



torn fabric:
patching problematic urban space

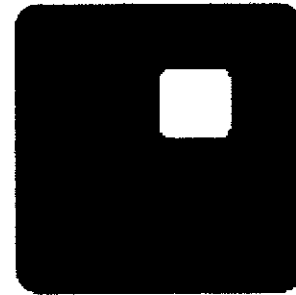
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acknowledgments

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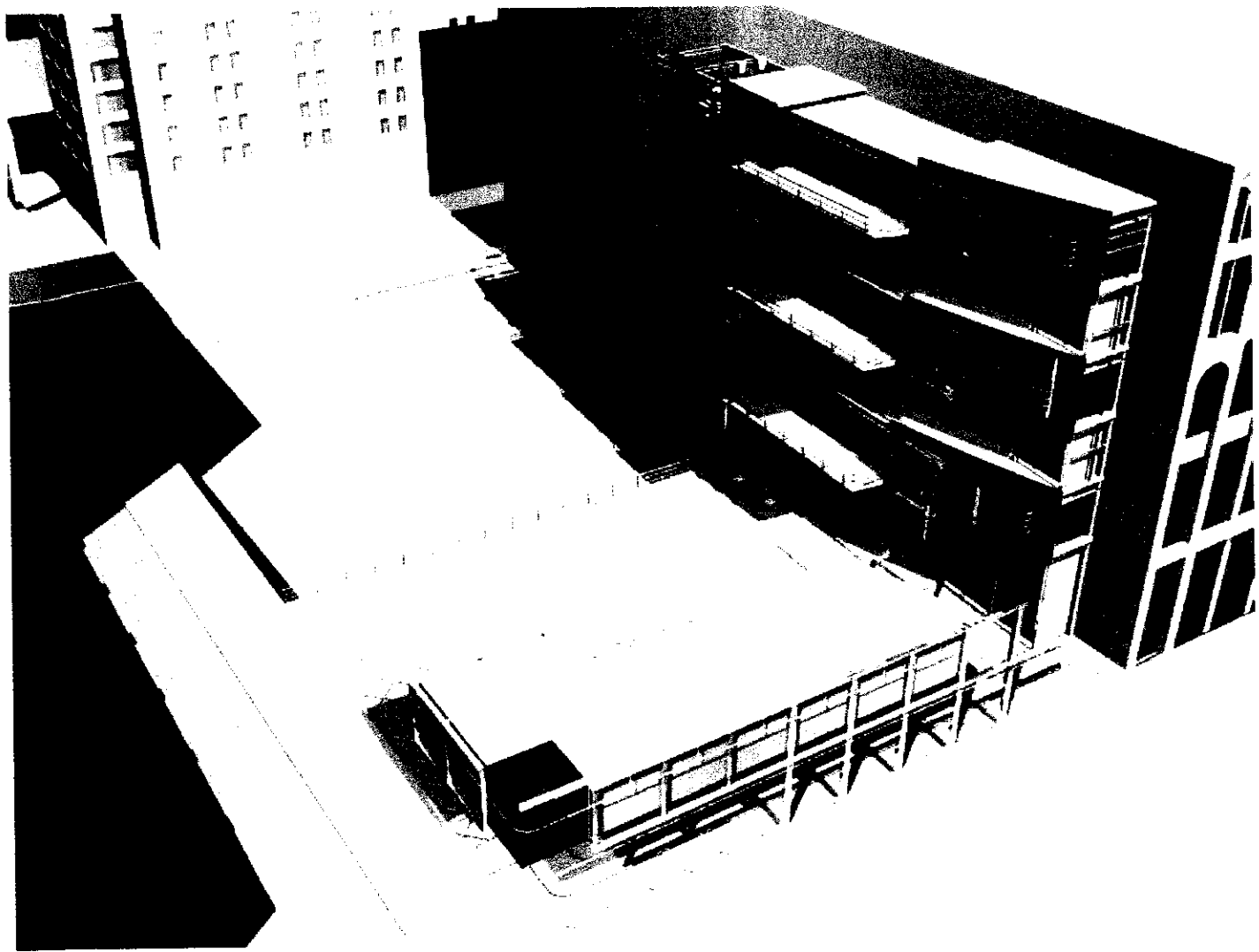
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My sincerest thanks to everyone involved, from professors to parents to peers. You've directed my focus, focused my direction and occasionally forced me to take a break - all of for which I am inexpressibly grateful.



a b s t r a c t

My goal is to address a problem which is endemic in urban spaces: voids in the urban experience. I've defined these places as "tears in the urban fabric." These are spaces where the rhythm of the surrounding area misses a beat. Places where roads have later been added and disrupt the continuity of the area, where buildings have been remodeled in a way which destroys the aesthetic, where buildings have been removed creating a defined void; these are all examples of tears in the urban fabric.

I've chosen to take on the latter of these examples, since it inherently has the most interesting solutions. However, simply inserting a building into a void in the city is hardly an original idea. Instead I've chosen to address those problematic spaces which aren't traditional in terms of site and require more innovation in resolving a conflict between the need for a "patch" in the urban fabric and the constraints of the site

The site I've chosen is in downtown Indianapolis, on Meridian Street half a mile south of the circle, directly next to the Old Spaghetti Factory. This is a beautiful area at the very heart of Indianapolis. It is within walking distance of many of its key landmarks, and plays a prominent role as part of the southern gateway into the city. Therefore, it seems exceptionally awkward that the building which was formerly on this site was removed; leaving the five story blank brick wall of the Old Spaghetti Factory to face what is now a raised parking lot.

This space is problematic because it clearly represents a void in the city, but the current parking lot is very crucial to the success of the many businesses surrounding it. I propose to create a small group of single residences attached directly to the blank wall of the Old Spaghetti Factory, and a small art gallery along the existing urban edge, simultaneously preserving the parking lot by sliding it under a new urban plaza. This project will relieve the tension in the space:, caused by the rhythm of the area coming to an abrupt halt, by creating a metaphorical "cap" to the row of buildings leading to it, thus offering a viable solution to a void in the urban experience.

The smell of hot dogs from a street vendor, the homeless person on a park bench, a slicing wind funneled by the canyon of buildings, the nearly palpable vibration of life created by thousands of people in constant motion: only in an urban environment can all these experiences be felt at once. The magic of urbanity lies in sensory overload. This constant barrage of sights, sounds, smells, thoughts, feelings and noises all weave themselves together into a colorful multisensory orgy, commonly called urban fabric.

It can easily be argued that every place on earth has a "fabric", however of all the areas which humans inhabit nowhere is this concept more apparent than in a dense urban space. Here the tangible and intangible forces affecting an area are more apparent than anywhere else on earth. They can mutate and change their magnitude in a very short distance. It is this constant flux and transition which gives the city a rhythm and life which is as unique to that place as a fingerprint to a person.

This fabric is woven from two very different yet equally important "threads". The first thread is that of the tangible or physical environment. It is the streets, the buildings, sidewalks, lakes, rivers, and physical location of a city. The second thread is the intangible, consisting of society and culture. These "threads" constantly interact and influence one another, continuously morphing the city creating an environment that could only be a product of the conditions of that particular moment in space and time.

Any holistic solution attempting to "patch" the urban fabric must fully take into account both of these components. However, the approach to addressing each is very different. The tangible realm can be seen and measured in objective quantifiable terms. Creating a patch, in the most basic sense, involves simply placing something in a void which meshes with the area and creates a fluid continuity with the surroundings. Since the physical component is so readily perceived, and architecture is based in the physical realm it becomes the determinant for site selection, and many design decisions in this project. Put another way, the physical level is addressed through the form of the space. Therefore, the function of the space must be determined by the concerns of the intangible level. This component requires a very different approach. Success or failure

o v e r v i e w

o v e r v i e w

cannot be seen or measured, only judged in subjective terms. Furthermore, the process of determining how to "patch" the culture of an area is nebulous indeed. Here it might be more appropriate to refine our metaphor and instead call the "patch" an enrichment, since culture is never really torn.

The physical component of urban fabric can become torn as the city grows and changes. Awkward places are created by removing buildings, changing roads or adding new ones, remodeling buildings without regard to their context or any other number of possibilities which no longer make the space vibrant. These changes no longer add to a place but take away from it the very infrastructure from which its fabric was based.

Everyone has experienced these spaces at one time or another as we walk down a city sidewalk and encounter some sort of void in the landscape. It may not even enter our consciousness, but at some level it is always experienced. Usually we look away and continue down the sidewalk, often with an unconsciously lowered perception of the area. These spaces cannot be looked away from forever. They directly affect the image and experience of a city, and must be addressed.

In many cases a solution to these voids is apparent. Simply restoring a façade, or planting a few trees, may be all that is necessary. My interest, however, is in the most problematic of spaces - spaces which are exceptionally difficult to reconcile and problematic to build on.

Problematic spaces are the ones which linger in a city, since a viable solution isn't as apparent. Due to the difficulty of building on these spaces they can exist for many years, and create a lasting impact in the area. For this reason these spaces need to be addressed: this is the intention of this project.

This project proposes creating three single bedroom residences and artists' studios, a small art gallery, a plaza, and a partially sunken parking lot in order to meet the entire range of needs of the area, as proposed by the cultural districts working plan for the Indianapolis Warehouse District. The residences will serve as living and working space for three artists selected to live there for a period of time. In exchange for housing they will become "employees" of the city. They will work on art projects throughout the city such as temporary installations, new street lighting, storm sewer and manhole covers, commercials, films etc. as well as create art for display inside the on site art gallery. The art gallery will feature primarily non-traditional art i.e. digital art, films, web design, and interactive exhibits, in response to a lack of facilities which focus on this medium. In addition the gallery will house more permanent displays on the history of the Warehouse District as well as Union Station. The residences and the gallery will frame a new urban plaza, which will utilize most of the street level area on the site. This plaza will be the host of innumerable functions from being a place to host street vendors and provide outdoor lunch space, to hosting street performers, sports rallies, political rallies, and art festivals. This plaza directly responds to the lack of readily available plaza space in the area. Finally, the existing parking lot will be preserved due to its critical relationship with the area. However it will be gradually sloped and eventually slide under the street level plaza, preserving it yet freeing the street level space for pedestrian use.

s c o p e

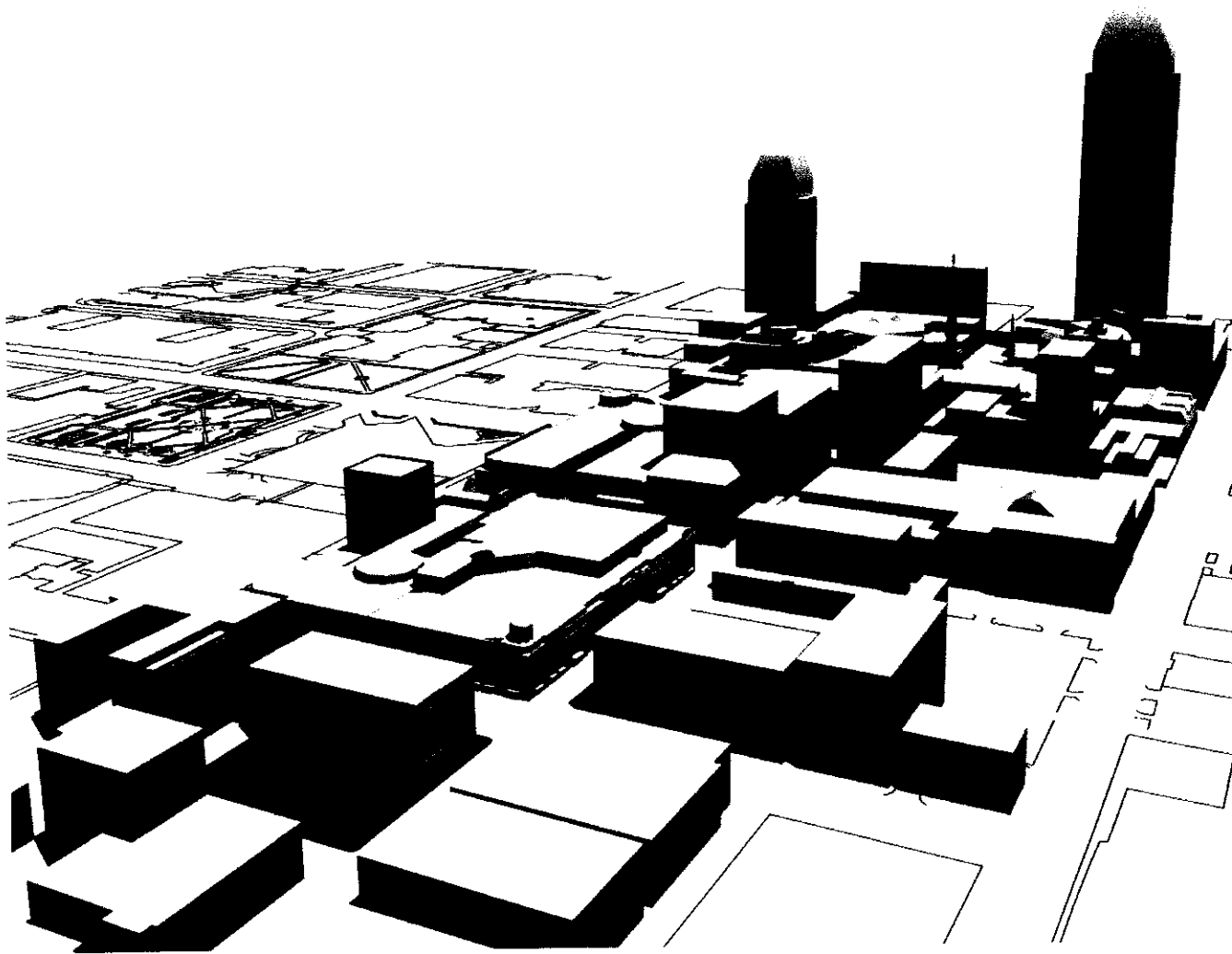
project goals

physical/tangible

- reclaim the void of the site and reweave it into the urban fabric
- extend the continuity of the area, through respecting the existing design vocabulary
- reform the space, while keeping the existing parking lot
- create a landmark for the southern entrance into Indianapolis and the warehouse district
- create a functional urban plaza

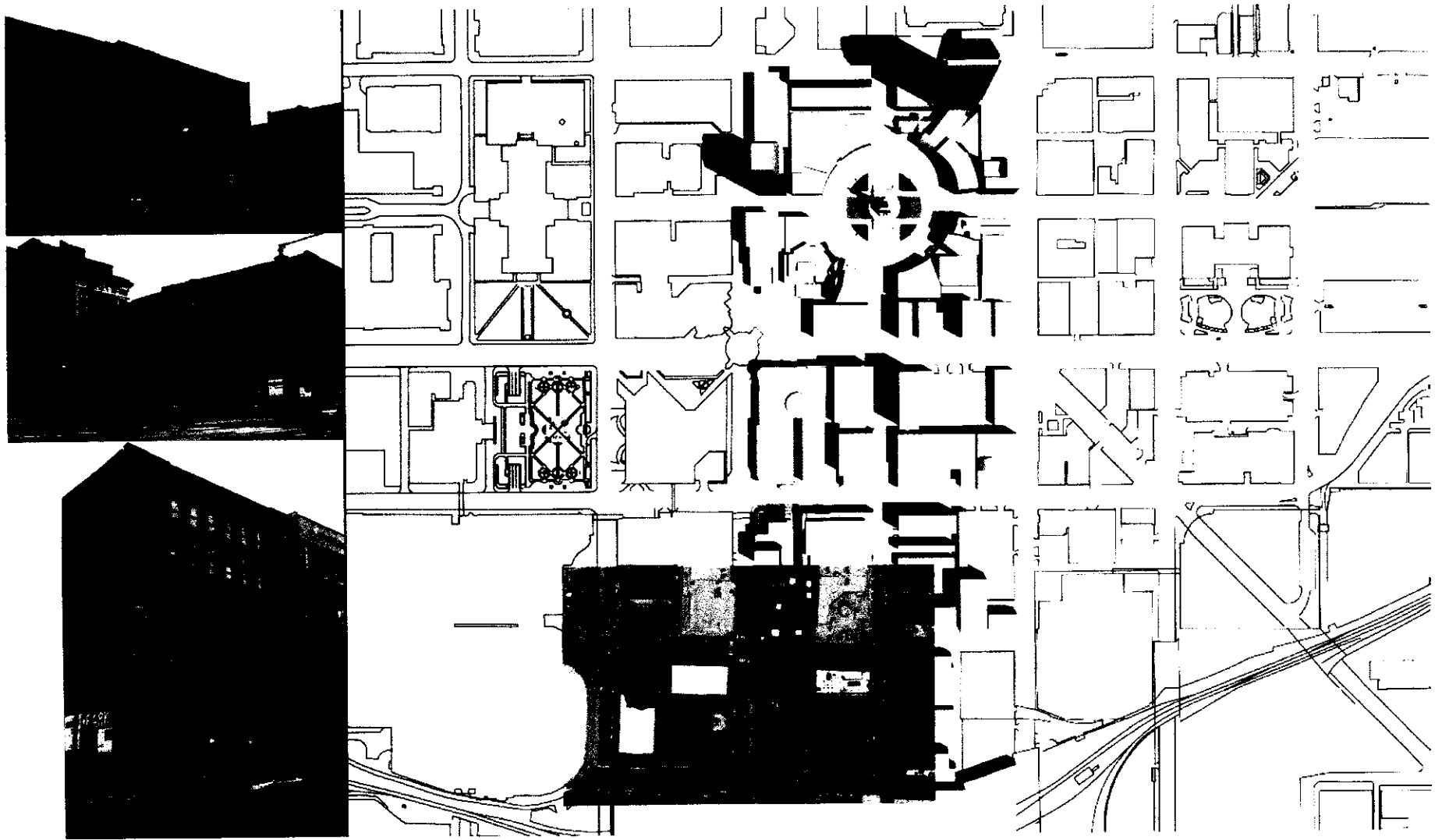
cultural/intangible

- increase local cultural participation
- improve night lighting
- reconnect the population with the history of the warehouse district and Union Station
- create a venue for street performers
- bring an art into the core of downtown Indianapolis

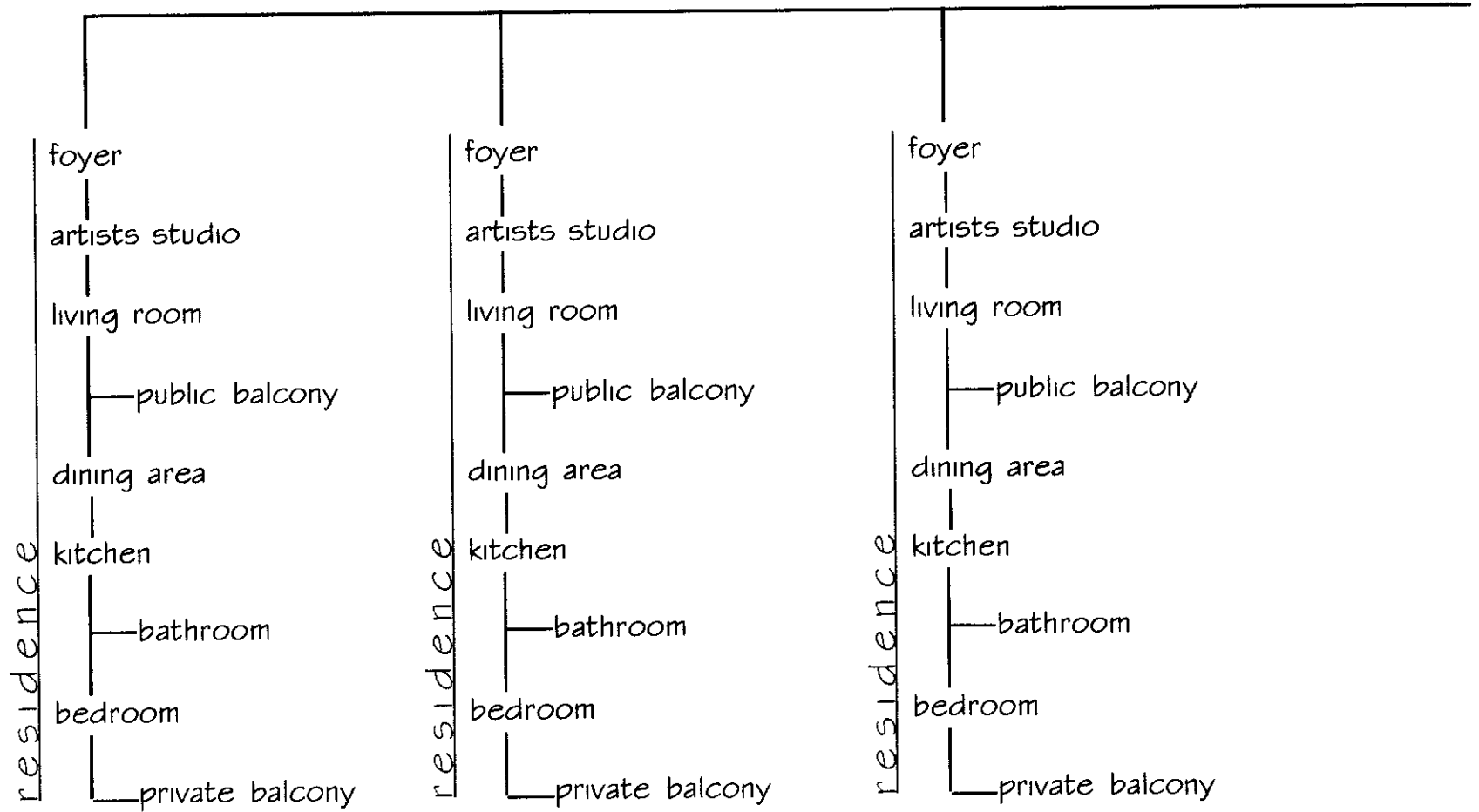


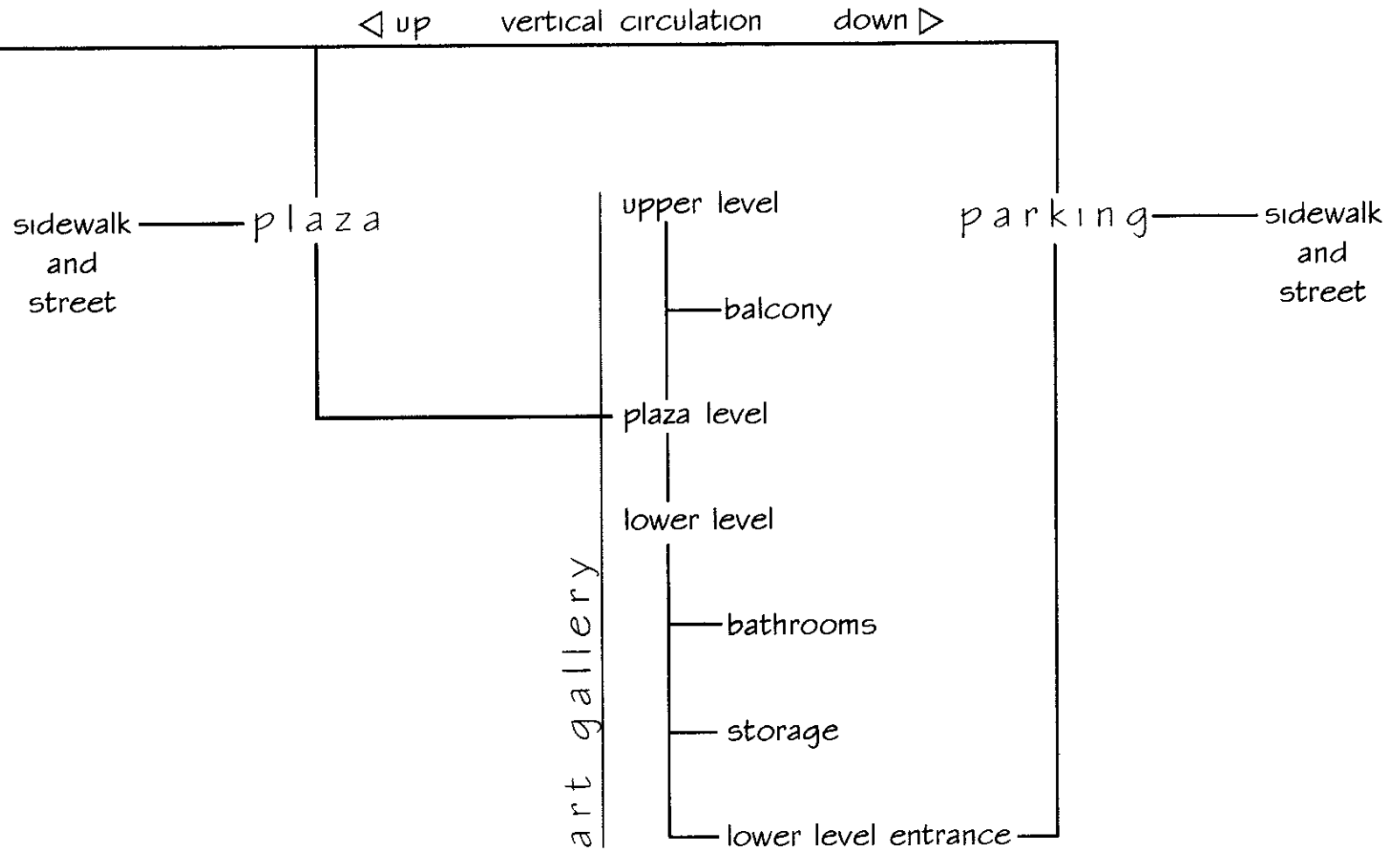
site

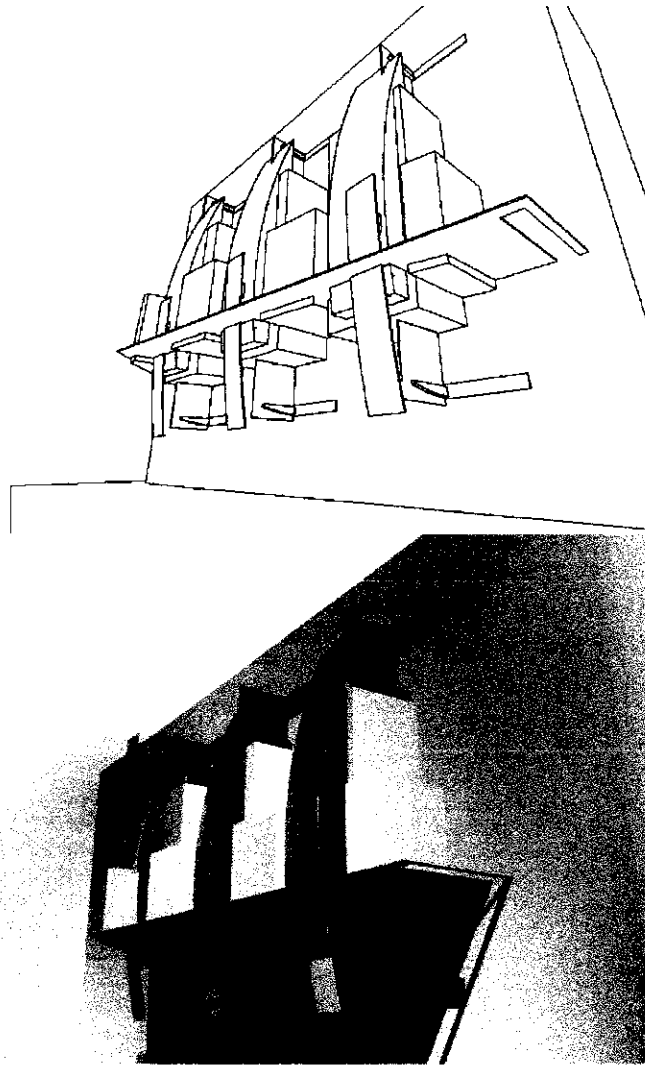
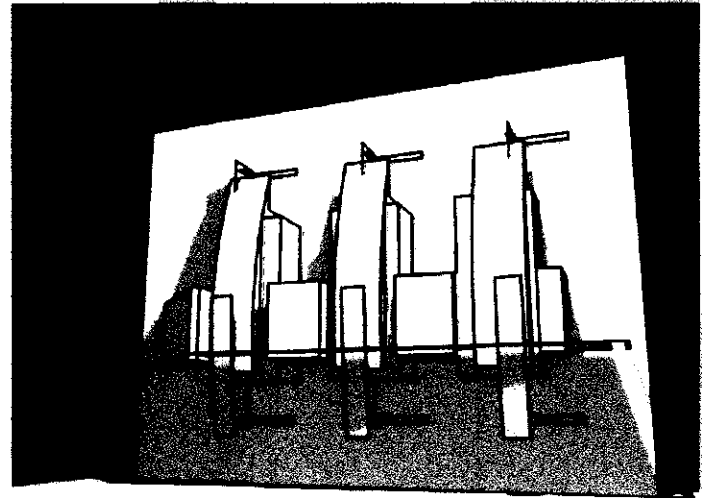
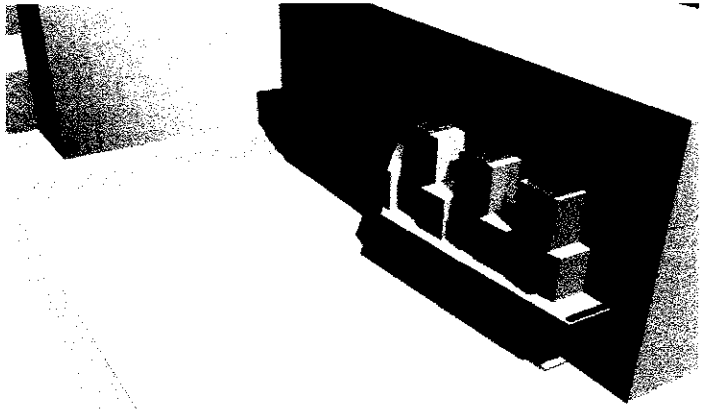
The site is at a pivotal location in the warehouse district of downtown Indianapolis. Located at the corner of Jackson and Meridian, it is within walking distance of Monument Circle, the RCA Dome, Conseco Fieldhouse, and directly adjacent to Union Station. Meridian Street also plays a key role, since it is the aorta of Indianapolis. The site forms part of the southern gateway into the city adding to its importance. The surrounding area is comprised of historic turn of the century buildings which are currently home to many bars, restaurants, offices and loft housing. These uses all lend to large amounts of pedestrian activity.



diagrammatic program and circulation





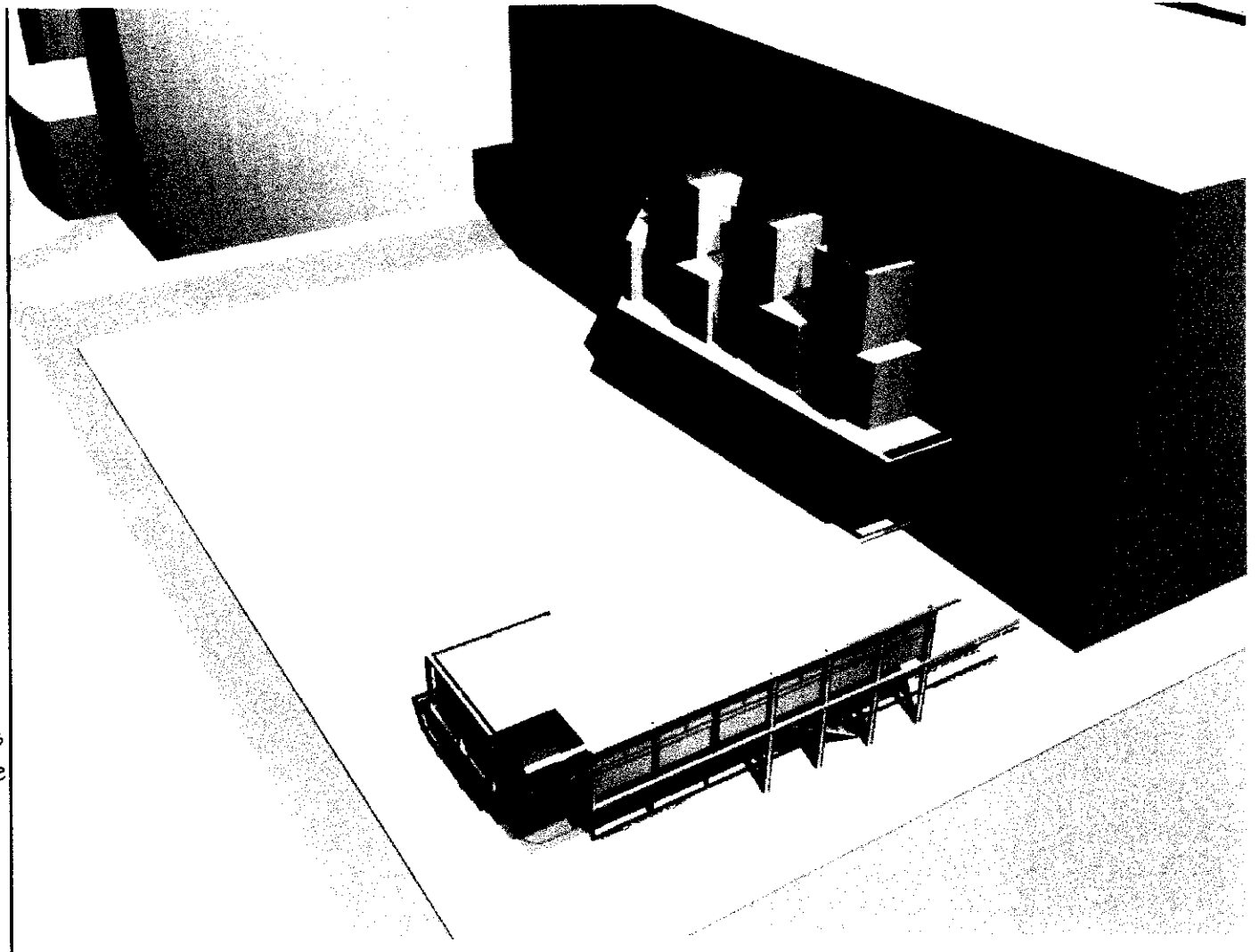


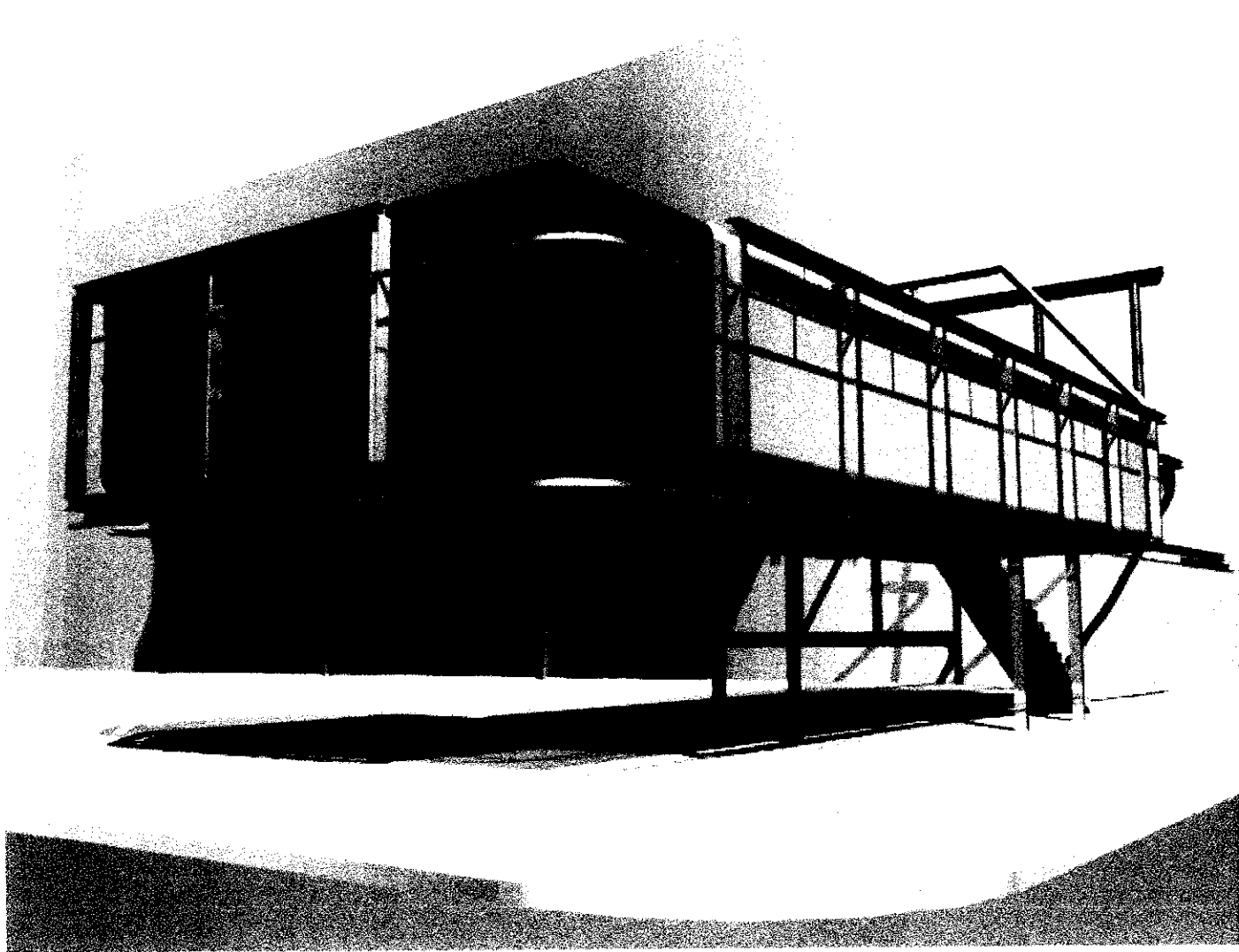
Iteration one

The initial concept was to create a residential component to hang from the party wall of the Spaghetti Factory. It would obscure the blank wall and be sculptural enough to serve as a distinct landmark. Since the structure didn't touch the ground the parking would be preserved. Initially I felt that the mere presence of a new building which wasn't turning it's back to the site would be enough to serve the cultural component of the city. The perception of the area would be altered simply by it's being there. This was a very superficial treatment, and it was little more than an architectural foley. It's actual function did little to enhance the area.

Itineration two

The scope of the project was expanded with the art gallery. Art was the perfect way to establish a cultural dialogue with the area. Purposefully minimalist in design it was conceived as a glossy outer shell meant to enhance the display of the art inside. In the same way that a jewelry box adds to the drama of its contents. The gallery recognizes its historic surroundings through structural spacing, the continuation of existing horizontals, the scale of openings and structure and its continuation of the urban edge along meridian. Parking is preserved by raising the gallery off the ground.

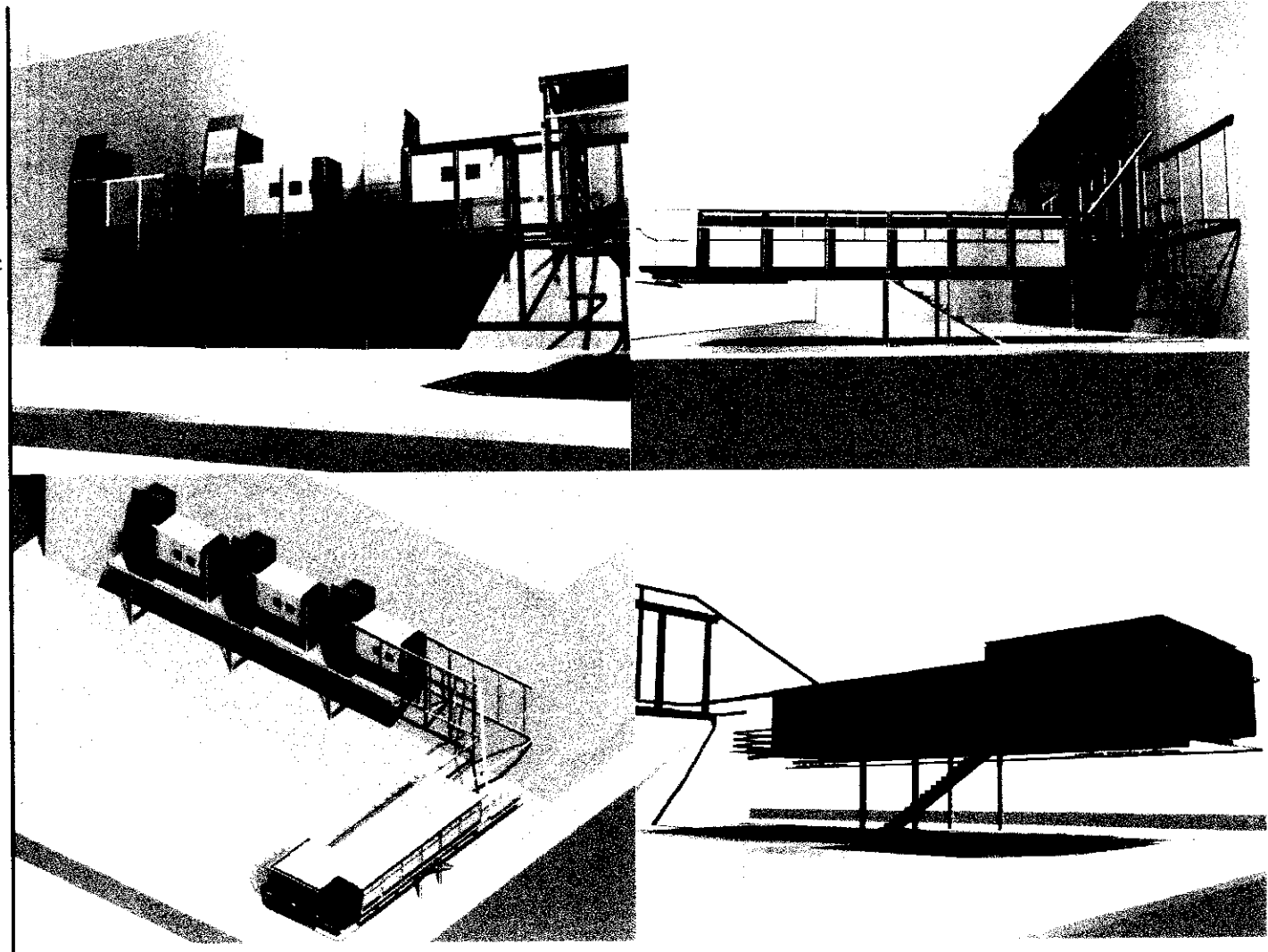


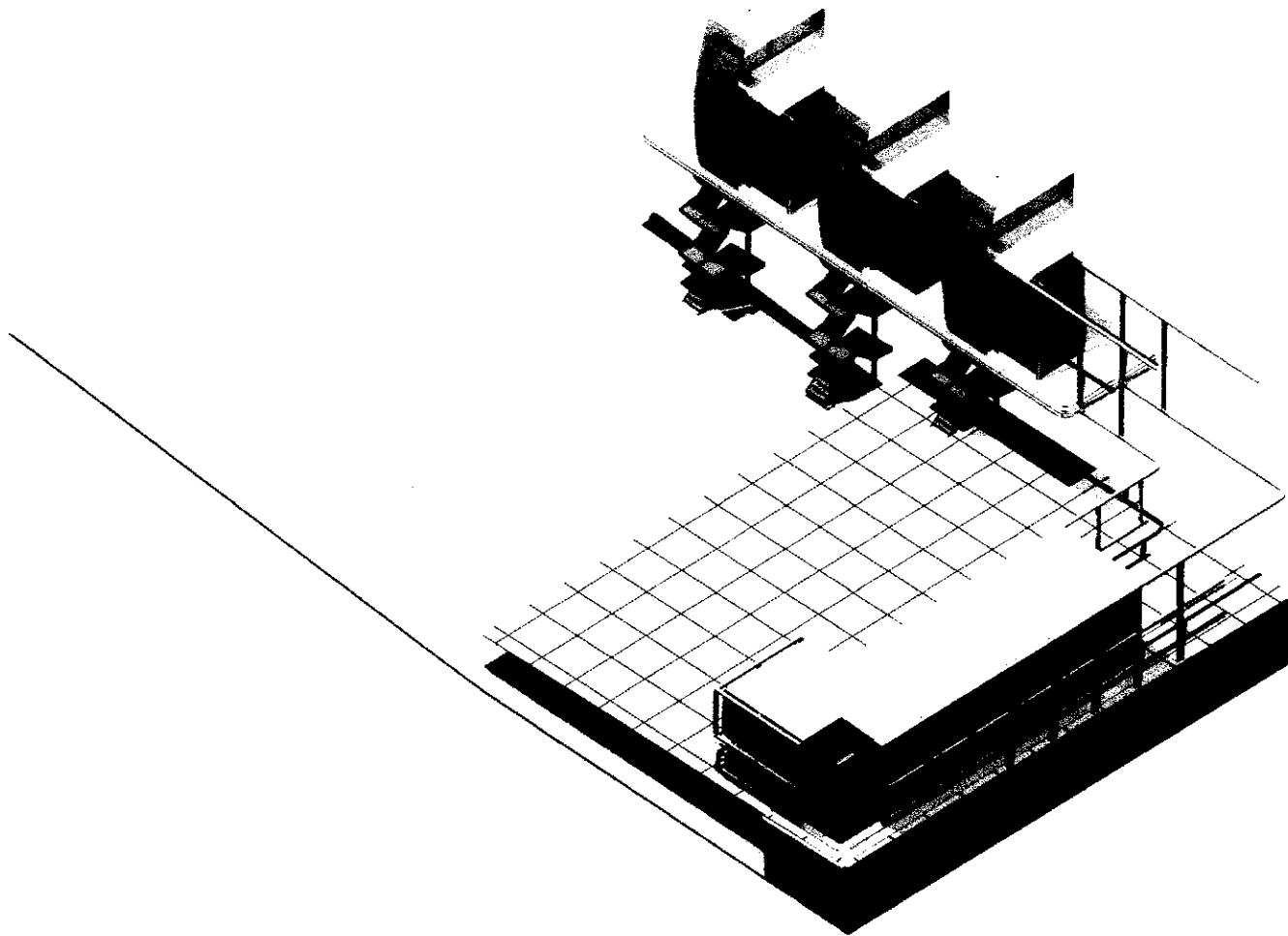


Iteration three

A redesign and refinement of the residences brought them more in tune with the gallery. A link between the two components was created through the combination of the structural systems of each piece. Physically combining both pieces, however, emphasizes the awkward design of the residential units. These residences seem to be straddling the fence between the vocabulary of the gallery and the previous residential design and are lacking the qualities that made either effective. They don't have the same sculptural quality that the initial residences had with the long sweeping curved facades which blended nicely with the flat wall, as it picked up your eye and moved it

along the building then returned it to the wall again. They also lack the stately minimalism of the gallery, even though they are constructed from the same set of components. The structural spacing, monolithic shell, and overall size and scale are all derived directly from the gallery.

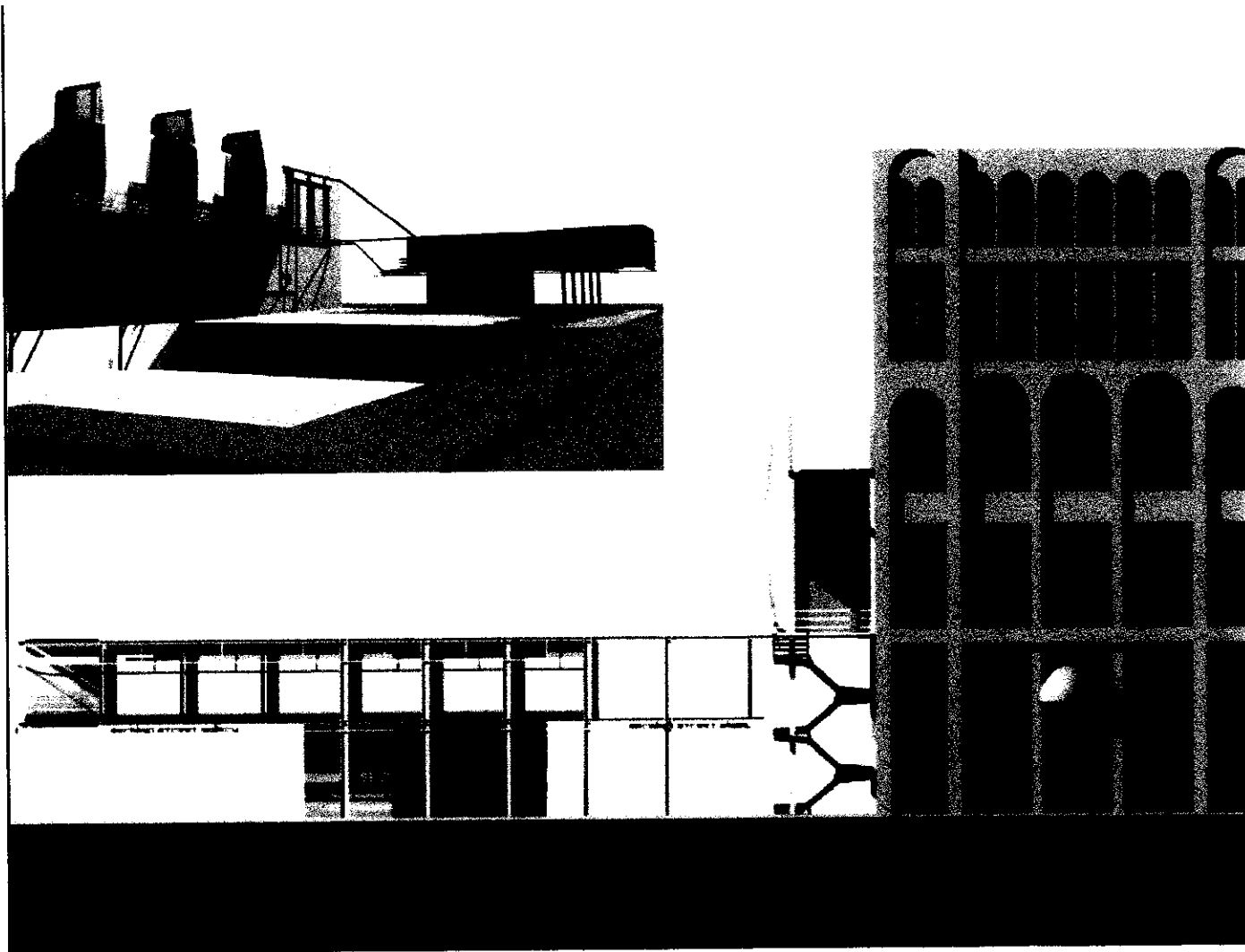


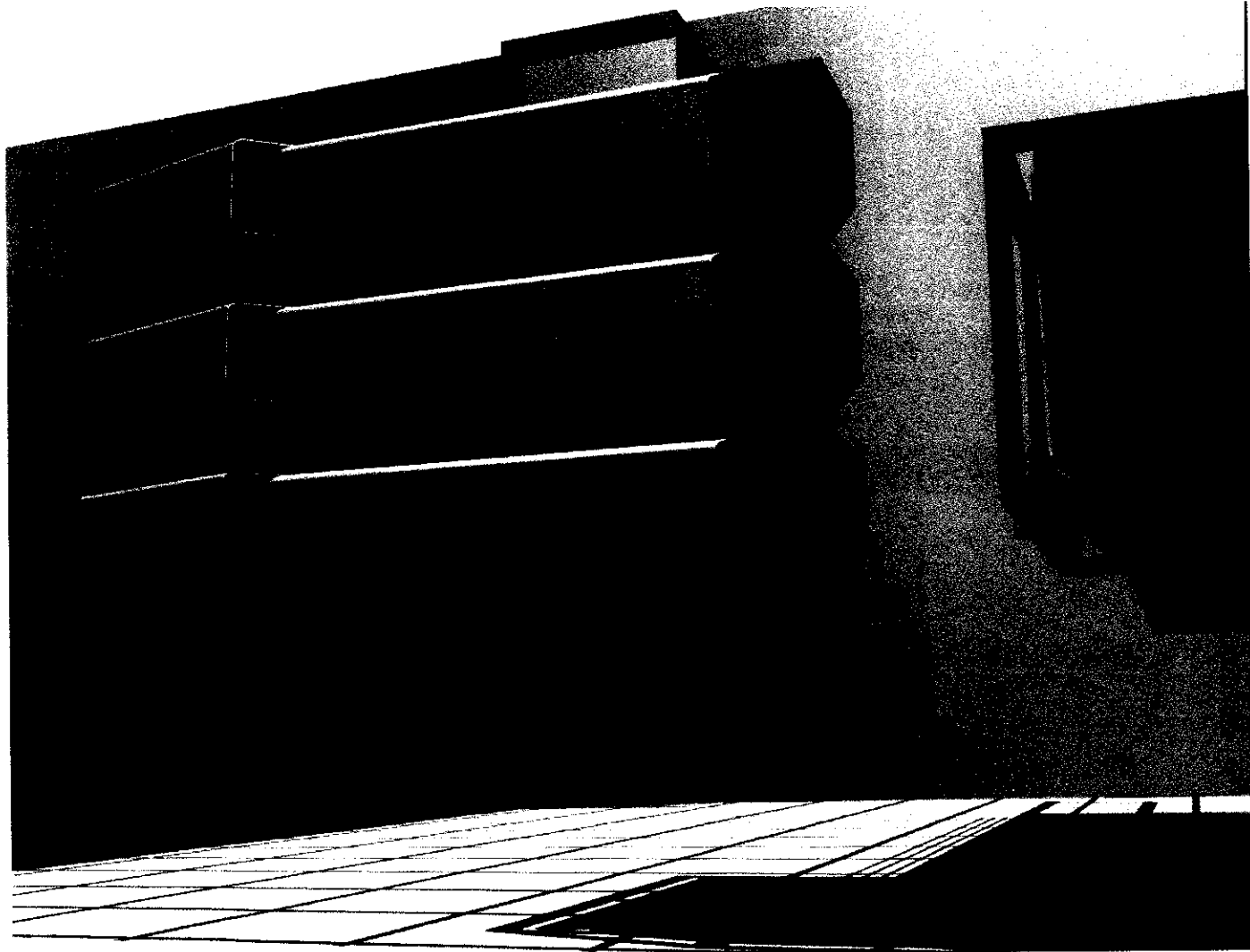


Iteration four

This step represented an epiphany which truly made the project come together. Throughout the development of the project I constantly battled with keeping the parking lot, but actually wanting it to be a plaza. Before this stage I had decided that the lot could be used as a plaza on special occasions by clearing the cars out. This represented an awkward solution. However, at this point I realized I could take advantage of existing site conditions and have both a plaza and parking lot. The west side of the lot is actually four feet lower than the east side, which meant that an A.D.A. grade slope could be used across the lot which would allow it to slip under a street level plaza. This has an

added benefit of creating more space for the gallery under the plaza. This space is perfect because it is naturally dark, and the gallery is intended for nontraditional art i.e. digital art, short film, web design, etc. The space under the plaza is perfectly suited to house video displays. The plaza is perfect for the warehouse district since it lacks a large outdoor gathering space. It will be able to tap into existing pedestrians and be an ideal space for street vendors, performances, rallies, art festivals and a host of other events.



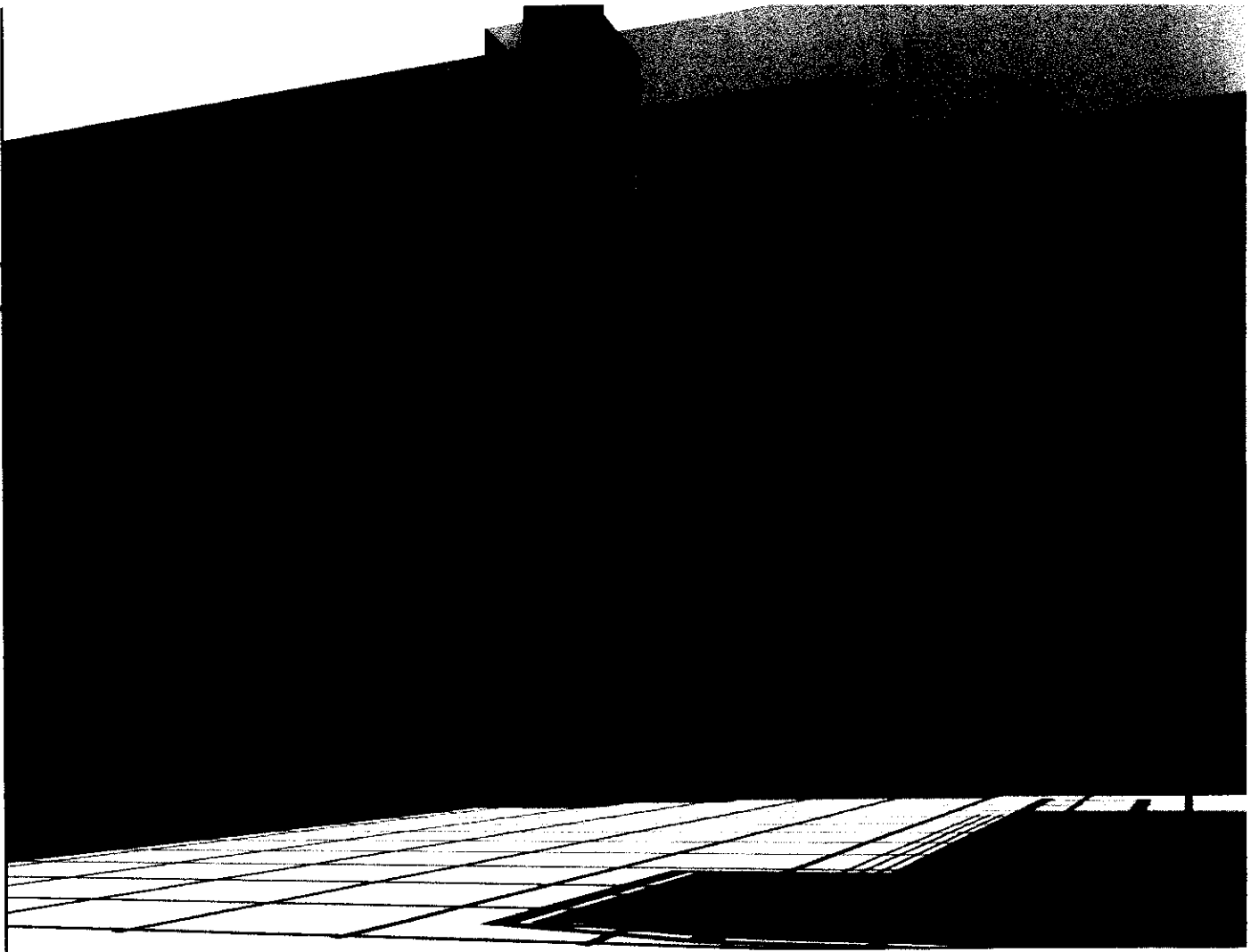


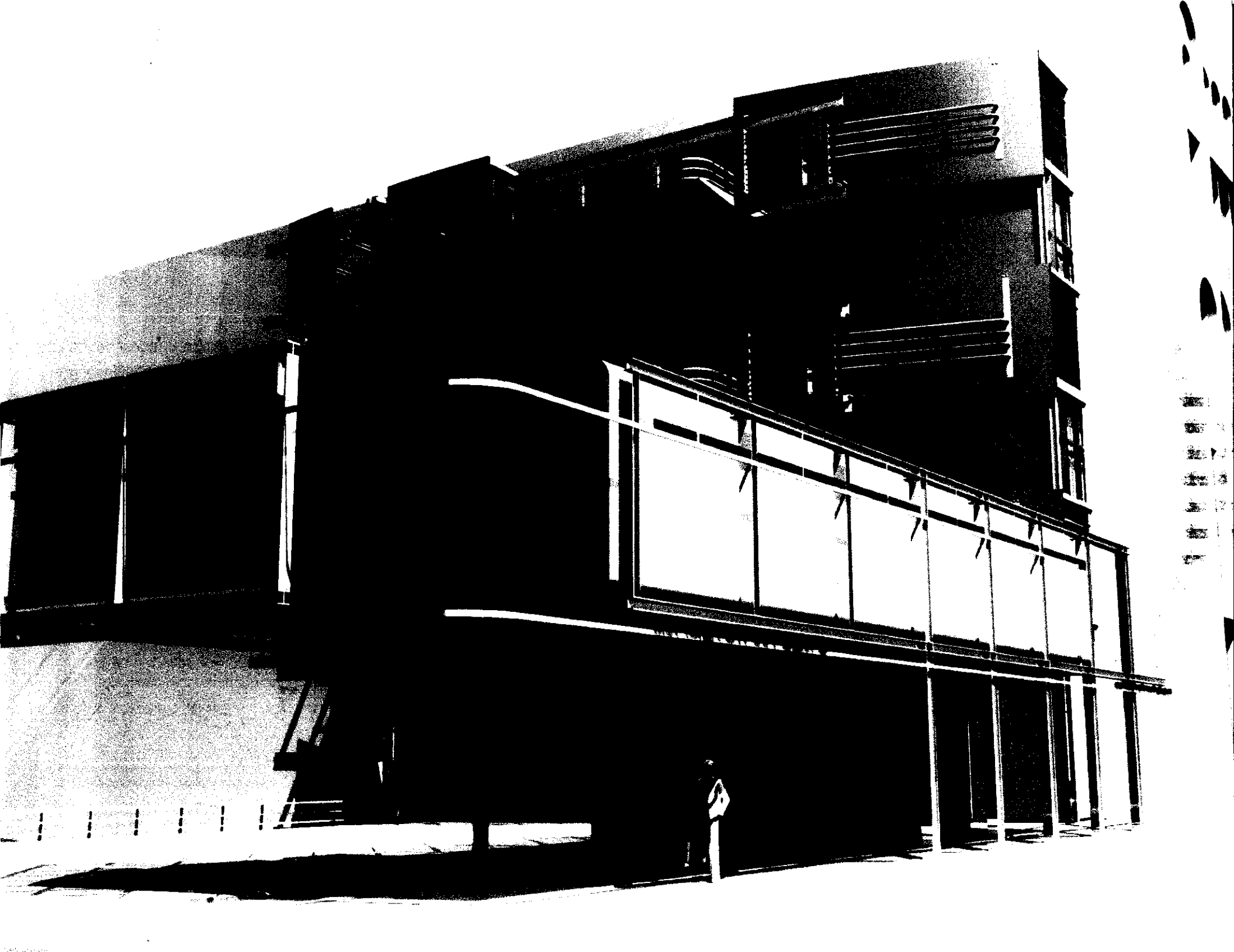
Iteration five

This stage represented a major rethinking of the residential component, which I hadn't been satisfied with for some time. This design changes the orientation of the units from vertical to a more appropriate horizontal orientation which mirrors the long and wide wall of the Spaghetti Factory. Here I am still using the design vocabulary of the art gallery, which clearly isn't an appropriate solution for the residences.

Iteration six

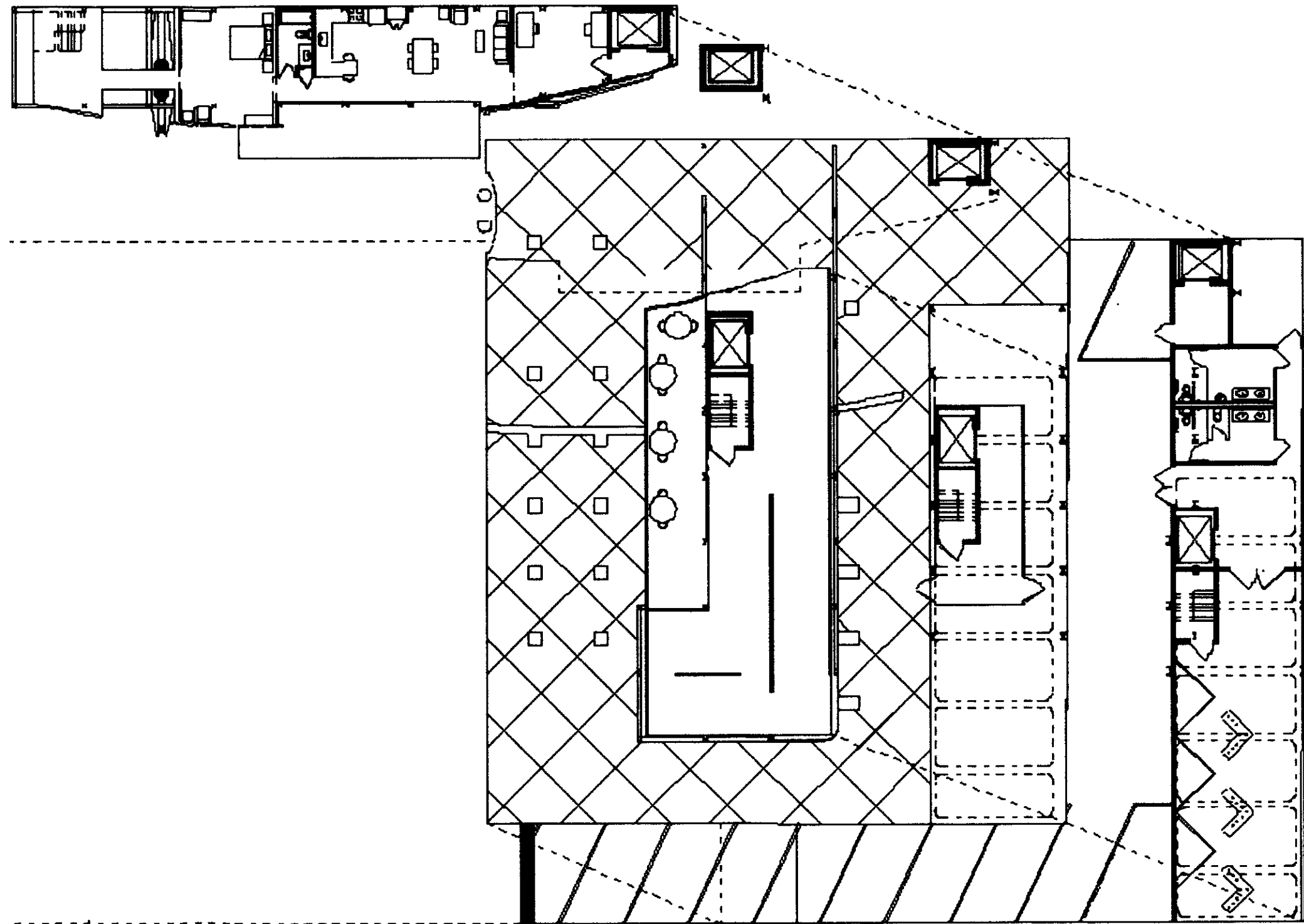
In this version I finally broke away from trying to make the gallery and the residences appear similar. I realized that even though they are close in proximity their contexts are very different. The gallery needed to recognize its historic neighbors and house a single function. While the residences have almost no true neighbors, and houses several functions for living. The residences represent production and the machine, while the gallery represents the finished, polished product.

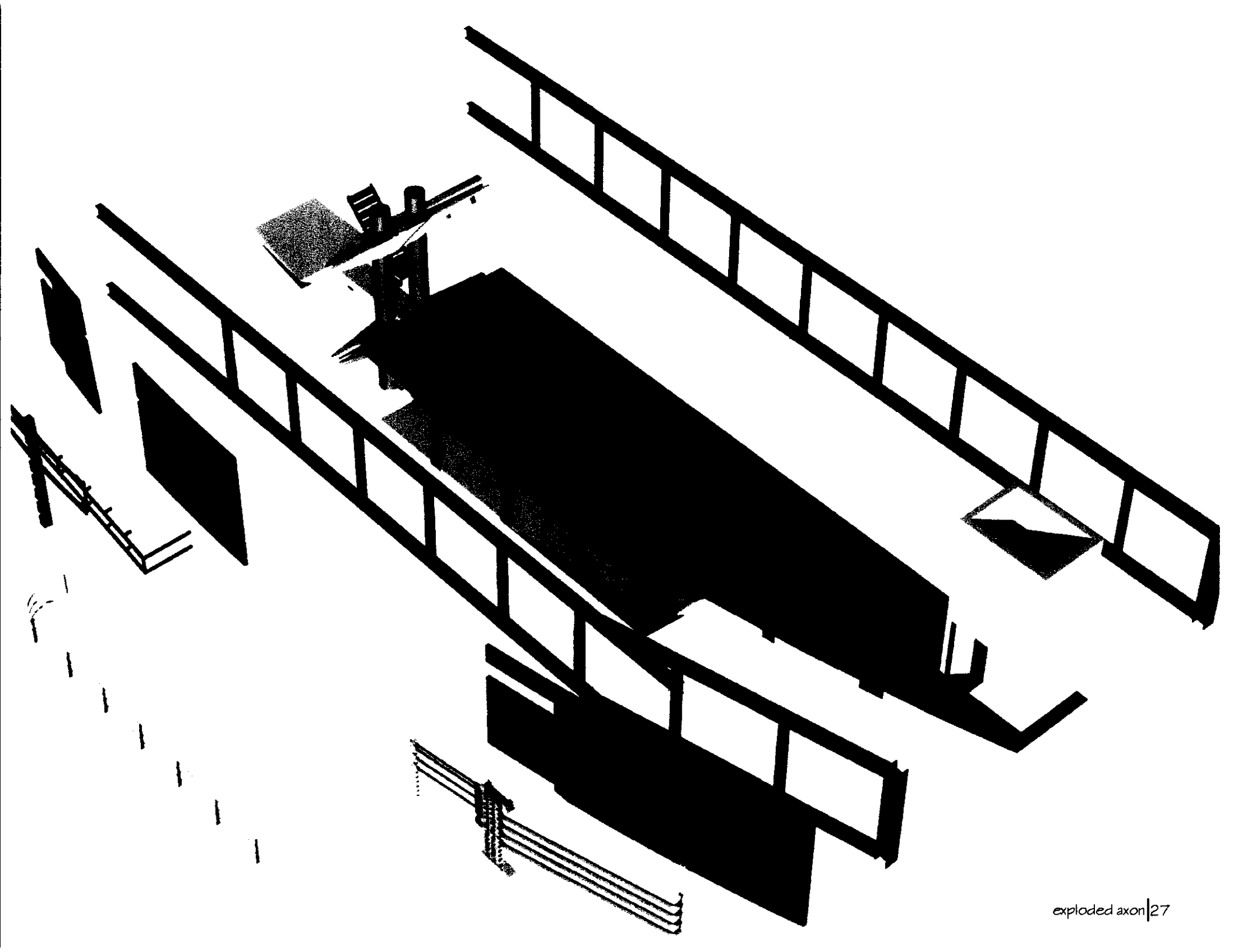


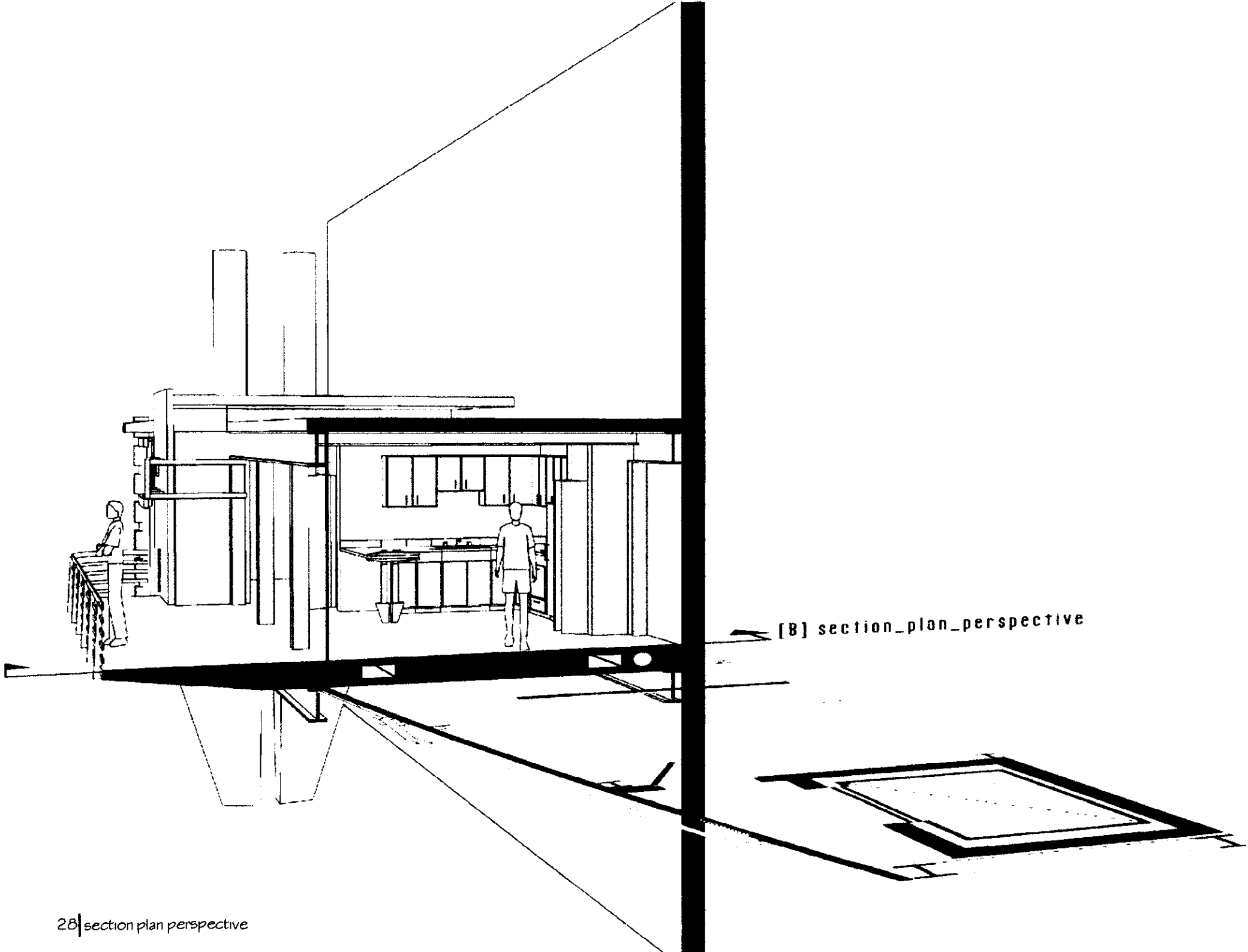


design solution

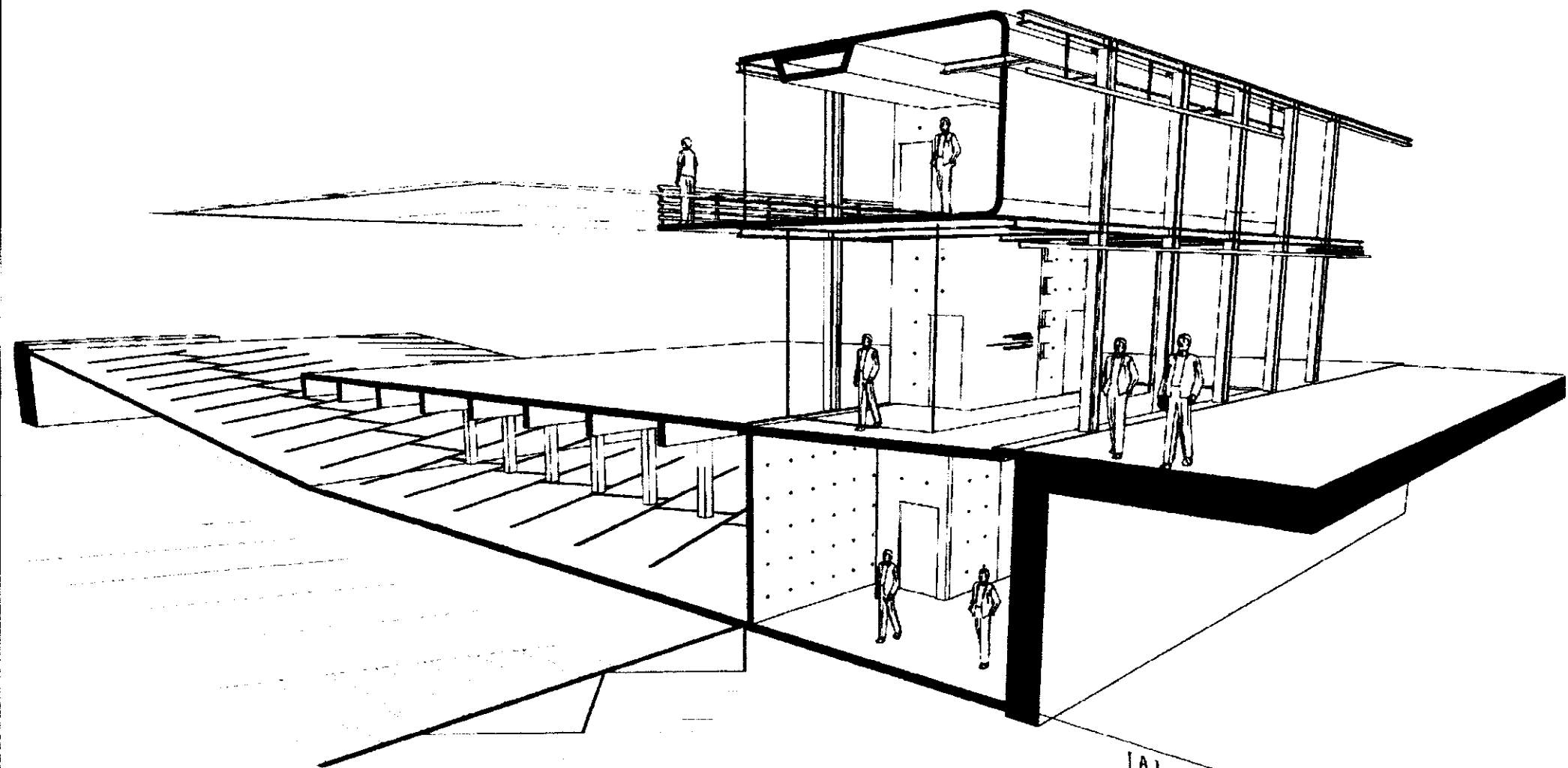
The residences finally came together in this final version of their design. They are closely related to solution number six, sharing the mechanistic exposed structure and copper curved walls. In this final version the entire unit forms an arc, projecting from the preexisting wall, nicely blending with its flat surface, in the same manner as the original version of the residences. The curved wall is clad in treated copper, which is similar in color to the brick, yet is a more modern sleek material. The structural issues in the previous version are resolved by supporting the residences at both ends, with a verendeel truss between the supports. The verendeel references the one used in the gallery through size and spacing. The structural members supporting the outer wall are partially externalized, adding another layer of detail and dimension to the residences. Each unit contains two balconies, one "public" balcony in the center, which faces directly into the plaza and is visually open to the public and a private balcony on the west end which is mostly obscured from public view. The glazed wall adjacent to the public balcony is divided into three sliding glass panels which, when opened, allow the balcony, living room and kitchen to blend into a seamless indoor/outdoor space.







[B] section_plan_perspective



[A] section_plan_perspective

