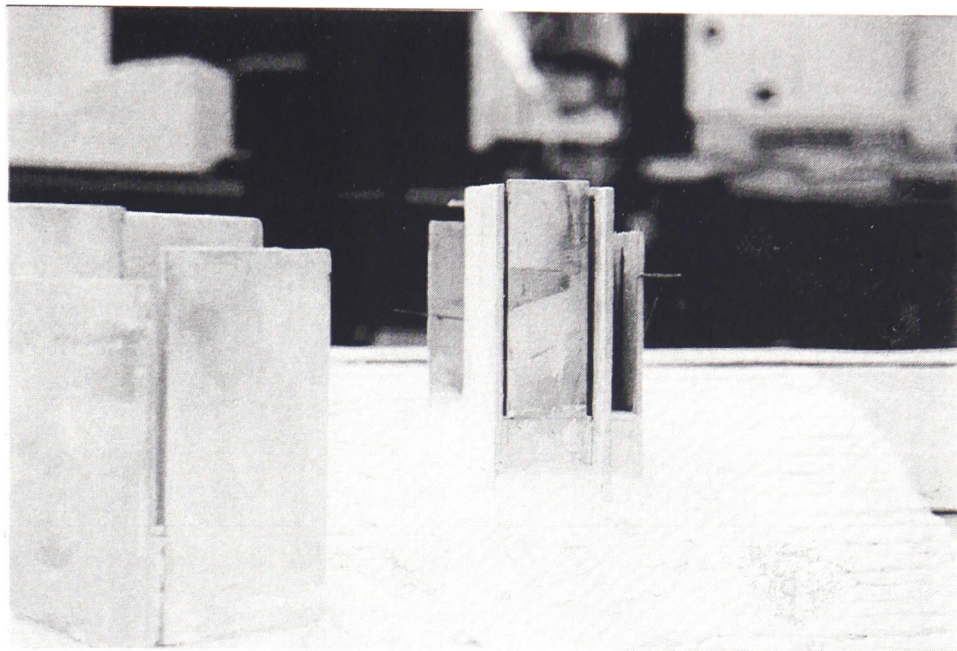


Plate 13 Dwelling - 0'

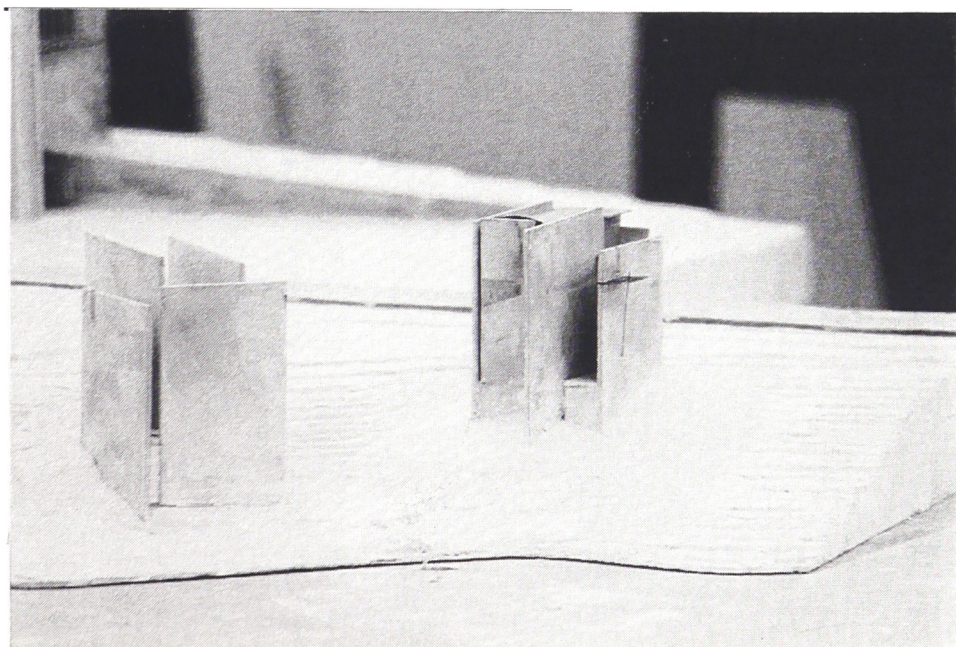


Plate 14 Dwelling - +10'

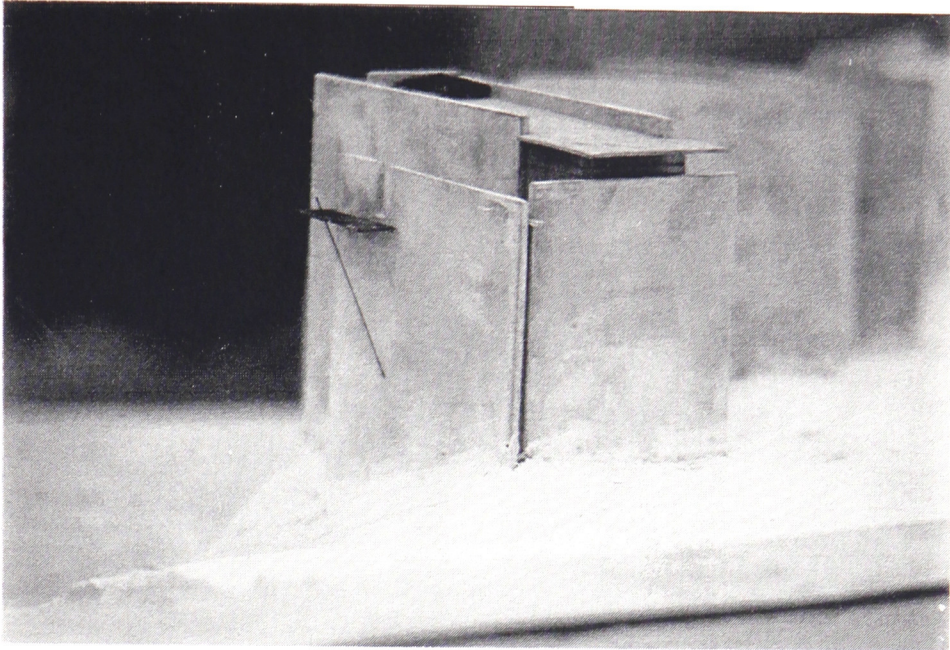


Plate 15 Dwelling - +25'

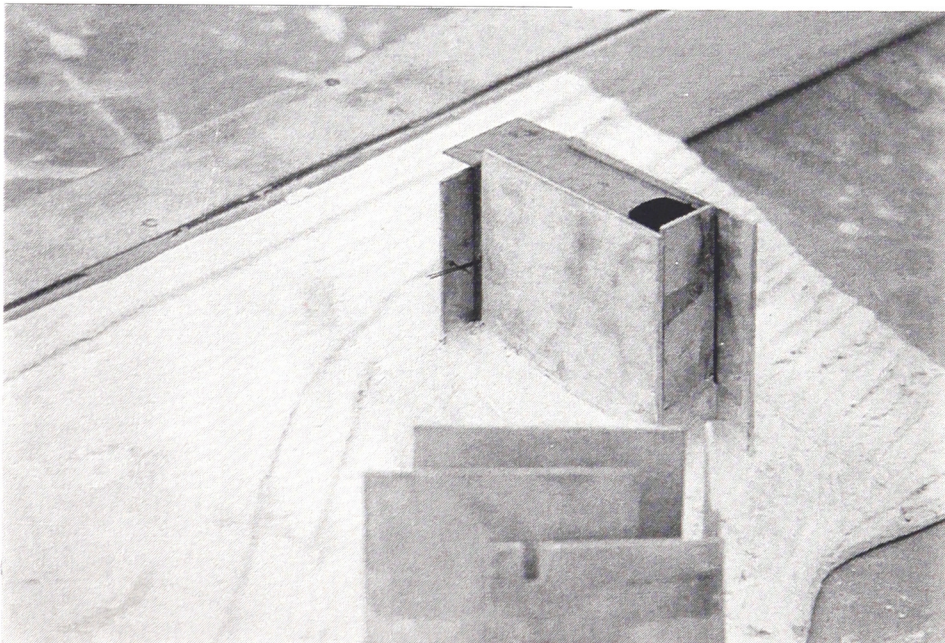


Plate 16 Dwelling - +125'

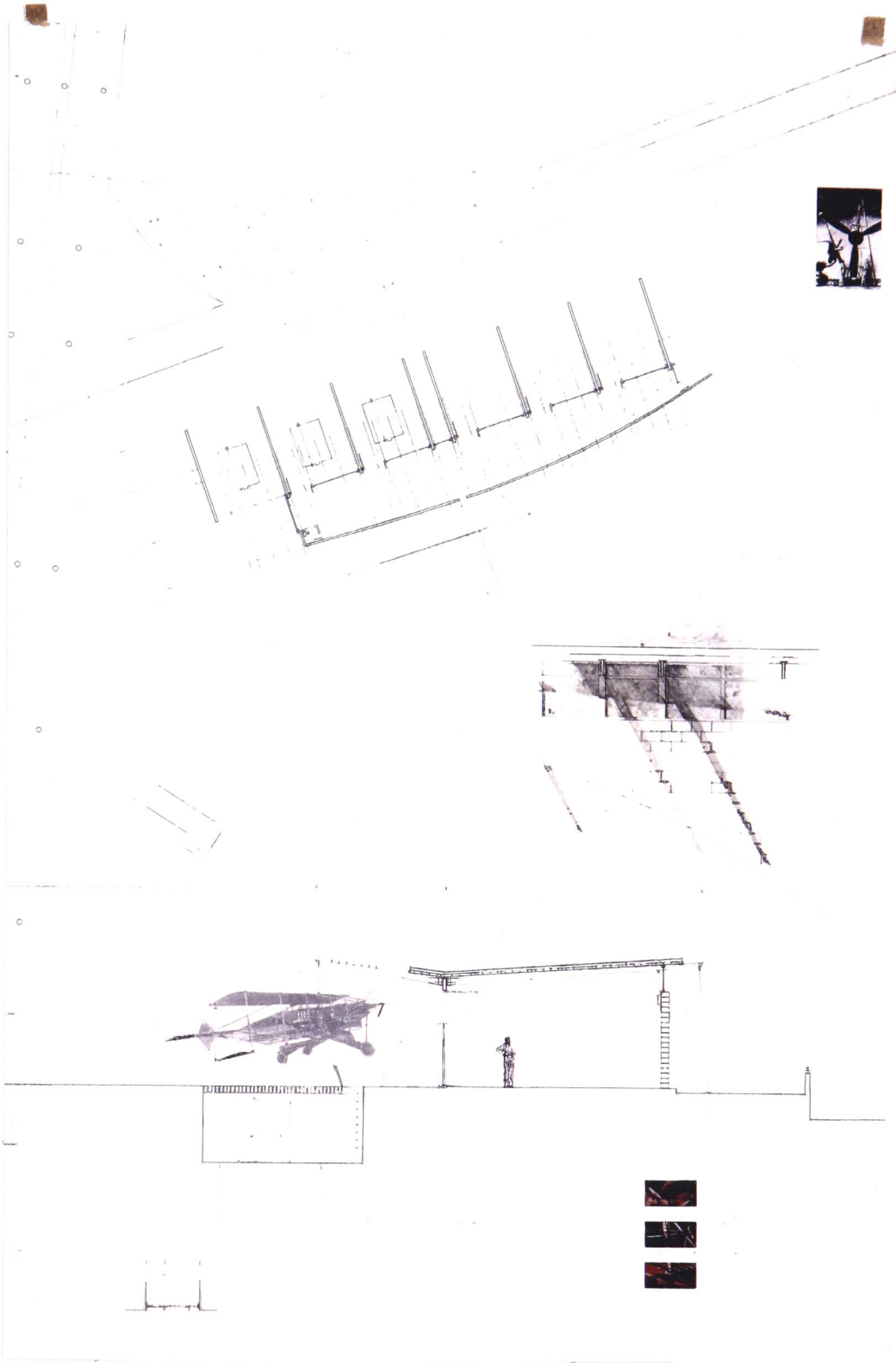


Plate 17 Drawing Three - Workshop

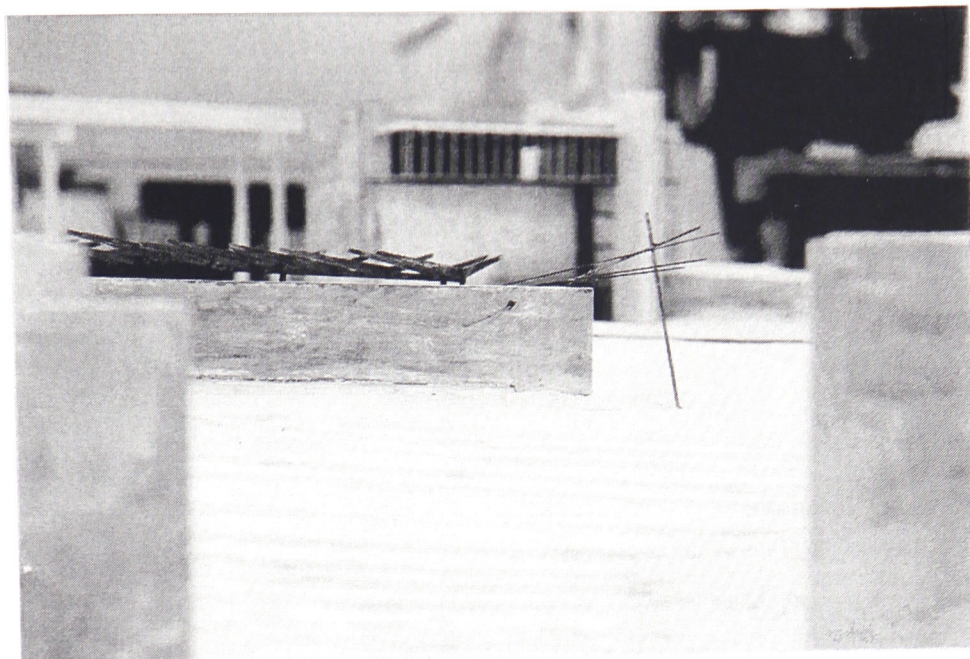


Plate 18 Workshop - +20'

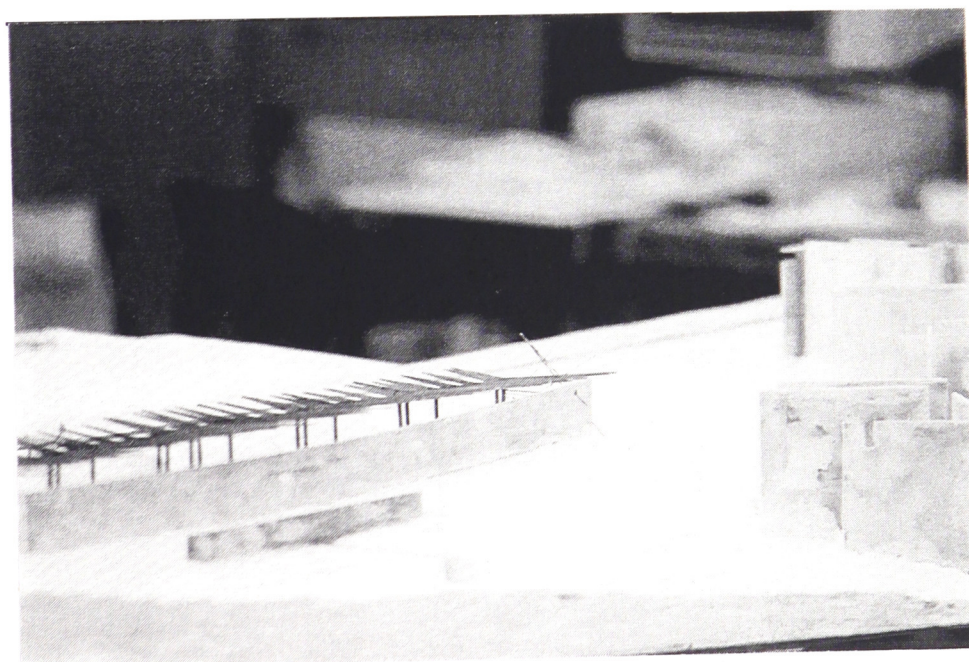


Plate 19 Workshop - +35'

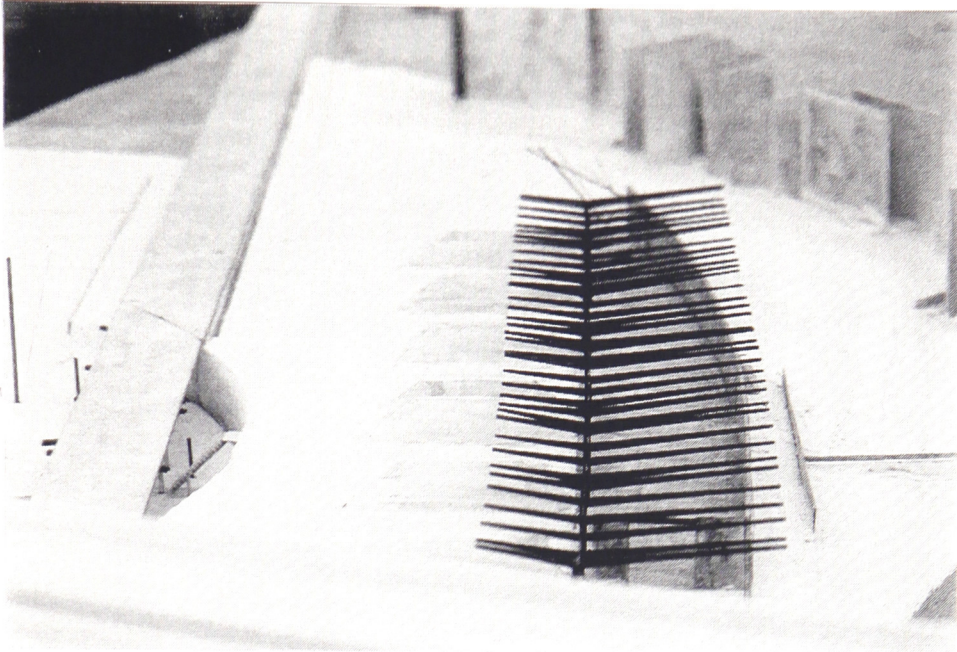


Plate 20 Workshop - +60'

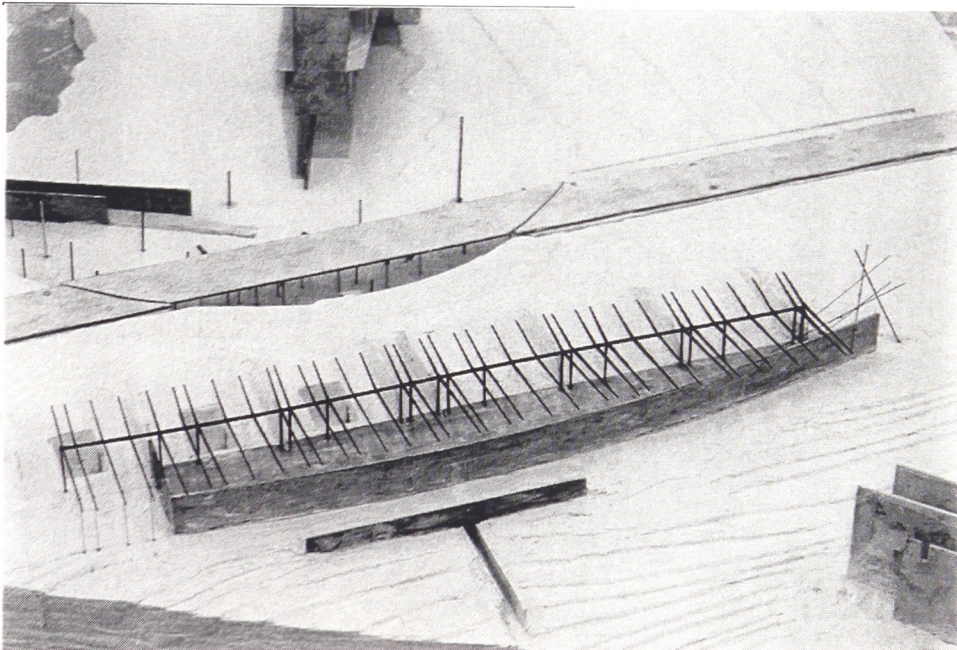


Plate 21 Workshop - +125'

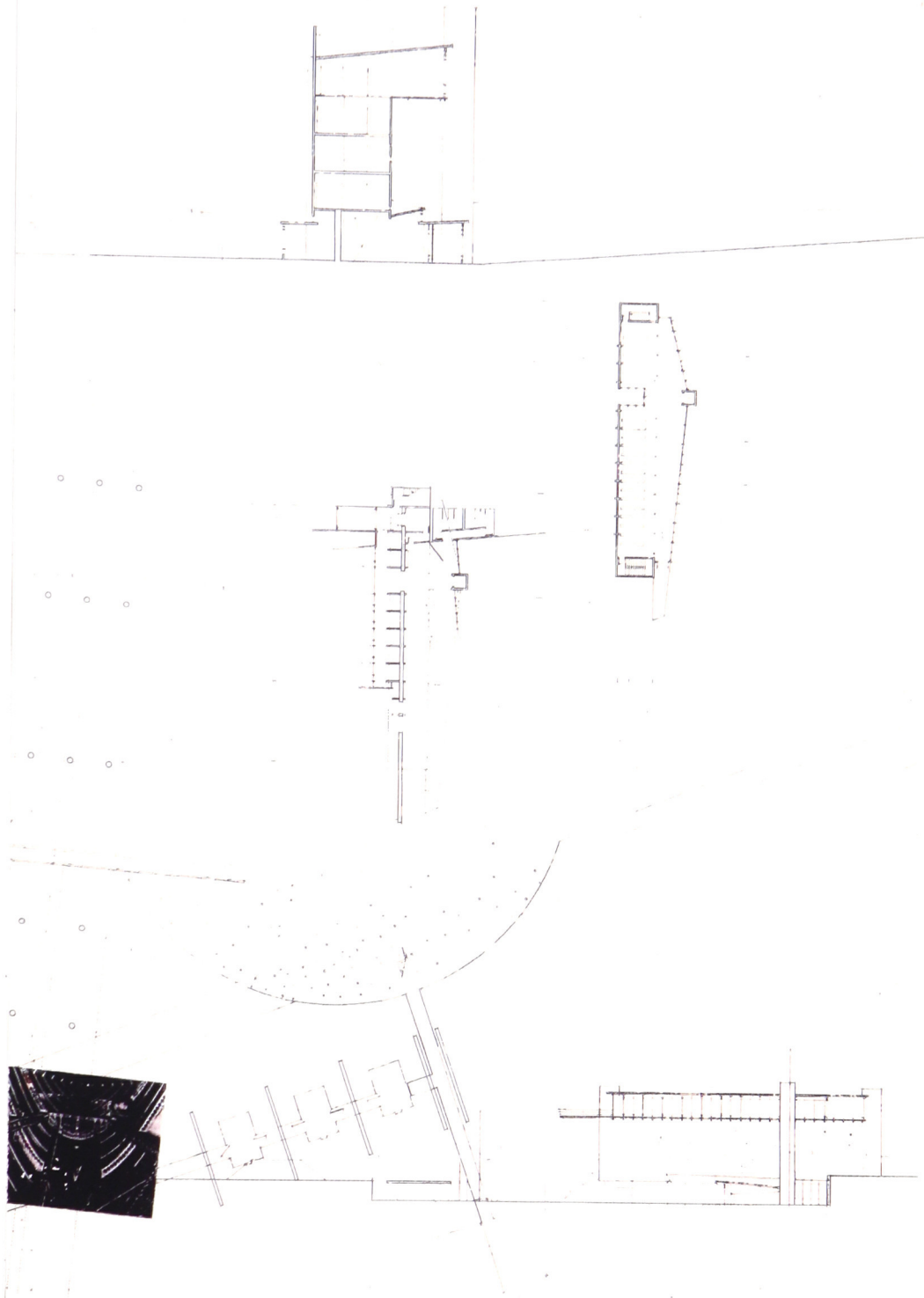


Plate 22 Drawing Four - Library

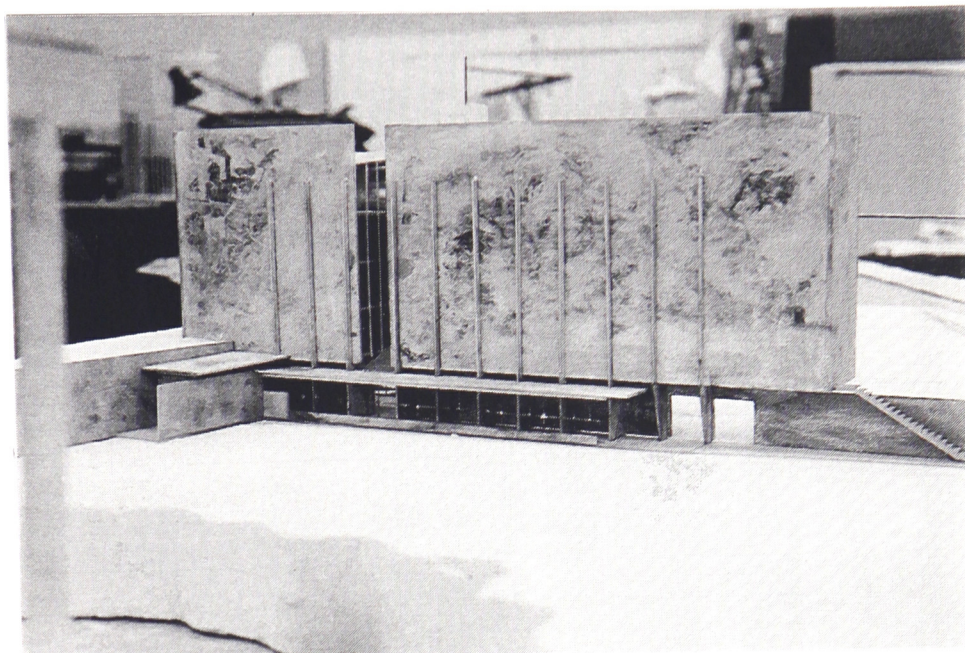


Plate 23 Library - +15'

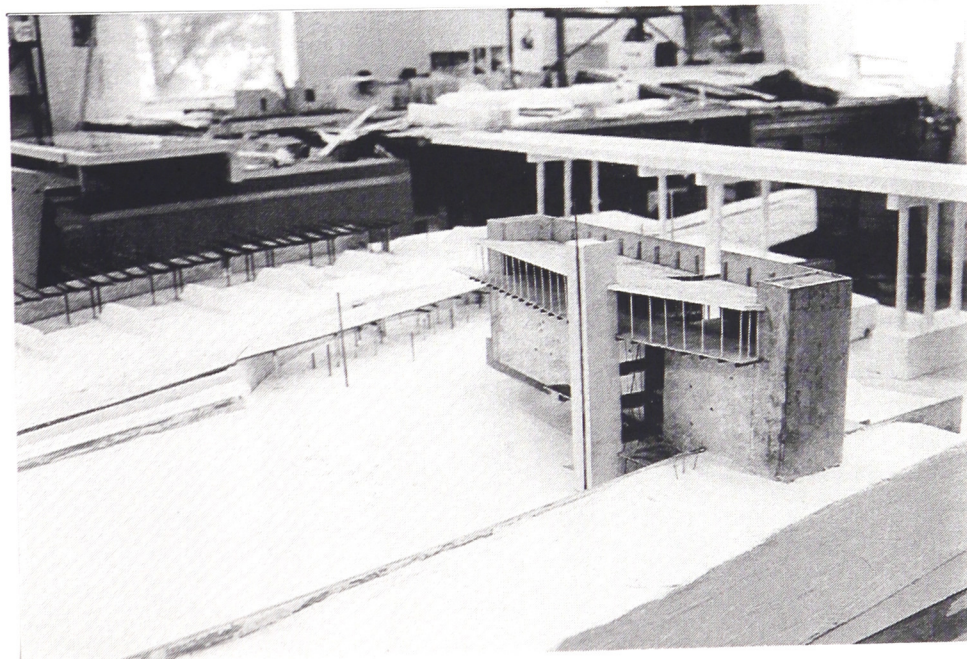


Plate 24 Library - +50'

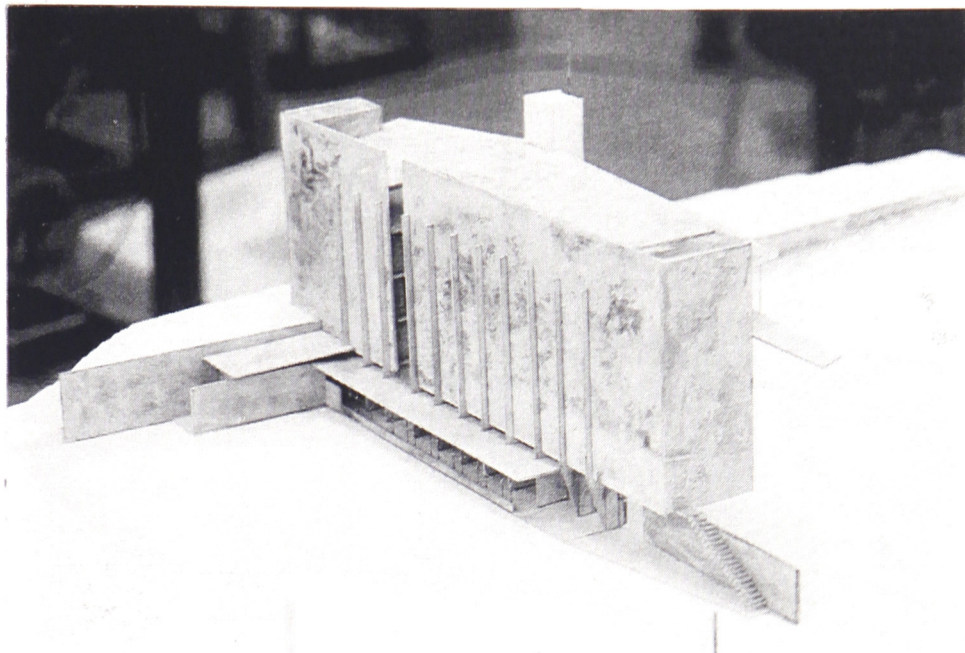


Plate 25 Library - +60'

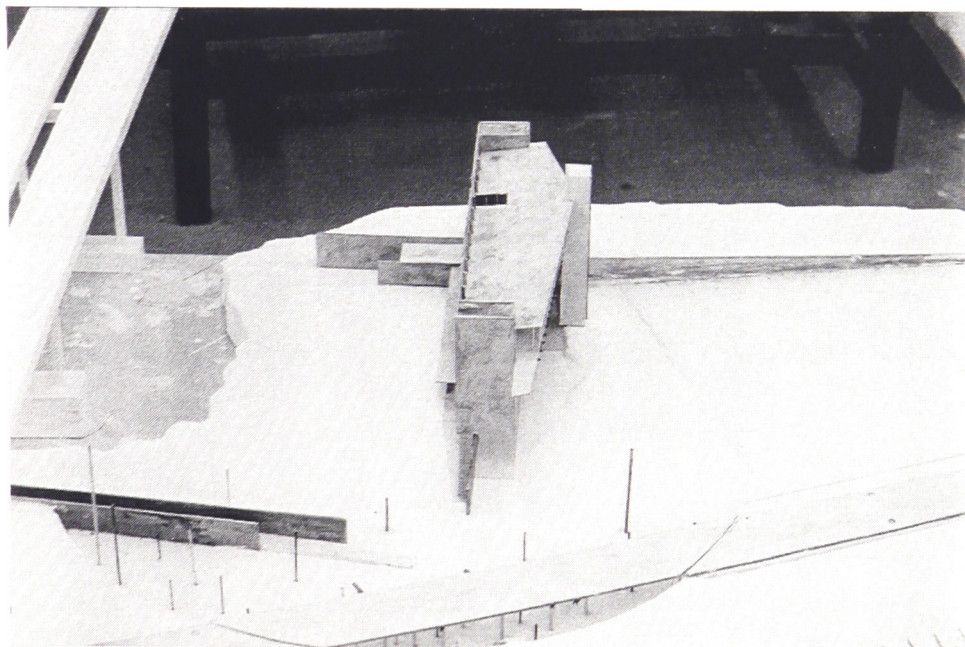


Plate 26 Library - +125'

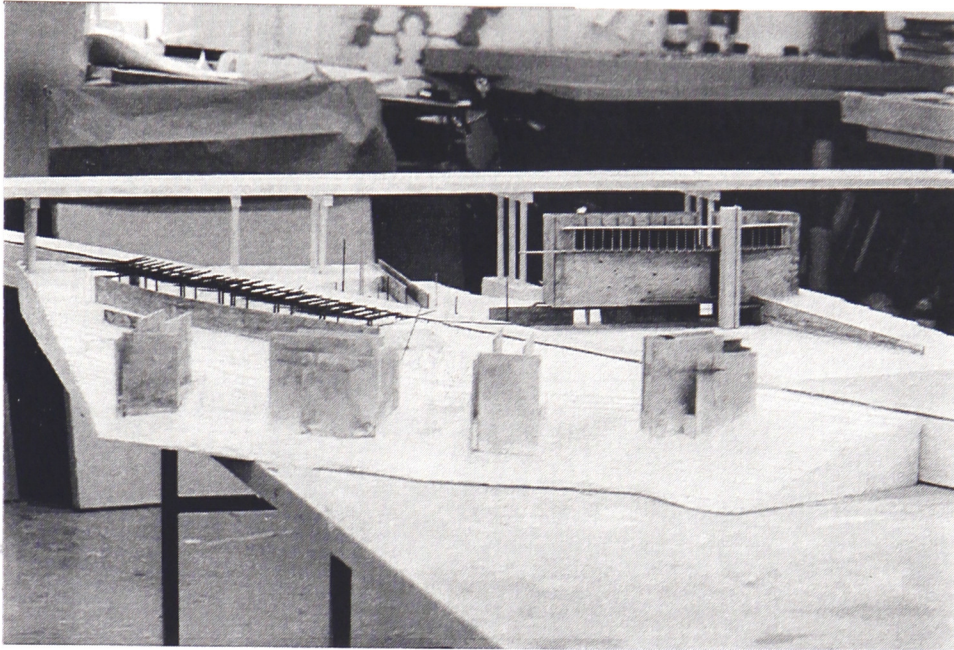


Plate 27 Flying Machines - +50'

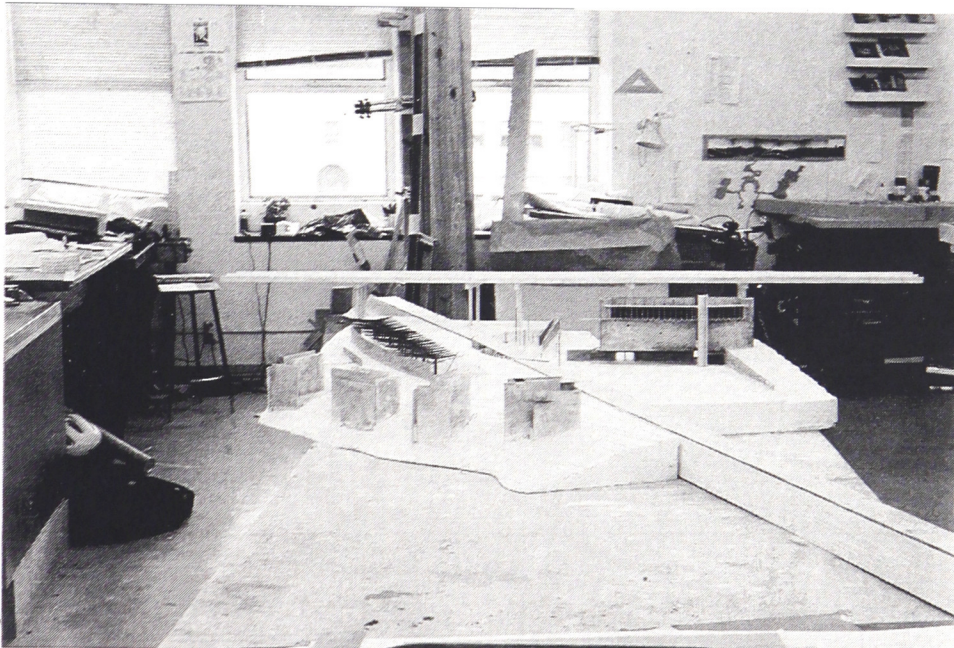


Plate 28 Flying Machines - +75'

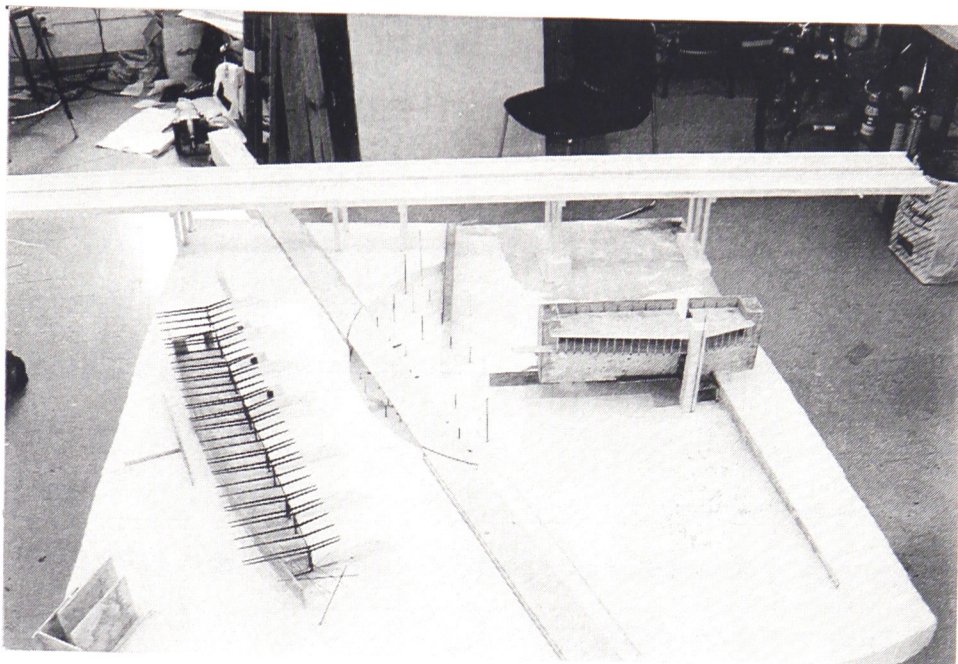


Plate 29 Flying Machines - +125'

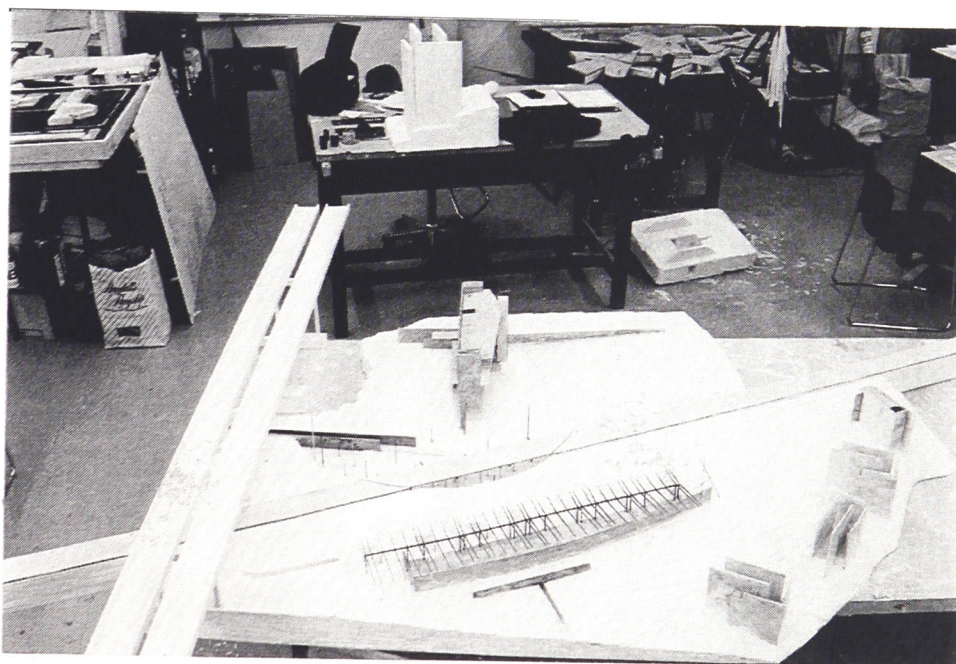


Plate 30 Flying Machines - +700'

APPENDIX TWO: POSTSCRIPT

Evident in the proceedings of the Oral Defense and worth mentioning was a general inability of the criticism to get beyond "personal language" of the project. There were several attempts made by Stephen Harris, a visiting juror from Yale University, to "remove" my hand from the project. In short the criticism by both Harris and Ellen Whittemore, from Harvard, was very predictable and problematic in its uniformity. The task I was confronted with was to get the critics beyond the decision to use the subjective, personal, idiosyncratic decision-making process as a method of making architecture in order to discuss the ramifications of such. I experienced a high level of frustration while I was unable to do this task. As the methodology put forth here would suggest, I must [and do] take full responsibility for this inadequacy.