

THE COPY WITHIN ITS FRAME



LUDWIG HÄNSSLER

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE
RELATIONSHIP OF A PICTURE TO ITS
FRAME AND SURROUNDINGS



Pablo Picasso, *les Adolescents*,
1906
Exhibition: *Der junge Picasso - Blaue und Rosa Periode*,
Fondation Beyeler, 2019

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 the Fondation Beyeler hosted the retrospective *Der junge Picasso - Blaue und Rosa Periode*. Alongside paintings lent by public or private institutions such as museums and galleries, the exhibition included a number of works owned by private collectors. Many of the paintings are widely used as postcard motifs and art prints or serve as examples in art history books. In most cases they hadn't been displayed publicly for many years.

As I visited the exhibition I realized something strange concerning mainly the privately owned paintings. Although I had seen them before, they didn't match my expectations entirely. It took me a while to realize what it was that confused me about them.

While the exhibition catalog had shown the paintings cropped right at the edge of the canvas, the originals were displayed in opulent baroque frames. They were probably meant to match the extravagant interior of a wealthy collector's salon. I noticed a strange friction between the painting and its frame but also between the frame and the calm modern architecture of the exhibition space. The imagination of decadence but also of dusty storage rooms had been imposed on both the painting and its context.

The exhibition made me realize that a frame is so much more than a container that can be filled with whatever you want. It can articulate both a clear border as well as a fluent transition from context to picture. In its relation to the image, a frame can either emphasize or minimize its meaning. It even makes us wonder about the institutions and social mechanisms that it stands for.

This essay will investigate the relationship of a painting to its frame and to its context by observing various examples. Starting with the contradictory character of rococo frames, I will go on to explore the idea of institutional framing that we find in the works of Louise Lawler. Finally, I will investigate how these examples can be translated into today's architectural production.



Pablo Picasso, *les Adolescents*,
1906
Exhibition Catalogue: *Der junge Picasso - Blaue und Rosa Periode*,
Fondation Beyeler, 2019



Johann Jakob Zeiller, The
Expulsion of the Money-
changers from the Temple,
1756-64,
Ottobeuren Abbey

DISSOLUTION OF THE FRAME IN ROCOCO ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Rococo is an artistic style derived from late baroque decoration techniques of the French aristocracy. It is mainly defined by the *rocaille*, the French expression for shellwork. While works of the early rococo period clearly reference the style's marine origin, later adaptations seem more abstract and sometimes include floral motives in the composition. Seemingly complex, rococo ornament consists of only two basic forms: the c-curve and the s-curve. Differing in scale, proportion, rotation, plasticity and ornamentation, rocaille can be observed all over the world in architecture, interior design, graphic illustration, textile art and painting.

While renaissance and most early baroque architecture articulate a clear differentiation between painting, frame and surrounding, rococo ornamentation often undermines these borders, playing with our expectations and imagination.

Ottobeuren Abbey is one of the most famous examples of rococo architecture in South Germany. The inside of the St. Alexander and St. Theodor Basilica is covered in rocaille, spreading from the pillars to the walls and across parts of the painted ceiling.

The main fresco over the entry hall depicts Jesus expelling the merchants from the temple. While at first glance the frame seems to merely surround the image, closer inspection reveals a much more complex scene. At the top, a decorative leaf drapes across the golden frame reaching into the picture itself. On both sides of the frame something similar can be observed, but this time the rocaille appears broken through. In the lower area of the painting the cloak of an expelled merchant as well as spilled wine extend across the painting's frame into the body of the church.



This contradictory character is driven even further in the case of the illustration accompanying the publication *Biblische Geschichten / Deß Alten und Neuen Testaments* (1748) by Joseph and Johannes Klaubern. In the upper left the rocaille disappears behind a small baldachin that adopts the movement of c-curves within its architecture. Right underneath, the frame becomes a part of the copper engraving, devolving into a shell that serves as a seat for an old man holding a walking stick.



Joseph, und Johanne Klaubern, *Biblische Geschichten / Deß Alten und Neuen Testaments, Denen Jungen Zu leichter Erlehnung, Denen Alten Zu Frischerer* Stecheren in Augspurg. Im Jahr Christi 1748.



Unknown, Austrian Bauernschrank from the collection of Bruno Bischofberger

While in many cases motifs of a given painting and rocaille itself coexist in close relation, existing paintings or prints can also be implemented in a rococo setting using rocaille to reframe them.

This is the case in the decoration of traditional 'farmers' closets' (Bauernschränke) representing a sort of 'pop rococo' that survived in rural Central Europe long after the upper class's stylistic turn towards classicism around 1750. Besides their obvious function as furniture, they were a frequent dowry representing the bride's family's wealth and artistic taste. During the wedding ceremony their colorful outside was proudly shown to the public. The decorations consist of drawings depicting common scenes of rural life framed by rocaille patterns. With the rise of printed pictures that could be bought from 'picture dealers' (Bilderhändler), they were increasingly replaced by copper engravings. Even within the frame we sometimes find small paintings of rural motifs of the specific context of the wardrobe that complete the print.

In the field of architecture, rocaille provided a way to easily stage art in formerly Gothic or Romanesque churches. Architectural elements such as windows, pillars and vaultings have literally been reframed by rocaille ornamentation. While the given structure remained the same, ornamentation was an easy and economic way to unify it with the current state of the art decorating it.

DISCLOSURE OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC FRAME IN THE WORK OF LOUISE LAWLER

While dissolution of the frame in rococo architecture draws the viewer closer into the painting, Louise Lawler's work emphasizes the distance between the two realities.

Louise Lawler is famous for her documentation of artwork in various contexts. She portrays it in art galleries, museums, exhibitions and private collections. Her work is often viewed through the lens of institutional criticism and the dismantling of power and privilege within the artworld. Like many others before her, she raises the question of what defines a work of art.

Looking closer at Lawler's oeuvre, we find something that lies beyond rebellion against the normative and social framework of the fine arts market.

In her photograph *Nude*, first displayed in 2002 in the MOMA New York, Lawler shows a painting by Gerhard Richter leaned against the wall of a gallery, ready to be hung up. Even though she alienates the painting through the process of copying, she puts the viewer on the same level as the artwork: she pushes it off the pedestal of high art. In the catalog accompanying her MOMA exhibition, her own photograph is rotated in order to display Richter's work upright, driving the question of authorship and originality ad absurdum.



Louise Lawler, *Nude*
Museum of Modern Art, 2002



Louise Lawler, *Monogram*,
1984 - 1999

Monogram 1984 - 1999 shows Jasper Johns' painting *White Flag* in the context of a private home. Its faded colors match the freshly made bed and the bare wall behind it, almost as if the painting itself were rubbing off onto the surrounding surfaces. At the same time, the specific context adds a layer of American prudery and domestic banality to the painting. The golden initials stitched onto the bed sheets also raise the question of 'Kitsch and Kunst'. Lawler's copy makes us see the original through different eyes.

THE PICTURE IS ALREADY PAINTED

Today we face a shift in architectural production. In Switzerland alone, demolition causes 500 kilograms of construction waste per second, resulting in the fact that the building industry causes 85% of the country's total waste. Furthermore, a third of all CO2 emissions originate on domestic property. At the same time, society constantly demands new forms of living, new adaptations of the workplace and landmarks in the urban fabric. Even conversion strategies usually result in the demolition of either the facade or the entire structure of a building.

As a young generation of architects we need to reconsider the ways we think about our constructed environment. But even with few things left to do:

How can we give new meaning to pre-existing structures and images?

How can the notion of framing help us? - both in a literal sense, meaning to shape the surrounding, but also metaphorically, meaning to change the perception it evokes.

What can we learn from rococo ornamentation's implementation of given motifs?

How can Lawler's approach - imagining the context as part of the picture - help us to change the perception that comes with a given structure?

Maybe the picture is already painted and all it needs is a little reframing.

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THE LATERAL VIEW



Leonardo da Vinci,
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1484-1486

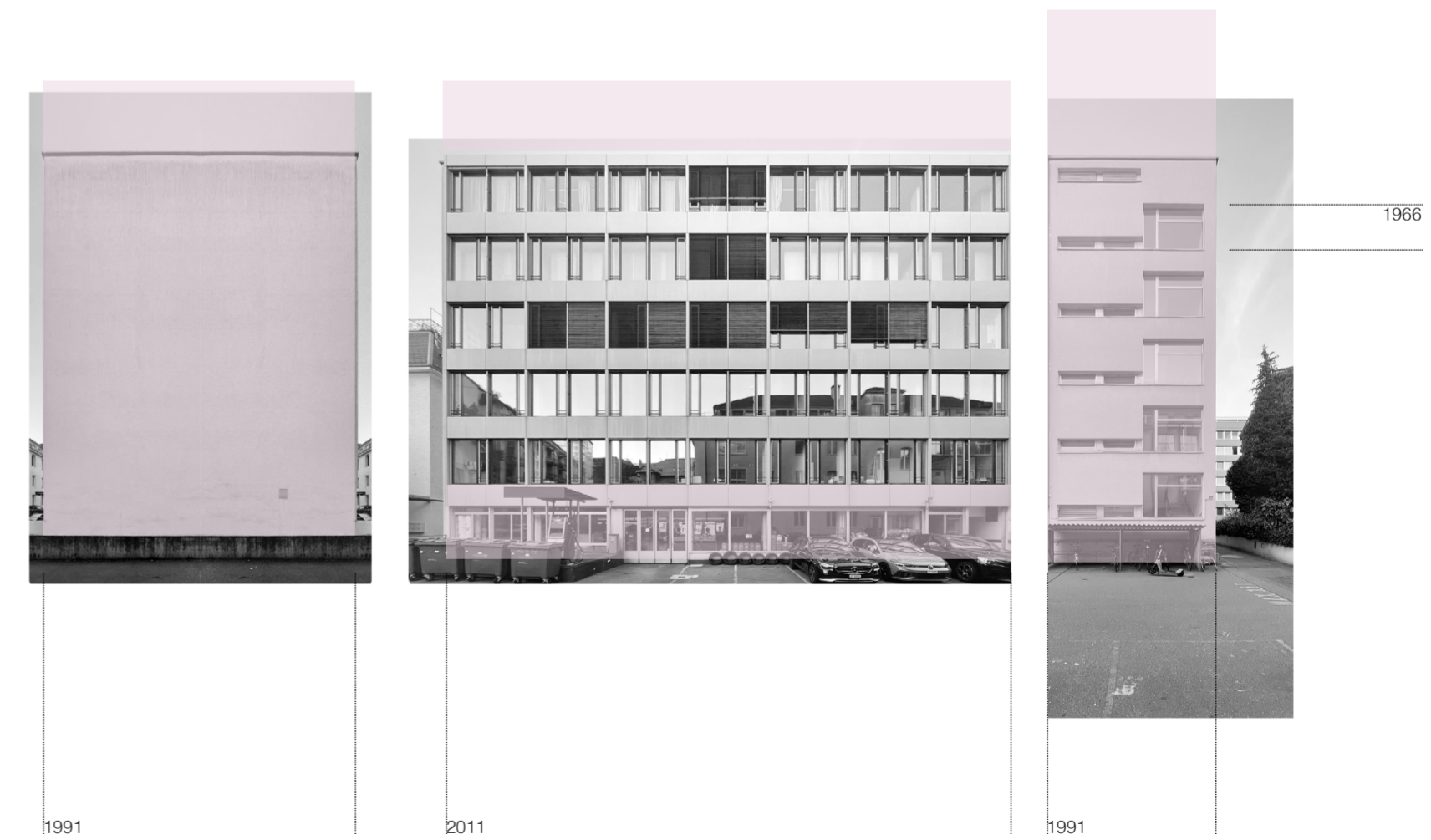
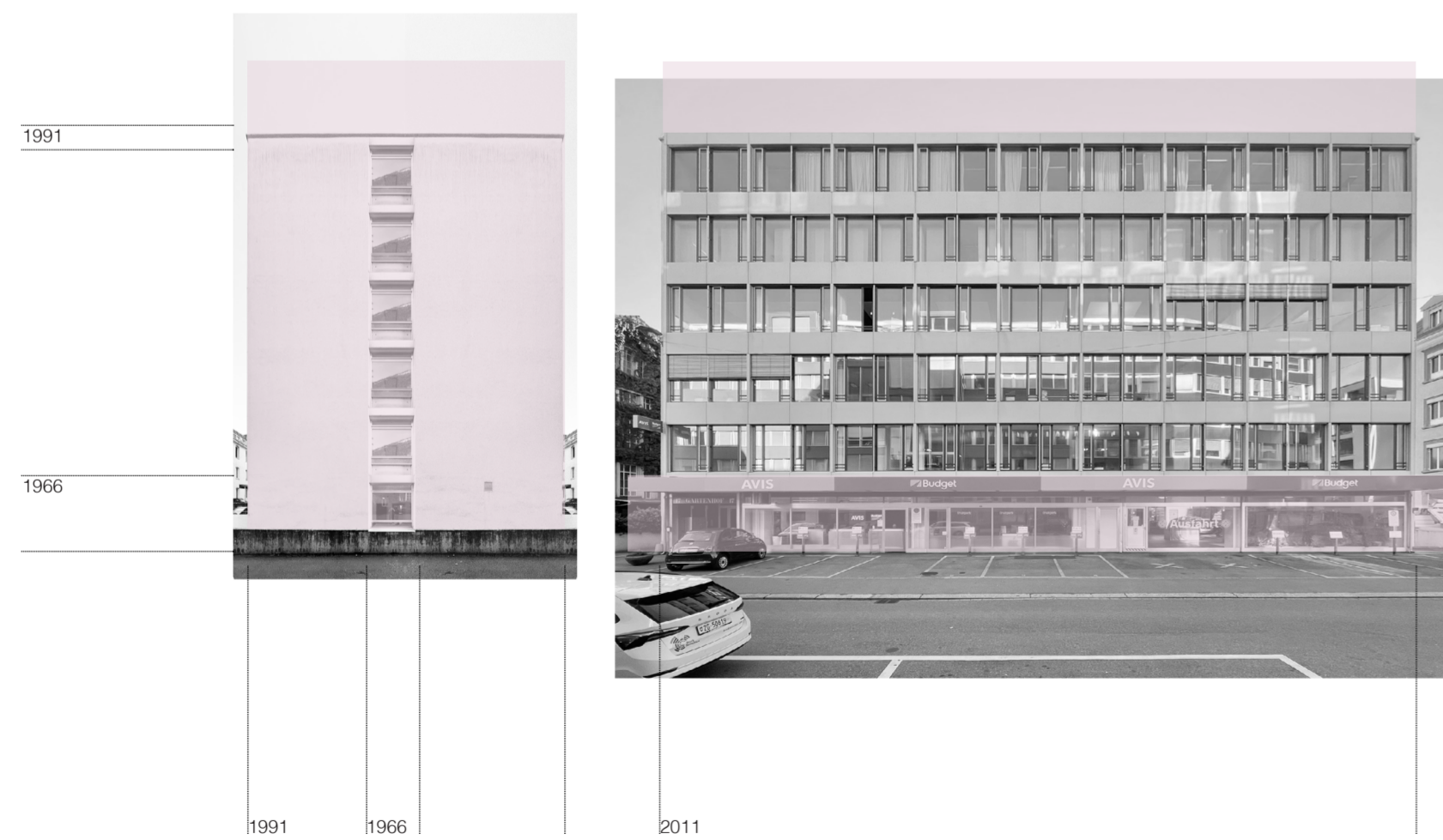
Starting with a short analysis of the office building at Gartenhofstrasse 17, the research focuses on the characters of side facades. Even when left blank they can create a strong image by the way they are shaped, by their materiality and their marks of weather and time. Beyond the concept of 'Kunst am Bau', the way they are painted tells the story of what has or could have been next to them.

In relation to the main facade they can articulate a clear cut, a continuation, a variation of the motif or even a contradiction. Sometimes the observation of the lateral view lets us see the main facade through different eyes.

The office building at Gartenhofstrasse 17 was built in 1966 by Sigmund Feigel (1921 - 2004). While the adjacent Zweierstrasse is lined by a row of office buildings constructed around the same time, Gartenhofstrasse 17 is slightly set back into the street, reaching into the realm of residential buildings and neo-classicist factory buildings.

Throughout its lifespan the building had been renovated several times. The roof and the party walls on both sides have been isolated, the canopy renewed and in 2011 the old facade panels were exchanged. The new facade, designed by Rolf Schaffner, led to a drastic decrease in energy consumption. Schaffner's facade is a reinterpretation of the original panels: the thin aluminum profiles are in harmony with the ones from the 1960s. The different construction periods result in a „bricolage des temps“.

Currently three of the building's six stories are empty due to the relocation of municipal police offices, making the future of Gartenhofstrasse 17 uncertain.

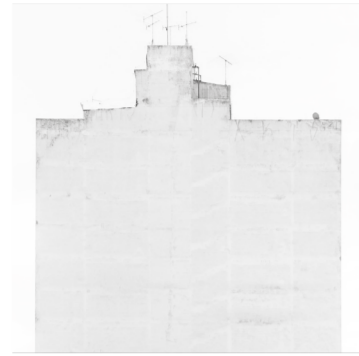


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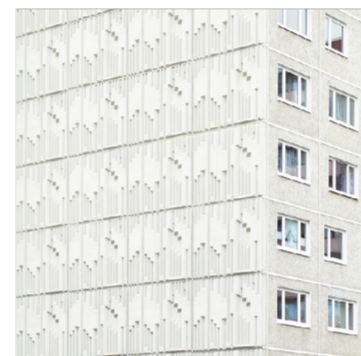
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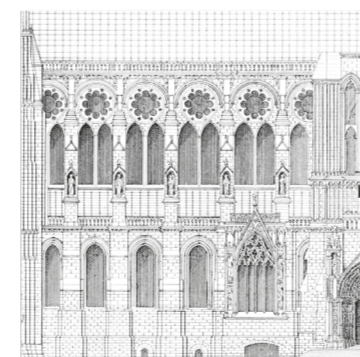
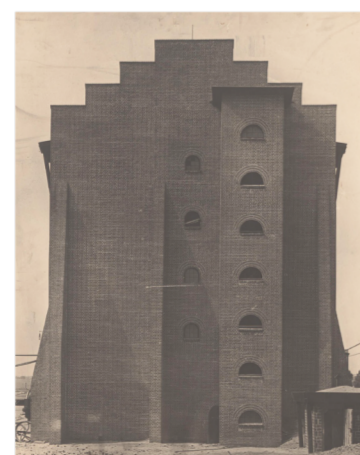
ORNAMENT



BLIND WALL



STRUCTURE

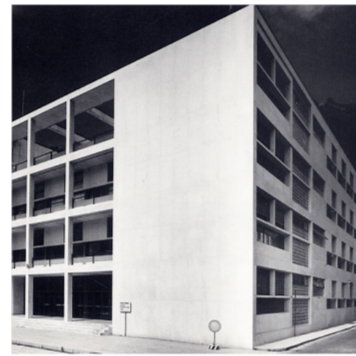
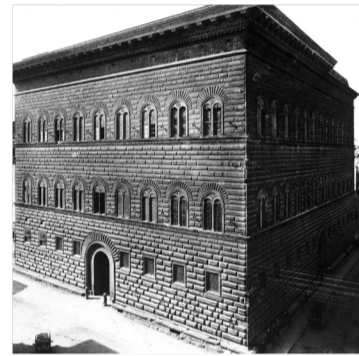


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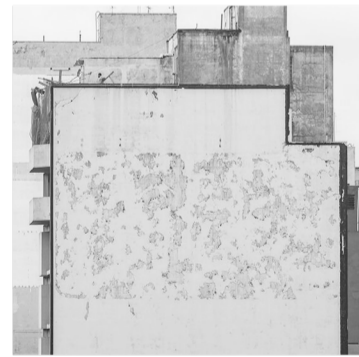
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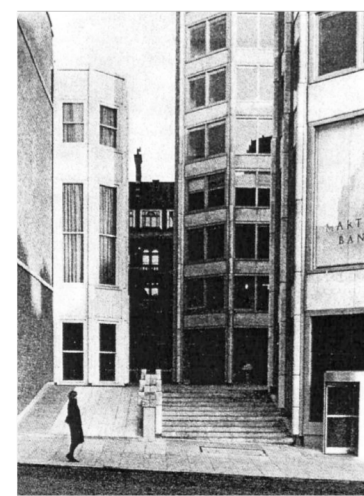
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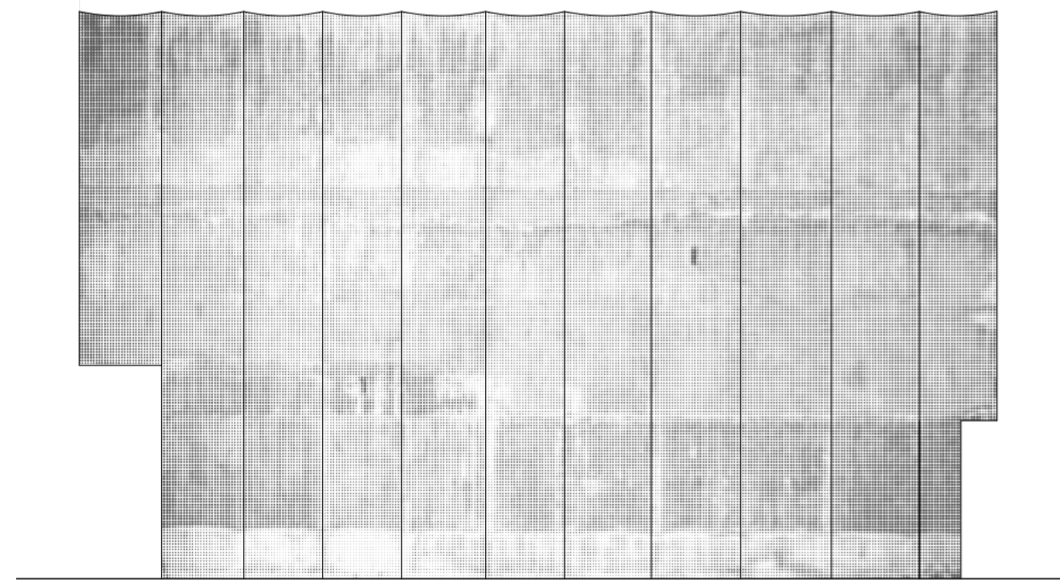
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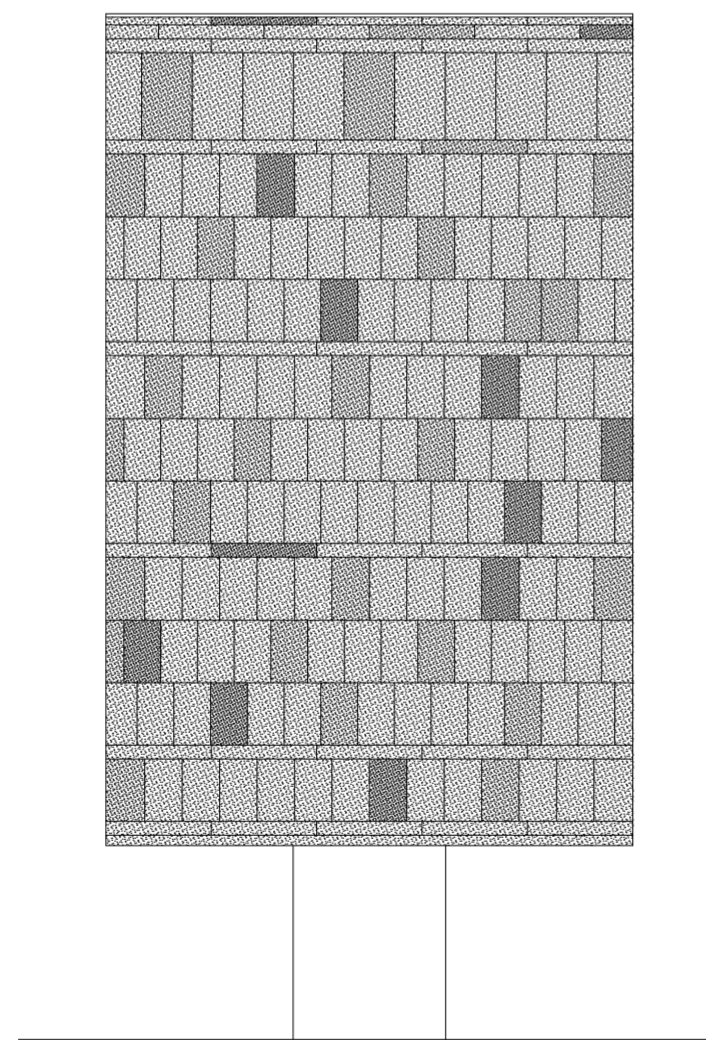


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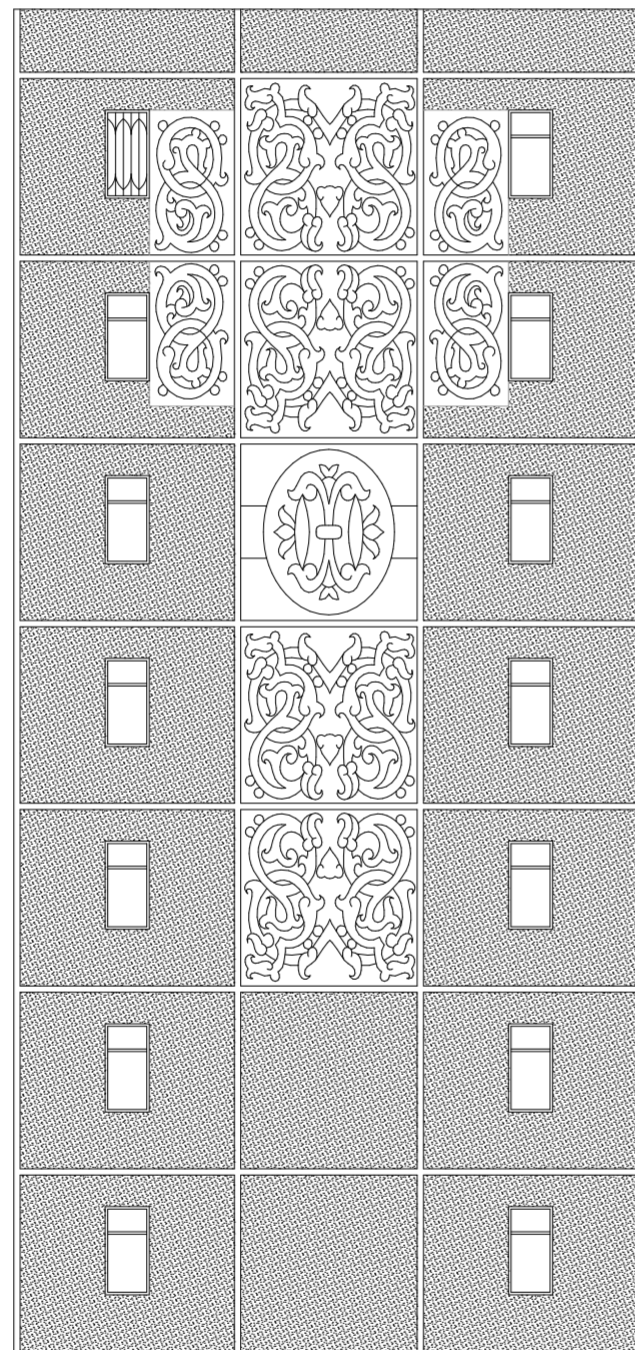


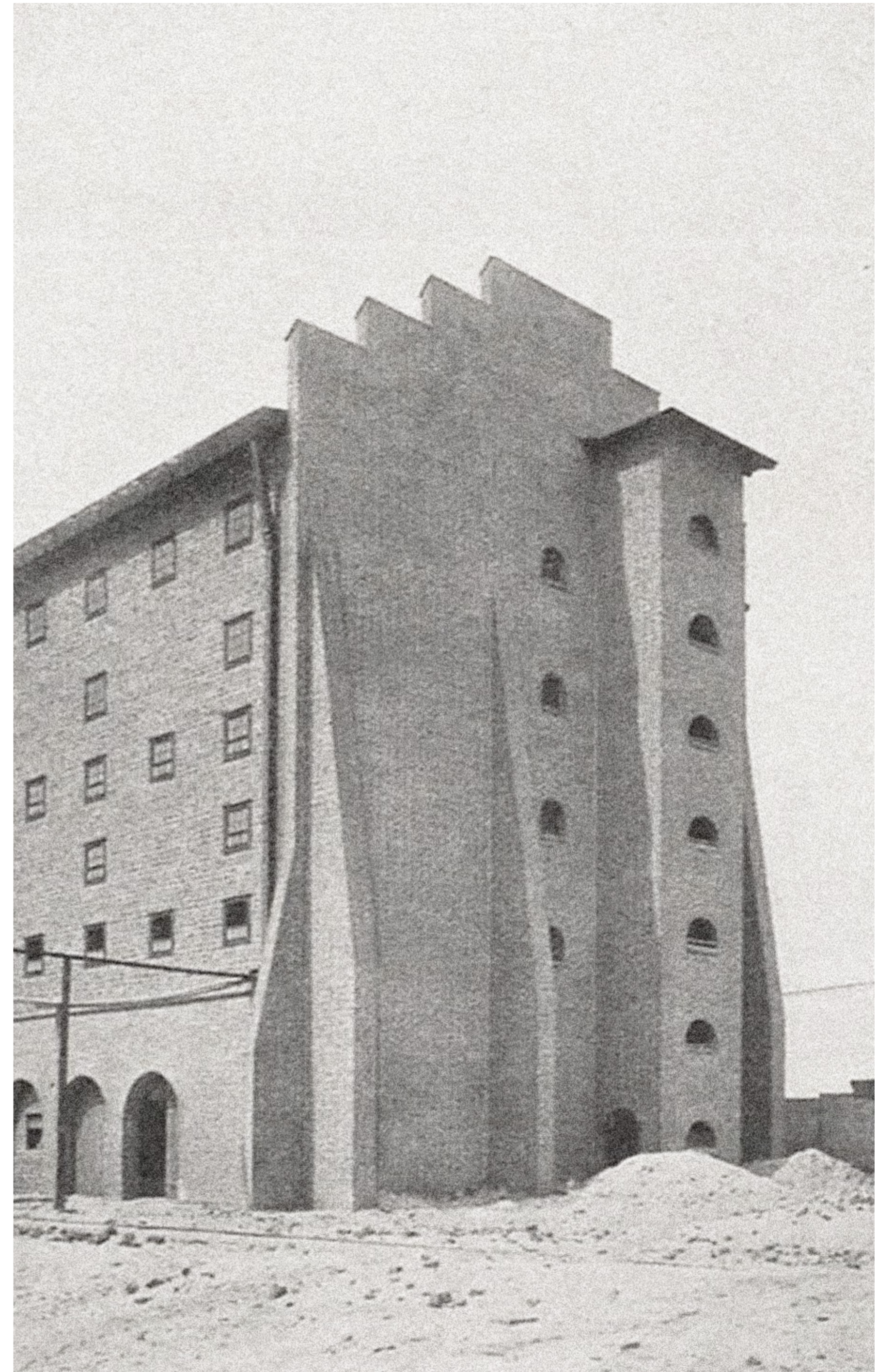
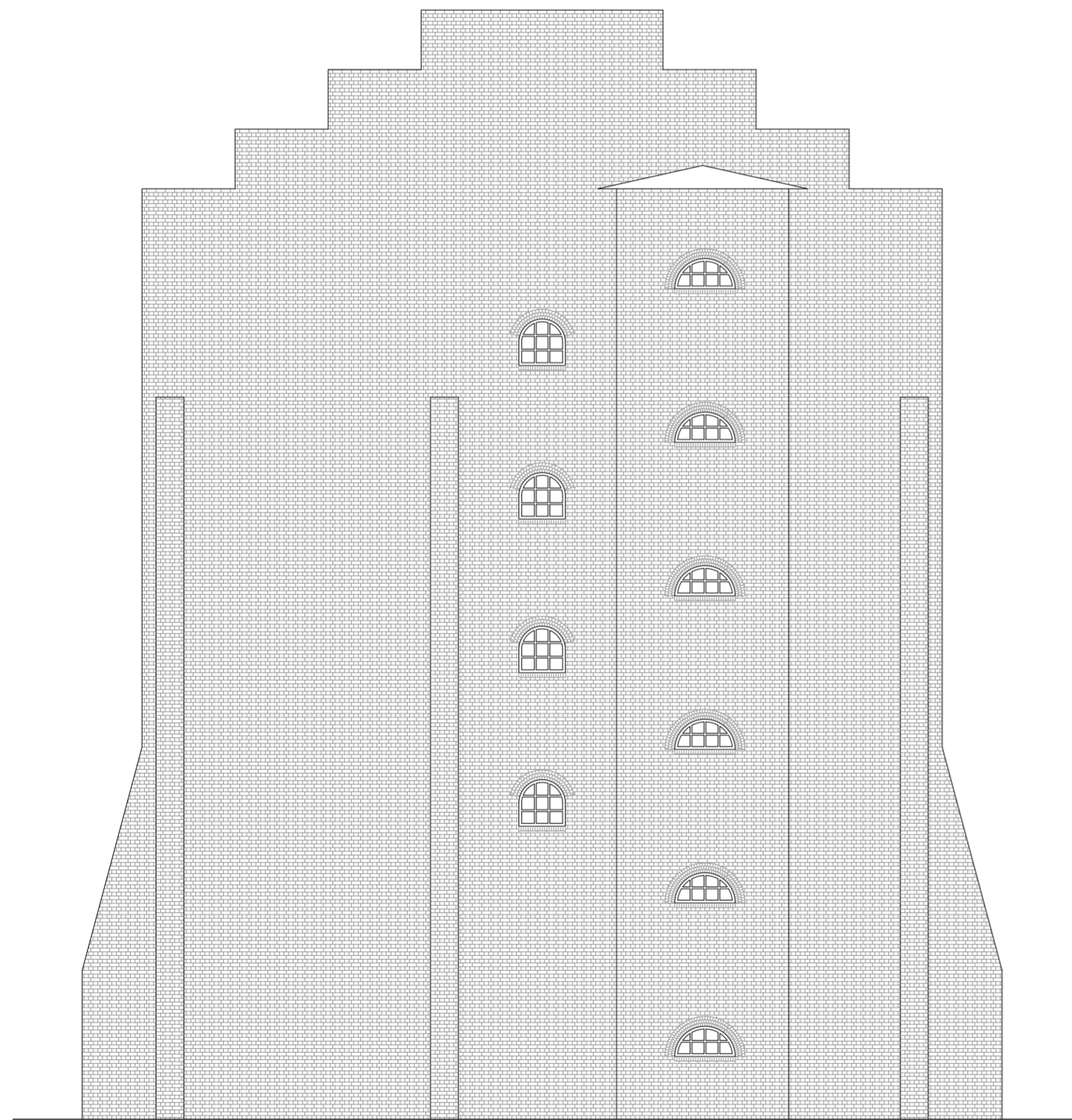


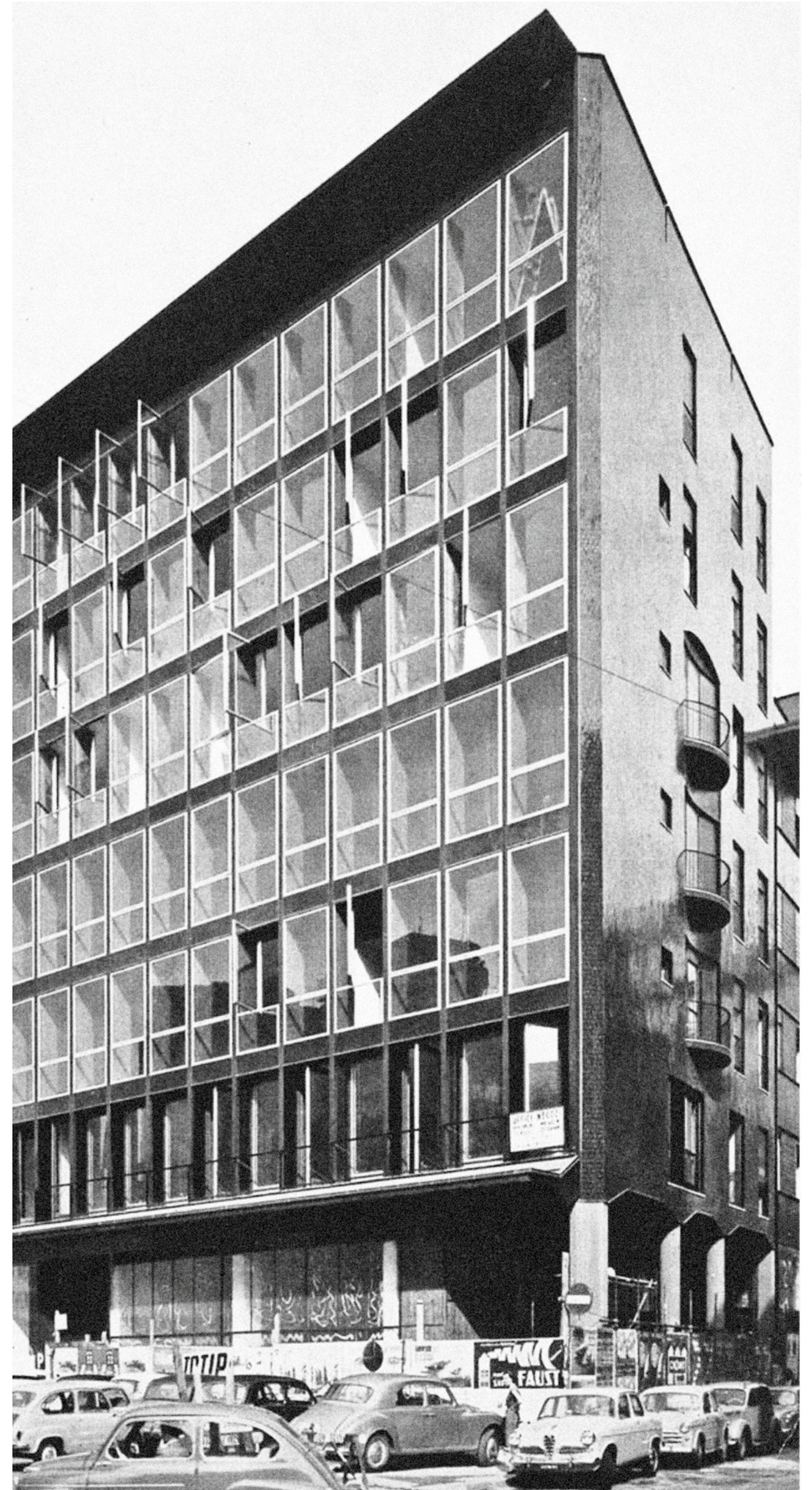
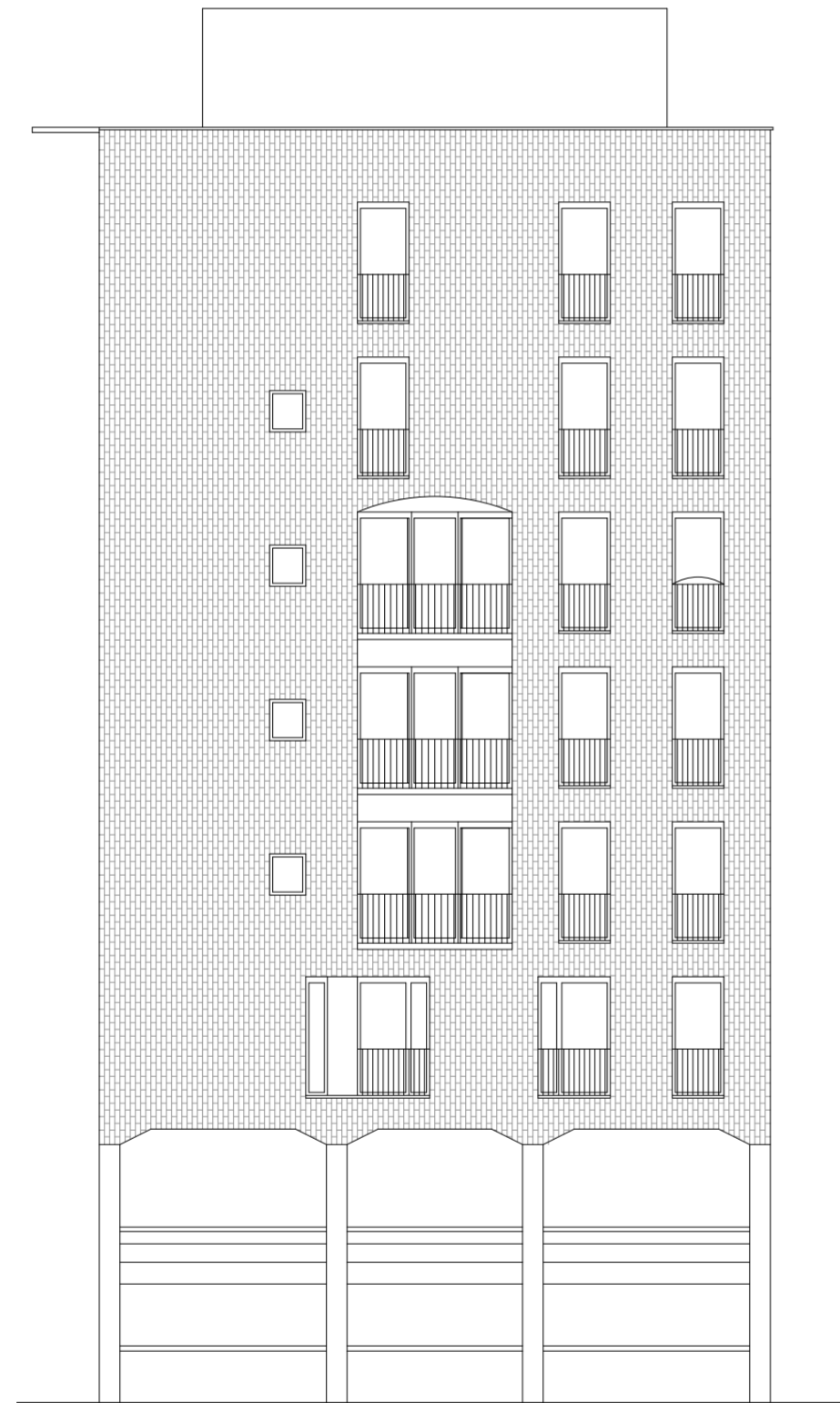
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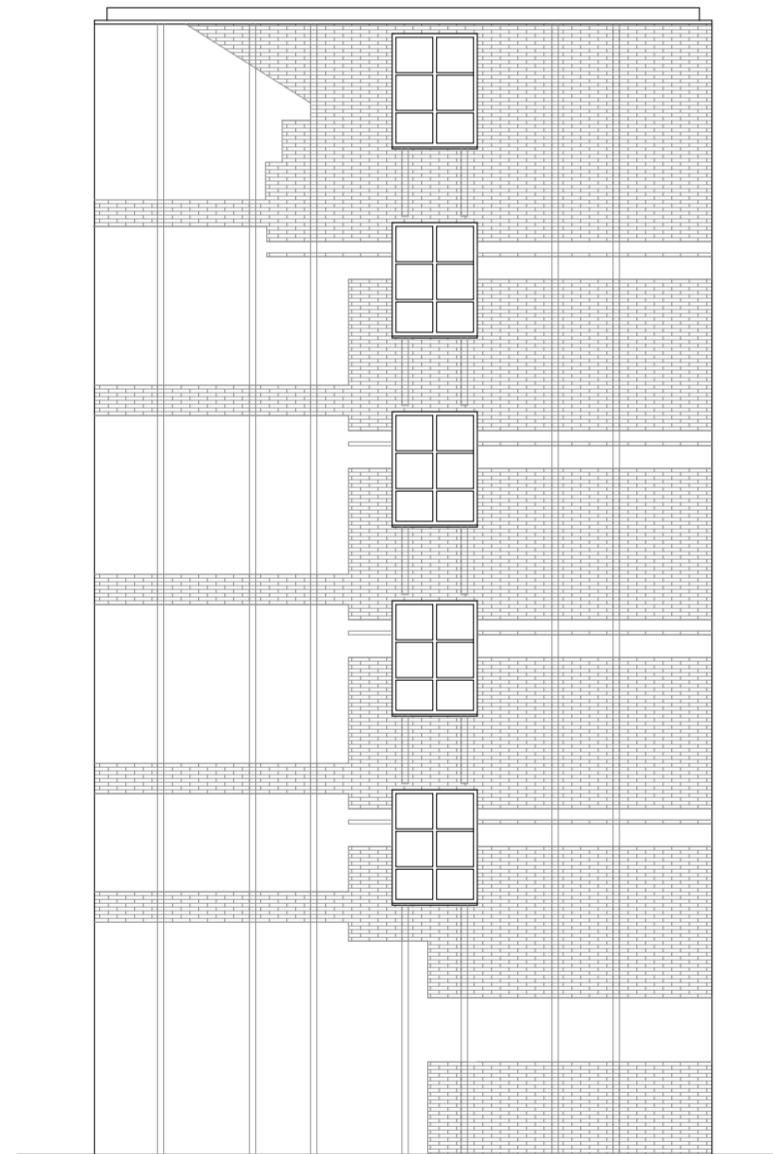
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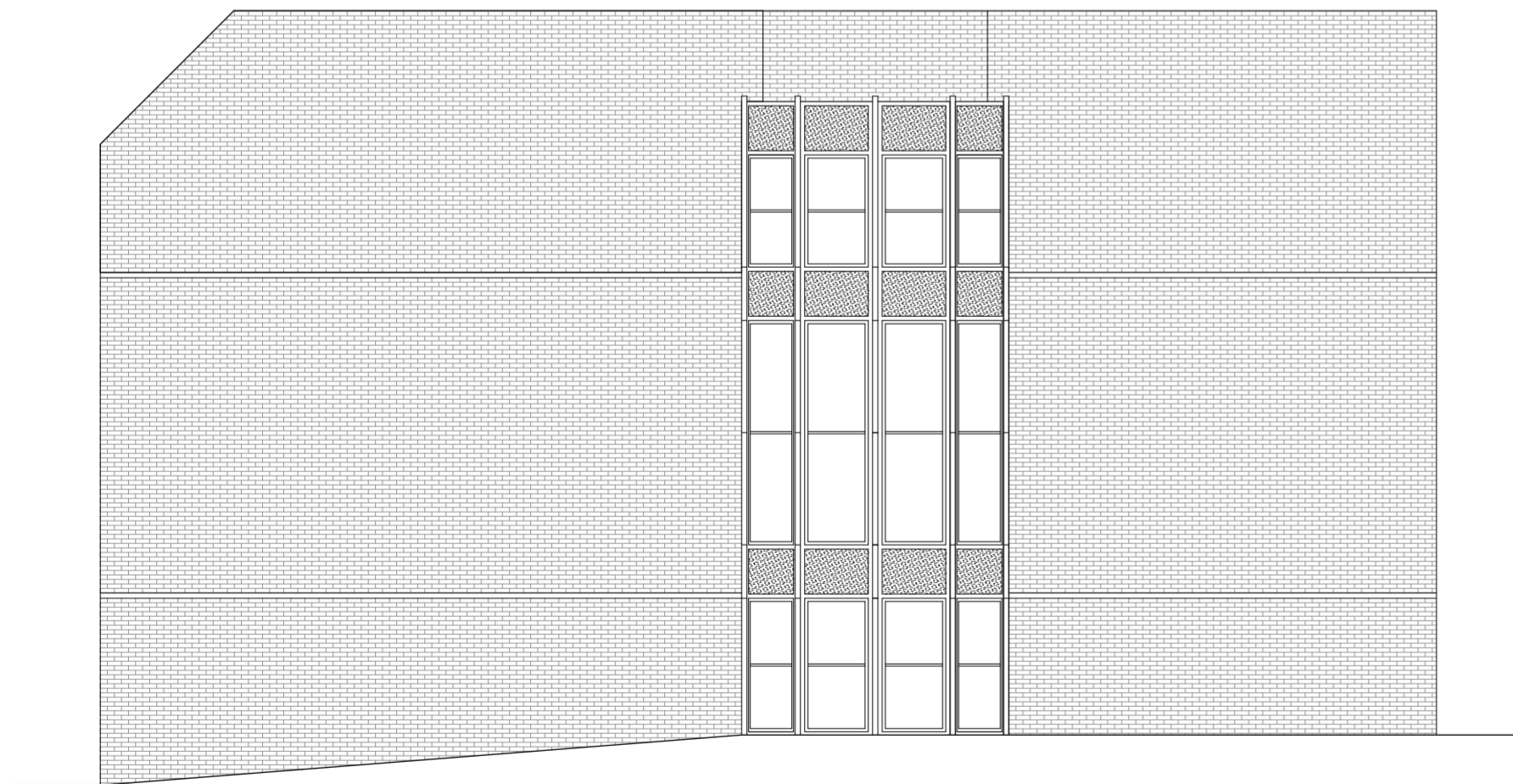




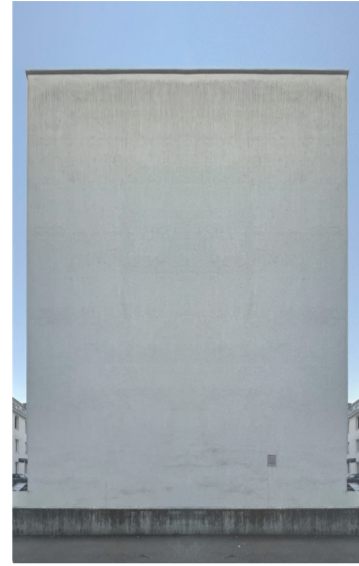




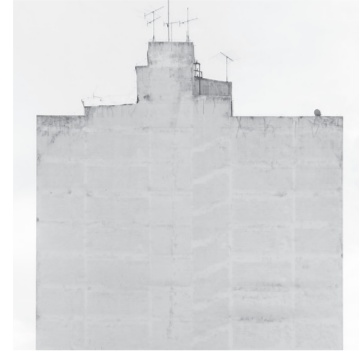




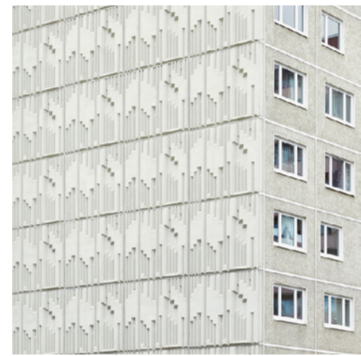
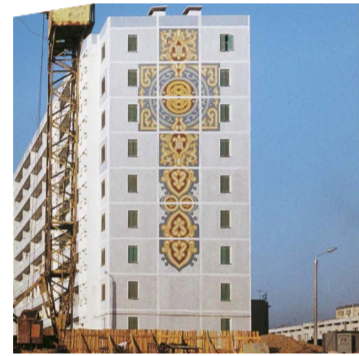
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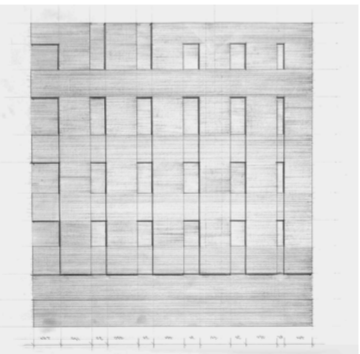
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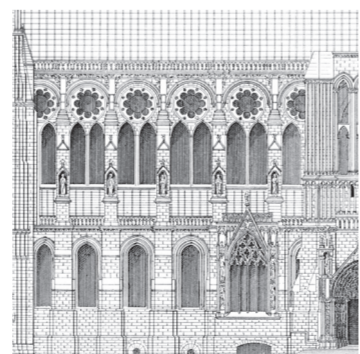
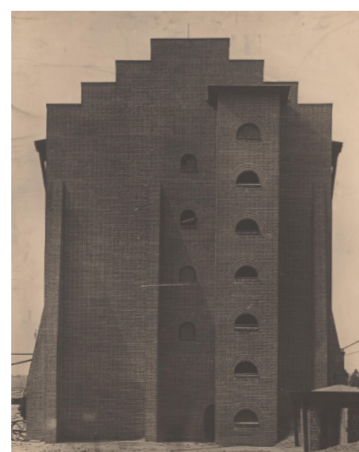
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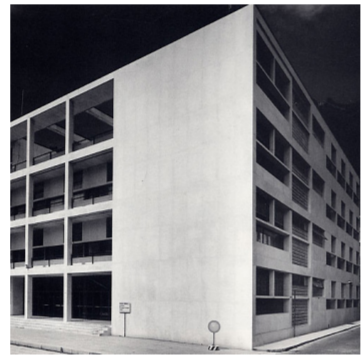
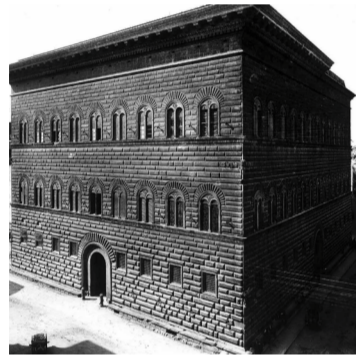


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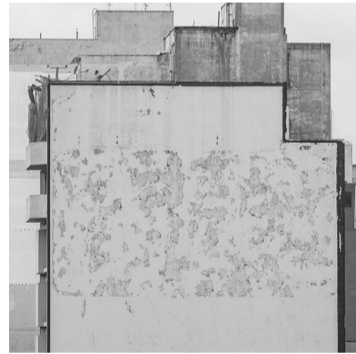
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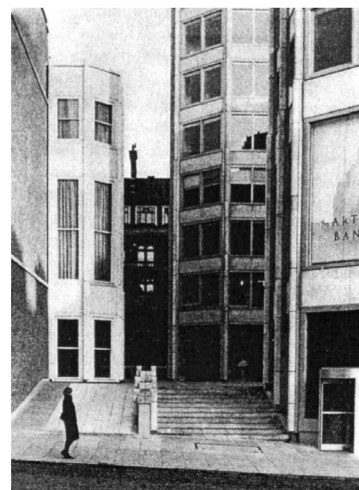
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