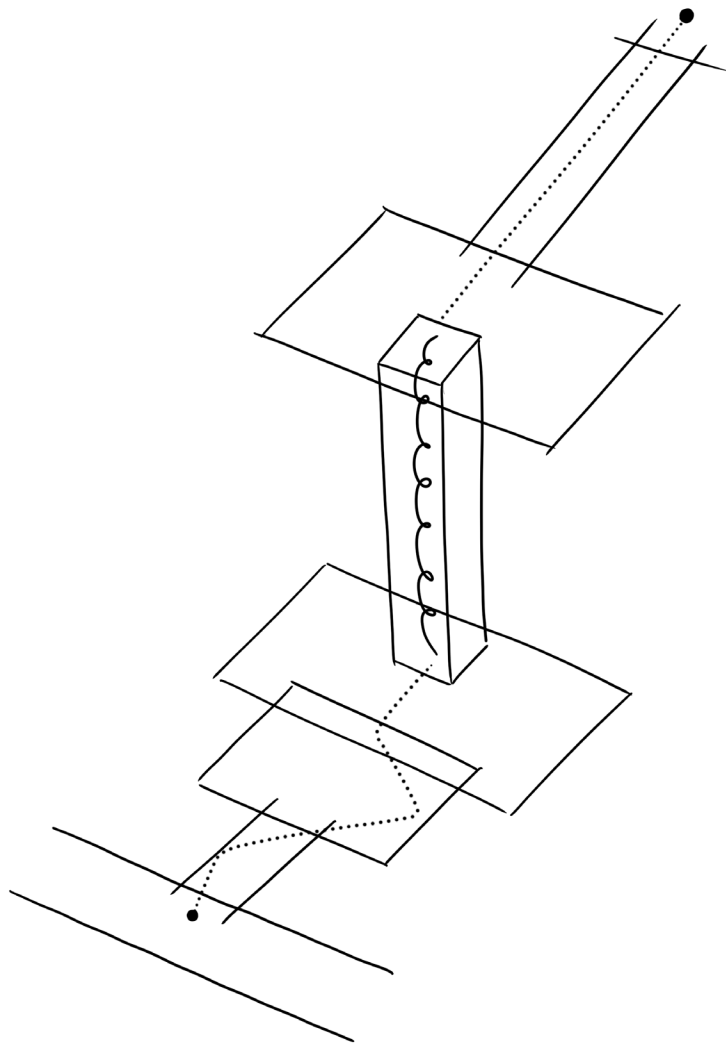


Diploma Studio
De Vylder | Langenberg | Delbeke

Multiples

The act of coming home
Luana Günthardt



preface

The lens of the multiple as a method to observe space drew my attention to a reoccurring moment in everybody's day to day: the act of coming home. Having accompanied 25 people on their way home in the last four weeks, this booklet serves as a moment of reflection on all the inspiring impressions and conversations.

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abstract

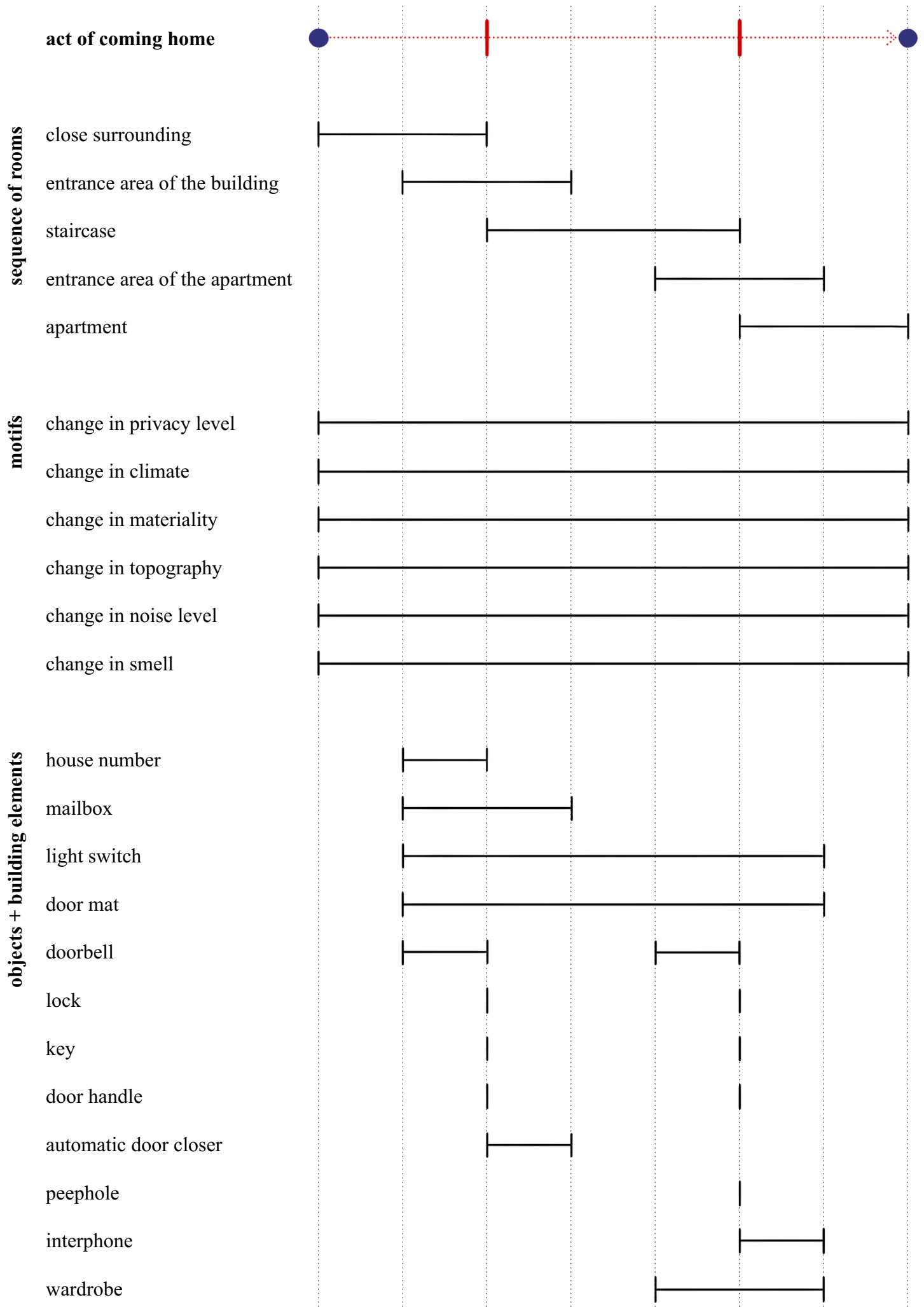
The feeling of home has several dimensions and refers to the knowledge of a place, its surrounding, and the people inhabiting it. It is connected to a sense of belonging, to feel sheltered and safe, and ultimately, to a moment of personal attachment to a place. Being related to previous personal experiences and their scale, the feeling of home can refer to public as well as private areas, possibly arising upon arrival at an airport, a train station, a street, a house, an apartment, a door or a room.

Speaking of the daily act of coming home, we usually refer to the moment of transition between the public and the private sphere. This transition is connected to rituals and prepares for the state of having arrived home, a state of resting in a place after having moved from one to another. It takes place in a threshold space, which belongs neither clearly to the public nor the private sphere. This interim state is not only present on a physical level of the space in between but also on a psychological level regarding the transformation from the public self into the private self, leading to increased awareness and desire for social interaction. It is the ambiguity of separation and connection, of creating distance and allowing proximity, which gives the threshold space its meaning as a spatial mediator. Remaining open to personal interpretation, it offers space for casual contacts in a neighborhood, which would not come about in the anonymity of the public or the intimacy of the private.

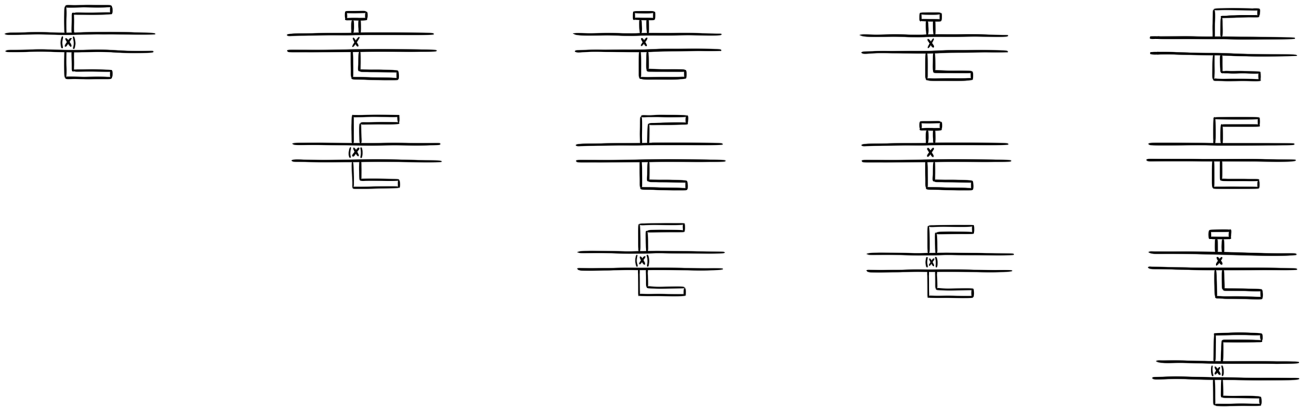
My attention is focused on the multiplication of this transitional moment in everyday life, especially how the threshold space, the act of coming home and social interactions are interconnected. The purposeful look at this everyday experience should tempt to dissolve the blind reproduction from one object to another and thus its self-evidence. By talking to people and accompanying them on their way home, I could personally experience their act of coming home and get an impression of their rituals, thoughts and social interactions. I deliberately decided to refrain from actively curating the selection of people I accompany or of buildings I visit beforehand, as I wanted to allow authentic randomness with this approach, suiting the ordinary nature of the observation topic.

the pattern

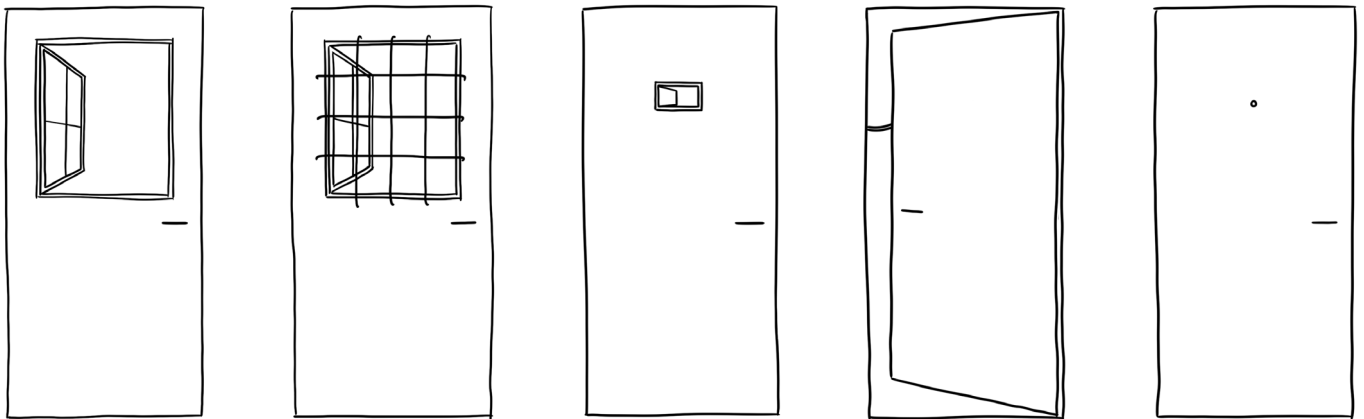
The act of coming home connects the two resting moments of being in another place and being at home. By comparing the visited threshold spaces on a physical level, a pattern reveals: the sequence of rooms, motifs, objects and building components repeat. The pattern indicates the common, whilst each instance specifically adapts to the context.



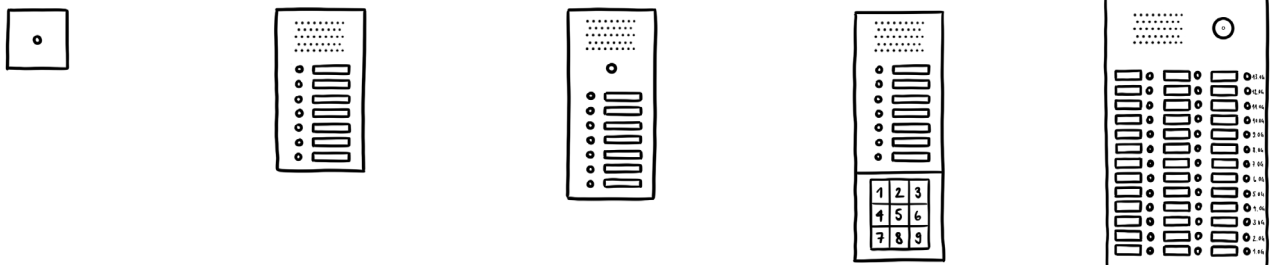
This pattern is based on the functionality of things, especially regarding objects and building elements. They can be categorized into the aspects of orientation + addressing, security + control, cleanliness + tidiness and connection + interaction. The comparative observation of the threshold spaces showed that some architectural details are almost identical, while others differ from each other. Such changes lead to an increase or decrease in the intensity of an aspect. The most evident variations found are illustrated on the following page.



Locks distinguish between authorized and unauthorized. Adding more doors to a threshold space allows for a more precise regulation of who gets access until where. Combined with automatic door closers, it increased the security of a building. However, it also introduced boundaries rather than connections, as doors stay less open and invite fewer to step through.



Openings form mutual visibility: wanting to know who is on the other side involves exposing oneself. The development towards more security for the inhabitant ultimately resulted in the peephole. Secretly being able to control the other side of the door creates an imbalance of who sees and who doesn't, going along with a decrease in interaction.

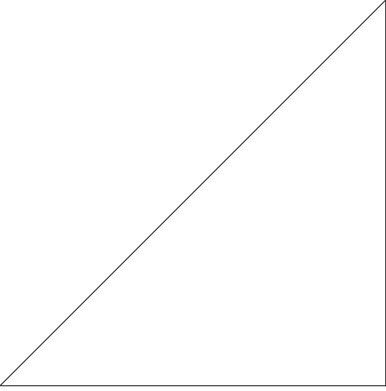


Doorbells connect the outside with the inside and give an addressing to inhabitants. The evolution into a technical communication device increased the distance between the public and private: Speaking over distance became possible, and the integration of cameras pushed the peephole moment further away from the private. Moving the mailbox to the more secure inside led to integrating secondary access systems. As a result, spontaneously posting a letter became impossible.

The comparison of details that changed over time indicates a tendency, especially towards more security + control, but also towards less connection + interaction. Nonetheless, in the current building praxis, the most up-to-date details are blindly repeated without considering the consequences. Furthermore, the access spaces of buildings are mostly determined by norm-compliant and low-maintenance materials, as well as minimum dimensions going along with restrictions of use and maximization of profit. The resulting uniformity of threshold spaces has lost the potential to mediate between the public and the private interestingly and to stimulate social interaction. Clear boundaries create enough distance between the two spheres to protect the privacy of the inhabitants of a building sufficiently. However, it leaves the question of how to allow moments of proximity broadly unanswered. Instead of threshold spaces offering room for self-awareness and personal interpretation, this approach leads to purely functional access spaces, which want to be overcome as quickly as possible.

the intangible

By giving weight to the psychological level of the interim state in a threshold space, the focus shifts towards the stories of the accompanied people about their social interactions, impressions and thoughts about the moment of coming home. These anecdotes offer an entry point to reflect on possible ways to establish spatial relationships that enhance interaction with and within a place. Because, after all, these moments of intersection between the public and the private offer room for informally getting to know a place, its surrounding, and the people inhabiting it, ultimately leading to a feeling of home before even having arrived in the own apartment. In search of examples identifying such intersecting moments, a selection of case studies follows, each illustrating a different aspect.



on roof terraces

on roof terraces

Visited object Accompanied inhabitant

Feldstrasse 112
8004 Zurich

multi-family house
back-to-back

6 apartments
on 6 floors

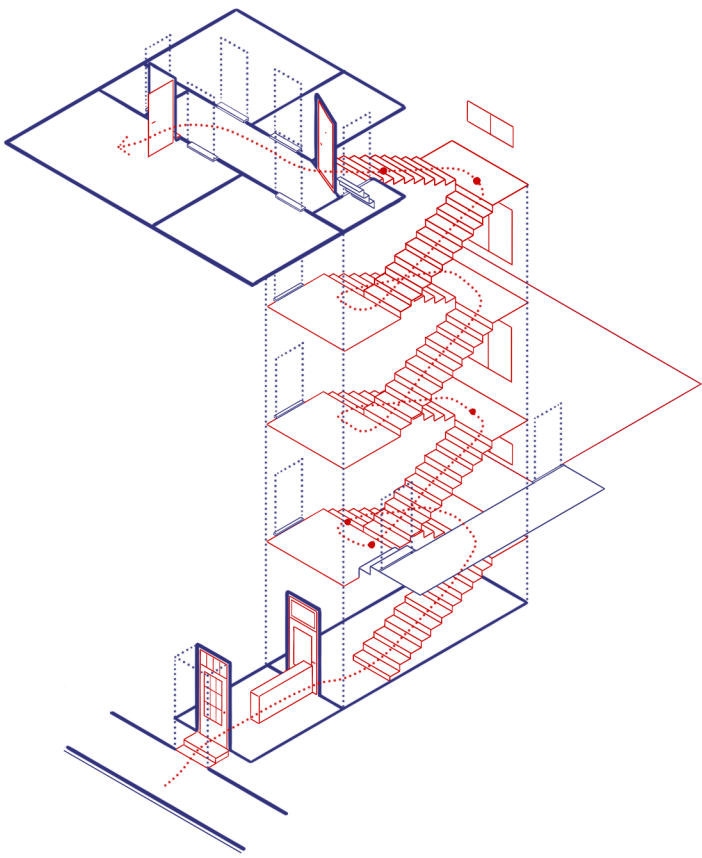
Anna
Zindel

shared flat for 2
5th floor

daily rhythm of work
8 to 5



«Entering the building and climbing the stairs, I soon pass by the door to access the lower roof terrace of the house. However, I don't have a key to this one, as usage of the terraces in the house is organized into two groups – a rule I have never really understood.»



«Continuing, a first view onto the roof terraces of my house and the building vis-a-vis opens up. It is one of the many views to come on my way to the 5th floor. Each window reveals a new perspective and therefore serves as a point of reference for me to understand on which floor I am currently.»



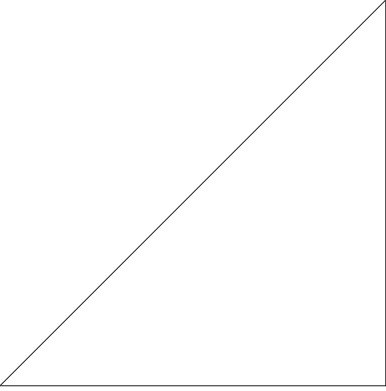
«The visual relations create a feeling of knowing the people I share a house and neighborhood with, even if I don't know them all in person. I can see them interacting, which is very enjoyable to notice and creates a feeling of livelihood within the house.»



«The roof terraces, in general, are the main point of interaction between us inhabitants. It is also where I casually met my neighbors and occasionally talk to them. Ironically, I know inhabitants of the neighboring house better than some of my own house, as our roof terraces are right next to each other and connected.»



«The door to access the second roof terrace is right next to our apartment door, making an inclination of the latter necessary. This proximity not only leads to an acoustic relation, such as when I get confused about whether it was our apartment door being opened or not, but also to a spatial one, as the inclination subtly channels the view into the corridor while entering, making it impossible to look into my bedroom directly.»



on materiality

on materiality

Visited object Accompanied inhabitant

Badenerstrasse 74
8004 Zurich

Timo
Bauer

multi-family house
city block

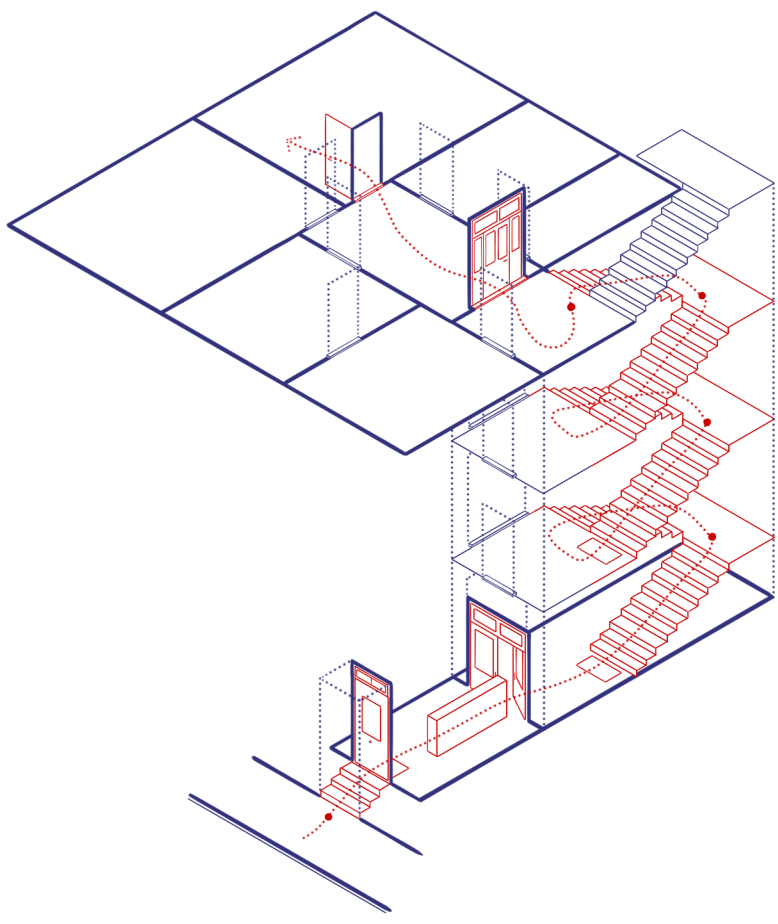
shared flat for 4
3rd floor

1 store + 1 office + 3 apartments
on 5 floors

daily rhythm of work
8 to 5



«Stepping into the deep entrance niche of the house, I feel relieved to have escaped the hectic street and busy sidewalk leading to the house. Sheltered by it, I unpack my key and open the door. Even though this moment of entering the house is rather abrupt, it feels very homely soon. Perhaps because of the swinging door of the vestibule, reminding rather of an apartment than a staircase.»



«First, the materials inside the house echo the ones of the street. The rather cold materials lead to the store's back entrance on the ground floor and extend into the staircase until the office space on the 1st floor. Many door mats can be found in the staircase, each symbolizing a new level of privacy until the apartment floors are reached.»



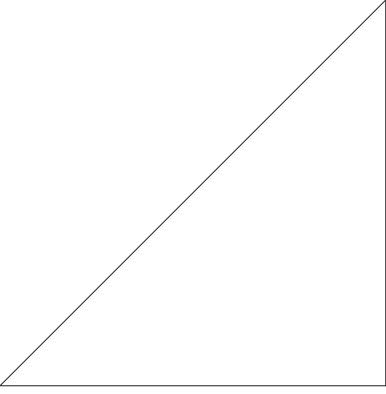
«Continuing, the materials successively change from hard, mineral materials to warm, wooden materials. A cosy feeling arises when I hear the creaking sound of the wooden steps and feel the contrasting softness on my feet in relation to the stone. Even the doors are differently materialized, signaling the change in use from a store to an office to apartments.»



«The transparency of the apartment doors makes the light of the staircase become part of the living space and vice versa. I enjoy this subtle proximity, as the ornamentation of the glass still provides enough distance not to feel inappropriately close to my neighbors. This connection conveys a feeling of liveliness, even if the interaction occurs only subconsciously.»



«Sometimes someone accidentally turns off the staircase light from within the apartment, but the staircase remains bright enough, receiving a beautiful shadow on the wall. The spacious landing allows leaving shoes and other personal items outside. The accumulation of them creates a certain familiarity between us inhabitants. The moment I take off my shoes here, I feel to have arrived home and walk in my socks to the door.»



on openings and insight

on openings and insight

Visited object Accompanied inhabitant

Hafnerstrasse 60
8005 Zurich

Emilie
Sauter

multi-family house
city block

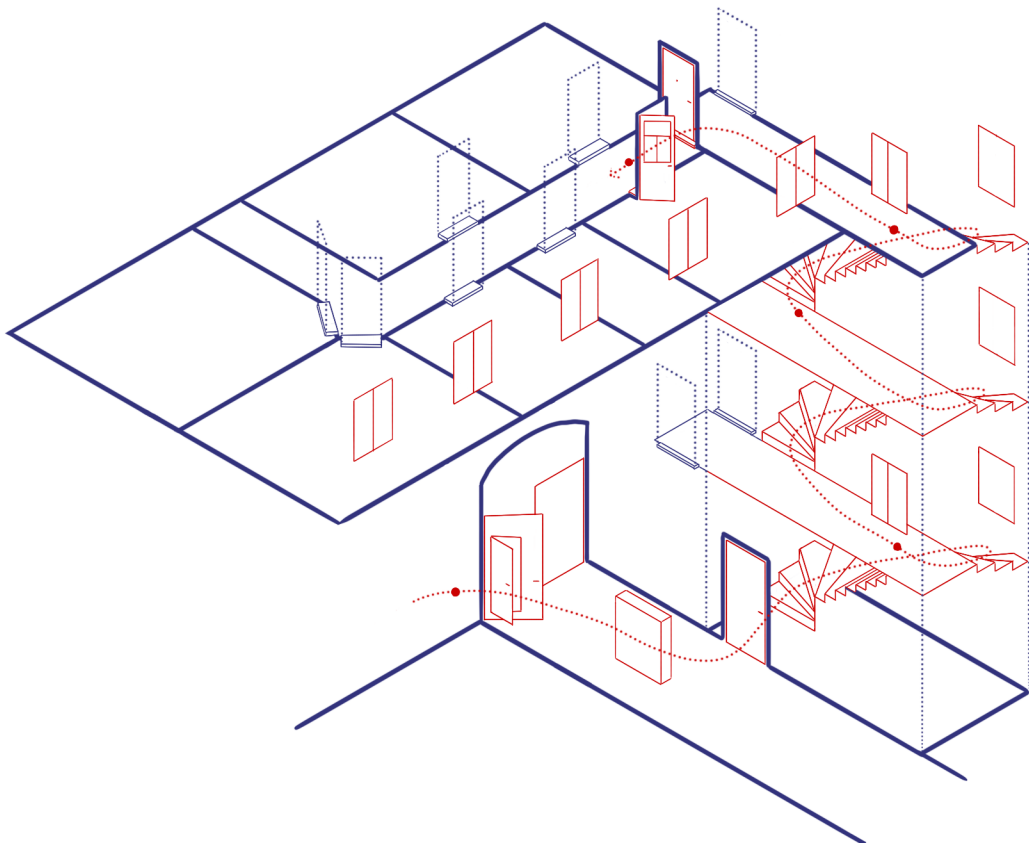
shared flat for 4
3rd floor

1 office + 1 apartment
on 3 floors

daily rhythm of work
8 to 5



«The gate's state of opening to the passage conveys a sense of time, as it is connected to a set of informal agreements between the users of the place. During the night, once I have closed the gate behind me, I feel safe and am thankful for the distance to the busy nightlife.»



«In one of the staircase windows, a moment of interchange has established. By now, it has developed into a small network of exchange amongst us inhabitants but also with our visitors. Every time I pass by, I look if there is something new, and if so, I wonder to whom of my neighbors it might have belonged.»



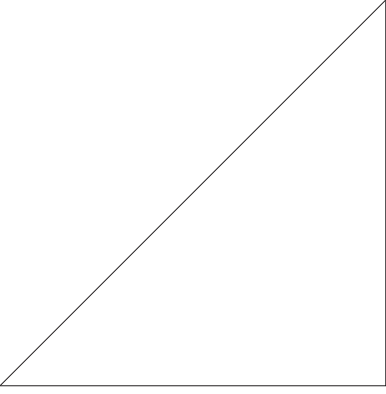
«Climbing the stairs, I pass not only by windows facing the outside but also towards the inside of apartments. Especially when it is already dark, they provide a warm light to the otherwise badly lit staircase. I enjoy this form of indirect interaction, as it transports a comforting feeling of knowing that I'm not the only one who will be at home in the building.»



«Before arriving at my door, I can glimpse through the window at the facade of my apartment. The light situation signalizes whether someone is already home, especially because the closest windows are the ones of shared used rooms. It communicates what might expect me when entering the apartment.»



«At the moment of stepping in, I already feel to have arrived home. The transparency of the kitchen door invites to look into the kitchen. As I'm usually the last to come home, I find my flat mates there. Placing my belongings somewhere on the wardrobe, I normally have already started talking to them and look forward to the evening together.»

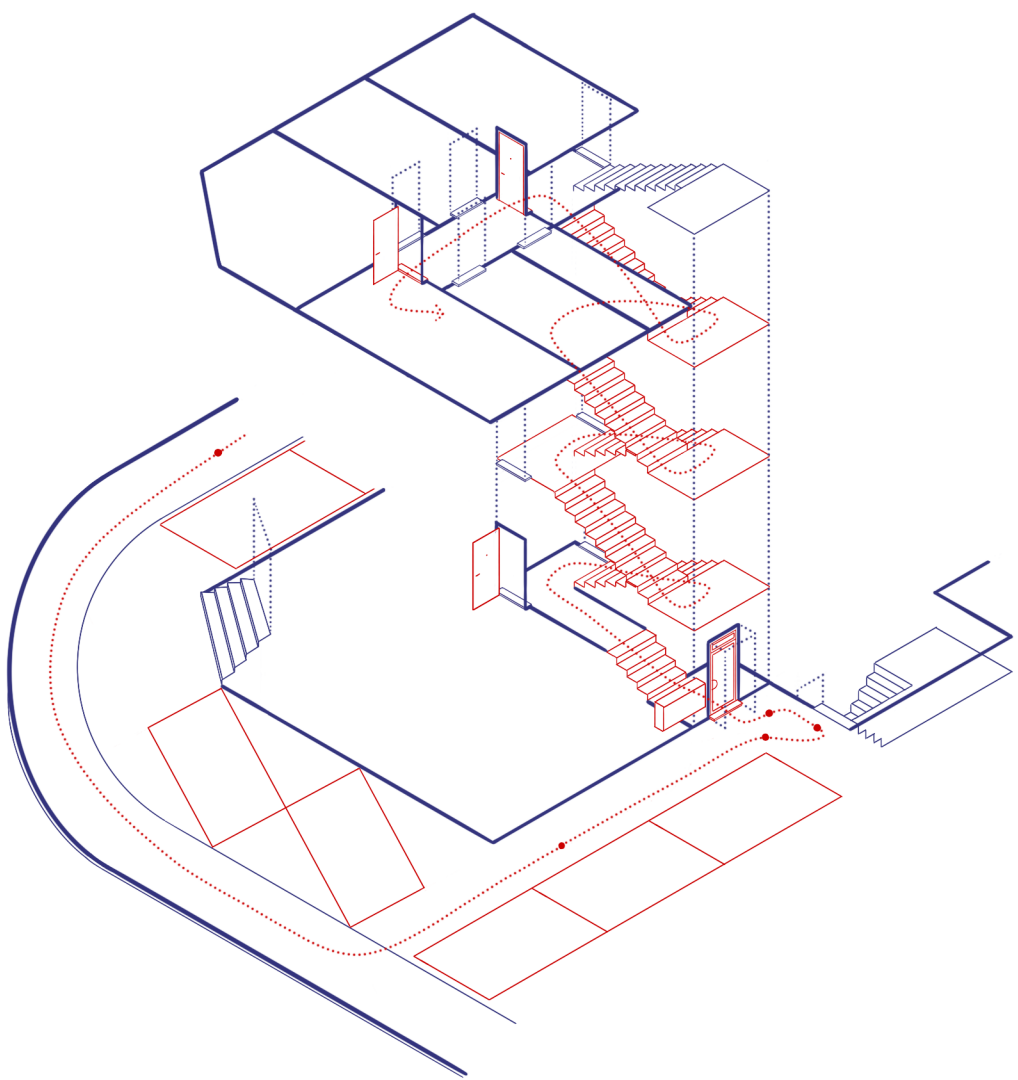


on commercial ground floors

on commercial ground floors

Visited object Accompanied inhabitant

Binzmühlestrasse 41 8050 Zurich	Christina Cibeira Lachmann
multi-family house row	shared flat for 3 3 rd floor
1 store + 9 apartments on 5 floors	daily rhythm of work 22 to 6



«Walking home from the train station after a night shift, I feel the rush of the people passing by to catch their connection to work. All the more, I enjoy the quiet atmosphere the small bakery in the front corner of my house tries to convey. A quiet moment before the rush I know will expect me in the backyard.»



«Usually, I come home when the bakery is in the middle of its preparation for the day. As they share their back entrance with our front entrance of the apartments, they often use the tight entrance area to receive deliveries. During this time, they really take over the entrance. However, I got used to it and don't mind the narrowness anymore.»



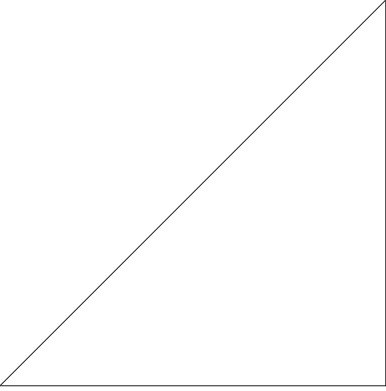
«The bakery uses our cellar as well as the courtyard house to bake their pastries. I often run into someone going from one place to another in a hurry. By now, I know this time of the day is their absolute peak hour. Because when I meet them later during the day during their breaks sitting on the intermediate platform on the table, I often get into a nice conversation with them.»



«During opening hours of the bakery, normally all the doors stay wide open. Entering, an intense, very specific sweet smell of pastry awaits me. I have to admit that I don't particularly enjoy it anymore. However, when the smell is absent, it feels like something is missing on my way home.»



«Only the moment I have closed my apartment door behind me, the smell of pastry slowly fades out and is substituted by the one of my home. After taking off everything that, when having entered, suddenly feels heavier than before, I normally go to the balcony and smoke a cigarette. I enjoy watching the happenings in the backyard from far for a while, as it makes my coming home so particular.»



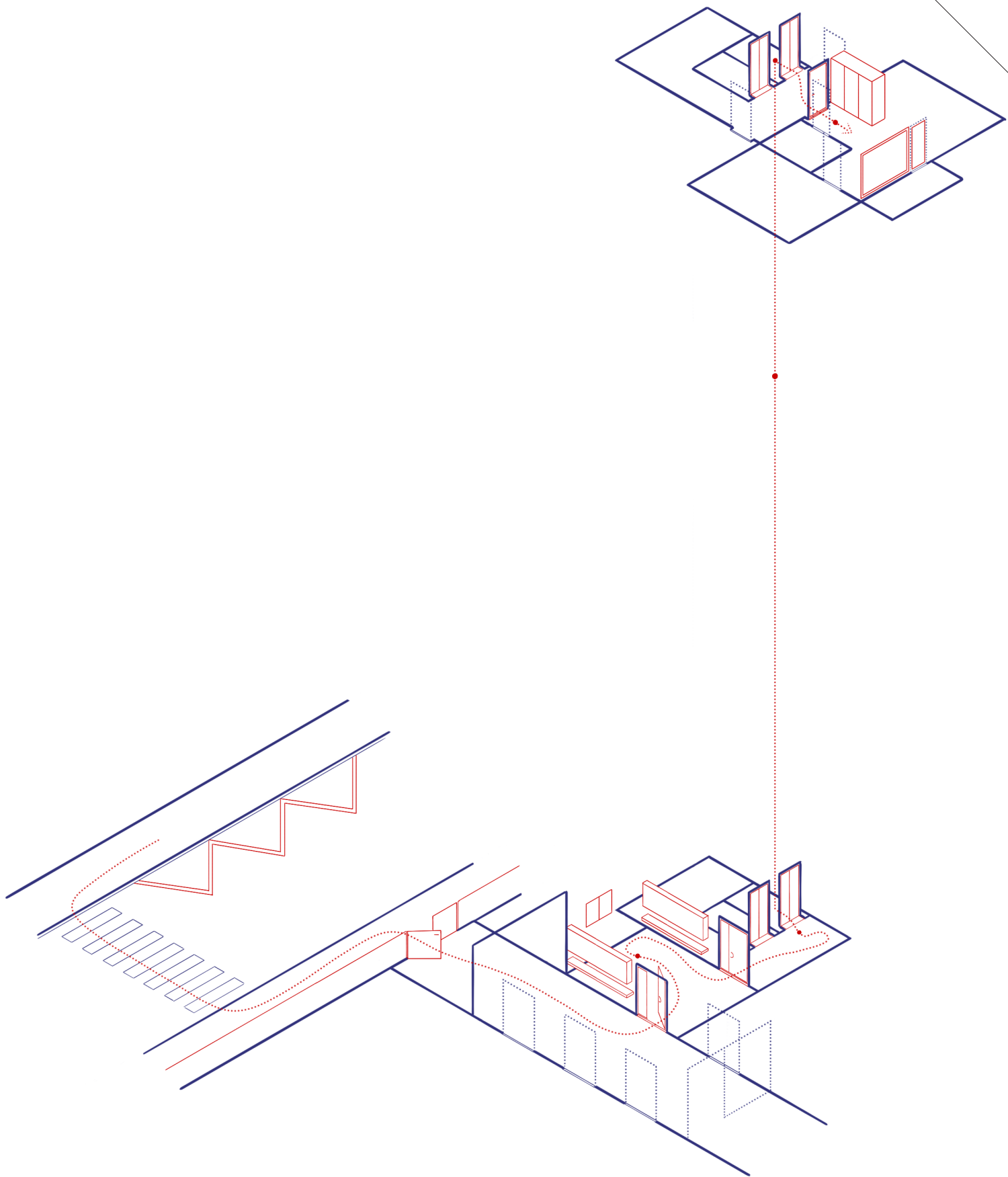
on elevators

on elevators

Visited object	Accompanied inhabitant
Gutstrasse 227 8047 Zurich	Meret Heeb
multi-family house high-rise	shared flat for 2 12 th floor
36 apartments on 13 floors	daily rhythm of work 8 to 5



«Living in a high-rise building goes along with a sense of orientation about where my home is located because even if being far away, I can often see it. For entering the vestibule of the building, no key is needed, so I only start searching for it by comfortably placing my bag on the bench. Being empty-handed, I even open and read my mail down here before continuing.»



«Waiting for the elevator is always a surprise, as there is no indication on which floor it is. While waiting for the old and slow elevator, I normally look through the magazines on the news rack, losing track of time. Sometimes neighbors join the waiting. The elevator's ping signalizes that it is ready for us to enter.»



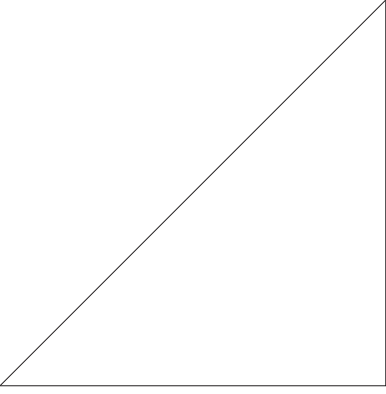
«The opening question into a conversation is always: to which floor is it going? No wonder I could almost tell of each person on which floor they live, but not their name. Also, we were soon known in the house as the two new young ones living on the 12th floor. In general, I enjoy this moment of interaction, even if sometimes a bit weird, but otherwise, I would never interact as much with my neighbors.»



«In the elevator, I lose spatial orientation. The only thing localizing me is the numbers everywhere. When the door opens, I catch a glimpse of other entrance areas, but I'm not particularly interested as they are in no way connected to my coming home ritual. Once the noisy elevator finally reaches my floor, I wish a good day and leave.»



«The moment I open the door to my apartment and see the familiar view of the city, I feel to have arrived home as it. After moving within the glossy elevator cabin from the shared entrance area to my apartment's entrance, the view indicates time and location again.»



on proximity to sidewalks

on proximity to sidewalks

Visited object Accompanied inhabitant

Wieslergasse 34
8049 Zurich

single-family house
free standing

1 apartment
on 2 floors

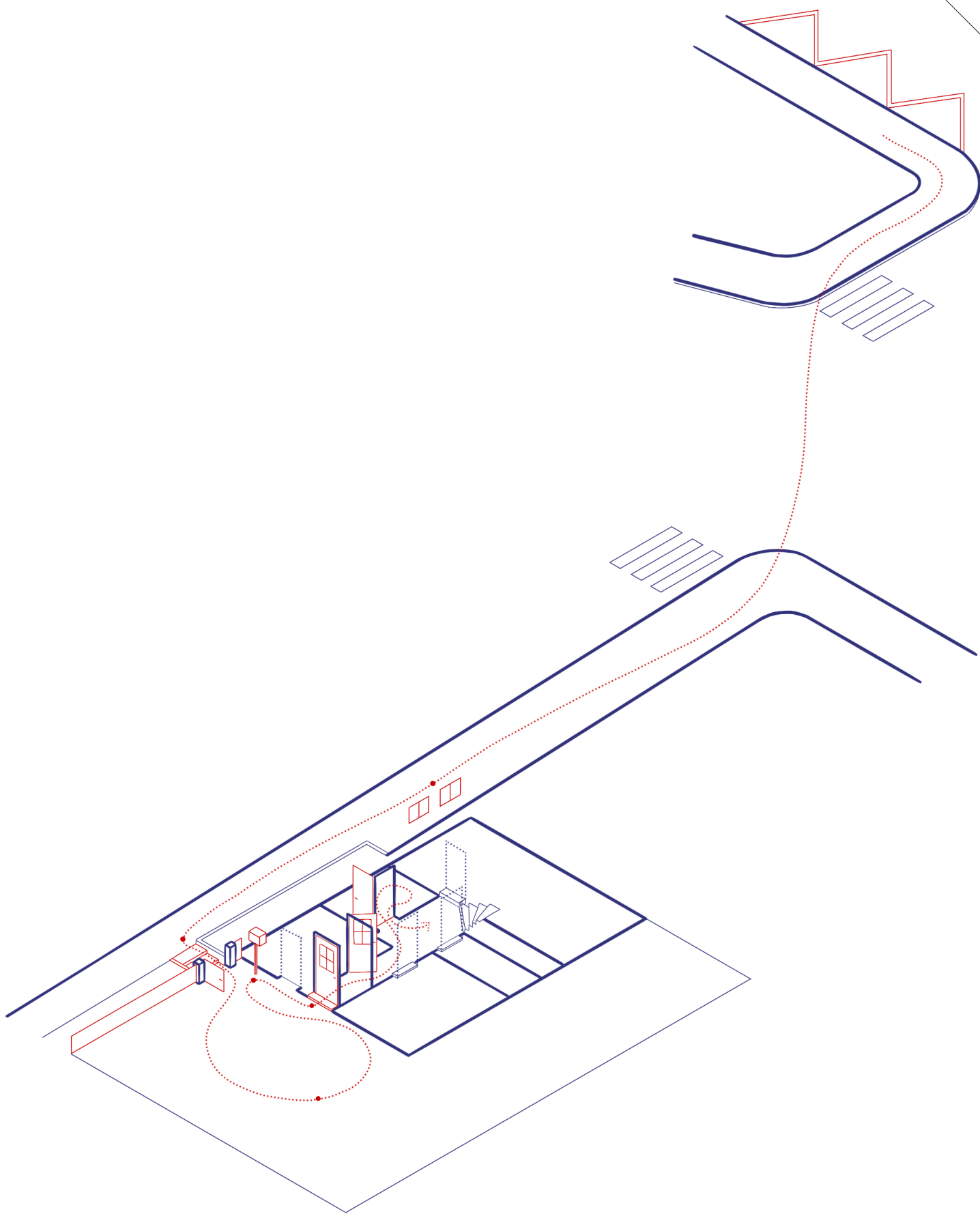
Emmanuelle
Farine

shared flat for 4
entire house

daily rhythm of work
8 to 5



«Passing by the kitchen on my way home, I always look down through the window into the house, trying to see if someone is there. Due to the rising topography of the sidewalk, the kitchen works like a lowered ground floor, creating an interesting relationship to the street level, particularly to children.»



«Walking through the gate into the garden of our house, I feel at home. We always leave the gate open as the handle is too low to use comfortably. However, I wouldn't do it differently as it reminds me of the gesture that someone has just invited you to enter.»



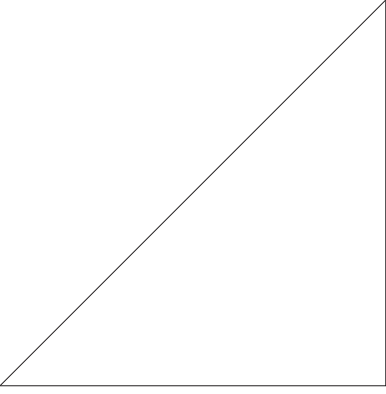
«During summer, before entering the house, I look after the plants in the garden. Apart from the kitchen, the garden is the most social area of our home. Often, I start talking with my neighbor of the house next door, who is always spending his time in the garden. Also, it happens quite often that people walking approach me, mostly asking me about the house which will soon be demolished.»



«After the usual round through the garden, I'm returning to the front yard and empty the letter box. Sometimes I lay my bags down and get scissors to cut something, but normally I go inside first. If I haven't met my flat mates by now, the latest I find them here, sitting in the chair while smoking or in the kitchen.»



«As the house heats up a lot during summer, we keep the window in the front door open to ensure as much ventilation as possible. I enjoy this time of the year, as it acoustically connects the inside of the house and outside of the garden.»



on bustle and noise

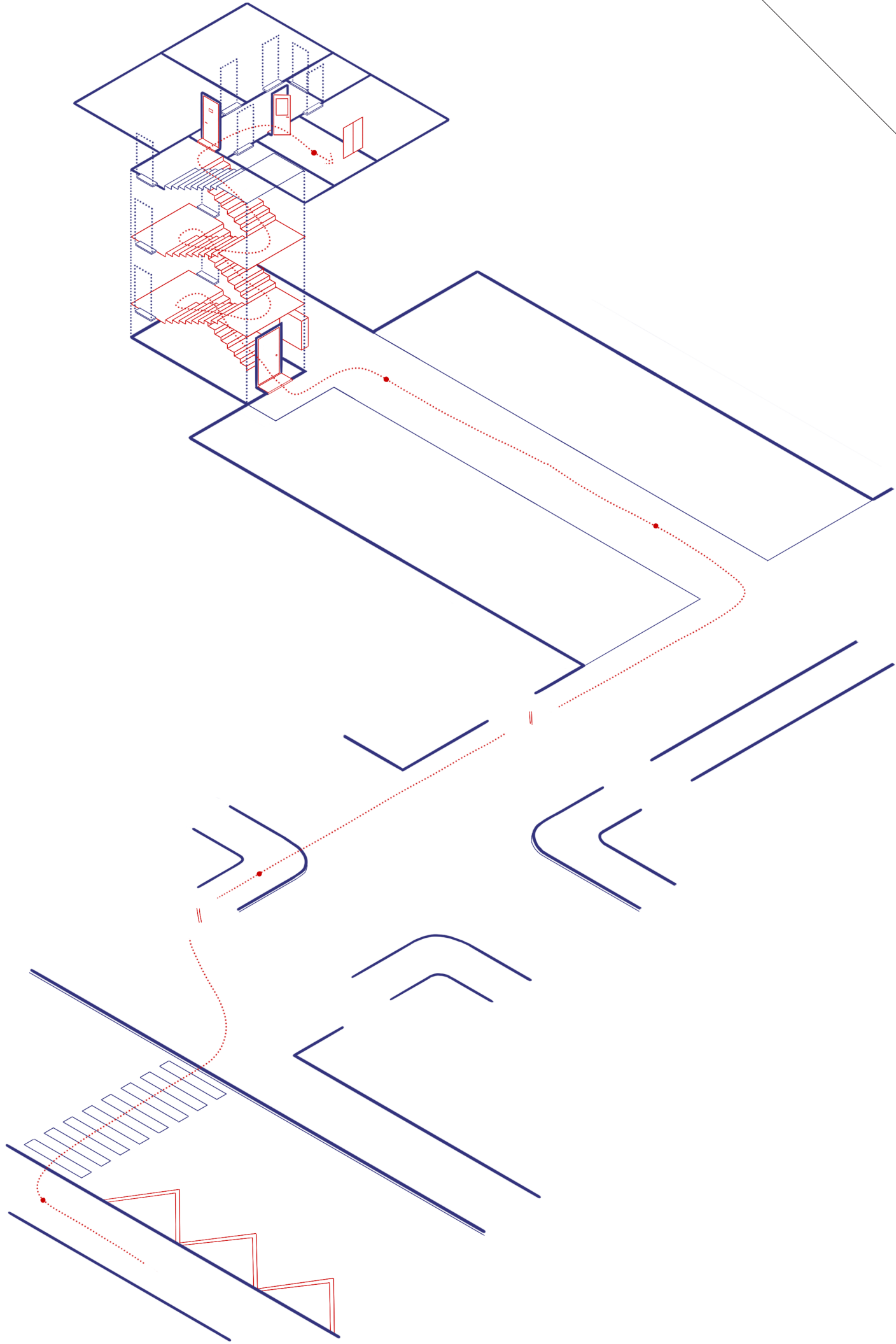
on bustle and noise

Visited object Accompanied inhabitant

Hohlstrasse 175 8004 Zurich	Flavia Kläy
multi-family house city block	shared flat for 3 2 nd floor
9 apartments on 5 floors	daily rhythm of work 8 to 5



«Getting out of the bus, I first have to cross the busy road I just came on. From there, the fastest way home would be along the main street. However, I always choose the one along secondary roads, as the successive decrease in bustle and noise helps me to gain distance from a day of work.»



«Walking home, the less attention I have to pay to the ongoings on the road, the more I sink into thoughts, wandering from the experiences of the day towards the forthcoming evening. Once I reach the edge of my housing block, where the pedestrian on our side of the street is suddenly missing, I start feeling close to my home.»



«Entering the quiet backyard, I always look up to our kitchen window, easily to be recognized by the compost standing on the windowsill. Lights or movements signalize whether one of my flat mates is already home, and I start wondering how their day might have been. The courtyard, in general, is the main place of interaction between inhabitants, and I consider all apartments connected to it as my neighbors, even if we don't share the same house entrances.»



«Right next to my house entrance, the streetside gate in the form of a sliding door to enter the courtyard is located. Every time it opens, the noise and bustle from the main road fade in, giving me a sense of location in the city again, which I have almost forgotten by then.»



«By the time I enter the house and my apartment, I feel mentally prepared to arrive home. While placing my shoes and jacket onto the wardrobe, I can take a glimpse through the kitchen out of the window into the backyard again. It reminds me how the way home positively influences me.»

conclusion and questions

The importance of the threshold space lies in its potential to communicate between the public and the private. Spatially mediating the decrease in anonymity respectively the increase in intimacy, intersections rather than clear boundaries allow for a personal reading of the space. They suggest possibilities for personal interpretation, for also appropriating areas not clearly defined as part of the own private apartment. After all, it is these moments of intersection within the act of coming home that can enhance a feeling of home, even before having arrived in the apartment.

Consequently, the overall question for a design intervention is: How to design such intersections between the public and the private?

Would an inversion of the planning process – in the first phase designing the act of coming home and from there developing the way of living in a building – help to design intersections?

Would an inversion of the entry point – starting from a building considered public, punctually adding privacy – offer inspiration to think of such intersections?

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