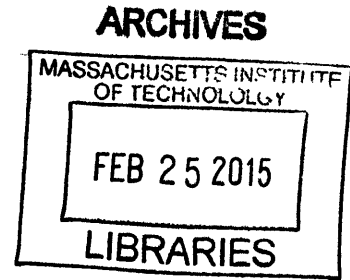


unCOMMON GROUND

BY DAVID MIRANOWSKI



B.A. Architectural Studies
Middlebury College, 2009

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Architecture at
the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

February 2015

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Signature redacted

Signature of Author: _____


David Miranowski
January 21, 2015

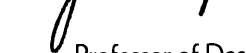
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Certified by: _____


Rafael (Rafi) Segal, PhD
Assistant Professor of Architecture and Urbanism
Thesis Supervisor

Signature redacted

Accepted by: _____


Terry Knight, PhD
Professor of Design and Computation
Chair of the Department Committee on Graduate Students

COMMITTEE

Rafi Segal, PhD

Associate Professor of Architecture and Urbanism

Ana Miljacki, MArch, PhD

Associate Professor of Architecture

William O'Brien, Jr., MArch

Associate Professor of Architecture

unCOMMON GROUND

BY DAVID MIRANOWSKI

Thesis Supervisor: Rafi Segal, PhD
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture and Urbanism

ABSTRACT

Brooklyn's urban fabric is a redundant array of perimeter residential blocks, built out over the last 200 years as a layered accretion. Within each block is a core that is spatially unified yet distinct from the public front of the street. These spaces are defined by their enclosure yet this barrier is not entirely impenetrable. Each block possesses a few unique moments of slippage in which the perimeter mass opens up to reveal a slivered view into the depths, and potentials, of this internalized world.

To the vast majority, including residents, these **slivers** and **cores** remain a visual phenomenon. The near-universal practice of extruding backyard parcel lines has created an architecture of division, namely the fence, closing off the yard from the block and the block from the neighborhood. This thesis proposes an alternative scenario, in which rear fences are removed and a thin line of public space is inserted into the mosaic of existing yards. The line, activated through a set of calibrated relationships with the ground and floating infrastructure, stitches together people within the open core and works against the detritus of old divisions. Through this intervention, a new grain emerges which connects Brooklyn's blocks and transforms the residual slivers into a network of spaces that open to an engaging, and unexpected, rendering of the pre-existing.

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on
June 20, 2015 in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rafi, thank you for sharing your wisdom and for continually pushing me beyond my comforts. Your thoughtfulness and intellect led me to unexpected findings, and for that I am very grateful.

Liam, it was a great pleasure to work with you during my time at MIT. Being immersed in your methodologies has shaped who I am as a designer. Thank you for all your insight and dedication.

Ana, a sincere thanks for challenging me this semester. The project became much stronger through your poignant critique.

Austin, Aurimas, Enas, Kyle, Kyung Sik, and Liz, your generosity is truly unparalleled. Thank you for being so amazingly helpful as I pushed to finish this project.

Bates crew, thanks for the continued support and for bringing the fun!

Susan and Mike, thanks for always being there for me. I love you guys.

Mom and Dad, it is impossible to thank you two enough. You have always encouraged me to pursue my passions and my curiosities to the fullest. Thank you so much for guiding me without steering and for making this all possible. To me it is the greatest gift and it has brought so much joy to my life. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Mary Kate, your love and patience through this journey have been a true blessing. Thank you simply for being you. Now, on to some new adventures!



un/common ground

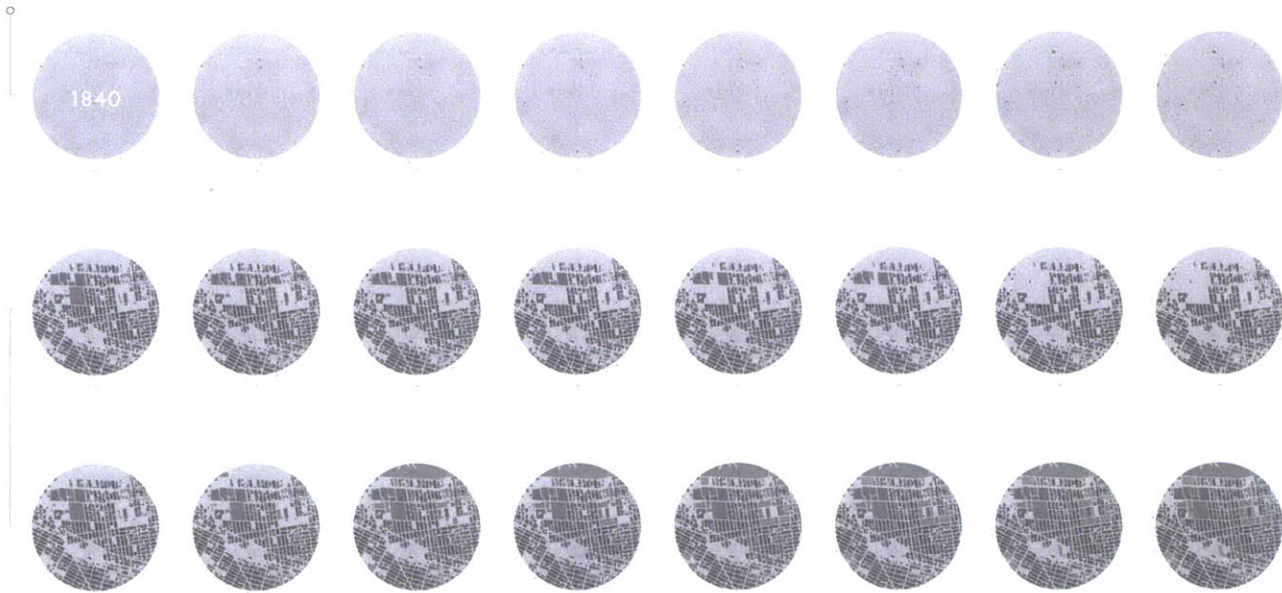
by David Miranowski



INTRODUCTION

an urban evolution
resulting spaces
inhabitation
potentials

site : Brooklyn, New York
population : 2.6 mil
first settled: 1634



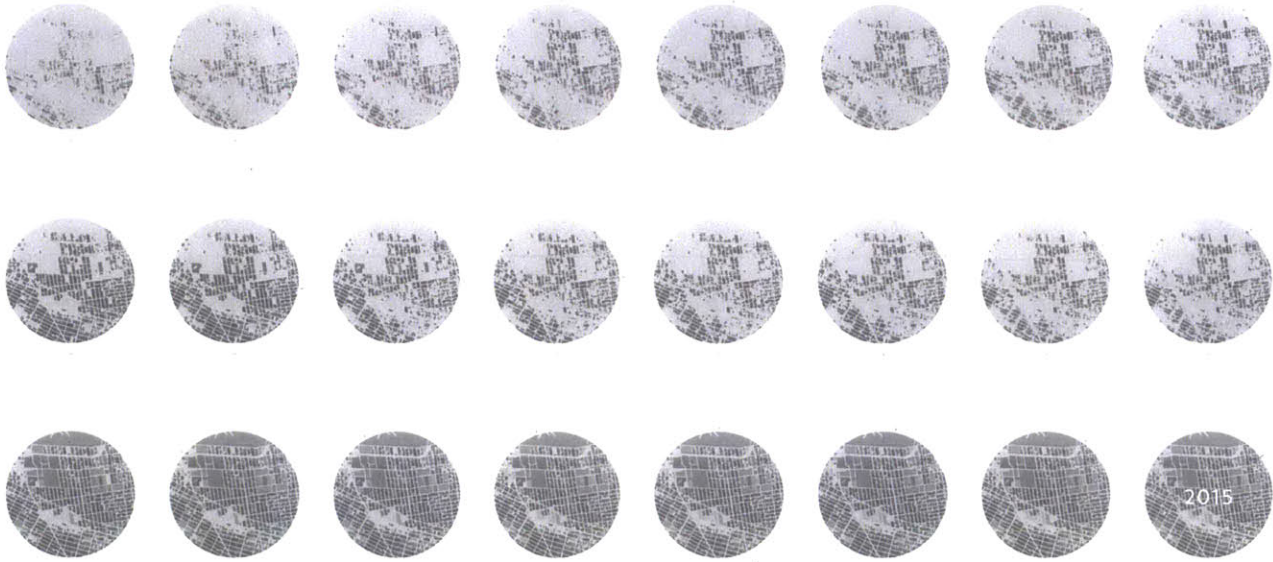
BROOKLYN PETRI

an urban evolution

Brooklyn's urban fabric reveals a narrative of rapid growth and transformation. It was less than 200 years ago when this land was wide-open, playing host to a handful of Dutch farmers who used the soil to grow wheat, oats, barley, and corn. Up until the late 19th century, when farmers had shifted their primary crops towards fruits and vegetables, Brooklyn – and the greater King's County – was the second-largest provider of produce in the country.¹ Roll the clock forward 100 years, to the end of the 20th century, and you will see a radically different Brooklyn, no longer second in agricultural production, but rather second-nationally in population density.

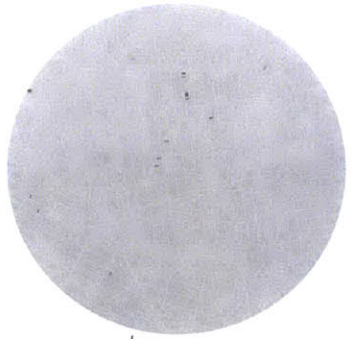
To stimulate this urban transformation, developers divided and rationalized Brooklyn's land across several scales – infrastructural, neighborhood, block, and private lot. Through the capitalist logic of parcelization, the ground was primed for a new density of residential building stock and, in turn, gained significant value as a financial commodity. What began as the incremental sale of a few farms near Brooklyn's original urban center quickly grew to become an all-encompassing speculative grid, draped across the entire borough. By mid-to late 19th century, the comprehensive framework for Brooklyn's future neighborhoods had been almost fully established, both as an abstraction and through physical infrastructure. Though at times rapid to the point of being reckless, the pixelated aggregation of individual units within these grids would ensue for the next 150+ years.



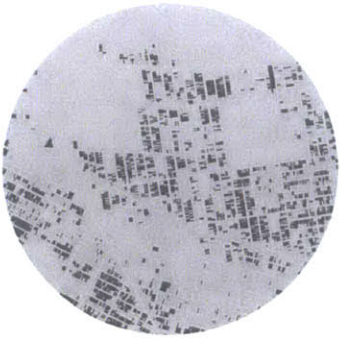


2015

> what next?



1855



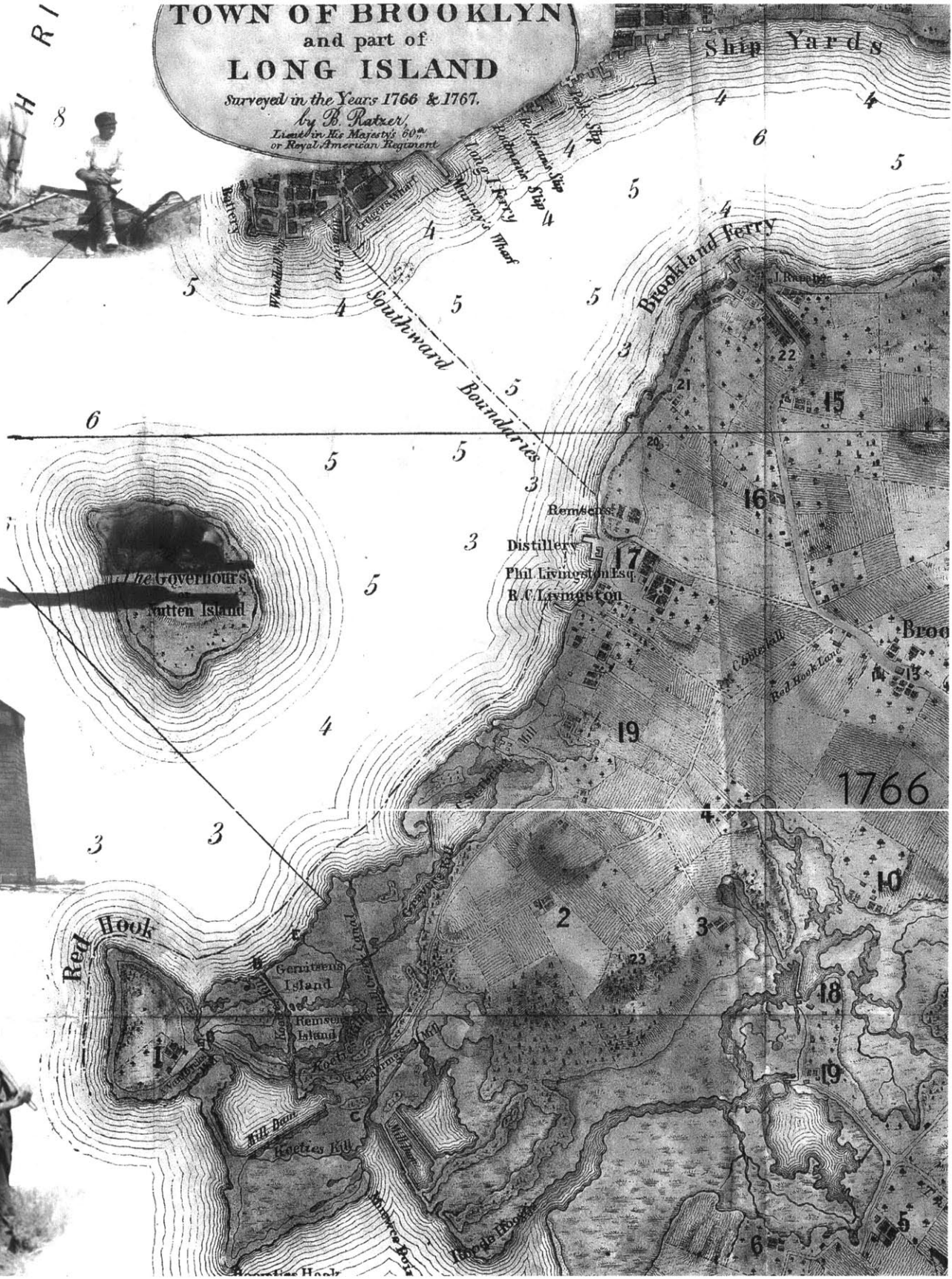
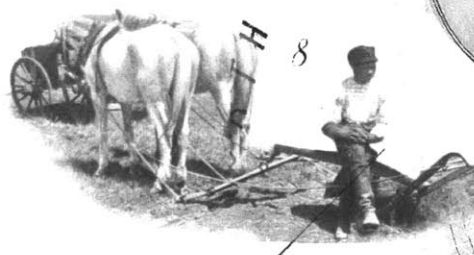
1900



2015

TOWN OF BROOKLYN
and part of
LONG ISLAND

Surveyed in the Years 1766 & 1767.
By *B. Ratzer*,
Lieut. in His Majesty's 60th
or Royal American Regiment



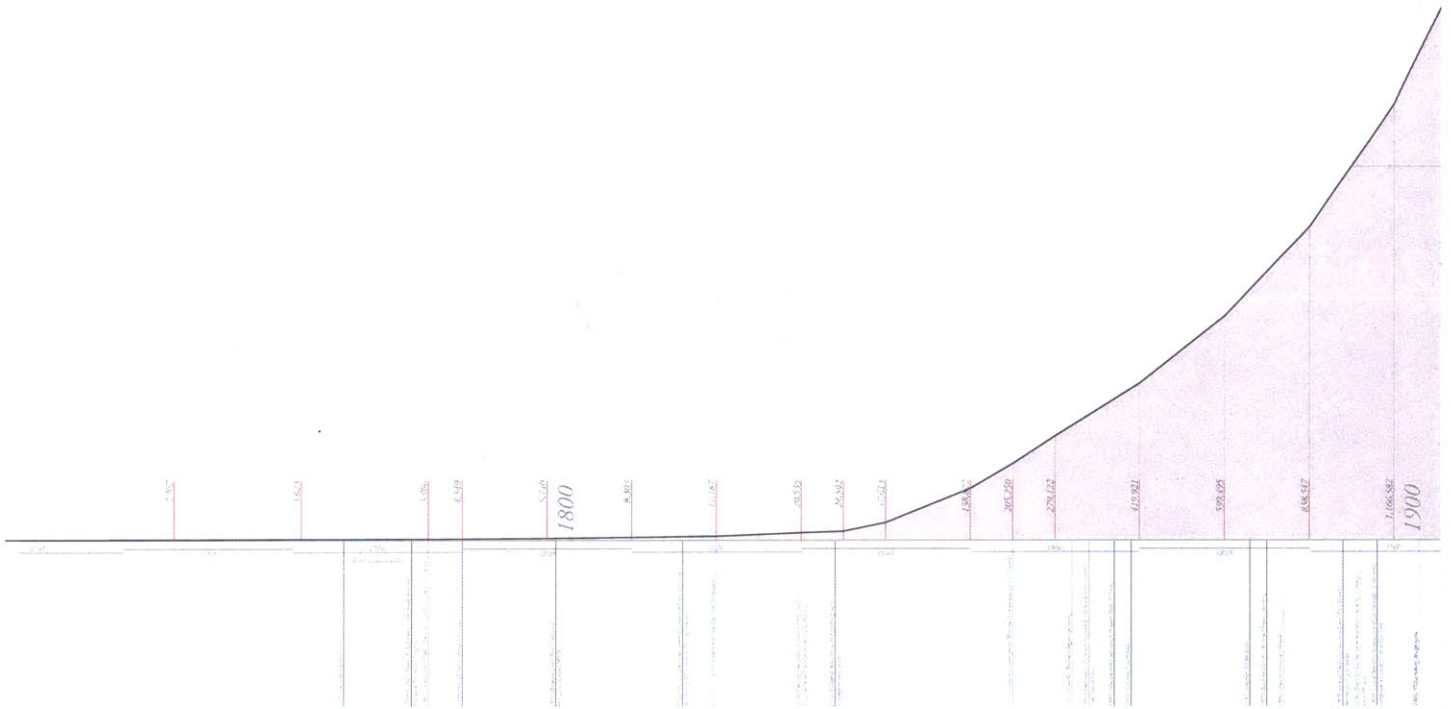
Brooklyn's section of the Ratzer Map of New York, surveyed in 1766

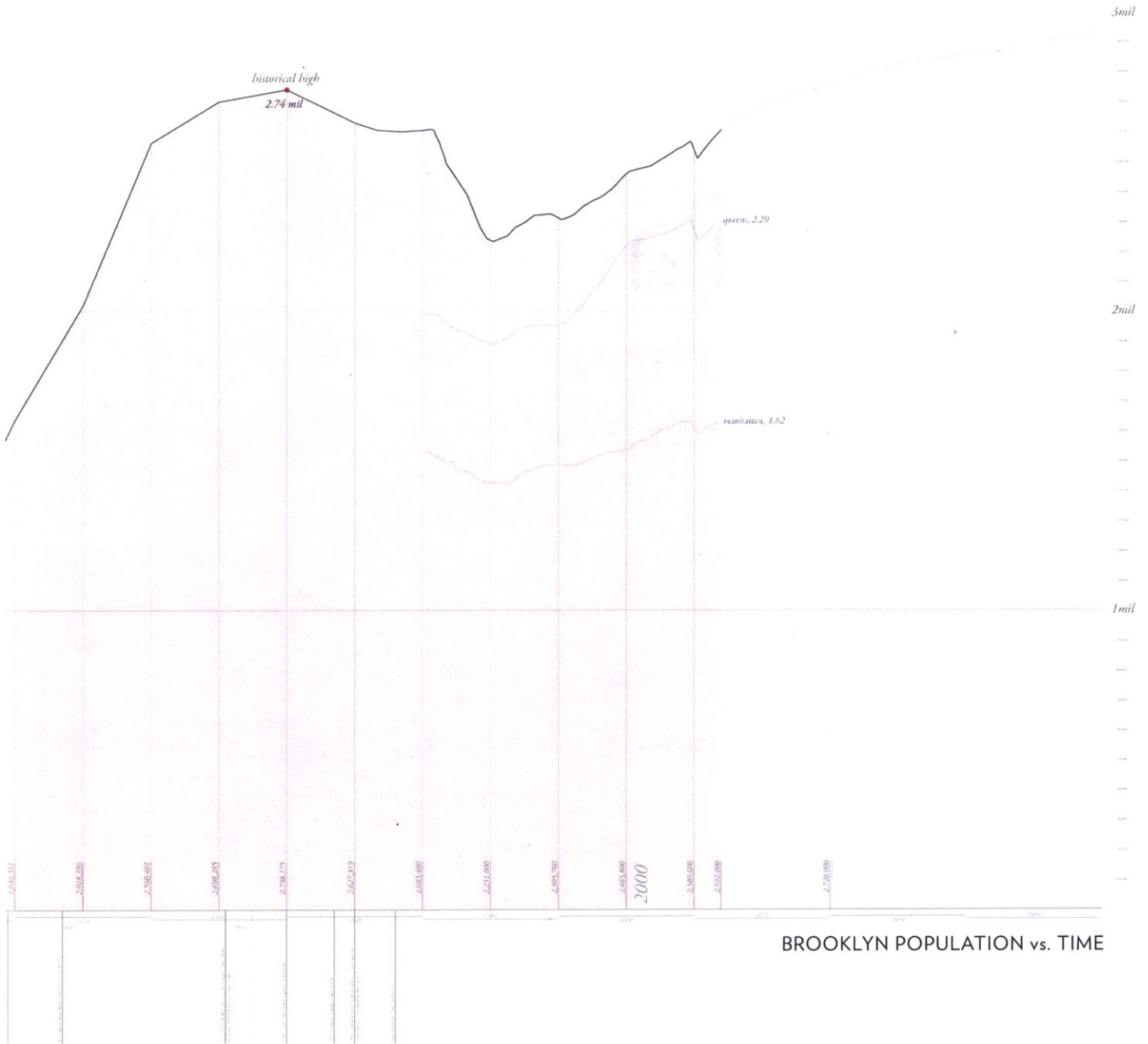


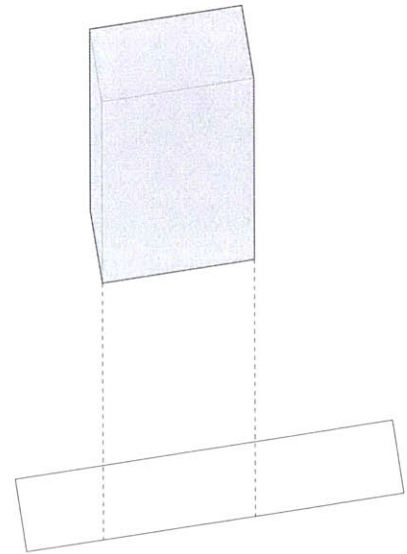
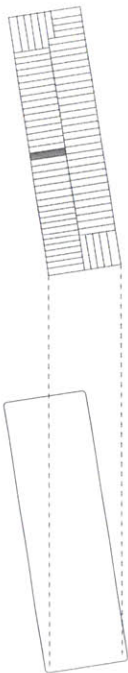
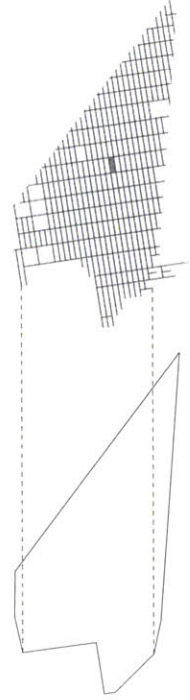
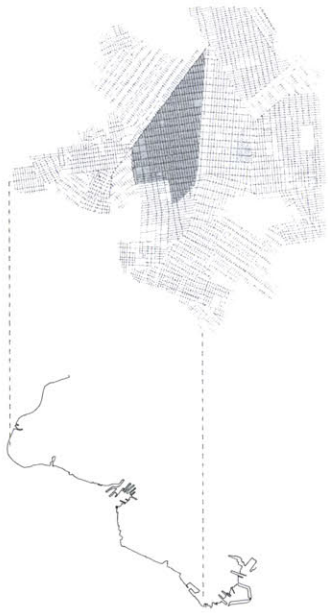
2015



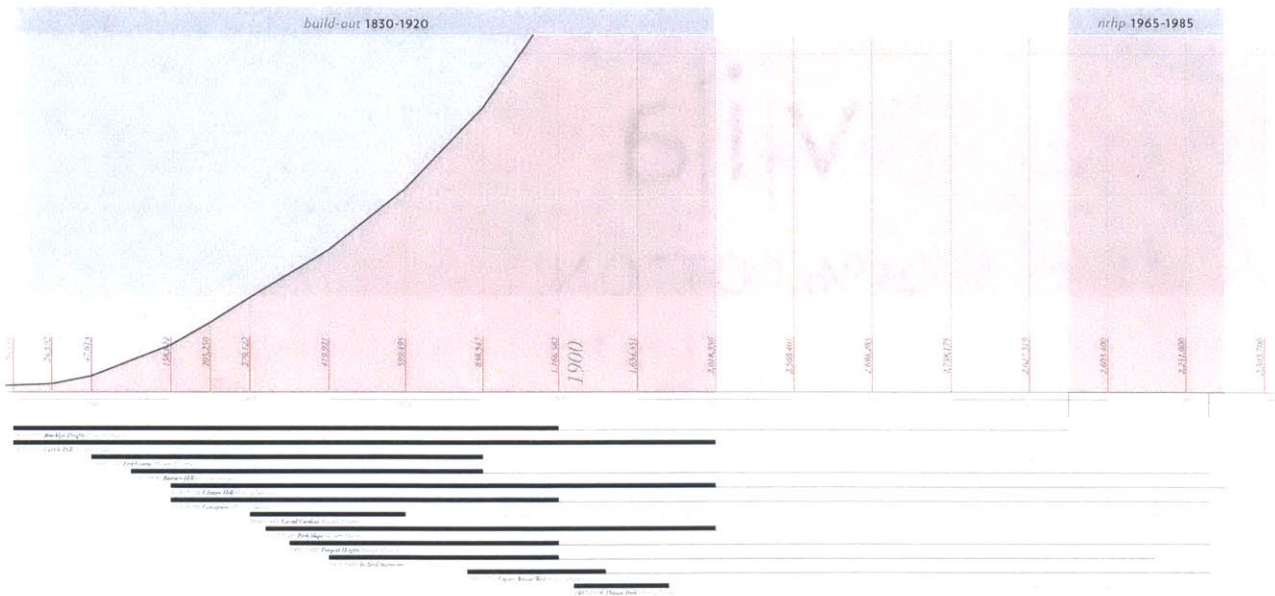
Contemporary Satellite Image of Brooklyn, from GIS





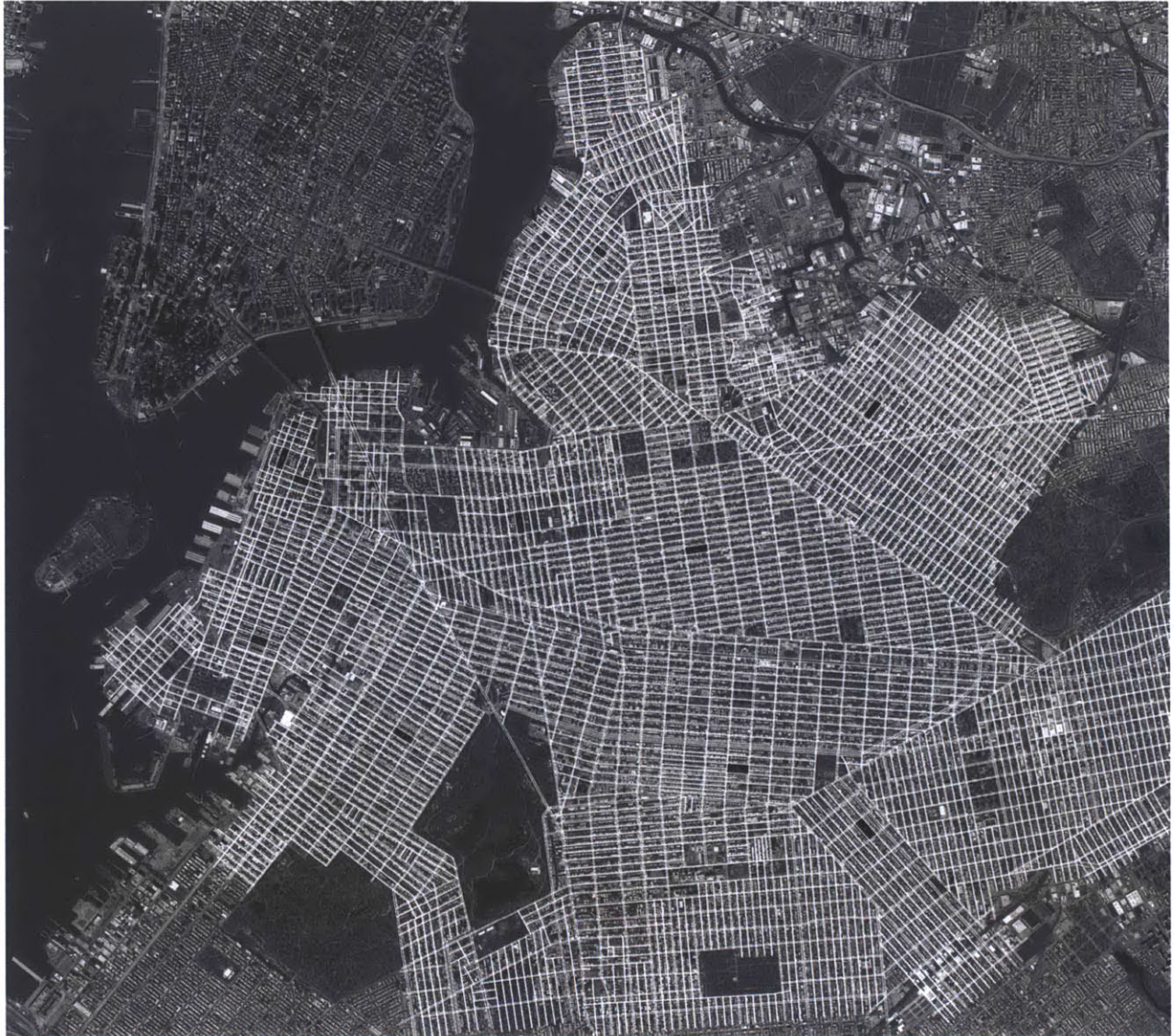


A SERIES OF DIVISIONS,
ACROSS SCALES
City, Neighborhood, Block, Parcel

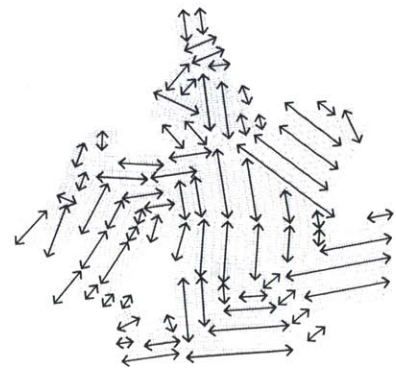
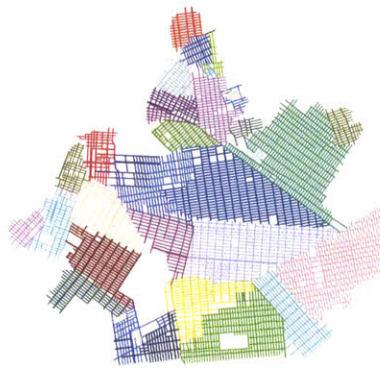


**CONSTRUCTING BROOKLYN'S
HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS**

Beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. Photo by Eugene de Salignac. 1918



“Remnants of past and present lay atop one another, the sediment from each historic cityscape seeping into the others.” *Suleiman Osman, 25*



A MOSAIC OF GRIDS



Grid 1



Grid 2



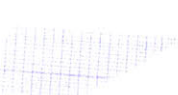
Grid 3



Grid 4



Grid 5



Grid 6



Grid 7



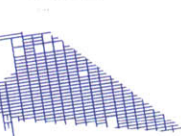
Grid 8



Grid 9



Grid 10



Grid 11



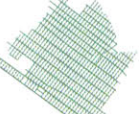
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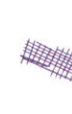
Grid 13



Grid 14



Grid 15



Grid 16



Grid 17



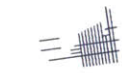
Grid 18



Grid 19



Grid 20



Grid 21



Grid 22



Grid 23



Grid 24



Grid 25



Grid 26



Grid 27



Grid 28



Grid 29



Grid 30



Grid 31



Grid 32



Grid 33



Grid 34

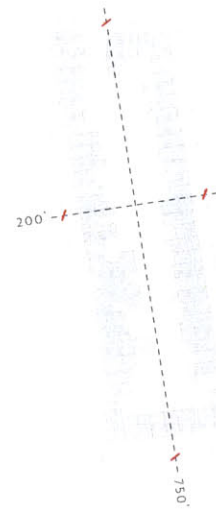


Grid 35



Grid 36

“With the borough’s oldest street grid and an assortment of buildings dating back to the colonial era,” writes U.S. historian Suleiman Osman, “brownstone Brooklyn was a tectonic cityscape with the architectural and social imprints of multiple economic stages: a Dutch agricultural economy, a mercantile port city, an immigrant industrial city, and an administrative office city.”² This layered evolution is manifest in Brooklyn’s overlapping street grids, which shift to accommodate previously established thoroughfares, property boundaries, land-uses, and significant architecture. The “multi-authored” history, as put by the urban theorist Eve Blau, is “visibly registered in the physical fabric of the city.”³

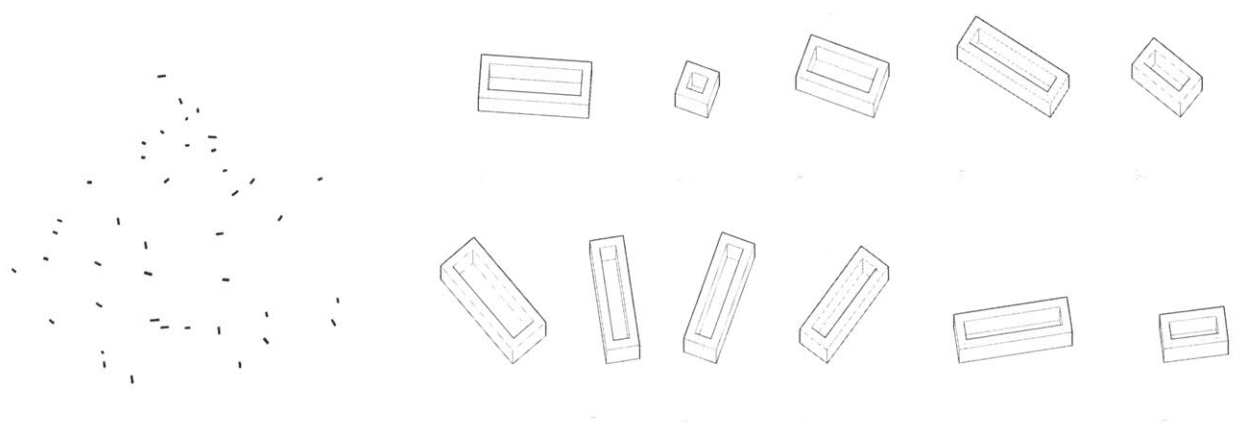


And yet, despite this wealth of peculiarities, Brooklyn’s urban fabric is surprisingly redundant in its formal composition because it is stitched almost exclusively around of the same typological unit: the perimeter residential block. Conceived of as a systematic way to produce residential density while still maintaining adequate exposure to sun, air, and private open space, Brooklyn’s perimeter block is structured around two disproportionate axes: a long axis of about 750’, which splits the block into two rows of parcels, and a 200’ short axis, which establishes the combined depth of two abutting parcels.

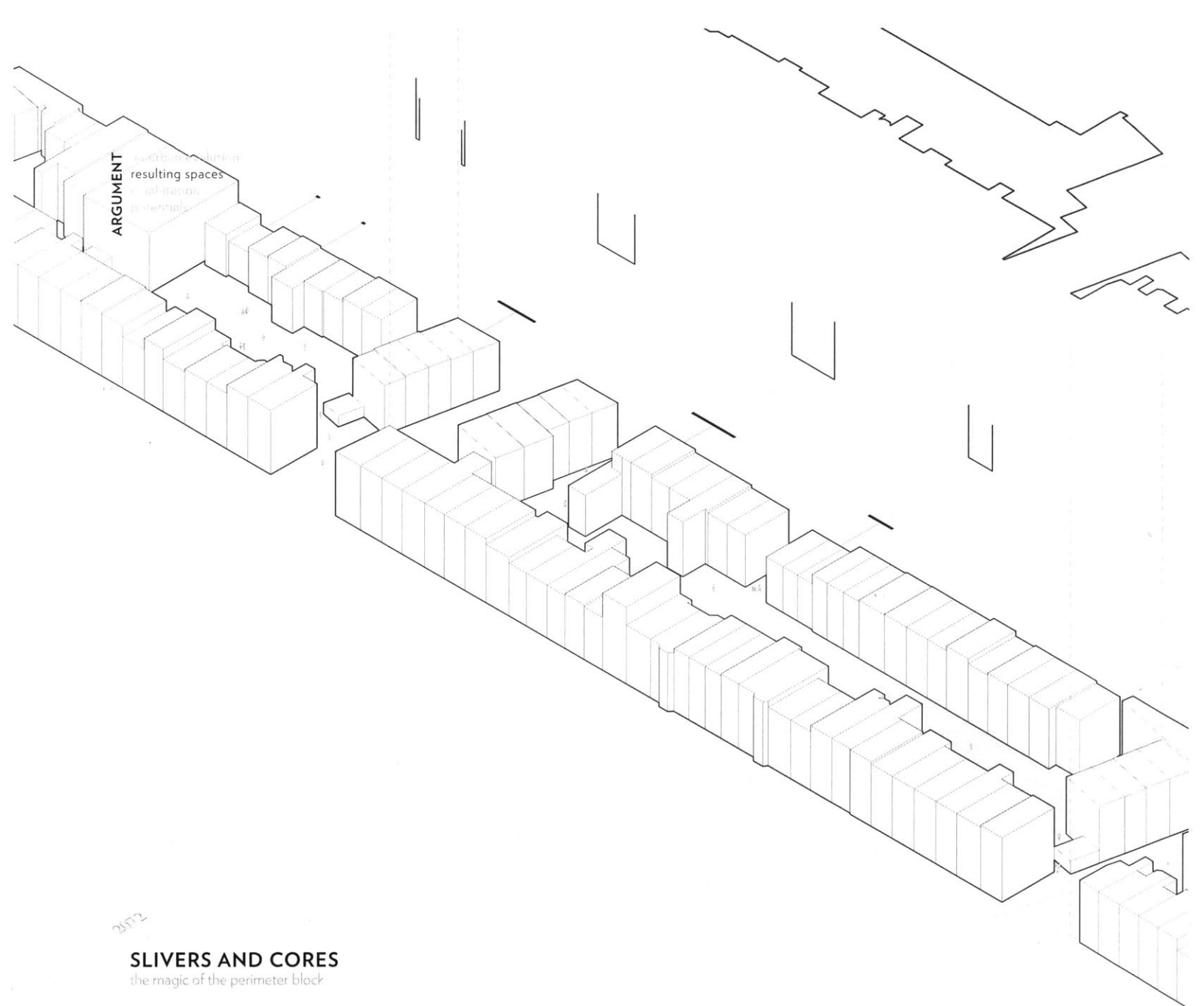
“..peel back the accumulated spatiotemporal layers of the built fabric to discover moments of alteration, addition, erasure, misalignment and realignment.”



West 133rd Street, 1877. Quote: Eve Blau. “Project Zagreb”, p12



Aerial image of Brooklyn from Google Maps



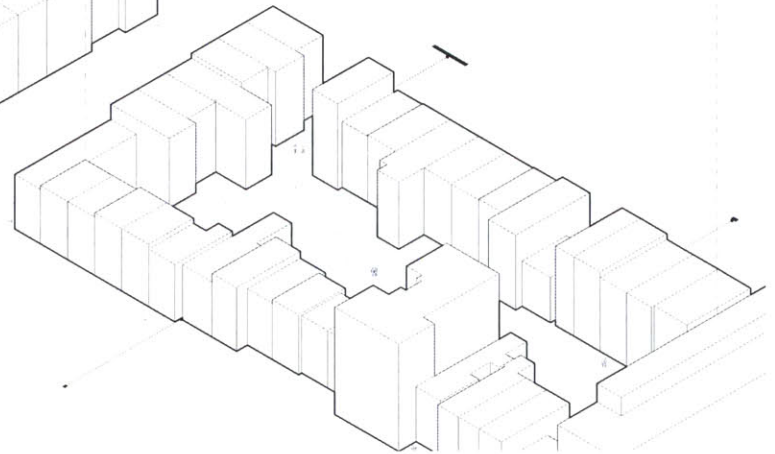
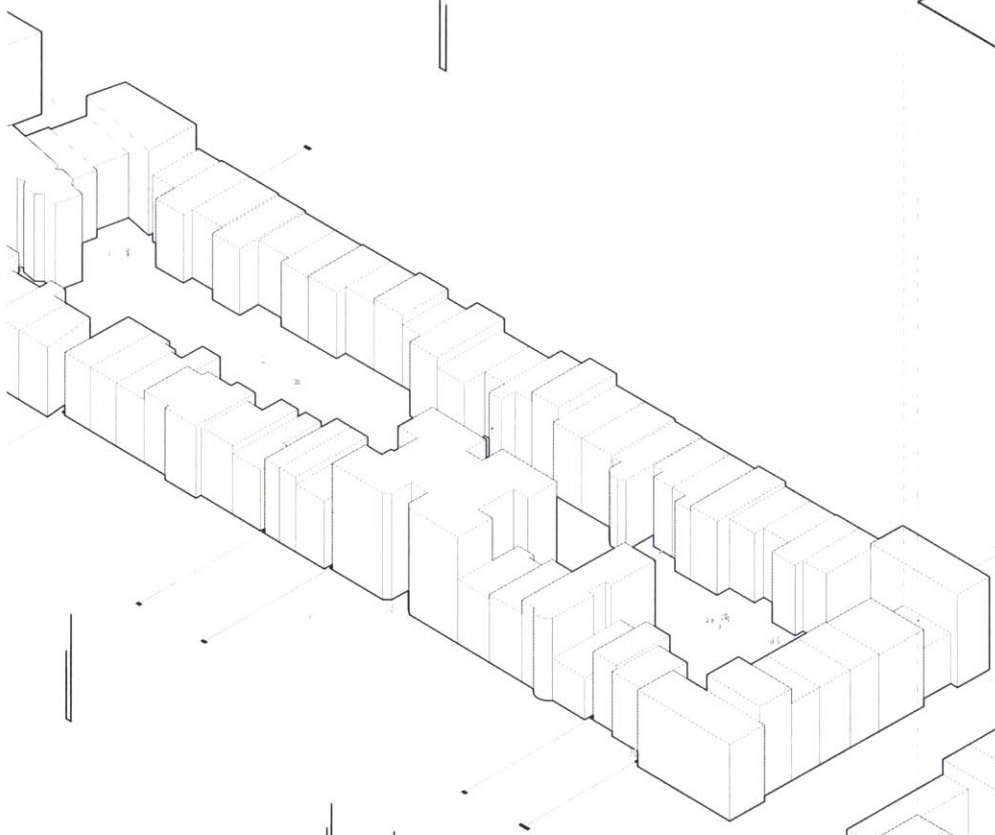
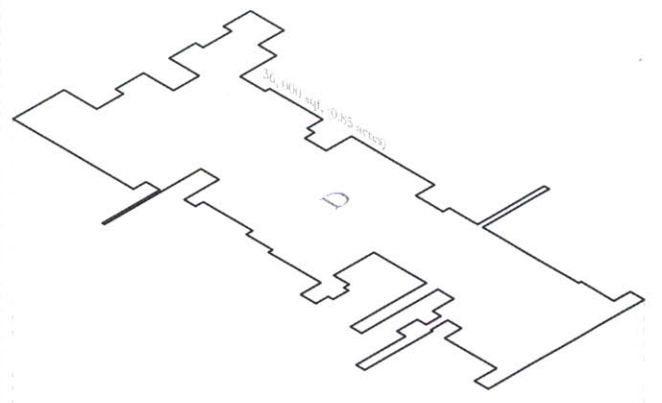
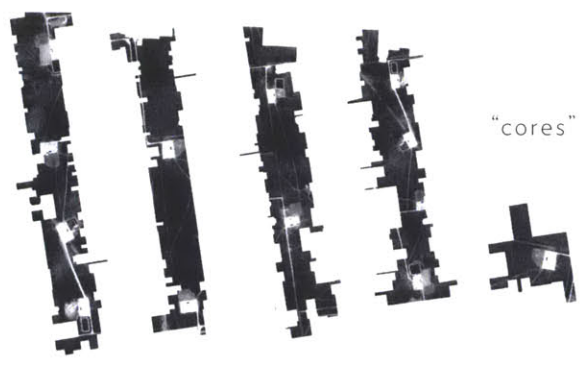
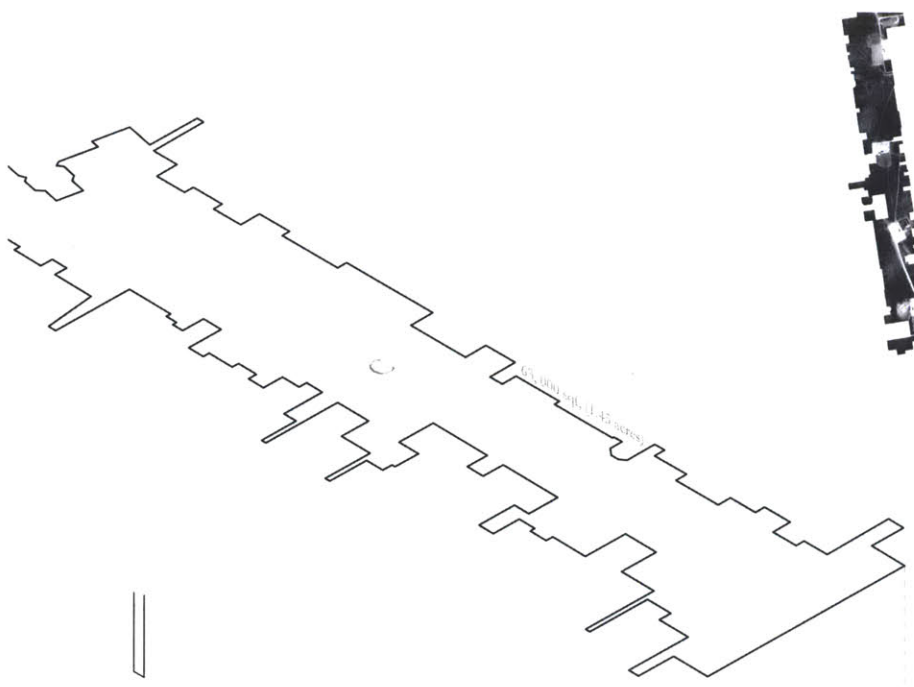
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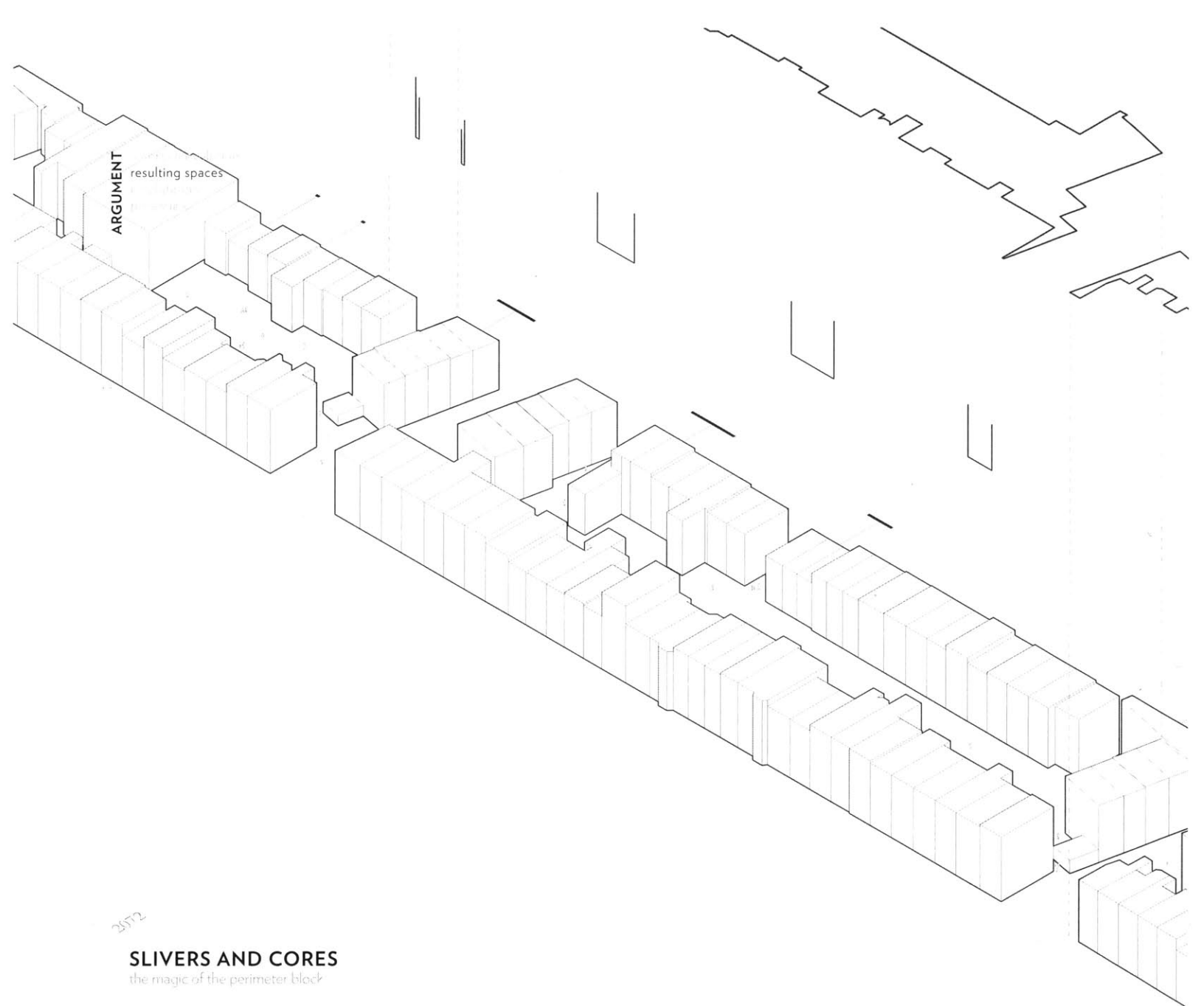
SLIVERS AND CORES

the magic of the perimeter block

While it was conceived largely around practical domestic concerns, paired with the logistical desire for expansive and rapid deployment across the city, the perimeter block presents some incredible spatial opportunities. In this scenario it is productive to separate intention - the context out of which the block is invented - from outcome, which I see as an abundant array of unique spaces that are each inscribed within an aggregated mass. This is an essential exercise according to Blau, who asserts that "the chronologically backward reading of the urban fabric constructs a narrative that foregrounds action - what the intervention or object actually does - rather than what it is intended or designed to do. It thereby reproduces the lived experience of encounter with the built object... The reverse reading," she continues, "produces a kind of knowledge that is spatial and fundamentally architectural."⁴ When viewing Brooklyn through this lens - through a deliberately intuitive, spatial, and experiential vantage - the perimeter block can be recognized as producing this magical set of spaces - embedded within real urban density, and yet, totally separate. There is something poetic about the way these spaces emerge through an accumulation of discrete units over time. These urban interiors, which I refer to as "**cores**", are a focus of this thesis.

2039





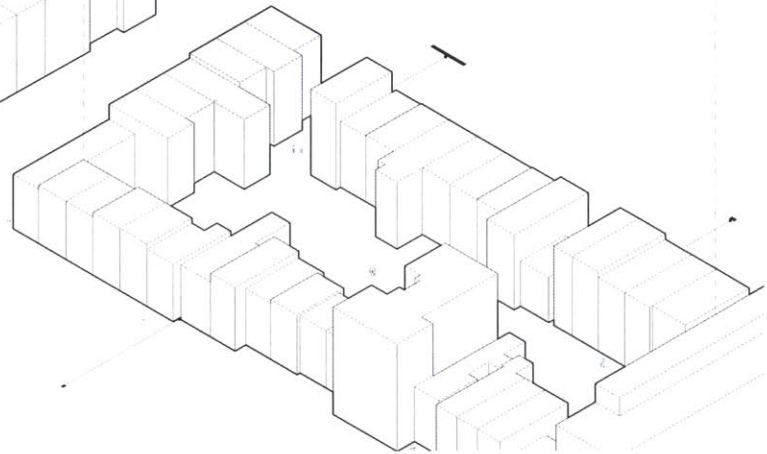
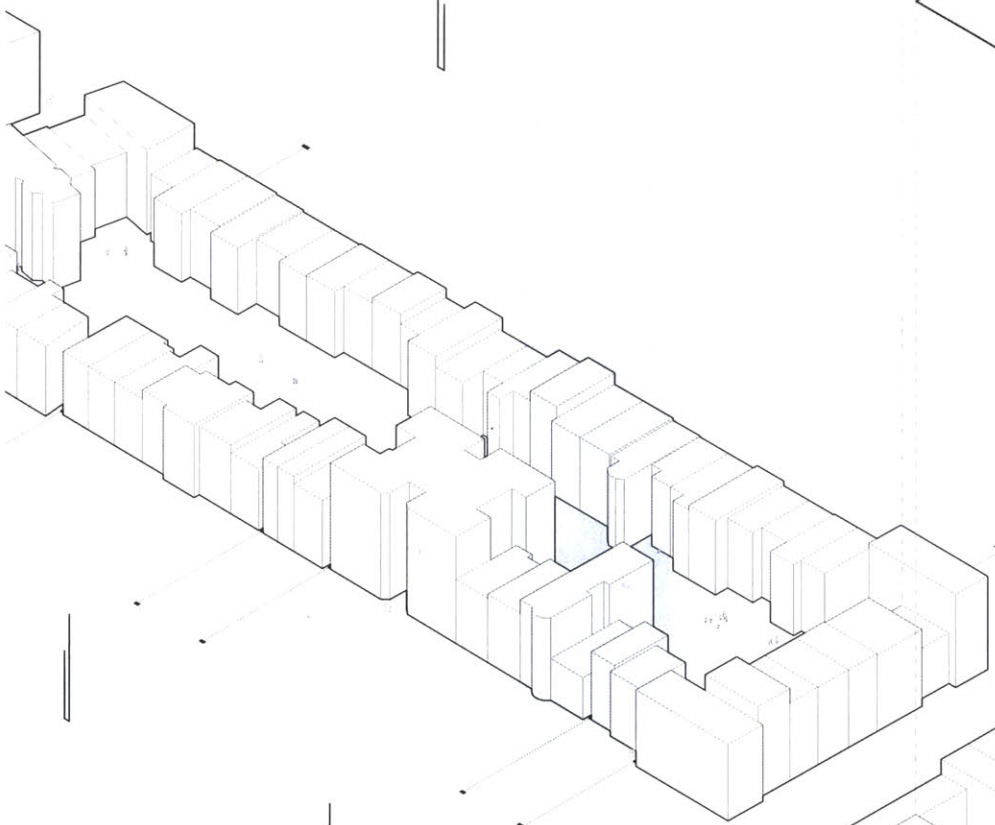
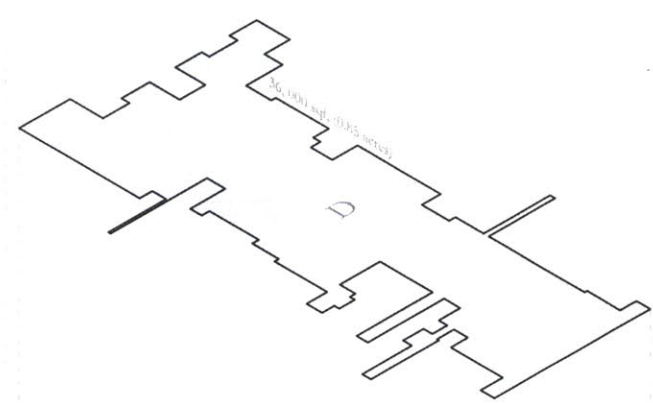
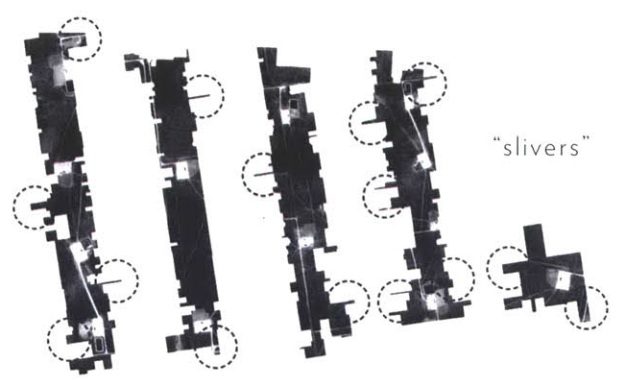
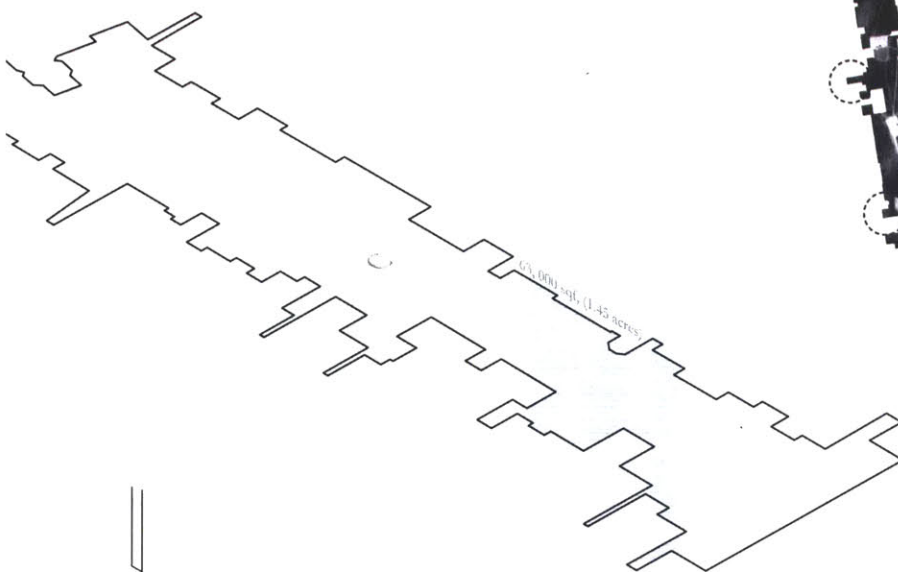
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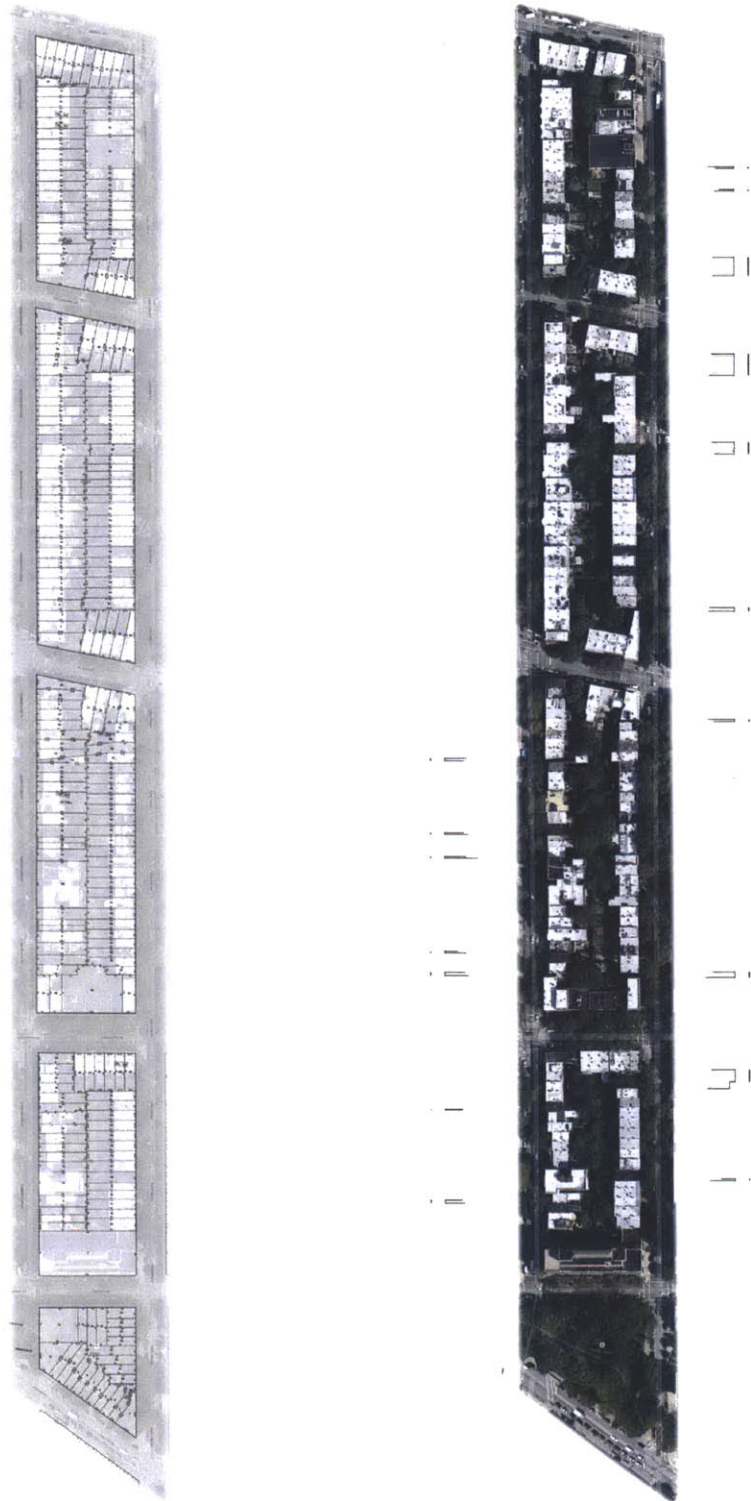
SLIVERS AND CORES

the magic of the perimeter block

“The space between the urban and the interior is one that continues to unfurl, requiring that one interrogates the productive interplay at the threshold where it is not possible to say whether one occupies a realm of privacy or publicity, a space on the inside or outside, a collective or individual moment.”⁵ Suzie Attiwill

The core spaces are defined by their enclosure but this barrier is not entirely impenetrable. Each block possesses a few unique moments of slippage in which the perimeter mass opens to reveal a slivered view into the depths of this internalized world. It is through the “**slivers**” that the hidden core becomes tied to the public front of the street. These are thresholds into a distinct space, nested deeply within the city, centered, and yet so very proximate. A few thin voids within an otherwise solid shell flickers light onto the sidewalk and provides a glimpse into the potentials of this otherwise mundane urban morphology.

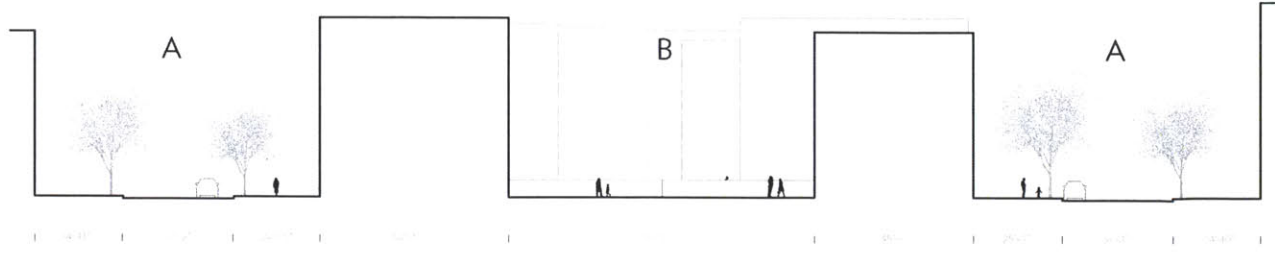




Perimeter Block-Strip Analysis

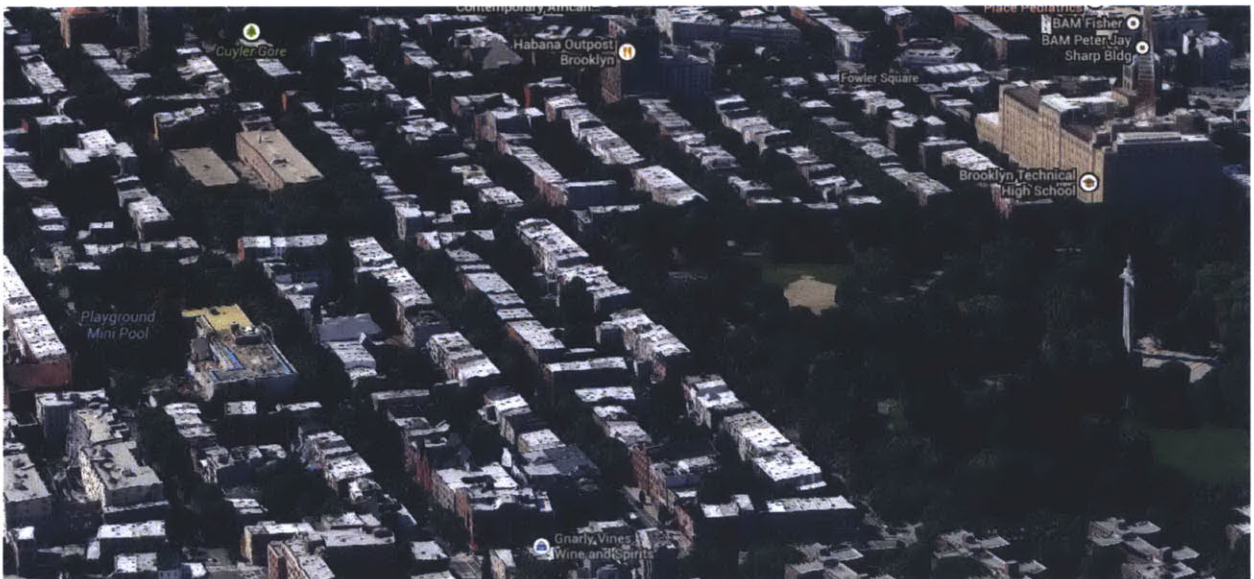


Photo of 1:160 model



Bay Ridge Backyards, 1916

The core spaces emerge through an aggregation of individual units over time.



Brooklyn images, Different Scales, all from Google Earth

FORT GREENE'S SLIVERS

cataloguing the residual

The word 'residual' is defined as, "a quantity remaining after other things have been subtracted."⁶ In the case of Brooklyn's slivers, the concept of the residual is actually inverted - it emerges through a process of addition, rather than subtraction, producing a void rather than some remaining solid. As voids, the slivers are defined by the exterior walls of two or more adjacent buildings. The scale of the slivers varies directly in proportion to the spacing between the unrelated buildings and can range anywhere between 3 to 110 feet. These gaps occur for several reasons, but are most-typically the product of codified setback regulations, private passages to backyards, odd lots, and/or the varied geometric conditions between parcels when the block shifts between its long and short face. The following is a catalogue of the multi-scalar residual spaces found throughout the Fort Greene neighborhood in Brooklyn. The catalogue is organized according to the width of each sliver.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



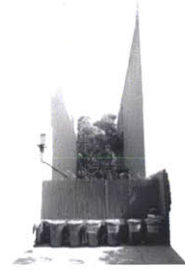
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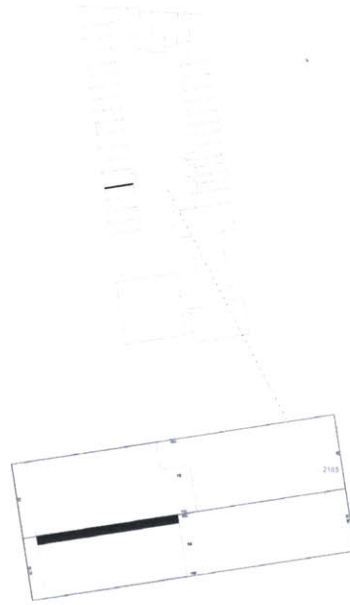


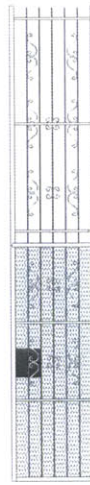
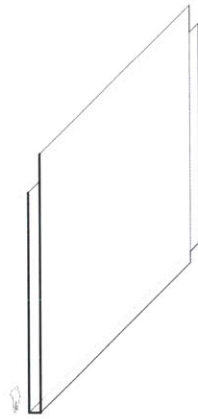
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small



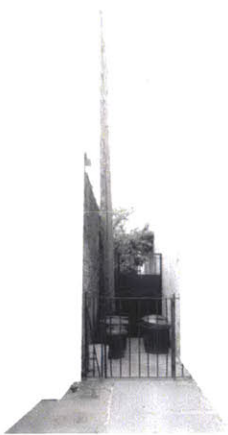
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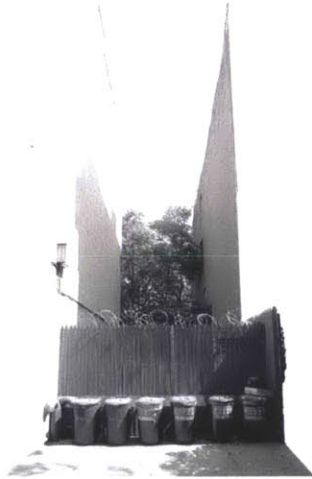
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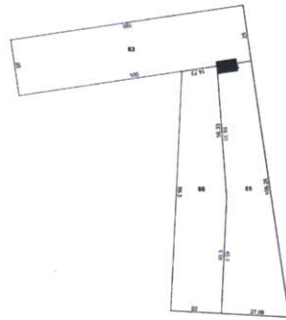
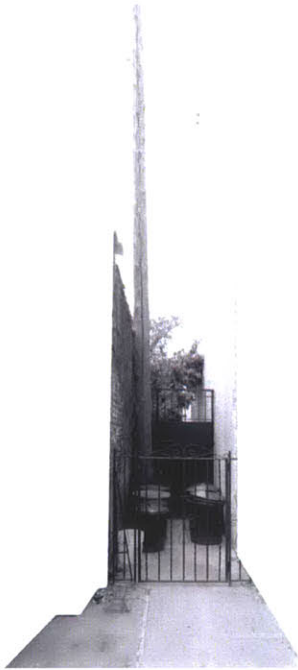


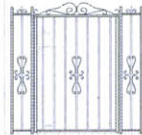
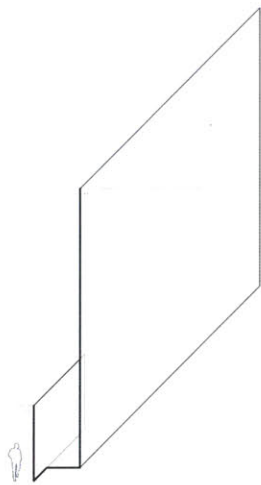
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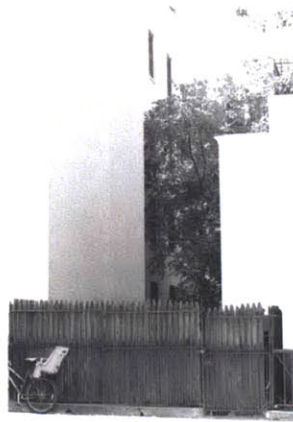
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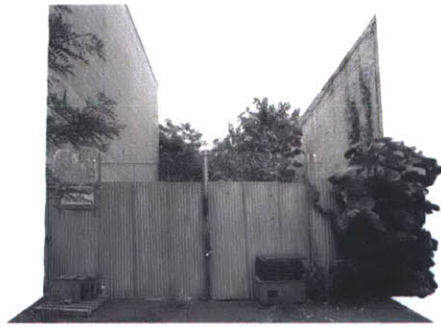
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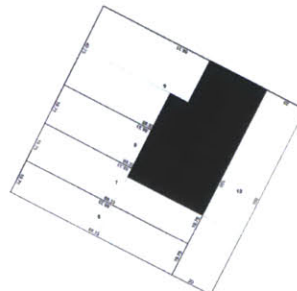
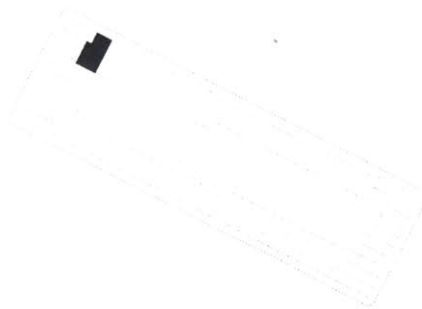


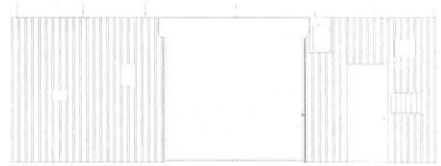
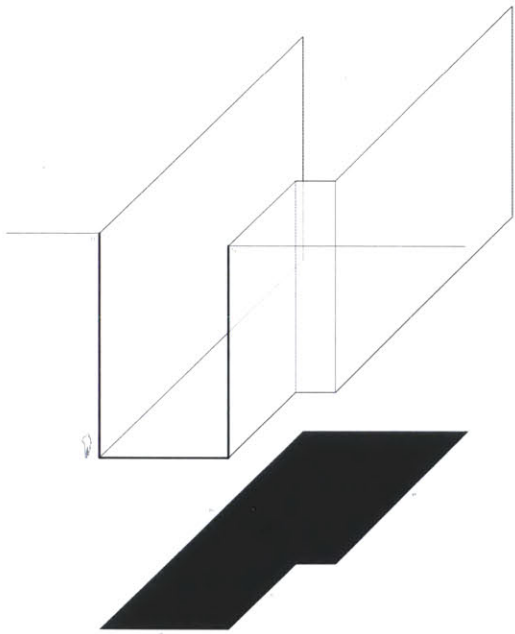
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medium



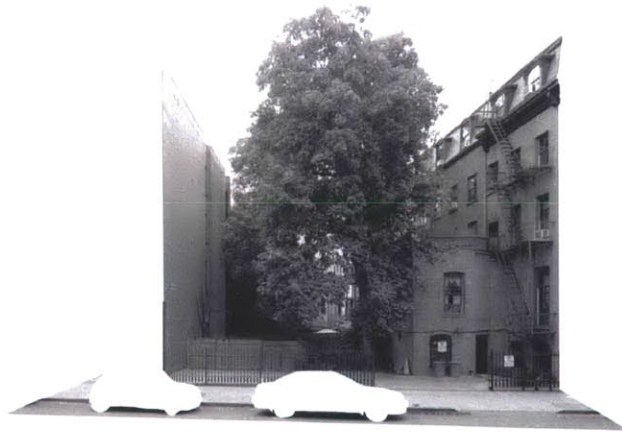


large



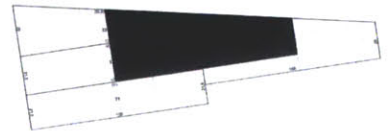
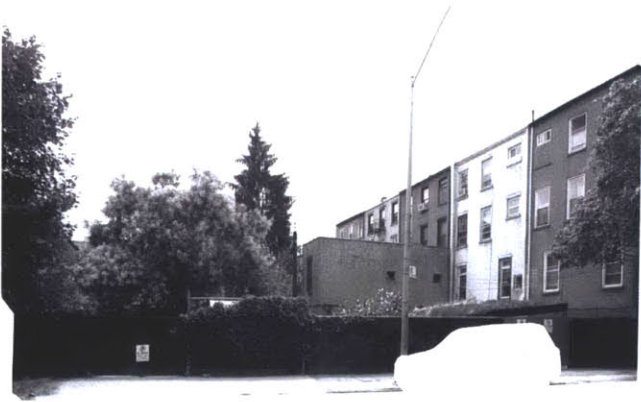


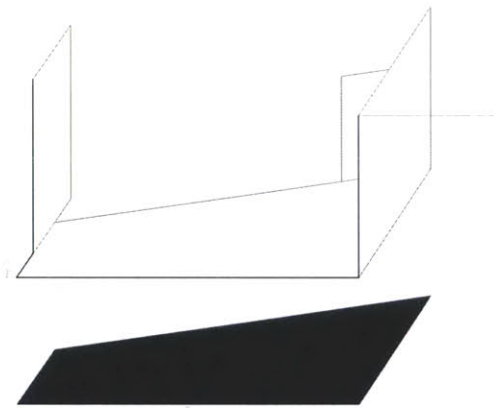
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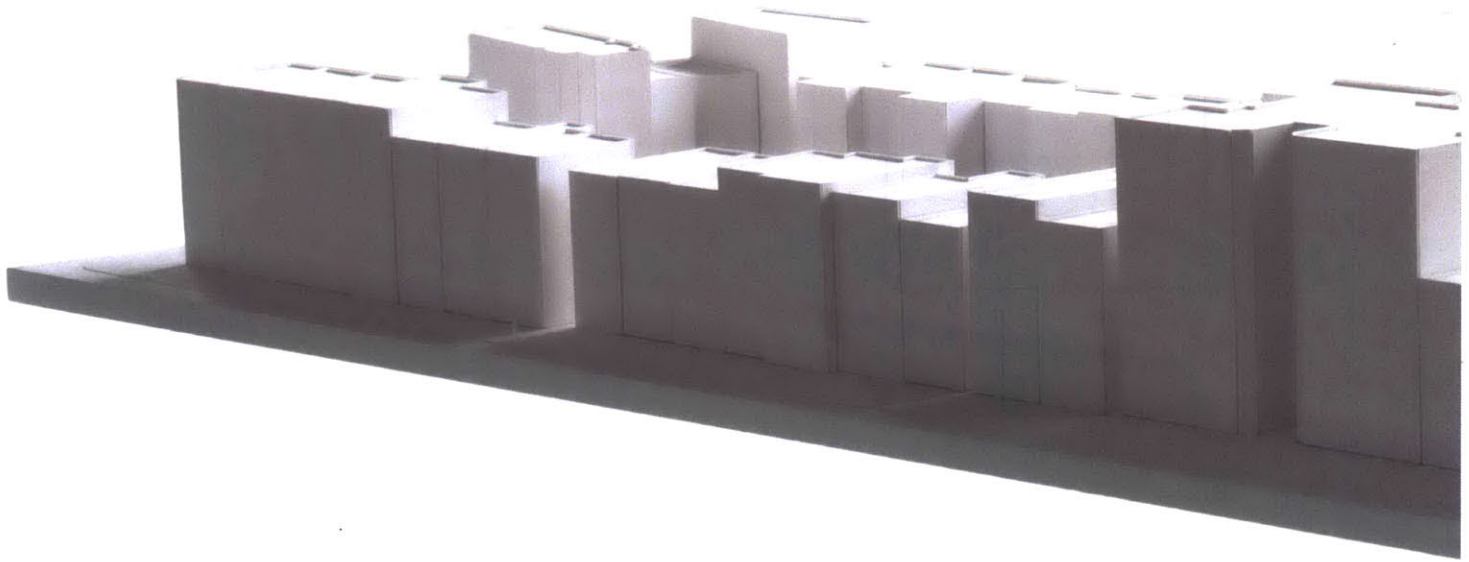


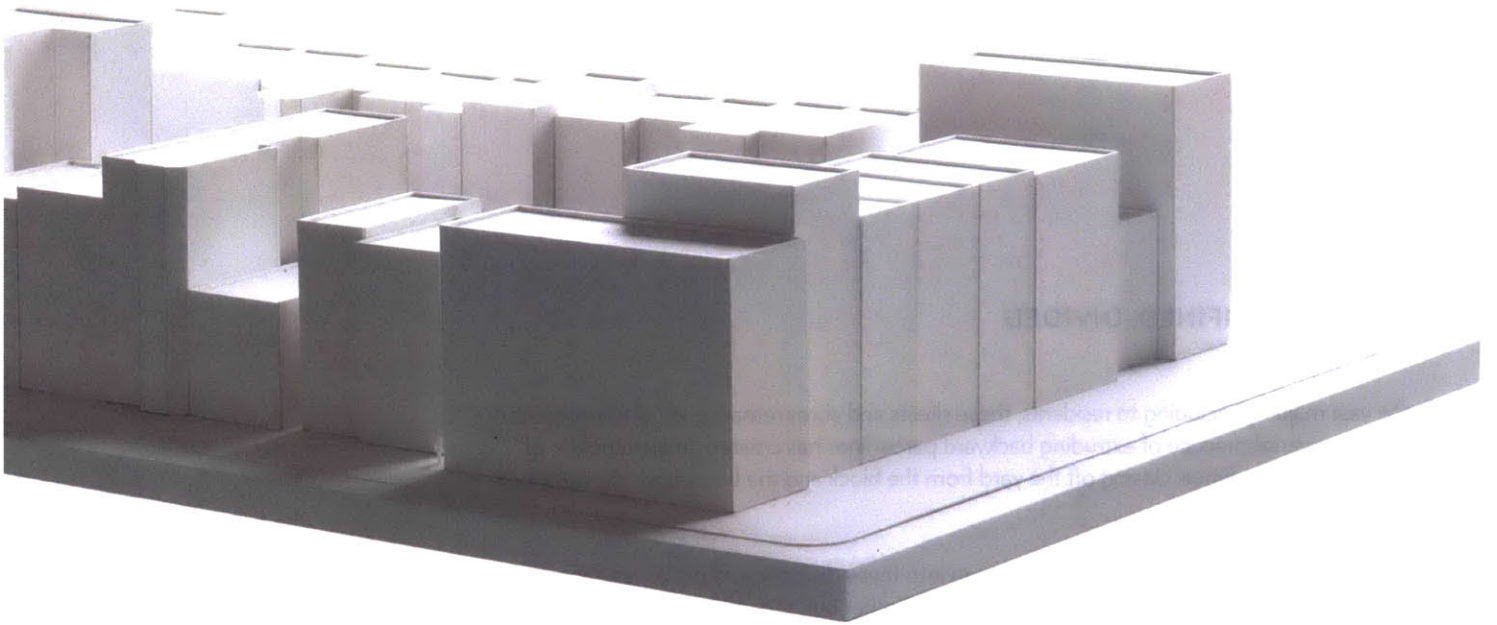
3

angle

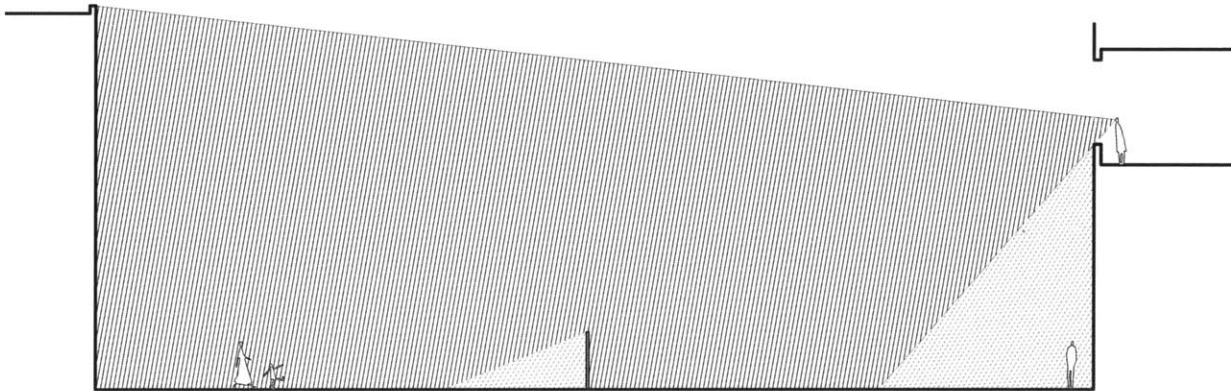








The Block, photo of 1:160 model



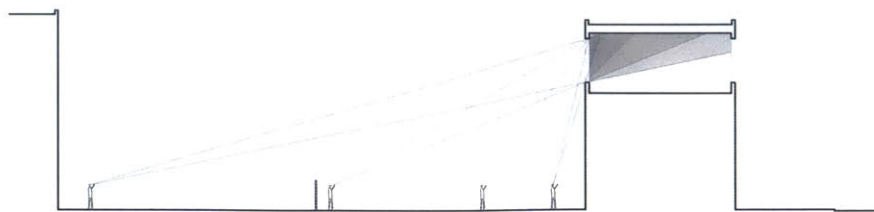
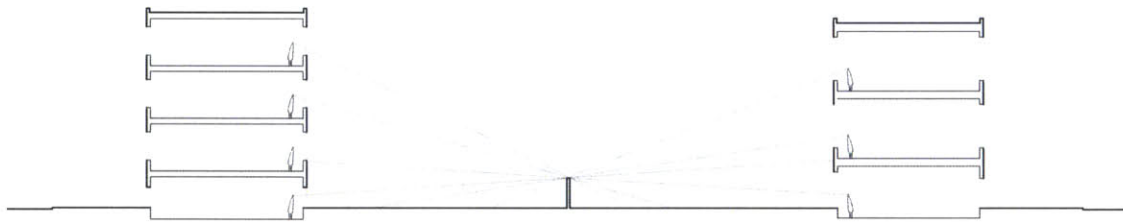
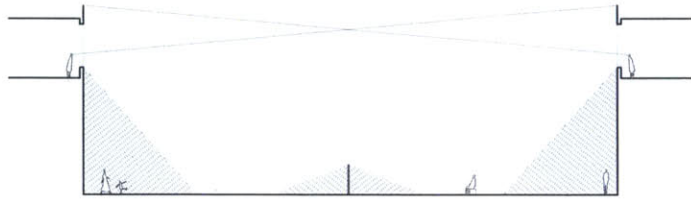
ISOLATED, CONFINED, DIVIDED

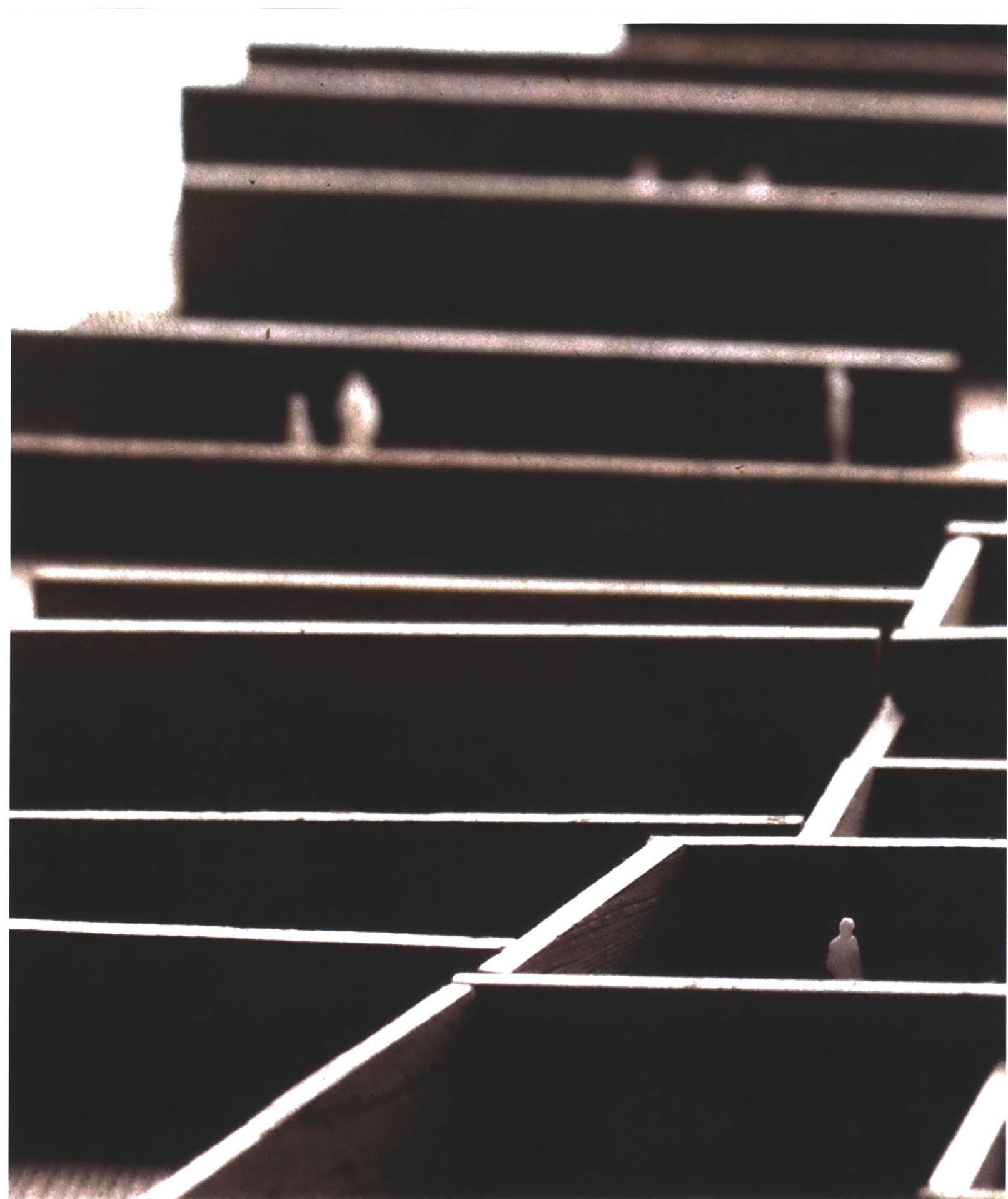
current modes of inhabitation

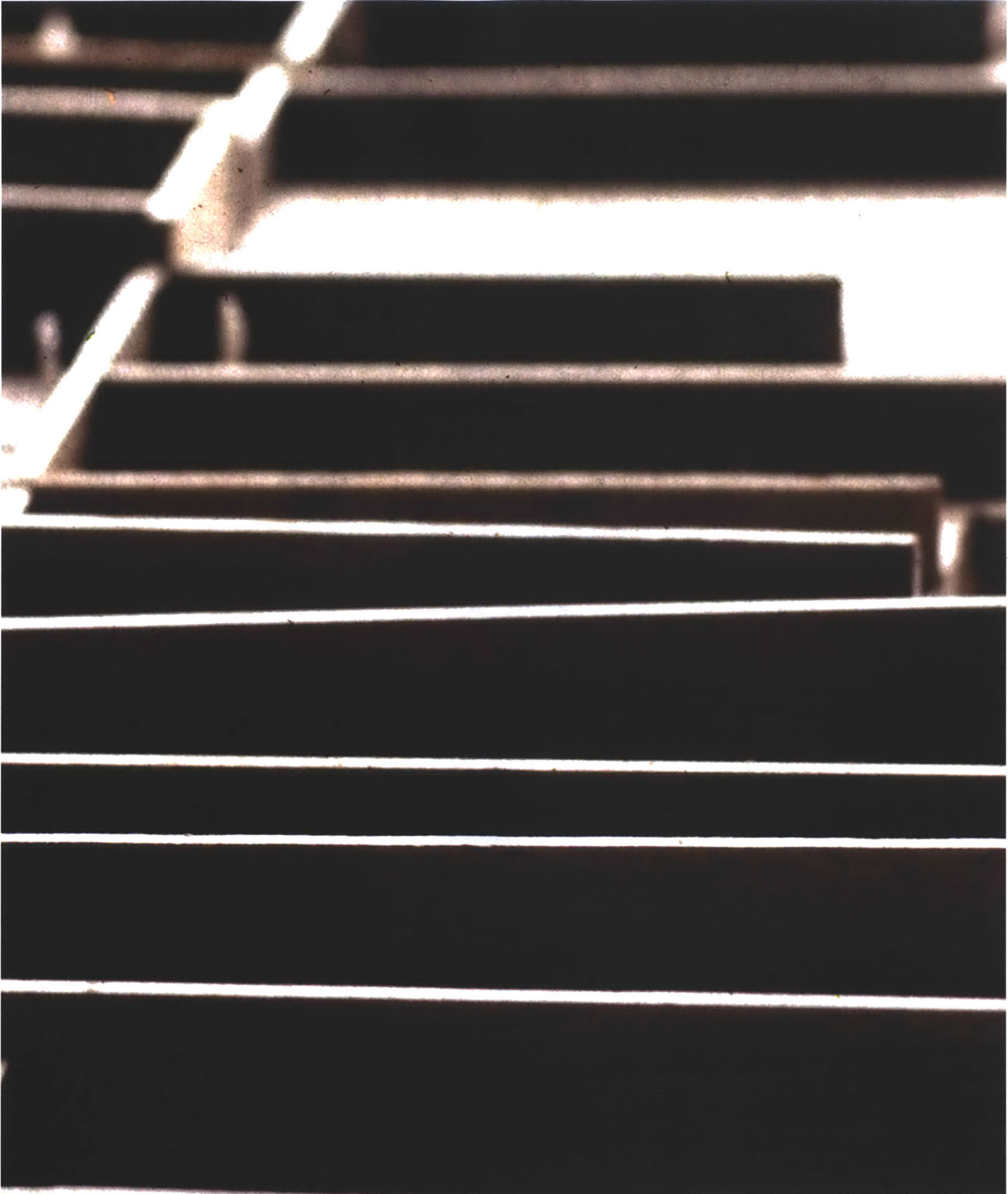
To the vast majority, including to residents, these slivers and cores remain a visual phenomenon. The near-universal practice of extruding backyard parcel lines has created an architecture of division, namely the fence, closing off the yard from the block and the block from the neighborhood.

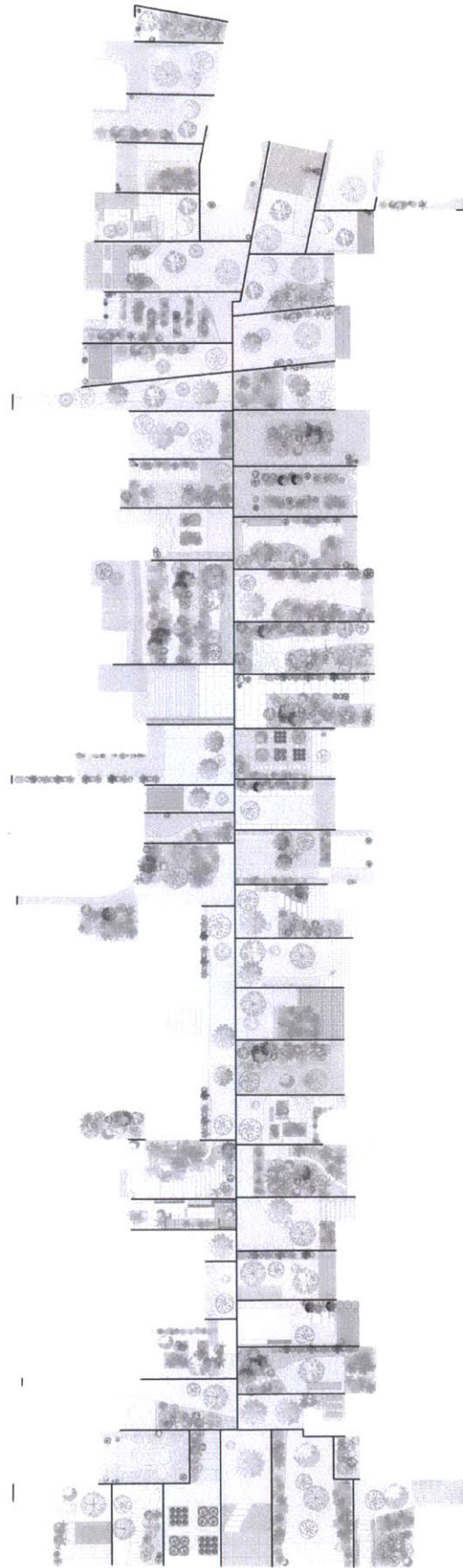
Our co-isolated inhabitation of this fabric is written into these divisions and produces enormous redundancies. Neighbors are stacked on top of one another but, regardless of these proximities, remain complete strangers. As mentioned before, Brooklyn is set within the second-most densely populated county in the United States, but increased density does not translate to increased connectivity. If anything, it fuels a divisive mindset that architecture needs to seal off the hermetic individual from the threatening urban metropolis.

This thesis roots itself firmly in the belief that there is a connection between urban form and communal engagement. We condition our environment, based on our fears, habits, and desires, but our environment also, in turn, conditions us. This thesis seeks to undo some of the rigid and wasteful divisions of space that are, by now, just a relic of the early parcel system. Architecture can help to facilitate the mindset that collectivity demands.









terra

Latin / earth, land



territorium

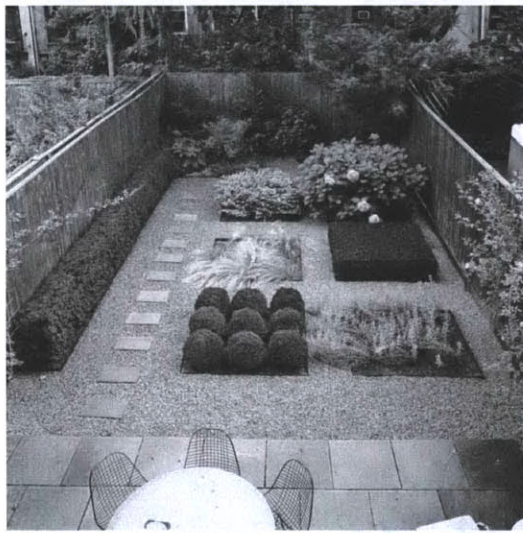
Latin / land within a boundary

terrain (piece of earth) + -orium (denotes place)

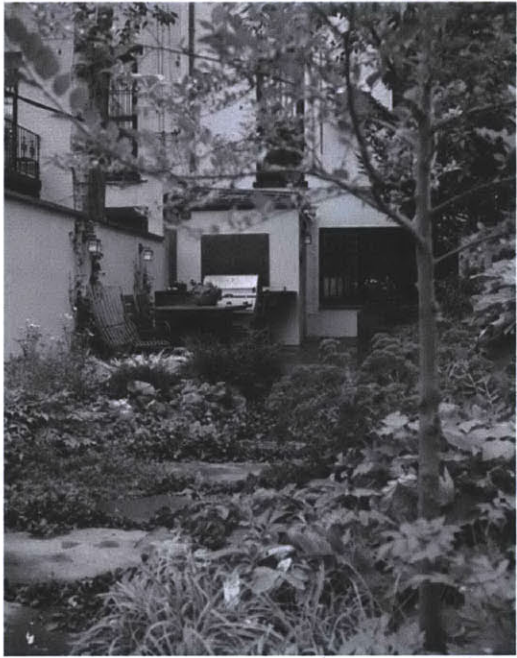


territory

*late Middle English / an area of land under the
jurisdiction of a ruler or state*



BROOKLYN BACKYARDS



Google Image Results for "Brooklyn Backyard"



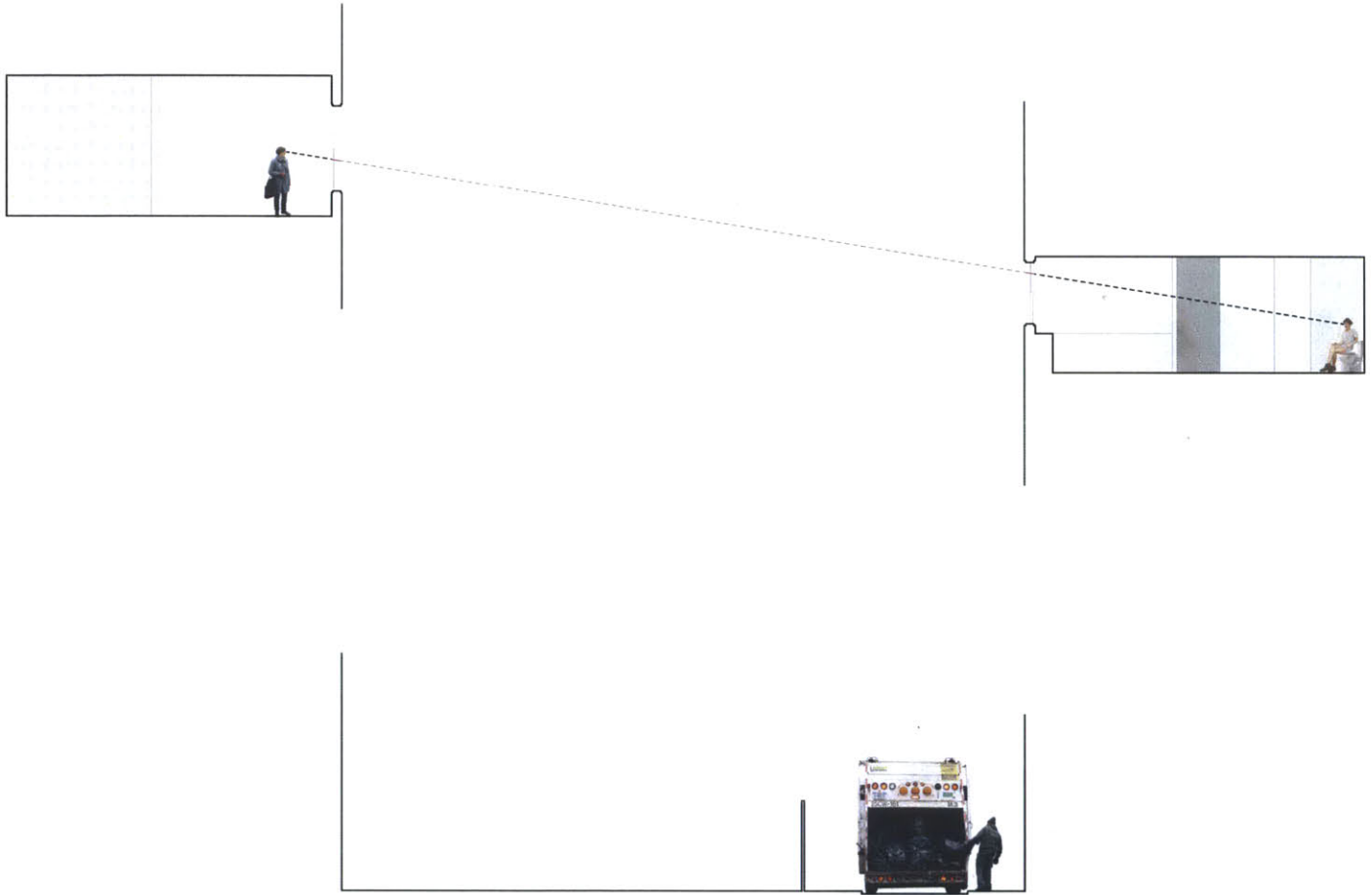
Backyard Scene, Home Improvement



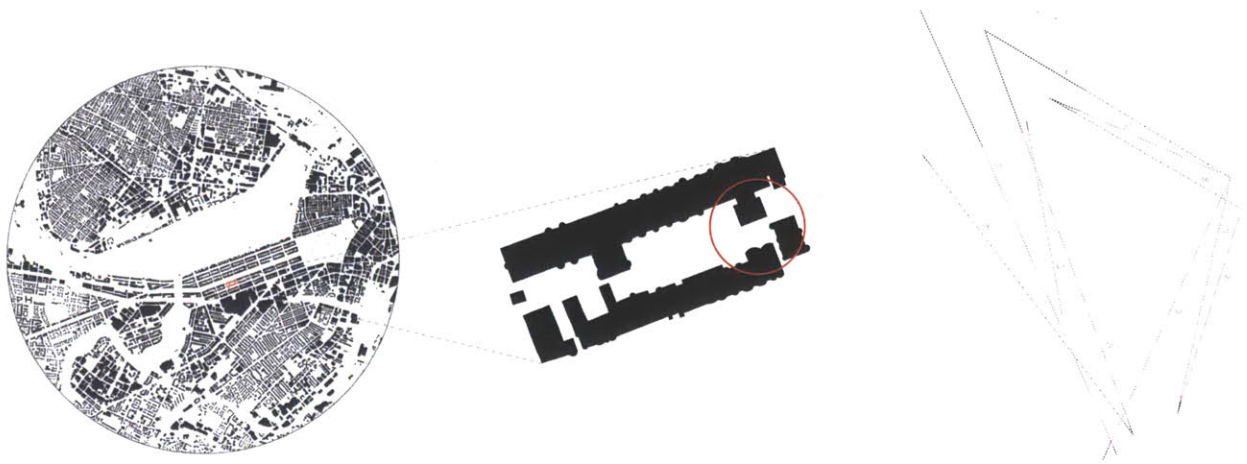
"Out My Window" Photographs. by Gail Halaban

Our only connection to these people,
though frequent, is visual.

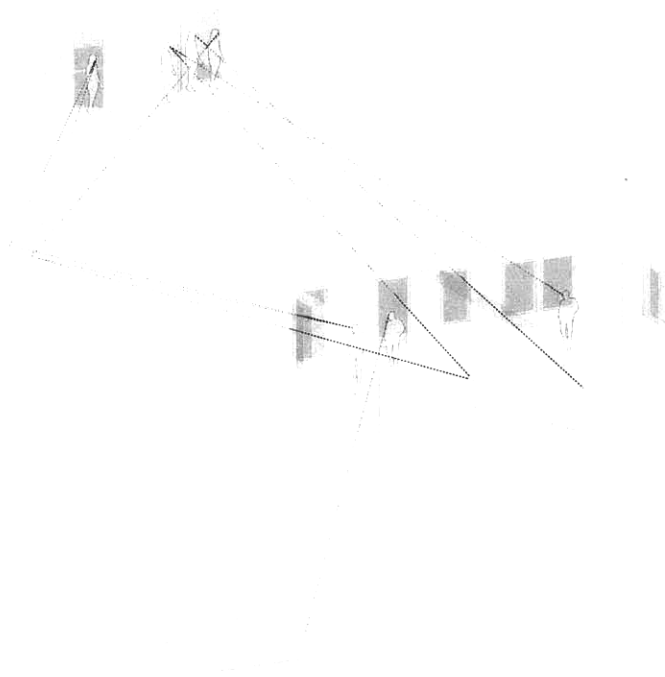
We are all strangers,
tucked behind panes of glass.

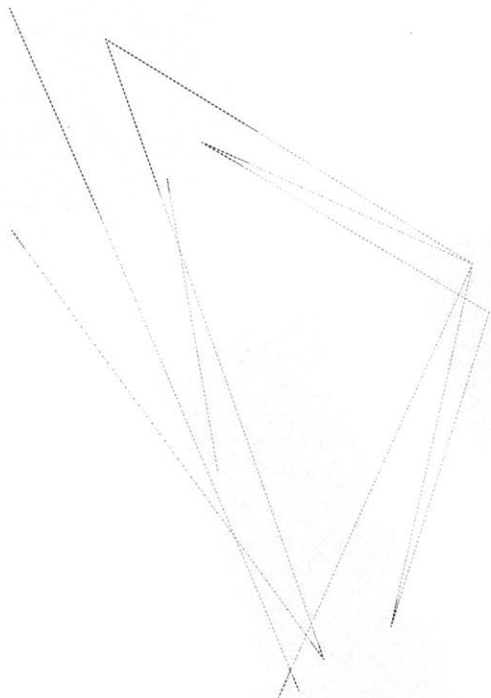


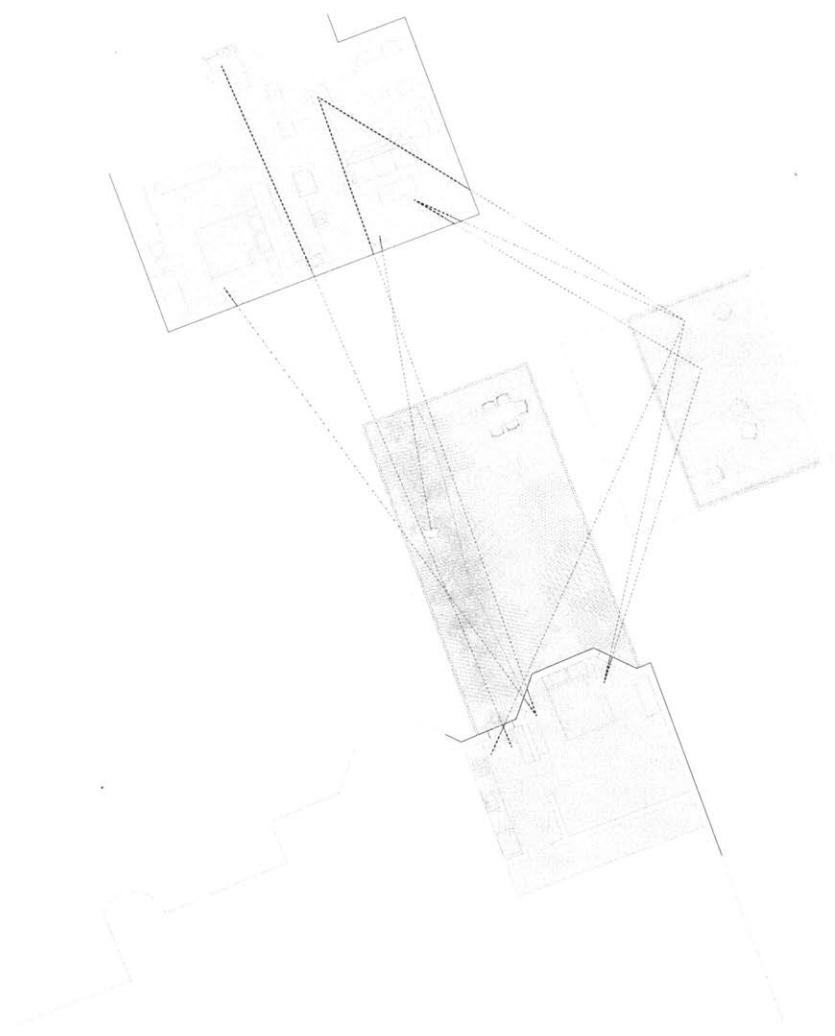
02/2



URBAN PROXIMITY/ISOLATION ANALYSIS,
CASE-STUDY: PERIMETER BLOCK WITHIN BOSTON'S BACK BAY







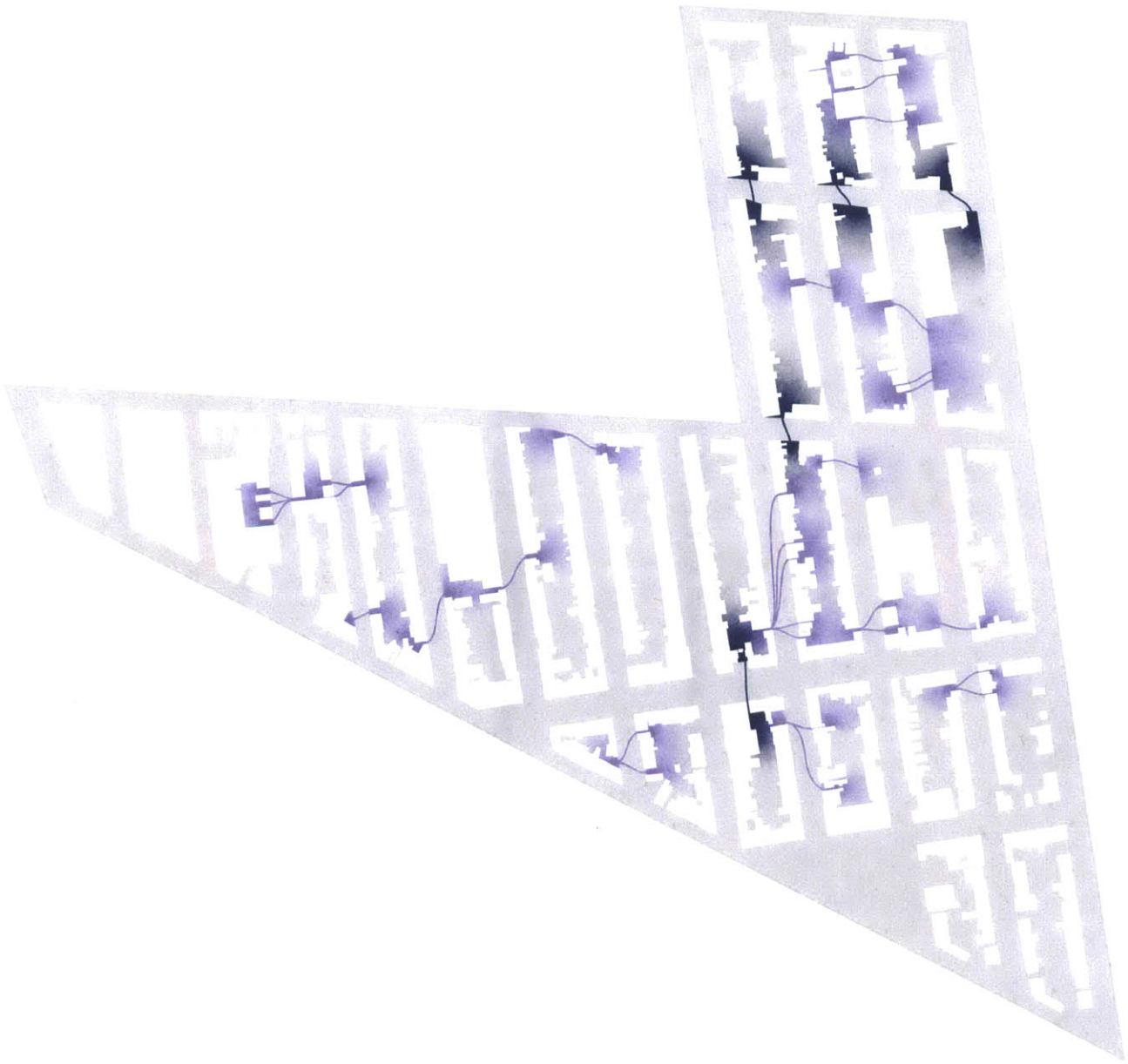
“cultural recycling”: a process that involves continuously reworking and editing, rather than obliterating, what is there.”⁷ Eve Blau

TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIALS

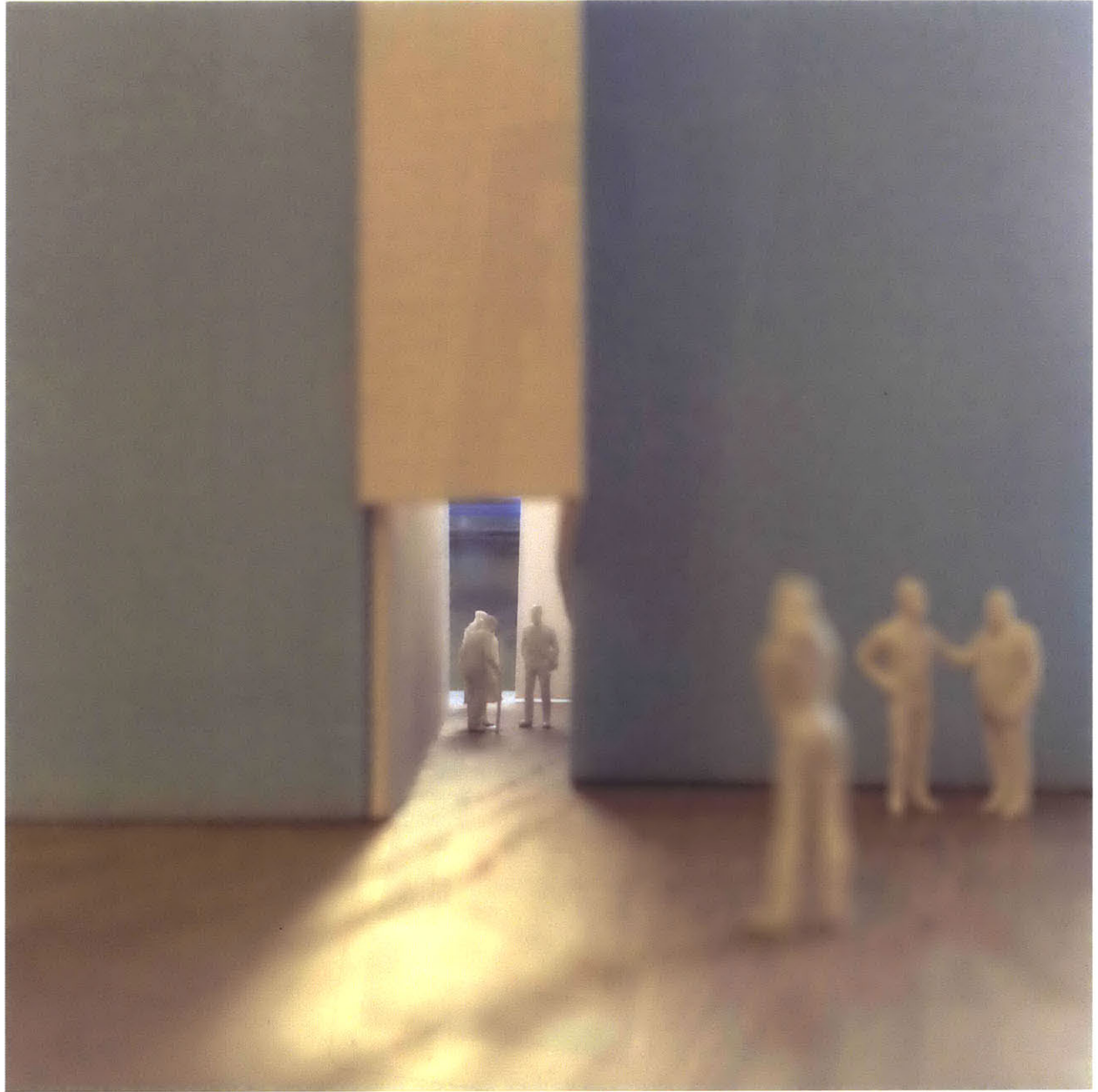
a provocation

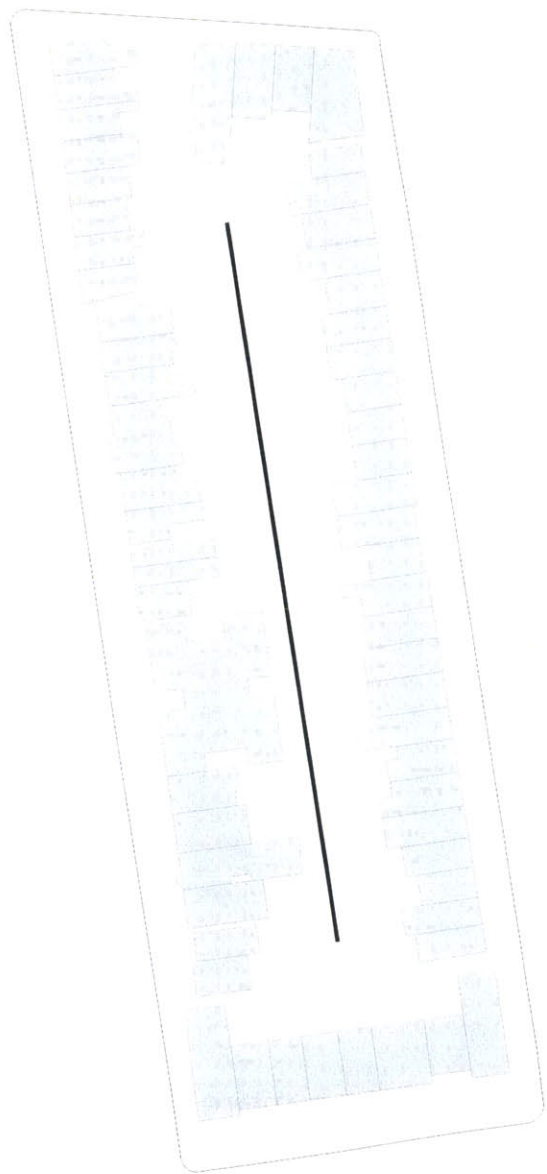
This thesis rejects our co-isolated inhabitation of the urban grid and explores the potential of weaving in new layers that can transform the existing. How do we re-program space and, more importantly, recondition what has become a stale mindset for city living? Rather than fighting the atomization of the home, however, this thesis seeks to rethink the notion of collectivity outside of it.

The fundamental provocation is to suggest that Brooklyn’s blocks become centered around shared open space. We don’t need to start from scratch to change our living habits. Rather, we can carve into existing built fabric, 200 years later, by knocking down fences, and creating a landscape for a thriving new type of communal living. (This urban form has already gone through several changes, after all!) Rear fences are removed and a thin line of public space is inserted into the mosaic of existing yards. Through this transformation, the slivers become occupiable in exciting new ways and the shielded ground plane becomes a datum for new forms of social connectivity and engagement. The closed geometry of the neighborhood gets eroded just enough for the urban dweller to grow accepting of the block as a nourishing extension of their home. No longer confined to the thin shell of their apartment walls, Brooklyn, too, becomes their home.





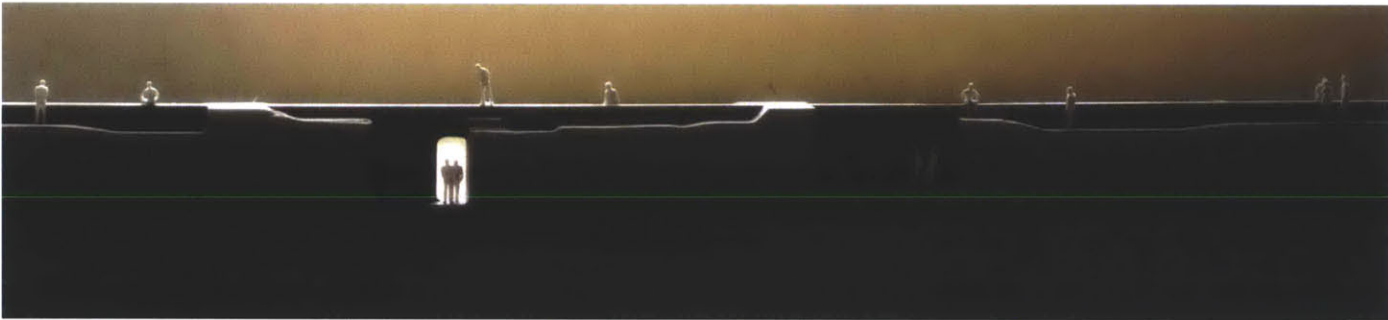




This thesis offers a glimpse into a more collective architectural fabric – diversifying the distinctions between interior/exterior, public/private – in hopes of expanding the notion of personal territory in our dense cities through new formal arrangements and minimal means.







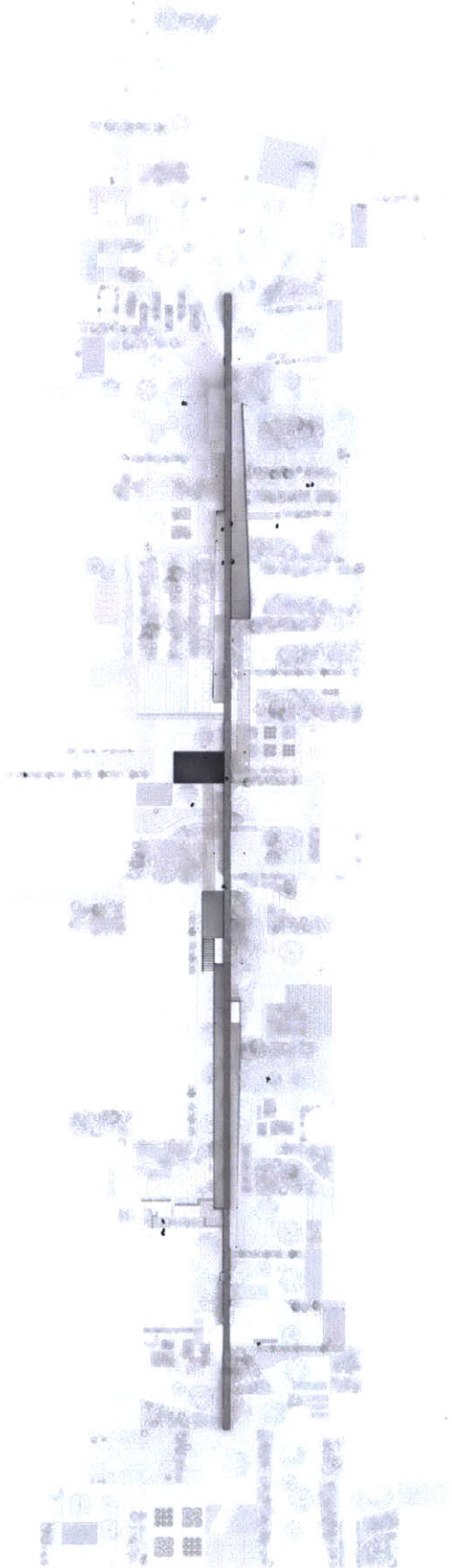
These environments, conceived of as self-contained universes, become combined as an open mosaic, a patchwork of difference.

THE LINE

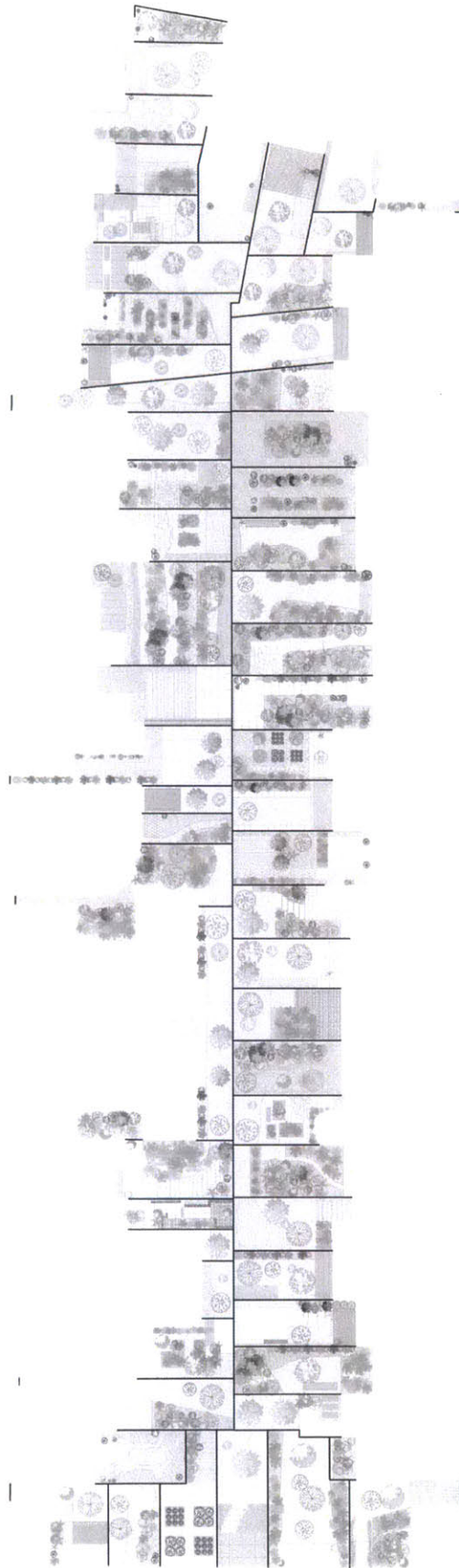
historic fabric, novel stitchings

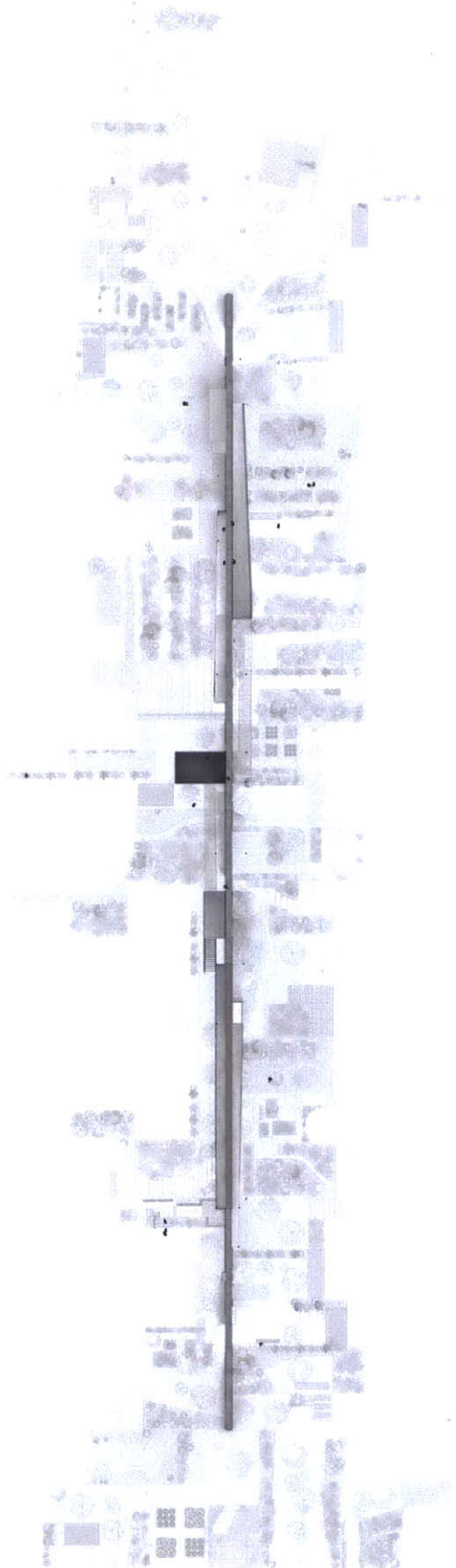
The line, activated through a set of calibrated relationships with the ground and floating infrastructure, stitches together people within the open core and works against the detritus of old divisions. Undulations in the ground plane position the body at different heights relative to the slab, which in turn, frame its potential set of uses – bench, table, counter, rock-climbing wall, and so on. Through this programmatic distillation, and its potential to produce variability, the line becomes many things to many people, but, to each, it is meant to serve as an extension of their home within the city. The line operates at two scales, the urban, because of its length (475'), and the domestic, because of its width (2.5'). It has a small theater, a library, a great communal table, rich scraggly gardens, and places for meditation.

Through this intervention, a new grain emerges which connects Brooklyn's blocks and transforms the residual slivers into a network of spaces that open to an engaging, and unexpected, rendering of the pre-existing. The line, in addition to offering various programmatic amenities, is a pathway that promotes these cross-block connections. It generates new urban spaces, experiences, and movements, all of which are aimed at promoting a more cohesive community and enriching the lives of everyone living within the city.

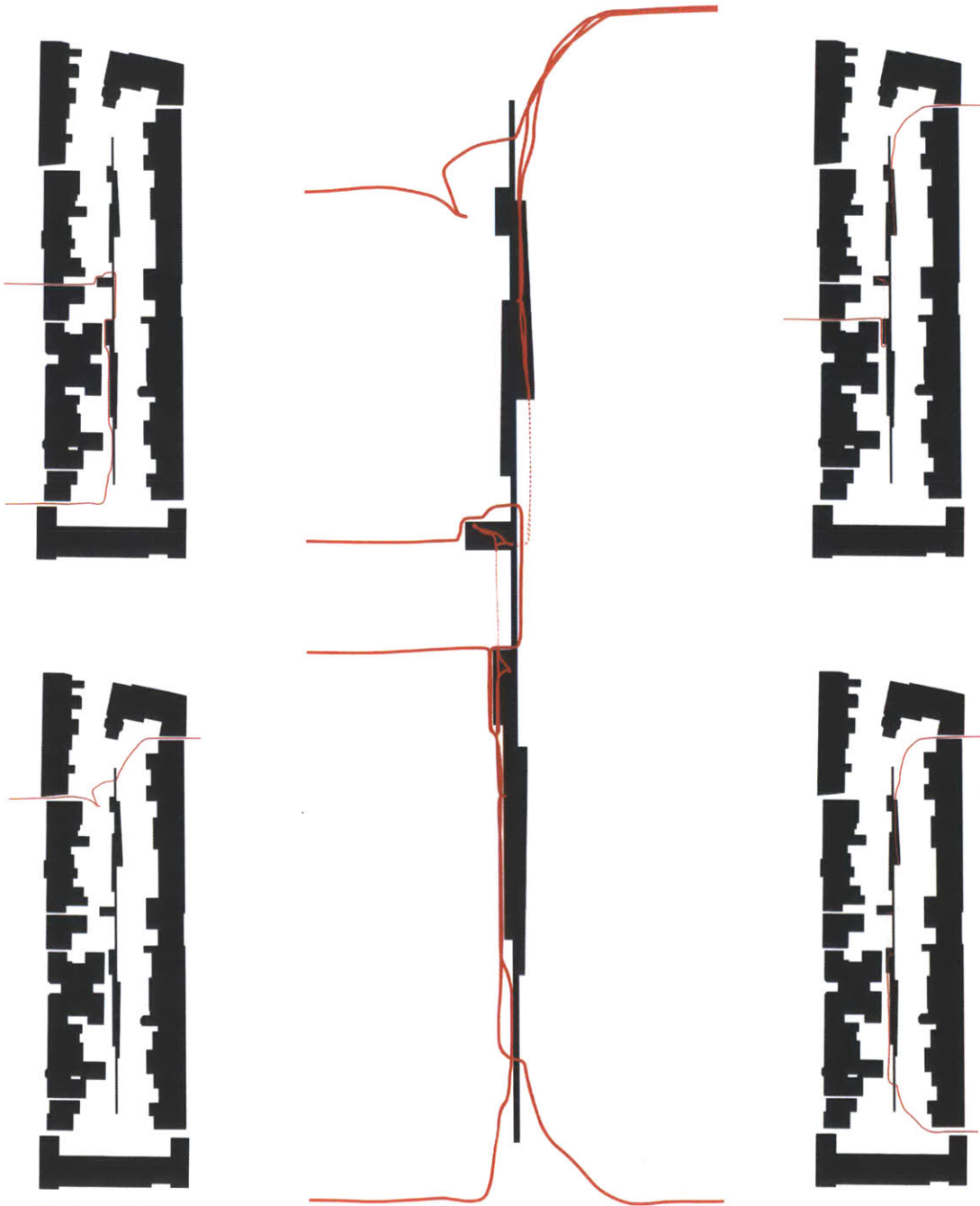


Replacing a set of lines that divide...

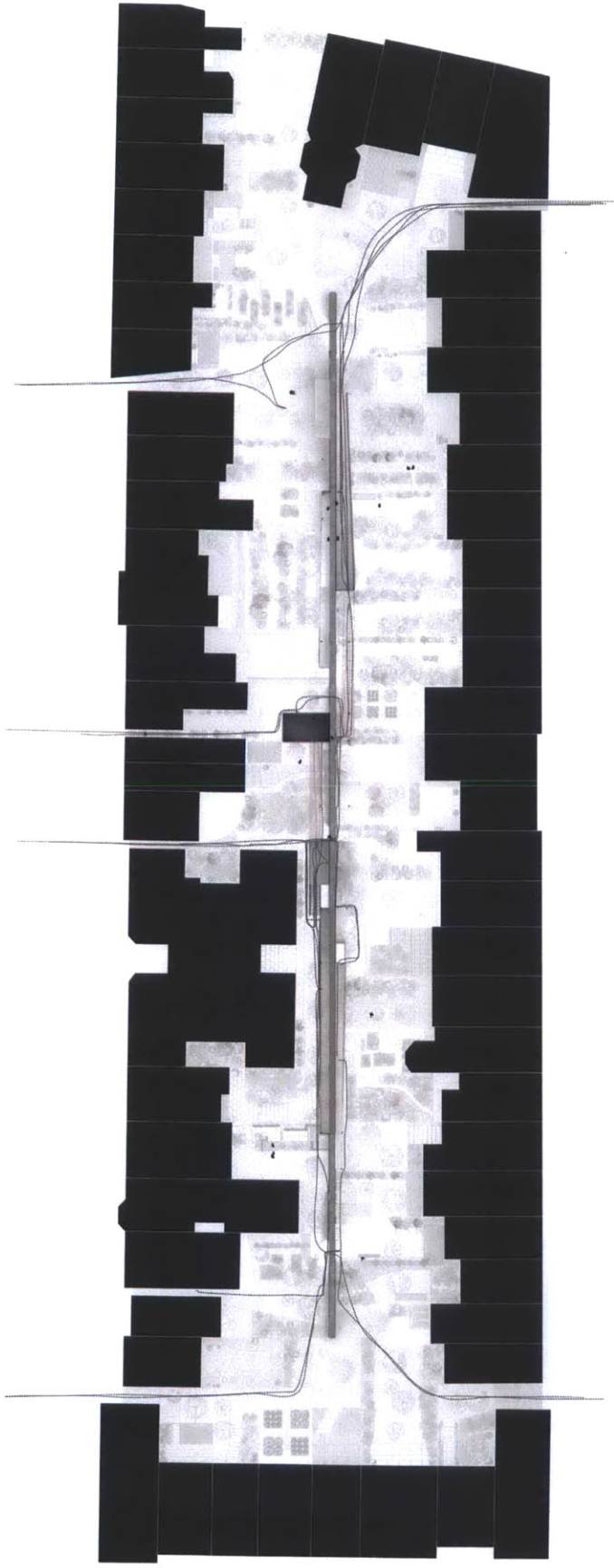




...with one that activates
and unites.



The Line as Path





A New Urban Grain. Cross-Block Connections



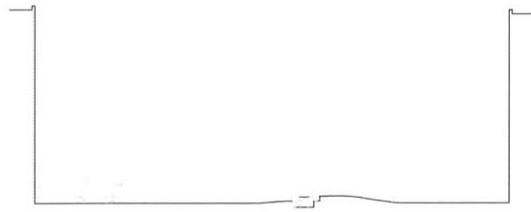


Figure 1

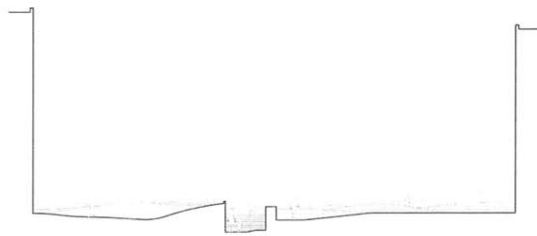


Figure 2



Figure 3

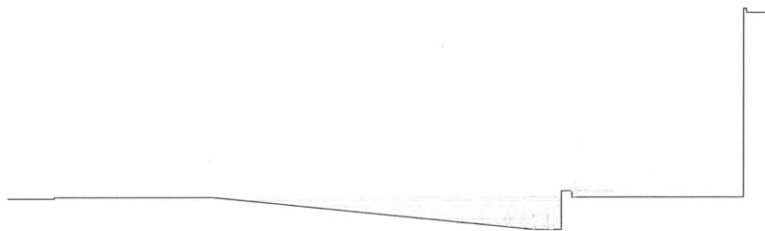
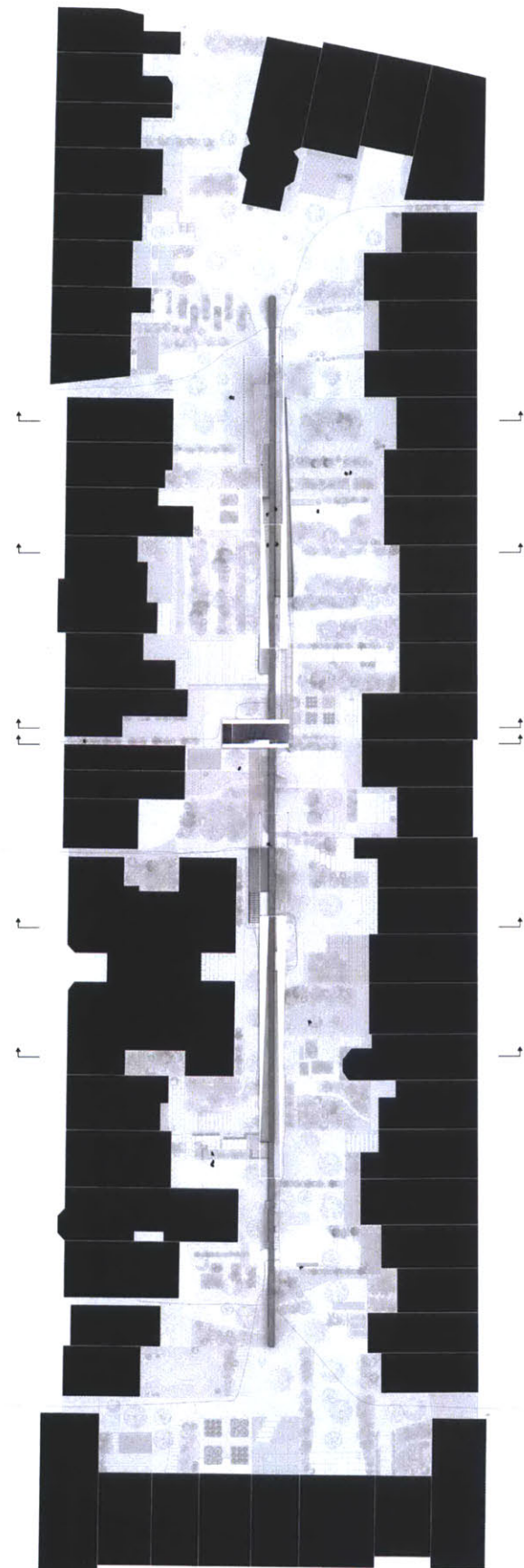
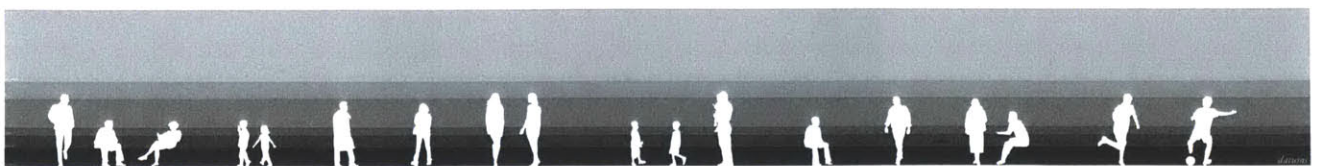
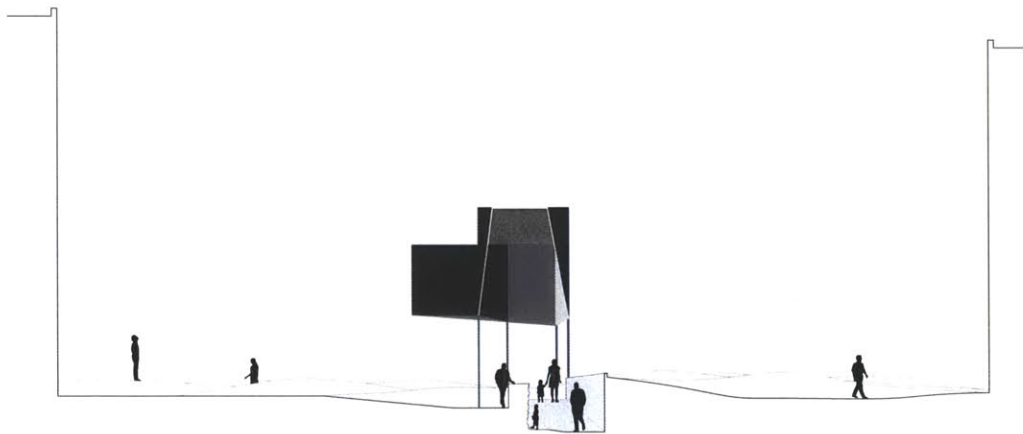
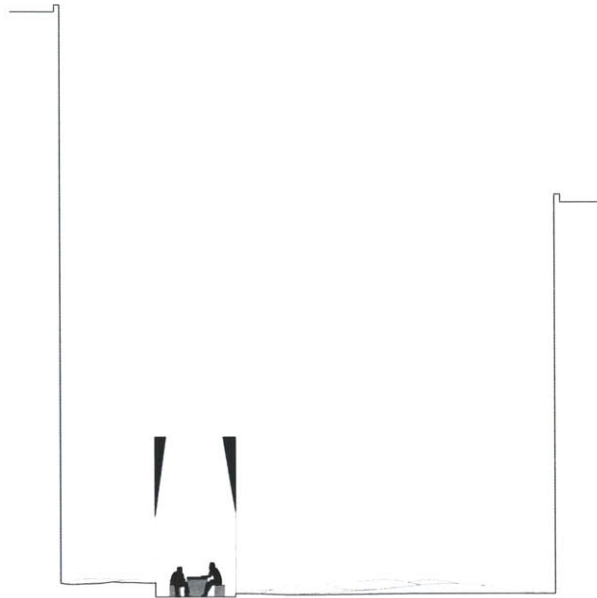


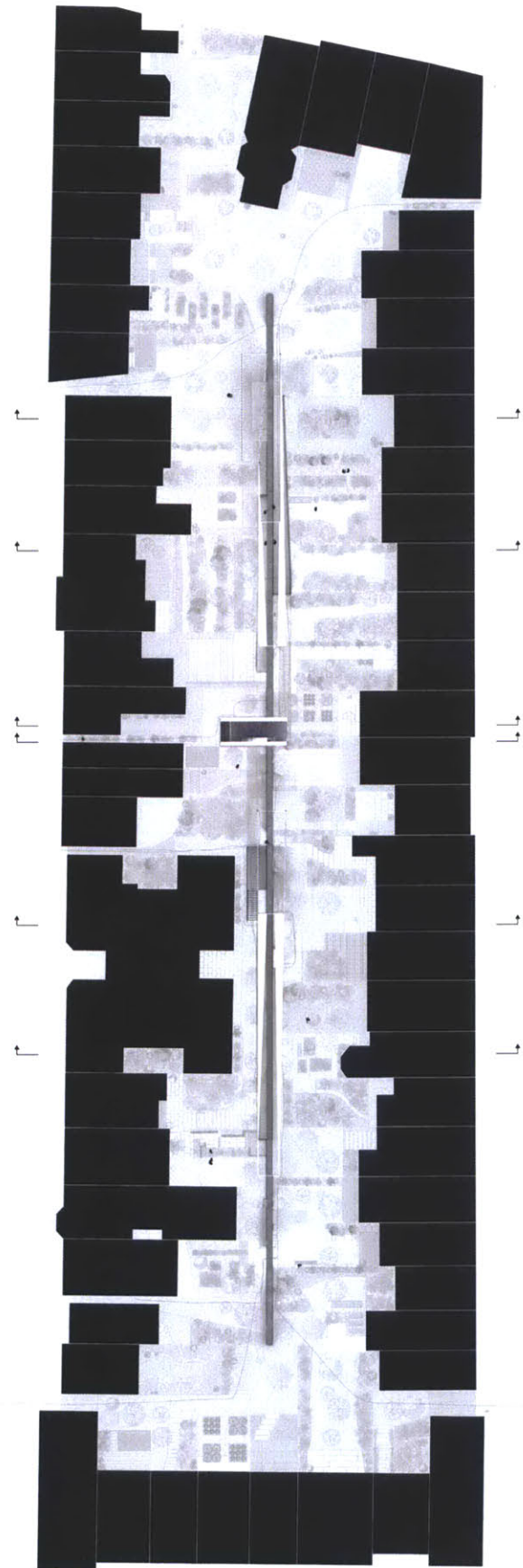
Figure 4

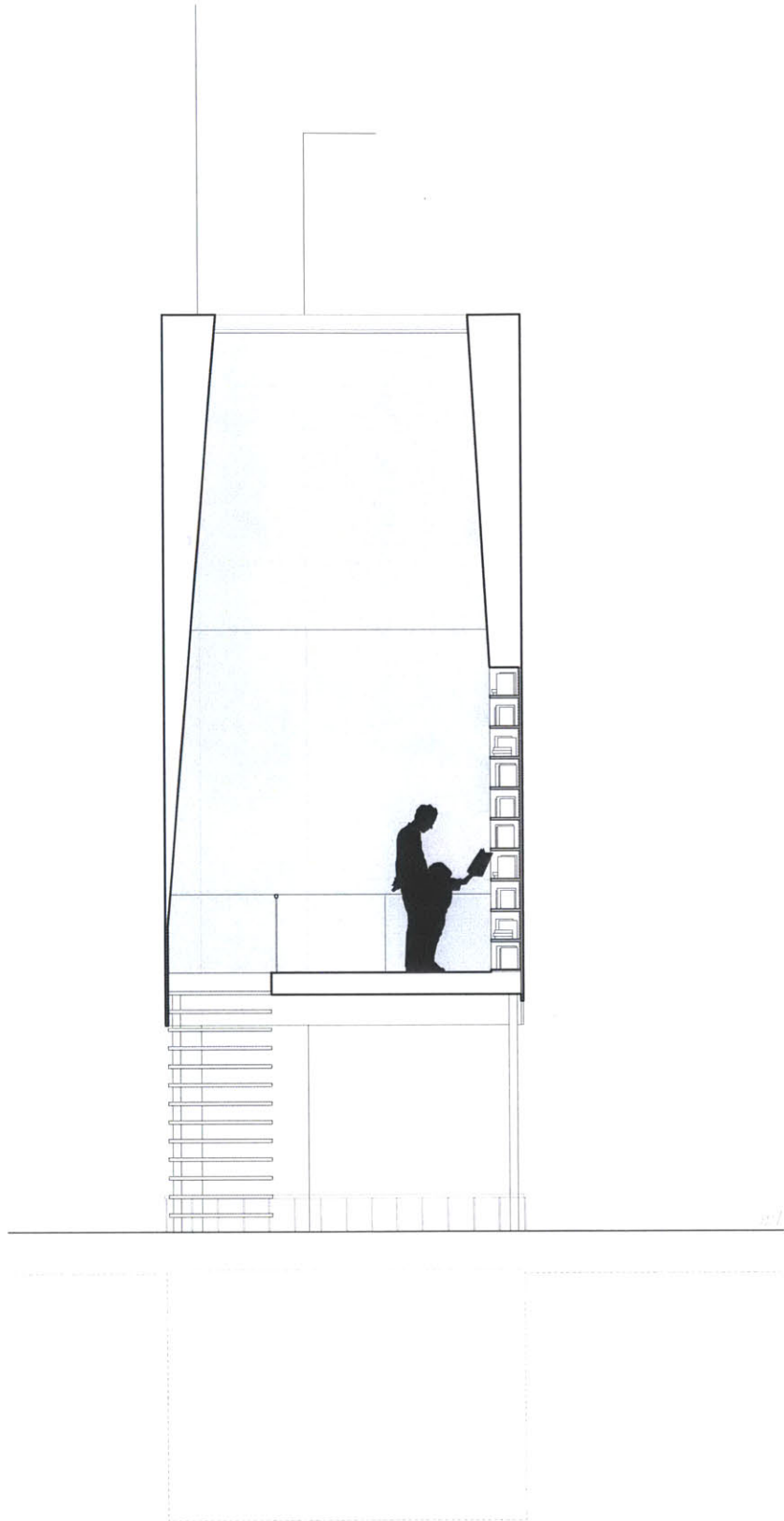
Diagrammatic Cross-Sections



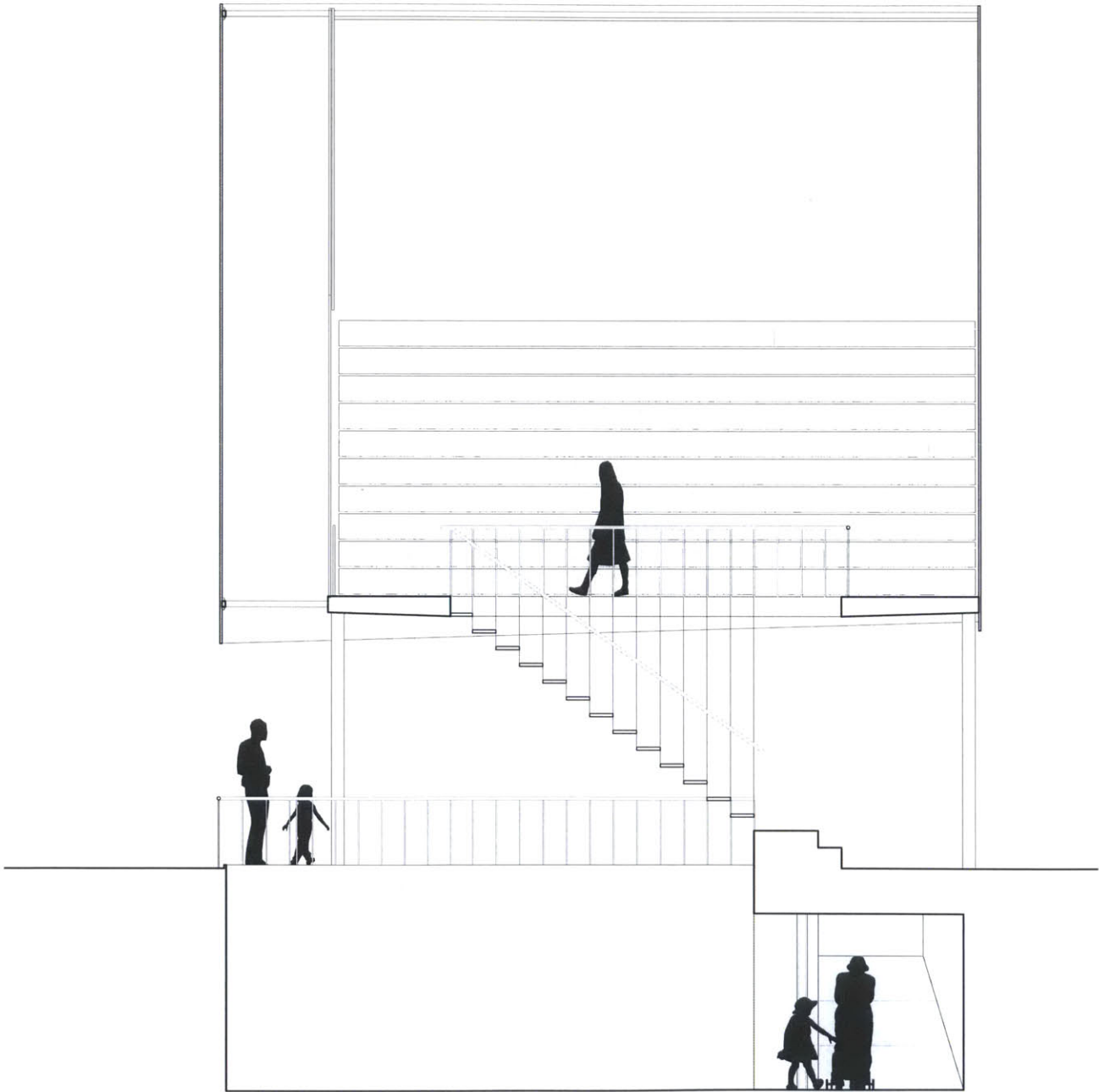


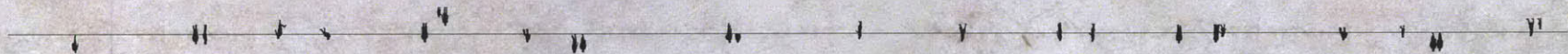
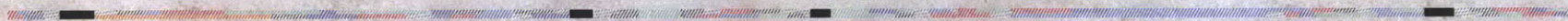
Cross-Sections, Datum Diagram





Communal Book Cube, Sections





 *crossing*

 *play*

 *bench*

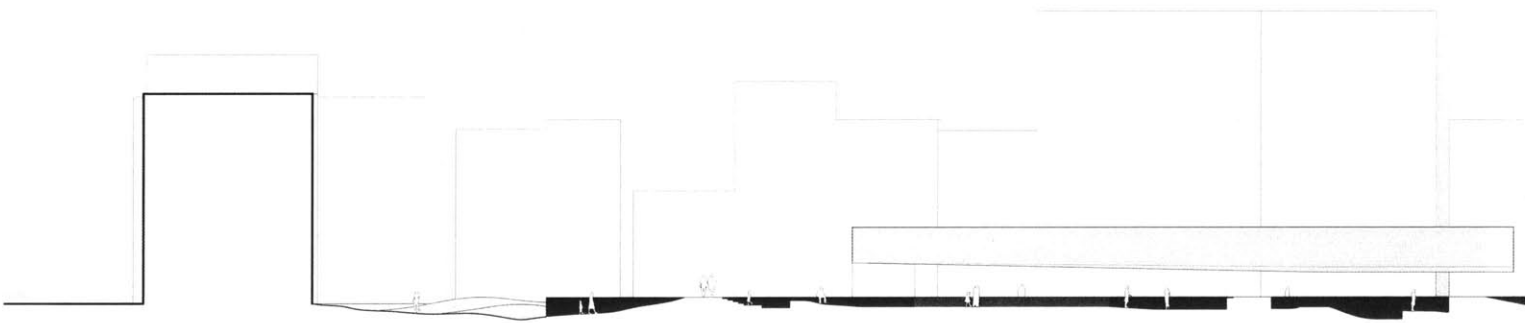
 *table/bench*

 *counter*

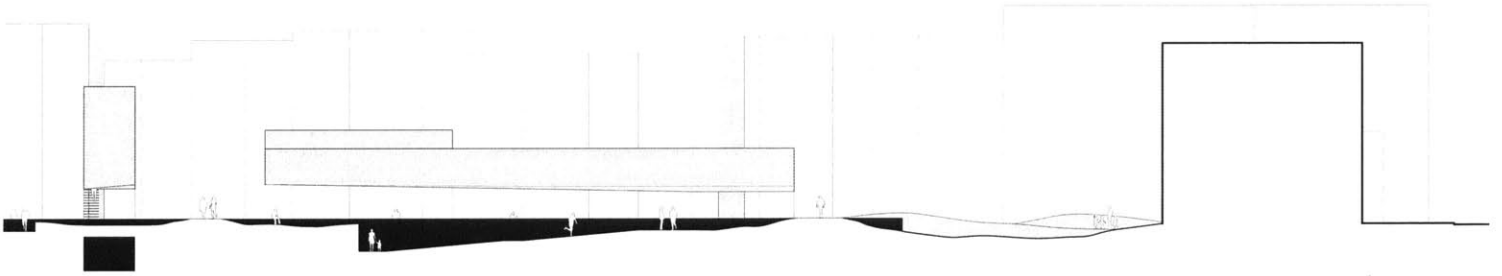
 *shelves*

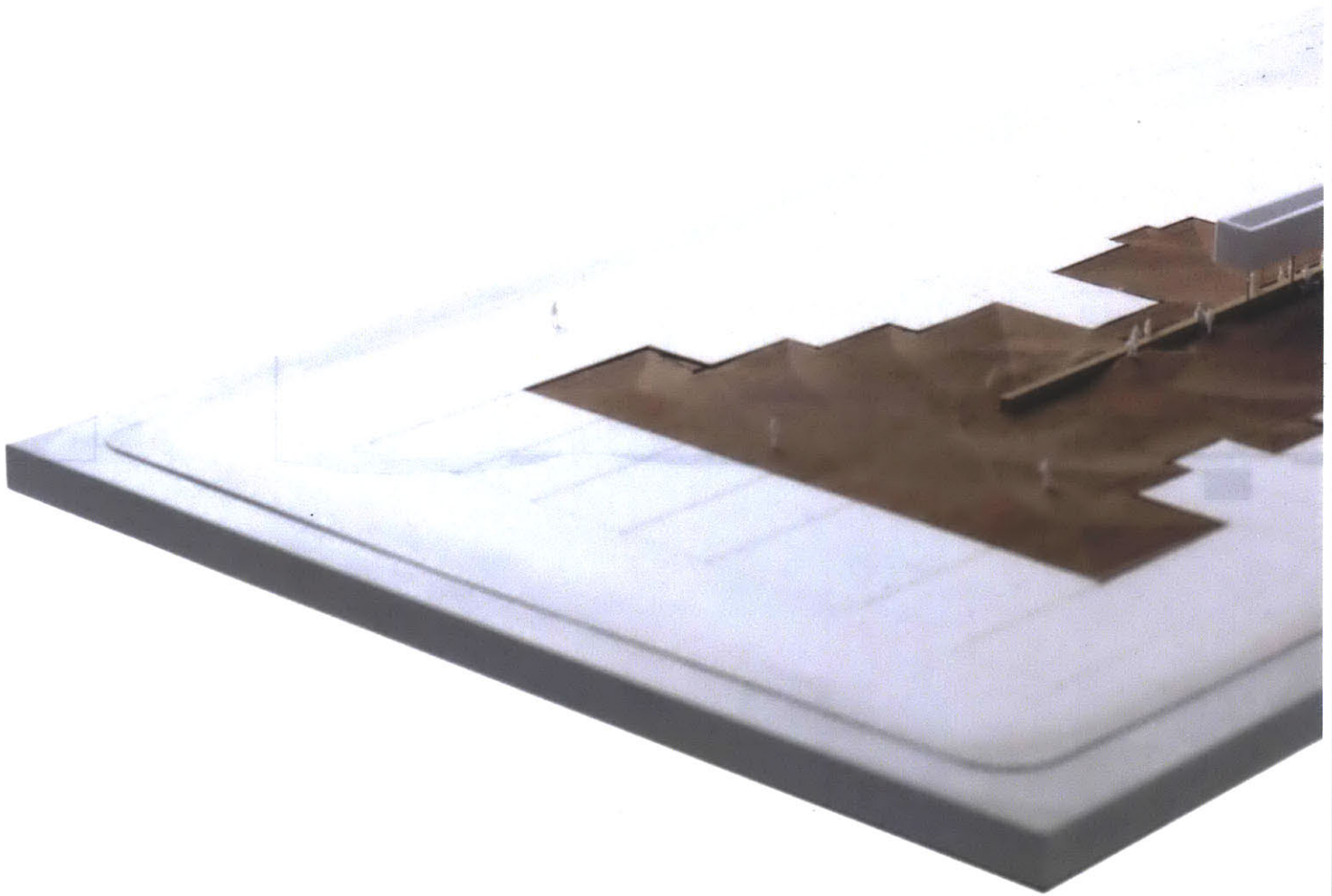
 *theater*

 *sloped, transition*

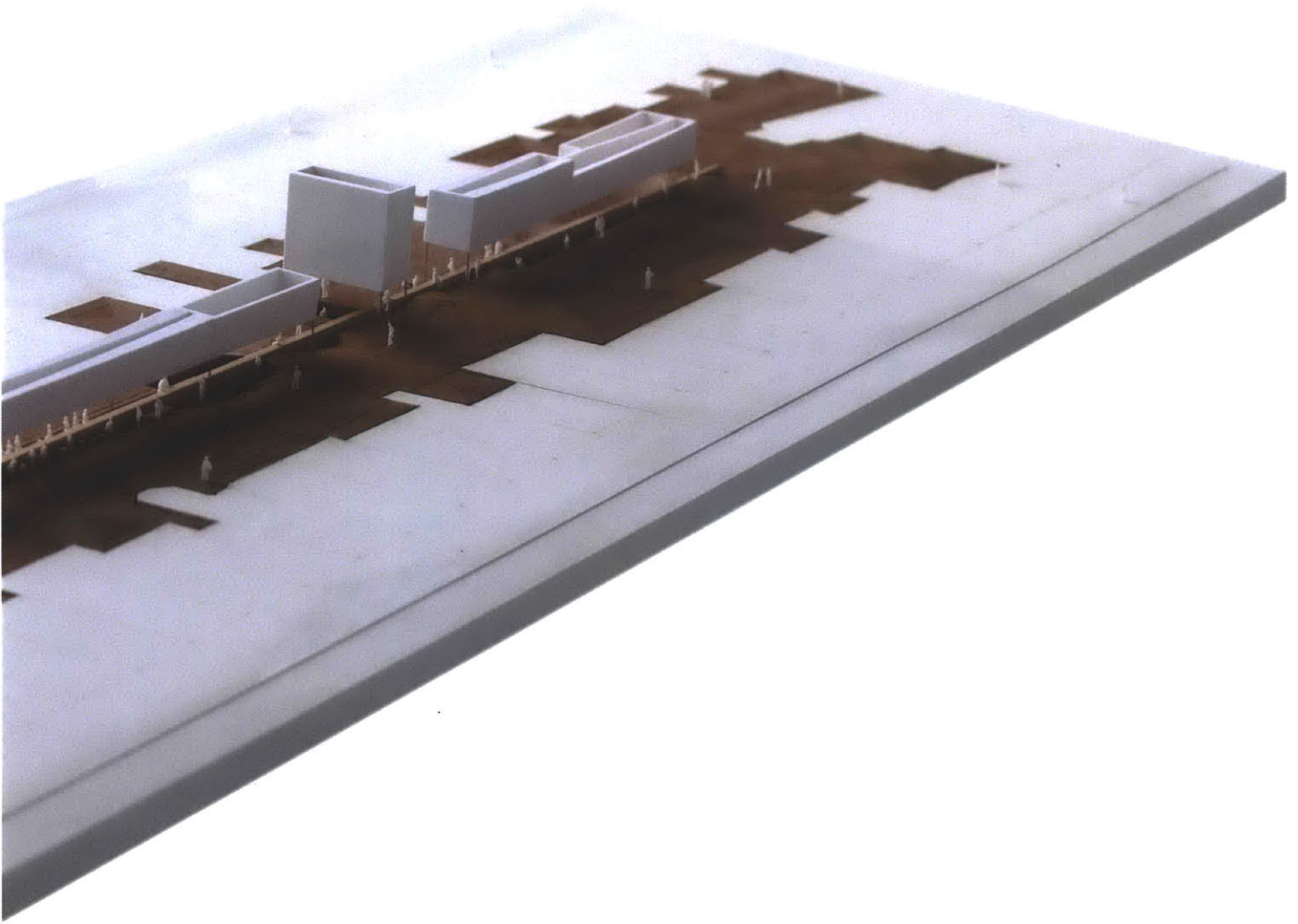


Long Section (adjacent to slab)



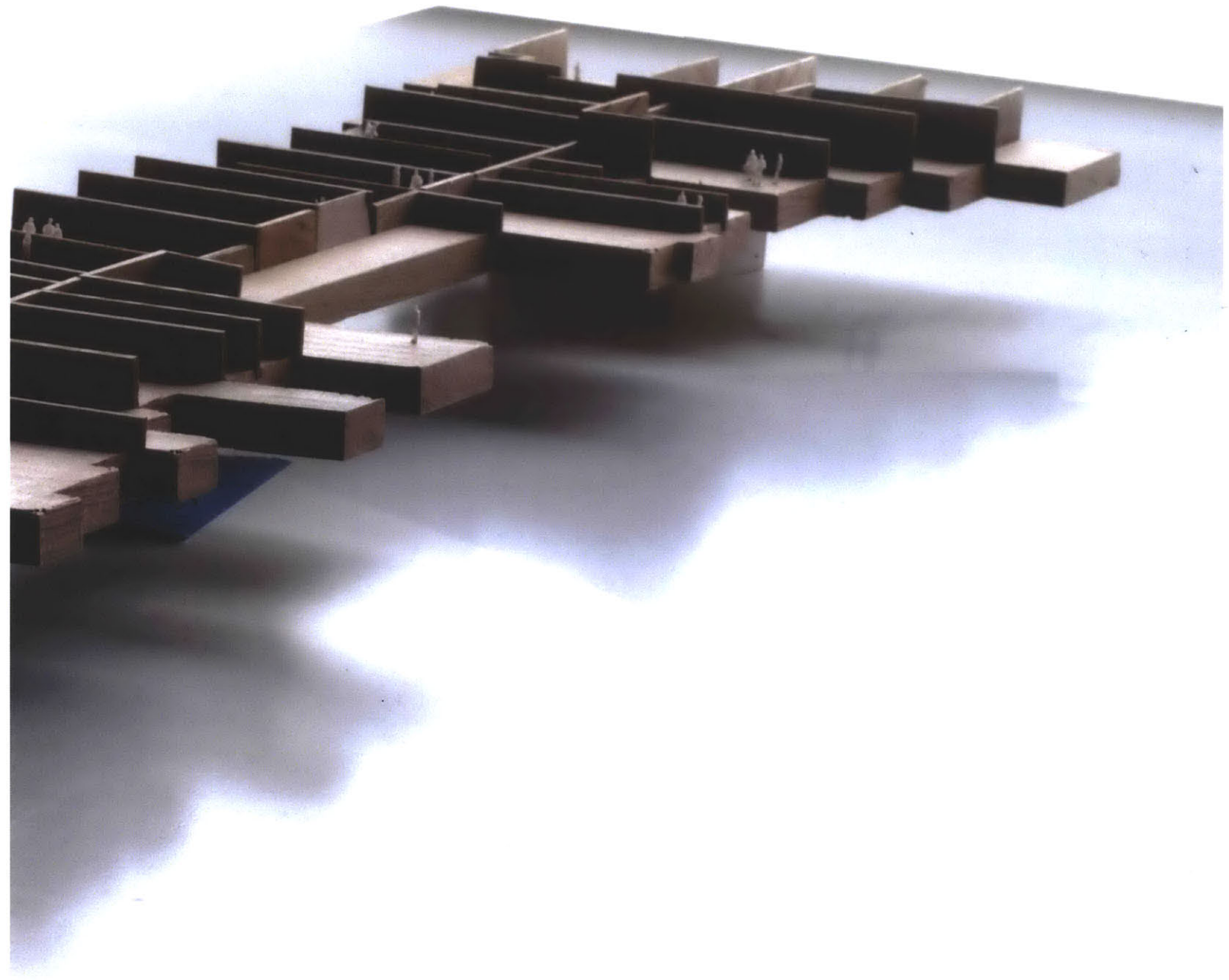


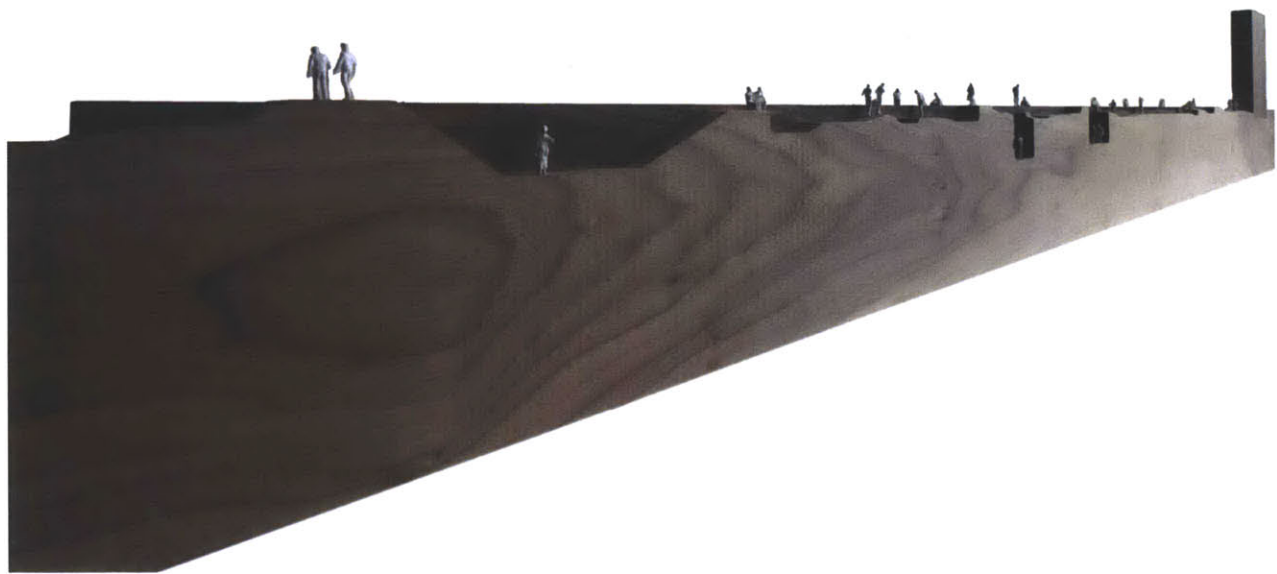
1:160 Model, In-Situ, Without Perimeter Buildings



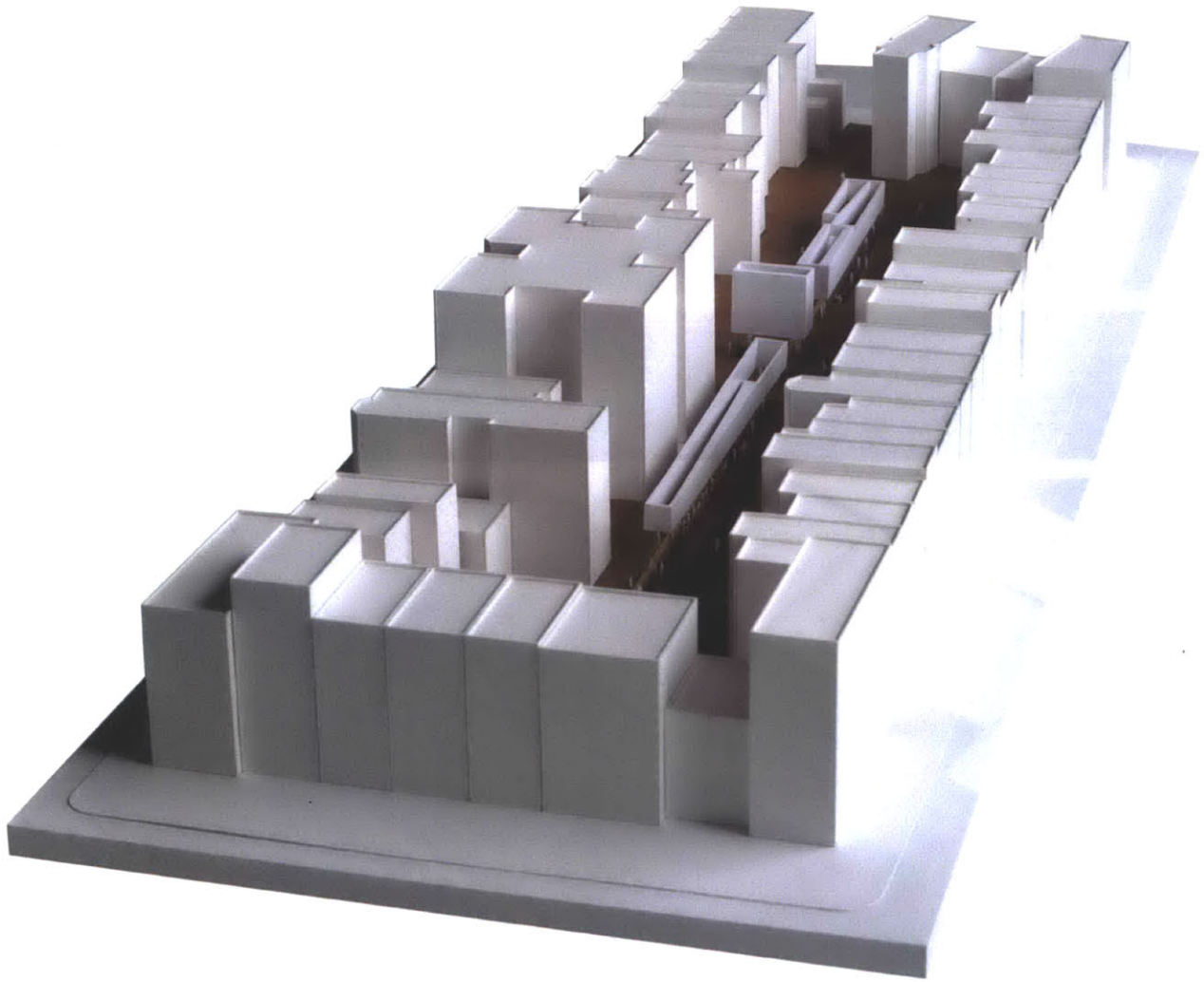


Fence Model

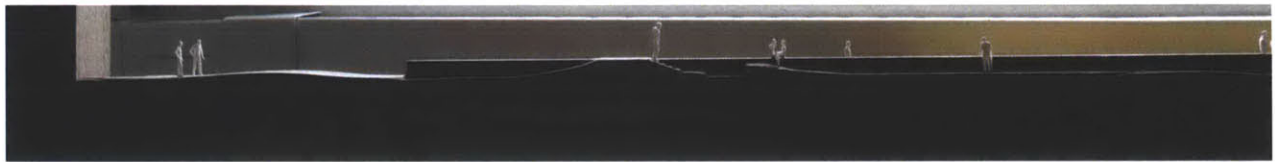
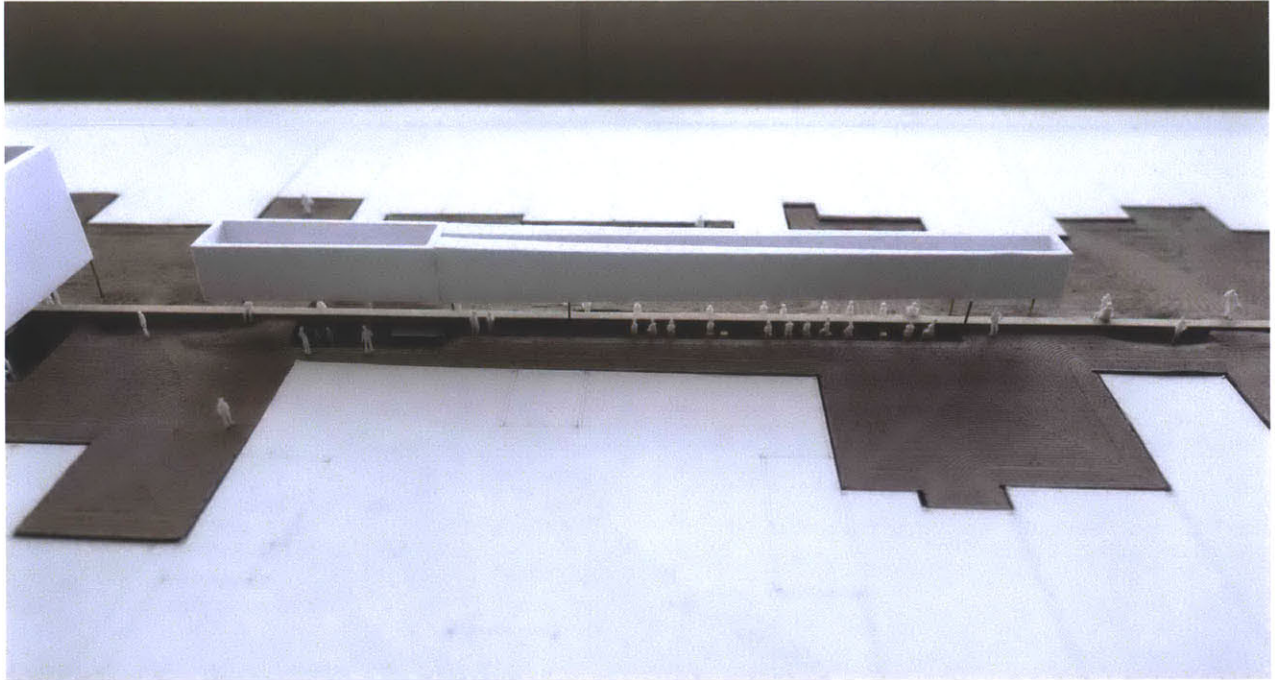




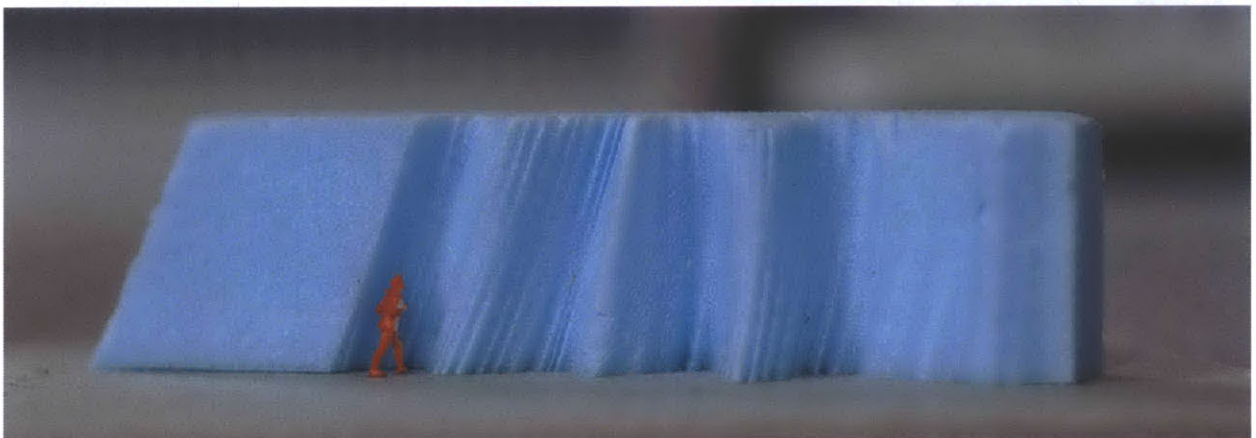
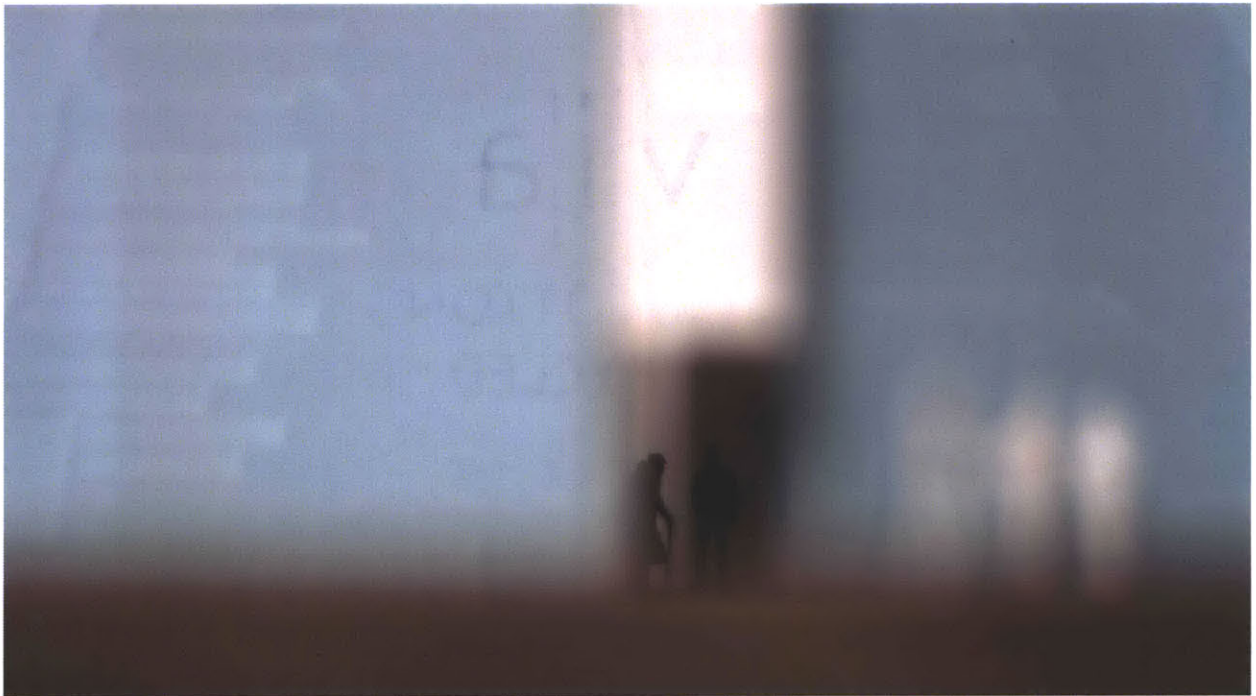
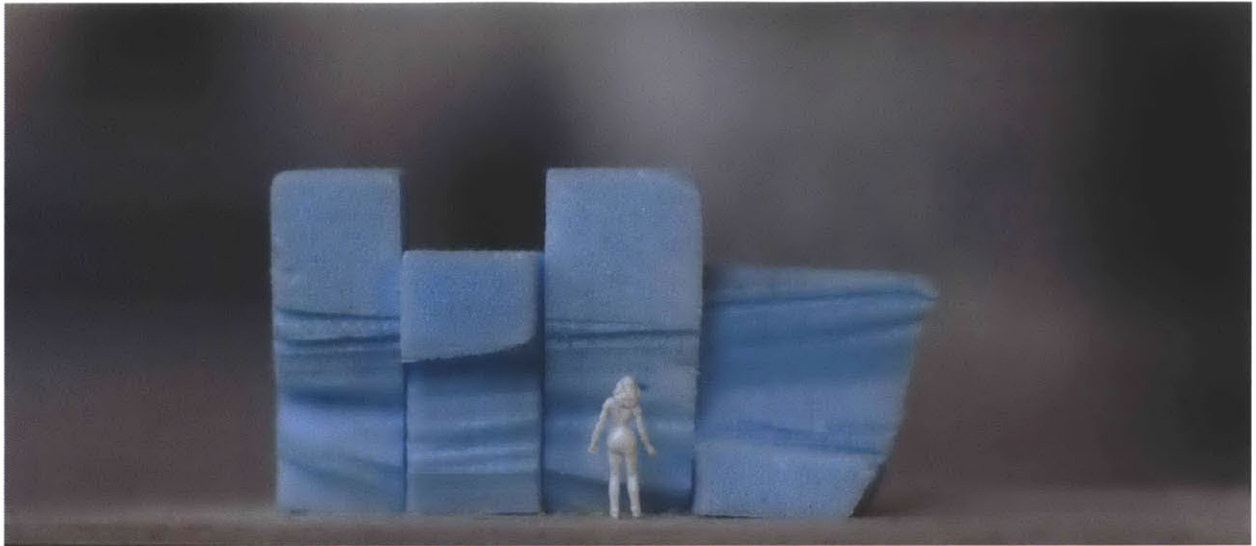
Long Section Model, 1:100



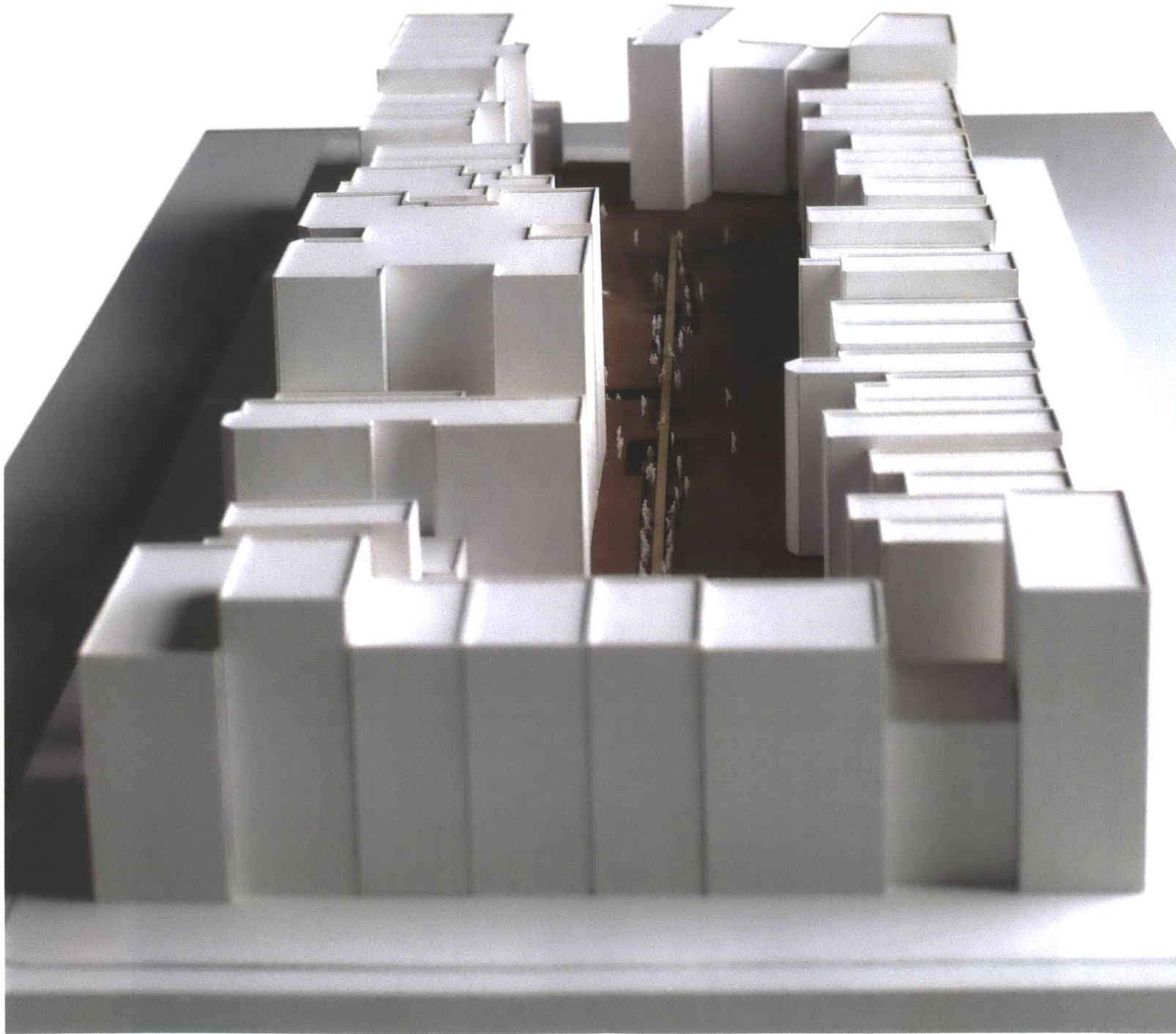
1:160 Model, In-Situ



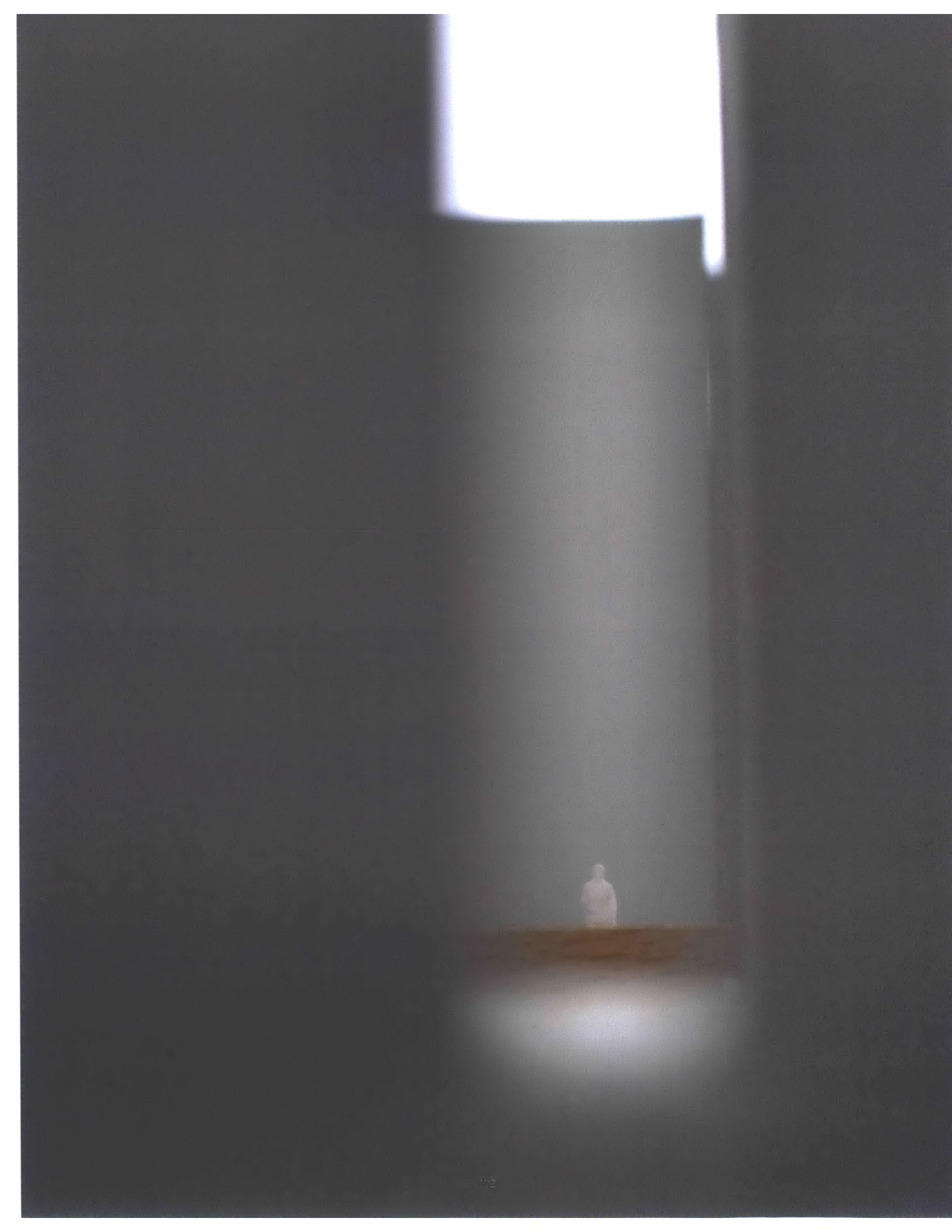
Ground/Slab Relationship



Wall Studies, Sliver Model







PROJECT
drawing
models
texture

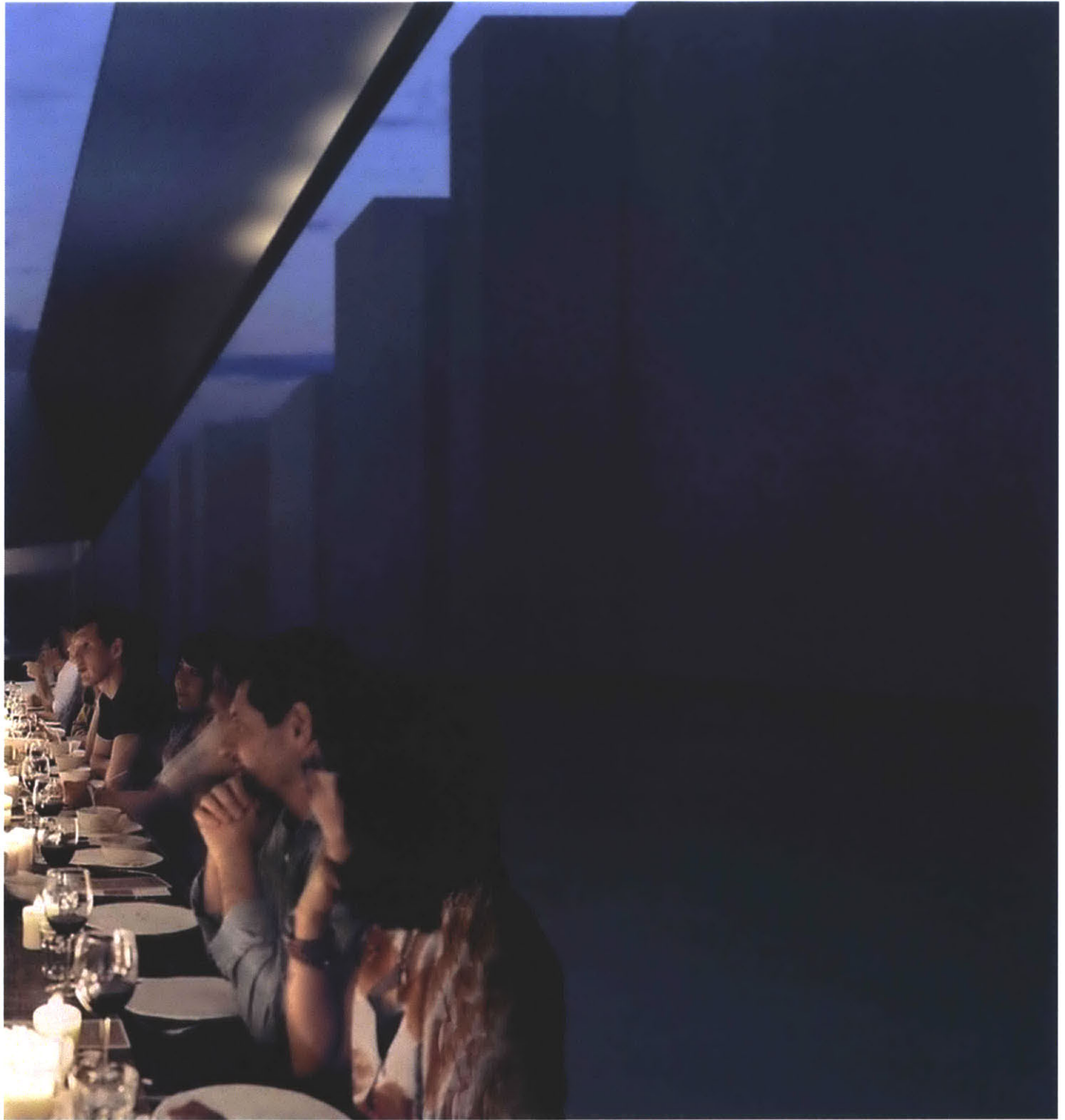


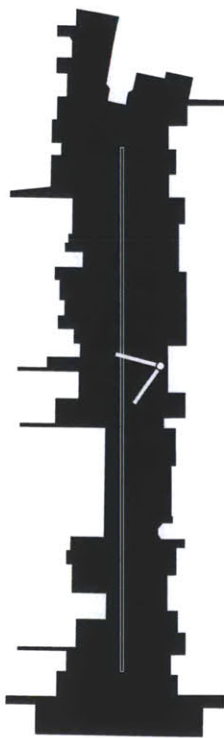






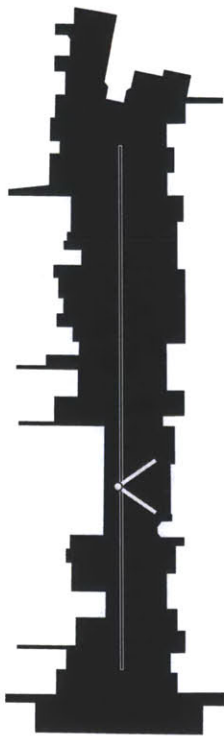
Communal Table





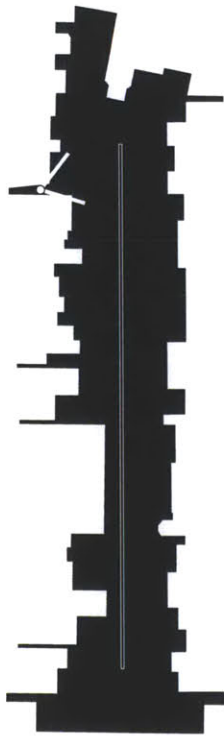
Book, Cubic





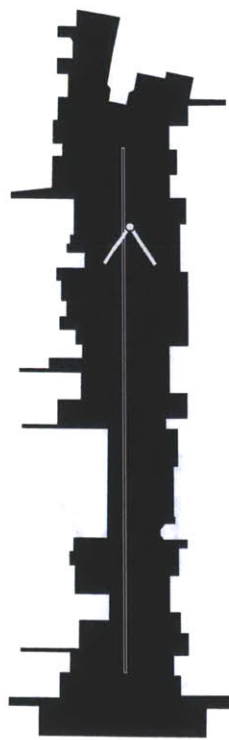
Work Space



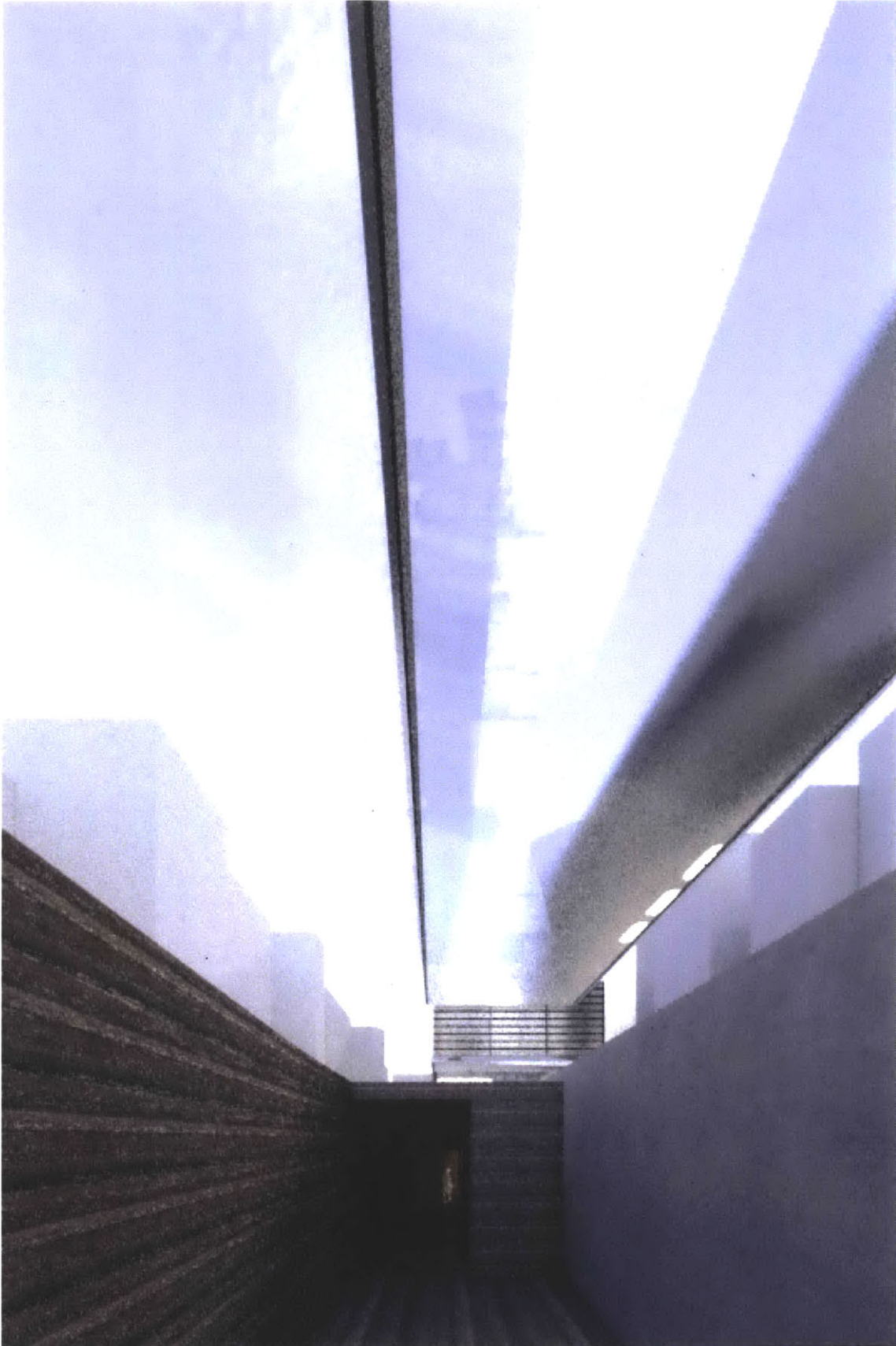


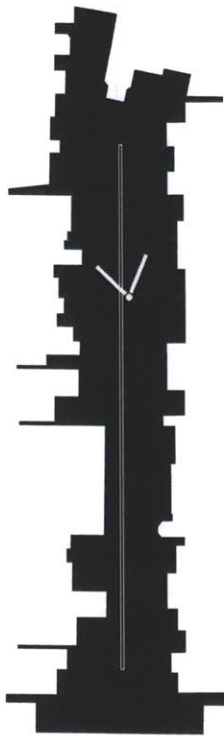
Theater



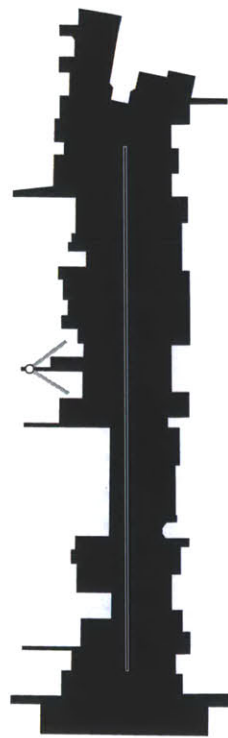


Passage 1



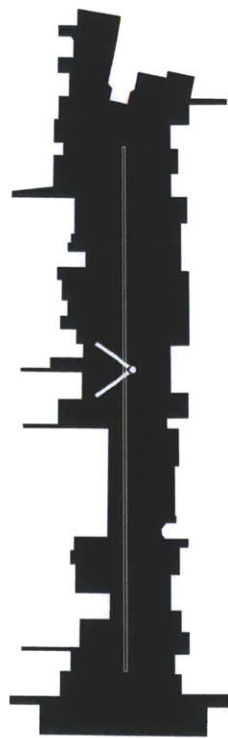






Sliver Entry



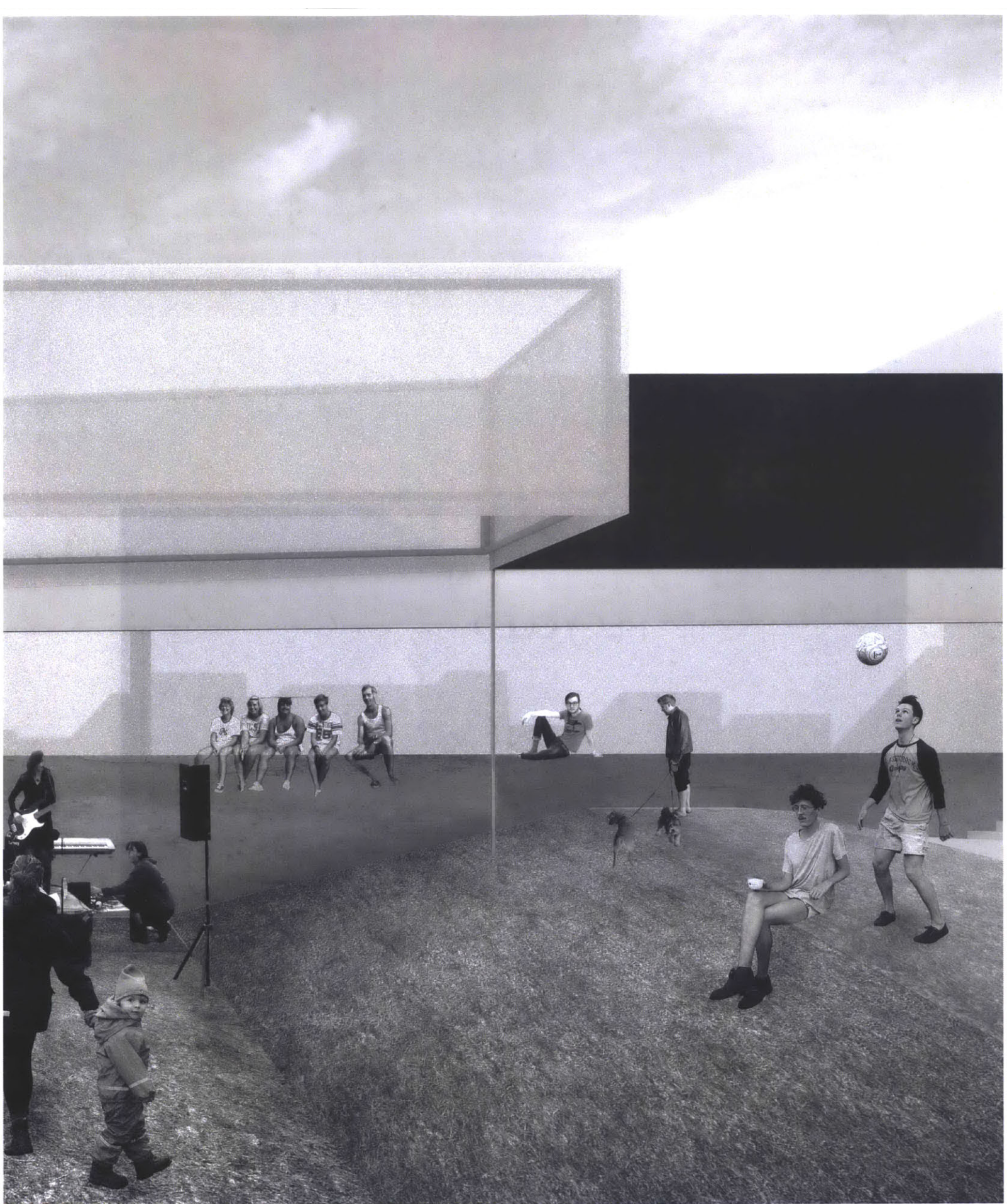


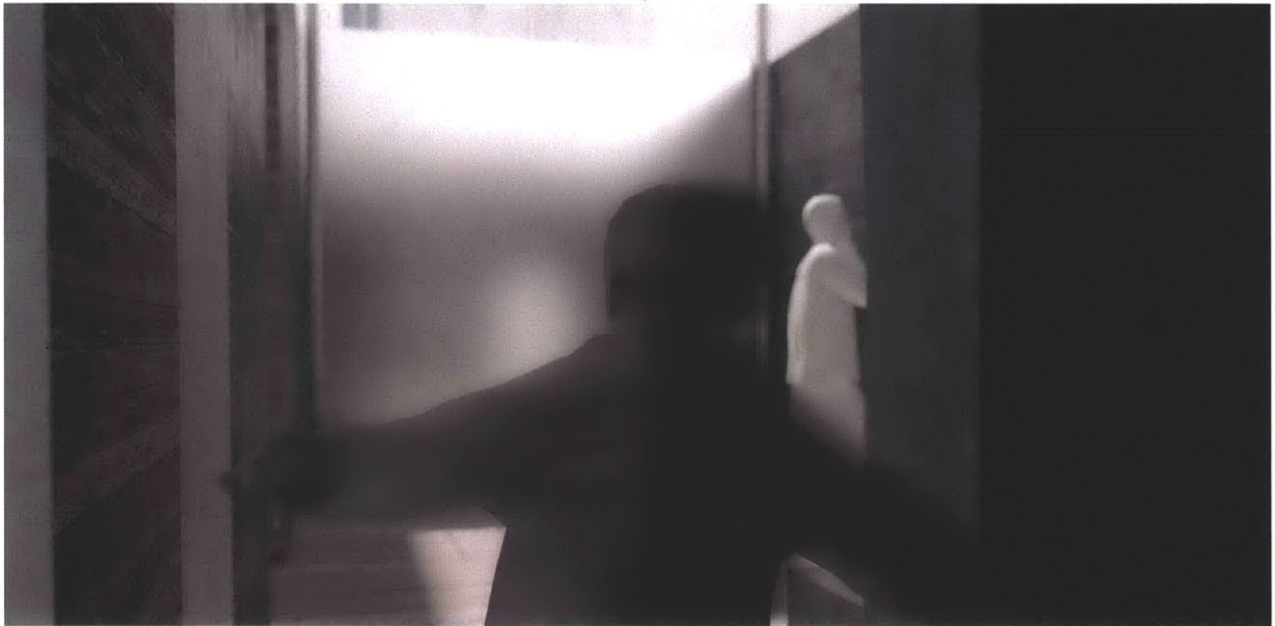
Book Cube Entry

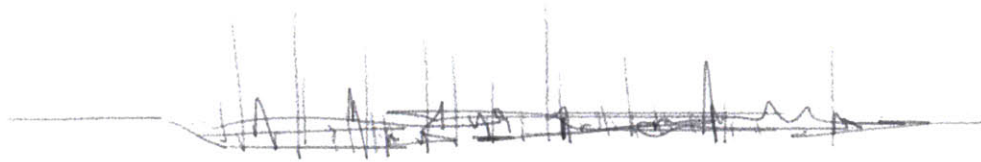




Neighborhood Festival







“..inner spaces where something human,
something gloriously ordinary presides.”⁸

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NOTES

1. "An American Family Grows in Brooklyn » Farming Brooklyn." An American Family Grows in Brooklyn RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <http://www.brooklynhistory.org/exhibitions/lefferts/farming-brooklyn/>
2. Osman, Suleiman. *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print. p.23.
3. Blau, Eve, Ivan Rupnik, and Ivan Rogić Nehajev. *Project Zagreb: Transition as Condition, Strategy, Practice*. Barcelona: Actar D, 2007. Print. p.8.
4. *Ibid.*, p.12.
5. Hinkel, Rochus Urban., and Suzie Attiwill. *Urban Interior: Informal Explorations, Interventions and Occupations*. Baunach, Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2011. Print.
6. "Residual Definition - Google Search." Residual Definition - Google Search. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.
7. Blau, Eve, Ivan Rupnik, and Ivan Rogić Nehajev. *Project Zagreb: Transition as Condition, Strategy, Practice*. Barcelona: Actar D, 2007. Print. p.16.
8. Darko Radovic, in Hinkel, Rochus Urban., and Suzie Attiwill. *Urban Interior: Informal Explorations, Interventions and Occupations*. Baunach, Germany: Spurbuchverlag, 2011. Print. p.32.

Thank you!

