

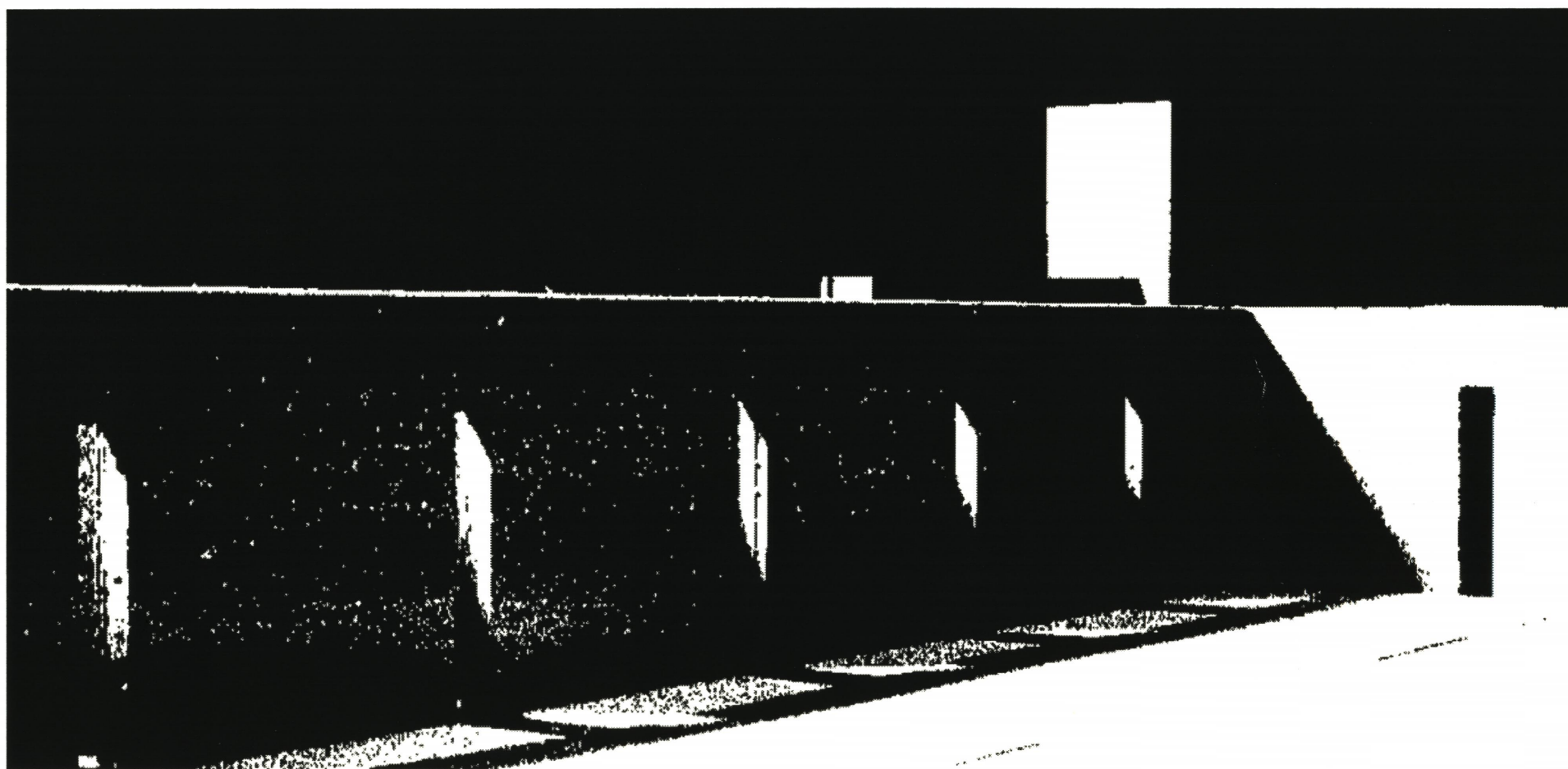


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Others were involved in the making of this thesis and I am grateful to them:

Thanks to my parents, my first and best teachers...thanks for everything.  
Thanks to for reference suggestions, conversation, moral support, generosity and friendship. Conversations with her gave me an awareness that I did not originally have.  
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Thanks to my committee: for his intellect and humor, support and outlook.  
for his intellect and humor, for the Sanborn map and for conversation;  
Many of the ideas and references presented in this thesis came directly from conversations with Also, special thanks to for getting on my nerves...profoundly.  
for their knowledge and clarity and for always being able to find some strength in my work.





The African Burial Ground

A thesis submitted by Kay Edge to the Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in final fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

Hans Rott, Chairman

Frank Weiner

Robert Dunay

William Galloway



"Through the creative dialectic between the temporal and the eternal, there necessarily occurs a form of integration between otherwise purely theoretic and pragmatic approaches. Another benefit of this realization - the realization that all things are composed of constants and variables - is that, if seriously embraced, it actively encourages honest inquiry, rendering the twin dangers of Fundamentalism and Relativism equally impotent, for universal justice has its own means of dealing with individuals who mistakenly believe that they possess the Absolute Truth, or, conversely, think that 'everything is relative.'" <sup>1</sup>

Kenneth Guthrie The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library

This thesis is tripartite. It is at once a search for the universal principles of good architecture, an architect's personal search for what is valuable, and the exploration of some particular ideas in a particular project. The successful thesis joins the universal and the particular and calls into use the rational and the intuitive. The thesis began with an attempt to name some of these universals and from them to distill some "clear and distinct" <sup>2</sup> ideas about the making of architecture. Together these ideas make a manifesto, not in a positivistic sense but rather as a way of beginning this "creative dialectic" between universal and particular. They are ultimately to help address the issue of significance in architecture.

"...without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are

empty, intuitions without concepts are blind... Only through their union can knowledge arise." <sup>3</sup>

Kant Critique of Pure Reason

In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant provides us with a kind of reconciliation between empiricism and rationalism; and an architect needs this reconciliation because the end product of what we do is perceived through the senses: we see it, touch it, hear it; we directly experience it, but there is also a rational pleasure to be found in significant architecture; in fact it is not significant architecture unless there is a rational idea. Kant defines reason as "the faculty which furnishes us with the principles of knowledge *a priori*." <sup>4</sup> These *a priori* principles of sensibility are time and space, the necessary conditions for perceiving which are built into the structure of the mind. While experience of the external world provides us with the material for knowledge, the reception of this material presupposes these principles. In Kant's epistemology, then, reason and experience together give us knowledge. Knowledge "begins with" but does not "arise out of" <sup>5</sup> experience. In this same way the making of architecture presupposes the



rational idea. Architecture may begin with function, budget, site, program and human behavior, but it does not arise out of these pragmatic concerns.

As W. T. Jones has pointed out in The Classical Mind, Euclid's Elements is considered by some to be the archetype of human reasoning, and geometry, as "the science which determines the properties of space," <sup>6</sup> is particularly relevant to the architect. It is a way of acting on the initial "sensuous conception," allowing the architect to provide a rational "underpinning" <sup>7</sup> for an emotive, aesthetic idea. It is a means of rationalizing and realizing, a way of returning to the original emotive image. The architectural expression of this rational yet aesthetic idea is the plan and the section. For Vitruvius it is the arrangement of these parts, the plan, the section and the perspective, that makes architecture.

"If we judge objects merely according to (rational) concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost." <sup>8</sup>  
Kant Critique of Judgement

Reason is only a partial bridge to the making of significant architecture and in The Modulor Corbusier cautions against relying on geometry and leaving an architecture without significance. The rational idea is necessary but not sufficient for the making of architecture. The architect must acknowledge that which cannot be expressed purely with rational concepts--the passionate, the spiritual.



Kant distinguishes the aesthetic idea from the rational one. To judge an object as beautiful is not a logical judgement but an aesthetical one. It might be argued that an aesthetic idea is in some way also a rational one and that Kant's distinction is false, but certainly the rationale of beauty is different from the purely rational idea. Beauty somehow transcends the rational. One has only to think of Ronchamp. Benedetto Croce has said that this difference is the reason the field of aesthetics was invented.

Aquinas and Kierkegaard believed that human reasoning stopped at a certain point and what was beyond that was intuited. For Aquinas, human reason was aided by divine revelation, "the infusion of gratuitous light." <sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard drew a distinction between knowledge and faith believing that objective knowledge of God was impossible. To go beyond objective knowledge to the spiritual involves a "leap of faith." <sup>10</sup> In this same way the making of architecture requires us to leave one way of thinking and to embrace another. This leap is the unteachable part of architecture.

There is then a different way of knowing besides the rational. It might be called tacit knowing or intuition. Carl





Jung spoke about it in this way: "I have explained that logical thought is what is expressed in words directed to the outside world in the form of discourse. Analogical thought is sensed yet unreal, imagined yet silent; it is not a discourse but rather a meditation on themes of the past, an interior monologue. Logical thought is "thinking in words." Analogical thought is archaic, unexpressed, and practically inexpressible in words."<sup>11</sup>

While science uses empiricism to collect data and rationalism to analyze and form universal principles, this method of making architecture would be (and has been) disastrous. The mechanistic approach is not a satisfactory one for it strips architecture of meaning and reduces it to nothing but a built program, no better than a bubble diagram. Architecture is not made from the function that a building is to have; it does not arise out of the prediction of what human behavior might be nor is it dependent upon the character of a particular site. Any fool can make a house. Only when the house embodies a rationale of beauty does it become architecture.

"Thus history ends by being extruded from the sphere of knowledge altogether and we are left with the conclusion that what the historian does with the individual fact is not to know or think it but to somehow intuit its value; an activity on the whole akin to that of the artist."<sup>12</sup>

Collingwood The Idea of History

Significance in architecture is inextricably tied to history and memory but it is important to understand history as something more than

simple historical fact. Just as historical fact cannot be the basis for faith (historical verification that a man died on a cross does not constitute faith), the reckless appropriation of historical form cannot be the basis for architecture. Yet the historical event or fact has great significance in both architecture and faith. To understand history is to intuit the value of a historical fact, to know the significance assigned to it—in what context and by whom and to understand the memory it arouses. In the quote above, Windelband has said that the historian's knowledge of historical event consists of judgements of value. The study of history is equivalent to the making of art because in deciding what historical facts are valuable, the historian is making an ethical decision. The artist uses a similar kind of intuitive judgement about what is valuable. What the architect chooses to do is an expression of what he or she values. Alan Colquhoun has said that the architect must know history, but must guard against the "seductions of history." The reason the Post-Modern style has failed, he explains, is because of its "tendency to express the most general and trivial connotations of the past; it is merely the pastness of the past that is evoked."<sup>13</sup> Instead of attempting to turn away from history or conversely, rather than simply collecting and copying the artefacts of history, we must adopt the same method of investigation as Kant does in his critical philosophy. The making of architec-



ture is always an inquiry but it should be an inquiry informed of the "accumulated past" <sup>14</sup> and one that is prepared to make a continuation of that past.

"Appearance belongs also to reality: it is a form of its being." <sup>15</sup>  
Nietzsche Posthumous Fragments

"Architecture is judged by the eyes that see, by the head that turns and the legs that walk. Architecture is not a synchronic phenomenon but a successive one made up of pictures adding themselves one to the other, following each other in time and space like music." <sup>16</sup>

Le Corbusier The Modulor

Sight is the most evocative of the senses. It is, as Plato says in the Phaedrus, "the clearest of our senses... the keenest mode of perception." <sup>17</sup> It is the scene or image that is initially and most compellingly apprehended in architecture. The way that history presents itself is not through material, structure or building technique; these have changed. Rather, history presents itself through image. The image is most powerful in arousing memory. When reason, intuition and history are the means of acting on a "sensuous conception," <sup>18</sup> then the scenography presented is a rational one, significant as more than a vessel of nostalgia.

"Fragments are in many cases much more useful than great historical ideas and often form the basis of a successful interpretation of the past...We know that to understand something of the past we must dig for small forces, for fragments. ...danger and chance are the most important aspects of the historian's work. It is the chance to expose the falseness of the documents, and to capture the meaning of a fragment of time, that should drive historical research and inquiry." <sup>19</sup>  
Dal Co Perspecta

The project site is one block in lower Manhattan near City Hall, bounded on one side by Broadway and surrounded on other sides by civic buildings: courthouses, the Hall of Records, and the Federal Office Tower. In 1991 while the site was being prepared for a new federal office tower, the African Burial Ground was discovered. Archaeologists removed more than four hundred burials and they were placed in storage at Howard University for anthropological study and to await a final resting place. A design competition was initiated to gather support for a memorial to be built.

History is recorded by those who have the power to write themselves in to one version of history. As an archaeo-







logical find, bones as opposed to documents, this site is a literal fragment of a history that does not appear in the documents. It provides evidence of another force in history. That is a part of its value.

The title page acknowledges the difficulty, if not impossibility, of fighting against economic forces in favor of something else. Considering real estate prices in Manhattan, this project would never be built. Office and retail space built as cheaply as possible and bringing the most return per square foot is the inevitable. After all "America is a land of private wealth and public squalor."<sup>20</sup> We pay for our freedom. The other difficulty alluded to in the title page is the problem of remembering a 17th century African culture in 21st century Manhattan. The instrument used to address this difficulty is the idea of secrecy, an idea that is pervasive in African art and culture and which was also an important element of slave life in America.

The first architectural device of secrecy in this project is enclosure. An unadorned, uninterrupted concrete wall conforming to the city block is the outside perimeter of the building. On the interior of this block a small chapel is placed on the east-west axis, and the median angle between this orientation and the city orientation orders the ossuary/columbarium building. The inside ground level is six feet above street level. The prelude to entry is a small plaza containing three trees at ambiguous orientation. This plaza is bounded on one side by an existing building designated to become a museum. The plaza is the passage from civic (museum) to spiritual (cemetery), from knowledge to faith. From this plaza at sidewalk level, the

glimpse of a different orientation is offered. The ossuary/columbarium, because it is the median angle between city and chapel, appears at an oblique angle from the plaza. The stairs and ramp lead up from the plaza and at the top, the new orientation becomes fully evident. The dead rest at a different orientation than the city. To the left of the stairs and the right of the ramp are gardens which serve as the beginning and ending of the building.

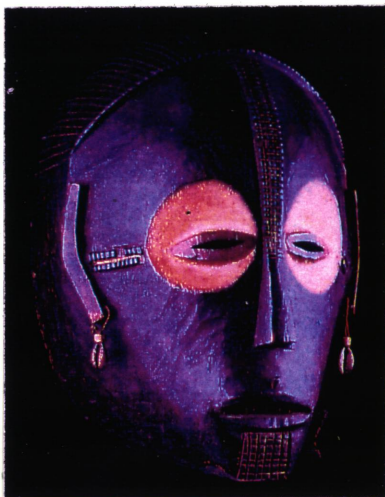
The ossuary/columbarium building contains twelve openings that appear as dark slits, three feet by eighteen feet. On either side of each opening is a bed of glass pieces and crushed sea shells meant to commemorate the Middle Passage. One material element of African religion was light-reflecting objects meant to represent the "flash of the spirit from human form to the sacred world."<sup>21</sup> The chapel sits at an east-west orientation partially surrounded by a pool of water which mediates the disparate orientations of the chapel and the ossuary/columbarium.

Inside the ossuary/columbarium, a catwalk at nine feet threads together the individual rooms of the ossuary. The supporting wall of the catwalk that runs along parallel to it on one side contains a written and pictorial history of

slaves and free blacks in America from the time of the first slaves to the Emancipation Proclamation. On the other side of the catwalk, through the dark narrow perpendicular walls of the ossuary appears a partial glimpse of the opposite wall of each room, washed in light. The source of light is not seen. In this wall are the graves of the reinterred bodies, each marked by a slab of marble. Below the catwalk in these dark hallways looking toward the ossuary are brilliantly colored panels of African textiles and beadwork. They only become evident upon pausing to allow the eyes to adjust to the darkness. Looking back in the opposite direction toward the catwalk, a slit of sky shows through the window above the catwalk. On the other side of these ossuary rooms, opposite the catwalk is a hallway and the inner perimeter columbarium wall. In these walls are niches, each of which contains nine individual glass shelves for urns. At the back of each niche is a slab of translucent marble which allows in light to silhouette the urns.

At the far outside end of the chapel between the columbarium wall and the chapel wall is a set of stairs which become narrower going up. These lead to a terrace. Inside the chapel, a granite altar holds the outer wall up and away from the inner wall. This allows in enough light to make a horizon line with the lower inside wall. At the far end of the chapel beyond the altar is a light tower which lights the end wall and allows objects on the altar to be lit from behind and above.

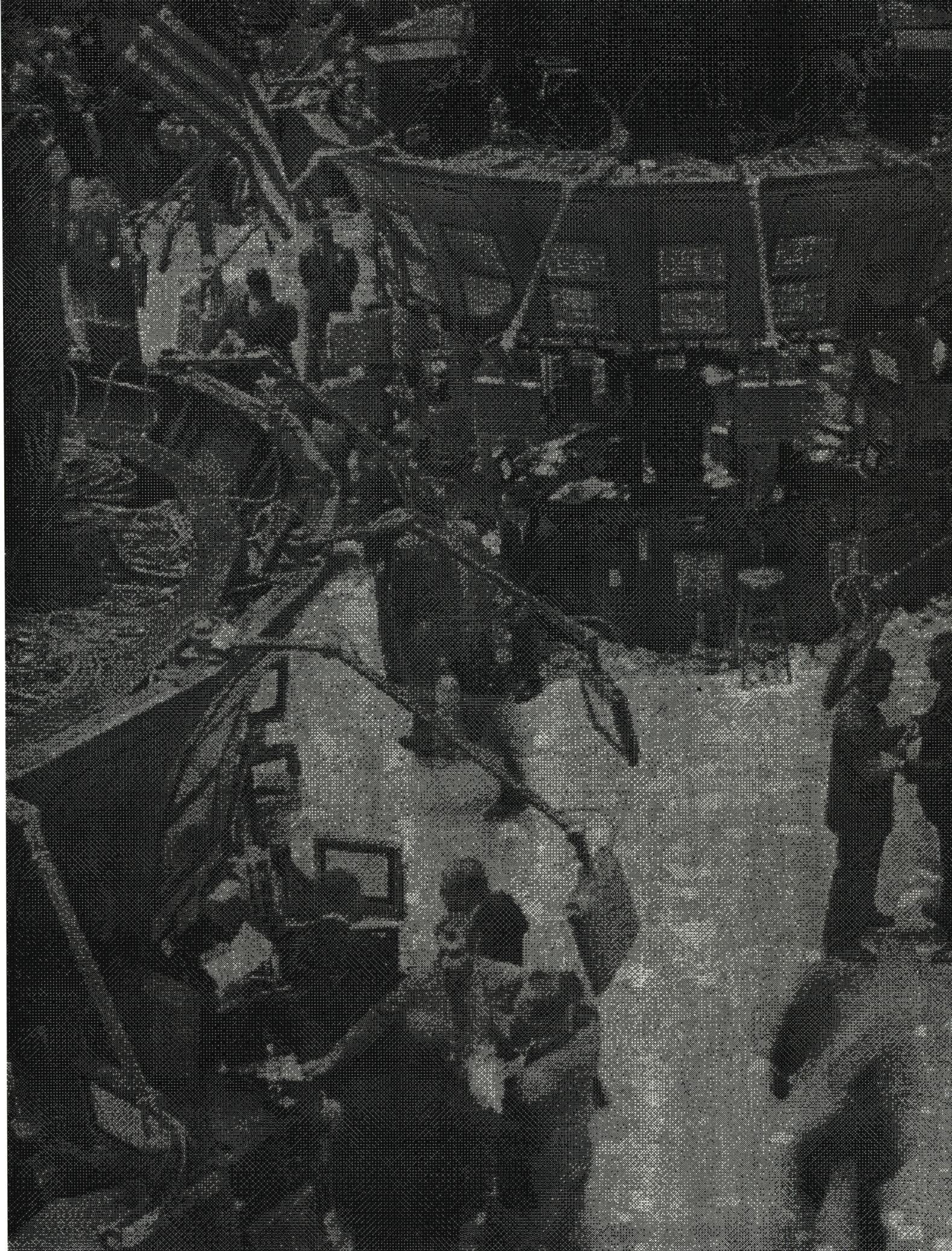




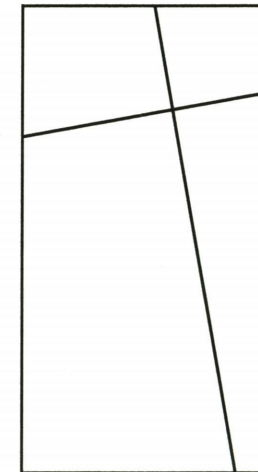
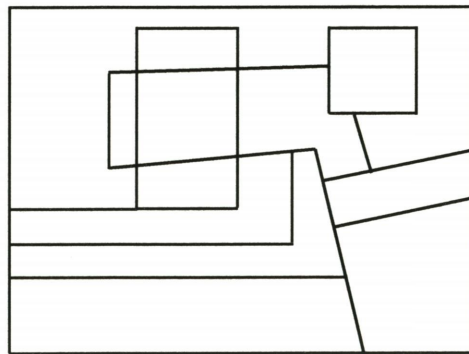
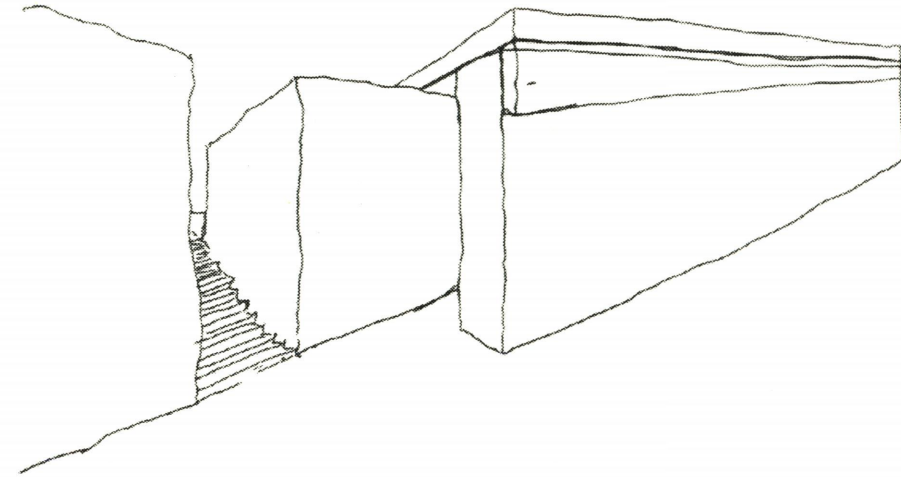
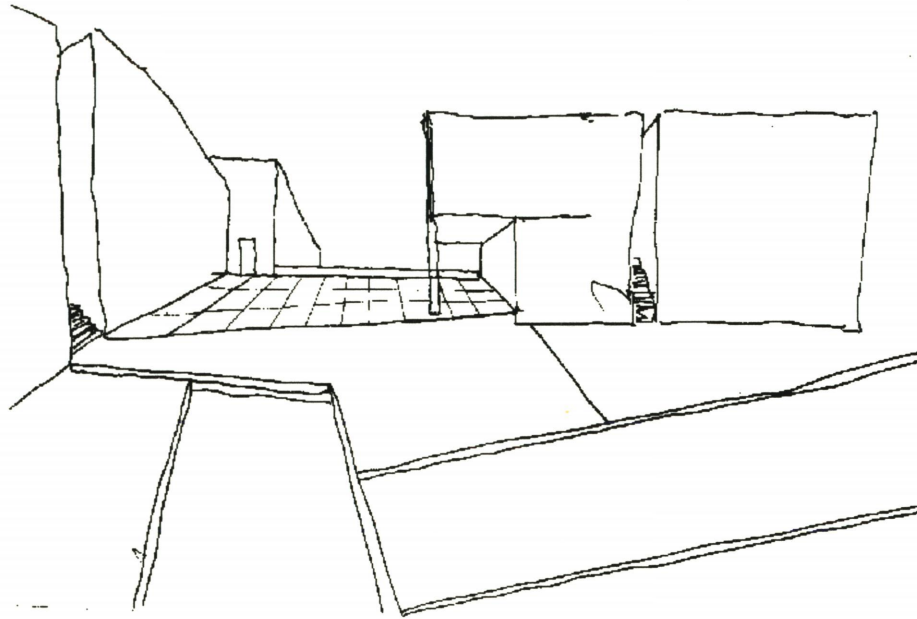
# The African Burial Ground



New York City

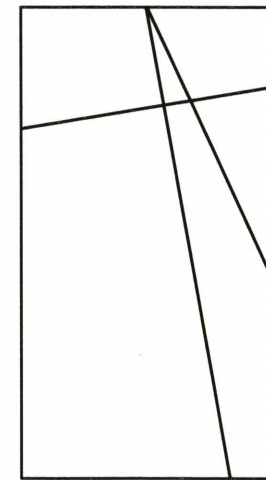
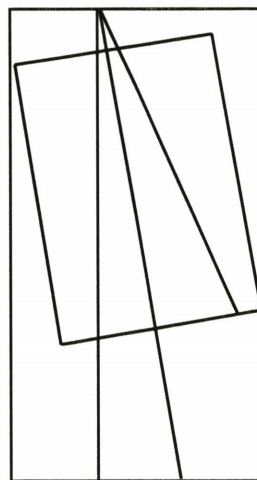
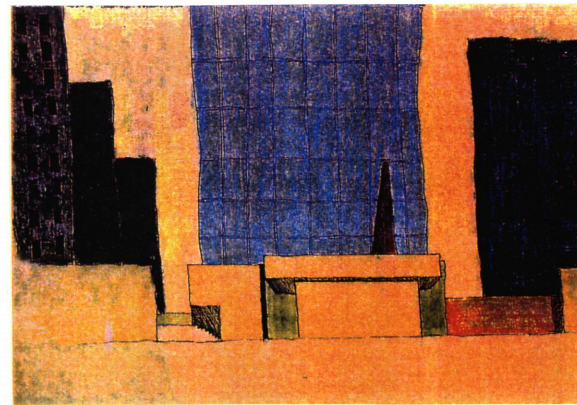
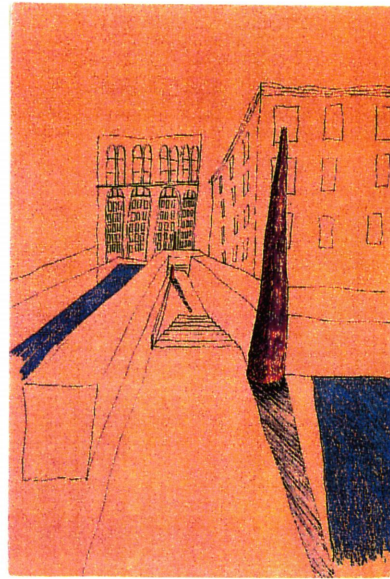






The plan of the northwest corner of Piazza san Marco provides a starting point for a site plan. The individual column plans of that corner suggest building plans.

The one hundred degree angle from that corner remains and everything else is discarded.



Three orientations intersect on the site: one given by tradition (the east-west siting of the chapel), another imposed by will and judgement, and one given by the orientation of the site and its context--the strict grid of the city.

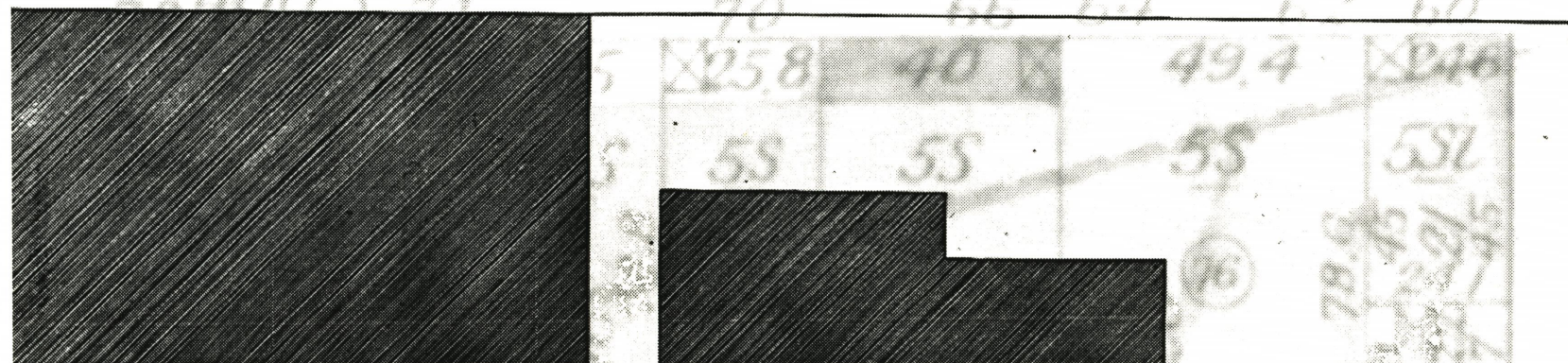
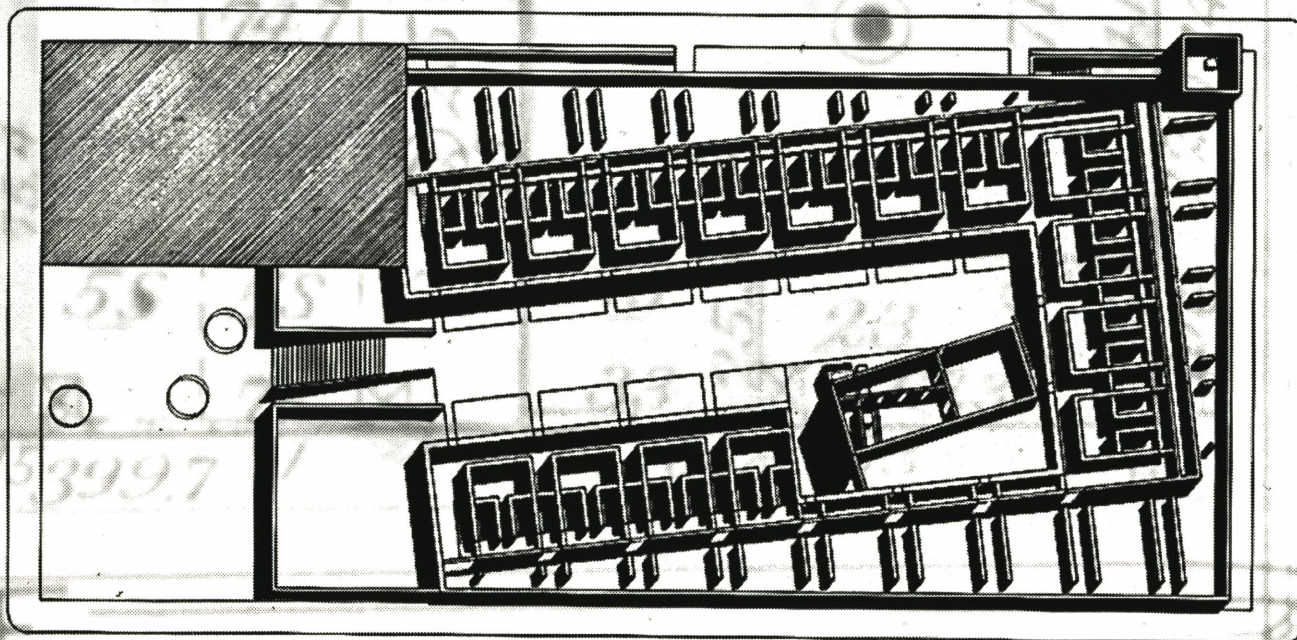
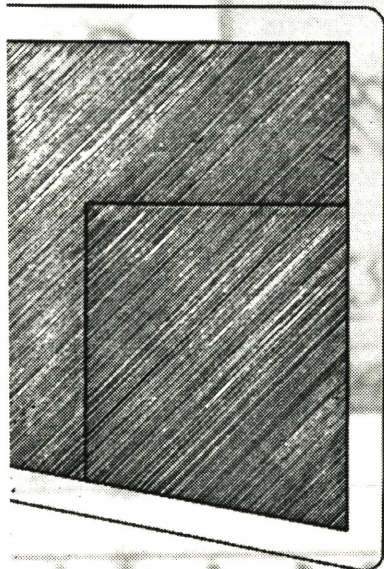
Finally the site is ordered by placing the chapel on the east-west axis and choosing the median angle between that orientation and the city grid to order the ossuary/columbarium.



"Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression."  
Foucault The Order of Things



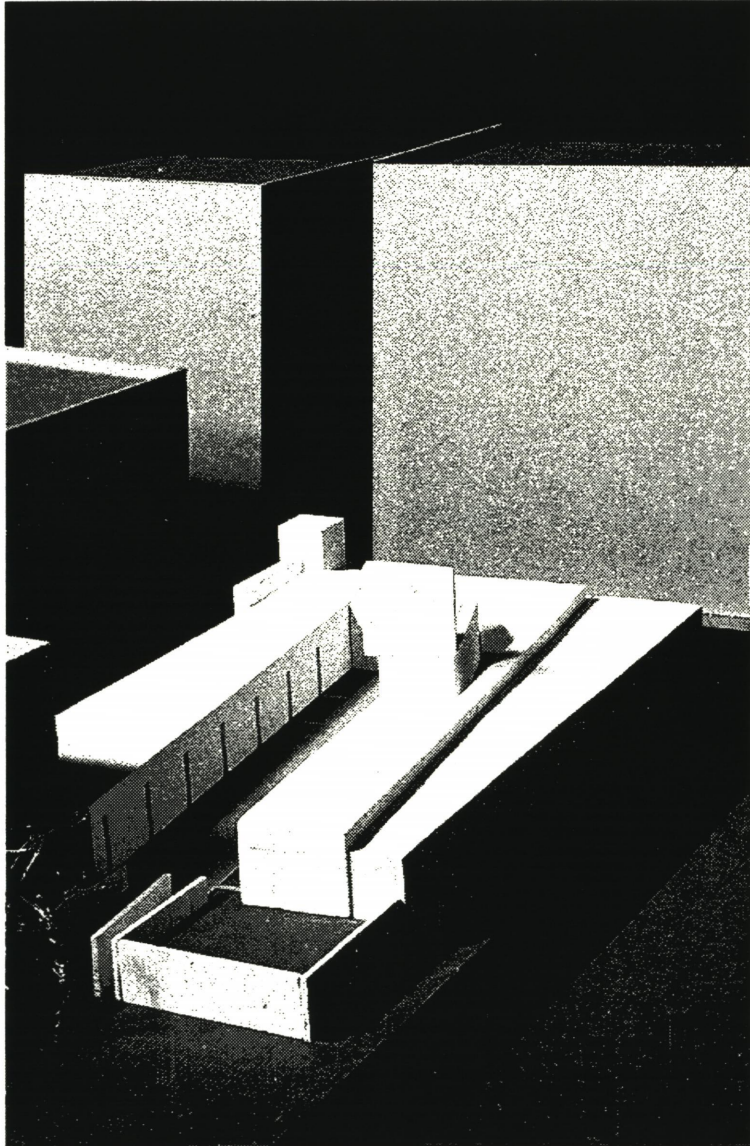




"I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it-- stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened."

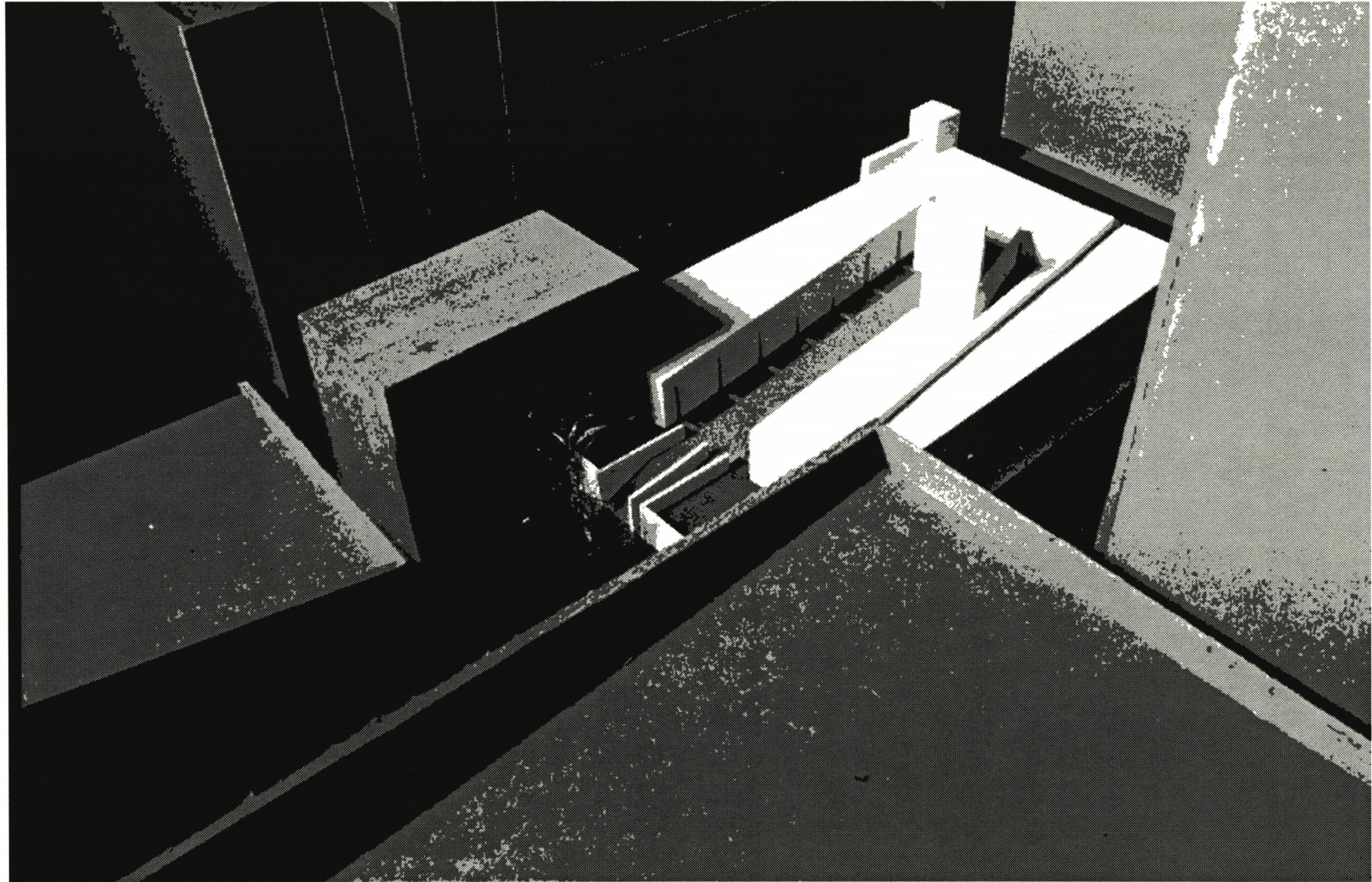
Beloved Toni Morrison





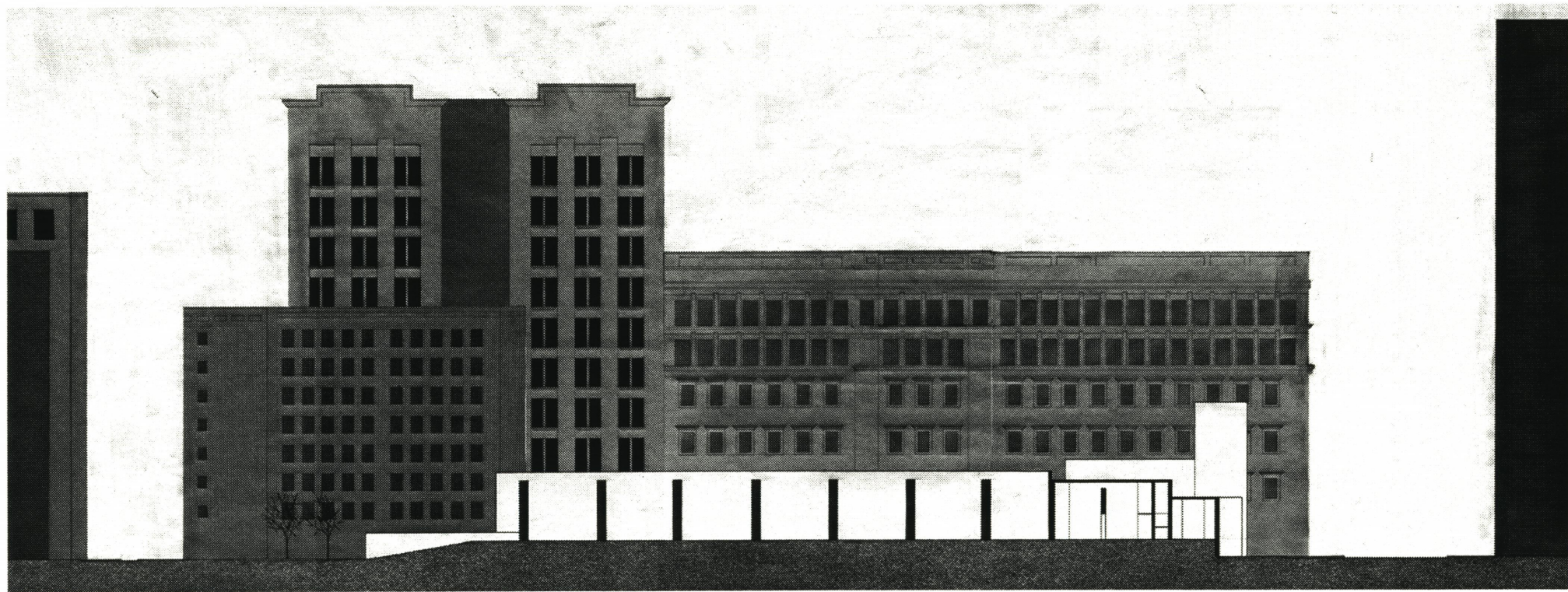
Site Model





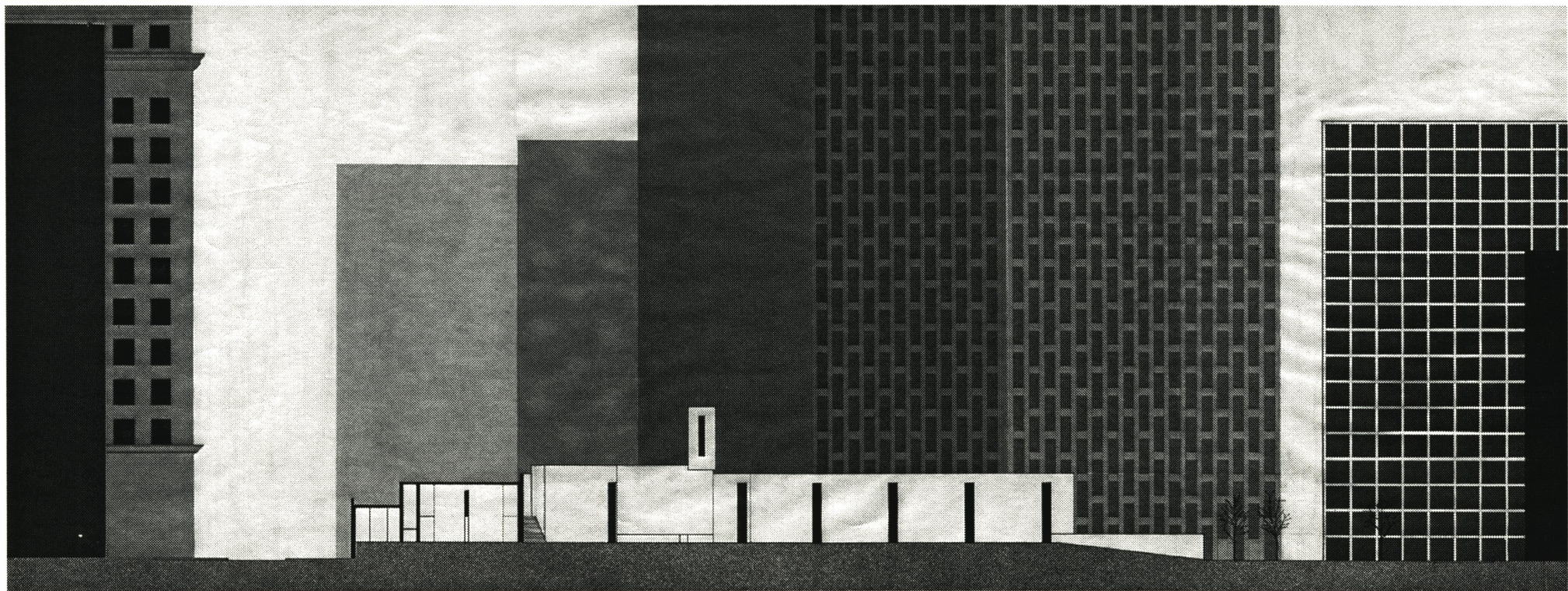


North Elevation



"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me forth in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a plain that was full of bones. 2. And he led me about through them on every side. Now they were very many upon the face of the plain, and they were exceeding dry. 3. And he said to me: Son of man, dost thou think these bones shall live? And I answered: O Lord God thou knowest. 4. And he said to me: Prophecy concerning these bones, and say to them: Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5. Thus saith the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will send spirit into you, and you shall live. 6. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to grow over you, and will cover you with skin; and I will give you spirit and you shall live. And you shall know that I am the Lord. 7. And I prophesied as he had commanded me; and as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a commotion: and the bones came together, each one to its joint. 8. And I saw, and behold the sinews and the flesh came up upon them; and the skin was stretched over them, but there was no spirit in them.



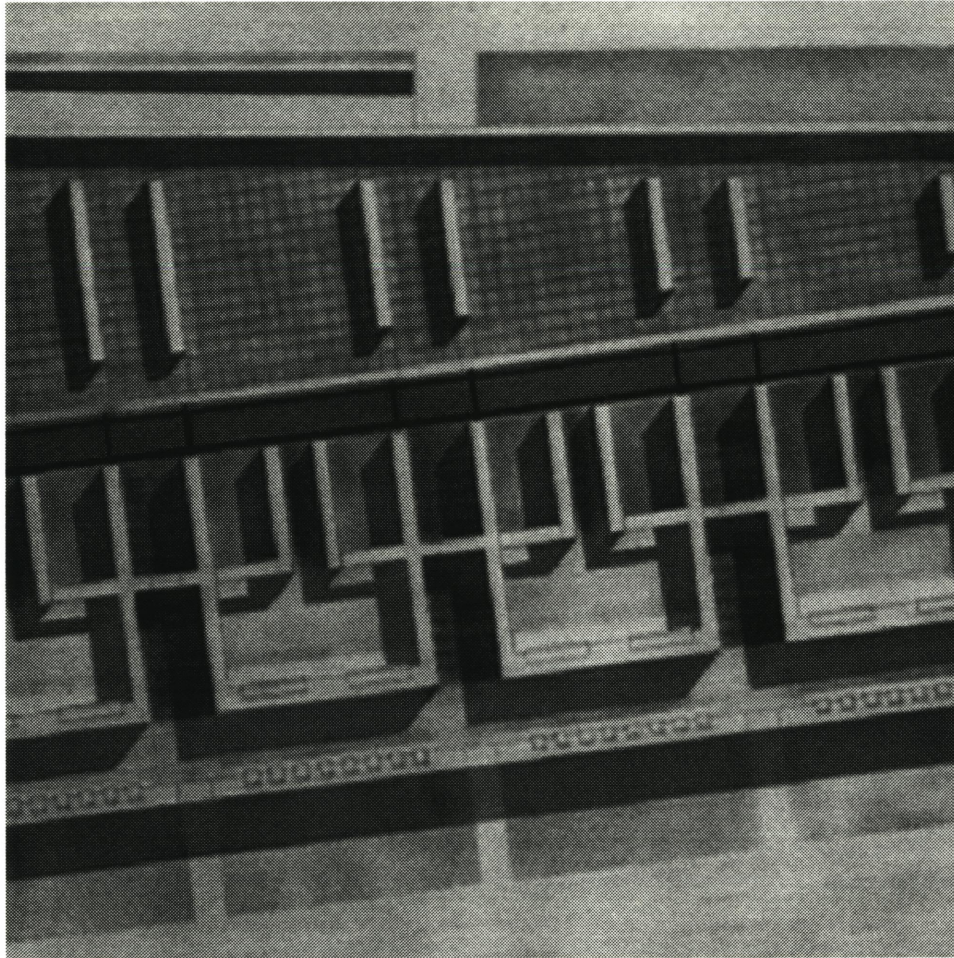


South Elevation

9. And he said to me: Prophecy to the spirit, prophecy, O son of man, and say to the spirit: Thus saith the Lord God: Come, spirit, from the four winds, and blow upon these slain, and let them live again. 10. And I prophesied as he had commanded me: and the spirit came into them, and they lived, and they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. 11. And he said to me: Son of man all these bones are the house of Israel. They say: Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, and we are cut off. 12. Therefore prophecy, and say to them: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will open your graves, and will bring you out of your sepulchres, O my people, and will bring you into the land of Israel. 13. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have opened your sepulchres, and shall have brought you out of your graves, O my people: 14. and shall have put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall make you rest upon your own land. And you shall know that I the Lord have spoken, and done it, saith the Lord God."

Ezekiel ch. 37 v. 1-14

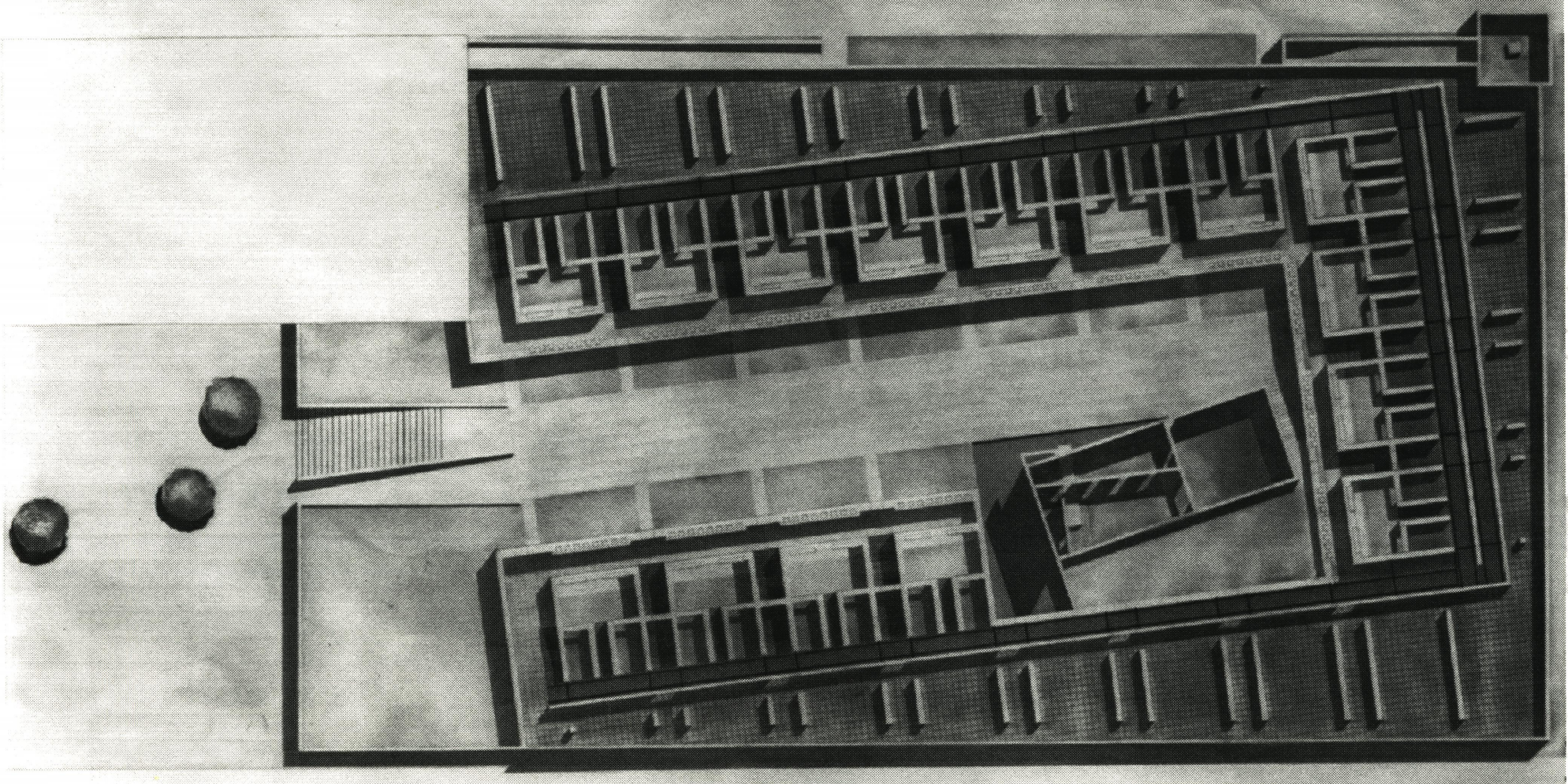




"The Plan is the generator... The Plan holds in itself the essence of sensation...Without plan there can be neither grandeur of aim and expression, nor rhythm, nor mass, nor coherence. Without plan we have the sensation, so insupportable to man, of shapelessness, of poverty, of disorder, of wilfulness. A plan calls for the most active imagination. It calls for the most severe discipline also. The plan is what determines everything; it is the decisive moment."

Le Corbusier Towards a New Architecture





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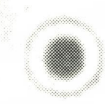
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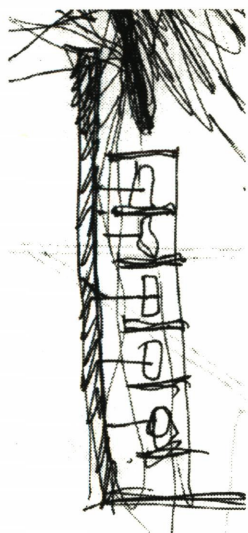
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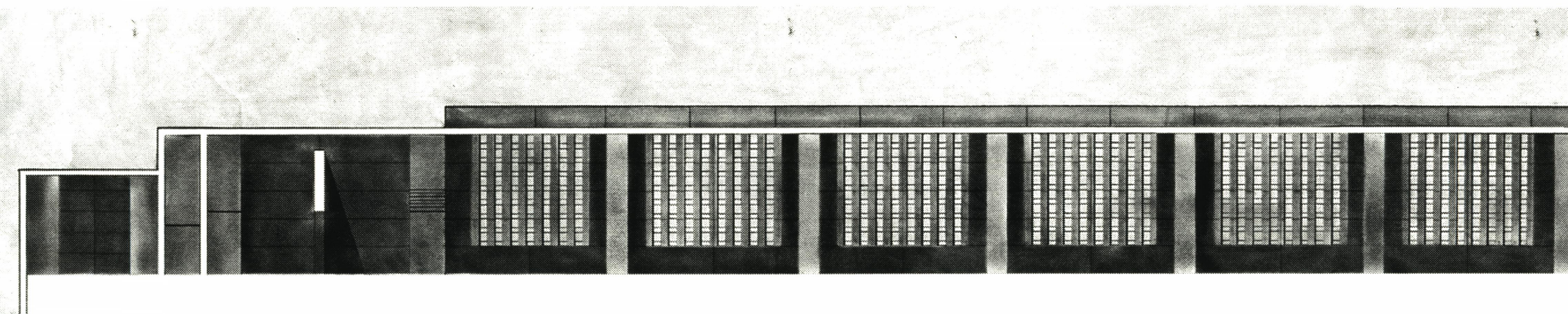
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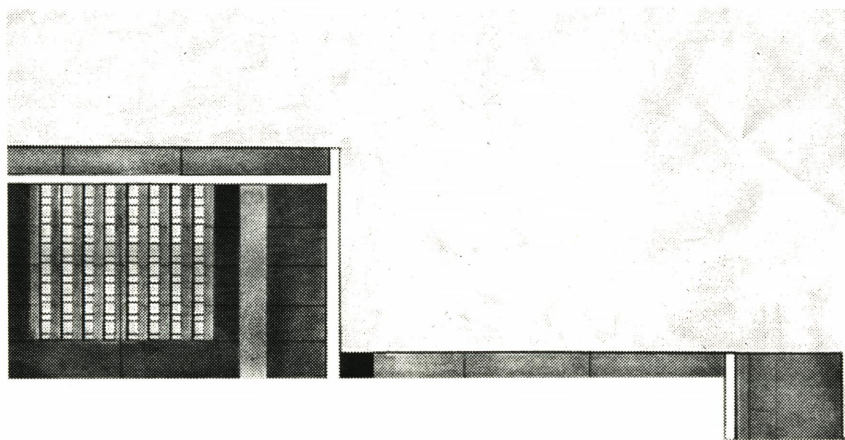


Section/elevation: columbarium wall

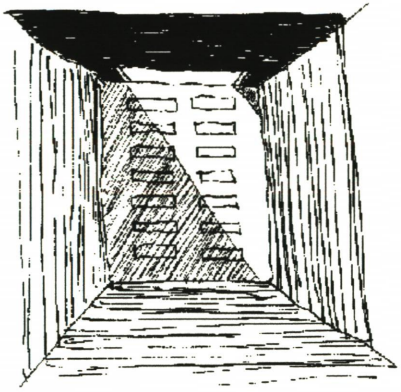




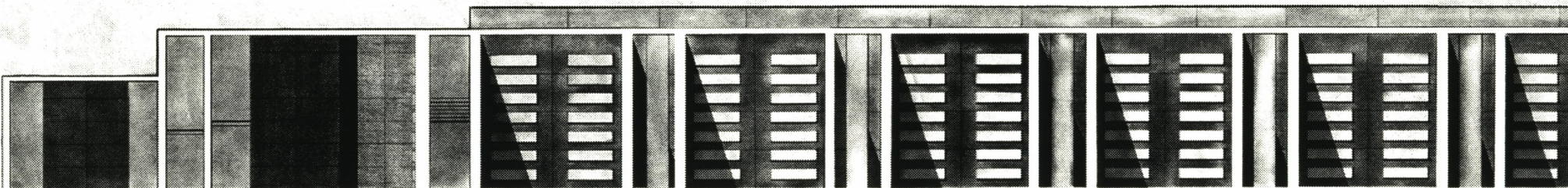
Model: columbarium wall with urns





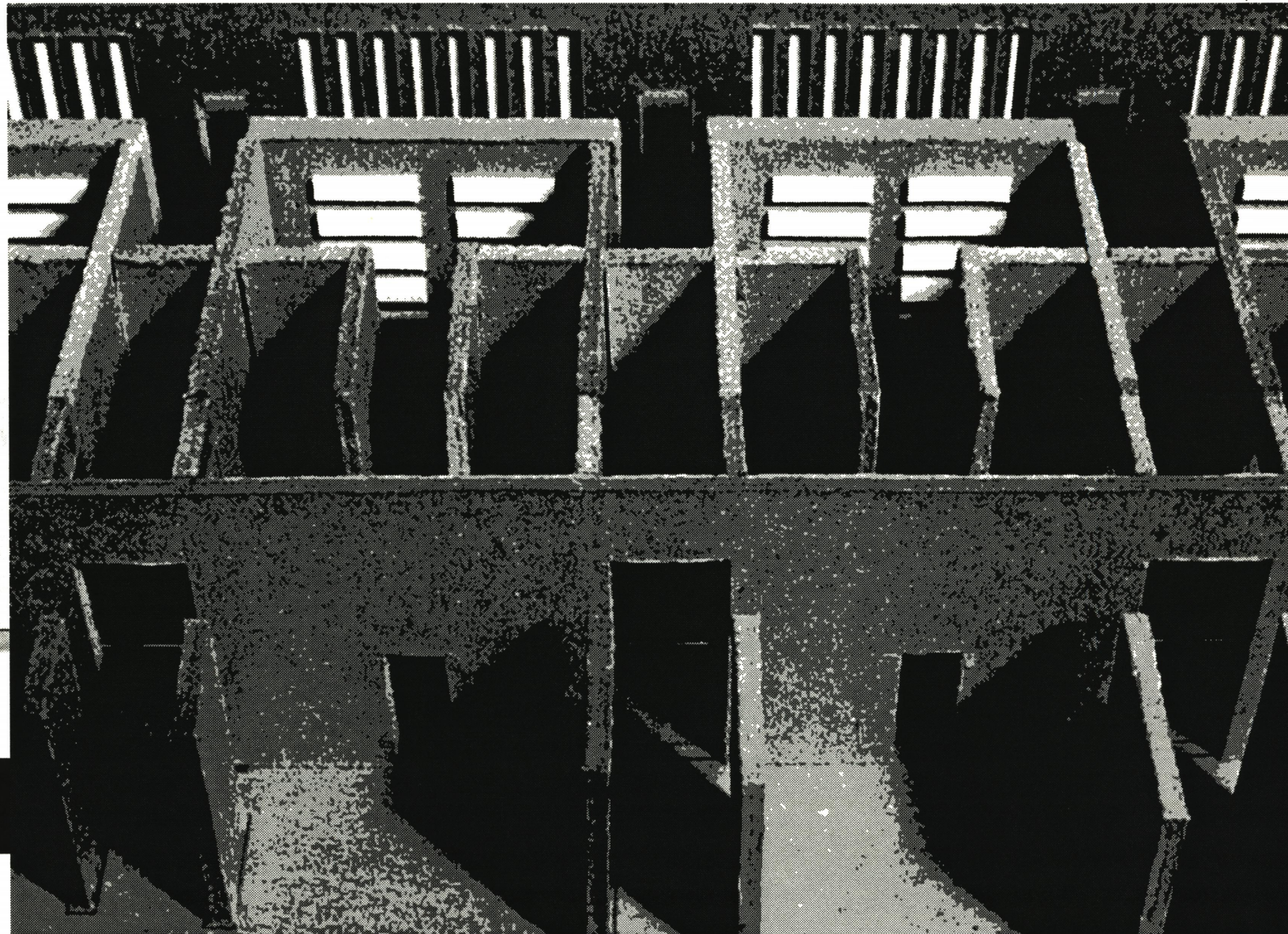
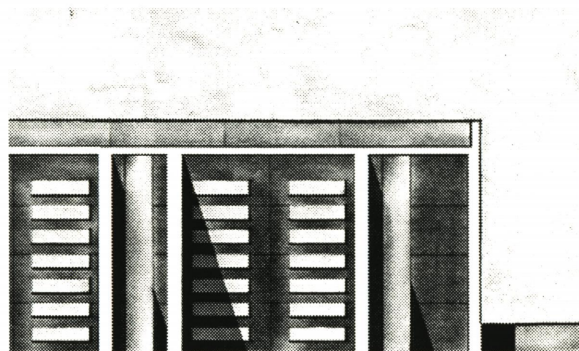


Section/elevation: ossuary wall





Model: ossuary rooms and columbarium wall





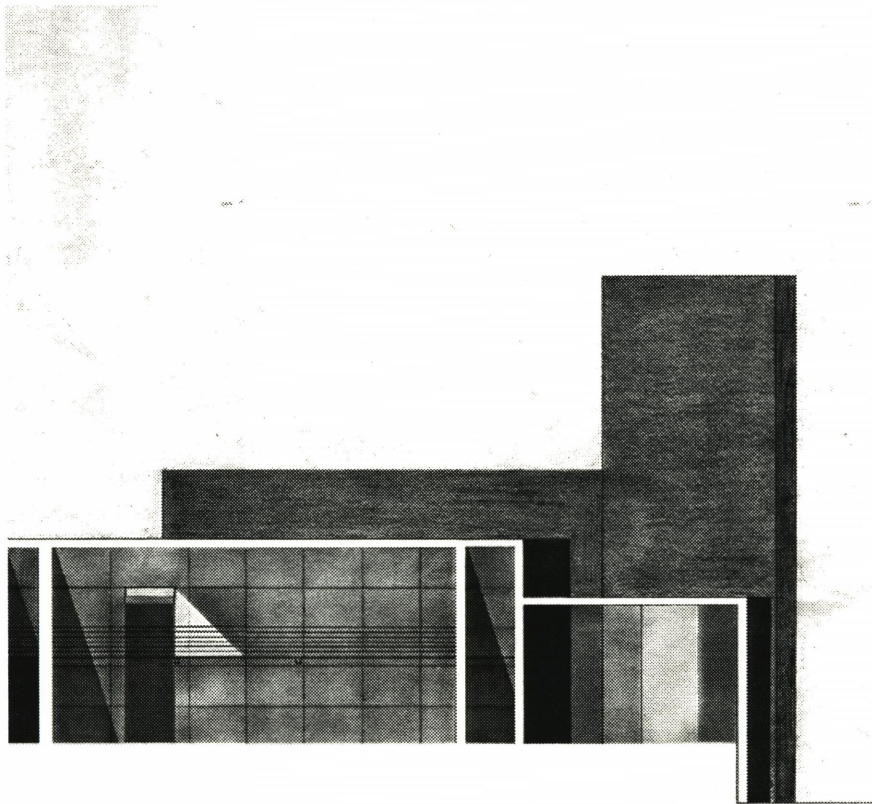


Section/elevation: catwalk and history wall



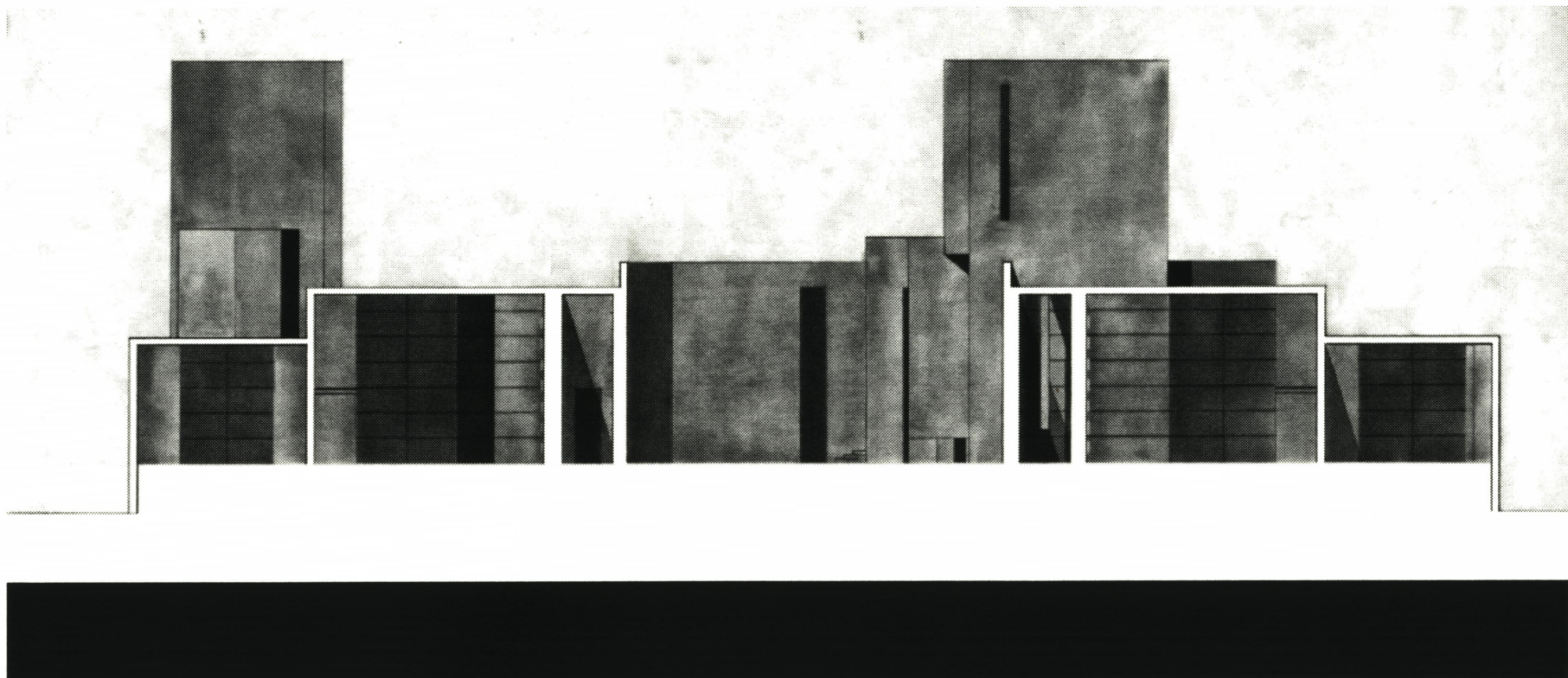


Model: catwalk and history wall





Cross section: history wall, catwalk, ossuary, columbarium





Model: history wall, catwalk, ossuary rooms, columbarium wall





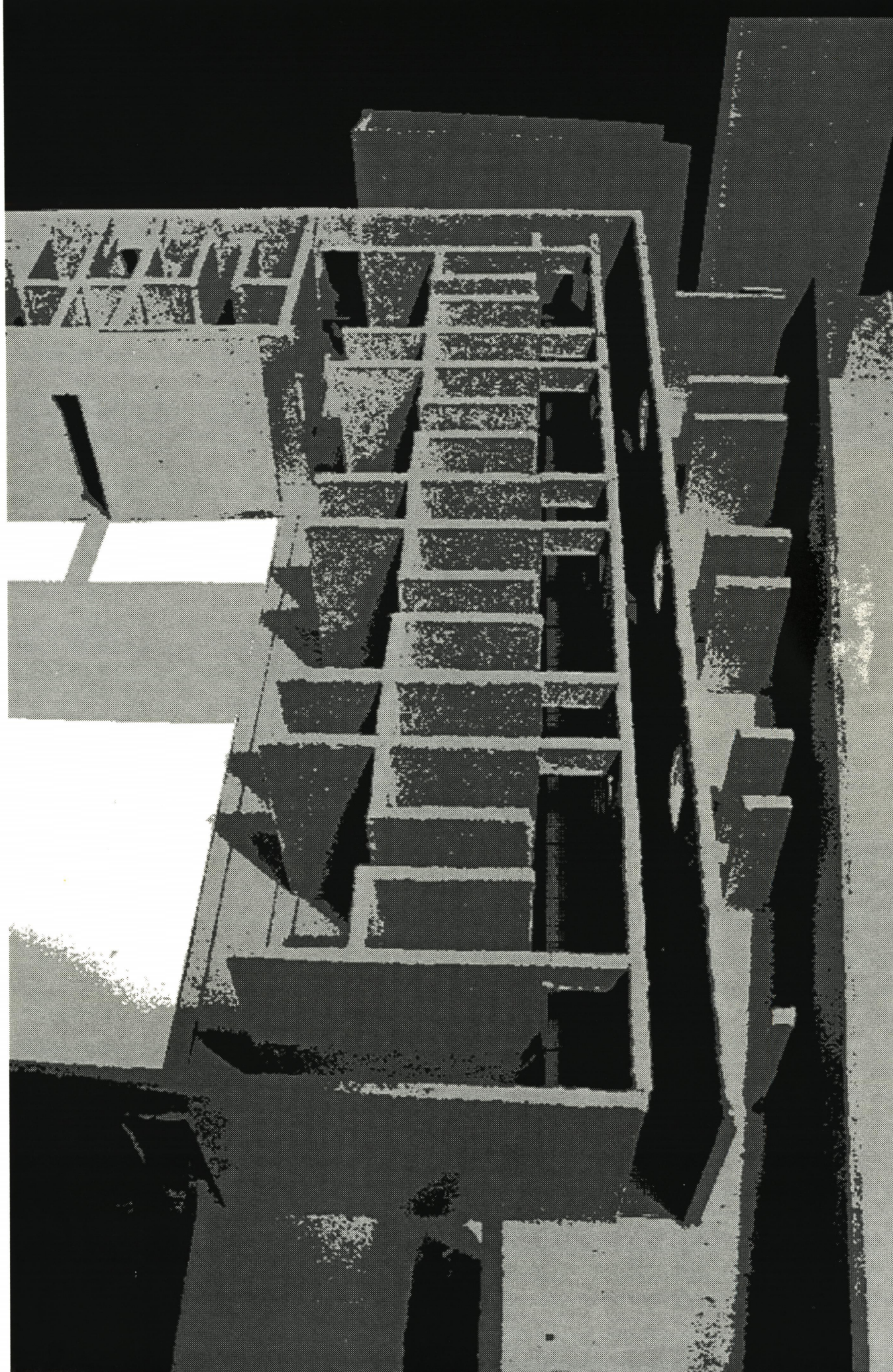


"Our elements are vertical walls, the spread of the soil, holes to serve as passages for man or for light, doors or windows. The holes give much or little light, make gay or sad. The walls are in full brilliant light, or in half shade or in full shade, giving the effect of gaiety, serenity or sadness. Your symphony is made ready.



The aim of architecture is to make you gay or serene. Have respect for walls. The Pompeian did not cut up his wall-spaces; he was devoted to wall-spaces and loved light. Light is intense when it falls between walls which reflect it."

Le Corbusier Towards a New Architecture



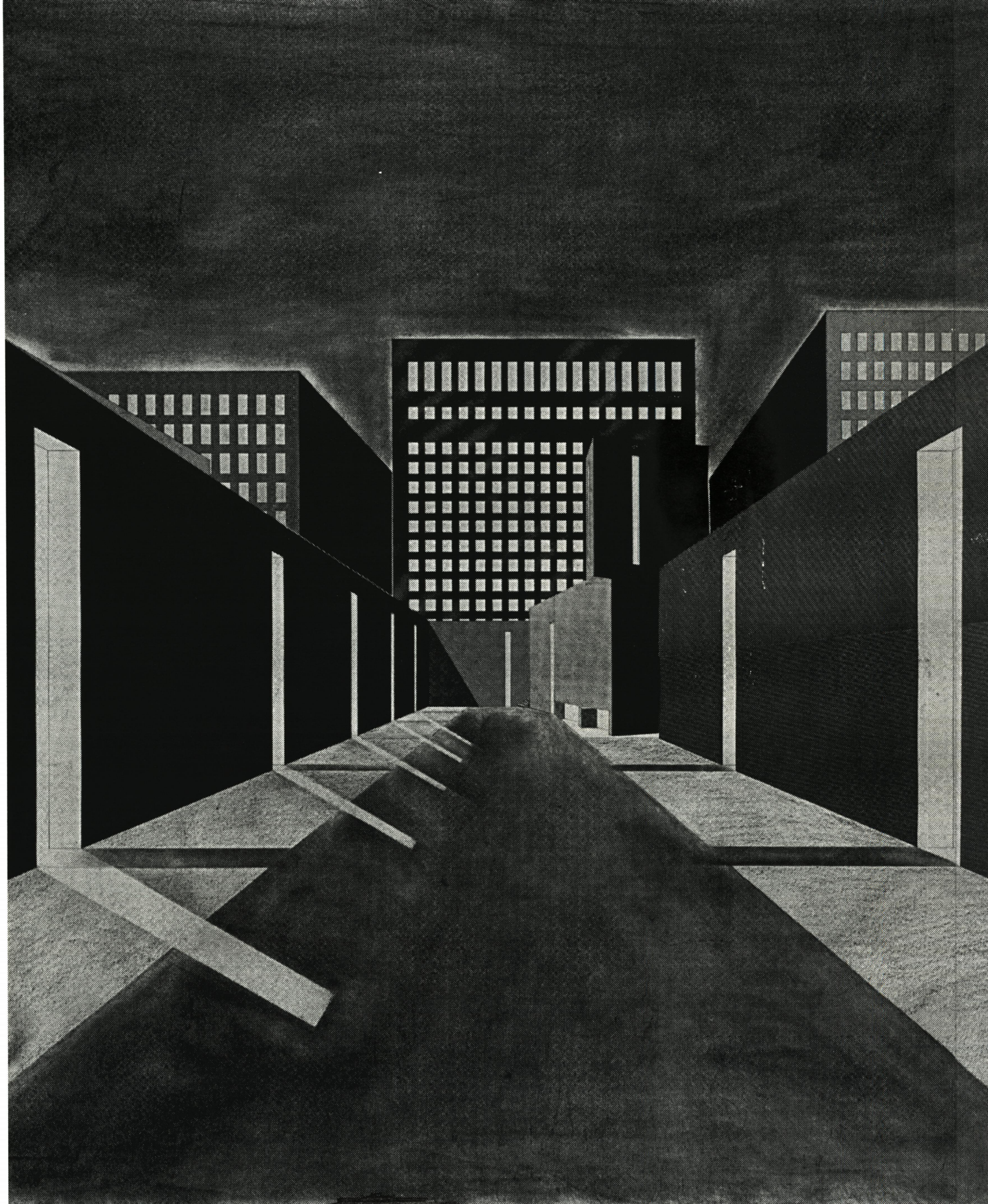


"Arrangement, however, is the fit assemblage of details...The kinds of arrangement (which in Greek are called *ideae*) are these: ichnography (plan); orthography (elevation); scenography (perspective)... Scenography (perspective) also is the shading of the front and the retreating sides, and the correspondence of all lines to the vanishing point, which is the centre of a circle."  
Vitruvius On Architecture



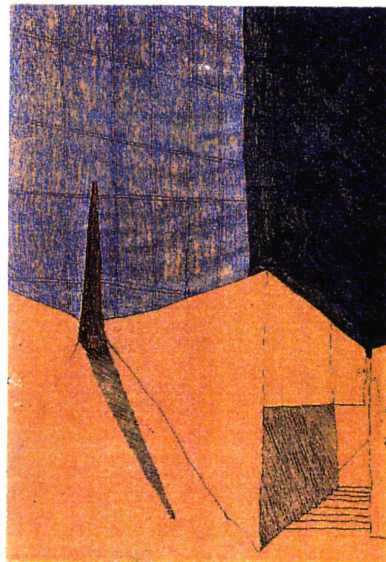


"Art is memory's mise-en-scene."  
Barragan The Architecture of Luis Barragan

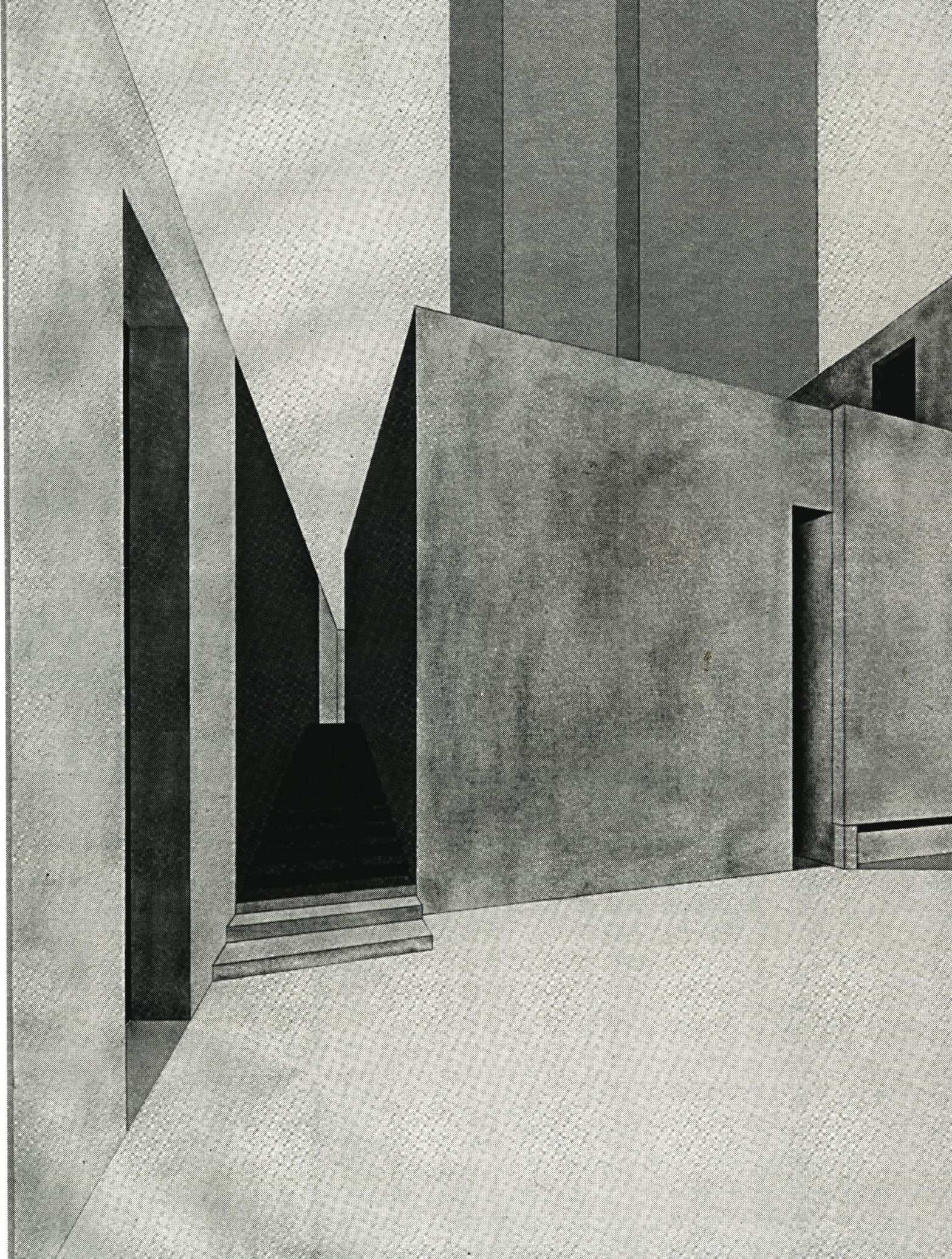




"We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her....there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some way includes the former, and is mightier in its reality."  
Ruskin The Seven Lamps of Architecture

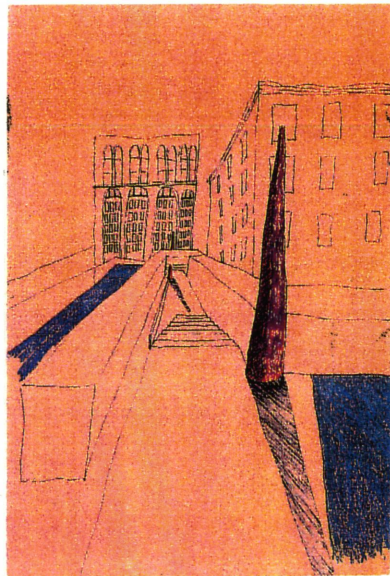




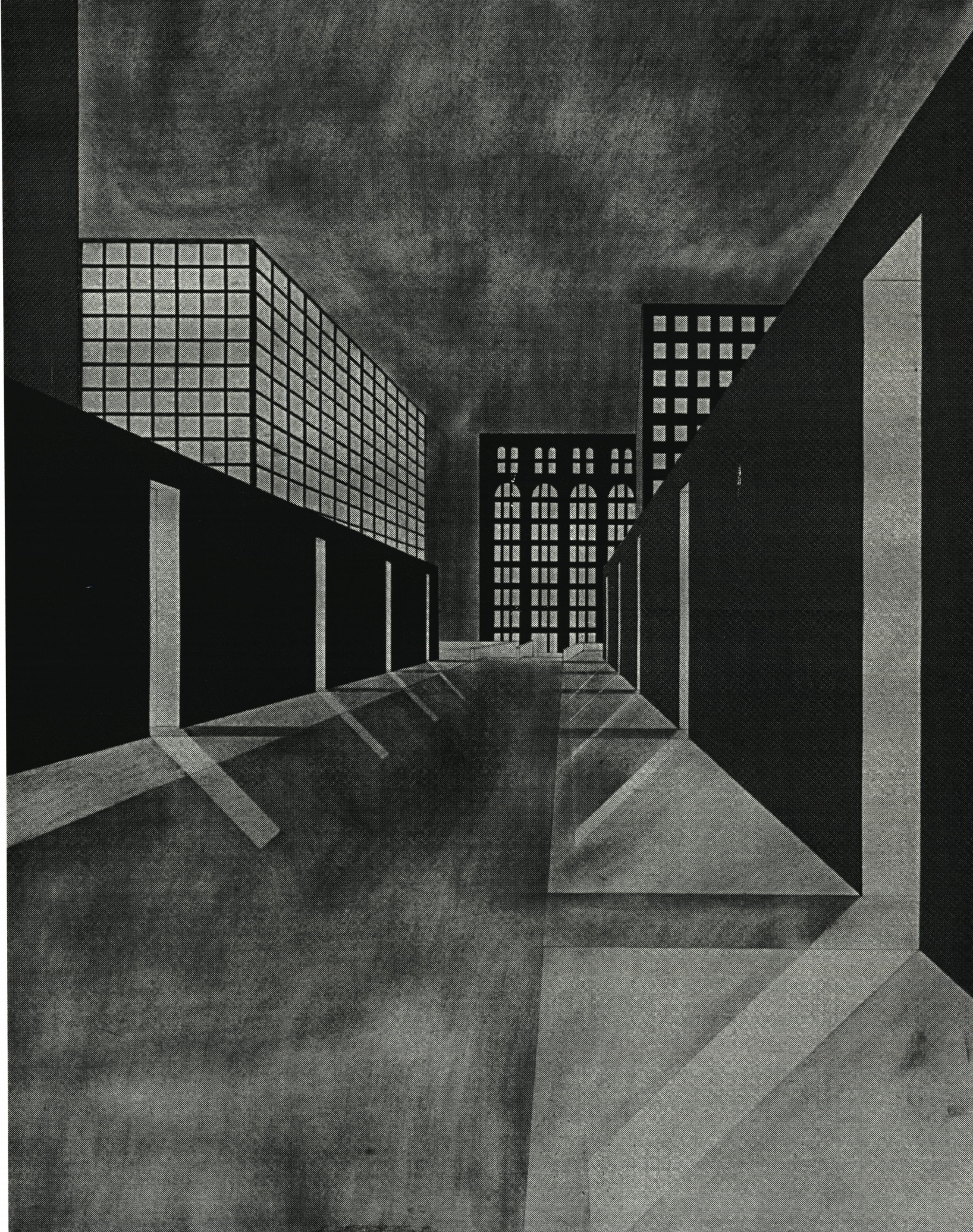




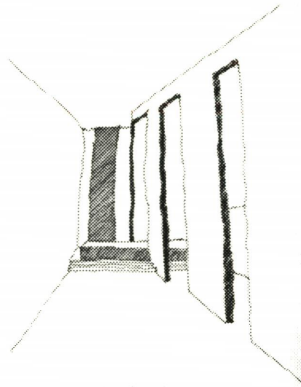
"Architecture is judged by the eyes that see, by the head that turns and the legs that walk. Architecture is not a synchronic phenomenon but a successive one, made up of pictures adding themselves one to the other, following each other in time and space like music."  
Le Corbusier The Modulor



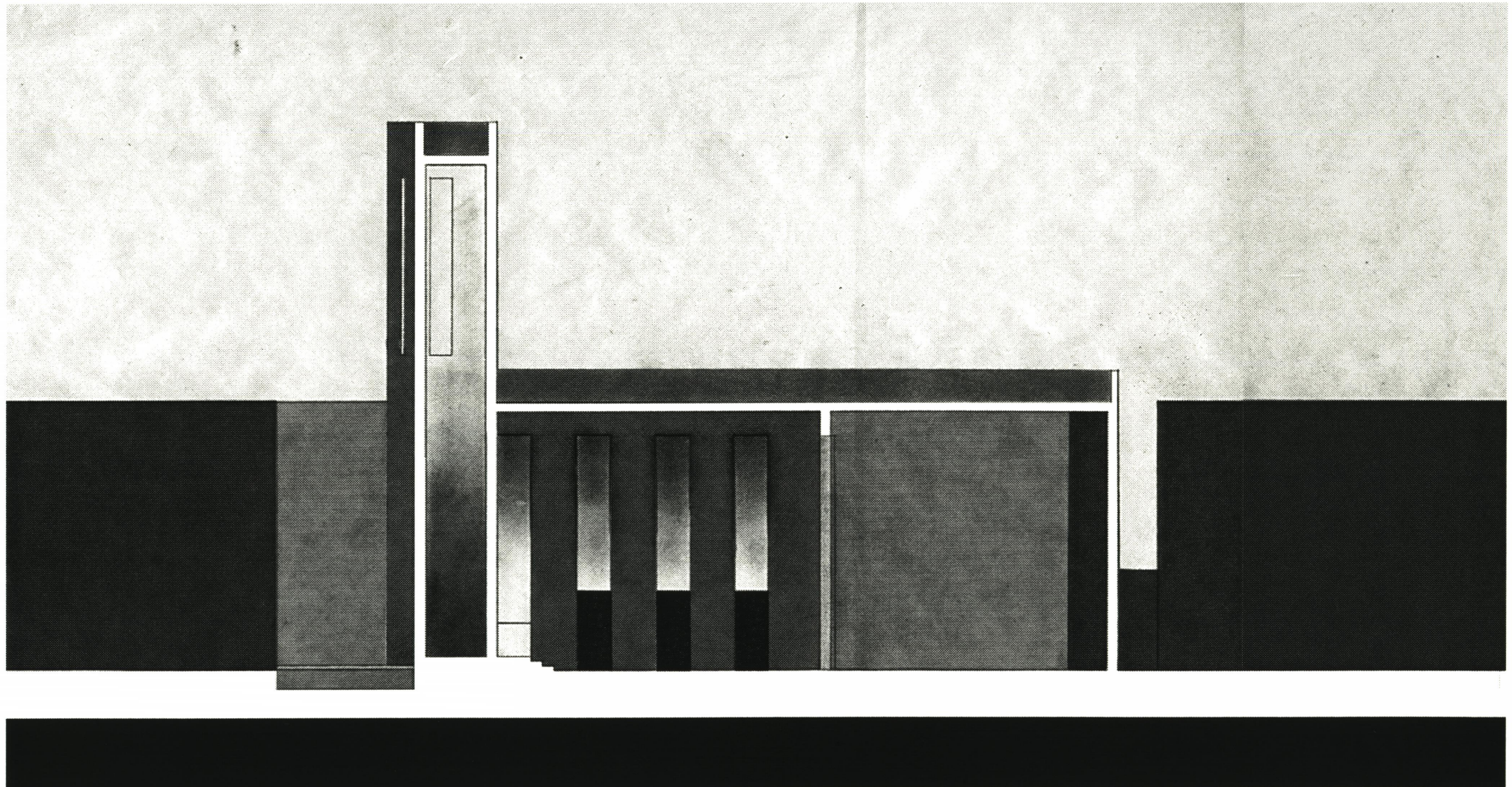








Chapel section: east/west

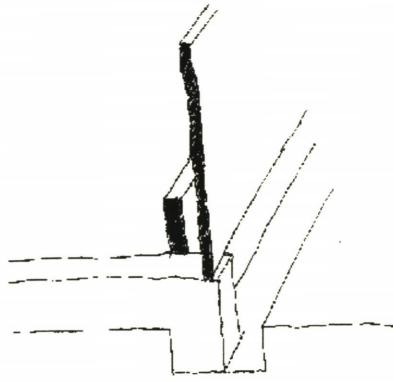




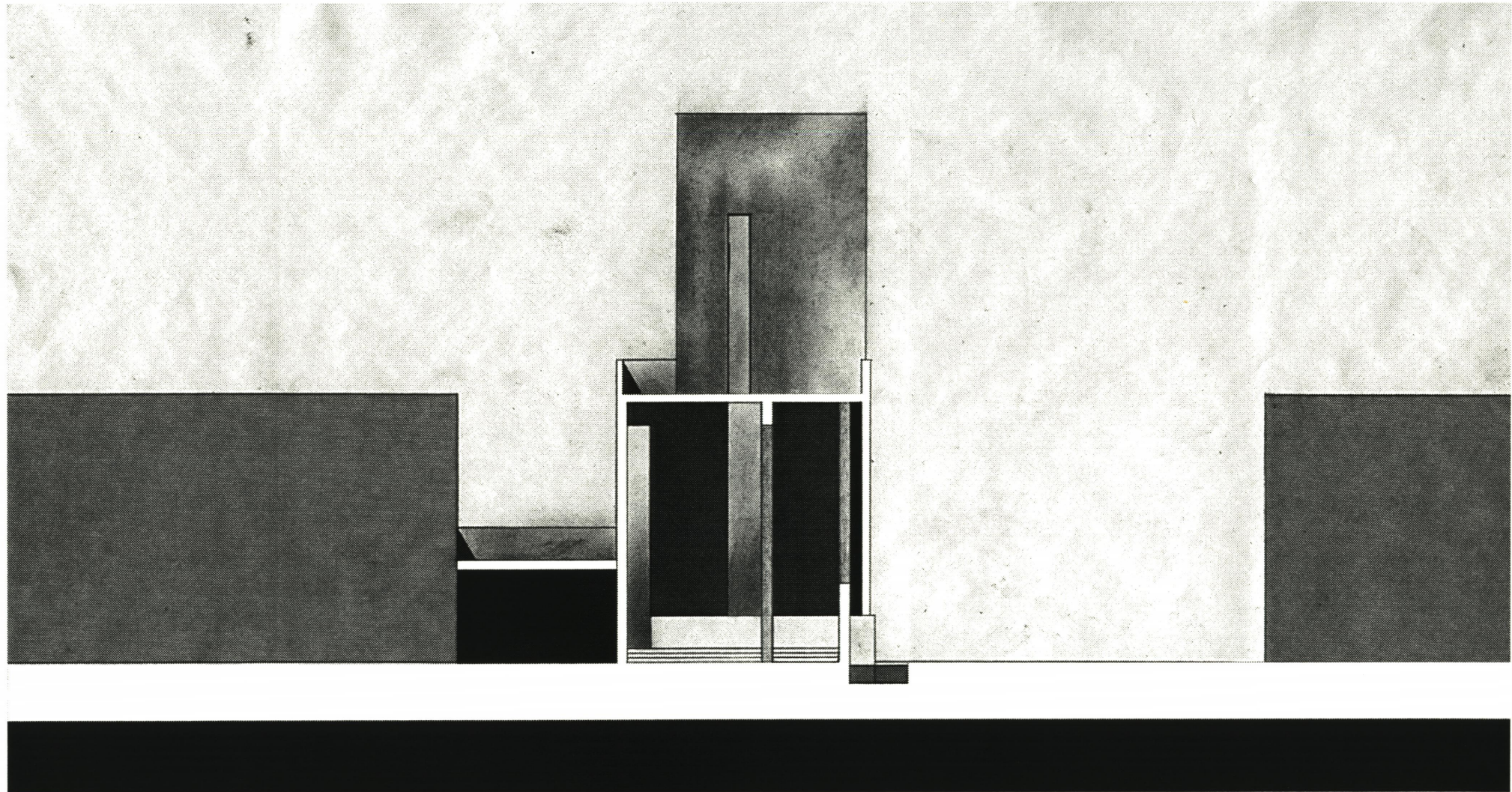
Model: chapel main altar





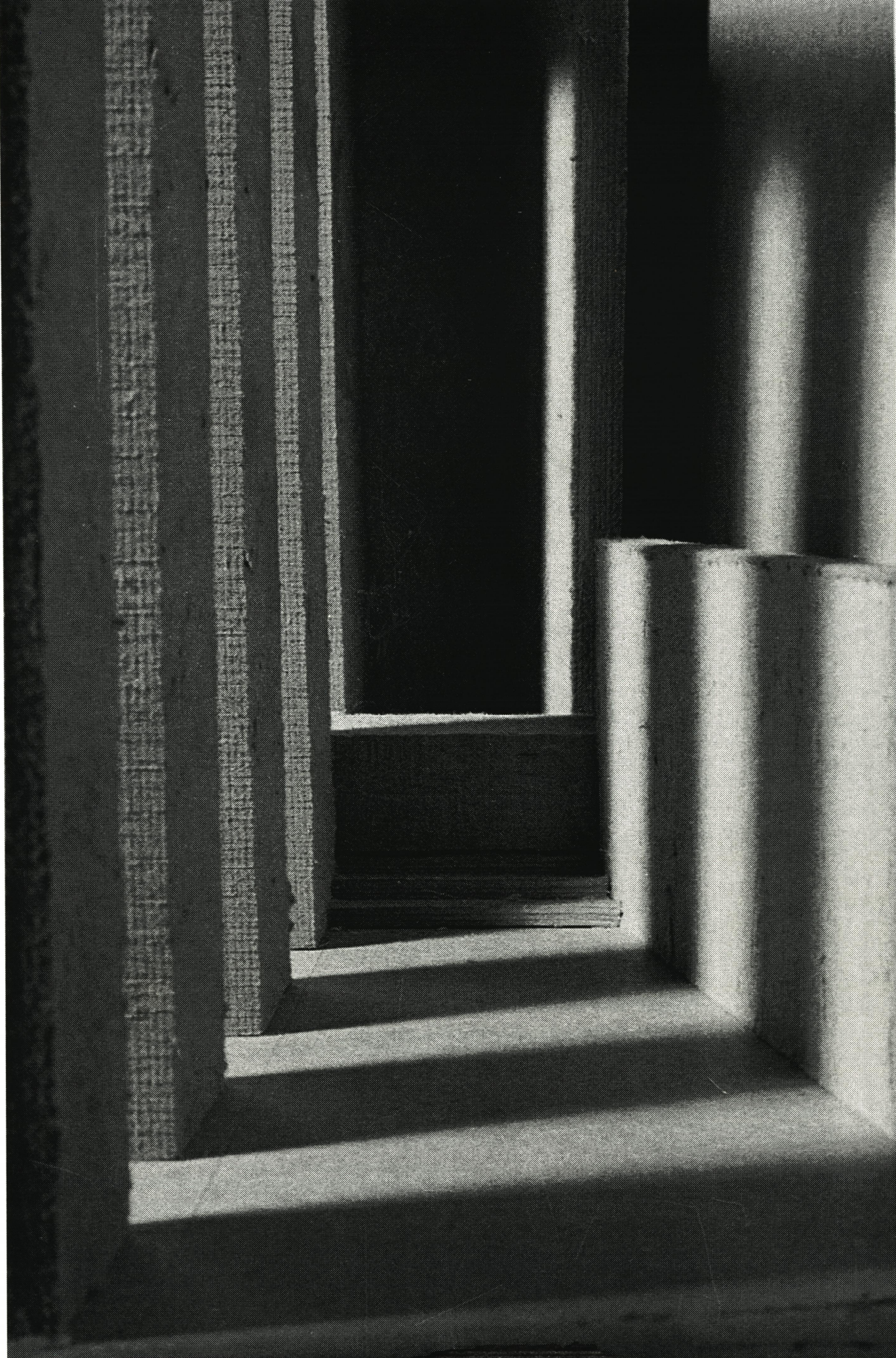


Chapel section: north/south



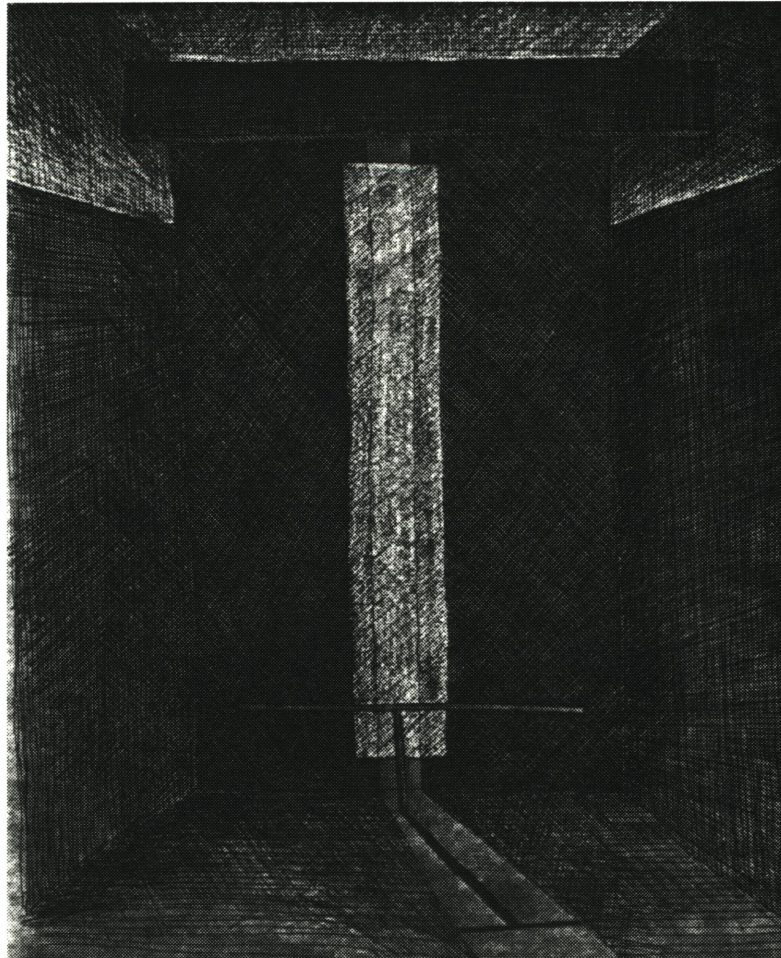


Model: chapel side-altar





Sketch and model: chapel horizon wall









"Almost every period of architecture has been linked on to research into construction. The conclusion has often been drawn that architecture is construction. It may be that the effort put forth by architects has been mainly concentrated on the constructional problems of the time; that is not a reason for mixing different things. It is quite true that the architect should have construction at least as much at his fingers' ends as a thinker his grammar. And construction being a much more difficult and complex science than grammar, an architect's efforts are concentrated on it for a large part of his career; but he should not vegetate there."

Le Corbusier Towards a New Architecture



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Guthrie, comp. and trans., *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1987), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Rene' Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Laurence J. Lefleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 93.

<sup>4</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 70.

<sup>7</sup> George Lesser, *Gothic Cathedrals and Sacred Geometry*, Vol. 1 (London: A. Tiranti, 1957-64), 8-9

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1951), 50.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. Anton C. Regis (New York: The Modern Library, 1945), 95.

<sup>10</sup> W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: Kant and the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 4 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1952), 228.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Aldo Rossi: *Selected Writings and Projects*, ed. John O'Regan (London: Architectural Design, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford U P, 1946), 168.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Colquhoun, "Three Kinds of Historicism," *Oppositions* 26 (Spring 1984), 38.

<sup>14</sup> Jose Ortega y Gasset, *History as a System and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History* (New York: Norton, 1961), 81.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Francesco Dal Co, "Criticism and Design," *Oppositions* 13 trans. Diane Ghirardo (Summer 1978), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Modulor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1954), 72-73.

<sup>17</sup> Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns eds., *Plato the Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1961), 497.

<sup>18</sup> George Lesser, *Gothic Cathedrals and Sacred Geometry* Vol. 1, 8

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Groen, "On History and Architecture: An Interview with Francesco Dal Co," *Perspecta* 23 (1987), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Colonial Press, 1899).

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Washington, ed., *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Random House, 1993), xxviii.



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