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A Meeting House in Boston: A Vehicle for Reconnection

Roseanne Hennessey

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A MEETING HOUSE IN BOSTON :

A VEHICLE FOR RECONNECTION

"Town-meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and how to enjoy it. A nation may establish a system of free government, but without the spirit of municipal institutions it cannot have the spirit of liberty."

Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America

THESIS COMMITTEE

Lawrence Davis, Advisor
Anne Munly
Christopher Gray

V. NICE:

MISSING -

GOOD V. D. - NEED MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS OF CITY HALL & SITE —
PARTICULARLY SPATIAL INFORMATION.

PROGRAM ANALYSIS; PRECEDENT INVESTIGATIONS OF GOVERNMENT / GRASSROOT
MODELS (FIG/FIG, FIG/GROWING, ETC.) AND PROGRAMS PREVIOUS
(SPEAKERS CORNER, HYPE PARK)

WHERE WERE THE 'KNOBS' ADDRESSED TRADITIONALLY IN THE PAST?

STATEMENT OF THESIS

This thesis project will explore the reconnection of the urban core to the periphery. It will deal fundamentally with the relationship of *center* to *edge* and the use of architecture as connective tissue.¹ The vehicle for this exploration is a Meeting House in Boston. This vehicle presents an opportunity to investigate the topic of reconnection as an urban/site proposition as well as a use/program proposition.

TOPIC OF PROJECT

Contemporary citizens suffer from a perceived disenfranchisement caused, in part, by the willful abandonment of participatory government. The program element chosen for this thesis attempts to assist in the reconnection of the residents of Boston to their city government. The Meeting House will provide a facility for the local citizenry to "...feel [their] strength and make up [their] collective mind."² In this manner, it will serve as a catalyst for reflection and debate where opinions and ideas can be publicly discussed in an environment of tolerance. The Meeting House permits a voluntary reconnection of the individual resident to the city government. It is a vehicle for citizens to re-enter the realm of public debate.

The main spaces of the program include a large meeting chamber, several smaller public forum facilities and exhibition space.³ The pairing of exhibition space (for reflection) and meeting space (for debate) is intended to provide a suitable atmosphere for discussion and reasoning through dialogue.

The site chosen is located on the periphery of Boston's government center. The Central Artery (Interstate 95), which now functions as a physical barrier between the downtown and the waterfront, is being relocated to a subterranean tunnel directly below its present location. The site thus presents an opportunity for the reconnection of the downtown core (center) to the waterfront (edge) on reclaimed land.

This site contributes favorably to the program with a location in close proximity to the existing City Hall and other municipal facilities. It is near to several historical meeting house facilities including Faneuil Hall, the Old South Meeting House and the Old State House. The Meeting House would be designed for use by the residents of the City of Boston. Boston's colonial and early history includes the use of the meeting house building type for religious and secular agendas. The city has a history of problems surrounding representation of the residents of peripheral neighborhoods (Charlestown, Brighton, Dorchester, South Boston, East Boston, Roxbury, Fenway, etc.) in the central city government.

¹The term center and edge are used conceptually. *Center* it does not refer to the geographic center of the city, it refers to a dense core of urban fabric, in this case coincident with the municipal government center of the city. *Edge* refers to the perimeter of the city which is currently separated by the Central Artery highway. This area is also coincident with a geographic edge of the city formed by the harbor. Conceptually, *edge* also refers to the residents of Boston, in particular residents of the outlying neighborhoods.

²Charles Jencks/Maggie Valentine, "The Architecture of Democracy", Architectural Design Profile.

³The program is explicitly outlined later on in this document.

ARCHITECTURAL ISSUES

The architectural issues to be explored as part of this thesis range in scale from the initial urban speculation concerning the treatment of the area left vacant by the removal of the Central Artery to the specifics of building tectonics. The following is an outline of these issues:

Thesis Prep

The primary goal for this initial phase is to establish the overall strategy of urban planning for the area of the removed highway. Once this basic strategy is defined, determining the specific site and associated context of the project is the secondary goal. Methods used in this initial phase are as follows:

- Small scale diagrams to establish an understanding of both the history and the urban context of the city
- Diagrams of that portion of the city adjacent to the Central Artery to inform the overall strategy of urban planning for the area of the removed highway
- Figure ground studies of adjacencies and relevant relationships to selected context buildings (City Hall, the State House)
- Collage of selected urban projects to generate spatial ideas
- Alternative proposals for the specific site and context (to be included in the presentation)
- Initial development of program as spatial volumes for primary spaces
- Analysis of selected projects of related topics (reconnection, urban infill, linkage, etc.), both theoretical and built

Thesis

The primary goal is to develop a detailed design of the Meeting House as well as the development of spatial criteria for associated "new" context which has a direct impact on the building design.

- Analysis of selected meeting houses and assembly buildings
- Development of final site plan
- Design of Meeting House building and associated exterior spaces using drawings and models (specific approaches to be determined at a later time)
- Large scale design of building details to provide for an exploration of building tectonics / use of materials

This outline will undergo modification as the review process proceeds.

STATEMENT OF EXPECTATION FOR FINAL RESULT

The proposed scope of this thesis is intended to allow enough time for the detailed design of the building and associated exterior spaces by the conclusion of the thesis. Comments regarding the feasibility of this in light of the information provided is encouraged.

URBAN ANALYSIS AND SITE SELECTION

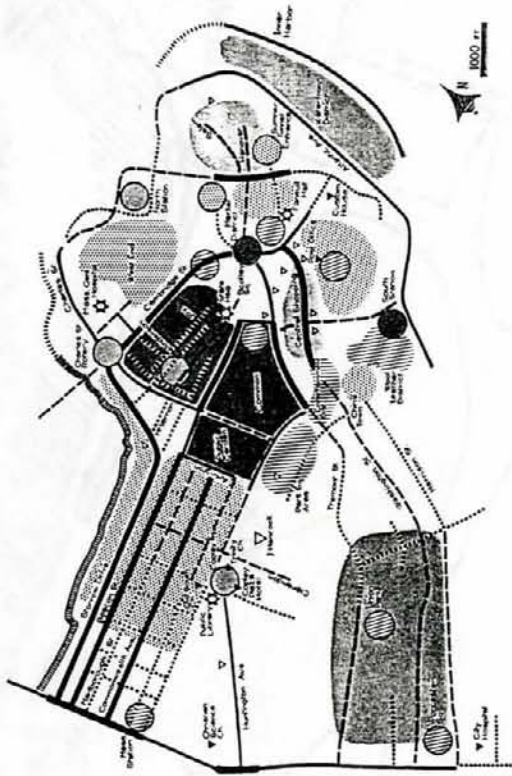
Initial site selection for this thesis centered on the desire for a clear example of an urban condition of physical separation between an urban center and edge. Boston represents an urban city with a "real" opportunity for reconnection because there is a physical barrier (the elevated Central Artery) being removed (sunk underground). This allows for consideration of the thesis as a proposal grounded in reality. In order to accomplish this grounding, circumstances surrounding the planned removal of the barrier have been *generally* accepted, although some liberty will be taken as the design proceeds. Since the design of the new parcels created by the removal of the highway is intended to go through a participatory process, there is an opportunity to manipulate these circumstances where necessary to support the thesis.

The selection of the site along this removed highway is in the process of final determination. The current proposed site is adjacent to the present Harbor Park, indicated on Figure 5.

Examples of site investigation and analysis have been included. The following is a brief description of the graphic material enclosed:

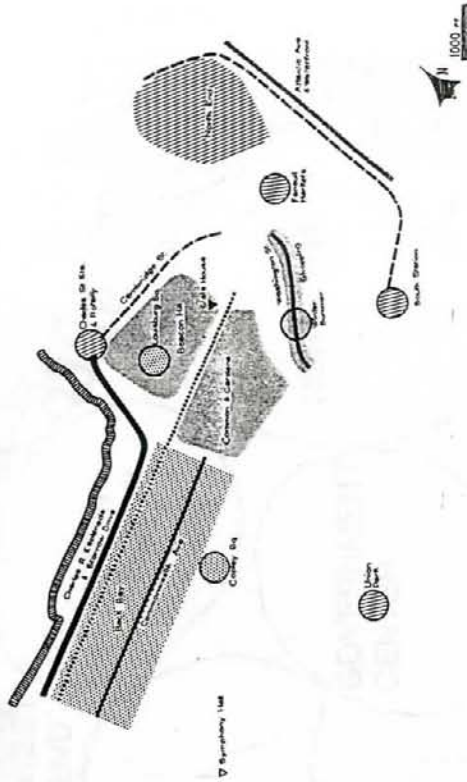
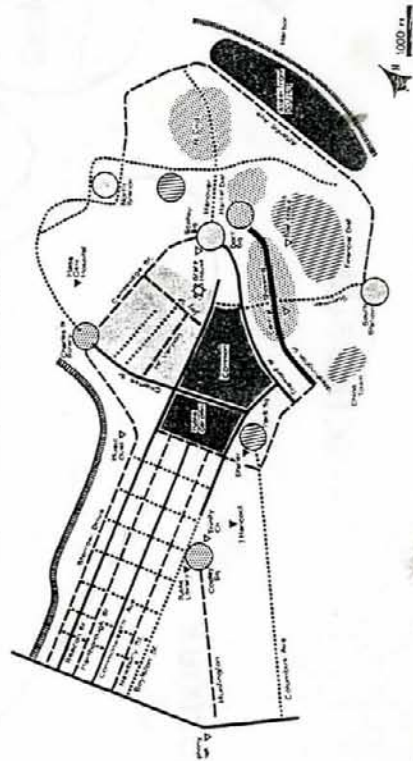
- Figure 1 Kevin Lynch's diagrams of the city in 1960 indicating the complexity of the Boston urban condition and the "perceptual" nature of the city
- Figure 2 Diagram of Boston's neighborhoods. The underlay for this diagram is from the Process magazine source (see Sources of Graphic Material section) and demonstrates one of the ongoing issues of the city: many neighborhoods are excluded from the visual perception and architectural discussions of the city. Unfortunately, this will also be true of this thesis, which is primarily concerned with a site located on the main peninsula of the city. However, this problem is part of the development of the programmatic aspect of this thesis and the topic of reconnection.
- Figure 3 Figure ground of Boston in 1940, reproduced from The Cornell Journal of Architecture, No.2
- Figure 4 Photograph of Boston prior to the construction of the Central Artery
- Figures 5-12 Figure ground analysis of the different urban strategies found in the city
- Figure 13 Partial city plan representing the existing conditions after removal of the highway
- Figure 14 Negative image of partial city plan representing the existing conditions after removal of the highway
- Figure 15 Diagram of the concentric street patterns. These patterns indicate a "high pressure" zone in the general area of the proposed site. This would seem to indicate three possible resolutions: a concentration of buildings at this zone; spatial release by providing large amounts of open space; or linking of the concentric rings.
- Figure 16 Diagram of radial street pattern. These radial streets appear to flank the area of the proposed site directing the focus towards the existing City Hall.

- Figure 17 Diagram of the orthogonal street pattern. This diagram indicates an area between two large fabric groups which possesses an orthogonal street pattern distinct from the fabric which surrounds the area on two sides. This diagram also indicates a major north/south and east/west axis with the Old State House at the head of the east/west axis (State Street).
- Figure 18 Diagram of the dominant pedestrian areas. These areas are concentrated in the area of the orthogonal grid. There is also a major pedestrian north/south axis which parallels the major north/south vehicular axis indicated in figure 17. At the head of this axis is City Hall. There is also a secondary east/west axis developing along the waterfront.
- Figure 19 Partial city plan showing significant public buildings
- Figure 20 Diagram indicating the two major "lobes" of dense fabric and the wedge shaped area of the orthogonal grid. This diagram best represents the overall urban strategy. The areas of the former highway located within the fabric "lobes" will be filled in with parcels similar to those of the surrounding fabric. The vacated strip of the former highway located in the wedge will maintain significant open space.
- Figure 21 This diagram shows the relationship of the State House, the Old State House, City Hall and the proposed Meeting House. The Meeting House is part of the governmental fabric of the city and is supplemental to the bureaucratic and symbolic City Hall. Therefore, it is proposed that the Meeting House be placed on the same orthogonal grid as the City Hall, but offset from the major axis. An alternate to this would be to place the major exterior space on axis with the City Hall, inverting the symbolic meaning of the City Hall building.
- Figure 22 Plan of I.M. Pei's City Hall Plaza design with an inset of Siena, Italy. This represents the concept of a government center, with a grouping of all public service buildings in a radiating pattern.

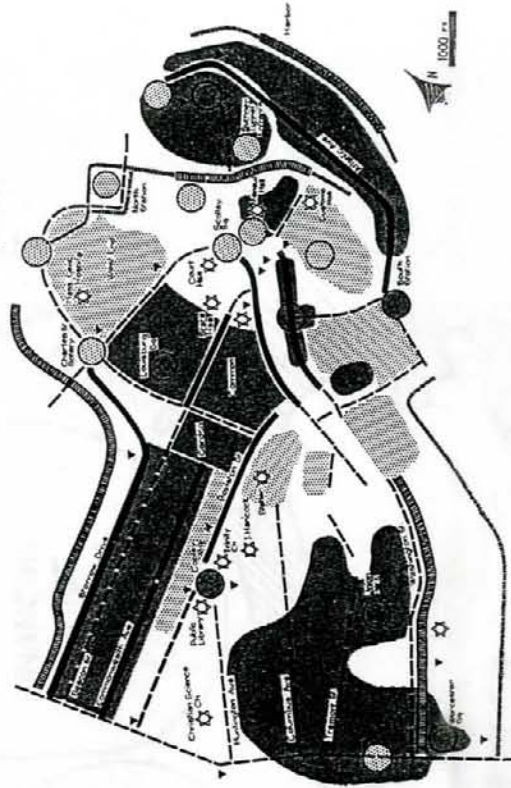


The Boston image as derived from verbal interviews

The Boston image as derived from sketch maps



The distinctive elements of Boston
38. The ritual form of Boston as seen in the field



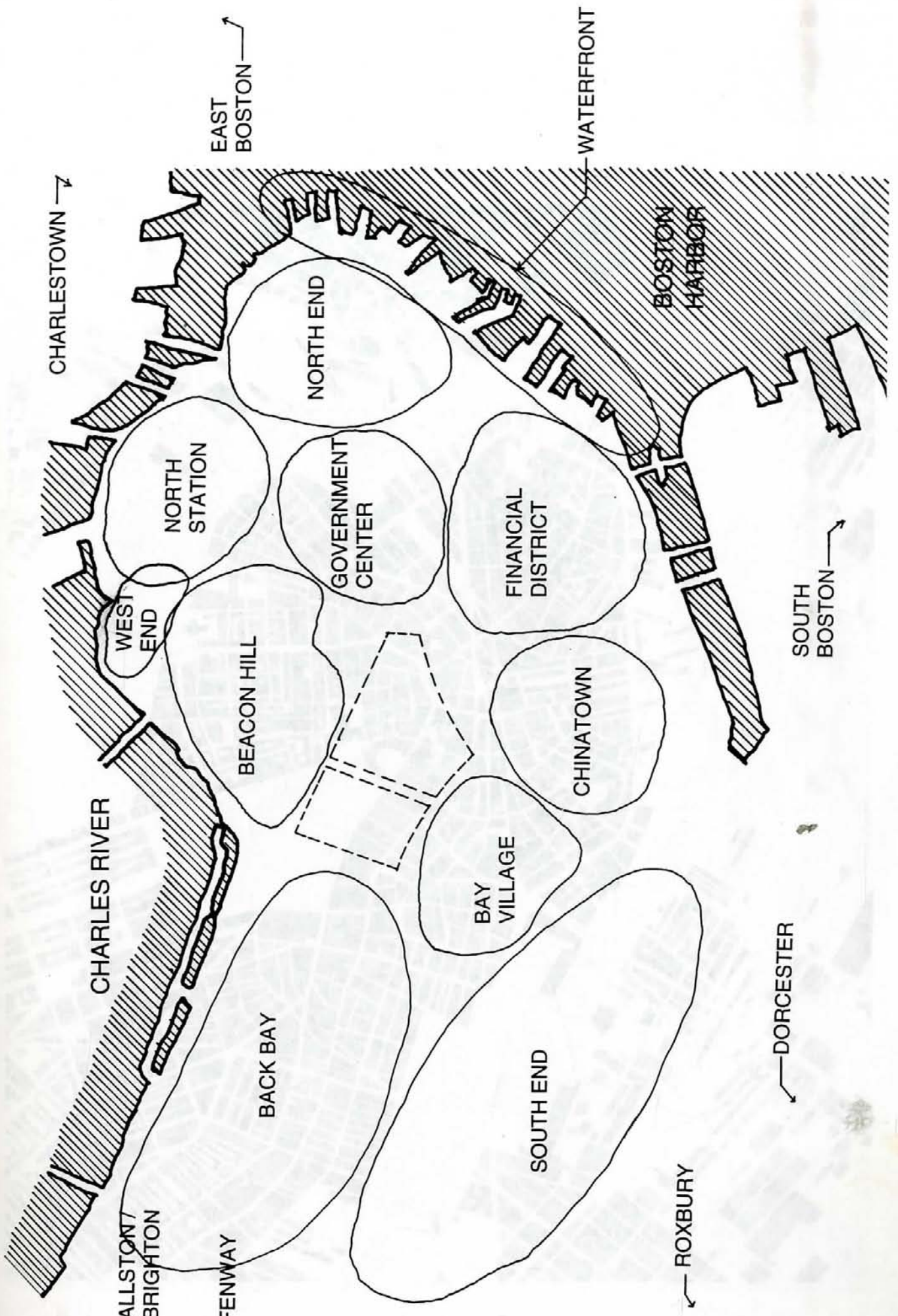


FIGURE 2: BOSTON'S NEIGHBORHOODS



FIGURE 3: BOSTON IN 1940, REPRODUCED FROM THE CORNELL JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURE, NO.2

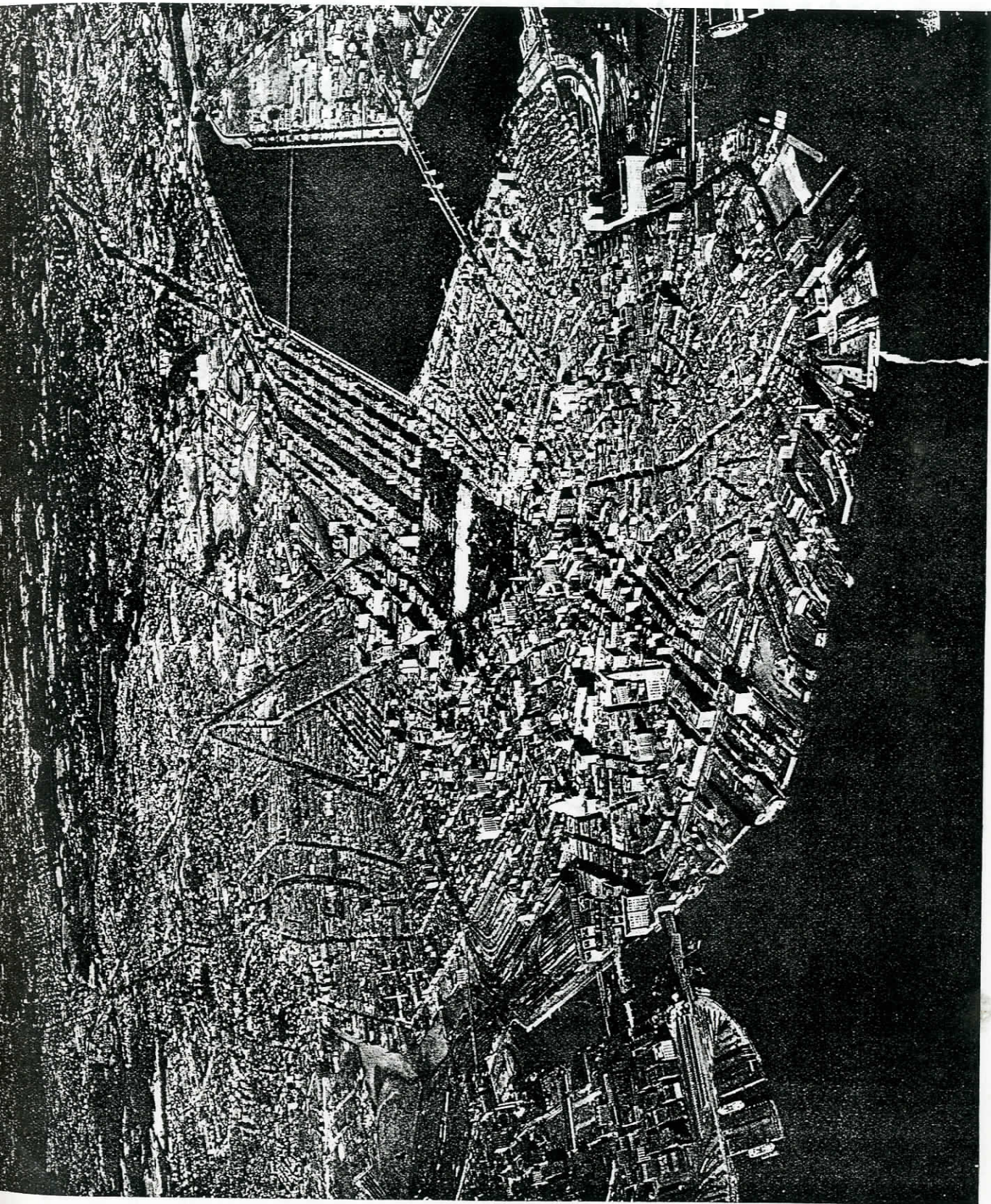


FIGURE 4: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF BOSTON BEFORE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CENTRAL ARTERY HIGHWAY

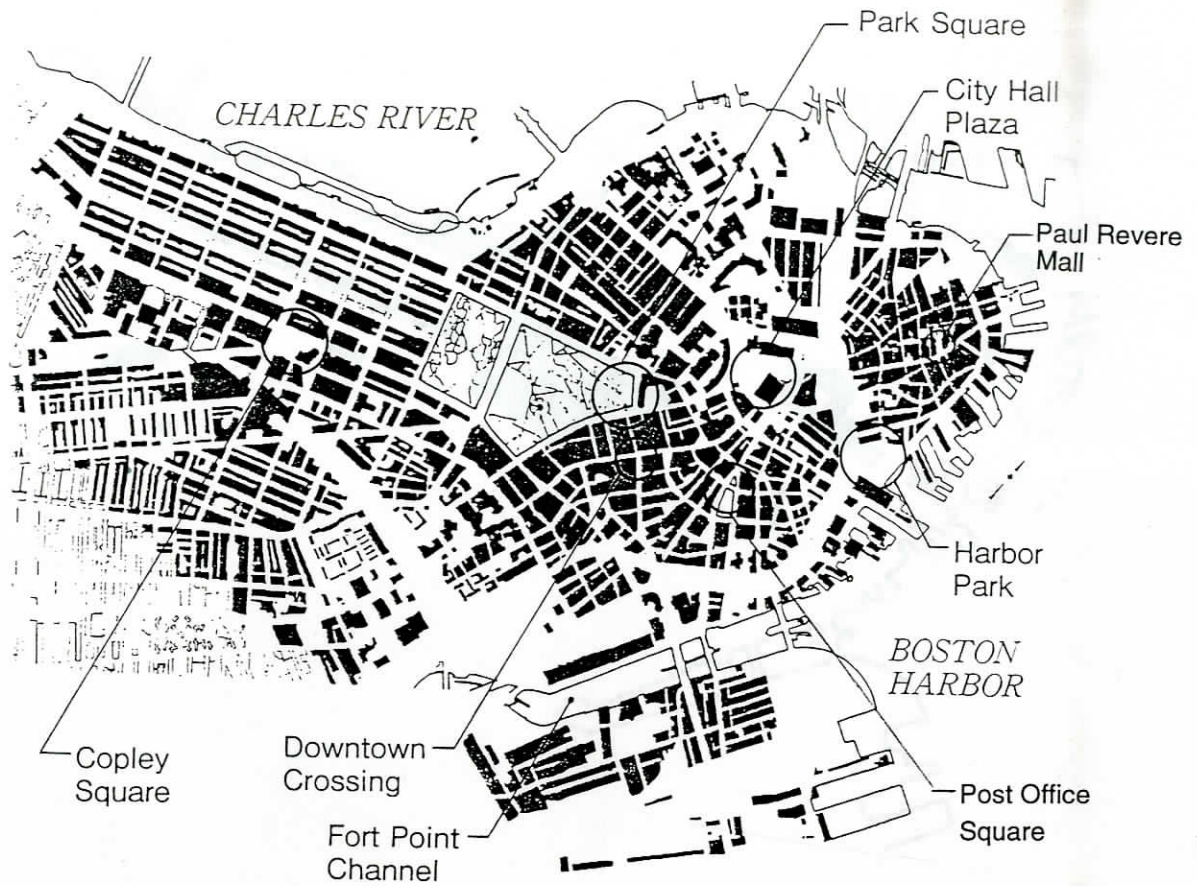


FIGURE 5: IMAGES LANDMARKS & PLACES, MODIFIED DRAWING FROM PROCESS MAGAZINE

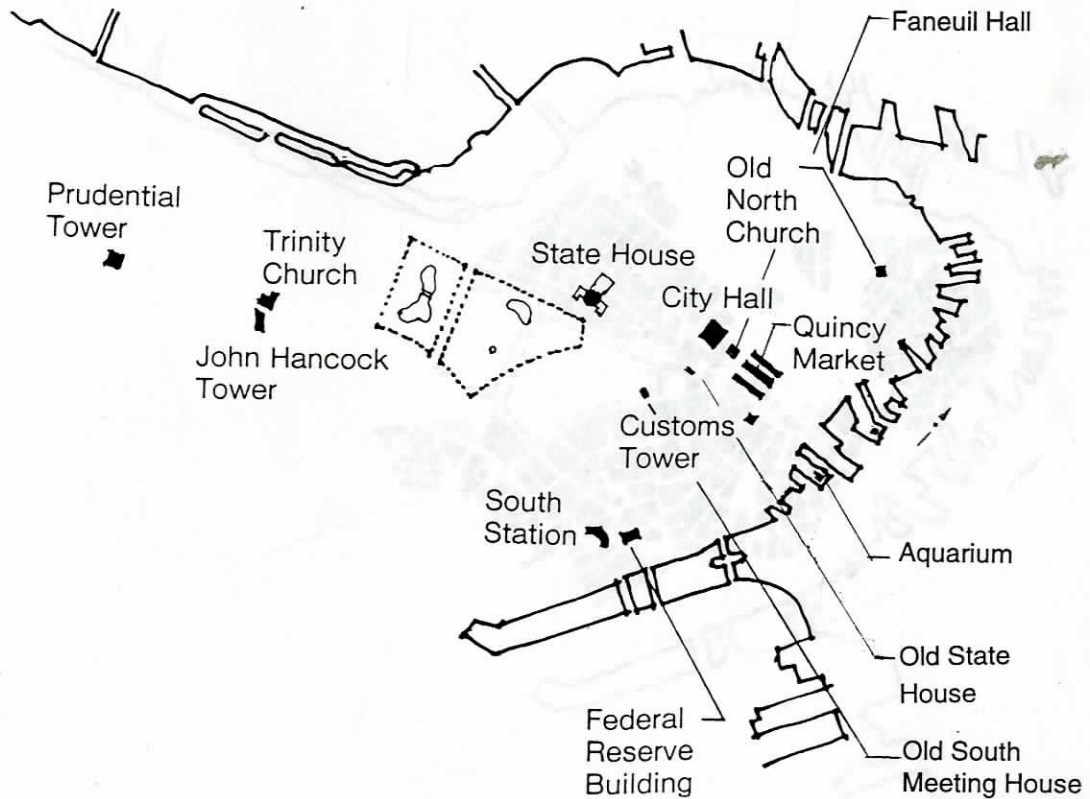


FIGURE 6: IMAGEABLE LANDMARKS, MODIFIED DRAWING FROM PROCESS MAGAZINE

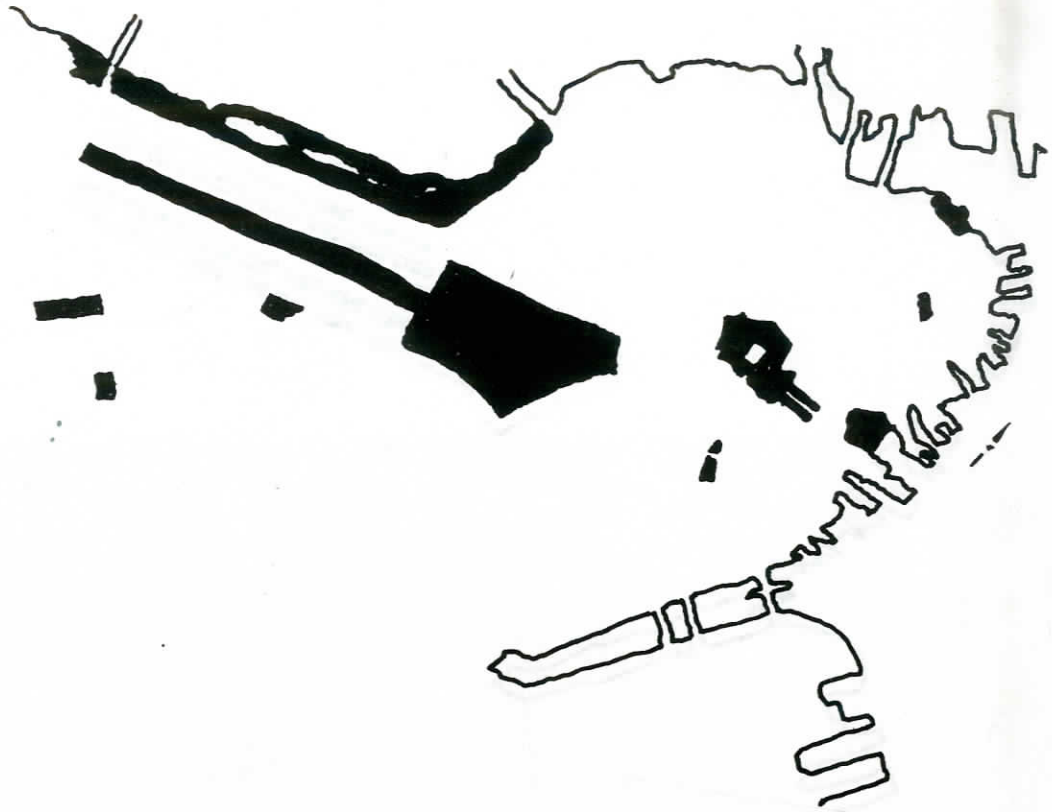


FIGURE 7: OPEN SPACE



FIGURE 8: "MEDIEVAL" BOSTON

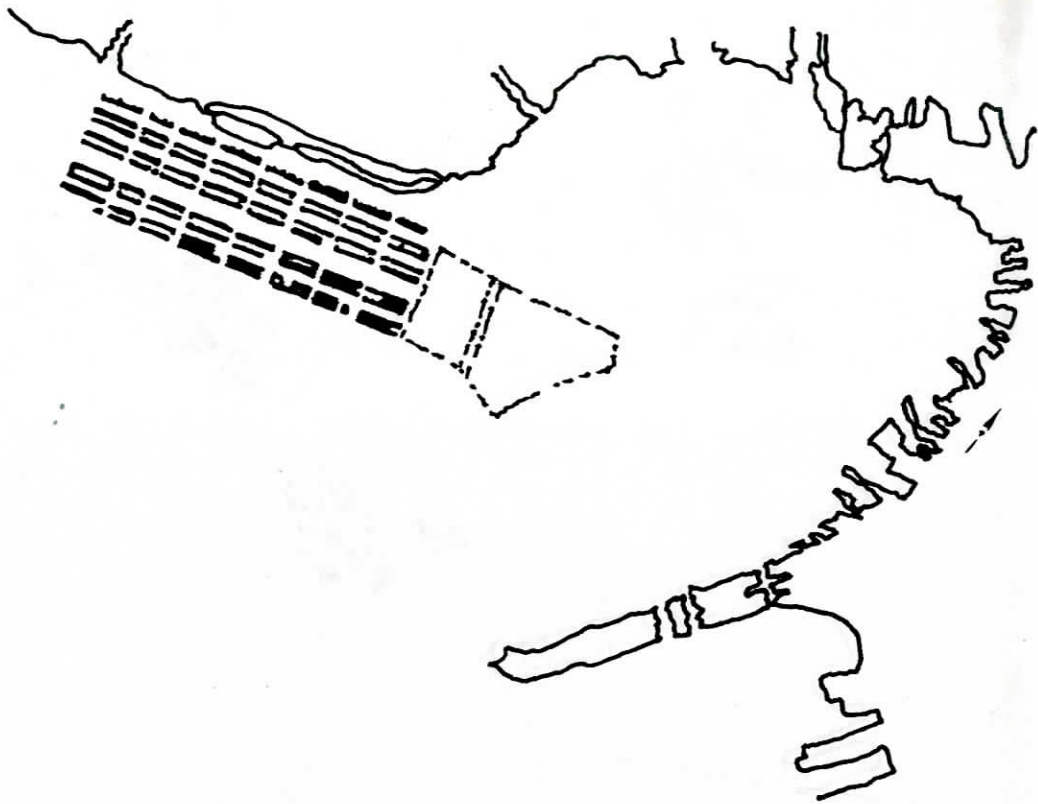


FIGURE 9: BACK BAY, BOSTON'S "FRENCH BOULEVARD"

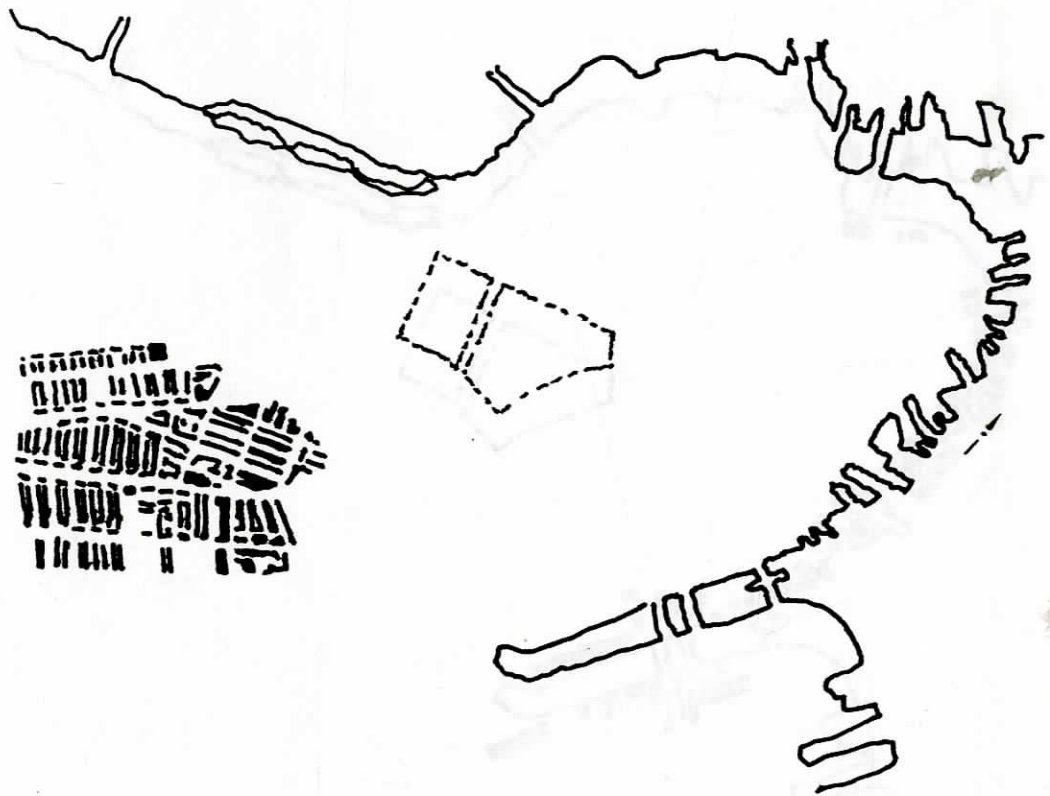


FIGURE 10: SOUTH END, BOSTON'S "LONDON RESIDENTIAL" AREA

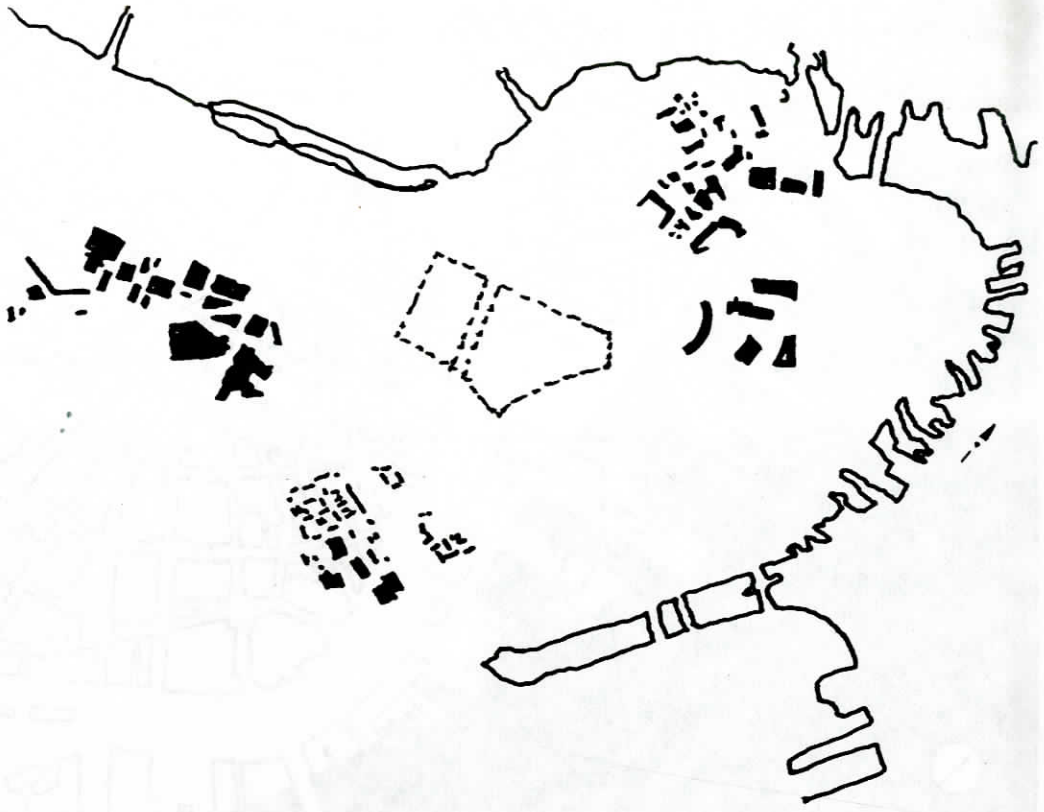


FIGURE 11: URBAN RENEWAL, 1960-1980

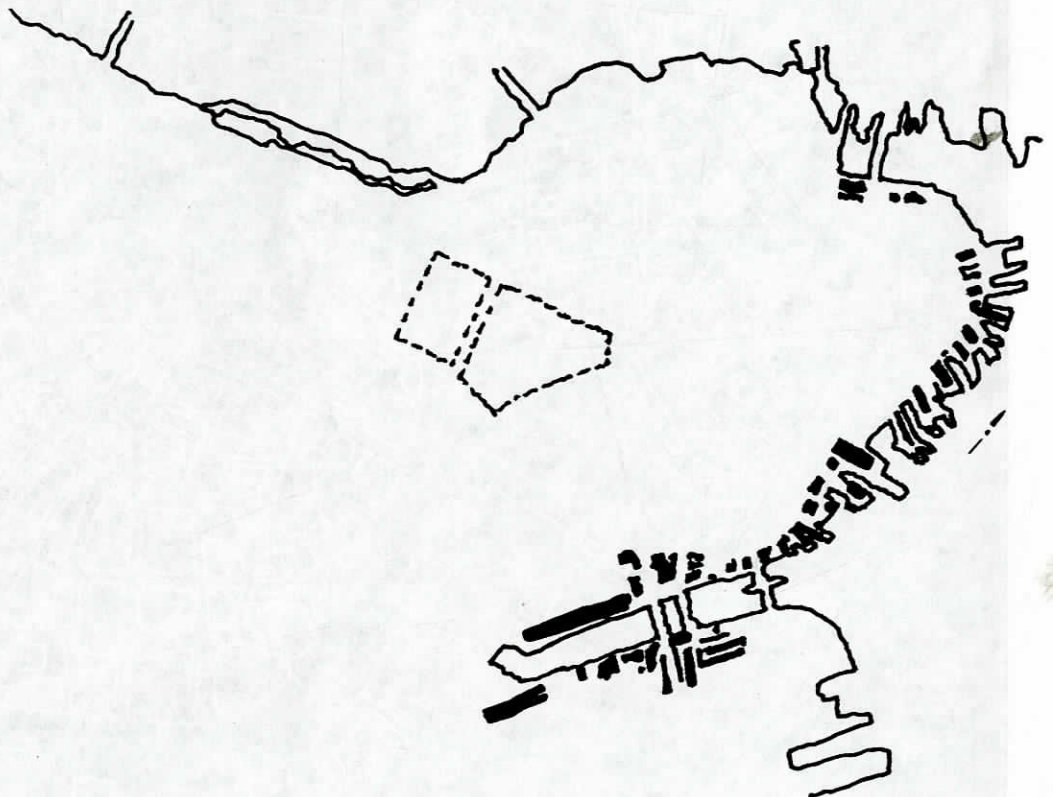


FIGURE 12: WATERFRONT



FIGURE 13: PARTIAL CITY PLAN OF EXISTING URBAN CONDITION WITH CENTRAL ARTERY REMOVED

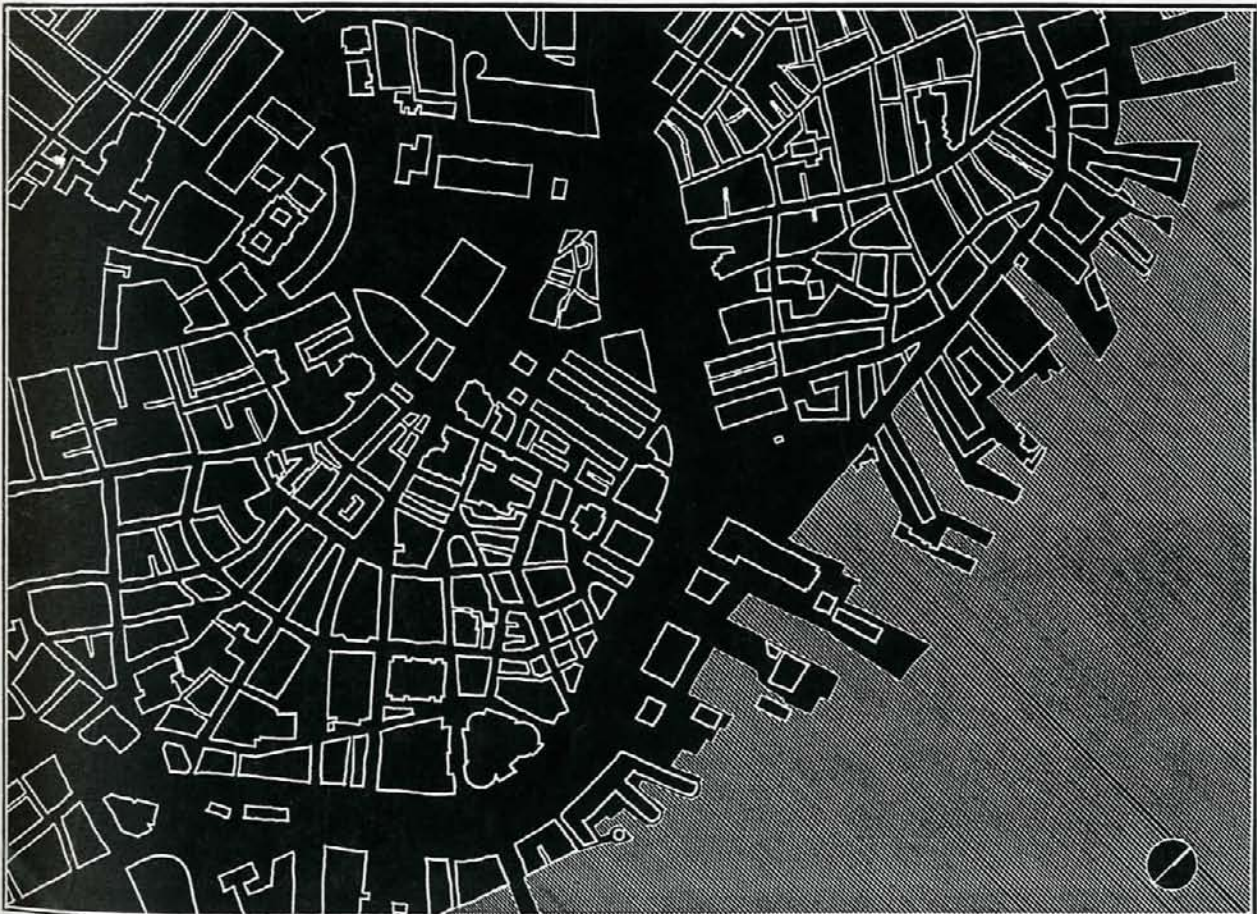


FIGURE 14: NEGATIVE IMAGE OF PARTIAL CITY PLAN



FIGURE 15: DIAGRAM OF CONCENTRIC STREET PATTERN



FIGURE 16: DIAGRAM OF RADIAL STREET PATTERN

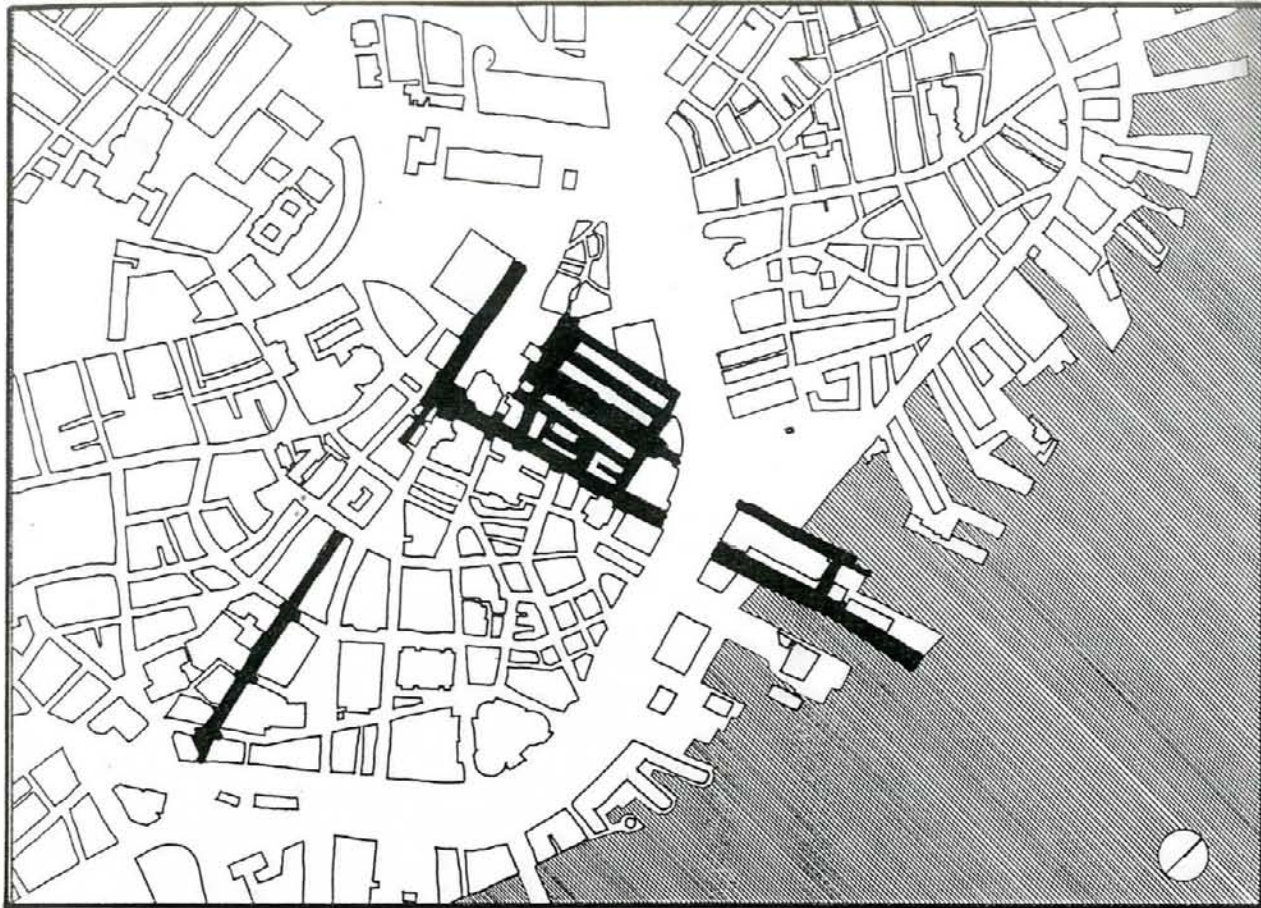


FIGURE 17: DIAGRAM OF ORTHOGONAL STREET PATTERN

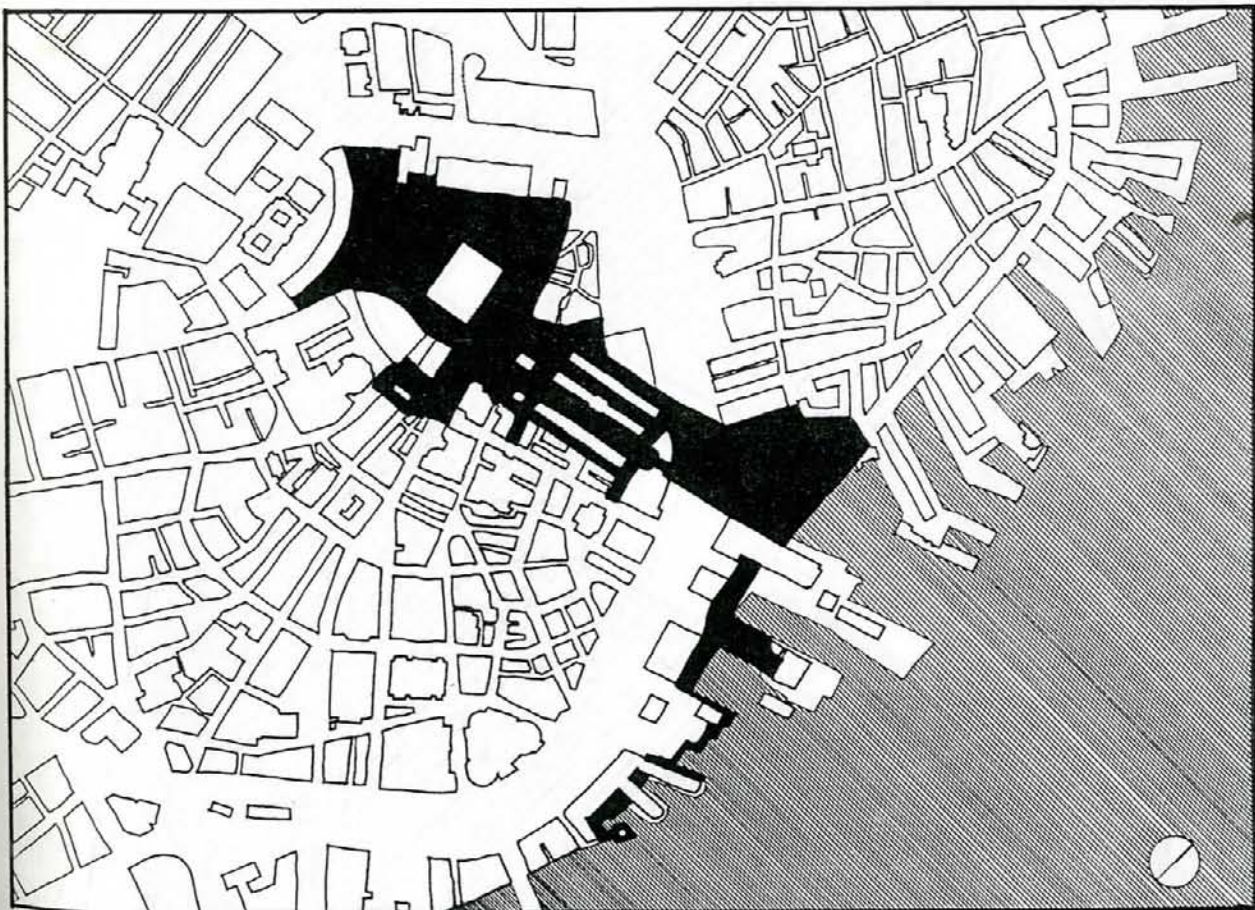


FIGURE 18: DIAGRAM OF PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION AND OPEN SPACE NEAR PROPOSED SITE



FIGURE 19: SITE PLAN SHOWING MAJOR PUBLIC BUILDINGS

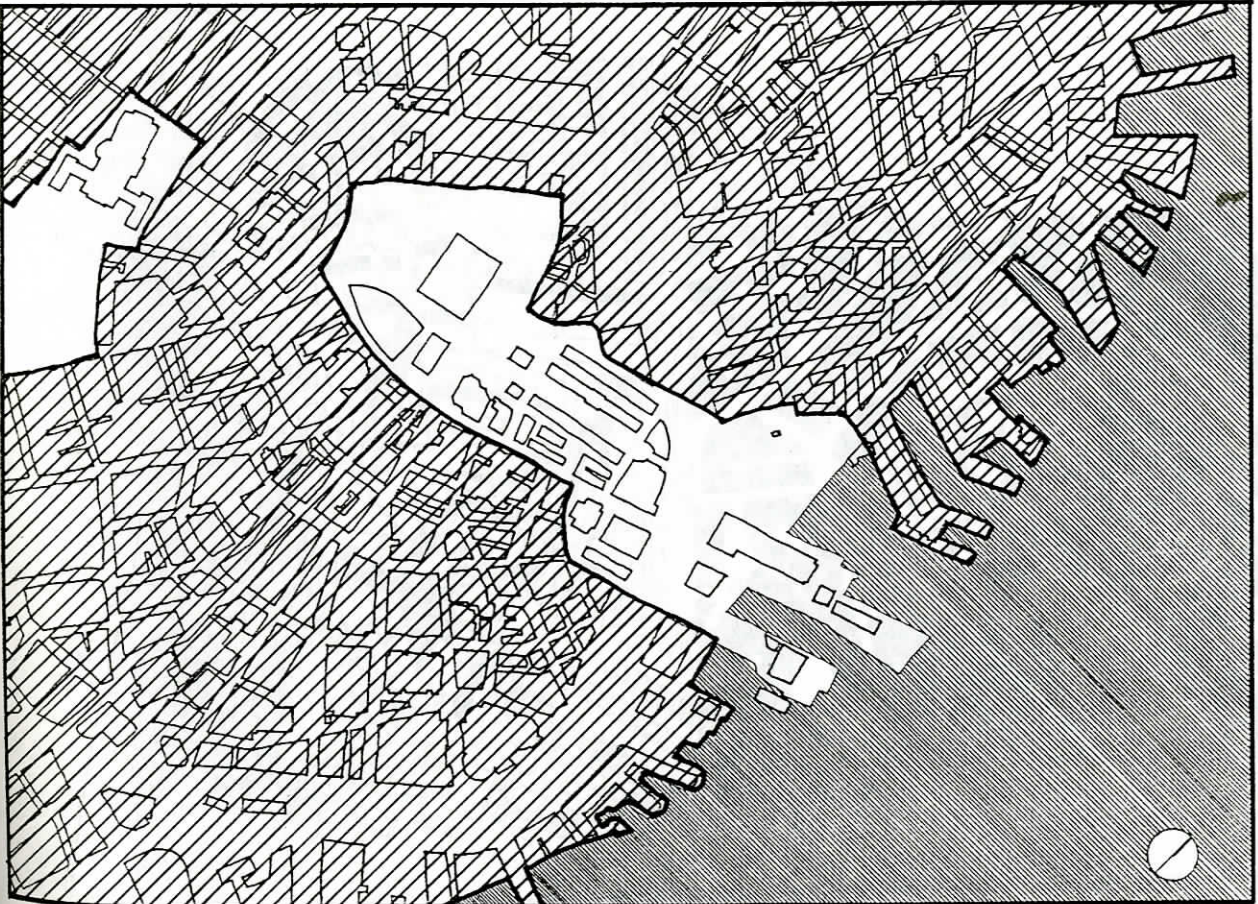


FIGURE 20: DIAGRAM OF OVERALL STRATEGY FOR VACATED "STRIP"



FIGURE 21: DIAGRAM OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE STATE HOUSE, CITY HALL, AND THE PROPOSED "BUILDING" SITE TO OPEN SPACE AND COMMERCIAL/RESIDENTIAL FABRIC

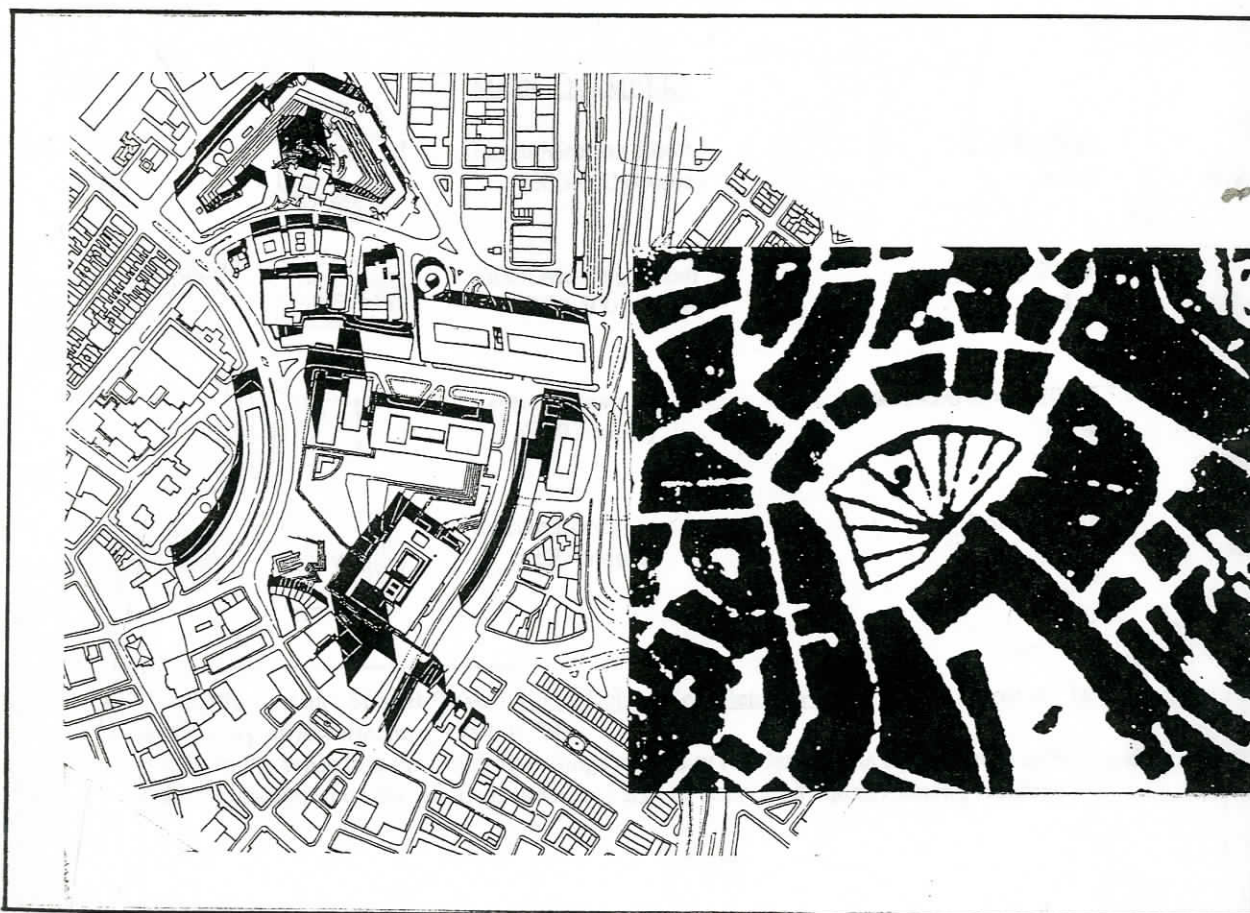


FIGURE 22: DIAGRAM OF BOSTON'S CITY HALL PLAZA AND SIENA'S TOWN CENTER

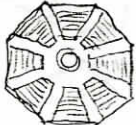
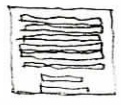

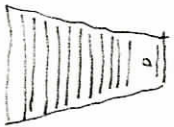


PROGRAM SELECTION AND ANALYSIS

As previously stated, there is a parallel relationship between the program and the site, and the thesis topic. Both elements were selected based on their applicability to the investigation of reconnection. This common link between site and program can also be described in the words of Louis Kahn, "The street is a Room by agreement. A Community Room, the walls of which belong to the donors; its ceiling is the sky. .. From the street must have come the Meeting House, also a place by Agreement."⁴ In this thesis proposal, the street and the Meeting House will require equal thought and consideration.

The Meeting House will be considered as an institution within the city. However, in contrast to existing governmental buildings, such as City Hall and the State House, it is not intended to symbolize power and authority. The Meeting House is intended to be a grass roots institution. As such, it is intended to be open and accessible to all residents, and should portray an image of accessibility to all residents. In providing a place for all residents of the city to engage in political discourse, the building should convey a sense of civic unity⁵ and should avoid subdivision by neighborhood.

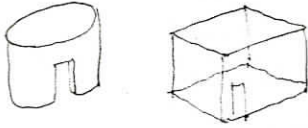
The program of the Meeting House is intended to offer a variety of spatial opportunities to be associated with a variety of meeting situations. The following outline indicates the general program proposed. The adjacent sketches, where applicable, indicate an initial exploration of the proscriptive spatial possibilities. The overall gross square footage of the building is currently in the range of 50,00 sf. Net square footage has been multiplied by 1.4 as an allowance for circulation, support facilities and mechanical space.

MAIN CHAMBERS

	<p>Large Meeting Room (600-800 people)</p>	<p>1 @ 6,400sf x 1.4</p>	<p>8,960sf</p>
 	<p>Small Meeting Room (200-400 people)</p>	<p>1 @ 3,200sf x 1.4</p>	<p>4,480sf</p>
	<p>Lecture Room (200 people)</p>	<p>2 @ 1,600 sf = 3,200sf x 1.4</p>	<p>4,480sf</p>
 	<p>Debate Room (200 people)</p>	<p>1 @ 2,000sf x 1.4</p>	<p>2,800sf</p>

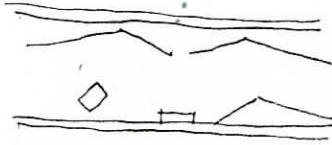
⁴Heinz Ronner and Sharad Jhaveri, Louis Kahn: Completed Works 1935-74, Boston: Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, 1987, p. 391.

⁵Unity in the sense that the building belongs to all city residents. It is not meant to infer that all meetings will result in resolution or that all ideas presented will be supported equally among residents.



Discussion Room 6 @ 80sf = 480 sf
(2-4 people) x 1.4 672sf

Subtotal 21,392sf



EXHIBITION SPACE

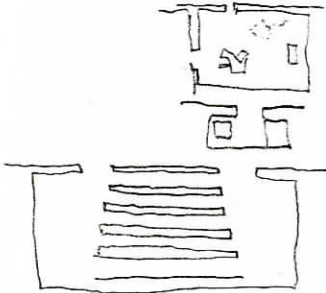
Halls 2,000sf

Rooms 1,000sf

Audio Room 12 @ 30sf = 360sf

Video Room 2 @ 400sf = 800sf

Subtotal 4,160sf
x 1.4 **5,824**



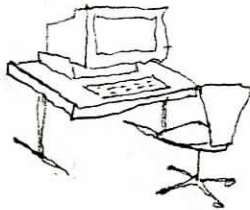
COMMUNICATIONS

Computer-based Network and Database 900sf
Access (fee)
(50 cubicles + computer room)

Meeting Archives: Video 600sf
(20 cubicles)

Remote Storage 500sf

Subtotal 2,000sf
x 1.4 **2,800sf**



OFFICES

Registry & Scheduling 800sf

Groups must register as sponsor
of meeting. Group members must be
residents of the city. Scheduling is
by lottery.

Statistics (fee) 500sf
public feedback
polling

Research / Auditing (fee) 500sf
info on past meetings

Public Documents (fee) 300sf
inquiries on public availability of documents

acquisition service for public documents		
Press	800sf	
equipment storage		
lounge		
Miscellaneous Administration	800sf	
Subtotal	3,700	
	x 1.4	5,180sf

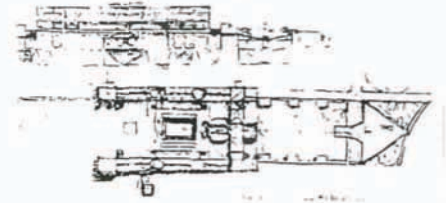
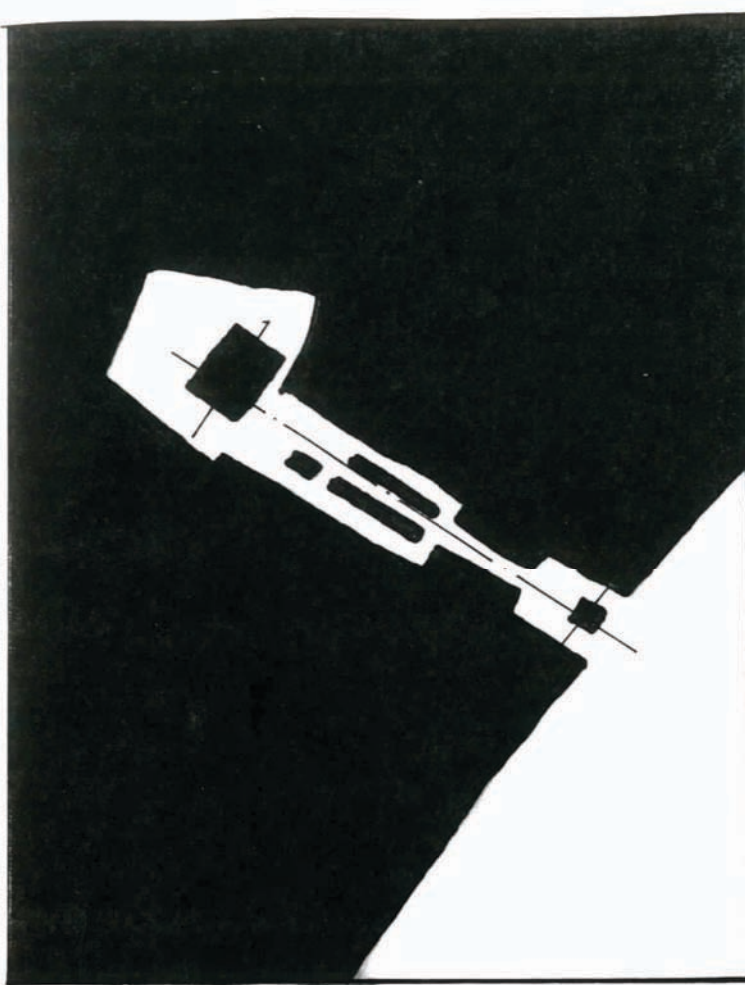
EXTERIOR SPACES

Open forum space with podiums, benches		---
Park		---
TOTAL	35,196	
contingency	x 1.2	42,235sf

Note: Parking will be in adjacent parking garage to be included on the site.

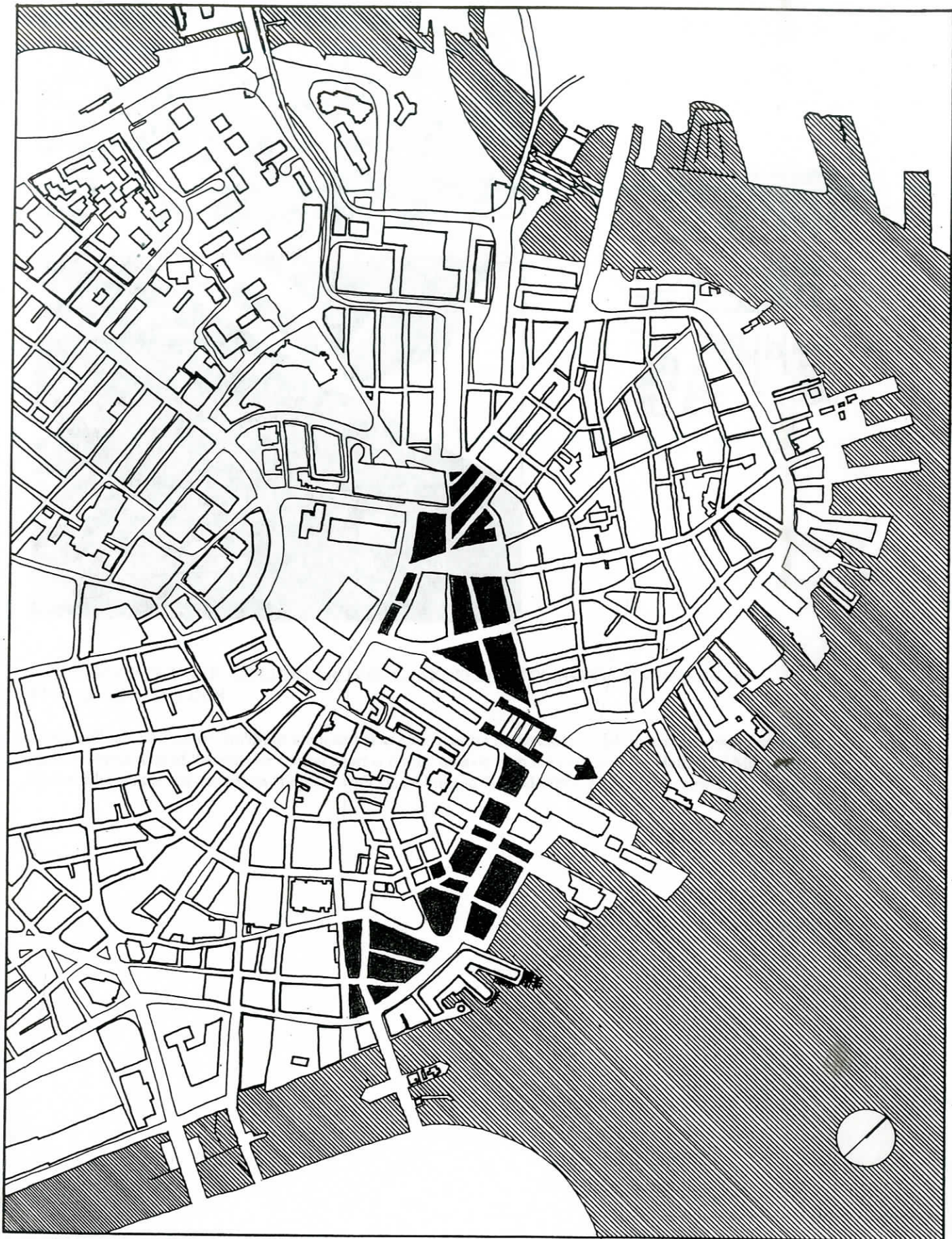
COLLAGE STUDIES

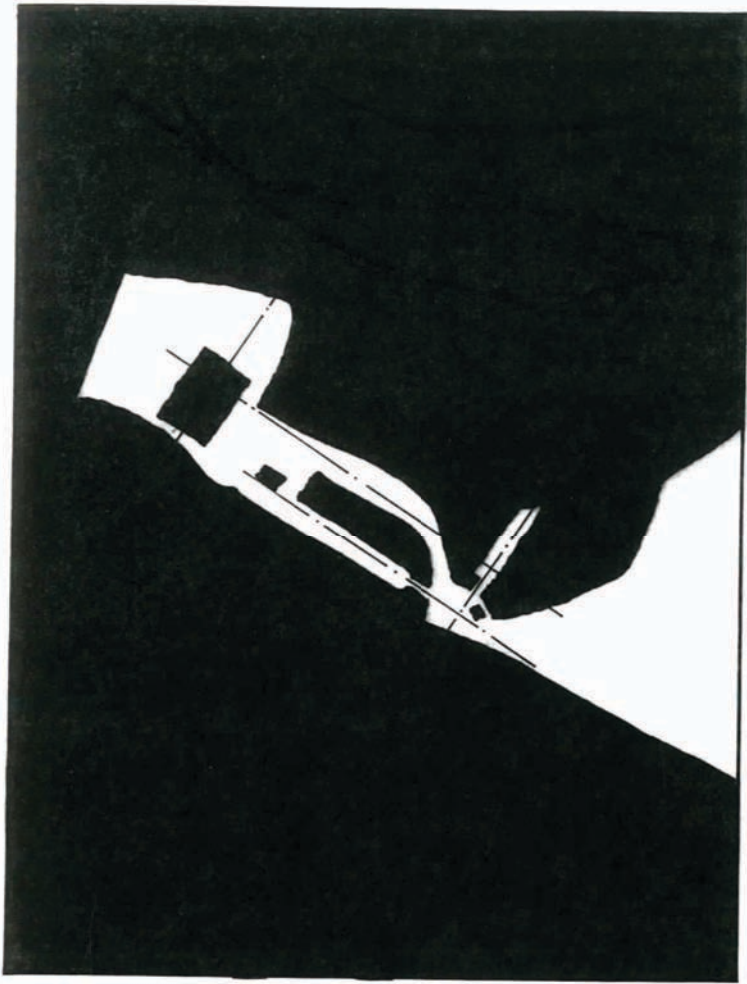
The following collage studies are intended to provoke discussion on potential urban strategies for the "strip" and the building site. Several schemes for the site will be presented at the final Thesis Prep review. These schemes have been developed after the collage studies, which were influential in their development.



COLLAGE OF LOUIS KAHN'S COMPETITION DESIGN FOR INDEPENDENCE HALL MALL IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

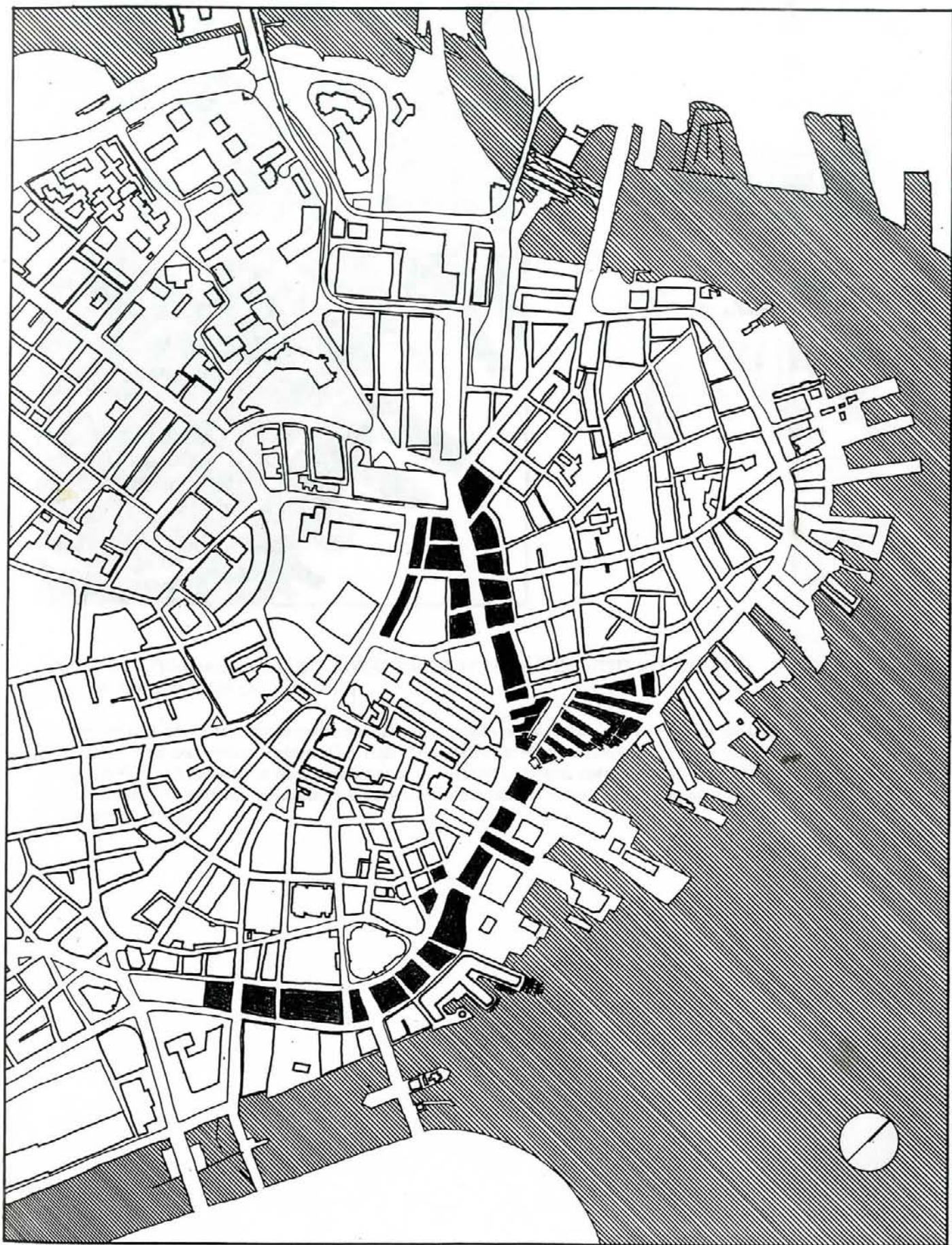
This collage demonstrates the use of a forecourt on axis with the existing City Hall. This forecourt includes steps up to the Meeting House, which is given an honorific siting on a plinth. In this collage, the Meeting House and the existing City Hall are facing each other across a pedestrian mall, as in Kahn's scheme for Independence Mall in Philadelphia.

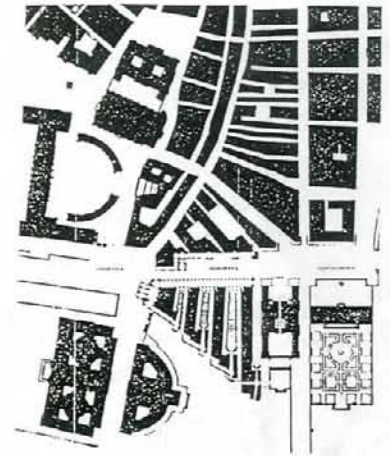




COLLAGE OF GUNNAR ASPLUND'S ROYAL CHANCELLERY COMPETITION DESIGN IN STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

In this collage, new fabric buildings are inserted as an extension to the existing fabric near the proposed site. The transverse axis of the exterior formal court is placed on axis with the existing City Hall. The Meeting House is located at the end of the "fingers" with visual links to the pedestrian mall and the new surface road.

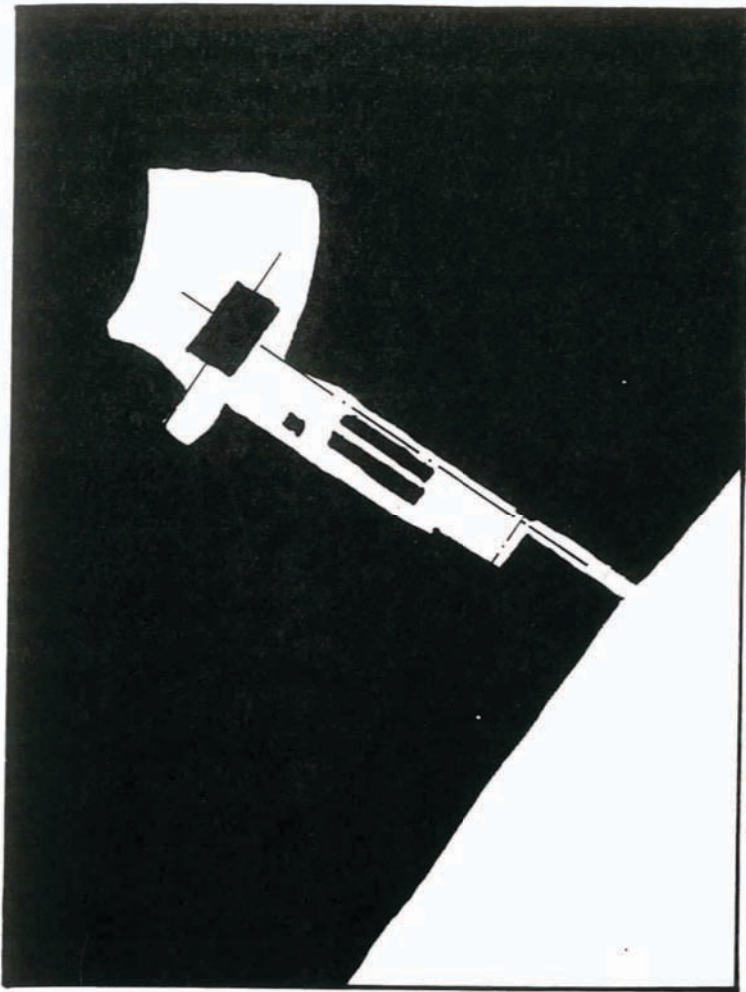




COLLAGE OF GUNNAR ASPLUND'S ROYAL CHANCELLERY COMPETITION DESIGN IN STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN (ALTERNATE)

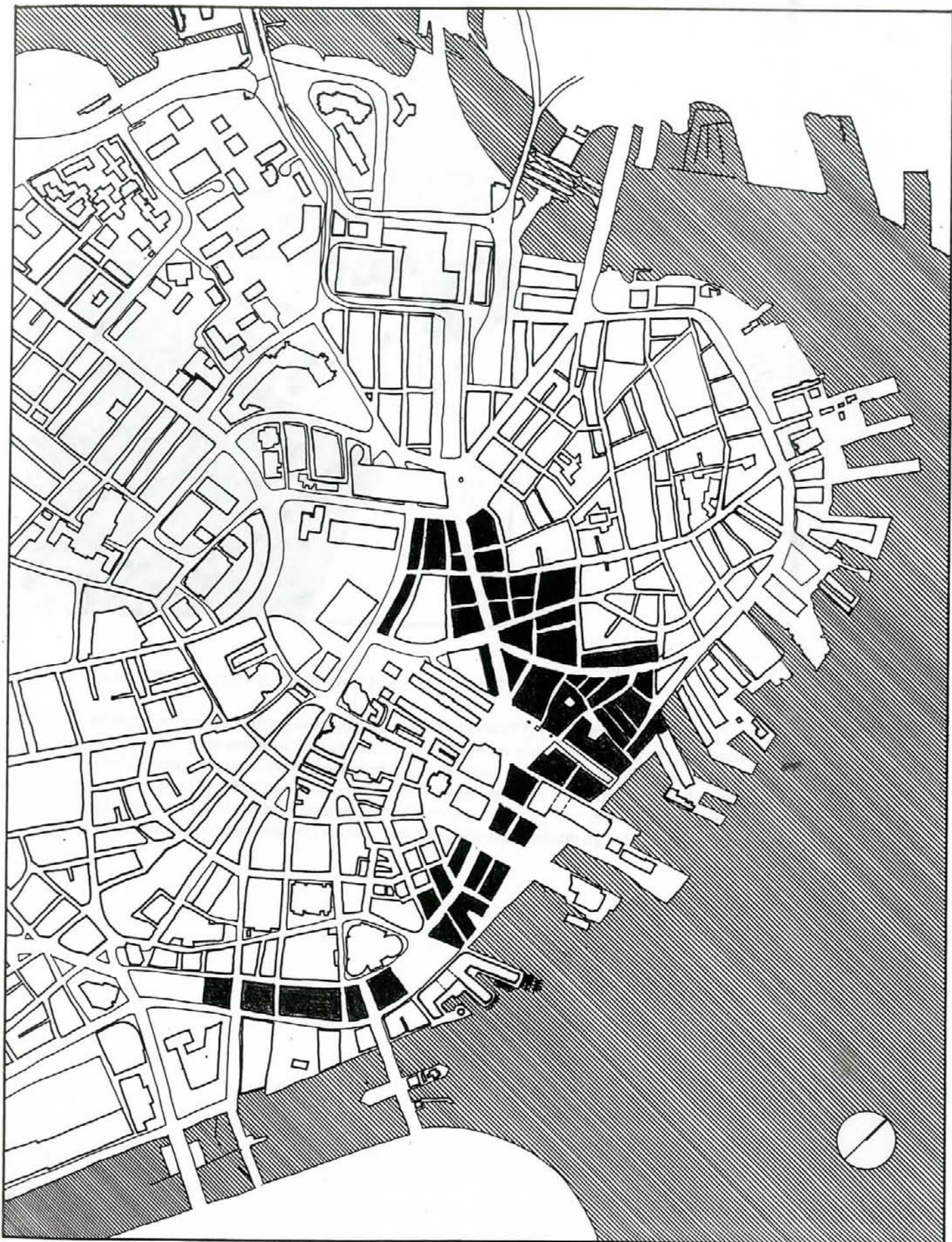
This collage is an alternate to the previous one. The significant change is the placing of the formal court so that the long axis is on axis with the existing City Hall. This places the Meeting House (at the edge of the last "finger") at the focal point of the high pressure area. As a result, a circular open space is proposed to resolve the radial geometry of the streets (pedestrian and vehicular) which meet in this area as well as to provide a forecourt to the Meeting House.

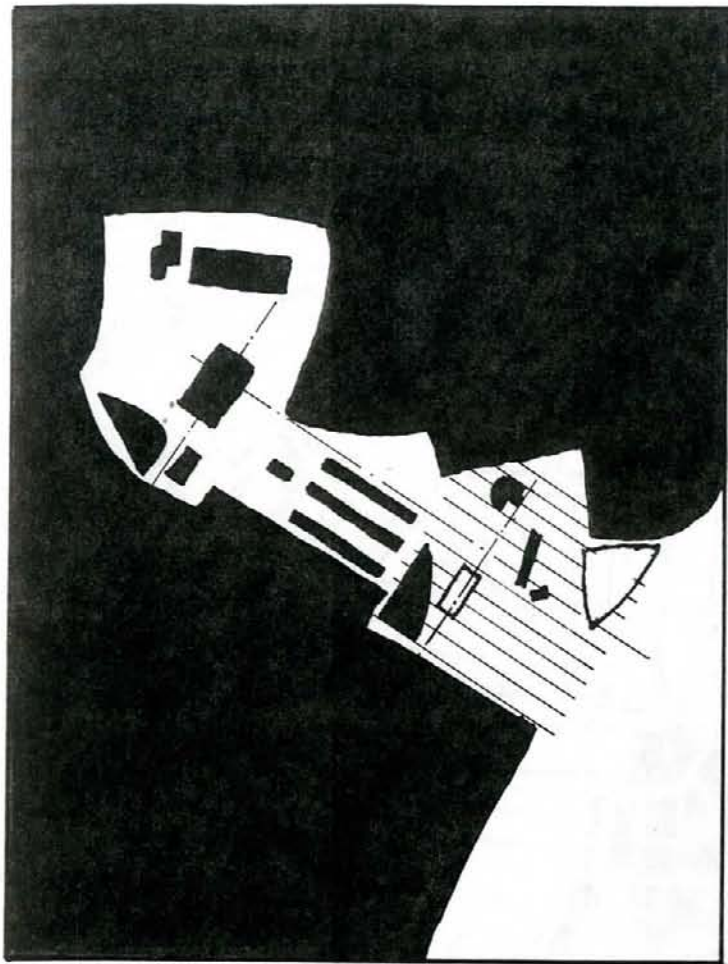




THE UFIZZI, FLORENCE, ITALY

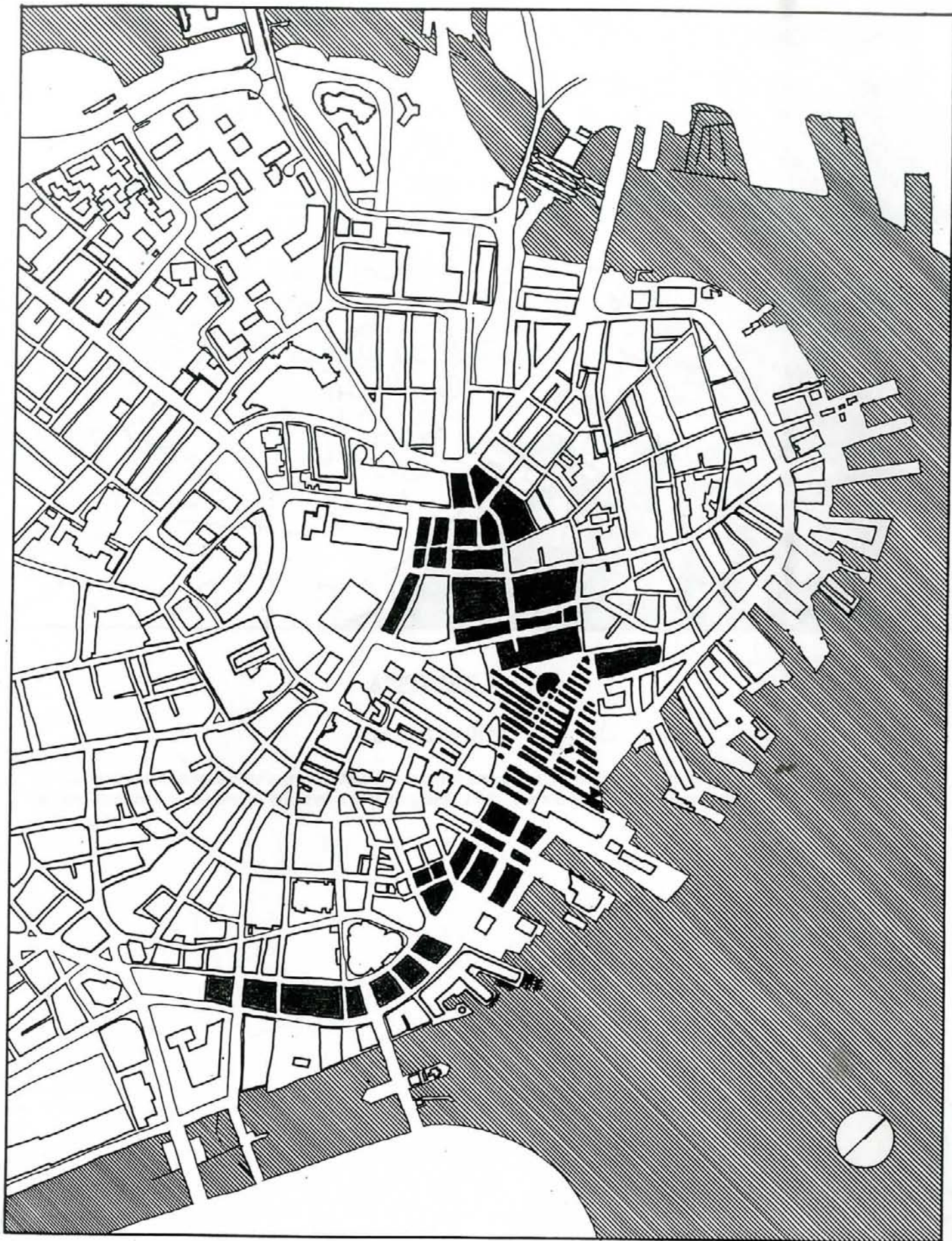
This collage uses the Uffizi as a gate from the water's edge. the gate leads to a court which represents the exterior program of the Meeting House. This court is on axis with the existing City Hall. This attempts to extend the realm of the existing City Hall down to the waterfront, incorporating the new Meeting House into the grouping of public buildings up the hill. In this way, the Meeting House remains in dialogue with the existing City Hall, while maintaining its separate identity through direct association with its own exterior space. In this scheme the meeting house would be located in the Palazzo Vecchio building with associated gallery space in the Uffizi.



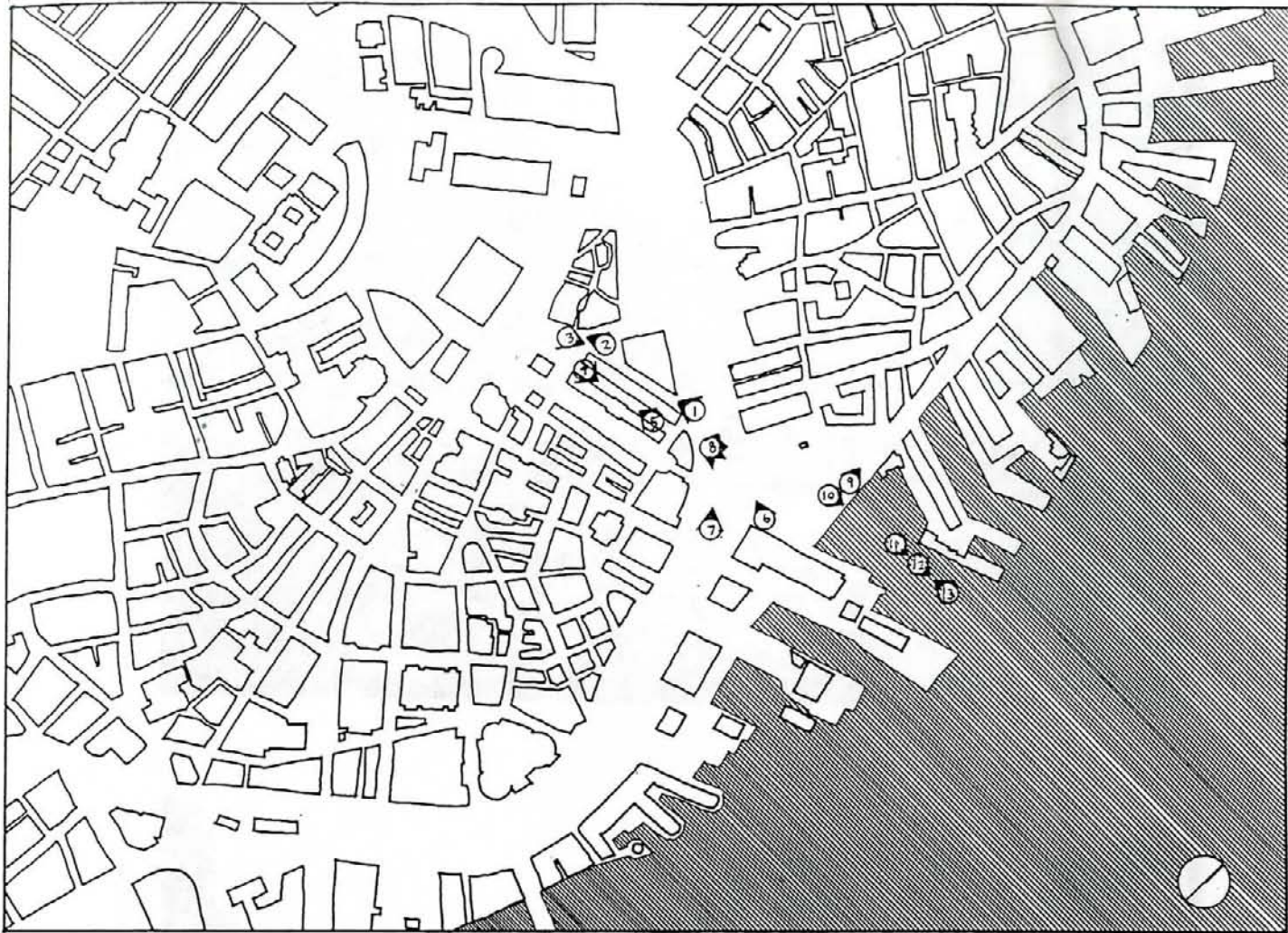


REM KOOLHAAS' IJ-PLEIN PROJECT, ROTTERDAM / AMSTERDAM

This collage supplements the existing orthogonal grid with Koolhaas' Ij-Plein grid. The resulting scheme places the Meeting House program among a field of bar buildings. The Meeting House program is dispersed as objects among this field of bars similar to the manner in which the existing government buildings are dispersed as objects within the open City Hall Plaza. The field of bars could represent a marketplace for the generation of ideas located next to a marketplace for consumption. The bars could also be viewed as a representation of the pluralistic aspects of the program with the carved spaces and objects representing the unifying aspects of the program.



0 200 400 600 1000

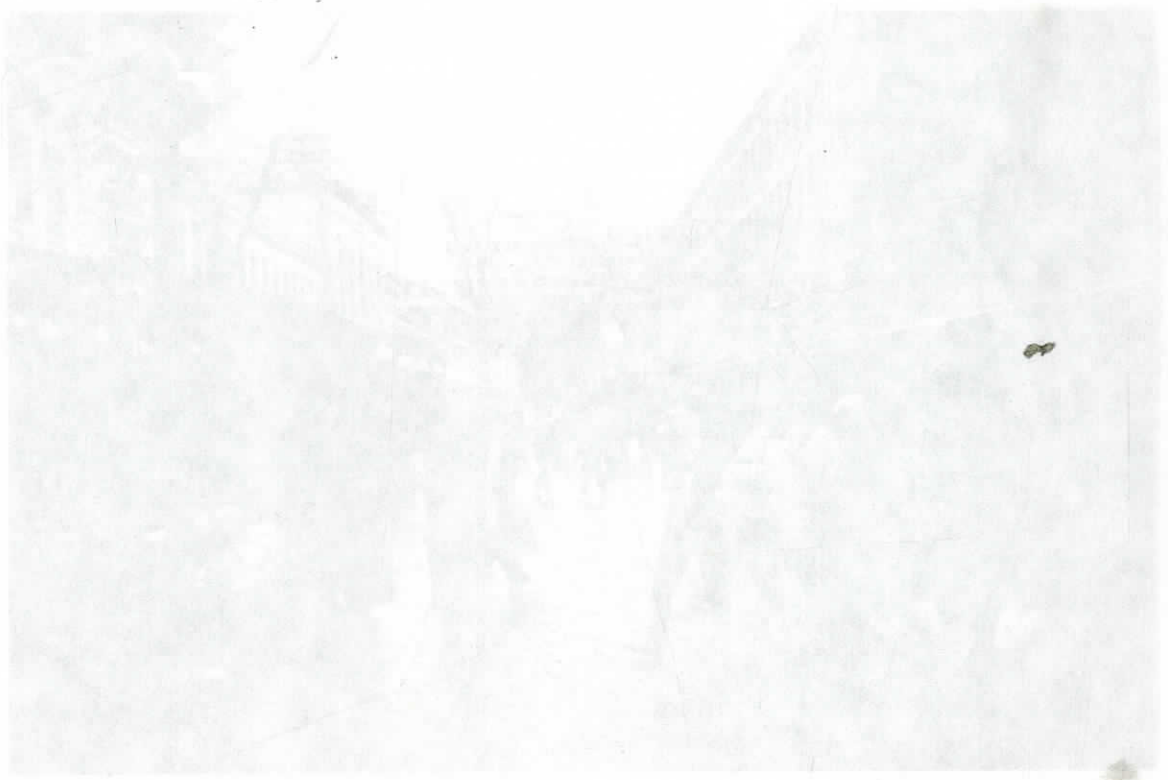


APPENDIX A

PHOTOS OF SITE

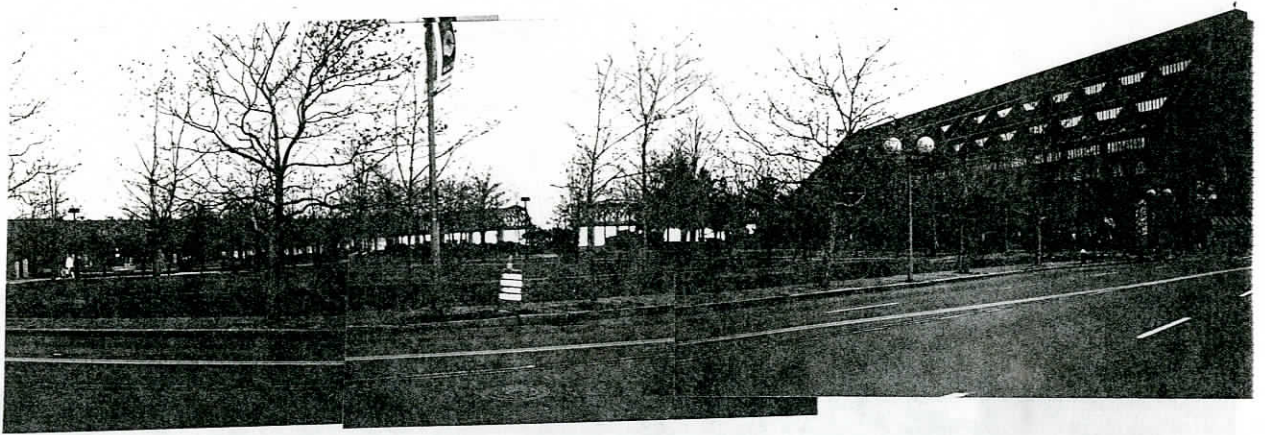
The following photographs offer a general description of the area in the immediate vicinity of the proposed site. The key plan above indicates the orientation of photographs 1-13. The remaining photographs are aerial photographs.

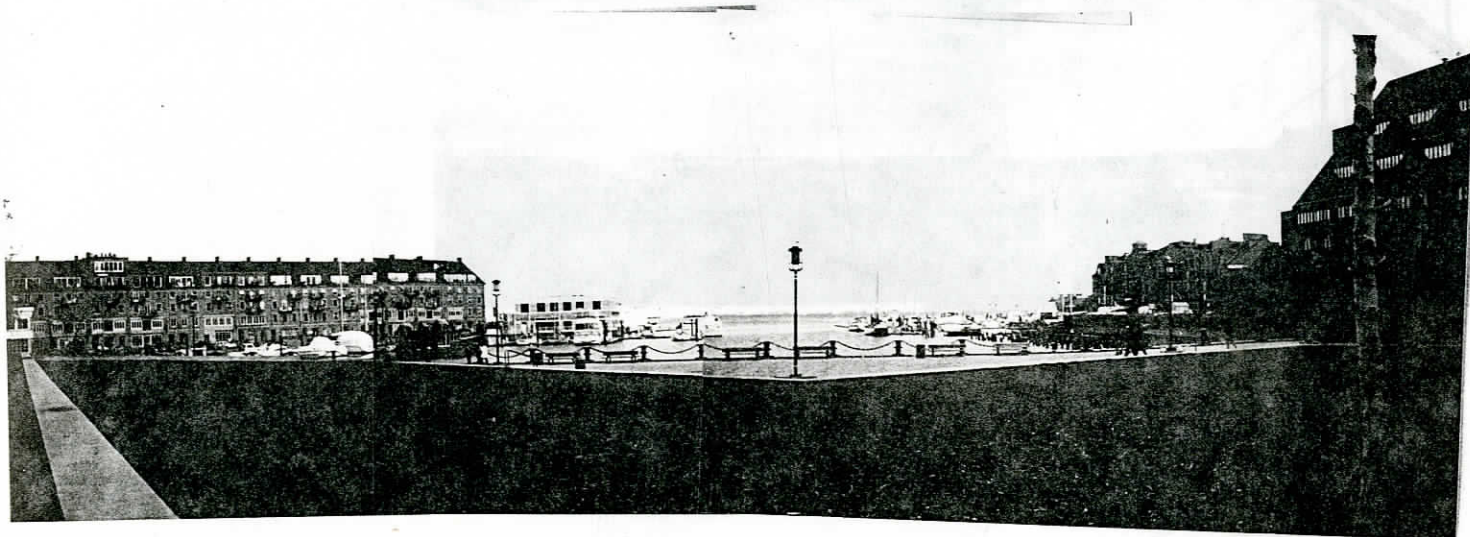


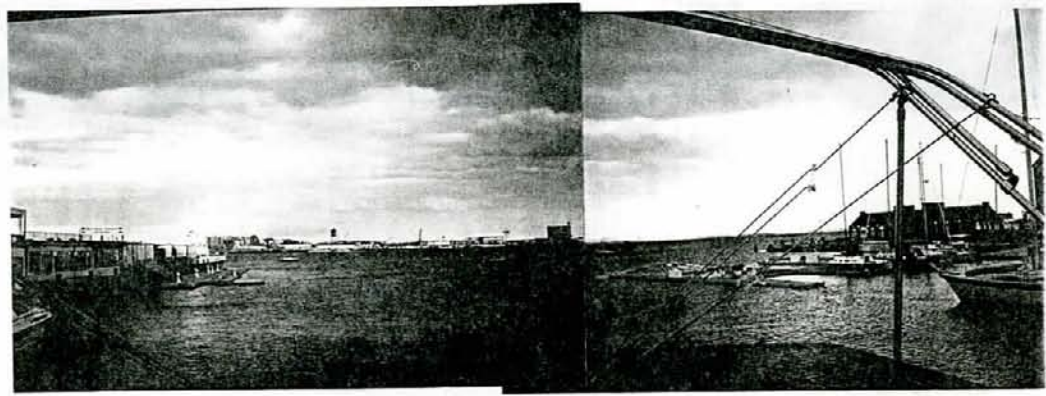
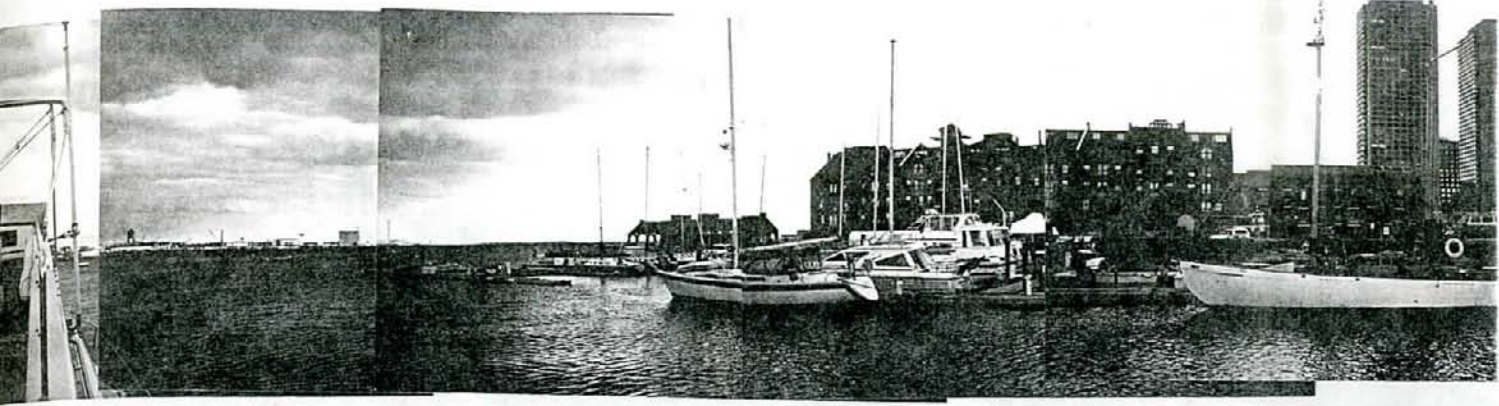


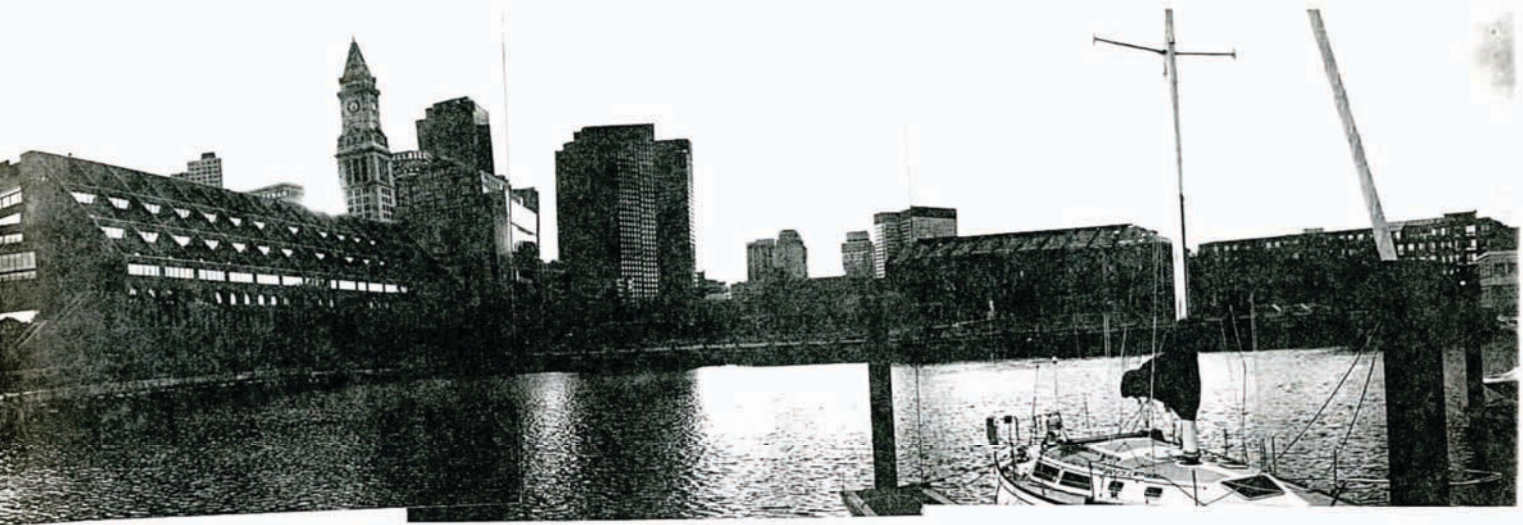


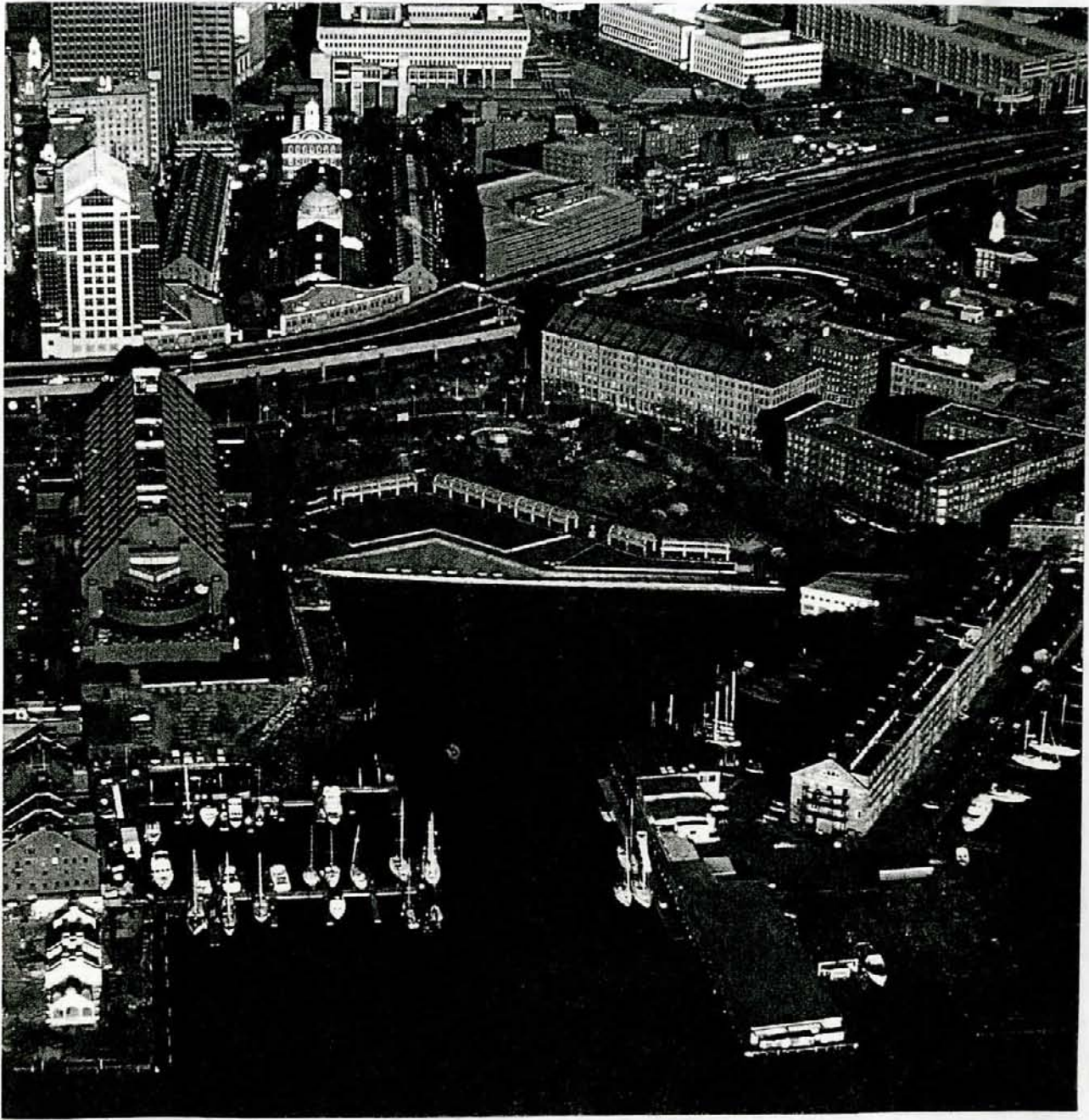


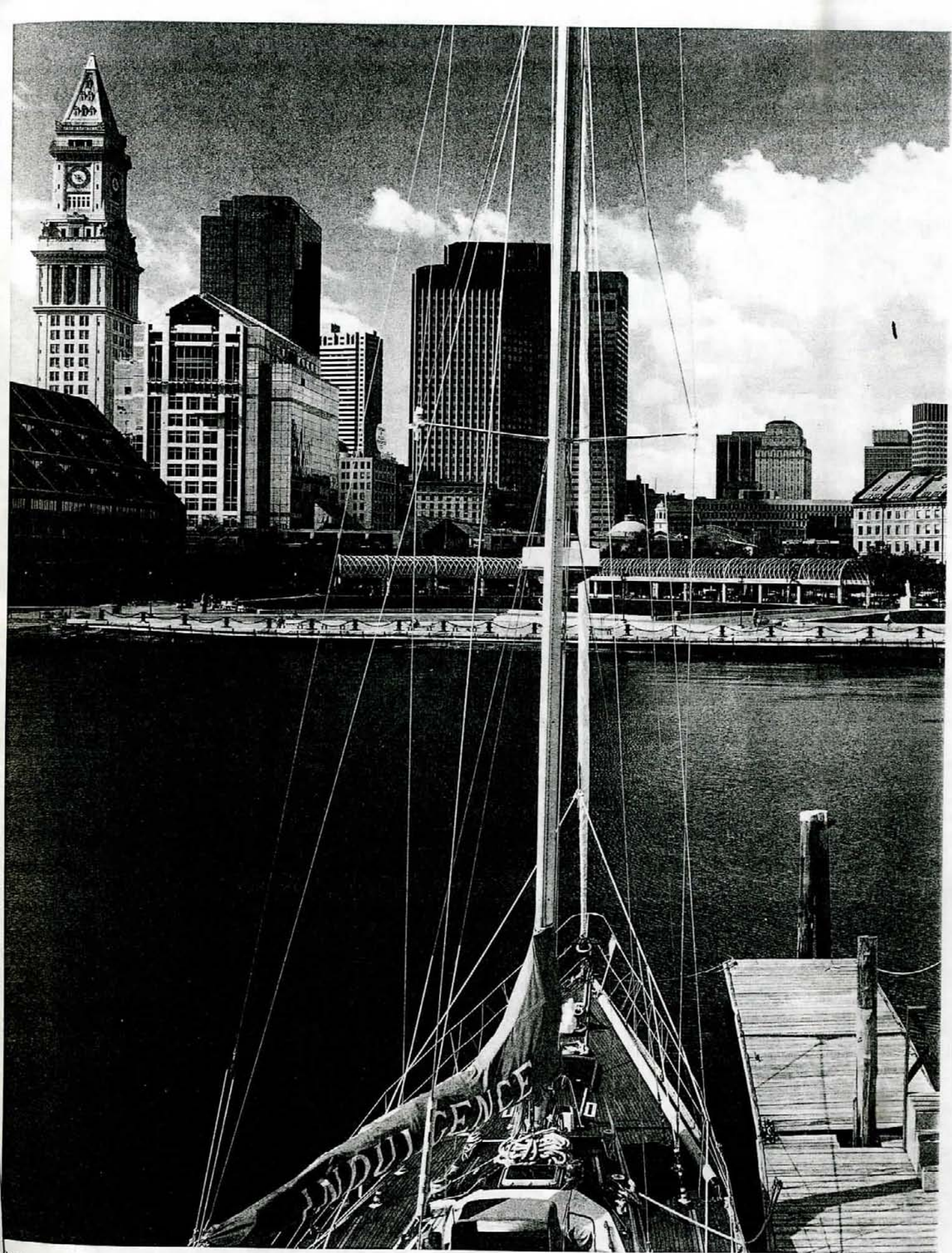




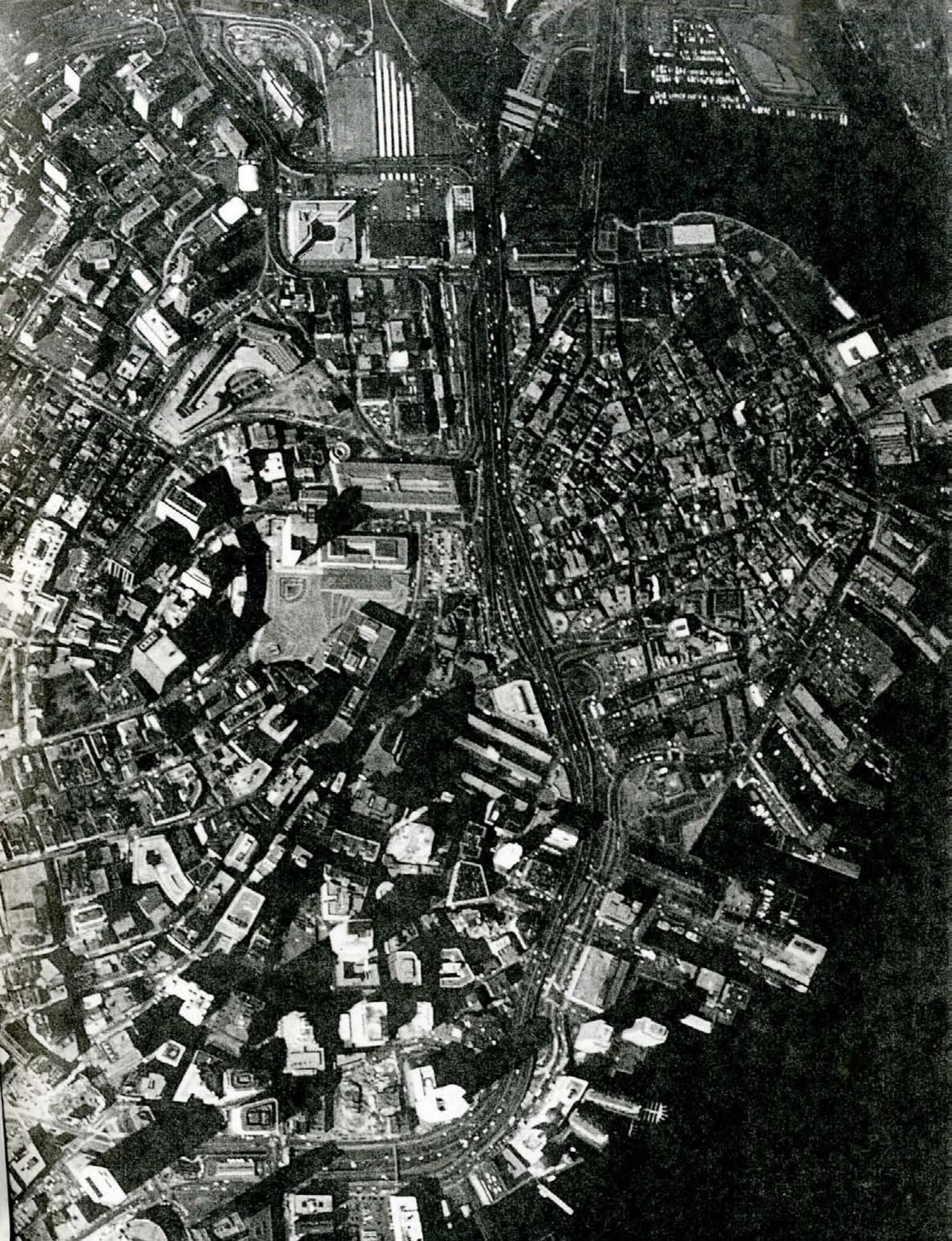








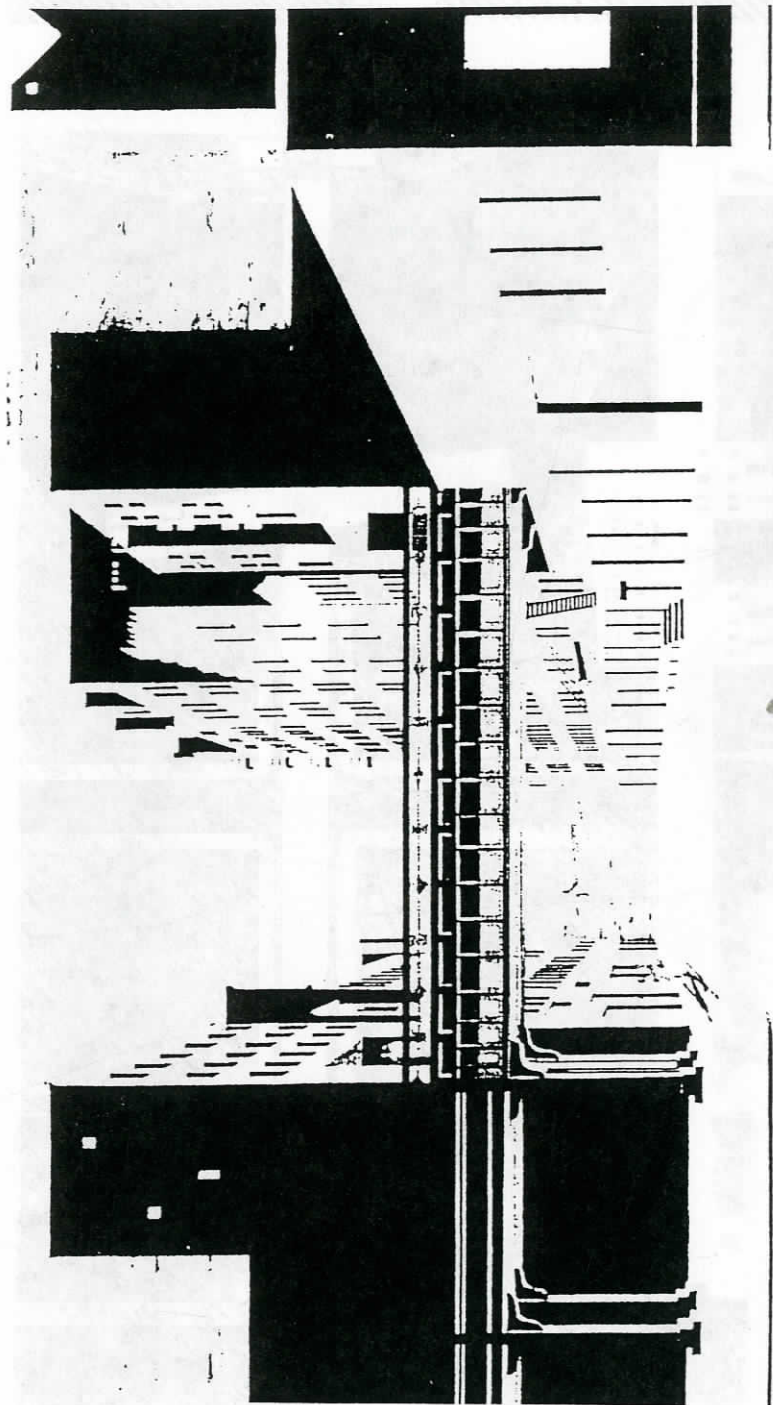
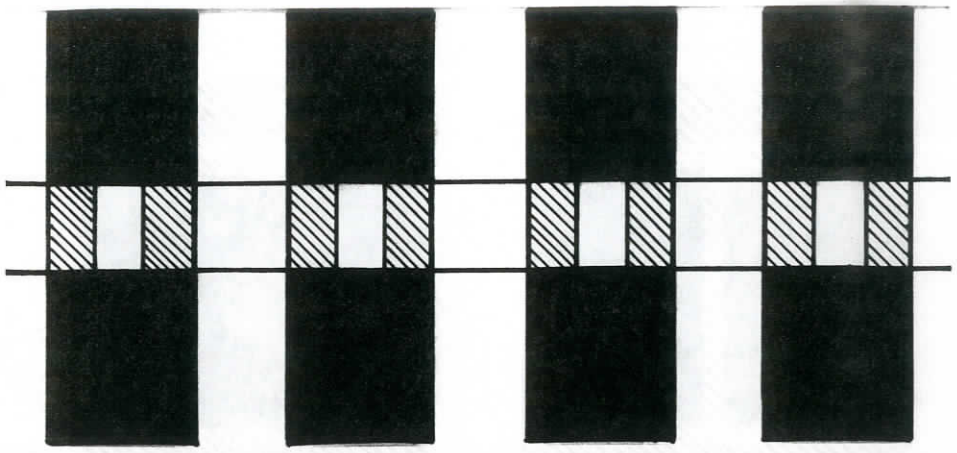
Boston waterfront



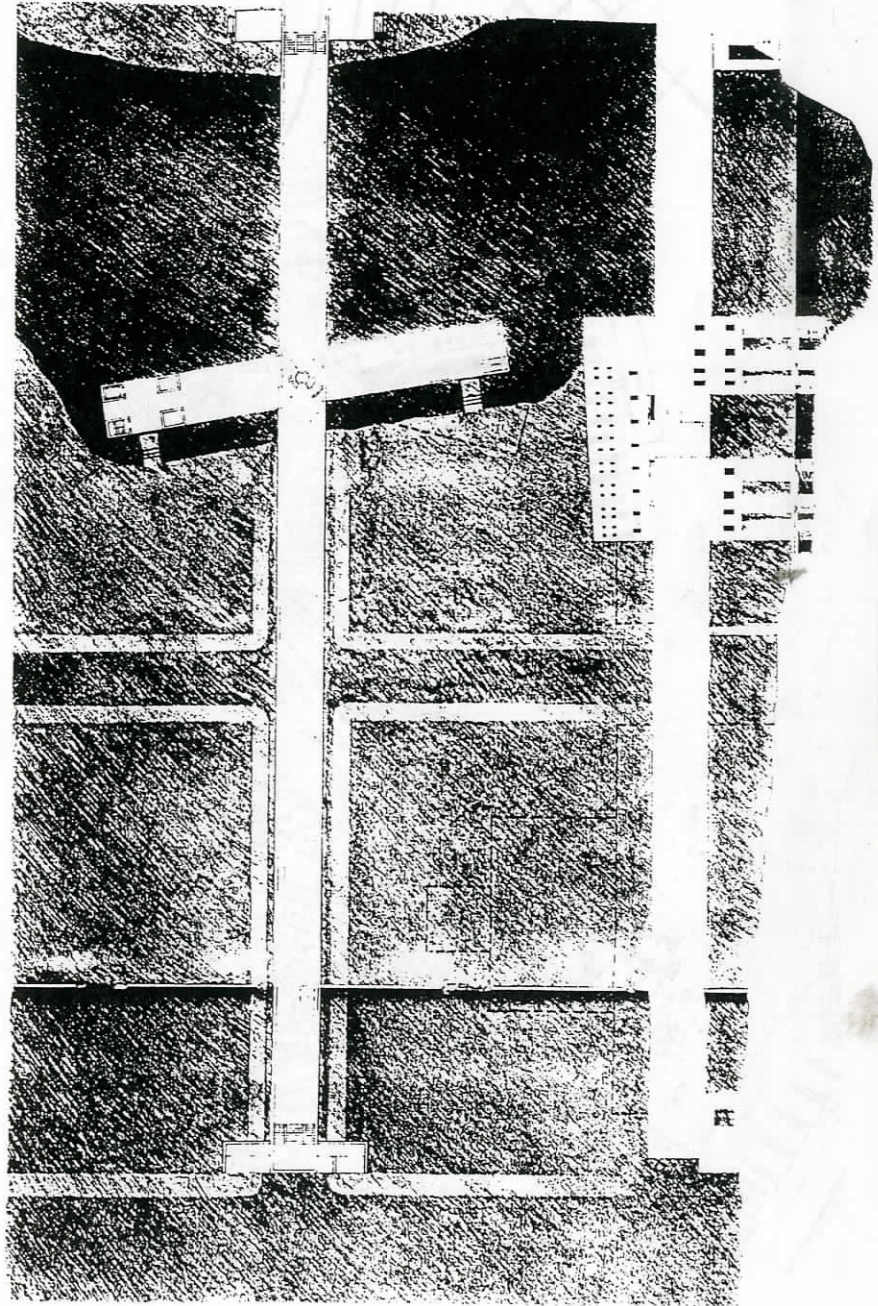
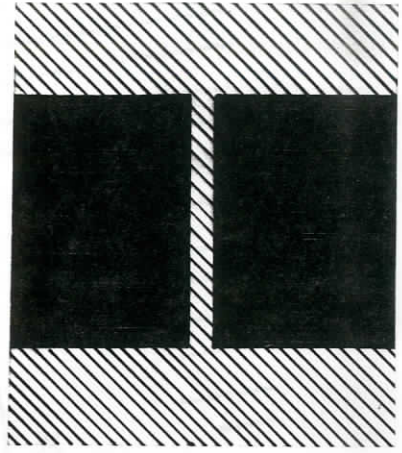
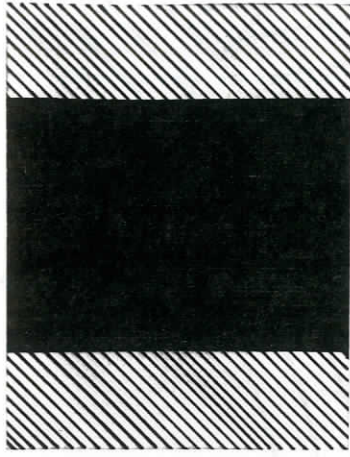
APPENDIX B

RELATED PROJECTS

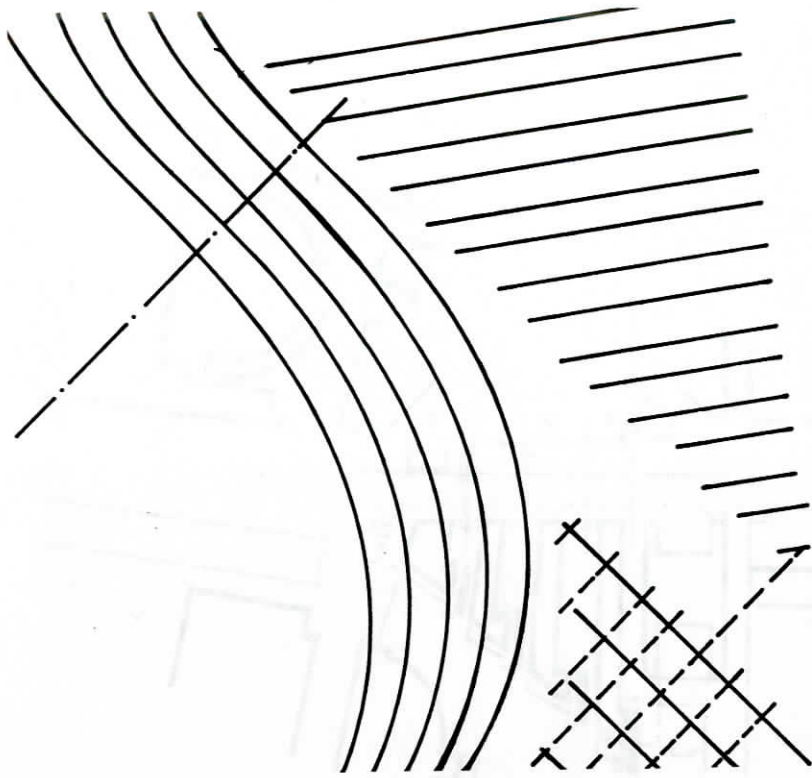
The following projects have been analyzed as examples of urban projects involving connection or reconnection of urban elements.



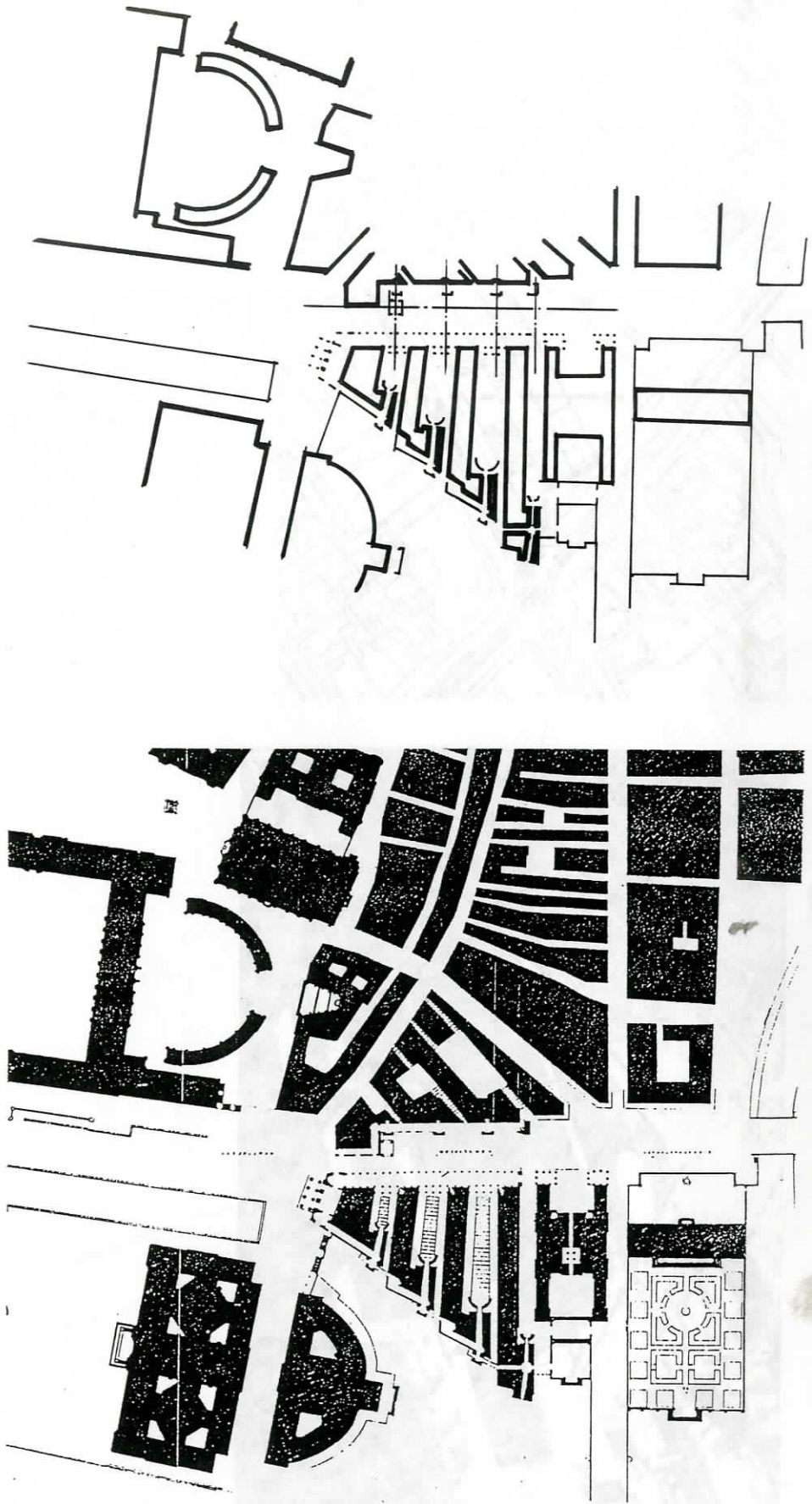
B1: STEVEN HOLL'S BRIDGE HOUSES OF NEW YORK, 1981
RECONNECTION THROUGH REUSE OF ABANDONED ELEVATED TRAIN TRACKS



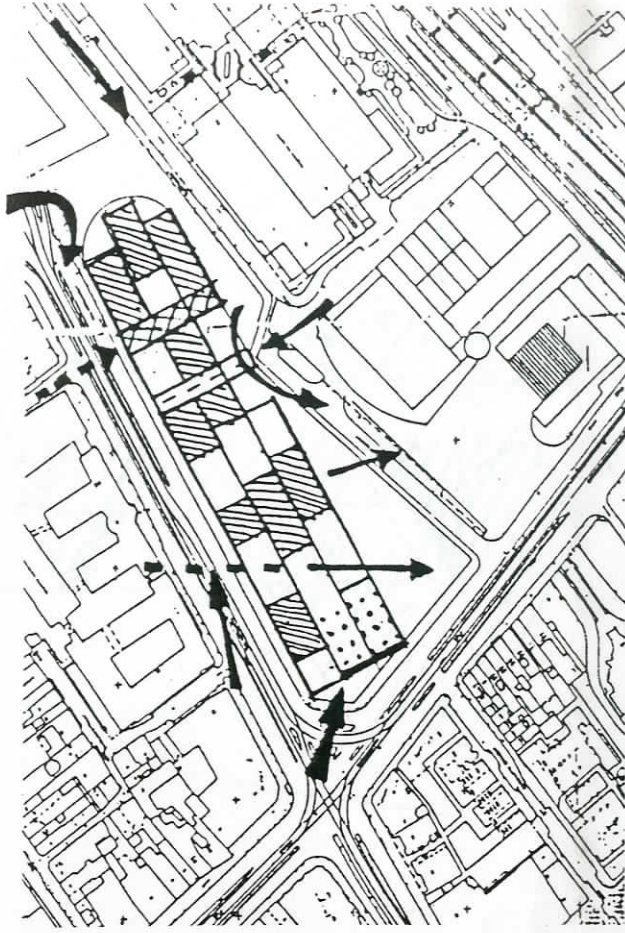
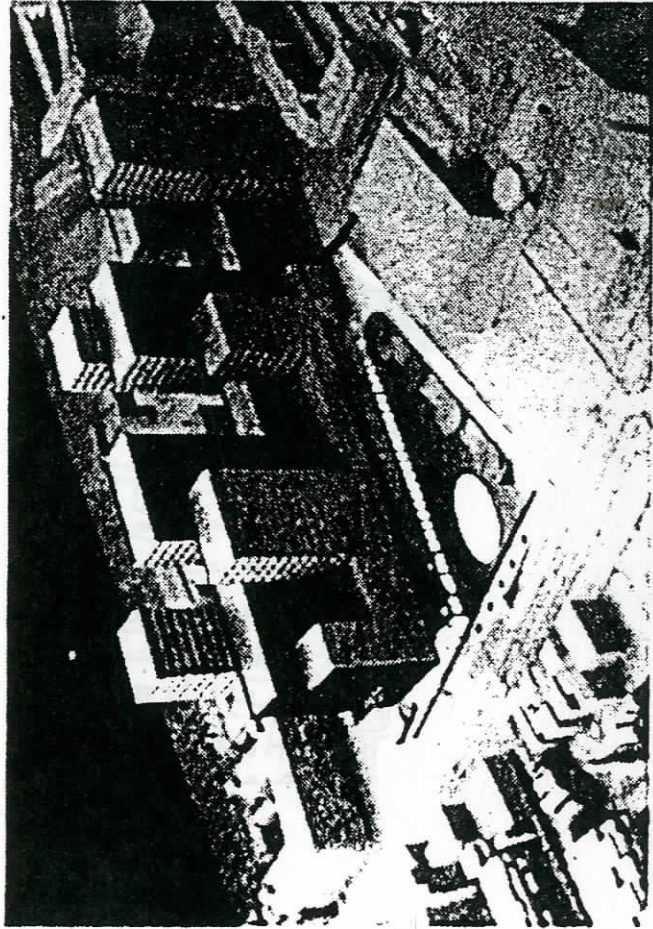
B2: STEVEN HOLL'S GYMNASIUM BRIDGE, SOUTH BRONX, NEW YORK, 1977
CONNECTION THROUGH PHYSICAL LINK (BRIDGE)



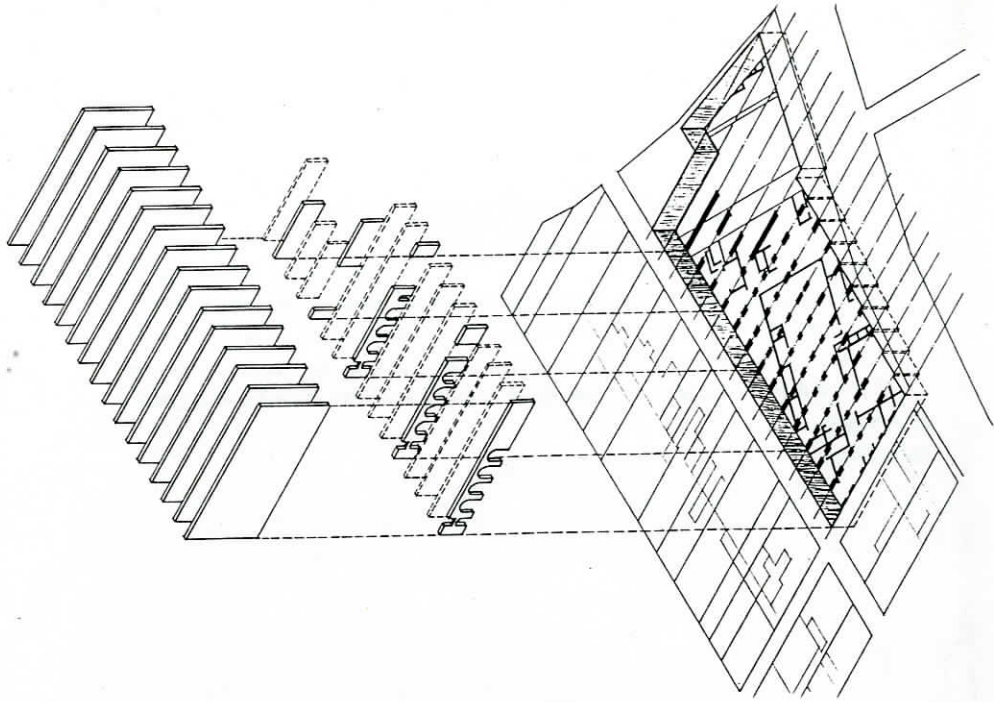
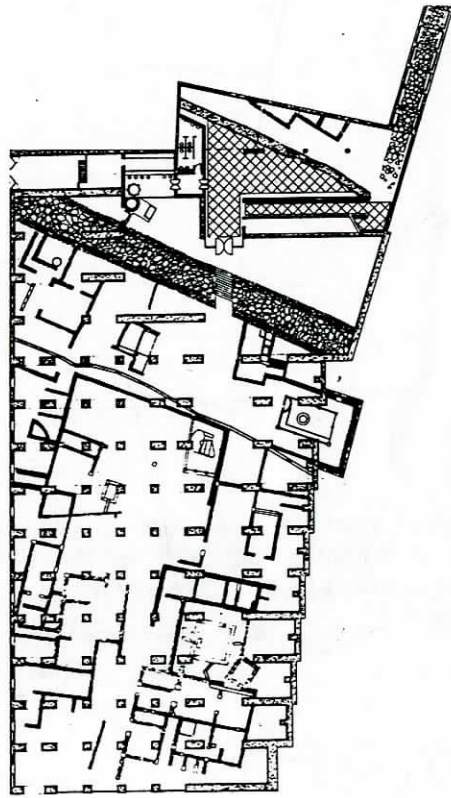
B3: REM KOOLHAAS' IJ-PLEIN PROJECT, ROTTERDAM/AMSTERDAM, 1980-89
EXTENSION TO WATERFRONT THROUGH THE USE OF GRIDS



B4: GUNNAR ASPLUND'S ROYAL CHANCELLERY COMPETITION, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN
CONNECTION THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF FABRIC AND EXTERIOR PUBLIC REALM



B5: REM KOOLHAAS' CITY HALL, THE HAGUE, 1986
USE OF THE GRID AND SLIPPAGE OF THE GRID TO ACCOMMODATE MULTIPLE ACCESS POINTS IN RECONNECTION TO CITY CENTER



B6: RAPHAEL MONEO'S MUSEUM OF ROMAN ART, MERIDA, SPAIN
CONNECTION OF MEDIEVAL GRID CITY FABRIC TO ROMAN GRID CITY FABRIC USING SECTIONAL OVERLAP OF GRIDS AND GATE