

PRECEDENT

INTRODUCTION

"As an architect I try to be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past - by precedent, thoughtfully considered." - Robert Venturi. (18)

Precedent considered includes apartments in Algiers, housing hills at Marl, Brunswick Centre in London, Unité d'habitation at Marseille.

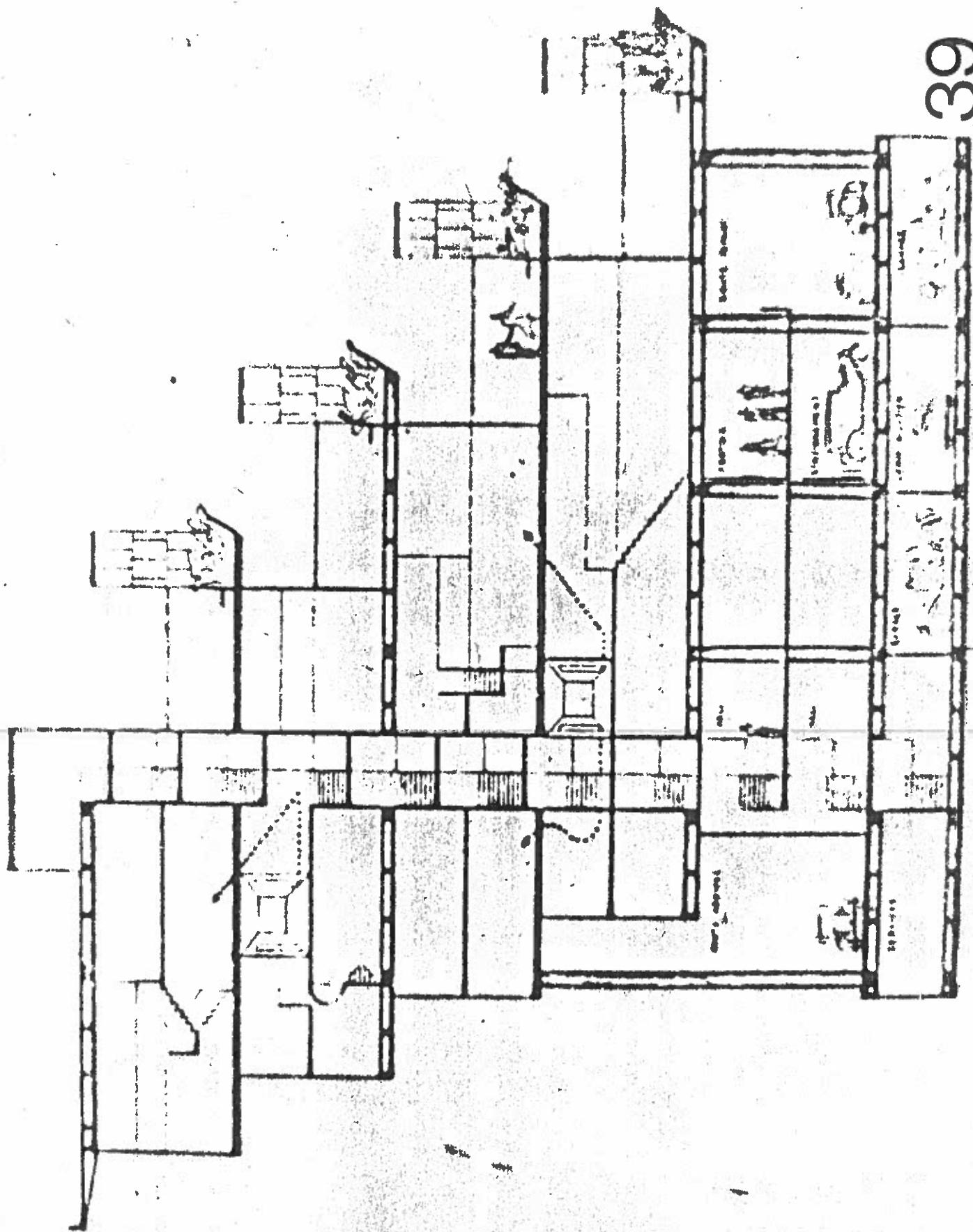
Title: Efficient Apartments in Algiers.

Available description: Illustrated, is one of four apartments for 300 families at Oued-Ouchaiia in Algiers. The organisation of the dwelling units has been largely determined by the sun. It is stated that the efficiency derived from terracing the living units contributes greatly to the economy of the building.

There are four different duplex flats with access from corridors at intermediate levels. Parking for the residents is located in the basement.

Structure: In situ re-inforced concrete column and flat slabs alternating with a slab supported by a grid of beams.

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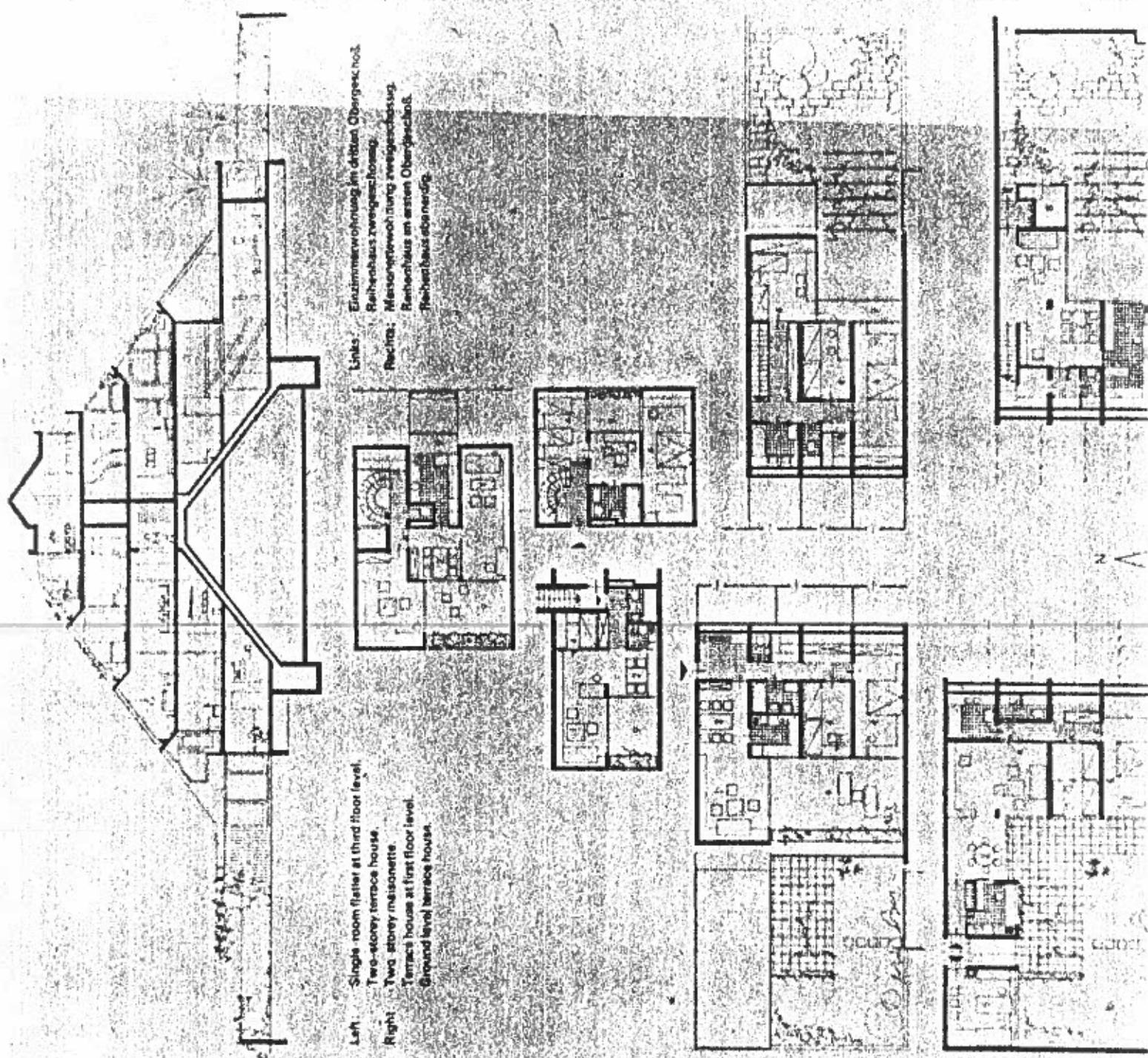


Title: "Housing Hills" at Marl by Frey, Schröder, Schmidt, completed 1963. (8)

Available description: In principle the Housing Hill combines a number of different housing types in a single unit which also provides parking space in its core, community premises and shops.

Each hill has 95 dwelling units: 30 single family houses, 16 flats with 4 or 5 rooms, 38 flats with 3 rooms and 12 flats with 2 rooms. The out-door terrace areas are ample serving as a substitute for a garden and providing views of the open skies.

Structure: Party walls, floors and flower boxes can be installed as pre-fabricated units. The stairs are so arranged that lifts are unnecessary. The load is transmitted through the girder framework of the garage roof so that stanchion free construction is possible.



Title: Brunswick Centre - London. Completed in 1972.

Description: Brunswick Centre consists of a mixed program including residential and commercial components, 20 office units, two pubs and a cinema.

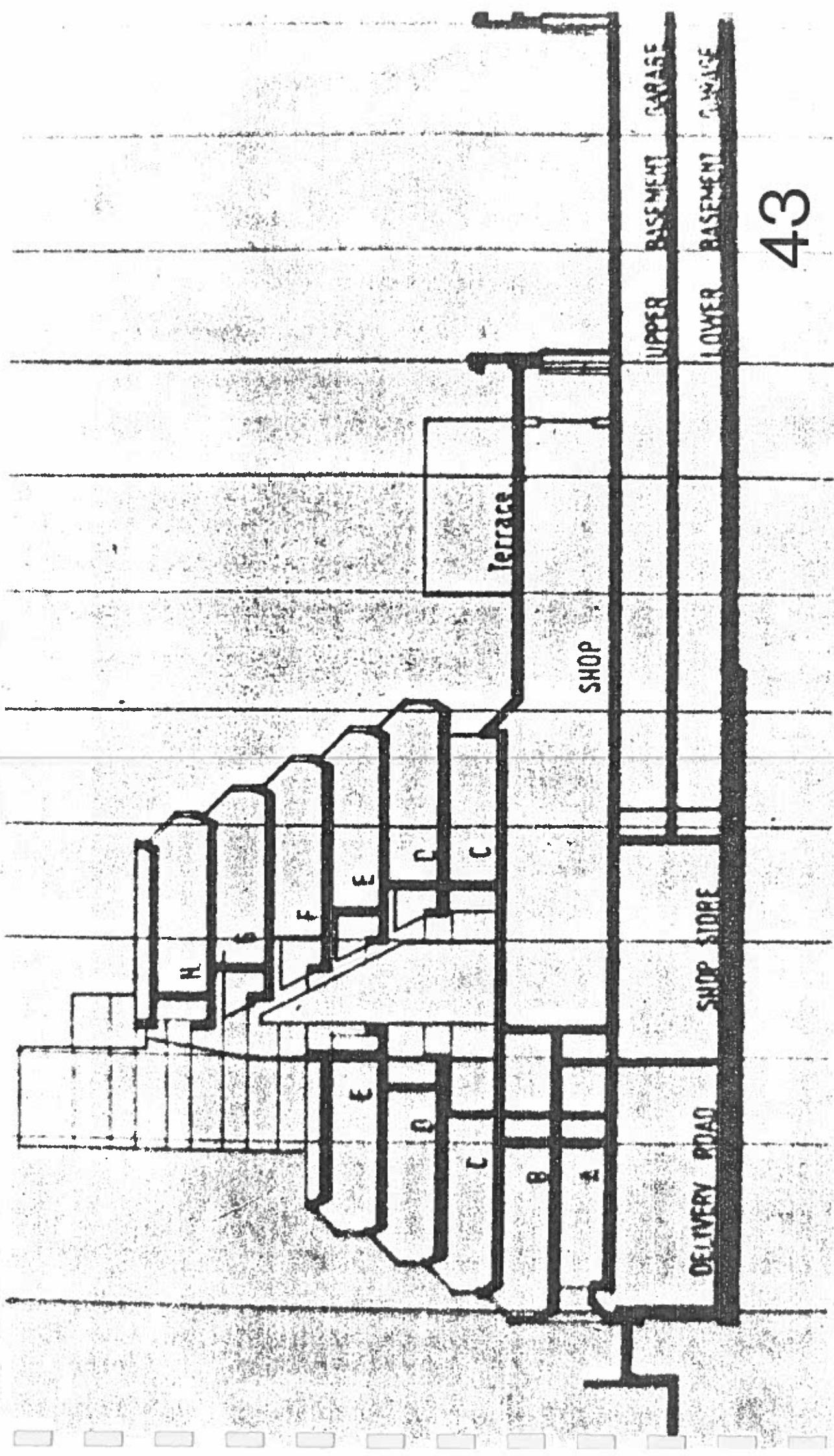
The site divides itself into three parts. The whole of the site consists of two built up areas, each having a basement area and a periphery reserved for services. The lower basement level consists of 500 parking spaces for the use of residents, situated under the living units. The services occur all along the east and west sides of the site.

The upper basement level consists of 500 extra parking spaces 58 of which are for the residents and the rest for shoppers. In the south east extremity of the upper basement level, one finds the cinema seating 500 with its entrance and ticket booth at street level.

The living units which divide into 4 groups, are built on the north-south axis. On each side of the road a group of dwelling units terrace down towards the interior and the exterior.

Four types of dwelling units are proposed. 56 Bachelor units, having three different types of plan, 216 two-roomed flats, having 2 possible variations, and 36 3-roomed duplex flats, giving a total of 558 living units with 1632 beds, which make up the ensemble of the Brunswick Centre.

Structure: The infra-structure and the towers are in re-inforced concrete, and the terraces are prefabricated. The supporting walls of the dwelling units are of brick, and partition walls are of light cement blocks. The floors are finished with concrete tiles.



Title: Unité d'habitation for 1 600 inhabitants at Marseille, 1946, by Le Corbusier.

- Available Description: From "Oeuvre Complete": (12) Modern living units for the middle class having to cope with problems which presented themselves at that time:
- a. determination of the size of the living quarters - different types of apartments required: bachelor, married couples and families with 2, 4, 6 and more children.
 - b. prefabrication of certain elements of the building e.g. living units.
 - c. independent structural skeleton of the building.
 - d. lengthening the units for efficiency.
 - e. question of sun and light.
 - f. inclusion of communal facilities e.g. a nursery school and a gymnasium.

After 20 years of continuous preparation, years in which these problems were constantly studied, the occasion presented itself to put theory into practice. The concern was for a prototype, a formal proposition of living conditions for the present mechanised civilisation.

The unité in its purest form was orientated east-west, receiving the Mistral (strong wind of the south of France) on a northern blind brick face.

At the moment of signing the contract, the definite site was situated on a hill at Saint-Barnabé amongst flowing greenery. Each living unit will have a view extending onto the enchanting horizons; the high seas, the old Port, the Estaque and La Sainte Baume.

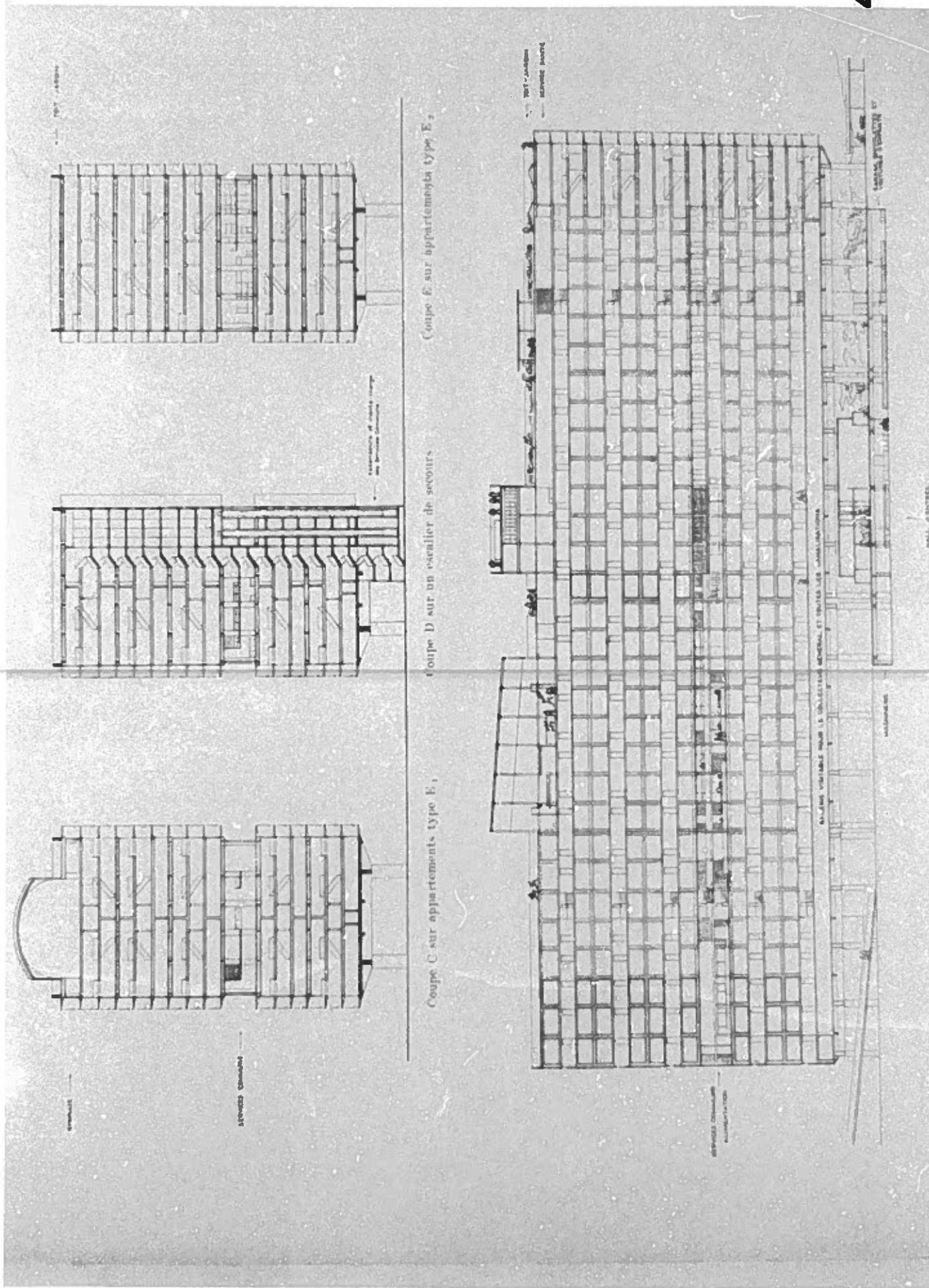
The solution of the Brise-soleil was carefully studied - (see the sketch of the path of the sun in winter and summer - "redeeming section").

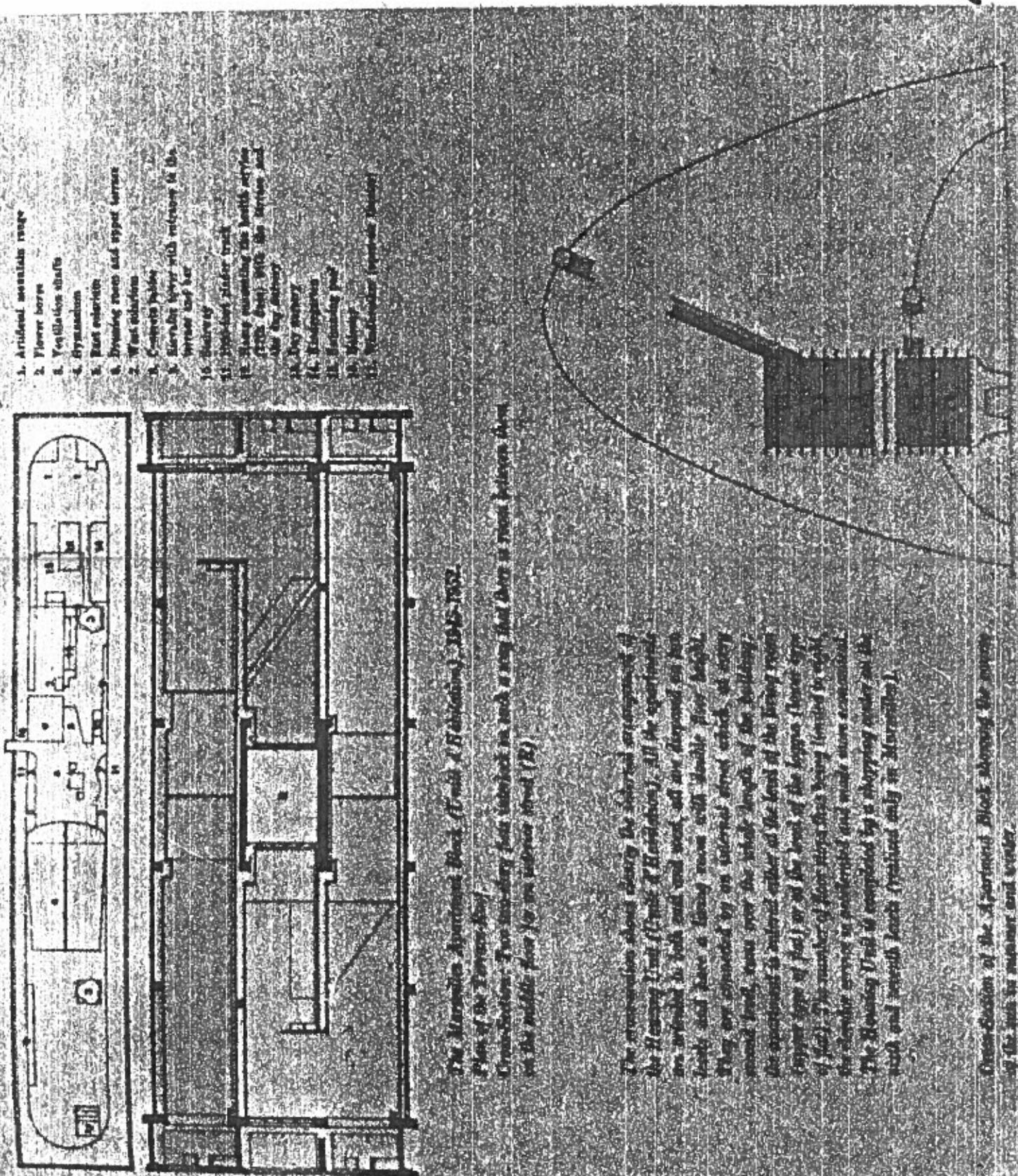
The entirely independent structural skeleton would be an innovation.

The realisation of the studies of Le Corbusier on unités d'Habitation led him to order his dimensions at a built volume perfectly proportioned according to the Modulor. From "Le Corbusier and the Tragic View of Architecture", by C. Jencks. (12).

The Unité provides total individual privacy as well as collective activities - 26 different social functions varying from a gymnasium to a shopping centre. Each family apartment (23 different types) has the kitchen as its centre, from which the mother can direct domestic affairs. The children's bedrooms are placed furthest from the parents, thereby allowing a psychological and acoustic privacy. The strong Mediterranean sun lightens their deep interiors and the exterior loggia provides a feeling of greater space. A strong frame for variable urban living is provided which is not destroyed when it is taken over and personalized. The shopping centre on the 7th and 8th floors is a calm, urbane, close at hand place which the housewife can run to without feeling ill at ease. A strong feeling of communal identity is further enhanced by collective facilities such as the gymnasium. Children play on the roof, not just when supervised by their mothers or an attendant, but at any time because the roof is quiet and safe. The Unité is a radical alternative to suburban sprawl in which groups of 1 600 people form a manageable sized association that gives the benefits of individual privacy and collective participation in one unity.

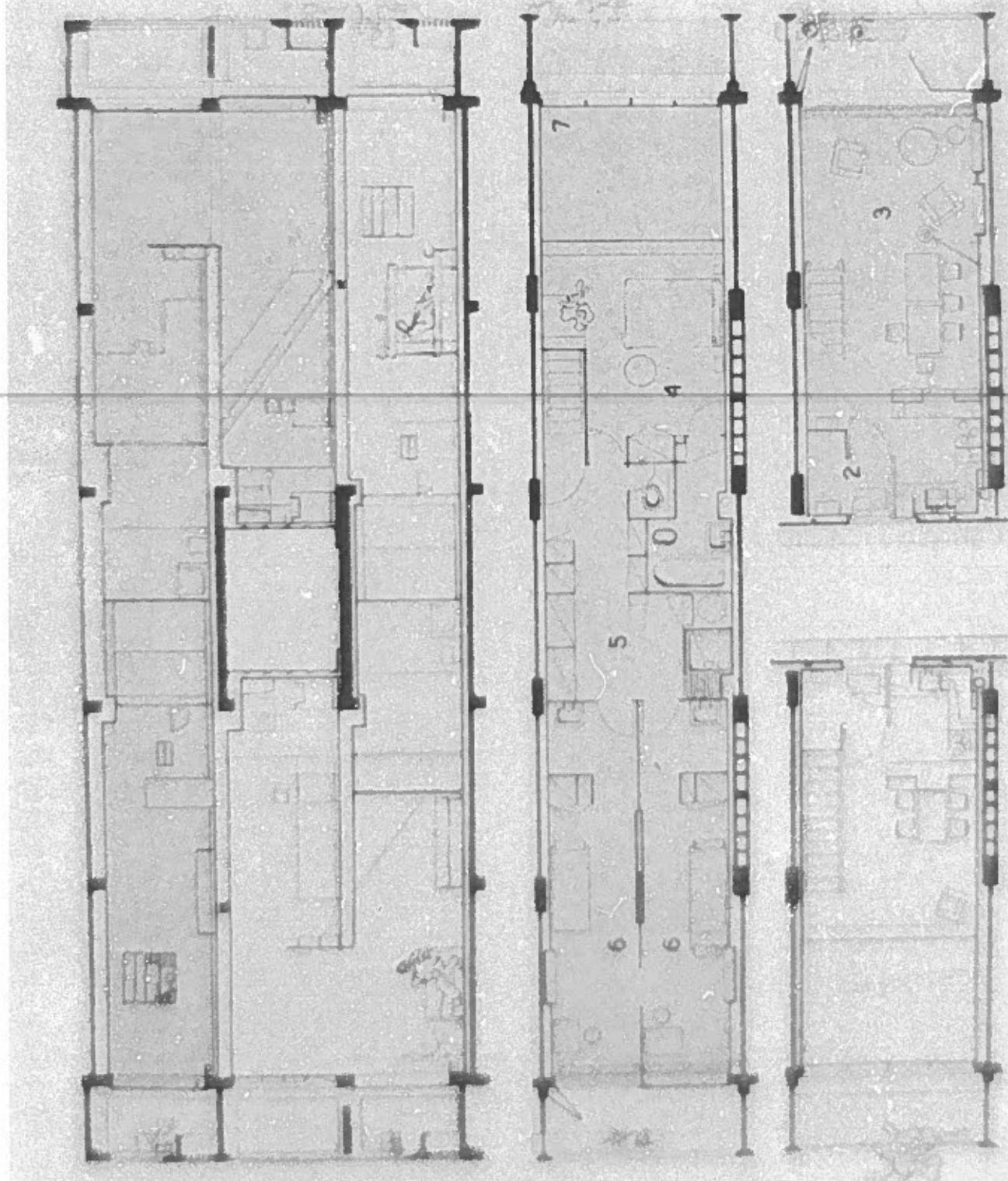
Structure: Independent structural skeleton. Off shutter and exposed aggregate concrete finish. Reinforced concrete pilotis give freedom of movement between the building and the ground. Lift stops are every second floor thereby increasing the efficiency of the lift.





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3. Le Corbusier: Unité d'Habitation, section and plan. Apartments interlock around a central corridor; the kitchen and bathroom cores are located above and below it, while the parents' and children's bedrooms are placed furthest apart.



Comment

On consideration of the precedent, it may be stated that generally the tendency in housing, be it the Unite or Brunswick Centre, has been to have an access way which allows entry to the unit, as well as service to it. The access way cum service corridor cum place where people meet inevitably occurs at the back of the unit i.e. its messy, noisy and smelly side - where the kitchen and the ablutions locate. The idea of street, of spaces to meet, to sit in the sun, to observe activity (23) with the consequent defensibility of the street (21) becomes lost because of the unpleasantness of the cold, windy, often narrow access way.

An understanding of the nature of an active street and each inhabitant's personal response to it in his pursuit of identity and making his home his own, suggests a new look at the access way to the living unit, and a revision of the tendencies exemplified in the precedent. A new look based on the personal response of inhabitants to their environment (3), participation with others and the possibility of allowing inhabitants to become and feel responsible for their actions in the built fabric. (9)