

somewhat together

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THE THESIS OVERVIEW

Multi-story, multifamily housing presents us with a curious dilemma: the more dwelling units we build as we densify, the fewer the connections among the dwellers. Spaces which have traditionally modulated the relationship between the individual and the world at large have collapsed to barren corridors and elevator boxes, made just wide enough for occupants to retreat back into their own cells. To critically reexamine the ‘corridor’ as an architectural object of inquiry is to reopen the possibilities for a more humane multifamily architecture which provides the necessary physical framework for encouraging chance encounters and inculcating a sense of community and belonging.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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studies
on the
multifamily
corridor

a
confederation
of lonely
sovereigns

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THE MULTIFAMILY CORRIDOR

Spaces of Encounter, Spaces of Communality

We talk of finding ‘ground’ and feeling ‘grounded’ as shorthands to express our rootedness to a certain place, a sentiment central to the concept of ‘home.’ It is in this regard that mid to highrise multifamily housing, as a typology of ‘home’ which detaches the dweller from ground and street, presents a curious dilemma:

Architects have arrived at a height-driven housing formula which increases the number of dwelling units but decreases connections among the dwellers in them. Spaces which have traditionally modulated the relationship between the individual and the world at large — ground-related spaces such as sidewalks, stoops, and porches — have collapsed to barren corridors and elevator boxes, made just wide enough for occupants to retreat back into their own cells. Contemporary multifamily housing functions to anonymize its residents from each other and sever relationships between them and the greater urban context. To critically reexamine the ‘corridor’ as an architectural object of inquiry is to reopen the possibilities for a more humane multifamily architecture which provides the necessary physical framework for encouraging chance encounters and inculcating a sense of community and belonging.

Park Hill Estate, Sheffield, UK. Photo.



HISTORY & CONTEXT

Activating the Multifamily Corridor is Not a New Idea

The history of twentieth century social housing parallels the development of the corridor. Examples like the interior retail street in Le Corbusier's Unite d'Habitation and Alison & Peter Smithson's 'street deck' collage submitted as part of their competition entry to the Golden Lane Housing Estates, brought intense attention to the multifamily corridor in the midcentury architectural discourse. The legacy of these developments stands controversial at best, left stigmatized with the downfall of publicly-constructed and -maintained housing in the Western world. This thesis is not an attempt to revive public housing; rather, it seeks to reengage with

the experimentations and lessons that have gotten lost in the current-day iterations of multifamily housing, at a time when the typology of the single-family detached home is being placed under scrutiny as cities continue to densify. The experience of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed concerns around shared spaces in multifamily contexts. How will we balance the need for community and density with the ongoing environmental and health crises of our time? This thesis situates itself in these urgent discussions, reinterrogating the multifamily housing typology through the 'corridor.'

Photomontage, from left to right:

Alison & Peter Smithsons Competition Entry for Golden Lane Estates. Collage.

Pruitt Igoe. Photo.

Lower Falinge Estate. Photo.

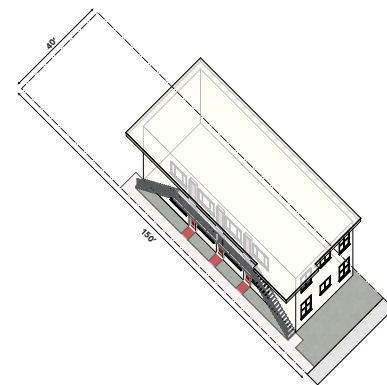
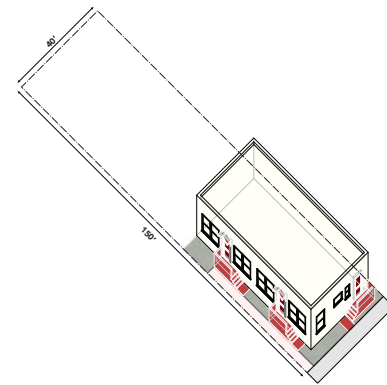
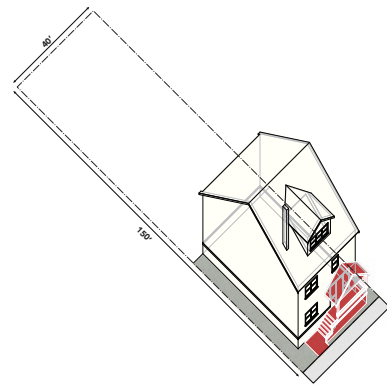
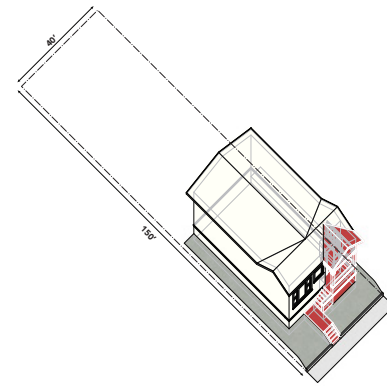
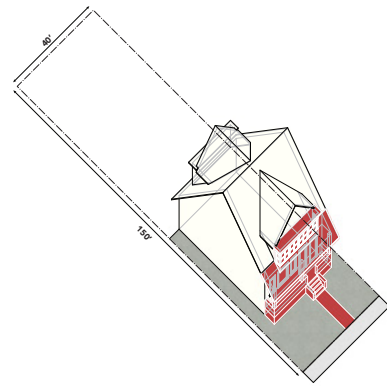
Demolition of Robin Hood Gardens Estate. Photo.



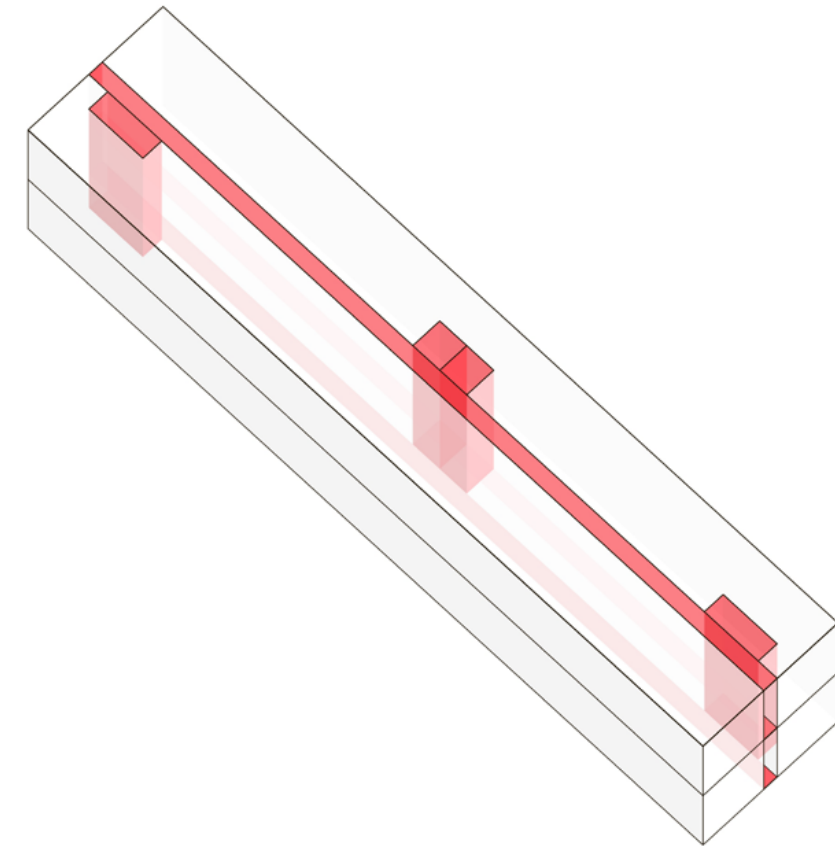
*The Arc of Housing History:
The US & Bay Area's Fear of
Large Housing Developments*

We find ourselves in a moment of timidity when the scope of the housing crisis calls for large, bold action. From the Gilded Age of Jacob Riis' time to the current 'Gilded Age' that places multi-million dollar condominiums above makeshift tents under highway overpasses, the history of housing in America and in the Bay Area constitutes a kind of arc in unfortunate symmetry. Muckracking progressivism triggering public consciousness to the housing problem would eventually find itself an amenable audience with the emergent welfare state, which took upon itself the duty to house the masses through claims of eminent domain. In wiping away the 'problematic' old urban fabric to make way for the newly

mythologized vision of modernity, architects were given free rein to exercise their godlike power over the urban-renewal tabula rasa in order to enact and impose their new social vision. With these abuses of design power came the popular backlash, however, and the architects found themselves one fateful morning waking up to the deafening roar of Pruitt-Igoe's demolition in a state of postmodern hangover. While recent California statewide legislations such as those effectively eliminating single-family exclusive zoning represent important steps forward, the architectural answer to the call for action remains in wanting. This thesis looks inward into the architecture of the multifamily typology in search of this answer.



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The Shrinking Public-Private Interface in Housing Typology

It seems the more dwelling units we build, the fewer the social connections among dwellers. This apparent paradox is perhaps explained in part if we regard the 'corridor' as the main architectural cause. In looking back to less dense versions of housing in the American housing vernacular, porches, stoops, and sidewalk-approaches through front lawns have played key roles in the public-private interface between the unit and the larger neighborhood. Multistory, multifamily typologies have obliterated this spatial choreography through the introduction of the corridor.

LOAD FACTOR

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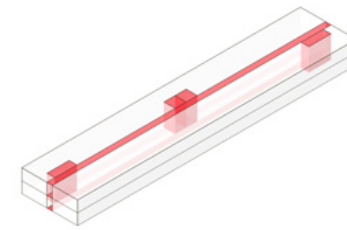
USABLE SF

RENTABLE SF

*All Hail the Load Factor:
The Anti-Corridor Math*

All building developments must follow the cold, exacting realities of the developer pro-forma. The 'load factor' calculation represents one of the most common tools a developer would use to test the economic efficiency of the building proposal. Regardless of whether the goal lies with maximizing profit or maximizing social utility, all development must undergo the simple division with 'usable area' as numerator and 'rentable area' as denominator. 'Usable area' refers to the portion of the building that tenants use on each floor, which includes corridor and horizontal circulation spaces but excludes shafts. 'Net rentable area' refers to the parts for which the tenants

— SLAB —



Gross Area = 25,000 SF
Usable Area = 24,040 SF
Rentable Area = 21,540 SF

Load Factor = 1.12

pay and over which the tenant exercises control. For a building pro forma to 'pencil', the load factor calculation number must come within 1.15. The more corridor and horizontal circulation spaces there are, the higher the load factor and therefore less attractive as a development proposition. In multifamily housing architecture, the 'tower' and the 'slab' have become the primary massing modes in response to this developer demand — but could there be a way to reconceive and rebrand 'the corridor' to reimagine this otherwise draconian calculation?

— TOWER —



Gross Area = 25,000 SF
Usable Area = 22,000 SF
Rentable Area = 19,800 SF

Load Factor = 1.12



THE THESIS QUESTION

*How will We Balance the Need for Density & Unit Production
With the Need for Community and Collectivity?*



NOTES ON REPRESENTATION STYLE

Corridor as a Spatial Collage of Experiences & Perspectives

In the typical multifamily development, the circulation spaces replace the street and ground, the two areas which traditionally function as the public commons among neighboring residents. Multifamily building circulation, if intentfully considered, has the potential to become this space of exchange, where multiple bodies in motion cross paths and interact in complex choreography to bring stories of late and create new ones. As a place which accommodates and produces multiple narratives, the corridor collages together the many individual perspectives to form a larger composition.

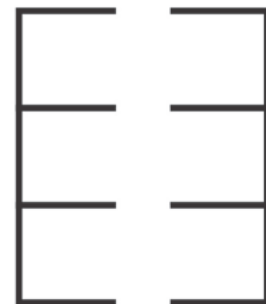
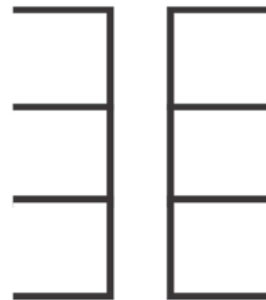
Collaged Collage or AKA Everything is a Remix

If you think up a brilliant idea, chances are that thousands have already had the same idea years ago. Tatiana Bilbao Estudio remarks on the collage as a method of representation which “each era [of architecture] reclaimed...in their own fashion and made the act of juxtaposition part of their manifesto.”¹ This thesis acknowledges this tradition through self-referential collage of collage; after all, as filmmaker Kirby Ferguson put it in his oft repeated phrase, “everything is a remix.”

¹ Bilbao, T. (2018). Perspectives. Arquine.



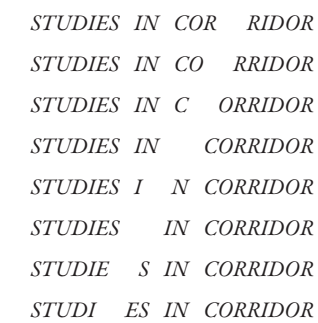
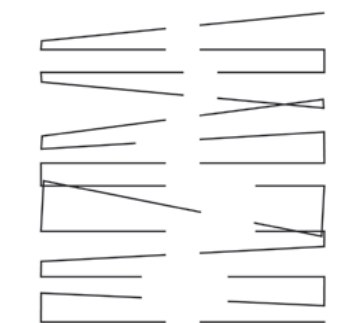
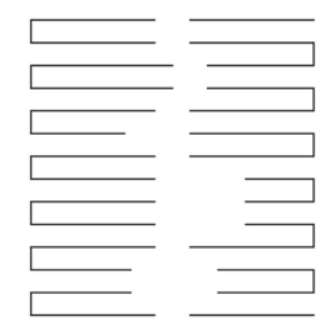
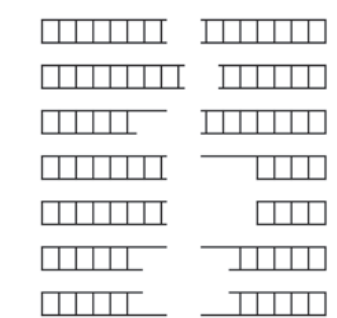
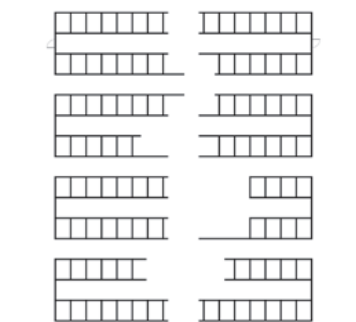
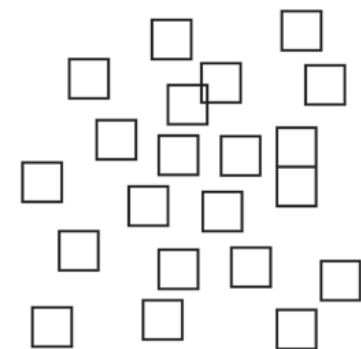
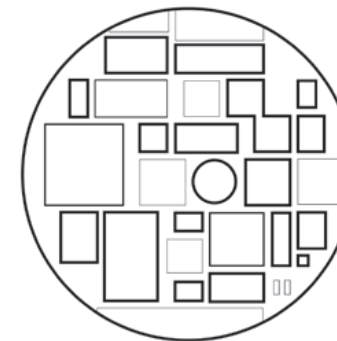
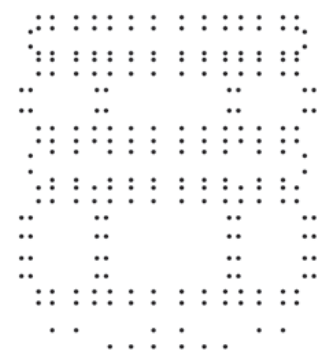
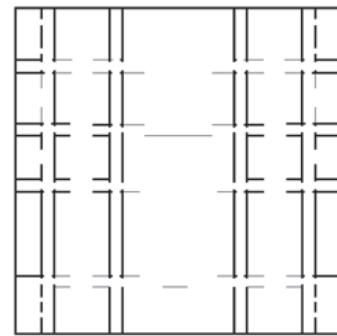
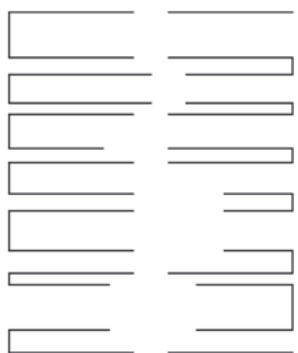
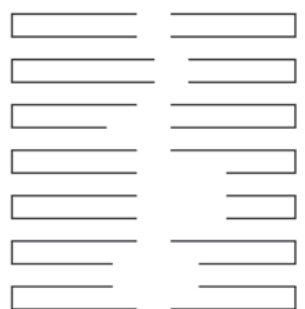
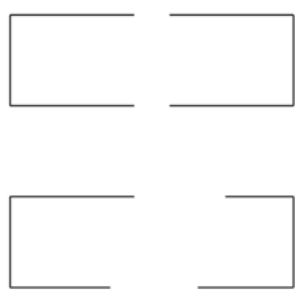
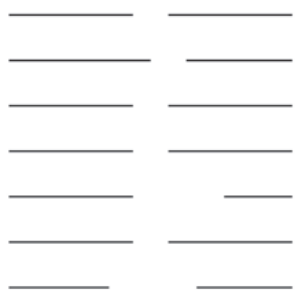
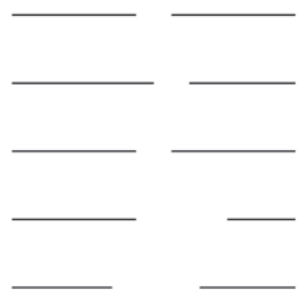
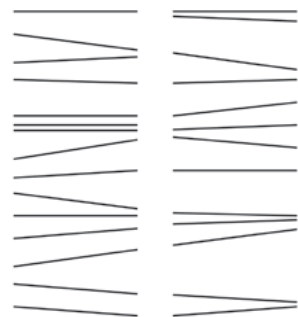
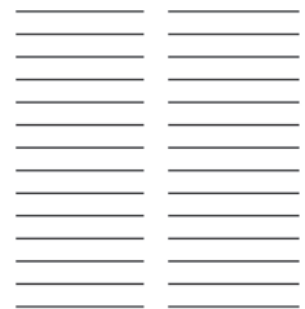
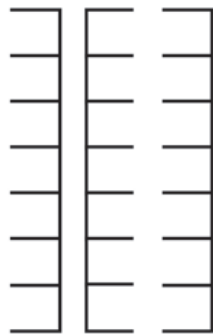
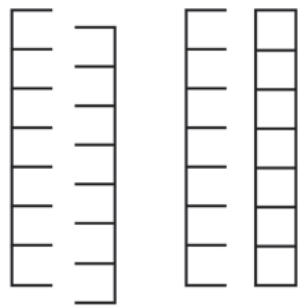
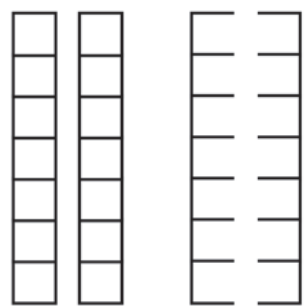
Model by Tatiano Bilbao Estudio
from the project "Not Another Tower"



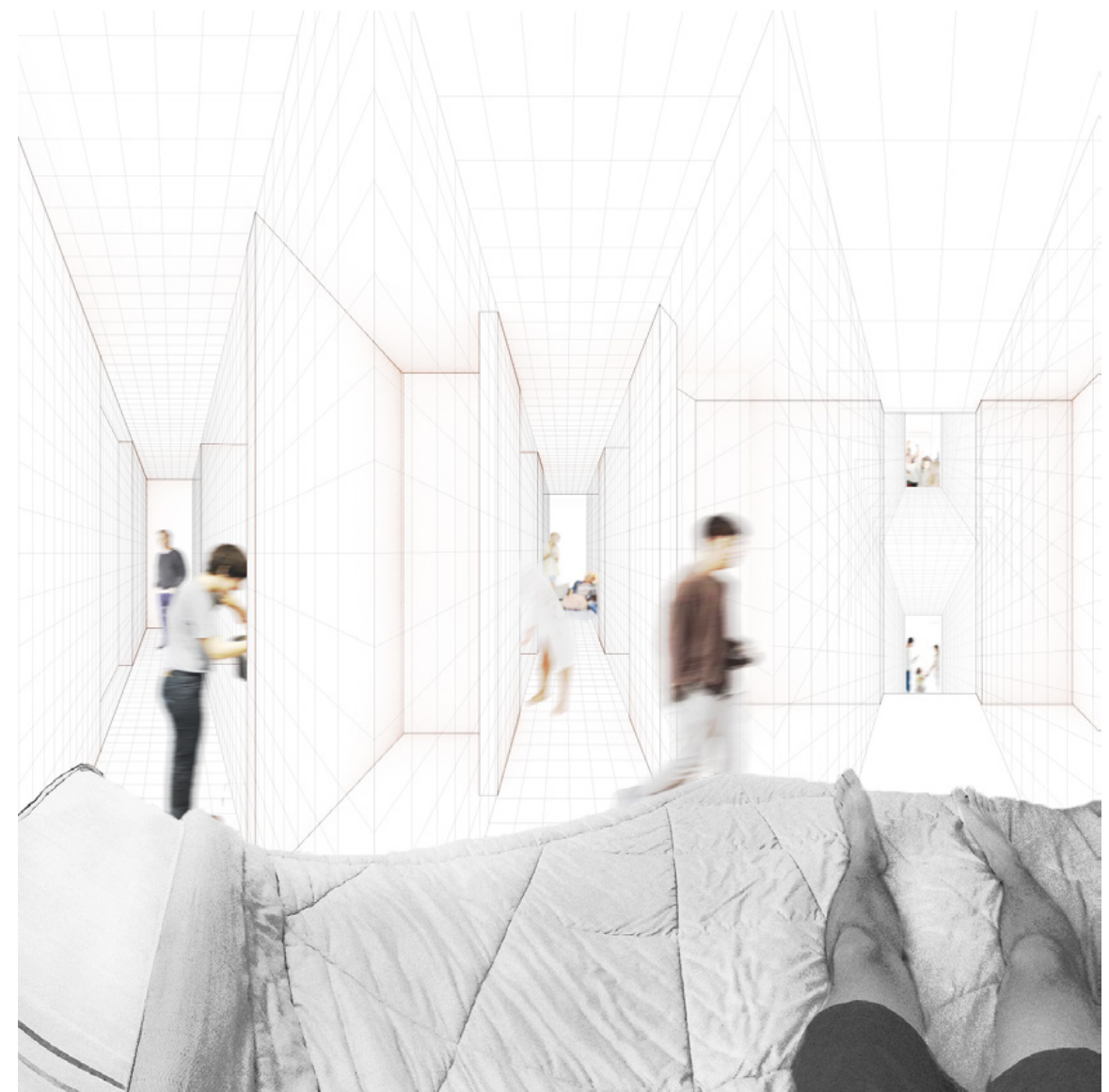
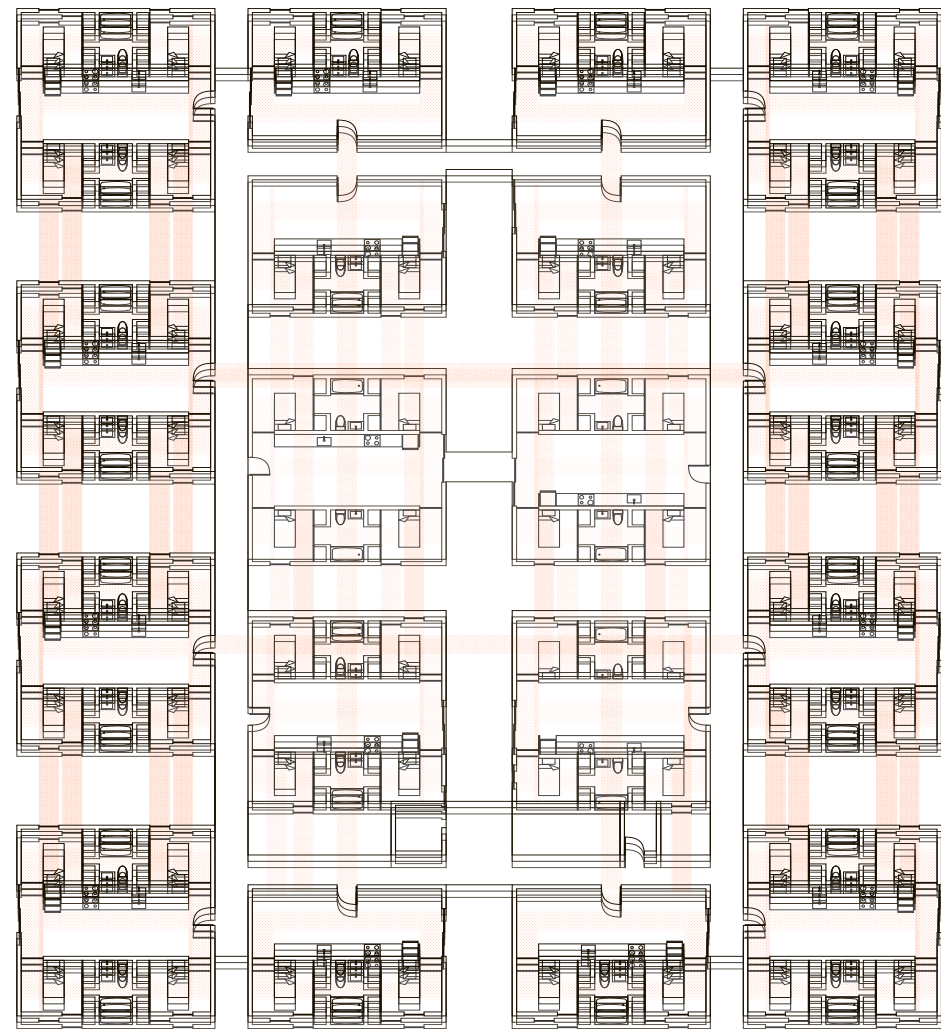
STUDIES ON CORRIDOR

How does a Corridor 'Emerge'?

A corridor both connects and separates. As void spaces which facilitate and control movement through the building, it manifests social relationships predicated within the political/economic/societal context in which the building exists, and in turn, serves to give these relationships more definition. In their purest form the corridors best show themselves in plan as linear void spaces which cross through the building. They can read as independent objects, voids between other occupied areas, or openings in a series of spaces. Each version imparts and implies certain social relationships among spaces and among the intended inhabitants. For the architect, they become important devices which make 'legible' these interactions in the plan drawings.



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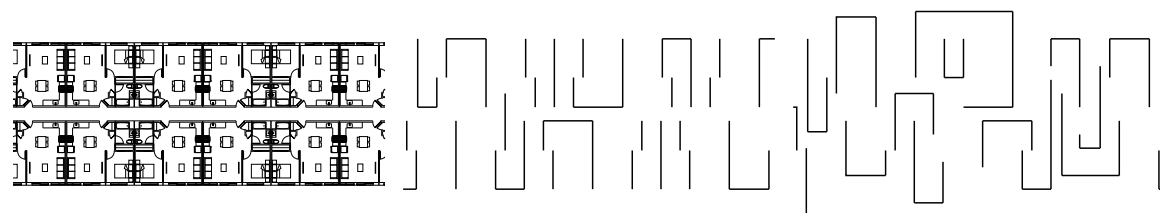
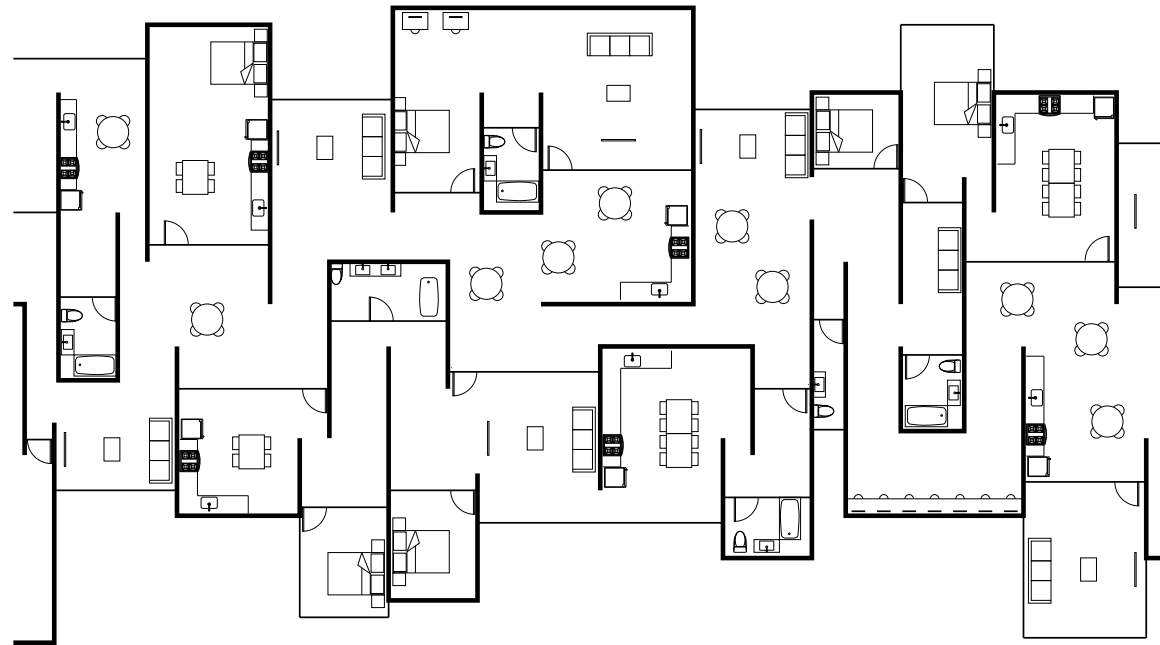


From Bed, the World

In taking the Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architect's Garden Village student housing project as a precedent study, we catch glimpse of what Robin Evans may have meant when he remarked that the architectural plan describes the nature of human relationships.¹ Entangled in a network of enfilades, corridors, and sightlines, the body remains at the center of social life at all times in varying degrees of separation and privacy.

¹ Evans, R. (1997). Figures, Doors and Passages. In Translations from drawing to building. MIT Press.

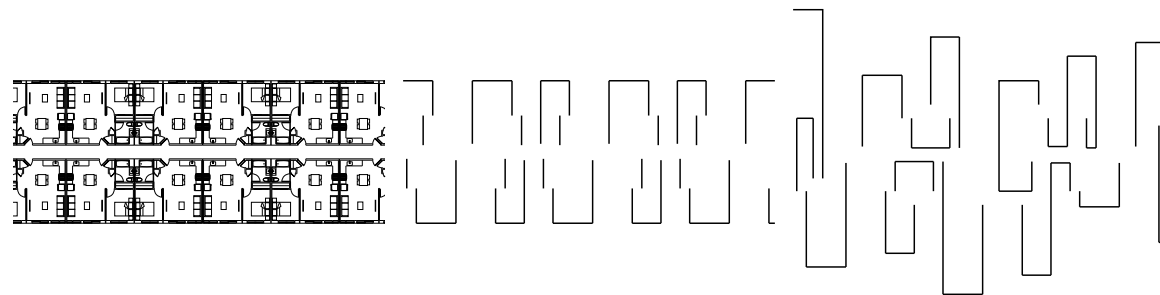
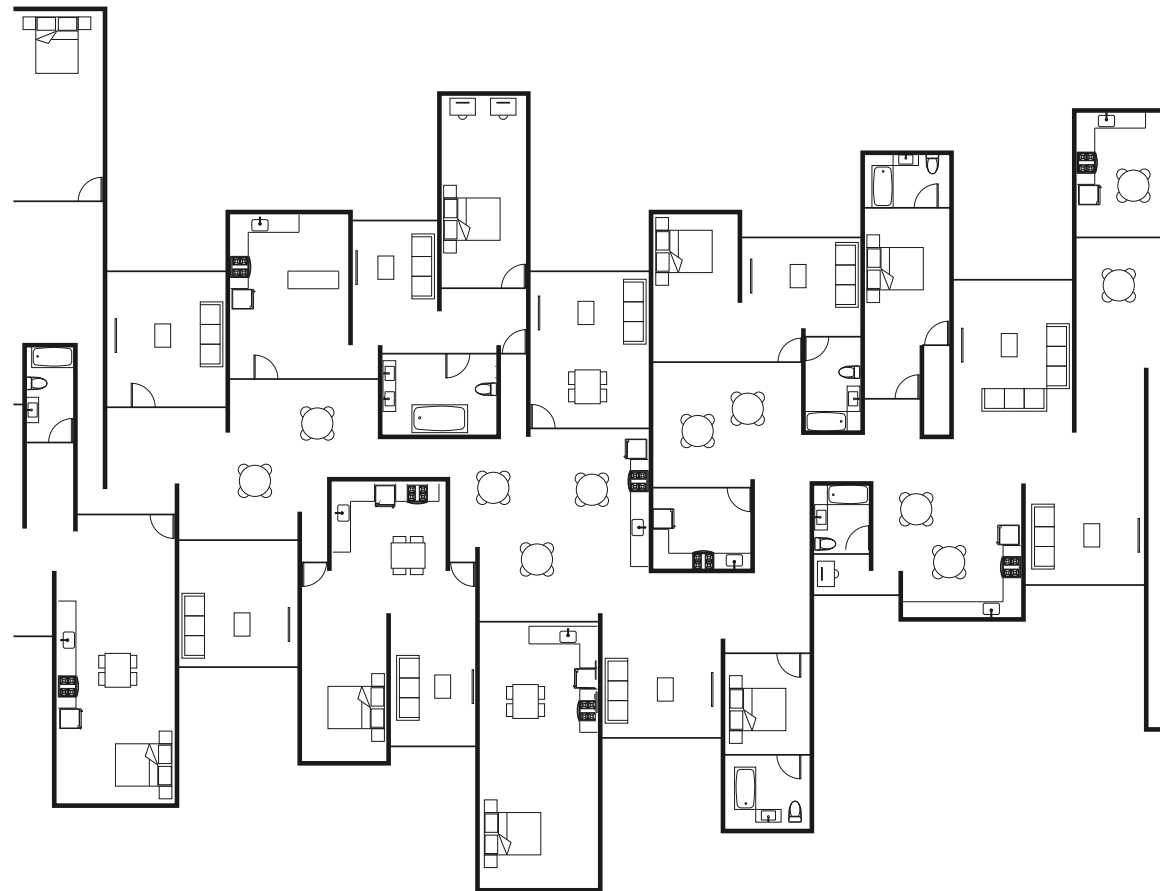
Photographs from Stanley Saitowitz | Natoma Architects



DESIGN STUDIES

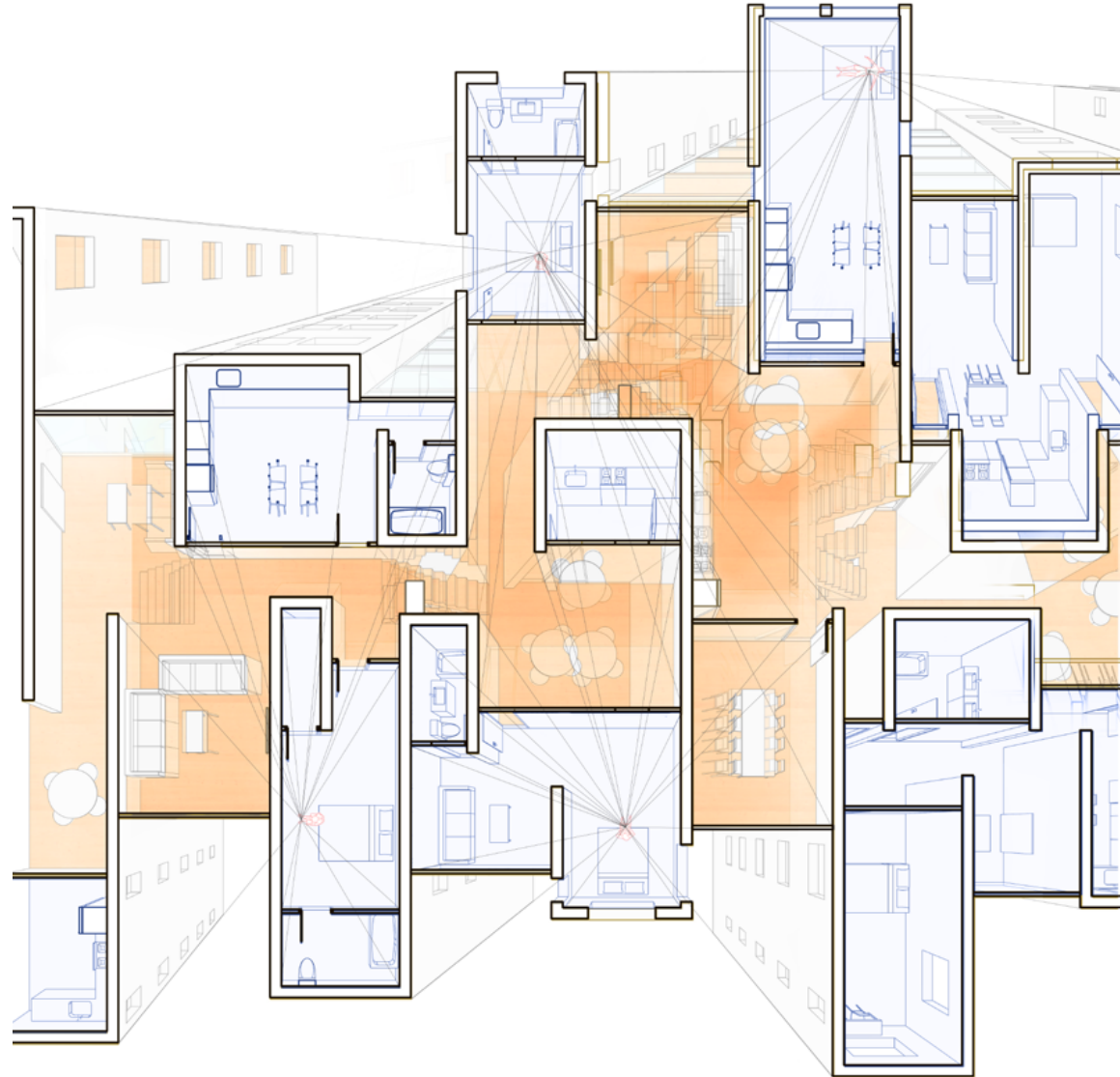
Corridor Manipulation Series

Using the architectural plan as generator, walls running perpendicular to the typical multifamily, double-loaded corridor are isolated to undergo a series of manipulations. The standard relationships between residential units and parts of the unit become upturned and challenged. The resulting floor plan begins to suggest a building that, at once, no longer has a corridor and is all corridor. Some dwelling units expose their kitchens to the new contorted spine of the development, while others open their living rooms to become community spaces.



Corridor Manipulation 2

With more deliberate care in the manipulation, the floor plan becomes elongated in the direction perpendicular to the main axis of the corridor, creating a rhythm of wide and narrow spaces. Inhabitants must necessarily engage the building corridor in order to access kitchens and living rooms, thereby intensifying the interactions among residents. Different livelihoods and households come in contact with one another, creating conditions of adjacency and overlap.



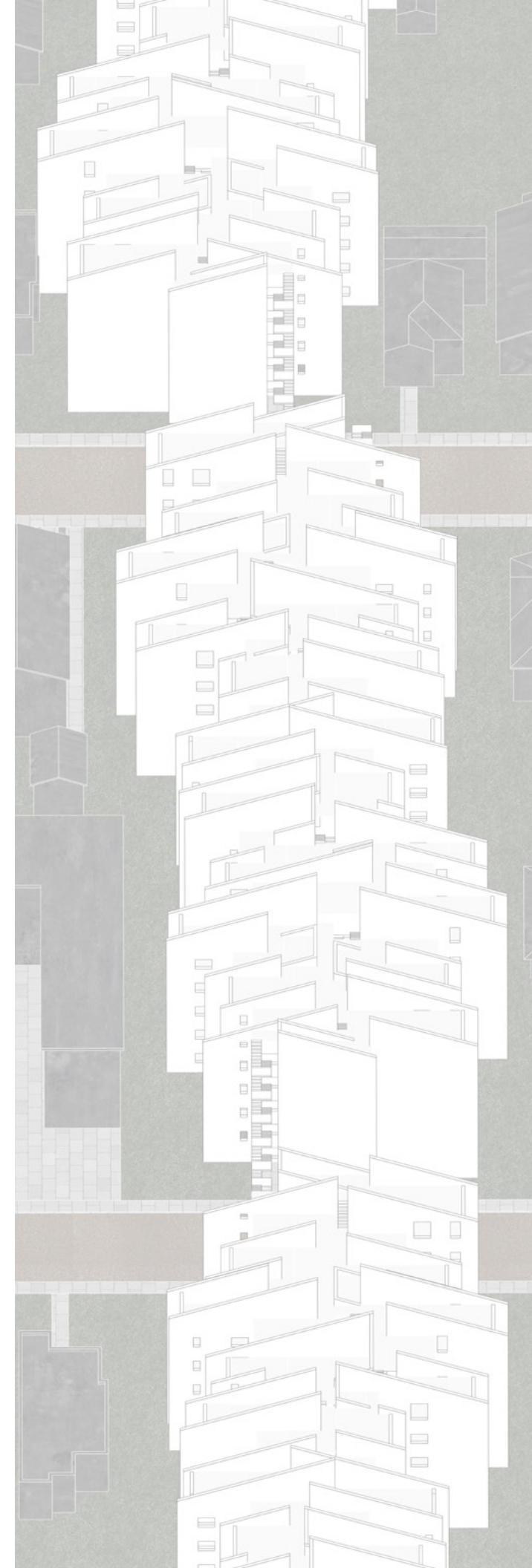
Corridor Manipulation 3

With shifts in the heights between floors, corridors from different floors come in contact and connect with another, further intensifying the social relations among residents. With each inhabitant forming a center, the corridor is the overlap of multiple centers, blurring the boundary between different dwelling units and breaking down the separation among residents. The complex choreography resulting from these overlaps among different units and floors reprograms the corridor as the perfect people-watching venue.



Urban Corridor

In aggregate, these series of operations come together to form a part of a larger urban whole, stitching streets, blocks, and neighborhoods together into one large and contiguous housing campus. The newly imagined multifamily typology becomes itself a corridor, functioning in the urban scale to place the building residents in conversation with the surrounding neighborhood and connect residents to each other.





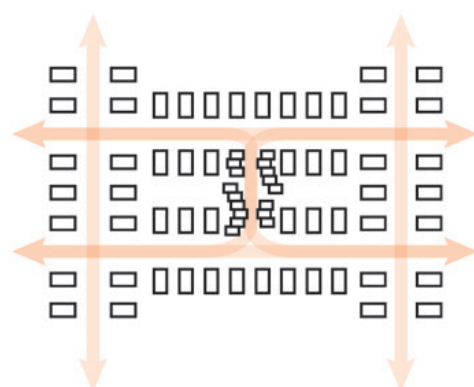
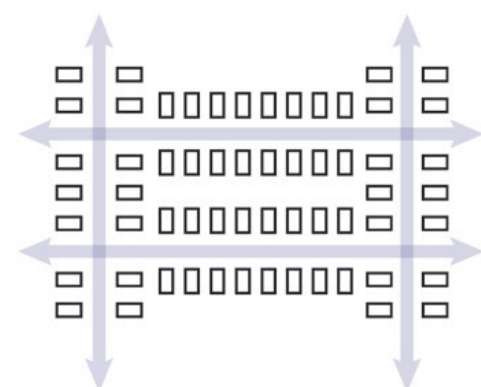
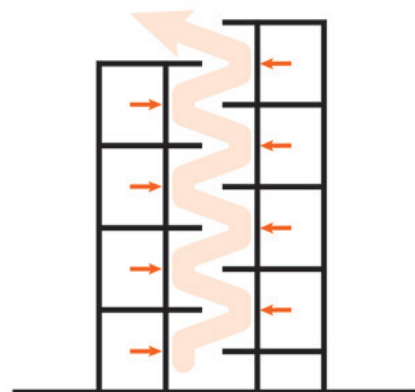
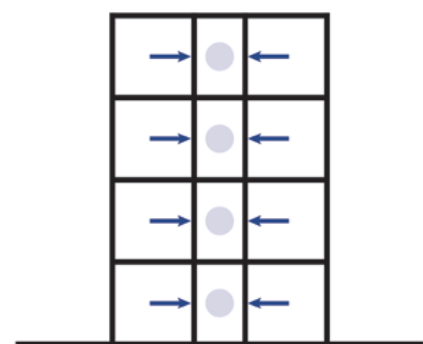
Photomontage.
Model by LAN Architects from 2016 Venice Biennale.



FINAL DESIGN PROPOSAL

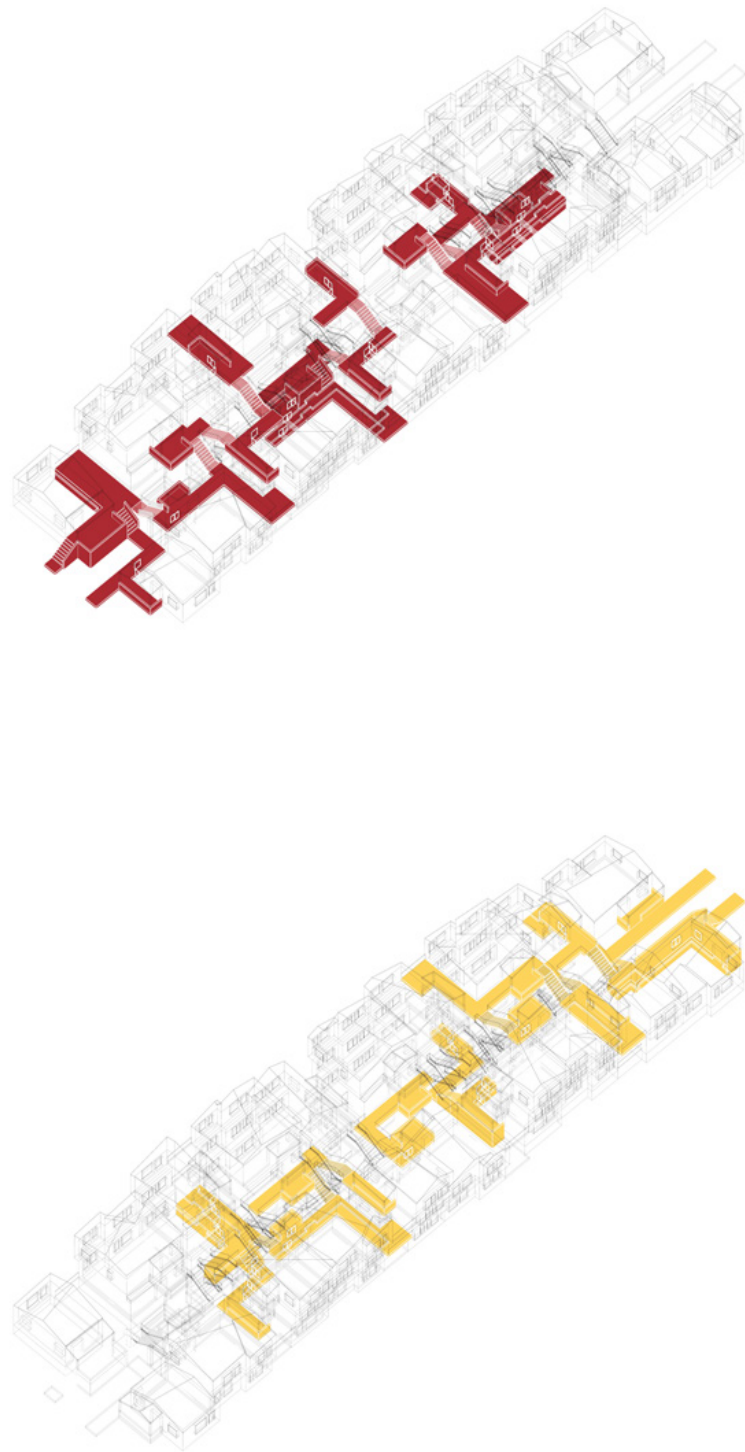
A NEW CORRIDOR BEGETS A NEW MULTIFAMILY TYPE

We start from the urban scale. Taking four standard suburban lots (dimensioned at 40' x 150'), the multifamily structure spans across the middle of a Berkeley-like neighborhood which, through recent pressures both from the market and the state, has begun to see more intense use of land in this traditionally low-density neighborhood.



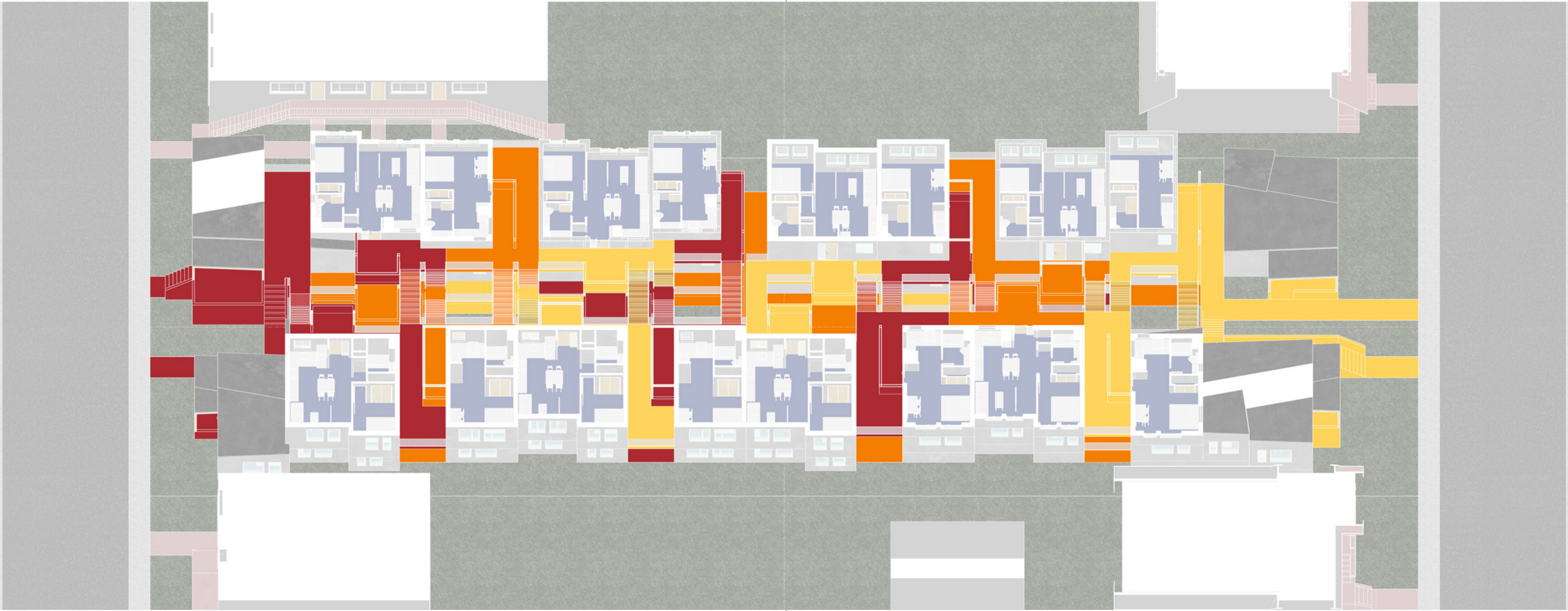
SOCIAL CONNECTION AS PRIORITY

What kind of multifamily architecture could arise if we start from the premise that a corridor's primary objective is to amplify social connections? These connections occur in varying scales and in varying dimensions. From the learnings gathered from plan-centered manipulations, which reorient the corridor's direction of travel and place the unit entries in more direct engagement with one another, sectional relationships are introduced through halfstepping across the corridor. This sectional manipulation introduces stoop-like conditions for each floor and brings more light and air down to the ground floor. All these alternations aggregate in order for the corridor to serve a larger urban function as a 'midblock connector,' strengthening networks across the whole neighborhood.

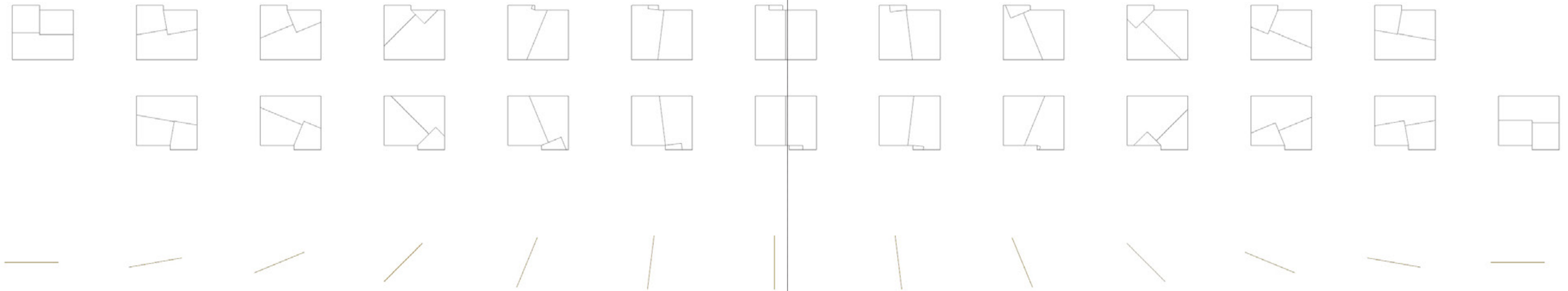


THE COLOR SCHEME

The colors serve both indexical and phenomenological purposes. They first imply ways to move through the building both horizontally and sectionally. The colors link a series of stoop-like and porch-like spaces and promote chance encounters among dwellers. Second, the interaction of colors function much like those in paintings from modernism and constructivism which investigates flatness and dimensionality. In other words, the colors are an exercise in juxtaposition and superimposition. And third, light refracts from these colored surfaces, giving these spaces warmth and vitality.



Second Floor Plan Oblique

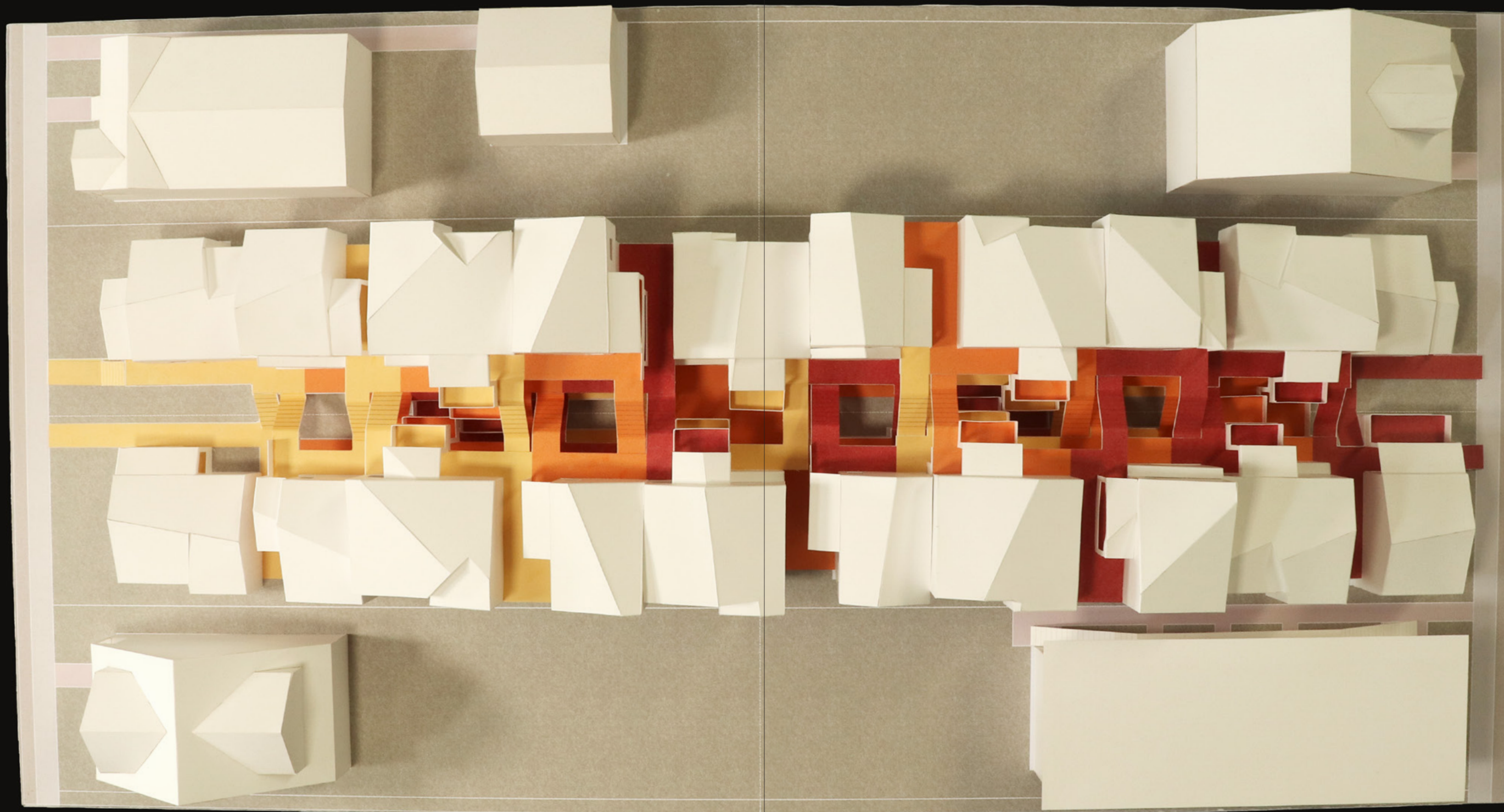


THE GABLE

Finally we arrive at the roof. As both a symbolic gesture to home and as a marker of individual structure, the gable is a powerful form which cites the American residential vernacular which at the same time leaves room for reinterpretation and estrangement to challenge the familiar. The orientation of the gable, determined by the ridge line, rotates gradually as the unit-stack moves from the street toward the interior depths of the building, until eventually the units face away from the street and into the corridor. The gable orientation serve as means of giving unique articulation of each unit-stack within a unifying formal gesture



—
Roof Plan Oblique





Roof Plan Oblique









