

# ITALY BUILDS

A new book by G. E. Kidder Smith

L'ITALIA COSTRUISCE



Tuberculosis Clinic, Alessandria  
Ignazio Gardella

"what too few Italian architects perceive—the wonderful lessons of the native architecture. The open brick grille . . . inspired by traditional vented walls."

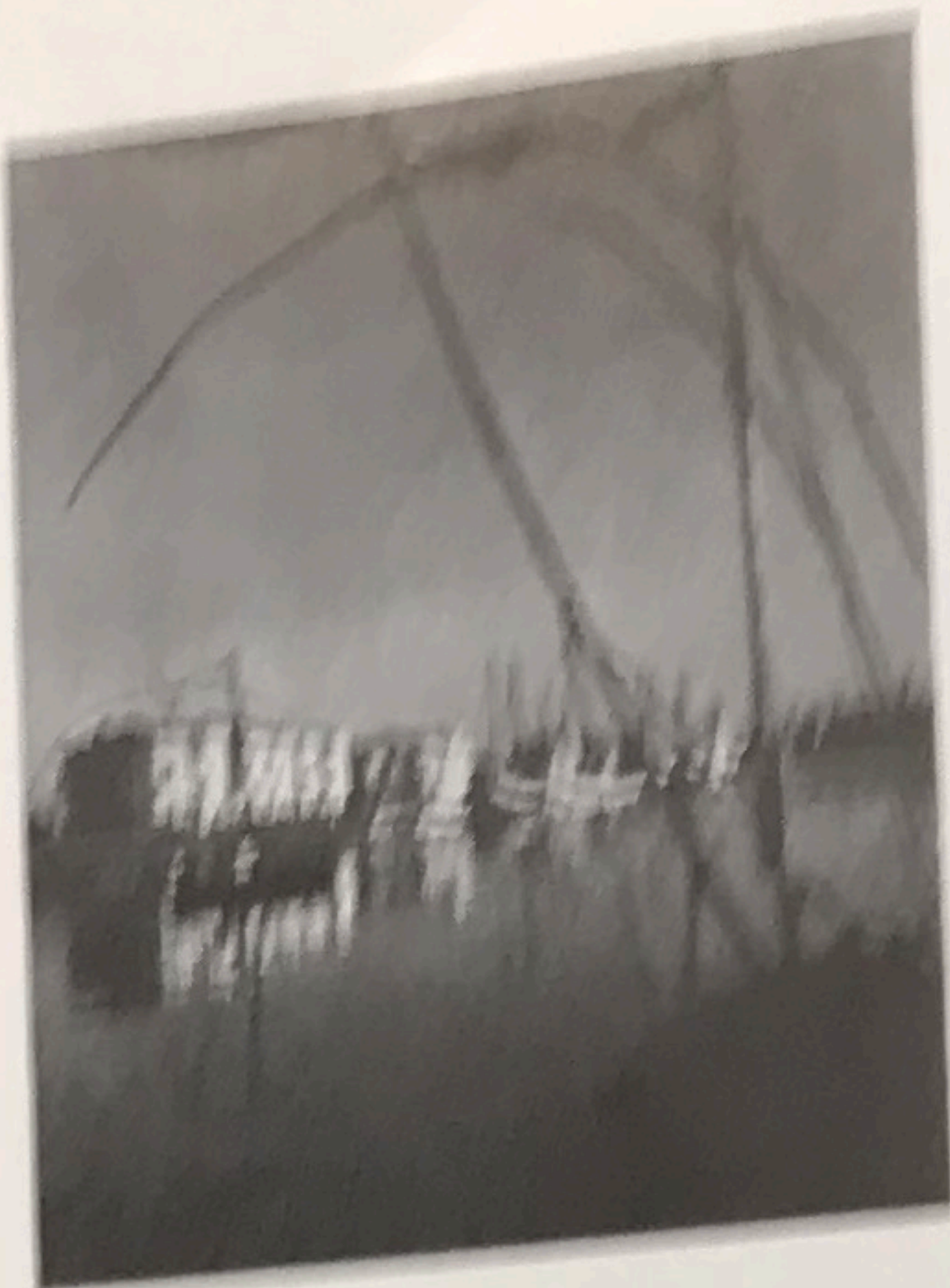
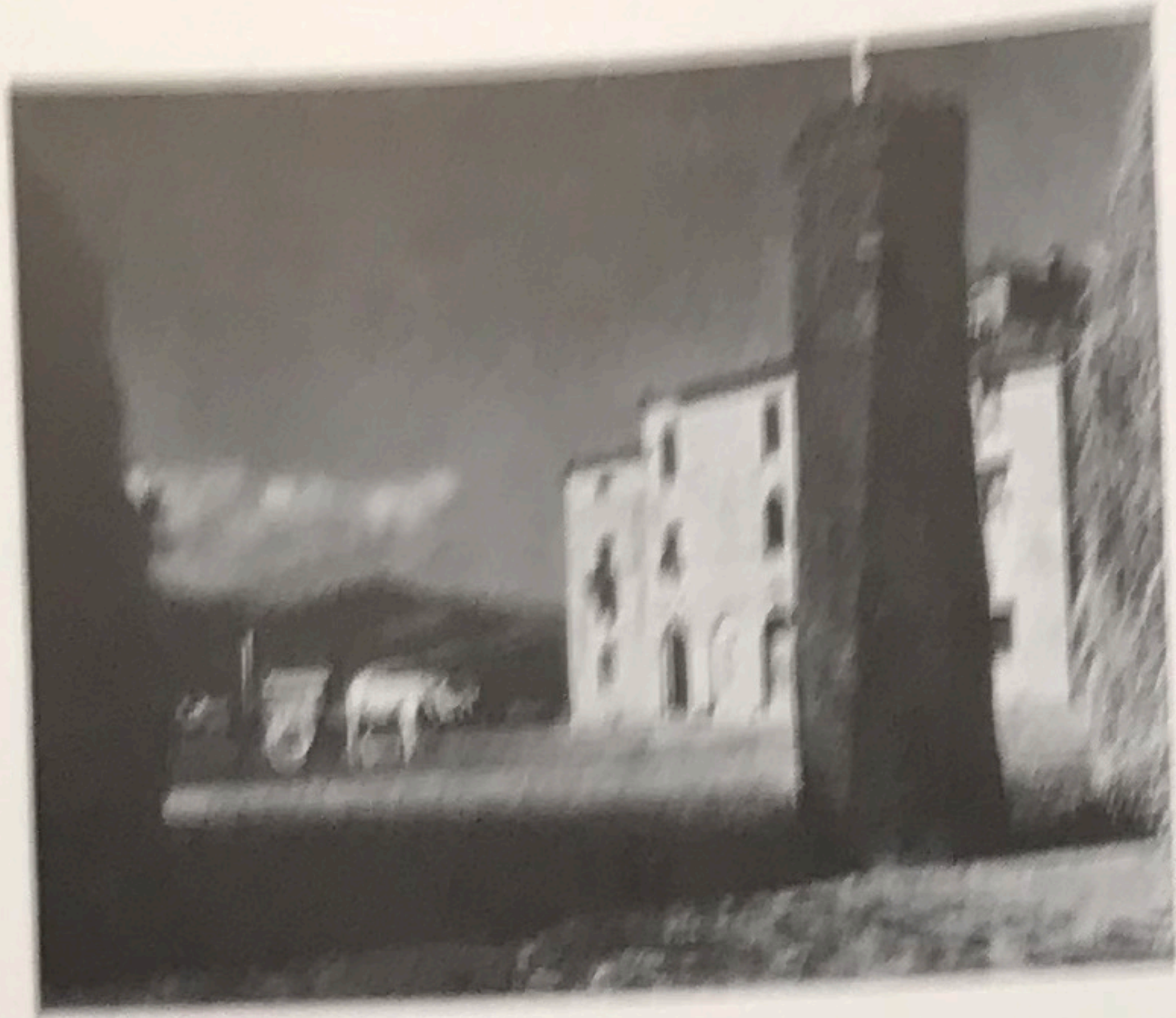
Architecture for Kidder Smith begins with the land, the climate, the people. It is not an isolated phenomenon but in its best manifestations, as deeply rooted as an oak in the natural and historical inheritance of the land it enhances. This is the message of his monumental new book, *Italy Builds*, just published by Reinhold, New York. The approach is as scholarly as the photographs are beautiful. The author is an architect and also a superb photographer, as readers of his *Sweden Builds*, *Switzerland Builds*, and *Brazil Builds* already know.

He starts with the land and the types of native architecture each region has produced. Then, as part of the inheritance, the urban setting. By far the best, and the unique section of the book is Kidder Smith's sensitive analysis of city squares. With plans, sections and progressive photographs he tries—and succeeds as far as is humanly possible in two dimensions, to recreate the esthetic experience of the square—of St. Peter's in Rome, San Marco in Venice, the tiny Piazza Umberto I in Capri. Another aspect of the city which he examines is changes in urban levels. One of the most fascinating layouts is a diagram of the "virtual ultimate . . . (in) the pleasures and excitements produced by skilfully created changes in urban levels"—the hundred and thirty-seven steps of the Piazza di Spagna, Rome. As well as the front and air view, little snapshots re-create on the page the pleasurable experience of *using* the stairs. With this foundation, the final section on the modern architecture of Italy comes as a slight anticlimax, even though the book has been criticized for showing only the peaks and none of the rubble—for in Italy there is little mediocre and the bad is really disastrous. But Kidder Smith is in love with Italy, and has made a book to be drawn from on many levels, as well as to be looked at and enjoyed.

—M.S.

"a soaring scalloped shell . . . hovers like an umbrella over its seventy-five foot span . . . a series of closely spaced prefabricated reinforced tile area formed a nearly solid formwork for the concrete finish. It is interesting to recall . . . the pottery dome of San Vitale at Ravenna,





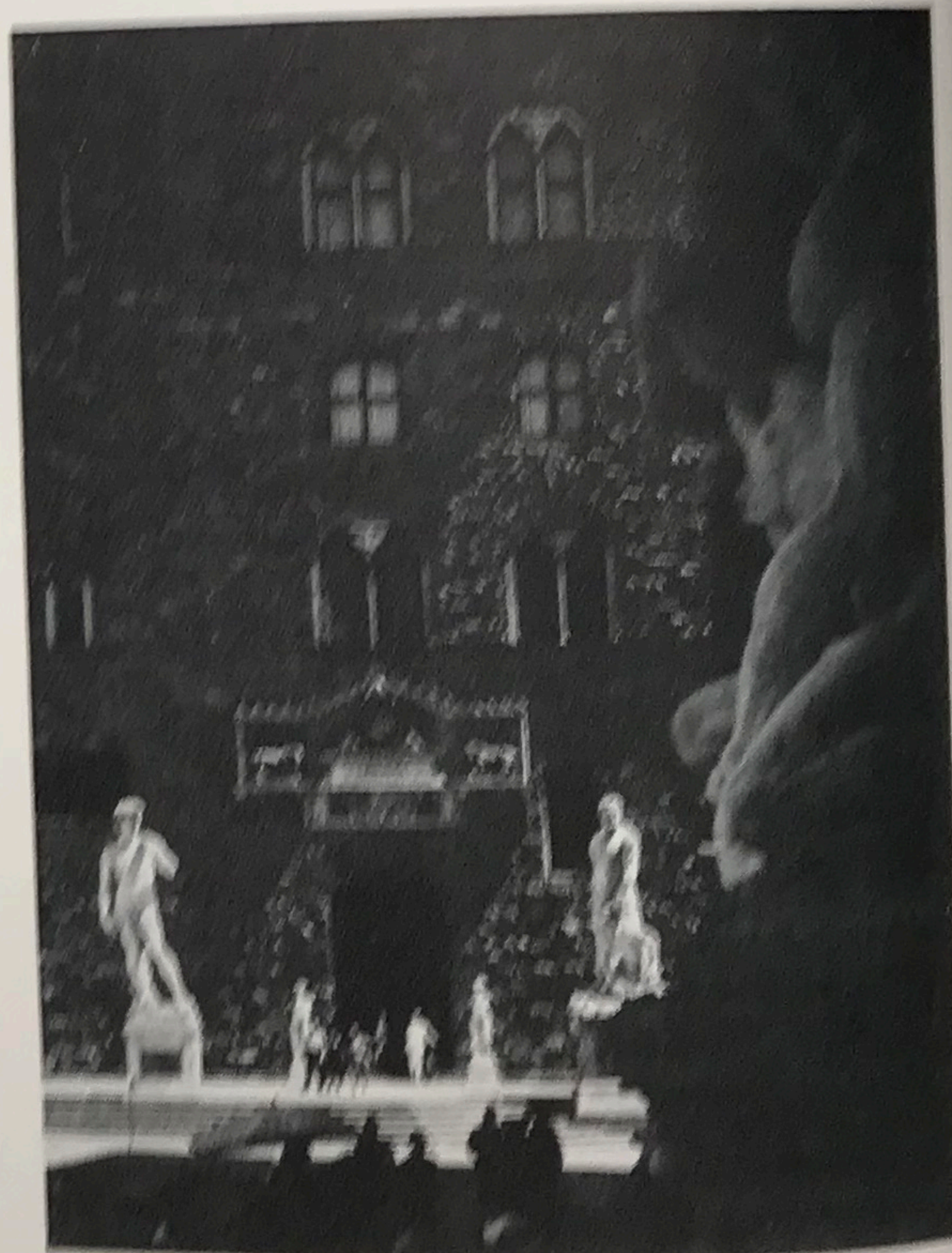
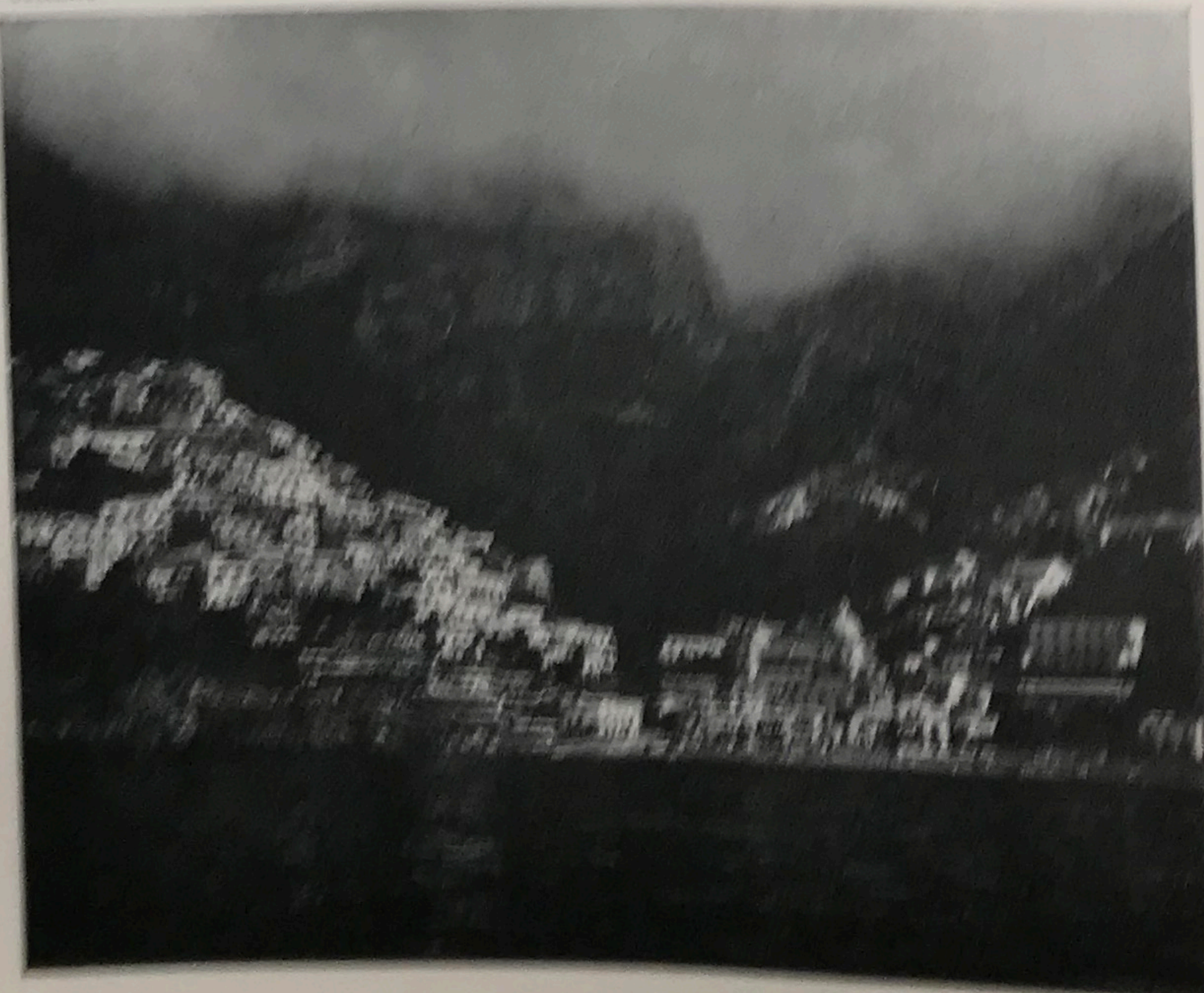
Fishing boats, Rimini  
"an integration of man and landscape"

Farmhouse, Città della Pieve (Umbria)  
"a strong feeling for shapes and forms  
and landscape : : logically divided  
into small separate units : : dominated : :  
by the central residence."

Cathedral, Orvieto

*The Inheritance; land and architecture*

Positano

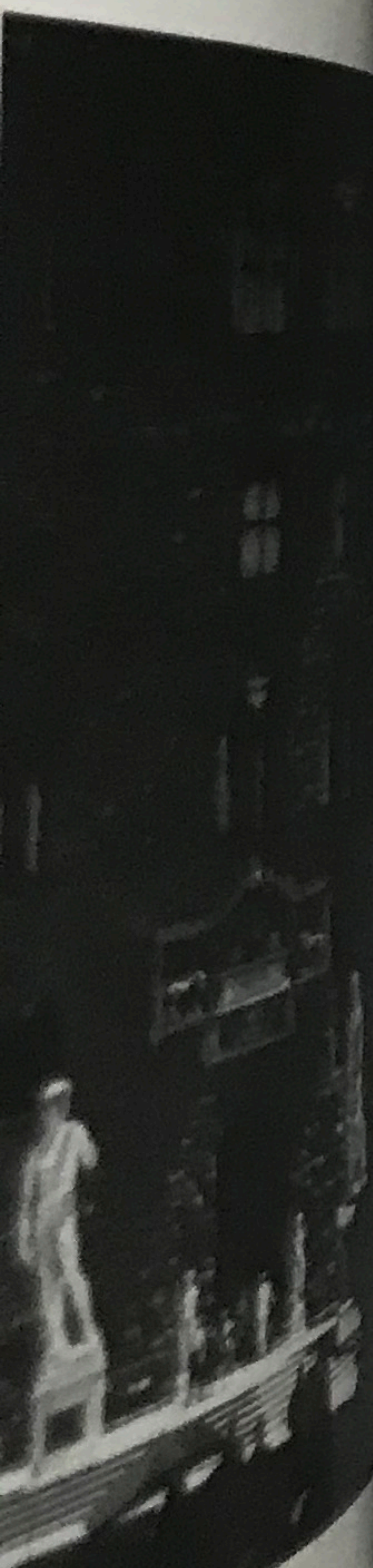


Piazza della Signoria, Florence

The message of Kidder Smith's book, as he repeatedly states, is not that these examples should be used as models, but only as ideas for contemplation. The land at Positano, for example, has not been bulldozed; the village climbs in harmony with its rugged backdrop and tiny harbor. Its sculptural houses face the sun; their limestone and plaster roofs last generations where tarpaper under the same conditions would have crumbled. Into the inheritance of Italy's architecture go the forms of the land and the building which has quite naturally adapted to it. The best building of the past is ever present: the secular open square of Florence with its traditional unity of sculpture and architecture, and the ecclesiastical square of Orvieto, which exists around and for the glorification of its cathedral.



Fountain, City of Rome  
"a strong feeling for the  
and landscape...  
into small groups...  
by the central column"

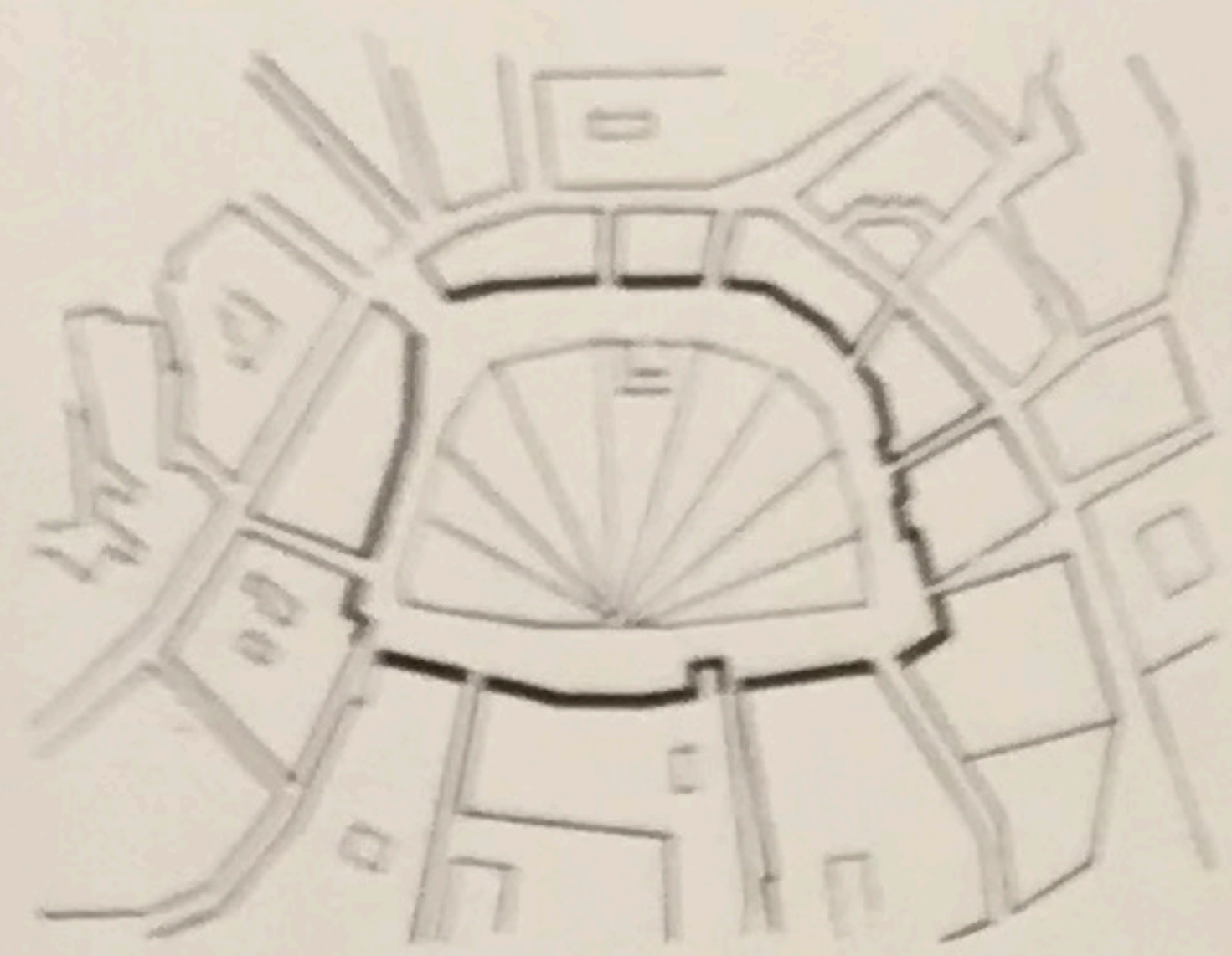


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... message of Elder Saffo  
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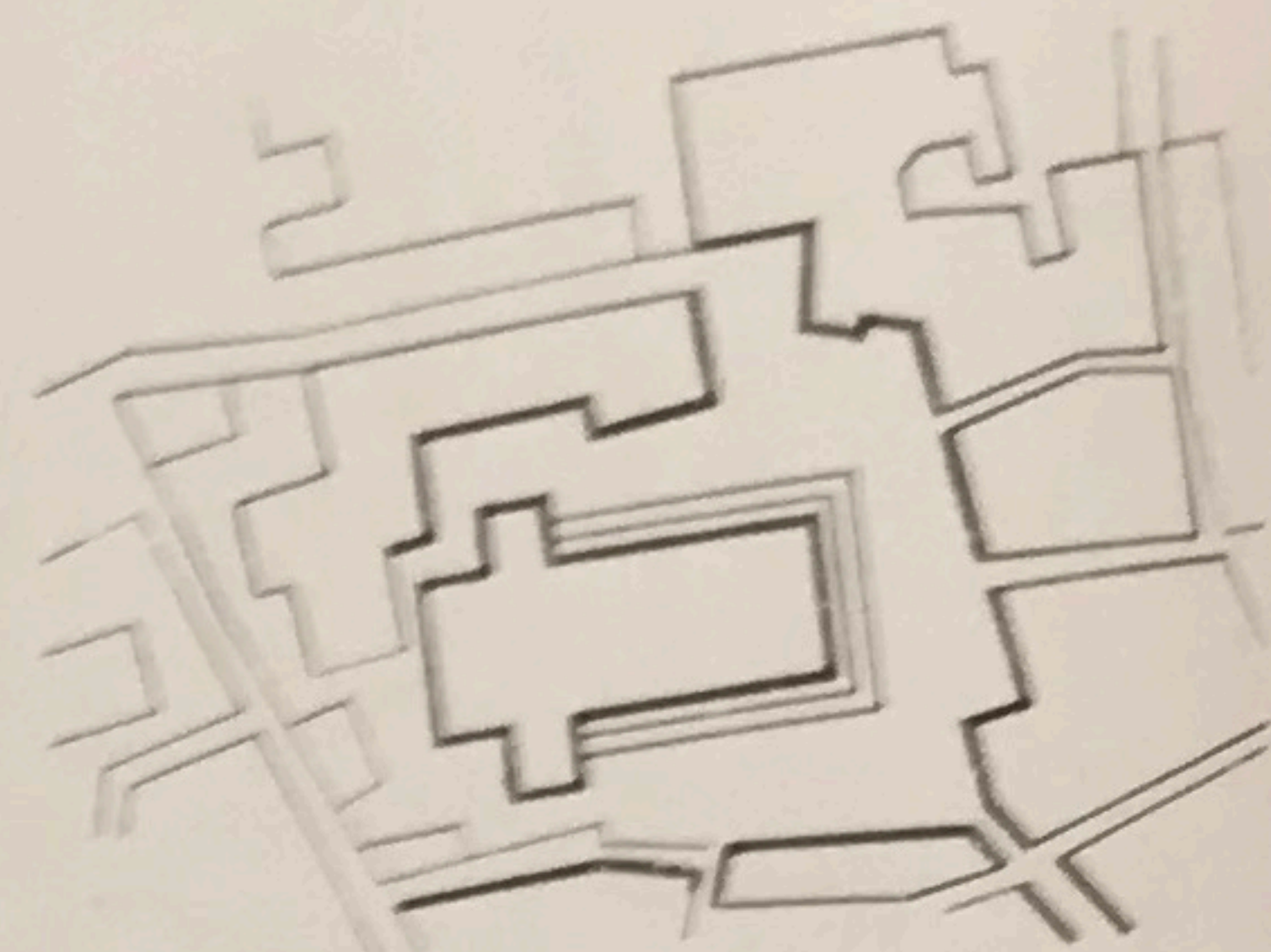
In a fascinatingly faceted analysis, the town square is presented as a—sometimes spontaneous—exercise in total architecture: as a core of city life for the use of traffic, as a breathing space, as a unifying element which joins buildings, sculpture and site, as an esthetic experience of forms and space, and as an endless human theater whose function—and lesson—is pleasure.



*Piazza del Campo, Siena, page 48*



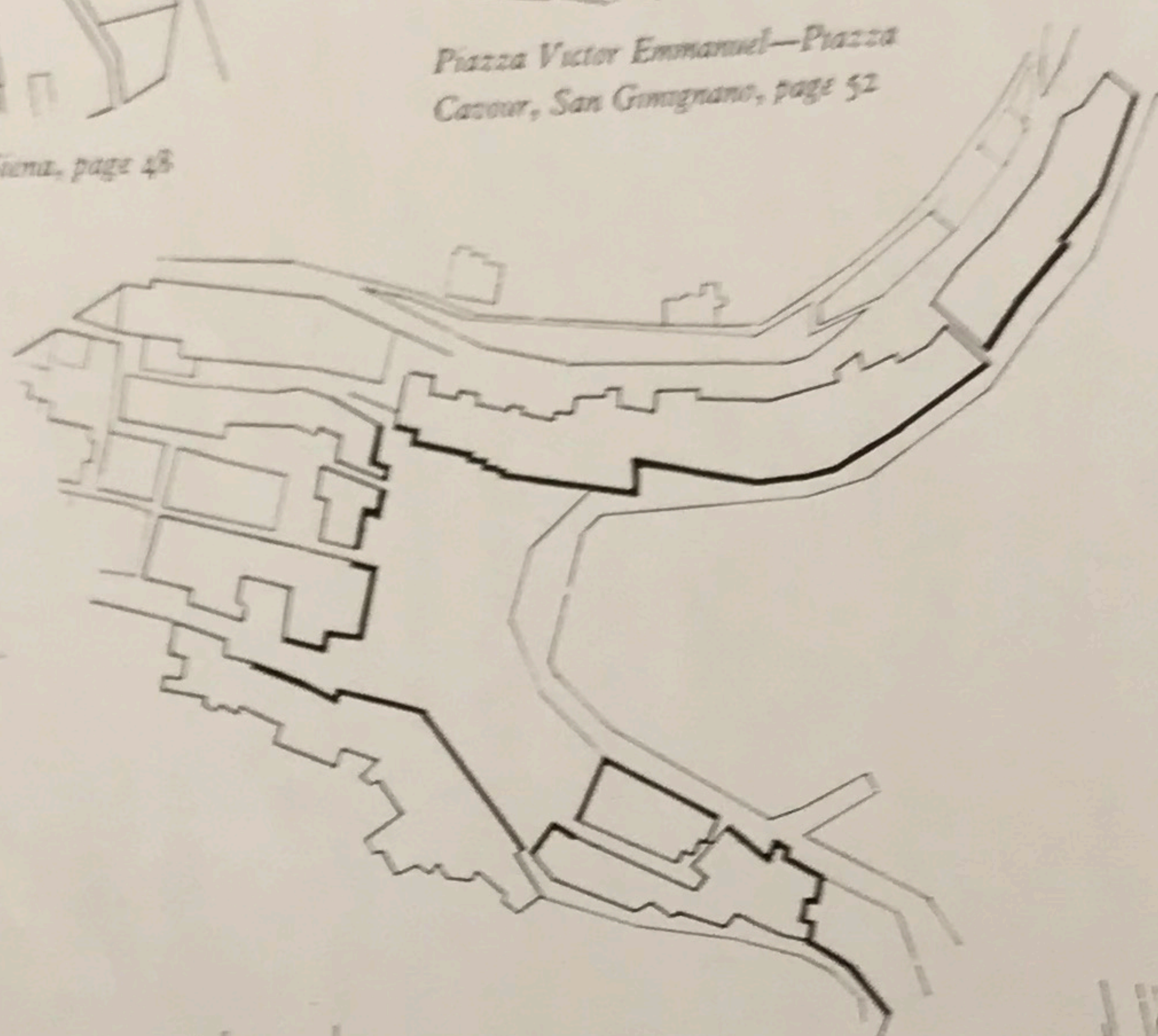
*Piazza Victor Emmanuel—Piazza Casore, San Gimignano, page 52*



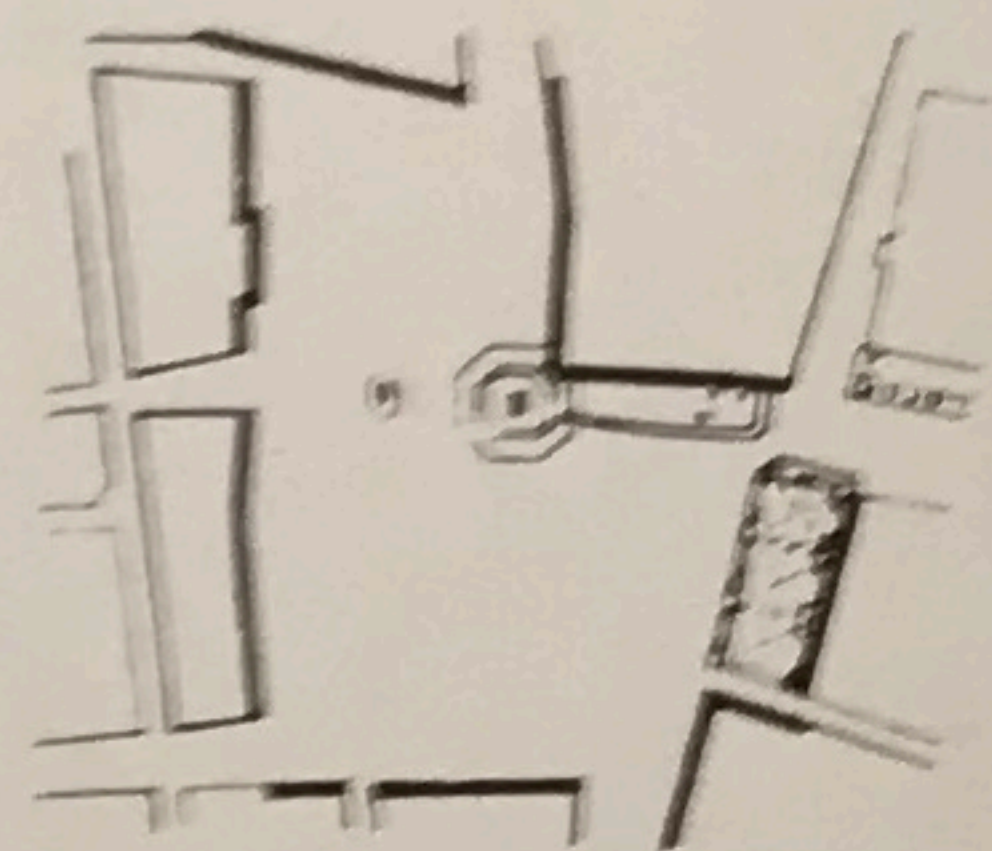
*Piazza del Duomo, Orvieto, page 56*



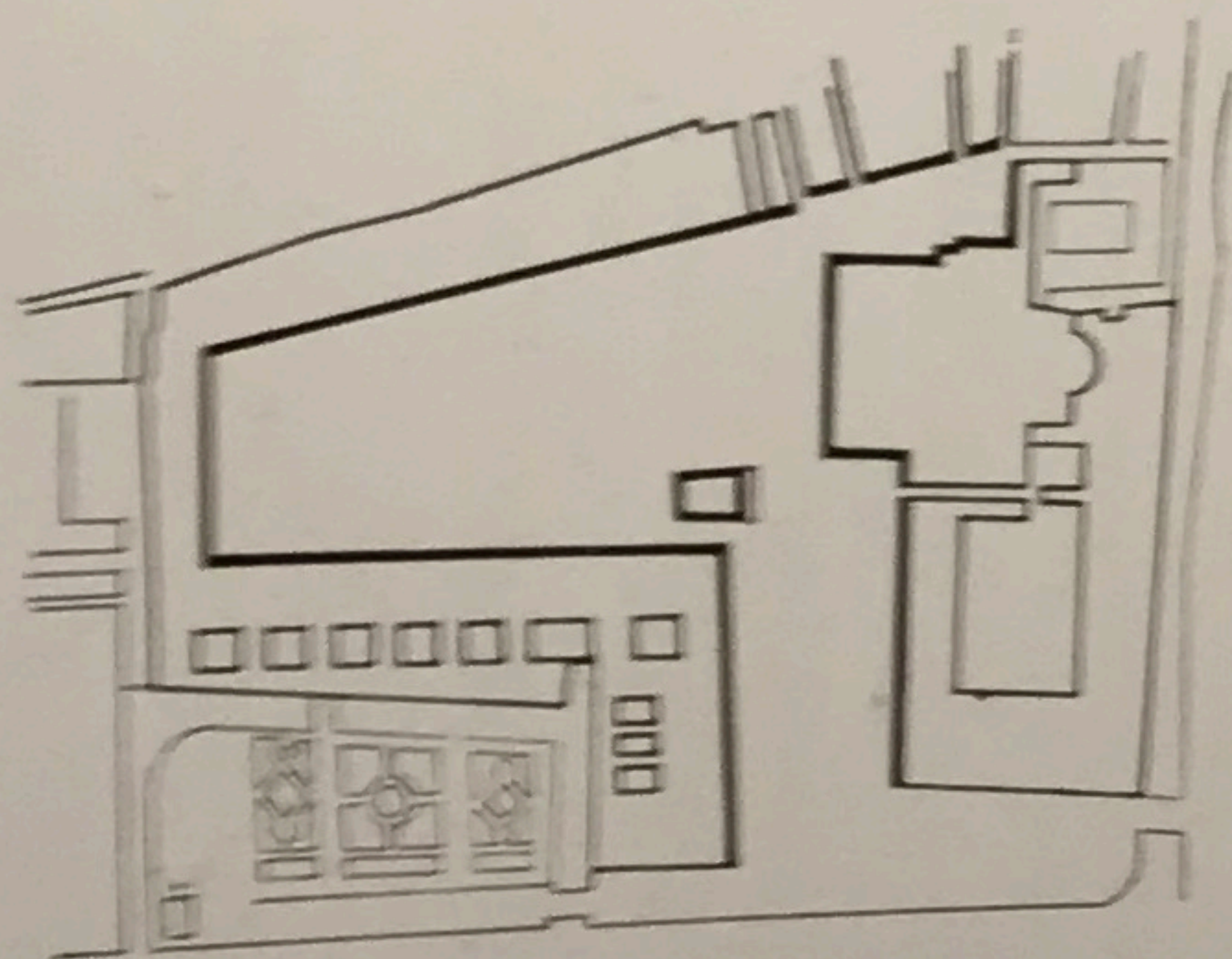
*Piazza Umberto I, Capri, page 60*



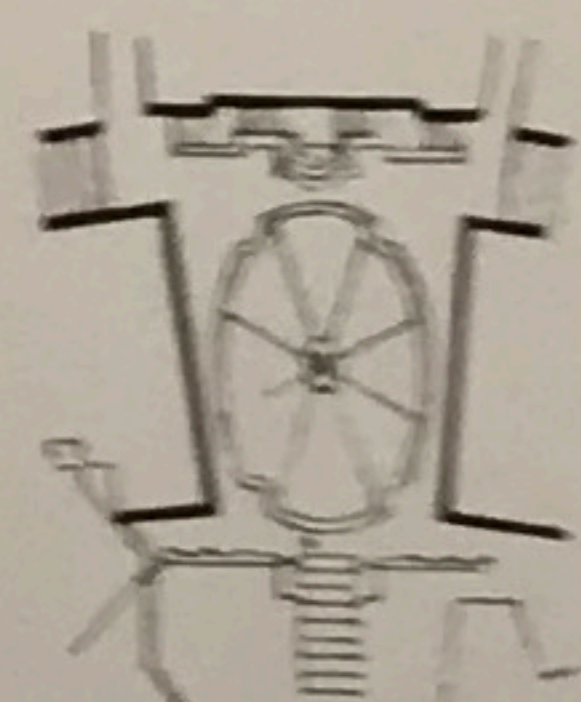
*Portofino, page 62*



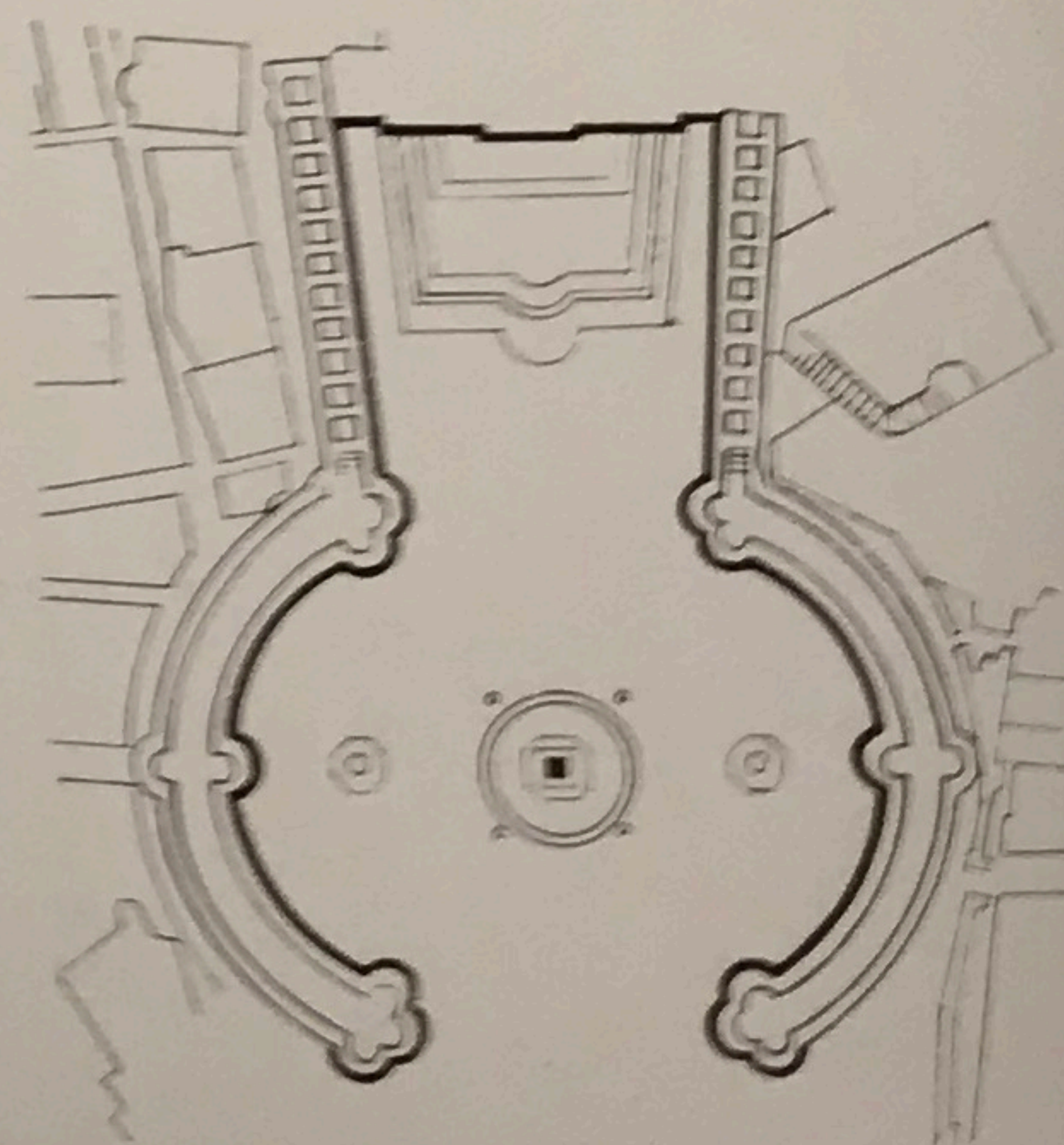
*Piazza Signoria, Florence, page 66*



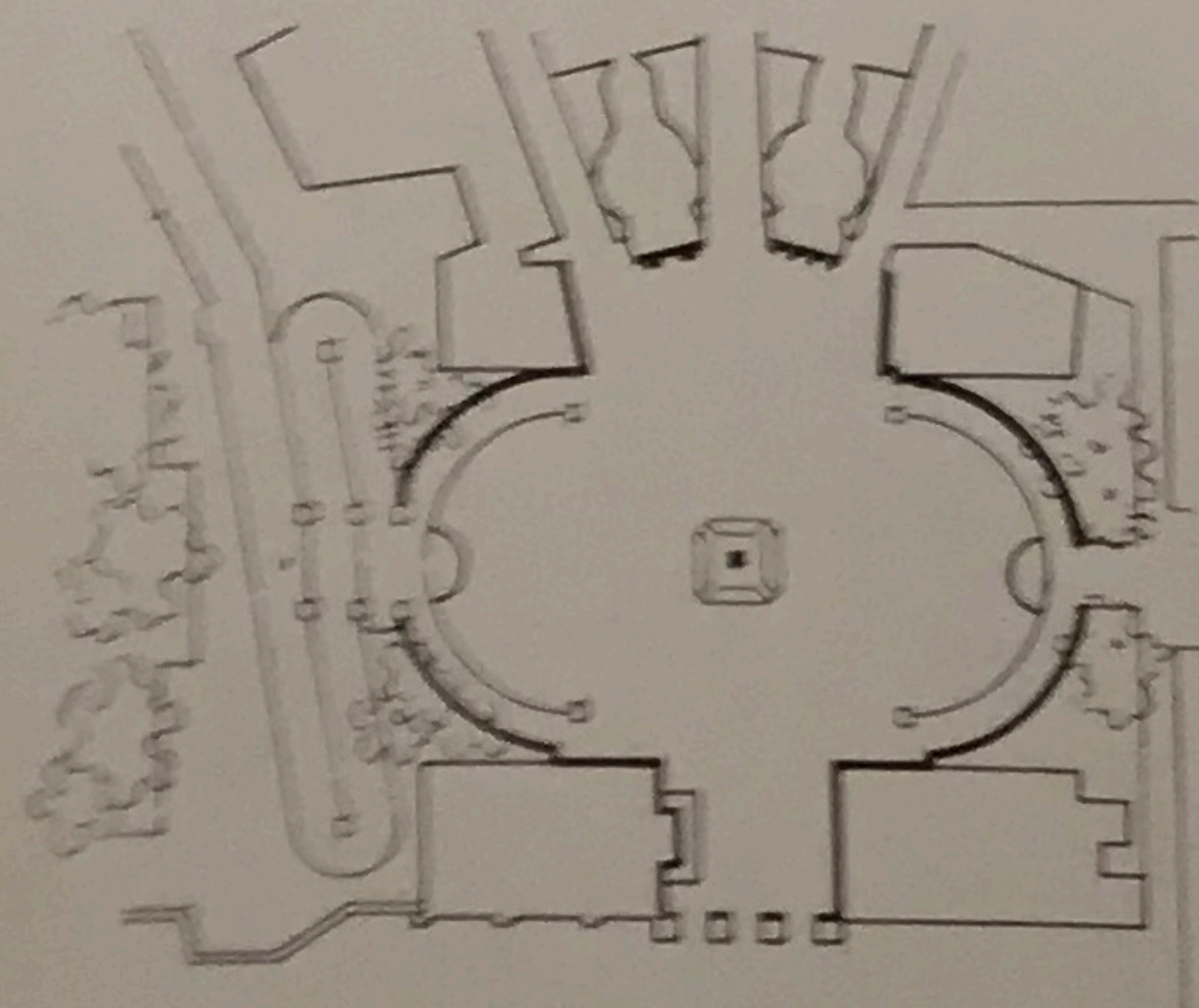
*Piazza San Marco, Venice, page 70*



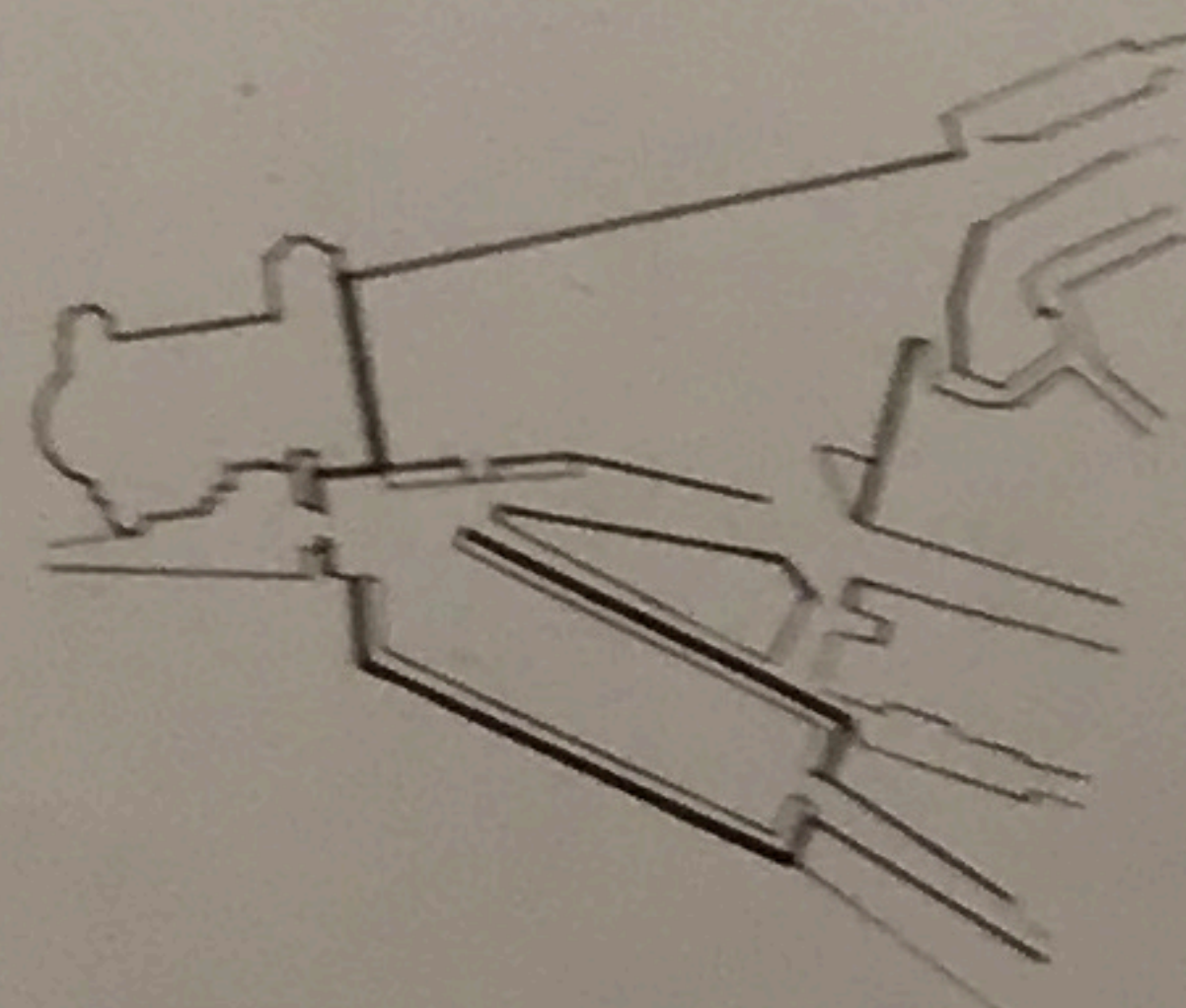
*Il Campidoglio, Rome, page 80*



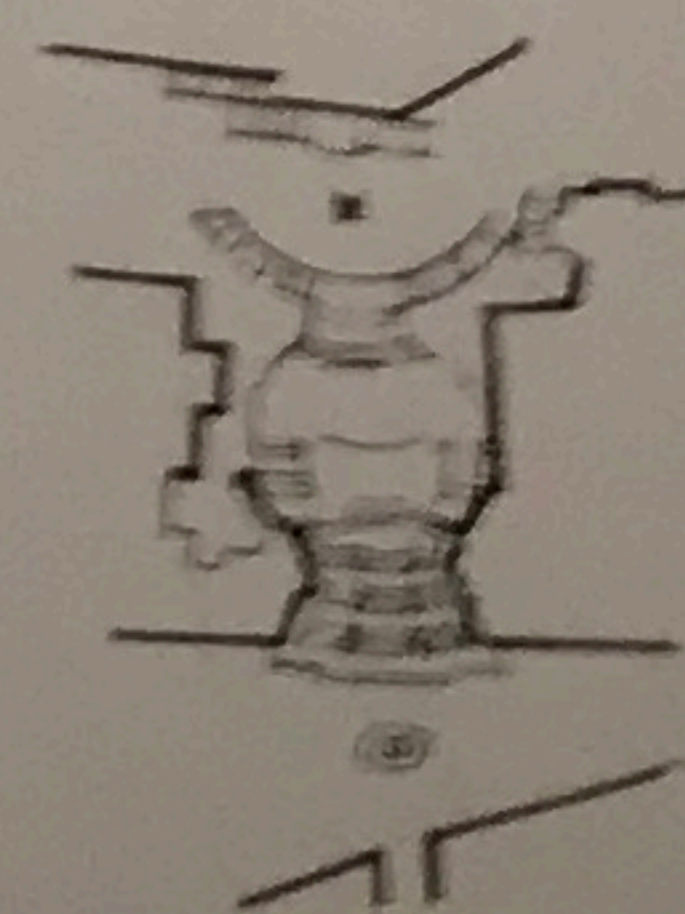
*Piazza San Pietro, Rome, page 84*



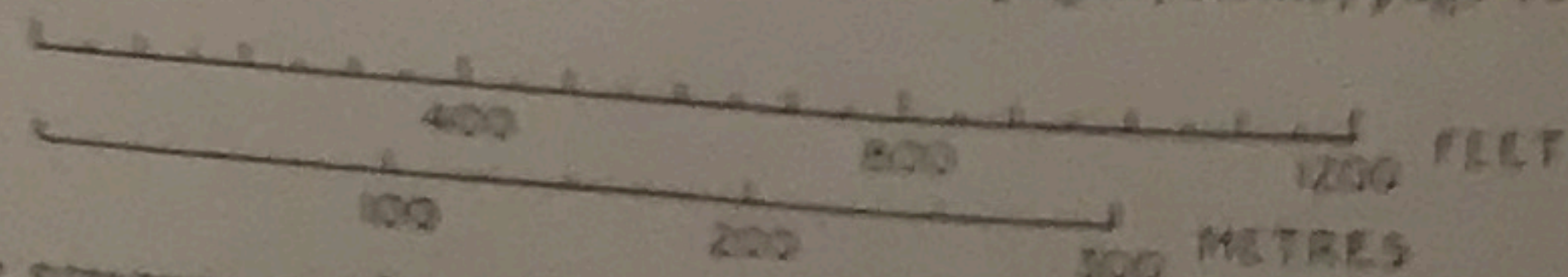
*Piazza del Popolo, Rome, page 90*



*San Francesco, Assisi, page 98*



*Piazza di Spagna, Rome, page 100*



*Comparative simplified plans, all drawn to the same scale, of the squares analysed in this book.*  
*Piante comparative semplificate, tutte disegnate nella stessa scala, delle piazze analizzate in questo libro.*



## Cities and squares



Piazza del Campo, Siena







Architecture of Italy

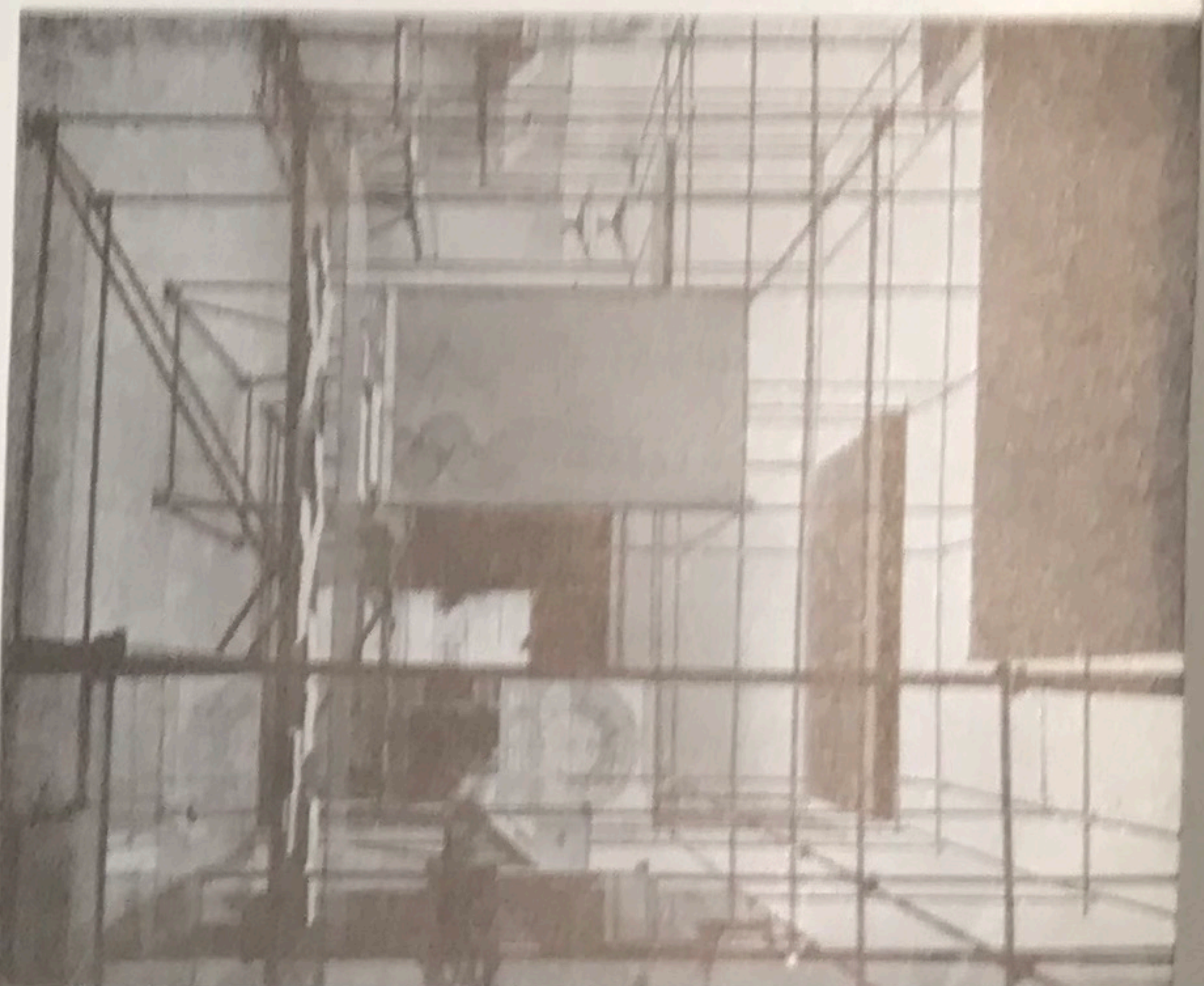
Apartment Hotel, Via Corridoni, Milan  
Luigi Moretti

"above the architectural rabble and rubble . . . a clean unflinching statement too little seen . . . Two identical abutting buildings . . . visually subdivided at the short end by the strongly expressed vertical line of the halls and their windows instead of a ponderous mass."

Sala "C"  
Exhibition Hall,  
Turin  
Pier Luigi Nervi

"Nervi makes concrete the direct expression of his analytical mind. The poetry . . . stuns with its grace. The two lowest rows of (architecturally) diamonds are open, and admit a kind of light . . . making the solid roof float on air."





Proportions Exhibition, 9th Triennale, Milan  
Francesco Gaecehi (with Carla Marzoli)

Photostated . . . Panels give an immediacy and . . . suppress to a certain degree the tendency of such cage exhibitions to become by their very mechanics more important than the objects shown . . . To make more realistic the message all measures are . . . from the Golden Section."

Sala "C"  
Exhibition Hall,  
Turin  
Pier Luigi Nervi

"Nervi makes concrete the direct expression of his analytical mind. The poetry . . . stuns with its grace. The two lowest rows of (prefabricated) diamonds are open, and admit a solid band of light . . . making the solid roof float on air."

