COLLECTIVE CONSUMPTION:
a game for living

Master's of Architecture Thesis
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Rhode Island School of Design

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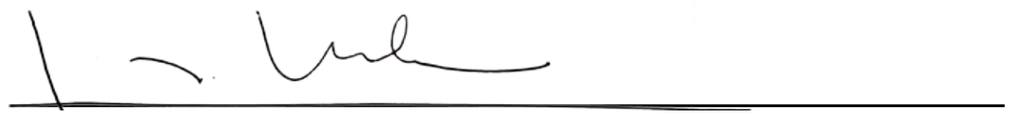


Jonathan Knowles (Thesis Coordinator)

Statement

"The time-lapse fluctuation of our societal floor plan has accelerated. Now you can almost watch the walls go up and down in real time."
-Rem Koolhaas, *Elements*

There is an efficient and beneficial way to collectively consume resources, but our houses and apartments do not function this way. The commons still exist, but their locations are sparse and specific. What if we established communal spaces that connect private dwellings and blur the lines between them? What new responsibilities and freedoms would arise? If we establish new commons and new abilities to share spaces and resources, we can help alleviate the pressing problems of housing today. Such as; insufficiency of income, environmental harm, and social alienation.

I will develop an architecture that will be collectively consumed for the benefit of a diverse group of users. To do this, I will create a kit of parts that challenges the assumptions of the North American dwelling.

Alexander D'hooghe of ORG for Permanent Modernity argues that the flexible and durable building types put forth by John Habraken could offer a possible shift. Habraken argued that the conventional building template consists of a tower (a steel or wood frame structured) sitting atop a podium (for parking, cultural amenities, or storage). Unlike the tower/ podium archetype of the past, "open" buildings could offer increased flexibility and adaptability for the future.

This system will be deployed in Oakland CA. where there is a rich history of communalism and dissent, that is presently being challenged by safety concerns, and a rapidly inflating housing market. These factors make the area ripe for an alternative approach to the housing problem.

CONTENTS

PART 1: PARTITION

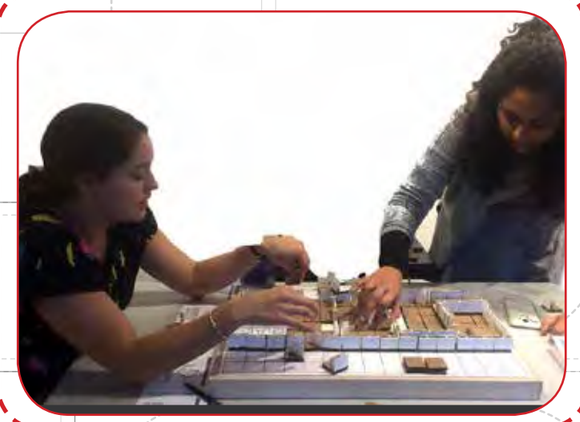
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your new dwelling! It has been outfitted with a unique set of movable parts to enhance your living experience. More parts await you in the library, help yourself to them! There is also a new neighbor just two walls away. Feel free to introduce yourself, and work together to enhance both of your living experiences. If the library doesn't have the part you're looking for, perhaps your neighbor will! There are no winners in this game, but your challenge is to create a richer, more beneficial shared space for all. Your tools are this kit of parts, and each other.

I conceived this board game as a testing ground to renew the conversation on communalism and the reordering/division of the dwelling. The failures of this game would serve to highlight points of friction and design challenges surrounding the architecture of communalism.

While the playful spirit of this experiment translated easily onto a traditional game board, the architecture of the board challenged the spirit of the game. By constraining players to a fixed grid of fixed dimensions, the shared space became what it was meant to fight against. Large private spaces were subdivided into smaller private spaces in order to negotiate a shared space that left players wanting more. Instead of opening up into a series of rich shared spaces, the board reasserted post-war social norms of the past 70 years.

The game raised several key questions for further analysis. Does a shared space have to be operable? If not what does a fixed shared space look like? What elements can must remain stationary as service to shared spaces? What is the NEED for this type of communalism in today's world?



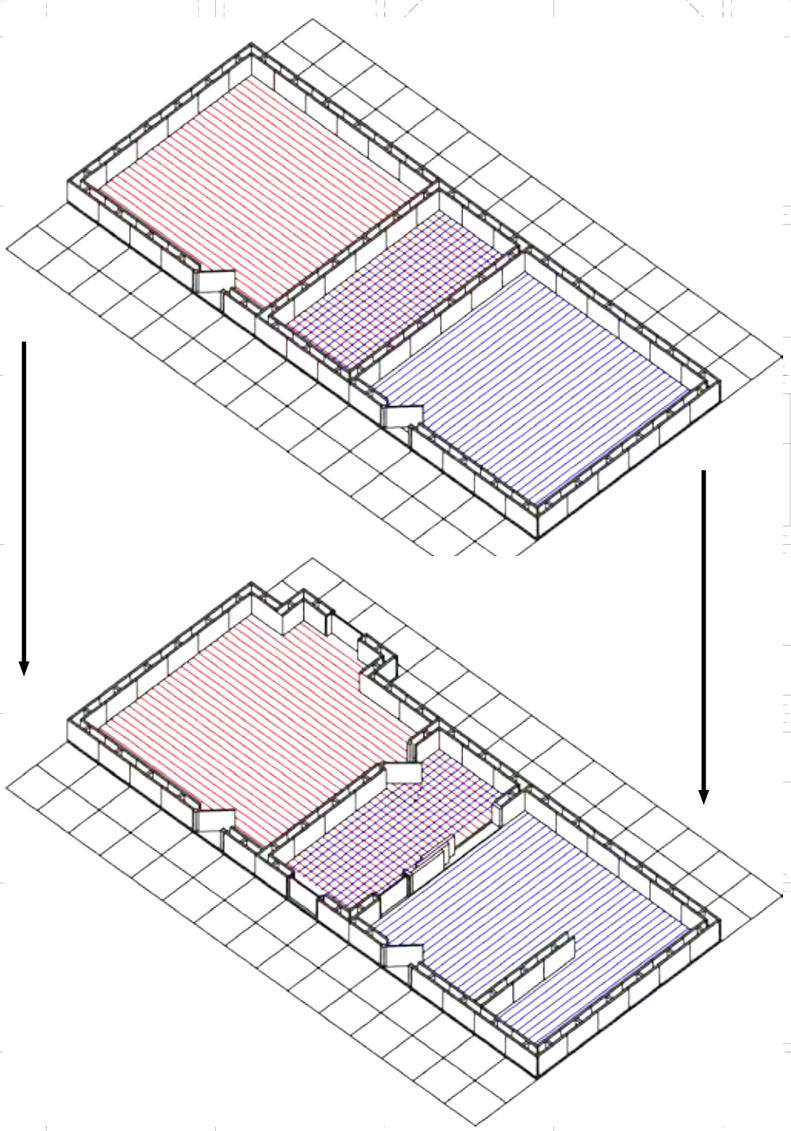
Players were encouraged to consider collective and individual needs in order to begin sharing building components and built spaces.

Shared spaces generally occurred in the form of a common area between two private residences.

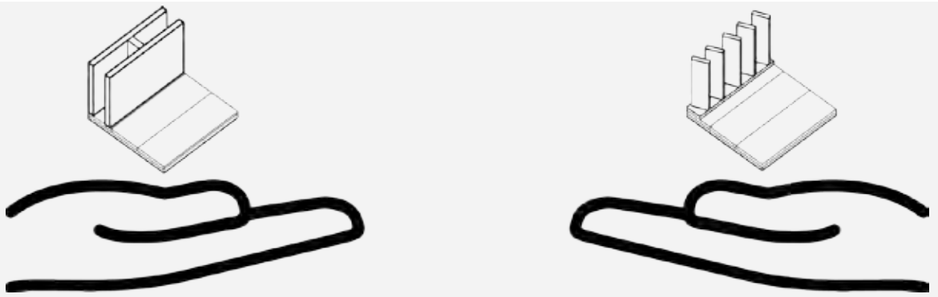
OBJECTIVE

This cooperative role playing game asks players to consider each other's needs in pursuit of a more beneficial shared spacial condition.

Players expand their living spaces into the common zone by trading resources to the bank and each other. The successful deployment of collective consumption leads to a more desirable end condition.



RULES



- Begin by deciding on a time limit for the game to take place. 5-30 minutes are recommended for play
- Players begin the game by discussing their preselected programmatic desires in order to respect them as they reshape the board
- Each player may take one free module from the library
- Players are allowed to exchange pieces freely between each other.
- Pieces can move freely about the board once they are in play
- Every piece can be moved according to the mutual desires of the players. This includes kitchen and bathroom utilities.
- There are no turns, but players can decide to collaborate or defect by working together to shape the board-space
- If a player decides to remove a piece/pieces from the board entirely, those removed can be exchanged with any piece in the library according to the value exchange chart.

DOCUMENTATION

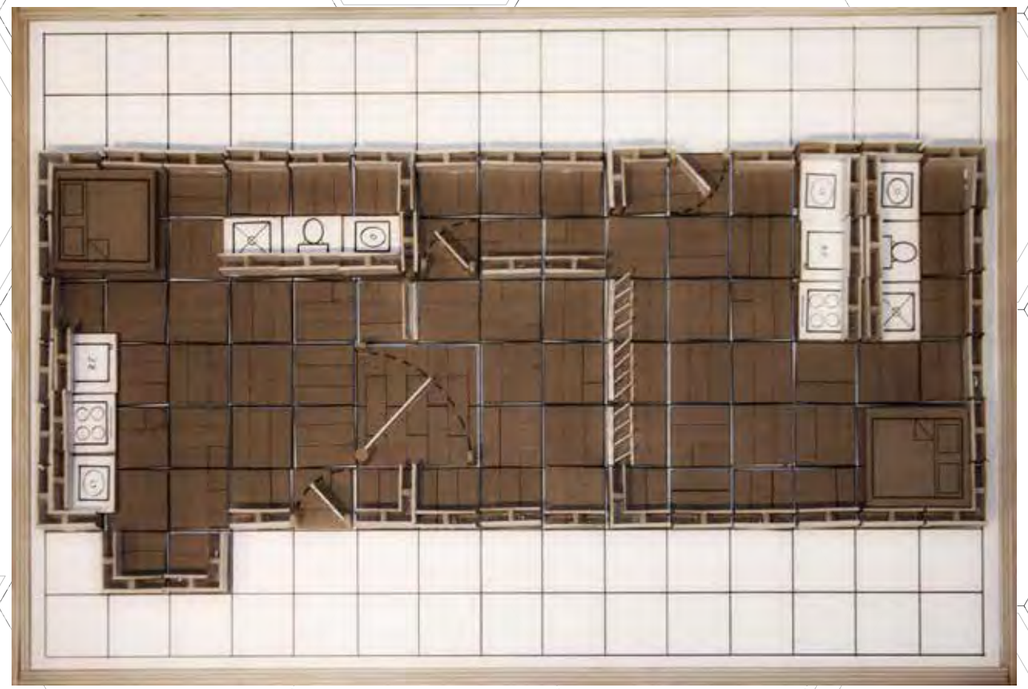
I documented and recorded the results of each game using coded axonometric drawings. Each game was played between two new players who role-played their current lives and programmatic requirements out within the game space.

GIACOMO + KEVIN

RACHEL + VAISH

ZOE + MARCUS

ENDING THE GAME



Congratulations, you have successfully began a community of collective consumption! When the established time limit has expired, players must conclude their changes to the dwelling. Any final disputes may be resolved, and the final condition is recorded for further analysis.

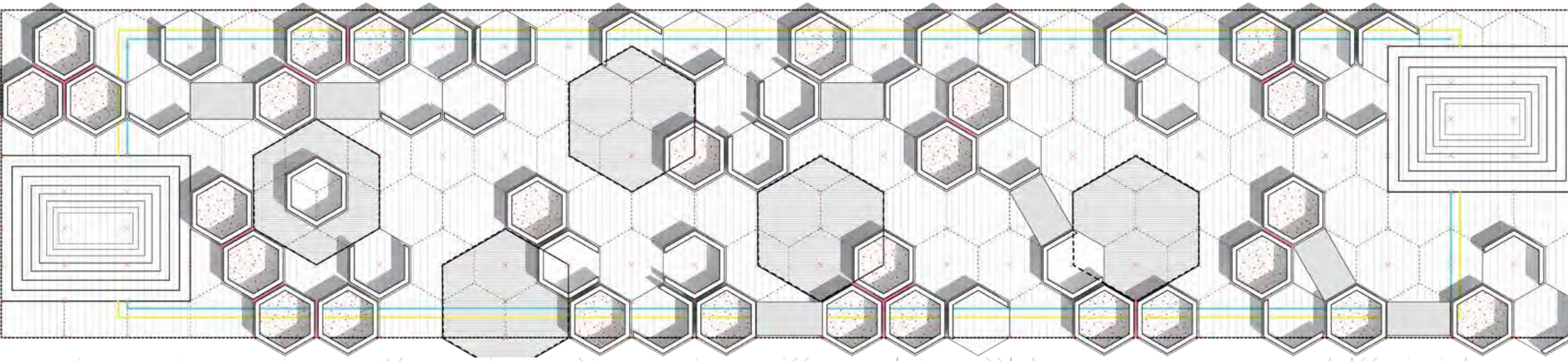
Throughout these games and tests, I learned several key things, and have raised important new questions. The most important issue that this gamed raised was the relationshionship between the structure of the board and the movements of the users. While this rectangular gridded scaffold is condusive to many classic board games, it has entirely different social implications whe the grid becomes lived. Our current living situations are most often gridded, why do we default to the grid, and what new situations arise when we subvert it?

While the grid could be somewhat restrictive, each game still played out independently based on the attitudes and needs of individual users. The game could also be seen as a study of how users from different lifestyles and background approach the problem of exchanging spaces.

PART 2: REVISIONS

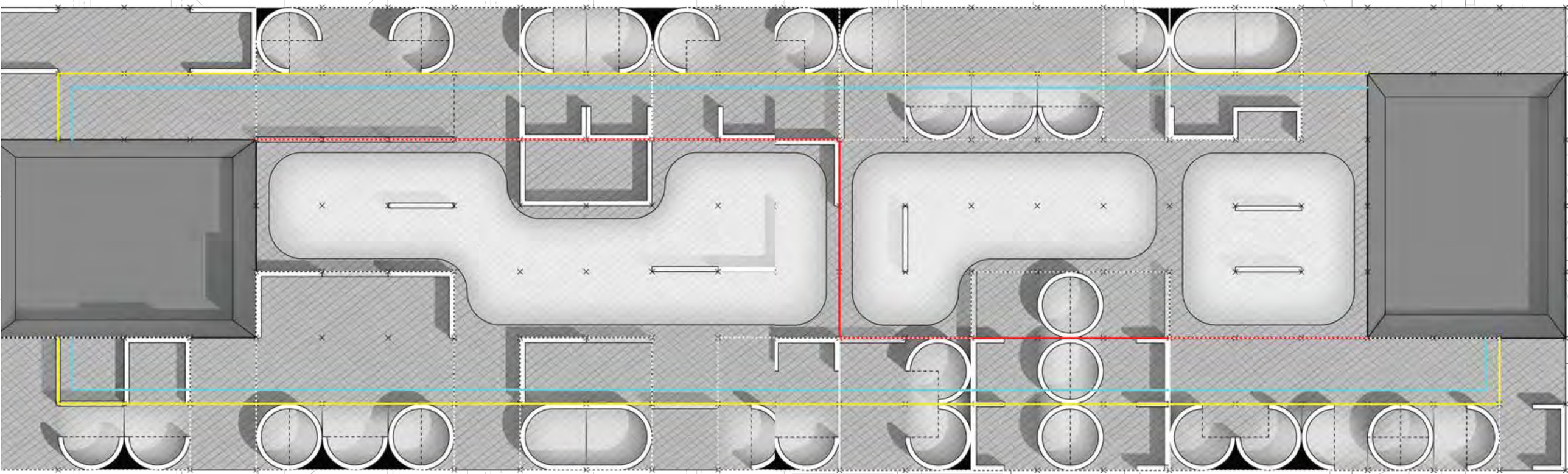
REVISION 1

After receiving initial feedback on PARTITION I started to reconsider the game board. PARTITION offered a limited and inward looking solution, I needed to rethink how I organize a building grid to offer communal spaces with both movable and stationary parts. The building should also break free of the grid in some way in order to address context and surroundings.



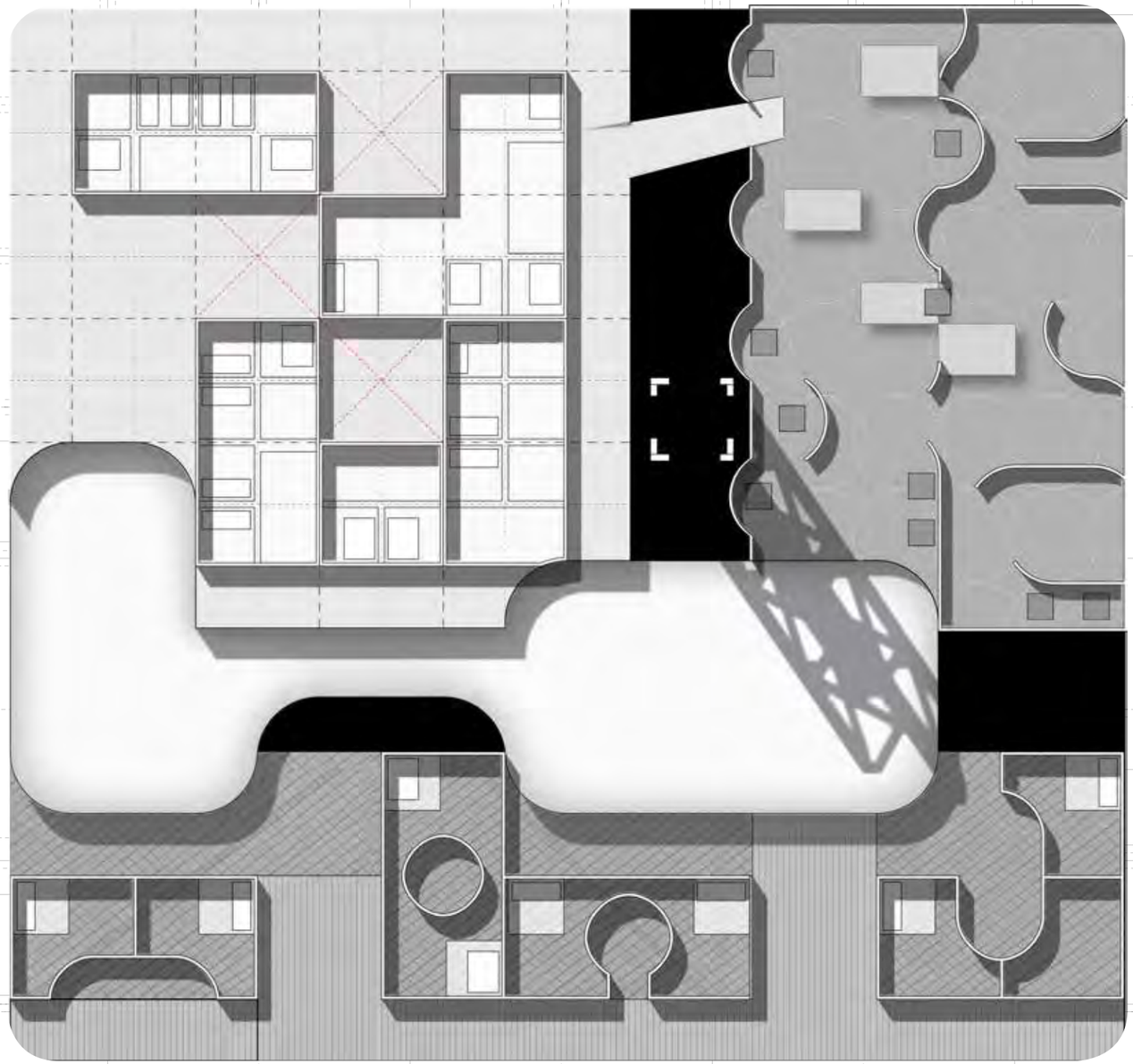
REVISION 2

In REVISION 2 I learned that a consistent relationship between module and grid may not be ideal solution for building communal spaces. While these modules offer some variability and spatial diversity, they essentially reduce this community to three fundamental symbols: the private program (closed circle), semi-private program (open polygon), and communal space (residual spaces). The community can operate on more of a gradient than these symbols offer. Indeed when confronted with the task of responding to individual and communal needs, it will need more tools than this kit offers.



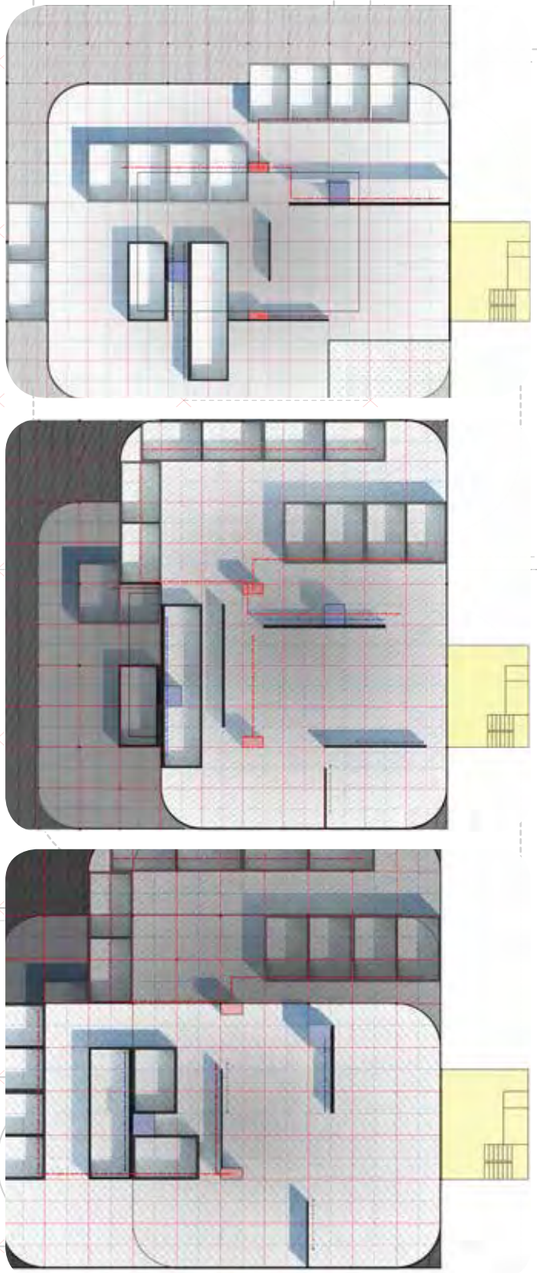
REVISION 3

In REVISION 3, I abandoned the rigid grid and shallow game board of the previous two revisions in order to test a greater diversity of grids. Considering different grids as adjacent situations or programs gave me the freedom to test new interior modules with more specific responses.



REVISION 4

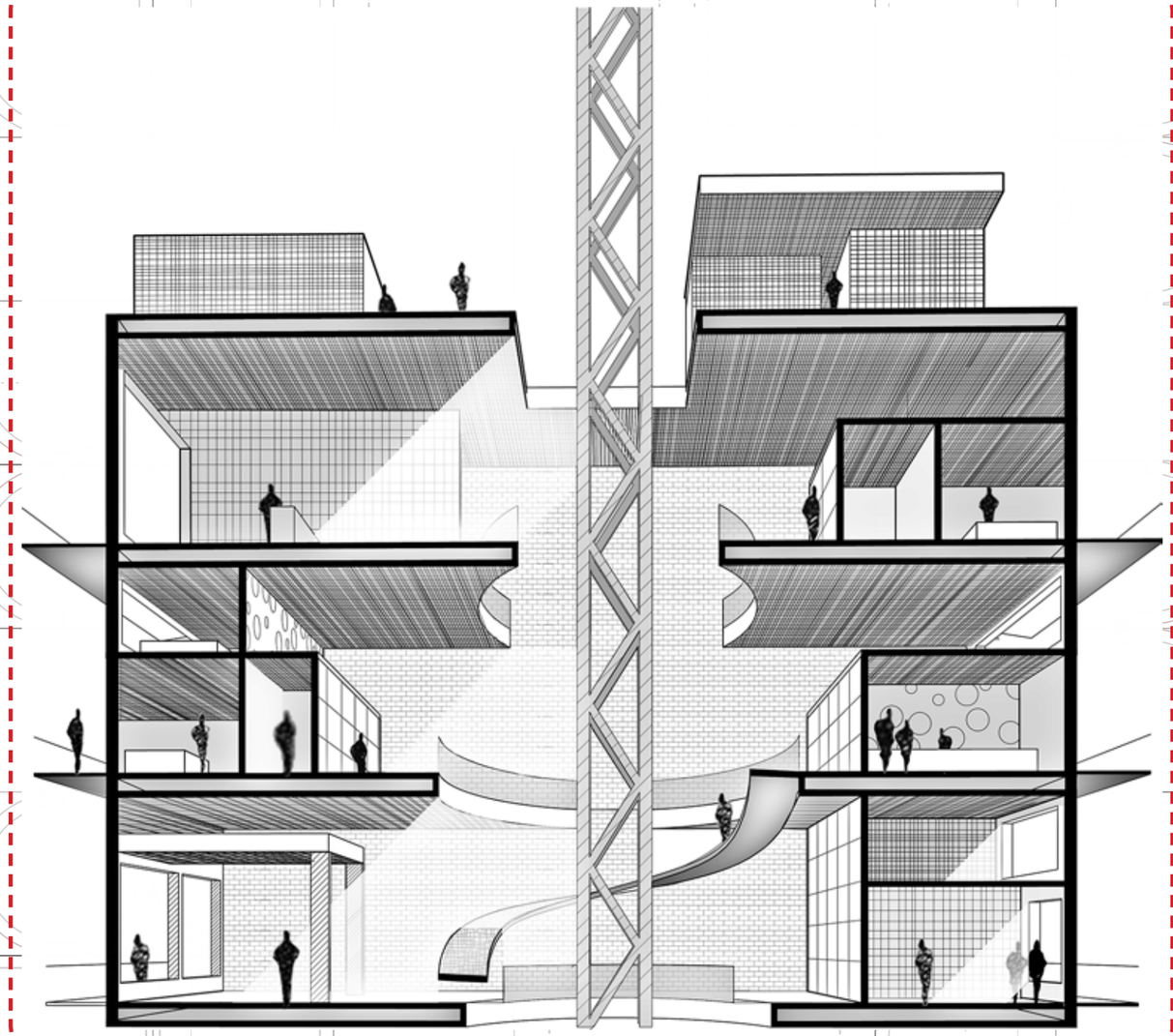
In REVISION 4, I returned to a grid system in order to study how a gridded scaffold would benefit from vertical repetition. These stacked floor plans began to look at vertical relationships and penetrations througha grid. The red and blue boxes were brought into the drawing to represent how services would penetrate through this system in a real built version of this game



PART 3: TESTING/EXPLORING

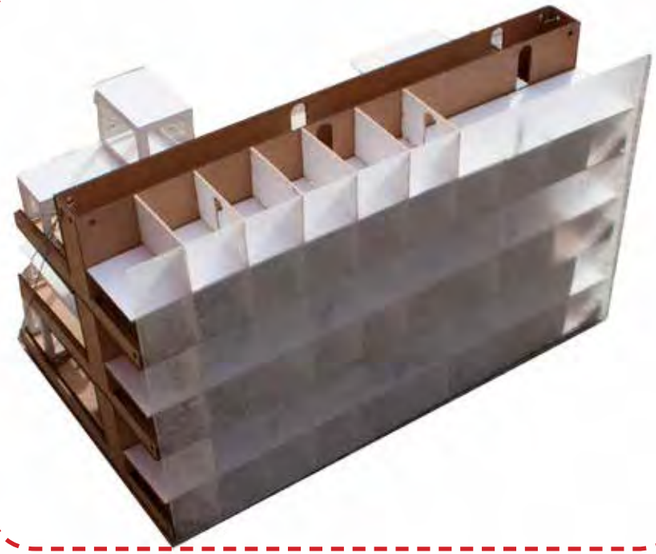
During the testing phase of my thesis, my goal was to discover a scaffold that could support a rich and diverse lifestyle for a changing group of users who would eventually inhabit the building. The role of this scaffold was to provide structure and services to the building, it ultimately shapes the rules and exchanges that are able to be played out within my building.

It was very important for this phase of the project to be a physical exploration. I modeled a variety of structures that attempted to embody a productive ambiguity where structure could double as circulation, space, or service...



TEST 1

TEST 2



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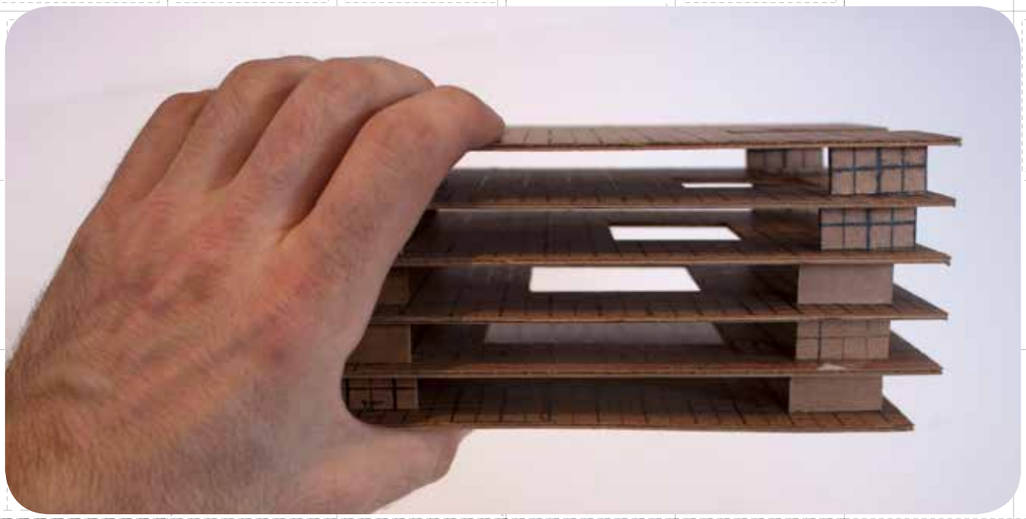

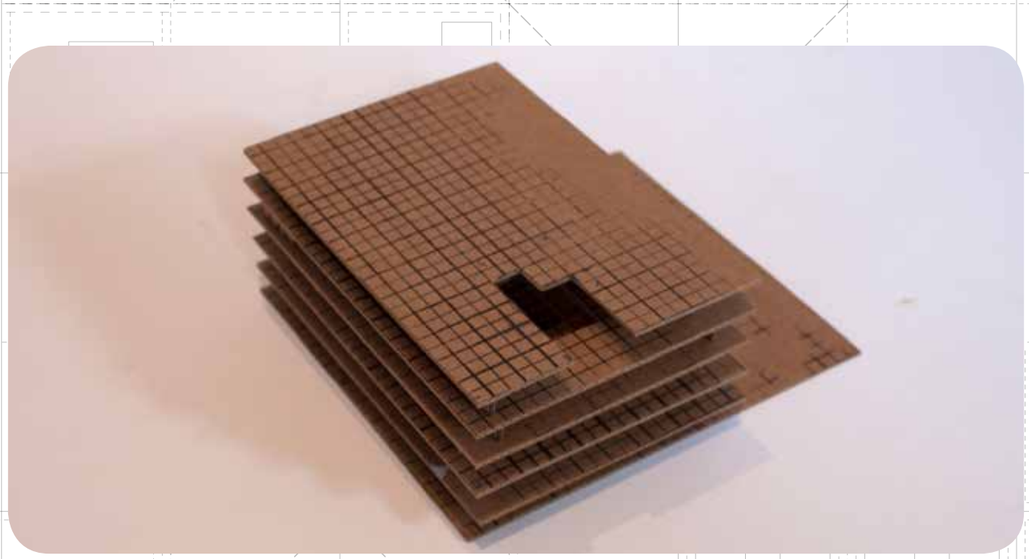

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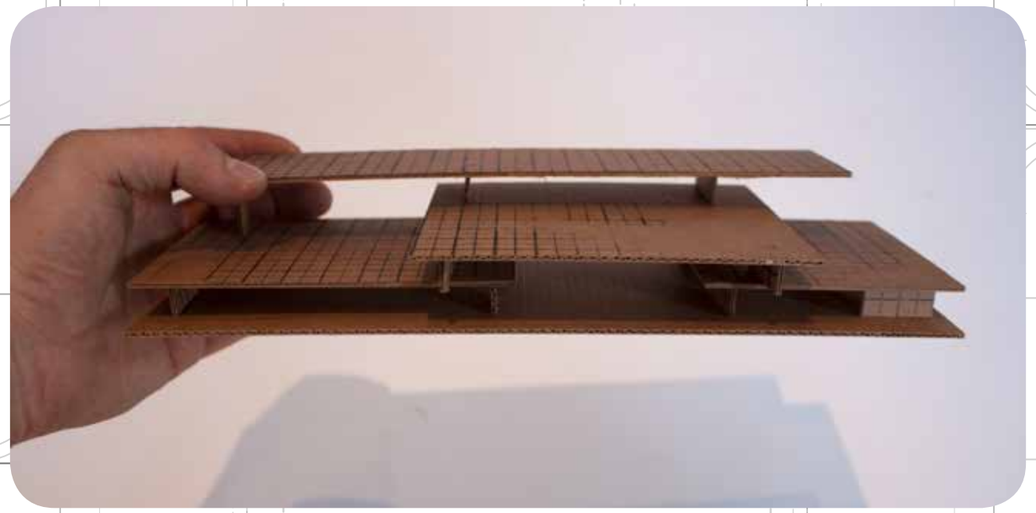

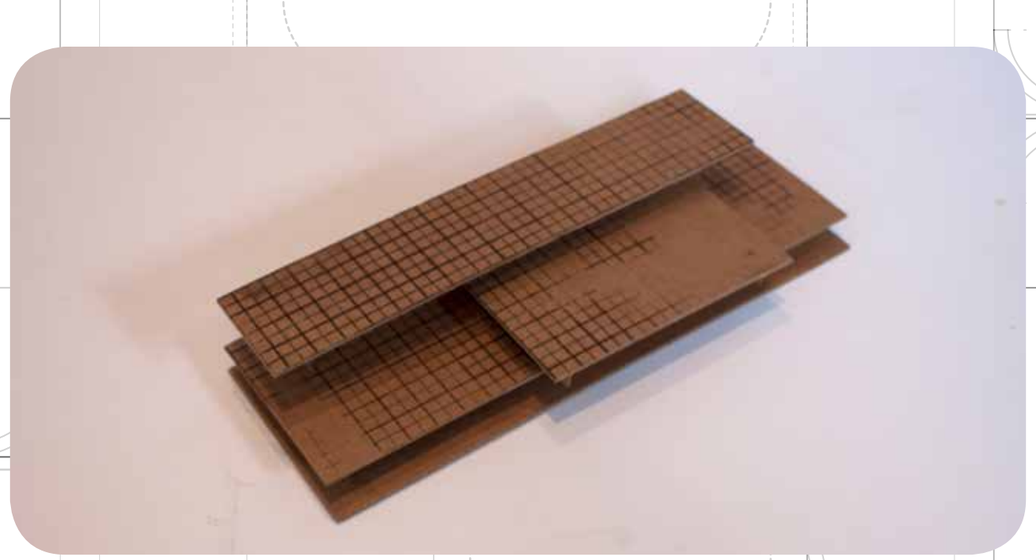

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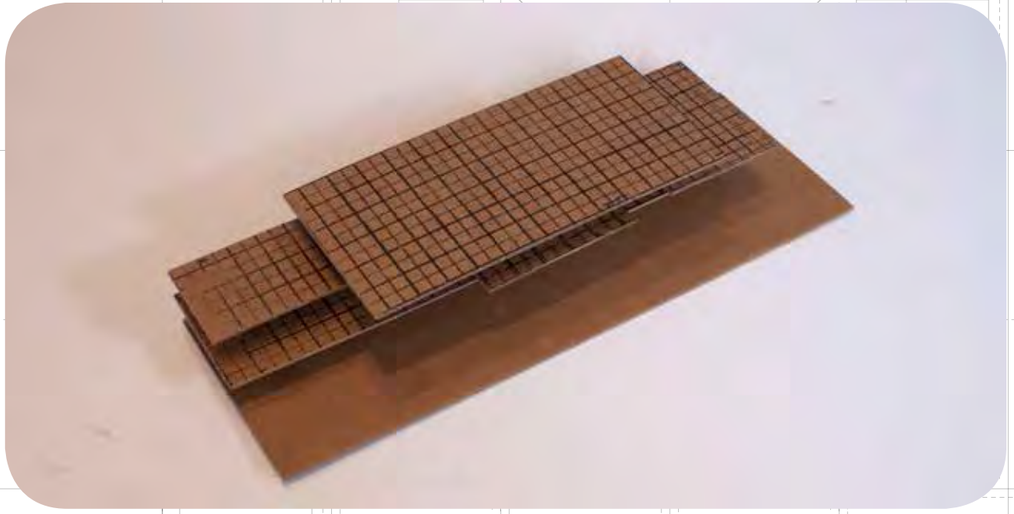

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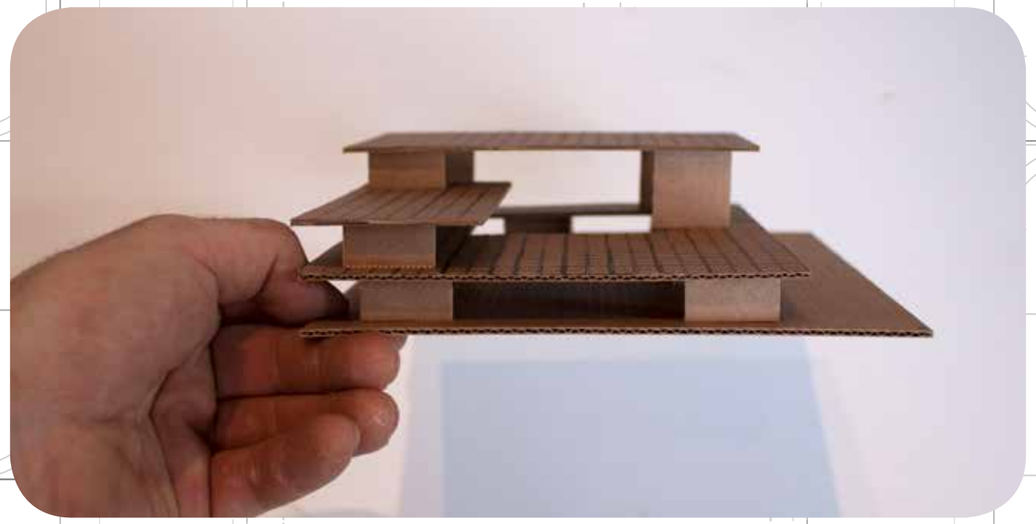

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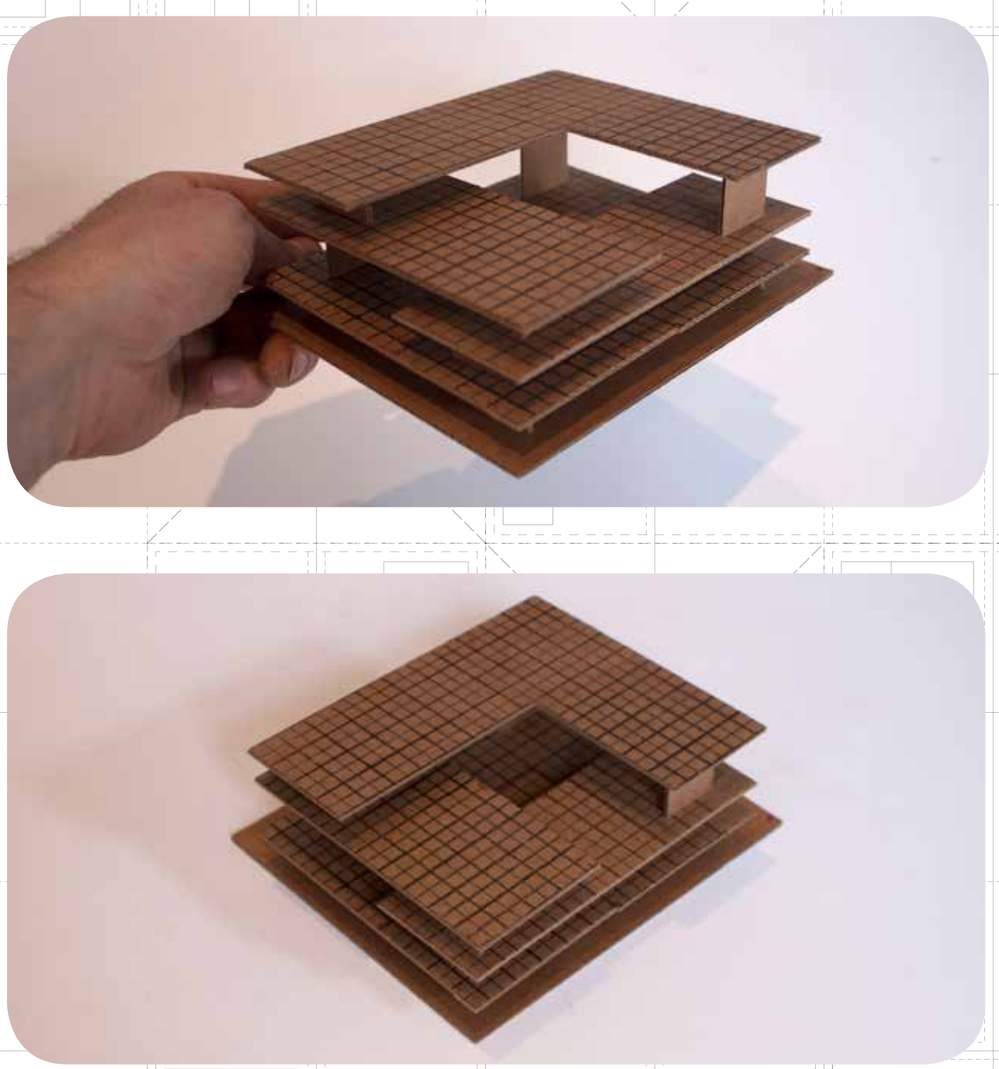

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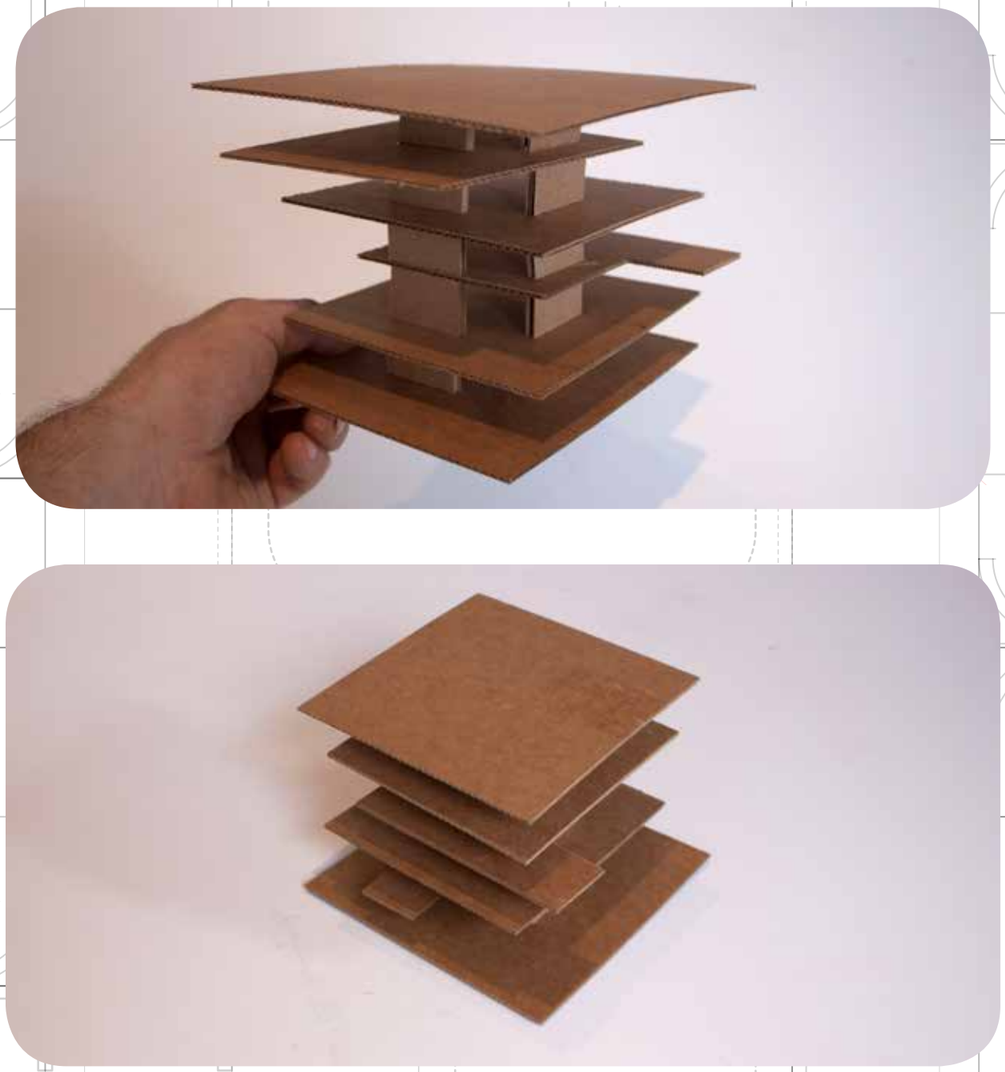
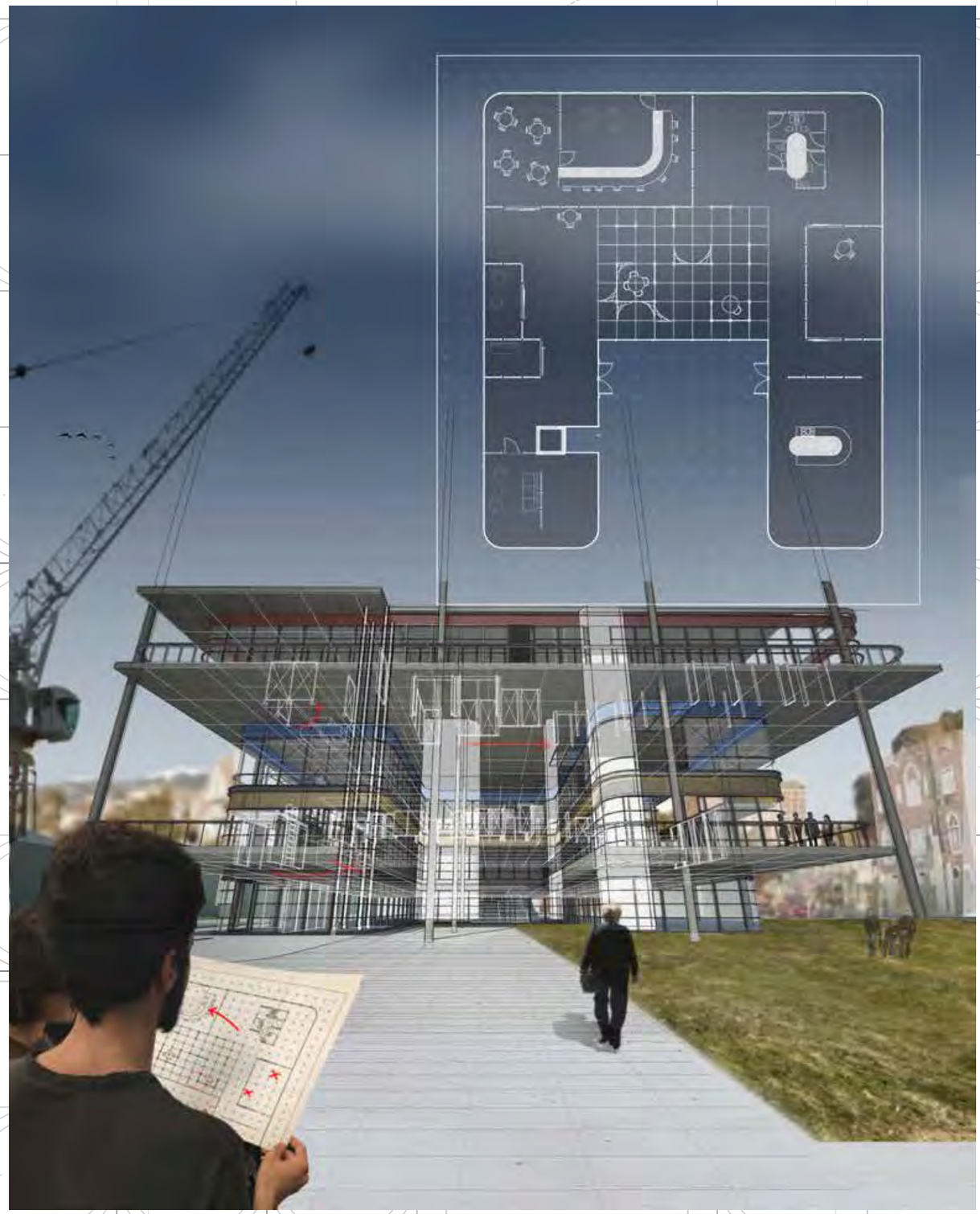


PART 4: DEPLOYING THE GAME

I was able to iterate several interesting structural arrangements that offered productively ambiguous spaces for architectural exchanges to take place. But one question still haunted the project.. Why communalism? Why now? I knew I would be able to supply an architecture that questioned ownership and privacy in the contemporary dwelling, so I searched for a contemporary place that might benefit from this practice.

My research led me to Oakland, CA. The recent Ghost Ship fire shined a light on communalism and the dangers of user regulated architecture. After a fire occurred in a communally occupied building called the “Ghost Ship” many other communal dwellings in the area were forced into eviction on the grounds of safety. While some of these practices were dangerous to the residents within, they offered rich new models of ownership and exchange that contemporary architecture cannot.

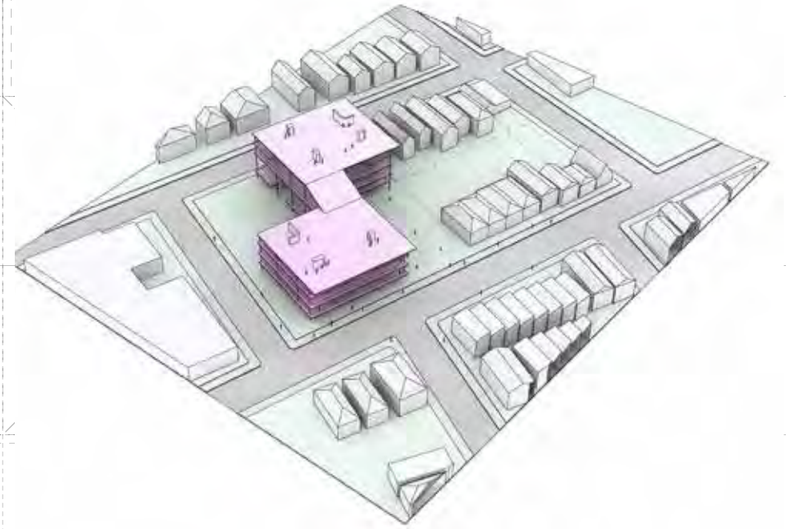
I chose to site my building in the footprint of a demolished industrial building which was previously inhabited by a community of artists. I wanted to propose an alternate story for the community that lived on this site. One where they could continue to prosper under a Community Owned Land trust. This model would legitimize the alternative models of ownership that communes and intentional communities often propose on the fringes.

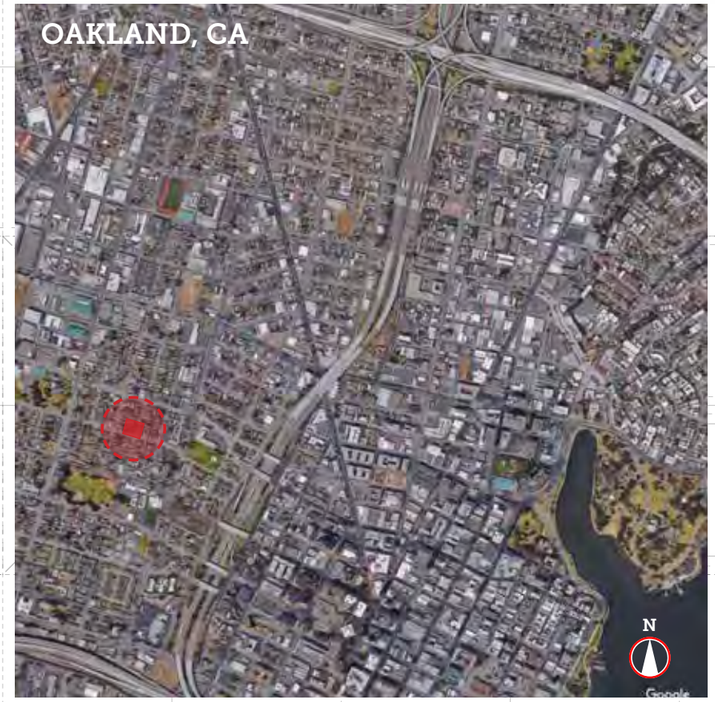


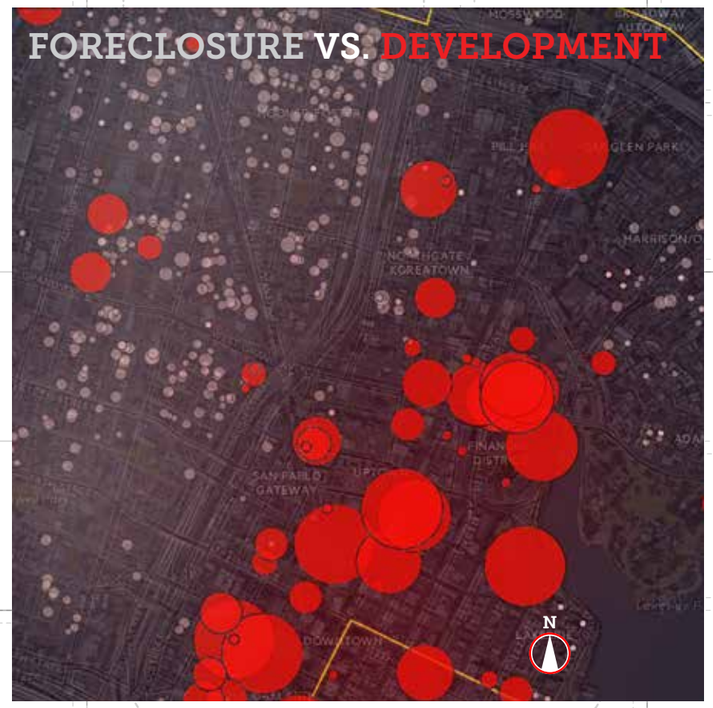
SITE AND CONTEXT

Positioned in West Oakland, the site is in a neighborhood that will almost certainly see gentrification in the coming years as the city expands and develops. Instead of following the conventional models of development, this building will propose a new community ownership model, where value and equity are not the primary goals of the developer, but rather to preserve a community and create an equitable living space.

The building creates two urban rooms that allow users from the surrounding streets and neighborhoods to easily enter and occupy the site.







COMMUNITY OWNED LAND TRUST:
AN ALTERNATIVE OWNERSHIP MODEL

This project will function as a community owned land trust. The ownership model will function by using the following steps.

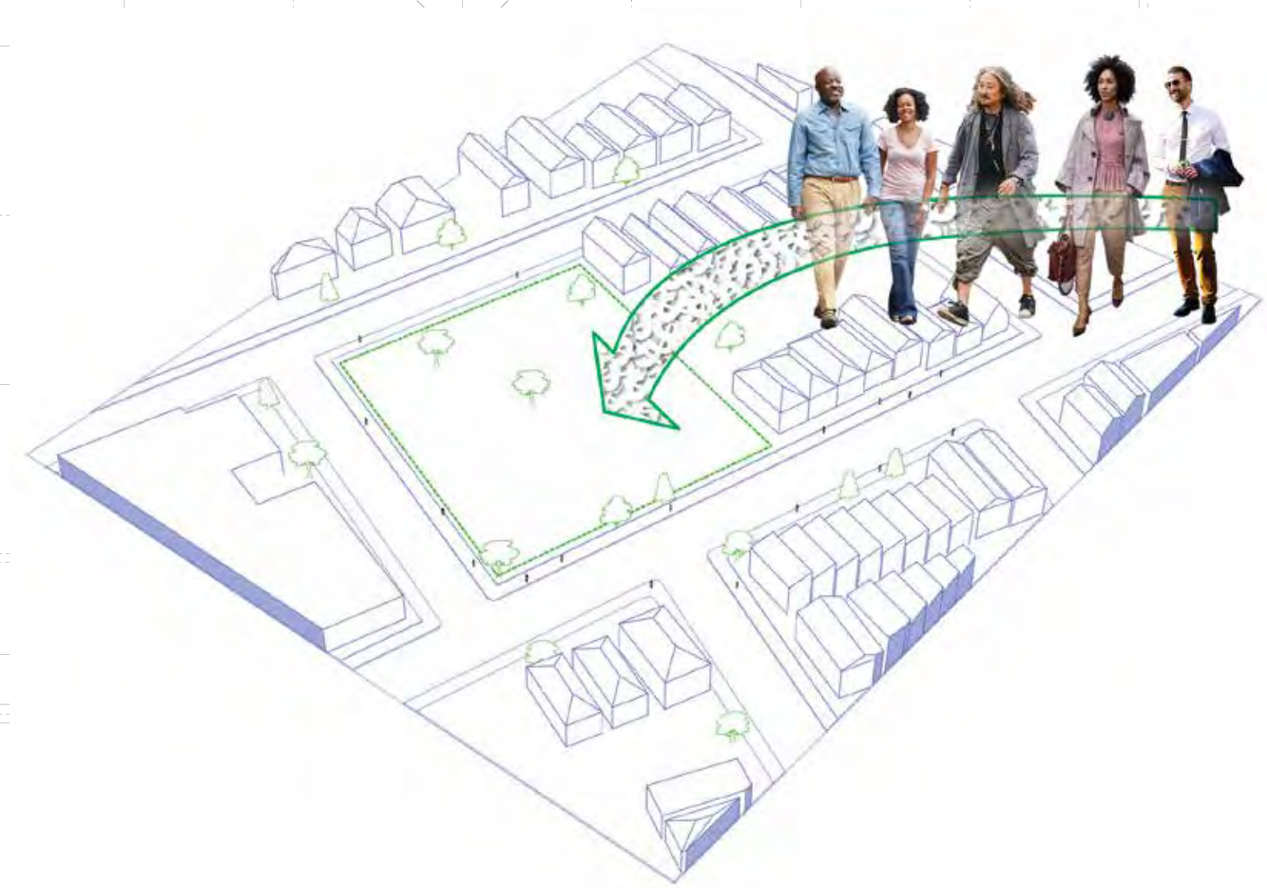
1: A group of investors buy the land and enter it into a community owned land trust. This ensures that the price of the land will remain affordable, and will not be sold to be developed at the surrounding community changes.

2: The investors pay for the building structure to be erected on speculation, assuming that users from the surrounding area will pay to buy into ownership of the project.

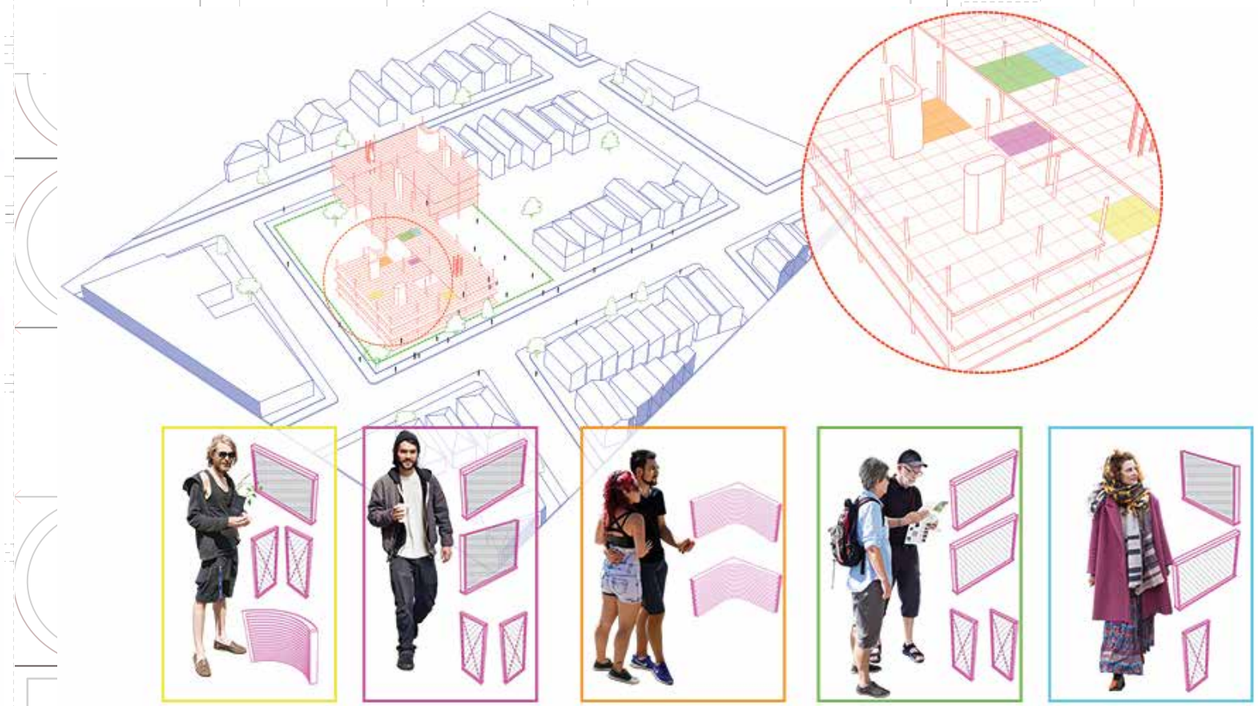
3: Users occupy the building by buying shares of the building

4: Shares entitle users to access to any part of the building at any time. Users are asked to then purchase infill modules for the building to be developed according to their needs. This is the crucial point where play and exchange return to the project.

5: When a user is ready to leave the community, they may sell their modules to remaining users, or trade them for goods. They can sell their share to a new users, and collect any equity that the share has accrued.

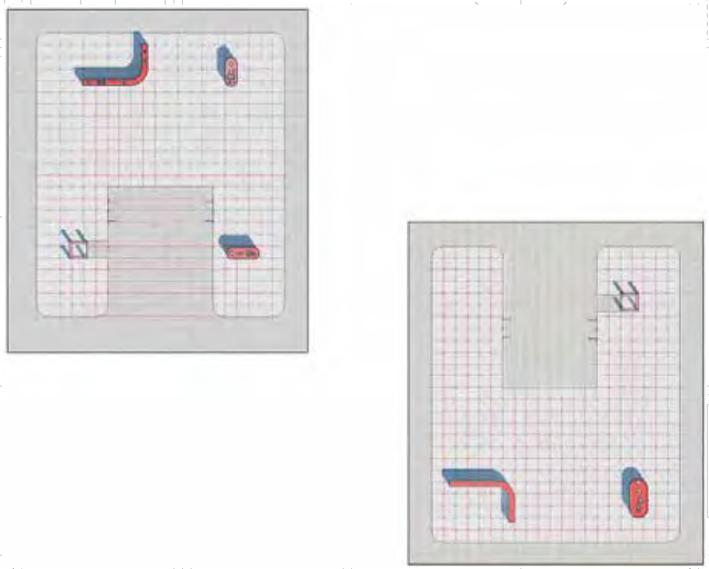


INVESTORS CREATE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

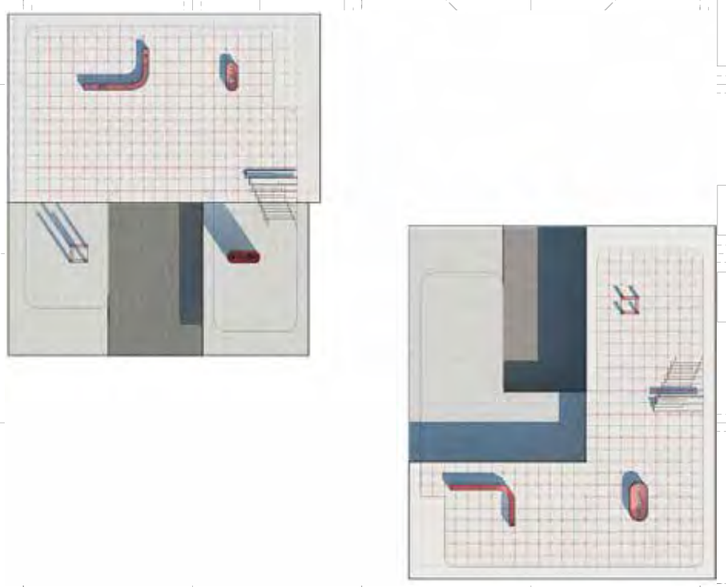


USERS INHABIT THE BUILDING AND
FILL WITH MODULES

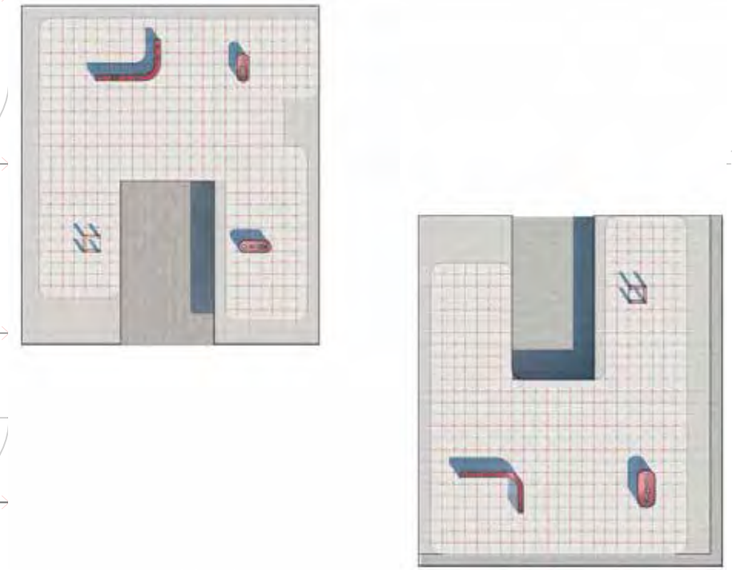
SCHEMATIC SCAFFOLD PLANS



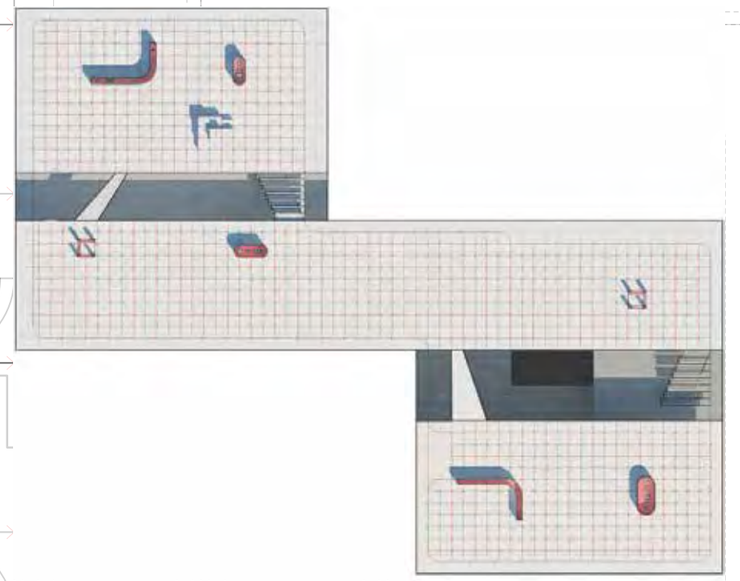
FIRST FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

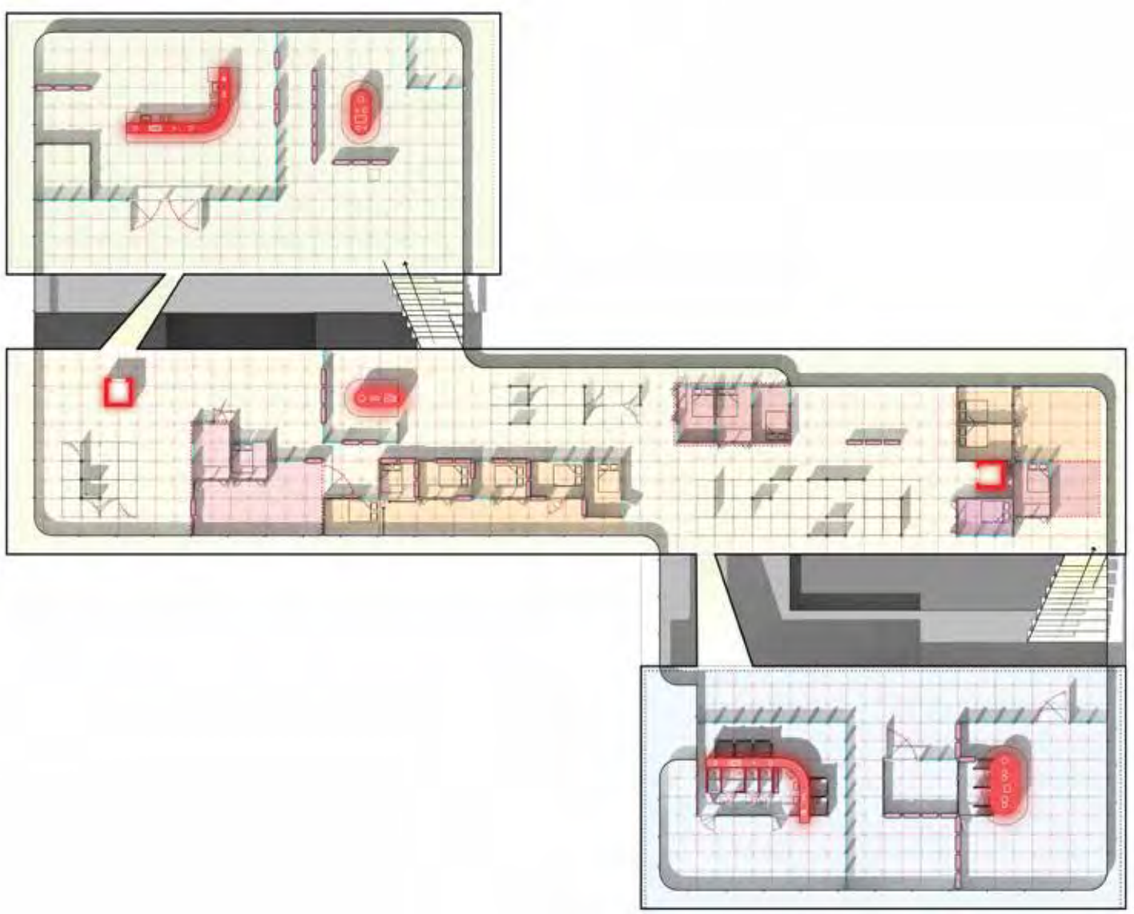


FOURTH FLOOR

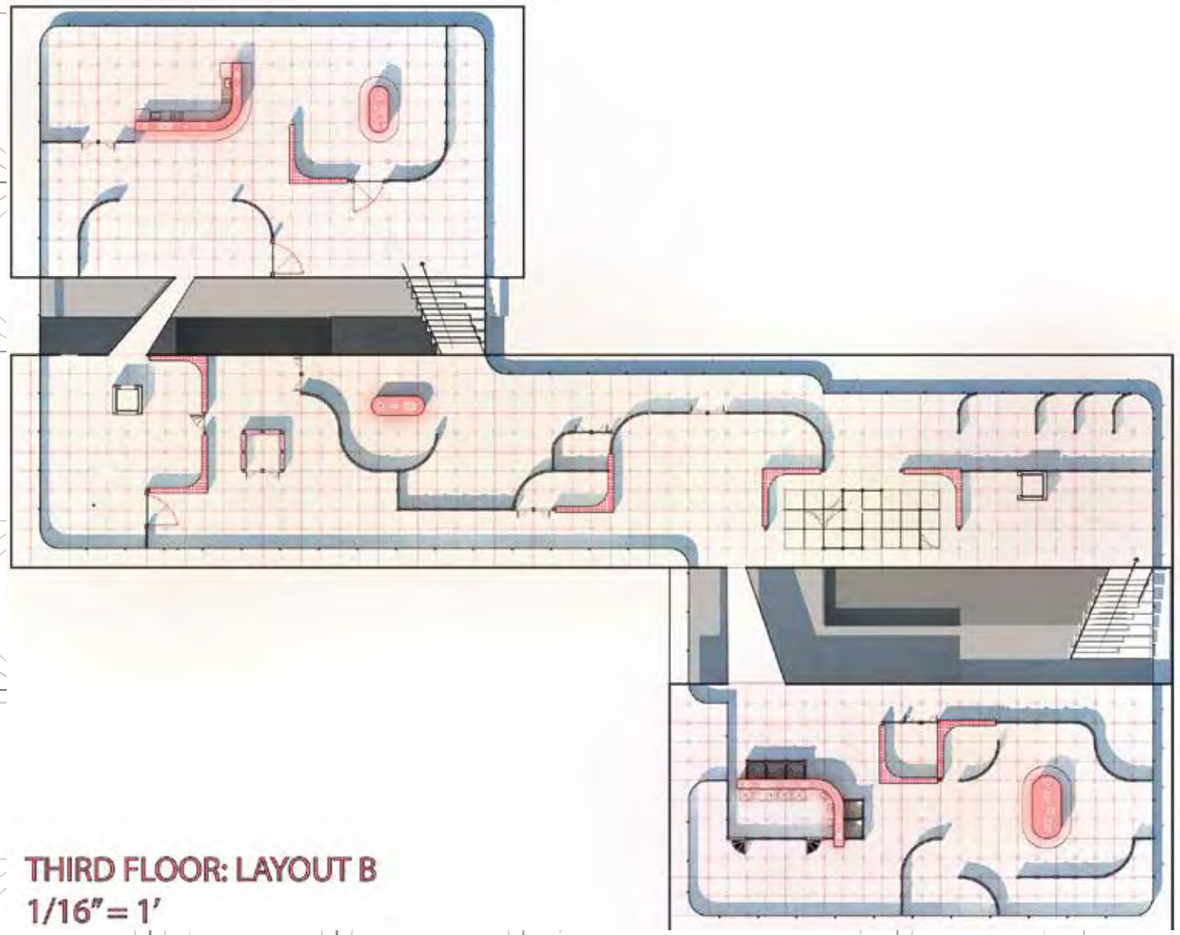
ALTERNATIVE INFILL SCENARIOS

After I had established schematic floor plans for the building, and located the essential building services such as structure, circulation and water/electric, I had to begin to test how the scaffold would react when users began to populate it with different infill elements. It was very important that these elements could offer positive experiences to all types of users who might join the community.

For this reason I tested conservative layouts for more traditional user groups, as well as more open layouts that could offer new and alternative lifestyles for those who wanted to embrace them.



‘CONSERVATIVE’ LAYOUT

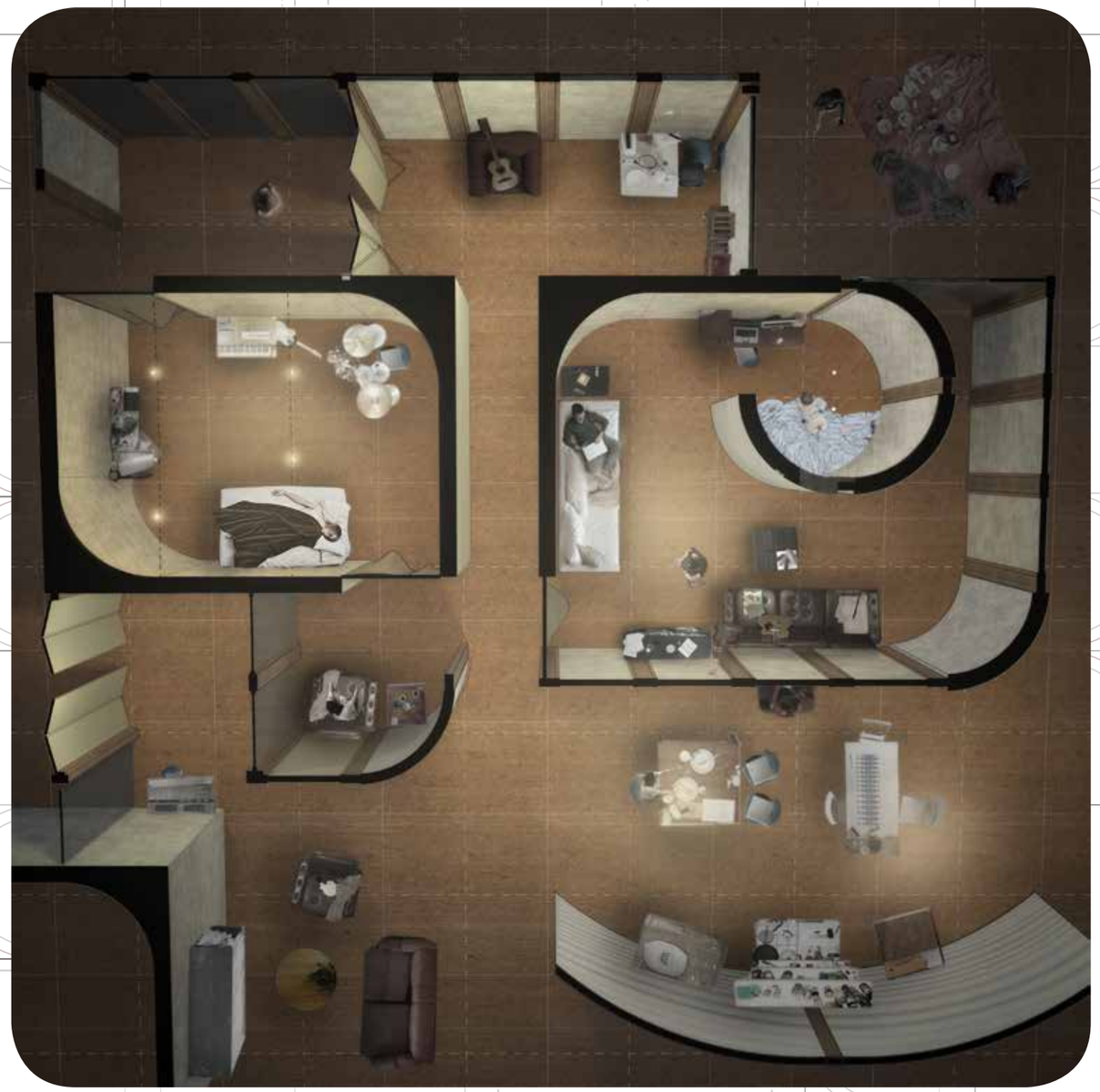


‘OPEN’ LAYOUT

UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHIZING

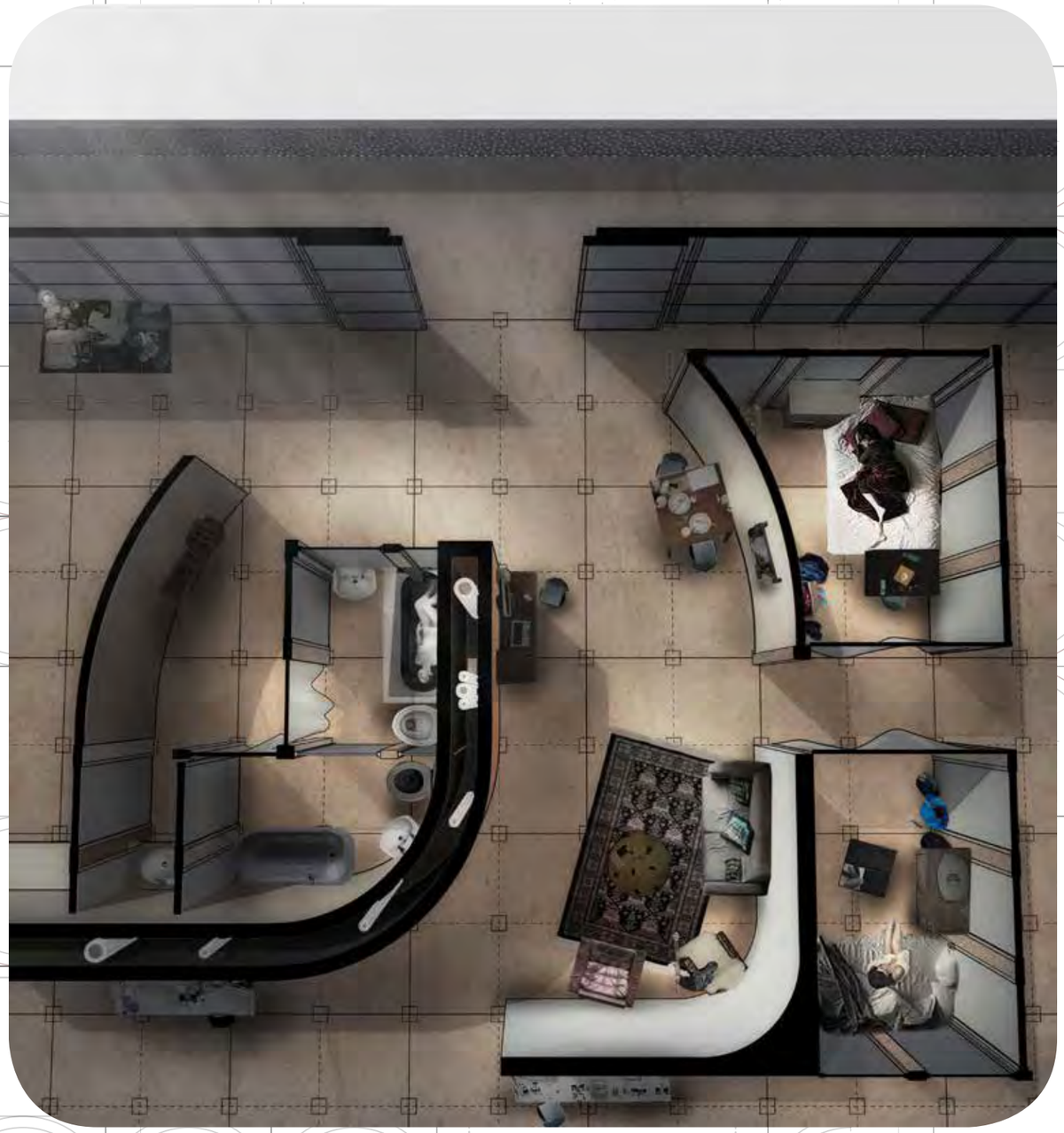
COMMUNITY 1

In creating a new type of dwelling for fictional users, it was very important to me that I would be able to imagine how they might use the structure, and empathize with their needs. I created a set of drawings that imagined how alternative dwelling layouts might create ambiguous ownerships and new social spaces for communities to occur. These plan-perspectives allowed me to empathize with users and imagine how the spaces might be occupied during different times of the day.



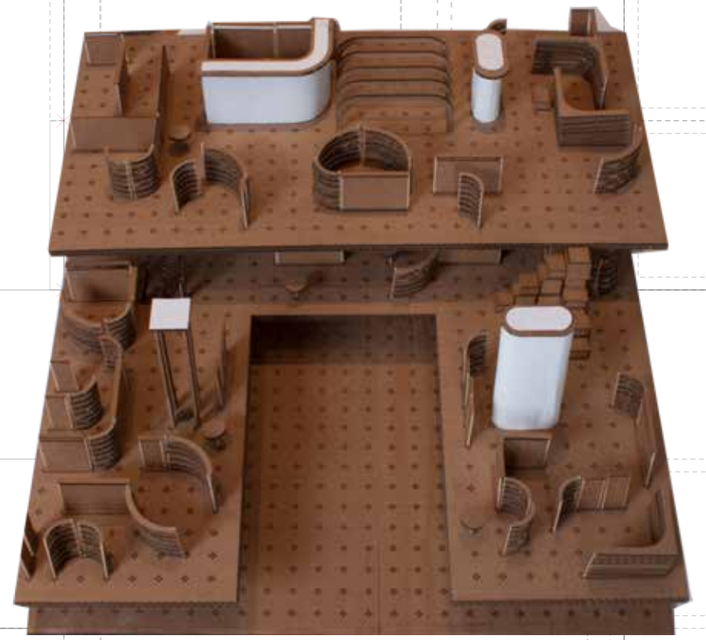
COMMUNITY 2

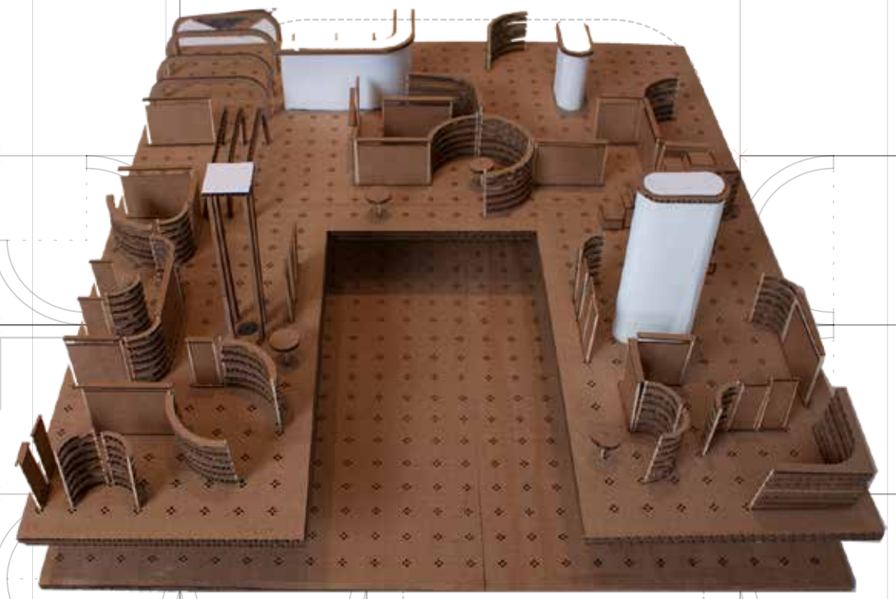
COMMUNITY 3



TEST BOARD

In the empathetic spirit of the previous drawings, I created a new board game that utilized the floor plans of my building to dynamically test how occupants and different user groups could adapt the building. Each floor is movable, and each piece can be rearranged to test different spatial configurations





COMMUNITY OCCUPATION