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CRIPPING ARCHITECTURE

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CRIPPING ARCHITECTURE

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture
Harvard University Graduate School of Design, by

Shaina Yang

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

May 2021

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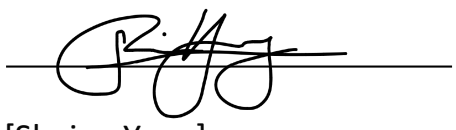
(signature)



[Shaina Yang]

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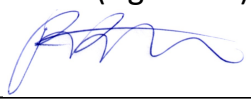


[Preston Scott Cohen]

CRIPPING ARCHITECTURE

a note on the title:

First proposed by Robert McRuer in his 1966 book *Crip Theory*, the act of "cripping the discourse" is to apply a disabilities lens to able-privileged conversations.
This reclamation of the slur "cripple" has stemmed crip culture, movements like #CripTheVote, and most recently the Netflix documentary *Crip Camp* with the Obamas as executive producers.
The term is not without its own controversies within the community.
It is reserved for use only by those who have a disability.

Cripping Architecture argues that what we think of as "universal design" - a least-common-denominator model - does not and cannot produce fully equitable architecture on its own. "Universality" is in fact a colonial value; what is required instead for a truly equitable world is a proliferation of diversity to capture edge cases, not just a reduction in diversity that attempts to capture everyone.

Today, the disabled community exists physically fragmented, isolated, and excluded across an ableist world. This dehumanising inequity burgeons as the global population ages and life expectancy extends, expanding the already 20% of people who are disabled.

Meanwhile, in the urban realm, Chinatowns, Koreatowns, Little Italies and Polands thrive - a model that microcommunities of the disabled could ostensibly also benefit from, if only it existed for them.

The project thus asks what multi-family housing would look like if it was designed for a community of bodies in wheelchairs as the "neutral" norm.

The resultant housing estate establishes sequences according to a different temporal experience - a nod to the "crip time" described in disability studies. Instrumentalising the ramp at multiple scales, it multiplies horizons both interior and exterior, creating an architecture flexible in vantage points for less flexible bodies. It is diverse in ways different than ableist architecture, yet through typological dialogue with the English terraced house and the London railway-adjacent linear housing estate, remains unexceptionally rooted in its local context.

Seven unit types serve a range of household structures - those who can live independently outside of ableist spaces, those who require live-in care, those who cohabitate with able-bodied family. Interior interventions speak to the experience of the body: a 5' turning circle is privileged throughout, while a unique inverted bay window allows for the face to be fully pressed up against the glass.

Periodic polyrhythmic aggregation of these units yield local heterogeneities at the scale of the sub-community between neighbours; other communities are formed along the alternate temporal axis of the outdoor ramp that links otherwise disparate units together. The Makian *group form* of the whole yields a new urban topography built on a 1:20 slope - negotiating dramatic local grade changes and stitching opposite ends together with a public green corridor.

The result is a unique community that inverts the status quo of able-designed and wheelchair-adapted to wheelchair-designed and able-adapted. By inviting the public to participate as passers-by, the community is given a place to call home without segregation or isolation - creating a new relationship between a marginalised group finally able to gaze upon the majority, and be gazed upon on the same level.

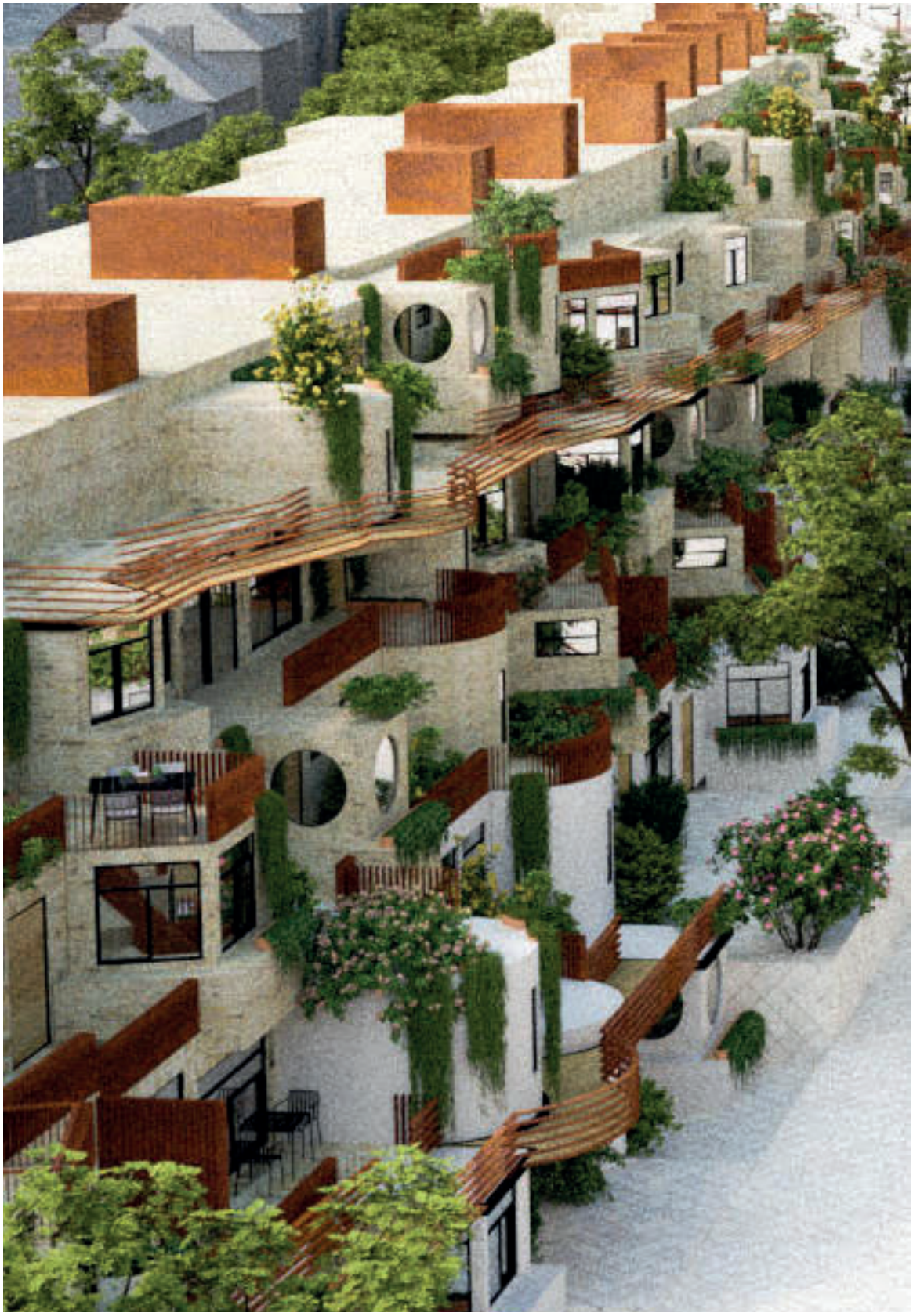
Attributions:
Rendering and drawing support from Calvin Boyd and Rayshad Dorsey

aerial view facing west

towards Swiss Cottage

aerial view facing east

t towards Chalk Farm



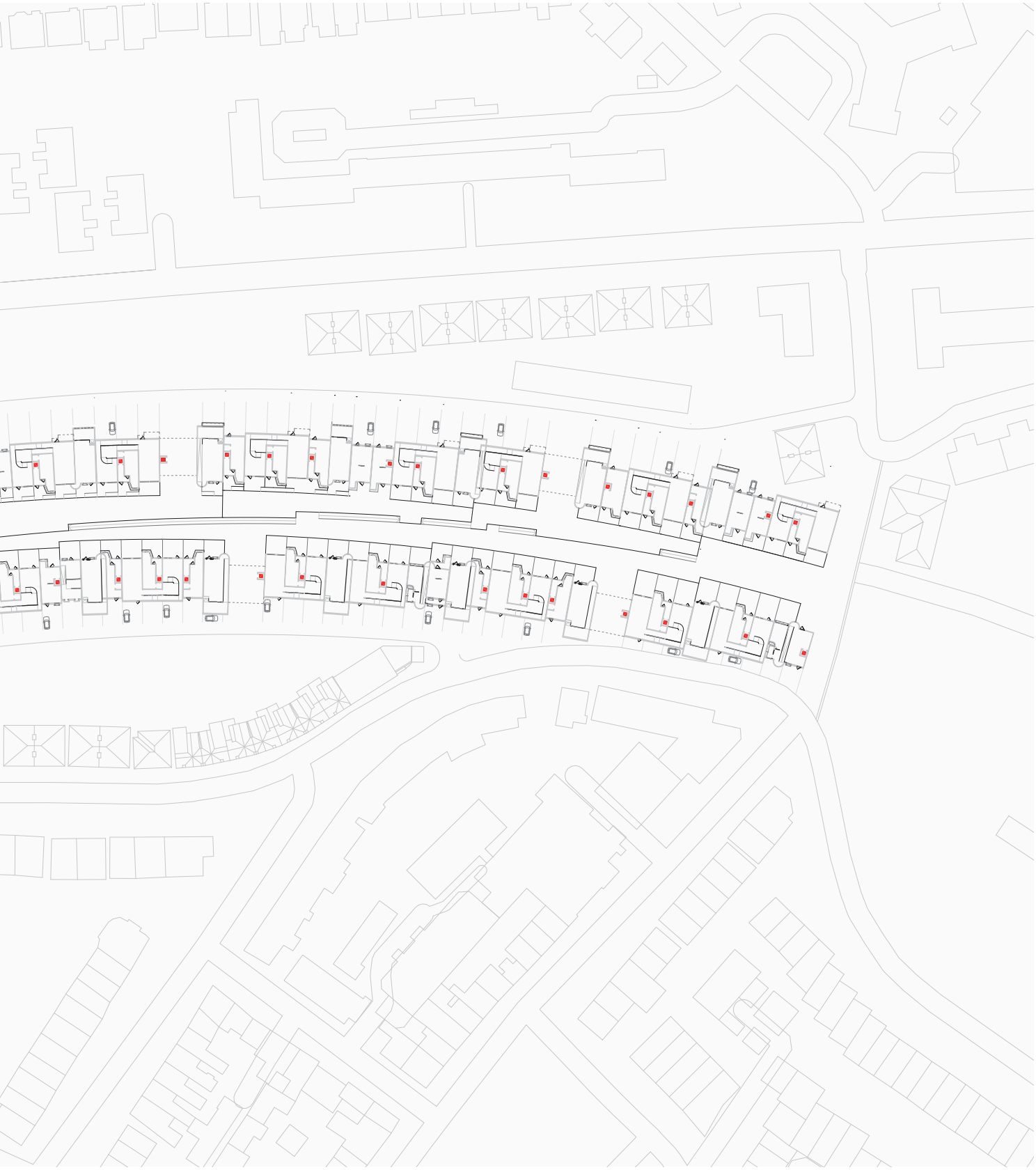
public (right, top), semi-public (left), a

nd semi-private (right, bottom) spaces

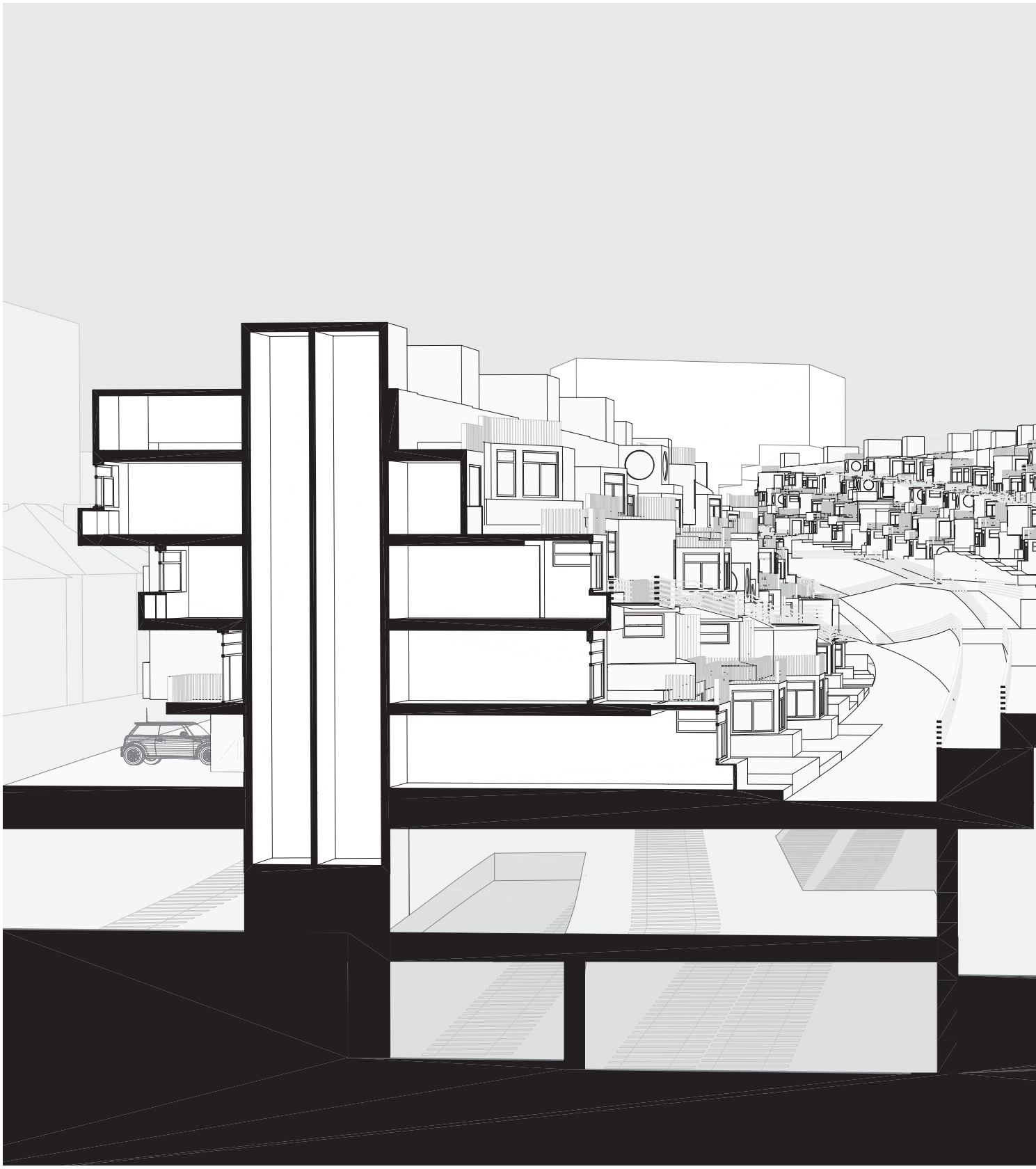
unrolled section in

n thirds, north bar

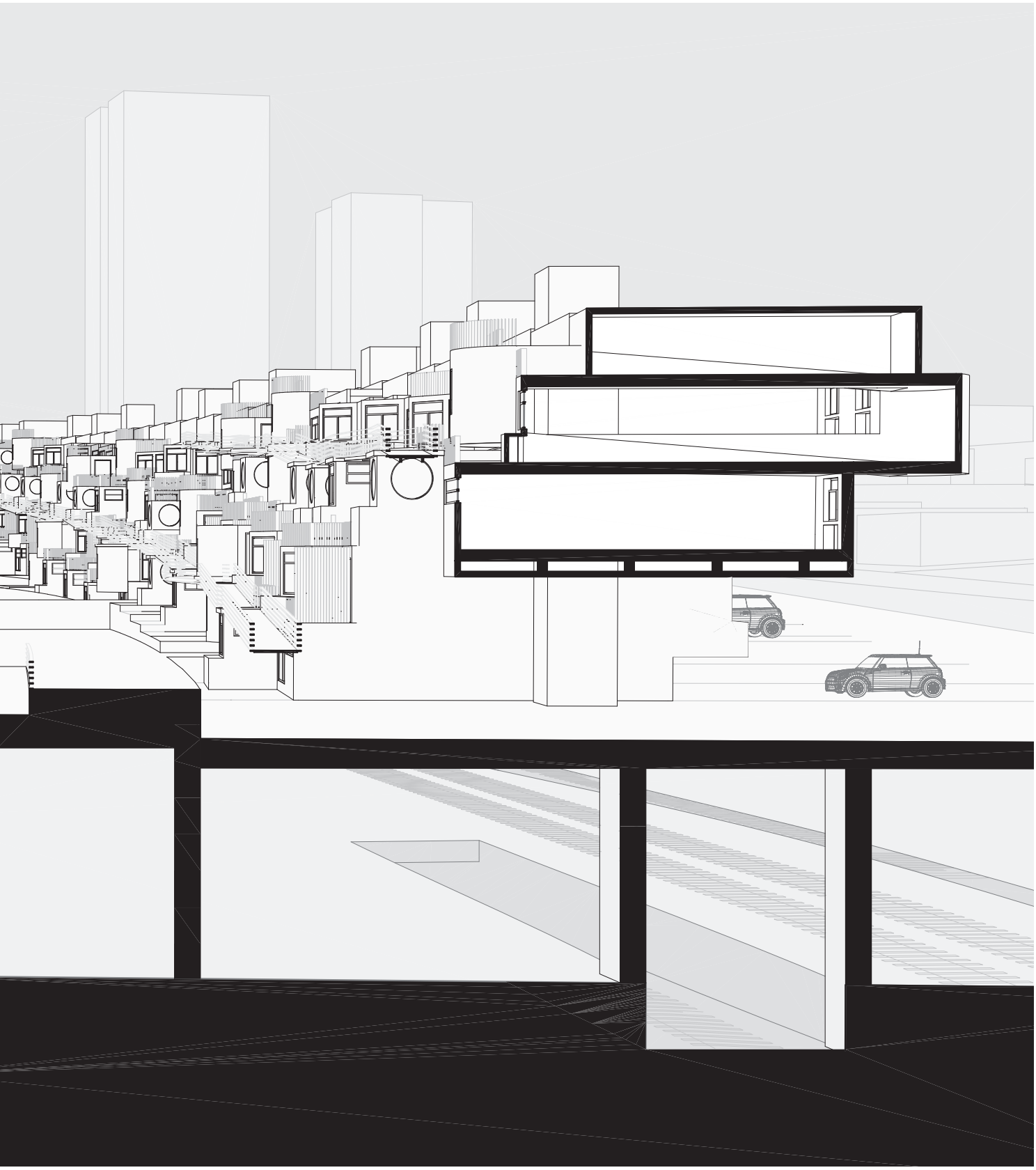
ground level plan with shared



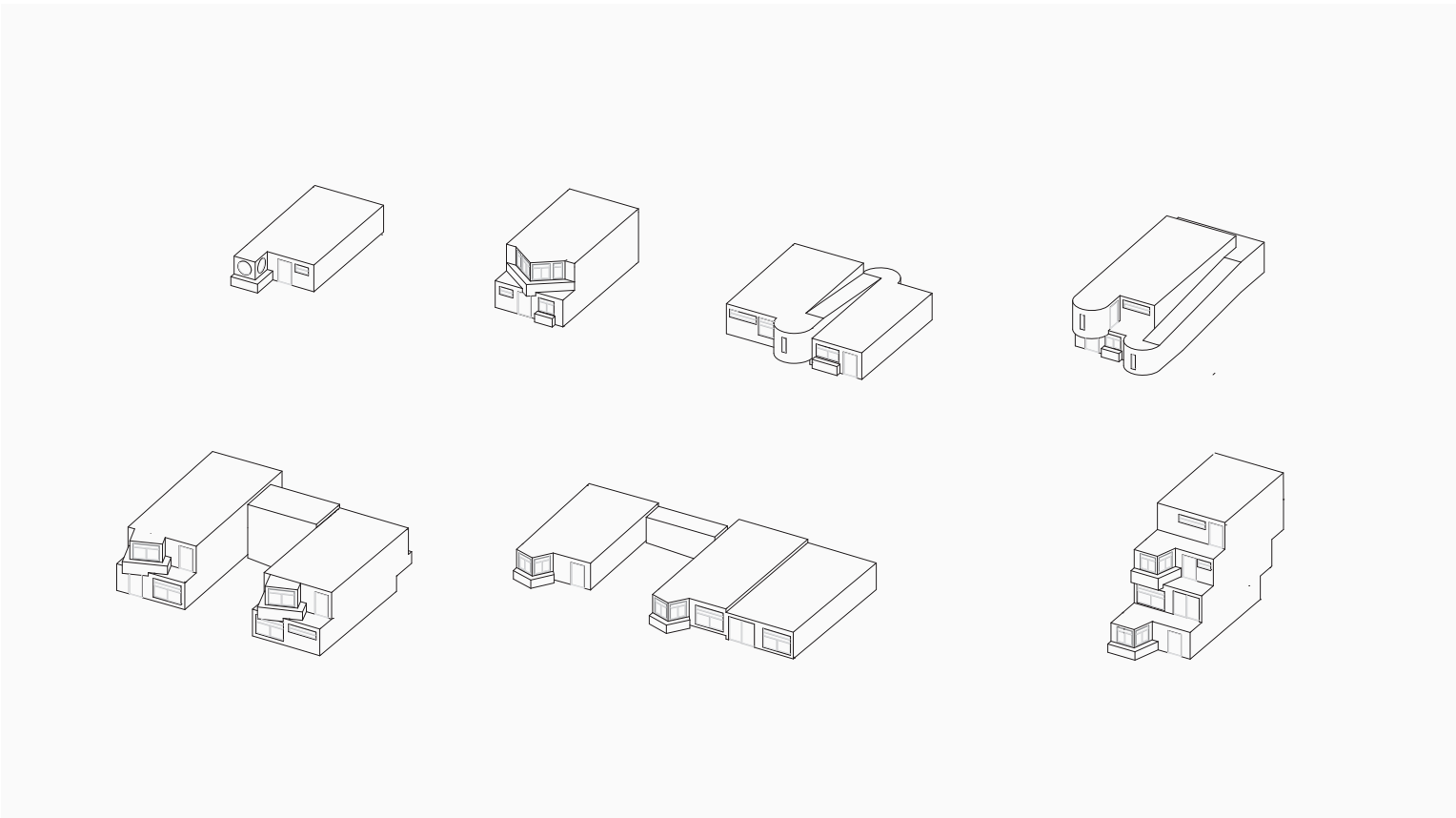
l elevator entrypoints marked

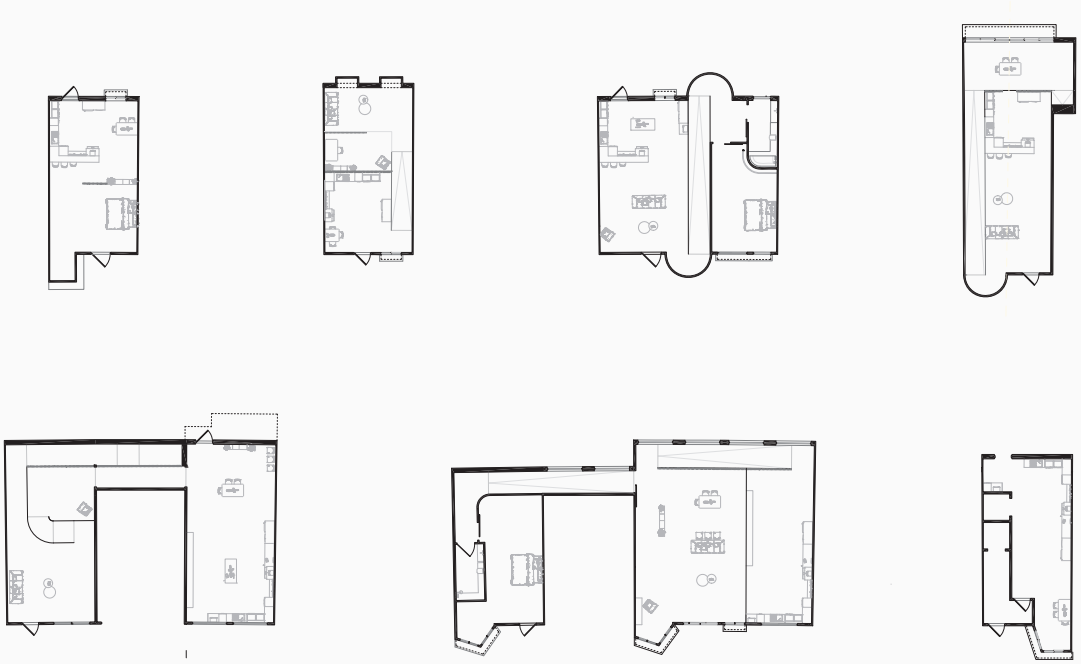


section pe

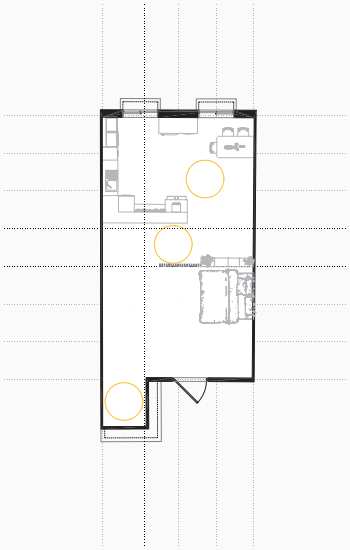


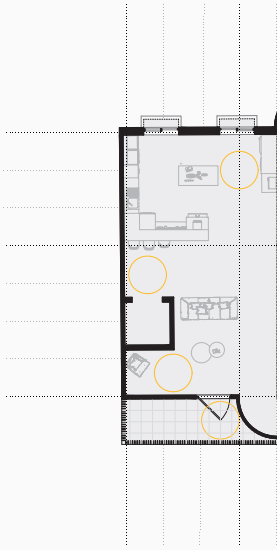
erspective



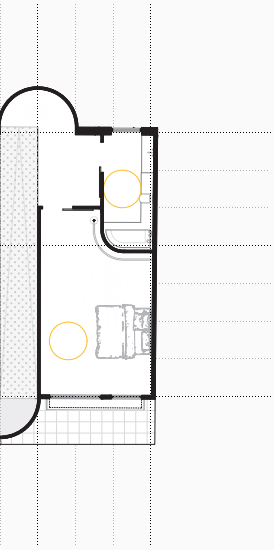


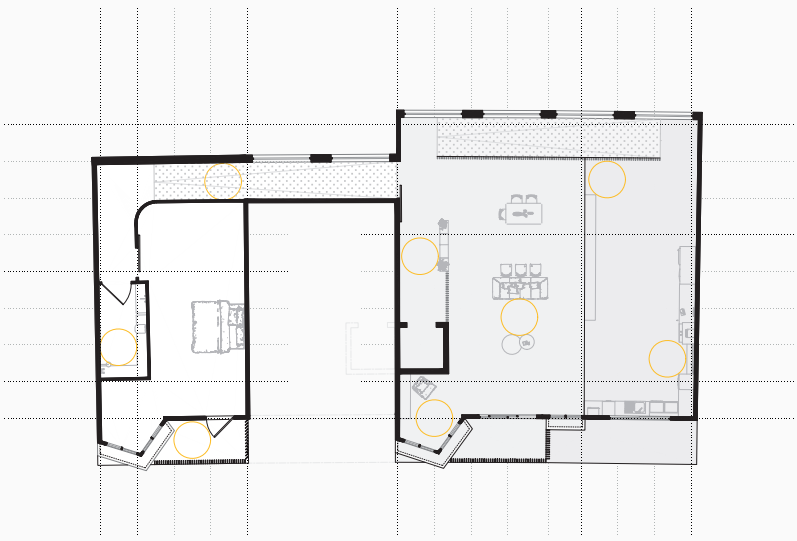
nit types



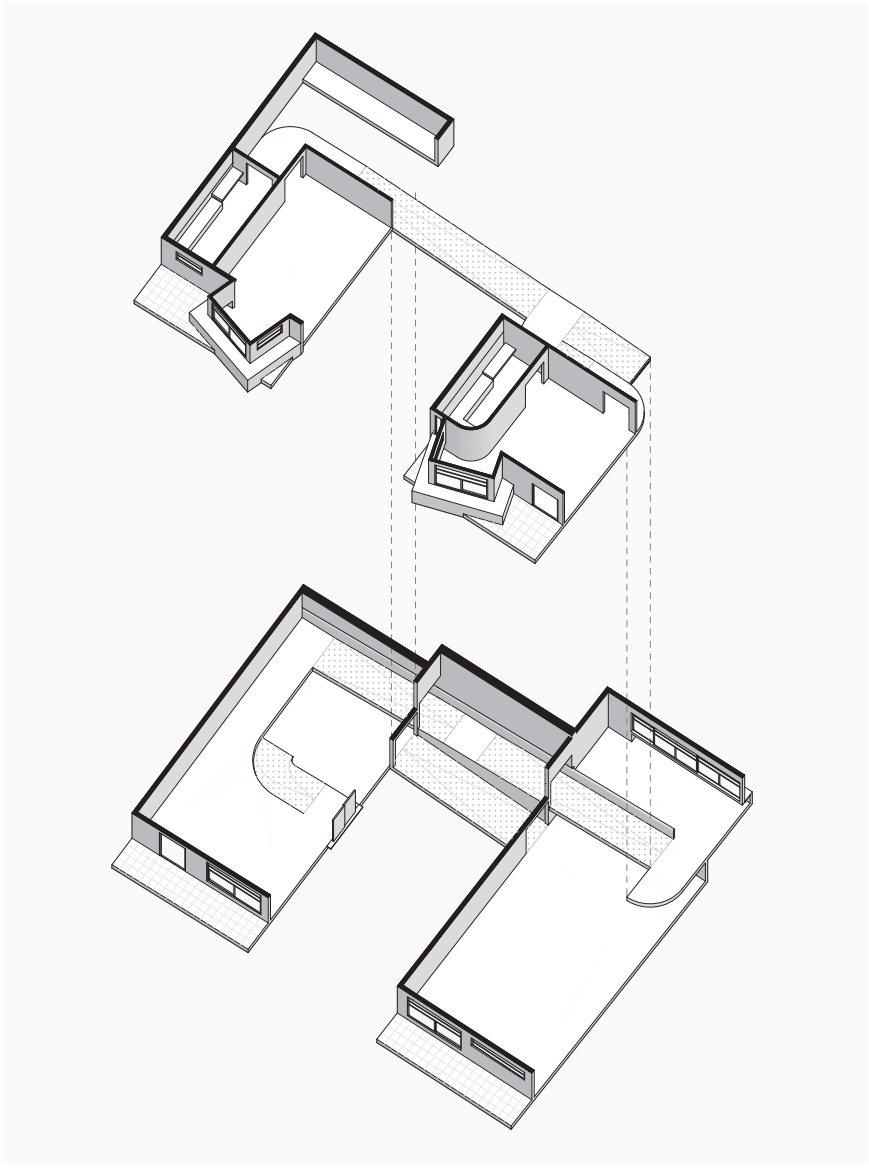


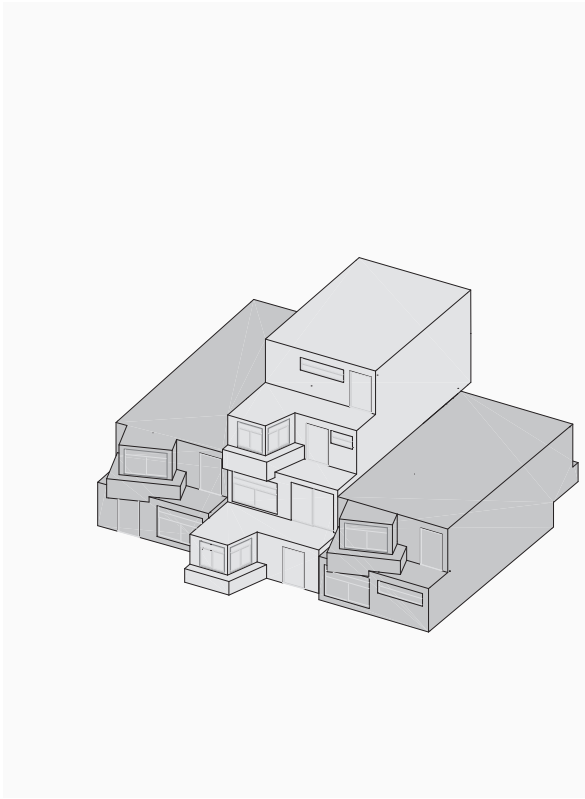
typical unit plans showing use of 5' organisat



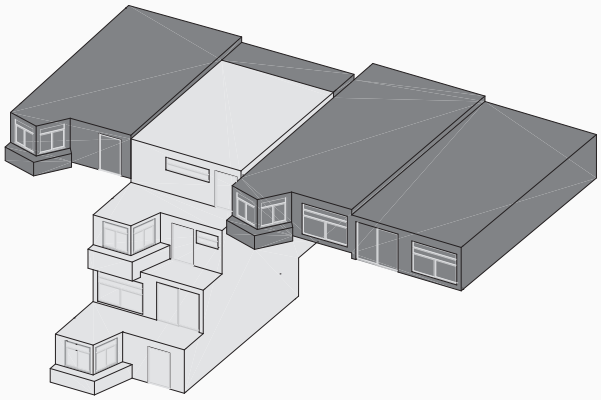


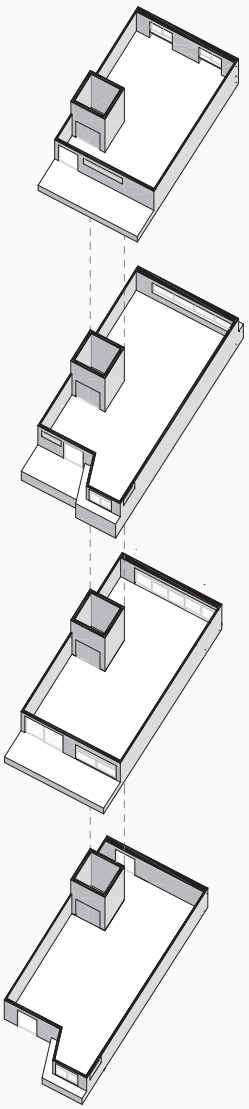
ional grid based on wheelchair turning circle





ramps may need to "skip" a bay in plan (left) to gain adequate run length; thes





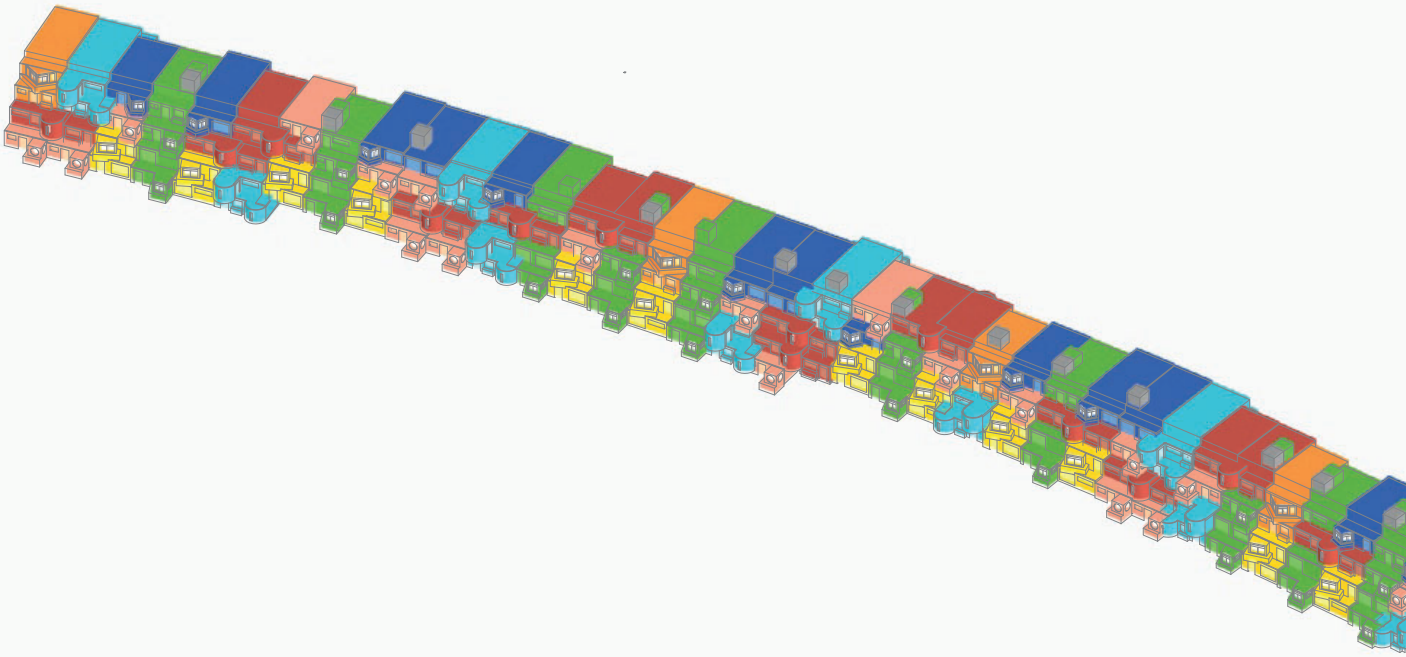
se unit types interlock (centre) with vertical private elevator -based units (right)

interior views showing integrated ramps, multipli

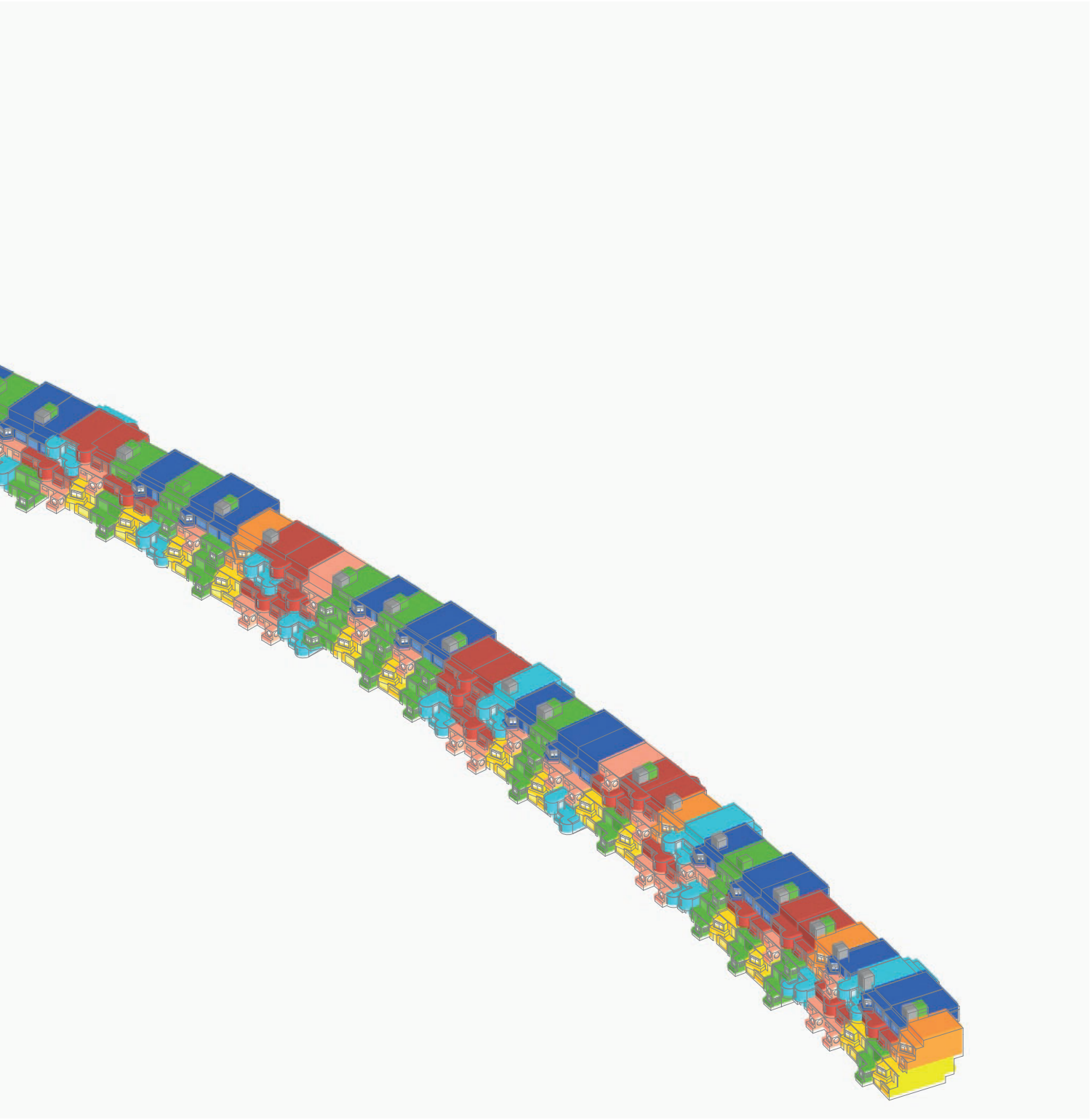
ed viewing horizons, inverted bay window feature

"a window is not a window unless you can press your face to the glass": bedroom view with inverted ba

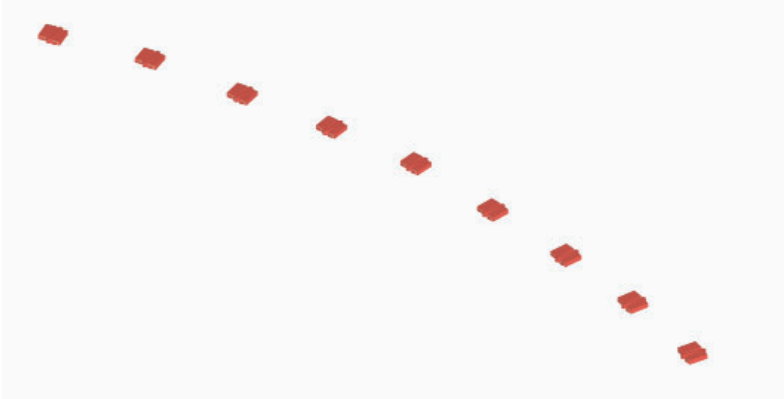
y window, allowing for fully immersed view outside and room to maneuver without having to reverse



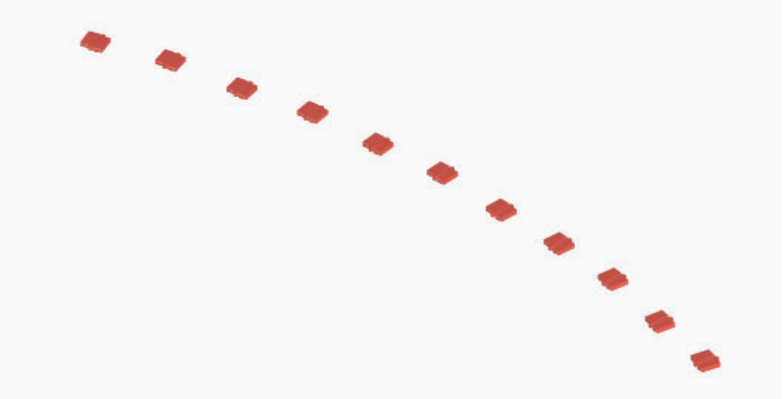
aggregate massing diagram, north bar - unit types are indexed b



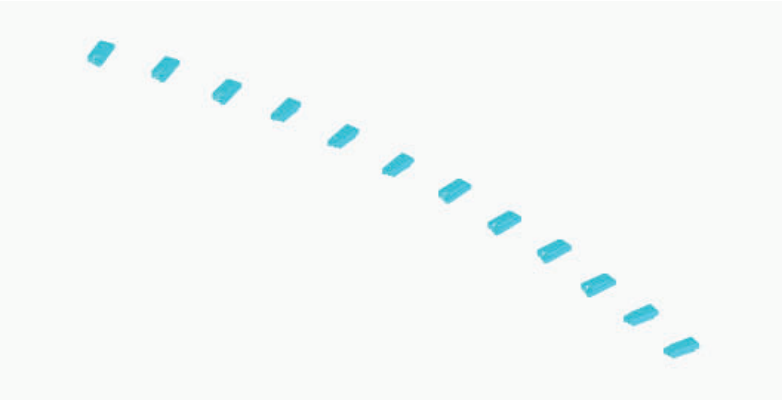
y protruding bay window shapes, shown here as different colours



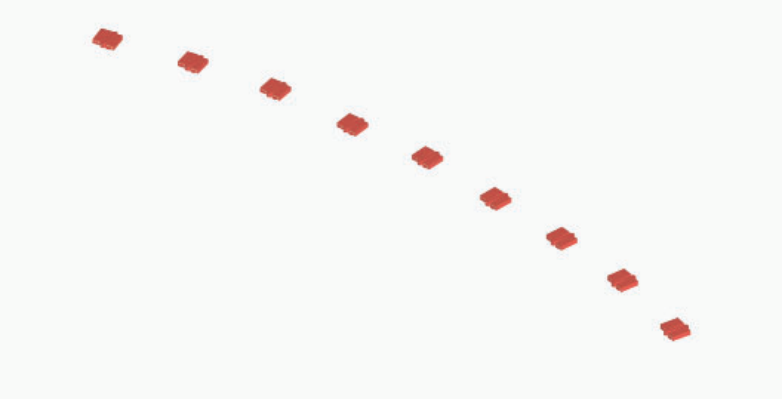
unit A, 2F - repeated every 8 bays



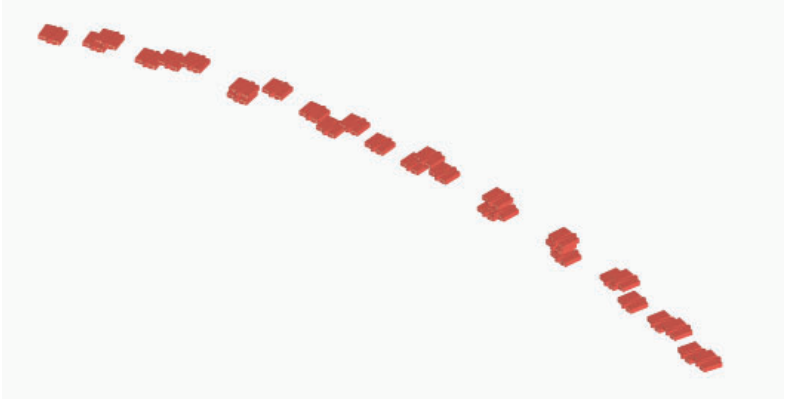
unit A, 3F - repeated every 5 bays



unit B, 1-2F - repeated every 5 bays

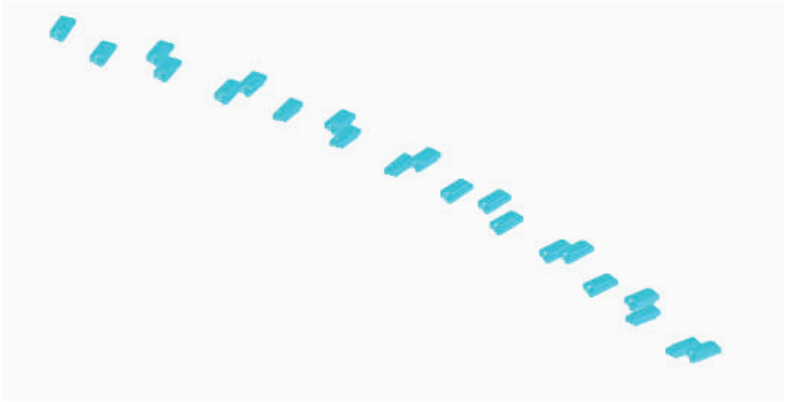


unit A, 4F - repeated every 7 bays

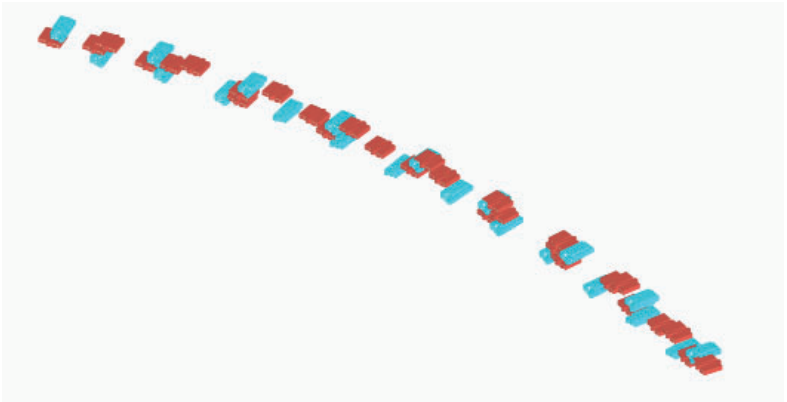


unit A - hetergenous periodic clustering

unit B, 3-4F - repeated every 7 bays

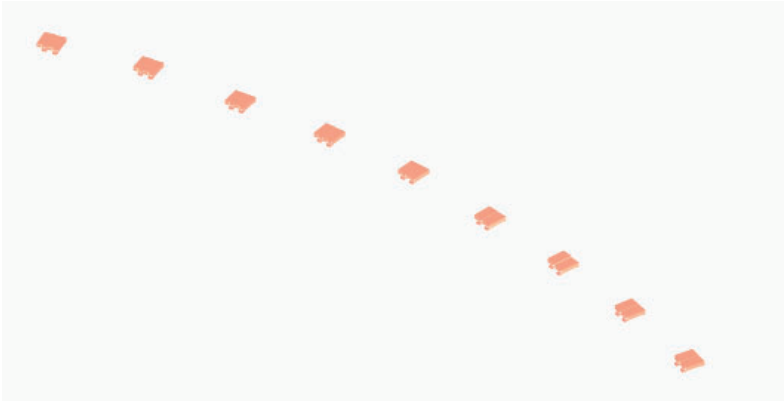


unit B - heterogeous periodic clustering

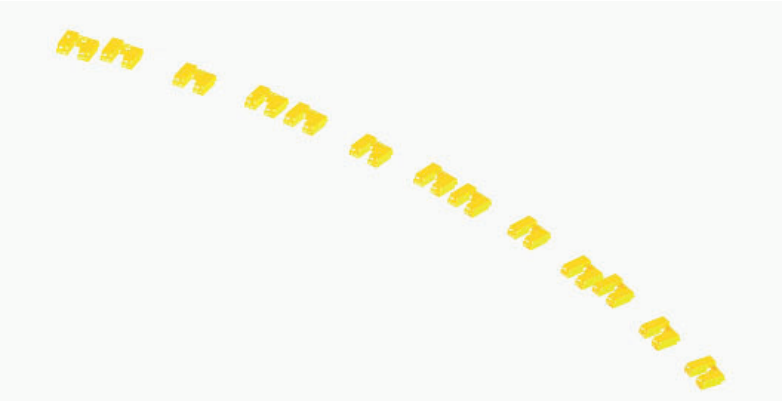


units A & B - heterogenous periodic clustering

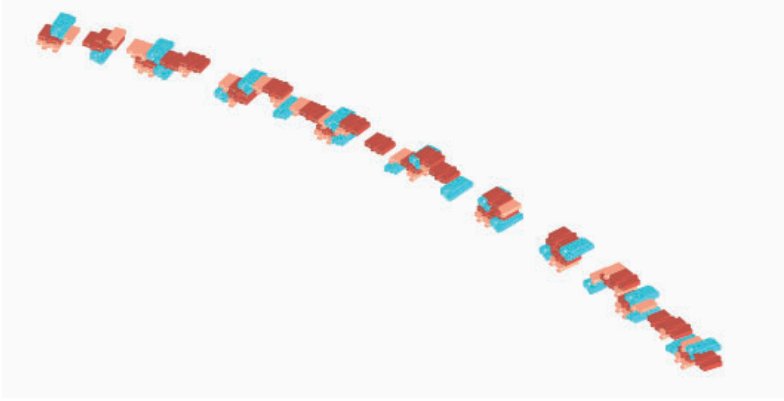
heterogeneity from regular repetition



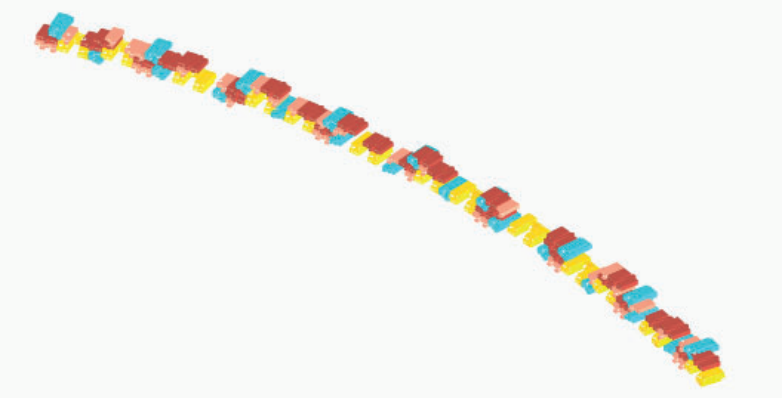
unit C



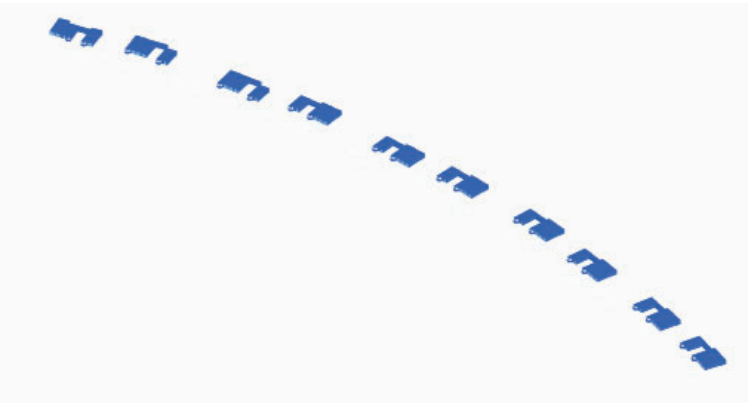
unit D (2-1-2-1 pattern)



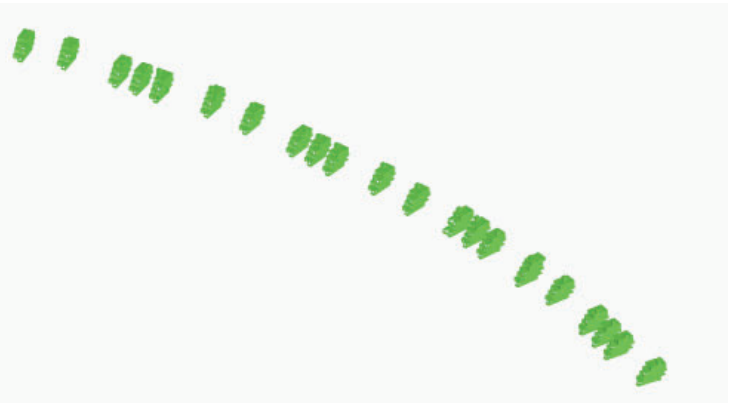
units A, B & C



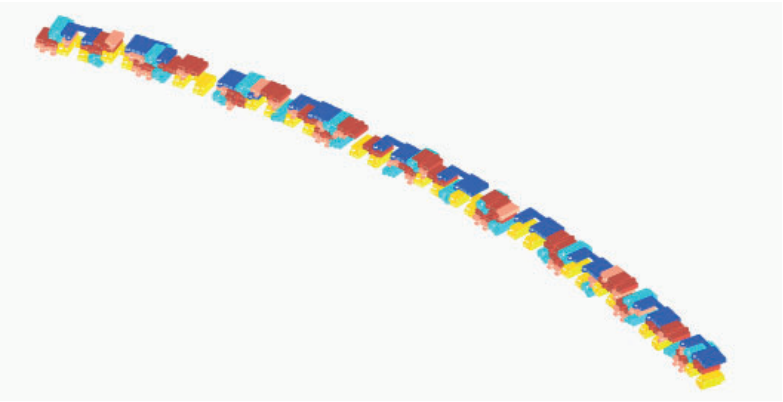
units A, B, C & D



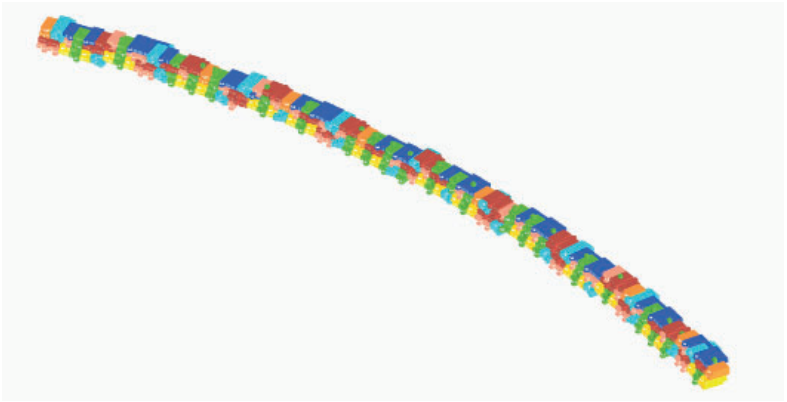
unit E (some mirroring)



unit F (2-3-2-3 pattern)



units A, B, C, D & E



units A, B, C, D, E, F & G

heterogeneity from regular repetition