which may contain nothing but a depiction of enclosed empty spaces, the voids become solids in terms of drawing conventions because they are the "figures" of the drawing.

The relationship between figure and ground is crucial to human perception and the interpretation of visual displays. Gestalt psychologists demonstrated that a set of simple principles governs the behaviour of the perceptual system and determines how we "see" compound configurations. In particular, what we understand to be a figure or a background is a function of the representation created by the perceptual system. In the words of Arnheim (1969): "All early imagery relies on the simple distinction between figure and ground: an object, defined and more or less structured, is set off against a separate ground, which is boundless, shapeless, homogeneous, secondary in importance, and often entirely ignored" (ibid., p. 284).

In some cases, however, a configuration is balanced such that figure and ground are reversible, as neither is perceptually stable unless viewed under certain constraints. The phenomenon of reversible figures was known since Necker reported it in 1832, following an experiment with an alternating perception of a line drawing of a cube that was consequently named after him the Necker Cube. The Gestaltists were the first to include this phenomenon in an overall theory of perception that was widely accepted and manifestations of it can be found in various fields, including the arts (particularly painting, drawing and engraving, e.g., work by Dali, Escher, and Alber). According to their account unstable perception, which leads to reversibility, occurs when conflicting principles of perceptual organization, determining meaning, are enacted. Later experimental data confirmed these theories (e.g., Chambers and Reisberg 1992). In the 1970s the newly founded cognitive science expressed renewed interest in reversible figures and the perception of figure and ground. This interest found its way into popular science and general public awareness (e.g., Attneave 1971) and possibly could have affected Stirling's choice of representational means. A case in point is Figure 2.9, where the opposing graphic means (shades) chosen to represent two levels of the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart make it very hard to tell whether the central rotunda is meant to be the figure or the ground. Colquhoun (1984), who sensed the ambiguity that is so typical of reversible figures, wrote about the rotunda: "the geometrical center of the building has become a kind of negation – an absence rather than a presence" (ibid., p. 20). As a result the prominent role of open spaces devoted to circulation, given an equal status in the pictorial representation, was loudly and clearly conveyed to the viewer.

Collage

We stressed the fact that the museum publications presented images in the form of collages consisting of freehand sketches depicting anything from the entire scheme to a construction detail, hard-line axonometric drawings, of which many were partial and largely abstract, and, somewhat apart, also plans, and a few elevations and photographs of models. *Lotus International* (see note 3) added drawings from other projects and also a humorous drawing of Stirling sitting in his famous Thomas Hope armchair. This addition set the current designs in the context of the rest of Stirling's work. Why did Stirling choose collage as a means to represent his designs? Why the mixture of so
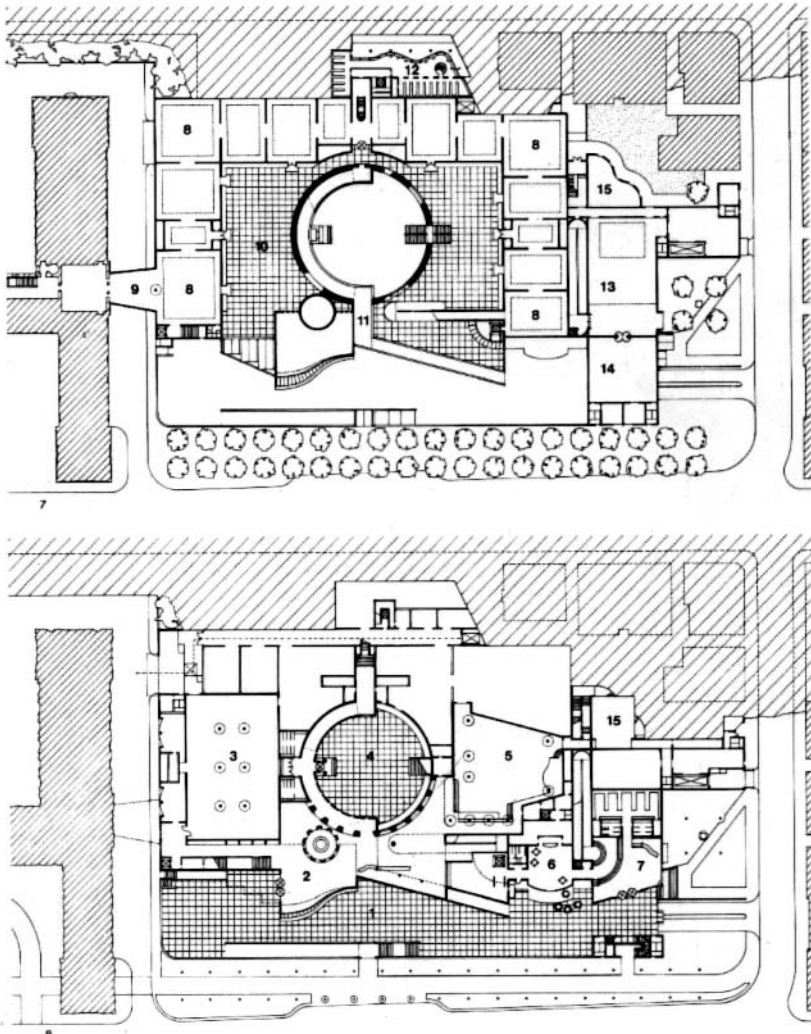
Figure 2.9 Two floor plans of the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart.

many drawing modes and representational conventions, in a manner that at times appears disorderly and loose? No reference to an explication by Stirling himself has been found in the literature. We shall therefore offer our own conjecture regarding this question.

By offering many images, as is forcibly the case in a collage, it was possible to avoid a deterministic, final set of images. The collage – this particular collage – was therefore a way to stress the story, the narrative, the process related to the project, rather than a still and frozen end product. By opting to show preliminary sketches, including alternative design configurations, Stirling could remain somewhat ambiguous and non-committal, and he could advertise his taste for non-monumentality and eclecticism. Stirling's