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COUNTY HALL, STRASBURG NATIONAL THEATRE, TOKYO COMPETITION ENTRIES

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Source: *AA Files*, No. 13 (Autumn 1986), pp. 16-25

Published by: [Architectural Association School of Architecture](#)

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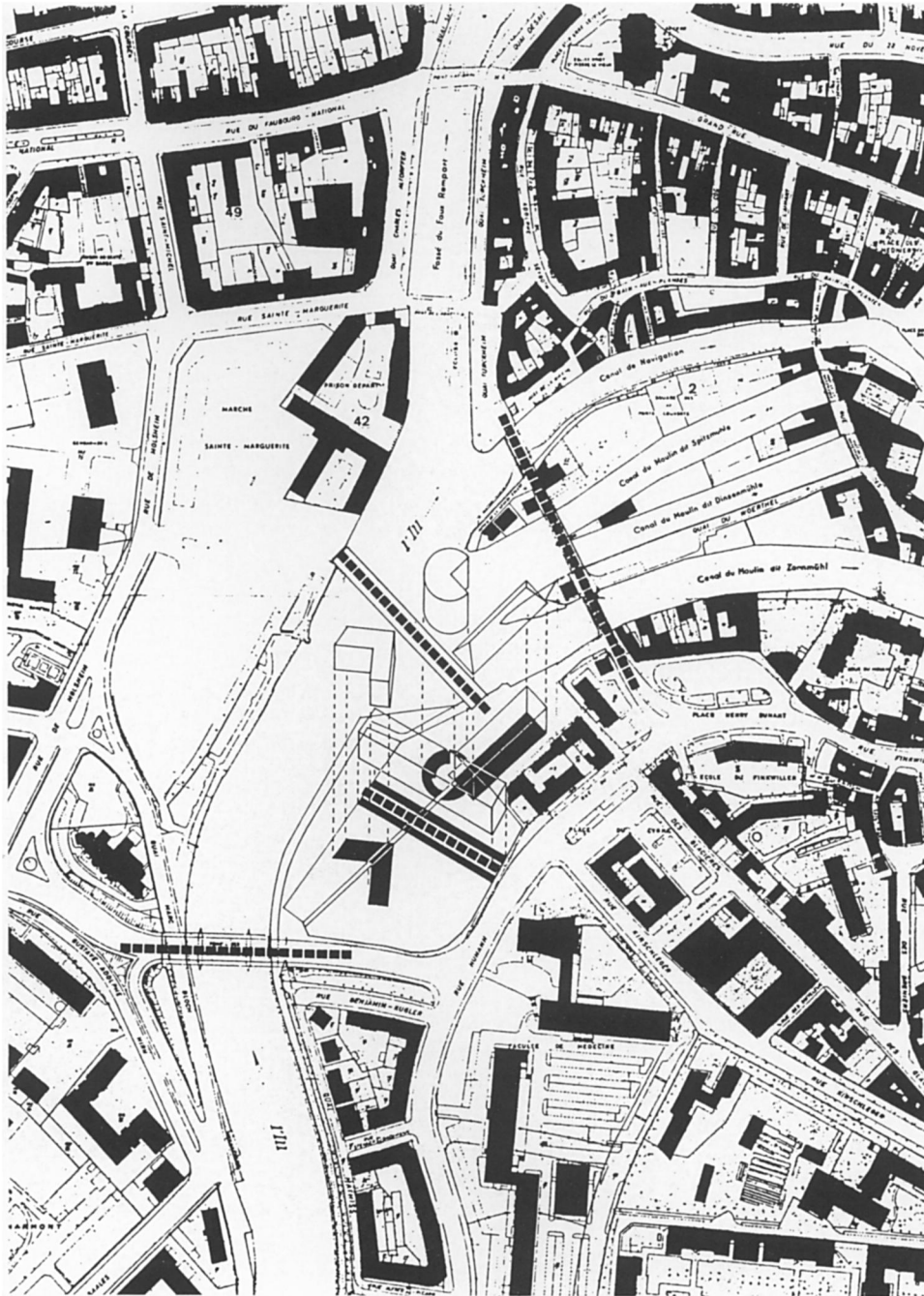
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# BERNARD TSCHUMI

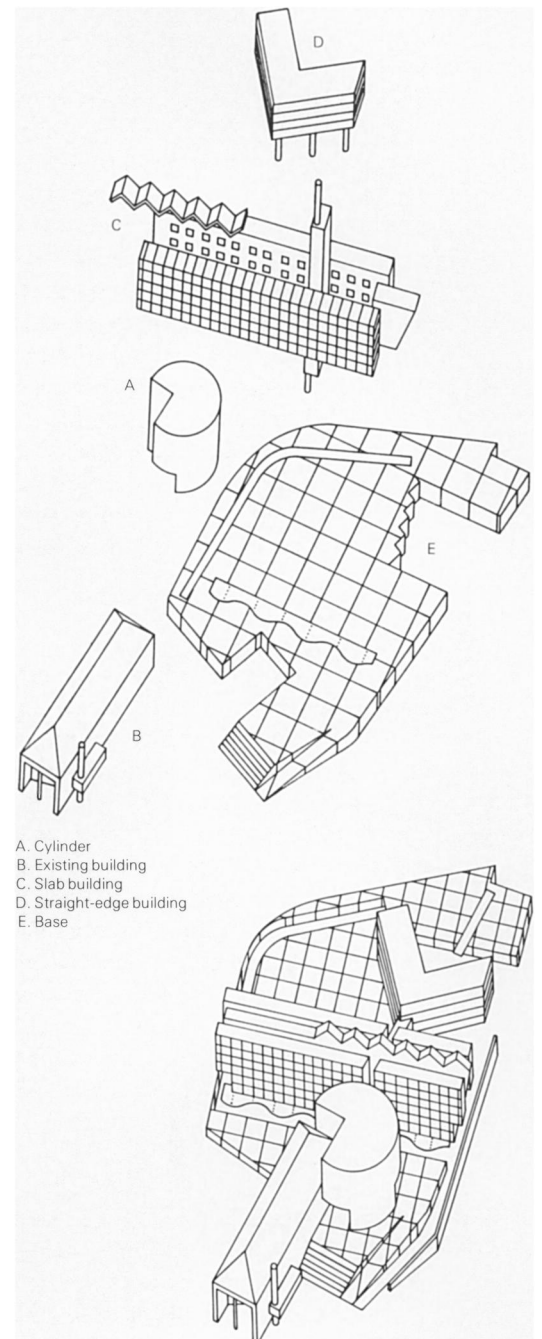
## COUNTY HALL, STRASBURG

## NATIONAL THEATRE, TOKYO

## COMPETITION ENTRIES



*Site plan*



*The fragments*

## NEW COUNTY HALL, STRASBURG

The competition was for a new county hall for Strasburg, a complex consisting of 20,000 square metres of offices, together with spaces offering the sort of protocol connected with local administration and visits by important State dignitaries. The proposed location is to the southwest of the town, on the bank of the river Ill, exactly where historic Strasburg (the district known as 'Little France') meets the Strasburg of the twentieth century ('the slabs of the Medical Faculty'). Before it stands a dam built by Vauban, and the remains of the fortifications are still visible on the site.

The brief asked for a representative building, and seemed to favour the demolition of the disused eighteenth-century building at the entrance to the site, the large mansard roof of which acts as a visual link between the historic town and the new districts.

The question of demolition was fundamental. To demolish an interesting building, a major landmark of the town, simply to make room for a building whose purpose is essentially administrative, suggests a certain cynicism. Moreover, it seemed to us that a more up-to-date approach would be to reject the expedient of demolishing the old building and at the same time to introduce a new concept of urban combination.

It is important to remember that the site lies exactly on the boundary between two types of urban planning, one emphasizing the traditional perimeter block, the other reflecting the ideology of large post-war developments, in which each building is treated as an isolated entity. Rather than imitate either of these, we adopted a conceptual framework that would create a new relation between these different architectural types — and offer a strategy that could be applied to similar situations.

Strasburg has witnessed a variety of urban layouts — the Roman *cardo* and *decumanus*, narrow medieval streets, the neo-classical compositions of the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century German town planning, and the counter-compositions of Van Doesburg. Consequently, we decided that the nature of the competition site as a meeting-point between old and new could both justify the rehabilitation of the old barracks and suggest a new urban project that would clarify the role of the historical fragments in relation to the contemporary period.

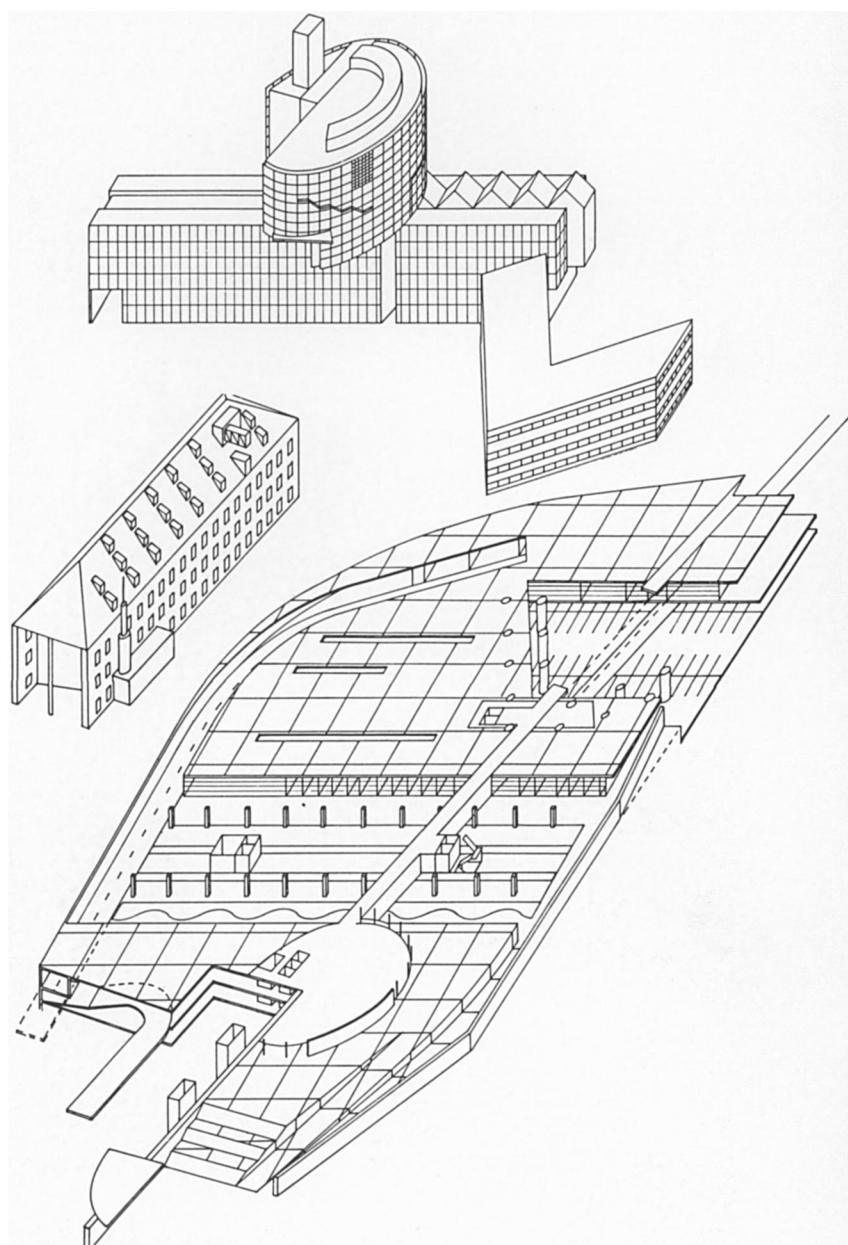
### The fragments

The problem, then, was to design a complex of offices linking the old and the new. In this instance the concept of fragmentation seemed appropriate for the following reasons: First, the fragment makes it possible to take into account the specific constraints of each element of the brief (for example the conference hall) without compromising the whole (for example repetitive floors of offices). Second, the fragment allows all the elements of the brief to be autonomous, while making it easier to perceive their relative importance. Third, the varying scale of each fragment makes it possible to relate the uncohesive space of the twentieth-century buildings (the medical faculty) with the cohesive space of the historic town. Fourth, the fragment also makes it possible, by suggesting free juxtapositions, to achieve a spatial invention, a poetic dimension, and a new conception of the site.

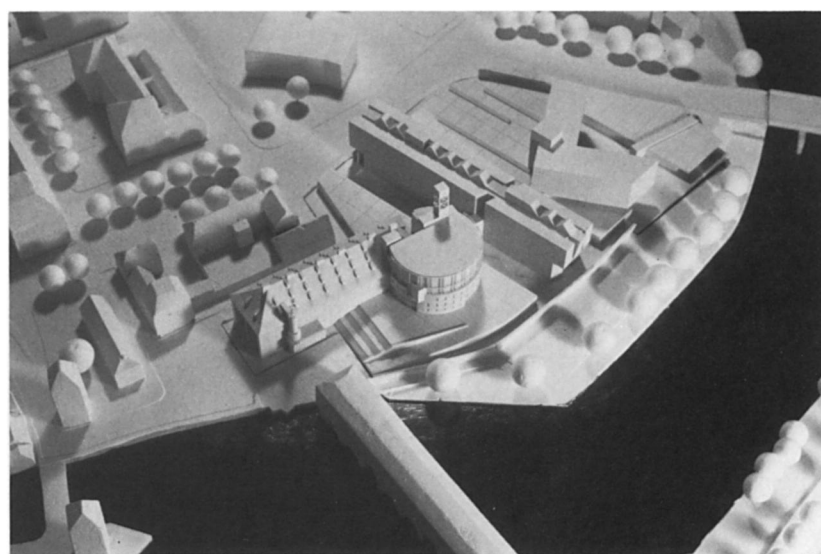
Taking this as our starting-point, we worked out a precise combination of volumes, based on both the requirements of the brief and the nature of the site:

A. The Cylinder, the focal element of the project, and immediately recognizable as such, articulates all the other functions. It includes the reception area, the chairman's office, the committee rooms, and the conference hall with its view of old Strasburg. Its resolutely modern structure plays on the fantasy of a space-age structure.

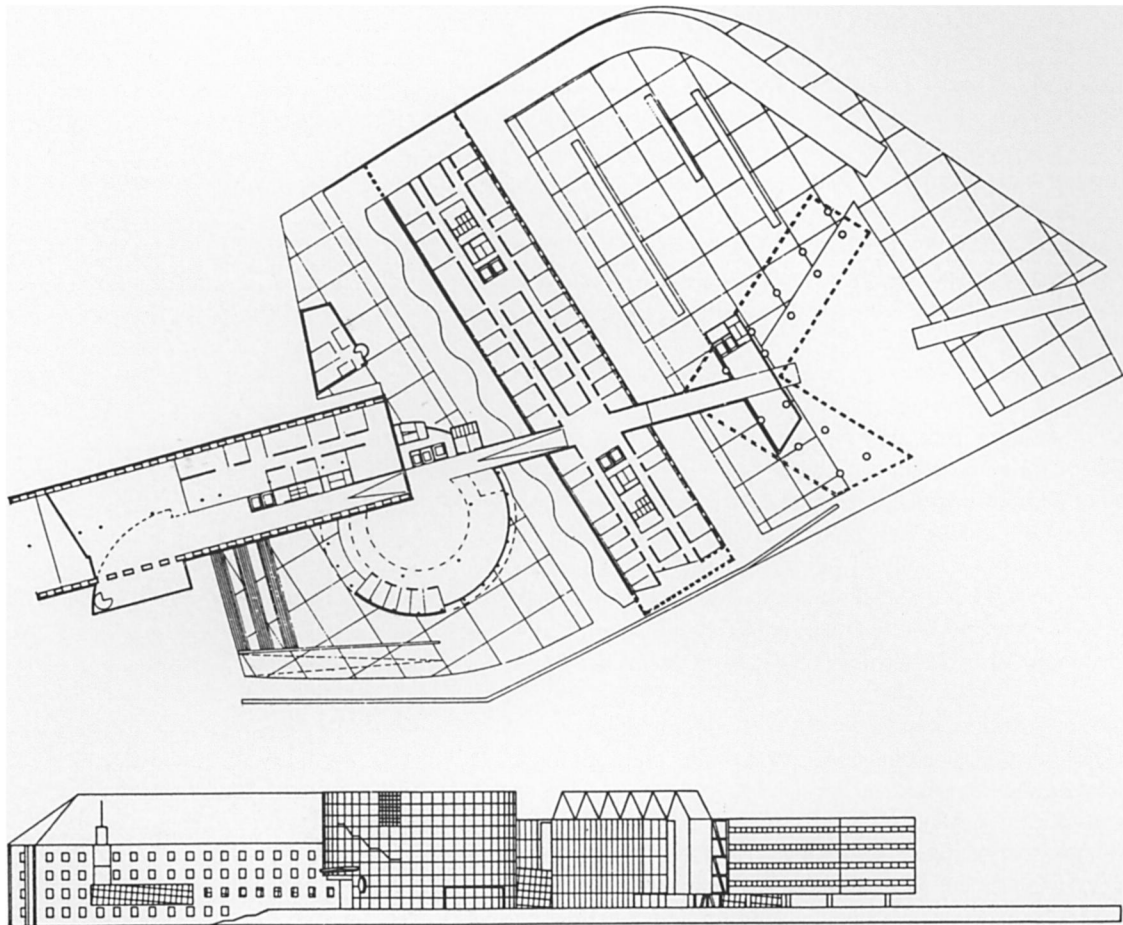
B. The eighteenth-century building, renovated and restructured, houses part of the chairman's services as well as the restaurants over-



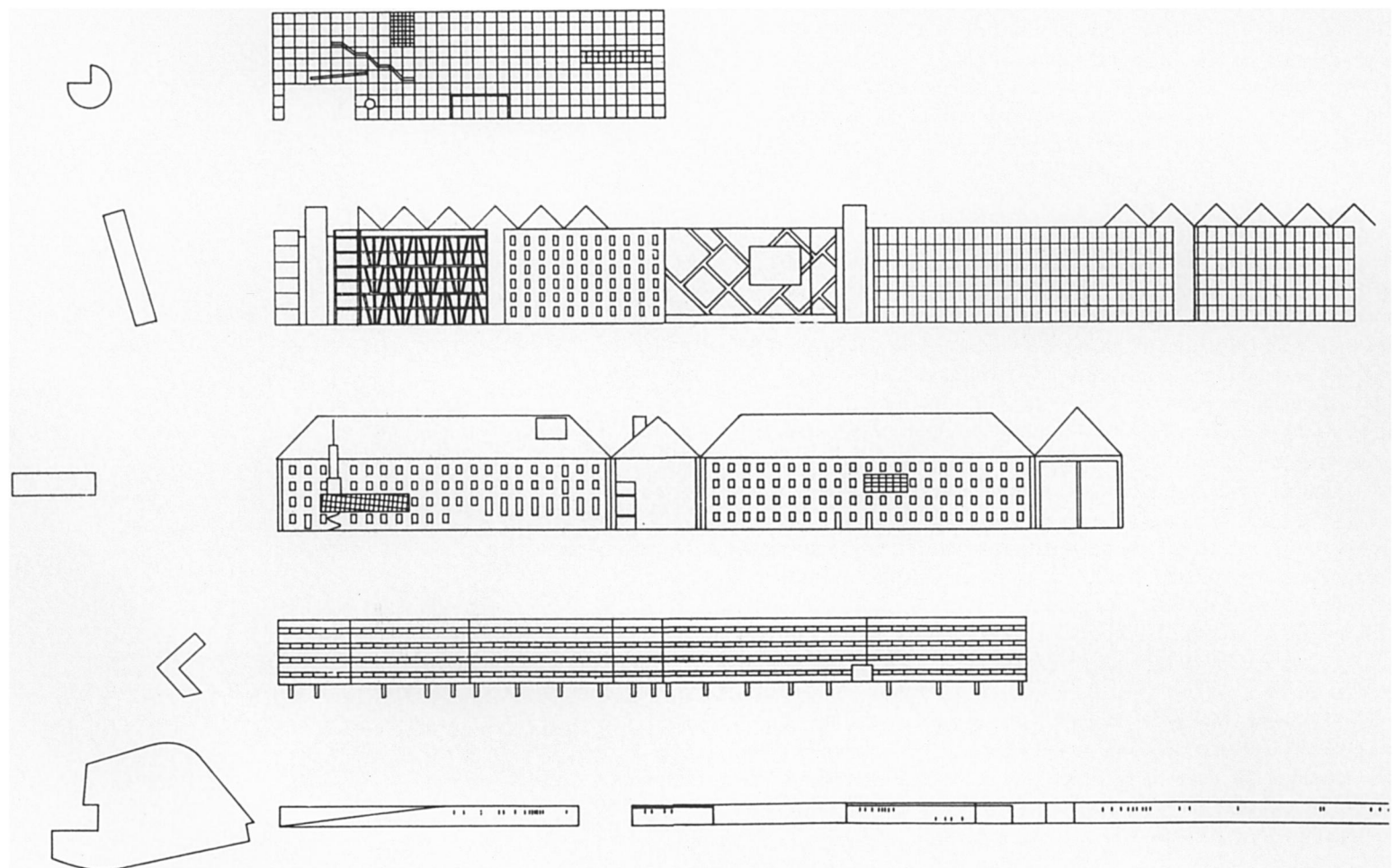
Axonometric with fragments



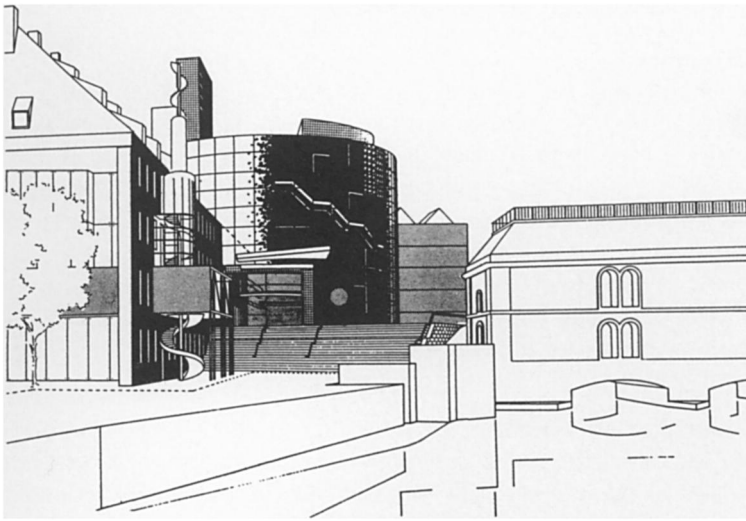
Model



*Ground-floor plan and elevation towards river*



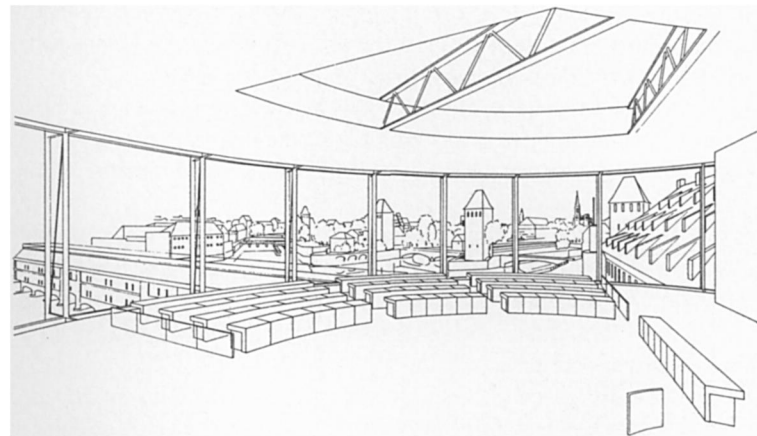
*Fragment façades, top to bottom: cylinder, slab, existing building, straight-edge building, base.*



*View towards entrance, with existing building and Vauban's dam on the right*



*Entrance hall*



*Conference hall*

looking 'Little France'. Carefully added contemporary elements (oriels, staircases) on the west and east façades, together with the recessed glazing of the north gable-end, help to efface the military connotations of the building while preserving the essential features of the façades and roof.

C. The contemporary Slab, containing most of the administrative services, is positioned at a right-angle to the river Ill — a major element of the setting — in the same direction as the bridges, Vauban's dam, etc. Unlike the unitary post-war blocks nearby, the Slab intentionally displays conflicting elevations: the elevation facing the outer avenues made of traditional Strasbourg pink sandstone, the elevation facing the historic district made of blue glass.

D. The Angle, a future extension of the whole complex, extends the grid of the post-war plan.

E. The Base, an abstract and mathematical landscape treated in part as a garden, comprises two levels: the first contains the underground car-parks, the other contains most of the general services situated at ground level and has the benefit of natural light.

These five elements define the project as a whole. Each with its own image, they act as both collision and articulation between the historic town and the new districts.

*This project was finally pronounced hors concours, as the city decided to demolish the eighteenth-century building.*

Translation by Sandra Morris.

**BERNARD TSCHUMI INTERNATIONAL**

Bernard Tschumi, Jean-François Erhel, Luca Merlini (Paris), Atelier UA5 (Strasbourg) with Christian Biecher, Neil Porter.

**Hypothesis**

How to deconstruct opera and architecture so as to 'think' their concepts in the most precise manner possible, and simultaneously to observe them from an external and detached point of view? How to devise a configuration of concepts which is systematic and irreducible, such that each concept intervenes at some decisive moment of the work? How to question the unity of a building or a monument without recourse either to a composition of articulated and formalized elements or to a random accumulation of isolated programmatic fragments? To play on limits without being enclosed within limits? To relate to other operas while referring only to one's own?

**Montage of attractions**

As we move towards the twenty-first century, the context of an opera house has changed radically. The 1986 international competition for a new National Theatre in Tokyo introduced a programme that required — besides two major auditoriums — an experimental theatre, a restaurant, mass-media facilities, exhibition spaces and a large outdoor space. In no way could it be conceived of as a unitary building, a pseudo-symbolical monument singled out from the city. If the theatre once went out to the city, the city has now re-entered the theatre. Purely theatrical signs have become part of the architectural language, while the performing arts are more than ever a 'montage of attractions'.

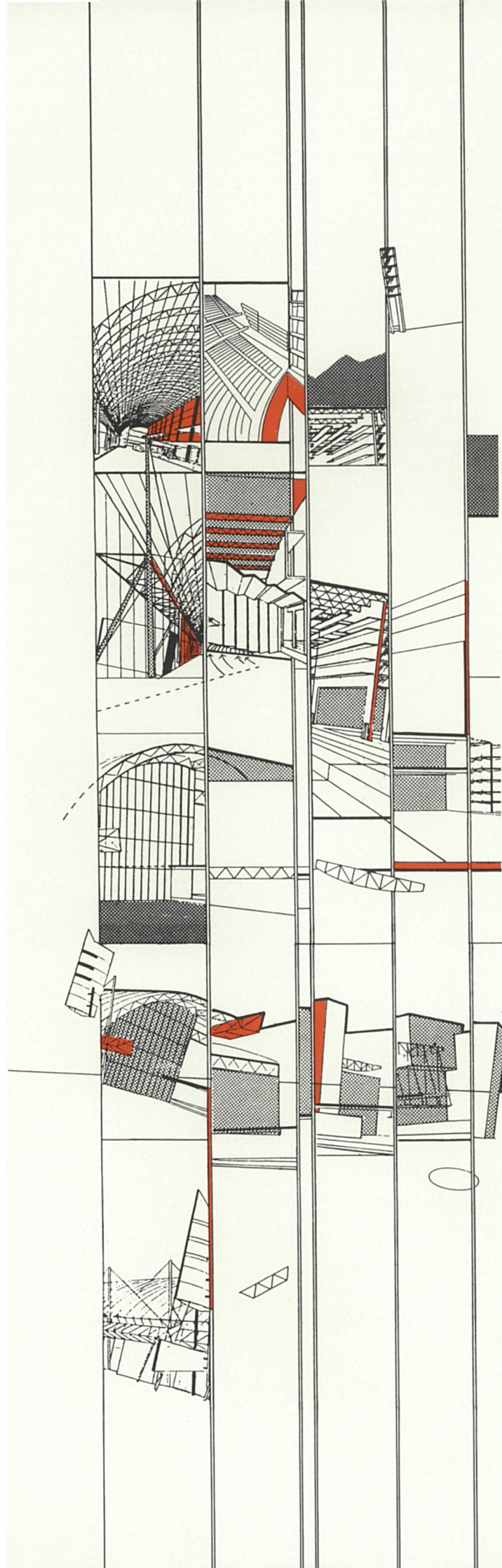
**Juxtaposition**

We have therefore abandoned traditional rules of composition and harmony, replacing them with a mode of organization based, not on 'form follows function', 'form follows form', or even 'form follows fiction', but rather on breaking apart the traditional components of the theatre and opera house and developing a new 'tonality', or 'sound'. No more artful articulations between the auditorium, the stage, the foyer, the grand staircase; instead, a new pleasure is to be found in the parallel juxtaposition of indeterminate cultural meanings, as opposed to fixed historicist practices.

In our project, functional constraints are not translated into a composition of symbolic units, but are extrapolated into a score of programmatic strips, each of which contains the main activities and their related spaces. The sequence of strips is as follows:

- A. The glass avenue provides direct access from the subway, car park and buses. Its busy mezzanines (theatre lobbies) act as a vertical spectacle, while its ground floor serves to gather crowds taking advantage of public services — box offices, shops, bars, press office, reception areas, information, police station, exhibition spaces. A restaurant is located between the glass avenue and the operatic garden.
- B. The vertical foyers overlook the glass avenue and encompass cloak-rooms, box offices, bars or buffets, suspended gardens. The limit between the glass avenue and the vertical foyers is qualified by lighting effects for the avenue (handrails, stairs, etc.).
- C. The auditoriums act as an acoustical strip accommodating each audience in a minimum of volume (for acoustical quality) and a maximum of visual comfort. This strip, which also accommodates VIP rooms, lavatories, etc., is conceived (at either end) so as to allow for small, localized future programmes.
- D. The servicing strip coincides with the proscenium, acting as a central artery which services the whole construction.
- E. The stages provide maximum flexibility and technical possibilities.
- F. This strip contains the backstage area, the assembly hall, the rehearsal spaces, the scenery shops. Wherever possible, the latter two are provided with daylight.
- G. The final strip is the first one from the point of view of artists and staff. It contains dressing rooms and related spaces — organizing them

*Conceptual diagram*



along the balconies of a four-storey artists' concourse (which avoids the anonymous repetition of corridors) — as well as the administration, which benefits from a direct view of the operatic garden.

### Notation

The strips are analogous to the lines of a musical score which can accommodate any type of sound, melody, rhythm. Some are technical spaces and others are city-like. Some are symphonic spaces in which crowds gather to sit and watch, while others are repetitive office spaces. All are interchangeable. However, in a given configuration they fulfil specific functions and develop specific music or a play: the new National Theatre.

On their longitudinal axis, the strips contain programmatic bands that extend into the operatic garden: the latter can be interpreted as either the conceptual origin of the strips or the final trace of their existence. On the transverse axis, the strips move from a rigorous interpretation of the band system to an increasingly disconnected or disjuncted one, as they reach the public realm — the glass avenue.

### Space and performance

The insertion of programmatic events into architecture is a means of breaking down or deconstructing its traditional components. The parallel strips of the score have been devised to receive these events, so that deconstructed elements (theatre, lobby, stage, piano-bar, etc.) can be manipulated independently, according to conceptual, narrative or, of course, programmatic concerns (just as the violin can be made independent from the piano in a concerto). This mode of notation/organization suggests that the juxtaposition of each of the bands can lead to intensified operatic effects: the layering of multiple facts as well as their interpretation.

### Logic of differences

Such an organization can be compared with the often noted dissociation between language and speech, code and message, which leads to a system of differences. In our project, for example, there is a logic of stages, a logic of lobbies, a logic of audience spaces. Each logic differs from the next and each lies within a space different from the one juxtaposed to it. At the same time the very principle of difference implies that an element can function or signify only through its relation to another element. No strip or band can exist on its own, yet no strip or band 'depends' fully on the others for existence. They slide on parallel rails, neutral and independent. However, events — the crowds, the spectacle — intersect them, establishing ephemeral relationships between the strips. Except for such moments of special intensity and interaction, the strips remain autonomous.

### Hypermetropolitan stage

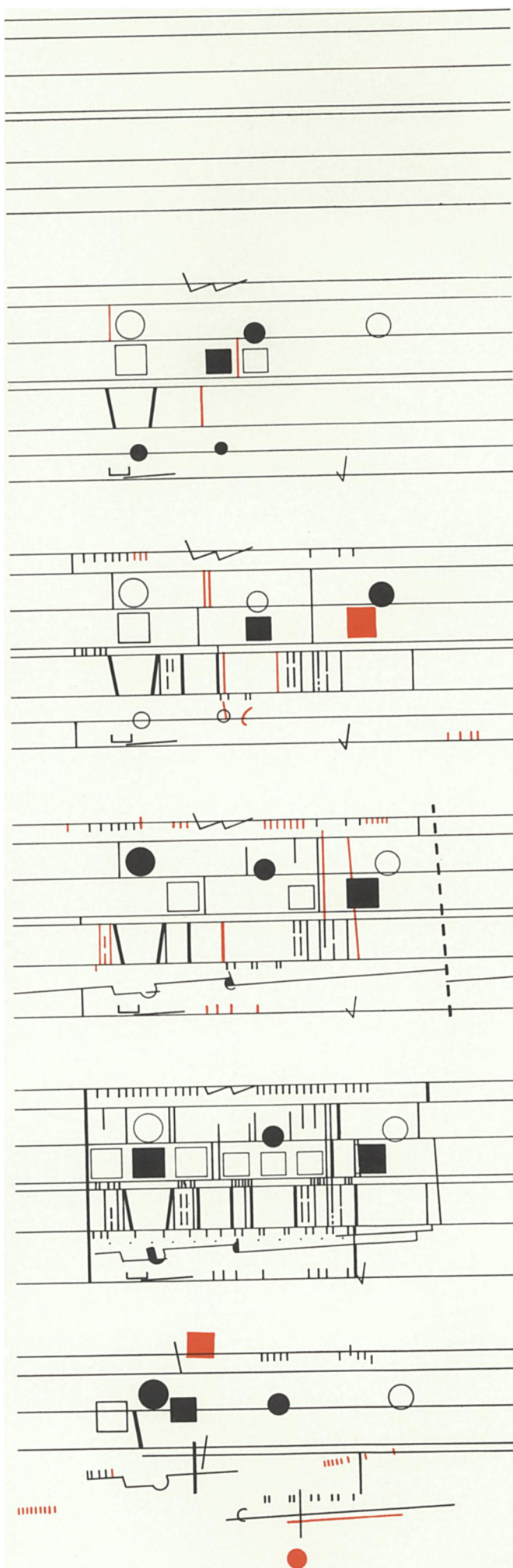
We have therefore tried to devise a method, to offer a simple tool which would be open to a variety of theatrical and operatic transformations: an instrument of work or a system without preconceived form, whose flexibility allows possible development of the programme during the planning process, ultimately permitting spectators, directors and actors to play it — whether as the city, a modern opera, Italian or Elizabethan theatre, or an electronic neon strip. The new National Theatre of Tokyo becomes a hypermetropolitan stage, on which the viewers are actors in the city as a whole. The parallel strips with their highly mechanized equipment speak a language of combinations, permutations and substitutions. All of this implies the cinefication of the opera house, suggesting a new spatial model for the performing arts.

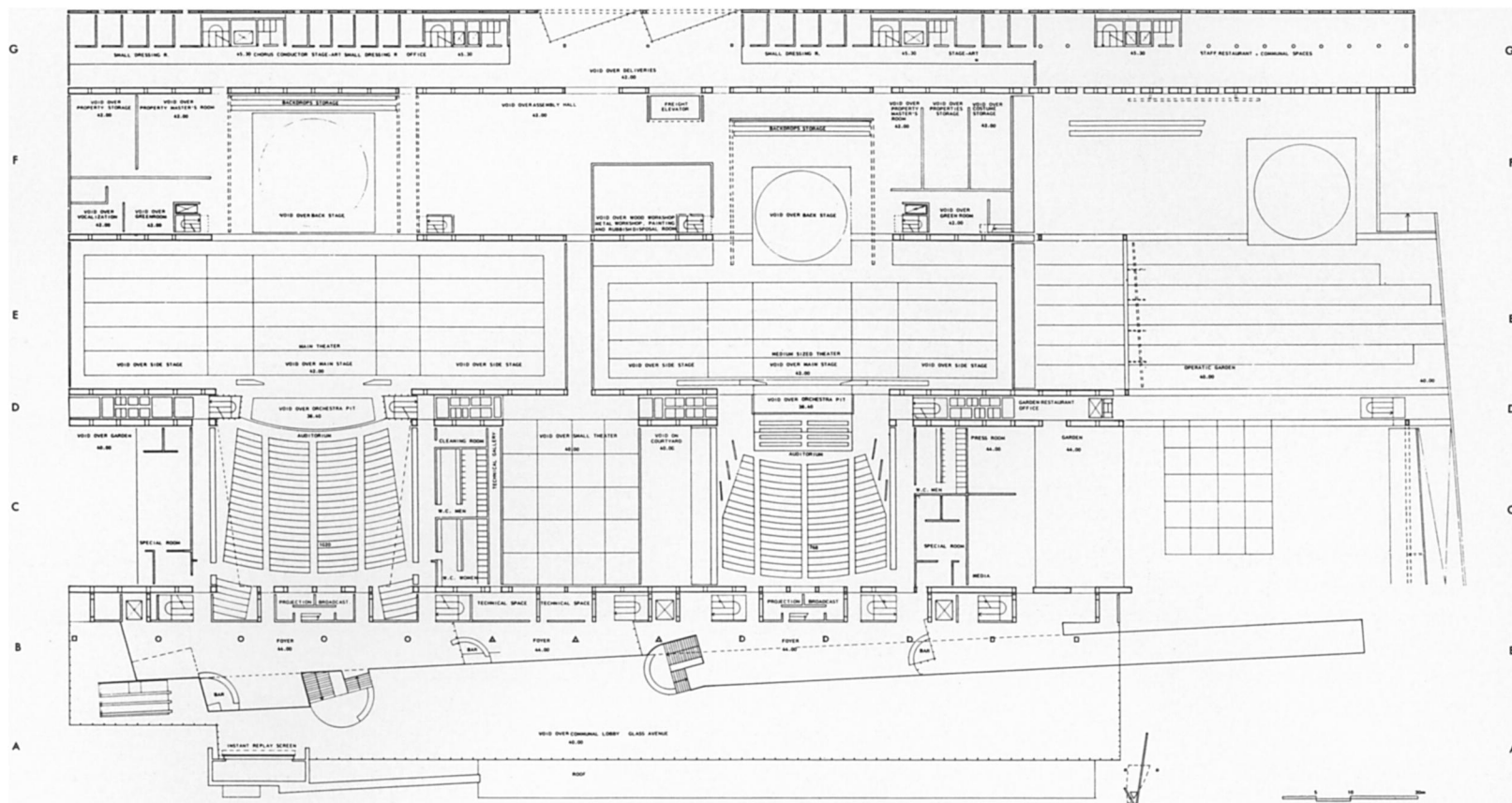
### BERNARD TSCHUMI INTERNATIONAL

Bernard Tschumi and Luca Merlini

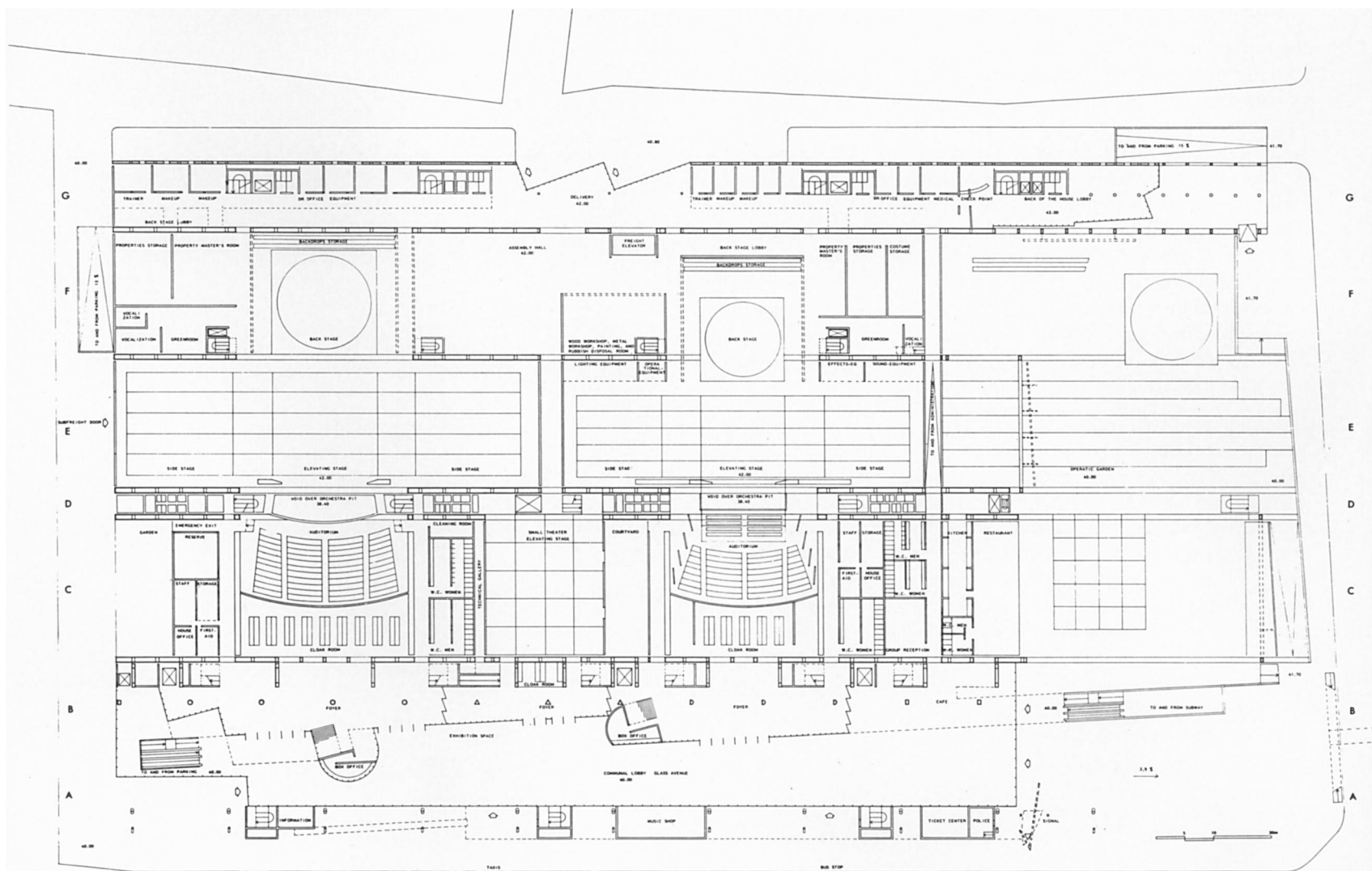
with Hugh Dutton, Peter Rice, RFR (Structure); Daniel Commins (Commins-BBM, Acoustics); Daniel Dubos, SETEC Bâtiment (HVAC); and Christian Biecher, Patrick Winters, Martyn Wiltshire.

*Strip perspective*

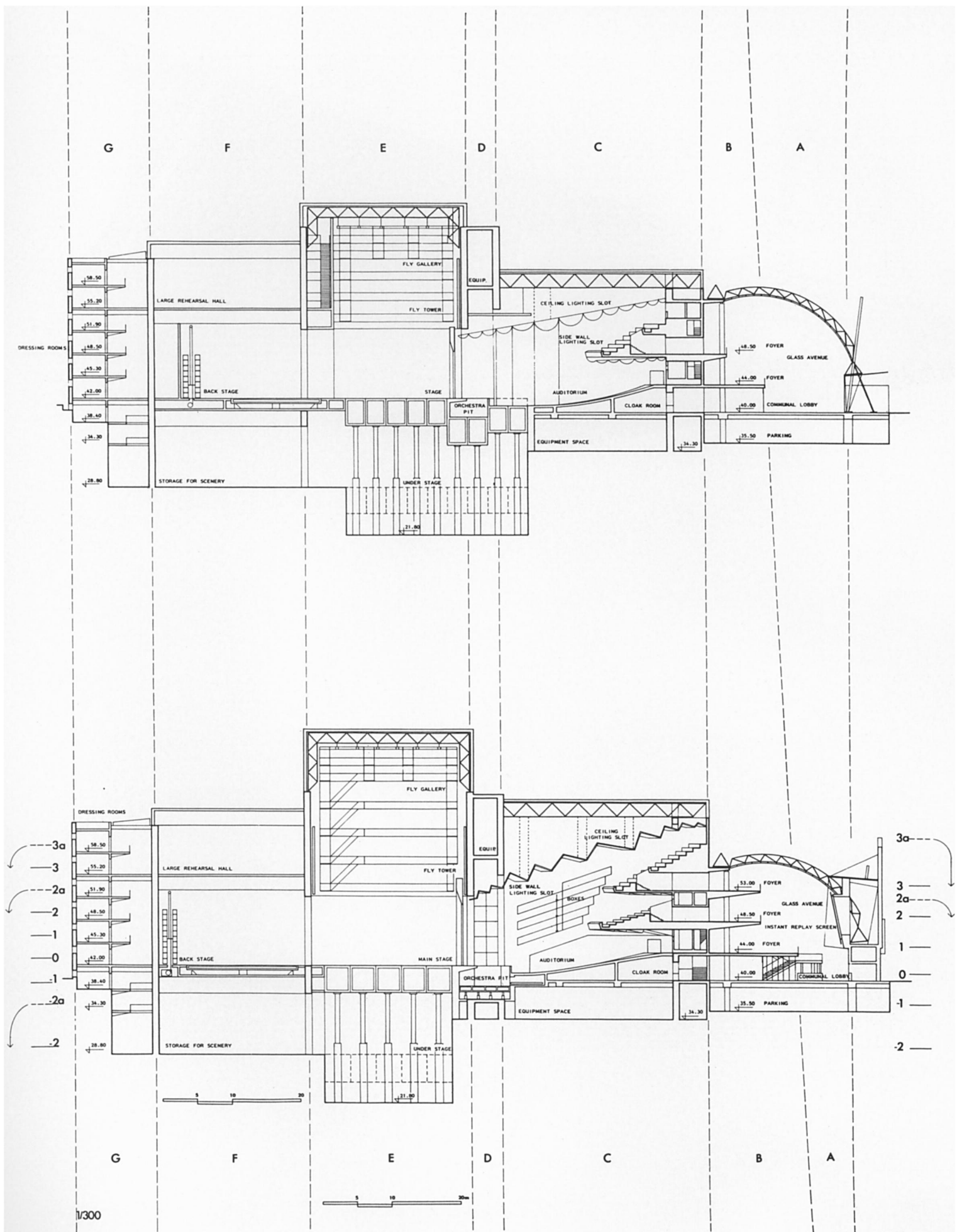




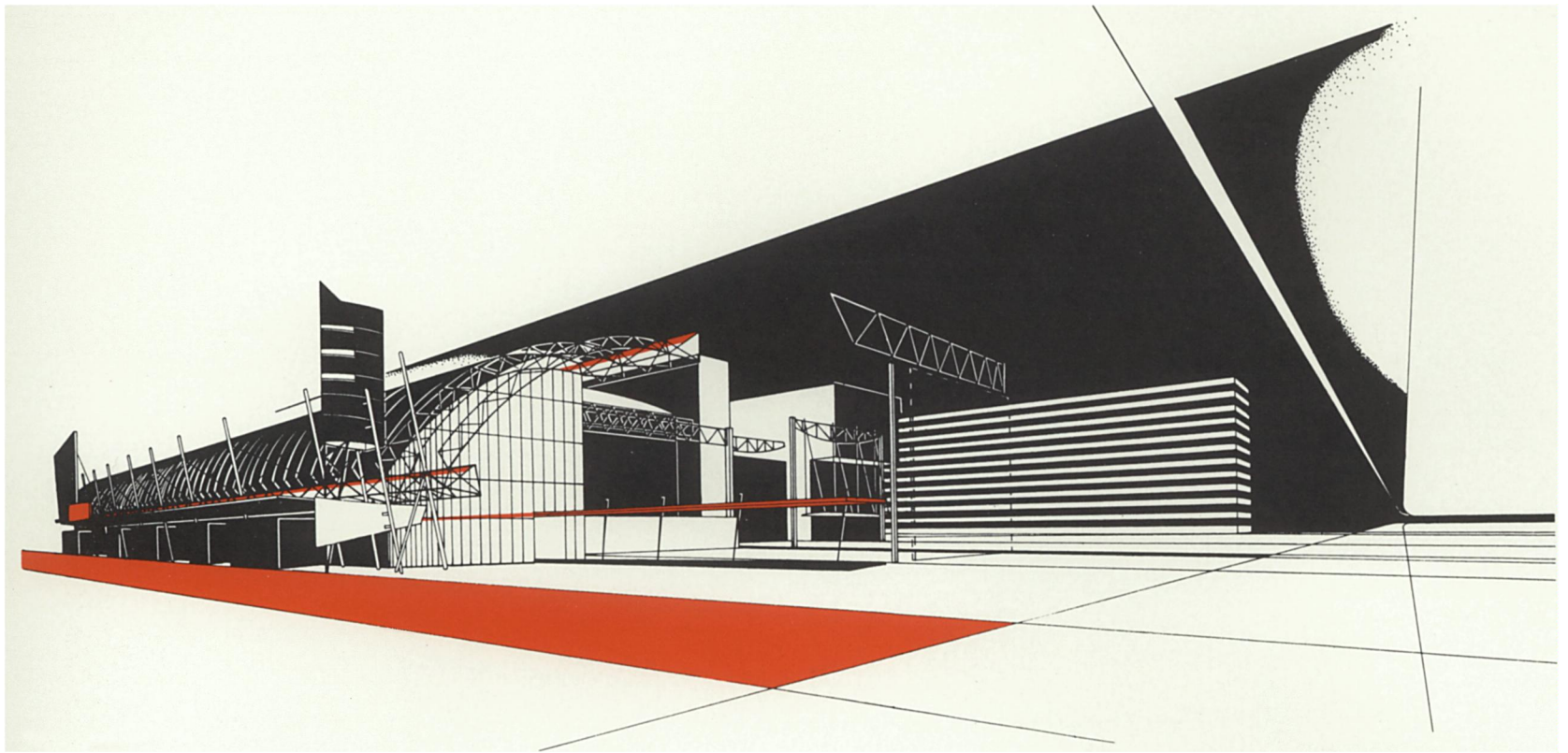
**First-floor plan**



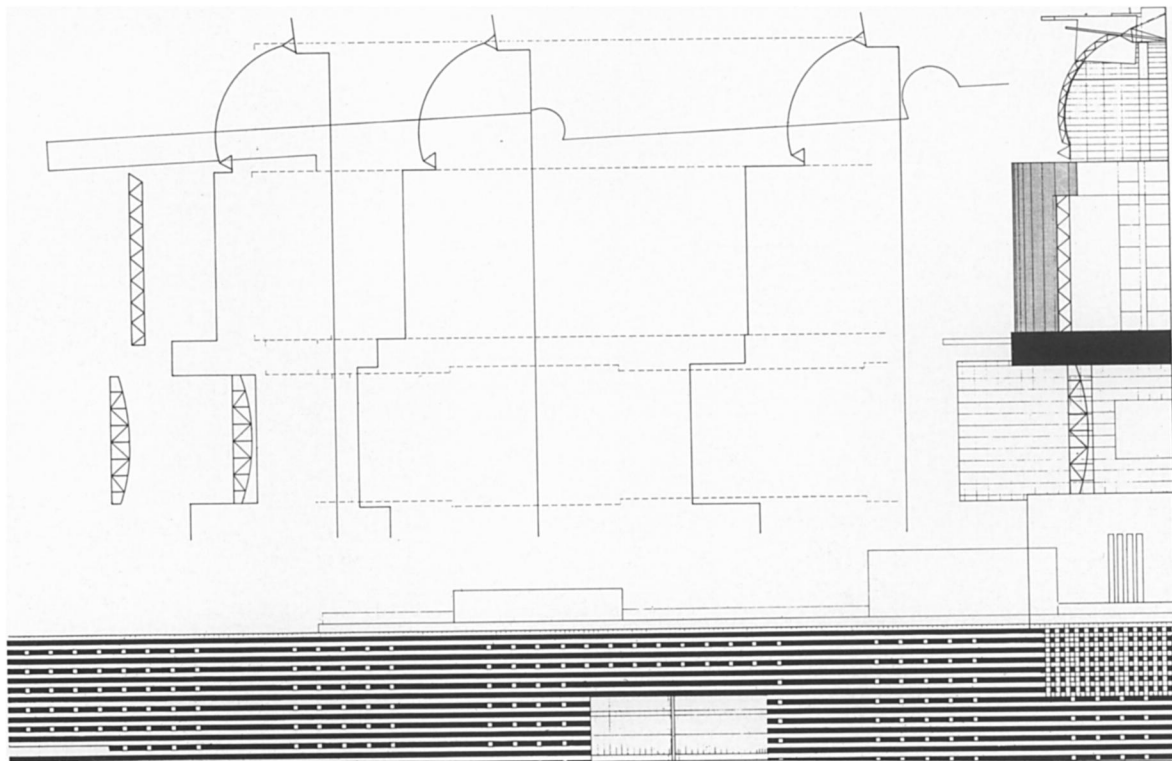
**Ground-floor plan**



Sections through medium-sized theatre and main theatre.

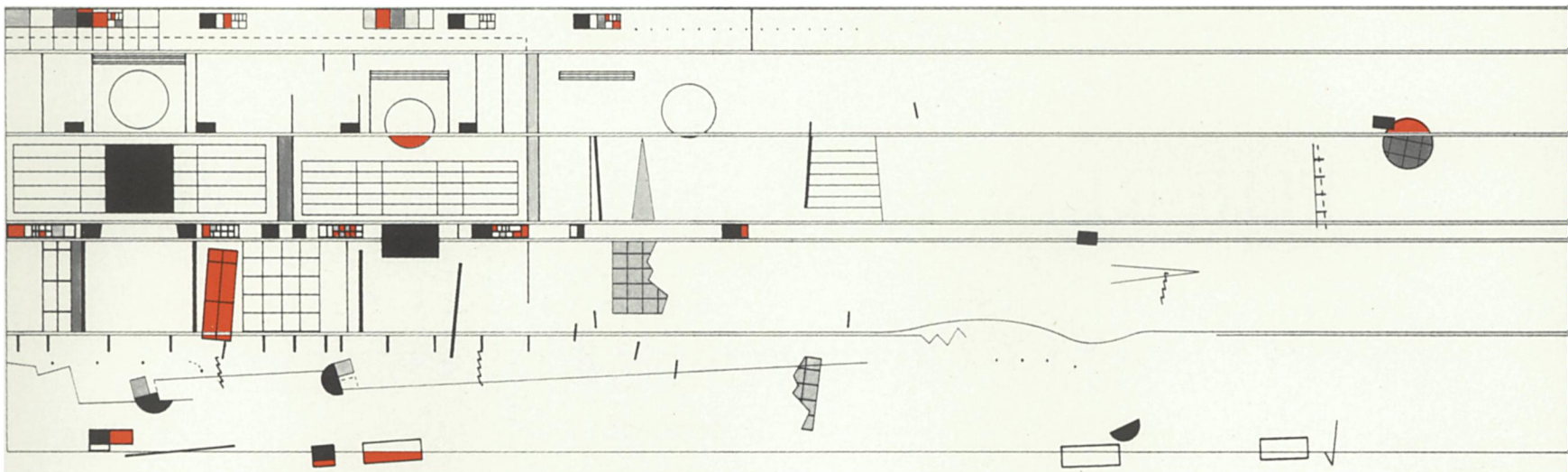


*Entrance view*

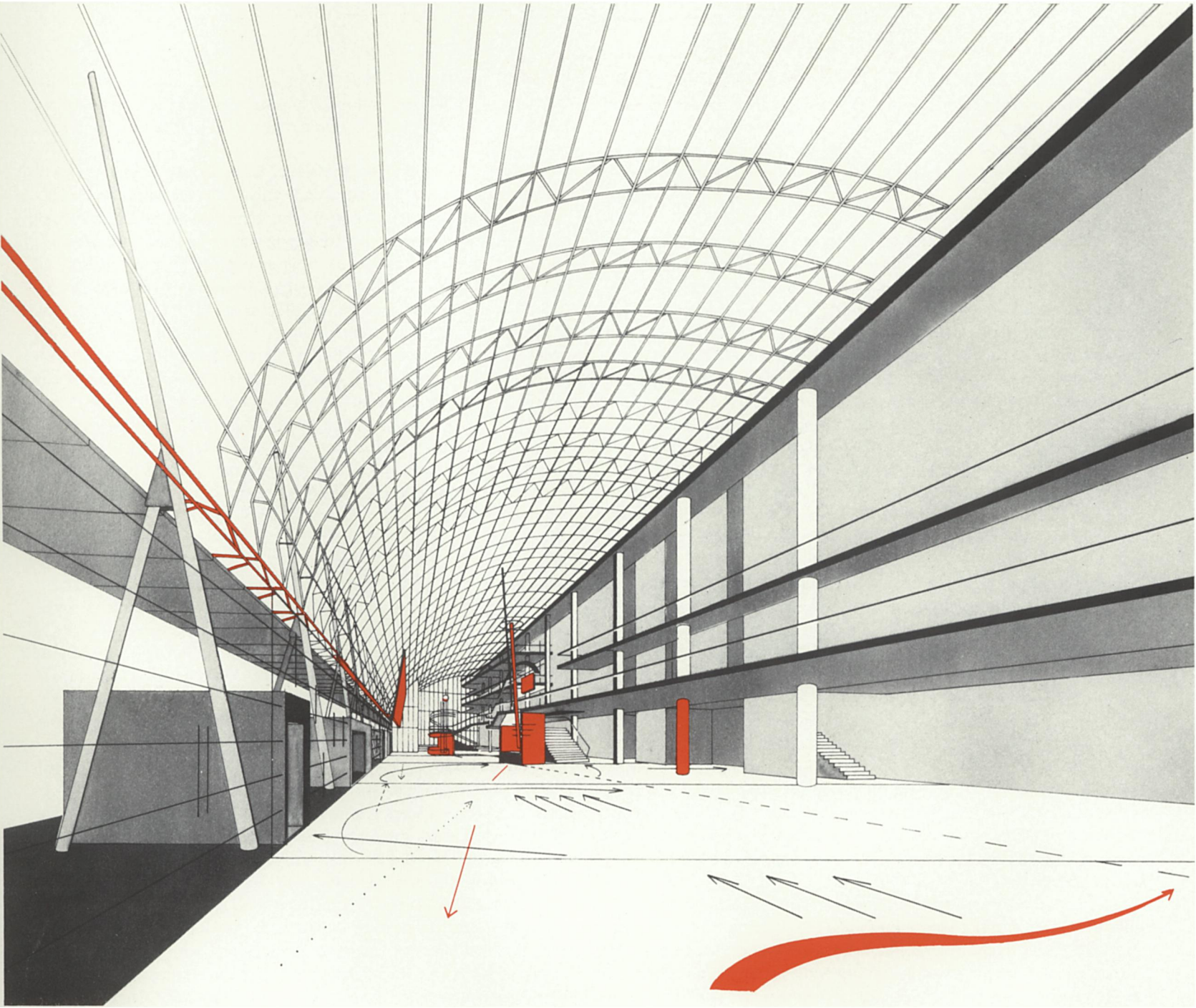


*Side and rear elevation*

NORTH ELEVATION  
EAST ELEVATION



Conceptual diagram



Interior view of main lobby