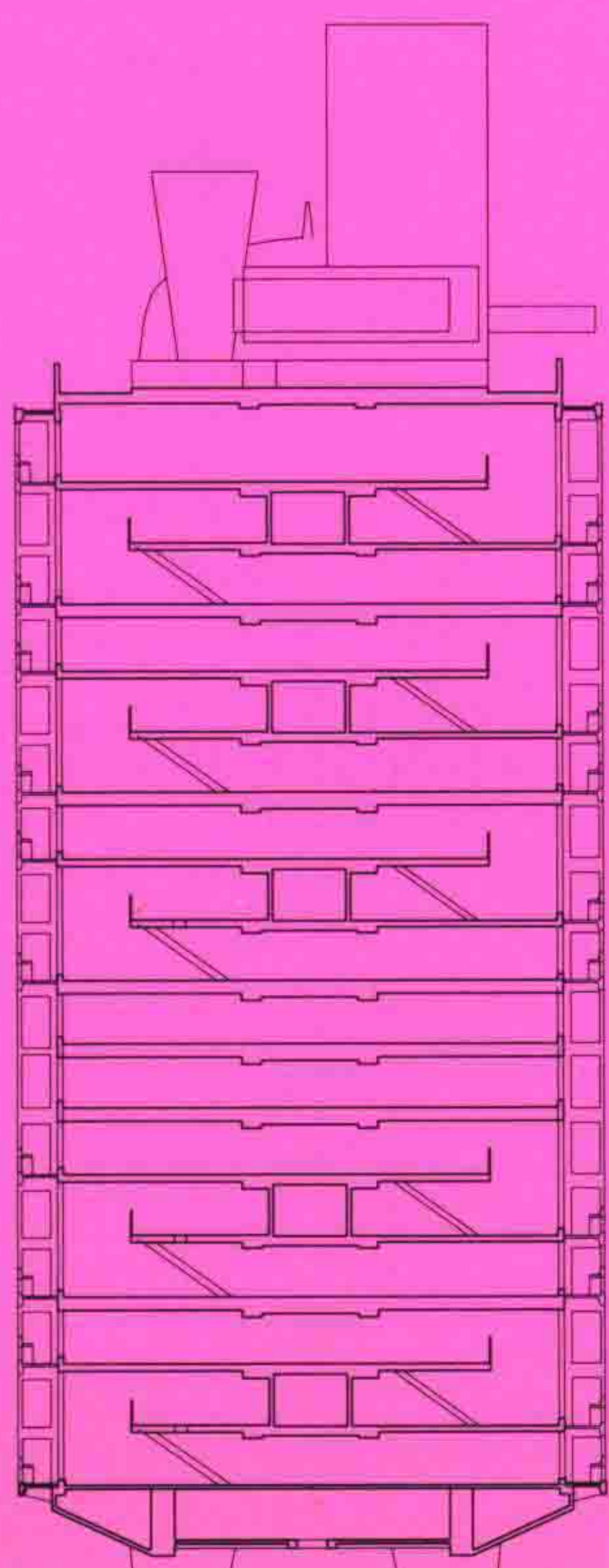


Key Urban Housing of the Twentieth Century

PLANS, SECTIONS AND ELEVATIONS Hilary French



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Plans, Sections and Elevations

Hilary French

Laurence King Publishing



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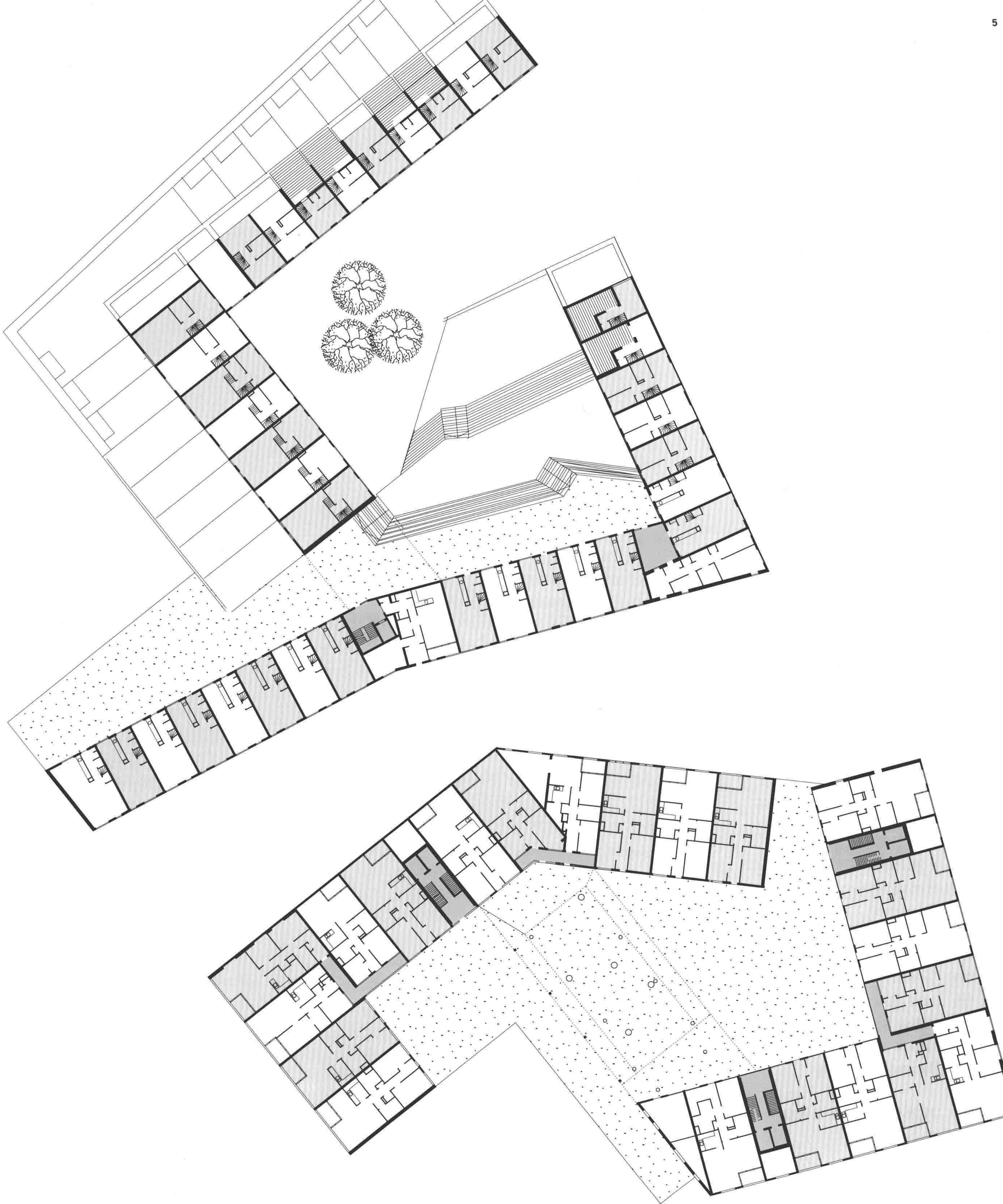
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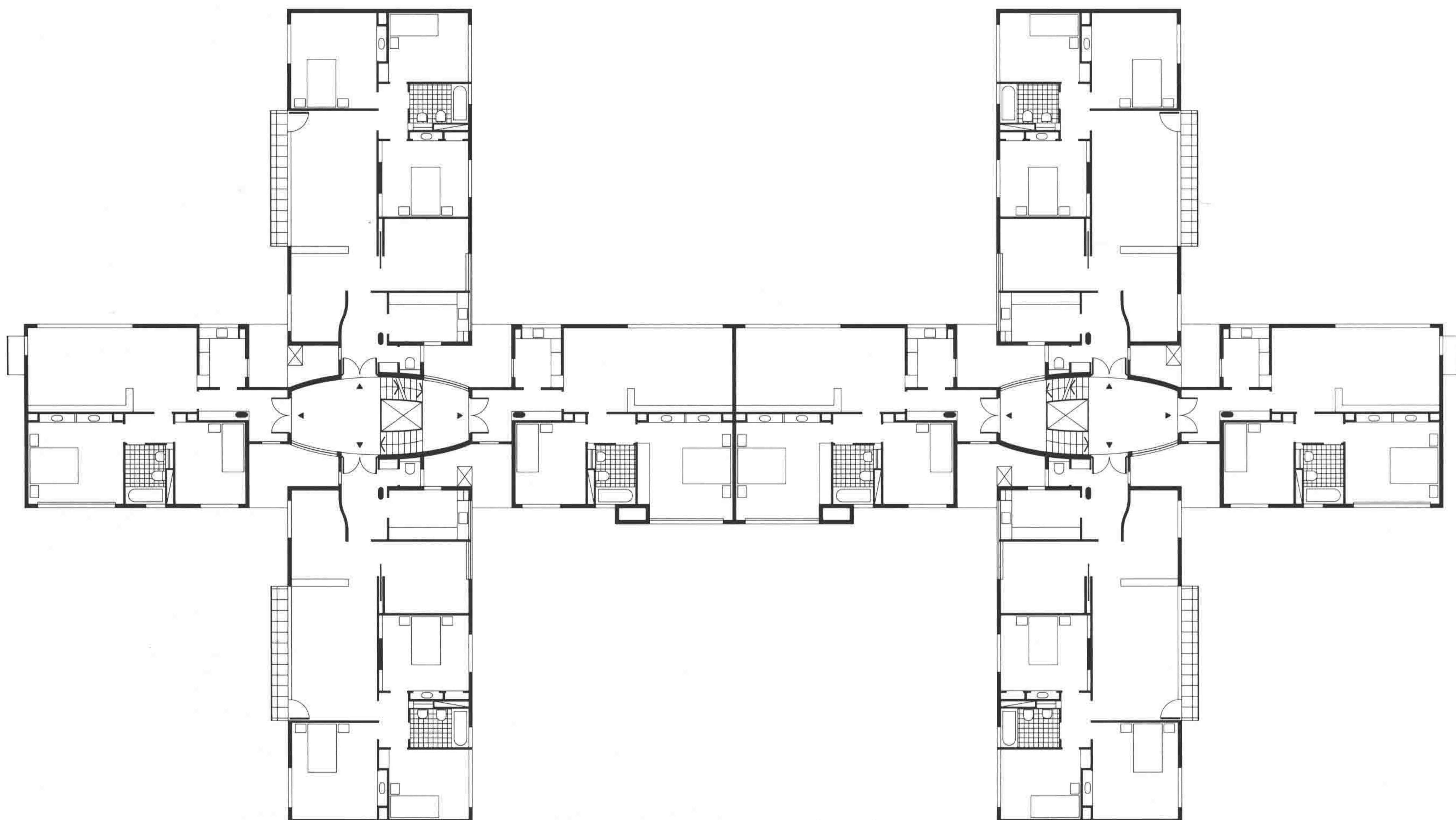


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Introduction



We are making this book because we believe that we shall want to escape from suburban street corridors to live in parkland with common amenities, air, and a view; and that the problems of housing cannot be solved by the provision of millions of little cottages scattered over the face of the country, whether in the garden city manner, or as speculatively built stragglers.

R.R.S. Yorke and Frederick Gibberd, Introduction to *The Modern Flat* (London: The Architectural Press, 1937, second edition 1948)

Drawing is a form of communication with oneself or with others. For the architect it is also, amongst other things a working tool, a way of learning, understanding communicating, transforming; a way of designing.

Alvaro Siza, The Importance of Drawing in *Siza: Architecture Writings*, Angelilo Antonio, ed. (Milan: Skira, 1997)

Three important books have served, to an extent, as paradigms for this one. The most significant is Roger Sherwood's *Modern Housing Prototypes*, published in 1978, not least because of his opening premise, as valid 30 years later in 2008 as it was then, that 'a re-examination of some of the great housing projects of this century (the 20th) is appropriate at a time when the design of housing commands the attention of architects the world around'. The other books are, firstly, *The Modern Flat*, published in 1937, by F. R. S. Yorke and Frederick Gibberd, and extending to their following title *Modern Flats*, published in 1958; and secondly, *Floor Plan Manual, Housing*, edited by Friedrike Schneider and published in 1994. Each of these publications has a particular perspective related to the location and time at which it was written. However, what they have in common is their acknowledgement of the role of the drawing as the primary tool of the

architect, and therefore their attempt to show drawings at the centre of the work rather than as mere illustrations to a critique or historical analysis. Similarly, in this book, drawings – orthographic projections in plan, section and elevation – generally drawn to scale for comparative purposes, are the primary tool used to describe the selected buildings.

These three earlier publications all work as 'picture books', showing selected buildings through a series of drawings with an accompanying short description. Roger Sherwood's *Modern Housing Prototypes* categorizes housing as a series of types: first as Unit types, then as building types. Unit types are categorized according to their orientation to the exterior: single, double and double-orientation open-ended. Variations on these basic models result from the positioning of the entrance, bathrooms and kitchens of the dwellings. Building forms are then

organized into categories based partly on characteristics such as site, orientation, density, etc. and partly on the access and circulation system: single-loaded corridors, double-loaded, split-level and skip-stop. The examples Sherwood chooses to expand on are grouped by their different building forms, arranged, according to density, as detached and semi-detached, row houses (or terraces), party wall, blocks, slabs and towers. Of the 32 examples he uses, Sherwood states that they are intended only as a representative sampling: 'well-known models of a particular housing type – Le Corbusier or Siedlung Halen by Atelier 5 for instance – or because they are particularly revealing examples of a type such as the Vienna Werkbund Exposition rowhouses of Lurçat or Brinkman's Spangen Housing.'

Writing in 1978, Sherwood speculates that, following two decades in which housing costs had risen at twice the rate of income, multiple housing projects will

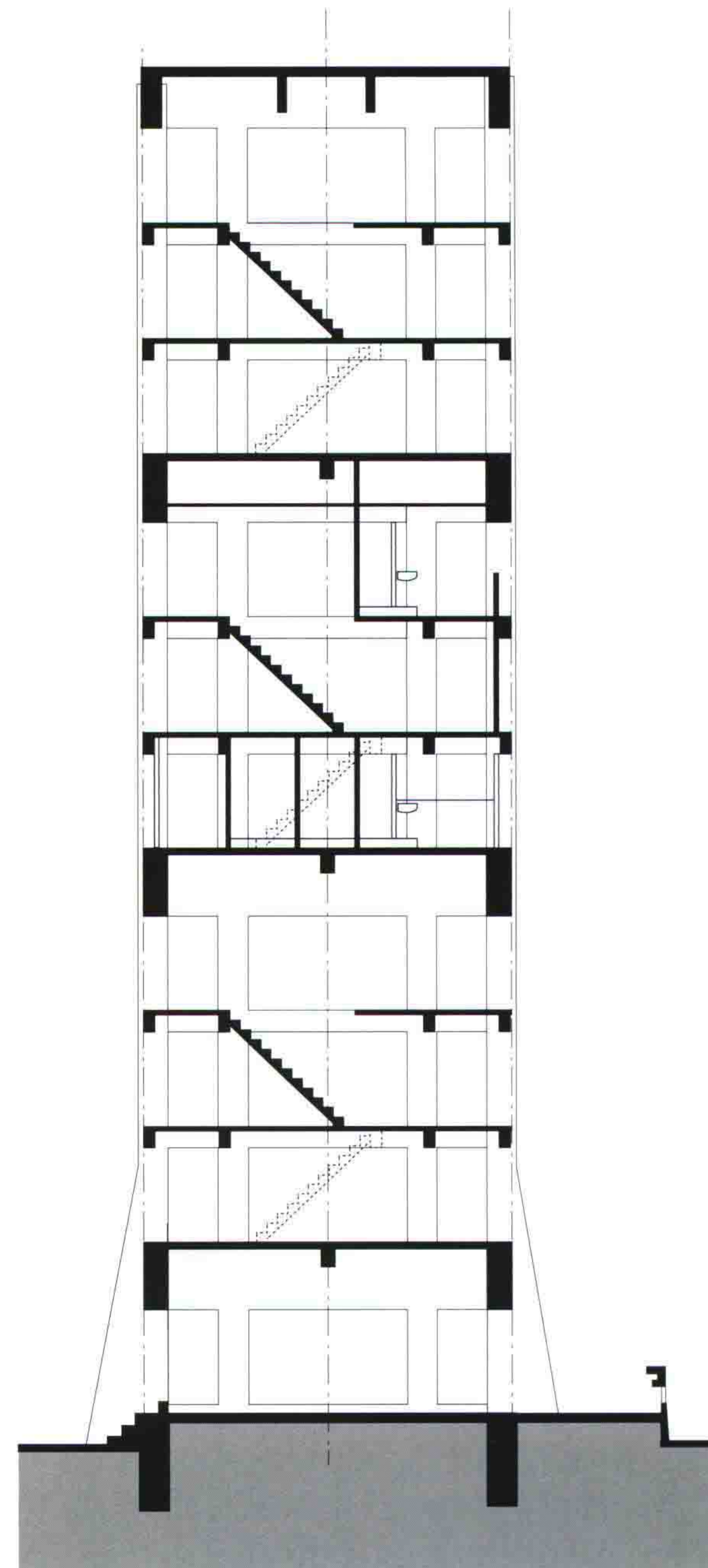


by necessity become more popular, as the norm of individual houses affordable to most middle-class families is likely to change. Additionally, although published in the United States, only a very few of the examples he chooses are American: the Pueblo Ribera Court (1923–5) by Schindler, the Peabody Terrace (1964) by Sert Jackson & Gourley, Price Tower (1956) by Frank Lloyd Wright – all of which are included here – as well as Wright’s Suntop homes (1939) and the courtyard houses (1931) designed by Mies van der Rohe. The majority of his examples are well known, mainly European, ones – many of which are included here. Others that might have been included are Le Corbusier’s version of the stepped section in the Durand Apartment design for Algiers (1934); the Zomerdijkstraat apartments in Amsterdam (1934), designed as ateliers with a double-height studio space; or Neave Brown’s Fleet Road scheme (1967), which reworked the alternating

street-and-mews pattern of traditional London thoroughfares.

The most recent of the three books, the *Floor Plan Manual*, published in 1994, similarly groups housing projects by building type, divided initially into one of two groups – either multi-storey or low-rise – and then categorized according to urban planning typology, for example ‘free-standing’, ‘infill’ or ‘block-defining’ structures, and, for low-rise, ‘row’, ‘duplex’ or ‘detached’. An introductory essay on the ‘typology of access’ by Helmuth Sting examines the options possible with different plan-types and how they might be grouped into various constructional configurations.

The time period covered by *Floor Plan Manual* is rather different to that of Sherwood’s book. The earliest project here is Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation (1947), and there are only a very few other examples from the 1950s and 1960s, most of which correspond almost exactly with the examples included



here. Instances of tower blocks include Mies van der Rohe’s Lake Shore Drive (1951), Denys Lasdun’s cluster block (1958) and Marina City (1964) by Goldberg. Safdie’s Habitat 67, the Halen scheme (1955–61) by Atelier 5 and The Ryde (1966) by PRP Architects are all included in the low-rise terraces or row housing section. The majority of the projects are those built in the 25-year period from the 1970s until the mid 1990s, with some additional, more recent, projects in the later edition. The authors claim to have ‘strived for internationality but only while limiting



Opposite far left: Peabody Terrace, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964, Sert Jackson & Gourley. The housing for married students at Harvard University has a series of eight-storey high buildings forming quadrangles punctuated with three 22-storey high towers.

Opposite right: Harumi Apartments, Tokyo, 1958, Kunio Maekawa. Section through slab block showing access corridors at every third floor level with stairs perpendicular to the structure.

Left: 800–880 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois, 1951, Mies van der Rohe. The two identical 26-storey high towers were early versions of apartment buildings with open plans and fully glazed façades.

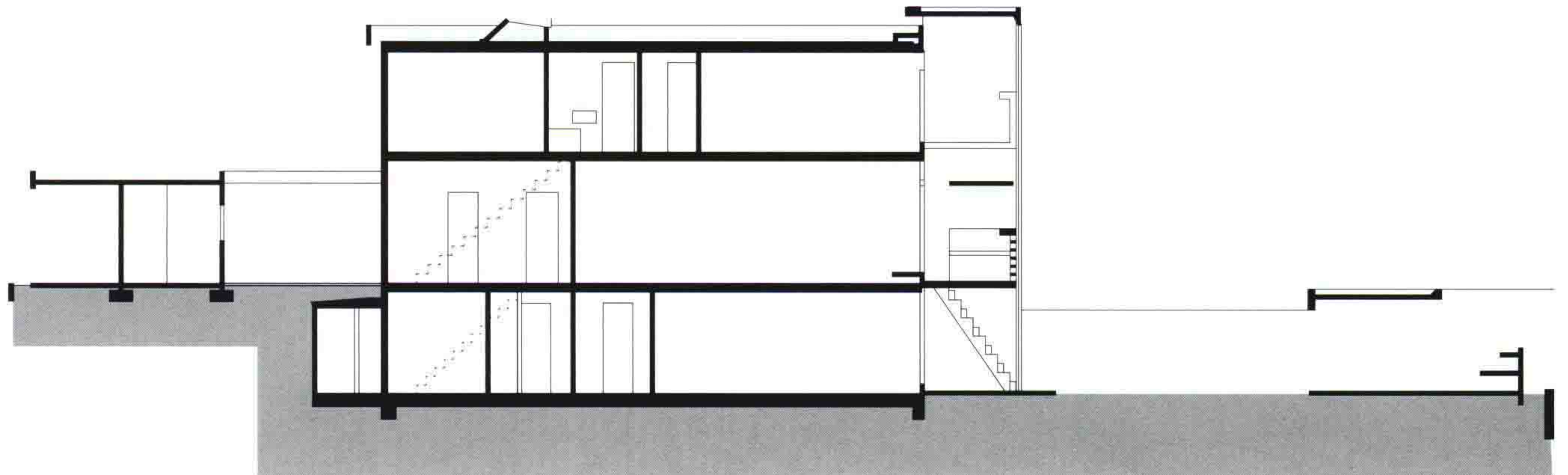
Below: Halen Housing, Berne, Switzerland, 1955–1961, Atelier 5. Section of a typical terraced house stepping down to follow the contours of the sloping site.

cultural and climatic differences to a certain degree'. That is, they have focused on European countries with a similar temperate climate. *Floor Plan Manual* was published in Germany, and a very large proportion of the examples are from that country; and another sizeable selection is from the Netherlands. Once again, very few North American projects are included.

By comparison, *The Modern Flat* (1937) has a somewhat different perspective, in that it is looking at the design of flats only – a relatively new

phenomenon in England at that time – rather than at all forms of multiple housing. It also groups its examples by country, following an introductory essay that explores the history of flats and analyzes the different developments in terms of type. The introduction to the first edition states that 'the flat has produced a building type peculiar to our own era: without precedent in the architecture of the past'. The book's radical approach includes describing the family thus: 'a single person, living alone or with friends, or it may consist of

man and wife, with or without children, and or other dependants' – concepts that are still difficult for some developers and landlords today. Its tone is entirely optimistic, advocating higher-density urban development in place of suburban single-villa layouts, which are deemed to be taking up too much land and spoiling the potential of the countryside. For the authors, the 'modern flat' is also a key element in the new modern architecture that uses industrialized construction systems as opposed to the traditional building methods of the house builder.





Twenty-one years later, in *Modern Flats* (1958), the same authors make no attempt to rewrite or attempt a critical appraisal of their previous work; they propose ‘simply a picture book of some of the more distinguished flat buildings which have been built in recent years’. They felt any critical commentary to be superfluous to opinions expressed on the examples they chose to illustrate, which, again, included only recent contemporary examples, in this case built since 1945.

Reflecting on their earlier publication, Yorke and Gibberd recognize that there had been a ‘need to make the case for flat dwelling’ because conditions at that time had been very different. Then, they had criticized the poor quality of workers’ housing – the dull uniform blocks in a sea of asphalt – and of luxury flats, seen only as an opportunity for developers to make more rental income. Twenty-one years on, they are observing new emerging trends:

building higher, building communities rather than individual blocks, and building neighbourhoods with mixed developments of flats and houses – above all, seeing architecture as a key element in the drive to provide people with better-quality housing and a better way of living.

The intention in the current volume was to bring together housing designs that are considered to be the best examples of their kind, or those that demonstrate either a particular approach by the architect or a particular interpretation of a recognized type. All of the case studies here have been described in professional journals, and most have been included in architectural histories. The majority of projects are from Europe, reflecting the roots and development of European Modernism’s focus on housing design in the middle decades of the twentieth century – and those from further afield also reflect this influence. Primarily these are what might

be described as the new typology of ‘modern apartment buildings’, the now familiar tower blocks and slab blocks as well as the complex residential estates familiar in all cities. In parallel with these runs a second strand that records the ongoing development of the low-rise, terrace and courtyard models that continue to be a significant element in all kinds of urban housing design.

Rather than a categorization by type – either unit type or formal typology – the projects are arranged in chronological order, loosely divided into six chapters in an attempt to describe them in a more focused architectural context. The starting point, Chapter 1, *New Urban Forms*, covering the first decade of the twentieth century, looks at the emergence of the apartment block as a new building type – albeit in many forms – and at the different approaches to the relationship between housing and the structure of the urban environment. Chapter 2, *European*