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Suture and Estrangement in Architecture

By

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SUTURE AND ESTRANGEMENT

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Master of Architecture 2020
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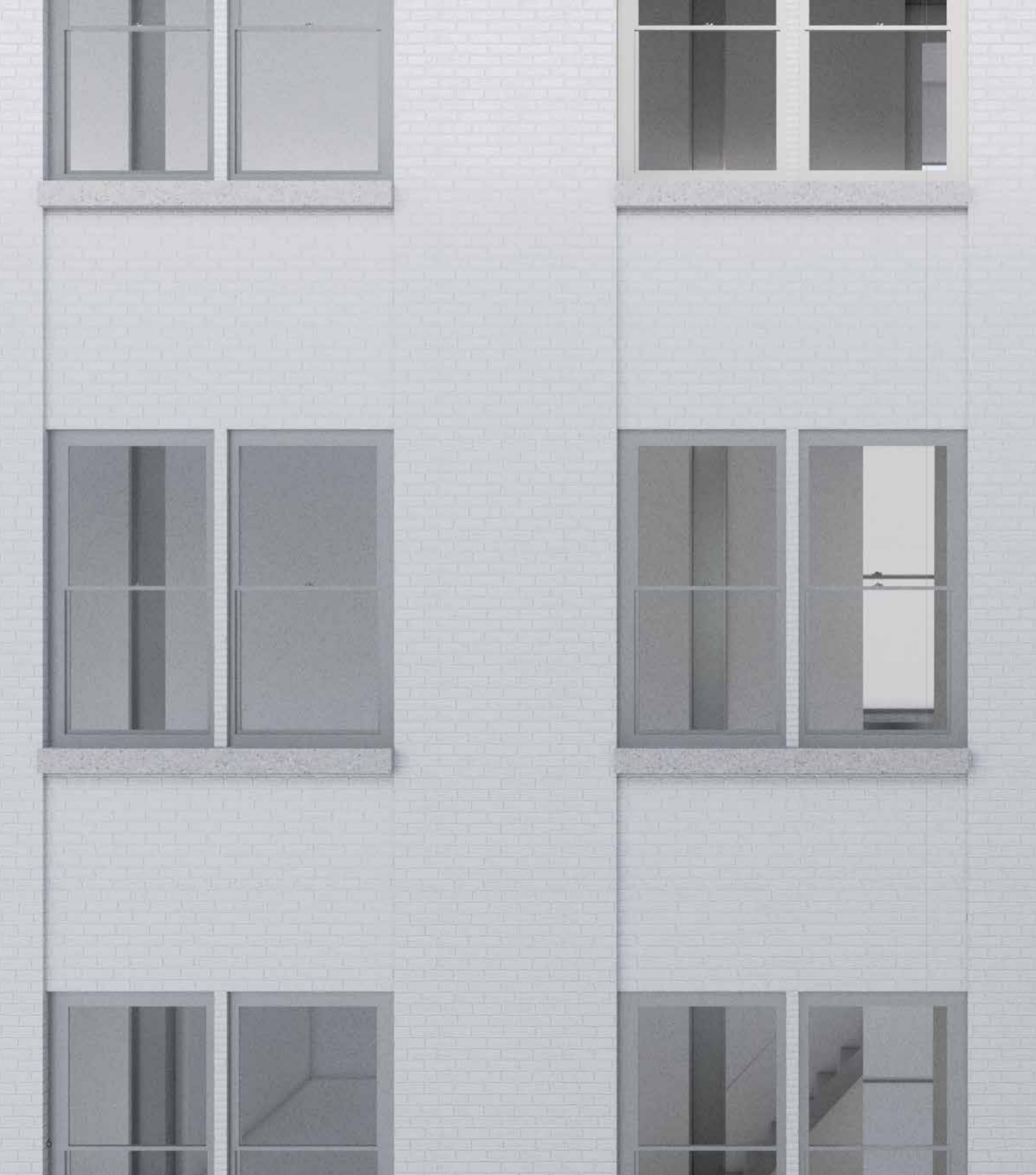
Abstract

This thesis investigates two film techniques and explores their translation to architecture with a focus on private life and residence. The production of a cohesive internal fiction might be understood as moments of "suture". The violation of this cohesion in order to make the viewer aware of the conceptual or physical apparatus that produces such fiction, might be understood as "estrangement". Film conventions for producing internal worlds are extended and translated to architectural models of tectonic composition, material surfaces, and programmatic codifications: I-profile columns and beams break the continuity of smooth white plaster, internal studs serve as substitutes for aluminum frame glazing, and accordion mirror doors fracture and affirm old and new fictions of contemporary living. Through focusing on extra-disciplinary techniques for constructing and irrupting cohesive worlds, the thesis offers new frameworks for articulating contemporary subjecthood and expanding architecture's scope of enactment.

Acknowledgements

Contents

PART I.

Suture: a method for stitching a viewer into a fiction, enveloping the viewing subject, and creating a loss of attention to the apparatus

Estrangement: a way to make the viewer aware of the conceptual or physical apparatus that produces internal fiction

Jean-Luc Godard, Contempt, 1964

Introduction

This project is concerned with a film technique and its potential for producing and reframing architectural space. While film and architecture have two different starting points—one depicts, the other is a spatial object or environment—the two mediums share an objective to produce a world with its own rules and sensibilities. This thesis investigates the effects of alternating between two sensibilities: one that privileges a cohesive internal fiction, "suture", and one that privileges the objecthood, or physical or conceptual apparatuses that produce the fiction, "estrangement". While these sensibilities have various names in adjacent art disciplines—Brechtian "alienation effect" versus "dramatic theatre" in theatrical arts, "literalism" or "theatricality" verus "figuration" or "illusion" in painting and sculpture, and what Jeff Wall differentiates between "auto-critical" versus "straight" photographs in photography—this thesis will use the filmic term "suture", and generic term "estrangement" for consistency.

The design is an intervention on an existing multi-family housing project, and focuses on interiority and domestic subjects in an urban and collective context. Focusing on private life and residence, the thesis argues that alternating between two sensibilities articulates new and inherited architectural frameworks in contemporary life.

What follows are several examples that articulate movement between suture and estrangement.
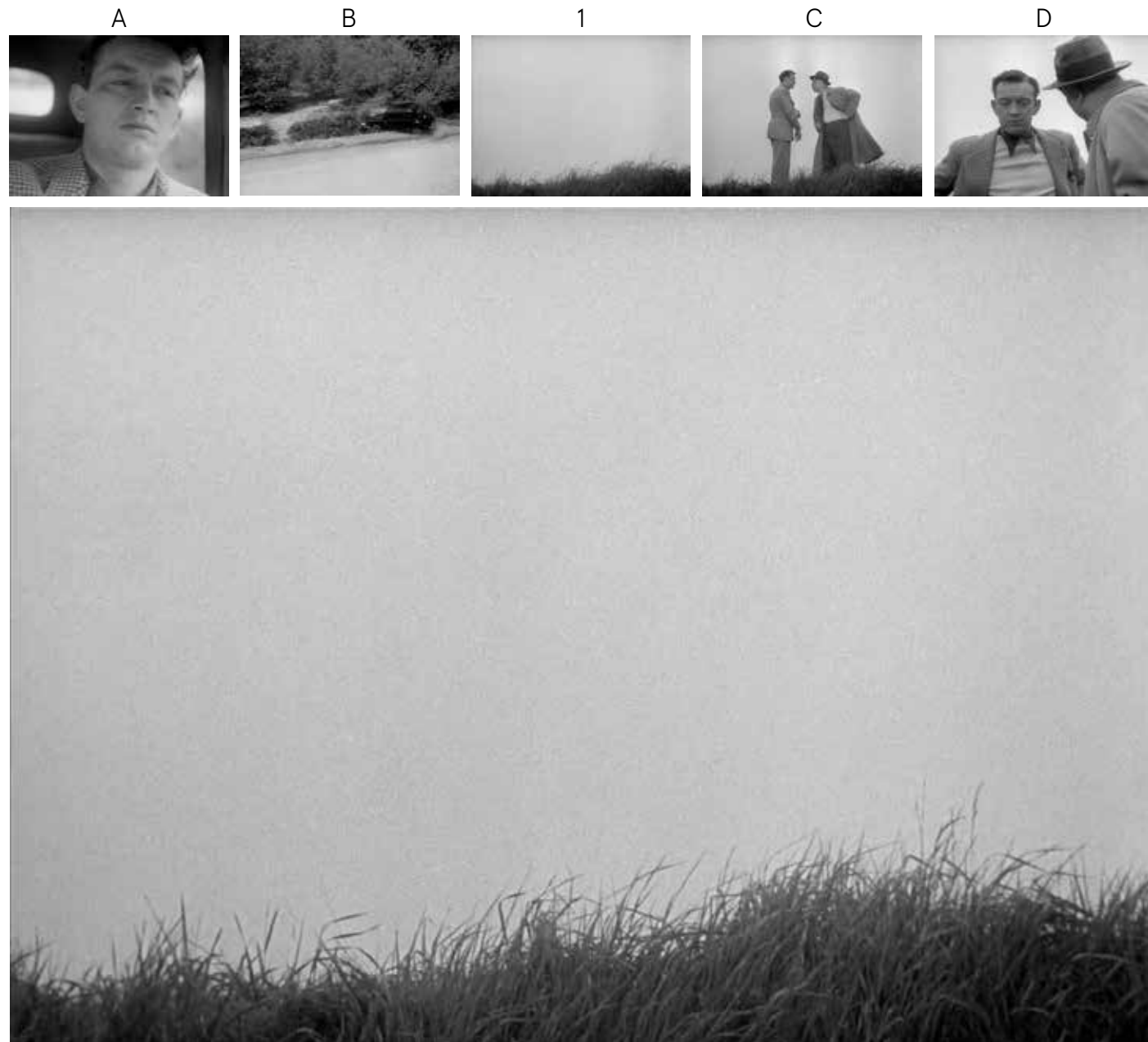
A | B | 1 | C | D

Jean Renoir, The Rules of the Game, *1937*

Film Techniques 1

The first example is in Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* where the sequence of shots produces a structure of causation: A, B, 1, C, D, that creates a narratival continuity, a break, and resumes continuity:

In the first shot (A) Andre Jurieux is driving his car, In the second (B), the car goes off the road; this cause/effect sequencing produces suture, where the viewer's attention is focused on the narrative. The camera then lingers on an empty berm of grass for an extended shot (1), which exemplifies a moment of estrangement, because the viewer's attention turns from the narrative to the camera work. Next, the driver and passenger walk into the frame and engage in conversation (C) and (D), which is a return to the original suturing structure.

Film Techniques 2

The work of the camera is not the only means for producing suture and estrangement. In Jean–Luc Godard's *Contempt* the director's decision with framing relative to framing conventions creates the effect. Here we see two protagonists interacting but the house's walls perpetually obscure their action. Catching a glimpse of someone on the phone through a doorway might be an unremarkable experience in everyday life; However, when the subject on the screen is such that the action/actors are blocked we become suddenly aware of the cinematographer's discretion as an apparatus or conditioning force of the narrative.

Jean-Luc Godard, Contempt, *1964*

Lizzie Fitch/Ryan Trecartin, Weatherline, *2019*

Film Techniques 3

In Lizzie Fitch and Ryan Trecartin's *Weatherline*, three identically dressed subjects walk outside between two signifying thresholds. Frequent shot changes and slight continuity errors relentlessly fragment the figures' pacing. The extreme foregrounding of editing severs the relationship between view and immediate experience, validating contradiction and overlap while still producing a coherent model of narrative.

Trecartin's cross-dressing literally executes Brecht's prediction that "if the part is played by somebody of the opposite sex the sex of the character will be more clearly brought out."[1] The multipleness of the three "Neighborgirl"s and repetition of the act of pacing reduces their identities to a conceptual category, enacting Judith Butler's definition of gender as "a stylized repetition of acts through time," where transformation is attainable "in the possibility of a different sort of repeating." The three figures' multipleness enacts the said "different sort of repeating". Their legibility indicates the provisional nature of identity, and the falsehood in deriving "social existence" from "some fact of physiology"[2] while the substitution draws attention to the act of assignment.

1 Bertoldt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in Brecht on Theatre, trans John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964)

2 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1988), pp. 519–531
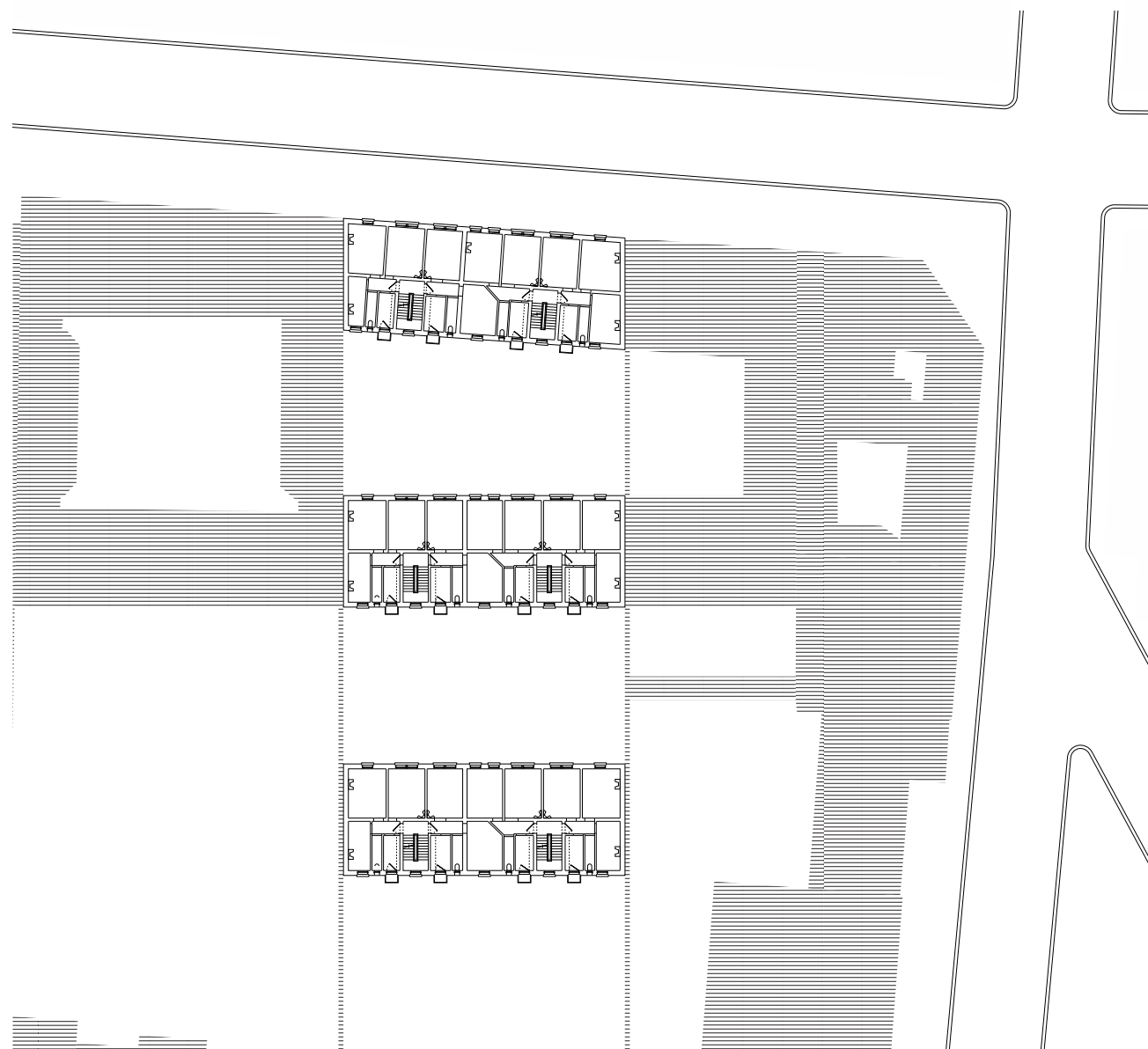
Design: Site/Existing Condition

The thesis design explores how these filmic methods could have analogous expressions or articulations in housing and spaces of residence. The project is situated in an apartment building situated in Paris. This choice of site is not because the design is specific to a location. Because the project is grounded in architecture as enactment and performance, Paris was selected for its discursive position as a place that has historically centered around performing lifestyle and living.

The building was initially completed in 1900 and served as workers' housing. The apartments are organized in a series of three six-story volumes. Each volume has four double-aspect units per floor, with two stair cores that each serve two units. The north-facing half of each unit consists of large bedrooms that correspond to the window bay organization, while the south-facing half accommodates circulation, two wet spaces, and a smaller bedroom. Each volume is identical in plan with the exception of the street-facing volume, which is skewed to meet the angle of the street. The building was chosen for its multipleness. As with Weatherline, the repetition of these three volumes enable the conceptualization and enactment of alternative reconfigurations.

Note: The existing structure is not considered suture on which estrangement is enacted; instead the building is a scaffolding for creating both the familiar and unfamiliar.

Design: Organization

While the existing building's unit distribution and organization was maintained, the central load-bearing walls were removed and replaced by a steel column and beam system that permitted working with a free-plan organization. Working with three volumes with varying urban conditions prompted three different design responses:

1) The street-facing building has peripheral units on each floor that do not have right corners due to the building's skewed orientation. Smaller rooms on the periphery negotiate the thinner peripheral units while a wide bisecting corridor permits views from the street to the interior courtyard.

2) The center building is surrounded by two courtyards and the front and back volumes. The design responds to the lack of directional bias and creates radical sectional conditions. The units stack and interlock such that each unit has a double height space, privileging vertical spaciousness over outward view.

3) The building furthest back from the street has a courtyard to the north and residual space to the south. Room-sized voids along the east-west axis across create additional views while maintaining a buffer from neighbors.
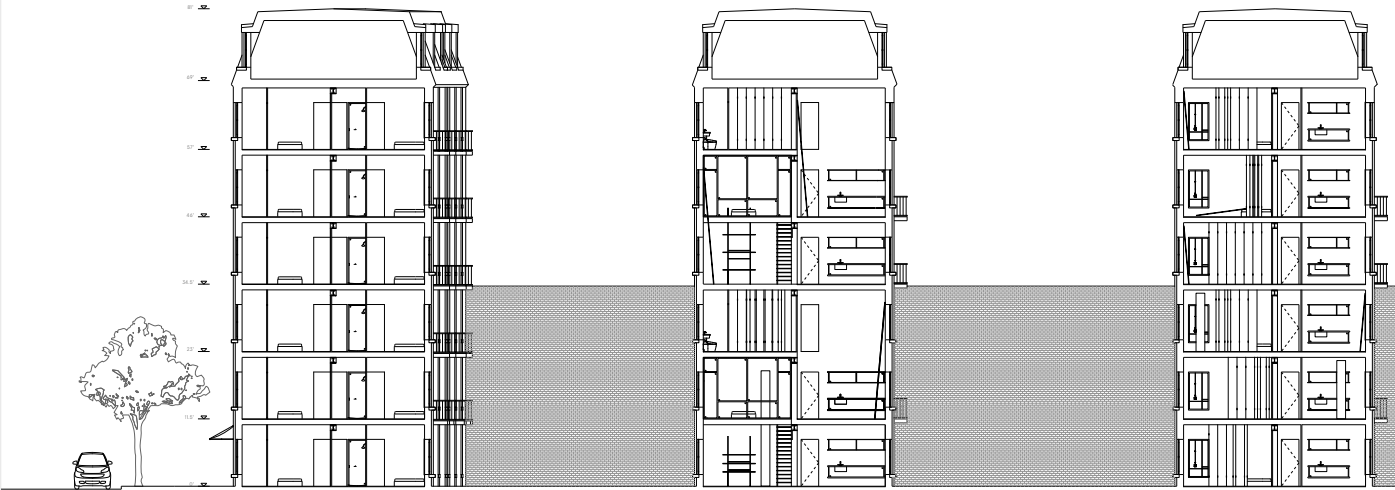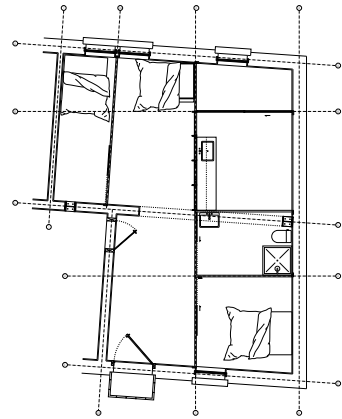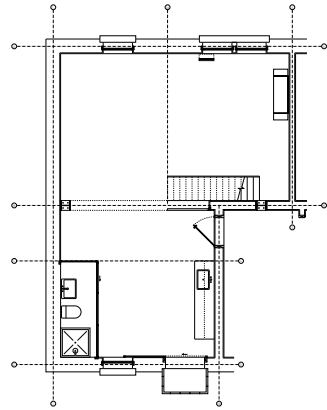
SECTION
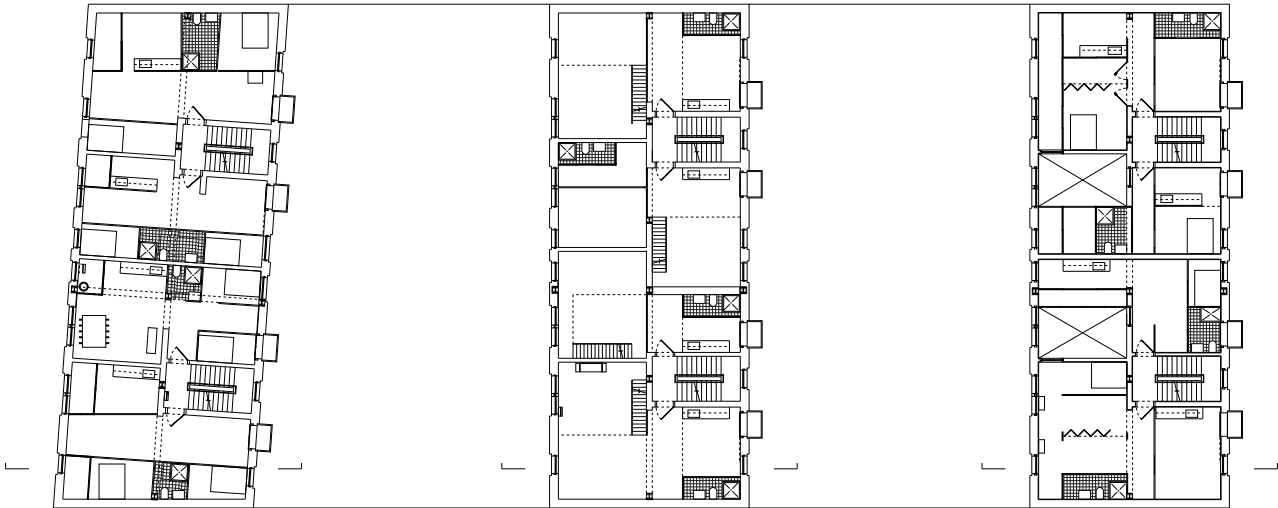
TYP PLAN
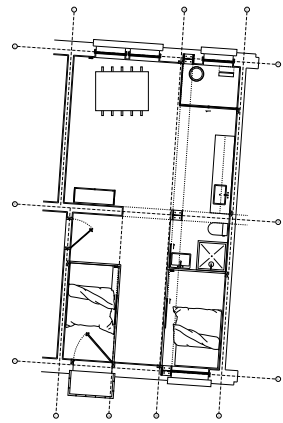
BLDG 1 | A

BLDG 1 | B

BLDG 2 | A L1

BLDG 2 | A L2, B L1

BLDG 2 | B L2

BLDG 3 | A

BLDG 3 | B

A

B

1

B
A

2

A

B

3
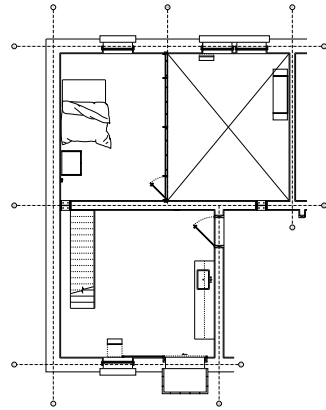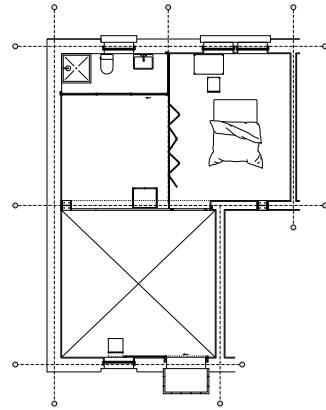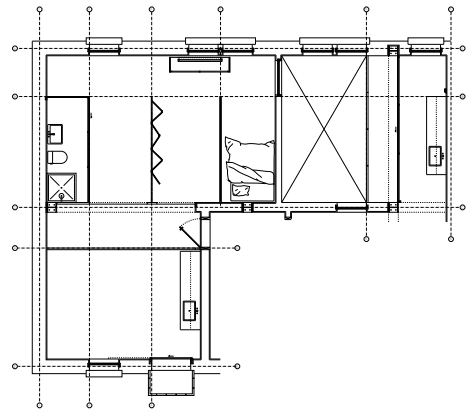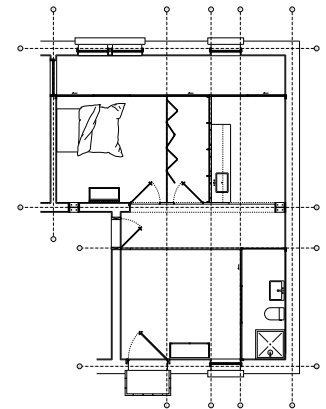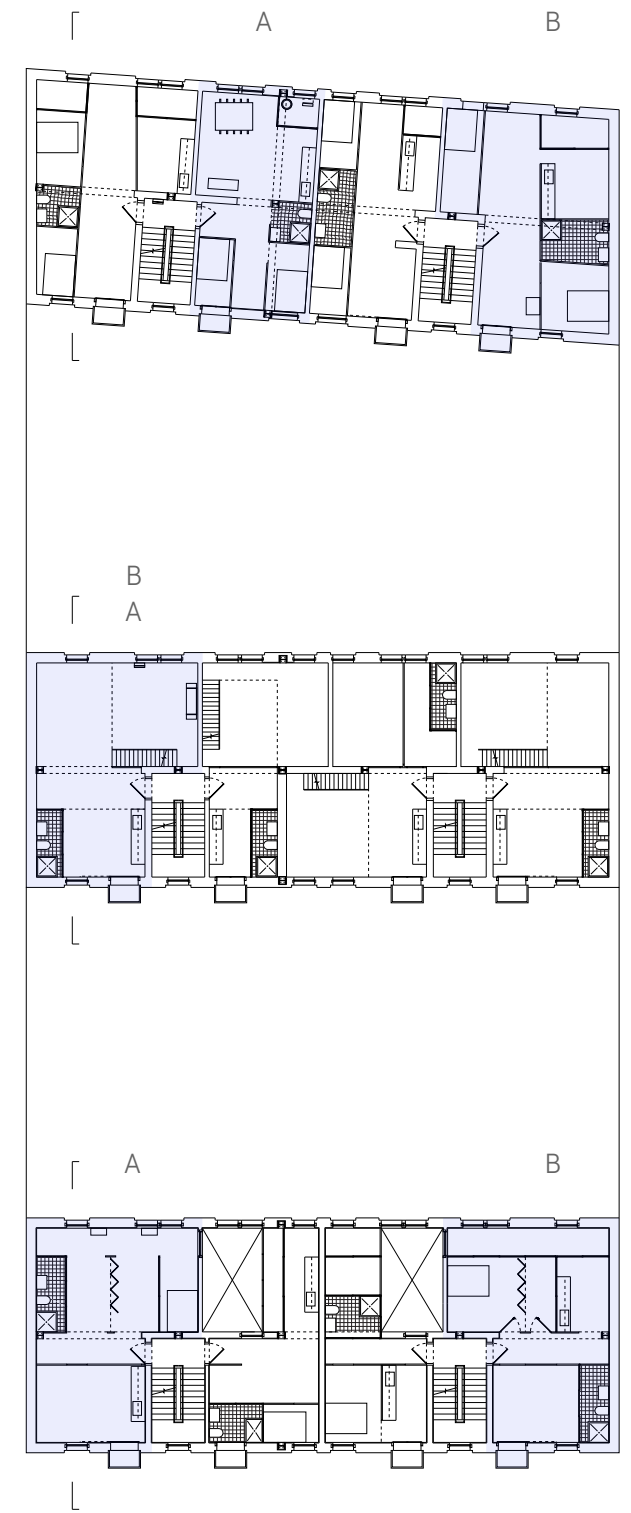
Plan: Bldgs 1, 2, 3

Design: Details

The design interventions are small-scale modifications, additions, and placements ranging from structural systems, fasteners, permanent and temporary partitions, to entourage objects. Efforts were made to maintain a residential scale to the rooms. Off-the-shelf inexpensive components rather than custom-fabricated compositions were used, which presents the assembly of everyday material culture as a language.
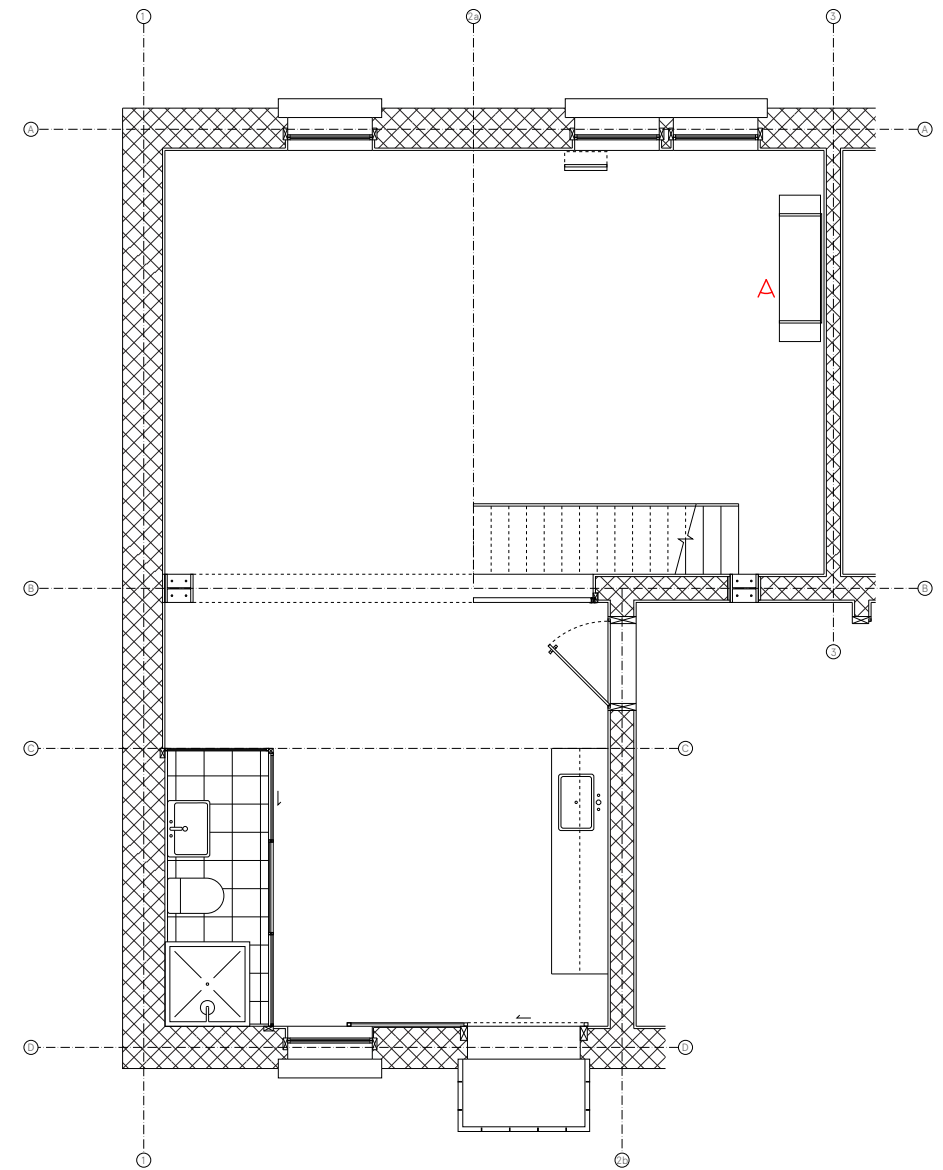
Following the model in *The Rules of the Game*, the building's structural system performs suture and estrangement through creating a break in a model. Wide flange steel columns and beams replace continuous load-bearing walls. The columns are flush with the surface of the sheathing such that they appear embedded, serving as a break in continuity rather than a secondary or independent addition.
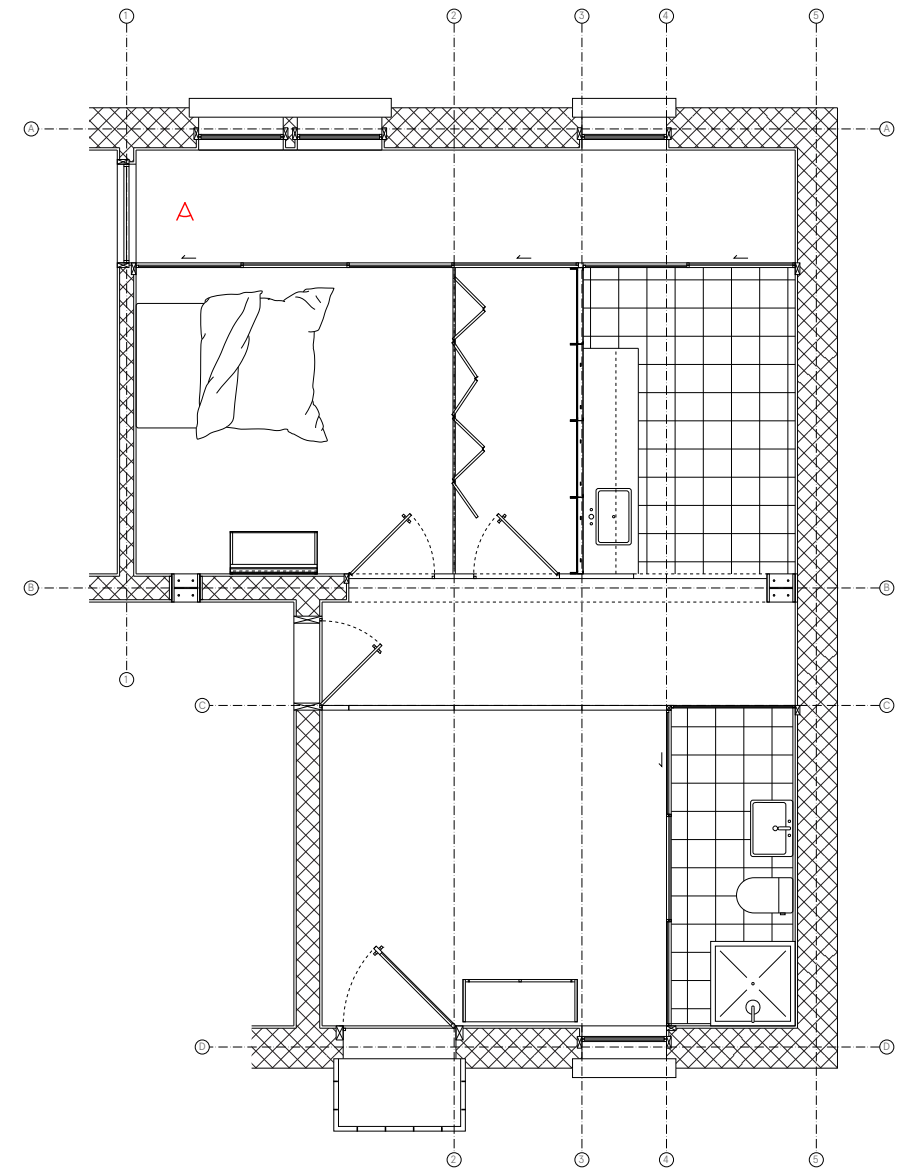
The reccurence of the wide flange members in the white plaster produces a motif, normalized through its repetition.
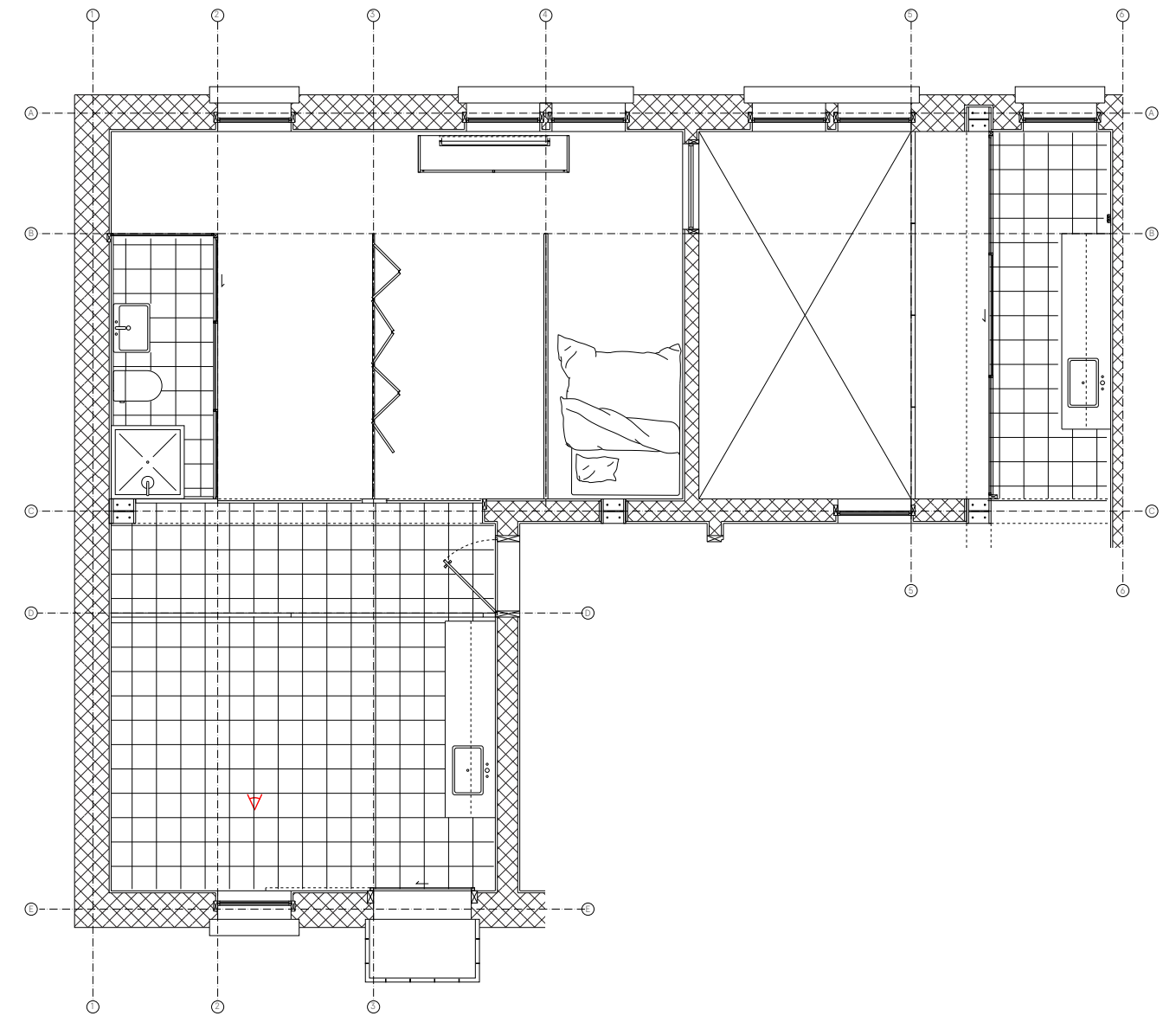
Steel plate fasteners holding 2" composite boards are a visible notation for how the wall system comes together. The thin quality of the material makes the partitions more temporary, and makes the break from one space to the next more sharp. This method of suture and estrangement is more akin to the model used in *Contempt*, where a convention—in the film's case a way of framing a shot, in architecture's case a way for constructing an interior wall—is disregarded or antagonized and thus made evident.
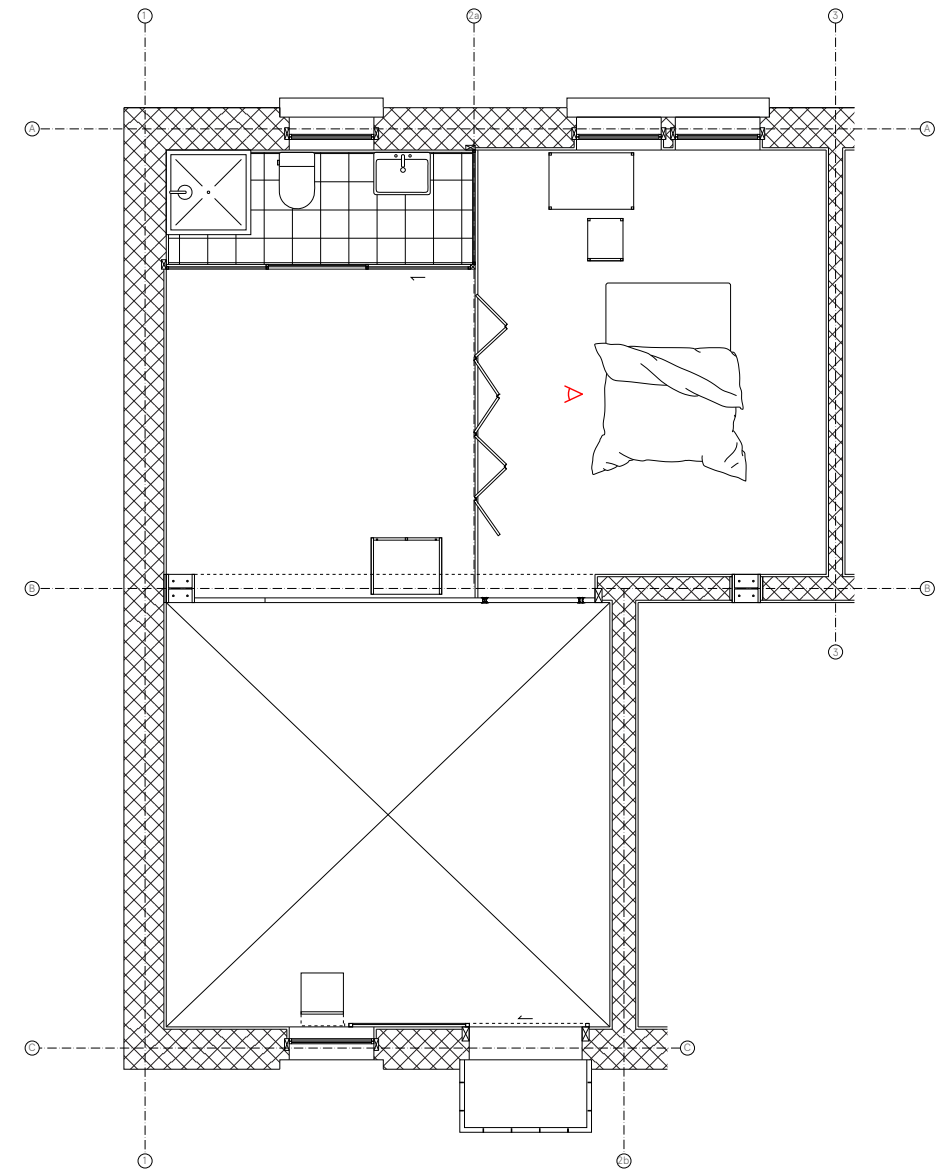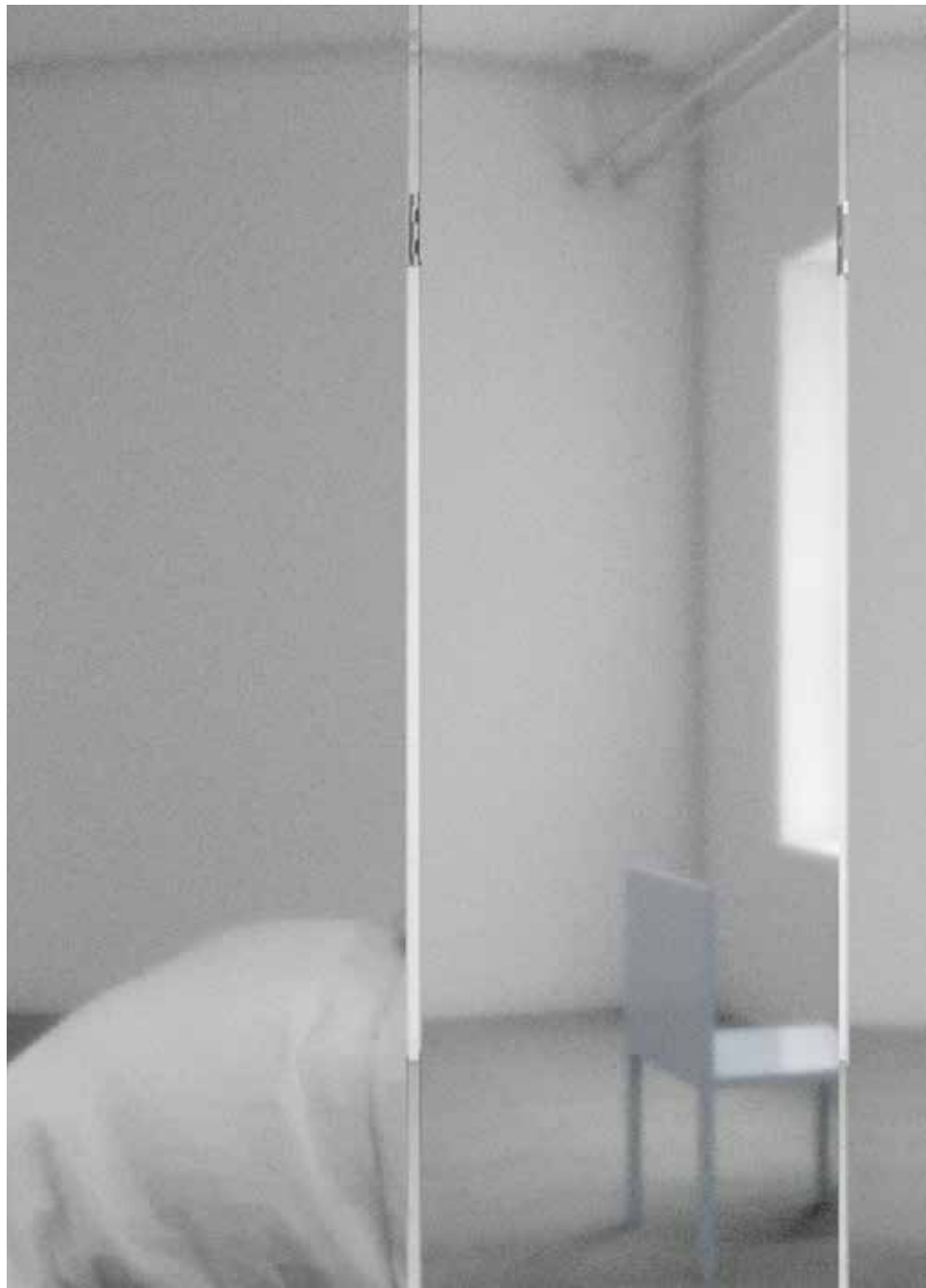
A mirror's reflection of light depicts, creating an illusion of depth and extension of space: a wrinkled bed, a chair, and window. The accordion structure interrupts this illusion. Light seeps through cracks. The hinges render the dematerialized surface into a substantive object, capturing the gaps, overlaps, and partial quality of contemporary private life.
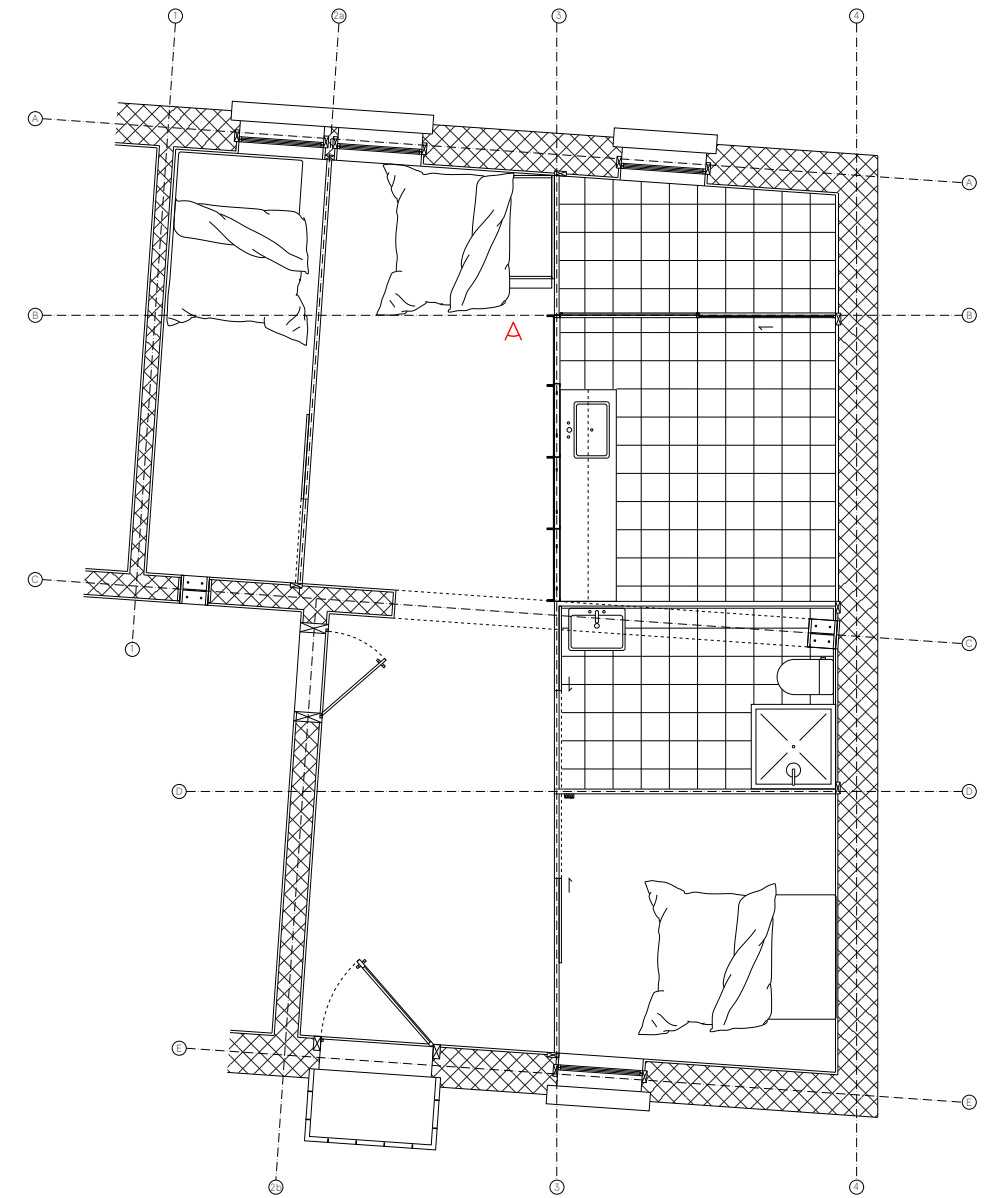
Metal studs substitute aluminum frame glazing. Re-appropriating a material typically used for internal framing foregrounds its material properties. The mis-use, or transposition, articulates the malleability of uses and the idea that the hardware that conditions bodies and cognition are not fixed.
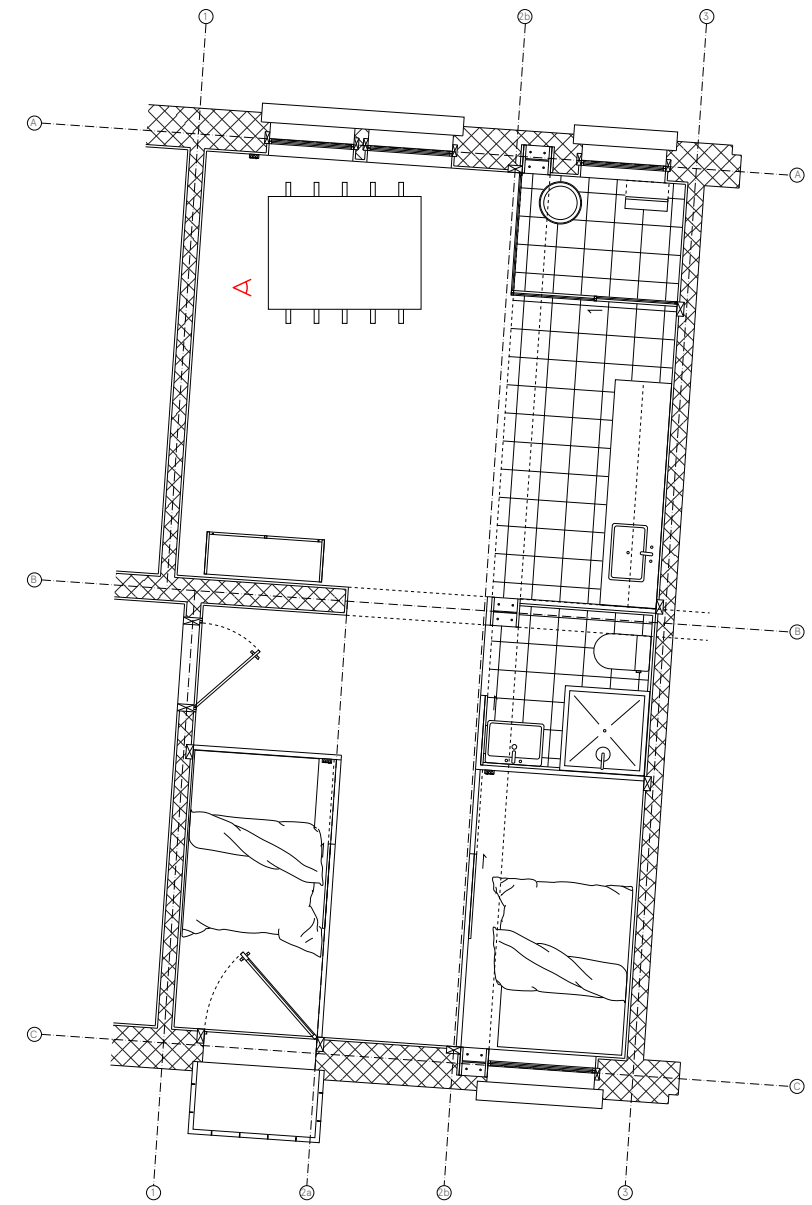
The free-leaning panel substitutes a curtain that covers the window, an ephemeral object or furniture with no name that covers and delineates spaces.
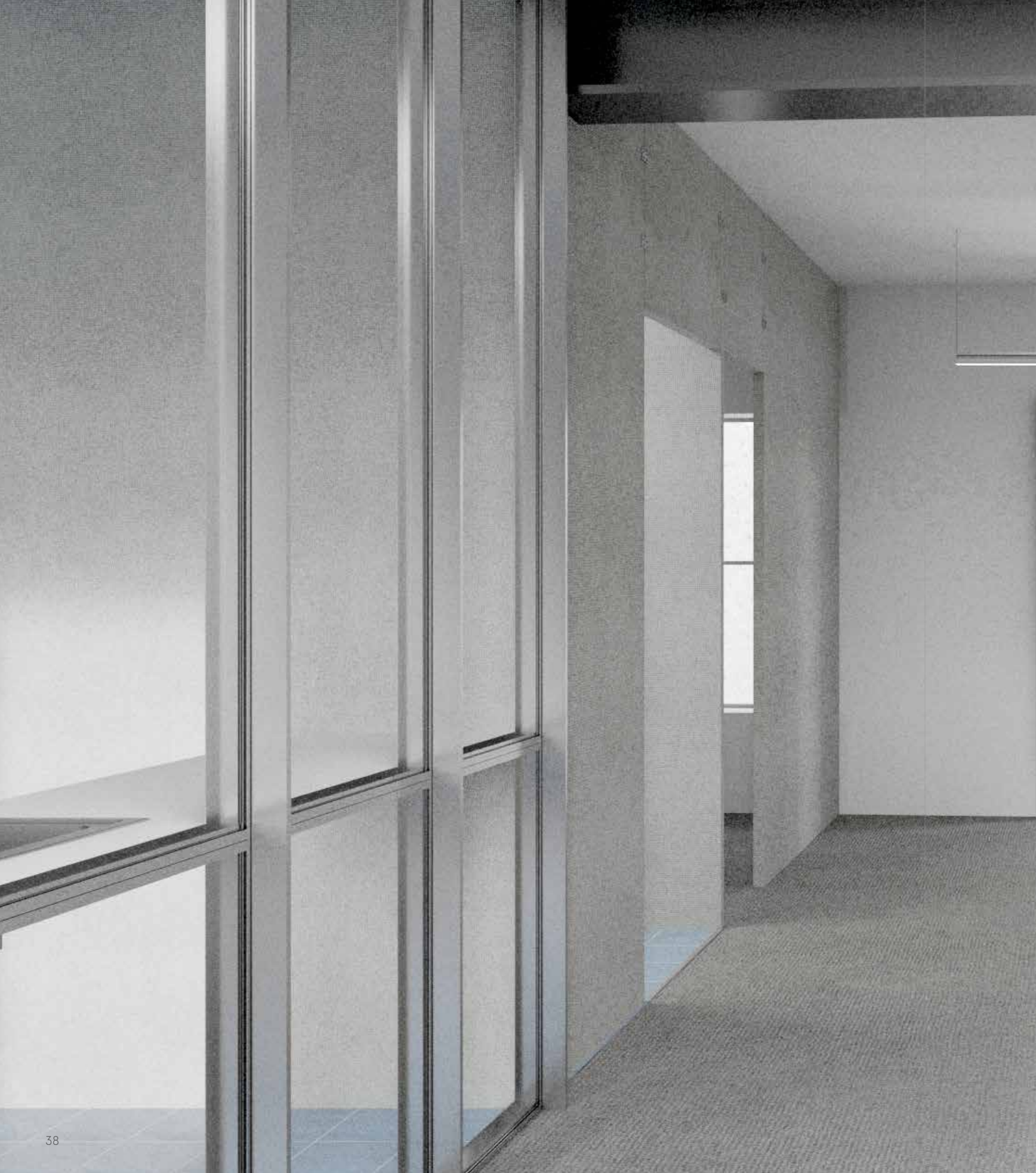
1
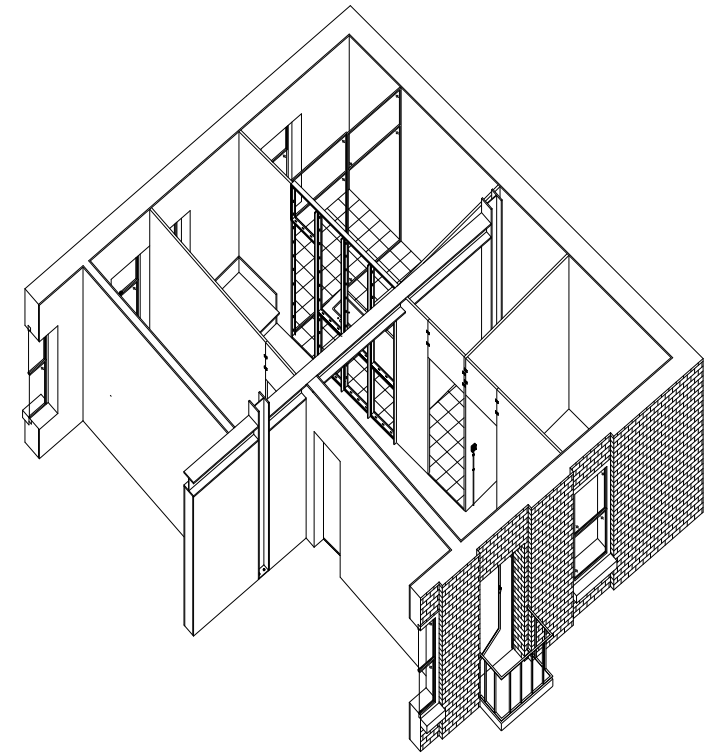
Axon: Bldg 1, Unit B

Plan: Bldg 1, Unit B

2

L3
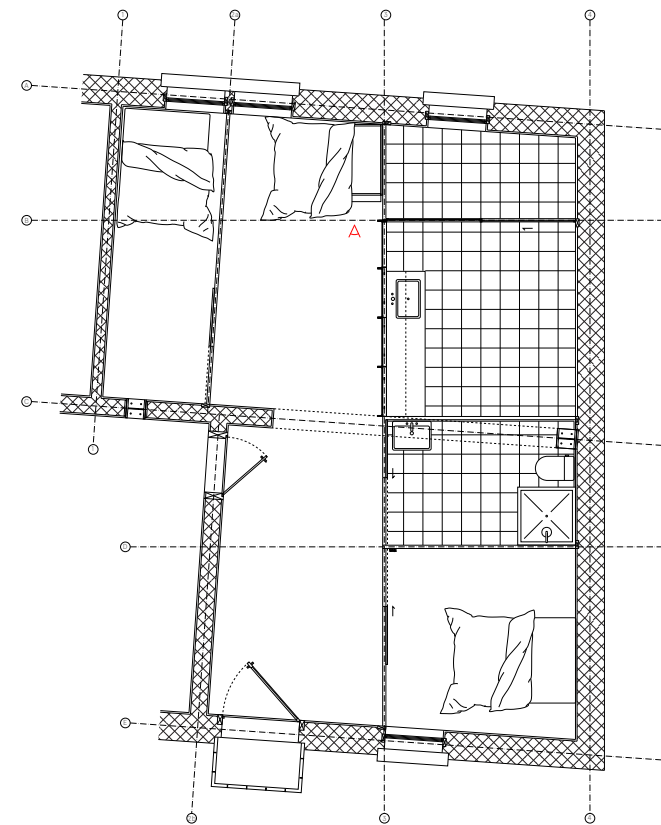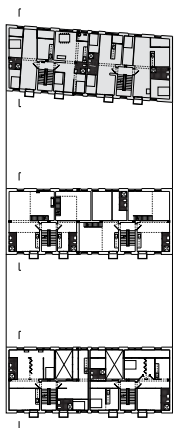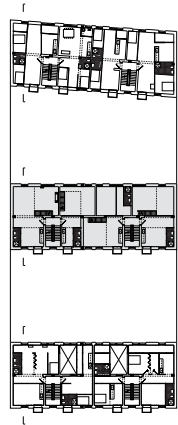
Opposite: View from Bldg 2, L2 towards L3 window

L2
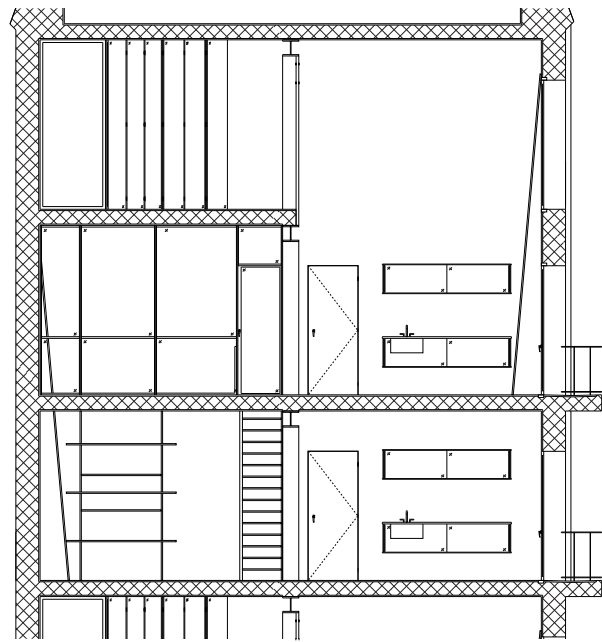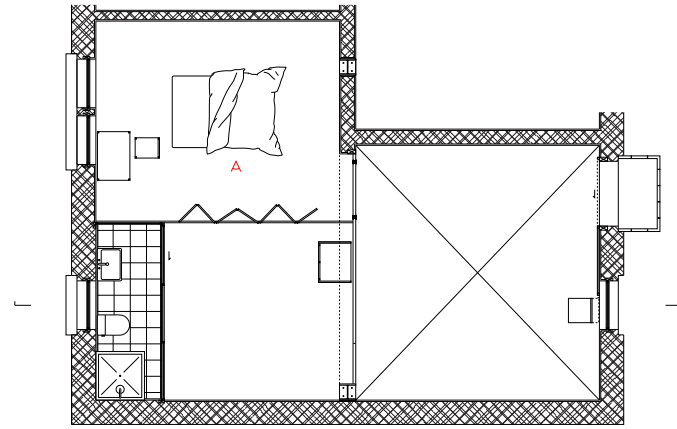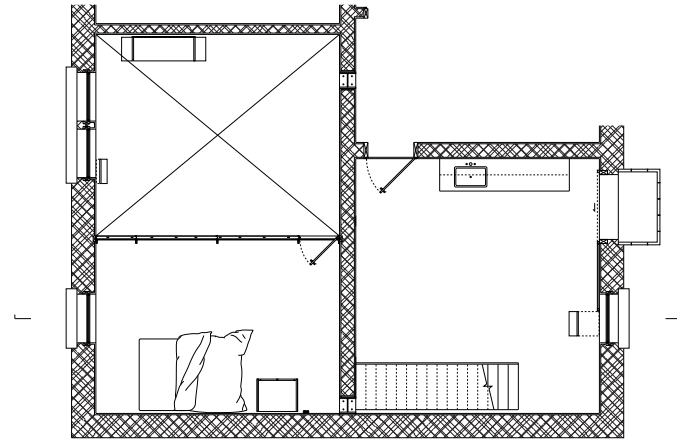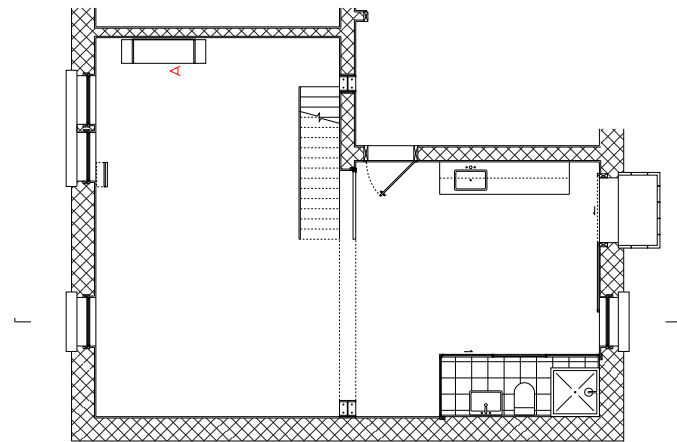
Section: Bldg 2

L1

Plans: Bldg 2, Levels 1, 2, 3
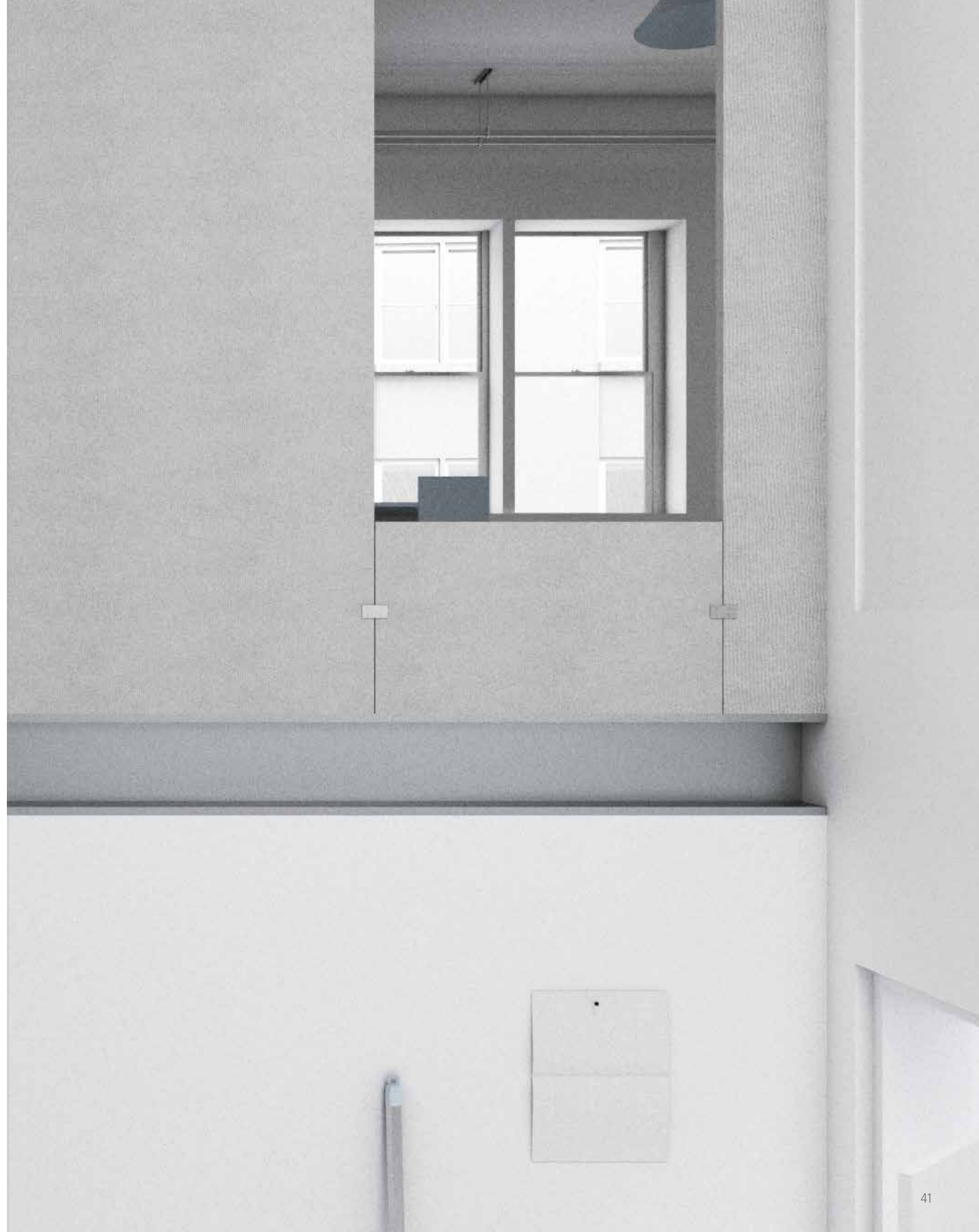
Plan, Bldg 3, Unit A

Above: view across void to
adjacent unit kitchen
Right: view across room,
accordion mirror reflection
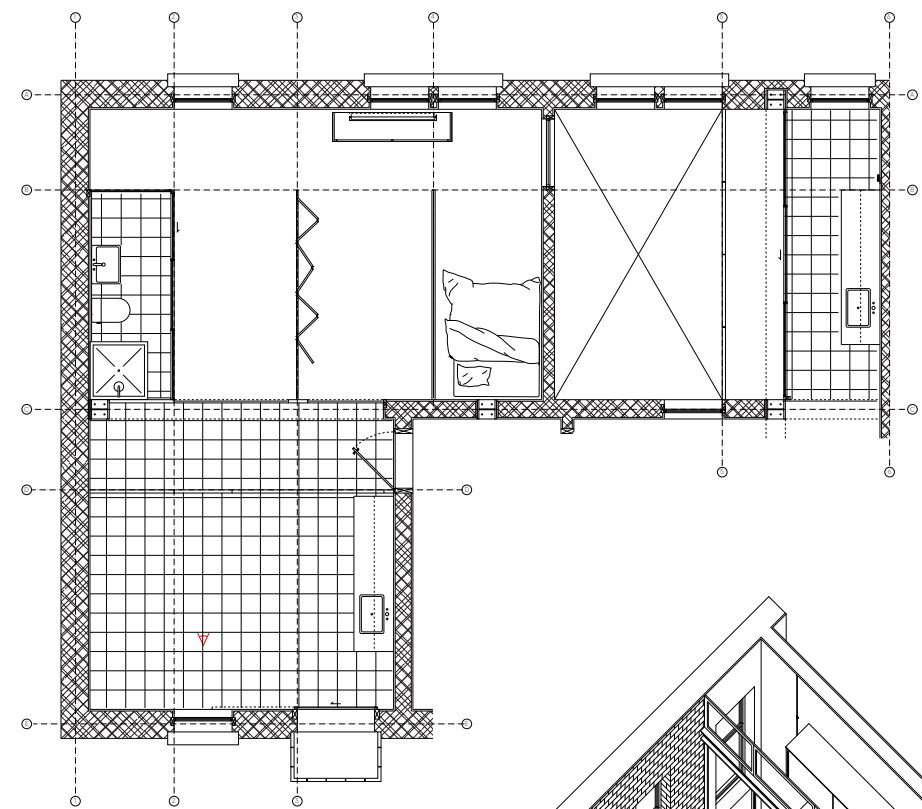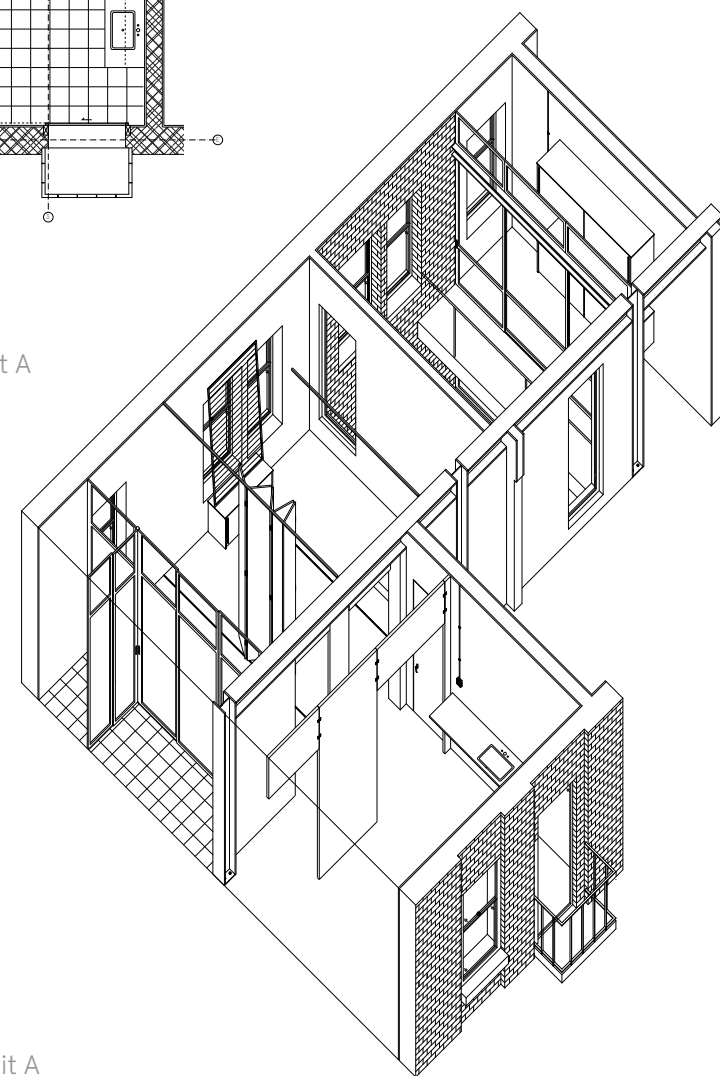
Axon, Bldg 3, Unit A
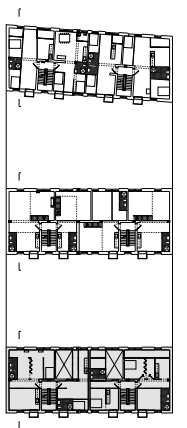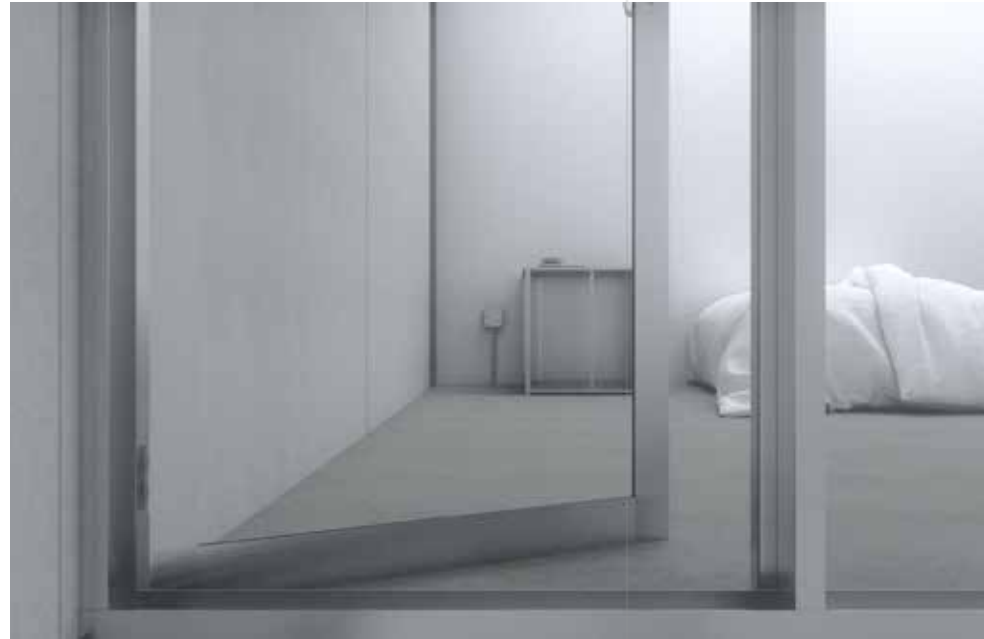
The section change and glazed partitions of the sleeping space enclosure questions associations between sleep and seclusion. The metal screens between a cooking wet space and general-purpose room foreground the impropriety of applying exterior materials to interior conditions. The excess of doors and partitions built from off-the-shelf fixtures permit rooms and circulation spaces to be familiar yet not fixed. In appropriating and mis-applying but not totally abandoning all familiar materials, components, and scales, the project creates and reflects a contemporary subject that alternates between critical introspection and going about their daily life and habits.

Lightboxes:
plywood, plexi-glass, LED strip lights,
screws, 12v transformer, 2x2
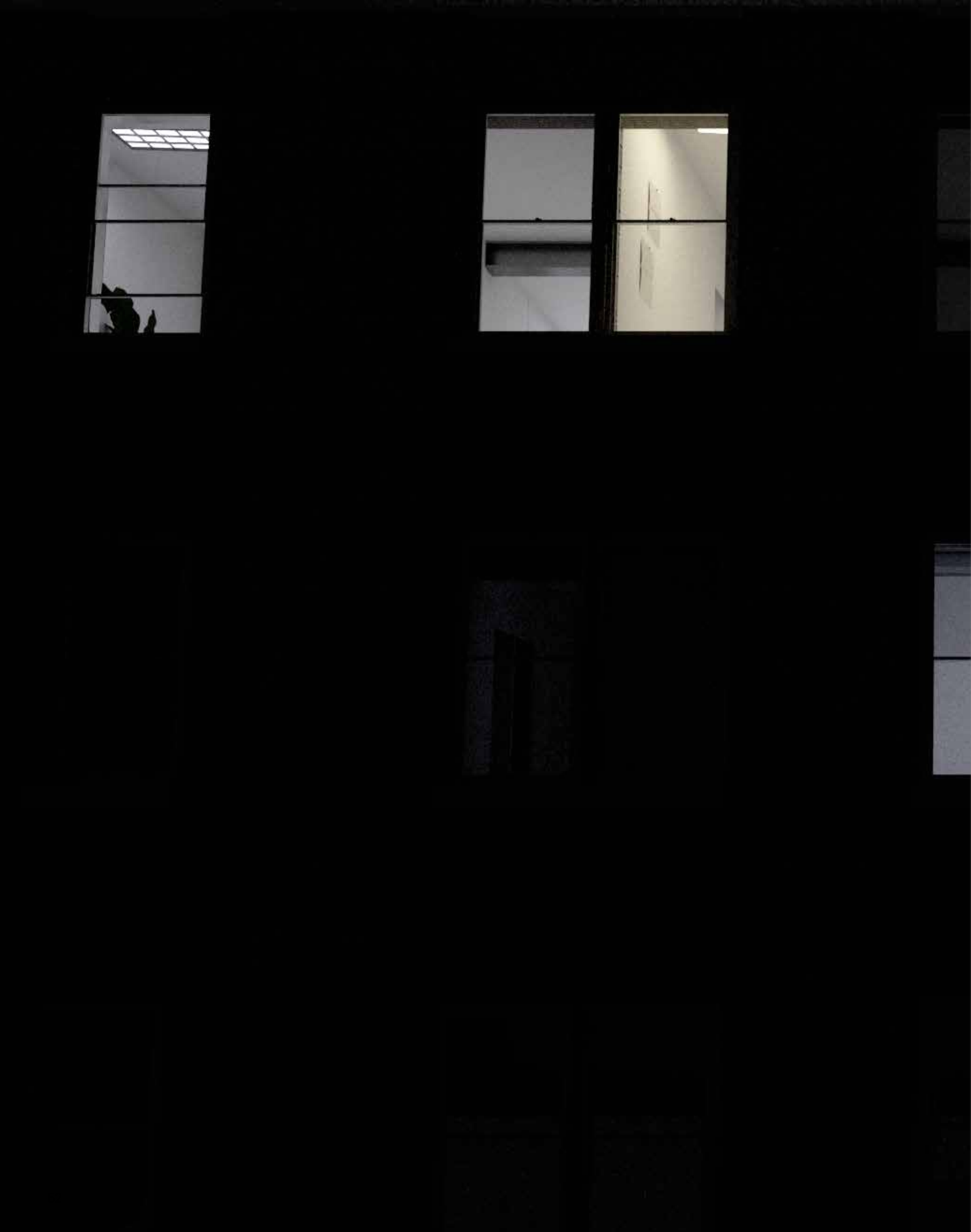
PART II.

I. Familiar Rules

In his 1949 essay "A Short Organum for the Theatre," Bertoldt Brecht describes a form of theatre in which a performance reveals "the rules by which it was governed."[1] Brecht asserts that this alternative structure of performance, the "alienation effect", generates an opportunity for self-examination not achievable in closed narrative. Working in post-war Europe, Brecht viewed this effect as a potential pedagogical tool for the masses. Distanced self-examination served to extend theatre's scope to have an outright political and social function.

This project takes Brecht's attention to device, or estrangement, as a point of departure and explores its translation to architecture with a focus on private life and residence. However, rather than focusing exclusively on critical distance and self-reflexivity with didactic political objectives, this thesis proposes oscillation between the two sensibilities as a means to examine and accept tensions in our lived everydays. The sequence of returning home and walking through the entryway, the way a column touches a wall, or the manner in which a partition folds, goes unnoticed at times and at others noticeably interrupts one's daily habits. Going between "suture" and "estrangement" brings to the foreground the simultaneous and contradictory positions, literal and illusive relations, that the beholder enacts in built space.
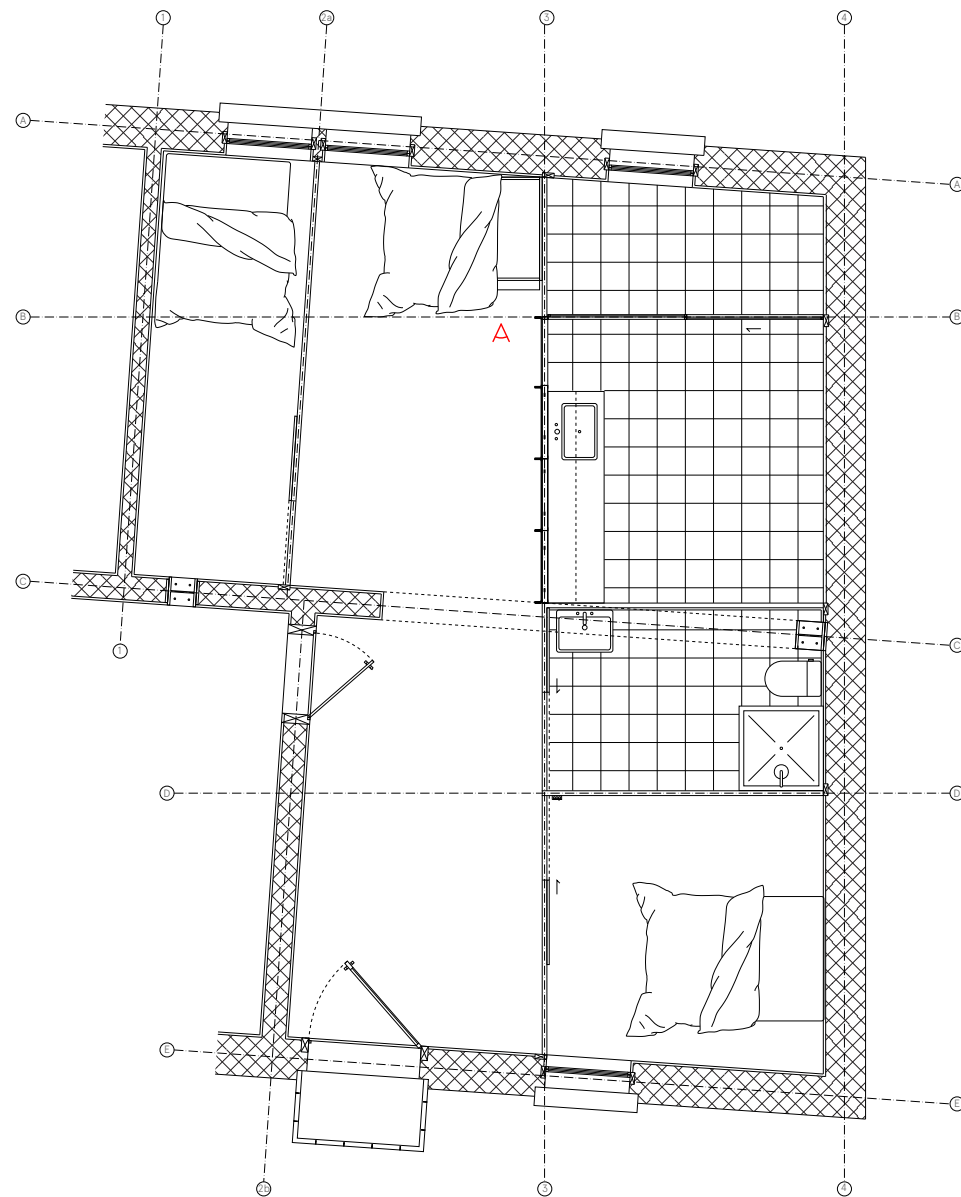
This thesis' interest in the physical or conceptual apparatuses that produce fictional worlds and convention might be better understood in relation to the modernist tendency towards autonomy, or medium specificity. The discussion of medium-contingent rule-systems, which reached a kind of apex in the 1960s, articulated in Donald Judd's "Specific Objects" and Michael Fried's critical "Art and Objecthood" essays, has renewed applications in architecture. Both Judd and Fried are interested in the rules that inform traditional painting and sculpture's dual nature as figurative illusion and real material object. For Judd, nearly all paintings are both illusion and material: "Two colors on the same surface almost always lie on different depths. An even color, especially in oil paint, covering all or much of a painting is almost always both flat and infinitely spatial."[2] He notes the blue canvases of Yves Klein and line paintings of Frank Stella as examples of "unspatial" or "nearly unspatial" and poses working in three dimensions as a way to "object to the old": "Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors—which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art."[3] More significant to this thesis is not Judd's attempt to experiment with spatial abstraction, nor his pejorative attitude towards illusion—he was hardly the first to exhibit this—but his essay's pinpointing of depiction as a provisional rather than absolute artistic convention and the way in which he frames his project as a conceptual response to a model's implicit rules.

Still, the strategies that Judd uses to circumvent painting's deplorable rules are useful to identify as they tend to be architectural, leading one to

Dan Flavin, Nominal to Three, *1964*

ask how architecture assists in creating critical distance, or estrangement, in art. Judd brings up Dan Flavin's fluorescent light-tube installations as an example of three-dimensional work that eschews illusion. To Judd, Flavin's work exceptionally encapsulates the new literalist sensibility because it engages with industrial materials, or "simply materials—formica, aluminum, cold-rolled steel, plexiglas, red and common brass, and so forth."[4] Take Flavin's 1964 "Nominal to Three" installation at the Green Gallery as an example: the work consists of commercially available glass tube lights of standard sizes—which contain an electric current and inert gases—placed in a series against a wall. A single tube, followed by a two-foot gap to the right, followed by two adjacent tubes, followed by another a two-foot gap to the right, followed by three adjacent tubes are lined up against a wall. The piece's relationship to the room's scale, distance to ground and ceiling, and arrangement require compositional judgment and conjure an industrial association, but do not attempt to figuratively depict anything.[5] The lights exist and appear as materials in their allocated space. The relationship that "Nominal to Three," and many other "literalist" works have with their beholder articulates Brechts' estrangement effect in both plastic arts and architectural space, imbuing it with spatial and material qualities of fabrication and production. In their emphasis on process, raw material, and the beholder's experience of the space, the ethos of specific objects assumes architectural concerns, while rendering significant conceptual effort a prerequisite for its engagement.

Fried, noting the conceptual nature of the literalist enterprise, critiques it because of its reliance on "theatricality", or the beholder's

Frank Stella, Untitled (Rabat), *1964*

bodily presence, to fully activate the work. Unlike Judd, Fried claims that "modernist painting has come to find it imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood" and points to the works of Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Frank Stella as examples of paintings that have both illusory qualities and qualities that reference their existence as objects.[6] He asserts that illusion and objecthood are not in conflict and that both are necessary for art—"Otherwise they are experienced as nothing more than objects."[7] Fried rejects the literalists' complete emancipation of painting from illusion and claims that these works are mere objects with analytical effort projected on them to transform them into works of art. In short, they are art only in name. For Fried, a work's referencing of its supports, such as its canvas material, the texture and application of paint, or shape of the tableau, in conjunction with its optical effects, determines its success with respect to the modern interest in autonomy. This architectural thesis is less interested in Fried's and Judd's ideals, and more interested in the qualities and rulesets they have distilled for how an artwork operates.

Negotiating between representation and material reality has never not been a concern in architecture. The tension between literalism and figuration—what only appears to be a structural support, and what actually functions as a structural support—has long been a persistent question, from Greek orders to reveal details of contemporary tectonics. Yet in today's context where the discipline continues to test the capacity of architecture as a mode of affirmative and critical inquiry, what motivates a work within and without its given rule system remains a cogent way to advance the conversation.
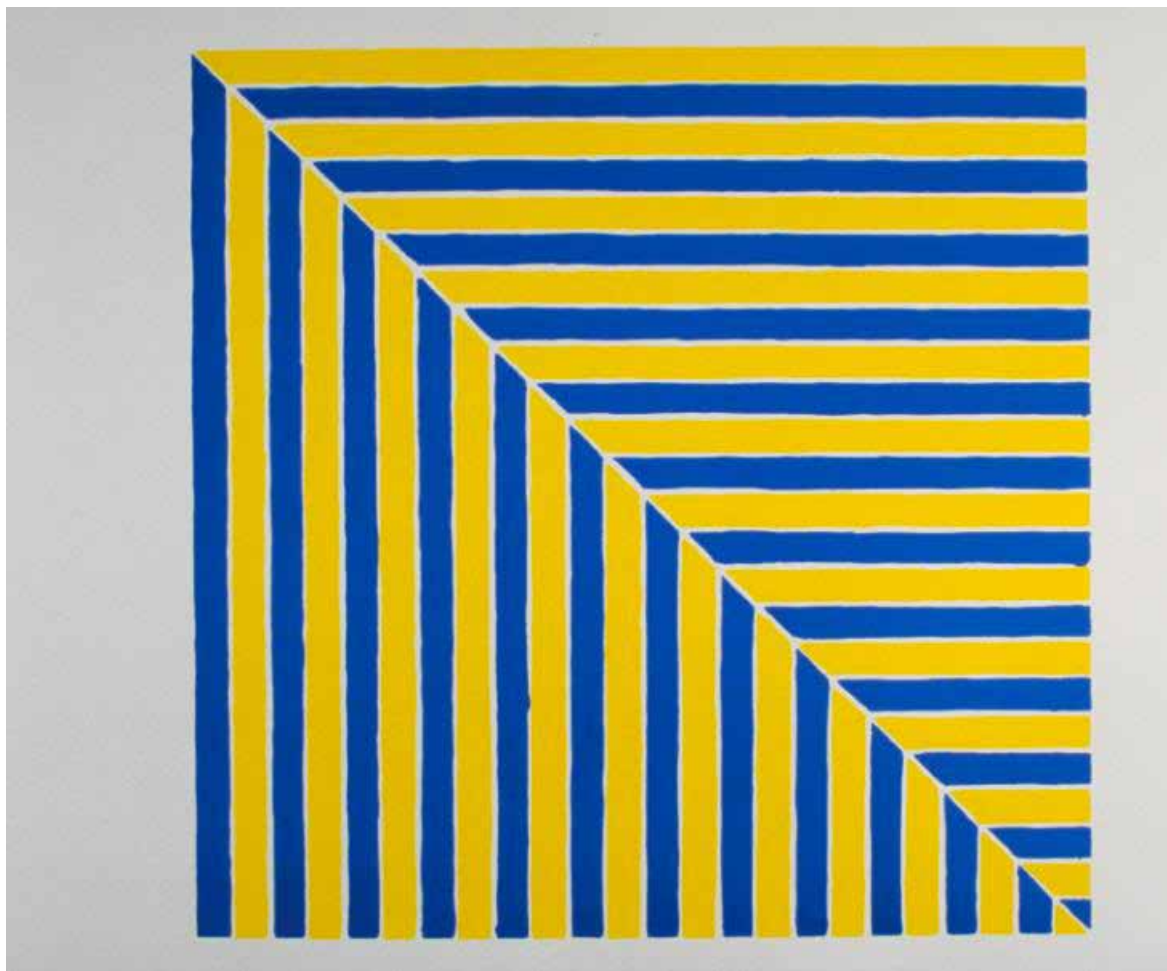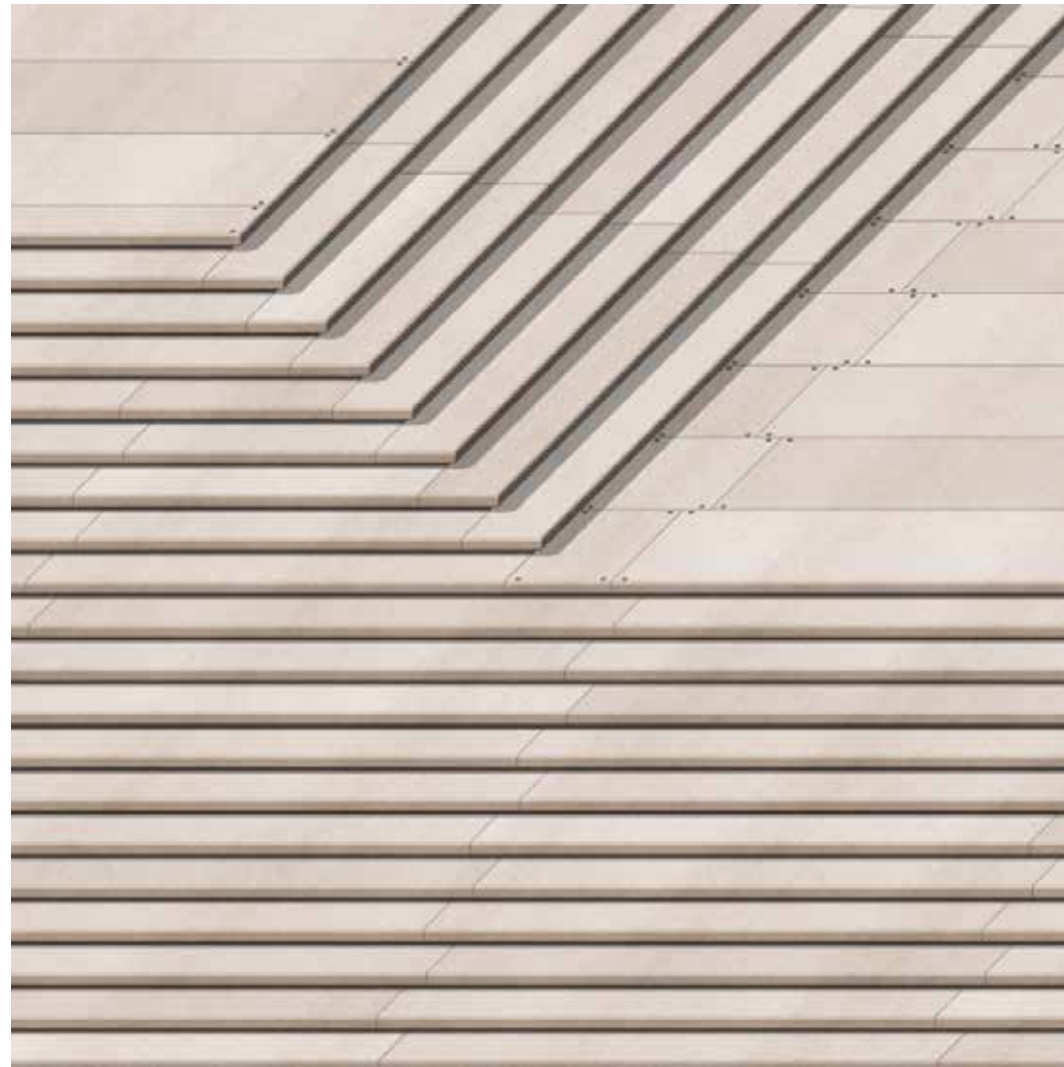
Jørn Utzon, Sydney Opera House, Sydney, 1959–1973. Image: DOGMA, 2019.

For some, the question of the literal and theatrical is endemic to late capitalism, where subjects are constantly shown idealized ways of being and performing in contemporary life. In his essay "Manet: Images for a World without People" Pier Vittorio Aureli argues that the "interaction and identification between picture and viewer, subject, and object is a fundamental characteristic of the productive and re-productive apparatuses of the post-Fordist economy."[8] DOGMA, Aureli's firm which he co-founded with Martino Tattara in 2002, almost entirely employs representational techniques that stress an image's perimeter, create flattened graphic patterns, or invert positive and negative relations, which draw attention to their compositional construction. While the condition where the observed work—whether textual, three-dimensional object or two-dimensional image—produces the participating subject has always existed, Aureli claims that such architectural images are particularly effective didactic agents in the current condition where digital data transactions and new visual interfaces are hyper-pervasive and serve select interests.

Another example of this renewed attention to object-subject experience is evident in Michael Hay's and Andrew Holder's lecture that accompanies the 2019 exhibition "Inscriptions: Architecture before Speech."[9] Hays and Holder recount Fried's description of Tony Smith's 1959 recollection of his discovery on the New Jersey Turnpike while it was under construction. Smith took three students on the unfinished roadway, driving without "lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored

Perspective: View towards entry with doors, Building 3, B

lights."[10] In referencing Smith's experience of "something mapped out but not socially recognized,"[11] Hays and Holder invoke not only the experiential and literalist qualities of the 1960s art enterprise but also its resistance to linguistic classification, or "speech", as contemporary architectural concerns.

Distinguishing between that which is unnamable or not-yet-named, and that which is namable or already-named, stresses the significance of familiarity in determining suturing and estranging effects. That which is unnamable is un-positionable within an existing model or system; its unfamiliarity makes it "strange." Conversely, objects and experiences that do have names perform in sentences, or speech, without pause or interruption. The act of naming thus "sutures" or familiarizes. Naming normalizes an object in a given system, or assimilates an event into socio-cultural categories.

Rather than inserting nameless objects and experiences in order to assign names, this thesis project questions the advantage of names and the role of fixed definition. It both accepts names and creates moments for recognizing their precarity. The project includes images and drawings that depict recognizable residential scaled spaces, and housing components such as wet spaces and sleeping spaces, and common material surfaces such as drywall and framing studs. Sometimes these familiar elements operate in an unnoticeable way, as a traditionalist might approach an pictorial painting. Other times, they announce themselves, requiring an analytical act to activate, as a Stella painting references its canvas supports, or as an aluminum Judd box requires the viewer to walk around to its back side to observe how the box terminates.

a
b
c
d
e
f
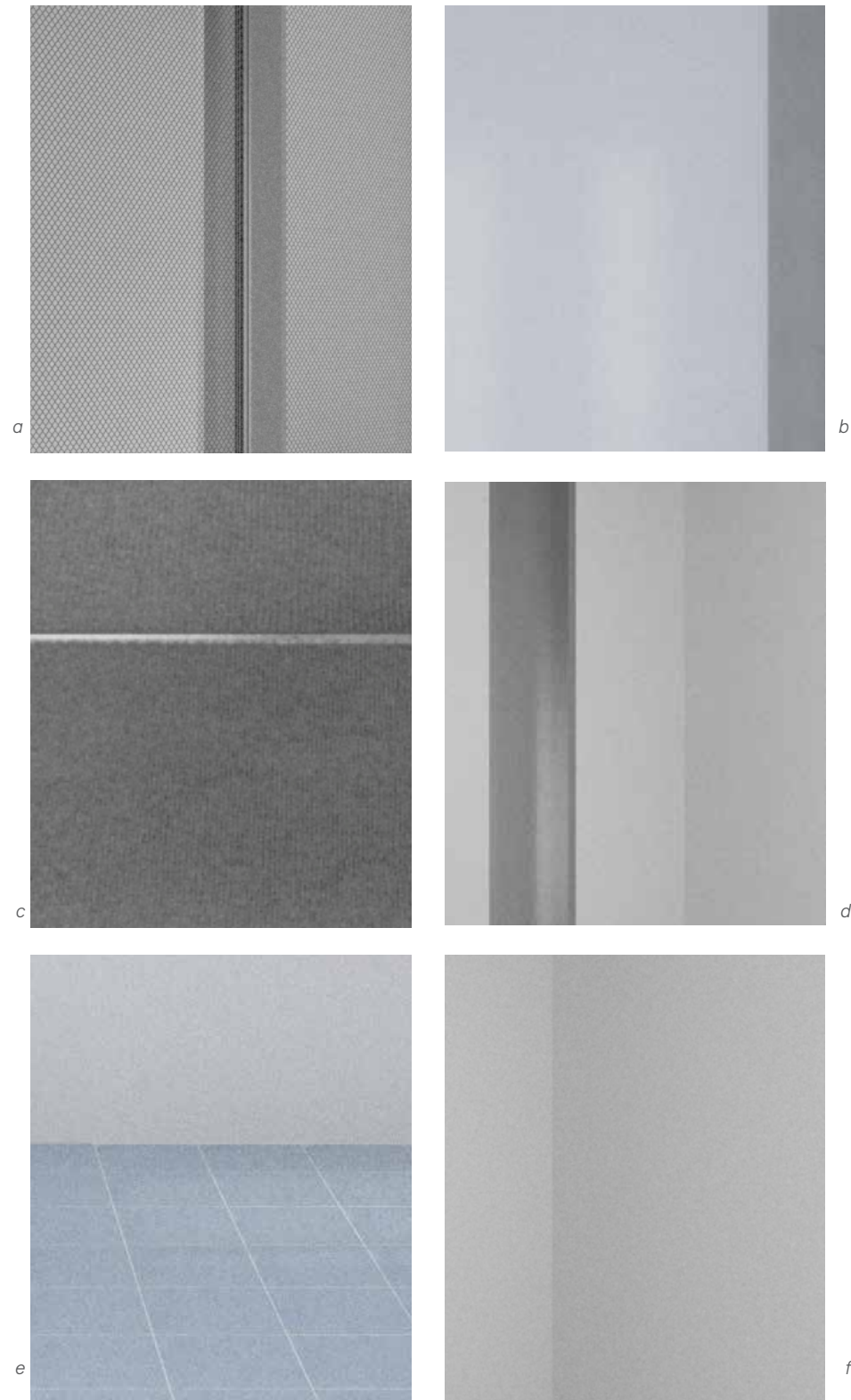
The default mode in which one engages with built architecture is literal,[12] such that engaging with a three-dimensional object or a spatial support neither depicts nor requires or activates analytical effort, as with a Stella painting or Judd box. The project assumes that interacting with the literal outside of a gallery, such as a carpet that covers a floor surface in an apartment, is not out of the ordinary and does not produce a moment of estrangement. In fact walking on standard carpet flooring is a moment of absorption, or suture—experiencing a material in a setting so banal and commonplace that it is does not create pause or admiration. Because conventions of engaging with built architecture, unlike painting, sculpture, photography, or film, begins with a literal rather than a pictorial sutured sensibility, its strategies for referencing its supports is different from Judd's proposal to present "simply materials".[13] In order to stress architecture's apparatus, the project attempts to bring one's attention to the ways in which our engagement with literal material relies on its own rulesets that differ in scale and scope from the ones that literalists were concerned with in the 1960s.

The process begins with selecting several sets of architectural registers and defining their rules. The first register is material: screen (a), steel (b, d), carpet (c), tile (e), drywall (f), and paint that have their own respective textures and grains, locations of application and programmatic associations. Take white dry wall and steel W-sections, for example: the project defines steel column and beams as physical load-bearing structure where members and are typically hidden behind smooth plaster surfaces or dry wall panels. To estrange these materials, the design conserves their

a

b

c

d

e

f

wall panel and structural function, but reorganizes its expression, refraining from concealing the steel. The columns and beams that replace continuous load-bearing walls are flush with the surface of the sheathing such that the members appear embedded in the wall, acquring optical qualities. The dark grey reflective extrusions serve as a graphic break in flat white continuity rather than as a secondary independent addition within the wall, such that the typical white plaster wall is charged with a border of dark steel.

The second architectural register is tectonic, such as the way an aluminum rail fits between floor surfaces (a, b), a metal screen divides two spaces (c), an assembly of stud framing serves as a partition (d, e), or a curtain covers a window (f). Each of these elements has a proper locations and performance. Inserted "properly", they suture the inhabitant in a familiar codified environment. However, once misplaced, substituted, redundant, re-appropriated, these assemblies begin to reference the rules that imply their impropriety. The metal screen's placement between a cooking wetspace and general-purpose room brings one's attention to applying exterior materials to interior conditions. The use of interior wall stud framing where aluminum-framed glazed partitions are typically used highlights the closeness of the substitutes between the metal extrusions, but also how the stud framing lacks the the optimized qualities of conventional glazed partitions. A free-leaning board rests against wall where the curtain might hang in front of a window, also bringing attention to the gap in the board's performance in comparison to a curtain's.

This logic is also implemented in the register of "program" where the stud system and sectional change, instead of opaque walls, are used to

a

b

partition the sleeping space from the double height space below (a). The metal rails along which accordion or sliding doors pivot and slide are spaced rather close, such that they create rooms the width of hallways, corroding associations between shape, spatial quantity, and occupancy (b).

However, this system reveals issues with the initial asumptions. The choice of white walls as a given convention begs the question of what factors inform such a choice. If the exposed steel column system is implemented in all units of all buildings, does it not become typical or ordinary due to its frequency? If an inhabitant had a prior residence that had embedded structural members, would this supposedly estranging system serve as an instance of suture instead? If an inhabitant lives in a unit with the initially-unfamiliar steel structure system for a few months, years, or decades, its estranging effects must cease at some point. These questions highlight the inevitability of conditionality in making assumptions and the lack of boundary around architecture as a experience or system, unlike painting or sculpture or film that engages its viewers in a determinate space and time and can constantly re-perform on unaccustomed eyes. With architecture, repeated occurrence or sustained enactment of estrangement easily slips into the realm of suture, revealing the impossibility of assigning fixed examples of suture and estrangement.

Absorption's and attention's susceptibility to change through repetition and enactment brings to light the provisional nature of rulesets, however real and absolute they present themselves. While each cannot exist without its relative position to its other, it is worthwhile to note the possibility and significance of shared definitions for limited durations of

time. This project takes on a final register of suture and estragement that addresses the temporal and contextual constraints and arbitrary nature of rules in its series of perspectival representations. The rows of perspective images are positioned in such a way to modulate between models of looking, inhabiting, and viewing. The breaks draw attention to their scaffolding—the wall and space on and which they are presented— and the clusters represent a continuous moment that produces suture. With the co-existence of both, suture is not viewed as positive, or in a position of primacy, and estrangement is not a negative, or in a position of absence.

Presentation view

Lightbox: Mirror view

Notes

1 Bertoldt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre*, trans John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964)
2 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975* (New York: Judd Foundation, 2015)
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
5 Jeff Wall comments on how we now believe the purity of non-depiction was never achieved in "Marks of Indifference," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, 1965-1975, ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 247-267.
6 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998)
7 ibid., 151
8 Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Manet: Images for a World Without People" in Scapegoat 03, Realism, (Toronto: Scapegoat Journal, 2012), 10-11.
9 Andrew Holder and Michael Hays, "Inscriptions: Architecture before Speech," (Cambridge: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, January 23, 2018) Exhibition Lecture.
10 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998)
11 ibid.
12 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998)
13 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975* (New York: Judd Foundation, 2015)

View: Bldg 2, Unit B

II. Film and Architecture

Architecture's affinity with film has a logistic dimension: both engage a mass audience and require massive financial investment. The two mediums also share a reliance on theatricality as they are activated by an observer that forms a relationship with a temporal event in space. They differ where film is an instrument of depiction, while architecture is an object or environment in literal space. However, what makes film a particularly apt comparison for this architectural thesis is how the two each produce systems, narrative modalities, or worlds, that exist in time. This project adopts strategies from filmic systems, privileging incomplete and partial ways of seeing, and resists comfortably resting within one.

With a technical history that spans a dense one hundred and twenty years, film is a relatively new medium, permitting a close view of its quickly shifting conventions. From cinema's inception up to the present—from the period of silent montage, to the technological developments that enabled long depth-of-field shots, to Japanese films that disregarded Hollywood conventions of camera positioning, to contemporary art movies with heavy digital post-production—the medium remains preoccupied with its dual position as a constructor and depictor of worlds. A surface glance at this history reveals a range of experiments that can be loosely characterized as attempts to manipulate one's experience of time and attention.

Sergei Eisenstein, Battleship Potemkin, *1925*

Jean Renoir, The Rules of the Game, *1939*

One of the earliest models of cinematic depiction, montage theory, most visible in the work of the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, concentrates on the sequencing of frames to produce conflicts of emotion, movement, light, and direction. Eisenstein's editing technique focused on "cutting [reality] to tiny bits,"[1] evident in his film *Battleship Potemkin* (1926). Shots of a ship getting ready to set sail are carefully interspersed among shots of a waving crowd. Each frame change presents high contrast: the direction and force of the wind blowing the white sails, the slow speed of the departing ship, and the frantic waving from the close-ups of faces in the crowd. The rhythm of the temporally coinciding but locationally fragmented shots produce spliced-together snippets that form a closed system of narration. In this system, the on-screen content's relationship with real time is excerpted and accelerated.

Alternatively, the French critic and theorist André Bazin is interested in a kind of cinema that privileges "plastics", or a shot's content rather than the relation between discrete frames. Bazin championed the depth-of-field shot, which captured the unfolding of events and on-screen movement and relations in one continuous take.[2] An example of such a shot is visible in Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* (1939), where Robert converses with his mistress Geneviève in a spacious window-lit room in her Paris apartment. The shot begins with Geneviève in the foreground watering her plants, and Robert at the end of the room looking towards the window where the Eiffel Tower stands. The camera depicts both figures in the frame in sharp focus, and captures their slight movements. Robert ambles from the window in the center frame and leans on a dresser in the right frame corner, turning
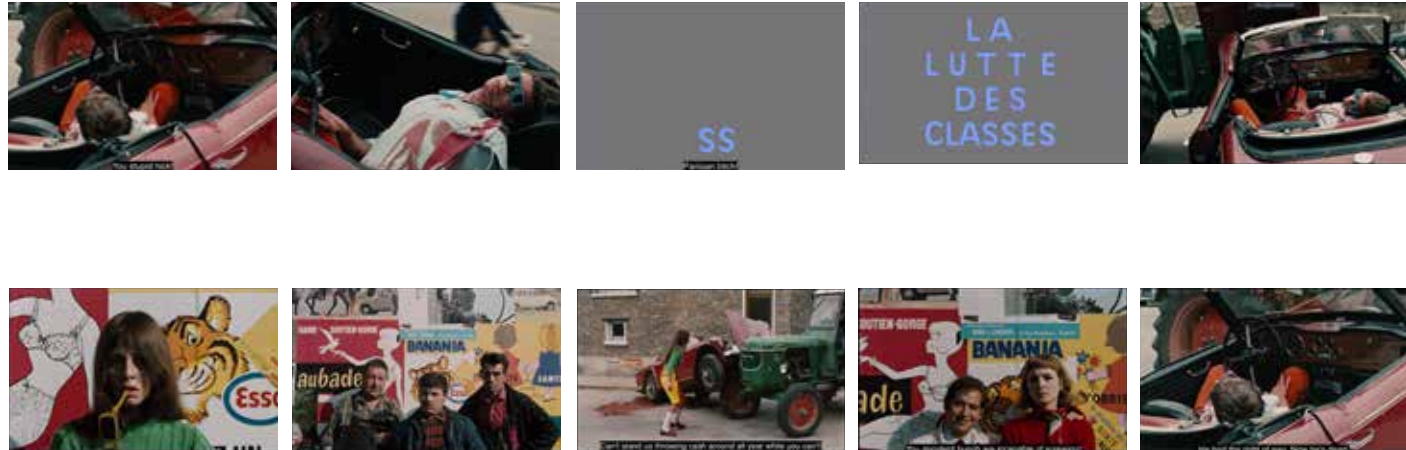
Jean-Luc Godard, Weekend, *1968*

towards Geneviève as she visits a different vase and examines its flowers. Unlike montage, this mode of narration depicts relations within a fixed camera location and continuous shot. Geneviève and Robert's conversation unfold in real time, a one-to-one temporal registration with the depicted event.

The differences between these two models do not announce themselves until the model changes. To shift from Eisenstein's montage to Bazin's prefered long-depth-of-focus-shot convention, or the reverse, the viewer makes adjustments in processing the structure of the story's progression, the length and rhythm of the shot duration, and intimacy with the on-screen subject. This dissonance creates a moment of estrangement, where the viewer's attention is turned momentarily to the apparatuses of the film's production—the editing and camera work—rather than the film's fiction. Estrangement thus finds itself relying on a few premises: it requires an analytical act where the viewer empirically deduces the new structure of narrative. It also is dependent on time. The duration of what precedes and suddenness with which one system shifts to a new structure determine the efficacy of the effect.

Yet some films actively foreground this kind of estrangement and shift between systems within one work. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend*, flat black frames with bold color text are interspersed between shots, highlighting the graphic flatness of the screen. Letters appear on the screen one by one, spelling "LA LUTTE DES CLASSES" (The Class Struggle). The next shot shows a fake-blood-soaked man in blue glasses splayed dead in the driver's seat, followed by frontal shots of members of the "society" staring at the

camera—his disillusioned girlfriend, a group of mechanics, a well-dressed couple. In this excerpt, three systems of narrating are depicted: an animated text frame, a car crash, and a series of character "types" that confront the viewer's gaze. The film's alternating between multiple systems cycles the viewer between sutured and estranged, unable to comfortably process a series of events in full and constantly reconciling disparate relations to time.

Michael Snow's 1967 *Wavelength* pushes the audience's tolerance for temporal suspension to an extreme. The 45-minute film is one continuous shot of a building interior. The narrative is reduced to an extended interior view of a loft apartment accompanied by a single rising sine wave tone. An assemblage of traffic sounds, mechanical whirring, phone conversations, footsteps, furniture being moved, a record player playing "Strawberry Fields", the track coming to an end, followed by more ambient sound, are unified by the continuous zoom from a fixed point and a tone that slowly increases in pitch.

Like *Weekend*, *Wavelength*'s camera work creates shifting narratives. However *Wavelength* operates with primarily still objects and relationships that emerge as the scale of depiction changes. As the camera zooms, the field of view gradually diminishes. At minute seven, peripheral walls of the loft fall out of the edge of the frame, such that the viewer only sees a wall of windows. At this point the traffic movement and sounds beyond the glass panes are the subject. At minute thirty, the windows are beyond the camera's frame of view and the viewer sees only a wall with a few postcards. By minute forty-two, the screen depicts the image on a single postcard: a view of the open ocean. This gradual shifting does not permit one to

*Michael Snow,* Wavelength, *1967*

Michael Snow, Wavelength, *1967*

Cindy Sherman, Untitled, 1978

definitely determine precise moments when the subjects change. However, they inarguably create series of recognizable situations: an enclosed room, an ambient street environment, an unbounded wilderness. These moments of recognition create "suture" and the durations between them, where the viewer is acutely aware of the painstaking slowness of the zoom, produce "estrangement".

The presentation of this thesis project takes after *Weekend* and *Wavelength* in that it produces both suture and estrangement within the work. The serial composition of the perspectival views prompts a horizontal reading of the images, such that some images are strung together as clusters while others are more isolated and depict a break from one location or camera modality to another. The three rows of images correspond to the three buildings, and loosely narrate the experience of approaching the building from the street, entering a unit, and navigating the interior space. The clusters of the perspectives are akin to a continuous panning or zoom shot, while a gap indicates a change in location to a different unit. Like *Weekend* and *Wavelength*, the presentation modulates between suture and estrangement, using the image-objects' locations to indicate temporal continuity and break.

In his essay "Pictures," Douglas Crimp discusses the role of time and staging in signifying a way of looking. Writing in the decades following Fried's critique of theatrical art, or art that requires a beholder to experience a work in time, he argues that art of the 1970s displayed an interest in literal temporality but with a reinvestment in still images. Crimp's example is Cindy Sherman's 1978 photograph of herself dressed as an office worker

A

B

C
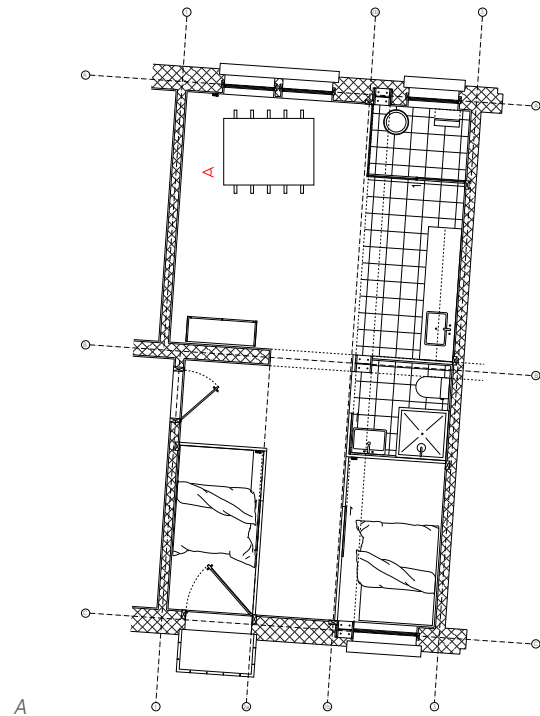
with skyscraper towers as a backdrop. Crimp questions what enables the viewer to discern the image as artificial yet within a familiar modality of looking: "Can we locate the solicitation to read the picture as if it were fiction in a certain spatial dislocation—the jarring juxtaposition of a close-up face with distant buildings—suggesting the cinematic artifice of rear-screen projections? Or is it the details of costume and makeup that might signal disguise?" By adopting conventions of filmic representation—the low camera angle, rear screen projection, and costume and makeup, the image is not a "re-presentation of that which is prior," but exists independently as a staged film still, "a narrative ambience stated but not fulfilled."[3] The still's capturing a way of looking that has temporal dimensions renders the appearance of being in a film an codifiable type. A sensibility of appearance, or modality of looking—instead of an icon or object—is a signifier for the headspace one assumes when watching a film.

This project's choice of depicting still frames comes from wanting to portray a sensibility of being in the world that articulates a present condition that is mediated through still and motion images. The stills appropriate a way of seeing that references a temporal continuum, and acknowledge the influence that films have on our idealizations, and our mimetic relationship with them. The project aims to explore cinematic strategies of suture and estrangement in architecture, not film, which led to the decision to represent the project in drawings and stills rather than film itself. Crimp's description of the analytic and conceptual processes required to reconcile disparate temporal associations is explored in built space (A), image composition (B), and in the arrangement of tableaus on a wall (C).

Lewis Baltz, Candlestick Point, 1987-89

The structure of the project's presentation takes after the exhibition strategy of Lewis Baltz, whose meticulous installations often included an irregularity in an otherwise systemic grid. In the New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California (1974) show, one frame is appended in front of the first image in the bottom row, as if adding an afterthought or emphasizing each image's indispensability. In his Candlestick Point (1987-89) series, each photograph sits in a thickened white frame in an even grid. However, some images are in color and others are removed, creating gaps, series within the series, and a hierarchical system of groupings and associations. The contrast between the deliberate and accidental qualities of the misnomer foregrounds the act of mounting the installation, and the inherent subjectivity in presentation.

Walter Moser writes about the link between Baltz's photography and cinema, and notes how Baltz's serial mounting and selective omission is parallel to the filmic technique of champ/hors-champ, or "on-screen space" and "off-screen space".[4] The gap between a series of four black-and-white views of the shoreline in Candlestick Point and a lone color image that depicts a view of the sun illuminating the San Francisco hills in the background serves a break in shot continuity. Like a new shot, the blank spaces indicate where the photographer changed location, or switched to a difference storyline. The photographic sequences in the 1977 Nevada series further articulate Baltz's cinematic influence—the organization is similar to filmic structure, beginning with an establishment shot of the city from a distant vantage point, followed by shots of street views, and intimate close-ups of a single house's wood cladding.

Moser compares Baltz's oeuvre with the works of the Italian filmmaker

Michelangelo Antonioni, Red Desert, *1964*

Lewis Baltz, "South wall, Mazda Motors, 2121 East Main Street, Irvine, 1974" in New Industrial Parks near Irvine

Michelangelo Antonioni, whose work is often noted for its architectural exploitation of emptiness and white space.[5] Baltz and Antonioni share a tendency towards formal abstraction. Like Baltz, the director frequently captures his subjects "frontally so as to deprive it of its three-dimensionality."[6] At the opening of *Red Desert*, Giuliana and her son Valerio stand facing the camera in an industrial landscape with train tracks parallel to the picture frame and smokestacks in the background. The characters rarely move diagonally—instead they pace parallel to the camera or advance perpendicularly. The film closes with Giuliana and Valerio once again in this setting, facing the camera while they observe the blowing yellow smoke. They turn, and walk away from the view, and the camera switches direction, so that they walk towards the camera out of the frame. Antonioni's frontal confrontation of the subject, coupled with his privileging of right angles and cartesian structures, abstracts space into flattened picture frames and distended moments with minimal movement. This editorial device portrays settings as static states and characters as clear objects of study, creating a tension between the medium's inherent temporal progression and the erratic characters.

Like shots from *Red Desert*, Baltz's photographs often depict an unstable subject in frontal views. In Tract Houses (1969-71) and New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California (1974) images of industrial wastelands, rural homes without people, and reflectionless windows create horizontal bands of texture across a picture plane, two-dimensional painterly squares, and thin lines that divide flat panes. His compositions acquire a graphic quality, with little modeling or diagonal lines that suggest spatial depth. The absence
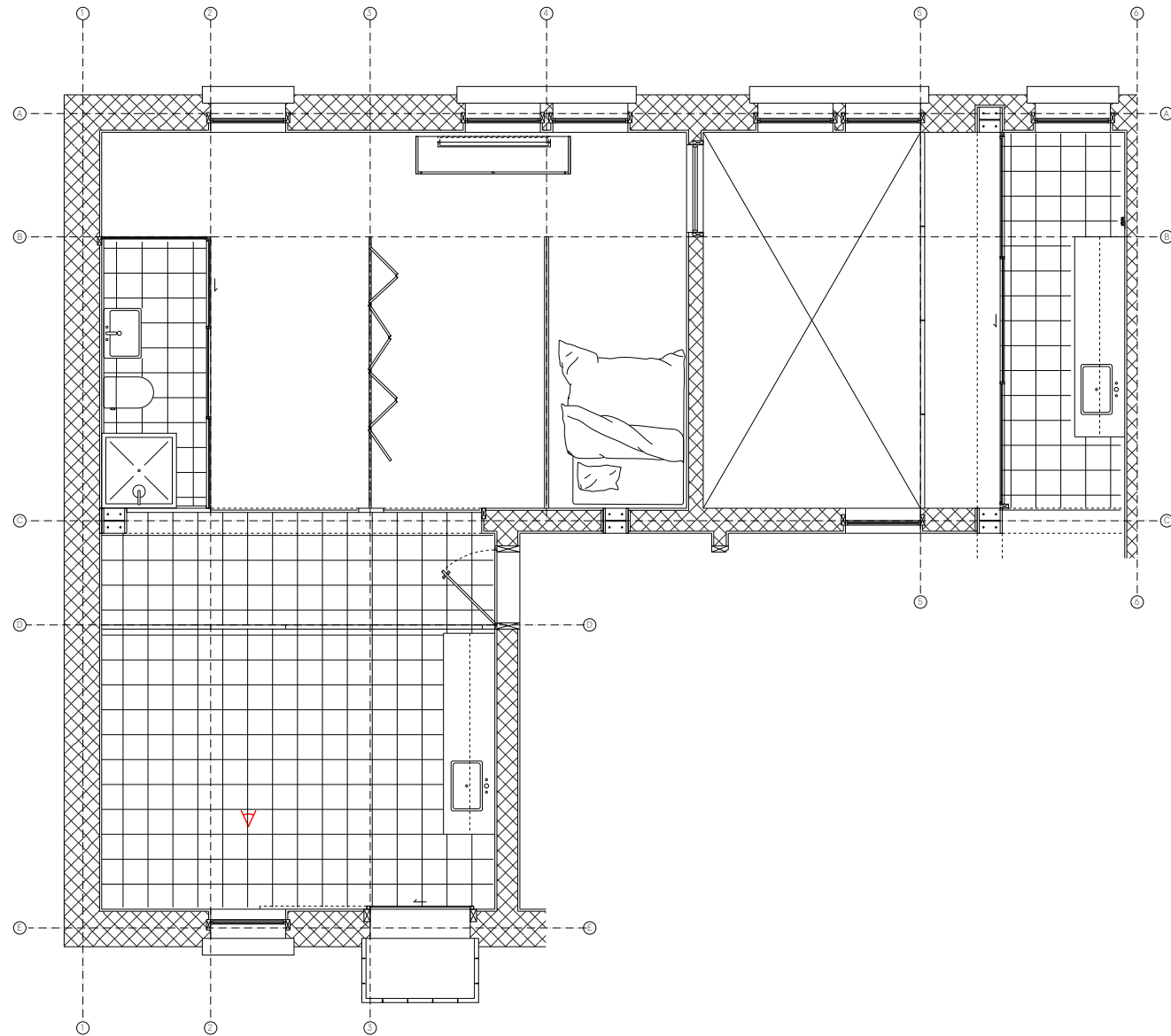
Plan: Bldg 3, Unit A

of people in the residential landscapes further distances the depicted subject from time and lived experience, as if documenting an artificial film set or abandoned town.

This project employs Baltz's and Antonioni's techniques in the construction of perspectives, adopting their formal abstraction as a way to extend and arrest one's attention to their environment. Typical units have right-angled structures and blank walls, and the camera eye is positioned perpendicular to the opposite walls such that the room's depth is compressed and the view is static. The units in the street-facing volume with skewed elevations have angled walls that deviate from the typical plan, producing images that subtly suggest movement and a shift from a parallel to rotated view.

As an intervention on an existing building, the project inevitably references a prior condition and moment in time. The new insertions are contingent on the existing unit organization and the project conserves only the load-bearing walls, clearly indicating that an alternate system was later added. Each panel and member emphasizes process, refering to their temporality: the unsheathed metal studs, the thin composite boards, and the connecting plates that sit proud of the boards, all have additive relationships to the existing structure. The free-leaning board is the most extreme instance of addressing architectural permanence and temporality—it appears as emphemeral construction debris, but its polished chrome material and placement in front of a window render it precious and functional. These allusions to the construction sequence and transparency around tectonics as apparatus present an architecture that is

View: Bldg 3, Unit A

always conditional and partial, a three-dimensional sculpture that inherits what comes before and anticipates an inhabitant-subject. It can be undone or last a while, suturing and estranging with each transition.

This project does not present a film but an architectural design and still frames that reference time and a filmic modality of looking. In oscillating between internal narrative and referencing apparatus, which demands sustained attention and requires exercising empirical logic, this thesis articulates the necessity of both this analytic sensibility as well as its relief.

View: Bldg 3, Unit A

Notes

1 *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. (New York: Oxford UP, 2004)
2 André Bazin, "The Evolution and the Language of Cinema," in *What is Cinema? Vol. 1* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005)
3 Douglas Crimp, "Pictures" in October, Vol. 8 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1979), pp. 75-88
4 Walter Moser, "Filmic Stategies in the Work of Lewis Baltz" in *Lewis Baltz*, (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012).
5 Hashim Sarkis, "Constants in Motion: Le Corbusier's 'Rule of Movement' at the Carpenter Center" in Perspecta, Vol. 33 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 114-125
6 Walter Moser, "Filmic Stategies in the Work of Lewis Baltz" in *Lewis Baltz*, (Köln : Buchhandlung Walther König, 2012).