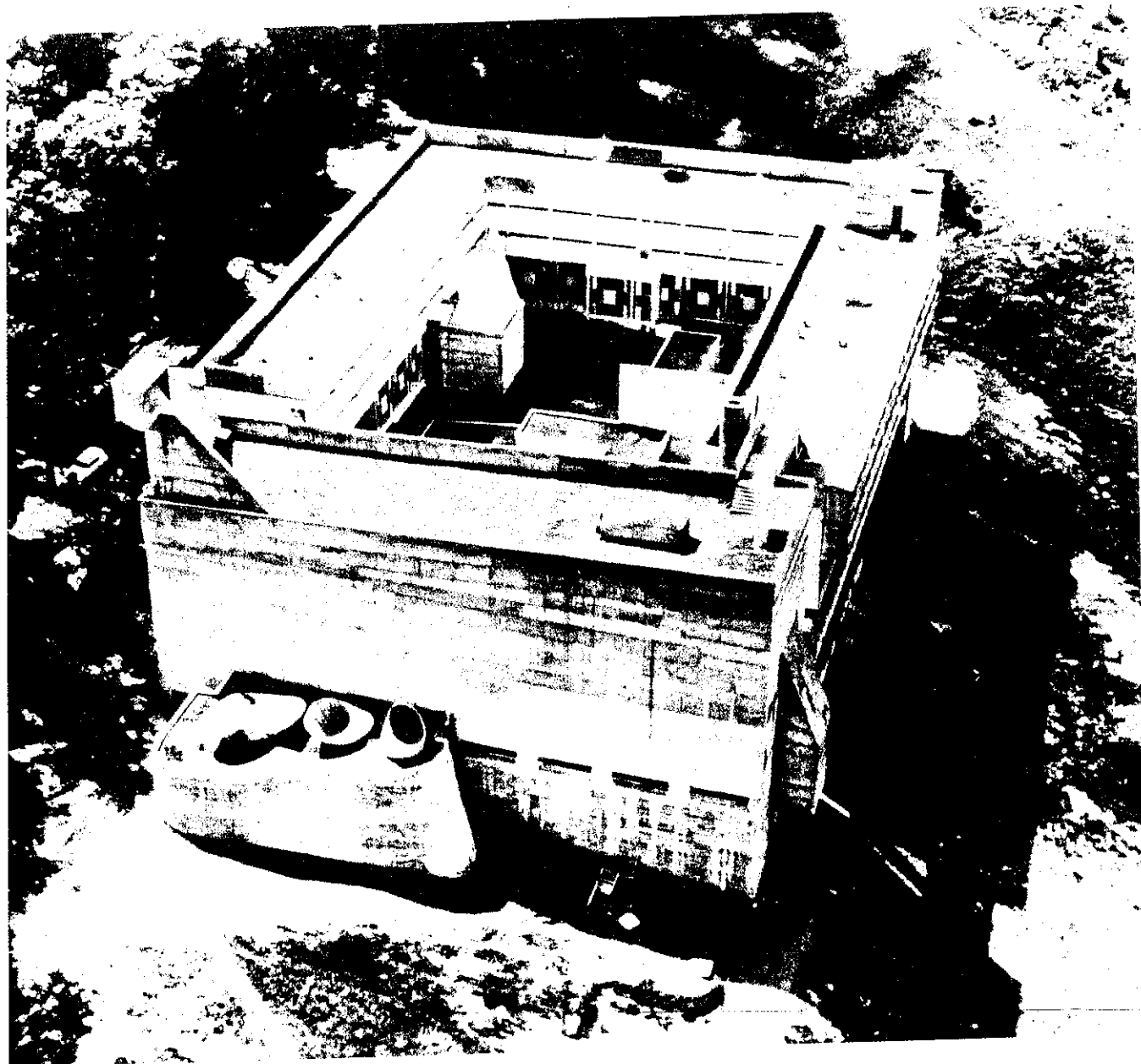


The Le Corbusier Archive
 H. Allen Brooks, General Editor
 A Series in Garland Architectural Archives

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1984

The Monastery of La Tourette by Iannis Xenakis

p IX-XVIII

Por rapport à l'édition:
 IX, Mus. de l'Arch. (S. Monach), 2006:
 certaines photos n'y ont pas reprises
 et mes commentaires de cette édition.

By 1953 Le Corbusier had already separated from Vladimir Bodiansky, the head engineer of ATBAT (Atelier des Bâisseurs: Builders' Studio) in charge of the *unité de habitation* of Marseille, and had kept André Wogenski, for the time being, as administrator and studio foreman. Le Corbusier was working on several projects at the same time. Each project was entrusted to one of the young collaborators with whom he worked several hours each week, in the mornings after reading his mail, because in the afternoons he stayed at home to work on his painting. Between work sessions the collaborator designed the plans while trying to respect as much as possible the guidelines that Le Corbusier had laid down in the work sketches, which he colored for easier readability. Here it should be pointed out that in general he made these sketches while conversing with the collaborator of the project in question, making suggestions and often accepting those of his collaborator. He benefited thus from a dialectic of thought with the young and inexperienced, but at times generous and inventive, mind of his interlocutor, who would give away, in all innocence, his thoughts, in case that he had any! I must also say that it was very rare for his young collaborator to give him any truly new and interesting ideas.

Having graduated in engineering, I was in charge, for all the current projects under way, of technical considerations and of making calculations, even if provisional. Of all the young collaborators, who at that time were no more than five or six in number, no one understood very well, if at all, the principles of strength of materials—which is what transformed me into an arbiter even of architectural aesthetics. This is how I started getting into the work of an architect, little by little, through the act itself, in depth and with responsibility, and all the while acquiring a taste for it, though in fact my deep-seated vocations were music and science, not architecture. Thus one fine midday in 1953, while accompanying Le Corbusier to Rue de Sevres, I asked

him abruptly if I could work with him personally on a project. "Yes," he told me without hesitation, "I have a project that will suit you perfectly; it is pure geometry—a Dominican monastery."

In the face of this project I had to struggle against my atheism rooted in ancient civilizations and, having been an orthodox Christian, against the "schismatic" reflexes buried in my psychic unconscious. As a matter of fact, I felt suited to create as if I were a believer, since I had escaped twofold from religion—from the ancient religion with which I had been impregnated as well as from Christianity. I possessed the necessary critical distance. But of course never during my collaboration with Le Corbusier was the religious or ideological side brought up by him, nor by me or the monks, our interlocutors. Besides, it was neither a question of revolutionizing the faith of the Dominicans nor of disrupting their habits. It was necessary to follow their planning of the physical spaces, of circulations and functions, and to organize them in the best possible way into receptacles that were stark but resonantly architectural. To discover, to create a different, other architecture, unique and original in its essential nudity—that was our goal.

As always, it took a percussive idea to get the project started—just as in the music composition that I was doing at the same time. It was Le Corbusier who, when bringing me the plan-sketches of the Reverend Father Couturier, initiator of this new monastery, also furnished me with the key idea that he had seen in a church near Moscow—a sort of box standing on end with a ramp giving access to its center, powerfully plastic in its simplicity. But how could this be done in keeping with the plan? I shall come back to this in a moment.

The general design of a closed rectangle was copied exactly from the model for monasteries of all times, which itself was copied from ancient dwellings: life inside walls around a garden, like in the house at Delos, itself in all probability a successor of the Mycenaean megaron (see also 315c-

316b in Plato's *Protagoras*). Meditative and contemplative life unfolds as one walks about inside the enclosure, the cloister. With the all-inclusive rectangle, Le Corbusier brought in the cell plan of the Charterhouse of Ema in Italy. But Le Corbusier wanted to give it a loggia and to open the cell toward the exterior of the monastery. The hotel room/apartments of the *unite* at Marseille became the prototype of the ready-made cells that were to occupy the upper levels of the monastery; the monastery itself was conceived as a *stadium*, that is as a college for the Dominican monks. The total necessary area required by the Dominicans' plan turned out to be around five thousand square meters: two upper levels of cells, one level of classrooms and common rooms, and a partial level of kitchens and communal services. The church had its own characteristics and closed one of the sides of the overall rectangle. On the map Le Corbusier chose to situate the monastery in the lap of a hill on the vast property not far from an old guest house of the Dominicans of the Monastery of Lyon. One of the sides of the rectangle, the west facade, was turned toward the valley, which gave the monastery the appearance of a monastery of Athos or of Tibet, because of the great overhang due to the sharp slope of the terrain (Figure 1).

The cloister, a covered passageway, was originally placed on the terrace roof of the monastery. But in the interim Le Corbusier's idea of a ramp's giving access to the nave of a church sparked my imagination, and I presented him with two types of solution. The first was a spiral, covered ramp around a vertical concrete core providing access to the terrace from all four levels of the monastery and to the church as well as to the entrance of the monastery (Figure 2). The project that I conceived on February 26, 1954, was rejected by Le Corbusier on March 19, 1954. I then presented a second project to him with variants in which a covered ramp placed against the south face of the church received, like a commutator, the covered ramps of the other levels (Figures 3, 4, and 5). These covered ramps, besides being an attempt to preserve the initial idea of

Le Corbusier, took the place of the cloister walk leading to the real cloister of the more conventional terrace roof, but from where there was a view of the west valley. Moreover, to speed up the exchanges between the four sides of the rectangle, Le Corbusier had the idea of making two covered ramps in the form of a rampant cross from east to west connecting the bodies of the buildings and as well as running from north to south. In the end, of all these tremendous ideas, there survived, due to lack of funds, only the cross-shaped covered ramps, to which would be added a covered "atrium." Le Corbusier left it to me to organize architecturally the spaces, the functions, and the circulations both on the drawing table and in the comings and goings between Lyon and Paris for the work meetings with the Dominican fathers. After each elaboration I asked Le Corbusier for a meeting, and he accepted or modified my drawing. As soon as he accepted it, I marked it with the initials L. C. and the date. I cannot enter into all of the details, and besides, time has erased many of my memories. I will therefore speak only of a few salient points of which I am proud or which seem to me interesting both in terms of this study and in this battle of wits with architecture, Le Corbusier, the fathers, and the construction prices.

Hence the "atrium." The fathers had called for a surface area at the intersection of the cross-shaped covered ramp. I traced an oblique line on the interior facade. Le Corbusier accepted it, and the atrium received its roof (Figure 6). Then, since I planned to hold it up by two parallel north-south sides, made of concrete blind veils, I lowered these veils to the natural ground level, and to lighten them visually I tore them into rather free-form combs and into curves, which Le Corbusier accepted with a smile (Figure 7). I also added, afterward and at the request of the fathers, a spiral staircase to link the cells of the professorial fathers to the level of the atrium, which was accepted as well.

Undulating Glass Panes

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Undulating Glass Panes

In June of 1954 I was studying the glass openings, 366 centimeters high, for the level of the common

rooms and the classrooms. I found out the vertigo of combinatorics in architectural elements, after having experimented with them in music. In fact, in *Metastasis* for orchestra, which I was finishing at about the same time (1953-54), the median part was constructed on a combinatorial organization of melodic intervals $\pm 1, \pm 2, \pm 3, \pm 4, \pm 5, \pm 6$, expressed in semitones. Furthermore, *Metastasis* was the source of another much more radical work of architecture that I conceived two years later. This was the Philips Pavillon at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, which I designed and made out of ruled surfaces much like my fields of string glissandi, which suddenly and for the first time in the history of music opened the way to the continuity of sound transformations in instrumental music. Moreover, on the occasion of the world premiere of *Metastasis* in Donaueschingen, Le Corbusier published in 1955 the first page of the score at the end of his book, *Modulor 2*, with an explanatory text of mine. Then I made several studies of the three facades, which did not satisfy me. I had chosen four elements, *a, b, c, d*, of the golden section and their twenty-four permutations, which I arranged on the unfolding of the facades like a variation on a single theme in time (Figures 8 and 9). But the play was too subtle to catch the eye. It was only in November 1954 that Le Corbusier made a kind of synthesis of my attempts and created the glass walls that are today the inside facades of the monastery (Figures 10, 11, and 23). But not everything could be put into glass in the same way. In the spring of 1955, on returning from Chandigarh, Le Corbusier called me into his office and gave me a sketch, by Pierre Jeanneret I believe, of a glass partition made of regularly spaced vertical casings containing glass panes of variable heights but identical widths, piled one on top of the other for the entire height of the story so as to lessen the glass wastes. Le Corbusier asked me to work on this for the glass facades of the Assembly at Chandigarh. The obsession of combinatorics had not left me, but right away I chose several distances in golden sections drawn from the Modulor. My problem was how to distribute these concrete upright casings (for

which I defined a standard rectangular section with rabbets to receive the glass panes) on the facades. In other words, how to distribute points on a straight line. This problem may elicit an infinity of answers, but two are extreme poles. One is to choose points without any periodicity whatsoever, that is by following a stochastic (probability) distribution. The other is to follow a strict periodicity. But at that time I was only catching a glimpse of the stochastic music that I invented a year later, and therefore I missed this solution in architecture. I regret it very much, because it was a unique occasion to introduce probabilities into architecture. Thus, I chose to follow a strict periodicity. But there the pitfall of the aridity of the permutational variation was amplified, this time thanks to the greater number of elements that I wanted to use. For if one is still able to "control" the twenty-four permutations of four elements, it is impossible to do so with ten of them ($10! = 3,628,800$ permutations). It was thus necessary to choose another criterion on a more general level, situated above the permutations. I had already treated this problem in music by creating a magnetic tape with blips at distances defined by the golden section and by even writing an unpublished score for percussion.

The criterion was that of the fluctuations of the densities of the points (blips) on a straight line (time). Density is a macroscopic perception, an instantaneous unconscious calculation that we make visually as well as aurally. This faculty originates in our mind and seems to be statistical. We make statistical analysis (synthesis) without knowing it. Thus, in traditional music the movements—*adagio*, *largo*, *presto*, *vivace*—are related to the criterion of density (the number of events per unit of time or length), which thus assumes an aesthetic weight. The *chiaroscuros* are akin to density, as is intensity. Thus the problem on the level of density is simpler, since in being situated on a more general plane, it contains fewer elements than the set of the distances between the upright casings. Control is easier. So the solution is to juxtapose on the facades patches containing dense, upright casings of reinforced concrete with

patches containing rarefied ones. Naturally, here it is necessary to define the degrees of density and their respective lengths (durations). But, moreover, another problem that springs up is that of the passage from one density to another, either in a continuous progression or brutally, in jerks. The problem of continuity in the transition as well as its speed and/or form plays a fundamental role in musical aesthetics or in visual arts and architecture.

After several attempts I designed a first composition, notably of the west facade, on three or four levels in counterpoint, which Le Corbusier approved (Figures 12 to 19). He was so pleased that he wanted to call them "musical glass panes," and he asked me to describe them in his book *Modulor 2*. I suggested calling them "undulating glass panes" because of the undulation of the densities. He accepted this, and that is how I designed them for the Assembly of Chandigarh, the Maison des Jeunes of Firminy, the Brazilian Pavillon in Paris, and for other buildings.

The parallelepipedical church posed several serious problems concerning its use, acoustics, lighting. It was supposed to contain the monks' choir, space for the laic faithful, with a high altar separating the two, and altars for the concelebration, which, during the 1950's, was an idea dear to the Dominicans. The width of the nave was defined by the necessity of having two rows of stalls on each side and in the middle a space large enough to permit two to lie down completely head-to-head in prostration on the floor. I designed a high altar that was judged by the monks to be too abrupt, too high, too, separative. In fact I had conceived it a little like a place for terrible sacrifices. It was too dramatic, too Aztec. Christ sacrificed himself, as did Dionysos, but the drama had to remain internal and luminous. In the end, just a few steps separated the two levels, that of the faithful from that of the monks, with great enough visibility in both directions and with the high altar able to be used from all sides (Figure 20).

It was obvious that the twelve small altars could not fit into the principal nave. I proposed a volume

joined to the north side in the form of a piano, noncylindrical with a ruled conoidal surface with a flat terrace roof (Figure 21). Seven altars would be set up on the ground level and five on the level of the high altar. For lighting I made three cones which I called "light-cannons," tilted in various ways on the plane of the terrace roof. In order to study them I made a model with little aluminum cans of Algerian olive oil and obtained Le Corbusier's approval

(Figure 22). Other small altars were added beneath the sacristy. A passage beneath the church provided access to the seven small altars of the piano form. I decided on the spot in a four-hour meeting with fathers Prisset, Belot, and de Couesnongle at Lyon to open and link the piano volume with the volume of the central nave. Fortunately, Le Corbusier, in Paris, found fault with none of this. The merging of these two volumes provided a spatial aeration and moreover allowed the light of the "light-cannons" to pass into the church, thus creating a lower, lateral lighting while leaving the upper part of the church in shadowy light. To make the south part of the church symmetrical, I added on the terrace roof of the sacristy, irregular, pentagonal prisms of concrete, tilted in such a way as to let the sun at the equinoxes pass into the principal nave by way of a slit in the church's concrete wall along the length of the sacristy. These were the "light-guns" (Figure 23).

There, Le Corbusier added a final touch by imagining, beneath this slit, a slightly inclined plane, like an invitation to the light. Thus was the church joined to the cosmos like the pyramids and other sacred edifices. After this, I studied the luminosity of the church with a light meter and found it to be not entirely sufficient. This is why Le Corbusier then opened a whole vertical slit in the northeast corner with a concrete shell marking it on the exterior (Figure 24) and then a partial slit between the ceiling and the walls in the nave, which created a glow of light in the darkness high up in the nave. The openings behind and directly above the choir went through quite a few adventures. Indeed, the problem was to light, without dazzling the opposite stalls—contradiction that found a most simple

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expression, but perhaps not an interesting one (Figure 25).

Suddenly we realized that the Dominicans made use of an organ but that there was no place for it in the church. I designed a kind of concrete "knapsack" on the exterior of the church's west side, at the end of the choir. Le Corbusier accepted the solution but changed the curves of the knapsack into straight lines (Figure 26).

The problem of acoustics was never settled, due to a lack of money. Initially I had planned, with the consent of Le Corbusier, concrete diamond shapes on the long north and south walls. On seeing them, Le Corbusier, ironically kind, commented that it was German Expressionism of the 1920's, but he did not forbid them (Figures 27 and 28). It was only the lack of funds that doomed them. The ceiling sound treatment (flockage) met with the same fate.

There was also the idea of installing electronic bells (real bells being too expensive) that would bathe in sound the valley far off. I drew my inspiration from sound louvers and shaped them in the form of an ellipsoid or paraboloid by revolution. The Dominicans, however, rejected this project (Figures 29 and 30).

Perhaps the most brain-racking difficulty was the belfry for local use in the monastery. A church must, of course, have a belfry. Le Corbusier set me on the track with a sketch from his youth of the belfries of the small, all-white Greek churches. A crop of multiple belfries ensued (Figures 31 and 32), but Le Corbusier found finally a "plagal" solution rich in simplicity and elegance (Figure 24).

One day Le Corbusier designed the oratory for the youth, not yet included for lack of space, in the form of a cube inside the monastery rectangle. He asked me to cut a pyramid out of paper, which he stuck on top of the cube on the study model that I had made of the monastery. I argued that this

pyramid was not of the same family as the other forms. He disregarded my objection and kept the pyramid, to which he then added a light hood, since the cube had no other opening.

It must also be added that I calculated in a first approximation all the dimensions and all the concrete sections of the building as an engineer in such a way that the whole monastery displayed a harmonious lightness. So it was to our surprise when the calculations of exterior engineers practically doubled all the concrete sections and even declared some parts (such as the terrace roof of the piano) impossible to build. I must say that Le Corbusier backed me up to the hilt in this disagreement and that finally we did find another contractor who recalculated the whole of it, and precisely according to my dimensions. The terrace roof of the piano came to be realized in prestressed concrete, which was used also for other parts of the structure.

In concluding these succinct recollections, almost thirty years later, I realize to what a great extent this collaboration was a perpetual and rich exchange between me, with admiration for him and his ideas, and him, Le Corbusier—understanding, cooperative, creative, free and independent, quick-thinking—never trying to crush me or to reject my own discoveries, but on the contrary always respecting them, discussing them, accepting them as they were or modifying them. A certain kind of fraternal joy united us in this project, not always the case in other projects on which I worked with him during these years—years during which architecture gradually became as important to me as the music that I was relentlessly working on at the same time. The monastery has remained for me a luminous memory. A few years ago the French government finally declared the Monastery of La Tourette as a historical monument of France.

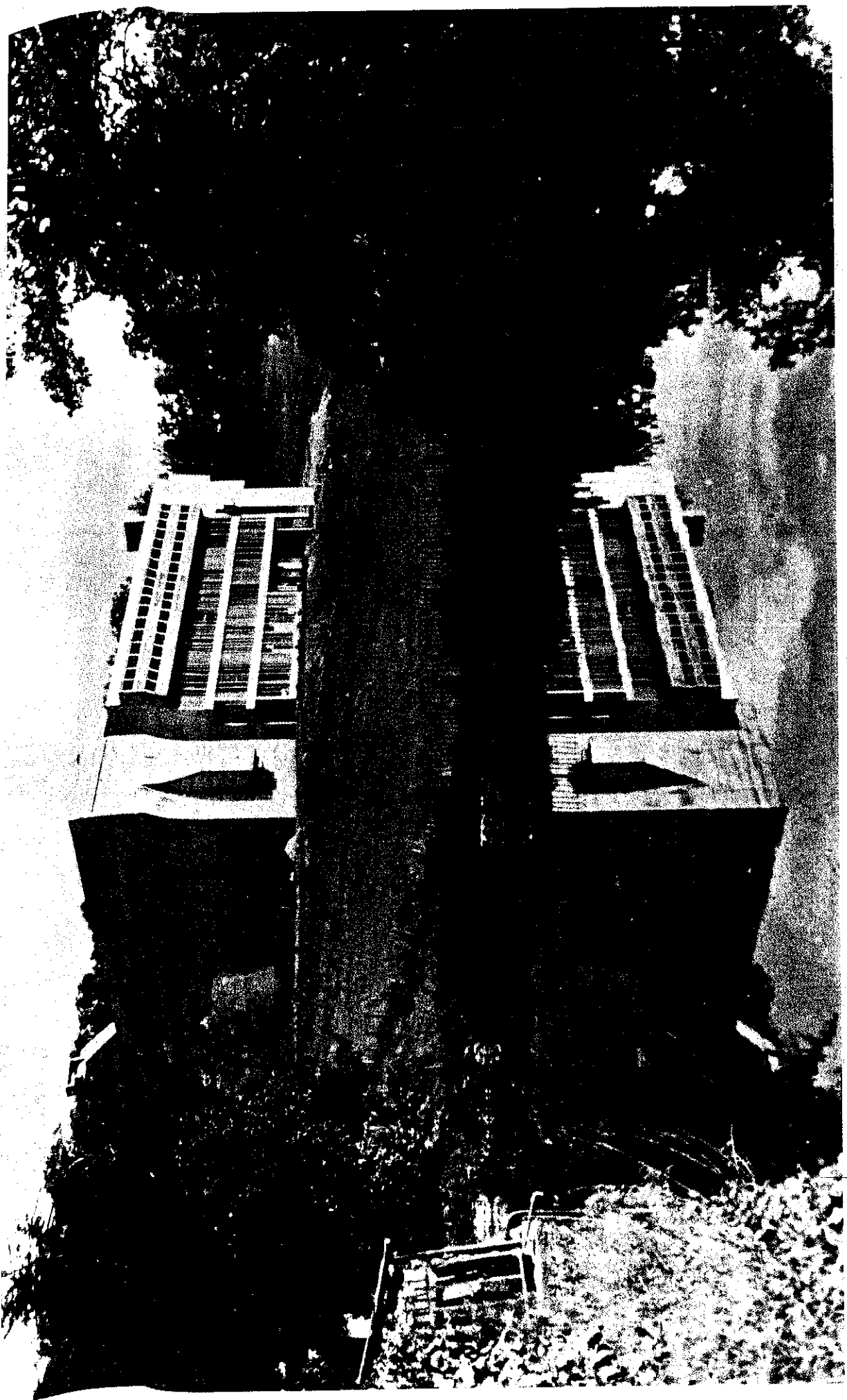


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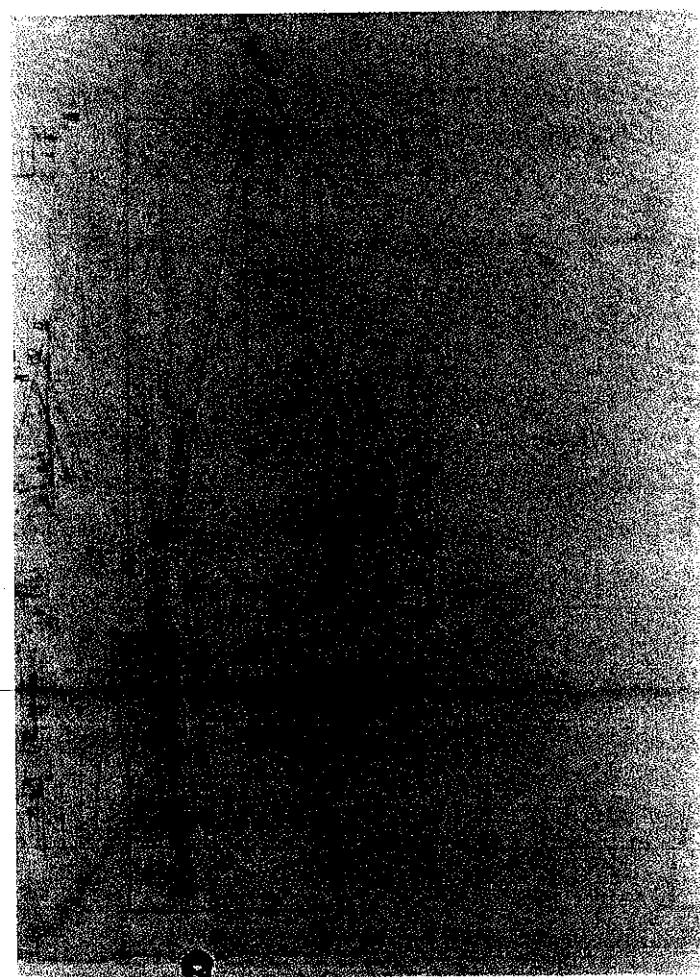


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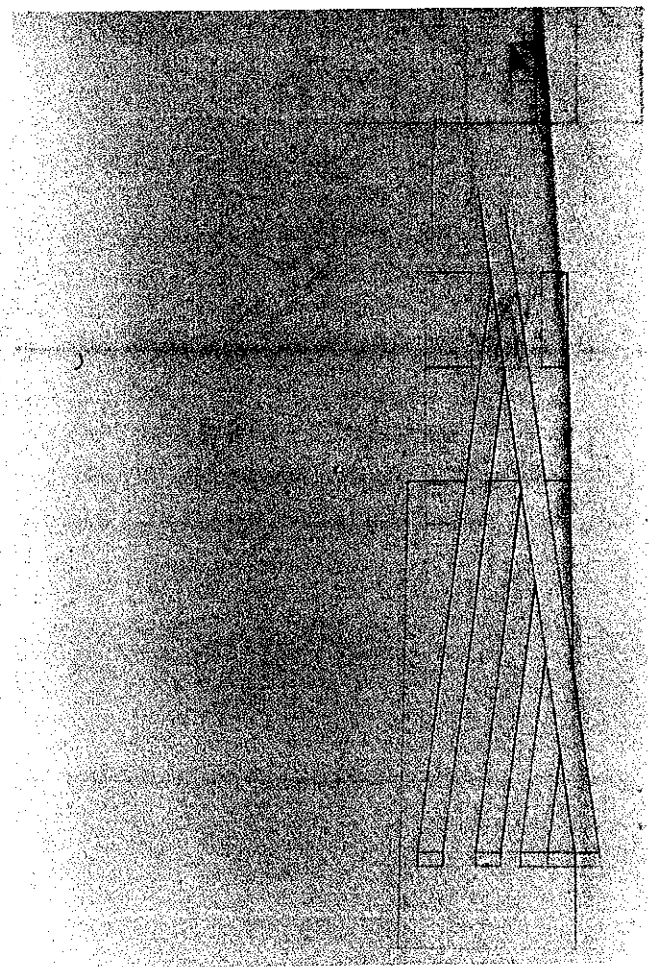


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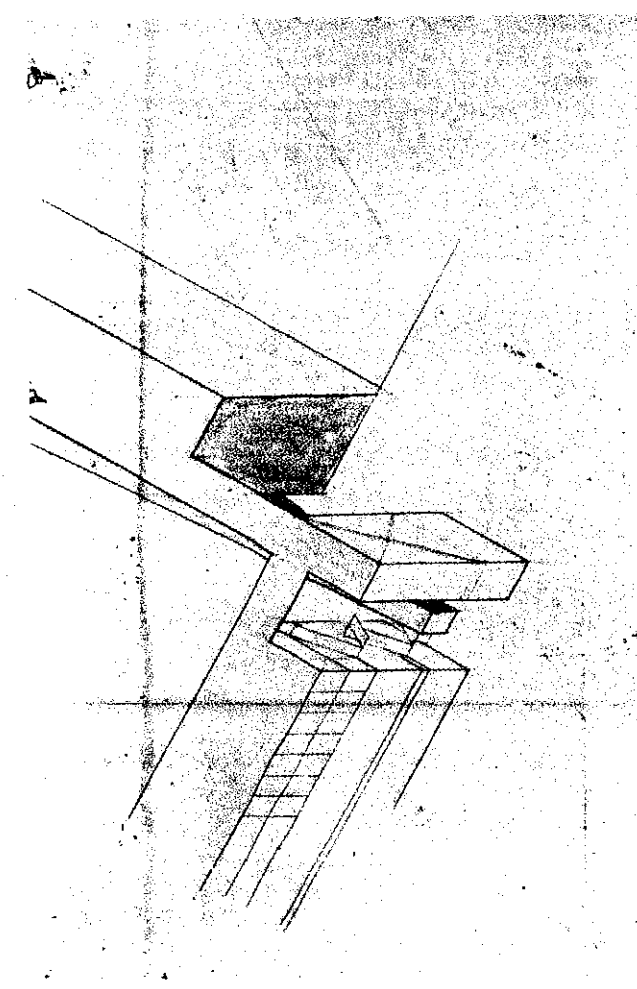


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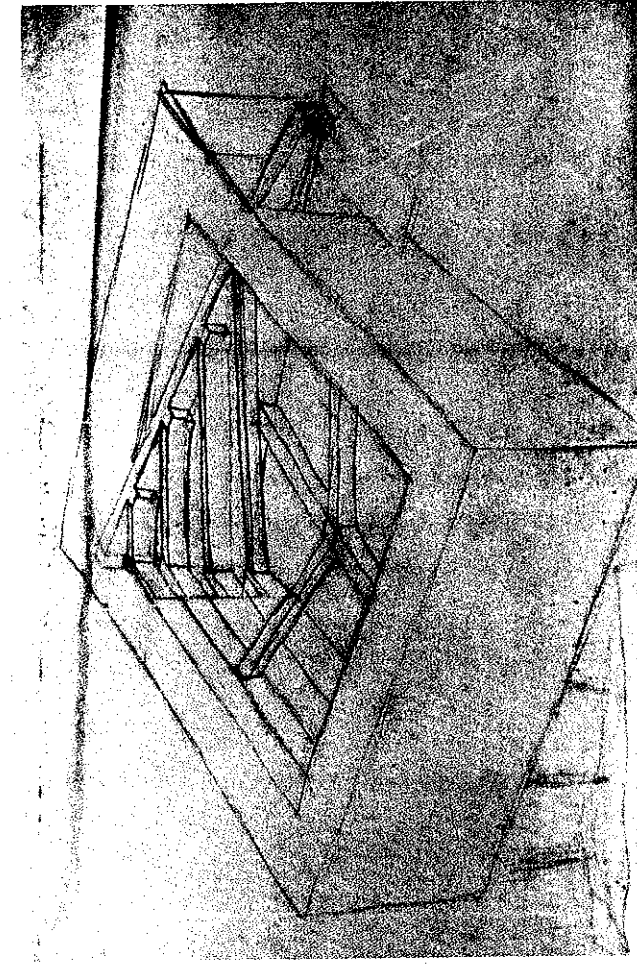


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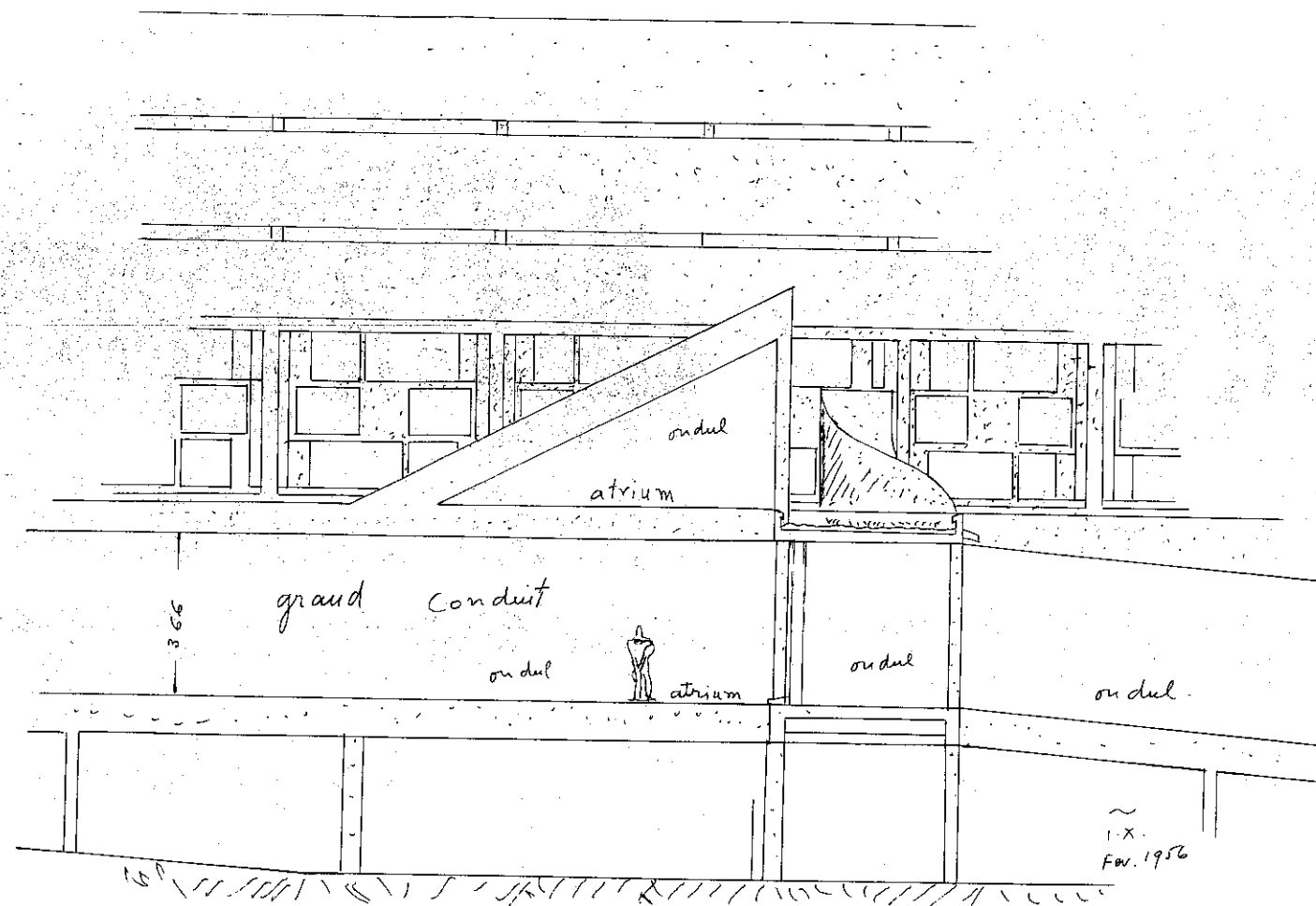


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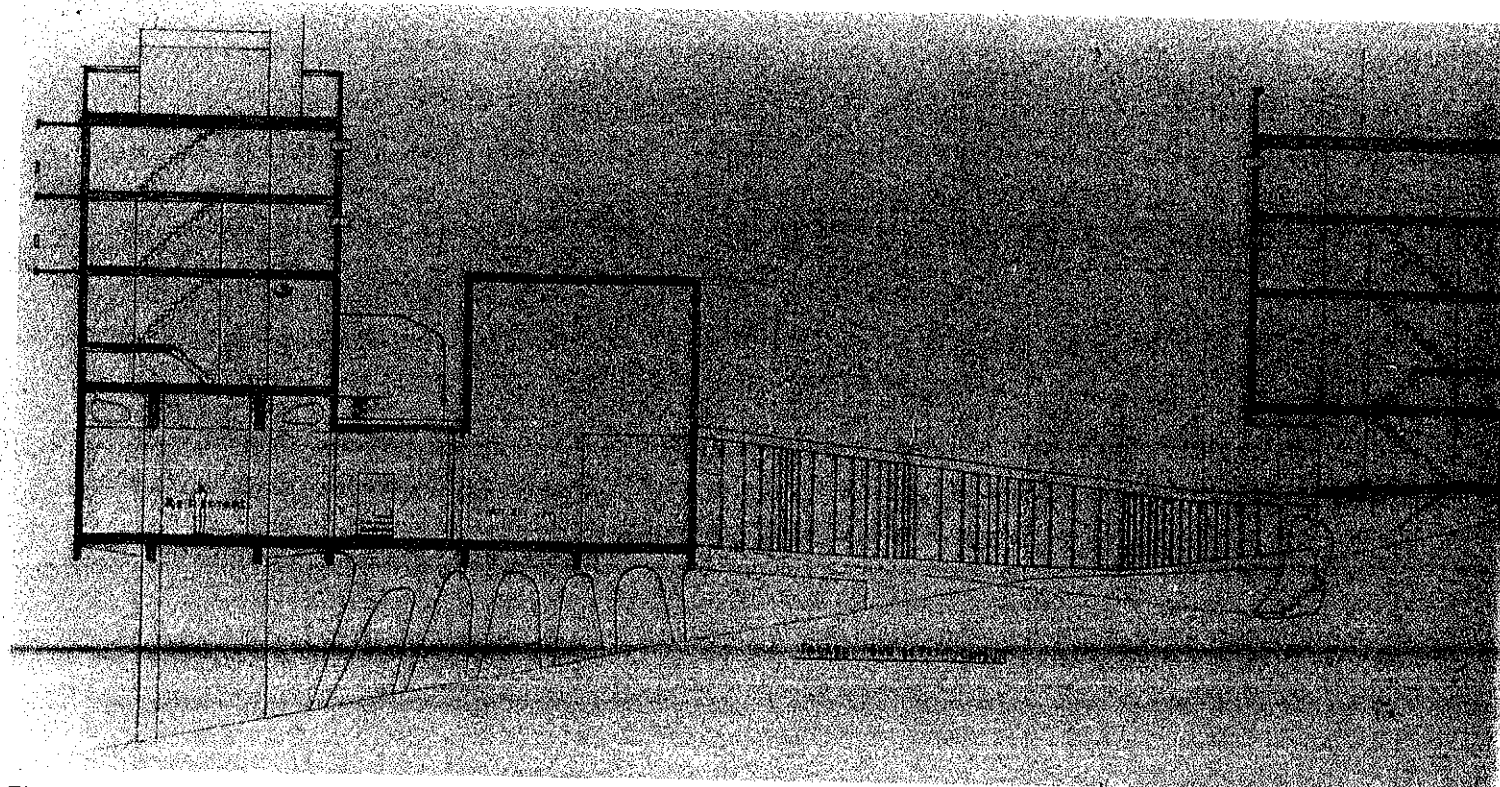


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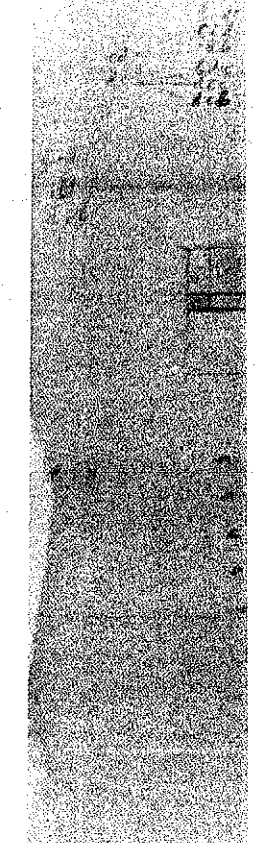


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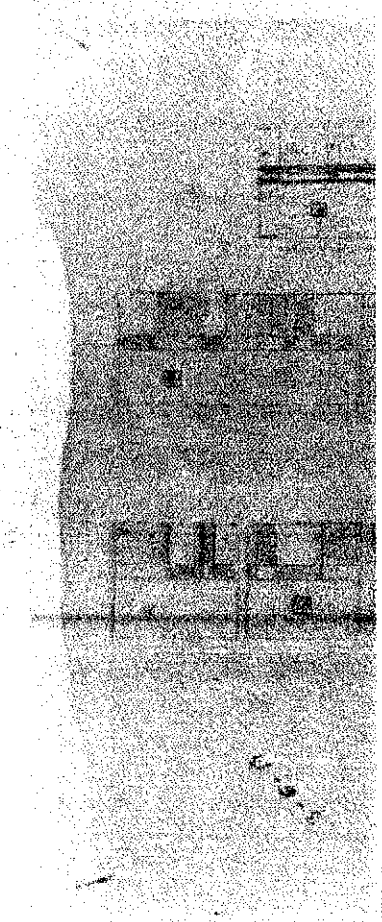


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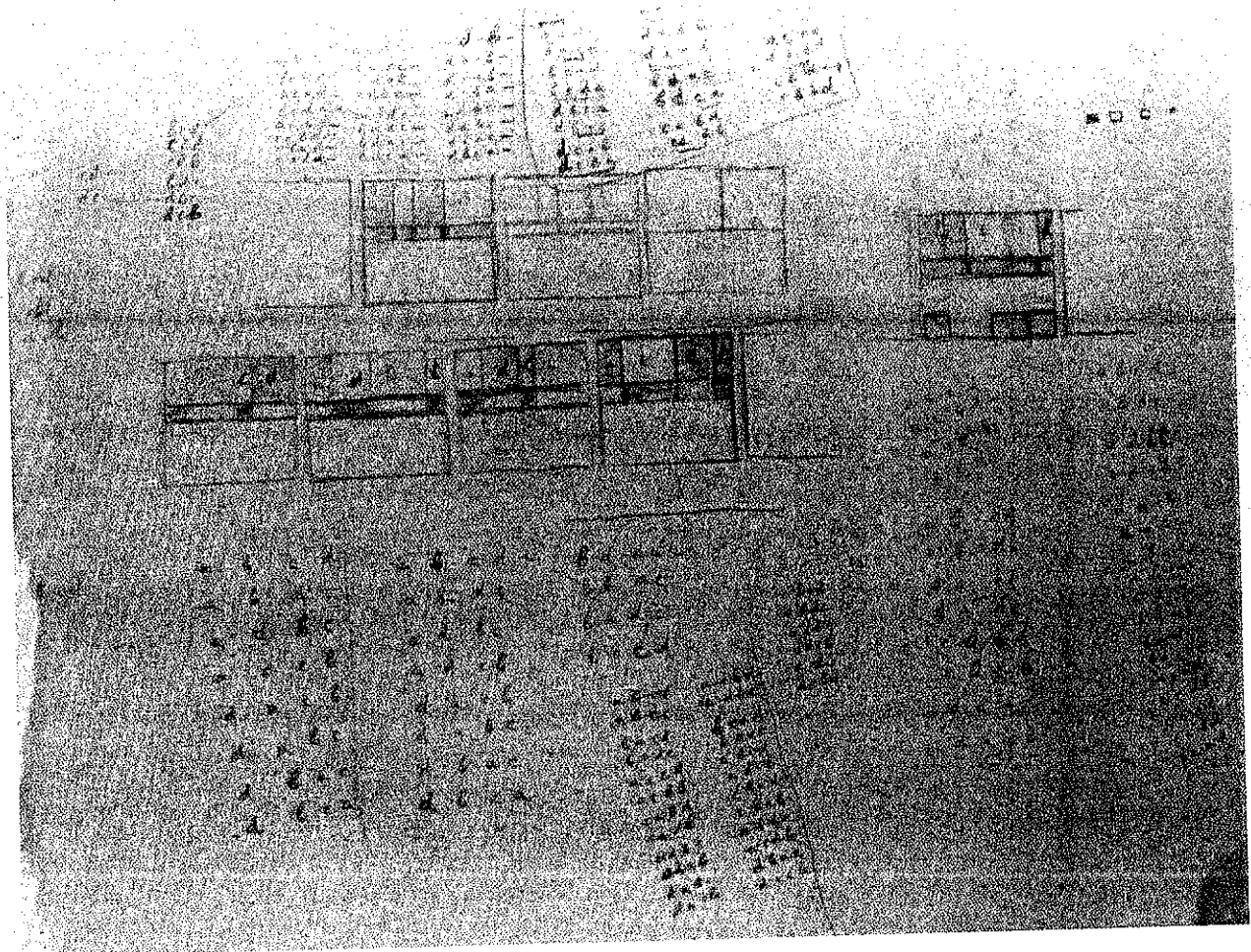
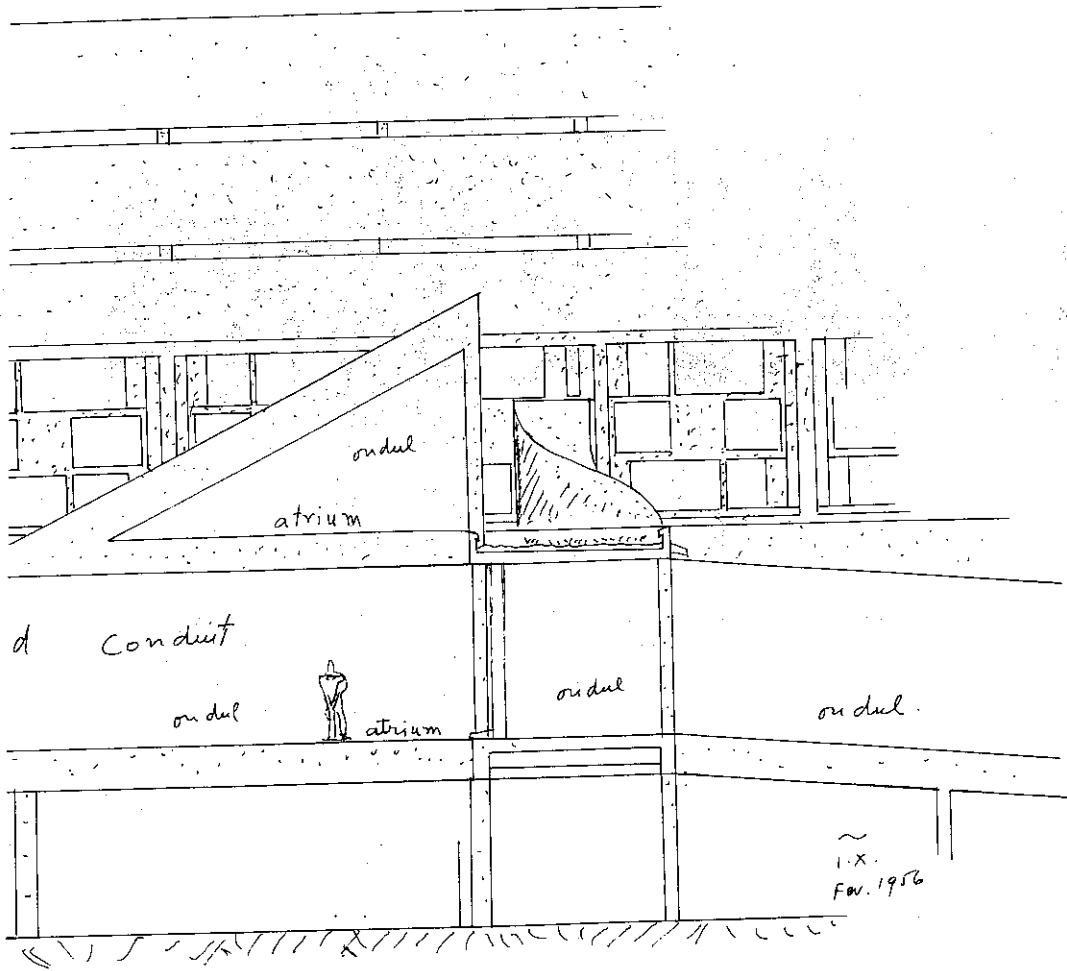


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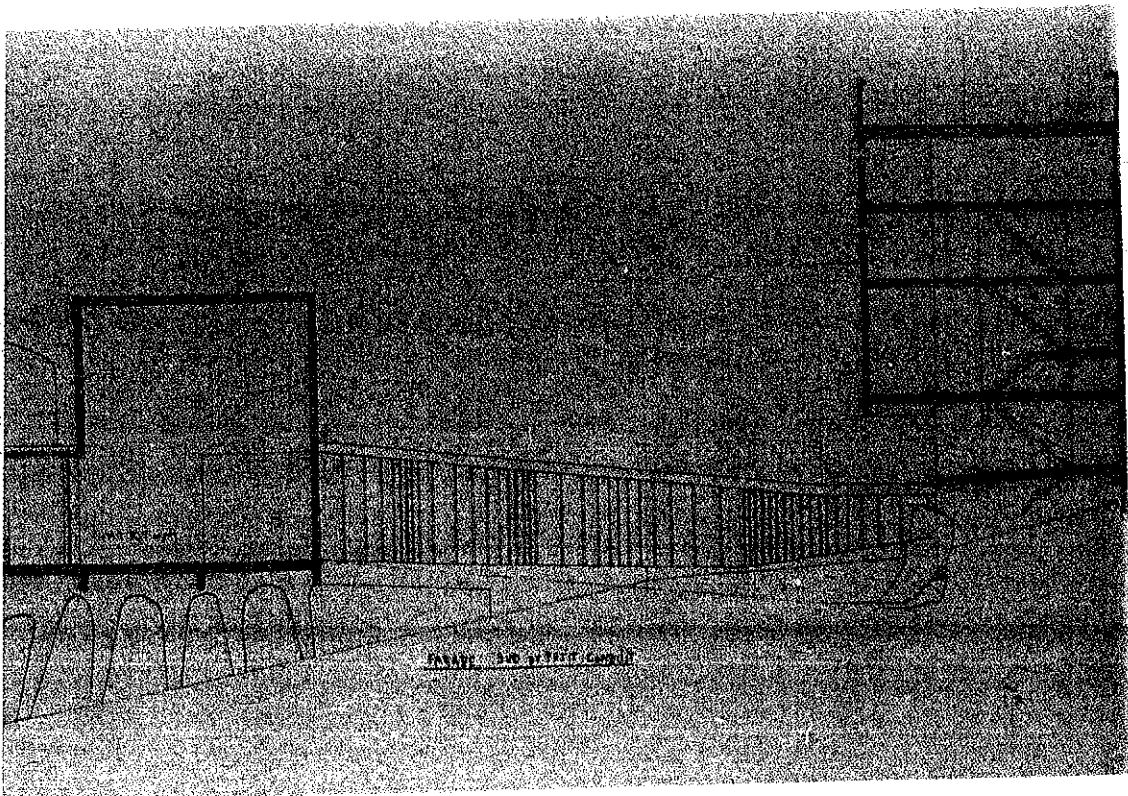
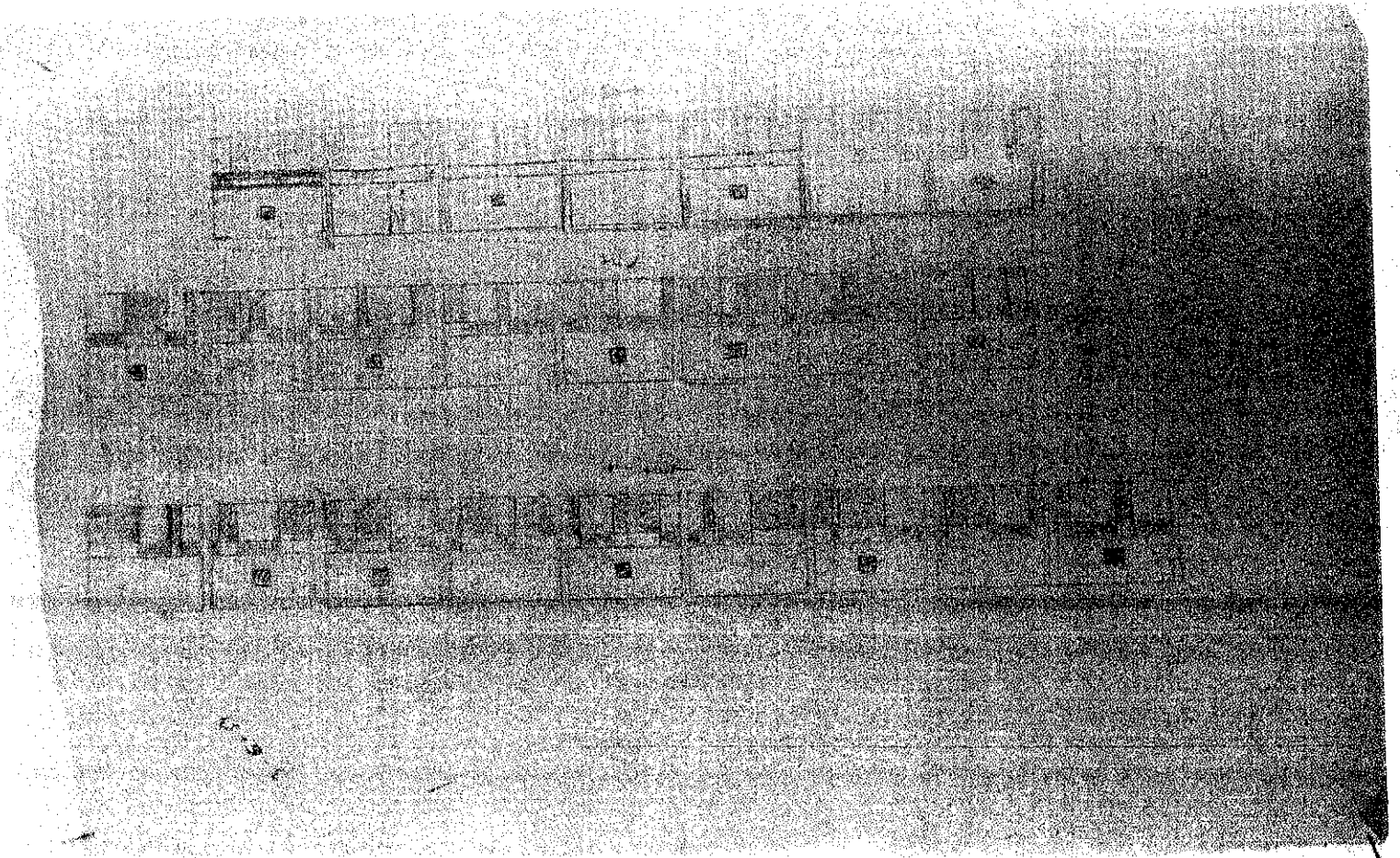


Figure 9



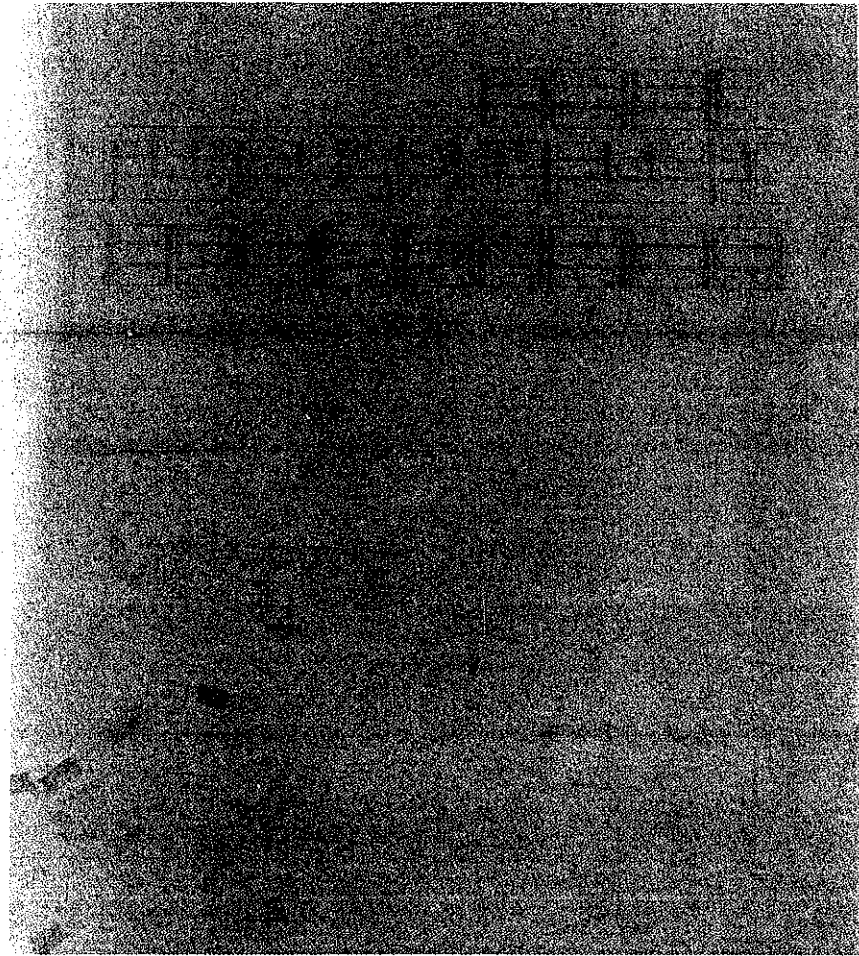


Figure 10

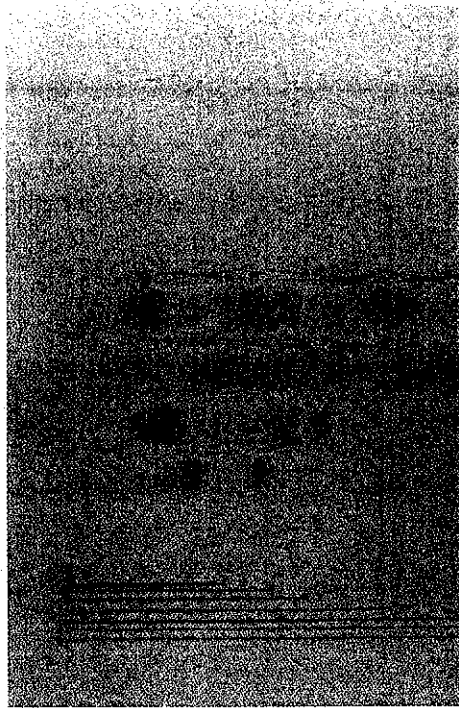


Figure 12

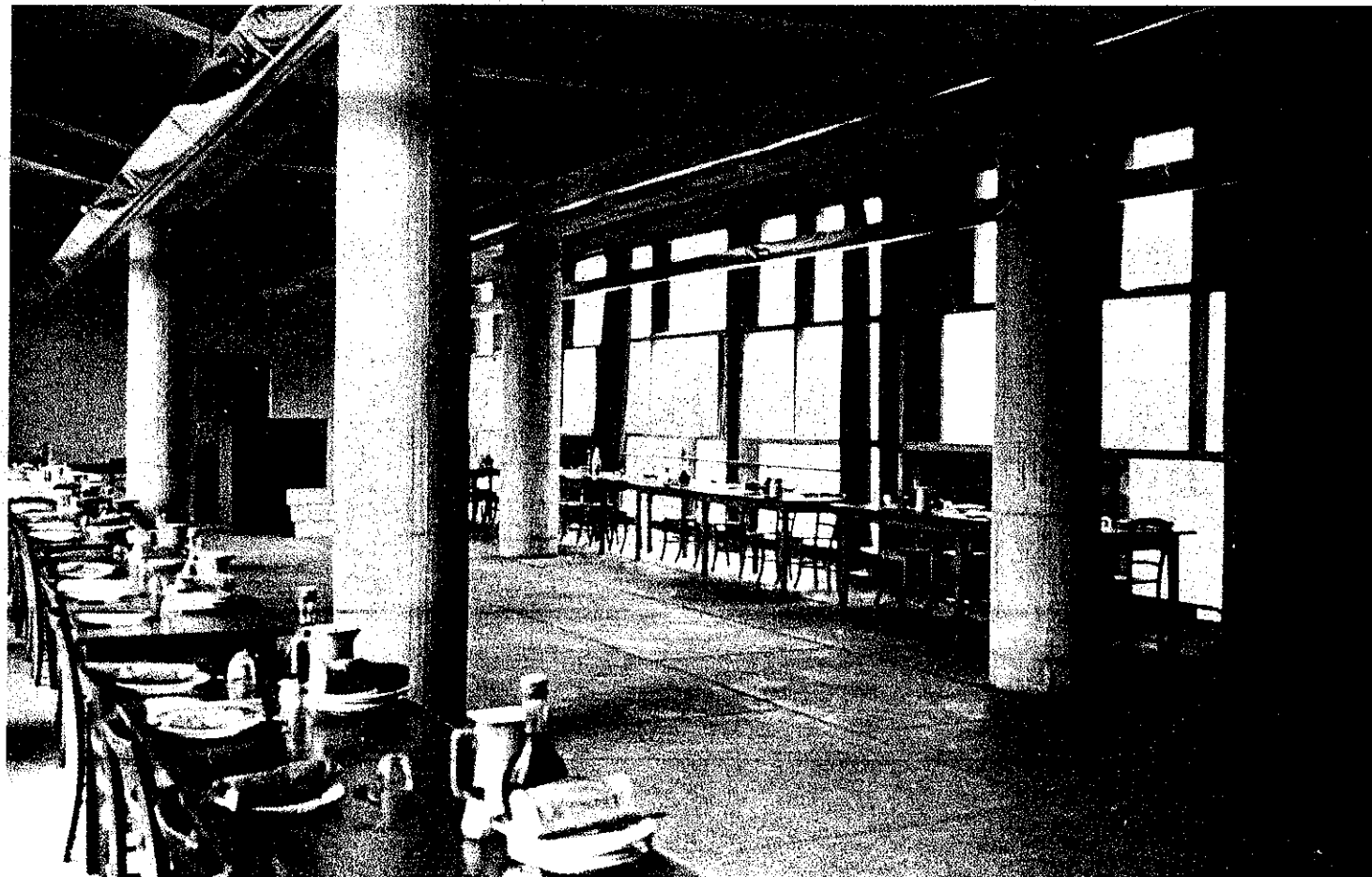


Figure 11

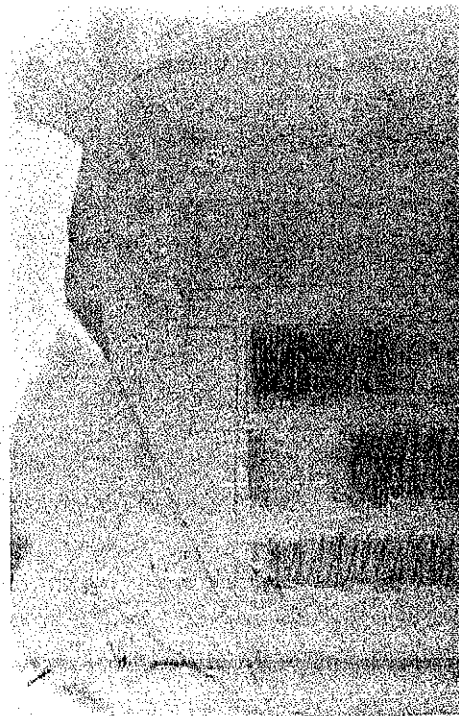


Figure 13

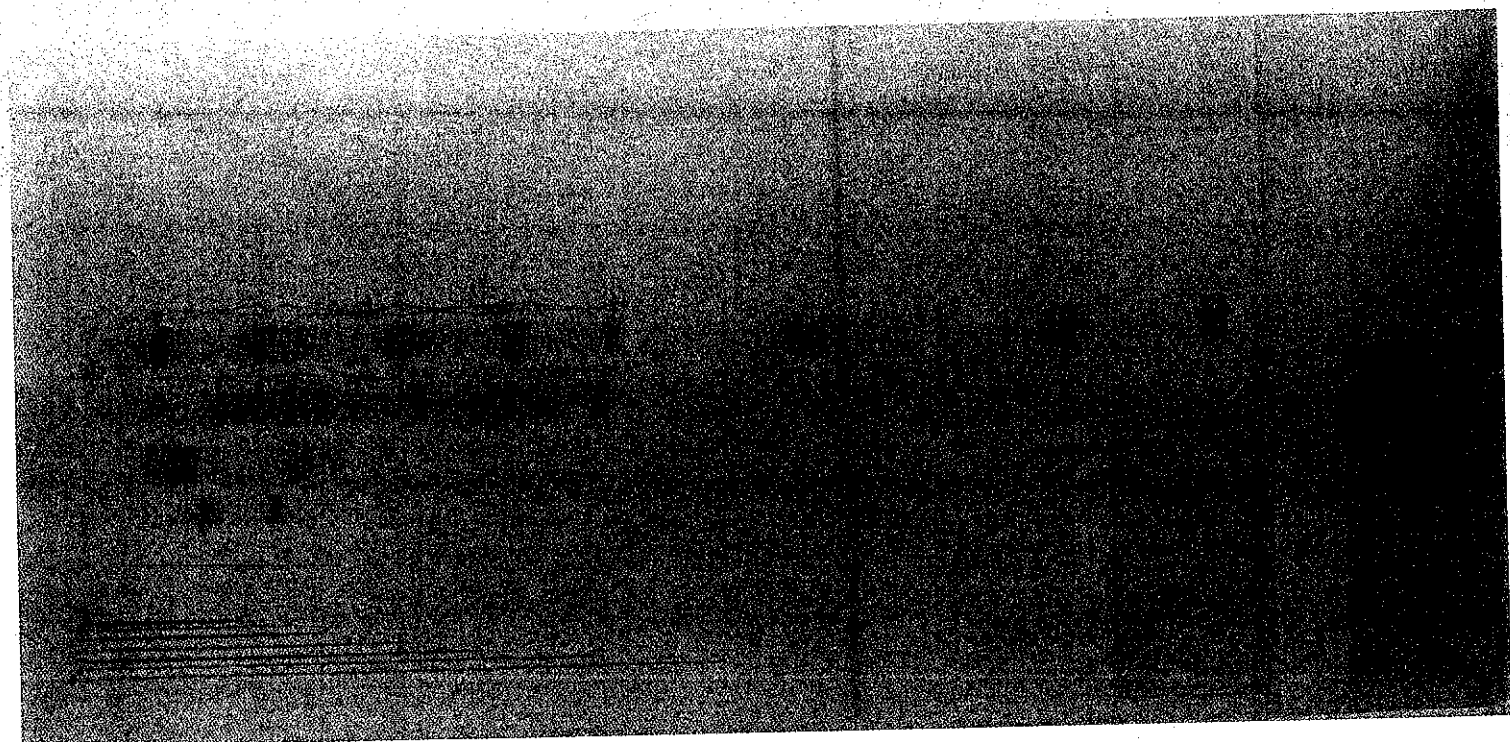
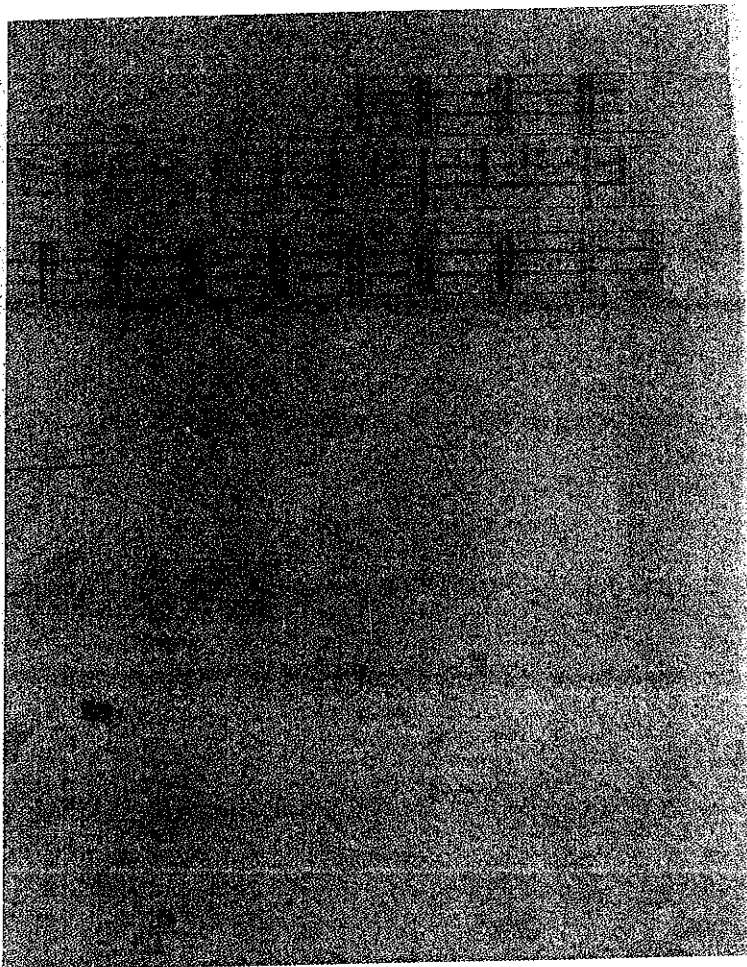


Figure 12

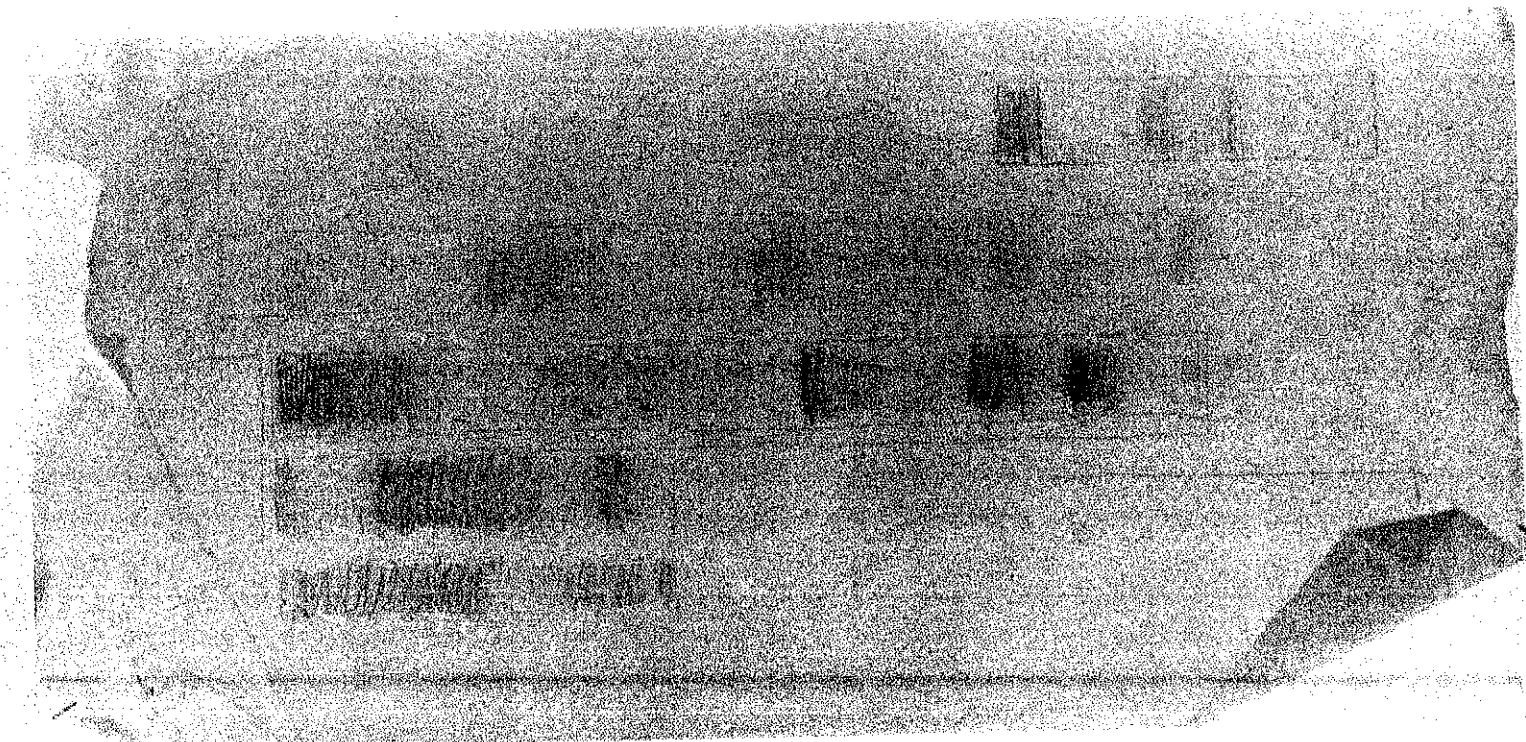


Figure 13

XX

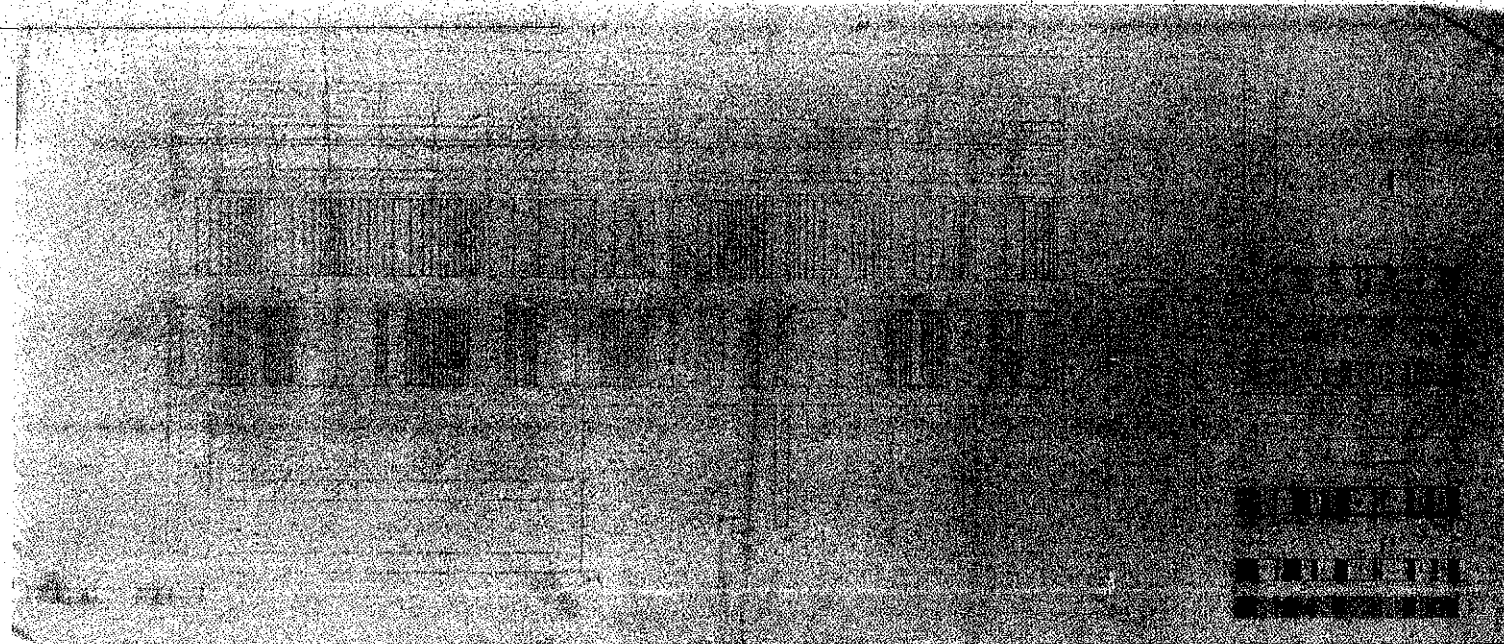


Figure 14

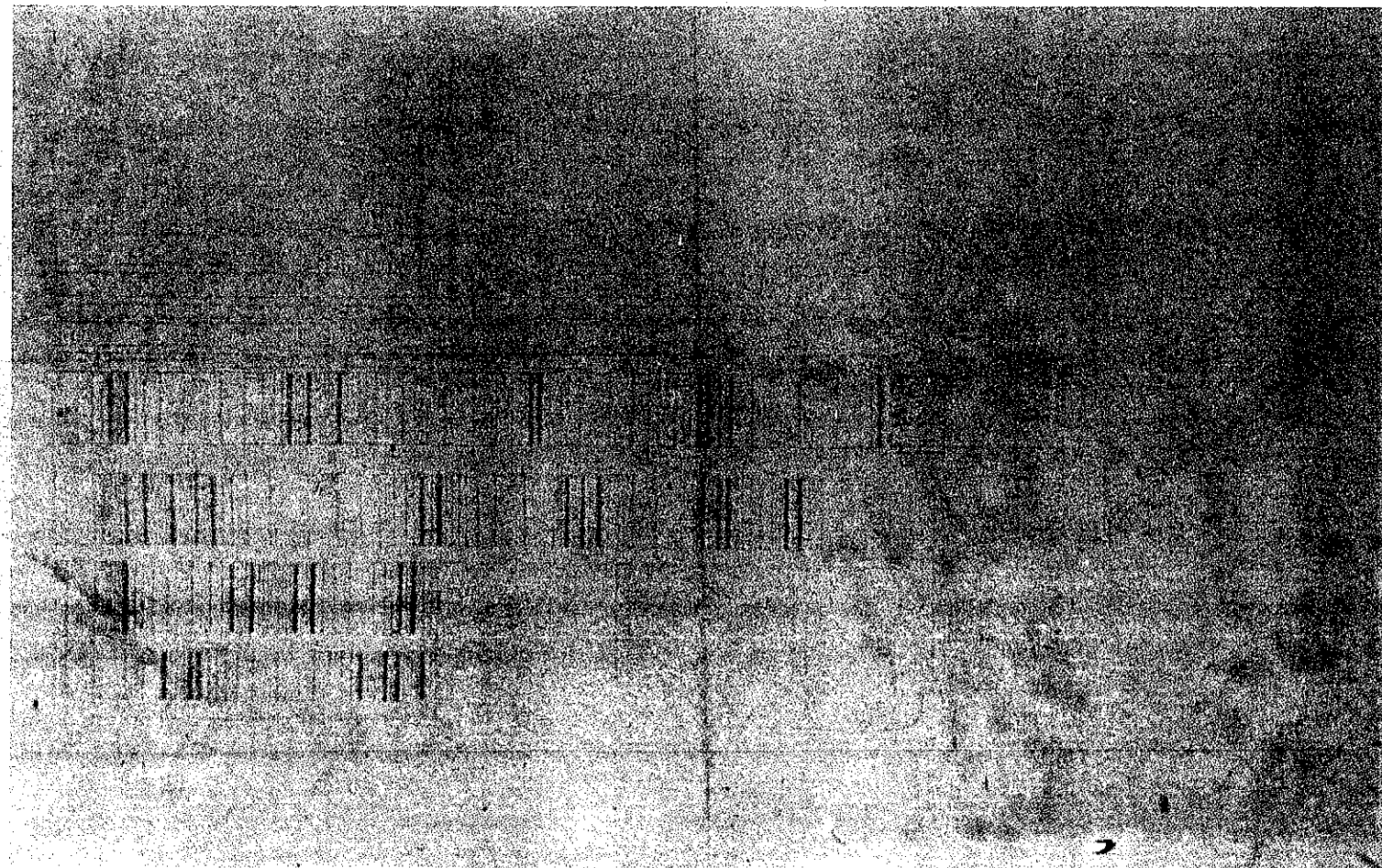


Figure 15

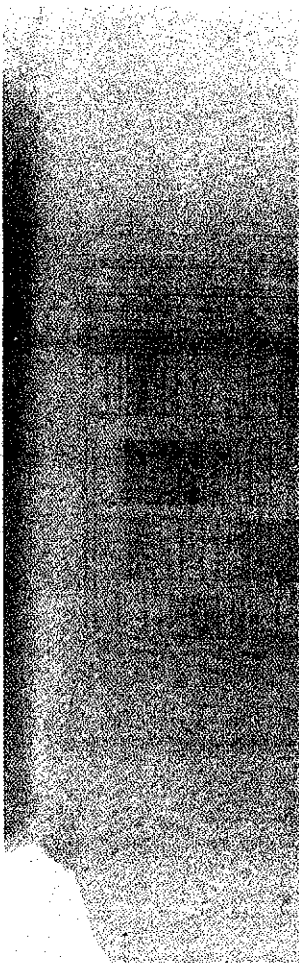
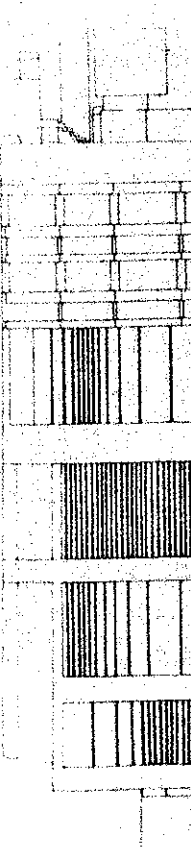


Figure 16



Couvent de
verre ondulé

Figure 17

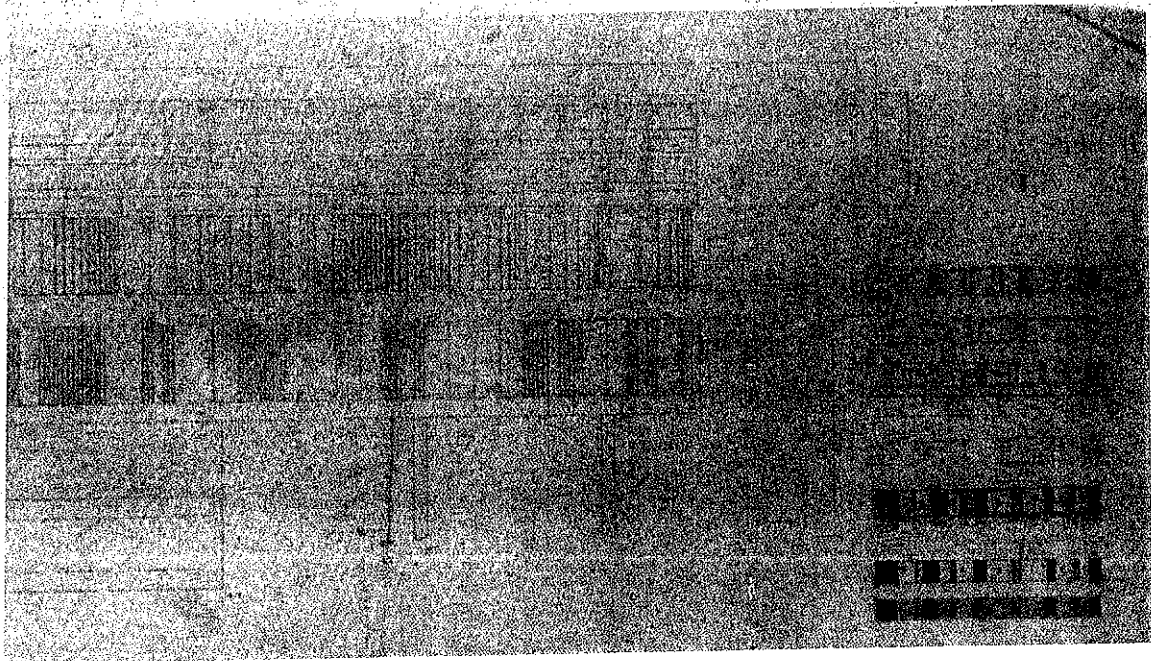
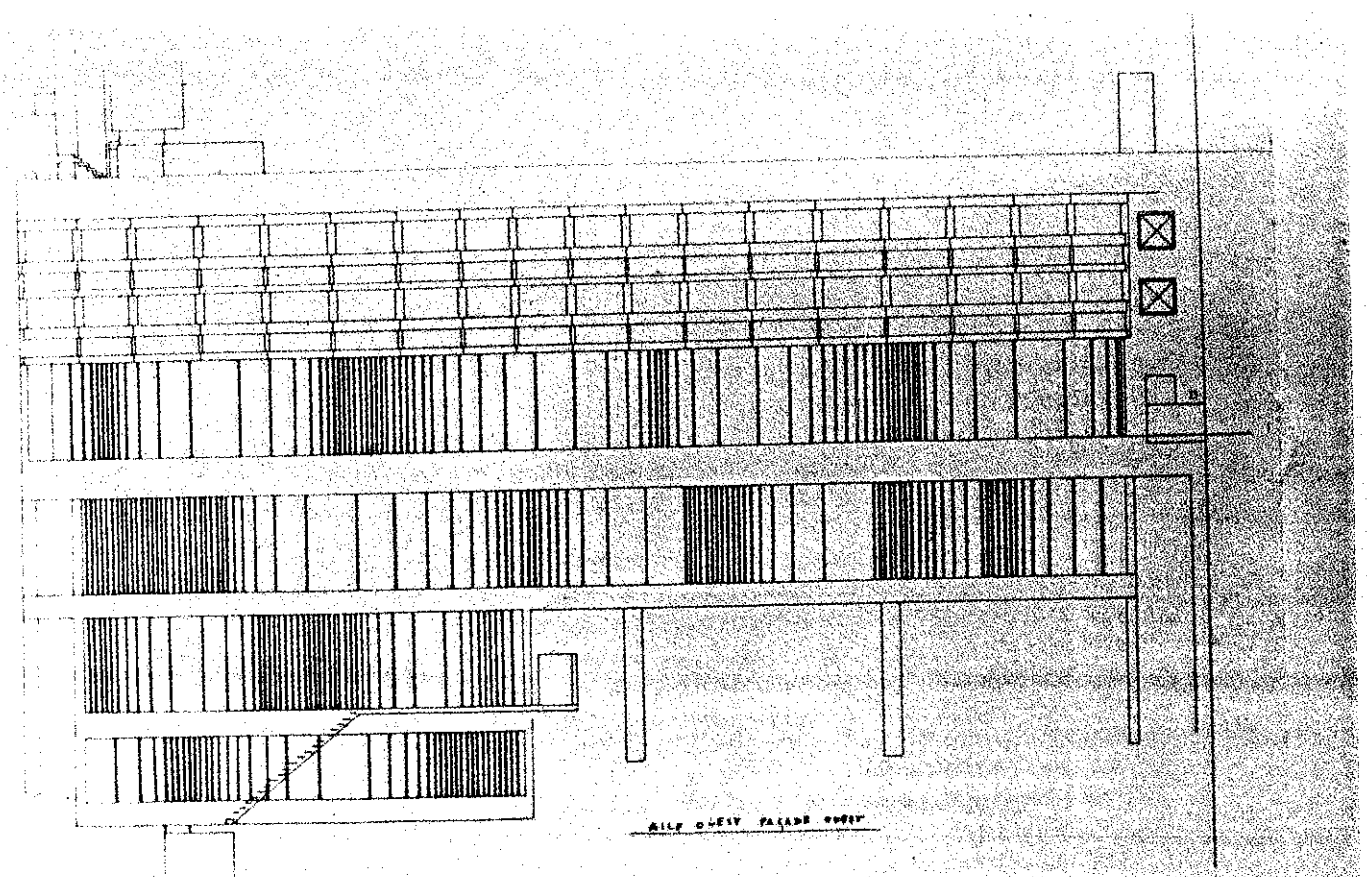
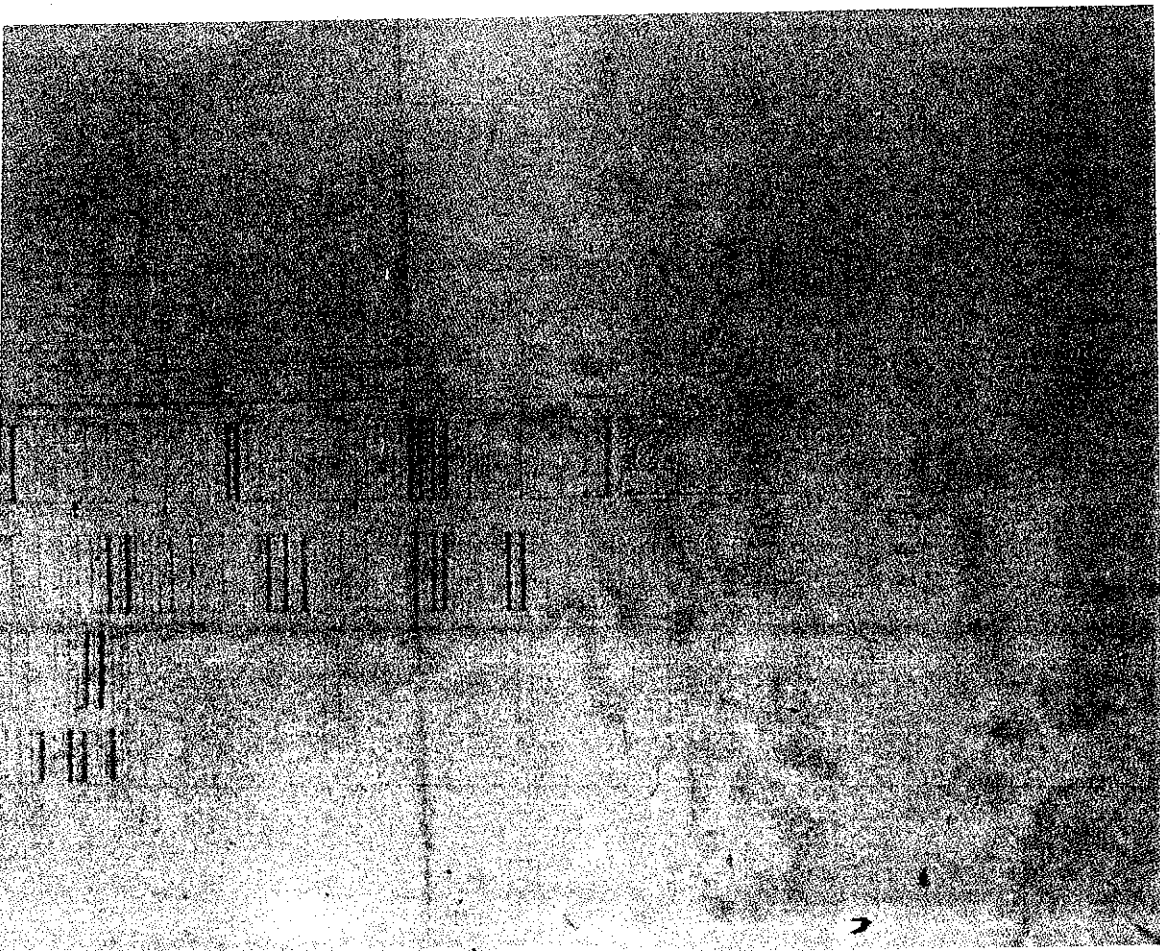
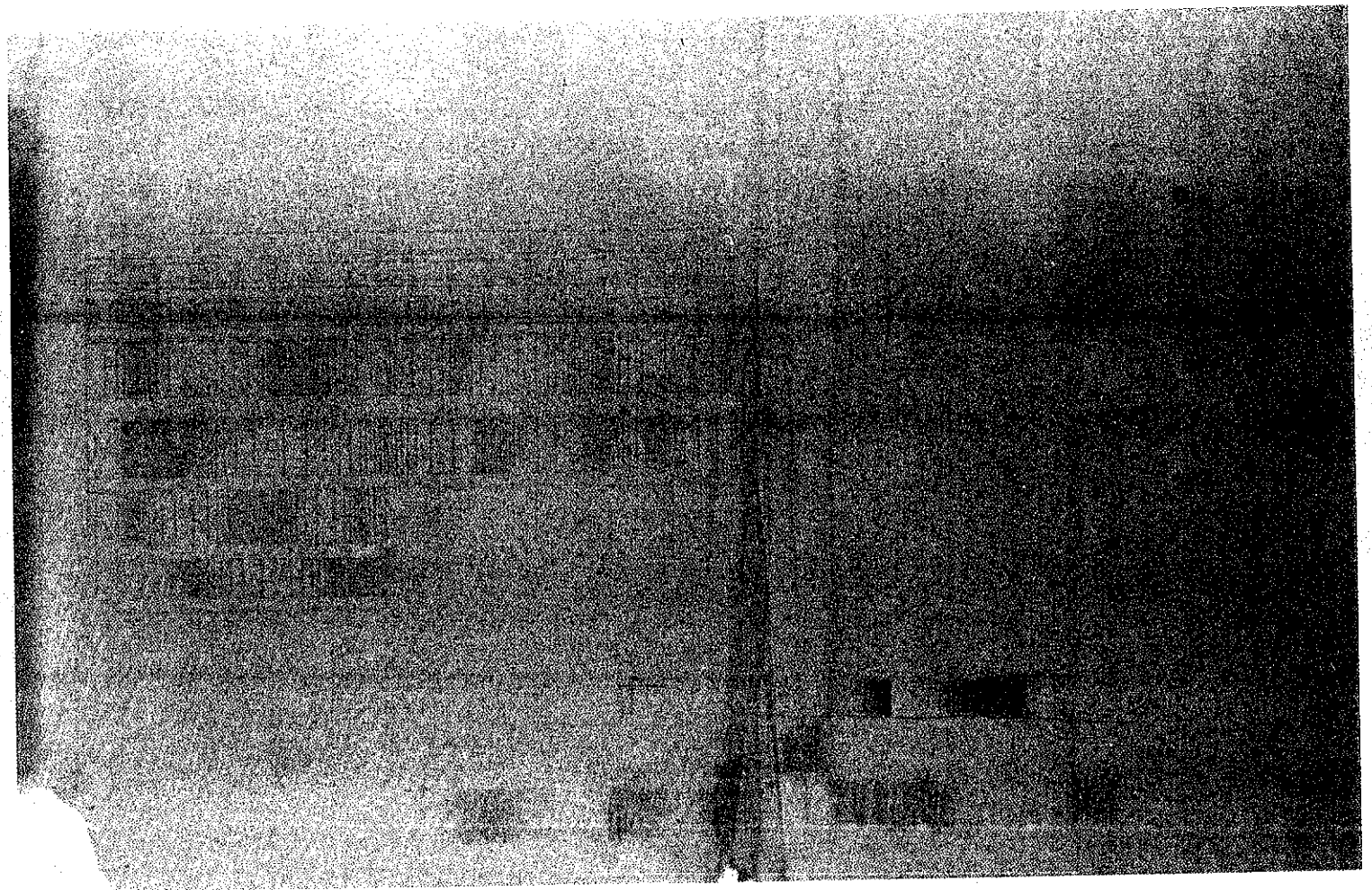


Figure 16



Couvent de Sainte-Marie-de-la-Tourette à Eveux sur l'Arbresle, 1955. Pans de verre ondulatories, façade ouest. Voir n° 150

Figure 17

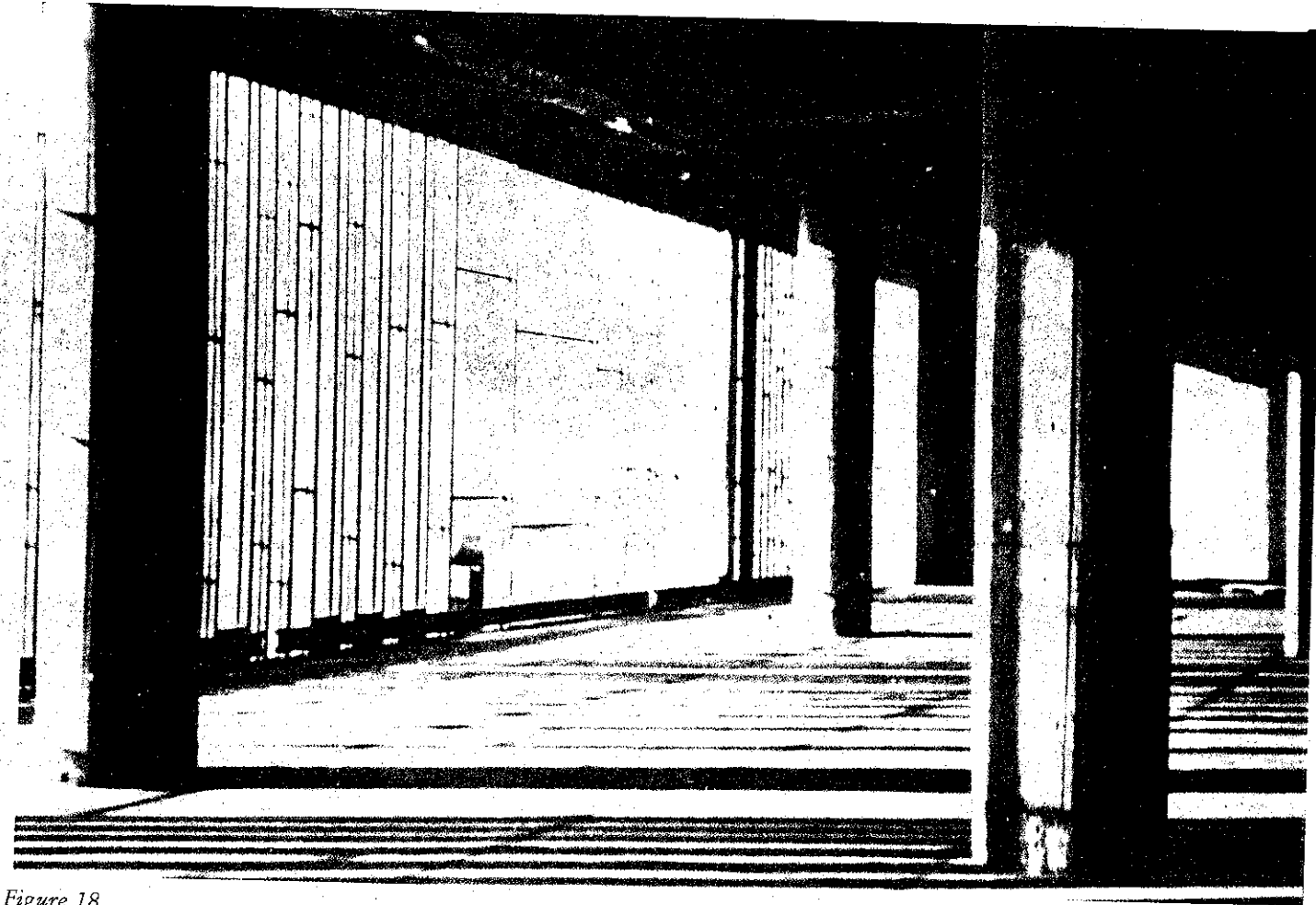


Figure 18



Figure 20

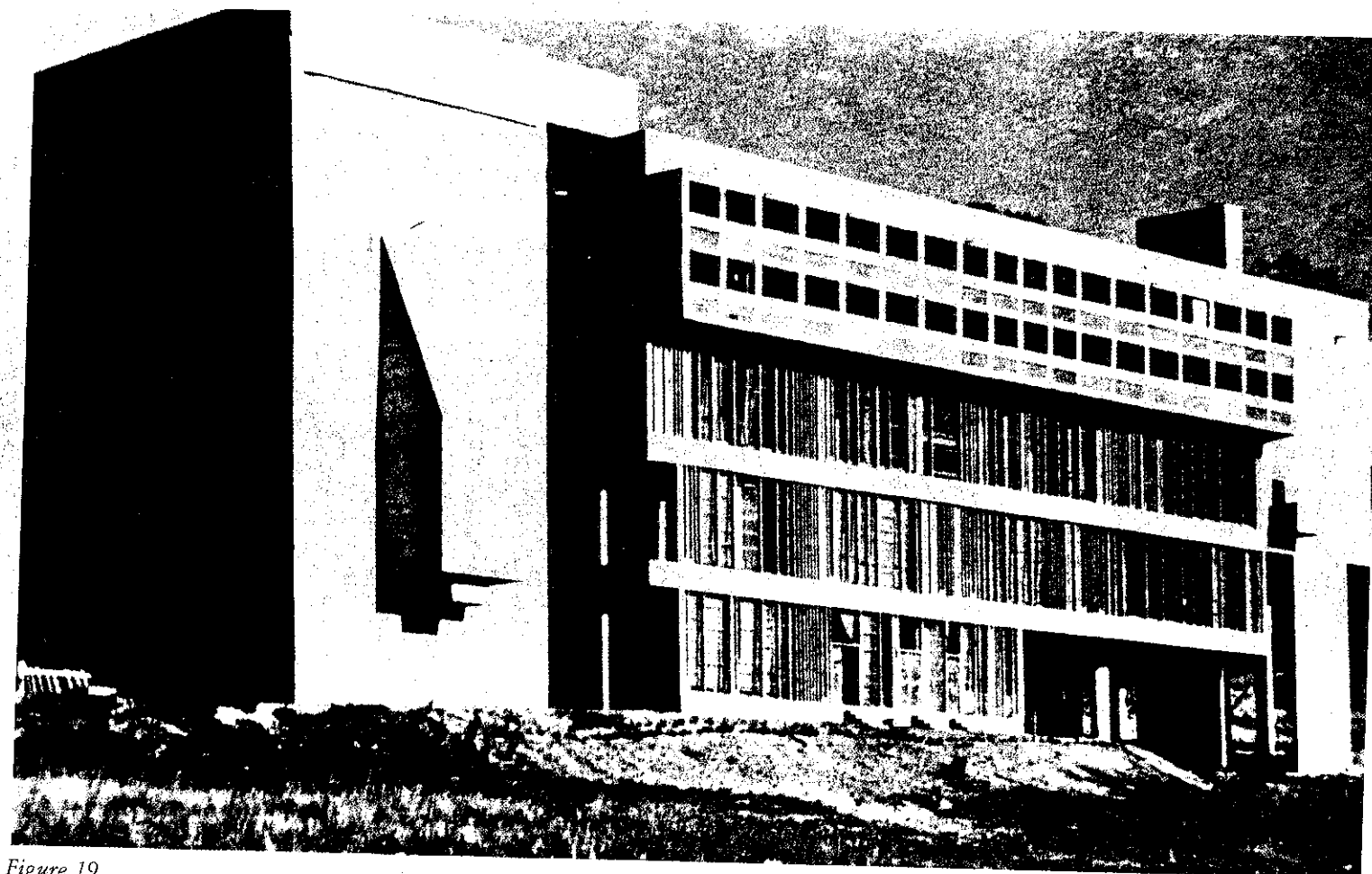


Figure 19

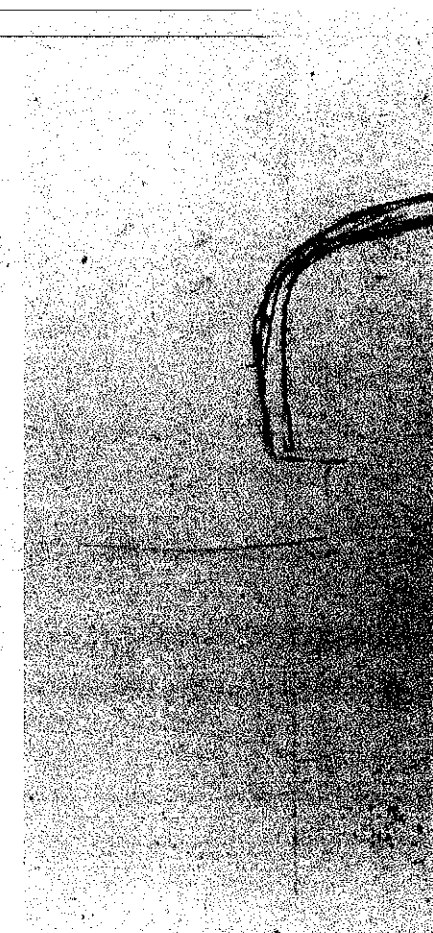


Figure 21

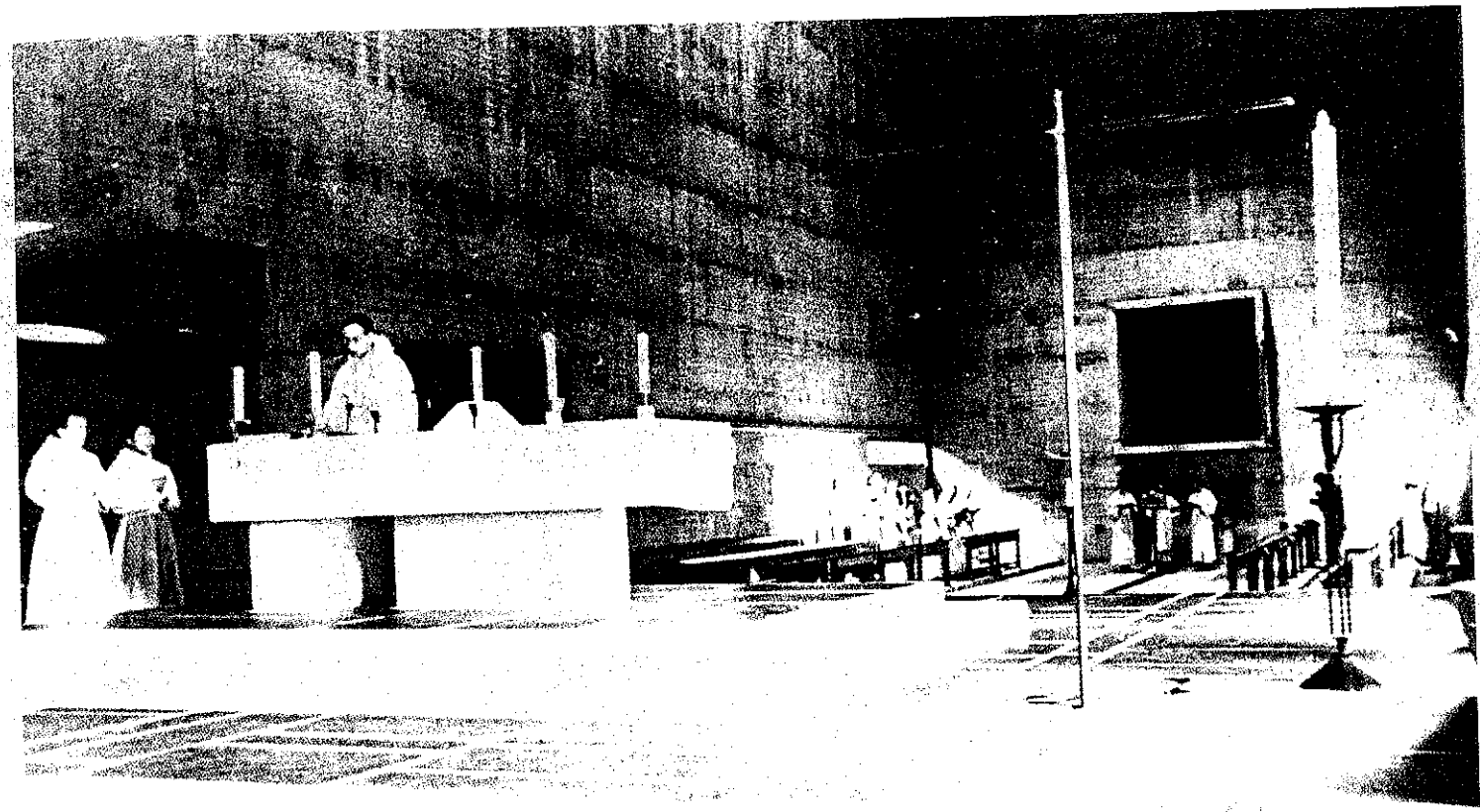
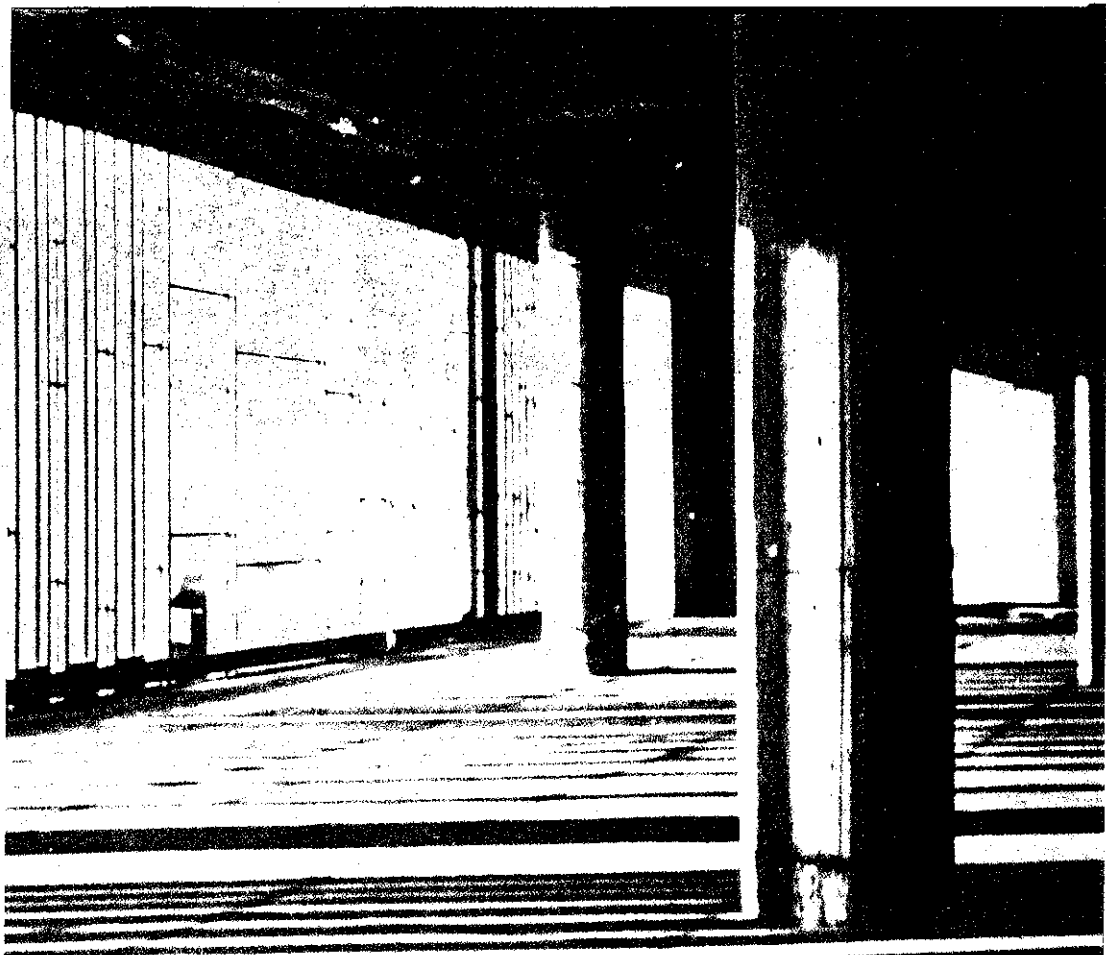


Figure 20

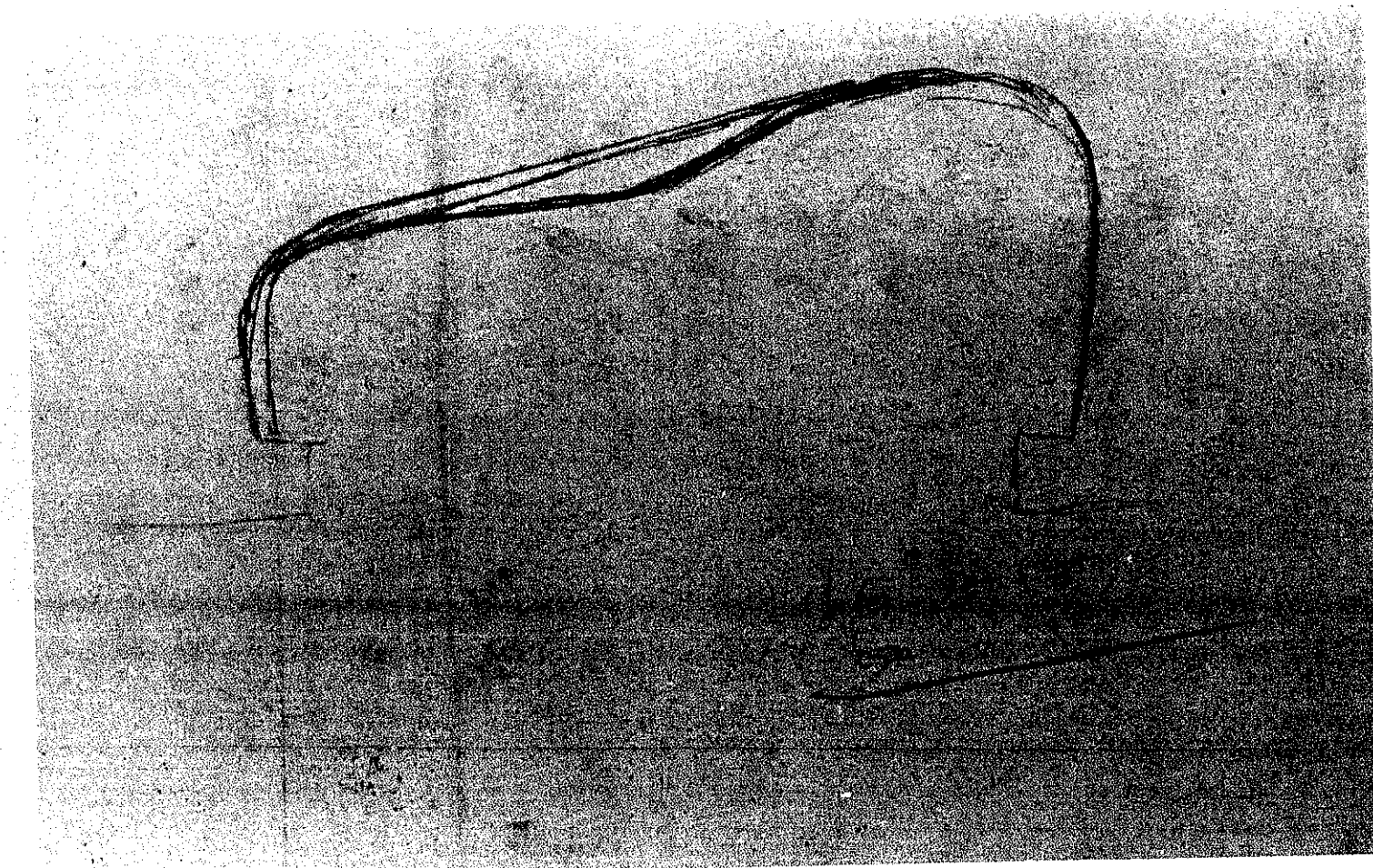
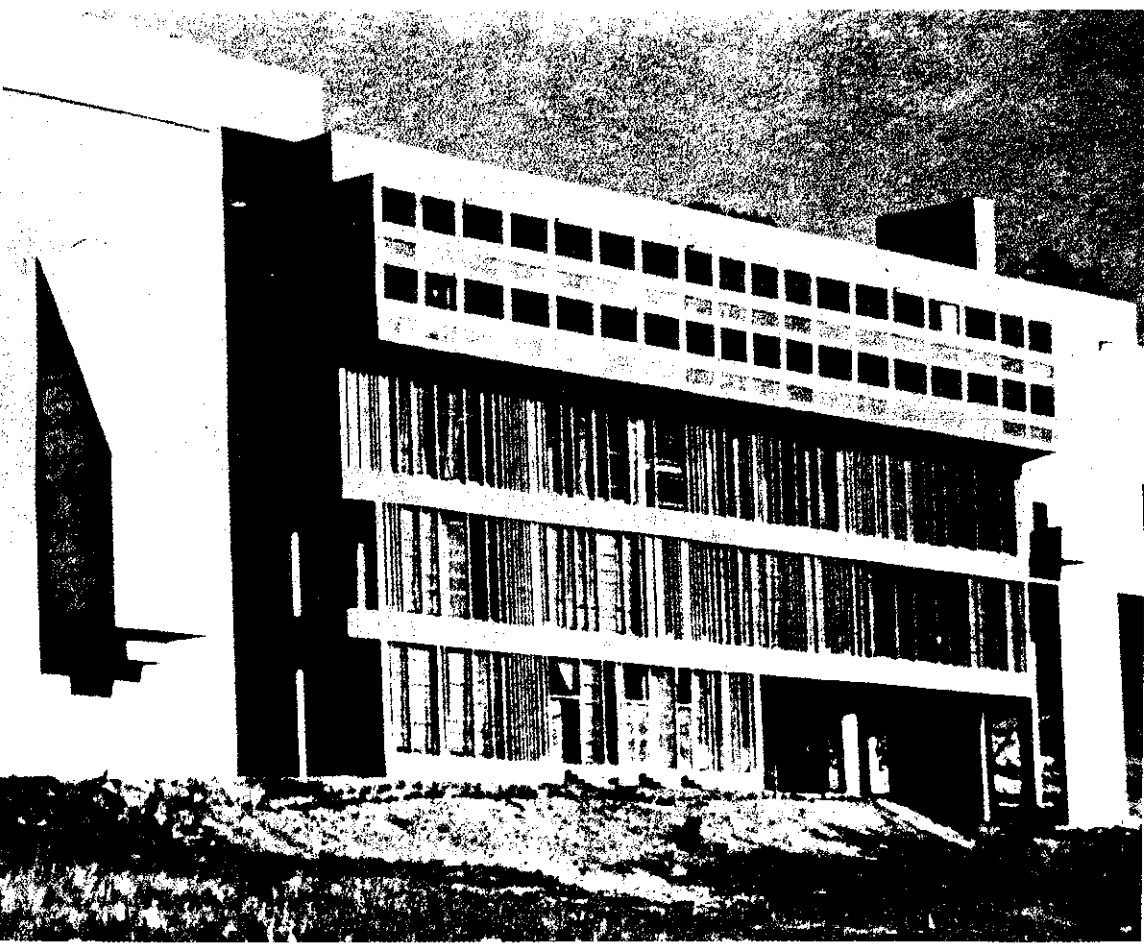


Figure 21

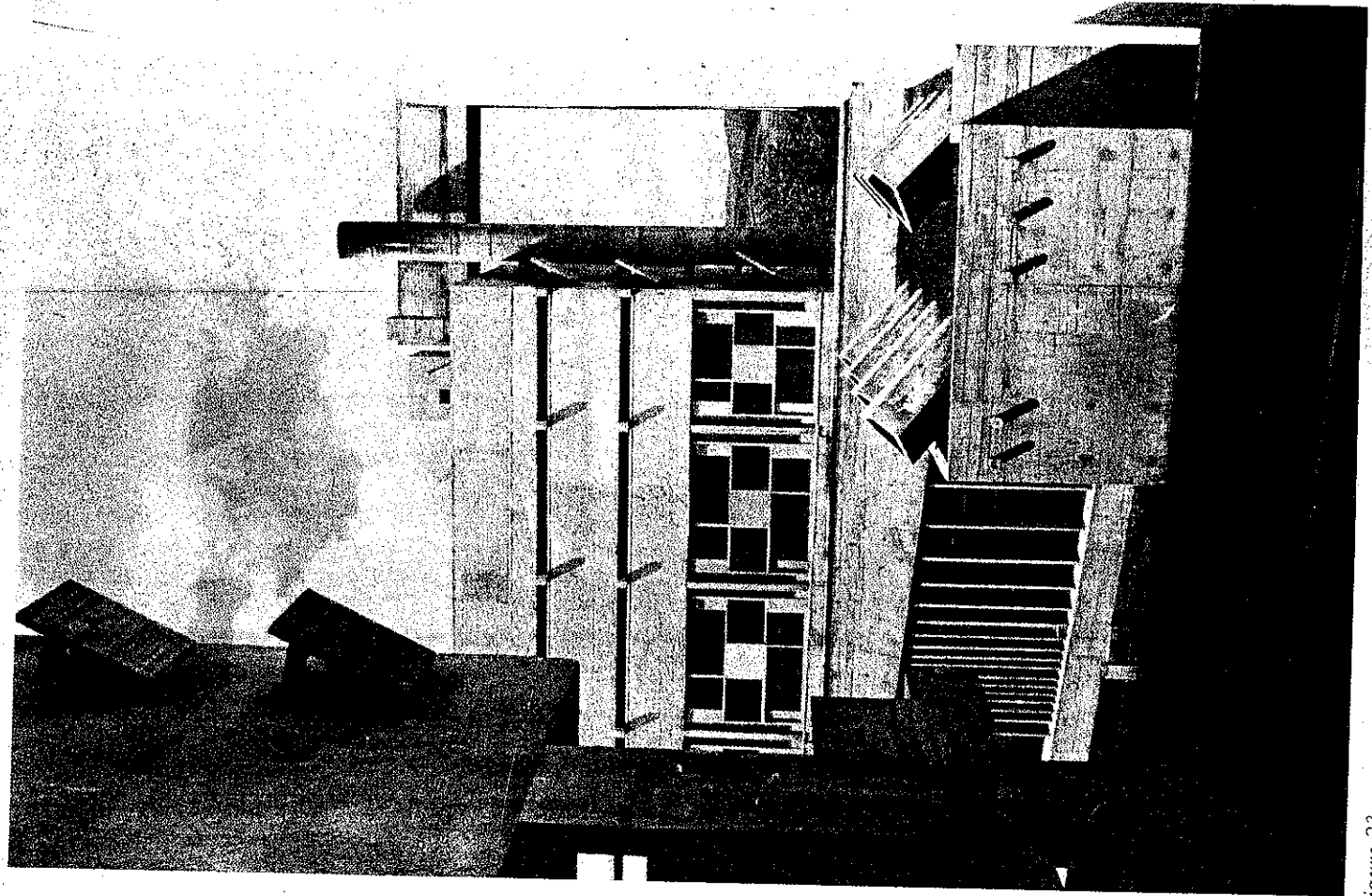


Figure 23

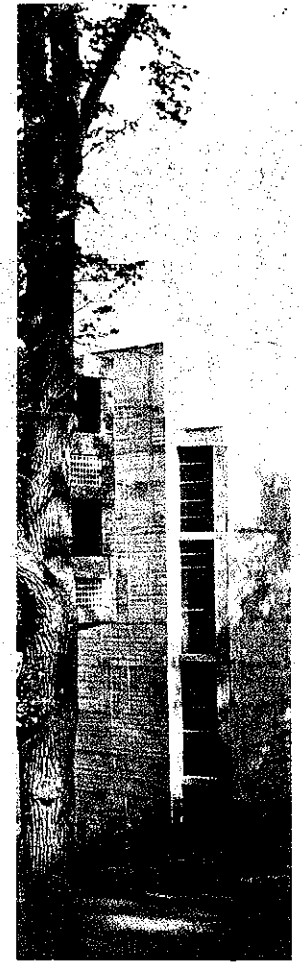


Figure 24

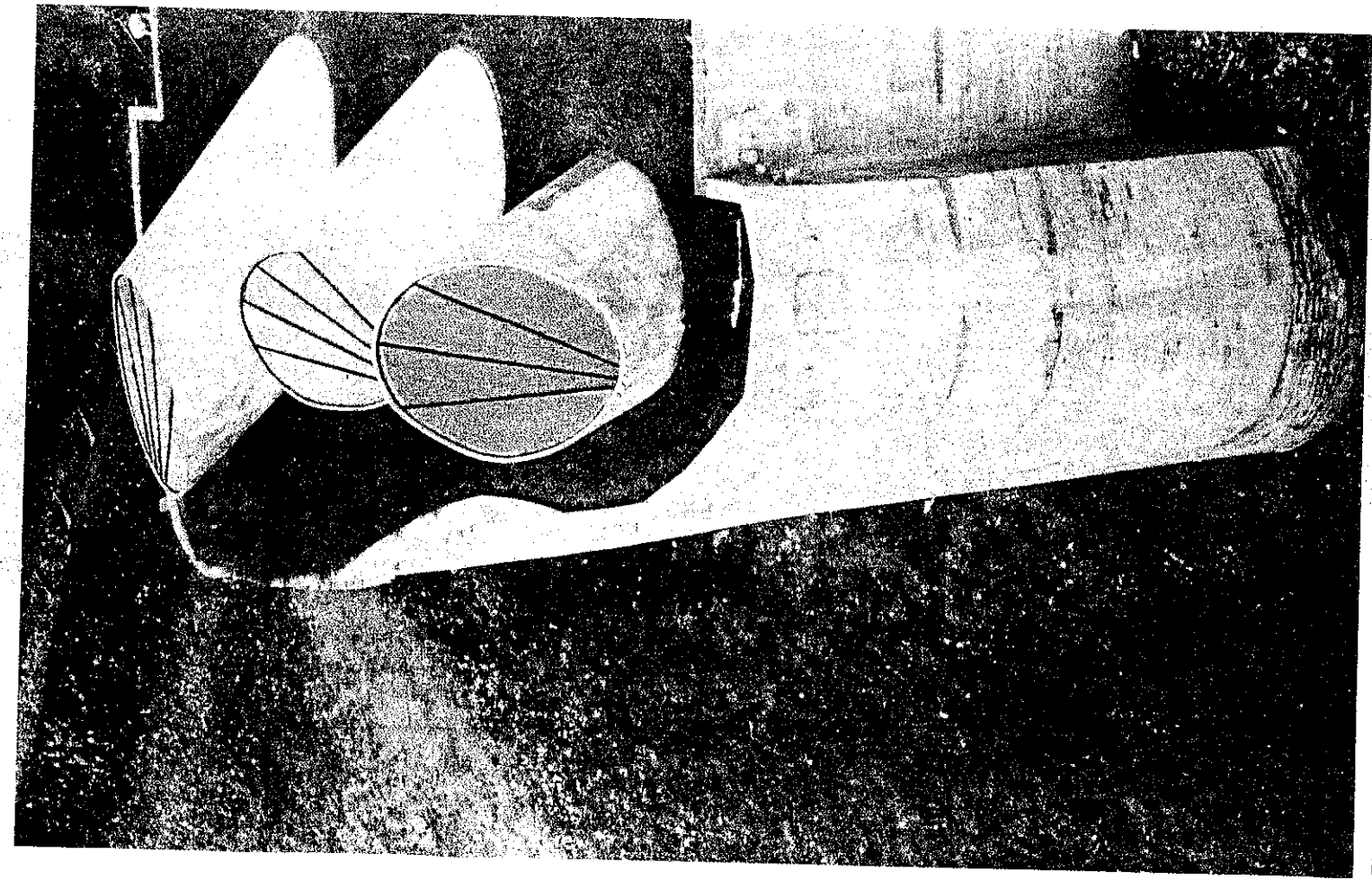


Figure 22

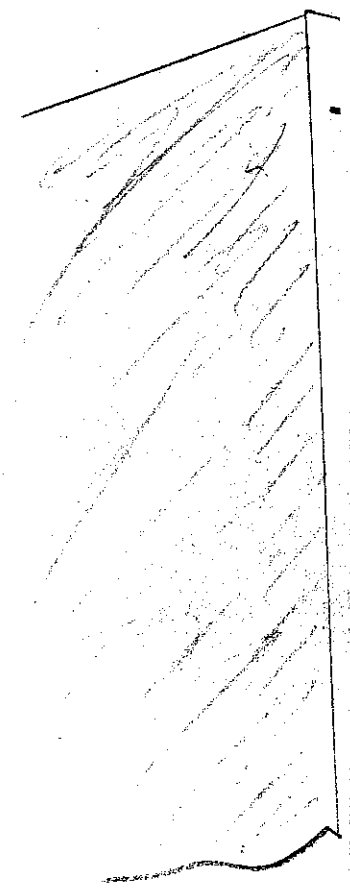


Figure 26

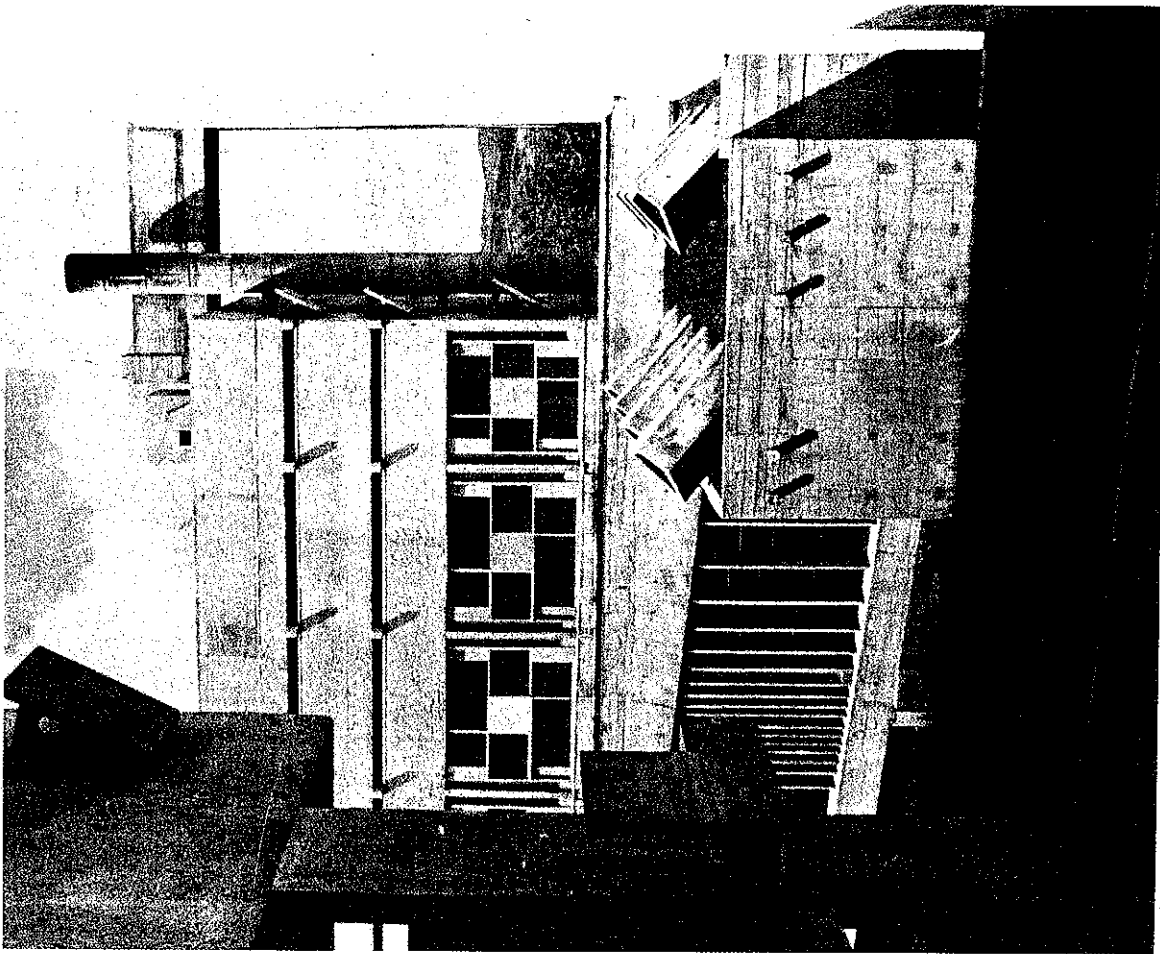


Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25

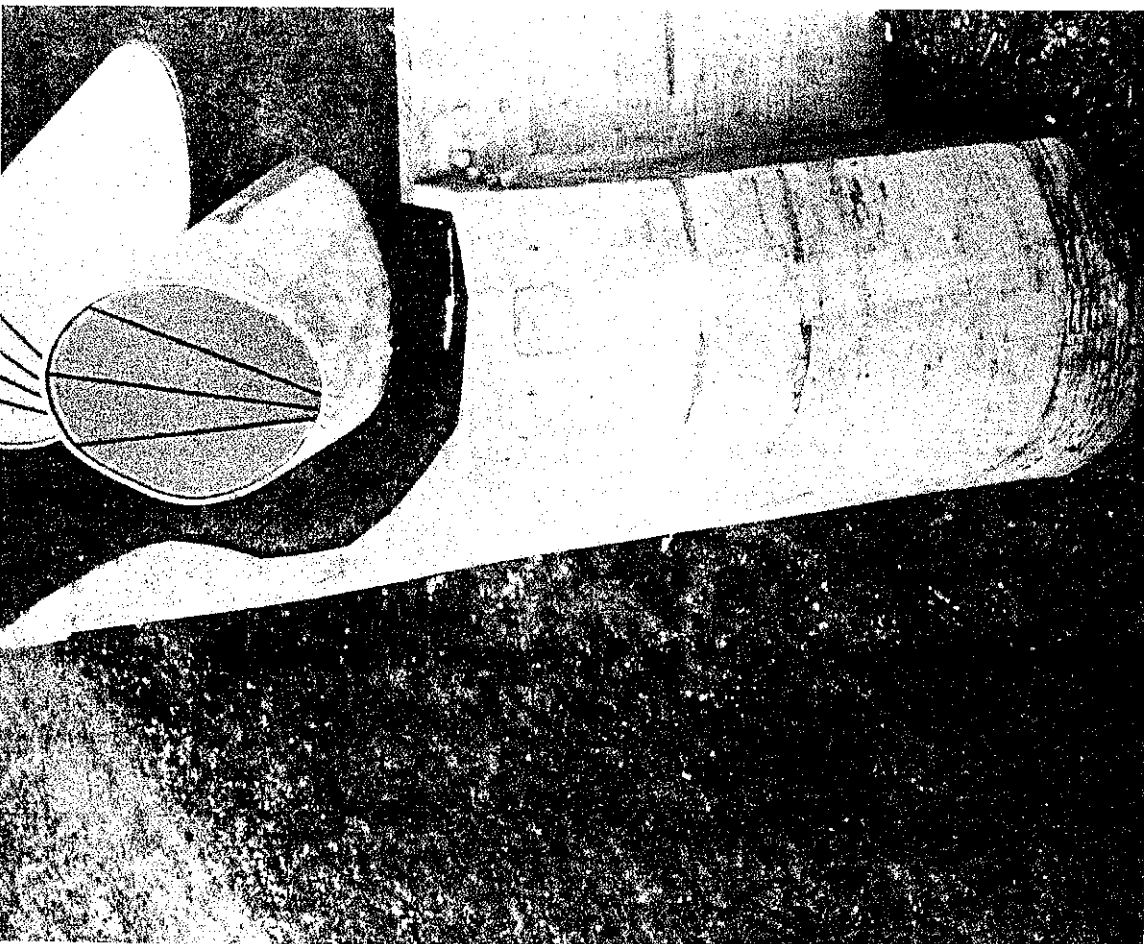


Figure 22

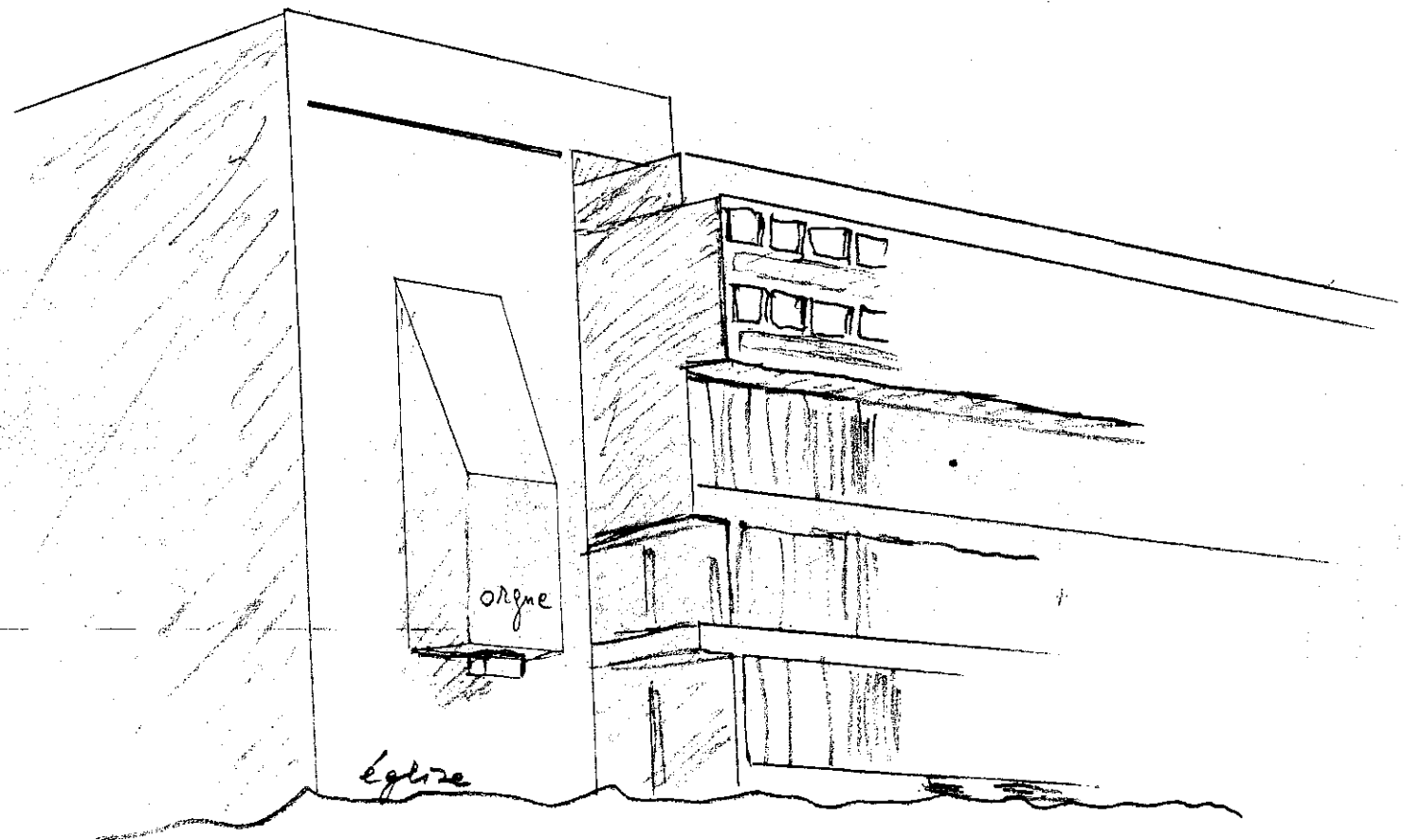


Figure 26



Figure 27

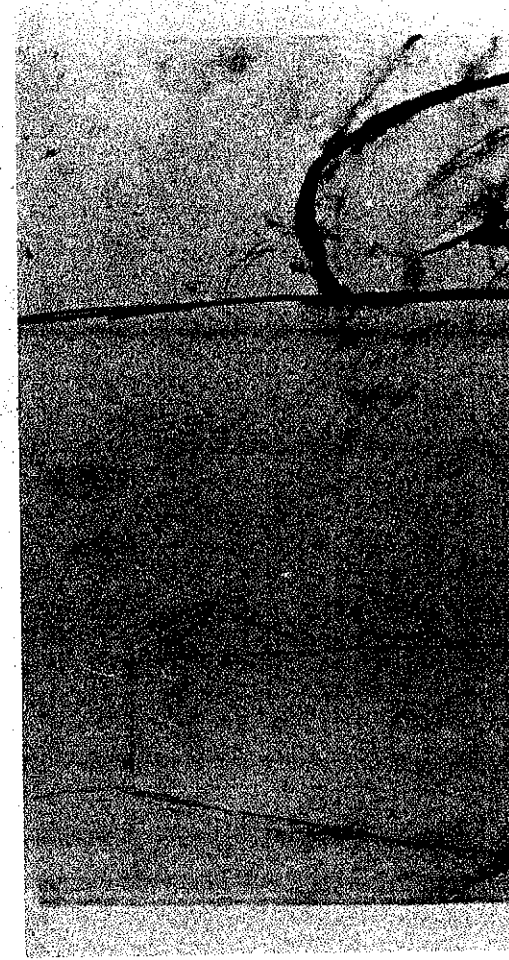


Figure 29

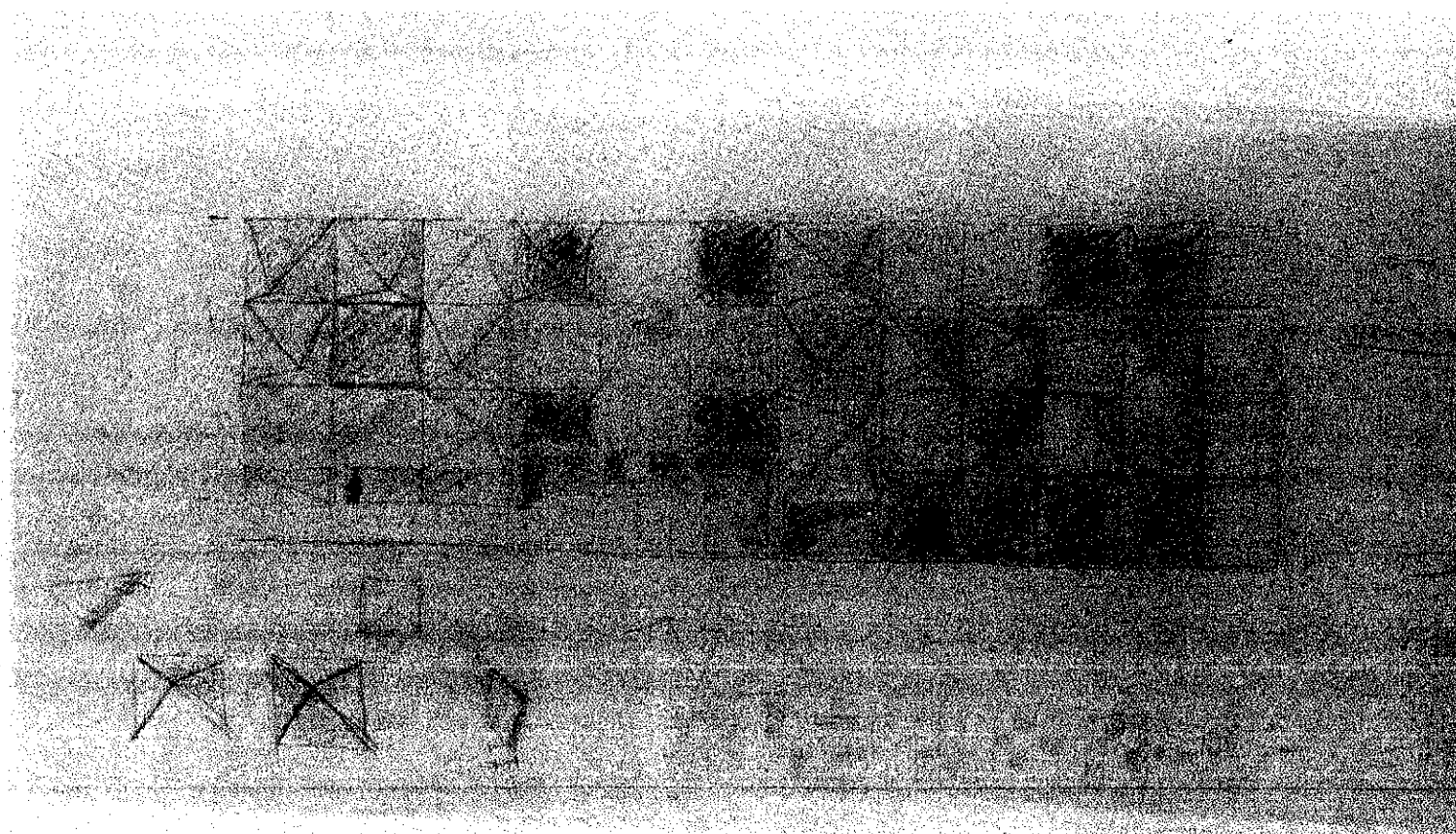


Figure 28



Figure 30

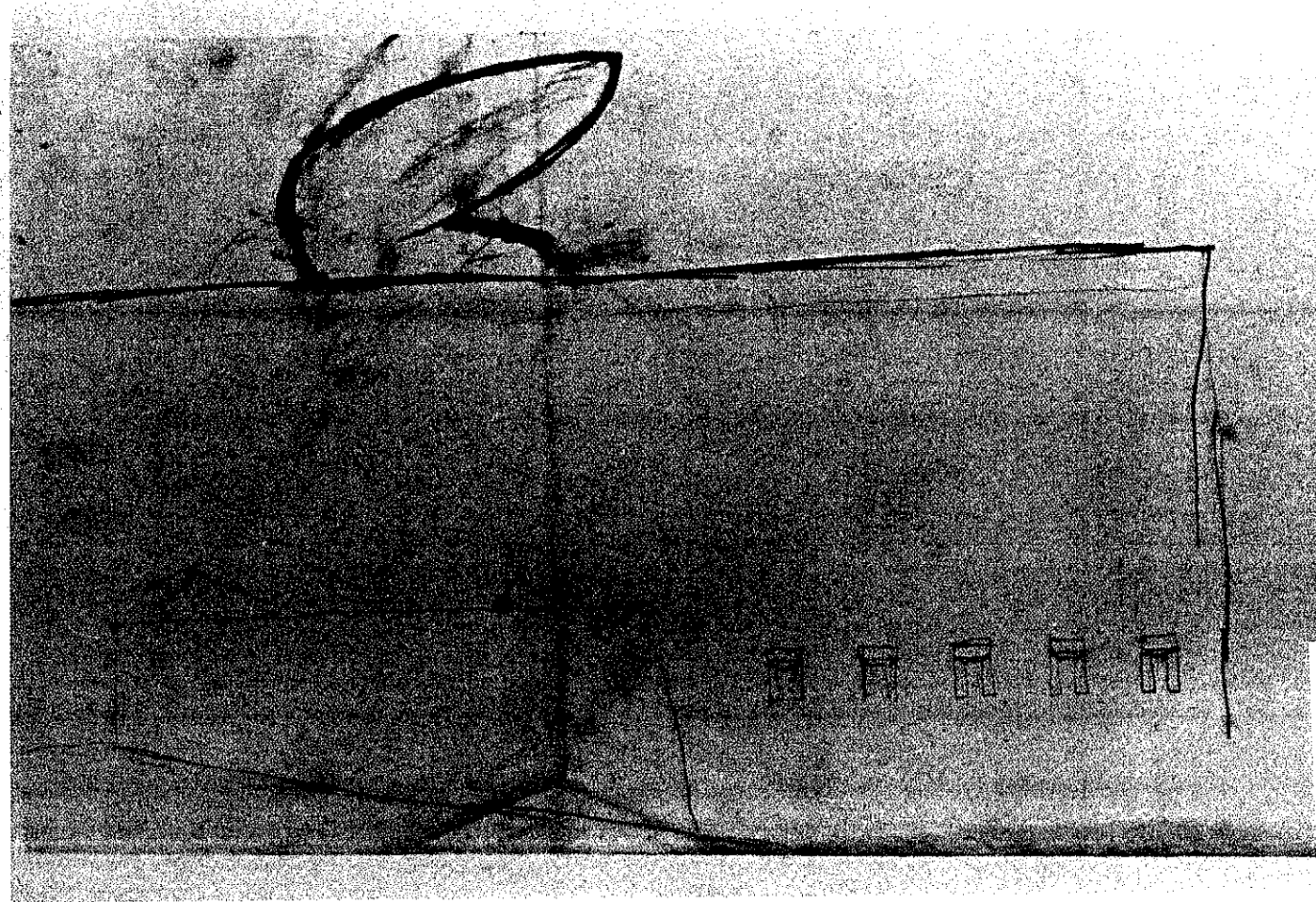


Figure 29

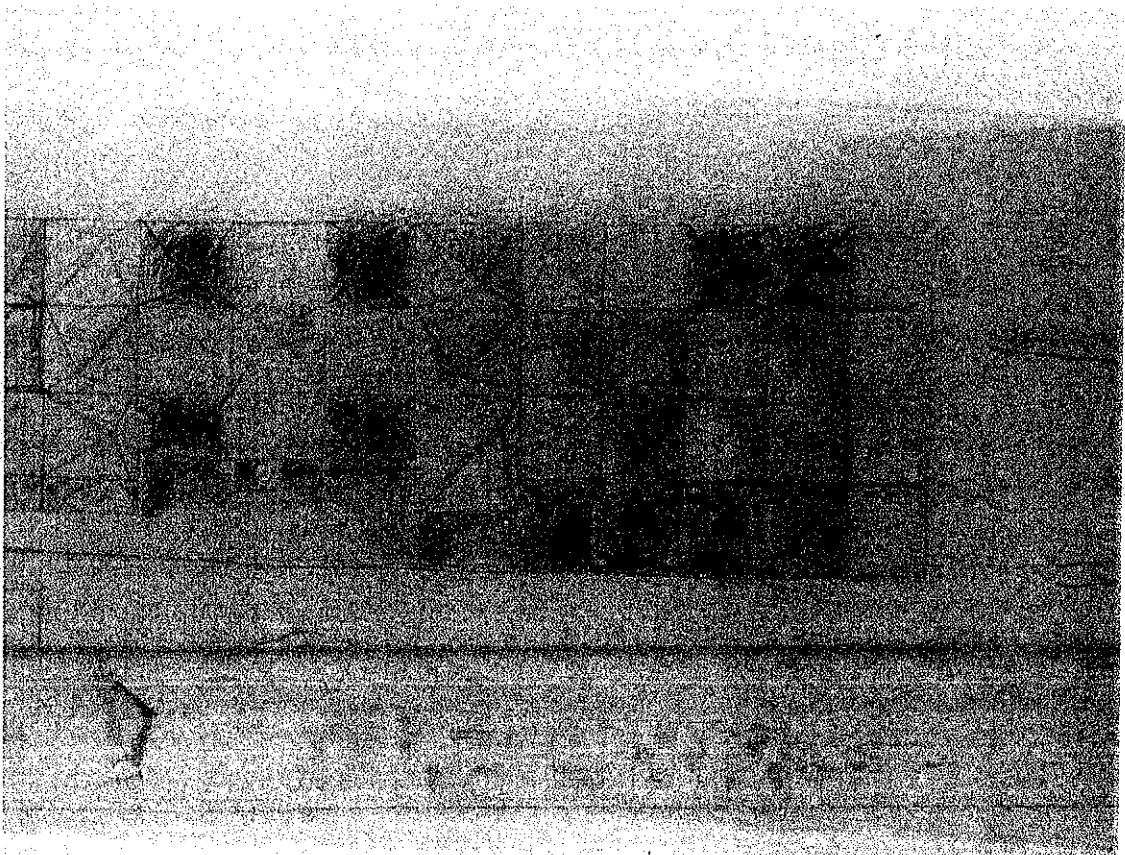
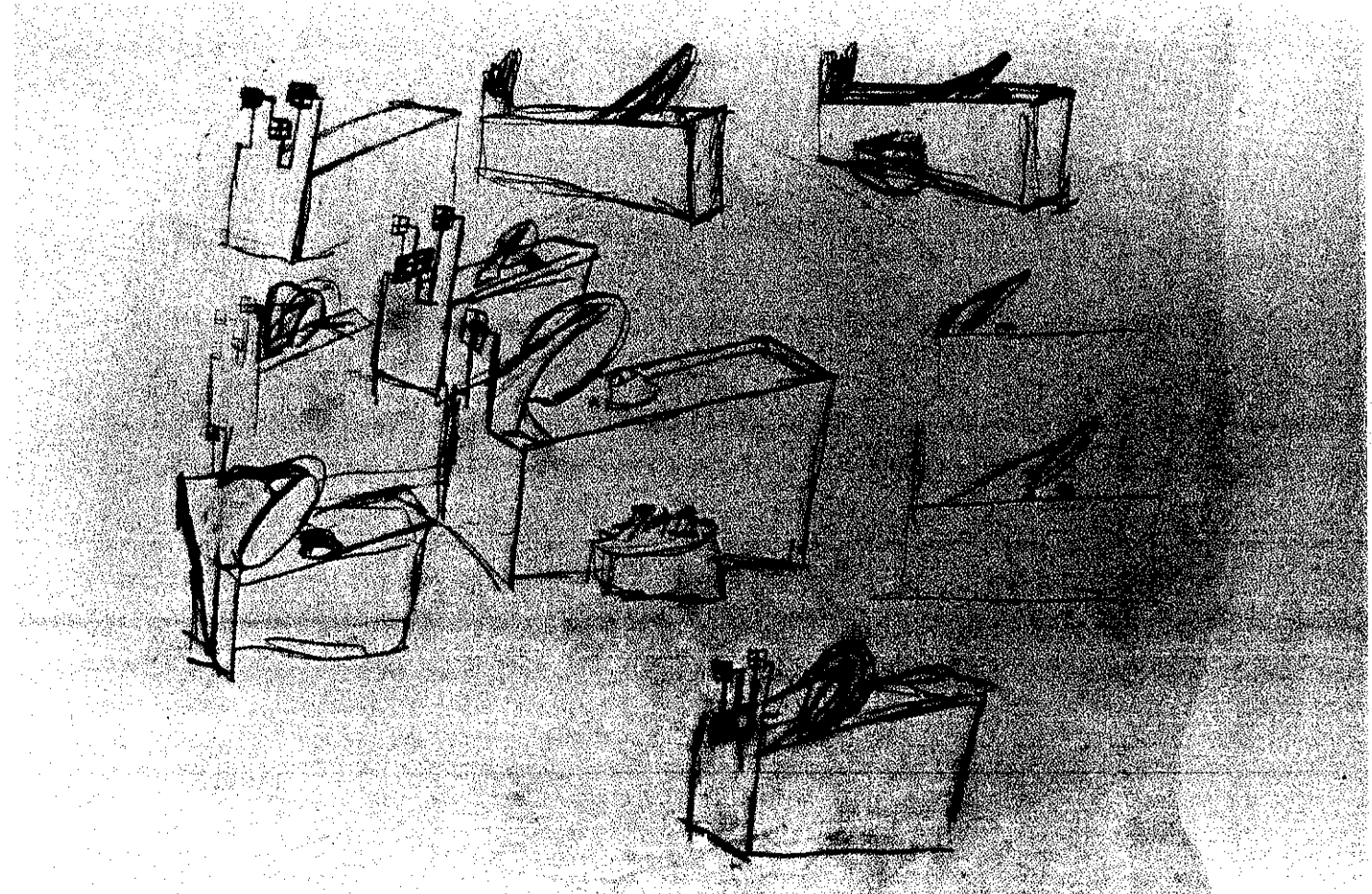


Figure 30



A Note on the C

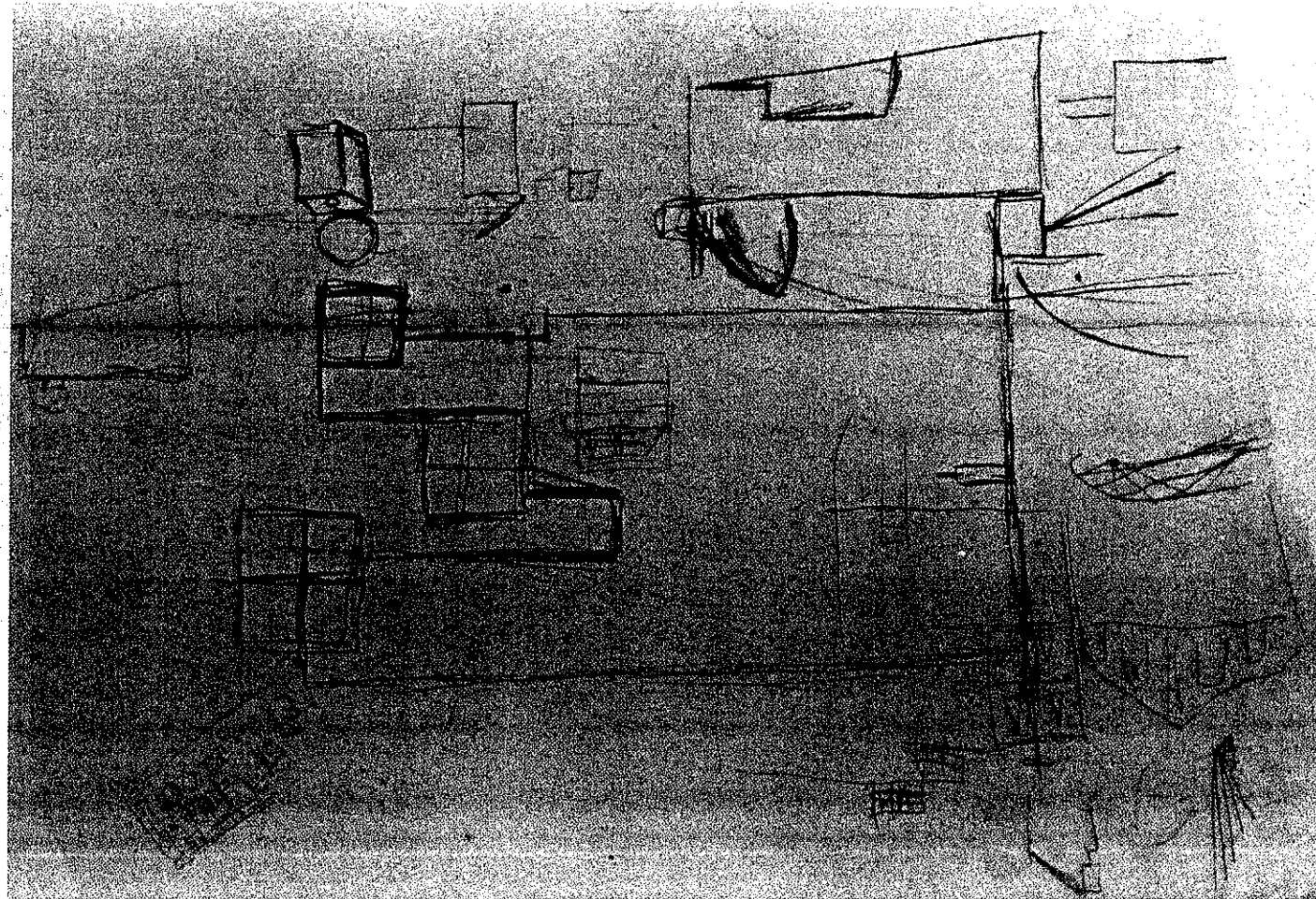


Figure 32

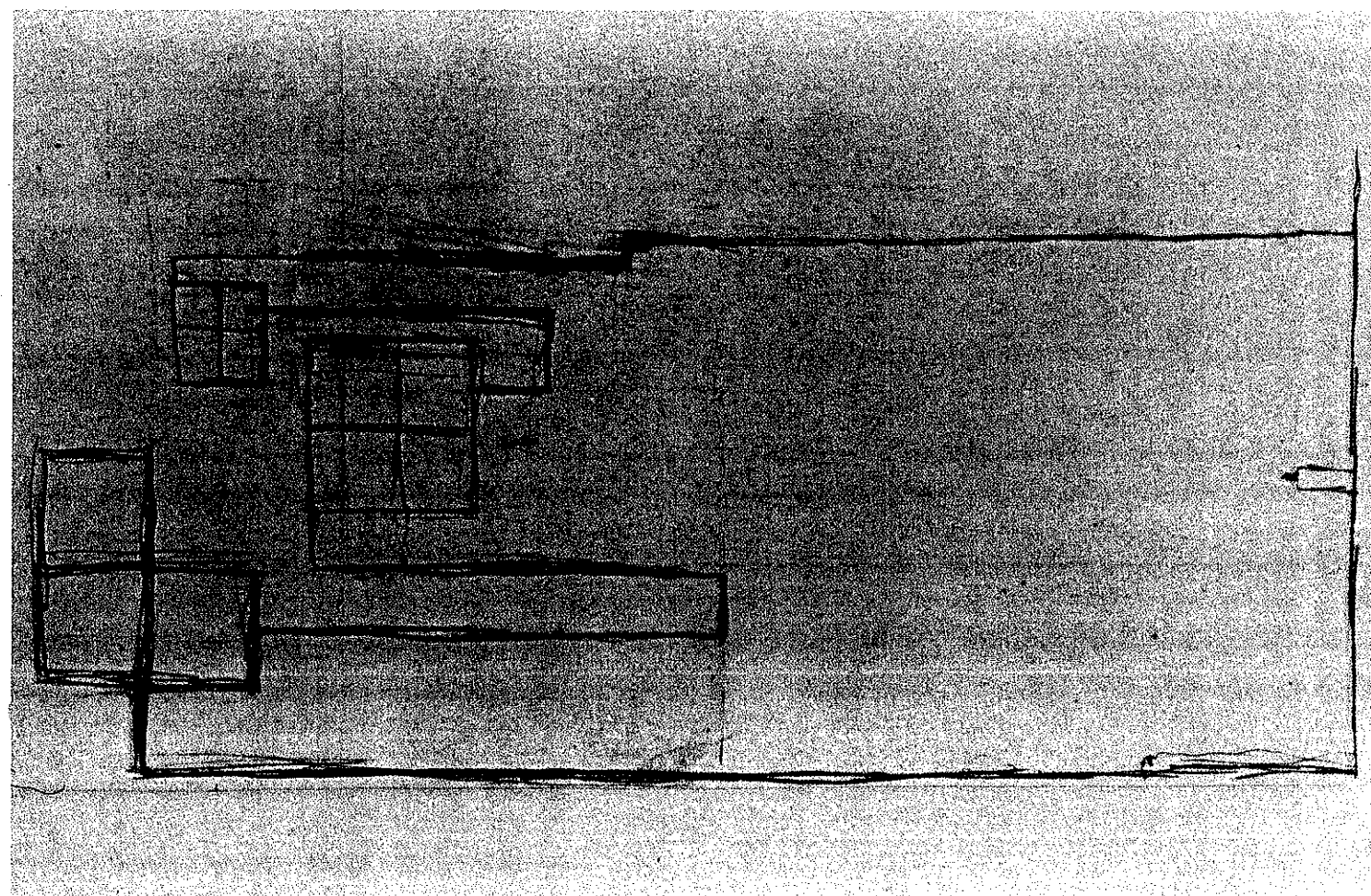


Figure 31

The Fondation Le Corbusier drawing with a card containing categories of information; edition prints the information cards, separating the categories.

The categories are:

1. *Title*: usually a little something written on the drawing itself.
2. *Description*: (a) in the style of the drawing, sketch or more formal mode of presentation, etc.), and its subject, any other extrinsic appears on the drawing mentioned here; also includes comments Corbusier has made (that a blueprint or exist, for instance)
3. *Scale*: taken from normalized to the drawing.
4. *Signature*: given a drawing. On the drawing, signature of the drafter, the person who apparently draw, the signature is illegible or omitted.
5. *Date*: the latest date drawing. Dates are day first, then the month, then the year. If is June 5, 1929. If the form is 5-6-29.
6. *Medium*: gives the (ink, pencil, charcoal, etc.)
7. *Material*: gives the means of reproduction.
8. *Dimensions*: of the drawing. They are always given with the height before the width, 0,47 x 1,67.