

Bernard Rudofsky. A Humane Designer

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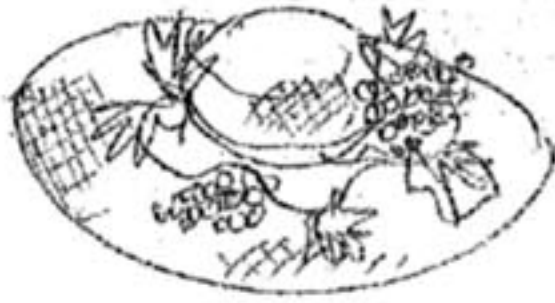
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1939
 Weintrauben
 auf Strohhut



Blumen oder
 Beeren mit
 Sandale

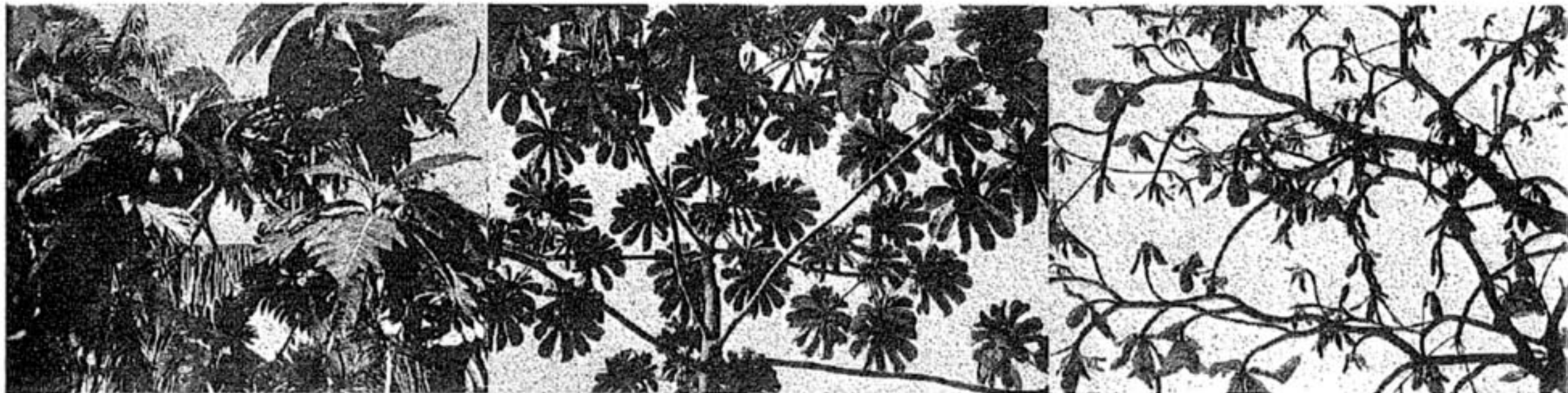


Blümen-
 garland
 angebracht

Bernard Rudofsky. Decor, date uncertain (late thirties?).

The drawing of vegetal decorations for feminine dress includes a straw hat with vine-shoots, sandals with flowers and berries, and a dress in a classical style with a garland of flowers stitched onto it.

Bernard Rudofsky. Samples of Brazilian vegetation, photographed to demonstrate the potential variety of foliage and branches' shapes in the gardens he designed, 1939-41.



Golden Eye "Kneelaces" and leg ornaments. The complete series included at least 16 different designs of "kneelaces", tying the knees or both the knees and ankles with chains of a more or less intricate geometrical pattern. Probably no more than three prototypes were executed.



See Catalogue no. 52 (p. 294)

See Catalogue no. 68 (p. 308)

it be made to measure, since it does not need to fit the body. The *Bernardo Separates* were an attempt to apply these ideas to industrial production.

Rudofsky accompanied his activity as a clothing designer with a limited involvement in the field of accessories. Foot jewelry has existed from time immemorial in cultures where the use of sandals, which leave the foot uncovered, is common, as in ancient Egypt and in India; Rudofsky designed rings, anklets, decorations for the top of the foot, little chains linked to rings and anklets that adorn the whole upper part of the foot, vines with fruits and flowers that climb up to the ankle, etc., with a purely ornamental purpose. (Just as he combines his white, linear architecture with exuberant vegetation, so Rudofsky invites us to leave the body intact and unaltered, while nonetheless adorning it with luxuriant decorations and fabrics.)

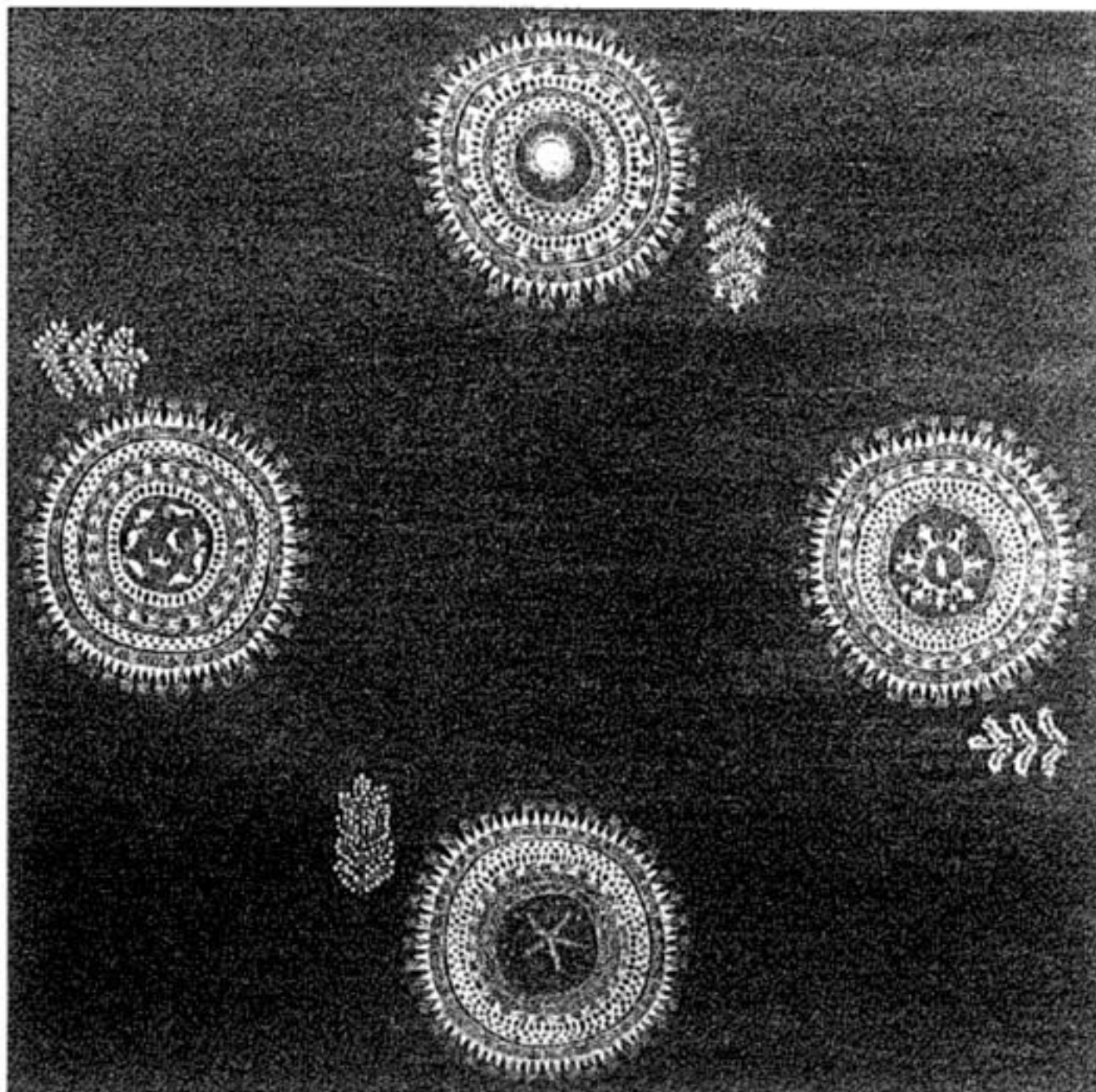
Kneelets and "kneelaces" are metal chains, a "new category of daring body ornaments... Equally novel is their intimate nature: they are not meant for show but...to be worn *under* the clothes to heighten a woman's self-confidence." Preceding the fashion for piercing, not extreme in the manner of sadomasochistic garb, they work on to the same psychological principles: they restrict the freedom to walk and intensify perception of the body. Rudofsky intends them as articles for sexual play, to be worn on the naked body, or beneath transparent pants or petticoats.¹³⁷

137 More recently, John Galliano presented a similar creation, in this case meant (!) to be worn in public on the naked body (see for instance Colin McDowell, *Fashion Today*, London: Phaidon, 2000, p. 111).

Rudofsky's books — on which, unfortunately, it is difficult to lay hands nowadays — offer a panorama of workings-out of various everyday activities. (Personally, I prefer to go back to the earlier sources, *Are Clothes Modern?* and *Behind the Picture Window*, because a reforming spirit still lives in them; the later works treating the same themes are less rich in proposals for change, while taking a more strongly critical tone towards Western society and its habits, and a less positive stance regarding the individual's ability or intention to adopt nonconformist solutions. *The Indigenous Environment*, his talk at Aspen in 1980, offers an effective synthesis of several of the themes that were dearest to him.)

To Rudofsky's way of thinking, it is inappropriate to distinguish between the reform of clothing and of the home; many points show the direct connection between these two spheres. He wonders: "Why do we spoil the pleasure of eating by putting on the most absurd body coverings such as formal dress? Why do we install expensive gadgets like air cooling in our houses when relief can be had by taking off our coats and neckties? Why do we talk at all about efficiency in pleasant everyday living, when we cannot, or do not want, to come to terms with the problem of clothes which constantly affect our lives?"¹³⁸ For Rudofsky, the desire to create an artificial climate is only the symptom of a hostile relationship with nature; it is the social obligation to wear clothes unsuited to transpiration that forces us, even in reasonably temperate climates, to install air conditioning, which wastes energy and separates us from a relationship with the natural environment. Different ways of constructing clothes would allow us to take up different postures and to do without our hated (by Rudofsky) chairs; a closer attention to the characteristics

138 ACM, p. 174.



Everyday Questions

See p. 242

Bernard Rudofsky (?). Golden Eye inlay table top with round placemats and place-markers in the form of little leaves, 1986. A table-top designed to work without tablecloths, which Rudofsky disliked. "These placemats of sorts have been incorporated into the mahogany table surface. The inlays are of bone, metal, stone, and wood."

Bernard Rudofsky. *Boat and fishes*, ca. 1933. Rudofsky illustrated his articles for *Der Welt-Spiegel* and *Domus* with naive little drawings of fishes, donkeys, boats, trees, buildings, etc. He used the same elements in his largest decorative work, the tile floor of the Oro house's bar.



and materials of the floor would permit us to spend much of our lives upon it. A different conception of the body, and a corresponding physical culture, could significantly modify the frequently felt need to "sustain" or "support" the different parts of body with chair backs, boots, etc.

Rudofsky tackles the study of everyday practices by postulating that their historic origin coincides with an ideal first principle. For every aspect of domestic life, for clothing, but also for the house as a whole — understood as the region reserved for the private sphere — he hypothesizes, and works at finding, a primal, "authentic" meaning. Unenthusiastic about "progress" and the "improvements" it brings, he works out a mythical or essentialist idealization of the issues — often quite concrete — with which he deals.

Rudofsky thinks of human activities in qualitative rather than measurable terms, without neglecting their psychological and immaterial aspects. This separates him radically from German functionalism, from Taut and the Existenzminimum. Frank declares that a house "is not made for cooking, eating, working, and sleeping, but for living in. Between the concepts of cooking, eating, working, and sleeping and the concept of 'living in' stands that which we call architecture."¹³⁹ Rudofsky maintains that it is crucial that we concern ourselves with trivial questions, because it would be pointless to build a house without having a clear idea of our own needs; because "it would be vain to occupy ourselves with architecture for habitation so long as we do not realize how we can sit differently and better, and the same goes for sleeping, eating, taking a bath, washing ourselves. About all these activities, we have only uncertain information."¹⁴⁰ He focuses his attention more on activities than on spaces and equipment.¹⁴¹

139 Josef Frank, "Unrast", *Architektur als Symbol*, cit., p. 150.

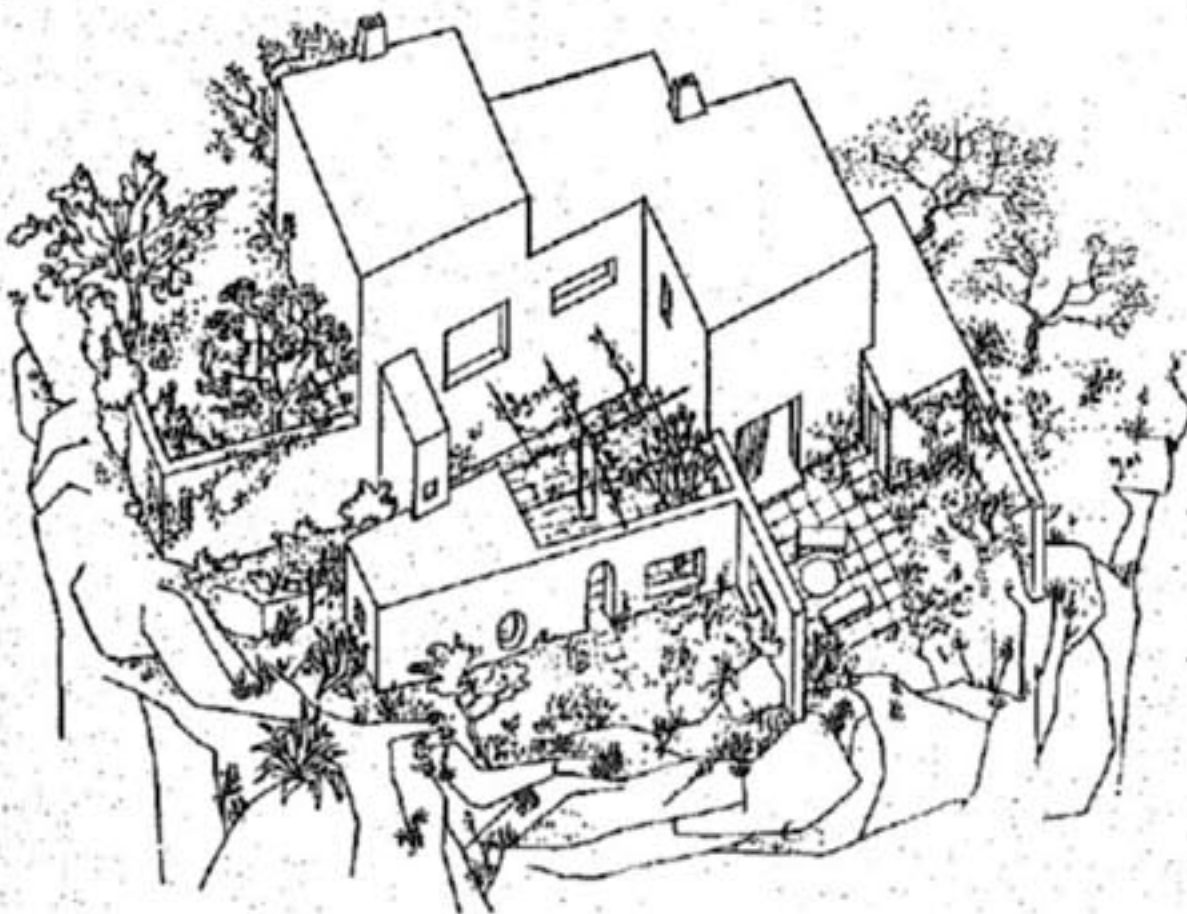
140 S/S, p. 8.

141 NIL, p. 13.

Some Hints for Enhancing the Quality of Domestic Life

- Cultivate the art of cooking and sensory interest in food
- Eat lying down, without using utensils
- Avoid the enormous immobilization of space entailed by beds and bedrooms
- Carry out a significant part of activities on the floor; create floorings with tactile qualities
- Purge interiors of invasive furniture; pursue "the comfort — or...the luxury — of space"¹⁴²
- Dispose the living room, "pure vessel of domesticity," for conviviality
- Put away works of art and avoid recorded music.¹⁴³ Looking at a picture or playing (live) music are actions to be carried out deliberately, lest one become insensible to the beneficial effects of art
- Bathing should be an act of "total regeneration," and should preferably be done in common. The bathroom should be connected with the living and dining rooms and, if possible, with a solarium for sun- and air-bathing¹⁴⁴
- The toilet should be situated in a room for washing oneself or, even better, "in a cubicle all of its own."¹⁴⁵ The toilet bowl should be conducive to a lower, squatting posture.

ALBERGO NEL BOSCO
ALL' ISOLA DI CAPRI
LE DUE STANZE DELLE SIRENE



Gio Ponti. Axonometric (from the east) of the two Rooms of the Sirens at the Hotel San Michele (designed by Ponti and Rudofsky), ca. 1938.

The two rooms benefit from a considerable variety of covered and uncovered spaces, each having a quite large outdoor room. (See also plan next page)

Rudofsky proposes everyday practices drawn from the civilizations of the Mediterranean and Japan, which he sees as the world's "cultural reserves." He is quick to point out that he is not suggesting that we copy, or that we should "adapt and adopt." His work "is neither meant to spread dangerous heresies nor to undermine our birthright to make the worst of possible choices. Rather, it demonstrates by means of random examples that life can be less dull than we make it. Its purpose,

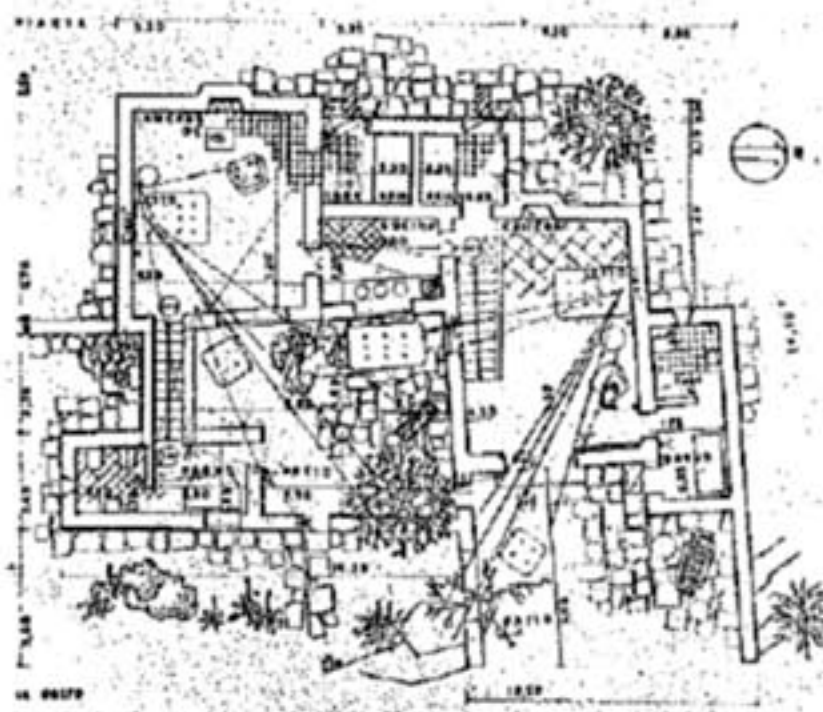
¹⁴² BPW, p. 175; TPB, p. 305.

¹⁴³ BPW, p. 77.

¹⁴⁴ BPW, p. 146-149.

¹⁴⁵ BPW, p. 146.

¹⁴⁶ NIL, p. 12.



Gio Ponti. Plan of the two Rooms of the Sirens at the Hotel San Michele (designed by Ponti and Rudofsky), ca. 1938. The two rooms share a kitchen; apart from this, they are independent from each other. As usual for him, Ponti emphasizes the views through the house and outwards from selected spots (in this case, from the beds). In a plan for a dwelling drawn by Rudofsky, it would be unlikely for any furniture to be shown: the architectural containers he designs are meant to serve a given purpose on the basis of the distribution of space, but do not seek to influence the conduct of daily life.

See *The Didactics of Curiosity*, p. 93 ff.

then, is not to tell the reader what is good for him, but to stimulate his critical faculties."¹⁴⁶

The best proof that his suggestions are to be regarded as provocations and not taken literally is that he himself applies them only partially to his own domestic life, even when he has the opportunity to build a made-to-measure house for himself and his wife.

However, while in *Architecture without Architects* he shows a multitude of anonymous buildings having unusual shapes and constructional solutions, so as to stimulate critical observation of the built environment nearer to hand, where material life is concerned, his tone (more prescriptive than descriptive) and pronouncements seem to convey that there is, for him, only one right solution. For example, when dealing with sleeping arrangements, after touching in passing on alcoves and hammocks he devotes a good part of his attention to the description of the Japanese solution, made up of a *futon* plus a bed curtain (*kaya*). In this sense, his comparison between various cultural products seems not relative (subjective, contingent, local) but absolute (intended to find the best answer).

Nevertheless, critics recognize that he has the ability to give us "the truest, most intimate, and most felicitous sense of our functions as inhabitants of the house,"¹⁴⁷ offering new ideas for the creation of "a spontaneous, inventive, autonomous habitat."¹⁴⁸

So as not to impose ways of living on his clients, Rudofsky rarely applied these solutions in his realized works. The one outstanding exception was constituted by the *Bernardo Sandals*: the carrying out on a large scale, with enduring commercial success, of one of his most basic principles. He did not have the good fortune of Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra with Dr. Lovell; he never encountered a client who commissioned a house that would put his radical ideas into practice. Teaching, understood in the broad sense, nonetheless allowed him to benefit a much greater number of people.

By making available to others the experiences and discoveries he had made in his voyages through different lands and books, he hoped to free architecture from the theory and rules so easily mastered by initiates, philanthropically bringing it back to the level of real life. With *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat* and *Sparta/Sybaris*, he provides the public with tools that equip it to improve its manner of living and domestic habitat for itself, without professional assistance. One is tempted to say that Rudofsky finally realizes an "architecture without architects," in the sense that he expresses ideas which tend to recreate, insofar as is possible today, "a perception, knowledge, and use of space that make planning superfluous, except on a 'one to one' scale." In spontaneous architecture, in fact, "[i]nhabiting was already — and was much more than — a planning activity. [People] hadn't yet separated themselves from their own living space, a necessary condition for their requiring a 'blueprint.' They oriented their own space with respect to themselves by being within it, not abstracting themselves from it,"¹⁴⁹ as inevitably happens with a professional design based on the scientific method.

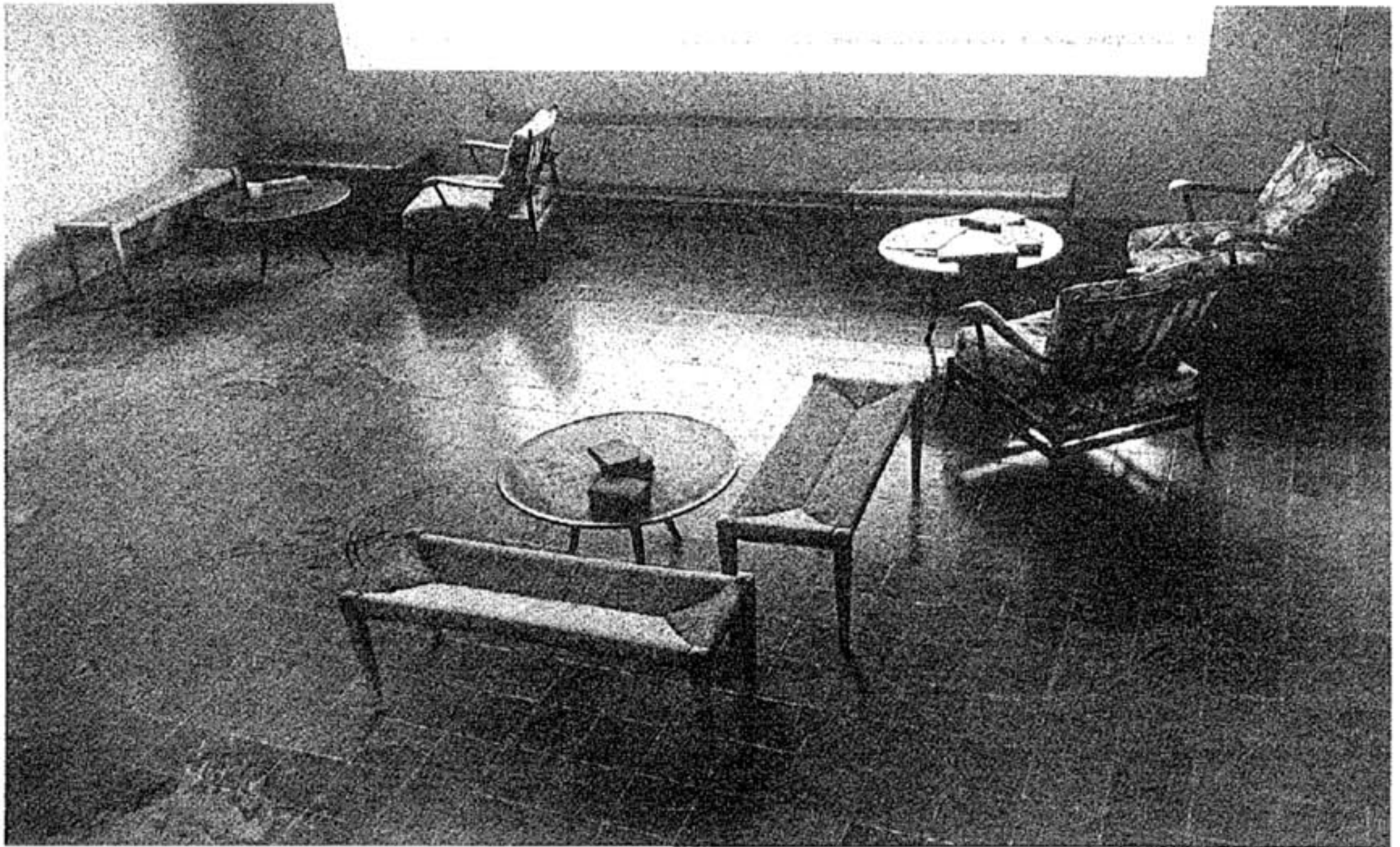
147 AR56.2.

148 AR88.12.

149 Franco La Cecla, *Perdersi. L'uomo senza ambiente*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1988, p. 57.

Bernard Rudofsky (?). The bar of the Oro house (designed by Rudofsky and Cosenza), 1937.

It is possible to make out the bar's floor, picturing the Bay of Naples. The room is furnished with their seats made of straw; benches, armchairs whose cushions are covered with a fabric by Lio Carminati; small tables having large circular tops with raised edges and three curved legs. While the latter were designed by Ponti, the other pieces of furniture were probably designed by Rudofsky.



The furniture designed by Rudofsky in the thirties (the furnishings for the Oro house, the 1936 (?) collection, the products of Casa & Jardim) are the offspring of the Viennese tradition and, by way of the latter, also of the Windsor style. Its appearance may situate it in time, but it seems anonymous, because it refers to a shared and widespread tradition, not to the work of any particular designer.

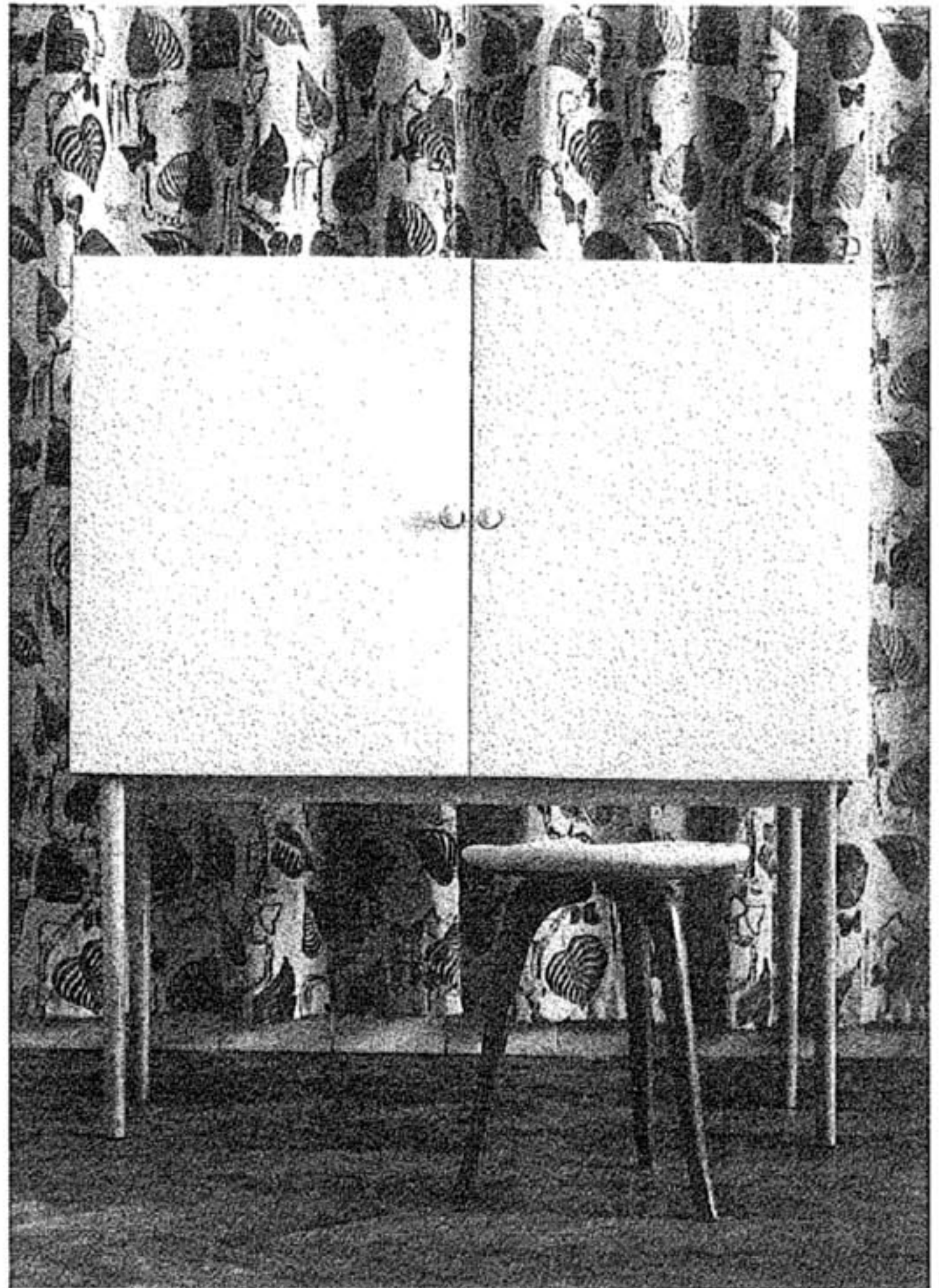
In this sense, Rudofsky's attitude is connected with the position of Loos, who did not design furniture, but instead used readily available commercial models such as Chippendale and Thonet. (In the exhibition *Sparta/Sybaris*, Rudofsky uses chairs by Hoffmann, Frank, and Thonet.) The same liberal stance was taken by Frank & Wlach's Werkstätten Haus und Garten,¹⁵⁰ which contributed to the freeing of the domestic

Furniture Design

See Catalogue no. 19 (p. 268) and no. 26 (p. 274)

¹⁵⁰ See e.g. the furnishings exhibited at the Österreichische Kunstgewerbe-Ausstellung, Köln 1928 (*Moderne Bauformen*, 1929, p. 79–84). In the same magazine, cf. other quite similar examples – such as the “[Wilhelm-]Knoll-Antimott” shown at the exhibition *Der Stuhl*, held in Stuttgart in autumn 1928 (p. 131–132/1929), and some stagings at the Sommerausstellung im Künstlerhaus *Neue Wiener Wohnräume* (p. 354/1930).

Bernard Rudofsky (?). A small white leather-covered maple dresser and a three-legged stool with an anatomical seat also covered in white leather, photographed in front of the living room's window curtain (made of the same Carminati fabric which covers the armchairs) of the Oro house, 1937. Perhaps the same model was produced a few years later in São Paulo by "Casa & Jardim".



See Catalogue no. 56 (p. 296)

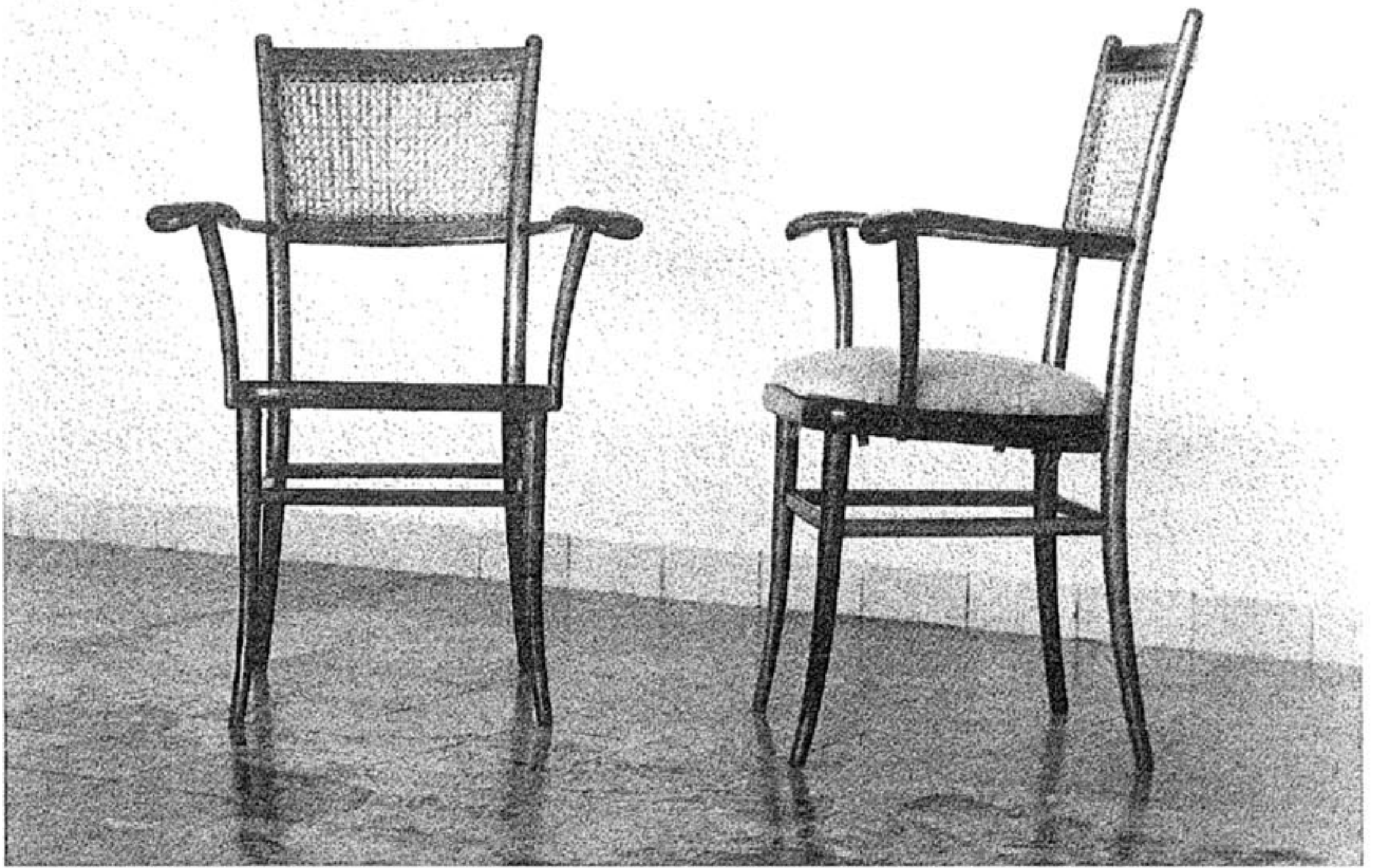
environment from the all-embracing planning advocated by Ruskin and the Sezession. And it is precisely to the designs of Josef Frank that Rudofsky's own seem most closely related. Rudofsky's training in construction is of the kind indicated in the books of Adolf Schneck (1928–1933).¹⁵¹

Rudofsky's rejection of fashions and impositions regarding furniture finds expression in the following passage: "Swedish furniture...has a very stable character, unperturbed by the antics of style promoters. [T]he discovery that furnishings are not yet subject to seasonal fashions like neckties was pleasant and reassuring."¹⁵²

Rudofsky's designs for furniture — like, to a certain extent, those for buildings — reject the spectacular, making unobtrusiveness and comfort their primary objectives. The "Cookie-chairs" are the exception. Curiously, this project is contemporary with the book *Behind the Picture Window*, in which Rudofsky calls into question the very use of

¹⁵¹ Adolf G. Schneck, *Das Möbel als Gebrauchsgegenstand* (1.–4. Band), Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann Verlag, 1928–33.

¹⁵² BR46.3, p. 67.



Bernard Rudofsky (?). Chairs in turned wood for the Oro house, with arms and wickerwork seats and backrests, photographed in Oro house's bar, 1937.



Bernard Rudofsky (?). Armchair in turned wood, with cushion covered with a fabric by Lio Carminati, photographed in Oro house's bar, 1937.

See *The Indigenous Environment*, p. 242 ff.

chairs: he says, "The chair is a true pillar of our civilization, the very symbol of Western comfort. [T]he comfort derived from the support of a chair is based on nothing more tangible than common consent."¹⁵³ This last statement, in harmony with Wright's declarations,¹⁵⁴ seems all the truer when we compare different peoples' ways of making themselves comfortable: there exist dozens of postures in which the body relaxes into and upon itself.¹⁵⁵

It has been noted that there has been no architect or designer who has not designed his "very own" chair. Wright warns that "[h]uman use and comfort should not be taxed to pay dividends on any designer's idiosyncrasy."¹⁵⁶ Frank issued a memorable invective against the chairs designed by the rationalists, in which the rigidity of the forms and the "genuineness" of the material derive from an ethic of discomfort and an *a priori* aesthetic that contrast with the object's very function.¹⁵⁷

153 BPW, p. 54.

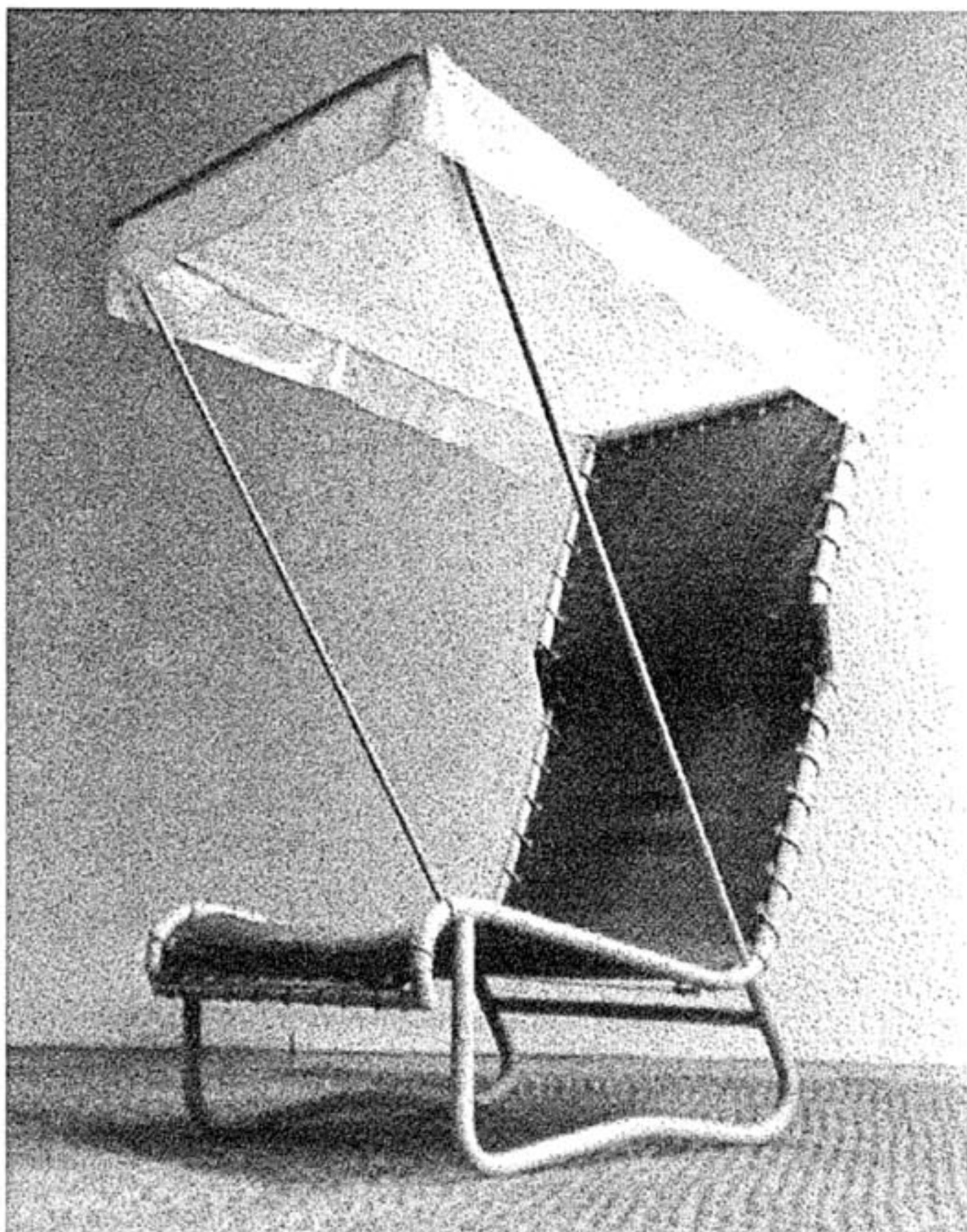
154 Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House*, op. cit., p. 170.

155 Marcel Mauss, *Les techniques du corps* (1934), collected in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris: PUF, 1950 (Engl. transl. *Sociology and Psychology*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

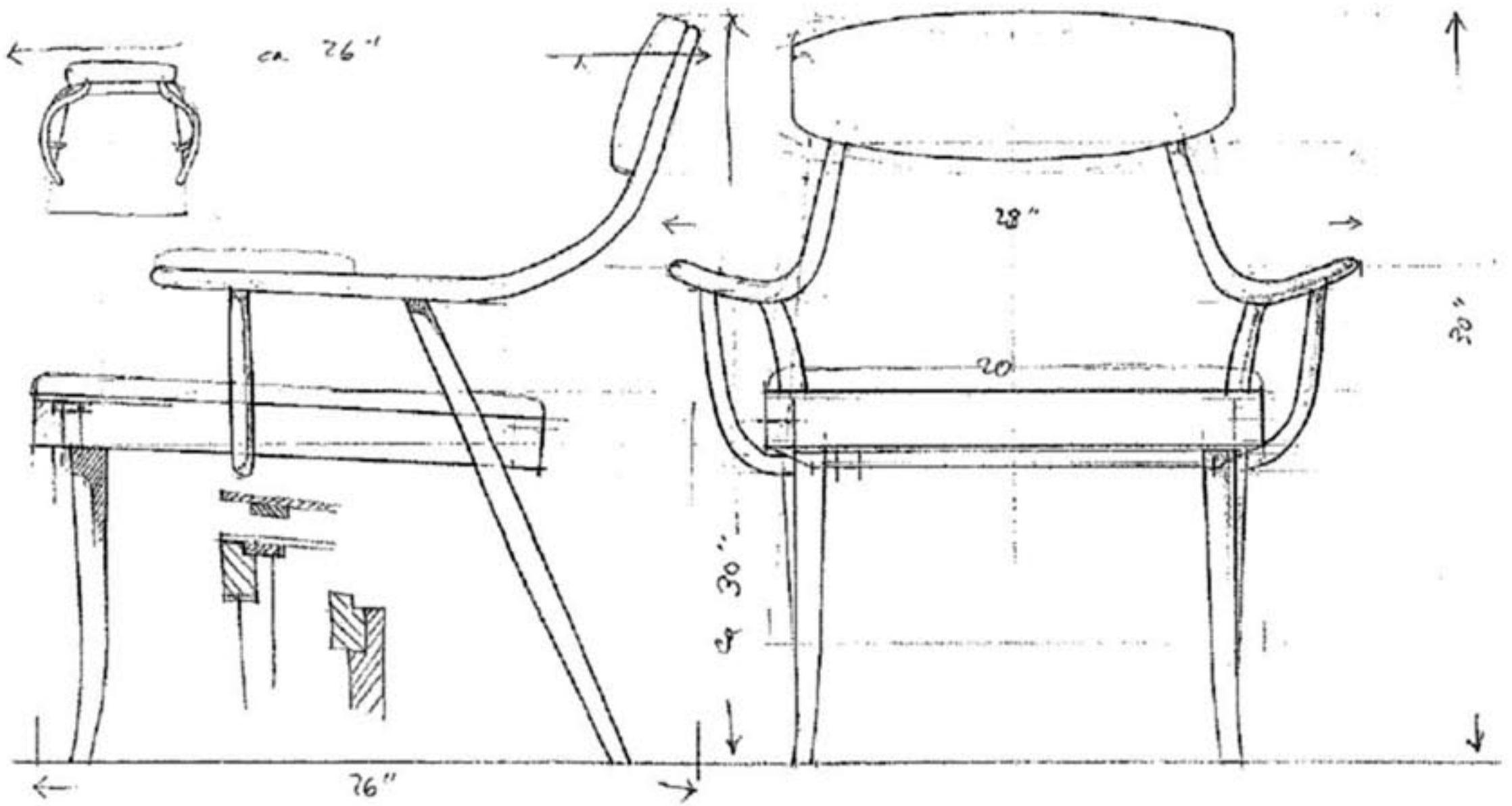
156 Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House*, op. cit., p. 44.

157 Josef Frank, op. cit. See also Josef Frank, "Die Rolle der Architektur" (conference in Alpbach), *Europäische Rundschau*, 1948, p. 777-781 (republished in Johannes Spalt, Hermann Czech (eds.), *Josef Frank 1885-1967*, Wien: Löcker, 1981).

Unknown photographer. Organic Design high-backed chair with attachable sunshade, designed by Bernard Rudofsky, 1941 (?). This prototype, made for the exhibition, was slightly modified with respect to the original design. Its structure is made of bent iron tubes, while the supporting surface (seat and back) is made from a "native knitted fabric" imported from Brazil, kept in tension and held to the framework by a rope that passes through a series of eyelets along its edges and winds around the metal tubes. It was made by the firm of John B. Salterini, "a pioneer in the manufacture of wrought iron furniture." The prototype was not followed by mass production, on account of wartime restrictions on the use of metal.



Bernard Rudofsky. Side, front, plan and construction details of an upholstered chair, date uncertain (1936?).



Bernard Rudofsky. Four chairs from a collection of sitting furniture, date uncertain (1936?).

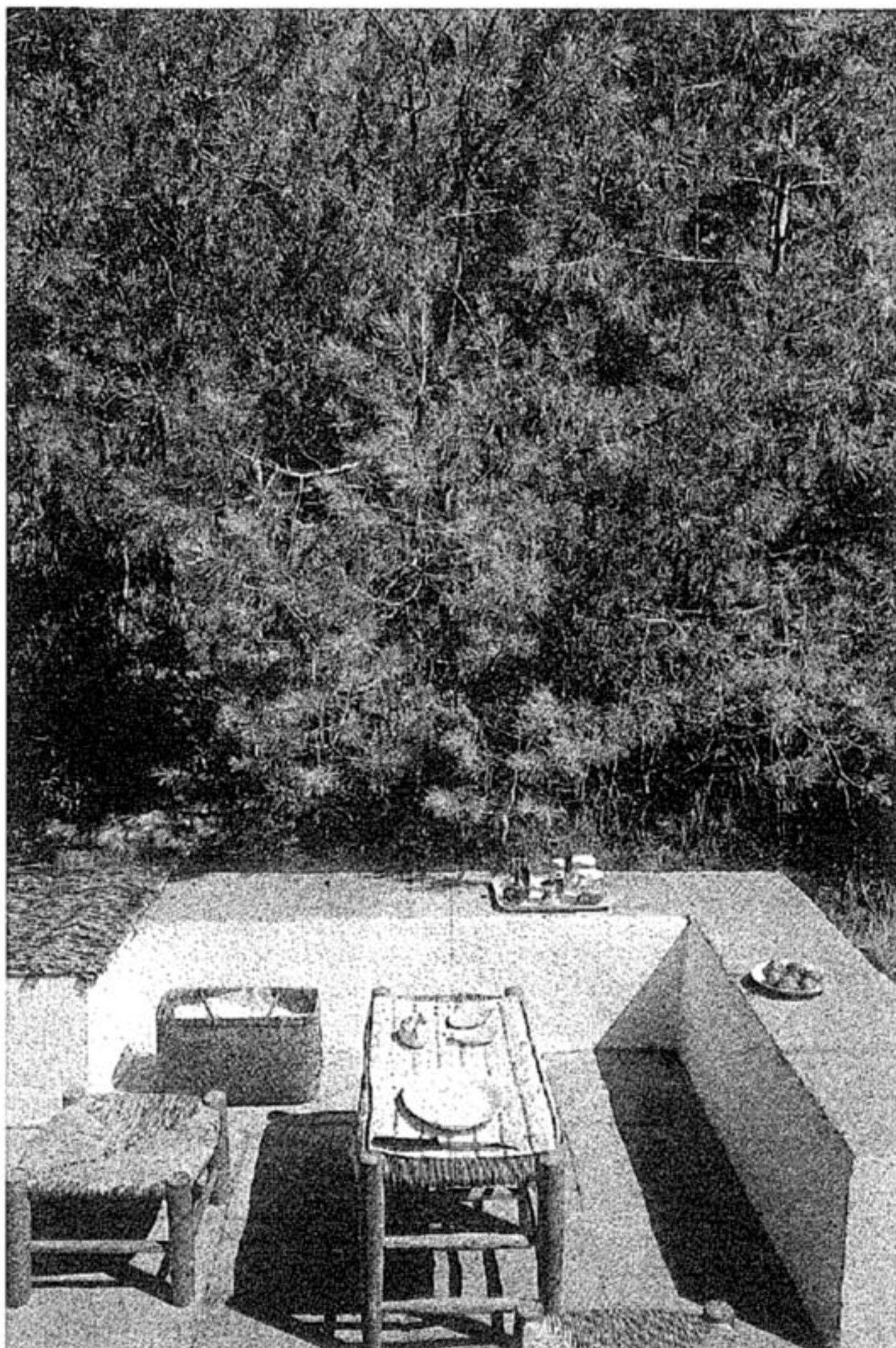
Rudofsky predicted that the evolution of customs and clothing would lead to more relaxed furniture; but he would have preferred to dispense with chairs altogether.

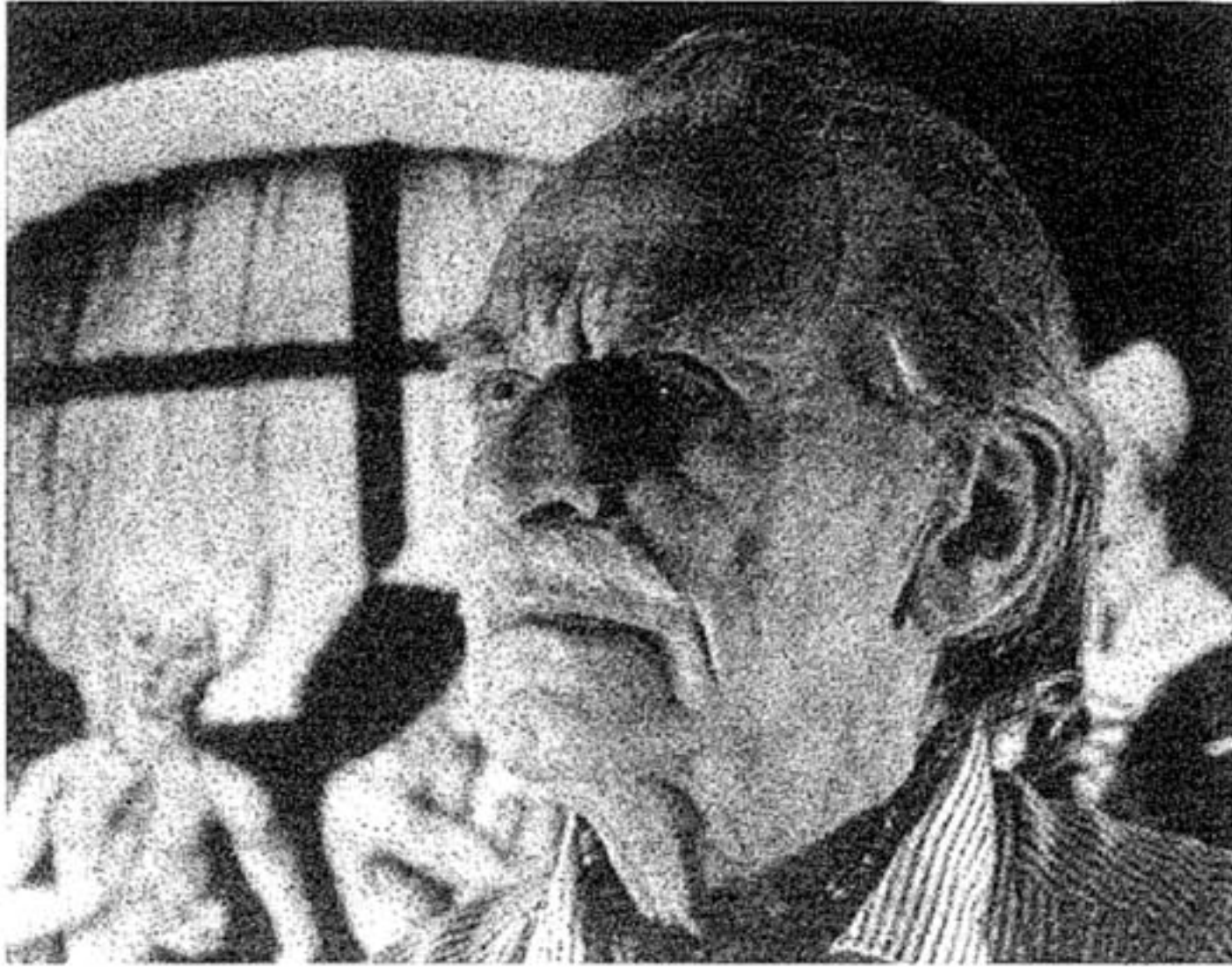
However, he did not design furniture adapted to unconventional body positions or habits. He does not create seats without back supports, which in theory he abhorred (even more than handles on cups).¹⁵⁸ Perhaps the piece of furniture that best expresses his thinking is the low, rectangular, straw-bottomed wooden bench or stool. Such pieces, designed by him, appear in his projects for the house on Procida, the Oro house, the Villa Campanella, and in his house in Andalusia. Anonymous ("without designers"), of humble origin, soberly comfortable, they attain — so to speak — the minimum degree of furniture, offering just a low raised surface upon which to sit, while inviting the body actively to assume a composed position rather than feebly subsiding.

158 NIL, p. 62.

Bernard Rudofsky. The terrace of La Casa's kitchen, 1982.

The straw-braided, wooden bench and stool, as well as the low masonry benches, play the not-much-more-than-symbolic role of elevating the sitter's position above the ground — and, in the case of the benches which form the border of the terrace, are covered with the same tiles as the terrace itself.





*Peter Noever. Bernard Rudofsky in his New York apartment, 1980s.
In the background, one of Now I Lay Me Down to Eat panels, picturing male and female bathers in a medieval convivial bathtub.*

In addition to his long career as an acclaimed lecturer and freelance writer, Rudofsky did several brief stints as a formal teacher. One year at MIT; two — not consecutive — at Yale; an abortive attempt at West Dean College in England; a year at the Royal Academy of Arts in Copenhagen. In an architect who had almost entirely given up his practice as a designer of buildings in favor of study and exploration, the fact that he never became a permanent member of a university faculty may appear surprising.

Rudofsky's personality, however, was not very compatible with institutional structures and with the ways academia works.

If we are to believe certain of his statements, he actually seems to have conceived of his role within courses of study as, above all, that of the "un-teacher:" a person who deliberately dismantles received ideas and preconceptions, so as to make possible comparisons with disciplines, cultures, and places not included in the scholastic curriculum. In reality, one of his most coherent — and realizable — cultural proposals concerns, precisely, the reformation of the institutional structures and teaching programs at Yale; a project subsequently presented also at West Dean College.

As I have already said, in his first books, *Are Clothes Modern?* and *Behind the Picture Window*, Rudofsky develops his analysis by offering solutions to the critical points he raises. Nonetheless, especially in the last years of his life, Rudofsky liked to deny his own constructive commitment; he declared that "nothing could be uncongenial to him than the role of reformer,"¹⁵⁹ and that "I'm not a reformer. I am an un-teacher."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Rudofsky introduces himself in "Biographical notes on Bernard Rudofsky," a publicity release for *Architecture without Architects*, MoMA Department of Circulating Exhibitions, November 1964.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in AR86.3.

The Didactics of Curiosity

Rudofsky as "un-teacher"

See Proposal for a Center for Environmental Studies, p. 231, and Catalogue no. 63 (p. 303)

Rudofsky clarifies: "I purge the students of prejudices and pre-conceived ideas, and I believe that vernacular architecture is a particularly suitable vehicle for what I call unteaching. Or, if you will, for critically sizing up not only modern architecture but a good many aspects of our civilization."¹⁶¹ We can thus recognize that Rudofsky used his study of vernacular architecture as a point of departure for addressing other issues as well.

Rudofsky was always repeating that he displayed exotic extravagances, learned and archaic examples, a world of unusual forms and practices in order to stimulate, through difference, the critical sense, the imagination, the individual's desire to look into things more deeply: for aesthetic-creative — i.e., artistic — reasons in the case of university teaching and lectures;¹⁶² above all to bring about changes in habits, in the instance of books and shows.

In any case, Rudofsky could not and did not wish to erect theories; the heterogeneity of his proposals effectively awakens inventiveness without, in my opinion, showing too much concern for strict methodology.

Someone said, "Mr. Rudofsky's charm as an unorthodox critic may lie in the fact that it is difficult to tell whether he views mankind's foibles with a reformer's zeal or an *aficionado's* delight."¹⁶³ In fact, his passion for giving advice and calling attention to opportunities alternates with rebukes and outbursts of disillusionment regarding human critical faculties. He shares Huizinga's pessimism as to the "general weakening of rational thought" and of the capacity for judgment; the combined effects of mass education, the rapid spread of news, and the division of labor. The combined effect of these factors is that "the ordinary man is ever less dependent upon his own faculties for thought and expression;" the result is that the spontaneous activity of individuals within the context of tradition is wiped out and replaced by a situation where the activities of a few become a "show" for the benefit of all the others, who become passive spectators.¹⁶⁴ Rudofsky can be placed alongside Huizinga and Mumford,¹⁶⁵ both of whom he read assiduously, and also with such other critics of modern civilization as Huxley, Illich, Jaspers, and Ortega y Gasset. He is not inclined to compromise with "progress" if the increase in the potential freedom of the individual is accompanied by the impossibility of genuinely autonomous behavior; if rigidity of norms and regulations and contempt for life as it is given to us end up as a purge of liberty and material pleasure.¹⁶⁶

Through his teaching, Rudofsky meant to break up a system of transmission of knowledge and ways of doing things which was, in his view, too closed and rigid, in order to encourage the acceptance of fragments of diversity and nonconformity.

His polemics against professional and academic institutions and his general intolerance of any framework made him a libertarian thinker, "a professional in dissenting" comparable to Illich, although some of

161 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture in Laramie, Wyoming, 1977.

162 During an unpublished lecture at Yale (1965), Rudofsky showed some of his slides and commented: "[T]hese pictures are not meant to present examples to be copied, rather to convey to you a larger range of creative imagination".

163 AR46.7, p.106.

164 Johan Huizinga, *In de schaduwen van morgen*, Haarlem: H.T. Tjeenk Willink & Z., 1935.

165 Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power*, New York: Harcourt, 1964.

166 TPB, p. 283.

his attacks later on in life may also have derived from personal frustrations.¹⁶⁷ There is, in any case, a complete convergence with Illich when the latter states that "the system creates students perfectly habituated to the fact that what they learn must be taught to them."¹⁶⁸

Rudofsky is for non-dogmatic teaching that stimulates curiosity, the development of individual identity, and independence of judgment; it should be the individual's own responsibility to cultivate his passions. In these, the school cannot and must not get involved; so one cannot ask it to provide a complete education. "There is no substitute for personal experience."¹⁶⁹

Rudofsky holds that schools tend to reward conformism, to challenge autonomy and intellectual curiosity; he seems to share the radical critique of Victor Papanek, who claims that "The environment of school...sets up a whole screen of blocks in the mind of the child that later inhibits his ability to ideate freely."¹⁷⁰

There is, nonetheless, no question that Rudofsky, who had studied in Vienna at a solidly old-fashioned upper school and at the Technische Hochschule — one of Europe's most prestigious and advanced polytechnics —, believed in the value of a school training. In his memoirs, much space is devoted to education and, in particular, to a comparison between the traditional European scholastic system and the postwar American one: a comparison not entirely correct, in which he underlines the virtues of the former at the expense of the latter.

Rudofsky cannot accept the idea of a school that neglects its duty to transmit knowledge. What is more, reduced learning does not rule out cultural conditioning; on the contrary:

"Although I never had anything to do with either Weimar or Dessau, I visited both places and was deeply depressed by their atmosphere. Gropius [firmly maintained that the less a student knows about the past, the better, and] did not believe in an education for the mind; he loved to have innocent students around him; people who unquestioningly accepted his word. It is a fact, that the Bauhaus never produced any distinguished painter or sculptor or architect. Marcel Breuer, the only man who comes to mind, was indeed a student for a very short time but mostly acted as a teacher. It is significant that he does not credit the Bauhaus with any influence on himself. He said: 'If I have gone to school anywhere, it is to the study of peasant houses in Hungary, in Italy, Greece, Spain, North Africa and France.' This is of course a very recent confession which he would not have dared to make while Gropius was alive."¹⁷¹

167 Cf. AR01.

168 David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, Concord, Ont.: Anansi, 1992.

169 BR, unpublished notes.

170 Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World. Human Ecology and Social Change*, Frogmore: Paladin, 1974, p. 133.

171 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lesson # 5 in Copenhagen, 21 April 1975, p. 9–10 of manuscript. The clause between square brackets comes from an unpublished lecture in Laramie, Wyoming, 1977.

It is perhaps worth noting that not even Rudofsky would have dared to criticize Gropius while he was alive, at least in written form, on account of the gratitude he had to show to him for having been one of the sponsors of *Architecture without Architects*. Apropos of Marcel Breuer's (then) recent exploit, see for instance "Folk Art. A Breuer Installation — in a Breuer Museum," *Architecture Plus*, June 1974, p. 84.

Learning by Confronting Diversity

Teaching, moreover, must make it possible to take up a "decentralized" position with regard to one's own inherited cultural system, so as to get beyond it and ensure oneself freedom vis-à-vis one's own culture by eventually working out an individual "cultural formula." (In this sense, Rudofsky is an intellectual precursor of the possibility of a hybrid, "mixed, relational, inventive"¹⁷² identity, in cultural if not in ethnic terms.) He speaks explicitly of "cultural eclecticism" as a model capable of giving rise to fertile results in terms of creativity and the quality of daily life; he insists upon the importance of "replacing conformism and xenophobia with a cosmopolitan outlook."¹⁷³ For Rudofsky, the knowledge of several languages is a necessary condition for the adoption of a different viewpoint, a different conception of the world.

Born in a region that is today part of the Czech Republic, into a German-speaking family which originally came from Galicia (a Polish region that is now part of Belarus), Rudofsky was proud to be a native of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a multicultural and multilingual entity. Like an entire generation of his fellow-citizens, he was accustomed to relativity and to daily opportunities for interaction with "diversity" not as conditions of disorientation, but rather as an advantage over those who had grown up in a limited, homogeneous context. One might observe, along with Claudio Magris, that Rudofsky was "a typical Habsburg character, heir to, and orphan of, that plurinational melting-pot whose disappearance had left him with the deep feeling of not belonging to any precise world." His disillusionment, perhaps even

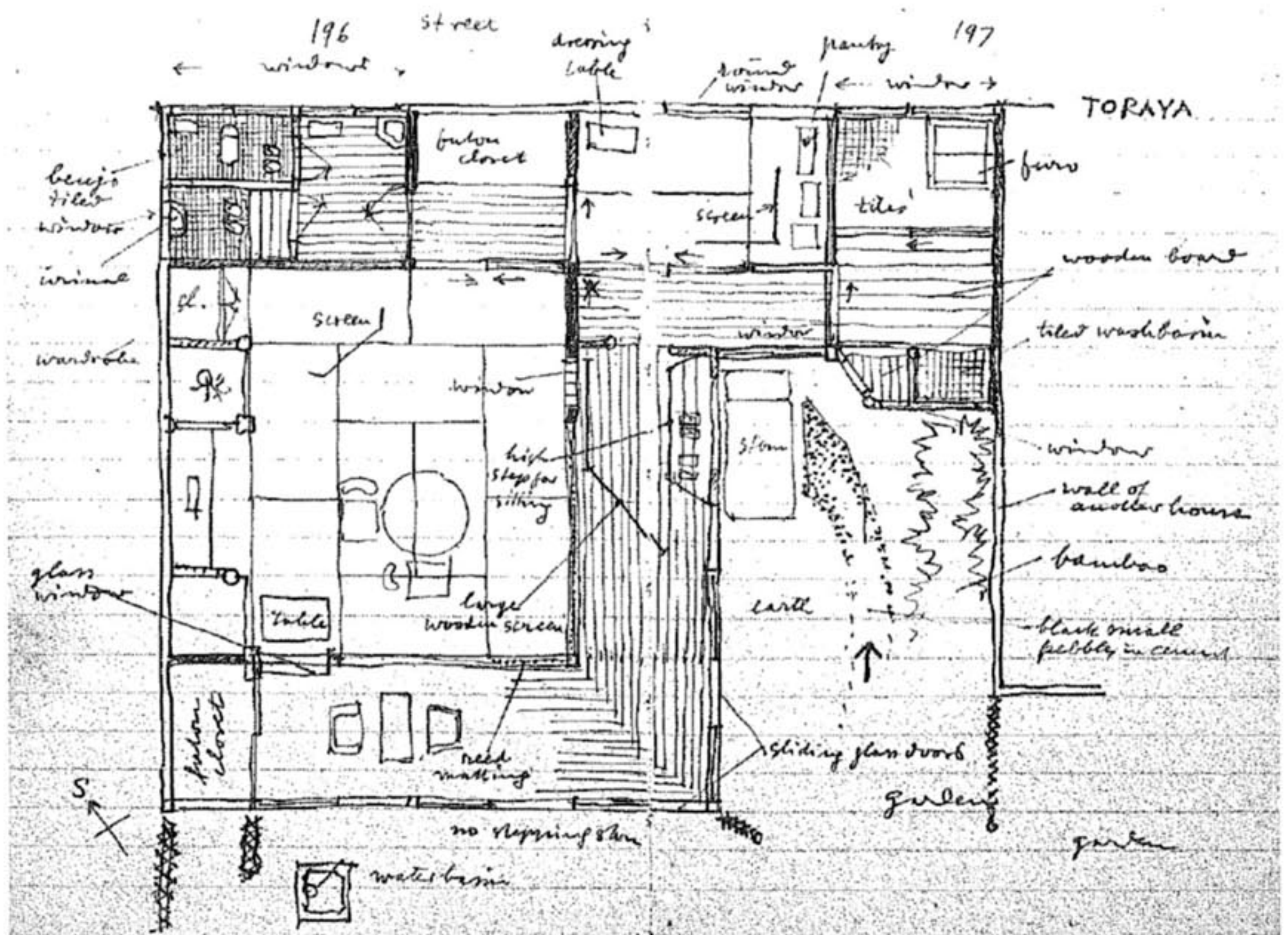
Bernard Rudofsky. Roofs in the harbor of Procida, 1934 (?).

Rudofsky too might have said: "If I have gone to school anywhere, it is to the study of peasant houses..."

¹⁷² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.

¹⁷³ Bernard Rudofsky, lecture at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1981.





revulsion, towards totalitarian institutions and ideologies may have been motivated by the cultural conditions typical of Austria after the fall of the Empire, because "Vienna is a city of the shipwrecked, even if they wear the mask of irony, of a skepticism towards the universal and value systems."¹⁷⁴ Like many of the generation who saw the rise of nationalism and its most extreme consequences, Rudofsky shares Frank's idea that "Patriotism and culture are two concepts which are unable to tolerate each other;"¹⁷⁵ and he is allergic to totalitarian dogmas and ideologies: "We have to be on guard against all doctrines. In architecture, as in politics and economics, slogans are often poison for the mind."¹⁷⁶

Brilli has observed that "[t]he most advanced civilizations have always exalted travel as a fruitful comparison of the known with the unknown"¹⁷⁷ and that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Grand Tour constitutes the codification of the practice of "rubbing one's own brain against those of others."¹⁷⁸ In conformity with this tradition, Rudofsky holds that the comparison with other countries allows us to

Bernard Rudofsky. Plan of a room at the Toraya inn in Kyoto, Japan, in one of his travel notebooks, 1958. Rudofsky liked to quote a sentence by Isamu Noguchi: "I go [to Japan] like a beggar or a thief, seeking the last warmth of the earth." (BR70, p. 263)

174 Claudio Magris, *Danubio*, Milano: Garzanti, 1986, pp. 227-228, 220.

175 Josef Frank, "Zum zweiten Mal", *Architektur als Symbol* cit.

176 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lesson in Copenhagen # 1, 17 February 1975, p. 2 of manuscript.

177 Attilio Brilli, *Quando viaggiare era un'arte. Il romanzo del Grand Tour*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995, p. 8.

178 Michel de Montaigne, *Journal du Voyage en Italie*, Paris, 1774.

define better the idea that we have of our own,¹⁷⁹ and that "[o]nly by comparing facts and situations can we arrive at some worthwhile results. Meeting strangers is one way of getting to know ourselves; learning about other nations' architecture enables us to see our own architecture in a new light."¹⁸⁰

Rudofsky recommends travel as an opportunity to expose oneself to refreshing contact with various ways of seeing things, as an essential passage in intellectual formation. In *The Kimono Mind* (1965), he invokes the rebirth of the art of traveling against the inanity of tourism. He had already dealt with this theme in 1957: "The tourist industry made a clean sweep of one of the most ingenious human activities, the intelligent pursuit of adventure.... Much as modern mass communications helped to weaken the barriers of national prejudice, they have taken the edge off the happier moments of travel. The element of surprise, the exhilaration which comes from personal discovery, are missing; what takes their place is pure and simple recognition."¹⁸¹

As for himself, travel constituted the cultural and existential framework of his whole life. He never stopped moving, and in certain countries he lingered for a long time: from 1932 until 1935 and from 1936 until 1938 in Italy; from 1935 until 1936 in the United States; from 1938 until 1941 in Brazil; from 1958 until 1960 in Japan.

The recurring elements that Rudofsky recognizes between one culture and another make comparisons possible, but in no way imply that the spirit of modern times must be standardized. If it is true that he shares an interest in "timeless" vernacular architecture with other modern architects hostile to time-bound forms, he nonetheless differs from many of them in not believing in a definitive solution to the problem of the house deriving from faith in the constancy of human needs; he thus finds himself in tune with that cultural climate which, especially in the postwar period, radically challenged modernist axioms. Rudofsky's accusations regarding the impoverishment brought about by the extinction of the vernacular in architecture is comparable with Lévi-Strauss's insistence on the impoverishment resulting from the extinction of cultural responses different from those of the West.¹⁸²

179 Bernard Rudofsky, *An Architect Looks at Exhibition Design*, unpublished lecture in Tokyo, 1958, p. 35 of second part.

180 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lesson in Copenhagen # 2, 3 March 1975, p. 2 of manuscript.

181 BR57.1, here at p. 218 ff. Cf. John Ruskin: "Men haven't seen much of the world by going slowly; just imagine whether they'll see more by going fast!"

182 See for instance "Race and culture", lecture held at the UNESCO in 1971, published in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le regard éloigné*, Paris: Plon, 1983 (Engl. transl. *The View from Afar*, New York: Basic Books, 1985).

Between 1923 and 1986, Rudofsky made 35 journeys, which generally took up the warmer half of the year.

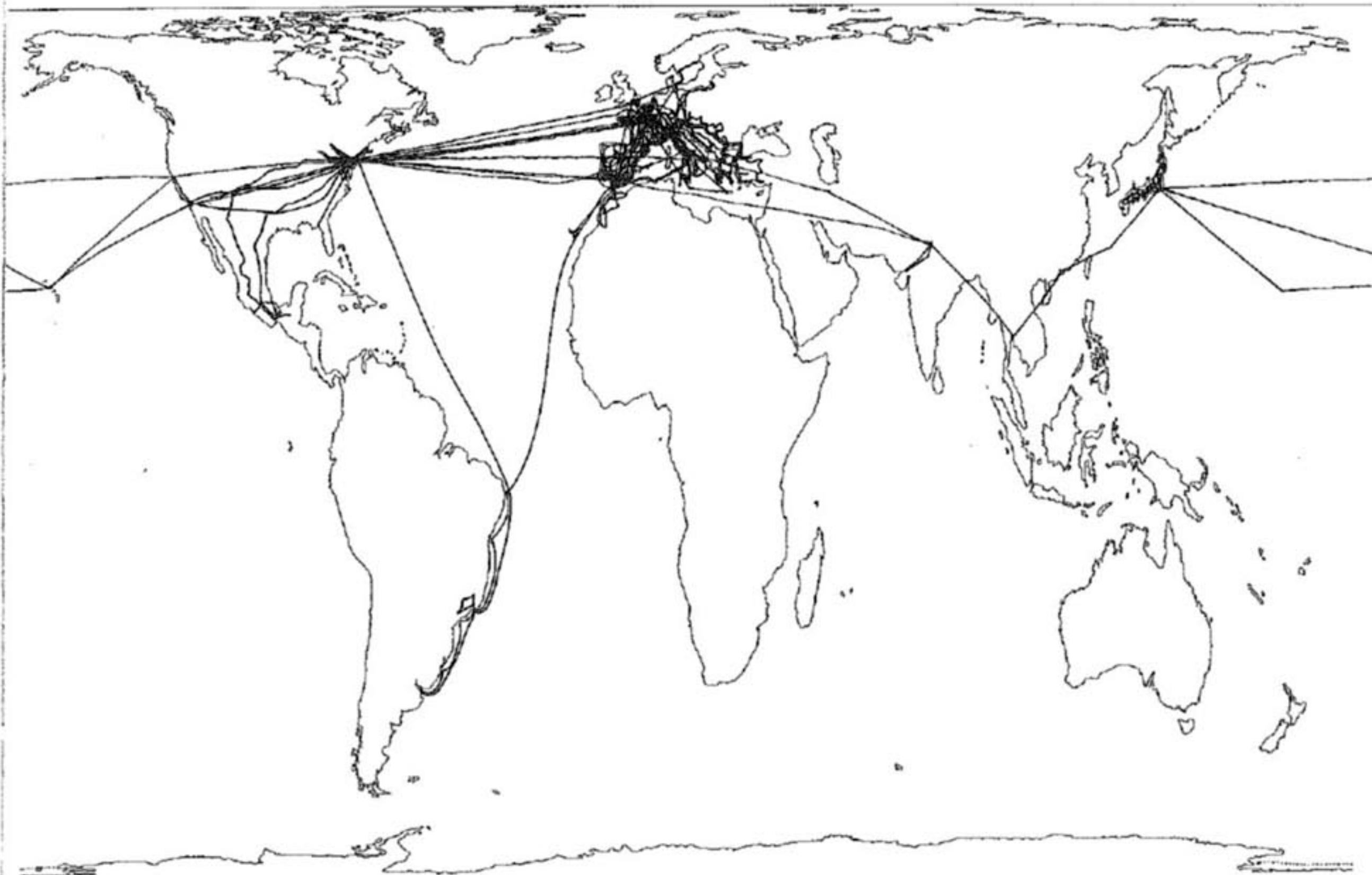
This was not a way of using vacation time; only for brief periods did he have a steady occupation that kept him at home. Travel was an activity to which he devoted a good part of his earnings, time, and intellectual energies. (He prepared for every trip by reading dozens — or even, in the case of Japan — hundreds of texts; the notebooks that he compiled at the New York Public Library are full of sketches of interesting places and objects to be seen, afterwards, *de visu*),¹⁸³ and from which he might draw documentation and arguments that confer vitality upon his works.

His youthful travels took on, in addition, a central existential value that Rudofsky tried to transmit to his students and readers. The 1925 journey along the Danube to Bulgaria, Istanbul and Turkey, and Asia Minor was decisive in bringing him into contact with a reality that seemed more "authentic" than that of Central Europe: a condition that was to seem to him, for the rest of his life, ideal, and ever more utopian, because it was being dismantled step by step by progress — but still full of human qualities waiting to be rediscovered.

The significance of this journey corresponds to that of Le Corbusier's *Voyage d'Orient* (1911), which largely followed the same itinerary. Rudofsky and Le Corbusier both drank, as it were, at the same stream:

183 The majority of Rudofsky's note- and travel books are conserved at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

A Map of Rudofsky's Travels



perhaps this is one of the reasons for the consonance that was to link them later on.¹⁸⁴ (It should, however, be noted that Le Corbusier's *Voyage* followed a rather familiar route and that — except for the very well-known pages on the Parthenon — he imparted little of this central experience to the outside world; his travel notebooks were published posthumously.)¹⁸⁵

Despite their number and length, Rudofsky's travels do not cover the globe in a balanced manner. As the map shows, Europe and parts of the Mediterranean basin were far and away his favorite places. For him, travel had to be not only an intellectually stimulating experience, but also physically pleasurable. A lover of the sea and the sun, he did not visit cold countries; deeply interested in the manifestations of human life, he did not visit unpopulated countries with their vast empty landscapes.

Rudofsky is no Chatwin, nor does he emulate Griaule, Mauss, or Lévi-Strauss. He takes many of his trips by car (driven by his wife Berta), sleeping in hotels. His personal experience shows that it is possible to travel authentically without engaging in spectacular undertakings, without being the first to reach (real or so-called) uncontaminated spots; instead, he ranges through the same territories as does mass tourism, but with slower rhythms and a more acute way of looking. What makes the difference is not the places but the way of doing things, the skill in seeing the details of what is there alongside the monuments codified in the academic canon and the guidebooks.

184 Rudofsky never denied his great admiration for Le Corbusier: "[His] early writings and early buildings were a revelation to me. His Latin elegance of reasoning, his native sophistication, made the ponderous pronouncement of his Teutonic colleagues seem boring. Besides, painter and sculptor that he was, he greatly admired the freely modeled houses of the Greek islands and North African towns." Perhaps his esteem was motivated by Le Corbusier's explorations of traditional Mediterranean architecture; or by his personality as a complete, "humanist" artist; or by their chats of 1946, at the tables at Monte's in Greenwich Village; or, further, by a "Latin" consonance of spirit which they shared as against the Nordic architects' fridity. Anyhow, Rudofsky willingly attacked Wright, in spite of the fact that many of the latter's ideas matched his own; and he seemed to forget that Le Corbusier was the one who proposed to raze Paris (and who, even if he couldn't carry out his proposal, was nonetheless guilty of having praised a crime which others were to commit, and of having destroyed the very idea of the city).

185 Le Corbusier, *Le Voyage d'Orient*, Paris, 1966. See also Giuliano Gresleri, *La Corbusier Viaggio in Oriente*, Venezia-Paris: Marsilio-Fondation Le Corbusier, 1984.

Catalogues

In his ongoing process of self-education, Rudofsky displays a great capacity for appropriating and developing the information and ideas he encounters along the way. Sometimes one finds traces of them in his buildings; more often, he presents his discoveries to his readers, his disciples, and the visitors to his shows as catalogues of possibilities. From the places he visits, and even more from books read in libraries, Rudofsky brings back objects, anecdotes, ways of life which he displays alongside one another, without worrying over-much about uniformity of context. And he offers the harvest of his insatiable curiosity as a possible cure for standardization, for the scarcity of free and independent minds, for mankind's continuing ability to form habits and prejudices,¹⁸⁶ for the boredom occasioned by the passive absorption of prepackaged products that serves to create manipulable consumers.

Like Loos, Rudofsky "was certainly a reformer of life, but he didn't set himself the goal of creating an ideal parallel culture, aiming instead to extract from existing culture its positive elements."¹⁸⁷ It is worth noting that according to Lévi-Strauss the "second stage" of anthropological study carried out by a Westerner "consists in using all [societies] without assimilating anything from them, in order to develop those principles of social life that it will be possible for us to apply to the reform of our own customs."¹⁸⁸

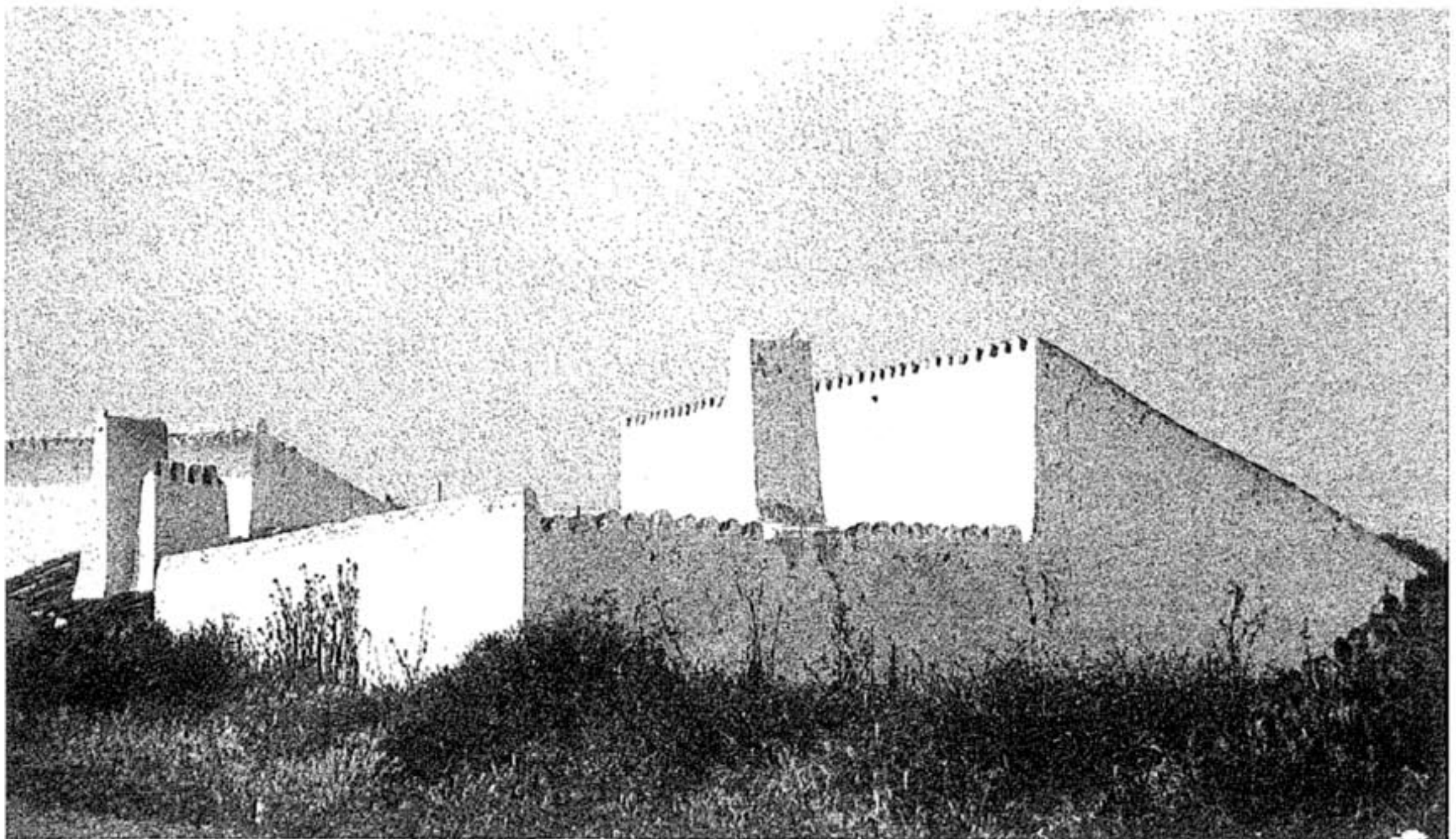
Convictions of this sort form the underpinnings for those of Rudofsky's shows and writings that are constructed as inventories of options and opportunities. If, in *Architecture without Architects*, this is an attribution made *a posteriori* by critics, in the case of *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat*

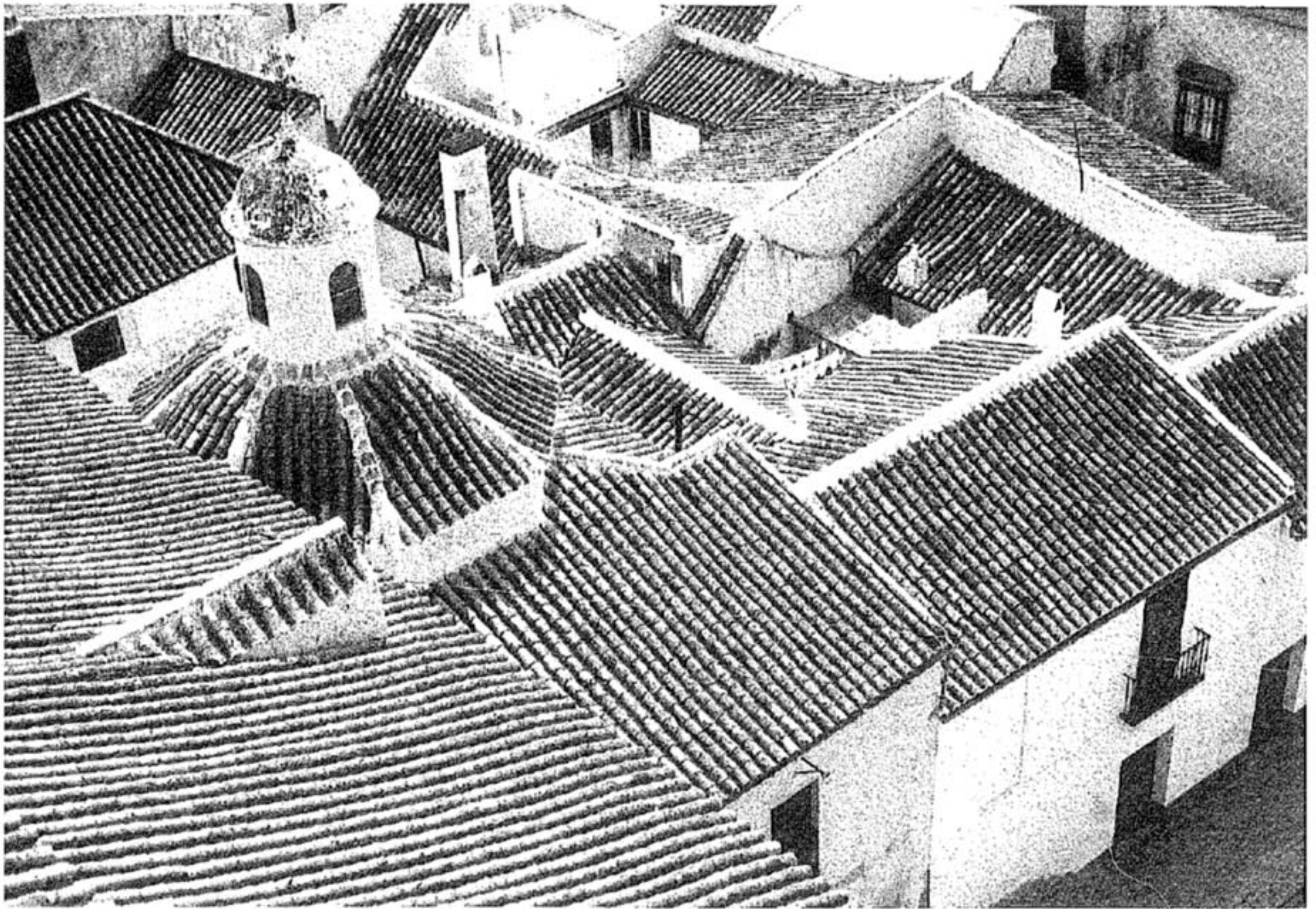
186 Cf. AR88.12.

187 Hermann Czech, "Introduzione", in Josef Frank (edited by Hermann Czech), *Architettura come simbolo. Elementi del nuovo edificio tedesco*, Bologna: Zanichelli, 1986, p. xiii.

188 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, Paris: Plon, 1955.

*Bernard Rudofsky. Rural house near Ecija, Spain, 1963.
A house designed by Rudofsky, or architecture without architects?*





Bernard Rudofsky. Roofs of Carmona, Spain, 1963.

Rudofsky instinctively recognized, and fought for the acceptance of the idea, that the quality of a settlement depended less upon its individual buildings and noteworthy structures (monuments) than upon the totality of the urban fabric.

See Catalogue no. 63 (p. 303)

it is Rudofsky himself who declares as much: "Primarily meant to serve as safe-conduct for his exhibition of the same name, [this book] can be read as a sort of new earth catalog."¹⁸⁹

A research project of his, probably from the early sixties, aimed above all to "attempt to determine the nature of a house incorporating the combined knowledge and experience of mankind with relation to shelter."¹⁹⁰ This encyclopedic intention was to be put into practice, twenty or thirty years later, in the shows *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat* and *Sparta/Sybaris*.

The projected "museum-laboratory" for Yale was likewise imagined as a potentially limitless catalogue of artistic and architectural materials and techniques.

The Prodigious Builders and *Streets for People* can be used principally as repertoires, covering diverse places and historical periods, of the phenomenology and reasons of constructed space. In the architectural field as in domestic customs and ways of dressing, Rudofsky likewise looks for the fundamental meanings, inviting the reader to get at them by induction.

¹⁸⁹ NIL, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Bernard Rudofsky, *Outline for An investigation into the principles on which to base a more satisfactory domestic architecture than the one held to be desirable today* (unpublished manuscript), early 1960s (?).

Streets for People deals with the spatial and functional value of the street; the preservation and overall quality of the urban fabric; the city as a reflection of a way of life; the cleanliness of public space; covered and shaded streets; places for pedestrians; the street as theater; toponymy; public stairways; bridges and elevated streets; markets; decorations; "natural" or "spontaneous" urbanism vs. the planned kind; public space as an open-air room; pavements; fountains, water, and public toilets; eating in the street and cafés; children and the street; education and respect for the natural and urban setting; the responsibility of the architect. The common element is the plea not to deprive public space of opportunities for diversity, pleasantness, affability, with all these factors aiming less at mere practical functionality than at the provision of a meaningful setting for individual and collective identity.

The Prodigious Builders deals with "animal architecture;" arboreal architecture and the tree as building; ludic, "functionless" architecture; embracing, concave, modeled architecture; mobile architecture; subterranean and excavated architecture; megalithic architecture; sepulchres and cemeteries; barns and deposits; fortresses; "agglutinative" architecture (spontaneous growth); the sexual and psychological

See *Purposeless Architecture*, p. 52



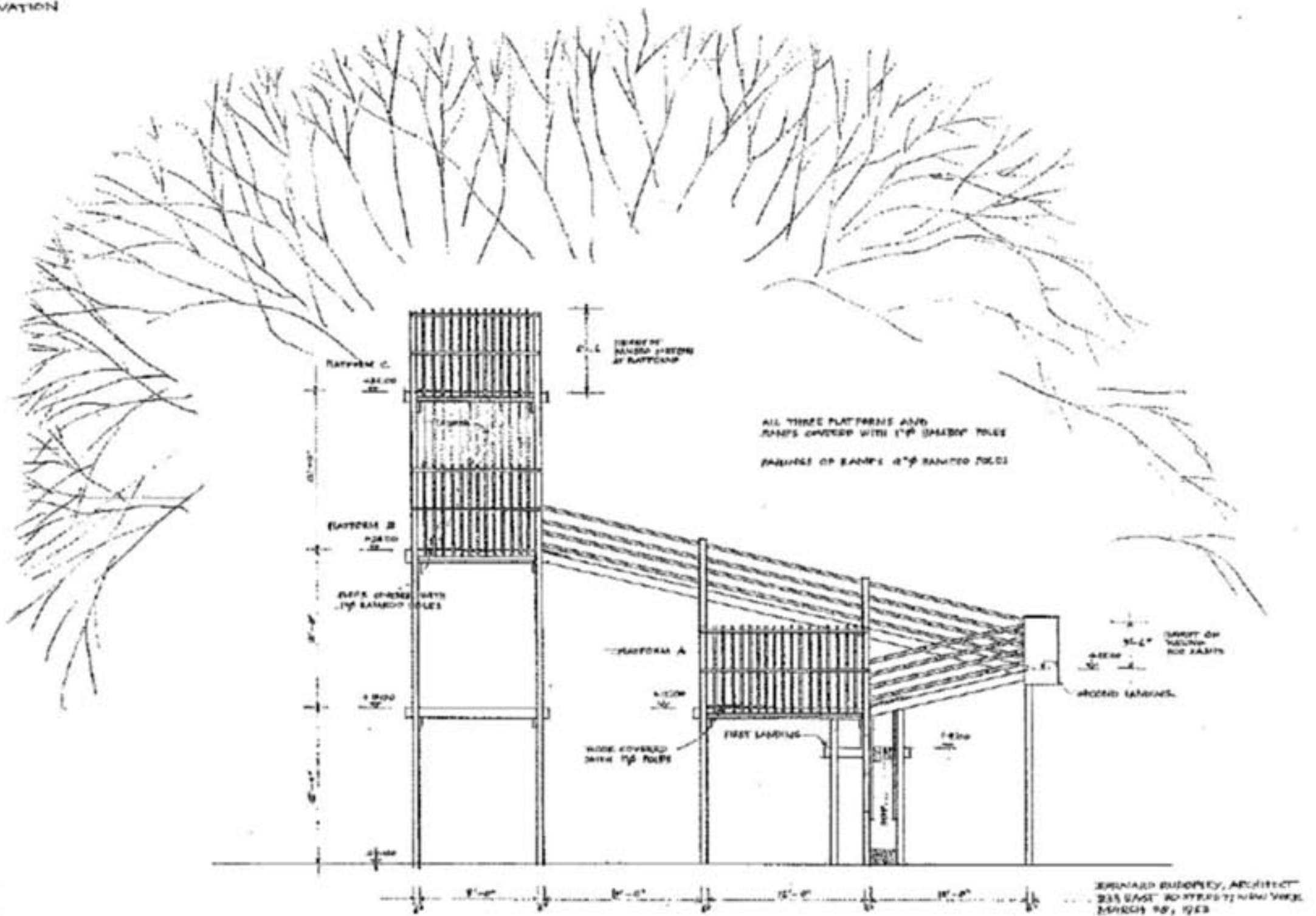
Bernard Rudofsky. Sicilian street pavement, 1967.

symbolism of architecture; the peasant house as an instance of typological homogeneity without standardization; the relationship with the earth and the territory; the relationship to environmental conditions; the domestic interior; High Vernacular; darkness and the sense of space; labyrinths; inappropriate or unauthorized reuse vs. "museumification;" the teaching of the value of permanence and creative play. The working titles for this book (*R is for Architecture* and *A Natural History of Architecture*) clearly express Rudofsky's intention to offer — above and beyond the works of the vaguely defined "prodigious builders" — his own encyclopedia of heterogeneous points of departure for seeing and conceiving of architecture.

J. H. CARMEL, TREE-HOUSE
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

38

SOUTH ELEVATION

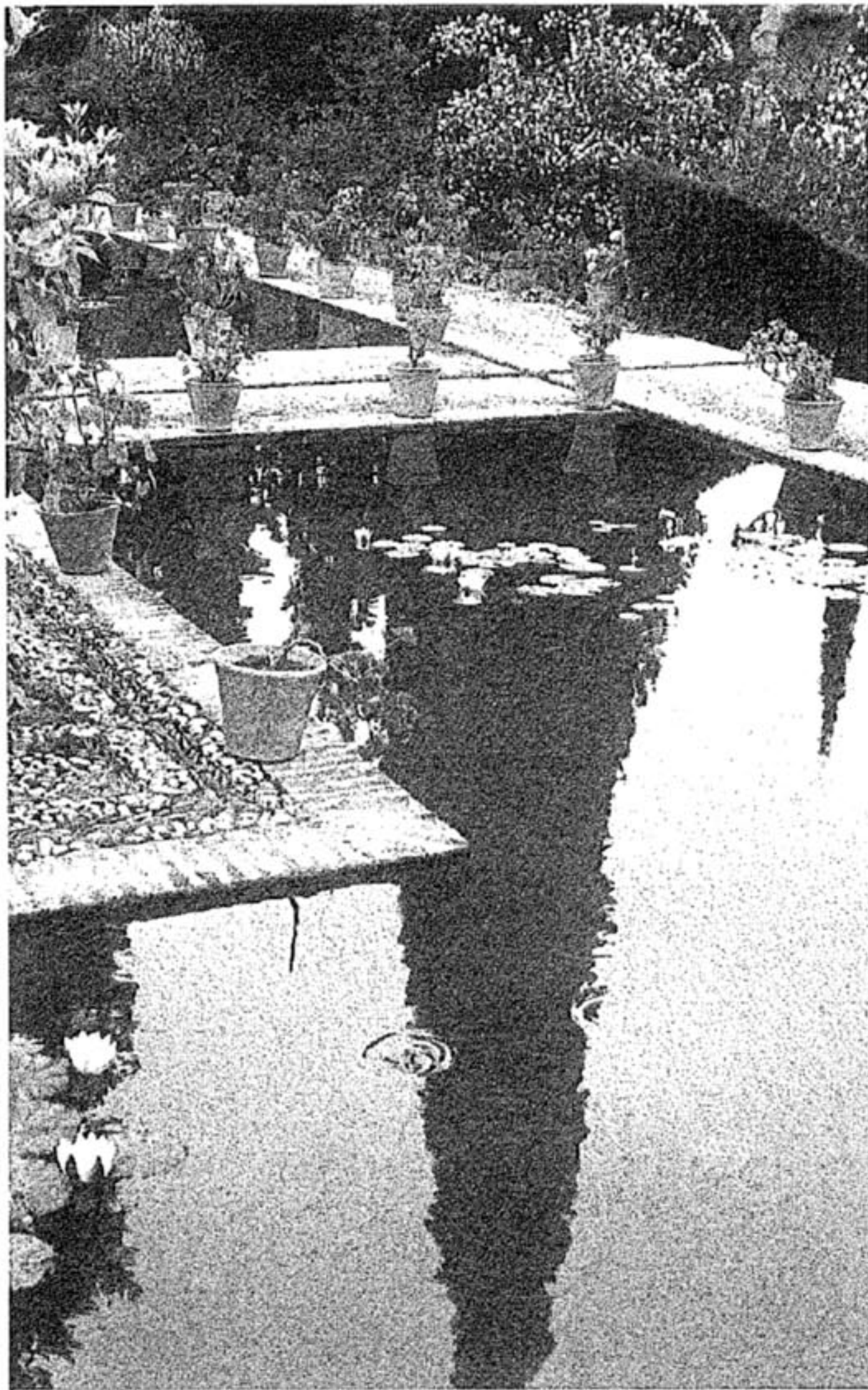


Bernard Rudofsky. Tree-house for a huge tree at the Carmel garden-house — South elevation, 1963.

Rudofsky frequently reproduces period illustrations, and quite rarely makes use of technical drawings and sketches that clarify the carrying out of a human activity, or the way of constructing an object. The illustrations in *Behind the Picture Window* are introduced as follows: "On the assumption that everybody is sufficiently acquainted with the looks of houses and their insides, illustrations have been limited to the less familiar...matters. They are meant to assist the reader's memory or, if need be, his imagination."¹⁹¹ *The Kimono Mind*, his book about Japan, published in a period by which all travel books were having recourse to the appeal of the photographic image, is entirely illustrated with woodcuts and drawings "primarily meant to convey some of the aroma of the Japanese cultural climate," since "Japan cannot be fathomed as matter-of-factly as England, Holland, or Disneyland."¹⁹²

191 BPW, p. 55.

192 TKM, p. 9.



Bernard Rudofsky. Pool in a Granada garden, Spain, 1963.

Not in intellectual abstraction, but in spontaneous reality, in "the pulsing life of all that is self-created, imperfect and sufficient" (TPB, p. 365), Rudofsky found the essentials of architectural creation.

It is above all in his shows that one can appreciate Rudofsky's talent as a communicator, able to initiate a dialogue with a non-specialist public on the concrete questions of life. He felt himself to "have a special interest or a special aptitude"¹⁹³ for exhibitions, and was skillful in selecting and putting "on stage" articles that would be effective from the standpoint of communication. He wasn't afraid to use stock images, nor did he strain to display originals faced with which the visitor might risk being distracted by incidental aspects: for Rudofsky, objects were always the exemplification of concepts or of classes of objects. What mattered to him was, above all, to evoke, to strike the imagination.

His shows — like, in fact, the whole of his *oeuvre* — do not have a scientifically systematic character, although they display unusual information caught in the folds of history or left in the margins by

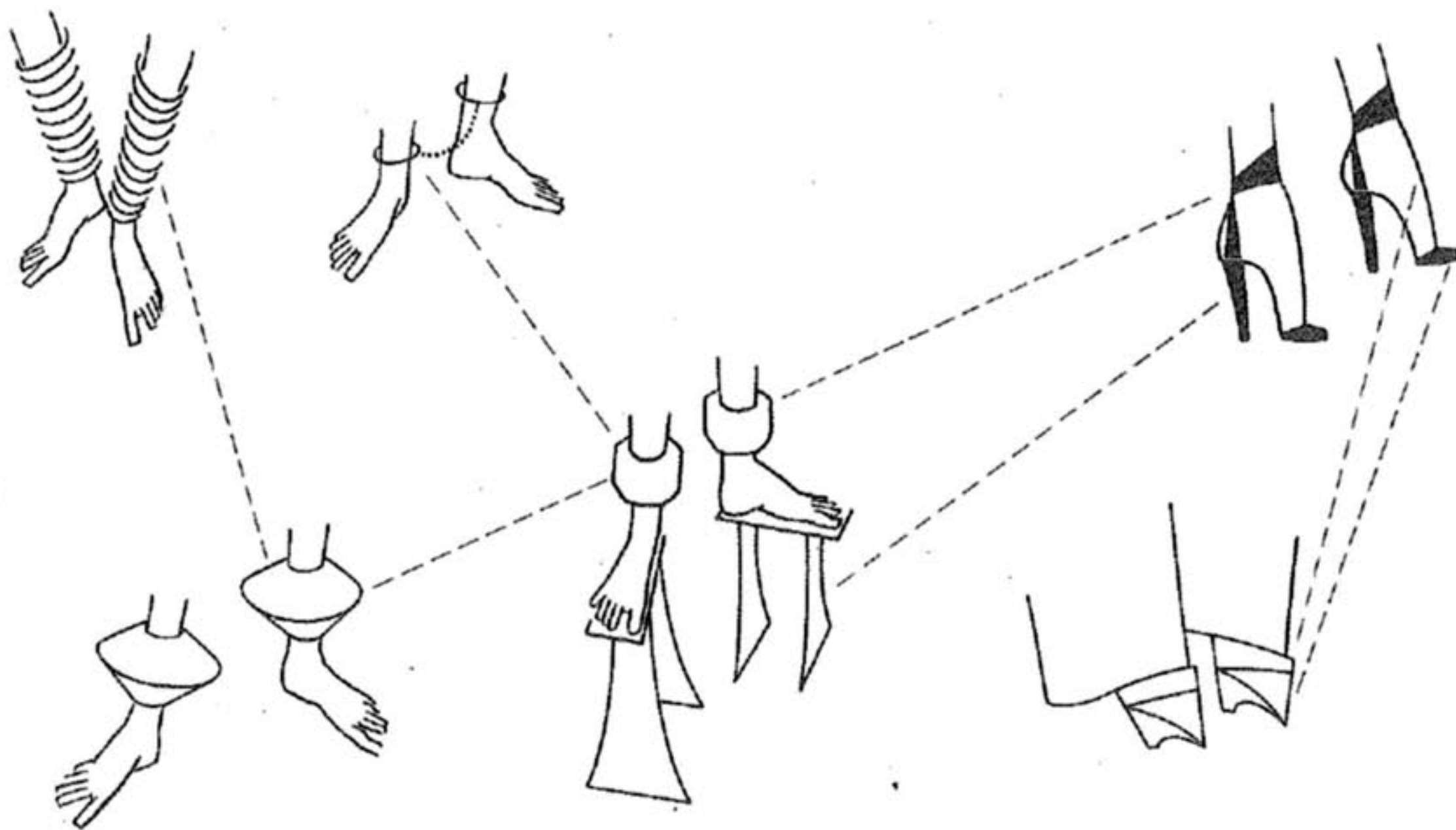
¹⁹³ Bernard Rudofsky, *An Architect Looks at Exhibition Design*, cit., p. 1 of first part.

focused scientific study. Panels with photographs, display cases containing objects some of which come from artistic and archeological collections, and domestic settings, constructed with no mimetic concessions so as to draw attention in the abstract to diverse individual situations while avoiding the aestheticized or commercialized trap of the "model house":¹⁹⁴ in *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat and Sparta/Sybaris*, all this comes together to offer unconventional solutions to problems that strike him as having been dealt with irrationally or without exploring the possibilities for pleasantness they contain.

In general, his exhibition designs aim "[t]o build an environment that resembles as little as possible a show room, a store or a conventional museum; to distract and intrigue the visitor with optical illusions and to display the objects out of context; to pamper his eye with shapes and colors."¹⁹⁵ He avoids the use of sound and lighting

194 However, Rudofsky considered, at least during the forties and fifties, the use of full-scale reproductions of houses in his exhibition projects (see Bernard Rudofsky, *Outline for An investigation into the principles on which to base a more satisfactory domestic architecture than the one held to be desirable today cit.*).

195 Bernard Rudofsky, *An Architect Looks at Exhibition Design*, cit., p. 9 of second part.



Bernard Rudofsky. Contrary to what might seem to be the eminent seductive qualities of woman it is female bearing that attracts man most, 1944 (?).

Rudofsky used sketches like this to communicate his ideas directly, almost without the use of words, to the visitors of Are Clothes Modern?

effects and, with the exception of the Brussels Expo, of films as well. In articles and lectures, Rudofsky sets forth his theory regarding the arrangement of an exhibition. He teaches: "A good way to plan a show is to anticipate what the public expects, and then do the opposite. The problems of the exhibition architect are related to stage design rather than to architecture... The highest compliment for the exhibition architect is when somebody says: 'I don't recognize the place.'"¹⁹⁶ The principles underlying the design of *Textiles USA* (1956), the Brussels Expo (1958), and *Architecture without Architects* (1964) still look like an application of the theories of Herbert Bayer.¹⁹⁷ The designs for the settings of *Textiles USA* and the Expo were considered exemplary by the press of the day.¹⁹⁸ But Rudofsky best displayed his abilities in shows like *Are Clothes Modern?*, conceived entirely by him and intended to express his own point of view, which was anything but neutral.

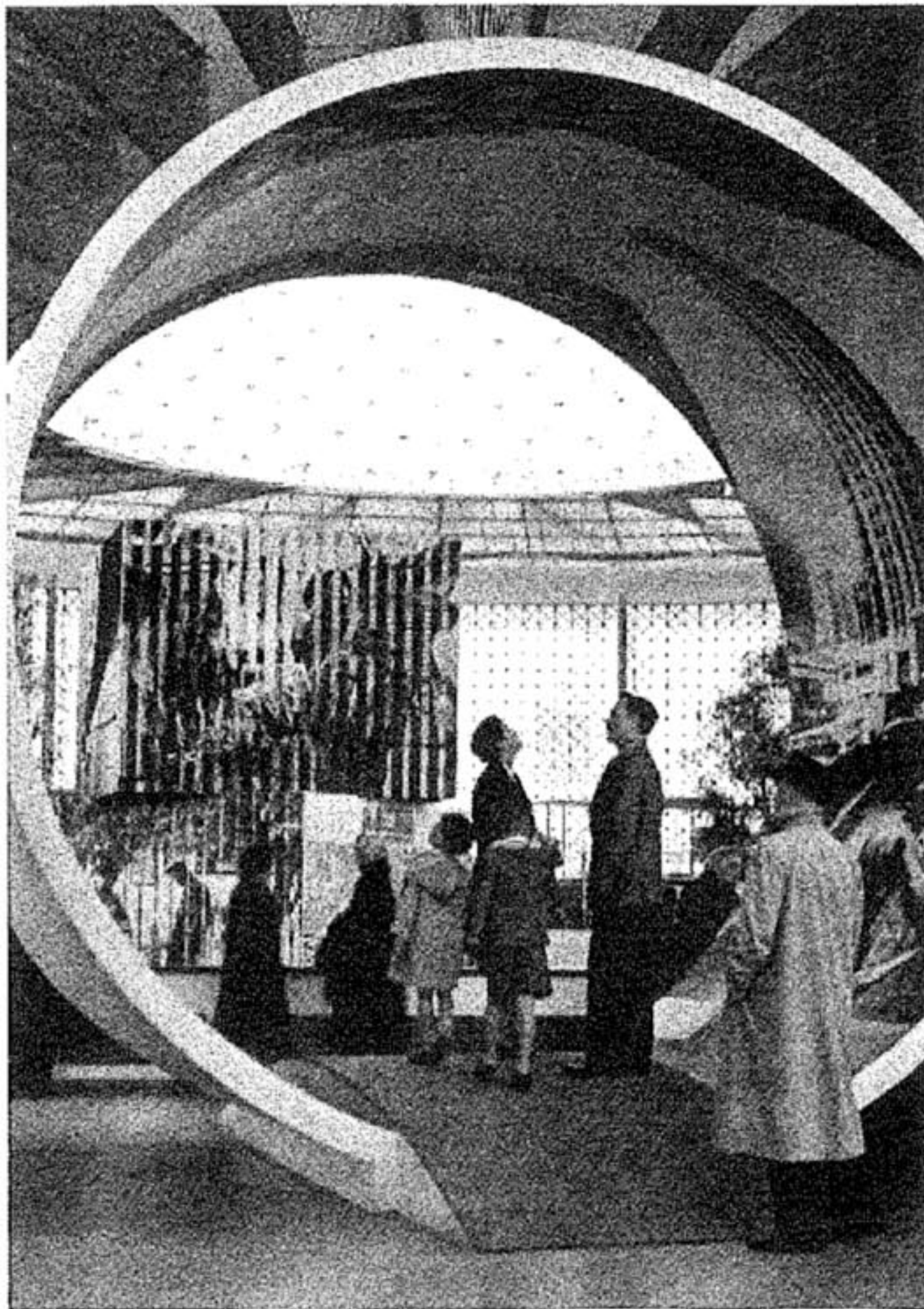
196 Bernard Rudofsky, *An Architect Looks at Exhibition Design*, cit., p. 6 of second part.

197 See for instance Herbert Bayer, "Notes on exhibition design", *Interiors*, July 1947, p. 60-77.

198 Cf. AR45.1, AR47.8, AR56.3, AR58.2, AR58.3, and the book by James H. Carmel, AR62.1.

See Catalogue no. 58 (p. 298)

Giorgio Casali. The anamorphic cylinder in the Streetscape section of Brussels Expo, designed by Bernard Rudofsky, 1958.



Rhetoric

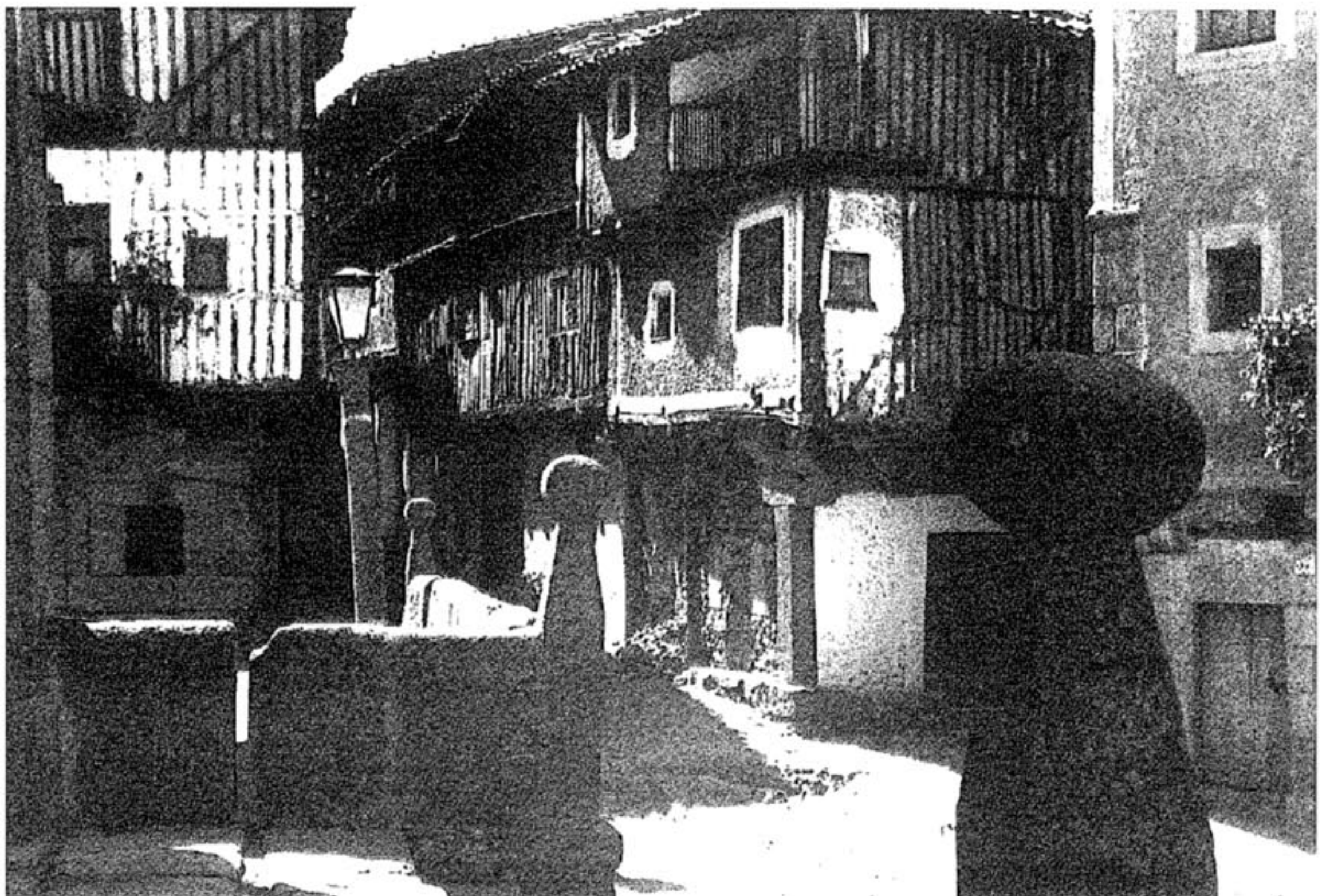
Scott has observed that the success of *Architecture without Architects* — a show and book/catalogue on “spontaneous” architecture created in 1964 — derives from the happy intersection of a high iconographic quality with the ability to engage popular architecture in a dialogue on questions that were then current: “Rudofsky’s retrieval of pre-industrial forms [was] commonly understood as an idealistic ‘antidote’ to the predicament of industrial civilization... [T]he images of architecture without architects appealed to the period’s growing discontent with the devastation of the urban and rural environment, to its liberationist and anticolonial politics, and to the uneasiness felt by some regarding the ever increasing commodification of everyday life. The carefully constructed images even aroused the sentiment that one was being shown not only an alternative, but somehow a ‘natural’, ‘essential’, or ‘true’ architecture, which existed beyond representation... [T]he reception [of *Architecture without Architects*] was facilitated by the catalogue’s peculiar capacity to act as a not-fully-determined screen upon which so many contemporary issues could be projected. From fear of a technological progress gone awry, to the sense of a growing urgency for preservation, community, and regional identity, and even to a comparison with the New Monumentality in architecture, these photographs continued to evoke pressing issues.”¹⁹⁹

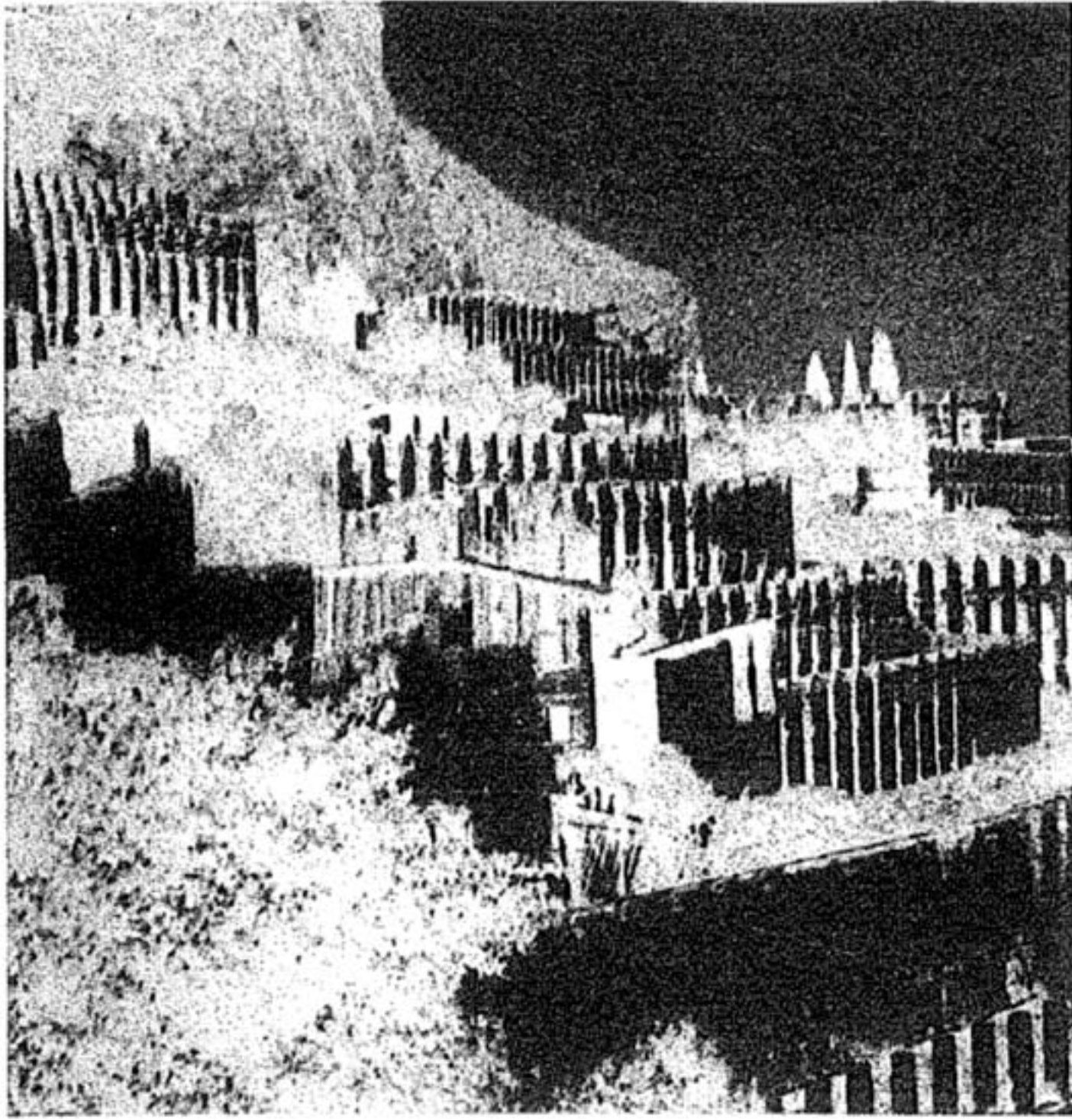
Bernard Rudofsky. Portuguese (?) village with houses with wooden latticework structure, 1965.

One of many examples of Rudofsky’s photography of “spontaneous” architecture, in which his “essentially pictorial” eye produces an image of undoubted quality.

The protests of the AIA and *Progressive Architecture* only served to increase the attention paid to *Architecture without Architects*, which was labeled subversive. But its success was not calculated. It in no way diminishes the intrinsic value of Rudofsky’s work to observe that the popularity of the show and the book that accompanied it

199 AR98.4, p. 69–70.





ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT ARCHITECTS

by Bernard Rudofsky

Bernard Rudofsky. Architecture without Architects cover, 1964.

A photo of the lemon-houses on Lake Garda, those stupendous architectural remnants, was printed in negative on the jacket of the original edition of Architecture without Architects. The cover expresses in an exemplary fashion the value — probably first noted by Ada Louise Huxtable, architecture critic of The New York Times — of the entire show as “an extremely sophisticated demonstration of architecture-as-abstract-art.” Cf. picture at p. 52.

stemmed from the international prominence of the stage on which he had the opportunity to perform and from the intersection between ambiguities inherent in his thought and the period's cultural orientations; and there is, in this, something paradoxical, given that the ideas he displayed regarding spontaneous architecture had already been expressed decades earlier. Moreover, the work in which he completely articulates and develops his ideas on the subject (*The Prodigious Builders*, published in 1977) neither received the attention nor exercised the influence of *Architecture without Architects*. One may even say that the latter's success derived from the laconic quality of the text — which lends itself to allusive, evocative readings — and from Rudofsky's ability to take or select magnificent photographs of architecture. Almost exclusively, these photos depict exteriors; and they express an “essentially pictorial” viewpoint and an idealistic approach to anonymous architecture.²⁰⁰

Scott is right to analyze *Architecture without Architects* in rhetorical terms (but the less well-known shows *Stairs* and *Roads* are also constructed in the same way): rather than scientifically investigating the context from which rural buildings were extracted, Rudofsky knows how to exploit “the potential of an allegorical refunctioning through supplementary and historically contingent meanings” produced by himself. “Rudofsky had indeed appropriated those images, adding a second

See Catalogue no. 59 (p. 299)

200 AR69.2, p. 21.

(modernist) text and undertaking a violent decontextualization in resituating them in a Western aesthetic paradigm."²⁰¹

The title *Architecture without Architects* is a classic example of an apparent contradiction, in which different meanings are attributed to the same word.²⁰² Rudofsky does not place "architecture" and "architects" in their usual relationship, according to which, once one of the two terms has been defined (for example, what is architecture), the other is automatically determined (the architect is a specialist in architecture). While he attributes to "architect" the restrictive meaning of a specialist in the construction of buildings, having a specific formal education and working in a professional institution, or rather — more in keeping with the critical and historiographical tradition — that of the creator of particularly significant buildings, meant to represent the formal subjects and protagonists of history, he assigns to "architecture" a broad meaning that can be better understood by turning to Harries's proposal, to which I shall return later on. The title and the careful selection of images, with almost no further argumentation, evoke a rich series of conceptual associations.

The title of the project calls into play references to the period during which Rudofsky was structuring his interest in spontaneous architecture. Lisa Ponti has referred to the Vienna of the thirties as a place which "seems to teach, through its architects [Hoffmann; Frank and Wlach; Strnad; Haerdtl] the value of thinking of architecture 'without an architect.'"²⁰³ What she — and Gio Ponti before her — wanted to express is the lay wish to accept that interiors are the fruit of the choices and usages of the inhabitants, who are expressing their personal values as to domesticity.

The modernist discovery of the Mediterranean dwelling likewise postulates the existence of an "architecture without architects," although in entirely different terms: here the architect is the observer, not the maker. Rovira draws attention to an article by Sert dated 1934 and entitled, "Arquitectura sense 'estil' i sense 'arquitecte'" (architecture without 'style' and without 'architect').²⁰⁴

I cannot formulate any definitive hypotheses as to the fact that one of these, or other, sources may form the basis for the title of Rudofsky's show. But it strikes me as interesting to recognize that the intersection between these two semantic contexts defines the recognition of the value, for a civilized and sophisticated man, of that which — apparently or otherwise — has come into being without architects, opening the way to interest in the dwelling — whether or not one chooses to call it architecture.

Rudofsky had a sincere passion for popular architecture, which it seems to me he transmits to the reader of his works. But in addition, he maintains that his "study of non-pedigreed architecture is mainly a parable."²⁰⁵

201 AR01, p. 220.

202 Chaïm Perelman, *L'empire rhétorique. Rhétorique et argumentation*, [Bruxelles]: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1977; *Le champ de l'argumentation*, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1970.

203 AR90.2 p. 47.

204 Winter 1934 issue of *D'Ací i d'Allà* magazine, quoted by Josep M. Rovira, op. cit., p. 222–223.

205 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture.

A parable of what? Paul Oliver has observed, "As the anthropologists may often reveal patterns of behaviour in our own society which go unnoticed precisely because they are so familiar but become apparent when exposed to another and alien culture, so the study of vernacular architecture can reveal either directly, or by analogy, some of the responses which the occupants may have to the buildings erected by architects."²⁰⁶ With reference to Rudofsky, Oliver, Rapoport, and Fathy, Anthony D. King recently noted that "just as many anthropologists have...reconstructed anthropology as a critique of their own cultures, so architects and architectural writers use 'vernacular architecture' as a critique of their own professional practice 'at home' as well as new, 'professional' low-cost housing in 'Third World' cities abroad."²⁰⁷

Rudofsky does not fail to cite Seneca, if not Locke and Rousseau; his belief that the peasant is an unchanging figure, outside of history, makes it possible to include him in the line of thought that links Dilthey, Frobenius, and Spengler.²⁰⁸ The last two, in fact, are among his favorite cultural references.

It should nonetheless be observed that, like the primitivism of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the condition of man in a state of nature is an allegory offered provocatively by Rudofsky as an intellectual and practical instrument of reform; and it is evident that he would never have wanted to experience it himself or suggest that others do so. The belief in a "natural" man, and thus in the existence of constant and universal principles, of a uniform human nature, is precisely what makes possible, for him as for the Enlightenment *philosophes*, communication and exchange between different ethnic groups, cultures, and historical periods.

Chaim Perelman has clarified that "[i]n the contexts in which it is a matter of establishing what is preferable, what is acceptable and reasonable, the discourse is composed neither of formally correct deductions nor of inductions that go from the particular to the general, but of arguments of every sort intended to obtain the assent of those for whose approval the theses are submitted." This applies to every discourse that tends to solicit the agreement, both intellectual and emotional, of an audience, rather than aspiring to an impersonal validity. There are no absolute rules: two contrasting theses may be applied to two separate contexts, time frames, or objects. "The symbol [but also allegory and metaphor] is indispensable...in that it would be difficult for emotion to develop over a purely abstract idea;"²⁰⁹ illustrations and examples must, above all, strike the imagination.

Rudofsky's rhetorical effectiveness can be measured through his extraordinary success with the public: *Architecture without Architects*

206 AR69.2, p. 26-27.

207 AR96.1.

208 Leo Frobenius, *Das unbekante Afrika. Aufhellung der Schicksale eines Erdteils*, München: Beck, 1923; *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas. Prolegomena zu einer historischen Gestaltlehre*, Zürich: Phaidon, 1933. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, München: Beck, 1920-22; *Der Mensch und die Technik. Beitrag zu einer Philosophie des Lebens*, München: Beck, 1931.

According to Spengler's theory, each culture has its own "nature;" no culture offers individuals any possibility of choosing for themselves; men can try to oppose to the destiny dictated by the culture to which they belong, but their inevitable failure will mark their moral and historical condemnation. To some extent Rudofsky may have absorbed such a view: he deliberately courted unpopularity and cultivated the legend of his being a bitter dissenter, an enemy of integrated society.

209 Chaim Perelman, *L'empire rhétorique. Rhétorique et argumentation*, op. cit.

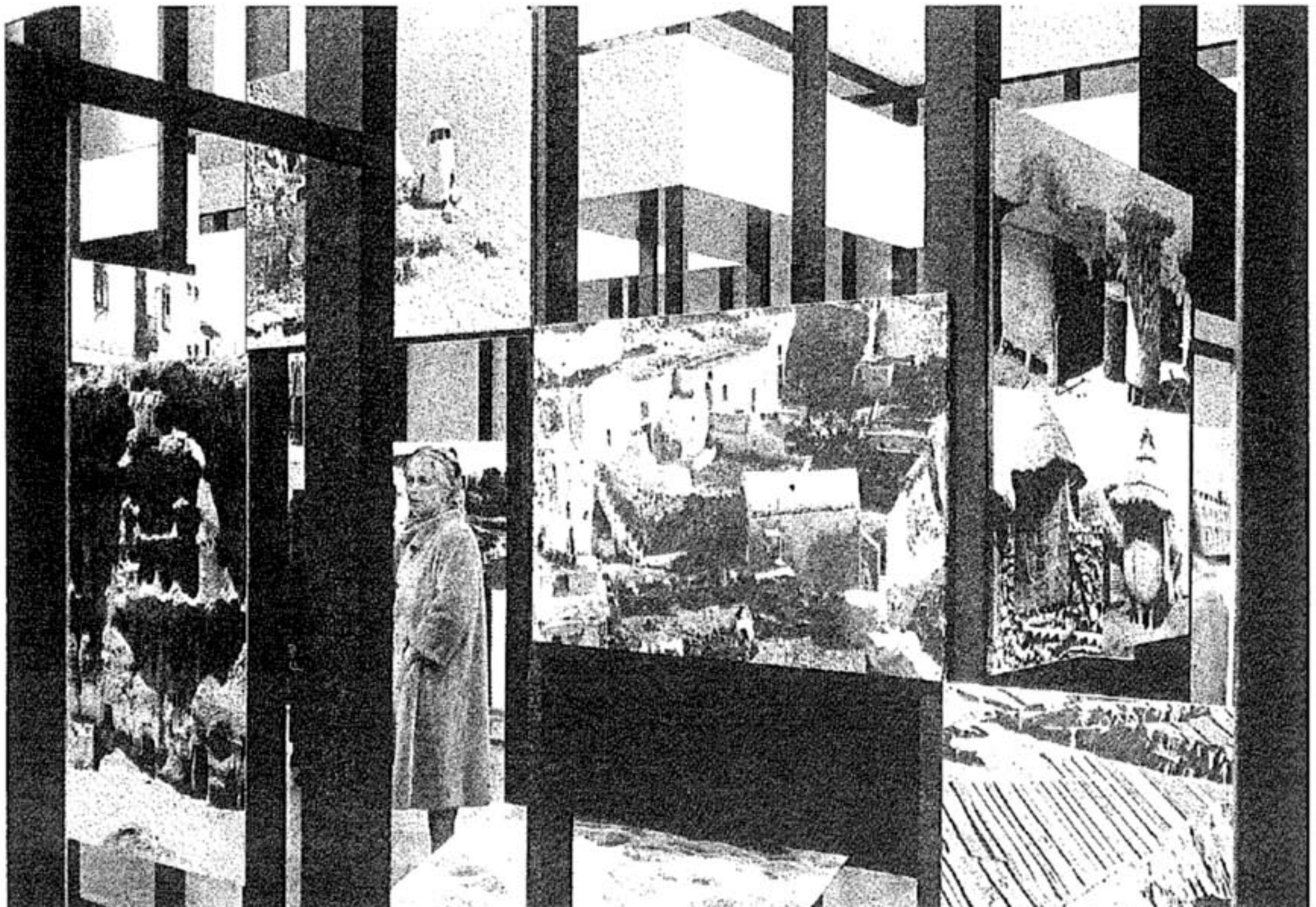
has sold more than 100,000 copies just in the USA edition and is still in print. His was not merely a quantitative success; he was a skilled and convincing polemicist and rhetorician, able to arouse enthusiasm and transmit energy and contents to his audience.

It is not merely out of cosmopolitanism that Rudofsky was constantly choosing remote, alien examples, towards which his public may have felt a certain diffidence. In his talks, he frequently attacked Americans' lifestyle and *forma mentis*. This was due not only to a distaste for certain aspects of American-ness, deriving from his Central European imprinting, but also to the fact that the greater part of his talks were delivered in the United States. (In the same way, he formulates merciless criticisms of architects above all, since it is at them that a large part of his writings and talks are aimed.) Everywhere he goes, he cites other places as examples and takes elements of comparison from "other" contexts, so as to cast doubt on the validity of local practices and beliefs.

His rhetoric is often aggressive, and feeds on paradox: in fact, some of his statements are valid precisely because they are paradoxical. It is his philanthropic concern that pushes him to face down victorious, standardizing progress with a haughty *vis polemica*, with an obstinate taste for the contradictory.

Were one to try to bring together into one argument all the examples he mentions in his talks, one would get nowhere: they are "cases," sometimes incompatible. These are not *exempla*, fragments to be assembled into an ideal Rudofskian system. In the United States, he praises the rationality of the decimal metric system; in continental

Bernard Rudofsky. Architecture without Architects installation at the MoMA, 1964. There being no other buffering elements besides the photographs, the space appears crowded with a forest of vertical and horizontal lines, between which one can make out other photographs, creating a setting in which buildings "without pedigree," taken from diverse geographical and cultural contexts, are visible, juxtaposed in accordance with Rudofsky's approach. "Architecture without Architects radically dis-embedded the indigenous structures it pictured from their geographical, historical, and cultural settings and put them into play within an explicitly modernist structure."
(AR01, p. 231.)



Europe, the naturalness of the Anglo-American system of measurement. He supports the elimination of all ornamentation and praises — adding a self-criticism of modernism (“the...caustic ‘Less is more’, heralded with airy deliberation, led to an impoverishment of architectural expression such as the world has never known”) — the Thai practice of revetting buildings with multi-colored ceramic fragments. He devotes an entire show (and a chapter of *Streets for People*) to the description of the quality of staircases in architecture, and theorizes that houses should be on a single level. He exalts the refinement of the food in medieval monasteries and is disgusted by the slop served him at Mount Athos. He sings the praises of sinuous primitive houses, and is allergic to Wright’s organic architecture. He designs architectural volumes with modernistic absolute straight lines, and exalts the slight irregularity of hand-made “spontaneous” architecture which is innocent of the plumb line.²¹⁰ He labors to awaken the critical intelligence and conscious freedom of choice (modern conditions), and defends the maintenance of traditional cultural differences (a pre-modern condition).

Some of these are contradictions personally experienced and left unresolved by Rudofsky. They leave their mark on him, making him an almost dramatic personage. In this sense he incarnates, for better and worse, the cultural spirit of his generation. Others are rhetorical artifice. He systematically employs the technique of disorientation, with an implicit accusation of provincialism: “[T]he surest way to displease an audience is to suggest that they are ignorant, worse, incurious.”²¹¹

The effectiveness of Rudofsky’s arguments is destined to unravel if they are subjected to verification in accordance with strict scientific methods. His texts, sometimes possessed of humor and an agreeable levity, are full of aporiae and lacunae. Rudofsky generally has trouble conforming to the conventions of different literary genres; even those of his writings that should or could have a scientific character tend towards satire and approximation meant for effect.

For example, in taking on *The Missing Link* (a project for a never-completed book on secular medieval architecture), Rudofsky seems unworried by his lack of an adequate background as an historian.²¹² His intellectual labors give us the measure of the virtues and flaws of what can be done by a brilliant dilettante. What stimulates him to deal with a topic and offer it to the public is the conviction that it has been little-explored or, worse, that it is discriminated against. Perhaps, it is thanks to a dilettantish approach, that he succeeds in bringing useful elements to the attention of a broad public, or in bringing concepts into a relationship with one another for the first time.

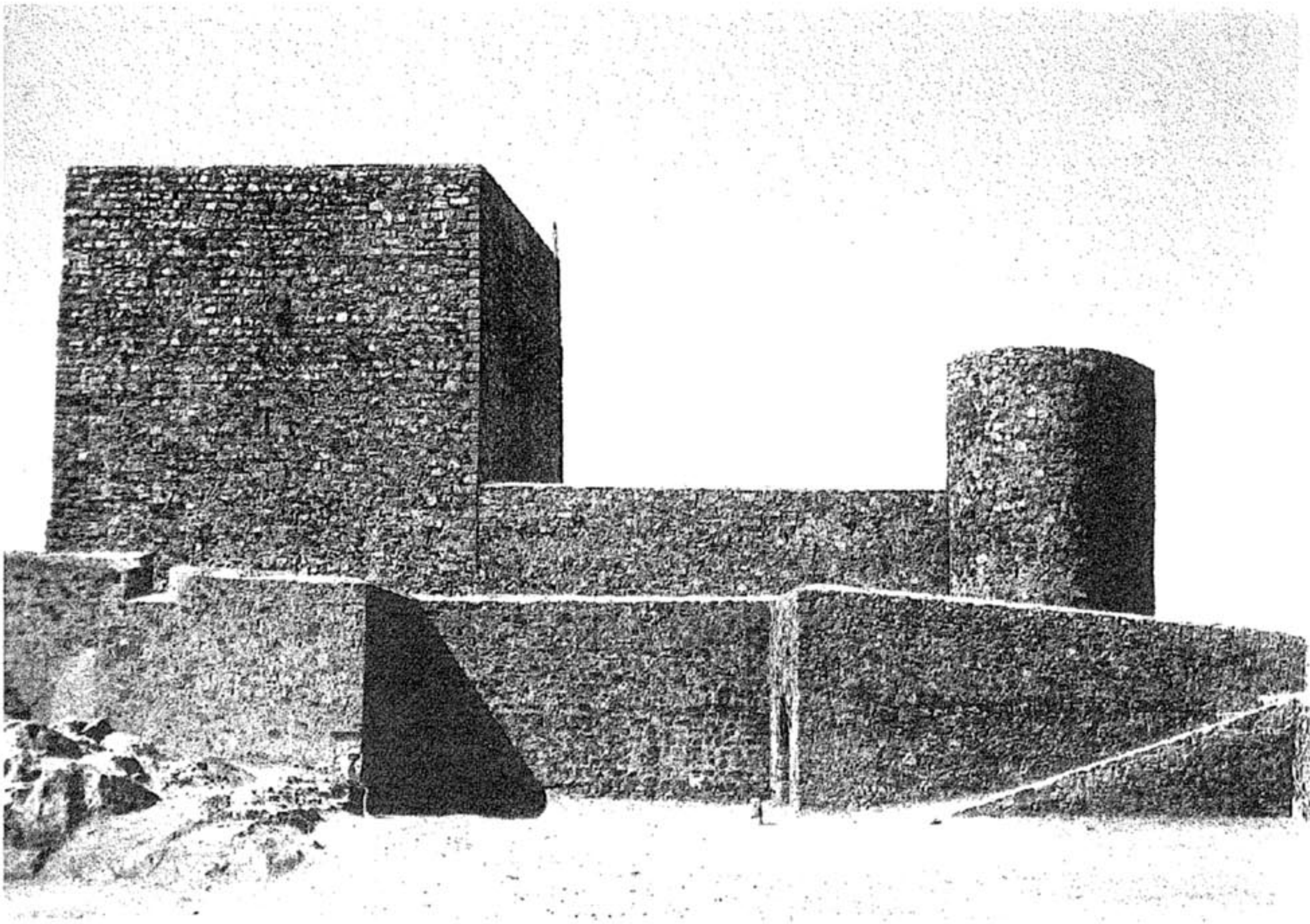
Rudofsky’s efforts are intended above all to offer his public a broad and

The Dilettante

210 Decimal metric system: BR43.1. Anglo-American system: BR38.14. Quotation on ‘Less is more’: NIL, p. 12–13. Thai practice: BR86.4. Stairs: SFP, p. 164–177. Houses on a single level: See p. 175. Food in medieval monasteries: BPW, p. 14. Mount Athos: TPB, p. 193. Lindenthal primitive houses: TPB, p. 103. Wright: TPB, p. 309. Plumb line: TPB, p. 251.

211 Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture in Yale, 27 October 1965.

212 Bernard Rudofsky, *Outline for a book on architecture in the form of a letter to an unknown editor* (unpublished manuscript), ca. 1978 (?). Other book projects include matters so different from one another as an introduction to Swedish culture (*I am going to Sweden*) and *Japanese books and maps of the Edo era*.



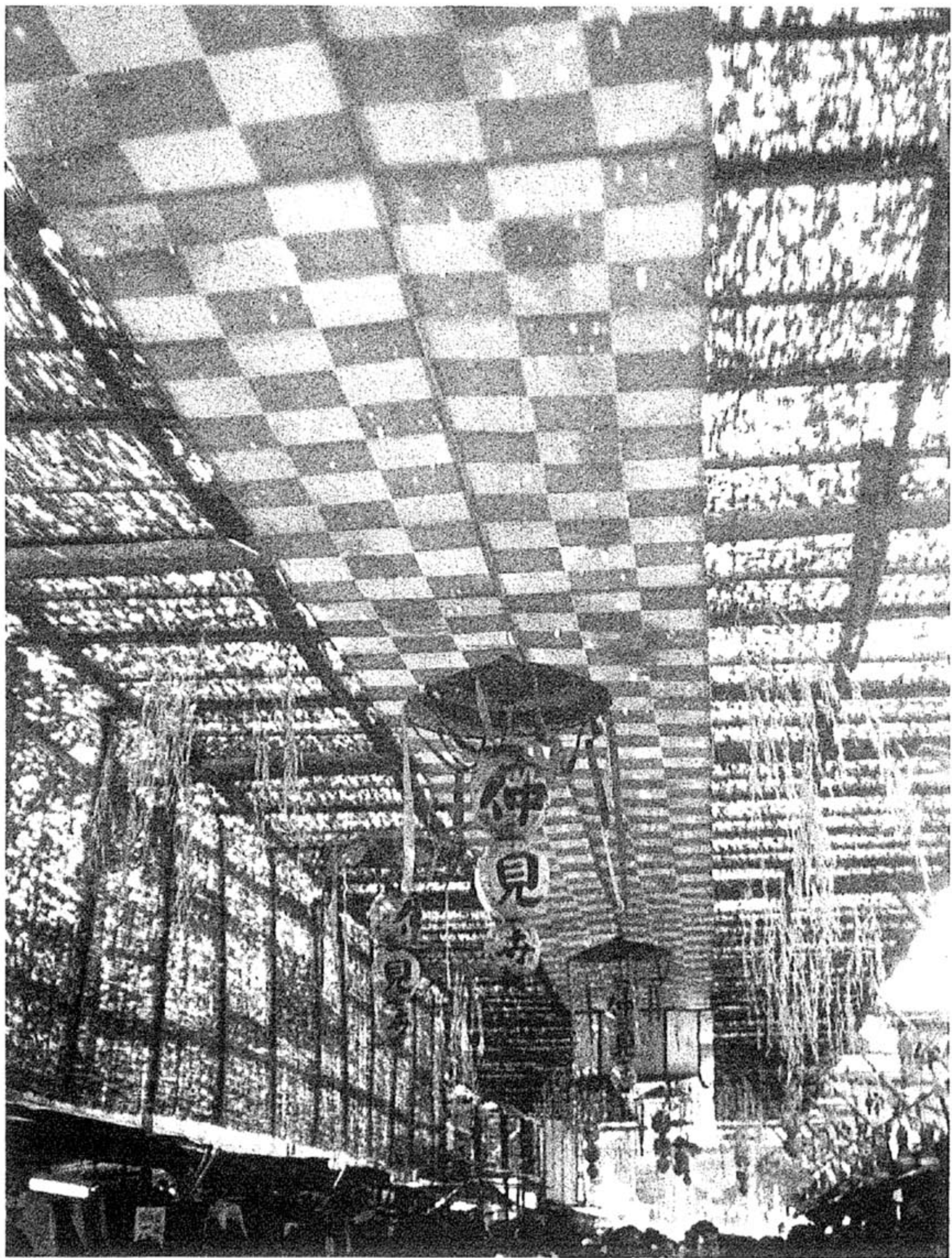
Bernard Rudofsky. Weary of see-through architecture, some of today's architects build pure volumes, their surfaces unimpaired by any openings. The Portuguese frontier fortress of Marvão, its only ornament the rich texture of stonework, anticipates such hermetic architecture, 1965.

During the last period of his life, Rudofsky worked intensively to a project — The Missing Link — concerned with medieval castles.

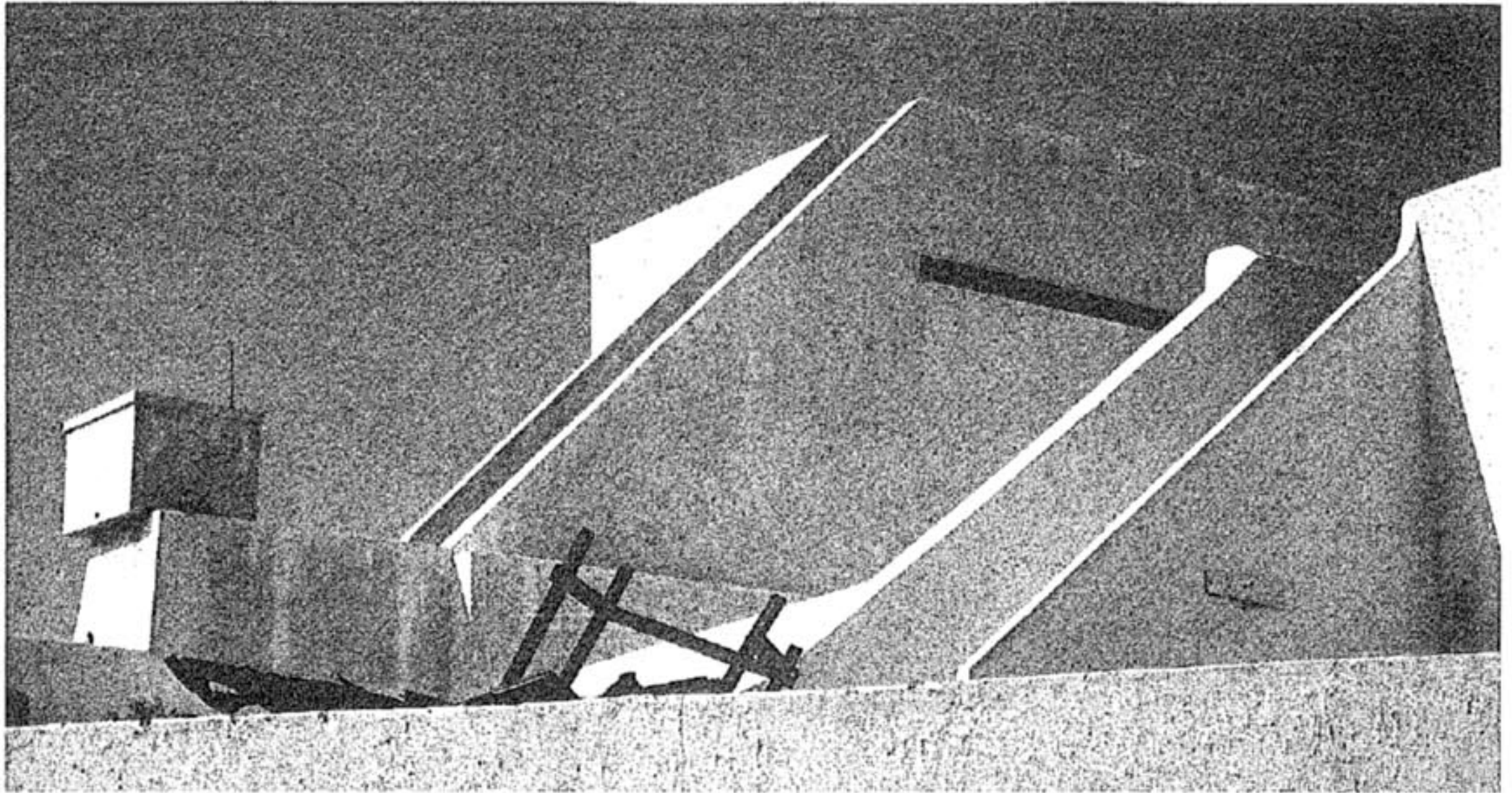
lively repertory of arguments and illustrations that will capture the attention and convince. It doesn't matter to him that he takes heterogeneous elements and connects them in a spurious way that the scholar would not always find acceptable. He is interested, first and foremost, in effectiveness, including emotional and sensorial impact. Projecting a slide he himself had taken of a commercial street in Tokyo, he commented: "[T]ravel through Japan...was for me the climax in my wanderings. [T]hose of you who have been inside the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, or any of the great churches, may perhaps concur with me that in this arcade we have an example of space which stands comparison with the interiors of these cathedrals. Plain daylight has been transformed into a magic glow, into space as we see it only in dreams."²¹³ The possible objection that the Japanese structure is perhaps lacking in the intentionality of the Gothic churches, if admissible, would only reinforce Rudofsky's idea regarding the possible "spontaneity" of the creative act.

Rudofsky's intellectual work is based on a global freedom of comparison. (His examples' common denominator is perhaps only the fact of being far from academe and standardization.) In general, examples are

²¹³ Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture with slides on Japan, perhaps held in Japan (?), 1960.



Bernard Rudofsky. Japanese canopied street, made of bamboo sticks, reed, and paper, 1955.



Bernard Rudofsky. One of several hundred small-scale observatories in the Portuguese fishing town Olhão, 1963.

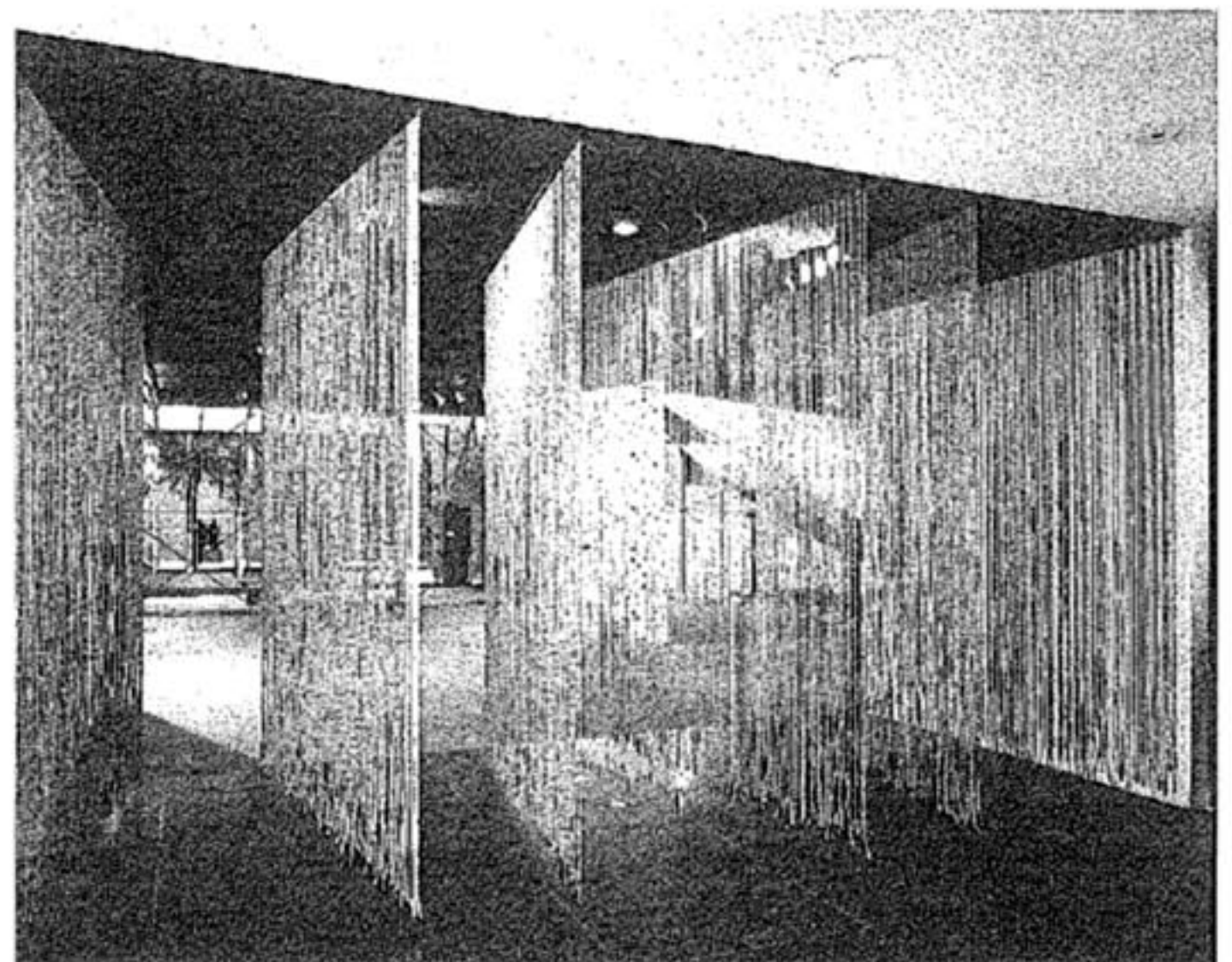
*Another example (see *Purposeless Architecture* at p. 52) of architectonic elements which catch Rudofsky's attention because of their sheer formal appeal, devoid of any contextual reference. He felt a similar fascination with the eighteenth-century "architectural astronomical instruments" at Jantar Mantar (Delhi).*

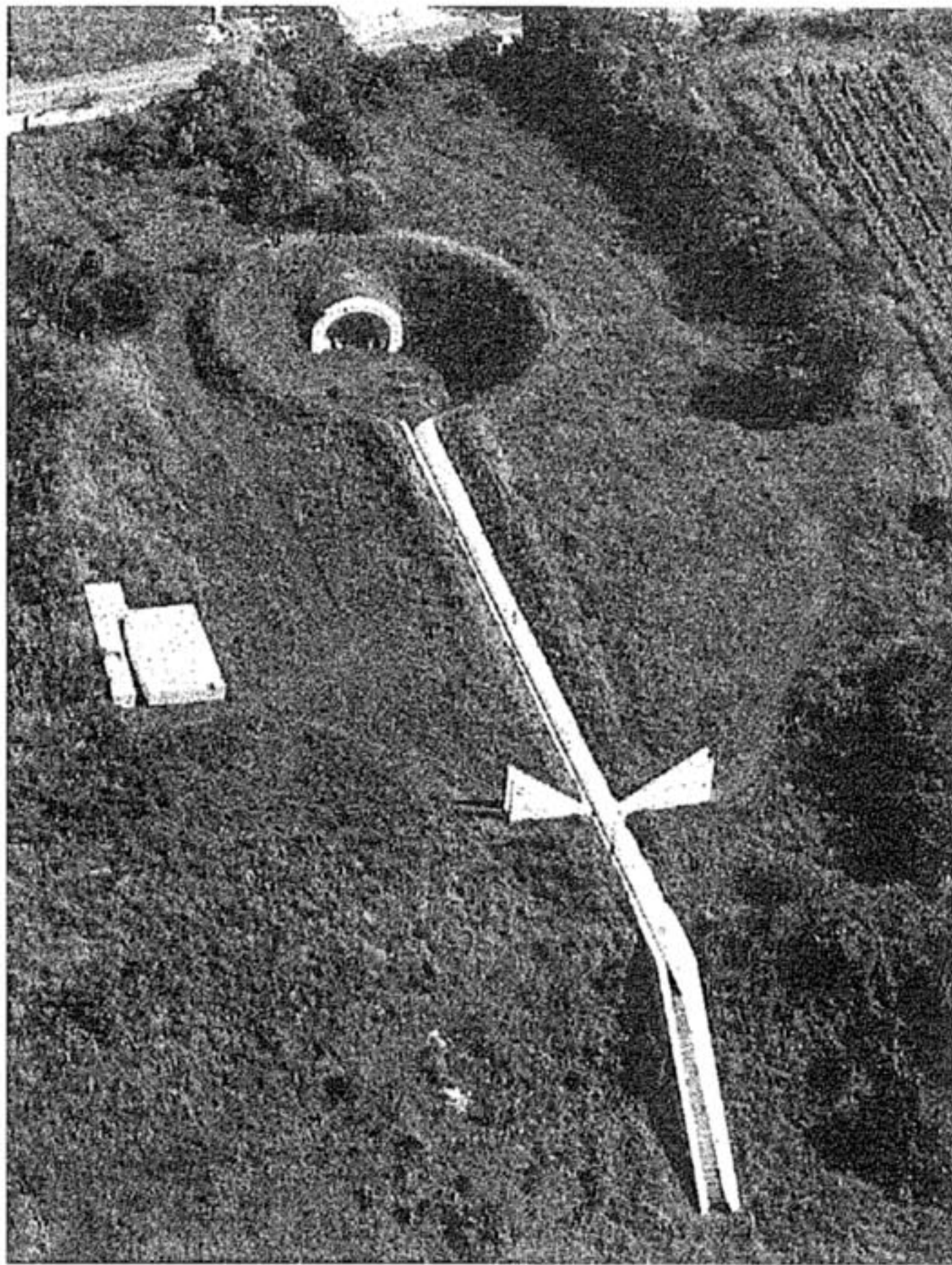
brought together on the basis of formal analogies, in accordance with an aesthetic approach. During a lecture, he commented thus on certain slides: "I am not concerned with the function of these structures but simply with their aesthetic merits."²¹⁴ That which artists and architects might have asserted through a design or through the construction of a spatial work, without encountering methodological opposition, Rudofsky states verbally — and not in his architectural works.

He sees no ontological difference between the (real or presumed) primitive and Classical antiquity: by now, neither one has a direct influence on contemporary Western civilization. (Besides, hasn't Paul

²¹⁴ Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture in Bennington, Vermont, 1973.

G. Barrows. Entrance to Textiles USA exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, designed by Rudofsky, 1956 (?). The way in is through black and yellow polyethylene ropes dangling from floor to ceiling: an example of Rudofsky's capacity for reinventing uses for things transferred to new contexts.





Gerald Zugmann. Aerial view of "The Pit" (die Grube), ca. 1991. Noever's habitable land-art brings into being a handful of primevalsacral architectural forms, to the point where it might be hard to tell it from an archaeological remain.

Veyne observed that "[t]he Romans are extraordinarily different from us and, when it comes to exoticism, they have no cause to envy the Amerinds or the Japanese"?²¹⁵ In *Architecture without Architects* and *The Prodigious Builders*, Rudofsky evokes — above all through images — many kinds of "primitive" architecture; but he devotes his most attentive study to the domestic qualities of Japan and the Mediterranean, which certainly cannot be regarded as civilizations lacking known individuals or histories.²¹⁶ If anything, it seems that for him there exists an ontological difference between pedigreed and non-pedigreed art.

The leveling effect of distance and the desire for a return to origins, however mythical, allow Rudofsky to refer in an imprecise way to sources that seem to him to shine with authenticity — for example, to those anonymous Mediterranean architectures in which he recognizes universal values, a timeless "humanity" which the environment he lives in seems to have lost. (The power of these references and beliefs helps explain the lasting success of a photographic book such as *Architecture without Architects*.)

215 Paul Veyne, "Introduction", Paul Veyne (ed.), *Histoire de la vie privée: I. De l'Empire romain à l'an mil*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985, p. 14.

216 BR60, p. 89.