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Inside James Stirling

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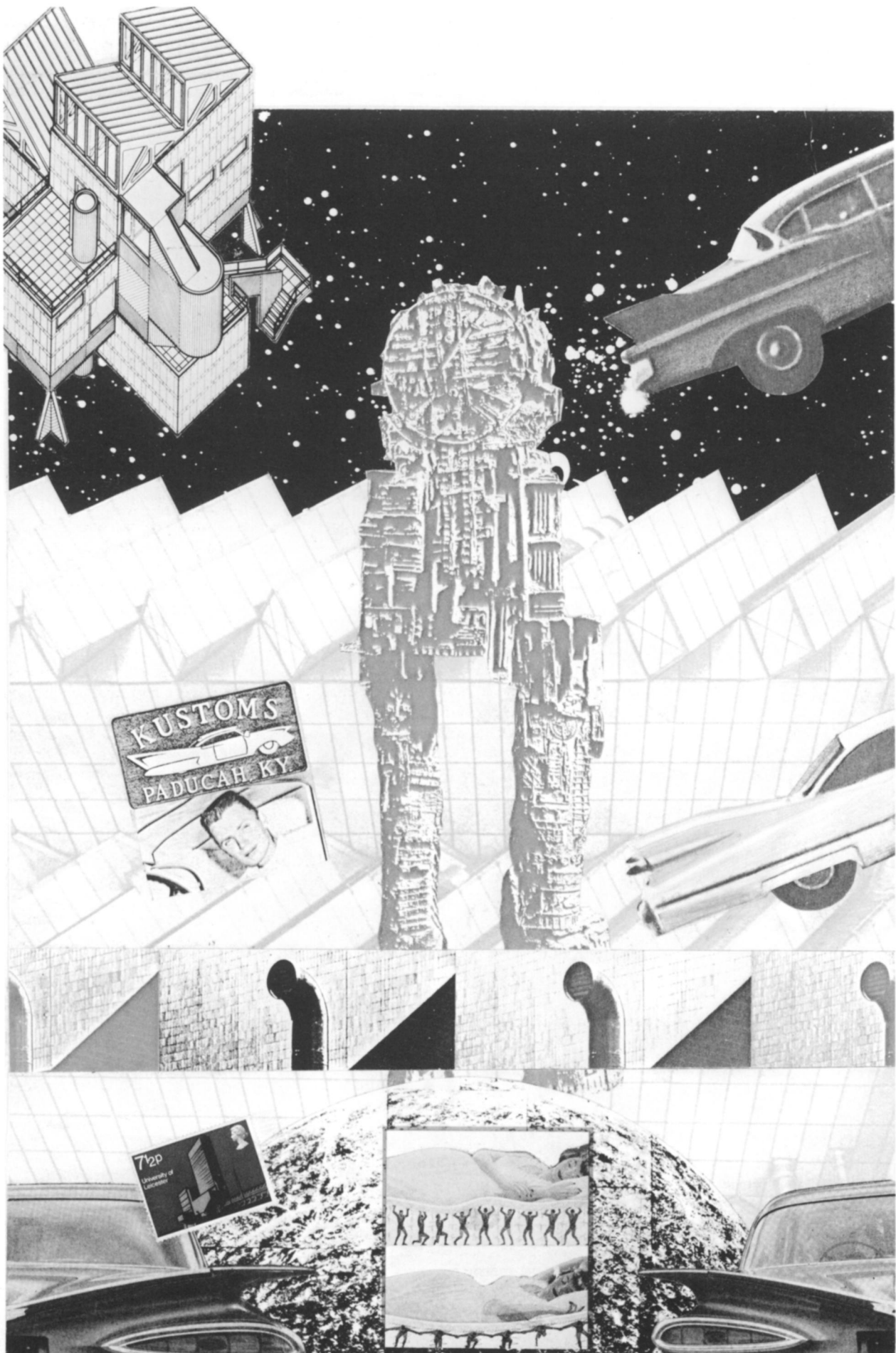
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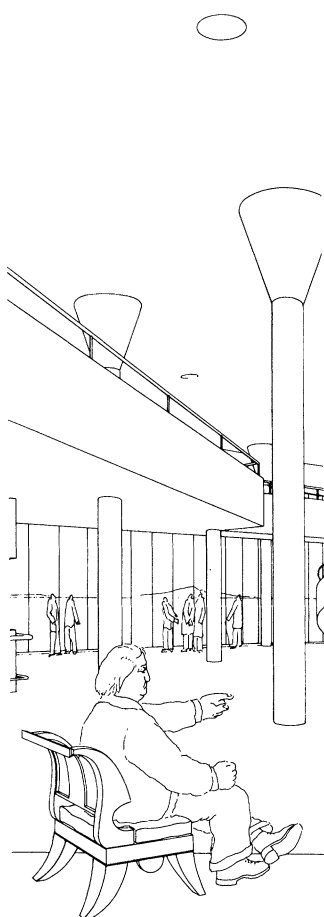
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Inside James Stirling



James Stirling's work—inventive, prolific and controversial—is judged by most critics to be instrumental in extending the interpretation of the principles variously known as form follows function and International Style; yet, to the general public, his buildings are disorderly examples of an arrogant idiosyncrasy which ought to be checked. Some critics are so impressed by his audacity that they evaluate each project not on its merits, but on its value as a polemic device in the continual jockeying for position characteristic of modern architectural criticism. A close look at the buildings themselves suggests still another evaluation.

The meticulous care Stirling brings to the making of architecture may not be necessary in theory, but the results are clearly worth the painstaking effort. Like a film director, Stirling refuses to relinquish control over the often tedious aspects of building in order to indulge an intellectual priority. His buildings rarely if ever need a defensive explanation about the nature of industry, or the impossibility of union labor.

In spite of the technical virtuosity of each project, Stirling's sensibility remains uniquely personal in a context made increasingly systematic and routine. One of his early projects, a cluster of apartment units in a suburb of London, still has a powerful impact which is obviously respected by the tenants, who use the premises as though it were a classic automobile, given them for safekeeping. Like an automobile, the building is clearly an object which exists to be used and would suffer greatly from an over-protective stewardship that might throttle the vigorous life the building now contains.

Stirling achieved his characteristic work in the execution, with James Gowan, of an engineering laboratory for Leicester University, in 1959. Here, with the almost simultaneous appearance of Louis Kahn's Richards Laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania, and Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale, the confrontation of classic functional architecture and romantic formal architecture became a central issue. Unlike past masters of the modern movement, Stirling and Gowan made no attempt to rationalize the intentionally harsh functional arrangement of their design with easily digestible images of ocean liners or rational geometries of squares and cubes. Neither did they create spectacular spatial effects, as did Rudolph, or quasi-metaphysical geometric patterns, as did Kahn. Instead, they clung stubbornly to the roots of traditional English building technology to design a structure reminiscent of the anonymous 19th century engineer-inventors.

I first became aware of Leicester in 1964, while the shock waves of Kennedy's death were mingling with the growing anger of students and new tunes from the British Isles. It had the impact of a high speed auto collision, the seductive raunchiness of one of Fellini's sirens, the glow of moonlight on the Mississippi, the revolutionary glint of *Borstal Boy*, the semantic craziness of *Alice in Wonderland*. It was an assault, a caress, a loony grin, a puckish swagger, a hot rod. It yawed up through the trees against the pea-gray sky above that English campus like a mechanical hobgoblin: gritty, not clean; dockside, not nautical; sincere, not cerebral.

One could almost hear it clank.

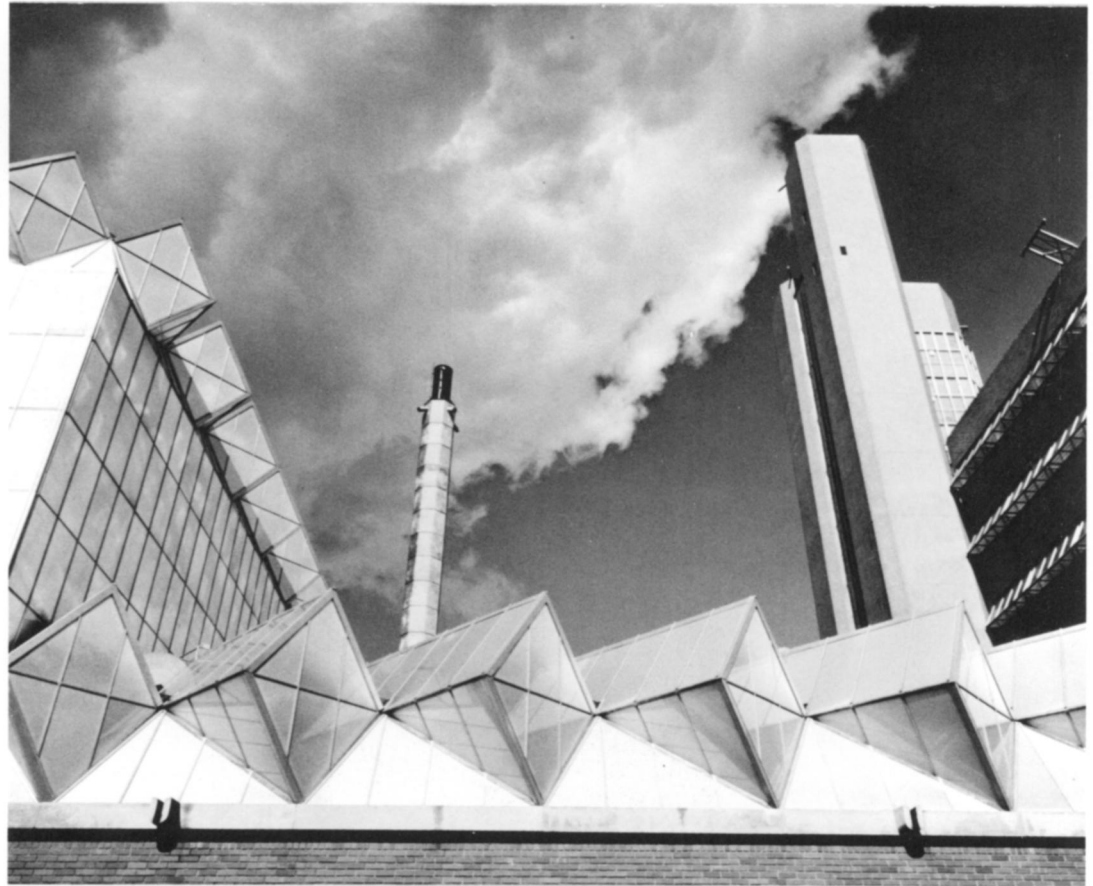
Like English motorcycles and automobiles, the building is organized as a visible collection of discrete functional parts assembled to a chassis and linked together with weatherproof fairings. Auditorium, lecture hall, offices and laboratories assume the correct position without compromising either shape or function. Instead of an *ad hoc* arrangement of rooms and utilities concealed in a standard building form, the shape and arrangement of the rooms themselves, with the joinery and structural support occasioned by their position in space, creates the architecture. Thus, while approaching the building one can appreciate the individual components of the structure much as one might enjoy identifying the parts of a steam locomotive.

A vast, serrated glass roof, cranked 45 degrees off the rectangular walls below, admits light to the testing laboratory.

A chambered, glazed tower, reminiscent of Wright's tower at Johnson Wax, effectively isolates faculty offices from noise and traffic generated by the laboratory and affords views to the surrounding campus.

Two wedge-shaped auditoria are positioned at the base of the office tower to provide immediate access from both campus and laboratory wing while curtailing through traffic.

A tower with special no-draft windows, immediately accessible from each floor of the office tower, houses small teaching labs. Unlike Kahn's similar arrangement at the University of Pennsylvania, however, Stirling and Gowan make a powerful distinction between "office" fenestration and "laboratory" fenestration. The graphic unity of the building is destroyed in order to answer a utilitarian bias.

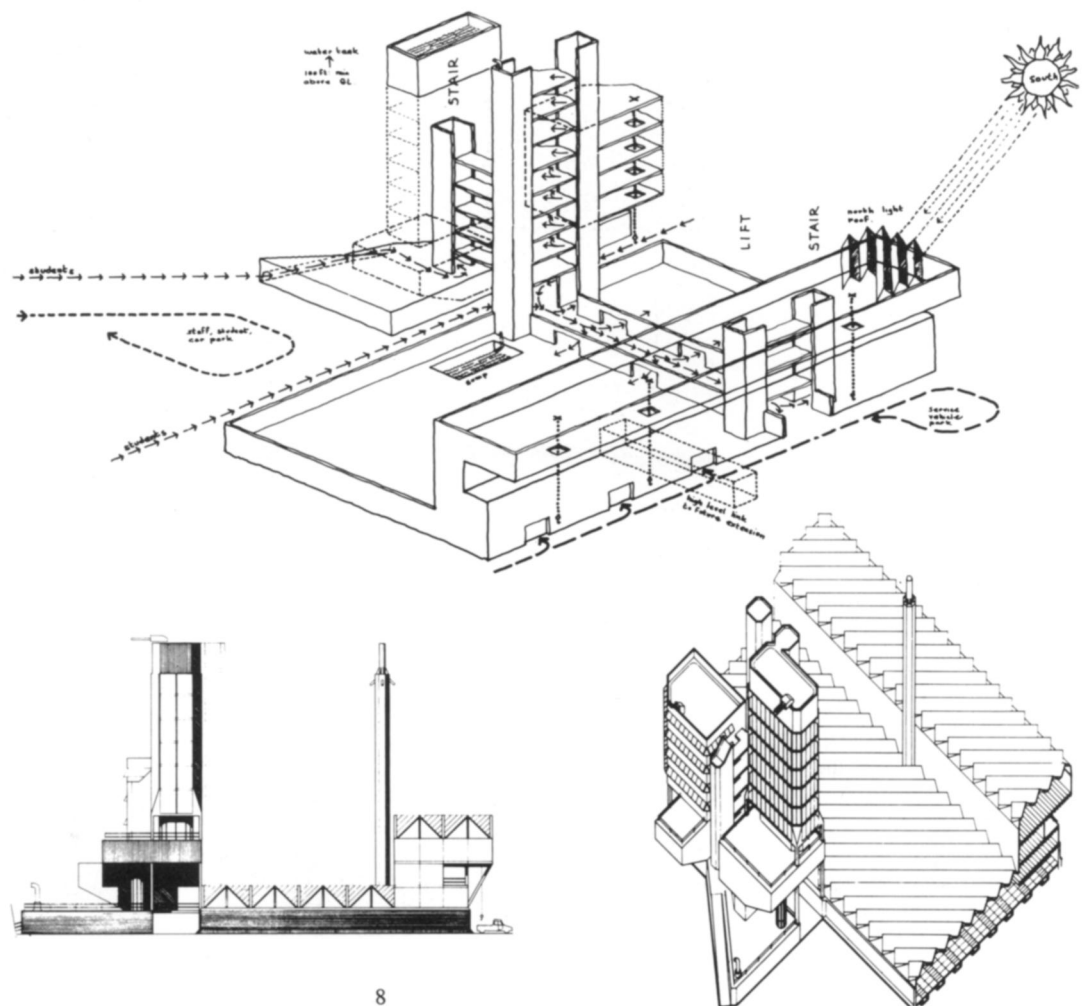


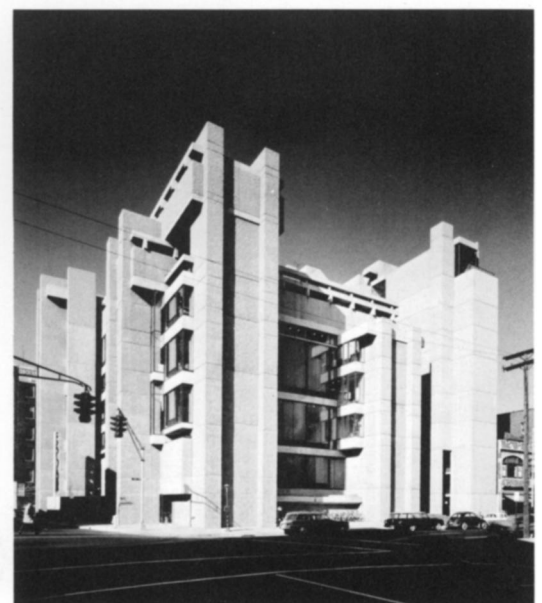
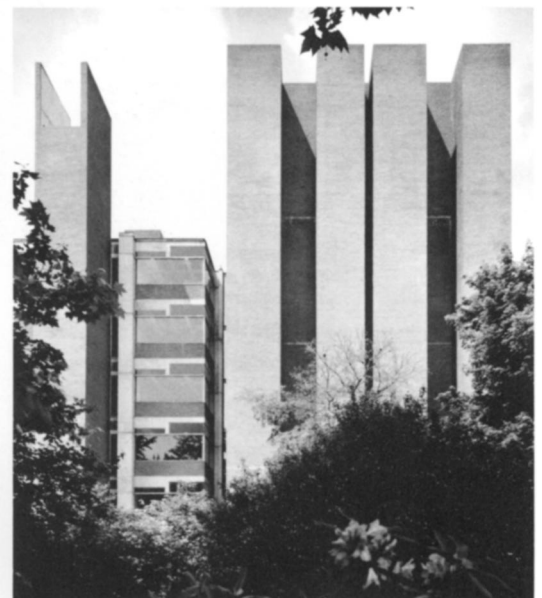
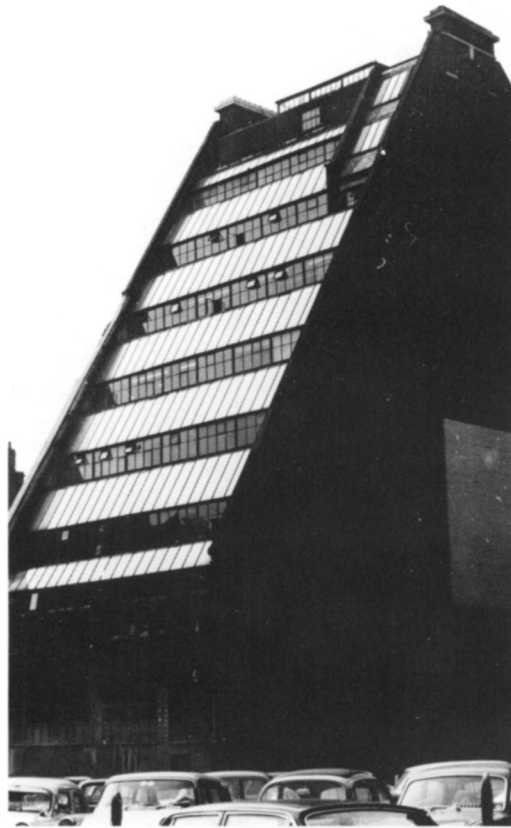
Leicester University's Engineering Building, 1959, was Stirling and Gowan's first internationally recognized work. Ground-level workshops cover most of the small site, while offices, labs and lecture halls are housed in a tower overlooking an adjacent municipal park.

This building's importance was recognized with the issuing of a 7½p stamp (above) by Her Majesty's mail service.

The workshop roof (top, right) is turned on a 45 degree angle, across the plan, to catch the north light. Shops in this wing can easily be changed in size as the partitions are movable. The tower spaces are more specific and its exterior form reflects that definition.

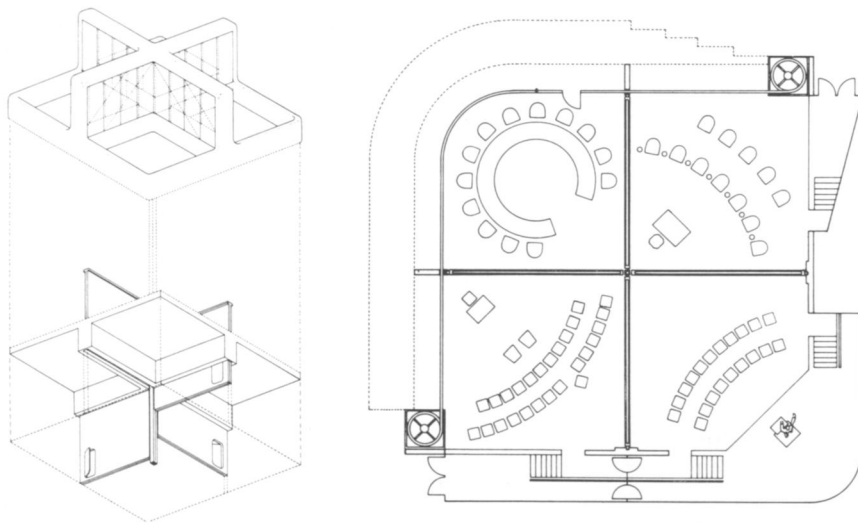
A circulation diagram (center, right), the northwest elevation (below, left) and an axonometric (below, right) demonstrate the acute concern for function that distinguishes Stirling's academic structures.





Three examples of 19th century anonymous English architecture shown here clearly possess forms and represent attitudes that have inspired Stirling's best work.

Constructed in the same period as Leicester Labs, Louis Kahn's Richards Laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania (right, center) and Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale (right, bottom) represent the formalist approach to architecture that Stirling and Gowan purposefully rejected at Leicester.



James Stirling grew up and studied architecture in Liverpool, a city much like Detroit. It is a manufacturing, not an intellectual, center. Pragmatic, no nonsense, getting the job done, industrial centers like Liverpool sported concentrations of military designers during World War II, whose designs for radar huts and cockpits were controlled by human factors, such as angle of view, reach and accessibility. Henry Dreyfuss pioneered that methodology in the USA, but the architects who were his contemporaries—Eero Saarinen, Kevin Roche, *et al*—were apparently unable to visualize an architecture in those terms.

It remained for Stirling to return from service as a paratrooper and discover that the design of buildings, like the design of war machinery, might be generated exclusively by urgent organizational priorities. That point of view—always blunt, and infuriatingly alienated—has allowed his work to develop in a framework uncluttered by architectural precedents. That is, unlike the majority of architects who share “cultivated” backgrounds that tend to reinforce “normal” design decisions, Stirling does not need a stylistic or intellectual justification for the “complexity and contradiction” implicit in each of his designs. He is simply unwilling to court the support of historians and critics at the expense of the built form.

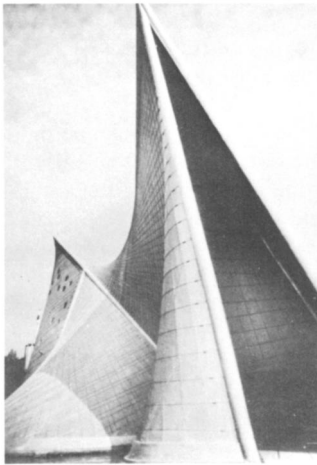
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We had just watched the long tambour wall at Stirling’s Olivetti Training Center coil tightly around the spindle on which it is stored. Everything worked without a hitch. “I suppose you’ve got to have people like Stirling and Le Corbusier,” said Brian Bagnall, now president of Concrete Limited and formerly student at Liverpool with Stirling, “. . . but you’ve got to be careful what you let them do.”

* * * * *

In the early 60s, painters like Richard Hamilton and Allen Jones showed work filled with industrial artifacts posing as sensual, threatening, or erotic companions. Nudes and housewives were surrounded by toasters, white porcelain refrigerators and black-tipped bumper guards which were all accorded equal pictorial focus. The objects, in fact, ceased to be “backgrounds” in the classical sense. Instead, fully autonomous, they competed fiercely for space with their suddenly static human companions.

The ascendancy of the object was a natural follow up to the “Kitchen Sink” of the 50s, when angry young Teddys and Rockers were portrayed by writers like Osborne as operators in the generally mean and deteriorating environment left over from World War II. When the burgeoning clockwork finally brings forth



Eric Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower (top) and Le Corbusier's Philips Pavilion for the Brussels Worlds Fair, provided early models for Stirling's irreverent attitudes.

(opposite)
Olivetti's Training School at Haslemere, 1969, includes a "multispace" used for lectures, exhibitions and various social occasions. "Lift-up" walls, housed in the roof, may be lowered to divide the space into two, three, or four parts (see diagram, top, left).

The two open sides of this space may be enclosed with a "roll-around" tambour wall that is housed in opposite corners of this space, as shown in the floor plan (top, right).

the streamlined Jaguars, chromed toasters, and Hoovers which had such an impact on English life, Harold Pinter devotes nearly an act of *The Caretaker* to a malevolent vacuum cleaner:

Suddenly the electrolux starts to hum. A figure moves with it, guiding it. The nozzle moves along the floor after Davies, who skips, dives away from it, and falls, breathlessly. Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. Get away-y-y-y-y. The electrolux stops. . . .

In a similar way, one has the feeling that Stirling's best buildings are somehow sentient. That they are able to feel footsteps, hands on rails, the throw of switches. There is an exhilarating series of revelations about the buildings themselves within a strict vocabulary that is voluptuous, yet pragmatic—finished, yet raw and revealing.

Many of these conventions had their origins in Pop Art. Just as Lichtenstein or Hamilton might appropriate a frame from Krazy Komix, tune it up and slot it into an arts context, Stirling, with insight worthy of Duchamp, has substituted off-the-shelf blowers, vents and maintenance equipment for painting and sculpture. The substitutions are not those of a teacher, who is anxious that we understand what makes the building work, or of a neo-Calvinist who is persuaded that we must learn to admit contradictory elements into an otherwise homogeneous context. Rather, Stirling's dramatic instinct employs these objects as a rhythmic punctuation of otherwise ordinary architectural events.

Stirling's work, like that of Charles Moore, camouflages outrageous formal and cultural configurations by bracketing all of these issues in a simple, often conservative building vocabulary. At Leicester, Cambridge and Oxford, the visitor encounters glass and red tile surfaces supported by exposed concrete; at Runcorn and St. Andrews a robust precast concrete; at Olivetti Training Center, glass and fiberglass. In theory, this is like a newspaper that manipulates a single system with a few simple rules, similar to those that govern tile, to spell out messages ranging from routine to urgent. Moreover, the "content" of the newspaper does not infect either the integrity of the type or the quality of the object any more than the configuration of Stirling's buildings affects our fascination with the pattern of tiles or the quality of the surface they provide. Like erogenous zones, these surfaces invite admiring glances, sustained contact, manipulation.

The turbines at the apex of the reading room at Cambridge, seen suggestively through a chenille-like layer of frosted glass from the reading room below, are privately bared through a small clear light on the balcony above. A tumescent vent

at Oxford rises from a stepped mound swinging a green tassel from its tip. The central column descends from its sheath at Haslemere as the window washer spreads cyclically along the length of the link.

Stirling did have some models around. Butterfield, from 19th century England; Le Corbusier, especially in work like the Philips Pavilion and later Brut work, like Maison Jaoul; and John Soane, the English eccentric who was finally knighted by William III. But the profane in architecture was essentially uncharted territory. Eric Mendelsohn had taken a whack at it with the Einstein Tower in Potsdam, and a few Russians had proposed things about the time of Potemkin, but a really profane architecture had only been a vague suggestion by the time Stirling took to the boards with partner Gowan to outline the labs at Leicester.

It's possible even they didn't know where it was going to end, but there was a stir in the consciousness of pop-fad London when Stirling and Gowan stuck a cast iron plumbing joint on the wall of a building. The joint was a w. c. mounting elbow which, in England, was not only indiscreet, it was baffling. Even conservative critics were intrigued by the boldness of the gesture, however, and linked Stirling and Gowan to the Brutalists which, of course, missed the whole point.

I prefer to think that quite early in his career Stirling placed his confidence, not in the codified world of architectural theory—a reference even for the Brutalists—but in the vulgar authority of objects functioning well in their place that we call the real world. Recognizing that the source of that authority was not in the form itself, but in the total dedication of a singular form to a singular function (not in itself a revolutionary attitude), Stirling saw the strenuous complexity of even a simple function as a generator of form. The standard designer's injunction, "form follows function," which has generated nearly three-fourths of a century of our architecture, has been operating on the premise that the only measurable requirements are quantitative and static. These Teutonic qualities discriminate, to be sure, but only between acceptable modes: one does not make love in the living room, therefore, one need provide privacy only in the bedroom.

Stirling's work allows more complex realities to exist. Thus, what came to characterize his work was not the intolerant 19th century "honesty" that governed the work of others—in itself a still unchallenged legacy of the Bauhaus—but a tolerant formal consciousness which, coupled with a healthy regard for utility, produced genuine inventions.

The Brutalists would cast some concrete against some rough boards and explain, in a scene right out of *Catch 22*, that they despised romance, but it was the only honest thing to do, and still believe they had preserved their functionalist credentials. But Stirling and Gowan went the other way. They made their buildings more refined, more complex, more accommodating, until the organization and detail had the quality, not of a Braque, for God's sake, but of Picabia, of Bugatti, of Werner Von Braun.

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Katrin had a new watch. It sat on a perforated plastic band that nearly matched her vinyl Courreges boots. It was 1967, the USA had not yet gone to the moon, the students at Yale had not yet set fire to the Art and Architecture Building, and pocket calculators were five years away. But Katrin, who worked with Warren Platner over at Saarinen's, and hung out with Jim's friend Keith, had discovered an electronic watch, run by batteries, tiny copper coils and a tuning fork, that sang if you held it up to an ear. Jim tried it on right away, remarking on the anodized green framework which you could see behind the hands. "Too bad buildings aren't like that," he muttered, and drove out to get a watch like it. But since it was Sunday, the best he could do was locate one with a flashlight in a shop window sometime after midnight, after an odyssey of A & W's, Safeways, police lieutenants, shopping malls and icy telephone booths.

The next morning he was there when the door opened.

* * * * *

Accuracy has engineering value. It is measurable. It is ruthless and objective. It tracks down requirements like a computer, and follows measurements like a micrometer. Concepts like unity, composition and tradition are inherently *inaccurate* except as sophisticated symbols of good breeding. From that point of view, the object-icons that Richard Hamilton and the Independent Group were painting and writing about had no pedigree at all, so why did a building need one?

After all, those great ships that haunted the eye of Le Corbusier, and still haunt the Eastern seaboard, for instance, were unified because their design had to be capable of resisting wind and sea. But fragmented, styled up, and installed on the beach on Long Island, those dreadnaughts are simply reminders, bookmarks, really. Looked at this way, the Brutalists were trapped in an intellectual *cul-de-sac*. They would not refute the principles that underlay their work—Stirling had not even done that—but they made the mistake of assuming that the founding fathers had *correctly translated those principles to architecture*. Their own work, extruded along

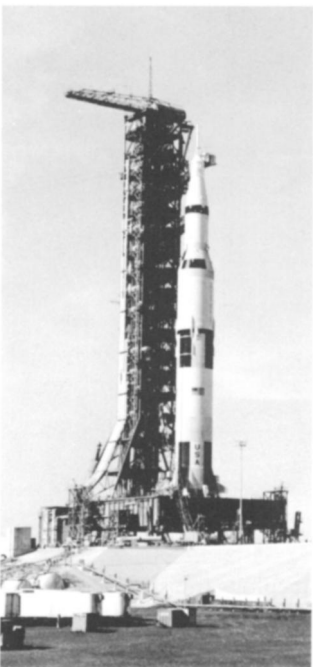
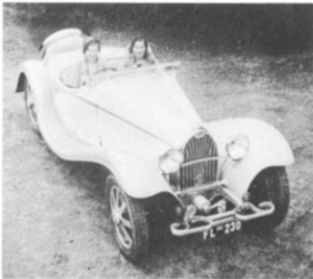
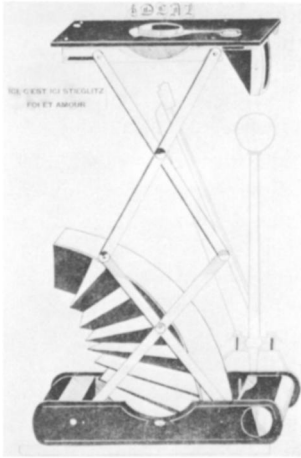
the guidelines laid down by Gropius, Mies and Corbu, inevitably repeated all the errors inherent in the original die block.

What became clear at Leicester and later at Cambridge, was that the resources available to modern building were diverse enough to make polymorphous accommodation practical in engineering terms. That the engineering limitations which may in the past have dictated a purebred solution with heavy dependence on a single material or a single means of fabrication were in fact only strategic limitations.

The best way to understand the History Faculty Building at Cambridge is to climb one of the stairs at either end of the V formed by the office block. After giving the Day-Glo orange handrail one last, affectionate pat, the cascading surface of the skylight dominates the view. One could inch along this corridor as though it were a plank bridge above a waterfall if it were not for the feel of the pipe rail clamped to the mullions, and the birch partitions opposite, which seem as secure as compartments on an excursion vessel. A few doors down the corridor, the windows narrow as the rake of the skylight cuts diagonally along the outer wall, then opens dramatically to frame glimpses of the mechanisms and structure within. It is like leafing through the illustrations in Andreas Vesalius's 16th century treatise on anatomy, as first the skin, then the vessels, and finally the muscular tissue itself are magically peeled away to expose the viscera. In a gesture more cinematic than architectural, the roof completes its transit and a gallery of windows bulges outward into the void of the reading room as into an aquarium, enabling the visitor, now encased in a protective capsule, to observe the strange life of the scholars below.

There are five layers of these gallery/corridors, each different from the one below, owing to the diminishing space below the skylight. They terminate at grade in a circumferential arrangement of library stacks, and at the top in a cluster of three air extraction devices, each as large as a Corvette, painted red, yellow and blue. Thus, the roof itself is the organizing device for a near miraculous transition from the domain of machines to the domain of knowledge with a commensurate discipline and insight devoted to each.

The building vocabulary employed so successfully at Leicester is extended at Cambridge, leading the visitor over and around the building, into otherwise prohibited areas, on tiles defined by close diagonal ribs and a gently depressed gutter. The subtle reinforcement of the plasticity of the surface, much as it had at Leicester, enables Stirling to treat walls, glazing and accessories as *separate elements*. A vocabulary, consisting of specifically unrelated parts until, placed within operating range of one another, like a critical mass, they cohere. Seen



(from top)
Francis Picabia, *Here, This is Stieglitz*, 1915.

Type 55 Bugatti "Supersport" roadster, 1930.

Kennedy Space Center's launch complex with the Apollo 11 vehicle shown in position for a test launch.

through a scrim of surrounding trees the building has a surprisingly modest scale. Reddish brick planes tug gently at memories of Victorian buttresses, the glassy enclosures are reminiscent of railroad sheds, the assembly of tubular steel is indeed something like rocket scaffolds. All these evocations flicker persuasively over the surface of the building. Yet the overall effect is that of simple technologic authority, finally domesticated and comprehensible, placed as comfortably as a Hoover on a shag rug.

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After a show at The Museum of Modern Art, a large color transparency of the building at Cambridge had been installed gloriously, if incongruously, on the ground floor of the Stirling office. When important visitors were expected, Jim would darken the hallway, plug the thing in, and wait for the gasps of appreciation as they rounded the last landing of the stairs.

One such morning a new American member of the staff, whom Jim had found at the American Academy, was standing before the transparency as I came down the stairs.

"What do you suppose governed the arrangement of the overlooks?" he asked me.

"He probably just put them wherever he could," I replied.

"What, you mean there was no system? I don't believe it. Look how carefully it is detailed!"

I agreed that it was a marvelously crafted space, and was attempting to convince him that there was no causal connection between craft and geometry when Stirling appeared on the landing.

The young man looked at him seriously and asked what governed the arrangement of the overlooks.

"Nothing," said Jim.

* * * * *

So Stirling, amused by the scramble to identify the precedent of this or that, steadfastly refuses to burp up the secret. Yet, on occasion, there are clues—a note in his "big book" scribbled over the exhausts on the dormitory at St. Andrews says: "These are not guns, Charlie," to Charles Jencks, whose long semiotic analysis, to the bemused Stirling, had missed the point completely. The old infantry song is closer:

This is my rifle
This is my gun,
This one's for fightin'
This one's for fun.

For Stirling, dune buggies, hot pants and low-riders are themselves symbols of a largely scatological reality. It is not his intention to sublimate the erotic energy of his work in a "hot" passage of chromium and plastic as Hans Hollein might, or to invoke the fetish quality made popular by highly finished work characteristic of California artists like McCracken and Kauffman. The intentional vulgarities of the buildings at Leicester and Cambridge celebrate a Rabelaisian consciousness. Like Oldenburg in his Ray Gun days, Stirling searches out the crude, the offensive, the profane as alternatives to the International Style. His direct use of materials is a metaphor for a consciousness impatient with the constraints of modern architecture.

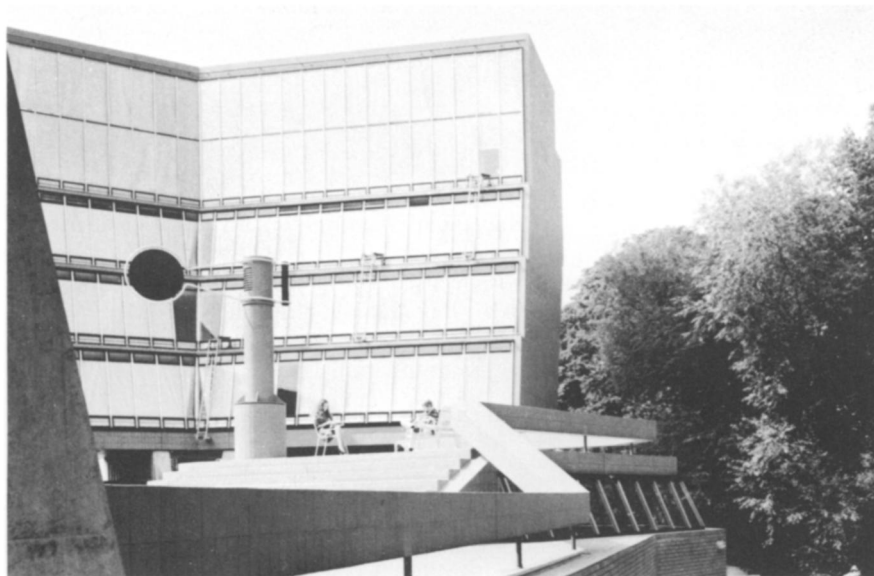
Digging through the archives at the Stirling office, I came upon the original copy of his 1950 student thesis—a community center. Stylistically, it falls somewhere between Basil Spence's Royal Festival Hall and Le Corbusier's Marseilles Block. Both had set powerful directions for European architecture at that time. But, he doesn't let it go at that. There are peculiar, pointed exceptions to the prototypes.

Like Marseilles, Stirling's thesis includes a roof-garden with mechanical equipment designed to function as roof furniture. But he rips off the sculptural disguise adopted by Le Corbusier, and fantasizes about the dynamic qualities of the exhaust stack, positioning his by now characteristic wind vane atop the building and strutting out the whole affair with guy wires like the equipment it is, rather than treating it as an abstract sculptural form.

The building is also on *pilotis*, like Marseilles, but the planning reasserts connections to the ground in a manner Le Corbusier strenuously avoided, by the creation of a lounge-coffeeshop at the interface.

Why the *pilotis*? In an elaborate analysis, Stirling demonstrates the economic advantage of *pilotis* over columns and, in a sublime political gesture, concludes that he must suffer their effect upon the design, which in turn forces heroic measures to rescue the continuity of the plaza.

Finally, like the Festival Hall, there is a sense of veneer, of the building as a thin container. But where Festival Hall's formal composition is gratuitous and ingratiating, the community center becomes airplane-like, with cross-braced wires and modular panels emphasizing the structural rigor of the design. No concessions whatever are made to the paunchy conventions of "civilized" postwar Britain. It is, over all, an abrupt, rhetorical reply to the signal prototypes after the war. It says, "I'm not having any," without so much as a thank you.



The effect of the project on other students at Liverpool was scandalous. They felt his work was disruptive, even immoral. He struck them as having a working method with a remarkable tendency to create untenable, even unworkable premises which threatened the whole profession.

* * * * *

In a conversation with Nikolaus Pevsner (Sir Nik, as I came to think of him, champion of English architectural criticism) I approached the subject of Stirling with caution. Frail, gaunt, tall as a tree, Pevsner became increasingly stern as I edged the topic into Brutalism, then popped a question about Stirling. His opinion was on record, he assured me, in countless articles and critiques. Why bother about him? I explained the dialectic as I saw it, that Stirling's architecture was nearly alone in a wasteland of English dilettantes.

"But Stirling is a rude man," he told me, "and the buildings he designs are rude as well."

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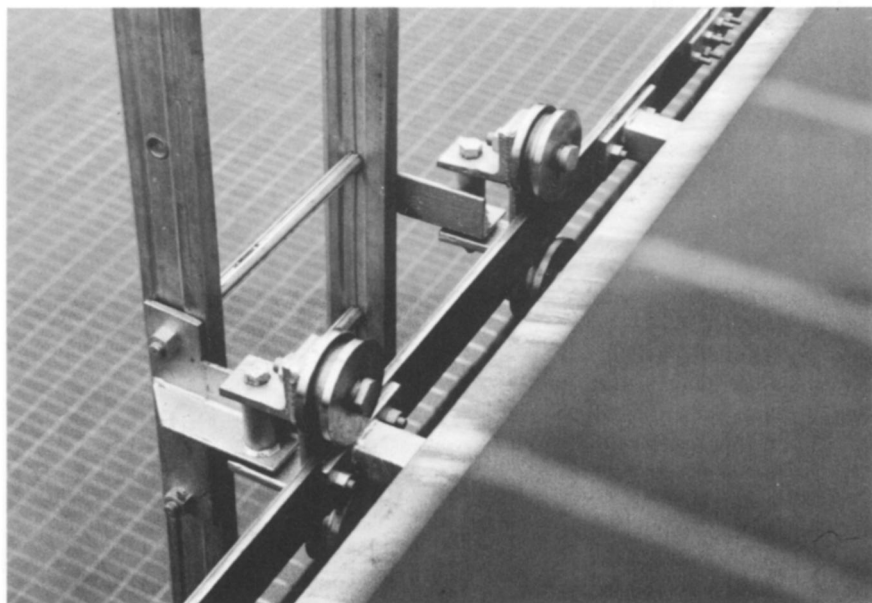
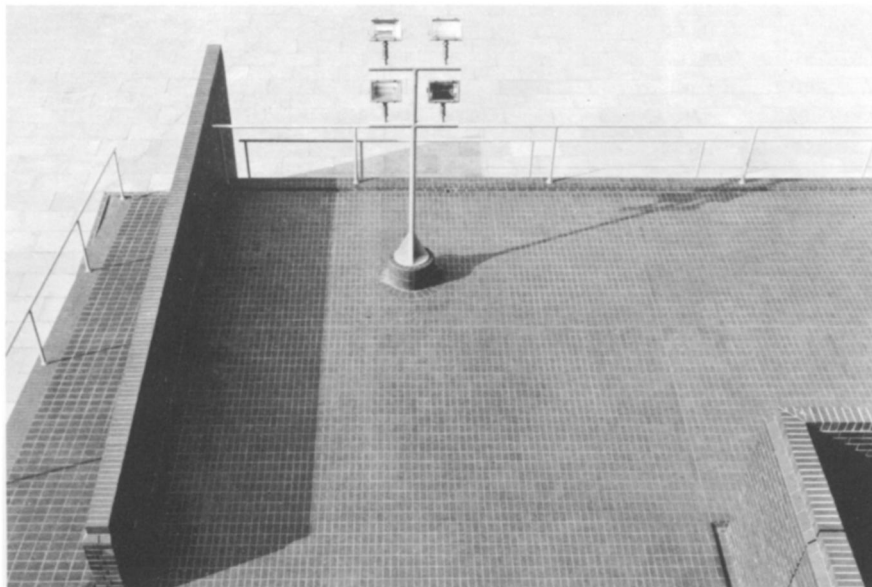
We are standing in the kitchen, Jim and I. I am leaning against a stack of three-legged Aalto stools which Jim has decided are good for commodity seating—like elegant orange crates.

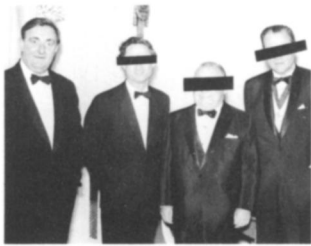
Mary, his wife, isn't home, but their family friend who edits an English yachting magazine has offered to make some sausages. Jim doesn't cook.

Sir Nikolaus, I told him, had been reluctant to talk at all. Jim nodded. He knew from the batting around he'd gotten in the press that Pevsner would be difficult, even haughty. It had been a curious meeting: Sir Nik had carried the contest triumphantly until he tried to recall a particular comment he'd made about Leicester Labs.

"That was the building you said was blue," I said, and he looked at me. His eyes twinkled—they had been lance-like before—and he said, "Oh yes, Jim caught me up on that one, didn't he?" and I allowed that he had. Jim chuckled. "He'd never even seen the building, you know." "Right," I said. "He knew he'd have to come clean with me then. He's a very chivalrous man—almost a real knight. Like Don Quixote." By now Jim was thoroughly engrossed with this distant contact with the mythical Sir Nik. "I wonder if I'm in it?" he said, and opened up Pevsner's *Dictionary of Modern Architecture*.

They [Stirling's buildings] have a ruthlessness which militates against their achieving a more than passing success.





"So he thinks I'm ruthless, does he? It says here that Charles Rennie Mackintosh was erratic, not an easy man. Do you think that's superior to ruthless?"

* * * * *

It is drizzling lightly on the temporary causeway that links Runcorn Southgate to the shopping city and, in the drizzle, the umbrellas of a single file of housewives weave uneasily. Eventually, the corpi* say, this gap will be filled in by an expansion of the city. But for now, one negotiates the quarter mile on a 50-foot-high steel scaffold, shut in by plywood hoardings to just below eye-level.

Behind us, the closed, jar-colored banality of the shopping city retreats. Ahead, there is only Southgate itself.

Returning from lunch the day before, Stirling had walked me around the 19th century London block in which he maintains his office. He described its organization like that of a machine, eagerly pointing out the service yard a full story below the street level. Here there are doors which give access to storage areas below the street itself to exploit the otherwise dead zone under the public right-of-way. We continued, his conversation dotted with observations about the light, the texture, and the life style accommodated in his neighborhood and I realized that I, like one of those shipwrecked adventurers rammed by the Nautilus, kidnapped and taken to a utopian undersea world, was in the presence of Captain Nemo himself.

Around the back of the block, the planners had contrived to provide a court behind each house closed in by a smaller carriage house which gave onto a mews for the stables and garbage.

"That's where they filmed *Alfie*," he said, pointing out that the carriage houses have become perfect studios and lofts for artists and designers in these days of the motorcar.

He might have been showing me scenes from *Things to Come*.

The next day we had our first glance at Stirling's version, out the window of a passenger train. From there, the long buildings lay low and parallel like louvers in a valley of grass and trees. Looking ahead to the steaming atmosphere of Liverpool, we could already imagine the formula—one of the constants in England's program of new towns—separated functions, isolated energies, specialized activities. Stirling's response lies ahead now: band on band of concrete, bright-colored plastic, circular openings, ribs, promenades, crossings.

*Corpi is residents' slang for a representative of Runcorn's housing corporation.

The girl at the first intersection, chewing gum, listening to Barry White on her wrist radio, puts a hand on her hip. "You're not from around here, are you?"

A Mercedes long-distance bus glides by below. Its windows look up at us. We continue on the wide walkway, past lace curtains and driftwood plaques, past orange and yellow dish towels, mementoes of Covent Garden, soccer trophies and nodding dachshunds each pressed furtively against the sliding glass windows. An engineer would have liked those windows with their aluminum frames and neoprene gaskets and curved, efficient corners.

"The man who designed it used to design boats," says the girl in the lavender apartment.

Occasionally a door is ajar. A big one for a dwelling, or a small one for the astonishingly efficient waste collection. We stop to watch the crew drop the black polymer bags into a waiting truck. They wave and shout like sailors on the fantail of a liner, and it occurs to me that the nautical atmosphere has less to do with style than with *control* and *efficiency*; that our ground economy rarely requires the taut discipline that is normal to life at sea.

We step over the portal into a bright green room right out of Pinter:

I'd have afromosia teak veneer. . . .
The Caretaker

A younger Malcolm McDowell flashes into the room. There are two stereo speakers; one sits atop a pile of pillows, the other shares the cushion of a Danish modern chair with a pictorial arrangement of brass wire, beads and velvet.

"I made that," says the lady of the house. "D'you like it?"

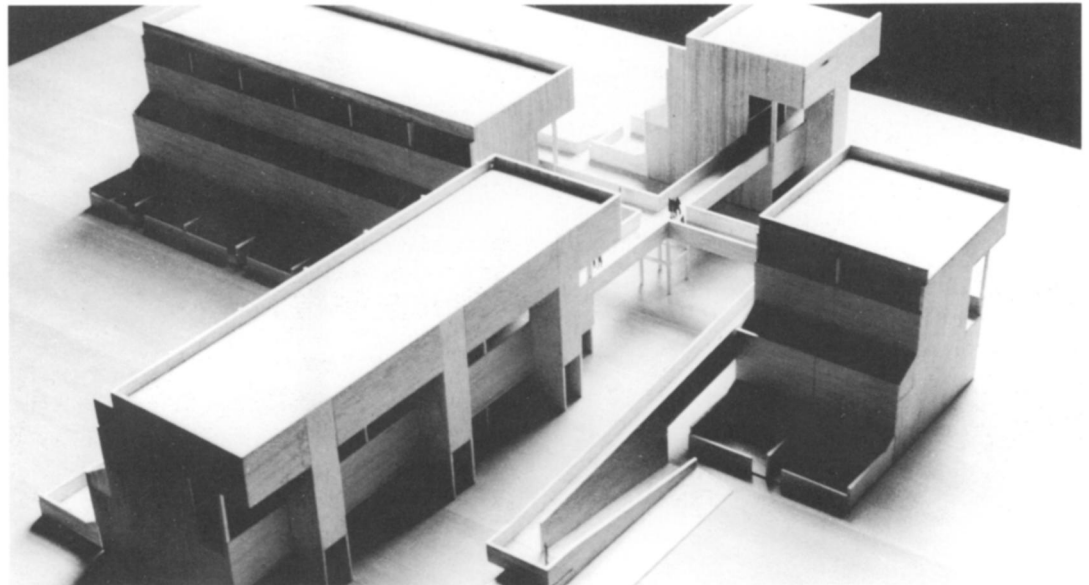
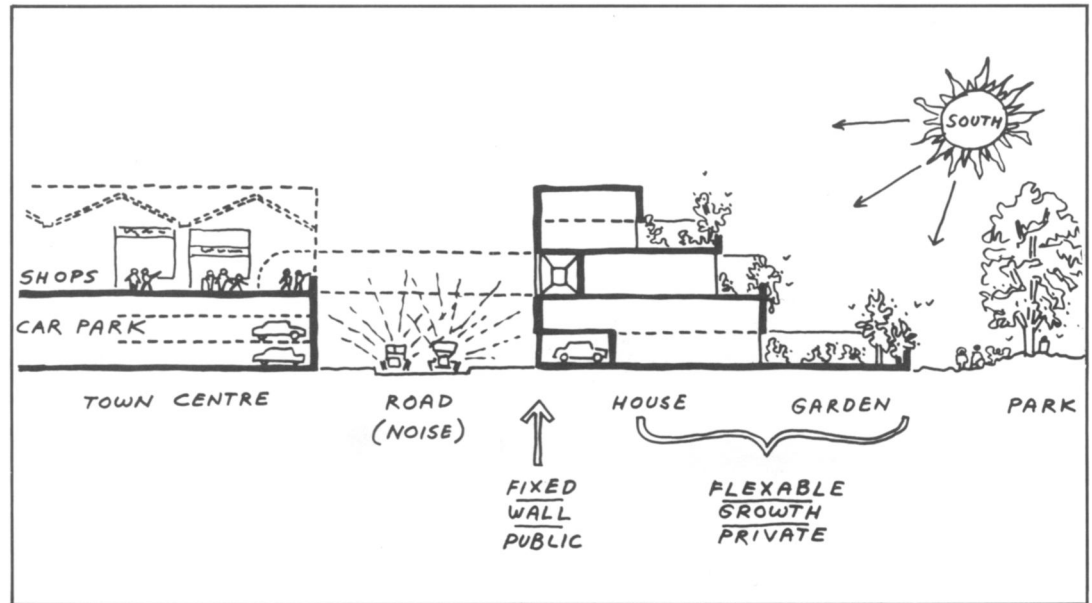
We allow that we do, and ask if she painted the place herself. "Naw, that was the corpi did that. They was all painted different when we came. D'you want some tea?"

Exactly what did Stirling have in mind? It's clear from the drawings that there was an intention to create a life style of extraordinary grace and generosity within the constraints of low-income housing. Its repetition is clearly a device adopted from Georgian town houses, rather than the canons of industrialization *a la* Bauhaus. Its scale refers to the crescents at Bath, or Stirling's own block in London, the terraces and orientation to Atelier 5's terrace housing in Switzerland.

Yet it is sometimes awesome where it should be grand, rigorous where it could be adventurous.

(above)
Even geared to accept an award for Leicester, Stirling retains his maverick image.

(opposite, from top)
Several of Stirling's sculptural elements that are never simply aesthetic, but always operating equipment as well, include: a kitchen ventilator installed in the courtyard at Queen's College, Oxford; a lighting fixture on the terrace of his Cambridge History Faculty Building; and, a window cleaning device at Cambridge.



(right, from top)

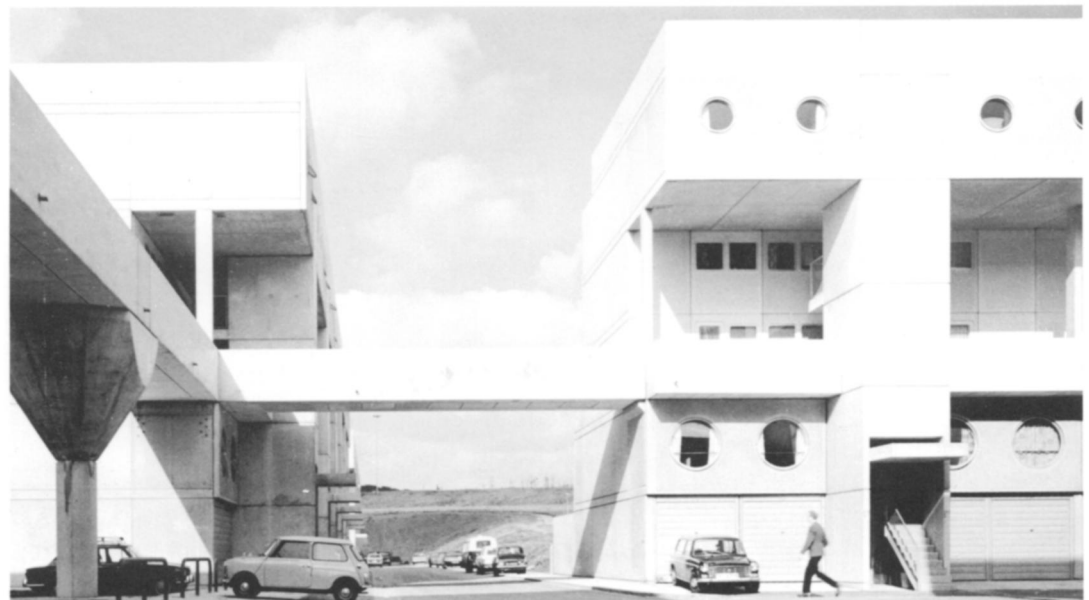
An early scheme for Runcorn New Town housing shows Stirling's basic concerns: light, air, privacy and access to public spaces.

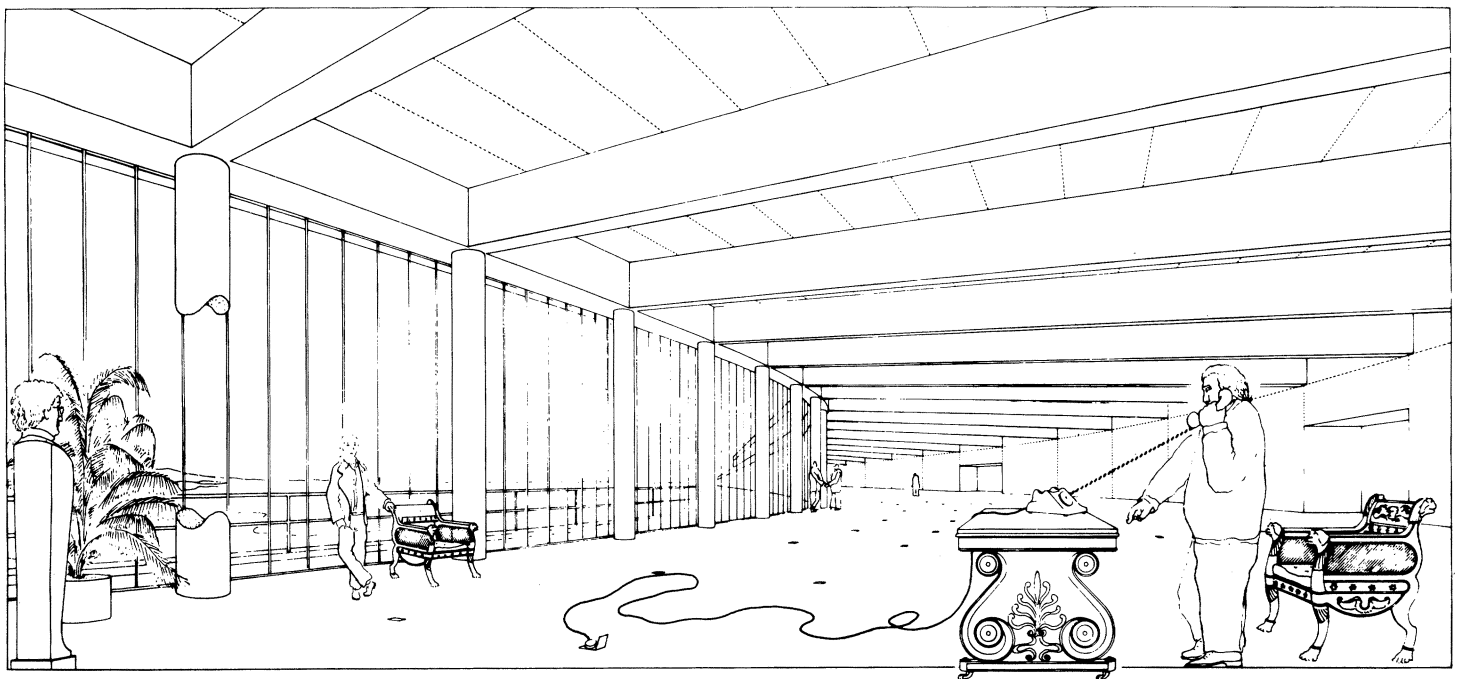
A model includes second floor circulation areas that are connected by bridges to the town center. The pre-cast concrete and polyester buildings with their porthole windows are seen here from the street side.

(opposite)

The living-dining room of Stirling's home in London contains many examples of the antique furniture he and his wife collect.

Stirling and his Empire objects are oddly juxtaposed with the spare office interior drawn in this scheme for Olivetti's headquarters at Milton Keynes.





* * * * *

"Mr. Stirling polishes these himself—he's very particular you know," and I excuse myself to wander back upstairs, past the little fuzzy birds wedged behind the mirror, past the teddy bear bank on the marble pedestal, past the Lichtenstein and the lithograph of someone removing his braces, to touch that toggle-switch and have another look at what Mr. Stirling spends his time polishing.

I had heard about the collection back in the States. It seemed peculiar for an architect of Stirling's character to have a collection of antiques. But then, this is England, where the BBC broadcasts daily exhortations on the identification and proper pedigree of domestic items. I begin to understand *that* as Jim and Mary wedge themselves into matching Corbusier chairs and balance TV dinners on little Aalto stools to watch a parade of experts ho-hum the date on a six-piece sterling service. Even so, it did nothing to prepare me for the audacity of the objects he has chosen.

There is a brass-bound round table which stands on a fly-cut pedestal in such a way that the profile of the top fits explicitly into the arc of the supports.

There is a pair of wooden chairs so perfectly carved that their smooth shells might have been molded by matched steel dies.

There is a small transparent plastic stool, like a saddle, fitted with a rotating yellow probe.

There is a pair of steel and leather chairs in which the primary function of the elements seems to be to engage the air which surrounds them.

There is a delicate rosewood shell mounted on a rectangular table surprisingly supported by a cross-legged stool, flanked by a pair of gilded sphinxes.

There is an enormous diamond-tufted sofa which dominates one end of the room and was used only once during my three-week visit, to contain Jim as guru in blue shorts during a tense meeting with our publisher.

There is an angry white record player, with holes the size of shotgun shells to indicate the location of speakers.

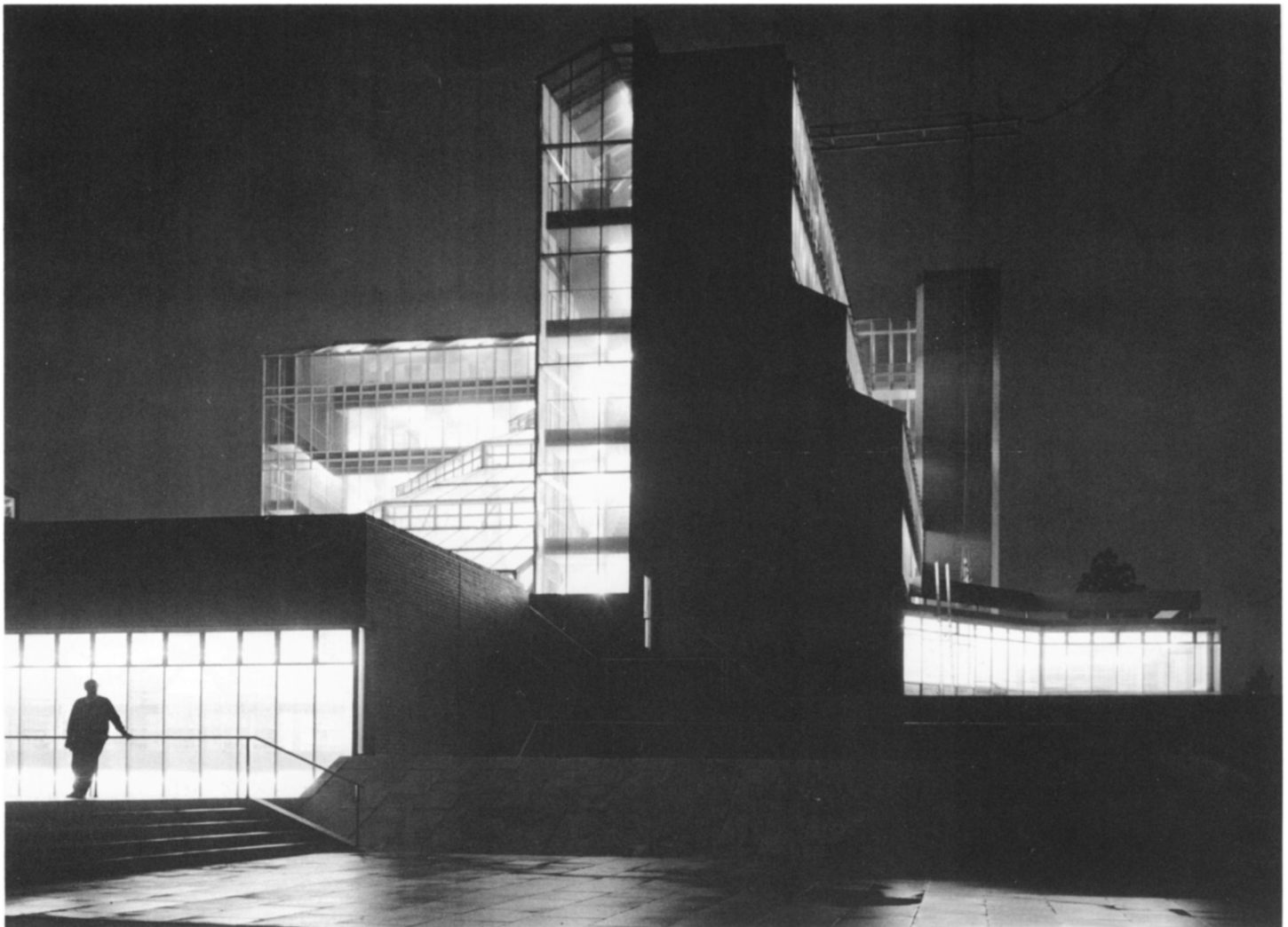
There is a strong slate-topped desk with absolutely nothing on it.

* * * * *

At his office drafting board, Stirling clamps the last inch of a soft pencil. His other hand cups the area he is marking, as it must have in grammar school. His concentration on that fragment of paper is awesome. There is nothing pretty about the emerging drawing; smudged, ragged, it is already an antique to be deciphered. The notes here and there direct attention to a system of construction, or a difference in inflection. The shapes are particular: a column capital, a handrail, the arrangement of glazing.

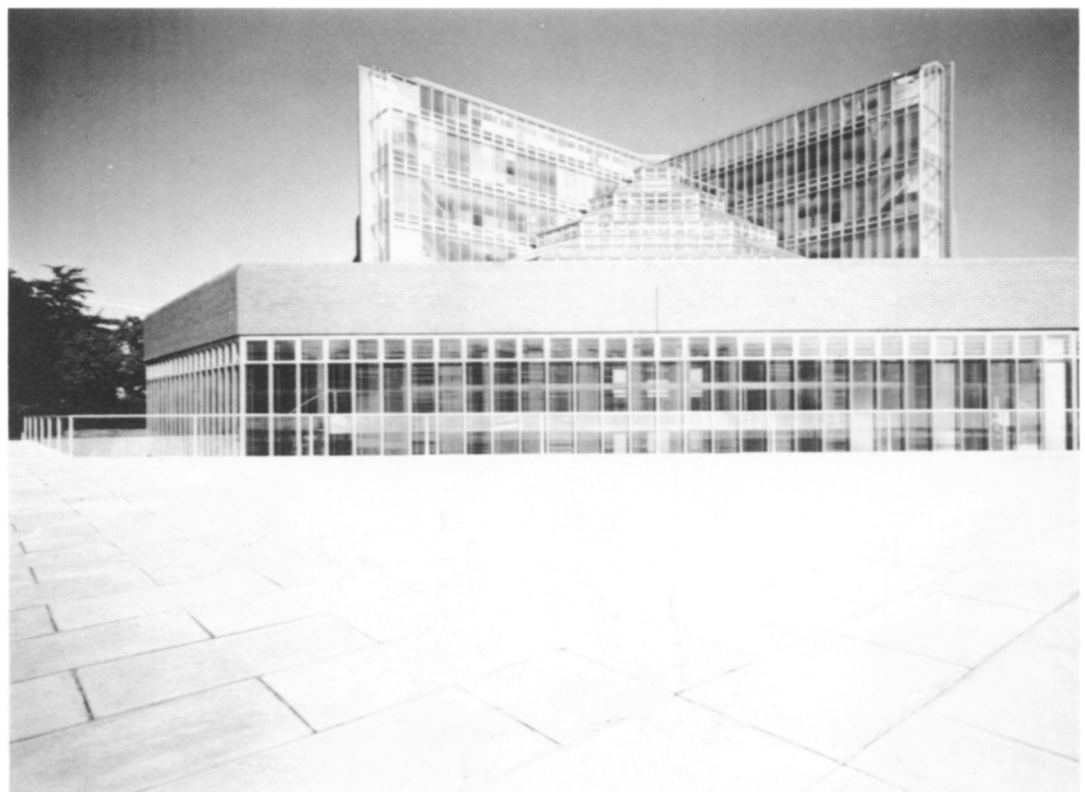
All fragments.

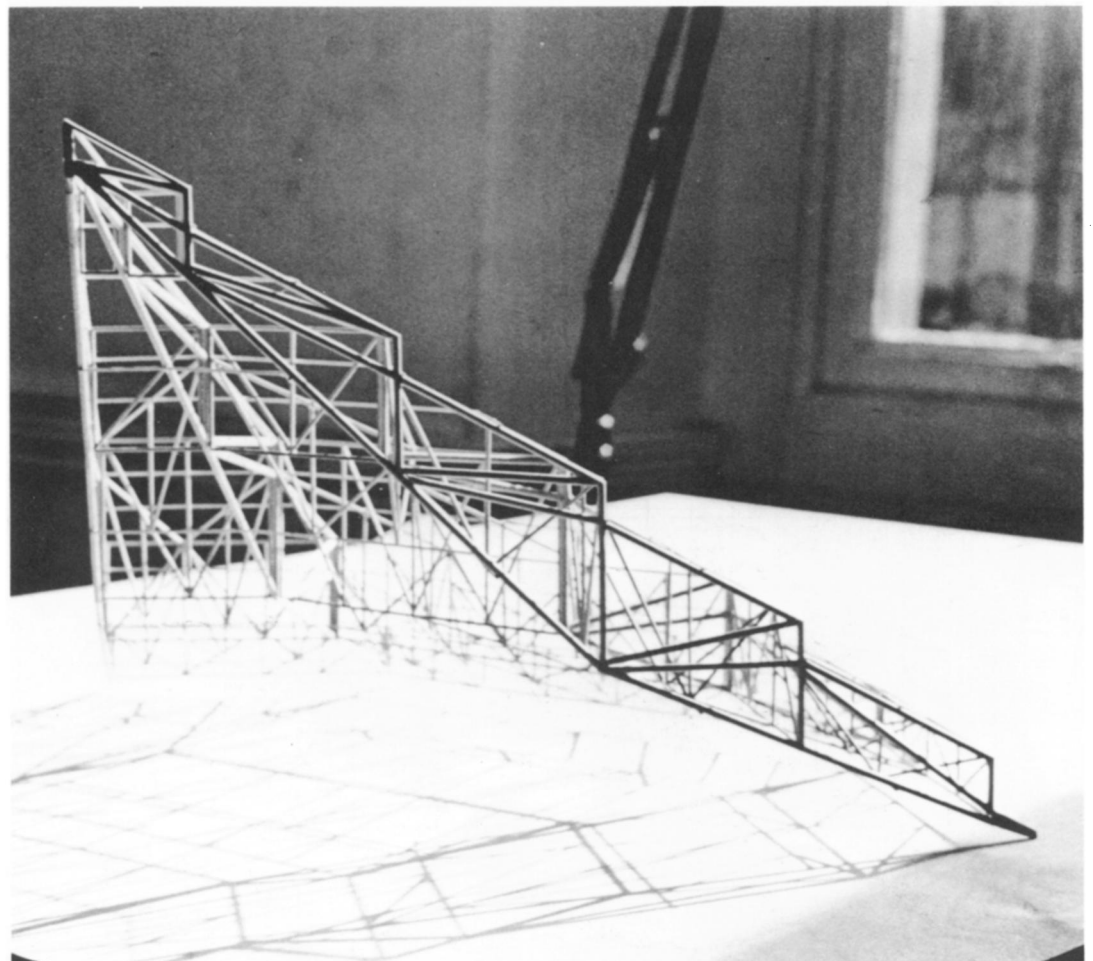
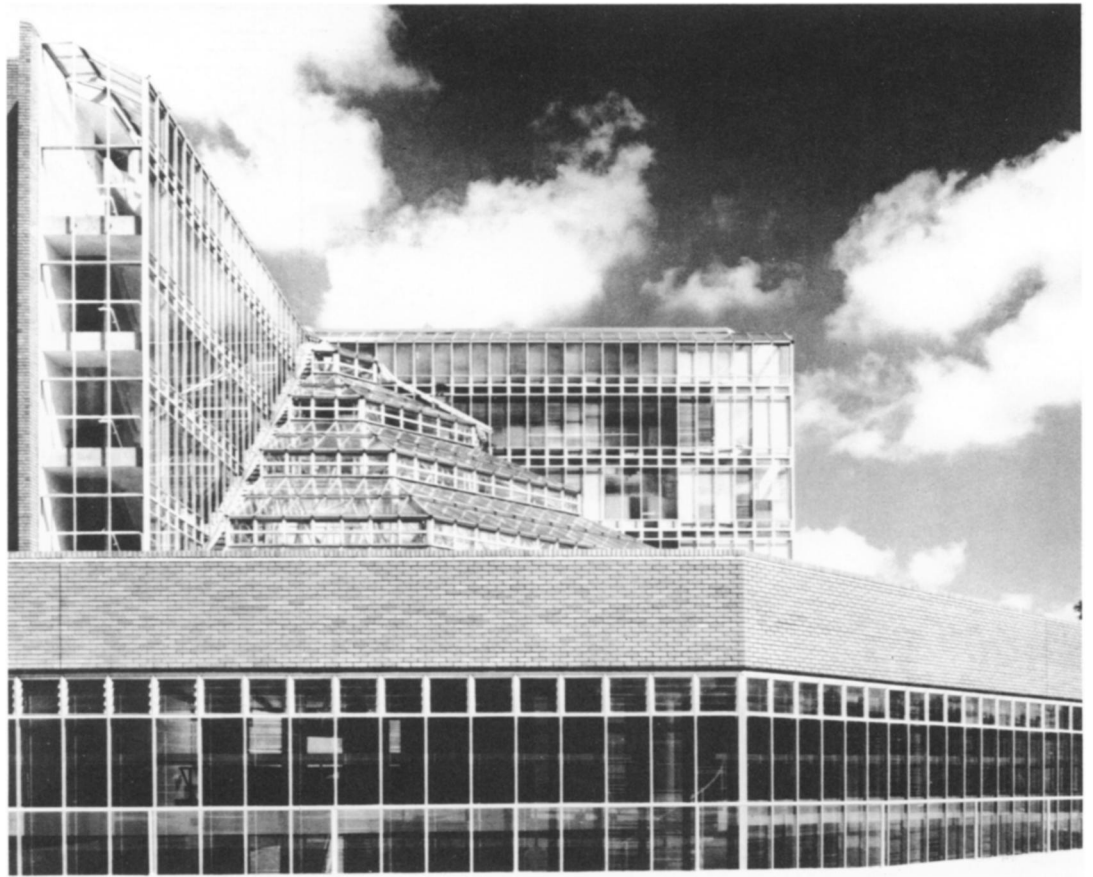




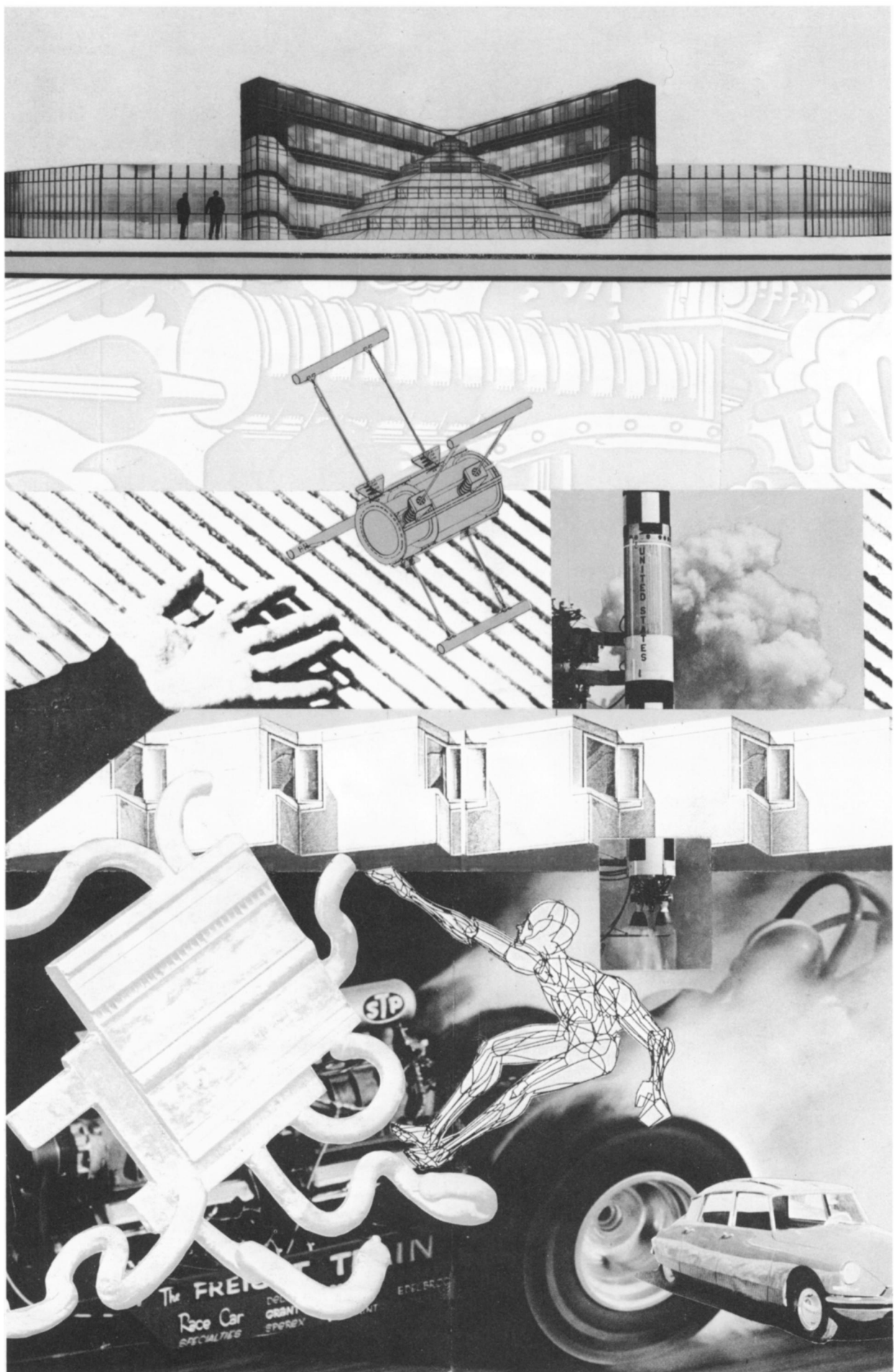
NOTICE:
Fold out model pattern
and detach from staples
with care.

Red tiles and a glazed steel-truss roof are the exterior materials of the Cambridge University History Faculty Building, 1964. These night and day views show the bookstacks below, the reading room roof and the office and seminar L-shaped tower.



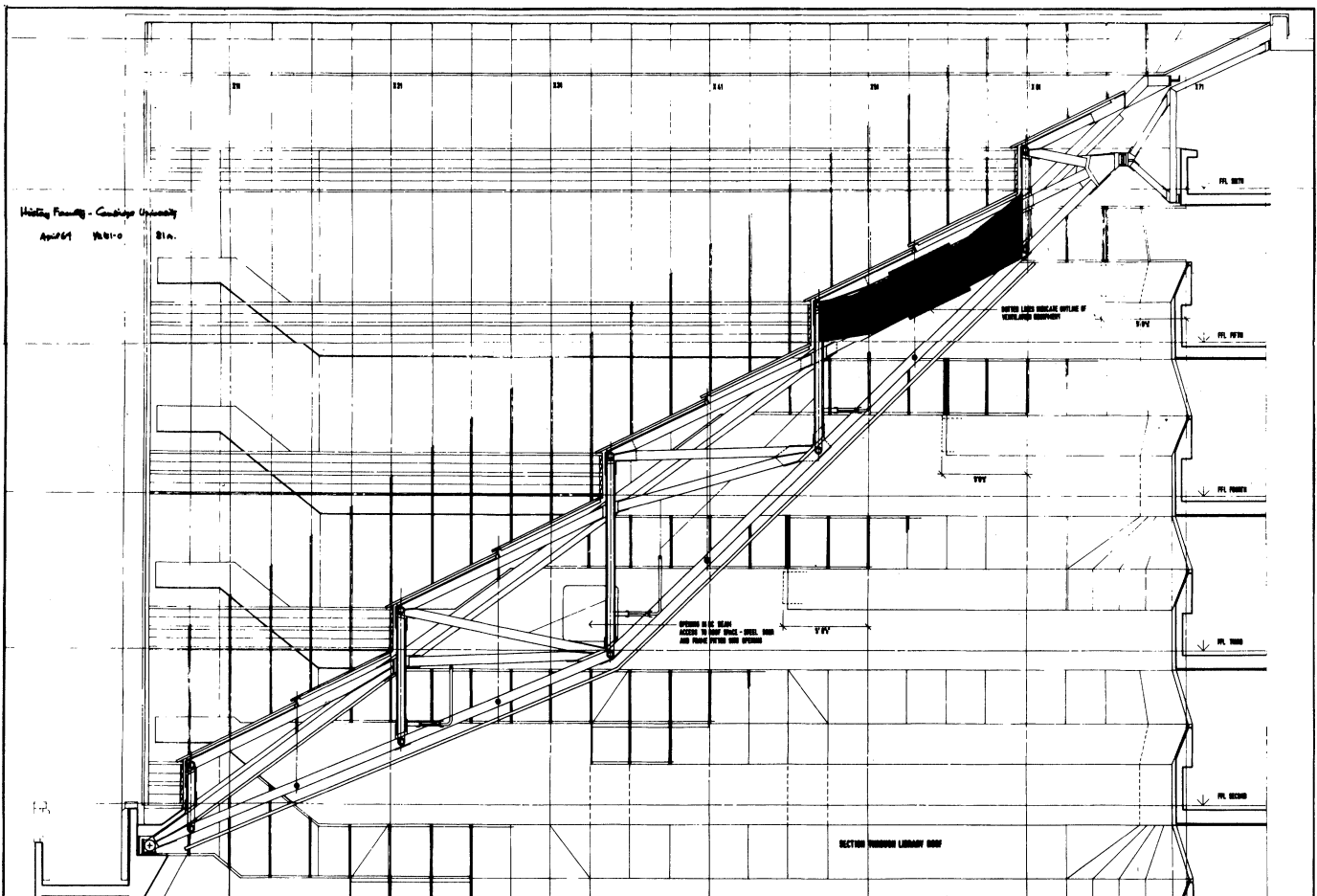
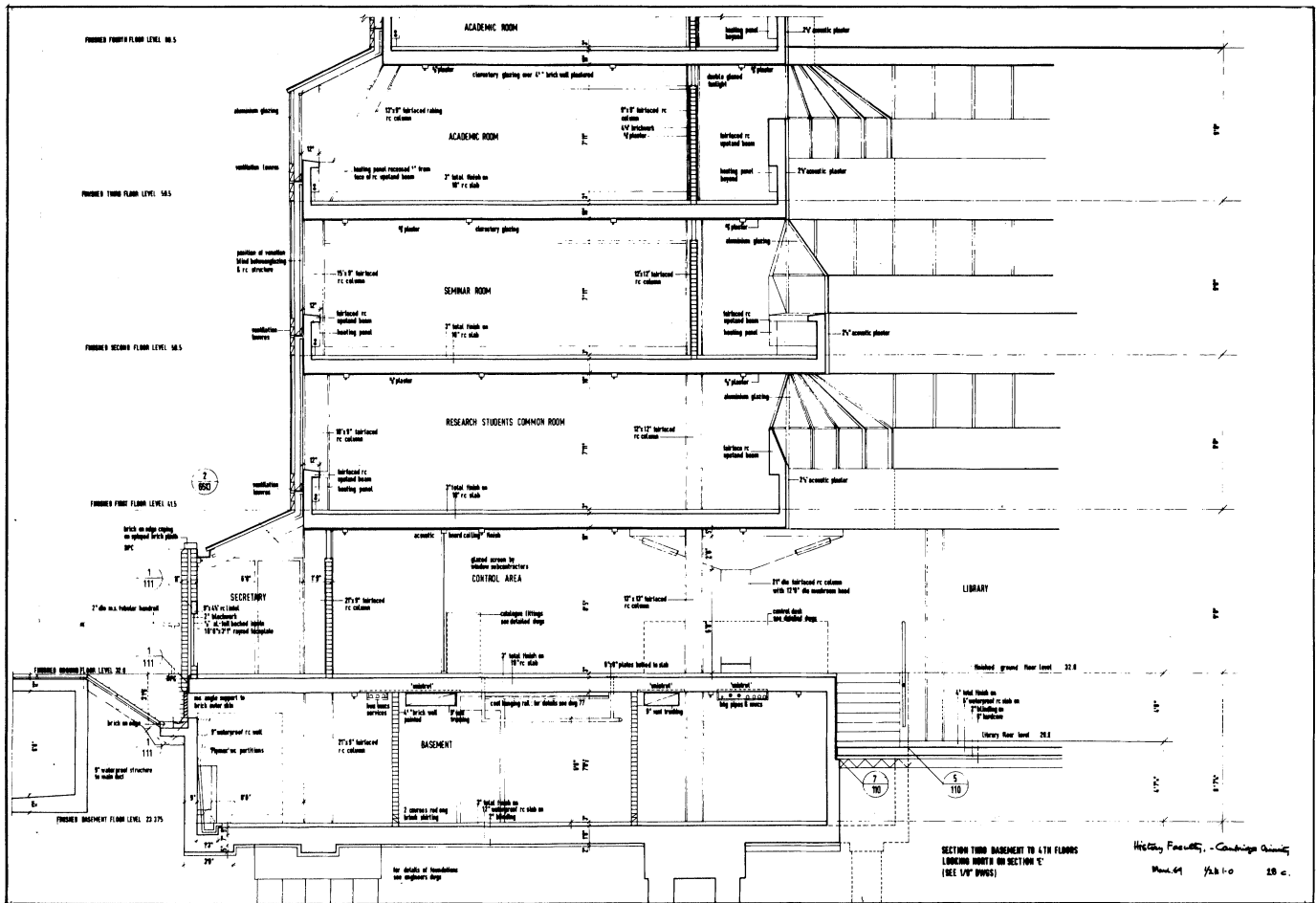


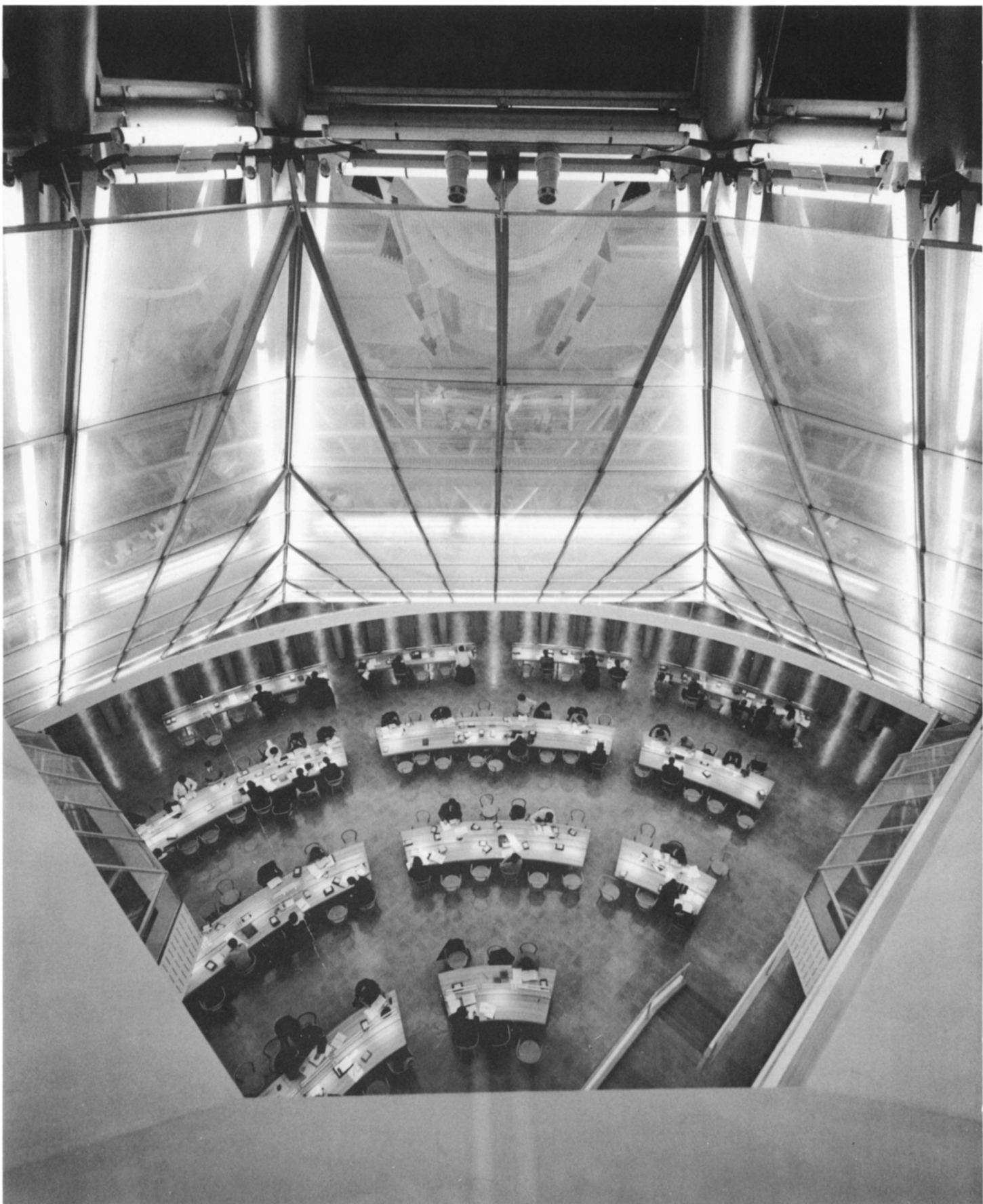
Exterior view of tapered roof and bookstacks (above) and a study model of the roof structure.





Gallery corridor (above) and the reading area.





Reading area and suspended air
extracting fans at the apex of
the glass roof.

