



Yale University, School of Architecture

Projects: Worldbridge Trade and Investment Center Fukuoka Prefectural International Hall
Nichii Obihiro Department Store

Author(s): Emilio Ambasz

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quently another group's "wide ocean full of tears."

My fascination with understanding the "whole of the moon" began not in the 1960s but rather was instilled in me during the Jim Crow era of the 1940s and 1950s—the post-World War II era, when the air was filled with a sense of victory, exuberant nationalism, and the joy of unprecedented growth. Paradoxically, however, the air was also filled with the growing awareness of this country's racial and social inequalities. As a black female child suspended in between the contradiction of victory and injustice, I dared to hope that I might become a professional musician. This hope came alive when I was hired, at sixteen, by the Dayton Symphony Orchestra to play French horn for a performance of a work by Gustave Mahler that requires additional French hornists. What a surprise this was, since just about everyone, except my father, had told me that I would never be able to get a job playing a brass instrument in a symphony orchestra. Encouraged that my impossible dream might come true, I applied for admission to the Curtis Institute of Music, which parallels Cooper Union in offering free tuition to all its students. It was the only school I applied to, because it was free and because it really had not occurred to me that I would not get in. After all, no one could have wanted to go to the Curtis Institute more than I. My working-class parents and I had planned on it, sacrificing necessities—as well as my teen-age social life—to prepare me to begin this step up the ladder of success.

I left home in the spring of 1959, traveling on a train for two days to Philadelphia with my shiny silver French horn tucked underneath my feet. I checked into a YWCA near Rittenhouse Square, and after trying to warm up quietly in my room, walked to school the next day for a 9 AM audition. There, on the corner of a tree-lined street, was the place of my dreams. An elegant, grey-stone mansion adorned with Baroque carvings and shiny black iron-work appearing even more magnificent than its picture in the catalog. Inside, past the massive oak door, the reality of what it would take for a black female to gain access to the world of classical music quickly revealed itself. After a brief wait in the crisp, cool lobby, I was ushered into a small salon, where an expressionless jury of white males requested for my first tune an orchestral excerpt that begins on the next to the highest note on the instrument. As you might imagine, things did not go well. I left

Emilio Ambasz practices both architecture and industrial design. In both disciplines he has received wide recognition. He has twice won the Compasso D'Oro (Italy) for his industrial design work and he has been the subject of exhibitions at, among others, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC.

Rendering of Worldbridge Trade and Investment Center, Baltimore, MD

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Worldbridge Trade and Investment Center
Fukuoka Prefectural International Hall
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them. The way is to reenact various scenes and descriptions of homelessness, underhousing, and what can happen. This is about women and housing and what can happen and how to fight it.

Camilla V [inaudible] and Kenneth Jackson, about what happens when an area is left to decay, and what people can do about it.

And the final, or close to final element in this was that, instead of a reading room, there was a hole in the center of the gallery representing the displacement of undocumented Latin-American workers in San Diego County—who had been living there since the late 40s—for the sake of suburban expansion.

These are the holdings of the DIA Art Foundation itself—the buildings it owns—which were up on the gallery wall. But they kicked a lot about putting it in the book, so it didn't end up in the book.

This is the book. The reason I'm showing the book is not to tout the book, which finally had someone else's name on it, but to say that this is Pruitt-Igde on the cover. I just went to St. Louis, and this is Pruitt-Igde, blown up in the late 60s, today. This is St. Louis, a very familiar-looking version of architecture, and this is what we do when we get rid of sub-standard housing for public housing tenants. This is the abandoned lot they get in return.

Sharon Sutton

I was grounded while you filled the skies.

I was dumbfounded by truth, you cut through lies.

I saw the rain-dirtied valley, you saw Briggadoon.

I saw the crescent, you saw the whole of the moon.

The whole of the moon, unicorns and cannonballs, palaces and piers.

Trumpets, towers and tenements, wide oceans full of tears.

Flags, rags, ferry boats, scimitars and scars.

Every precious dream and vision underneath the stars.

You saw the whole of the moon.

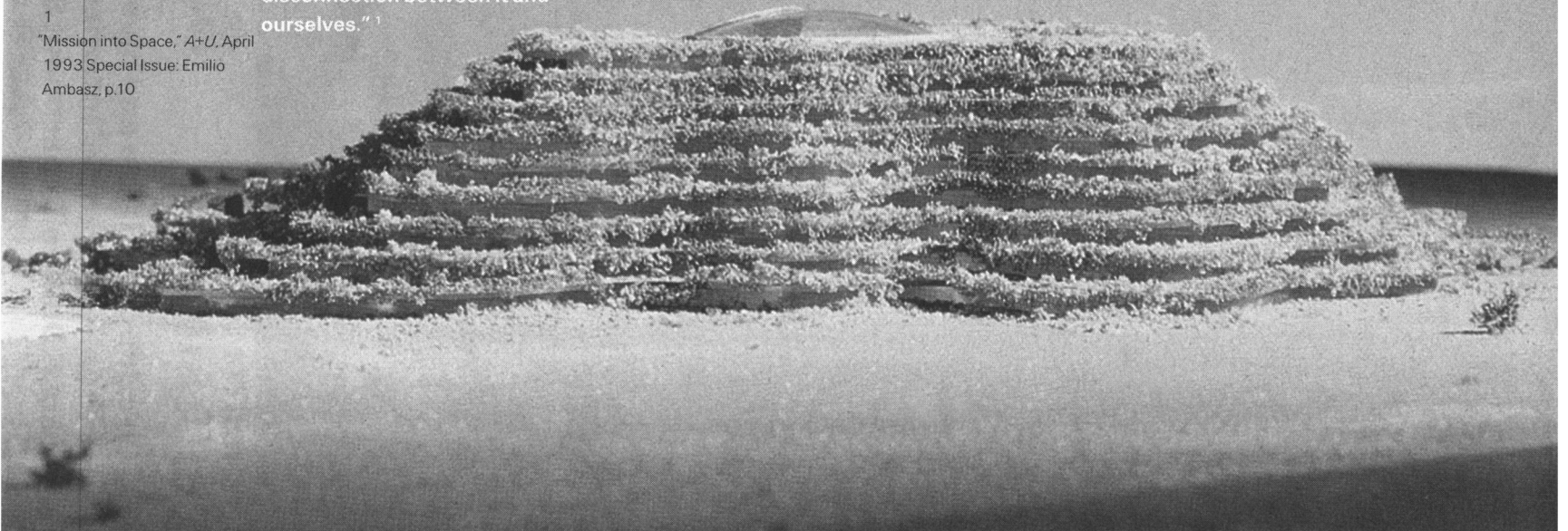
These lines by the Waterboys capture my desire to understand architecture holistically, as the context of all human experience. A context that can be at the same time liberating and unrelentingly oppressive, depending on one's race, class, or gender. A context in which the "palaces and piers" of one group are too fre-

The presence of nature is integral to the architectural work of Emilio Ambasz. Architectural space and the space of landscape are woven together so tightly in each of his projects that to tear them apart leaves nothing understandable as either nature or built form. The following images of three projects: The Worldbridge Trade and Investment Center in Baltimore, Maryland; Fukuoka Prefectural

International Hall in Fukuoka, Japan; and the Nichii Obihiro Department Store in Obihiro, Japan, all demonstrate how the shape of nature dictates the shape of the architecture. No matter how contrived the landscape of winter gardens and planted terraces integrated into these buildings might be, these projects embrace an idea of nature as a commanding force. In the past century architects have labored to keep the natural world out of buildings to the point of distorting our definitions of nature. Value has shifted from the beautiful vistas of the landscape to the natural resources of the strip mine. Although the construction and mechanical systems of Ambasz's projects may not address the concerns over global ecological threats, the form and space of these projects demand a new understanding of both architecture and nature. As Herbert Muschamp writes: "Ambasz's images point toward the conviction that the environment cannot be 'healed' without first addressing a more fundamental disconnection between it and ourselves."¹

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"Mission into Space," *A+U*, April 1993 Special Issue: Emilio Ambasz, p.10



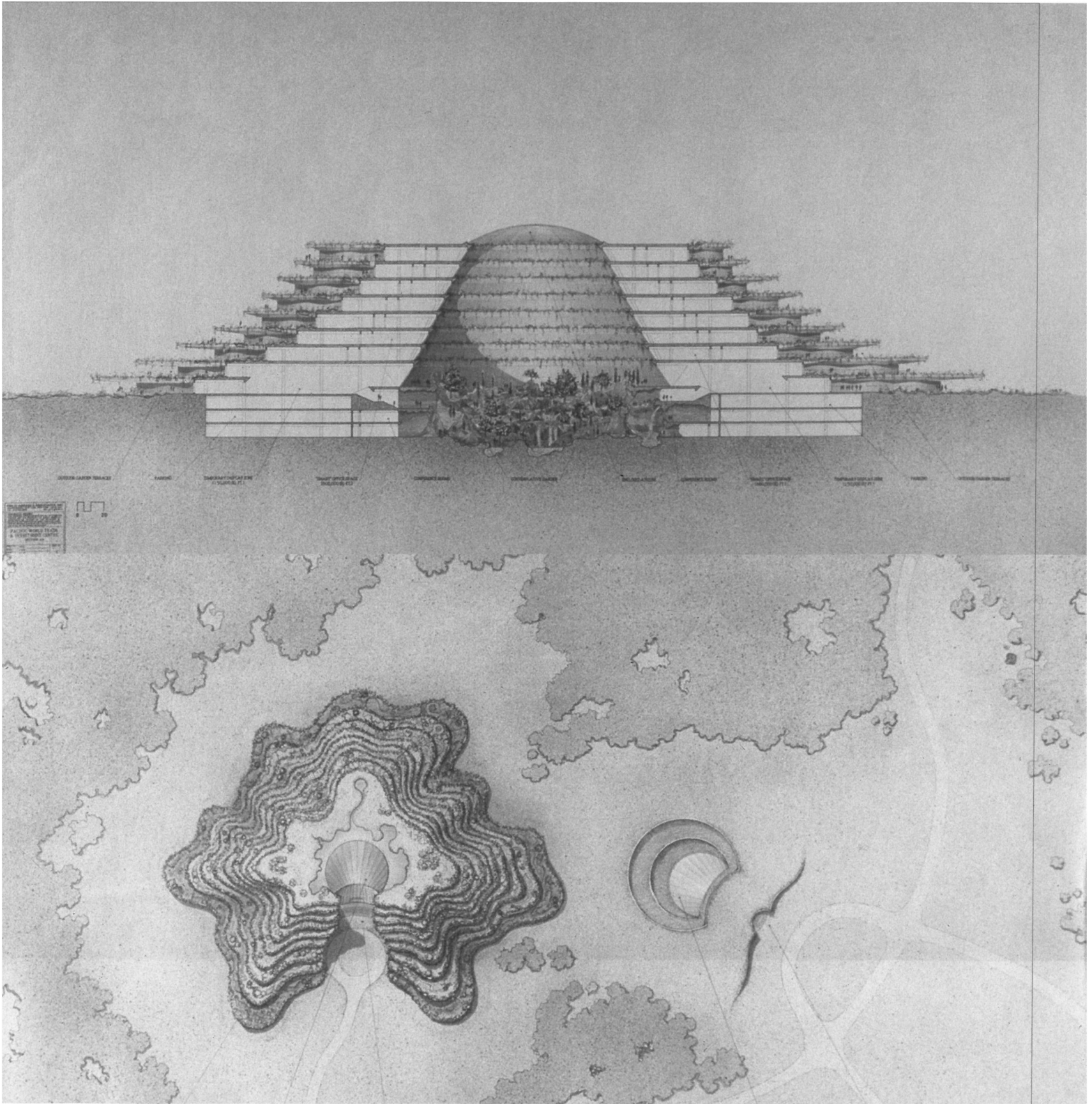
the audition with an overwhelming sense of humiliation, each missed note ringing like a deathknell in my ears.

Later in the day, pacing to and fro on Samson Street, wondering how to explain to the folks back home that I might not be moving out of the inner-city into one of these magnificent row houses, hoping that another idea would strike like a bolt of lightning. Then, in the serendipitous way that things happen in my life, I heard wonderful music that I had never heard before coming from the window of an apartment. Determined to know its name and needing to be distracted from the pain I felt, I knocked on the door. A young black man appeared and I soon learned that he was Homer Lee, a clarinet player and the only colored student at the Curtis Institute. With great generosity, Homer Lee and his two white roommates invited me into a cavernous studio apartment that looked exactly as I had imagined the apartments of bohemian musicians. They shared their recording of Puccini's *La Bohème* and somewhere along the way explained the impossibility of my entrance into Curtis. They encouraged me to go instead to New York City's Manhattan School of Music, which apparently had a shortage of French horn players. They also coached me in auditioning for expressionless white males, a lesson I still rely on. It helped me to achieve tenure at the University of Michigan. Homer Lee assisted me in setting up an appointment at the Manhattan School of Music, and he even argued so relentlessly with the ticket master at Penn Station that he agreed to exchange my return trip to Cincinnati for one to New York City, with just enough cash left over for a plane-ride home.

Several weeks later, I received a letter saying that I had been awarded a full scholarship to attend the Manhattan School of Music. I also received a letter from Homer Lee saying that his existence at the Curtis Institute had become unendurable. That he could not continue his role of being an only one in such a hostile situation. After literally handing me a key to the future, Homer Lee jumped off a bridge and killed himself. From that time onward, I have been deeply aware of the deadly difficulty that some people have in trying to access the grey stone mansions of privilege, and of my obligation to struggle against that situation. Homer Lee could not make it to the future, but he managed to pry open that massive oak door for me. Like it or not, I thus inherited a responsibility to open doors for others.

Building section drawing of Worldbridge Trade and Investment Center

Plan drawing of Worldbridge Trade and Investment Center



It was a long journey to becoming a member of the Musician's Union and to being able to take bows in extraordinary music halls like the old Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, the War Memorial in San Francisco, and even the Academy of Music in my favorite City of Brotherly Love. Along the way, I had yet another lesson in social responsibility. We are now in the early 1960s, at the height of urban renewal, when my childhood neighborhood in Cincinnati was being systematically brutalized by a so-called revitalization project. Every time I went to visit my parents, I saw, in what had been a rather pleasant place to grow up, more and more of the dark side of the moon. A burned or abandoned building. Tall brush growing wild in vacant lots. Windows barred to keep out criminals. For almost ten years the streets where I had ridden my bicycle, planted flowers, and played hide-and-seek were filled with bulldozers and mud. The house where my best friend and I had dusted dark woodwork and traced our fingers over stained-glass windows was abandoned and eventually became a pile of rubble strewn with garbage and leaves. The windows of my own house nailed shut. A gun kept hidden in an old record player. A Doberman pinscher under the back porch. In Ohio, my aunt's eight-room house leveled for a highway. The quiet of my grandmother's farm in Sutton, West Virginia, pierced by high-speed traffic whirring through her front yard. The meaning of losing all my ancestral land to urban development was not clear to me at the time, but intuitively I began to take an interest in community organizing in New York City.

One serendipitous event led to another, which I tell in longer talks, and eventually my life intersected with a bunch of students who were also concerned about grey mansions and bulldozers. In a bloody rebellion, they forced Columbia University to reconsider its plans for expansion into Morningside Park in Harlem and to actively recruit minority students. In 1968, after that spring when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated, I was offered another full scholarship—to study architecture along with 26 other African-American recruits. Not only because students demanded that the university become less racist, but because many people, throughout the country, were willing to make extreme sacrifices in the name of social justice. My sense of obligation to repay a debt to society increased, as yet another massive door to privilege was pried open for me.

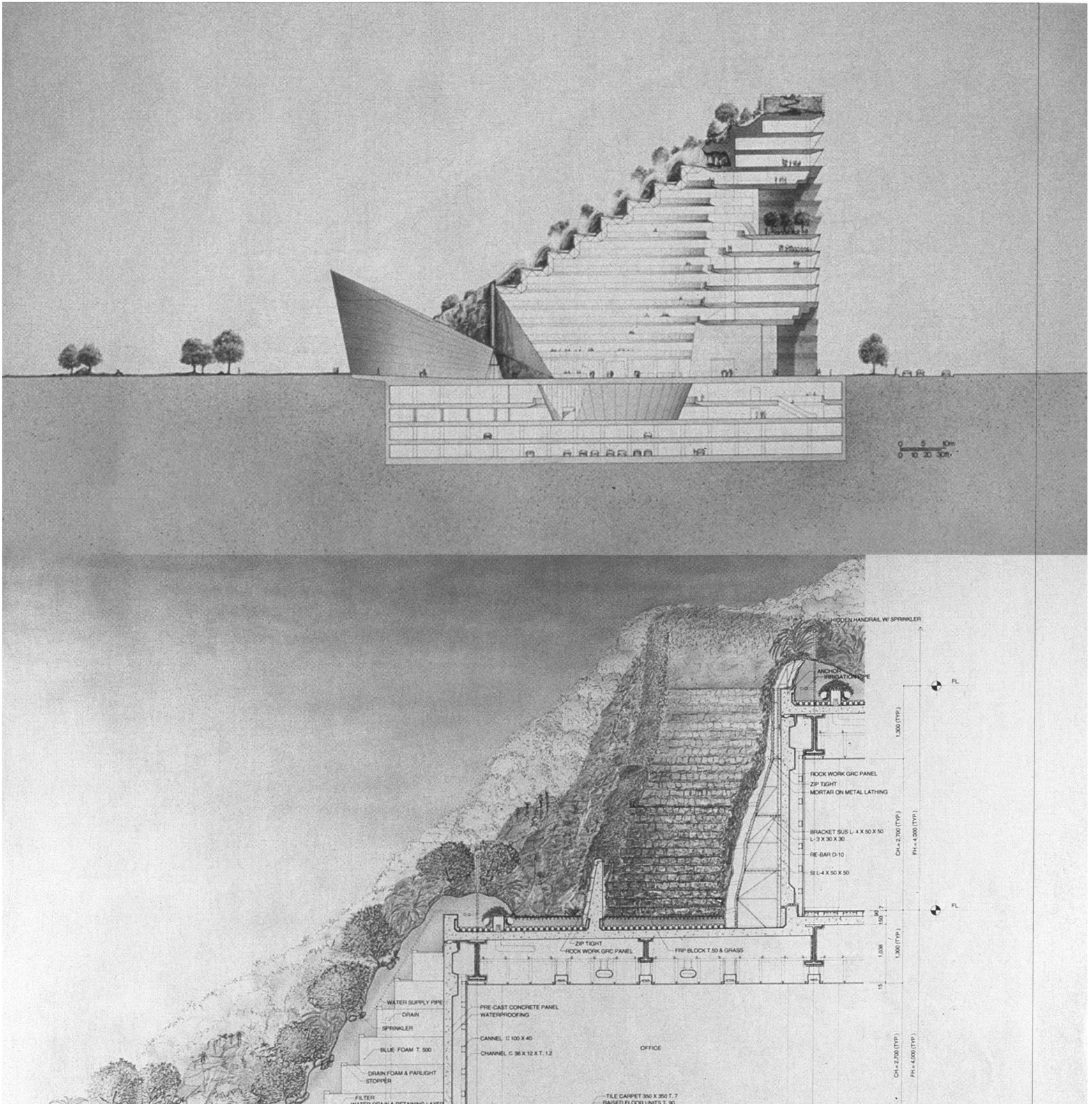
As you all know, this was a period of experi-



mentation in schools across the nation, and the School of Architecture at Columbia was no different. High atop Avery Hall, we built models, rode skateboards, prepared late night meals, slept, discussed projects, basked in the admiration of famous mentors, boasted of all-night marathons, but mostly we used this great skylit Brigadoon to expand our sense of social responsibility and to invent dreams for solving the problems of humankind.

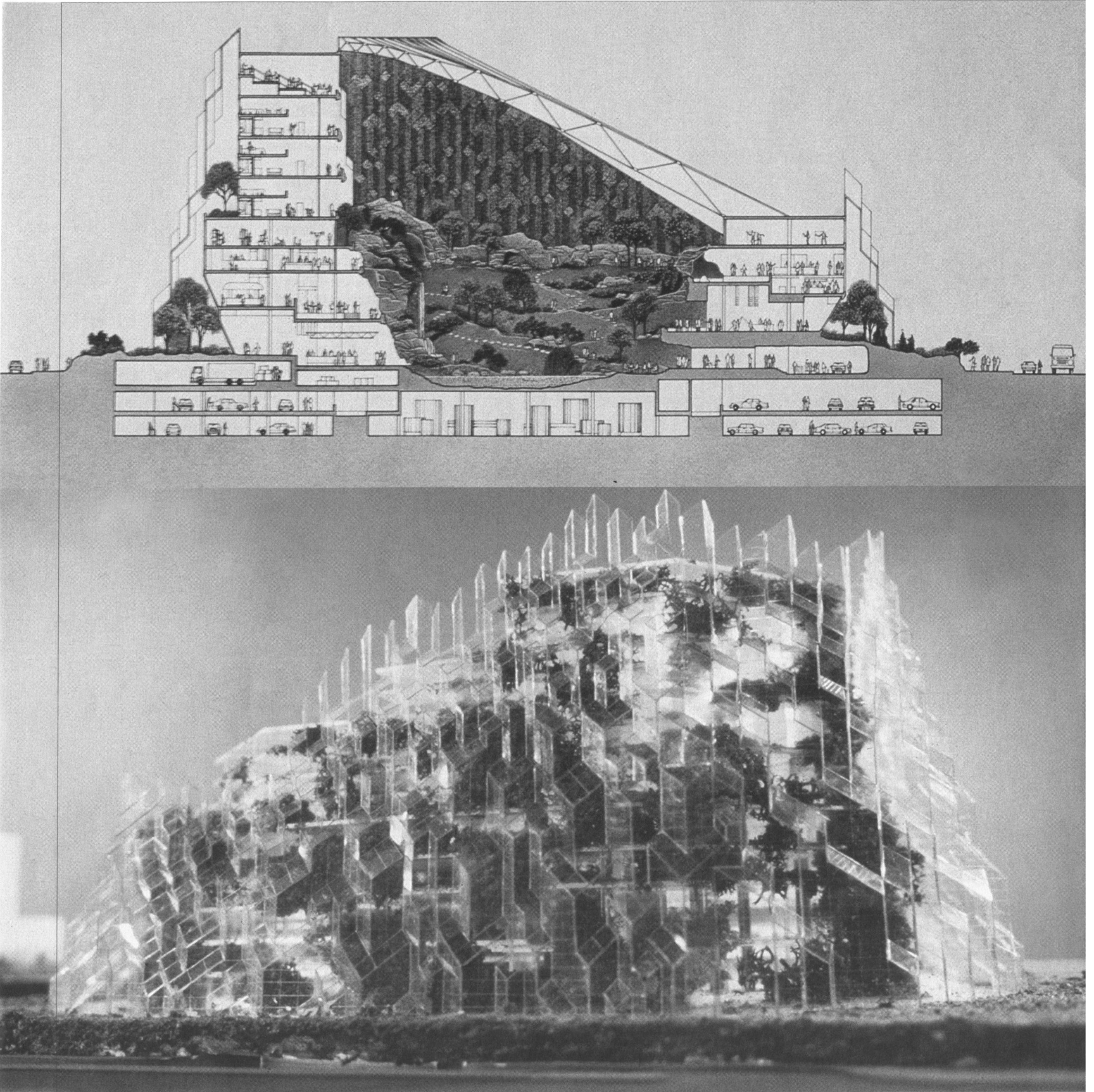
A major curricular concern was how to create housing for all U.S. citizens—a concern that was buoyed up by a never-fulfilled promise of massive federal funding. We disavowed the role of specialist, insisting that broad participation in political and economic issues is an essential precursor to good design. We disavowed the image of the lone virtuoso artist, insisting that sensitive, holistic design solutions require teams of people that include the client. We disavowed the idea of neutrality and objectivity, insisting that all actions reflect cultural values. But alas, “things change,” and as Ron Shiffman said, the Vietnam War and then the oil embargo of 1973 subverted the quest for social justice. The country lurched from one economic crisis to the next—crises that had an especially severe impact on architects. Housing subsidies vanished. Construction costs skyrocketed. Unemployed architects could be seen walking the streets with portfolios as offices closed or cut back staff. The architectural profession mirrored the mood of the country, in which more than a few people blamed the poor, rather than international events, for soaking up resources. Conservatism took hold and a newly enthroned crew of design specialists erased the expansive vision of architect as social planner. Proclaiming that architectural education cannot be wasted on social work, they re-erected distinct boundaries around the formal aspects of building. Whether it be learning to watercolor a building perspective, to make leak-proof roofs, or to use history or philosophy to generate physical form, the architect's domain, they asserted, was in the craft of construction. The why or for whom of building was another problem altogether.

For me, however, there was no turning back. After a five-month period of unemployment, I enrolled in the Environmental Psychology program at the City University of New York, which attracted me by its peculiar insistence that research be conducted, not for its own sake, but to serve specific groups of people. My own studies brought me full circle to inner-city



neighborhoods where, instead of riding bicycles, planting flowers, playing hide-and-seek, dusting dark woodwork, or tracing fingers over stained-glass windows, children are facing daily assaults of crime, drugs, violence, and homelessness. With a series of grants from the NEA, the Kellogg Foundation, and the University of Michigan, I was able to develop a method of exposing elementary school children to architecture in its most holistic sense, as the stage upon which cultural values are acted out. The evolution of this effort is now called the Urban Network, a program in urban design that has become an international exchange of ideas on what children and adults can do to improve the environment. My goal is to bring children and adults together across the abyss of their cultural and socio-economic differences in a common effort to create a better world. A world in which the human condition is enhanced by the quality of its physical environment.

I use an Urban Network videotape to explain such an expansive educational agenda to children. I begin by showing the negative aspects of cities: their abandoned buildings, their lack of appropriate places for children to play, their poverty, garbage, traffic. Everyone can imagine magical places in which to grow. But how can we learn to make these dreams come true? The first step is to look around you to see what a city is. A city is houses, apartments, museums, churches, city halls. A city is flowers, trees, water. A city is art and delicious food. The children whom I've been interviewing in the video volunteer that people are also the city. Without people, they say, there wouldn't be a city. It is people who make a city beautiful, who keep it clean, who look out for things. But people can also make a city awful. If we want to be the kind of people who can make a city better, we need to learn to work together. Although people sometimes work alone, it's important to be able to share ideas and make compromises. It's important that everyone can make a contribution. Brothers and sisters can contribute. Friends can contribute. Your teacher or principal can contribute. Even small children can help. If we learn to work together, we can make wonderful things. We can make fanciful models or drawings. We can paint ugly buildings. We can construct a set, such as this one. Or even build a kiosk. If we learn to work together we can take this place—and make it look like this. When we're through we can all get together and be

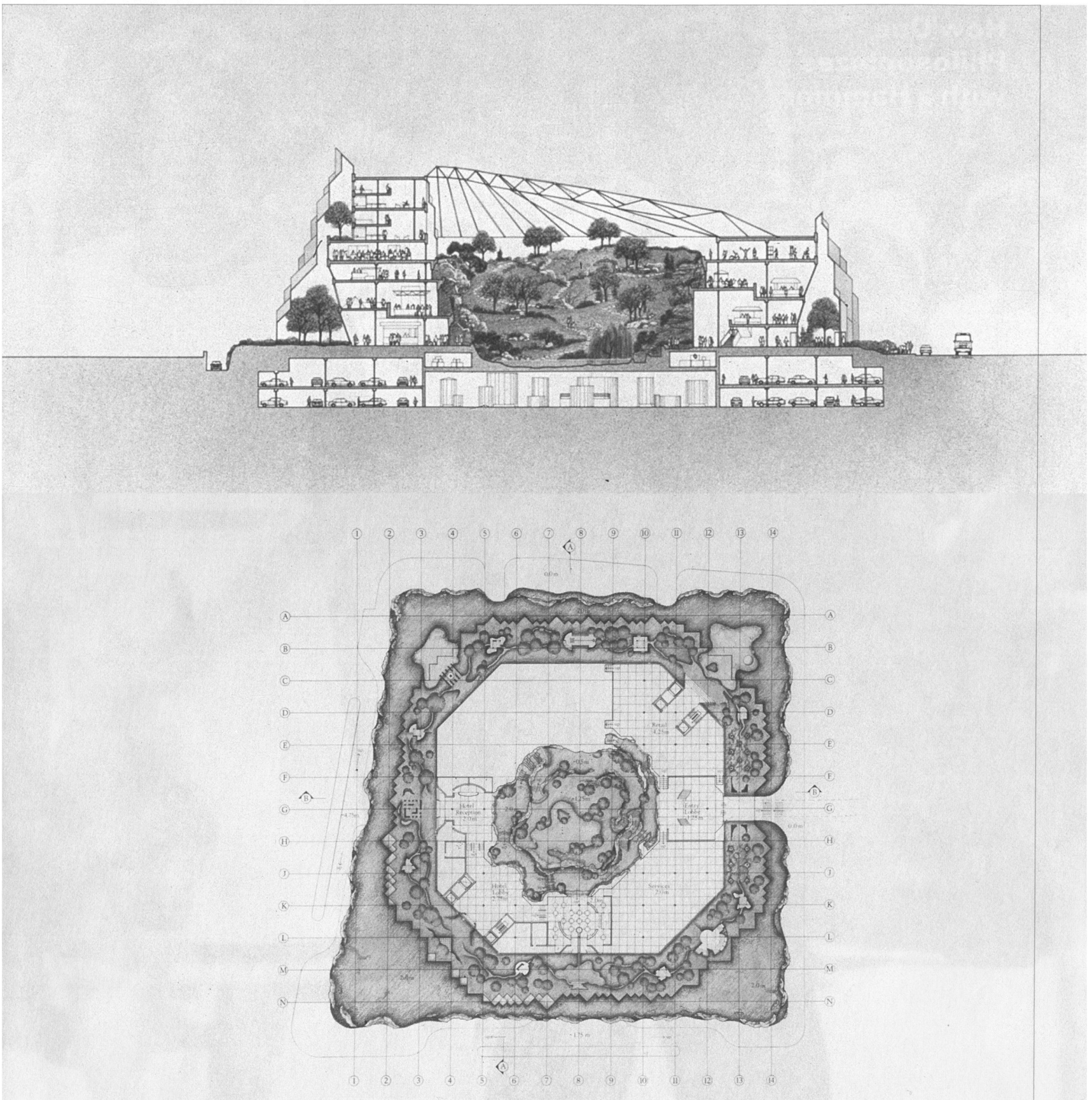


proud of what we have accomplished. And just remember, "If we don't have a dream, how we gonna make our dreams come true?"

"Things Change"? As Susan Fainstein points out, conservatism is growing. Added to the devastation of inner cities by the highways that were plowed through them is their abandonment by businesses and industries, who bequeathed deteriorating buildings, contaminated sites, and the high cost of development to the people—now so maligned for their dependence on welfare—who could not afford to accompany them to the suburbs. While the privileged few in the waning crescent of the moon nit-pick about cycles of growth and recession, those on its robust dark side know that there has been a continuing downward slide that started not long after Dr. Martin Luther King stood at the Lincoln Memorial and declared his faith that we could hew a stone of hope out of the mountain of despair. As a descendant of Homer Lee, Dr. Martin Luther King, and a student-led struggle for democracy, I contemplate the abandoned buildings, garbage-filled lots, and glassy-eyed people who populate the nation's inner-cities and ask myself: How can architects, landscape architects, urban designers, and urban planners find a stone of hope with which to erase this ugly picture? How can we bring a sense of optimism for finally upending elitist land-use policies that relegate so many people to this wide ocean full of tears? The 1960s vision of an architect as one who is deeply involved in political life, who works collaboratively, who is unflappably committed to represent the interest of disadvantaged groups, is a step in the right direction. However, the future beckons us to commit to an even more revolutionary effort to see the whole of the moon.

Discussion:

Tony Schuman: What you've just heard were four individual narratives. Certainly, one of the legacies of the 60s was that people understood their role, not as a fashionable undertaking, but as a lifelong commitment. And that's the optimism that comes through here. **Audience:** Steve, what kind of houses do you design? **Badanes:** Ranch houses and Colonials—no actually, no. I design pretty much single-family houses. I'm going to be one of the last of the breed, I'm sure. It's a building type that—when we talk of the legacy of this century, it won't be the single family house, I hope, because I don't think in the future we'll have



much land for them. But at this point I have to eat. I do half the year teaching and building with students and the other half of the year building for private clients. Most of the houses are energy efficient and somehow, hopefully, responsive to the site and to the desires of the people who live them. As socially responsible with that context as you can get. It's an embarrassing question. **Audience** (Denise Scott-Brown): Le Corbusier also did a city for 22 million people and designed a small single-family house at the same time. We architects have to do that because that's how we get our experience. It's also how we learn to understand clients, and you don't have much option. When we work, say, in public housing, we can simulate a client, we can set up a client steering group. But when we work with an individual family, we learn a great deal. We do have to transfer that to other groups, but I think we shouldn't knock ourselves for doing single-family houses. I think the Modern movement was wrong. On the other hand, every time Le Corbusier did one, he probably thought of it as a prototype for something else, and that's probably right.

The "nowhere stair" is mentioned in *Complexity and Contradiction*—it sits in Bob's mother's house, and he got it from Frank Furness at the University of Pennsylvania. I think your students probably read *Complexity and Contradiction*. **Badanes**: It was required reading.

Scott-Brown: Thank you. But there's a question in this that is one of reconciliation, and that is: We are artists and we are social beings, and in every revolution there has been a young poet sitting somewhere saying, "How can I write poetry when the people are at the barricades?" And each of you has to deal with that question, as have we, and I'd like to hear how you deal with it. **Badanes**: What was the question? **Scott-Brown**: We want to make things beautifully; we're artists. Artists have certain characteristics. Very often they want to make it themselves. There's a time when your system can be broken open, there's a time when it is—it's as if your baby's got its legs broken. We want to do good, and we also want to make beauty, and this puts us in a straddling position. More maybe than anyone else. **Sharon Sutton**: Well I think the answer for me is by being schizophrenic. I don't really have a choice about whether I'm going to be in the center making things beautiful or in the margin causing trouble. I am in the margin, and I know that. **Scott-Brown**: Why can't