

DENOTATION

A
Literate
Institution
for
a
Small
Southern
Town

Gregory Paul Louviere

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**A Literate Institution for
a Small Southern Town**

by

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MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
Abstract	2
The Commentary	3
The Library	6
The Story	13
Bibliography	25

PREFACE

The structure of this work is to provide and substantiate the denotative analogical background of the “field” as opposed to the connotative foreground of the “object.” The accompanying texts recede into a formal stratification, rather than a prioritized hierarchy. Each of these three texts--The Commentary, The Library, and The Story--contribute distinct aspects to the denotative field as an architectural investigation. The Commentary responds to The Story; The Library responds to both The Story and The Commentary, serving as a sort of “link” between the two.

"It is not always necessary for the true to be embodied; it is enough if it flutters nearby as spirit and generates a sort of concord, like when the sound of bells floats as a friend in the air and as a bearer of peace."

Martin Heidegger

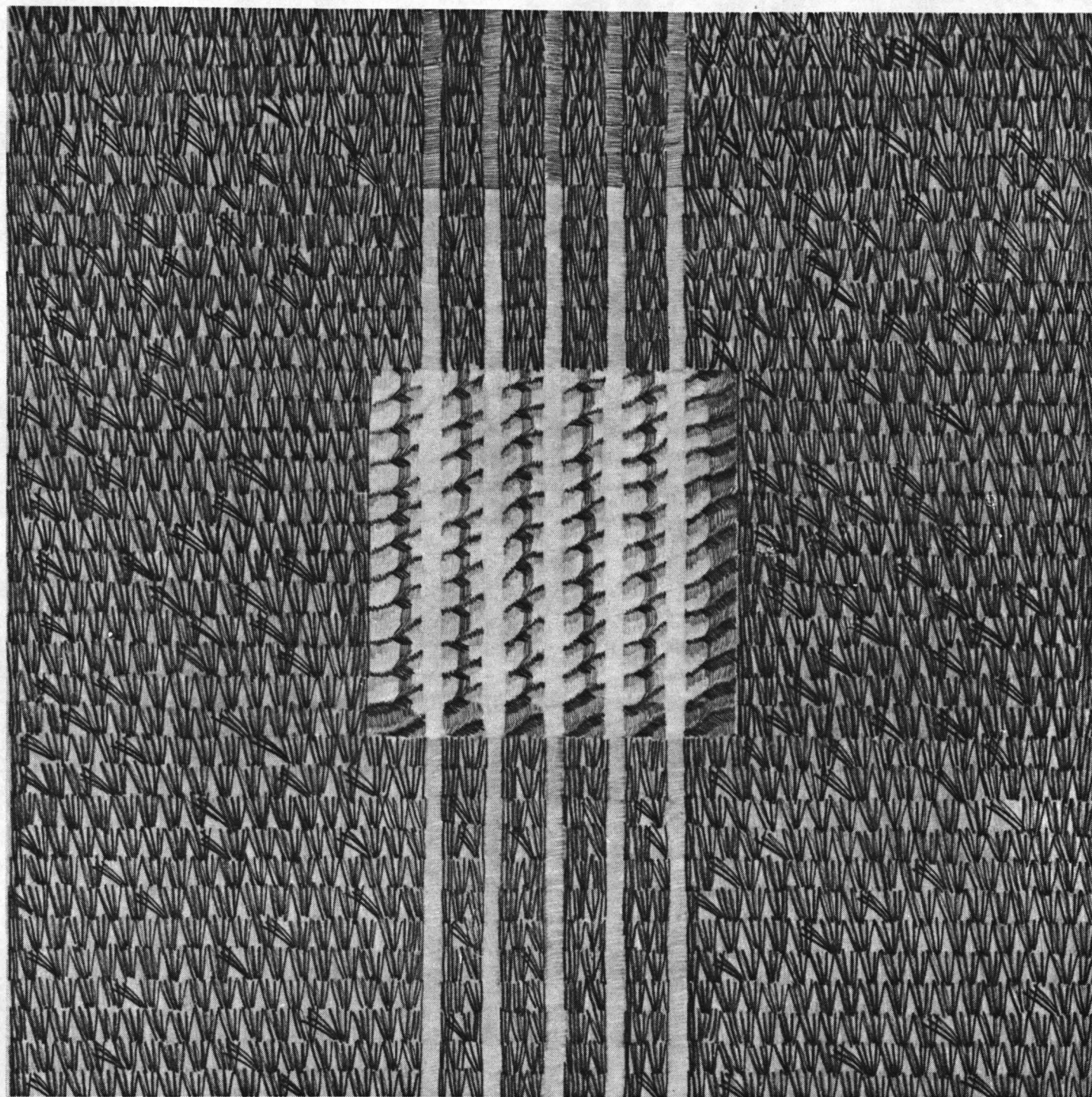
ABSTRACT

The usage of the paired terms of denotation and connotation are one means by which language provides for the declarative knowing of all things; denotation is a naming by means of indication, whereas connotation is that which incites the specificity of meaning to a particular thing. Where the denotative assumes a recessive posturing of a formal ambiguity, the connotative proceeds towards a greater clarity with the intention of potential certainty and separateness in meaning. In the same manner as with language, the denotative in architecture responds to the elemental analogue

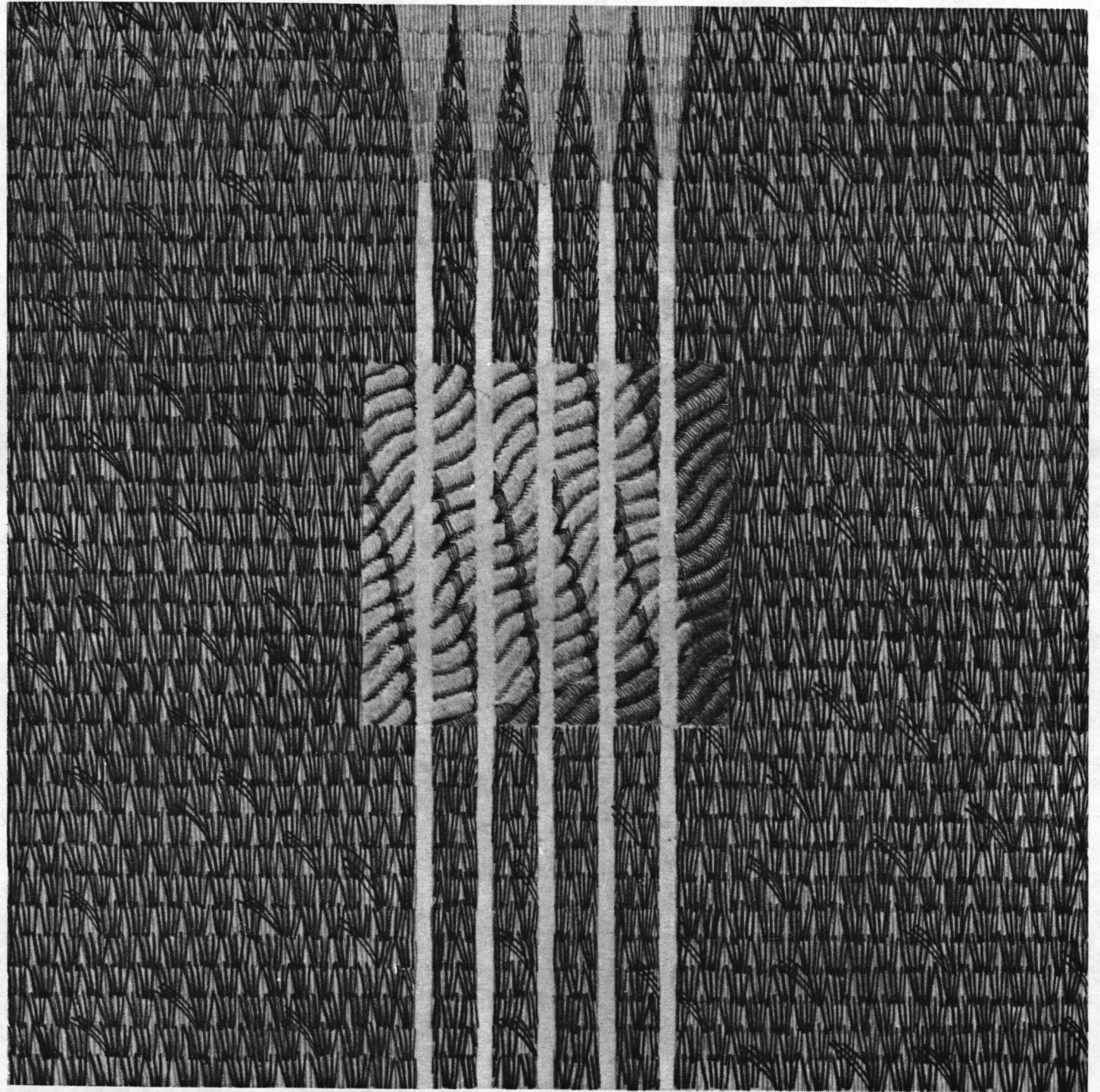
operatively as a background within a field of signification, whereas the connotative responds to the elemental analogue exemplifying an objectification through categorical distinction.

The use of the term denotation as the title of this exploration is to instate the accompanying text within the resonance of the denotative background in an attempt to circumvent a connotative, architectural objectification, at times operating under the guise of evidential justification. This circumvention, by means of the denotative positioning, is not meant as a vindication of the architectural object; rather, it is meant as a critique of the autonomy of the object and the foreground that it inhabits. This use of denotative background (not as a dialectical or teleological response to the connotative object) is to provide for an ungrounding in the work to the primacy of object as architectural edification.

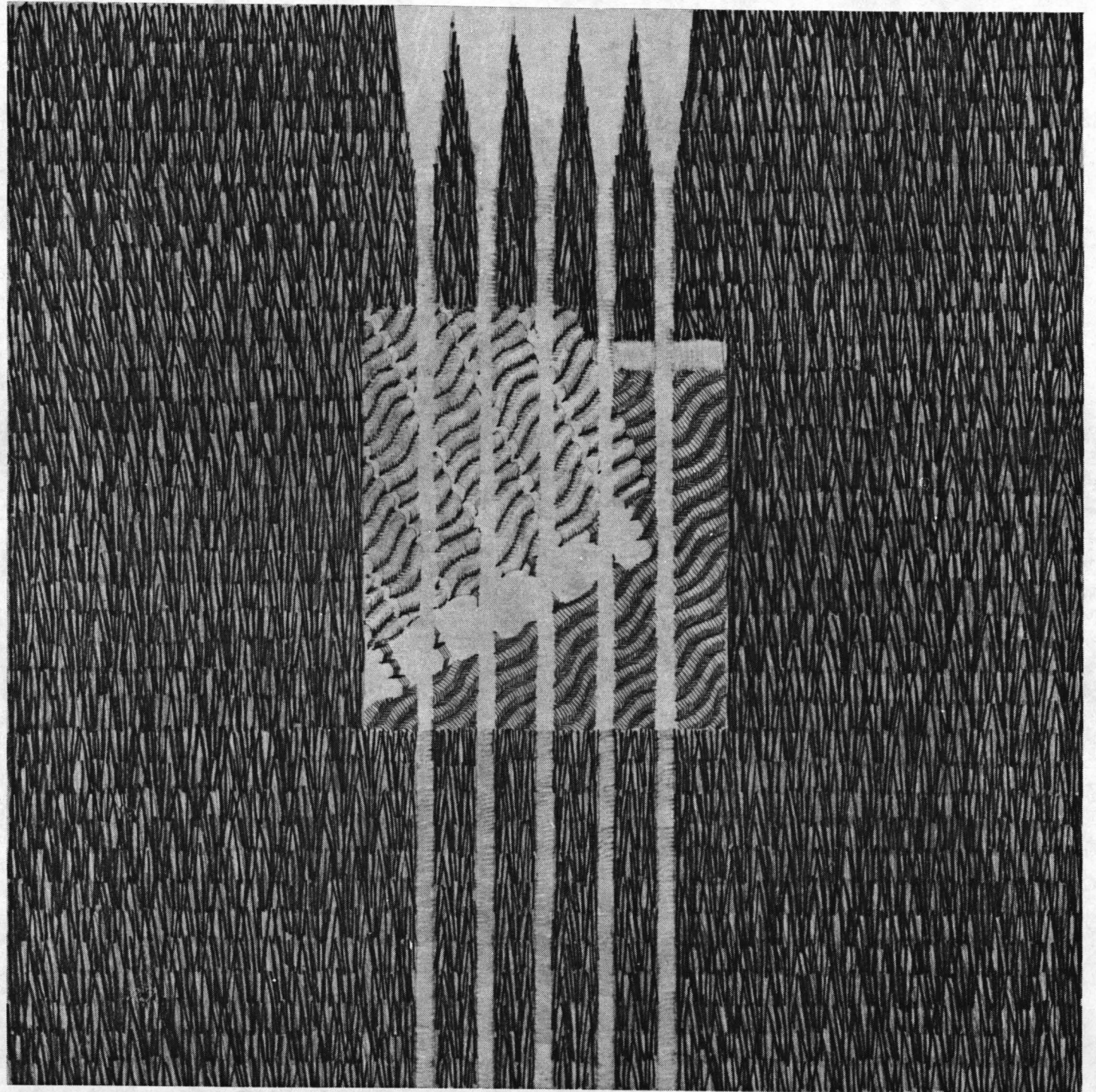
This story began as all stories begin, but this one began on a Monday morning in spring. And like most stories which begin in spring and particular to those which begin on a Monday morning in spring, the possibility of encountering some form of a physical or spiritual transformation seems inevitable given the analogical referents. However, given the “fact” that this story does begin or rather began on a Monday morning in spring, one must not fail to take into account the allusionary context of a story that begins or began on a Monday morning in spring. One may assume that the allusive propensity of transformation would be of a more explicit significance if this morning began in a suburban subdivision in New Jersey called Meadowbrook, and more implicit it if began on Guermentes Way outside the town of Combray.



Yet the story begins, or, rather, has begun on
a Monday morning in spring with all the
allusive and analogical implications of
transformation. It may be ascertained that
the transformative tendencies of the banal,
bucolic illustrations of the cessation of the
locusts' wailing—the recanting bell of Our
Lady of Sorrows calling attendants to early
morning mass and the return of the
fisherman from the Gulf, passing enroute the
flooded fields of rice and marsh grasses
overladen with the sweet dew left by the
ever departing night. So, for this Monday
morning to begin, which has begun, and for
this story to begin, which has begun, it must
become not by the silence of the locusts, the
sojourn of the returning fisherman, nor by
the remnants of the night's stay, but by the
recalcitrant unknown of this transformation
of a Monday morning in spring.



And so, a Monday morning in spring begins,
or began, or has begun, and has become a
Monday morning in spring for the
unknowing of that which it is, and the
knowing of that which it is not. For the
wailing cries of the locusts mourn not the
fleeing night nor their carcasses that will
soon lie lost amongst the leaves, the parched
acorns, the fragments of blue egg shell, or
the bird droppings beneath the very tree
where the locusts now have ceased to screech,
as though the emitted silence that befell their
cries of the passing night was the quiet of
wonder at the astonishment of encountering
the unknown and momentarily vanquishing
the etymological histrionics of unraveling
the known. The locusts, like the returning
fisherman and the toiling bells, are but the
recompense of Creation—Creation as the
tenuous, unknowing moment during which a
Monday morning in spring began.



FIRST FLOOR

Administration

Circulation Desk

Reception

Preparation

Administration Offices

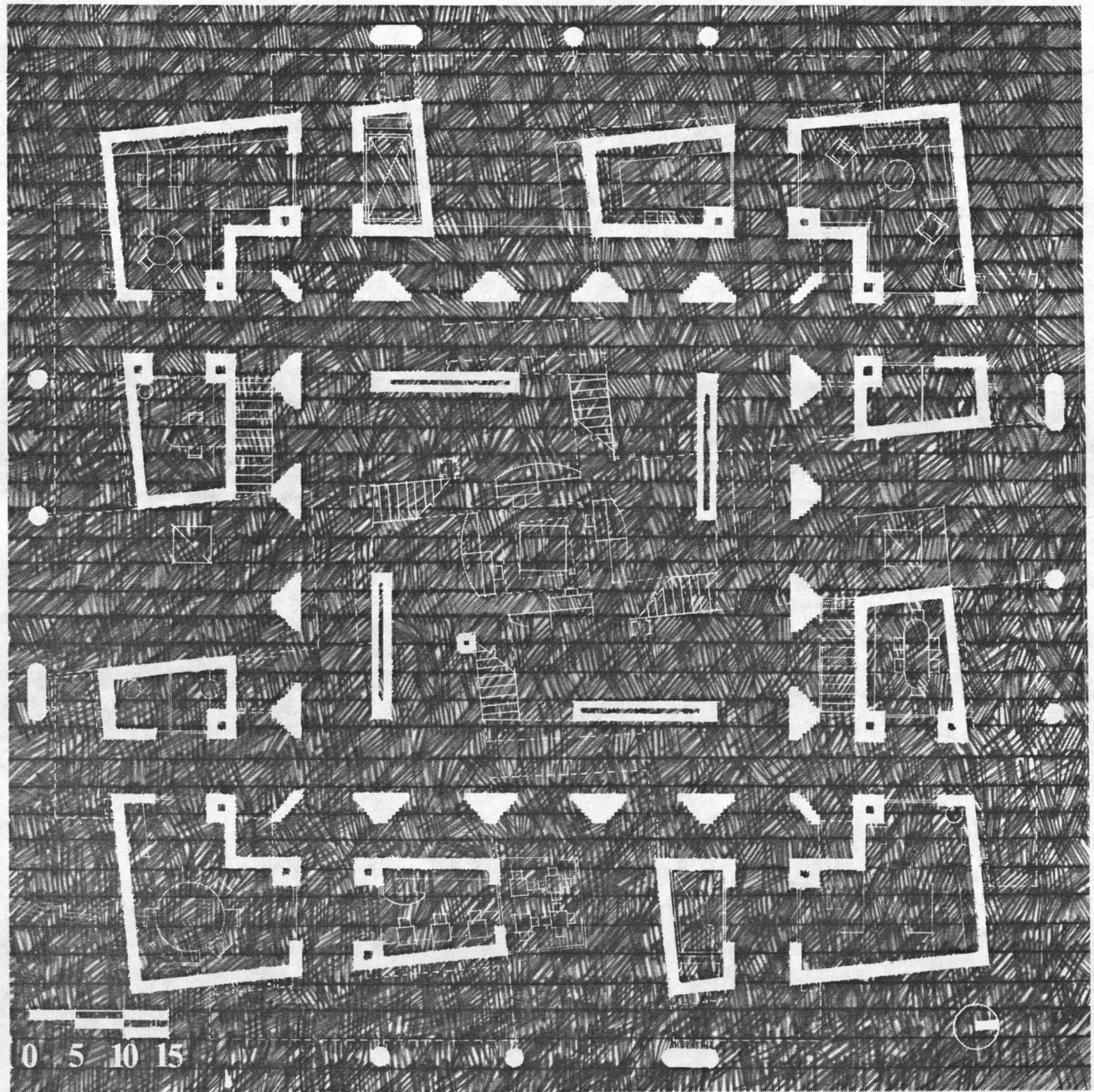
Conference

Cafe

Meeting Rooms

Restrooms

Elevators



SECOND FLOOR

Reference and Periodicals

Browsing

Stacks

Periodicals

Workroom

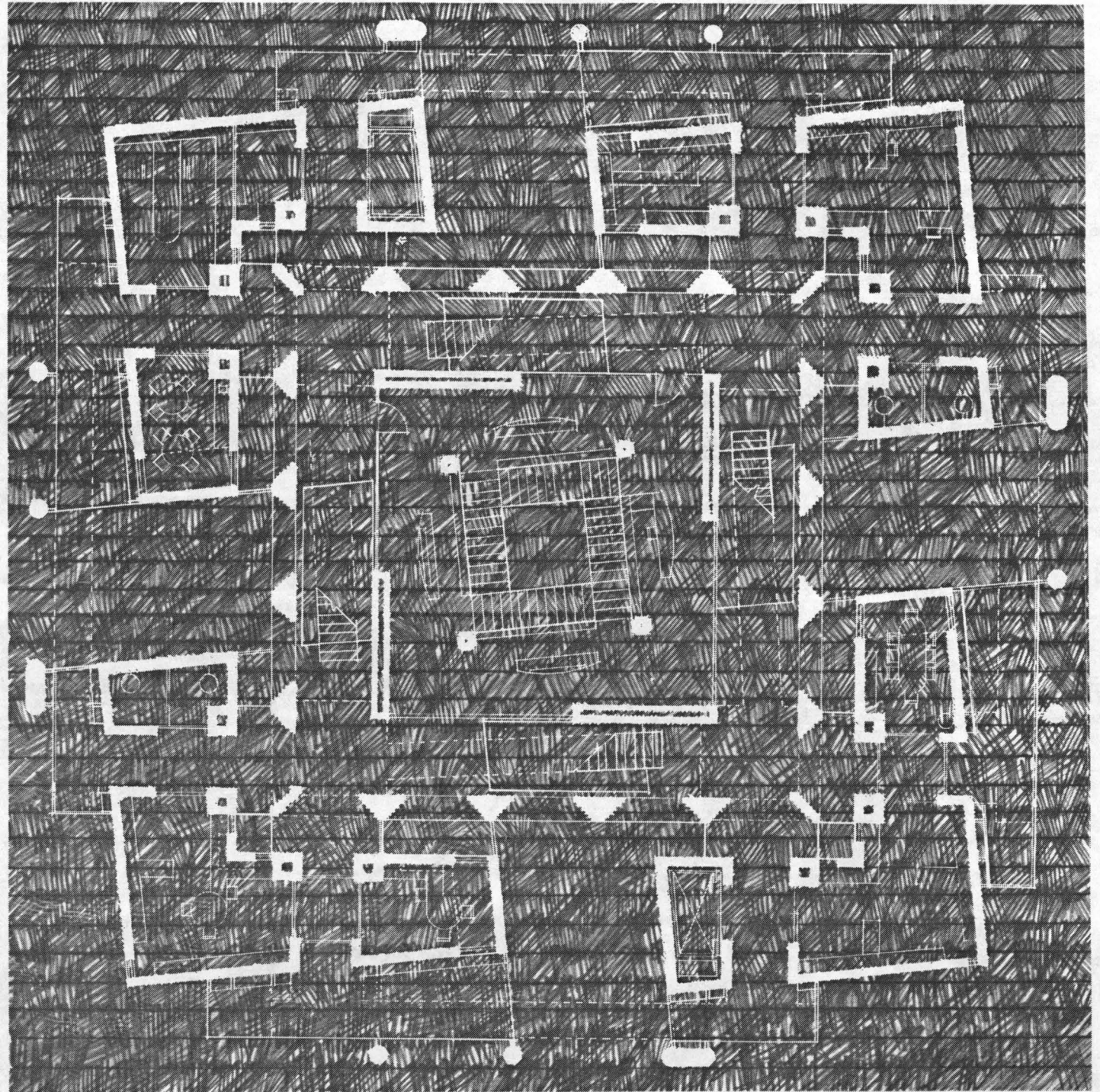
Lounge

Reference

Study Room

Restrooms

Elevators



THIRD FLOOR

Mezzanine and Stacks

Art and Architecture

Sciences

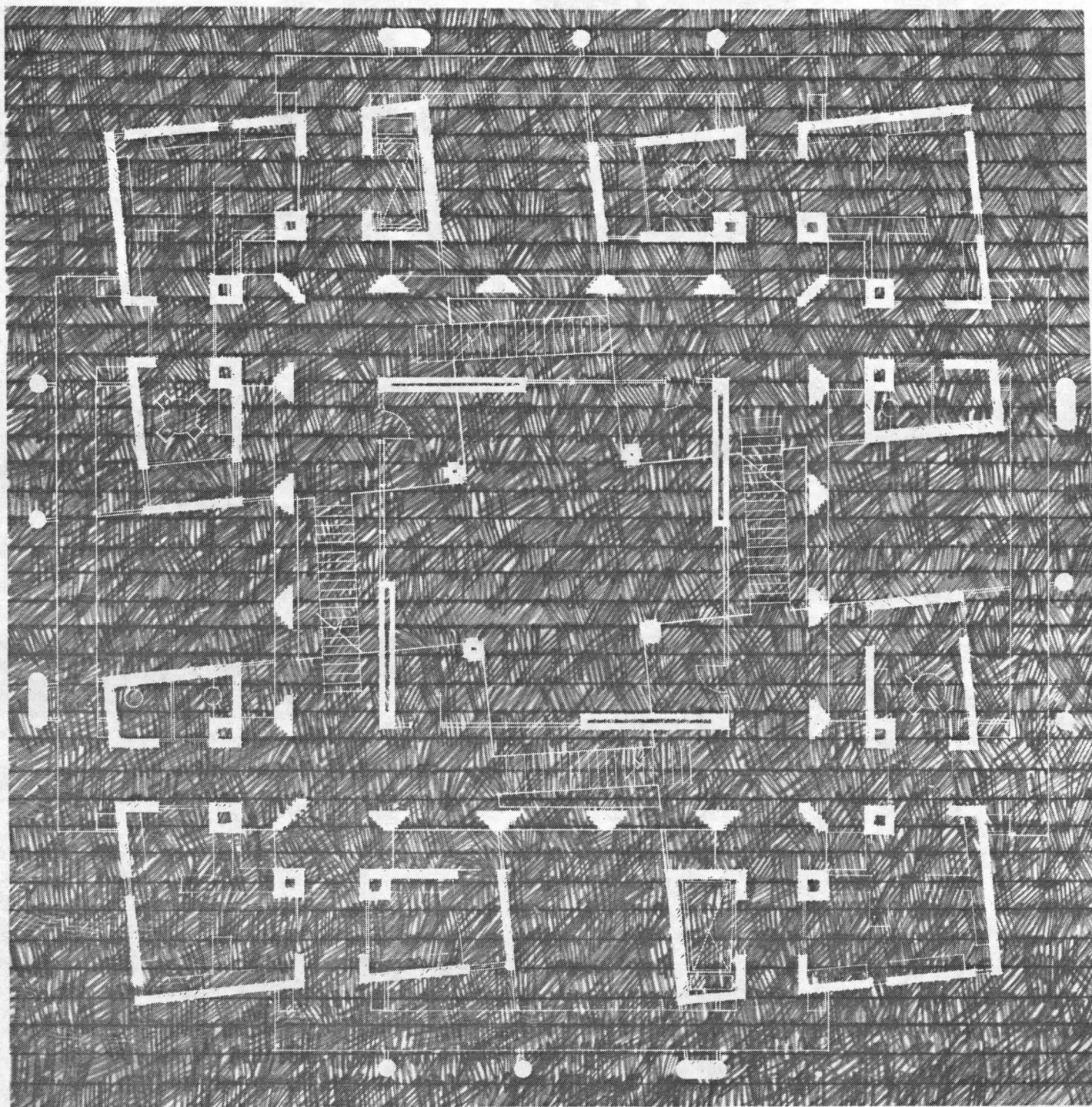
History and Philosophy

Literature

Study Rooms

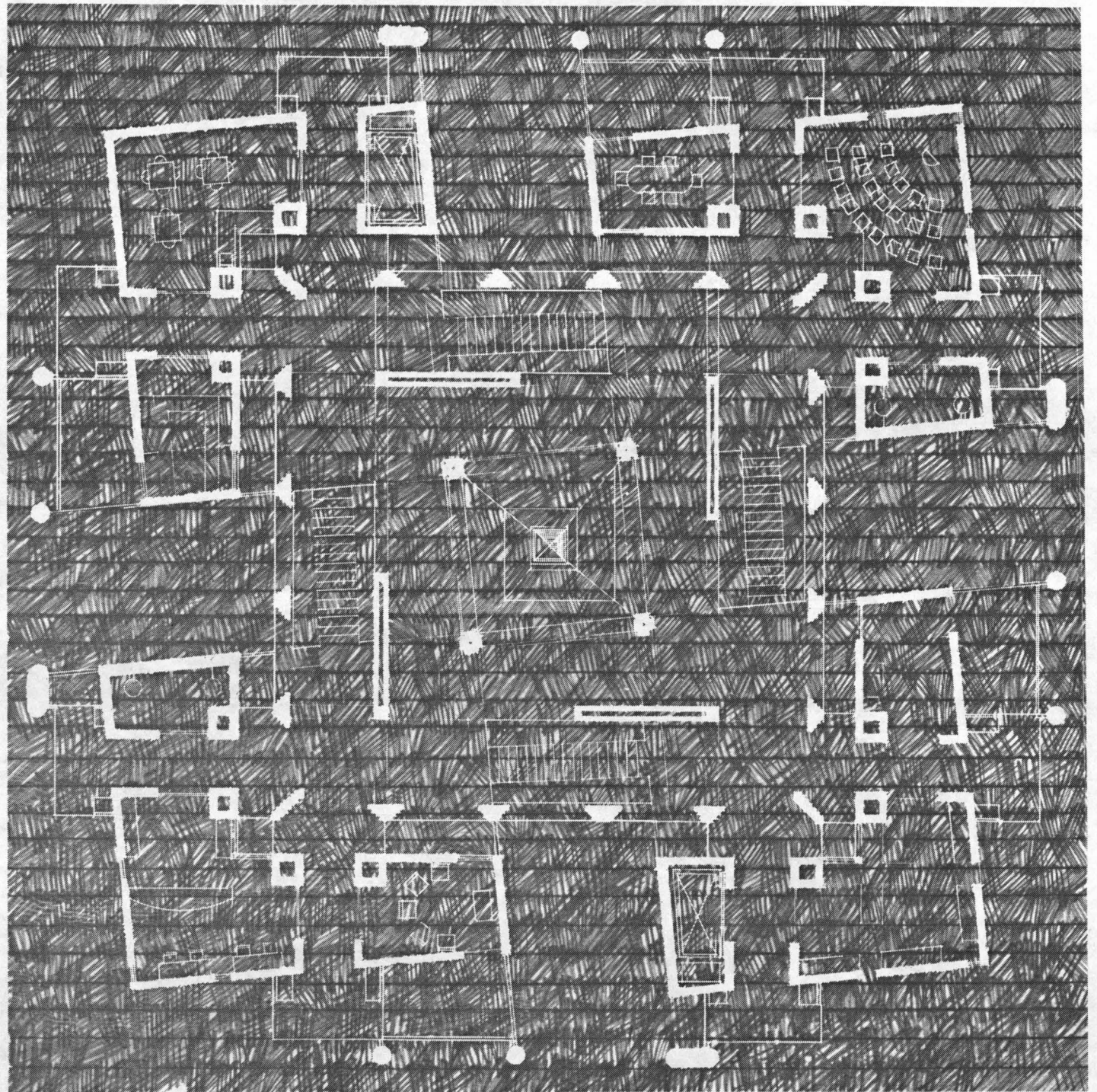
Restrooms

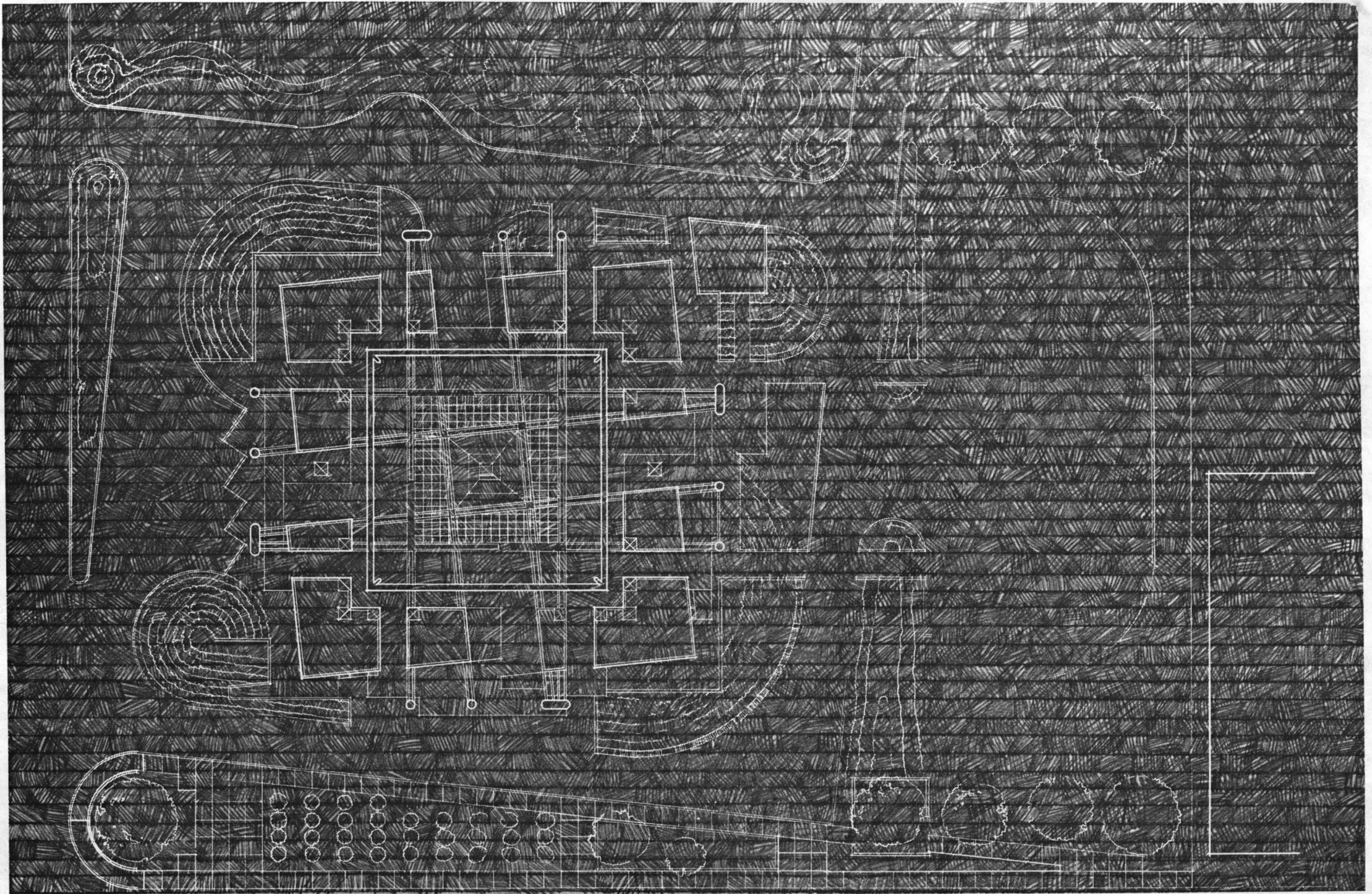
Elevators

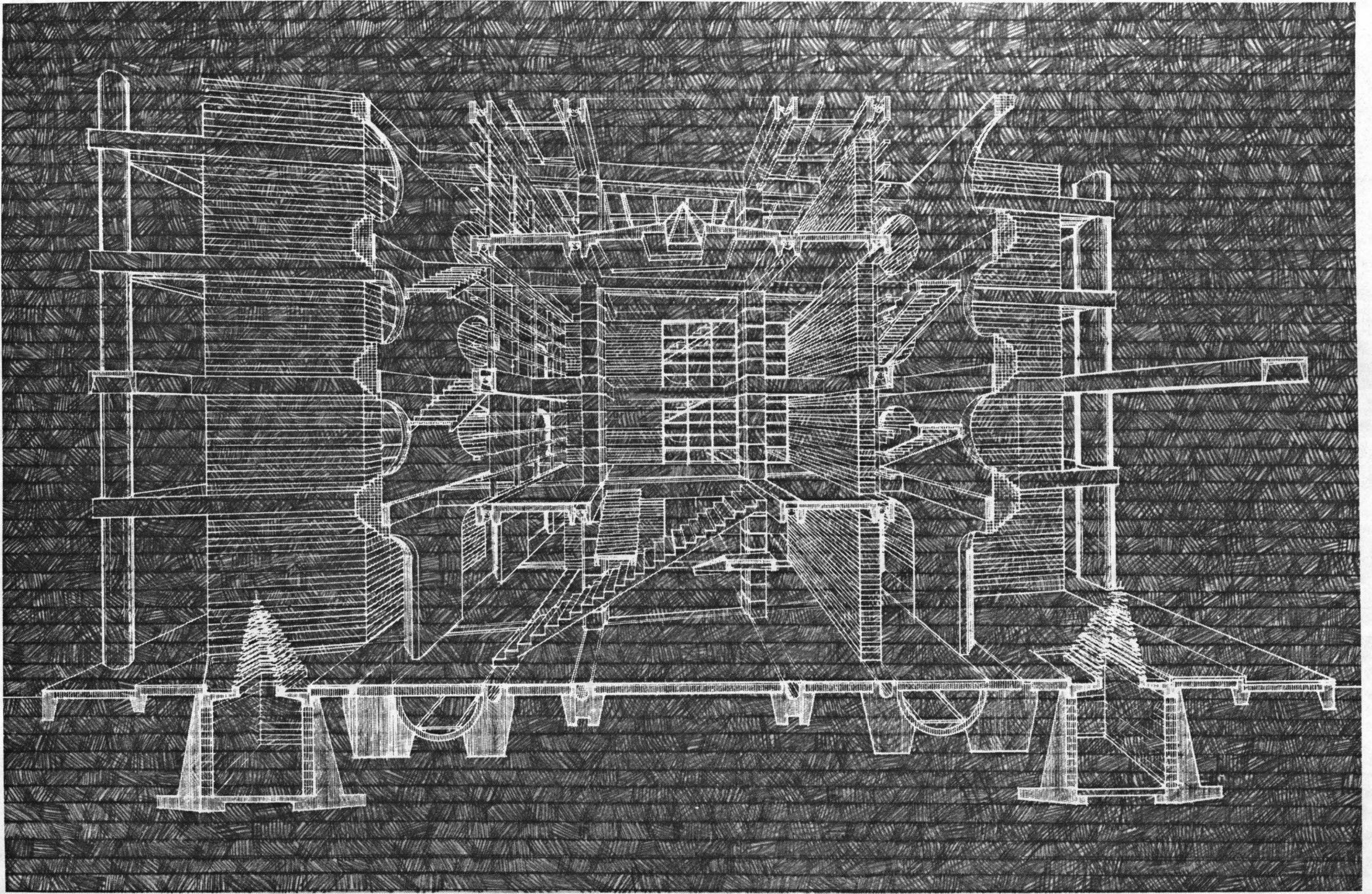


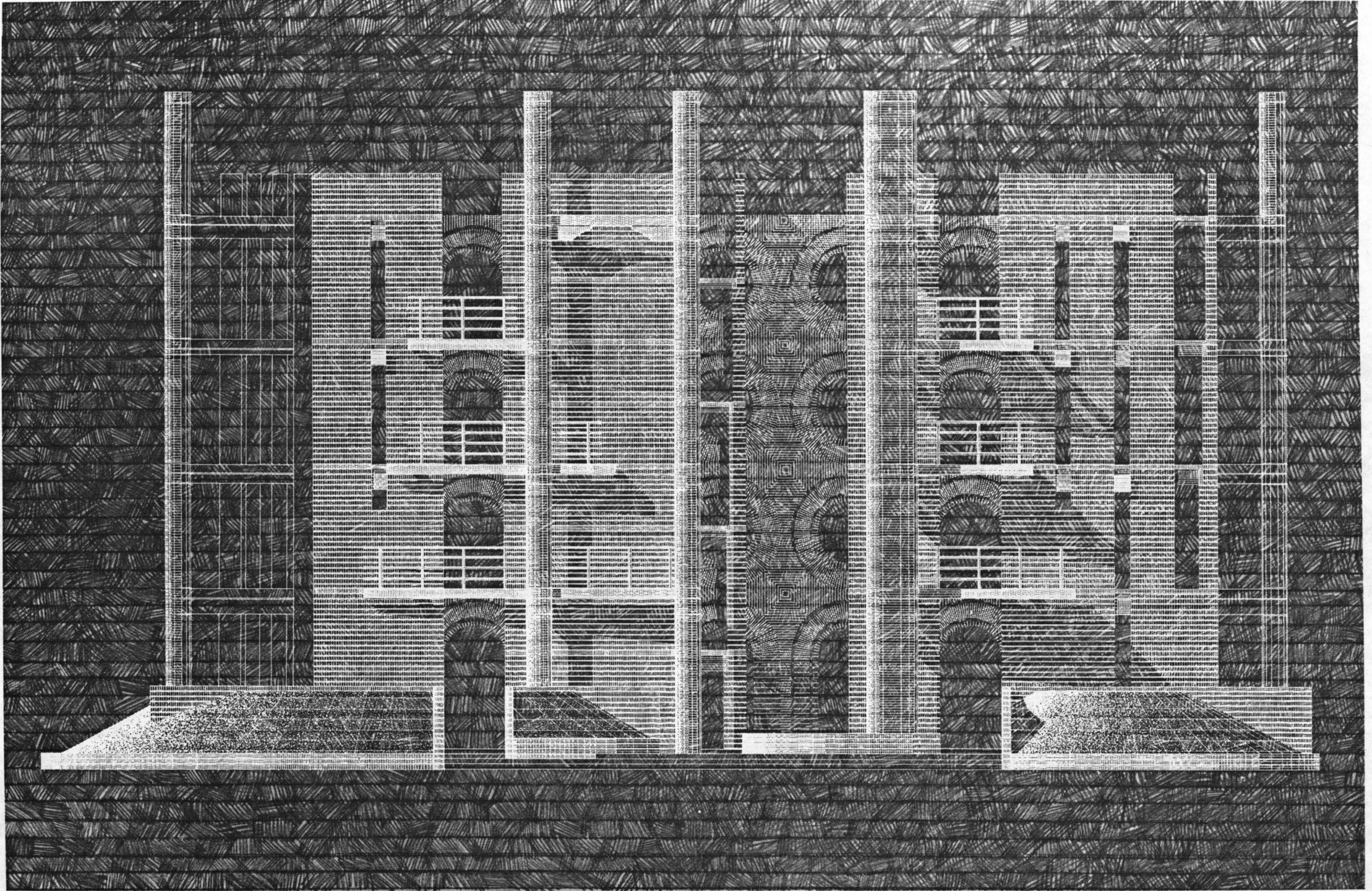
FOURTH FLOOR

- Lycee**
- Meeting Rooms**
- Conference Rooms**
- Classroom**
- Story Room**
- Media Room**
- Screening Room**
- Demonstration Room**
- Preparation Room**
- Roof Garden**
- Restrooms**
- Elevators**









Monday morning began as it must to those who subscribe to Mondays, and particularly to those who subscribe to Mondays and mornings. This early morning began not unlike many such spring mornings in this south Louisiana town, for the grasses and shrubs were replete and overladen with the evening's dew, and the chorus of locusts laid hushed as the slowly dissipating night moved onward, away from the coastal prairies. And like every other morning in this town, the bell of Our Lady of Sorrows was rung its usual six times, calling forth the attendants for early morning mass. And as was usual, Clarence Thibodeaux was on his way home from the inlet waters of the Gulf of Mexico, bringing with him the Sun and a cargo of freshly caught crabs. For in this town, with its usual quiet and casual formality, something was and would be always different about this day. To its inhabitants, whether they ascribed to the notion of Mondays or mornings or even springtime, they knew that this day would be forever set apart from all others.

A day—a Monday with a morning, afternoon, and evening in spring. A day of dissonance, liken to that of the grand opening of the New Downtown Bank in the autumn of 1972, or the Silver Jubilee celebration for Father Von H. of Our Lady's. Incidentally, Father Von H. was not his full name, but one could not expect a parish of French Acadians to refer to him as Good Father Von Hormannsthal. This particular day would be set aside to commemorate the full operation of one of the town's primary social institutions, the New Library.

Like other fellow townspeople, Clarence Thibodeaux has sensed the ramifications of this day, and for his part of the occasion had worn his Madras plaid shirt. Although Clarence would not be able to formally attend the day's perusal of the New Library, the mere selection of his plaid shirt with a pair of Butternut blue jeans over that of his usual navy blue coverall, usually worn for his predawn treks to the rivulets of the Gulf, was a sure indication of the

momentous nature of this day.

Driving into town along his customary route, Clarence peered into the rear bed of his pickup truck as he made his usual turn from Highway 90 onto Main Street. The objective of his gaze was to note if his ice chests of two dozen crabs and three medium-sized catfish had scratched the bed of the two-toned blue Ram Charger. Since he had been brought to bear the financial burden of this pickup truck due to the financial negligence of his eldest son, "Little Thib," he always felt compelled to contemplate the depreciation value of a scratched bed on the used pickup truck market. For Clarence, a pickup truck of this nature was one of status, used sparingly only for Sunday drives to the Dairy Queen or for driving through town to view the decorated front yards at Christmas or for the convenience of loading an occasional sack of chicken feed from the Feed Store while his wife was next door at the Grocery. At times, he felt morally insulted to see his truck bed

loaded with ice chests and crab nets, even if the bed of his pickup truck was securely covered with a carpet of unused burlap sacks.

Today he did not appreciate this usual moral dilemma. Rather, he was preoccupied with the anticipation of what the day might bring. He was excited by the thought of not only being able to decipher the roster of parked cars attributed to the attendants of early morning mass at Our Lady's, but because he could also peer directly across Main Street to make his assumptions as to accessibility for entering, parking, and exiting from the New Library. He would then be able to relay these findings as to the particulars of the New Library to his wife later that morning over breakfast.

Since his wife would be the actual standard bearer of the Thibodeaux family at the New Library later that morning, he felt it was his responsibility to verbally and graphically familiarize his wife about such matters. In

doing so, he deeply knew that this act of familiarization would be both socially and economically advantageous for himself as well as for his wife, and especially advantageous for the family Oldsmobile. Due to Mrs. Thibodeaux's small height and the vastness of the Oldsmobile's hood, drive-in entrances and exits posed potential hazards to her, as well as to the Oldsmobile. Recalling his humiliation years before at the grand opening of the New Downtown Bank, where upon returning home from his day job as a deputy for the Parish Sheriff's Department, he chanced upon finding the family automobile abandoned and surrounded by a select group of town elders and two fully coordinated bank tellers. His closer inspection found the car to be obtusely lodged and suspended by one of the New Bank's concrete-curbed, fully landscaped parking medians, adjacent to the New Bank's drive-in entrance. Due to his patient guidance, Mrs. Thibodeaux, since the incident, has fully mastered entering, parking, and exiting at the

New Bank (although many would no longer consider the Bank to be New). It was his hope this morning that, with the aid of his instructions, his wife might be able to avoid potential miscalculation at the New Library until later this morning.

As Clarence drove farther down Main Street, the seriousness of his stare intensified for it became readily apparent to him that the expected carnage of inadvertently slaughtered opossums along Main Street were greatly lacking in numbers. To Clarence, as well as to other members of the community, vast numbers of newly dead opossums along the shoulders of Main Street was a sure indication of a holy or secular holiday of great significance. The knowledge of this new found observation struck him with puzzlement; had he overestimated both the significance of this day and the relevance of the New Library to the community? He felt suddenly plunged into an inlet of October water, as the once cool, fresh air riding through the side

vent of the cab turned suddenly cold and icy.

Had he, Clarence Thibodeaux, been made to play the fool? Had he lost such contact with the community that they, the townspeople, would play a joke on him in such a calculated manner? Inspired by these questions, he suddenly felt that every possible on-looker along Main Street this morning would be poised there to report to the other members of the community on the wearing of his most auspicious short-sleeved short of Madras plaid. To Clarence, it would be not only himself, but also his wife who would bear the brunt of this reported humiliation due to his overzealous, anticipatory adornment with the Madras plaid shirt.

To him, as to his wife, this plaid shirt of soft, faded yellow ground, with its orthogonal patterning of burnt orange transversed by syncopated hues of light blue, was worn for the commemoration of a successful week's worth of work. This shirt—the first and only he had selected for himself from a J. C. Penny sales

circular—was reserved only for Saturday afternoon restitutions. On these afternoons, he would join his wife on the shaded front porch and sit upon one of the lawn chairs she had earlier transported from the garage at the rear of the house. At these times, while he sat there drinking one of his first or second of two beers from a transparent ice tea glass that had the appearance of cut crystal, Mrs. Thibodeaux would relay to him significant news about town and who and what neighbors had passed their home enroute to anticipated mass at Our Lady's. These moments made him feel proud and cared for; although being in absentia, he could retain an active involvement within the community through his wife. With his standing still intact, he could directly lower his gaze and admire the deep coloration of his arms against the soft yellow of his shirt and compare that to the ivory white of his extended bare feet. Sitting back into the full embrace of the folding chair, he could press the arch of his bare feet onto the aluminum of the hollow bar that ran across the

base of the chair. Alive and relaxed from the combination of the coolness of the glass of beer and the sensations on his feet, he could slowly turn his gaze outward into the front yard and admire the length of shadows cast by the live oaks he had planted five years before.

Although these trees were still no taller than his wife, Clarence lingered upon the sense of majesty these two oaks would present to those who had since passed his home enroute to anticipated mass those Saturday afternoons. As he approached the orange awnings of the Western Auto, a sense of calm began to slowly release him from the panic he had felt earlier. With a renewed spirit, he suddenly knew that his journey down Main Street this morning was no longer an objective filled with independent moments of departures and arrivals. Rather, it came to him that his journey this day was actually one of a return, where he was merely passing in between. He felt delight in the fact that he, Clarence Thibodeaux, while driving

down Main Street this morning, had discovered that the Gulf of his early morning crabbing and the front porch of his home on Saturday afternoons were, somehow, one in the same. By known deviation of circumstances, that plaid shirt (that now pressed and billowed about his chest from the breeze blowing out of the side vent) and the briny odors of the Gulf waters (that had been sequestered from the caluses under his hand and that now ruminated about the cab) had come to mean one timeless moment. Content and quieted by this new-found knowing, Clarence entered the main block of downtown.

It was at this time that Clarence chanced upon seeing two identically dressed men lingering on the Main Street sidewalk in front of Our Lady's, intently looking and pointing across the street at the New Library. As Clarence approached the outer periphery of Our Lady's, he distinguished the identical, freshly starched-and-ironed, dark gray uniforms as belonging to Harvey and Harold Russell, owners of the Yazoo

Lawnmower and Repair Shop next door to the church. As he drove past the two men, Clarence neglected noting the New Library and, instead, began to stare openly at these two men in order to judge and surmise the reactions upon their faces to his appearance that morning wearing his Madras plaid shirt. From their position, both Harold and Harvey were immediately aware of Clarence's glaring and began to ask themselves (as well as one another) for some possible motive for Clarence's slightly demented stare.

They both found nothing unusual about Clarence's arrival into town at this time in his pick-up truck and its cargo of freshly caught crab. Harold then vocally reasoned that Clarence was merely creating some sort of mental message and that Clarence would be arriving at his home that afternoon with a dozen gratuitous crabs. Harold felt that he should be the deserving recipient of these crabs, since it was actually he who—for no charge—had sharpened the blades of the Thibodeaux family's

Yazoo, brought in last Thursday by Clarence's youngest son, "T-Thib." While Harold continued to verbalize his reasoning for Clarence's insidious stare, Harold's partner, Harvey, no longer considered Clarence's stare. Rather, Harvey allowed himself to think only of the crabs locked securely in the bed of Clarence's pickup truck. Almost inadvertently, Harvey began to recall a certain summer as a boy, when both he and Harold's family spent six days of the Fourth of July holiday at the Russell family camp along the banks of the Mermentau River.

Harvey recalled vividly the incident of that summer, when members of the camp community had dredged up and laid upon the shore the body of a local inlet fisherman. The recessed silence of the gathered crowd only intensified the chorus of cries of the fisherman's wife as she ran toward the frozen tableau of the man's body. To Harvey, the manner in which this woman ran, with the random contortions that her body

assumed, and the abandoned nature with which her arms and legs moved in front of her, was as though she had been projected from some unseen catapulting device. As she flew past him, he became mesmerized by the deep blue-and-magenta arabesque patterns her double knit shorts had revealed upon her jostling legs.

Having reached the purloined body (now residing upon a bank of brilliant white shells) she began the arduous task of dislocating the insurgency of crabs that continued to rend upon the dead man's body. Harvey judiciously surmised that the mournful cries he still heard were not from the fisherman's wife, but, rather, from her tracery of protruding veins, which had witnessed the fisherman's flesh become an object of sustenance for the feasting crabs.

Returning from his brief dislodgement from time, Harvey then allowed his thoughts to enter into Harold's absurdly analytical cataloging of gastronomical delights attributable to one dozen, fully dressed Gulf crabs. Due possibly to Harvey's newly acquired consternatious glare,

Harold then allowed his unrelenting, verbal assault concerning his much anticipated crab dinner to lapse and trail off into the morning air of the adjacent churchyard. With the exigency of less than one breath between them, both Harvey and Harold quickly unleashed and momentarily suspended hands brought forth from the front pockets of their dark gray trousers. By this reciprocated gesturing of the hands and by an unfolding of mutually discernible, insipid smiles, both Harvey and Harold had conveyed to one another and to themselves what they felt to be the only possible reason for Clarence Thibodeaux's portentous glare released upon them this morning.

In this town, the Russell family at large (of which there were numerous members) poised a great puzzlement to the community due to the distinctive, yet consistent nature of their physical and personal characteristics: their high, almost insurmountable foreheads; the peculiar pinkness of their thin, ribbon-like upper lips;

and—particularly—the abrupt and impatient nature of their speech. However, due to the more social nature of Harold and Harvey's standing within the community, the clarification and distinction between these two particular Russells was always considered as a welcome and, at times, heated subject of discussion among the townspeople. Although contrary to one popular assumption about town, Harold and Harvey were actually not twins. Rather, they were first cousins and were separated by an age difference of more than four years. The discussions that emanated about town concerning the identities of Harold and Harvey were not curtailed by their seeming unknowing decision to wed the Frye sisters, Eva and Yolanda, of Port Barre. And to make these distinctions a bit more difficult to contend with, both Eva and Yolanda had taken it upon themselves to only appear publicly together, flamboyantly dressed in similar fashion and sporting hair of identical style and coloration, courtesy of Addie Lou's Beauty Shop and

Dartel's Drug Store.

Both Harold and Harvey are fully aware of the community's ongoing investigation as to the actual identity of their personage, and have, at times, come to the defense of one another as to their kinship and personal lineage. Thereby, they have gesturally surmised that due to the distance and the speed at which Clarence was traveling along Main Street, he was unable to fully discern the flagrantly cursive lettering embroidered upon their neatly bordered, oval name tags. Without this conclusive evidence as to their distinctive identities, they felt that Clarence was, therefore, perceptively conducting his own investigation as to the distinctions between these two particularly well-known Russells. Both feeling indignation as to the trite nature of this mutually assured disclosure (particularly Harold, who until moment ago was contemplating his selection of television viewing which would justly complement a dinner consisting of one dozen

Gulf crabs), they abruptly turned toward the direction where Clarence had earlier arrived into town and began their repetitious assault on the Main Street sidewalk toward their place of business.

As Harold and Harvey neared their storefront facade, most assuredly they were considering the vast business potential this momentous day might bring to Russell's Yazoo Lawnmower and Repair Shop due to the frontal adjacency of their business to the New Library. As they arrived at the entrance to their recently renovated storefront (complete with brushed aluminum mullions, pan de verre fenestrations, and crowned atop by a full-spanning embossed plastic billboard, care of Yazoo Motors Incorporated of Yazoo City, Mississippi), the first of the morning mass attendants began to issue forth from behind the processional doors of Our Lady of Sorrows.

With both men now securely within the shop,

Harold relocked the entrance doors, allowing his ring of seven keys to retract into a chrome spool mounted at his waist. Meanwhile, the initial, departing attendant from mass, Wilda Faye Longlinais, completed her abandoned descent down the front steps and onto the brick pathway leading from Our Lady's. Undisturbed by Wilda's clumsy and hurried manner, the grounds of the churchyard were held still and motionless by the suspended arms of the massive oaks that shielded the final vestiges of clear, morning mist. Intent upon fulfilling her early morning quest, Wilda's arms were flung full at her side as she maneuvered her imbalanced body forward along the uneven brick pathway toward her desired position on the Main Street sidewalk. Unable to relinquish the pace she had originally established on the pathway, she cased her eyes downward to assist in her intrepid footings along what would be considered by most as a treacherous route. Knowing full well the necessary assistance of her downward glance, she nonetheless redirected her

concentration from the imprecision of her steps onto the grayish-green patches of moss which she felt had somehow been allowed to grow unchecked within the recessed crevices along the lusterless, red brick pathway. Neglecting the folly of her misdirected concentration, Wilda Faye plummeted as she neared her positional objective onto the Main Street sidewalk. Now askew and disheveled by her near-fatal landing, Wilda momentarily paused to regain her composure, only to hear the laughter of birds above in the sanctuary of the oaks. Unrelinquished in fulfilling her long-awaited desire, she quickly arrested her split purse, which had released itself from her once secure grasp. By pivoting around and nudging herself slightly forward, she found herself at the anointed position: at the precise place where the walkway of Our Lady's spilled onto the Main Street sidewalk and directly across from the edifice of the New Library. Now framed by the New Library at her rear and faced by the entrance to the church, she stood there, erect and

still, as the remaining attendants came forth from behind the processional doors. Quieted and secured in the achievement of her position, she imagined herself eclipsed, and, thereby, transformed into a readily perceivable state of visionary presence.

As the issuing attendants began their slow and guarded descent down the front steps of Our Lady's, many of those present began to peer forward toward the stiff, amorphous form that partially obstructed their full view of the New Library. However, due to the high incidence of glaucoma and cataracts among the group there gathered, it was Girdie Richard's son, Aldo, who first signaled the identity of Wilda Mae Longlinais to the puzzled members of the crowd. Undaunted, but somehow moved by the askance stares, the recently enlightened crowd caused a feeling of pride to quake her little, rotund body. Holding firm to her accostive position, Wilda drew in the first breath of excited anticipation for she now knew that it

was within her grasp to divulge the knowledge she held concerning the New Library, which, in turn, would assure for her a greater role (beyond that of housewife), which she longed to deserve. As a housewife, she would listen intently during dinner to her husband, head of the town's Water, Sewerage, and Maintenance Department, as he revealed to her the rudimentary details of the town's sewerage and water linkage to the New Library. She would then spend her day compulsively cleaning and committing to memory every last fact that was given her the evening before.

As the entourage careened down the brick pathway, headed by one of the town's leading matriarchs, Iris LaFleur, no one in the crowd seemed challenged by Wilda's guarded position or her somewhat erratic behavior this morning. To the members of this entourage, as well as the majority of townspeople, Wild Faye Longlinais was well-noted for her flighty and compulsive nature. Owing to this fact, the community had

long since dedicated an oddly structured, idiomatic expression ("*c'est fait comme Wilda*") in Wilda's honor that meant either that one had reacted in a peculiar manner or that one had compulsively cleaned one's place of residence in such a way that no germ could possibly survive the sanitary onslaught.

Yet, as the crowd neared the end of the pathway, the morning sun incised a stream of blinding, white light, coming from between the edifice of Our Lady's and the rectory of Father Van H., toward and through the place where Wilda now stood. Unknown to Wilda at this time, the since quieted mockingbirds, high in their sanctuary in the oaks, became enhanced by the deep, brilliant luster emanating from the highly lacquered surface of Wilda's coiffure. Sweeping, then closely encircling this luminous apparition, the mockingbirds voiced their delight as they basked and hovered in the shimmering reflections of light from the tresses laid securely atop Wilda's head.

The unrelenting sun continued its onslaught of piercing rays upon the steadfast position where Wilda stood, stilled. Shielding her face from the debilitating light with her opened purse, Wilda cased her pained eyes onto the cool, shadowed surface of the churchyard pathway and again reacquainted herself with the embedded patches of grayish-green moss residing within the deep recesses of the bricked path. Deeply engrossed with what she felt to be the voracious nature of uncurbed moss growth, her once unalterable morning's objective was abruptly set aside as she continued to consider the opportune growing conditions for these same voracious patches of moss upon the brick piers beneath her own home. Now set upon the eradication of any potential moss growth on the brick piers by the use of a highly concentrated disinfectant, she darted for her nearby parked automobile. Abandoning her once held, prime position—the sidewalk—Wilda quickly reversed her automobile and proceeded hurriedly down Main

Street.

But the moment when the crowd of issuing mass attendants had finally reached Wilda's once-guarded and illustrious position, Wilda's face was still and motionless, deeply embedded within the cracked protrusions of her automobile's windshield, due to her now unalterable collision with the newly arriving Bookmobile.

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