

There is Room

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ABSTRACT

Homes were never neutral. Post-Industrial Revolution, American housing adopted the era’s obsession with efficiency, optimization, and order, removing friction from the home. As a result, rooms were categorized, functions were separated, and spaces of work were pulled apart into two spheres: productive work, paid work, and reproductive work, the domestic work.

Yet reproductive work, domestic work, or housework, is simply work, although it is rarely acknowledged as such. Without this labor, there can be no production, no economy, and no political action. Being critical to the functioning of society, by removing friction from the home, society renders this essential work invisible, reinforcing exploitative expectations placed on women’s bodies and labor.

This project rejects the notion of a frictionless home. Rather than eliminating friction, it advocates designing with it. Through architectural strategies such as spatial overlap, indeterminacy, and moments of interaction, the project transforms the home from a machine that conceals domestic work to one that reveals it and values the people who perform it.

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THE RESEARCH

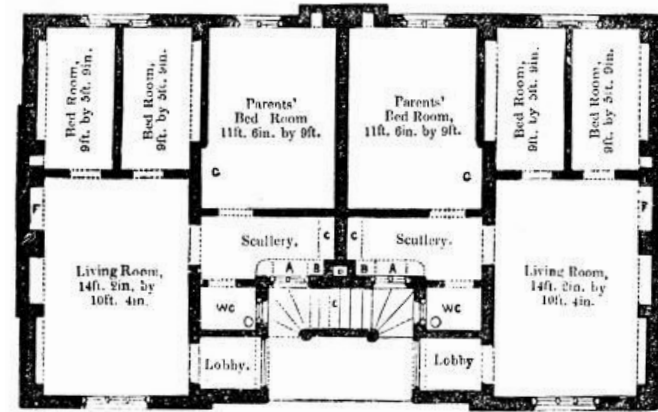
This research investigates how architectural design can make reproductive work visible, valued, and collectively acknowledged within the domestic sphere. Building upon historical critiques and contemporary scholarship, the study interrogates the ways spatial organization has both reflected and reinforced the division between productive and reproductive work. By examining case studies, theoretical frameworks, and alternative housing models, the research seeks to uncover how architecture might challenge the invisibility of care, maintenance, and domestic labor.

Central to this investigation is the premise that the home is not a neutral container, but a site where societal values, economic systems, and gender roles are constructed and contested. Through a critical analysis of design precedents and the exploration of spatial strategies, such as shared amenities, overlapping functions, and intentional friction, the research aims to propose architectural interventions that foreground reproductive work. Ultimately, the research asks how housing can be re-imagined to foster collective responsibility and dissolve the artificial boundaries between public and private, productive and reproductive, and individual and collective life.

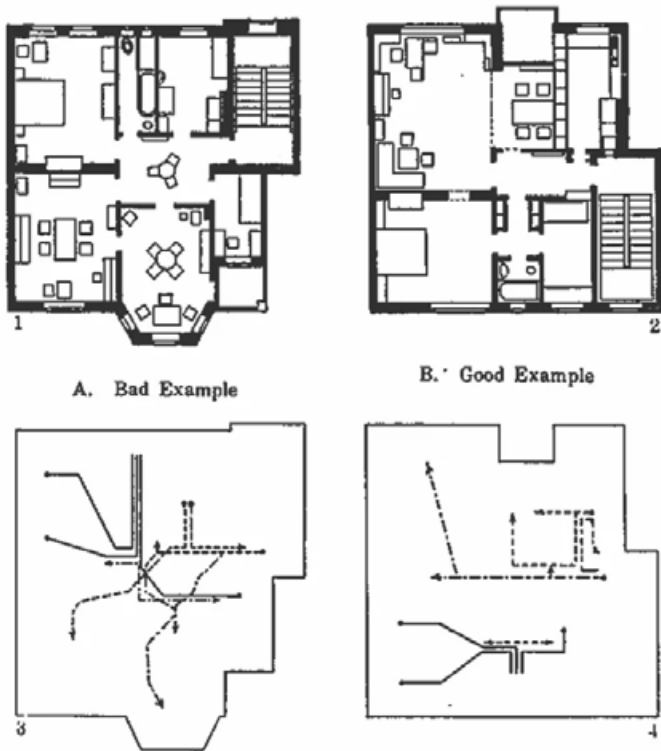
The Housing Project

As a new urban mercantile class emerged and urban areas developed during the Italian Renaissance, the organization of domestic space became an architectural project. Housing became a highly choreographed machine that could be designed and controlled. In Sebastiano Serlio's "On Housing for All Kinds of People", Serlio elevated the importance of designing the plan across social classes, from the farmer to the prince. One aspect remained consistent across these housing plans: productive work was removed from the house into workshops and outbuildings away from the house and away from the reproductive work within it.

This way of thinking was solidified in Henry Robert's 1851 Model Houses for Families, which optimized domestic life around efficiency and the nuclear family. The parents received their own bedroom, and the children of different sex their own.



Henry Roberts, Model Houses for Families, 1851.



Alexander Klein, studies for the efficient pathway designs of small apartments, 1927.

Alexander Klein studied the optimization of movement through a home in the 1920s. His studies aimed to avoid conflicting pathways to produce more efficient homes. These ideas of separation and aversion to conflict were replicated in suburban housing in the United States after World War II.

These architectural strategies, while ostensibly aimed at improving daily life, also contributed to the isolation of domestic work and the people, primarily women, who responsible for it. By prioritizing efficiency and minimizing interaction, such designs reinforced the notion that housework should be invisible and unobtrusive. This not only shaped social expectations within the family and the housewifization of the female body but also marginalized the value of reproductive labor in broader societal terms. The legacy of these approaches persists in contemporary housing, where spatial organization often continues to obscure and undervalue the labor that sustains everyday life.

Within this mass housing system, **rooms became commodities** defined by fixed function and locations. The home was **rendered limited, unimaginative, and frictionless.**

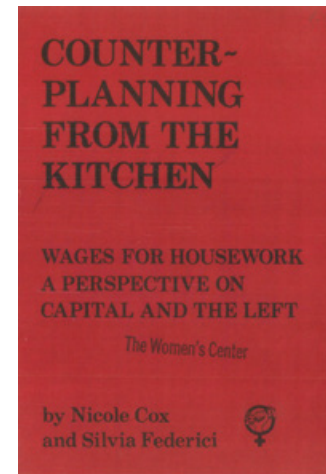
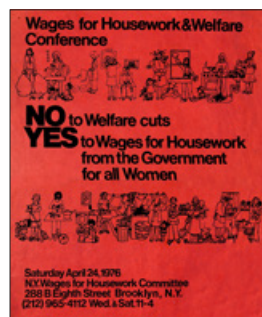
The Relationship of Production and Reproduction

History has produced a rigid division between productive and reproductive work. Productive work became located outside the home, public and visible, and exchanges for wages. While reproductive work was inside the home, private, invisible, and within the sanctuary of care. And so, the efforts of reproductive work were naturalized in work given freely under the guise of love and care, and romanticized, losing its essential value.

However, the public work of production cannot exist without the private work that sustains it. Reproductive labor is indispensable and critical to the functioning of society. Without it there can be no culture, no economy, and no political action.

The current capitalist economy relies on the work of reproduction, but offers it no value or recognition. To counter this lack of recognition, Silvia Federici demands wages for housework. Through these demands and strikes against housework, she exposes the contradiction of the separation of paid productive work and unpaid reproductive work, revealing it as the hidden infrastructure of society. And more importantly, **highlighting their interdependence.**

"Wages for Housework & Welfare Conference," 1976.



Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, Counter-Planning from the Kitchen, 1975.

The Domestic Sphere Re-Thought

Reproductive work remains undervalued because it remains hidden. Every worker, institution, and economy depends on care, maintenance, education, cooking, cleaning, and emotional support, yet this work has historically been treated as natural, private, and unpaid rather than skilled, social, and economically essential.

In the 1975 pamphlet "Counter-planning from the Kitchen" by Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, advocated against the idea of domesticity that portrays home as a place of rest and intimacy. Instead, they understand the home as a place of work, and more specifically, what Marx termed as "reproductive labor."

Reproductive work is the efforts needed to make life possible, and when reproductive work is invisible, those who perform it carry a disproportionate burden, reinforcing inequality and limiting participation in public life. Recognizing reproductive work as central rather than peripheral dissolves the hierarchy that privileges productive work. **Housing can no longer be designed as if production and reproduction are separate worlds.**

Reproductive Space as a Political Project

Recognizing reproductive work requires a fundamental shift in how the relationship between the private household and the collective city is understood. Domestic tasks often appear as individual responsibilities, yet they function as the invisible infrastructure of public life. The spatial organization of housing has historically concealed this dependence by isolating reproductive work within the private home.



Anna Puigjaner, Comedor Comunitario in Mexico City, 2017.



Anna Puigjaner, "Kitchen Stories," 2017.

Anna Puigjaner's research project "Kitchen Stories" reframes the domestic kitchen as a political device rather than a private necessity. By documenting housing models that exist without private kitchens, Puigjaner reveals that the contemporary apartment kitchen is not a universal requirement but an ideological construct. Removing the private kitchen challenged the assumption that cooking should be an individual household responsibility and instead positioned food preparation as a shared service and collective practice. Through this collective action in the city, the work of food preparation, and reproductive work as whole, become more visible and valued.

Recognizing its True Value through Friction

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the invisibility and undervaluation of reproductive work are deeply rooted in the spatial and social organization of the home. By critically examining historical models, contemporary practices, and theoretical frameworks, the study reveals how architecture can either reinforce or challenge these dynamics.

The contemporary housing model attempts to eliminate friction by organizing the home into fixed rooms that neither conflict nor interact. This organization avoids encounters with domestic work, and ultimately conceals the work that sustains life.

**WE REJECT THE
FRICTIONLESS HOME**



THERE IS ROOM

For Friction

In our proposal, rooms are adjacent to each other, with no clear differentiation between what rooms and programs. It could be a corridor, or a shared kitchen, or a bedroom. Rather than assigning predetermined functions, this spatial framework produces architectures in which habitation, program, and relationships are continuously defined, negotiated, and redefined through informal and formal social interactions at both the scale of the unit and the scale of the building.

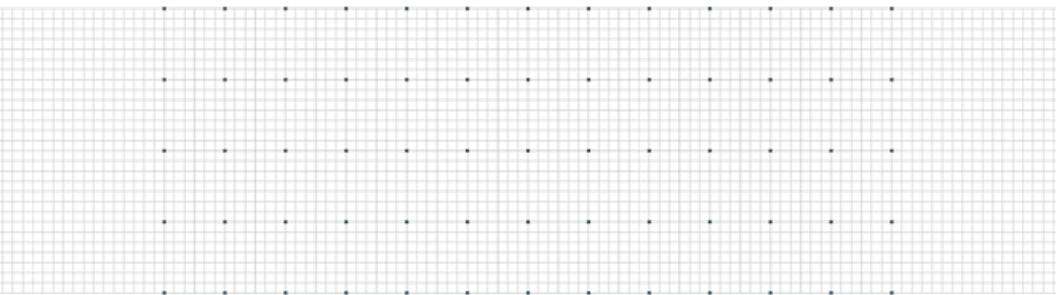
To move from one room to another, the resident must pass through other rooms and must interact with and understand those activities. Movement creates encounters, and encounters create conflict and awkwardness. In order to function well, there must be a mutual understanding of these parallel activities.

As needs change, these sequences adapt to life contingencies and are never defined by top-down planning, producing awkward sequences. Suddenly, the work of maintaining life is no longer hidden. The home becomes porous, fluid, and negotiated between neighbors.

The Framework



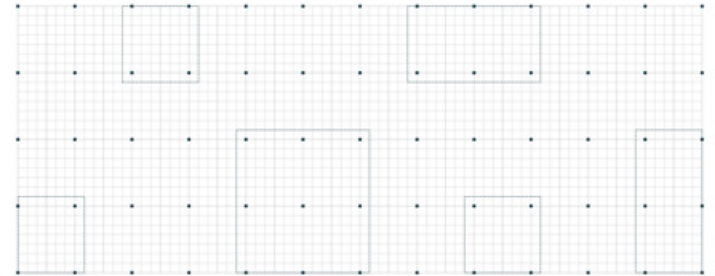
1. 4' x 4' Grid



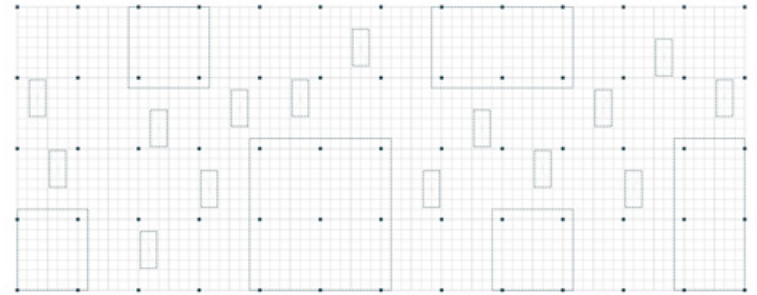
2. Establishing a column grid.



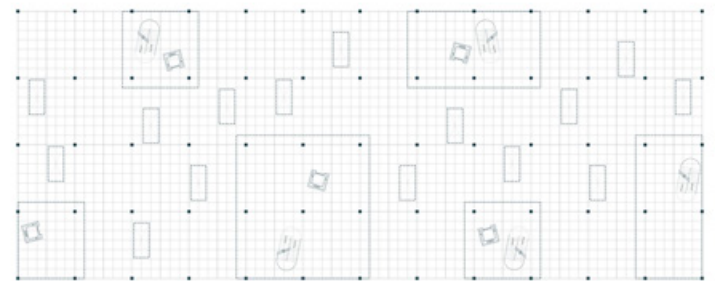
3. Establishing a mass timber structure.



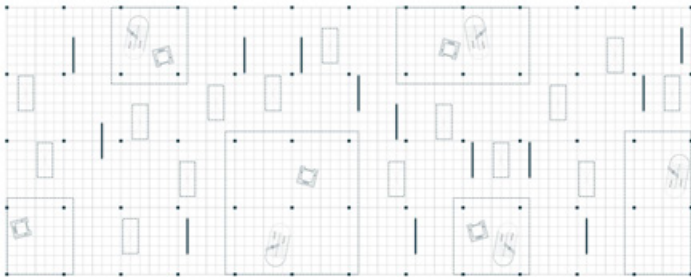
4. Locating double-height shared courtyards.



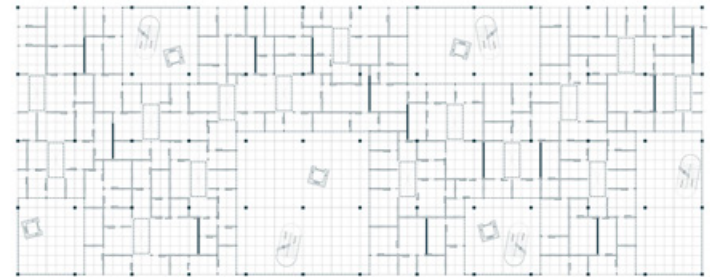
5. Locating light-wells.



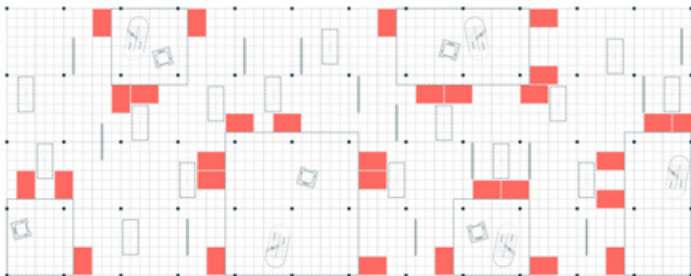
6. Vertical cores in the shared courtyards.



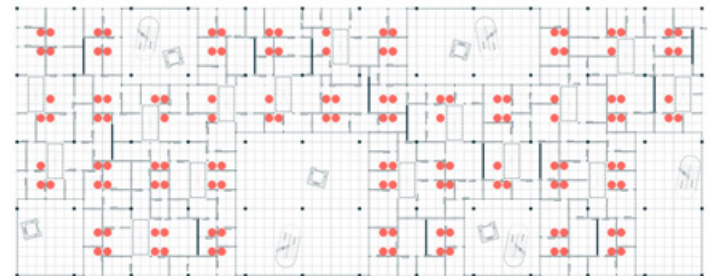
7. Placing plumbing walls.



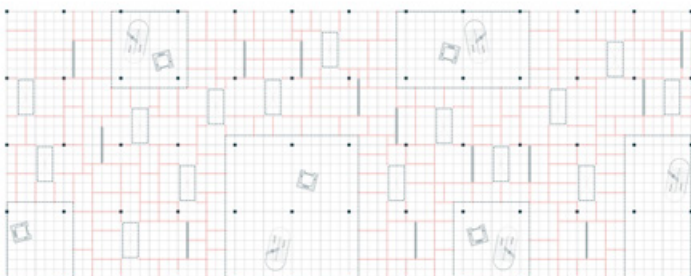
10. Placement of the walls.



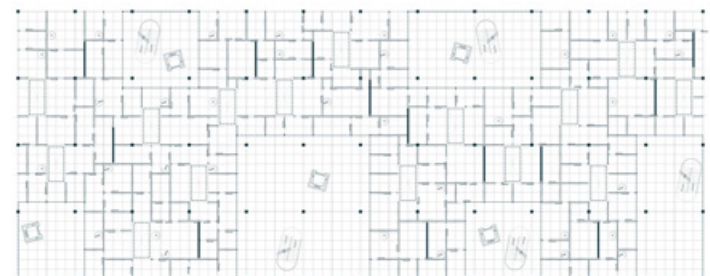
8. Locating "seed rooms" in between the shared courtyard and light-wells.



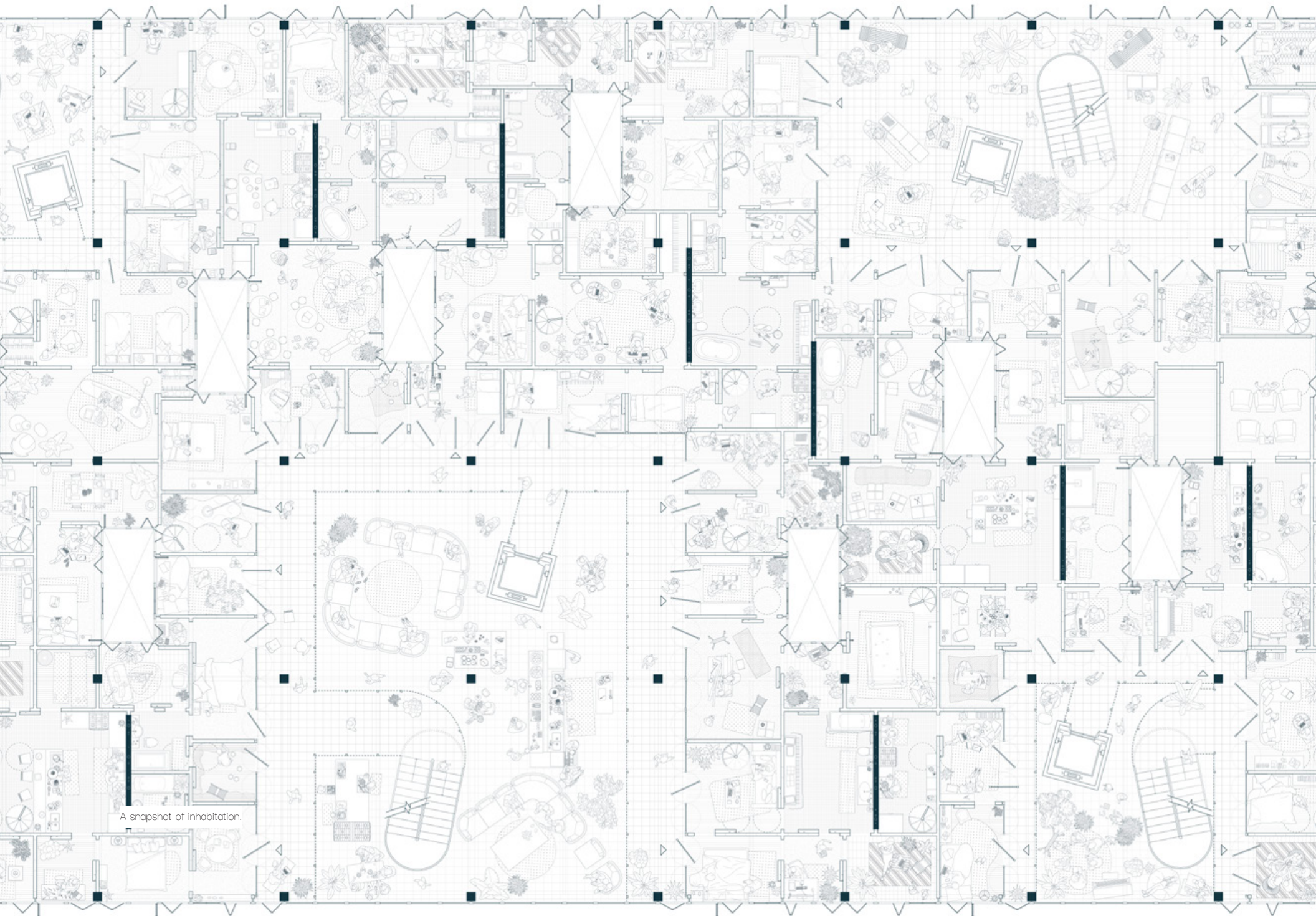
11. Potential in-unit stairs.



9. Potential wall placement on the 4'x4' grid.



12. Placement of in-unit stairs.



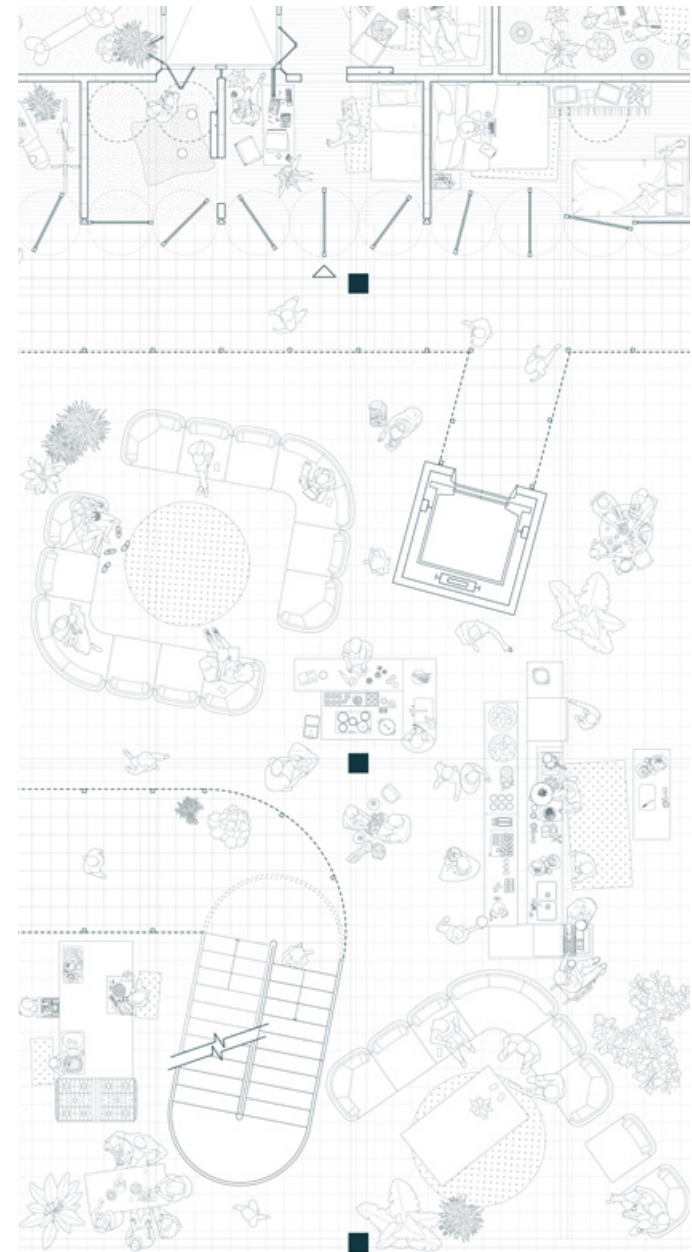
A snapshot of inhabitation.

The Procession of Opportunities

The Entry Point: The Shared Domestic Work Courtyard

The procession into your unit already highlights domestic work. The landing of the elevator and staircases will always land you into a shared courtyard in which the program reflects a shared domestic labor. In the plan above, the community kitchen is shown as the heart of this courtyard. However, its program can change by floor to other shared domestic work programs such as shared child care, shared laundry, etc.

This design intervention directly challenges the spatial isolation of domestic labor by making it a collective and visible experience. The shared courtyard and community kitchen not only decentralize individual responsibility but also foster a sense of communal care and engagement. These spatial strategies disrupt the traditional boundaries between private and shared tasks, prompting residents to renegotiate their roles in maintaining the home.



Shared kitchen courtyard.



Annexing Rooms

This flexible wall system transforms the way private and communal spaces are used and perceived. By requiring negotiation with neighbors to expand or contract living areas, the design turns spatial boundaries into opportunities for interaction and collaboration. The concept model shows the potential door opening compared to the actual openings.

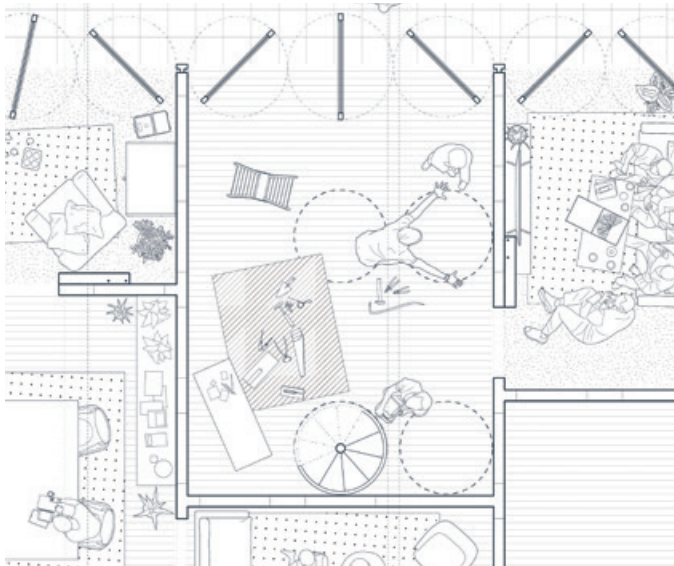
The shifting arrangement of rooms, such as a bathroom adjacent to a childcare space, encourages residents to rethink conventional domestic roles, adapt to shared needs, and participate in the ongoing reorganization of household responsibilities.



The WIP (Work in Progress) Rooms

Empowering residents to shape their environment, the concept of “work in progress” rooms eliminates pre-assigned functions and places design agency directly in the hands of the user. Instead of fixed, prescriptive layouts, occupants are invited to define and reconfigure spaces according to their evolving needs and preferences, supporting a living arrangement that adapts over time.

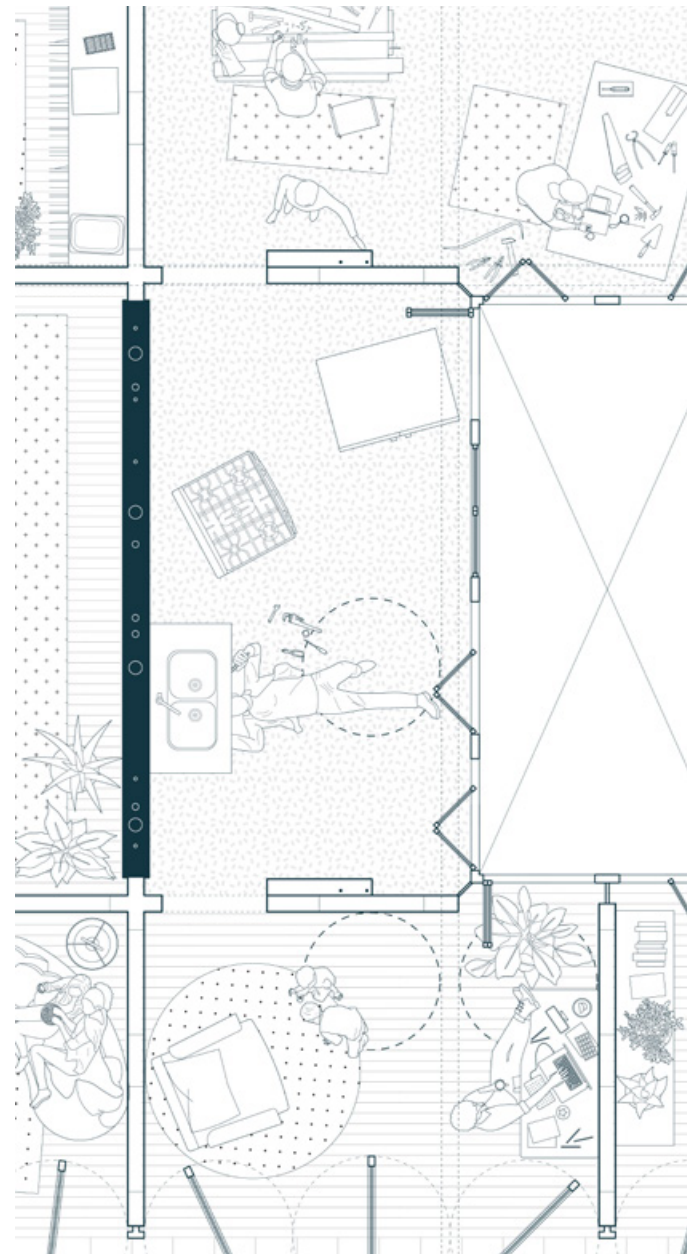
The annexing horizontally through the flexible wall system not only allows the residents the freedom of reconfiguring their living environment horizontally, but the ability to expand vertically is possible through potential opening of the floor to place a in-unit staircase.



Work in progress room.



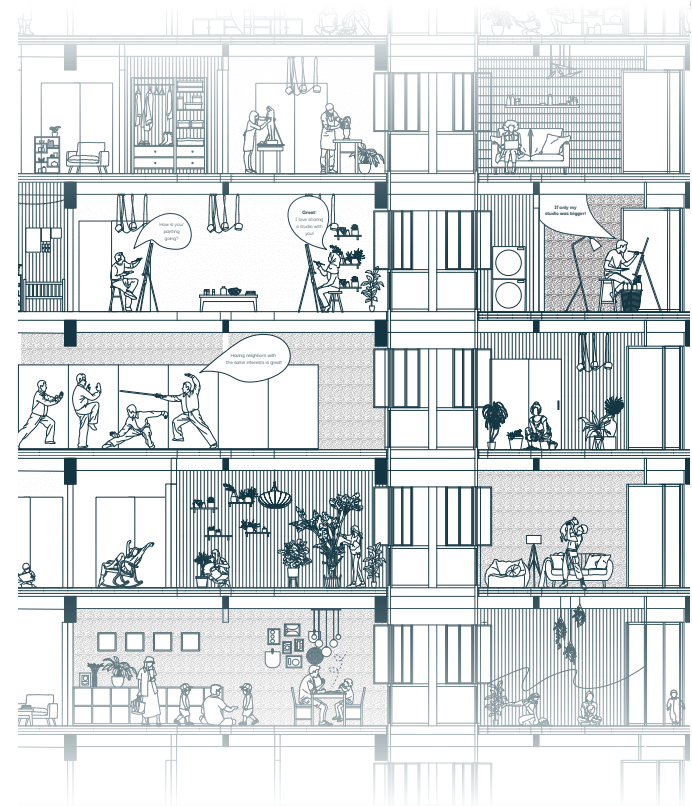
The inclusion of a continuous plumbing wall further expands these possibilities: by allowing any room along this axis to become a wet room, users gain the flexibility to introduce kitchens, bathrooms, or laundry areas wherever they see fit. This approach not only breaks down traditional spatial hierarchies within the home but also foregrounds user choice, fostering a more dynamic, responsive, and democratic domestic environment.



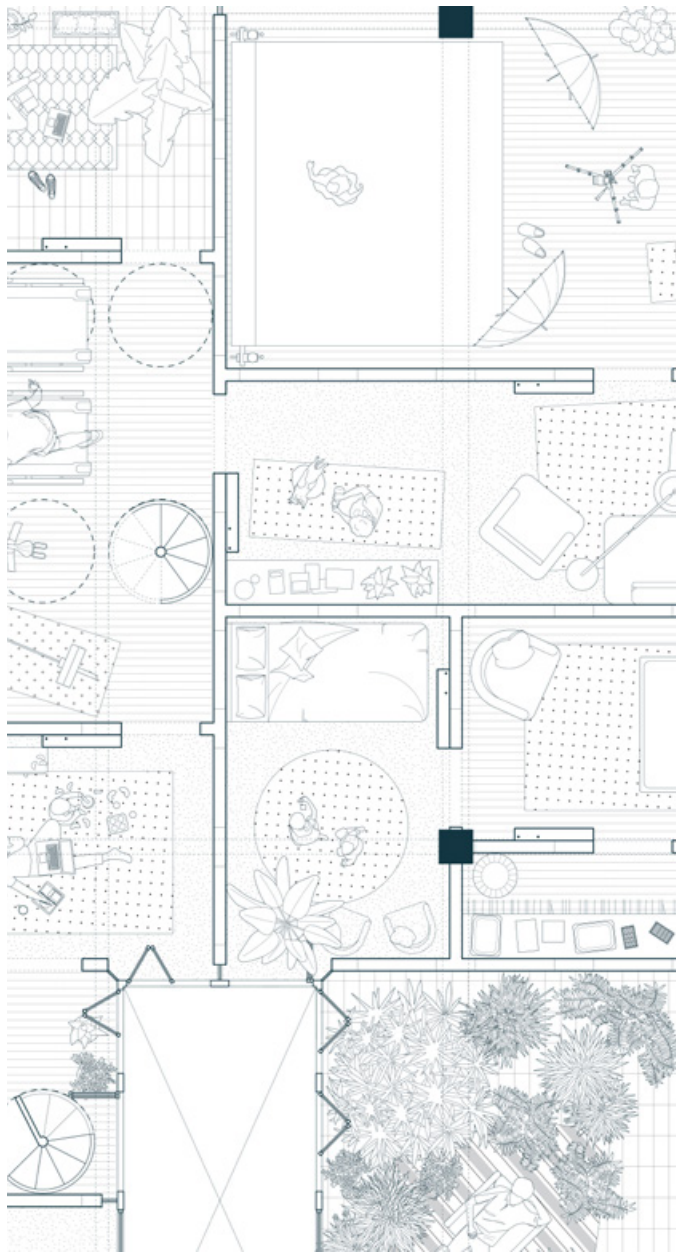
Work in progress with a plumbing wall.

The Choice to Share

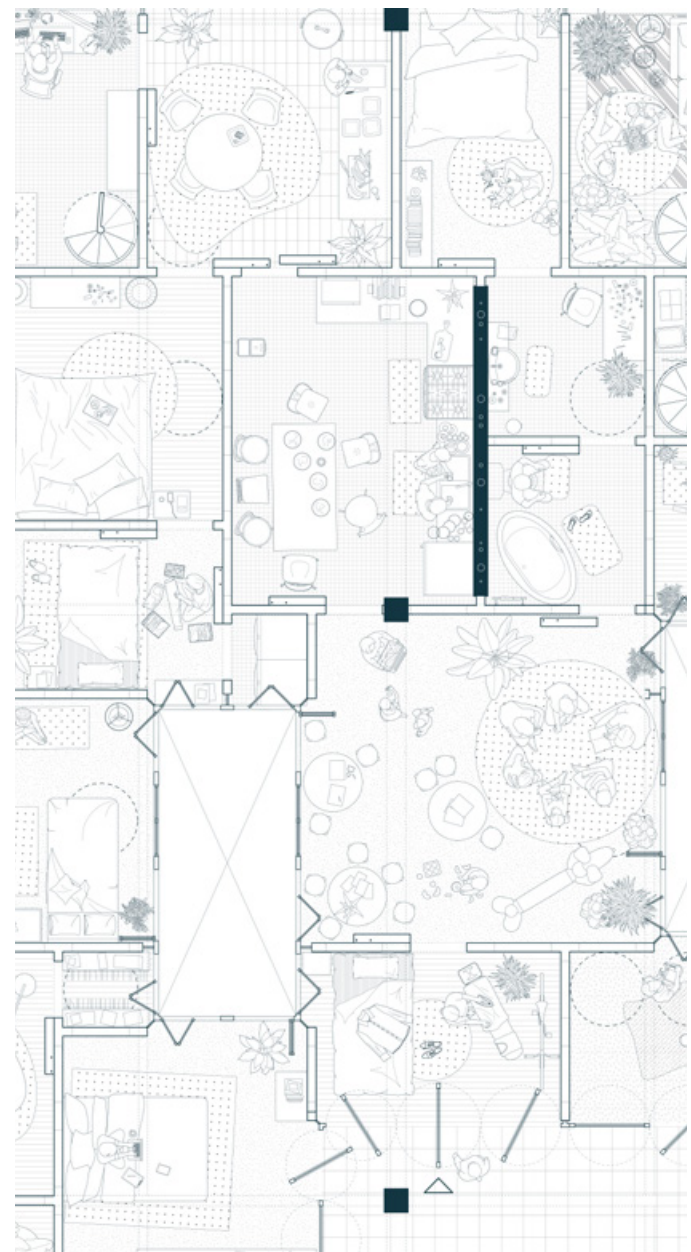
Building on the flexibility of the “work in progress” rooms, residents are also given the choice to share a space between two units, further dissolving rigid boundaries within the domestic environment. This option allows neighbors to collaboratively define areas for communal activities, such as shared child care, collective cooking, martial arts room, shared studio, or co-working, based on their evolving needs and relationships. By making shared spaces an intentional and adaptable part of the home, the design encourages social interaction, mutual support, and resource efficiency. This model not only fosters a sense of community, but also demonstrates how architectural flexibility can empower residents to negotiate and co-create their living arrangements, transforming the home into a responsive and participatory environment.



Moments of shared activities.



Shared fitness area between two units.

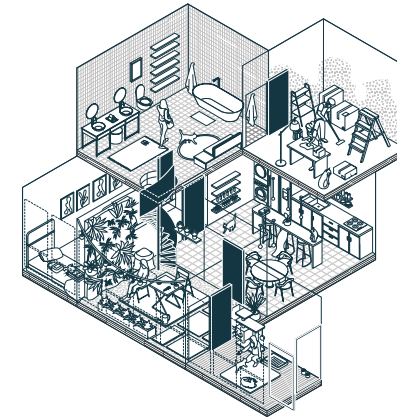
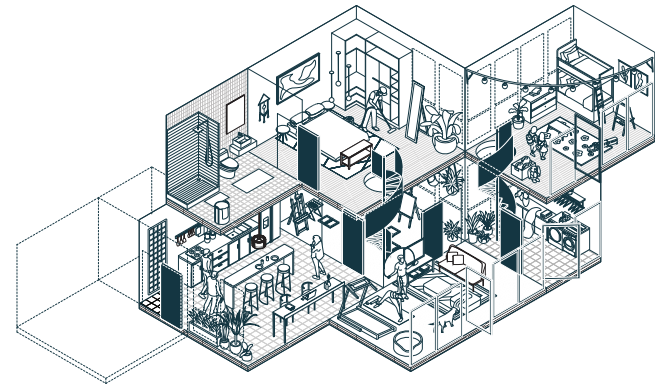


Shared child care between two units.

The Friction-full Fluid Unit

As a result of these design strategies, the relationships between spaces become intentionally awkward and unconventional, breaking away from traditional domestic order. The unit acts as a parasite—growing both vertically and horizontally—without conforming to a specific shape or prescribed boundaries. Spaces morph and adapt through negotiation, expansion, and sharing, creating a living environment that is fluid, unpredictable, and responsive to the collective needs of its inhabitants. This architectural approach challenges the notion of fixed, static homes, instead embracing the messy, dynamic realities of everyday life and allowing the domestic realm to continuously evolve in form and function.

Highlighted in the axons are the elements that make this annexing possible, the in-unit stair cases and the doors within the flexible wall. Allowing friction to happen in the unit through the unknown placement of the addition of the room. Causing the reproductive rooms being places in between productive rooms making the residents having to acknowledge the reproductive labor.



Aggregative unit configurations.



Visual friction across the light-well.



Friction through the enfilade system.

THERE IS ROOM

Through spatial, visual, circulatory, and material strategies, this project reintroduces friction into the domestic sphere, transforming the home from a machine that conceals domestic labor into one that reveals it and values the people who perform it.



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