

Gathering Blue  
Holding the Aqueous

# Gathering Blue

## Holding the Aqueous

Ashley M. LeFew

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture  
in Architecture

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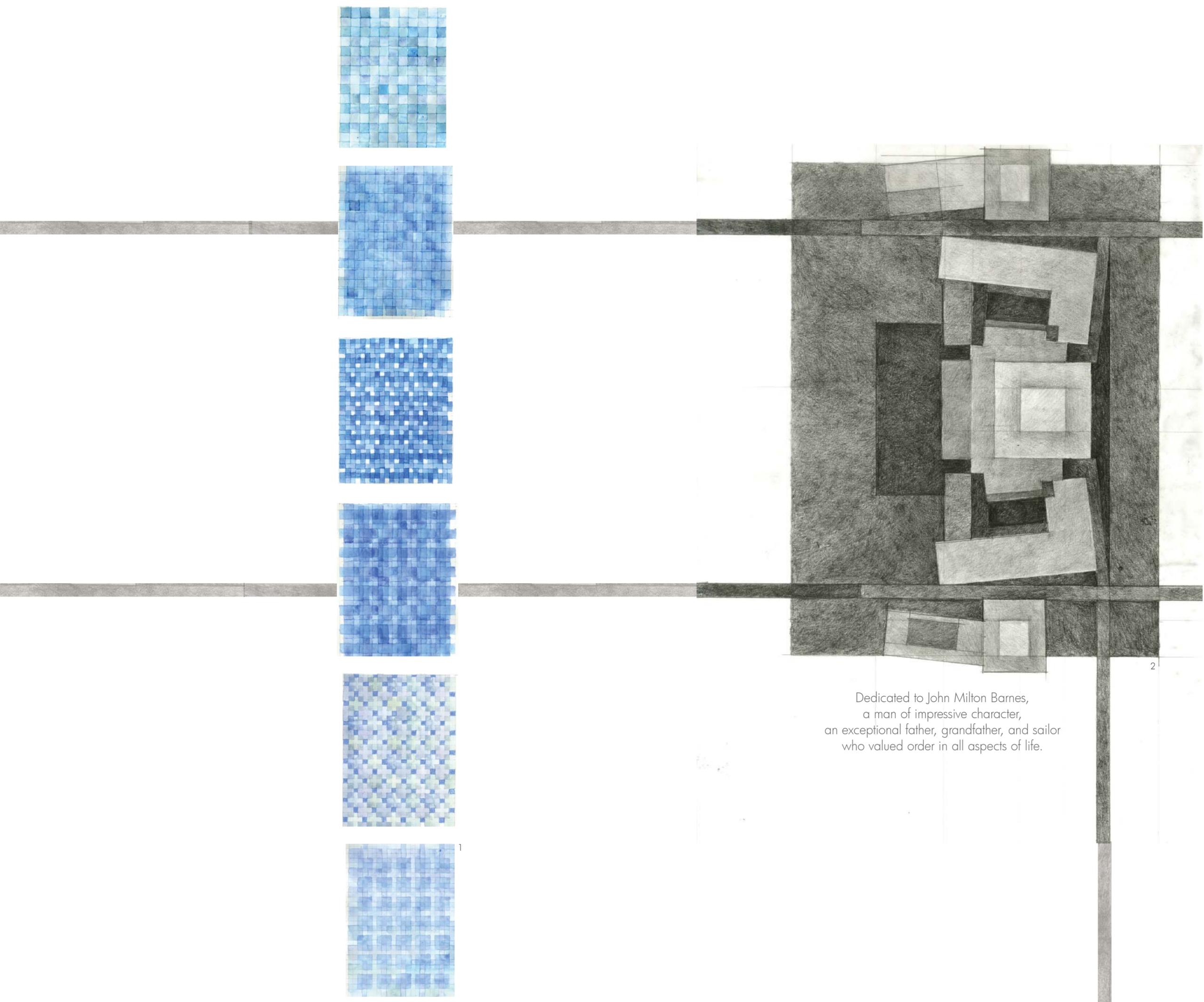
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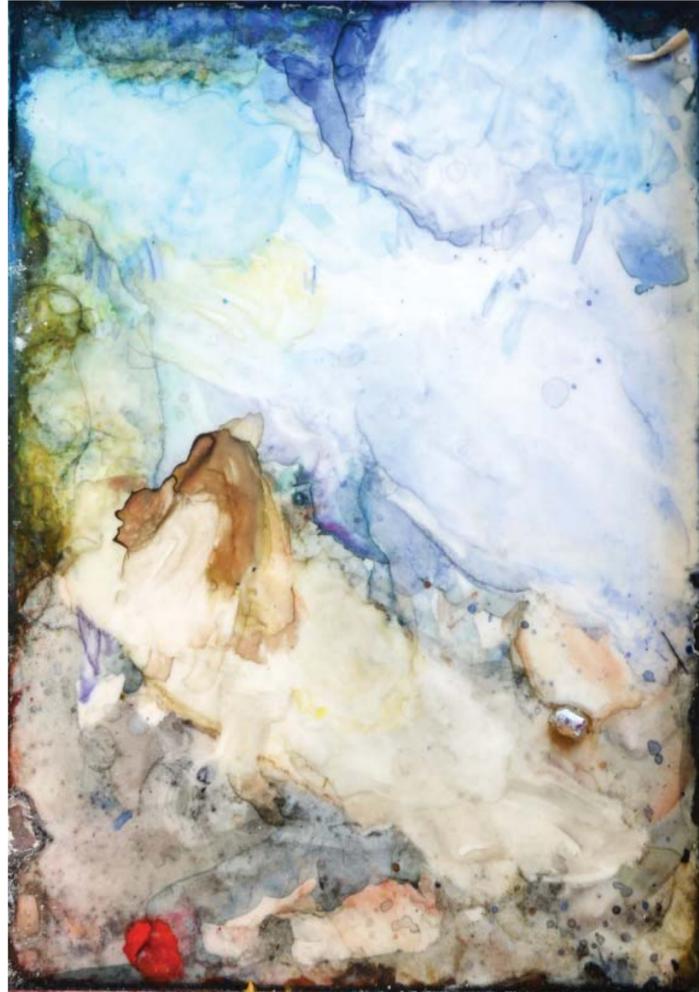
### Abstract

This set of drawings and paintings is a means to explore building. The building is imbued with the qualities of elusive memories and images that have been rediscovered and reconsidered through making. The qualities are linked back to place, the place of a bath house and sailing club at Smith Mountain Lake. In seeking qualities, the work explores the relationship between flatness and depth, line and color, form and image, and therefore architecture and painting. The work draws out and gathers disparate blues and searches for those transient aspects of the world that can be rendered eternal.



Dedicated to John Milton Barnes,  
a man of impressive character,  
an exceptional father, grandfather, and sailor  
who valued order in all aspects of life.

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## Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to

Gene Egger and Donna Dunay for wisdom; Frank Weiner for unceasing inspiration and encouragement; Shelley Martin for teaching me how to trust my intuition and ability; Steve Thompson for being my Cheshire Cat, for understanding what I am doing better than I do, and for guiding me toward knowledge with poetic language and images; Hans Rott for valuable criticism, dissemination of bits of his vast knowledge, and most importantly for demonstrating the living of a good life; Bill Galloway for being one of the most compassionate and enthusiastic teachers and people that I know, for giving me hope in the potential value of one good person in the world and in architecture; my truly exceptional studio for your friendship and encouragement, for challenging me to be a better architect in your talent and skill; my kindred spirits for their quiet and thoughtful company; Matt, my family, and dear friends, those few unfortunate souls who know me well and love me still.

Thank you all for your care and support.



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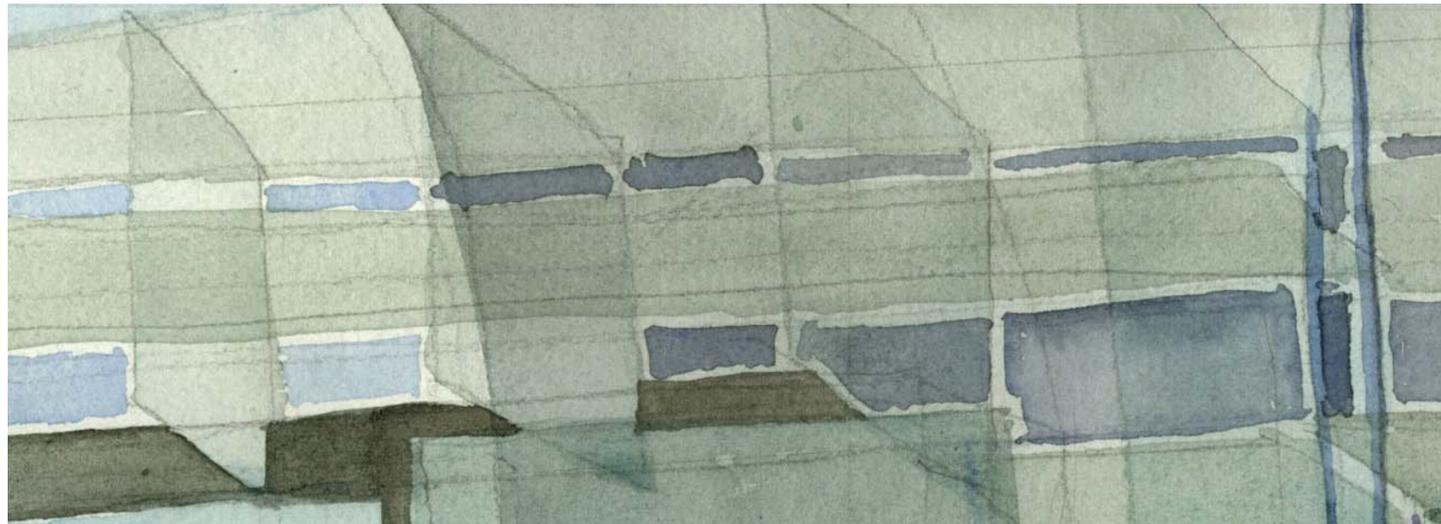
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## Preface

Architecture, as well as building, has the potential to render eternal the aspects of human existence that are most transient. This set of drawings and paintings is a means to explore building. The building is a bath house and sailing club for Smith Mountain Lake. It becomes a reliquary for holding the likenesses, images, and emotions of memory, and the qualities of place. The building makes room for life or patterns and fields of life that it holds. There are traces of vibration and chaos and ebbs and flows. Reflectivity and turbulence are eroding the building. Stable elements of building become the armature for less stable images of memory. Stable geometry is pushing against the forces and tides of wishes, dreams, and thoughts; the everyday of the building against the eternal; happiness against sorrow; necessity against free will and chance. All of the forces are playing out, and put into play. Images are boats floating, rising and falling and swaying, not in spite of their limits, but precisely because they are tethered to the dock. The building as an ordered entity aspires to hold the aqueous, to contain the immeasurable, and to present the indescribable.

## Beginnings and Endings

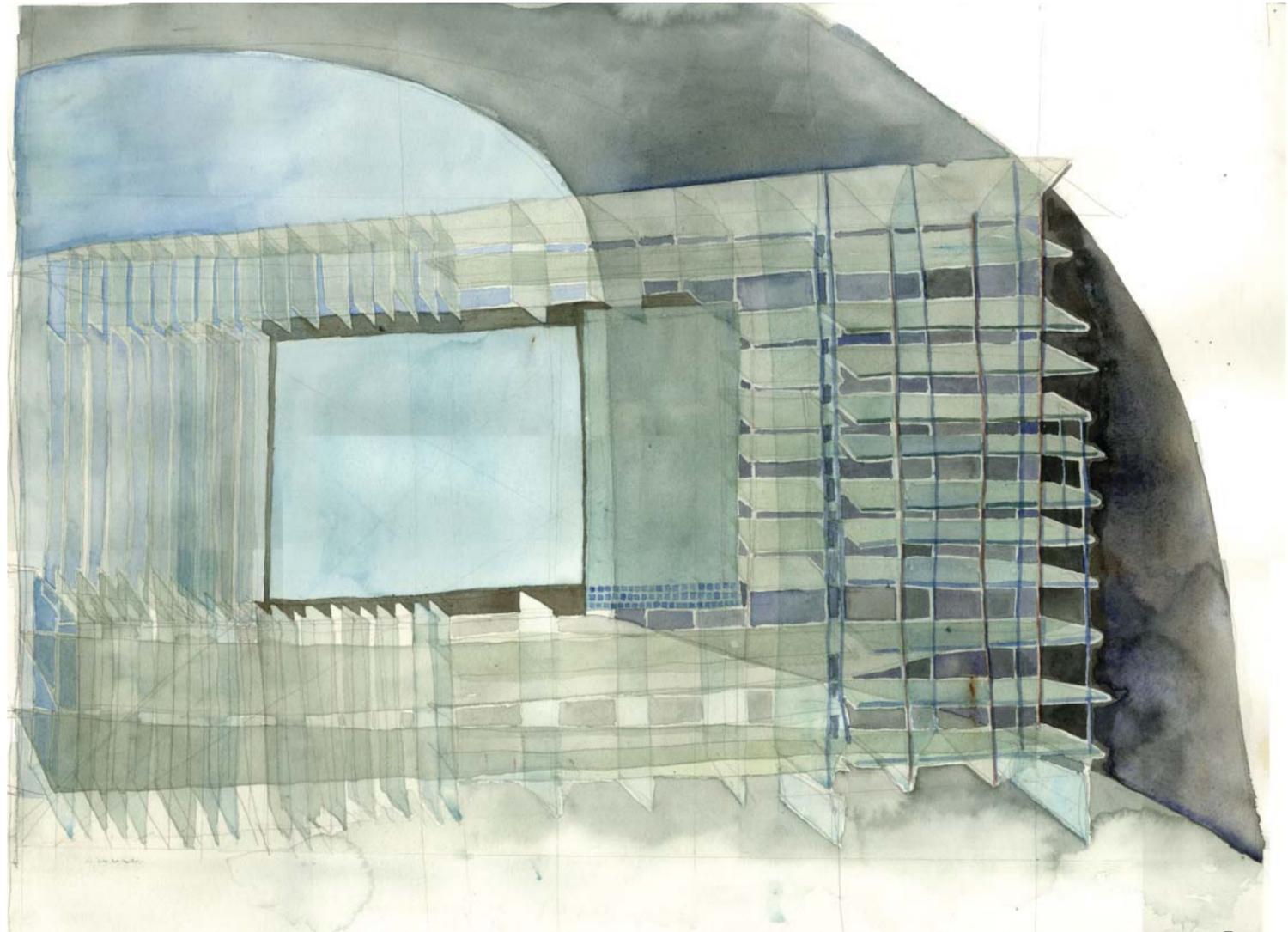


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### The Aqueous Repository of All Things

"The Cubist medium thus is not one of ethereal clarities but of dense, gelatinous ambiguities. It savors water rather than air, the container-like still-life rather than the open landscape, the receptacle with its concavities and convexities rather than the straight and limitless vector, the mesh and the interlock rather than the statics of object adjacencies. It suggests an equilibrium, but one that oscillates and vibrates. Shimmering with visual puns and alliterations, humorously rejoicing in its own chimerical existence, it encompasses the ebb and flow of form and meaning, the grafting of illusion and allusion. At once inwardly turbulent and outwardly reflective, it is the stream, perhaps the ocean...the aqueous repository of all things." (Slutzky 30)

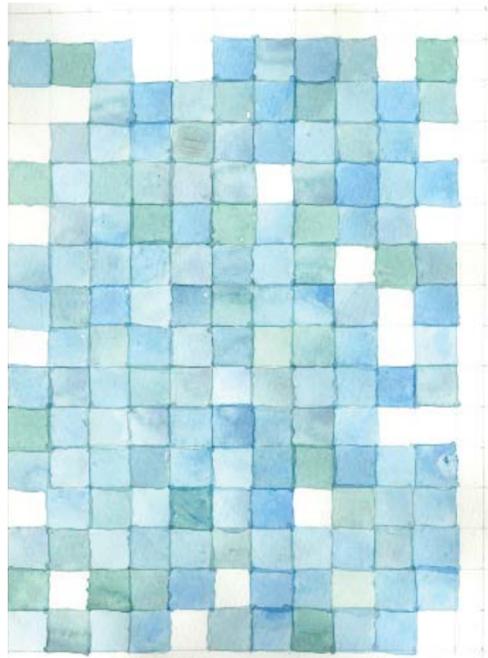
Glass entry gate



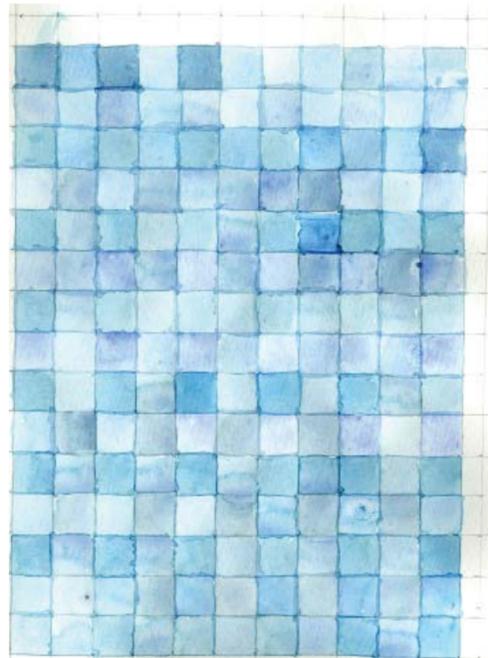
## Recollecting Place



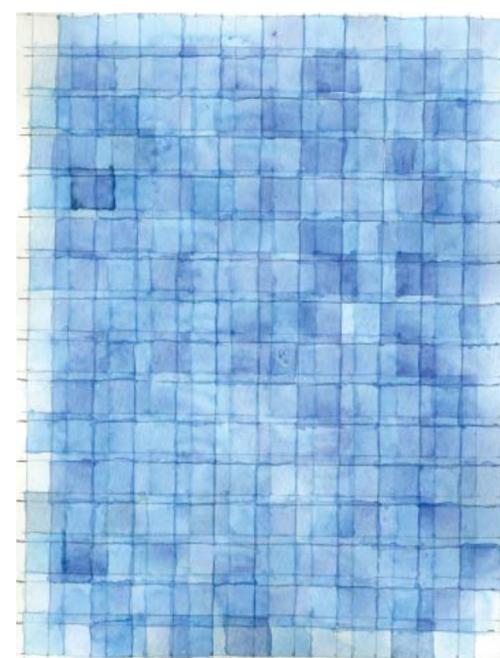
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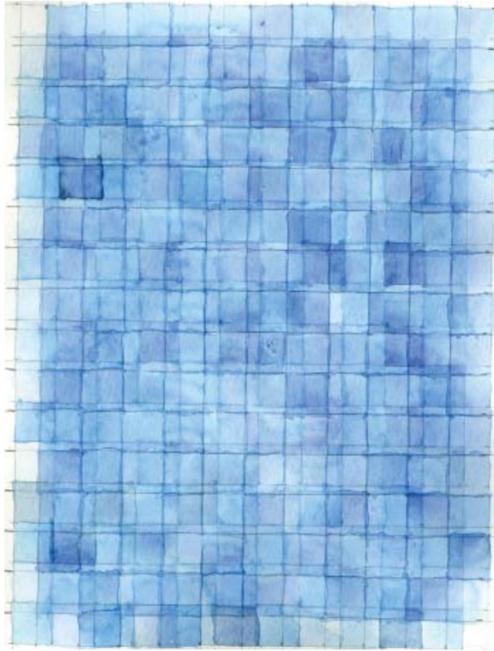
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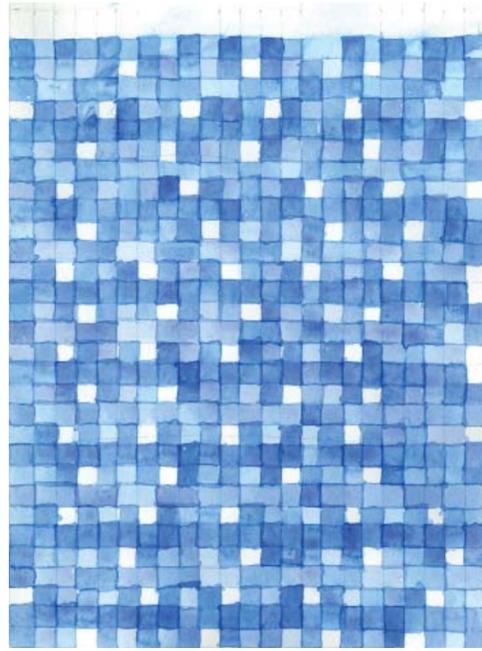
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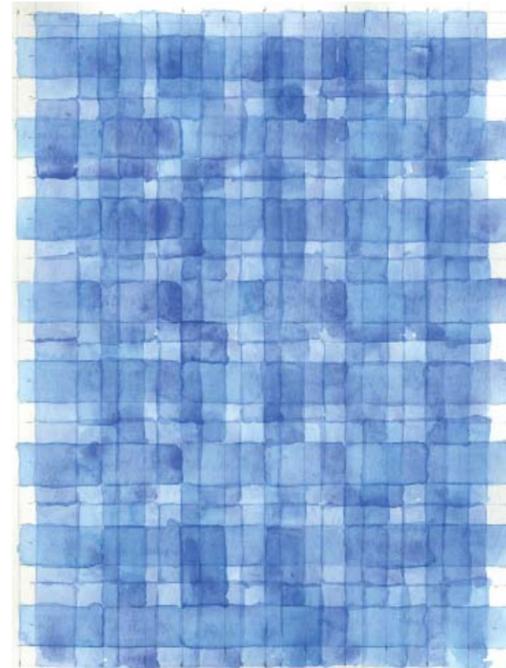
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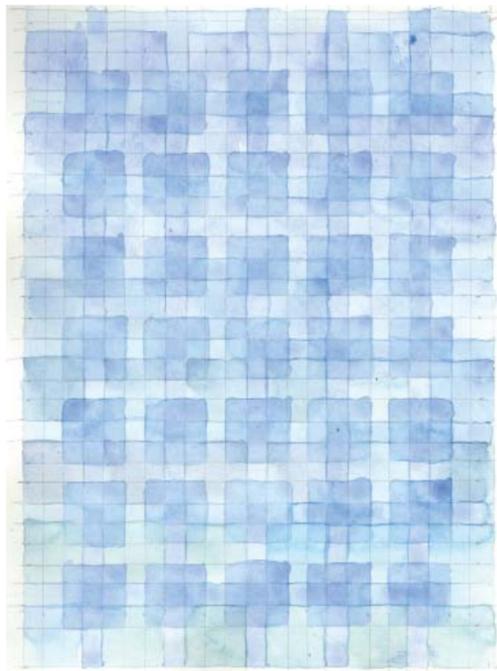
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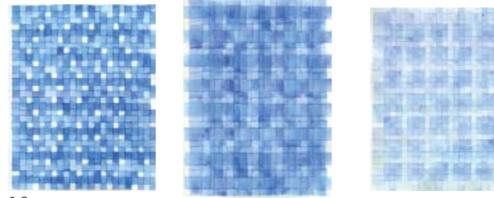
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## On Blue

Let the background for the building be a range of blues. Blue not unlike the dappling colors I often see behind my eyelids. The color I find lurking under layers of creamy reds of living flesh. The color of souls who are gentle, yet with hope and courage confront life's certain sorrows. Blue that is pulled across the ground as shadows made by the Virginia sun weave through forests. The color of a distance that recedes as you near, the color that morphs and shimmers when you blink. It is like the sky which fades at the edges and varies with the water in the air. It spreads like butter over distant cities and mountains, and glistens like melting sapphires in golden hair. The melancholy hue that reminds me of all I have never seen and might never know. I find its wondrous reflection ever held within the vibrant and turbulent surface of water. It offers reverie for the mind as it undulates like a down-filled comforter across a bed. I can only attempt to catch it in fragments and pull it forward, holding it tenuously in a woven net of lines. All the while I wonder if it will be slowly leaking back into the sky, slipping past the bounded horizon, and leaning toward the water of its cosmic reflection.



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Through the attempt to perfect her work, the architect, like the alchemist, is working toward her own perfection. The work moves from the personal and the narcissistic to the collective and the universal. The path to the eternal and the immeasurable is through the quantifiable and the measurable. We must begin by fixing something in our minds and eyes in order to transcend that very fixation.



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Through the trees you find the limit of the land.



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A garden of boats growing untamed.



22

Turning,  
the lake leads us back toward the painting of the sky.  
Horizontal surfaces tilt up.



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Only the lake is the middle ground.

## On Water

"There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme downtown is the battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

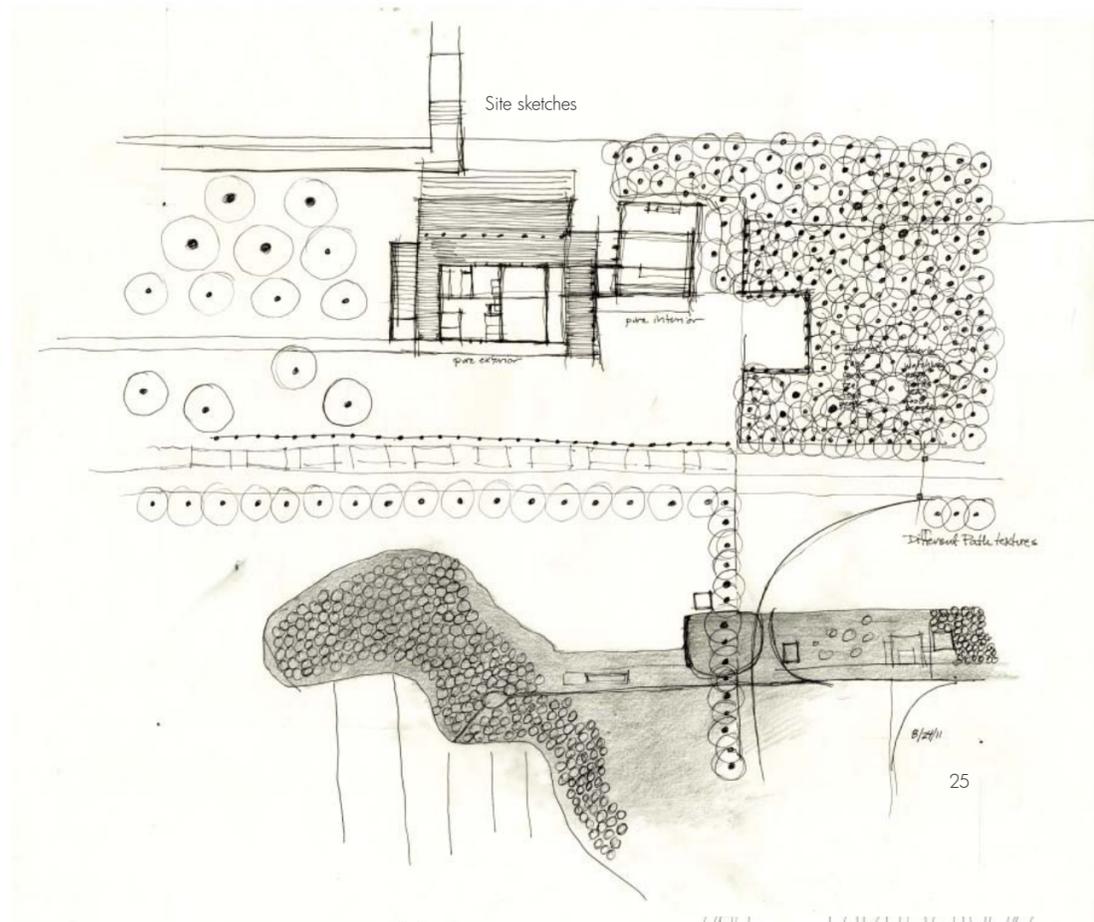
Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks glasses! Of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! Here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in, and there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lands and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

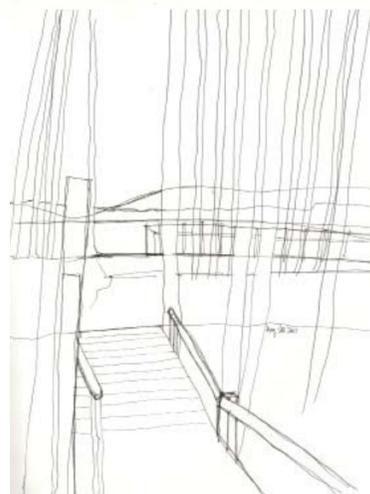
Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be a thirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever." (Melville 3-4)



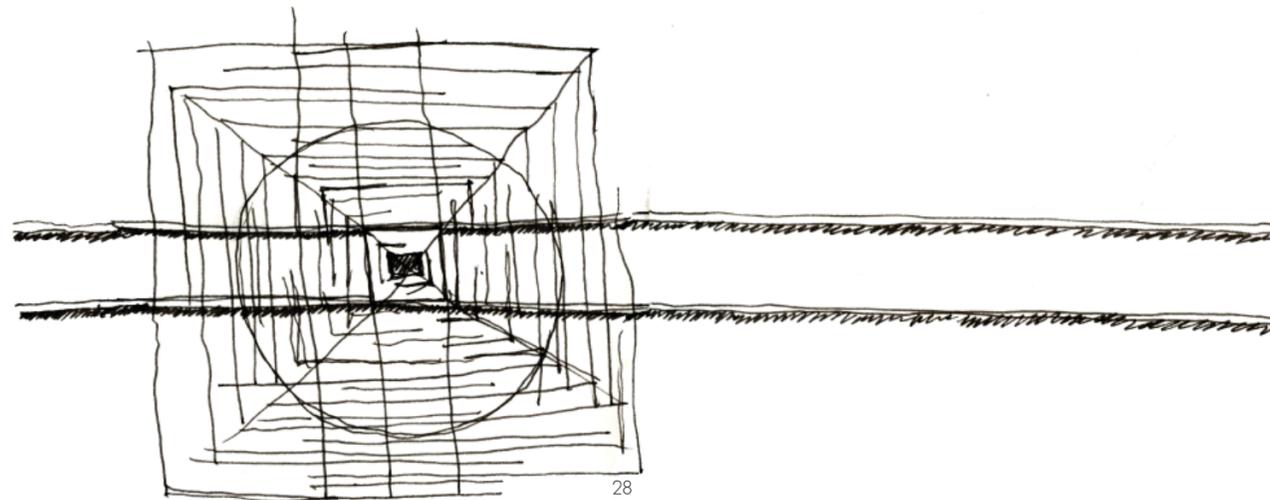
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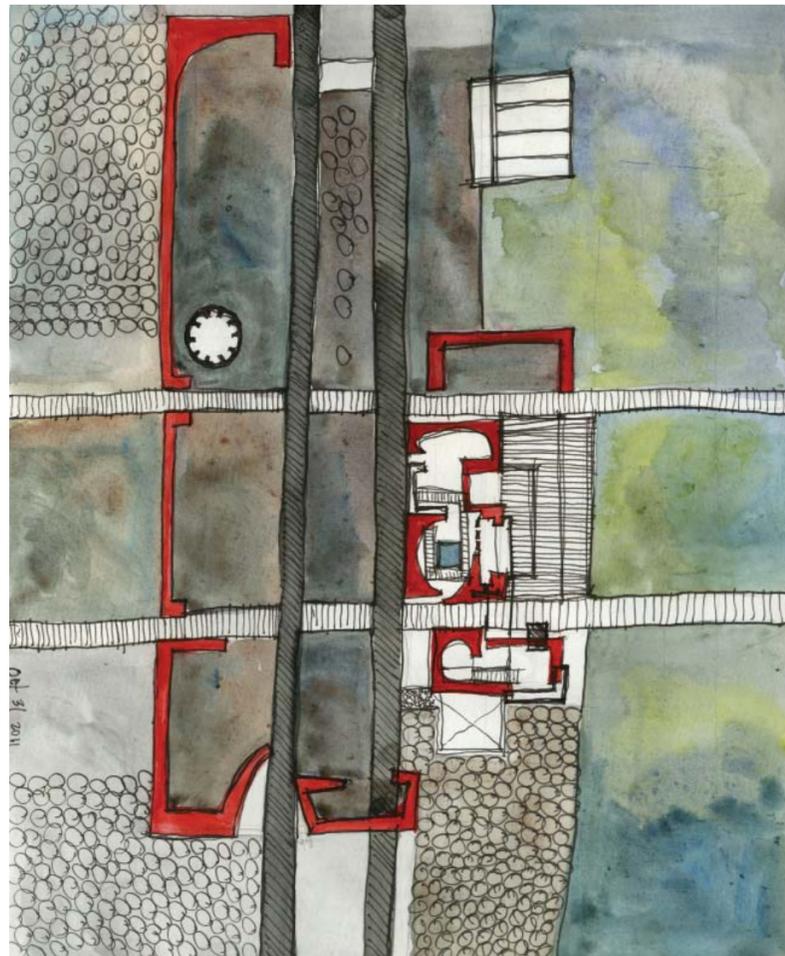
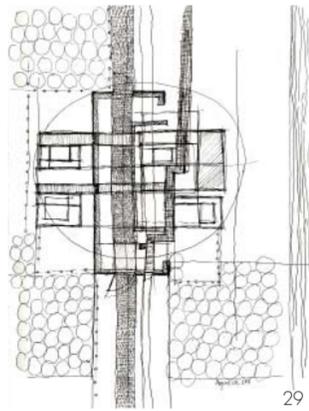
To be present on the site is to inhabit a stained glass window. The shadowed vertical figures of the foreground frame the hazy blue horizon. In its permeability it gives you the layers of the horizon like the flatness of a painting or a wall. The paths of the site allow you to penetrate this painting and inhabit the room of the lake. The site is directed toward blueness.



## Directing the Whole



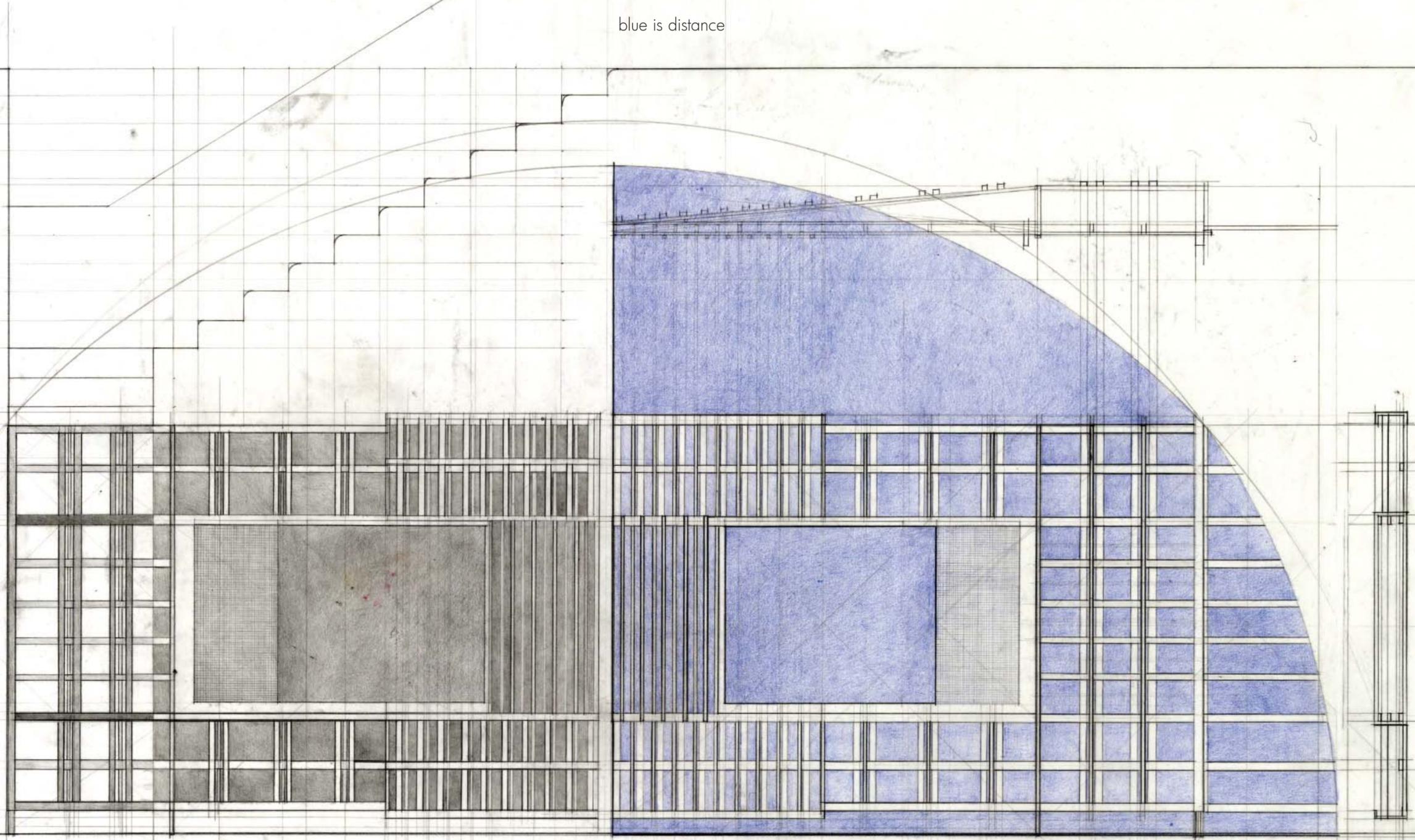
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## Loom of Time

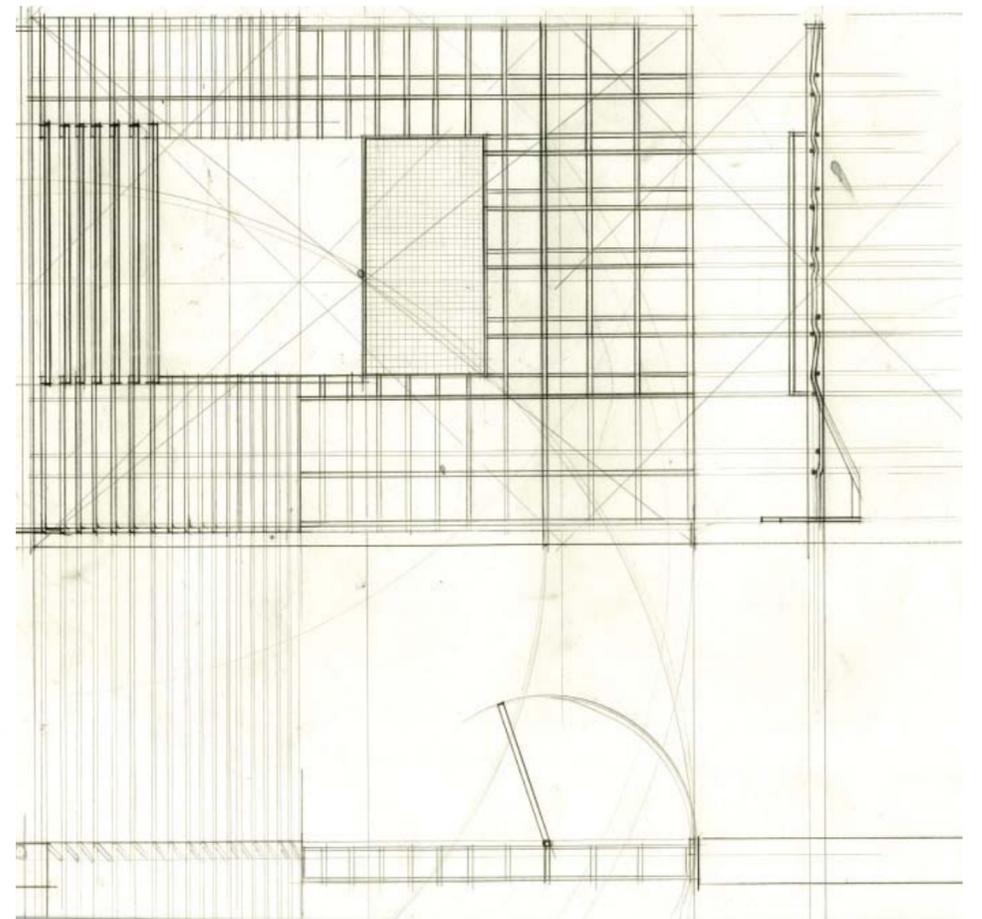
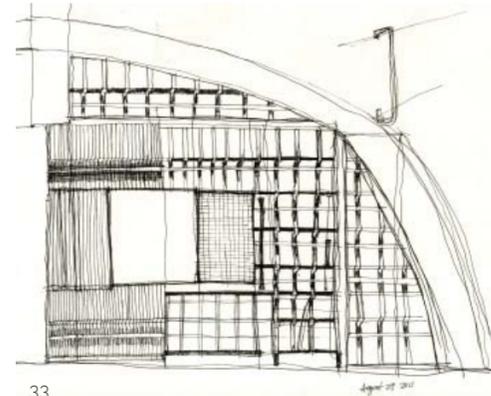
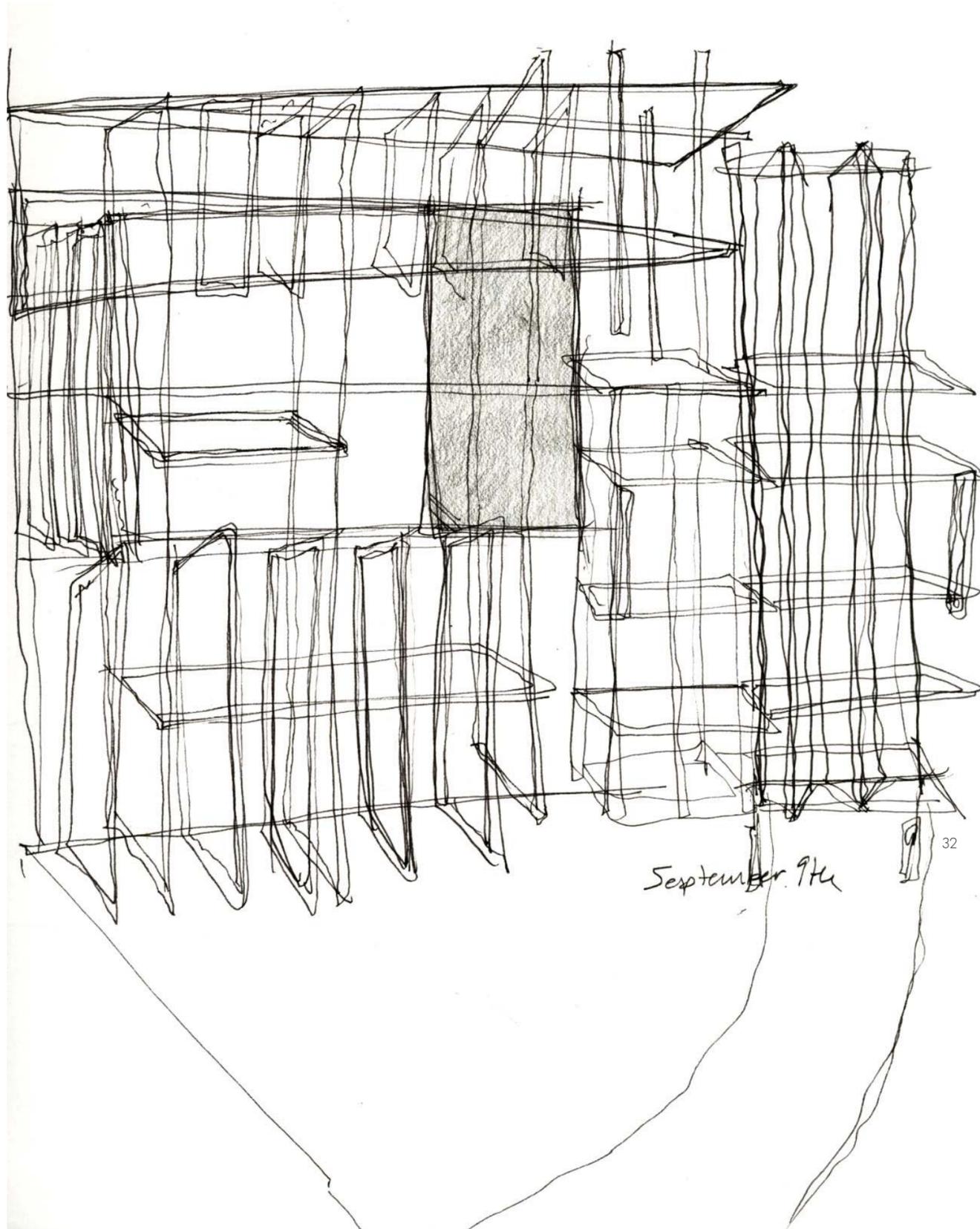
"As I kept passing and repassing the filling or woof of marline between the long yarns of the warp, using my own hand for the shuttle, and as Queequeg, standing sideways, ever and anon slid his heavy oaken sword between the threads, and idly looking off upon the water, carelessly and unthinkingly drove home every yarn; I say so strange a dreaminess did there then reign all over the ship and all over the sea, only broken by the intermitting dull sound of the sword, that it seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates. There lay the fixed threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity; and ere, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime, Queequeg's impulsive, indifferent sword, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be; and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage's sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free will, and necessity—no wise incompatible—all interweavingly working together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events." (Melville 233-234)

blue is distance



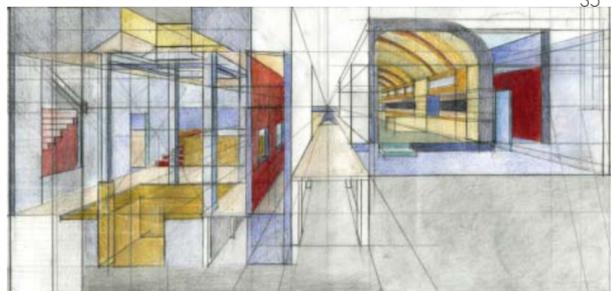
Recto-verso faces of the entry

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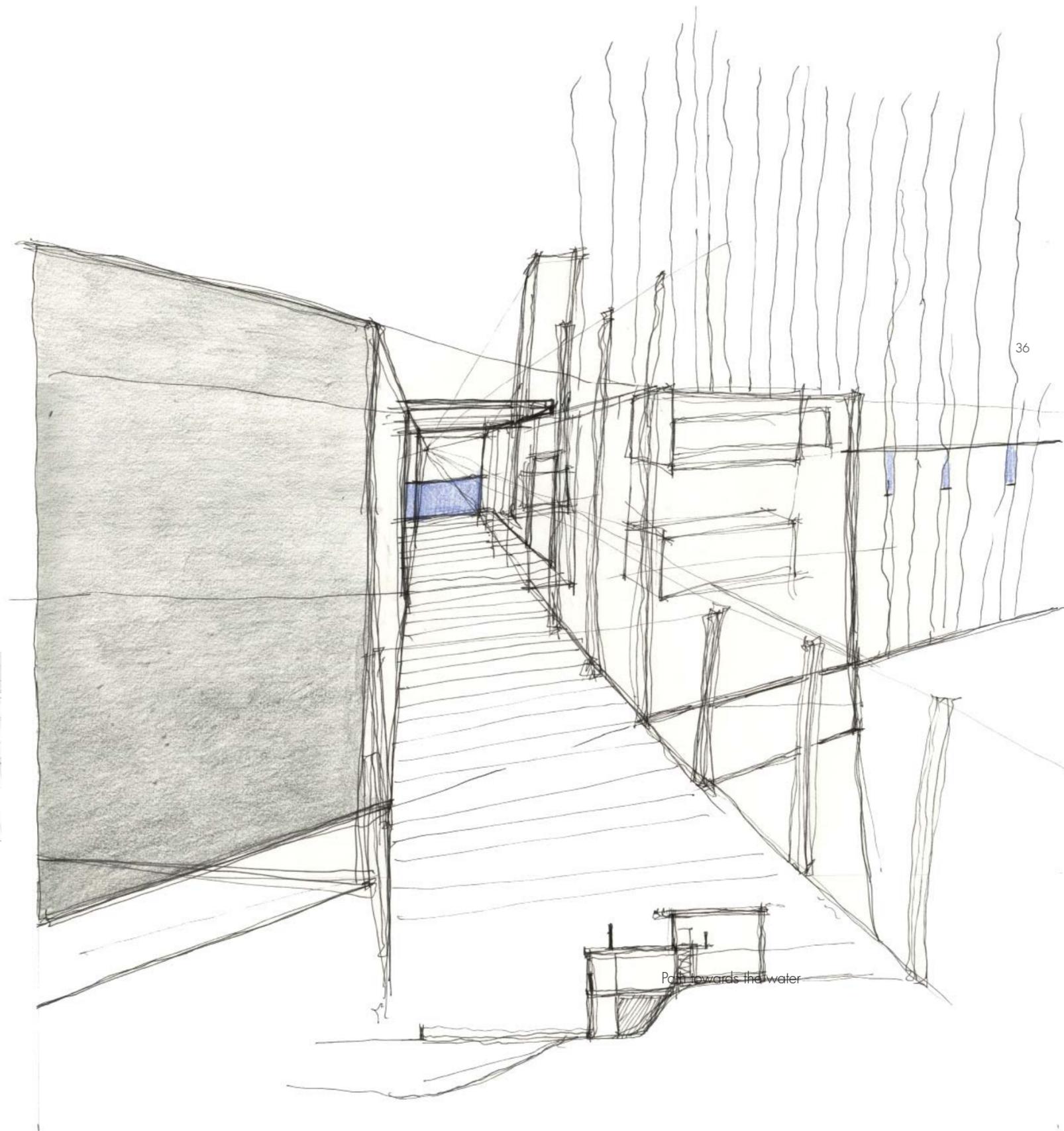
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Studies of gate

The parting of the buildings creates a portal to the meeting of sky and water. The wooden planks of the path resound rhythmically as you walk toward the framed blue horizon. The compression of the path opens at the end in a horizontal and vertical expansion. As though walking onto a stage from behind a curtain, the path gives you access to the whole world. You are surprised to find it looks back at you with expectation



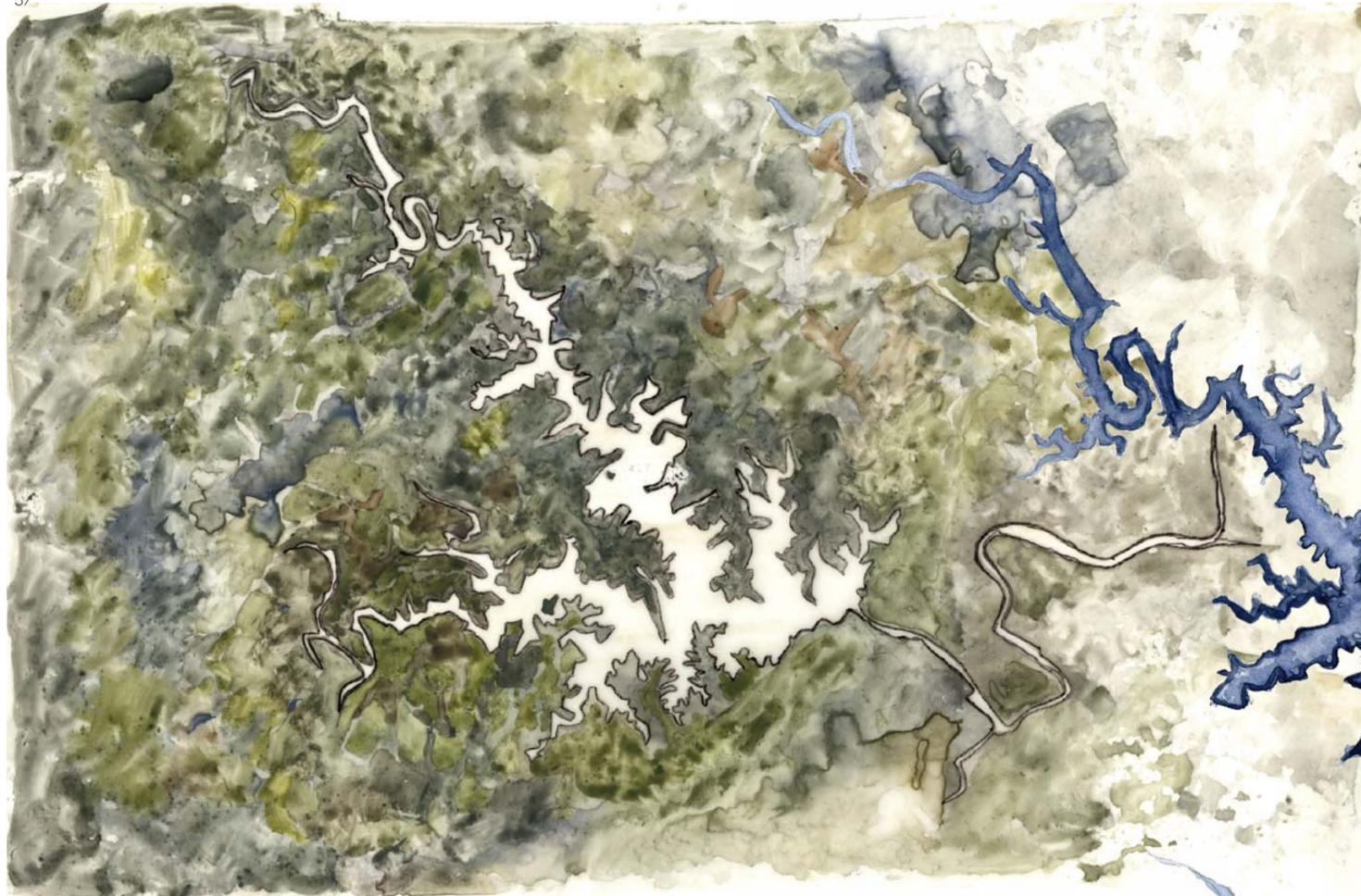
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is the meeting of sky and water a room or a painting?



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Path towards the water

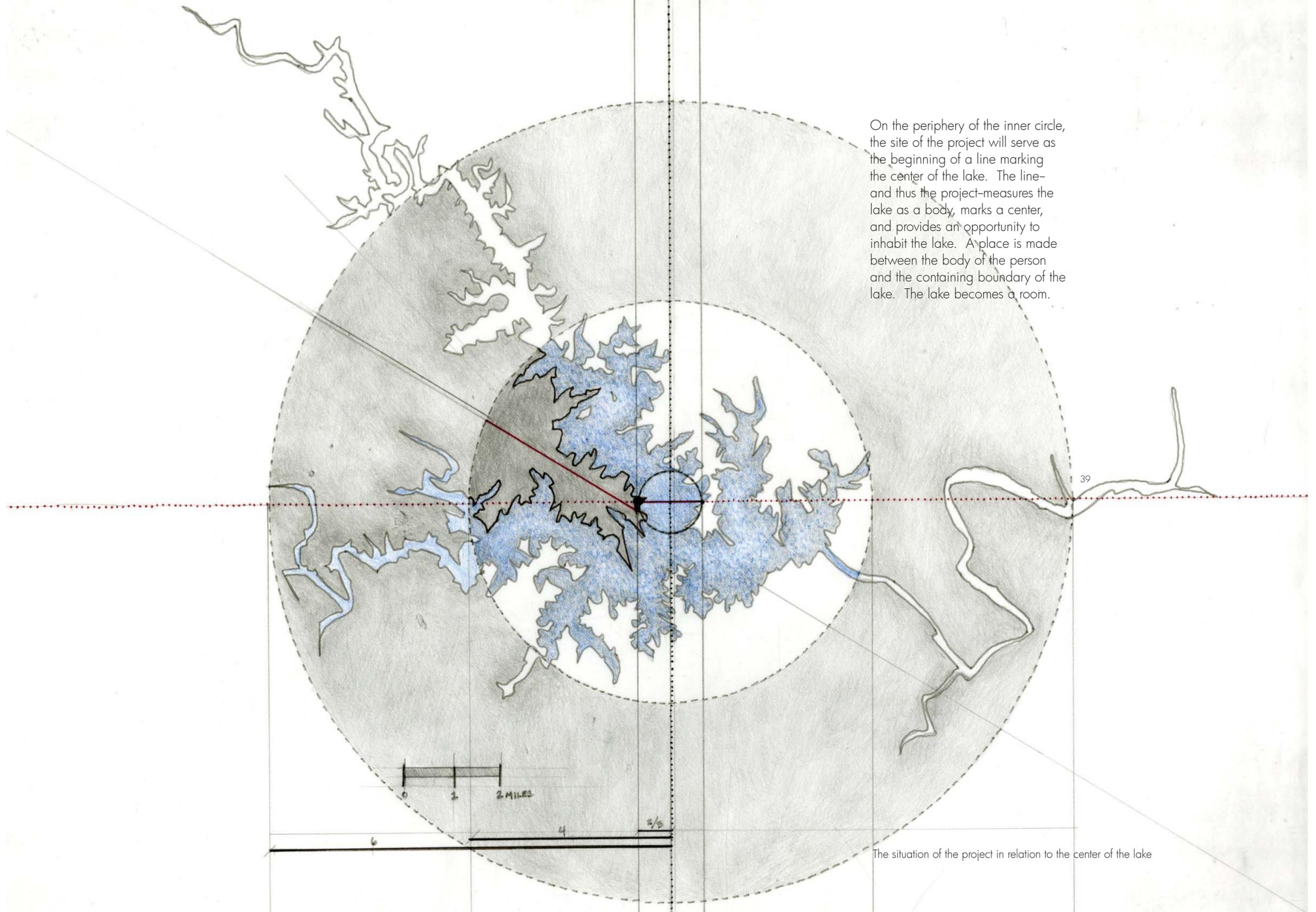


The void of the lake  
The body of the lake

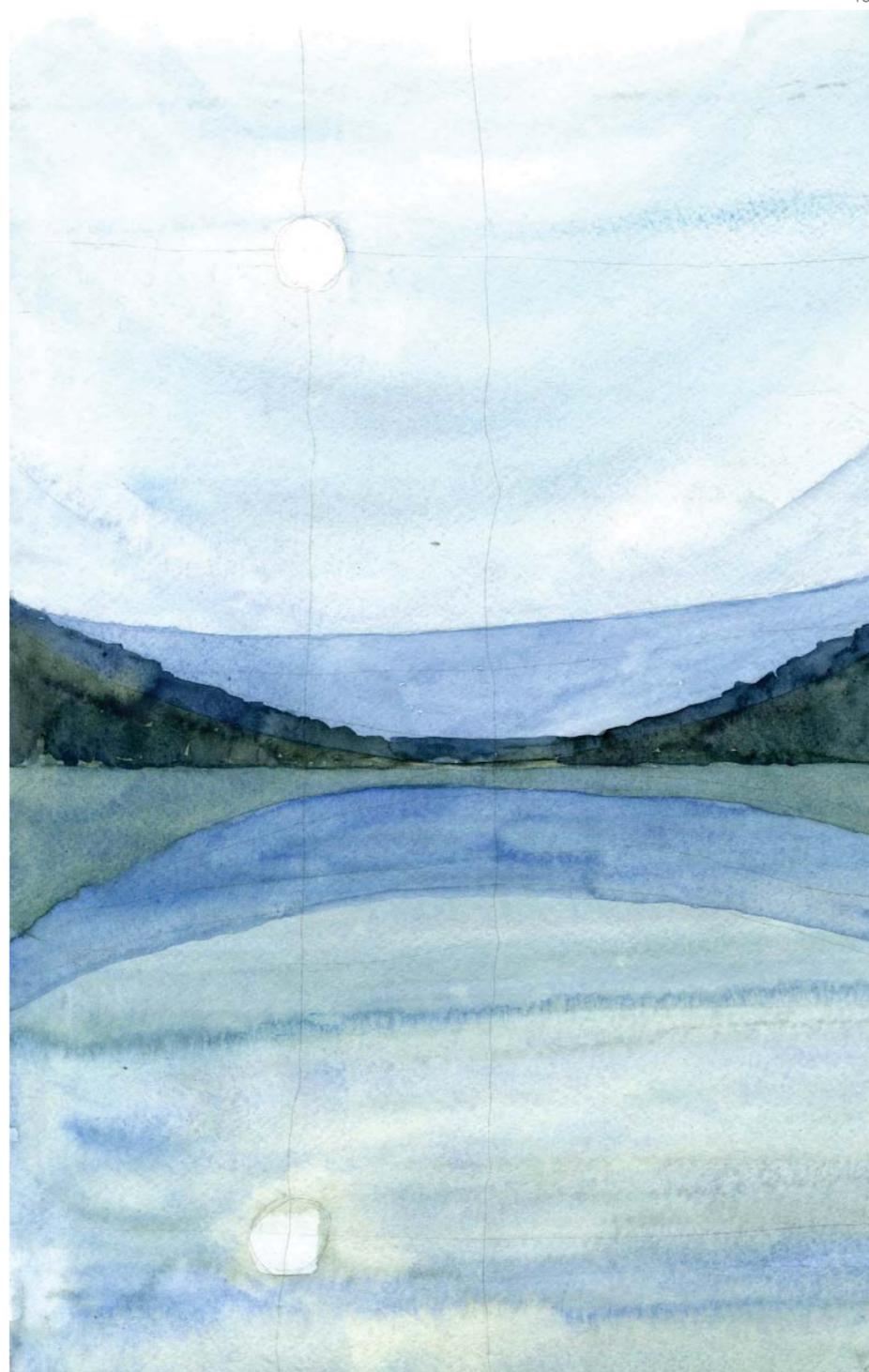
If place is the space between a body, and a containing body, then what is the potential relationship between the body of the building, and the body of the lake? The containing body of the lake, or shoreline, is the limit of the land. The relationship between two bodies can become the relationship between their bounding lines.



On the periphery of the inner circle, the site of the project will serve as the beginning of a line marking the center of the lake. The line—and thus the project—measures the lake as a body, marks a center, and provides an opportunity to inhabit the lake. A place is made between the body of the person and the containing boundary of the lake. The lake becomes a room.



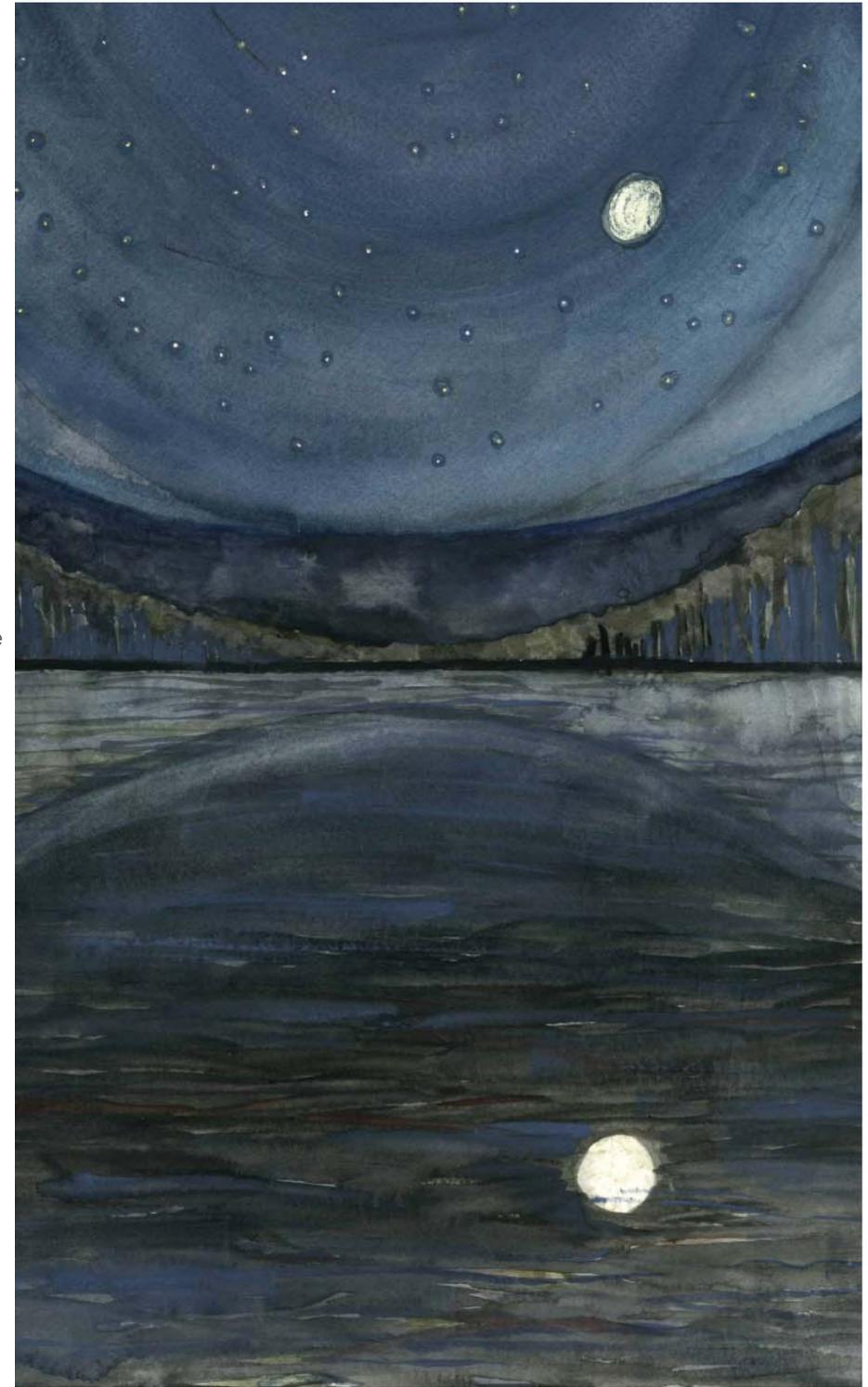
The situation of the project in relation to the center of the lake



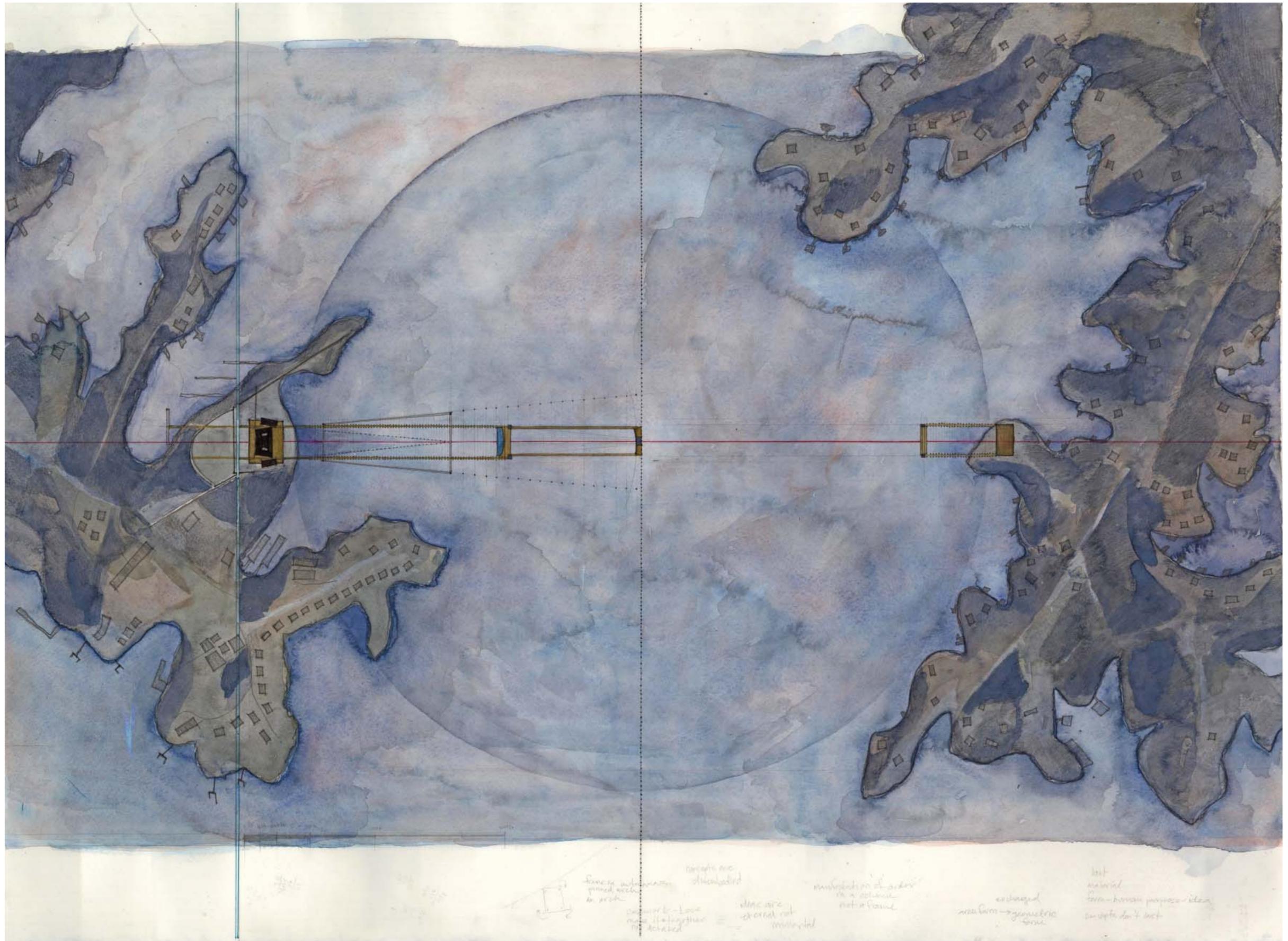
The day room

Night is the time of the sincere opening of the world to sight. It is the time of the dome of the sky.

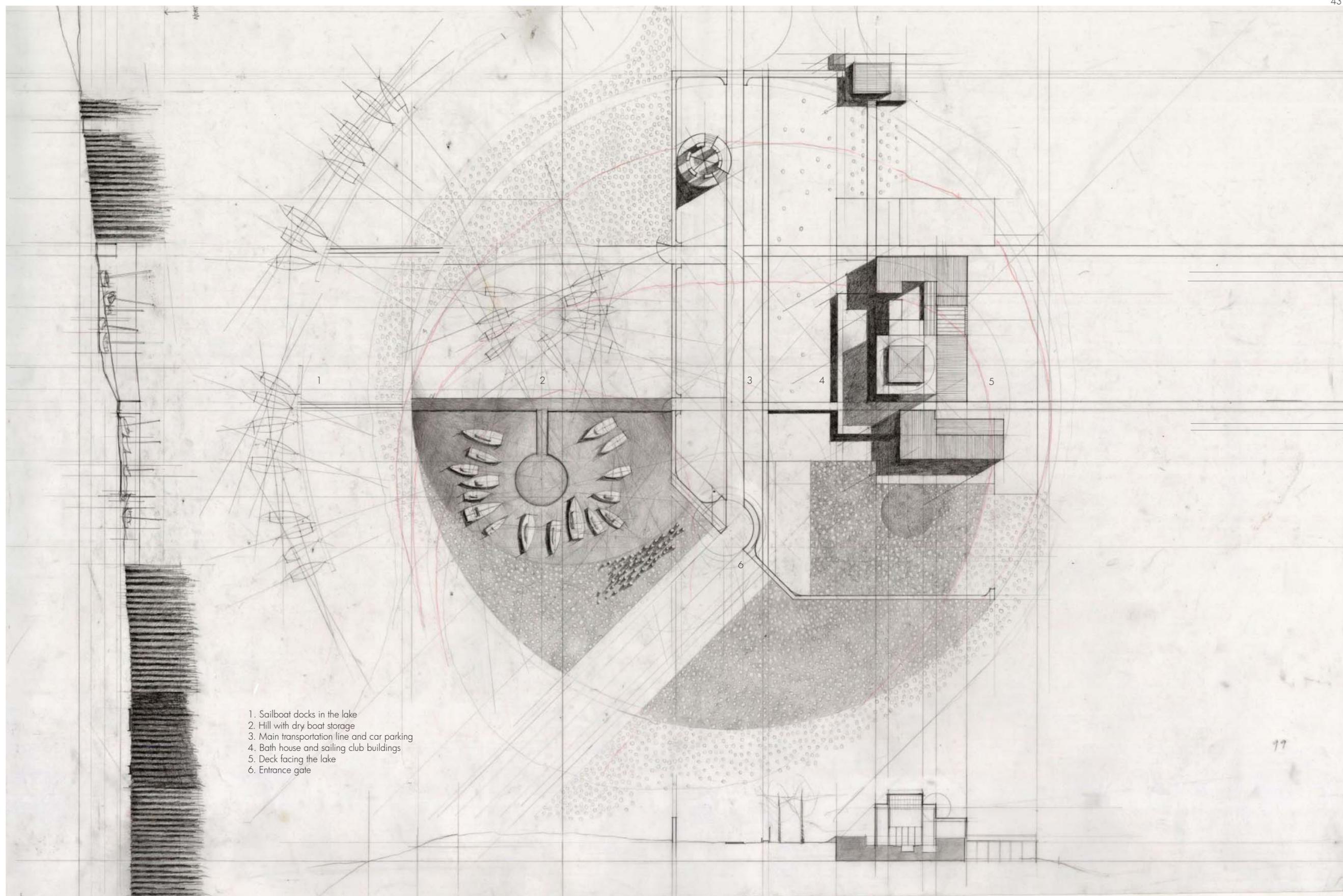
Day is for the agitated mirror of the lake to show us indirectly the blue, the things that we can only understand through reflection, things that we are incapable of looking straight in the eye.



The night room

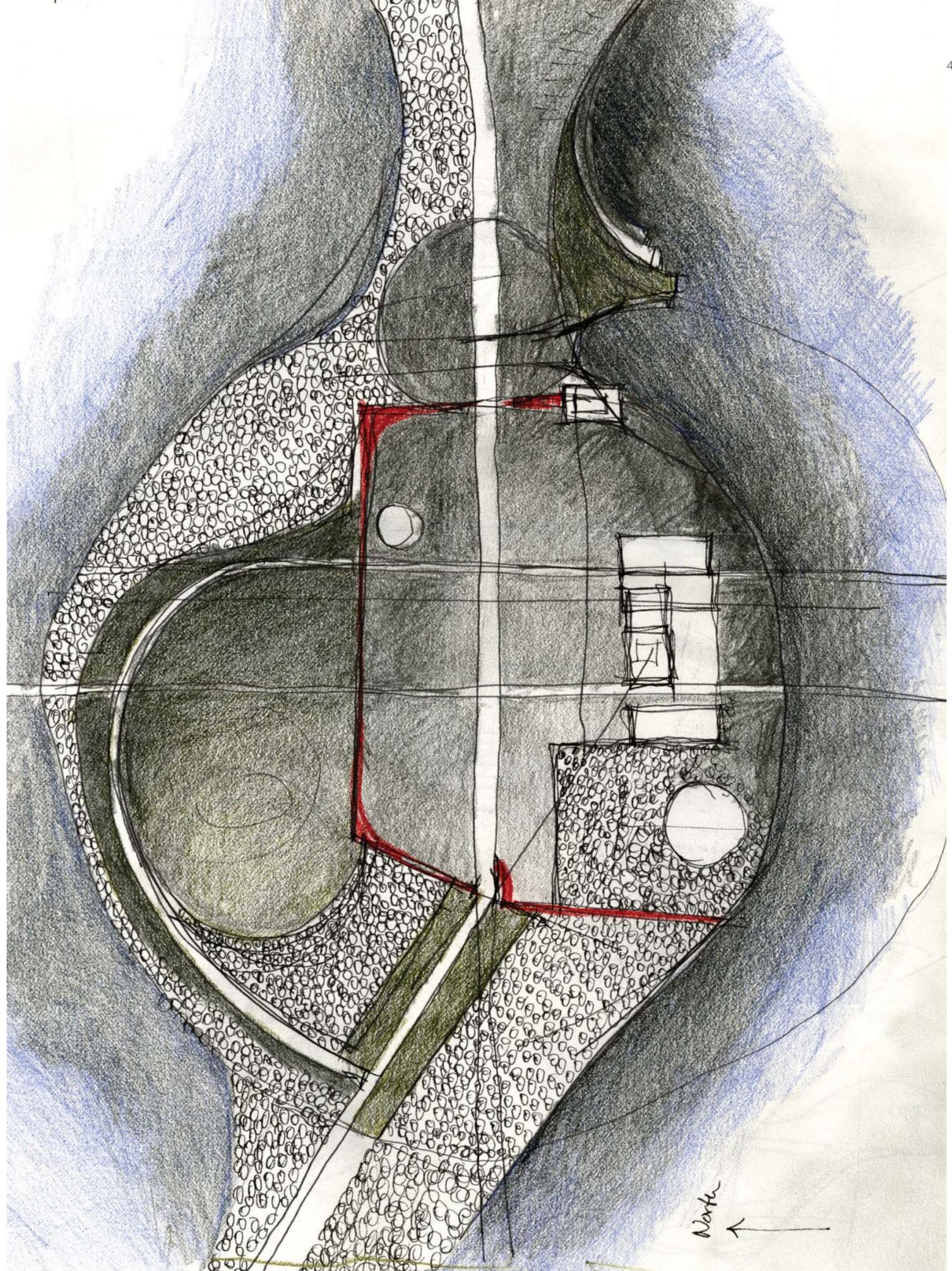


The sky and the lake



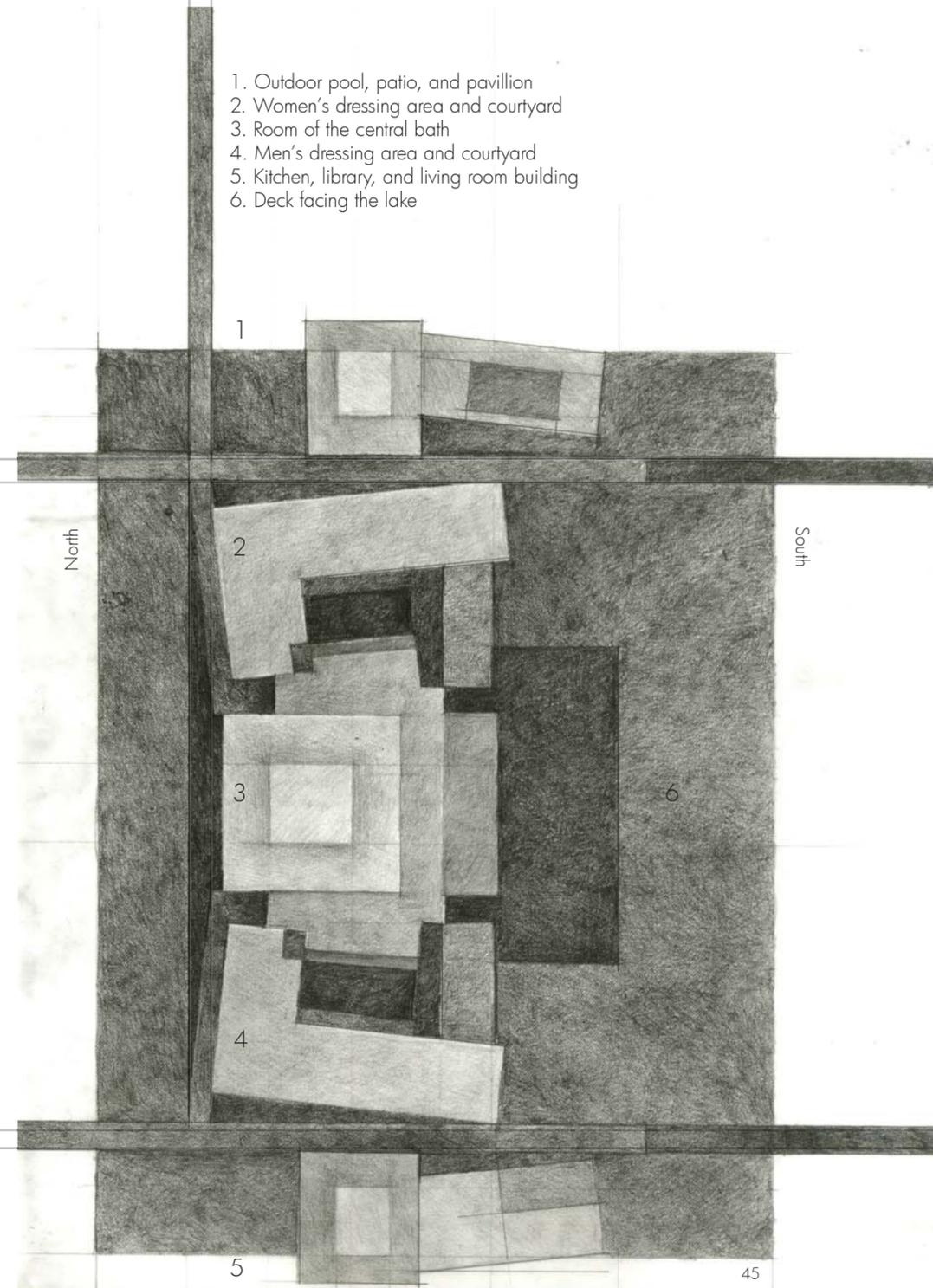
- 1. Sailboat docks in the lake
- 2. Hill with dry boat storage
- 3. Main transportation line and car parking
- 4. Bath house and sailing club buildings
- 5. Deck facing the lake
- 6. Entrance gate

The image of the city



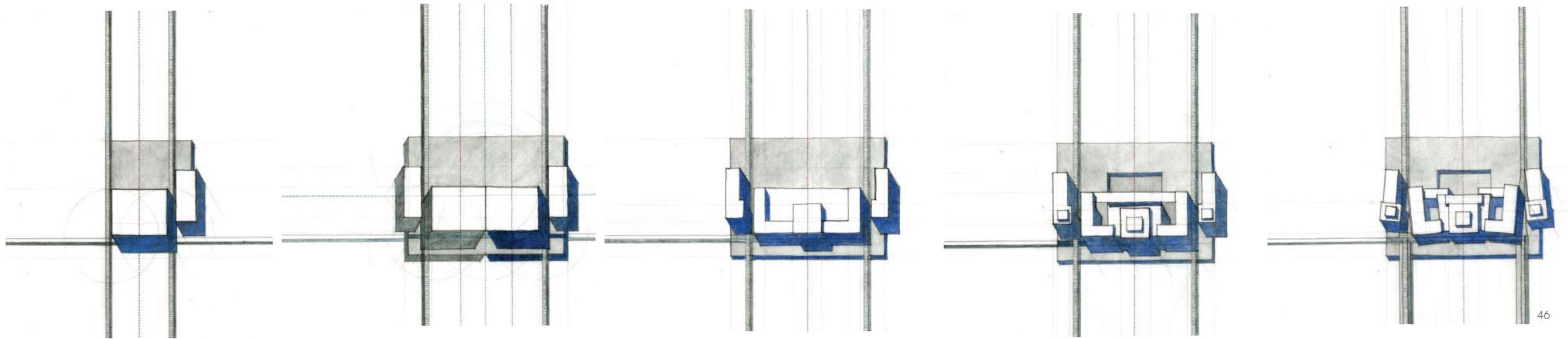
A bodily imagining of the site

## Realizing an Order

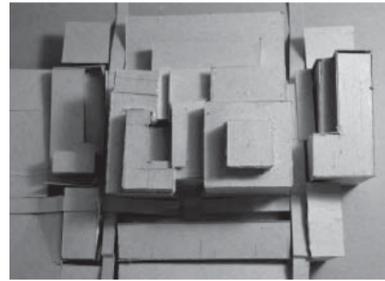


A realization of hierarchy and order allows for a blossoming. The building becomes directed toward its own being, and the director becomes the spectator.

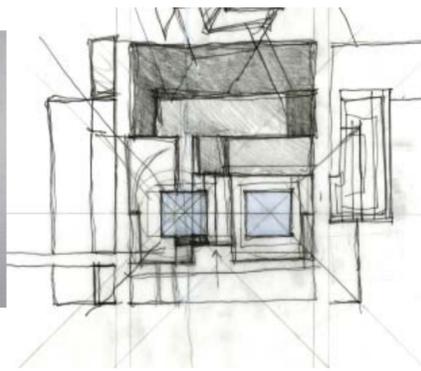
The Generation of the Plan



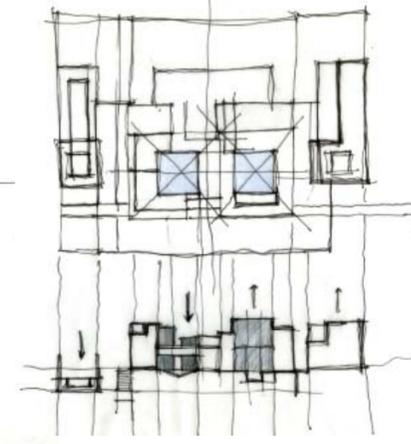
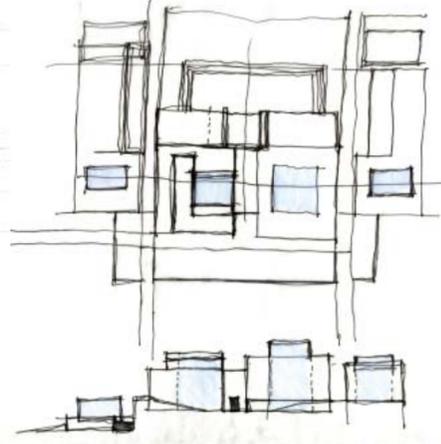
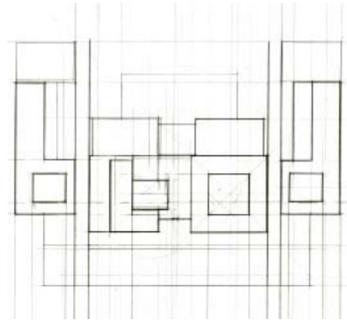
Exaggeration and articulation of the elements of memory



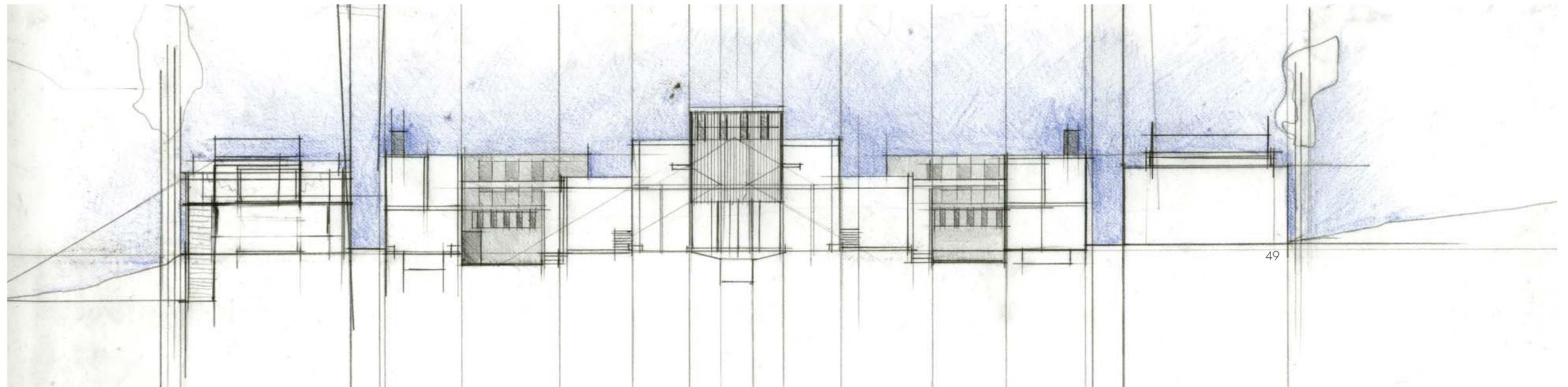
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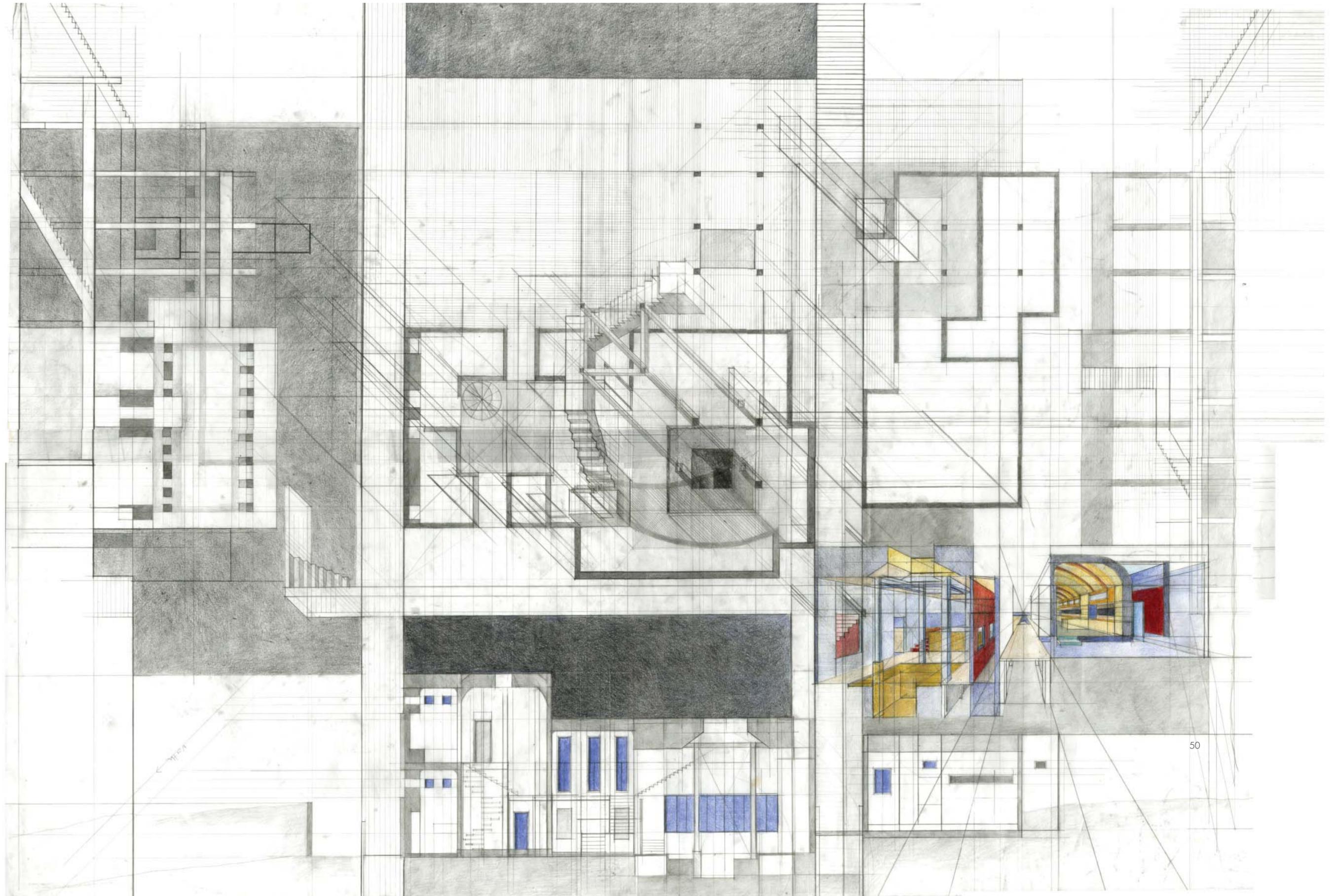
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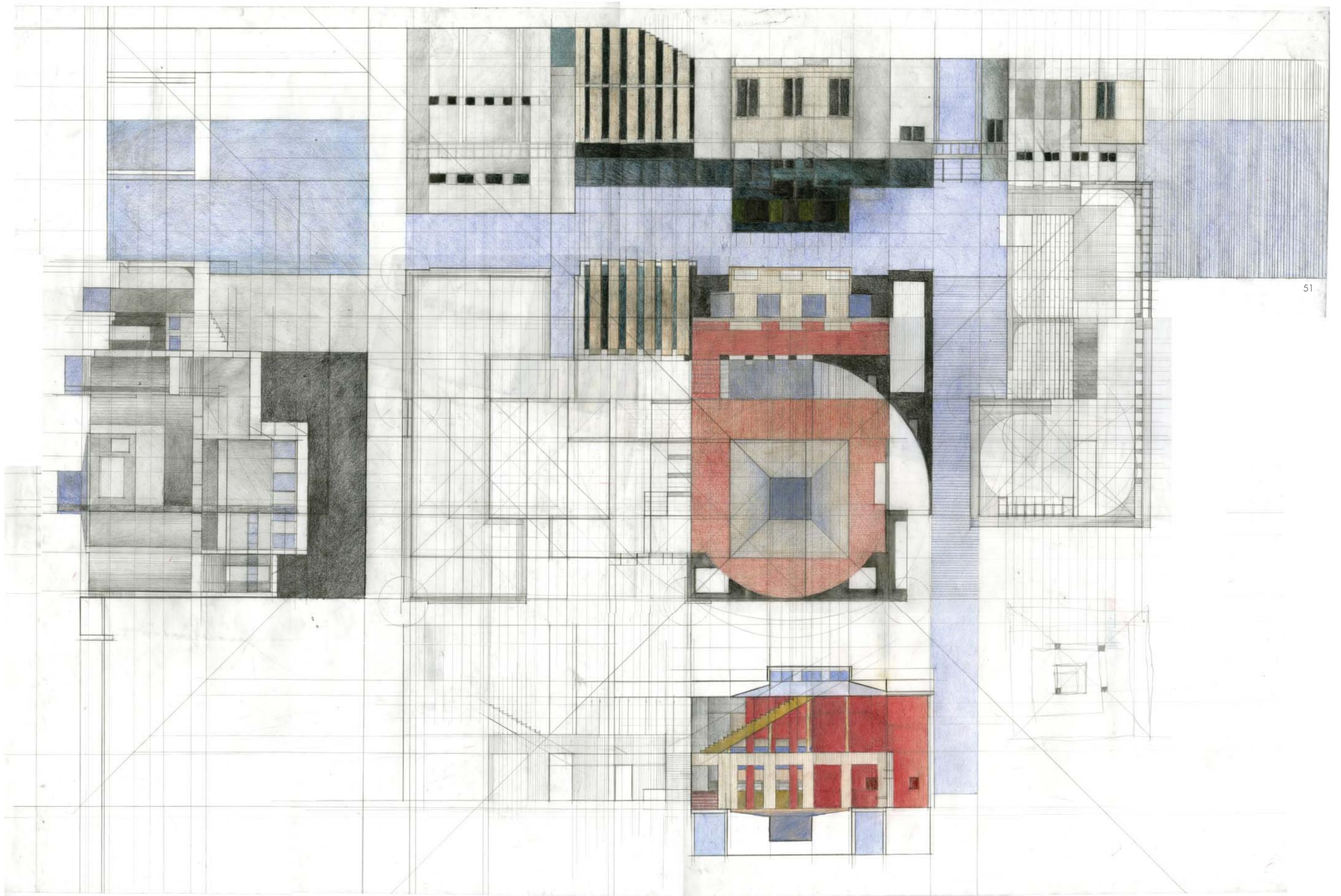
If symmetry is a reflection  
then excess can be disciplined redundancy.



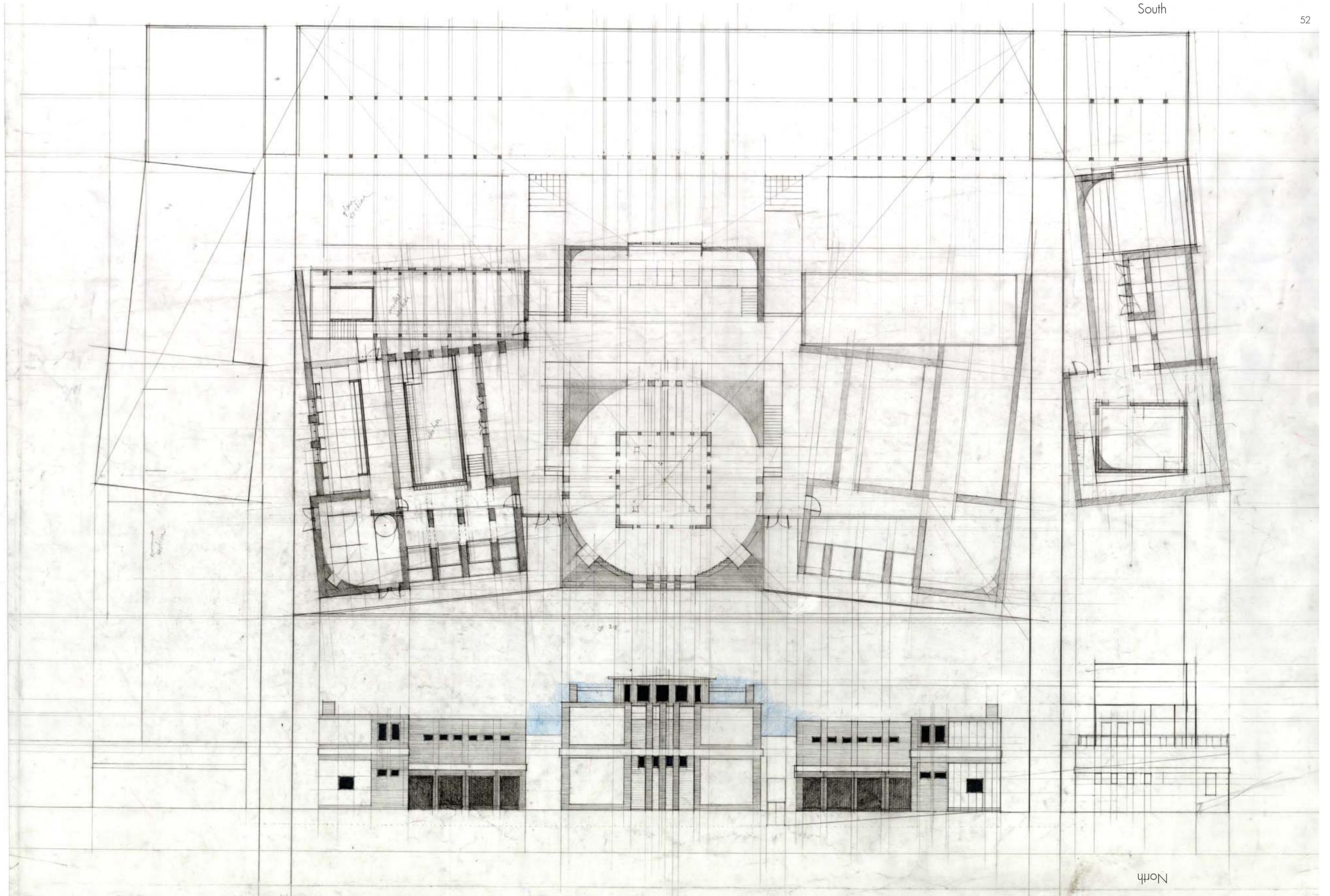
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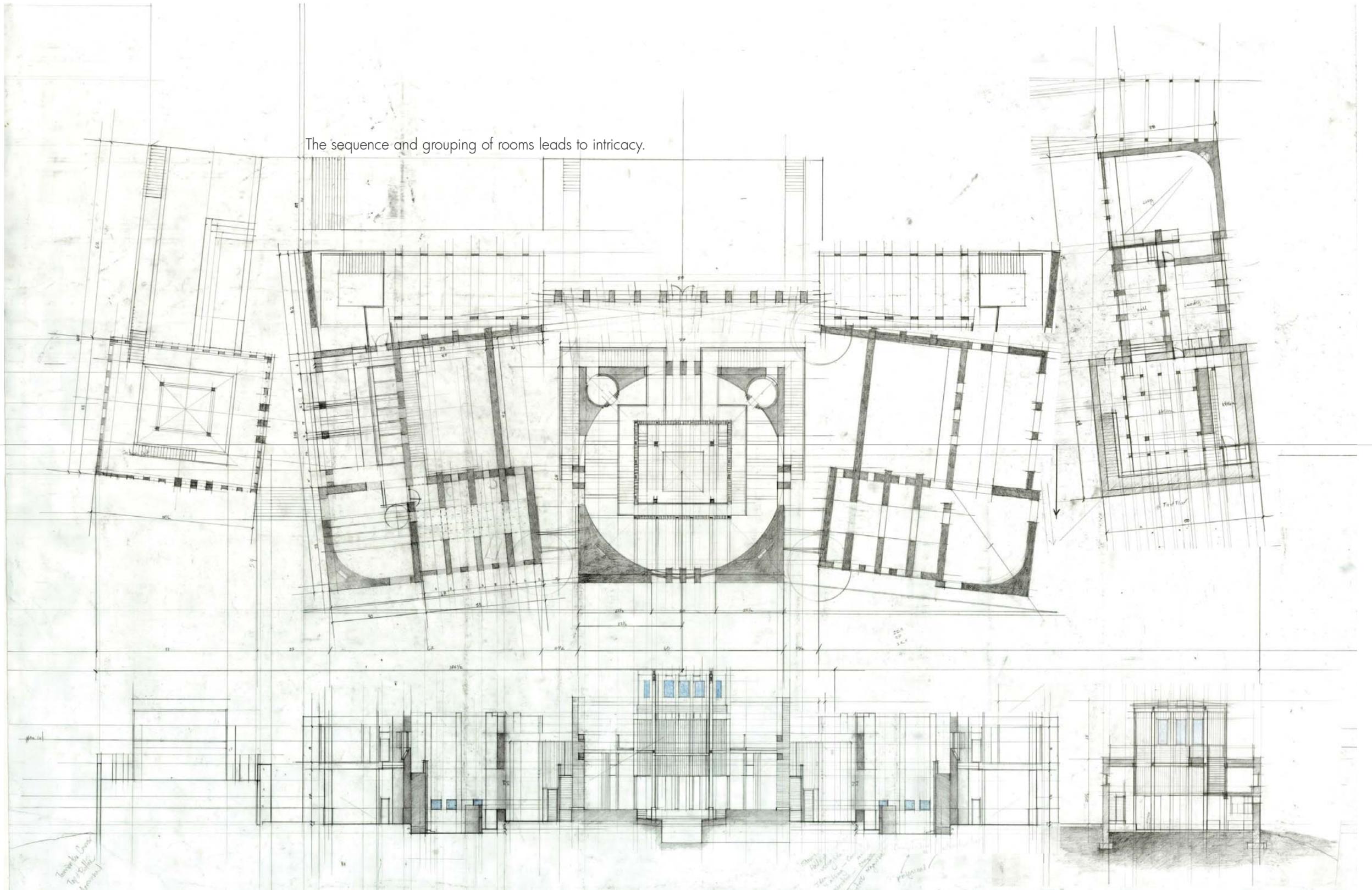


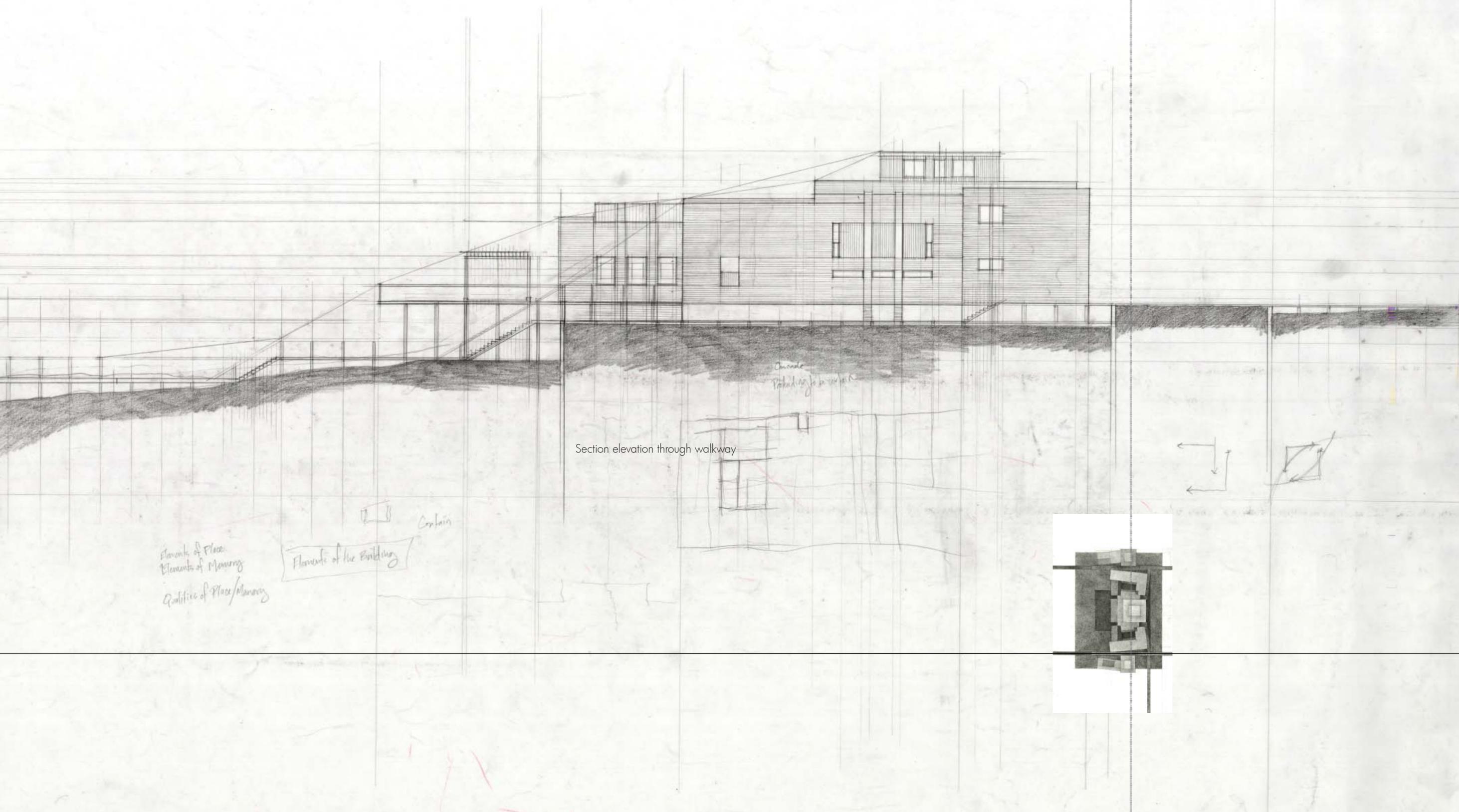
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First floor plan and North elevation

The sequence and grouping of rooms leads to intricacy.





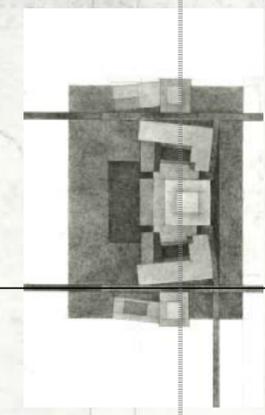
Section elevation through walkway

Elements of Place  
Elements of Meaning  
Qualities of Place/Meaning

Elements of the Building

Contains

Concrete  
Paving for walkway



aspects of the interior are withheld, while other rooms leak into the sky

Foundation  
Elevation

catch the sky

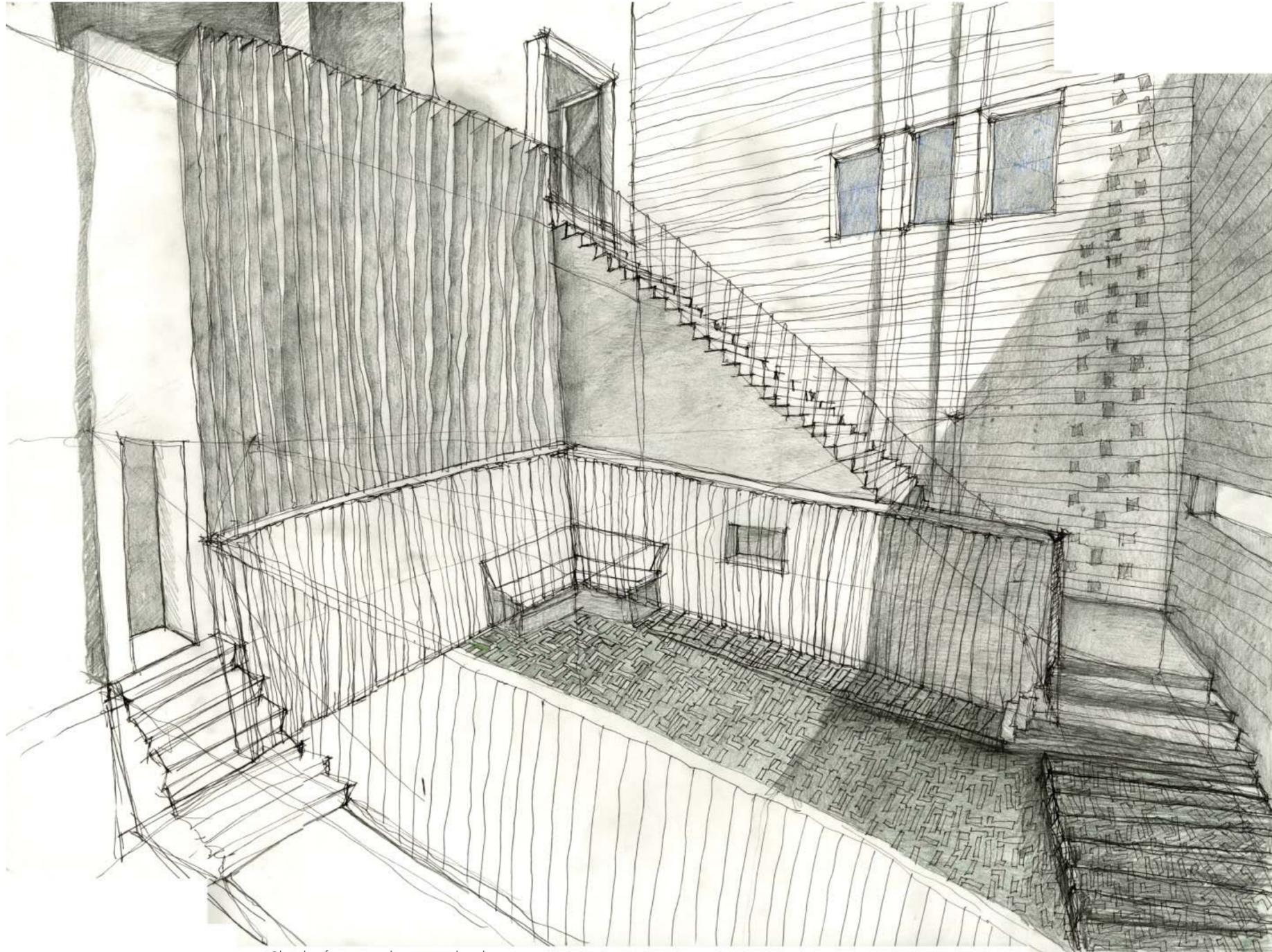
Section through courtyard of women's building

Section 4/5

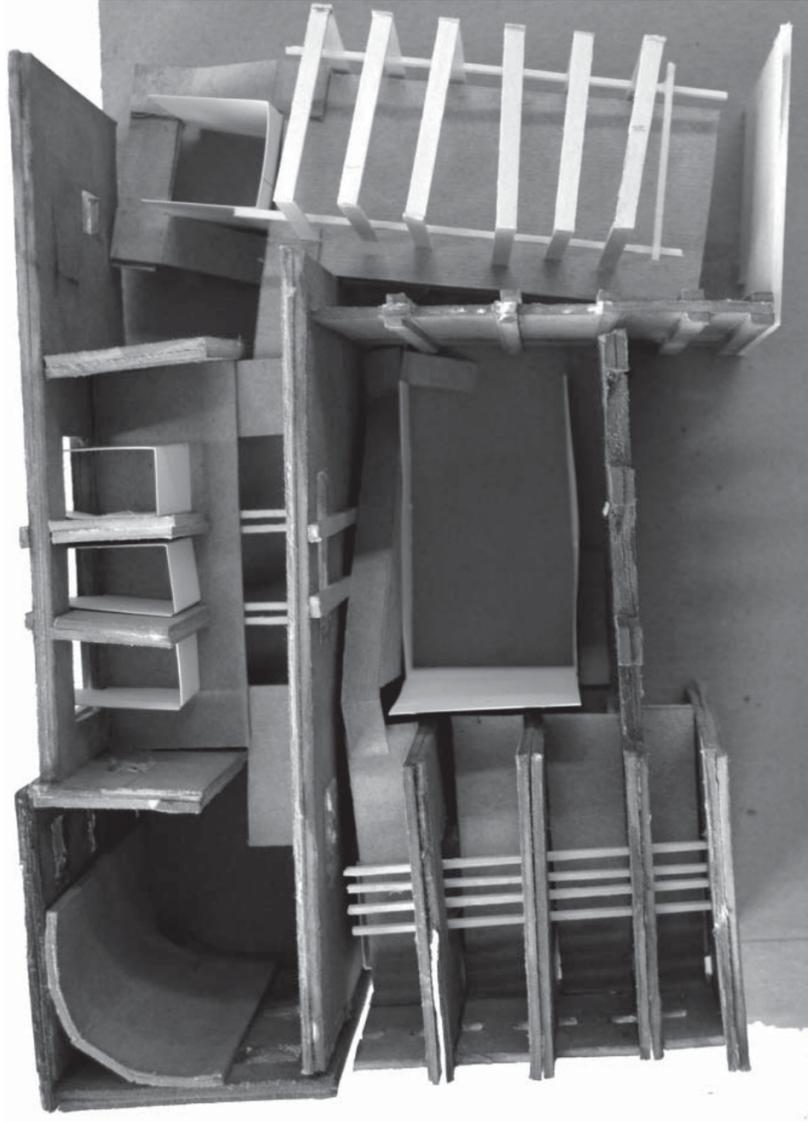
Building

gift  
present  
presentational  
re presentational  
representation of layered  
presents toward  
returns  
recollection

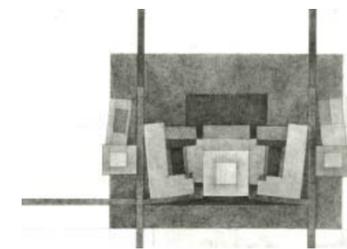
A recollection and  
presentation of  
presents

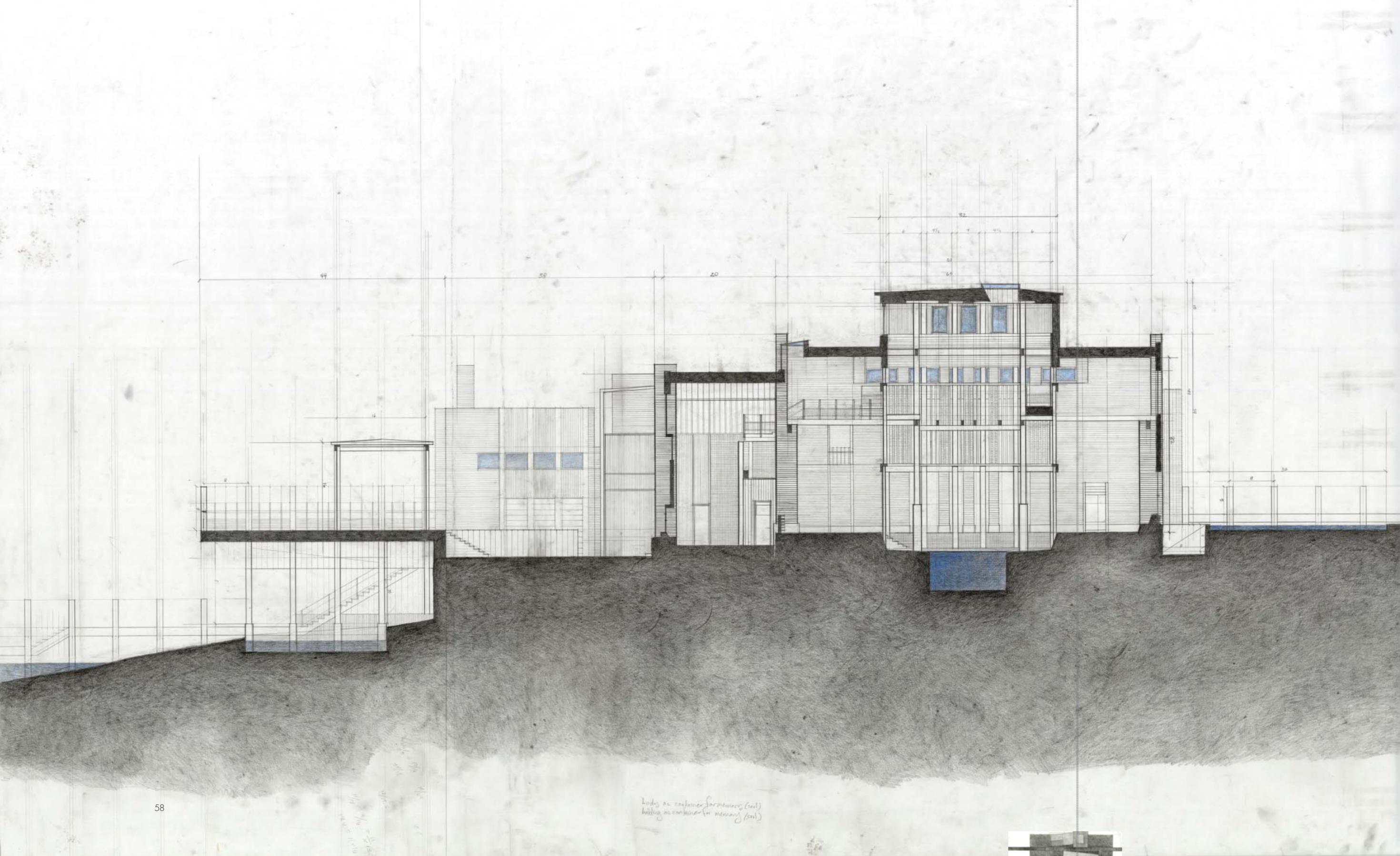


Sketch of courtyard open to the sky



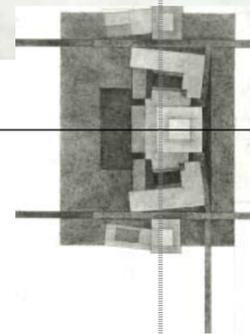
walls keep the world out, and hold an intensification of the world within



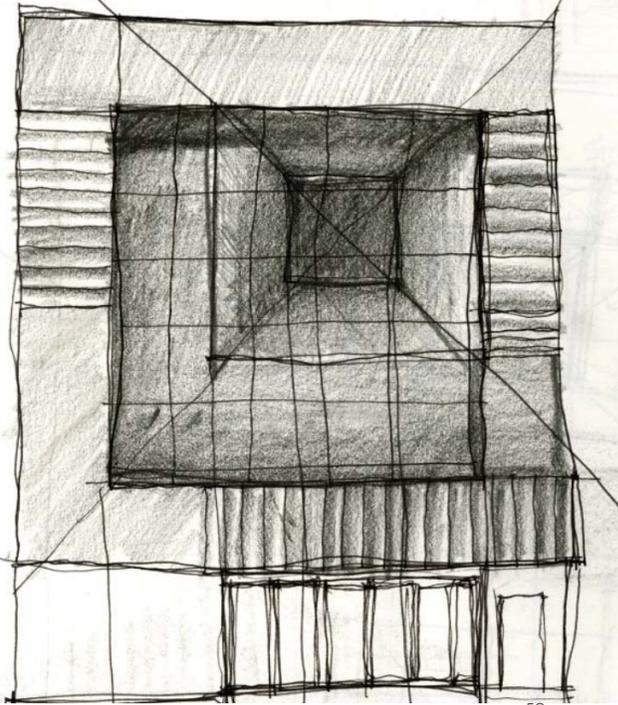


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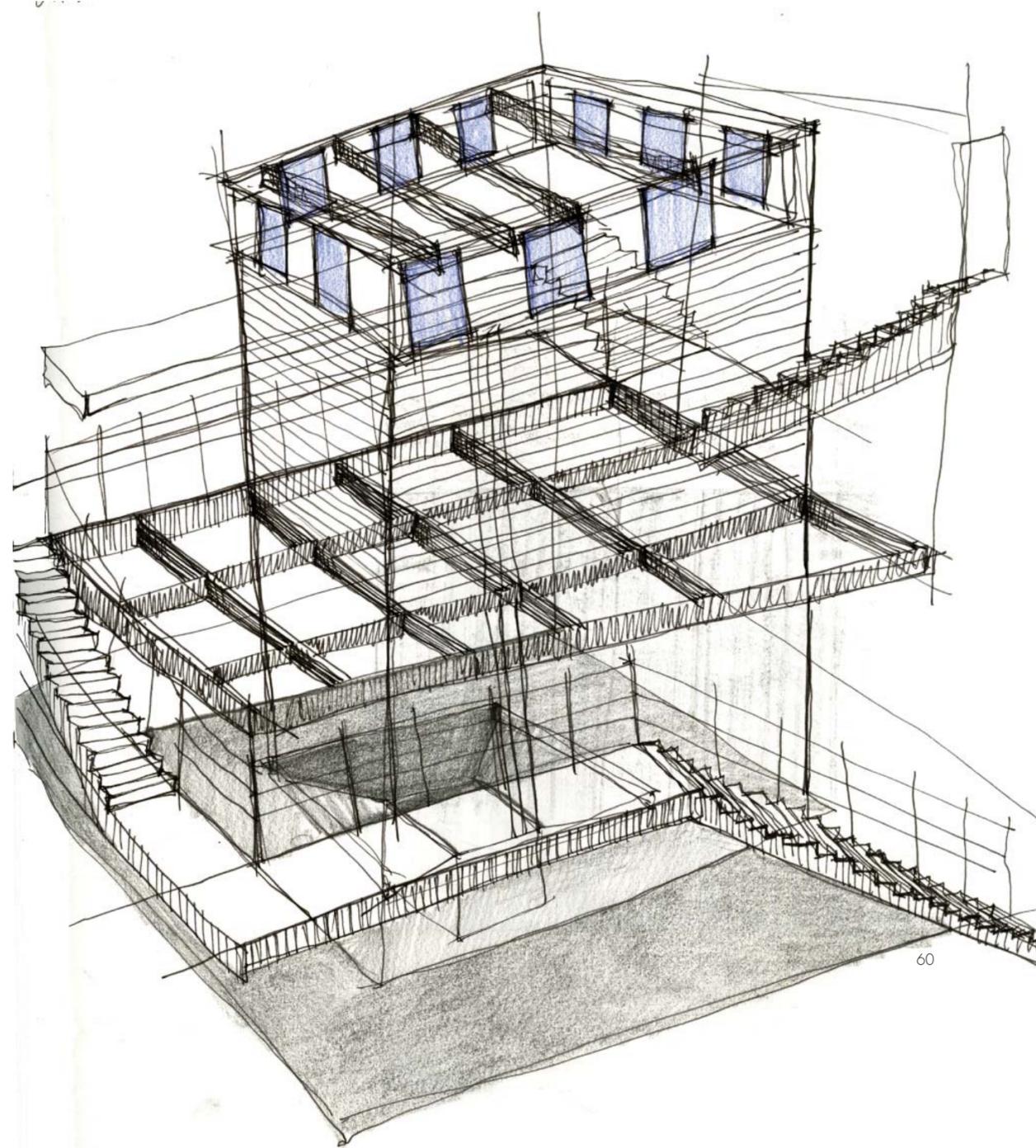
Lobby as container for meetings (cut)  
kitchen as container for meetings (cut)



Presence of a Room

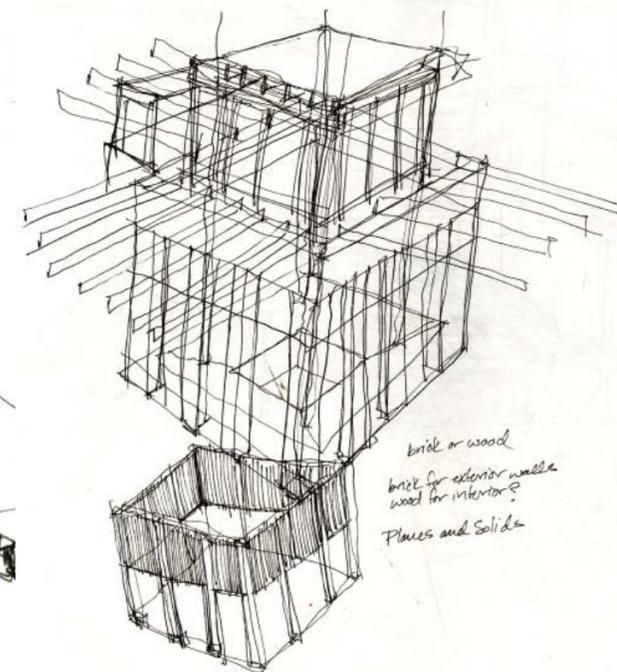


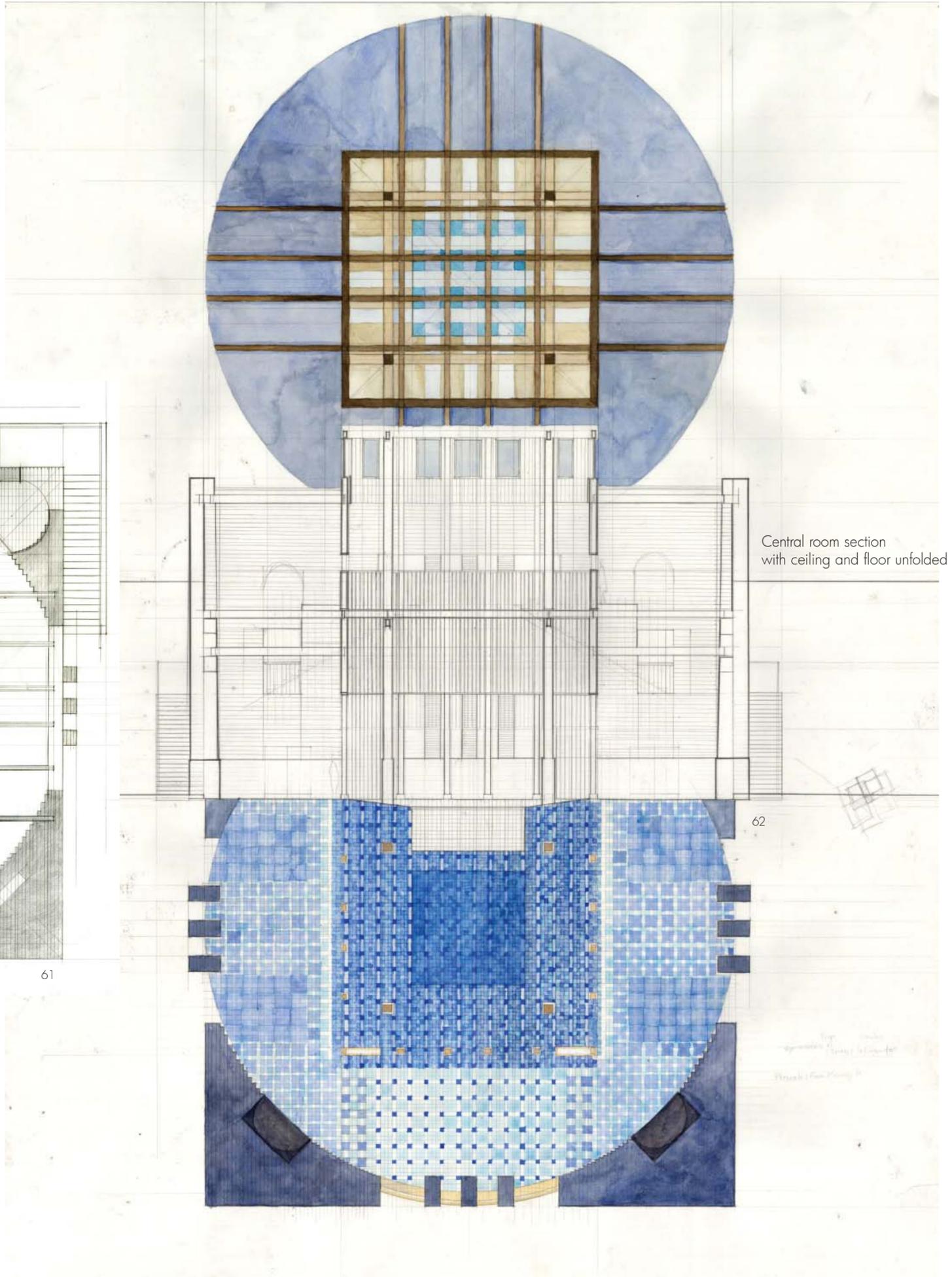
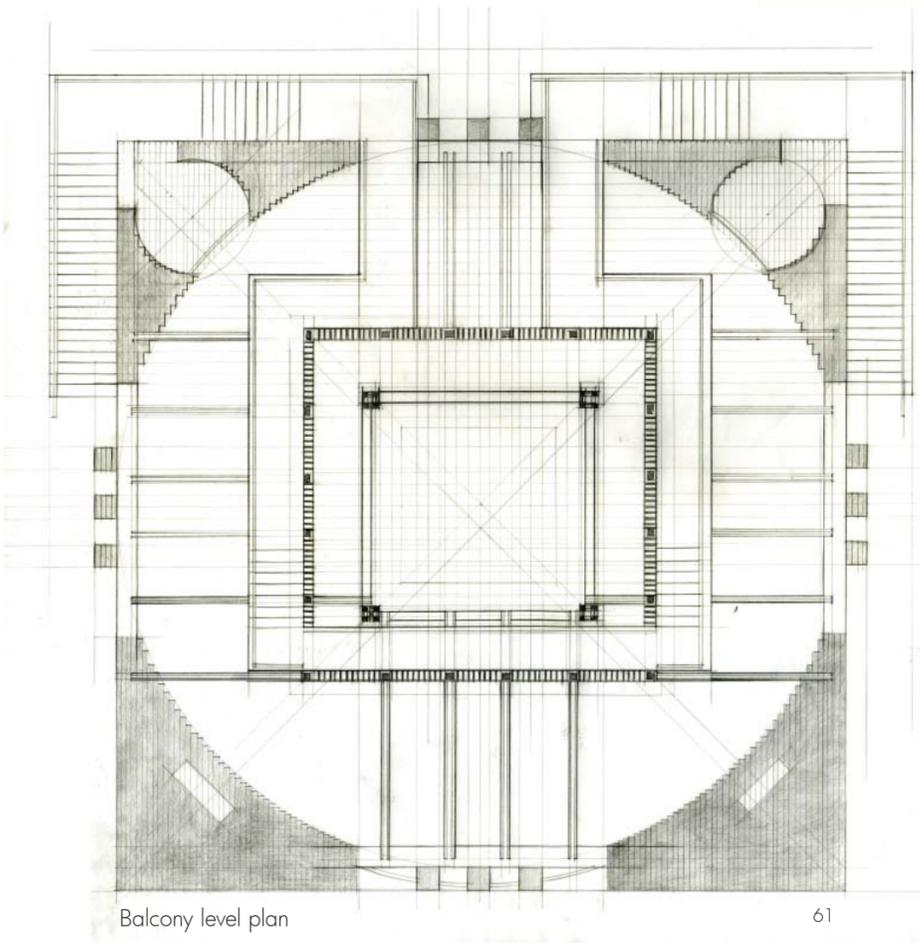
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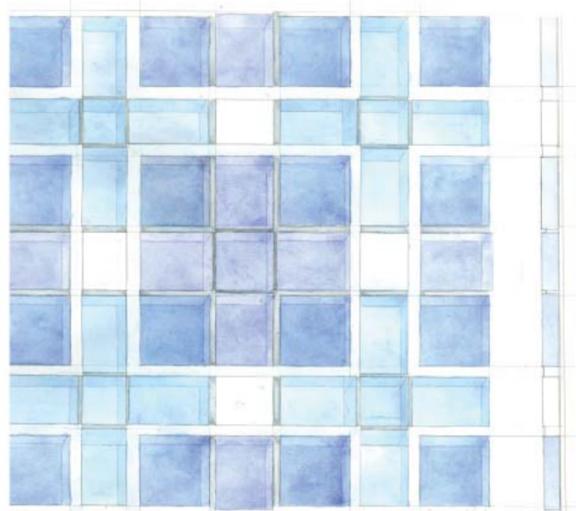
### A Basket and a Room

"Precision and fine craftsmanship are the benchmarks of the Nantucket Basket. Reminiscent of the historic Lightship Baskets made by sailors during long sea voyages, this lovely basket has a wooden base, a sturdy wooden handle, and is tightly woven to hold even the most fleeting memories of a summer afternoon on the island."  
(Nantucket Basket)



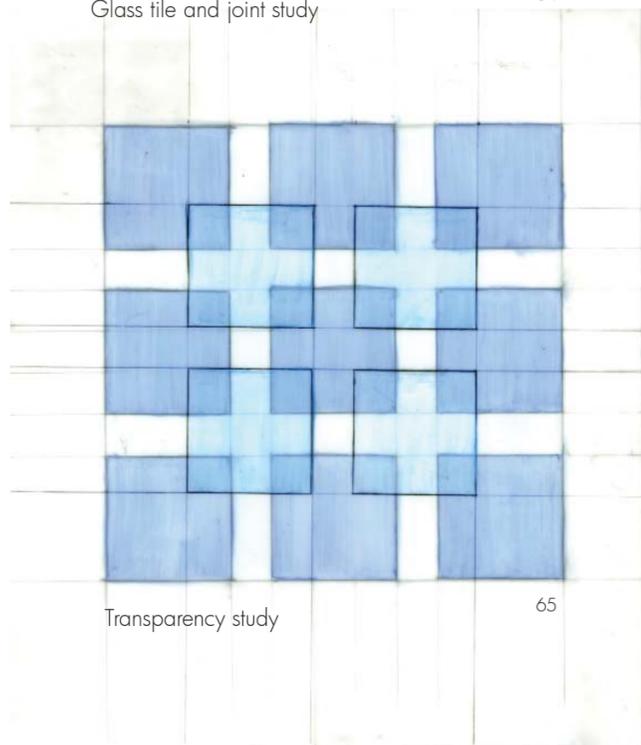






Glass tile and joint study

64

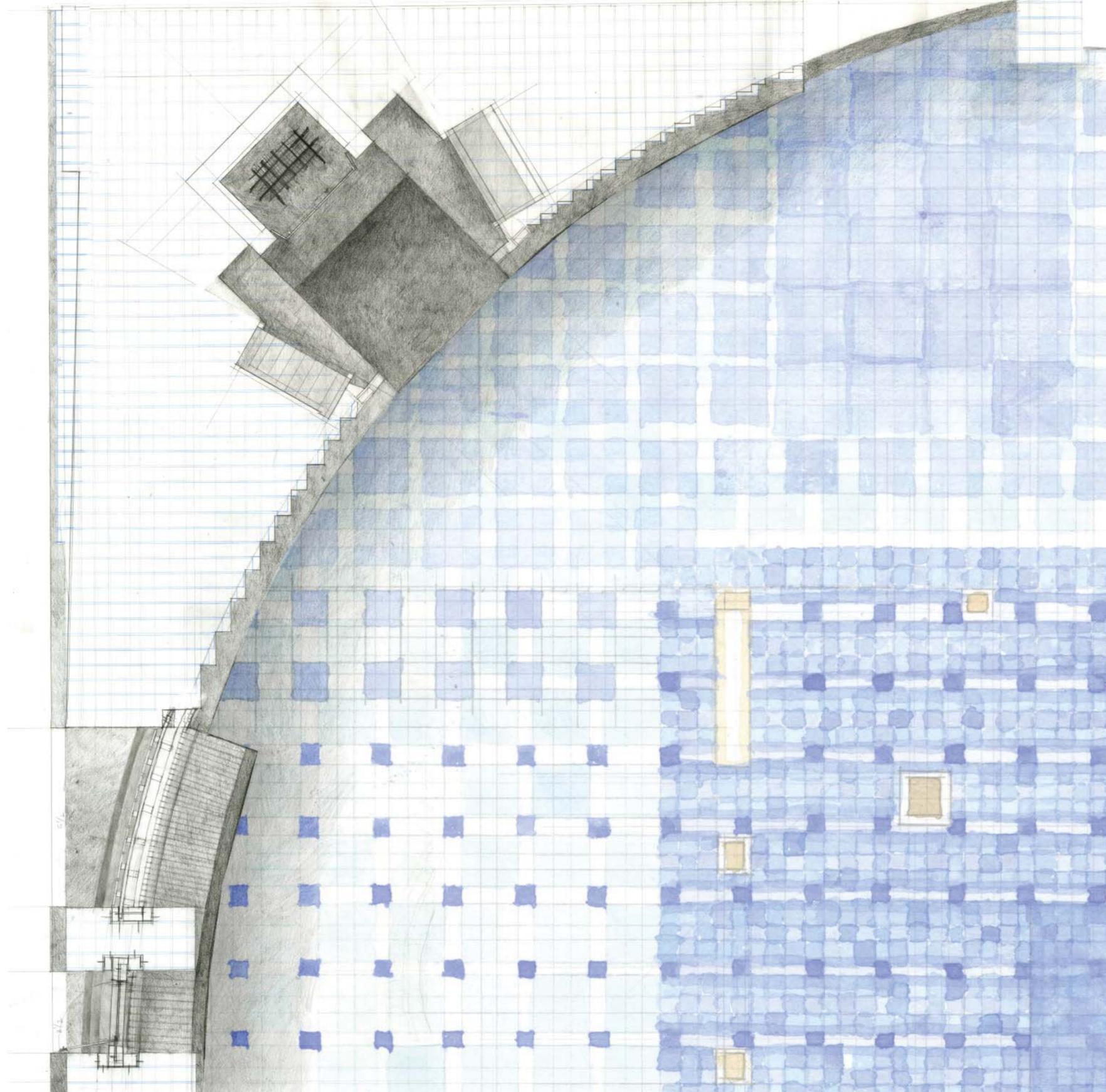


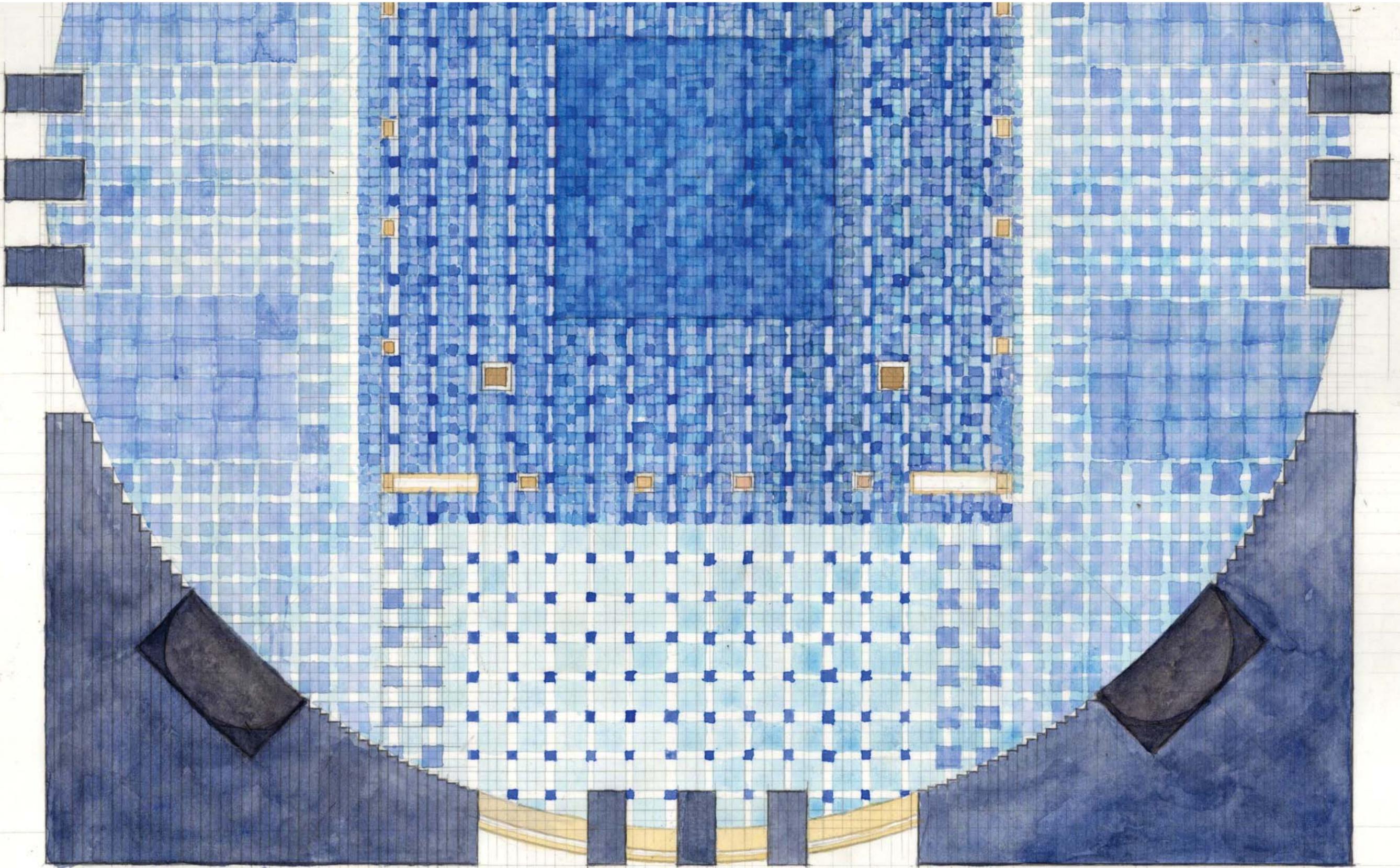
Transparency study

65

Plan of central room with floor and fireplace alcove

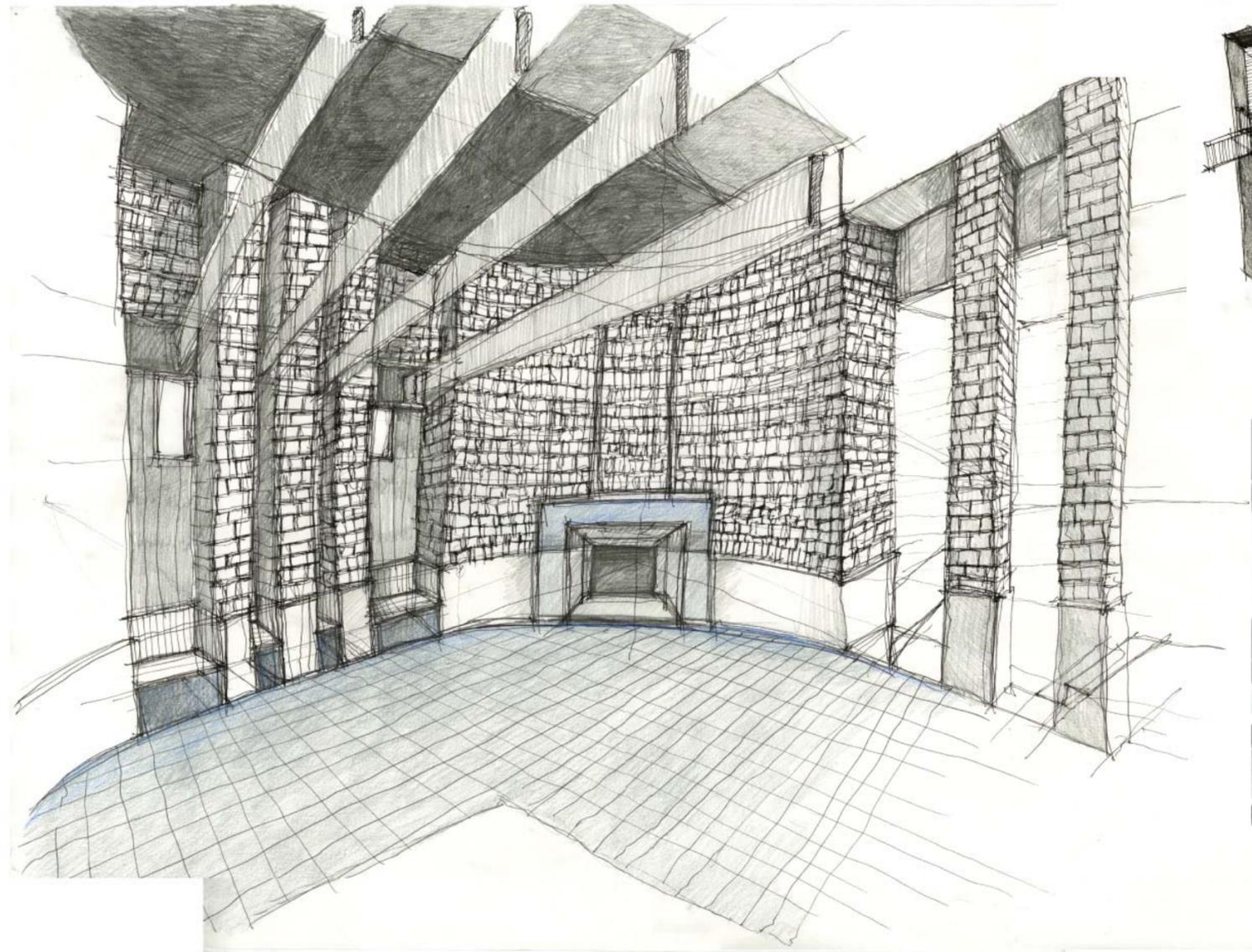
66



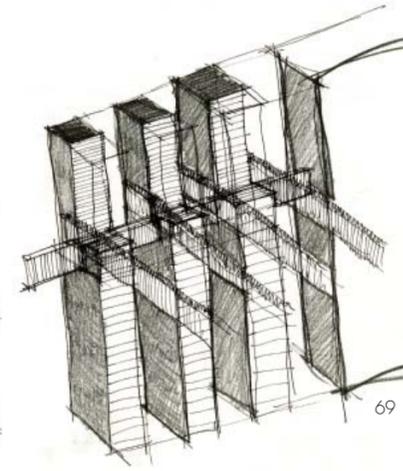


Textural tile pattern of the floor

Woven beams and a textured wall are born of crystalline blue.



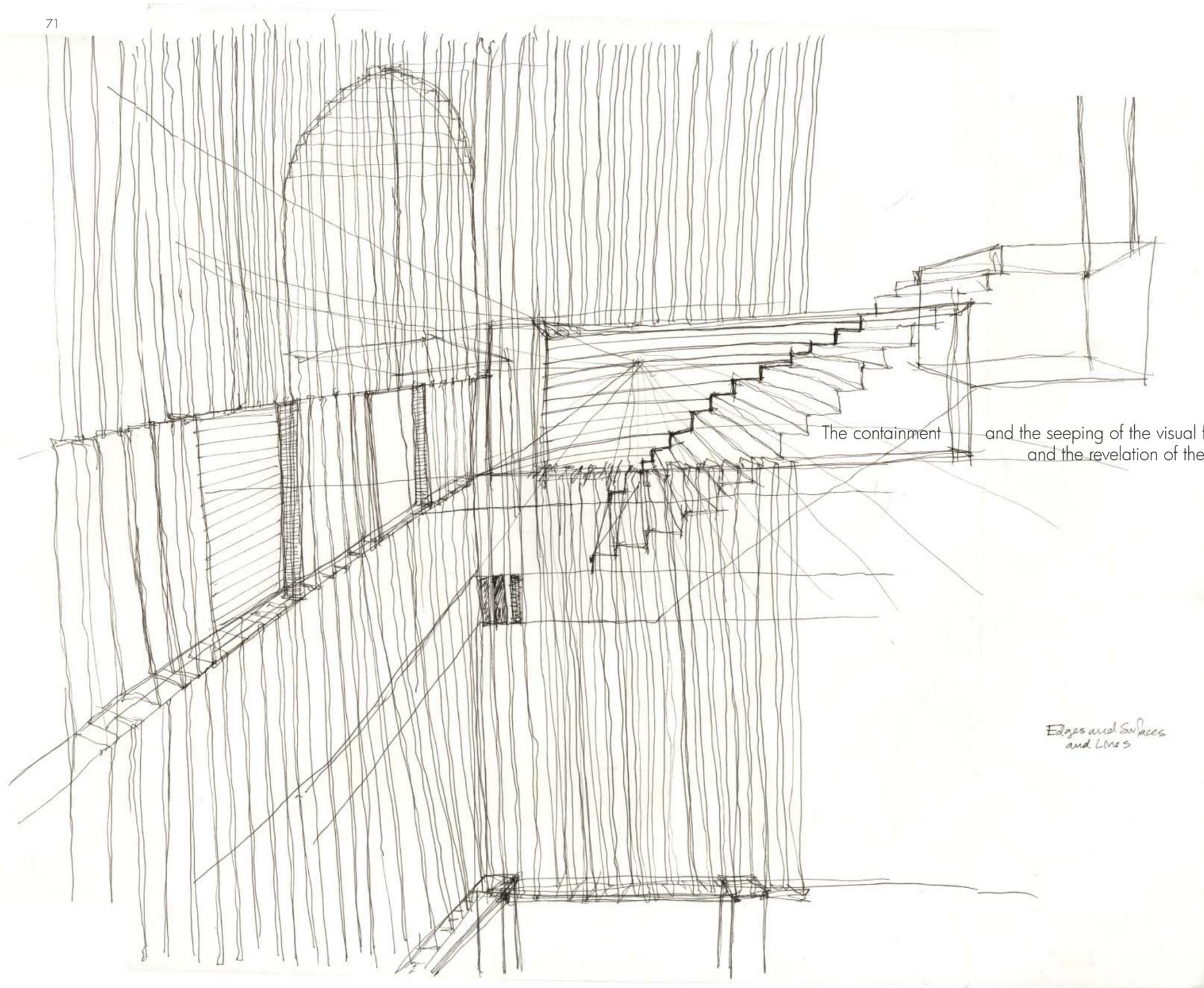
68



69



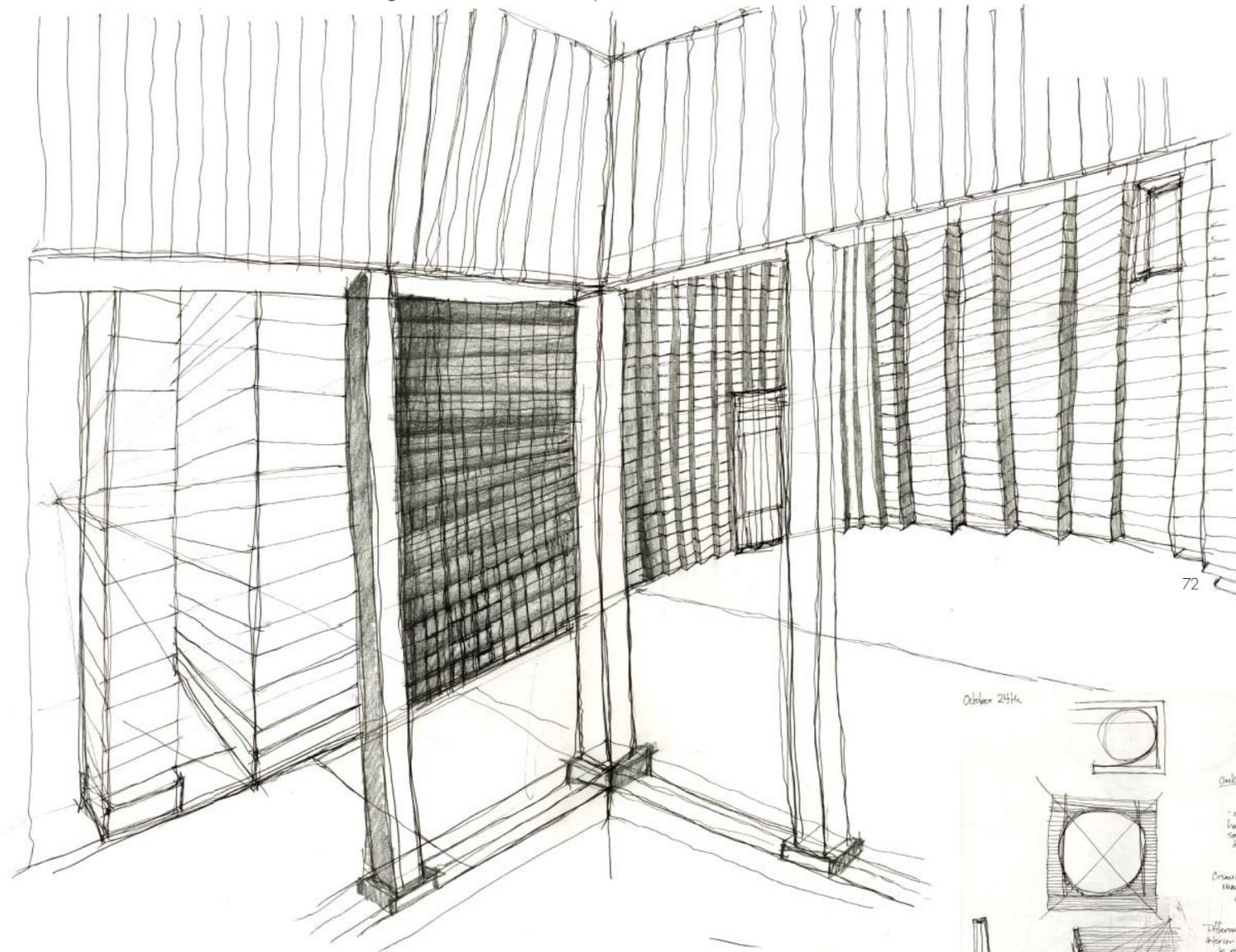
70



The containment and the seeping of the visual from a room within a room and the revelation of the stair.

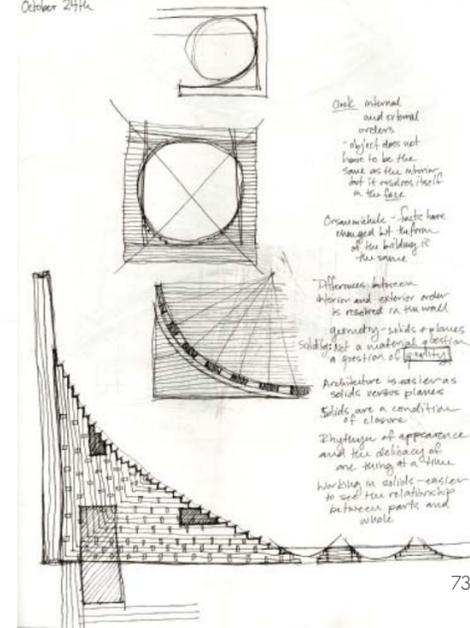
Edges and Surfaces  
and Lines

The interior surface of the wall is agitated, turbulent, and porous.

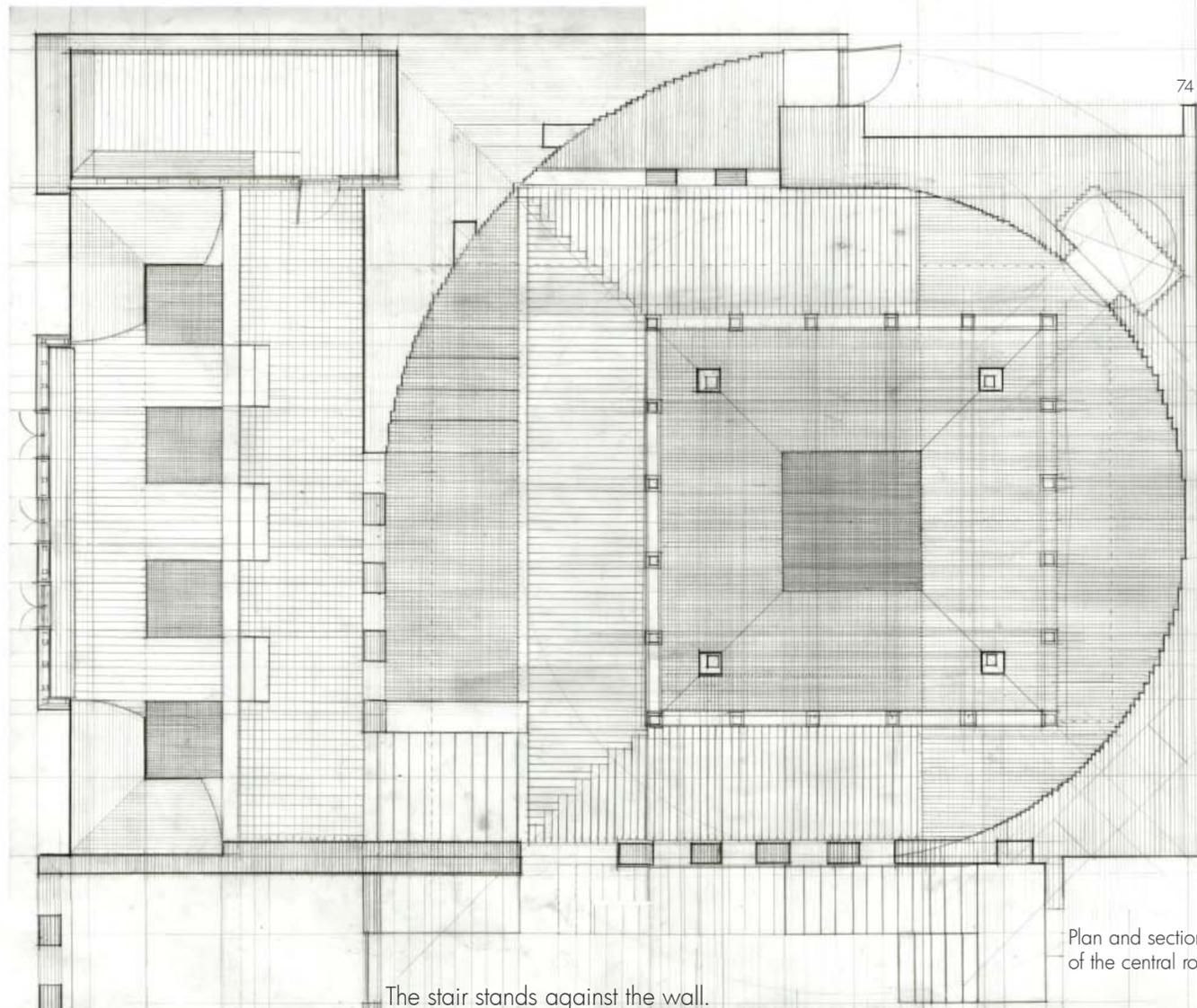


72

October 24/16



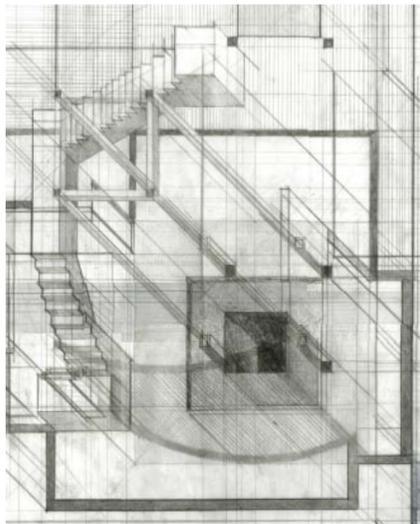
73



The stair stands against the wall.

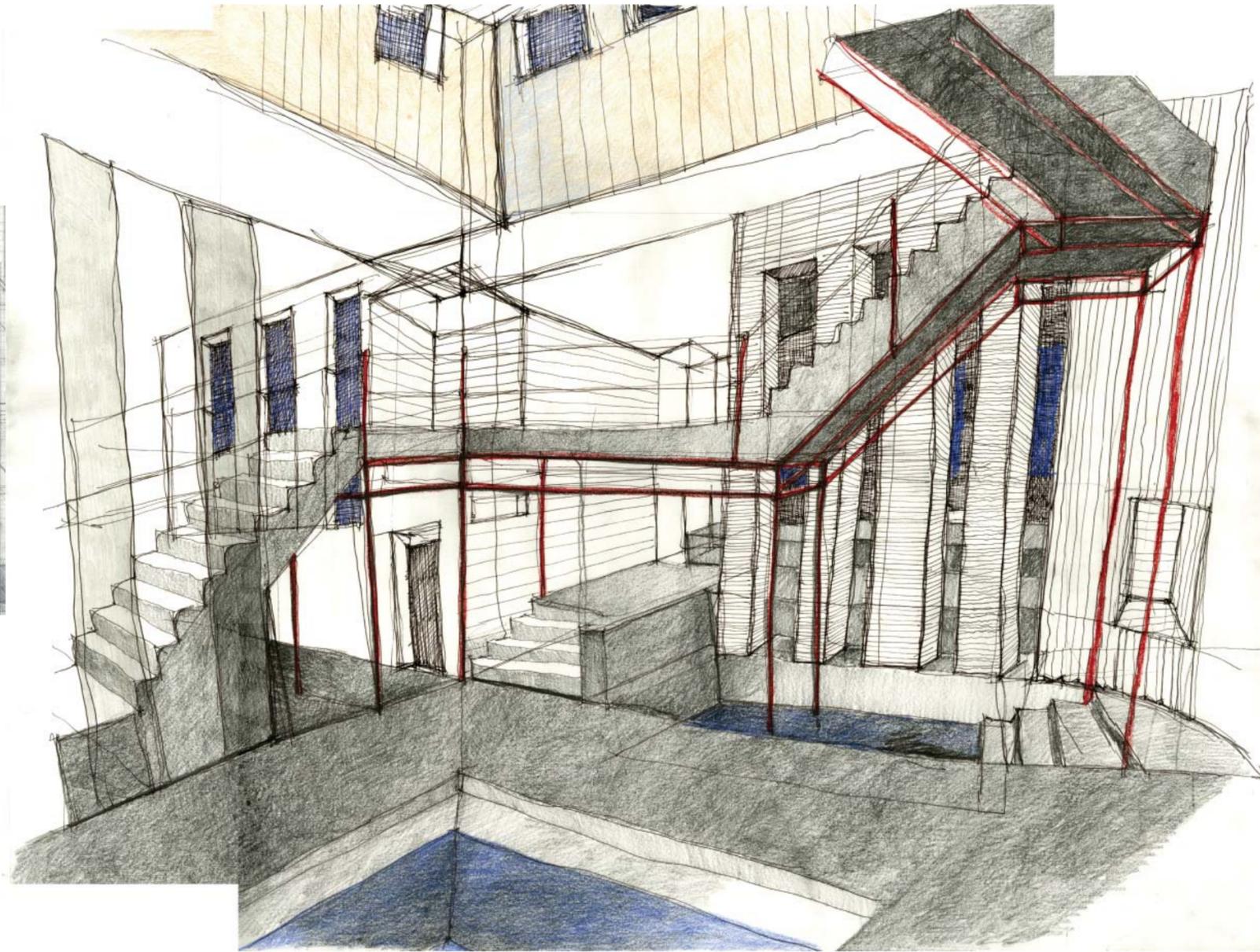
Plan and section elevation of the central room



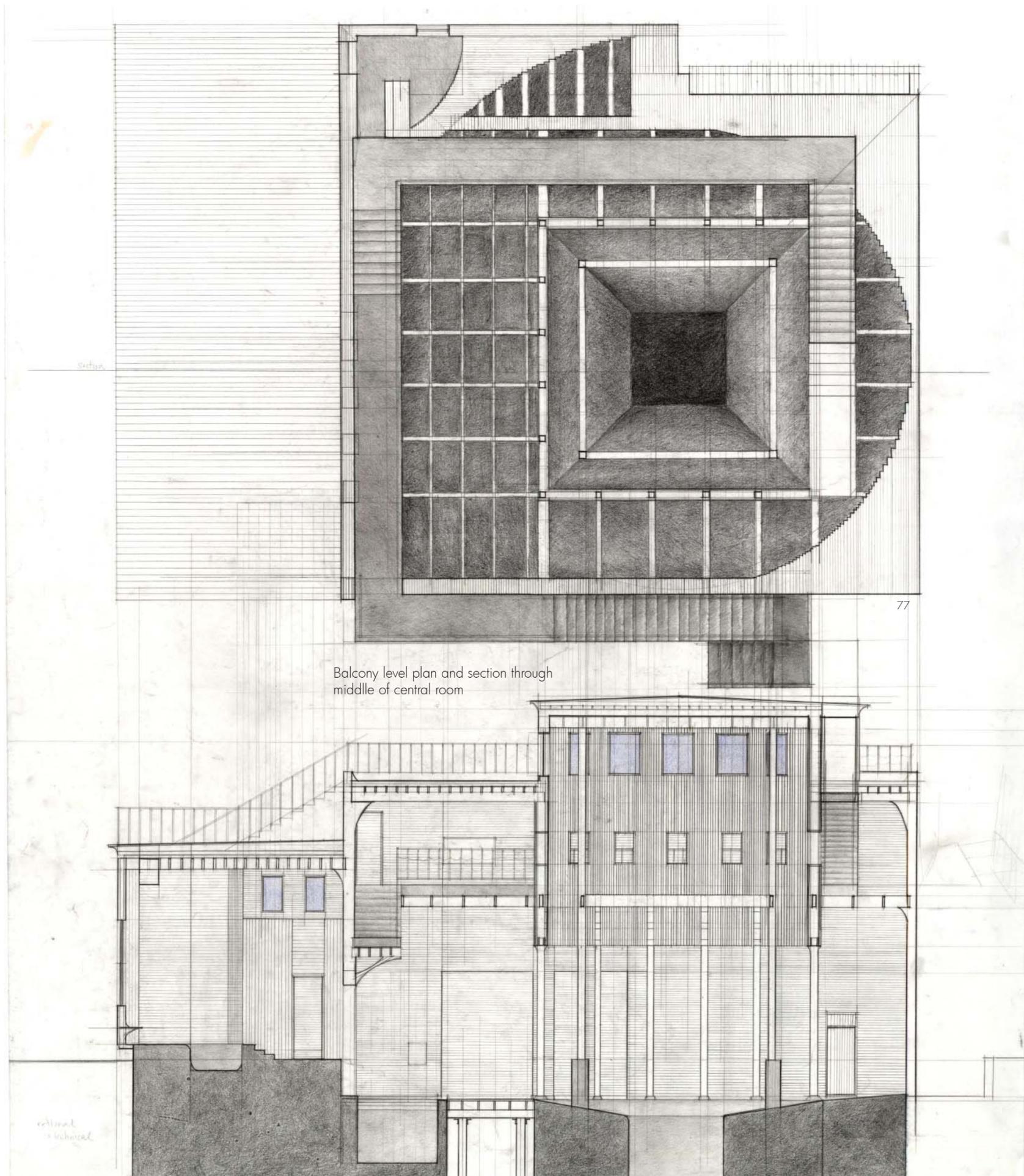


75

Among the play of verticals and horizontals, the stair ascends.



76



Section

77

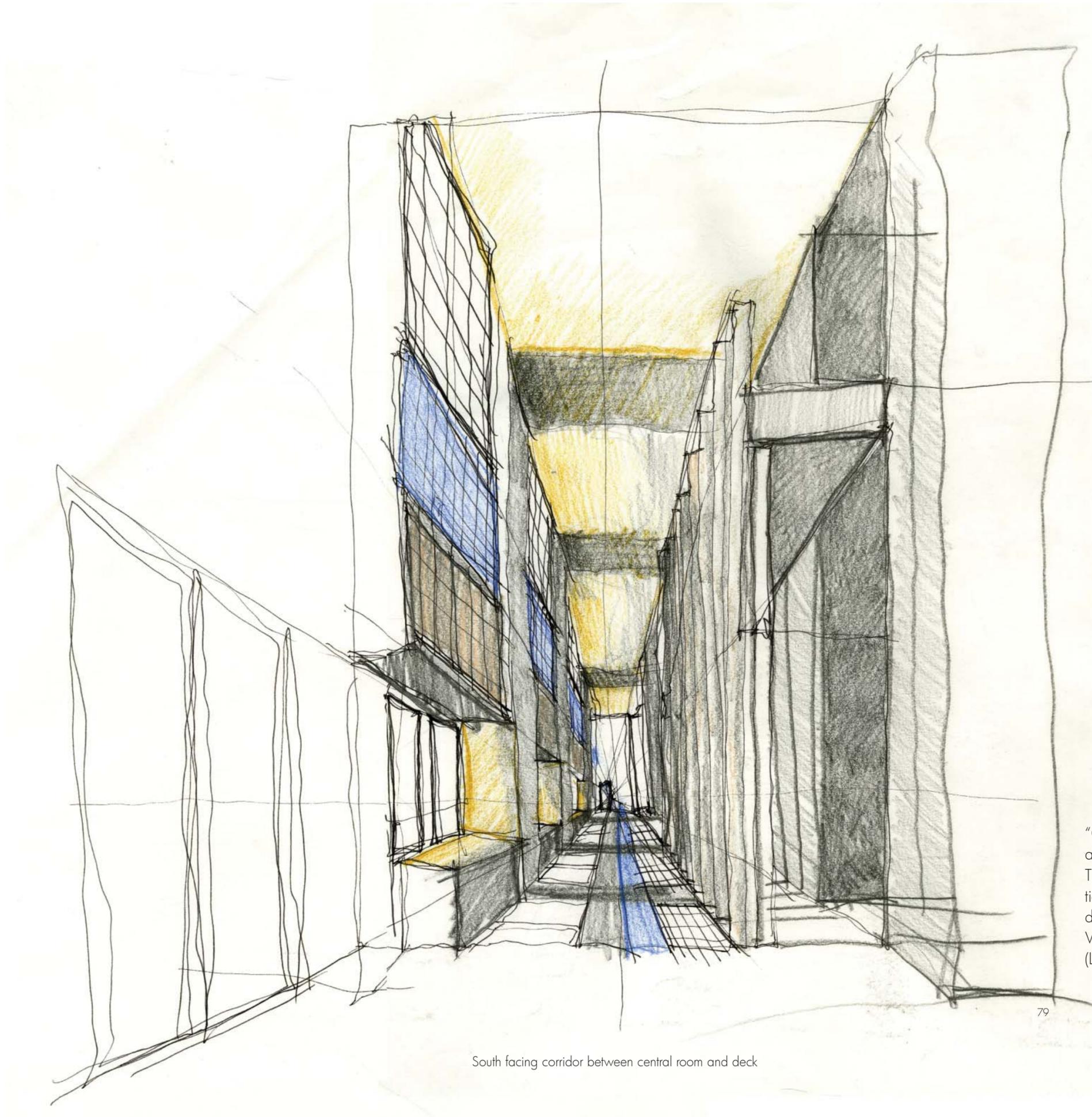
Balcony level plan and section through middle of central room

retinal  
technical

## Resonance of Form and Color



78



"Color tones like musical tones, are of a much subtler nature. They produce much finer vibrations in the soul and have no designation in our language."  
Wassily Kandinsky  
(Life of Kandinsky 90)

South facing corridor between central room and deck

79

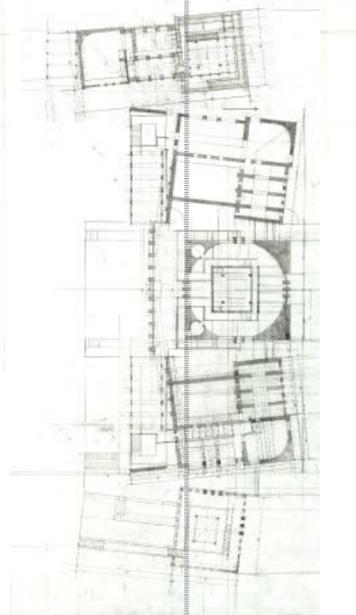


East elevation

80

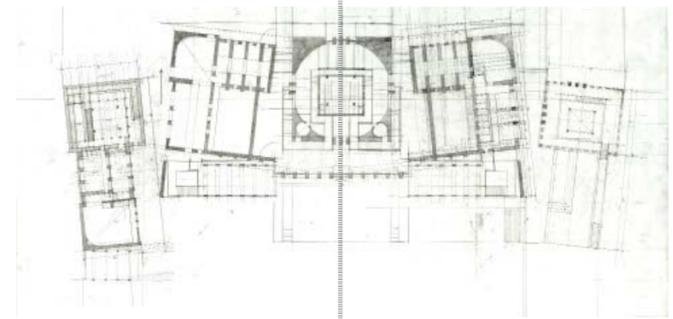
The faces, surfaces, and textures of the project give it a presence and character. They play with depth and flatness and rise, forming edges to meet the sky.

Opportunities to confront, look through, or move past vertical surfaces define the faces as either reflective and frontal masks, or welcoming portals into rooms.





South elevation



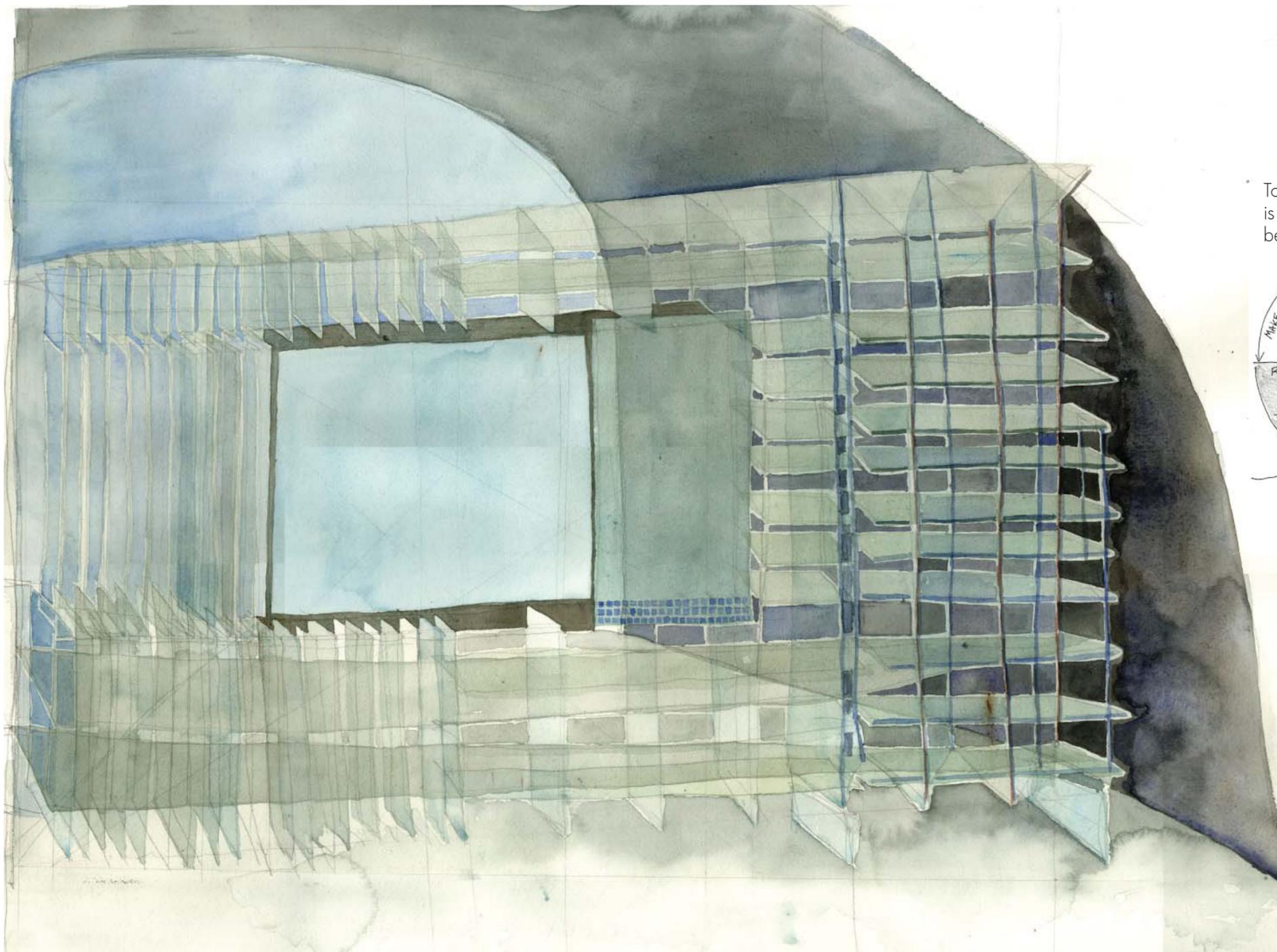




Looking back  
The building against the sky

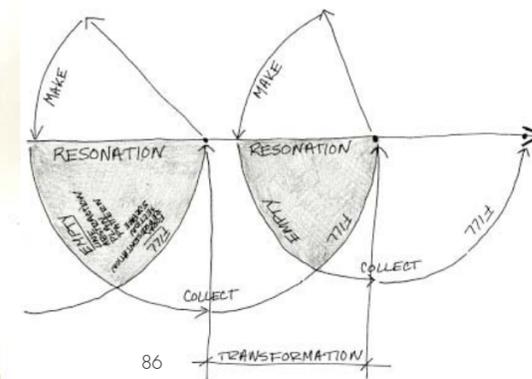


Looking out  
Essential and primal qualities of a  
shadowy forest on the edge of water



85

To find an end  
is to return, to reflect upon, and to continue  
beginning.



## APPENDICES

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All images were made by the author.

### A. Works Cited

Life of Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of On the Spiritual in Art. Ed. John Bowlit and Rose-Carol Washton Long. Trans. John Bowlit. Oriental Research Partners: Newtonville MA, 1980. Print.

Melville, Herman. Moby-Dick or, The Whale. Penguin: New York, 1988. Print.

"Nantucket Basket." Hancock Baskets. Printed tag.

Slutzky, Robert. "Aqueous Humor." Oppositions Winter/Spring 1980: 27-51. Print.

Stevens, Wallace. The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens. Vintage: New York, 1990. Print.

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- 4 Study in blue, watercolor on paper, 9x11
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- 44 A bodily imagining of the site, pen and pencil on paper, 11x17
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- 46 Exaggeration and articulation of the elements of memory, pen and pencil on vellum, 12x18
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- 71 Possibilities of a room 3, pen on paper, 18x24
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- 86 Diagram of beginning, pen and pencil on paper, 8.5x11
- 87 A thesis desk, digital photograph
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- 90 Toward open courtyard from stair hall, digital photograph of early model
- 91 Public bath of the central room, digital photograph of later model
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- 100 Section view of central room and South corridor, digital photograph of later model
- 101 Sketch of the Norvell-Otey House in Lynchburg, VA, pen on paper, 11x17
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### C. Images

Model Photographs



North-East corner of women's building

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Left pathway toward the lake  
Toward open courtyard from stair hall

90



Model Photographs

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Public bath of the central room

92



Layers of the central room

93



Outdoor porch of the private quarters meets the sky

Model Photographs



Corridor between South facade and central room 94



95



96

Central room



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Model Photographs



Stair hall adjacent to central room

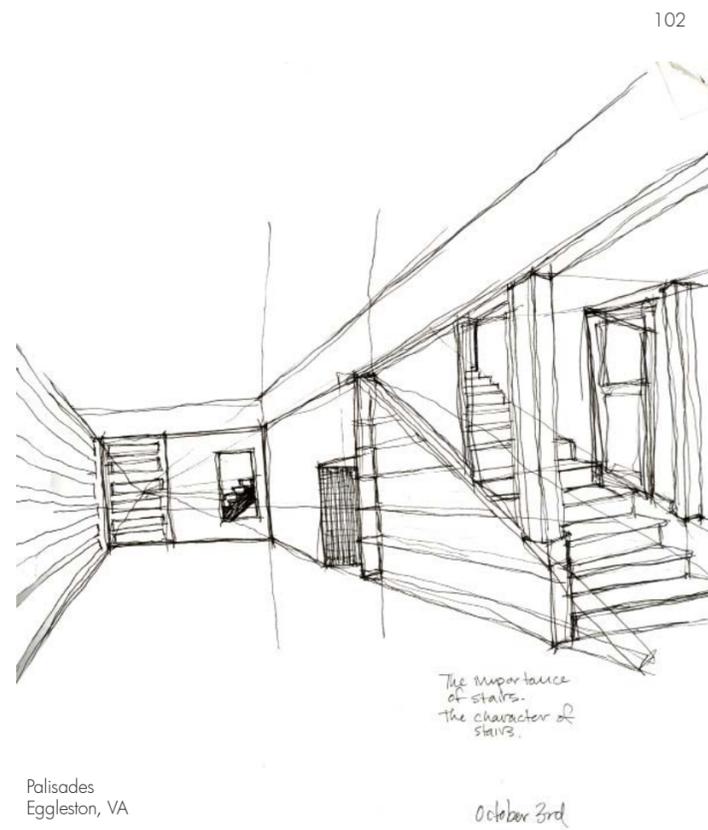
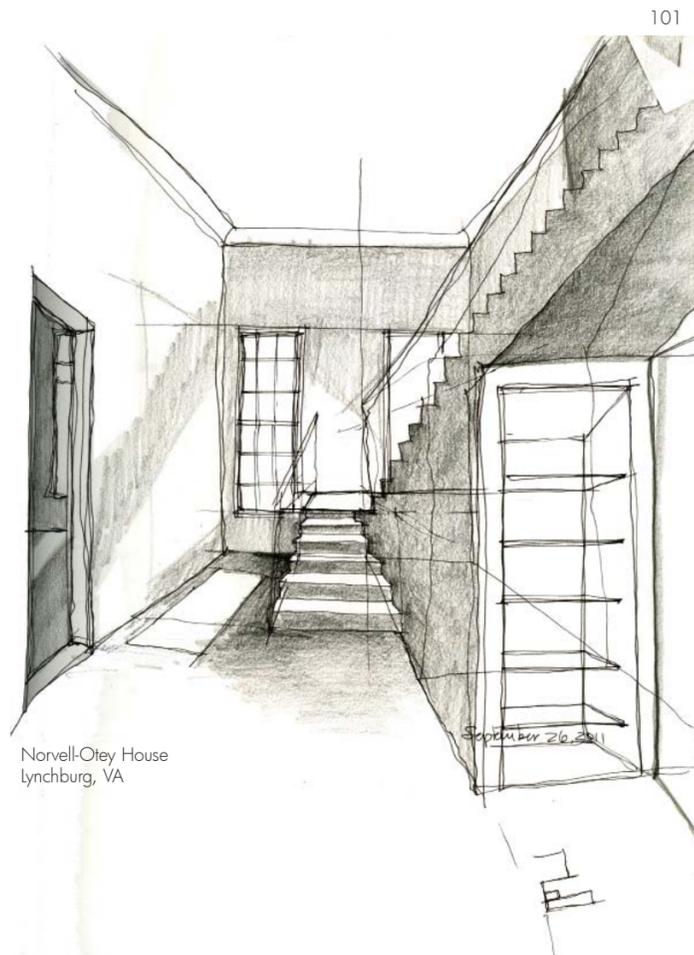


Vertical expansion of central room



Section view of central room and South corridor

Stairs



Thoughts About Palladio and Baths

Programming of architectural sequences

The organization of Roman baths: a sequence of monumental spaces juxtaposed along axis of symmetry

The theatrical spatial complexity of Roman baths offered an indoor miniaturized city.

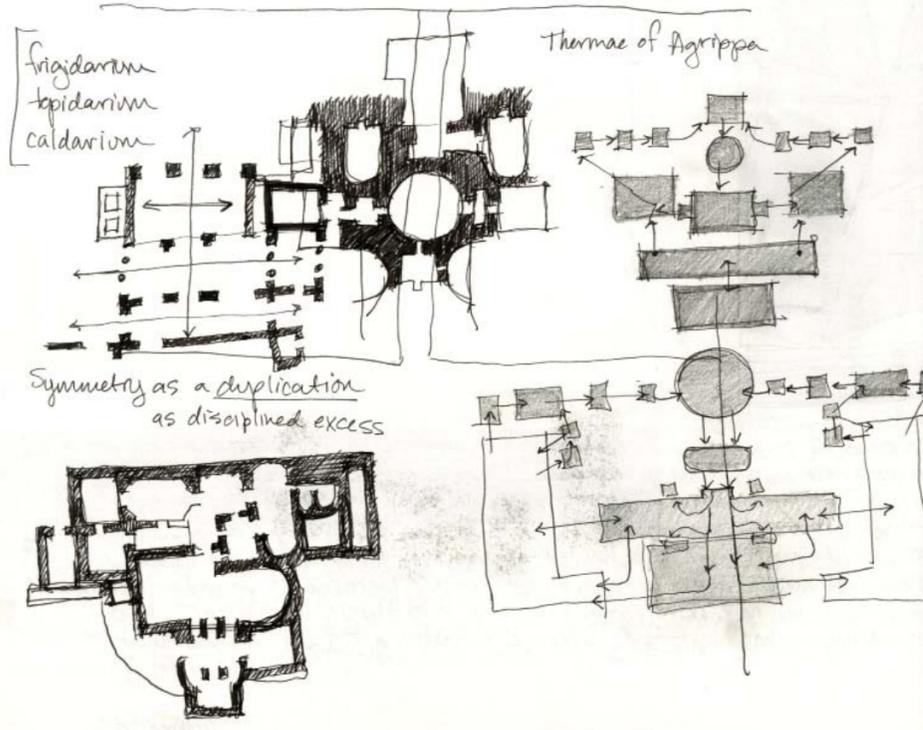
Palladio's conflation of typologies

The object/villa is a theatrical frame for the garden

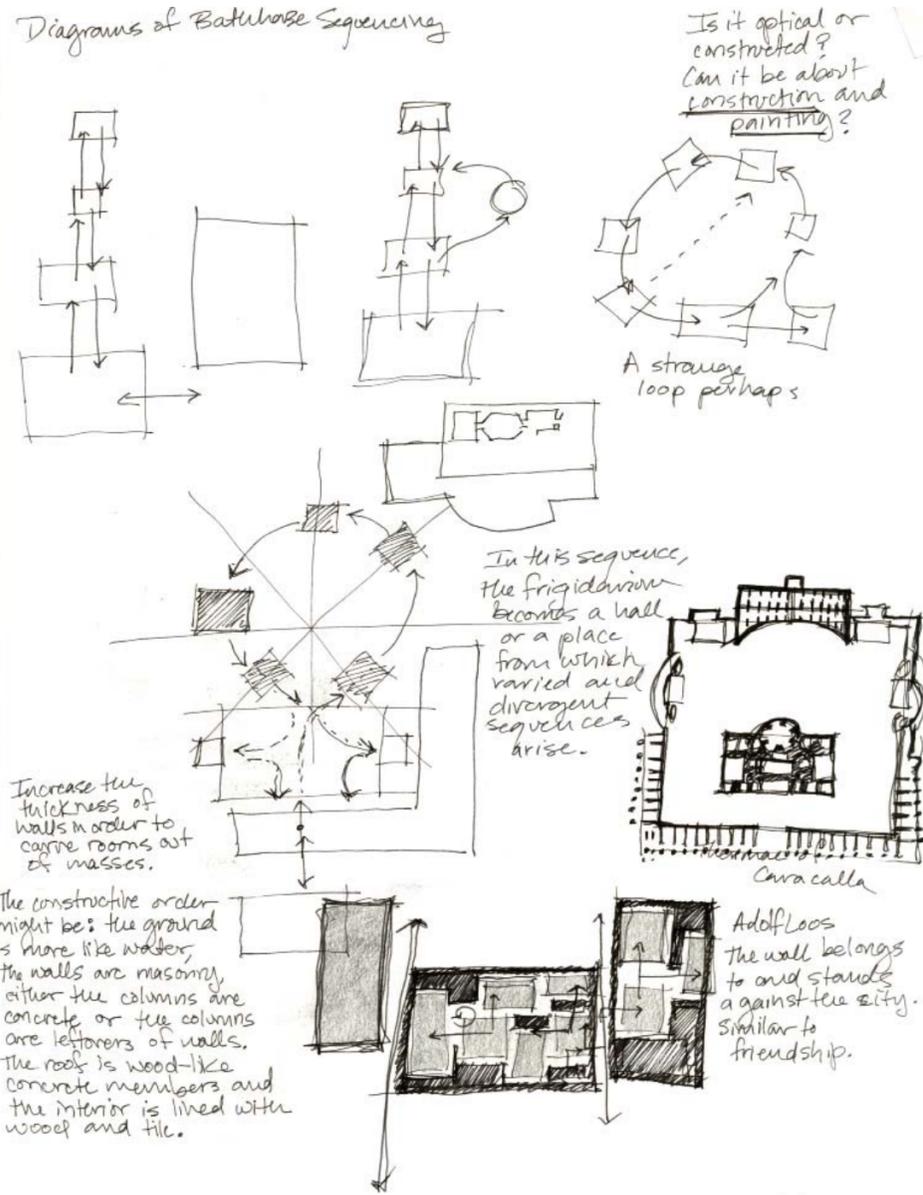
To Palladio the bath house uniquely grouped multiple programs lending it an intricacy through its sequence of different spaces.

Intricacy, Sequence, Difference

Isak Berlin  
The Hedgehog + the Fox



Diagrams of Bathhouse Sequencing



Architectura Navalis Mercatoria

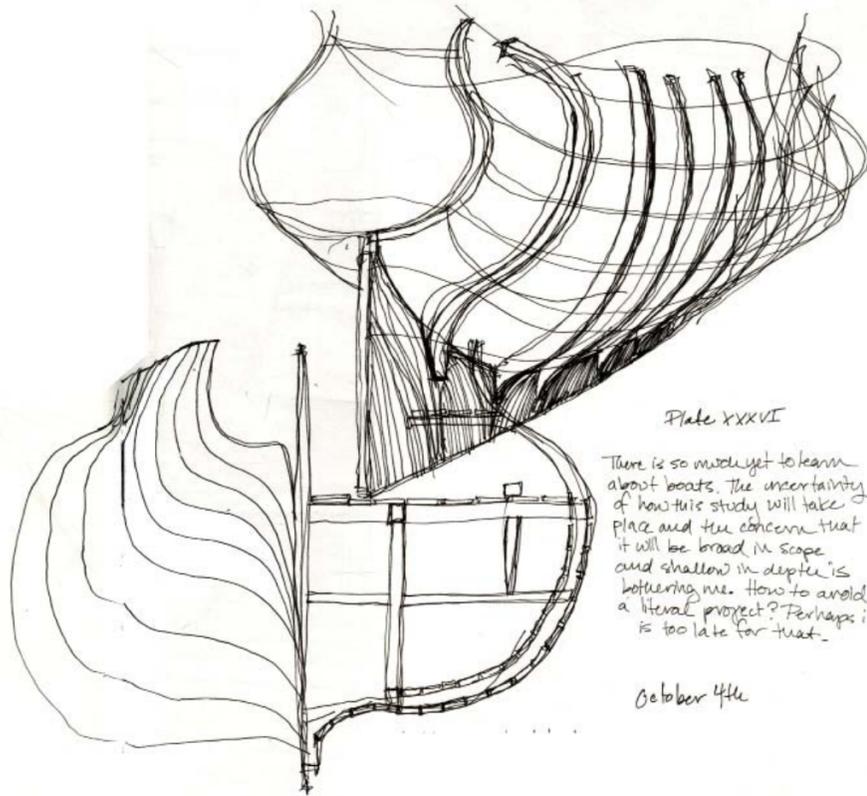


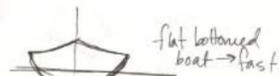
Plate XXXVI

There is so much yet to learn about boats. The uncertainty of how this study will take place and the concern that it will be broad in scope and shallow in depth is bothering me. How to avoid a literal project? Perhaps it is too late for that.

October 4th

November 29th

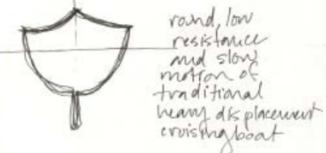
Hull forms



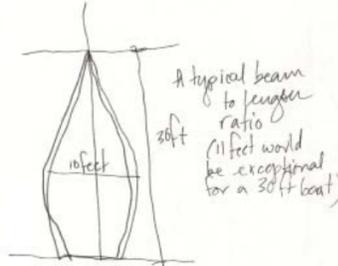
flat bottomed boat → fast



wedge or v-shaped like a heavy keel boat

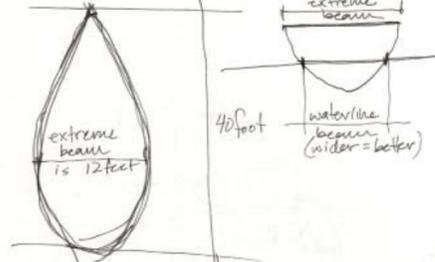


round, low resistance and slow motion of traditional heavy displacement cruising boat



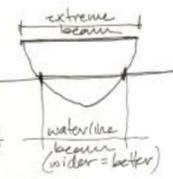
A typical beam to length ratio (11 feet would be exceptional for a 30 ft boat)

A racer-cruiser

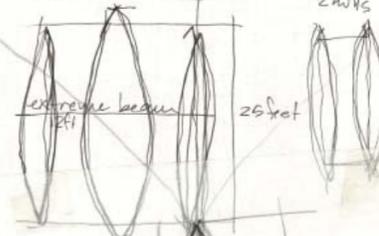


extreme beam is 12 feet

40 foot

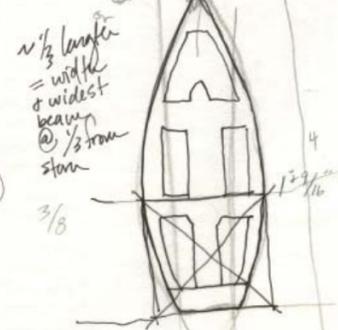


Catamaran - 3 hulls



extreme beam 25 feet

2 hulls



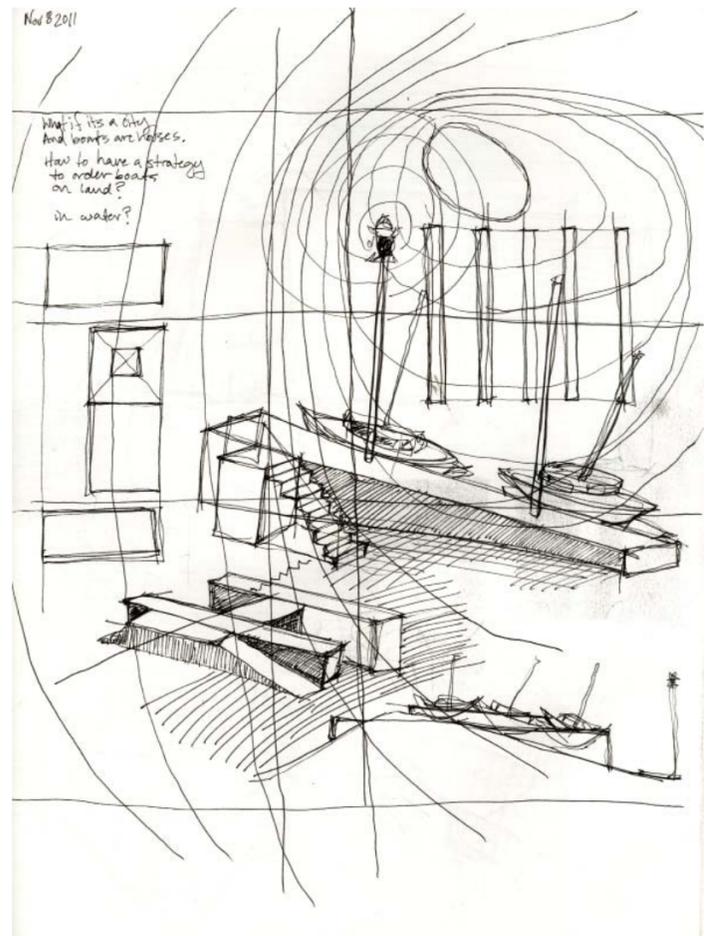
1/3 length = width of widest beam @ 1/3 from stern

3/8

4

1 2/3

Nov 8 2011



What if it's a city and boats are houses. How to have a strategy to order boats on land? in water?

Books

The Human Condition by Hannah Arendt  
 On the Soul and on Memory and Recollection - Aristotle  
 The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture - Pier Vittorio Aureli  
 Collected Fictions - Jorge Luis Borges  
 The History of Colors - Manlio Brusatin  
 The baths of the Romans explained and illustrated - Palladio  
 Alice in Wonderland - Lewis Carroll  
 Architectura Navalis Mercatoria - Fredrik Henrik af Chapman  
 Historic Springs of the Virginias: A Pictorial History - Stan Cohen  
 The Forge and the Crucible - Mircea Eliade  
 Sverre Fehn on the Thought of Construction - Per Olaf Fjeld  
 Michel de Klerk, 1884-1923: An Architect of the Amsterdam School - Suzanne Frank  
 Interaction of Color - Josef Albers  
 On Weaving - Anni Albers  
 Monsters of Architecture - Marco Frascari  
 On Being Blue - William Grass  
 Raimond Abraham, Unbuilt - Brigitte Groihofer  
 Unprecedented Realism - K. Michael Hays  
 Not Architecture But Evidence that It Exists - Brooke Hodge  
 Concerning the Spiritual in Art - Kandinsky  
 Between Silence and Light: Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn - John Lipsett  
 The Giver - Lois Lowry  
 Gathering Blue - Lois Lowry  
 Material Stone: Construction and Technologies for Contemporary Architecture - Christoph Markauer  
 The World's Best Sailboats - Florence Maie  
 Moby Dick - Herman Melville  
 A Summer's Day - Joel Meyerowitz  
 Zeto: Augusto Romano Borelli, Paola Gregnaro, Due Chiese - Margherita Petronzani  
 Raumplan Versus Plan Libre: Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier - Max Risselada  
 The Architecture of the City - Aldo Rossi  
 The Four Elements of Architecture - Gottfried Semper  
 The Tempest - William Shakespeare  
 The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens - Wallace Stevens  
 In Praise of Shadows - Jun'ichiro Tanizaki  
 Ten Books on Architecture - Vitruvius  
 A Blue Tale and other Stories - Marguerite Yourcenar

Essays and Articles

Aqueous Humor - Robert Slutzky  
 Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal - Colin Rowe  
 Replacement - W.B. Clark  
 Brecht's Concept of Gestus - Deirdra Graythorn  
 Facing and Spacing - David Leatherbarrow  
 The Tell-the-tale Detail - Marco Frascari

Things

Daughters of the Dust - a film by Julie Dash  
 Hammered Silver Water Pitcher - Carlo Scarpa  
 The Lace Maker - a painting by Johannes Vermeer  
 Melancholia - a print by Albrecht Durer



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**"The Man with the Blue Guitar"**  
**Wallace Stevens**

IX  
And the color, the overcast blue  
Of the air, in which the blue guitar  
Is a form described but difficult  
And I am merely a shadow hunched  
Above the arrowy, still strings,  
The maker of a thing yet to be made;  
The color like a thought that grows  
Out of a mood, the tragic robe  
Of the actor, half his gesture, half  
His speech, the dress of his meaning, silk  
Sodden with his melancholy words,  
The weather of his stage, himself.

(Stevens 169-170)