

JOHN HEIMBACH
A STATE CAPITOL

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A STATE CAPITOL, MUCH MORE THAN A
PUBLIC SPACE, BECOMES A SYMBOL FOR
THE PEOPLE.

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APR. 10, 1979

A STATE CAPITOL

by

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An undergraduate thesis submitted in
partial fulfillment of the requirements
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of

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INTRODUCTION

Governmental architecture and public architecture are for most purposes synonymous terms. They represent a vast quantity of city, county, state and federal buildings, parks and monuments in every part of this country. A third term often used as synonymous with governmental architecture is federal architecture. However, this refers more specifically to those buildings used by the federal government or which represent the federal government. It does not include many types of local civic or institutional buildings such as schools, city-county buildings, fire and police stations, etc.. This paper is directed toward that architecture which houses the basic functions of government, namely those functions dealing specifically with the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The contents of this paper will manifest themselves in the design of a state capitol.

The capitol building is traditionally the place where governmental policy is born therefore, it goes beyond being a public building and becomes symbolic of the ideals of our government. This symbolic function makes capitol buildings the highest level of governmental or public

architecture. No other governmental building stands as symbolic of these ideals. However, all governmental architecture is representative of the strength of the government and the people's faith in it, and the capitol building rightfully should be the most representative of this. Therefore, a capitol building, because of its symbolism and its rank among governmental architecture, would be quite representative of a study of such architecture.

All public architecture and particularly federal architecture is unique in that it requires special considerations from the designer. Public architecture should be the best of all architecture. It should guide and give direction to the enhancement of public values by establishing examples of the best architecture for other buildings to be compared against.¹ This is by no means a new idea, public architecture has traditionally taken this role and responsibility. Every public building from the federal office buildings to the individual town post office is a tangible symbol of nationality and public pride in our form of government. Therefore, that symbolic function should be

recognizable in every public project. That spirit is a desirable goal in the design of all public projects so that they may stand as concrete examples for all projects public or not.

Our public architecture represents us. "It represents the very dollars and diversity of the people."².

A BASIS FOR DESIGN

1

Governmental architecture should be the best of all architecture: it should be the example for all projects, public or not. Our government buildings and particularly our capitol buildings should represent and symbolize our government. At present, that representation is vague and obscured. They are, in most cases, symbolic, but few of them make any attempt to represent, in physical form, our government and its philosophical basis. An understanding of that philosophy (at least partially) is necessary for the developement of a proper approach to the design of any building representative of our government.

I see that philosophy as being made up of four major points; a separation between church and state, a representative democracy, a three-branch system, and free and open discussion and involvement in government.

Because church and state were so closely interlocked in England in the 1600's, refusal to submit to the ecclesiastical authority of the Church of England implied disloyalty to the crown. A desire for free worship brought many of the early colonists to America either by their

own choice or because England had exiled them.³ This idea of free worship for all requires a distinct separation between church and state, and became a fundamental concern of the colonists. This has remained a fundamental concern throughout the history of our government. A system dominated by a monarch with divine rule or near divine rule was inappropriate for a new country developed on the basis of the freedom of the individual. This separation would also allow for a greater involvement in government without the apprehension of punitive action on the part of the church.

The government outlined by the Constitution is a representative democracy. It was patterned after the Greek ideal of democracy where everyone is allowed to participate in the government. However, because of the immense size of the United States and wide spread population, a government where everyone is involved would be far too slow and ineffective. Therefore, a representative system was developed to increase its effectiveness and provide a quicker and more uniform government.

Articles I, II and III of the Constitution outline the basic structure of the government. It was developed around the concept of three branches, each with individual powers to provide checks and balances against the other two. The executive branch is composed of the president, or in the case of a state government, a governor. The judicial branch controls the court system, including the Supreme Court and the other inferior courts beneath it, and the legislative branch is composed of the two houses of congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate).

The most important aspect of our government is that it is one of the few which allow the luxury of open discussion about the affairs of government. In some countries such as the Soviet Union, China, North and South Korea, etc., the affairs of government are subjects for only those directly involved. Discussion of the affairs of state in this country is more than just a luxury, involvement in government by everyone is encouraged. From the early meetings of the revolutionaries to the vast and expensive political campaigns to educate the people

of the political issues and the lobbying that has become a part of the federal and state legislative sessions, open discussion and the encouragement of the individual to involve himself in government has been a part of our governmental system throughout its history.

Our capitol buildings should symbolize these ideals. Beyond being a functional governmental building, the capitol building carries with it a level of symbolic importance which no other government building possesses. It is the most important governmental building. It stands not only as the physical location of where government meets and is formed and reformed, but also as the single monument to the sovereignty of the state. A capitol building, even though it is a public building, is not used as most public buildings are. It is not normally a place which invites leisure time activities such as a park or a shopping mall. It is not service oriented as would be a post office or a bank. It is a place where government is developed, but not as it would be in a city hall or a county courthouse; not in the sense of immediate participation of the local residents. It is a place which

requires a special trip to see it or participate in its activities. Most people see their state capitol building only rarely, if at all. The governmental affairs which take place within it do not include the participation of the people directly, but instead, the representatives of the people are the participants. This makes the capitol, to a degree, more distant and removed. It exists in the memory of those who have visited it and in the imaginations of those who have not. It becomes a goal when traveling to it and a landmark for its immediate domain. For these reasons, its symbolic importance qualifies it as a monument.

Most of our state capitols were designed quite similarly to follow the example of the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C.. In many cases, they are the major organizing elements of their respective cities, and often become the terminus of classical automobile approaches. These capitols take on similar characteristics with our national capitol, and they are appropriately symbolic of a strong government and all have a spirit of nationality, but they rarely show any response to the

region in which they're located. A state capitol should have that sense or spirit of nationality, but more importantly, it should represent the state. Therefore, regionalism is a very important difference between a state and federal capitol.

The design of a state capitol building would have to be based on certain fundamental considerations such as the characteristics of the region, its symbolic role as the single most important monument to the sovereignty of the state, and the incorporation of the philosophy of the government into the form of the building.

I have been using the terms monument and now regionalism. These terms are common in discussion and criticism of architecture but their meaning is not always clear. A clarification of these terms is necessary for a further understanding of what a state capitol is.

MONUMENT

The terms monument and monumentality are all too often associated

with massive representations of money and power. Unfortunately, this has lead to a relatively mutated impression of what a monument can or should be. A monument is a symbol with the major determining factors being size, formal plan organization and scale. Other catagories of symbols are decoration (a symbol which is applied), and ornamentation (a symbol that is a part of the design). A monument, however, becomes the design itself. They are distinctive in the respect that they have great meaning and are usually an expression or celebration of a great historical event or political idea.

A monument is a visual experience. It must be experienced, as most symbols, by seeing it. A monument can be a dominant element over a geographical area or it can be a focal point of a small park. It will usually command attention as one approaches and this aspect often strengthens its meaning and emotional impact. If a monument establishes a visual approach, then it becomes a goal and once attained, it becomes a strong reference and point of departure.

REGIONALISM

"Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequence of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences."⁴

Regionalism is a term used often by architects in discussion and criticism. Its actual meaning though is a bit vague. An immediate understanding of the term as it relates to architecture is that it deals with climate and landscape as general conditions, and how these factors influence the design of a building. Certainly these factors are quite influential in design, but there are other factors of equal importance which should also be considered in the concept of regionalism. The general character of the people and their distinctive quality of life (their beliefs and values), and the history and cultural heritage of a region; these are factors which collectively create a more complete image of a region.

The general landscape will change as will the climate, as one moves from one region to the next. This provides important information

about regional characteristics and how they are employed in architecture. However, the geography or climate is not representative of the people, and since architecture is created by and for people, the unique values and beliefs of the people of a region are equally as important to the understanding of regional characteristics.

History and cultural heritage play an important role in the concept of regionalism. For instance, the history of Montana as a settled territory is not very long, but it is certainly a flamboyant one. It does not compare with the long history or the cultural background of the various nations of Europe or Asia. It doesn't even compare with the rich history of some of our eastern states, but the history of this state has very greatly effected the growth of our towns. Due to the heavy gold, silver and copper mining in the region in the mid to late 1800's, the growth of Montana towns was rapid and sporadic. The towns were built on or adjacent to the major strikes or claims and became urban communities long before any kind of agricultural basis was established. Due to the climate and terrain and the distance between these

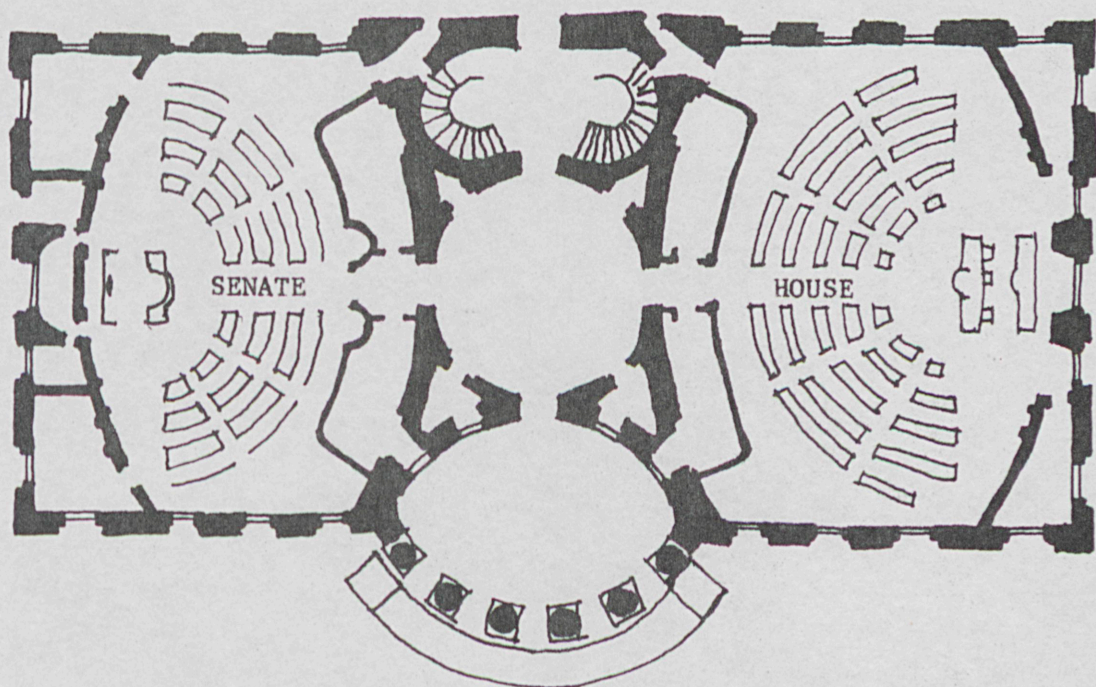
communities, they were often isolated entities and their architecture took on a feeling of strength, security and self-sufficiency. With the exception of the indians who were already here, the general culture of the region represented a wide variety of influences from other parts of the country. Some of these early settlements (particularly Butte) had a mix of ethnic groups that would not be expected in such remote areas. This ethnic variety, however, only had a minimal influence on the general cultural background; the greatest influence came from the hearty environment and the day-to-day challenge to meet it.

BACKGROUND

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While we were still under British rule, and in our early years as a nation, our government met in simple surroundings (anything with a room large enough would suffice). A tavern was not an unlikely meeting place. There was no formal structure to the government at the time, just a collection of those who were interested. The Constitution established the general structure our government was to take, and its principles provided basic design criteria for the early statehouses. Most of these statehouses were designed on the basis of a response to the two legislative bodies outlined in the Constitution. They consisted of two assembly rooms with a common meeting area between (one room for the House of Representatives and one for the Senate Chambers). This basic layout became a standard for nearly all of our capitols (see page 12).

Most of our capitolts were done at or before the turn of the century and are quite representative of an era of eclectic architecture. Most of these capitols are Baroque in their detailing and in the totality of their designs. They reflect the traditions of the Beaux-Arts School which was quite common in much of the architecture of that period. How-



Pennsylvania Statehouse

ever, the trend toward classical design in our governmental buildings very likely began with Thomas Jefferson as early as 1789 with his design for the Virginia State Capitol (see page 14). He believed that public buildings should be patterned after Roman architectural models to express visibly the nation's republican principles.⁵

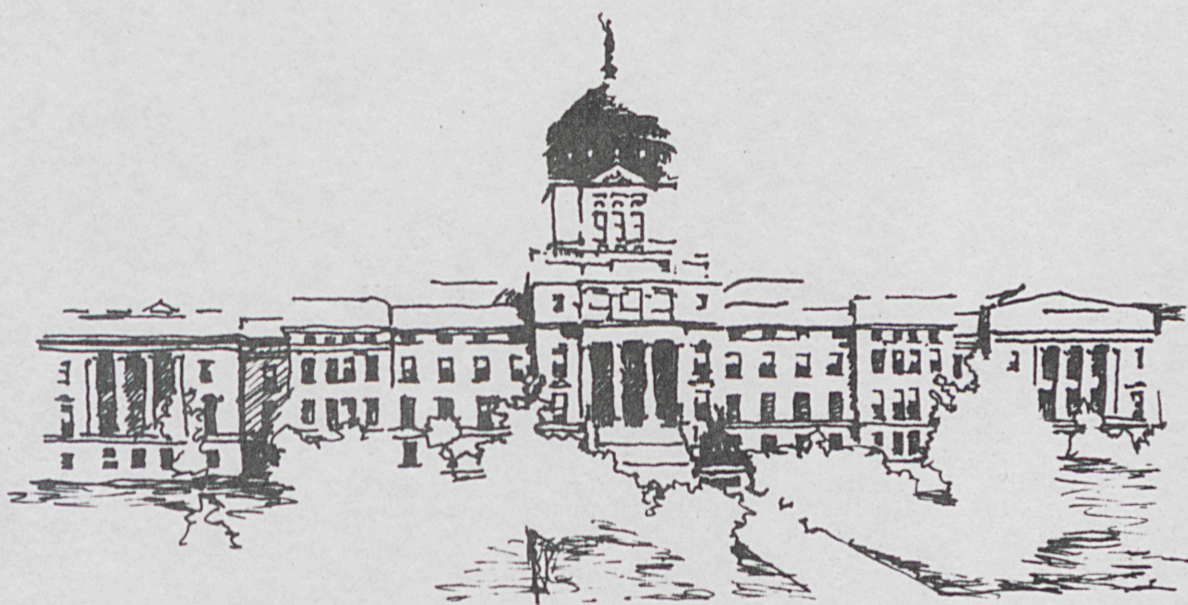


Virginia State Capitol

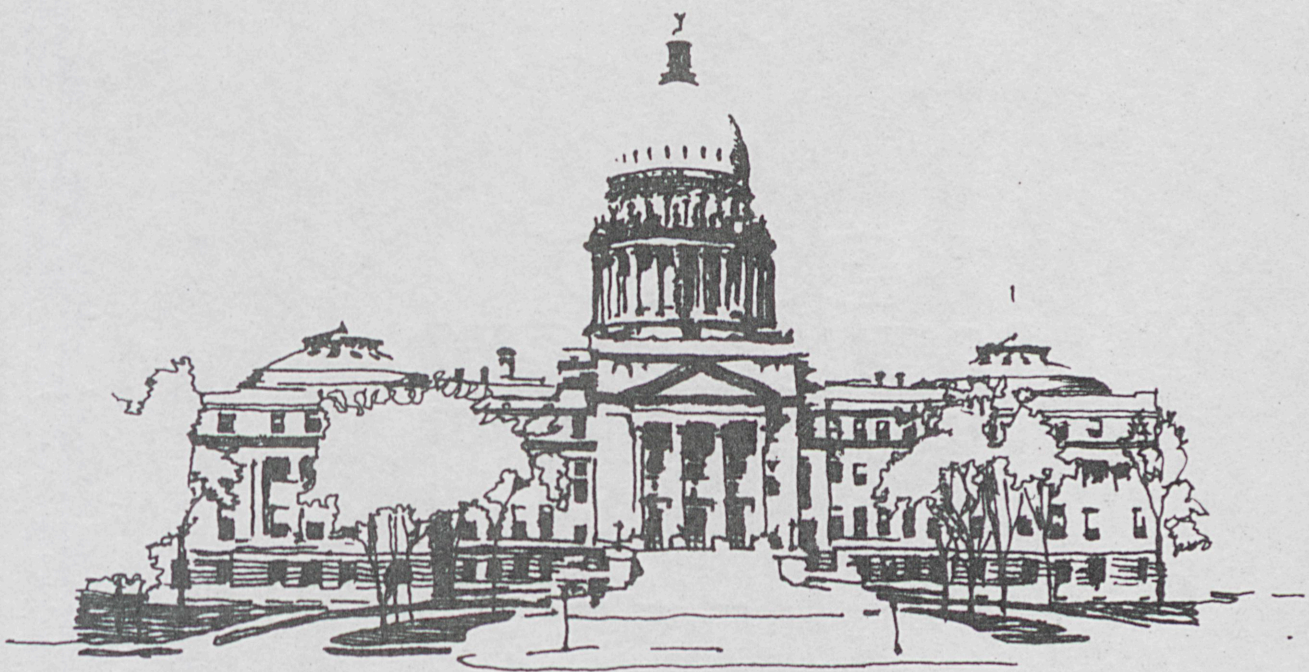
The design of our state capitols reflects an attempt in most cases to create a model at a slightly smaller scale of our U.S. Capitol. The Montana Capitol is an excellent example of this, although so would the Idaho Capitol, Wisconsin, Illinois, Utah, California, Minnesota, etc. (very few would not be good examples of this) (see pages 16-18). These state capitols follow Baroque traditions in the way they pattern themselves after the grandeur of the Roman formal planning and the emphasis on the visual effect of the building as a monument. This is demonstrated in the approach to the buildings, in the way their design rules the site, and in the way they control the layout of the city in the immediate vicinity of the capitol.

The approach to these capitols happens as a vista along long beautiful avenues. These approaches are usually very formal, often lined with rows of evenly spaced trees along romantically lit boulevards, again reminiscent of Washington D.C..

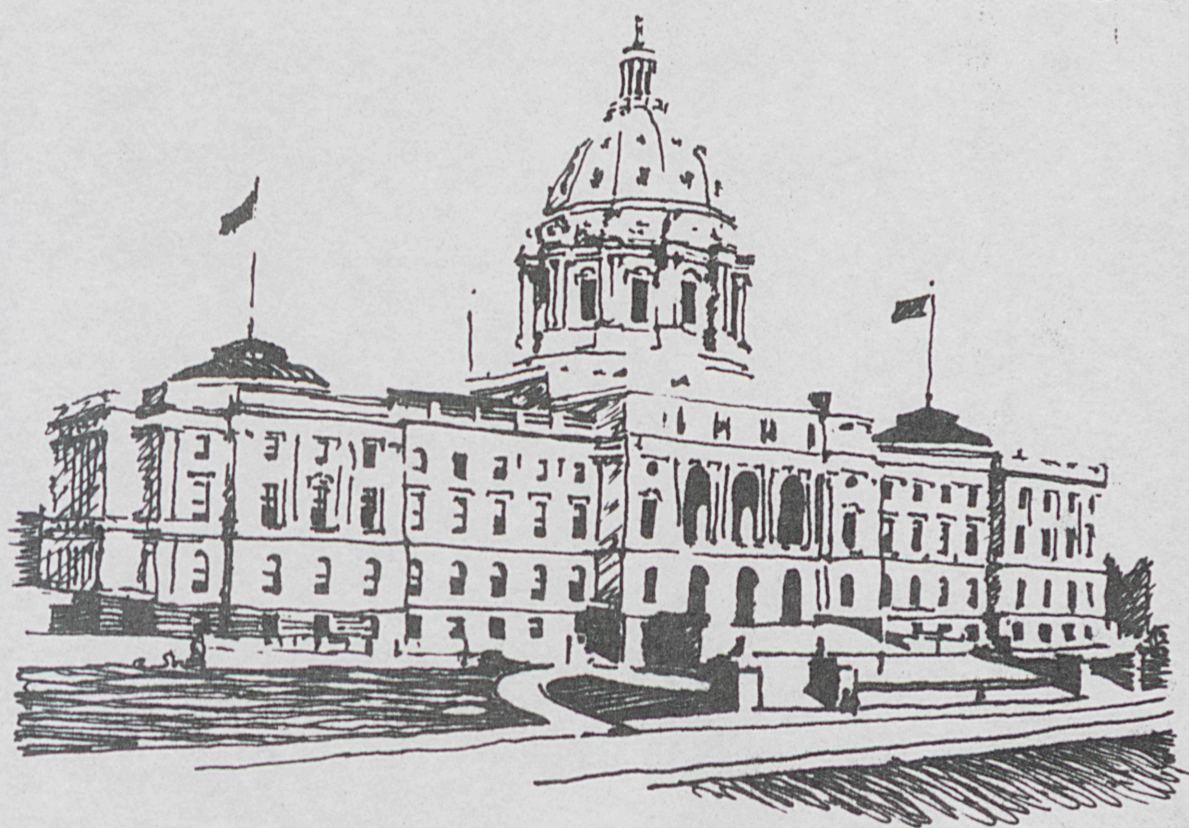
The capitols rule over the site in a way that is characteristic of Roman formal planning with the automobile and pedestrian approaches



Montana State Capitol



Idaho State Capitol

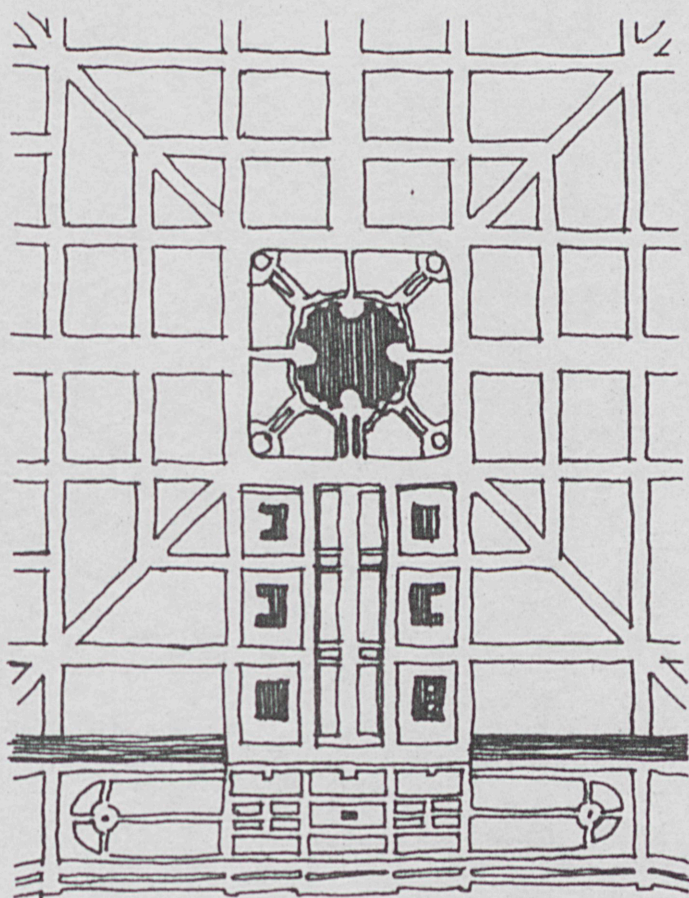


Minnesota State Capitol

laid out to create an impression of magnificence and grandeur. This impression is further emphasized by the plan of the city immediately surrounding these capitols. The streets are usually laid out to create visual corridors leading up to them and strengthen the visual effect (see page 20).

These aspects are not necessarily bad in their design, however, they all fit together to strengthen this image of a small U.S. Capitol to represent each individual state. This creates a misleading conception of the structure of our government and the power of the state as related to the federal government. The state government is not an extension of the federal government, so why should the capitols be representative of this? The state capitol should represent the state. It should also represent the state government's connection with the federal government, but not as an extension of it.

All of our capitol buildings as they have developed throughout history have for some reason excluded the third branch of government from their design. They suggest that the judicial branch is either



LAKE MINONA
Wisconsin State Capitol (plan)



subordinate to the other two, or that it is so entirely different that it requires special attention separate from the other branches. The actual condition is that it is an integral part of the government and not at all subordinate.

The design of our early statehouses was based on a response to the Constitution and its outline for the structure of our government. Most of these statehouses consisted of two assembly rooms with a common area between. This common area had an equal significance to the two assembly rooms, and served as a meeting grounds between the two houses of congress. It also served as a place for the general public to voice their opinions on the various issues. The common area symbolized one of the more important aspects of our government's basic philosophy, the luxury of discussion and the encouragement of involvement. Unfortunately, that central common lost its significance as our nation got larger and the need for representatives in government got stronger. Its significance gradually changed to becoming a space designated for circulation.

Following the lead of Baroque characteristics in our governmental

architecture, there was a need for a vertical element to designate the statehouse as a building of equal importance to the churches, and also to terminate and strengthen the visual approach to the building. On the early statehouses, the cupola was used for this vertical definition. According to some, the dome on state capitols developed through a constant enlargement of this cupola for the purpose of competing with the monumental capitols of other states.⁶ However, I am more inclined to believe that it was actually another symbol borrowed from Roman architecture. The cupolas of our early statehouses were vertical statements for the purpose of establishing a landmark and did not always relate to a space directly beneath them. The domes on most of our capitol buildings are also vertical statements but they are similar in character to many of the domes of the Renaissance period in Rome (St. Peters is a good example), and relate very directly to the rotunda beneath them. The rotunda, not normally found under a cupola, is a space with a very powerful impact. In Imperial Rome, it was a symbol of divine power. The Rotunda is a very intimidating space and has always

had very powerful connotations, therefore, the introduction of the dome over the central area of our capitol buildings and the resulting rotunda has created a space with such a powerful impact that it intimidates the user and lessens the usefulness of the space. The space no longer functions as it was originally intended.

CONCEPTS

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My approach to the design of a state capitol was based on certain fundamental considerations; the representation of the government's philosophical basis, its symbolic role, and its regional characteristics. My major concerns and general concepts have grown out of these and out of my criticism of existing state capitols.

Our state capitols have followed the tradition of early statehouses and are designed on the basis of housing the legislative and executive functions. They have unduly placed a strange significance on the judicial branch by separating it from the other two. A more correct response to the physical representation of the government as it was structured in the Constitution would be through a physical representation of all three branches in one complex. This would bring more meaning to the complex as a whole, and it would also consolidate the major functions of government and create a potentially more efficient capitol.

The early statehouses consisted of two assembly rooms with a common area between. The significance of this common area was equal to that of the assembly rooms and it was symbolic of the people and their involve-

ment in government. It was a meeting place and a place for discussion. Unfortunately, this common area lost its significance, and became merely an area designated for circulation. I see that common area as being the most important part of the capitol because it more accurately represents what our government stands for. I feel that it is so important that it should be the symbolic part of the capitol; the common area should be the monument. Therefore, it becomes the goal when traveling to the capitol and a point of departure when leaving. It will be the common reference for all those who come to the capitol.

I have been careful, in doing a physical representation of the three-branch system, not to give too much emphasis to any one of the three branches. However, the judicial branch does function differently from the other two. It serves the people by testing the legislation created by the executive and legislative branches. It is no more powerful than the other branches, but because of its functional difference, I have set it apart from the other two only slightly to represent this functional difference.

The physical solution of the capitol uses the natural contours of the site, leaving it untouched as much as possible. The intention is to create the appearance of the capitol building setting in the natural landscape of that area of Montana. To carve dynamic sculptures into the site for the sake of creating a more architectural solution or for the purpose of emphasizing the lanes of approach, would be inappropriate. A straightforward, and more simple natural approach is more fitting with the lifestyle of Montanans. The landscape surrounding this capitol is already dynamic and an attempt to compete with that landscape would be a misguided effort. To situate the capitol along the original contours would also direct it toward the more important visual approaches and the more important vistas from within. This is very important because it strengthens the image a capitol must have to be a symbol of such great importance. It must establish a certain visual impact for the visitor approaching it, but this does not necessarily mean a formal approach with no loss of visual contact is the proper solution. The domes on most state capitols increase the visual

impact and function as a sign to direct the visitor's approach. I am using three tall towers to signify its location and since I have no formal avenue approach, the occasional visual contact increases the anticipation and strengthens the visual impact when the visitor reaches the site instead of describing nearly all of the monument from any given distance.

Most of our state capitols are located in the center of their respective cities and often assume a position of honor by becoming a major organizing element for the layout of the city in the immediate vicinity. The location of the site of the Montana Capitol does not have this relationship with Helena. Instead, it is set apart from the city and becomes a first class building in a third class neighborhood. I have overcome this by placing the capitol complex on an Acropolis of sorts. In doing this, I have increased its importance visually and controlled the views from within the complex. Instead of looking from the capitol down through a third class neighborhood, I have controlled the view over that neighborhood to the landscape beyond and the

mountains of Montana.

Because of the image I want the site to strengthen (one of a monument in a natural setting), I feel that parking on the site would be very disruptive, therefore, the parking requirements will be satisfied underground.

PROGRAM

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SPATIAL NEEDS

These requirements represent the projected needs of the capitol and were developed through a comparison with the master plan of the capitol complex done by the Division of Architecture and Engineering.

LEGISLATIVE

Senate Chambers	2,500 sq. ft.
Gallery	2,000
House Chambers	3,500
Gallery	2,000
Sgt. at Arms Senate	250
House	250
Senate Majority Leader	200
Minority Leader	200
House Majority Leader	200
Minority Leader	200
Stenographers	300
Legislative Hearing and Committee Rooms (30)	ea. 450
Legislative Council	
Reception	500
Offices (20)	ea. 100
Secretaries	500
2 Conference rooms	ea. 250
Legislative Auditor	
Reception	300

Legislative Auditor	200 sq. ft.
Secretary	100
Asst. Legis. Aud.	150
Staff Offices (15)	ea. 100
Secretaries	500
2 Conference rooms	ea. 250
Storage	300
Lecture Hall	900
Senate Staff Offices	
Secretary of the Senate	150
Asst. Sec. of Senate	150
Journal Clerk	150
Asst. Jour. Clerk	150
Chaplain	150
Bill Clerk	150
Asst. Bill Clerk	150
Secretaries	500
Senate President	200
Secretary	100
Storage	300
House Staff Offices	
Journal Clerk	150
Asst. Journal Clerk	150
Chief Clerk	150
Asst. Chief Clerk	150
Bill Clerk	150
Asst. Bill Clerk	150

Reading Clerk	150 sq. ft.
Chaplain	150
Secretaries	500
House Speaker	200
Secretary	100
Storage	400
Congressional Offices (50)	ea. 400
TOTAL SQ. FT. LEGISLATIVE	57,800

EXECUTIVE

Governor's Offices	
Reception	500
Governor's Office	400
Secretary	150
Lieutenant Gov.	300
Secretary	100
2 Conference rooms	ea. 250
Staff Offices (20)	ea. 100
Secretaries	500
Storage	1,000
Budget and Planning Offices	
(15)	ea. 100
Secretaries	400
Secretary of State's Offices	
Reception	500
Secretary of State's Off.	300
Secretary	100
Asst. Sec. of State's Off.	200

Secretary	100 sq. ft.
Storage-Vault	3,500
1 Conference room	250
Staff Offices (4)	ea. 100
Secretaries	200
Lecture Hall	900
TOTAL SQ. FT. EXECUTIVE	13,650

JUDICIAL

Supreme Court Chambers	1,700
Gallery	2,000
Law Library	5,000
Lecture Hall	900
Justice's Offices (4)	ea. 350
Law Clerks (4)	ea. 100
Secretaries (4)	ea. 100
Chief Justice's Office	350
Law Clerks (2)	ea. 100
Secretary	100
1 Conference room	250
Storage	200
Court Recorder	150
Sgt. at Arms	250
Attorney General's Offices	
Reception	500
Attorney General's Off.	300
Secretary	100

Asst. Attorney Gen. Off.	200 sq. ft.
Secretary	100
2 Conference rooms	ea. 250
Staff offices (8)	ea. 100
Secretaries	300
Storage	400
Clerk of Court's Office	300
Secretary	100
Storage	200
Supreme Court Offices (5)	ea. 200
TOTAL SQ. FT. JUDICIAL	18,100

MISCELLANEOUS SPACES

Central Common Area	
Lobby Areas	
Mail Service	
Staff Offices (3)	ea. 100
Secretary	100
Receiving	300
Sorting and Distributing	500
Storage	150
Media Rooms	2,300
Cafeteria	4,000
Kitchen	800
Receiving	300
Storage	300
Office	100

Printing

Offices (3)	ea.	100 sq. ft.
Offices (6 in shop)	ea.	100
Secretaries (2)	ea.	100
Receiving		500
Storage		500
Sorting and Distribution		500
Printing (House and Senate)		ea. 2,500

Miscellaneous Storage

Mechanical

Toilet Facilities

Maintenance

Elevators

Stairs

SITE

The site chosen for this project is the existing capitol grounds. I am making the assumption that the existing capitol is no longer there and that the vacant site is a given condition in the design. Since the major emphasis of this project is to gain an understanding of what a state capitol building is and to design one, I am not making any judgement as to whether this is the best site or even whether it is good or bad. It is merely the framework within which my research will

manifest itself.

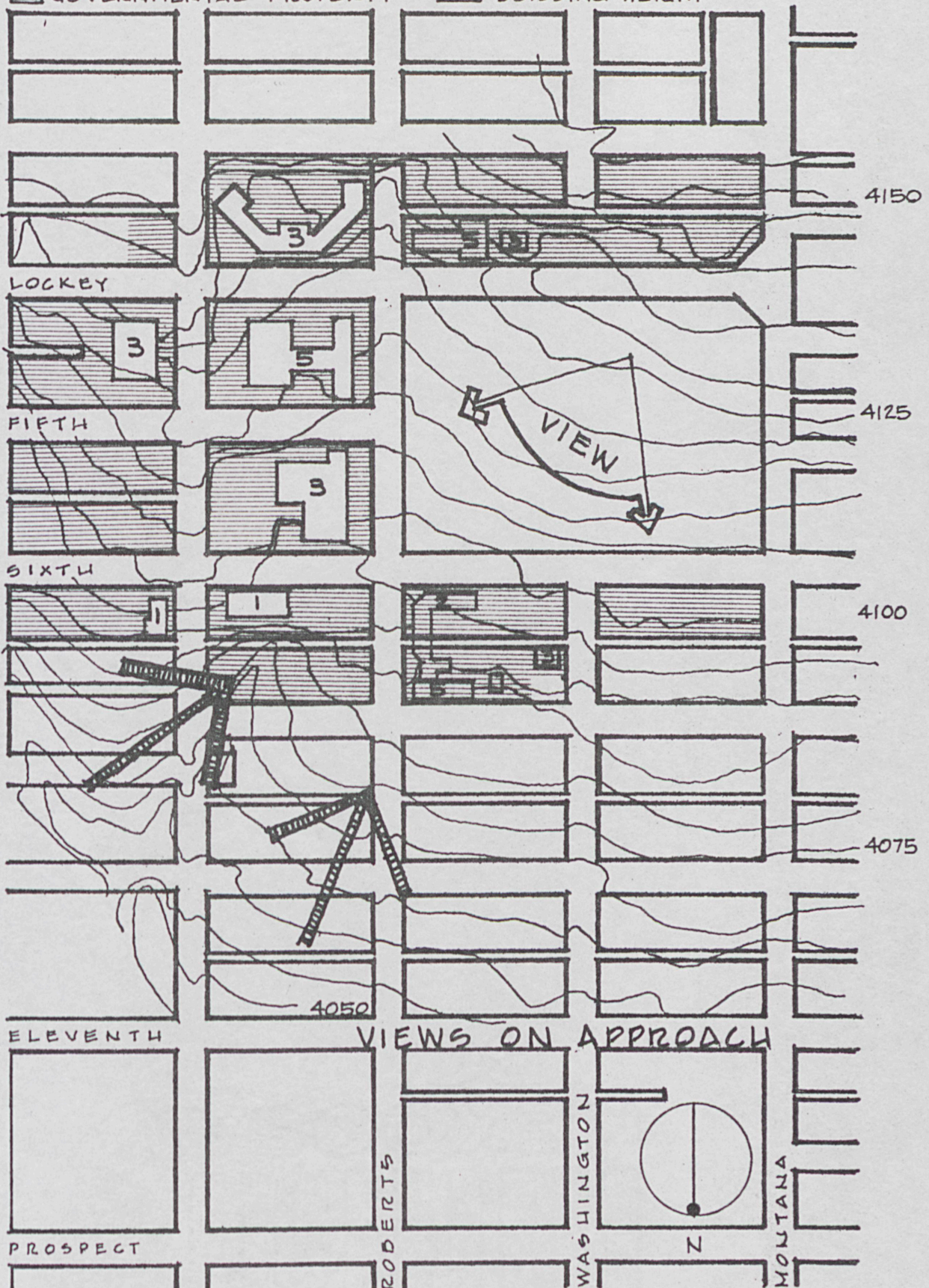
The evaluation of the site includes the traffic and approaches to the site, the general climate, the visual corridors both to and from, the parking, the topography, and the buildings surrounding the capitol. Most of this information is presented in graphic form on the following pages.

TOPOGRAPHY, BUILDINGS & VISUAL

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 GOVERNMENTAL PROPERTY

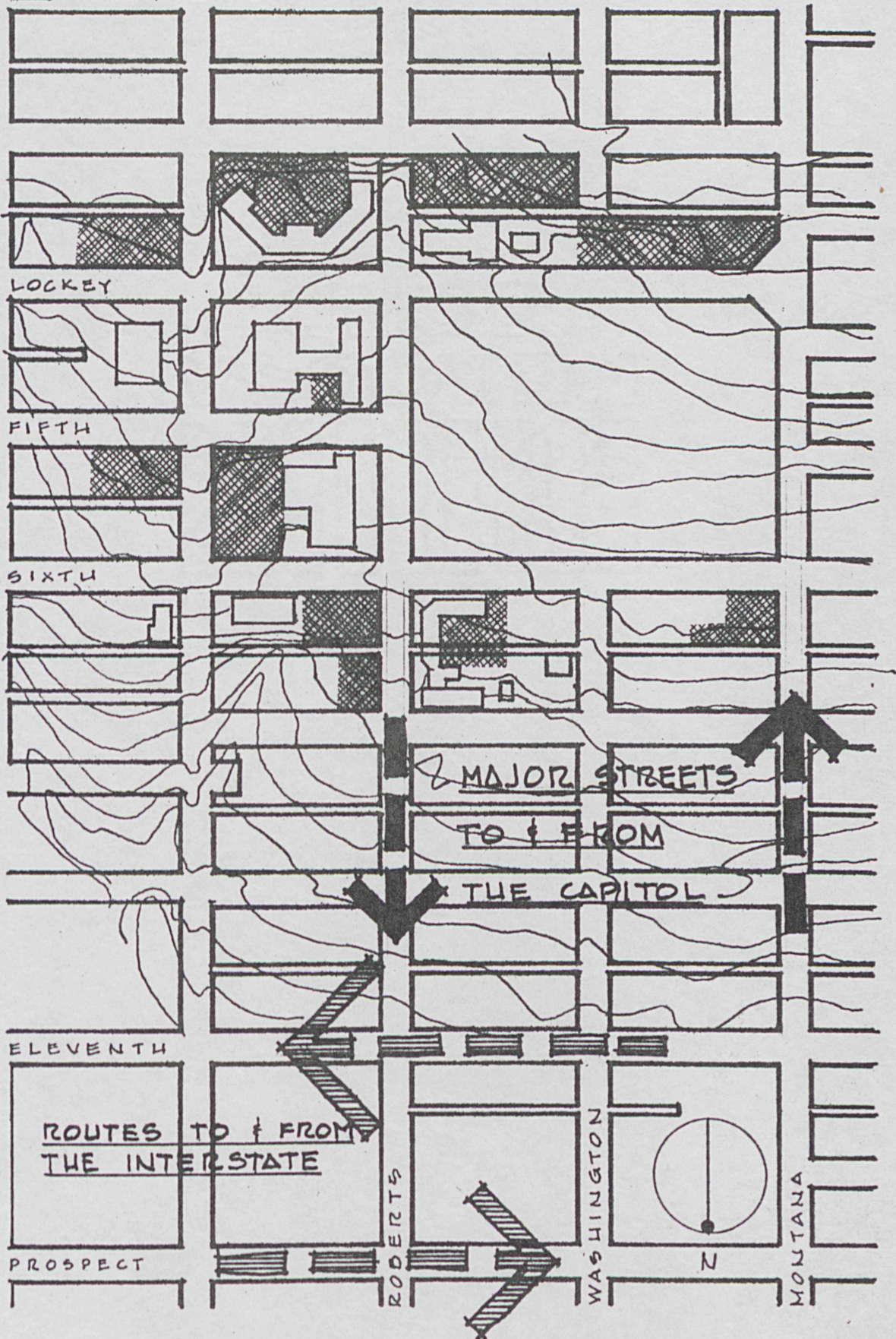
 BUILDING HEIGHT

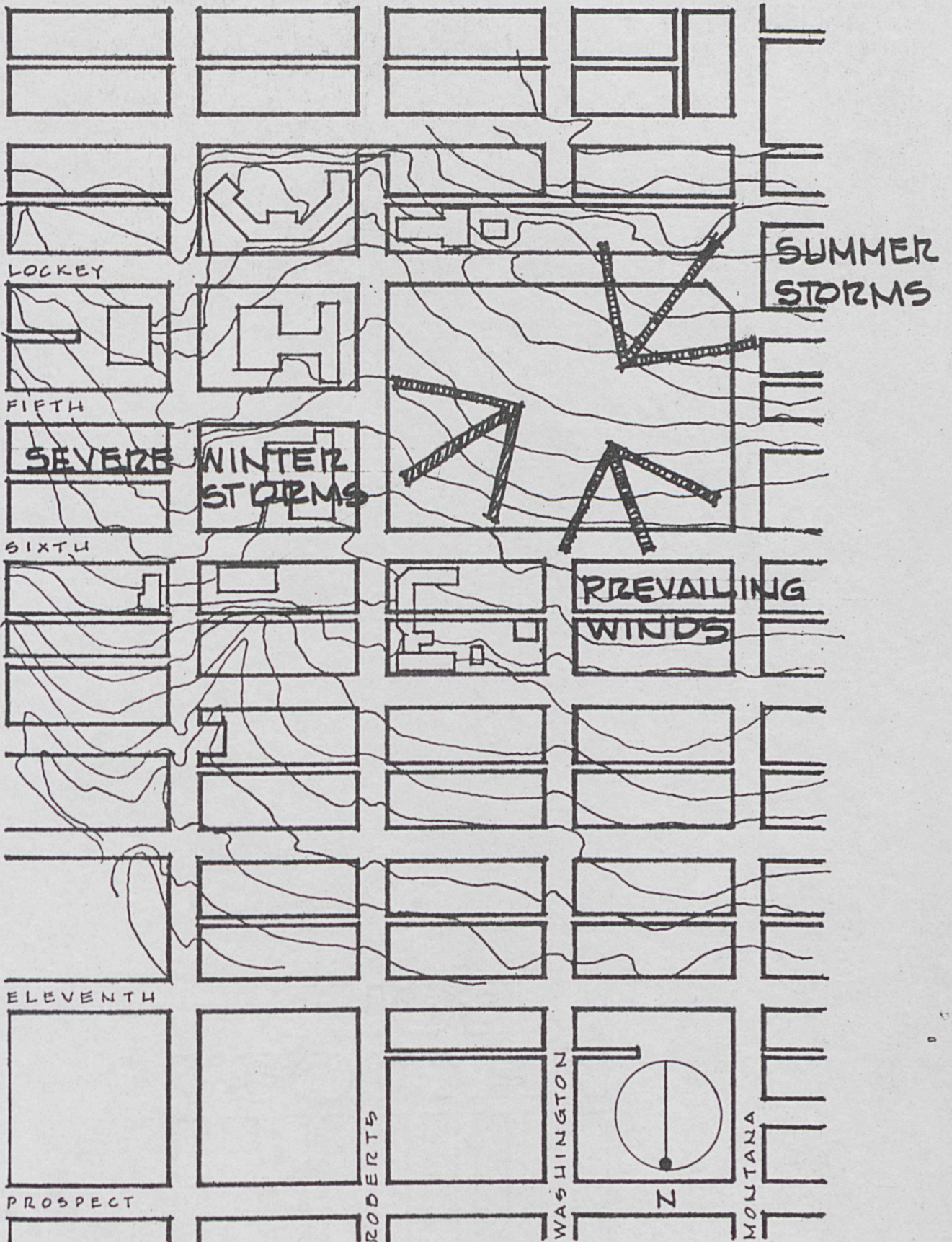


PARKING & TRAFFIC

37

 PARKING





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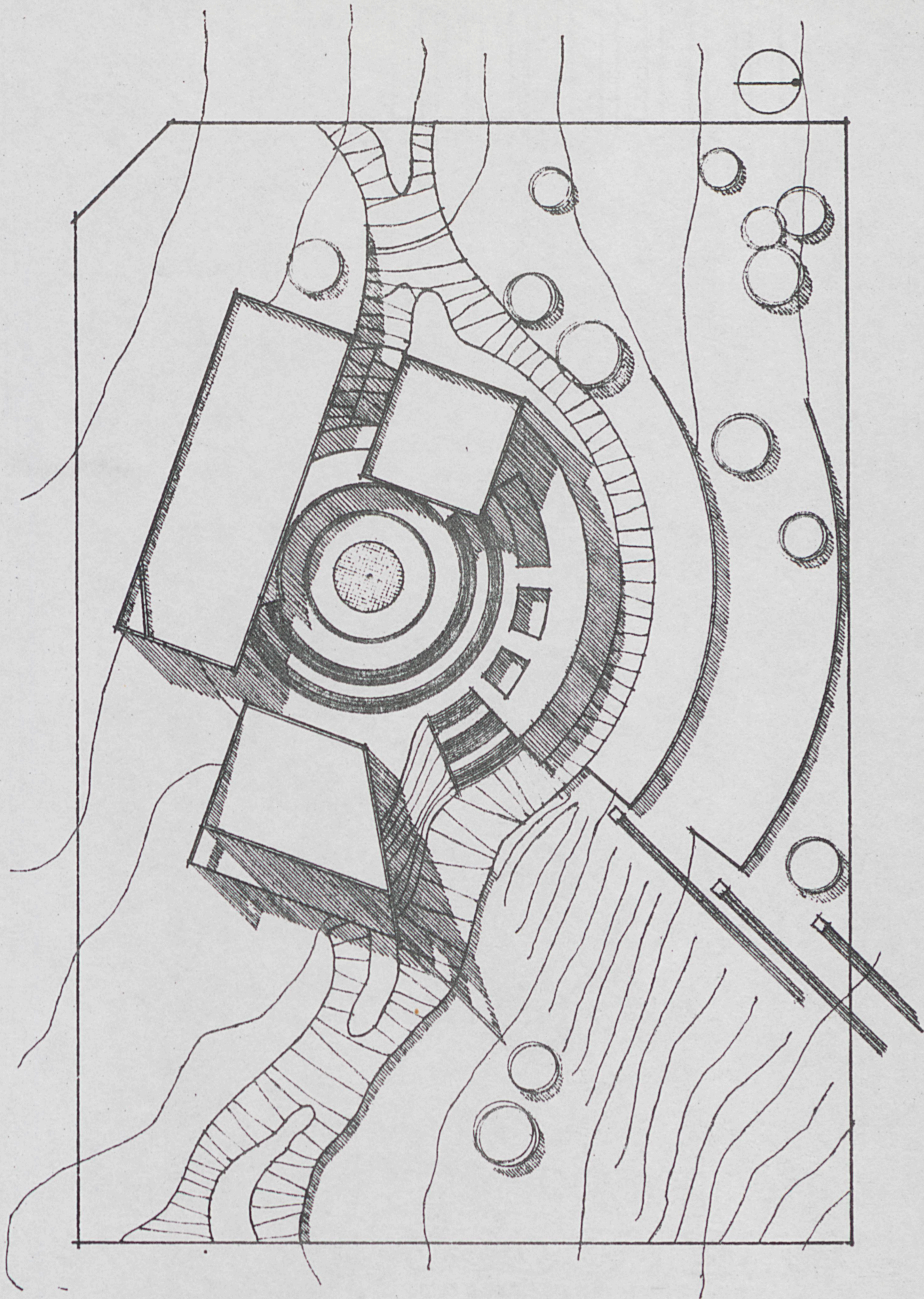
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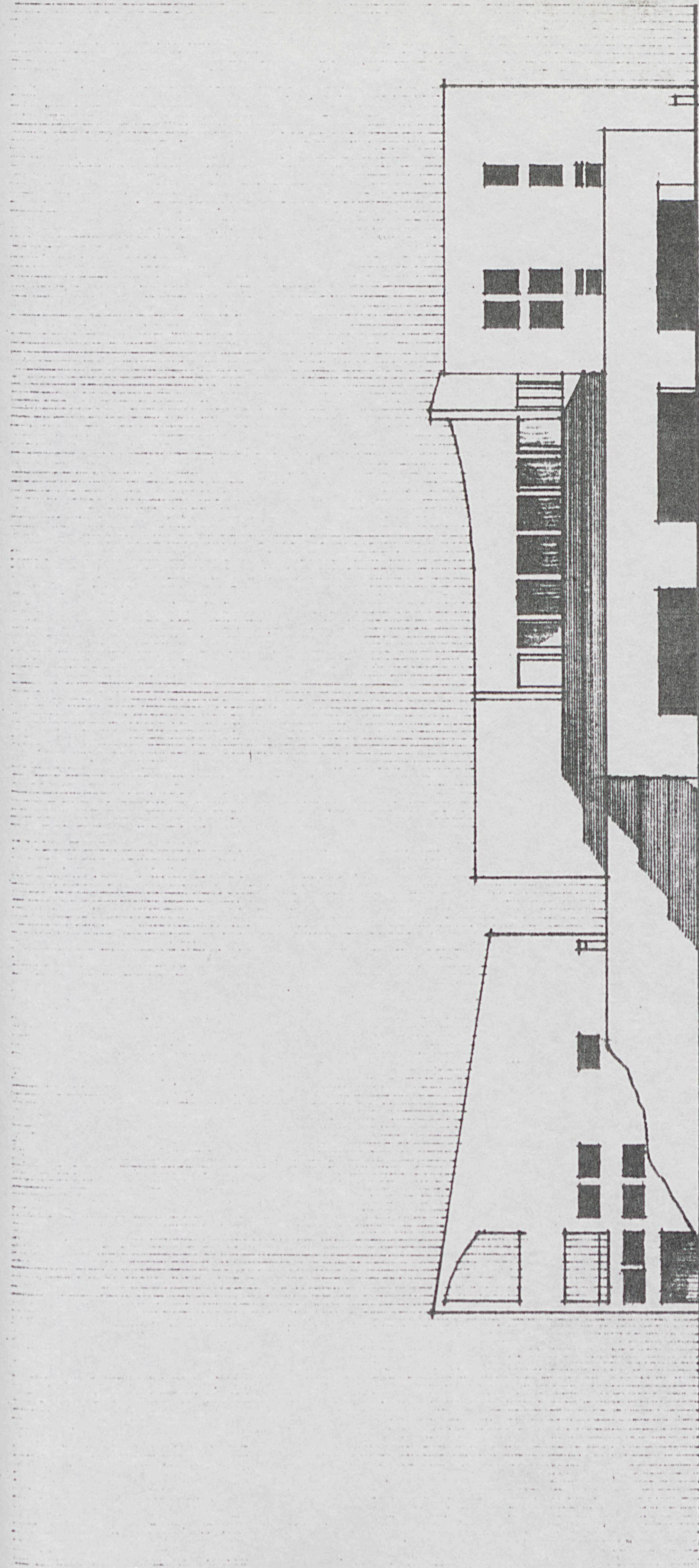
Personal Interview: O'Connell, Tom, Chief Planner, Division of Architecture and Engineering, Helena, Montana

FOOTNOTES

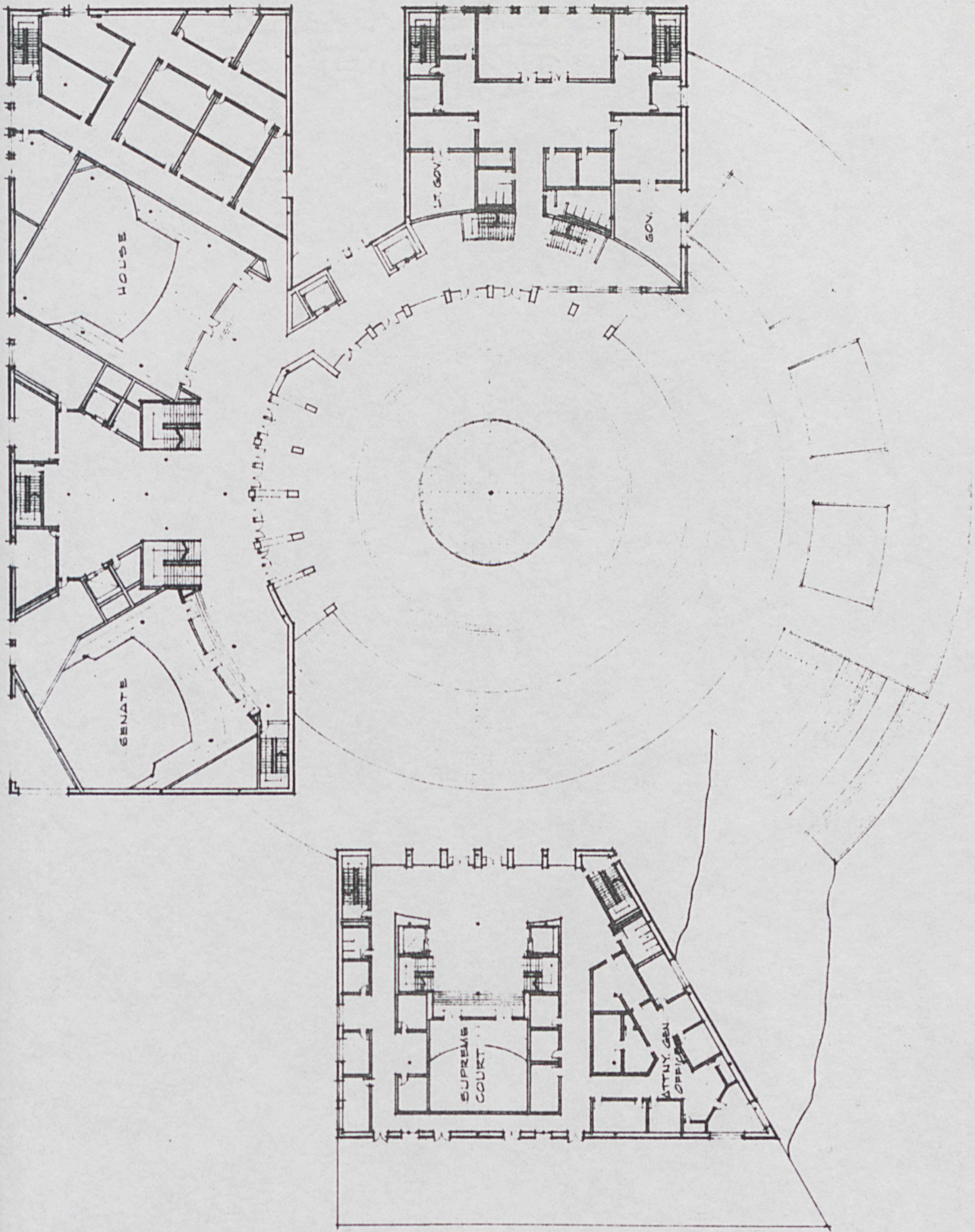
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2. Ibid, p. 84.
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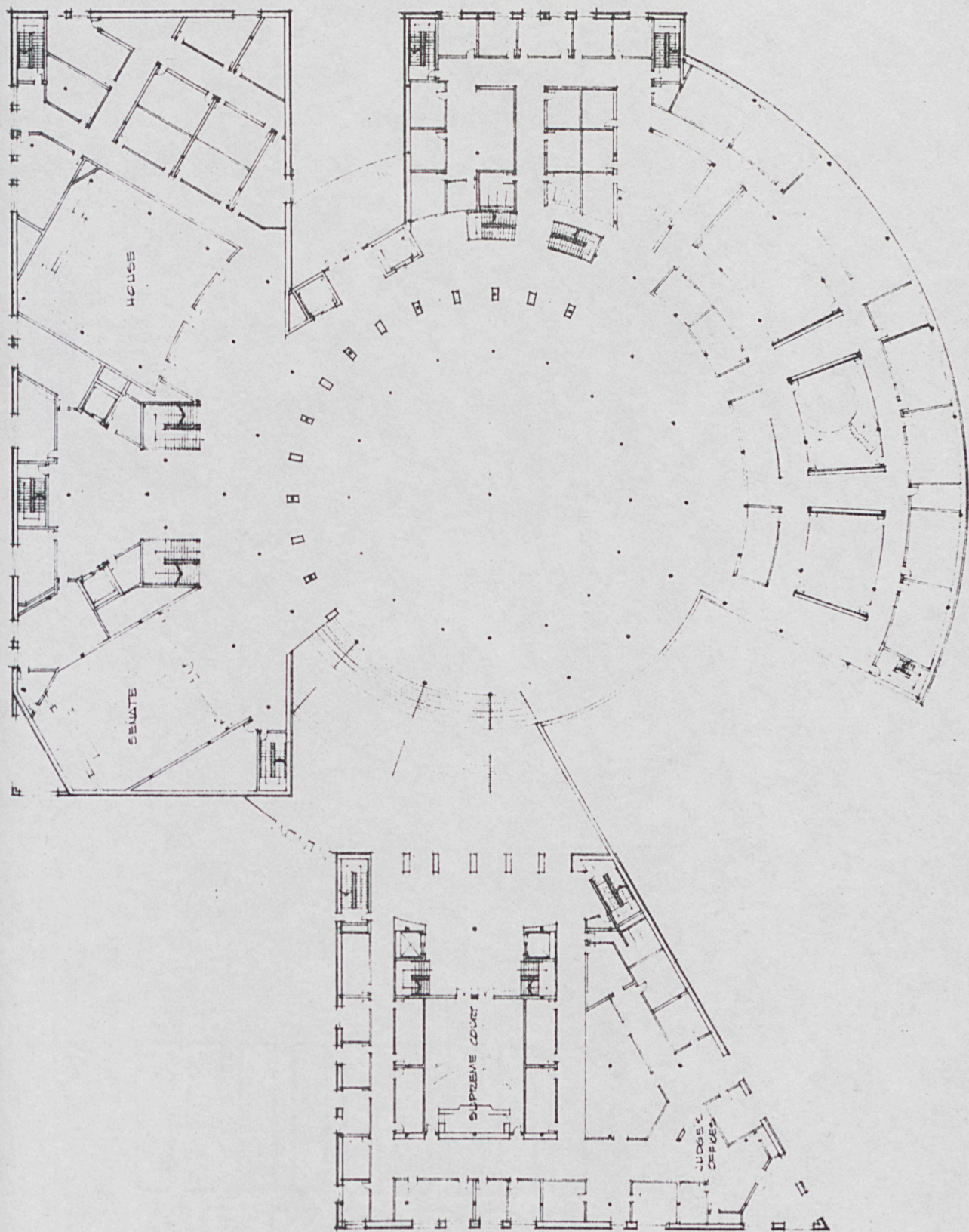




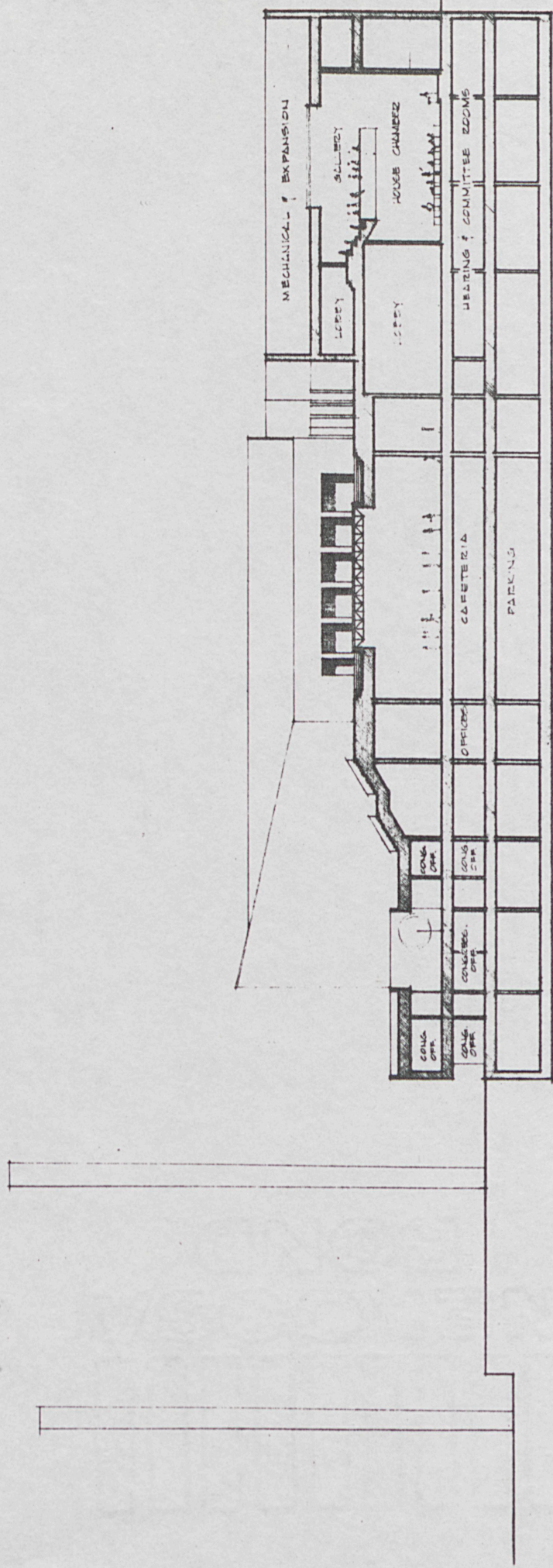
NORTH ELEVATION



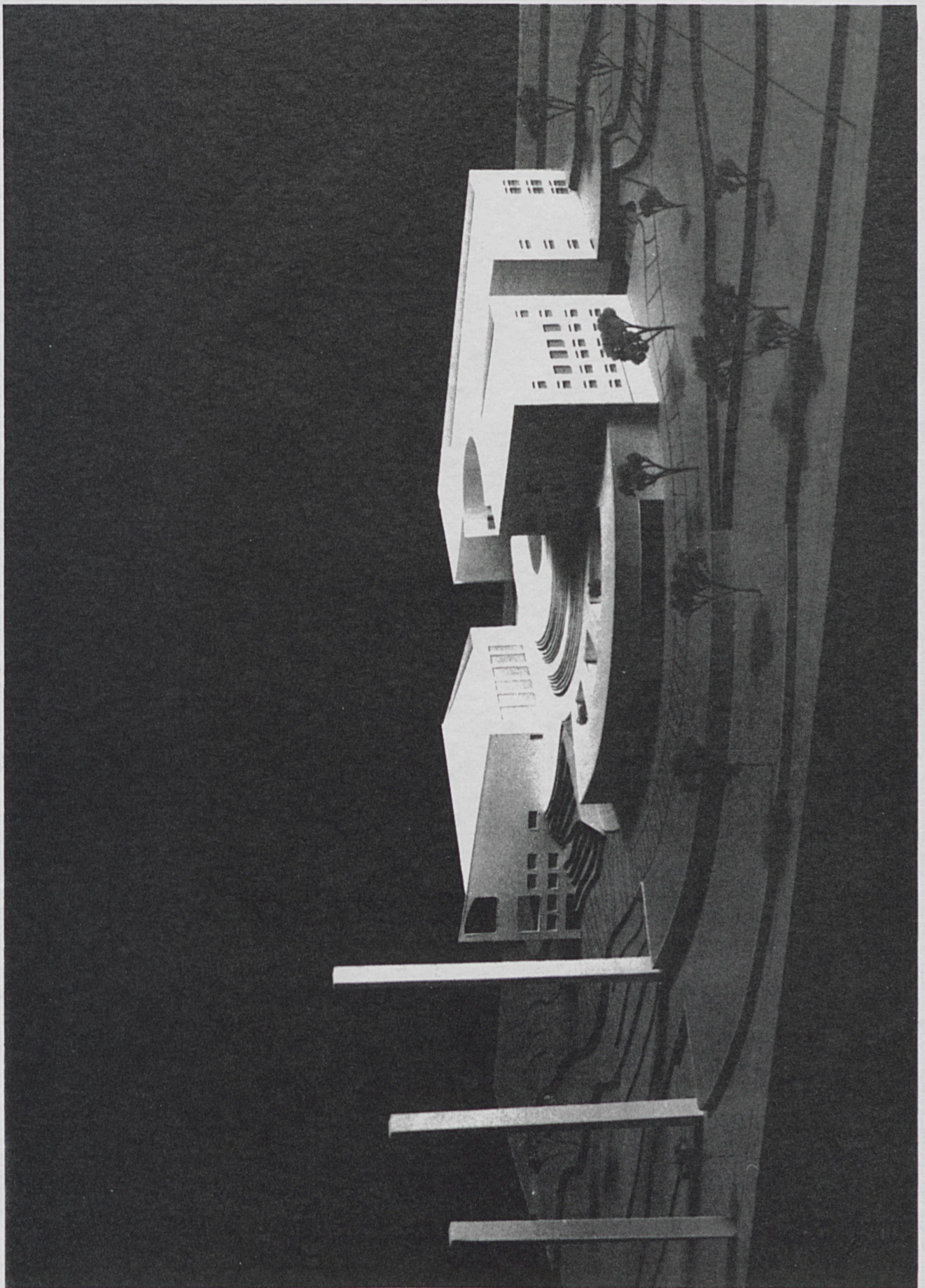
GALLERY LEVEL

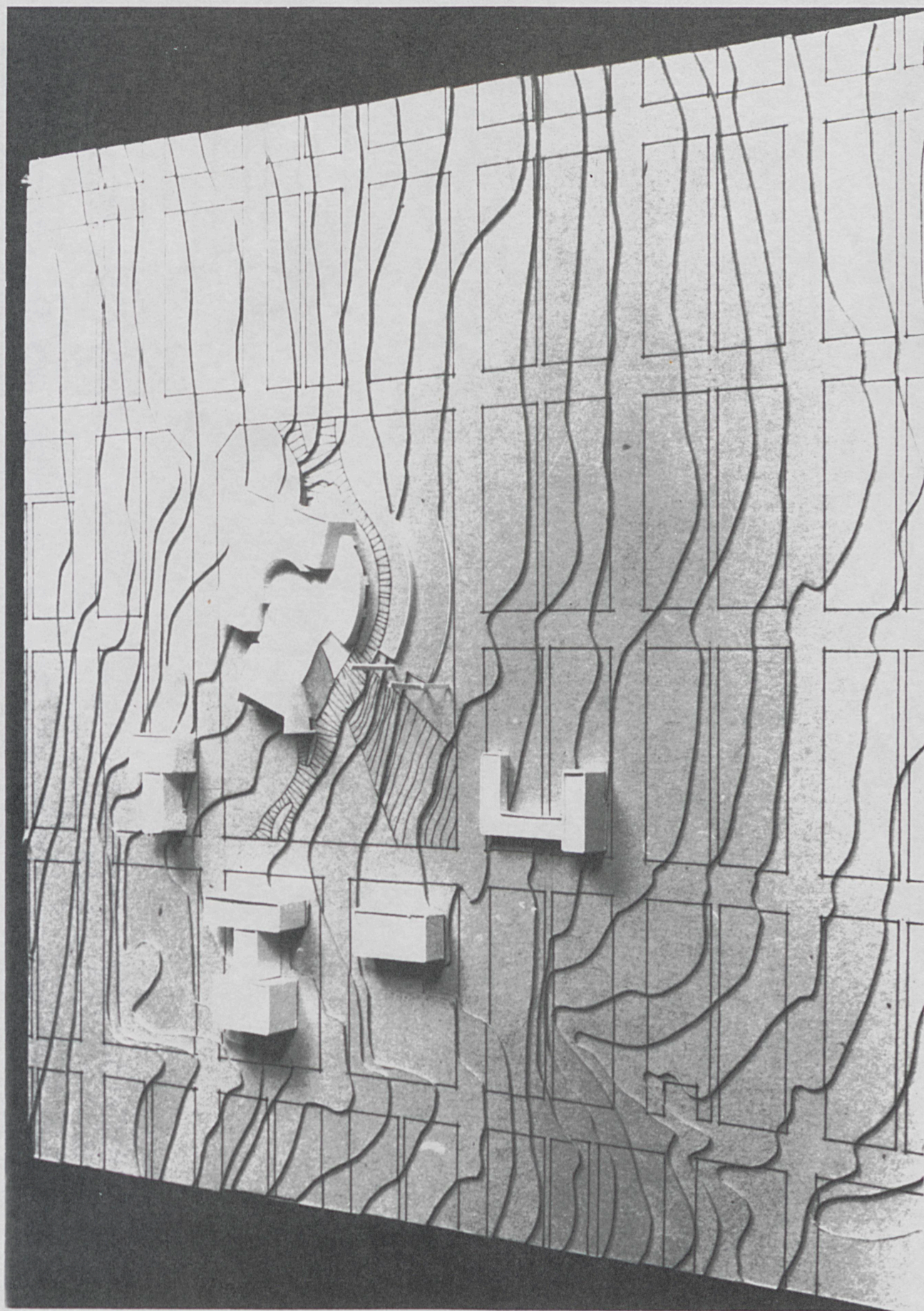


CHAMBER LEVEL



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