

**DELIMITATIVE WALLS:
DWELLINGS ON THE N.Y. WATERFRONT**

by

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"Have I said it before? I am learning to see. Yes, I am beginning. It's still going badly. But I intend to make the most of my time."

Faces—RANIER MARIA RILKE

[ABSTRACT]

Part of the struggle of making architecture is reconciling its various realities; as it exists as pure idea and its transformation into a 'thing' existing in the world. Modern times poses a new challenge as well. As Jacob Bronowski has said, the dilemma is no longer to find structure for material but to find material for structure. Therefore, the 'imposed idea' is important as an impetus for Architecture to exist.

In this project the imposed idea was the use of a series of parallel walls, vertical planes, that delimit the place for dwelling.

In the first drawings, an attempt was made to use color as the substantiation or realization of space. The line drawing remains as a descriptive adjunct to the expressive drawing. They *become* together; the idea vs. its realization each describing the 'thing' in its *evolving* reality.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*T*O ALL THOSE who have
contributed to my enlightenment
and growth, I offer heartfelt thanks.



*T*O MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS who
offered unconditional emotional
support and love, I am forever in your debt.



*This book is
Dedicated to my parents.*

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

Simply stated, a thesis project is merely a means for investigation and thought about architecture. I believe it is most successful when a clearly defined limit is established and the realm of investigation is pushed *within* that limit (what I have chosen to call the 'imposed idea'). The range of inquiry should address both the large conceptual realm and the realm of details.

This project originated with the Competition for the N. Y. Waterfront sponsored by the Municipal Art Society in 1987. As part of an effort to revitalize the Hudson River Waterfront [along the old West Side Highway] ideas were sought as to the use and possibilities that could be created. On the scale of the city, my initial idea was to transform the grid of the city streets into linear elements or piers that extend out onto the water. Thus joining the existing fabric of the city with the newly created one. The pier would act as pedestrian access to various structures on either side of the pier itself.

With this established, I chose to narrow the focus to one pier and the search for the 'structure' began. The imposed idea became to use the wall to delimit, or establish the boundary of space within which to dwell. The walls were visualized as linear elements in plan which became planes as they rose in elevation. The two major boundary walls act to isolate dwelling from the chaos of the city, so are parallel to the Manhattan shore line. They run north to south and are aligned with the flow of the Hudson River. They exist both as spatial containers and, individually, as 'condensed mass,' in the sense of Luis Barragan's walls.

I relied on several 'spiritual leaders' or mentors, for inspiration and occasional reassurance. Luis Barragan certainly was an early inspiration. The recognition of the power of a wall as a pure plane defined by light and how it meets the edge of the sky is a lesson from him. But for this particular project Tadao Ando lent perhaps the greatest support. I think the following quote reveals part of my debt.

Today the major task is building walls that cut the interior off entirely from the exterior. In the process, the ambiguity of the wall, which is simultaneously interior and exterior is of the greatest significance. I employ the wall to delineate a space that is physically and psychologically isolated from the outside world.'

In Ando's approach, the wall is used not only for its ability to isolate but also to *contain* space, "purified space enclosed by floors, walls and ceilings." ² This became for me the consummation of the imposed idea; the two walls creating a rigid, fixed space that was then explored in a plastic way within, creating various spatial relationships.

At this point it seems prudent to mention a third influence, though by no means a guiding one. This project probably would not be possible had it not been for Theo Vandoesburg and his theory of neoplasticism. His ideas were based on a concept of a 'new' architecture, which together with the adjoining arts, would be elemental. That is to say, it would develop out of the elements of building in the widest sense. These elements such as mass, surface, time, space, light, color, material, etc. are plastic, he said, as well as objective and universal. While I believe it was necessary for his theory to remain pure and not be tainted with subjectivity ("This unity can be achieved only by suppressing arbitrary subjective elements in the expressional means.") ³ I think time has tempered that exclusion.

Vandoesburg's concept of space however still echos in the modern mind:

...space means to him [the artist] a special tension operated in the work by the tightening of forms, planes or lines. The word formation means to him the visible embodiment of the relationship between a form (or colour) and space and the other forms or colours. ⁴

In **Plate 2** following, color is used to express this idea about space and its formation through the use of color. A hierarchy can be set up which is sympathetic to the initial imposed idea. That is, the distinction is initiated here between walls that are cast concrete (the two major boundary walls) and the north and south walls which are precast. These walls become open to the views of the river and also serve as entrance from the pier and exit to the water.

The boundary walls, as part of their initial conception, were thought of as delimiters—both in physical and visual terms. There-

fore, the treatment of openings in these walls was dealt with carefully—the part of the wall that rises above the water is treated as *surface* to collect the sun and reflect into the water. Sunlight is allowed to enter through a ‘transparent’ section of the wall. However, the glass block maintains the integrity of enclosure and relative continuity of surface. The wall transforms as it enters the water, becoming thicker and dissolving into steps that retreat into the water. The passage of time is perceived both by the number of steps revealed and their corresponding wetness or dryness from the rise and fall of the tide.

The walls become ‘immaterial’, in a sense, as they express the reflection of light and become surface. The choice of concrete is ‘right’ for several reasons: it is perhaps the most appropriate material to answer the ‘material for the structure’ question (the ‘structure’ used in this instance to refer to the imposed vocabulary of planes) and the capture the sense of immateriality. To borrow once again from Ando:

Concrete is the most suitable material for realizing spaces created by rays of sunlight. . . .When they agree with my aesthetic image, walls become abstract, are negated, and approach the ultimate limit of space. Their actuality is lost and only the space they enclose gives a sense of really existing. Under these conditions, volume and projected light alone float into prominence as hints of the spatial composition.⁵

My hope is that this brief introduction has elucidated my basic intentions and that the drawings which follow speak for the rest. ■

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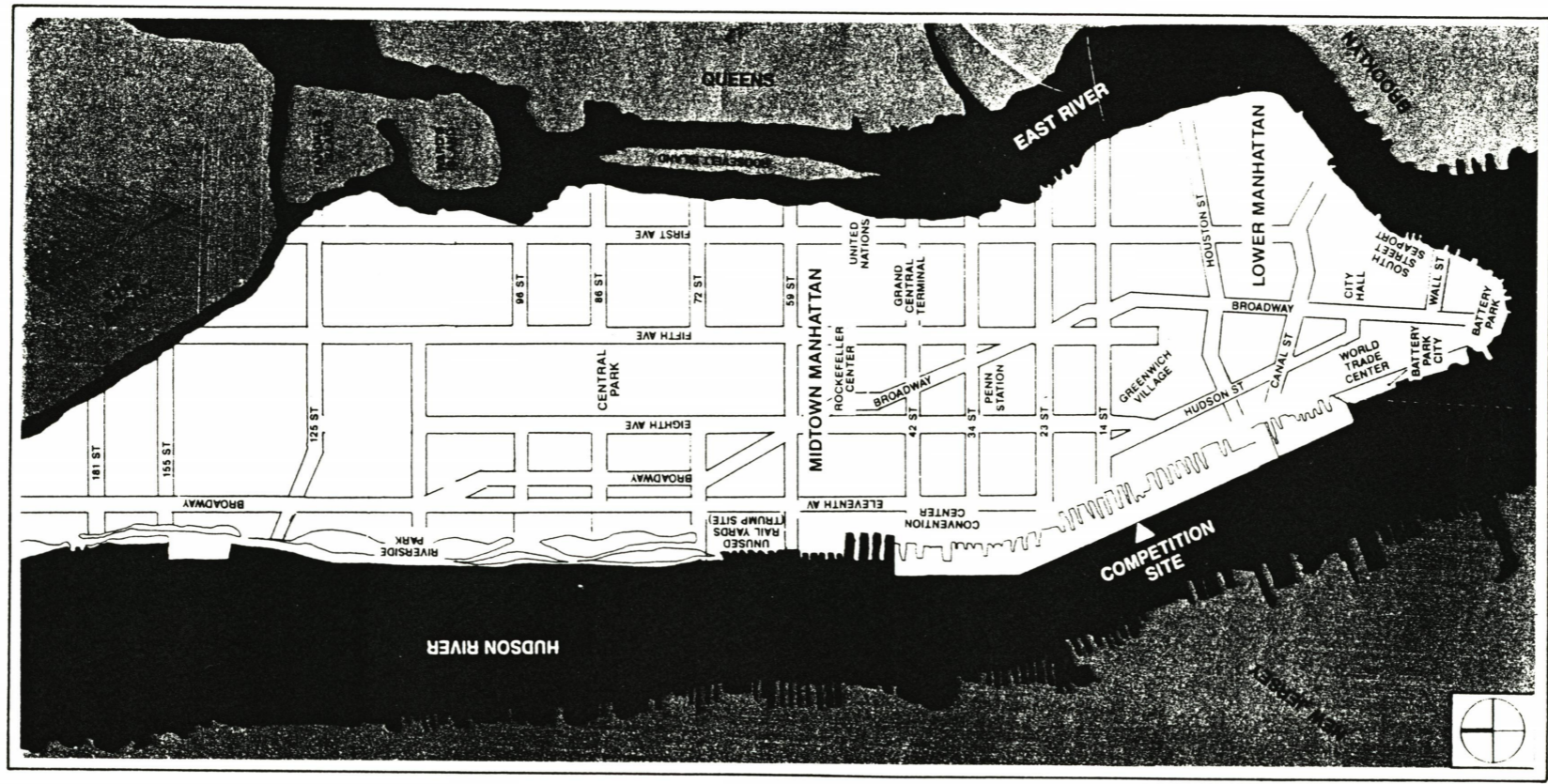


PLATE 1

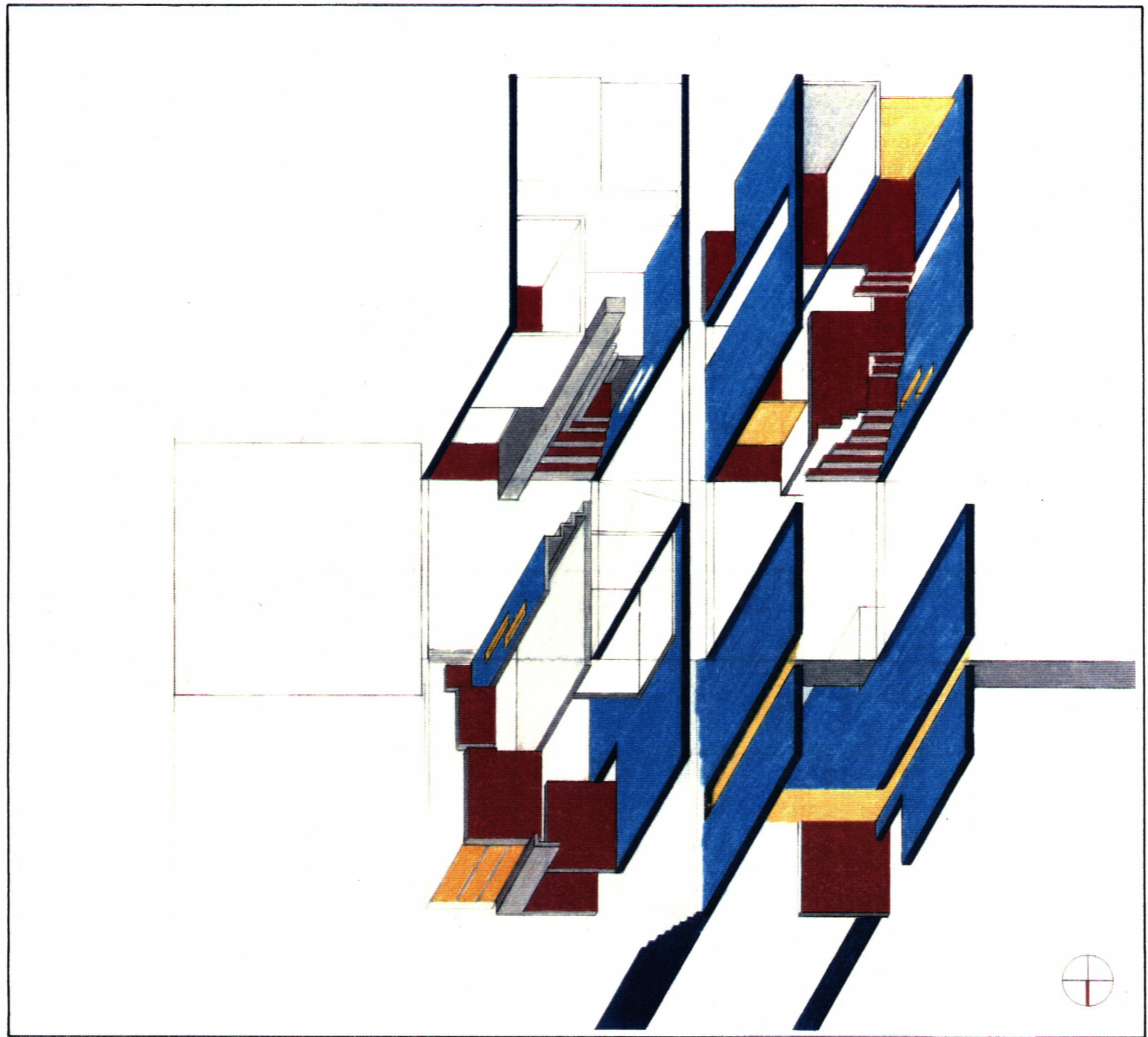


PLATE 2

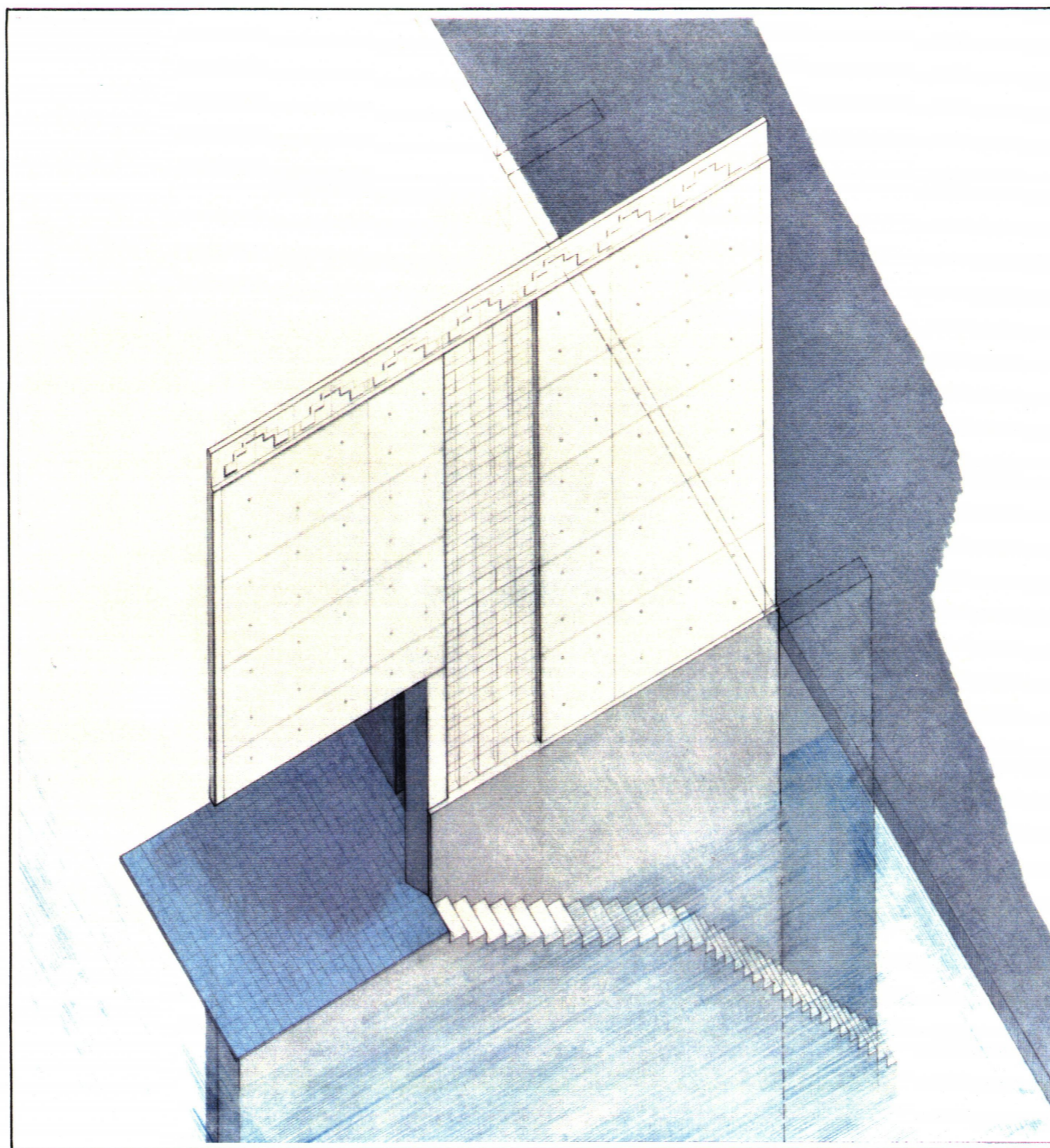


PLATE 3

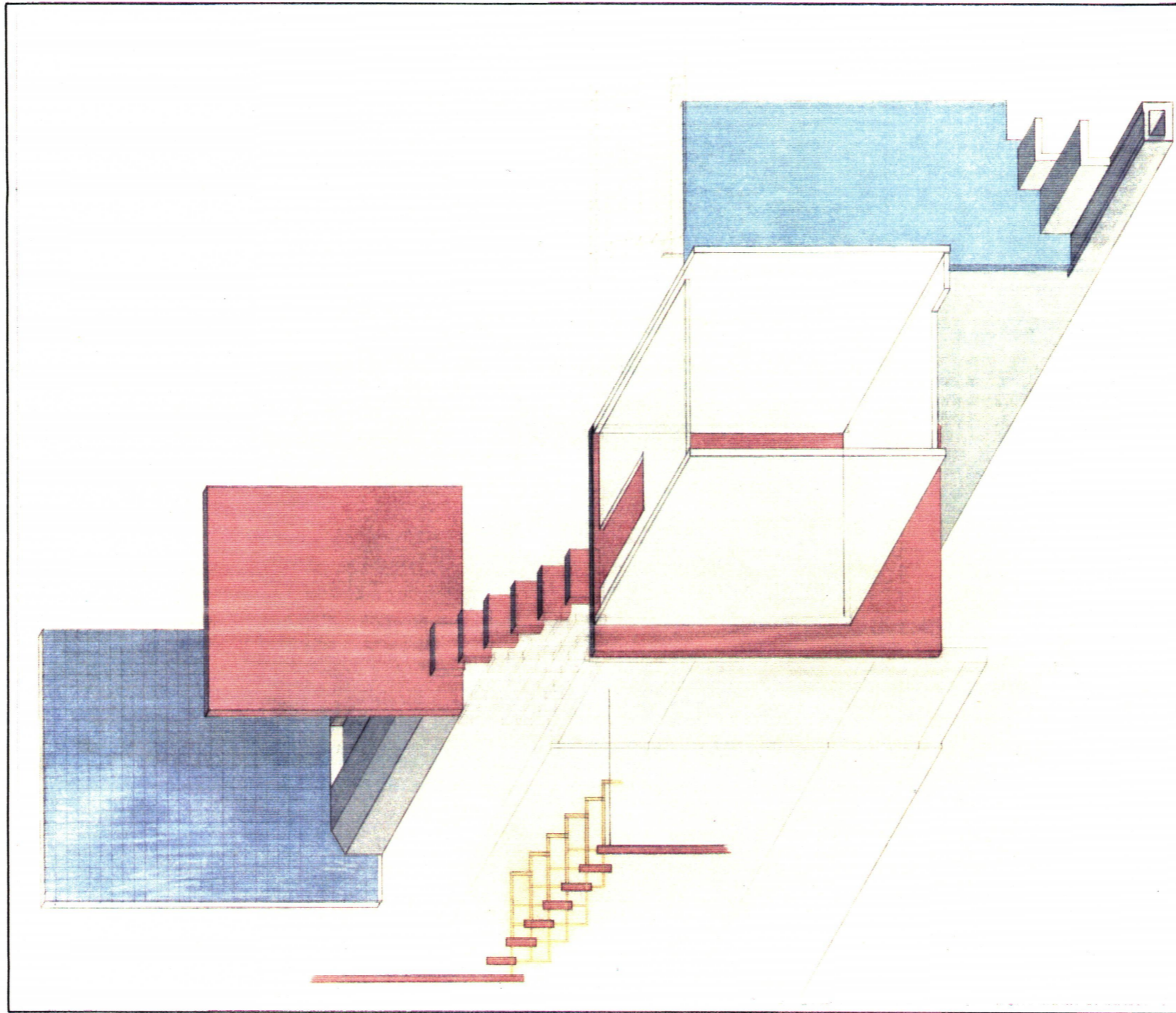


PLATE 4

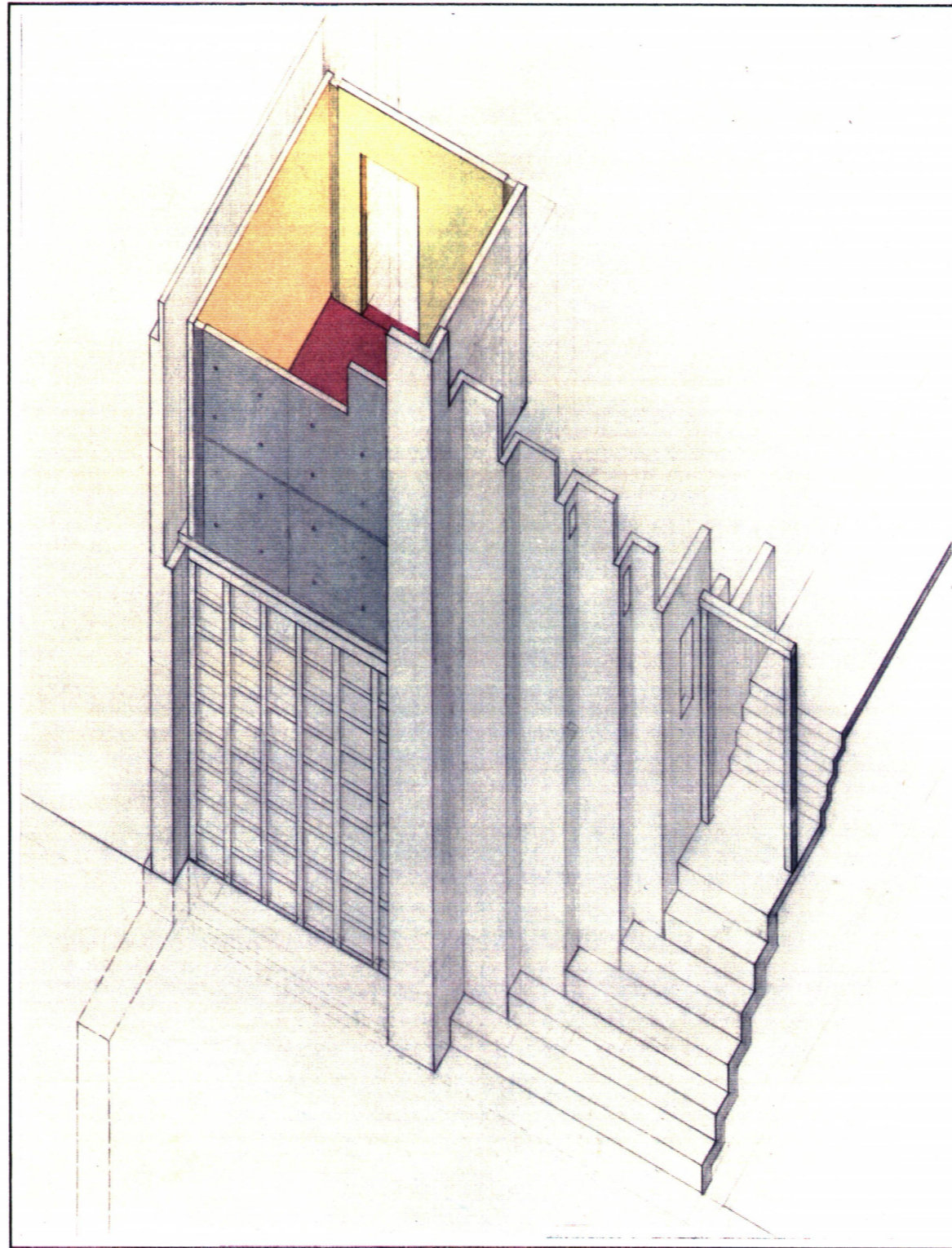


PLATE 5

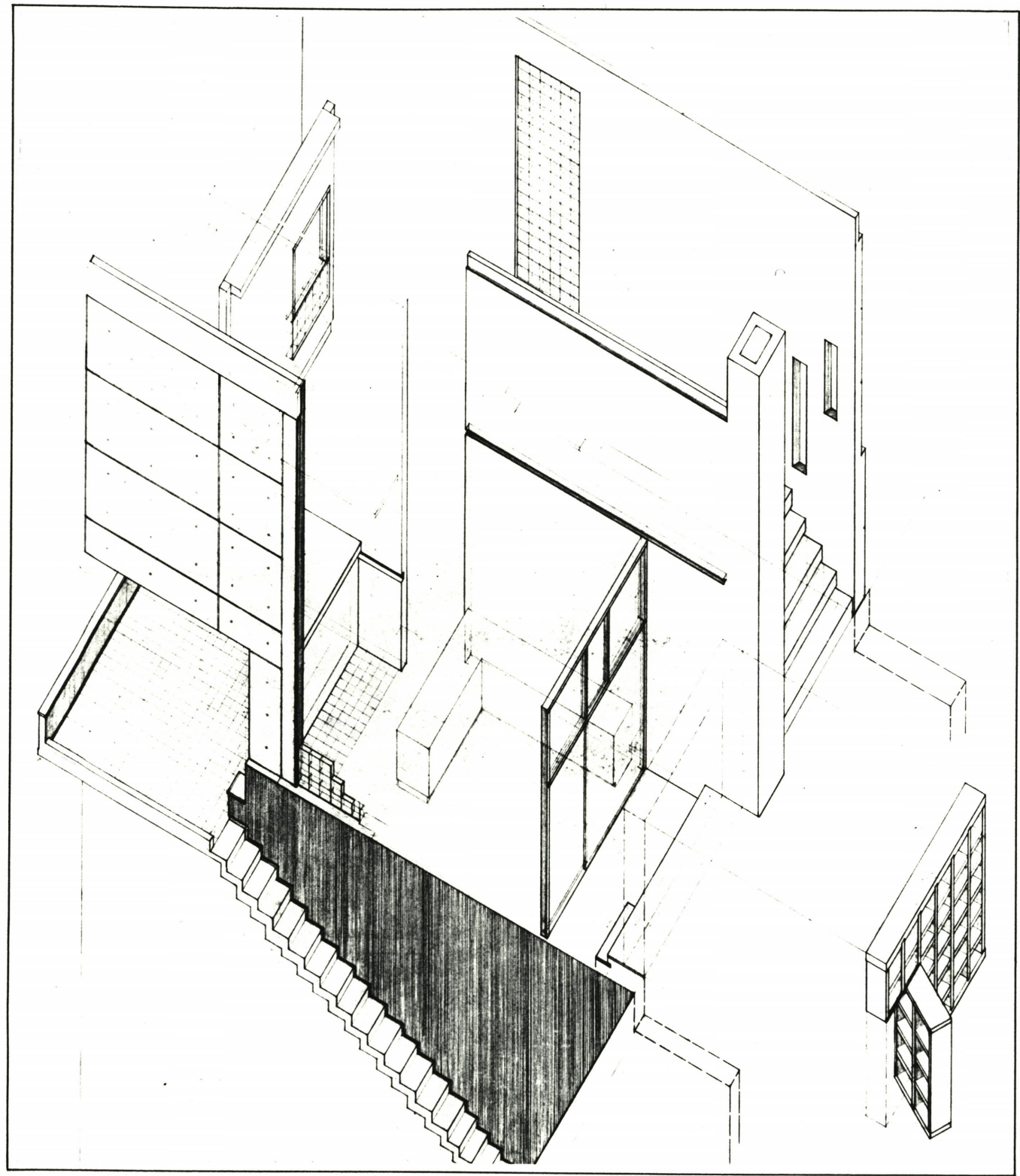


PLATE 6

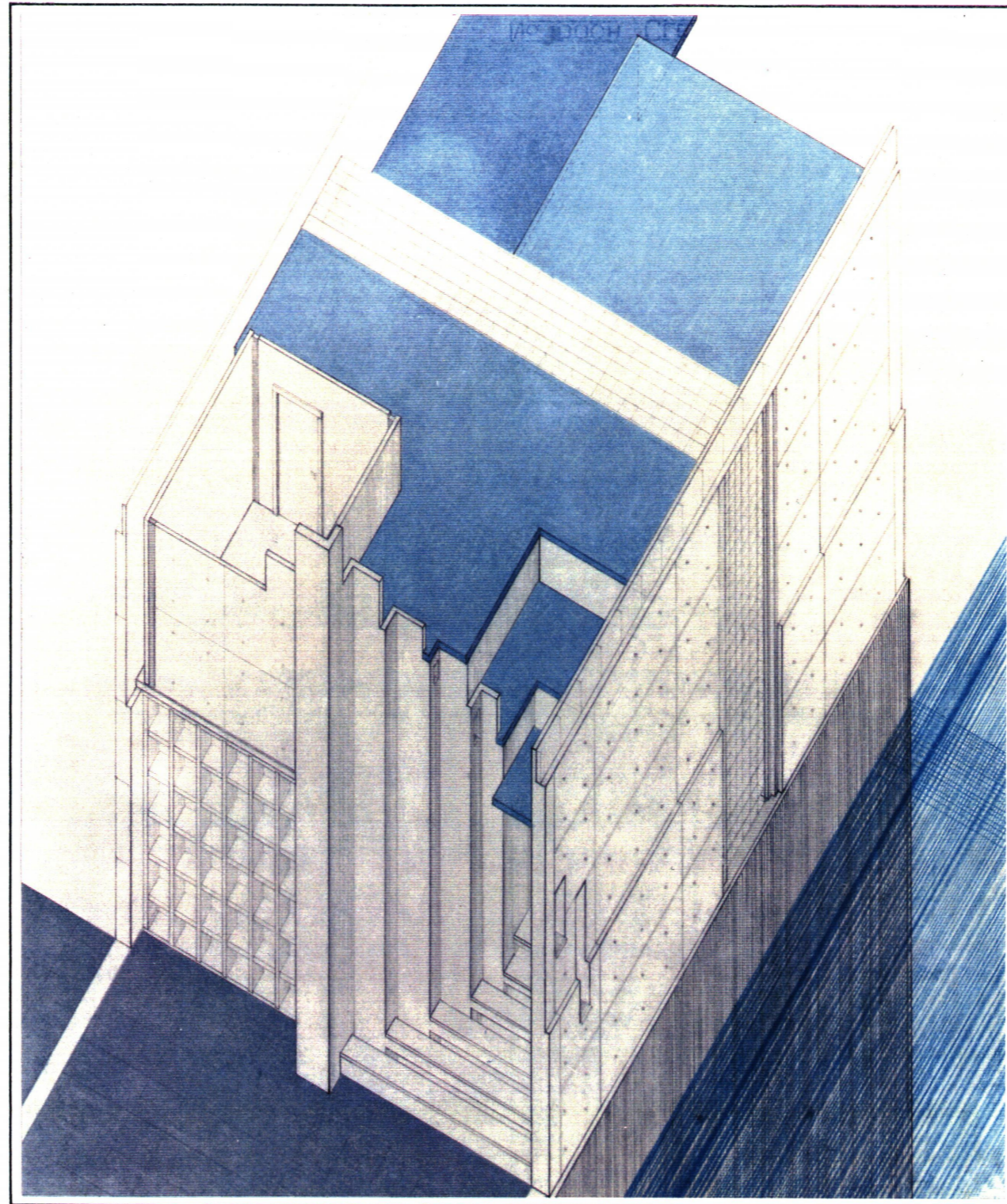


PLATE 7

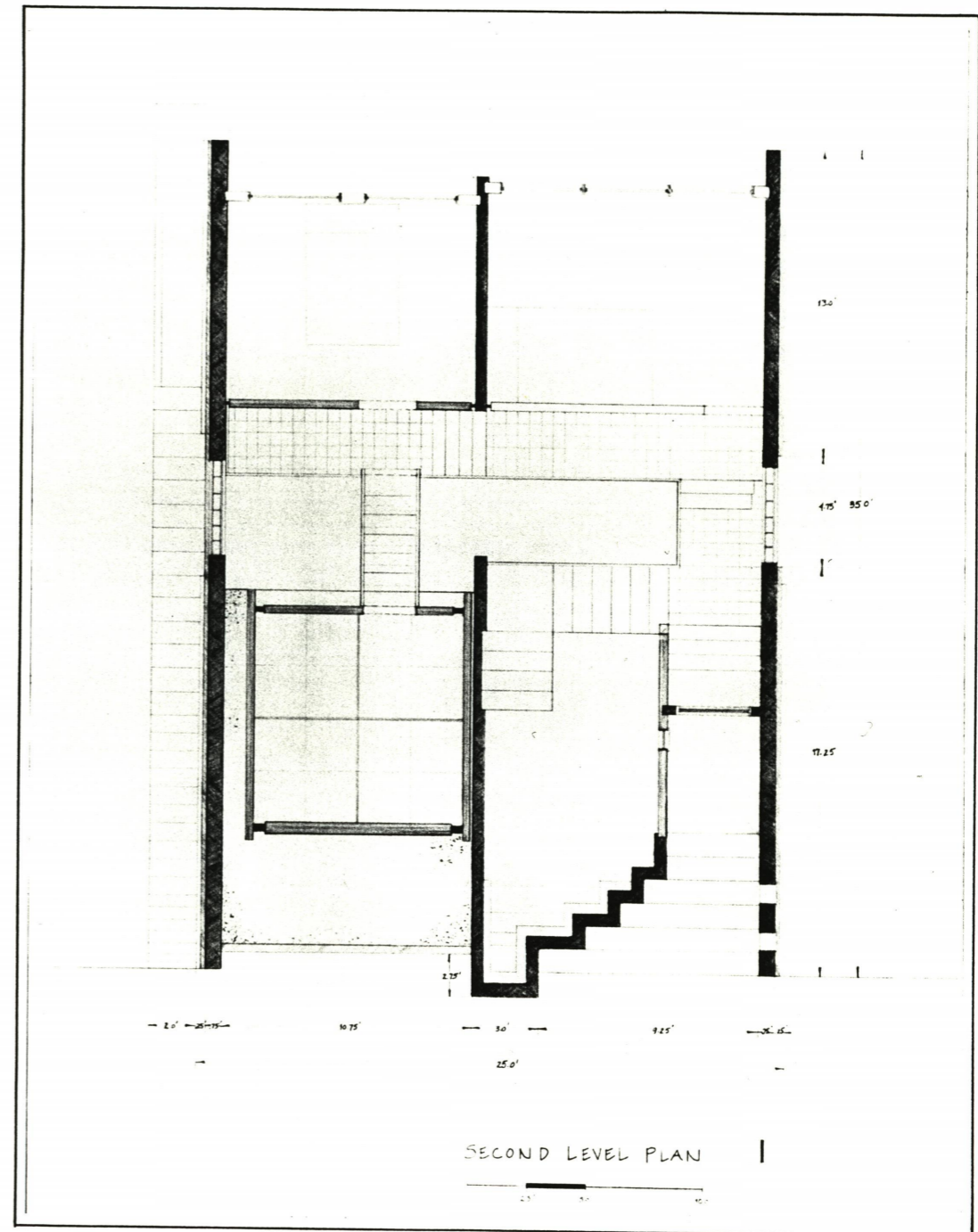
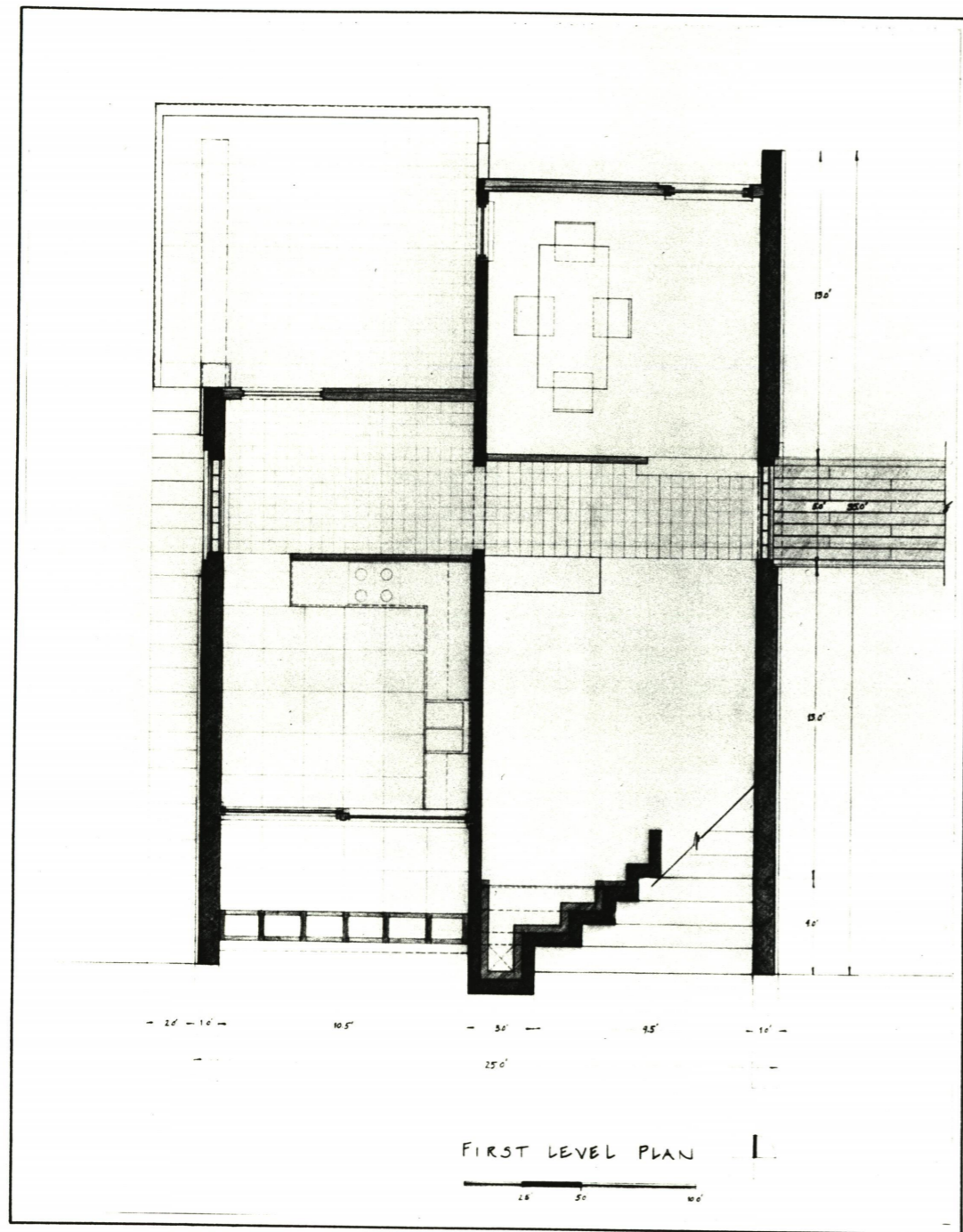


PLATE 8



PLATE 9

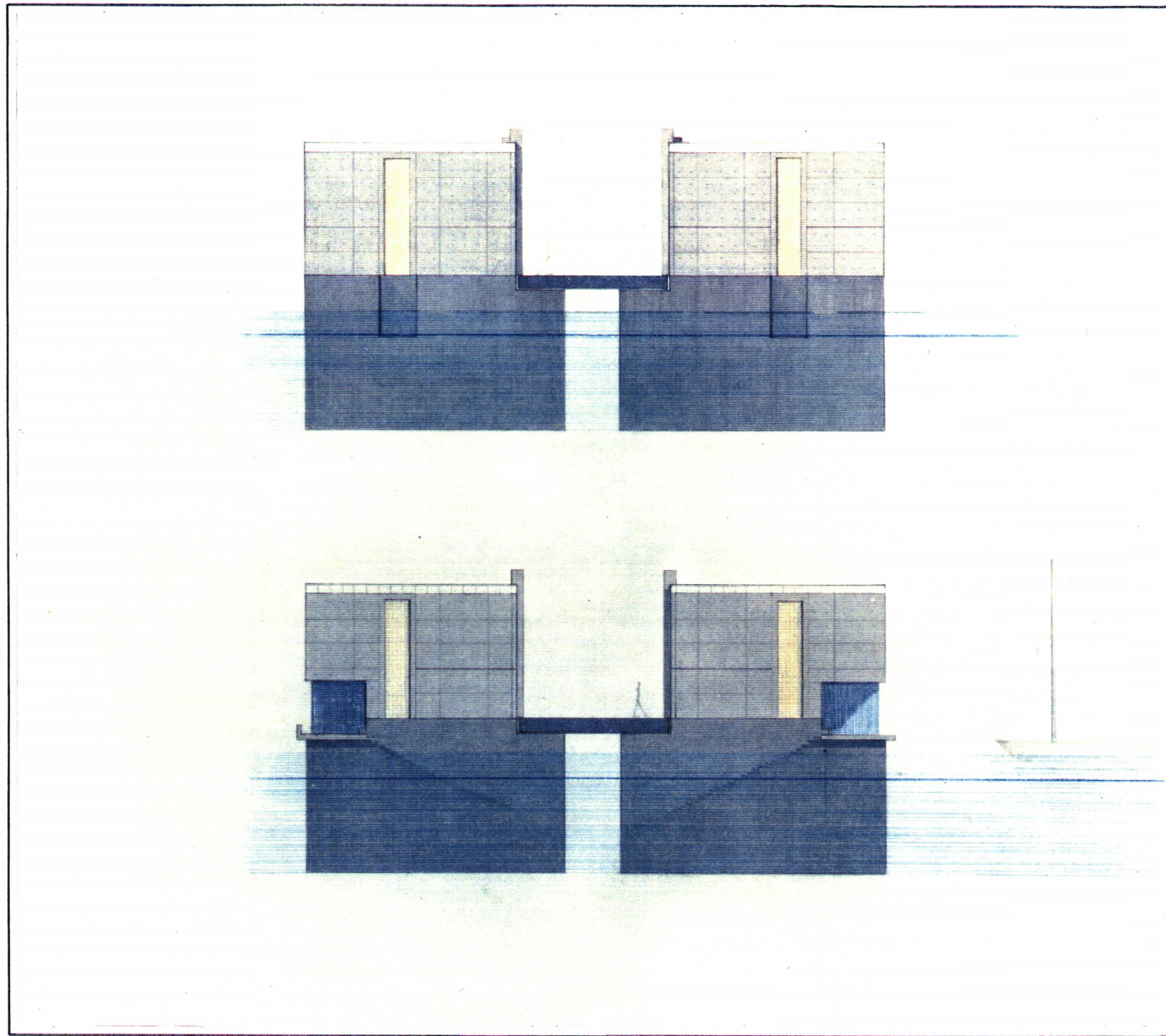


PLATE 10

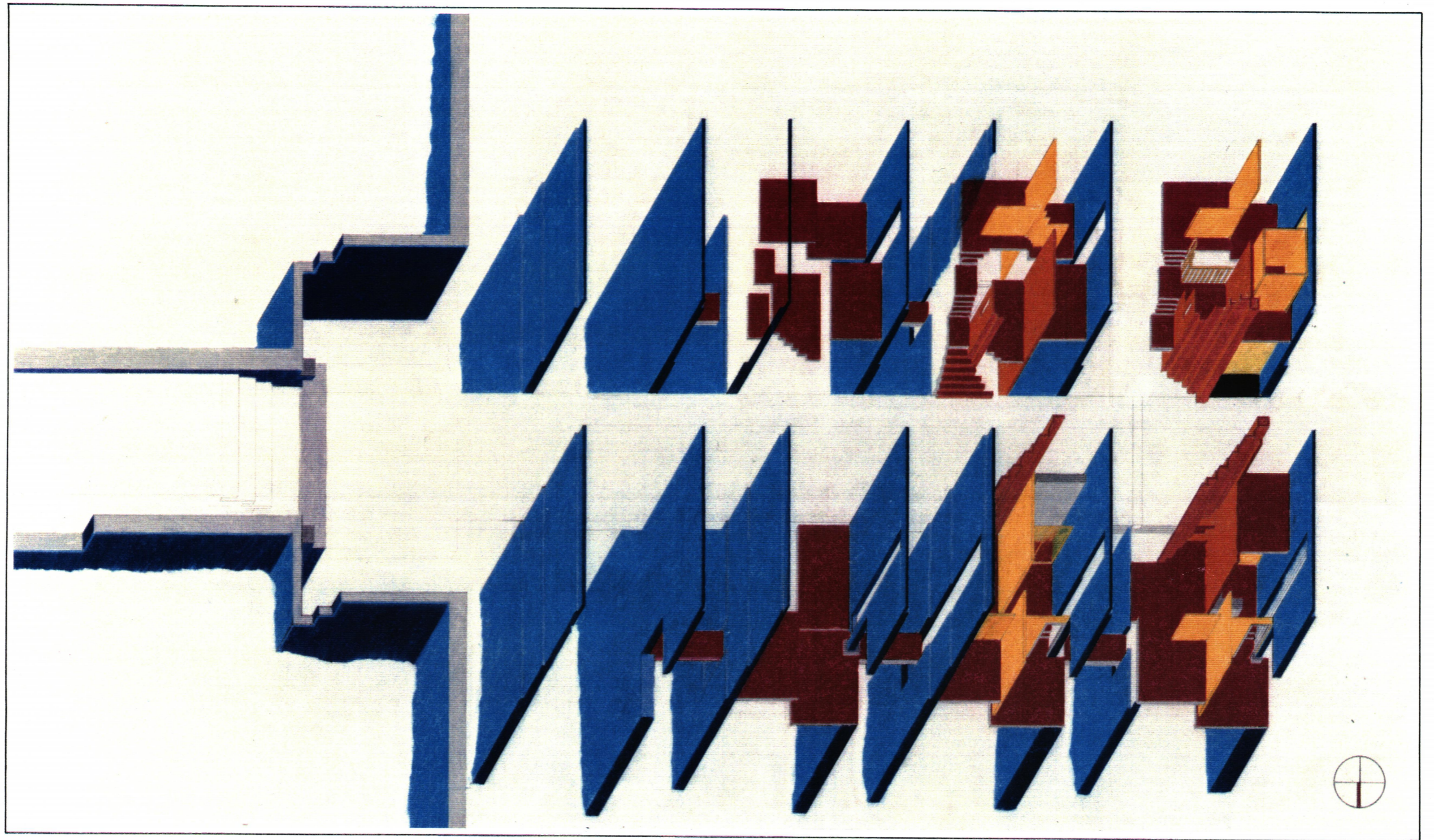


PLATE 11

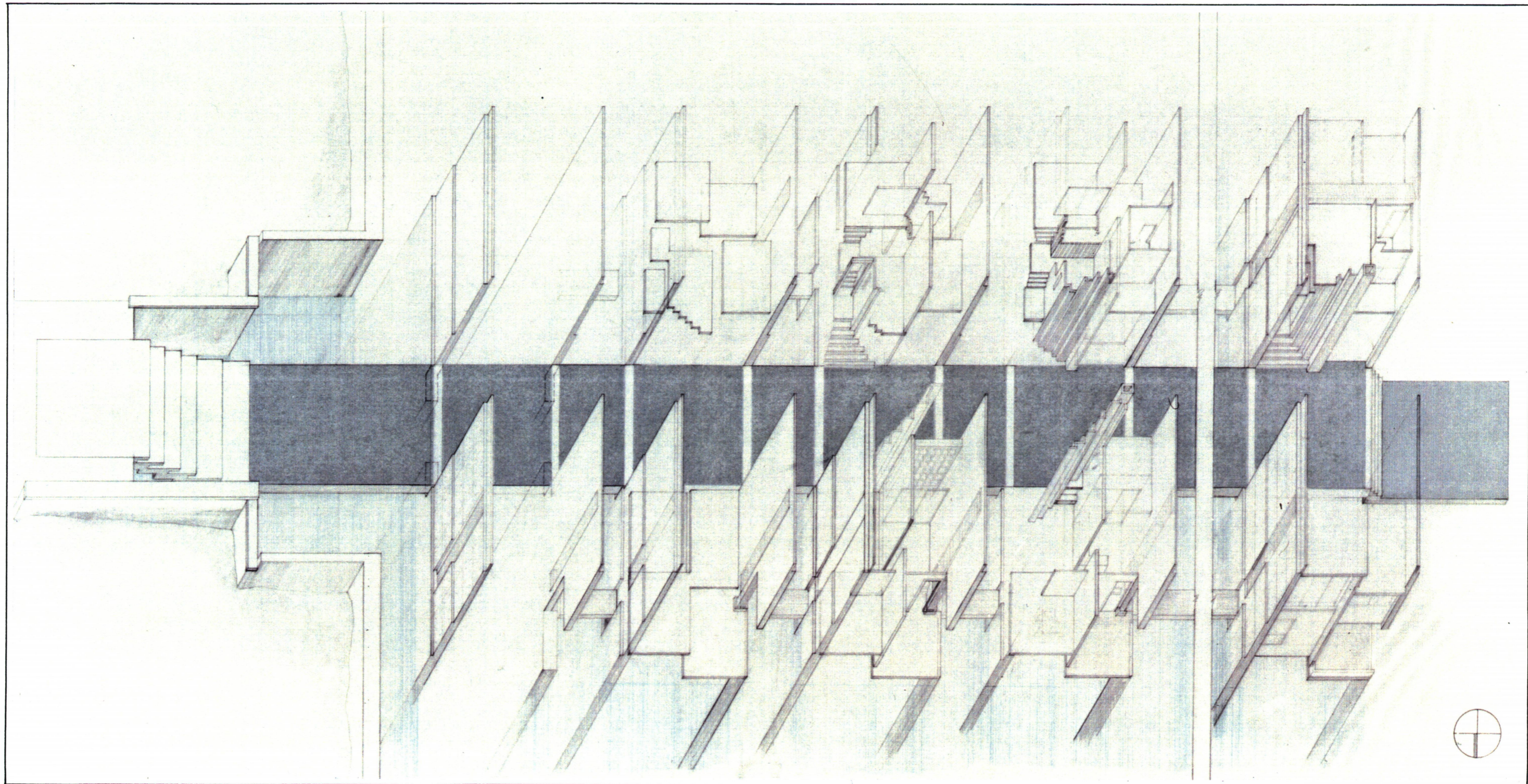


PLATE 12

CONCLUSION

The architect is by nature always abstract but life sets him the task to build his abstract forms, situate them in such a way that useful space for life may form itself amidst them; i.e. life itself . . . it is evident that I understand architecture as an activity outside all utilitarianism, a non-objective architecture consequently possessing its own ideology, different from that of other ideas; this is how I understand all art: as an activity free from all economical, practical and religious ideologies.

KASIMIR MALEVICH
from *The Artist and Infinity*

NOTES

1. Ando, Tadao, "The Wall as Territorial Delineation," *The Japan Architect*, June 1978, p.12.
2. Ibid, p.13.
3. Van Doesburg, Theo, "Report of the De Stijl Group," *Principles of Neo-Plastic Art*, Humphries & Co. LTD, London 1968
4. Ibid, p.7
5. Ando, Tadao, "From Self-Enclosed Modern Architecture Towards Universality," *The Japan Architect*, May 1982, p.12.

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