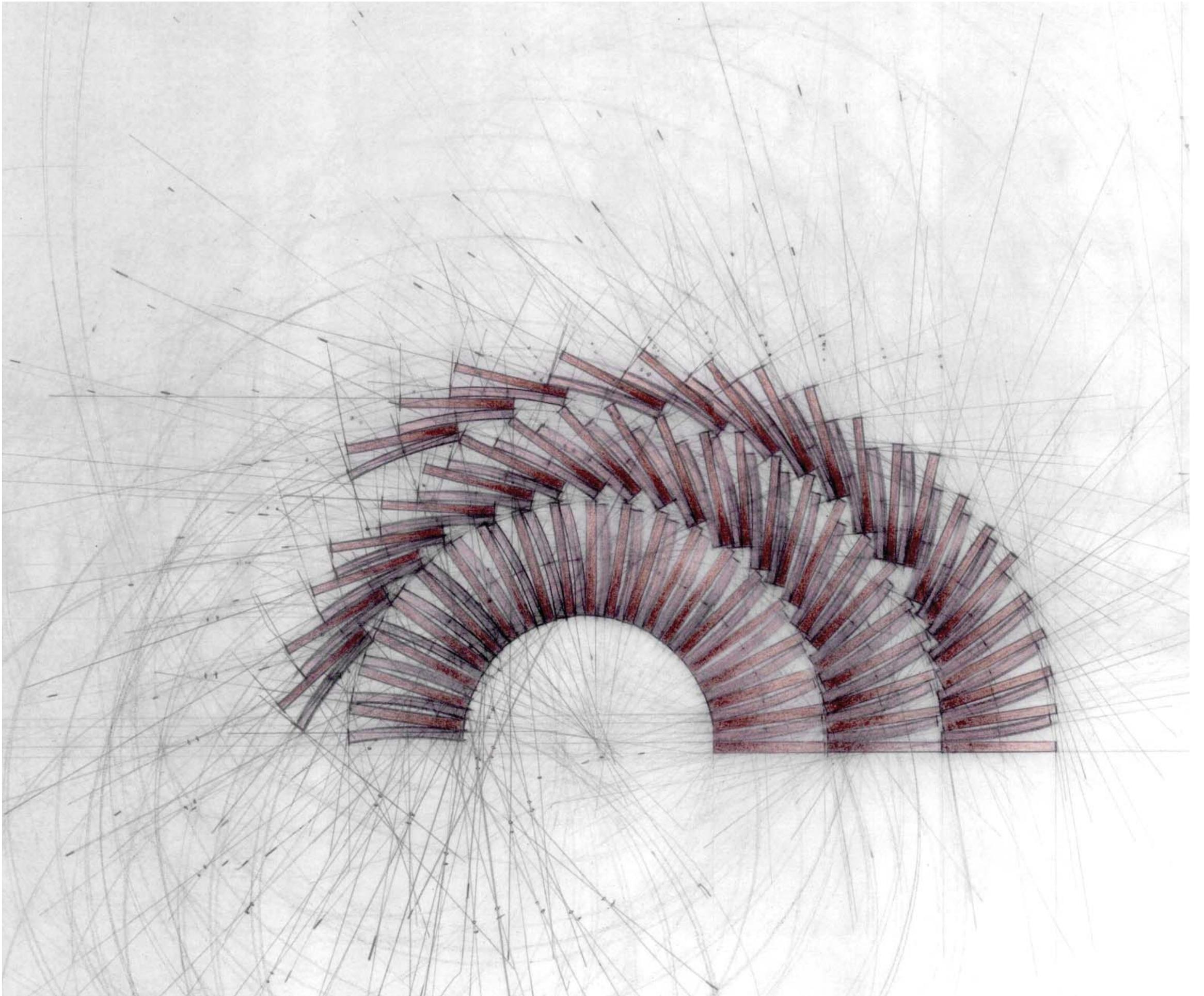


s t r a n g e m e a s u r e



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Aaron M. Horst

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute + State University in partial completion of the requirements for the degree Master's of Architecture.

Steven Thompson, Chair \_\_\_\_\_

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Blacksburg, Virginia  
August 30th, 2006

s t r a n g e m e a s u r e

Aaron M. Horst

To bring movement into architecture, that eluding fixity into that fixed. Beginning here, in paradox, a paradox recurrent, in the form of various oppositions—movement and stasis, the impulsive and the graphic (the graph),  
measure and disorder (or measured disorder).

The very form of an ‘opposition,’ and its subtext of mutual exclusion restated as an entwined tension, an impossible one-within-the-other, thought if not realized, oblique if not overt.

To work with flight, architecturally, with the movement of people and objects, departure and arrival, and, as architecture, with enclosure and disclosure. The experience of flight, specifically the boundlessness of one’s gaze when airborne paired with the aircraft’s insularity. To inhabit the infinitude of the sky within a protective vessel, moving through, and suspended within, space,  
extending the boundaries of the subject.

Each scale—the scale of expanse, and the human scale of the aircraft—opposite yet enmeshed, the aircraft physically, sensorially, framing the  
boundless.

Aside from scale, the earlier question of movement, transience, within this  
expanse.

Transience as flux, flux as that antithetical to architecture’s fixing in time,  
even as time is expressed.

A way to think while working—to ‘think’ expanse while working with enclosure,  
to ‘think’ the meander while outlining the static.

The struggle between impulse and order, between ordered impulse and  
harmonic proportion, symmetry and the meander.

Allowing a strange measure, indeed, cultivating this irregular growth, a  
graphing of impulse, an impulse to graph.

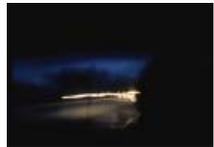
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t o p o g r a p h y



m o v e m e n t



f l u i d i t y



i n c r e m e n t a l



t i m e / s h i f t



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s c o p o p h i l i a

Information (topographic information) acts (in the drawing) as a kind of voyeuristic enabler—the image in-formation (forming while also formed, of the past). The visual entails the look, the gaze, the eye moving across and within that able to be seen, the visual landscape.

The drawing, however, presents an image-world, a world distilled into the solely visual and, perhaps, a surface tactility. Drawing a line as a presence, as that describing the object, the actual. The drawing can only fix as an image, never as a reality. Only the reality of the visual, a pleasure in looking aside from all other senses.

In flight, one experiences a vast exaggeration of visual scale—a near-borderless or all-encompassing gaze over an area. The gaze framed by the horizon, the ever-receding border. To portray the sense of space within a drawing, within that allusive surface—how to portray the sheer surround of one's suspension above the earth.





t o p o g r a p h y

Topography divides movement, effectively fixing moments of that resistant to fixity. In achieving this, an opposition emerges between constancy defined (the line) and that in-between implied, numerically (the unseen slope).

The space within a building implies presence—of the individual, or group of individuals and their corresponding extensions, much as the space between topographic lines implies ascent or descent (of a specific meter, carried out over a specific distance).

The question, likewise, equally divided—the character of the implied movement, and the meter actively defining it. The space between the increments drawn as a straight line, drawn into the line, the default impulse subsuming all possibility, all character.

How, then, to regain that lost space between points, the interior trajectory of that spatial connection?





*'Old endgame, lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing.'*  
-- Samuel Beckett<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Beckett, Samuel, *Endgame*. New York: Grove Press, 1958, pg. 60.

m o v e m e n t

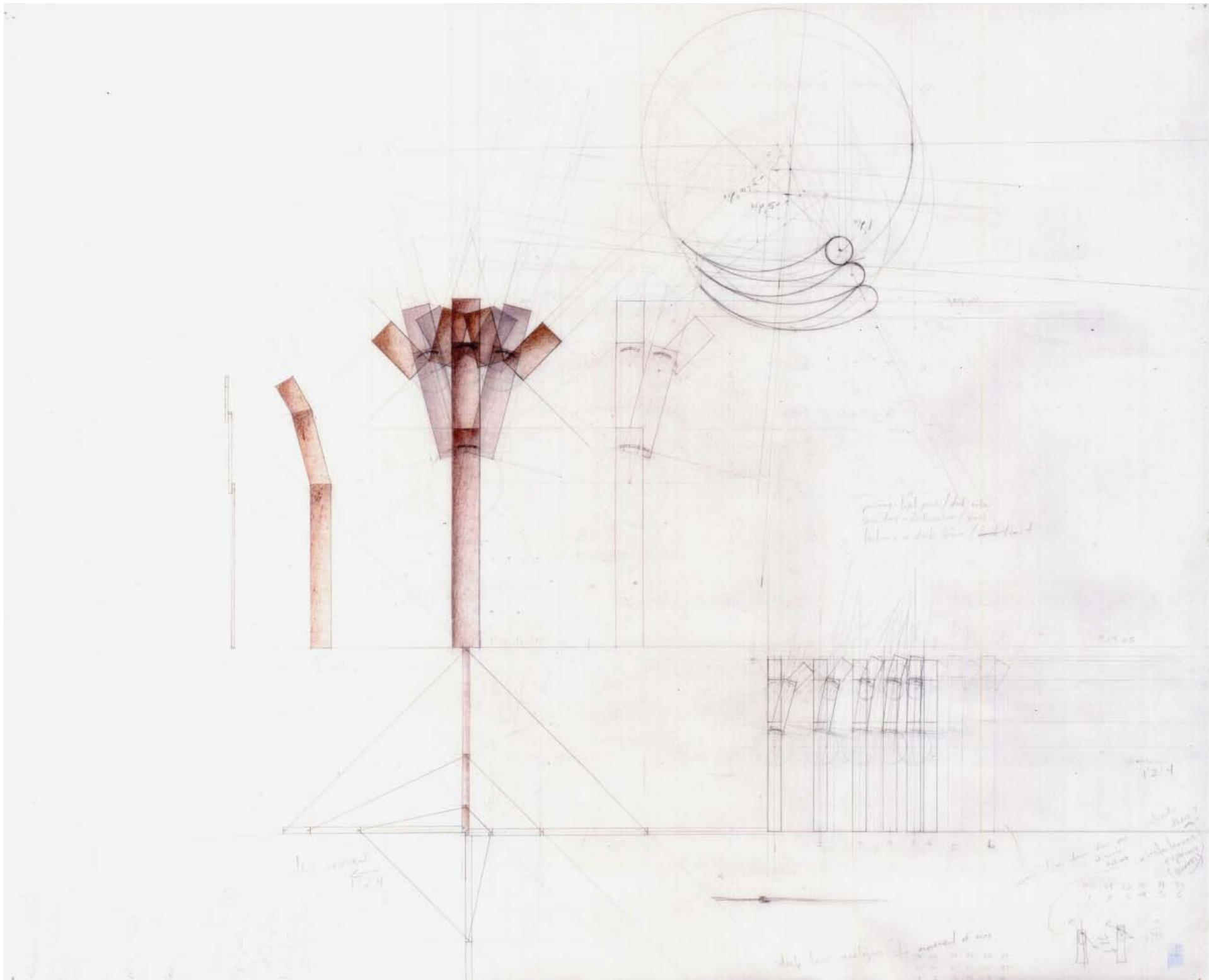
Movement as a concept is antithetical to definition, that is, to the record. We understand movement as a fluid sequence, as a rhythm that does not stop, but ceases.

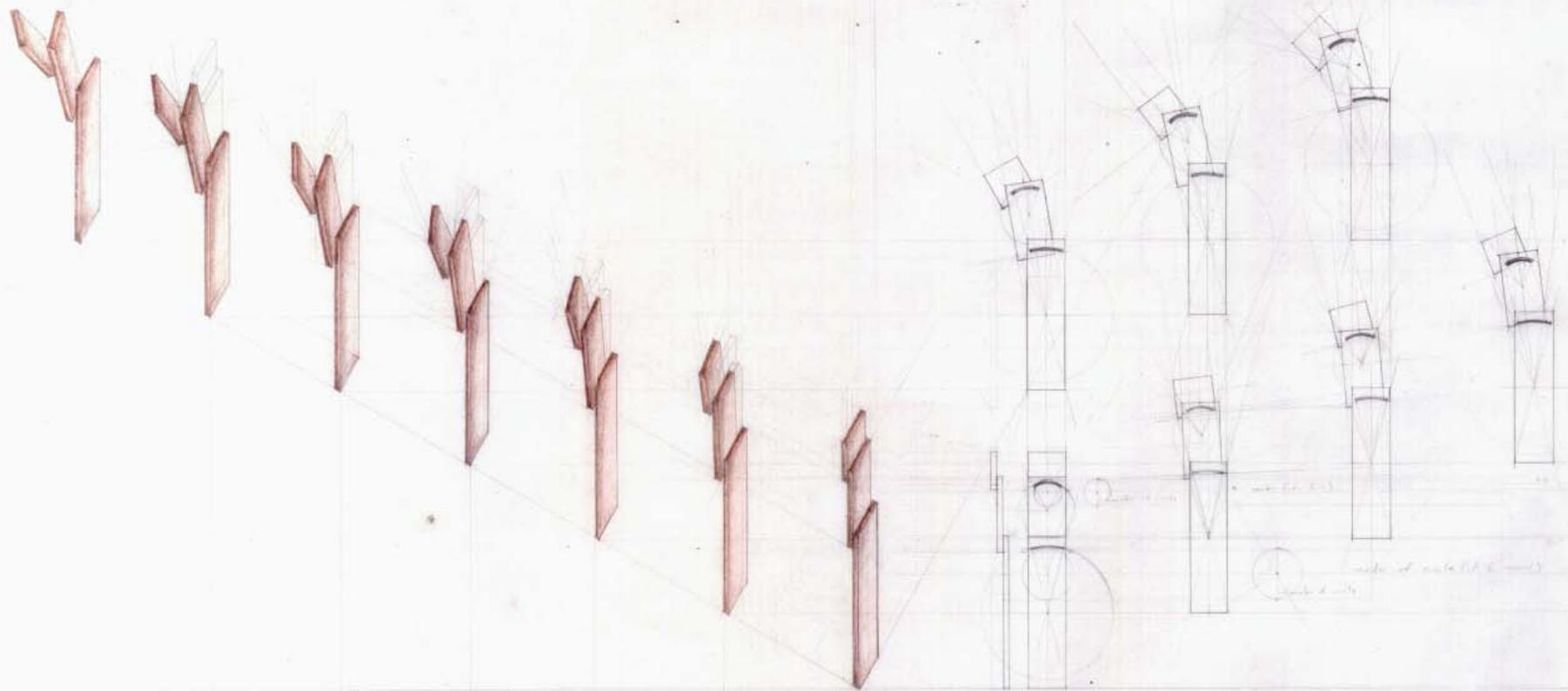
The interplay between two impulses—the desire to portray, mimic or simply maintain properties of movement (the active, that which seeks) into the static, the iconic, the built (the contemplative, that studied, considered, following experience).

However, as architecture, or a work of architecture is both an object of study (the artifact) and an experienced passivity (its interior life)—the passive through which one acts or reacts, an illusory ‘way out’ of the paradox seems apparent.

In simplest terms, one moves in order to arrive elsewhere. How, then, to think this movement, to seek through fixing, through drawing.

To bring the movement of the subject to the movement of the object—to objectify (fix) subjectivity, to attempt, in utter futility, to fix the ever-elusive, constant deferral.





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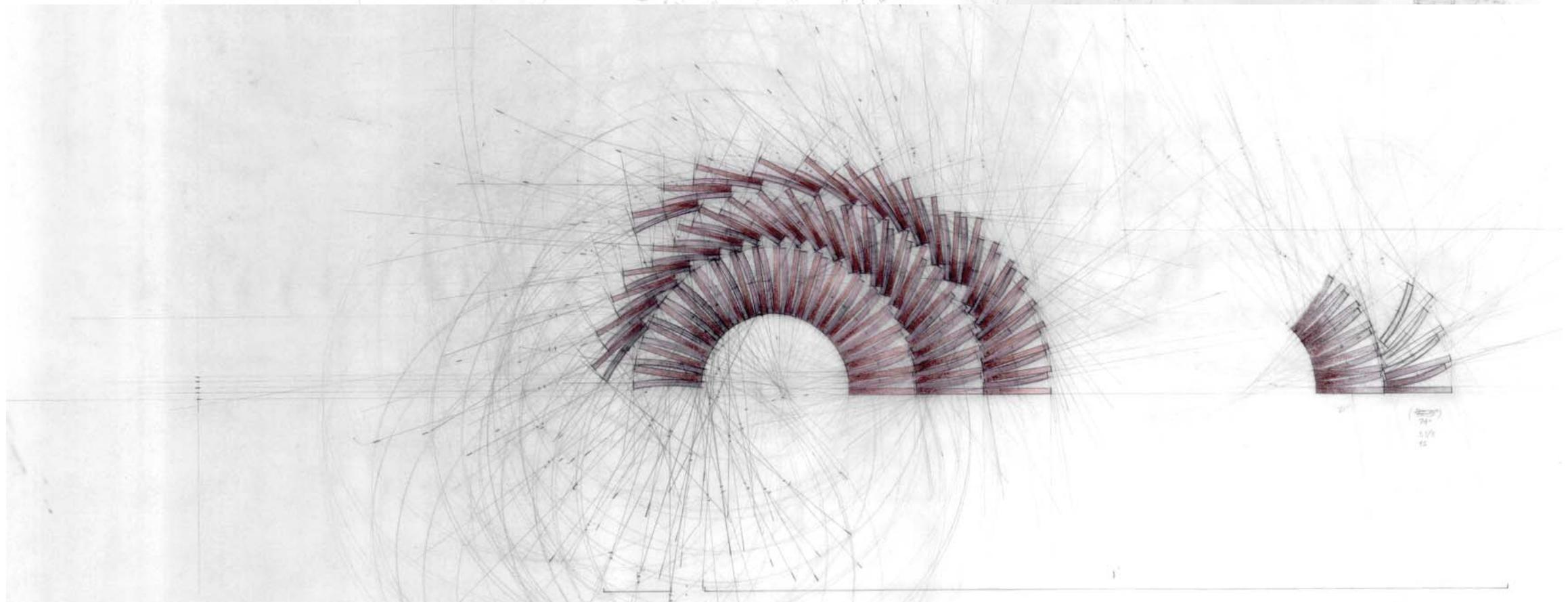
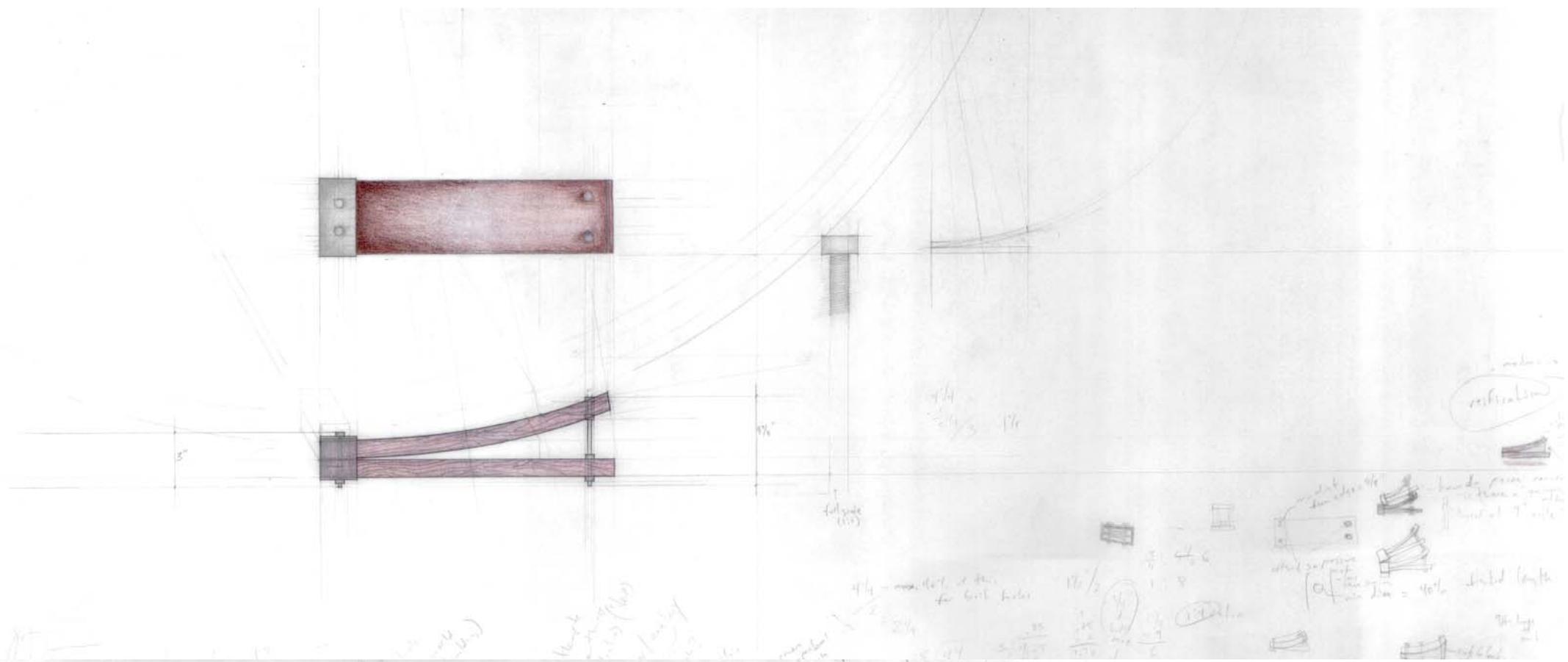
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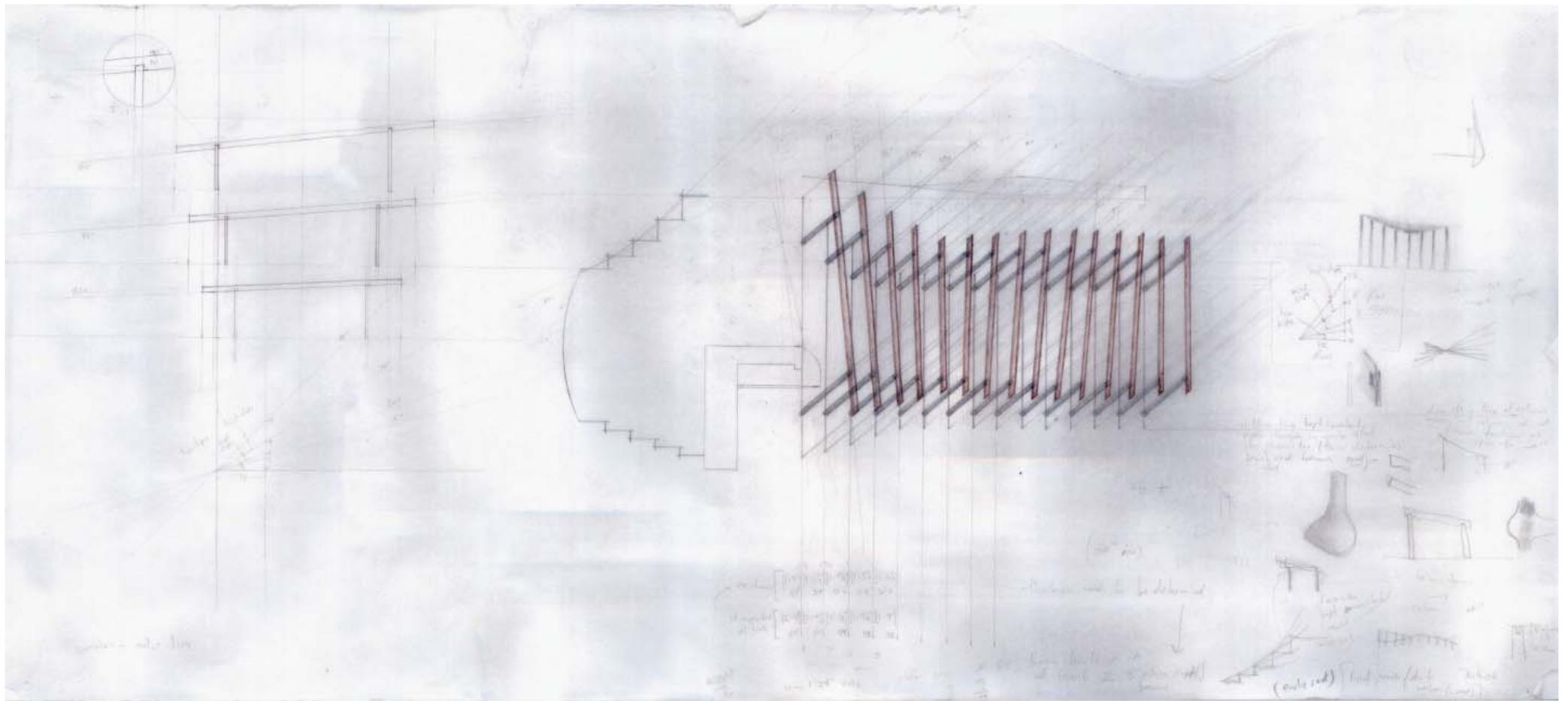


f l u i d i t y

The fluid implies a seamlessness, a smooth constant wholly complete as an entity, while also implying a diffusion, a de-formation and formation within what surrounds. The difference between the cyclical and the serial manifest architecturally as something built-up, never whole but for the sum of its parts, its partiality.

One may break down fluid phenomena, as movement, into pieces and directives. However, at the basest subatomic level, a moving particle can never be placed with complete accuracy. Does it follow, then, that the 'place' itself vacillates, eludes, resists fixity? The terrain is mapped, yet un-fixed.

A constant quantum flux—the truly fluid—this understood as the in-dwelling physical constant of all things. Proximity, then, as that factor determining the degree of openness or apparent density (as in flight).





# i n c r e m e n t a l

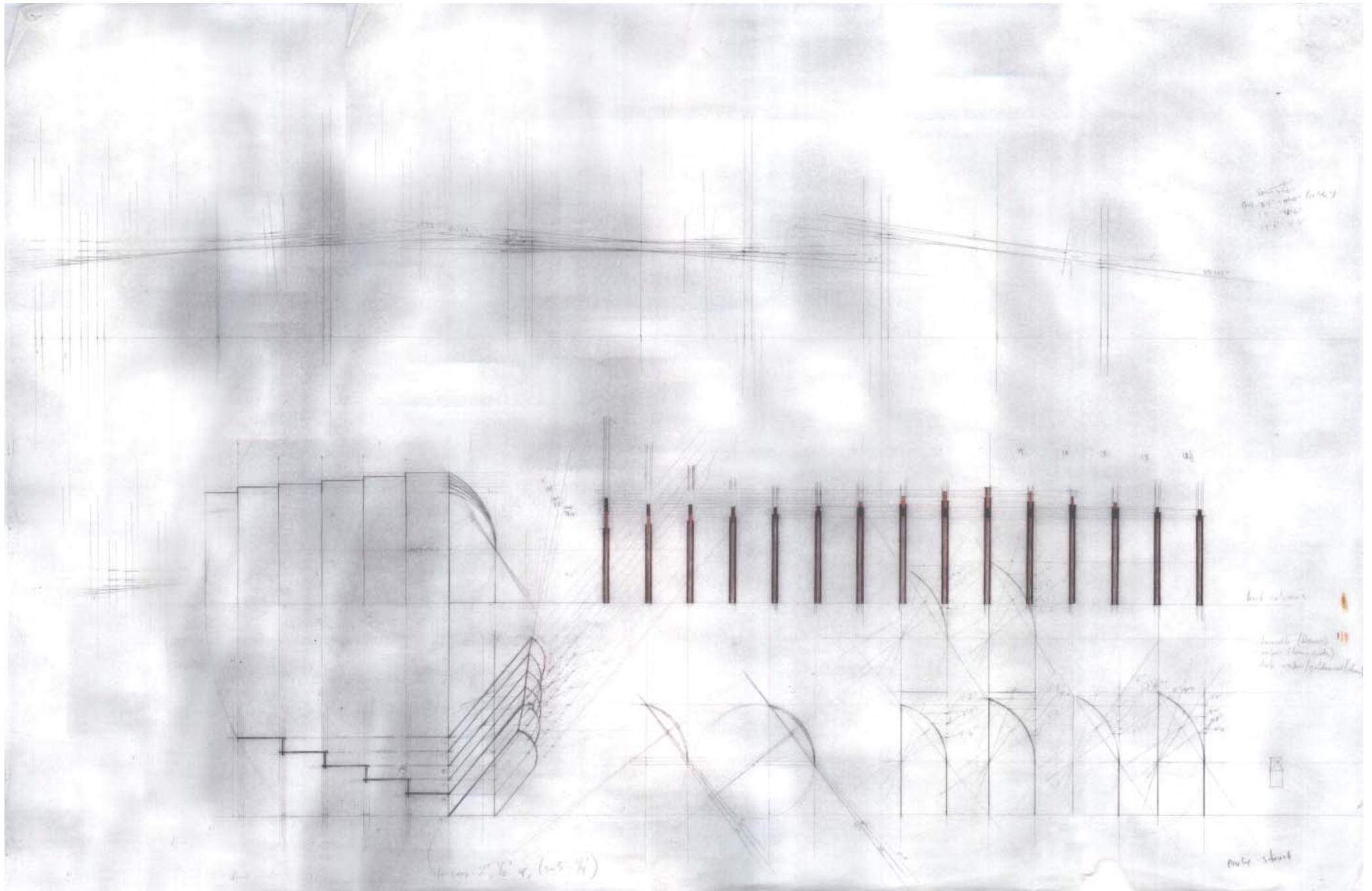
Segmenting movement brings the increment into play—the slight change between pieces closely attributable, an overall scheme understood as a sequence, and characterized, perhaps most importantly, by subtlety of change—‘a slight or imperceptible augmentation.’

The meandering line (of a topography) becomes the metered line (of a wall, a roof), thus built-up, intentional, the ground line abstracted.

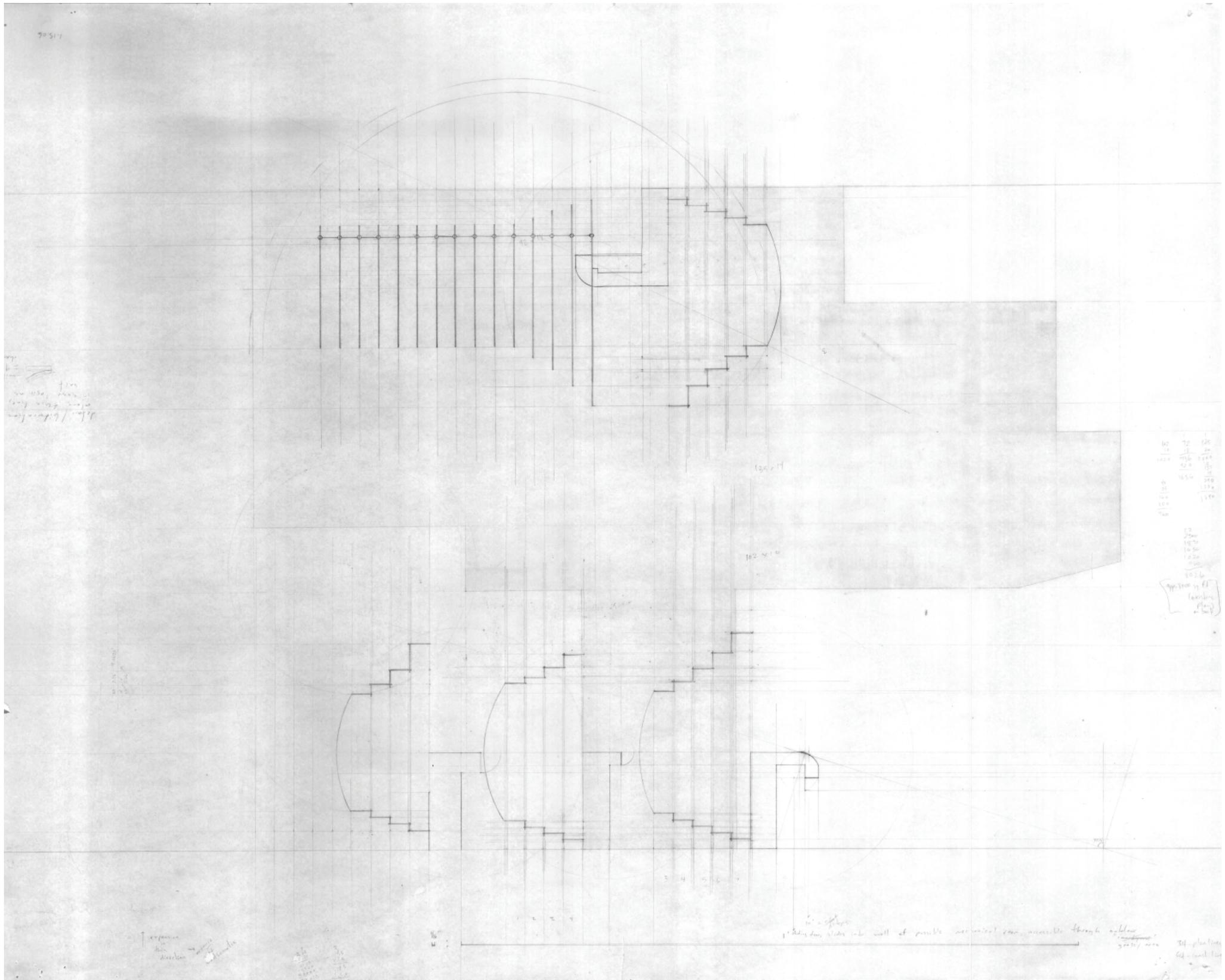
The line wanders within limits. The increment moves, grows repetitiously, ascending and descending between two fixed heights at a fixed meter.

The tension between the sum and its parts, to try and maintain the parts within the sum, in the face of the sum, in seeming futility.

How to focus on the individual within the multitude, the infinitesimal within the overwhelming? How also, to link pieces into a whole, into the near-recognizable order of a chain of events?



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# t i m e / s h i f t

One's sequence through the building as a chronology, a small history.  
One can stop or collect time (in a photograph), but not space. Time in a photograph understood as an only-time, a time never to be relived, but restated ceaselessly, visually.

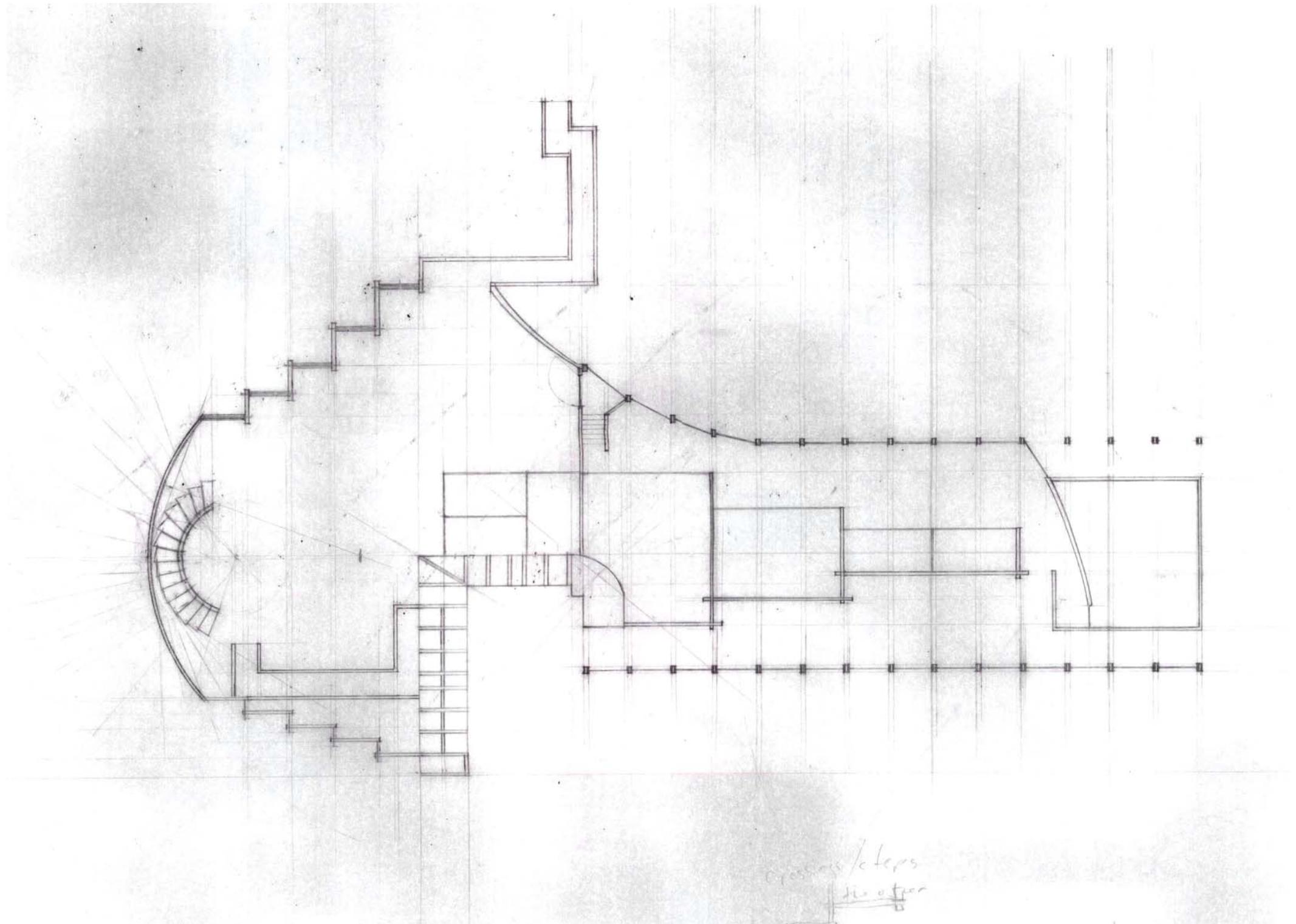
Spatial form resists this, for space continually reiterates itself, external of time. Spatial limits both precede and remain after time's visual capture within a photograph. Physically, we may revisit space as long as its form remains—space acquires a past only by means of its alteration. We may only access time's past by means of remembrance.

We conceive of space statically, as something fixed, contained, shaped, whereas time eludes, moving always forward, altering (aging) that in its path. Space, in most basic terms, *is*. It is the tangible world, containing and constituting matter. Time flows actively, constantly, through space.

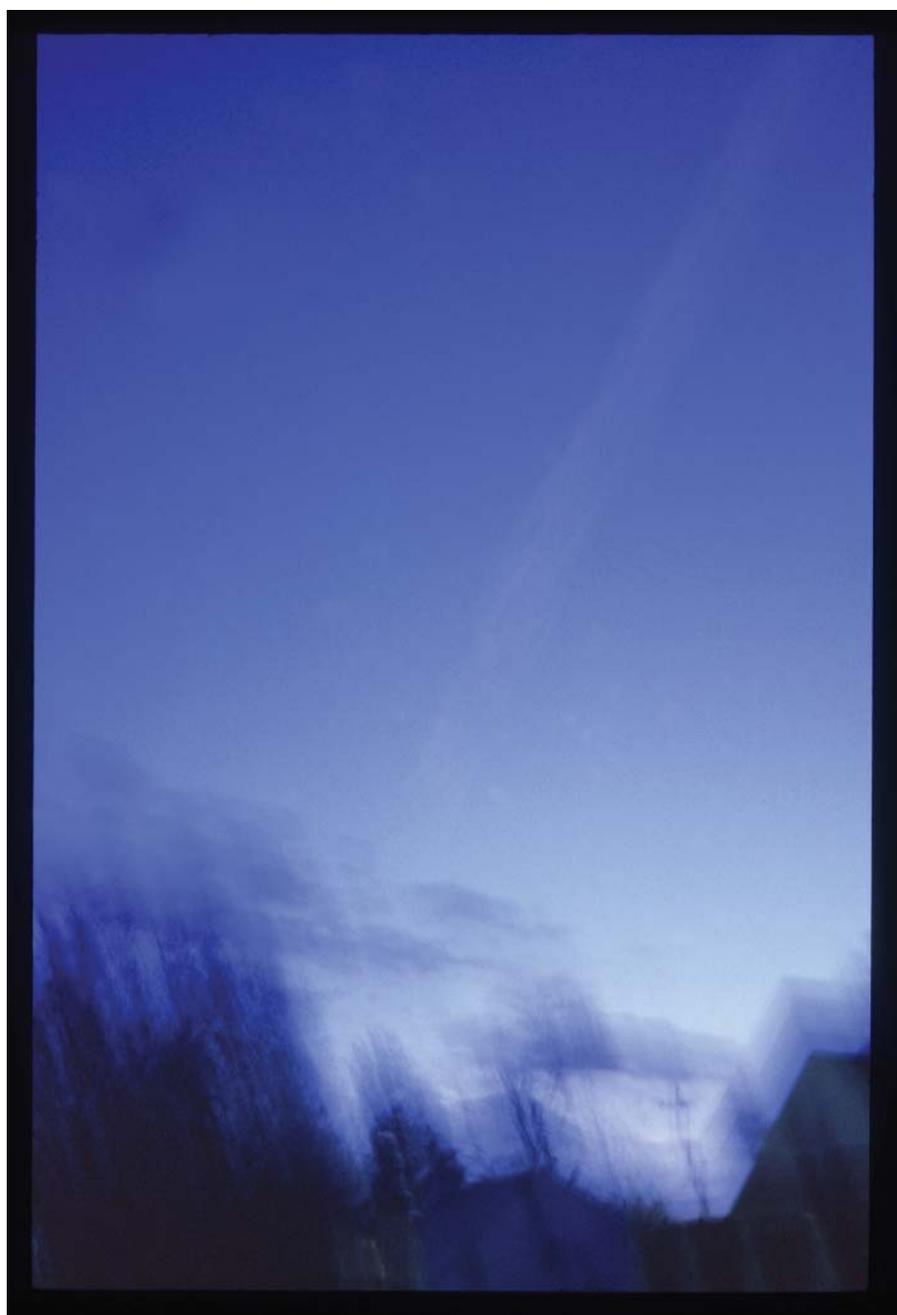
Time characterized by shift, a perpetual shift away from its previous location.

One occupies vision without movement (paused space, visual concentration)—the visual 'gives one pause'—one watches without movement that apparent, appearing, a visual time.

Time understood as an essential fluid or ground on and within which we move, always, forward in time, or rather, time always forward in us.



crossing/leaps  
his office



p r e t e r n a t u r a l

(An) architecture outside of nature—not the ‘nature’ of ideas, but nature in the sense of an always-renewing ecosystem, a constant. The drive for architecture is constant, its objects first created, posited, then depleted, diminished and finally, remembered.

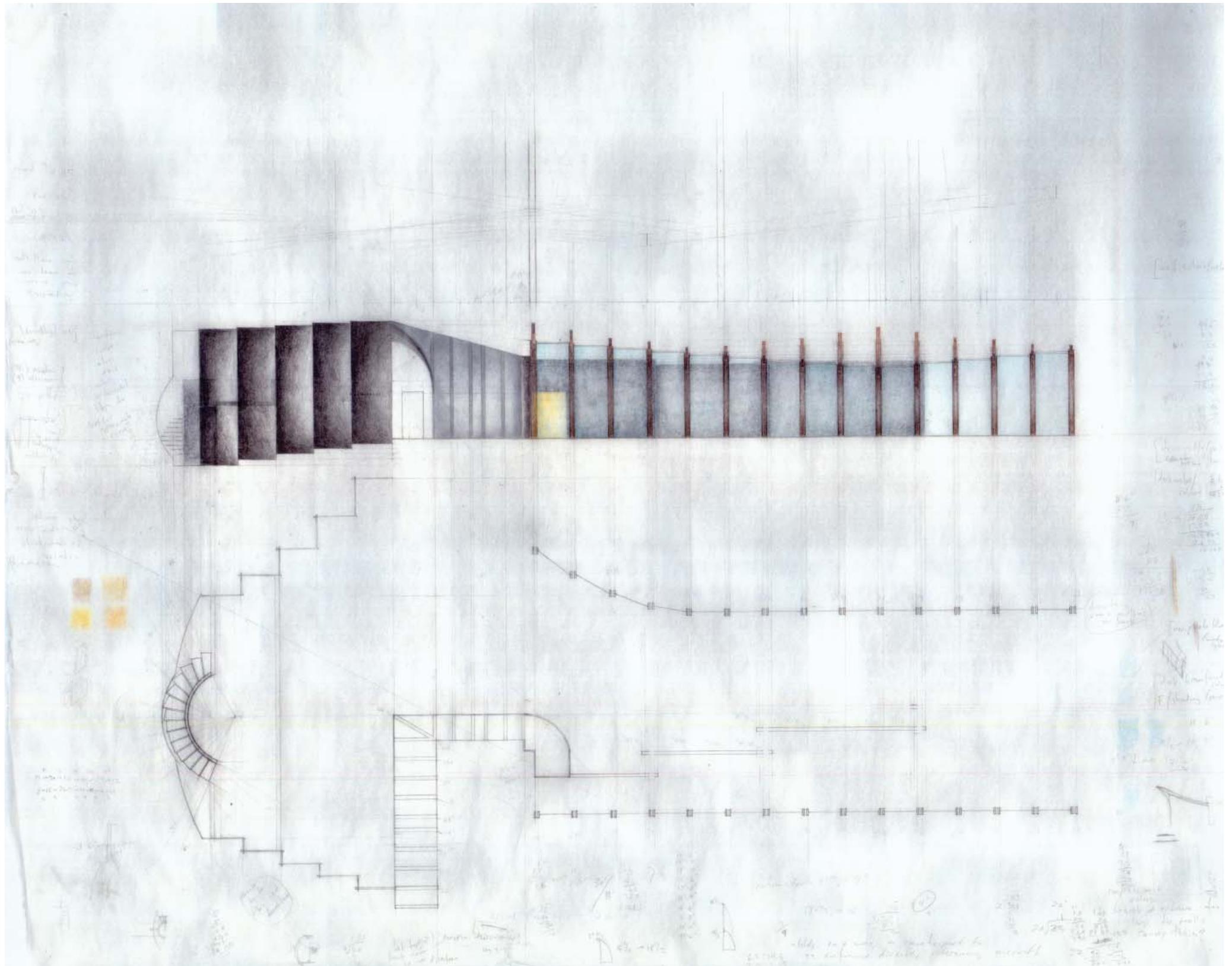
To be truly outside of nature, one must engage in remembrance, in the recollection of that once present and now absent to the senses, that of the past.

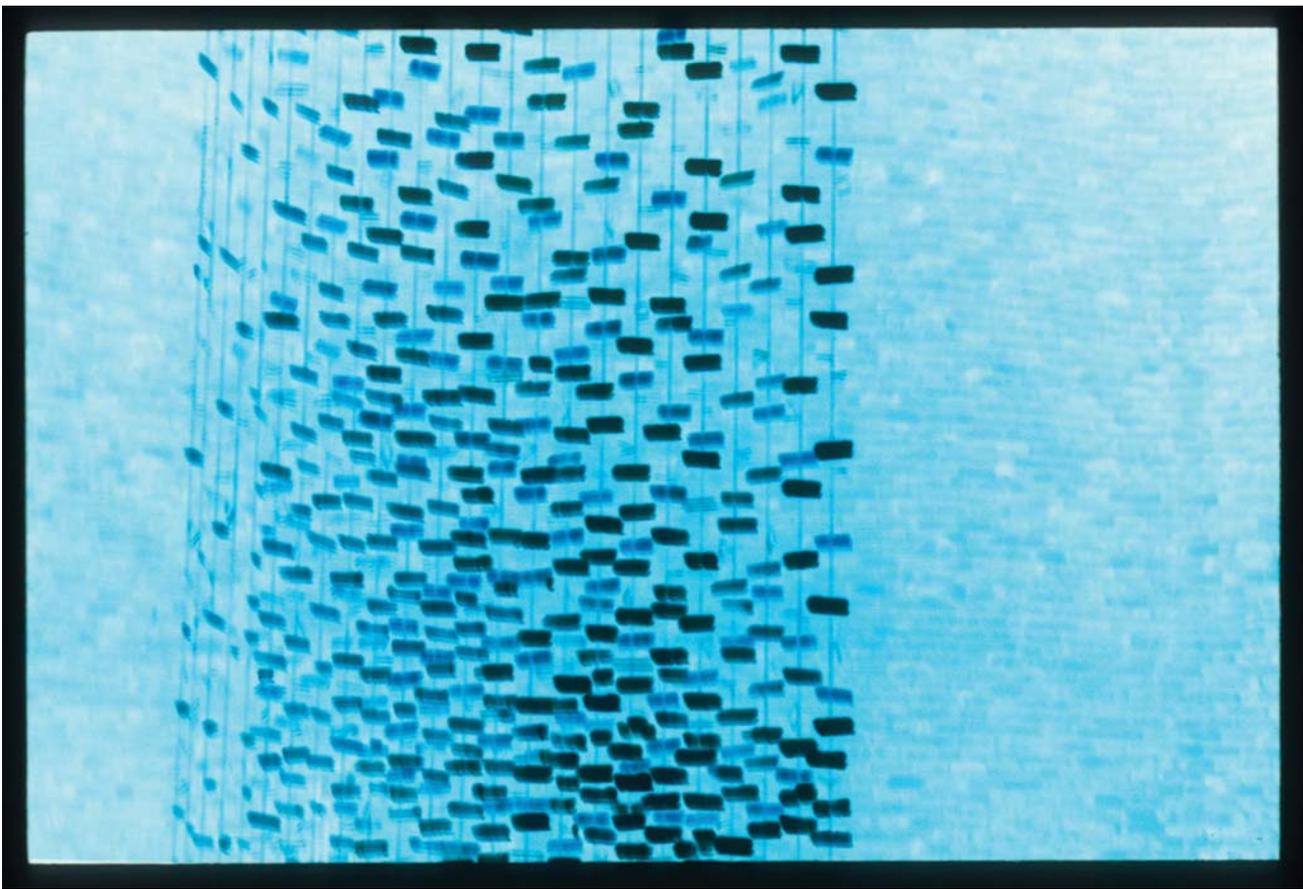
Architecture as a science of enclosure and disclosure, framing nature or the natural, manifest in and of itself as the preternatural, that in but not of nature.

To disclose implies the dimensions of a secret, and its partial or utter revelation. Disclosure entails, initially, the opaque, a severance between perception and meaning behind, followed by a gradual, though not always entire un-masking. The enclosure un-locks, disclosing, perhaps, its meaning, its strange reality. The unusual ‘outside’ of nature, the rational, in its context, its ‘site.’ The discord between the rational and the felt, the timeless and the corporeal-temporal. The strangeness of an echo, a disembodied voice (the echo of movement within the structure, its incremented record and the desire for its sound, its happening).

The echo of an order, an aftershock of sorts, running, flowing (turbulent) throughout the built work, the artifacts of decisions, intention, will, the poetic realized (or approached).

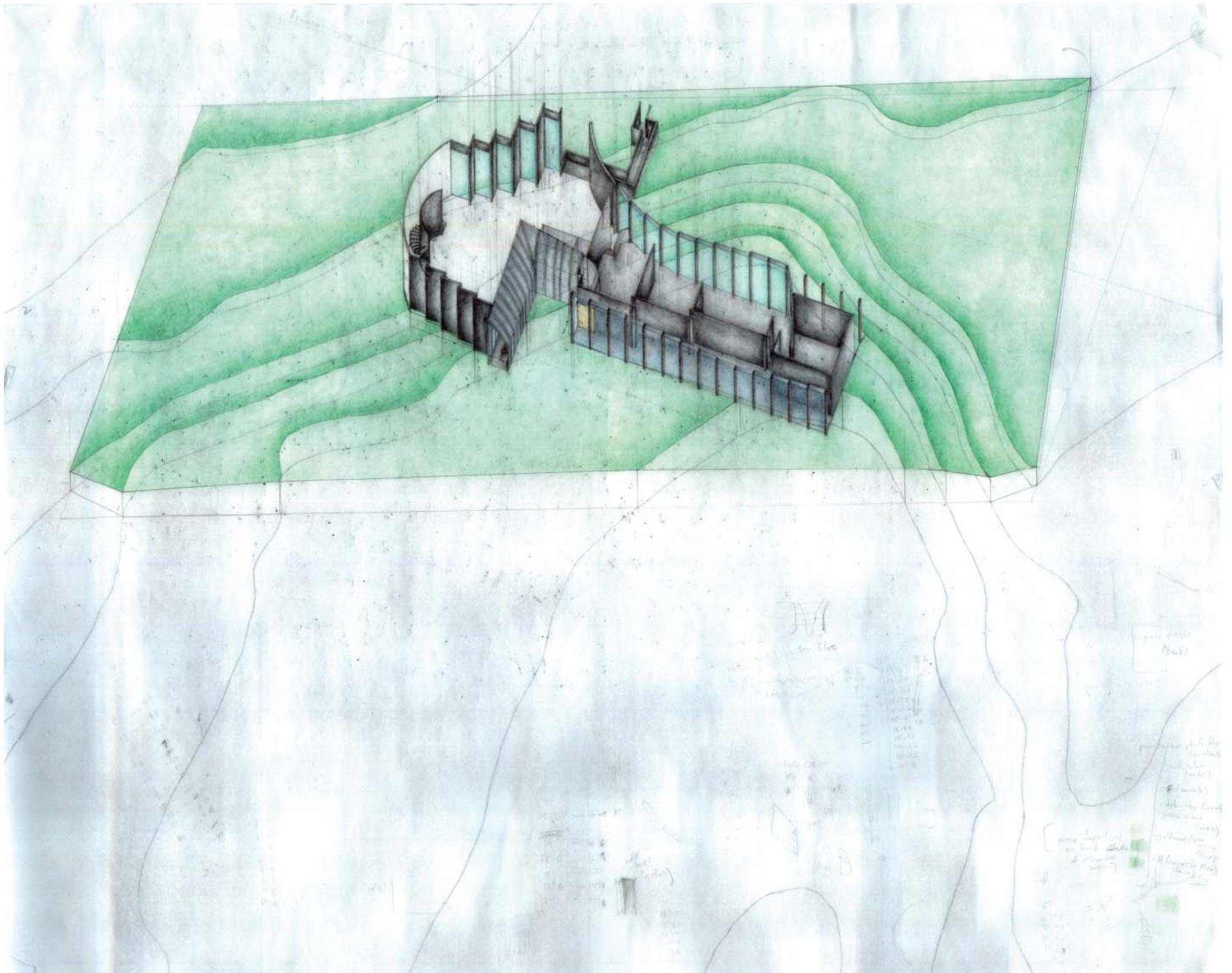
As one to another, as one to the Other.

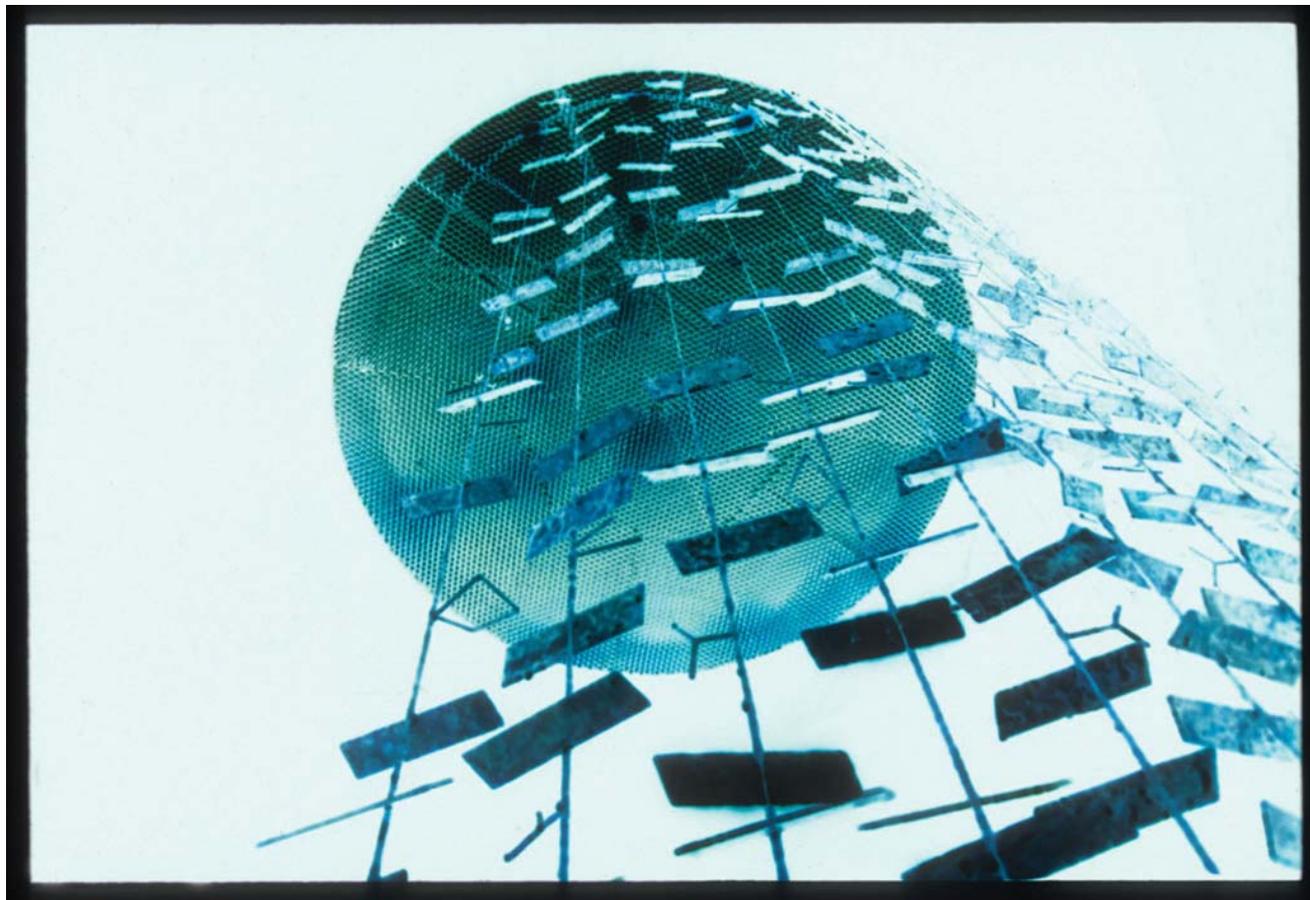




a n i m i s t i c

The notion of the ‘discrete in-dwelling spirit’ of things, that is, attributes of sentience ascribed to the objective. In similarity to the perpetually mobile subatomic particle, the positing of every object as teeming internally, spirited, active. This universal activity may be differently stated as the in-built potential of all matter, to be shaped, formed, or indeed to form by passive resistance. To draw, actively, pursuing the description of an inactivity discretely infused, one must conceive of the built inside as the ‘soul’ of the building, coloring and deforming the exterior that forms. Drawing as that which infuses the artifact, the concept, the to-be with a certain vitality, a blood, a pulse. To physically draw the building, the site, the shadow, the concept—the time of the hand, following and creating the line, every line. The body in the drawing, constituted in the very act, made manifest by the image, pointing back, folding back, as in a dream of reality. The drawing as physical memory, the tangible record of physical time, an interior life, felt, discerned.





i n t e r i o r i t y

Flight occupies a place outside the bounds of the physical body, but not of the mind, the associative mind (as in the move from the perceived structure of birds to machinated mimicry). When in flight, as we occupy a vessel, suspended in and moving through fluid, one's gaze becomes boundless, outside of both the body of the individual and that of the airplane.

The contradiction between a dreamed image and a built reality—between that on which each relies (to come into being, to *become*). Desire pursues the made, the built, through the conduit of dreams, of images. To envision pursues the future-built (one moves to be elsewhere).

The hidden, in view, or glimpsed, or maintained.  
The body in the landscape, the body of the landscape.





*'It is this duality of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which  
I am both the one who asks and the one who answers.'*

*-- Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Arendt, Hannah, *The Life of the Mind*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1978, pg. 185.

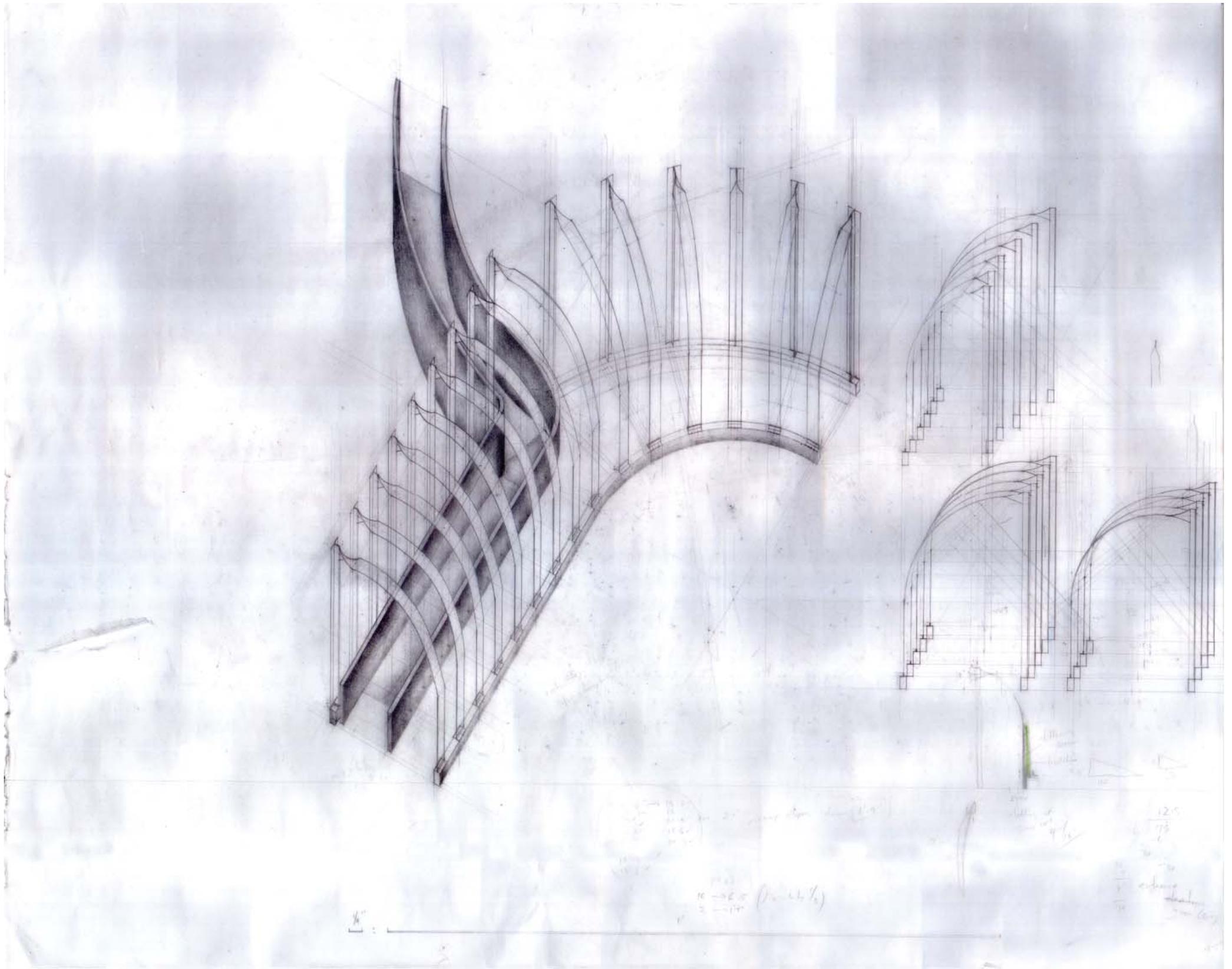
d i v e r g e n c e

The primary split in consciousness as that of body and mind, as that of two divergent compulsions, manifest within, and as, the boundary of being. To conceive of each as simply antagonistic opposites, between which success and defeat constantly change hands, misses the very paradox of the 'two-in-one'—that is, body and mind as the duality which is not separate.

The bifurcated self (a twin impulse) moving forward, working against paradox.

In the case of an airplane's wing, two streams of air, one faster and higher, create lift. The pull of each is mutually inclusive, preceded by propulsion, rather than one acting first to establish the other.

Body and mind as simultaneity, occurring *at once*.





m e a n d e r

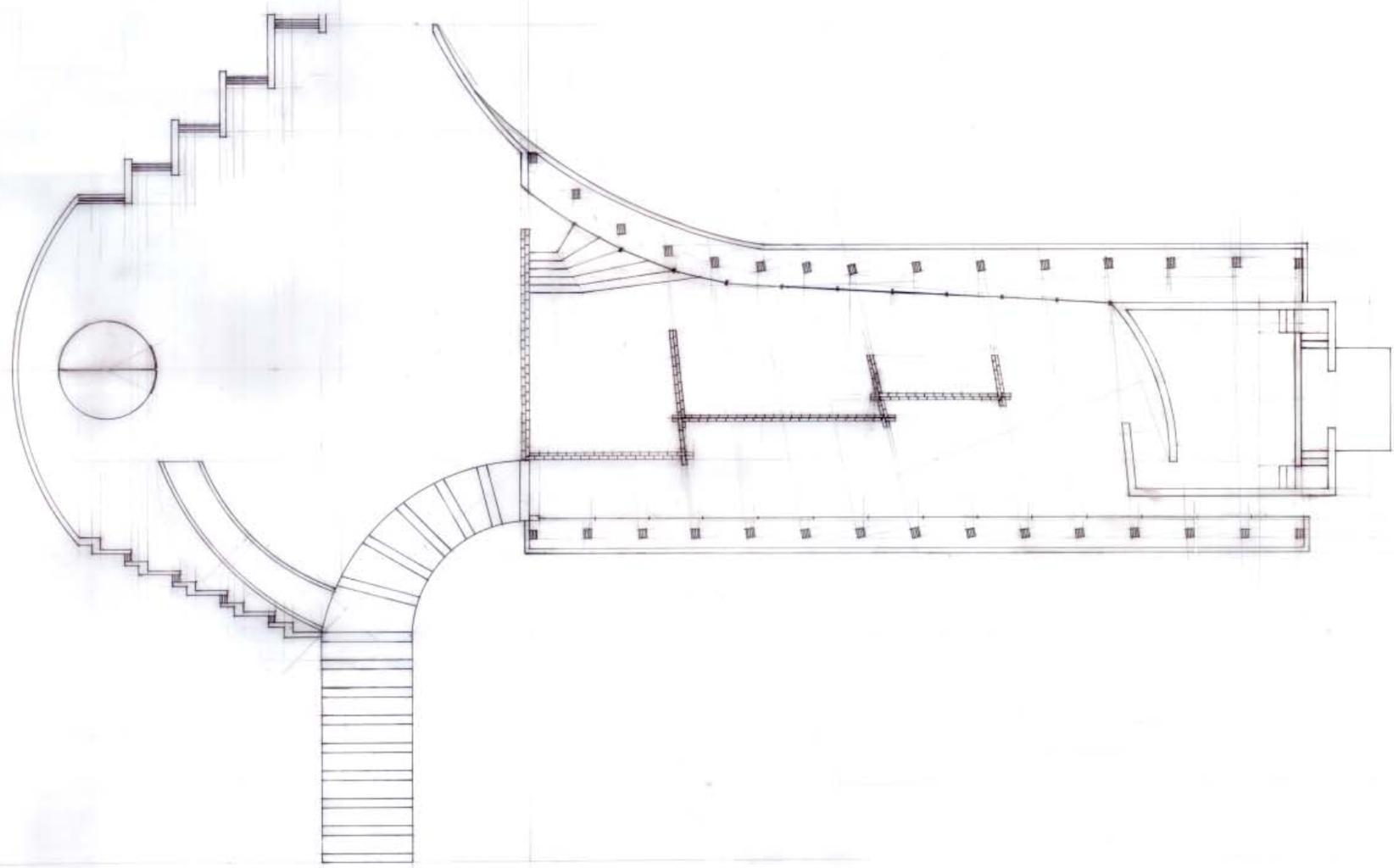
To meander implies a lack of direction, of will, of intention. To trace the meandering line, following its own inner directives as it leads, or forming the meander, wandering meaningfully for a time, then shifting once again.

In architecture, again, one's limits spatially determine the extent of the meander, the meaningful detour.

To speak of this, this pleasure in moving through an enclosure (that discloses), one necessarily forgoes the directions associated with use, with the intent to get somewhere, not merely to move for its own sake.

The meander thus circumscribes, structuring the order or ordering the structure according to one's course through the built. The placement of a column or a wall, for instance, helps to form the path by which it is, also, deformed.

A purposeful wandering.



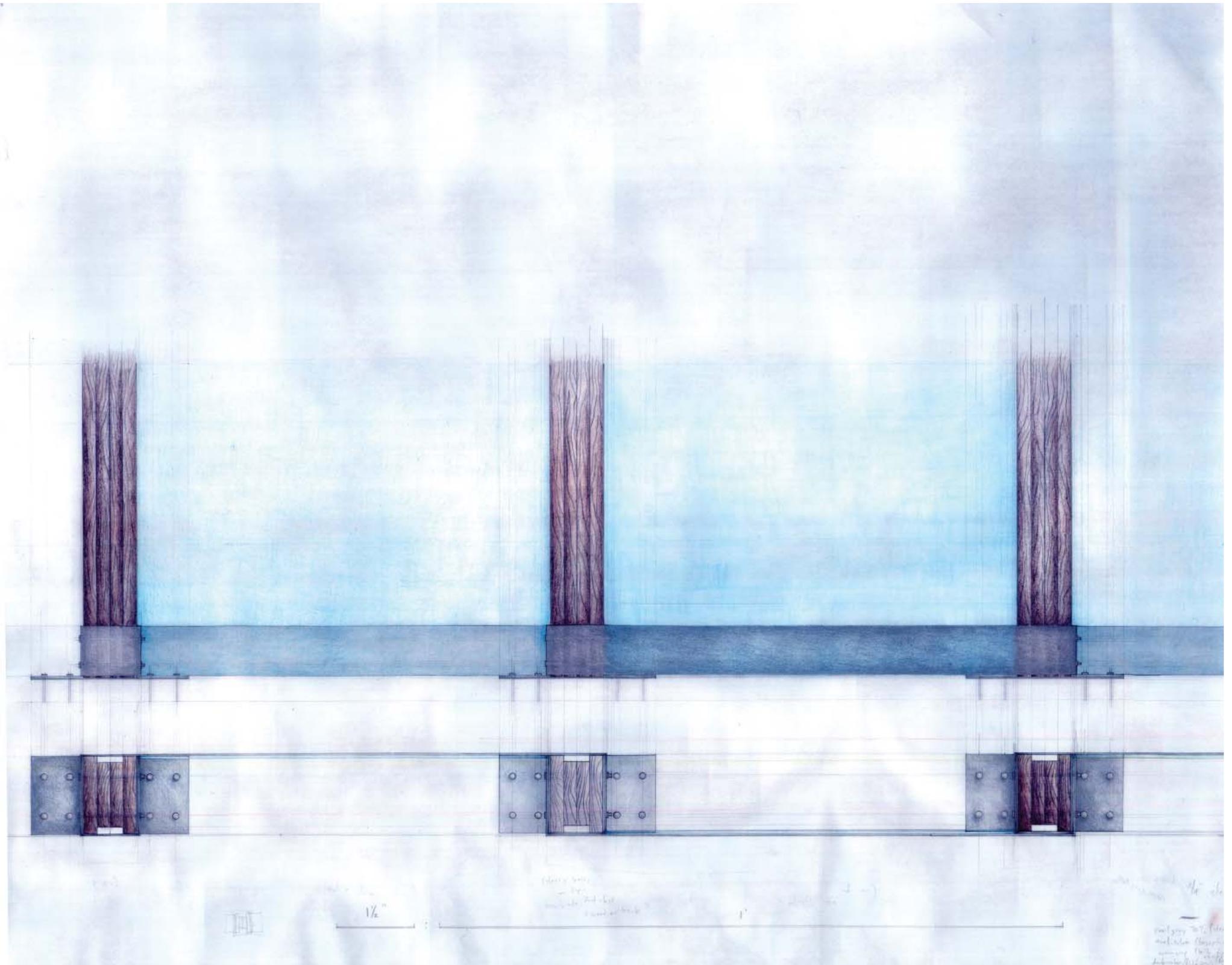


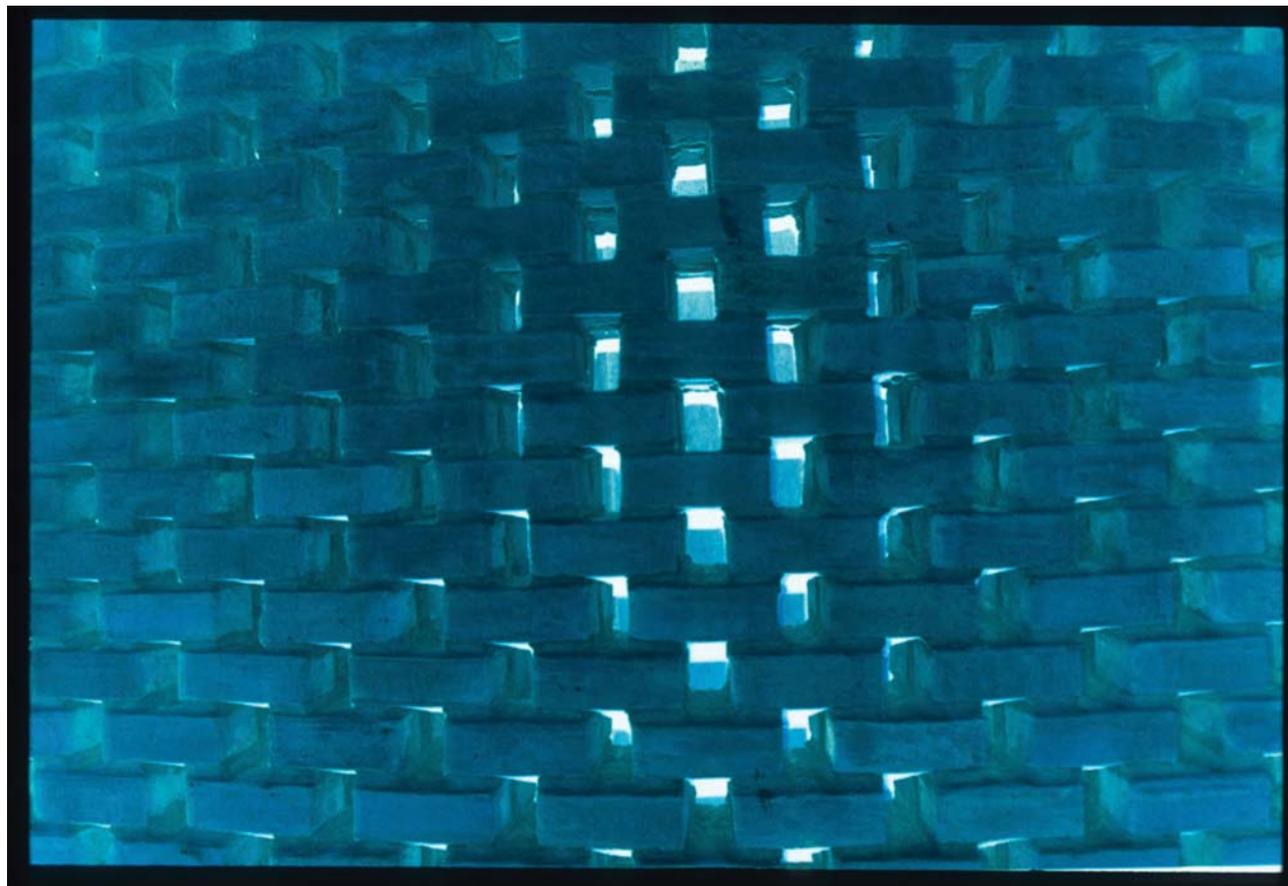
# e x p a n s i o n

A language of expanse particular to traveling vessels (airplanes, ships)—  
navigation by means of imaginary lines of latitude, coordinates, maps.  
In flight, the initial sense of expansion (steady, of the landscape), as when one  
observes the receding land from a ship's stern. This state of expansion peaks  
finally when one's suspension within the atmosphere, or the ocean, becomes  
the only perceivable state, when one enters 'that marine infinitude which  
both buoys and engulfs.'<sup>1</sup> The (visual) connection to the ground, stretched,  
extended, and finally broken.

To bring this notion into building, into that which expands and contracts,  
sequentially, but which rarely, if ever, achieves the extreme loss of scale  
particular to the act of flying. The ground understood as that from which  
the airplane springs forth, surpassing translated into the architectural point  
of connection. To bring a character to the ground line, an articulation of the  
point at which structural members begin to ascend, to scale.

<sup>1</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, *The Writing of the Disaster*. Lincoln: UNiversity of Nebraska Press, 1986, pg. 112.





*'The circle, uncurled along a straight line rigorously prolonged, reforms a circle eternally bereft of a center.'*

*-- Maurice Blanchot<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Blanchot, *Disaster*, pg. 2.

# d i s t e n d

The measure of deformation, to give measure to ebb and flow. To distend toward or away from, or, each at different moments.

Distension implies a previous order, one deformed by an internal pressure, by that in-dwelling. A suggestive continuity between the space formed and that forming it, between the pieces and the actions of the pieces.

Here is Blanchot: 'It is the haste of the Finite to which one longs to entrust oneself once and for all without foreseeing that the Finite is only the ebb of the Infinite.'<sup>1</sup> The fixed preceded always by movement, by positioning, and thus determining. The distended form pushes against its limits, failing always to exceed, because failing always to surpass distension itself.

<sup>1</sup> Blanchot, *Disaster*, pg. 31.





*'The time of the other, which is the unrepresentable representation of a time without present and always returning.'*

*-- Maurice Blanchot<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Blanchot, *Disaster*, pg. 89.

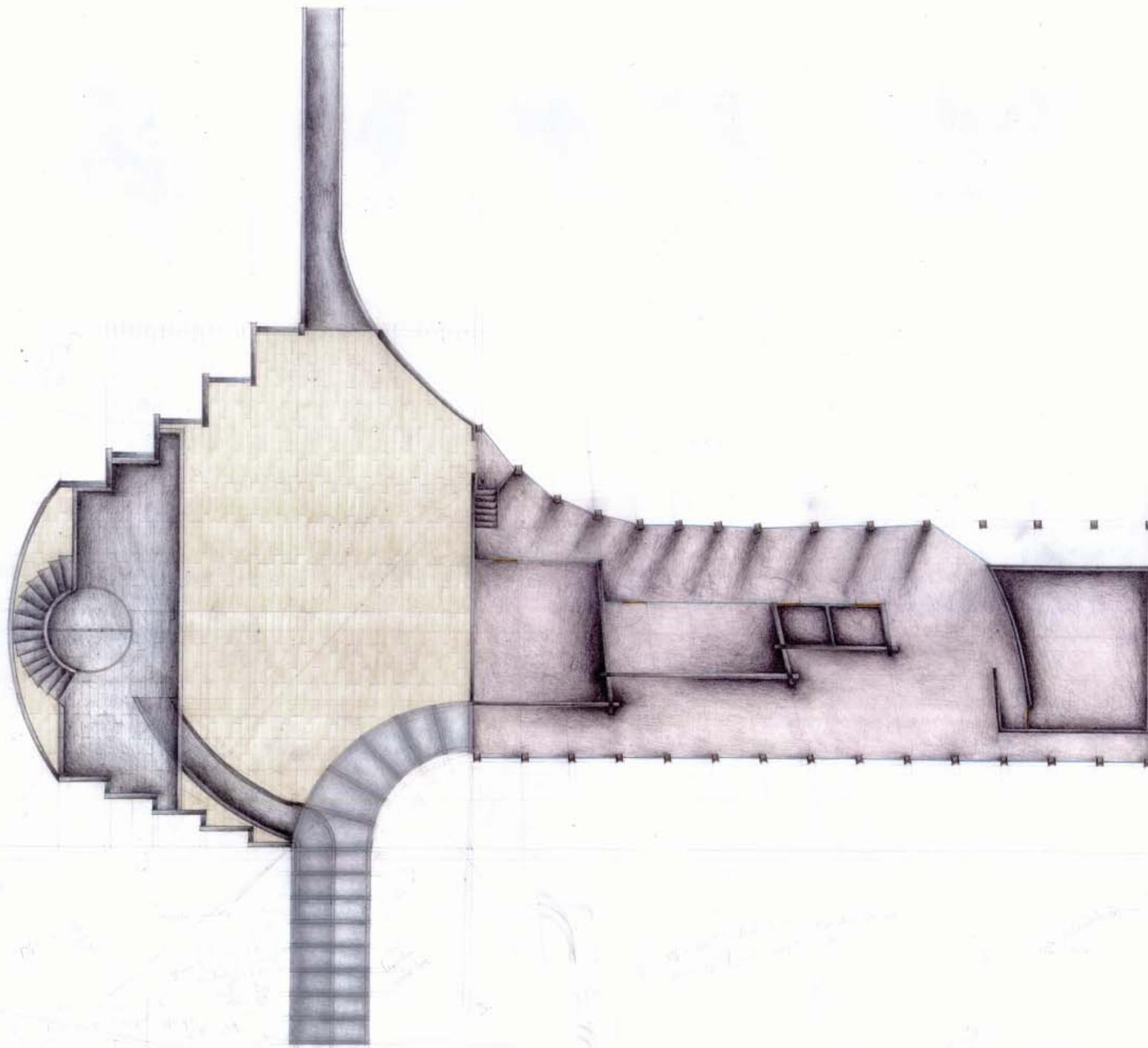
d e l a y

To delay implies first a visceral time—the time which is felt, felt because  
made apparent, pointed to by its alteration.

To feel space, as delayed, to delay by leading, by forming the path, the path  
itself delayed by an act of expansion separating its trajectory. The course re-  
collected, rediscovered.

The difference between separation and division, between elusive distance and  
precise severance. The ‘distance’ involved in separation also alludes, drawing  
attention towards that interrupted.

Architecturally, to form one’s path involves, perhaps, a prescribed dissipation  
and re-formation, the re-constitution of that moving from presence to  
absence and back again.





*'To take a mere thing out of its context with other things... reveals no difference...  
it loses its reality and acquires a curious kind of eeriness.'*

*-- Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, pg. 184.

p a r t i a l

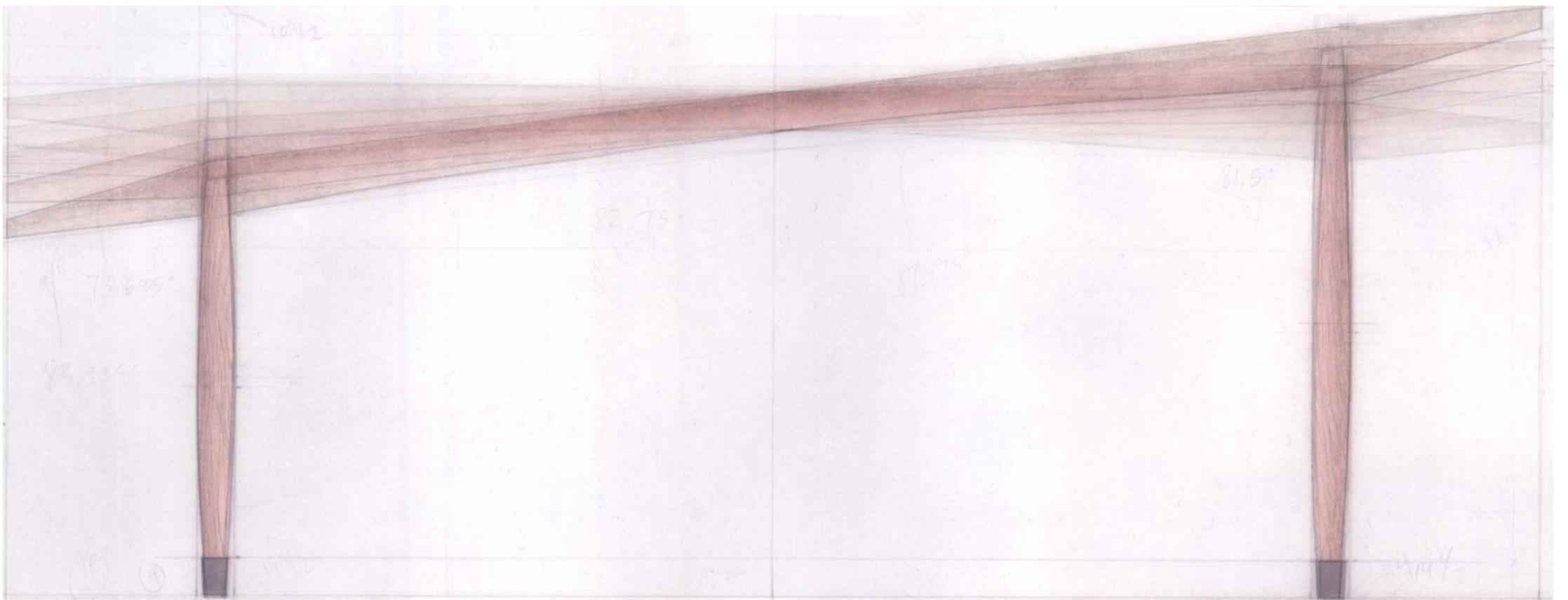
Intuition in regard to proportion, proportion defined as the ‘relationship between quantities.’ The relationship between pieces not so much a ratio or a question of size; rather, a repeated measure forming a whole with constituent pieces foregrounded, rather than lost in the overall Gestalt.

Does this, in effect, negate any Gestalt, any overwhelming of the partial? Is the part isolated as a kind of non-part, an irrelation? Can there be both the sum of its parts and something greater, a presence given to ‘that false seventh chord which renders harmony sublime’?<sup>1</sup>

Here, again, the question of proximity—does the whole, at a distance, reveal its parts, pointing back, in effect, to its interior structure, both equalized and subsumed.

Can there be an architecture with no secondary, revelatory, skeleton, or can there only be acts of architecture in which these may lack? The partial-impartial, individual, condensed, active in its forming.

<sup>1</sup> Serres, Michel, *Genesis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, pg. 128.





*'Babel is an unintegratable multiplicity, a sort of intermittent aggregate, not closed upon its unity. Together we are this strange object, immersed in the clamor.'*

*-- Michel Serres<sup>1</sup>*

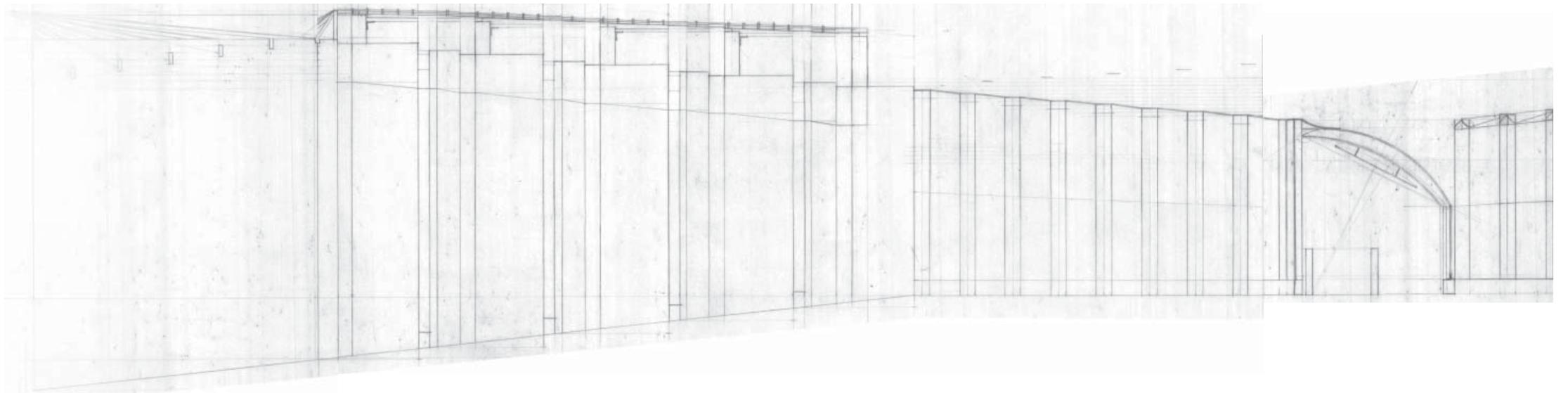
<sup>1</sup> Serres, *Genesis*, pg. 124.

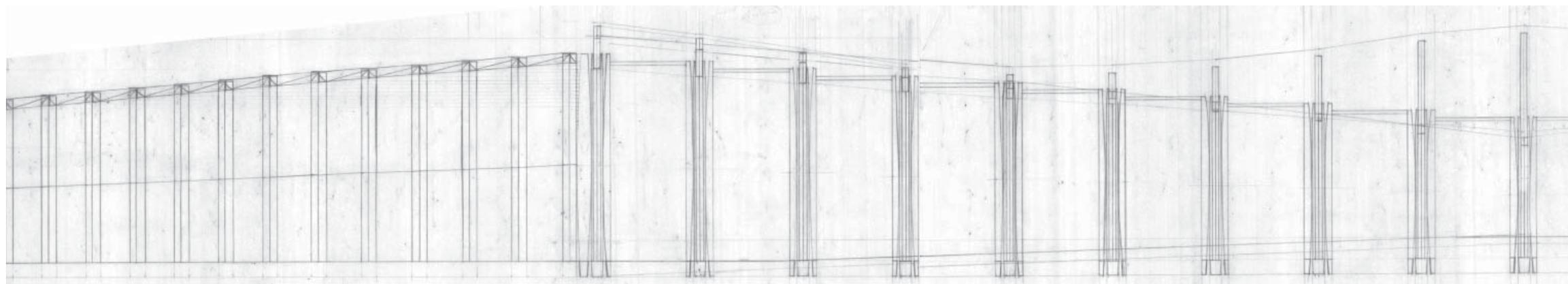
s e q u e n c e

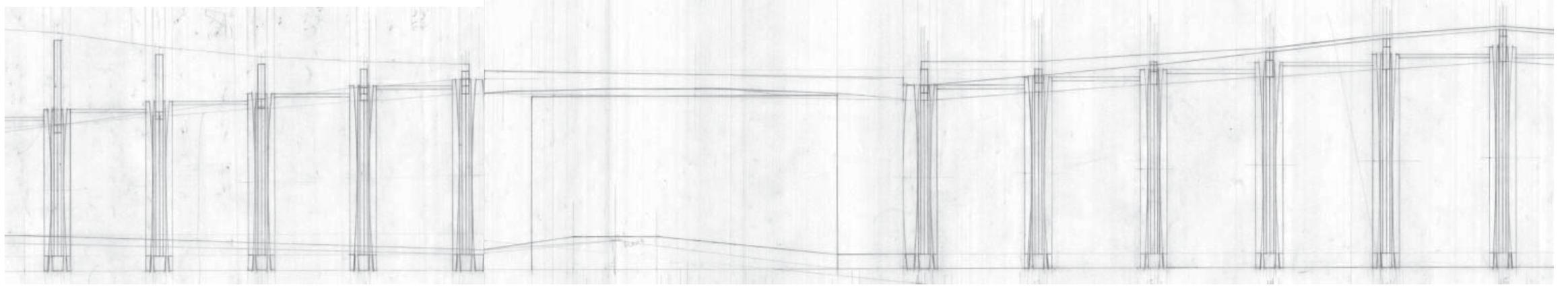
A logic of sequence and a logic of differentiation.

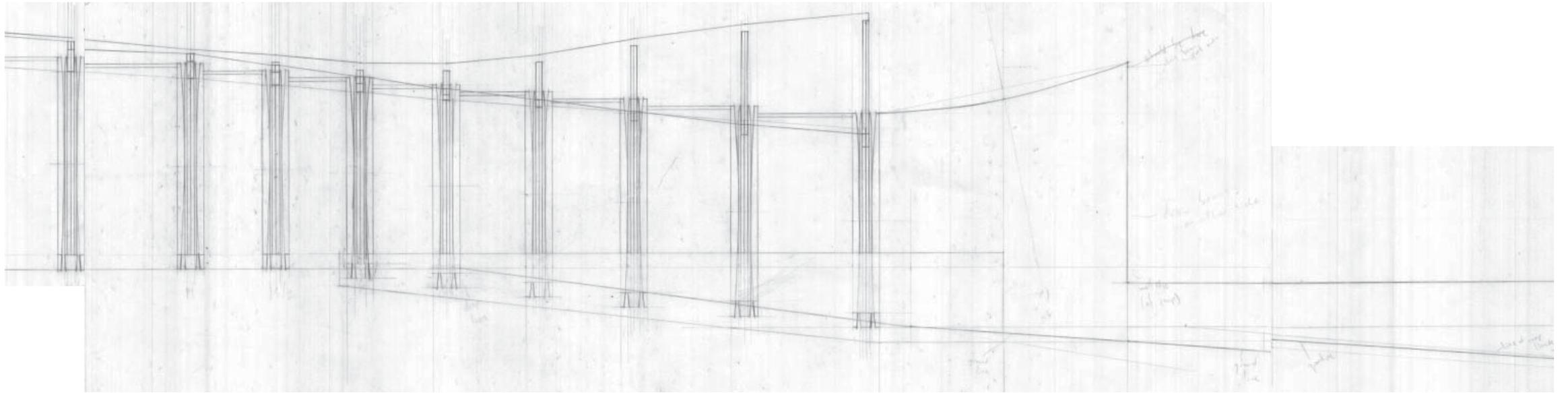
Figuration depends on either the monumental / monolithic figure (on the whole which denies its parts, though perhaps not its making), or on that series of parts or actions constituting a figure on an 'inactive' ground. To figure the sequential, to figure by giving presence.

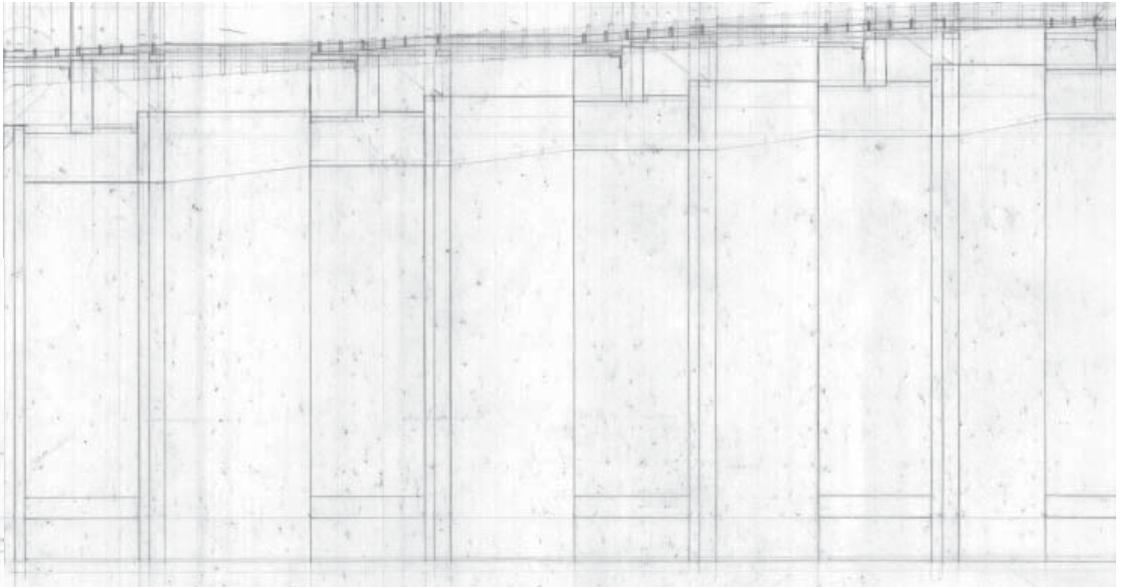
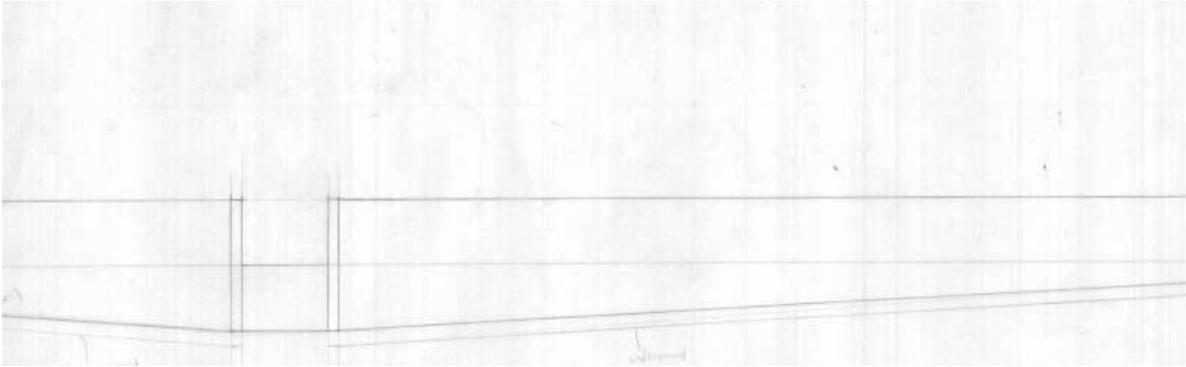
A sequence ordered according to its parts, each part responsive to that preceding, determinant of that preceding. Resolving each tension in order to figure the object, the built work; or, rather, to let the tension figure, discursively, that which is. The present brought into presence, rather than figuring as a consequence of chronology.

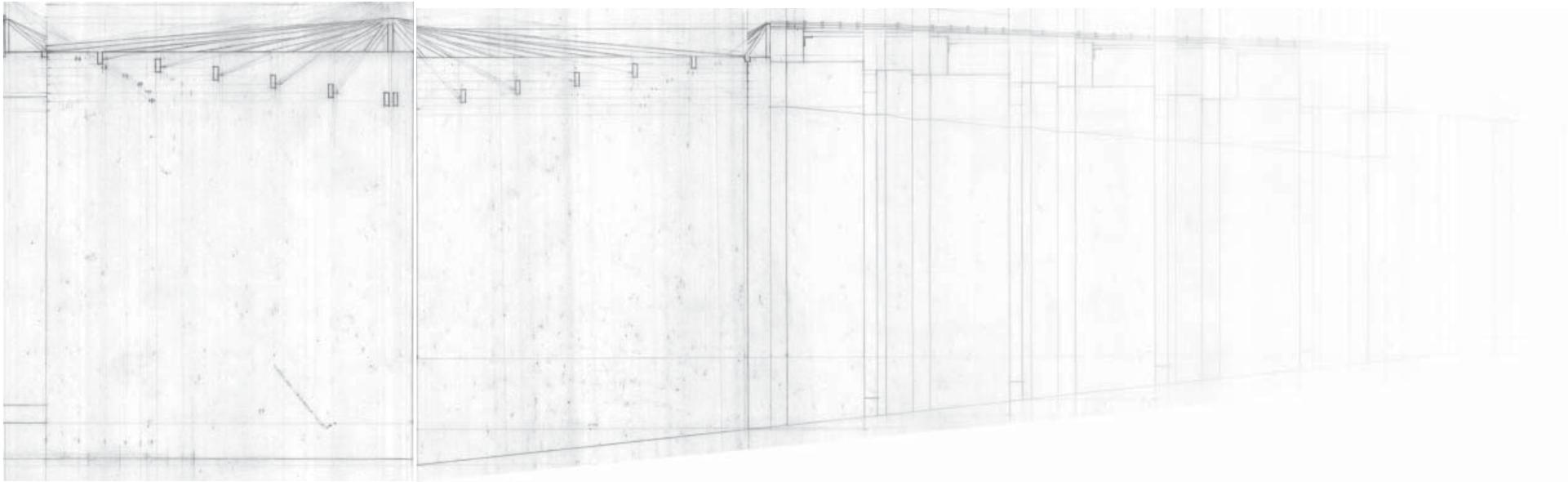


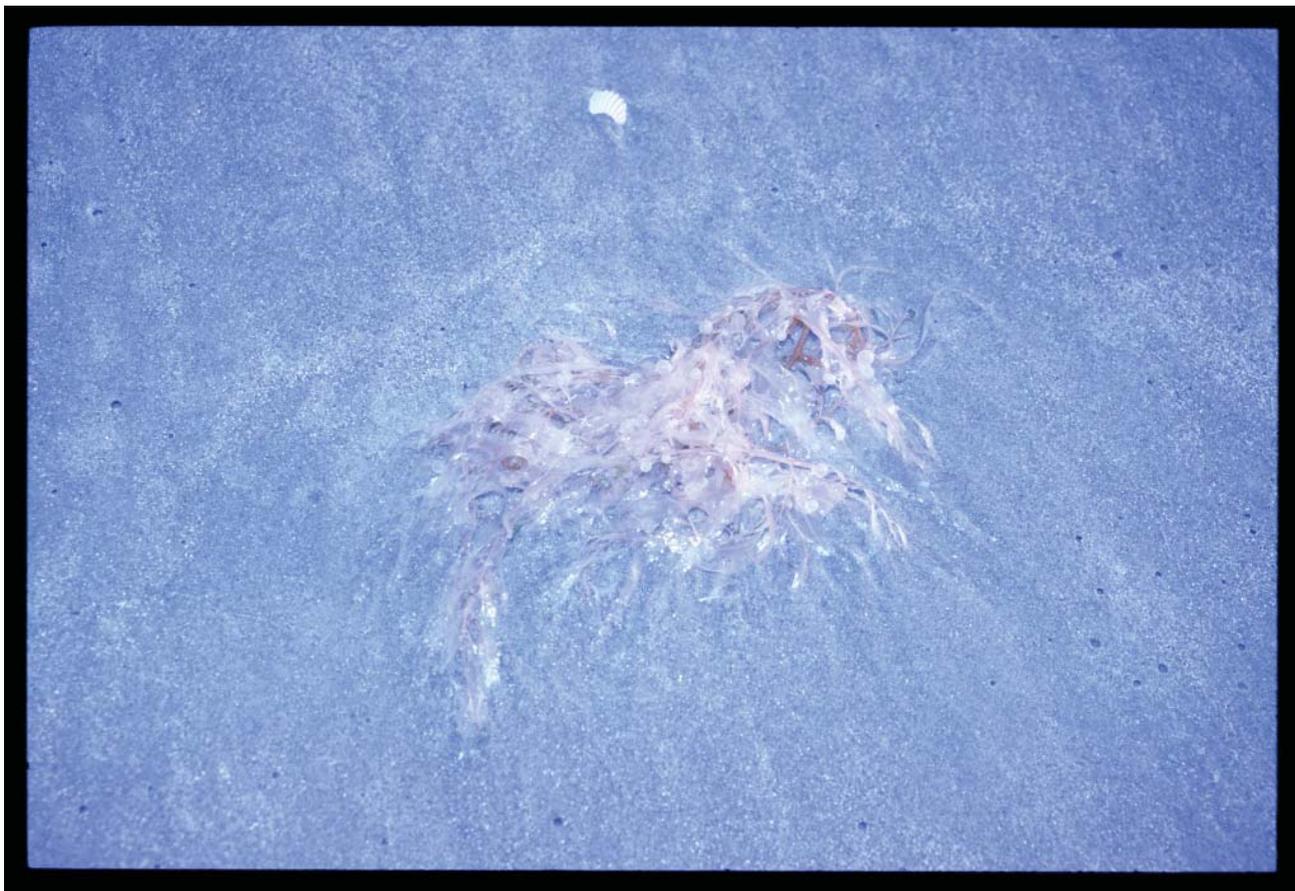












v a c i l l a t e

The 'topography' of the plan has an implicit reality, communicable only in elevation, perspective, etc. That indicated in layers, much like topography, flattened layers indicated by line or shadow within the drawing.

In music, for instance, a series of fixed notes describing a composition, one meandering between points, yet fixed by an overall lexicon of placement.

To compose of stasis and transience, of placement, re-placement or displacement. A line that shakes, vacillating as it describes. The line which surrounds and circumscribes, 'a meaning infinitely suspended, decried, decipherable-indecipherable.'<sup>1</sup>

In a work of architecture, this meaning becomes necessarily fixed, captured. As a photograph captures and displaces, that extracted time framed, strange.

<sup>1</sup> Blanchot, *Disaster*, pg. 50.





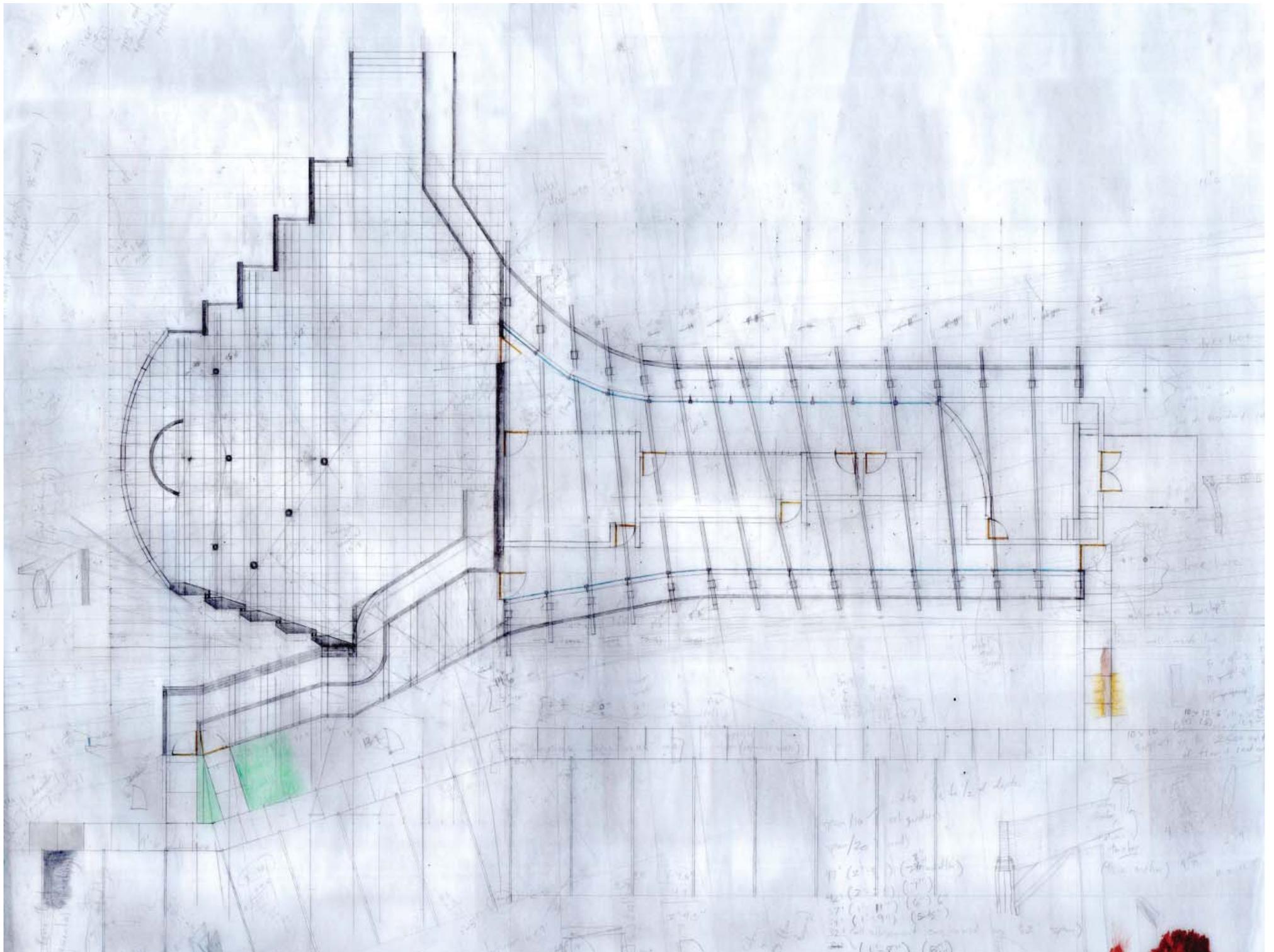
s l i p p a g e

As we move into chaos, as its inner workings lessen in their mystery, one attempts to find a mutually beneficial order, a 'ground that shifts.'

The need to link opposing poles, to entwine forces in seeming antagonism with one another, forces that, in proximity, slip, never joining, never fixing, but instead enacting an invariable, constant tension.

The three-body problem and its constant deferral, that lost (consistently, reliably) within the peripheral. The 'third' body always peripheral.

How to think the third body, the peripheral always anterior, the just-before glimpsed but not seen.





# f i g u r e / g r o u n d

To figure, to resemble (as in an analogous relationship).

A drawing which resembles a building. When isolated, as a drawing often does, 'where' is this figure, this resemblance (physically, in time)? On what ground, what non-place, is it figured?

A drawing's 'adherence to fact' as its only true ground, on which a separate figure becomes, emergent, the idea manifest visually. The figure as a 'fact' only visually, only as an impression or projection of the real.

The ground as a kind of dark matter, that 'seen' only as it acts on the figure, as it dis-figures, overlapping, but not overwhelming the drawing. A vague darkness at the edges, as a reminder of the figure's falsehood, of its potential.





a l l u s i o n / i l l u s i o n

An allusion (in literature, in art) enacts an order of sorts between like entities,  
or rather points from one, to another.

‘Alluding’ to that external, a separate, though similar, reality. To draw attention  
away from that which points, or to strengthen by a noted commonality. Both  
are the function of the allusion.

The illusion does neither—rather, its mystery draws one toward, indeed,  
within it—an illusion presupposes our participation, while an allusion asks  
of it. The illusion lacking mystery—a cloaked reality, masquerading as truth,  
hiding the edges of the mask.

The drawing ‘masquerading as truth’ as it draws attention to that (visually)  
‘like’ itself.

A drawing consistently, wholly, illudes as it alludes, ‘turns away from, by  
turning toward.’<sup>1</sup>

A doubling and a separation of the line. The unfolding separation, the  
movement of thought by which one regards another, the other.

<sup>1</sup> Blanchot, *Disaster*, pg. 100.





# h o r i z o n

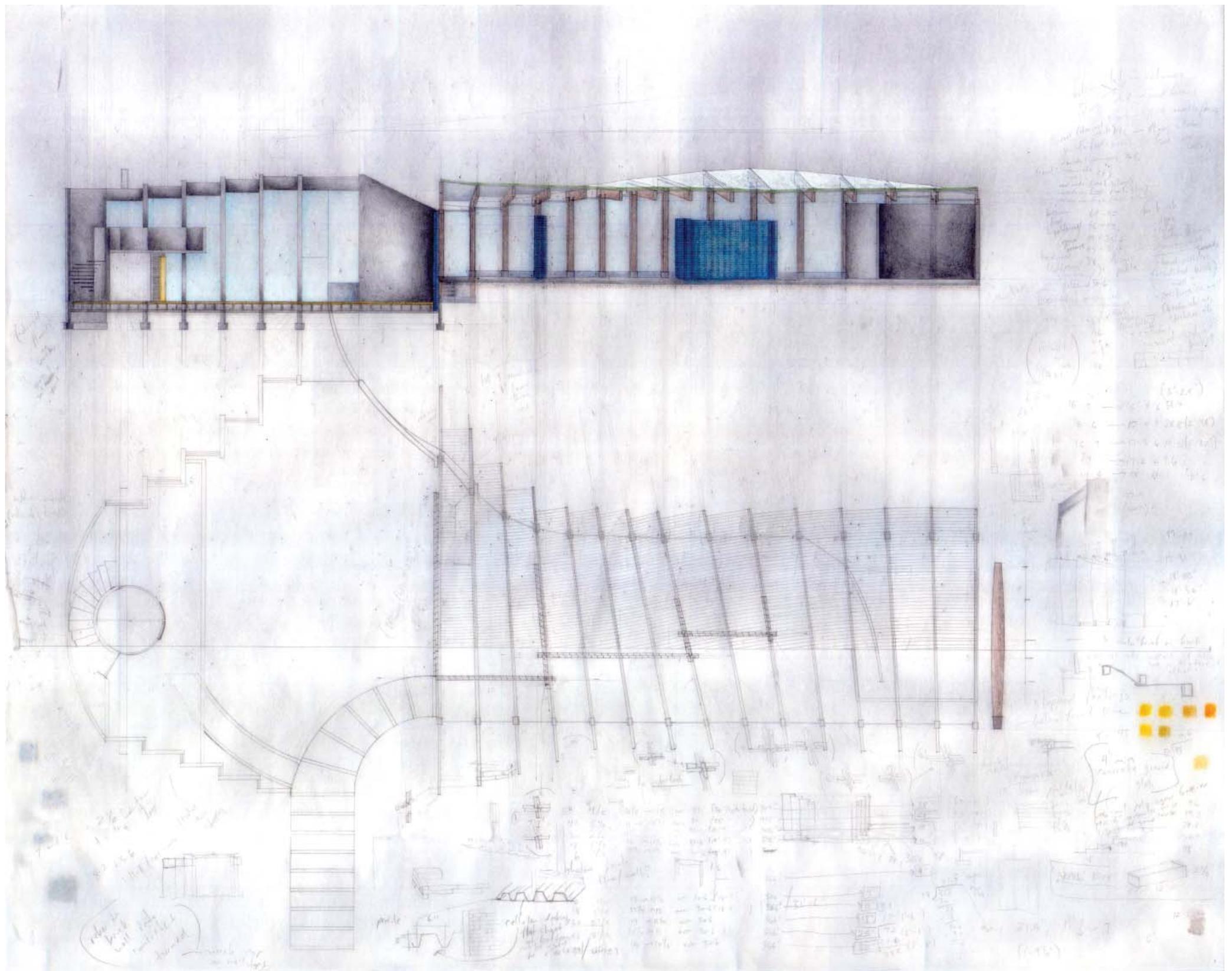
The horizon as that toward which one moves, constantly, that which always recedes, eludes precisely as it is visually manifest. Eluding while in our presence, or rather, our presence in its surround, its envelope.

The architectural section as the 'caught' horizon, its possibilities summed up, finally, able to observe, to read, the partial as a whole. An exposing cut, as all cuts expose.

The section pauses, in real time, a built reality or possibility, a past or future.

A line which has moved through, invisibly, through which one moves, visually, in order to study, ascertain or inhabit the section's revealed and foreshortened interior.

The meandering line of the plan informing that of the section, lines seeking both description and fixity.





c o u n t e r - n a r r a t i v e

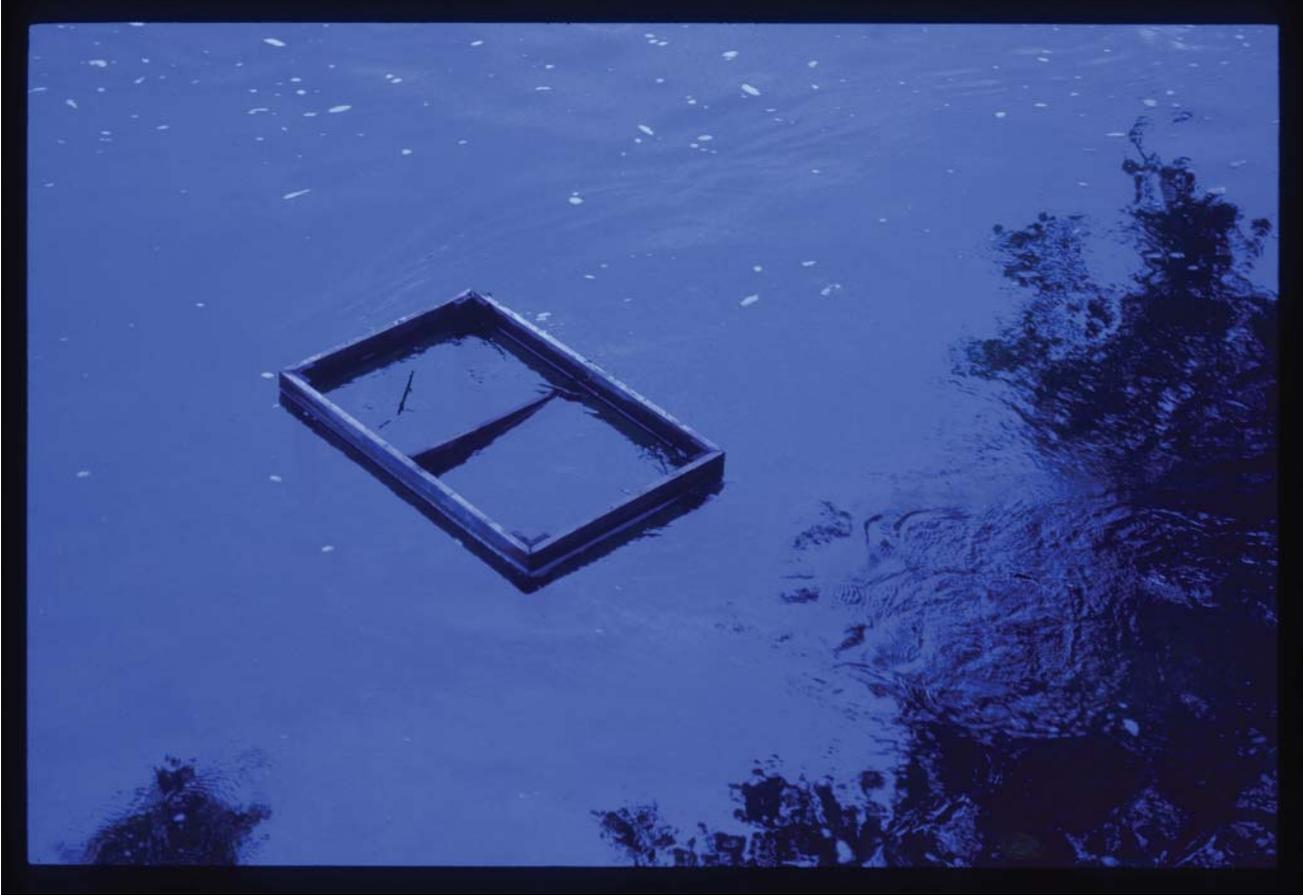
Within the visual site, the site from the air, the building as a point, an anchor. A landscape, a chain of parts, a novel view, an expanse in which pieces, fields, sit, anchored and anchoring, constituted, surrounding, but not overwhelmed. The site as the second 'narrative,' augmenting the work of architecture, shifting to accommodate it, while, perhaps, architecture defers also. A mutual deference.

A 'counter-narrative' understood as another story, a parallel but differing account. To give account of something, the meander at another scale, the view calming the landscape, reducing the meander to a tremor, slight but detectable.

The increment as one narrative, the site's meander as another.







c o d e x

*'... an unintegratable multiplicity, a sort of intermittent aggregate, not closed upon its unity.'*

*-- Michel Serres<sup>1</sup>*

A collection of work supposes, perhaps, pieces that form a whole, a coherence.

This thesis does not coalesce; it is not fixed, not 'finished.' As it has eluded and broken into partials, above all it seeks a language, a language to implore, to speak the impossible.

An inventory of thought, a codex of approaches, of pieces, moving through fleeting answers and perpetual questions. To conjure the specter of movement in its very fixing, its attempt and compromise within the work of architecture. To seek, incessantly, endlessly, to circle, circumscribing, loosely, the boundless. This is the object of the thesis, the object of study—to seek without finding, to move while fixed, to push through contradiction to reveal, perhaps, the resolution which does not resolve—the process.

An architecture shaped by the subject, though not beholden to it, as nothing is or can be outside of the self, of one's experience as a subject. The subject moves through, positing and determining a world separate and experiencing the world-as-given.

To collect disparities, parallel narratives, the story incomplete, yet told, spoken.

To allow slippage, inexactitude, openness. A meaning resistant, elusive, and somehow not closed, linking aspects of the work together as a chain of events, a serial meander.

Drawn as if written, written as if drawn.

<sup>1</sup> Serres, *Genesis*, pg. 124.





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t h a n k s

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