

# COLLAPSE OF TIME

RY CONSTRUCTIONS

JOHN HEJDUK

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THE COLLAPSE OF

AND OTHER DIARY

TIME

CONSTRUCTIONS

THE CLOCK OF DELETION:  
David Shapiro

TIME AND JOHN HEJDUK'S ARCHITECTURE

Douglass H. Shaffer reminds us, in his volume on horology, that the cases for tall Connecticut clocks were often built by the local coffin-maker. The clock is a cabinet for death, and Shaffer also makes the extremely vital point that clocks are historically less significant as time-measuring devices than as 'models of the universe'. The architect John Hejduk has masterfully reminded us of the elegiac in his monumental public clock, which is in itself an experimental masque. This clock does indeed dip into its own coffin and rises to become a powerful tower of wholeness and of the possibilities of perspective.

One of Shaffer's discriminations may help us with 'The Collapse of Time' and its richness. The horologist distinguishes between the public clock – fixed, monumental, functioning as icon and collective memory – and the chamber clock, fit for the private room. Perhaps it is Hejduk's idiosyncratic blending of private and public space that has permitted him to make, at once, something as portable as a timepiece into something as monumental as an obelisk. Hejduk puts his collective clock on wheels, to make poignant the nomadic condition of his time. The enormous scale rebukes any reductive retreat into intimism or *fin de siècle malaise*, though his symbol is melancholy and speaks of the end of periodization itself. The Mallarméan theme of absence makes his tower as intimate as any toy, but the mature plotting of this rigorous stage-set turns the humour saturnine and complex.

Hejduk has created a model of the multiplicity of thought itself in his public clock. In a diary note, he has given a spectral narrative to his piece, in which a participant, male, is chosen to face the different angles of time. Hejduk enunciates his basic analogies in the descent of time from a vertical that he calls 'flat time' to a 45° angle of 'isometric time' to 0° or 'horizontal time'. These metaphors combine in their own perspectivism with Hejduk's terrifying image of a woman who reads continuously his transcendental poem, *The Sleep of Adam*, inside a movable booth. The clock presides over a kind of sacred marriage, in

which man and woman, having thus heraldically announced themselves as seer and sayer, leave the site together. Nor does the architect-poet forget the collectivity, since the townspeople are instructed to move the portable clock to another destination.

What has happened here is a very replete homage to the plasticity of time and duration. Hejduk has written that he has wanted to restore the woman in architecture and pliable time. He has done this without resorting to the soft watches of Surrealism or other whimsies of Popular Art. His image is at once medieval and modern and has the sombre relentlessness of the Bergman of *The Seventh Seal*. Architecture here is involved in a ritual of 'purity and danger'. The multiplicity of time, which might seem a chaotic impurity, is 'cured' by the recitations of a heroine, who becomes, in a sense, the striking of the clock through poetry: continuous poetry like uninteruptable time.

Hejduk's clock, one of a group of clocks that delete or remove the correct time with a square blank surface, is a maximalist model. The clock speaks against the reductive and false ways in which we divide ourselves and time. While some analytic philosophers have spoken of the sin of analogizing space and time, Hejduk revels in the space-time continuum and creates a model that enunciates the analogy as a species of habitation for time.

Roman Jakobson praised the early fiction of Boris Pasternak for its dislocations and metonymical features, particularly the use of lexical fiction such as the famous figure of Mayakovsky's life walking down the street. Hejduk is the great master-builder of such metonymical distortions and lexical fictions. His clock is, for example, both the representation of a clock and the negation of all measuring devices. His *memento mori*, *vanitas*, skull-clock or coffin-clock are all parts of his dislocating strategies. The use of ready-made railroad wheels and the spectral no-colour of the monument reinforce the sense that this is indeed a tragically expressive fiction: a tower that becomes its own death-bed.



Like the sea shells and animal architecture that he loves, Hejduk builds contingent typologies where the boundaries, after all, are fearful and speak of the impossible 'horror' of our epoch. A clock that removes the right time restores true time. It has seemed to me for a long time worthwhile to consider architecture as one of the temporal arts, or perhaps the temporal art *par excellence*. Architecture demands a film, not a model. One of the dilemmas of a generation raised either to isolate the arts in a sepulchral chastity or fuse them in a Wagneresque dilettantism is the loss of a sense of multivalent architecture as always a multiple mosaic in diachronicity. John Hejduk seems to be the only architect who understands the temporal poetics of architecture as an essential and necessary part of the act of refuge. (In his architecture, we find the dynamic spin that has been drained out of most contemporary models. His restless clock embeds time and shows its contradictory potential, like those uncanny primary words that Freud isolated for their antithetical meanings.) Like the word 'cleave', his architecture cuts and unites. His clock integrates the variety of temporal experience and yet serves, like David's *Death of Marat*, to be a revolutionary image of time's end that separates us from all reconciliations.)

Hejduk's masques are not part of the facile pluralism of American tolerance. They are severe models that explain the loneliness of 'one who refused to participate'. The clock seems dry and discursive as David's sketch of Marie-Antoinette on her way to execution. And all of this is as it should be: Hejduk is involved in constructing models that must survive what the theologian Arthur Cohen called the 'Tremendum', the caesura of the transcendental. The meanings of Hejduk's clocks are wrested from the loss of meaning. That is why his 'leaving-out business' is so tumultuous and resonant. His theological clock is a kind of late-Romantic protest in the style of Blake, against all reductive clock universes. His clocks are no more discursive than Johns' maps, but they are the supreme symbols of an age that demands a representation of its desire.

Hejduk knows that poetry does not signify effusion, sentiment, dithyramb or impressionism. If anything, his poetry has a kind of sublime empiricism, a respect for fact and for the fact of fiction. His poetry has the clear cadential bias of the Americanist in William Carlos Williams. His clock is part of an epic, pluralist and imaginary city that he is always building in number, weight, and measure, as collagist as Williams's 'Paterson' and even more a critique of all deracination. (Hejduk's strength is in his critique of the nostalgias. His architecture and poetry refute the use of tradition as complaisant ground.)

(Time is more than a mystery for architects and poets: it is indeed a sensuous and social fact, the context of contexts and imbricated with the addresser and addressee and the palpability of form. In John Hejduk's architecture, we are constantly haunted by the space that is always timely.) His book *Victims* is nothing if not a critical encyclopaedia of the darkest event of our epoch. If Adorno asked what lyric was possible after Auschwitz, we now have our response. The appropriate response after Auschwitz is a chiliastic architecture that again and again, glaringly, audaciously, poignantly and angrily, studies last things and speaks of things that might last. This melancholy and critical architecture and poetry are healthier than the eclectic pedanticism of our day and all reductive purisms.

(Hejduk's clock, like Loos's column for Chicago, functions as a kind of aphoristic manifesto. A master of uncertainty and doubt, Hejduk's architecture speaks of the provisional and not the absolute. What architect since Schwitters has made such a determined effort to fuse art and shelter? What critique is surer in its swerve away from the contemporary baroque and the deathly authoritarian symmetries of our Rationalists? In Hejduk, as in Walter Benjamin, we are given an image at once transcendental and logical. Instead of 'critical regionalism', we are reminded that the dominant region is the mind. Hejduk's works are the mature speculations of a cosmopolite in the age of the destruction of the city and one who approaches the institution of architecture with a militant intransigence.)

In September 1986, the clock-  
structure was built  
in Bedford Square, by the  
Architectural Association  
School of Architecture,  
London . . .

30 SEPTEMBER 1986









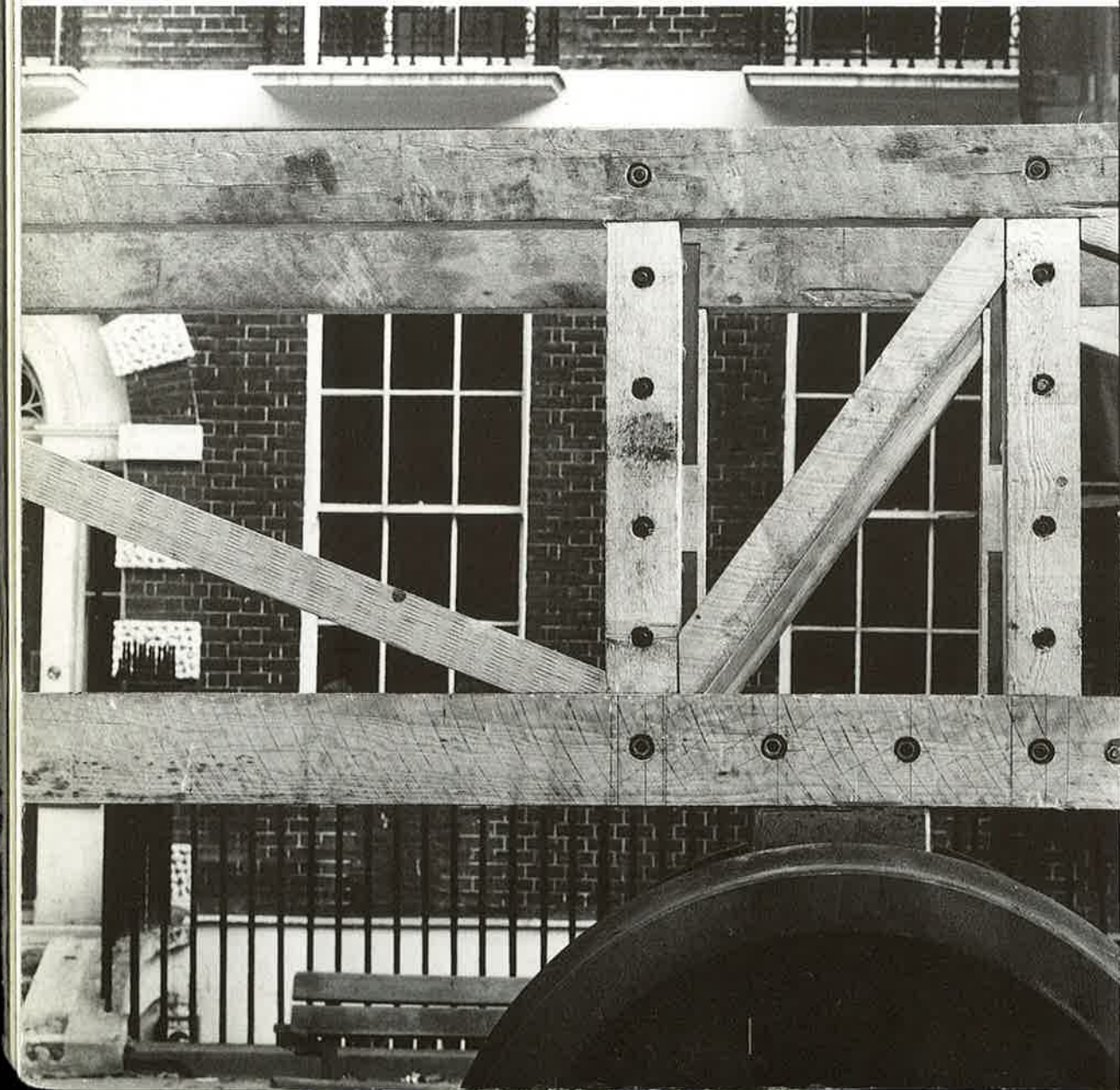




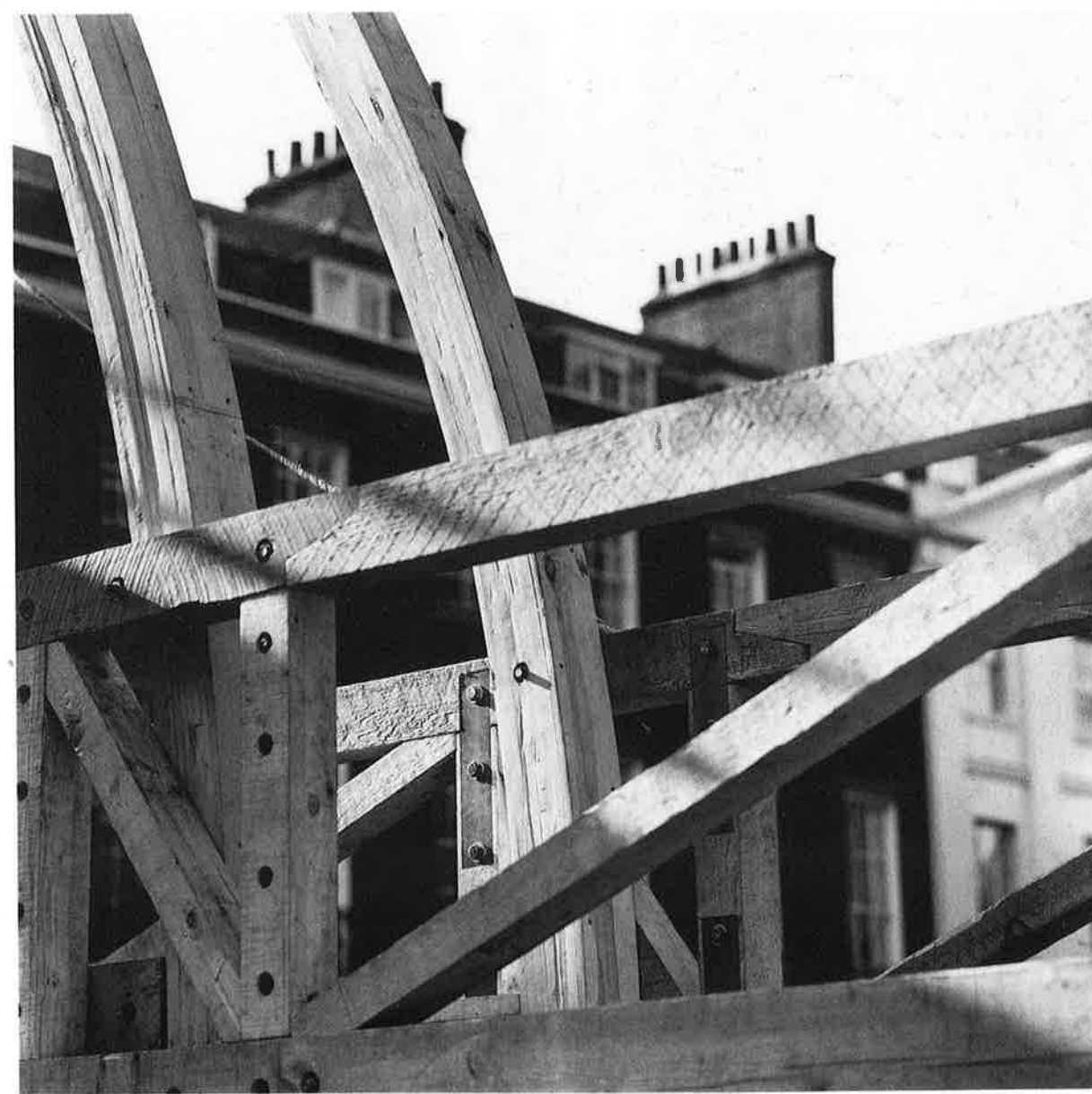
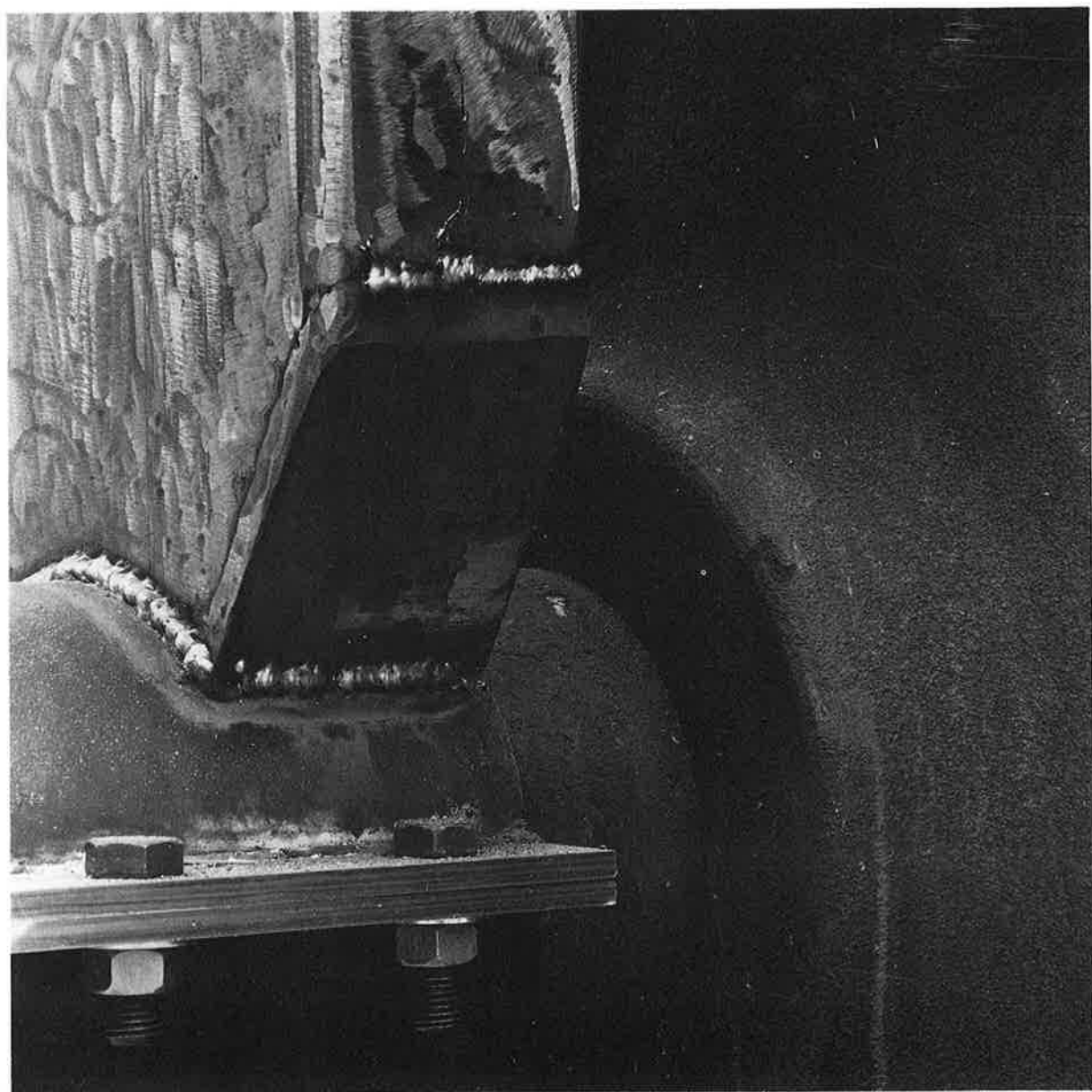


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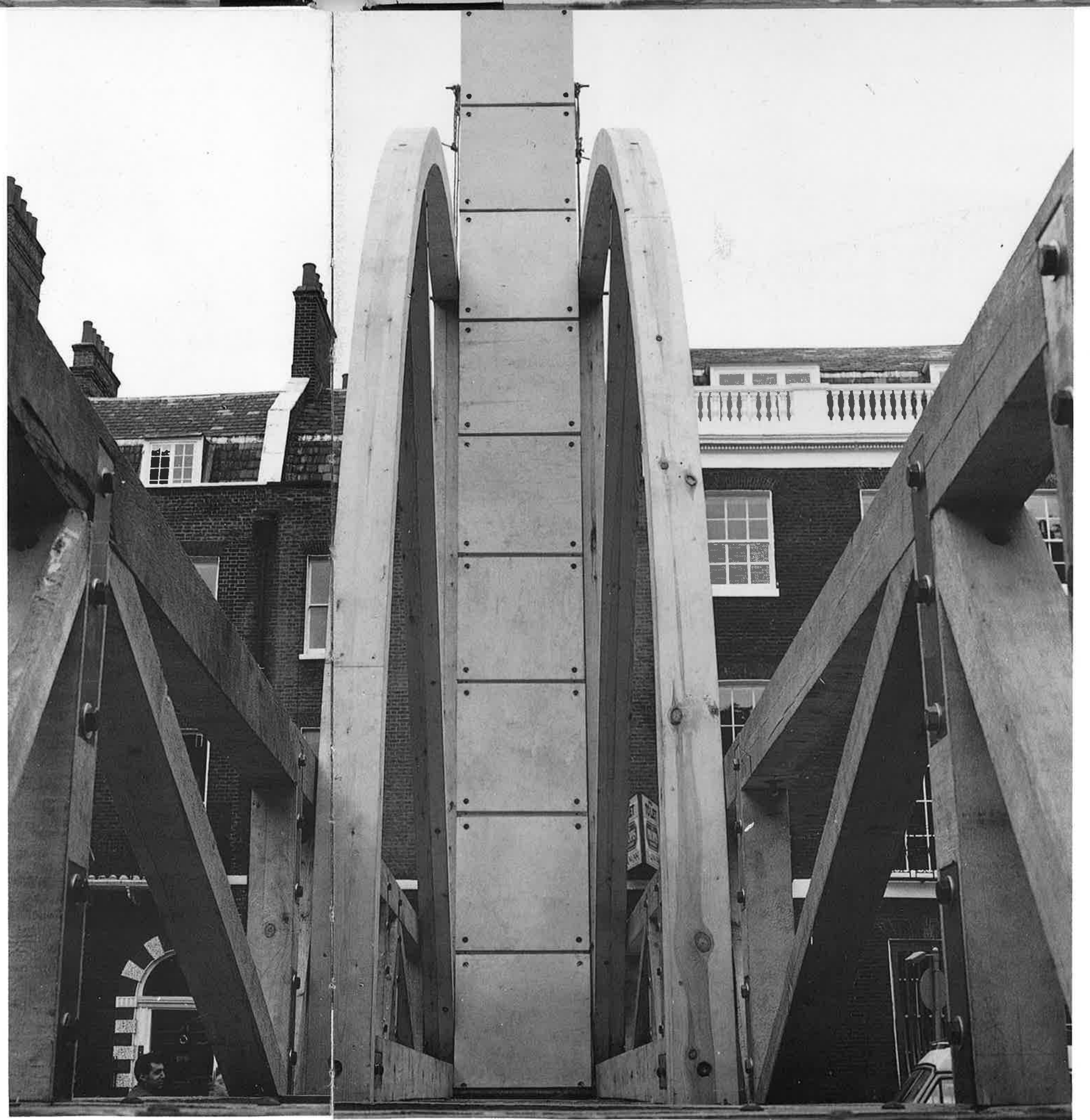






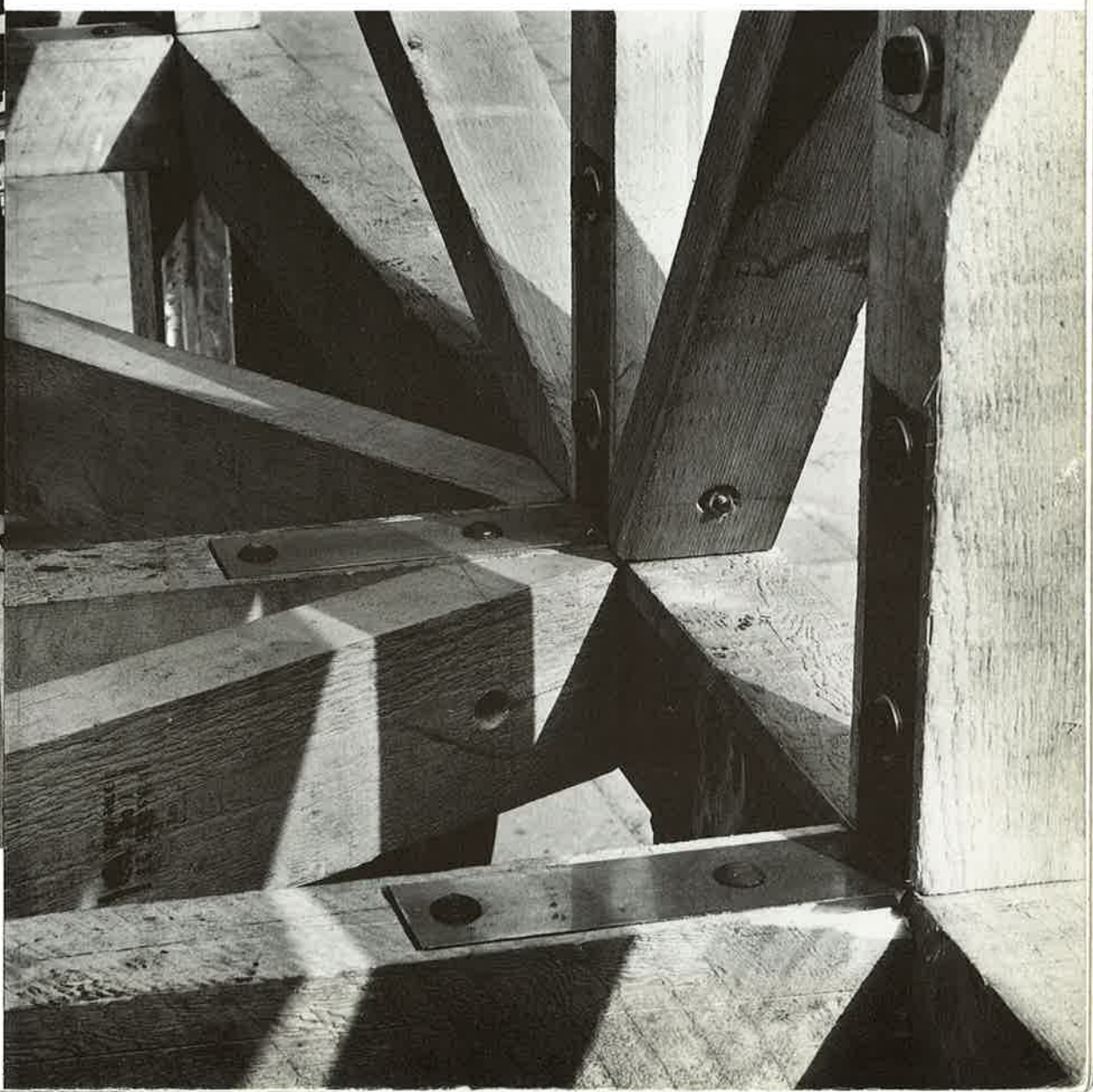
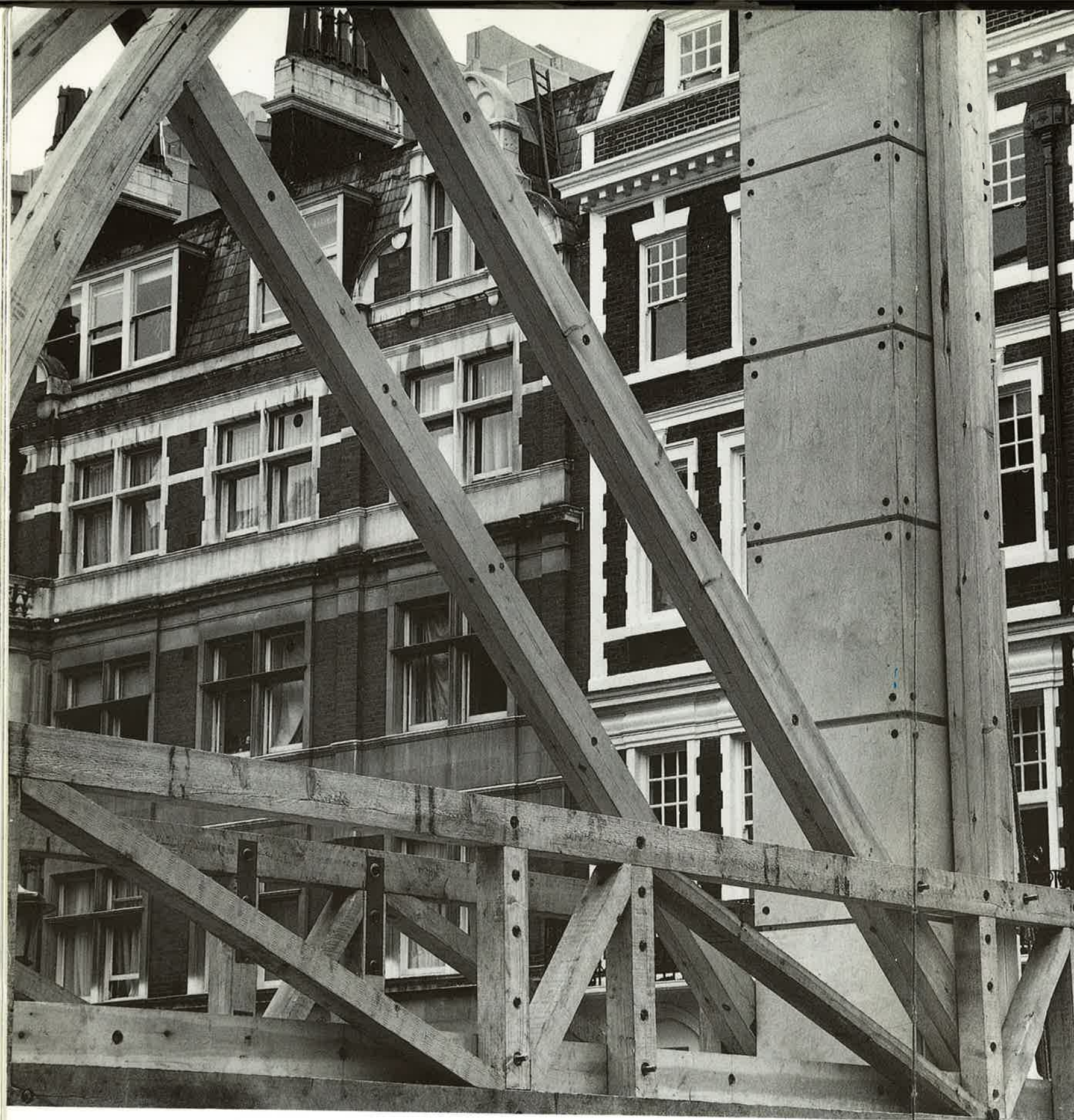
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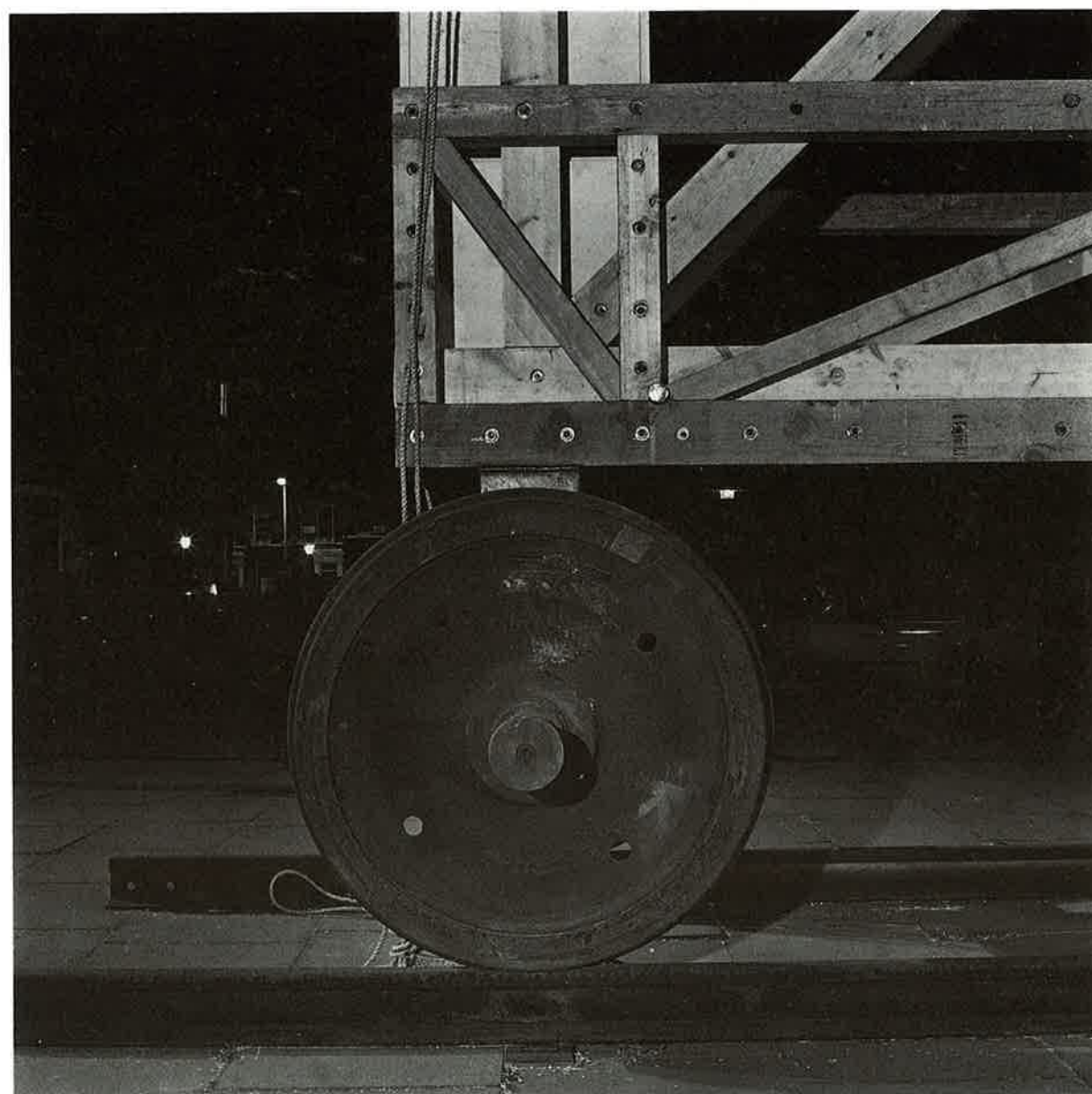




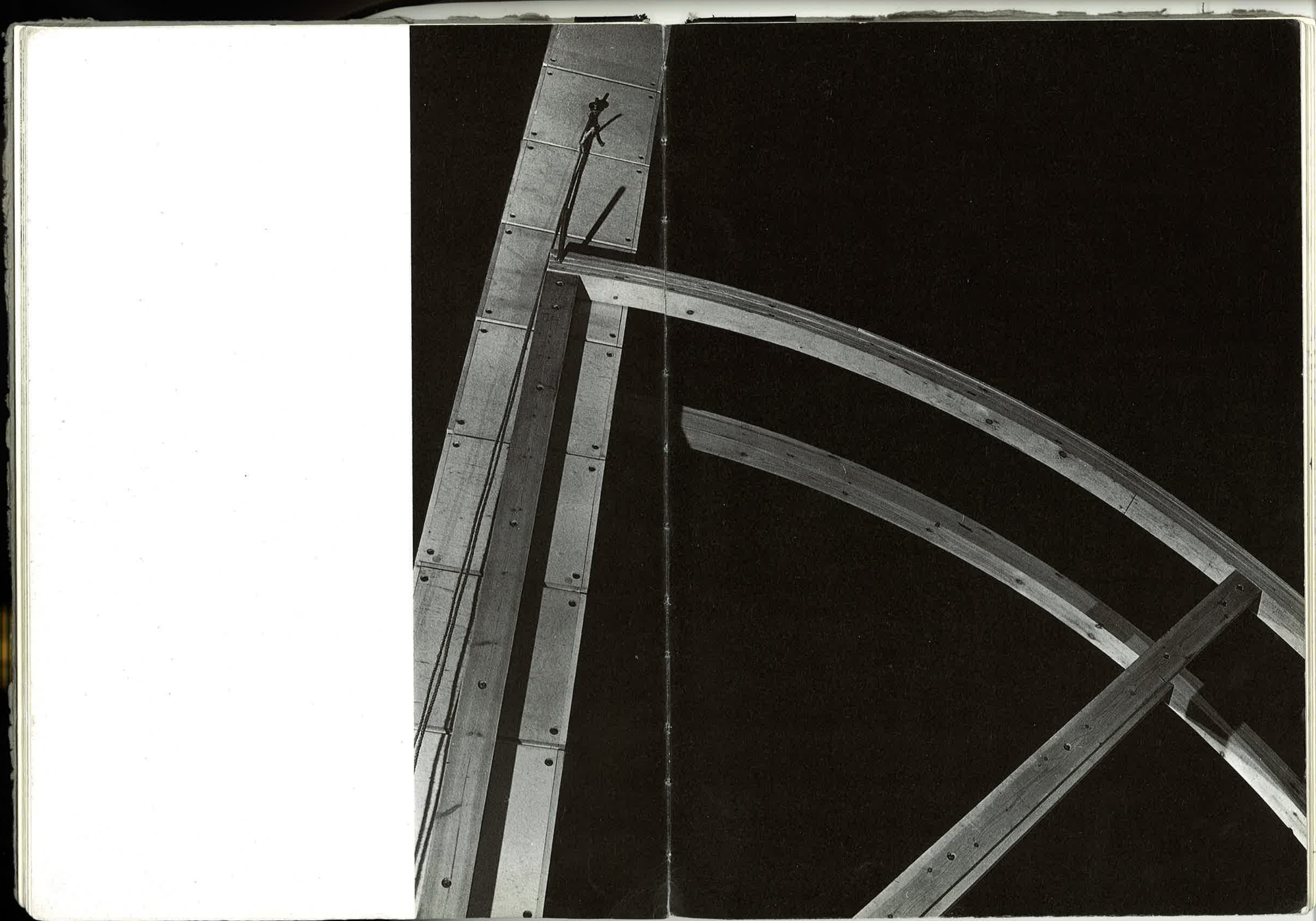




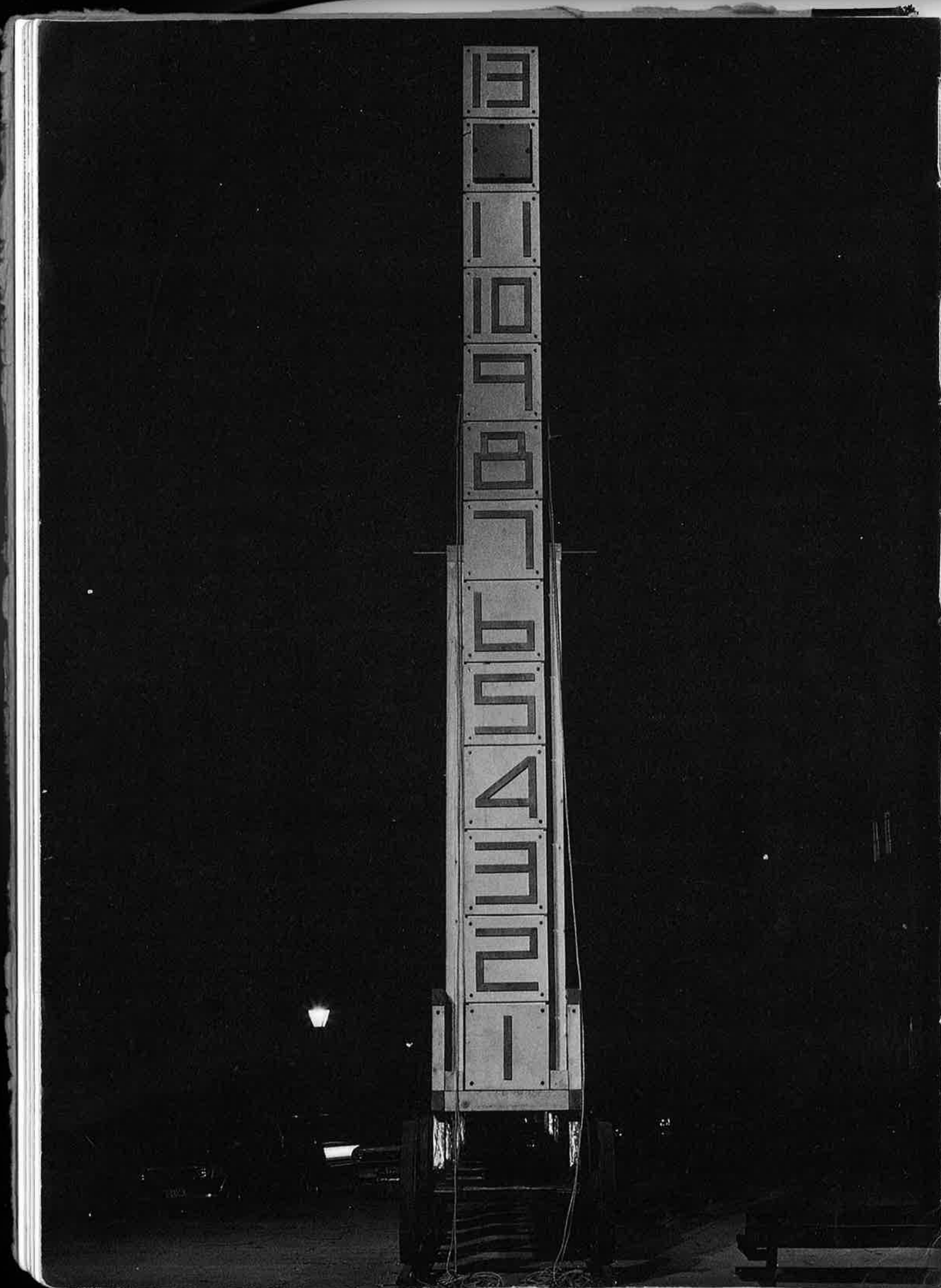












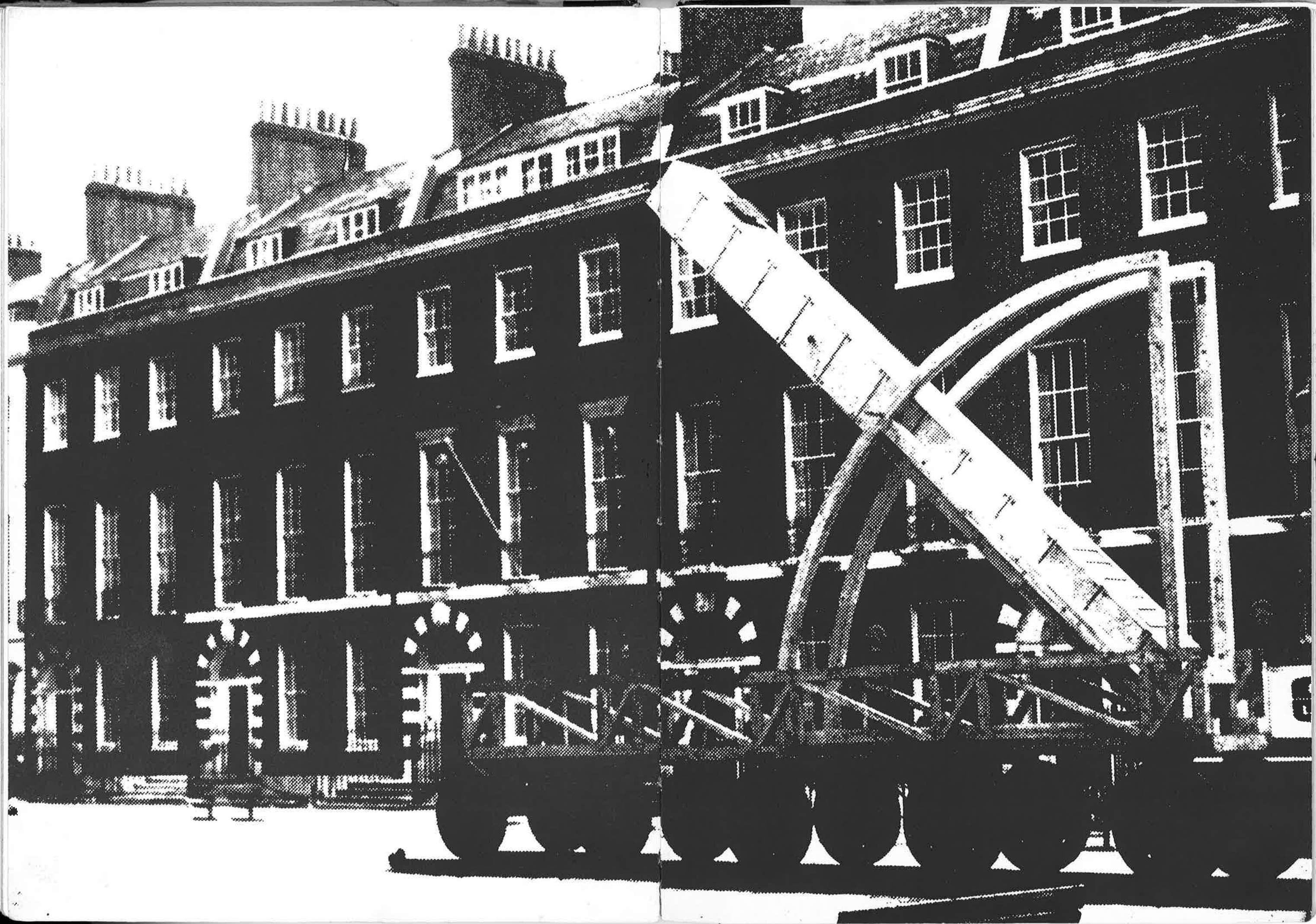




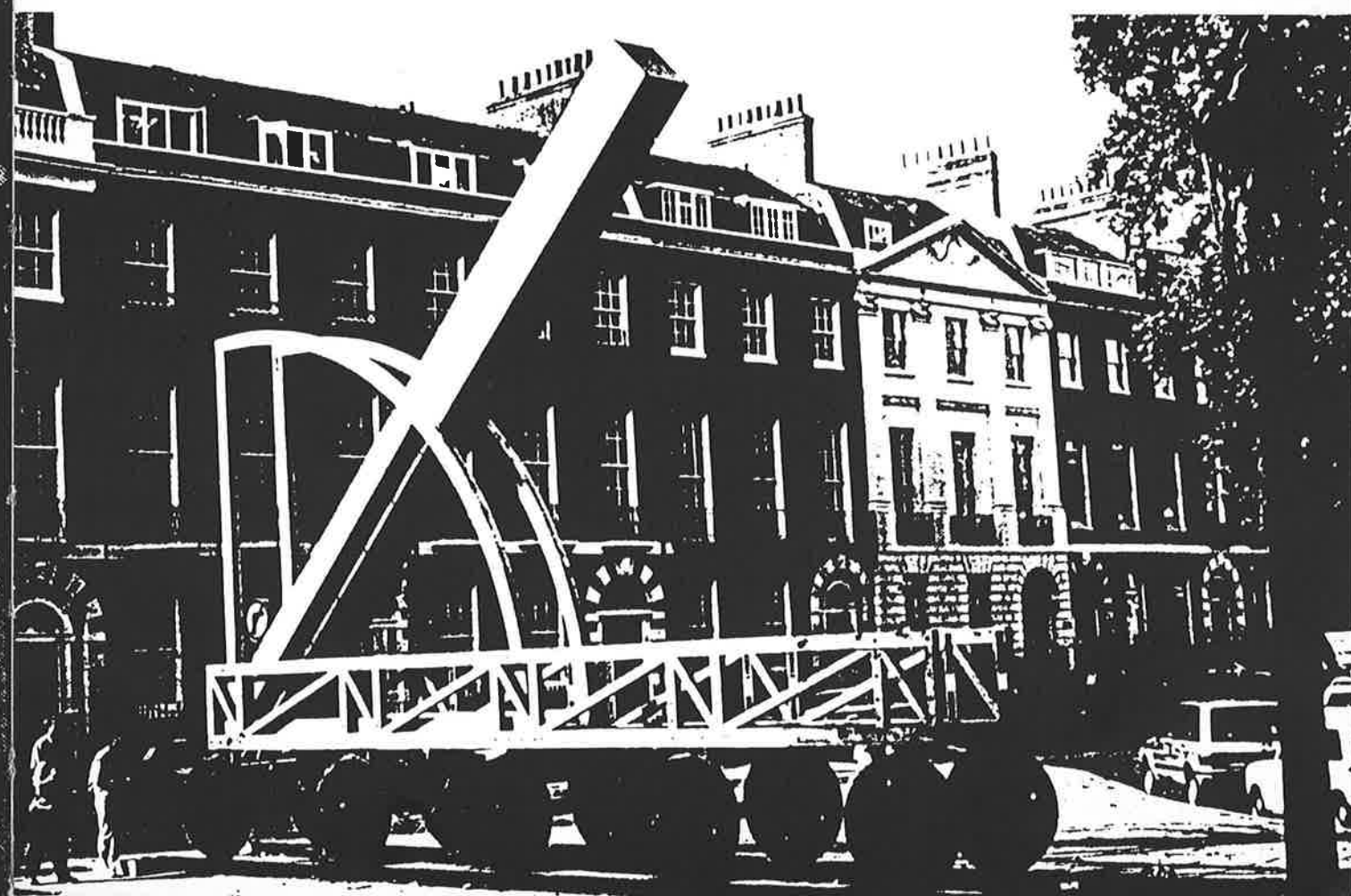


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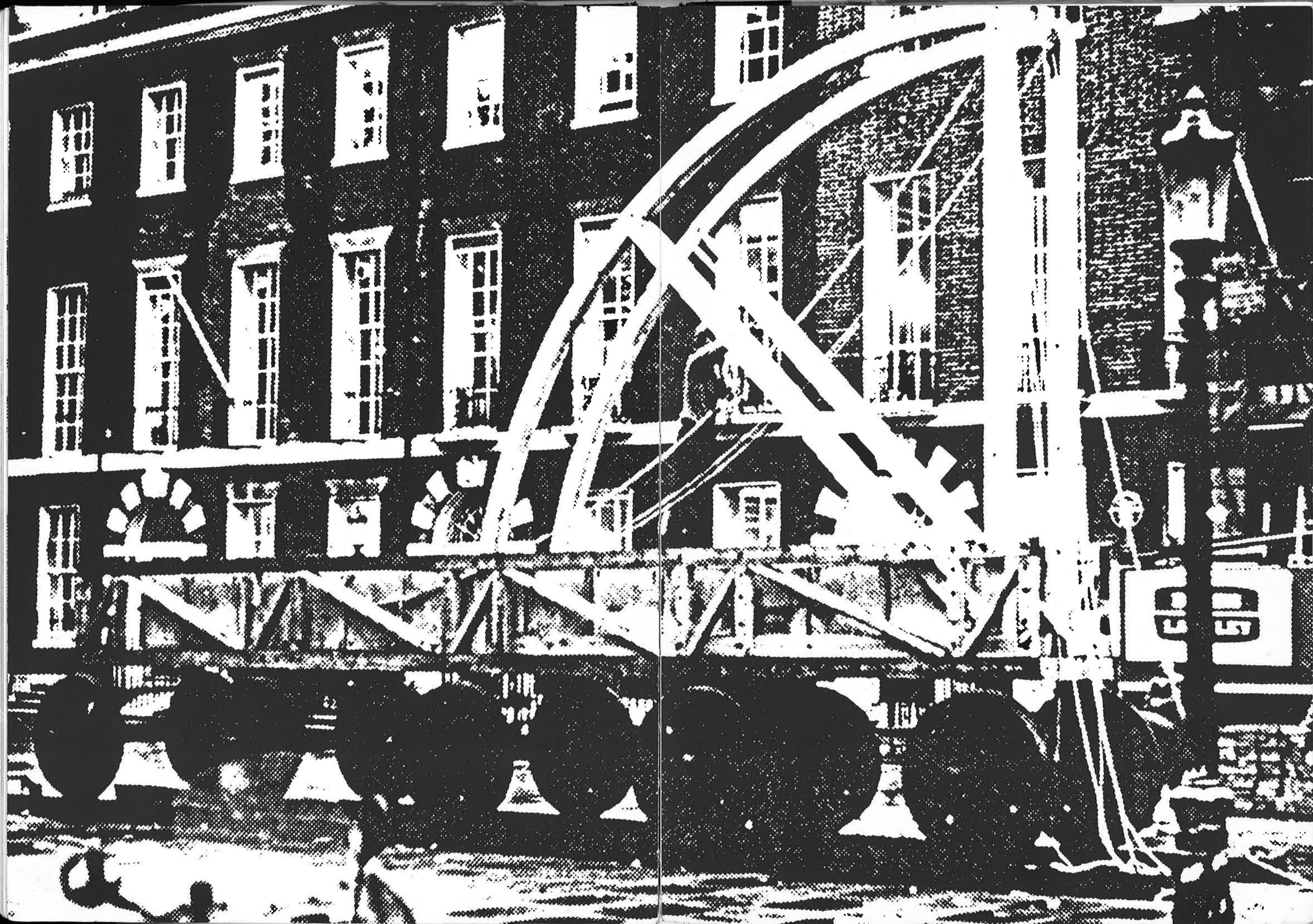




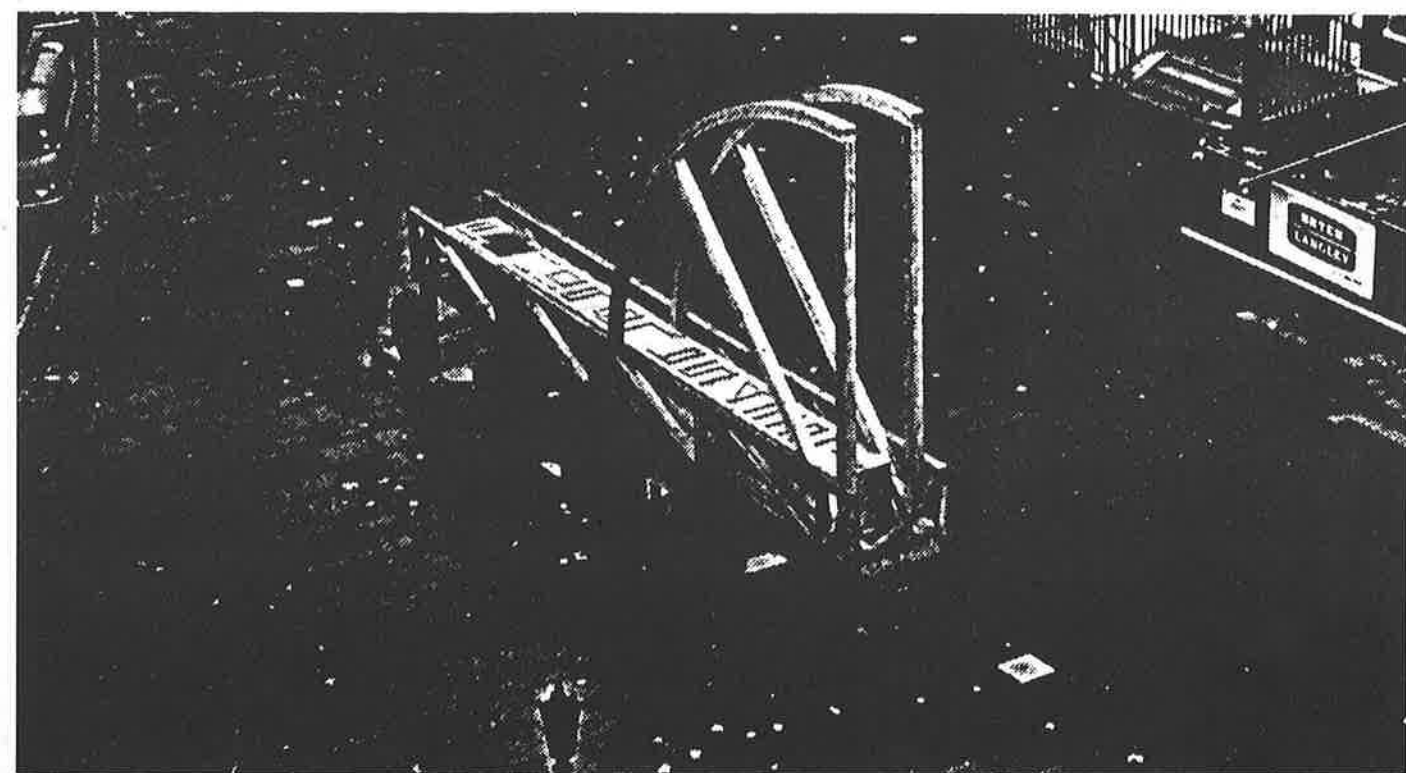
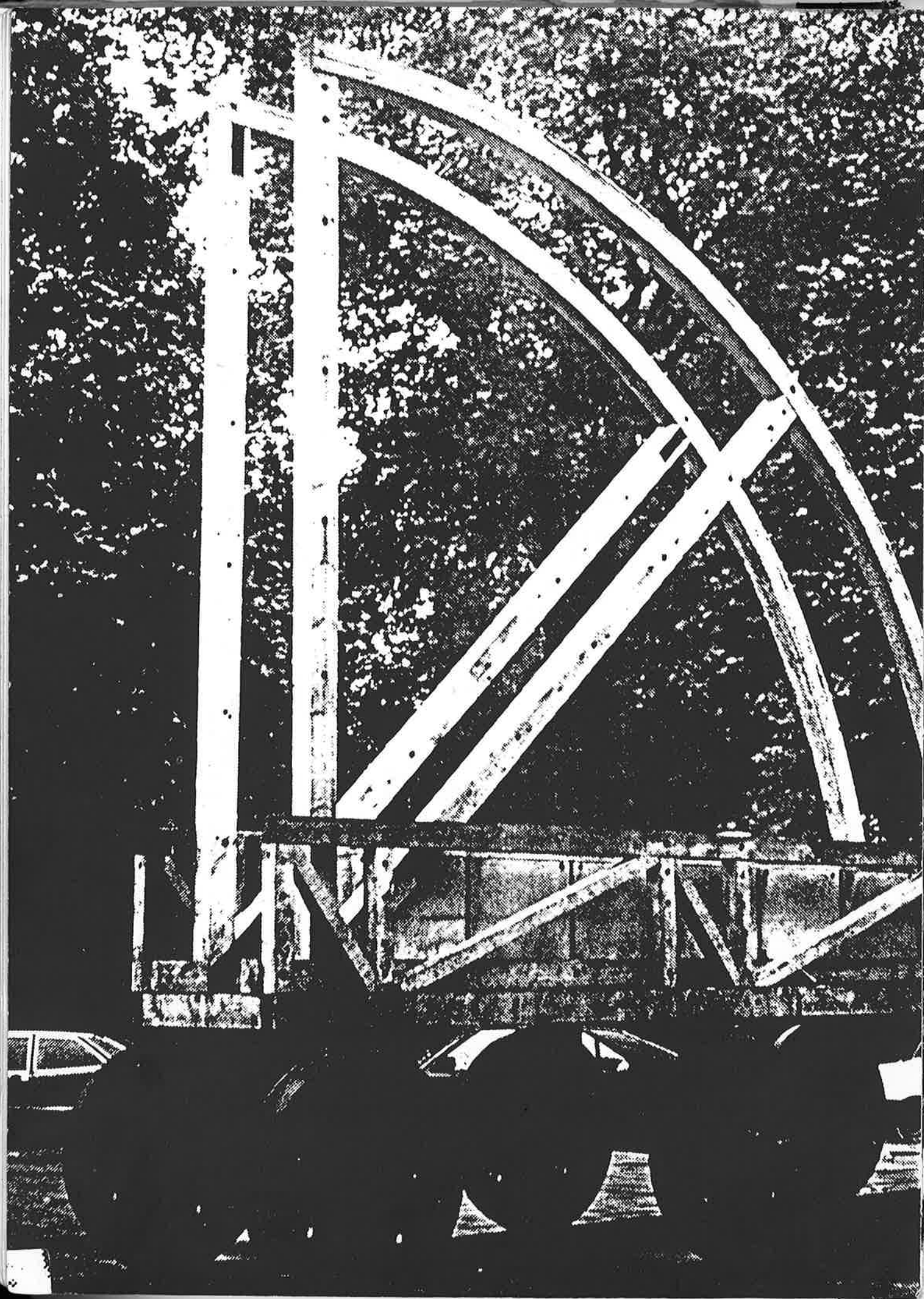


30 OCTOBER 1986











# DIARY CONSTRUCTIONS



The Italian booklets I held in my hands had the effect of drying the moisture on my skin. The small vari-coloured books had the sense of producing an evaporation. They also dried up the dense haze between the years 1984 and 1932. The documents had the aroma of another time and another space. The booklets simply erased dates; although 1911 somehow kept on reappearing. They brought back the memory of copy-books and the dread of the daily test at public school no.47 around 1936. The remoteness was all-pervading.

The very thinness of the books caused me concern for their health. I kept on laying them down as a packet on the grey African marble table but quickly picking them up again, fearing the stone too hard for their gentleness.

Their contents seemed to be making a request, but I was not quite sure. Surely they were the private places of an architect's soul . . .

They were the ruminations of a fellow-architect . . . silent resurrections.



The places they attempted to describe precisely were not the main issues; there was some-thing-else . . . being alluded to . . .

The *actual place* was the very *documents themselves*. The subtly coloured covers and the little sheets of paper with printers' ink on them *were* the site-place. They were site as promissory note . . . redeemed only by signatures . . . and the spoken name.

The booklets acted as private letters, made even more private by being made to appear public; although they were sent out throughout the world, they were 'expected to be returned'.

And so I would return them . . . in a special private way . . . they would go on a return journey . . . but accompanied.

The day before receiving the envelope which encased the booklets from Italy, I had been looking at the plates of Holbein's *Dance of Death*.

What transfixed me was the distances which Death had to traverse. Holbein envisaged him always on the road . . . a journeyman . . . his

appearance known, his timing unknown . . . Holbein's dread . . . celebrated.

The plates were filled with music . . . distantly heard. *Death came out of time*.

I climbed the wooden stairs of my house; it was becoming a melancholy evening, that is, the leaves of the mimosa tree in the garden were contracting early; they let in the light of a summer dusk.

I lay upon my bed and began *The Sleep of Adam*.

Some weeks later I had not quite a dream . . . I desperately tried to recall a sentence before dawn . . . a struggle with an elusive pre-sacredness. We have all experienced that vague space . . . the space of the not-quite-awake yet no-longer-quite-asleep . . . the sentence that I was able finally to retain (through enormous effort) until I awoke was . . . 'God withdrew back into his latency'. Some time later I completed *The Sleep of Adam*.



My wife introduced me to the delights and mysteries of Hawthorne's *Zenobia*. It is to her that I owe my understanding of the space of woman . . . (the embryonic space of after-image and before-image) . . . henceforth female as subject, as architectural (object) subject matter. The horror of the death of Zenobia is that it fixes subject into object . . . into fixed time . . . a rigid time . . . it takes out pliable time . . . the plasticity of a woman has been removed . . . and so it is with architecture . . . as subject . . . the object of architecture must reconstitute woman-female . . . or so it seems to me.

A woman will read aloud from *The Sleep of Adam*.

While Eve waited  
inside of Adam  
she was his  
structure  
her volume  
filled him  
his skin hung  
on Eve's form  
when God  
released her  
from Adam  
Death rushed in  
preventing collapse

I am obsessed with time and have recently created time-pieces . . . *clock towers*. One of my recurrent persistences is that present time cannot be seen . . . present time has an opacity . . . present time is opaque . . . present time erases . . . blanks out time . . .

I envisage a single clock tower mounted on a caisson. The tower moves from a vertical upright elevational position back down to a horizontal planimetric position . . . from a  $90^\circ$  upright position to a  $0^\circ$  horizontal position. The clock tower moves through spatial time, elevational, flat time ( $90^\circ$ ) . . . then angular, isometric time ( $45^\circ$ ) . . . finally horizontal, perspective time ( $0^\circ$ ). The clock tower on the caisson can be moved from place to place . . . from time to time . . . (the first entry into a constructional diary). The clock will be used in my conversation on time with the north of Italy.

I have the idea of the clock.  
I have the ten booklets from  
Venice.  
I have the poem *The Sleep of  
Adam* . . .  
All are objects and all are  
subjects.



In Berlin two structures of the *Victims* were built in the Light Hall of the Gropius-Bau. A third structure was contemplated. It was called 'Security' (this was not built in Berlin). 'Security' will be built for the journey to Venice.

The three initial elements for the constructions of a diary will be . . .

1 clock tower (on wheels)

2 'Security' structure (on wheels)

3 booth (on wheels) . . .  
woman contained

These elements will be moved from place to place. The townspeople of one place will move the elements to the next designated place into the hands of the receiving townspeople.

Each place agrees to erect a high wooden pole with a pulley system at the top of the pole; from this pulley system a wooden chair can be suspended.

The movable clock tower is placed in position facing the vertical wooden pole (attached pulley system). A wooden chair which is hung to the back of the movable booth (woman's booth) is taken from the booth and by pulley is suspended from the pole. A man chosen by the town climbs the pole and sits on the wooden chair facing the vertical clock. His eye-level is at the centre of the vertical clock tower; he is facing vertical time (flat time). The clock tower then begins its backward descent over a twenty-four hour period.

At a  $45^\circ$  angle of descent the man in the chair (also being lowered in sequence with the time) faces (eye-level) isometric time. At the completion of the clock's descent to  $0^\circ$  the man in the chair faces perspective, horizontal time (past time).

While clock and man are descending, a townswoman (chosen) reads, from inside the booth, the poem *The Sleep of Adam* continuously over the twenty-four hour period. When the clock tower reaches its horizontal

position, the woman in the booth stops reading the poem and the man in the wooden seat attached to the pole gets down from the chair; removes the chair from the pulley system; brings it to the woman's booth; opens the door of the booth; helps the woman out and down from the booth; closes the door of the booth; attaches the chair to the back of the booth; then leaves with the woman.

Before they depart from the site, they take the appropriate booklet (pertaining to that specific site) from a pewter box and then proceed to nail the booklet to the wooden pole, leaving it to the elements.

Throughout the twenty-four hour period, the 'Security' structure has been put into place in relation to the clock, the booth, the pole.

The townspeople then proceed to move the mobile clock, the movable booth and the 'Security' structure along the road to the next name-place, where the procedure will repeat itself as before, but with the receiving townspeople officiating at the new site.

When all ten name-places have been visited, the structures will be brought into Piazza San Marco, Venice, where they will be . . .



