

CHAPTER FIVE

The site

Though chapter five is not the last chapter of the book, with this chapter the book reaches a point of completion in terms of the range of scales that the presentation covers. This chapter addresses the urban scale and issues that have to do with the site. The single most important urban element to which emphasis is directed towards is the street. In the proposal, the street not just a traffic route but is a habitable community room that is part of the public realm.

FRONT BACK CONDITION

Dividing the field

The proposed line of row houses divides the existing field in two and sets up a front-back condition at the site. Both, the front and the back, can be seen as public rooms that are bounded between the existing surroundings and the row of units. In the front, the sidewalk and the row of units provide enclosure to Broce and contribute to the character of the street. In the back, the alley is an extension of the row.



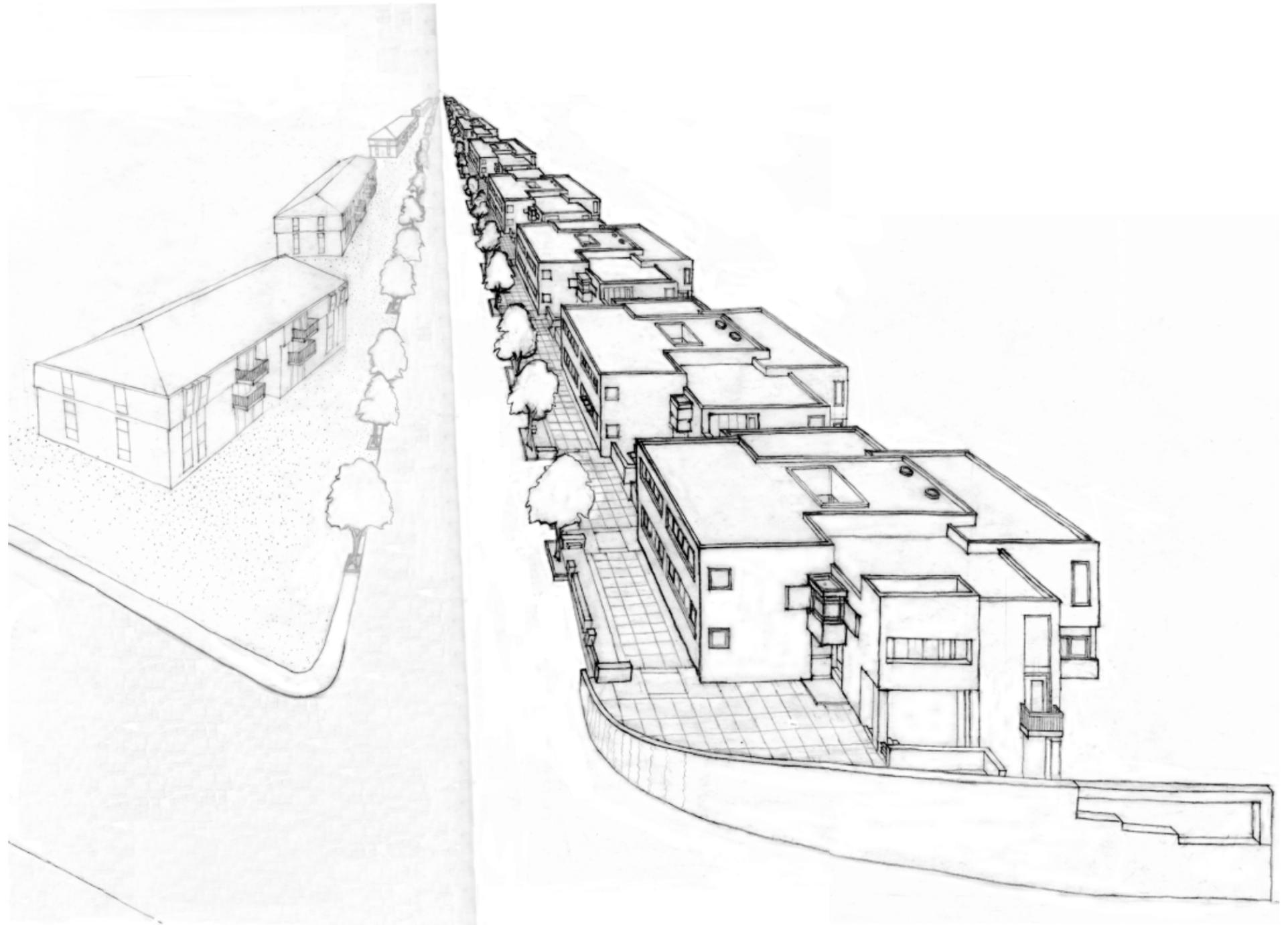
Semi-enclosed street condition. In the above photograph, one can sense the absence of urbanity in the existing.

The floor

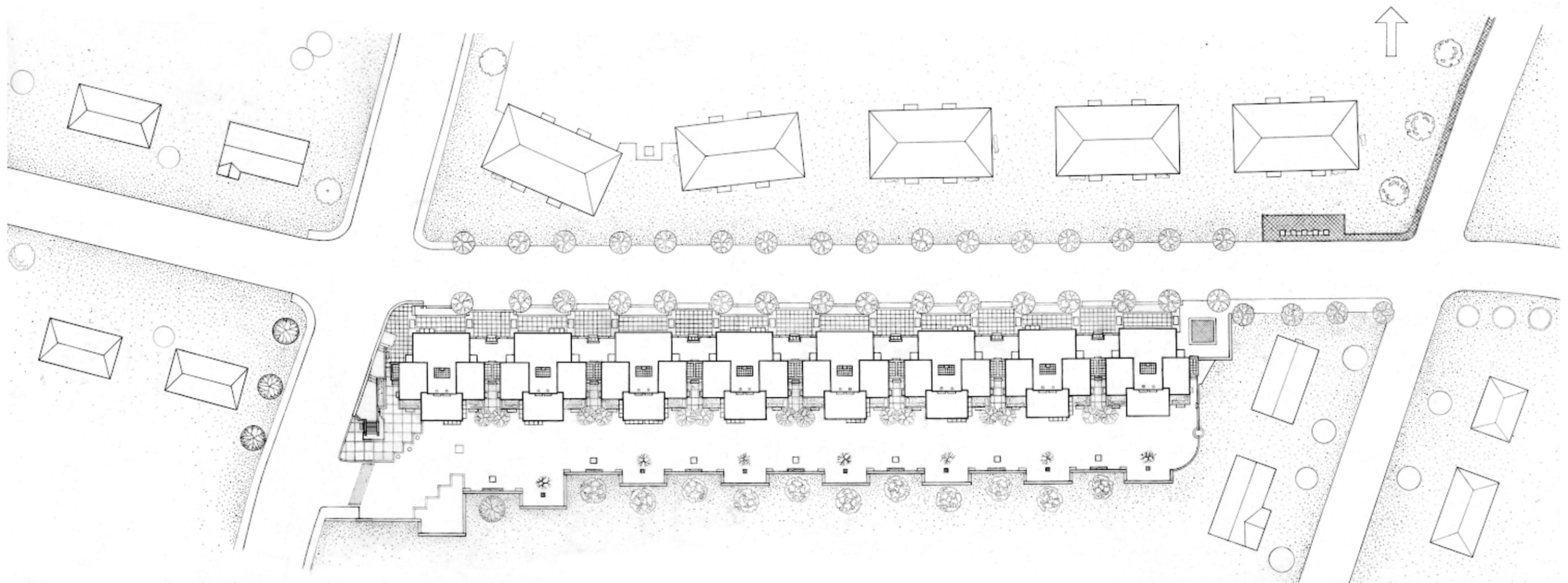
Of great importance to the making of the two public rooms is the floor. Analogous to a theatrical stage, a floor can be the stage for communal activities upon which as Lewis Mumford mentions "the drama of social life may be enacted, with the actors taking their turn as spectators and the spectators as actors." (note 10) The floor in the particular project is the architectural element to which collective activity is contributed. In the history of planning, despite their great influence, the utopian models that came to replace the urban city of the past, have proposed a street without life, and a city that can work only under specific circumstances. (note 11) For that reason the proposed project is sympathetic towards urbanization that values the qualities that existed in the urban city of the past, at the same time remains committed to the ideals of modern architecture.



In the above photograph the change in pattern (large to small) and texture (smooth to rough) adds a secondary layer of complexity to the surface. Therefore the path has three zones, one of which is claimed by the house as if it is an extension of the inside out. The value of the above floor lies in what Herman Hertzberger would call 'competence' in architecture. (note 12)



Perspective view of the proposed scheme for Broce St.



Street plan



Side elevation (Tom's creek elevation)



Front elevation (Broce St. elevation)

The street

The street has been the concern of many architects, among them architect Luis Kahn. Luis Kahn makes the following statement concerning the street: "If you think of the street as a meeting place, if you think of the street as being really a community inn that just doesn't have a roof. And if you think of a meeting place called the community room, the street, is just the front of the house, and the streets were dedicated by the house to the city for their use". From the above quotation it is clear that L.Kahn is proposing a different street than one that is used only for transportation. [abandons the CIAM principles of separation of functions]. (note 13) It is clear that Kahn is visualizing a street that is habitable, a street that can encompass community life, a street that is an extension of the activities in the home. And the quotation continues, "... so you have no streets, you have roads but no streets". (note 14)

What is commonly understood as the street can be divided into two components, that which has to do with vehicle traffic, and that which has to do with pedestrian traffic. The two components can be seen as the two parts (or elements) that make up the street as a whole. Le Corbusier, in his utopian model of the Radiant City, kept the pedestrian in the park and separated the vehicular traffic from the pedestrian. In the project presented, the street is part of a greater floor to which pedestrian traffic has access to. It is within the intentions of the proposal to make the street a room that can be a habitable community room that can be claimed as a traffic route when needed.

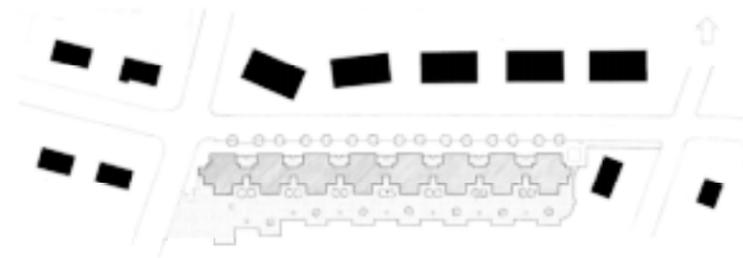
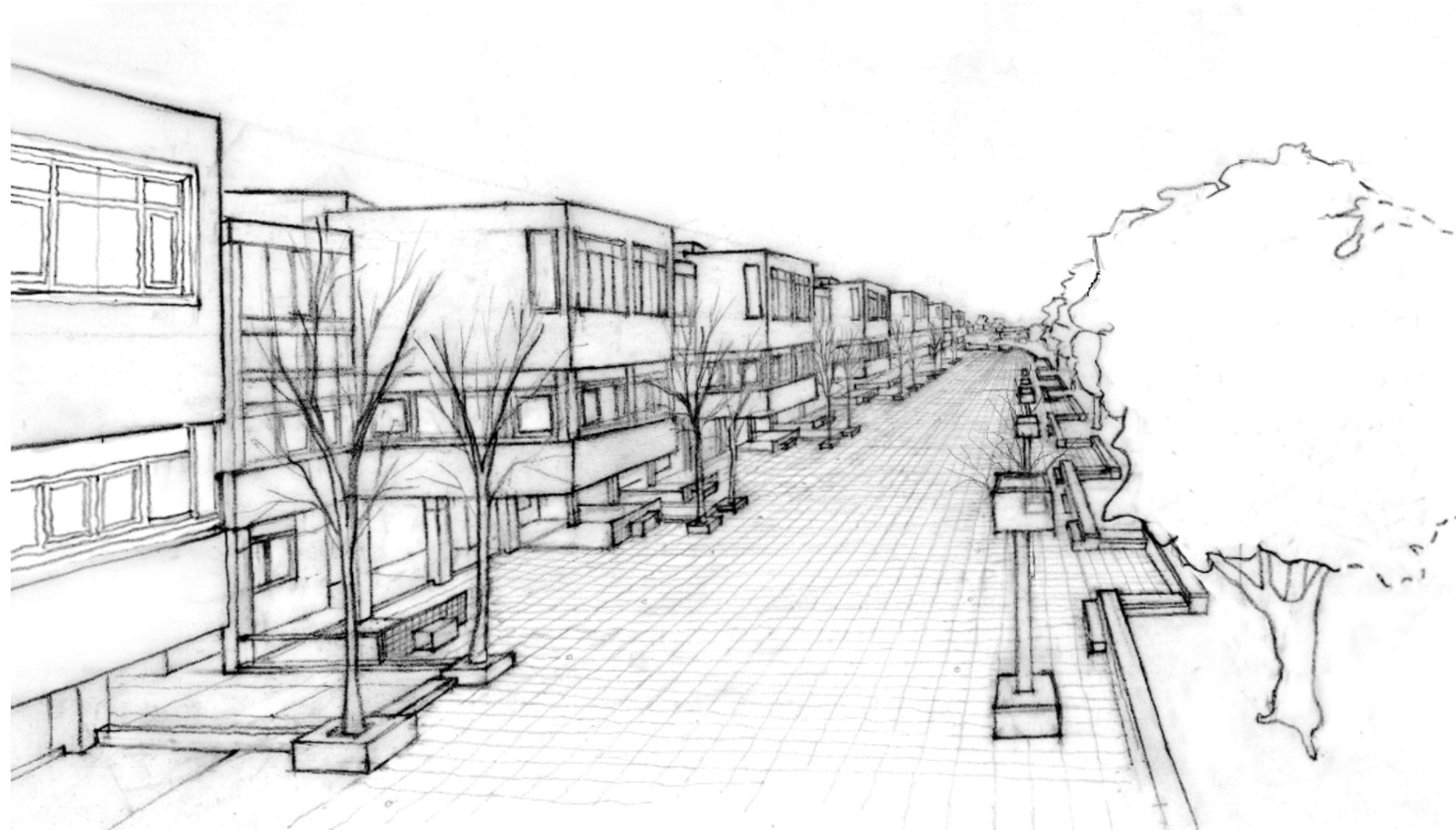


Diagram of proposed backstreet condition in relationship to the front and the existing streets.

In agreement with the notion of a street that is also a community room is American architect Wayne Attoe. In his writing, Attoe, proposes what he calls "a domesticated street" on the basis of the following two design principles: one, multiplicity of activities; and two, design of small scale objects that are more familiar to the senses. (note 15) The first principle is implemented as the design of the floor allowing it to be either a traffic route with adjacent parking, or an area of recreation. The second principle refers to objects such as: the light-pole, or the water-fountain, or in general small scale objects that on comes in contact on a day-to-day basis and participate in making the public rooms habitable.



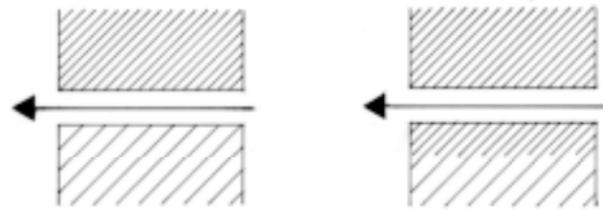
View of the outdoor public room in the back. The boundaries of the outdoor room are defined by the row of units and the row of trees.

Broce Street and the proposed intervention



Photograph of Stongate apartments on Broce Street

The condition shown is indicative of a housing project that is not conscious of its urban potential, but rather maintains the same relationship among buildings and with the street as if it involved single family houses. More importantly, it rejects the opportunity to support community life and contribute to the quality of the street. For that reason, the proposed project extends housing beyond Broce to establish a new condition at the particular location of the street.



Site diagram of before and after. The proposed project extends the boundary of the housing area across Broce.

Ordering the site

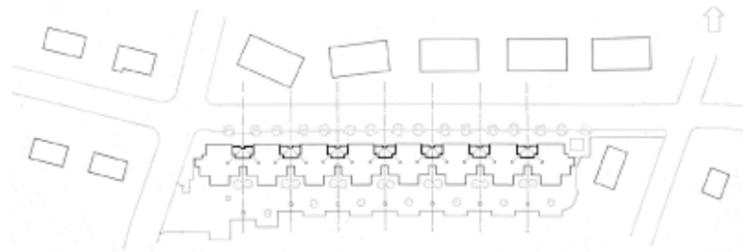


Diagram of primary (vertical) and secondary (diagonal) axes.

The extension of housing beyond Broce Street introduces order to the street that results from extending the axes that are constructed. Of primary role to the ordering of the site the objects such as, the trees , the stair, and the light pole.



Site plan