

A CONVERSATION

by

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER



OF



ARCHITECTURE

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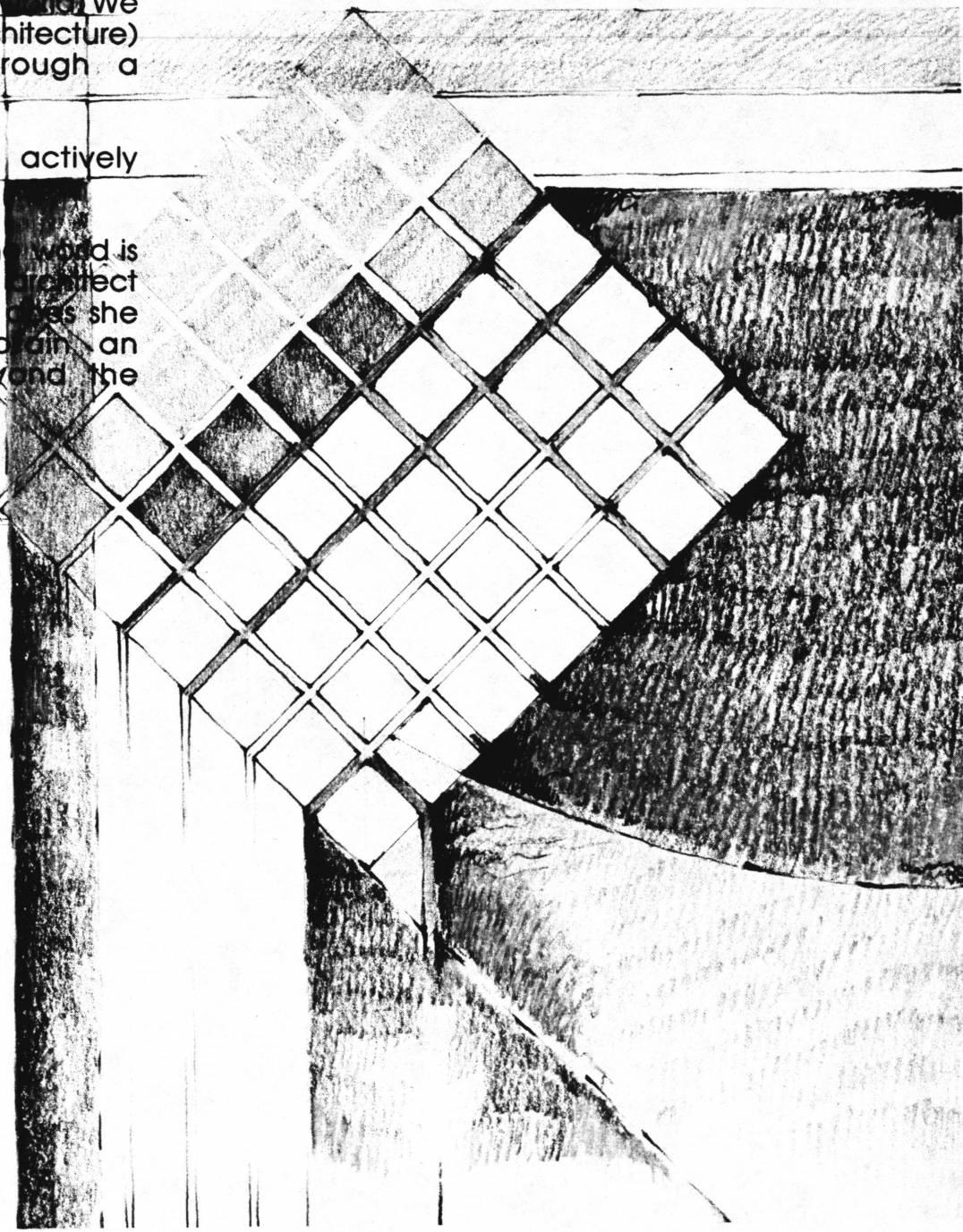
June 1991

This thesis is a conversation among myself, architecture and education. This conversation made apparent the necessity for a greater understanding of the world beyond what is immediately perceived.

Architecture is a discipline of the world. We can know the world (through architecture) by 'perceptual faith' or through a philosophy of reflection.¹

To study the world is to be actively engaged in architecture.

The immediate observation of the world is complex and rapid. Does an architect respond to this observation or does she or he reflect, try to obtain an understanding that goes beyond the apparent.



"A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I was not capable of ..."

Maurice Merleau Ponty



The study of architecture, in fact, may be a study of the world and ourselves. For most, the world is what we "see" based on what we assume to be a common perceptual understanding. This "perceptual faith,"¹ as discussed by Merleau-Ponty, is known by a verifiable acceptance of the world, and ourselves, as an observable perception.

...fulfillment of meaning in the architectural work is represented by the expression of 'stupor' -

the effect which the architect experiences in front of his or her own finished project. Reward comes for the architect -

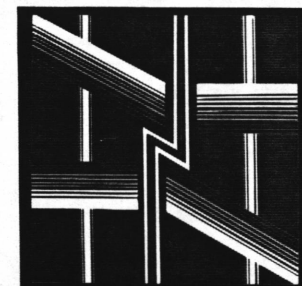
for the fatigue, the expenditure of knowledge, for the anguishing research, the difficult experiment

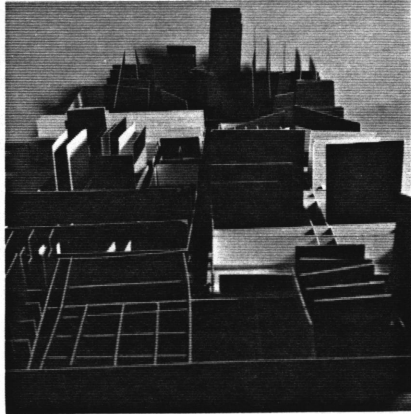


in the form of a gift offered by the completed project:

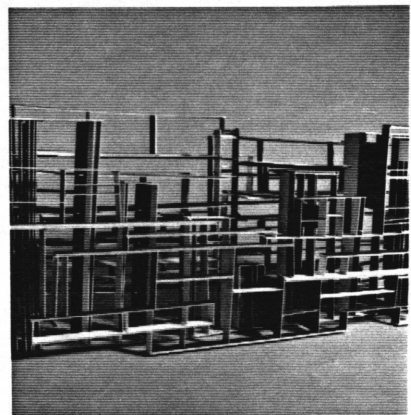
stupor, an event which re-opens the kingdom of experience, the territory of the surprise which one wanders into despite all the rationalism, knowledge, and concern with which the architect acted while conceiving the project.

Francesco Dal Co





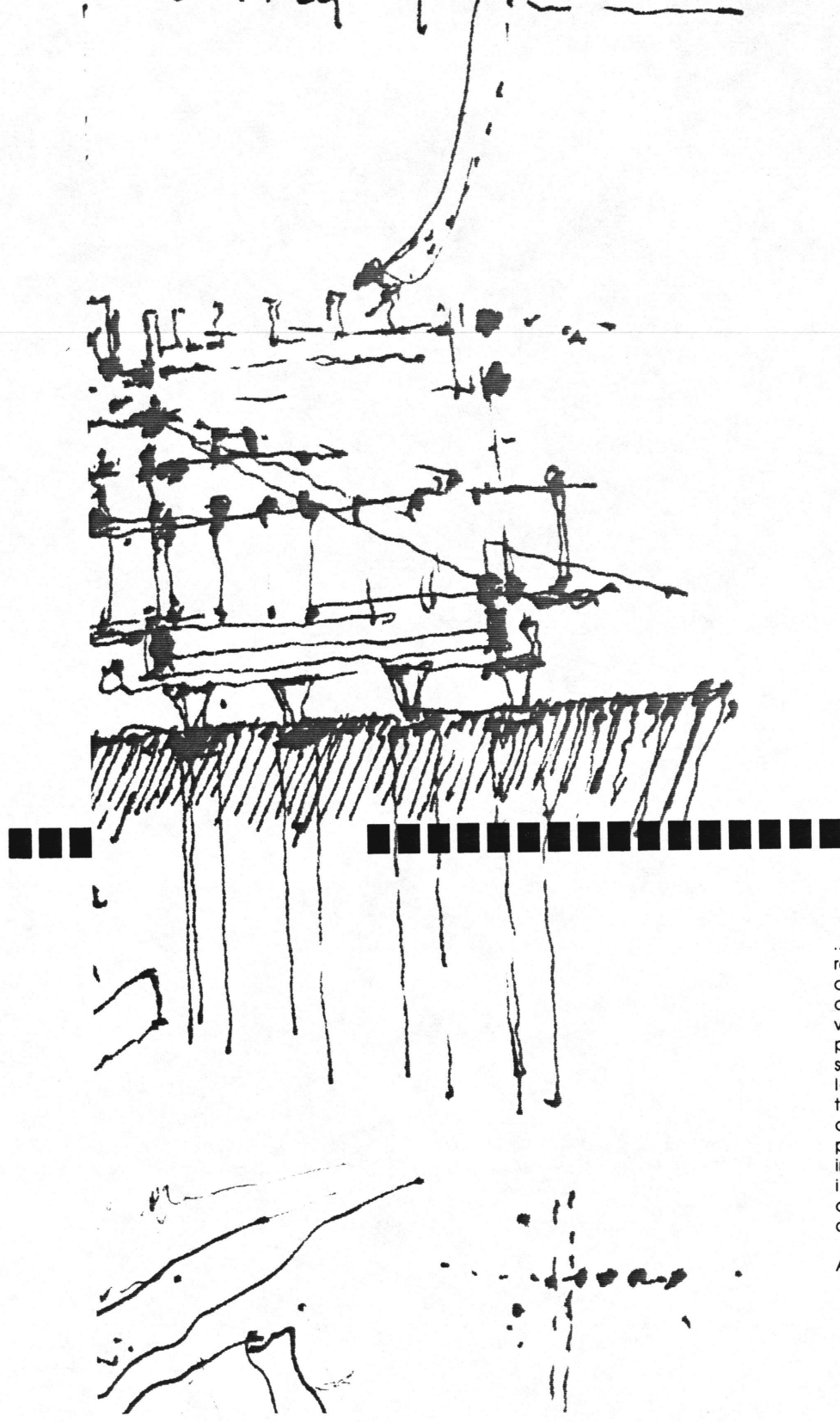
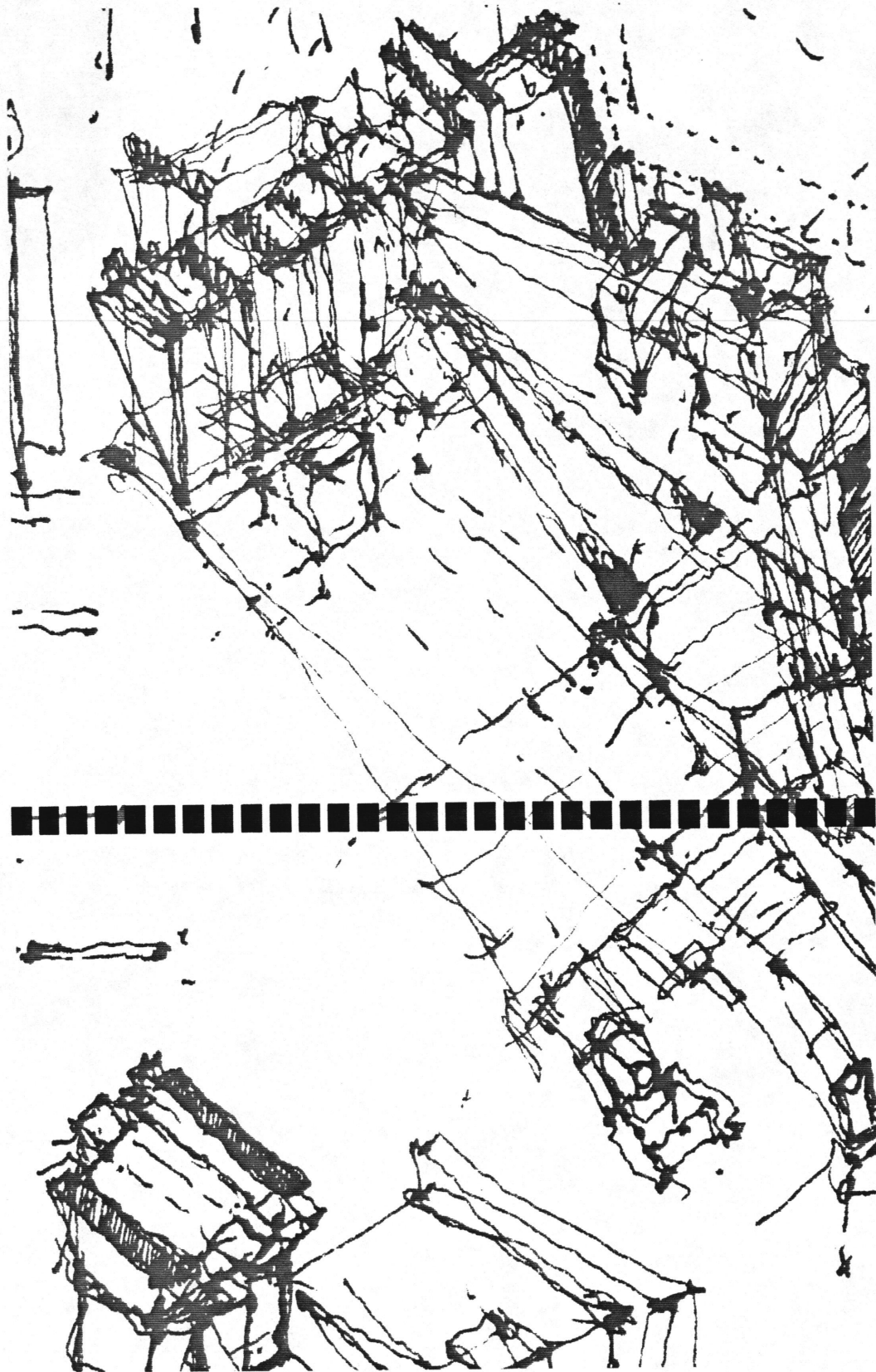
However, this perceptual world, although, has limited boundaries. It has been contended that sole reliance upon this faith, either indirectly or directly, has led to a perceptual "distantlessness"² based upon a parochial simplicity. To be actively engaged in the inextricable, perhaps we might embrace a world without these perceptual boundaries - one that encourages understanding beyond the tangible, a "philosophy of reflection."³



He taught beginners in such a way that a distant goal was implicit in it from the start. He himself was constantly struggling to make progress, and knew how to establish the right foundation for hard work, because as far as he was concerned hard work had to take precedence over talent.

Paul Kee



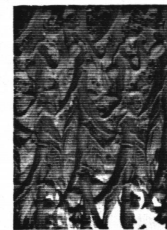
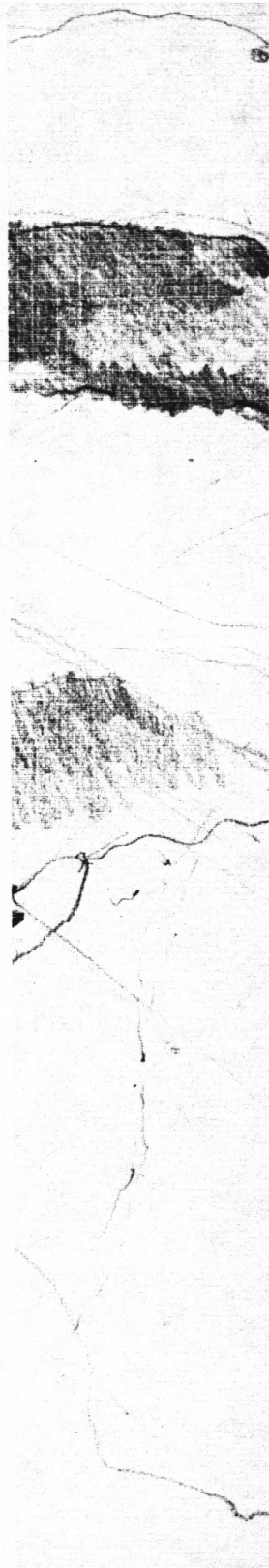


The architectural study of this thesis is theoretically based in the domestic urban typologies of the traditional neighborhoods of New Orleans, Louisiana; more specifically, the "shotgun" and the variations thereof, the double and the camelback. The "shotgun" can be considered what Kenneth Frampton identifies as a "significant urban form" 1

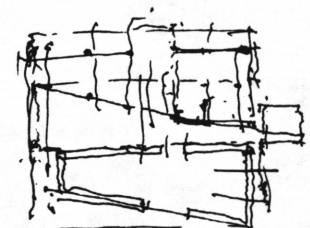
... to develop out of regional characteristics an architecture in which the progressive simplification of language allows the urban relations defined by the project to play an increasingly important role, along with that of its conceptual basis.

Alvaro Siza

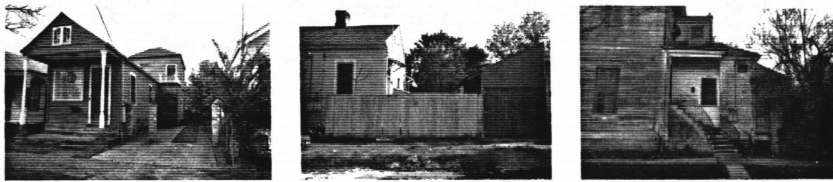




The city of New Orleans is substantially below sea level. A network of levees and subterranean pumping stations are the controlling devices of its environmental equilibrium. These manmade interventions establish a tense coexistence among building, land and water.



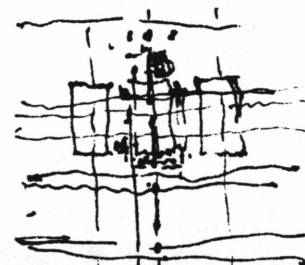
What is reflection? In dealing with the "intelligible world",⁴ for what is visible, substantiation is solely established through the verifiable. Reflection, however, demands immersion into the world of thought; the world of thought moves within and outside the "intelligible world." It now enlists the perceptual and imaginary worlds as modes of thinking which lead to a knowledgeable field of vision.

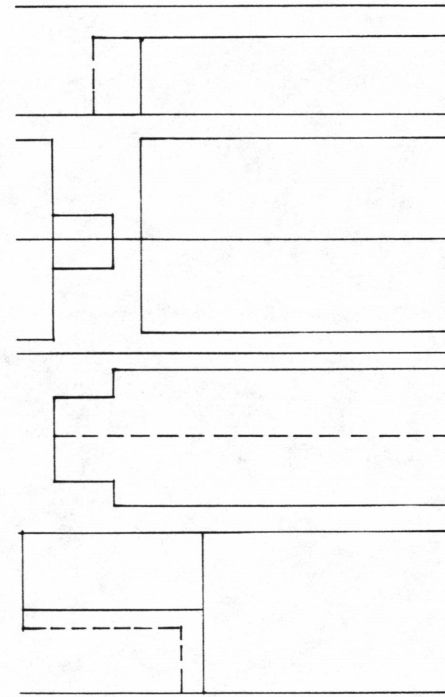
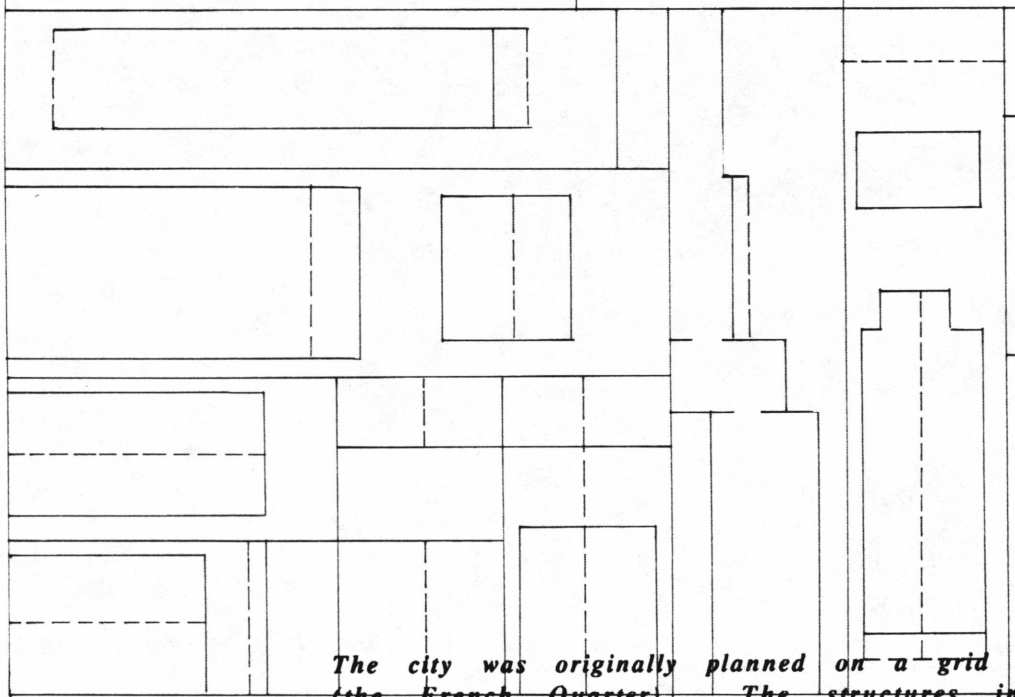
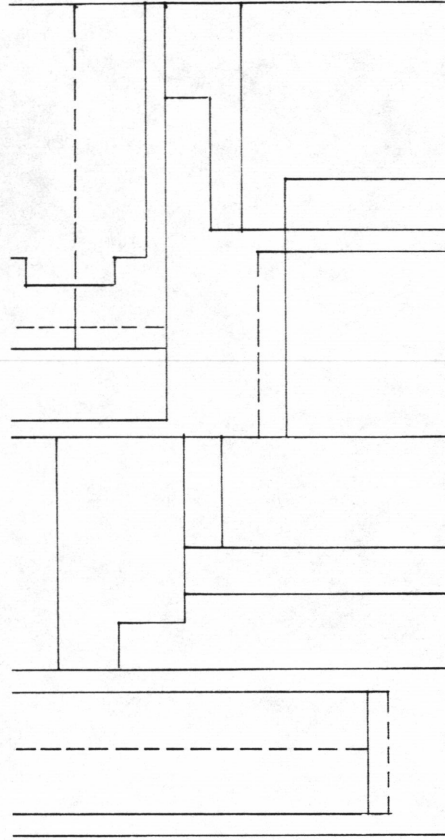
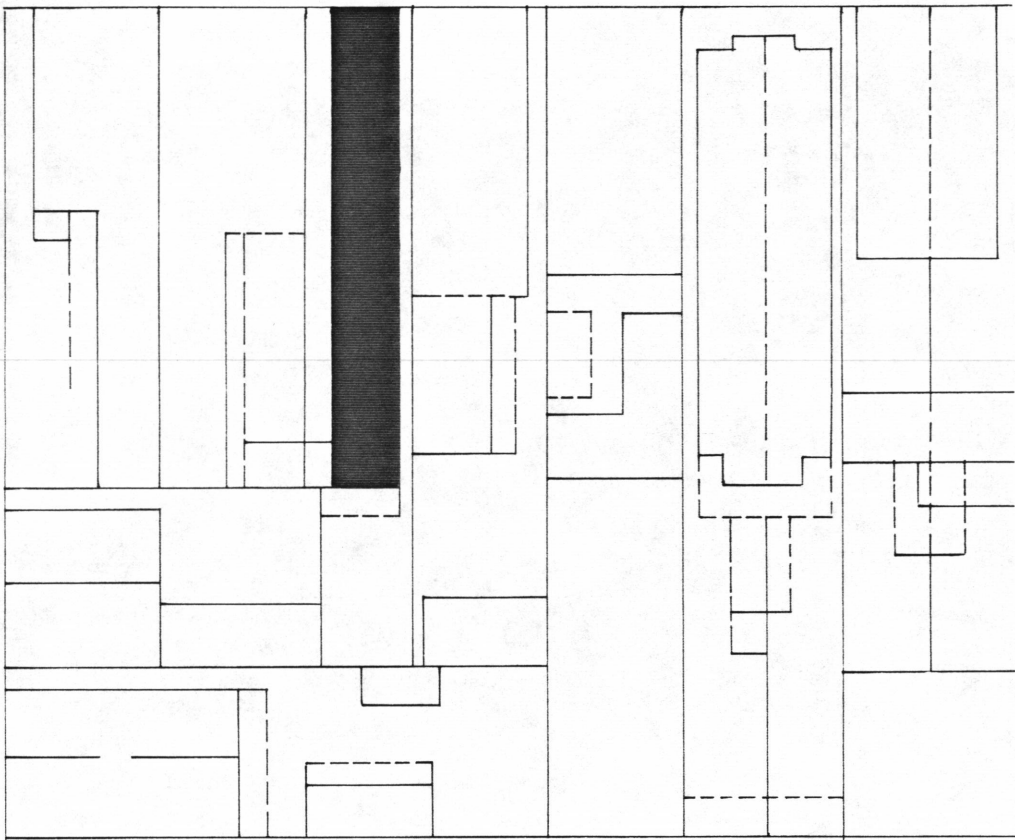


... that which is living in the object dies before the object. That which is living in the language lives with the language.

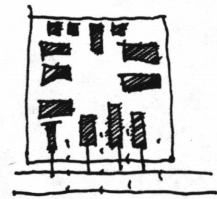
Karl Kraus

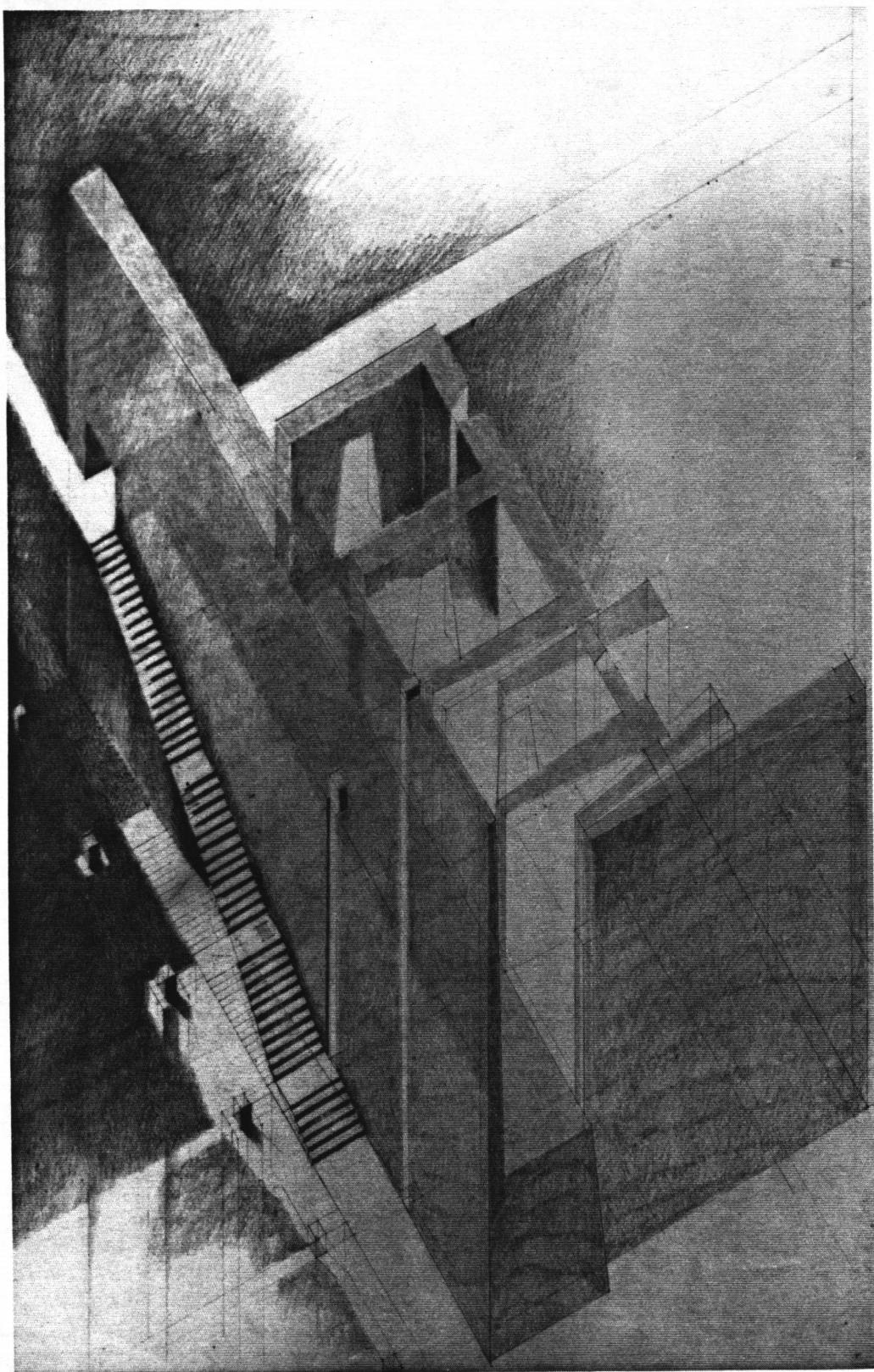
The evolution of these typologies resulted from the presence of "culture specifics of expression"² which may be identified by the climatic concerns of a subtropical environment; stipulations of the site such as the absence of elevational changes; tectonics of building and traditions based either in historical precedent or cultural superstition.





The city was originally planned on a grid system (the French Quarter). The structures initially were attached reflecting its French and Spanish origins. As the city grew beyond the boundaries of the French Quarter, the structures assumed a detached nature but still very close in proximity to one another. In many respects the traditional neighborhood block is a microcosm of the city.





This thinking is an exchange between the world of facticity to a dimension of discovery. The world of "perceptual faith" is challenged, and yet enhanced, by questioning this perceptual certitude through a "philosophy of reflection."

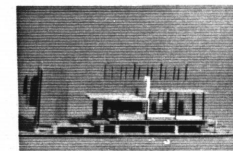
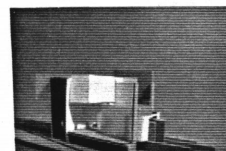
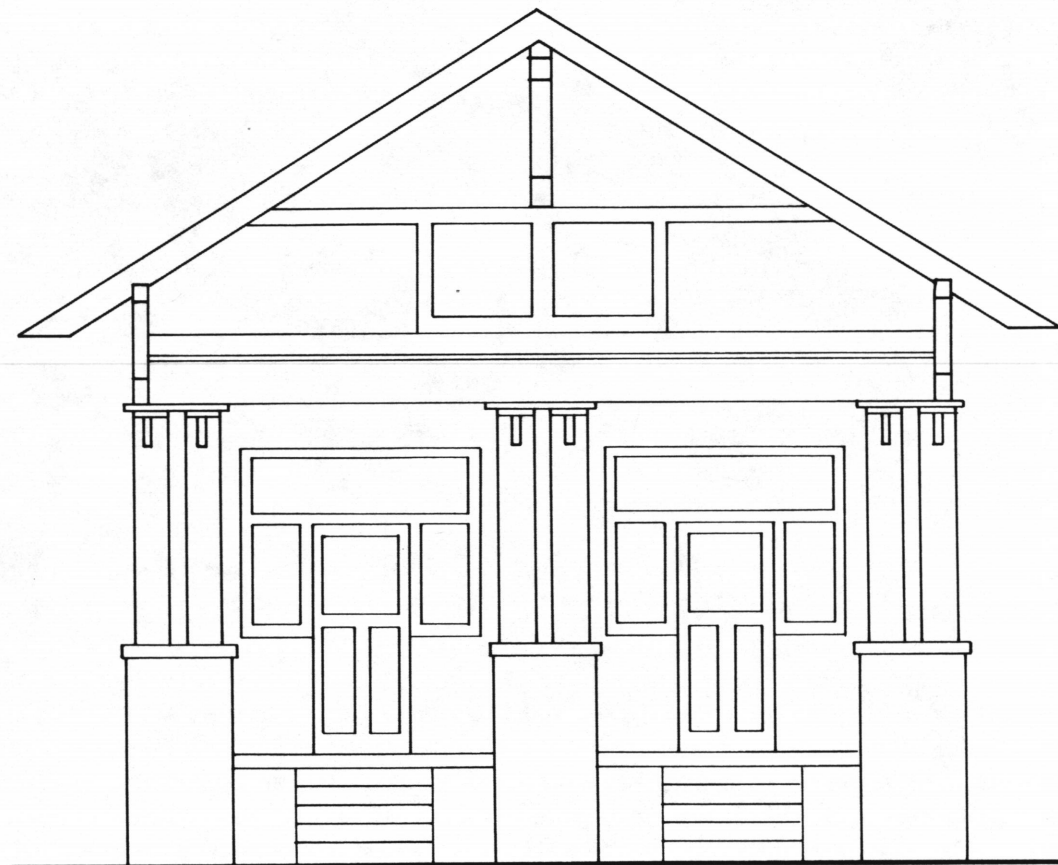
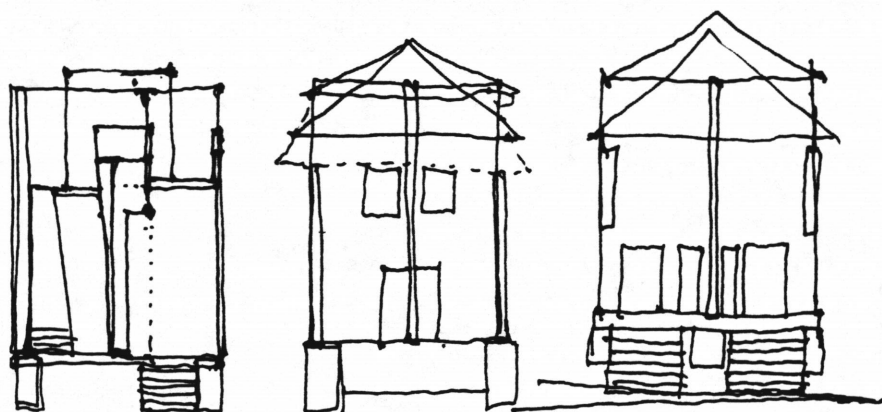
Through reflection, we are able to realize a distance from that being questioned. It is important to realize the significance of this simultaneity between the perceptual and the reflective, in terms of what Merleau-Ponty calls the "centrifugal movement."



In short, the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme.

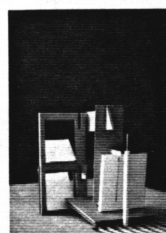
G. Bachelard

The typology of the shotgun is in a sense archetypal. The elements of stair, wall, and pier in conjunction with its explicit linear sequence present themselves diagrammatically as a challenge to "mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place" ⁴ allowing the type to assume its proper identity without regressing into nostalgia or historic mimicry.

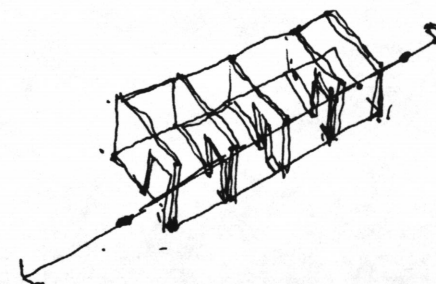


But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us.

G. Bachelard



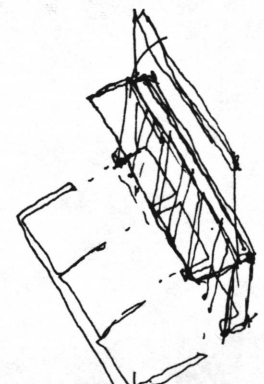
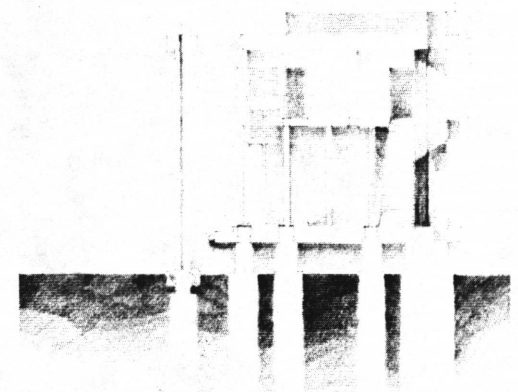
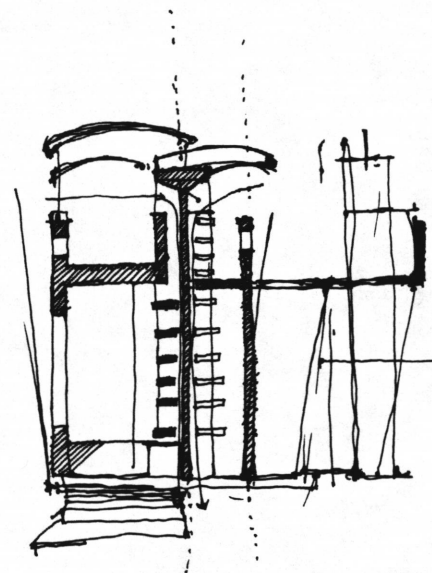
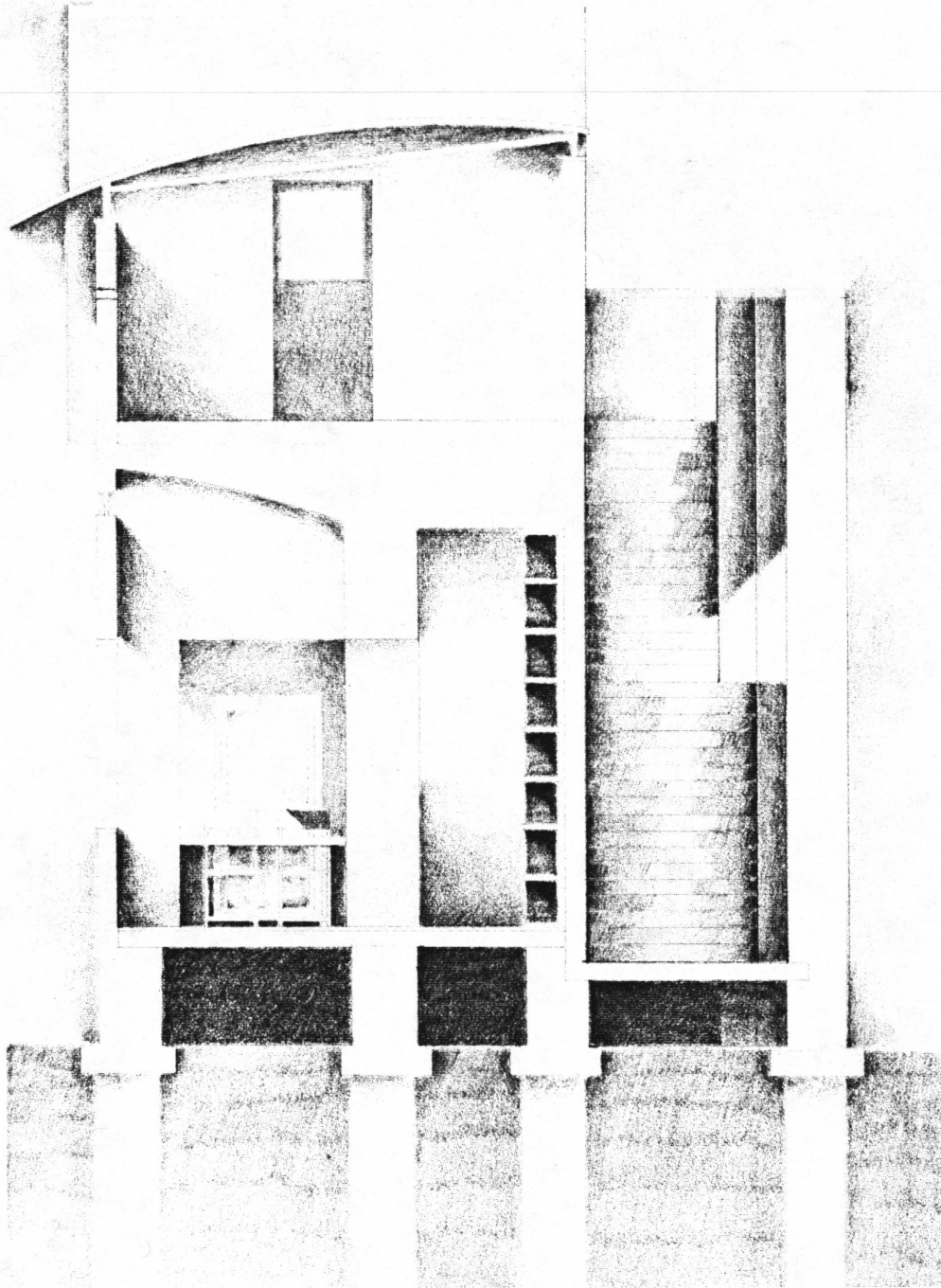
The term "shotgun" is derived from the sequential and linear configuration of the internal spaces of the type. It is speculated this identification arose from the notion that a gun could be discharged through the front door with the shot exiting at the rear. Local superstition attributes this arrangement as an accommodation to the release of any "trapped" spirits.³



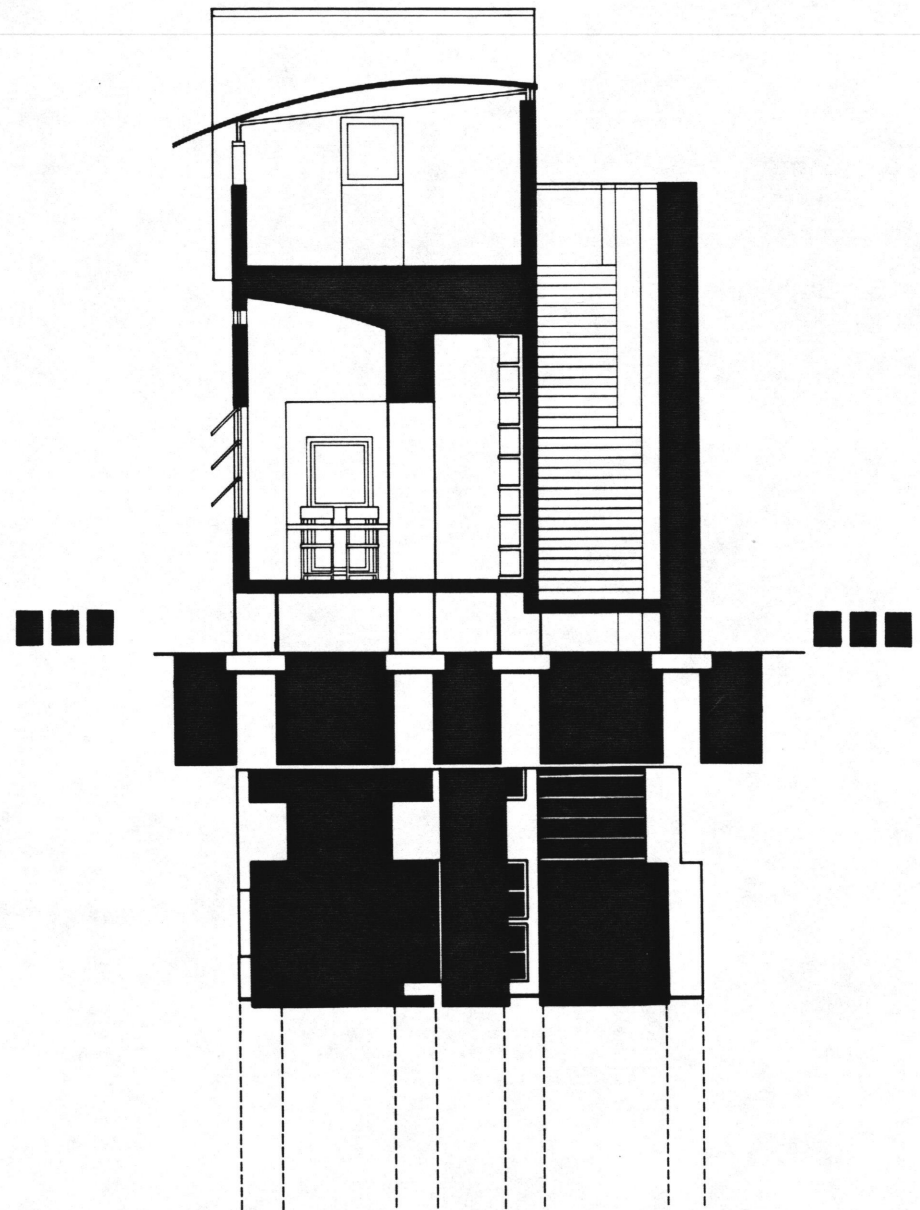
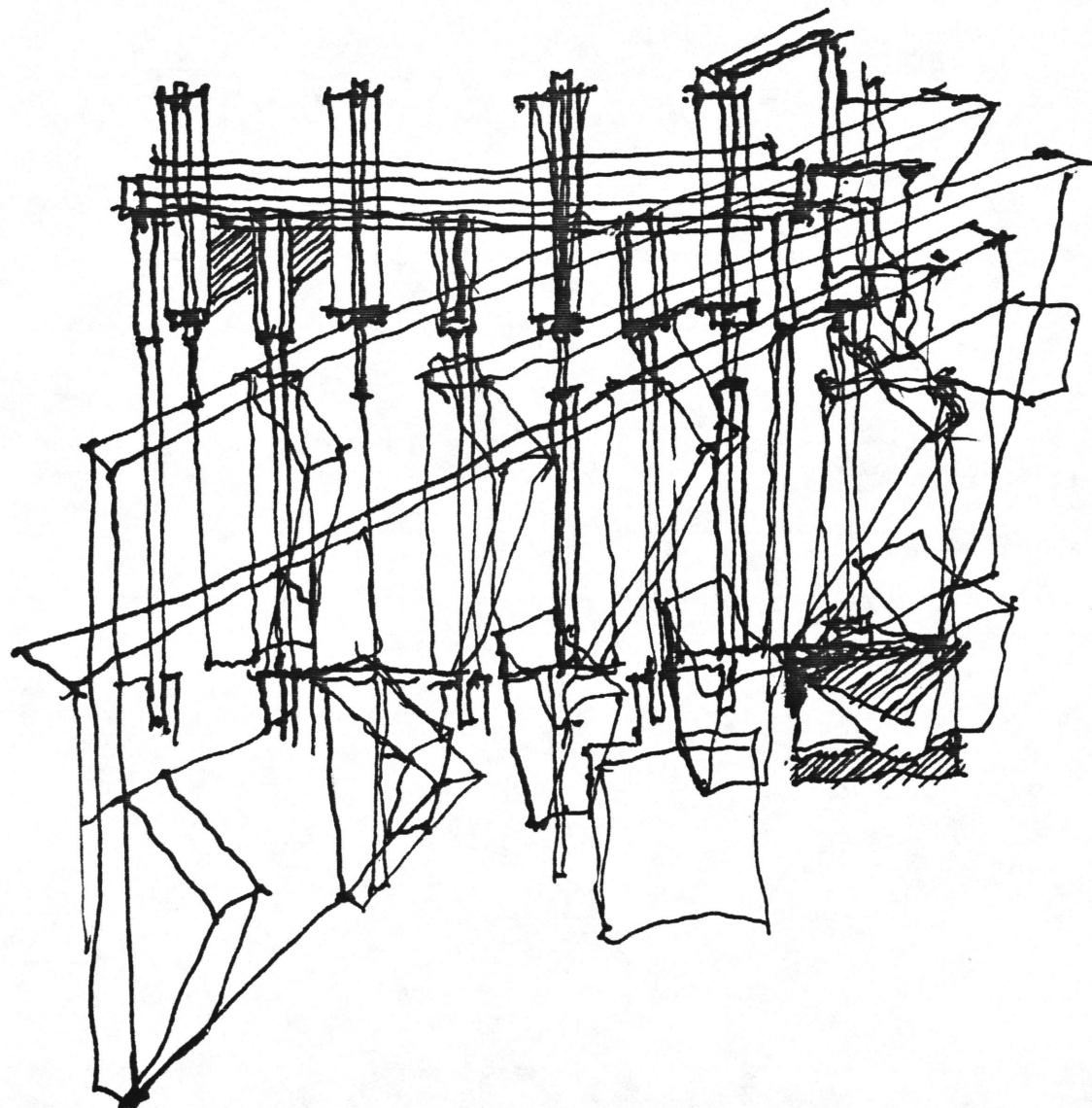
Only the unexpected awakens happiness, but it has to clash, with much of the expected that is being dispelled.

Elias Canetti

This movement may provide for the study of architecture, that reciprocal bridge between the diverse worlds of thought, as reflection, and the more formal concerns of the perceptual. In this way, our thoughts may be able to enter into a new field of vision.



The shotgun double is diagrammatically specific in its mirror image of plan to section. As with all of the typologies, the plan was the primary generator. The frame of this "identity given specific"⁵ is acknowledged as the initial point of departure.



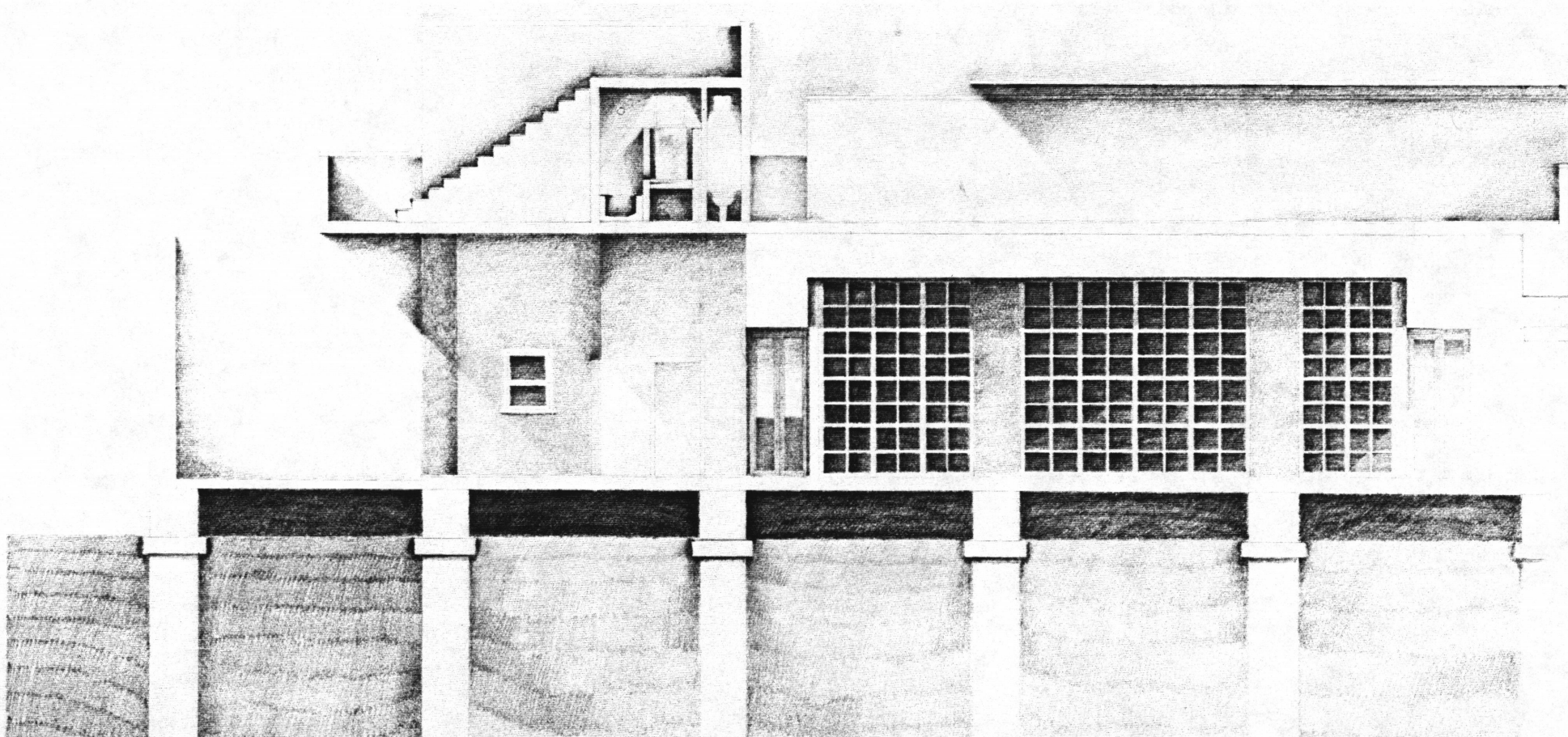
One of the exterior walls was expanded to spatially accommodate and reinforce the adjacent stair (an element of the shotgun camelback). The exterior stair now assumes a duality of being physically exterior but interior by way of vertical access. This reinforces an attitude of introversion towards the experience of the more public spaces.

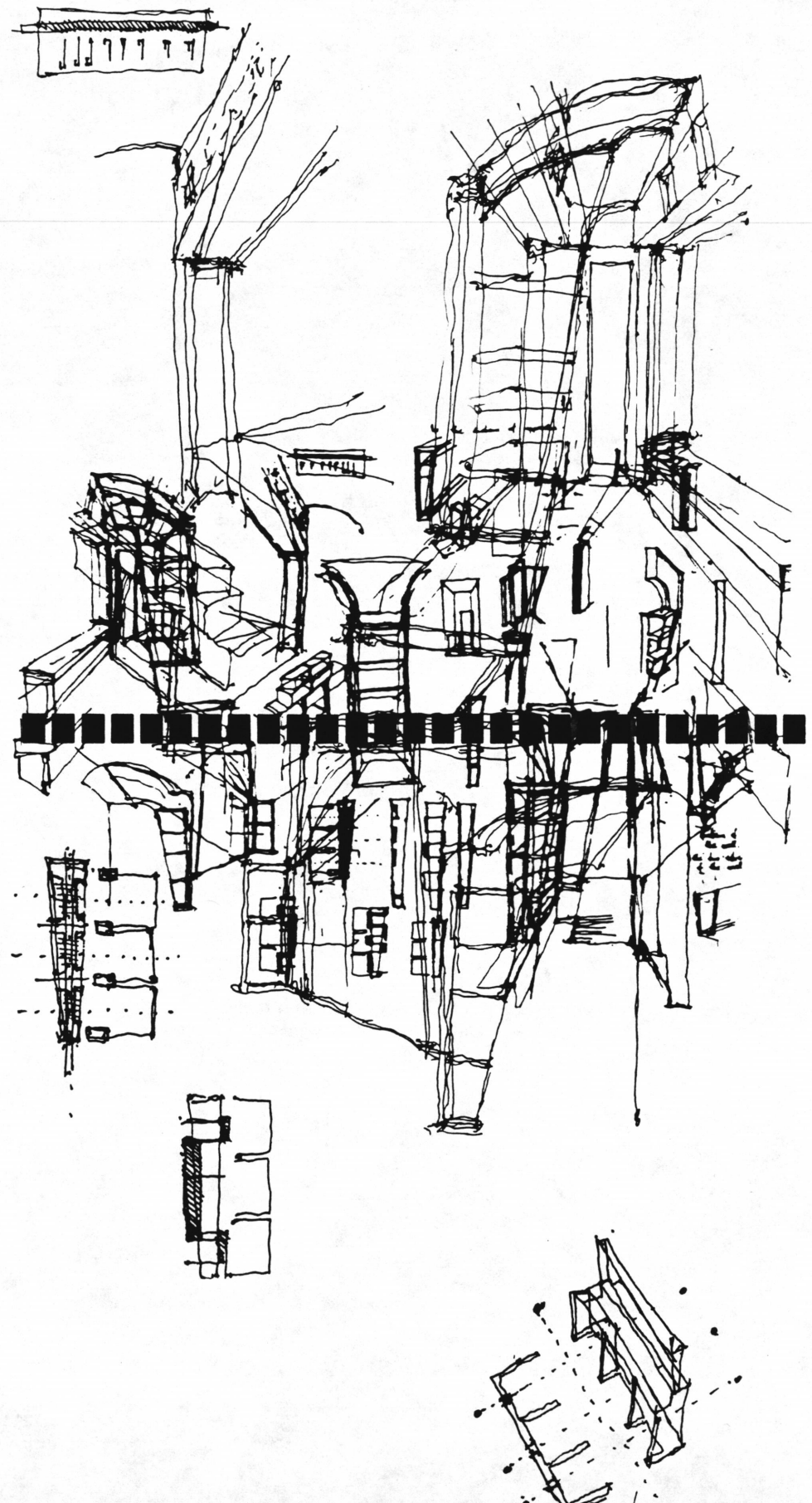
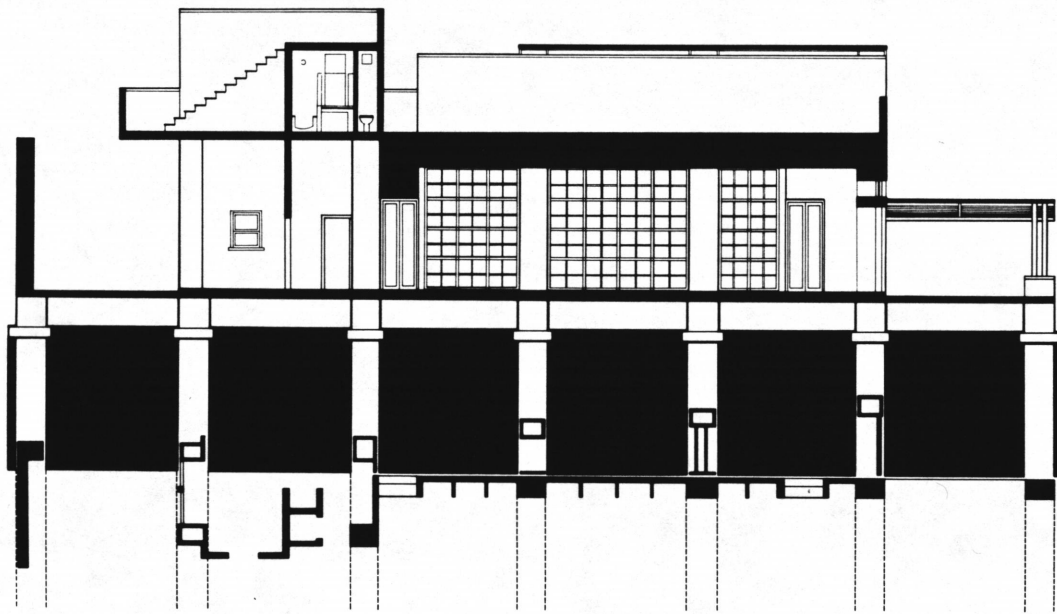
In every act, fidelity to the model and departure from it are inextricably linked.

George Kubler

We, as students of architecture, come with a naive confidence about our knowledge of the world, skilled in the obvious and eager to demonstrate. For most of us, our previous world of learning has been one of memorization and repetition of that memorization.

Our discipline of architecture has asked us to know architecture as well as the world, by investigation, exploration, and thinking in other words, to reflect. How is this initiated - how can the discovery of architecture as well as the world be encouraged by reflection?



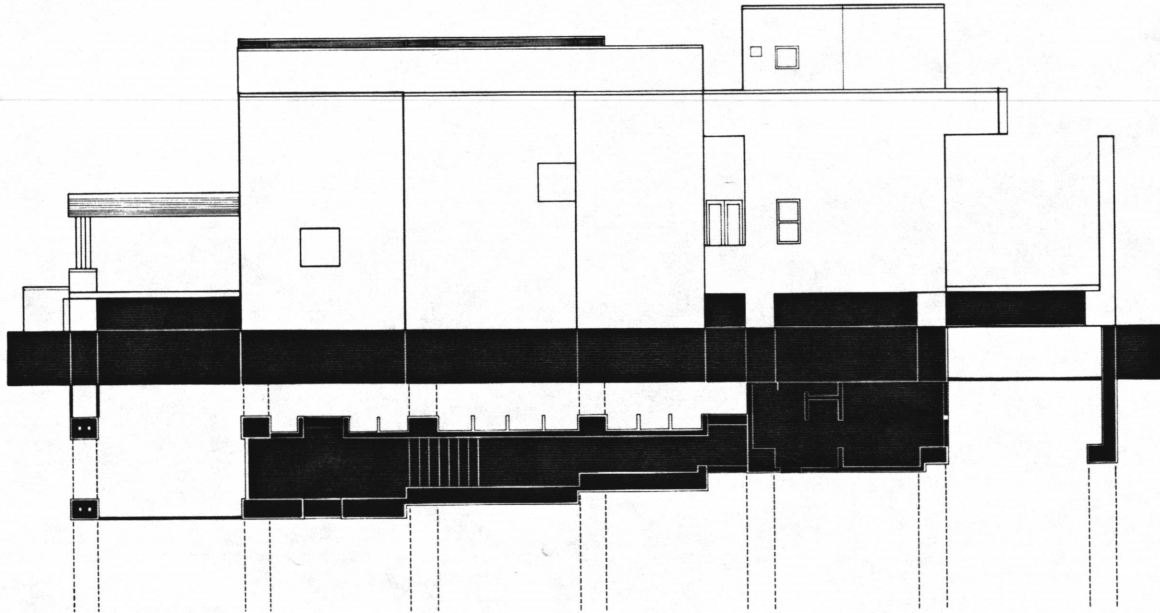


The section is seen as the exegesis for the expansion of the spatial re-definition of the three-dimensional space implied by the specific footprint of the typology. This re-definition is concerned with the articulation of the spaces, more particularly, an establishment of defined public and private dimensions; and the question of the quality of interior light.

The common interior wall of the shotgun double has been expanded to assume an active dialogue with the interior public spaces as a library.

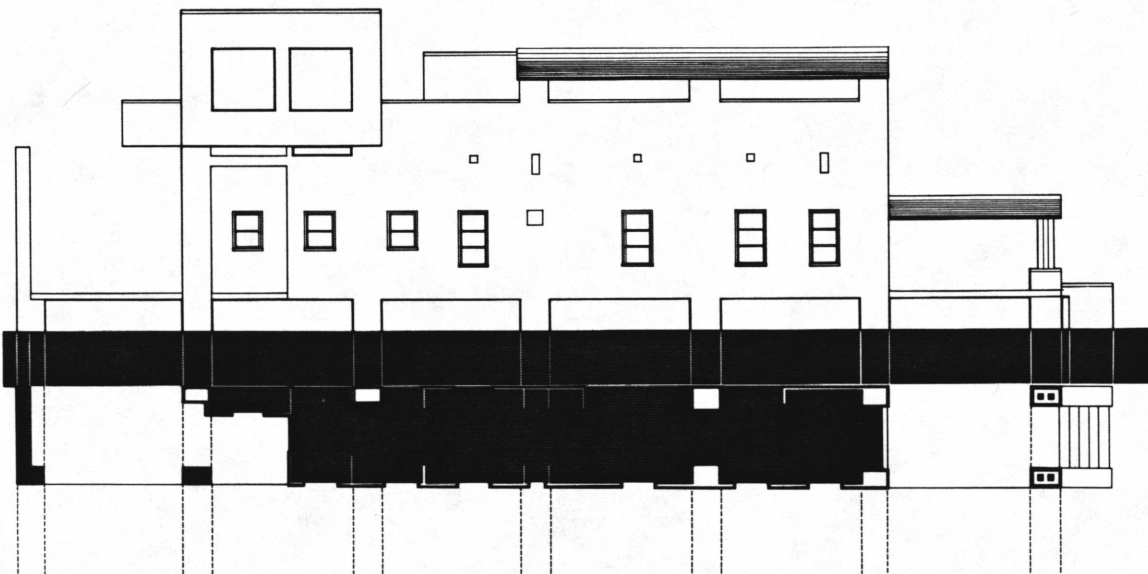
Home - is the place from which one starts and to which one finally returns to know it for the first time.

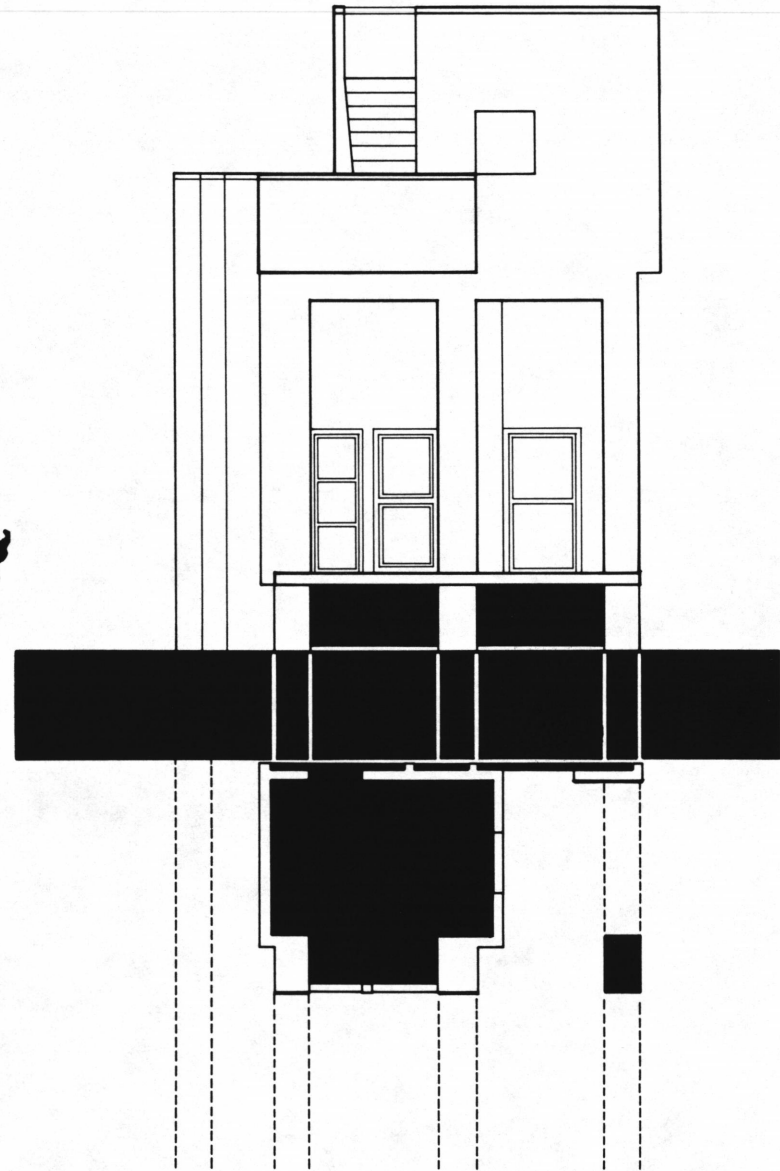
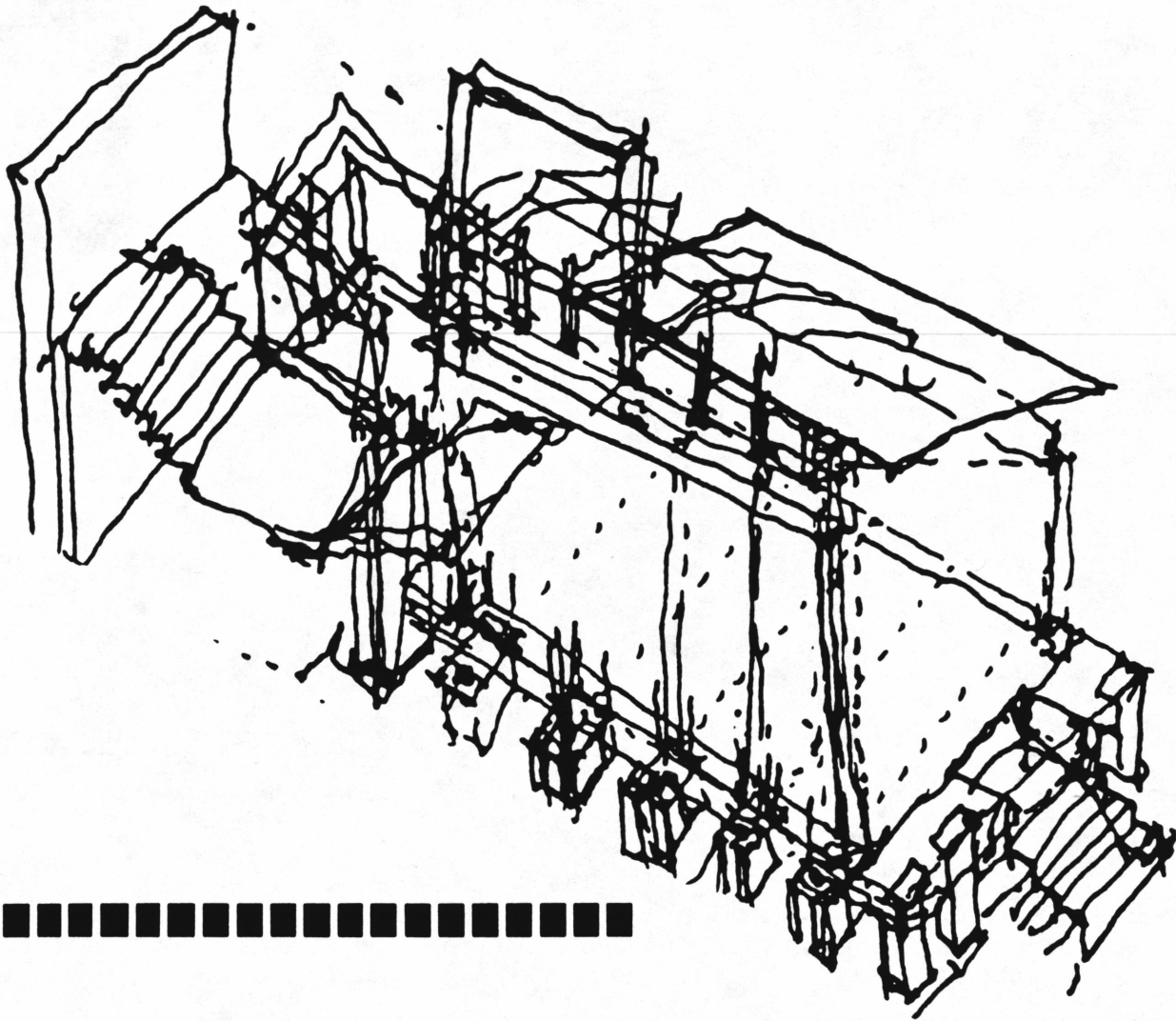
T.S. Eliot



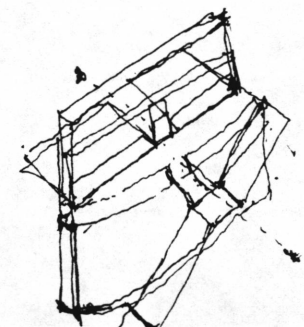
The act of reflection is in itself a questioning of what came before but not a return back to the point of departure but to places adjacent. From these adjacencies, a return to the visible world brings with it new understandings.

Reflection requires that we engage in a personal dialogue that challenges this visible world and now engages the perceptual and imaginary worlds as modes of thinking.





In the shotgun and its variations no distinction is made between the public and private realms. Through manipulation of the order of the types, demarcation is given to the distinction between public and private. The cultural tradition of the "front room" as public is maintained with increased demarcation of private sectors being introduced as the progression continues towards the rear. Vertical movement in the house introduces the more "private" of the public

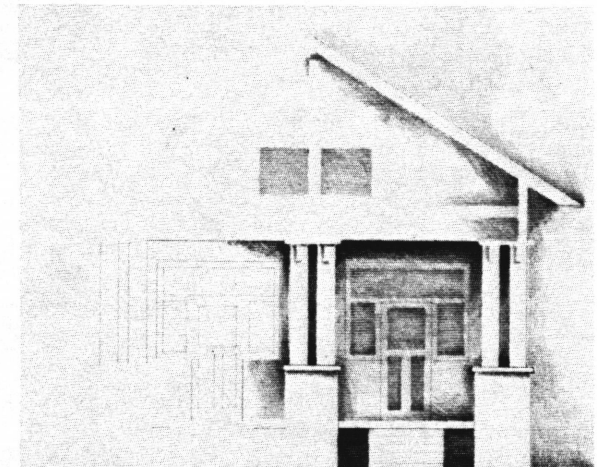
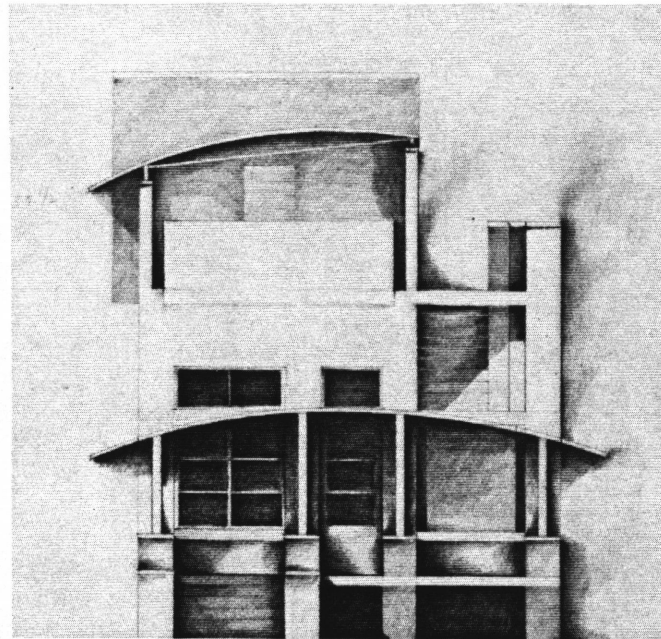
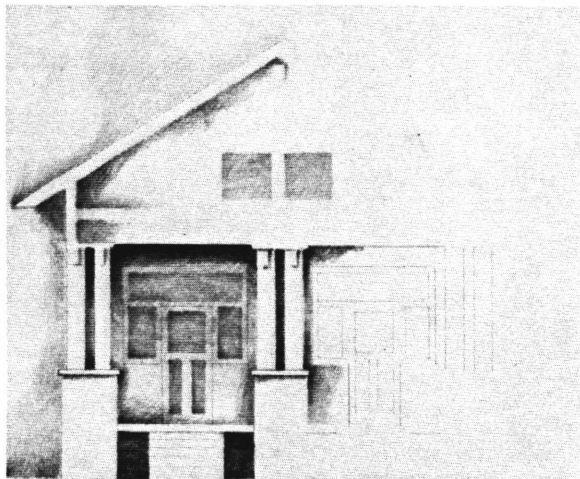
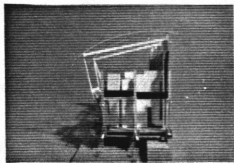


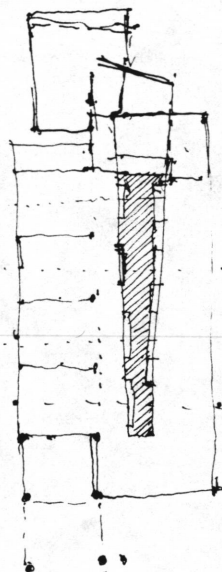
....the unity of image and memory, functional composition of imagination and memory.

G. Bachelard

This conversation is now at the doorstep of knowledge in both the worlds of perceptual faith and reflection. To find this knowledge, active engagement of these worlds, in adjacent disciplines, stands as the means for the continuation.

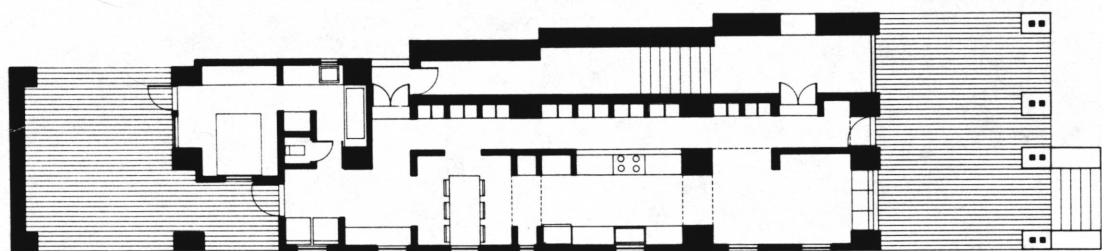
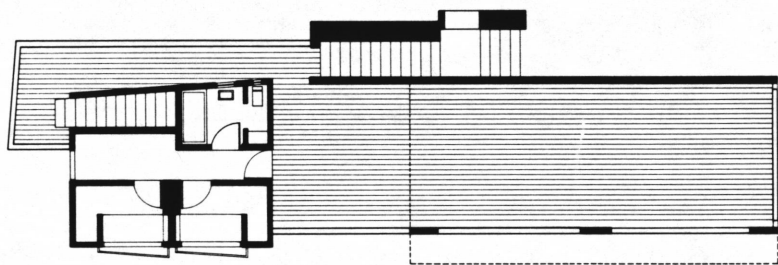
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- 1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and Invisible
 - 2 Heidegger, Martin, Poetry, Language and Thought
 - 3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty
 - 4 Ibid





... a multiplicity and multiformity of its constituent parts. For this is a dialectic unity, a co-existence of contraries. Man is torn between these two tendencies, one of which seeks to preserve old forms whereas the other strives to produce new ones. There is a ceaseless struggle between -- tradition and innovation between reproductive and creative forces. This dualism is to be found in all the domains of cultural life. What varies is the proportion of the opposing factors. Now the one factor, now the other, seems to preponderate. This preponderance of the single forms and gives to each of them its particular physiognomy."

Ernest Cassier

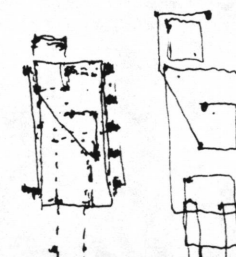


1 *Kenneth Frampton, Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an Architecture of Resistance, The Anti-Aesthetic Essays on Postmodern Culture.*

2 *Ibid*

3 *Steven Holl, Pamphlet Architecture No. 9, Rural and Urban House Types in North America.*

4 *Kenneth Frampton*



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