

36

Ritual Space: An Urban Monastery

by
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree Master of Architecture at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

June 1990.

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RITUAL SPACE: AN URBAN MONASTERY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the problem of how to design an internally consistent world of religious contemplation and ritual as insulated from an essentially secular, highly urban context. The project is a Christian monastery in Boston's South End loosely based upon the order of Saint Benedict. Monastic life, is by nature a utopian condition. Urban life, in total, is considered Anti-utopian, potentially destructive to the contemplative religious existence. The Monastery has also traditionally existed as a model community to the larger urban society. To be an effective exemplar and a member of the larger community, the monastery must allow the city access to its spiritual and physical resources. The goal

here is to design both the monastic space and its regions of encounter with the Urban world. Thus, in addition to the "cloistered" monastery there is a small church, a primary school for grades K-3, a hostel and a public swimming pool.

The book is subdivided into two parts. The first part deals briefly with monasticism and ritual, the precedent of monastery types, and concludes with a commentary on Le Corbusiers monastery for the Dominicans at La Tourette. The second part is the design project which addresses urban and site issues in a diagrammatic form. This is followed by cursory outline of the program and the building's collective construction systems. The book finishes with descriptions of the place as five distinct elements. Symbolic and physical content is conveyed either through a narrative framework or as a virtual listing of the architectural elements and their essential characteristics.

Advisor: Fernando Domeyko

Title: Lecturer.

Acknowledgments

4

I would like to thank the many who have helped me in this endeavor of self and professional discovery:

Elane for her love, support and penetrating sense of organization and timing.

Fernando for the depth and power of his criticism.

Father George, Father Urban and Father Sean and the monks of St Martins Abbey for their insight into the mystery.

Tom Chastain and Eric Dluhosch: teachers of uncommon ability.

Peter, Daniel, John, Rich, Laura, Rob, Shira, Rick, and Al, who helped me when I needed it most.

To MIT, I am forever in its debt.

The entire thesis crew and especially my good friend _oe.

My family.

Contents

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Contents	6
Introduction	20
Monasticism and Monastery Precedent	26
The Project:	42
Urban Context : Introduction and Responce Program and Construction The Monastery The Church The Pool The School The Hostel	
Bibliography	142

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression.

Michel Foucault.

The game and the creation of the game must be seen as one phenomenon, and indeed, it is subjectively plausible to say that the sequence is playable only so long as it retains some elements of the creative and unexpected. If the sequence is totally known then it is ritual. If play is the establishment and exploration of relationship then greeting and ritual are the affirmation of relationship.

Gregory Bateson.

What the primitive man does has been done before, his life is the ceaseless repetition of paradigmatic gestures initiated by others and given meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which those gestures repeat a primordial act. An object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Not only does ritual reproduce the original act but in the repetition and participation it also takes place at the same mythical, primordial moment. All sacrifices, all acts of ritual are thus coincident with the mythical instant of the initial act. Through this paradox of rite profane time and duration are suspended. History itself is abolished and the celebrant is transported into the mythical time and space of the original event.

Mircea Eliade.

The brain has special mechanisms for coding space in terms of time. For children the present is highly subjective, they cannot coordinate the dual nature of the present, which is both an objective reference point for the past and the future and a category of experience in its own right. They tend to confuse the boundaries between past, present and future. Through play they learn to mark these boundaries and separate their idea of the present from experience of the present. This is called decentering and it calls for an ability to understand various time relationships from different points of view in time and space.

Jeremy Cambell.

All really inhabited space bears the notion of home.

A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability....To bring order to these images I believe we must consider two principal themes, 1) A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward and descends downward. It appeals to our consciousness of verticality. 2) A house is imagined as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality.

Gaston Bachelard.

The monasteries gave the human enterprise the regular collective beat and rythm of the machine; for the clock is not merely a means of keeping track of the canonical hours, but of synchronizing the acts of men.

Lewis Mumford.

Introduction



How to address an issue as complex and mysterious as ritual and then design a space to effectively support its practice? Herein is, at least, an articulation of the problem and an attempt at a solution. This design is an attempt to explore the field of human experience, call on its essence and house it in physical form. A modest goal, no less. Guided by the thoughts of Bateson, Eliade and the others adumbrated above, I choose the dualities of ritual and play, the known and unknown, and time and mortality as the designs generating metaphysic.

The occurrence of rite and play in the every day serves to maintain an understanding of the unknown and unknown as complimentary states of mind. Those states of mind are accompanied by comparable states of time space. If a young child lives in a mythical time and progresses towards

profane time through the creation of play, then a monk seeks to abolish profane time and progress towards mythical time through the repetition of ritual.

The knowledge and experience of our mortality, that is, our development in the physical world of common experience, marks the perceptual boundaries of profane and mythical time. There is a vague awareness of this boundary that eludes investigative understanding. And yet, this awareness informs, perhaps directs, the apprehension of meaning. It is strange. Arising from the mist the question hovers, can and how do we know that which is unknowable: God, ourselves or our place in the scheme of things? How is meaning and place restored to the body of the individual and collective soul? One answer may lie in the ability to unask the questions that choke the faith. Without faith there is no living

rite or play, no creation or establishment of the potentially stable new. Perhaps rite and play are the agents to bond the known and the unknown as a single unit and unask the question of Oedipus.

My project needs to recognize this presence and discern its components in order to design its realization. I will conclude that to make a space conducive to ritual it must approximate as closely as possible the continual maintenance of the known interspersed and balanced with the unknown. Here there are concerns with the actual qualities of contemplative and ritual space.

Julie Meservy has observed three essential elements in the successful formation of contemplative space. There is the center, the reference and the frame. The center is the physical place from which the contemplative knows his

position in space and time. Through the secure inhabitation of this center, the individual is able to focus on the reference before him. The reference is a 'mobile threshold between inner and outer experience allowing the contemplator to transfer his being through 'extension' to another state of mind. The frame embodies the physical boundaries of the place. It serves to isolate the contemplative from external intrusions and offers a multidimensional place of peace and serenity. The notion of threshold is crucial for understanding this project

A threshold is a boundary between worlds, physical conditions or states of mind. In the threshold, for the moment of transition, two conditions exist simultaneously. If the known is a world or state experienced before transition, then in transition to another world there is passage to

the relatively unknown. The threshold cradles opposites together and in the shifting nature of its time and space offers the sight, choice and the possible recognition and merging of multiple worlds. It is a place that is at least two places. It is a place of control and potential. Considering the design problem, the threshold is more than a physical opening, it is the quality and scale of the social and spatial interaction between worlds.

The monastery interacts with the secular world through its supporting functions of the church, hostel, school and swimming pool. These functions physically and socially surround the cloistered life acting as thresholds.

Each threshold offers a different quality and scale of society to the cloistered life. Each function admits the city to the physical and spiritual space in different degrees

and types of access. The encounter with the city in the church is different from that in the hostel, school or swimming pool.

Monasticism and Monastery
Precedent



For the Benedictines and indeed for all western christian monasticism the essential collective ritual is in the Eucharist and the Offices of the Rule.

The Eucharist is one of the seven rites of the historical christian church considered to have been instituted or observed by Jesus as a testament to inner grace or as a channel that mediates grace. Here the last supper is daily commemorated in the act of eating and the celebration of the Mass. The body and blood of Christ is physically embodied in the bread and wine of every meal.

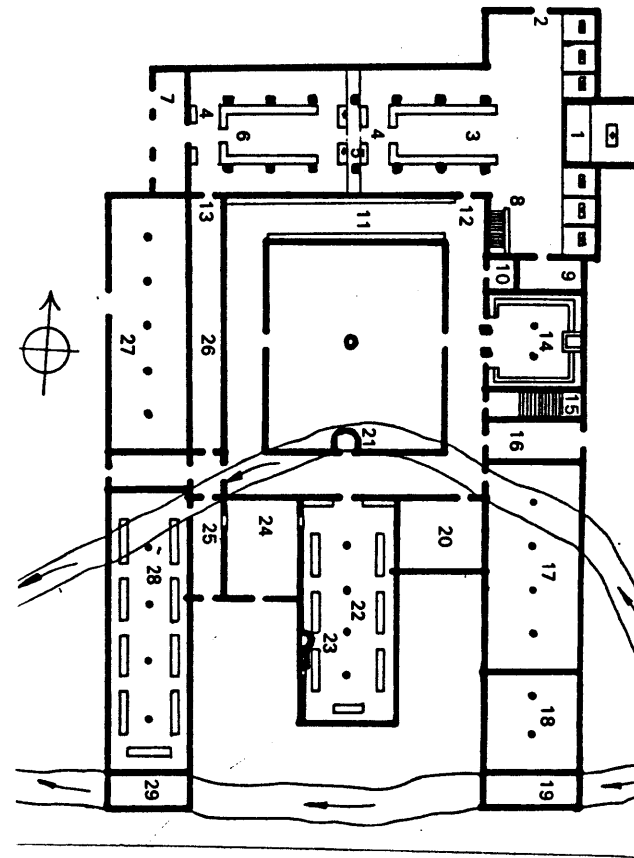
The Rule of Saint Benedict guides every individual and collective act of monastic life towards the embodiment of a perfect society. It is a complete prescription for living. Eating washing and working are all invested with symbolic importance in the divine order of things.



If the rule is the construct for establishing and maintaining this "perfect" society, the office of the rule represents the ritual act of collective devotion engaged at precise times during each day. This originally occurred seven times a day in response to the biblical caveat "seven times of day I have rendered praise to you". Thus, gathering occurs to recite psalms, responsories and prayers through Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Vespers and Compline. The offices were rendered so absolutely that a clock was invented to maintain the necessary synchronized precision. The monastery becomes the optimal physical framework for the accomplishment of these rituals. Efficiency in the organization of the place is essential and this perhaps most apparent in the monasteries of the cistercians.



For many, the Cistercian plan represents the archtypal solution to monastic living. The Cistercians were a reform movement founded in the 12th century on a rigorous asceticism and an ideal complete withdrawal from the world. The monastery was always built on a remote, rural site with a flowing stream or river. The cloister was used as an organizing element off of which different symbolic and nonsymbolic activity would be accessed. The church, the refectory, the chapter house, the fountain and other functions opened directly off this courtyard. The sleeping arrangements were always a communal dormitory above a monks common room on the cloister. Except for the Abbots apartment, there was no private space and almost all space had two aspects: one to the cloister and one to the country side.



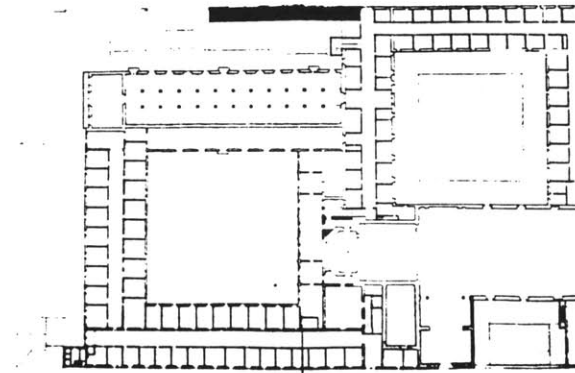
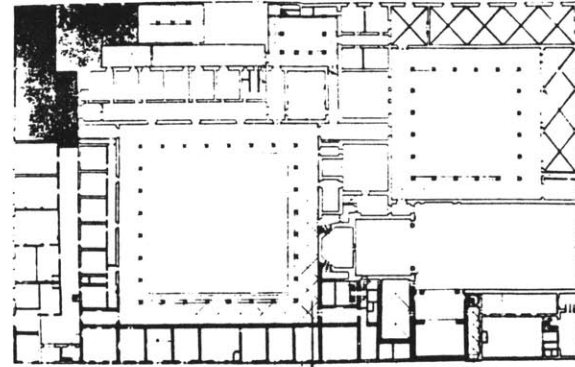
The rural setting will probably always remain the ideal condition for a monastery. For an urban setting one has to look to the architecture of a different order. Such a setting, in the middle ages at least, is found in the friaries of the Mendicant Orders: the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Unlike the Cistercians, the case here was not withdrawal from the world but a mission outwards to it. The spiritual unit included not just the cloister but the surrounding town and countryside as well.

At the level of the ground the cloister organization remains the same as that of the Cistercians. Communal and symbolic space opening off of the central cloister. The major difference being the replacement of the dormitory sleeping arrangement by individual cells for the monks.



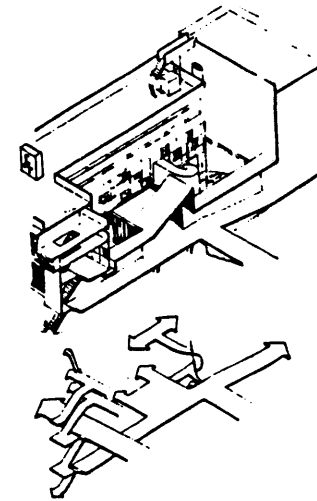
Because of the need for more space the cells are positioned on a second level above the cloister and accessed by a centrally loaded corridor. The corridor describes three sides of the cloister square. The fourth side is occupied by the church. The cell now has only one aspect, either to the greater insulation of the cloister or to the lesser insulation of the street. The privacy of the cell displaces the communal center of the cloister as the most important monastic space. From here the monk must prepare himself for his mission into the world as an individual.

The cell has remained an identifying feature of monastic life. One problem with its application is found in the double loaded corridor situation. First, when cells are stacked in multiple floors no light reaches the corridor. Second, in an urban context on a row of cells must always face the outside. The contemplative life is harder to



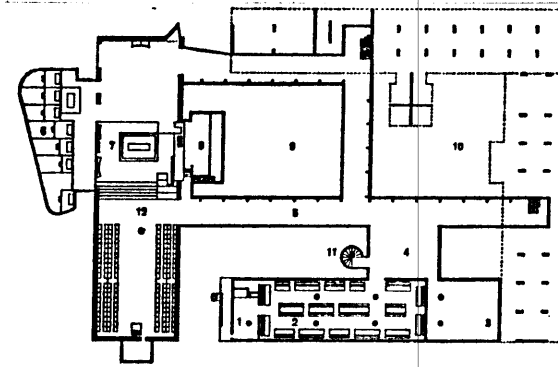
meet on the street face, the inward looking cells have an advantage. A contemporary, albeit rural, solution to this dilemma, is found in the monastery of La Tourette by Le Corbusier.

At La Tourette, Le Corbusier has taken the traditional cloister and transformed it. The original closed form has been opened through the displacement of the church from the other functions. Built on a steep hill, a traditional form would not have worked here. The entire structure is raised off the ground and the landscape moves underneath. At the entry level is the monastic college which includes a library and classrooms. Below are the communal and symbolic spaces: the refectory and chapter house and the entry into the church. Above the entry level are two levels of cells. The cells look out into the country side and are fed by a corridor that runs around the cloister.

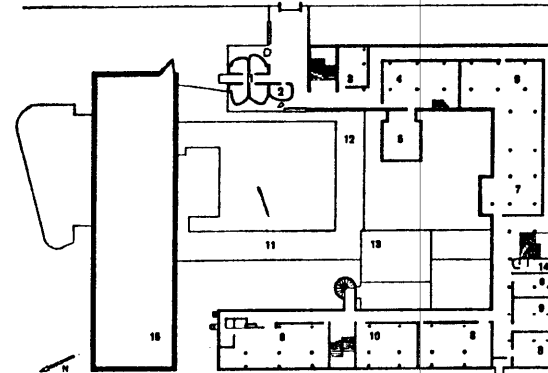


He has solved the problem of light in the corridor but the outward looking nature of the cells would be less desirable in an urban context. In any case the single loaded corridor is form worth repeating. The monk moves out from his private space into a one which is immediately understandable as a collective space. There are other things going on here of great interest.

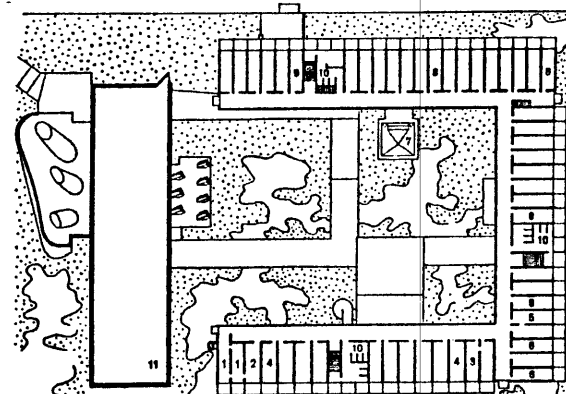
The efficiency of ritual movement has been taken very seriously here. Rather than the expected circumambulatory form there is an articulation of the routes to and from an atrium adjacent to the refectory and chapter house. Ritual movement is given a form for itself.



Refectory floor

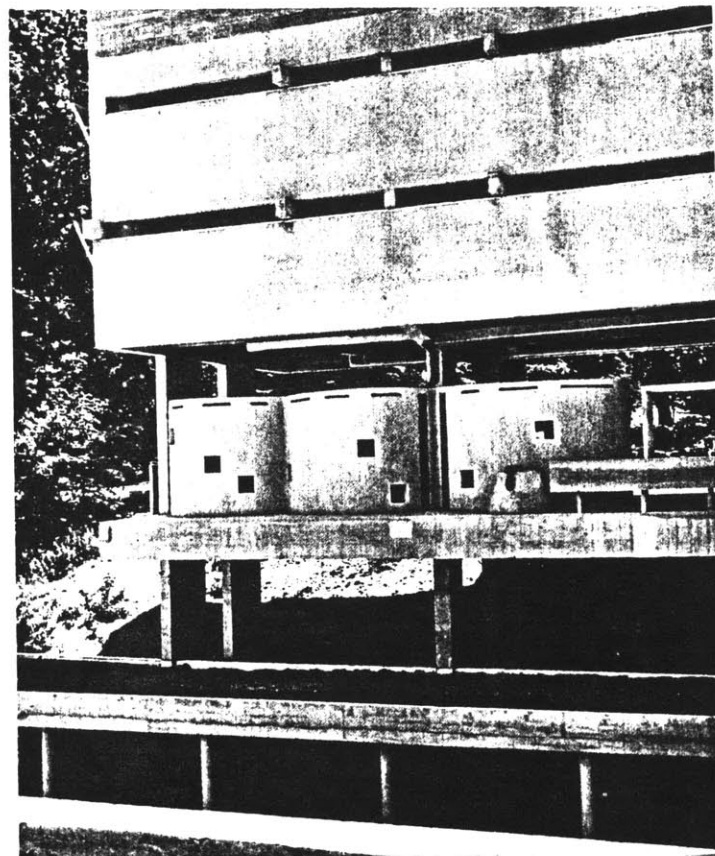


Entrance floor



Cell floor

Profane movement, as the public access might be called, is given unimpeded visual access to the heart of the cloister. From the entry platform the activity of the college level, is perceivable beyond the partially transparent window screens across the cloister. The atrium space although articulated is opaque to the eye. This perception holds for the paths that lead to the atrium as well. From the atrium to the church the path becomes transparent from both looking in and looking out.



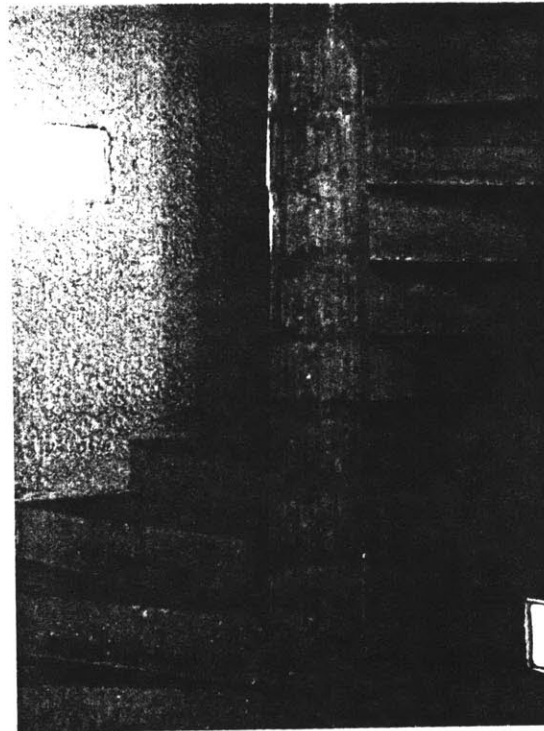
This makes sense, in that the church is where the monastery meets the public. The path becomes a prelude to the intersection of worlds, made congenial in the church by a shared faith and ritual. The known of the impending ritual is deliberately invaded by the potential unknown of the profane observer on the entry platform above.

There are other interesting related features here. The corridor to the cells runs adjacent to the cloister allowing perception of the common space. The openings are rendered as a continuous, very narrow strip of transparency.



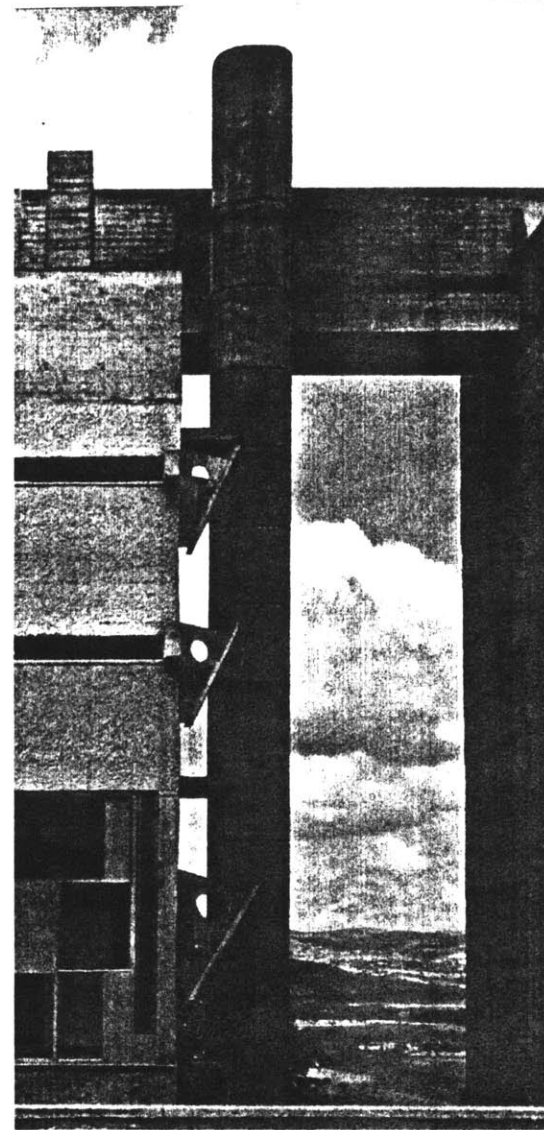
There is view out but not down to the cloister. Similarly there is from the profane viewing platform no access to that behind the same strip window.

Another interesting feature occurs in the vertical circulation usually given in a conventional scissor arrangement. There is no such stair entering the symbolic level. He deploys a spiral stair to make the connection between levels directly to the atrium. This stair is entirely dark except for small translucent lights at the steps.

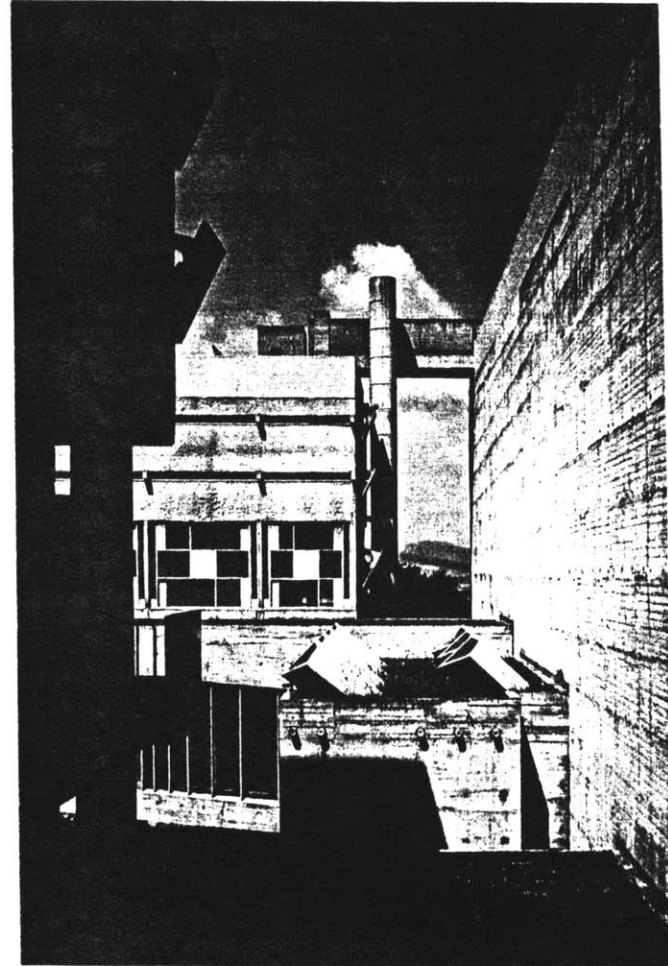


Movement serves not only to shield the passage to the ritual space from profane eyes but in its dark spiraling form it disassociates the sequence of spatial experiences. Arrival is severed from departure. The space of the college or the cell corridor is thus strongly distinguished from the atrium.

An additional supporting observation is seen in the strange light devices positioned at the ends of all the corridors where Le Corbusier restricts forward vision with a tilting panel. The supporting web has a circular hole in it that allows a perfectly framed view to one side. Except for climatic changes, that view always remains known.



In this control and separation of viewer from the viewed, Le Corbusier serves to distinguish the known and the unknown in the perception of ritual space. Thus, he strengthens for both the monastery as a place where the mystery is discovered and unveiled.





Father George: "Make it a fortress"

*Father Urban: "They must feel the
wind, the rain and
and the cold."*

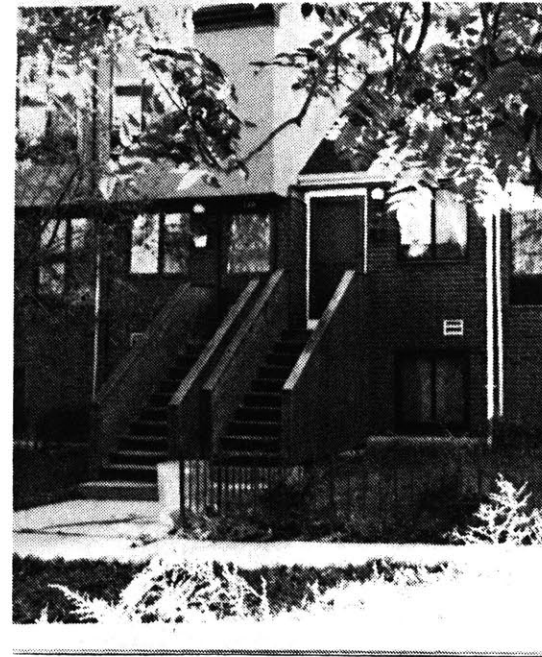
*Father Sean: "They need to
step out of the cell
and into the light."
"The work must be
separated from
the monastery."*

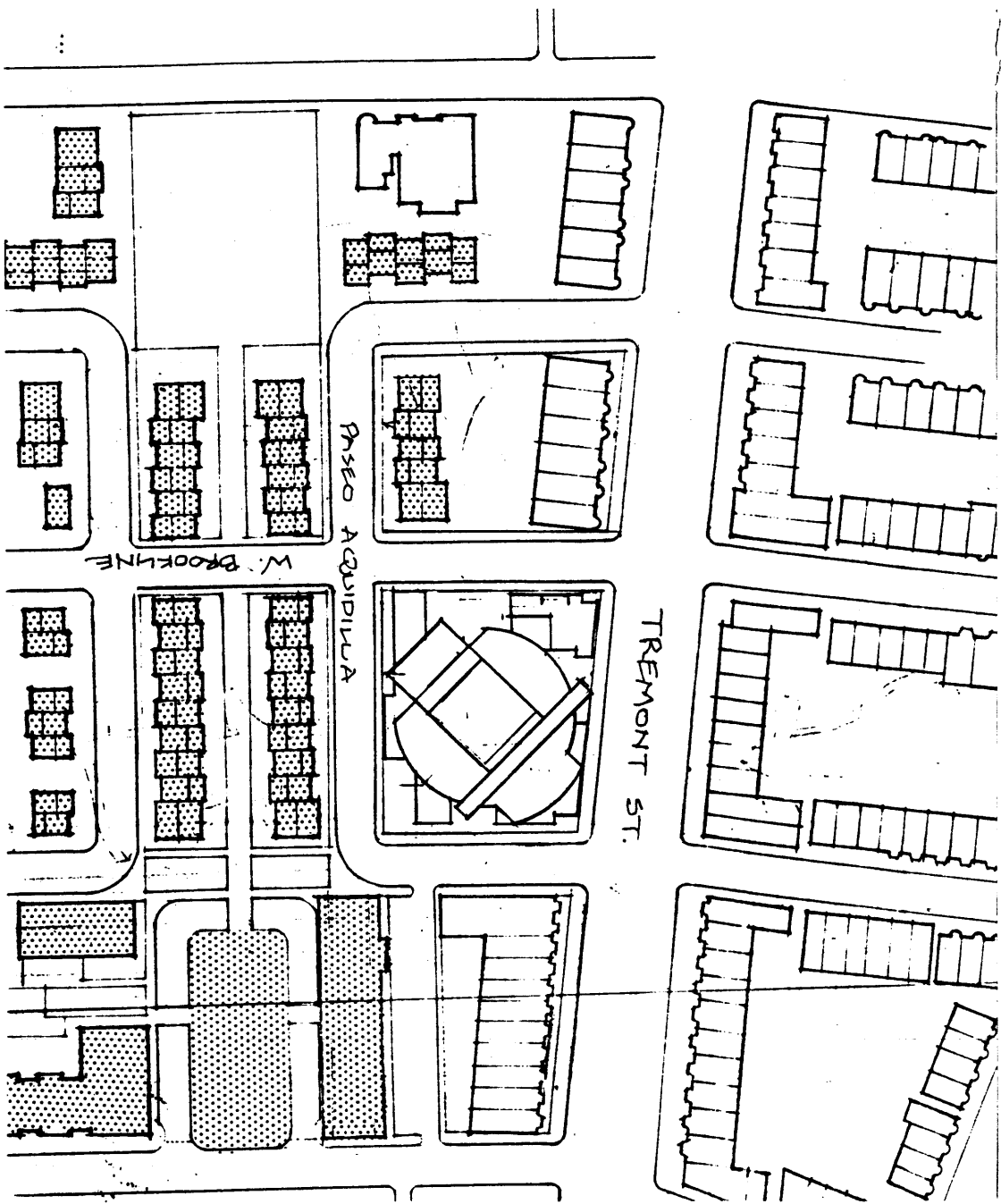
Urban Context: Introduction
and Responce



The site is in Boston's South End. One edge faces Tremont Street. Another edge fronts West Brookline Street. The two other edges face onto Paseo Aquidillo, a street that was formed when the housing development Villa Victoria was organized and built in the 1970's.

Villa Victoria which wraps around the site on three sides is a thriving neighborhood of over 500 predominantly Hispanic residents. They care for their neighborhood enough to police the streets for garbage. It is important to respond to this condition gracefully, at least in the design program if not its form.

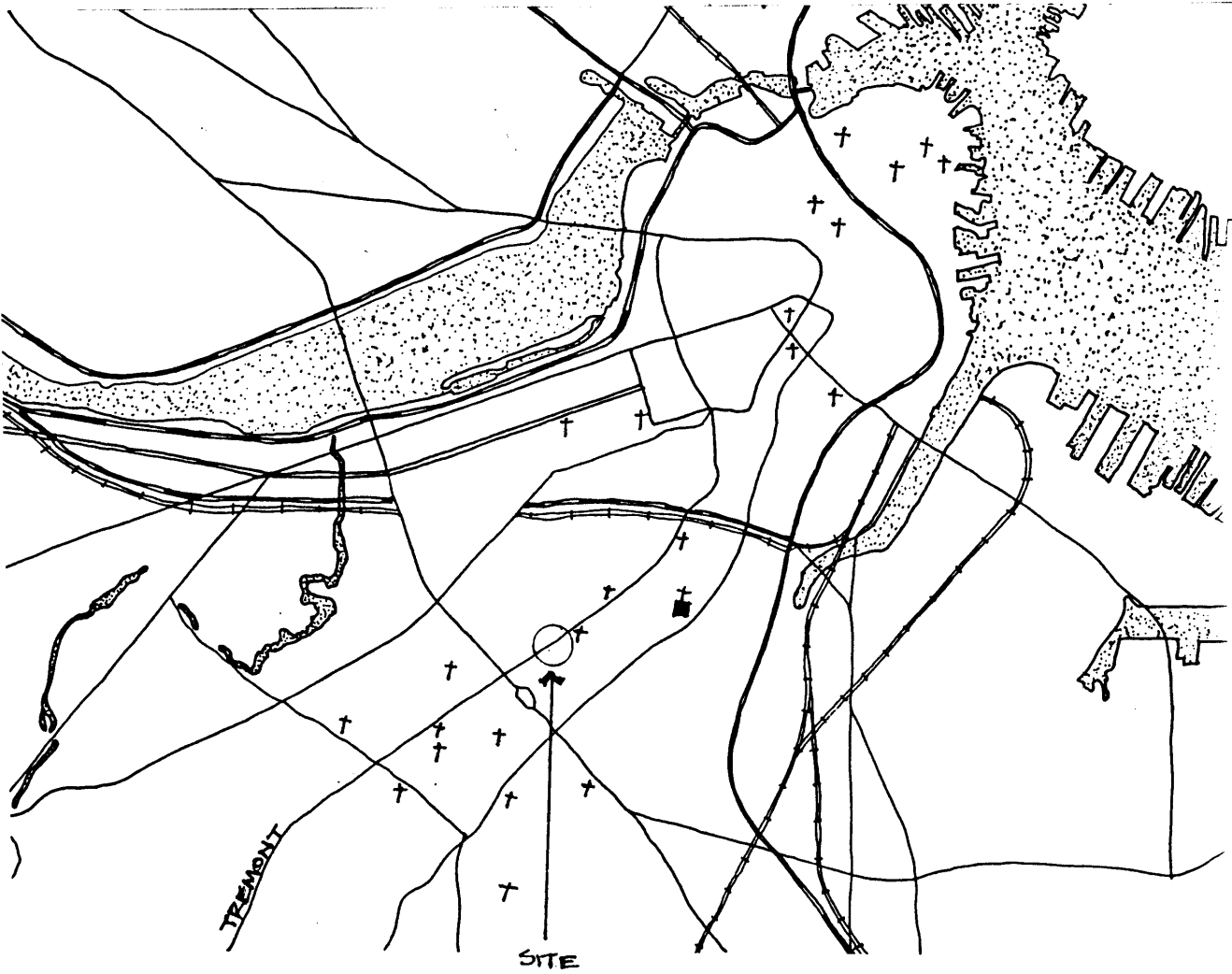




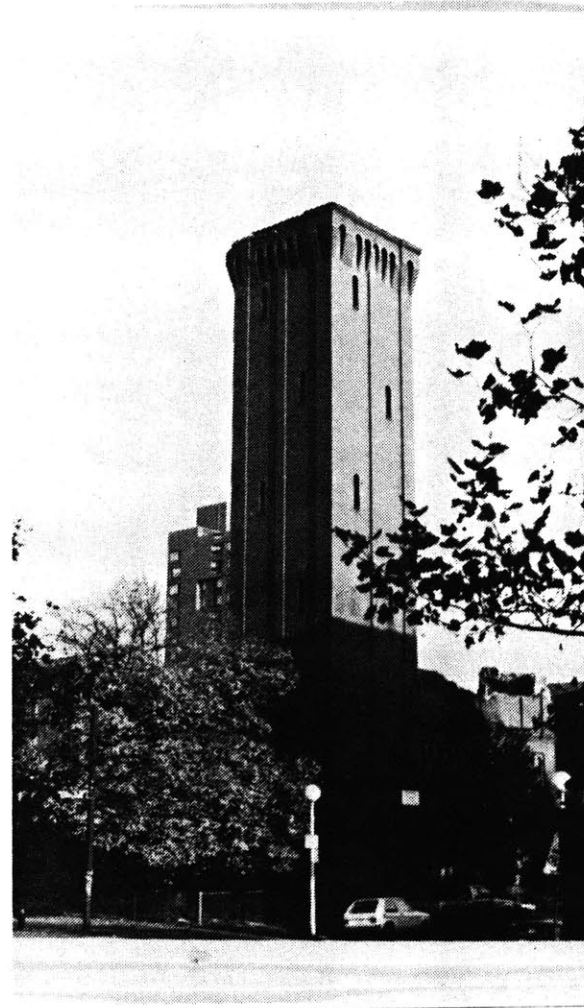
The area around the site has a high concentration of churches and other public buildings. The form of these architectural elements are variations on the theme imposed by the row house building type that dominates the South End and much of Boston.

As mentioned earlier there are numerous churches in this portion of Boston and a majority of them are Catholic. The location of the cathedral should underscore that the South End was where the newly immigrated Irish first settled in the mid 19th century. There are also a number of schools and a few religious orders in this area.

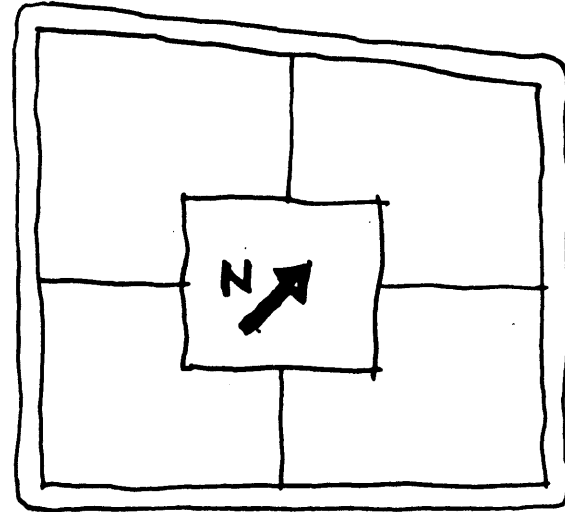
Tremont Street is a major link between the Boston central business district and the once southern suburbs. Tremont and W. Brookline Street have each become a Bus route for the MBTA transportation system.



The site itself holds the ruin of a Congregational Church built in 1865. It burned down in 1972. All that remains are four heavy brick walls and a bell tower. The long side of 142 feet faces Tremont and the main entry of 78 feet faces onto West Dedham. The walls and the tower are 20 and 100 feet high respectively. Some but not all of this ruin will remain to articulate the presence of the new.

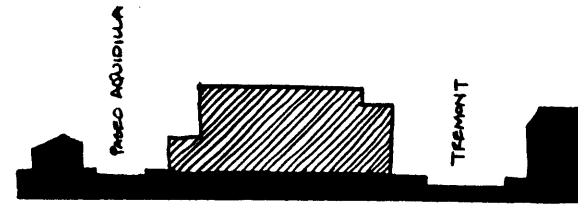


The site is organized into five areas. The monastery is at the center, the church is to the north, the hostel is to the west, the pool is to the east, and the school is to the south.

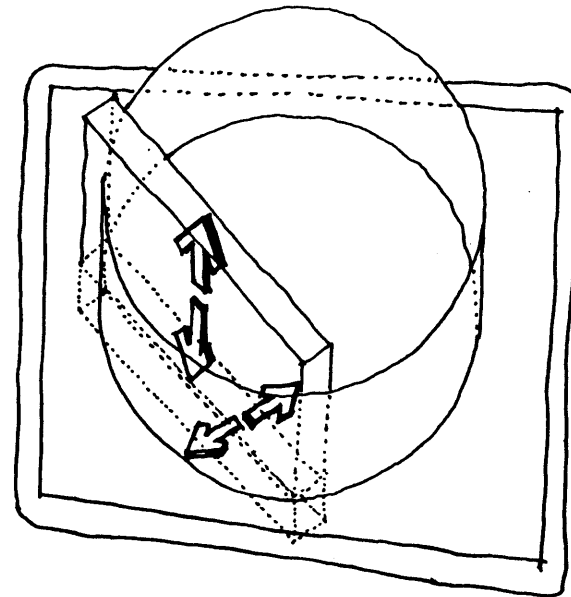


Entries into the enclosure occurs through any one of the four corner functions which consequently act as programmatic and physical thresholds from which to meet the city at large.

Relation of building mass to the street.



A diagonal element, "The Threshold", connects church to cloister horizontally and ground to sky vertically.

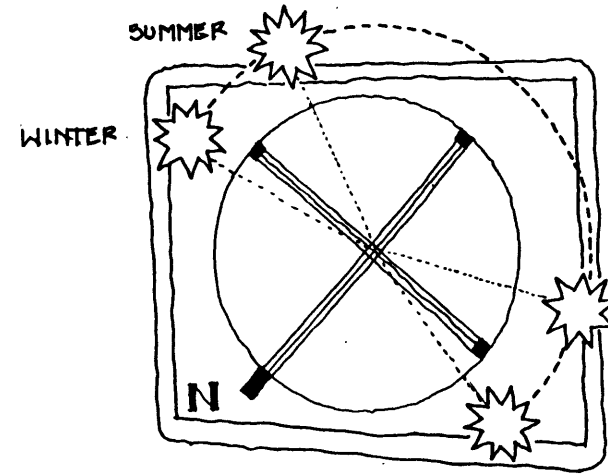


In dealing with the site there were a number of basic moves. The necessity of protecting this place from the city resulted in raising the cloister, hostel and church functions an entire story above the street.



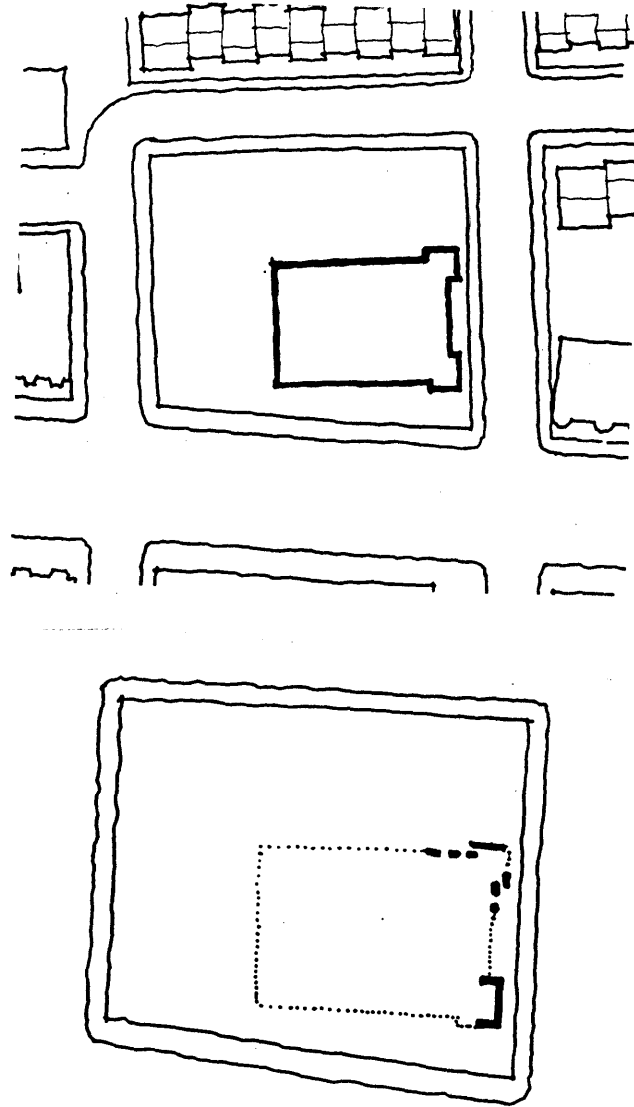
As additional response to this end, the direction of the church and cloister were shifted 45 degrees to the prevailing city grid.

This shift also serves a cosmological purpose. It aligns the ritual spaces of the church and cloister with south thus tracing the path of the sun and the cycles of the day.



As an additional insulative measure the cloister is housed inside a cylindrical enclosure that opens to the south.

The civic memory of the old church is preserved in the entire height of the tower and fragments of the wall.



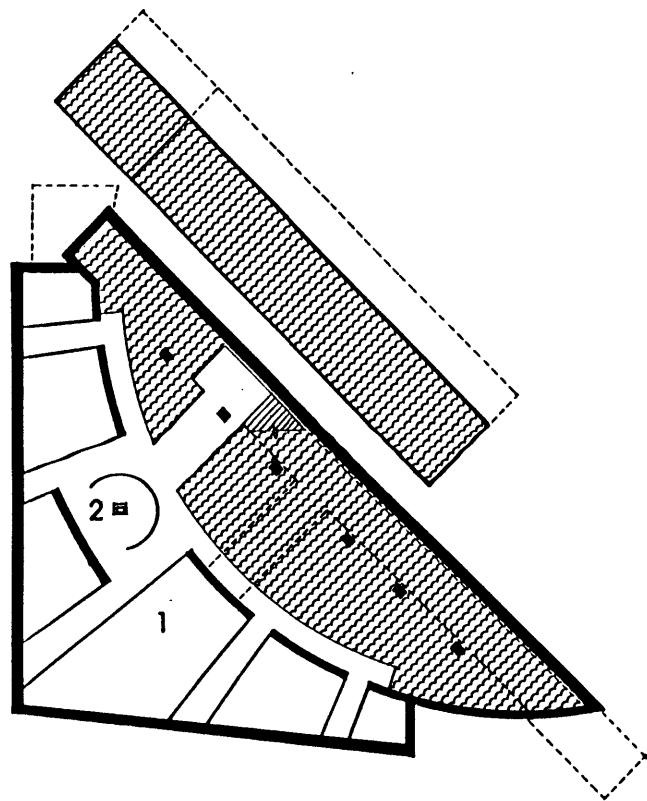


There are five distinct aspects to this project. There is the monastery proper, it will be called the cloister, which occupies the center of the site. The other four uses are distributed to the corners of the block. There are the monastery guest house or hostel and administration. There is the place of work, in this case a primary school/day care for children from kindergarten to third grade. There is a small church for the monastic community. Finally there is an overture to the neighborhood in the form of a public swimming pool, which would be scheduled to allow the monastic community and villa victoria community separate use.

61

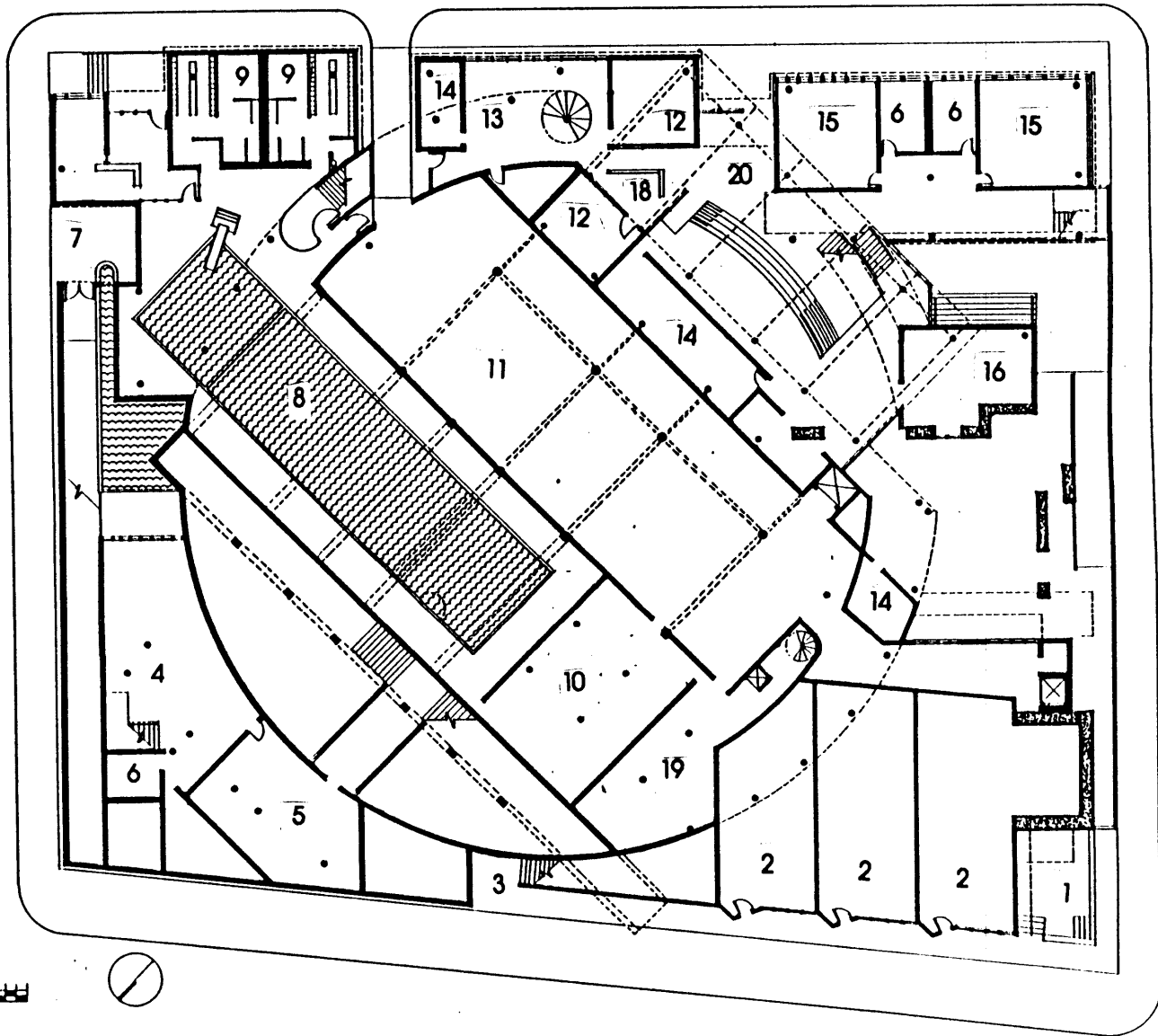
Below Ground Level

1. Crypt
2. Chapel



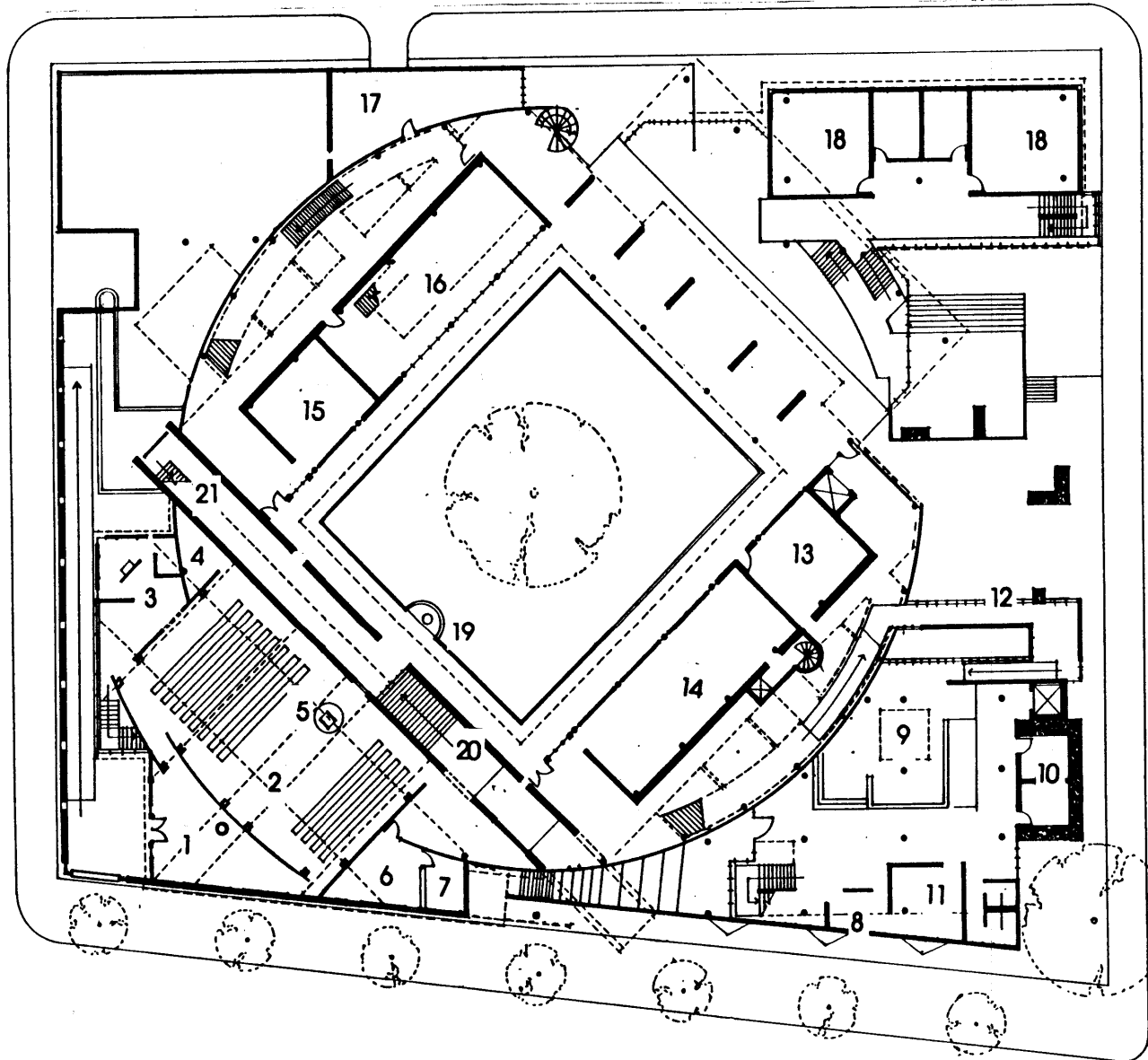
Ground Level

1. Park/Bus Stop
2. Rental space
3. Entry to guest house
4. Common room
5. Entry to crypt
6. Bathroom
7. Church entry
8. Swimming pool
9. Locker room
10. Mechanical
11. Garage
12. Office
13. Lounge
14. Storage
15. Classroom
16. Library/Art space
17. Pool
18. Reception
19. Kitchen
20. School entry



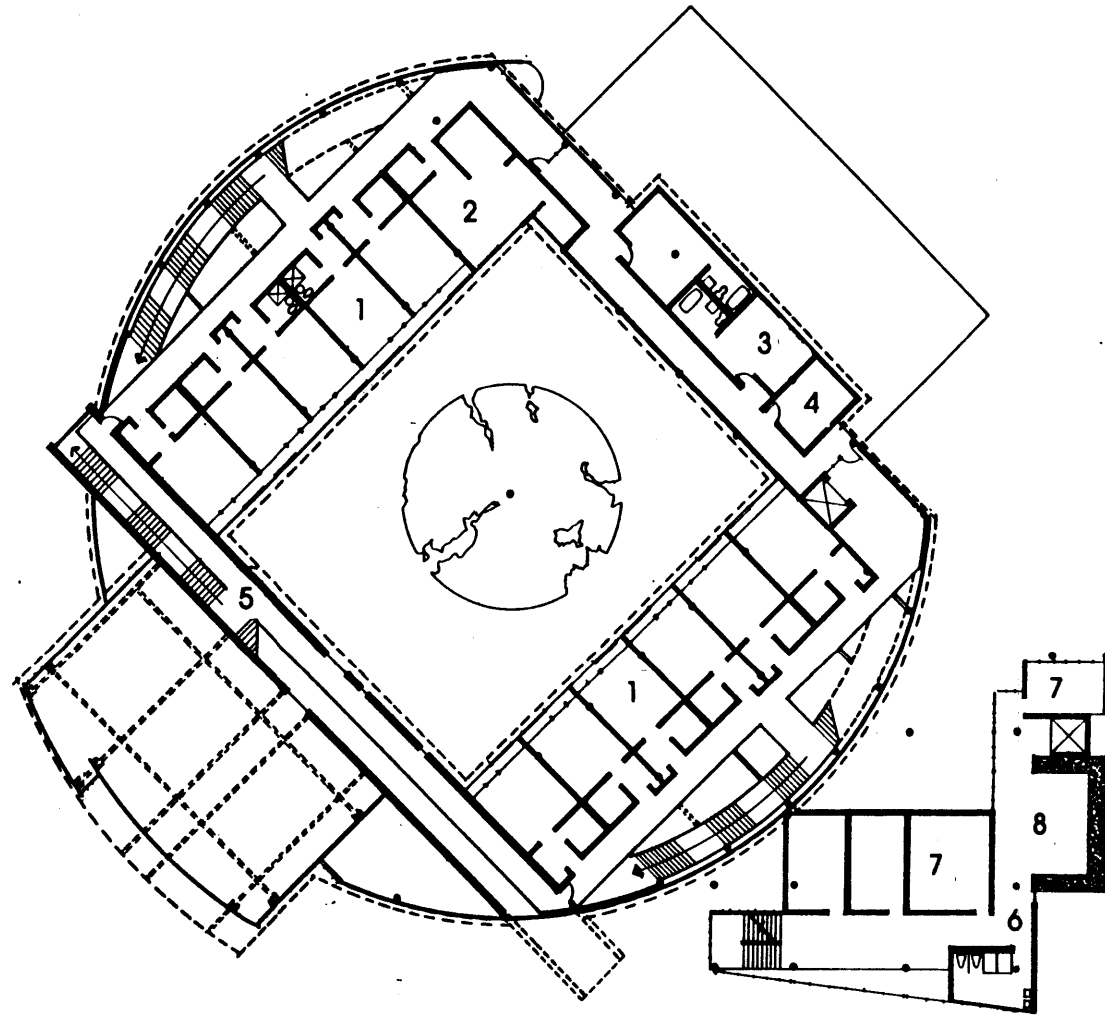
First Level

1. Narthex
2. Nave
3. Chapel
4. Organ
5. Alter
6. Sacristy
7. Bathroom
8. Receptionist
9. Parlour
10. Interview room
11. Office
12. Catwalk
13. Novitiate
14. Refectory
15. Chapter house
16. Archive/Library
17. Recreation Room
18. Classroom
19. Fountain
20. Stair to crypt
21. Stair to clock



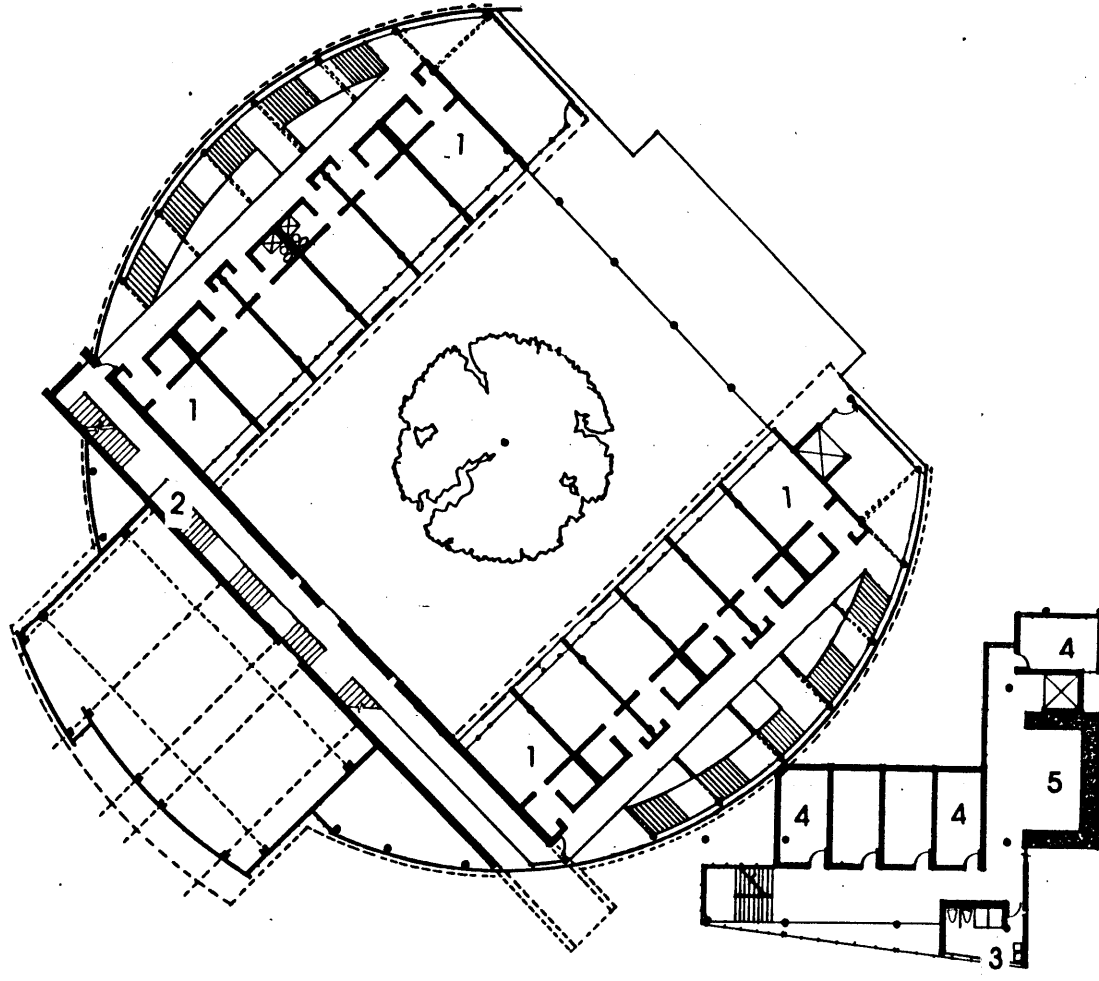
Second Level

1. Cells
2. Abbots apt.
3. Infirmary
4. Nurses station
5. Stairs to clock
6. Bathroom
7. Rooms
8. Public space



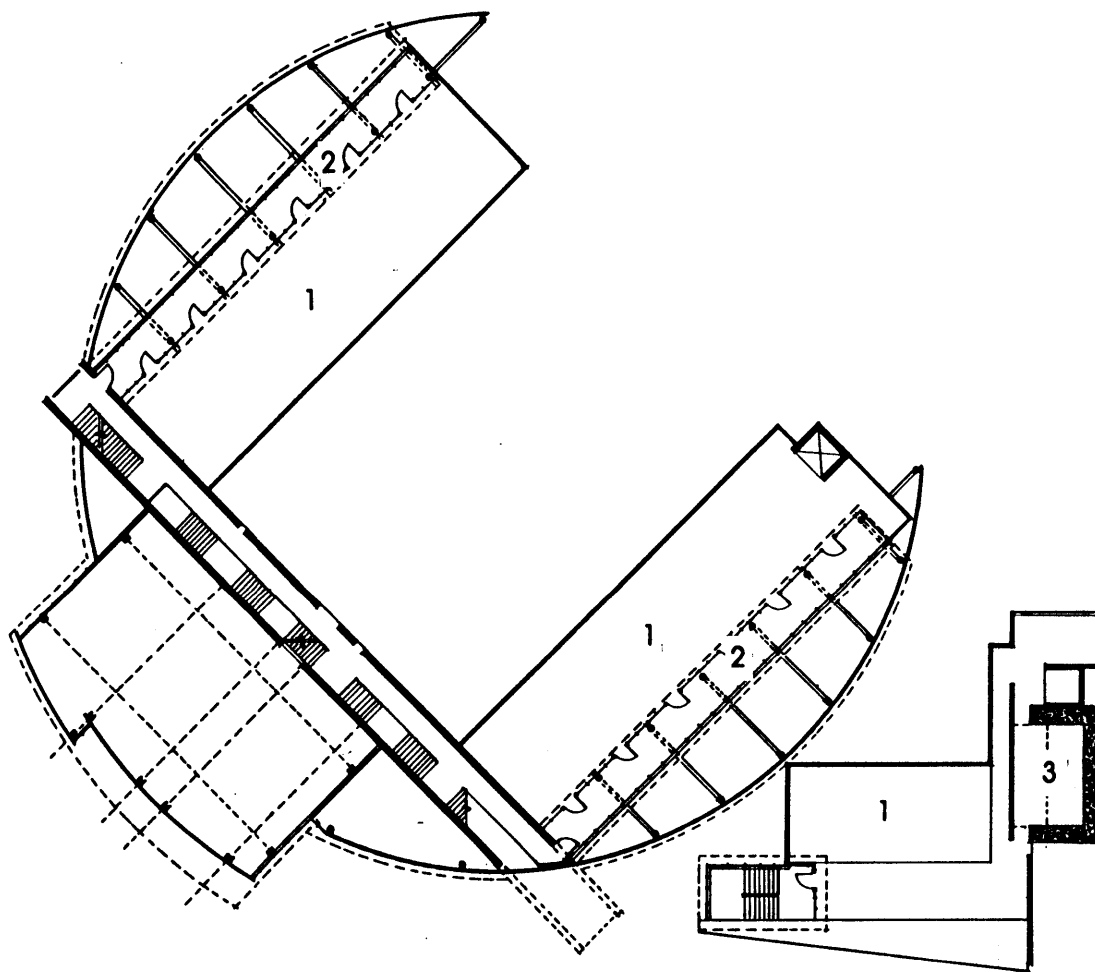
Third Level

1. Cells
2. Stairs to clock
3. Bathroom
4. Rooms
5. Lounge



Fourth Level

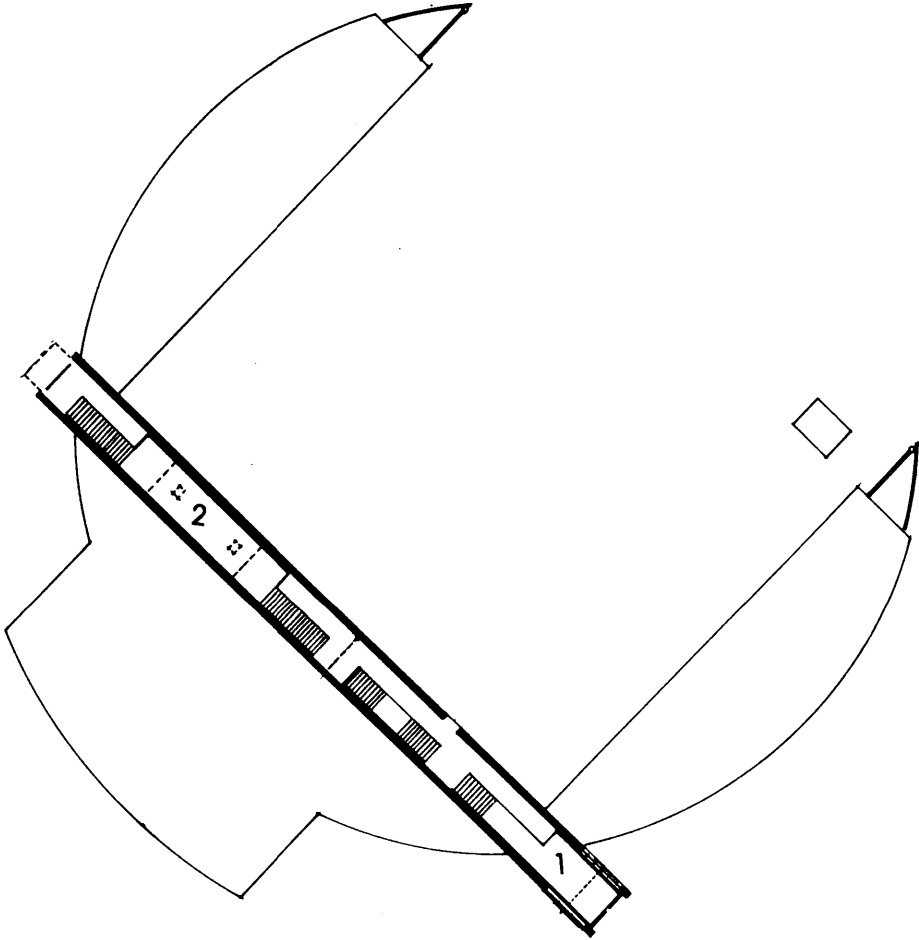
1. Roof garden
2. Arcade
3. Sky lens



73

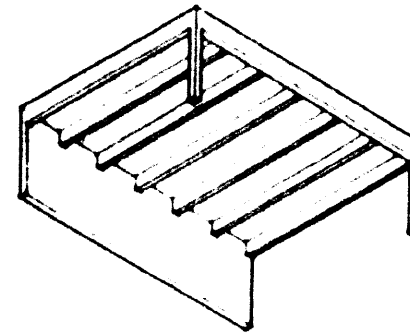
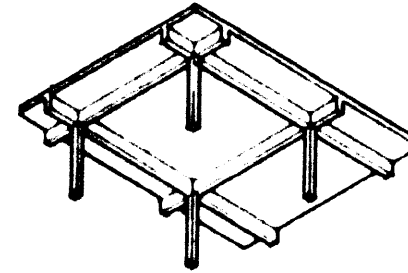
Fifth Level

1. Clock observation platform
2. Bell station

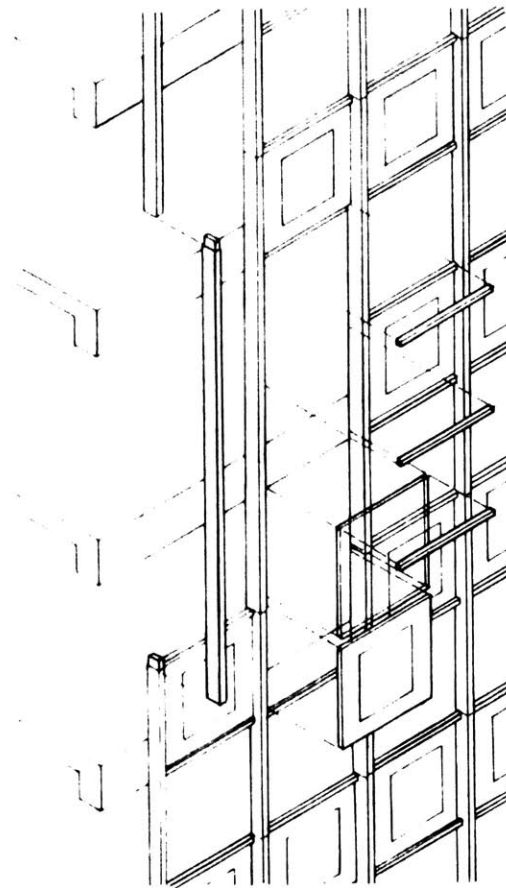


The primary structural system for the monastery is poured-in-place columns and one way ribbed concrete slabs with the rib/column combination becoming a frame to support the cylinder. An exception to this rule is found in the area under the raised cloister floor where the large oak tree rests in a six foot deep soil tray. Here, the slab becomes a two way system to both handle the increased load and to provide additional spanning capability for the garage below.

On the Tremont Street side and part of the Paseo Aquidulla side the cylinder rests upon a concrete cylindrical wall base 12 feet high, the height of the cloister floor. Separating the concrete and Kalwall is a 3 foot high band of transparency. This is enough to give the wall the appearance of floating and the offering of constricted but constant perception through this barrier from from one side to the other.



The same one way system holds for the hostel, the swimming pool, the school, the crypt and the street levels of the church. At the church sanctuary level the primary structure becomes a steel column and beam system which is clad with finished plywood sheets. The walls of the church at the level of the street and the narthex are poured-in-place concrete. This wall with its pronounced crenellation continues around Paseo Aquidilla stopping at the church entry. The swimming pool entry and the school are clad out of concrete block with a large metal and glass window wall defining the school's atrium enclosure. The hostel street facade is a steel and glass stick system.

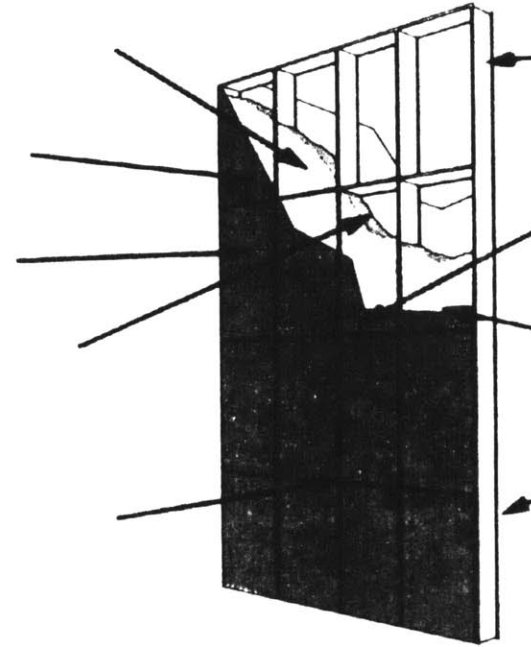


3.44 'Stick' system for attaching curtain wall cladding with vertical movement joints at 'stick' connections.

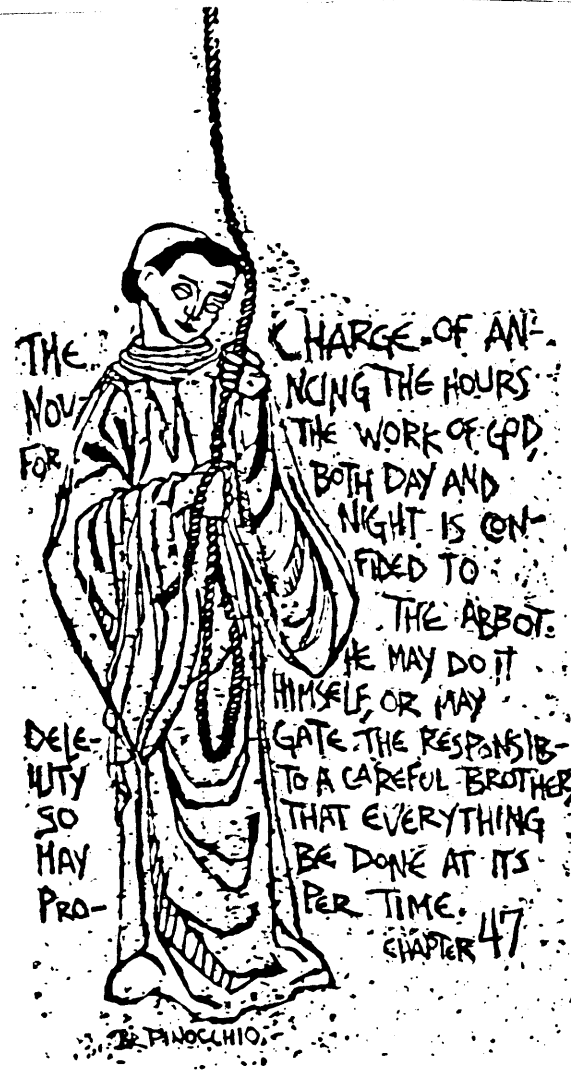
The Monastery proper exists primarily within the protective enclosure of a 40 foot high cylinder.

Except for the occasional transparent window this cylinder is made entirely from the product KalWall. Made as an insulated sandwich panel with faces out of a milky white fiberglass, this stuff transmits a translucent light, insulates thermally and acoustically and provides a very durable protective enclosure. The wall is set into and supported on a treated wood frame. This is an independent system which is diagonally braced and attached to the verticals of the site cast concrete columns.

Because of its translucent nature the wall itself contains light. The wall is physically and metaphorically understood as a container for the holy spirit.

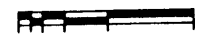
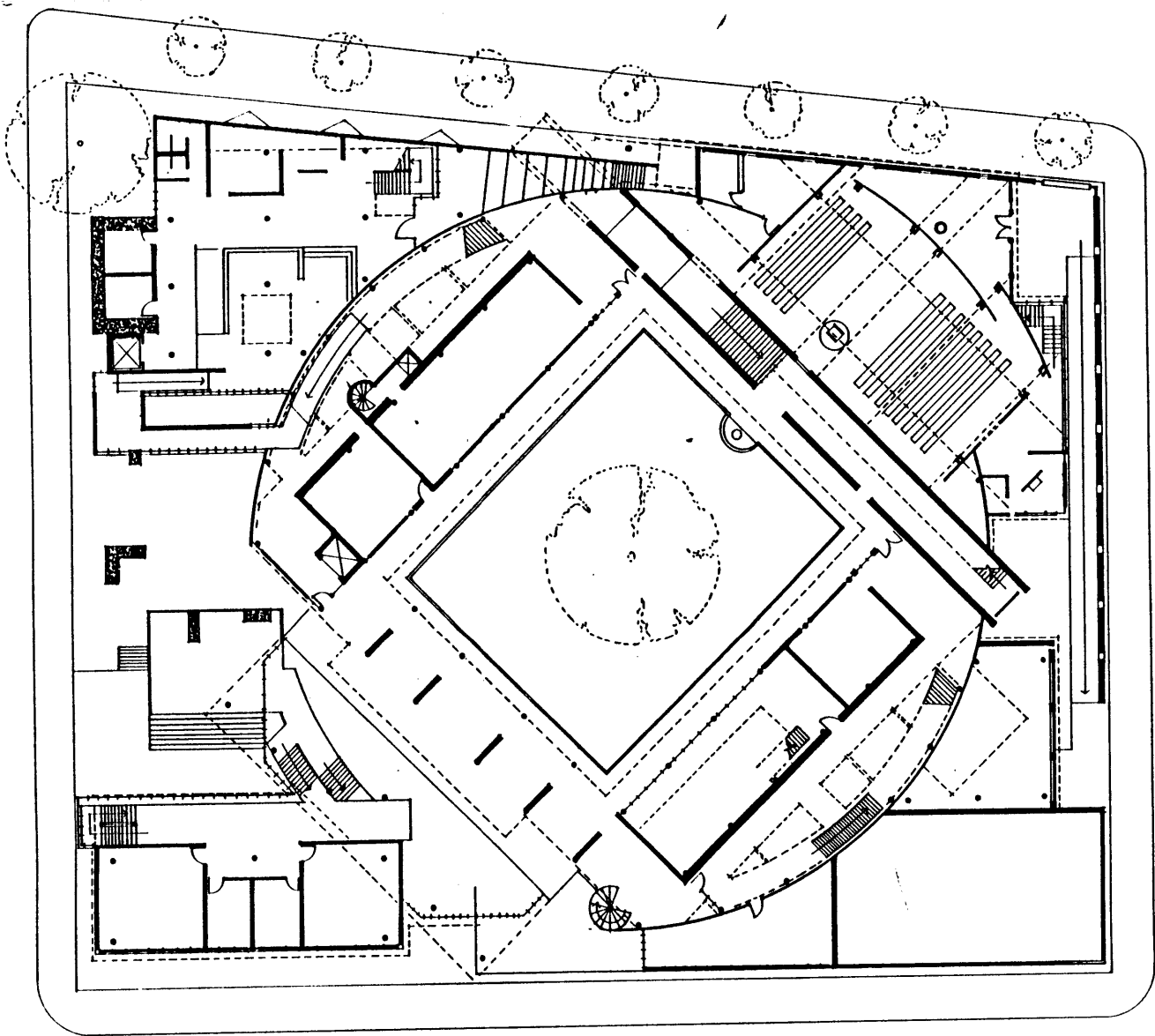


The Monastery



The monastery proper is, as mentioned before, enclosed inside an insulative cylinder and raised 12 feet above the street level. At the center of the cylinder is the cloister. Unlike the traditional Cistercian cloister all functions are not organized off of this space.

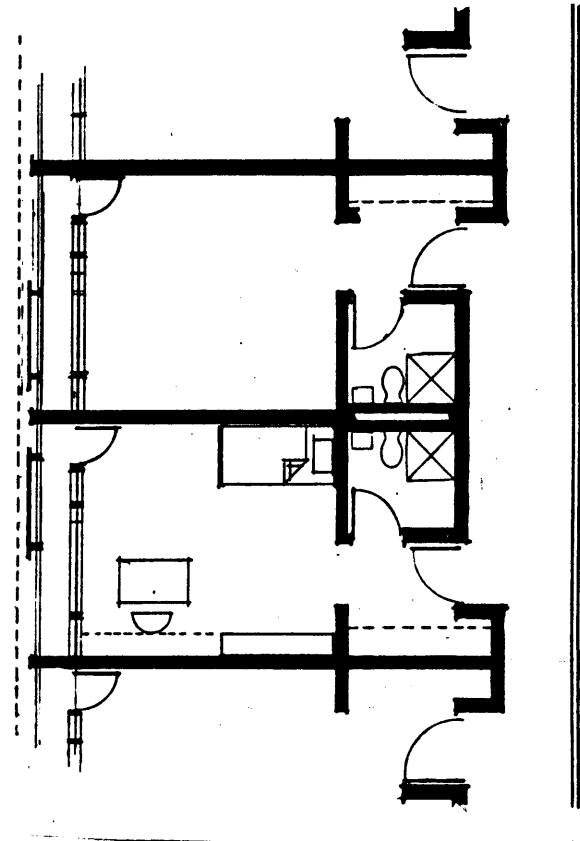
The collective functions of the place: the library, refectory, chapter house and novitiate occur off of the cloister. The kitchen is on the first floor serving the refectory through a spiral stair and service elevator. The cloister spaces are given ceiling heights of 15 feet. All open onto the cloister but the chapter house and refectory have special anteroom entries at the base of the circular stairs and adjacent to the wall that separates the cloister from the church. A recreation room moves outside the cylinder on the Paseo Aquidilla side and faces the houses of Villa Victoria.

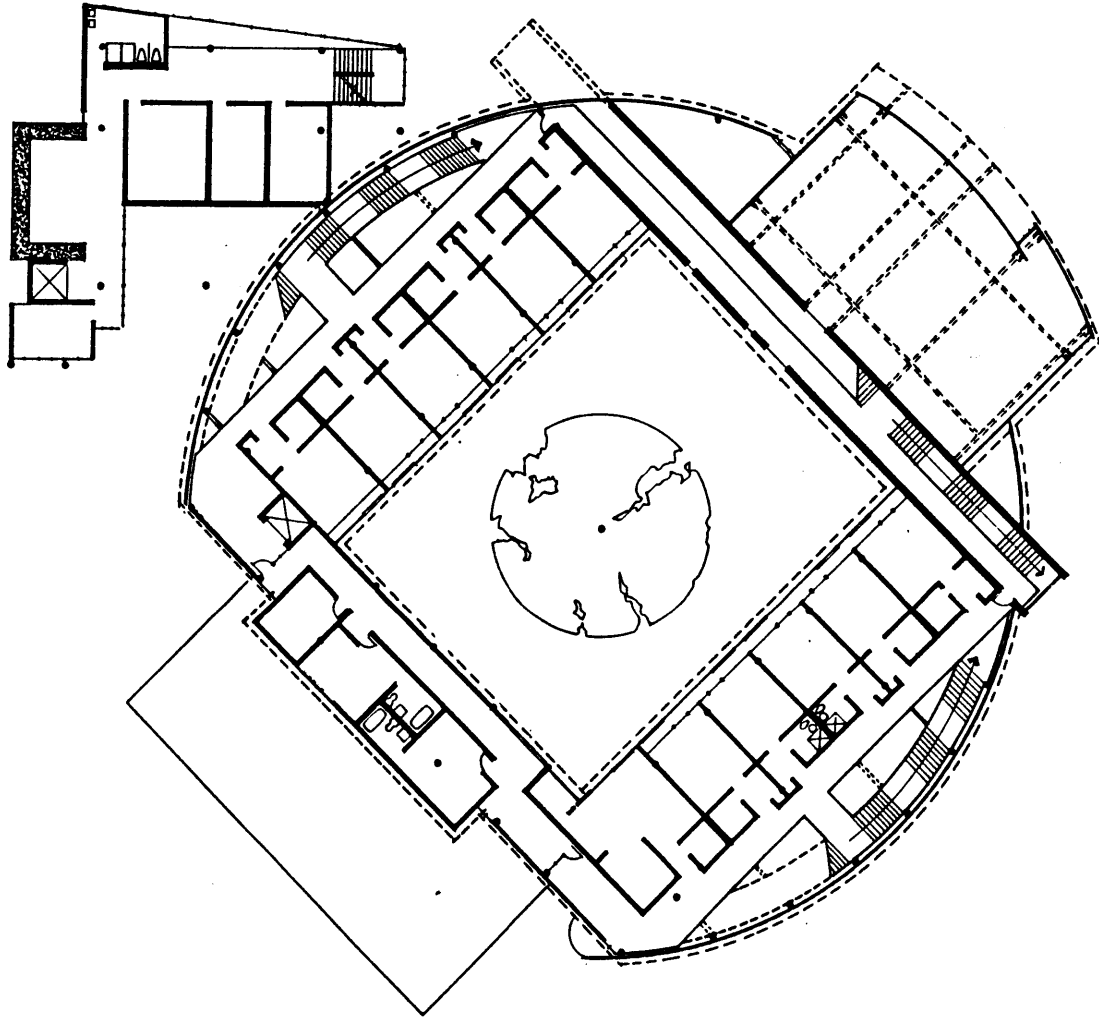


On the second and third levels there are 23 cells and the abbot's apartment. To approximate their own view, the cells and apartment face the cloister and the boughs of a large oak tree. This requires that the cells are entered from the cylinder side. The entry is defined by the closet jutting out into the corridor.

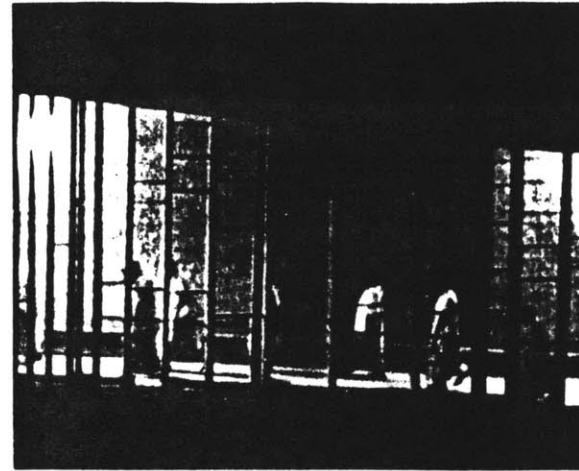
The unit interior is 13 feet wide and 21'-6" long with an additional 2' balcony. The bathroom helps define the entry into an almost square living space. A large screen, adjustable for light, provides privacy for one side of the room.

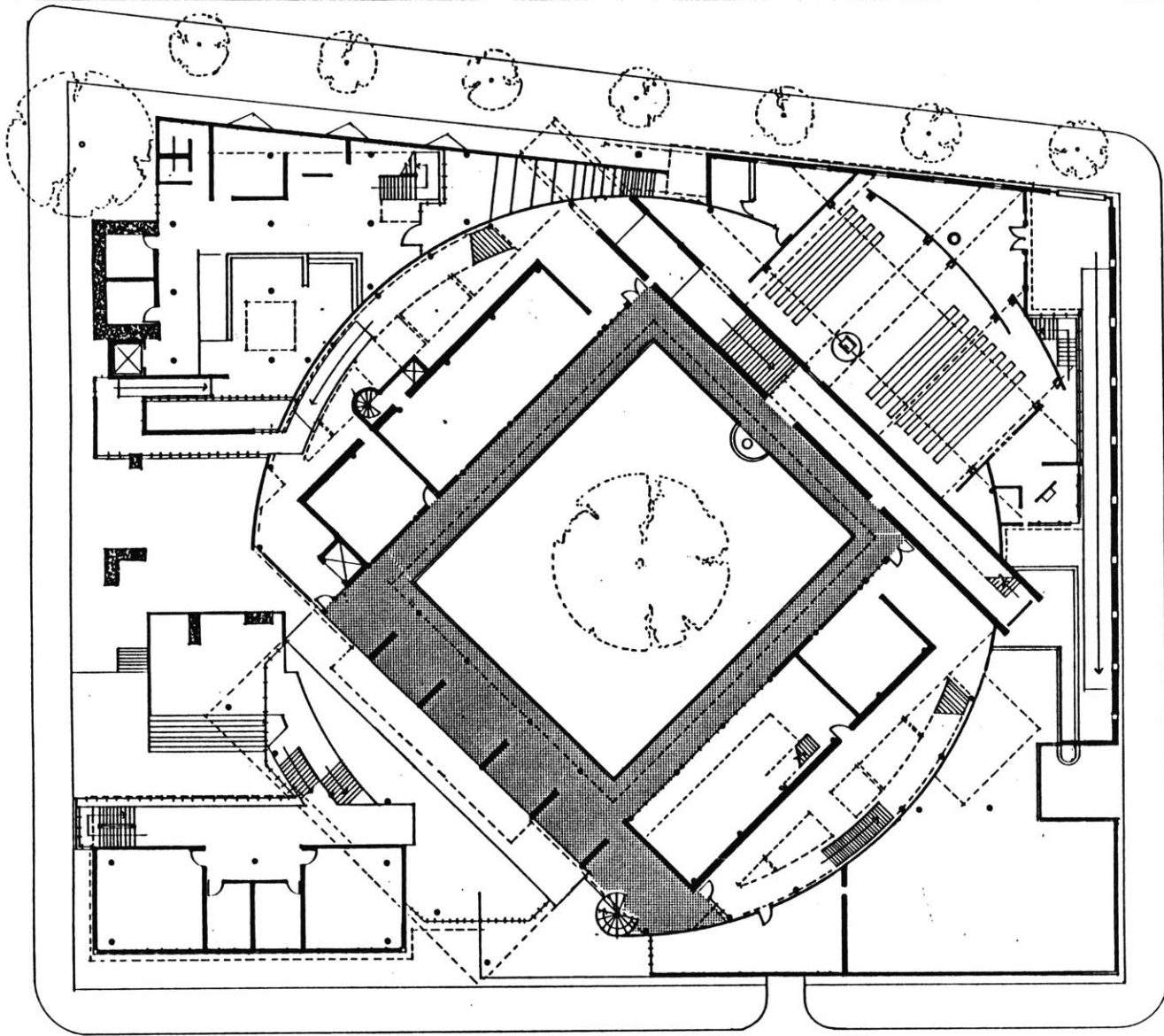
The infirmary is to the south of the cloister on the second floor. This allows the infirmary's two rooms and the nurses station to face the sun.





Walking is an essential aspect of contemplative life. Here the patterns of bodily movement are synchronized with the recitation of the prayer, the advancement of the rosary, the intonation of conversation and the rhythm of breathing. In a contained place like this the freedom and ability to move is essential not only to ones spiritual conditioning but also their sanity. Movement is given numerous possibilities in four distinct regimes. First there is the cloister walk itself. Entirely outdoors, this covered walk circumambulates in the traditional fashion around the central open space.

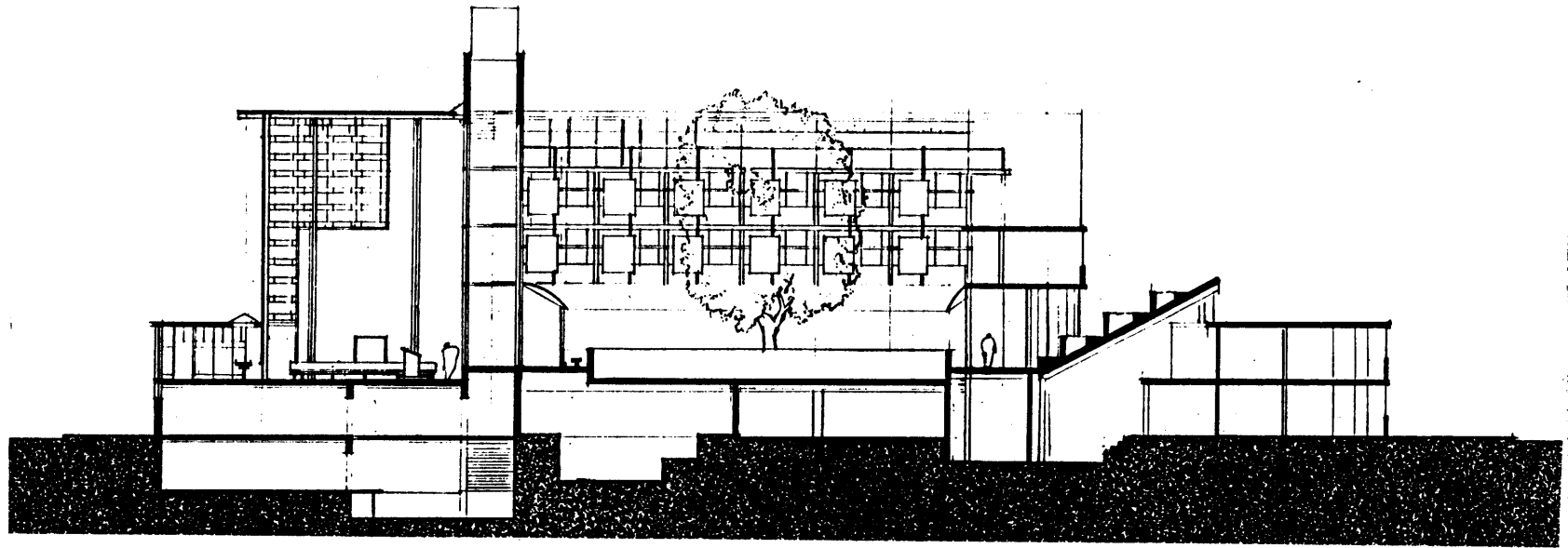




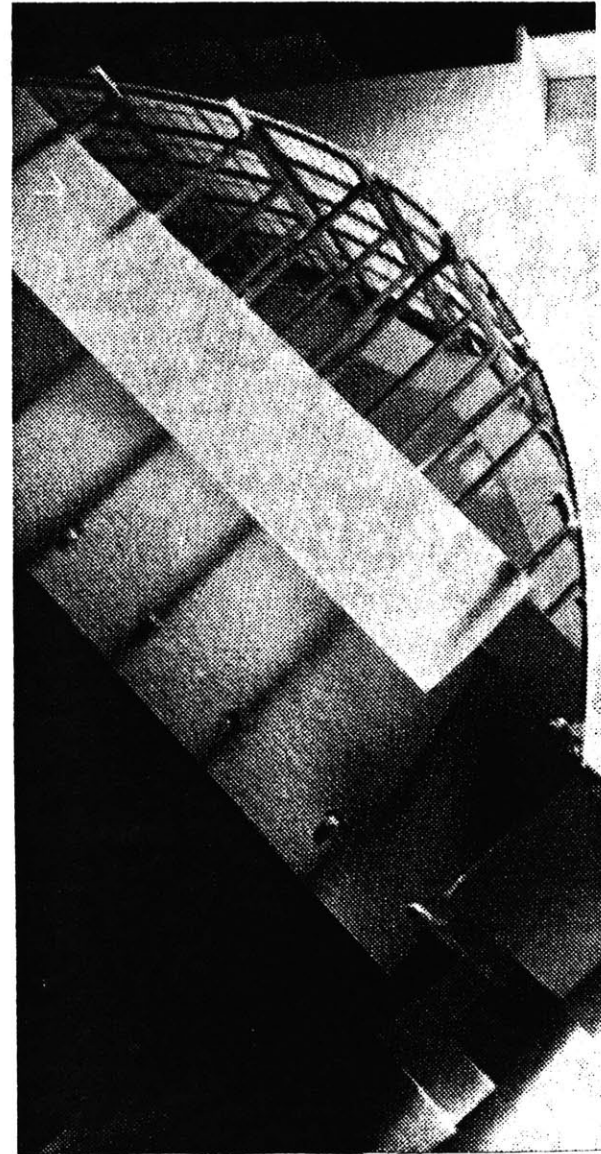
The space is formed by an elevated tray of earth which holds the tree. the top edge of the tray is at hip height and on the northern border there is a fountain.

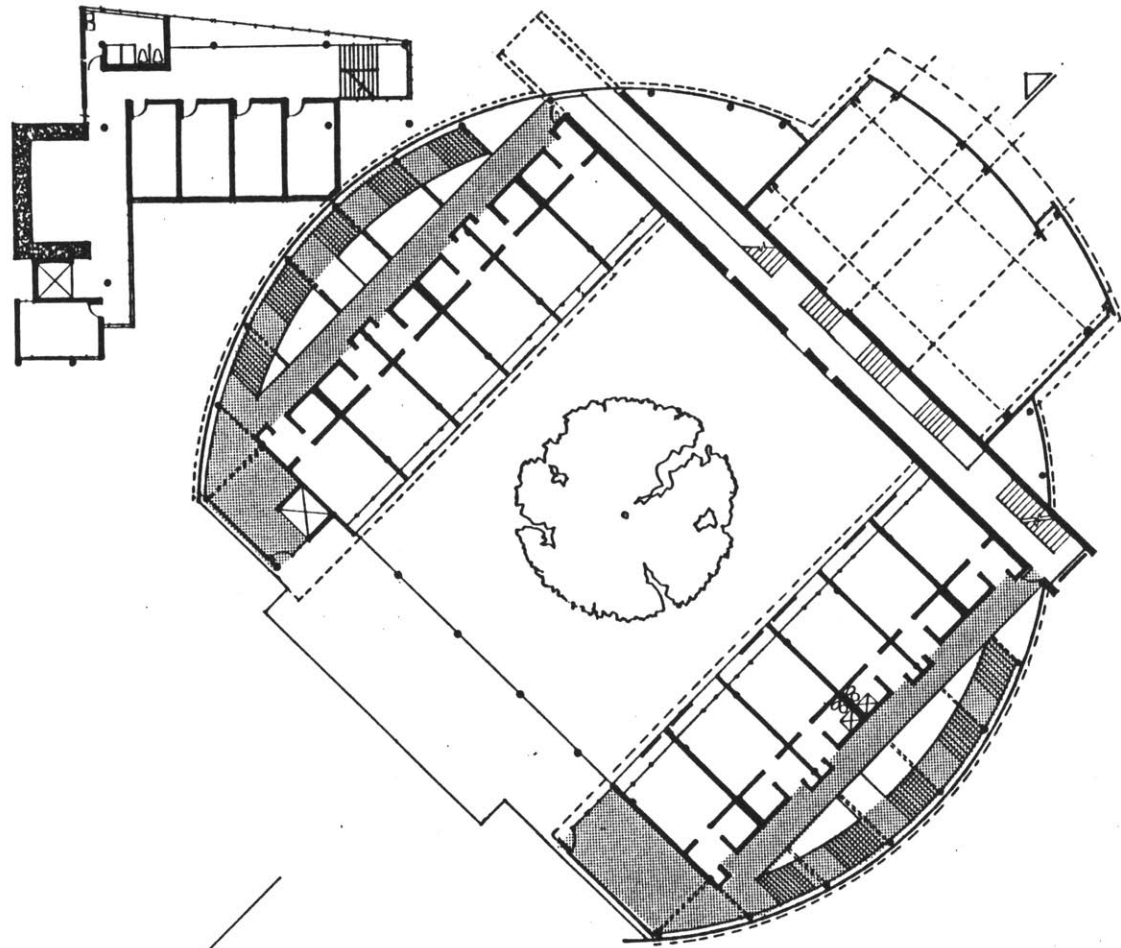
The cloister floor continues underneath the infirmary floor above. It slopes at twenty degrees and becomes the roof of the school public space below. Covered with grass this inclined plane aids in blending the view out of the cloister with that of the sky. The big tree offers a filter for sun and sound.





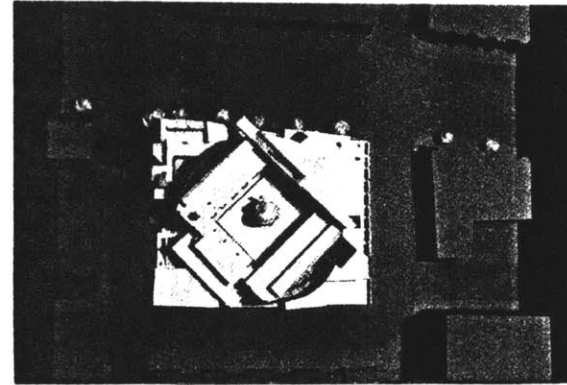
A second regime of movement is the stairs which move along the cylinder from the cells. This space is inside and has a large sky light above. It is protected and enclosed from the elements but it would not be heated. In contrast to the independent lightweight nature of the Kalwall system the stairs are heavy and made from the concrete of the floors and supporting structure. It is here that the nature of the circular enclosure is felt. Only the cylinder is controlled by the imaginary generating point at the center.

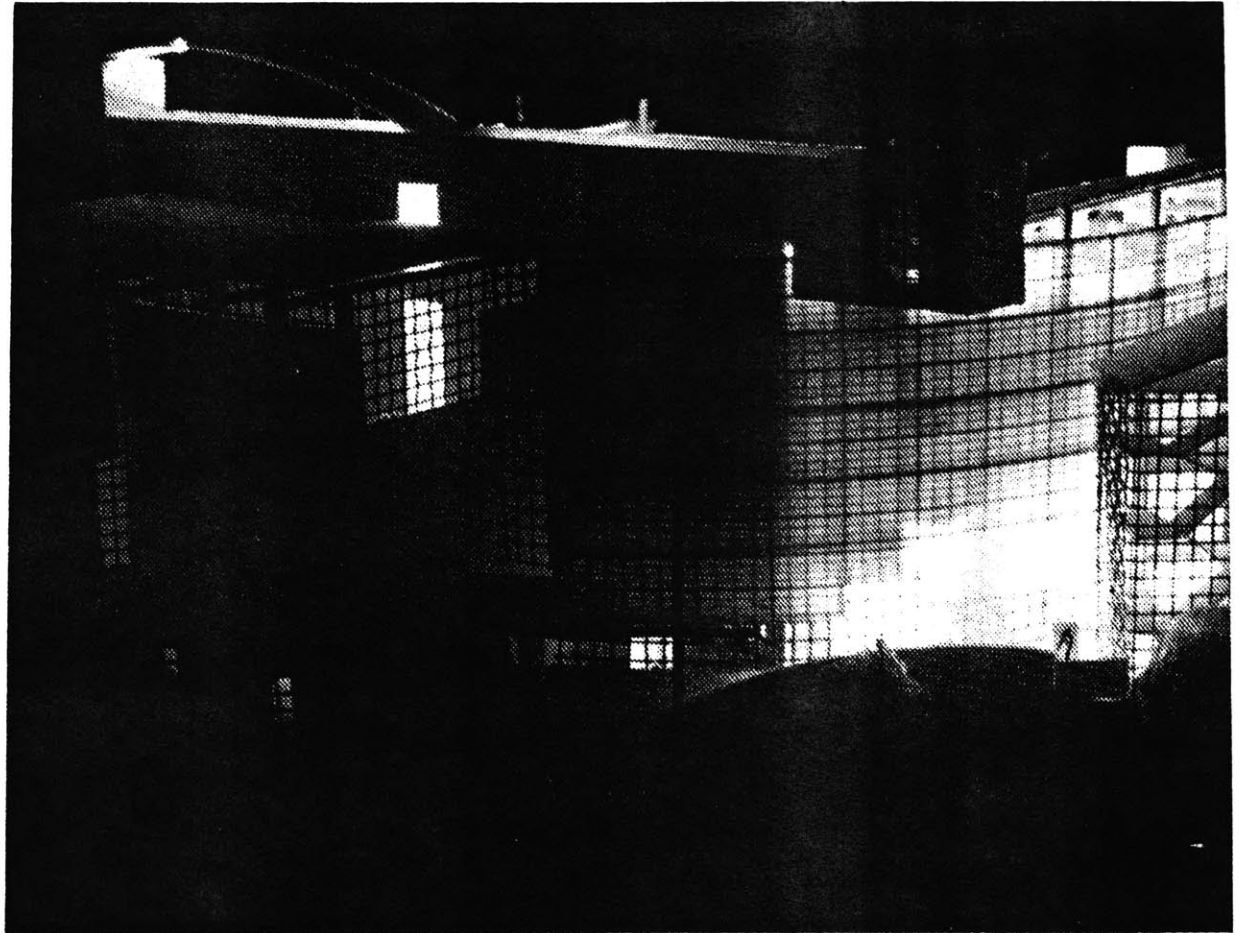




Neither the stairs nor the supporting structure enforce the radial nature of the Kalwall. These other elements are generated by the 45 degree site shift to the sun. Only the curving nature of the wall itself suggests the center. A distinction is thus made between the container and the contained.

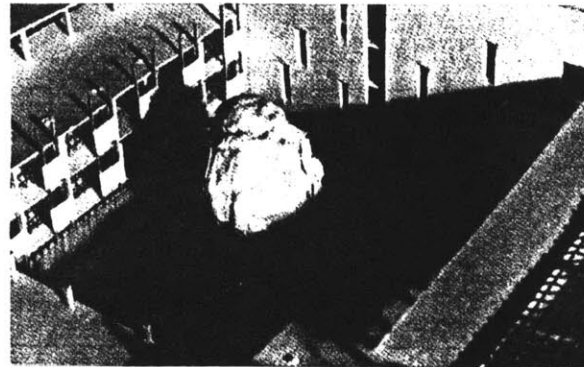
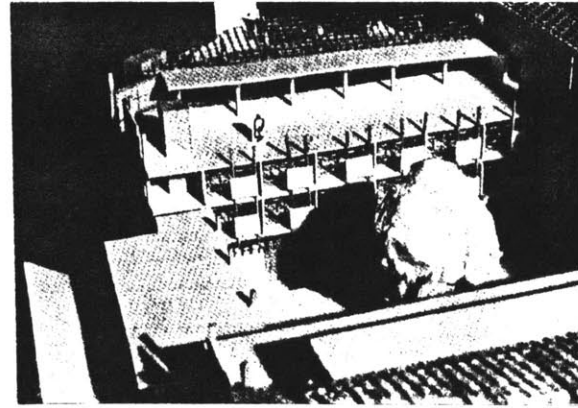
The movement from the individual worlds of the cells to the collective world of society is crucial. Here, it is important to make a subtle transition from the eremitic tendency of complete withdrawal that is partially provided by the cell to the cenobitic presence of the communal life on the cloister floor. Movement from the cell to the ground thus suggests the recognizable geometry and direction of the cell but also through the cylinder the physical presence of a center in the cloister which is marked in memory by the tree.

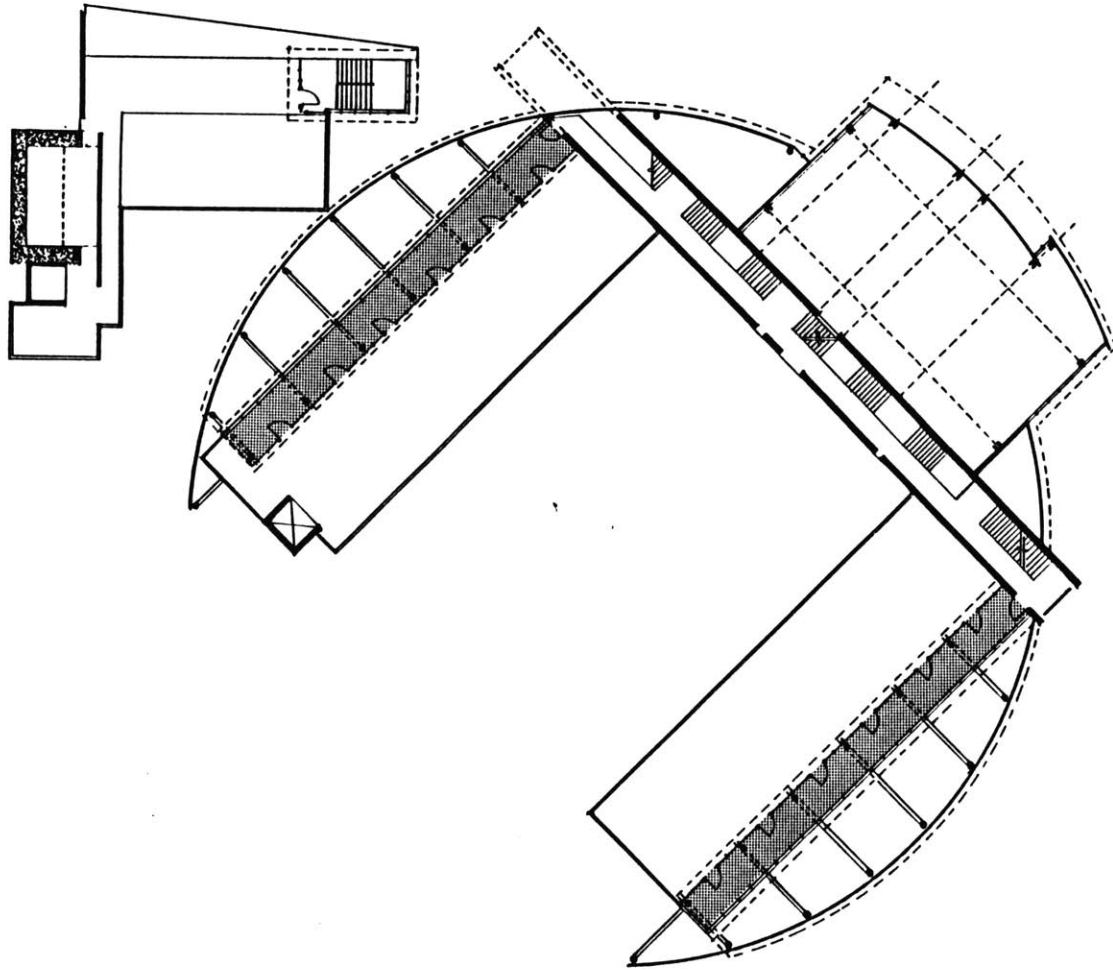




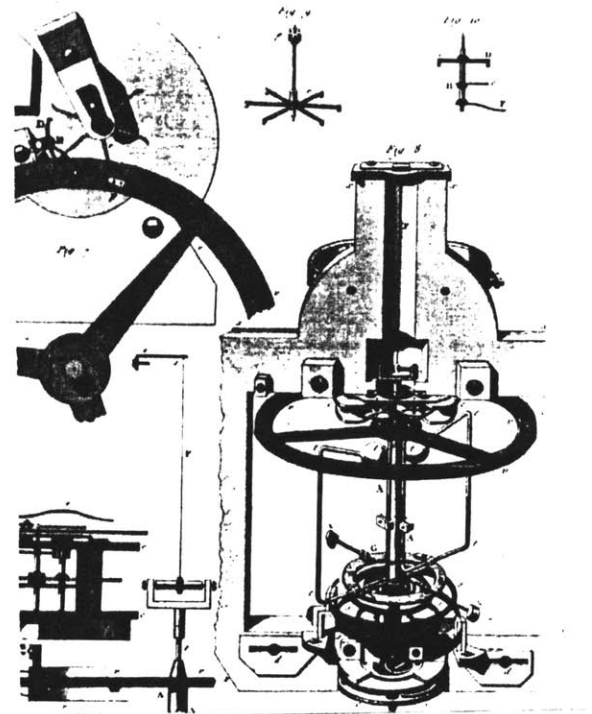
The wall hovers in a diffuse and even light. The muffling of external sounds. Concrete, fiberglass and wood: the alchemy of materials. Light draws you up, gravity pulls you down. Movement feels this container of the spirit and all its qualities of protection, definition and transformation.

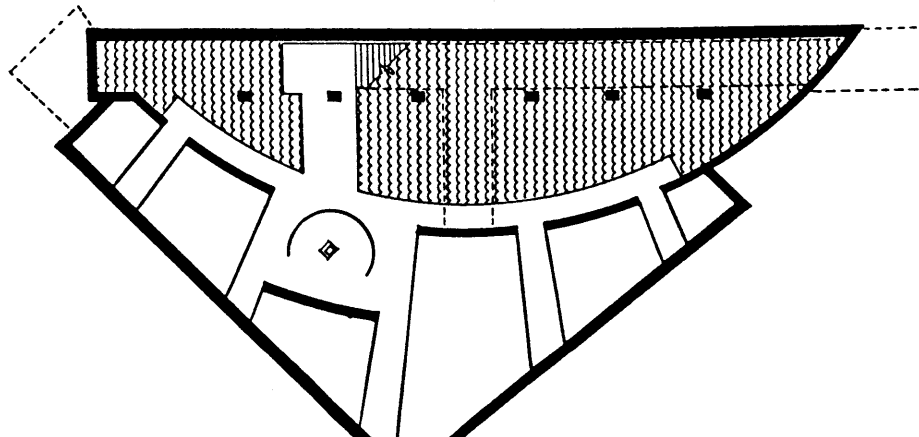
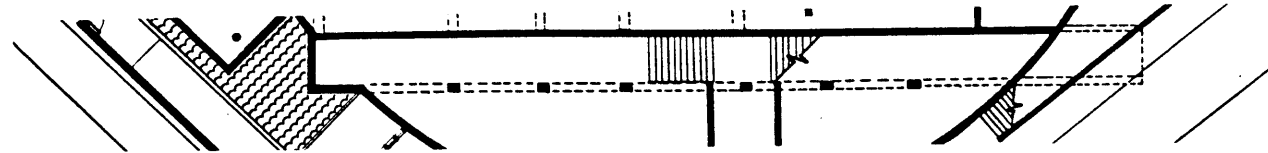
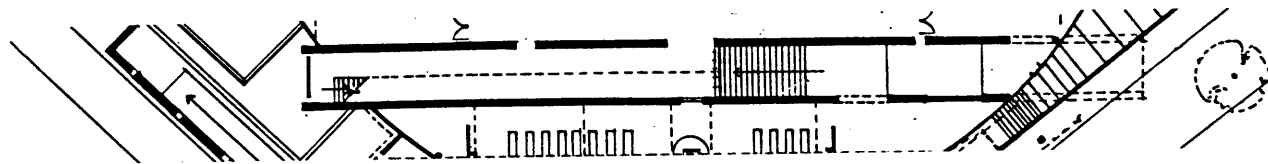
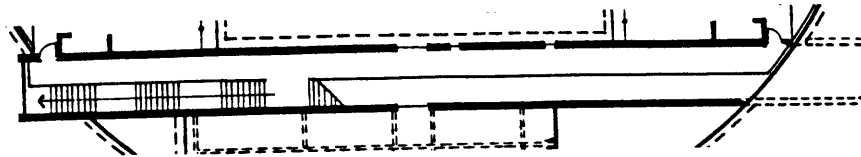
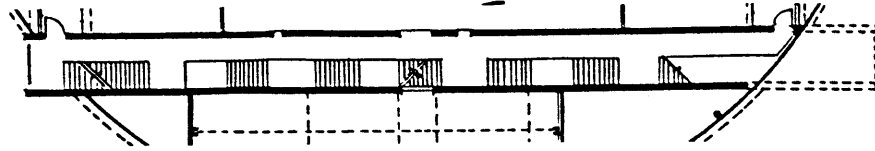
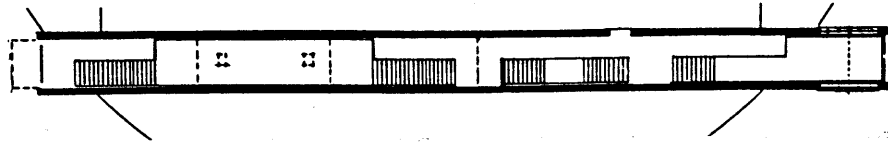
The third regime of movement is on the roofs of the cells where an enclosed arcade is available as are uninterrupted views of the city to the south.





The fourth movement regime connects all the other movement regimes together. This regime is given a distinct physical form as the paired concrete walls which cut diagonally across the site separating the church from the cloister. Although covered this space is not enclosed. It is open to the weather. At the upper floors the movement between cell blocks occurs here.

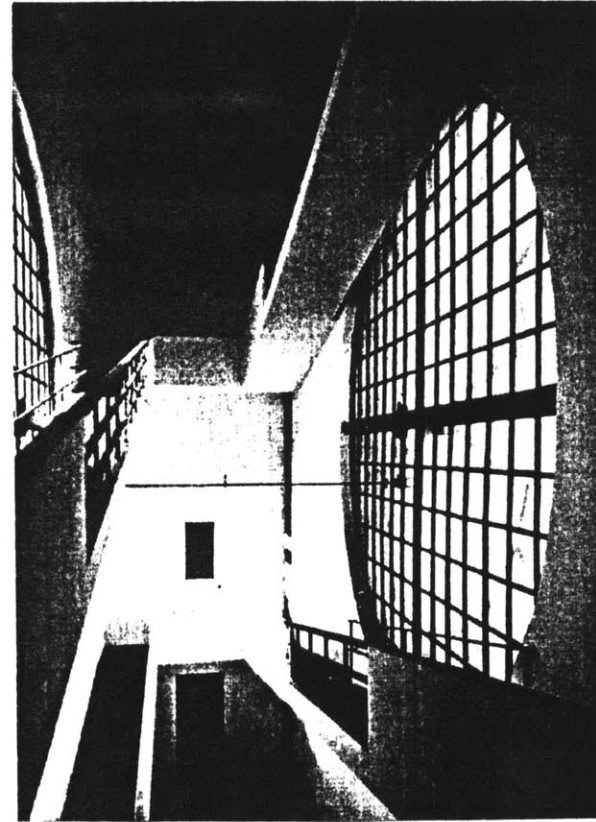




This space of concrete walls functions as a major threshold. It contains movement into the church, down to the crypt, horizontally between the cell blocks, and finally gives form to the transition from the cloister floor upward to the bell station and the analog clock. The clock juts out towards Tremont St. and over the entry into the hostel. Here, the transparent face of the clock is 12 feet high.

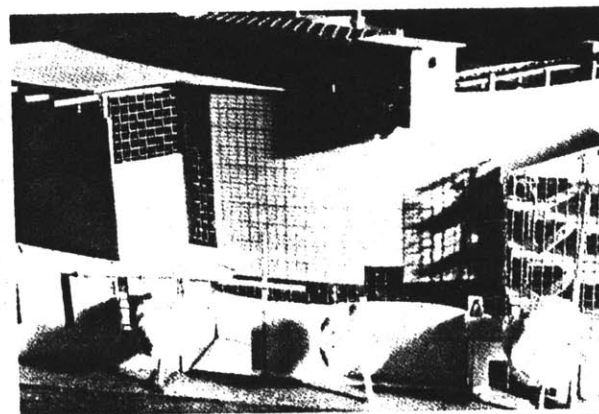
A platform rests inside this chamber and a small framed view at eye level is offered straight ahead along the diagonal axis of the threshold.

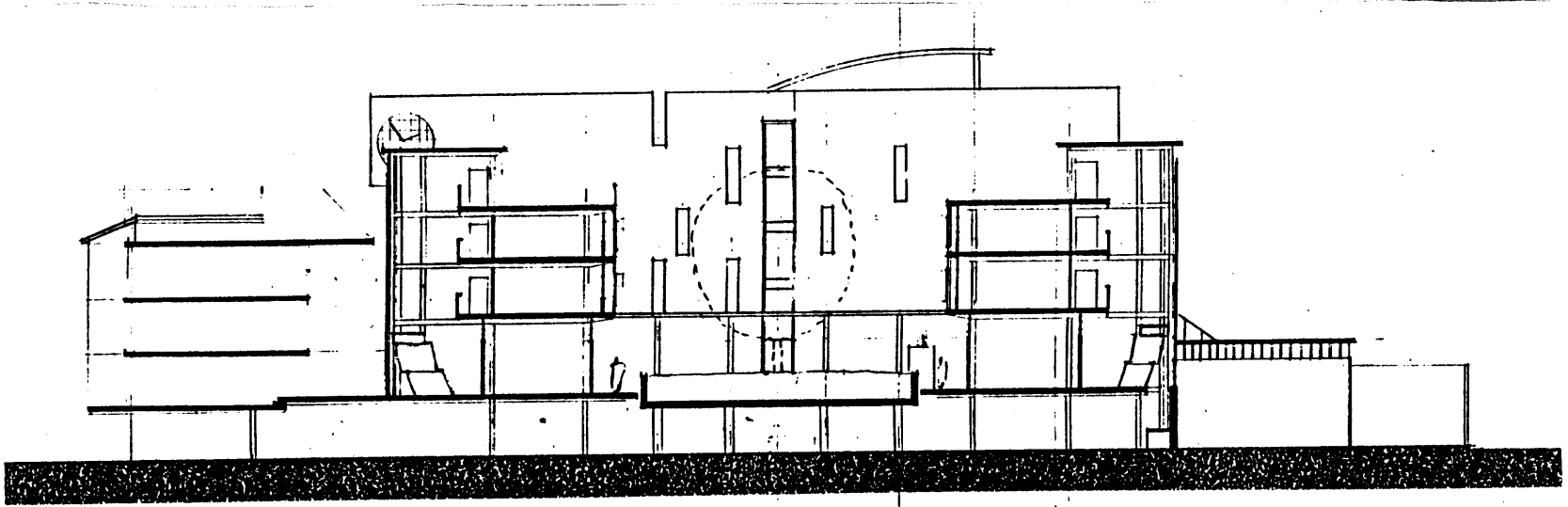
Through the timepiece the view is expanded north and south to the city. From here it is apparent that while the diagonal shift defies the city grid it parallels the direction of the Charles River. The monastery can be seen and known as part of a larger natural order.





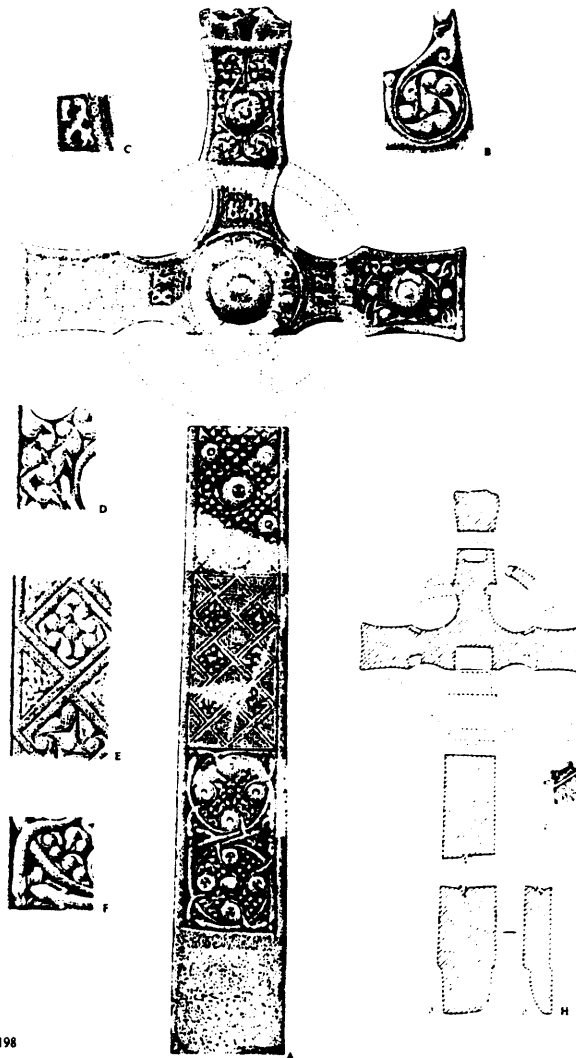
The passage into the church occurs within The threshold. Stepping out from the refectory anteroom into this space, a small window looks out through the Kalwall to Tremont Street presenting a brief exposure to the unknown. A ramp leads down from the cloister level at 12 feet to the church level at 10 feet. One steps out of the diagonal and back into the Kalwall cylinder. Here is the sacristy and the entry into the sanctuary.

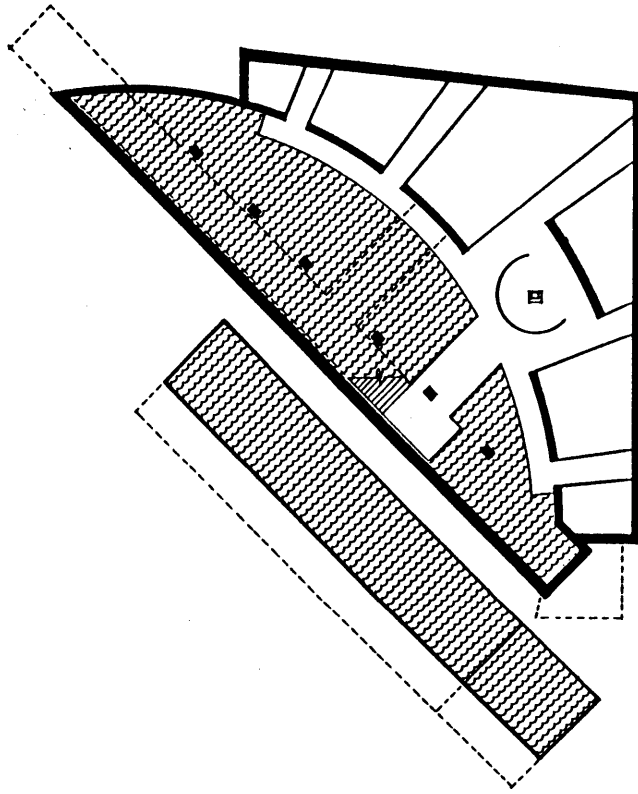




To the left was the church. Straight ahead, through the gate, and down the steps to below ground is the crypt. Here a bridge leads across a pool of water (the River Styx?). One side is circular and describes the radius of the cylinder above ground. The burial chambers lie outside this circle

It is thus apparent that the concrete space of this threshold is both a physical and metaphysical place. It embodies the physical passage between worlds, an act which happens in time. Time. The secular time of the clock and the view out the small window; the ritual time of the bells and the collective movement to the office; the passage to the crypt and the mortality of the flesh; the transition from one cell block to the other the experience of the weather and the cycle of the seasons.

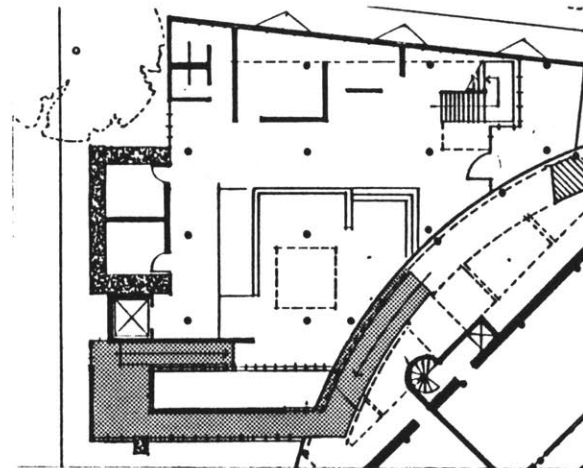
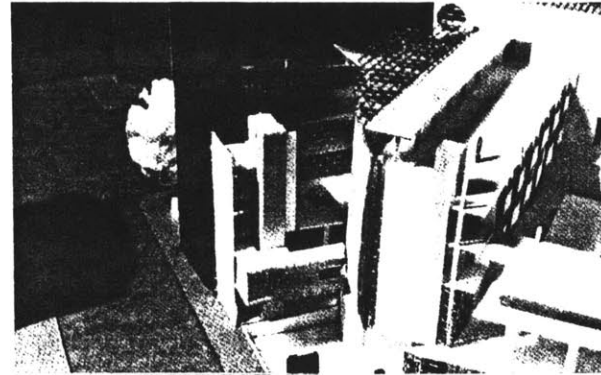




The thresholds to the other corner functions are less articulated formally. The passage to the hostel begins as a ramp which rises to 15 feet along the cylinder before leaving its protection.

One enters a catwalk with the hostel to the right and the playground below and to the left. A view to the hostel is limited to a full height narrow window while to the playground views are through a full height and length transparent screen. A 180 degree turn is made and a ramp returns to 12 feet at the waiting platform of the hostel.

The entry to the pool occurs across the cloister through a similar recognition of the cylinder in a curving stair that terminates in a half circular Katwall enclosure.



In both of these areas the form of the passage associates directly with the enclosure. The spatial sequence is thus more continuous from one place to the next and the experience of transition more gradual. This movement stands in contrast with the transition to and from the place of work. Which is designed to disrupt the continuity between spaces. More about that in the description of the school.

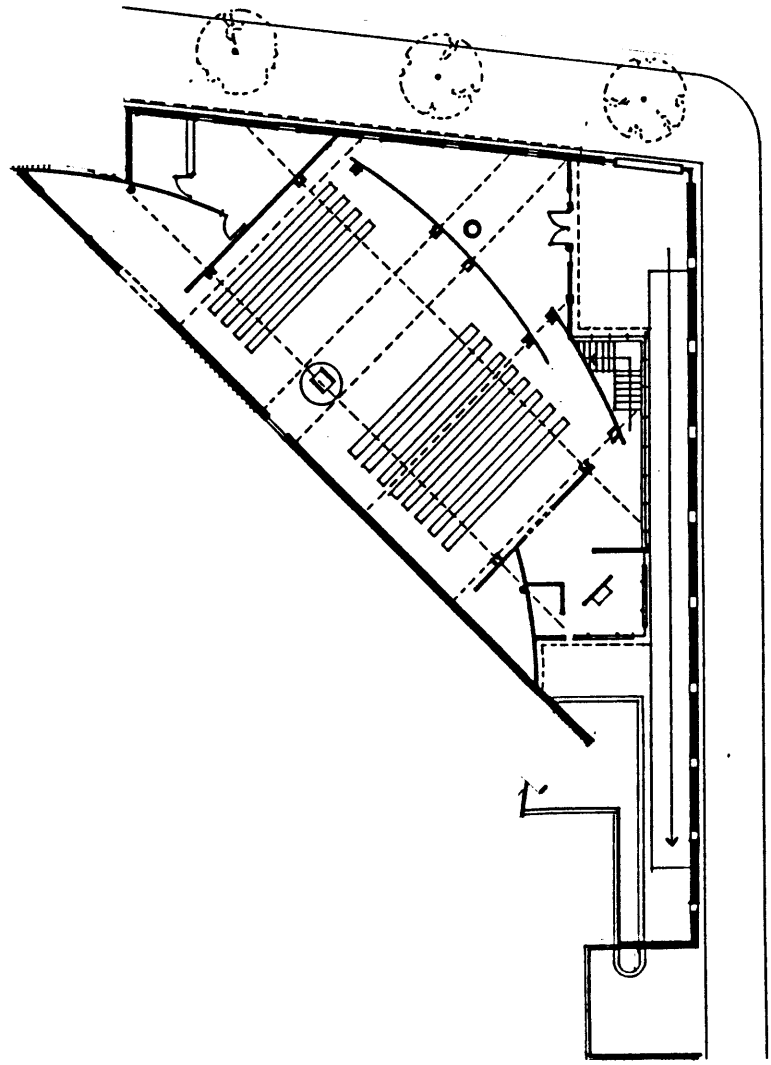
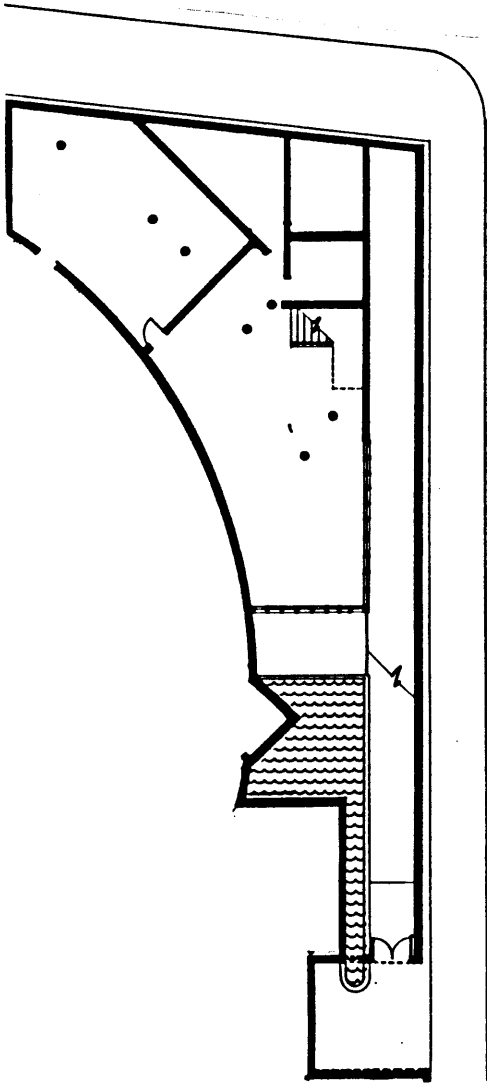
The Church



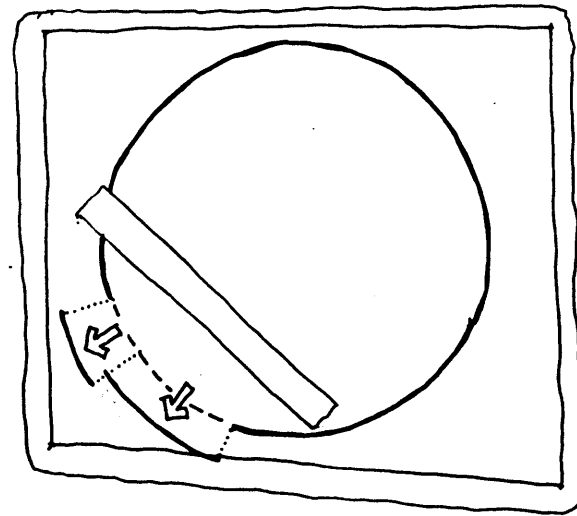
The entry to the church is off of Paseo Aquidillo and into a square space with a small fountain that disappears through a rectangular hole in the wall adjacent to a large, heavy, wooden door.

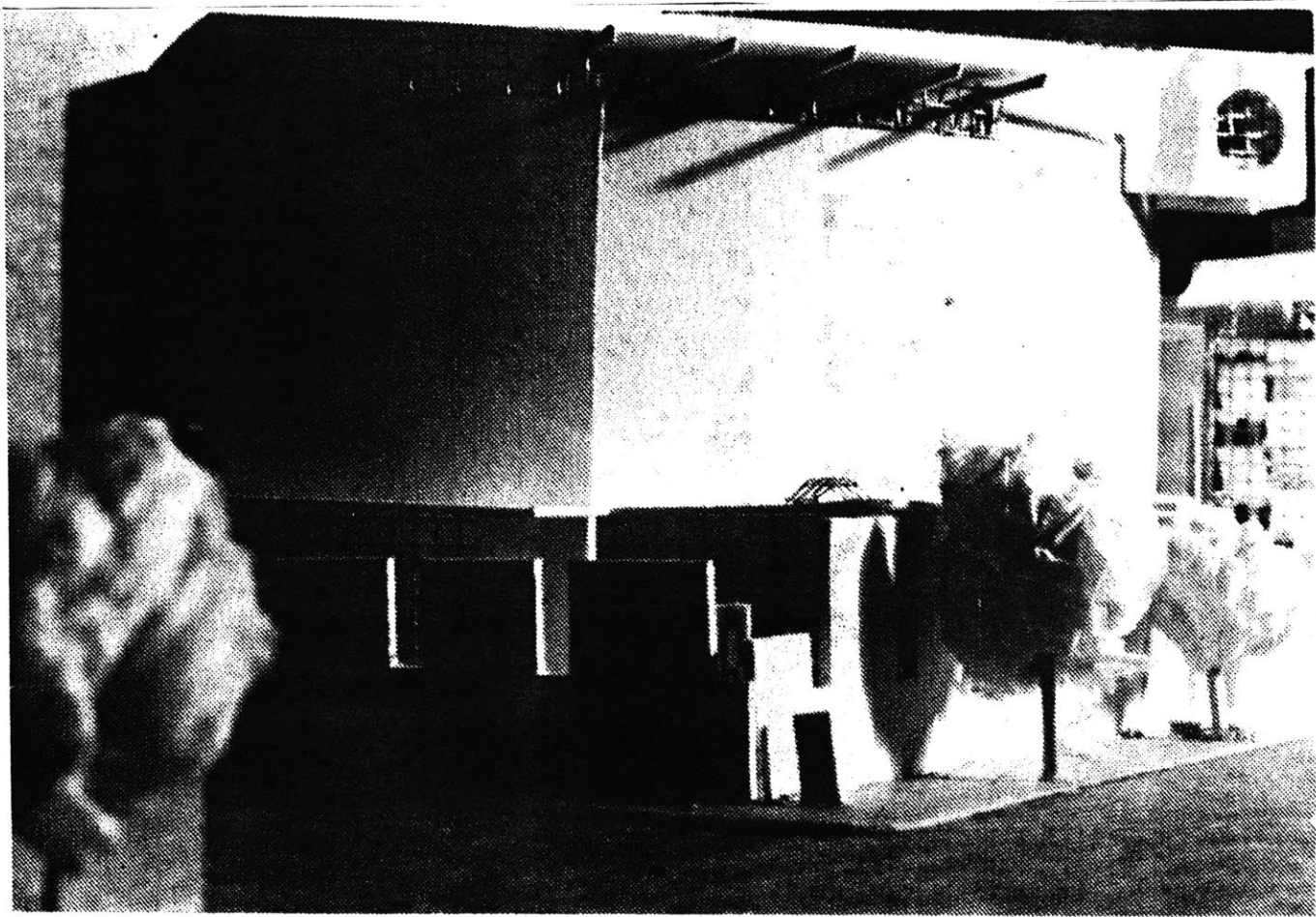
The door opens to a ramp which rises gently towards Tremont St. The fountain becomes a channel which leads to a larger pool the same size as the entry space off the street. The ramp rises past a small garden and glass screen adjacent to the pool and along a glass enclosed stair to a platform where a view down to Tremont St. is offered.





This is the entry forecourt to the narthex. The entry is all glass through which the opaque barrier of the sanctuary looms. Aligned with the doors is the font and behind the font is the curving wall of the sanctuary which is raised three feet off of the floor. The supporting steel structure is seen only in this gap. This curve is a displacement of the monasteries cylindrical enclosure. It is displaced again to create entry into the sanctuary.

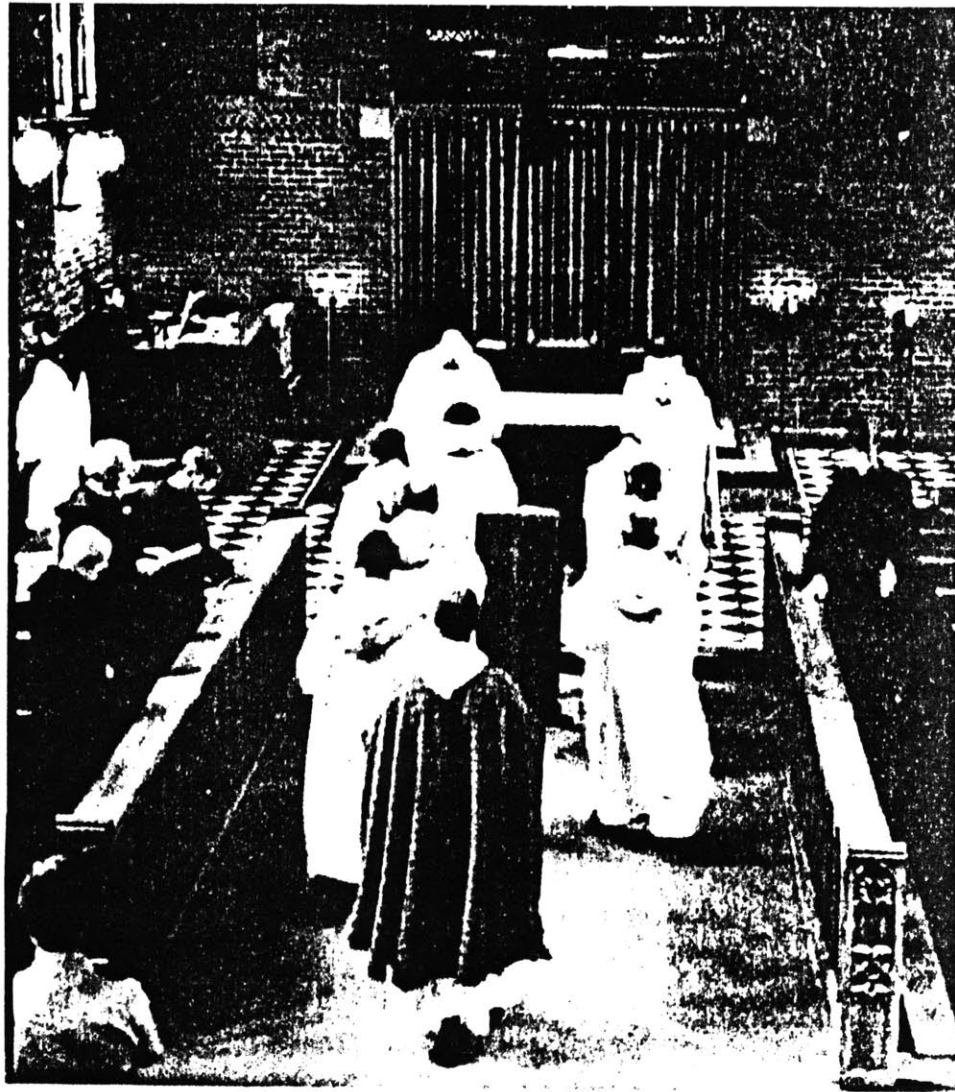




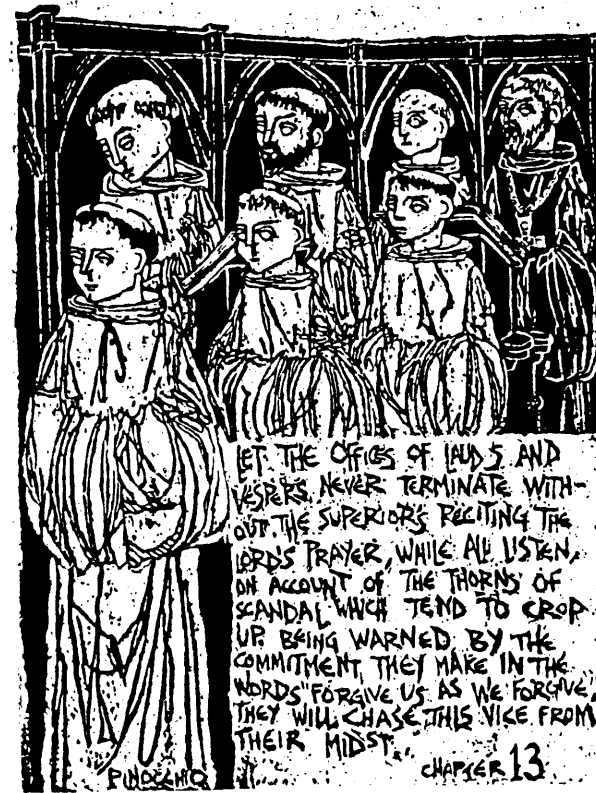
Elsewhere it is hidden on both sides by a cladding of 8 by 4 sheets of finished plywood. Within the sanctuary the ceiling rises to 50 feet. Plain light streams in from the east and the west and colored light filters through the stained glass inset into the concrete wall to the south. This wall, the same one that holds the clock, anchors the exposed steel beams of the roof. There is room in this space for about 120 celebrants to sit comfortably. The space is full of light and the walls are so light that they do not touch the ground. They seem inflated with an ethereal breath. This contrasts to the huge concrete wall which is so heavy and yet it too is penetrated by a wonderful colored light.

This is perhaps a space where the known and the unknown can merge in a transcendental grasp of the One, the Good, the Beautiful and the True.



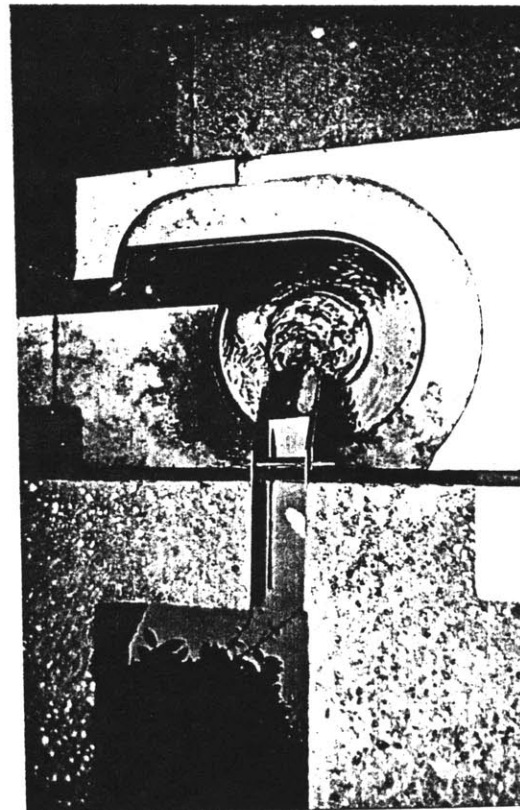


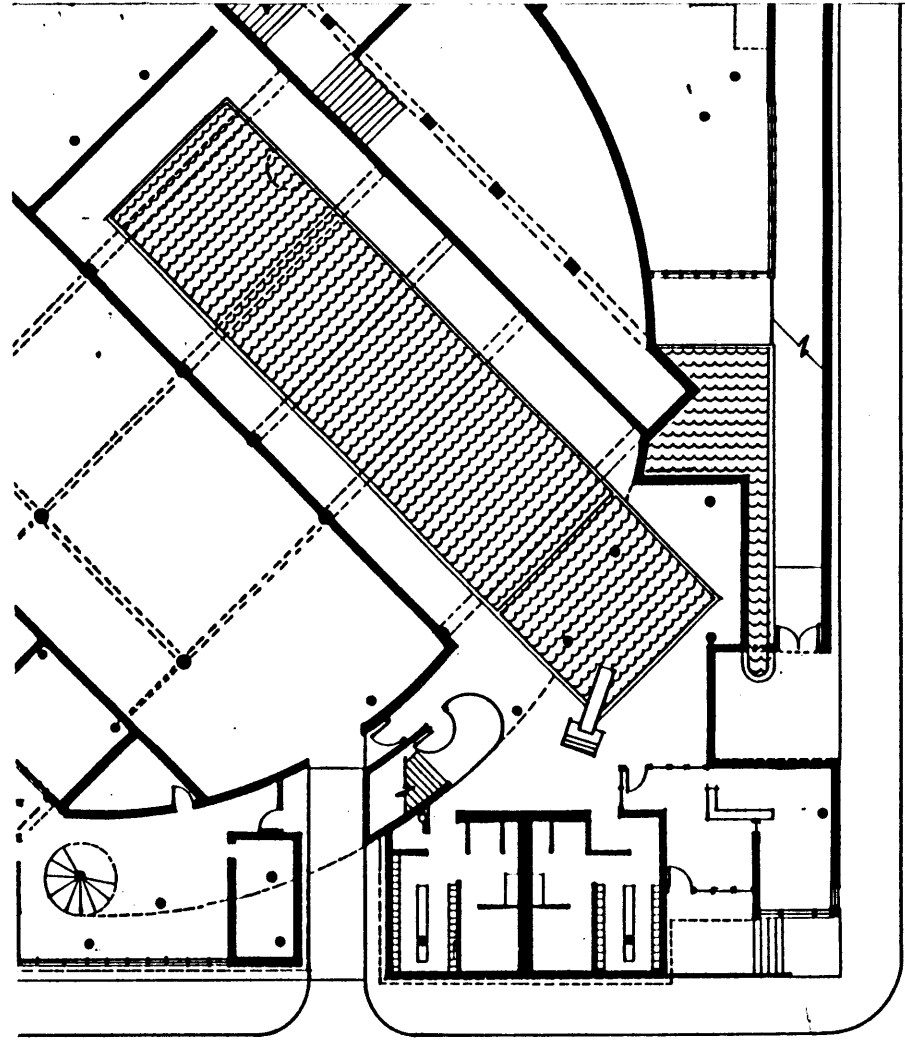
The Pool



In the other corner of the site is the swimming pool. This may seem like a strange idea, but there is a precedent. The Silesians of Don Bosco Technical High School have one. The traditional means of monastic exercise are no longer available. There are no forest or fields to work in this urban context. Without substantive and vigorous care of the mind, body and the spirit, the spirit itself can wither or become isolated. Furthermore, swimming is an excellent meditative experience.

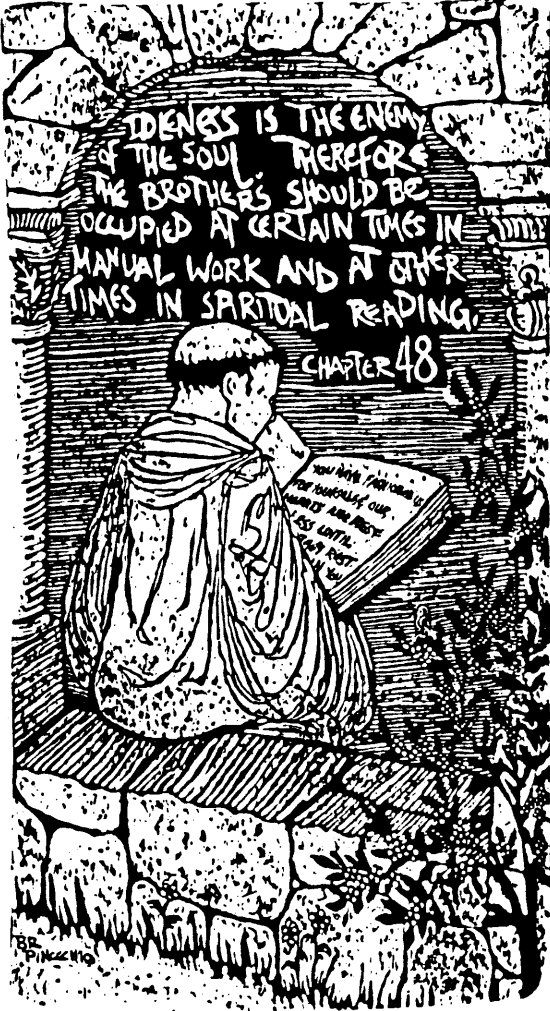
The monastery must reach out to the city even if it can not completely let it in. Like the other corner functions the pool works as such a device. This facility can be scheduled for public use so that it does not conflict with monastic needs.



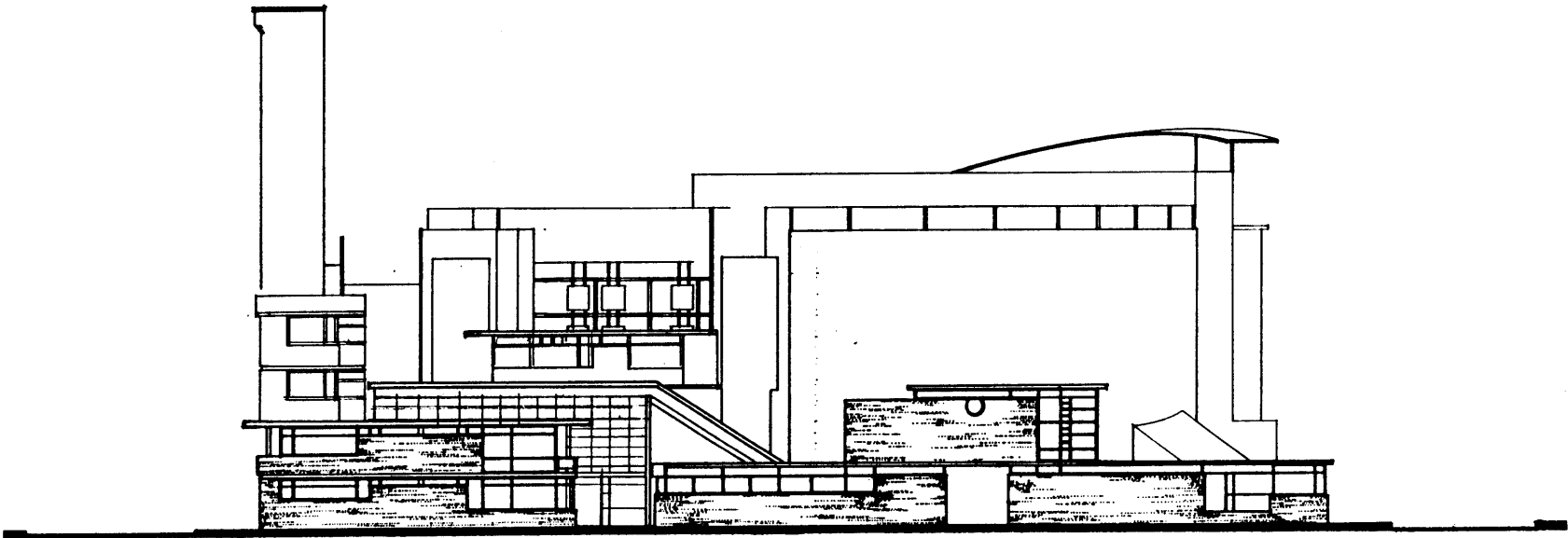


Entry to this space occurs off of a small reception space into the light of a large atrium that allows for the extra height of the diving board. The ceiling is lower underneath the cloister and it is dark and relatively unknown. One swims towards this dark and back again. Back and forth the diminishing and increasing intensity of light and the expansion of space records the progress of the lap. Illumination is a well understood metaphor for knowledge. Here, the known and the unknown are encountered once again.





Labore est ore-to work is to pray

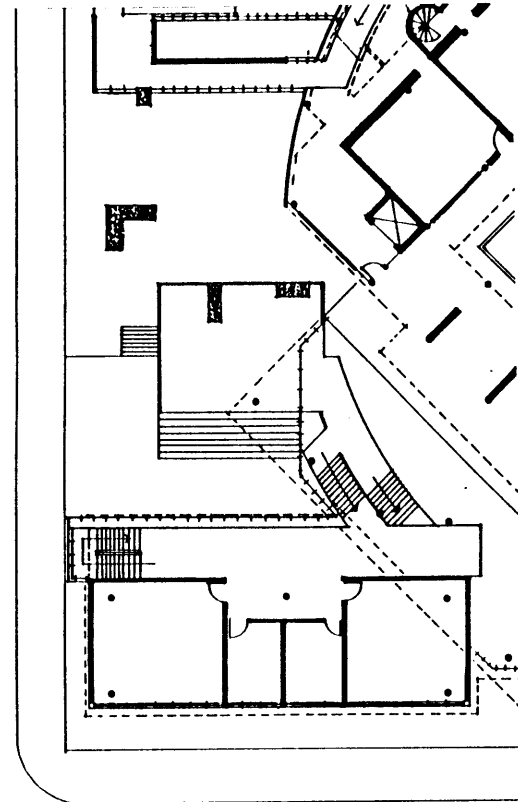
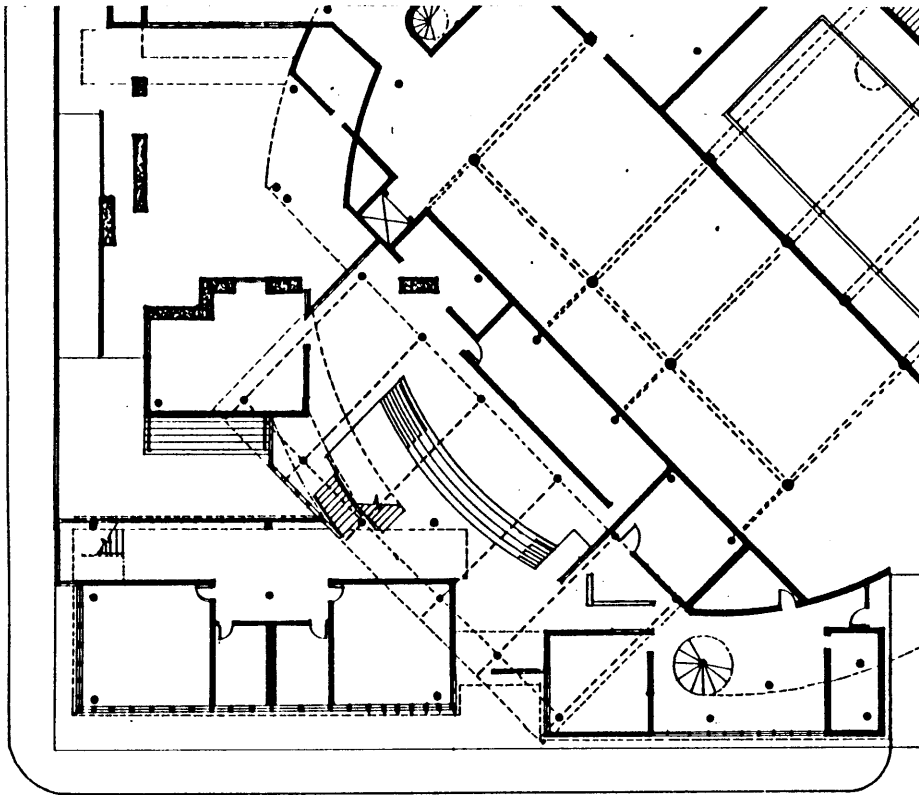


In Monastic life work is essential and prescribed by the rule. For the purposes of this design, work is given form in a school/day care center for children between from kindergarten to third grade.

Education is a common role for the Benedictine. In the primary school play is the primary mode of learning. The school provides an effective threshold to the monastery and to the neighborhood. The neighborhood educational needs are addressed and the contemplative religious world meets the secular world through the active medium of play.

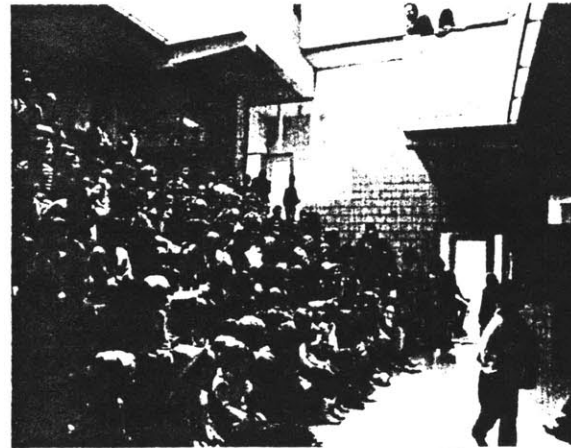
The school is decentered, shifted away from the radial control of the monastery enclosure and taking the form of the larger street grid. The playground is sunk five feet below street level: to the passerby, the sunken play space is seen as the foreground to the elevated ritual space of the cloister.





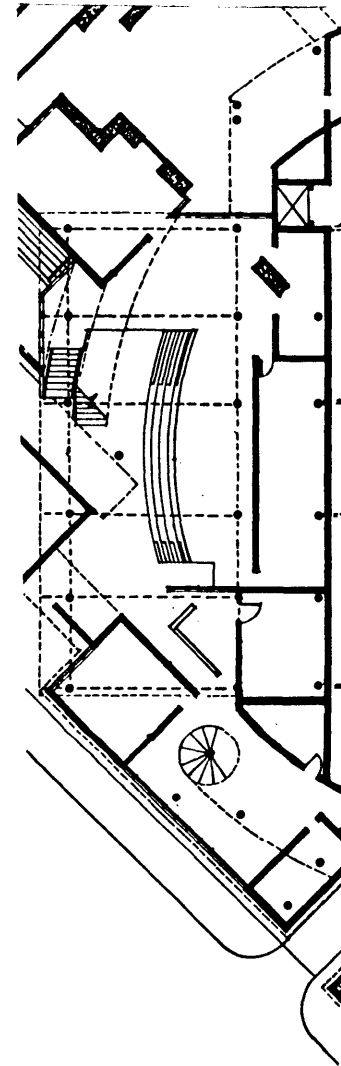
The ruin of the old church structurally supports and provides closure for the combined library and art space and defines the boundary between the learning of this interior "knowledge space" and the exterior "experience space". Collective gathering recognizes the monastic center through the form of the amphitheater and in the circular movement between floors.

The school functions as a threshold between the distinctly different worlds of the monastery and the city. The intersection of one distinct world with another becomes, among other things, a problem of language and the filtering and interpretation of information. The language of play and the universally disarming form of childhood innocence would seem to be excellent, although cacophonous filter.



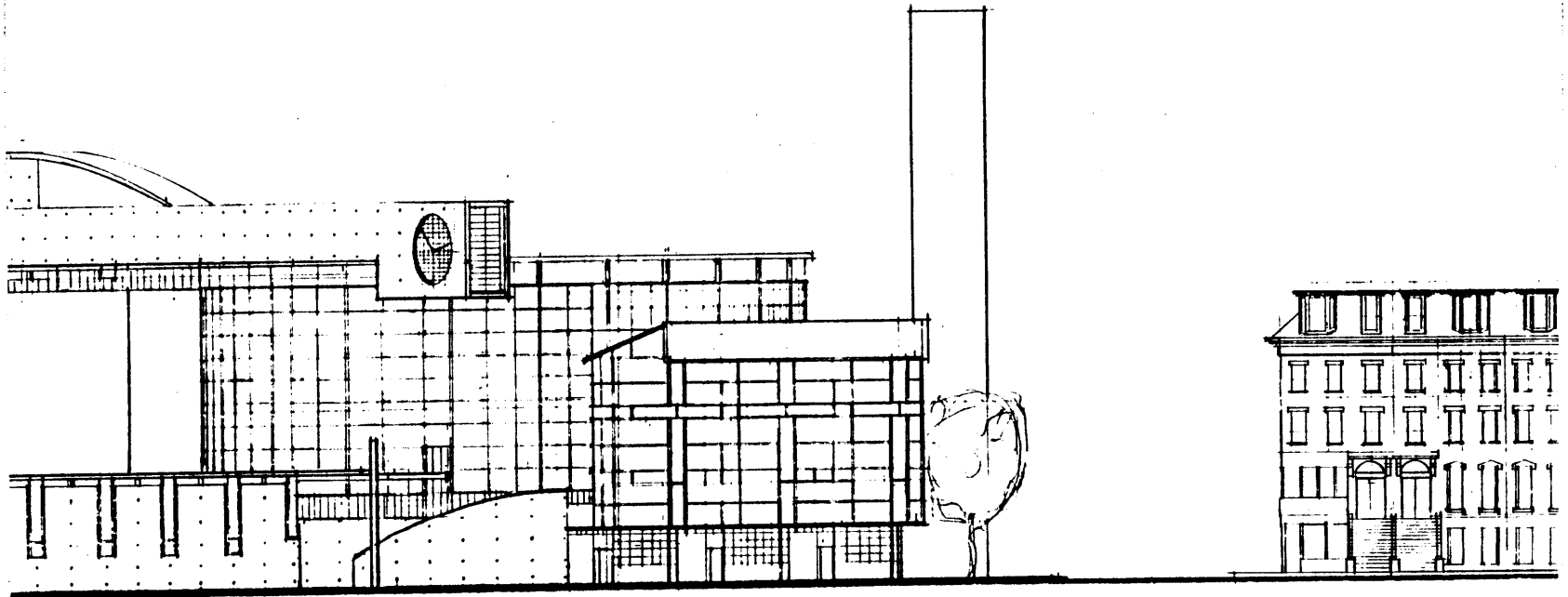
Connection of the school to the Monastery is provided through two means, an elevator to the garage and an outdoor circular stair from the cloister level. Both routes incisively separate of departure from arrival. The stair in its spiraling form has no relationship to any space other than itself. It disassociates the before and after elements of a spatial sequence from each other.

As a contrast the circular stair leading from the cells to the cloister is associative with the cylindrical enclosure and thus feels the community within the wall. The stairs of the Threshold are also associative in that the entire length of this concrete slot is generated and understood in the process of the climb.



Three building masses front on Tremont Street. On the eastern corner the hostel is transparent and matches the street geometry. A tall brick tower, the remains of a church?, is set back off the corner. Three shops are at the ground floor. The steel and glass curtain wall elevation above strangely evokes associations with a cross.

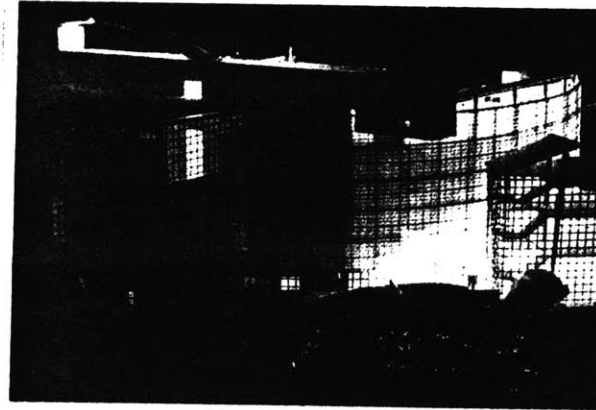


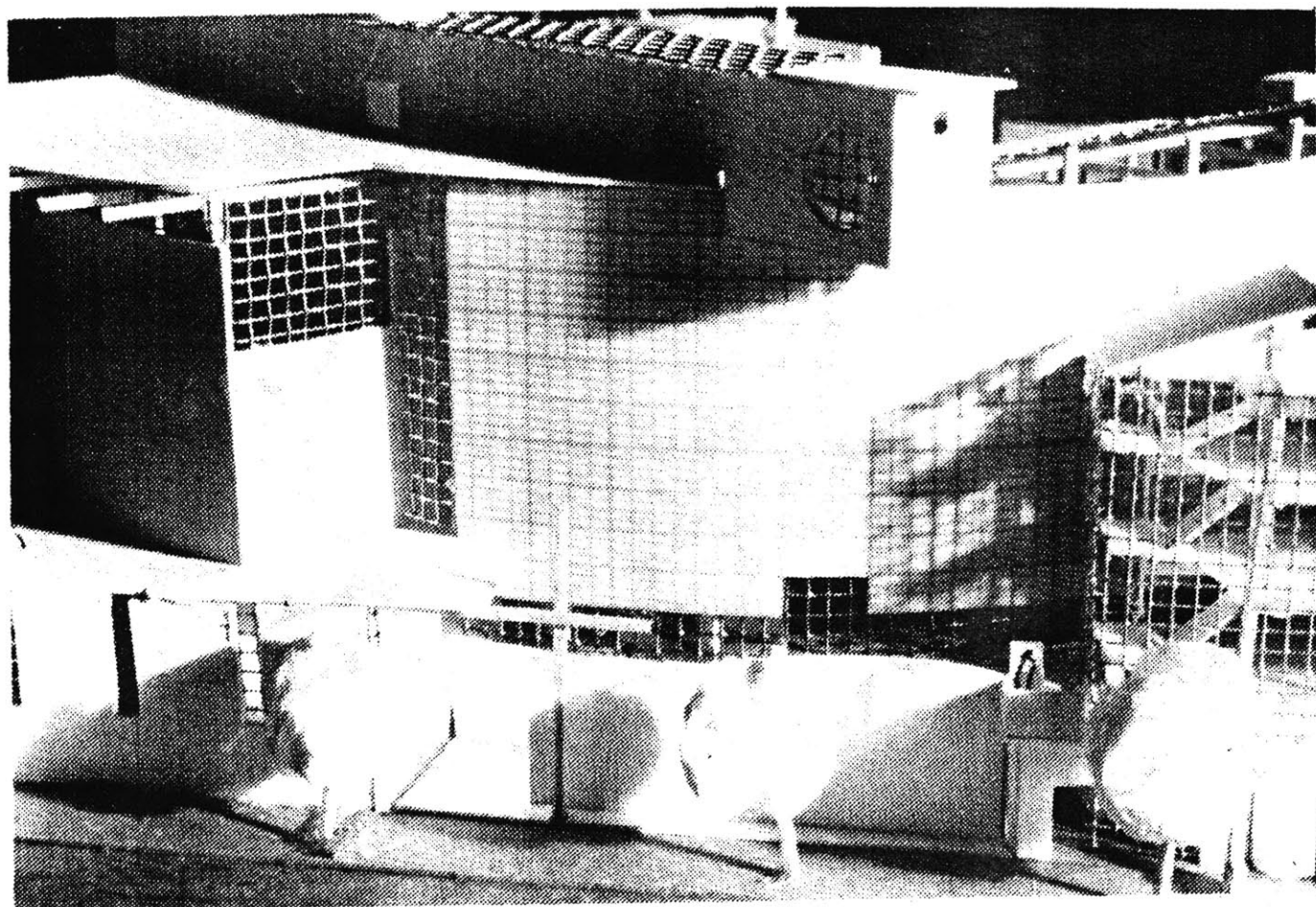


The Hostel

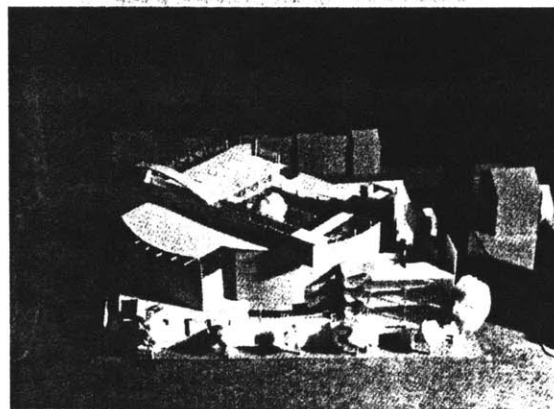


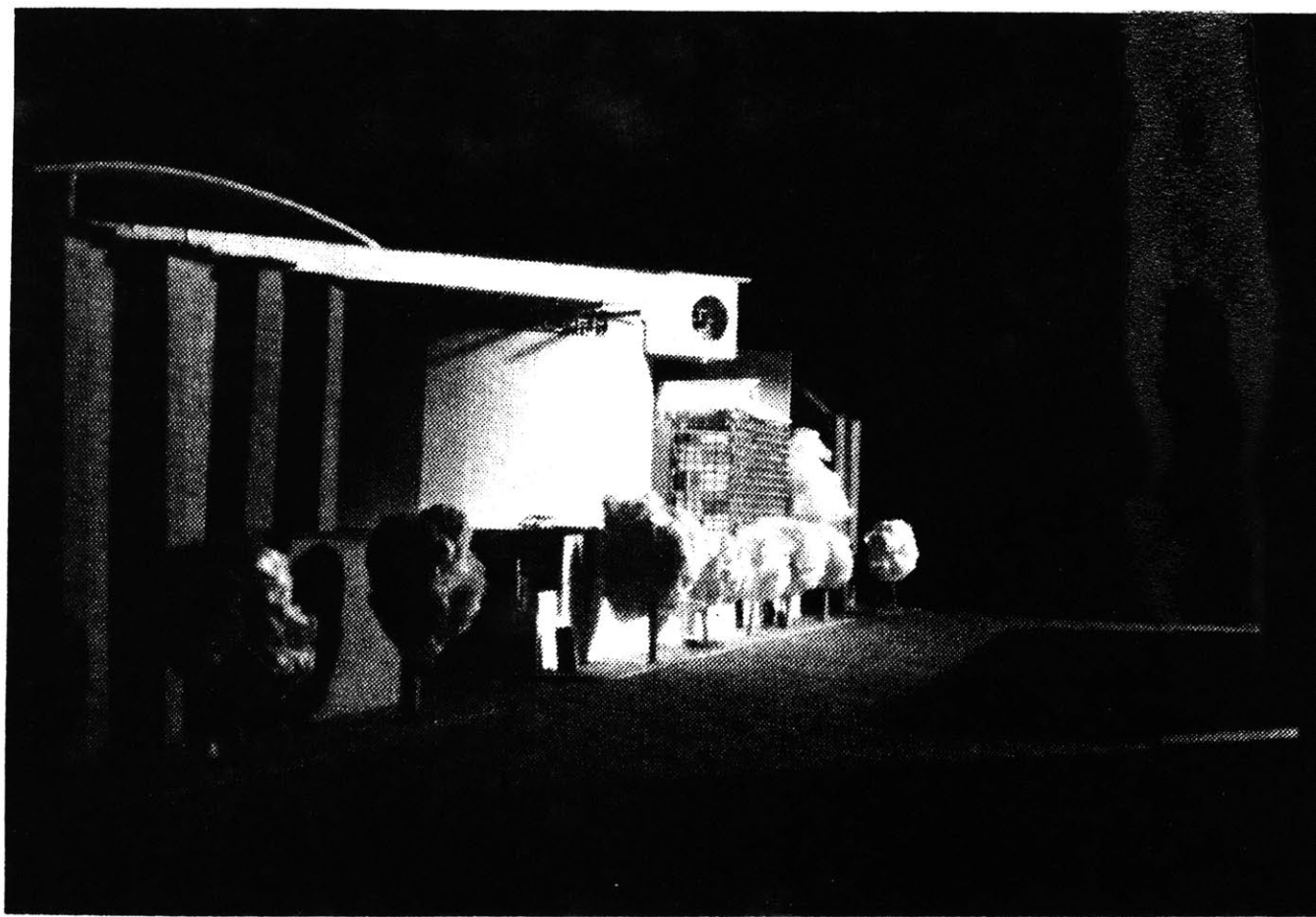
At the center of the block is an additional building mass. This is apparently cylindrical and made from some material that is milky white in color and striated with evenly spaced black lines. It seems to have light inside it. It is supported by a one story high concrete wall of the same cylinder. Between this concrete wall and the milky wall above is a thin band of transparent glass through which one can barely detect movement. Above, probably a story higher than the roofs of the other buildings on the street, a horizontal form projects beyond the top of the milky cylinder and hovers over the sidewalk. It appears to be made of concrete. Inset into its surface is a large analog clock with a transparent face. This whole thing seems to move away from the street at a diagonal.



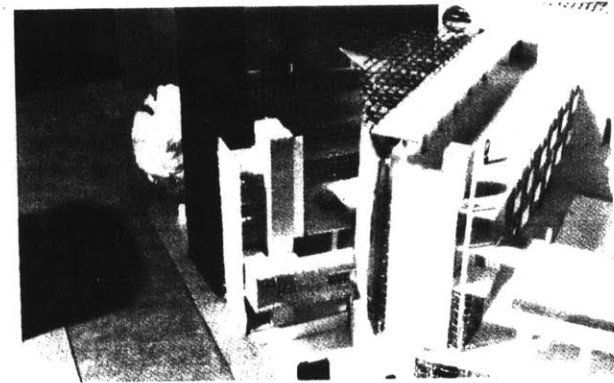


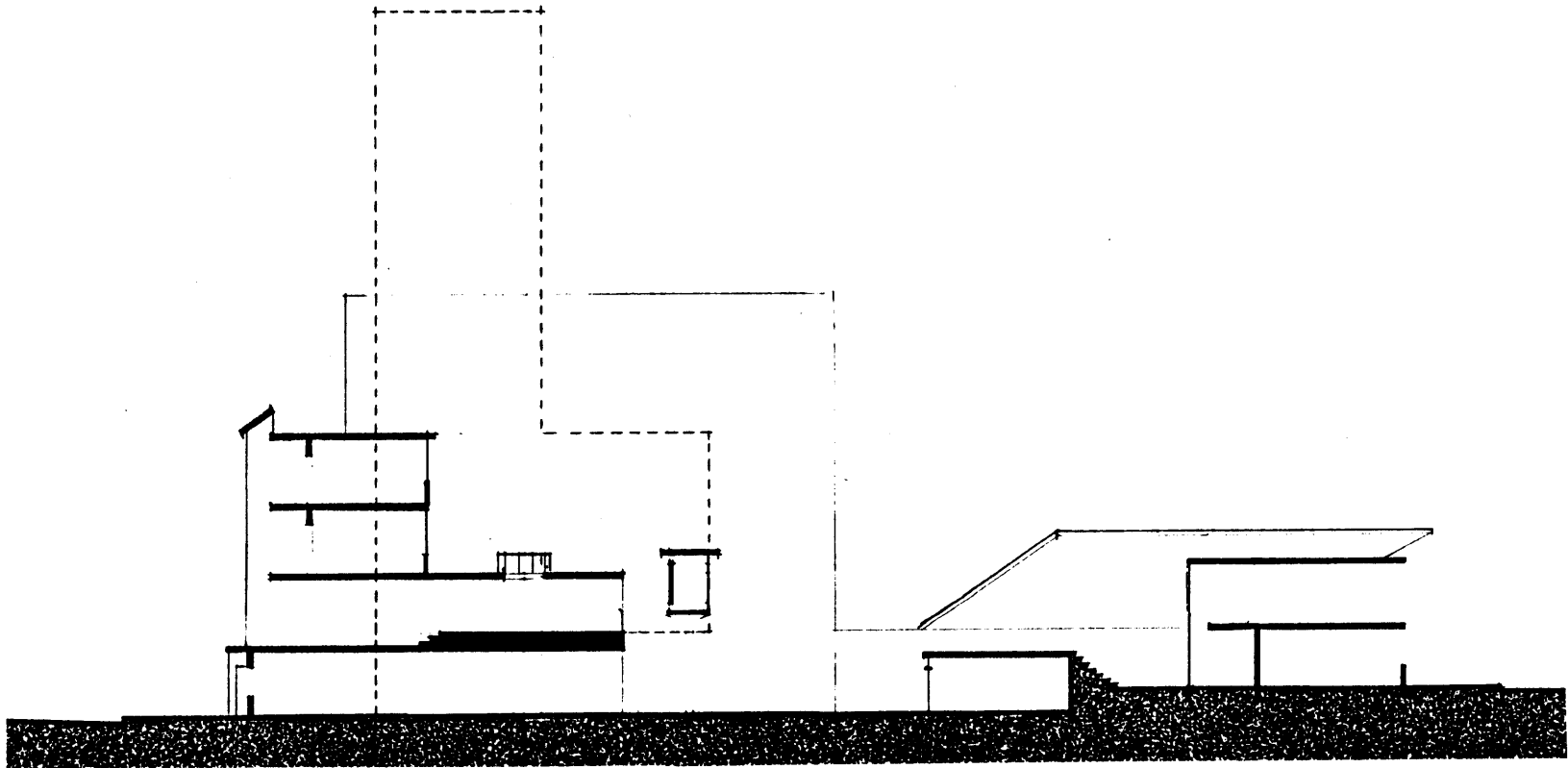
The third building mass here rest against this diagonal. This building although a different material seems to be part a cylinder and part a rectangle. It is set on a story high concrete base which continues up to support a roof. There is a platform at this higher level and a glass and wood entry beyond. The roof extends beyond the concrete and is supported by a steel column and beam that together evoke the shape of a cross. The roof shelters a broad step up and with the cross marks a gateway. A stair leads up along both the street and the cylinder. It begins narrow but widens with movement. The steps vary, starting steep but becoming more gentle towards the top. The clock hovers above and the ruin looms behind the hostel. Passing underneath, there is a constant view through the narrow transparent ring to the inside of the milky cylinder. Movement is towards a transparent, projecting stair enclosure of the hostel. The entry is to the left, along the cylinder. Just before arrival and at eye level a small transparent window in the cylinder is peripherially apparent on the left. The transparent ring is now at your feet.





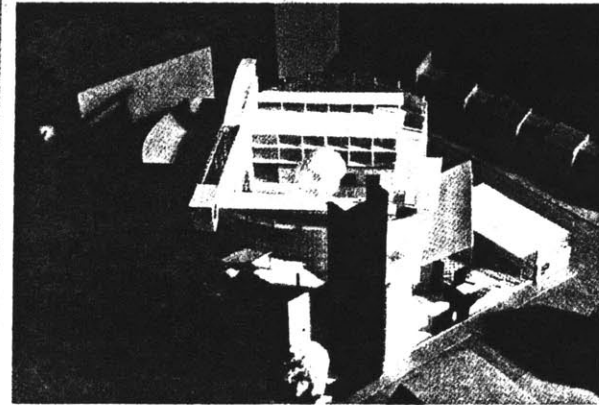
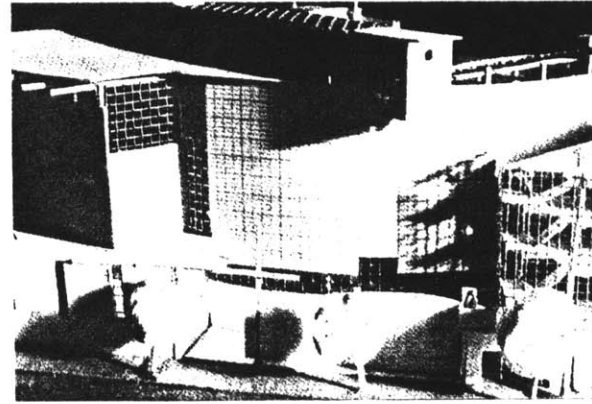
Inside the ceiling is low. Straight ahead the brick of the ruin reappears protracted and enclosing a room. To the left, adjacent to the cylinder a large square platform rises under a skylight. Full height windows define a surface beyond which a bridge is seen disappearing into the cylinder. It is higher than this podium and is supported by a portion of the ruin. A body size width of window occurs at the meeting of bridge and cylinder the rest of the bridge is opaque to the eye. Through this opening is a tantalizing glimpse into the monastic enclosure. Looking below and beyond the bridge and toward the sun is a play ground. It is partially defined by additional shorter segments of the ruin.

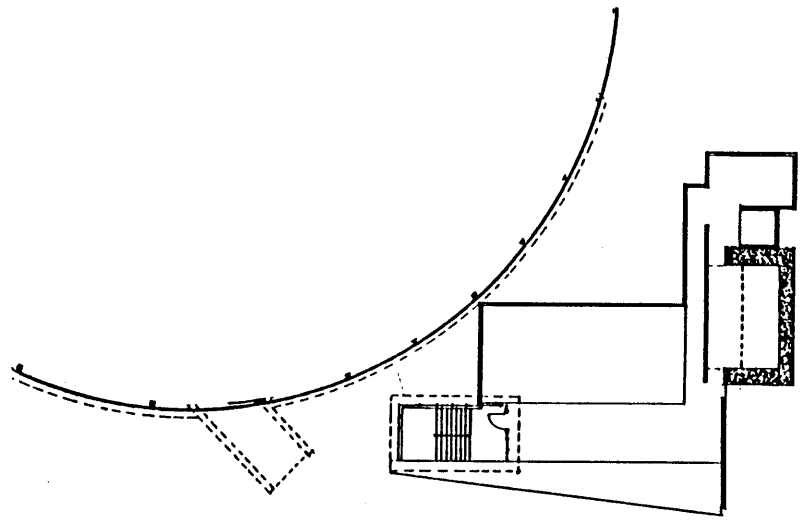
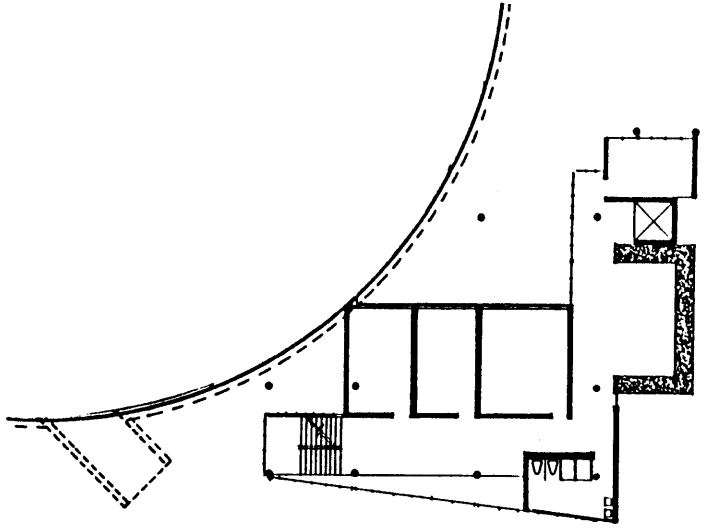
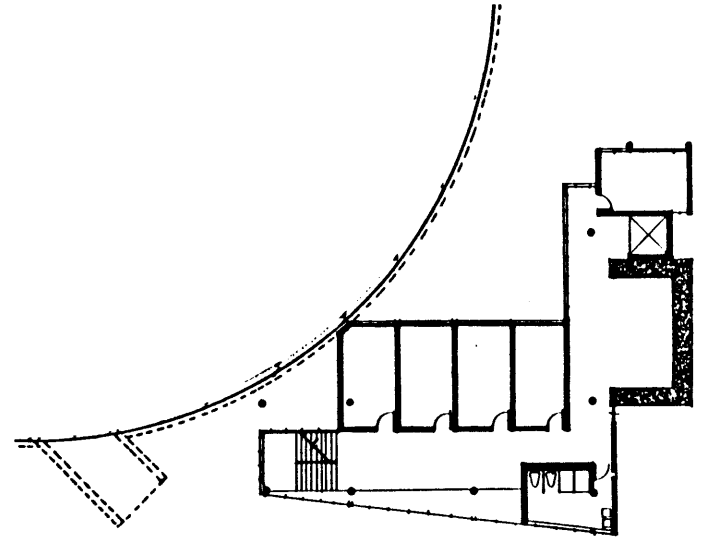
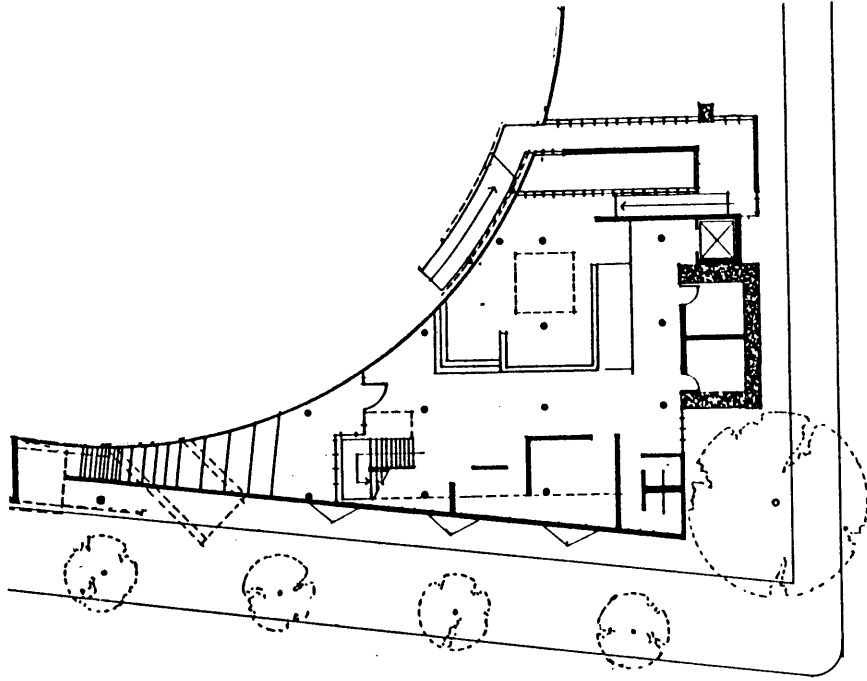




Movement to the rooms above and finally to the roof occurs in the transparent stair along Tremont St.. The rooms view out along the cylinder towards the playground and the southern sun. The ruin is three feet thick and its bulk defines the shared public space of these floors. From here one can look across the skylight of the podium below towards the mysterious serenity of the milky, curving monastic enclosure.

At the roof the ruin reemerges rising a full 50 feet above. This massive U shaped tower is closed on the fourth side by a 20 foot high wooden batten wall. From a reclining bench a view is framed against the ruin to a narrow section of the sky. Aspiring to heaven, weighted to the earth, Permanence, decay, regeneration, this space is intended as a lens to mortality.





He comprehended that the effort to mold the vertiginous matter dreams are made of was the most arduous task a man could undertake, though he might penetrate all the enigmas of the upper and lower orders: much more arduous than weaving a rope of sand or coining the faceless wind.

Jorge Luis Borges.



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